Harry goes willingly to face Voldemort in the Forbidden Forest. When Death shows Harry the tragic outcome of failing to completely destroy the Horcruxes he has to do it all over again. At the same time as Harry's decision to re-enter the Living, Time and Magic throw another resurrected hero in the mix, the slain Lord Commander of the Night's Watch.

CANON up to Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows "The Forest Again" and A Song Of Ice and Fire/ GOT Season 6
It was time.

The challenge rang through the ears of all the living and resonated within the dead that scattered the grounds. Harry knew this, because at this moment he could feel the strange pulling sensation of souls being sucked into the fog of the veil. The Hallows were in his possession, but he was skeptical of the concept of a Master of Death. After hearing the voice of his nemesis offer armistice, a sudden, hollow emptiness swallowed him.

Harry brought his lips to the golden snitch, letting it know his intent. As he made his way inevitably forward, somewhere in the back of the mind he laughed cynically. He was going to die a pure, sacrificial virgin just like they used to do in the good old days. He knew that this was such a bad decision to make, gambling on the fact that he needed Voldemort himself to cast the killing curse.

Hagrid, restrained by magical ropes and brought down to his knees, cried his name when he made his way into the clearing. Harry paid him no heed, knowing that any sort of distraction could make him lose his resolve.

"Harry Potter... the boy who lived," announced Voldemort. "Now, he has come to die."

Harry closed his eyes as the flash of green sent him to the nether.

The next time he opened his eyes, he was in a place of foggy illumination, an ethereal version of a deserted Train station. Empty railway channels bordered either side of him, with obscure platforms on each side of the tracks. This pattern continued as far as the eye can see.

The weightlessness of his body against the floor was disconcerting. He got up, and from the periphery of his vision, a bench caught his attention. Underneath it, a bloody, shriveled human effigy almost made him empty his stomach. Fascinated, he peered at it, and was once again made to jump when a deep voice called him.

"Harry! Harry!" a figure called him, emerging from the fog to materialize into Albus Dumbledore. "Come, my boy. That was such a brave thing to do ... but deep inside I knew you were the only one who was capable," he said solemnly.

"Professor," said Harry, thankful and relieved not to have to stare at that thing anymore. It seemed to have a connection to him, but he could not fathom what in the world it was meant to be. "What is this place?"

"I was about to ask you the same thing," Dumbledore replied. "I will answer, but first, tell me, what do you think?"

"It appears to be King's Cross, except...well, cleaner," said Harry, lacking a better description.

"Hm, yes. It is a transit of a sort, Harry," he said sagely, folding his hands into the opposite sleeves. "A place... it appears, some gifted people can interact with," Albus winked.

"The hallows..." Harry deduced. "People who have interacted with them... masters of death?"

"If such a being exists, this may be quite the place where they exercise that ambiguous title. I will say that powerful wizards have tried many different ways to escape, hoodwink, or even control Death, whatever we perceive that to be..." Dumbledore mused. He shook his head ruefully. "Present
company included, I admit to it."

"The philosopher's stone," Harry said. "Was that the secret Professor? Most of my friends did find it interesting you were so old," said Harry with a smirk. "I guess they thought it just went with the territory of being the most powerful wizard alive," said Harry. Dumbledore chuckled, nodding his head in amusement.

"Always keep your levity and ability to laugh Harry," Dumbledore said as he approached an empty bench. His voice abruptly turned serious. "The Dark Lord did not fully understand what he has done. Or if he did know, it is truthfully the most dangerous, and powerful magic ever created," he added solemnly. "Have a seat, my good man. You have an appointment," said Dumbledore. With a profound slowness and almost reverent aversion of his eyes, Dumbledore turned his back to Harry while at the same time indicating to the bench with an open hand. "Ask your questions, answers will come forth, but I cannot interfere," said Dumbledore as he faced away, humming a merry tune lightly under his beard.

Harry had a feeling that no matter how inexplicable this place appeared to be, this aura seated at the bench did not belong.

A faded black robe, almost gray with age, sat with head bowed, the hood almost drooping to its chest. A tall figure with arms interlocked within sleeves, it appeared to be looking straight down through its torso and past the floor. The figure appeared to be sitting, yet it was not interacting with the bench nor the environment. It simply was there, yet it was not really here in this reality. An entity of significant importance acquiescing to meet with mortals. Harry sat, keeping as far away from the edge of the robe as possible on the small bench.


"What?" Harry said dumbly.

"It is abomination!" the voice seethed. "Neither alive, neither it is dead," a rant began. "This cannot occur. The Curse, somehow empowered beyond my realm of purview. The Horrible Cross, an abomination!"

"The Curse…what?" Harry said, his heart racing at the words emanating throughout this place.

"Life… it is now being twisted," it said slowly. "Life is either present, or it is not. After Life, I will come." Harry closed his eyes, even though he knew the answer to his next question.

"Is that why I am here?" asked Harry.

"Not yet. Time is not ready for you." The grey robe paused, rubbing his sleeves together. "There is something you must see," the Gray robe said, with a hint of excitement. "Come, look," it commanded. The figure turned its hood and faced Harry, who saw pure emptiness, a vast black hole of never-ending nothingness. Then suddenly, the infinite stars of the universe emerged from a pin point within the hood and swallowed him.

He was now standing in a dark bedroom, the pale moonlight showing the sleeping forms on the bed. Harry recognized himself sleeping, his glasses and wand on the bedside table. A woman lay next to him, staring straight at the ceiling with an ear to ear grin on her face. This reality was not clear, it reminded him of a pensieve memory, but he was pretty sure that the shock red of hair belonged to Ginny. However the maniacal smile did not belong, neither was that solid red gleam to her eyes.
Harry stepped closer; wanting to make sure the vision was not playing tricks on him. As he neared her side of the bed he noticed a picture of three teenage children, presumably his family, he couldn't see himself sleeping so peacefully in another man's bed with Ginny, of all people.

A red eyed, wide awake Ginny with a grin that was too big for her face.

She shot up from the waist, her hair falling over her eyes as she reached under the book on her bedside table for her wand. She pointed upwards and made a miniature lasso-movement turn of her wand. The windows to the bedroom swung open and a cold bitter wind flew in, the curtains billowing across the room.

Sleeping Harry eyes flashed open as the howling wind made a eerie sound throughout the house. Harry watched in frozen horror, he knew that wand movement was a general un-warding spell. Ginny must have brought down whatever security was in place on the house. Without hesitation his older self grabbed his wand off the table, madly scrambling for his glasses just as three more figures apparated into the master bedroom. A quick disarming charm from the female intruder and a body bind jinx from the red haired man made Harry helpless. His eyes grew wide as Ginny got out of bed and joined Hermione, Ron and Neville as they surrounded the bed. All four of them had that solid red gleam to their eyes.

"Harry Potter... the boy who lived..." all of their voices said in unison. "Finally, I have returned." There was a simultaneous flash from their four wands of that awful green light and Harry Potter was struck dead instantly.

At that moment Harry was warped back forcefully into the bench. He tiled his head back as he stared at the unnatural ceiling, sweat pouring down his face and his breathing coming in hard gasps.

"Is that, a divergent path, or some kind of alternate reality ...or future? Or is it my... is it truly what is in store? My destiny?" he said, once he had the nerve and the composure to speak once again. He addressed himself; he could not bear to look into Death's cowl again. Voices rang out, booming from every direction.

"Death says true," the seething voice confirmed.

"Fate says true," another voice emanated.

"Life says true," yet another.

There was a pause.

"Magic, says false," a female voice challenged. "Luck is interfering."

"Luck is laughing at us," another voice agreed. "However, Time will accede to the Master Of Death," this voiced added.

"Luck is not to be disregarded, or taken lightly," Death challenged the other voices. "How is it that two mortals who exist on different planes, virtually the same age, have cheated me, at the same time?" Death seethed.

Across from Harry a similar, almost identical scene was playing out. The man was sitting next to another gray robed figure, virtually a mirror image of Death beside him. The man was wearing a heavy fur-hide cloak.

"Who is that?" Harry said to no one in particular, and Dumbledore shrugged, shaking his head side to side.
"The Bastard with two names," said Fate. "Both of which he does not know." The man far across the tracks tilted his head back, almost the same gesture as he had done when he saw his futuristic death. Probably that was exactly what he was doing.

The figure seated next to him on the bench, moved fractionally, so small a movement it appeared a shudder. "The effigy you saw, it unravels this place. It is an abomination! We cannot remove it! "The voices echoed throughout the station. Harry got up at once and stepped away. As he thought about it, he was insane to sit down next to Death in the first place.

"Professor, can you tell me what all this means? The Bastard with two names?" Harry pleaded, desperate for clarity.

"Another gifted one, it appears. He seems to be doing negotiations just as you are …." Dumbledore mused. "I wonder who that may be as well, however, I cannot cross," he added, indicating the tracks with a wave of his hand. "I must stay on this side. " He added, softly stroking his long beard. "You heard them. Death has given me reprieve to speak with you, but as the voices said, what you saw is the path of Fate, Life, and Death. Time and Magic do not agree, and may have a hand in helping you to remove ... that-" Dumbledore pointed at the bloody effigy that somehow seemed close even though the bench was at the very edge of the fog. "And that man may also have an important role to play."

"So what should I do?" Harry said at last. "I just need to destroy Voldemort and Nagini, right?" even as he said it, it seemed much harder now, now that he thought about it. Having visions of your death put a lot of ambition on hold.

"I was mistaken, Harry," Dumbledore sighed. "Alas, I do not know how to destroy the horcrux. What we did was simply destroy the physical vessel." Dumbledore paused, a bit taken back with himself. "Interesting place this is, that seemed to have come out quite bluntly, not my usual style, I must say," he chuckled. "I must be losing touch."

"What?" Harry breathed, another take your breath away and sweat bursting from the pores moment immediately set upon him. How could Albus Dumbledore be wrong? "What, does this mean..." Harry swallowed; his mouth suddenly full of cotton. "That this," he waved at himself and the weird train station, "Was all for nothing?!"

"You saw their faces, Harry," Dumbledore sighed again. "Their eyes. It was them, him, together. The Dark Lords... all of Gryffindor, no less," Dumbledore whispered, his eyes growing bright with sorrow.

"What I saw was the future, which means it can be stopped, right! Right?" Harry pleaded to the open.

"This particular path is determined," said Fate, being asked directly.

"My summons is true. It will occur as you saw it," Death seethed.

"Life has been ended at that point," Life chimed in. "No return."

Harry swore internally. All these Riddles, when all he needed was a way to stop one Riddle.

"I laugh at you three," Time interjected. "I am able to correct where Life has faltered, and pluck possibility out of Death's embrace. Magic, what say you?"

"Luck seems to be with these two," Magic said. "So be it. You two will correct this abomination. A hint; young Harry: curses activate the Horrible Crux. This, you shall remember. "
"You two?" Harry whispered, confused. "And what is that you meant about curses?" he demanded.

Suddenly, the other man was catapulted from his seat; arms and legs flailing as he flew through the air. Dumbledore calmly sidestepped as the body came hurtling towards their side, colliding with Harry and knocking them both through the bench and unto the station floor rolling haphazardly in a tangle of cloak and dark hair. Dumbledore watched dumbstruck as the two young men rolled off the edge then vanished. Exeunt stage left was an understatement.

"We will be rid of this abomination yet. You may cheat Death, but you cannot cheat us all," Magic declared, with Time laughing in the background.

Albus Dumbledore wished he could go back and give Harry the help he deserved, now that new knowledge confirmed that his plan did not succeed. That blasted Tom Riddle has caused so much suffering. His eyebrows furrowed into his brow as he pondered a way. Presently, his body was fading into the fog. There must be a way to still offer assistance before it was too late.

He needed to treaty with these entities once more.

Harry kept his eyes shut as he woke up. He was having this awful dream of being in a bright place and Dumbledore was there and being target practice for a human slingshot. He also had a bad kink in his neck and a cramped right arm as if he slept on it whole night. He tried to stretch but only managed to bounce his toes against something hard and tangle up his limbs in a few old jeans and socks with his feet and a couple hangars. He opened his eyes only to realize he was in a closet, curled up awkwardly in a fetal position with his head braced by the wall.

A single line of light was shining through the doors. In his line of vision he saw another set of feet sprawled awkwardly across a toppled chair through the gap.

"What the hell!" Fully awake now, he must have hit every corner of his blasted closet before he got out with a mad scramble. He untangled himself and his glasses from a couple hanged shirts and threw them away from him digging in his right back pocket for his wand. He pulled it out, only to observe it had a sizable crack running along the length of it, from tip to the decorative carvings on the handle grip.

"Shit.." he murmured, stamping his foot but at the last moment silently easing it on the ground at the same time, so he not wake the intruder, which in turn effectively compounded the anger that spiked through him. He gripped his hair in frustration.

The boy on the floor was wearing clothes way too large for him, drowning him in the heavy fur and over sized boots he wore. His rear end was in the air, his body halfway folded over the toppled chair, his hands splayed awkwardly to the sides over his tiny bedroom floor at privet Drive. Harry circled him slowly, looking for any signs of playing possum , most probably waiting for the moment to strike out at him unawares. Trying to launch an attack from that embarrassing position would be totally laughable, but even more embarrassing is if he did manage to disarm him or take him down. Harry felt useless with his wand being damaged . Touching him tentatively with a hangar did not stir him, so Harry nimbly stepped over him and cracked open his bedroom door to peek outside. The voices were loud, yet at a familiar conversational level, and thankfully not shouting, so he assumed the Dursleys were none more the wiser. As he closed the door he glimpsed himself in the mirror hanging on it. Another of those breath taking moments grabbed him.

He was twelve.

He pressed his fingers into his face.
He looked down at his oversized t shirt and jeans.

He didn't feel twelve, just he looked twelve.

Was it possible to feel older or younger than your body told you it was?

Maybe, this was some sort of polyjuice age altering potion prank played upon him in revenge for that time when he…

No.. that's not right.

His memories took him back to the path to the acromantula nest- the golden snitch... the hallows...

He was seventeen! But the mirror was definitely saying twelve though. It must have something to do with this guy here. Harry dug around his clothes for a long sleeved top and a belt. Trying his best to maneuver the boy's arms he sort of got them tied in a hopefully strong enough knot with the long sleeve sweater, then used the belt as a final means of securing the wrists together. He righted the chair and sat down on it, staring at the figure tied up in his bedroom.

He was around his age (his current age, Harry grimaced) and had curly, uncombed black hair, long and trailing down his neck. His skin was pale, far too much so, it seemed to have a blue tinge to his face, and Harry came to the conclusion that wherever he was before, he was freezing cold. There were suspicious crusty-looking areas on the front of his weird clothes, it reminded him of something Viktor Krum would wear, except black, and creaky, and maybe not too comfortable either. Harry waved his wand without casting or even thinking about any particular spell to see what was the effect of the damage.

It surged from a slight shocking sensation to making his wand arm vibrate painfully within a span of a few seconds. Harry cursed again. Broken wand, a sleeping intruder, twelve again, what else could possibly happen?

A high pitch wailing howl came from outside. Then it became a yip yap bark of a small dog. Harry opened his window and looked down. There was an ash gray pup barking underneath his bedroom window. His tail was wagging and he was turning in circles between each barking salvo.

"Shhhhh... you here with him?" Harry hissed downstairs. The dog actually stopped barking for few moments, tail wagging, as if to confirm that he was indeed with the guy inside. "Hold on, and be quiet yeah? I'm coming just wait a moment," Harry said, resigned to quell this noisy problem before the Dursleys went investigating outside. He dug in his trunk quickly and took out his invisibility cloak and made his way out the front door. When he got around back the dog began to snarl, sniffing the ground but not seeing where the person approaching was.

"Easy boy, good boy..." said Harry as he crouched and lifted his cloak. The dog began to charge at harry, then jump back, then hop, spin, then charge again, then snarl in a manner only puppies can; with much vigor and misplaced bravado. Harry took off his cloak and scooped up the dog in one swift motion. The pup squirmed for a full ten seconds, then just like that, it stuck his head out and panted happily. Harry wasted no time and made his way back around the yard and through the front door, opening it carefully after looking through the front window. As he got in and closed the door behind him, he spotted the intruder in a low crouch, stealthily advancing behind Dudley who was sitting on the couch with what appeared to be a fire poker at his side, with the tip held in a knife grip, ready to strike a fatal puncturing blow to the back of Dudley's fat neck.

Harry was almost ready to stun him senseless when at the last moment he realized his wand was broken. With an awkward one handed underhand throw, he launched his wand at the intruder with
the hope that he did some miraculous thing like turn and catch it without making a sound. How he was going to get this to end well he had no idea.

The intruder did manage to notice something approaching him in his periphery vision and flinched, ducking even lower as he brought up the fire poker in a defensive swing. He hit the wand solidly and Harry grimaced as it made a wooden cracking noise. Harry made a frantic motion of a finger against his lips. The intruder understood and for a fleeting moment he looked confused, and then used some neat foot work to cushion the wooden stick before it fell on the floor. Harry was impressed, maybe more so than if he had actually caught it out of midair unawares.

Both boys were frozen in half crouches, eyeing each other warily. One was balancing a broken wand on the instep of a dark boot a few inches above the ground, a fire poker held in the ochs low stance. Harry was crouching with a finger on his lips with a happy puppy head panting excitedly, floating with a body out of his armpit.

They remained there for a full five seconds, both frozen in stance. Probably the most impressive standoff ever, considering the circumstances, Harry thought.

Harry indicated a calm motion downwards, and nodded his head up, beckoning to come follow him upstairs. The intruder nodded, once, then twice, a bit more certain as he gingerly picked up the wand from his boot and quietly followed Harry back up the stairs.

Harry waited anxiously for the intruder to get back inside and closed the door behind them.

"You are yet not even a man," the intruder noted, a strange aristocratic accent with a hint of puberty–induced awkwardness. He cleared his throat. He frowned as he watched Harry and the headless dog. "Ghost?" he croaked. The dog actually yipped at that. Harry shhshed the dog, somehow thinking it would listen to him. "You executed my direwolf with beheading, sir?" the intruder accused, his face turning pale.

"No no, its a magic cloak look!" he lifted the body-less head to demonstrate. The intruder did a back-step in reflex, before leaning forward as if to attack. This reaction caused Harry to literally jump back a few steps. "Here, take, yeah?" Harry released the puppy and it immediately ran to sniff the intruder's boots, tail wagging in glee.

The intruder, surprised to see the dog fully functional and so small, got even more confused. He looked around the room within a few heartbeats, and even eyeing the window as a viable escape. "What, 'magic' occurred here?" his brow furrowed, his posture straightening. "Speak, who are you, and what is this place?" The intruder growled as he stood tall, the fire-poker now held loosely in his hand.

"Alright, I'm Harry, and this is a long story, but you must not go crazy with that thing, ok?" Harry said, both palms facing down. "And keep it down, your voice travels," he whispered.

"Oh...okay?" the intruder asked, never hearing that term. "No I am not suffering under madness, it is you with your wits misplaced," the intruder countered. "Is this some poison you have brewed to belittle my senses, and what did you do to my speech, I sound newly squired!"

"Quiet," Harry re-inforced. "It's, complicated, but we got ..." Harry paused. He didn't want to say re-incarnated, he felt woozy thinking of that fateful trek into the forest. "Another chance to..." Harry shook his head again, he didn't want to do that gamble of life and death again, shouldn't have done it in the past, nor would he in the future.

Just never again.
"We were turned back into twelve," he said with resignation.

"Twelve! As in years! Surely you jest!" the intruder argued, but was following Harry's finger pointing at the door behind him. "What..." The intruder turned behind him and looked into the mirror that was hanging behind the door. "By the gods..." he cursed, walking closer to the mirror. "What is this..." he murmured as he touched his face, just as Harry did not even ten minutes earlier. He began to push his fingers in his clothes, finding gashes and holes peppering all over his torso. Without warning the intruder began to unbuckle the rib buckle harness and his shoulder cross straps. "Am I dreaming or am I delusional? It must have been Tormund's blasted sour milk..." he said, prodding.

Did he just say a man's sour milk? Harry thought.

"Anyway, why are you doing that and are you going to tell me your bloody name?" Harry stressed.

"It's Jon," Jon breathed as he ran his fingers over his torso. There were closed stab wounds all over his body. "They turned on me..."

Harry closed his eyes briefly. "They got me too..."

"Was it the Night's men? Men of the Black?" Jon asked as he stared into the mirror. "Or the wights?"

"Wights?" Harry asked.

"The dead arisen," Jon replied, his chin touching his chest as he took inventory of the destroyed armor.

"No," Harry replied. "It was the Death Eaters themselves and Voldemort, not their bloody things...Inferi...whatever they called them..." Harry did not want to think of the fifty or more strong of Voldemort's inner circle, neither the lake in the cave. "Voldemort was the one who..." Harry stopped right there.

"This brigand's name is Voldemort?" Jon said. "The white walkers never put name to their existence, it is paramount concern to North, everyone has heard the tale of the ones that attacked Wildling bay," Jon nodded grimly, positive on his theory. "We must raven word, and quickly!"

"Jon, hold up. Just think about this for a second, mate," Harry said.

"I am NOT your mate," Jon declared, all ready to attack once again. Harry rubbed the corners of his eyes with thumb and forefinger.

"It's a slang, a manner of speech, it means, friend, or buddy, pal, that sort of thing..." Harry explained. "Let's get this straight. You are the one more out of place than me. Well come on, your gear, speech and how you move all remind me of the dark ages, and... to sum it up, we both died." Harry sighed. "We were both returned to this age, except you are here, in my uncle's house. Do you know where you are?"

"No, but this..." he touched the mirror, "Must indicate you have master glass-smiths to craft such an incredible image on this looking glass. I assume we are in Slaver's bay?" Harry looked to the ceiling. It could go wrong. It just did. He's not from here. As in, he is not from this Earthly reality.

"What year do you think this is? What country?" Harry asked, exasperated.

"We are in the tenth year of Summer, of the ten-gross score of the Old Men. Within the next few moons, Winter is Coming," Jon said tiredly. "Slaver's bay is in Essos, if I remember my lessons well," Jon nodded.
"Okay then," Harry said in a low whistle. "Before we go further, let's really get introduced. Harry Potter. Originally from Godric's Hollow, but really more like Devon if you look on the map. You?"

"I am Jon, of the North, bastard of the now deceased Lord Eddard Stark of Winterfell. My house allegiance has been forsaken through willing vow as I took on the Black. I was Commander, briefly ...but now it seems my watch has ended," Jon added in afterthought, reality now sinking in. "I have... reasoned, that this place is not, my place, and your place, does not know my place, for we are but strangers, chatting over the impossible," Jon said slowly.

"Yes, that's about...it..yeah I guess," Harry said with a shrug.

"Tell me, Master Harry," Jon cocked his head to the side. "Are you a lord of House Hollow, or of some noble birth, or is this place just too, perfect for my imagination?" Jon ran his finger along the factory painted smooth edge of the door. "Such an even square edge ...And what is this material?" Jon picked up the long sleeved sweater from the discarded chair on the ground, stretching it. "I had much hope that this wasn't used for a pleasurable restraint while my virtue was ravished while I was sleeping off whatever they poisoned me with," Jon said with a straight face.

Harry just stared, his lips moving slowly as he mouthed 'virtue was ravished'.

Jon sighed loudly.

"Are you a boy lover?"

"No!" Harry said, shocked. "No! I didn't, I woke up just before you did! I swear!"

"On the Old Gods or the New?" Jon asked, his tone most serious.

"We," Harry made a grand circle motion to encompass this reality, "don't know your 'gods', remember?"

"So you did not?" Jon accused.

"No I did not," Harry echoed.

"Ghost," Jon said. "Does this boy speak the truth?" Jon petted the little direwolf.

The direwolf pup did nothing but dribble some more on the dusty floor and sniff at Jon's hand. Jon looked into Harry's eyes with a cold glint in his stare.

"I am jesting you, Master Harry. You look ready to squat on the chamber pot!" Jon laughed his eyes still murderous. "You tremble easily as the wind trembles the trees."

"Right," Harry breathed out, not even knowing he was holding his breath. Harry was trying to get a bit more understanding of the humor and slang, or at least he hoped so. He knew he can't be too lax around him. That poker was still very deadly in his hand. "Can you give me that stick?" Jon gave him the stick that he was holding in the same hand as the metal poker, and Harry saw that now with the longitudinal crack, there was a snap along the middle of the wand, the phoenix core visible in one or two places. "Great."

"Looks like it meant something of great import," Jon nodded.

"I probably shouldn't have thrown it at an assassin about to stab fat-ass downstairs," Harry resigned.

"What is it?" Jon indicated.

"I am sorry."

"It was broken from before," said Harry. "It wasn't you."

"You a mummer?" Jon raised his eyebrows. When Harry looked at him with a blank expression Jon explained. "An actor, of folly, humour, laughter," Jon said. Harry shook his head. "Only they carry such things, pretending to cast magic and foul ailments on the stage act," he explained. "For the townspeople to enjoy," he added, "also to spread tall tales based in truth of real events at the town square."

"Magic? Well yeah, I can do real magic, I'm a wizard," Harry said without really thinking how odd that sounded to someone from a completely different reality.

"By the gods," Jon laughed loudly, "You are even more delusional than I am!" he laughed even louder.

"Keep it down up there!" Dudley screamed.

Harry wanted to send an ass-itch hex down from his room to shut him up before he alerted his uncle and aunt but knew that wasn't going to happen now with his broken wand. "What do you know about wizards?"

"Just tales...some are frightening children stories to keep them awake, or if it is the more well-known ones, charming bedtime stories of jolly old men with long beards and fancy clothes," Jon shrugged. "They are numerous history stories of the Old Gods and Men, the First Men, Wargs and Shamans beyond the wall, Dragons with riders. Some are true, some the Maesters claim are pure folly, but the tales of Wizards are rubbish. Who would believe a single man could do all such powerful lore? Tales of Wizards are borne in taverns, drunkard musicians with great songs of heroic deeds and magical spells," he explained.

His voice dropped low. "Some are tales are of men of unbridled hatred who were feared, these are the ones the children like to spread. Tales they hear when they get to go in the lands with the hunting men. Tales best said around the night fire." Jon smiled fondly at the distant memories.

"The latter," Harry deadpanned, sitting down on the chair.

"You are hated, and much feared?" Jon asked, caught off guard.

"Hated, oh yes," Harry nodded readily. "Feared?" Harry began to shake his head, but then eventually nodded just as readily. "Yeah, that too I guess," he explained in a much lighter tone. "By the first to third years, and the Daily Prophet if I remember," he put his finger to his chin. "Maybe it's the talking to snakes thing they fear, or maybe it's just me...whatever," Harry shrugged it off.

"You do this..." Jon asked, his head tilting "...You talk to snakes?"

Harry nodded.

"You wave a stick and cast unspeakable pain and body changing ailments?"

Harry nodded sideways, tilting his chin side to side.

"You, ride through the clouds on winged chicken headed- horses?" Jon smirked, holding in his laughter.
"Watch it, I have done that, actually," Harry agreed, a smile also creeping at the corners of his mouth.

"You, enchant unmoving objects to hold power, and make people revere them? Cast spells to bind people into a merry fellowship?" Jon laughed now.

"Voldemort did something similar, but I'm not like him, though," Harry explained.

"Then Voldemort is a Light wizard, while you are the bad, stone heart wizard who rides chicken headed horses and send men and fair lady alike to rapturous fear, and hatred," Jon confirmed. "I like this version of Harry of House Hollow much more," he nodded. "He Who Uses Wizardry to make people fascinated with un-moving things is a typical boring children tale. A tale of the Light wizard. The Hard Wizard tales are what Bran and Rickon love to hear from their little friends," Jon smirked.

"Your House Hollow has failed you in your preparation, for the Light Wizard is typically weak but somehow he has slain you, while we know the stone-heart wizard always wins in the end!" Jon laughed as he sat abruptly on the bed, toppling back and hitting his head on the wall when the mattress sunk in softer than he expected. "Such a soft bed for a Hard Wizard, no wonder you were killed." Jon chuckled, rubbing his head.

"You seem pretty casual about dying and coming back," Harry said, crossing his arms and leaning on the two back legs of the chair. "Why they turn on you? Your jokes need work, but that can't be all..." Harry replied with one eyebrow raised.

Jon shrugged, and his shrug looked more impressive with the heavy fur lining his shoulders.

"I have thought this through in that bright place. This is what I know. The cold makes men prone to anger, and fighting. Fighting men are also very hungry- the training leaves us weak. Fighting men, with no wenches readily available, tend to escape the guards and sentries, to seek release in a woman. Cold, hungry, stiff-spined-blue-balled fighting men who are want of various forms of action and suffer the curse of boredom. The 'lucky' ones are assigned to the easy dusk to dawn and dawn to dusk south of the wall ranging. These are supposed to be honorable men who patrol in search of wild-lings. We are sworn keepers of the peace, defenders of the realms of men."

"Sounds like they are Knights to me," Harry chipped in. Jon shook his head sadly.

"These so called honorable 'knights'; which mind you, all head to Mole town one way or the other, now are employed into prison guard shifts. Some are forced to squander their precious meat with a few hundred more, and in close proximity to females that they are forbidden to touch upon the penalty of flaying then crucifixion," John smiled again, that strange smile where you think he's laughing, but in reality he is deciding if he can just arrange for you to be sent to man the crenellations alone without oil reserves and tinder.

"Now those men... Those men are the best kind, it seems," Jon smiled as he rubbed his head. "I have passed instructions which are to be considered law, for peace between men who were once sworn enemies. But we are still men, in the realms of the living. The Night King is undead, not mortal like us. They did not understand what we face, and will face." Jon closed his eyes as he took the pathetic excuse for a pillow and plumped it behind his head as he stretched out on the soft, soft bed. "Traitors will find a much darker place than me..." he sighed loudly. "Much darker, by far," he mumbled, crossing his booted feet at the ankles.

"How old were, or are you?" Harry asked.

"Am going to be twenty, next moon," Jon responded, uncomfortable. He fidgeted with the leather
armor that felt awkward and too big on him. "It is fitting that a soft hearted Hard wizard wear this," he kicked up the long sleeved sweater at the edge of the bed. Sitting up, he removed the hard leather outer armor with practiced ease and the softer wool-and-hide under protection. These two bulky items he placed carefully at the foot of the bed. There was a ratty blood stained long sleeved tunic underneath, which he promptly removed. Harry noted that he was muscular and wiry, much more defined and in proportion than his skinny self. He put on the faded long sleeve sweater of a cartoon image of a man in gold and orange armor, long beams of light blasting from each limb.

Harry was angry. The blasted thing fit him like it was his all along.

"I do beg your pardon, Harry of House Hollow," Jon said. "Might I wear this?" he asked, closing his eyes and folding his arms behind his head before Harry had a chance to even respond.

"Yeah, sure," Harry said, getting up to change out of his dirty clothes. "And it's just Harry... from... um, house Potter if that makes more sense to you." Harry got a few items of clothes from his cupboard and some from his trunk. "You are Jon Stark of House Winterfell?"

"No," Jon replied with regret. "It's just Jon. That's my only real name," he said softly. Harry figured that this was a sore spot for him. "Snow is my bastard name. Use it only if you must."

Harry got the impression that using it lightly, or in jest, was quite a serious affront. Definitely don't play with Commander Jon and his bastard name. It could mean the end. Harry grinned.

He'll definitely use it every time he can as soon as he got a wand.

"Don't leave the room," Harry warned. "And don't attack, kill, or threaten them downstairs," he added as he walked out the door. "We'll figure this out, Snow," he grumbled. "Give me ten minutes. Don't you do any squatting or whatever it is you like to do. You'll get your chance in a real toilet, after I take a bath. " Jon grunted in annoyance. The door clicked closed.

The direwolf crawled up under Jon's armpit and circled a couple times before finding a spot to sleep.

"Well Ghost. Maybe we will have tales of a wizard to tell the people ..." Jon said as he petted the animal with his eyes closed. "When the stranger comes a-knocking. Again."

He was taking off his dirty, oversized seventeen year old clothes in the bathroom. He put the water on to get to a nice warm temperature and took a long hard look at his face in the mirror.

*It..looks flatter. Almost, invisible. Is it gone?* Harry thought. The train station voices came back to him.

"Curses empower the horrible cross."

He stepped into the shower, thinking. Does that mean using a curse makes it stronger, or getting hit with one? Snape's lecture came to mind.

'The Dark Arts are many, varied, ever-changing, and eternal. Fighting them is like fighting a many-headed monster, which, each time a neck is severed, sprouts a head even fiercer and cleverer than before. You are fighting that which is unfixed, mutating, indestructible...'

Harry closed his eyes, trying to get a feel for Voldemort's lingering magic in the scar. He didn't feel anything remotely close to the later years in Hogwarts. He traced his fingers over it, did it feel flatter, or was it his previous experience of rubbing it all the time giving him a sensory memory of its shape and feel?

And what about Jon? The Voices had told him he needed him to help destroy the effigy Voldemort left behind. Death itself asked him to.

I'm the bloody Master of Death, now. At least that part of the hallows story was true.

But what do I do now?

Integrate him into magical society. Get him somehow into Hogwarts so they could...

Wait. He's a Knight, a *Lord Commander* actually. He isn't a wizard. He can't do magic...

'Magic and Time say false,' the voices had said. Time did its part alright. Did magic also intervene? He couldn't worry about that right now, he had no wand to test this theory.

First, we will have to get a place to plan. Or rather, firstly, he needed an ally to help him get out of here and get back a wand. And then he can get Jon to test it out. He had a gut feeling he had some sort of magic, why else or how else would he become a visitor from another world?

He was sent by the forces Magic, and Time, and Luck after all. It's going to work itself out. Hopefully.
Who did he know could help him out of this jam and keep it quiet?

And lastly, is he going to do things much differently, or try to keep it-

No... Ginny, Hermione Ron and Neville became Dark wizards- multiple personifications of Voldemort. They killed him years ahead in the future.

Harry began to vigorously scrub himself with the soap, a weird numbness running through his skin.

I was shown my own nefarious demise. Wait until Trelawny gets a hold of this! He began lathering shampoo in his hair.

What did they all have in common which caused these events to happen? They were all in Gryffindor, but so were Seamus and Lavender. They were his friends, about the same age, in the DA.

It finally came to him. They were all in direct contact with a Horcrux. Dumbledore said his 'plan' didn't work. He didn't know how to destroy the horcuxes. Basically, he admitted he didn't know how dangerous they were... how they affected wizards they came into contact with. The greatest wizard of their time, the Chief Mugwump, the head of the International association of Wizards blah blah-

He just didn't know.

Harry came to the grim realization that he had to figure this one out himself, but at least he knew what the horcruxes were, and how they were hidden . Ginny was the first one to come in contact with the Diary.

Holy Merlin's balls. That was in year two, because of Lucius Malfoy. At Diagon Alley he slipped it in her bag.

Immediately washing off and drying himself, he got dressed. Firstly, he needed to deal with his guest, and get re-armed. Needed a trustworthy, resourceful wizard to spring him from this place.

"What a beautiful owl!" Ted Tonks said as he looked out his window at the convenient owl perch he had installed when his daughter went off to Hogwarts. He was a man of practicality, and having owls dive in unto his dinner table or crashing into his furniture at the most inopportune time was a thing of the past. Only a galleon at any reputable pet store, the nifty little perch installed right outside a window pane and was enchanted with a 'ez-rest owl attraction' charm. Owls now landed neatly outside the designated window and waited a few minutes before coming in, giving him or Andromeda a chance to invite them in.

"I'll get it," a lanky eighteen year old girl wearing an oversized witch's blouse and tiny shorts said, knocking her knee into the dinner chair with her haste to get to the window first. Grimacing but admirably trying to hide the fact that she was limping, her father shook his head at her then went back to his paper and coffee. She opened the window and offered her arm which the snow white owl immediately hopped unto.

"It's for.. me ..?" Tonks smiled as she talked to Hedwig. She carried her to the pet area nearby while untlying the note on her leg. Hedwig ate from the owl treat bowl and water dish as she tried to figure out who this was from. She didn't know anyone who mailed her using this pretty owl. Hedwig stared at her as she walked up to the staircase to her room, then let out a quick hoot, reminding Tonks that she would wait for the reply. Tonks glanced up but then focused on the letter again, wincing each step she went up.

She settled down in her adequate but untidy bedroom, trainee books and research papers all over her
desk and the left side of her bed.

"Well I'll be damned," she breathed. This was from someone she only knew about in stories: Harry 'The Boy who Lived' Potter has owled her. She grabbed her wand. If there was any one basic element her studies taught her, anything remarkably unusual could be a sign of trouble, no matter how mundane it may seem. In the wizarding world, stuff happens and better to be just a little paranoid than hexed or bewitched into something that can have cascading and dire events.

"Impervisito, asiente colloportus, imediacio homenum revelio," she recited. The window pane closed gently, as did the door behind her, and a light ripple of light sealed the doorframe and window frame in a gentle blue pulse. No listeners or spying elements were found either.

"Aparecium enscripto," she said and tapped her wand on the parchment itself. No hidden words or enchantments flared, so she went ahead and began to read. As she read, she frowned, blinked, and various other expressions of doubt crossed her pale, heart shaped face. Her hair reverted to become dark black, identical her mother's.

'Tomorrow. He needs me to help him tomorrow. The children's park off Privet drive, Little winging. Look normal,' he says in the letter she summarized.

Tonks bit her lip as she read it again. 'Look normal' he says. Something wasn't right. As far she knew, they never met, so he didn't know what she looked like, and she really doubted he knew that she was a Metamorphmagus.

She thought the general feel of letter was innocent enough, except for that little Look normal bit. It gave her a heads up though. This boy was intriguing, and he knew some things that he shouldn't be able to. Guess she had a trip to do now, to prepare herself better for tomorrow.

She wrote a quick response in the same tone, agreeing to the visit and the diplomacy needed to not draw too much attention. Keeping the original letter in her magical safe box she got recently, she grabbed some flight goggles and gloves and made her way downstairs.

"Hey, going to get a research paper material from a mate downtown. Be back in a couple hours," she said as she gave Hedwig the letter. He father grunted in acknowledgement and said offhandedly to be back in time for dinner.

Jon and Harry were sitting in Harry's bedroom later that evening. Harry had successfully convinced him to bathe and change in the bathroom and brought up some food for them without the Dursley's knowing there was someone else upstairs for the entire day.


"It was leftovers," Harry added, then closed his mouth; not wanting to spoil the good impression by saying that even Dudley wasn't a fan of the simple meal. At least it was more than enough for the both of them to eat with the added plus of not being important enough for Aunt Petunia to notice that it was finished.

"Right. Tomorrow you say this associate is going to get us out of here."

"Yeah."

"I take it your relatives despise your hard wizard ways."

"Yeah, pretty much."
"Hm. Soft." Jon shook his head in laughter. "They should have broken you out of this occult magic you speak of. You look weak." Jon scoffed. Harry rolled his eyes.

"Look, Snow," said Harry. "This was not a happy place for me, and yes they did do cruel things to a kid, me, growing up. Its... not a good feeling to be not wanted by your family." Harry looked away with disgust at the doorway."If you want to call them that," Harry added regretfully.

Jon gave him one of those stares, which were a bit uncomfortable because in modern culture that kind of intense eye contact wasn't just...done anymore. Harry concentrated on not breaking it first.

"Apologies." Jon said finally, going back to his food. After a tense couple minutes he added, "My family didn't really want me either. Sent me away to the Wall, the Night's Watch, to take the Black."

"Sounds like a raw deal."

"Yes. It made me a man, but it gained me allies...and many enemies." Jon added, eating his spaghetti with a long slurp." Hmm- good stuff." Harry frowned.

"I'm going to have to give you some pointers on modern etiquette and stuff you should know. First, no slurping in public." Harry said. "Also your accent is remarkably northern even if you use different words that we do now. We going to have to give you a crash course in British history, magic and muggle."

"Muggle?" Jon said.

"Normal people, non-magical."

"Like myself?"

"Maybe, maybe not,;" Harry shook his head. "I'm not too sure of that. At the station those entities said they would intervene for this situation...well.. our travel back in time; to happen. Magic said they would."

"So you heard them too?" Jon said abruptly. "These, booming voices."

"Yeah. I'm just going to say it. Did you have, or, experienced any magic? Any sort of weird impossible stuff?"

Jon gave him another stare that lasted about ten seconds.

"Death showed me a glimpse into my future life," Jon said, wiping his mouth with the Tesco table napkin. "Being brought back to life by the Red woman. Surviving a crush of almost two thousand men in battle. Also I defeated a Lord of Winter. With Dragon glass and Fire. The Lords of Winter are already rotten corpses which are continuously regenerating, creatures of foul magic to be sure."

He gulped down a drink of water. "And... later... being Impervious to the Winter's Touch, a cold of unearthly note and even later on...Dragon Firebreath."

"Wow." Harry was impressed. "You are impervious to dragon fire?"

"Maybe that was a strong word," Jon admitted. "I felt the heat and the pain, but only for so long as the fire lasted. I was Unburnt. I was not permanently injured."

"And the Cold?"

"The white walkers bring the cold. It seeps into the land, killing all the ground's life the longer and
more numerous their stay. Men who travel across their territory come across an unnatural chill, freezing to death within a month's time, even after having left the cursed area. Then they rise from the dead, joining their army. It is called Winter's touch. It made advancing the battle lines impossible. The realms of men were always on the retreat, burning their own walls to prevent the advance of the horde." Jon looked at his empty plate. "Ghastly, I say. I was unhorsed in a battle and injured. My horse had fled, or died... but I managed to survive long enough to find shelter in a cave and recover, even in the blasted cold, and get back out of their territory after a week hidden. I could not cross from behind their front advance on foot. I found a flowing river heading south, and a held on to a drifting log. For almost two days... I was going along the current in freezing temperatures. Yet I did not die. It must be some sort of magic. No mere man lives through that..." Jon suddenly made a fist and pounded his forehead in anger.

Harry started in shock, almost flinching bodily.

"I have not imagined this," Jon said."I have not imagined this."

"What?" said Harry tentatively.

"The memories ring true. But I have not lived them. Curse you," Jon seethed, his eyes murderous. Jon's whole body tensed, hunched over his meal.

"Me?" Harry said, a bit worried now.

"The voices," Jon hissed. "...they claimed 'A Lion roars in the Darkness. Only he holds the key.'"

Harry and Jon stared at each other. Harry's resolve grew fast. Jon was testing him.

"You are the Lion," Jon admitted. Breaking eye contact, he got up and rubbed the back of his head. "You are the pebble that started these ripples. That's what they said."

Harry watched him pace. "And what did they say about you?"

"Me?" Jon laughed. "They called me the Sword of the Light."

"Oh really?" Harry said, eyebrows going high.

"Which makes absolutely no sense, Harry of House Hollow-"

"Potter," Harry corrected.

"Because they also said: 'You will once again take on the Black, in this you shall come to terms'." Jon pounded his head once again. "Do you know what this means?"

"You said you took on the Black before right?" Harry said.

"Yes, the night's watch." Jon agreed. Harry studied him a few seconds.

"Is that a Knight, as in defender of the realm, or Night, as in day and night?" said Harry. Jon faltered briefly in his pacing, then continued.

"It is a play on the word. It is a bit of both- usually it is riff raff molded into fighting men, criminals on pardon from death who choose to take the black, outcasts and other non-desirables. Most take it as a legitimate alternative to dying either a slow dying existence as a scoundrel or beggar, or quick death on the executioners gallows. I was trained in the art of war, a Knight, and also as a Vassal, who can read, write and draw up wages, laws and agreements on behalf of my superior or Liege."
And I grew up with Nobles in my liege's house, which was probably the reason the last Lord Commander trained me to take his place." Jon stopped his explanation mid-stride, frowning to himself. "Almost as if he knew - that he would be betrayed, and tried to warn me of how easy one could be set upon by his own men." Jon laughed bitterly. "I did not learn that lesson well, it seems."

"The only 'Black' I know, which could make any sense whatsoever ...is a wizard family named Black. To be precise, 'The Ancient and Most Noble House of Black'."

"Well, they sound lively," Jon murmured sarcastically. "More like a gathering of Black magic occultists to my ear."

"True, true," Harry nodded. "To an extent," he smiled. "There are some good apples from that tree. Well, only one or two of them ...really," Harry faltered, sounding unconvincing to his own ears. He frowned, his heart paining him on what happened to Sirius.

He would rescue him this time, this he swore to himself.

"Your expression," Jon said. Harry shook out of his thoughts.

"What?"

"You were thinking dark deeds, something fierce," Jon noted."I am experienced in seeing that look upon men." Jon sat down again on the bed. "Maybe you aren't so weak as you seem."

"Erm.. thanks?" Harry said, shaking his head. Jon watched him again with another long , piercing stare. Harry was beginning to think he had some sort of leglimens ability. But then again, this man led a militia. And he knew criminals and nobles alike. Harry really began to understand that Jon was a man of numerous dark experiences and encounters. A bit scary to be honest.

"Enough of the past. Tell me about this meeting tomorrow and what to expect in this new world."

"Alright. " said Harry. "It's a girl. She's a witch and got some nifty , and unique abilities. Her name is Tonks, but just ...I'll do the talking. Be polite, and don't act or say anything like... weird ... be careful with your responses to her questions . We don't want to throw her off or give ourselves away. We'll come up with your story eventually after I give you some tips on how things work."

"Is my name not good enough for this Tonks?" Jon objected. Harry tilted his chin side to side in a vague gesture.

"Magical people are curious folk about other wizards they don't know about. We're very, very rare compared to the amount of non magical people about. " Harry thought for a second." Maybe another orphan bit, wizards and witches eat that one up all the time." Harry grinned. "I should know. Also, you gotta watch out for cars...they are some really crazy drivers and oh yeah- tv and radios are things that.."

Nymphadora Tonks was at the rendezvous point ten minutes early the following morning at eight fifty a.m. She was here yesterday placing some mild apparation detection wards and a few well placed sneakascopes at each corner of the block, all of them charmed to her earrings to give her a warning if there was any sort of dark magic being performed during this meeting.

She was dressed in a white Michael Jackson leather jacket to go with her dark blue dinner gown underneath. She also wore some incredibly high heeled leather boots under the long skirt of her dress. She was leaning up on the fence on the inside of the park, trying to look inconspicuous in her muggle attire she put together after she did her broomstick surveillance of the area yesterday.
Afterwards she popped by her old classmate from school.

As she came unannounced, her friend Sarah could only get one dress from one of her cast-off trunks. She had fully integrated into the magic world and her old muggle clothes that could fit were far and few in between. Sarah strongly advised that she needed a jacket to go with the dress or all her breasts would be showing, and was not appropriate for anything other than a dinner date. So Tonks had to ask her dad this morning to borrow a jacket for a muggle costume party she wanted to go to later tonight. Her father only had his old white MJ jacket with a couple well placed zips all over it. She loved it on sight.

Only five minutes had passed when she saw two boys walking towards the park as they came into view around the corner. One was a bit shorter than the other, ruffled black hair covering his head and glasses on his face. The other was walking in stride with him, speaking out the side of his mouth, watching everything with a sense of scrutiny only a tourist or someone who was very awestruck would have done.

Both walked a bit, different. Not like the twelve year olds they should be. She remained where she was, watching them.

"There." Harry said, spotting her instantaneously. "The girl in the... never mind. You can't miss her."

"Definitely," Jon murmured. "I thought you told her look normal. Compared to the few people we've walked past and those children playing in there... she's attracting too much attention. Or is that normal?"

"Normal for her it appears. Let's go. Smile, be nice and let me handle this ."

"Aye," Jon muttered, nodding. "The signal is, Winter is Coming," Jon added hastily out the corner his mouth.

"Signal for?"

"If you need me to incapacitate or ..well.. y'know." Jon gave him a look. "If it goes down badly."

"You can't be serious," Harry sighed, stopping to look at Jon squarely. "She's just a girl, she becomes a friend of mine you can't- I mean she won't-" he stopped suddenly on the pavement. Harry looked Jon in the eye. Jon was serious. Harry shook his head and continued walking towards the park. Maybe he shouldn't be as trusting, maybe he needed Jon to think differently, after all he is a Stranger in his ordinary world. But without a wand, or a weapon of any sort he doubted Jon could really do anything to Tonks. She even did newt levels and supposedly, if his memories served correctly, was doing entrance studies for examinations to qualify for the Aurur program this winter.

"Just, easy mate, I got this." The two boys walked up to her, her eyes taking in their faces as they approached.

Harry stood a respectful four feet away directly facing her while Jon continued in an arc so that he was at angle closer to her right arm yet not close enough to her or Harry to be in their space and folded his arms across his chest. Harry saw the movement and huffed, pulling Jon by his sleeve back closer so the two boys stood side by side.

"Hullo," Harry said, smiling. Tonks just watched him.

"Hello," Jon said, nodding upwards.
"How do you know who I am?" Tonks said, her eyes wary. "And that I was the one you are looking for?"

Jon smirked, his eyes twinkling. Harry smiled, a bit of confusion on his face. There were five other people in the park, a young mother with her two children, and by the swings another young boy with probably his younger sister, both of them probably Harry's own age.

"Lucky guess," Harry answered. "I'm glad you returned my owl, I was hoping we'd get chance to talk, in person. I'm Harry, this is Jon." He offered his hand for Tonks to shake. Jon relaxed, and did the same after Tonks accepted Harry's handshake.

"Well lads, this is, might I say, a bit unusual? You Harry's cousin or something?" Tonks asked.

"No, milad- I mean ma'am," Jon corrected.

"How about we go by the benches and talk?" Harry deflected, gallantly gesturing to the benches underneath a shady tree. Tonks shrugged and lead the way and sat down. Harry sat down one space away from her in the middle of the bench, leaving the end for Jon, who instead took up a defensive position standing up behind Harry's left shoulder, as to not be a distraction to the meeting and giving him a good view of the entire park.

"A bit intense fellow there," Tonks smiled at Harry. Harry laughed nervously.

"Oh, he's cool. So Tonks, you asked how I know you. Well I was always curious about what my parents did and who they were ever since I joined Hogwarts, and it seems that there was some history there of them being a target, or well, hunted. I mean, before they were murdered."

"You don't flower things up, do you Harry..." Tonks murmured. Harry shrugged, not flinching under her gaze. She had nothing on Jon, anyway.

"So, I asked about why weren't those people arrested or something at the Library late last term, and some of the older kids told me that's the Auror's job. Me with my dumb mouth blurted what's an Auror? And that earned me major embarrassment points as they laughed. The boy who lived don't know what an Auror was? Well, that was brilliant..."

Tonks laughed as she rest her elbow on the back of the bench as she crossed her legs towards Harry, bouncing her ankle. "Okay, I see. Go on."

"I asked one of the older guys afterwards on the Quidditch team, about Aurors, and they said they heard the Tonks girl who left last year wanted to become one. I got your name and worked up the courage to write you," Harry said, doing his damned best to push every bit of hero worship he could muster in his innocent, twelve year old visage. "I'm really glad you came."

Tonks smiled, and cleared her throat. "I must admit it was unexpected, but I was curious. You're resourceful for a lad. And who is he?"

"He's Jon. He's also one of the reasons I mailed you." At that moment came a yip yip yip of a dog and ghost came pelting down the road, his tongue hanging out of his mouth. The little wolf pup bounded into the park and aimed straight for Jon. Jon smiled and called him to heel by his legs, which Ghost promptly refused and began running circles around his feet. "And that's his dog, Ghost; who I believe we forgot was sleeping under the sheets."

"Nice puppy," Tonks observed.

"Thank you milad- ma'am," Jon said pleasantly.
"Yes well," said Harry. "I am in dire need of a massive favour. I know we've just met, but my relatives are muggles, they just won't help me with this. I took a chance in mailing you, seeing as you intend to become an Auror and so on, you might help me." He did his hero worship thing again.

"The Boy hero of wizardry mails me, of all people, and asks a favour." Tonks dramatically tapped her lip looking up in thought. "Hear what. Let me hear about this favour, and I'll think on it. I can't promise you more than that. It's nothing ridiculous or anything , right?"

"No no no, I won't ask you anything bad or anything," Harry said, keeping up with his twelve year old persona. "Just I can't do it alone." Harry looked around a second. "Mind if you did some privacy charms or something?"

"Sure, no problem." Making sure no one was watching , Tonks took out her wand and began to wave. In a smooth strike, Jon's had her wrist in a grip and was in the process of twisting her arm when Harry did a frantic motion to stop.

"What the hell mate, it's cool!" Harry said removing Jon's arm away from hers with a wild tug. Tonks had pulled her arm away and cradled her wand arm against her , out of their reach.

"Sorry," Jon said, sheepishly. "Bad reflex?" he shrugged.

"Whoa." Tonks said, watching Jon's hands up in a placating manner as he stepped back. "Ok, I am going to definitely put a privacy charm up. You two are devilishly up to something."

"No we're not, not really," Harry explained, giving Jon a look. "He's just a bit jumpy, bad dreams and all, or so he says."

"Hm," Tonks said as she quickly did the privacy charms. "So. Now we can talk. What do you want?"

"Um.. We need you to get us to Diagon alley. Its pretty embarrassing and no one could know, not even my friends, or the headmaster. Which is why I couldn't mail my teachers, either." Harry took out his wand with the crack running along the entire length of the wand, showing the semi-solid phoenix core inside. "Got to go to Gringotts, and sort myself out by Ollivanders." Tonks looked at sympathy to his wand. "Some other errands I'd like to do too, if we can."

Tonks was contemplating his request.

"Well, maybe..." Tonks hesitated.

"I can even throw in a fifty galleon tip once we are through?" Harry pressed. Tonks narrowed her eyes.

"Won't your folks be curious to where you left?" she asked, skeptical.

"Nope. Once I do my chores and back before sunset, the less they see of me, or the neighbours see of me, the better!" Harry said.

"Sounds like cool folks," Tonks said, smiling. "For a young lad to be so free."

"Ahm, yeah, sometimes..." Harry agreed half heartedly. He definitely didn't think that cupboard was cool, or free.

"When do you want to go?" Tonks asked.
"Would now be alright with you?" Harry answered immediately. Tonks eyed the both of them.

"No time like the present, as they say," She admitted, getting up. "No funny stuff, Jon," she warned, turning her back to the other park goers and removing the privacy charm. "We can walk to the other street, from there we'd catch the 'bus."

"Great, thank you," he said. The walk was done in under five minutes and they waited until the road was clear. Tonks then held her wand up for the Knight Bus, and within moments it came screeching to a halt in front of them.

"Welcome lady and gents, how can I do for ya?" Stan said.

"Three for Diagon, please," Tonks said, digging in her zippers. Harry already had the fee out in his hand. "Oh right, cheers," she gave Stan the fare and sat down with the two boys. Jon was trying not to be flabbergasted, but his pale face and wide eyes were telling.

"He's not from around here, is he?" Tonks asked Harry. Harry was at that moment pulling on a steep wizards hat over his hair and forehead.

"Nope," Harry said. Jon took out one of Uncle Vernon's old Kangol hat and put it on his head. As Tonks was sitting in the bench she unzipped her MJ jacket and opened it up. Harry couldn't help but stare. Tonks caught on to her actions and sort of closed the jacket around her. "Um, Random question. Is there any way for wizards to ...check family history if they don't know it?"

"Yeah, sorta. It's a magic seal based on blood that can link a wizard to a family. It isn't as precise as a Wizard family scroll or portrait, but it gets certain disputes settled easier than through court."

"How does it work?"

"Basically, it's a spin the bottle mechanism the goblins, and some other guilds use to determine family affiliation. It basically points out the most prominent genes and blood history. Its sometimes pretty vague, as some families have a lot of different old lines in them. The hotter the seal glows, the more direct the descendant. Gotta be embarrassing for some of the Slytherins, who... traditionally, you know what...don't go far outside, if you catch my drift," She winked and chuckled. Harry found her laugh charming. "But then again, maybe they aren't embarrassed," she frowned.

"Slytherins are wizards who talk to snakes?" Jon asked out of the goddamned blue. Harry groaned inwardly.

"Oh, no, well I mean, technically, only Slytherins have been known to talk to snakes, but not all Slytherins talk to snakes, I mean. Ok there were two known Slytherins who talked to snakes. The worst of the Lot. I don't even want to talk about it. But they are rare. Very rare. The Hardest of the pureblood maniacs who turned.. dark... Anyway never mind about that. We're here," she announced. "This is our stop."

Harry shook his head as he followed Jon and Tonks off the bus. He wanted to kick Jon and his Iron man t-shirt off the last step on the way down. Jon waited for Harry as the bus sped off.

"O' hardest Slytherin," he mumbled to Harry.

"Shut it," Harry staged whispered back.

"All right! And this, my dear lads, is the Leaky Cauldron," Tonks parroted in her perfect tour guide voice. "Please do not eat anything that has been served very hot because it has probably been cold for a long time and used a flash heating charm on it, disastrous for the bowels, dear me, but please do
enjoy a cold brew by all means!" Tonks pushed open the door to the pub and walked in. People watched the two boys without much interest but then did a double take on Tonk's MJ white jacket. At least Harry knew that she would be getting all the attention instead of him.

"Wotcher Tom," she said with a wink. Tom gave her an ugly stare and grunted. She flipped a galleon at him. "A remember-me-not special in everyone's next round please," she whispered. Tom grunted again and offered her his dirty rag on the table. She pretended to look over the bar then spat directly in the rag.

"No one saw you 'ere," he nodded and went back to his duties.

Harry was fascinated. As they left the back door and into Diagon alley entryway, he nodded back at the bar. "What was that about?"

"Tom's spot are full of nosey folk," she said softly while tapping the blocks. "It's an old trick my mom knew he did to give everyone who bought another drink a bit of short term memory failure. Got a potion bubbling on low simmer that he throws the rag in when you pay with coin and spit. Gives you a couple minutes of everyone forgetting you were ever there."

"Neat," Harry said. She was the right choice to make for this trip.

"Turn around boys," Tonks commanded as the blocks began moving away. "Almost forgot about the clothes." Harry and Jon were perplexed; but obliged and turned their back to her. There was a slight woosh of magic and rustling of clothes. "Just hold this for me a mo'," She asked Harry and the dress was thrown over Harry's shoulder. Startled, Harry had to use tremendous willpower not to peek. The fabric smelled of shampoo, cream and a slight flowery perfume. "And this," and the jacket was handed to Jon. "Okay, lets roll." They turned and she was dressed in a perfectly normal witches robe, with a bit of dip at the neck more than usual. She took the clothes back from them and folded them a couple times then stuffed them in a magic purse. Her hair began to shorten and turn a nice shade of pink, then ended with fluorescent green tips.

Jon's eyes widened, but he said nothing. Harry cleared his throat and followed her through.

Within minutes at a steady pace, they were in front of a vault clerk at Gringotts.

"Morning," Harry said in a chipper voice. The Goblin grunted, not even looking up from his papers on the desk. Harry had a moment when he recognized the goblin as Bogrod, the one he used the Imperious curse on. "I would like to retrieve some gold from my vault."

"Vault key?" Bogrod asked impatiently.

"I'm sorry, I don't have it with me," Harry said. Bogrod shuffled for a parchment in his drawer. He unrolled it, putting on his spectacles. The parchment rolled onto the floor and along the walkway behind.

"You the owner or cosigned?"

"Owner?"

"Hereditary or Current account?"

"Hereditary," Harry agreed.

"Head of house?"
"Yes."

"Siblings or other benefactors whom are to be informed?"

"No."

"Status?"

"Excuse me?" Harry asked.

"Sole heir, betrothed, parent or guardian, married or widowed?"

"Um, I'm only tw-" Harry began.

"My good sir," Jon interrupted as he spoke to the goblin. "Please accept my apologies, but surely a blood seal would do?"

"Very well," Bogrod grunted, watching Jon closely. "If you shall, place a spot of your blood on this board, here and here." He shoved a small, bloodstained chalkboard inscribed with runes towards Harry pointing at two spots.

Harry watched Jon curiously, but then offered his thumb to Tonks, who drew her wand and silently issued the paper cut jinx on it. Harry pressed his thumb at the two spots.

Bogrod accepted the board and placed it under another small parchment. The parchment soaked up the little blood and words began to materialize on it. Harry was instantly reminded of a cross between Tom's diary and Umbridge's detention quill.

Vault 687, 820.

"Very good, Mr. Potter. Your trust fund vault 820 you are able to draw one thousand galleons monthly free of service charge. Your hereditary no 687 has a cap of five thousand per week with written withdrawal scrolls signed and sealed two days in advance until your finances are drained. All withdrawals at hereditary cost 5 gallons per every 1000. Which would you like access?" the goblin asked, in a bored, unwelcoming manner.

"Trust fund please."

"Bilgrumble," Bogrod summoned. "Please attend Mr. Potter and guests." Another goblin came towards them. "Mr. Potter, please instruct your Magicker to counter the blood seal. Your privacy is important to us, and we should hope that you keep doing business with us." He shoved the board back and gave them the parchment with the vault names and numbers. Tonks tapped the board and the blood was reversed unto her wand. Bilgrumble offered Tonks a fresh cloth with she wiped off the edge of her wand. This was done with a formal air and Bogrod nodded. "Very well, next!"

"I'll wait here," Jon said. "You go on ahead."

Tonks nodded and gave Harry the parchment with the numbers of his vault. "Come on," she said, walking with Bilgrumble.

"Jon," Harry warned. "I'll be back."

"Yes, of course," Jon replied with a slight bow and a small smile. When they were out of sight Jon turned to Bogrod. "Is there a way to determine magic parentage..to let's say, abandoned magical children?"
Bogrod watched him. "If your direct parents had accounts with us, of course." Jon stared at Bogrod with calculating eyes. Bogrod actually broke the silence first. "You wish to try, young master?"

"I will be grateful. Is there a price?" Jon asked, his eyes never leaving Bogrod's.

"I like you, young man. No charge. Would you need a magicker or do you have another means?" he offered the board.

Jon took out the butter knife he had sharpened overnight from his meal while Harry slept. With an efficient nick he cut his thumb.


"Very good Mr. Black, excuse my informality, I meant Lord Black. Your trust fund vault 780 and 492 you are able to draw one thousand galleons monthly free of service charge. Your hereditary numbers 711 487 has a cap of five thousand per week with written withdrawal scrolls signed and sealed two days in advance until your finances are drained. All withdrawals at hereditary cost 5 gallons per every 1000. Which would you like access?" the goblin asked, his eyes twinkling.

"I would like to retrieve one thousand galleons, and my parents information."

"Very well. Here you are, Mr. Black," Bogrod stretched over and produced two different scrolls.

Regulus Acturus Black vault number 780. The Noble and Most Ancient House of Black vault number 711.

Giselle Gemma Ollivander vault number 492. The Most Ancient House of Ollivander vault number 487.

"Thank you, good sir."

"Your name, Mr. Black, so that I may enter it into our records?"

"It's Jon."

"Would you be taking on a hyphenated... or prefer simply Black."

"I will just take on the Black, thank you." Again.

"It is done. Your funds will be brought to you. Next!"

John stepped aside, Ghost sitting neatly at his heel. By the time Tonks and Harry came back Jon had a bag full of coins wrapped around his wrist. He and Harry shared a look.

"Well, look at you!" Harry nodded. "I thought this might of been harder, but you seem to improvise and get through quite well!"

"One must do what he can to help himself," he addressed them. "Great success, but not all the puzzle pieces are in place."

Tonks looked from one to the other. "I think there is something I am missing, but who am I to be curious about the boy who lived and why his friends take out large sums of gold." She chuckled.

"Oh, yeah well..um don't want to have to keep popping back in all the time." Harry laughed lamely.

"So..." Tonks smiled. "Ollivanders?"
"Yup!" Harry said, relieved.

"After you, mila - ma'am," Jon bowed slightly.

Tonks turned on her heel with a flourish and her hair danced around her as she turned to leave. "I'm not anyone's 'milady'...nor 'ma'am'. Just Tonks is fine," she smiled. Jon bowed again in acknowledgement. "Why do I get the feeling I am going on an adventure. World renowned Hero, bags of gold, goblins, and weapons. A mysterious friend with only one name- sounds like the beginning of a great story!"

"Pardon me, milady. My name is Jon Sno-Black. John Black." Jon said as they walked down the street.

"Really?" Tonks eyebrows went up. Harry tried to hide his surprise as well. "As in House of Black?"

"Yes," Jon said. Tonks frowned.

"I've never heard of you," said Tonks suspiciously.

"My father," Jon said slowly. "Was Regulus."

"Oh, I am so, so sorry," Tonks said, her hand going to her chest. "I didn't know, he was really young he passed under such mysterious circumstances I never knew-"

"Neither did I," Jon said, trying not to laugh at how absurd this was. He didn't know his real mother home, now he didn't know his father here. A bastard no matter where he went. Harry did a shushing motion out of Tonks' line of sight. "I prefer to keep it private, if possible," Jon said remorsefully.

"Sure, no problem, mums the word," Tonks replied.

"Mums' the word for what, exactly?" Jon asked.

"Just a saying," Harry intervened. "Secret is safe with her," he added. "Here we are!" He knocked loudly and pushed open the door to the wand shop.

"Coming!" said Ollivander from the back room. He walked into view and laid his pale eyes on them. "Welcome, Oh my back so soon? Ms Tonks, Mr. Potter, and...?"

"Jon," said Jon, nodding.

"Yes, yes... Mr. Jon," Ollivander said, not breaking eye contact. "How may I help today?"

Harry turned to Tonks. "Hey this might be a while, you mind terribly if Jon and I talked to him?" Tonks looked between the three of them and decided that nothing untoward could happen here so she took the hint and nodded.

"No problem, I'll browse around and be back within an hour if anything. I'm sure you two would be able to find me, place is quiet today." Tonks turned to Jon. "No funny stuff."

"No funny stuff," Jon agreed.

The men watched her leave and Harry turned back to Ollivander, all business. "I need a new wand. One that leaves no ministry underage use of magic trace. Can this be possible?"

"Usually underage wizards who ask this aren't attending Hogwarts. Or wish to be, unobserved,"
Ollivander drawled out the last word. Harry took out his wand and laid it on the counter.

"Oh ho," Ollivander said, perching his glasses on his nose. He took it up and inspected it. "Oh my," he said. "Yes yes, I see."

"You do?" Harry said, his eyes narrowing.

"Oh yes," he said. "The underage trace would not apply here anyway," he agreed. He drew his own wand and Jon tensed. "Have no fear," Ollivander said, and he wordlessly flipped the open sign of his establishment to 'closed' and ran a few privacy charms and animagus revealing spells.

"Explain what you meant about the trace not applying," Harry said.

"Your secret is safe with me Mr. Potter. I assume you are from the future, or have somehow crossed the beyond and come back." Ollivander simply went about his business and began looking for new wands on the shelves.

"Oh?"

"Yes, that is what that wand shows me. The magic performed in that wand has already matured and gelled. Look at the core- the phoenix feather has been infused with your magical essence, forming a plasma. Signs of high use of adrenaline-filled battle magic. A few unforgivables as well, and many, many shields that have deflected strong curses. All signs of a Hardened wizard."

"You can keep this quiet?" Jon said in no uncertain terms.

"Of course my boy. I haven't survived this long without being able to deal with hit wizards, mages and the like. Confidentiality is one of my specialties," Ollivander said. "You are going to want to keep that, I have a project that you may want to try, Mr. Potter." Ollivander came back with a dozen wand boxes. "But first, let me help your friend."

"Mr. Jon, please come and step forward. Try these."

Jon tried a few of the wands, without any effect.

"It might help if you told me your surname, my boy," Ollivander probed gently. Harry nodded and shrugged at Jon.

"It's Black," Jon said. Ollivander nodded.

"And the other parent?"

"Ollivander," Jon replied, watching the aged wizard in the eye. Ollivander stood still a second, nodded, and went into the back room a moment.

"Oh this is interesting. I will have to design one for you. But first, I have my suspicions, but let us experiment on my theory. Mr. Potter, Mr. Black, please take a hold of each end of the poor broken wand."

They did as they were told. The wand began to glow from its core, with a soft trill of phoenix song emanating.

"Yes, I was correct. I have good news, and I have not so good news, Mr. Potter."

"The bad news..." Harry sighed.
"Your magic has been altered. Your power over curses has been handicapped, to being almost ineffective," Mr. Ollivander smiled. Harry eyes opened wide, and then shut his eyes and blew out a long hard breath.

Well. *Fuck me.*

"Mr. Black, your power over curses has been focused and amplified. It almost as if you took Mr. Potter's natural ability and added it to your family's traditional knack for dark magic." Harry looked at Jon. Jon didn't even blink.

"Is that the *good* news?" Harry hissed. Jon folded his arms.

"The good news is that it will be tremendously difficult for you to turn to the Dark, Mr. Potter. Most young men who walk in here asking your initial question usually do."

"Well that's something," Harry grumbled.

"Also, your defensive or light-sided magic should also grow rapidly to compensate your inability to cast hexes and curses effectively."

"That's absolutely spiffing, no doubt," Harry muttered, thinking of the ramifications of this turn of events. Mr. Ollivander straightened and began to survey them as he walked back and forth in his shop. He clasped his hands behind him, similarly to the Professors at Hogwarts. In a slow deep tone, he began to speak.

"The synergy of both your magic cause this core to unleash radiance." Mr. Ollivander looked at the damaged wand, the core glowing faintly, almost alive. "That is truly the good news."

"Radiance?" Jon asked.

"When I said earlier about the project for Mr. Potter, it now means both of you must undergo it. It's a practice that used to be common a long, long time ago in ancient Babylon. It was called Kur Milid originally, but we call it simply Core Meld now," Ollivander gripped his left wrist with his right hand, raising his arms up in demonstration.

"Basically it is the process of creating a wand bracer infused with a plasma core. " He mimed drawing his wand from the inside of the left wrist. "It may seem slower, but it is quite intimidating if done right," Ollivander winked. "Often stops any altercation in its tracks."

*Hah. I really doubt that but ok.*

"So why isn't this used more often?" Harry grinned.

"Because there is a catch twenty two in this process. It usually needs a fully aged core which is attuned to the original owner. But it also needs to be done when the owner is still developing his magic. Quite a quandary. How can both be possible at the same time?"

"Time magic..?" Harry suggested.

"And that, my friend... is correct, and how I know that the underage trace would not apply to you, even for a new wand. Your magic has matured, but now you have managed to come back and do it again, rebuilding your abilities even though your wand has already been synergized. To the both of you, it seems, but in different ways."

"Sounds good," Jon said after a few silent moments.
"I will ask you return soon so that I may give you a supplies list and instructions for this project. Depending on the success of your acquisitions, you should have this Core Meld bracer ready within a few weeks to a month."

"The catch?" Harry asked.

"You will need to apprentice with me some days each week to get the feel for wand-smithing. And for the other components, you may need to register with a few guilds, a couple within Diagon and one or two in Knockturn."

"Why?" Jon asked.

"The bracer must be made solely by your hand, all ingredients and process must be done without assistance. Instructions are fine, but it will only work if you procure supplies, design, build and test it yourself. You can't even buy the supplies, you must get it from the source."

"Sounds like a lot of hassle..." Harry queried. Mr. Ollivander shook his head in dismissal.

"You would have basically two sources of attack, or defense, or a combination of both, available to you at the same time," Mr. Ollivander said sagely, tilting his chin upwards in challenge.

"Like wielding Sword, and the Shield," Jon nodded in agreement.

"Oh. Wicked," Harry grinned, offering his fist to Jon. Jon connected without missing a beat, or taking his eyes off of the sage Wand Maker.

"However, I realize that with your unique, dual circumstances, I can only offer you both loaner wands for now. You would work on your own wands as you apprentice here. Maybe this is best, the result would be a real compliment to your Phoenix bracer project." Mr. Ollivander gave them a solemn nod and he turned to climb his ladders.

"Oh, before I forget. There is a membership fee for all guilds, and it varies from guild to guild. My apprentice fee is one hundred galleons per year, due the day before you begin. This covers regular material for study and practice. For sale, you must either procure it yourself, or buy from our stock. You earn forty percent of sales of wands you design, if you so choose to make this a regular occurrence. Obviously you will not have to pay for your own final wands and bracers. How about it, young men?"

"Done," Jon agreed at the same time Harry said "Of course!"

"It is Agreed, then" he said, stretching for a box on the third shelf. "Ah, here it is. Olive Branch and Dragon heartstring. Only probably really effective for serious curses bordering on Auror dark detectors going off like crazy, but pretty bad at everything else. But if you are an Ollivander, this would work for the interim. Here you are, young man." Jon accepted it with a bow and waved it. Harry felt sleepy immediately.

"Careful!" Ollivander said, casting a counter charm at Harry. Harry shook his head, disoriented. "Well, that hundred year sleep curse worked like a charm!" Ollivander beamed. "Maybe some extra care is necessary, Mr. Black. Don't get too accustomed to it, it definitely doesn't suit you."

"One hundred year sleep?" Harry said, watching Jon inspect his new weapon.

"Once you sleep for the entire first year, it's almost impossible to re-animate you until around year sixty," Ollivander added, sliding down the shelves on his charmed ladder. "Here it is. It's a shame, for such a great wizard, but..." he came down the ladder and presented Harry with his interim loaner
"Holly and troll hair. Horrible combination, but the most compatible with any wizard. Even gives near squib-levels hope. Frighteningly good at the growing hair charm. Specializes in Lumos, and Winguardium-class spells. Can't do a lick else. Almost stopped this line ten years ago, but I do get the odd customer every year or so that needs one."

"Thanks. I guess," Harry received his wand and sure as he said, his lumos and levitation spells were bright and rock steady. He tried a mild jelly legs hex at the ground... but his hand began to vibrate and burn with a mild shocking sensation, similar to what happened with his broken wand yesterday.

"Want to start tomorrow? We can use the Knight Bus now that we got wands without bothering Tonks," Harry said to Jon.

"Yes, the sooner the better," he agreed. Both of them counted out the galleons and gave it to Ollivander. Ollivander got a parchment from his drawer with a pre-written agreement.

"Let me give you your apprentice license. Hm," he murmured.

"What, is there a problem sir?" Jon asked, studying the old man's expression.

"This seems to be...more of a family based document. Hold on, I have to edit the wording here," he tapped his wand to the parchment, "and here," again he tapped, "here, here, here and this line. Very well, this seems to be in order." He gave them both a copy.

There were clauses about restricting opening a separate business within two years, and using the Ollivander brand-name without consent, and certain other business related context that seemed fair. It also contained wording to the matter of attaining Junior level after successful completion of the apprenticeship. It also had a clause about applying to the ministry of international co-operation to complete a separate application. This application allowed a Junior smith with three years of experience to join the International Wandsmith Guild with hopes to become a Senior Smith.

"Sealed and signed with Blood?" Jon asked.

"Yes," Ollivander said, first note of surprise in his tone. "You've joined a guild before?" he asked politely.

"Sort of," he responded vaguely, drawing his makeshift dagger. He re-opened the small cut he made earlier while the old man gave him an enchanted quill. Jon squeezed his thumb until a pearl of blood formed, then touched the tip of the quill to it. He signed his copy, the enchanted quill multiplying his drop of blood to flow smoothly over the parchment.

Harry drew his wand absentmindedly and produced the paper cut jinx on his thumb. To his own amazement, the spell worked perfectly.

"Interesting," Mr. Ollivander said. Harry shrugged, and used the quill to sign his copy of parchment. "I was expecting to have to counter charm whatever happened to your finger but it seems the jinx was mild enough to work without issue. Usually the piercing class of jinxes is a level closer to the darker spectrum."

"The intent wasn't to harm anyone, that's the difference," Harry explained. "It was to help me learn more about magic, a positive aspect, maybe it can be called a charm in this case?"

"Perhaps," Mr. Ollivander said, not truly convinced. "Tomorrow, at eight o'clock will be fine. I will give you time to see what supplies you will need and during the course of the day you can visit the other guilds. I will call an associate to escort you to Knockturn if necessary." He wrote names of two books. "Get this at Obscurus'. I have the others you would need but those two are your starter books."
Begin them tonight," he added.

"Right. Will do. This was illuminating. Thank you once again, Mr. Ollivander," Harry said, a small nod towards his new trainer.

"It is an Honor, Master Wandsmith," Jon said solemnly with a medium bow.

"It has been over two hundred years since there was an outsider apprentice," he said, pulling his beard. "Tomorrow then. Walk in the light," he said in farewell.

"Walk in the Light," Jon replied. They both turned and left the store. Right across the road was Tonks, leaning on the wall of the shop. Harry was about to ask about the Walk in the Light thing but she approached before he got a chance.

"You got through?" Tonks asked. At their nod she smiled. "Good."

"We just need to get two books from Obscurus, and we could leave." Harry said, giving her the fifty galleons agreed upon. Tonks looked a moment at the small bag of coins, then pocketed it.

"Thanks, cheers!" She began to walk to the bookstore. the two boys followed behind her. Harry appreciated how graceful Tonks moved under her robes. He tried to not notice, but it was hard to concentrate.

"Here we are." As she opened the door, none other than Lucius Malfoy stormed out, obviously annoyed at something. Harry dipped his head and looked away. Mr. Malfoy strode down the road and exited left to the shortcut at Knockturn. Harry noticed that he was clutching something that looked remarkably like the Diary in his hand. Tonks scowled at Malfoy's back then made her way into the store with Harry and Jon in tow. They walked to the front of the shopkeeper who hadn't heard the door chime twice so was caught off guard when he noticed three people standing in front of him.

"Good day. Two copies of this, please," Harry asked. The shop clerk called out to the back room. "Katie!"

Katie bell, his fourth year Quidditch teammate, came out front. "Please get two of these for a Mr.? " he asked offhandedly.

"Harry! How's it going! Hey, Tonks was it? You look good!" Katie greeted them, taking the parchment from Mr. Ridgewall. "Who is your friend?"

"My cousin, Jon," Tonks said, smiling.

"Hi! Okay , I'm just gonna get this and be back in a minute!" Tonks nodded her thanks and she left.

"See the guy who walked out of here when we were walking in?" Harry whispered to Jon. Jon nodded. "He's bad news. We have to take care of something he is going to do as it happens to protect a little girl. We can't make any mistakes with him."

Jon genuinely smiled. "Just let me know when Harry. I am on top of it." He offered him his fist and Harry connected almost on reflex.

"We gotta stop doing that," Harry said as they both realized how uncanny it was.

"What are you two whispering about?" Tonks asked.

"She's older than you two." Harry shrugged, undeterred. Tonks smiled ruefully and shook her head, "Boys."

Katie made her way back, making small talk with Harry as they paid for the books. They left, waving cheerfully to Katie who seemed genuinely pleased to see him.

"Maybe you made an impression on her," Tonks noted with a grin.

"I am the youngest seeker and fastest snitch catcher, in like forever," Harry smirked, ruffling his hair as he put back on his hat.

"Oh really?" Tonks said in a high pitch voice. "I hope that isn't a lie!"

"You don't read the prophet, do you?" Harry asked cheekily.

"I Must have missed that edition," Tonks countered with a sniff. Harry walked past Pettichaps, and almost laughed at how small the clothes were, when he realized they would probably fit him still.

"One more stop, let me get some clothes at Milkins', seems we will be back tomorrow," Harry noted.

"Oh? More shopping?"

"Yeah, and we would be apprenticing as well," Harry said nonchalantly.

"Oh that's definitely a lie," Tonks stopped immediately. Harry walked into her bouncing into her back, causing Jon to stretch out a hand to prevent both of them from falling over. "Ollivander's is specifically a family run business. That's why they are the best in Britain. They have never offered apprenticeships, ever." Harry and Tonks untangled themselves, even while she was fussing.

"Not true," Jon said. "He said himself they haven't done it over two hundred years."

"Oh, come on." Tonks glared at them both. "Like, for real?"

"For real," nodded Harry.

"Congrats," she offered skeptically. "Let's get you geared then. Come on this way." She began moving in the completely opposite direction. Harry was confused. Milkins was just down the street.

"Where you going? Milkins is down this way," Harry protested. Tonks looked at him and shook her head.

"Trust me, for budding professionals, here is where you want to get gear. Sturdier stuff."

They walked towards the entrance to Knockturn alley. They walked for a couple minutes until they came to a stop in front of a dusty store. The sign above said WWG with a faded explanation below. Tonks hustled them inside, and they were now looking around at a different kind of clothes shop with uniforms, gloves, long over coats and tunic style robes.

"Mr. Bulistrode!" Tonks called. "Mr. Boot!"

"Good day good day!" A middle aged man with a bright smile and beefy arms came from behind the counter. "Hullo! Tonks is it? And who are your companions?"
"This is Jon, and Harry." Tonks shrugged. "Babysitting for the day!"

Harry groaned.

"Well! All well and good! how may we help?" Harry saw another man appear from the store room with a crate of dark uniforms or material levitating in front of him and unto the cashier's counter. "You finally ready for your first fitting?"

Tonks bit the bottom lip, and hesitated. "Yeah sure?"

"Good! You wanted ah, A-12 grade? Resistance level one gloves, boots, and level two ladies leather jerkin?"

"Ahm... yes, preferably the troll lined, not the dragon lined." She hesitated. "What was the difference in price again?" she ventured.

"Let me bring both and we'll let you try 'em on, then we can work something out eh?" Bulistrode said. "Bring me the Macedonian reserve and the Romanian Aerie level two's and some level one gauntlets and boots Bootsman!"

"Got ya! What size?"

"Small top, um.. size C cup or is it now D?" Bulistrode eyed Tonks front shamelessly. "Size small gloves and boots..um a size eight?"

"Yeah," Tonks said, trying not to be embarrassed about the loud proclamations of her chest in front of the boys who were smirking, pretending to look around. "And some apprentice robes for these two, and level 3 gloves."

"Oh?" Bulistrode smiled widely. "Nice of you to bring in extra customers , I'll give you a neat discount!"

Harry and Jon came forward and followed Bulistrode to the Journeyman's section. "We got basically everything you might need here lads," he offered. "Protective gear designed for many of our guilds menu all grades, all styles. She said you need level three gloves, got the finger cut-out version here, and all-covered here. Index and thumb cut out versions here. Gauntlet attachment here, and reinforced backhand plate attachments if necessary. What line?"

"Smithing," Jon said simply.

"Broom? Furniture or Instruments of wood?" He pointed at the wood type journeyman gloves. "Metal, cauldron, fine instruments or tools?" he pointed at the metal section. "And these are the alchemy bottle and glass making gloves. Very resistant to heat."

"Wand-smithing," Harry explained.

"Oh," Bulistrode stopped his sales pitch. "Ah, this is new." He paused a second, rubbing his beard. "The closest thing I got to that is used for the department of MLE. Much too bulky for such fine work. You may need to check the Curse breaker's Guild for a pair of their runic inscription set. It's a bit pricey though, but it's the right protection when dealing with dormant, kinetic and resonant magic. You don't want to play around with wand cores without one of those until you get your methodologies right. Ask for Stannis. Tell him I sent you. You'll need these though."

He brought them both pairs of masks that look eerily similar to the Death eater's versions. "This is for the final mating part between cores and wood. There may be magical flashes that sear the eyes and
face. Don't get cocky until you know the different type of reactions. Safety first is our motto at Wizards Worldwide gear."

"I'll take a pair of level one 'metal final instruments' gloves and also a level two 'metal tools' gloves. Oh, the complete set with the heavy gauntlet attachment and reinforced backhand attachment. Also the "Invincible Armor" line of metal tongs and chisels set I saw back there," Jon pointed.

"Very good!" Bulistrode said, impressed. "I'll set it on the counter. And for you?" he addressed Harry.

"Just Gloves for broom modifications would be fine with me," Harry said, getting inspiration.

"Excellent choice. I heard you made Gryffindor in your first year. Good one lad!" Bulistrode bustled about grabbing the items the young boys wanted. He spread them across the counter. "And here is your Magical hazard level 4 Apprentice Aprons and Robes. I'll give you two each, twenty percent off for the robes, five percent for the gear. Don't wear the aprons in direct sunlight, use them only in the workshop."

"That will be one hundred and ten galleons for you," he pointed to Jon. "Sixty eight galleons for Mr. Potter," he calculated on his abacus. "Will you be doing Gringotts note, or direct coin?"

"Coin," Jon said, drawing out his money. Harry did the same.

"Hey guys," Tonks called invitingly. The two young men walked over to the changing booth. "What you think?" she showed off the Leather jerkin. It fit snugly on her torso and was tight around her shoulders. It barely covered the top of her thighs. Harry took note that her legs were on point. He also took note that Tonks wasn't shy whatsoever. "This is the Macedonia brand, with the troll lining on the inside."

"Looks good," Harry gulped. He was beginning to sweat.

"But? I know there is a but there somewhere..." Tonks challenged.

"Isn't the Dragon line better?"

"Too rich for me. Got to get the gloves and stuff too for my practical," she frowned.

"In thanks for your help today, I will gladly help out with the cost of the dragon lined jerkin, milady," Jon offered.

"Oh no, I couldn't, Harry and I had an agreement."

"Consider this a gift, not an agreement," Jon persisted.

"The young man clearly doesn't mind," Mr. Boot encouraged, overhearing the exchange. "You would be better off in the long run with the dragon liner as I said, Ms Tonks."

"Okay, if you must," Tonks smiled prettily. "Thanks!" She went in the changing room to change into her original robes. When she re-emerged and paid, all three of them were practically bouncing with excitement on their new gear.

"Where is the Cursebreaker guild?" Harry asked. Tonks expression changed.

"I can't take you there, Harry. That's a bit further down and maybe a bit dodgy."

"It's just for a pair of gloves for us," Harry said. "Won't be a minute."
"We'll be quick," Jon reinforced. Tonks sighed.

"You guys are too much!" she laughed.

They made quick time down the road, Ghost running around them and yip yip yipping the whole way. Into the shopfront with CBG marked on top, and direct to the counter.

"Morning, I'm looking for Stannis?" Harry said. The woman behind the desk seemed disinterested.

"He's in the back, what d'ya want? she asked.

"Mr. Bulistrode sent me here." Harry insisted. "I would like to talk to him, if you please."

"Hold on," she said, getting up and going in the back. A minute later a small man with a wiry build came out, his face scarred in a couple places. He came to the counter and leant forward on it.

"Bully sent you?" he said in a grating voice that seemed almost comical to his small frame.

"Yeah, he sent us here because we want to buy two pairs of Runic inscription gloves."

Stannis eyebrows shot up. "Is that so? Very well, its thirty five galleons a pair."

Jon sized up the man, looking him in the eye. "May we see it?" Stannis grunted and went back in the room. He came back with two small trunks, one under each arm. He opened them with a tap of his wand and two sleek black pairs of gloves were in each one.

"These are designed to insulate your magic from the magic of the object you are working on. No feedback, or explosions, guaranteed."

Harry's eyebrows shot up. "Up to what Curse level can this protect?"

"This model goes up to Blood, Ghoul, Tissue rotting and Time/age curses."

"Got any for ...darker... protection?" he prodded. Tonks just looked at him, aghast. "Poison enchantments...what about Possession or Death-Soul magic?"

"Ho ho ho," Stannis said. "You want the good stuff. One minute." He locked the trunks then went back into the store room. He re-emerged with some jet black onyx boxes. "This is top of the line Egyptian Tomb curse breakers' gauntlet. This protects you from anything." He rubbed a silk cloth on the corner edge of the onyx boxes and they unfolded like a flower.

In each were matte black gloves, with a unique shimmering effect similar to Harry's invisibility cloak. It was mesmerizing, how the gloves folded at random, yet undeniably artistic, placed just so. They resided against the expensive box liner, resplendent against the deepest black satin backing.

The three of them simply watched in fascination. Harry actually had to swallow because saliva had built up in his mouth. It was surreal.

"One hundred galleons for the two of 'em. Another hundred for the onyx boxes, they also serve as a good storage element for anything that these bad boys need to handle. You want them?"

Harry nodded immediately. This was probably what they needed to handle the horcruxes. Heck, even if there were no horcruxes, no Basilisks to face, he knew he would still buy them. "I'll throw in another fifty if you give us the name and contact of the craftsman that made this."

"Ho ho ho," Stannis chuckled. "Done." Tonks eyes kept getting wider with the way these boys were
throwing money around. "Sign this, this is your guarantee of protection against cursed objects for up to fifteen years. If for some reason you do get cursed, the gloves will go dormant. Bring 'em back if you can and you will get a new custom made set with the counter curse inclusive of the new protection, and a two thousand galleon insurance payment."

"Great way to keep your development cycle going," Tonks noted.

"Aye lass, no better way to improve the product than through breakers complaining about what it couldn't handle. It's been through 6 revisions already over five hundred years, each one probably twice as strong as the last revision."

"Don't forget the Runic set," Jon said. Stannis put all four boxes on the counter and wrote them their bill. He also wrote the name of the master craftsman who forged the Onyx set.

"I'll give you his name for free. That's two hundred and seventy galleons." Harry and Jon put up the one thirty five galleons a piece and said their farewells. He looked at the name on the parchment.

"Holy crap," he said. Tonks asked what was the matter when Harry stopped to read the name. She looked over his shoulder and peeked at the name. "Someone named Sanguini. So what?"

"Um yeah," Harry said stalling. He forgot that he shouldn't technically know who this was. He felt a tug on his belt and Ghost began barking like mad and made chase, running down the street. "What the hell?" Harry spun around, spotting a runner making a mad dash with his money bag in hand. "Thief!" he cried. Tonks whipped around with her wand in hand.

"Imobilus!" the light blue freezing jinx flashing towards the scoundrel. He flashed his wand behind him and deflected the bolt of magic. Jon was already in motion, his shopping bags dropped and taking off at a full sprint.

Harry pointed his loaner and shouted "Winguardium leviosa!" The runner half turned throwing up a hasty protego shield. It had no effect and he was unceremoniously lifted up and thrown in a heap against a lamp post. With a clatter he fell down; Ghost already upon him and biting his ankle. He began to frantically kick at the wolf pup, screaming in pain. Within seconds Jon was there, waving his wand. The madly scrambling thief immediately fell asleep. Ghost was still gnawing on his ankle, his pant leg getting dark with blood.

"To me," Jon ordered. Ghost growled at the thief but let him go and backed off snarling, his eyes never leaving the sleeping body. Tonks reached next, casting a manacle charm along the disarming charm. The bag of gold and his wand zoomed into her hand. The commotion had Stannis and the old lady out of the storefront along other seedy looking individuals. Harry took off his glasses and pulled his hat on hastily.

"You got back my bag? Let's go, we're causing a scene!" Harry urged the others. Jon was still looking down the length of his wand at the sleeping thief, standing dumbstruck at what he had just done. He caught his senses and left, running back towards Harry and Tonks. They walked triple time out of Knockturn, their breath panting as they made their way to the leaky cauldron.

"Just a trip to Gringotts and Ollivanders,' he said," Tonks laughed. "Sounds like an adventure,' I said. Careful what you ask for eh?" Tonks laughed half jogging half walking.

"We need to stop at Ollivanders!" Harry huffed and puffed. Only Jon was breathing easily. They ducked in without knocking and Ollivander looked up from writing at his desk. He saw the look on their faces and got up immediately.
"What happened?" he asked, concern on his face.

"Thief... we got back our money but I think Jon used the sleeping curse on him." Harry panted.

"I will see to it. Better get going before the Aurors come sniffing," he advised, stepping around the counter and urging them out the shop. "Go! quickly! And do not apparate out!"

The trio ran out the shop and made their way into the Leaky cauldron just as two Aurors popped in behind them at the entrance to Diagon alley, the door closing as they made their way to the brick wall. Straight out the door through the pub and unto Charing cross, Tonks' hand was up with her wand and bam! the Knight Bus arrived.

"You lot again eh? Hop on, then!"

The trio boarded, took their seats, and breathed out hard. Tonks was grinning ear to ear, alongside Harry. Jon was staring at his wand, lost in thought.

"You guys go hard huh? I mean, all that money and stuff," Tonks said. "Plus I've never even heard of someone levitating another person in a fight- right useful it turned out to be. And at such range!"

"Shot was lucky, I guess," Harry said. For some reason he knew instinctively not to cast anything else, the wand seemed to be growing on him already. He frowned.

"Yeah! Went through Protego like butter!" she exclaimed, all excited. "It's like you've had experience with this before!" she laughed, eyes full of excitement.

"Not really," he said. "Just instinct..."

"Your instinct was to use Winguardium leviosa?" Tonks grinned. "Unorthodox but very effective. I like it!" The way Tonks said it Harry felt his body warm up. "Jon you were very brave, and you too Ghost!" the puppy barked once. "And I got the manacle hex on the first try, been practicing on Dad for a long time!"

"He was asleep at the time," Jon said calmly, deflating her.

"Oh hush!" she exclaimed. "Real life stuff. Aren't you pumped?" she nudged Jon on her right, and Harry on her left.

"Yes," Jon deadpanned. Harry shrugged. The bus reached the spot they were dropped off at the street behind the park. It was already almost two o'clock in the afternoon.

"Thanks again," Harry said, distractedly.

"Owl me, ok? You didn't post a return address!" she called out at the two boys through the window as they got off. Within a few seconds there was a bang! and the bus vanished. They made their way back to the house, snuck in and stuffed all their purchases in the closet. Both popped open their books and began to read.

"I'm going to grab some food," Harry said around half five, stretching. "I'll bring it up then see about the chores I need to do, then come back up. Nobody comes in here so... just chill out and relax. We got work in the morning."

"I think that maybe I should also find a place for room and board, close to the Master Wand maker." Jon said. "I have been given this Black identity and a family fortune, it's almost as if the forces want us to have a very big head start in our mission," Jon said. "It has me uneasy, usually life throws you
challenges to match your ability. But this famous heritage and Ollivander connection makes me feel like something very big is going to be thrown at us to compensate at the ease in which we got through today."

Harry thought a minute, his voice getting very low. "Those horcruxes gave Death itself a reason to send us back. This is not going to be easy. Better take all the positives as they come."

"You are right in this. In the ways of magic, I am a novice." Jon nodded solemnly.

The next morning a tawny owl was tapping on the window at half past six in the morning. Harry got up groggily, putting on his glasses. That was Hermione's owl. It was carrying a letter and a newspaper.

Harry opened the letter first.

Dear Harry,

You made front page! With the Black Scion to boot! Who is he and what is he doing with you?

Tell me everything!

Hermione Granger

He kicked Jon lightly who was asleep on the ground on a pile of comforters. Jon got up sitting up at the waist.

"Good strong pose there, Black," Harry said, grinning. Jon looked at the moving image of the front page. It showed him looking down at the crumpled form of the thief, his wand aimed directly at his heart in a commanding pose. Ghost was in the forefront, back hunched and snarling, teeth bared.

"Lord Black Saves the Boy Who Lived!" read the headline.

"Today would be a bit less hectic," Harry said sarcastically.

"So it would appear," Jon said calmly, reading the article. "Why did we stop again? When the thief made off with your gold."

"I recognized the craftsman who made the Onyx gloves. His name is Sanguine. He's a bloody Vampire." Harry grimaced.

"Why is this important to us?"

"We need him to train us..." Harry said simply.

"What?" Jon said.

"We've got to create armor to protect us from the horcruxes. We have a few weeks until our appointment with Mr. Malfoy. We get it without him knowing that we have it and safeguard it. But when it comes times to destroy it, we got to be prepared. And that means protected. It appears it latches on to anyone nearby when the vessel is destroyed, and that isn't good. It makes this ten times harder than the first time."

Jon gave him one of those mile long stares.

"Lovely," he rubbed his face. "Just fucking lovely."
Chapter Summary

Garrick Ollivander tells them in order to complete their Core Meld project, they must get the components themselves. Time to join a Hunter Guild!

It was seven in the morning. The weather was dreary today with a bit of rain. Jon and Harry dashed off the Knight bus unto Charing Cross outside the Leaky Cauldron, both not wanting to get their beaten old knapsacks wet. They each had their runic gloves set, aprons, masks and books in it, but the broken zipper and numerous holes in the backpacks discouraged them from even risking getting it wet. Ghost poked his head out of Jon's unzipped bag, panting happily at the drizzle falling on his face. They wanted to reach Diagon early and head into Obscurus' bookstore as soon as they opened so they could browse Curse breaking manuals.

Jon was in a grumpy mood after reading the paper. Harry explained to him how The Prophet affected the relatively quiet life and culture of Wizarding Britain. They took shelter under the canopy hanging over the pavement as the bus warped back into traffic.

"Is this Tom fellow really trustworthy? Or was Mistress Tonks easily tricked out of her coin?" Jon asked, rubbing his hair of any excess drops of rain. He wasn't sure that the man really could control the spread of information.

"I really don't know. But until we get another way in, this is it. Keep your face down, and just follow me," said Harry. "Our robes make us seem older, might be a good thing to avoid too much curious eyes. Hood up." Harry drew his hood up as far forward as it could go, and walked in with Jon in tow.

There were a few wizards and witches having a morning tea with scones. The two boys walked through with only one or two curious glances their way. Harry made sure not to wear his glasses to avoid recognition. Jon walked with purpose, Harry noted, and that made him stand out. They both exited out the back without any words between them and through the wall into Diagon Alley proper.

"Per chance there be lodgings here?" Jon asked as they made their way to the book store.

"Leaky cauldron has rooms. I stayed there before." Harry made a rolling motion with his fingers, and Jon caught on that he meant in the past. "It was ministry affiliated with Fudge though, the moment you try to room there everyone will know. Ollivander could help you out."

"I know he can. I also have a suspicion that man already has a lot of influence, the good, and the not so good. Powerful men with proprietary knowledge of a valuable commodity, do not underestimate them. I prefer to find my own way, if I can. Master Ollivander seems trustworthy, but I have been fooled easily before."

Harry nodded, but Jon's nature was rubbing off on him. Mr. Ollivander seemed so harmless before when he first met him, even if he was a bit creepy. He was naive then. The old man probably put on airs, depending on who he was dealing with. He didn't even blink when he deduced that Harry was
older than he appeared. Parents, children, Hit Wizard or Time Travelers made no difference, he was in his element when it came to clients. The only person he was perplexed by was Jon, and for good reason. A person from a different era, or a different reality was something Harry was sure the wand maker never came across.

Did the sage know, or suspect Jon not being who he said he was? He mentioned that he would have to design a wand for Jon before he proved his theory on the phoenix wand. Tonks’ reaction to them being apprentices also was in line with the fact that either he believed Jon was his grandson, or that the both of them were too interesting or suspicious for him to not have under his watchful eye.

They walked into Obscurus' and bade Mr. Ridgewell a 'Good morning' who returned it with a smile.

"Just here for quick research this morning," Harry said pointing at the library area shelves.

"Right you are, take your time. Good to see young men taking on their studies seriously over the holidays!" Mr. Ridgewell commended while he sipped his tea. Harry looked around, tip toeing to see behind the high sales counter. "Katie comes in a little before eight, if that is who you are looking for."

"Ok," Harry said, and both boys walked to the shelves. "Thanks."

"Enchanting permanent resistance into clothes or items, correct?" Jon asked as he perused the titles. "Yeah. Also ... any kind of books related to craft, or curse breaking rituals for wizards. That should also have information we need."

The both of them sourced a few texts and were making little notes and references for renowned Curse breakers and their relevant biographies and written material when the doorbell chimed after half an hour. A tall blonde wizard walked in. Harry went still and gave Jon a look. Harry indicated his ears and pointed to the front counter. He waved a quick notice me not charm with his borrowed wand. The air in front of him felt hot, then cold, then there was a slight shock.

Jon gave him an irritated look. Harry shrugged. Both of them pulled their high quality hoods over their foreheads and looked down directly into their books, carefully listening in.

"Edgar," Malfoy greeted. "How are things?"

"Good, quite good Mr. Mafloy!" Mr. Ridgewell responded eagerly.

"Did you get the shipment I donated?" he asked smoothly.

"Yes, I believe it did come in a package yesterday afternoon. I'll have Katie look into it as soon as she comes in, Mr. Malfoy. It was quite generous of you, if I say so myself. Mrs. Obscurus' will be delighted with the addition of that line of product. She sends her thanks and will owl you her regards soon."

"It is my pleasure, Edgar," came a cordial reply. There was a few moments of silence.

"You needed something else? May I offer you some tea?"

"Thank you but I must politely decline. I was hoping for a look at the contents of the shipment, but young Ms Bell has not arrived?"

Harry heard the slight tone of impatience creep into Lucius Malfoy's cultured smooth accent. Draco's was similar, except it was much easier to detect.
"I... believe she would be in just before eight," came the reply. "Maybe if you return after eight she would have the packing list organized and the books in the staging area prepped. Would that be acceptable?"

"I was hoping to catch her earlier than that, but alas it cannot be helped," Mr. Malfoy said. "I will return, but might she postpone that task for... early tomorrow morning... could that be arranged? I wish to be here when the package is opened. I hope you would advise her to pop in a bit earlier, hmm?" came the smooth, deep voice.

"Of course! that is definitely not a problem Mr. Malfoy. I'll see to it that she comes in a bit earlier."

"Excellent," Malfoy said. "Thank you Edgar, and I will await word from Mrs. Obscurus. Please send my regards if you happen upon her before then. Have a good day."

"Will do, and thank you once again, Mr. Malfoy." There was the sound of footsteps and then the door chime tinkling as Malfoy left.

Harry and Jon looked at each other before Harry indicated that they should pack and leave. They cleared the table they were using, and then searched the main area for books and journals that they decided will help with their plan.

"I'll have to get this by proxy," Harry whispered, once they spotted it available. "Don't want to let Edgar get any ideas." They left the store without picking them up and up Diagon Alley way towards Ollivanders. "What does he want with that package anyway? Didn't he donate it in the first place?" Harry said aloud.

"It is a front. It is young miss Katie Bell he is focused on, more than the package," Jon said softly.

"What?" Harry said. "Why?"

"From what you told me about those cursed items, it seems that Mr. Malfoy wants to activate it as soon as possible." Jon rubbed his arms, uncomfortable. "But to activate this one, you said it needed a strong emotional connection. You said the girl wrote into the diary and divulged her deepest secrets?"

"You think he is trying to give it to Katie?" Harry said, confused. "Katie isn't Ginny. Why would she need a diary? She seems popular and isn't really the emotional type." Jon shrugged.

"You told me the wizard slipped it into Ginny's possession right before school started. I would have done it sooner, if I had the chance. The opportunity presents itself every day at that bookstore- Ginny was a spur of the moment decision from what you have told me."

"You have a point. Still can't see Katie writing into a diary like a first year student," Harry frowned. The more he thought he knew, the more he realized that there was a lot he didn't know. If what Jon suggested was true, why target Katie? Harry pondered this as they walked.

They arrived at Ollivanders. Mr. Ollivander was wiping down the glass display at his storefront with a clean cloth.

"Good morning, sir," Harry greeted. Jon did likewise.

"Ah, yes. Good morning lads. I have a list done up inside with supplies..." he paused. "I see you got your robes already, very good. And apron?" They nodded. "Gloves, mask?" Again they nodded.

"Very good! Come, on mornings you will enter this way," he picked up his bucket of water and his
cleaning cloths. "Hold this for me. Oh this would be a duty you would alternate between yourselves every morning." Harry took the cleaning stuff, nodded and the two boys followed him around the side of the building.

Mr. Ollivander opened the work area door at the side of the building, closer to the back of the property. He lighted a lamp with a tinder box set aside on a shelf right next to the door. Next to it he had strips of matchstick wood in a small box. He ignited one and lighted multiple other oil lamps with the matchstick. The workshop was fairly large, with complex wooden and metal contraptions looking like magical jigsaw tables, sewing machines, presses and what appeared to be a spindle in the corner. The opposite wall had shelves with hanging racks of files, pairing knives and sharp tools, all organized by size and tooth grade. Towards the rear of the building there was a large service counter with a shop window cut out of the wall. Next to the service counter was another door which lead into the visible store room holding shelves and crates of raw material. On the opposite side, leading to the storefront, was another open door. This led to an office, with desks, shelves of books and metal storage filing cabinets.

"Okay, rule number one, it is not the most important, but it is important. Avoid use of your wands or magic as a general overarching rule. It is used at certain points in the craft, but not for other tasks. Cleaning, moving, lifting, tasks that can be done by hand must be done by hand. This place is the equivalent of a magical gun-powder or ordinance factory. While the muggles have flammable and explosive stockpiles of dangerous material, we have sensitive and costly magical material. Ignition, summoning, and transfiguration magic upset the delicate balance of raw material and also of the finished new wands. Also, it has happened only once in our family's history, but a cataclysmic magical chain can occur, igniting the entire building. We do not wish this to occur ever again. Only in emergency should we cast spells within these walls."

"I was wondering why you were cleaning by hand, Mr. Ollivander," Harry nodded.

"Oh that," Mr. Ollivander said. "It is just a habit of mine. On a whole... cleaning charms do not work as well as soap and water. Even in the healing profession bandaging and cleaning wounds by hand is best practice. Did you know that the house elves clean linen and robes by hand, in soap and water? Their magic can do it, but it is engraved in them to give the best result possible, and hand washed is better. Magic leaves a residue on all it touches, and the more magic something is susceptible too, the more tainted it becomes. Which leads me to rule number two. Magical gloves of at least level 3 are to be used whenever handling wand material. Let's see what you got there, I have a feeling you may have gotten the wrong thing, lads."

Harry and Jon took out their gloves. Mr. Ollivander inspected them and nodded. "Excellent choice. I had a feeling that was the reason you were that far inside Knockturn. Well, your basic list is done, now just your bracer list items to collect. We'll get to that. For this first week, I will ask you to read certain books and get familiar with the equipment and stock we have. Speaking of stock, let's get started! We'll do a stock check! Very exciting," the old man laughed as he got clipboard, parchment and quill. Jon chuckled softly alongside him. He knew how tedious stock taking was.

Mr. Ollivander gave them each duplicates of the stock list and kept one for himself and ushered them to the store room. "The main large crates of wood are what we call 'raws' in the business. Straight from the various floral suppliers and guilds. The smaller boxes contain some basic handle and stem designs that are quite popular . Shelves have a simple alpha-numeric system and each box, bin or crate stays where they are, remember that. They are assigned to that shelf so we are never confused where items go. The cores, finishes, varnishes, service parts etc are kept in the smaller boxes across here. Some cores, however must be kept moist in their native ...um state, so those are kept in there." he pointed to a sealed glass cabinet filled with cauldrons of various sizes and shapes. "All requisitions must be entered here," he pointed to the huge log book complete with ink bottle and quill
on the service counter dividing the workroom to the store room.

"Rule number three, and probably the most important rule - the wand is different in all of nature that it is probably the only non-living entity that has, I can only describe it as... a personality. There is no real term for it. Wand makers all over the word have tried to quantify it, but it is impossible. There may be a connection to the stars, to the date of birth, height or zodiac sign, or there may be not. It may choose a wizard while reject another. We call it magic. What is definite, is that a master smith has a reputation which is quantifiable. My family may be regarded as the 'best' to some, but our main business is what you may call 'mass produced wands with personalized customization'. Our forefathers," he looked at Jon, "were comparable to what the eastern nations called a master sword smith.

He paused for effect.

"They did not work for the nobles or governments to make mass produced swords for soldiers, they made one of a kind weapons to special individuals, and only one at a time until that weapon was completed. A true work of art."

Harry and Jon nodded solemnly. Ollivander laughed.

"You two are way too serious," he laughed. "Well, that time has long gone. We make wands for profit mostly, but that doesn't mean we make substandard wands mind you! You should have seen yourselves, visions of grandeur etched into those young faces."

"But your wands are the best!" Harry reinforced. Mr. Ollivander smiled, but shook his head slightly.

"Our 'best' wands were commissioned to my family via one on one basis, and is built to exacting specifics. Minerva's wand took me almost three months to build. Her father was a very well respected man in the scholarly circles, he wrote many journals, learned and documented spells from all over the world. I was young then, and on the 'rise' in terms of skill. He offered me a challenge, as a friend, and an honor it was to me, to be given this opportunity. Hers is made from very rare materials. That was my last masterpiece. The trick with this, is that the factors which make a wand truly great, also rely on the owner's magical acceptance and bringing forth the best of its capability."

"There are... people... out there with tremendous skill. They craft weapons that even I cannot compare. I call them the eternal six. Of the six, I know of such a wand, that it can only be attained through mortal combat. The wizard or wizards who created these weapons, thrive on the legend their work inspires, more than the craft."

"Do you know who they are?" Jon asked.

"Ah- ah!" Ollivander said shaking his finger. "Those are trade secrets bound by Masters' oath."

Mr. Ollivander clasped his hands behind his back. "But anyway, for now I will show you around, get this stock list done, and over the course of this week I shall demonstrate the use of the equipment, theory, techniques and we would practice on a simple wand and core combination. After lunch today I will give you your supplies list for the bracers. Tomorrow we move on from there. Also I will help you plan the steps to determine how your own wands will be made. Agreed?"

"Agreed," said Harry.

"Yes, Master Ollivander," Jon said formally. Mr. Ollivander looked amused at Jon's style of speaking.

"Let's begin then... row A1, Birch 21 pieces by one foot..."
"The Curse Breakers guild. Apothecary's guild. Hunter's Almanac and Trade guild. Arithmancer's Guild. Let's hope we could afford them..." Harry said as they were walking down Diagon alley after they had lunch. "We might have to wait until next month to get all the stuff he told us to get."

Jon walked alongside him, nodding. "I believe not all require high entry fees for membership. But we shall see."

"You seem to know about how things work here," Harry inquired. "This is all news to me."

"I know nothing, Harry of House Hollow." Jon watched Harry, a crooked smile on his face.

"There was a joke there somewhere, right?" Harry countered, eyes narrowing.

"Forget it," Jon said. Jon did remember that Harry did say his jokes needed work. "This place reminds me of my world, in a sense. Except there are no street fights or soldiers on patrol. But the basic rules apply. Some of those guilds can actually be profitable to us."

"How?" Harry asked, perplexed.

"We become members, and we are paid based on required jobs."

"Oh, okay."

"Others may be qualification based to acquire restricted knowledge. That arithmancer one sounds like it could be one of those. Examinations and the like."

"We'll invite Tonks when we have to go down Knockturn by CBG again, Jon. That Hunter guild is even further down so we could do both that day. A qualified witch would be a big help, just in case; y'know ... 'Winter is Coming'," Harry said.

Jon gave him a disgusted look and shook his head as Harry laughed.

"Anyway, this is the Apothecary's guild. Let's check it out."

"Hello?" Harry ventured as he walked through the door. The place was a narrow room almost stuck unto the side of the Apothecary main store. Both walls on either side of the room were covered in numerous notices and ingredient lists with stamped dates on it, some dates in the past and some yet to arrive. Harry was getting accustomed to the people being somewhere in the back instead of at the counter and took his time looking around the place, and at the back wall where extremely tall shelves held jars and bottles of various shapes and colours.

"The main store is next door, luv!" a lady shouted from the back room. "You sure you're in the right place?"

"Yes, I think we are in the right place," Harry called back.

"One moment!" she replied. Harry spied her putting away a bowl of food and hastily wiping her mouth on a well used cloth. A woman in her thirties with shocking red hair came out, plump and chubby face to go along with her stocky build. "Hiya lads, what can we do for ya?"

"We wish to go ranging for these items. I believe we need a guild membership license?" Jon said, handing over his parchment list.

"We have some of these available next door, luv," She said, frowning. She mouthed silently some of the items on the list. "You gentlemen are brokers or something?"
"I got this," Jon stage whispered to Harry. Harry nodded.

"We want the freshest samples of these ingredients, preferably direct from the ranging missions themselves. Three of those items are class B regulated imports. We wish to apply to your guild membership to legally be in possession and import said items."

"I have a hunter team booked on a mission that includes these three," She said, her finger pointing at the parchment list and then opening her massive log book. "Our AG has to meet them at the port when they retrieve it by next Thursday."

"AG?" Harry asked.

"Apothecary's Guildsman," she replied, watching him a moment before going back to her logs.

"That means you got to get in contact with your Hunters by Monday, if you want a chance to meet our team in Calais before they leave camp on Tuesday morning. That's the soonest you can get your Wild Bog Boar urine, and Elfen Bat wing. Those are easy. The Diablo's claws... well. Hope you got your hunter team prepared for that."

"Yes they are. That would be fine, Milady," Jon nodded. "What is required of us?"

"Fill out this form and forty galleons," she took out a roll of parchment. "That fee is nominal for your level of import license, lasts three years." Both Harry and Jon took their time and filled out the forms.

"This paperwork is sufficient for the I.C.O.P. wizard at Dover's Apothecary. His name is Rook Littleborough."

"I.C.O.P?" Harry asked.

"International Co-operation Port Authority," she replied, eyebrows coming together.

"Roger," Harry nodded, smiling. Basically a wizard's customs officer, he deduced.

"He is above board and does things legitimate, please do not, and I repeat, do not try to bribe or slide things through. Your official import/export license will be processed within six months. But don't worry about the British Ministry, this is a legal document and you can go about your business for now. You would only be able to export goods into France when you get your official license, so please do not cause any International incident by carrying restricted goods there."

She took out a huge stamp with a PAID print and slammed it down on their contracts. The woman looked at Jon's face out of curiosity, then back at the table where she rest her bowl of food. The front page of the prophet was clearly visible. She turned around in shock, then smiled a brilliant smile. It totally changed her face. "You ready to sign the roster?"

"Yup," Harry said, already having his paper cut spell at the ready. Both young men signed with the enchanted Quill provided.

"Good work yesterday Lord Black. That Sticky Six was a pain, always got off... slap on the wrist because he never had the stolen goods on him, even though everyone sort of knew he did it. Out in a year or so tops. This time he got put away in Azkaban for a Tenner. Here you are," she gave them their scrolls of Guild Association parchment. "You let your hunter team get in contact with ours to meet at base camp before Tuesday morning in order for you to bring back in your goods at Dover Port."

"Thank you," Harry said.
"Oh, and Lord Black," she added. "Try to keep your hunter team away from the French Port pub, will ya? Some of them are fiery lads and don't like each other much. Keep it clean down there before they get all rowdy."

"Your advice is noted and well received," Jon bowed slightly. "Thank you."

"Well alright then luv! Prosperity and Safe travels upon you," she added as a farewell.

"Profit and Honor to you, Milady." Jon replied. Harry sort of mimicked the bow awkwardly, and both of them left the guild.

"What was that Profit and Prosperity bit about now?" Harry asked, falling in stride next to Jon.

"Prosperity and Safe travels was a blessing set upon Traveling merchants," Jon said. "Profit and Honor is a blessing set upon Store Merchants. A person can be both, but it is usually used in the appropriate setting when conducting mutually profitable business."

Harry looked at Jon with a sense of awe. "Well alright then. You got this whole trade and guild thing down," Harry nodded.

"I know a few things," Jon smirked. "Now we are to become Arithmancy Guildsmen. Hopefully there are no difficult pre-requirements." They walked towards Flourish and Blotts bookstore.

"Good afternoon," Harry said to the young male clerk sitting at a booth to the back called AMG. His feet were perched on top the counter, leaning back while reading Potions Quarterly. He had a horrible slick hairstyle with glasses that were too small for his face."We would like to join the Arithmancy guild, please."

"Ravenclaw's holy knickers," the store clerk said, watching the two boys in annoyance."What is it this week? A bushy haired first year girl joins a couple days ago and now two more? At least you two dress fitting for the title." He sighed as he took out a clipboard with parchment. "Names, please."

"Harry Potter."

"Jon Black."

"Right," The store clerk said, looking at them again. He squinted through his glasses. He cleared his throat when he realized it really was them. "Ahem. The Prophet had you taller, though."

Jon just looked at the youth, then shrugged.

"Here, read these," the clerk said, handing them scrolls.

The two boys read the agreement. Harry deduced it was more a Knowledge club than a guild, but then lower down read that certain formulae or experiments could be commissioned for a nominal fee within the Guild. If you were hired to create a formula for a spell or ritual, or even a potion idea tested and created; this was the Guild to do it and be paid. This was also the only way to lay claim to a new potion, spell, or equipment that you have created. Harry now understood why Mr. Ollivander wanted them to join. Their designs would be new to this era, and the Guild has international ties that restrict a copyrighted creation from being used without permission or royalties.

"You ready to sign?" the clerk asked when they were through.

"The membership cost says only five galleons a year," Jon said.
"Yes. That is for just being able to get updates on meetings and read the subscribed scholarly papers if you wish to purchase them through owl delivery. But any intellectual property and magic you create you will need to pay the Senior members in the guild to peer review your work, and make you the official Architect. All works you produce will accumulate royalty based on how useful, remarkable, or groundbreaking it is. This membership is also necessary to get your product out to public market, and legal according to law. But what do they know, anyway? People create good stuff all the time. Potter, you of all people should know this. Your family created Sleek-Eazy, Pepper Up and Skelegro. Come on," the clerk said in a haughty voice.

"You and Percy hang out a lot, don't ya?" Harry remarked. Harry didn't even know about the Potter legacy to begin with. Something to think about.

The clerk scrunched up his face in annoyance. "Please don't. He's a prat who should never have even come close to earning a badge."

Harry grinned. He knew that would have ticked off this guy. Most Ravenclaws hated Percy. Was it because of Penelope? Harry decided that he didn't really care either way. He did the paper cut spell on his thumb and Jon did the knife cut again.

"Very well," Jon said as he signed with the enchanted quill. Harry did likewise afterwards.

"You can come back later for your finalized documents and account number to link to any Gringotts details. Like, tomorrow later," the clerk said, and went back to reading Potions Quarterly.

As they walked down the road back towards Ollivanders, Harry stopped Jon and pulled him out of sight between two buildings. Snape was walking towards Obscurus'.

"Malfoy senior and Snape visiting there on the same day. This can't be good."

"Who?" Jon asked, eying the talk dark haired man with billowing black robes.

"'Reformed' Dark wizard, former Voldemort servant, who get this... now works for the school Headmaster as a double, or is it a triple agent? Let's say... well yeah... a double agent. Works both sides. And his own. Whatever."

"A turncoat," Jon spat, disgusted.

"If you keep turning the coat inside out every other week, does it make you a bigger, more scum groveling turncoat or simply ...a platinum sellout?" muttered Harry, touching his lip in contemplation.

"What?" Jon said, bewildered.

"Forget it. Let me see if I can cast silencio with your wand," Harry said, holding out his hand. "Need to silence the door chime so we could sneak in and hear what he wants." Jon handed Harry his wand.

"Silencio!" Harry pointed at a mewing cat by the rubbish bin. The entire alleyway was engulfed in a rush of deafening silence and the cat jumped two feet in the air, crashing into old boxes of trash without making a sound. It fell over, its legs pointing in the air, the legs kicking erratically. Jon bent over double with the absolute shock of his own heartbeat slamming within his ears. The silence spell was so strong the entire area become a vacuum what Harry imagined the silence of space to be. Harry quickly waved the counter spell before the tremendous shock of his magnified heartbeat burst his inner canal.

Both boys were sweating, gasping at the pain their jaws and ears were feeling. The poor cat feebly
rolled over, unable to get its balance and retain its footing.

"Well, that didn't work so well," he said, giving Jon back his wand. "That's a freaking cannon!"

"Let's not give ourselves away by doing rash tasks," Jon said as he made his way back to the workshop. "We need to get that Hunter's license today, if possible. The quicker we get it, the quicker we can arrange to tag along with the AG team. Would Mistress Tonks be able to come with us on short notice?"

"'No time like the present', is what she told me if I recall," Harry grinned. "Let us go to the owl shop. They got owls that would send a quick message."

Tonks happened to be finishing her lunch at the table when the Owl perch chime 'hooted' through the house. She saw a spotted owl sitting patiently at the window. She flicked her wand to open it and the Eyelops Owl's emporium messenger came zooming unto the back of the chair closest to her, leg outstretched. She took it and read it. The owl hooted once for a reply. She summoned a quill from the writing desk in the study opposite and replied on the reverse side.

Give me fifteen minutes.

"He was here again, this morning," Edgar said. Snape nodded, but did not ask more at the counter.

"Is there somewhere we can talk?" Snape said in his droll tone. Edgar motioned for him to follow.

"This is the fourth time for the month he's come," Edgar said uneasily. He rubbed his arm unconsciously. "I was a nobody, a nothing! The ministry never suspected... why is he coming around so often now? Does he know? What do I do?" Edgar said in a low voice.

"I... do not know why he has been here so often. Sticky was caught yesterday, and Dumbledore told me his inside man at MLE got out from him that his main target was Malfoy, but Malfoy seemed to be in a wary and in a very foul mood. That's why he went for Potter instead."

"Potter, as in Harry Potter?" Edgar said in shock. "He was in Knockturn yesterday?" Snape pinched the inner corners of his eyes.

"Edgar, you are an idiot," Snape seethed. "Did you not read the papers?"

"Katie did call a boy Harry yesterday..." Edgar said in realization. "I had no clue that was Potter, he seemed a tad older than what I thought him to be."

"He was also here in the bookstore?" Snape said.

"Yeah he came to get two books," Edgar replied, nodding. "Katie would remember if I asked her."

"No don't," Snape said. "Potter buying a book is of no major consequence. I rather you play along with whatever Malfoy is doing without alerting young miss Bell of anything amiss. Keep your ears open tomorrow when he visits, and simply try to remember any details of what he does. That is all I require of you."

"Alright. He tried to play it off, but it seems he was a bit desperate," he replied.

"Desperate to see his own donation on the front shelves?" Snape scoffed. "I believe he wishes to have legitimate reason to be in your stock room at a time when no one else is likely to see him. But I am purely speculating. Do not follow him in when he comes tomorrow; stay where you usually are at the counter, unless invited of course. Simply eavesdrop or plant a spying crystal ball somewhere
out of sight. If he by chance detects it, tell him it was placed there a while ago because of past instances of theft from the temporary staff. Is that clear?"

"Understood," Edgar nodded, rubbing his forearm again. "He gives me the creeps," the older gentleman said.

"You should be careful," Snape agreed. "But do not be afraid or nervous. Use a calming draught if necessary tomorrow morning." Snape turned on his heel and made his way back out of the store.

Edgar sat down, rubbing his hands together in the private office chair. He flicked his wand and sent a reheating charm at the tea pot on the nearby kitchenette counter.

Tonks made her way to Ollivanders that afternoon with a spring to her step as she walked up Diagon Alley. She had no clue what those guys wanted but they were up to something again, she knew it.

She knocked and entered the Wand store and Mr. Ollivander came from the office room to the front counter. "Ah, Miss Tonks, welcome. What can I do for you?"

"Oh, just popping in. Your lads asked me to meet them here, if that's all right with you Mr. Ollivander," she responded cheerfully.

"Not a problem, one moment if you please," he said and disappeared back through the door. Within a minute both Harry and Jon came out the front. Tonks had a twisted smile on her face.

"Well. You boys look the part," she said in a mock apology. Harry took off his gloves and apron, smiling as he stashed them in his backpack.

"Sir, we still have to check the last two places," Jon said.

"Will she be with you?" the old man asked.

"Yeah," Harry added.

"I will?" Tonks countered.

"We do hope she will escort us," Jon said formally. "If it pleases Milady," he added with a slight bow.

"I told you cut it with the bowing and milady stuff," Tonks said. "And where are we going? I hope not to Kno-"

"Oh its' just back to CBG and H.A.T," Harry cut her off. "She'll be fine, I mean we'll be fine with our manacle throwing heroine to protect us," he teased, nudging Jon. Tonks rolled her eyes.

"HAT?" Tonks said, perplexed.

"Hunter's and Trade guild," Harry explained.

"Oohhh, you mean the HG," Tonks corrected. "At least get your abbreviations right," she threw back at him. "This better be good."

"Tomorrow same time, lads," Ollivander reminded in a cheerful voice. "Make sure and read up tonight."

"Will do," Harry said, zipping up his bag. Jon nodded in agreement and both of them followed Tonks out into the mid afternoon sunshine. Ghost joined the crew as soon as he spotted them from
his cool resting spot by the side door of the property.

"You guys are crazy. You are going straight back to the where they almost stole a half a grand of gold from you. Nuts."

"Nah we're alright. We didn't walk with all that coin today anyway," Harry said.

"I will be more vigilant as well," Jon said. "These robes also are better spell resistant so whatever spell they used would be less effective at distance," he added, brushing off some wood dust.

"I don't know. They don't call him Sticky six for nothing. Look how far he got you with that pickpocket spell. I think those guys come up with a different one every time," Tonks said.

"A woman told me that he was sentenced to ten in Azkaban, was it?" Jon queried Harry for clarification.

"Considering that was only yesterday that was- " Harry began.

"The fastest I've ever seen a petty thief get a court hearing and sentenced, right?" agreed Tonks. "I wonder if it was because it was the Mighty Lord of The Black and The Immortal 'Harry The Boy Who Lived Potter' were the intended victims of such dastardly crimes, hmm?" she joked.

Both Harry and Jon laughed nervously.

"Oh come on," she huffed. "That wasn't so bad," she argued good naturedly. That earned her a few more heartfelt but equally fake attempts at laughter. "Whatever. So, what are we doing in Knockturn today? Ghost you ready for some action?" she asked the little wolf. He yipped in confirmation.

"Good lad."

"How good are your combat skills, Mistress Tonks?" Jon asked in a light, airy manner.

"My what? And what did you just call me?" she asked, stumped at the question.

"Can you fight?" he said simply. Harry was watching her trying not to burst out laughing. Jon didn't play!

"I can, erm... hold my own, thank you very much!" Tonks said, watching him as if he grew another nose.

"Would you wish to join us as we create a Hunter's Clan as a founding member? We are on our way to register."

"You can't be serious."

Jon raised an eyebrow at her, a slight smile on his face. "I think it would be quite, exhilarating, don't you, Harry?" Jon turned to face her. "I'm as serious as I can be or my last name isn't Black," Jon challenged.

"Oh now I know you're kidding me. Serious and Black in one sentence is something only a Black would laugh at, or have the guts to laugh at. You're only Lord Black because he has lost familial rights until he is out of prison, you know," Tonks retorted to his challenge.

Harry's face went blank. Oh crap I forgot that he doesn't know!

"Tonks, Jon doesn't know about Sirius," Harry said contritely. "He's still getting accustomed..." he tried to explain to her.
"What do you mean 'He doesn't know about Sirius'? His own uncle?" she was getting mad.

"He found me after the place he was staying at, the caretaker died suddenly," Harry made up on the spot. "She was like a mum to him. Kind of why I wanted to bring him yesterday to help him...sort himself out," he added in a soft tone, lying his guts out for all it was worth.

Tonks was instantly chastened. "Oh." She stammered. "Oh, well. I... didn't know either, Jon. Sorry."

"Let us cut the chatter along this stretch, shall we?" Jon said, never breaking stride. His voice was all Lord Commander again, Harry noted. "We are going to register, I do hope you are willing to accompany us."

Tonks remained quiet and just led the way, internalizing it while she kept alert to the people's movements about her. These lads had guts.

"It's right here," she said after a few more minutes of walking. They entered into a barely occupied pub that was dark and dimly lit with torches on the walls. There was a large notice board almost covering the entire wall on the opposite side. To the right was bar counter and more notices on smaller boards behind the bottles on shelves.

A loud wolf whistle went up when Tonks strode forward towards the bartender who was replenishing his stock. A group of wizards sitting at a table in the back were whistling and shooting her appreciative looks. Jon glanced their direction, then dismissed them as nothing.

"Sign us up," she said, getting straight to the point.

"One of you got to be of age," he said, crouching low to reach in a cupboard. "I'm guessing that would be you," he answered her, wiping a bottle free from dust and placing it on the shelf behind. He did this a couple more times with a box he had by his feet before getting up and looking at them all. "This is interesting. Aren't you the Lord Black. Well fuck me."

Jon inclined his head a notch. "Yes. Do you require proof?"

"No. This is not the normal line of work for high bloods like yourself. You really want to get into this? Or is this just a teenage phase," he smirked. He looked hard at Tonks. "My. Well. If the rest of you looks as nice as your face," he leered. "I might be able to help you out," he smiled, fixing his robes a bit to look more presentable.

"Just give us the details and sign us up," Tonks said, her hand close to drawing her wand. "You have no status," she spat. "I don't know why you barmen feel that all women like your type anyway..." she said clearly.

One of the wizards who were cat-calling her laughed.

The barman's eyes narrowed. "One moment," he said, and went to the back. He returned with a scroll. "Here," he handed it to her, but when she went to take it he jerked it away and set it before Jon. "Let the Lord Black take a look at this," he said to her as he kept his hand on the parchment, eyeing her in direct challenge. Harry was getting mad. Tonks wasn't backing down from the stare either.

"It's cool, T. A round of the 12 year scotch," Harry intervened, handing over the required amount. The barman held the stare with her for a few moments longer, smiled broadly, then took the money and began pouring drinks. Jon was reading through the parchment, a frown on his face.

"I knew something like this would be an issue," Jon spat.
"What is it?" Harry and Tonks said at the same time, reading over his shoulder.

"A Clan can only be formed by a witch or wizard of age," he explained, pointing at the text. "But they can take on no more than four underage apprentices at any given year. Apprentices must pay twenty galleons per year until they are of age. All earnings from sales must be accounted for and ten percent commission must be accredited to the guild representative body for the first year in existence."

"Lord Black is right, sweetums," the barman said as he put three glasses in front of them. "Its forty for the Clan Witch. Twenty for each apprentice. Ready to sign up, chica?" he grinned, holding an enchanted quill in front her face.

Tonks drank her shot in one gulp, took out her wand and cut her thumb with the paper cut spell. She took the quill and signed her name, then the others followed suit and galleons were given.

"Oh. You need an official name to allocate to your account, for you know, money purposes," the barman grinned, pointing at the top of the parchment. "How are you going to get paid with no name sweetums?" he smooched at her.

"Give him a name, Lord Black," Tonks said, still not breaking eye contact. Jon thought a moment, his memory focusing on the crest of his Black name on the Gringotts scrolls. On top of the parchment he wrote The Crows' Vambrace.

The Barman took the scroll, frowned, then watched the young boy who didn't even flinch under his gaze.

"The Crows' Vambrace huh?" he nodded. "That'll do." He waved his wand and tapped the parchment and then pointed at the huge notice-board on the wall. "Remember, if you do not accept a mission once a year, your Clan is disbanded. All new clansmen must sign on this record, for clarity of association, and of course, if there is any issue with pay. And you can join another clan at the same time only if at least one of the your founding members is present when signing unto the new clan."

Harry nodded. "Keeps people from being a turncoat, right?"

"Right. I am going to get your Hunters' guild licenses." He turned and left into the back room. He returned with three leather pendants on leather strings. He put them on the table and pointed to the main notice board. "You got regular bounties there, you get special requests here," he pointed behind himself. "Any job you do and you wish to keep it quiet outside of the known hunter guilds, that's up to you. Nothing that you do outside we can mediate or verify your claim to upgrade your rank level, or if things go bad within your clan. I advise you to do the work clean until you get a more, well, solid reputation. We pride ourselves on keeping internal clans from each other's throats, but if you do fuck up enough times, we simply look the other way if we're really fed up of you. Happy hunting, Lord Black of the Crows' Vambrace. You too, sweetums. And who the fuck are you, anyway?" he asked Harry.

"Just a friend of these two," he answered with a grin. "Nobody, really."

"Very well, Friend who must not be named," the barman said. "My name is Vince Greyback. I'll be your guy when you need international portkeys, or a foreign contact. I'll hook you up." He looked appreciatively at Tonks. "Once your Goods are profitable," he smiled at her reddening face, "You'll do well here in the trade."

Jon nodded, got up off the bar stool and took up the pendants.
"We'll be back for those port keys, soon," Harry said.

"Anytime, friend who must not be named. I'll be around." The three of them left the dark pub and back out into the mid-afternoon sunshine. Tonks' mood changed immediately after stepping out of there.

"The Crow's Vambrace, huh?" said Tonks. "I like it." Harry was really beginning to like how Tonks said those words.

"Yeah Jon. Spot on," Harry agreed whole-heartedly.

"It suits," was all Jon said as they made their way to the CBG.

"Why did I even agree to this," Tonks said dramatically. "I've got enough going on without playing 'I'm a badass hunter now' games with you two!"

"We got a mission lined up from next week Tuesday to Thursday already," said Jon, not breaking stride as he walked into the CBG.

"Stannis! STANNIIIISSS!" the lady shouted at the back. "Black is here, again!" she called, fiddling with her Wizard Wireless Set as she tuned into Rita's Skeeter's 'Word on the Street' program.

Stannis came out from the back, wiping his hands on a clean cloth. "My Lord Black. What a surprise," he deadpanned as he leaned on the counter.

"Mr. Stannis," Jon greeted with a nod. "We wish to join the guild."

"What? No," he said, smiling with yellowed teeth.

"And why not?" Tonks said.

"You can't join twice. With the purchase of your Onyx set you already are part of the members guild. You may subscribe to the owl magazine, everything. Even attend meetings. Paid services are for qualified CB, and you need some certifications for that. Why you want to join?"

"Need a," Harry looked at his list. "Magical artifact creation' license," he said.

"Ho ho ho. Well if you want to create an artifact, you need to get a license, don't ya lads?" Stannis went in the back, reappearing within a couple minutes with a form.

"It's nothing, really. Just a formality. That'll be ten galleons each, lifetime membership Artificer's license."

"Tonks you in?" Harry asked, counting out the galleons. Stannis grunted a negative. "She can only hop on your CBG membership if the three of you are already in a recognized clan as members." Jon put his fist up to Harry who connected immediately. The two of them displayed their Hunter's amulets. Both young men grinned in expectation at Tonks.

Tonks was flabbergasted. Her both hands were covering her face. She nodded behind them.

"Done!" Stannis said as he presented them with the famed enchanted quill. A couple signatures and sore thumbs later the three of them, the Crows' Vambrace were walking along Diagon Alley with licenses to create powerful magical artifacts of their choosing, without the MLE bearing down on them.

Tonks was in a semi state of shock. How could these two have done this to her?
"You guys are crazy. I really mean it this time." They kept walking further up on the other side of Diagon to get something to eat when a breeze cut through a narrow alleyway between blocks, bringing a stale, metallic scent with it. "Oh, phew, why don't they ever clean out that place?"

Harry smelled it too. "What place?"

"The old cauldron facility-workshop-place-shop-whatever! It closed down from there when they got big and opened up fresh lower down at the more fashionable storefront location. What's his face again? Potage's Cauldrons," Tonks explained.

"I want to see this place," Jon said, turning direction and heading along the narrow alleyway. Harry shrugged and followed, leaving Tonks looking frustrated and weary. She stomped her foot and went in after them.

"Perfect," Jon Black said. "Absolutely perfect." He had already opened the half rotted wooden door and was looking inside.

The afternoon sun came straight through the doorway and would have also come through the large windows if they weren't boarded up. Tonks and Harry lit up a Lumos and followed him inside. The main area was an abandoned store front with hanging hooks welded into the ceiling and racks of metal shelves with a few broken cauldrons left to rust. The majority of the space was empty, with two doors leading off from the main area. One led to a medium sized passageway with a staircase that went down to a cellar, and adjacent to it, a stairs that led up went to the first floor. The other door led to a metal smith's workshop with an abandoned anvil and metal forge pit. Strategically placed venting pipes and chimneys were all over, along with a cooling basin made of what seemed to be marble. The back of this room had a large metal rolling cage gate, which was closed in by grand, heavy, metal reinforced wooden doors. Jon walked into the workshop and pointed at the rolling chain gate. Harry used his levitation spell and the gate groaned and squealed upwards, a chain pulley winding down next to it. Jon began to work the winch arm and the chain wrapped around the metal contraption with a satisfying clink-clink-clink of chain links. When the gate was fully raised Tonks opened the wooden doors with an alohomora, and they creaked open to let in the afternoon light. The doors opened to the back of Diagon alley. Harry looked at both sides either way, there were business places' old discarded equipment, boxes and even some neat seating areas with hammocks and tables.

They went back inside and explored the upstairs which seemed to be a double bedroom apartment with kitchen, washroom and a main sitting area which had a patio overlooking the back of Diagon alley. The view from the patio upstairs allowed Jon to see over the wall and showed a muggle park, which had a few small ponds dotted in between the walkways and plenty of trees.

"Whose property is this, did you say?" Jon said with a gleam in his eye.

"Come on, I'll introduce you," Tonks said, sighing as she went back down the stairs.

"Home sweet home," Jon said, rubbing his hands together.
Lucius Malfoy was desperate when he planted the Diary on Ginny. Initially, he was targeting a third year Katherine Bell. Harry races against time to steal the diary from right under his nose.

Harry was sitting in the Hogwarts infirmary. Ron was beside him as they watched, helpless, as Madame Pomfrey did her tests on Hermione. The girl was petrified, her arm outstretched, frozen in place like a mannequin.

"Wish you were here with us. We need you Hermione," said Harry.

"Whoever did this..." Ron was saying in disgust, eyes cast downwards. "They need to pay! Whoever that heir of Slytherin is, anyway! It's got to be Malfoy, Harry!"

Harry shot up out of bed, the rays from the sun hitting him directly in the eye. He wiped his eyes, then realized that he needed to be somewhere this morning.

Like early.

"Fuck!" he cursed. He threw his legs over the edge of the bed and completely forgot about his roommate who was sleeping on his pile of comforters, stepping on him and falling over with a thud. Harry didn't even bother apologize as he dug into the false floorboard in the corner and retrieved the Onyx box with the gloves.

Jon swore as Harry scrambled his backpack on his back.

"Get up!" Harry said. "We fucked up! We have to be at Obscurus and its already seven o'clock! Jon, you need to write Tonks and explain to her that we have a sting operation going on. She needs to look completely different, get a truth potion and there might be some action. Meet us at the store! Hedwig!" he shouted out the window. Hedwig swooped in.

Jon rolled out of bed and unto his feet, grabbing robes. "It will be done," Jon said, throwing them over his head.

Harry grabbed his cloak and broom that was in the closet.

"Write!" he ordered pointing at his desk. "Meet me at Diagon!" Harry jumped out the window, holding unto his broom. The broom dropped like a stone until the flight response kicked in, right above the ground. Harry swung down the last couple feet and began to sprint towards the dead end around the corner. As soon as no cars were visible, he drew his wand and summoned the Knight bus.

"Oh... it is you. Diagon?" Stan said, yawning.
"Yes," Harry said, jumping in. He took the seat closest to the door.

The bus ride felt like it took an hour instead of ten minutes. He dug in his small money pouch, grabbed a galleon and tossed it at Stan. Stan snatched it before it dropped.

"Whoa!"

"That's for the week," Harry said as he jumped out, broom in hand. As soon as the bus left, he ducked around a muggle garbage disposal container. He dug into his bag, retrieved the cloak and don the Onyx Gauntlets. Hopping unto his broom, he realized that the tail and front would be visible even under the cloak. He stood up the broom on its bristles, and hopped on the metallic band where the bristles connected to the main shaft. Holding on tightly to the broomstick, with leg muscles quivering trying to balance, he maneuvered over the three storey roof of the Leaky Cauldron. When he rose over the roof, it appeared that Diagon Alley had never existed, but he kept going in the direction he knew it to be and within a few seconds a sensation of pure cold washed over him as he passed through the magical barrier. Diagon alley spread out below him.

There!

Walking calmly with his cane tucked under his arm was Lucius Malfoy, already halfway up the road towards Obscurus' Books and Journals.

Harry breathed a sigh of relief. He could not risk being noticed though, and decided he would be stealthier on foot. He made way to the nearest alley and hid his Nimbus under yesterday's garbage bags behind Fortescue's place. He trotted lightly on the other side of Diagon alley until he caught up level with Malfoy. He kept a safe distance away to avoid being detected, even under his cloak.

Instead of walking in the bookstore, Malfoy slowed his gait to peep in the window. He stood there for a few seconds, then kept walking further on. Harry followed at a safe distance, hands tingling in the onyx gauntlet. He now began to really notice the feel of them, the way that it almost removed the sense of vulnerability humans have where their physical body was concerned. Harry felt like if he struck a wall with his fist right now, the wall would be sending him a subpoena in the morning.

Lucius Malfoy made his way towards a Cafe, sat down outside at the table, and let a pretty waitress attend to him. Harry was too far to hear the actual words, but Malfoy was charming, polite and made the lady smile as he ordered. When she left, his countenance darkened and he began to tap his foot impatiently, looking back down the road towards Obscurus.

Harry ducked in between the gaps of the buildings across the road from the cafe. He was deliberating getting closer to him, but decided to play it extremely safe. The waitress returned, bringing him a tea in a bowl and a plate with tartine. Harry watched in morbid fascination as Malfoy dipped it in the bowl and daintily nibbled on it. He took his time, periodically taking the bowl in his hands and drinking directly from it. Then, he pulled out a pocket watch from inside his robes flicked open the face, glanced at it then snapping it shut. He resumed his tapping of the foot. This repeated for a few minutes. He made small talk with the waitress a few times when she made her rounds. She finally turned to go back inside, and Lucius Malfoy suddenly went alert, looking down the street. Malfoy wiped his mouth quickly, dug into his pocket and left a couple galleons on the table, dumping the dirty napkin on top of it and stood up.

Harry looked down Diagon alley and saw Katie hustling towards the bookstore. A young man in glasses called out to her, waving her to wait. While Harry watched, he noticed Malfoy casually stepping within the doorway of the cafe such that, at this angle, he can look towards her but remain unnoticed from her perspective. The young wizard caught up to Katie, talked to her for a bit before Katie impatiently ended the conversation with an apology that Harry could hear faintly as she turned
to leave. Harry’s eyes narrowed as he spotted the youth with the glasses pop open a tiny potions flask and throw a few drops at her retreating back, reminding him of a priest blessing his flock with holy water. Katie didn’t feel it, continuing towards the bookstore with hurried steps.

Harry looked again at Lucius, who was now dabbing a spot of perfume discreetly at his neck and on the front of his robes. He waited until Katie had entered the building at Obscurus, made some more small talk with the waitress inside and waved goodbye to her. He straightened his robes, looked at himself in the reflection of a window and slowly, almost reluctantly, began to walk back down Diagon towards Obscurus. The bespectacled young wizard was nowhere to be seen.

Harry crossed the road and was now following a dozen feet behind Malfoy. He left a lingering trace of a cologne that smelled pretty good actually. He frowned, was that what he had now put on?

He was getting confused. Did Malfoy want to somehow woo or entice Katie?

Harry really wished he could cast a Silencio on himself so he was completely hidden. He had to be absolutely perfect, something was definitely up and he only had one chance to get in the door as Lucius walked in. Lucius slowed down again, stopping at a stall to buy the Daily Prophet. He looked up once or twice at the sky as he opened the paper. Diagon alley was no longer as empty, a few more people were beginning to make their way to work, or open up their business. Malfoy dug for his pocket watch again, glanced at it, snapped it shut and then Harry finally noticed what he was waiting for.

An owl came to land on the guttering of the roof of Obscurus. In its beak was something small, a tiny folded piece of parchment. It dropped it and Malfoy skillfully used his cane to summon it before it landed without drawing his wand. He opened it, smiled, and dropped it on the ground. He continued onto the bookstore. Harry snatched it up as he walked past it, pocketing it as he tried to get in position to slip in behind Lucius.

Lucius Malfoy opened the door and Harry almost gave himself away as the cloak touched him briefly when he slipped in. He actually looked outside in curiosity before he closed the door, the chime tinkling merrily.

"Good morning Mr. Malfoy," Edgar Ridgewall greeted with a slight bow.

"Edgar," Mr. Malfoy stated in return. "How goes it?" he asked, silky smooth.

"Very good, very good. All is well, however I did not see Mrs. Obscurus yesterday but I will pass on the message when I do come across her," he said causally, sipping from his tea.

"And did you relay the message to Miss Bell, I trust?" Malfoy inquired, smiling. Harry was reminded of Lockhart for some reason when Malfoy smiled. Except Malfoy’s smile was twenty times more venomous.

"Oh yes," Edgar smiled back, waving his hand towards the back. "Told her to come in a bit early to see to the donation set. Would you like me to call her? I believe she is in the store room."

"I would like to assist, if possible; with how they are to be arranged. Some of the journals are, shall we say, more important and cannot be grouped with the wide release publications. I believe my courier was at fault and did not separate them into two different packages," Malfoy explained. "May I?" he indicated to the storage room.

"Of course!" Edgar replied, gesturing to the back. "Take your time." Lucius stepped around the counter and made his way towards the back room. Harry quickly ducked behind a shelf, took out the
Harry waited for Edgar to reach for his teacup and blow before stepping around the counter towards the storage room.

Harry was now in a room with two main shelves filled with taped up boxes. The walls had one or two shelves as well as counters and a high window with Owl delivery paraphernalia scattered on the desk below. Katie was near the main delivery door, sitting on a counter with her wand out, cutting the tape of a stack of large boxes.

"Good morning," Mr. Malfoy's voice came from between the shelves. Harry paced him on the opposite side of the shelf, watching his every move. Katie's head looked up.

"Morning?" she enquired. "Can I help you? Who is there?"

"My name is Lucius Malfoy," he said as he came into view. "I wish to help you with my donation. There was a slight mix up," he said with a smile. "Some of the literature was bundled incorrectly and simply cannot be sold like the rest."

"Is Mr. Ridgewall aware you are here?" she asked cautiously. Everyone knew his son was a pureblood ideologist and suspected his father was the influence. Katie didn't proclaim it to the whole world, but it was known she wasn't a pureblood.

"Why yes," Mr. Malfoy replied, getting closer. "How far along have you reached?" he asked politely.

"Um.. I have now begun," she said, looking uncomfortable. She hopped off the table to stand, smoothing her robes down her front. "The packaging spell is quite strong, haven't got the right unlock spell yet," she waved her wand uncertainly with a hesitant laugh. Harry could tell she was nervous, maybe getting a bit afraid. He moved a little closer just in case she needed help. He crouched low, watching the both of them with slow, steady breaths.

"Allow me," Malfoy said as he approached, separating the handle from the cane to reveal his wand. For a split second Harry was thinking of attacking, then he calmed himself. Katie actually went a bit rigid.

"Edgar is right there. He won't jinx her. Not like this. That is not a true Slytherin's style."

Malfoy approached, and with a gentle hand on her wrist, he motioned a figure eight into a swoosh. "This is the motion, 'Alectrono'." He guided her hand twice, then demonstrated on the first box. It neatly tore through the packaging and the flaps opened up. "Let's see, ah no, this one is all right to go to the front." He gallantly put a light touch on the small of her back as he looked around. "Show me where the others are. Why don't you try out the spell, Miss Bell? Easy once you get the swoosh correctly," he smiled.

To Harry's horror, Katie smiled prettily back at him.

"Ok," she said, biting her lip while looking at his smile. "Alectrono!"

Another box on the table opened, and she peered inside. Malfoy leant over her nicely rounded bottom and peered over her shoulder. Their bodies were definitely inappropriately close. Something was going on.
Katie braced both hands flat on the table and arched her backside against Mr. Malfoy. Her eyes closed as his hands held unto her waist with a light touch. He leant over and nuzzled the back of her neck, making sure his chest was flush against her back.

"Write to me," he said softly, nipping her ear. "I will secret you away and fulfill all your dreams," he hissed, his hands roaming over her body. Katie closed her eyes, moving slowly against him.

"When...?" she said, her voice husky.

"Not now," he said, kissing her neck. "When your family cannot see, during the term. Do it in here; no owls," he added, his voice dangerously soft. He gave her a wrapped package. "Only Electrno will open it. I will only come and get you once you tell me everything that you want and how badly you want it, my love."

Katie took the tightly secured package and put in her purse, turning in his arms and putting her hands on the sides of his face.

"Anything you want, Lucius." Then she kissed him.

Harry had enough. He pushed down an empty inkwell off the edge of the table next to him. It hit the ground with a loud glass thunk, followed by an obnoxious rolling sound. Malfoy straightened and stepped away; immediately wary. Katie stood there touching the front of his robes and running her hands on his arms, eyes glazed over. Harry ducked low and circled to the other side of the shelf, watching Malfoy advance to investigate. He spotted the empty inkwell which rolled to a stop on the ground.

Malfoy had his wand out, looking around for an obvious clue. He left the storage room with a determined stride. Harry crept quickly around the shelves in the opposite direction, straight to Katie's purse. Before he could get close enough, Malfoy returned, kissing her passionately, then double checking once again in her purse. Harry's heart raced, he could have stretched out and touched his robes, he was that close. Satisfied that the book was still in it, he took out the perfume bottle he carried and sprayed it on the packaging.

"Only in there, understood?" Malfoy hissed, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. Katie nodded, smiling at him. Without further ado, Malfoy turned on his heel and walked out. Katie leaned back on the table, touching her lips tentatively. Harry counted to ten, then slowly approached the purse. Katie was still staring at the door. Harry opened up his bag, took out his apron, wrapped that around the package, and then put it in his backpack. For a moment he studied Katie, and how flush her cheeks were. She folded her arms tightly against her bosom, both hands on her mouth, a silly smile on her face. She turned around to continue her work, biting her lip and fixing her robes. Harry felt repulsed. He couldn't decipher if it was because of the Horcrux or what he witnessed. What he did know is that he had to stash this somewhere safe.

He contemplated not leaving her alone in the storage room but the Horcrux was way too dangerous. He frowned, promising to himself to make sure she was okay as soon as he could. He watched her inscribe a heart with L and K in it on the wooden desk with her wand, and hastily stepped out before he vomited.

On his way out he saw that Edgar was methodically sipping his tea, oblivious to what just happened. When Harry walked past him on the way out, he failed to notice that the cup was empty, and a small trickle of blood was seeping out of his nose.

Harry remained under his invisibility cloak outside on Diagon. He wished he had a watch. Where was Jon and Tonks?
He dipped into an alley to remove his invisibility cloak. He wondered if Gringotts was safe enough to store the Horcrux. Considering his options, he had to concede that he didn't have a choice. He was wary about doing this. If this was found out to be a dark artifact in his vault, he was toast. That was it. Harry Potter would be in Azkaban or on the run from the Ministry, and he needed Hogwarts and allies to complete his mission. Wanted criminals were not the best allies to the general populace, something Sirius suffered through the years before he died.

As he made his way to Gringotts, something occurred to him. If Malfoy planned this all along and this time was apparently successful, how did Ginny end up with the diary the week before school opened?

What happened differently today which caused his diary attempt on Katie to fail before?

Something I did since coming back, Harry deduced, storming towards Gringotts. What did he do differently with Katie?

He bought the books alongside Jon and Tonks. Katie and he talked. She was in a good mood. What did they talk about? Quidditch, her summer job, and how glad she was to see him and hoped to see him again. Tonks had said "I made an impression on her."

Harry had dismissed that talk with Katie. He realized because he was older, that sort of thing wasn't as important anymore. For a normal twelve year old, a pretty girl saying it was nice to see him would make a boy feel special. He tried to rewind that day. Maybe he did feel special, he did sort of boast to Tonks about his Quidditch skill, didn't he?

Harry's head was hurting. Something he did, something made her be in this situation that she wasn't in before.

Could it be that Malfoy had tried a different approach before and scared her, enough to make her quit? Could it also be that she changed her mind from leaving the job upon meeting him at Diagon? Was her interest reinforced by the newspaper article after the thief was caught?

Edgar had said that Katie comes in a little before eight on mornings. That was yesterday; after he noticed Harry looking for her. Was it that Katie mentioned him throughout that first day and Edgar, knowing how teens operate, was somehow expecting Harry to call again?

Too many possibilities. He had the diary now, and that was what was important. He ducked into the alleyway by Gringotts and put the package into the Onyx box, apron and all. He would simply buy another apron today. Crap. That meant going back down to World Wizarding Gear. He removed the Onyx gauntlets and folded them neatly in his bag. He then went inside Gringotts and confronted Bogrod.

"Mr. Potter," Bogrod greeted. "How may Gringotts be of service."

"How long would it take to open a new, er... current account?"

"Quite some time," Bogrod said. "You would be referred to the sales goblins upstairs and they would take you for a tour on available vaults and different levels of protection."

"Ouch," Harry cursed, thinking.

"Is there something you need?"

"I want a separate vault opened, but time is of importance," Harry said cautiously. Bogrod opened a drawer and took out a log book. He took out spectacles from his suit pocket and placed them on his
"Let's see, yes. I was correct," Bogrod confirmed, his finger on the newest page.

"You are in luck, Mr. Potter. Your Clan, the, um.. The Crow's Vambrace account has been created and Vault number assigned, just need the three founders to sign the seal. Please be advised that this is not a very highly secure vault. But it does come with a bit of, leeway shall we say." Bogrod flashed a pointy toothed smile.

"How so?" Harry enquired.

"As it is a separate, business entity you have created, your clan account cannot be associated to you through the public forum. Only the three of you know or can have access to the file information. NO family, heirs apparent or Ministry of Legal Affairs can strip this information from Gringotts. It is the matter of utmost confidentiality."

Harry smiled. It reminded him of a business account in an offshore bank.

"Can I make a deposit?" Harry asked.

"As soon as signatures are sealed," Bogrod confirmed. Harry nodded.

"I thank you for the good work, Bogrod," he said formally, with a single dip of the head. Bogrod blinked a couple times.

"Honor and Blood, Mr. Potter," Bogrod replied, also slightly bowing. Harry left the bank. He decided to walk back to Obscurus to meet with the others. Jon was there, leaning against the wall, a fierce scowl on his face.

"I believe Mistress Tonks is upset," he said quietly. "What happened with the wizard?"

Harry shook his head. "Not here. Streets have ears and eyes." He looked around casually. "I was successful. Where is she?"

"Inside. Something is wrong with the librarian. She told me to divert anyone for a few minutes. " He gestured at the doorway. The sign was flipped to 'Be back in ten minutes.' "I advise you keep walking and not attract too much attention to here," Jon said, his hood pulled low.

"Meet me at the bank. Walk separately," Harry said, leaving.

Tonks was inside the bookstore, shining a light into Edgar's eyes. They were not dilating or contracting as they should.

"The fuck happened here?" she whispered. Her pores were raised. Edgar was methodically sipping his empty teacup, barely paying her any notice, even though she was shining a light in his face. "What the hell, Potter..." she asked herself, perplexed.

She peeked into the store room. She could see movement and the sounds of books hitting each other. Tonks focused on Edgar's face, build and clothes. With great concentration, she began to change. Height was always an issue when it came to this, and had to settle for a shorter version of Mr. Ridgewall. She waved her light again in his face, yet still no natural response. Just a mild recognition that someone was in front of him, but nothing more.

She made her way around to the storeroom. Walking in, she saw Katie diligently opening every box that was still sealed, from the dusty, forgotten ones on the top shelves right down to the newest set
near to the back door delivery entrance. Every box was opened, and her wand was waving figure eights with swooshes, "Alectrono," repeated at anything remotely sealed. Then she stacked the books into lopsided towers of barely balancing piles.

"Merlin," Tonks breathed. She made a hasty retreat, reverting back to her original form.

"Jon, where is Harry?" Tonks demanded, opening the front door a tiny crack.

"Walk separately," he said stonily. "Meet him at the Bank," he repeated and walked off, not looking at her. Tonks ran back inside went down to the office backroom and out through the side alley exit. She did the chameleon charm and began to walk along Diagon alley. She made her way past Gringotts then stepped in the alley, removed the illusion then made her way inside.

Jon and Harry were waiting for her at Bogrod's counter.

"Sign this," Harry said. Tonks just stared at him. Harry stared back at her, eyes cold. It reminded her of veteran Aurors decades older. She took the parchment, read it through at double speed, knicked her finger and took the quill. "Follow me," Harry said and set off when she signed.

"The vault is only one level down," he explained. "No one is to enter it after today. Nobody." Harry said softly.

"Why? What happened at the store?" Tonks whispered, her temper rising. Harry shook his head.

"Inside," he said calmly, producing the key. He opened the massive stone etched door and went inside. It was small, nothing compared to his Trust or Heritage vault, but it would have to do. It was the size of a tiny storage room, probably ten feet by fifteen feet, with the opposite wall consisting of multiple lockers the size of picture frames.

"Lumos," Harry said, then pulled the vault shut behind them. It was suddenly very, very cozy. Tonks produced some light as well.

"Malfoy tried to plant this cursed object on Katie. I was hoping that you guys would have arrived earlier but .." he scowled. "I couldn't stay longer, Tonks, if that is what you're going to ask. This is more important." He rest the bag on the ground, then overturned it carefully. He pointed his wand at his onyx box.

"Winguardium Leviosa," he muttered, controlling it as he opened one of the lockers. He deposited the onyx box in the small locker numbered five.

"Tonks, this is serious. Katie has been bewitched with a scent based potion. Two, in fact. One was sprinkled on the back of her robes, the complimentary one was on Lucius Malfoy." Tonks began to protest. Harry pointed his lit wand at her, making her flinch reflexively. "This conversation is not to leave this room. " She nodded.

"His accomplice was a young wizard with glasses. Slight of build, slick black hair, blue and grey street robes. Had the potion in a small cork stopper bottle. You have any sort of truth serum?" he showed both of them the piece of parchment.

"No," she sighed, looking at the tiny message. "Why can't we alert the Aurors?"

"Men like him usually have spies," Jon guessed out aloud.

"The way his son boasts about who his father knows, I'm sure he does," Harry said, reinforcing the idea into her head without arousing too much suspicion that he really knew for sure that he had spies
in the MLE department. "Tonks you need to find the guy and get that potion bottle back. I really
don't want Katie to be under the microscope with the Ministry."

"Microscope?" both Jon and Tonks asked, lost. Harry sighed.

"Under suspicion, or held against her will, basically let's not spook the girl too much," Harry said.

"Let's say I do find him, but not the bottle, what then?" Tonks said. "I wouldn't keep that on me if I
were him." Harry thought for a few seconds, nodding.

"You are right. Maybe we should just focus on fixing the problem first. You need to get Katie out of
those robes. Careful with them, block your nose or cast a impervious spell on yourself. I think it is a
compound love potion, its obsessive and strong. Don't get caught in it."

Harry stopped.

"Damn," he cursed, pacing in the small, gloomy vault.

"What?" she asked. Jon parroted her as well, curious.

"Jon might have to do it. Or me." Harry said darkly. "He's vile, truly a serpent. I got really fucking
mad. I wanted to..." Curse him. He took a deep breath then blew out his mouth, letting out some
steam.

"You two are boys. No way. Why Jon, or you, may I ask?" She asked again.

"I smelled it following him. It doesn't work on men."

"Oh," Tonks drawled. "That kind of potion. That isn't a love potion. It's more a lust potion. Activates
by a code word, or spell. Great for secret affairs. Don't want the person following you like a lost
puppy."

"Well, shit. Speaking of puppy, Jon, where is Ghost?" Harry said, perplexed.

"He is outside Master Ollivander's side door, the one we usually come in. I told him to wait for me
there."

"That's an awfully smart dog, isn't he?" Tonks commented.

"It's a wolf," Jon explained.

"Whoa!" Tonks exclaimed. "No wonder he went through Sticky's ankle so easy! Canines are rarely
familiars though. Guess this is just another weird thing you two have going on."

"Yes," Jon said simply.

"Let's go," Harry said.

"Wait," Tonks said. "Mr. Ridgewall has also been hexed. I don't know what is wrong with him."

"What do you mean? He seemed fine drinking his tea when I left the store!" Harry said.

"He's still drinking it, or he thinks he is. It has been empty for some time now and yet he's still
sipping. He's also not responding to me, or anything else for that matter."

Harry frowned. He didn't know what poison could cause that. "Crap. We'll need a healer to check
him out. Drat. I was hoping to keep this quiet. Katie is a nice girl... this could mean trouble for her. Is there anyone , any Auror you trust to keep this quiet?"

"Dawlish has been a friend to my dad for like..forever. Since I was a baby. But that's not how it works, Harry. Aurors must assign a case number and summary to any investigation. Once they bring him or her in, its logged . Those are the rules under legislation Two dot one, clause 24. Aurors keeping things quiet is recipe for corruption and for criminals to slip through technicalities when in court. One of the reasons why your folks got cornered into hiding. Not enough paperwork for other legal departments to effectively counter what he who must not be named and his followers were doing."

*Or maybe they were betrayed by a slimy rat.*

"What time is it?" Harry asked.

"A little after quarter past," Tonks said. "That's what the great clock on Gringotts tower said when I came in.

"Once Master Ollivander sees Ghost, he will know we're nearby. At least he would not suspect that we are not coming," Jon said. Harry ran his fingers through his hair in frustration.

"No choice. We'll have to fire message to the Headmaster," Harry said. "I want to do this as soon as possible, without Aurors. If he knows I'm apprenticing here he might try to interfere, and I really don't want him trying to monitor me. I like learning from Ollivander and hanging around you guys. And he doesn't know Jon, yet." The two boys looked at Tonks.

"Me?" she said. Harry shrugged in apology. "Fine. Why do I keep getting the impression that I'm not the oldest one here?" she laughed. They two boys laughed as well, fake as hell.

"Tell him what I said, except leave me out of it. And leave out the cursed object, we have it locked away and that's the most important thing. Tell him that snake was looking for a poor girl to prey upon or something. Make it sound good. Once Ridgewall and Katie are healed, that's all that matters to me. " *For now.*

I will deal with Malfoy Senior later, Harry thought. The three of them nodded in agreement and left the bank.

"See ya, Tonks," Harry said, waving.

"Milady, please enjoy the rest of your day," Jon said with a wave.

"Sure," Tonks said sarcastically, a crooked smile on her face. "Later," she waved and made her way back to the leaky cauldron. There was a backroom there that had a public floo fire she could use to contact Albus Dumbledore. She began reciting to herself the story she was going to tell him.

Harry was diligently using the number three fine wood chisel on his practice wand handle. Mr. Ollivander wanted them both to make a circumferential pattern at with end of the handle closest to the wrist. He advised a simple repeating wave design for Harry, and a straight groove for Jon. Both young men were seated at work tables with vice clamps holding the wooden handles horizontally. The clamping mechanism was connected to a fine metallic gear system which was housed on a pulley wheel. Tough elastic bands were routed around the pulley wheel to a kicking arm. This kicking arm was controlled by both foot pedals, right for clockwise rotation of the wand, left for anticlockwise. The technique was to carefully mallet the chisel along a penciled outline of the pattern drawn on the wood while rotating the handle. The soft tapping of the chisel in time with the stepping
of the pedals was almost meditative in its rhythm.

Harry was currently doing the second turn when a visitor popped in, calling a cheery "Good morning!" from out front. Mr. Ollivander responded in kind and after giving his apprentices a positive nod to continue, stepped out the workshop, through his office and went to greet the client.

The two lads continued for a few minutes, the *chap chap chap* sound in perfect unison from both chisels. Mr. Ollivander walked back in the workshop with his hands clasped behind his back.

"Harry, Headmaster Dumbledore would like a word with you. He also says he would love to use this opportunity to meet Lord Black, Jon." Both young men gave each other a look, then got up to take off their aprons. Harry hung his borrowed one on the back of his chair and Jon tossed his on the counter where they put their bags. Mr. Ollivander walked back out front first.

"Jon," Harry whispered. "He can read your mind if he makes enough eye contact," he warned.

"Is there any way to stop this?" Jon countered, alarmed.

"Clear your mind. Think of when you are at one with your inner self."

"Usually that is when I am practicing the sword, or archery," Jon mused.

"Try imagining a shield to your thoughts," Harry advised, inspired. "If you are sensitive to any probe, he will know, and stop trying. It is impolite to do this, and he knows it."

"It will be done, Harry of House Hollow," Jon said with determination. Both stepped out to the front room.

"Harry! It is good to see you my boy," Dumbledore greeted, his palms outstretched. "And this must be young Lord Black," he said in welcome. He clasped his hands in front of him at his belt, the humble elderly grandfather once more. "My name is Albus Dumbledore, I am the headmaster of Hogwarts, Harry's School of Magic," he said with a slight bow. "You have made quite a splash in the Daily Prophet, young man!"

"And good day to you, Headmaster Dumbledore," Harry said, smiling. "Yes, this is Jon, he gave me a hand in that scary situation," Harry said, gratitude in his voice.

"Greetings, Headmaster," Jon said simply. "We were caught off guard, but I hoped to be of some assistance when we were accosted. It was no way as heroic as the papers made it to be."

"Ah as humble as he is brave. Very good qualities, young man. If it pleases you, have your guardians Owl me at Hogwarts. I will make accommodations with the Ministry if you wish to transfer," he offered with a smile.

Jon gave a slight bow. "It shall be done, Headmaster Dumbledore."

He nodded, and then addressed Harry.

"Quite an honor, to apprentice here," he said. "I hope all is well. Maybe you could have written?" Dumbledore smiled. Harry ducked his head in embarrassment, even though he knew this was exactly how Dumbledore liked to pry.

"I didn't want to stand out, again. Just I ... I really like it," he said simply.

"And you, Mr. Black? How fares it?" he asked Jon.
"I am learning from the best, it is more than I could have wished for," Jon said solemnly. "Truly an honor."

"Excellent, excellent. I was contacted by one of my previous students, a miss Nymphadora Tonks, charming young woman, very promising talent. I presume you know of her?"

Both boys nodded, giving nothing more away.

"I don't know if you are aware that Katherine, from your Quidditch team, has a summer job at Obscurus' Fine Literature and Journals Bookstore lower down Diagon Alley."

"Yes we met her briefly to get our books," Harry answered, occluding his mind. He got sudden inspiration. "Here, let me show you!" he dashed off to get his backpack and retrieve the book.

He knew that Leglimens practitioners would ask you a question and then try to pry information when you were thinking on the subject. He didn't want to tip his hand that he knew occlumency as yet. He just hoped Jon could protect his thoughts for the few seconds he needed to deflect Dumbledore's attention.

"Here, it's really neat!" Harry said, looking down at the book instead of the headmaster as he opened it. He handed it to the headmaster, who took it, read the summary and author's note, and handed it back.

"Very good Harry, you should do well. Ah, the enthusiasm of youth," Dumbledore said sagely, returning the text. "Miss Tonks popped in there this morning to get a book and noticed that something was wrong, terribly wrong. She contacted me and I went to investigate, along with Professors McGonagall, Flitwick and Snape. The Librarian was given a short-term memory potion from the initial testing done by Professor Snape, but further testing by Madame Pompfrey showed that it was a combination of that along with a calming draught caused a bad reaction. He is at Hogwarts under surveillance right now. So is Miss Bell. She seems to obsessively want to open every closed box she can lay her hands on. I'm afraid until we figure out what has happened, I have asked her parents' permission to let her recuperate at Hogwarts. The house elves are doing a good job bringing boxes for her that are sealed, and then resealing them when she's finished with that set."

"Here is where the mystery deepens. In a seemingly unrelated event, a peculiar house elf, Dobby, is now in St Mungo's ward for Magical Creatures. He is currently being restrained from constantly harming himself, saying he must warn Harry Potter. This is why I am here. Does this mean anything to you?"

"Who?" Harry asked, dumbstruck. He looked down to the floor, deep in thought. "Dobby?" he almost forgot about him. He had him locked away this summer, didn't he? When all the owls were bombarding the house ... yeah, Uncle Vernon wasn't happy about that. "You mean a Hogwarts house elf?" Harry asked, planting tendrils of suspicion into the Headmaster.

"No," Albus said slowly, pulling his beard. His eyes stopped his grandfatherly twinkle, and his shoulders straightened, almost imperceptibly under his flamboyant robes, but Harry knew the headmaster well enough to spot the difference. He was mad. Mad and concerned that he didn't ask those obvious questions. Hermione was right, Wizards don't ponder or think about house elves whatsoever. "No, I don't believe so." He turned to Mr. Ollivander. "Garrick, lads... thank you for your time but I must make my leave. Pardon me. This is something I must follow up on with utmost haste," he bowed, and without waiting for their response turned on his heel and left the store. There was a cry of "Fawkes!" and a flash outside the window.

Mr. Ollivander eyes grew wide and literally drew his wand with lightning speed. "Quickly lads!
Before it touches the ground! *Reducto! Depulso! Evanescarium!*

He destroyed his main glass window, banished the glass then disappeared the shards. Jon was stunned, but spotted what he wanted. Without hesitation he dashed the five steps to the glass wand showcase counter facing the street. He planted a hand flat on the surface, vaulted over and caught the two Phoenix feathers that were dancing merrily down to the pavement outside. He had to tuck his head under and roll on his shoulder to compensate for his lunge, cradling the feathers delicately in his palm. He sprung up from his impromptu dive, holding the feathers that were now refracting rainbow colors unto his hands under the midday sunlight.

Harry had only begun to move.

*Jon was a freaking cat.*

Jon cradled the priceless feathers in his hands, gingerly stepping back towards the shop. He had an awestruck expression on his face as he studied the weightless treasure in his palms.

"Phoenix feathers at noon," Mr. Ollivander said in reverence, a tear rolling down his cheek. "Full tail plumage, not the hit and miss molting wing feathers. My, this cannot be happening. It cannot be. Careful, lad. Do not drop it!"

"Harry," he whispered, not taking his eyes off of Jon for a fraction of a second. "Glass cabinet, third shelf, the diamond plated box, please bring it here." Mr. Olivander's hand shook terribly as he took out the ring of keys he kept in his robe pocket. Harry accepted the keys and went back into the store room. Mr. Ollivander opened the door for Jon with due haste, closing it behind him and flipping the sign to 'Closed'. Harry returned with the Diamond mini-chest and put it on the sale counter. "What extraordinary luck," Ollivander breathed in reverence. "Virgin feathers; untouched, unsoiled..." he added in rapturous glee. Harry has never seen the man so emotional. "Look Harry, Look! It's Perfect! He still has on his gloves!"

Jon placed the treasure in the diamond chest, the light from the Sun casting prismatic effects on the precious stone as it shone through the feathers.

"Unrequested, Freely Given, Sun Kissed feathers from the only Phoenix in Britain. Untouched by magic. Luck as it has never come before, it has now come!" The hundreds of wand boxes in his store began to rattle, responding to their creator's magic. The old man was crying feely now. He admired the treasure in the box for a few seconds more, then closed it. He took a deep breath to calm himself.

"That good huh?" Harry said, not knowing what else to say. Mr. Ollivander barked a laugh, putting a firm, sturdy hand on both of their shoulders.

"'That good', he says," Ollivander chuckled. "Yes, my dear lads, it is just 'that good'." He vigorously shook their shoulders, the Master Wandsmith fully in his glee. Both Jon and Harry grinned, the old man was infectious in his excitement. He began to pace up and down his store. He began to mutter to himself, his voice growing stronger with each non-sensible syllable.

"They are yours. Oh no, this is not chance. It must be. It was meant to be. Only the circumstances of you two doing whatever it was you were doing, yes, yes... these past few days ..." he looked at them, through them, with his rheumy eyes. "This acquisition will go down in the books. No. It is too divine to be recorded, the magic will be lost in mere parchment and ink. It needed to be lived, experienced. Yes. Two of you have created this unique sequence of events. Inexplicable coincidences. Your new wands will be exquisite. Extraordinary. Yes. They shall, oh yes they shall," he declared, nodding once for emphasis.
Wand still in hand, he crossed his left wrist with his right hand in a sudden, dramatic movement. His wand began to glow hotly as he mimicked the motion of the drawing a wand from his inner forearm, pulling out the wand slowly.

"It will match with the bracers, it must. It cannot do anything else but be perfect," he muttered to himself, his hands now clenching in fists in front of him; the true embodiment of victory.

"Sir?" Jon asked out of concern.

"Yes?" Ollivander snapped, alarmed that they dare disturb him.

"Is everything alright, sir?" he asked, genuinely perturbed.

"Yes, yes," he said, looking at the treasure chest. "Look at that piece of crap," Ollivander spat, gesturing rudely at the diamond chest. "All glittery stones. Nothing but a box worth a mere hundred thousand galleons. Nothing! Ho, a pittance compared to the contents."

He watched the two boys jaws drop in shock.

"The phoenix. The strongest magical animal there is. Immortal. Beautiful. Indestructible," he said softly. "It has given you these. Your previous wand was made from plucked feathers, a rude gesture towards such magnificent a creature." He shook his head sadly, then with an abrupt change in mood, he pointed his finger at the both of them. His voice went deeply grave.

"You must practice, gentlemen. Back to work! Until I have seen you create ten world class wands, only then shall you work with these cores. Now, back to work!" he ordered, beginning his ramblings once again.

Both Harry and Jon were thunderstruck, not believing the passion Mr. Ollivander had for his craft. Harry looked at Jon, nodding to the workroom.

"Nice catch," Harry whispered in recognition of the acrobatic feat; offering his fist. Jon connected immediately, not even breaking stride as they entered the workshop.

"It was nothing, Harry of House Hollow. Just lucky, I guess," he smiled, quoting Harry's excuse he told Tonks.

"Hm. Let's hope our luck doesn't run out. Next week is the trip to France."

"Easy," Jon said, shrugging. "Ranging with cut-throat companions? This is what we Immortal Heroes do for fun."
IT'S ALWAYS SAFE AT HOGWARTS

Chapter Summary

Katie's friends organize to visit her at Hogwarts' medical wing. Jon is put to the test when the party encounters an unexpected attack.

It was before dawn Saturday morning, two days after the incident at Obscurus. Harry woke early wanting to prepare himself for his half day at work and then more errands in Diagon. It was only a few days before the mission to France and he needed to finalize certain details. There were quite a number of post left on his window sill, some wet and dirty, as if it was dropped on the roof or on the shrubbery. He must get Hedwig a treat in thanks for her collecting them all and dropping it on the sill.

He decided to open another mail from Hermione first. In it she said she heard something happened to Katie but no one wanted to tell her exactly what, and she would let him know as soon as she can. She also hoped to get a response soon.

Harry wrote back telling her Dumbledore was taking care of things and that he did not know anything other than she was hexed into opening closed boxes and they were trying to find out what caused it. He put it in a muggle envelope that she provided and set it aside.

Another mail was from the twins, Fred and George, saying that they got word from Oliver Wood that Katie was in the Hospital Wing at Hogwarts and were trying to get the team and a few friends to visit her. They gave him instructions to book a ticket on the afternoon Hogsmeade train scheduled to leave at three. Their Mom and Dad would meet him at his house to convince their folks to give him permission to leave and return on the Sunday morning return trip. He replied and said he didn't need their folks to visit the Dursley's, he would make it regardless.

Another two were from Gringotts. They were statements of both his hereditary and Trust vaults. The hereditary was fine, but the trust fund was small and only limited to the one thousand monthly limit until he was of 'age'. Four thousand was all that was left in the Trust, so by the time he was of age that might be depleted at this rate. His family vault was a nice healthy Twenty Five thousand galleons and change. Considering that the diamond chest alone was worth over one hundred thousand galleons, he deduced that the Ollivander family was one of the truly wealthy families if he could afford to just leave that in his storeroom with only a simple glass cabinet to secure it. Harry then calculated that if a wand was worth an average of 20 galleons, then most likely that treasure might have been a family heirloom passed down from long time ago and it has increased in value over generations. It didn't seem Mr. Ollivander's style to spend his hard earned sales revenue on something like that.

Another was from Ron. It seemed that his own brothers failed to or more likely, intentionally did not inform him of the trip to Hogwarts because his letter was the usual 'how are things and what he was doing over the summer' type drivel. He shouldn't say drivel, but at his age chores and Ginny being a pest probably wasn't that interesting anymore to read about. He decided to return his letter with an invitation and the same instructions for Ron to join him and his friend Jon to visit Katie. He even said
he would get the ticket for him once he sent confirmation owl addressed to Owl's Emporium Owl-box before one that afternoon.

A slightly damp post with a very ornate envelope was addressed to Lord Black and Associates via proxy from Gringotts.

"Snow," Harry called out to Jon, who was sleeping with his face in the pillow.

"Harry," he grumbled. "Is it time already?" he called out without moving his head.

"You have a letter from Gringotts addressed to Lord Black."

Jon pushed himself up and rubbed his face. Harry gave him the letter and the opener. Jon scanned it, and his smile grew wide.

"Yes," he proclaimed in victory, eyes wide awake now."It has been accepted." He handed Harry the letter to read.

"Pavel Potage has accepted your offer to purchase the property!" Harry said in congratulations.

"That was quick!"

"I asked Miss Tonks what she believed to be a fair price for the property and bid a little more than that. He wasn't that hard to persuade but said he would consult his associates and send official word soon."

"Wait," Harry said as he turned over the first page and read the back. "It says here 'Our client has accepted your offer of sixteen thousand galleons. We counter offer that this sum be paid four thousand galleons up front and another twelve over the course of two years to be directly deposited into a Trust Vault set up for his heiress Miss Alexandria Potage. It also says 'Miss Potage will be involved in the Official Signing off of the Deed' meeting Sunday at noon on the second floor of Gringotts Bank.'"

"Yes, that seems to be correct."

"Interesting."

"Why do you say that?"

"Did you actually meet Alexandria when you talked to Mr. Potage?"

"No, I have not."

"Hm."

"Speak your mind, Harry of House Hollow."

"I noticed that they worded the term 'direct deposit' and not 'transfer'. A bit of a difference."

"Explain the difference between the terms to me," Jon said, his interest piqued.

"If I were to take a wild guess," Harry touched his lip, thinking. "I believe that Mr. Potage wants you to be in regular contact with his Heiress over the course of two years. Direct deposit means that you must be physically present at Gringotts to witness the transfer of gold coin, or even do it yourself, I am not sure. I could be wrong. It also means that young Miss Alexandria Potage might also be there, either overseeing or just being courteous to you, seeing as you are from an Ancient house and all that."
"Understood, continue," Jon nodded.

"Transfer means the goblins would do their own internal thing without anyone having to be there. You would see the balances of transferred amounts every three months in your post. Like this one," Harry gave him his Gringotts records and showed him where the interest from his hereditary vault was transferred into the Trust. "No Potter had to physically do this process," Harry explained. "Since both accounts were pretty much stagnant since my parents passed, the interest transferred from the principal amount in the heritage vault to the trust was consistent in value."

"You believe he wants me to get involved over time with his daughter," Jon summarized.

"Could be. Maybe he sees an opportunity and is laying the groundwork for his daughter to get to know you. I don't know what properties go for in Magical Britain but sixteen thousand for a place on Diagon seems quite reasonable."

"Yes, Mistress Tonks was teaching me the basics and a bit of history. When they put up the muggle repelling wall surrounding the alley; that side of Diagon has now become the back. Before, that side was open to the world. Businesses do not want that side anymore so the properties became storage type facilities. Remember the grand double doors? She was telling me that was the main entrance to the armory, generations before. This aspect I recognized as soon as I laid eyes on the place. It is purposefully designed like that to allow horse carts to roll in with raw material. It is similar to how we did it at Castle Black."

"So you were once Lord of The Black of Castle Black. If you rename that place you could be Lord Black of Castle Black again," Harry joked. Jon hit him one of those grim stares. But eventually he broke out into a wide grin.

"Funny thing is, Harry of House Hollow, I was thinking the same thing. It is not a castle by any means, but they do say every man's home is his castle."

"Oh, you do have an ancestral home in London," Harry remembered. "Grim Old Place it was," he said sadly, remembering Sirius. It pained him each time he thought of how he was locked up, escaped, then locked up again, only to be killed on a rescue mission.

"I will see it in time. However, I wish to be close to Ollivander's workshop. It would be best for now," Jon said.

"Oh, I need you to come with me this afternoon on a train ride to my school. Some of Katie's friends want to visit her. We will return tomorrow morning."

Jon nodded, distracted. "Once we would be back in time to reach Gringotts." He got up and peeked out the door. "I'll be back, using the loo room."

"Just loo."

"Apologies, the just loo room," he nodded and snuck across the hall.

Harry shook his head and began making a list of things he needed to do today. He also decided to write a letter to Tonks.

"You are quite the slave driver, for twelve. Or is it thirteen? How old are you anyway?" Tonks said, bearing down on them with powerful strides at the sidewalk table outside of the Cafe. It was midday and a beautiful day in Diagon Alley.
"Milady," Jon immediately got to his feet and pulled out the heavy metallic chair closest to her with a slight bow of his head. Harry saw this and awkwardly tried to get to his feet.

"Hey. Um Twelve. Nice that you could make it, you got through?" Harry smiled in hope. Jon expertly maneuvered her chair back in and she took her seat comfortably.

For a second Tonks looked around in bewilderment that she was seated, then remembered her manners. "Thank you," she said in a soft voice, then back to her regular irritated tone. The two young men took their seats.

"Yes Harry. Or, should I say, tentatively we got through. You still need to get the robes to test it first." She took out a tin full of dried chamomile. Harry's bewildered expression asked an unspoken question. "Yes, it is Chamomile tea, of all things. Make a bit of the tea, just bring a bit to boil, and pour over the back of the robes. Then use this," she held up a small vial of potion. "This is to test if it was truly neutralized. The area would change colour if it worked. If the robes remain as they were, the tea did not work. If it works, just let her drink it over a few days. The real problem is how are you going to get her robes, and they are going to believe you are a potions prodigy if you do cure Katie." She paused. "Wait. Are you a potions prodigy?" She asked with suspicion.

"What is the problem," Jon said. "Being a prodigy is a good thing, not so?"

"Sometimes I wonder about you, Jon. He's twelve. Are you really a wizard?" Tonks asked, laughing, fully expecting Harry to join her. Harry kind of smiled awkwardly.

"I have not been armed with a wand until recently," Jon said, embarrassed. Tonks stopped laughing.

"You mean... you never had a wand before?"

"No," he replied. "I- " Harry pressed his shoe on Jon's under the table, trying to get him to stop. "I don't want to talk about it."

"You've got a mean Sleeping curse. Non-verbal," Tonks eyes narrowed at Jon.

"Learned that in the store," Jon said truthfully.

"Really." Tonks leaned back in her chair, studying Jon. "You walk around and talk to grown wizards like if you got a lot of clout, though. Greyback showed you due respect at the Guild."

Jon gave her a stare, then shrugged, lacing his fingers together on the table. "I know my own capabilities. That's all I can say."

"What do you want to eat?" Harry offered her the menu, deflecting the questions. "Barbara is coming this way. I'm hungry. You got the tickets?"

Tonks turned her attention back to Harry and accepted the menu. "Starving. Yeah, two for you guys, one for Ron and guest. Is that guest me?" Tonks asked. "I think I'll just take the Burger and salad. Or should I try the fish n chips..." she dwelled on the menu a bit. "Muggles do that better. Maybe the burger."

Harry reddened a bit. He didn't think Tonks would want to go to Hogwarts to visit Katie. The extra ticket was for Hermione if she responded in time. Knowing Hermione her owl must be busy making trips around the various Arithmancy members looking for recommendations to counter-

"It was him!" Harry said suddenly. Jon immediately was on alert.
"Who?" Jon asked. Harry looked around. The place was currently full with the lunch crowd.

"Privacy spell?" Harry asked Tonks. Tonks shook her head after looking around.

"Too late, it won't work with this crowd."

"Um," Harry stalled. "Later I would explain who the 'him' is, was. The extra ticket was for my friend Hermione Granger, that's if she got the message. Didn't think you'd be interested. We can still make it happen for you, though."

"Granger? Granger...nope doesn't ring a bell," Tonks said aloud. "Can't say I've heard the name. Pretty?"

Not right now at this moment, not really, but in a few years, she's pretty alright, Harry thought.


Tonks watched Harry a bit differently, as if measuring what kind of man he would make. She nodded at him, smiling. "I think you two seem to be in the middle of everything. I'm going to be an Auror and believe it or not, I've never had to draw my wand on anyone before. This week alone since meeting you two I have done more practical work and gained real life experience against dark magic... instead of reading stupid books and law texts. I want to be where the action is." She grinned devilishly. "Don't worry about the ticket, I already bought one for myself," she patted her robes indicating where she had her ticket.

Jon laughed aloud. Harry and Tonks looked at him in wonder. Tonks voiced the same thing Harry was thinking.

"You're actually laughing..." Tonks said. "I've never heard him laugh."

"You women are beautiful creatures," Jon said good naturedly. "Inquisitive, beautiful creatures."

Tonks actually blushed at the praise.

"Why pick apart how he is going to help Mistress Katie if you were also coming to the school?" Jon asked. "You can administer the experiment by simply taking her robes off of her without any issue of modesty. You two are women."

Barbara the waitress came and interrupted the conversations. The three of them gave her their orders and as she walked back another waitress brought them a pitcher of water and each a small plate of rolls.

"Thank you," Jon said warmly to her making direct eye contact.

Tonks observed that the second waitress was watching Jon with a smile as she walked off.

"What is up with you two?" Tonks said in exasperation, shaking her head at the both of them.

"Hm?" Jon asked as he buttered his roll.

"What?" Harry said, mouth already full of roll.


"Look who it is. Our star seeker," Fred greeted, grinning at Harry as he came through the portal to
platform 9 3/4. The twins came across and the three boys connected with their fists.

"Sup mates," Harry grinned.

"Had to tell him, didn't ya?" George said, lowering his voice, thumping at Ron.

"I'm right here and I can hear you!" Ron spat as he walked behind Harry. Both he and Ron had an overnight bag slung over his shoulder, just like the twins.

"Whoa," George said, seeing Tonks materialize out of the pillar with Hermione in tow. He nudged his brother. "Damn."

"Yeah," Fred said, checking her out.

Jon followed last carrying Ghost in his arm, looking a bit confused to how he manage that impossible feat. Ghost jumped out of his grasp as soon as they crossed. Jon looked back at the pillar, pushing his hand through it in wonder.

"Hey guys!" Hermione said brightly at the twins. "Come and meet Tonks and Jon!" she said.

Tonks narrowed her eyes. "I know these two," she said in warning. "No funny stuff." She crossed her arms.

"Um..." Hermione said. "And this is Jon. Jon, Fred George. And that is Oliver and Angelina over there. Other Quidditch team members." Oliver and Angelina walked over.

"It is my pleasure, Mistress Angelina," Jon greeted her, taking her fingers and giving her a bow. Angelina put her hand to her chest, shocked. Hermione pouted, jealous that Angelina got the same treatment she did.

Jon offered his hand to Oliver and the twins. He shook each of their hands in turn. "Gentlemen," he greeted. The twins looked at each other, eyebrows raised.

"Um, nice to meet you!" George said, swallowing nervously.

"Cheers," Fred said, wary.

"Let's get on," Harry ordered. "It's almost ready to leave."

By the time they were in Hogsmeade station it was late in the afternoon. They made their way through the town and up the sloping path towards Hogwarts proper. They reached the perimeter gates that were closed with thick chains and a heavy lock.

"Hagrid was supposed to be here and open for us," Oliver Wood said. They waited for half an hour. The sun was rapidly setting.

Tonks, being the oldest, decided that they should return to town and contact someone who could help. They all began the trek back into Hogsmeade proper.

Harry lagged back until he was side by side with Jon. "Stay sharp. Usually when things like this happen, be wary of attack," he said in a low whisper.

Jon nodded, increasing his stride until he was in front, then made small talk with Tonks as if that was his intention all along. Harry remained at the back, his wand tucked into the sleeve of his apprentice robes.
"He thinks that we should be on alert," Jon said in a low tone between small talk. Tonks looked around warily.

"What?" Tonks said. "Its only Hogsmeade!" she replied.

"Just, trust in him," Jon said softly. "Couldn't hurt to be careful." Tonks casually opened her travelling cloak so that she would have better access to her wand tucked inside her robes.

Harry looked up at the sky. The moon was almost visible.

"Hermione, when is the full moon. Is it tonight?" She looked up at the sky as well.

"I think so."

"Hagrid's a good one, but he forgets little details sometimes," he said.

"What you mean?" Hermione asked. Hermione watched him with a weird expression. Harry shrugged, watching the shrieking shack on the way back down. Now Harry wanted to kick himself. They knew Hagrid for only one school year, so Harry shouldn't know his personality all that well. He needed to be more careful.

They made it without incident back to Madame Rosmerta's place. Harry was relieved about that, at least. She greeted Tonks and Oliver, who she knew well.

"Gonna use your floo," Tonks said. Rosmerta asked them if they wanted something to drink and Harry agreed to order a round of butterbeer for them. Within minutes Tonks came back.

"It seems Hagrid is busy with some Threstral trouble at the moment. McGonagall is sending Filch down with keys. Give him fifteen minutes to reach the gates."

"Threstral trouble?" Harry said under his breath, thinking. "Why does that ring a bell..." he pondered.

"Yeah," Tonks shrugged, sipping her butterbeer. "Ugh. And to think I used to like this stuff."

"Sorry," Harry said, distracted. He moved next to Jon, who was feeding Ghost some meat he bought earlier under the table. "Jon, you got the Apothecary's list Master Ollivander gave us?"

"Yes, I believe so." He dug in his bag and took it out. Harry scanned the ingredients.

"Thought so. We've got a couple options for animal hide for tanning... and threstral wing is one of them," Harry murmured, head low with Jon. *The Elder Wand was also made with threstral tail hair.*

Harry also saw that on the rare material list for the stitching.

"What's that you got there?" Hermione asked, curious. "Is that a shopping list?"

"Sorta. Summer project." Harry replied.

"On?"

"Wand bracer," Jon replied. Harry groaned internally. This was not something Harry wanted to spread. Hermione is one of his two best mates but she could be extremely bossy.

"You could buy those, you know. And from what I've read it's not as fast as the inner robe pocket or as convenient as even a skirt or pants pocket. Depending on the brand, it can even make the wand
stick if the conditions are right, or wrong; depending how you look at it. Warlock Wonders Weekly usually has articles on these type of things for the dueling circuit."

"Warlock Wonders weekly," Harry mouthed silently, not believing how ridiculous the whole notion of war mages having a weekly magazine. He stared at Hermione, hoping this was a high level joke.

"Gilderoy Lockhart sometimes writes for that magazine, Granger. Don't take on that crap," Oliver Wood said, joining in. "Hey I heard a rumour that he might be teaching Defense next year. On my NEWTS too," he shook his head. "What do you think, Black?"

"I do not know of this Mister Lockhart. When I meet him, I will know the measure of the man," Jon dismissed the idle gossip, continuing to feed his wolf pup while reviewing the list. The other lads in the crew raised eyebrows. Angelina and Hermione shared a look, a tiny smile on their faces.

"Tonks, you got any info on threstrals?" Harry asked, clearing his throat.

"Other than they are invisible? Nah. And I know they pull the carriages. But that is about it."

"Hm..." Harry said. "And you?" he asked Hermione.

"No," she dipped her head in shame. "I'm so sorry." Harry thought she was going to cry.

"Anyone?" he asked loudly.

Angelina put down her drink. "Yeah. I believe the full moon is their mating night. The alpha male from different packs usually fight a single duel to assert dominance on the night of the full moon. He may lay with three to four females in the rival's pack who are in heat after he has killed the challenger and smeared his warm blood on his wings." The group all looked at her in astonishment. "What?" she shrugged. "I find them fascinating."

"Let's get going," Tonks announced. "Filch would be waiting for us by the time we reach."

On the walk back up to the gates, Harry did notice one or two threstrals flying out and diving aggressively back into the canopy. The closer they got to Hogwarts, the more often he saw it happening over the forbidden forest. The sun had set and it was getting dark rapidly. Tonks lit her wand as she led the younger students up the track. Harry once again made his way over to Jon.

"Jon. The threstrals are winged horse-like creatures invisible to regular wizards..." he explained in a low tone, walking shoulder to shoulder. "We've got mostly tame ones here, but there are wild ones in the forest."

"You sound concerned," Jon remarked, once again on alert.

"I am the last wielder of one of the eternal six," Harry breathed. "Remember what Ollivander said about the elusive master weapons. One is the elder wand, I'm sure of it. I had it in my possession before...you know."

"Right. And?" he replied.

"It was made with Threstral hair. And wizard myth links threstrals with death."

"You are going somewhere with this."

"You ever noticed that you like to call me Harry of House Hollow? And I keep correcting you but it still sticks somehow?" Harry said, noticing more and more aggressive behavior above the forest.
"Yes, what of it."

"The way you pronounce it, it sounds like Hallow."

"Harry-" Jon said, also noticing the peculiar jumping and diving pattern of the winged creatures.

"I had the Three Deathly Hallows and used them as they were meant to be used," Harry was actively watching the threstrals' behavior now. The rest of the party only heard the faint cries, but could not truly see what was happening, how worked up they were behaving.

Harry stopped in his tracks. Tonks halted her advance. "I...might be the reason that they are acting like this."

"Harry? What's up?" she asked, shining her light along the path.

"They believe me to be the biggest alpha rival there is tonight."

"What?" Jon said in an elevated tone. The others quieted and looked in their direction.

"Yeah..." Harry said looking at a particular spot in the sky. One of them had changed from random jumps to now a particular trajectory. It was steadily coming closer with every dive. When it was about a half a mile away, it took a massive leap, and flapped its wings aggressively in the sky, aiming directly at him. Harry drew his wand, opening his body to a wide stance in front of the party.

"Jon!" Harry shouted. "Winter is fucking coming!"

Harry pointed his wand at the diving creature, running a few steps forward to clear himself from the group. There was a rustle of robes as Jon shot past him, Ghost charging with a growl.

"Lumos maxima!" he shouted. A beam of light burned through the night, blinding the threstral just as it swooped down at them. It crashed at full speed, dragging along the ground a few meters just as it landed. It shrieked and flopped on the ground but was on its feet after some mad flapping of wings and a ear piercing shriek. Ghost pounced with lightning fast speed, but the beast flapped one massive leathery wing and sent the young wolf flying in another direction. Jon flinched as he tucked his head low and rolled on his shoulder underneath the wing of the beast and sprung up in front of it. He tackled the neck, throwing his entire weight at it.

"Jon!" Tonks screamed, watching on in horror as he wrestled with an invisible enemy. Harry was trying to keep his beam of Lumos light focused on the threstral's face, but it was thrashing wildly as Jon locked his arms around the thin, bony neck.

Jon cursed in pain as the talon on the tip of the left wing had caught him at least three times on his back and leg in the ensuing fracas. The fear of stabbing he inherited was sending paralyzing fear into him. Something inside was awakening from the fear of meeting that end again, strengthening his resolve. The stabbing pain became nothing. Jon was desperately trying to manipulate the birdlike beak from attacking his face. In the mad scramble he noticed that one of the front legs was not working, which was probably the reason why the beast could not simply overpower his small body. With a scream he kicked out at the broken foreleg and the beast went down face first under its own weight. In a smooth motion, Jon threw his legs over the long neck and mounted the beast like a horse. Holding the loose skin under the jaw in his left hand, he drew his butter knife with his right and sunk it in the throat. With a grunt of magically powered rage, he yanked it around the neck in a long, swift strike.

There was another piercing shriek as a long splatter of dark red blood fell in front of Harry. Now that
its blood had been spilled, the creature came into full view of the entire party.

Jon got to work on the flailing beast, stabbing it in the wound five, six, seven times, his arm swinging in smooth, controlled arcs as he pinned the head to the ground with his left arm. The wings stopped flapping, and the beast stopped its frantic thrashing.

"Rah!" Jon said, stabbing it again, again, and again, non-stop. "Die, damn you!"

The shtick shtick shtick sound continued in the ensuing silence. Tonks' wand was pointing to the ground, her legs trembling in shock. The older boys who were previously forming a human barricade in front of Hermione, Angelina and Ron were now witnessing Jon plunge his fist into the bloody neck multiple times, each hit resulting in a spurt of blood.

Nobody moved an inch.

Harry walked forward. "Jon!"

Shtick Shtick Shtick

"JON!" Harry shouted in his ear.

Shtick Shtick Shtick

"THAT'S ENOUGH!" Harry commanded. "Stop it now, it's done!"

Shtick Shtick Shtick

"Expelliarmus!" Tonks caught herself and intervened.

The butter knife flew out his hand towards Tonks and fell at her feet. Ron and the others followed the arc of the weapon, their jaw dropping when they realized what it was. Jon was about to strike again when he realized his hand was empty. He looked up on bended knee before Harry who was pointing his wand in Jon's general direction, breathing hard. Jon bent his head down, catching his breath for a few seconds as he regained control of himself. Harry aimed his wand away from him. With trembling arms and legs Jon shoved the thestral head to the ground, and pushed himself up in front of Harry.

Both young men nodded.

Jon was catching his breath, covered in blood. He looked around, concerned.

"Ghost," he commanded. "To me!"

There was a faint whine in the darkness. "Ghost? Where are you?" he turned, trying to find the direction of the sound.

Again the whine. Jon limped to the sound and found his familiar in the tall grass, trying his hardest to move. "No," John whispered. "Ghost..." he growled, anger building in him. "Potter, I need your help!" he commanded, looking at his companion whine on the ground.

Harry was at Jon's side in a heartbeat. Ghost's flank was opened, and the meat on his ribs were visible. He was bleeding all over his legs and stomach.

"It is a horizontal wound," Jon whispered, petting his familiar on the head. The dog was trembling, the mouth hanging open. "We can save him, we must," he said solemnly. "If the claw had slashed between the rib, that blow would have ..."
"Tonks!" Harry commanded.

"I'm here, I'm here!" Tonks said already at his side. She was shining her wand at the dog. She threw off her cloak, crouched down and used a slicing spell to shred it to ribbons. Then she incanted a freezing spell alongside a pain expulsion charm on the strips. She then transfigured some nearby branches into straight, flat pieces of wood. With a complex piece of wand work she created a miniature stretcher.

"The pain killer charm works better on a cold surface. It will keep him calmer," she said, her voice cracking. She took a deep breath.

"Levitate him, Harry," she said quietly, forcing calm in her voice. "Easy! His back may be in trouble too. Keep him stable. Even. Careful... nice. Smooth, good that's it," she encouraged. Harry gently laid the wolf pup on the stretcher. He twisted his wand while doing the levitation and now both stretcher and animal floated at waist height.

"Fred, George, take Ghost to Hagrid's," Harry ordered, his voice grim. The twins came forward and with a uncharacteristic solemnity, they took hold of the floating stretcher. "Tonks, I need you to escort them, then take everybody straight up to the castle. Blast open the gates if Filch isn't there. Everyone walk with Lumos activated," he said, his hand on Jon's shoulder. "The challenge has been met, and Jon is the victor. They won't strike again. There is something we need to do first. Then we'll clean up and meet you at the Hospital wing."

Tonks gave Jon and Harry a strange look, and then lit her wand.

"You heard the man," Tonks reinforced, her voice cracking again. "Let's keep moving."

Jon watched mutely as the party made quick time up the path.

"Well done, friend. Hagrid will fix Ghost, he's the best. I have trust in him."

"Ghost is strong. He is the strongest of the litter, I knew it from the first day." He turned on his heel. Crouching he retrieved his fallen butter knife.

"Isn't that the same thing you use to sign the seals?" Harry said, it did look familiar.

"Aye. It's your aunt's table instrument. You didn't even notice I spirited it away the first night." Jon smiled a grim smile. "Do not be a gaoler in your next journey, Harry of House Hollow. Your inherent nature does not permit it."

"Probably," Harry agreed. "I hate being locked up, can't stomach doing it to someone else. Let's find a way to carry this up, before something else takes it. Or eats it." He looked down at the bloody creature. "Fine fucking work. You made sure it wasn't getting back up." Harry moved the head with his shoe. It rolled a few times, only connected by some bloody tendons. The spine was completely severed. Harry kicked it again and the tendons easily slipped out the torso.

Harry's eyebrows went into his hair. "Overkill much?"

Jon shrugged while he looked at the tiny weapon in his hand. "It is faultless, even now," he said in grim satisfaction and awe. His new forge downstairs would definitely be put to use. If this is what he can accomplish with only a sharpening stone with his newfound magic...

"Hmph," Harry looked at the innocent eating instrument. "Figures. The voices didn't call you 'Sword of the Light' for nothing, then." Harry was at work folding the open wings to the torso. He took a few minutes kicking the legs to fold in before they locked in rigor mortis. "I couldn't do shit. Lucky
you were here." Harry laughed at himself as he dug in his backpack for his bath towel.

"Engorgio." The towel expanded into a massive piece of material similar to the shape of a snitch. "What the bloody hell?" he complained, cursing at his wand.

Harry levitated the carcass and decapitated head unto the snitch towel. It instantly turned dark with blood. He wrapped it up and tied the wings of the snitch together. "Some 'Lion' I was."

"The voices do not lie, everything that they told me has already begun. They are not mistaken," Jon said. He passed his hand under his robes, feeling where he bled from his puncture wounds. The pain was coming back in waves now.

"Right." With the twist of his wand the bloody package lifted as one. "Come on, let's go clean up and then visit Katie."

After five minutes of walking they reached Hagrid's. His door was wide open, the light spilling out the massive opening. Harry deposited the bloody package outside on the lawn.

Hagrid had the stretcher suspended across two of his massive chairs, allowing the wounded animal to relax on the suspension of the interlaced cloak material. There were green straps holding down Ghost's neck, head, torso and leg. There was a massive ham bone between his teeth. Ghost seemed happy to gnaw on the salty treat as the gentle half giant worked delicately on his injuries. Hagrid glanced at Harry and the blood-covered Lord Black.

"What the," Hagrid exclaimed, his hands rock steady even though he was surprised at the sight. "Yer alright lad? That blood ain't yours from what Fred and George told me," Hagrid enquired.

"No. How is Ghost?" Jon said, grimacing in pain.

"I got this poultice and the Nature's living light bugs already working on the taint of the wingclaw. He's lucky, but not outta danger yet. I sent the twins for the bone and cartilage knitting potion from Poppy. His back needs it, right now, pronto. Once I get this wound covered in this," he pointed to a vat holding a rabbit pelt floating in a potion. Jon looked in the vat, confused. "It'll help his skin and flesh grow back four times as fast. Also fight any infection. Then I got to keep him from moving around too much while the bone potions do their work overnight." He demonstrated the restraining vines wrapped around his neck, legs and rump. The vines were slowly moving, tightening and twining where necessary in a firm, controlling manner. "Don't 'cha worry about Dolly down there, she's a sweetheart." Harry looked under the stretcher where a potted vine plant was slowly moving, the vines reaching up and restraining Ghost with subtle movements. "He would need to stay the week to heal. Within a couple more days after that he should be good as new, won't ya little buddy?" he cooed at Ghost. Ghost kept gnawing on the hambone, drool pooling on the stretcher as he made his soft growls. "Great familiar you have here, Mr. Black. Or can I call you Jon?"

"Master gamekeeper, you may call me friend, or brother. I have no words that I can say or repayment too large to thank you for your expert care for Ghost," Jon bowed deeply. "I am in your debt, Mr. Hagrid," Jon said humbly.

"Ah! Is nothing! Just take care of him and feed him good meat and we will be even," Hagrid smiled, using his pinky finger to dress the open wounds on his side. "There.. there.. that's a good lad," Hagrid said, carefully attending to his small charge. "Go get cleaned up friend, you smell as if there was a dead threstral outside the door," Hagrid joked. "The professors are expecting you."

"In the morning, I shall return, Ghost." Jon bowed to Hagrid, and limped out the hut.
"Yeah Hagrid, thanks again. Will be back tomorrow," added Harry. He closed the door behind him and levitated the carcass towards the main doors of the school. "Jon, you've been limping more with each step."

"Yes. I will live," Jon gritted through his teeth.

"Ok then," Harry said. "Straight to the medic for you."

"Best idea I've heard all night." They reached the front steps.

"Give me a few seconds to stash this somewhere where it won't stink up the place," Harry dashed towards the Whomping Willow. He dumped his bloody carcass and with a few tries of levitating a branch to the knot that calmed the tree down, he managed to put it to sleep. He levitated the threstral into the entrance of the cave below it. It wasn't completely hidden, but he would be back tomorrow morning for it. He dashed back and met Jon leaning heavily on the doors. Harry levitated the heavy wooden beam barring the doors by poking his wand through the tiny seam between them. He got under Jon's arm and supported his weight.

He kicked open the door and released the levitation spell at the same time. The resounding boom echoed through the main open areas of the castle with a satisfactory echo. By the time he half walked, half carried Jon to the steps to the Hospital Wing Tonks was flying down the stairs.

"Was that you, Harry?" she screamed. "You gave us such a fright! Jon! What happened? Bring him, quickly."

"You could at least help, he's not the lightest bloke around," Harry said as they inched up the stairs.

"Levitate him!" Tonks ordered.

"I hate that," Harry said. "I won't suffer him the indign-" he cut off at Tonks weird expression.

"Someone levitated you before then?" She smirked.

"Ah, once. After Quidditch. Bad fall. Felt really embarrassed," he lied quickly. Tonks shook her head and ran down the remainder of steps.

"Oh, ok. Phew!" she scrunched her nose as she approached them. "Forget that. I'll do it. Damn, did you guys bathe in the blood?" she held her nose and levitated Jon up the stairs.

"You will put me down, Miss Tonks," Jon said weakly.

"Nope. We're almost there. Katie is already looking a bit better. The tea worked! She's still a mess though, she fought tooth and nail to keep on the robes, and the constant spell casting did a number on her," Tonks tone grew darker, her face twisting in anger. "Poor girl didn't sleep a wink the entire time. She's still doing the hand motions off and on but we got her to lay down and now she seems more in control of herself..."

"Ridgewall?" Harry asked.

"The bezoar helped. He's still sleeping off the poison."

"Good." He opened the doors and allowed the two of them through.

Madame Pomfrey looked up from Katie when the three of them entered. "Let's get you two cleaned up," she ordered, taking over the levitation charm.
"Goodness, Mr. Potter. Is this Lord Black?" Professor McGonagall asked. "Do you have an address for us to owl his guardians?"

"Um yeah. Hold on." Harry went into the healer's office and wrote down the address for Ollivander's shop on it, McGonagall was right on his heels. She read the parchment and nodded. Thankfully she did not immediately recognize the importance of the address and began scribing a message.

"Name to address?" she asked Harry.

"Mr. Garrick," Harry said simply.

"Thank you, Harry. Please feel free to clean up and change. It seems that Hogwarts is never dull with you around. I will inform his guardian of what has happened."

"Thank you, Professor." Harry went to Katie's bed, where the rest of the gang was standing. They parted to let him pass, with half of his robes covered in dried blood. Katie looked pale as a ghost. Her hair was dull and she had dark circles around her eyes and chapped lips.

"You smell bad," Katie said weakly with a smile.

"It is nice to see you too Katie," Harry returned. "How are you feeling?"

"My arm hurts," she said with a smile. "I look probably as bad as you smell, don't I?"

"You look beautiful Katie. You just need to get some rest. And probably some sun. And maybe some chocolate ice-cream," he teased, taking her hand.

She beckoned him closer. He stepped around Hermione and crouched next to her bed head.

"Thank you," she whispered. "Tonks said you deserved the credit, not her." She smiled, touching his bloody chin in affection. "You look really heroic right now," she said softly, chuckling. She brought his head down lower so she could talk directly in his ear. "You will tell me who did this to me, maybe not now though. When we are alone." Her voice was weak, but Harry knew that she was determined to find out.

"Sure," he replied. "Will do."

"Good. Now go bathe. Get away," she tried to shoo him, but her arm did a figure eight and a swoosh. She cried out in pain, holding her bicep with her next hand. Angelina immediately brought her recovery potion from the bedside table and put it to her lips.

"Get better soon," he said turning. He left the bedside and went to the hospital showers. He watched as Pompfrey used a powerful hosing spell from her wand on Jon. He was sitting on a chair under the running shower wearing only a towel around his waist. He didn't protest, he just allowed the medic to do what she had to do. The water running off from him was light pink. His apprentice robes were stashed in the corner of the stall, darker pink draining off of it into the piping.

"Take the next stall, Harry. I'll take care of Mr. Black. You know what to do," Pompfrey instructed him.

"Yeah, more than you know," he mumbled under his breath so she couldn't hear. How many times did he visit this place in his past life?

Later that night, in the Gryffindor dorms Harry was lying awake in bed. Oliver, Ron and the twins
were asleep in the same room.

He was replaying the conversations they had together when he finally came in to sleep.

"Where do you find these guys Potter. Jeez," Oliver laughed. The twins were solemn. Ron was still pale, just listening to the others.

"A freaking butter knife, mate." George stated in disbelief.

"Yeah. What is that all about, huh Harry?" Fred asked him. "At least a real knife I could understand. But who does this?"

"The fucking Lord Black does this, that's who!" Oliver announced. He slashed his finger around his throat with a snarl on his face. "Did you see all that blood!"

There was a rousing cheer. "Hear Hear!" the three Weasley Brothers announced.

"Where's the booze Oliver?" Fred asked, hyped up.

"Nah mates! Change of plans. Since Katie and now Jon are in the wing still, it's not the same. At least we got to wait until Jon comes back in. Can't drink in his honor without him."

They all griped about the trip from Hogsmeade and who was too chicken to help. Most of the arguments lead to "I couldn't see it, why didn't you do something," variations so Harry just remained a bystander to the banter. He didn't really do anything either. He might of blinded it initially, but Jon went to town on that bag of skin and bones.

He deserves to knock back a couple for all his effort.

At the present moment Jon still hasn't come back and it was nearing midnight. Pompfrey must be holding him overnight. Harry fluffed the pillow beneath him in frustration. He made sure his wand was still there underneath it. Or rather, his loaner wand. His mind ran across the Phoenix feathers waiting for him to build his own wand. It's going to take some time practicing though. He really needed to get his magic back up to scratch.

This 'no curses' handicap was leaving him way too vulnerable.

At that same moment on the other side of the school, Jon was resting in the bed next to Katie's. She was already fast asleep.

He knew Harry felt frustrated that he wasn't able to help him as much with his mismatched wand. But Jon always remembered what the voices said about their roles in the mission to destroy the Effigy left behind in that netherworld.

As soon as he saw the beam of light erupt from Harry's wand and pierce the darkness, he knew the voices prophecies rang true.

You are the Sword of the Light, sworn into service of the Lion. Only he holds the key.

He's been using only two spells since he's got a wand back, yet already he has retrieved one of the Horcuxes and cast suspicion on a member of Voldemort's high-ranking inner circle within the week. And they got rid of a pest that troubled Diagon's merchants for years.

And now the both of them have obtained valuable components to tackle their project. Wand cores, plus hard to get ingredients. They were efficient, at least.
Jon groaned in pain. At least he was alive to actually create the damn things. But without this battle he would not have been able to fulfill another aspect of the prophecy.

Bathed in blood, you shall become the Sword that Pierces his foes. He must cast no magic to kill, nor shall he curse another human being.

He will become the Light that Shines through the Darkness.

Kneel, and swear allegiance.

"It has truly begun, just as the voices said..." Jon said aloud. "We shall win Potter, or die trying."
Harry recruits his Gryffindor mates to help him with butchering the dead threstral. Master Ollivander gives them vague information that makes Harry suspicious to his true intentions.

"Jon. Wake up."

Jon opened his eyes. The wounds were feeling much better. However he still felt slightly ill, as if he were poisoned from too much Wildling wine.

"Harry." Jon groaned as he sat up, his feet touching the cold floor. "What time is it?"

"Quarter to eight. You alright?" Harry asked. He was dressed in a white t shirt and blue jeans. "Get dressed. I will wait for you to get ready and take you for breakfast downstairs. We also need to swing by the library. Remember we got to get you to Gringotts. You should mail ahead, just in case we reach a bit late for your meeting."

"All right." Jon got up, frowning at the flimsy medical gown he was wearing. He picked up his overnight bag and made his way to the showers. The chair was still in the stall, an old ratty robe hanging on the shower curtain rod.

Ignoring it for now he showered, dried and was taking out the other apprentice robes he got at World Wizarding Gear when he realized that the ratty old robe was actually the ones he wore last night.

"What?" he inspected the robes. It wasn't ratty. It was actually camouflaging with the background where the blood stained it. He tried it on. There were patches where the robes were normal: dull black with the grey trim, but the majority of it was camouflaged. It was nowhere as absolute as Harry's magic cloak, but it gave him good ideas of how it could be used in the future.

He took it off and folded it into his bag. He dressed in his spare robes and left the showers.

"Ready?" Harry said. Jon nodded and they left the hospital wing. On their way down he noticed the suits of full plate armor decorating the halls. He slowed down, inspecting it.

"These knights were awfully small," he noted.

"These weren't worn by knights," Harry said.

"What?"

"The armor is alive all on its own. Sometimes they move from place to place when no one is watching. I'm pretty sure Hogwarts uses them for protection if it feels threatened. I don't know if that has ever worked against wizards, but they definitely weren't worn by real people. Oh that reminds me, I think there's a place here you would like to see!"

Jon nodded. There were walking up a flight of stairs. "I thought you said breakfast was downstairs,"
Jon said.

"Making a quick stop at the library, then the Room of Requirement. Need to get info on the Diablo claws. You might find something you like in the room of requirement."

The library visit was indeed short. The Class B restricted items that they would be ranging for was easy to find. The Wild Bog Boar was the French version of a Nogtail. Harry made quick notes about where it was found and different methods to deal with it. The Elfen Bat lived in caves and was well known to the local populace. The Diablo was the hardest to find information on, but all references to it were indicating that it was a larger, nastier Erlking; a creature he, Ron and Hermione faced before.

Piece of Cake.

The Wild Bog Boar urine was used to boil the animal hide to make leather. In this case, the hide would be the threstral wing once Mr. Ollivander said it was ok to do so. The Elfen Bat Wing was used to make the bracer magically malleable and snug fitting to the user's arm. And the Diablo claw was used as the blade for any cutting.

"All right," Harry said. "The rest of the ingredients can be found locally so we should spend our time there looking for these three specifically."

"Agreed," Jon said, taking his notes and folding it into his robes. They left the Library. "Harry look at this. What do you think happened?" He took his other robes from his overnight bag and showed it to him.

"Whoa." Harry held it aloft. "The blood from the threstral had a reaction with this. A bit dodgy looking but... this could be very, very useful." He gave it back to him. "Come, let's go to the seventh floor quickly." Jon was breathing hard by the time they reached the top. Harry opened the door that magically appeared after pacing in front of it. "I assumed you might want to take a look at the stuff here, see if there's anything you want that could help."

Jon looked at the rows and rows of junk and other things that filled the room.

"What is this place?" he said in wonder, walking amongst the stuff. He kicked at a discarded suit of armor. "This one actually looks like it was used by a knight." He looked up the cross corridor. "Ah. This is what we are talking about, Harry of House Hollow!" He immediately walked down one of the lanes perpendicular to the main middle aisle.

There were other suits of armor, full plate, mail, half plate, cuirass, all different types. Even some hard leather chest pieces. Then, on a rack further down, he saw weapons. Swords, poleaxes, maces, whips and a couple shields. He touched a few of them, checking for the quality. He picked up a massive great sword, smiling at the weight and feel.

"Ah. Weapons of war littered about in a school for children. I can't wait to enroll." Jon nodded grimly.

"A bit heavy for a wizard to be walking around with that, Snow," Harry laughed. "It's almost your own height."

"I was never good at this weapon anyway," Jon said. "I prefer the long sword, or better yet, the gladius. My father had a massive great sword just like this called Ice. He never used it in battle because its practicality in real combat was limited. It was a ceremonial sword meant to put the guilty to death." Jon assumed a fighting stance with the sword. "The balance of something like this is too much for a person my size and strength." He put it back on the rack. "Ah. This I will take." He
picked up a heavy dagger which had a sturdy belt case and sheath. "Perfect."

Harry picked up a smaller one.

"This could be useful. What are these?" he asked Jon, looking at a pile of long, slightly curved pieces of wood with the centre wrapped in a tight piece of leather.

"Longbows. I will take one and keep it by the workshop until I have taken ownership of the place later. It looks like a walking staff to the untrained eye... I will use that excuse if anyone asks what it is."

"Ok cool. Ready?"

"Wait. I saw a particular piece I would like. Ah," he marched a dozen feet back where they came. "Here, this," Jon proclaimed, blowing off the dust of a brown piece of light leather armor. He picked up a nearby cloth and wiped it. "It needs slight repair and adjustments, but it will suffice. I am getting a bit fed up of being stabbed," Jon actually smiled, laughing at his own joke.

Harry smiled back even though he thought that Jon might be seriously losing it.

"Sorry that you got hurt. Good thing we were close enough to get you healed. How is it now?"

"The wounds feel good, remarkably. I'm just a bit short of breath. Feeling weak."

"A night in the hospital wing usually does that to you. You'll be ok by tomorrow. Katie and the others are already down having breakfast." They made their way down. Harry paused briefly on the ground floor to hide away the weapons and armor they found behind a hidden passageway portrait.

"Hogwarts is littered with these secrets," Harry explained. "I'll show you a map when we come back."

They entered the main hall.

"Wondered where you two went off to," Tonks said in relief. She was dressed in an airy, flowing silver-white robe. Harry smiled. For a moment he contemplated sitting in the tiny gap between her and Angelina but squashed that line of thought.

"Hey, morning folks," he said in greeting. "Just a quick stop to the library, what's to eat?" he sat next to Ron, who was sitting next to Hermione. Harry took a plate and handed it to Jon, who promptly sat down next to Katie who had her right arm in a sling. She was directly facing Ron across the table. Jon bid her a good morning and asked to her well being. They made polite small talk.


Jon smiled, accepting his praise with a single nod. "I know some things. Harry also deserves much of the credit. The Light blinded it, the beast injured its foreleg severely upon landing. It was the only reason I was not brutally gored to death."

Jon nodded grimly, cutting his sausage with the Hogwarts knife with a quick efficiency. He pointed lazily with the Hogwarts knife to the group. This got the others' attention alright. "Harry has told me regular wizards cannot see the threstral. It put up a good fight. Almost too good..."

"Only those who understand and have witnessed Death can see them," Hermione explained. "And Angelina was spot on with the whole rivalry and mating season behavior," she added. Angelina simply nodded in acknowledgement.

"Thought you didn't know anything much on them, Granger," Oliver teased. Hermione waved her
"Are you crazy? After what happened last night I couldn't be left in ignorance! I visited Hagrid very early this morning and asked for references to check up in the Library. Also, I sent mail last night and I got back some post this morning from my...um... Knowledge group," she blushed. Her expression made Harry think that she didn't want the fact that she was in the Arithmancy guild to be known as yet. Smart girl. He would keep it quiet, for now.

"You mean the Arithmancy guild?" Jon asked her, biting into his bread and sausage. Harry shook his head in amusement. "The clerk said a young girl with bushy hair joined, a first year, last week. It was you, Mistress Hermione?"

Hermione subconsciously ran her hand along her hair, trying to flatten it. "Yes," she admitted. "He's a bit rude, in my opinion," she said under her breath.

_He's a bit of a snake, in my opinion_, Harry thought.

"He's a student here?" Jon asked.

"Yes. Seventh Year Raven. Michael Ellewyn-Sayre or something."

"Him? I always thought he was a brown-noser to Snape," Tonks added. "How do you guys know him?" Tonks asked Harry.

"Talked to him at Flourish and Blotts," Harry said. "Seems he has interest in Potions," Harry stressed the word, glancing at Katie. Jon's eyes narrowed, and Tonks caught on, her hair cycling to its original Black colour. She snarled.


"Mates." Harry addressed the boys as breakfast came to a close. "I have a job I need to do and I might need you guys to help. Its bloody nasty, smells bad, and you're going to have to get your hands dirty. Six gallies a head. Who is in?"

"What's the job?" Fred and George asked at the same time as Oliver said, "I'm in."

"Butchering and draining the dead threstral. This morning. In time to package and get ready for shipping. An hour, hour and a half, tops."

Oliver froze for a second, then nodded. "Ok. I'm in, as I said."

"In!" Fred and George chorused.

"In?" Ron shrugged, a bit dubious.

"I've had enough of that smell from you two," Tonks said. "I'll just be up in the library for a bit. Need some more info on the counter potion."

"Are girls invited?" Katie asked.

"I'm definitely in if it's ok," Angelina added. Hermione also nodded.

"Katie, I think you should take some more time to recover but if you want you could watch. That's is if your stomach could handle it." He finished up his breakfast. "Oh and guys, no magic! This is down and dirty stuff."
Katie simply stared at Harry in disbelief.

"Why would you want to do this by hand?" she enquired.

"Don't want to contaminate it," Harry replied. "We'll get gloves that the sixth years use for herbology, if that's ok Oliver?" Harry suggested.

"No problem. Pretty sure Hagrid got the keys for the storage rooms by the greenhouses."

"Can you three bring up some containers- need vats, and some air tight barrels. Check Hagrid. If he has some empty bottles with cork stoppers we would need that too. Hermione, you go with them and convince Hagrid to loan us his pumpkin cart."

"Okay," Hermione agreed. "Who's pulling it?" she asked.

"I have a suspicion Jon would be able to recruit some ...friends. Angelina, come with us. We're going to get some texts to help with us determine how to do the actual cuts, and retrieve some tools upstairs."

"What can I do?" Katie asked. Harry thought a second.

"Can you ask Madame Pompfrey for some medicine or potion that helps stop nausea and sickness from bad smells? Also anything that could help us prevent smelling it for too long. Tell her that you still feel sick from certain scents."

"Roger that." Everyone was murmuring excitedly with the impromptu project as they finished their breakfast.

"Angelina, Jon, with me. Let's go get what we need."

Ten minutes later the crew was assembled at the side of the castle facing the Whomping Willow. Harry had his arms full with a heavy leather satchel filled with cutting tools, butcher hooks and metal funnels. The wooden cart was brought up from Hagrid's place with barrels, vats and large multi-gallon bottles sitting in the tray. Hagrid himself was trudging up the hill, a sack containing what Harry thought must be the gloves. A wooden picnic bench was hitched on his shoulder, his massive arm easily holding it in place.

"Here ya go, Harry." Hagrid said as he placed the table down. "Oh, so there really was a dead threstral outside last night. Knew it couldn't just be you two." Hagrid nodded."I'll be back down with Ghost. Let me know if you need anything more."

Angelina opened the book they got on Magical Animal dissection and cast a spell at it. "Engorgio, winguardium leviosa," she said. The book grew large and the instructions that was diagrammed across the pages was big enough for everyone to see clearly. She set the book to levitate over the lawn. Harry retrieved the bloody carcass by levitating the snitch towel out the hole under the tree. Katie gave each of them a sip from a vial of potion to help them deal with the horrible smell. The twins arranged a few barrels under the table so that dripping blood could seep between the slats into it. Harry maneuvered the carcass unto the picnic table. Jon and Harry took the unstrung Longbow, wrapped one end of the towel around it and began to pull it out from under the body, rolling the wooden bow. When they were finished the blood stained towel was now wrapped like gift paper around the wood. Jon began wrapping wire around the towel to squeeze the blood out. He did this process while everything was propped up in a barrel to drain.

Blood was steadily seeping into the table and fell inside the barrels. Harry gave cutting tools and the
butcher hooks to Oliver, Ron, Hermione and the twins. "Here: the twins would work on the tail and hindquarters. Ron you're with me, we are doing the sectioning and skinning of the wings. Hermione you would do the gutting. Oliver would do the front. Angelina you got the process ready?"

"Yeah." Angelina started calling instructions from the manual and who should begin first and where to cut. The process was methodical and after the initial spurts and sprays of threstral blood subsided, the surgical team began to operate smoothly.

It was grueling, disgusting work. Jon and Angelina filled bottles from the blood pooling in the barrels below the blood soaked table. It seemed that the copious amounts of blood were a trait winged magical equines had. The different limbs were arranged in barrels that were labeled. The organs were put in cauldrons filled with blood. Surprisingly, Oliver, Hermione and the twins were getting adept with the machete and curved blades. Harry and Ron were doing a cautious job on the wings, as the instructions were specific on how this process should be done.

When the two boys were finished with that, Harry looked over to Jon. "I'm going to fetch Tonks. Ron, walk with Jon and take him to Hagrid's. Keep a lookout for him. I'll meet you there."

Harry dropped the bloody gloves on the lawn and raced up to the library. Tonks was doing her research and smiled when he walked in.

"Hey, finished?" she asked. Harry couldn't help but admire how beautiful Tonks really was when she wasn't frustrated or bossing them around. Actually, Harry thought, she looked beautiful no matter what she was doing. Harry smiled. He hardly ever talked to her, alone, like this.

"Almost. They are finishing the packing. I need you," Harry said, then shook his head. "We need you," he corrected. "Might be a bit of action, but I'm banking it doesn't come to that."

Tonks waved her wand and the books stacked themselves neatly on the table. She grabbed her notes and folded them into a pocket. She approached close to Harry. "What is it?"

"I have a niggling suspicion that Jon and I could get one or two threstrals to help us cart the stuff. Even possibly take it straight to Diagon if this works. We need you for some magical backup. Just in case. But I doubt. Should be fine." Harry realized he was babbling. Why was he so nervous?

You died a virgin. You're technically eighteen years old in a twelve year old version of yourself. You are raging hormones in one confused little pervert.

Tonks embodied everything that he believed was great about magic. Beautiful. Spontaneous. Strong. Ambitious. Full of Adventure. A sense of humour. He held his breath as she walked towards him.

Tonks walked passed him with a simple, "Ok." She reached the doorways to the library and turned. "You coming?" she frowned. "Something on my forehead?"

"Nah, just a piece of chewed up sausage stuck in your hair," Harry covered up smoothly from being caught staring. He pointed, walking towards her.

"What?" she exclaimed. "Take it out! Eww! I did find your mate Ron was a bit too eager. Did you hear how loud he smacked his lips?!"

Harry did a quick slight-of-hand with a bit of gore still present on the leg of his jeans, squeezing it between his fingers out of sight and pretending to remove it from her hair. He was so close to her face he could see the slight freckles across her nose. She smelled like shampoo, cream and heaven. He had to look up a bit into her eyes as he removed the small chunk and opened it in his palm to see.
"Evanesco," she said, pointing her wand at the tiny piece of meat. "Alright. Let's go," she commanded, turned on her heel and left. Harry watched her hips sway for a second then followed behind, his heart broken. He sighed.

I don't have a bloody chance with her. Twelve.

_I'm still a bloody kid._

They picked up the armor, daggers and their luggage bags and reached the cart site. The twins and Oliver were finished. Angelina and Hermione were labeling the vats, barrels and cauldrons on the wagon bed. Fred and George were using magic to fix the wheels properly and repair the creaky and rusted harnesses. Oliver was using a water spell to clean the tools and the table.

"So," Oliver noted. "Talk about putting the cart before the Horse. If I didn't witness and filled it with my own hands, I would never believe all that blood and guts came from one threstral. The different parts' total weight is probably twice as much as the body!"

Harry nodded. It was eerily strange how much blood they harvested.

"You could be on to something there. These magical creatures and their total disregard for physics," Tonks said. "Harry says he might be able to get Jon to recruit threstrals. This I _definitely_ want to see."

Harry grinned and shrugged. "Come on let's get ourselves a Prancer, Dancer and a Rudolph or two," he picked up the gloves and threw them in the back along the other stuff. They met Ron and Jon who were talking with Hagrid about Ghost. Ghost was still restrained. He was currently being fed a potion from a shallow bowl. He was lapping it up slowly, breathing deeply and eyes closed.

"How is he?" Harry asked them.

"Good. In pain, but the bone mending potion is working well. It will take some time." Jon said.

"Hagrid, do you have any more meat to feed the threstrals. And could you show us how to do the call?" Harry said. As soon as he said it, Hagrid frowned.

"How ya know bou that?" he asked.

"Read about it in Diagon?" Harry offered.

"Oh. Ok," Hagrid mumbled. "I thought that was a trick I made up, but probably someone else musta knew about that one." Hagrid opened a chest at the corner of his kitchen. He removed a large slab of bloody pork. Harry indicated that Jon take it.

Hagrid cleared his throat. He then made a weird creaking call that resonated in the hut. Jon listened, nodding.

"It is similar to the dragon call I heard-," Harry shook his head desperately. "In night time tales when I was young," Jon finished smoothly. "I can do it."

"Offer a piece of meat to it, directly from your hand. When it eats from it, touch below the jaw, and on top of the crown in a firm manner. If he or she likes ya, the threstral will kneel. I like to acknowledge them with a name. That seems to work."

"And if they don't show favour upon me?" Jon asked the half Giant.

"Jump back so they cannot take your hand, I bet."
Harry brought Jon his bag. "Maybe you should throw this robe over that one."

Jon pulled it out and put it on. They all made their way outside and unto the lawn. Harry had a gut feeling that they would need some more space. Harry kept walking until they had a suitably large area in front of them.

"Okay Jon." Harry announced, the whole team standing behind them, wands drawn. "Let's hear it."

Jon tilted his head back, his hands cupping his mouth as he let loose a long, blood-curdling call.

There was a reply in the distance, then another, and then many other joined in the cry, making high pitched noises similar to a flock of crows crowing over a battlefield.

Around sixty wild threstrals came out from deep in the forbidden forest, swooping low in a structured formation similar to birds' pattern of group flying. They circled above once, then began darting down one by one unto the lawn in front of them. The Threstrals formed neat even rows even as they hoofed the ground and flapped their wings restlessly, all of their eyes on Harry. The Hogwarts crew, jaws dropping, backed off a few metres while brandishing their wands, while at the same time Hagrid rushed in front of Jon and Harry, his own umbrella at the ready. Some of the threstrals flapped their wings in an annoyed manner.

Jon drew his knife, dropping his stance, ready to fight.

"Wait, don't do it Hagrid." Harry warned, stepping forward in front of Hagrid. He approached the closest one, his palm holding the slab of meat. He drew his wand, pointed at the meat, and put some extra magic into the paper cut jinx. It cut a neat chunk off the bloody steak. He fed the first threstral, and it accepted the treat. Harry put his wand hand on the top of the crown. With a gentle but firm hand, he pressed down.

The threstral bent one of the forelegs, the birdlike snout almost touching the ground, the large black wings spreading flat over the grass. The whole herd followed suit.

"Name him, Harry," Hagrid instructed, his voice teary with emotion. "And feed some more. Then you would be able to call them when needed."

"Very well. I name you..." Harry deliberated a few seconds. "Shadow Wing." The threstral made a sharp cry, almost as if pledging knightly service to Harry. Shadow Wing got up, and began smelling Jon. It mewed at Jon's robes, then began sniffing at the meat in Harry's hand. "Shadow Wing, go there," Harry dismissed the creature. He pointed behind him towards the wooden cart. The threstral flapped its wings and hopped towards the cart, hoofing the ground and sniffing the Hogwarts students grouped there.

Harry cut more strips of meat, and fed it to the first six threstrals that approached.

"Rudolph." This one had a shiny nose.

"White Star." He named an albino threstral with a star shaped pattern on its head.

"One Ear," he dubbed another for obvious reasons.

"Tornado," he christened another who was disposed to regularly flapping with his wings, making circular gusts of leaves and dust along the ground.

"Banshee," he named another, whose cry was so high pitched only Ghost and Fang barked when it opened its mouth. No one else heard its cry.
"Star Scream," he named another, whose peculiar habit was to throw back its head and howl at the sky whenever he made a sound. After he fed Star Scream, the meat was done.

Jon looked at the rest of the pack, who were advancing restlessly, wanting their share.

"Be gone. I shall call you again when needed. Go!" Jon commanded with a bark.

As one, the rest of the threstrals took to the air, the wind blowing dust and leaves amongst the Hogwarts crew. Fred and George were petting Banshee and Star scream affectionately. Ron was examining the creatures intently, alongside Angelina. Hermione, Oliver, Tonks and Katie just kept a respectful distance, their wands still drawn but not held at the ready. Tonks was staring at Harry intently throughout the whole process.

"These two are twins," Fred said, grinning. George was examining the wings and flanks of Banshee and Star Scream. "Yep."

"We can tell," George claimed as he petted Banshee.

"How?" Ron asked.

"It's a twin thing," Fred explained. "You won't get it ickle Ronnie."

Hagrid was overcome with joy. "Harry, it took me years to befriend the twelve we have here for the opening feast! What a promising lad, no, a wizard you are becoming! And Jon, you too. I will look after Ghost, have no fear, until you return for 'im."

"I have full trust that Ghost would recover, Master Games-keeper." Jon bowed in gratitude.

"Thanks again for the help, Hagrid," Harry beamed. "Can I borrow the cart for a few days? Got to play Santa Claus now. Jon is going to be late for a meeting."

"Yeh, sure you ca- Santa? What?" Hagrid mumbled, confused.

"Thanks!" Harry said, waving as he walked back up the hill with the rest of the crew.

"You two are nuts!" Tonks breathed. "Did you know for sure that they would not attack?"

"Yes," Harry said. "Threstrals can be tamed. Just need certain conditions for it to work."

Tonks just stared at Harry and Jon as if they were insane. Harry dug in his bag and pulled out the money bag inside. He paid all the students, even Katie, who gave him a quick hug with her good arm.

"Guys," he offered his hand to the twins first. "We're not taking the train. Jon and I got to get back to London a.s.a.p. Thank you so much for the great effort and everything!" Harry gushed.

"The galleons were also a nice touch," Fred chimed in, trying to look serious as he shook his hand.

"Best hourly rate, in like, ever!" George reinforced grabbing his hand. Angelina laughed, shaking Harry's hand after, then grabbing him in a big hug.

"Can't go wrong with that! A great hour's pay and all the knowledge we gained," Angelina beamed. "Plus seeing all those Threstrals bow like that- Priceless!"

"For sure!" Oliver stated. "Hit me up anytime if you need work done, I'm your man." He shook his hand as well. "Jon, sorry, Lord Black. You are one bad Son of a Witch!" He offered his hand to Jon,
who shook it with a smile.

"It is my pleasure, good man." Jon added. Ron gave Harry a handshake and Hermione stepped up to
him timidly, hesitantly. She was watching him with a suspicious tilt to her chin.

"You've, changed," Hermione said , taking his hand in both of hers. She was watching his eyes
intently, anything on his face to decipher what was different about him from only a few months ago.
"Even how you cast magic. That isn't your wand," She noted."This one is bigger." Ron also took
note that Harry's wand was the same holly colour of wood, but it was thicker, longer.

"Hermione," Ron interjected . "Hasn't anyone told you it's a bit rude to be, comparing blokes wands
like that," Ron snickered. Hermione protested.

"What do you mean? Of course it's different! And I was using comparison to show him how I
know!"

"Never mind," Ron said in exasperation, shaking his head. Harry and Jon were unrolling the drained
snitch shaped towel. They used the red stained towel to cover the goods in the back of the cart.

"Tonks," Harry asked. "Can you use a charm or something to keep this stuff safely tied down to the
cart?"

"Hm. let me try..." Tonks thought a second. "Cache dors bien Au lit!" The towel tightened down
over the cart, securing itself together with the wings on the underside. "Huh. That's a Malfoy family
spell, if you could you believe that." And in an undertone so only Harry could hear, "Alectrono is the
counter spell to release it. Cheeky bastard."

"Noted, and thanks," Harry said. He and Jon found a way to harness Rudolph, Storm Wing and
White Star nose to tail to the cart. Harry laughed as it really did resemble a red sleigh with three
reindeer pulling the harness. Ollivander did say this wand was very good at the hair growth charm.
He tried the beard growing charm on himself. He then used a lightening spell on his full bushy beard.
Now he had a full white beard.

"Ho Ho Ho! What do you think, Hermione?" he grinned.

"Maybe a red suit and two hundred more pounds and you'll be perfect," she smiled.

"Next time, maybe I will!" Harry climbed up front and took the reins.

"Milady?" Jon asked, looking over to Tonks. He stood next to the front bench, his arm gallantly
inviting her over. She came across and to her amazement, Jon hitched his two hands together to
boost her up. She stepped into it and sure enough Jon lifted her inside. Jon double checked that they
had everything and then he himself climbed in the tall pumpkin cart.

"Ahoy Shadow Wing! Ho White Star! To the sky, Rudolph! " Harry shouted, and the thestrals
began to run a few steps then flap their wings. The ensuing speed burst was phenomenal. Tonks
began to scream in glee as they shot off into the sky, leaving the rest of the Hogwarts crew waving
up at them , laughter ringing through the morning.

"Ahem. Well, seeing as we are all here, we may begin," Galroop said, walking into the meeting
office. It was a sizable board room, with a very long oval table which could seat sixteen people.

Harry, Jon and Tonks were already seated, patiently waiting for the Potages to arrive.
The boys had to go to Madame Milkin's after they landed the threstral carriage behind the property building. They each bought a set of robes off the shelf. Harry so that he wouldn't show up to the meeting in a blood stained white t-shirt and jeans, Jon so he wouldn't show up in his apprentice robes. Harry was now wearing an elegant white robe that somehow reminded him of a High priest robes, with the exception that the pointed wizard hat had a low, wide brim. The cuffs had white and gold trimmings, and there was intricate golden embroidery going down the front. Harry at first hated it, but when he put it on it he found that it completely suited him. If there were multiple stars and moons or some other sort of weird pattern, he could picture Dumbledore rocking these threads.

Jon, true to his name, bought a severe black robe that fitted him like a muggle suit. The only major difference was that he also bought tall black leather boots from WWG instead of fashionable shoes. Tucking in the pant legs into the boots turned the outfit into something looking far more militaristic than originally intended. Harry grudgingly admitted it suited him.

Tonks was all business chic in a deep blue robes that squared her shoulders and cinched at her narrow waist. It was a high neck affair, with a single stitch pattern accentuating the curves of her chest and hips.

Harry invited her along because he knew she had more legal experience and technical knowhow in her training to be an Auror. Also she was of age so she could ...

Harry stopped rationalizing it and simply looked at the woman. It didn't matter what skill set she brought to the table, Harry just knew that he wanted her around him as much as possible.

In the back of his mind he knew it was bordering on an unhealthy obsession.

Mr. and Mrs. Potage walked in after Galroop, along with a wizened old wizard wearing very old fashioned, but immaculate robes. In his hand was a briefcase and file folder. Jon immediately got to his feet, nodding his head slowly in acknowledgement to the elegant yet plain Mrs. Potage, and then stepping forward to offer his hand to Mr. Potage. Pavel Potage blinked, caught off guard, then greeted Lord black with a firm handshake.

"Mr. Potage," Jon greeted watching the man in his eye.

"Lord Black," Pavel returned.

Walking in behind the elderly wizard was a teenage witch. She was taller than average height, shocking green eyes and a full dark head of hair. Her hair was done in an up style, making her seem taller and showing off her young, expressive features and full lips. Her makeup was tastefully done to accentuate her eyes and lips, and Harry took note that she missed nothing in the room, scanning everything and everyone with a glance. She was wearing a lilac sleeveless dress, cut with a heart shaped bust. That and her hairstyle gave her a princess-like appearance. Her eyes stopped on his momentarily, then focused on Jon. She overheard the greeting and was now focusing on Jon and his mannerisms.

"My wife, Eleanor, and my daughter Alexandria. This is my legal counsel, Mr. Farnworth," he introduced. Jon clasped his hands behind his back and bade Good day to each of them. "And this is Lord Jon Black, of the Ancient and Most noble House of Black. Thank you for your patience Lord Black," he added graciously.

"It is not a problem, Mr. Potage. We only arrived a short while before you did." He opened his hand in introduction to Harry and Tonks. "These are my associates, Mr. Harry Potter, and Miss Nymphadora Tonks."
"Good day," Harry said simply. Tonks nodded briskly. Mr. and Mrs. Potage just stared. Alexandria's eyes opened wide.

"Shall we?" Galroop cut into the silence as the goblin invited the arriving party to sit. Jon took his seat between Harry and Tonks.

The meeting went on for around half an hour. Bilgrumble came in once bringing refreshments in the form of tea, scones and a cold pitcher of water. Jon was frequently glancing towards Alexandria, who was studying the three of them in turn. Miss Tonks was listening to every word the legal counsel was saying, taking notes where necessary.

"If there are no questions?" Mr. Farnworth asked after the discussion on terms and conditions were finished. There was none.

"Who will be the witness signing the agreement alongside Lord Black?" Galroop asked.

Harry nodded that he would be the one to sign.

"Who will be the witness signing the agreement alongside Mr. Potage?" Galroop repeated.

"I will," Alexandria spoke for the first time in a melodic soft voice. Jon's eyes met hers again. Tonks watched her with narrowed eyes. The respective persons signed after Jon and Pavel signed. Jon was presented with the deed to the property and Pavel was given a Gringotts note with the agreed down payment printed on it and signed by Jon. There was a shake of hands all across both parties and Galroop clapped once in excitement.

"So! Congratulations to both parties. It is done and agreed. I thank you on behalf of Gringotts bank. Allow me to escort you out."

When they were in the main lobby and the goblins had left, Alexandria came up to them.

"My Lords, and lady," she said with a small courtesy."If it pleases you, please call on us so that we may become friends." She gave them an elegant card with her name and address. She gave Jon the card. "Whew, thank god now that the formalities are done. Can I get the two of you to sign this? My mates would not believe me when I said I had to come to this stuffy meeting."

She gave them Friday's copy of Witch Weekly. On the cover were a picture of both young men seated in their apprentice robes at the Cafe in Diagon alley, their postures casual as they chatted before Tonks arrived.

Jon had a confused look on his face, but he gamely took the quill and signed. Harry signed as well.

"Cool, thanks. My sixteenth birthday is just before school reopens. Leave an address when you write so I invite you guys to the little get together we're having..."

"My address would be the property on Diagon, Miss Potage," Jon clarified to her. She laughed, embarrassed.

"Oh yes. Silly me. Well I will send the invites there. Hope you can make it. Ta!" She said, looking at the both boys. "Miss Tonks," she added in farewell, and walked back to her family.

"Well. That wasn't so bad." Harry said as they walked up to Jon's new place. They opened the double doors and brought the carriage in. "You will need to get a crew to fix up the place, Jon."

"Yes. I will definitely need new fittings."
"Mr. Bulistrode and Mr. Boot know all the craftsmen who do these sort of thing," Tonks advised. The three of them helped off load the carriage. Tonks and Harry wrote up a small inventory list, and mailed both the Hunter's guild and the Apothecary's guild to get going rates for these items. Jon wrote mail to the local hardware and made arrangements to at least have all the doors and windows fixed by tomorrow so he could secure the place.

Jon looked sad. Harry didn't know what it was, but Jon was bothered by something. Harry asked what was wrong.

"I believe celebrations are in order, but I cannot truly celebrate with Ghost being so severely injured. I thank you, Harry of House Hollow, and Tonks, for accompanying me to the Bank. You have been good friends to me."

"Aw. It's ok," Tonks said, giving Jon a warm hug. He awkwardly returned it, then shook Harry's hand.

"Let's go see if Master Ollivander is still closing up his shop. We could tell him about the threstral wing and tail hair we got for the bracers." said Harry.

"Yes. Better I keep my mind on getting armed properly."

"So your mind isn't on Alexandria?" Tonks ventured, looking at the list in her hand.

"The princess?" Jon asked. "She is nice on the eyes, I must agree. But I do not know her well. Who knows? She surely seems pleasant enough."

"Oh, ok." Tonks said without making eye contact. "You guys ready for the trip to France tomorrow?" she asked, changing the subject.

"As ready as we could be. We also got a good way to transport the stuff back," said Harry, indicating the patient and watchful threstrals. "Go back to Hagrid's," he ordered, and with some tricky maneuvering, they left the armory and took off. They closed the doors and walked out into Diagon Alley.

"Threstrals' limitation is the sea, Harry," Tonks corrected. "They could take us to the port at Dover, but cannot cross the ocean. From there we need to go by boat."

"Oh. Well, at least they could wait for us to carry us home," Harry conceded. Harry glanced at Tonks who seemed to be deep in thought, biting her lip.

They caught Ollivander closing the shop. On the closed sign was a notice saying that he would re-open next week Monday. The trio greeted him and asked him about the change in schedule.

"You didn't think I would let you three simply go ranging abroad without a clue, did you?" Mr. Ollivander asked. "Especially with your limited wands. I'll be coming with you, as a voice of experience. This is going to be grand," Ollivander rubbed his hands together in excitement. "Haven't had a bit of rough and tumble in a while."

"You expect trouble?" Harry said. "Supposed to be a simple routine mission as far as the woman said."

"Did she mention anything about the Diablo?"

"She advised us to have Hunters who knew what they were doing."
"Yes," Ollivander said, pulling his beard. "There is a secret to luring out the Diablo, and it is not well known."

"What is it?" Jon asked. Tonks was frowning at the Old Man.

"A bit of bother, mind you. It must be handled, delicately. It will only appear if a child is lost in its territory. Their natural fear and innocence attracts them into corporal form. From then on, we can defeat it. It is the hardest ingredient to get in the required list. You will need my help."

Harry went very still. He had no clue that this was a prerequirement. He didn't know how he felt about this.

"Isn't that, bordering on Dark magic?" Harry ventured.

"Yes, if you allow the Diablo to attack the child. But fear not. If you save them, return him to his parents and defeat the demon, you would not suffer the taint. Have no fear Harry. We shall walk in the Light."

Harry had a bad feeling about this. This was too close to dark magic. There was a high chance of any type of failure causing an innocent child to be cursed, or killed. Their mission tomorrow better go as planned.

Too much was riding at stake for this stupid bracer to mess it up.
Harry convinces Jon and Tonks to immediately leave for France to rescue a child kidnapped by the Diablo.

It was after midnight in France. Jon and himself were walking out of a forest into farmland with a stretcher between them. On the stretcher was a cloth covered figure. Tonks came out following after them, her eyes red and puffy. Ollivander had his hat in his hands, shaking his head in remorse.

A group of maybe one hundred muggles were awaiting them at the edge where the field met the forest. They held torches and pitchforks, weapons of the farming trade. Some even had rifles. Most of them held flashlights, some were accompanied by dogs.

A couple ran forward, screaming in distress.

"You found him? My boy, no my boy!" the mother wailed. The father was distraught, rushing forward to lift the cover and see. On the stretcher was the body of a seven year old boy, eyes missing and mouth open, bared in a final scream. Upon seeing his son, the father slumped to the ground, unconscious.

"I am sorry," Ollivander said softly to the mother. "We found him like this, it was too late."

Harry snapped upon hearing the lie. A pain deep inside was growing stronger every second. And with the pain, his wand began to thrum with energy.

"Shut up, old man. This is all your fault." He closed his eyes shut, rage igniting every pore in body. He drew his wand, and without further ado, cast the Killing Curse on the Master Wand smith, hatred burning through his veins. Jon froze, not believing what he was seeing. "We should have never dealt with this filth," he snarled, pointing at the muggles. "Rats and stinking vermin."

"Enflamare!" fire shot out of his wand, hot pure rage. He swept his hand over the crowd, igniting everyone who was close. The red of the fire mirrored in the red in his eyes.

The screams of the burning people woke him up from the horrible nightmare.

Harry woke up. It was very early the morning of the excursion. The plan was to meet up with the others at King's Cross and catch the train to Dover leaving at nine. He took a deep, calming breath and got out of bed, double checking his packed trunk before going to the bathroom to get ready for the day.

Harry knew that any dream concerning Dark magic was not to be ignored. He decided to make an effort to help mitigate any chances that this mission could go down with such dire outcomes. He dressed quickly, put his invisibility cloak in his knapsack and made his way to the dead end to summon the knight bus.
Fifteen minutes later he was invisible walking up Diagon Alley towards Jon's place. He turned off into the narrow side alley that lead to the back side of Diagon. There was lamp light shining from the upstairs window and another at the window downstairs. It was still early, only six o'clock in the morning.

"Caw, Caw," Harry called out, the worst imitation of a crow ever heard in the living world.

"Caw! Caw!" he said again, louder.

"Caw, Caw," came a reply. Jon opened the top window. "You keep to your habit of waking my sorry arse every morning, Harry of House Hollow. I'm coming down." Harry nodded, and went down to the small side door. A minute later he was inside sitting at the patio overlooking the muggle nature park on the other side of the wall. The sun was now coming up.

"Saw your light on, Snow. You afraid of the dark?" Harry teased.

"No," Jon hesitated. "The things you only find out when you actually move in. The muggle barrier is almost right on top of the edge of this property. And the wards that empower it chill the night air. Usually I am not bothered by the cold, but I believe it somehow taps into my magic to power it. I ..just leave the lamp burning. It ..is more comfortable, that is all."

"Hm. So what you been up to since we left yesterday? My mind has been spinning ever since Ollivander told me about the Diablo."

"I have been modifying the camouflaged robes. I mailed Miss Tonks for sewing and alteration spells. She sent me some tips. I seem to have been successful. Want to see?"

"Sure."

Jon went into his bedroom. A few minutes later a voice came out to Harry. "See?"

"What?"

"Good," Jon touched Harry on his shoulder. Harry sprung up from his chair like a scared girl. "It works." Harry stared hard at where the voice was coming. Harry pointed his wand at him.

"Lumos."

Jon was now visible under the bright light.

"Ah ha! Now at least we know the limitations of it. Very neat ninja costume by the way."

"Ninja?" Jon asked. "What is that?"

"Yes, ninja. Long story short, assassins that used stealth instead of brute force."

"Ah," Jon said. "I hate those guys."

"You know what I hate? When powerful wizards manipulate others," Harry grumbled.

"Oh?" Jon said. "You don't seem to be one inclined to self loathing."

"What?" Harry said. "Where did that one come from?" Harry frowned.

"'Powerful wizards manipulating others.'" Jon removed the headpiece and pulled back the cowl of his modified robes. His head came into view. "You do not know the true scope of your own power,
"You're seeing things. My magic is crippled, pathetic. I am not manipulating anybody, either," Harry argued.

"The Lion roars. His allies will hear the call, his enemies will cower in awe."

"Voices eh? Stop with the prophetic sayings," Harry grumbled. "Unless it's really important. Ah fuck it. Better to tell me. Prophecies are the worst. Never anything good comes from it."

Jon laughed.

"Tonks said it a few times. Remember when she said she wants to be where the action is, Harry?" Jon explained. "Your friends, all of them that I have met so far, acquiescence to your commands, or do it willingly and with prompt acceptance. Knowledge, right now, is your power. Knowing what can happen and intimate details about the people in this world is your strength, just as much as it is my handicap. My newfound magic is strong, but I have no clue how to use it. However, I have faith in my training, and survival instinct. We are vastly different from your soft friends."

"'Immortal heroes', huh?" Harry sighed.

"Exactly. The Master of Death speaks, mortals and even threstrals take heed," Jon grinned.

"Just like how the Lord of the Black walks, and girls swoon with rapturous applause," Harry countered.

"That, is not true," Jon dismissed. "So. What brings you here at this godforsaken sunrise hour?"

"We've got to find a way to avoid what I think Ollivander is going to do to 'help'. Don't get me wrong, I am not afraid to take risks. However, I risk what I can control, not other innocents. Never again. That doesn't work in my favour."

"What do you think he is going to do?"

"The man is completely nutter over his craft. He sees this as a challenge only my old wand and our unique circumstances can create. These bracers would be his next masterpiece, and even more so because he got the Chosen one to be his apprentice... imagine when the wizarding world finds out that The Boy Who Lived crafted such weapons. I believe he would go to great lengths to see this happen."

Harry got up out of the chair, pacing.

"It all adds up," Harry explained. "The Ollivanders have never taken outside apprentices. He knows an opportunity when it strikes, did you see his face when you got the feathers? He wants this to happen. He needs it to happen."

"Harry. Stop. What do you think he is going to do?" Jon commanded, his eyes narrowing.

"He's going to target a child and deliberately orchestrate it such that he is lost in the Diablo's territory. Then we save him, and the cycle of Dark practice is stopped, countered by the heroics of the rescue. My problem is that is way too risky."

"The hell?" Jon snarled. "How do you know this?"

"I dreamt that we were leaving the forest with the child's corpse, and Ollivander lied to the parents"
and the entire village search party on how it happened. I lost it, completely."

"Lost it?" Jon queried, folding his arms.

"Myself, my magic, everything. I went Dark, Jon. And my dreams matter. I've learnt that lesson a long time ago, the hard way."

"What did you do in this dream?"

"It was a slaughter." Harry breathed out hard. "I killed the old man and burned them all."

"By the Gods," Jon breathed.

"And I think he is manipulating this ever so subtly that he will want us to finish this task, get good with wand making, only then will be able to make our real wands. And I desperately need it, I'm already at a disadvantage without being able to use curses."

"I see," Jon nodded. "This... dream... is all, conjecture, correct? Or was it prophecy?"

"I don't think it's a prophecy, just a possibility. One that must not happen."

"Then we cancel this trip," Jon summarized. "And be done with it."

"I don't think we have that choice if we want to get armed again," Harry said. "What I propose is that we do some digging at the Hunter Guild and find out if there are any bounties for a known Diablo, wherever that may be. Maybe a family has lost their child and need guild hunters to retrieve him. I don't know. What I do know is that we can't be the real reason for the child to go missing. I am putting my foot down on that."

"How about we talk to him and ask him if there is a substitution for the claw?"

"Knowing how these old sages work," Harry admitted. "The Diablo claw is probably the most convenient. I doubt he would have an alternative that was simpler. Most likely it would be the opposite."

"We don't have much time to find this information, Harry."

"I know," Harry pointed at Jon's camo gear. "But your timing is perfect. I was hoping to go down to Vince Greyback at the guild and ask him about Diablo bounties. I was going to lend you my invisibility cloak so you can be my backup, but maybe we can both go undetected through Diagon and Knockturn. Just to be safe. Witch Weekly reporters are everywhere, it seems."

"No time like the present," Jon agreed. "Let me grab my stuff."

Ten minutes later they were outside of the Hunter's guild three quarters way down Knockturn Alley. There was noise and voices coming out the windows. Harry and Jon looked around, making sure no one was watching. Harry removed his invisibility cloak. Jon pulled down his hood, pulled the mask wrapped around his face and threw a normal cloak over his modified camouflage gear. They pushed open the door and went inside.

The place was pretty full compared to last time they came with Tonks. Harry brought this cloak hood as far down as possible over his face. Jon simply watched the patrons with a sharp eye. He subtly drew his dagger out of the sheath and set it back in again, making sure it was free if necessary. A few wizards paused and looked at them, then went back to their own drinking or talking.
"Come on," Harry said, and went to the counter.

"Greyback," Jon called to the bartender.

"Ah, the Crows' clan, was it?" he greeted with a drunken slur. "What do you want?"

"Are there any Diablo bounties available?" Jon asked.

"Whoa there lads. That isn't fare for you young un's, I mean, Lord Black and Friend who must not be named. You got to be a bit higher in the rankings."

"We are fully capable of handling it. We just want the information," Jon demanded.

"There is no insurance for next of Kin in your contract. Only what you leave in your will," he challenged Jon. "You better know what you are fucking doing. There are no second chances."

Harry laughed.

"What? You think I'm funny?" Greyback snarled at Harry. Harry pushed back his cowl and stared him the face.

"I am the living embodiment of second chances. Do you have bounties or not?" Harry said in a low tone.

"Oh fuck. This can't be happening," Greyback said. "Shit. Hear what, if the Boy who Lived says he's ready, he's fucking ready. Yeah I got two still open. That shit has been going like wildfire these past few months. Like an infestation. Some of the previous trails have gone cold. We got a fresh one in, and guess what lads - it came in this fucking morning."

"Where?" Harry asked.

"Pyrenees. A village north of Beauxbatons. Called Salles. The village has been slowly getting smaller in numbers over the last decade. The muggles believe that it's cursed. The things that happen to them and the bounties the couple of magic sensitive living there send to South Hampton' AK guild... and even the American guilds across the pond are grimier than ever. The bounties have been steadily growing in difficulty over the past twenty years. We get the trickle on effect. We're in it more for profits...we want jobs with a regular stream of monetary rewards...it's better returns than that Hit Wizard guild south. Those guys really do it for glory. The French based guilds also are gettin' dodgy. They sometimes create shit to encourage foreign wizards to come. I don't know why, but we've been getting disappearances there...three of AK's and one of ours over the last two years haven't come back. It is getting pretty hot."

"Disappearances? They dead?" Harry asked.

"We got an old timer doing his investigation on two of AK's men. One he knows was killed. The other two are still at large. Our guy, well, we believe the French drew him in and snuffed 'im. Can't finger who or why, but that's what the guys here think."

"The French Pub at the port?" Jon asked.

"Yeah. You heard about that?" Greyback asked.

"I know things," Jon said. "Give us the bounty details for the Diablo at Salles."

"Three kids have gone missing over the past few months. The last reported one was last night."
Here," he turned around and tapped his wand on the notice board behind him by the scotch tumblers. A duplicate snapped into existence. "Fresh off the owls’ leg. You're the first to bite. Bounty is currently five hundred galleons for deceased target recovery and two thousand for 'Alive and Well' on any of the three children. The bounty for the Diablo itself is twenty five large, whole," Greyback explained.

"Whole?" Harry asked.

"Yes. Properly dissected and shipped fresh may earn you more at the Apothecary's. But that's what the guilds’ association bounty stands at... for the corpse whole that is. Easier to bring in a dead body than to mess up and get killed trying to cut it up. Let the professional curse breakers deal with that shit."

"And what makes the villagers think it was magic, and not some normal person kidnapping them?" Jon asked.

"The sleep of the entire village is affected Lord Black," Vince explained, laughing. "You guys are rookie as shit. Diablo's also fuck with the dreams of the people who know the victims. Lads, in good faith I really can't give this to you, but...you guys signed up. This is A rank mission. It's your call."

"Who is our contact? It says here Salles via Beauxbatons."

"The defense teacher at the school is the intermediary for the villagers. The original request came in from Mr. and Mrs. Robert Rabiot. The school is the financier and business contact. We believe that the villagers all put up what they can, which probably isn't much unless they're loaded, and Beauxbatons sends the request and pays us. They work out something after. It seems their headmistress is taking direct affront of dark magic happening on their doorstep."

"She should," Harry said with conviction.

"Man, Hogwarts is worse. That forest is infested with stuff. Just yesterday I got some requests for quotation on fresh threstral parts. And a wild one in heat too, according to the amount of gallons of blood that they recovered. Those blokes are going to make a mint. And that's not counting on some crazy shit I've been hearing from some folk. Monsters in and out of the castle. It is crazy even up here lads."

"Oh?" Harry probed. "And what prices you gave them?"

"Starting bid is two hundred galleons per gallon of blood. And it seems they got three. And the bones are worth probably fifty galleons a rib, and one hundred for the legs. The real value is the tail hair, which is going for fifteen galleons an inch."

"Wow," Harry said. "So why don't hunters farm the forest then?"

"It's all about the precision of the target, and the timing. Threstrals are sneaky bastards who won't attack unless provoked. And the potency of the animal is peak when they are in heat. And then, the effect is doubled if it is the alpha, and tripled if killed in single combat. A lot of magical arithmancy stuff at play there. There have been some counterfeit kills, but the samples sent yesterday were the real deal. The AG members here who analyzed the sample are trying hard to find out who did it," he pointed to a group of wizards in a heated discussion.

"Hmm," Jon smiled. "I wish them good luck."

"Rare ingredients are rare for a reason, lads. This Diablo isn't hard to take down, it is the circumstances that make the job difficult. Speed. You need speed to catch it. Only three victims have
been successfully recovered in their territory, and that was hundreds of years ago. Similar to big snakes, when they feed, they rest in physical form and are vulnerable. A week, tops. By that time though," Vince drew his finger across the neck. "The victim is rotting in a ditch already."

Harry grimaced. That dream was probably too close to comfort. Did Ollivander really think he could orchestrate this? Or was it only his suspicious nature of living a life fighting against dark magic that cast doubt on the friendly wand sage?

He hated doubting himself. "We'll take it," Harry said. "Fuck the trains. Set up the portkey connections."

"Fine. Its ten galleons for return trip to Dover. Once you are there show your guild pass and Rook will link you the Calais Camp portkey for around fifteen. From there you got three ways to head south; train, broom, or French Visitor's portkey, which takes about a couple days. For this mission, if you want to be the hero, take broomstick. Remember you need speed. If you want to do it easy when the Diablo is resting, take the train. Clean, easy, twenty five once you find it. If you're good at fighting dark creatures that is."

"How long did this come in?" Jon asked suspiciously.

"Last night... erm. this morning around two. Guild owls are fast, so it probably took one hour to reach us. And there is one more clue, most reported Diablo attacks are rampant the night after the full moon, and attack at midnight. So, if all things considered, the child was most probably snatched six hours ago."

"The Crows' Vambrace would take this," Jon said, determined. He counted out the ten galleons for the portkey, and then gave another ten. "For you. The information is worth it. Victory will be ours, let Glory shine her light upon us this day." Jon bowed.

"So be it. Glory to the Guild," Greyback responded formally, shocked by Lord Black's old school declaration.

Harry shook his head as they left the pub. "Victory? Glory?" he asked in question.

"When Rangers need to go into Battle against a worthwhile enemy, that is one of the sayings to reinforce that it is not only our paid duty that we serve, but to the Glory of the profession. Rangers usually have quiet days, but when the call comes, we must be fierce, and swift."

"Your face looks like death itself, Jon," Harry noted as Jon strode out of Knockturn.

"I am not a wizard yet. But I do see fucking coincidences that are highly unlikely happening as we speak. We must rescue this child, and kill the demon. We need Mistress Tonks within minutes."

"And Ollivander?"

"Yes, and Ollivander. He knows how to destroy it, which to me, is secondary to rescuing the child. He can meet us there if he wishes. He is not of great import at the moment. His experience would be necessary for us to permanently fix this situation, but the child comes first."

"Agreed. I wish I had my old Hermione with us," Harry said. "She knows things. Things that make the difference with unknowns like this."

"Aurors supposed to know about dark magic. Mistress Tonks would have some sort of knowledge."

"She's not an auror yet."
"We will prevail." Jon walked to the clerk at the owl’s apothecary. He wrote two quick messages and paid the fee. The two boys went back to Jon's place. Jon took off the top of his robes. He buckled the repaired light armor over his undershirt. Then he threw the camo robes over that. He strapped on the weapons belt along with his wand and dagger. Then he threw the normal cloak over his ensemble and grabbed the unstrung longbow. If you opened the front, all you would see is the black inner lining of the back of the cloak. Jon was living up to his adopted name to the fullest.

Harry felt woefully under-dressed in his fashionable white robes. At least he had his invisibility cloak in his backpack.

By the time Jon and Harry were ready to go, Tonks was knocking on the door.

"Its bloody six thirty!" She said to Jon. "Aren't we to be at the station for nine!" She blinked at Harry's dark expression. "Oh. Hiya Harry. What are you doing here?"

"We're going to southern France to rescue a child. And kill the Diablo. We have the portkey to Dover, then connect to Calais camp. After, we need to get broomsticks at Calais and high tail it down to the village Salles. That flight might be an hour if we push all out."

"You're kidding, right? No don't answer that ...I know you two by now. I wore my leather armor just in case it was something like this. Jon said to be ready for action. Is that some sort of code you guys use to transform into Heroes or something?"

"No," Jon said. "'Winter is coming' is the battle cry for that."

"Oh. Right you are then," Tonks said, dumbstruck. "Never a slow day with you guys," she sighed. Her face turned serious. "Let's rock."

Jon retrieved the portkey and held it in the centre of the three of them. It was a small sculpture of a Wizard in battle with a Chimaera. Harry and Tonks hovered their hands over the statue. Jon looked at the portkey; a solemn, determined expression on his face. He looked at the others. "At times like this, it is custom for warriors to say something."

Tonks and Harry stared at Jon. In a low voice he announced:

"To Arms! Strike, the Crow's Vambrace!" The statue glowed blue, infused with magic from his voice.

All three touched the portkey and vanished.

They reappeared in a cellar with a marked runic circle encompassing the entire floor. The lines of the circle glowed red, then faded into a pulsing yellow. Tonks and Harry were laying face down sprawled on the floor. Only Jon was crouched on one knee, his head dipped low. Electrostatic currents of magic swirled around him as he rose to his feet.

"Oh cripes man," Harry complained. Even his entry was heroic.

Jon helped Tonks to her feet and went up the stairs. Harry trotted to catch up. There was a wizard seated at a reclining chair, sleeping with his feet propped on the desk, his head back, mouth wide open. Jon smashed his hand on the table.

"Wake up. Where is Rook?" Jon demanded.

The wizard abruptly dropped his feet and rubbed his face from sleep. "I'm the night shift," he yawned. He looked at the clock on the wall. It read six thirty four. "He comes in for 8. What do you
"I am Lord Black. I need immediate portkey transport to Calais. How much is it?"

"That's twenty-one galleons for the three of you." The ICOP wizard began shuffling in his desk for rolled parchment. He took a pair of spectacles out of his robes and put them on. "Guild association papers and writ of goods inventory traveling out of Her Majesty's kingdom."

Jon brought out the Apothecary's license and placed the galleons on the table. "We are not taking goods."

The ICOP wizard looked at their paperwork, then scrutinized the trio. "You guys look young. Please step on the designated rune circle to scan for ingested poisons, enchantments and other questionable artifacts." He pointed to a circle on an open area of the office. There was a cage hanging menacingly low from chains over that area.

Jon stepped in the circle. It pulsed once, then nothing. "Good. Next!" Jon stepped aside. Harry went next. It pulsed once, then blinked orange, then pulsed yellow again. The ICOP wizard frowned. "Dabbling in a spot of potion, have you lad?" the wizard asked.

"No, nothing really. A scent nullifying potion to help nausea. I was sick." The ICOP wizard stamped Harry's papers.

"Hm. Next!"

Tonks went in the circle, and the circle pulsed once, then nothing. "Good. Here is your portkey."

This was a miniature sculpture of a weighted scale. "Maximum of ten days stay on business before you have to return to lengthen it. Safe journey," he grunted, heading off into the kitchenette to heat water for tea.

The trio touched this and was transported into another cellar. The smells here were different, it smelled of breakfast and tea. Harry was a bit more prepared for the portkey effects, he was now on his hands and knees instead of prone on the relatively clean floor. Tonks was still flat, cursing at the indignity of it all. John was rising once again from his crouch, magic swirling around him.

"How do you do that?" Harry asked, irritated.

"Abdominal core strength, Harry of House Hollow. You are physically weak," Jon replied as he helped Tonks to her feet, who shrugged off his arm, embarrassed.

"House Hollow?" Tonk's asked, confused.

"Godric's Hollow he means," Harry explained. "Private joke." They went up the stairs into a breakfast cafe. "I'll ask about the brooms." Harry walked to the person serving behind the counter.

"Bonjour. Trois Brooms, the fastest you have, s'il vous plait." Even to his own ears the broken french was horrible.

The bartender nodded, pointing out the window. Harry followed his direction and walked out the door, Tonks and Jon following him out. Across the road was a Magical sporting goods store. They walked in.

"Bonjour," he repeated. "Three of your fastest brooms, please."
"Oui," the young female clerk said. "One hundred and fifty for one."

Jon and Harry looked at each other. "We don't have enough," Jon said, doubtfully. They checked their money bags, and only came up with one hundred and forty in total. They did not think to take all their gold with them.

"Do you accept Gringotts credit note?" Tonks asked.

"Oui," the clerk said. "It is More that way. One hundred seventy five for one broom."

"Done," Jon agreed, agitated. Time was slipping away. The clerk provided a runic board similar to what Bogrod had at Gringotts. Jon nicked his finger and placed it on the two spots provided. The young clerk took a bill parchment, wrote on it the items and cost, then placed it on the board. The parchment soaked up the little bit of blood, and the vault numbers came up.

"Please Sign," she said, smiling. "Lord Black." Jon did so, and the clerk gave them a duplicate for the receipt. She went in the back, and called out a name. "Gaston!" she shouted. "Trois Quicksilver, vite!"

After two minutes, an older man came out hovering three brooms wrapped in brown paper.

"A map and broom compass, please," Harry said, remembering last minute.

"Oui, three galleons for three sets."

They paid, took the brooms and exited the shop. The sun was finally beginning to warm the morning.

"Jon. Command the broom to fly in front of you. Stick close to me by leaning forward slightly."

Jon opened his new broom. "Fly," he said, and it hovered dutifully in front of him. He climbed aboard, gripping tightly. Harry and Tonks jumped on theirs and took off, making sure Jon was following. Within minutes of flying, Jon seemed to have gotten the hang of it and now veered his broom in the wake of the other two, keeping pace.

The journey south was swift and uneventful. Harry had to give credit to the manufacturers, this definitely was a broom made for high speed straight line travel. It felt sturdy and arrow straight, not flighty and twitch sensitive as his prized Firebolt. Within the hour, they were closing down on the main village of Salles.

To his horror, Harry recognized the farmland and forest boundary from his dream. The way the land undulated, the flock of lamb and even the old abandoned cart was eerily familiar.

"Stop," Harry said, raising his fist. "The Diablo is in that forest."

"How?" Tonks said over the roaring wind.

"He dreamt of this place," Jon replied. "Trust in him."

Harry circled above the forest. He let his magic guide him, his instinct of sensing the presence of Dark magic feeling like an uncomfortable itch on the back of his neck. There was something here, but the area was too broad to narrow down an exact location. He halted mid air, turning in to the others.

"Erlkings steal children. This we know. The Diablo is a nastier version to this dark creature. Tonks,
the child might still be alive. Do you know of any muggle tracking spell?"

"Yes, but... it is actually a line of sight tracking beacon to follow them from a distance. Not a detection spell...wait." Tonks thought a second. "I do know of a spell that detects human listeners or hidden wizards, it is more of a counter eavesdropping barrier. It will glow red if someone is nearby."

"Show it to Jon," Harry ordered.

"Imedacio homenum revelio," she demonstrated the wand movement and targeted an area directly below. It sputtered out before it even reached the canopy of trees.

"I caught something like Immediate vicinity in the translation." Harry advised. "Is there a broader version?"

"I suppose that would mean a lasso wave instead of a twirl, and probably a flourish instead of a jab at the end. Let me try..." She mimed the motion first for practice, then recited, "Maior Homenum Revelio!"

A globe of magic encompassed the party, a nice shining green that dissipated in strength as the globe grew larger and wider. The magic effect was visible on the canopy below them, but it faded away, showing no signs of detection.

"We need to get lower. We will rake the area. Tonks keep repeating that spell, Jon try to get a feel for what she is doing. That wand is a cannon. Hopefully it can do the barrier class spells as well, we might need it."

Harry dived lower, followed by the others. He closed his eyes periodically, trying his best to feel the presence of the dark creature. He was hearing Tonks repeating the spell systematically as they skimmed the top of the trees. Jon was trying to get the spell, but his attempts fizzled and crackled even after trying his best.

"Harry, why don't you try?" Tonks asked, frustrated. They were scouring the forest for five minutes and still nothing.

"My magic is wonky. And this wand is only good for two class of spells, so far. Lumos and Winguardium."

"Your finger cutting spell seems to work," Jon shouted over the wind.

"Yes. It is the only exception that does actually," Harry shouted back. "Wait. Ollivander was also perplexed how I managed to do it properly. At the time I thought it was a technicality, but now..." he looked strangely at Tonks, then his finger. "It might be ..." Harry stopped immediately. "I have an idea. Lets land and we'll have to play a game of hide and seek."

"This is the craziest theory I've ever heard, Jon," Tonks said. She and Jon were on foot, walking with the broomsticks along the edge of the forest. "Harry's gone nuts." She cast the revealing spell again. "It just doesn't make sense."

"Trust in him," Jon repeated. "He constantly questions the status quo of magic, it is his special trait that makes him a great wizard. Keep trying."

"Trying to randomly catch him with this spell when he is under an invisibility cloak," she said aloud. "And he didn't even say why we are wasting time with this stupid game," she cast the spell again. The area pulsed yellow then a red outline emerged, disappearing within the blink of an eye. Tonks cast again at the direction she last saw it. Now it definitely outlined a human shape.
"Well done," Harry said, removing his cloak. "To the air again. Lets test out my theory."

Airborne again, Harry practiced the motion for the far reaching global reveal spell. Jon frowned.

"Harry wait," he said. "The spell outlined you when Mistress Tonks succeeded. We will tip our advantage of surprise if we alert the Diablo."

"Damn, I didn't think of that. You're right." Harry thought a second, remembering the clues Greyback gave them. "Speed. We need speed and accuracy. How good are you with that bow?"

"Fair enough for up to two hundred meters, depending on wind."

"And if you were flying double, would you be able to shoot?"

"Yes, but...arrows. I have none."

"Tonks, can you transfigure arrows for Jon?"

"No problem," she agreed.

"Here is the plan. If this works, we would be able locate the child and/or the Diablo with the expanding spell. If the Diablo pokes his head out to see who cast it, Jon would ride double with Tonks and get the shot off. It's very resistant to spells, but weak against normal bludgeoning or even piercing. The trick is to match our flight speed with the expanding globe, so as soon as I get feedback, we change course and attack the red outlines before the bugger knows what's up. If it's the child, I will grab him with magic or by hand if necessary. You two are to be right behind me, and attack the Diablo if it tries anything." Tonks and Jon nodded. "I will handle the extra broom, Tonks you pilot for Jon."

"Sounds good," Jon said. He dug in his robes for the bowstring. After stringing up his bow, he accepted the hastily transfigured arrows and quiver. "Milady, please shrink and hold unto this cloak for me." Jon took off his cloak and handed it to Tonks. Tonks eyes widened as Jon raised his mask and covered his head with the hood. Only his onyx gloves and the bow and arrows were now visible. His broom came closer, and with some tricky climbing, he settled behind her, his legs snaking over her hips and locking his ankles under the broom shaft. The back of his thighs were pressing on top her hers, his body snug on her backside. Tonks handed Harry Jon's broom. Harry now rode double on the two Quicksilvers.

"Guys look!" Tonks said, pointing. A small stream of smoke was coming out of the forest a few miles down.

"Seems like the bastard is cooking." Harry cursed.

"Enough talk, lets attack," Tonks said.

"Agreed," Jon said. "It is time for action. Winter has come," he declared, putting an arrow between his teeth and notching another on the string with a relaxed grip. Harry took a breath and began the lasso movement.

"Maior Homenum Revelio!" he shouted.

The effect was immediate and devastating. A bright blue pulse of magic erupted from Harry's wand, expanding in a wide circle. It shot out from his position and Harry put the broom through its paces, casting the spell again while gunning it at top speed. On the third cast the spell crossed the smoke and two red outlines reflected back towards them. Banking left into a hard dive under the canopy of
the trees, Harry made a dipping circular arc to attack the location of the two figures from the flank. Dipping and dodging through the trees they came upon a small stream with a hovel embedded in the rock on its bank.

They zipped over the water towards the source of the smoke. There was an ugly red creature, about four feet in height with devil horns and a nasty rusted farmer's pitchfork scooping a fresh animal carcass into a massive cauldron, a fire burning merrily below it. Harry shot past the creature, spotting a tied up sack that was struggling and rolling on its own near to the cookpot.

*Phffet Phffet!*

"TAKE THE-" Harry was shouting over his shoulder as he zoomed past the hovel, but he needn't have bothered. Before he finished the command the creature was already on the ground, two arrows embedded in it. One was in the head, the other in the chest. There was a splash and Harry and Tonks put on the brakes, fishtailing midair to a halt. Jon had immediately dove in and was now swimming to the bank. Within a minute he started climbing the rocks and dashed towards the fallen creature. His soaked camouflage robes were now plainly visible. He drew his heavy dagger and sawed through the neck of the ugly elf-like creature. Within seconds the head was separated from the body.

Tonks and Harry landed as Jon dropped the head. It rolled a few feet along the stony bank. Tonks grimaced but wasted no time in untying the rope knot on the sack.

A little boy of about eight years old, dirty and bleeding from numerous scrapes, fought tooth and nail to get free from imprisonment and then against Tonks, who had to block numerous punches before the boy realized that he was rescued.

"We gotcha kiddo, it's ok. We're the good guys!" she declared. Harry made his way over to them. The child began to cry, but this time it was tears of relief and joy. He began to speak in rapid fire French, gesturing with his hands. "Can't understand you," she mimed; pointing to her ear and then shrugged. "We're going to get you out of here. Back home to Mama and papa. Come on," she beckoned. Jon was in the background, tossing the corpse and head into the same dirty sack the boy was captured in.

"Richard," the boy said slowly, pointing to himself.

"Harry, Jon, Tonks," she indicated her team.

"Bonjour, et merci boucoup!"

The three of them crouched down next to the boy, making sure he was ok. Harry was weak with relief. Jon offered Harry his fist, who connected without even breaking eye contact with the lad. Tonks was running basic diagnostic spells on the boy.

"He needs sleep, and a calming draught. His heart rate is sky high."

"Richard," Jon commanded. "Stand up, and take deep breaths." Jon did the same thing. "You are free. The Diablo is no more." He offered the boy his hand to shake. "I'm Jon Black. We are from the hunter's guild in London. We are called the Crow's Vambrace."


"Let's get him home," Tonks said, smiling from ear to ear. "Jon, don't let the corpse touch you. Just make sure and use the gloves to deal with it."

"This aspect, I was prepared for. But thank you for your consideration, milady," Jon bowed his head.
in thanks.

"We did it. Thank god," Harry let out a deep breath.

Jon laughed as he tied the sack to the back of his broom. "No, Harry. You forget already."

"What?" Harry said as Tonks helped the boy sit in front of her on the broomstick.

"You underestimate your own ability. God had no part in this. This is what Immortal Heroes do for fun, remember?" Jon said over his shoulder as he kicked off. Harry took one last look at the fresh, bloodstained bank and the big cauldron of soup bubbling merrily. Minutes away from tragedy.

"Yeah. I guess you're right," Harry agreed, talking to himself. He let out a deep breath as he mounted his own broomstick and set off after his comrades.

Harry checked the magical sundial on his broom compass.

It was only ten minutes past eight.
The main street of the magical district of Salles was deserted. All the roadside shops were closed, the homes above them windows were closed shut. The trio had hidden their brooms on the outskirts of the town and walked in. Jon was undercover, his dried camouflage gear keeping him invisible as he scouted ahead. Tonks, Richard and Harry were walking along the middle of the dusty, cobbled stone street.

"Creepy," Tonks noted, her wand still held in her hand. Richard was walking with heavy steps, exhausted and weak from his ordeal.

"Eglise," he said again, then pointed further down the road. Harry and Tonks nodded, not having a clue what that meant. After five minutes, there were sounds of running footsteps accompanied by little patches of dust on the cobbled stones.

"Everybody is there. At the worship hall. Their holy man is saying prayers, and a vigil is being kept," Jon puffed.

"Good. You think there would be trouble?" Harry asked, talking broadly to the open. Jon removed his mask and brought back his cowl.

"No, most probably the opposite. We would be welcomed heartily with the rescue of this boy," Jon reasoned. "However, we are still on mission. Be wary of surprises."

Richard's eyes were awestruck with the appearance of Jon's face out of midair.

"Let's not keep them waiting, shall we?" Tonks said, walking on. Another five minutes of walking, and they were outside the main yard to the church.

"I will remain hidden," Jon said. "As a precaution." He pulled up his hood and mask and vanished. "Stay frosty, Crows."

Tonks Harry and Richard walked up the steps and through the main double doors. They halted at the entrance, the sun shining down on their backs and casting long shadows. Harry's white robes with golden trim reflected the sunlight, creating a glowing effect around his silhouette. The priest stopped his sermon abruptly, his jaw dropping.

"He has heard our prayers! The Light of the World has shown favour upon us! Richard has been brought back!" The priest declared in French.

The congregation, as one, turned in their seats to look back at the entrance. The cumulative effect of
their faces contorting with astonishment and disbelief was disturbing to Harry. A middle aged couple and two girls sprung up from the front pew. Richard swayed, his feet barely holding him up. The two girls were the first to reach him, both of them taking him in massive group hug.

"Richard!" they screamed. The parents were not too far behind, the mother breaking down again before she got six feet close. Her face was red with crying before, now her tears shone in the morning light with joy.

"My god," she whispered, touching her son's face and taking him in her arms. She fell to her knees, hugging him fiercely. "Thank you," she kissed Richard on both cheeks. The father, Mr. Rabiot was frozen still, watching Harry and Tonks with awe.

"An owl came. Said a team was on its way. I could not believe it. No one has come before... when the others...were taken." He explained in English. "From the past incidents, the most I had hoped was for..." his voice hitched with unshed tears. "A proper goodbye," he choked.

"But you brought him back," he declared, still stunned. His eyes bored into Harry's. He offered his hand. Harry took it to shake, but instead of shaking it, Mr. Rabiot took it in both hands and fell to his knees.

"The Wizard of the Light has come, Alize," he said to his wife and family, tears flowing freely now. Harry felt awkward, seeing as his hand was held in a firm grip. "His robes shine with the sun," he said in amazement. "He has brought Hope, and Light, into this cursed town. He has brought Richard back to us. Come girls," he got back up to his feet. "My name is Robert. Come meet my family, oh ..I didn't catch your name.. Mr.?"

"H-" Harry began to respond.

"Hallow," Tonks interjected for him quickly. "Mr. Hallow," Tonks smiled. "I'm Ms. Dora, pleased to meet you."

The priest had finally reached the emotional scene, his flock piling out the pews behind him. The crowd remained a respectful distance behind Father. The priest faltered in his stride, slowing to a tentative halt.

"Is it correct what I have heard," his English was cautious, measured. "Hallow be thy name?"

Harry was feeling very uncomfortable. "Yes," he agreed, nodding. "Go- Roderick Hallow, pleased to meet all of you," he corrected. He gave a short nod, scanning the crowd, stalling. "This is my associate," he watched Tonks' hair, "Red Dora, and another one of us is here, but he his keeping watch." He scanned the walls hoping Jon got the hint.

"His name is Mr. Black," he announced loudly.

As if on cue, Jon appeared from behind the congregation, totally wrapped in his black cloak from his neck down.

"Ah, there he is," Harry pointed behind the priest and the churchgoers. "Please let him through."

"It's Lord Black!" one of the girls said in the crowd. The crowd parted to let him pass. Even though Jon wasn't that tall, his black cloak and impassive expression was intimidating. Maybe the fact that he also held a longbow in his hand was also a bit alarming to the people.

Alize and her two daughters came forward to the trio. Robert had a sleeping Richard hitched on his hip.
"Miracles still happen," she said in a very heavily accented English. "I am Alize, these are my daughters Rylai and Ramelie." The elder girl was about seventeen, the other was probably two or three years younger. Harry would have thought them pretty if it weren't for the tear streaked and puffy eyes from the crying.

"Pleased to meet you," he nodded with a slight bow. The two of them stared, still sniffing from their tears, now tears of relief and joy. The girls came up one at a time, and laid feather-light cheek kisses on all three of them.

"Merci," they said while touching each of their hands with both of theirs.

"You're welcome," Tonks said warmly to the family, her eyes wet with emotion. Jon bowed his head in acknowledgment.

"It is truly a miracle that the wizard in White, a wizard in Black, and the Red witch would save our son. Did you, by chance... ?" Robert asked.

"It is no more. We have made sure of it," Jon nodded in finality.

"The curse has been lifted!" the priest declared, raising his arms in thanks. There was a loud Amen and a round of applause. "You have been a blessing to our small community. I am sure you are weary from your grim task. Please feel free to freshen up at... umm.." the priest spotted a face in the crowd and beckoned him closer. "This is Mr. Thomas, he has a lovely bed and breakfast establishment suitable for visitors. We must take Richard to the local healer to make sure he is healthy, and whole," the priest acknowledged.

"Thank you. We would like to send word to Beauxbatons as well," Harry said. Mr. Thomas came forward offering his hand to Harry.

"Bonjour. Jean Thomas, follow me, please. I will escort you to my hotel, I hope it will be to your liking," he smiled. "We would summon an owl for you there." The three of them said their farewells to the family and followed Mr. Thomas out into the street. A few more minutes of walking they took a left off the main street and eventually they came up to a beautiful gardened property. From the charming wrought iron front gates there was a straight walkway leading to a medium sized four storied chateau. Jon paused at the gate, watching the surroundings. He whispered in Harry's ear, who nodded. He turned to their host.

"Pardon me, Mr. Thomas, I must retrieve goods we have left and return shortly. Let your man know to expect me in maybe ten minutes time."

"Of course, Mr. Black. I will see that it is done."

"Nice place," Tonks smiled, admiring the well kept hedges and gazebos dotting the beautiful garden.

"Yes, thank you," Jean acknowledged. "It has been in my family for a long time," he explained. They walked up the driveway and into the grand front door between the classic style French pillars. He drew a wand and tapped the front door. Harry didn't expect him to be a wizard. Jean opened the door and allowed them inside.

"Please," he offered. "Have a seat while I have my people prepare your rooms. Would you like some tea while you wait?"

"Sure," Harry said, taking a seat in the grand lobby in front of an ornate coffee table.

"Thank you," Tonks said as she sat next to Harry on the loveseat. The furniture was arranged such
that they would have been too far away if she took one of the armchairs. Mr. Thomas smiled, made a small bow, and turned into a doorway behind the greeting counter.

"What did Jon tell you?" Tonks said softly, leaning close to Harry. Harry was watching everything about the place.

"He is bringing the broomsticks and the diablo. Stay alert," said Harry, his wand hidden up his loose sleeves.

Tonks nodded. She leaned back on the loveseat draping her arm on the top of backrest. She crossed her legs towards him, bouncing her ankle.

" 'Red' Dora, huh?" Tonks laughed. "I like it." Her hair grew longer, the red turning more brilliant. She leaned in on him, her chest touching his elbow. "You, of all people, can't go around announcing who you are to strangers," she warned, speaking low in his ear. "That's careless. We need to decide on code names. Aliases."

"Agreed. I wasn't thinking," said Harry, his neck tingling with her proximity. She smelled of her sweat, and the dusty earth. He was probably also sweaty and dirty from this morning's long flight and walk. Her warmth on his arm felt amazing.

"Ah," he acknowledged. A mature woman was bringing a serving tray with tea, and biscuits.

"Bonjour," she greeted with a smile "My name is Rosie," she said simply in English. "I will prepare breakfast for you. It will be brought to your rooms, or you may come back down in the dining hall if you wish, after you have been settled in, of course." She placed the tea service on the coffee table in front of them. "If there is anything else Mr. and Mrs. ...?"

Tonks smiled and shook her head. "I'm Red and this is Mr. Hallow," she offered. "And thank you, this is fine."

"You are welcome. I believe Mr. Thomas will let you know when your rooms are ready. And I am to expect the Black Wizard as well, non?"

"Yes," Harry nodded. "He will be in shortly." She nodded and arranged the cups and spoons just so on the table.

"There is a desk over there with writing supplies. The owl will be sent down shortly for your use," she indicated a writing desk near to a set of lovely French windows opening to a patio outside. "Please, call if you need anything. I will be in the kitchen down the hall." She nodded with a slight curtsey, and turned into the hallway.

Tonks, just sat there, her head propped on her hand, staring at the side of Harry's face with an amused expression.

"You didn't tell me your wand wasn't fully compatible with you," she stated.

"I didn't? Must have slipped my mind..." Harry said, embarrassed at the horrible fib. He smiled, still slouched against the loveseat, scrutinizing the tea set on the table. It seemed familiar, somehow. Tonks' close presence was distracting him.

"Must have.. eh?" Tonks repeated. She said in a low, soft whisper in his ear. "You are insane, you know that, Harry Potter? You are doing things that no young wizard would attempt to do, even with a matched wand. Yet here you are," she waved her free hand. "In a grand chateau in France sipping tea."
"Well, I haven't actually drunk any yet," Harry said, stretching forward to serve, breaking contact with her. She immediately put her palm flat on his chest and pulled him back to where he was against couch.

"Oh no you don't..." she reinforced, putting more of her weight on his side. "I am talking to you. And we are not eating or drinking anything here, especially from a wizard home. You might be crazy, but I am still older and still looking out for us. All of us."

Harry grunted. She was probably right, anyway.

"What is up with you two?" she hissed in his ear. "You two are the bravest, hardest wizards I have met who aren't even legal to drink. Hell, even harder than some who are."

Harry shrugged. "I don't know. We got through, didn't we?" Harry challenged.

"Jon is a trained combatant," Tonks said softly. "You are supposedly a fabled boy hero, who is a legit hero in reality." She watched his face with a fond expression. "Almost as if you are living beyond expectations. Something is up. Spill it."

Harry thought a second. He wanted to explain to her why they were doing what they were doing, yet still not tip her off to the full truth. He needed to get pointers from Dumbledore on this aspect of magic. Harry was not one to bend the truth out of habit. He now came to realization that the Old man had merit for his reasons. Harry frowned as that earned Dumbledore a newfound grudging respect. He sighed.

"I need a proper wand. So does Jon. Ollivander can't fix mine, so he gave both of us a project to acquire components to build them ourselves, and bracers to match. Only fitting that his new apprentices should design their own."

"Ollivander has put a lot of faith in you. I didn't expect him to think you guys would succeed with those," she indicated his wand arm.

"I'll manage," Harry said. "We also found something interesting with this. Spells that connect with me seems to I dunno, be recorded by this wand. My gut tells me getting it to fully work is not so easy though."

"Why?" said Tonks. "What you mean?"

"I am guessing that if the caster knew that his spell would be able to 'unlock' it on this wand, the magic won't work. It needs to be done unwittingly, and not like a training exercise. Like, it actually needs to be used on me, not tested out."

"A copying wand?" Tonks said, her eyebrows shooting up.

"Ollivander may be many things, but he doesn't make crap. He said this wand was useful for wizards who were having a hard time with casting their magic. Also, the lumos and winguardium class of spells were excellent. Ever heard the school expression, 'Dumb as a troll'?" Harry chuckled. "This is made from troll hair and holly. The books we're studying gives some history to the uses and compatibility charts of different combinations. Holly supposed to ward against or capture evil spirits. Trolls are dumb, but can be trained with the right methods. Also the hair growing charm is pretty good too. Probably due to the fact that trolls are right awful hairy. Light, be it from the sun, or spell class *Lumos*, on a whole, cast good defense against evil creatures and dark magic. Some cultures link Holly to the Sun, and Lightning. I think it might be closer to lightning since another Holly wand gave me this," he pointed to his forehead. "Trolls can be trained to learn new stuff, but usually
through force. Kinda like how this wand works."

"Wow. Okay so you guys are learning," she nodded in agreement. "At the church ... I caught a bit of what the priest was saying ...my French isn't great, but he did say something that roughly means 'Lord of the Light'." She smiled. Harry realized that her whispers had them very close and her eyes were twinkling. "The sun did give you a bit of oomph!" she made a fist, "for your entrance. You surely made an impression in those white robes."

"Yes. He fits the tales of a White Wizard extraordinaire," came a voice. Tonks jumped away from Harry. Harry noticed that one of the French doors was open.

"Jon," Harry grumbled, peeved at the interruption. "You could have used the front door." Jon pulled back his hood, and only his eyes and forehead were visible.

"We must leave. Let us be on our way to Beauxbatons; quickly! We can complete our business there," Jon warned. He looked down at the still dry cups of the tea set. "Good, you have not drunk from this, correct?"

"No," Harry said, confused. Tonks was immediately on her feet, wand drawn, stepping towards the exit. She peered outside, then scanned the halls for any sort of threat. "What's up?"

Jon beckoned him outside. The three of them made their way out into the garden. Jon had their brooms and the sack against the wall.

"I recognized the symbols and metalwork on the front gates and along the fence. It is the same design as Mr. Malfoy's cane. Look," Jon pointed to the decorative metalwork on top of a gazebo. Harry had to squint, but he did see the etching of a serpent with fangs bared engraved into the design. "Look at the emblem on the tea set," Jon indicated. "It is similar to their family crest pattern on his cloak."

Harry's face turned a deathly calm.

"They... he couldn't be behind these Diablo attacks... could they?" Harry whispered, anger pooling inside of him.

"I am not versed in investigations. They could be innocent. However we must leave, and make haste." Harry did not move, his body tense as he drew his wand, looking up at the four storey building.

Tonks yanked him by the back of robes, almost making him fall on his back. "Come," she commanded. "Now is not the time to be the War Mage version of a White wizard. We need more information about these people before you even think about starting a war between France and us. Get on your broom, let's leave!"

Harry nodded and all three mounted, making their escape and flying south towards Beauxbatons.

The trip took only fifteen minutes. Harry followed behind Tonks, flying on autopilot. What he was really concerned about was the Rabiot family. Would they need to go back and check in on them? Was Mr. Thomas' household dabbling in Dark Magic? Were the Rabiotics magical? Someone had recognized Jon in the church when they called out his title. The Daily Prophet might have subscribers here. He needed to find out if all those people were magical or was it a few people alone had the gift.

Jon was right. Until the mission was finished, they were not to drop their guard.

The sun was beating down on them in the mid morning summer heat. They landed near to the front
main doors of the artistic, beautiful castle with fairy tale spires and grand circular towers. The sun gleamed off the pearl white walls and shone off the stained glass of the windows of what Harry guessed was their main hall.

"Excanduscent!" Tonks said, pointing her wand upward towards the sky. A red flare of magic shot up, then exploded in a pretty cascading shower of magic. The effect should be visible to anyone who had a window.

"Nice," Harry said. "Now what?"

"Now we wait for someone to let us in."

"Okay." Harry agreed, looking around for Jon. Jon was nowhere to be found. "Jon?" he called.

"Right here," he said, waving his wand.

"Okay, gotcha." Harry thought he was paranoid before, but Jon didn't care how suspicious he came across. Harry was happy for it though. That tea could have been poisoned, or fatal. He was at that moment completely grateful to both of them for being a team.

A window above opened and a loud voice rang out.

"Bonjour? Qui est là?"

"Hullo!" Tonks shouted stepping back so she could see the person speaking out the window.

"We're here to see the Defense Instructor!" Harry shouted up, joining Tonks so he could see.

"Defense?" came the response in English. "You the British Hunter Clan?"

"Yes!" he replied.

"Here, so soon?" came the reply.

"Yes!"

"You wish to see the Defense Teacher?" another shout.

"Yes!"

"Out! Wait a few minutes we shall come!" the window closed.

Harry shrugged at Tonks, and once again they stood in front the doors. Before long, the right side creaked open and a beautiful woman stepped forwards, dressed in dark, heavy, monk-type robes.

"Hello," she said. "Please come in."

Tonks stepped forward, but Harry stopped her.

"Hello, we are the Crow's Vambrace from London. If you don't mind me asking, might we get your name?"

"So sorry, I am Valerie Valmont. I am the caretaker here."

Harry was pleasantly surprised that the Beauxbatons' caretaker was so pretty. Filch really brainwashed him into what a school caretaker would look like.
"I am Roderick Hallow, this is Red Dora, and Mr. Black is hidden. Black, you can come out," Harry said, holding up Jon's cloak. The cloak wrapped around a figure and Jon pulled back his camo hood, and pulled down the mask.

"We are here to see the Defense teacher. We have clan business with him," Jon said.

"Yes he is on his way down. Would you come in?"

"Until he meets us, we prefer to wait outside, if it pleases you," Jon said, eyes cold.

"Very well," the lady said, looking at Jon. A couple minutes passed. There was an awkward silence where she actually blushed at Jon's penetrating stare. She cleared her throat. "I will go fetch him, he was up late in the town last night, and is having a bit of a lie in. He should be here any moment, ah..."

The door opened wider and a man came out, his robes hastily put on. "Yes, these are the clan wizards?" he asked abruptly, watching their faces.

"Yes," Jon replied. "And you are the defense against dark magic instructor here?"

"Yes," he responded. Jon stared at the man.

"I'm not so sure. Can you prove it?" Jon challenged. Harry and Tonks kept a straight face, even though inside they were squirming with how aggressive Jon's attitude was.

"Hm. How do you suggest I prove it?" he inquired with a tilt to his head.

"Answer a couple defense related questions," Jon proposed, clasping his hands calmly behind his back. Harry now had second thoughts. Jon seemed quite sure of antagonizing this wizard. Valerie looked between the two parties, her hands wringing.

"Very well, garcon," he said, folding his arms.

"How would one find, and nullify a Diablo?" Jon asked.

The man did not move, but his arms tensed. Tonks and Harry drew their wands in plain view, holding it loosely at their sides. Valerie stepped a bit behind the man. The man noticed the aggressive gesture, but did not reach for his.

"Follow its tracks," the man said. "Then a blasting curse should do it."

"And why would a teacher of defense need a clan to do this work if it were so simple?" Jon asked.

"In fact, why couldn't any moderately trained wizard do this?"

"I am not paid to...

"You are not...paid?" Harry cut him off. "You are paid to pass on the art of defense! You should be..." Harry seethed until Tonks put restraining hand on his wand arm.

"What is your name?" Jon asked simply.

"I am Professor Allemons," he said.

"Magic blasts are not effective against the Diablo," Jon calmly stated. "It also leaves no tracks."

"Oh? Says who?"
"Says true nemeses of the dark arts," Jon proclaimed as he picked up the sack with his gloved hand, and emptied out the contents. Both Valerie and the man looked stunned at the appearance of the decapitated head of the ugly creature. Allemons dug into his robes, reaching for his wand.

Jon slashed his wand in a swift, final stroke. The man slumped, falling asleep immediately. Valerie cried out, trying to shut the door but Tonks kicked it back in and had her wrapped in the manacles charm immediately. She began to scream, kicking on the floor with chained ankles and wrists.

Jon walked up to her with powerful strides, drawing his heavy dagger. He held it to her cheek. "This dagger has cut through that creature's neck like soft cheese. Who are you, and where are the persons you hold captive?"

Her screams quieted as the blade was held close to her eye. "Mercy," she whimpered, crying. "Mercy!"

"Speak," he commanded, pressing it against her beautiful face. He began to apply pressure to the bone underneath her eye socket. She struggled to keep her head away from his grip on her hair.

"My name is.. is..Blake Wellman- Castor. That is Gordon Castor, my husband. They are in the cellar, keys are in my pocket," she said, her eyes burning bright with tears. Jon took out the keys.

"I do hope Master Ollivander comes in time to awaken you both," Jon waved his wand in her face and she fell asleep.

Harry had his hair in his hands.

"Well, that escalated quickly," he said. He levitated Castor and the dead diablo inside the double doors and closed it behind them. "So, what happened there?" he asked Jon. Jon was sheathing his dagger and removing his cloak.

"Those robes did not fit that woman, and her hands were extremely smooth and unblemished. What sort of defense professional would allow the pretty caretaker to open the front door to strangers who suddenly appear when there is a crisis nearby. And if he was at the town last night as she proclaimed, he should still be there maintaining vigil until reinforcements or some sort of update had arrived. Untrustworthy to the last," Jon spat.

"Manacle them both, Milady," Jon said. "To an steadfast object. We do not know if they have allies inside the castle." As she did this, Jon strung up the longbow once again. "Harry, you may need to use this. You are to take a rearguard role and protect our backs. I will be point and mistress Tonks would be our main spell caster in the middle. Tonks use your homing beacon spell on me so that you know where I am at all times. Maintain five paces between us. Let's rescue these people and be out of here as soon as we can. This mission has gone beyond the initial call of duty."

Jon made his way down the cellars, a tiny red blip flashing periodically. He began checking the doorways in the basement, some leading to food storage vaults, others leading to storerooms filled with school chairs, desks and other maintenance items. Some doors led to valves for the castle such as plumbing and fresh water pipes. They made their way steadily, cautiously, checking behinds crates and shelves for signs of the prisoners. At the end of the longest hallway they came upon what appeared to be a dungeon type door. Jon stopped, crouching fifty feet away from the door. He whispered to Tonks. "Can you cast the global reveal spell, without making a sound."

"Yeah," she nodded. She did so and three red outlines reflected back from the doorway. The reaction was immediate.
"Help!" a voice cried in French. "In here!" The voice sounded exactly like Allemons'.

"Each of you speak your names!" Tonks called back.

"Aloysius Allemons!" said one. "Defense teacher!"

"Paige Poulsen!" cried another female voice. "Healer!"

"Valerie Valmont!" an identical voice as the woman upstairs said. "Deputy headmistress!"

"We are coming to get you out," Tonks said. "We are a Clan from London, we caught the two upstairs. Are there any others?"

"None that we know of," Allemons replied.

"We got the keys," Jon said, inserting it.

"No!" Allemons said. "The dungeon keys are enchanted to only be opened by staff. Anyone can lock it, but only staff can open it. It will petrify the key holder until the remedy is used."

"Very good," Jon said. "This person sounds like a true defense instructor," he whispered to the rest of them. "How are we to get you out?"

"Oil the hinges with a lubrication spell. Then aim a cutting charm on bottom of the door. Finally Lumos through the keyhole is the combination of spells that would remove the hex on the lock. Then the key would work."

Tonks did as instructed then opened the door using the key. The three staff members hastily exited and greeted them.

"Thank you for your speedy response. They came shortly after we sent the post. I don't know what they wanted, but when they took our hair I knew it was for the poly-juice potion." Deputy Headmistress Valmont explained. "And who are you?"

"We are the Crows' Vambrace," Tonks said. "I'm Red, this' Hallow, and he's Black." Tonks pointed, but Jon was nowhere to be seen. "He's incognito. But he's around," Tonks shrugged.

"I have a counter potion for the polyjuice," Allemons said in a thick heavy accent. "Where are they?" he began running down the long corridor.

"Front hall. Manacled," Harry responded. "We got back Richard as well. He's home with his folks."

Allemons stopped suddenly. "Quoi? Deja?" he barked. "Already?!" he beamed a big smile. "That's a lie! He is alive and well! Fantastic! Who are you guys?"

"Crows' Vambrace," Harry repeated. "Let's round up those two then we can talk business."

Thirty minutes later Madame Maxine and two French Aurors were at Beauxbatons. The two imposters were processed and escorted out of the school by the authorities, their heads covered with black sacks. The Aurors notified them that they were low ranking but noted pure-blood radicals associated with Grindelwald's legacy of hidden followers. The trio was now seated in Madam Maxine's large and airy office. They were discussing the events at the castle.

"Organisation informally known as 'Purificateur de Sang'. It's a seedy network designed to intimidate and force new-bloods and non-pure magical families out of historically strong magical locations. Only new-bloods were targeted in Salles, Richard and his sisters are all magical, but the
parents are not. It is a shame. They don't understand that the Ancient magical families are disgusted by these tactics and have also left some of these towns." Madame Maxine explained in her study. "Both Rylai and Ramellie are my students. We hope to get Richard in a couple years, who seems the most promising of the group, but I fear now that Dumbledore would swoop down and snatch him, as he usually does with gifted wizards."

Tonks grinned. "And what makes you think that?"

"Being rescued by The Boy Who Lived and Lord Black may have some influence on him," she said, watching the two boys. "Knowing Albus, he would definitely use that to his advantage."

"You know who I am?" Harry asked.

"Oh yes. As part of the Council of International Mugwumps, I am informed of particular children who have been directly affected by war, or family that was attacked by notorious criminals. Which is why your presence is even a bigger mystery," Madam Maxine probed, watching Jon.

Jon tilted his head upwards, acknowledging the headmistress' statement but not having anything to say in reply.

"Your clan association and identity would be our little secret Harry... of, House Hollow, was it that you said Jon?" she teased him. Jon bowed slightly. "Exceptionally good work here. There will be a bonus accredited to your guild account on top of the fine work you have accomplished regarding le Diable. The rescue of our staff was timely, and rather fortuitous, for them. I'm sure they would not mind throwing in a little extra in the pot."

Madame Maxine checked the Hunter's Almanac and Trade request parchment initially drawn up. She placed her spectacles on her nose.

"So. Here is the remuneration list:

"Core request: Retrieval 'Alive and well' check. That is two thousand. A paltry sum in truth, but that is only because this feat has not been achieved in so long. No child in recent history has been brought back alive. It seems almost as an afterthought considering the rate of successful recovery. Truly a shame this is the agreed upon payment. You have definitely changed the game, Crows." She stamped that request.

"Core request: Diablo slain and proof of death. Twenty Five thousand. You say you would be transporting the corpse back to England. I will offer you a fine price if you change your mind. No?"

Harry shook his head. She tut-tutted and stamped that line.

"MLE Bonus: Auror's bounty of fifteen thousand each for the capture of the Castor siblings. Thirty thousand." Another stamp of approval.

"Siblings?" Tonks said. "I thought they were married?"

"And so they are, now; that is. Blake borrowed her mother's names to sort of hide the fact. Her birth name was Genevieve Castor."

Jon and Harry looked disgusted. Tonks frowned.

"Professional Bonus: No Collateral Damage. No Breach of Wizard Secrecy. No violent altercation with rival clans or locals. Four thousand each." Three stamps followed.
"Special Bonus: Professional Services to Beauxbatons School of Magic. Rescue of staff and non-disclosure of breach of security- Twelve thousand. This special bonus can be retracted if the Guild leaks information of the attack into the public sphere. This bond of secrecy is to be upheld for up to one year and can be reversed through Gringotts transfer if breached." She took out a different stamp and pressed on that line. "Quite a haul, Ms Tonks. You should be proud of your lads. You look quite young to be a huntress of such caliber, and to have recruited these two? You must be something special."

"Ammm yes, thank you, headmistress," Tonks bowed her head, blushing.

"Grand total: Eighty One thousand galleons. Professional execution rank S Class. Guild commission Eight thousand one hundred galleons. Clan allocation Seventy two thousand, nine hundred." She made six copies of this document. "One for each of you personally, and take the copy to both your guild representative and Gringotts for confirmation of your pay. These funds would be in your vault but only verified for use when you submit these documents."

Tonks, Harry and Jon read through the list and the sums of money involved. Harry glanced at Tonks, who looked pale, as if she wanted to faint.

"You ok?" he asked, concerned.

"That means...twenty four thousand..plus..each," she whispered. "Wow," she breathed.

Madame Maxine stood up, her giantess frame dwarfing the room around her. The trio stood up as well, hands at their side at attention.

"You should be commended for your speed and accuracy," the headmistress said. "Too bad we can't reward you for that. Your Clan name would definitely get a boost after this." She drew her wand, and made a X shape with her arms across her chest in a salute. Her wand pointed to the ceiling at the side of her face.

"Victory belongs to the Crow's Vambrace. Glory to the Guild," she announced, smiling. "I hope to not need you for future tasks, but I will call upon you if I do."

"Glory to the guild," both Harry and Jon replied, returning the salute. Tonks quickly did the same.

"If you need any more assistance for your travel back to London, please check with Madame Valmont. I am needed at the French Ministry of Magical Law Enforcement to see about the Castors."

Tonks smiled. "Thank you. I think we all definitely need a bath!"

"And some food," Harry said with a laugh. Madame Maxine stepped around her desk and opened her office door.

"Of course. Feel free. Madame Valmont would be happy to attend," she said. "Thank you once again, young lady. And to you too, lads."

Jon bowed and the others said their thanks. On the way down to meet the deputy headmistress Jon spoke up. "We need to check back with Salles as soon as we can. Mr. Ollivander should still be meeting us there."

"We need to warn him. I wonder if we could send a message to the Calais port about Jean Thomas," said Harry.
"He seemed confident of this mission. I believe either he already knows about them, or has other means of short term abode in the town. We will still send it, just in case."

"Come on. We'll deal with them afterwards," Tonks grumbled. Harry and Jon did not tell her about the entire dream. "Let me get clean first. And some breakfast."

"An army marches on its stomach," Jon agreed. 

"And Gold wins wars," Harry finished, looking at the remuneration list.

No wonder warriors risk their lives to do this work. Jon's performance was outstanding. They may have fallen into two traps if it weren't for him. Greyback was right. This job wasn't playing around.

No second chances if you messed up, as both he and Tonks nearly did with their trusting nature.
THE CURSE OF ESTAGAL PT. I

Chapter Summary

The Crew heads over to the next town to eradicate a nogtail infestation. However things are never so easy...

Tonks was uncharacteristically pensive on the flight back to Salles. The trio had chance to freshen up, eat, and have their robes cleaned before leaving Beauxbatons.

When they landed outside the local bed and breakfast cafe on the main street to meet Mr. Ollivander, Harry tapped her on her shoulder.

Tonks looked at him. "Hmm? What?"

"You ok?" Harry asked. Tonks nodded, her expression hard to figure out.

"Yeah, this is just a big eye opener, that's all," she said as she hid all of the brooms and the dirty sack under notice me not charms.

"Eye opener?"

"Yup. This job is serious business. And even though the rewards for this risk may seem worth it, money can't help you when somebody draws a wand on your back or kills you while sipping your tea."

Harry never thought about these things before, and it didn't seem to bother him now. He found it hard to contemplate not being in danger, or facing it head on when necessary. Harry looked at her, nodding in agreement.

"Can't be more dangerous than Auror work."

"I don't know. It could be. Or maybe at the same level. With the Auror job, you actively investigate wizards who are wanted for a crime... it gives you a focused purpose. This job the threat could come from anywhere, anytime. It's much more ...random shall we say. Which makes it vastly more dangerous, in my opinion."

"You having second thoughts?" he asked as they stepped into the charming eatery on the ground floor of the two storey building.

"I don't know," Tonks admitted truthfully. "There he is."

Jon came in last, watching the two other occupants in the place having a mid morning snack and tea. Mr. Ollivander rose up from his table and approached.

"Morning, lads. Miss Tonks," he greeted with a nod. The three of them returned the greeting. "Paul here has told me that the clan from London saved the boy. Very, very commendable of you three," he said in a low voice. "I am happy for him and his family. It is not easy, losing a young one," Mr. Ollivander said sadly. "You kept the body, correct?" he ventured.
"Yes," Jon confirmed. Ollivander indicated that they should all sit in the booth. He took out a map of France. On it were circled areas connected by a straight line.

"Good. I have news of a farm infestation of the wild bog boar probably only half an hour flight from this town." He indicated one of the circled areas. "It's called Estagal, closer to the eastern side of south France. I sent a few owls since I made that list for you lads," Mr. Ollivander pulled his beard. "The Hunter Clan The Reaper's Scythe has abandoned that job because the village where the farm is didn't have the required down payment. Now the infestation has gotten bigger and they are desperate. The Reaper's clan are pretty well known for routine Magical Creature jobs which is why they can call their high price. That was a couple of months ago."

"So that's where we come in, right?"

"Yes. Also the Elfen bat can also be found in that region. We can use some of the wild bog boar carcasses to lure a few out their cave at night. They are mainly scavengers."

"Sounds good," Jon said, clasping his hands under his chin. "Before you continue, I am curious. How did you know about the Diablo?"

"I've got my ears to the ground, son. I've heard tidbits of news, whispers from clients and acquaintances, of dark practices on the rise in southern France. The regular disappearances of these children, it reminded me of when I was young and Grindelwald was recruiting. I hate to say it, but these times are frighteningly similar to those days during the great second war."

Jon looked across to Harry. Harry remained silent, listening to the old man's tale.

"There were rumours of two other children being lost previously in this southern region," Jon said.

"Richard was the third, according to the guildsman, Greyback," Harry said.

"Greyback yes. Be wary of him. He has connections on the good, and not so good side of things. I hear he works hard for the guild and the clans generally like him, but don't cross him personally."

Mr. Ollivander frowned.

"If a Diablo isn't dealt with, the haunted nightmares of the village manifest into Erlkings... dwarf type creatures that fester in phantom form, growing in hate. They then become lesser demons, who haunt children's closets and slip into their nightmares. They lure children to sleepwalk out of the safety of their homes, then become corporeal and snatch them away. Usually, the children manage to wake up and escape on their own, especially if they are strong magically. Magical parents are also sensitive to the kidnapping of their children from the family home, and intervene before they are able to wander off into remote areas or forests where the Erlkings magic is strongest. Over generations, they gain strength and manifest into their 'adult form'. These are what are referred to as Diablos."

"Diablos are more powerful and may physically take the child away from their homes, regardless of protections left by the parents. They are more common in Spain, which is why the creature is called Diablo and not le Diable."

"And to kill or capture it- what would you have advised us to do?" Jon asked. Mr. Ollivander nodded.

"Tracking hounds are very good at smelling out the dark magic tainting the child. If you give them clothing which has the child's scent, these dogs could hunt down the child, which would lead hunters to the vile creature. Silencio must be cast on the dogs, so that the barking does not alert it. The Diablo is quite impish and have powerful magical spells if confronted. A muggle rifle is the best way to
defeat it, it is extremely vulnerable to their non magical weapons."

"It would have been too late to save the boy if we had gone by the original plan," Tonks said angrily, looking at Ollivander then glancing towards Harry.

"Greyback told us that they feed on the children. He knows his stuff, this one had a massive cauldron cooking soup. Probably going to have Richard as his main course. We had to be fast," Harry's eyes did not leave Ollivander's for the whole conversation.

Jon clasped Harry's shoulder in commendation. "He convinced us to rescue this boy immediately, which is why we did not meet you at the station. Our apologies, Master Ollivander," Jon said, his whole body relaxing.

"Oh no, no apologies are needed. Quite the opposite, in fact. He is quite remarkable in that way," Mr. Ollivander smiled. "Very persuasive, yes. You are a very resourceful team, you made it here and rescued the lad in record time. Indeed; he held true to the Wandsmith Guild's watchwords. You have lived the creed and Walked In the Light," he congratulated Harry, his expression proud as any father could be.

"Yeah I wondered about that," Harry said. "What does that mean?"

"All modern Masters earn their title through an impeccable reputation of living their life without taint of the Dark." He straightened his posture, steeping his fingers under his chin, just like Jon did earlier on the other side of the booth. "There were times of old, violent times, when weapons masters had no issues with dabbling in dark magic, infusing their craft with malice and subterfuge. It was probably the worst era of wizard kind. Evil magic practitioners were rampant and empowered with powerful weapons, designed to bring ruin and hatred. After the Goblin revolution, the International Council of Guilds and Trade was formed between the Japanese, Americans, Haitians, Brazilians, The Coalition of European nations, and the East African Shamans. These factions created rules to govern the creation of magical artifacts, weapons, and magical livestock breeding. Wandmakers, especially, were mandated to refrain from dark practices by Decree of the 1406 Fellowship Meeting of Master-Smiths. My ancestor actually chaired that meeting, I believe his name was Giroud Ollivander the 4th."

Ollivander paused, rubbing his beard and sipping his tea. "The Ollivander Family has never produced a dark wizard, never," he declared, looking at Jon. He glanced at Harry. "You shall Walk in the Light," he said, half proclamation, half direct order.

"Yes, Master Ollivander," the two boys chorused.

"Very good." Ollivander nodded. "Right. On to the next. We would need ... I believe one oak barrel of scotch. A white dog. Seven water skins made of pigskin. And a cage constructed out of iron. The cage ...we should be able to source on the farm itself. So," Ollivander dug inside his travel pouch and took out parchment and a never-out quill. "We find a pet shop along the way. We get the dog. We corral the wild bog boars out of the farms and capture them in the cage. This we suspend from a tree." He diagrammed the cage hanging from the tree with stick figure pigs in it. "We then funnel the scotch into the pigskin pouches and feed them in the cage. We place a wooden trough below the cage and capture the urine overnight. Euthanize the parasitic beasts, and use the bodies to lay a trap outside the bats' cave. Simple stunners or other non lethal spells to capture them, then remove at least four wings when they are still alive. That is the minimum required amount for our testing and final build. More than that is just gravy. We ship the urine in the Oak barrel and declare all our goods at the ICOP in France who would give us a scroll with sealed signatures to clear it in Dover. One day, and probably two nights, if all goes well."
"Sounds good," Jon said, cracking his knuckles.

"What's the catch? You make it sound easy," Tonks said.

"Cursed farm-folk can be dangerous. They may be fine one moment, then act erratically, or even attack the next. Usually a large clan is hired. They assemble the town folk in a large hall while they do the extermination of the nogtail or boar infestation. They keep watch over them and keep the peace until the curse is lifted."

"The Reaper's Scythe," Harry asked. "How much did they want and what are their numbers like?"

"I am not sure what their actual fees were, but the general going rate for Nogtail extermination in England is about sixty to a hundred galleons per creature. Depending on clan rank, the call out fee is usually two thousand to five thousand. The Reapers are probably rank B, with about fifteen members give or take. I believe one founding member, a couple administrative and legal, and probably different magical specialists in their field team. Fairly well known group."

"And the wings and urine are both restricted import. Why?" Jon asked.

"Nogtail urine is used in a ritual to animate the dead when stored in iron casks over five years in a place untouched by light. Dark, horrible creatures, Inferi. Corpses, risen from the dead, highly resistant to magic. Ghastly," Ollivander said softly. "It is the only known use of it other than magical tannery. And once the urine is stored in something else other than the Iron Casks, the dark potency is neutralized. Which is why it is still available on the market legally. The Bat Wings are integral when using Dragon hide and other magically impervious material to help shape and mold it into armors, gloves and so forth. France regularized the export of this valuable item to help keep the monopoly firmly in their control. The export taxation on Bat Wings are high, but worth it if you continue trading over time."

"Guys, you ok with the plan?" Harry asked. Jon and Tonks nodded. "Well, let's get to work on the stuff."

An hour later the four of them flew to a standstill over one of the cursed farms at Estagal. Suspended from Tonks’ broom was a massive dog-carrying case with their newest team member, Cloud. Cloud's box had a window where he could stick out his head and enjoy the flight, his long tongue flapping in the breeze. Jon still carried the dead Diablo in the sack under his Quicksilver. Harry carried the barrel full of scotch tied to his broom. The extra weight slowed the trio enough such that Ollivander's older broom kept pace easily.

"Cripes!" Harry exclaimed. There were corpses of cattle littered on the fields on the outskirts, crows and flies rampant on the decomposing bodies. There were ox carts pulling piles of dead cattle with farm hands urging them on towards what Harry presumed was a mass grave at the top of the hill.

"The curse has spread to the livestock already," Ollivander shouted over the wind.

"What exactly does the curse do?" Tonks shouted as they surveyed the work below.

"It drives the other farm animals mad over a period of time. It also kills the harvest if the boars stay too long. This looks to be a bad case!" Ollivander shouted.

"And the people?" Harry asked.

"They fall under despair," Ollivander replied. "Most can't understand what is happening; what is causing the failure of the farm. The boar hides itself to the locals. When they call for help outsiders can diagnose the problem and hire hunters to eradicate them."
"Madness you say?" Jon shouted. "Are they also prone to the curse?"

He pointed to a particular fellow who suddenly began rolling on the ground, screaming. Another ranch hand came riding across, his lasso swinging. Within a few seconds he had him roped up, hogtied his hands and legs, and hefted over the saddle. A small gathering of about four people came and talked to this man, while the tied fellow kept screaming and putting up a futile effort to free himself.

"Let's go talk to them," Harry said, determined to help. The party swooped down on broomstick so that they could talk to the Horseman from a safe distance.

"Ho there, Cowboy," Harry said. "We've come to help!"

The Cowboy looked up at them, blocking the sun with his hand. The group of people with him did the same.

"You sure this time?" the man countered. "Some others came a while back. And then left." He spat on the ground.

"We're not the Reapers," Harry said. "Is he ok?"

"He got the sickness," Cowboy shook his head. "If you aren't the Lying Scythes, who are you?"

"We're the Crows' Vambrace," Harry said simply. "We're going to help you," he reassured.

"Good news at long last," Cowboy grimaced. "Michael is the name. Michael MacMillan. Follow me. I'm taking him to the field hospital."

They followed him towards a large barn that had numerous people moving in and out and stalls set up outside. There were repair tents fixing carts, harnesses, saddles and the like. Some tents had men who were sharpening farm tools. Others were distribution sheds, with queues of people waiting patiently with hand held barrows and cart, collecting goods.

The crew landed a distance away and Mr. Ollivander and Tonks diligently got to work in concealing their stuff. Jon let out Cloud and put him on leash then handed him over to Tonks. Harry just stood there, watching the scene.

*Why do I get the feeling that this whole scenario has been plotted?*

Most of the people, even the children, were morose, and quick to quarrel. He also noticed that most of the people in authority here had wands.

"Jon," Harry said. "This is quite suspicious. Stay sharp."

"Always," Jon said. All four of them drew close. "I will stay hidden. Expect me to be behind the people you are talking to if there is a meeting. Secrets are usually whispered behind the main speaker by their advisors. That is where crucial information can be gleaned. Otherwise, I will be about ten feet to your left."

"Roger," he agreed as Jon went invisible. He turned to Mr. Ollivander. "My alias is Roderick Hallow. Red Dora. Mr. Black. What name do you want to be?"

"Hm... Mr. Grey would be fine for now," Ollivander said. "Let us get cracking. We should have the boars captured by before dark."
The meeting with MacMillan and the resident healer, a witch named Penelope Payet was short, and not as forthcoming as Harry had hoped. The inside of the barn had been converted to a field hospital, some patients were suffering wounds, others were restrained and in fitful sleeps. Penelope was a stern middle aged woman who said she had no time for long talk. She informed them that some of these were victims of random attacks from colleagues who simply snapped and swung at them with whatever was closest, and on a farm, that could mean life or death. The attackers usually went into a rage before collapsing, screaming until they went hoarse. She pointed to a few sleeping people who were strapped into their beds. A couple days of sleep after treating them with potion would usually set them back straight, but recently the remedy has stopped being sufficient and the madness would strike again. MacMillan was one of the few wizards who was helping restrain and transport sick people to the hospital.

Nobody trusted the local produce anymore so they sent certain people to other towns to bring water, foodstuff, supplies and necessities to this centralized location. Fencing material and lumber were hot sellers, seeing as people wanted to either protect their property from rampaging cattle or repair their carts for transporting animal corpses to the three main mass graves across the numerous farmsteads.

"At this rate, most of the townsfolk here would eventually leave, with or without their loved ones." She shook her head as she surveyed the twenty something patients she had in the barn. "This place is cursed," Penelope said. "I cannot talk much longer. I must go to my patients. Please do what you can and let us know how we can help. We don't have much, but our home is important to us, not everyone likes the idea of starting over, Mr. Grey."

"Understood," Ollivander said. "If you don't mind, we would like a metal cage, the larger the better, and please point us to the nearest swine enclosure. We will begin our work and remove the Wild Bog Boars."

"Follow me," Michael said. He got back on his horse and led them across a couple fields. These fields were peppered with crows, and workers loading corpses unto ox carts using pitch forks. Makeshift pulley contraptions were attached to the front of the carts, useful in lifting the heavy dead animals and piling them into the cart.

He pointed to an animal stable and enclosure at the end of this particular property. "This is the biggest swine house on the eight or so farms. If you want to crack this one first, we'd be much obliged. I'm going to get you your cage."

When he left, Jon revealed himself. "These people are taking it very hard. I have not detected any sort of duplicity amongst them, only fear and frustration."

"Aye," Ollivander said. "The infestation has set in too long. Everyone, please do not let the boar touch bare skin. Tonks, you and Cloud corral the ugly, long legged pigs with dark eyes into the outer enclosures. Kill the sow immediately after you chase the Boar off of it. The poor pig now lives only to feed the nasty creature. It may turn rabid before it dies. Better you end it quickly and save yourself from being attacked. Jon, put them to sleep as soon as Cloud chases them out of the pig pens. Harry you and I should go back and get our stuff and fly them back here. I do not like being left on foot here," he offered Harry his arm. "We'll be back," Ollivander said and they vanished.

The day was spent with Tonks and the gang rounding up the long legged pig creatures with the great Swiss Shepherd dog working diligently. Cloud was chasing them into the massive bull cage that Michael had brought for them.

Working amongst pigs and their nasty ways had erased any sort of hunger within the group. By the time four o'clock reached, Michael had brought even more cages due to the high number of parasites Cloud the Boar Hunter was finding. They had sourced more water skins and barrels of scotch to
facilitate the extra number of the nasty creatures. Five more cages were setup, each filled with eerily quiet Boars taking turns suckling on the scotch filled water skins. Various wooden troughs and containers were used to catch the urine underneath the full cages hanging from the trees.

Jon and Harry were digging a deep pit during the cooler portion of the afternoon away from the cage area where Tonks and Ollivander were working. Both young men were sweaty and bareback, using a combination of shovels and *Winguardium leviosa* to create a massive grave for the dead animals.

"This is what 'immortal heroes do for fun', huh?" Harry said to Jon. Jon grunted with laughter.

"Not everything is glorious and gold plated," Jon answered, digging the shovel in. "Even the unpleasant tasks must be done."

"Tell me about it," Harry said, his shovel scooping up another mound of dirt.

"Look at the bright side. No one is trying to kill us. And you are getting desperately needed exercise," Jon laughed, looking at Harry's scrawny arms. Harry shook his head, even though he agreed with him. His physique was pitiful. He paused, straightening his back in the pit that was almost their height.

"How is it I am not feeling hungry, even after all this work?" Harry said.

"Ask Master Ollivander. It seems even they have not mentioned food either."

"Nah, forget it. Let's just get this done. They have good reason to not want to eat. Those things are disgusting!" Harry sunk in his shovel and continued the rhythm.

Tonks and Ollivander were in foul temper, spending the day herding the Wild Bog Boar and using a bludgeoning curse to quickly and painlessly kill the sickly looking sows which these creatures had fed upon for weeks now.

As soon as Ollivander said that they had enough urine from each cage and transferred to barrels brought to them, Tonks and himself cast cutting hexes on their necks, the animals finally making a mournful squeal as their death cries. When it was dusk, Harry and the others had caught almost thirty of the weird, disproportional creatures across the network of farms.

By nine o'clock that night, the infestation was eradicated and twelve barrels of the urine were harvested. The pit was filled with the dead regular pigs and majority of the Wild Bog boars. Tonks doused the open grave with pitch oil and lit the dead on fire.

"My firstborn for a bath!" she lamented as the fire caught. Jon was at that moment setting up a clean water barrel at a height. Harry levitated it unto the second level of a barn loft.

"Milady," he called her from inside. "I hope that you name him Jon," he laughed in good humour. "I have set up a shower of primitive sort. Simple, but it would get you clean." She came inside and saw the barrel leaning on its side on the loft, the stop cork aimed over a relatively clean stall. There was a cord attached to the stop cork to release the water. "Pull the cork to let the water flow, and cork it again when you are finished. Here is soap I requested from Michael." He gave her a bar of soap.

"I could kiss you right now," Tonks gushed at Jon, then Harry. "The both of you," She laughed. "Now shoo!" She chased them out and closed the main door to the barn behind her.

Harry and Jon went to Mr. Ollivander, who had a grim expression on his face. They all sat down wearily on a fallen tree, enjoying a few moments of comfortable silence. Ollivander lit a pipe and puffed.
"The profit from harvesting all of this urine should have compensated for the lack of initial value proposed by this village. This is probably the worst infestation I have heard about. Usually three to six is normal. Ten is a lot. But thirty?"

Harry froze.

"This is not normal, you say?" He said slowly. "Ten would be a high number?" Jon tensed at Harry's tone.

"Very very unusual," Ollivander nodded. "This is not right, no, no, no... this ..." Ollivander looked off into the distance, thinking, puffing again on his pipe.

"This was planned," Harry declared. He knew it in his gut the moment they saw the market outside the hospital. Something was definitely wrong in this village. "Someone plotted this, and allowed this to get out of control."

"Yes, they probably convinced the Reaper's Clan to take the job, then bought them off, making sure they refused to actually complete it. No other clan would follow up on them, they have a reputation of getting the job done," Ollivander ventured.

"Why would anyone plot to infest these hard working farmers with these creatures?" Jon said.

"Dark magic, Jon. They wanted to farm the urine ...for smuggling purposes. To arise the dead." Harry snarled. "We got here first. Michael wasn't expecting real help. Not from us. He was expecting others to come..."

Ollivander froze, tilting his head as if listening to something.

"Where is Tonks?" Ollivander asked abruptly.

"Bathing," Jon replied. Jon also stopped, listening. "The water has stopped." He grabbed his camouflage robes from the tree and put it over his dirty, sweaty skin. Within moments he grabbed his knife and wand, disappearing from sight. "Harry, you and Ollivander go through the front to check on her. I will circle the back. Count to fifteen then enter," he said softly.

Harry and Ollivander went on the alert. They went to the main front doors, and peeped through the gap by the hinges. Someone had Tonks at wand point, their wand directly underneath her chin. Tonks had her hands out at her side in surrender, naked and soaking wet. There were two of them, both clothed in dark robes with hoods pulled low over their face. They were also alert to the fact that it had gone quiet outside, just as Jon had gone alert to the quiet on the inside.

Harry finished the count, then slowly opened the front door, calling her name tentatively, not to startle the intruders into doing something rash.

"Tonks?" he said, moving slowly as he came into view.

Both hooded wizards turned to face them. The one closest to Tonks took cover behind her while keeping the wand to her neck. Tonks remained calm, looking steadily at Harry's face while her captor ducked down, only his eyes and hood visible over her shoulder. The other wizard aimed a steady wand at the two of them.

"Drop it," the captor said from behind Tonks. "Easy, slowly."

Harry moved slowly and flipped his wand, holding it with thumb and forefinger alone. He put it down on the ground. Ollivander did the same. He did not break eye contact with Tonks.
"Who are you?" the other asked in a foreign accent. "This was not the agreement. Why did you use oaken barrels?"

"We're here to help these people," Ollivander said. "Please, let her go and everything will be alright."

"Months we spent setting this up. And some idiots come early and kill all of them. All of this work for nothing!"

"You should have started a bit earlier in the year," Harry said. At that moment a cold breeze blew through the night. "You feel that? It's almost Autumn, innit."

"What?" the captor said, glancing at his comrade. The comrade shrugged. "What the fuck that supposed to mean?"

"It means Winter is coming," Harry deadpanned.

Tonks heard a sickening rip then felt a warm splash of liquid against her back just as her captor's hold went rigid. She immediately grabbed at his wand and blasted the other wizard with it, knocking him into a stall. She aimed again as he fell, using a stunner on him as he crumpled to the ground. She stared at him, casting the manacle charm just in case he stirred. She touched the back of her neck, her face pale from adrenaline. She screamed when she saw the blood on her hand.

Harry and Ollivander rushed to her side, Ollivander offering his cloak as he hastily cast a charm to clean her back from the blood. She dropped the wand and fell to her knees, holding her mouth in shock as she watched her bloody hand.

"These two may have allies," came Jon's voice, grim. "We must check on the townsfolk and see if they are all right. Get dressed Mistress Tonks. This day is not over yet."
THE CURSE OF ESTAGAL PT. II

Chapter Summary

After the attack, Jon scouts ahead and infiltrates the town.

"Give me a moment, everyone." said Tonks. She was still crouched in the main barn, Ollivander's old cloak covering her wet body.

"We must go. It isn't safe," Ollivander said.

"I'm not going anywhere. I ..." Tonks stammered, looking at her bloody hand. "Just need to..." Tonks angrily wiped the blood on the dusty ground. "I need to be cleansed." Tonks eyes were now dry, but red with anger. "I want to feel clean."

The three men looked at each other. "We shall stand guard outside, mila-"

"Cut it out with that milady crap. And no one is going anywhere. Each of you just... keep a look out for me, okay? I'll be quick. Need to get this blood off." Tonks abruptly stood up, taking a deep breath. She walked back to the showers stall. The old black cloak hung loosely on her shoulders, not even hiding the front of her nude body. She didn't even seem to care. With her back turned to them, she stepped under the barrel.

"My wand, Harry," she summoned in a whisper, her hand outstretched.

"At once," Harry dug in the dead man's robes for Tonks' wand. He retrieved it and walked towards the open makeshift bath stall, his head dipped low. He focused on her feet, and the black of the old cloak, the wand held high in two open palms. He did not dare look at her body or her face. They were in a bad situation already, and he couldn't make it worse by gaping. She took it and threw the old robe towards him. Harry didn't even make an attempt to catch it and it covered his bowed head and arms as if he were a mere serving slave.

Harry felt exactly how Wormtail must have at the resurrection site. He backed out of the stall with head bowed, not even removing the old man's garment. Tonks waved her wand and the water started to flow. Jon coughed loudly.

"I'll go get Cloud. And organize our belongings. Master Ollivander, I would ask that you use your magic to set up a perimeter to detect intruders, please. Harry," Jon called. Harry threw off the cloak on top of a railing, embarrassed. Jon hit him with one of those stares. "Those people are in danger. Make sure she is ready," he said in an hoarse whisper, his tone indicating that not only dressed, but ready for action.

Harry just looked back at him, confused. He lowered his voice. "What do you expect me to say? Plus, she's bathing." And naked.

Jon approached with three quick strides and got in his face. "Use your knowledge," Jon countered in a low tone. "She's in a precarious state. Keep her together."

Harry opened his mouth to protest, but Jon scowled.
"You," he said warningly. "Will protect her, much better than we ever could, if you get her into combat ready state of mind. Find a way." He walked to the main door, peeped through the slats, covered his face and drew his hood, disappearing.

Harry gulped, looking at the black of Tonks hair under the trickling water. The stall door blocked her from chest to knee. Her arms were vigorously moving, scrubbing her skin.

"So..." Harry said, stalling. "You alright there?"

There was no response, only the sounds of bathing.

"Hey..."

"Yes. No. Fuck!" she snapped, her voice shaky. "You've got some explaining to do, Harry. And when we're back home and out of this shithole, you will explain."

"Explain what?" Harry said, perplexed.

"You are really beginning to piss me off, you know that?" She snarled, washing her face from the soap. She stared at him. "He just butchered that man, like what we did to those boars. Ear to fucking ear, I am still trying to get the feel of it off of me! Now don't you fucking dare say 'Explain what' like you have no clue!"

"I would have done the same, Tonks," Harry said simply. "It is you we're talking about. Your life. We don't play around with that. He had a wand to your neck."

"Harry," she sighed, scrubbing the back of her neck. "You talk as if this is nothing. This is what I am trying to understand about you two all this time. That isn't normal for lads your age."

"We're different," Harry said.

"No shit," Tonks said with a grunt. Harry had to think up something quickly to make Tonks understand, without making her really understand.

How would Dumbledore do this? Harry got sudden inspiration.

"Jon has been taken into a special orphanage when his mother got sick. Well that's what he told me." Harry began. "Those people sound strange to us, but I guess if someone heard my story they would say I'm strange too. The orphanage was based up north, in a medieval fortress to guard against the Scots during that time in history... the war. It was nicknamed 'The Wall'," Harry explained, making up the story as he went along. "Mainly because of a legendary siege that they withstood when Winter Fell upon them. Northern English warriors held it against attack for a long time until reinforcements came."

Ooh I am getting good at this Harry thought, mentally clapping himself on his back.

"That's where you get that Winter is Coming tripe about, huh?" Tonks said.

"Don't play with those words," Harry warned. "It's that serious when it comes to him."

"So," Tonks ventured. "About this orphanage..."

"I didn't want to press him, but basically from what I could put together they trained the lads there in the Ways of a Knight from young, as tradition."

"Even now?"
"They still train us to be wizards right?" Harry countered.

"Touché," she replied.

"Something happened up there, and someone who cared for Jon...died," Harry explained. "He escaped and made his way down to me, remembering a story of a Black being wanted in connection with the Potter family. I don't know how, and I don't know why. But he found me."

"It seems like a binding of fate," Tonks said. The water began to trickle down. The water level was now below the cork opening. "Drat," She said, her eyes closed and hair still covered with soap. "Shoot. Harry get up there and take off the lid and pour out the rest so I can rinse my hair will ya?"

Harry gulped. He climbed the ladder to the loft and did as she commanded.

I must be dreaming!

It was bordering on torture. He overturned the water barrel and aimed it down her head. The water washed off the suds and she finally opened her eyes. She gasped as she looked up.

"Harry!" she screamed, crouching down and covering her bits. "What are..?" She stopped, embarrassed. "I did tell you to do that, didn't I?"

"Yeah."

"You ok if I did a memory charm?" Tonks said, turning a beet red.

"Of course not," Harry cheeked.

"I will kill you if you ever breathe a word about this," she snarled. Harry smiled. Tonks was back, all right. Snappy and bossy as ever.

"Mums the word," Harry said, giving her a thumbs up.

"Get!" she cried.

"Okay okay!" Harry said as he scampered down from the loft. "Hurry up. Jon went to get our stuff. We've got to make sure Ms. Payet and Michael is safe."

After searching the dead body and taking whatever possessions he had, Harry levitated the corpse and carried it near to the fire pit. Jon had a plan to make the other talk when they awakened him.

"Get up," Harry's voice came. "We need to let you see this."

The stupefied wizard came to his senses, awoken by Ollivander's enervating spell. He struggled against the manacles tying his wrists and ankles behind his back. Heat was in the air, wafting hot dust across his face. Harry's face took up most of his vision. He crouched low, talking to him with palms clasped patiently between his bent knees. Harry nodded behind him. The captive squinted, disoriented from the stupefy spell.

"This is your buddy. Wave, buddy."

Ollivander and Tonks stood on either side of a kneeling hostage, a sack was tied over his head. Their normal clothes were transfigured into loose, shapeless black robes, deep, heavy shadows playing over their faces. Behind them was the inferno of the burning pit of dead pigs, the flames throwing up ashes, smoke and burning meat smell.
The kneeling body waved his arm at him.

"We have him silenced and disarmed. I have questions. We want to know who are you and why you are here."

"I not telling you anything," the captive said in a heavy accent, defiant.

"They all say that." Harry said nothing more, just kept watching. Both men remained silent. "Until the tools come out."

"You don't scare us. Brit shit."

"You ready to die then?"

No response.

"Your mate doesn't want to die." The kneeling man waved his arms pleading with muffled sounds. "Hear that? He didn't want to talk either. What you do next determines if you die, he dies, or both of you live. So who are you and what are you doing here?"

No response. Harry shook his head, exasperated.

"Chuck him in," he called out. Tonks waved her wand and the body was thrown in the burning pit. The fires snapped at the new fuel. A ghastly yell began to sound through the night, screams of a dying man. Harry turned his attention back to the captive.

"Music to my ears," he announced, closing his eyes and smiling in contentment.

"Fuck! Vladsko! Vladsko Seminov! I belong to Krov! Russian. Please, mercy!"

"How many of you are here?"

"Three more, at main hub camp!" he pleaded.

"What did you come here for?"

"Owl came. Said wizards came to kill boars. We were sent to find out what was going on."

"Who do you work for? Who hired you?"

"Purificateur of Krov," he said, desperate. "French arm."

"Ah... Vlad, you don't mind if I call you that? Russian isn't my strong point. See? Easy, this wasn't so hard." He clapped the side of his cheek twice. Vlad flinched, scuttling away from him. "Who sent the message from the camp to call you?" Harry asked pleasantly.

"We don't know. We were sent here, that's all!"

"Come on," Harry tsked, exasperated. "Guys, we have another to add to the fire!"

"He has bad French, probably also Russian, I don't know!"

"Where is your French base?"

"Paris."

"Give me names," Harry ordered, leaning in closer.
"Tra- tra.. tray.." he stammered, then began to froth at the mouth.

Shit

"Guys! We got a suicide poison going on here!" he called. Tonks and Ollivander rushed up to him, but by the time they got close, Vlad had keeled over, his eyes glassy, leaking a sickly green substance out of his mouth.

"That's some dark, twisted life to live," Tonks said sadly. "We got his stuff and the info, let's go."

"We'll let the French Aurors deal with this guy," Harry said, using the dead man's sleeve to close his eyes. "We all ready to roll?"

"Tonks will disappear the two of us," Jon said, his head in full view again.


"We side along near the rocky stream by the perimeter of the main property. I will scout, and try to catch them unawares. I hope I will not have to be as extreme," Jon reassured the party. "Most likely the rest of his clan would be awaiting a report from these two before anything drastic befalls the farm folk." He strung his bow. "Milady, please enchant these arrows to be blunt and also containing that wonderful knockout spell. I will use the sleep curse if I get close enough. It did not pass through his robes when I attempted it... which is why I had no choice," he said grimly, watching the corpse burn. "Directly in the face only."

"He had it coming," Tonks said, determined. Harry thought her eyes looked cold as she watched the flames eat away the body in the swine grave.

I am changing her. She was an Auror, but never this serious. Harry contemplated how he was affecting the lives of the people he knew once again, and was not sure if it was for the better in all cases.

"His life went down an inevitable path when he challenged us," Jon said solemnly. Tonks grabbed his arm, and Ollivander grabbed Harry's.

The party arrived a hundred meters from the fence of the main hub farmstead. "We take cover there," Jon pointed to ditch of a dried stream. "Mistress Tonks, the tracking charm, if you please." She administered it on Jon. "I will be back." Tonks grabbed at his invisible body before his face disappeared.

"Be careful," Tonks said. Jon nodded.

"Strike clean, Jon. And true." Harry offered his fist, and felt an invisible firm hit against it.

"To arms," Jon said, and disappeared.

Jon made his way across the field. Tonks tapped both Harry's and Ollivander's wands and now both of their wands pulled their hands towards Jon's movements.

"Once he doesn't go in a crowd, if you look hard enough down the line of your wand, you can see a faint outline. The spell connects the pull to your sight, giving you clues to where he is," she explained in a whisper.

The three of them crawled on their belly so that they were prone at the crest of the ditch. They all peered down the sight of their wand. Jon was jogging through the field, his bow notched. He
crawled underneath the wooden fence and approached. After a few minutes, the spell fizzled out from Harry's wand.

"Tonks you still got the spell going?"

"Yes." She frowned. "The pull is still connected and strong, just it doesn't see well in the dark."

Harry's gut instinct was to get closer so he can back him up better. Harry also knew now that these sort of gut instincts were wrong.

"Patience. Trust in him," Harry said softly to the others. Tonks snorted.

"Funny. He says the exact same thing about you."

Harry smiled. Jon was a good guy, all in all. He still was worried though. He wanted to take out his invisibility cloak and back him up, but he couldn't do that with Ollivander around. The man might go nuts if he figured out that he was in possession of one of the Hallows.

The minutes ticked by in silence. Tonks arm was being pulled and guided by Jon's movement, slowly going left to right, inch by inch.

Harry was getting very agitated and nervous.

"How long do you think he would need?" Harry asked. Tonks shook her head.

"He's still moving. He seems to be ok," Tonks reinforced.

"Good," Harry breathed.

Jon had circled the main market hub twice. The stalls were empty yet still alight, the goods still out in the open. Client carts and wheelbarrows were still queued in line. The reason for this was that there were close to one hundred people sitting in the road, legs crossed with hands clasped behind their heads, facing down at their knees. Two wizards patrolled the captured townsfolk in front of the Massive barn. Some sniffled, but otherwise there was an eerie quiet only interrupted by the footsteps on the dry, pebbly road of the their captors.

"Ten more minutes, healer," a male voice warned. "Our guys better be back soon." Jon heard this as he climbed from the one open window way to the back. He was in what he had to believe was a chamber pot room, for there were covered buckets of what he had to believe was feces due to the smell. Jon pulled taut on his bow, carefully making his way towards the front main area. He kept to the shadows, not knowing how the brightly lit sick room would affect the camouflage.

The main doors to the hospital were slightly ajar, light from the lamps spilling out. A group of people were standing in front of a wizard who wore the same style of robes as Vlad. This wizard was sitting on top of Ms. Payet's main office desk, set dab in the middle of the beds of patients. He was inspecting wands scattered on the table. He appeared bored.

Ms Payet was being held hostage. She looked tired and stressed, and was trying to keep calm for the sake of all the people inside and outside.

Jon recognized Michael MacMillan in one of the beds, apparently unconscious or sleeping, Jon was not sure. The four other people standing with their fingers linked behind their heads all had on similar medical scrubs as Ms Payet.

Jon took aim. Now was not the time to listen for anymore clues. There was a twang of release and
the blunted missile connected to the back of the wizard's head, knocking him flat off the table, out cold. Jon smiled, the blow probably would have knocked him out anyway. This was the third time he could not believe how true his arrows flew.

He was beginning to like this whole magical wizard thing. The five medics gasped and rushed forwards, grabbing their wands. Some began to circle, looking for the source of the attack.

Jon spoke in a low, calm voice.

"Be calm, and be quiet! The others are still at danger. Get defensive positions and put him in restraining binds. Do not call out. I am here to help."

"Who's there?" came a low response from Penelope Payet. "Crows?" she whispered.

"Stay inside, and remain quiet. Attack only if they enter. I will be back shortly, then we will talk." Jon went to the front doors and carefully peeped out by the hinges. The two patrolling wizards were making random paths. Jon frowned. He was still giving a shadow on the door in front of him, even though he was pretty sure he remained invisible.

Going out the front door would inevitably spill a tall shadow along the ground. He cursed inwardly. He would have to time the guards when they were both not facing the light spilling out. Jon thought about the consequences of alerting the two wizards. He did not know what these wands could really do, as both he and Harry had used barely five spells in between them. He doubted these men had any such handicap to have been able to take a whole town hostage.

Jon hustled back towards the window, climbing out and circling around the building. Both of these two shots must be quick, and accurate. The sound of the wizard falling would alert the other. He found a spot in the shadows and waited. He put an arrow in between his teeth and notched another. Patiently, he waited. They would eventually cross closely in a straight line sooner or later.

After four minutes of waiting, he observed that their paths would cross directly in line, probably twenty meters one behind the other. He took up his archery stance and drew. This would probably be his fastest reload he would ever have to accomplish.

Now.

Twang!

One connected solidly in his back. Before the wizard collapsed Jon opened his mouth and the feathers of the arrow dropped into the waiting space between the index and middle fingers. With a smooth, graceful pull the second arrow was notched. The loud thud was heard and people looked up to see the wizard fall. His companion spun around at the sound, pointing. Jon looked down the shaft once more.

Twang!

This arrow did not reach its target as a glowing circle appeared in front of the wizard and the arrow bounced off the shield charm.

Shit.

Jon ducked and moved back into the deeper shadows, circling.

"Get out here!" he shouted in Russian. "We got trouble!" He looked down at the blunted arrow, and
quickly did a wave of his wand in a dramatized infinity pattern. Two bright orbs of light began to
revolve around his body, similar to electrons circling a nucleus. "Andriy!" he shouted, his wand
sweeping the shadows. "Donchev is down!" He made his way cautiously towards his fallen
comrade. He flicked his wand and a pale yellow light bounced off the crumpled body. "Alive, but
out!"

Jon let loose once again at the man's back. The glowing orb of light intercepted the arrow and a bolt
of lightning reflected towards Jon. Jon threw himself flat down under the magical bolt, smashing his
face and mouth on the pebbly ground. His lips burst and his teeth felt as if he had just took a gauntlet
to the face. He pushed up from the ground and kept moving. The stall behind was now on fire from
the light ball's attack.

Jon drew his knife and kept circling, light on his feet, avoiding the lighted areas. Most of the hostages
were now laying flat on the ground, crying for mercy.

"Come out!" he demanded. "Come out you Brit shit!"

As soon as his back was turned Jon sprinted through the brightly lit area and plunged his knife into
his back, paying no head to the magical circling light protecting him. He felt his dagger drive deep
into his rib cage, then there was a blinding light. Jon felt an intense burn run through his body and
everything went dark.

Tonks shot up from the ditch. The spell went suddenly dormant.

"Jon is down!"

"Fuck!" Harry shouted. "Get us in there!" Harry held out his hand towards Tonks.

"Main street market!" Tonks shouted to Ollivander and grabbed Harry.

They appeared on the scene of miniature chaos. One side of the marketplace was on fire and there
was a burning pile in the middle of a rapidly retreating crowd of people.

Tonks immediately used a crowd opening jinx and a path was forcibly pushed open in front of them.
Ollivander apparated behind them and the three of them sprinted towards the fire. Tonks pointed her
wand in desperation.

"Aguamenti!" she screamed. The hosing spell created a hiss of steam on the pile of three bodies.
Harry levitated Jon from the other two wizards. Their robes and bodies were burnt almost down to
the skeleton.

"Noo!"

Tonks broke down in tears as Harry laid a motionless Jon down, his thestral robes steaming and
burnt in many places. Tonks collapsed to her knees, coughing and crying in disbelief. Ollivander
took off his wizard's hat, unblinking, unbelieving. His eyes were rheumy and beginning to water.

Harry looked at the two incinerated bodies, then back at Jon, who seemed to be sleeping, if sleeping
with burnt pieces of robes and patches of foreign burnt body matter could be considered sleeping.

Harry poked his foot to Jon's head. Tonks looked at Harry with pure hatred.

"What...are you doing?"

Harry crossed his arms, tapping his foot as he looked down at Jon.
"Okay Mr. Black. Show's over, you can get up now," Harry commanded. Tonks looked incredulous.

"Potter, are you fucking insane?" Tonks looked at the two corpses, beginning to doubt herself now.

"I ...always wanted to experience a beautiful lady crying for me," Jon's voice murmured, his eyes still shut closed. A smirk came on his face. "Do not be so condescending, Roderick Hallow. It did hurt a lot before it was put out." Jon opened his eyes, his mouth still bloody from his dive. Tonks' jaw was wide open in disbelief. Ollivander was openly crying with tears now, laughing.

Jon smiled a bloody smile.

"Mistress Tonks, forgive me. I meant no disrespect, nor undue stress," he said. With a groan, he sat up. Harry gave him a hand to help him up. Jon grabbed it and it was still searing hot. Mid pull Harry screamed.

"Ow!" Harry let go immediately, and Jon fell ungainly on his backside with a loud oomph. He rolled over, holding his now aching lower back. He laid his cheek flat.

"I think," Jon panted, moaning in pain. "I think I will just lay here awhile, until I cool off and recover," he said tiredly, closing his eyes on the dusty, rocky ground.

An hour later Madame Maxime and the same two Aurors that were there early this morning was at the hospital.

"The Crows have been busy," she greeted Tonks. Tonks was still numb, and merely nodded in thanks. The Aurors and the headmistress were standing with Tonks, Ollivander and Harry around Jon's bed. He was given a large black robe to rest in as he ate dinner.

"This network is larger than we thought," one of the Aurors said. He produced a scroll to Tonks. Tonks read it, and looked at her teammates in turn.

"This is a Russian bounty. They require three farms to be targeted, infiltrated, and contaminated over a five month period." The Auror took back the scroll.

"We've been trying ever since we found this piece of information what the contamination was supposed to be. Never thought it would be something as straightforward as bog boars," he concluded. "But why though? What do you think, Ms Dora?"

From Ollivander's slight shake of his head she knew that letting the authorities know that they wanted to mine the urine for inferi creation might be a bad idea.

"They wanted the people out," she lied. "The families here were under strain with the sickness and were almost ready to leave. Didn't you say some wizards want magically historical places to be reclaimed? These people here are magical no doubt," she offered.

"Maybe," the Auror said, unconvinced. "These two dead and one alive would still fetch you a decent bounty from the contractor department. If you want some more private work, leave us a calling card."

"Be careful with the questions," Jon offered, biting through the meat. "They have a suicide poison on them that activates if you dig for information that they are incapable of giving."

The Aurors stared at Jon. Jon stared back. The two Aurors looked at their gagged and blindfolded
captive laying on another bed nearby.

"We'll... take that into consideration. Sign here, and here, ladies." The Aurors offered Penelope and Tonks two parchments. One was a report on the infestation job being complete and the particulars of the service. The other was a report on a hostage situation and the capture and elimination of foreign Hit wizards on French soil. As clan members were mercenaries, they would not be able to offer an impartial account of the incident in court and were waived from testimonial unless they were direct suspects in a crime. Ms Payet would be required to attend court as the village representative at a further date as state witness to the events of this night.

"And here," the Auror said, handing Tonks an official looking document.

"Take this to Gringotts. They would liaise with Scrooglings and transfer your bounty moneys," his partner began to explain.

"International Bounty level B-3 claimant form. Known Outlaw Recovery: Status 'Alive and Well' - Twenty five thousand galleons for Andriy Rasklov a.k.a Raskas. International Bounty level C-6 claimant form. Deceased recovery of John "Donchev" Doe, John "Milix" Doe and Vladsko Seminov - Four thousand galleons each."

"That reminds me," Ms Payet said. "This was the original Hunter's Guild contract. Take this to your guild. We owe you so much for all you have done, but we will honour our agreement. It may take some time, but you will get it."

Tonks read the parchment. "This here said the Clan call out fee was four thousand galleons, and one thousand commission per Wild Bog Boar." She stared at Penelope, astonished. "May we speak, privately?" The two women went towards a quiet area. Tonks raised her eyebrows, patting the scroll with her finger. "From what I see here, you can't afford this."

"I know. It is almost ten times the rate. We were desperate, but no one was coming. The Scythe's somehow locked the job in without actually doing it, or letting someone else take it. This was the last official offer we had issued, hoping the reward would get help in. Michael Macmillan the American came, but he was a lone hunter hoping to make a score. He didn't know exactly how to complete the job, but he stayed a few months and was committed to helping whichever way he could. He was very good at helping us organize a system to help cope with our problems. Most of the people would have starved or left if it weren't for his hub central idea." She looked down at his bed. "They Crucio him for almost an hour. Made everyone watch. These Russians were professionals. Lynching, I believe they called it in the new world. Public brutality. Which is why the few of them could have overthrown this town in such a short time. We were weak."

"As you said, those guys knew what they were doing. You don't have to deal with dark wizards every day."

"Still. It is a shame. We need to learn how to protect ourselves. If your Mr. Black would like to stay, he is most welcome. We need someone like him."

"Yes, he does leave an impression, doesn't he?" Tonks agreed, turning towards the two boys who were sharing a joke with the Aurors. She chuckled to herself. "Want to hear something funny? The other boy with the glasses is the one you should watch out for though. Everything seems to revolve around him."

"Him? He seems harmless."

"Tell that to Lord Voldemort," Tonks said quietly, giving her a wink. Penelope eyes widened, then
she smiled a wondrous smile. She observed the unassuming boy laughing and joking in her modest field hospital.

"No... it couldn't be!" she said in a whisper. "The Boy Who Survived the Killing Spell! Is it truly him?"

"My lads," Tonks said with grudging pride, folding her arms. "They're legit. I'm beginning to believe them when they jokingly say they are immortal."

"You must be joking."

"Believe me Penelope, after what I've seen tonight, I wish I was."
Jon, for the first time in a long while, was not awoken by Harry in the early morning. Instead, he woke up naturally, feeling refreshed and ready for the day. What he did not expect was the few vases of flowers and cards placed on the side table in the hospital. He picked up the closest one, reading the card that was written in French. After staring at it in confusion, the words began to make sense and turned into English.

Dear Mr. Black

From our family to yours, thank you from the bottom of our hearts!

The St Claires

Michel, Annette and Jean Paul.

Another vase had similar thanksgiving notes and a striking assortment of Gladiolus, King Protea, Chamomile, Hyssop and Black-Eyed Susans.

"Mr. Black, I am glad to see you awake and rested," Penelope Payet said, walking over. "There is tea, or coffee, that I can bring for you right over there, if you wish."

"Good Morning," Jon replied, his voice scratchy and deep. "Coffee is fine, Mistress Payet. Why...?" he pointed to the table next to him.

"Oh yes, some very meaningful selections came pouring in around dawn this morning," she smiled, stepping close to him and looking at the bouquets. "King Protea, yes... It signifies daring and resourcefulness. It is symbolic of diversity and courage. This arrangement signifies all of that; strength of character, sacrifice, justice and honor."

Jon stared at the vase, touched that someone would have gone through this for him.

"Please send them my thanks. It is appreciated," Jon said sitting up. "Where are the others?"

"They left early to go to the work site. They allowed you to rest and will return for breakfast."

Jon swung his legs out of bed immediately.

"They left without me?" Jon said, perturbed. "I must make haste."

"No, rush," she said gently, bringing him some coffee. "They were arranging everything for easy transport and then will meet back here for breakfast. The curse has been lifted. Everyone, even after the horrific attack last night, still managed to get a full good night's rest. Even Michael has recovered sufficiently to accompany the Crows to devise a way to transport the heavy barrels."

"Very well," Jon said, standing up while sipping his coffee. He nodded his head in appreciation of
the great taste. Madame Payet informed him that the main house across the way would accommodate him if he wanted to freshen up. "What time is it?" he asked.

"Oh a little after nine. Feel free to go across and shower when you are ready. Unfortunately all we have are these to offer you to wear," she pointed to a set of elegant black robes that were folded on the bed closest to him. "Your special gear was almost completely destroyed ... You were extremely lucky it protected you from the fire."

"Yes, lucky," Jon nodded, hiding his smile behind his coffee mug. He tucked his feet into provided bedroom slippers. "Thank you Mistress Payet for your hospitality and care. I will take up that offer of a bath."

He made his way across to the large farm house closest to the marketplace.

"Bonjour," the middle aged woman there said. "Penelope said you would come," she greeted. 'I am Marie. Please feel free," she showed him to a large bathroom with a tub and shower. "Here are towels, and soaps." She demonstrated the hot and cold taps and left him to it.

Half an hour later, feeling refreshed and clean in the new robes provided, he made his way back to the large kitchen and outdoor picnic area at the Market. The town folk were still busy at the market, but the atmosphere was more of one of business as usual, rather than desperation. There was laughter and boisterous voices, children running and merchants haggling wares.

The voices quieted as he approached, heads turning towards him as he walked across the street. A little girl ran up to him, probably no more than six years old, and gifted him two hastily picked flowers.

"Merci beacoup, chevalier noir," she said shyly, handing him her present. Jon crouched to one knee, and took them with a grin.

"Merci," he responded, the girl laughed at his accent and ran away to her mother.

"Mr. Black," a burly man selling lumber said, nodding in thanks.

"Black," another called, raising his fist in salute.

"Le Chevalier noir!" another called, his craftsman hammer raised in victory.

"Le magicien noir immortel!" came another salute.

Soon all the morning folk present were praising him, calling him strange French terms that he has never heard before. Some came and shook his hand, offering him bound parcels and packages, and even a few bottles of wine. A pretty girl saw his predicament and brought across a massive woven basket for him to put his gifts in.

"I... am, very grateful," Jon said uncomfortably as hefted his hamper. After finally deflecting incomprehensible commendations and praise he got to the breakfast shed. Some of the families offered instead to take him to their homes to feed him. "Thank you, but I must decline," he said, smiling and shaking his head. The food merchants dished out a hefty plate of breakfast and offered him choices of juice, tea, water and wine.

As he sat down at the long eating benches, Ollivander, Michael, Harry, Tonks and Cloud apparated in the field a short distance away from the breakfast shed.

The crew smiled at Jon as they approached. Cloud bounded forward and eagerly sniffed the table
where Jon's plate was. Jon laughed as he offered the white Shepherd a healthy piece of ham.

"Wotcher," Tonks greeted, patting him on the back as she sat down next to him. "Whoa!" she said, seeing the basket sitting on the bench on the other side of him. She leaned across his back to peep at the contents. "No drinking on mission," she laughed, taking out a wine bottle to look at it. Small talk ensued as the two food attendants brought everyone a plate to eat and began digging in.

"Michael and I visited Madame Valmont at Beauxbatons this morning," Harry said. "We convinced them to loan us a large goods wagon with a couple of their winged horses to transport the stuff to Calais. Professor Allemons would do the driving."

"That is scheduled for one. But first, the Elfen bat wings," Ollivander reminded. "This should not take long as we only need one or two to secure what we need. Professor Allemons knows an area that he demonstrates for field trips for the upper levels. The wing harvesting from the creature is a common practical assessment pre-NEWTS course."

"Very well," Jon nodded. Michael looked a bit embarrassed, a bit overawed as he watched Jon.

"Mr. Black, I have heard the rumours," Michael said bluntly. "Your clan mates verify and credits you with the slaying of the Diablo, capture of two infiltrators at the school, and four of the Russian gang. All in the course of one day."

Jon tilted his head in acknowledgement. "We operate as a cohesive unit."

"Hm. I see. How old are you?" Michael asked.

Jon stared at the man. Michael didn't flinch.

"May I ask why you have these questions?"

Michael laughed. "Two reasons. This is one," he took out a rolled parchment with the ribbon sealed with France's coat of arms on it. "The older heads had a council meeting a few hours after the incident. Penelope was there as well and asked that I give this to you after you had chance to settle down and have something to eat."

Jon accepted the scroll and cut the ribbon with his trusty butter knife. As he read, he frowned.

"What does it say?"

"They are asking me to honor their new town square by agreeing to let them use my name and likeness with a statue. Word has reached the joint council of Salles, Estagal, Rousillion and Rocomadour. These apparently are the main magical towns in the south, and they offer me this statue, along with sanctuary for me and familial relations if I wish to become a French magical citizen."

"They must want you really bad," Harry noted, whistling.

"That is truly a high honour," Ollivander noted.

Michael grunted in agreement. "The French were always annoyed that they did not have a fabled magical hero like the Boy Who Lived in England. I don't know why these Europeans believe that story anyway. No one survives the Killing Curse," he laughed. The crew laughed alongside him, even Harry who could not help but enjoy the irony of it all.

He did it. **Twice now.**
Jon pursed his lips. "I will agree to the use of my name and likeness for the statue. However, I must remain a loyal subject to Her Majesty's United Kingdom. I also wish to reserve the right to visit the lovely people of southern France. Allies and symbolism are important. Will this be sufficient?"

"Mr. Black, from what I have heard, the people here would marry off their daughters if you only smiled at them," he chuckled. "They'll agree to your terms all right."

"And the other reason?" Jon asked, all business again.

"I came to England to start over," Michael said, leaning forward earnestly. "Being a hunter seemed a good idea at first, until I realized there are very, very, powerful wizards here, and in Europe as a whole. And some bastardly strong creatures to deal with."

Jon nodded, his stare intense.

"Not every day a man comes across a wizard who can take on a Russian Hit Wizard team and live to tell the tale. Far less survive immolation from the Zwillingsfeuerball Charm. I was hoping you will put in a good word to Ms. Dora here for me," he paused, letting out a breath.

"I want to contribute and be a part of your Clan," he directed this towards Tonks. He smiled at her. "Sometimes I would like to learn a bit more from people before I get involved. You guys are young, but yet, you're good. Frighteningly good. Was just curious about your age, that's all."

The three British wizards all looked towards Harry. Harry was listening intently to Michael's pitch.

"Mr. MacMillan," Harry addressed him. "Can you give us a second to discuss this?"

He finished his apple juice and nodded, mildly surprised that they all deferred to Harry. "Sure," he agreed. "I'll be inside by Penelope. I would let her know you agreed," he held up the scroll, "on certain conditions, of course." He got up and left the table.

"Tonks? Jon?" Harry put some more food in his mouth. "What you think?"

"Trial first. Let us hire him as a hedge knight if needed, as needed," Jon said, watching his retreating back.

"We need to find out his background too," Tonks said. "Anyone who was willing to help this situation over months even if he couldn't eradicate the nogtails must mean something."

"His mission records can be checked if you talk to Greyback, saying that he wants to join your guild," Ollivander added. "I believe he may be useful as Jon said; as needed when needed. It may be prudent to hire him as security on mission, regardless of the fee associated with the bounty."

"A hired wand," Harry nodded. "Jon, that might be a good idea to try out. We can hire him as your personal security for when you go to Alexandria's party. Stay outside, make sure no one is coming for you, that sort of thing." Harry shrugged.

"Agreed. A trial would be best." The remainder of the meal was eaten in amicable silence. When all was finished, Jon stood up. "Let us go see Madame Payet."

Half an hour later Jon was modeling for his statue on a crate. The town craftsman Bob, Penelope, Michael, and the town 'mayor' Mr. Zilliard were all present with the Crow's Vambrace. They were all on a slight incline on the crest of a sloping field. The sun was at Jon's back, casting a shadow along the field. Cloud was running around, chasing the birds that lingered on the grass. Jon was now regretting his choice, but grudgingly went along with all the pomp and fanfare.
"Strike a pose, Mr. Black," Penelope Payet encouraged. Jon scowled, irritated. He shifted reluctantly, his attitude darkening with each request. Harry was reminded of the Tri Wizard media circus.

After a couple minutes of the craftsman conjuring miniature statues copying Jon's likeness without artistic success, Harry got frustrated. He gave Jon his weapons belt, his unstrung bow and asked Tonks to transfigure a quiver with arrows. Jon, seeing what Harry was doing, strung the bow and accepted the quiver.

"Widen the crate," Harry ordered. The craftsman did so. Jon opened his stance a bit wider. "No, still not it. Give it a cobble stone finish like the street." With another flick the crate turned to cobblestones on top. "Do the teeth thing, Black." Jon put an arrow between his teeth. "Okay bad idea. Nock it in the bow. Right. Wait. Still need something more," he looked at Tonks. "Can you create a moving surface such that Jon needs to walk along the top of it?" Tonks waved her wand at the modified crate, widening it and making the top slide slowly like a conveyor belt. Jon lowered the centre of his balance and began to move.

"Capture a couple now, Bob," Harry ordered the Craftsman. After the third miniature was conjured, all were in agreement that it suited Jon and brought forward a perfect likeness. Jon jumped down, relieved that the show was over. Penelope gave Jon a motherly hug.

"It will be a great honor for our small village. What you have done for us is beyond words. The hope, and strength your team have instilled in us will make us a better community," she said, looking like a proud mother. "If my daughter wasn't so young, I would have sent your guardians formal word of potential betrothal. I do hope you plan to visit again soon."

"He's still young Madame, give them some time," Ollivander joked, puffing his pipe. "The future is bright, and all things may be possible." The men laughed. The team bid their hosts farewell before they disappeared.

The Crow's Vambrace turned towards Michael. Tonks spoke up.

"So, MacMillan. We discussed your proposition. There are some conditions. We will hire you with pay up front for missions until we get a feel of how well we work together, regardless of success or not with the bounty. Obviously this can increase depending on what happens on the field. But until we are sure, you would be a hired wand for now. After time we may let you join. How's that sound?"

"Sounds fair," Michael agreed. "You sound like you have something lined up?"

"We may need you to be security at an informal function we may have," Jon said.

"We?" Harry said.

"Yes. You will accompany me," Jon replied to Harry, his eyes not leaving Michael's.

"You got beef with another clan?" he asked, his eyebrows going up.

"No. Worse than that," Jon replied. "A girl's sixteenth birthday party."

Michael was silent a moment, then laughed. He laughed until he realized that Mr. Black was not smiling.

"You're serious."
"Mr. Black is always serious," Harry said, smirking. Tonks groaned.

"Not a problem," Michael shrugged. "Let's get your bat wings. The transport is coming at one. More than enough time, I reckon."

"So. Twelve barrels of two hundred liters of Wild Bog Boar urine, three pounds of Elfen Bat wing, an all White Swiss Shepherd christened Cloud, and the whole remains of a Diablo. Three French Quicksilver brooms. Wazza did tell me some young Apothecary Guildsmen he never saw before passed through yesterday, early," Rook Littleborough said. "Writ of goods and Import licenses, please," he said, circling the large cart.

Jon produced the documents and placed them on the desk.

"Did you procure these items through purchase or through Registered Hunter Guild ranging?"

"Ranging," Jon replied.

"Hunter Clan name and writ of services, please."

"The Crow’s Vambrace," Jon replied, producing the signed documents Madame Maxime and Madame Payet provided. Rook took the documents and copied down certain information from the documents unto his own. He made a copy of this completed scroll with a flick of his wand and stamped with a blue stamp pad.

"This is your writ of inspection and itemized goods which aligns with the guild requests, so that is in order." Jon took the scroll of parchment.

Rook took out a large battered log book and a separate, newer book with a schedule of costs and scarcity matrix.

"The going rate of importation tax on the wings are three galleons a pound. Legally casked Nogtail urine rate is ten galleons per two hundred liters... you have twenty four hundred. The diablo... hmmm," Rook said, eyeing the party.

Jon stood in front of the desk, silent, watching.

"Who are you brokering this for?" Rook asked.

"We are entering the business as new dealers in the market. It will be offered to manufacturers of magical protective gear at fair prices," Jon explained.

"You do not have a written purchase order from a creditable merchant body?" Rook asked.

"Not yet," Jon said slowly. "The lady who approved this license has said that this document would be enough to bring in these goods," Jon said patiently. "Is there a problem?"

Rook studied Jon and his elegant robes donated by the French. He glanced at Harry's all white robes, scrutinizing the company Jon kept. His eyes lingered on Tonks a moment before spotting Ollivander sitting on the waiting area chair.

"Only the companies associated with the Aerie in Romania want anything near this quantity. For you to just jump in that competitive sphere..." Rook trailed off, shaking his head. "This is fine. I am just doing my duty."

"May I ask who is your contact with the Dragon Aerie?"
"Hm. Charlie Weasley comes to mind, he's one of the few people from there that comes through ICOP with goods. Your total is one hundred and twenty nine galleons for the harvested items. The Diablo, in such condition, is no charge."

Harry and Jon put up the fare and their bill parchment was drawn up and a duplicate was created. This was stamped with a red stamp pad.

"That's it. Send Diagon branch my regards," Rook said, organizing his recently written scrolls and receipts. Tonks issued the weight reduction charm on the cart and the four of them pushed the massive cart out unto the delivery yard at Dover's Apothecary ICOP port services. Even with the decreased weight, it took them almost ten minutes to push the wooden cart out of the premises and into the open field.

Everyone looked at Ollivander for inspiration on what to do now.

"I did not anticipate all of these barrels. One would have been sufficient. But we cannot waste it. You have made a fortune on this if you get a bulk sale. We must find a way."

Harry had his finger to his mouth, his brow furrowed in thought.

"We do have a way. It's just that, it's really far."

"What do you mean?" Ollivander asked.

"We brought stuff from Hogwarts to London using our thestrals," Jon said, studying Harry and coming to the same line of thought.

"Our thestrals? You have thestrals?" Ollivander asked incredulously.

"Yeah, they do," Tonks said laughing. "What, after all that's happened you mean to tell me you are really surprised about that, Mr. Ollivander?" she laughed. "Probably the most believable thing about these two."

In a sudden change of manner, Tonks got down to her knees and picked up a handful of soil.
"Home. What a first trip on my own without my parents," she said to the others. "It's crazy what can happen in a day."

"Yes it is. Let's see if I can make this day eve more crazier," Harry said, staring at the afternoon sky to the north. "We're back in jolly old England. No sea to stop them."

"You can't expect them to hear you even if you try, Harry," Tonks said.

Harry just shrugged, looking to the north. "Give me a minute. I'm going to try something."

Harry closed his eyes, focusing on the hardest moment of his life. The moment he opened the snitch, knowing it was his time to die.

The moment he united the Deathly Hallows, and formed a binding contract with Death.

The area grew unnaturally still. The wind, the trees, everything settled down and it became quiet.

Ollivander drew his wand, feeling magic heavy in the air of a different class, of supernatural essence.

"Harry?" he called, feeling uncomfortable.

Harry could see and feel the long walk through the Forbidden Forest. Hagrid, restrained and on his
knees. Voldemort, and his followers, awaiting his presence.

"Shadow Wing, One Ear, Banshee, Rudolph, Tornado, StarScream, WhiteStar," he called to the sky, his voice altered with magic. "To me," he commanded, clenching his fist before him.

The air grew even heavier, and Ollivander was forced into a crouch, his robes pressing down on his frame. Both Tonks and Jon eventually had to join him, magic bringing them to their knees behind Harry in a forced bow.

"Harry!" Ollivander shouted. "What are you doing?" he screamed, horror in his voice.

Harry opened his eyes, and finally the heavy magic disappeared. "They are coming."

"Who?" Tonks said, getting to her feet, woozy. Harry walked over to the massive cart.

"Jon, are any of the parcels in here meat?" Harry asked, looking in his hamper basket.

"Yes, I believe so."

"Good," Harry dug around and found a leg of ham. "You do not mind, do you?"

"No, not at all, by all means, go ahead."

Harry took the meat and walked further into the clearing. He crouched down on bended knee and used the paper cut jinx to cut it up into pieces. At his crouched position he began distributing the meat in a circle around him in seven evenly distributed servings. Within seconds of waiting, Crow-like screams could be heard coming from a distance. Specs in the sky grew larger and larger, seven black shapes flying in a V formation at tremendous speed. They flashed down like seven bolts of lightning, surrounding Harry at their food stations.

All threstrals were bowing, knee bent and snout to the grass, wings laid flat on the open field.

Harry stood up, his white robes billowing in the breeze of their landing. The threstrals remained eerily motionless, their bow uniform and perfect.

"Rise," he commanded solemnly. The threstrals stood, shaking their snouts, flapping wings, hoofing the ground. "Eat," he said, and all attacked their share of the meat instantaneously.

Harry let them eat and approached the others. "Problem solved," he grinned. "The seven should be strong enough to get this to London. Jon help me with the harness, Tonks you too. Might need to modify them to make two trains with Shadow Wing the leader in front."

Ollivander just stood there, fascinated at what he has witnessed.

"How, what?" he stammered, coming up to Harry, eyeing the hungry beasts. "You summoned them?"

"Yeah," Harry said. "We got in a fight with an Alpha a few nights ago. The next day Hagrid showed us how to call one and tame it, and eventually these seven were chosen," Harry explained. "Feeding them and naming them made them accept me. Quite helpful in our future line of work, now that I really think about it. I'll have to owl headmistress Maxime for a quote on this wonderful cart...don't want to have to return it. Hopefully she would let us purchase it."

"Just to convince them to cross the ocean now," Jon added, remembering Tonks' limitations.

"Oh, nah, now that I've actually done it, they should come to me anywhere I call. I think that
limitation is for other wizards... I am this herd's true Alpha and recognized by them as such. They will come, I'm pretty sure of that." Harry said, watching how the Abraxan harnesses were designed and trying to figure out how to sort this out.

"Remarkable," Ollivander said, inspecting the threstrals eating. Most were finishing the last morsels. "Well. It beats having to take this on the train."

After a half an hour of Tonks and Ollivander experimenting how to reconfigure the harnesses to accommodate the smaller threstrals, Harry grew frustrated. He told them to revert all the alterations and leave the harness as is. He sat down on the driver's bench and called the threstrals one by one. Ollivander stepped aside, and was going to question him when Tonks shook her head at him.

"Its uncanny how he uses his magic, and how he disregards conventional thinking. Patience, and have trust in him, Mr. Ollivander," she said to him, folding her arms and watching Harry do his thing. The threstral backed in between the harnesses laying on the ground and when Shadow Wing was last to align, the harnesses levitated, contorted, then attached to all of them in an orderly fashion.

"Hop on Master Ollivander. Jon just make sure everything is secure. Cloud! Up boy!"

Cloud was hiding under the cart ever since the Threstrals arrived.

"I'll pick him up," Tonks said, sympathetic to the dog's fright. "Come luv, it's okay..."

Within minutes, the Crow's Vambrace was airborne and heading to London.

Harry woke up Jon bright and early the next morning, bringing him a hearty breakfast from the cafe higher up Diagon Alley.

"We got the day off... let's use it to organize our Clan business. And I need to get some more robes. Did you get an owl?"

"No. It's only yesterday afternoon we came back. When would I have gotten the time?" Jon said as they had breakfast on the upstairs patio.

"You need one. And you need the ministry to register your fireplace on the network." Harry explained.

"Is that so?" Jon queried.

"Yes. And you need to get school books..." Harry looked around. "Wait you have no shelves. You need to fix this place up."

"Oh? I would never have guessed," Jon said sarcastically.

"And get some security in. Right now that cellar got a lot of expensive material."

"Should I be writing all this down?" Jon asked, raising one eyebrow.

"You need to see if you can replace the ninja gear. Think that possible?" Harry said, pointing his fork.

"I am trying. Maybe World Wizarding Gear would have something less, um... elaborate and flowing. Something close and more suitable to continue testing out more threstral blood on. I am not very good at the cutting and stitching Tonks wrote to me about."
"Jon!" came a female cry outside.

"I wonder who is that?" Harry said rhetorically.


"Unless you have a secret admirer," Harry countered. Jon shook his head with laughter.

"Right. Only one other person, or maybe two, know that I live here, and I doubt Miss Alexandria Potage would step off her throne to go down a side alley in Diagon."

"You never know," Harry teased.

"I will bring her in," Jon ended that line of conversation, rising quickly.

"Put on some real clothes," Harry reminded him as he reached the stairs.

"This pants reaches the knee, and she has seen us bareback digging for an entire afternoon."

"She would be a guest in your castle, remember?" Harry advised.

"Hmph. I better find something," he turned to go into his quarters. "Please take out something for Tonks to partake in the breakfast from the hamper, and warm the kettle for tea in the meanwhile." Jon leaned out the window. "One moment!" he replied, waving at her.

"All right!" came the reply from the street.

Harry took the hamper from the kitchen and some wares to add another setting to the patio table. Jon returned wearing the Iron Man T-shirt he confiscated from Harry. "I definitely need to get stuff," he said, embarrassed. He ran down the stairs and let Tonks in.

"Hiya Jon," Tonks said.

"Miss Tonks," Jon bowed. "Please, come in."

Tonks came in, and sighed. "I couldn't sleep well. I was thinking about the fire, and I came to check on you. Just to make sure."

"I am quite well," Jon reinforced. "The pain was gone with a full night's rest."

"That's good. Come here," Tonks said. Jon came closer. Tonks suddenly wrapped him in a firm hug. "Thank you, for being so brave," she said softly, "I... I..." she just held Jon, who could not move, he was so stunned. "Couldn't believe my eyes when I saw you in the fire. Still can't believe you're ok."

"Yes, you must not worry," Jon said, patting her back. Tonks let him go.

Tonks held him at arms length, her eyes bright with happy tears. "You saved my life, Jonny boy. Don't you know doing those things for damsels in distress is not conducive for our self confidence? I wanna be an Auror, y'know." She pulled him back in a quick hug. "You're a wiry lad," she noticed, squeezing his arm.

"Ah... yes... it's the training," Jon stammered, a bit self conscious. "Come, your timing is excellent. Harry is awaiting upstairs in the patio."

"Why am I not surprised?" Tonks laughed. "Wotcha, Harry!" she called up, taking the steps two at a time. Jon latched the door closed and followed behind her. "You lads are up to something, aren't
"Business meeting," Harry beamed, pulling a chair out for her to sit at the table. "You're just in time." Tonks took the seat and smiled at the two of them.

"All this nice treatment!" Tonks laughed as she saw her plate. "You're going to make a girl fat if you keep this up," she said, pouring tea into her cup.

They took their time and ate, making small talk and discussing the week ahead.

"Let's see about our finances at Gringotts this morning. We also need to hire a curse breaker to get the claws out of the Diablo."

"Fair enough," Tonks admitted. "Or you could ask Ollivander. He seems to know a lot."

"Yes. But I also want to find out if that creature has other parts that are valuable and unique. A curse breaker would be able to tell us that too."

"True. Did we get a concrete offer yet for the Threstral parts?" Tonks asked.

"I will have to check my mail box at Eyelops," Jon said. "I set the return address there."

"That's a good idea. Keep your home address private," Harry agreed.

"I was thinking about that," Tonks said, sipping her tea. "Wouldn't it be better if we had an established Clan Hall, or House?"

"A property?" Harry asked.

"Yes. A place reserved for business and such," Tonks added.

"Sounds good," Jon agreed.

"When we were walking through Hogsmeade, I noticed there were places for rent nearer to the station. Far enough from the popular spots, but close enough to Hogwarts just in case you guys need to handle stuff while at school. Also, less prying eyes there than in Diagon. Cheaper too."

Harry thought that was a good idea. That forest, no forget the forest, the Basilisk would make a mint if they destroyed it and harvested the corpse. Those spiders also could be harvested, but Jon and Harry were nowhere close enough in power and knowledge to take them all on.

Jon stared at Tonks, who was pensive and thoughtful.

Does she want to be close to them when they left for school? Her behavior downstairs was a bit... different.

"Brilliant," Harry said. "That may be just what we need."

"And what about the American. Michael?"

"We need to check on the guild for more information about him," Jon said. "The more I think about it..." he frowned, putting food in his mouth. "Ah, forget it."

"Tonks, do you know Charlie Weasley? He's Ron and the twins' older brother."

"Yeah I think so, that's who Rook was talking about, innit?"
"Think you can arrange a meeting with him? We would like to do business with the armor smiths that made your Dragon jerkin. We could probably get a nice healthy sum for the extra barrels we have."

"I will write him. He was a year or so above me if I remember," replied Tonks. "I wonder if I still have the sale parchment..."

After they ate, Jon took some time inside to bathe and get ready. Tonks and Harry sat in the patio watching the sky brighten and discussing this and that.

"So. When are you going to get back a good wand?"

Harry hesitated. "I think when we've created some good test wands that are deemed worthy, Mr. Ollivander would let us use our new Phoenix feathers."

"What?!" Tonks said. "Did you say phoenix?"

"Um..yeah?"

"That is really, really cool. I have never heard of anyone with a phoenix core before."

"Oh?" Harry inquired.

"Yeah, only phoenix I know of is Fawkes. He doesn't like anyone except Dumbledore," Tonks said. "How did you manage to get that?"

"Fawkes flamed Dumbledore outside the shop last week. Two fell off and Jon caught it."

"Holy shit," Tonks whispered, staring at Harry incredulously. "The funny thing is, I believe you."

Harry grinned, "Just lucky, I guess."

"Luck, he says. The two of you are so strange," she said, shaking her head.

Jon came out, clean and dressed in his Madame Milkin's Suit-style robes and his tall ranging boots from WWG. "Whenever you are ready," he said. "We can leave for Gringotts."

Tonks stood up, nodding. "Let's go. We'll write Charlie from Eyelops when we stop off there."

The rest of the morning was spent running errands on Diagon alley. Dropping Clan documents at Gringotts, checking the Apothecary for going rates of raw materials they had in possession, and checking all the shops for school robes, supplies, clothes and a new Owl for Jon. Also, they checked on a small Ministry sub office for required documents necessary for Floo connection on Jon's house. While Tonks was writing Charlie at Eyelops, Jon took Harry aside.

"We can't go ranging safely until you have access to your spells, and I need better spell resistant armor until I can defend myself with magic. I was thinking about the Vampire you mentioned who created the Onyx gloves. If we could contact him and also get started on the bracers, we would be better prepared for the Dark Lord's cursed artifacts and more missions."

"Yeah. Ollivander wants us to build our own wands, and he's not going to let us get the phoenix feathers until we're good. And from what I've seen, we could have tested and built dozens until he decides we built enough top notch Ollivander level wands."

"It appears to be a daunting task. I also noticed you did not use the cloak in France." Jon let it hang.
"He knows about the Hallows. Or should I say, the fable of it. If he even suspects my invisibility cloak being one of them, he's going to go nuts."

"That cloak renders you perfectly invisible however, the blood stained robes were weak against water, direct light, and still left a shadow. But another thing happened in France that you did not even realize," Jon smiled.

"What?"

"My knife, and long bow," Jon said softly. "Reacted to my magic and the robes. By inflicting deathblows underneath the robes' influence, they turn invisible when I wish it so."

Jon drew his heavy dagger, and before Harry's eyes, it faded from sight and camouflaged against his current robes.

"Yeah, you shot the Diablo with the bow, and I remembered before... seeing the onyx gauntlet and the bow when you were saddled up with Tonks. Afterwards I didn't see it when you ran off to rescue the hostages."

"I experimented yesterday at home with a bit of the threstral blood. There is a problem," Jon said. "The blood alone does not turn the patch I took from my apprentice robes invisible. I think it needs a mixture of my blood with its blood, under the right circumstances..."

"And? You got it to work?"

"No. I tried with a few small cuts. It is my gut feeling that my blood needs to be unwillingly spilt."

"Ah. That sucks."

"What?"

"Ah, as in, that is a bad turn of luck."

"Right. I will figure it out, eventually."

Tonks came out of the Eyelops. "You guys ready?"

"We need more gear from Mr. Bulistrode," Jon said. "And we need to check on Greyback."

"No problem," Tonks shrugged, setting off. "I have two immortal heroes with me," she winked back at them, her hair spinning about her as she turned on her heel.

"Back again Ms Tonks? Oh and you two fine young gentlemen... it's the entire gang!" Mr. Bulistrode greeted as they stepped in the store. "Always a pleasure. How can we help today?"

"I would like to browse your," Jon thought a moment. "Ah, yes... your level four magical hazard garments. Different from the apprentice robes you sold us before."

"Certainly!" he replied. "This way," he gestured to a large shelf near the fitting rooms.

"I would prefer something with less, fanfare and extra material," Jon said, inspecting the options shown.

"We have some Game wardens and beast-master level gear here," Mr. Bulistrode offered. "But they aren't level four protection. Very good against claws, teeth, and puncture, but not so much magical accidents. The only thing I could think of..." he thought a moment. "Is this," he walked back to the
front display and the mannequin there. "Used mostly for display, but..." he laughed as he drew his wand and cast **scourgify** on the window from the inside. It cleaned some grime off the inside of the window, but dirt on the outside was still blocking the sun from coming in clearly. "Hasn't been a hot seller. It's a relic from the past that nobody appreciates any more. Dueling Robes, level 4 magical hazard with no extra frills and thrills. Simple, and inclusive of an attachable face mask, or if you want, we have separate accessories for a hood and balaclava headpiece. Made in the early sixteenth century; far east. We kept this because it attracts walk-in clients. Well, when the windows were cleaned oh so long ago," he laughed. "They never really buy it, but do get something more modern and fashionable when I show them around. We still have a few still in stock."

The robes were a dark brownish grey. The upper portion was cut similar to what a samurai might wear when he was out of armor, except the sleeves weren’t as loose and the torso was belted with a heavy cummerbund that was designed with three concentric belts with functional buckles. This cummerbund had sewn in attachments that could be used for adding weapon scabbards or belts. The upper robe had no buttons and widened to an open, high collar. There were tiny metal hooks where buttons should be and matching holes on the opposite side to close. The robe continued lower past the cummerbund and finished just below the calf. The pants was a simple military cut with only mid thigh side pockets as a departure to the stern lines.

Jon folded his arms, inspecting it. Harry was doing the same. Tonks had her head tilted, as if really trying to understand the purpose of the design, but was also intrigued.

"Why would the robes be open in the front like that?" Tonks said, watching the obvious flaw in protection from the middle of the torso to neck.

"It can close with the tiny hooks," Bulistrode said, flicking his wand and the mannequin made a graceful about turn, then went back motionless. He demonstrated the functionality of the hooks, and the open V down the middle came closed and the tall, wide upturned collar now wrapped around the mannequin's ears and jaw. He released the hooks, allowing it to return to its intended state. "But it was sort of a taunt to the opponent, sending a message that he was not afraid to show his chest, a vital weak spot," he said confidently, seemingly knowledgeable about his work.

He grinned, folding his arms, subtly matching Jon's and Harry's pose. "And also because whoever wore this to a duel was the baddest fucker around and didn't give a shit about who was in front of him."

Jon approached the mannequin to get a closer look.

"This design was also popular when used with a chain link chest mail, or light leather armor underneath it," he said offhandedly.

Mr. Bulistrode tilted his head in appreciation of Jon's knowledge. Jon inspected the seemingly useless heavy attachment loops and hard leather guides set at particular spots on the upper back, third rib, lower back and the extra padded material under both shoulders.

"Even may accommodate for outer chest plate, wait...is this a ..." Jon eyes opened in excitement, then he was contemplative once again.

After a long pause, Jon nodded in satisfaction. The sturdy loops and guides on the back were designed to attach either a heavy sword scabbard across the back, or lighter dual short swords. The guides on the forearms allowed heavy vambraces to be equipped. That, alongside the shoulder straps, meant that full curaiss could be donned over the ensemble. Magical robes that accommodated either light leather armor or chainmail underneath, or if inclined; heavy plate on top. Excellent.
The designers knew what they were doing. "What is the price?" Jon asked.

"This is an antique, but as you can see," Bulistrode advised, not reaching the price pitch as yet. He showed off the newness and sturdiness of the garb, still like brand new. "Whatever charms the designers did is permanent, these level four robes don't decay like any of the regulars."

Mr. Bulistrode stepped back subtly; right out of the gang's personal space, just out of their blind spot. His hands were clasped behind his back, not distracting his potential buyers from making their decision. Mr. Boot was at the sales counter, observing the master salesman at work.

"I have two others in the back, different colours. I believe the all black would suit you better, Jon." He made a motion behind their back towards the sales counter and Mr. Boot ran off to the storage room, bringing back the sets they had in record time. "Come, let's try it on. Probably we can persuade Mr. Potter too if he likes."

"Sure, why not?" Harry said.

"And what about me?" Tonks added, intrigued.

"Oh?" Bulistrode said. With a snap of his fingers Mr. Boot went back in the storage room. "We actually do have one designed for a female duelist, slightly different cut, but maybe the colour would suit you," he said uncertainly. "Ah. Let's try them on, then we shall discuss your options," he flashed another bright smile.

Minutes later Harry was wearing the exact duplicate of what was on the mannequin, Jon was wearing an all black trim version, and Tonks had on a slightly different outfit that was trimmed with blood red fittings on a dark red, almost black, female version without the cummerbund. Hers was closed at the waist with a single belt, and the V at the front was exchanged with an off center button down design that continued down past the waist and flared a bit at the hips and thigh region. It was finished with a slender version of the stern militaristic pants that came with the men's robes.

"This is an unusual color. Almost the color of dried blood," she ventured.

"Ah yes," Bulistrode hesitated. "It was intentionally designed that way. It was inspired by a legendary witch who completed the Joust way back then. She made sure to finish her opponents in the tournament with a spell that allowed their blood to be splattered on her, so by the time she made it to the finals, her entire ensemble was covered in dried blood, and only her latest kill was still fresh." He touched the highlighted trim on the design. "The only witch to have won it unscathed and completely sane at the end, if my memory serves me right."

"Really?" Tonks said, looking this way and that in the mirror. "You remember her name?"

"Not her given name, no," he replied. "But she was known as the Red Ora Kill after her victory. A seer who gave her King bad tidings and he banished her into the tournament, as a roundabout way of execution. Wizards were superstitious of killing seers directly, said it was bad luck. Guess he thought she would be easy food for the Hit Wizards who risk their lives in search for glory in that deadly tournament."

"Red Ora Kill?" she said softly. It had to be coincidence that Harry thought up of the name Red Dora and then this man gives her some history on a witch called that.

*Or was it?* Tonks stared at Harry.

Harry looked worried. He was seeing her expressive face do the range of emotions associated with being told of a prophecy. "Just a coincidence! If it's one thing I am not, and that's a seer!"
Tonks looked at both of the boys, her expression unsure. She sighed, once again watching herself in the mirror.

"This entire outfit feels so light," she said. "It's amazing." She put her wand in the robe pocket. She flicked it out and slipped it back in, getting a feel for the height and speed of quick draw. "The pocket is perfect, and the right angle to keep the wand from easily falling out."

"Mild attachment charm to wood is enchanted in the pocket liner. Touch of your skin breaks the charm," Bulistrode explained. "This is the real thing, not the crap Warlock's Weekly like to advertise."

Harry felt a bit exposed with the deep open V of the design showing off his under jersey, but the buckles and whole design of the Robes made motion feel more dynamic, and not flamboyant and eye catching as loose wizard robes did. He had the feeling that you were able to do all sorts of maneuvers, unrestricted, with these robes. He looked across to Jon, who was doing something peculiar with his left arm. He did not fully put it through the sleeves, instead, his arm was bent at the elbow, resting in the roomy armhole as if it were in a sling.

"Stylish. Some of the folk north of wall would have loved this," Jon uttered to himself, appreciating the robes. "With elements of practicality and military foresight in the design." He shrugged out of the robe with his left arm with a flourish, revealing his wiry arm underneath. He grinned at Harry. He slipped it back on. "Mr. Ollivander would love to see that motion in action."

"What?" Harry asked, lost.

"Don't worry, you shall see. Soon. So," he turned towards Mr. Bulistrode. "You have convinced me. Did he convince the two of you?" he asked Harry and Tonks.

Harry nodded, and Tonks sighed.

"This is going to cost a vault," Tonks said softly. "So. Price?"

"We can work out a payment plan, if necessary," Mr. Bulistrode said amicably.

"Price?" Tonks said again.

"Two thousand each. And forty galleons more if you prefer the balaclava, and hood attachments."

"And what about the weapon harnesses?" Jon asked.

"Lord Black, you know your stuff. I'll throw them in if you want for thirty," he added dubiously. "Not that a wizard would have need for them, but if you want the full thing... sure! Why not?"

"I remember you saying you have the index and middle finger cutout level 4 gloves the last time I was here," Tonks said. "Those gloves have an enchantment to protect the exposed fingers like the rest of the hand, but allow for the same touch feel, right?"

"Correct, twenty for a pair."

"I'll take three pairs. And the robes. With balaclava. Do I get a scarf too?" she asked.

Mr. Bulistrode laughed. "How did you know about that?"

"A Red witch who likes to splatter blood on herself must have had something to wipe it off her face. Also, this outfit needs one," she said, modeling herself in front the mirror.
"You are quite perceptive," he said. "I have the scarf, but it has no protective enhancements whatsoever. Except for being non-stainable, it is just a simple scarf. It is however, the Ora Kill's original scarf, and it is a bit pricey as it's an ancient antique. Eight hundred galleons for it." He brought a chest out of the back room. He took out a set of keys from his pocket and opened the lock. In it was a scarf the same dark red colour as the robes.

"Wow. How do you know it's the original?"

"A Blood Runic board will tell you the names of all the victims of the tournament who were defeated by her. Still works up to this day. Their names also check out in the history books written about those tournaments. You would need to be in the Arithmancy Guild to get access to Librarians with that information. I can't remember the name, but it held most, if not all the records of the Joust Tournament. That guild would be able to help you."

"We'll take them," Harry said. Mr. Bulistrode nodded, his hands on his hips.

Mr. Boot punched the air behind them in victory, silent as a wraith.

The trio removed the gear and Mr. Boot brought their accessories and even included enchanted shrinkable mannequins to mount them on when they were not in use.

"These robes are very easy to clean with soap and water. If you need to clean it with magic, use Aguamenti instead of scourgify. Scourgify would probably leave you with a nasty feedback sting. Scrubbing brush and hang out in the sun to dry and they'll be fine." Mr. Bulistrode wrote up their bills. All three cut their fingers and paid using the Gringotts chalkboard.

"I noticed these circular stitch spots that seems to be a place for a patch," Harry pointed at the left sleeve by the forearm and on both the shoulders.

"Yes, that is for standards or house banners to be placed by the user. The patches are included in the box. You can attach any coat of arms or banner you want on the patch and it would integrate into the robes with simple stitching."

"We need to go a bit further and we would pass back for these things," Tonks said. The trio said their goodbyes and headed further down Knocturn towards the Hunter's Guild.

As they walked across the room, the other patrons grew quiet. Jon was immediately on alert. Tonks slipped out her wand. Harry did the same.

"Its them," one of the wizards proclaimed from a bar stool, standing to face them. "The Crows."

"Hail," another man said in congratulations. He sounded drunk. "Victory is yours, rookies."

"Aye," another man said. There was a general rise in clamour and good humor in their voices. Some tipped their drinks to them. The noise level began to ascend.

Greyback began hitting an old cowbell behind the counter. "Come on lads, if we're going to fucking do it, let's do it properly. Get on yer feet, fellow hunters. Front and center Sweet'ums, Black, and Glasses boy."

Jon and the others came forward and accepted the tumblers of liquor presented to them by Greyback.

Greyback drew his wand, and crossed both arms across his chest in a X, wand pointing to the ceiling, just as Madame Maxime did. The other wizards in the establishment did the same, even the drunk ones who were trying to maintain balance.
"Victory belongs to the *Crow's Vambrace*. Glory to the guild!" came a chant.

The trio returned the salute. "Glory to the guild!"

"That's right fuckers!" Greyback declared, taking a shot from his tumbler. Tonks drained her glass. Jon watched Harry, then the alcohol in suspicion for a moment. Both of them shrugged, then drained their tumblers. Harry's twelve year old chest burned. He offered Jon his fist, and he connected, both young men coughing.

"You guys lit up the fucking place down there! When Bogrod sent the commission statement we couldn't believe it. And an immediate rank boost recommendation from Maxime herself. For rookies you guys don't fucking *play!*"

"Oh?" Tonks said. "What did the statement say?"

"Eight thousand galleons commission, and change," Greyback stated. "Some S rank clans don't even get that in an entire hunting season, and you got that in a day?" Greyback laughed, pouring another round. "What did you do, end world hunger?"

"That's just for the morning job. We got some more coming in," Tonks said winking at her lads. "Should be processed today. A three thousand commission direct, with trickle on commission over time," she said airily.

"You're fucking with me right."

"No, she is not," Jon said.

"Another round on tha house lads!" Greyback declared, and he flicked his wand and rows of tumblers assembled on the counter. He grabbed two bottles and deftly flipped them upside down and expertly drained them over the glasses, spilling nothing. There was another loud cheer as the drinks magically appeared in front of the patrons. "You went from unranked to B class in a day. You guys are serious."

Harry and Jon shrugged. Tonks beamed with pride.

"What do you know of Michael MacMillan?" Jon asked a few minutes later when Greyback was fully in a good mood.

"Who?" Greyback asked again.


"Never?" Harry said. "He was at Estagal. There was some confusion with the *Reaper's Scythe*."

"The Reapers got a false alarm a while back, as far as I know," Greyback pulled his beard. "They got the call out fee, but then they got intel on arrival that the boars were eradicated. They came back to London the next day, with documents and shit. They've been sent to Argentina last month on another mission."

Harry cursed. He knew something was up with the whole Marketplace setting.

"You know of any wizard who can ride a horse competently, and recover from the Cruciatus curse"
"Hm. There was some rumours of a cowboy wizard who was ridiculously tough, as in, magic didn't affect him as it did normal wizards. Spell effects didn't last long on him at all. But that was still years ago when he was imprisoned for fraud in Spain. Seems he used to swindle people's property and flip it."

"Sell it to who?"

"Mainly relatives of Thomas's family who lived in northern Spain, and some other purebloods on the continent. I think he got locked up because Aurors caught up with the original owners who were befuddled and signed over properties without being paid."

"Did you remember his name?" Harry asked.

"Only by one of his codenames. Triad, I think it was. Or was it Trayard, something like that. Locked up in the Celda De Inferno. Spain's version of Azkaban the last I heard of him."

"If we wanted to say, follow up on his prison sentence, how do we do that?" Tonks asked, all cheer gone from her voice.

"You might need to go down there and see for yourself at the prison. Or better yet, check with a Spaniard registered Hit Wizard clan first. Aurors generally don't like foreign wizards looking for people on their turf. Gets the wand fingers itchy. Especially B ranked clans and higher. Most Auror Corps are alerted when high ranking clans step foot on their soil. And we do jobs for profit, not to cause wars, or get disappeared, if you know what I mean. Keep your work clean, and we would have plenty more days like this," Greyback indicated the happy bar.

"What if we catch him... if theoretically he comes to England?" Harry said.

"Better you get concrete info on a missing convict. So at least you can get paid if theoretically, he escaped, and theoretically just happens to come here and you theoretically catch an international bounty. International Bounty is what the AK guild at SouthHampton specialize in. We call them the GloryHounds. I think they call themselves that too, to be honest."

"So why are they named the AK Hunter's guild?" Jon asked.

"Obviously, they kill first and collect bounty based on deceased rates. Who captures wizards and transports them alive? Way too dangerous. Only Rooks try that. Hunting Wanted wizards is pretty dangerous, but the flipside is, if the hunters get killed there is no public outrage. They're paid to do the work, innit? Kind of like Aurors, but everyone thinks those guys are heros. When it gets hot they subcontract hit wizards for extraction of targets in foreign lands. Easier to deny accountability when things go down wrong. Nobody cares about mercs dying, except other mercs, that is. The Aurors contractor departments just hire the next clan willing and able."

"Meat for the grinder," Jon said.

"You got that right, Black. There is always some young buck willing and able to die young. Aurors can't be seen dying all the time, looks bad on the government."

Harry grimaced. "Keep this conversation under wraps Greyback. How much is that going to cost?"

"A date?" he looked at Tonks with his best good boy face.

"No," she said at once.
"Ah. Well, worth a try, anyway," he said good naturedly. "A pint of threstral blood should do. And that is just a gift, not payment for my silence. I will forget this convo as my gift in return. My silence is free, it cannot be bought, or sold. But I do like presents. We good?" Greyback offered his hand to Harry. Harry shook it.

"You shall have it," Harry confirmed.

"Happy hunting then," Greyback nodded. "Let me know how it goes, if you need a contact down in Spain."

"Will do," Harry said.

They left the guild. The trio picked up their robes and dropped it off at Jon's place. Jon and Harry walked in silence as the three of them went to the cafe to get lunch.

"What are you guys thinking? MacMillan is behind the two attacks?" Tonks asked.

"Could be. But he seems more of a lackey than the mastermind type."

"Hide in plain sight," Jon said simply.

"You think Estagal is in danger?" Harry asked.

"Yes. No. I am not sure. I think he is right now solely interested in me, Mr Black."

"Fuck." Tonks said, slapping her forehead.

"What is it?" Harry asked.

"He might have heard the conversation I had with Penelope. I told her who you were, Harry, and how you guys joke about being Immortal. We were definitely in earshot of him. He played it off cool, when we were on the site in the morning, but he changed as soon as he sat down at breakfast. He was all, humble like and persuasive, trying to convince us to let him join."

Harry remembered the memories that Dumbledore showed him of young Tom Riddle in the pensieve. How he convinced Hepzibah Smith over time to show him the Cup. It did sort of remind him of Michael's performance that morning.

"Jon, what do you think?"

"We invite him. And we capture him. It's that simple."

"It's not, what if he is innocent and his story is true?" Tonks said.

Jon had no answer.

"Having a dark wizard targeting us is not cool," Tonks said. "I will have to get information from the Ministry. Or their ministry. My application permit gets me access to research material on legal cases. Maybe I can dig up some stuff."

"Sounds good," Jon said, flexing his hand.

"What is it?" Harry said.

"He was impressed about the twin light ball spell not affecting me. I saw it in his mannerisms. He wants to know how I survived it. Most people were like Mistress Tonks, who was amazed and
unbelieving that I was unscathed, and were happy that I survived. He wanted the knowledge of the
skill. Thinking back, I believe he had no genuine interest in actually joining the clan."

Harry nodded.

"If what Tonks said is right and he could have overheard them, what he really wants secrets to your
'Immortality'," Harry deduced.

"But that's just a joke. Right?" Tonks countered.

"Right, but what you told Penelope convinced him otherwise. That's how these types work. They
piece together things, and latch on to an idea, obsessed."

Tonks stared at Harry. "You sound like you know this first hand."

Harry returned the stare. "I read stuff. In the library. Sometimes," he shrugged.

"Oh. If you say so," Tonks said, eating her rolls.

"Yeah. Nobody is immortal."

"Valar Morghulis," Jon said offhandedly.

"What does that mean?" Both Harry and Tonks said.

"All men must die."
Chapter Summary

Master Ollivander and his apprentices begin to craft their weapons. Tonks, Harry and Jon are invited to Alexandria's Cotillion Event at Carcassonne.

The following morning was spent at the workshop working on the wand bracers. Mr. Ollivander insisted that their gloves, mask and Apprentice robes were sufficient to protect themselves from the toxic remains of the Diablo corpse.

"Lads, no time to waste. You have all the rare items necessary. The potency is best when fresh, as it is usually with most crafting professions. Potions, are another story..." he instructed, his hands clasped behind his back.

"Jon you said you had the level two fine metal tools? Those would be enough to extract the claws. Trust me," Ollivander began rubbing his hands in anticipation as he took out a new leather journal from the top drawer at his office desk. "Ah, yes. These are the instructions I have complied from various notes and manuscript of renowned craftsmen."

He gave them detailed instructions on tanning the Threstral wings.

"There is a process of using animal brains in the tanning process. What we have here lads, are very rare combination of elements that... should create an exquisite solution."

He took out a large chalkboard and hung it on the wall. He began to write on it, explaining the quantities needed.

"Nogtail Urine. A must. Elfin bat wings, superior malleability with shape-shifting capability. Diablo brains, the only magical creature that can conjure spells at will with devastating effects. Notorious opponents simply because their abilities overpowers all other types of conventional magic."

He drew a diagram of the outline of the leather bracer. He then completed with surprising detail, a drawing of the lacing system and the wand support.

"You will design something that resembles this. I must commend you on your ability to collect the hardest parts in such a short time. Threstral components of the highest potency. And the claws, the sharpest magical material available, used worldwide for armoring."

The two boys nodded in acknowledgement.

"I believe we should also experiment with the bones to see if we could make a full threstral wand, which I have not attempted due to the rarity of it. Rare, and extremely dangerous. Our gloves must be worn at all times."

Ollivander instructed them to pour the nogtail urine in their individual five gallon cauldrons. They ignited the bunsen burner with a match lit by the lamp fire. He continued his lecture, writing down steps in point form.
"This must heat for an hour and allowed to cool. While it is heating up, we must add the brains. So go ahead and place the head within the bench vise grip."

Jon used large tongs to pick up the severed head and held it steady while Harry opened the vise's jaws with the handle then tightened it so that was secure.

"Good," Ollivander drew on the board a top down diagram of the Devil's head, dividing it down the centre with a straight north to south line. Ollivander gave Jon and Harry what appeared to be a small two man saw. "Mask on, hood up," Ollivander commanded, donning his own well used set. The two boys did as well. "Straight down the centre of the skull."

Both young men began to saw through the paper thin skin of the Diablo. The skin tore easily and black bone peeked through the gap. Within minutes a sizable gap was created through the skull, revealing a glowing, cream-coloured substance beneath.

"Use the mask's auxiliary straps to safely secure the air gaps by your chin. Keep it airtight. The extraction releases a gas that is poisonous." Ollivander demonstrated with his and also pointed out the box of bezoars nearby. "If anything happens, grab a bezoar and run outside to swallow it. Do not panic and remove your mask inside, as that it would only make it worse? Understood?"

"Yes, Master Ollivander," Jon and Harry said in unison. Ollivander nodded and checked his notes once more, then added more instructions on the board.

"Number four iron spike, hammer at these two points," Ollivander commanded. He used a quill and inked two large 'x's above the tiny pointed ears. The two boys grabbed the tools on the wall and poised the hammer and spike over the spot.

"One the count of three," he commanded. "One, two.. three!"

Both boys struck true at the point and a crack began to zigzag almost comically around the base of the skull through the two damaged pressure points. The entire skull was now cracked like a hard-boiled egg.

"Perfect." Ollivander brought a cauldron with a clamping lid. "Put the skull fragments in here," he said. Harry and Jon picked up tweezers and peeled the thin bone carefully off the glowing brain matter and placed it in the cauldron.

Ollivander made addendums on the right side of the board; quick dashes going down in a list.

"The diablo brain, in such good condition, can be dried and powdered and is used to create powerful alchemy; potion based weapons when stored in the correct flasks. Instant Darkness, Dementia in a Bottle, Confringo, Blindness Gas, even sealed Patronus spells are possible." He wrote down these few examples. "However, for our purposes, we will need samples of its natural state." He began reading from his notes again, then wrote down more on the board. "Number three silver paring knife, scoop out approximately one tablespoon. This should now be entered into your cauldrons."

They did so and the light yellow liquid now turned to a sparkling pink substance.

"Good. Carefully release the vise and overturn the brain into this cauldron," Ollivander brought a thick glass cauldron that Harry would have mistaken for a fishbowl. "This is a Fairy Wing cauldron. Materials placed inside of this cauldron will float and not be contaminated." Harry used the heavy tongs and lifted the head. Jon held the cauldron carefully as the brain was overturned in it. The brain slowed to a float, and remained still. Jon closed it with the cover.

"That lads, is approximately forty thousand galleons right there," Ollivander winked. He took it to
his cabinet. "It is yours. But until you are ready to secure it, I shall keep it here. Put the remains of the skull back in the bucket."

"The Diablo brains will strengthen the amplitude of magical defense the bracer would absorb if you are quick enough to use it to block an incoming spell. However, its true ability comes forth when you channel a complex shield, or high level attack spell. It has been known to amplify original spells created by the owner of the bracer. The brain matter creates a bond with your own brain, your magic, and your personality. If you create a useful spell, the Core meld bracer would magnify its potency two fold." Ollivander held up a glass jar of Threstral blood, examining it in the light. "Here is where it gets interesting, and your own personal touch would be used, Jon. Your gear that camouflaged seamlessly into the background is a new invention, and could serve a very practical purpose."

"But that, the threstral blood..." he trailed off. "It only works when fused with blood unwillingly spilt..." Jon suggested. Ollivander poured the blood into two separate flasks and set them on the requisition counter splitting the storeroom from the workroom.

"Hm." Ollivander dismissed. "We need to let that brain and urine combination simmer. You can take off your masks now, let's have a little break while we wait. I'm famished." He turned, taking off his mask and gloves and grabbing his keys. "Let's take a walk to the cafe and grab something, lads."

Ten minutes later the two boys were outside the cafe sitting at their favourite table. They were awaiting Mr. Ollivander, who went inside to order at the counter as it wasn't quite lunchtime and Barbara was helping cook for the lunch rush.

"It's ready!" Ollivander called from inside. "Come and pick it up."

The two boys retrieved their plates of pancakes and eggs. Ollivander came out after them with only two tall clear glasses and a custard filled cone.

"I still have a sweet tooth, my appetite isn't as ravenous as you growing lads," he laughed. He placed the two glasses in front of the them as they ate. Halfway through the meal, both Jon and Harry looked uncomfortable, sizing up to sneeze. Harry began to feel the tickling nose sensation of a powerful sneeze coming on, mixed with a rising heart beat, as if he had just ran a short distance.

Master Ollivander flicked his wand and both glasses expanded and became large fishbowl style cauldrons.

Harry and Jon sneezed, and blood gushed out of their noses. It splattered into the fishbowls. They did this two more times, holding on to those fishbowls for dear life as the sneezes poured blood out like a violently spouting faucet. After the fourth and last bout of sneezing, Ollivander gave them both a bezoar and a small vial of Blood replenisher.

"Blood unwillingly given, solved," Ollivander smiled, watching the now pale and weak boys. "There are many spells that can do this, but they all are dark. We old timers know a few tricks to get around these ...limitations," he winked. "Swallow that bezoar and drink up. You would be fine by the time we reach the shop."

By the time they returned to the shop, Harry and Jon were indeed feeling better, until they saw their reflections in the shop window. Dried blood stained their upper lips almost comically. They went to the washroom and washed their faces.

"Told you this guy was nuts," Harry grinned as he dried his hands and face.

"The man is quite ingenious, I would never have thought of this method to get my own blood," Jon
shook his head in amusement. "You think he would join our clan? His knowledge would be a huge advantage to us."

"We could only ask," Harry said vaguely. He dropped his voice to a whisper. "Sages like him and Dumbledore usually want something in return. Their currency is loyalties and secrets... and he's good, very good at hiding his curiosity about us. These types know how to play the waiting game, and get critical information, freely given too. It would take a lot of convincing before he decides to pack up shop and go ranging with us. Master Ollivander is singularly focused on wand crafting."

"I genuinely like and respect Master Ollivander. Wish we had more allies like him," Jon said.

"In time, we will," Harry replied, leaving the washroom.

Ollivander was waiting for them in the workshop.

"Let's test out your theory Jon," Ollivander said. "Hold out your sleeve." Jon did so and Ollivander placed a tiny amount of threstral blood and an equal amount of Jon's unto a spot on the apprentice robes. The spot became invisible.

"Success," Ollivander commended. "The blood thinning enchantment used for the Blood Seal quills would be effective in stretching your samples to coat your new set, Jon. I will perform it for you when you are ready."

The old sage watched them sternly, pointing his wand at the two glass cauldrons of blood.

"Your blood is priceless. I advise that you secure any remaining samples in Gringotts as soon as you are finished with your camouflage project. Or if you want, destroy it with Reducto in a Blood magic potion cauldron. We shall only use a few ounces of this mixture to polish the bracer when we are finished. With the phoenix core infused, you would be able to magically cause it to disappear at will, hiding your wand. This would work to your advantage, obviously. If for some reason you are required to hand over your wand, you should give them your spare, while your real one is safely hidden away, ready for a surprise attack!"

Once again, Ollivander did a dramatic demonstration of pulling an imaginary wand from the inside of his other wrist.

"Many wizards have perished over countless duels, thinking that they have disarmed their opponent, only for this movement to be the last thing they see," he said gravely. "Ah. It has cooled sufficiently. Add the Threstral wing," he ordered. They complied. "Good. Tomorrow we would add the Elfen bat wings to make the wing magically supple and stretch as you grow older. We'll let this sit for now. Continue reading chapter seven and get back working on the Oak and Niffler tail wands you started last week." Ollivander turned to leave. "Oh, and do not let these two samples out of your sight!" he warned, pointing at the cauldrons filled with their blood on the counter.

"Yes, Master Ollivander," they replied in unison, nodding.

"Good. I am going to the apothecary to get ingredients to start the blood thinning enchantment potion. I expect that those would be prepped and ready for the core infusion by the time I return." Ollivander turned and left them to work.

After work that day was done the boys left the workshop. Harry popped in Jon's place to help him unpack some items delivered to him over the past couple days and clean up. Tonks dropped in an hour or so into their chores. After a bit of small talk, they all agreed that Tonks should be the representative for Clan correspondence between Charlie, the Dragon Reserve and affiliated
businesses, and legal research on Michael MacMillan. They also decided that mission ranging would be put on hold until Harry and Jon had the magical bracers, at least, to counter their lack of effective wands.

Jon, seeing as he had some influence as being part of an Ancient House, would make initial contact with the various property owners that were shortlisted from the classifieds of magical newspapers available. Also, he would have to contact various craftsmen and vendors to get his home into a more secure and comfortable space.

After Tonks left, Harry took it upon himself to give Jon basic instruction on various Hogwarts-related stuff to better prepare him for school, and more importantly, in-depth knowledge of the major events that happened before. Harry also tried his best to explain how prejudice worked in the magical world, the Blacks' family tree, and what he knew of Sirius' and Regulus' story with the Potters and his involvement with the war against the Death Eaters.

He also decided that even if he couldn't do curses and jinxes himself, Jon's wand, which was singularly effective at those class of spells, was perfect for learning them. Jon had taken well to instruction of the Tripping jinx, Disarming jinx, the Blasting Curse, the Stunning Curse, the Paper Cut Jinx and the Impedimenta Jinx that evening. However, shields, charms, and counter jinxes fizzled out every time Jon tried them with his Dragon heartstring wand. Harry let Jon use his wand and the basic levitation and Lumos charms were practiced. His levitation was shaky and didn't raise all that high, but for a first timer it was sufficient. The Lumos gave off a pale, ice blue light instead of a nice bright white. They dismissed that as incompatibility with the wand itself, rather than any magical issue.

The following day they finished their first fusion of a Niffler tail core into the Oaken wood. They then sealed the corkscrew threading between the stem and the handle with their wands, a flashy magical welding process which needed their masks, gloves and apprentice robes for their safety.

"Congratulations. This is the beginner's wand all apprentices must learn first. Give it a while to set and then we would try it out. It is especially good at Summoning charms, Stealing hexes, earth based spells and physical space-altering enchantments. In the meantime," Ollivander pointed his wand at the bracer project chalkboard. "Let's continue." Ollivander brought out a blue rolled carpet which resembled a tarpaulin. He spread it over the largest work table. "Levitate the body up, Harry. We would extract the claws now. Jon, you brought your fine metal tools? Good."

With a wave, he shrunk the notes from yesterday and pulled it off the chalkboard and into two new leather tomes.

"As apprentices, you would be required to keep all your lesson notes and projects in this book. You are free to add side projects and self study in it. Now," he drew a diagram of the arms and legs of the Diablo.

"The claws are extremely long and retractable. They begin here," he drew an arrow close to the elbow, "And here," he drew another arrow middle of the shin area. "You can be mortally petrified if your are skewered with the claws still inside the body. When they are extracted they lose nearly all of the dark magic embedded in them," he advised.

"So. Number three scalpel, make crosswise cuts where the arrows are. Masks up and tightened," he ordered.

Harry cut on the left arm, Jon on the right.
"Lengthwise incision half inch deep along here," he drew a line running down the forearm. "Another
crosswise cut here," he drew a line across the back of the knuckles. "Heavy pliers to crush the claw
here," he drew an arrow near the elbow. Jon did so first, then Harry followed. "Peel back the skin
from the cut using scalpel and tongs three inches from the wrist."

Both of them did so.

"You see the black thin bone? That is it. You need to use a pincers and pull the claw out from the
hand area with considerable, steady, force. Jam the scalpel between the claw and the flesh at an
angle, this will serve to cut the tendons as the claw comes out, keeping it whole and intact. Begin."

It took the apprentices ten minutes to slowly pull out the seven inch long black spike with the 'fine
tools' metallic pincers.

"Good!" He opened a metal box. "In here. Wrap up the body and put it away. Let's try out your first
Niffler wands, shall we?" He placed two small red balls on the table.

Both Harry and Jon picked up their rough, unpolished wands from the work tables. Harry felt a
surge of pride from completing this first step into weapon making.

"Give it a whirl, summoning charm first!"

Harry and Jon both called out, "Accio!" One of the balls flew straight into Harry's hand, the other
flew into Jon's stomach. He clumsily caught it as it was falling.

"Good! Put it in your pocket. The basic pickpocket spell is 'Kleptopliss'," he demonstrated a delicate
flick of his wand held within thumb and forefinger, the motion mimicking plucking a hair out of mid
air. Jon's ball popped out of his pocket and floated across the room to Ollivander.

Both of them tried the spell, and after a few tries Harry got it to work. After some trial and error and
further instruction, Jon finally got it to work as well. Ollivander took them outside behind the shop.

"And now, the earth spell. Tunneling is a Niffler's specialty. This spell was modified from that to
help plant crops and trees. Non-verbal spell only. The basic is the Spade Charm," he gripped his
wand like a knife; stabbing it in a downward motion. "The more useful and powerful version: the
Plow charm," he kept the same grip and stabbed in a downwards 'come-here' motion. Mr. Ollivander
brought a flower pot full of soil and rest it in front of them.

Harry got both charms on the first try. Jon did the stabbing motion and the flower pot exploded, and
a half a foot gouge was left on the ground.

"Stronger than usual, might need some tempering there, son. No worries, once the wand works,
that's important. Lastly, the space altering charm." He took out a ring box from his pocket. "Envisio
Engorgio!"

The box remained the same size, but he pushed the red ball in it, then the other, then his hat. He
closed it, opened it, and showed it to them. He gave them both two ring boxes to test along with a
ball each.

Harry got it on the fourth try. Jon got in on the tenth.

"How long does this last?" Harry asked.

"This basic spell would last about ten minutes. No matter what you try to do to keep the box closed,
once the enchantment wears off, the contents will pop out, unaltered. If the magic isn't countered
before it wears off, this box will not be able to be enchanted again for almost a year. Larger spaces will not be able to be re-enchanted for proportionally longer times. Very, very, tricky concept this type of magic is. *Envisio Finite!*

In a smooth motion he ducked down just in time to catch the sprung hat on his head. The two boys did the cancellation spells and on the first try the balls jumped out.

"Excellent. We'll cut to shape and hang out the bracer wings now using the claws. And then leave it to dry overnight. Tomorrow we would begin on construction and design. By Saturday, once all goes well; we would be able to infuse your old core and polish them up, ready for action!" Mr. Ollivander grinned as he led them back inside.

That afternoon Harry and Jon decided to visit the bookstores and look up Jon's Sleeping Curse, seeing as Jon could cast it with both wands without much effort. Harry and Jon found no reference to it whatsoever. For such a powerful and useful spell, it bewildered Harry that the closest he found in Obscurus' library was the Sleeping Charm, which basically was useless since the recipient could be awoken by any regular sort of disturbance. They made a mental note to ask Mr. Ollivander about it.

The rest of the week passed in the same vein. They completed two more wands, and cut and designed the holes used for the bracer lacing. They treated the threstral leather with some more of the brain matter taken from the Fairy Wing Cauldron and mixed it with Holly wood shavings.

The two other wands were second level wands, less specialized and closer up the scale towards the all purpose wands school children got when they enrolled into Hogwarts. The second wand they created was Birch and Hippogriff feather. This wand favored dicing spells and animation, but unfortunately Harry's creation was completely dormant to his magic. It worked fine for Mr. Ollivander and Jon, so all in all, the wand was okay. The third was Fwooper feather and Cedar Wood. This specialized in confusion charms and the silence spell. It was also quite good at the Winguardiam Class, Shrinking and enlargement charms, and Transfiguration.

"This combination is the only wand capable of what is called the Demencia Curse. This curse is especially dangerous since the only counter is a bezoar, or the counter charm from a wand that has either Fwooper feather or Cedar as a component. The Demencia Curse is a spell that drives a wizard insane over a long period of time, very hard to detect because it seems a natural progression that some wizards suffer from, due to parentage."

"Speaking of curses," Harry asked. "Why is it that Jon can cast the sleeping curse so easily? And we cannot find any reference to it."

"It is a curse that only Ollivanders can cast," Ollivander said simply.

"Oh, ok." Harry said lamely.

"The magical counter is non verbal," Ollivander showed both of them a complex wand movement. "The only two other counters must be completed within the first year, and those are the ringing of a cowbell, and the screech from any dragon. My family can actually will the one hundred year Sleep curse to be cancelled if they are the original one who cast it. Just a simple touch of their wand on the temple will awaken them, even past the first year."

Harry whistled. "That's interesting. Did anyone ever survive the entire sleep?"

"Yes. A few. A very long time ago. The wife of one of my forefathers. And their daughter. The mother turned to the dark, and was seeking the secret to immortality. She cast the unforgiveable on her husband, my ancestor, and made him cast the Sleeping Curse on herself and her daughter. It was
rumored that she came across a prophecy which was to occur many years in the future, of a weapon, a wand, that would eventually resurface. One of the Eternal Six, the Wand of Eternal Youth. She was desperate to live long enough to be present for the prophecy, and willingly went into the sleep. The curse keeps the body in stasis, and it does not age, or decay. She did awake, but unfortunately she went crazy. The daughter survived and apparently lived a healthy, productive life."

The two lads shared a look. Could it be the wand created by Time?

"Anyway, enough stories. Back to the stitching lads!"

Their first breakthrough in their Clan business venture came through early Saturday morning. Harry was awoken by Hootie, Tonks' family owl. He was singing a song towards Hedwig, who was sitting in her favorite branch outside Harry's window, ignoring the loud courting. Harry stretched and opened the window, and Hootie eventually flew in under watchful gaze from Hedwig. The brown owl began a little side to side step dance on the bead head, then offered the rolled parchment on his right leg, then when Harry reached for it, offered his left instead, as if he made a mistake.

When Harry took it, Hootie circled and showed off a bit around Hedwig, then departed into the early morning air.

RH,

This message has been duplicated and Mr. B will be getting his copy as well.

CW has brokered a meeting with the founder and Chairman of 'Protectie Ultimate' (Ultimate Protection) Mr. Constantin Balaur for Monday morning. It will be held at their offices in Romania. He insists that any Clan business must be conducted with all Founding Members present, as in the past, deals have gone sour without all signatories available.

He is willing to accommodate all of us as his guests at the Romanian Dragon Reserve's Hotel for the length of our visit. CW has told me that as a strict rule, all wands and weapons must be kept with a named person of our choosing when entering the main head office for the meeting.

I am reluctant to be unarmed for even a moment in a foreign place, now more than ever before with our investigation of M.M. still inconclusive.

I advise we postpone this meeting to a later date.

I have also received a concrete offer from Macedonia's Armory Guild. They are willing to take our entire stock at premium price. Three thousand galleons a barrel, which is basically 125% 'street value' retail prices and 95% Bulk rate prices. Sounds good, right?

Maybe not.

According to the scarcity matrix published in the latest Apothecary's Guild Almanac, our stock would be the freshest and largest bulk supply readily available. Our actions in France have had a Legal cascading effect. There is an investigative report in the Scribe de Reveur (French Daily). The French Regulation of Magical Creatures Department, who usually would have allowed magical users to deal privately with small infestations and reap the by-product, have issued public notice of random inspections and steep fines associated to the "Deliberate and Voluntary neglect of swine herds to facilitate Wild Bog Boar Infestation".

This is to be put in effect within two weeks.
If, and this is a big IF; the French decide to spread knowledge of this policy to other nations due to suspicion of syndicated dark practices, this would mean that the trading price in Western Europe would steadily increase over the next few months. As I have luckily acquired this market intelligence quite early, a good idea might be to aggressively take any infestation missions as soon as possible to increase our stock and be the main suppliers in the region.

I believe that Mr. Balaur also knows this information and has accepted the meeting under such short notice to get our stock of raw material quickly, and avoid the rise in price. The faster we move, the better our chances to capitalize before this information becomes widespread across the guilds.

This would be a win-win situation. We will hinder the production of potentially Dark magic raw material, gain substantial profit, and allow Cloud to run around the place. He has been an uncontrollable source of energy these past few days!

We will also need a place to securely store the product.

Let's meet today after your work hours and discuss the way forward.

Yours,

RD.

Harry read the letter a couple times. He definitely would need to discuss these options. Their bracers could be finished today once the phoenix core infusion went smoothly. After that process was done, all that would be needed was to put in the laces and test. Hopefully they could hide their real wands and give their chosen representative spares just in case things got hot at the Dragon Reserve meeting.

If they entered a mutual deal with the renowned Dragon Reserve Armourers, they may get closer to finding out more about the Vampire Sanguine through mutual links. Having an entire Onyx Full Body set was paramount to defeating Voldemort's Horcuxes.

He sat on his bed, pondering their long term plan. Protecting themselves from possession was good, but where would the extracted Soul Magic go when they destroyed the vessel?

His head began to hurt. Even though the trio had done all they can to combat Voldemort's plans, they have never come across any sort of spell or ritual that counters this type of dark magic. They took it for granted that the clues Dumbledore left for them would work, and destroying all the physical vessels would be sufficient. Thinking of Dumbeldore's maimed hand, he deduced that Dumbledore probably knew that he was in the early stages of possession, and did not fight the journey to the great beyond, willingly taking death as a better alternative to empowering the Dark Lord.

They would need to find a direct counter to Voldemort's Dark Soul Magic.

Harry eventually got ready for work and made his way to Jon's place on Diagon Alley.

"Caw! Caw!"

"Coming!" came the response from the upstairs window.

A few minutes later Jon and Harry were discussing Tonks' letter as they whipped up a hastily made breakfast consisting of reheated homemade bread, cheese and baked chicken. Both agreed that all three of them needed to brainstorm the possibilities.

"This," Jon declared as he looked at his stay-fresh charmed cooler box. "Is the best thing about this time. Easily storable food. Especially cheese. Do you know how awful our cheese tastes if it is left
for too long? I am contemplating learning the magic spell for electricity to own one of your aunt's refrigerators."

"No such spell. And a fridge won't work here in Diagon, or around your house for long. The magic here is quite strong, and it causes electrical devices to malfunction. Didn't we go through this already?"

"Electrical devices... that is for non magical people, right?"

"Yes," Harry reinforced. "Even if you do find a normal house, over time, the electrical stuff begin to go haywire. It balances off when there are non magical living in the same house, like a counter weight. Hermione has T.V.s, fridges, and other electrical stuff. My aunt did too. It's when the place is fully lived in by wizards, things begin to fail."

"Hermione, she is the one with the bushy hair," Jon recalled. "The one who acquired a lot of theory and could back it up with her spells?"

"Yeah, her parents are non magical. She got teased a lot around this age, but later on when things got more serious, it was scary for her to be walking alone at school."

"But you said she was adept at spell casting," Jon said, confused.

"Yes, but her nature isn't in fighting. She is more of a scholar, an intellectual type."

"I see," Jon said. "And Ron?"

"He is familiar with wizard know-how that both of us didn't know, things that we think are strange he has lived with his whole life. Culture, and what magic can, and cannot do; he knows a lot about. Unfortunately, some of the prejudices and weakness wizards fall prey to also sort of sticks with Ron."

"Understood," Jon said. As they got ready to leave to go to work, Jon hesitated. "I have received the invitations late last evening for Alexandria Potage's birthday celebrations."

"Good. When is it?" Harry said, heading down the stairs.

"Tonight."

Harry froze. "What? That's short notice!"

"Yes. It seems that it is equivalent to a Cotillion event. Here is yours," he handed Harry his invitation. "And here is her letter. She explained why it was sent so late."

Harry read the flowing cursive handwriting on the high quality parchment. It explained that to avoid too much publicity and unwanted guests attending, her parents decided to send the invitations at the last minute. Even though the Potages were well known, they wanted a safe and enjoyable evening without unnecessary complications. They managed to keep the invitation list down to two hundred and fifty-

"Two hundred and fifty?" Harry whistled. "Didn't she say this was a little gathering?"

"If I remember correctly, yes, that is what she said."

Harry opened his invitation. On the card was a flowery invite written over the backdrop of a beautiful chateau surrounded by green fields.
Mr. and Mrs. Pavel Potage invite you, Harry J. Potter to our daughter Alexandria's birthday celebration on Saturday evening and Brunch festival the following day. The Honor of your presence is requested for Dinner and Dancing at seven thirty in the evening at our Ancestral Family Home at Cite de Carcassonne.

Celebrations would be held through the night and luxurious accommodations would be available for overnight stay in our guest chateau. Brunch would commence at ten thirty the following morning.

We eagerly await your timely positive response through magical touch on the below charm.

Sincerely,

The Potages.

For your convenience, please see attached writ of permission to be presented to your ICOP representative at your nearest available Magical Port. This would provide you swift, safe and comfortable portkey travel.'

"Whoa," Harry said. "This is some event."

"Yes, I gathered such when I searched the texts for information on the place. It is a magnificent fortress near the south of France. Not even eleven leagues north of Estagal." Jon sighed. "Circumstances are a bit dodgy, isn't it?"

"What do you mean?"

"The person we were proposing to hire for security for the party, which we presumed was to be held here, in England, is based not even a stone's throw away from the event. Now, he may be a person of dubious character that we may need protection against."

"Maybe he won't even know," Harry shrugged.

"We told him, remember? Do not underestimate people. It is not difficult to figure out. Tonks must come," Jon declared. "Our skills are suited for covert operations and attack, not dancing and... socializing."

"Did she get an invite?" Harry asked.

"Yes. And ...it is addressed to her 'and guest',' Jon indicated the invitation envelope sitting on his study desk.

Harry and Jon just stared at each other. "We didn't get 'guest' invitation privileges, did we," Harry said, one eyebrow raised.

"No. Do you know anything about the Potages?"

"Nah, all of this is new to me too."

"So we have no foreknowledge whatsoever," Jon said. "Let's hope that we can somehow finish those bracers... we need some sort of magical defense."

"Today...could be possible," Harry ventured, frowning. "Once everything goes smooth. We wouldn't have much time to practice though, but it would be great to have some sort of semblance of all my spells for use." Harry brightened, feeling excited about trying out the bracer as it was so close to completion.
"Let's owl this to her immediately." He wrote her address on the scroll and sent his midnight coloured owl, named Raven, off with the invite.

The moment of truth came after lunch. After almost an hour of extracting and then fusing the phoenix core from his old wand, Jon and Harry were on the final touches of completing the bracer. Fusing the split phoenix core into the threstral leather was time consuming and physically draining.

A soft phoenix song was emanating from the cores, and heat. This heat felt wondrous and invigorating at first, but over time, it became like a furnace in the workshop. Ollivander said under no circumstances were they to stop. The Core meld process must be completed in one sitting.

Ollivander was giving pointers and closely inspecting the process on both lads, sometimes leaning in as close as they were, hot, sparking magic bouncing off their masks.

When it was done, Ollivander and his apprentices took off the masks from their sweaty faces.

"Now, to polish," he commanded.

The two boys proceeded to dip the cloth in their thinned blood and rub it in the bracer. Then they took another cloth and dipped it in the threstral's blood and repeated. The bracer darkened, then became a smooth colour of deep brown.

They both strapped it on, and when tightened, the bracer began to fade from view.

Harry put up his fist, and Jon connected, as usual. The bracers momentarily began to glow.

"Whoa!" Harry remarked.

"It is the radiance of the Phoenix feather, and both of your magic," Ollivander nodded, a tear of joy in his eye. Without warning he drew his wand. "Stupefy! Stupefy!"

Jon and Harry threw up their left hand in reflex. The red bolt of magic hit the bracer, and the magic dissipated with a crackling sound. The bracers felt uncomfortably warm on their arms.

"It works. It WORKS!" Ollivander exclaimed, his boyish enthusiasm once again to the forefront.

Harry watched his bracer in amazement, then inspiration came to him. He immediately drew his Holly and Troll hair wand and pointed at the ground. "Stupefy!"

A healthy red bolt shot out of his wand, scorching the ground and leaving a nice trail of magical smoke to curl up from the spot.

"Yes!" Harry said with relief.

*Finally, an attack spell!*

Ollivander watched Harry's display, stunned. "How did you do that? That wand should not be able to..."

"It can learn through coercion, or force." Harry grinned. "It is a copying wand."

"Miss Tonks did tell me of your disregard for conventional magic," Ollivander nodded sagely. "Yes...yes, you are indeed unique... in all our years we have never unlocked the secret of that combination. It simply served as a means to an end, but now... absolutely brilliant. The paper cut spell, that was how you did it, correct?"
Harry nodded. "Yup. Also acquired a nifty wide range detection spell. It is limited though, the magic must be cast to be used on me, and not for drills. If the caster knows it can be copied, it won't work. We tried."

"Very, very good, Harry. I have underestimated you, once again," he said softly. "Now, we can experiment with the bracer's spell casting ability. The most common use, as Jon said a couple of weeks ago... was for a shield charm. Let's see it!"

"Jon, the spell is Protego!" Harry demonstrated the wand movement with his right hand to no effect, then tried it with his left. The invisible shield charm popped into existence in front of his bracer. "Nice! Think of a barrier between..."

Harry cut himself off as he noticed a shimmering haze of light blue magic began to solidify into a semi-transparent crystalline wall in front of Jon. Jon had his left fist clenched in front of his heart, his stance mimicking the form of when holding a real shield.

Harry's and Ollivander's jaws dropped a couple centimeters.

"An Aegis," Ollivander whispered. He tapped his wand on the crystalline structure, resulting in a spark of magic. "The interlocking plates are perfect..." Ollivander walked behind Jon, peering through the crystal shield from the other side. "Head to toe, full frontal protection. This bracer was meant for you, Jon."

"I am the shield that guards the realms of men," Jon whispered, awestruck at this display of magic.

"What?" Ollivander asked.

"Just a training chant we used growing up," Jon covered up smoothly.

"I see. Very good, none the less. From what I have researched, the magic is not as rigid as what is executed from a wand. The Core Meld bracer medium is much more natural. It is an extension of your skills, your personality, your beliefs, not fancy movements and incantations."

"Doing wand motions with one hand and trying to use the left to do the same thing might be confusing," Harry agreed. "Makes sense."

"The bracer grows in ability, just like the wand does, but not through texts and learning. All magic that you can accomplish must be brought forth from the inside, and not learned from the outside. I believe that should be it for the day. You have done well lads, and made me a happy, old man."

"Master Ollivander," Jon bowed slightly, "You are an excellent teacher, this success should be accredited to you."

Ollivander laughed, clapping his hands once in glee.

"Let's call it a team effort. You two got the supplies. I gave you the knowledge. You must register that you created the magical bracer at the Curse breaker's guild. Any legal entity that wishes to give you trouble must confirm if it is illegal, and gentlemen, no one has done this in a long time, they won't even bother suspecting how useful it is. Release your magic on it."

They did so. After a few seconds, the bracer turned invisible.

"Ah. Perfect. Enjoy your weekend gentlemen, Monday is a new day and I must attend to my journal. Today has been a great day."
Later that evening Harry and Jon were awaiting Tonks and her guest at Jon's place. Harry was wearing new dress robes bought from Madame Milkins, a black three piece ensemble finished with a fashionable cloak clasped on his left shoulder. It reminded him of a cape.

Jon wore a crisp long sleeved white shirt with black pants tucked into recently polished WWG boots. The Dagger's belt was cleaned with the metal finishers immaculately polished, fitting skewed across his hip. A new fur lined black cloak draped his shoulders. Harry thought he looked like a suave pirate. Somehow, it suited him. Both of them double checked that they had their gifts, the invitations, and their overnight trunks packed.

"Jon!" came a woman's voice, followed by three knocks on the door a few minutes before seven.

Harry was somehow dreading this moment. Tonks was supposed to bring a guest. Harry didn't know how he felt about Tonks on the arm of some unknown and probably good looking man. He also knew he didn't have a choice or say in the matter, so bravely sucked it up and went down with Jon to greet her at the door.

Jon opened the door and allowed her in. "Milady," he bowed, a smile on his face. Tonks slapped his arm playfully as she stepped in. She looked lovely in a black body-hugging dress which had a slit along the side of the left leg. The material had a bit of sparkle here and there, giving the impression of twinkling stars.

"Hey! You guys look great. This is my friend," she said, realizing that the person didn't follow her in. "One sec," she stepped back out the doorway and pulled in a witch her age. "Ahem. This is Sarah, my best friend. Sarah, this is Jon, and that's Harry. Guys, Sarah Clearwater."

"Pleased to meet you," Jon said in welcome. "Pardon the mess. Recently moved in."

Harry came forward and shook her hand. "Nice to meet you. You ladies look smashing," he smiled, his entire attitude uplifting by this pleasant surprise. Sarah returned the smile.

"Nice to meet you. Gosh," she laughed. "I am so sorry Nym," she apologized as she shook Jon's hand.

"See? Told ya it was them. Why would I lie?" Tonks laughed. Sarah sized up both young men. Harry returned the favour. She was pretty, slightly shorter than Tonks, blond hair and light brown eyes. She was dressed in a white dinner gown with a matching wrap around her bare shoulders. She had on high heeled white boots, but still only barely reached Jon's height. Tonks towered over Harry by a few inches with her high heels.

Jon and Harry helped them with bringing in their overnight bags and offered them something to drink. Tonks accepted a glass of wine, and after some persuasion, Sarah accepted one as well. Harry and Jon drank a non-alcoholic version which tasted quite good, all things considering. "Well, shall we?" Tonks said after they had small talk and finished the drinks.

"Yeah! Let's get going," Harry agreed, feeling an excitement building up in him replacing his previous sour vibe.

"This is going to be a blast!" Sarah said. "Thanks for inviting me," she said to Tonks.

"After you," Jon said, gesturing down the stairs. The two girls went down, and Harry turned to follow.

"Wait. You forgot these," Jon said, handing him the three wands he made this week. "Just in case."
Harry looked at Jon's unreadable expression. He nodded. "Okay." He tucked one in each of his WWG boots, which actually had a groove for such purpose and one in his vest rib picket. His normal Troll hair wand was in the bracer tucked away under his long sleeves. "You are not taking your spares?"

"No. I believe I am more suited to the bracer's magic than these wands. It should be sufficient as my backup," he replied, following Harry down the stairs.

"All ready?" Tonks said, grinning as they came down. They nodded and took out their invites.

The four of them tapped the charm on their invites and disappeared.
Once again, Harry found himself in an awkward position in the incoming port key area at Dover's ICOP office. This time he was in a plank, his body in a rigid push up position. Magic spiraled up his forearms and left an uncomfortable dazzling light in his vision. At his side Jon was rising up from his customary crouch, a bright blue electric pulse of magic swirling around him. Harry noticed that even Sarah was a bit awestruck at Jon's entry from her fetal position on the floor. Tonks had tried, really, but being on all fours with her butt in the air wasn't a vast improvement for her self-dignity.

It did, however, make Harry grin in guilty pleasure. He tucked his knees under him and sprang up to his feet, offering her a helpful hand. Jon was doing the same for Sarah.

"What was that?" Sarah asked, twirling her finger at Jon's feet to his body.

"He's got this cool magic portkey signature," Tonks explained, dusting off her knees. "Aggravating, isn't he?"

"I got you," Sarah said, drawing her wand and casting a quick Scourgify on Tonks' dress. "Jon," Sarah called.

"Yes?"

"Do you terribly mind if on the next jump we could go first, so I can capture that magic effect on my camera? It will really help my standing in the office," she begged.

Jon stared at her, not knowing what to say. Harry cut the silence.

"Your office?" he asked. "Who do you work for?"

"Witch Weekly," she said, smiling. "There could be something in it for you, depending on how well my editor likes the picture. And of course, how well sales go that issue."

Harry looked at Jon's perplexed expression, Tonks' smirk, and Sarah's hopeful smile. He nodded at Jon.

"If you must," Jon shrugged. "Shall we?" Jon picked up his suitcase and Sarah's overnight bag and went up the stairs. Harry and Tonks reached for her bag the same time and their arms brushed against each other.

She smelled like heaven was the first thing that came to his mind.

"I can handle it," Tonks offered.

"Allow me," Harry smiled at her. "I need the exercise," he joked. Tonks returned the smile and indicated for him to go ahead. They followed Jon up the steps. To Harry's surprise, there was a small
gathering of festively dressed wizards and witches forming a disorganized line to the main service counter. Parents and their children were having animated conversations while they were waiting.

Harry spotted Daphne Greengrass with two people who appeared to be her parents. Marcus Flint was with a young witch on his arm that he didn't know, Hannah Abbot and presumably her Mother from the resemblance, and looking timid and a bit out of place, Neville Longbottom was standing beside his grandmother. Neville's eyes opened wide and his expression changed as he spotted Harry. He gave Harry a short wave. He said something to his grandmother who looked in their direction. She frowned, then reluctantly nodded. Neville came over.

"Hey! Good to see you Harry, thought I would have been the only Gryffindor here!"

"Hi Neville!" Harry said offering his fist. Neville hit it after a moment of hesitation, not sure of what he should have done. "Good to see you too, all is well?"

"Yes. Sorta. I am not sure what I am doing here," he whispered. "My gran received an invitation for us to go to a birthday party for Alexandria Potage. I never heard of her, but gran said I need to get out there, at some point, and this would be a great way to see France," Neville sighed, fixing his robes. "How do I look, horrible..or nah?"

Neville was dressed in very fashionable robes, which somehow did not achieve the desired effect on his chubby build. He fit in well with the style and pomp of the other patrons waiting in line, though.

"You look great, man. Nice robes. Guys, this is Neville Longbottom," he introduced. "Sarah, Jon, Tonks." Neville shook each of their hands with a growing smile on his face. He lingered a bit on Tonks' face. "Anyone else we know here?" Harry asked.

"Yeah, Hannah is there. I don't know if you remember Flint from Slytherin, he is in the Quidditch team. And another Slytherin girl, Daphne Greengrass. We spoke for a little bit. She was saying that Draco Malfoy was supposed to be here, but something happened recently and they couldn't come. Dunno what that's about."

More small talk ensued and after a few minutes Neville's gran called him up to the counter as the line progressed. "It's okay if I hang out with you guys when we reach? Hannah and I said we would stick together seeing as it seems to be a 'who's who' event," he finished with a bit of a whisper.

"Of course!" Harry agreed. Neville nodded and said his goodbyes to the others.

"He seems normal," Tonks said, watching him walk off. "Perceptive. This really is shaping up to be a sacred twenty eight hoity toity type of gathering," she murmured. "Well, considering who I recognise here. Didn't think the Potages were into that sort of thing."

Their group joined the back of the line. Harry waved at Hannah, who waved back at them cheerfully. Daphne spotted him, their eyes touched, and she simply nodded. Flint noticed Tonks and Sarah, and disregarded the two boys. The line moved without much delay, and after a few minutes they were in front of both Rook Littleborough and Wazza Rivers. Harry spotted Barty Crouch Senior in the office behind, cross checking invites and documents.

"Looky here," Rook said, his eyes running through the invitations. "You guys get around," he said drily. Wazza looked up from his work and scrutinized Tonks, Jon and Harry.

"You three again," Wazza noted. "Everything went smoothly last time?"

"Yes," Harry said.
"Oh I didn't tell you did I?" Rook said offhandedly to Wazza. "They apparently are also part of a Clan. The Cro..."

"We are here on leisure, not work," Tonks cut him off. "Are you supposed to be blurring out people's business in front of everyone?"

Rook stopped, looking up at her. "Hm. Pardon me. Here is your re-configured portkey, Ms Tonks." He handed each of them their invites. "This will connect you to Calais. From there you would receive another connection to Cite de Carcassonne. Have an enjoyable evening."

The four of them thanked the International Co Operation official and stepped into the designated portkey circle. Jon stood apart, allowing Harry and the two women first.

"You have your camera ready?" Tonks asked Sarah. Sarah flicked her wand and it popped out of her travel bag.

"Yes, let me double check..." she fiddled with the controls. "Right! Let's go."
The three of them touched their portkey charm with their wands and disappeared.

Jon count to ten, then entered the circle. He arrived on one knee, his other boot planted firmly on the ground, head bowed. The magical effect was pulled in from the floor, and began to spiral upwards as he stood up. The camera was clicking away in the couple seconds it took him to get to his feet.

"Nice!" Sarah commended, reviewing the raw film through the lens. "Whoa." She showed Tonks a particular capture, a ghostly overlay caught in one of the pictures. "What is that?"

"It looks like a ... a lizard? Or a dragon?" Tonks murmured. "Jon, Harry come see this."

The two of them looked at the image shown on the camera. Jon frowned.

"It is an effect of my magic, I guess," Jon shrugged. "Let us keep going." The crew raised eyebrows at Jon's clear dismissal. They grabbed their luggage and went up the stairs into the diner. They followed the other party goers down the corridor and into the adjacent office. There was another line, this one being the French side of the ICOP port key queue. As soon as they stepped into the office, two officials came up to them.

"Bonsoir. Greetings, if you please, come with us for a moment," one of the officials requested. The four of them followed him, but his partner pointed at Sarah. "Not you," he added kindly. "Please join the line, your associates would meet you shortly."

Tonks, Harry and Jon were taken into a smaller sub office in open view of the regular travelers.

"Have a seat," the ICOP wizard offered them, pointing to the three chairs in front of an office desk. "I am Monsieur Koman and this is just a formality. Please read this document. Your port key has alerted us to the presence of B ranked registered clan hunters on our soil. Our magical law enforcement security level has been elevated to yellow status, this is just a courtesy allowing you to read, and be in agreement with; our port key services, the purpose of your visit and conduct forthwith."

They accepted the rolled up scrolls and all three of them read the summarized policy. Basically it enforced that no aggression towards locals would be tolerated, and Ranging without writ of Guild services or French Government approval was not allowed on this visitor-level portkey. Penalties of breaking this agreement could lead to immediate detention and may be followed with prosecution.

"This applies to all visitors, but with elevated status in effect, all known Hit Wizards, Hunters, Curse
breakers and Apothecary guildsmen must be notified in person. Are we in agreement, Hunter clan The Crow's Vambrace?"

"Yes, sir," they agreed, signing the scrolls.

"Very good," Mr. Koman nodded. He stamped their invitation and took out a sickle from a bag of coins. With a wave of his wand the sickle attached to the invite over the portkey charm. "Here is your direct portkey to the grounds. Please feel free to leave from the designated travelling circle. Enjoy your evening."

At the departure area Sarah was nervously waiting for them. "Everything ok? People were whispering that you might be in some sort of trouble..."

"No," Harry said. "Everything is fine," he placated.

"Guards should be suspicious, it is their duty," Jon commended. Harry groaned. Sarah raised her eyebrow at Tonks.

"Don't mind Jon," Tonks lamented. "Let's go already!" The four of them entered the circle and tapped the invites with their wands.

They arrived in a large, extravagant courtyard. There were lit torches and tall street lamps with fairy lights in the bulbs. Decorations stretched across high above the crowd gathered by the main steps to the castle main hall. Harry looked up at the medieval structure, comparable to Hogwarts by design but not in size.

Close to two hundred people were assembled outside in a loose crowd, most of the party revelers clustering around three circular bars that were spread over the large courtyard. Waiters and Waitresses carrying trays were offering finger foods and refreshments to the patrons waiting for the main doors to be opened.

There was a red carpet leading up the five wide steps into the main building, with two podiums at the top manned by a man and a woman. The man was dressed in a suit complete with coattails, top hat, cane and monoculars with attached chain. He had the air of a generational family butler; aged, arrow straight, and meticulously groomed with nary a smile on his face. The witch was young and vibrant, talking to guests who were proceeding up the steps to enquire about the delay. Harry thought she must have had a cheering charm about her, for even slightly agitated guests left the conversation happier than before they talked to her. A string quartet at the top of the steps provided soothing low key music to the patrons drinking and talking in the courtyard.

"This is nice," Sarah said, taking a couple pictures. Tonks was scanning the faces of the crowd. Some of the faces looked familiar, and she was trying to figure out from where.

"Some are from Salles and Estagal," Jon read her mind and shared his thoughts with the others. "Those are the Rabiot daughters, Rylai and Ramelie, and a few others from the church. Also I have spotted Madame Payet." He focused on the pretty girl standing next to her. "She was the one that brought me the basket," he mused. Jon remembered their last interaction with the healer, when he was posing for the statue. "Is that her daughter?" Jon said appreciatively. "Why would she say that her daughter was too young for me? She seems older," he asked Harry.

Harry watched the girl. She did seem older than they were by a few years. "Jon. You don't understand. Nobody expects guys our 'age' to be in a clan, far less what we accomplished at Estagal. And you don't come across young, either, even if nobody knew you took out the Russians," he whispered.
"What are you two up to now?" Tonks enquired, suspicious of their whispering. "Every time you two plot like that, I get all nervous."

"She helped me with the basket for my hamper," Jon explained, nodding towards the girl next to Penelope Payet. "Nice girl," Jon smiled appreciatively. Tonks spotted the girl they were talking about and recognized the healer.

"Ms. Payet is here," Tonks said seriously. "Does that mean Michael could be here too?"

"I don't know," Harry said, now on the alert. "Didn't see him. Could be a possibility."

At that moment, Neville and Hannah came across. "Hey, there you are!" he greeted, a glass of what appeared to be butterbeer in his hand. "You should talk to the guys in blue, they would organize your stuff and have it sent to the rooms. You are staying over, right? And this is Hannah Abbot. Hannah- Jon, Tonks, Sarah, and well... Harry," Neville added unnecessarily.

"Hey," she said shyly. Hannah looked at the two older girls with a bit of envy. "Nice to meet you!" As if summoned, a young man in blue came across to the crew with a clipboard and quill.

"Good evening, honored guests," he said in a thick French accent. "My name is Adam, and I will help you with your things. May I see your invites?"

"Sure," Harry said, giving it to him. Adam took it and frowned, then looked for Harry's scar.

"Mr.. Mr. Potter.." he stammered. "It is an honor," he said awkwardly. "I have seen your face recently, haven't I?"

"I don't know, could be," Harry grinned, shrugging. Adam returned the grin and accepted Tonks, Sarah and Jon's invite.

"Ladies, Lord Black," he gave a small bow. "Welcome," he added. "I will see to your things. They will be taken to your rooms and secured with a charm which would alert you to any tampering, and immediately call the security. Please enjoy your evening!" Adam let them sign for their things, gave them a small parchment with their room numbers and charmed their luggage away.

"Lord Black?" Hannah and Neville said in unison. Jon looked uncomfortable, but he nodded.

"Please, call me Jon," he requested. "It is a pleasure to meet you, Hannah," he smiled at her. Hannah returned the smile.

"Same," Hannah said. After a few minutes of small talk the music dipped and came to a close. The Butler with the coat tails cleared his throat under the effects of the *sonorous* charm.

"Good evening, honored guests. Welcome to Carcassonne hall. I am Monsieur Valmont. It is my honor and pleasure to be your host on behalf of Mr. and Mrs. Potage, and their lovely daughter Alexandria. The family is grateful to be honored by your presence and do hope you have an enjoyable and memorable evening. Please feel free to come to me with any concerns. After you have been seated, dinner will be served. Thank you, and enjoy the party!" The musicians started a festive tune.

The grand double doors opened and light shone down from inside the main building along the red carpet. The crowd slowly began to ascend the short flight of steps. The young woman at the podium accepted the invitations and introduced them to the Potage family who were standing inside of the doors, greeting guests and shaking hands.
Alexandria Potage looked absolutely radiant in a pretty peach colored dress. The colour contrasted with her dark hair which was done in a cascading French fishtail braid. In her hair were a few glittering jewels, really adding a royal flair. Neville whistled as they approached.

'Wow," he breathed. "Like out of a story book."

Harry agreed silently, watching the other guests pouring in front them. Tonks and Sarah were first up to the maître.

"Bonsoir," she greeted. "Names?"

"Hi! I am Tonks and this is Sarah Clearwater," she offered. Sarah smiled at the greeting witch, taking out her press identification.

"Hello, I am a photographer for Witch Weekly. Heard of it?" The greeting witch nodded. "Would it be alright if you asked the birthday girl and her parents if I would be able to take some pictures?"

Harry observed the proceedings.

"One moment," she turned to Monsieur Valmont. She whispered into his ear, and he nodded a couple times, watching Sarah, Tonks, and the others. He made a beeline towards Alexandria and talked into her ear. Alexandria looked to where he was pointing and recognized Tonks, himself and Jon. She waved and beckoned Sarah and her crew over.

"Hi!" Alexandria greeted Jon and Harry. "Glad you came! Ms Tonks, was it? How are you? Introduce me to your other friends!" she said cheerily, a grin permanently plastered on her face.

"Neville Longbottom, Sarah Clearwater, Hannah Abbott," Harry did the introductions. "This is Alexandria." Greetings went around and Alexandria asked if Sarah would do the honours and take a picture of them together.

"Sure!" With a wave of her wand, the camera hovered in place and all of them came together for the picture. Alexandria was in the middle with her arms around Harry and Jon's waist. Tonks was on the other side of Jon and Sarah on the end. Hannah smiled prettily next to Harry and Neville bravely had his hand around her waist. The camera clicked and flashed a couple times as they smiled for the pictures. They disbanded and Alexandria thanked them all.

"May I take a few more with Jon and Harry?" she asked Sarah as the others dispersed.

"No problem," Sarah said, raising her eyebrows at the two boys. She took the camera and lined up the shot. Jon went first and offered Alexandria his arm. Alexandria, surprised by the gallant gesture, slipped her hand through and rest her hand on his elbow. Jon stood arrow straight and stared at the camera, a faint smile turning up one side of his mouth. Alexandria also took a regal stance, tilting up her chin with an aristocratic flair. The camera clicked and flashed a few times.

Next, Harry came forward. He smiled at her and lightly rest his arm around her waist, leaning in a bit for the picture. Alexandria leaned in as well, and both of them grinned. Sarah nodded and gave them an ok sign.

"Thank you so much! I do hope you two come and share a dance with me later!" she gushed.

"Sure!" Harry said. Jon bowed his head in agreement.

"Of course." He smiled at her.
The crew moved along and sat at one of the large, round tables that could accommodate twenty seats. They were talking to each other for a few minutes when Mr. and Mrs. Rabiot, alongside Madame Payet, walked across with three stunning teenage girls and a young boy in tow. Jon put down his glass and got to his feet. Harry and Tonks followed suit.

"Mr. Black, Mr. Hallow, Ms. Dora!" Mr. Rabiot greeted. "This is truly a pleasant surprise. I did not expect to see you again so soon, but I am happy it is for such a pleasant occasion."

"Monsieur Rabiot," Jon nodded, and they shook hands. "Richard, I hope you are well," he asked the young boy. Richard just stared, a grim expression on his face.

"I am. Thank you." He hesitated, almost as if preparing himself for a speech. "I want to become a strong wizard, just like you, Mr. Hallow and Mr. Black," he declared in a halting English.

"Mr. Hallow?" Hannah and Neville whispered to each other behind their hands, confused.

"When did you learn how to speak English?" Ramellie, the elder of the girls scolded. The family looked down at their youngest with an expression of amazement.

Richard responded in French and the family laughed. Rylai translated. "He says that he learned those words specifically for when he met you two again. Even though he didn't know if it would ever happen. But it is a promise."

Madame Payet spoke up. "You know them, Robert?"

"Yes, they came to our rescue. They are the Clan from London."

"Clan?" Sarah whispered to Tonks, bewildered. Tonks shook her head.

"Later," she responded.

Penelope Payet turned her head from the trio to the Rabiots a few times, perplexed.

"It was your son? That was abducted?" Madame Payet hissed in surprise. "They never specified in the meeting, they just said that the boy was returned safely!"

"I told our council man not to do so. I did not want any stigma upon our family, through no fault of his own. Let's keep it private, Penelope. All right?" He gave his son an affectionate pat on the arm.

"I see. Garcons, Mademoiselle Dora, this is Melisse, my daughter. Our families know each other because Ramellie and Melisse are very good friends at school. And it seems that we both have a lot to thank you for. How long were you here, again?"

"A day and a half," Jon responded.

"You work fast!" Payet said. "I always wondered why Madame Maxime spoke as if she dealt with you earlier."

"There is a magnificent statue of you going up now in the square," Melisse added. "It is called, 'Le Chevalier Immortel'."

"Ca c'était quoi? est-ce vrai?" Rylai exclaimed. Melisse laughed, nodding. "Isn't that true, Monsieur Black?"

"Yes," Jon said, a bit embarrassed. "Not the immortal part, however. I'm just an ordinary man. Um, Wizard." Jon rubbed his hair in exasperation. The three girls began to whisper behind their hands.
"Children!" Mrs. Rabiot snapped, and the three girls stopped their chatter. "Pardon these girls, they are young still," she said, her face stern.

"It's ok," Harry said smiling. "Jon isn't one for too much pomp and grandeur." Mrs. Rabiot nodded, pleasantly surprised that Jon was so humble.

"Small world, isn't it Madame Payet?" Tonks said eyeing the three girls.

"Oui! I must say you do look so lovely, Miss Dora! And who is your friend?"

"This is Sarah Clearwater," Tonks introduced. "Sarah, Penelope Payet." The two women shook hands and more introductions followed around the table.

"Please, join us," Harry offered, pointing at the free seats. The two families graciously accepted and occupied the table.

"Blimey! I'm going to find Gran and Mrs. Abbot," Neville jumped up, almost forgetting. "Save some seats for them Harry!" Neville called behind him as he took off searching. Harry groaned inwardly as the Rabiot's looked a bit confused. Neville found his Grandmother and Mrs. Abbot in conversation with the Greengrass family. Within minutes all of them came walking over and introductions were made.

The French families were now openly staring at him, Harry 'The Boy Who Lived' Potter, aka Roderick Hallow.

Harry realized that their table was drawing a lot of attention as all of the other tables were presently only seating groups of two or three. Their table was already almost totally occupied and full of chatter and laughter. He recognized faces of Beauxbaton girls from the Tri-Wizard tournament and spotted the main attraction herself.

Fleur Delacour was here, talking with some people he did not know on the far side of the ballroom. Tonks, who was sitting at Harry's left hand side leant over and began whispering in his ear.

"You do realize our clan aliases are now blown."

"Unfortunately, yes."

"You do also realize that most of these girls want to eat the two of you, instead of dinner. And the parents are willing accomplices."

Harry noticed that Tonks leaning over his arm like this was drawing looks from the other French girls. Daphne and Sarah were apparently oblivious, but Harry knew better than to underestimate the Slytherin girl. For all he knew, she was absorbing everything and not missing a beat.

"That's a bit much, innit? We're not prime bachelor material yet," he whispered back in her ear.

"They think you are older. Hell, I think you are older," she admitted.

"What, you jealous then?" Harry teased. Tonks chuckled, a nice husky sound in his ear.

"You see? That's exactly what I am talking about. No twelve year old punk would crack a joke like that."

"It's ok," Harry dismissed. "They're harmless."

"If you say so," Tonks warned. The conversation was interrupted when Adam came over to their
table, bowed, and offered menus. He began filling water and wine in the glasses provided.

"If you will, honored guests, please press your wands against the dishes and the drink of your choice and it will be brought to you shortly. May I be of any other assistance in the meanwhile?"

Mrs. Longbottom pulled his sleeve and he bent low to listen to her request. He nodded and smiled. "Will there be anything else?" The table thanked him and proclaimed they were fine. Tonks leaned back in.

"I will need to talk to Penelope about Michael. There may be another twist. There are records of a 'Buck Trayard' being arrested in Spain. His age doesn't match Michael's. Older by a decade or more."

"Greyback's info are mainly rumours. Could be that it isn't the same guy," Harry admitted. "But I trust Jon's instinct." He scanned the crowd again, just in case he was here and they did not pick him up as yet. "Let me know what she says."

"Yep." Some minutes passed with pleasant conversation across the table. Tonks hesitated, then leaned back in. "I am not cramping your style, am I Harry? I can exchange seats if you'd like. Maybe you wanna chat up someone your age," she chuckled.

"You stay right where you are," Harry insisted out the side of his mouth just as Mrs. Rabiot addressed him. He smiled politely at Mrs. Rabiot while absentmindedly patting Tonks' thigh twice under the table and resting it there in a comfortable manner. Only when he finished answering the older woman did he realize what he unconsciously did to the beautiful woman sitting next to him. He calmly brought his hand up to his glass of water and took a small slip. Tonks mirrored his action, except sipping on her wine. Harry sensed that she wasn't actively displeased or angry. Most likely; she did not even notice the intimate touch.

Dinner was served shortly after and everyone enjoyed their meal. Harry made certain to mind his table manners and Jon also was a perfect gentleman, helping the ladies if they excused themselves from the table and always first to help them retake their seats. Fleur Delacour and Alexandria Potage walked over with two of their friends, and Alexandria stopped to make small talk with Ramellie and Melisse. Their visit was short and Alexandria stopped between the two boys before leaving, dipping her head between theirs.

"I hope you enjoyed the meal! Also, don't forget!" she smiled at them, her hands lightly resting on both of their shoulders. Harry and Jon returned the smile and reassured her that they did no such thing. Fleur scrutinized the two of them during their chat but said nothing. Alexandria patted their shoulders and wished everyone a great night and to not be a stranger on the dance floor. Harry sensed that Tonks stiffened when Alexandria was between them and felt his heart beginning to race. Was Tonks jealous? Or was his private obsession getting the better of him?

After dinner was finished and desert was now a fond memory, Monsieur Valmont came to the front where a tall cart draped in a red velvet material was now pushed in. The music dipped in volume and the fairy lights in the hall dimmed, leaving only the front of the ballroom and the cart in full spotlight.

"Honored guests, may I have your attention for a moment. I hope you left some space after that scrumptious dessert for cake," he tapped his wand and the material was dramatically whipped away, revealing a beautiful four storey birthday cake. Harry thought it was a cool twist on the sonorous charm that his voice resounded in English or French; according to your preference.

"The mystery guest who will have the privilege of Cutting the Cake with Alexandria will be our little
game of the evening!" He grinned and Alexandria, who was standing to the side with her close friends began shaking her hands in protest, laughing at the situation.

"Edgar! You can't!"

"And why not?" He teased. "Ladies and gentlemen, honored guests, we thank you for coming to our darling Alexandria's birthday celebration and hope you are enjoying the evening! So, here is the little game! The strapping young men here are seated on chairs that are charmed to recognize if they are accounted for, or preferably if they are not, since we don't want any misunderstandings with any fair damsel be they near, far, or currently holding her hand! So beware lads, if you are taken, the charm will know!"

There was a polite round of laughter.

"Right! In this glass bowl," he waved his wand with a flourish. A deep, clear, spherical bowl wrapped with a golden ribbon appeared on the cart. "In this bowl, Alexandria will select three balls. Gentlemen, please reach under your chair and you will find a slip of paper with a number on it!"

Sounds of shifting chairs ensued for a few seconds and the general murmuring of voices increased.

"You have them? Very good! Alexandria, please step forward and take out any three."

Alexandria needed to be cajoled and slightly pushed forward by her friends who were giggling and laughing at her. She blushed as she briskly walked across to the glass sphere. She took out three of the balls and gave them to Monsieur Valmont who bowed and grinned at the crowd as he accepted them.

"Now. Here comes the fun part ladies and gentlemen. You shall decide which of these three extremely lucky young men would have the honor of cutting the cake and maybe, just maybe, a chaste kiss from the belle of the ball!" Alexandria laughed out loud, scandalized that she would not be able to choose.

"You! You are evil!" she cried out in laughter, hiding her face. The crowd laughed, getting more and more into this game.

"There would be some input from you as well, pet, never you fear. Uncle V will never leave you high and dry!" With another extravagant wave of his wand, a night eye mask popped into existence. Alexandria frowned, perplexed. "Come, come!" Monsieur Valmont encouraged, and placed the blindfold over her eyes.

"Now, esteemed guests, when I call out these numbers, the gentleman holding the number should come front and based on your applause or reaction, Alexandria would decide who would have the honour of cutting the cake!"

Alexandria screamed in exasperation, embarrassed that she was going through a lottery to pick a partner to cut the cake.

"Are we ready?" he drawled, to rapturous applause. "Number twenty two!"

A handsome youth around sixteen years old stood up, accepted a polite round of applause from his table, and walked forward with a growing clapping response and cheers from the crowd. He came forward and bowed respectfully to the crowd, waving at friendly faces he spotted. The cheers grew louder.

"Ah, a crowd favorite, is it? Give it up for Number twenty two!" there was another round of applause and cheers. Alexandria clapped in excitement.
"Number 7!" he called next. Harry froze. That was his number. Tonks leaned over and saw the parchment in his hands.

"Get up there, Potter!" she hissed, giving him a shove. Harry felt reminiscent of the Tri Wizard tournament. His table gave him a large round of applause and cheers began to ripple as people recognized who he was. The crowd politely clapped as Harry got up and walked forward. He was almost a foot shorter than the first boy, who offered his hand to shake in friendly competition. Only when the boy spotted his scar did his face go slack, and he just stared. He took back his hand, and suddenly looked very uncomfortable standing next to the Boy Who Lived.

"What a surprise! Once again for number seven!" Harry waved to the crowd and the cheers grew louder.

"Number nine!"

Tonks laughed aloud as she scooted one over unto Harry's chair. "You have got to be taking the piss... What is _up_ with you two? Well, go on then!"

Jon stood up, and the applause slowly faded away. There was an almost eerie silence as Jon stepped out from his seat.

"Le Chevalier Immortel..." a lone voice said. "C'est lui! Le Chevalier Immortel!" he exclaimed loudly. Murmurs went around the ballroom as he came forward, the phrase being repeated as recognition spread. When Jon arrived next to Harry and number twenty two, there were elevated voices speaking that phrase. He shook both of their hands.

"Amazing. Well, ladies and gentlemen? Can I get a round of applause for number 9?" Jon stood up a bit straighter, his hands folded across his chest. Number twenty two looked dumbstruck. He tilted his head at an angle to gauge Jon's face, comparing mentally that it was actually the same person as the statue.

The entire ballroom erupted in a loud cheer. Everyone from Salles and Estagal rose to their feet in applause. "Le Chevalier Immortel!"

"Alexandria?" Monsieur Valmont prompted, trying his best to be heard over the din. The noise grew louder. "Do we have a winner?"

"I have no choice. Number nine it is!" she exclaimed, pulling off her blindfold. Alexandria laughed as she saw the three of them.

Harry felt relieved. "Congratulations," he said drily to Jon, offering his fist. Jon hit it, a wry smile on his face. Harry indicated the standing ovation with a tilt of his head. "What us 'Immortal heroes do for fun', huh?"

"It appears so," Jon replied under his breath. Jon raised his hand in acknowledgement and gave the crowd a small bow. The noise grew even louder.

With a natural grace Alexandria came over to number twenty two, held his arms in both hands and gave him cheek kisses on both sides of the face. The crowd clapped in appreciation of the gesture. She did this as well to Harry who smiled, wished her all the best and a happy birthday, and went back to his seat. He noticed Tonks was not clapping as wholeheartedly as the others.

Jon and Alexandria cut the cake. While Alexandria was leaning close to him with their backs to the crowd she said, "I have only heard rumours about the statue. I did not know it was about you, Lord Black."
"It was not my decision, nor my sole responsibility," he responded humbly. "We worked as a unit," he explained.


They turned towards the guests and fed each other a piece of cake. A polite round of clapping followed. Alexandria slowly faced Jon, her eyes looking up to his. The crowd simmered in anticipation, almost willing this to happen. Jon took the small step forward as Alexandria went on tip toe, leaning in. Jon bent his head lower and both of them shared a light kiss on the lips. The crowd began to cheer even louder than before.

Sarah had seen it coming and had her camera ready, clicking away as they came together and separated. They both turned to face the tables with broad grins. Jon smiled broadly, even though his posture was tense. Alexandria stepped closer to his side, keeping her fingers in the crook of his elbow as she made a dainty wave of thanks to the crowd.

"Ladies and gentlemen! La princesse royale et le chevalier immortel!" Monseur Valmont announced. The curtain on the stage opened up behind them and a full musical band began playing an upbeat melody. The clapping continued as they both separated with a small bow and went back to their seats.

"Like a fairy tale hero, Jon. Well done," Sarah congratulated him as he sat down. "You could be making some nice galleons if they let this go to print!" she showed Jon and Harry the pictures.

"Oh really?" Tonks asked. "How much you talking about?"

"Probably a hundred. Maybe two if you're lucky!" Sarah waggled her eyebrows at them. "We pay premium commission to our clients if the issue sells out!"

Tonks scoffed. "You guys will be rolling in it," she added drily, taking her refilled wine glass to her lips. Jon frowned at her tone.

"Is something wrong?" he asked Tonks, scanning the crowd. He noticed that tables nearer to the stage were being moved further back for dancing. "How many did you have to drink?"

"What, are you my big brother now?" Tonks muttered to herself, draining her glass. "Let's go dancing," she suggested to Sarah, Daphne, and the four other girls. "We can grab something at the bar there as well. Excuse us," she said to the adults still seated at the table. The girls nodded in agreement, and Jon rose from his chair as Tonks lead the girls towards the front. He took his seat and caught Mr. Rabiot's eye.

"You all right there, Mr. Black?" he grinned. "You're a lucky man."

"It does not feel like it sometimes," Jon admitted. "Harry, Neville..." he eyed Richard and raised an eyebrow at his parents. Mr. Rabiot raised an eyebrow back as if Jon was raving mad. "Ahem. Harry, Neville, on me." Jon got up and Harry and Neville fell in line. Jon made his way to the front and instead of turning left to go to the bar where Tonks and the others were ordering drinks, he made a right and went out the grand double doors.

"I need some air. I could do with some light sparring right about now," Jon said as he approached the outside bar. A few other patrons were outside as well, chatting animatedly and smoking pipes and cigarettes. "Neville. Are you familiar with these parties?" he stared into the poor boy's face.

"Uhh..no..first time...really. No. I shouldn't say that. My gran used to take me to functions as a little
"Mate, your gran is still taking you, sorta like Richard," Harry explained as he took a swig of his first alcoholic drink. It burned nicely down his throat, then he began to cough. Jon sipped his wine slowly, scanning the crowd.

"Well. This is a bit different. She said in no uncertain terms that I was not to be tailing her around and to be a bit more... brave..." Neville finished lamely. "Seeing a friendly face has really made a difference." Neville took a swig of a beer and swallowed it calmly, nodding as he put back down the bottle. "I don't know how you guys do that wine thing. Carling or nothing for me."

"Neville, you drink?"

"Yeah, once in a while Gran invites me for a drink when she wants to relax over the summer holidays. Ever since she heard I stood up to you she's been a bit more, lenient. Told me it took guts to do that."

"Oh," Harry said, feeling a bit embarrassed now that he remembered what they did to him in first year. It was a strange feeling, recalling something that technically happened only a couple of months back.

But to him, was literally a lifetime ago.

"You two had words?" Jon asked.

"Nah, not really. But Neville tried to stop us from leaving the tower after curfew."

"You did? Harry you shouldn't have -"

"It was Hermione," Neville cut him off.

Jon looked to Harry then Neville, then back again, then laughed raucously, his head tilted back.

"Thought you said she was a scholar type!"

"She's capable of powerful spells when she is ready," Harry shrugged.

"Yeah. Still got a slight bump on the back of my head for that," Neville grumbled. "Uh oh. Flint is coming this way."

"Potter," Marcus Flint sauntered over with his date walking next to him. "Shea, get us something to drink. Potter, you wanted a juice or something?" he said.

"Nah, I'm good." Harry took another sip of his drink, refraining from grimacing. His body definitely wasn't accustomed to alcohol at this age.

"Isn't it a bit past your bedtime?" Flint said, accepting his drink from his date. "Shea. This is Jon Black, Neville Longbottom, and everyone knows Harry Potter. Shea Carrow," he introduced. Harry expected a typical combination of insults, but Shea smiled pleasantly and said, "Pleased to meet all of you."

"A pleasure, milady," Jon said smoothly, watching directly in her eyes. Shea raised one eyebrow at him, hiding a smile behind her wine glass as she sipped.

"Hannah wants to know where you went," she directed at Neville. Neville straightened up, taking another large gulp.
"Oh?" Neville enquired, turning. "And what else did she say?" Neville asked as he leant back against the bar.

"She sent her to fetch you," Flint grumbled. "Are you that thick, Longbottom?"

"Thick?" Neville scoffed as he put down his beer. "Marcus, this is your third year you've been kept back at Hogwarts. How old are you now, twenty?" Longbottom countered. Harry coughed up his drink, laughing. Shea hid her laughter behind her hand. Flint drew for his wand but Jon was faster and clamped a firm hand on his, preventing him from retrieving it from his pants pocket.

"Uh-huh," Jon remonstrated. "It was only banter amongst schoolmates. No need for that," Jon warned, both of their arms tensing against each other. Flint's scrawny arm was no match for Jon's proper stance and the way he controlled his wrist. "I am going to let you go," Jon said calmly. Flint shrugged his arm away from him then, giving Jon a glare. Neville, Jon and Harry didn't flinch as he glowered at the three of them. Flint drained his wine glass and set it down hard on the bar table, intentionally knocking down Neville's beer as he walked away. The bartender didn't miss a beat and already had a next cold one sliding down the slick counter.

Neville caught it smoothly and took another sip in one fluid motion. The three boys laughed as Flint disappeared into the crowd. Shea shook her head. "The things a girl does to go to a party," she sighed loudly as she started after him.

"Forget him," Neville declared, taking a deep swig. "Have a drink with us!" he invited.

She contemplated Neville a moment. "Sure. Why not?" Another wine glass was presented to her. After a few minutes of talking between the four of them Shea leaned over to Neville. "Let's go dance!" she said in his ear, taking up her purse and pulling him along.

"Jon, Harry..." Neville called as he was being pulled away. "On me."

"You heard the man," Harry relayed the order on, eyeing the enticing way Shea's hips moved as she dragged Neville along.

"At once," Jon agreed, making a quick step to catch up.

The dance floor had dramatically filled during the ten minutes they were outside. Shea steered Neville towards Hannah and Daphne, speaking loudly to be heard over the music. "I'm borrowing him a bit!" she giggled. "Take Potter and Black in the mean time!" As Harry and Jon caught up, Daphne stepped forward into Harry's trajectory, almost right between his feet. Harry froze for a moment, looking into Daphne's blank expression. The both of them just stared at each other for a second. Harry offered his hand, palm up.

"May I have this dance?"

Daphne smiled, and rest her hand lightly in his. They began to dance, Harry remembering McGonagall's lessons as if it were yesterday. Daphne wasn't the most elegant, but she knew the steps and they flitted over the dance floor without any major hiccups.

"You know how to dance," was the first thing she ever said to him. "You don't seem the type," she admitted.

"I try," he responded. "You're quite good yourself," he complimented. She smiled again, looking into his face.

"I don't know what it is about you," Daphne said. "But you seem different since last year."
"Oh? How so? This is the first time I'm talking to you," he countered.

"You seem composed. Not afraid anymore to be this world famous wizard. That's all," she said, coming a bit closer on the next bar. She did a smooth turn into his arms and Harry found himself holding her around her waist, with her back firmly against him. After swaying a for a few more bars in this position she twisted in his arms. "Your wand is pressing into me," she declared, looking back at him. Harry went mute for a moment until he realize that it was his spare wand in his vest pocket pressing into her, even though he was intrigued by this weird Slytherin dancing in his arms.

Harry spun her around and now they were in the normal hand on her waist position.

"Oh? You rather I did this?"

She laughed. On the next bar she repeated the turn and now her back was pressed up against him. "No, I rather this." Harry spotted Jon dancing with Hannah but Jon was being a total gentleman about it, even though he moved ten times more gracefully than Harry thought a man should be able to.

Daphne held Harry's arms across her stomach and swayed for the few more bars of the song. The song ended and another one started up. Daphne released herself and stepped away from him. She stared at him a moment, the hint of a smile tugging her lips.

"Thank you for dancing with me," Harry said politely. She nodded, and retreated towards the rest of the group of girls.

Harry joined Jon and Neville who had also finished their dances and were now standing behind Tonks, Sarah, Shea and Rylai who were chatting with each other, moving their hips in time to the music.

"Scotch on the rocks for me," Harry called the bartender. "Wine and beer, for them," he indicated Jon and Neville. "Wine, Tonks?" he asked her. She nodded. "And Sarah?"

"Wine for me too please," she said. Harry asked the Rabiot sisters, Shea, Melisse, Hannah and Daphne what they wanted. Harry ordered all the drinks and the three boys helped carry them to the girls.

"To friendship," he said as a toast, raising his glass.

"Friendship," they declared and all of them clinked their glasses and took a sip. They chatted amiably for a few minutes and Neville went to dance with Hannah when the next song started.

"Quite a crew you've put together," Tonks commended Harry. "You're like a bloody magnet."

"I am? Why do you say that." Harry said, taking his drink in tiny sips.

Tonks turned towards him, leaning her hand against the bar and creating a barrier between them and the others from hearing her.

"Why do you pretend you don't know what you are doing?" Tonks hissed. "You... you're just... ah I just can't describe it."

"I'm just being friendly, that's all," Harry shrugged.

"Whatever," Tonks eyed him, unsure of what game Harry was playing. She leaned in even closer. "You've recruited two Slytherin girls into your little crew within minutes of speaking to them.
Coming from you, the hero of wizardry, that should be an impossible feat. That Greengrass girl was melting in your arms," she teased. "Shea has been watching you a couple times as well, as if trying to figure you out. You've got moves."

Harry felt a heat run up his neck as Tonks spoke in his ear. At least he could blame it on the five entire sips of scotch he had for the night.

"Neville is the one who convinced her, not me," Harry defended himself.

"That boy gravitated towards you, so you're still the hub of this wheel."

"We're all enjoying ourselves, right?" Harry cut out the direction this conversation was going.

"Yeah," Tonks admitted looking over Harry's shoulder. "And another one," Tonks grinned. "You've got some debts to pay. She's been covertly looking out for you two since you stepped outside. Go get 'em, tiger." Tonks smoothly turned around and began talking to Jon and Melisse.

On the end of the bar almost right under the stage, boy number twenty two, Fleur, Alexandria and one or two familiar faces from Salles and Estagal were chatting animatedly. Harry observed Alexandria's body language and the way she angled herself slightly away from the circle, opening up her front to the dance floor. Harry made small talk with Neville as he timed the ending of the song.

"Hold my beer," Neville said, giving it to Harry before the song came to a close. Harry smirked as Neville probably had the same idea as he did, except he was going to tackle Shea again who was unconsciously or probably consciously shaking her tail a bit in Neville's direction. Harry placed Neville's beer on the bar and walked directly across to Alexandria, making sure she saw him approach.

"Hi," Harry said as the song ended and another began.

"Heeyyy," Alexandria smiled at him.

"Do you want to dance?"

"Oui," she said, stepping out away from her friends. Harry offered his hand and she took it, placing the other on his shoulder.

As soon as the music started, Harry realized that this girl was a trained dancer and Harry was nowhere as good as she was. She understood this as well, and made things a bit easier for him with simpler movements.

"It's not every day a regular guy can dance with a princess in a castle," Harry said. "You look beautiful tonight," he complimented her.

"Thank you," she grinned. "Not every day a regular girl gets to dance with a legendary hero," she responded cheekily.

"Well, it's your birthday, so that sort of makes it special. I'm not really a hero, I didn't actually do anything when I was a baby," he sighed. They danced a bit closer on the next four bars, then came apart on the next two, turned and twirled. The bridge of the song was a slower tempo and their bodies came close. Alexandria rest her head on his shoulder.

"You are a wonderful dancer," Alexandria commended. "You do not stick to convention, you make it easy for anyone to dance with."
"I think it should be fluid and natural," Harry shrugged, smiling.

"You should write me. I've been hearing some interesting stories and I would like to find out how true they are," she smiled prettily at him. "I prefer my knowledge, first hand," she whispered in his ear. Harry felt a warning bell tingle down his spine. Even if it was an error in translation on her part, that tone and invitation was quite intimate.

"Sure, I'll write," Harry gulped. Alexandria nodded, and rest her head on his shoulder once more for the remaining bars of the song. They swayed to the music.

The song came to a close and Harry thanked her for dancing and made his way back across to their group.

The night progressed and Harry gave up on his barely touched scotch and kept to non alcoholic drinks as he danced with nearly everyone in their group, and Alexandria again. Jon was more conservative, but he did dance with Sarah, Alexandria, and Fleur.

Try as he might, he couldn't work up the nerve to ask Tonks to dance. As he stood there fuming by the bar as number twenty two danced with Tonks, Daphne appeared out of nowhere and came very close to him, standing barely an inch away from his midsection, her feet together between his spread legs. Harry felt literally cornered, trapped between her and the bar. She leaned over his shoulder and ordered an orange juice from the bartender. Harry had previously noticed she was the only one not drinking alcohol the whole night. He should have done so as well because the mixture of the few sips of scotch and the one glass of wine he had with his meal was intoxicating.

She folded her arms in front of him, sipping her juice, her arm brushing against his belly in faint touches. She stood there, saying nothing.

"I liked how you danced earlier." She leaned forward and put her weight against him. She wrapped her arms around his torso and gave him a hug. Harry closed his arms around her and they danced slowly, closely, just moving softly to the music. When the music was done Daphne smiled at him, said thanks, and stepped aside.

When Tonks finished dancing with twenty two, she smiled a wry grin and came across to Harry.

"Whoa there Casanova," Tonks giggled. Her face was a bit rosy from dancing and maybe a tad from too much to drink. "Like you got a not-so-secret admirer," she whispered in his ear.

Harry sorta wished she wouldn't do that. He was already partially excited about the close contact with Daphne and Tonks slightly slurred voice made him feel on fire.

"It's alright. I got a feeling she just needed a nice long hug," he said softly. "She's nice, a bit quiet, but nice."

"You're a good guy Harry," Tonks sighed, resting her forehead comically against his shoulder. "She likes you and you aren't taking advantage."

"It's interesting," Harry added. "Maybe a bit fast, but I can handle it."

"I can be your bodyguard." She grinned at him, her white teeth forming two perfect rows in her mouth. Harry could not but help notice the way she was leaning forward he could see down her dress. He kept his eyes on the level of her teeth.

Harry laughed. "Not saying you won't make an excellent bodyguard, but I'm ok. I don't mind."
"I'll stick around, just in case," She said, playfully taking his arm and wrapping it around her waist. She leaned her back up against him.

It just coincidentally happened that a new song began to play and Tonks began to sway in time against his pelvis as he leant against the bar. Her dancing felt like nothing he has felt before in his life. It assaulted his senses with rapture. As the main chorus started he was painfully aroused against her soft body.

Tonks pressed against him and realized what she had done. Even still, she continued swaying for the entire chorus then eventually stepped away from him and casually picked up her drink from the bar. She emptied her wine and leant back over to his ear.

"I'm going to the bathroom. Do not move from this spot until I come back," she slurred. "Especially not outside." She turned and left.

Harry nodded even though she had already turned her back to him. He let out a deep breath and ordered some water to help him cool down. Within five minutes she was back and leaned on the bar next to him as if nothing had happened.

"Marcus Flint is nowhere to be seen. Shea is still here. But he is gone," she said casually. "Did you steal his girl?" she added in a tone more suited to querying if he remembered to brush his teeth this morning.

"No."

"Ok."

"Can I lean up on you again?" she said after a brief pause.

"Yes."

"Good."

She planted herself against him and drove him absolutely nuts for the next hour until the night sky began to lighten. At the end of the night, Tonks turned in his arms and draped her arms on his shoulders.

She stared into his eyes. Her hips still swayed against his to the music.

Harry couldn't believe what was happening. Something was wrong. Or something was extremely right.

"I'm going to tell you something, Harry, and you are going to be cool, very cool," she said huskily.

"All right. What is it?"

Tonks brought her lips two inches away from his.

"You definitely aren't twelve."

Harry didn't even give away his position by flinching, even though all his Occlumency training snapped up an impenetrable wall.

"Oh? Why you say that?" he said with a tone of disbelief.

She grinned at him, her lips touching his nose as she spoke.
"The chair charm registers only males fifteen and older and unattached. Right now I've got a wand pointed at the back of your neck."
Chapter Summary

Tonks interrogates Harry using a custom truth serum.

Harry's jaw tightened. He had previously suspected something was up with Tonks. The pressure of the wand tip at the back of his neck verified that he wasn't imagining things.

"Keep your hands on the bar," Tonks ordered.

Tonks slipped her free hand into his waistcoat inner pocket and confiscated his wand. She leaned in closer and spoke directly in his ear.

"Stupefy this close to your spine can damage you, permanently. Be very cool, and you will be fine. Understood?"

Harry nodded, his whole body tense. His eyes flicked to the dance floor and spotted Jon dancing with Melisse. He was not looking in this direction. In fact, no one was looking in their direction since Tonks took over. Almost as if her behavior made them feel uncomfortable enough that people preferred not to notice. She glanced around and steered him away.

"Let's go. No funny stuff, whoever you are."

Tonks led them towards the doorway at the back of the banquet hall. She ignored the doors leading to the kitchens and bathrooms, and continued along a corridor until they turned right and went up a flight of stone stairs. The torches that aligned the rough hewn walls were flickering with a warm orange light, casting shadows that stretched in front of them as they walked past.

Tonks cast the manacle charm on Harry when they were finally alone in the corridor and his wrists were captured behind his back.

Harry cursed inwardly at his predicament, his mind racing. Would she believe him if he told her the truth? Or would a more believable lie have a better chance of convincing her? After a couple minutes of walking through connecting bridges bordered by medieval balustrades, Tonks opened the door to the chateau hotel.

Keeping the wand pressed between his shoulder blades she steered him down a flight of steps and into a room numbered twenty, presumably her hotel room considering he recognized her travel bag. She dragged the sole chair from the writing desk in front of the queen sized bed.

"Sit!"

Harry did so without resistance. Tonks took out a sneakascope, a notepad and a couple vials of potion. She dragged the small writing table across and put these things on it.

"So. Anything you want to tell me?" she asked conversationally.

"What would you like to know?" Harry responded in kind.
"Who are you?"

"Harry Potter."

Tonks glanced at the sneakascope. It was dormant. She frowned.

"Are you under a glamour or polyjuice potion?"

"No."

"Have you been befuddled or cursed?"

"No. Not at all. Tonks, did it occur to you that the charm might be inaccurate?"

"It isn't," she replied confidently. "It confirms my suspicions ever since I met you. No one throws a hovering charm in a fight, or offs a Russian Hit squad without blinking an eye at your age." She looked down at the notepad. The words that were captured were written without a slant, meaning that the interviewee was not exhibiting suspicious behaviour.

"How old are you?" she asked.

"Twelve," Harry said, his occlumency training slammed into place. The sneakascope shifted off axis a fraction by a few degrees then stopped.

"Ah ha!" Tonks declared, triumphant in victory. "I knew it. Spill it!"

Harry stared at her, incredulous. "Spill what? If this is some sort of ...domination game, I will be happy to tell you that it is working."

"Harry, or whoever you are, cut the crap!" she hissed. "You are hiding something. Your abilities far surpass any first year at Hogwarts. Who are you, really?"

"I told you," he smiled. "Harry James Potter. The one and only."

The sneakascope remained motionless. Tonks cursed. She picked up the vial of potion, and watched him intently.

*If I am wrong, I could be tried and sentenced to Azkaban for giving a minor a truth serum. But I'm not wrong. Everything inside me tells me this wizard is older, more experienced than me, and not who he says he is.*

"Merlin, guide my hand tonight," she whispered under her breath, closing her eyes briefly.

"What is that?" he asked, eyeing the bottle.

"Secrets Unveiled," Tonks replied. "A potion mainly used by jealous wives or girlfriends on their partners. It invokes emotional responses, rather than intellectual responses, which Veritaserum does."

"Whoa!" Harry tensed now, his hands straining at his bonds. "You can't do that to me. Are you crazy?"

"Maybe. It was you who wanted me to make a truth serum for Michael Ellewyn-Sare, remember?" Tonks stared at Harry, gauging his response. Harry frowned.

"He's disappeared, he hasn't been at Flourish since that day. We checked."
"I know. His family went on holiday. Very coincidental, don't you think?" Tonks approached him. Harry drew back a bit. Tonks magicked the desk away with one fluid motion and it went sliding along the floor.

"Tonks," Harry started.

"Nuh-uh, too late now," she cut him off, and flicked her wand at his mouth. It opened. With a shaking hand she dropped eight drops into his mouth.

After a minute had passed, Harry began to feel very emotional, similarly when he told Ginny that he was leaving to go to the hunt for the Horcruxes. He took a deep breath.

"What is your name?" she asked softly.

"Harry, you know that."

"Do you like me?"

"Yes. A lot... why are you doing this to me?"

"I see. I'm so sorry Harry. Do you think I am a bit too old for you?"

"No, of course not. You're just right."

"How so?"

"You are everything I think is wonderful about magic. Amazing. Powerful. Full of life and the most precious thing a wizard could have," Harry said. He closed his eyes, pain clutching his heart. This felt like heartbreak, except twice as bad.

Tonks hesitated, her hand going to her mouth.

*I must be strong. I can do this. He is just an imposter. It's not really Harry. It can't be.*

"But.. don't you think you are too young for me?" she said softly.

"I'll be nineteen next July. We're the same age," he declared.

"Finally!" Tonks cried. "So why do you ..how ?"

"Time travel," Harry admitted, even though he was fighting it. Under no circumstance could he tell her the entire truth. He said too much as it was. This potion was overpowering him. Enough of the games. She would have to be satisfied with this knowledge for now.

He poured magic into his phoenix bracer and the manacles clicked open. He banished them from behind his back and it shot out sideways and hit the table with a loud clatter. Tonks spun on her heel, aiming her wand at the distraction.

Harry drew his spare Niffler wand from his right boot .

"Kleptopliss!" He plucked his wand deftly with his index and thumb, aiming at her.

Two wands and the vial flew out from her hands with arrow speed. Harry instinctively caught her teak wand with his left. The vial hit his chest and broke on the ground between them at the same time his newly made Hippogriff Feather wand smacked him in his nose. It bounced off of him and fell on the ground. Tonks made a dive for it on the now wet floor and fired a stunner.
"Stupefy!"

A flash of light came forth, but the spell did not shoot out. Tonks tried again twice while Harry was recovering from the hit to his face. Nothing happened.

"It's no good," Harry countered. "Drop it," he threatened, pointing his wand. Tonks scowled at the malfunctioning wand, then tossed it aside. "Get up."

She did, her eyes never leaving his. Harry summoned the discarded wand and put it back in his waistcoat. "So. Are you happy? Satisfied?"

Tonks said nothing, just stared at Harry. He faced her, his wand held loosely at his side. They remained that way for an uncomfortably long period of time, even though it was only half a minute.

"I want back my wand."

"And what if I did give it back to you? What are you going to do now? Even if I let you go. Would you hunt me down, capture me again and lock me up?"

"I... don't know. Maybe... or maybe not. I can go on a vacation. Migrate. Find a husband. Get away from this."

Harry felt his heart break at those words. This potion was not helping him to remain aloof. It suddenly dawned to him that the potion was also working on her.

"Why run?" Harry asked, curious to hear her response.


"Secrets unveiled. This is very dangerous stuff. Never heard of it. Where did you get this?"

"I lied before. This is a potion I made myself," she sighed in frustration. "Stop asking me questions, damn you."

"Do you have a boyfriend?"

"No. Well, now everyone suspects I'm a cradle robber. I can't believe this is happening."

"What? Why did you say that?" Harry demanded.

"I just secreted you away to my room." Harry dipped his head cursing at the floor.

"Oh Fuck! How are we going to explain this?"

There was a jarring blow to his head. His Niffler wand fell from his hand and rolled under the bed. Tonks had kicked him flush across the ear. She immediately tackled him to the bed, already on top of him scrambling for her wand still held in his other hand. They tussled against each other, Tonks stretching over his face trying to reach his hand. Harry's hand let go of her wand and it fell in the gap between the bed head and the mattress.

"Ah!" She dove again from on top of him, jamming her hand painfully in the small space, desperately reaching for it. Harry wrestled behind her, grabbing her body from behind. He grabbed her shoulder and her waist, trying frantically to stop her from reaching the weapon.

At that moment the door opened.
Harry and Tonks froze, her short dress hitched over her waist in the fight, showing an expanse of bare hip and leg. From the doorway, someone would think that they were doing something they definitely should not be doing.

"Pardon the interruption," Jon said calmly. "I was looking for the both of you. I heard the bed rocking against the wall and ... Maybe you should have locked the door."

"Jon!" Tonks screamed. "He isn't who he says he is!" She screamed, muffled a bit by her face flush against the pillows. Harry still kept a firm grip on her from behind.

"Later," Jon dismissed. "MacMillian is here. And he is not alone."

"Crap." Harry let her go and jumped off the bed. He stumbled from the sudden movement and fell down, still damaged from the blow to the head. Tonks yanked down her dress and rolled over. She got up and pulled the bed from the wall, retrieving her wand.

"Expelliarmus," Jon flashed his Dragon Heartstring wand. Tonks wand flew out her hand and Jon snatched it. Tonks cried out in frustration.

"Are you with us, milady?" Jon was kneeling next to Harry who was clearly disoriented. "Can you heal him? Those wizards do not appear to be friendly party goers."

"S'got a mean roundhouse," Harry grimaced, holding his swollen ear.

"Yeah I can," Tonks sighed. "I am so, so sorry I hurt you." Tonks said aloud, then cursed in embarrassment. Jon gave her wand, handle first. "Episkey. Enervatius Minimus. Where is that blasted counter potion." She picked up the vial on the table. She took a sip, and offered Harry the bottle. He nodded gratefully and took some as well.

"Give me a moment to change," Tonks ordered. "This dress is totally drenched."

Jon helped Harry to his feet. He peeped outside down the corridor. Seeing it clear, both boys stepped outside and assumed guard positions on either side of the door, wands drawn and arms crossed in front of their hips.

After a couple minutes, Tonks opened the door. She emerged in the dark red Robes bought at World Wizarding Gear.

"Let's go," she commanded. They made their way back upstairs and opened the door leading towards the bridge connecting the main hall to the chateau. Jon raised his fist and crouched. Tonks and Harry peeped out the doorway. Four men and Michael MacMillan were in the courtyard, wands drawn and in a heated conversation with six wizards.

"They are having a confrontation with the attendants in blue and Monsieur Valmont. Wait. I see Mr. Potage and Alexandria coming out of the hall." Jon cursed. "I don't have my bow. Stupid girl. Why would she get involved?"

Harry crouched and took cover behind the nearest pillar along the bridge. Tonks did the same. "Wish I could hear what they were saying."

"The body language is more than enough," Tonks added. "They definitely aren't friendly." Mr. Potage came to the front, his hands up in a placating manner. He was trying to reason with them. "Guys dressed like that aren't here for cake and ice cream. What is he doing?"

Harry did not like this situation one bit. From their vantage point high up he could tell that this was
not going to go down well.

"Tonks, can you side along us down there?"

"Can't. There seems to be a light barrier here," Tonks replied. "Probably a temporary security field to prevent people popping in and out."

MacMillan gestured and one of his lackeys drew his wand and stunned Mr. Potage, knocking him out cold. Alexandria screamed. Flashes of magic broke out between the two groups.

"Potter, catch me! To arms!" Jon shouted, and vaulted over the railing immediately.

"Wha... " Harry said dumbly, watching Jon's cloak billow behind him like a cape. He drew his Holly and Troll hair wand from his bracer and caught him with a hover charm just before he landed. Jon's feet touched the ground and he cushioned his landing with a shoulder roll. He sprinted towards the battle.

Tonks froze. "He is crazy! I'm backing him up. Don't let me down, luv," she said behind her with an intense look. Their eyes caught for a second, then she jumped over the railing.

Harry was confused if she meant what she said for a fraction of a second before he cast the hovering spell and slowed her descent as well. She landed relatively safe, considering that her attempted tumble only left her momentarily stunned.

Harry leaned over the rail, making sure she was okay. She got to her feet, looking up at him. She waved. Guess she needed to work on her tumbling skills.

She gestured for him to come down the long way around. Harry nodded. If Tonks wasn't sure about catching him from that four storey height it would probably be safer if he ran down. He glanced at the courtyard. The men in blue were getting creamed, falling one by one.

"There's no time!" he shouted. "Go!" he pointed to the fight. Tonks nodded and ran off to back up Jon.

Running down would take way too much time.

"No problem Harry. You can do this..."

Harry took a deep breath then vaulted over the railing, the ground approaching him with a rapid finality. Pouring magic into his bracer and his Troll hair wand, he envisioned *Winguardium Lleviosa* combined with *Arresto momentum*.

Magic began to arc from his bracer towards his wand. A circuit of magic began to envelop his arms, a bright glowing band of magical energy.

Tonks stopped in her tracks. A bright light was shining behind her. She turned, looking up at the glowing body falling from the bridge.

"That idiot!" she screamed. "Harry!"

Harry couldn't see his own hands they were glowing so bright. All he knew that he was going to die, again.

One story above ground he slowed dramatically. The bright glow eased, and now his feet dangled below him, hovering in mid air. His cape fluttered in the breeze.
"Wha..?"

Tonks just stared up at him, frozen. "Well now I've seen everything," she whispered. "Get down here this moment!" she screamed, looking back at Jon who was throwing spells all over the place. Presently he was behind a massive Crystalline shield, protecting Alexandria Potage and her unconscious father. He won't last long! "Jon's gone kamikaze!"

"I'm trying!" Harry shouted, kicking his legs. Did she say kamikaze? That gave him an idea.

If Voldemort could do it, that means it is possible.

"I'm going in!"

Floating high above the ground, he again poured magic into his weapons, envisioning Stupefy, Llumos Maxima, Protego and Depulso in a combination with Winguardium and Arresto Momentum. Once again white, blindingly hot magic swirled around his body and he shot off like a cannon towards the fray.

"No way. You gotta be fucking me," she whispered as he sped across the courtyard like a rocket.

"Protego!" Harry screamed as he shot towards MacMillan and his gang. With a loud crash Harry dive-bombed feet first in front of Jon, and an explosion of white magic flattened the intruders and sent the three outside bar stands flying. Harry's shield took the brunt of his landing, skating forward creating a long gouge within the courtyard.

He finally came to a smoking halt in a two feet deep crevice at the far wall, breathing hard, his robes glowing white with magic. The robed intruders were scattered about, some legs and arms tilted awkwardly in broken configurations. The wall facing him was singed a few shades lighter from the blast.

Jon was braced against his Aegis Crystal Shield, Alexandria Potage gripping the back of his robes tightly. By the time Harry made the long walk from the perimeter walls Tonks had the five wizards including Macmillan, disarmed and manacled to transfigured chains. These chains were magically bolted to the ground. Some were moaning in pain, screaming at their broken legs and arms. The partygoers were congregated on the steps, taking in the incredible scene.

Alexandria was casting various charms on her unmoving father. Harry came over along with Tonks. Harry's black three piece robes were now bleached pure white.

"Nice of you to finally drop in," Jon nodded, offering his fist.

"Anytime," Harry breathed, connecting. He watched his sleeve in wonder. "Well. At least it was only forty galleons," he lamented, watching his ruined robes. Tonks was now crouching next to Alexandria, doing diagnostics with her wand.

"He needs medical attention. Penelope!" she cried out to the crowd. Penelope came forward, picking up her skirts as she ran across from the other injured. "Do you know what curse caused this?"

Penelope ran her wand over him. She looked at Tonks, her eyes hard. "Please call your mother, Alexandria," she said softly.

"No. No," she shook her head. Neville came forward, escorting a shaken and crying Eleanor Potage. Her footsteps were hesitant, until she saw her daughter crying. She ran to meet her, taking her in a firm hug. She buried her daughter's head into her neck.
Madame Payet shook her head sadly at Eleanor's tear streaked face. Eleanor Potage crouched next to her husband, rubbing the side of his pale face. She bent over sobbing. She closed his eyes, and kissed her hand and pressed it to his lips. She grabbed her daughter and both of them cried in each other's arms.

"His heart couldn't take the stunner," Payet told Tonks and the others quietly. Tonks shook her head in remorse. Jon approached the Potages. He bowed formally towards Eleanor.

"He was a good man and defended his daughter with valour. May we carry him inside, as a show of respect?"

"We would...be..." She sobbed. "Thankful."

"Crows, to me." Jon took off his brand new cloak and laid it over Pavel Potage. "Harry, can you?"

Harry nodded, and levitated the body perfectly horizontal. Tonks went in front and drew her wand, holding it close to her body, pointing upwards in front of her face. Jon and Harry did the same shoulder to shoulder behind the body.

Tonks set off with a parade ground solemnity and the Crows Vambrace stepped forward as a unit. The crowd parted on the steps and Tonks led the small procession up the stairs. One by one, people drew their wands as they passed, igniting it with Lumos in a show of support to the Potage Family. Mother and daughter tearfully followed Harry and Jon, Monsieur Valmont and Mademoiselle LeBlanc joining up behind them. Valmont had his hat in his hand, his balding head bowed, his face stern with rage. Jasmine Leblanc, the hostess who introduced guests, was sniffing, her once perfect make up running down her tear stained face.

Tonks instructed Harry to lay the cloaked body down on the stage. The three of them stood in front of the stage, did the guild salute without the chant, and made a small bow towards the fallen man. They dispersed and escorted the Potages to a seat nearby so that they could grieve.

"Monsieur Valmont," Tonks approached him. "Did you contact the Auror offices, or Beauxbatons?"

"My wife is deputy headmistress there, I should have done this sooner."

"Oh, tell her to let the defense teacher bring the polyjuice antidote," Harry added. "Tonks, let's see if you were right about Trayard all along."

Tonks nodded, even though she resolutely avoided looking Harry in the eyes ever since the bedroom fiasco.

Valmont drew his wand and a white patronus shot out of his wand and faded into the early morning of dawn.

"Lord Black," he turned to Jon. "May we speak? We are in need of a favour." He guided the trio away from the grieving Potages.

"How may I help?"

"I must convince Madame and miss Alexandria to leave the family home for a while. It is obvious that our attempts to protect her was not sufficient. Over the past few years rogue elements have been trying to coerce Pavel into agreeing to marriage contracts with Alexandria. Now that they are alone, I fear that they would come again, and this time, it would be much more aggressive. Gangs may even try to extort Mrs. Potage for their own 'protection.' "
"Is it so bad here?" Harry was amazed.

"There is your proof," Valmont shook his head at the weeping women. "As manager of their household affairs, I am deeply troubled by what has happened here."

"Were they blood purity zealots? What did they want?" Tonks asked.

"Yes. The Potage family has been frowned upon in some circles due to their success over generations and not staying true to strictly magical marriages. Mr. Potage's mother was non-magical. Seeing as they only have a daughter, many of the pureblood lines wish to marry her to their sons, taking over the family name. They wanted to 'talk' to Mr. Potage about previous betrothal proposals."

"Hasty bastards," Harry snarled. "This is only her sixteenth birthday!"

"It is customary in France to register formal proposals the night of the Debutante ball. Usually, the girl gets to meet and greet the suitors available to her and form friendships with them. Then, sometime in the future, she chooses one for marriage. If she so desires, of course."

"Sounds medieval," Tonks spat, disgusted. "So basically, she is auctioned off?"

"It is only a custom. It is not necessarily adhered to religiously. Some girls prefer it this way, a grand ball and concrete offers of a dashing prince to sweep them off their feet; just like in a fairy tale. Alexandria is a special case. She is heiress to a well off family and also very popular with both the aristocracy and the regular magical folk. She is much more down to earth than what you have seen portrayed here."

"So what went wrong?" Harry demanded. "Why did they get hostile?"

Valmont hesitated. He turned to Jon. "They wanted to see you, as well. The man in front said you knew him and he just wanted to talk. Under no uncertain terms were they leaving until they did."

Jon's face turned to stone. "MacMillan is still alive. Mistress Tonks, how strict are the rules when it comes to honor Duels?"

"It's.. illegal. And not worth it."

"Let me be the judge of that," Jon spun on his heel and made to leave. Harry grabbed him by his arm.

"No. We have things to do. Remember?"

Jon's wand trembled in his right hand, he gripped it so hard. He stared at Harry, who did not flinch.

"Get the authorities then," he spat, folding his arms. Jasmine cautiously came up to them.

"The Aurors are outside as we speak, my Lord. They wish to speak with you."

Jon raised an eyebrow at her, and Valmont translated. Jasmine walked with them to the front doors. Madame Maxine, alongside Monsieur Allemons and Mrs. Valmont were standing next to two Aurors. The Valmont couple came together and hugged fiercely. The Aurors did not even seem surprised at seeing Tonks, nodding calmly in recognition.

"You three!" Madame Maxine barked. "Again? Should have known. What happened here?"

"These ruffians crashed the party and attacked the birthday girl's father," Mrs. Longbottom responded as she was closest to her. She came down the steps, Neville in tow.
"The Wizard of the Light took them out. He came out the sky like a bolt of lightning," Mr. Rabiot snapped his fingers. "Victoire escarante."

"From the Sky? Flawless Victory?" One of the Auror asked, crouching amongst the injured captives. "Wasn't this guy in Estagal?" he pointed his wand.

"Yeah," Harry raced down the steps, pushing his way through the crowd. "Mr. Allemons, you have the counter potion?"

"Oui," he responded. "Auror Bernard, Monsieur Hallow here suspects this one to be in disguise. May I?"

"One moment," Auror Bernard replied, scanning the faces. "Anyone has a camera?"

"I do," Sarah said, coming forth.

"Please take a picture of these faces for us." Sarah did so and the Auror tapped the camera, then the faces of the captives. Five scrolls snapped into existence, and the Aurors made sure that the images were identical. "Excellent. You may administer the potion."

The defense teacher opened MacMillan's mouth using the same spell Tonks used on Harry. The potion was given to him and within seconds his face began to bubble, his body growing wider in size.

"Bingo," Auror Bernard said. "Good catch, Crows. You definitely need to leave a calling card with us."

"Who is he?" Harry asked, watching the young face revert into an older, tougher face.

"Buck Trayard, escapee since four years ago. International bounty registered convict. One moment." He turned and spoke with his comrade. "Lucas, bring the documents please. Check with Paige, she's the admin who had the files on the case."

Auror Lucas nodded and disappeared using a portkey. Harry looked towards Tonks, who stared stonily at Trayard's face. She did not acknowledge Harry in any way.

"Where is Alexandria? And Eleanor?" Madame Maxime asked. Madame Payet told her they were inside. "Poor Alexandria. This must have been horrible for her to experience. I must offer my condolences and offer any assistance necessary. Excuse me."

"Jon," Mr. Valmont called. He walked over to the older man. Valmont guided them away from the crowds and listening ears. "What say you? Would you be able to offer them sanctuary? Even for a short while?"

"Yes. My home is humble, but I would do my best. It is the least I can do, after my involvement in what brought Trayard here in the first place."

"That sale was done under ownership of Alexandria herself," Valmont ensured. "The Blood purity spies would not be able to easily track it down. Only the Goblins, myself and the family know about that tiny deal. You must move quickly. I do not trust all the Aurors. I will secret away the family to your room and give you the family portkey to escape before this place becomes swarming with the press. I hope to convince them of this plan on the way down."

"So be it. I will meet them shortly."
Lucas came back and hashed out the details between Bernard and Tonks.

"International Bounty level B-1 claimant form. Known Escaped Convict recovery, status 'Alive and Well' - thirty thousand galleons for Buck Trayard. MLE Auror bounty for unknown assailants, status 'Severely Injured', two thousand each. This may rise depending on when their identifications are confirmed."

Lucas frowned as he did the arithmetic.

"You guys are going to flatten our Contractor department budget allocation. Next time you do something like this, please do it after October. Our quarterly budget meeting is going to be ghastly with so much expenditure. To Brits, of all people," he grumbled. He handed Tonks the clipboard and Tonks signed her name in duplicate.

By the time Tonks was finished with the Aurors Jon pulled her and Harry aside. He told them of the plan to sneak the Potage women out.

"Let's get our things then. What number are you?" Harry asked.

"Nineteen. Right between the both of your rooms." Jon set his face to neutral, trying to look serious as he scrutinized the both of them. Inside he was dying with laughter. "Not that it is my business, but if you wanted to be subtle, banging down the walls was not a good idea."

"Very funny," Tonks snarled. "Do you really think .."

"it's not my business," Jon grinned and turned on his heel. "Its mum with me."

"'Mum is the word' is the correct term," Harry corrected.

"Apologies, milady. Your secret is safe with me."

"Whatever," Tonks said. "I'm ruined. My social life is over."

"We can fix this," Harry reinforced. "Nobody knows what really happened."

Tonks did not answer, just kept walking, basically ignoring Harry. Harry felt like this cold shoulder from Tonks was not a good thing. Now he felt like his social life was over. They collected their things and brought them into Jon's room. The Potages were not here as yet.

"I am going to get Sarah. Hold on a moment." Tonks stormed out of the room.

"You are one trouble magnet," Jon mused, sitting on the bed and rubbing his hair. "A magnet with the power of the freaking Sun. I thought I attracted bad omens and problems."

"The station put us together for a reason. Looks like you got yourself a psuedo-fiancé," Harry teased, "And her mother as well. I seem to have less worries than you right now."

"Is falling like a comet from the sky a common thing amongst wizards? Overpowering an assault team with one offensive strike doesn't sound normal, even for wizards."

"No," Harry agreed. "It isn't."

"And you managed to do it, from the sky. A blinding ball of light."

"Yeah. These bracers really are something. Imagine when I have my proper phoenix wand made. It's going to be awesome!" Harry remarked as he pulled back his sleeve. "Argh, I can't wait!"
"Our reputation has increased, once again," Jon said as a matter of fact.

"Yeah," Harry replied, feeling morose.

"The people are calling you the Lightning Comet."

"Really?" he shrugged. The more he sat here, the more he felt sad. Tonks was mad at him. Very, very mad.

"If the female friends you made tonight were not smitten with your charms before, they are awestruck with your power now. Which do you prefer?"

Harry didn't say anything, he just sat himself down in the chair next to Jon's writing table.

"Tonks knows I am older. And going by her logic, she knows you are older. I told her time travel. I don't think she would believe me if I told her we were 'reborn'. She was serious. She kicked my ass. Its only because she grabbed the hippogriff wand that her spells didn't work. She might have taken me out."

"Not for one moment do I believe Tonks wishes you permanent injury or ill will. As a matter of fact, I believe quite the opposite."

"We were both under a truth serum. She said she might run away. Get married. Elope."

Jon crossed his arms, surprised.

"She doesn't understand the ... relationship ... or the connection she is having to the both of us. She doesn't like it."

Jon raised his hand for silence. "Someone is coming."

Tonks, Sarah, Eleanor and Alexandria came in the door. The room now felt very crowded.

Alexandra and Eleanor came forward to Jon and Harry. Both of them curtsied in tandem. Alexandria returned to her full height and presented an elaborate banner. On it was a Coat of Arms of two white Abraxans rearing up on either side of a greatshield crossed with two Claymores. The greatshield had an image of a full plate armor engraved with the house mantle. Below this a banner flag with cursive flowing letters read 'EST 1206 'House Potage' Cite de Carcassone'. Underneath the flag were multiple cauldrons forming a mountain, supporting the entire ensemble.

"Noble warriors, House Potage is in your debt. Please, recognize this coat of arms as a token of family Loyalty and Fealty."

Harry rose to accept this hand woven gift, when Jon held his arm back. "Harry, be careful. You offer your vow of protection and support if we do this. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"It is better if I took this, seeing as I am your man," Jon advised. Harry gave him the floor. Jon nodded.

He stood up in the centre of the room, looking Alexandria in the eye. "Are you sure, Alexandria?"

"Yes, my mother and I have discussed this."

Jon looked at Mrs. Potage.
"And are you sure, Eleanor?"

"Yes, Lord Black."

"I am sworn to the House of Potter. Do you accept this hierarchy?"

The two women looked at Harry, his once black suit now a faded bleached white. They nodded, awestruck. "Very well. I call upon my liege to be witness to this arrangement. Sarah, will you be the independent witness?"

"Um.. sure?"

Jon stood before the two of them, and opened his palms, face up.

Madame Potage folded the coat of arms into a perfect square, and placed it in his right hand. John tilted his chin upward in acknowledgement, and she kneeled on both knees before she let go of the coat of arms. She rose, curtsying once more.

"My Lord," she said solemnly and stepped back. Alexandria hesitantly did the same. She folded her coat of arms and placed it in his left hand. She kneeled, let go of the coat of arms, then rose once more.

"My Lord," she curtsied, dipping her head.

"Good. It is agreed. I accept your offering of fealty. I, Lord Jon Black, of the Noble and Most Ancient House of Black will protect your family with all my strength, honour, and earthly resources."

Jon picked up a quill from the desk and signed his name at the bottom of the coat of arms.

"You have said your farewells and are ready to leave?"

"Yes we have. Here is the Portkey," Mrs. Potage offered. Jon activated it and the six of them vanished.

They reappeared on a desolate beach facing north. The Potages were awkwardly sitting on their travel bags. Jon was standing at full height, magic swirling the sand at his feet. Tonks and Sarah were straddled over their overnight suitcases. Harry was in the 'ready' position at the beginning of a sprint. He got to his feet, his arms crackling with electric blue magic.

It's better than a mouth full of sand, anyhow.

"Where are we?" Tonks said, looking at the beautiful sunrise over the water.

"Alexandria? Eleanor?" Harry prompted. They all turned in a circle. There was a short cliff behind them.

"It is a border portkey, only to be used in emergencies. It transports family members to a place closest to the French border of the country we wish to go. Or so his mother told me a long time ago. Pavel did have his secrets."

"Harry, call them in," Jon suggested.

"Good idea. You think they would be smart enough to pick up the cart at your place?"

Jon shrugged. "Tell them to do it."
"You left the gate up?"

"No."

"What, we gave them a spare key?"

"Doesn't magic get around these things?"

"Some things just don't work like that."

Sarah, Eleanor and Alexandria heads swiveled back and forth as the two boys bickered. "What are they talking about?" Sarah asked Tonks. Tonks shook her head in resignation.

"You two have no clue what you signed up for. At least they are quite capable of dealing with any trouble. But they are trouble. It is attracted to them like moths to the flame." She shouted at the two of them. "Harry! Just get their sorry arses over here. Let them use Hagrid's!"

"Good idea!" Harry returned, smiling at her. Tonks turned away. Harry tried real hard not to feel hurt.

He closed his eyes. The sea breeze began to dissipate. Tonks and Jon saw this ritual and took to one knee immediately, head bowed. The other three women saw this, confused.

"Shadow wing, One Ear, Rudolph, Star Scream, Banshee, Tornado," Harry recited, raising his palm to the north. The heavy magic overlapped the salty freshness of the beach. The tide stilled, and the sea became as tranquil as a lake. A commanding, overbearing magic pressed Sarah, Alexandria and Eleanor to their knees.

"Harry, you're hurting me!" Sarah protested, struggling to keep herself from being forced face first into the sand.

"To me!" Harry clenched his fist. He opened his eyes and the loud sound of the ocean returned, breeze blowing through their hair and robes. The party got shakily to their feet.

"Sorry. Should've warned yuh, luv." Tonks apologized to Sarah.

In record time, the threstrals struck like six bolts of lightning. They materialized in their graceful kneeling position in a circle around Harry.

"Rise," he commanded. Alexandria and Eleanor stepped back in amazement. "Tonks, they couldn't hitch themselves. Guess that doesn't work." She didn't even reply, or acknowledged that he said a word. Tonks was avoiding even looking at him.

"What are those?" Mrs. Potage asked.

"Very, very fast horses," Harry explained, feeling drained. "Come on everyone, they will take us to Jon's place."

Within minutes the party was streaking high over the ocean at blinding fast speed.

"Bonjour, Jon!" a cheery voice said, knocking.

Jon was currently drooling all over his pillow in his room. He felt more drained from the alcohol than spellcasting and shielding Alexandria and himself from the fight. He rubbed his face.
"Morning," he grumbled towards his door.

"Are you hungry? I made breakfast!" Mrs. Potage announced.

"Coming," he announced. He crawled out of bed, staggering towards the door.

"Oui! I'm sure you would like it!"

He opened the door and made his way to the bathroom, rubbing sleep from his eyes. He opened the bathroom door and almost walked into Alexandria who was in a modest nightgown, brushing her teeth. She spat out toothpaste, startled.

"So Sorry!" she apologized. She watched Jon's shirtless body. She frowned at the severity of some of the faint scar lines over his lean muscles.

"My apologies," he murmured, leaving. "It slipped my mind. Next time I will remember." He pulled the door closed. He returned to his bedroom, and found his cleaned iron man t-shirt.

A minute later a knock came to his door. "Bathroom is free," she said in accented English. Jon grunted acknowledgement and went to use it and wash his face.

By the time he was finished, Eleanor had a hearty breakfast prepared and dished out on the large circular patio table. Jon bade them a low good morning and sat down. There was an awkward silence as Jon surveyed his housemates. Mrs. Potage smiled and Alexandria played with her fork.

"Guess we can still celebrate brunch?" Alexandria tried to break the ice. She attempted a buoyant tone, but it just came out forced.

Jon tipped his chin in agreement, taking the first bite. The two French women waited with baited breath for his approval. He took a few more, feeling hungry and not noticing the stares. He finally looked up at them, startled. After another few awkward seconds of silence; he caught on.

"It's wonderful," he smiled at Mrs. Potage. Alexandria nodded in commendation and began to eat as well. She was without makeup and quite fetching with her hair combed casually down over her shoulders. She was dressed in a muggle t-shirt and skirt.

"Merci boucoup," Eleanor replied softly, her eyes bright and still red from tears. She smiled at Jon with sincerity, even through her acute grief. Jon met her eyes with one of his customary stares. Eleanor searched his, trying to understand the young man who had protected her daughter with his life, even though he had met her only twice.

Alexandria felt a bit embarrassed at such raw emotion in her mother's face and voice, but Jon understood the true meaning of her statement, and the gratitude that resonated in her voice.

"You're welcome, Madame," Jon offered. Eleanor stretched her hand palm down across to his, tears coming down her face. Jon accepted it in both of his.

"Do not be afraid. Harry and I will take care of you."
Bright and early Monday morning Harry showed up at Jon's place to pick him up on the way to work, except this time Mrs. Potage greeted Harry when he made his ridiculous crow call outside.

"Bonjour Mr. Potter!" she called amiably from the next bedroom window. "I'll open for you!"

A few seconds later Jon poked his head out his window, his bed hair strewn all over his face.

"Coming."

Mrs. Potage opened for him and they went upstairs. Harry was subjected to a choice of French coffee or regular British tea. Harry politely accepted the coffee seeing as Mrs. Potage was so eager to please. "Breakfast would be ready in a short while, if you want."

"Merci," Harry responded, enjoying the coffee, feeling a bit awkward having Alexandria's mother feed him.

Small talk ensued as Harry helped her prepare breakfast.

"Jon would need to replenish his cooler box," she advised. "Probably bring in a proper wizards' pantry as well. I could probably head into Liverpool or even Birmingham if Diagon-"

"You are not to leave unattended until some sort of security is in place, Madame Potage," Jon interrupted, dressed in his apprentice robes. Mrs. Potage opened her mouth to protest, but simply nodded and went back to cooking.

"That is probably for the best," she muttered in resignation. "Until things back home quiet down. I await Monsieur Valmont's owl for when the service is to be held."

"We shall discuss that later when we return," Jon agreed. "Please use extreme caution if you need to leave the house, especially as Harry has informed me that many wizards flock to Diagon during this week for school supplies. No one is to know that the both of you are here."

"And what about Alexandria?" she mother asked.

"What about me, maman?" Alexandria enquired, coming out of their shared room. She was wearing a loose fitting pajamas pants and a muggle sweater.

"Your OWLs, dear. We must register you to attend Hogwarts if we are to remain away from home until your majority."

"Hm. That long?" she asked, watching Jon's high quality robes out the side of her eye.

"That can be arranged. I think Professor Dumbledore will meet Jon and Master Ollivander this week to register him," Harry pitched in.
"Ollivander?" Alexandria exclaimed. "As in the master wandsmith?" she said excitedly.

"Yes," Jon said simply.

"He's highly respected by the northern students who come into London to get their wands," she took out hers. "Mine is from Gregorvitch's. It's good, but for some reason I think it could be a bit better," she complained.

"Let me see," Jon asked. She handed her wand over. Jon inspected it. He dug in his backpack and took out his texts. "White Poplar," he confirmed. Jon took out his wand and raised his mask briefly as he poured magic into the fusion ability. A bright magical link connected the wands. The initial sparks immediately turned colour. "Feedback is ice blue, most probably Unicorn hair." He checked through his texts and Harry took her wand for a cursory inspection. Jon found the page and quoted aloud:

'Unicorn hair cores produce the most consistent magic, least subject to fluctuations and blockages, most difficult to turn to the dark and the most faithful of wands. However, they do not make the most powerful of wands and are prone to melancholy if mishandled.' Jon looked at the Potages and rubbed his chin, thinking.

"Mrs. Potage, how was this wand selected for Alexandria?" he asked.

"Gregorvitch's branch in Marseille has a standard order form. We filled out her basic information, height and weight at ten years and sent a vial with a few drops of tears. Also she added a list of likes and dislikes and deepest fears."

Harry and Jon looked at each other, eyebrows raised. "She didn't get to test out others?"

"No, hers worked quite well when it arrived," her mother confirmed.

"Levitate this book," Jon asked her, closing his heavy textbook. She did and it floated up smooth and slow, bobbing a bit at eye level. "Higher," he encouraged. The higher it went, the more it bobbed and waivered. Jon shook his head.

"I think hers is a bit of a mismatch. Harry will demonstrate, come," he ordered the three of them. They all went down to the forge where the massive Abraxan cart still sat parked by the heavy doors.

"His current wand is specialized in two classes of magic, winguardiam and Lumos but it also has a hidden ability. Miss Alexandria, try to levitate this," Jon hit his palm solidly on the gigantic cart. The cart's footprint was taking up almost the entire floor space.

"Can't. That's impossible!" she claimed, shaking her head.

"No wizard could lift that," her mother agreed.

Jon raised his eyebrow at Harry. Harry shrugged and drew his troll hair wand. With a simple swish and flick he sent the cart up, stopping it inches away from the ceiling. It remained rock steady. The two women stepped back, shocked.


"Your wand needs some customization Miss Alexandria, and probably a better 'main stem' choice of wood. The handle and the core is fine. I can fix it if you want. Maybe a Holly or Birch stem might suit you better," Jon remarked.
"You can? How.. how did you know?" her mother asked.

"We're Ollivander's apprentices," Harry informed her. Alexandria and her mother smiled at their joke. The two boys grinned. The French women's faces turned incredulous.

"Non!" Alexandria breathed.

"Oh yeah." Harry countered.

"It is strictly a family-owned legacy. Similar to my husband's family business!"

The two boys grinned again.

"Well, if the knowledge must be handed on to non-family members, guess you two deserve it," Alexandria stated. She looked at Jon with intrigue, then dipped her eyes and watched the floor.

"May I ask you something, Jon?"

"Certainly."

"Why do they call you Le Chevalier Immortel?"

"What does that mean?" Jon asked.

"The Immortal Knight," her mother translated. Harry and Jon shared a look.

"I think that story came about a couple weeks ago when I was at Estagal. Survived a fireball spell."

"Non," Alexandria's repeated as her jaw dropped. "Melisse told me a lone wizard took out the Russian hit squad! He was Burned alive, but unscathed! Was it ...you?"

"Yes," Jon admitted.

"I'll have to send her an owl! She never mentioned that you were the one, not a single word! The whole night and she didn't say anything!"

"Probably didn't want any competition," Harry sniggered softly under his breath. Jon heard him and hit him playfully. Eleanor studied the massive cart, and Harry's relatively small frame and his boyish face.

"No wonder Monsieur Valmont sent us to you two. Two wizards who have cheated death. 'Les Champions Immortels' he claimed. You are knights. The way you two fought... " her mother began, then immediately halted. "When we came into your room I knew Edgar made the right choice. I felt the vast reservoir of your magic the moment we stepped in. I would not have let Alexandria swear to you otherwise."

"You can sense our magic?" Harry said, immediately on alert.

"Yes, my maiden last name, the Sare family, some of us have this skill."

Jon stared at Eleanor Potage. He called Raven, his owl, and wrote a letter. "I will ask Mistress Tonks to escort you two to make your errands. Please charm your appearances to mask your identities. Remember, experienced trackers will not be fooled. Tonks would help you, just in case you need protection, once she is in agreement, of course. Otherwise we will take a day off and see to it."

The mention of Tonks name left Harry feeling down. He still didn't know what he could do or say to
fix the awkward situation *Secrets Unveiled* created.

"Ladies, we better get going. We will be late. Thank you for breakfast, Madame Potage," Harry smiled. He hit Jon's arm with the back of his hand. "Grab a sandwich and let's go."

"I'll pack it for you and bring it down," Eleanor said, going back up the stairs.

"Have a good day, *mes chevaliers immortels*," Alexandria teased, giving Jon and Harry hugs. "Right now I have words with my so-called 'best friend'!" Her mother came back down with a wrapped package in a brown bag. Alexandria waved and went back upstairs. Her mother waited a moment for the sound of her steps to fade away. She pulled in the door to the stairs.

"I hope mademoiselle Tonks will come. We need to restock your supplies and get her prepared for Hogwarts. Is Mr. Dumbledore a strict taskmaster? Would he allow her in?" she whispered.

"Tell him that you are under my solemn vow of protection. He will not refuse you."

Mrs. Potage blinked at the young boy confidently speaking to her like a grown man. She bent her knee and briefly touched her skirts, dipping her head in slight curtsy.

"Yes, Lord Black. Have a good day," she offered him the brown bag and closed the door behind them when they left.

"Jon," Harry said as they walked up Diagon Alley. "The way you speak sometimes, adults can't figure you out. You got this soldier thing going on. It unbalances them."

Jon shrugged.

"So. Something I wanted to ask you but ..."

"Ask. Don't hesitate."

"How many men have you killed?"

"If I remember correctly, sixty three. Thirteen in single combat, one on one. One by execution at the headsman block. The rest are accredited in our combat logs as 'final mortal injury' either in battle skirmishes or by arrows. Two Lords of Winter. And one woman," he added, his face turning hard at the last.

"Fuck. That's ... insane." No wonder he seems so aloof to fighting.

"Yes. The Wall and north of it was not a place for the weak. The Northern Wildlings were ruthless, and savage to a point. The brothers had no choice but to adapt."

I *had no choice*. Jon added silently.

Harry continued on in silence, frowning as they walked along.

'A trained combatant,' was Tonks' previous description of Jon. That is definitely the Understatement of the fucking year. *Jon is the real deal.*

"I need your help, Harry of House Hollow. I want to create a wand using a Diablo claw as the core and the threstral wing bone as the stem and handle. I believe it will arm me in a manner I prefer."

"You want to build a wand specific to cutting and piercing attacks."
They arrived at Ollivanders five minutes before eight. Both of them automatically went to the back and retrieved the wet rags, scrubbing brushes, buckets and cleaning solutions to start their morning routine.

"Not quite," he drew his dragon heartstring wand, inspecting it. "I want to create a weapon that can be transfigured into a sword, when I need it. This phoenix bracer has an uncanny response to my shield spell." Jon began scrubbing the low bricks curbside to remove grime. "You should have seen it, no matter what those wizards cast, blocked! The looks on their faces!"

"I could imagine." Harry stopped wiping the glass, watching Jon. Jon stopped as well, sensing a question was coming. "I have never seen a block like that. Nothing could get through you say?"

"Yeah, absolutely," Jon nodded with a grin. Harry and Jon just stared at each other, Harry thinking of ways his shield spell may be used to combat Voldemort's cursed horcruxes- Jon, thinking that his luck that night wasn't going to last long. The unfamiliarity of the spell was all that kept him alive against trained wizards.

"But it was not going to last. They were maneuvering to flank me, and if you did not defeat them, or by chance I miraculously created a .. I don't know... a full circle of impenetrable defense; I would have been taken out. Alexandria would now have been captured, probably raped and then forcibly married off somewhere." Jon's expression soured at the thought.

"Bloody hell. How could you say that?"

"Seemed the most probable outcome if I failed."

"Are you always this pleasant?"

"I know I couldn't defeat armed wizards prepared for magical battle," Jon said seriously. "Your timing, and bravery, was astounding," he commended.

Harry vigorously continued cleaning the glass, embarrassed at the compliment. Jon continued his work, enjoying making Harry squirm.

"It appears this white wizard can be a badass motherfucker when it truly matters," Jon declared with a smirk. Harry just scoffed, doubling his effort to make sure he got out the spot he was trying to remove since Saturday.

The Red Hogwarts express had just arrived. The station was teeming with excited students carrying cases, trunks and pet cages at platform 9 3/4. Jon, Harry and Alexandria were waiting on the Weasley family, who were perpetually last minute arrivals. Sure enough, at ten minutes before departure Arthur, Molly and the rest of the gang came through the barrier with all the hustle and bustle of a large family in a hurry.

"There they are," Harry announced. Jon and Alexandria turned. After the Weasleys came through, the Grangers followed, Hermione already silently fuming as she stared at the back of Ron's head. Harry knew she was pissed at having to wait.

Harry waved and the entire crew came over.

"There he is!" Molly Weasley exclaimed. "We met before, you remember dear?" she pinched his cheek. Harry smiled awkwardly, allowing himself to be inspected and manhandled by the doting woman. "You look much healthier! I hope that awful woman has been treating you better!"
"Erm... I manage," Harry said in explanation. "Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, these are my friends, Jon, and Alexandria. They would be transferring in."

Molly's eyebrows raised in question, but pushed away her questions as she smiled warmly and stretched her hand. "Nice to meet you, I'm Ron's mother. And the twins. You know Percy. He's your prefect. But have you met my daughter, Ginny? Come dear, yes come! Don't be a mouse!"

Harry didn't expect to feel so, indifferent to seeing his first love. He thought he would have felt some sort of heartache at seeing her again, but all he felt was now was an emptiness above his stomach where happiness and excitement on seeing Tonks every other day should have been.

Tonks made sure to avoid Harry whole week when she was helping the Potage women with their errands. She only came to pick them up after both Jon and Harry left for work at Ollivanders. She made sure and dropped them back before they returned and only visited Jon when Harry had left after hanging out a few times this past week.

Harry and Jon's success at creating prototype Threstral bone wands with the diablo claw did not substitute for Harry's broken heart. Jon said she was doing well when Harry asked, but did not extend further conversation or details. Saturday after work, Harry directly asked if she did say anything about him, Jon shook his head and said that she did not. He advised that Harry should write to her directly. Harry believed that Tonks would destroy any letter he sent.

Plus, what could he really say? If she tried so hard and succeeded in avoiding him, what could he possibly put in a letter that would make her feel differently?

Saturday to Saturday, an entire week, not a single meeting, not a single message or word about him. The last thing of note she said to him was just before she jumped off the connecting bridge, trusting him with her life.

Don't let me down, luv.

"Pleased to meet you," Alexandria said cheerily, trying to fill the awkward void of the two boys just staring at the little redhead girl. The two girls shook hands. Alexandria continued shaking hands all around as the Weasley boys introduced themselves. Hermione came up last, briefly shaking her hand and then focusing all her attention on Harry. Harry appeared to be lost in his own world.

"Harry?" she said, coming close and touching his arm.

"Uh yeah?" Harry turned to face her.

"Are you ok? Ginny, come meet Harry," she encouraged the younger girl. Harry greeted her with a smile and shook her hand. When they touched, nothing happened, no spark, no reconnection of good memories, no feelings of unfulfilled destiny came forward. Harry didn't know if he expected something to happen, but as it was in this moment in time, there was nothing.

"Ginny, this is Jon," Harry introduced. Harry immediately noticed that Jon also had a faraway expression.

"Hi, Jon. Nice to meet you. They told me about you," she nodded to her brothers and extended her hand. There was a couple seconds of silence as Jon just stared, examining her features as if it were a puzzle meant to be put together at a single look.

"Ginny...yes," Jon stammered, dumbstruck. He shook her hand in a late reflex, before she had a chance to drop it. "A pleasure," he composed himself, smiling. Chatter and various conversations started up as ore friendly faces and well wishers came forward to greet the twins, Harry and Jon.
Everyone at the mission to Hogwarts stopped by, excepting Katie.

Harry looked around. He stepped to the twins. "Where is Katie?"

"She's still at Hogwarts. Her arm still has a bit of hex in it and from what she told us, writing and spell casting is still troublesome for her. Three weeks later and Pomfrey still hasn't cracked it yet." George explained.

"Whatever happened in that library was bloody murder," Fred said in a low voice. "She thinks it was a dark magic curse that didn't pan out how it was supposed to. Pomfrey told her that Ridgewall recovered, but Katie notices he has a bad reaction to even seeing a teacup, or the smell of tea. He freaks out and begins muttering until a calming drought is issued. She asked about you. She said you didn't write and Dumbledore said he could not give out your address for her to write you," he explained.

"Only you could do that, he said. She didn't want to send any letters through us," George wagged his eyebrows.

"Smart girl." Fred acknowledged.

"We shouldn't even be telling you this," George put up his fist.

"But, you know how it is, we're bros, aren't we?" Fred completed the sentence, offering his fist.

"You need to ask?" Harry connected with both of his simultaneously and the three of them did an elaborate multiple-hit hand movement 'Gryffindor-quidditch-team-only' handshake routine which ended with an intricate finger flourish.

Ron came over instantly eyeing the three of them with a touch of envy. "Can I see that again?"

"No," the twins answered, turning and taking their stuff on the train. Ron looked devastated.

"I'll show it to you inside," Harry promised, giving Ron a normal bounce as they boarded.

Ron leaned in. "That girl is top drawer, mate," he whispered, glancing at Alexandria.

"Uh huh," Harry whispered. "Don't," he warned. "Trust me. She is a whole other kettle of fish."

"What?"

"Bat in the crease, mate. She's...accounted for."

"Accounted?" Ron whispered. "What does that mean? You..or Jon?"

Harry hesitated. It was too hard to explain.

"No, neither...but.. But she's accounted for. Right now, that is. Hard to explain. Forget it."

"Okay, then."

Ron and Harry led the way on the train. Harry instinctively went to the one they settled in since the third year. When he opened it they caught Michael Ellewyn-Sare and Penelope Clearwater suddenly breaking apart from kissing.

"Whoa!" Ron said, backing out. "Sorry!"
"You," Harry challenged. He was about to reach for his wand but his older, wiser self decided to play this differently. Rushing in here was not the way to do this. They needed proof and a confession. "... Are in our cubicle."

"What?" Michael folded his arms looking at the second year. "This is my cubicle, dimwit. How can a second year even 'have' a cubicle? Get lost, Potter. And shut the door gently." He turned his attention back to Penelope.

Harry just stared, itching to let his rage explode with some well placed curses. He stood there, arms akimbo, just watching them. Penelope stiffened at his aggressive posture. Ellwyn-Sare turned around again, confusion on his face. "What? You deaf? Or just so full of your own egotistical shit that you can't take a hint? Scram!"

"Five to six," Harry said suddenly, remembering the tiny message this snake sent to Malfoy senior. "Five to six," he repeated darkly, his eyes boring into Michael's. Harry felt so angry he believed if he only pointed his left index finger the bracer would automatically blast his stupid brains all over Penelope's cheating ass.

"What? Is that your bedtime? Get lost!" Michael got up and slammed the door shut in his face. Hermione and Ron just stared at Harry. Harry was now currently staring at the door to the cubicle not even three inches from his nose.

"What was that?" Hermione demanded. "Now we have a cubicle? And why are you so angry? What's going on?"

"Nothing," Harry replied and turned. "Let's find somewhere else." Harry had to keep reminding himself that they did not have six years of Hogwarts train rides... ahem five, (since this year he and Ron used the flying car), as history.

He had to remember he was doing things afresh. He didn't even experience his second year ride.

"This one is free," Ginny said opening one two doors down. "If you want," she added, embarrassed when Harry looked directly at her.

"Cool, yeah this is fine." The six of them packed their stuff in the luggage compartments and sat down in the cubicle, three boys on one side, three girls on the other.

Harry was sitting opposite Alexandria, Jon opposite Hermione, and Ron and Ginny were first in at the window seats. Ginny and Ron leaned out and spotted their parents, calling them and waving goodbyes. They kept waving as the train began to move, then eventually left behind the platforms as it sped along the tracks.

Alexandria took out her retooled Holly wand, examining it. Jon had presented it to her Thursday at the workshop with her mother when they visited. They met Master Ollivander and Alexandria was impressed the way he treated the boys almost as colleagues, comrades even, instead of apprentices. The wand did feel more receptive and her spells came out quicker, and more defined. The white handle and the brown stem really was a stark contrast to the all white she was accustomed to.

"That's interesting," Hermione stated. "Two different types of wood?" she raised her eyebrow.

"Oui," she smiled prettily at Jon. "Thanks to him." Ron, Ginny and Hermione's eyebrows shot up. For some reason, they all stared at Harry, as if they knew he had the answers. "Works much better now. Merci boucoup," she told Jon.

"It was my pleasure, milady," he answered smoothly, dipping his head once in acknowledgment.
"What did you do Jon?" Hermione asked kindly.

"I rebuilt her wand using Holly and used the proper threading technique instead of a magically bored core socket. It is much more fine tuned and measured now."

"What a perfect gift," Alexandria said softly, twirling it between her fingers expertly. "If I had this wand...Maybe...papa..." She went silent and her eyes grew damp.

"It was an unprovoked attack," Harry consoled her. "It wasn't your fault," he added softly. He noticed Ron and the others staring, confusion all over their faces. He needed a distraction to take their attention off of her. "Jon and I are wandsmith apprentices."

Their lost expressions did not budge.

"Jon built over her wand for her," he explained. Hermione frowned now, while the two redheads still were befuddled.

"We apprentice at Ollivanders over the summer. We may continue one weekend a month once Dumbledore signs this permission form." Harry tapped his backpack. The three of them responded in a chorus of 'Ahhs' in understanding.


"Yes, we are extremely grateful," Jon said simply.

"That's why you changed your wand, Harry. Did you build it yourself too?" Hermione asked.

"No, the one you saw was one of Ollivanders'. We still haven't reached general 'all purpose' builds as yet. Still need to get through the various training steps and wand projects before we build a school worthy, all-purpose wand from scratch."

"Practice, and more practice on your technique is a strict necessity," Jon quoted Ollivander in a deep, elderly voice. Conversation built around the wand lore and what they learned, but both boys instinctively understood that their French adventures and the actual weapons they had created were secret and not to be divulged as small talk on the train.

The crew whiled away the hours with various activities and topics of conversation throughout the ride. Neville popped in, said hi, then left again saying he would be back.

"He always loses his toad," Ron complained. "Probably hunting it down again," he sighed. Within ten minutes Neville came back pulling along Shea Carrow.

"Hey guys, remember Shea?" He introduced her to Ron, Hermione and Ginny.

'Slytherin' Hermione thought, but did not let it come through in her voice.

"Aren't you going into fifth year?" Hermione asked pleasantly. Shea nodded, smiling.

"Yeah, I am. You guys going into fifth as well?" she asked Alexandria, and Jon.

"Oui," Alexandria replied. Jon smiled but shook his head. She turned her attention to Alexandria.

"I'm so sorry about what happened last week," Shea said sincerely. Shea sat, squeezing between Alexandria and Hermione, patting Alexandria's knee. "How are you holding up?"

"I don't know. I'm just... trying to, day by day," Alexandria admitted. The loss of her father was still
a shock to her every time she replayed the scene over and over in her head. She was grateful that Jon's apartment only had two bedrooms because she didn't know what she would have done if she could not sleep next to her mother. It was her only real comfort these days.

"Stay strong, honey."

Hermione was in the awkward position of sitting next to a Slytherin who was consoling a girl who she barely knew. She was surprised Shea didn't flinch where their knees or elbows touched.

"I will," Alexandria responded. "Thank you Shea."

"No problem. See you around, Jon, Harry. Kiddos," She left the compartment. She popped back in her head. "Oh... and Neville, thanks."

"Cool... no problem," he said. Neville sat down next to Jon.

"It hasn't reached here yet, but my Gran got the paper with news of Carcassonne. Due to the sheer awesomeness of what actually happened, they toned it down, she said. They didn't want their readers to think it was too unreal to... well... have been real. Kind of cheapens it, to be honest. That thing both of you did, that shield and the light comet... bloody wicked!"

Ron, Ginny and Hermione just stared at Neville.

"Light comet?" Ron asked, bewildered.

"Isn't Carcassonne in France," Hermione asked Neville, but was watching Harry.

"Um... Yes?" Neville responded, seeing the looks Hermione, Ginny and Ron were giving Harry. Harry signaled a neck cut to silence any talk of France. "Oh shoot, I think Trevor has gotten away, again. See ya later guys," Neville made a strategic retreat.

"You were in France?" Hermione asked.

"Yeah, we were," Harry replied. Hermione waited for him to continue. Harry leaned back and went back to his book. She huffed in annoyance.

"That's nice. May I ask why?"

"They were invited to my birthday party," Alexandria explained, facing Hermione. "Is there something wrong with that?" she challenged.

"No! No I was just a bit surprised, that's all. Harry's family didn't sound the type to allow that sort of thing."

"I've shown them the error in their ways," Harry shrugged. Hermione frowned.

"You didn't even write," Ron complained.

"Sorry, I thought it would be easier to fill you in when we were in school," he deflected. Harry could see the wheels turning in Hermione's brain. Knowing how she thought, she was going to ask Neville about the French paper and order it herself, probably through the Arithmancy Guild network. Harry would have to find him first and cut that out.

No way he could allow this to leak this early, to Hermione of all people. She would go absolutely bonk-
"Harry and I had to intervene when Alexandria's father was attacked at the end of her birthday celebrations. A gang stormed the grounds, rather... more like an attack squadron. Fortunately, I was able to stall them long enough for Harry to come to our rescue. He dealt with them and immediately avenged the loss of her father," Jon deadpanned. "Fantastic bit of teamwork." He grinned. This time it was Jon who offered his fist to Harry, not breaking eye contact with a gob-smacked Hermione. Harry's jaw dropped a few centimeters.

Harry groaned inwardly as he rubbed his eyes with his left hand and tentatively bounced Jon's fist with his other. At least Jon would not be sorted into Slytherin. Subtlety was definitely not his strong suit.

Harry took a deep breath as he braced for the onslaught.

After a harrowing last half an hour of the train ride, they finally reached Hogsmeade and Harry could not wait to get some fresh air. He genuinely believed after suffering and opening his heart under Secrets Unveiled and that grueling Hermione questionnaire that he would be able to withstand any Hogwarts or Auror inquisition. At least he was getting extremely good at dodging questions. Albus beyond the veil should be proud.

When the gang arrived at the threstral carriages, Harry was pleasantly surprised to see Katie Bell waiting there. When she spotted Harry, Jon and the Weasley gang, she rushed over.

"Hey!" she greeted everyone. "You won't believe how much I've missed you guys. My parents came for a few days, but I have been bored out of my skull. Oliver is here somewhere, and so is Angelina." She addressed the whole gang but she never took her eyes off of Harry. "Harry!" she came forward and hugged him fiercely. "You got taller?" she scrutinized his face and height while still holding his arms. She aligned herself side by side, and her shoulder was almost even with his. She gave him a chummy one-armed side hug. "Blimey, you did!"

Harry shrugged and grinned. "Maybe, or you just shrunk," Harry said, not knowing how to respond. Katie laid her eyes on the beautiful dark haired girl in their midst, perplexed. She retrieved her arm around his waist.

"Mistress Katie, this is Alexandria Potage, a friend of mine," Jon came forward, introducing them. "This is Katherine Bell, star chaser for the Gryffindor Quidditch team." The two girls shook hands.

"Hmph. Only Ollie and Potter are the stars here. Everyone else is just production crew," Katie scoffed. "Including this skank, I mean, brilliant teammate over here," she said loudly so Alicia Spinnet could hear her clearly as she approached. She grinned at the short, light brown-skinned girl. Alicia approached, raising one eyebrow in challenge.

"Look who's talking. You dropped Spencer like that," Alicia snapped her fingers, "In hope of getting some lightning rod- oh Hi Harry, did not see you there!" She lied, clapping Harry on the shoulder, all the while grinning at Katie. Katie's smile vanished from her face, her glare promising future vengeance. Alicia gamely hugged Katie in faux greeting. "I own you now," she declared evilly in Katie's ear (even as they hugged), a smile turning up the corners of her mouth.

Katie just glared at her friend as they let go, giving her a scowl and a grudging nod because no immediate comeback came to mind.

*Well played, Ally. Well played.*

"Sup, Potter." Oliver sauntered over, with Angelina following. Oliver's trunk was levitating behind
him while poor Angelina needed to focus her Winguardium Lleviosa to carry hers. "Lads. Ladies," he greeted the group. Harry and Oliver Wood greeted each other and the mind numbing combination of fist bumps handshake routine was repeated. Ron positively oozed envy.

"Gryffindor's Red Lions," he acknowledged his teammates. "For life!" Oliver declared as he hit his fist to his heart twice. "The elite chosen from the best house there is." He accepted the same complex handshake combination from Alicia, Katie and the twins. After this was done he crossed his arms, pausing for effect as he eyed his team. Jon noticed that they straightened a tiny bit, as if under parade ground inspection. "I want the Double championship. It has never happened since ...like ever." He flicked his wand and popped open his trunk. In it, a golden trophy gleamed under the station lights. He took it out with one hand. "Behold, the Quidditch Cup. Trusted to the captain of the winning team for the summer hols, but, alas, must be returned during the opening feast. It is only a trinket. What is important is that we are recorded in the history books, breaking records. Youngest Seeker. Fastest Catch. The title is ours now, and it will be ours, again; same time next year. This is the strongest team I have had the honour to play with. The tryouts will be only for reserves. You, my good friends, are Hogwarts' Reigning Champions. Conduct yourselves as such and we shall bear the mantle with pride. And when we are on the pitch ... no mercy!"

Jon, who was furthest away from Oliver nodded gravely in approval of this rousing speech. He folded his arms against his chest.

"No mercy!" the team agreed in unison.

"Well, now that's done," Oliver announced, clearing his throat and returning to his normal persona. "Let's go get some grub." He turned and walked away, hands in his pockets.

As soon as the first years were finished sorting Headmaster Dumbledore stood up.

"Please welcome two transfer students, Mr. Jon Black and Miss Alexandria Potage, who will now be sorted into their respective houses. Come forward, Mr. Black," Albus Dumbledore announced. Jon took the stool, and placed the hat on his head. He waited patiently for a few seconds.

"Gryffindor!"

Jon returned the hat to the stool, and without further ado simply took his seat at the Gryffindor bench. There was a round of applause at the table. Alexandria was far more nervous as she walked up the length of the Great Hall and sat on the stool. The Sorting Hat was placed on her head. The hat was prompt once more.

"Gryffindor!"

The Gryffindors cheered again.

"Very well," Dumbledore announced. "Dinner shall now be served. Please tuck in."

As Harry ate, he spotted Marcus Flint talking with Draco Malfoy. Malfoy looked a bit haggard, or maybe his hair was not up to the usual impeccable condition. Draco did look across to Alexandria a couple times, but then spotted Harry watching him and went back to his meal.

When dinner was finished and pudding was being served, Albus Dumbledore stood up once again.

"Joining the staff for the position of Defense Against the Dark Arts will be Professor Lockhart, who, some of you may know, has written a few of your theory texts," he clapped politely, and the staff table reluctantly joined in with a paltry attempt. Some of the female students put some vigor into their
clapping, but it died quickly when they realized the student body on a whole was not impressed.

Lockhart practically jumped to his feet, flashing a smile.

"Thank you thank you, one and all! As you should already know, I was hand-picked out of numerous worthy candidates for this honorable post. I must give my sincere thanks and gratitude to headmaster Dumbledore for his infinite wisdom by selecting I, Gilderoy Lockhart, world renowned author of must have modern classics such as 'The Vampyre and I', 'Gnolls, Bowls, and Foals', 'Gadding with Trolls' and 'Magicke Most Magnificent', to call a few. Please feel free to get your copies of 'The Standard Book Of Spells, Lockart Gold Edition' autographed by yours truly, during my office hours, or if you wish, anytime I am near. If you have not gotten your copy as yet, please mail order through-"

"Thank you, Professor Lockhart," Albus interrupted. "But I am sure that these young and vibrant witches and wizards need to savor their dessert treat and are quite tired from their long journey." This was met by rapturous applause. Dumbledore raised a hand in humble recognition, thankful for the response but also showing it was not necessary. The clapping faded away. "Thank you, but for now, eat up!"

When they were finished and were heading up to the Gyrffindor tower, Harry pulled Jon aside.

"Jon, I need you to owl Tonks, and tell her-"

"I told you that you should -"

"This is important," Harry insisted. "Tell her to purchase a set of onyx gloves and double check that there is a diary book in the onyx box we left in the vault. Tell her to wear the dueling armor, and leave no part of skin exposed."

"Will do."

They walked on.

"And remind her; don't touch it! Use a stick or something if she wants. You got all that?"

"I will let you proof read it before I send it out, Harry of House Hollow."

"Good."

They walked some more. Harry was mulling over what message he could send with Jon's owl to get her back on speaking terms. He refocused on Katie's attackers once again.

"And tell her, that the first Hogsmeade visit we should do something about Ellewyn-Sare," he whispered.

"Understood."

By the final corridor, Harry stopped Jon again. "What about the clan house? What news?"

"Tonks will have to go and see for herself. I have been in contact with two sellers but we forgot to follow up, didn't we? With all that was happening with Alexandria, it slipped my mind."

"Speaking about her...so...?"

"I...don't know. Her presence is growing on me. But fate is a nasty beast."
"What do you mean?"

"Remember I told you about a woman I killed?" He said in a very low whisper.

Harry frowned. "I remember."

"She was a wildling woman I captured on the northern side of the wall. Then her people eventually tracked her down and captured me. I was her captive, if you want to call it that for almost a year. She was tiny but her presence was not. My first and only true love."

"Alexandria reminds you of her?"

"No. Ron's sister reminds me of her. Ginny."

"Aw. That's sweet," Harry chimed. "Wait... what? Didn't you just say you killed this woman?"

"Yes..." Jon hesitated. "From my arrow. It's uncanny, the resemblance. She is what I imagined Ygritte would look like at that young age."

"That sounds like a story you will definitely need to tell me another time. Ginny is shy now, but as she gets older, she can handle herself," Harry explained as they walked through the portrait. Alexandria was talking with Percy. Seeing Percy made him think of Penelope, and thinking of Penelope made him want to curse that seventh year Ravenclaw, Michael Ellewen-Sare, into oblivion. Jon and Harry made their way past them and up the stairs to their rooms.

He watched Alexandria chatting animatedly with the prefect for a few moments. Percy was clueless. He doesn't even know his girl was snoggin' another boy on the train ride here. Wait. Maybe Percy wasn't dating Penelope as yet. Maybe that started after Michael left Hogwarts. But why would Michael suddenly be interested in Penelope? Harry, be it by chance or sinister magic, realized that Penelope Payet and Michael MacMillan had the same first names.

Coincidence... or nah?

Penelope was a half-blood... wasn't Sarah, Tonks best friend; her older sister? He probably should mail Sarah and get some information out from her. Harry began to change into pyjamas.

What was Flint and Draco muttering about? Harry decided to put himself in Lucius Malfoy's shoes. If it were him and he wanted the Chamber of Secrets opened, he would find another way to manipulate a student, since the Diary plan did not work out. Could it be that Lucius and Michael were working together again?

Maybe, Lucius Malfoy sourced another Horcrux and was using his lackey to plant it inside the school for an unlucky student to come across it, starting the cycle all over again.

He was tired, and trying to think of plots within plots from simply observing Marcus Flint and Draco talking wasn't worth this amount of headache.

_It was probably nothing_, was his last thought as he fell into bed, exhausted.

The next morning he woke up and looked out the window. Hagrid seemed to be cleaning up one of his livestock pens. There were feathers scattered about his feet. Harry's blood ran cold.

"Jon!" he shook him hurriedly. "Wake up. Something might be wrong. Let's go check Hagrid and retrieve Ghost as well. Meet me downstairs as soon as you can. I will be in the common room."
Ten minutes later, Jon was reunited with Ghost, who was not moving as fast as he used to, and walked with a slight hobble. Jon's face lit up with happiness as he fed the wolf some pieces of meat. Ghost licked his fingertips after each piece was fed to him.

"Hagrid, what happened here?" Harry asked quietly, his blood running ice cold in his veins. *No... this can't be happening.* 

"I dunno lad. But somebody must have killed all my chickens. Why would anyone do such a thing?"
Breakfast was a tale of two worlds. One was of an excited student populace seeing friends and familiar faces embarking on a new year at Hogwarts. The other, an isolated lightning rod of panic and suspicion.

Harry scrutinized everyone.

No one was safe from his piercing gaze. Many averted their eyes when his eyes caught theirs, even the older students. Someone had wiped out Hagrid's chicken coup, and no matter how indiscriminate it appeared, Harry knew the culprit really wanted to kill the few roosters there. He told Jon to look out for symptoms of possession by the Horcrux during the short journey back up to the main hall. However, the true magnitude of the danger the school was in could not be expressed in such a short span of time.

The Basilisk's gaze was fatal. It was only due to extremely lucky circumstances that Hermione, Colin, Justin and Penelope were only petrified. And, a student possessed by Voldemort was no laughing matter either. Unfortunately, with the diary supposedly safe and locked away, Harry had no clue which Horcrux was in play nor who was being manipulated.

Wait. That wasn't true.

The Cup! Hermione, Ron and himself stole it from the Lestrange's Vault. He knew he had a 'Malfoy-did-it' obsession before that everyone thought was ridiculous, but this time it could only be him. Lucius Malfoy probably had some way to get it from the vault, and used Draco to bring it here.

He did look a bit under the weather last night at the Welcoming Feast.

Harry had to act fast. Whoever was behind this was sinking further and further into Voldemort's control as the days went on. His head hurt, and his face was damp with perspiration, even in the cool morning air of early Autumn. His magic was volatile, almost on the brink of sparking through the multiple weapons on his person.

Harry currently had five wands on him: one in each of his specialized boots, his regular Troll Hair on Holly in his pants pocket. Their prototype Diablo wand was in the bracer, and the Niffler tail wand tucked in the inner pocket of his Hogwarts robe. That would be his go-to disarming weapon for now.

Jon was the epitome of well acted normalcy. Polite, quiet, and eerily relaxed as students from Gryffindor asked him measured questions. But Harry noticed that Jon was not immune to the tense situation as well. From time to time Jon would slip his right hand into his left sleeve, touching the Diablo wand secured in the invisible threstral bracer. Jon's normal Olive branch wand with Dragon heartstring was in his regular pants pocket.
Alexandria was undoubtedly the star of the morning. Shea even came across and said hello. One thing about Hogwarts students is that they missed nothing when it came to inter-house interaction. A Slytherin fifth year greeting a new Gryffindor girl was not something seen every new term. She sat down next to Jon, who the Quidditch team seemed to hold in very high regard. Even more so now as Alexandria had no qualms about sitting with lower-class students, even passing Jon platters of food which Jon could have stretched and reached for himself. Jon thanked her politely and continued small talk with Alexandria, Hermione, Katie and the twins.

Harry was definitely not in a talkative mood. Even Ron was catching on. He probably deduced that something was up with him, but uncharacteristically decided on listening in on the two newcomers' discussions rather than pry. Harry thought for a second that Ron was being quite observant but then pushed that thought away as he realized that Ron was more focused on the what the pretty French girl was saying and her mannerisms.

Schedules were handed out, and breakfast came to an end when the bell rang for their first class: Herbology.

Harry was scanning the behavior of everyone he laid his eyes on as they went about in various directions towards their respective classes; especially students that seemed to be heading in the shortest route towards Myrtle's bathroom. "Jon," Harry indicated that he follow him. Both boys stepped away and Harry dropped his voice to a whisper.

"I have to make sure the chamber hasn't been opened already. Prepare another letter to Tonks. We need her to source the closest chicken farms so we could raid them for roosters, tonight if possible. I think your sleep spell would be best to capture them. I will need a snake as well. I can command it to go down and check to see if the inner sanctum has been opened. Don't tell her why we need the locations of the farms. Not yet. I hope she trusts you enough to help."

"Our talks have been tense, but she still will listen. I am dreading the day when she decides to question me. My story has held for now, but sooner or later she is going to want the truth," Jon whispered back.

"She might. Just watch out for that Secret's Unveiled potion."

"Can't I just explain?"

"Negative. That's a no-no. At least my excuse of 'time travel' is a known legend amongst wizards. Resurrection and Dimensional travel? She'll freak out." Harry folded his arms.

"Freak out?"

"Go crazy."

"I see," Jon frowned. "I'll improvise if it comes to that. I could do without any kicks to the head."

"Funny. I'm surprised she hasn't figured out that Time travel keeps the person exactly the same...no age change or anything. Technically, I should look like eighteen if it really was 'time travel'."

"You seem quite sure of this phenomenon," Jon hissed.

"Hermione and I did it before. Only a couple hours jump. But we saw our past selves doing stuff we did before. It's crazy."

Jon rubbed his eyes and his face.
"That means two Harry Potters running around at the same time."

"Bingo." Harry nodded.

"Bingo?"

Harry sighed. "It means you are spot on correct."

"Magic is getting more and more crazy by the second."

"Tell me about it. Things are changing already. All this is sorta new. And dangerous." Harry nodded, scanning the students who went up the western staircase. Hermione waved at him.

"Coming Harry?" Hermione asked as she slipped her bag over her shoulder. Ron also pulled up short, waiting on the both of them.

"Um... Yeah," Harry replied, focusing on his nearby friends. He even took a hard look at Ginny, who seemed to be fine. She caught him staring at her and blushed, dipping her head as she followed Professor McGonagall to their first class. "Take Jon down, I gotta go to the loo. Be there in a bit. Cover for me if Sprout asks."

"Professor Sprout," Hermione corrected. "All right, but don't be long! Jon?"

Harry and Jon bounced fists and Jon picked up his bag and followed Ron and Hermione down to the greenhouses. When he was about to leave, Harry noticed that Alexandria was still seated; watching her schedule and worrying her lower lip. He hung back, watching her. She was intensely focused and made no move to get up from the table.

"Hey," Harry said behind her. She started, caught unawares.

"Oh! Harry, you surprised me!" she hit him playfully on his leg. "I cannot understand these instructions to my potions class. It says 'dungeons', does that mean...prisons? Zis school has classes in prisons?"

"No, we call the floors below ground the dungeons. Come, I'll show you." He offered her his hand.

"Merci," she took it and rose to her feet, gracefully stepping over the long bench with Harry's helping hand. She stopped, scrutinizing his uniform and face. "You have gotten taller. Impossible."

Harry smiled. Katie had said the same thing. "From my humble experience, rescuing damsels in distress gives them exaggerated opinions on their rescuer," he joked.

"Oh really? Why do you say that?" she folded her arms and wrinkled her nose.

"Katie told me the same thing yesterday."

"Maybe because it iz true?"

"Maybe. But I did help her out this summer holidays when that guy's-" he pointed to Draco -" evil father tried to hex her at her job. Don't tell anyone though. That secret is only between the three of us... and Tonks. Katie doesn't even know yet. I'm letting you know because you don't know what he's like, and how his family operates. Be careful around him."

Now more than ever

"He looks like a Thomas, or a Malfoy," Alexandria observed.
"Malfoy, right on the money. He's Lucius' son."

"Thank God Uncle V advised against inviting him last minute," she whispered. "He heard that our mutual business associates were distancing themselves from Malfoy when the British Aurors came knocking at a social event at his house. Embarrassing, but it appears that nothing substantial came of it. We retracted their invite, regardless of the outcome of the investigation." Draco had turned a corner and was now out of sight. "And he looks young."

"He is in my year," Harry shrugged. Alexandria playfully dismissed that fact with a smirk. "You two are heroes. *Mes chevaliers immortels,*" she smiled at him.

"Right. I forgot about that."

Harry and Alexandria walked along the halls, continuing with their small talk as they weaved through hustling students.

"Potions and Charms are my best studies. What is ..." she looked at the timetable- "Professor Snape like?"


Alexandria's eyebrows shot up. "And he teaches here?"

"Yeah. Believe it or not, Professor Dumbledore puts his faith in him. He hates Gryffindors and dotes on his little Slytherin Snakes. Probably going to be the teacher you hate the most," Harry's expression soured. The man laid his life on the line for almost twenty years, and was instrumental in Harry getting the knowledge to finish off Voldemort. He still couldn't afford to offer any positives to Alexandria on the incredible scope of his bravery, and loyalty to the Light. It would contradict everything the students perceived of Severus Snape.

"...Don't lose your temper, and keep your wits when dealing with him. He may seem unfair, but arguing against his bias won't get you anywhere. It makes it worse."

"Damn," she whispered. "Sounds like a monster. I will take your advice and play it very safe," she agreed.

They arrived outside the Potions classroom and Alexandria was the last student in queue. "Thanks!" she waved with a smile. "Wish me luck!"

Harry gave her a salute and grinned. He turned on his heel and hustled back out of the dungeon levels and back to the ground floor. Jogging now, he made his way to his room and retrieved his invisibility cloak. He glanced at the clock in the common room. Almost fifteen minutes of his class had passed already. He cursed as McGonagall would most probably be looking for him at lunch break to issue detention for skivving off Herbology.

Fate really had a way of causing certain events to happen. Ron and himself were given detentions by both Snape and McGonagall for crashing the Anglia into the Whomping Willow. He could probably bet a thousand galleons that Ron somehow would get himself into detention by the end of the day. Another thousand would probably be on Snape being the dastardly disciplinarian.

Within a few more minutes he was at Myrtle's bathroom. When he was sure it was clear, Harry drew his wand and opened the door. He stood still as a statue, alert, focusing on the silence within the gloomy space. No Parseltongue murmurings could be heard.
"Lumos!" He pointed his wand at the ground in the dim bathroom. The fine layer of dust was not disturbed by any signs of recent footprints. He aimed his bright light at the entry to the chamber where the faucets and sinks were. The porcelain and paint seemed intact, no seams or crumbled stone indicating that it was ever opened.

Nobody had come this way as yet.

He closed the door and took out his Fwooper feather wand. He walked backwards from the doorway, casting the Confundus charm in a zig zag pattern of tiles leading towards the entrance. Hopefully that would dissuade anyone from attempting to go inside this particular bathroom until he solved this mystery of the Rooster killer.

The defense class was right after lunch. Harry already had his prophesized detention slip in his pocket. Right now the year two DADA class was subdued, waiting on the new teacher to come out from his room. After a couple minutes had passed, a Hogwarts house elf opened the classroom door carrying above his pointy ears what appeared to be an ancient record player complete with an obnoxiously big speaker horn. The large megaphone-shaped speaker bobbed along the middle corridor and the elf eventually placed it on the teachers desk. He climbed on the teacher's chair and took out a record from a trunk that had floated in behind him. With a showman's flip of the flat black disc, the house elf placed the record on the turntable and snapped his fingers. The player began to spin. With deft fingers, the house elf shuffled and pulled the record back, making a bass beat scratch out loudly from the speakers.

The whole class was dumbfounded by the tiny elf DJ seriously at work. The Elf stopped his intro, letting the record spin twice as fast as it caught up to the beginning of a track. A loud Public Service Announcement ding emanated throughout the classroom.

"Allow me to re-introduce myself. My name is LO!- OH! Lo-to-the-Cee Kay!"

There was a loud bang and a huge cloud of smoke. Lockhart appeared wearing what appeared to be Aviator shades and a sixteenth century top hat. He was dressed in flashy lavender robes, singing into a World War II SCR 536 two way radio.

"I used to move Galleons by Grin to the Gee Tay!" He gesticulated, pulling a massive gold chain from his neck.

And on it went for about two minutes, Professor Lockhart spitting some fire along with DJ Towel Fresh on the tables. One or two of the students were actually nodding their head to the beat, while the rest was literally frozen, too astonished to move, just watching each other with bewildered expressions. Harry and Jon drew their wands under the tables. This reminded them of the weird and extremely erratic behavior Katie was exhibiting when Malfoy planted the Horcrux on her.

"Hermione, Ron. Go and get Professor Dumbledore. Dean, stop that. He's been cursed, or confounded. Go with them, keep your wands drawn. It is not safe." The three of them carefully got out of their seat and kept low as they exited out the class.

"Got the hottest witch in game wearing my chain, that's right -OH!"

"Lockhart and Malfoy were in Flourish and Blotts for the beginning of the term last time around," Harry informed Jon. "When the book was initially given to Ginny. Seems he got to Lockhart instead."

They both stood up out of their seats as the ridiculous performance continued.
"No direct curses on Lockhart. Weapons free on the elf," Harry ordered Jon. They both brandished their wands.

"Stupefy!" Harry shouted, aiming at Lockhart. The spell shot true, then amazingly Lockhart expertly deflected the bolt of magic at the last instant. Harry froze, lowering his wand.

Well, that is DEFINITELY something new...

Lockhart unbelievably continued with his rap, except now he was focusing solely on Harry, battling verbally towards him. Harry could have sworn that the white of his eyes were now turning pink in colour.

"Depulso!" Jon shouted at the elf. The elf and his record player went careening towards the blackboard. The record player broke into pieces, the gaudy horn clattering loudly on the ground. "Incarcerous!" Black embalming bandages shot out of his wand and wrapped the elf from head to toe. Lockhart stopped, comically frozen mid syllable.

The whole class went deathly silent.

As if a puppet's strings were cut, the Defense teacher's posture slumped. His head fell forwards, arms hanging lifelessly at his sides. His back hunched over unnaturally. Lockhart flicked his arm and a wand snapped into his hand. He slowly looked up and grinned at the two boys facing him. Harry could recognize that expression anywhere, it was a constant nightmare ever since year five.

The situation turned deadly serious. Lockhart lowered his centre of gravity and aimed his wand.

"Get out of here! Go! Go!" Harry screamed. "Jon! Shields! Protego!" Harry commanded, bringing up a shield using the bracer on his left arm.

A blood red, scorching bolt of magic shot out from Lockhart's wand, splashing against his shield and igniting the paintings and shelves lining the wall. Screams, screeching of chairs and a mad scramble ensued as the dozen or so remaining students ran out of the class.

Harry retaliated with his troll hair wand casting a powerful levitation spell. Lockhart flew up in the air as if he were shot out of a cannon. Amazingly, he flipped; and cast a cushion charm then a sticking charm onto the ceiling. Lockhart was spread out like a human spider on the ceiling. With lightning speed he fired three spells at the chain supporting the iron chandelier.

"Diffindo! Reducto! Depulso!"

The massive chandelier was severed from the ceiling, falling over the two boys. Harry countered with Winguardium, which froze it for only a fraction of an instant. Lockhart's Reducto curse immediately shattered it into fragments and his banishing chain finisher sent scalding hot debris from above towards Harry's shield. The Protego Charm shattered under the deadly barrage. Red-tipped metal shards ripped through his bracer shield and sink into his left arm, torso and his face. Harry staggered and was on his way down when a wrecking ball slammed into his right side. He registered that Jon had bodily tackled him and flung him across the desks on his left. He rolled off the unforgiving furniture and crashed in a heap against the bookshelf.

Harry's vision was red, his world was pain. His left arm felt like it was mangled in barbwire. His face was a searing oven of heat and blood. Jon was scampering over the desks, running away from the ensuing attack spell chain. The desks and furniture behind him exploded as Lockhart tracked them with another combination of Bombarda and Confringo. Jon threw his frame over the last desk and poured pure desperation into his bracer as he crouched in front of Harry. The Aegis, a multi-layered
crystalline shield, rippled to existence in front of them. A red splash of Enflamare fire curse engulfed the shield, making Harry's world an even redder hell.

"Stay down, keep cover!" Jon screamed. The flame based spells suddenly cut off, and now was replaced by a long string of Latin. Jon crouched low in front of Harry, his Aegis shield protecting him from a multitude of multicolored spells lancing from Lockhart's wand in rapid fire. Desks, books and chairs crashed against it.

"Watsh outh.. fug thuh greens spullz- you c-can't block t-t-them.." Harry gurgled. "Doddgg... Runnngg.." Why couldn't he speak properly? Why did it feel like he was missing his left arm now? He tried to look down to his left, but that eye was registering only black and red.

"Stay down! Keep behind me if you can," Jon bellowed as he drew his Diablo Wand. Lockhart was scampering like a massive spider along the ceiling, trying to find an angle to get past the defense. Jon tracked him, allowing various projectiles to bounce off his Aegis.

Both wand and the bracer began to glow a bright white. When the continuous barrage lapsed for a moment, he cocked back his arm like a javelin thrower and heaved. The previously innocuous nine inch wand transformed mid flight into a massive Diablo claw and pierced Lockhart's attempted shield and skewered him through his chest, pinning him to the ceiling.

Lockhart looked at the massive toothpick lodged into his chest with astonishment. His wand clattered to the ground. His hands slowly curled around the engorged Diablo claw. As soon as he did this, he began to stiffen, then his skin turned a pale gray, fully petrified. The stone ceiling splintered behind him, and with agonizing slowness, his stone body slid off the claw and smashed into the ground. Pieces of his hands broke under the weight of his body with a crunch.

Jon summoned his Diablo spear piercing the ceiling using Harry's Niffler wand. It reverted mid flight to its previous shape and he caught it out the air. He set it back into his bracer. He pointed the Niffler wand again, this time at Lockhart.

"Kleptopliss!"

Lockhart's watch, a pouch of coins, a ring full of keys and his gold chain came tumbling along the ground towards him. Jon picked up his backpack and levitated these things inside it. The bookcases near to the front of the class were now completely on fire. He was never successful casting the Aguamenti spell and Harry was in no condition to move, far less cast any spells. Harry was struggling to turn his head to the left, trying to figure out what was going on with his body.

"Look here, don't look at it. On me," Jon said, crouching next to Harry. He kept a firm index finger on the crown of Harry's head, the only place not covered with blood. Jon's lips drew into a thin line as he surveyed the damage. "Eyes on me. I'm going to get you out." Jon scooped both of their bags and pointed his Hippogriff feather wand at Harry.

"Winguardium mobilicorpus!"

Harry made a gurgling sort of scream as he was levitated off the ground. He tried to turn his neck to the left to see what was the god-damned awful sensation where his arm should be. Firm, but gentle fingers restrained the top of his head, once again.

"Keep your head still and don't look at it!" Jon ordered as he transported him out of the burning classroom. "This place is going up in flames. Madame Pomfrey will help you soon. I swear to it."

Harry could only gurgle some more as more black smoke entered his lungs and heat piercing into his
right eye. The door opened and glorious cool air rushed into his mouth. The right half of his vision contained the ceiling and the hallway; a blurry grey of stone and dusty windows. The left side was simply pain painted in red and black. After a few seconds of riding the up and down wave of levitation he couldn't feel his face anymore.

"It's bad... innit?" Harry used his right arm to point to his face, delirious. His mouth felt full of blood. It was getting hard to breathe. "I can't feel...or see."

"It is. I will get you to the healer."

"Nevr...bin thish bdly hrt bfore..."

"Jon!" An authoritative voice called. "Oh Merlin help us... Get him to the medical wing! At once!"

Harry barely acknowledged a tall midnight blue shape with a triangle of white hanging from a pale face. "Severus!" the blue shape shouted. "Help get him to the infirmary! I will see to the fire."

"Goodness." A dark shadow leant over, blocking the meager light. "Open, Potter. This will help," a hoarse voice which sounded terribly like Professor Snape commanded. Something cool was pressed against his lips. Harry decided it was time he close his eyes.

Well, the one he could feel, anyhow.

Jon watched on as Professor Snape administered the potion. Harry's left arm was a bloody mess of shredded robes and tissue. The left side of his face was completely mangled, with bits of metal protruding out of his cheek and forehead. The left eye was severely damaged and covered with swollen flesh, blood and a clear, pus-like substance.

"Mr. Black, I will clear the halls in front of us, no one is to see him like this," Snape commanded. "Keep him as steady as you can. Can you do that?"

Jon nodded, not totally sure, but there was no alternative right now. The headmaster was dealing with the inferno behind them. Snape drew his wand and flicked three times. A ghostly white patronus message shot forth to different areas of the school. "With me," he ordered and strode purposefully down the hall, casting aversion hexes at intersections where students might cross their paths. Any students who did encounter Snape quickly turned on their heel and ran away when they saw the grim expression on his face.

Jon kept to his task, concentrating as hard as he could on keeping Harry level. Within a couple minutes they arrived at the doors to the Infirmary. Snape raised his hand to halt. He poked his head in. Madame Pompfrey, McGonagall, Flitwick and Sprout were there waiting.

"Are classes cancelled and students returned to their common rooms?" Snape asked immediately.

"Yes, Severus," McGonagall snapped. "What is the meaning of this alarm?"

Snape ignored the question. His eyes took in the empty beds, all except one that had curtains drawn. "Who is that in there?"

"Miss Penelope Clearwater. She has been confounded." Pompfrey informed.

"Is she sedated?" Snape demanded.

"Yes, what is going on?" Flitwick pressed again.
"Something very, very ...sinister," Snape pushed open the double doors. "Brace yourselves. Potter has been severely injured. Mr. Black, bring him in."

The teachers gasped as Harry was levitated in. Pompfrey immediately took over the hover spell and laid him gently on the closest bed.

"What happened?" she demanded. She was using a medical charm to remove the destroyed sleeve off his left arm.

"Shrapnel from the destroyed chandelier propelled with magic," Jon informed. "It was red hot after being obliterated with Reducto."

"Who did this?" McGonagall whispered. Madame Pompfrey conjured a massive magnifying glass to hover over Harry's face.

"Lockhart. Possessed. And confounded."

"Lockhart?" Sprout cursed. "That ponce? Has Albus dealt with him?"

"No. He is dealing with the fire."

"So what happened to Gilderoy?" McGonagall demanded.

"Dead."

"What? By whom?"

"We battled," Jon declared. He did not extrapolate further.


"I also dealt with the weird elf creature. Should still be alive, he was easily restrained." Snape studied the young man for a few moments.

"At least you are efficient," Snape murmured under his breath.

"Start from the beginning, young man," Sprout sighed, more confused than before. Jon calmly explained to them the weird chain of events while Pompfrey took out long metallic tweezers and gauze.

"Something, changed, you say. Instead of acting confused and foolish, you described his manner as puppet strings being cut. And then he got aggressive."

"Pretty much. He was singing and rhyming into a device. Then when we tried to stop him, he opened with Bombarda and Enflamare."

"By all things holy," Flitwick swore. "That doesn't make any sense..."

"It didn't make any sense...but we were there and that is what happened...and this was the outcome," Jon indicated Harry's condition.

The teachers and Jon stood a respectful distance away as Pompfrey worked on Harry. She unlaced the bracer and put it on the bedside table. There was a cloth soaked in potion over his injured face, and she was diligently using tweezers and scalpel on his bicep, shoulder and forearm. There was a metal bowl filling up with extracted shards of metal and embedded pieces of blood soaked robes.
After ten minutes of this she encountered some longer slivers of metal that were not coming free. It had lodged into the bone.

Albus strode through the door, levitating two disillusioned shapes in front of him. His face was solemn. "How is he, Poppy?"

Madame Pompfrey huffed, putting her hands on her wide hips.

"I will have to remove, then re-grow the bones in this arm. And use re-knitting potion on the flesh. The damage is too severe to try to surgically repair. There may be a slight possibility the eye can be saved, but I will need Severus to brew an eyesight repairing potion and a particularly tricky eyeball restorative. Some of the metal has gone very deep in his face. The only positive is that the metal itself is not cursed, which should make healing spells and medicine work without too much of an issue after the physical repair is done."

Albus removed the disillusion spells and placed the bodies on two beds. The heads of house scrutinized Lockhart's stone skin and broken hands. His mouth was opened wide, his nose chipped. Albus covered Lockhart with a white sheet. "He was dead before the petrifaction set in. He did not deserve this," Albus said sadly. "He was one of us, even for a short time. May he forever rest in peace."

Professor McGonagall cleared her throat and finally found her normal voice. "Mr. Black, thank you for saving Harry. Are you injured? Do you need anything?"

Jon shrugged. "I am fine. Maybe some water... I would be thankful, please."

She snapped her fingers and a house elf appeared.

"Milly," McGonagall commanded. "Bring a pitcher of cool water, and a pot of tea. And biscuits. Something a bit stronger for the teachers as well. This has been one first day to remember, or preferably, to forget." She watched Harry's mutilated side and shook her head in sympathy.

"Yes, Mistress. Milly will see to it," she vanished with a pop.

"If I am needed, I will be in my lab. I shall begin on the ocular restorative." Snape turned on his heel, his robes billowing impressively as he stormed out of the hospital wing.

McGonagall laid a hand on Jon's shoulder. "You were quite brave, young man. It seems that you are trading favours. First he brings you in when you were injured, now you bring him in return. You two are bound together by fate, apparently."

"Apparently. I was not even as close to being as badly injured as he is, however. He didn't even know the extent of how badly he was hit." Madame Pompfrey left the bedside to retrieve a medical surgery kit and a few bottles of potion kept in the metal cabinet. "I don't think he would have stayed awake if he saw what happened to him. Shock can incapacitate a man if he is not accustomed to seeing injuries like this..."

McGonagall nodded gravely. Both of them knew going into circulatory shock could potentially lead to death.

"Poppy is one of the best there is. He will be alright," McGonagall reinforced, her mouth in a thin, hard line. Milly reappeared with a large covered silver tray balanced in one hand and a basket of biscuits and flour based snacks in the other.

"Please feel free to have a seat in the recovery area. I need to begin work on his face," Pompfrey
advised. She pulled the drapes around the bed.

After the teachers and Jon shared a quick cup of tea, the other heads of houses excused themselves and left to see to their own house. Albus Dumbledore rest a hand on Jon's shoulder, nodding solemnly.

"Thank you, young man. The hat chose well last night. I am afraid there is a school wide curfew until the Aurors come in and do their investigation. May I escort you back to your dorms?" Professor Dumbledore offered.

Jon nodded, due to the fact that with all the moving staircases he doubt he would remember how to make it back on his own anyway. "Thank you, headmaster. Your assistance is greatly appreciated."

They bid farewell to Madame Pompfrey and both of them left the infirmary. They walked in silence along the corridors. Dumbledore was first to open up conversation.

"I have the strangest feeling that you are not worried, nor showing any spike of anxiety or adrenaline usually accompanying such a dangerous situation."

"I guess," Jon replied vaguely, shrugging. They walked on a bit in silence, Dumbledore humming to himself. Jon had the feeling that the elderly wizard was burning with desire to interrogate him, yet was pretending to be patient and kind to not alienate his new student. He waited patiently for the questioning to begin, and was not disappointed a minute later.

"What do you really think happened in that classroom, Jon?"

"Sir, my suspicion is that multiple curses were cast on Mr. Lockhart. And from what I have heard previously, he was a showman, a personality with more flash than substance. At first, he definitely was in control and wanted to leave a strong impression, but it all came out wrong, and disturbing. As if he was being twisted. Maybe he was trying to fight it, in his own way."

"Your classmate, Mr. Thomas, said he was singing to music?"

"Yes sir, the elf was using a record machine."

"And when the elf was stopped, only then did he attack. Am I understanding this correctly?"

"Yeah, basically," Jon shrugged.

"Interesting," Dumbledore muttered, pulling his beard and staring into the distance.

Jon said nothing, just walked alongside him in silence. They arrived at the Fat Lady and it swung open immediately as Dumbledore approached. He and Jon stepped through into a room full of students awkwardly trying to pretend that they were chatting, reading or playing board games and cards. They immediately became quiet, and focused on the two of them. Albus Dumbledore noticed the rushed irregularities; the chessboard incorrectly setup on the board, one or two open books were being held upside down. A sixth year pretending to be interested in a first year group of students.

"Good afternoon, dear children," Albus said benevolently. The Gryffindor den all responded with a chorus of 'Good afternoon Professor Dumbledore'. Albus smiled, raising his hand in thanks. "Professor McGonagall will be with you shortly. Please remain in your common rooms until further notice."

"Where is Harry?" Hermione blurted out.
"Hospital wing," Dumbledore replied.

"Can we see him?" Alexandria added.

"Certainly, but not today. The curfew is in effect, and it is a very strict one." Dumbledore raised his finger in warning to his captive audience. "No one is to leave. Your meals will be brought to you and your head of house would keep you updated. Things will be fixed, have no fear. Have a good afternoon, keep safe and enjoy the rest of the day off from your classes. I must see to things."

He turned and ducked through the entrance.

Alexandria ran towards Jon and grabbed him up in a hug. "I am so sorry," she said, rubbing the back of his hair and squeezing her body to his. Jon returned the hug with one arm. He admitted to himself he was getting a bit attached to these hugs.

"How is Harry?" she asked, pulling away and keeping a hold on his arms. Jon shook his head sadly. Hermione, Ron and the quidditch gang all came closer to hear the news.

"Not good at all. I have avenged him. He will recover, knowing that the person who did this to him has paid the price," Jon declared. "Keep him in your thoughts everyone, he needs all of your prayers and well wishes."

Tonks was currently packing up her books at the end of her lecture at the Ministry of Magic. Her hair was left in her natural black colour, her robes were the more conservative, all black loose garb instead of her preferred fashionable styles. She exited class without any small talk with her fellow recruits and made her way to the designated Apparation zones. Within moments she was in her room, taking off her scratchy robes and putting on a loose t shirt, feeling drained. The days were monotonous and admittedly she was a bit bored.

The Auror recruit classes were frighteningly dull. She knew that the actual job consisted of periods of normalcy spiked by field calls. Investigation and clue gathering was the bulk of the work. Sitting in court and having breakthroughs in cases would be the highlights of her day. It was rare that there were a lot of calls to action even though it might, just might get hectic when there were crises.

A month ago she thought that the Auror job would prove that being a half-blood Black did not condemn her to inferiority where magic was concerned. She knew her relatives shunned her mother and father, and by extension, her. She would show them all she was worth the title of being a powerful witch; capable of living up to the Ancient and Most Noble Black heritage, regardless of her mother's removal from the Family Tree Tapestry.

She flicked her wand to open her cupboard and watched the red robes draped over the mannequin. With another flick she shut the doors with a snap. A month ago was before she met those two, before she became a Guild Hunter.

Tonks threw herself face down on her bed. She wondered how Harry was doing. And also Jon. Jon was another enigma. Through their correspondence and few visits he volunteered no information that was not specifically asked. Jon clearly was not picking sides over the 'incident'. Jon was simply Jon, clinical, calm, a silent sponge absorbing everything around him. A boy of few words. All in all, a strange lad.

The three of them were the Crow's Vambrace. She was their Clan Witch, but everyone they met immediately knew that Harry was their ghost leader and driving force. Jon was the muscle. Tonks was their all around spell-caster and spokesperson. It still amazed her that they were so good
together, their unique strengths and abilities synergizing with uncanny success. The results made her bank account go from zero to Hero, their adventure had saved lives and brought renewed hope to Salles and Estagal.

Now she contemplated if she had screwed it all up. She didn't know if she could really work with those two again on the field if she couldn't trust Harry. Harry admitted that he was eighteen, amongst other, personal things.

A hardened wizard in a flippin' twelve year old body.

The magic that feat took was incomprehensible. Harry was a mage, no... a Grand Sorcerer in a class all in his own if what he said was true.

Tonks rolled off the bed and took out a photo album of herself growing up from underneath it. She thumbed through happier times, and stopped on a photo of herself and a few friends at the first Quidditch Match during her third year. She looked so innocent and cute then. She stood up in front of the mirror on the closet door. The loose muggle t-shirt did nothing to hide that she was no longer that little girl. Her experiences in France also changed her outlook on mortality and magic. Dealing with rogue elements could turn deadly, and death could strike even during mundane tasks.

Mundane tasks like barrel bathing in a farm barn.

In hindsight, learning that Harry was not exactly who he said he was seemed inevitable. That moment when he had confronted the Russian in that barn without fear was key. He had met her gaze with such ferocity; even after he surrendered his weapon, conveying that he had this deadly situation under control. In Carcassone; that awesome display of brute force to take out the skirmish with one strike.

The history books said it was impossible, but the latest Scribe de Reveur has acclaimed that the British Guild Crow's Vambrace has been tentatively accredited with the First Wizard to achieve the ability of Flight. Further debate by the International Confederation of Wizards would be required to scribe this occurrence officially in the Wizard's Worldwide Almanac of Magical Records.

Those two boys were forces unto themselves. Their magic was an integral part of them, not simply channeled through their wand. They were heroes inside... and it showed externally in their capacity for magic.

Monsieur Valmont called them 'Immortal Champions.'

Tonks was really starting to believe in their corny offhand jokes. If the entire bloody south of France could empower the legends they were carving out for themselves and she was witnessing it firsthand, why would she even fight it?

Her lads were fucking legit.

Tonks wrinkled her nose and as she flipped back to the photo during her third year. She concentrated as she looked in the mirror. Her body shrunk a few inches, her bust decreased dramatically and her skinny arms and legs widened a bit with baby fat. Her face also rounded out a bit, and her shape became more plump than svelte.

She struck a pose, her mind racing.

Tonks shook her head, this was insane. She should not even think of it. She had no business even thinking of this. She was older. He was younger. That was it.
The Ez-rest Owl perch dinged throughout the house and made her jump. She immediately reverted to her natural shape and sped down the stairs. When she saw the snow white owl on the perch outside the window her hair turned colour into a bright pink and she raced to open it.

RD

Hogwarts is under magical attack.

You must acquire a Rooster and bring Cloud. We need locations of nearby poultry farms. Secure the clan base using our funds if necessary. These are the last direct orders from RH.

I am writing on his behalf because he has been severely injured and has been potion induced into a deep coma. He is in critical condition. There is a possibility that he may be permanently blinded in the left eye.

Mr. B

Tonks sat down abruptly. Her hair reverted to black as she put her fingers to her mouth in shock. She folded the parchment and took out a fresh one. She thought of all the questions she wanted to ask, but instead wrote a short response.

It shall be done.

RD
MUDBLOODS DESERVE TO DIE

Chapter Summary

Jon has no clue how to fight against magic. Nymphadora Tonks is a one-witch reinforcement army.

The next morning Tonks had her books, important clothes, clan gear and potions trunk packed. That letter could be a turning point in her life, and she knew it. Her parents were humble and wanted the absolute best for her and her future endeavours.

She was an adult, or maybe she should say, of age. Time to let them know what she has been doing these past few weeks.

"Mom, Dad, can I show you something?" she asked as she joined them for breakfast.

"What's up?" Ted asked, looking at her as he sipped his morning tea. He put down the Daily Prophet. Andromeda joined them from the kitchen, wiping her hands on a drying towel. "Is it ministry stuff again?"

"No. I've got... a new job. Thing. Here," she showed them a parchment of her recent Gringotts records for the months of July to early September. Ted frowned, scrutinizing the rows. He passed it on to his wife when she asked. Ted leaned back, shifted his plate and laced his fingers together on the table.

"That's... interesting." Ted nodded, his eyebrows knitted in concern. "Are you in some sort of trouble?"

"Starting credit, forty five galleons. Deposit fifty galleons. Then... look at these sums! Internal Credit transfer TCV twenty seven thousand galleons, forty five sickles and three knuts. Internal transfer credit TCV twelve thousand galleons, internal transfer credit TCV four thousand galleons. Internal transfer credit TCV thirteen thousand galleons. Debit two thousand eight hundred World Wizarding Gear. Other small debits. Remaining balance FIFTY THREE THOUSAND TWO NINETY! What is going on here? What is TCV?" Andromeda voice rose higher and higher as she read Gringotts statement. She looked absolutely furious. "This better be blasted good. If you dare tell me you've been gambling, or dealing with shady-"

"No mum. I am now a registered Clan Witch for the Hunter's Guild." There. She said it. She took a deep breath as she eyed her parents.

"What?" her father snapped. He took off his glasses and rubbed his temples. "That's extremely dangerous. Especially for a lone girl." His voice was low, measured. "What does TCV stand for?"

"The Crows' Vambrace. That is the name of our clan. I want to help you out here as well, and probably put something away for a nice retirement when you are ready for it," she offered with a hesitant smile. "Those figures are my cut of the payments issued by clients for work done on jobs."
"These...are ...astronomical fees," her mother growled, hitting the parchment with the back of her palm. Tonks could not remember the last time she saw her mother so angry. "In one month? Wait. This is the span over two and a half weeks! What kind of jobs were you doing that costs so much?"

"What I always wanted to do. Combating dark magic."

Her parents stared at her, trying to find words. Her mother actually made a rather passable imitation of a goldfish. Her dad composed himself first and took back the parchment. "Is this some sort of pre-requisite for the auror program?"

"No. Actually, Aurors contract out reputable clans to help them do their work," Tonks explained. "Some of those fees are from The French MLE." She pulled out her trump card: the Gringrotts' statement of the Crows' Vambrace Clan Vaults. "What you have in your hand is the account you set up for me since I was in Hogwarts. This, is our Clan's statement." She passed it across the table.

Her parents watched the curled parchment as if it were a potion that the healer wanted them to take, but knew from prior experience it tasted awful. Reluctantly, Ted took it.

"Holy shit," was all he said. Her mother looked over his shoulder, and her lips pressed together.


"As I said, we were fighting dark magic."

"We?" her father asked.

"My team and I. There are three of us."

"Three? I'm confused. Only big jobs get these sort of payments. Since you're so young, won't you be like, a trainee of a big group? You said you were the Clan Witch. Which means you are the founder, or leader, or am I mistaken?"

Tonks knew that this part would be the hardest to explain. It still didn't make much sense to herself, far less to her parents who did not go on the adventure to witness her lads in action.

"I need a secrecy oath from you two if I am going to explain this to the best of my ability. Clan affiliation is something that is kept secret, even from the Ministry."

"All right. I'm dying to find out. I Swear not to reveal what you tell me in this discussion," her father declared, tapping his mouth his wand.

"I swear," her mother did the same.

"The Boy Who Lived and the Lord Black are my teammates. The three of us are the Crow's Vambrace. We have rescued a kidnapped boy, foiled an infiltration and hostage situation at Beauxbatons, and rescued a town from a nogtail infection orchestrated by a Russian network of criminals. They eventually took the whole town under hostage... we freed them and captured the
leader. Also, we captured a French hit squad that attacked a rich heiress' birthday party. Those figures are the bounty payments issued by the Aurors and so on."

Her parents were suitably impressed. Tonks could have sworn that her father, even through his frowning demeanor, was immensely proud.

"I... I don't know what to say. I didn't think you had it in you at... well; so young an age. I always believed with the proper training you would learn and be capable of magic beyond my dreams...but this..." he looked down at the Clan Account. "This is incredible."

" Incredible is an understatement. But How?" her mother asked. "Your most advanced attack spells when we sparred are *Stupefy*, *Depulso* and the only non-verbal you have is the manacle charm."

Tonks knew that her parents were closely monitoring her spell progress. If the roles were reversed, she would be dumbfounded as to how their aspiring eighteen year old daughter could be fighting crime abroad. Tonks blew out a deep breath. This was it.

"Actually I... mostly helped. Those lads are *Heroes*, daddy. They do stuff that most wizards- um well... I had only imagined. There is no other way to explain it. And-" she blew out another breath. Another bombshell was coming. "I'm going to splitting time between home and at Hogsmeade."

"What? You...moving out?" her mother asked, concerned.

"Sort of."

"What about your studies for the entrance exam?" her dad asked.

"I can do both. I'm going to rent a place in Hogsmeade, for clan business. I'll be back and forth, and I'm still going to do classes. On the weekends I would most likely be up there, but during the week I'll be home some days, depending on my lecture and practical schedule. But please, don't tell anyone. If they ask, say I am renting in London or something."

"Hogsmeade huh?" Ted pondered. He rolled back up the parchments and tapped his wand to cast a ribbon charm. "Once you're sure, we'll do whatever we can to support you."

"Thanks dad," Tonks beamed.

"We'll stand by you, no matter what. If you are sure, then I'm alright with that," her mother said softly. "When will you be leaving?"

"I guess... now? I'm packed already. I'm taking Cloud. The Hogwarts express leaves in thirty minutes."

Her parents looked at each other for a tense moment, then at Tonks. "I'll help you take your things," her father offered. "I did see an amazing broom in the storage room... was wondering how you got that..."

"Gift from Lord Black, we used it on mission. I'm going around back and get Cloud. Where's his leash?"

Fifteen minutes later the Tonks family were on platform 9 3/4, three trunks and a dog carrying box piled on top of them. Cloud was happily leashed circling around Tonks legs. He was waving his white tail at the few passengers going on the red train.

"Be careful, Nymphadora," Andromeda said, giving her a hug. "Write as soon as you're settled in."
"I will mom."

"Gets cold there soon. Take care of yourself. Let me know if you need anything."

"Thanks so much dad. Love you both so much."

"You want to make an old man cry? get on. We'll be seeing you soon. You're only a train away."

"Yeah. Bye mom. Will floo call when I reach!" Tonks levitated her trunks on the train and sat down in the nearest compartment. She opened the window and waved. Cloud bounded up on her lap and was barking joyfully at her parents.

Her parents waved at the two of them and Nymphadora got a weird feeling of nostalgia, remembering when they used to drop her off to school.

Now, she was summoned to be a one woman army of reinforcements to the most protected magical place in the world. She sat back, drawing a deep breath. If Jon "The Immortal Knight" Black said they were under attack, she had better be ready. Without further ado she took off her loose robes and dressed in the dueling armor. She put on a regular traveling cloak over that and settled in for the ride.

"She needs proper rest, Headmaster," Severus Snape confronted Dumbledore as soon as he arrived. The headmaster was uncharacteristically clad in somber robes when he walked in the medical wing. The afternoon sun shone through the western windows. "It is only so much stimulant potion I can give her before she starts to make mistakes."

"And good afternoon to you as well, Severus," Albus Dumbledore nodded. "I agree wholeheartedly with you. However, Poppy has told me under no uncertain terms that speed is of the essence."

"She has rested for a total of three hours, only one hour breaks after nine hour shifts of surgery and spell work. You must bring in relief."

"Would you have inquisitive healers from St. Mungo's reporting directly to the press? She said the work is not beyond her capacity, it simply needs time, and attention. I prefer to allow her, and the Aurors do their work without panic or unnecessary involvement from parents and the public alike. Is there anything more I need to know about concerning Harry?"

"Progress has been steady with the arm. The torso and face have been treated as best as she could, all of the metal pieces extracted. Bones are re-growing as we speak. Concerning the eye, the restorative will be finished," Severus twirled his wand in a circle. A clock-face shimmered into the air. "Sixty four minutes. Then it will take half an hour to cool before it is administered."

Severus began to pace, hitting his wand against his thigh in a nervous gesture as he went into lecture mode. Albus observed his behavior thoughtfully. Severus has never shown this much determination for anyone other than students of his own house.

"That time will be crucial. The eye repair and especially the reconnection of the optic nerve is extremely taxing and meticulous work. I recommend we have a specialist brought in with a seal of confidentiality, specifically for moral support and physical backup for Pomfrey, if it comes to that."

"Have you slept, old boy?" Albus enquired. Severus just snarled, dismissing the question.

"It is too critical a stage not to have all of our weaknesses covered," Severus hissed. He would have mentioned hiring substandard Defense Staff as a weakness, but for the moment, unity amongst staff was paramount. He did not want to be at odds with Albus when two students were sequestered in the
hospital wing within the first day of classes. "Who knows how well she will manage in an hour or two? Sleep is necessary for her to perform at the highest level, which this procedure indubitably is."

"You have given this much consideration, Severus. I must apologize for not giving her as much attention as I should. I have spent the majority of the time deflecting the Aurors from Harry's situation as much as possible. You have someone to proposition?"

"Healer Wanderley Worthington Junior comes to mind."

"Moody's personal surgeon, yes. You do know if we contact him, Alastor will know."

"Your student's eye is at risk, Headmaster." Severus did not argue, just stated the facts.

"Very well. See to it. Speak with Poppy and scribe the summons. I will sign it and personally deliver it to him. In the meantime, I will keep watch here. Please inform Minerva, Pomona and Filius that I will be leaving soon."

"Wotcher, Rosmerta!" Tonks greeted, letting her wrapped up broom and levitated trunks drop with a thud on the inside of the doorway. A draft of cold air followed her in. In her left hand Cloud's leash was wrapped a few times around, and the dog obediently sat, wagging his tail and looking adoringly up towards his master. She turned and shut the door, drawing back her hood.

"Hullo, Tonks!" Rosmerta put down the wares she was washing and came forward to the counter. "Will you be staying a while?"

"A short while, yeah," Tonks smiled. "Open up a room for me for a few days, please."

"No problem, now it's quiet time until Halloween. You would have your pick of the lot."

"Great!" Tonks dug into her purse for her money bag. After ten minutes her stuff was packed away in the largest room, the one with its own back alley staircase exit. She planted one of the pair of sneakascopes above the exit door and kept the other in her pocket. If someone tampered with her door, the one in her possession should alert her. That was what the manufacturers claimed it would do. Hopefully she wouldn't have to put it to the test. She grabbed Cloud on his leash and her Quicksilver broom and made her way down the exit. She walked up the street and dropped off a pre-written letter to Mr. Howard Humburly at the owl post station. He was the owner of a property behind Hogsmeade station that Jon had shortlisted for purchase or rental. Cloud was energized out in the open street, his tongue hanging out happily as he sniffed all the signposts and any immovable object within the range of his leash.

"Heel, Cloud!" Tonks commanded as she walked down the road. The dog bounded over to her side, sometimes tangling up her legs with his leash. Tonks patted his head and he eventually calmed down and kept pace on her left. Tonks made the walk up to Hogwarts gates with her broom slung over her shoulder. To her annoyance, the gates were locked, again. "Come on, boy." Tonks scooped up the massive dog and with some clumsy maneuvering, used her broom to fly over to Hagrid's hut. She set down and Fang and Ghost began to bark from inside. Cloud gustily returned the favour.

"Hagrid! Hallo!" Tonks called. Hagrid swung open the door, his parasol held at the ready.

"Nym'dora! Lass! What are you doing here? Get in, quickly!" Hagrid hustled her and Cloud inside the hut. Fang and Ghost began to snarl. "You shouldn't be- oh? And who is this white 'un?" Hagrid smiled at the dog, completely disregarding the curfew lockdown scolding he was going to give his unexpected visitor. "Swiss shepherd huh? Yeah, I reckon that be the one... those coats are magnificent. Very good at magical animal control if I rem'ber correctly."
"Yeah, Hagrid this is Cloud. Ghost looks almost fully recovered, Hagrid! Great work! Jon was down for a while without him. Ghost you remember me?" Tonks crouched and extended her hand. Ghost approached, sniffed, then licked her fingers once. He silently went back and sat down on the rug in front of the fire. Fang was still in attack position, staring at Cloud.

"Easy Fang," Hagrid commanded "Sit yer arse down over there," he pointed. Fang spun twice and bounded over to the massive bed and jumped on top of it. His tail hit the bed in intervals, staring at Cloud. Cloud was currently sniffing Hagrid, unsure of what to make of the huge half giant wizard. "So. Nym'dora. You're not really supposed to be here. Aurors are in the school."

"I heard Harry was attacked. Jon wrote me. I'm here to visit him. And possibly help if I can." Tonks squared her shoulders, determined.

"Hullo Rubeus!" a voice came outside of the door. There was a rapid knock on the heavy wood.

"It's the headmaster," Hagrid whispered, unsure if to hide Tonks or not. "Better get this over with, then," he grumbled, deciding against it. "Definitely not the time for secrets." Hagrid opened the door and greeted his second visitor. "Professor Dumbledore, come in!"

"Good evening," Dumbledore stopped in the doorway, looking at Tonks. "Miss Tonks. What a surprise." Dumbledore did not look particularly pleased. The last time he spoke with her, Dumbledore had to make a hasty visit to London and Obscurus' Journals and Literature bookstore. That spiraled into the discovery of two people hexed and an Auror Investigation into Dobby and the Malfoy residence. The next time he heard of her Professor McGonagall had told him that Harry and his friends were attacked visiting Katherine Bell at the hospital wing. Dumbledore studied her, clasping his hands behind his back. The effect was immediate. His demeanour exuded power and suspicion. Tonks had never been so intimidated in her life.

"Good evening Professor Dumbledore," Tonks made an awkward attempt at a curtsy. "My friend Jon told me that Harry was in the hospital wing. I was coming to visit."

"Yes, he is," he said curtly. Dumbledore paused, never breaking eye contact with her. "Right now I am on my way out. The gates were closed."

"I saw. I um, flew over."

"You flew over. I see. The grounds are charmed to warn us of malicious intent by visitors when we activated the security hex. Seeing as it has not done so, I believe that you wish Hogwarts no ill will. Is that the case, Ms. Tonks?" Professor Dumbledore said gravely.

Tonks put up her hands in innocence. "No, of course not sir! I'm here to help, and check on Harry, I swear!" she hastily said.

Professor Dumbledore stared at her another moment. "What was the reason for you being reported by your head of house to come to my office in your fifth year?"

"Um... I impersonated Wiona Merrythought and kissed her boyfriend?"

"Correct." He turned to Hagrid. "Send floo call to Minerva and Poppy. Tell them that I have spoken to Miss Tonks and have allowed her entry to the school and she is allowed to visit Harry as they see fit. Miss Tonks, pardon my rudeness, but I must speak to Rubeus, privately."

"Um, ok. Hagrid, would Cloud be ok here for now?"

"Sure, why not?" Hagrid replied. Tonks eyed the massive boarhound and the young wolf and raised
her eyebrows. "They're fine. I have it under control, lass."

"Thank you Hagrid, Professor Dumbledore. I'll head on up. I can find my way." Dumbledore just stared at her as she left the hut. Hagrid closed the door softly behind her.

"Wha' was that all about?" Hagrid asked Dumbledore.

"She has been involved in two separate incidents when it came to students' safety over the school break. The timing of her visit now is quite," he stroked his beard, looking at the direction of the school. "Uncanny."

"Naw. Jon Black and Harry are her friends. She's like a bossy big sister to them from what I noticed. She personally brought up Ghost here, with the twin Weasley boys."

"Ghost?" Dumbledore asked. Hagrid indicated the white wolf curled up before the fire.

"This is Jon's familiar, Ghost. Got injured in the fight with the thestral. I've been treating him ever since."

"A wolf," Dumbledore noted, watching the animal. "The closest relative to magical creatures while still being non-magical, apart from the mighty Blue whale. But they are highly reluctant to fraternize with humans. Jon must be a powerful wizard to have him as a familiar."

"Aye, that he is. Fiercely loyal to him, in fact. Tried to escape as soon as he could walk. But I spoiled him rotten so he finally decided to stay. I took a couple a bites to show that he could really trust me," Hagrid chuckled.

"Very well. I am going to hopefully fetch Wanderly Worthington from Manchester to help Madame Pomfrey. She is currently taking a short rest. Professor McGonagall is currently manning the Hospital wing and Septima is overlooking her Gryffindors. I came to give further instructions and to reinforce that no one is to be allowed in while the Aurors are here, but maybe I should have put a bit more pep into my step."

"Ah, I'm sorry Professor. But she's alright. She even checked out with Ghost. He accepted her as soon as she gave him her hand."

Dumbledore drew his wand and did an animagus revealing charm on Cloud. Cloud yipped once and hid behind Hagrid's massive legs. "Good. From this moment forth until I come back, Godric himself is not to be allowed unto the grounds. Is that clear?"

"Yes, Professor Dumbledore," Hagrid apologized.

"Upon my return, ask me for my password. Please have Severus and Filius ready as reinforcement on short notice. My password would be," Dumbledore looked around for inspiration. "The White Wolf. I would give a password to Mr. Worthington, and that would be 'Chocolate Cake'. This should be asked as soon as we arrive at the gates. Please remember this, and do not allow such a breach to happen again," Dumbledore said gravely.

"Understood, headmaster. Sorry fer letting you down."

"Be ever careful, Rubeus. Mr. Worthington is a shrewd and powerful healer. He must be checked out on arrival. Let the others know Miss Tonks is on her way. I must leave. Constant vigilance, old friend."

"That's an old order code word..." Hagrid frowned.
"Things are getting Dark once again, Rubeus. We cannot afford any mistakes," Dumbledore turned and left.

"Mr. Black," Professor Septimus Vector called into the common room after reading a slip of parchment brought to her by a house elf. "Where is Jon?"

"He's up in his room," Percy said, seated behind a desk near to the entrance door. He was mandated to man the portrait door and not allow any students to leave. This task was shared between himself and Claudia Howard, the seventh year prefect.

"Call him down, Weasley. Bring him to me in Classroom G-11, please. Ms. Howard, please hold on for the time being."

A minute later Jon came downstairs and Percy escorted him out. They walked to the closest class down the hall. Percy knocked on the open door.

"Come," Professor Vector said. The two young men walked in. Tonks was standing next to Vector by the teacher's desk. "Thank you Percy. Please wait outside, this would only take a few minutes."

Percy closed the door behind him and leaned on the wall. He drew his wand and scanned the halls.

"Jon, this young woman says she knows you. Do you?"

"Of course."

"I asked her to give me a specific question about her that you would be able to answer. Please answer it on this piece of parchment." Vector beckoned him over to the first student desk in front of her where ink and a quill was set up.

**What gift did you get her in the clothes shop?**

Jon dipped the quill and answered.

*Dragon leather jerkin.*

He handed the parchment over to the professor. She checked it with another parchment that she had Tonks fill out prior to calling Jon.

"Good. Hagrid and Professor McGonagall confirmed that you two did know each other, but seeing as I am in charge of you for now, I am making triply sure. She says she is here to visit you and Harry at the hospital wing. I will call Professor Sinistra to escort you down. Give me a minute, Miss Tonks. Jon, do not leave until I come back."

Jon dipped his head in a small bow.

"Thanks, Professor," Tonks said.

Professor Vector got up and left the class.

"It's serious here. Haven't ever seen the staff so tense," Tonks opened up as she sat down on top of the desk on Jon's left.

"Harry was in a literal mess. The left side of his face was one large bloody wound... and his arm." Jon shook his head. "Since the adrenaline has gone, those images are all I could think of."

"Shite. What happened?" she whispered. "Your letter was maddening... and short on info."
"Lockhart was hexed, similarly to Katie. He got aggressive and was quite skillful. Obliterated a chandelier and banished the pieces into Harry. It was partially blocked by his shield charm, but a lot still got through. He's been under care from the healer since yesterday after lunch. No word yet on his condition. I am extremely glad you came. I have no idea how to battle magic. Enemies are no problem. Harry is the one verse in these things." Jon's voice dropped lower. "Did you bring a rooster?"

"No. Not yet. Why would you need a rooster?" Tonks whispered. Jon stood up and bent low to her ear.

"There is a basilisk in the castle."

"What!" Tonks hissed. "How?"

Jon had to think up something on the spot. Harry knew about the Slytherin Monster due to his previous journey. How was he to explain this now?

"He told me he had one of those dreams about it. Yesterday morning we awoke to find out the chickens were killed. All of them. It is somehow related."

"Dreams?" Tonks asked. "Harry definitely told me he wasn't a seer."

Jon simply stared at her. Tonks cursed.

"Fuck. I should have known," she closed her eyes. "Rooster... rooster... all I know about the uses of a rooster is a blood ritual used for vandalism. Permanent ink for almost a whole month. That's about it."

"I don't know why he told me to ask for the rooster, but he did. He also wanted you to find information on poultry farms nearby."

"Jon, Hogwarts is in a very remote part of Scotland. There is nothing nearby for miles on end. Only Hogsmeade. Anything else would be by broom." Jon raised his hand to halt.

"Someone is coming," he warned. Sure enough, both Professor Vector and Sinistra came in the room. Percy walked in.

"Jon, you may go with Miss Tonks to visit Harry. Percy, thank you. Ten points to Gryffindor," Vector said. "Professor Sinistra would escort you down to the Hospital wing."

The walk down to the Hospital wing was eerie and quiet. The sun did not set entirely as yet, so the empty halls had an orange glow on the tiles where sunlight crept in.

"Wands out, Nymphadora and Jon. There are three Aurors working in the castle. They do not expect the conspirator to attack while they are here, but have advised all staff to remain vigilant." They bent the corridor with the defense class from yesterday. Tonks watched the stern-faced Auror from the Ministry standing sentry at the door.

"Tonks," he nodded as they walked past. His eyes followed the three of them.

"Auror Drinkwater," she replied in greeting. She continued walking, only nodding once in acknowledgement. Within minutes they were at the hospital wing.

"You are to wait in the visitor's area until summoned." Sinistra escorted them through the main doors to the infirmary and turned a left before the first row of beds. She opened a door and Tonks and Jon
were seated in a room with a short coffee table and a few couches. There were stacks of old
magazines on couch side tables and a narrow shelf against the far wall packed with books. There
was an aquarium built into the wall opposite the shelf. Colourful fish swam through a miniature
version of Hogwarts castle and the Quidditch pitch. "Professor McGonagall will see you shortly. You
are not to wander the halls until an escort has been provided. Am I clear?" Sinistra spoke in a no-
nonsense tone.

"Yes, Professor," the two of them said in unison. Tonks realized she had turned immediately back
into student mode the moment Headmaster Dumbledore confronted her. Sinistra nodded and left the
room.

"I am to assume that Harry did not tell anyone else of the..." Tonks mouthed the word Basilisk
without saying it out aloud.

"Bingo."

"Bingo? What?" Tonks frowned.

"Isn't bingo used for... affirmative?"

"Yeah, but it usually when it is a mystery clue popping up or something that you figured out after ...
forget it."

"Sorry. But yes. He does not want people to know about his... um... clairvoyant dreams." Tonks
raised the hem of her loose robes and showed Jon the dark red pants by her calf.

"These robes were inspired by the Red Oracle.. or Ora Kill to be exact, according to Bulistrode.
Harry thought up my code name Red Dora on the fly in Salles. I was curious and dug up on her
story. She was eventually hunted down and killed by a Hit Squad almost fifteen years later after her
victory. It appeared she became a psychotic serial killer after her taste for blood."

"Interesting. What was her real name, did you find out?"

"Yeah. Her name was Immaculate Betelgeuse Black. An ancestor of ours. A white seer gone
horribly dark after her performance in the Joust."

"Witches going dark seems to be a trend I am hearing more and more often recently," Jon said. "Is
this a common occurrence?"

"Not really. A wizard going Dark usually becomes an issue when he has a cause and gains political
power. Wars, uprising, civil unrest, that sort of thing. A witch who goes dark usually creates a
powerful curse that lasts generations, without anyone really knowing she went dark. Betelguese
created the curse Sectumoccipitalis, a curse that sprays blood from the neck like a fountain. Her
continued usage of this curse during her life tainted the female branch of the Blacks to have one
particular fetish as a recurring... thing. My aunt Bellatrix was known for her madness, and love for
torture. My other aunt was one for self-love. My mother, thankfully escaped the curse. The Black
girls have always been ... analyzed for traits by healers even when in the womb.'

Jon stared at her, smirking at her penchant for flirting. "No wonder your mother named you that."

"Shut up," Tonks said. "I think the story is just that, a story. The curse needs to be fulfilled by the
girl, who has choices of who she wants to be. Some of us just choose to give in to their ...namesake."

"Of course. What are we, if not our choices?"
Tonks broke off the conversation, feeling uneasy. She picked up the magazine closest to her. On it was the picture of Jon and Harry sitting in Diagon alley. To her annoyance it was a recent *Witch Weekly*, the same issue Alexandria asked the boys to sign in Gringotts after their meeting.

"Tell me about him."

"I was in the surgery area when Pomprey was explaining to the headmaster. They needed to re-grow his arm bones and potion the flesh to magically repair. Also she said she *might* be able to rebuild his eye. The Potions master seems competent. I believe it took the whole day and more to finish the ocular restorative."

"Wow. Yeah, Snape is good at potions, I give him that. Too bad he's a bastard when it comes to dealing with people."

Anger grew inside of her when she imagined a disfigured boy with only a socket where his eye should have been in this picture. She mentally chased the image from her mind.

"I mailed Mr. Humburly about the property behind the station. Hopefully I would get a response by tomorrow back at Rosmerta's place. I would need to find out more about this..." she mouthed the word Basilisk, "In the library. I wonder why McGonagall hasn't come as yet."

They waited for almost an hour, talking about the situation in hushed tones and what they could do about the property. There were long gaps in between when Jon and Tonks would simply be quiet. When an hour passed, Professor McGonagall came into the waiting area.

"Miss Tonks, Mr. Black, I can only speak for a few minutes. A specialist healer has agreed to support Madame Pomfrey at this critical stage. They are working on him right now, as we speak. He will have to be awakened afterwonds for a short space of time for around five minutes. It will be just to test to see if he can sense a sensitivity to light after the operation. He would still be heavily potioned, but at least he would know that you two came to visit him before we sedate him completely again for surgery aftercare. I will come back again when she says you can stop in during that short window. I am not sure how long from now that would be. You may call upon Millie for supper if necessary. In the meanwhile, I must go back to my post."

"Thank you, Professor," Jon said. Tonks thanked her as well. The clock on the wall now read minutes to six. "Might as well eat something now."

Tonks agreed and they summoned Millie for supper.

At around nine o'clock Jon pushed Tonks awake on the other couch. She opened her eyes, and sat up. "They said we can see him now," Jon said. He offered his hand and helped Tonks to her feet. Both of them followed Professor McGonagall to the surgery area.

Harry's head and the entire left side of his face was heavily bandaged. His neck, upper chest and left arm were also completely bandaged, his elbow bent and held in a sling. His right eye watched Tonks and Jon approach.

"Hey," he whispered out the side of his mouth. "You are a sight for sore eyes."

"Well, eye," Jon joked. Harry rolled his one good eye. He feebly held up his right hand and closed
his fist. Jon softly touched his fist with Harry's. "I brought you a visitor."

"Hiya Tonks," Harry croaked, trying to smile.

"Hiya Harry," Tonks said, taking his right hand in hers. "You look awful. How are you feeling?"

"Right now? Nothing. But I did get an immense headache when they did the light test," he pointed to the left side of his face. "They gave me a painkiller so I could talk to you first. It's going to get ten times worse if they don't sedate me soon."

Tonks wrapped both of her hands around Harry's. "What can we do to help?"

"Pen. Paper. I need to give you some info," he whispered. "They only gave us a few minutes."

Tonks slipped out, took up a quill from the registry counter outside and brought a napkin. Harry took the quill and scribbled instructions.


Madame Pompfrey came in at that time. Harry crumpled the napkin in his hand and held it close to his side before she could see what he had in his hand.

"I'm sorry, but we need to put him under again before the pain kicks in," the healer said. Her eyes were heavily bagged with dark circles. Tonks leant over and gave Harry a sisterly kiss on his good cheek while taking the crumpled napkin from his fingers. Harry knew he definitely had a new source for Patronus casting if needed.

"Get well soon, Harry," she said softly as she pocketed the note and quill.

Jon nodded solemnly towards Harry.

"Bye," Harry said to her. "Glad you came."

"As if I would ever stay away," she grinned.

"And thanks, Jon."

Tonks kept smiling as they both waved goodbye.

Harry's heart warmed at her smile. At least getting almost blinded and crippled got her back talking with him. "Laters," he said as both Pompfrey and Worthington came advancing with a tray full of potions.

Tonks and Jon left the surgery area. They went over to McGonagall who was chatting with Dumbledore.

"How was he?" Dumbledore asked.

"Positive. It appears his medical treatment is going well," Jon shrugged.

"Good. I was present for the initial work on his eye. Not a pretty sight, I am afraid. I must commend Severus for convincing me to bring in Mr. Worthington. There were slight complications."

"What? Complications? What do you mean?" Tonks asked.
"Phoenix tears were present in his blood. Had a bit of heat emanating from the wounds, which did not bode well for the eye restorative, which needed to be at a constant temperature. His expertise was needed at a crucial time. Both of them claimed that the modifications to the procedure were successful and believe that the healing process should go routine from now on. Miss Tonks, you may stay over for the night in the Hufflepuff dorms if you wish. I prefer as it is late that you do not leave the grounds until morning. Jon, Professor McGonagall would escort you both back to your dorms."

"May I use the washroom before we go?" Tonks asked. "I'll be quick."

"Certainly," McGonagall agreed.

Tonks went to the hospital bathrooms and made a duplicate of the napkin tucked away in her outer robe pocket. She cast impervious on both of them, quickly reading the message Harry wrote. She folded Jon's copy tightly in the palm of her hand.

When she returned to the ward both Jon and herself followed McGonagall down to the Hufflepuff den. She offered her hand to Jon as she turned to go in. "Thanks," she said. Jon looked down at her hand for a fraction of a second, bewildered. She opened her eyes in warning, indicating he take the offered handshake. Jon caught on and grabbed her hand, shaking it twice firmly. He pocketed the folded napkin he felt in her palm. "Tomorrow, then."


When Jon reached back into his dorms it was late and most of his housemates were sleeping. Alexandria had curled up on the couch downstairs. She awoke when he came through the portrait.

"Hey Jon. How was he?" she sat up.

"Potioned for pain. But it seems the treatment was a success." He yawned. Alexandria got up and gave him a quick hug.

"Oui, tres bien. I'm happy to hear that he's going to be okay. I'm heading up to bed. Bonsoir, Jon."

She leaned forward on tip toe and kissed him quickly on both cheeks but Jon had unconsciously leaned in for a middle kiss. Alexandria paused, watched his embarrassed expression, and spontaneously gave him a quick peck on the lips. Jon reddened as Alexandria spun around, running up the steps to her room.

Jon shook his head and smiled. He opened up the parchment folded in his hands. He read the note and was completely lost. Myrtle? Penelope? Michael? Lockhart? He was dead. So what did the French have to do with this? Malfoy? Was that Lucius Malfoy? The only name he recognized was Flint, the oldest student in the school. Protect Ginny. That was self explanatory. Rooster again. Dawn. More than one, and Cloud as watchdog. That made some sort of sense.

He would have to talk with Tonks in the morning to figure this out.

In the middle of the night, a sly fox was sniffing around on the corridor towards Myrtle's bathroom. The fox inched forward tentatively, sniffing the ground carefully each step it took. It nimbly avoided tiles enchanted by Harry's Fwooper wand, sniffing out the remnants of magic. When it reached the closest un-charmed tiles to the door the fox whined in frustration. The last six tiles adjacent to the door were completely confounded. The door was closed so he could not even make the jump in his more agile fox form. The fox stood up awkwardly on his hind legs on two adjacent tiles and immediately morphed into Michael Ellewyn-Sayre. Spreading his arms for balance on the narrow tiles, he drew his wand.
"Alohomora!"

"Fucking elf, dumb as batshit," he swore. He took a deep breath and vaulted from a standing position towards the doorway. He made it, but one of his feet grazed the charmed tile. He fell over inside of the bathroom, cursing as his leg began to cramp up. He cast the counter to the jelly legs jinx and felt his leg revert to normal. However when he got to his feet his whole world was spinning.

"Great. Just fucking great," he cursed. He crouched down, and reverted back into the fox. Leaning sideways with an ungainly trot, he slinked under the door into a bathroom stall and curled up. He would have to sleep off the confundus charm before he did something stupid and try to jump back out of the bathroom and become another double cursed lunatic like Lockhart and Penelope.

At least he and Penelope weren't exposed to the cup. That lust potion and the confundus charm had done a number on her though. Hopefully his memory spell earlier would erase any link towards him. He cursed again. Potter would make it out the hospital wing alive. No way he could get back in there again with all the staff on high alert.

All his plans; his house elf, Lockhart, was all for nothing. Lucius better be coughing up more dough when next he talked to him. That man was sinister as well, but he knew how to play that game. He would lay clues to convince Lucius to up the ante. If it worked, Lucius would believe that it was his own idea to pay him more for all his effort. Either he came to that conclusion on his own, or else Draco would simply be his next guinea pig.

Mudbloods deserve to die, but at least he could get paid making it happen. Getting rid of Potter would be icing on the cake.
"Headmaster," Auror Drinkwater said. "Sorry to trouble you so late." It was two in the morning.

"The hour is of little importance. The sooner we get to the bottom of this attack, the better." There was no twinkling of eyes, nor was he in any mood for frivolities. "One moment, please. I wish to summon the heads of house for this meeting." Albus Dumbledore flicked his wand four times and then gestured for the Ministry Officials to come in to the staff room.

"The meeting will be basically inconclusive, I'm afraid. But feel free to summon them." River Drinkwater and his fellow Auror Jon Dawlish stepped into a board room next to the Teacher's lounge. Dempster Wiggledale, the representative for the Research Unit Sub-Human Intelligent Non-Goblin Species (R.U.S.H.I.N.G.S) division of the Regulation of Magical Creature Department followed them in.

Mr. Wiggledale pulled along a thick chain dragging along the suspect house elf who was cuffed and muzzled. The manacles connected the neck, wrists and ankles with chains designed more for a human three times his height. The elf's head stared at the ground, ears drooping, tiny fists holding up the overlong chains' slack close to his chest as if his life depended on it not dragging on the ground.

The three Ministry employees took seats at the long rectangular table. Albus Dumbledore flicked his wand. A teapot and clean cups came floating towards the table. He smelled the pot and realized that it contained stale tea.

"While we wait for my fellow teachers, I will see to this," Dumbledore said and stepped into the kitchenette next to the staff room to make a fresh pot.

By the time Snape, McGonagall, Flitwick and Sprout came into the board room, Albus Dumbledore was already seated and everyone had a cup of tea before them.

"Apologies for the late hour, but I believe we all would like to hear what the preliminary investigative results were," Dumbledore greeted his staff. The four heads of house murmured agreement and took their seats, except Snape, who watched the elf with an intensity reserved for errant Slytherins who dared overstep their bounds.

"Severus, please sit," Dumbledore said calmly. Snape pulled out his chair and sat, eyeing the elf handler next.

"Why is the creature chained like this?" he asked with an air of suspicion.

"Vampire's manacles. Stops magical disappearing or shape shifting," Wiggledale pulled the chain for
emphasis, and the elf shuffled closer, holding his chains close, similarly to how a baby holds its favourite blanket for comfort.

"The headmaster wanted us to meet as soon as our preliminary report was finished," Dawlish said. "Our main talking points will revolve around this-" he took out a wand wrapped in parchment. "And this," he placed a written scroll and a vial of an unidentified potion on the table. He opened the scroll of notes.

"Um... In summary: the scenario presents itself as a premeditated chain of curses, poisons, hexes and mind control. And ended in one heck of a battle. The elf here," he pointed. "Is the middle man. Mr. Lockhart was his victim. Penelope Clearwater was also an intended target of this elf, or possibly directly hexed by the mastermind. She has been coerced using an amorous potion, and then confounded, and lastly suffered under a memory jinx. The potion was found in Lockhart's quarters. We have countered the poison, but the combination of the mind control being compounded by the Confundus charm is an issue. Right now, she may need weeks to recover properly from that particular combination of spells. She needs rest, and proper medical care. Her status is considered stable and her treatment can be facilitated here at the school. No need for St Mungo's until the healer here can evaluate and escalate if necessary."

Dawlish took a sip of his tea, frowning at the report parchment.

"Lockhart's natural corpse would have connected a lot of missing pieces together. Unfortunately, Harry Potter and Jon Black decided to take matters into their own hands. And from our light questioning of a few of his classmates, something Potter did seem to trip the whole situation."

"Something Potter did?" Snape snapped.

"From all accounts, Lockhart and this creature here were performing a show, a break-the ice technique to possibly give a fun first impression. Lockhart was definitely not himself, however. Neither was this fellow. The elf was controlling him, to a point. The elf was also under instructions."

"From who?"

"That, we failed so far to find out," Wiggledale offered. "Their magic binds them from breaking their owner's secrets. He is not registered in the family elf records either."

"What has he said?" Dumbledore pressed. Yet another elf somehow caught up in dark magic. Was this a coincidence?

"Nothing. The tongue has been removed. And he cannot be coerced to use other forms of communication. A well thought out plan to protect the true culprits."

The staff all looked perplexed at the elf, who resembled something more like a pitiful bat without wings. Dawlish cleared his throat.

"But various dark modifiers were inflicted on Lockhart before these two came before the students, some we believe were cast a while ago. Most likely he was probably forced or under the Imperius to ingest a personality modifying potion, but the petrifying curse leaves that aspect inconclusive. Which makes this much harder to pinpoint exactly what happened to him. Something about Potter's presence caused Lockhart to change. Some students noticed his eyes turning a pinkish hue before those two boys decided to do something."

Snape stiffened. Dumbledore noticed Snape's reaction, but did not take his eyes off of the Auror. Dawlish stood up and approached the wall.
"We traced the spells back on this wand," Dawlish tapped his wand on his report scroll and with a flourishes threw it up into the air towards the wall. The scroll flattened, enlarged, and stuck on to the wall. On it was a report on the left half and a diagram of a clock on the right half.

"One week ago," he commanded, and the date appeared above the clock. He tapped the scroll again. "I am creating a time lapse of the last few days of Lockhart's life," he explained to his audience. He tapped the scroll clock. "Six second hour speed." The clock's three arms spun quickly, and pings of light glowed on the second hand every time a spell was cast. A Conjured Spell List appeared underneath the clock in sync with the glowing light.

"The regular stuff, if you consider all these grooming and styling charms ‘regular’ for a male. Also there is a pattern of daily household routines at particular times until this day, Thursday of last week." He pointed with his wand at the list which showed a repetition of basic spells a wizard might use during the course of a week. "Then, nothing." The clock kept spinning but no blips of glowing light came forth. "Nothing until... Sunday morning, where a normal unpack spell and some other regular mundane stuff associated with him moving into his quarters. A peculiar and noticeable gap. Sunday's spells were ended at five fifteen by a weak attempt at a rubber shield spell and a hastily attempted Patronus message, which probably did not reach its intended target. Did anyone here get a distress call from Lockhart before the opening feast?"

The school staff shook their head murmuring negatives. "The Hogwarts Express' arrival at Hogsmeade is usually at three thirty. Students usually arrive at the castle an hour or hour and a half after," Flitwick stated.

"Yup. We believe that a participant might have been on that train. We suspect whoever was behind this, captured Lockhart previously, most likely Thursday evening; and did whatever they needed to do to him. Probably made him ingest a Forget-Me-Please memory potion to lock away whatever curses they put on him."

"That may be Jack In the Box," Snape hissed. "A potion used to mask hexes and curses to allow a short period of normalcy. Effective for moving cursed wizards in public without drawing suspicion. Only known by select potions alchemists, and nigh impossible to brew." Auror Dawlish nodded.

"Drinkwater. Make a note of that. Very possible lead. It narrows down our search. Never heard of it before, but you may be 'in the know' more than us," Dawlish said. "Auror Drinkwater, the Spell globe, thanks." Drinkwater opened a small chest and passed him a small clear ball with two holes in it. "So. Here is where it gets serious. Monday, one p.m. If you didn't know this little fellah here," he tossed up the glass sphere; "It's a Spell globe. It can replay images of spells cast by a wand. Only images, so do not be alarmed. The spells are not active."

Auror Dawlish pushed the tip of Lockhart's wand into the spell globe's hole. A light began to swirl in mist within the sphere. A smoky yellow light emanated away from the wand, resembling a muggle cinema projector beam.

A sequence of magic began. Auror Dawlish pointed his wand at the list of magic numbered down the scroll display on the wall. He started from the top.

"Ok first. Concealment. The Disillusionment charm. Cloud dust charm. Smoke Bang hex." Auror Dawlish explained as the spells rippled forth, pulling down his wand along the scroll.

"As you can see, this is what happened in the classroom. The fight really begins when Lockhart uses a highly skillful non verbal-deflection of a Stunning Charm... then an incredible sequence happened. Watch!"
A blistering light show of magic flowed out of the wand. "Blazing Curse, Sticking Charm, Cushioning Charm, Cutting, Obliteration, and Banishing. Bombarda multiple times, Confingo the same, Shield Counter Shrinking hex, Cutting ten times, Combustion, Ignition, Disembowelment, Bone Shattering, Concussion, Inciendo, Full body bind, Ripping, Crushing, Surgical Amputation, Impedimenta, Flame spear, Icicle curse, Scorpion Curse, Propulsion Charms. You name it. The spell globe recording enchantment has listed all seventy five lethal spells within the fight which lasted less than thirty seconds. Finally, a pretty strong Protego. Then nothing. He was taken out."

The staff were silent, watching the eerie light show splash against the wall. Dumbledore's eyes were scrutinizing the list of magic coming down the enlarged scroll.

"Harry could not have been the one responsible for blocking all that," McGonagall whispered. "I doubt even any seventh year could."

"Indeed," Snape said softly. "This defense was all Mr. Black."

"We deduced that. However, we cannot, under Ministry Law, confiscate his wand and do this same procedure to him. This definitely was self defense under lethal attack, and he is not to be pressured into an interrogation. What we do know is that whatever petrifying spell he used, it's pretty damn strong."

"What would you like us to do for you concerning Jon, Auror Dawlish?" McGonagall asked politely.

"Watch over him. You've got a transfer student who knows how to block all of these spells. Usually, in our experience, that means that they might have knowledge and expertise in using them. Or, he has one heck of a shield charm. One of our main conclusions why we suspect Lockhart was under some sort of dark magic control was the extreme change of behaviour from Sunday to the point of combat. Also, not one Unforgivable was cast, which needs a full combination of mind, heart, and magic to work." Dawlish flicked his wand at both the scroll and the Spell globe. The presentation was over. "Unfortunately that's all we have for you, at the moment. Mr. Wiggledale? Anything you want to add?"

"This elf is our only real clue to who was behind this. We are locking him up in our dungeon until we figure out a way to get the information from him," Wiggledale confirmed.

"I will be staying on, Headmaster Dumbledore," Auror Drinkwater said. "Auror Dawlish would try to crack it from his end with the rest of the department. We have agreed that I will remain and be his eyes and ears." The three Ministry officials stood up.

"Very well," Dumbledore agreed, also standing. "Thank you for your report. The floo network will be open in my office." The staff and Aurors all walked out, the heads of house diverting along the way to return to their quarters. Dumbledore escorted the Aurors to his Office and Dawlish and Wiggledale left through the fireplace.

Rivers Drinkwater and Albus Dumbledore stood staring at the fireplace, both men contemplating the not-so-ideal situation the school was in. The light soot from the fireplace was falling slowly unto the thick rug.

"If that will be all, Headmaster," Drinkwater turned to leave.

"One moment," Dumbledore hesitated, thinking. "I do have a favour to ask. I hope that you may be of some particular help to us, in a non-Ministry capacity?"
"Oh? What did you have in mind?"

"While we search for a replacement for our teaching post, would you terribly mind organizing a Dueling tournament to help train some of our students to defend themselves in a real life situation... and also to take their minds off of this horrible tragedy? A welcome and useful distraction would raise the spirits of the school, while imparting useful knowledge which may help keep them safe."

Drinkwater thought for a moment, touching his chin as they walked.

"That's a good way for me to get to know the students here. Once I don't have to mark papers and issue detentions, I don't see why not. I wish I had something like this when I was here."

"Excellent. We may speak more of it tomorrow, and make our plans a reality. For now, let me escort you to your quarters."

"Sounds like a great idea," Drinkwater smiled, rubbing his short beard. "Mighty fine idea, in fact."

"You would be doing the children a great service. I would be in your debt," Dumbledore acknowledged with a slight bow as they walked through the dark hallways of Hogwarts.

Michael Ellewyn-Sare sniffed the reverse side of the secret passageway in the Ravenclaw Tower library at four o clock in the morning. He found nothing in that bathroom. No revealing spell had any effect. The only reference he knew about the Secret Chamber of Hogwarts was a vague clue. Moaning Myrtle was killed a long time ago, in a bathroom. Other than getting chummy with the ghost and blatantly asking her, he had to figure this out himself. The ghosts were loyal to Dumbledore.

Someone had definitely tried to prevent anyone from entering though. That Confundus trap was well played, growing in intensity the closer to the door the person reached. Penelope paid that steep price already. The lust potion forced her to do his bidding with an indomitable determination but all of those steps on the Confundus Charm made her turn back. By that time it was too late. She was speaking in tongues for an hour and then finally passed out around noon.

Whoever orchestrated that defense knew the bathroom was special. That meant he was getting very close.

He just needed to crack the secret.

Patience, a small voice told him inside. Haste will not make a difference here. Intellect and patience is the key.

His fox nose smelled no one was around, so he pushed through and reverted into his normal body. He snuck upstairs into his bedroom and changed his robes into his pajamas. He would ponder about this mystery a few more days then try again.

Lucius did say that it won't be easy. Anything worth forty thousand galleons couldn't be easy.

I can't believe I am doing this.

Tonks was currently controlling a tempered Lumos spell as she tiptoed through the massive but disgustingly smelly chicken coup.

A fucking chicken thief. Oh well. It could be worse. Someone could actually catch her doing this.
daring and kick-ass heist.

"Nymphadora. Listen to me. You hunted shitty nogtails and drained their stinking piss in a farm smelling of death and even more shit. This is nothing. Don't cry. Just do it," she hissed to herself in the dark, red-bulb illuminated building. She had a large, empty flour bag strung over her shoulder, ready to full up with feathered presents; a psychotic female version of Santa Claus. Or maybe with the reddish glow on her Blood red robes she could be Satan reaping these poor, innocent, chicken souls for everlasting torment?

She stepped in something that didn't feel like firm ground, and was quite squishy.

_Fucking hell._

Tonks convinced herself that she was doing it for Hagrid, Hogwarts School, and all the kids in it. She couldn't find any relation between roosters and a Basilisk that Wednesday morning at Hogwarts library, but Harry insisted on it in his note. It was so important that in the few precious minutes of consciousness he could spare, he decided to use it to scribe that note and underline those clues. Unfortunately, as of this time, early Thursday morning he was still out cold and the Hospital ward did not allow any more visitors the next day. If he could have only _told_ her why they needed the roosters this might not have left such a gaping hole in her pride and maybe, just maybe, repair her shattered sense of 'wizard-relations-with-muggles' sense of morality.

She bit her lip as she tiptoed through substances she dared not shine her light on. There were dozens of birds sleeping here. Would the muggles raise a regional alarm if she took a few hens here, a few roosters there? Would the MLE hunt her down for Muggle-baiting?

Her target before she snuck in was four roosters, ten hens. She was going to follow through, she wasn't going to back down, damn it to hell.

At least no one actually _saw_ her doing this. Tonks also had a great Nancy story to tell Hagrid when she offered to help him out with his coup. He'd be delighted that a past student would think of helping him out in such a fashion. Hopefully he would not press too hard and actually investigate if she 'had a distant relative on her father's side that reared chickens'.

Hopefully. She would absolutely _die_ if Dumbledore somehow found out she was a Diabolical Cock Snatcher.

_The things I do for those two..._

She shone the light in a roost full of sleeping birds and got to work with a toned- down stunning charm.

_________

Harry opened his right eye slowly. His brain felt foggy and his vision took a while to focus. Madame Pomfrey hovered over him, putting away a vial of potion.

"Harry, wake up dear," Pomfrey encouraged. "How are you feeling?"

"Drugged?"

"Expected. Take your time. I'll help you if you need to use the washroom."

The sun was bright and shining through the windows.

"What day is it?" Harry finally got his bearings.
Thursday. The sedative lasts close to forty eight hours, to help with the discomfort. How does your eye feel?

"Eye feels...scratchy. Confined. It's throbbing a bit." Harry gingerly touched the bandage covering the left half of his face. There was no spike of pain, only a sensitivity that was a bit more acute than he was accustomed to.

"Easy there. The eye is out of danger and is fully repaired, however it will take some time to heal and feel 'normal'. How is your vision in your right eye?"

"Where are my glasses?" Harry asked, patting the side table.

"You shouldn't need them," Pomfrey smiled. "Tell me if you can read the poster on the other side." She drew open the curtain and pointed to the far wall. There was a poster showing basic wand safety and steps to calming a spelled patient with particular symptoms.

"That's... nice.." Harry stuttered, momentarily pleased that he can see so well. "Yeah, I can read it."

"Excellent! Don't you fret, young man. Soon, everything will be ok," she smiled confidently.

Suddenly, a wave of self pity came over him. He almost died Monday. The fact that he could only look through his right eye cemented that in his brain. He looked down at his left arm. It was bandaged down to the wrist and in a sling. He simply stared at his fingers, which were slightly swollen and crusty looking. Right now, he felt very vulnerable. "How... is it?" he indicated his bandaged left arm with his right.

"Your arm? It has been fixed, and it should heal fully within another week. But for now, you must not use it and leave it in the sling. The healing process works better when the body accepts the magical procedure and finishes the strengthening stage naturally. You need to eat something. Are you sure you are ok, Harry?" Pomfrey asked again.

Harry didn't know how to answer that. He tried to wiggle his fingers and memories of the few seconds in the Defense classroom flashed behind his eyes. He squeezed his eye shut when the red hot spikes sunk into his face.

Phantom pain ran through his face and arm. He shuddered, keeping his eye shut tight, trying to push it away.

"What's wrong, are you in pain?" she enquired.

Harry shook his head, but did not answer or look at her. He just took deep breaths, trying to push aside the anxiety and calm his racing heart.

Complacent and cocky, Harry. You underestimated Lockhart. Just because you lived to seventeen before, doesn't mean you would make it that far again. Think! You've changed things! Everything is not the same as it was!

"I'm ok. Just a bad feeling. Memories of... this," he indicated the left side of his face. His right eye snapped open, focusing on Pomfrey's face. He scowled, his voice getting stronger. "It is nothing. I'm fine."

"You are sure, Mr. Potter?" she asked, her posture returning to the strict no-nonsense nurse mode.

"Yeah, I need to use the bathroom. And something to eat sounds good." Harry swung his legs over and put his bare feet on the ground.
"Very well. When you stand up, I need you to turn around slowly on the spot."

Harry frowned at the strange instruction. "Huh? Why?"

"It is to make sure your balance and motor skills were not affected." She drew her wand. Harry began to turn, then everything went haywire and he had no choice but to stumble back into bed. She ran a diagnostic spell and saw the basic health indicator charm flicker from green to yellow to red then back to green.

"Interesting."

"What's 'interesting'? " Harry muttered, a bit annoyed he was feeling so dizzy. He closed his eyes as he sat down. His head was spinning.

"You are showing undulating signs of poisoning, but... You aren't poisoned." Madame Pomfrey frowned. "Stick out your finger." Harry did and she tapped it gently with her wand. Harry felt a tiny pin-prick and a pearl of blood dangled from her wand. She deftly dropped it into a nearby test tube.

"One moment. Don't try to get up yet." She stepped to the cupboards and pulled out a few tiny vials.

"The health diagnostic spell shows what I expect to see of someone who was bitten by a snake. However," she dipped a drop of venom in the test tube with his blood. "It seems you are immune to poisons. Or venom on a whole."

"That's good, right?"

"Technically... yes. We medics always like to know why, though," she looked at him. "We also found phoenix tears in your blood. The most potent restorative there is. That could be it."

The Basilisk venom and the phoenix tears are in constant battle within me, it appears.

"So... Venom won't work on me. But... is my blood poisonous, or something?" Harry deflected.

"Heavens," she said, surprised. "I hope not. I must have gotten some on me during the past few days. However, I like your rationale... that is a good question though. Let me check. Finger again." She repeated the process and placed the drop of blood on a petri- dish. She then took out a bezoar and crushed it flat with a silver knife. Copious amounts of juice squeezed out. She scooped up the pulp and mixed it in the Petri dish with his blood.

The juicy pulp coated the blood but did not mix. Madame Pomfrey frowned.

"Your blood seems to have the same neutralizing and anti-venom properties of a bezoar. One more time. I am going to test your blood on a sample of poisoned blood." Madame Pomfrey drew a drop of her own blood and placed it in a clean petri dish. She took a vial of Cobra venom and used a dropper to place two drops on in the dish. The venom had an immediate and drastic effect on the sample. The blood thickened and turned into a dark, jelly substance.

"Finger again," she commanded. Harry offered his slightly sore finger. She took a drop using her wand and put it on her poisoned blood. Before their very eyes the venom was nullified and her blood turned back to its natural red colour and texture.

"I will have to look into this. But some other time. For now, take this. This is to help with your balance. Your visual and vestibular systems might have been affected during the surgery and may be throwing you off. It should ease up within the day."
She offered Harry a capsule with a glowing pink substance inside. Then she offered him a glass of water. After a minute, Harry felt the world become stable again.

"Let me help you over to the bathroom," she offered.

Harry gratefully accepted. He stumbled and shuffled his way slowly with her aid to the bathroom doors and further inside right up to the stall. He opened the door, and using his good hand to keep balance, was able to close it behind him with a kick. He felt like an invalid. Even though deep inside he knew he was lucky to even be alive, he was still embarrassed he needed so much help to reach the bathroom.

"I'll be outside. Let me know if you need help to make it back to the door." She left him and turned to leave.

"I'll be fine," Harry replied, trying to put confidence in his voice. When he was finished, he ambled slowly towards the mirror above the sink. He looked a mess with all those bandages and his hair sticking out from the top of his heavily wrapped face. For some reason he was reminded of the bandaged villain in the cartoon Dudley used to watch, *Samurai X*. He washed his hands and left the bathroom, taking careful, deliberate steps not to fall over again.

Madame Pomfrey was bustling about, changing sheets with efficient skill and cleaning up the laboratory desk area. She quickly cleared the pharmacy counter and discarded the test samples. She watched him carefully as he made his way back to his bed, unaided.

"A cane may be necessary. You will need to stay at least one more day, it seems," Madame Pomfrey said. "Your motor skills definitely aren't what they used to be. I'll release you tomorrow afternoon instead once I see improvement."

Harry's first response was to protest and reassure her that he was fine, even though he realized that was his inner rebel speaking. He knew damn well he was not ready to leave yet.

"Okay, no problem," Harry sighed. He looked around and realized that he was not the only one here in the ward.

"Who is that over there?" he pointed to the girl sleeping with an eye mask on. Her wrists and ankles were restrained and tied to the bed. Her hair was covering most of her face.

"Penelope Clearwater, a sixth year Ravenclaw. Confounded. Poisoned. And a memory jinx," she asked. "She has been doing much better, I must say. We are hoping it wears off soon. Normal counters are not working, but progress has been positive and steady."

Crap. She must have gotten past his aversion and Notice-me-not charms by Myrtle's bathroom. She probably also set foot on the more severe Confundus jinxed-tiles. He'll need Jon to bring him his Fwooper tail wand to release her from its proprietary Confundus hex.

Then the *Crow's Vambrace* would need to get to fucking work on that snake Ellewyn-Sare.

"Damn. Sorry to hear that," he said with genuine sincerity. He will *kill* that fucker when he got a chance.

"No, no, never you mind that. That's what I am here for. You concentrate and focus on getting better. It wasn't your fault."

Harry felt even more awful now. He made a conscious effort to take her advice and concentrate on himself, so that he could help Penelope get better and then corner Michael with a proper dose of
Veritaserum. Hopefully, with an Auror or two as witnesses. Speaking of cornering vermin, he had to devise a way to incriminate Peter and vindicate Sirius.

Once again he had to internally scold himself for being reckless, hasty, and not taking things one step at a time. He couldn't do all of that and deal with the chamber of secrets when at present moment he could barely walk. He sighed.

"What about the bandages? When would they come off?"

"Your facial bandage can come off tonight. The eye bandage will stay on until Monday evening. That definitely needs one week of no use to heal properly. The arm sling, that might be two to three weeks. You will need to come every night for checkups when you leave, and for re-dressing. Maybe pain killer, depending on if you move your arm too soon. I must stress, once again, do not use it. The flesh is still knitting and needs proper time and care to heal."

"Right." Harry's stomach grumbled something fierce. "You were talking earlier about food?"

"Yes. I'll have the elves bring something up. Come, have a seat at the eating area, Mr. Potter."

Harry shuffled across, and struggled to maintain balance to sit down. When he finally settled himself, another sudden bout of depression crashed like a wave over him. He sighed. Being injured and defeated once again in the hospital wing sucked.

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RD

I just got back from visiting Harry. He helped your best friend's sister. Tomorrow both of them should be given the all clear to head back to their dorms. As it is the weekend, he asked for me to invite you again to the castle so we could talk about things. Walk with your Jet Black gloves and broom.

Mr. B.

Jon was sitting in the common room writing a letter to Tonks. It was eight o'clock, an hour and a half after dinner on the last day of classes that Friday evening. Surprisingly, a lot of students had made the trek with him. He recalled the events of the evening.

First, when he told Alexandria of his intention, she had offered to join him. He agreed and when they both stood up, Mistress Granger was quick enough to deduce where they were going and asked if Ron and herself could accompany them. Ginny shyly asked as well. Neville caught on when they left as a group. Katie called out from lower down the table and she immediately left her friends. Alicia Spinnet rose as well, curious about the procession her best friend was joining. Angelina saw her fellow chasers leaving and nudged Oliver to investigate. Oliver just had to make eye contact with the twins and those two knew what was up, and answered the summons.

Daphne came across to Neville as the group left the hall. She asked him a soft question and eventually the entire procession made a solemn journey through the halls, many other students whispering and giving them long, strange looks as they made their way.

Most of the students were in awe of Jon already. Word of the fight in the defense class had spread since classes resumed Wednesday afternoon. Basically, everyone knew Jon took out the defense professor who went barmy and in a murderous rage, sending Harry Potter severely injured to the hospital wing. Jon had acted as if he were merely taking out the trash instead of killing a grown wizard and saving the Boy Who Lived.
The dozen students swelled again, and was taking the shape of a small crowd when Hannah Abbot, Lee Jordan and Shea Carrow from Slytherin joined them a couple floors above. The only house not represented was Ravenclaw.

Hermione was silently counting the number of people about them when she whispered something to Jon.

"You think Ms Pomfrey would allow us all?" she asked.

"Is there a policy which prevents this?" Jon countered, not breaking stride.

"Not that I know of..." she said lamely.

"Then it is allowed. Allies and symbolism are important. The school, from this simple display of camaraderie, knows that we stand with him," Jon stated. The party eventually reached the doors. He turned to them and gave them a small head bow. "Thank you everyone. You honor him with your presence." He opened the door and held it open for everyone to file in.

Harry was seated at the eating table, reading an issue of witch weekly. When the first few students poured in, he had no chance to hide away the magazine. He smiled at Ron and Hermione then his smile grew into mute shock as the others kept pouring in. By the time Madame Pomfrey came to investigate, the walkways were crowded with well wishers. Since he wasn't bed-ridden and in no need of isolation, she simply explained the rules of the infirmary and not to cause any trouble. Harry greeted everyone and immediately asked Jon for his Fwooper wand that he had previously taken from his boots when they initially brought him in.

After about ten minutes of small talk, Harry shakily got up and asked the crowd to stay here for a minute while he went to check Penelope. Harry, Jon, Hermione and Katie went with him. Harry cast the special reversal of the fwooper-class Confundus charm on Penelope using his matching wand.

The result was immediate. Penelope stopped fighting against her restraints, and her head stopped twitching as if she were possessed. Her breathing became slow and even. Hermione put her hand to her mouth and stared at Harry with astonishment.

"Hey," Harry said after a couple minutes when her face relaxed. Penelope's eyes fluttered open.

"You were hexed."

"I was?" she responded. She frowned at Harry's bandaged appearance. "Potter? What in the bloody hell happened to you?" she demanded. "Why am I- oh!" she looked down at the restraints on her wrists and ankles. She pulled at them. "Fuck. It was this bad? Asylum level restraints! Let me guess, my face is covered in scratches, huh?"

"Yeah. Absolutely. You look like you got makeup done by a werewolf or, probably a hippogryph." Her face was pale, but unblemished. Harry dipped his face lower to scrutinize her cheek and pointed. "Ooh. I could play tic-tac-toe on those N.E.W.T. level right-angle scars."

"Funny," Penelope retorted. Hermione smacked his arm. Harry grinned as he moved her hair from her face tenderly without even realizing what he was doing. Penelope didn't even flinch, just blew away a strand that was by her lip. He had to keep reminding himself that a normal twelve year old boy wouldn't just do these things. "What happened to you though?"

"The hippogryph and werewolf practiced on me first," Harry sighed. "I must say they did a much finer job with you, though. The training helped."

"We'd make a good couple, then," Penelope retorted, her scowl turning into a crooked smile. "But
seriously?"

"Someone cursed Lockhart. Mind control. We got in a spot of trouble with him."

"I don't see him around," Penelope craned her neck to look at the other beds.

"He's six feet under. Aurors took him a few days ago." Harry said simply.

"Fuck!" she breathed.

"Yeah. Scary." Harry shook his head but Penelope got the feeling that Harry and Jon weren't even phased one iota that a professor was dead.

"You going to get me out, or what?"

"I'll call the healer," Hermione offered.

"Wait, Hermione," Harry said, his tone lowering and getting serious once again. "Penelope, do you remember anything?"

"The last thing I do remember is having dinner. With Michael. Where is he, by the way?"

"Ellewyn-Sare?" Harry prodded. "I don't know." But he might be officially 'Missing' when he was through with him.

"Yeah. Then... waking up here. What day is it?"

"Friday. After dinner."

"A whole week! I must look horrible!" she pulled at the restraints. "Ah! Can you please get this off?"

Harry nodded to Hermione. She walked off to fetch Pompfrey.

"Drink a lot of Camomile tea." He eyed the clothes hamper at the side of her bed stuffed with her scrunched up school robes. They were wrapped up in a clear plastic bag with official Auror labels on it. He levitated it further away from her. "And throw away those robes you wore Sunday. Don't get close to it without a proper stasis charm. In fact, I'll ask Jon here to do it for you," Harry strongly suggested. "Jon, use inciendo on them in a level three cauldron, alright?"

"It will be done, Harry of house Hollow."

Katie put together what he was saying and grabbed Harry's good arm, turning him to face her. She stared hard at him. "She got potioned, like me?" she hissed.

"I believe so," he whispered back.

"Jon?" Penelope asked, staring at the silent dark haired boy. "As in, Lord Black?"

"Just 'Jon' is fine, Mistress Penelope," Jon smiled.

"Mistress? Wha... ?"

"Don't mind him. He's weird like that," Katie explained.

"Oh. Ok. My sister told me about you two."

"Oh?" Jon asked. "Sarah? And what did she say?"
"Hm. You guys are some 'powerful motherfuckers' was the direct quote, if I recall. I laughed at her. I said Harry Potter could fly pretty good, considering he's only a firstie, but that's about it. She said, 'Oh, you got that right.' When I asked what she meant about that, she just shrugged but didn't say a thing. So... what did she really mean?"

The two boys looked at each other and shrugged. "Ah, that story might be best told... later." Jon folded his arms, a definite smirk on his face.

Harry grinned. "Let's just say your sister knows what she is talking about. But let's keep that between us, yeah?"

The Ravenclaw girl said nothing, but Harry knew that they loved to analyze hundred of meanings from vague responses. She just looked at both of them for a few moments. Harry could see the gears turning and the pieces coming together on the new puzzle in front of her.

"When you barged in, on the train... I really thought you were going to lose it when you saw us snogging. You said something about 'your' compartment, you were so certain of it." She smiled in a way that insinuated that some sort of jealously was involved. She looked between them and saw Pompfrey walking down the aisle. "She's coming."

"We'll talk later. Katie, let's go. Jon, handle the robes, mate. Anyone you wanna call to fetch you some fresh clothes?"

"Cho is my understudy. Cho Chang. I trust her more than my fellow sixth years right now," she frowned. "I'm not a typical 'Claw to be perpetually scared or paranoid, but I've just lost a bloody week of memories. Can you bring me some parchment and quills without Pompfrey knowing?"

Penelope asked Katie softly so the approaching healer could not hear her.

"Sure," Katie replied. "I pop back in a little later."

"See ya," Harry nodded. He and Katie shifted and allowed Pompfrey to come check on Penelope. As they walked, Katie had to slow down her stride considerably to let Harry keep up.

"You're really banged up," Katie noted. "Ah... that was smart. Great opener, stupid."

"Tis just a scratch," Harry smirked, looking down at his feet as he concentrated on each step. Katie groaned in exasperation.

"A scratch. You look like a fifties movie horror patient," she teased. "Walk like Frankenstein too." Her words were meant to be humorous, but Harry sensed that Katie was genuinely worried about him.

"I do, don't I?" Harry laughed. "Well, the bandages on my face are coming off in the morning. A new face. And a few new body parts. Harry Potter 2.0; new and improved."

Katie stopped them before they joined the crowd. "You're impossible. I'm really glad you're going to be ok though." She ruffled the clump of hair poking out the top of his head, and ran her hand down to the back of his neck, touching the curls there. Harry felt a tingle when she touched the sensitive area of his nape. She patted him twice on his good right shoulder and pulled him in for a light hug. "Your friends are waiting." She smiled once again and walked off to join the others.

Harry watched her figuratively run away from him like if he was contagious. She said her goodbyes to the others without breaking stride and was out of the main doors seconds later.

He shook his head and shuffled along, careful not to lose his balance and collapse in a heap in front
Harry’s glorious return to his dorm Saturday before lunch was mundane and such a non-event that Harry felt a bit as if he were in the Twilight Zone. All of his other adventures before usually ended in either severe ostracism or on the other end of the scale, Hero worship. When McGonagall dropped him off inside the portrait a few first years simply avoided him, and a couple seventh years watched him slowly walk across the common room and up the stairs but said nothing. The majority of students were outside enjoying the last few sunny days of summer watching Quidditch tryouts.

Hedwig had delivered a letter on his bed.

RH

I've convinced Hagrid to allow me to help him with his recent loss. If you are able, both of you meet me at Hagrid's around five. I don't know if Prof. Dumbledore wants me around in the school proper. I will have to mail him officially for permission next time since this time I'm doing Hagrid a favour. I've secured the place Jon recommended for fifty galleons rental a month on a six month lease. When your first weekend off comes around you two could decide if it is worth purchasing outright or agreeing to a longer contract.

RD

Harry read the letter and felt a weird sensation in his stomach. Tonks visiting him when he was gravely injured and Tonks dealing with him now that he was on back on his feet again were two different situations. Would she be back to her charming, bossy self or would she be all weird and stuff knowing that he was older?

It would be good to see her though. He wondered if he could even walk down that far. His thoughts about her swirled in his head. He took a deep breath as he tried to focus solely on the business at hand.

He did not know what plans Malfoy and Michael had now that Lockhart and Penelope were no longer under their control. He was skeptical that a mere rooster could slay a basilisk over a thousand years old. In his previous journey, he came to the realization that even well respected and learned men like Albus Dumbledore did not know everything when it came to dark magic, due to the innate nature of that branch of spells being shrouded in suspicion, and conjecture. And what proof was there that a rooster can actually killed them? What some dead writer said in a book? Did he kill one in his search for material?

Harry scoffed. A phoenix, the Sword of Gryffindor, and guts. Pure fucking guts. That is what kills a monstrous fifty foot long snake who can kill you simply by looking at you. With magical resistant skin. Terrifying speed and venom. Big enough to swallow a twelve year old, whole. Even Hagrid could be knocked back as a snack to those monstrous jaws.

Harry also knew that he should cover all angles and better to be safe than sorry. Someone killed those chickens, so they must also believe that the basilisk was real, and alive and well, and weak against the crow of a rooster. However, now that Lockhart's possession was stopped before Voldemort truly had complete control, the perpetrators were stuck until they realized parselmouth was necessary to control the beast.

It would be suicide to attempt to attack it head on in his condition anyway. Roosters it is then.

Harry walked across to the mirror. His facial bandage was off and his face looked normal. If he
pressed really hard he could see faint scar tissue but considering that his face was ripped open Monday, it was a miracle it looked as perfect as it did. The slanting eye bandage wrapped around his forehead and eye made him look heroic and warrior-esque, something out of a fantasy book. It was wasted on his light frame and perfectly smooth face, devoid of a lick of beard with only a faint, pathetic mustache coming in.

Harry took out a set of Hogwarts outer cloak and draped it over the infirmary donated white long sleeve shirt and dark school slacks. The fresh bandage slanting across his eye was distracting. Anyone he talked to would be staring at it. He dug into his trunk and took out his transfiguration books.

Within short time, he found a clothes modification spell. He altered his hood so that the left side of his cowl covered the majority of his left eye. When he put the cloak back on, he stood in front of the mirror. The hood now had more material favoring the left half, casting shadows over his face. The visual effect was sinister, like what a dark wizard should look like, but it effectively covered his left eye and the unsightly bandage.

Which was the point. Obviously. It had nothing to do like looking like a dark wizard. No. Not one bit.

Harry grinned at his new look. He found it absolutely brilliant.

In the meantime, he better get some beauty sleep in his own bed and hope by the time he got up he would be able to make the trek down the slope without breaking a leg.

Later that afternoon Jon and Harry met up with Tonks at the back of Hagrid's hut where the adjoining chicken coup was constructed.

"What are you doing up there? Don't you know its rude to fly over the gate of a wizard's property?" Tonks admonished them, hands on her hips. "Too lazy to walk, huh?"

"Hiya Tonks," Harry said, relieved that Tonks was back to her bossy self and not all awkward about their situation. As yet. "Sorry Hagrid, you know usually I would walk down."

"Harry! Yer know me better than that! It's fine, once you visit me now and then, however you want to do it is not a problem with me. Nice brooms by the way," Hagrid shouted up at them. Jon greeted Tonks and brought his Quicksilver broom down.

"Milady. Harry is having difficulties with his balance," he said quietly next to her. "I see you were successful," he eyed the chickens doing their chicken behavior in the yard and settling in to the nest boxes. Harry followed him down, holding on to dear life as he struggled to balance the broom steady low over the ground. Tonks came over and grabbed the front of the broom.

"Thanks," Harry said, embarrassed. He lifted his leg over to dismount and promptly ended up in a heap on his good right side. It was still enough to send pain running up his injured side. "Fucking motherfucker shit fuck!" he swore under his breath. He struggled to get up only using his right arm. Jon eventually helped him up.

Tonks' heart went out to him. But then she remembered he sent her on mission into a shit house full of chickens. She pushed those affectionate feelings away.

Hagrid chuckled. "Never seen that before, lad. You alright? Thought it was your arm that was hurt?"

"Still is," Harry whined. Now it was hurting even more. "But I haven't recovered totally. Sometimes
"I get vertigo."

"Vertigo?" Hagrid bellowed. "You foolish lad, what in the blazes are you doing on a broom if you got vertigo? You wanna break your neck? I'va mind to mail Pomfrey and march you back up to the hospital righ' this minute!"

"It's ok, for now. She gave me tablets and its under control," Harry responded calmly. He pointed at the chickens. "You got them settled in then?" he inquired, expertly diverting Hagrid's attention.

"Yeah. And I fixed all the fencing," Hagrid grumbled. He still watched Harry crossly. "It was a fox that came in and did it. Sprout found that out using a tracking reveal spell, bloody mongrel."

"A fox?" Harry asked. "Where is Cloud? Tonks tell him to protect these chickens. Hagrid you ok with that?"

"That's actually a great idea. Chickens don't like charmed or spelled fences. They begin pecking it and their beaks get all messed up. Fang! Ghost! Cloud!" Hagrid bellowed. After some frantic barking Cloud, Ghost and Fang came scampering around the corner. Ghost seemed to be having fun playing with his lesser canine relatives. When he spotted Jon, he paused, then approached calmly, stalking like a wolf. He circled Jon and Jon offered him his hand. Ghost smelled it once and bound off towards a fallen tree, and climbed on top of it, sniffing the air, on full alert. Cloud ran up to Tonks, jumped up on his hind legs and rest his paws high up on her travelling cloak, trying to lick her face. Tonks had to manhandle him down where he began sniffing her legs and beating her lower half to death with his furry white tail. Fang sat down next to Hagrid, wagging his tail periodically, eyeing the chickens.

"Fang, these are the new chicks. You know the rules. No biting. No snarling. Ghost, you don't like chicken anyway. I don't want you anywhere near 'em. Cloud boy... You will stay close and guard them, y'hear?" Hagrid ordered.

"Ghost, there is a fox on the loose," Jon called him. Ghost ambled over. "Protect the grounds, will you? Let Cloud watch over the chickens. You watch over the grounds."

Ghost simply watched Jon for a few seconds, then yipped once. "Good lad. How is he going, Master gameskeeper?"

"He wants to go hunt, but he still isn't ready," Hagrid shook his head. "Maybe next month he would be back to full strength. He would need to go hunting eventually, as he eats only bloody meat. Just now winter will be here and he needs to keep active to get bigger and stay healthy. Or else... he'll just get like Fang over here."

Fang whined morosely in complaint.

"What you crying for? You know it's true. I still luv yuh, you lazy lug," Hagrid bent over to scratch his dog behind the ears. "Go on in, I still got to clean out the coup and get the feed. Probably meet you back inside for some tea. Also those rock cakes you love so much should be ready in fifteen." Hagrid grinned, expecting to see their young faces light up in anticipation. Harry and Jon slapped on their best fake smiles to date.

"Right-o," Harry said. "We'll... just go on in then. The three of them entered his hut.

"How are you feeling?" Tonks asked immediately. Harry got the impression that it wasn't out of concern, more like she wanted to know if he could handle some bad news.

"I'm getting there. What's up?"
She slammed the door hard.

"I just got back from Obscurus'. Mr. Ridgewall is fine by the way. A basilisk is rated five X's on the magical creatures lethality scale. The only known creature more dangerous is the Nundu. What the fuck is a basilisk doing inside the castle full of children and how do you know this for sure? And what are we going to do about it?!"

"To summarize: I killed it before."

Tonks jaw dropped.

"Oh. Well why didn't you just say so?" she criticized, as if his words explained everything. "You're not eighteen anymore. You're twelve. It isn't the same-"

"I was twelve then too."

"Oh for crying out loud, the lies-" she snarled.

"I'm not." Harry cut her off.

"You're not?"

"No. But the way I did it before may not work again." Harry took a deep breath.

"What? Explain."

"The chamber was opened by Ginny possessed by that same book we have locked away in the vault. She controlled the Basilisk and targeted muggle born students. I went down there and fought the thing. Fawkes and the Sorting Hat helped me out."

"Fawkes... and the sorting hat. You got to be fucking with me," Tonks hissed, pacing up and down in the hut.

"Yeah. It gets better. I killed it the with the Sword of Gryffindor." Tonks froze almost mid-stride.

"Blimey," Tonks breathed, in perfect imitation of Ron. "Three Hogwarts-related magical relics. Nice, strong triangle of magic there, Harry," Tonks murmured, impressed. "Our Auror texts always hints towards three sources of magic or spell-work are symbolic of Light Wizardry. While seven or sixty three are related to the Dark."

"Interesting," Harry nodded. He wondered how many marked Death Eaters Voldemort had when he was at the height of his power.

"So. I'm dying to figure this out. What does a rooster have to do with the basilisk?" Tonks demanded.

"Their crow is supposed to slay it." Jon and Tonks looked at Harry as if he had gone crazy.

"Sounds like bullshit to me," she spat, finally sitting down.

"I was thinking the same thing earlier. Who can actually corroborate this myth?" Harry cursed, running his finger tips in a drum pattern on the wooden table.

"Easiest thing would be to test it and see. Send a rooster and hope for the best," Tonks offered.

"There is more to it than that, a bit more. Do you know what a parslemouth is?"
"Sure. They talk to snakes."

"Right. The Chamber of Secrets is Slytherin's hidden magical...chamber," Harry finished lamely, lacking a better word. "To get in, a parselmouth needs to open the entrance. Then the Snake pit is opened from a statue."

"If I remember correctly, didn't you say parselmouths are very rare?" Jon asked Tonks. Tonks had gone very still.

"The last one was Lord... You know who," Tonks breathed. She was watching Harry deadly serious now. "You went in and killed it."

"Yes I did."

"Therefore, it was either opened before to release the Basilisk... or..."

"Yes. It was released before and... yes to your unsaid question," Harry sighed.

Tonks stood up immediately, drawing her wand. Harry didn't move, or blink his good eye.

"Jon, move away from him," Tonks ordered. "Do it now!" Jon got up, and stood to the side of the table, crossing his arms. He stood up in such a way that he could easily physically disarm Tonks if it got dangerous.

"I am not fucking playing with you this time, I am going to ask this only once. Did you release the Basilisk?"

"No."

"Are you Lord Voldemort, re-incarnated?" she pointed the wand directly between his eyes.

"No."

"Are you Salazar Slytherin or Herpo?"

"No."

"Then how the fuck did you open the chamber to get in?" she snarled. Her wand was beginning to glow red with a pretty strong stupefy spell. One this close could literally do him in. Jon was watching the interplay, his stance lowering a fraction, his arms held akimbo at his sides.

"I am a parselmouth. I could hear the snake in the tunnels behind the walls and under the floors."

Tonks stood there for almost a full minute, her expression hardening and her eyes boring into Harry's eye. She finally relaxed a bit and let her wand hand drop to her side.

"So. Let me get this straight. Only a parselmouth could open the chamber, and you are the only parselmouth around these days. Which means that unless you decide to do something dangerously stupid, we don't need to worry about this basilisk getting free."

Harry shook his head, frustrated.

"Someone is also trying to crack the secret. And they seem to have some solid information on what they could expect to happen. And most likely they are going to keep trying until they succeed, no matter how many people get hurt. Basically, we are dealing with a plot to wipe out students from this school, and even though it would be difficult for them to release the monster, the attempts can have
dire ...or probably deadly, consequences. All it takes is one rogue wizard with enough determination ... which means that this particular person doesn't give a shit about what happens to children. An early sign of descent into dark wizardry."

"That, premeditated murder, Sacrificial soul or blood magic, renunciation of social ties, and an extreme tolerance to self mutilation or pain. Yeah. You know the texts," Tonks commended.

"Whoever is doing this is going down that route, all right. You got a suspect in mind?"

"Ellewyn-Sare."

"Let's fuck him up then," Tonks said immediately, sitting down at the table once more. Jon retook his seat as well.

"What? That's what Auror studies been teaching you? Let's go fuck 'im up?!" Harry grinned, enjoying this bloodthirsty side to Tonks. He wondered why she wasn't sorted before in Gryffindor, like him.

Tonks grimaced. She hit the desk hard with her closed fist. "You're right. But a basilisk! He has got to be fucking insane."

"Don't forget he is just a lackey. Malfoy is the one behind this."

Tonks swore. "Cripes. I hate that guy."

"We need a confession. And a situation with enough proof to silence Malfoy senior as well," Jon added sagely. "Mistress Tonks has a valid point. If you do not open it, then shouldn't the school be safe from it so that we can focus on the human element?"

"The bottom line is that we can't risk it. Wizards, no matter how idiotic or unskilled, can achieve impossible things. Magic also manifests from determination with a bit of help from luck, skill, and desperation. Give Michael enough time, who I think is pretty skilled in his own way, and he will get it free. Malfoy isn't any slouch either. We still need to destroy it."

"But that involves opening it. Pandora's box anyone? What if we can't ..." Tonks trailed off.

The table grew quiet. Opening up the chamber and not finishing the job, or even getting killed in the attempt, would mean the students would be killed on sight when it got loose.

"I have a tentative plan," Harry said softly.

"Listening."

"I capture a snake and use it as my messenger, my minion. I believe the King of Serpents would not affect its own kind. We blind a rooster, and send his ass down there with the snake. Once the place is locked behind me, I go down and open the inner sanctum. I high tail it out of there and seal the place again. If the rooster dies, well, we know that it couldn't have been so easy. If the rooster lives but fails to kill the Basilisk, I will ask snake what happened. But if the rooster trick works, bingo, snake would tell me if its dead or not. Piece of cake."

"What happens if the Basilisk lives and is just waiting to be unleashed?" Jon asked.

"I... I will go back down." Harry shrugged.

"Please. Don't make fucking jokes like that," Tonks moaned.
Harry didn't reply. Jon was eerily silent as well. Tonks closed her eyes and rest her face on her propped up palms on the table.

"You just said you didn't know if the same circumstances would work. Basically, it was luck that cannot be ...convincingly reproduced. And the Sword of Gryffindor is tiny compared to that snake. How did you manage that, by the way?"

"Stabbed it through the roof of the mouth."

Tonks mouthed 'through the roof of the mouth' silently, doing a very good goldfish impression.

"How big is this Basilisk, may I ask?" Tonks said cautiously.

"Fifty to sixty feet long. Six feet thick at tail, maybe ten to fifteen feet at thickest part of the body. Massive."

"Just keep getting better, doesn't it?" Tonks grumbled.

"Would invisibility work?" Jon asked in the resulting silence. "If it needs to cast its gaze, if it can't see you, then...?"

"That's an idea."

"We can send a creature cast with an invisible spell inside the chamber. Maybe it might work."

"That will give us time to attack. But what spells can kill it?" Tonks asked. "The references all say that it is impervious to magic."

"The killing spell might do it," Harry offered.

"Absolutely not," Tonks countered at once. Tonks pointed at Harry. "And I don't want to hear you ever fucking say such a thing again."

Harry shut his mouth. Tonks was dead serious.

"The diablo was highly resistant to magic. We persevered," Jon remarked, finally breaking the tension. Harry and Tonks looked at him. "Maybe a non-magical attack?"

"If the rooster doesn't work. Let's blow its ass up," Harry suggested. "We set flammable and explosive material in the chamber. I open it and, get clear. Then boom!"

"That's a muggle thing, isn't it?" Tonks said. "Blowing things up?"

"Yeah."

"There is a fire curse that does the same. It's called Fiendfyre," said Tonks.

Harry face turned a deathly pale colour. Memories of that night poured through him. That was the night countless people died, including Tonks, Fred, Remus, Colin, Snape...and himself.

All for nothing.

Ginny, Hermione, Ron, Neville all housed Tom's splintered soul, and eventually killed him years later. Voldemort was defeated that night at Hogwarts, but he came back, as he always does. Except this time, there were more versions of him, embedded in the people that he cared for the most.
"Harry? Harry!" Jon was calling him. Tonks was looking concerned. He had apparently zoned out completely.

"I know of it," Harry said warily, his one good eye searching Tonks'. An incredible surge of magic infused his body.

**You will not die. Not while I have breath.**

"It is Uncontrollable. Unless you know of a way?" Harry breathed out finally.

"It burns continuously once the caster is conscious. But it cancels out when they are knocked out, or killed," she answered.

"Ah. Sounds... deranged. But it might work."

"Better than trying to stab a toothpick in a gigantic snake," Tonks huffed.

Jon stood up, walked a few paces away from the table and drew his wand. "This... Diablo claw is the sharpest magical material there is. According to Ollivander, it is used to cut impervious dragon hide ... amongst other things when armouring. It surely dealt with Lockhart." With a quick motion similar to flicking open a retractable baton, the wand transfigured into a massive claymore double edged sword. "If all else fails, I will attack it under invisibility."

Tonks was suitably impressed by that feat of magic.

"You got balls, Jon, I give you that. But even you must know that getting close to a snake that size is madness. It may be able to detect you, even if it can't see you. And one bite is all it takes. A slow, painful death," Tonks glowered at him.

"And one clean strike is all that is needed," Jon said calmly, reverting the wand back to its original state.

"My blood is an antidote to venom, by the way," Harry said offhandedly.

"The surprises keep coming," Tonks chuckled.

"Aaaaand... we need to legally stop Michael and Malfoy. Tonks, come up with a sound plan. We still got one Auror on the grounds. Maybe we can set it up such that he can do the actual interrogation or even the arrest."

"Dawlish or Drinkwater?" Tonks asked.

"Drinkwater," Jon answered.

"Hm. I think he fancies me. I'll see what I can do."

Harry put in his internal diary that he found another poor soul to go missing. He pushed those dark thoughts out of his mind.

"A confession will be crucial," Harry said. "It clamps down further plotting by Lucius if he gets tangled up in it."

The three of them silently agreed to this aspect of the Mission when it came to dealing with Michael. Tonks folded her arms.

"So. What have you done to protect the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets?" Tonks asked Harry.
"Trapped the floor outside of it."

"What about the inside?" she asked.

"What about it?"

"You mean to tell me you didn't set up some sort of alert that warns you if someone gets in?"

"Didn't think it would matter, the outside is pretty well protected," Harry was now seeing the gaps in his thinking. He was feeling quite embarrassed right now.

"Harry, Michael could fly over the floor with a broom."

"Fuck." I should have thought of that. Harry could kick himself right now. Tonks sighed. She began writing on a piece of paper.

"I will give you spells to alert you of any trespassers. And also a few sneakascopes. Well, at least he's not a parselmouth. The chamber should still be closed."

"Another cursed object is in play. I think it is the cup of Helga Hufflepuff. Probably used on Lockhart. Those pinkish eyes..." Harry said.

"Correct. I have his keys right here. Miss Tonks, these are the possessions I took off of Lockhart when we dueled." Jon took out his Onyx Box. "Use the onyx gloves when handling these items and investigate where the keys open. The Aurors did not find anything suspicious in his quarters other than Michael's potion... and the elves report that nothing has been hidden away that belongs to Lockhart. It may not be in the castle anymore."

"There is a key-mate spell I know of. Should help me find where these keys open." She accepted the box. Harry nodded in thanks.

"I can't do anything until I'm fully healed. I also think that Michael won't undergo too many risks while everyone is vigilant. He may wait until it's settled down. Patience and use of wits are more his style. Probably in two weeks we can try to deal with the Basilisk."

"Agreed," Jon nodded.

"Agreed. I'll work on the legal side and these keys. Oh, and here is the address of the place and spare keys for you two in case of anything." She handed them both a pair of keys. "I'll be there unless something comes up in London that I can't put off. Getting the floo network sorted out next week. Come and check it out when you can."

"I think that's it," Harry said. "You two have anything else to add?"

Jon and Tonks shook their head. The three of them stood up and walked out the cabin. Jon was walking around the corner to say goodbye to Hagrid when he noticed Tonks hanging back at the doorway. She indicated he go ahead. Harry was steadily focused on watching his steps when he heard Tonks call his name.

"Harry!"

He stopped. He turned around. "Yeah?"

She beckoned him over. Harry walked back over to the hut. She pulled him inside gently and closed the door.
"Let me see," she said softly.

Harry allowed her to pull back his cloak. Tonks inspected the bandages wrapped around his forehead and eye.

"Does it still hurt?" she asked, touching his face tenderly.

"No, my eye still feels a bit scratchy. By next week I can take off the bandages," Harry tried to put enthusiasm in his voice, but this period of injury was not sitting well with him. The mention of fiendfyre brought back horrible memories of the Battle of Hogwarts. His emotions were all over the place right now.

"I... Might be still mad at you. Or myself. But you're an okay bloke, despite what happened in France."

"You still don't trust me," Harry said softly, indicating the tense showdown in their little meeting.

"I... really shouldn't. But I actually do."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah," she said, smiling. "You're convincing. Very persuasive."

Harry blushed.

"My heart... went haywire when Jon mailed me. Seeing Hedwig, then actually reading the letter... y'know, when you were attacked. It was two extremes." Tonks dipped her head, composing herself. "And when I saw you, I didn't think it would have been so bad."

Harry wondered if the 'bad' she was talking about was the effect on her heart at seeing him so badly injured or the witnessing the actual severity of the damage done to him. He desperately hoped it was the former.

"Thanks for coming, though. You really made me feel better... about things," he said lamely.

"I, I am glad Jon told me. I had to see you. I-I know you don't have caring guardians. I also didn't want you to think that you were, alone or anything. Or that me being mad at you was a reason for me to stay away." She took his good right hand in her left hand.

Harry looked down at their interlocked fingers.

"These are dangerous times," she said simply. She bent her head and gave him a feather light kiss on his lips. "For good luck. I'll see you next week, or when Dumbledore allows me too. Stay safe."

She came closer and gave him a one armed hug, careful not to touch his injured left hand side. Harry returned the hug with a strong right arm around her back.

"I'm still kinda mad at you. But, that doesn't mean you can't write." She tweaked his chin. "Write me, Potter."

"I will," Harry said, his voice almost betraying his emotion.

"Let's go. Tell Hagrid I will bring more next week if needed."

"Okay," Harry said dumbly. They left the hut. Tonks got on her broom, looked back at him and waved.
"Bye, Harry."

"Laters," Harry waved. She grinned, then shot off.

Harry stood up there a long time on Hagrid's front steps, just watching her shrink in the distance towards Hogsmeade.

A sinking feeling was settling in his stomach. Did Tonks just give him a goodbye kiss, or was it the beginning of something that he dared not put in words, before he jinxed it to an early death?

Any which way he looked at it, it wasn't one of those 'Hey I really like you and this could be a good start for us' type of kisses. But he couldn't dismiss it either. It happened.

He sighed as he walked off. He will just have to take it one day at a time. Magic was one thing he was good at.

Understanding women, well...

At least he wasn't alone. Fifty percent of the world's population suffered the same thing.
ENEMIES OF THE BLOOD, BEWARE!

Chapter Summary

Jon and Harry are unable to counter the dark magic rampant in the school. Another student is attacked. Jon witnesses something that changes the game completely.

"Harry. Wake up." Jon ordered, opening Harry's blinds. The sun pierced the windows and stabbed him right on his face. Harry stubbornly switched to the other side, so that the back of his head was now absorbing the sun's rays.

"No."

"Instructor Sprout has received word that you were released out of the hospital wing over the weekend. You must come to the plant house for lessons at quarter past eight."

"No," Harry repeated stubbornly, sinking his face into the pillow.

"Don't be such a weakling. You woke me up and magicked me to another country before the sun rose in the sky. Now you refuse these childhood school tasks? Get up and get dressed," Jon snapped at him and left.

Harry eventually got up, grumbling all the way to the showers. He cast the water repelling charm with his Fwooper tail wand on his bandages and took a long bath. By the time he arrived in the full common room he was feeling in much better spirits.

"Harry! Glad to see you looking much brighter!" Hermione gushed. The majority of Gryffindors greeted him warmly as he came across. Ginny turned scarlet as she walked up behind Hermione and Ron.

"Thanks Hermione," Harry said, accepting her light one armed hug.

"Hey, Potter. How are you feeling today?" Katie Bell asked quietly. She frowned, watching his hood up on his face. Usually boys only did that when the weather warranted it, not the first thing early morning. *He must be self conscious about his face.*

"Better. I actually didn't fall on my arse coming down the steps. That's good." He smiled at her.

"'Sup Harry? You hiding your face?" Ron blurted, noticing how the hood was blocking the left side. Harry shrugged.

"Looks bad ass," Ginny commented out of the blue. Some of the other students took a longer look at Harry's modified robes. Fred and George came over.

"Oi! The Kraken has been released!" George exclaimed. Forge eyed his robe's cowl. "Whoa. Cool. How did you do that?"
"Took a while. Not too hard, actually."

"Are you going to tell us, or not?" Fred wagged his eyebrows.

"Yeah... okay. Here are the spells: it is a transfiguration multi-enchantment. Engorgio Selitxet."
Harry held his Fwooper Tail on Cedar wand like a lint brush and passed it over his left sleeve with a slight flourish at the end. The sleeve lengthened and curved out a bit to the shape of his flourish.

"Then hemming pattern duplication charm: Exemplum Consuo." He weaved the tip of his wand in a zigzag pattern and the hem stitch bordered the extended material, linking up with the original hem.

"To finish and secure the magic to make it permanent, Abra Cadascra Selitxet. Careful with the final one, if you do it wrong you might unravel all the loose ends of whatever you tried it on. Practice on some old stuff before you ruin your good uniforms." His left sleeve now covered his hand to the tips of his fingers, hiding the entire bandage.

Hermione was diligently miming his instructions, repeating the spells silently.

"Could you do it for me?" Ron asked. Ron smiled, embarrassed at his too short outer Hogwarts robe. His dark pants were exposed four inches over the rulebook limit of ankle height for boys, and now was closer to the wrong side of the mid-calf threshold that girls were allowed.

"Sure," Harry agreed. Harry demonstrated the spells once again in front of the whole common room. Ron's outer robes lengthened evenly to the tips of his shoes. Harry then did the hemming charm. The robes folded unto themselves and magical stitching hemmed the material neatly. Abra Cadascra Selixet was used to finalize the process.


Some of the upper years murmured and nodded appreciatively. Fred and George had already gone ahead, and now had both sides of their cowls extended. The morning sun now created shadows that covered their faces. Lee Jordan and Oliver also joined in the fun. They gave each other a bounce of fists.

A lot of the older boys, even Cormack McLaggen and Kyle Rackenshire copied Harry's lead. Hermione and Alexandria were frowning at the domino effect that Harry just caused. Percy pressed his lips together, but did not comment. He huffed and returned to packing his study notes in his bag. He got up and left the room. Alexandria picked up on his attitude and came across to Harry's side.

"Harry, won't Professor Snape or Professor McGonagall be upset about the boys...changing the uniform?" Alexandria asked. Jon folded his arms, watching closely as the boys imitated Harry's spell.

"Hermione, what does Hogwarts, A History or the Student Guide say about these things?" Harry asked politely.

"Um...Hold on," Hermione thought a second. "I have it here," she dug in her bag and took out the student's guide. "Cosmetic alterations to the House Cloak, the outer wear of Hogwarts uniforms, should only be used for repair, and lengthening to maintain proper coverage. The minimum thresholds for the length are the ankles for males, mid calf for females, and sleeves no longer than the third knuckle joints for both girls and boys. No patterns, team colours or House Logo alterations are permitted." She quoted. "It does not mention anything about hood alterations."

"Well then! It's alright," Harry reassured Alexandria. "Oh, and lads, the change is permanent. There is no simple reversal, so...yeah. Do it at your own risk."

Fred and George had figured out how to make a blood red glow emanate from the shadows of their
deep cowls. It shone out of the darkness from their eyes, and open mouths. Ginny approved of this
effect.

"Finally found a good use for the jack-o-lantern spell huh?" Ginny grinned. "Might be better used at
Astronomy class. Looks wonky during the day."

"Your words have been noted, young apprentice," George hissed, turning slowly and aiming the red
fiery glow from his face on her.

"Yeah... but no," Harry warned. "Don't do that. You're going to get me in trouble." Harry knew that
Voldemort's eyes were red, but students didn't know what he looked like. However, the teachers did.
That effect would definitely not be funny from their perspective.

"How would this get you in trouble?" Forge asked, curious. Gred added, "We modified the spell, not
you."

"Dumbledore may be lenient in some ways, but not that. Trust me," Harry said. "How about a
'gloom and boom' charm? I think I know something that's also pretty cool, but a little less likely to
tick off Dumbledore."

Harry showed them a short term charm that attached a shadow to the top half of the face and
emphasized a deep echo to their voices, similar to being in an underground cave.

"Excellent," Forge's voice bounded off the walls of the common room. The crowd *Ooohed* in
response. Fred and George grinned and gave Harry a bounce on his right hand. "Very cheeky for a
second year aren't you, Potter?"

"Just a tad," George's voice echoed as soon as he applied the charm.

"Might be worthy of being our apprentice," Fred agreed, their echoes now overlapping.

"So where does that leave me?" Ginny argued, scowling.

"You could be his apprentice," Ron answered, tilting his head towards Harry.

Ginny blushed scarlet and scampered away.

"All right, Harry? We owe you one." Fred said, cancelling the gloom and boom.

"No problem. Let's go. I'm hungry," he said simply and set off. Jon and Alexandria followed him
out. Harry's natural stride was back, but he focused intently on his balance just to make sure he didn't
plummet to his death on the many staircases. On arrival at the great hall for breakfast all chatter and
noise ended. Harry looked up. The student body and the teachers' table were staring at them as they
all came through the western entrance to breakfast.

Harry paused, and looked over his shoulder. The majority of Gryffindor had filed in behind him, two
abreast, all of the senior males towering behind Jon, Alexandria and himself, their hoods drawn low
over their foreheads, shadows blocking their face. Harry and Jon paused, looking at the scene.

"Good Morning," Harry said cheerily to the quiet hall, half of his face hidden behind his modified
cowl. He nodded at the teachers desk, and stepped aside allowing his Gryffindor housemates to sit
down at the long table. The senior males went down on the left side followed by the junior males.
The girls all sat down gracefully on the right. Then the males took their seats on the left. The early
first years that were clumped together at the furthest end from the teachers' table seemed to shrink
even more as their upperclassmen sat down with a cult-like discipline. Only when Harry and Jon
finally sat down did the older boys pulled back their hoods and took up their utensils to attack breakfast.

"Pass the toast please, Hermione," Harry asked politely, not even noticing the strange effect happening around him.

Hermione was frozen stiff, watching the teachers table with an expression of dread. "S-sure," she replied, passing it on. "Harry, I think this little stunt might have gotten you in trouble..."

"For?" He asked, buttering his toast. He didn't do anything wrong.

"I think if Snape could hex you with only his eyes you would be melted into a puddle of mud, or worse, right about now," Ron leaned in and whispered.

"Professor McGonagall doesn't look too pleased, either," Neville added.

"Hmm," he nodded, adding sausages and eggs to his plate. "I can't see why, though," Harry shrugged.

Seamus and his fellow second years were concerned. "Your eye still... y'know," he gestured to Harry.

"Um, it's getting better." Harry deflected as he continued eating.

"So ... you going to keep ticking off Snape by keeping your hood up?" Seamus pressured.

"The bandage... is a bit much," Harry replied. "I could do without the looks."

"Mate, everyone here is looking at you anyway," Dean whispered.

"I don't want them to see the bandages," Harry said in finality. Last week Monday still gave him phantom pain anytime he dwelled on it. The attack reminded him that this second attempt at life definitely would not be a walk in the park. "Let them stare if they want, I just want to eat my breakfast."

Daphne Greengrass came up to him when they left to go to their joint class period for Herbology.

"Hey Harry," she greeted with a smile. "Glad to see you up and about."

"Thanks. How do you do?" he replied. Katie Bell nudged her friend Alicia Spinnet, both of them frowning at the Slytherin girl.

"I'm good. Like the look," she gestured vaguely at his face. They began to walk out the castle and down to the greenhouses. "The Aurors told the Heads of House and Dumbledore to monitor your friend, Black." She came closer and tip toed a bit to whisper in his ear. "They think he is extremely powerful."

"Oh?" Harry went on the alert. They were monitoring Jon? Crap! "How do you know this?"

She pulled his tie a bit so Harry had to bend lower to hear. "Professor Snape has alerted the entire house not to antagonize or attack Jon Black in any form or fashion. Especially as Auror Drinkwater is keeping an eye on things. And I get the impression Snape's House meeting was not out of any sort of concern for your friend, more like a perverse ... word of caution for us. The older students think it is some sort of elaborate code that means they should do the complete opposite, as a test for the upcoming dueling tournament."
Holy shit. Slytherin House thought that they could take on Jon? This is bad. Jon has sixty-something kills confirmed. He may not hesitate on punk Slytherins, if he got the slightest inclination they were serious.

"What dueling tournament?" Harry pressed. He was also thinking about pro-active countermeasures to this new Slytherin development. He would cash in that favour from Fred and George immediately to be Jon's lookouts.

"What, your head of house didn't tell you?" Daphne asked, trying to determine if Harry was having her on. Why are Gryffindor boys always so clueless?

"If she did, I wasn't there to get the memo," Harry replied. Lockhart had championed a Dueling tournament before. That was a farce, and didn't last long. Fate seemed to be recreating similar events, just different circumstances leading up to it. He needed to keep a watch on Ginny and definitely make sure no one got attacked from the Basilisk.

"Memo?" Daphne asked, confused.

"I didn't get the message," Harry corrected. "I was in the hospital wing, remember?"

"Yes, true. Well, if your friends didn't say anything, probably McGonagall did not pass on the message."

"Could be. Who is behind this tournament?"

"Dumbledore... and the Auror stationed here. From the rumors going about I think that the defense periods starting from this week would be used for spell theory and sparring practice. And tournament days will be on Saturdays and Sundays. Flitwick, Sinistra and the Auror are the facilitators."

"So the Auror is going to be teaching defense?"

"Not from what I've heard. He's just doing this for the school as a side thing. The School Board is dragging their feet getting a replacement. Draco said his father was working on getting someone 'competent'."

Harry translated that to Lucius Malfoy stalling the process of getting someone who could competently corner Michael and unravel this conspiracy. Or worse, get a Voldemort sympathizer in to radicalize the pure bloods and endanger the rest.

Typical Hogwarts drama. Harry sighed.

"So," Harry drew a breath. "Thanks for the info." Here it comes. Harry didn't want to, but he knew this was how the game was played. He strengthened his resolve as he entered the fray.

The Game of Houses.

"I owe you one." There. He said it.

Daphne grinned. "No problem. I'll take you up on that favor sometime. Ta!" she sauntered away and joined Tracey and that snooty Blaise guy. The three of them dropped their heads in whispered conversation as Daphne approached. Daphne was resolutely shaking her head when they leaned in on her. Maybe she was keeping their talk secret. Or maybe she was just putting on a show as they were in full view of him. There was no way to know for certain.

Not even two weeks in and he owes a favour to a Slytherin girl, who until recently, had never
spoken a word to him. In fact, they danced at a ball in France and got all comfy before they even held a full conversation. He might live to regret this later.

The joint class reached the Herbology greenhouse and sat down for class. He would have to talk to the twins and Jon as soon as he could.

During Lunch the four heads of house passed around notices to the students present and extra copies to the house prefects to place on notice boards around the common areas.

"This is what I was telling you about earlier," Harry explained to Jon. Jon was reading the rules.

"It says below 'Only from the list of spells that will be distributed in your allotted defense period'," Jon said. "Guess I will see what magic is allowed in a few minutes."

Fred and George came across to them and bordered the two boys. "Right. So this is what you wanted us to look out for right? Jon is now public enemy number one right?"

"Yeah, sorta..." Harry said. "Jon, the school wants a piece of you. Everyone is itching to see what you can do."

"Am I to be a target? Well, so be it. I accept this challenge," Jon declared softly, his face going impassive with pre-battle excitement. He closed his eyes momentarily, relishing the call to arms.

Fred and George eyed him suspiciously. "He's really enjoying this. Harry mate, are you sure he needs us?"

"Seems he is all right with threstrals or possessed wizards popping up at random and trying to kill him," George grinned. Harry found it a bit ironic that he was accustomed to random attempts on his life as well.

"I'll talk to him," Harry sighed. "But nothing has changed. When possible, look out for him and Alexandria."

Jon grew wary. Jon's Lord Commander voice came to front, his face hardening. "Alexandria? What does she have to do with this?"

Fred and George recognized this expression from before when Jon rushed the threstral with a simple butter knife.

"Right you are, Harry boy, you talk to him." George made a hasty retreat.

"I'll let you two iron out the details," Fred added, and both of them grabbed their bags and left. The bell rang at that time. According to the notice, the defense class was relocated to an old dining hall on the third floor.

"Jon, the Slytherins are known for cunning, and do not 'fight fair'." Harry let that hang for a bit. Jon walked on, not even making eye contact with Harry as he strode through the throngs of students. His eye was on Alexandria's luxurious dark hair further down the main corridor to the staircases.

"Are you saying that they will dare to attack Alexandria to anger me?" Jon hissed. He was getting serious.

"It is a possibility. That may even be a bit too obvious for their tastes, but sometimes the thicker ones may not be as subtle or forward thinking as the older heads. Let's put it this way, older Slytherins may not be as crude and unoriginal to target her, since that might be more like a junior's style. And
junior classmen have to be crazy, or have a pair of elephant balls to think about challenging a
popular, pretty girl who is older than them, and is associated with you. But still, we rather be safe,
than sorry."

"And the other houses?" Jon asked as they walked down the halls, Jon catching up ground with
Alexandria.

Harry didn't even think about Hufflepuff or Ravenclaw. Far less Gryffindor.

"You know, I didn't even think of them," Harry admitted.

"You need to know the art of war. The most obvious enemy is so gargantuan that they hide the true
loni assassin who sinks the knife into the ribs. Maybe I should announce that the 'Ancient and Most
Noble House of Black' has offered its unconditional vow of protection upon the Potage family."

"Wizards do like that sort of pomp and grandeur," Harry snickered. "I don't know if that would
change anything, though."

Jon and Harry had finally caught up to her. Jon stepped in front of her and bowed slightly. "Milady,
may I have the honor of being your escort to class?"

Alexandria stopped up short, momentarily stunned.

"Um, oui?" she replied. Jon's offered her his arm. His gallant gesture opened up a view of the
weapons belt with the wicked heavy dagger slanted across his hip. The crowded corridor did not
miss the gleaming sheath of the dagger. "It is only two levels down, I do not wish to inconvenience
you," she reasoned, blushing a bit.

"It's alright. I have sworn a vow of protection, Alexandria," he said offhandedly, his tone neither
pompous nor condescending. Those close enough (even those further pretending not to be listening
in) definitely heard him. "If you agree, I will be honored to walk with you," he smiled. She returned
the smile a bit hesitantly.

"Merci," Alexandria said softly, a bit embarrassed yet inwardly pleased of Jon's strange behavior.
She rest her hand on Jon's offered arm. Harry shook his head, chuckling under his breath. If the
school didn't know before, they definitely knew now that any ideas about targeting Alexandria could
result in Lord Black sending you to the morgue.

Harry followed them quietly down the stairs to their Potions class. Professor McGonagall was exiting
the heavy wooden dungeon door, presumably from having a meeting with Professor Snape. Her
eyebrows creased together when she saw Jon walking with Alexandria, then her expression softened
when she noticed the polite and gentlemanly distance between the two of them as they approached
the class door.

"Inside," Professor McGonagall commanded the crowd building up in the hall. "Professor Snape is
expecting you." The fifth years filtered into the class. Alexandria thanked Jon and waved goodbye.

"Black, Potter, one moment." She was reminded of twenty years prior saying those same names, in
that same tone. The two boys approached.

"Ten points to Gryffindor, Jon, for making Alexandria feel welcome to the school," she commended.
Jon nodded his head once in acknowledgement. Harry internalized that as McGonagall-speak for
"Finally, a gentleman graces our halls!" She turned to Harry. "How are you feeling, Harry?"

"I am feeling much better, thank you, Professor McGonagall."
Auror Drinkwater has been notified that you are allowed to return to classes, but you may opt out of the spell exercises, if you wish. Madame Pomfrey has told me in no uncertain terms that you should not be attempting any form of sparring. However, I have informed her that you, of all people, should not be shied away from proper training seeing as we have let you down on your first day back. I believe that Auror Drinkwater will choose methods suitable to the age level and magical aptitude of his charges, and maintain appropriate levels of safety.

Understood, Professor. So, that means I'm allowed to participate, then?” he grinned.

Professor McGonagall's lips pressed together. Harry's enthusiasm was giving her second thoughts. "Yes, Mr. Potter, you are," she confirmed, albeit with an expression of 'maybe Pomfrey was right'. "Do not overdo it. I will be very cross if you are not fit when the Quidditch games begin." She tapped her wand four times in a square and a slip of parchment popped into existence. She cast a spell to manifest a quill and quickly scribbled in both their names and signed the bottom of the sheet of a pre-written hall pass. "Off you go. Here is a note to explain your tardiness. Quickly now. Third floor. You know where the old dining hall is before the Charms Auditorium? Good day, gentlemen."

"Good day, Professor McGonagall," Harry and Jon chorused. McGonagall nodded and briskly made her way out of the dungeons.

"I know a shortcut," Harry whispered when she turned the corner. Harry guided them to an abandoned classroom dungeon and pushed against a wall with rusted, unused manacles hanging from the top of the interlocking stones. The wall swiveled easily, revealing a narrow, spiral staircase leading upwards. Within a minute they were outside the new Defense class. They pushed the door open and walked in.

"Mr. Potter and Mr. Black, is it? Welcome. Take a seat," Auror Drinkwater offered. Harry showed him the note. He took it, scanned it, and gave it back. The two boys sat down at an empty two-seater table to the back of the class.

"All right. We're all here. So what we are going to do today is get acquainted, which we have already done, and the first stage of survival if attacked. Just things you should know, before you go unto the next stage, which we would touch upon later."

He tapped his wand on the board. "Awareness. A major difference between wizards and muggles is that magic amplifies our natural state. If we feel uneasy, or have any inclination that danger is imminent, our magic kicks in maybe a second, or two, before. This feeling can be recognized the more times you encounter it. Trainees enter our program without it, but eventually graduate with a pretty damn good sense of it, instinctively. It can save your life. So, here are some tips to recognize threats." He tapped the board again.

"Understanding body language and positioning. This works. Believe me. One innocent-enough wizard or witch may be talking harmlessly in front of you, drawing your attention. We will call this person the primary, or immediate target. If it is a trap, usually, they have backup. Be aware of the body language of nearby wizards, who at first, may seem like they are just there for the ambience and the fine weather, but in reality, are waiting on a signal to attack. These, we shall call secondary targets."

"So, let's focus on the primary target. Easy clues, listen to the tone of voice, watch the types of garments they wear. Are they flamboyant and cloth heavy? Or maybe they are light and high quality? Light and high quality robes are easier to move in, and most times, spell resistant. How much attention are they really giving you? Do their eyes sometimes flicker towards someone else, a possible secondary target ally? How easily can they access their wand? Do you get the feeling they hiding something? How large is the personal space allotted to you? Remember, the closer they are,
the harder it is to counter their attacks. If you do not trust the person, keep a safe distance. And obviously, if you think they are going to attack, decide quickly and be ready and able to draw. Have your spell chosen mentally before you even think of aiming. Some blocks can be cast without aiming directly at the source of the spell."

"The secondary targets. The quickest thing to notice is that backups usually do not act naturally. They don't smile, joke, or use plenty hand movements, even if they are pretending to be in conversation with another secondary, or even a non-hostile. Most of their energy is being used to pretend that they are not keeping a close eye on their point wizard, or witch, and what you are doing. Keep the closest secondary suspect aligned with your primary in such a way so they don't have a clean shot at you if things go down. And if you get the feeling this is a coordinated ambush, get out of there as quick as you can, any way you can."

He drew a top down diagram of a street. He demonstrated how a confrontation can happen and how secondary targets may surround you easily if you are not aware of potential dangers.

"Awareness keeps you alive for the most dangerous period- the first couple of seconds of an attack. Skill, guts, and a solid repertoire of magic comes after. Let's do an easy test." Auror Drinkwater laid sheets of blank parchment on each desk, except the entire last row. Between rows he brandished his wand in a languid up-and-down paint stroke manner. "I have now put up mirror illusions behind your individual rows. You will notice that even if you look behind, or in front of you; all you would be able to see is your own reflection. This exercise is about awareness. Write down the names of the students immediately behind you, and the ones immediately behind them, all the way to the last row. It shouldn't be too hard. There are only four rows. Only six names for the first row, four for the next, and two for the third. Two minutes. Begin."

Only Hermione and Daphne Greengrass from the front row got all six names right. Malfoy got his four names right because Crabbe and Goyle were always behind him, and Blaise and Bulistrode usually sat in the final row. Crabbe and Goyle couldn't even remember their own housemates right behind them. Most of the Gryffindors got half of the names right, but not the correct order. Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs were worse. Harry and Jon were in the last row behind the Ravenclaws so they were exempt from the exercise.

"So out of the forty or so students in this year two class, only three students got all the names and the positioning right." He smiled at the class.

"Sir, this exercise was a bit unfair," Terry Boot complained. His Ravenclaw pride took a hit at not being able to get any of the names and positioning right. "It is a classroom setting, not some dark alleyway with unscrupulous individuals."

"Agreed," Auror Drinkwater said. "Just a classroom setting." He removed the illusions. "Guess what. The students in the back there," he pointed to Harry and Jon. "Survived a dark magic attack, just last week, in a classroom setting. Harry is lucky to be with us this fine afternoon."

The class went silent.

"For your level, we are going with the standard surprise attack. You do not expect to be attacked. Yet for some unlucky reason, today is not your day. Shit happens. Someone is about to draw on you, and it doesn't look good. Who wants to volunteer a choice of action?"

Many hands went up. River Drinkwater called upon Hermione. "A shield charm, or blocking counter spell."

"Apparition away to safety." Some more hands went down.

"Very good! Anyone else? Mr. Malfoy!"

"The strongest curse you know," Draco offered, sneering at Harry. Harry raised his one visible eyebrow at him. Draco turned away.

"Quite an aggressive option. I like that. Anyone else? And yes, Ms. Bones?"

"Um ... disarming hex?" she replied.

"Ah yes, your aunt works in the Ministry yes? Maybe she gave you some tips eh?" Auror Drinkwater commended. "All are viable, all may be effective in some way. All have their pros and cons." He tapped his wand on the board and the exact quotes came up. "Allow me to critique. Ms. Granger's suggestion would create a 25 to 50 percent chance of coming out of this encounter unscathed. Reason why? You've got to be pretty good with blocks to counter whatever it is they might throw at you, and you better hope your blocks are as good as you think they are. Also, Unforgivable Curses are a very dangerous reality, and are unblockable."

Hermione bit her lip, studying the Auror intensely.

"Ms. Patil's choice is a flip of a coin. Wizards and witches your age are not trained well enough to do precise Apparation as yet."

Padma's smile turned upside down. Pansy Parkinson snickered from the other side of the class. Drinkwater turned his attention towards her.

"However, Ms. Parkinson, underage wizards have been known to escape a dangerous situation using wild apparation. Usually from aggressive muggles or speeding motor vehicles."

He went back to the diagram of the bird's eye view of a street. He drew a big circle around it. "A planned ambush attack may consist of an Anti Apparition field; or even a counter apparition hex can seriously incapacitate someone who tries this way out. If you are lucky and it is a random attack, Apparating out is the safest solution. An Anti-apparition barrier will give you a nasty backlash of magic if they expect you to hightail it out of there. 50-50% chance of getting out of there unscathed."

"Mr. Malfoy's curse method is probably a seventy five to one hundred percent chance of... victory, or if it didn't work, an elongated battle. If you are successful with the curse, you have inflicted damage on an opponent and they are probably not able to continue. If not, you two would be dueling for a while. One of you is going to be taken out. Escape would be difficult from that point on. But that's how it goes."

"The ministry prefers the disarming charm, because it can stop an attack in its tracks. Expelliarmus is the most useful one. Usually, the fight is over after that. Once no secondary targets are involved. Regular all purpose shield charms aren't as effective against Expelliarmus because it casts a repulsion barrier charm towards the opponents hand. The more skilled you are at this spell, the greater the chance of their wand being propelled directly back at you. Barrier-class spells aren't blocked easily by shield charms, which in itself is a barrier class magic. All in all, statistically, these were the most picked choices demonstrated by Magical Law Enforcement recruits. So, very good answers, all of you."

Hermione looked relieved seated at the front of the class. Harry liked the angle Drinkwater was taking in this defense course. Hopefully it would help keep his classmates safer for the times to come.

"Before I continue, may I call upon Mr. Black and Mr. Potter to offer their opinions?" he asked the
two boys at the back of the class.

"You go first," Jon mumbled, using his knee to hit Harry's leg.

"I think he called you first, didn't he?" Harry kneed him back.

"You're the wizard here, not I," Jon mumbled. Harry had no counter to that one.

"Expelliarmus if they draw first, Stupefy if I draw first," Harry answered loudly.

"You know about Stupefy? Very good. I like this answer. And Mr. Black?"

The class went silent, waiting patiently on Jon's response.

"I believe a combatant should play to their strengths. If the person is close, within arm's reach, I will attack. If the person is a bit further, I might use defense. It depends. Speed and accuracy are the most important in my opinion. Whatever method chosen, it must be efficient and well practiced."

"A combatant, huh?" Auror Drinkwater smiled. "Haven't heard that term in a long while. Usually, that is a term used by soldiers. Yes, practice is the key element that makes the difference. And that's what we are going to do. I know some of you are excited by a 'Dueling tournament'. But I am pretty sure none of you are excited to get put on their arse facing your fellow schoolmates. Victors, and losers, either you are in to win, or you are out. That's what mock duels... and even life or death situations, are about. Once everyone understands those simple fundamentals, this can be a learning and even enjoyable experience for all, no matter if you are the winner or not. So, without further ado, these are your lists of spells that year two students would be allowed to use in the tournament." He passed around scrolls of parchment. The students eagerly unwrapped them and began perusing the list.

"Professor Dumbledore, Professor Flitwick and Professor Sinistra and I have come up with the format, rules, and progression tiers of this competition. These preliminary rounds are randomized one on one pairs of all students in a particular year. This is mandatory for all of you. First round victors move on to the next round. The defeated contestants may opt to re-enter, and they shall face other defeated contestants who also wish to re-enter. If you lose twice, you are out. The winning duelists face each other until the last four contestants. The victors of these last two matches will head into the Year 2 finals. Depending on what the facilitators decide on the winning performances, the Champions may be invited to enter a Hogwarts Inter Year Tournament. Yes, Miss Granger?"

"Sir, does that mean year champions can be faced with, other years?" Hermione asked.

"Tentatively, yes. It might not be feasible, due to older students believing that sparring with younger students may seem to be advantageous and may lose face. We might have to work something out."

"If I have to beat up on some wee firstie for the title of Hogwarts champion, I'm all for it!" Draco Malfoy laughed. "In it, to win it, as you said, sir." Crabbe, Goyle and Pansy joined in with annoying laughter.

"True. I hope a seventh year doesn't think the same way about you, Mr. Malfoy."

Draco shut his mouth abruptly. Pansy kept laughing, not understanding the hidden slight Auror Drinkwater threw back at him. Draco had to nudge her not-so-discreetly to shut her up. Harry chuckled quietly in the back row.

"I will be available for drilling practice and oversee light sparring on Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays for second years at seven pm until nine pm. Class times would be used for defensive
tactics and practical spell demonstrations, and will not be used for sparring. This arrangement will stand until your replacement Defense Against the Dark Arts Instructor arrives. Yes, Miss Granger?"

"Sir, aren't you the replacement?"

"No. I am not versed in the theory coursework and teaching aspects of this job. I am simply trying to help the school until a proper candidate arrives."

Harry noticed Malfoy making a snide comment to Justin Finch-Fletchley as Auror Drinkwater mentioned the replacement. Harry could bet that Malfoy was gloating about his precious father being the one deciding who their new teacher would be.

"Please remember this. If you wish to spar, it can only be done under supervision of the facilitators, who are Professor Flitwick, Professor Sinistra, and yours truly. Anybody caught illegally dueling can be expelled from the tournament, and also house points and disciplinary action can be brought down upon you. Professor Snape has offered to be the disciplinary facilitator for this tournament. He will also be the referee during the duels. Scoring on match days will be done by Headmaster Dumbledore, Professor McGonagall, and Professor Sprout."

The bell rang.

"Is that it then? All right," Auror Drinkwater announced. "You will not be given any homework, but I advise you to learn as much as you can about your spell lists. There will be no practice this evening! Wednesday is the first session for second years!" he announced over the hustle and bustle of children leaving the class.

"Blimey," Ron came up to Harry and Jon, all excited. "We're going to learn how to duel! He's brilliant!"

"Ron, he's just gave us a list of spells and expect us to be able to know how to use it without proper explanation of theory! It is a bit rushed, don't you think, Harry?"

Harry shrugged. "He will show us tomorrow. What are you upset about? You, out of all of us, will pick up these spells the fastest."

Hermione gave him a strange look. Harry averted his eyes.

Ah. I goofed up.

"Why did you say that, Harry?" she said softly, intently. The students were filtering out of the doorway and heading off to their last classes.

"You're a smart girl, you just know things. You'll do fine," Harry explained. Hermione blushed, flattered. Harry could feel her eyes boring into the side of his face. Jon sensed that Harry was now uncomfortable with his slip up and Hermione's rapt attention.

"Mistress Hermione, the Auror is using a hands on approach. I think, considering the circumstances, getting the feel for casting battle magic would be more in serving our interest than book lore and lectures," said Jon.

"Obviously you would say that. You are a battle mage already," she said as a matter of fact. "Some of us still get a bit dodgy when we have to peel potatoes with a sharp knife."

Jon turned a bit red, and fell into stride next to Harry. Harry finally found someone who could make Jon blush. Will wonders never cease.
Ten points to Gryffindor, Hermione, Harry thought.

"Come on," Ron said. "We've got potions."

The group of them made their way down to the lower levels. They encountered Alexandria and Shea Carrow on their way up.

"All right, Potter, Black?" Shea greeted.

"Shea, how do you do?" Harry said.

"Miss Shea," Jon bowed.

"I'll keep an eye out on her for you," Shea winked at Jon. "I've never seen Snape avoid docking points off a Gryffindor before. She made it through the Invigoration Draught unscathed. You sure made an impression on him, Black."

"Ah," Jon said, not having any idea how to respond to that. Hermione now studied Jon Black as if he were a fantasy character out of a story book. "Thanks."

"A plus tard!" Alexandria told their group, waving as they walked past. "Bye Jon," she said softly, smiling.

"Later, heroes," Shea teased. Neville looked back at Shea as they climbed the stairs. Ron was watching Alexandria.

Hermione, Daphne Greengrass and Parvati all giggled at the boys' slack faces. The girls then scowled as if they did not give each other leave to laugh collectively.

"Ugh. Double potions in the afternoon," Harry muttered as they approached the door to the class. Guess it was back to school life for him until they were ready to take on the Basilisk and set up Michael for a hard fall.

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Tonks finally found out where Lockhart lived. It was in a town north of Dublin called Drogheda. At present moment she was riding in the Eiraan Bus leaving from Dublin. Her Quicksilver broom was packed in a slightly modified cello case. She was pants at reading muggle maps, but she did some quick research on how to take a muggle bus. This bus would take her to from Dublin station to Drogheda and from there, her Key-Mate location spell should allow her to home in on the lock that goes with these keys.

She asked Sarah to enquire about Lockhart's London Gringotts account, and lo and behold, his British vault was closed a few weeks ago. He now banked his money through a local Irish bank, Leprechaun's Pot, a solely wizard-run bank based in Drogheda.

After the third random guy kept trying to make small talk with her on the bus, she got frustrated and hefted the massive travelling cello case and took a seat to the back.

Sarah's loaned muggle dinner gown and the white Michael Jackson zipper jacket seemed to be attracting the wrong sort of attention. The male kind. She cast a mild repulsion charm on the area before the last couple rows on the bus and sat down. The rest of the hour long journey was quiet after that.

Her thoughts ran on Harry. She was dreadfully confused. Was she just in a feedback loop of "what if" feelings for him because he proclaimed to have feelings for her? She didn't find him particularly
ugly, neither particularly attractive physically. He was in the midst of those awkward puberty years.

But his charisma and ability to get stuff done, regardless of his own safety, and general overly-heroic behavior instilled a strong sense of... loyalty? Possessiveness? Respect? Whatever it was, it was a strong pull, almost as if he resonated magic that drew her in.

There was something about him... something she couldn't put her finger on as yet. He intrigued her.

She wondered if she was attracted to what he could be, instead of what he presently was, which, to her conflicting feelings and sporadic embarrassment, was a Second year at Hogwarts.

*He's not, not really. He's a Sorceror. A mage with the ability to travel through time.*

Maybe not the Grand Sorcerer 'title' that was bestowed upon Albus Dumbeldore. The real deal. Skills borne of magic not of this world. Survival of the Killing Curse. The ability to summon Threstrals. Dream-Seer qualities.

And most importantly, an uncanny knack for combating Dark Magic. It empowered him, fueled everything he did, from helping out a hexed Quidditch comrade to dragging the three of them into France on the suspicion that a boy would be killed by a magical devil. He did all of this without hesitation, with a wand that completely crippled his spell casting.

Harry was special. She knew that.

She cursed under her breath. Harry The-Boy-Who-Lived-and-Came-Back-to-Hit-on-Her Potter was dominating her thoughts during this quaint little bus trip through Ireland. She took a deep breath to clear her head. She needed to get into mission mode and find the Cursed Cup of Helga Hufflepuff. That was what was important.

*Bastard didn't even write her as yet. Typical male.*

"Damn you, Potter," She said aloud.

*Girl. Hold it together. He's too young for you. Don't let that blasted Betelgeuse Black make you fall under that hereditary naming curse she left the Black girls with. You're not some crazed Nympho. Get that through your head and you'll be just fine.*

The rest of the week went past without anything extraordinary happening, unless you consider Neville Longbottom having a decent *Expelliarmus* charm at the end of Wednesday's spell practice session extraordinary. Thursday evening Harry was allowed to remove his eye bandage. His eye felt a bit sensitive to light, so he decided to use an eye patch Friday during the day and take it off during the night. Friday evening after all classes were done, Harry told Jon he needed him to back him up.

He was going to check on the Chamber to make sure nothing was disturbed.

Harry gave Jon a meaningful nod when he caught Jon heading to the bathroom. The two boys were alone.

"Ready?"

"I will modify one of my older Milkin's robes. Give me some time to apply the threstral formula."

"Meet me in the common room dressed in your normal robes. Walk with the invisible gear in your bag," Harry instructed.
A half an hour later the two boys left the common room, claiming that Harry was going to the hospital wing for a check-up. They ducked in a nearby class and Harry put on his invisibility cloak. Jon hastily changed into his newly modified invis-business robes he bought for the Gringotts meeting. They made their way up to Myrtle's bathroom. Harry removed the spells on the ground. On the tile closest to the door he realized the Confundus trap had been tripped.


Both wizards stayed comically still for a moment, even though the only thing visible was Harry's Fwooper wand.

"To arms?" Jon whispered.

"To arms," Harry replied, drawing his Diablo core wand. Jon drew also his Diablo wand and immediately it transfigured into a Claymore. A shimmering light blue magic manifested over his left arm. The Aegis solidified, and became a head-to-toe crystalline shield.

"Let me go in first," he offered.

"Wait. I'm the wizard here, remember," Harry whispered. He drew his trusty Troll hair wand on holly.

"Maior Homenum Revelio!"

A blue orb expanded from his wand and encased the walls and doorway of the abandoned bathroom with an electric blue wave of magic. A black humanoid form blipped then folded itself down into the ground, running through what appeared to be a toilet drain.

"What was that?" Jon asked, disturbed.

"Myrtle just flushed herself down the loo."

"By the gods!"

"Chill. She's a ghost. She's already dead."

"That's...comforting," Jon whispered uncertainly.

"It's empty. Wish I had the charm Sprout used to identify the fox's tracks." Harry stood up at the entrance, watching inside. Jon transfigured the Diablo wand back to its original state. He drew his Dragon heartstring on Olive branch wand.

"My blue Lumos," Jon said, comprehension dawning.

"What?"

"Remember my failed Lumos charm? It didn't fail... it is different. Now it makes sense to me. Let me show you." Jon pointed his wand. "Lumos!" A soft blue light emanated from the tip of his wand.

Blue tinged paw prints, footprints, handprints, fingerprints, anything recently touched was now highlighted in a mind-boggling maze of crisscross clues all over the bathroom.

"Someone was busy in here," Harry said with a hint of dread entering his voice. He activated his own Lumos charm at the section of sinks that covered the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets. Only the mirror above and the faucets had blue handprints on it.
The person was probably an animagus, considering the animal prints spotted along the ground alongside footprints.

Harry stooped down right there on the threshold to the bathroom and laid his wand on a footprint, measuring the length of the shoe of the culprit.

"I don't even know why we are wasting time. We have a primary suspect. Let's capture Michael. And let Tonks interrogate him."

Harry saw merit to Jon's straightforward suggestion.

"Yeah," Harry whispered. "But we must let Drinkwater do the 'interrogation'. We need something that would stick. Tonks has no authority in here."

"That makes things difficult. How are we going to get him to do that?" Jon asked. Harry didn't know the answer to that, as yet. He racked his memories of his previous year two.

"Ginny," Harry said suddenly. "The order was: Colin. Justin. Hermione. Penelope. Fuck... we need to get back."

"What? Why? What about them?" Jon asked, alarmed. He hated when Harry spoke in this tone; similar to when Harry suspected Ollivander of using Dark Magic in 'orchestrating' the Diablo attack on little Robert Rabiot.

Harry began enchanting the bathroom with Tonk's suggested spells, and quickly reapplied the same sequence of increasing hexes on the tiles outside the door. He also placed a sneakascope in the torch scone on the wall nearest to the door.

The two boys hastily made their way to the closest empty classroom. Harry closed the door behind him and removed his Invisibility cloak. Jon began to change as well.

"Ginny was cursed with the Diary. We changed that, and Katie ended up becoming the cursed girl. Someone still killed the chickens. That also happened before. So we sorta averted Ginny's full blown possession, but it ended up almost as bad, as Lockhart got possessed instead. You dealt with him before he could activate the parseltongue password, which is good: the chamber is still closed. An official dueling club was created back then, too."

Harry looked down at his sling. "I also needed to get the bones regrown in my left arm in the Hospital wing, which was ten times worse this time. Ron and I got detentions first day. The events are different, yet similar. I wish I could put an end to this fucking up nightmare," Harry cursed.

"Fate is a nasty beast. Things that happened before, are happening again. I am beginning to understand the situation now. So what happened next? Why did you call those names?" Jon demanded.

"If we substituted Katie and Lockhart for Ginny, we have our possessed victim in the previous timeline of events. Penelope was also petrified. This time, she was hospitalized under crippling mind-altering hexes. That leaves Justin, Colin, Hermione. Penelope and Hermione were the last two victims of the Basilisk. Mrs. Norris; Filch's cat, Justin and Colin were the first."

Harry closed his eyes in rage, cursing himself for not seeing the pattern earlier. He breathed out heavily. "The victims of the Basilisk are being attacked in reverse order. I always referred to Ellewyn-Sare as a snake, ever since I saw him douse Katie with the lust potion in Diagon. In this timeline, Michael and Lucius Malfoy combined are 'substituting' for the Basilisk. If what I believe turns out be right, Hermione is in danger." Harry hastily packed his bag with his invisibility cloak.
"Hermione? She said she was going to the library tonight to research the magics list in preparation for sparring tomorrow."

"What? She never said anything to me, nor Ron!" Harry snapped.

"She told Alexandria."

Harry understood that Alexandria must have told Jon. Both of those girls had two things in common, a thirst for knowledge, and a love triangle with Jon. Maybe Hermione was trying to understand the type of girl it took for Jon to notice them. Harry suspected that Hermione was crushing on Jon, even if Jon himself did not notice. Harry stared at a blank piece of wall.

"I didn't think to warn the twins to look out for her as well."

Hogwarts students were nosy, and most were quite perceptive. Hermione was a muggle-born and close friends to both Jon and himself. A target subtle enough not to be frighteningly obvious (like Alexandria), yet devious enough to be a scheme worthy of a senior Pureblood-agenda sympathizer. But not all pureblood sympathizers were Slytherin.

What would a seventh-year Ravenclaw do if he wanted to create a bit of mischief?

He would create a scheme that would divert all attention away from himself. Ellewyn-Sare did insult Hermione when she signed up for the Arithmancy guild and had no remorse in poisoning Katie and Penelope, who were both half bloods. And he seemed pretty intelligent.

The Slytherins were cunning, but they always wanted people to suspect that one of them was behind it. They thrived on recognition, even if it was only amongst their own.

Ravenclaws operated closer to a genius-level echelon.

Michael's modus operandi so far was to let others do the heavy lifting. He remained in the shadows, pulling strings and getting people hurt. It would not be past him to let a Slytherin take the fall for any attack on students. Especially students that he felt deserved it. Mudbloods. Prissy Gryffindors who thought they knew it all, but in reality, were just useless breeding instruments to even out the house ratios.

Prissy, mudblood Gryffindors who were allies to true Nemeses of the Dark arts.

Harry felt his blood run cold. He began to sprint down the halls. Jon took off after him.

By the time they found her, Harry thought that if he didn't control himself, he would burn the whole fucking castle down.

Hermione lay face down in a side corridor used frequently by Slytherins who traversed to the Library, blood pooling around her face. Her hair was sheared off her head, her wand broken, along with the fingers of her right hand.

Jon and Harry could not believe it.

"Hermione!" Harry shouted as he skidded into a crouch next to her. He drew his wand and summoned a patronus message out of pure desperation. A ten foot tall lion with massive phoenix wings shot out of his wand and then multiplied into three, bursting through the walls with a grumbling Roar.
Harry willed them to summon Dumbledore, Pomfrey and Drinkwater at fucking once.

He delicately used his expert levitation ability to carefully turn her over. He covered his mouth when he saw her condition.

Hermione's nose and two front teeth were smashed in, as if someone had used a bludgeoning curse directly on her face. Her bushy hair was crudely shaved off, and her half opened eyes were colourless. Her legs, arms and hands were broken, the two charming slightly-larger-than-normal front teeth were missing from her bloodied mouth.

"I'm here luv, I'm here," Harry whispered, desperate for a response. He put his ear to her mouth. She was breathing faintly. He held her tenderly against his chest with his good right arm. "You are going to be all right, 'Mione. Say something luv, anything. Can you hear me?"

After what felt like a lifetime but was probably only five seconds, he got his response.

"'arry?" came a trembling whisper, so tiny he thought he imagined it.

"Yes, my sweet, dear Hermione. It's me, Harry. Harry Potter. I am so sorry Hermione. So... so... sorry...help is coming right away. Talk to me," he said softly, touching her face. Tears were running down his cheeks. He didn't know any medical spells that could help her!

Jon's face was pure, and absolute, murder. With a sudden movement, both his shield and the Claymore were summoned. He took up an active defensive stance with Harry and Hermione at his back, protecting the both of them from further attack.

"Hurts... so bad... " she sighed in his ear. Bloody saliva leaked out of the gaps of the missing front teeth in her mouth. "dark... I... can't see anything."

"Potter, look!" Jon commanded. Harry turned his head towards the opposite wall. On it was a scrawled message written in (what Harry suspected to be) rooster blood.

'The Chamber of Secrets Will Be Opened. Enemies of the Blood, beware!'

Suddenly, a phoenix fire burst in the hallway. Jon lowered his stance, the claymore angled around the shield, tip ready for a piercing strike. He opened up his stance, ready to charge.

"No! It's Dumbledore!" Harry croaked, his throat full of cotton.

An instant before the flames solidified into the bearded sage, Jon reverted the sword into his wand with a quick snap of the wrist while simultaneously releasing the aegis magic from his bracer.

"Harry? That was your message?" the Headmaster spotted Hermione, brutalized and broken cradled against his chest. Fawkes circled in the hallway, crying once in a pitiful wail. Dumbledore dashed across and scooped Hermione up in his arms. The loss of her weight against him crumpled Harry on his knees even further, muscles constricting with the pain coursing through his body, through his heart. Harry just stared, still not comprehending the blood on his hand was hers.

"Fawkes!" Dumbledore commanded, and the bird nosedived unto his shoulder.

Dumbledore was gone in a pillar of flame. Not four seconds later Auror Drinkwater was the first wizard on the scene. A large shimmering bubble preceded him down the corridor, his arm raised at the ready as he trotted down the halls. He pointed his wand at the two boys, taking in the crime scene with rapid eye movements. He spotted the snapped wand on the ground.
"What happened? Where is Granger?" For a few heartbeats, there was no answer.

"The headmaster transported her. I believe to the hospital wing," Jon answered for Harry, who seemed shaken to the core.

"I presume that is her blood, and her wand," Drinkwater said, no hint of emotion in his voice. "Any idea who did this?" He read the words written in blood on the wall silently.

"No," Jon admitted.

Harry dared not open his mouth. Blurtin random suspicions could allow Michael time to escape. He needed something concrete. This may not even have been him. He needed proof.

Jon cleared his throat. "She told our friend that she was going to the library this evening. If I had known, I would never have let her walk alone." Jon was doing a good job at explaining. Harry rubbed his fiercely burning eyes, staring at the slick reddened tiles and bloody clumps of hair on the ground.

"You two seem to be at the wrong place, at the right times quite frequently, I noticed," Drinkwater said slowly, clearly.

"Do we, now?" Jon said slowly, but a tad more dangerously. He lowered his centre of gravity, opening up his posture into a well-balanced fighting stance.

Auror Drinkwater narrowed his eyes. "Stand down, Black. It was just an observation." His voice grew hard, and bordered on being an direct order. "A guilty suspect would not be able to summon Aurors with a winged Lion patronus. It directly contradicts the emotion and desperation needed to conjure that spell. I presume it was yours, Potter?"

Harry nodded once, too distraught to even look up and scowl at him. The Auror used his wand to create a crime scene barrier blocking off both entrances to the hall.

"Lads, on me. Wands out; four paces behind at seven and five o'clock. Stay sharp. We're going across to the infirmary."

"What is the plan, sir?" Harry asked as he followed Drinkwater, forcibly commanding himself to drape the persona of a frightened twelve year version over himself. He didn't think right now he was fooling anybody, only himself.

It was taking everything, every fibre of his being to keep the rage from exploding. If he couldn't keep this magic down, he would absolutely slaughter Ellewyn-Sare, and enjoy every fucking day of his life in Azkaban. He did not even care if it was him responsible for this.

A target, any target would be sufficient.

Jon's phoenix bracer grew warm, warning him that it was connecting to Harry's magic. Jon's left arm was in close proximity to Harry's right arm, and he began to feel his own pulsing with an intoxicating, heavy, Soul-pulling magic. He took a natural step to his right to put some distance between them.

Jon glanced across to Harry, and saw into his eyes. Jon immediately looked away.

The red, pulsing, magical gleam overlapping Harry's bloodshot eyes... definitely was not a good thing.
Jon gulped in trepidation. Looks like he was going to send another hasty summons to Tonks, before Harry burnt the entire school to the ground with Dark Magic.

Hopefully her presence would calm him down.

Hopefully.
The walk across to the Hospital wing felt like a psychedelic nightmare. Harry kept his eyes low, focusing on Auror Drinkwater's boots as they marched forward. It took them less than five minutes to reach to the double doors.

Before they could enter, Severus Snape parted the doors dramatically and stepped outside, loose sleeves billowing under his arms, the very picture of a giant bat. He shut the door behind his back, eyeing Harry and Jon.

"These two again," Snape hissed in disgust.

"These two again," Drinkwater confirmed. "You are here quite promptly, Mr. Snape. Very astute timing, I must say," he said flatly.

"You wish to allusion something further, Mr. Drinkwater?" Snape countered.

"No. I wish to check on the girl who was attacked."

"The ward must be isolated for the time being. Pomfrey is doing her job. It isn't safe for you to enter." 

"I am quite sure I can handle it," Drinkwater retorted, anger getting his voice.

"A man of many talents. Auror, teacher, healer, may I assume you are also a gifted alchemist?"

Harry looked up just then. Alchemist? Why would he mention alchemy? Jon and Harry exchanged glances.

"You are stalling," Drinkwater snapped. "Please, step aside," the Auror lazily pointed his wand at Snape's midsection. "Do not hinder my work here, Severus." Severus glanced down at the weapon, a slight curling of the lips hinting on his face. It did the opposite of what a smile intended to do. Snape looked all the more frightening for it.

"There has been, a... misunderstanding," Snape offered. "A vial has been... found on one of the students in my house. It has broken and rendered him with a similar, ailment as... Professor McGonagall's charge," he added with a tinge of disgust.

"Her name is Hermione, sir," Harry said venomously, stepping forward and glaring at Snape. The rage that simmered under the surface was just itching to claw its way out and blow up. This former death eater was as good a target as any right now. He had a unique magical expertise in pissing him off.
Jon raised an eyebrow at Harry. Harry's jaw muscle was tightening, his right hand taut, but at least his eye colour was back to normal.

"Forty points from Gryffindor, Potter, for insubordination. Get your eye checked if you cannot even glare properly with both," Snape dismissed him. Jon realized that Harry was squeezing down his left eye shut. "The vial held a highly potent gaseous form of *Sanity's Eclipse*, which means that anyone getting near needs to protect themselves from the residual vapour."

"Very well. Lads, wait here." Drinkwater cast a bubble head charm over his head. He dug in his pocket for some gloves and quickly put them on. "You will watch them?" he directed to Snape.

"If I must," Snape sighed, as if this was beneath him. "Put those away," he ordered, eyeing their wands. Jon looked across to Harry. Harry held Snape's gaze for two seconds longer, then reluctantly pocketed his wand. Jon followed suit and folded his arms, keeping a watchful eye on Harry. He caught Harry's attention and nodded slowly, conveying an unsaid message:

*Keep it together Potter. We will get to the bottom of this.*

Two minutes passed in stony silence. Harry was dying inside every moment he did not know how she was doing. He had to get in there and see her.

Drinkwater came out after three minutes, manhandling a surly Marcus Flint whose hands were manacled behind him, a similar bubblehead charm over his face. Flint's eyes were colorless, just like Hermione's. He stumbled along as the Auror steered him out the doors, complaining that it was so dark inside his mind, and he wasn't leaving the hospital until he could see.

"Where is the nearest floo node?" he asked Snape.

"By now, the only Floo fire that would be active is the headmaster's. The rest are shut down, temporarily." Snape added with a touch of delight. Harry knew he took pleasure in making other people hate him. Drinkwater cursed softly.

"You're lucky, Flint. I've a mind to walk you all the way down to Hogsmeade to get this over with," Drinkwater snarled. "Dumbledore has given the all clear to enter," Drinkwater said to Snape. "He requested that you send them in."

"Very well," Snape sneered at the two Gryffindor boys. "Inside," he commanded, pushing open the door and striding in. Harry and Jon followed suit, with Drinkwater steering Marcus back inside.

"What's going on with him?" Jon asked the Auror about Flint.

"He's the guy who did this," Drinkwater muttered. "His wand did the bludgeoning. Even had the scissors with pieces of Miss Granger's hair still in his pocket. It seems Snape found him writhing on the ground, crying like a little bitch how he can't see. He'll be crying more when we throw him in dementor paradise."

"No... I'm sorry... just..." Flint protested desperately, panic on his face.

"Shut up, idiot. It's far too late for that now."

Harry didn't believe that Marcus 'Two plus two equals twenty two' Flint was behind this one bit. And from the way Snape was acting, Harry thought Snape didn't believe this scenario either. Harry didn't spare him another glance. Flint could wait. He quickly made his way down the aisle to where Pomfrey and Dumbledore were standing. It was the same surgical area they had him in two weeks ago.
Professor Dumbledore turned towards them.

"Thank you for your quick summons, my boy. It has made Madame Pomfrey's work so much easier."

"What? How is she, sir?" Harry asked, his adrenaline pumping.

"Madame Pomfrey says the physical damage would be healed overnight. We are in the midst of countering the Sanity's Eclipse gas."

Harry frowned in thought. Hermione looked a complete mess not even ten minutes ago, yet here was Dumbledore calmly saying that 'the damage would be healed overnight'? "What does the gas do?"

"It is a potent mixture of what appears to be Instant darkness, Blindness gas, and Dementia's Embrace. It was used initially to incapacitate Hermione. Blinded, and with a strong psychosis inducing potion taking over, she had no chance to defend herself properly against Flint. Afterwards, after he fled the scene, a second vial broke in his pockets. He too, was found close to the Slytherin dungeons, distraught and in a fit of madness screaming that he cannot see. Severus arrived with him in the hospital wing almost the same time as I did."

"And his wand? It's confirmed?" Harry pressed, his gut clenching. That snake was smart. Too smart. There was absolutely no way Michael was getting away with this.

"No fucking way."

"Yes. Bludgeoning curse. Multiple times. Such a sad, misguided young man. To throw away one's future, just like that," he snapped his fingers. Dumbledore shook his head, watching Drinkwater sit him down on a chair. "For what? Terrorizing a young, innocent girl cannot be worth being sentenced to that horrible place. He will be tried as a full adult. It was his choice and he must be taught a lesson on the error of his ways."

"He confessed already, Headmaster Dumbledore?" Jon asked, confused.

"He said he will, if we help him with his eyes and restore his sight. A confession will only grant him a minute bit of leniency. The evidence is enough to incriminate him without it."

"Send them in, Professor," came Pomfrey's voice. Dumbledore parted the curtains and allowed Jon and Harry to approach Hermione.

To Jon's utter amazement, Hermione appeared fine, except that her skin was paler than usual, her hair neatly shaved close to scalp, and her colourless eyes were darting all over the place, an affliction associated with blindness.

"Harry? Jon? I heard your voices," she ventured, her hand hovering towards them. Harry took her hand, gently, almost unbelievingly.

"Hey," Harry said, taking her surprisingly strong grip with both of his hands. "Yeah it's us, Jon is here too."

"Thank you for finding me so quickly. I just...hope...they find a cure," she said softly. "This is probably the most frightening thing to experience... this darkness. I'm trying my best to... stay positive, I guess."

"They will. Or we will, Mistress Hermione. You will be cured," Jon reinforced gently as he took her next offered hand, sandwiching her small, soft hand between his.
"Thank you for your quick thinking, Harry," Pomfrey said wearily, packing away her potions kit. "As the attack happened within half an hour, the blunt trauma to her bones was easily attended to. Her teeth would be re-grown and fixed by Saturday evening."

"So she would be okay?" Harry prompted. This was a miracle!

"That aspect, yes. Severus, Healer Worthington and I would meet tomorrow in the morning to formulate a counter potion to restore her sight. We just sent word. He said we would be here by first light."

Harry was happy that Hermione was not in any sort of physical pain. He totally forgot that quick attention to broken bones was probably Pomfrey's bread and butter in a school for magical children that played Quidditch. Metal shards had ripped into him and lodged itself into his bones, which is why she had to remove and re-grow his, which was a completely different situation.

"Would that be...soon enough? It isn't, a permanent thing, right?" Harry asked Dumbledore.

"We do not know, as yet. This is the first time I have seen this Alchemic combination. A warped yet ingenious mind designed this weapon."

"Can I speak to you a moment," Harry leaned over to Jon. "I'll be back, one moment Hermione."

Both of the boys stepped away from the bed and moved away from the adults. "Jon. My blood is a strong anti poison restorative. Pomfrey tested it last week. I need you to distract the Auror and Snape. I want to test it on Flint first."

"You, going to let him taste your blood?"

"No. I'm going to drip it in his eyes."

"Ah," Jon twisted his face in disgust. "You're the wizard here."

"I'm going to cloak in the bathroom," he whispered. "Distract them away from Flint when I leave."

"It will be done."

Both of them walked back across to the adults. Drinkwater was filling out a parchment, writing down an incident report to be transcribed later into the preliminary case files. They spent a few minutes by Hermione's side talking to her and consoling her. Harry found inspiration, spying the magazine pile tucked away in a box at the corner of the room.

"When we fix your eyes, maybe you can check out last month's Witch Weekly. It's a special edition. I've got a cool idea!"

"What are you on about, Harry?" Hermione asked, squeezing his hand.

"You can pick out a style you like. And I will grow your hair for you. My wand specializes in hair growth spells, remember my Santa Claus bit?"

Hermione laughed aloud. For her to be laughing so soon after being brutally attacked and blinded was a miracle. It sounded like music to his ears.

Both Dumbledore and Pomfrey smiled at the young teenage friends. "Splendid idea, Mr. Potter," Pomfrey commended.

"Sure, I'll like that. But, priorities first." Hermione closed her eyes and sighed. She gestured at her
face with resignation. "Maybe ...maybe it won't be so bad... if..."

"Don't talk like that Miss Granger," Dumbledore said kindly. "We will restore your sight."

"Thank you, Professor," Hermione whispered dejectedly.

"Excuse me, just need to use the loo," Harry said and excused himself. Jon watched him go.

"Mistress Hermione, I wish to speak to the Auror. I will be back soon."

"Take your time. Thanks for visiting, Jon."

Jon approached Drinkwater, who was dipping his quill in the ink bottle calmly as he wrote down his report. Snape loomed over Flint, making sure that he was witness to the proceedings.

"Auror Drinkwater, Professor Snape, a word please," Jon clasped his hands behind his back.

Both men looked up at him, curious.

"Something you want to add, Black?" Drinkwater paused writing mid word.

"Yes. It concerns your house, and the school on a whole. It may or may not have ...influenced this dastardly attack, Professor," Jon directed towards Snape.

"Go ahead, Mr. Black," said Snape.

"He is restrained? I do not wish this to spread." Jon inclined his head towards Marcus. River Drinkwater nodded. He transfigured a portion of the tiles underneath Marcus’ feet into a anchoring metal plate bolted into the ground with an iron ring protruding on top. He cast the manacle tethering charm and a chain manifested around his ankles and cuffed wrists, looping through the ring.

"That is a permanent transfiguration, Drinkwater. I do hope you will get your maintenance team to replace the flooring you have ..."

"Quiet," Drinkwater snapped at Snape. "Black, we will borrow the healer's office." He got up, taking the roll of parchment and writing instruments. "Flint, do not make me silence you. Not a sound. You need all the leniency you can get."

"Yes sir," he sobbed.

The three of them walked over to the office and Drinkwater shut the door.

"Take a seat, Mr. Black," Snape drawled.

"No. I will address this matter quickly. I have found out that your house wishes to challenge me."

Snape said nothing, just watched Jon with a narrowed expression. Jon met his stare. Snape used his leglimency, trying to find out how he knew of this.

He saw flashes of full scale war; Ice, Fire and Dragons. He broke off the contact.

"Have you found what you wished to see?" Jon asked sardonically.

"Did you just try to probe the mind of this student?" Drinkwater enquired. Snape and Drinkwater squared off.
"It is of no matter," Jon dismissed. Both men turned their heads incredulously at his tone. "I wish to bring this out in the open. Your house. Do you deny it, Professor Snape?"

"I do not deny it," he responded.

"Auror Drinkwater, Slytherin believes that this attack on Miss Granger; being a friend of mine, will incur anger on my behalf."

"Does it?" Drinkwater probed.

"It does. But I am comfortable with my anger. Harry, on the other hand..." Jon shrugged. "Do not underestimate him."

"What are you saying, Black," Drinkwater said slowly.

"I wish to make myself available to Duel challenges from your house. Any year, any student currently in this school. I will abide by whatever rules are in place by the Headmaster. My only personal limit is that the maximum amount of opponents I must face at once be no more than four. I cannot guarantee the safety of more than that. I hold on to my right to have a second."

"Why in the world would I even allow such a thing?" Snape snapped.

"Your house has sent a strong, cowardly message by attacking an innocent second year girl. I am sending a message back."

Snape stared at the young man in front of him. For him to insinuate that he was a coward in front of the Auror was not behavior expected from a second year student.

"You are a second year as well," Snape countered.

"If they believe I am easy pickings, they are sadly mistaken," Jon said confidently.

"You will address me by my title, Mr. Black."

"Very well, Mr. Snape," Jon bowed.

"My title is Professor, boy."

Jon turned to Auror Drinkwater, dismissing Snape. "I want to end this feud through honorable combat. If he does not want to agree, I wish to ask that you, Auror Drinkwater, use your influence to make this happen. I do not wish to deal with cowards."

By this time, Drinkwater's eyebrows were almost touching his hair.

"If you are sure, I will talk to the facilitators about it," Drinkwater said, glancing across to Snape.

"You are not going to...hurt anyone, are you, Mr. Black?"

"Every injury that will be inflicted... will be within the boundaries of the set rules," Jon grinned widely. "I cannot account for what may happen... if there are random attacks on my person or my allies within my vicinity. I believe even mortal injury used in self defense is pardonable under deathly attack, isn't that what you told me, Auror Drinkwater?"

"I don't believe any of my students will try to kill-" Snape began.

"Mistress Hermione had her bones broken, face smashed in, and is currently blind, and you refuse to accept the possibility that this could have escalated into murder? Your unflappable loyalty to your
cowardly house is commendable, Professor Snape."

"He got you there, Snape," Drinkwater murmured, nodding. Snape stared at the both of them, his face contorting with rage. As if a light switch had been flicked on, Snape's face became impassive, almost indifferent.

"I have had enough of this...farce," Snape snapped. "Do as you wish, Auror." He spun around and exited the office, leaving the door open in his wake.

Snape glided across to Dumbledore and Pomfrey, who were converged around Marcus and shining light into his eyes.

"Professor, it's a miracle! I can see again!" Flint cried in joy, watching his chained hands. A minute passed and then another voice penetrated the room.

"Madame Pompfrey!" Hermione shouted. "Come quickly!"

The healer dashed off to her bed. Snape froze, watching his student, then the headmaster who was almost as dumbfounded as everyone else. Pomfrey disappeared behind Hermione's curtains. She poked her head back out.

"Albus, her vision has returned!" she exclaimed, then ducked back inside.

"A Miracle at Hogwarts," Albus Dumbledore mused, also walking over to Hermione's area. Snape stood at the alert, his eyes darting around and eventually put two and two together.

"Where is Potter?" he snapped. Just at that moment there was a loud flush and Harry came out of the washroom, drying his hands on his handkerchief.

"Right here, Professor Snape," he said hesitantly, cautiously. "Did something happen?" he watched everyone rush towards Hermione's curtained section.

Snape threw up his hands to the sides in resignation.

"Harry!" Hermione exclaimed from her curtained-off sickbed. "Come quickly!"

Harry dashed across. "Hey.. what's up?" Hermione flung herself across to him from her bed, hugging him fiercely. Harry returned the hug, her soft short hair pressed against his cheek.

"Thank you," she whispered secretly into his neck. "I can see again! It is a miracle!" she said loudly, convincingly.

"That's... amazing!" Harry acted. "How?"

"Maybe it was the ghost of the Healer of Godric's Hollow," Pomfrey laughed in a whimsical manner. "The very same healer who founded the Hospital wing," she said in reverence.

"Your arms," Harry empathized. There were massive black and blue areas where the bludgeoning curses hit.

"Well, she says that would take the longest to heal. Long sleeves for now. It doesn't hurt anymore, thank God. Important thing is that I can see again, it was a nightmare I couldn't escape...you don't know what it's like...it was awful, I kept thinking to myself that I would have to learn Braille, and never see a sunshine again, and what would I tell my parents? Would they have taken me out of school?! It was horrible!"
"I am relieved that you are well, all things considering Hermione," Jon said smiling. "However, I shall not forget. Do not go out wandering alone without telling us," Jon reminded her. "I will protect you. This I swear."

Hermione just stared, her eyes watering at his words.

"Oh..." she squeaked, and gave Jon a massive hug too. He awkwardly returned the hug. "It's ok..." she sniffed. "I will be careful, very careful, from now on."

"That's all well and good," Auror Drinkwater said. "Young men, would you please give me a few moments with the young lady?"

"Sure," Harry said. Jon bowed and allowed the Auror to approach.

The two of them left and took a seat at the eating table, leaving the adults to crowd around Hermione. Harry shot Flint a glance. He appeared to have folded back into himself, staring at his chains, contemplating his not so promising future.

"He's the fall guy-" Harry whispered when they were no longer being observed.

"I realize this. He is an enforcer, not a seasoned alchemist. Someone gave him the gas potion. And set him up."

"And whoever could that be, hm?" Harry's face twisted in frustration.

"We need to stop him quickly," Jon stated the obvious.

"He's using his strong points. Potions. Brains. Scheming. I have to start upping my game."

"You have a plan?"

"Yeah. It's a crazy plan, but we need him to be caught. Vigilante stuff would just get us kicked out, or locked up." Harry pointed over his shoulder at the poor sap who was sobbing quietly in the chair, chained to the ground. "At least we helped Hermione before... I don't know what could have happened with her eyes, actually. That shit was a serious bit of alchemy for Dumbledore and Snape to not be able to counter it. This guy is getting out of fucking hand."

"The darkness is swallowing him," Jon said seriously.

Harry just stared at Jon for a while. This was a touchy subject to him, but he needed others' introspective if he really was to defeat the Horcrux left at the station. It was connected to him, somehow. Death charged him to destroy all of them, properly this time. He had no clue how to do such a thing, yet.

He lowered his voice to a whisper. "What...do you know of it? The 'darkness', that is," Harry asked hesitantly.

"Magic is not the only way one could go dark. It is deeper than that. It is the human soul, your essence that is corrupted. The more powerful one is, the more it is magnified, touching and twisting those around. I presume for wizards, it could be globally catastrophic."
"Who ...did you know? Did they turn?"

"Many. But my squire, Olly... he was only a lad. His descent hurt me the most. In the end, the hatred on his face when he sunk the knife, his bloodshot eyes pierces my nightmares sometimes. Twelve, or thirteen, I am not sure. Our age. But the hate. The hatred in his eyes was one of an old, bitter man. It was my last, true memory." Jon closed his eyes briefly.

"Your squire, isn't he supposed to be like your ...man servant or something? Why would he turn on you?"

"I offered sanctuary to our enemies. I believed that the dead walking were the true collective foe, and that I must unite the living, throw away our grievances to stand firm when the long night was to set upon us. Some of my men, including him, thought differently. A wildling ranging party killed his family a couple years prior, and destroyed everyone in his village. A sound reason for hatred, but the slope cannot be scaled again once you have gone down that path. Mutiny. Treachery." Jon stared through the table. "In the station, I saw snippets of what happened afterwards. I was brought back to life by the red witch. My loyal men could not believe it when I walked out that room. The traitors were rounded up. None bent the knee. I cut the rope that released the gallows. I watched that boy hang."

Harry knew the memories were churning in Jon's mind. Sometimes, that long walk into the Forbidden Forest haunted his nightmares. But being around his friends and loved ones once again helped to counter that horrible experience.

Jon had no one. He was a Stranger in a new world.

"Fuck," Harry said. "I'm sorry." Jon steepled his fingers on the flimsy breakfast table. He was quiet for a minute, thinking. He turned his head slightly, and stared at Harry over his bicep.

"Do not allow yourself to suffer under this hatred, Harry of House Hollow. You are the Light that shines through the darkness. The Lion roars and summons his allies, and sends fear into the heart of his enemies. I will be your fist, your sword. Leave that job to me."

Harry was silent for a long time. "What brought this up?"

"You do not even know," Jon said, disturbed. "Your left eye, the injured one. You were squeezing it shut."

"I was?"

"Yes. I believe a... part of you, was fighting it on your behalf. You could not allow the Auror or Snape to see, but you didn't even know you were doing it."

"Okay. You are scaring me now. What the hell are you talking about."

"The red magic in your eyes."

"Red magic?" It finally dawned on him. The rage, the inclination to decimate Michael...

Oh no. No no no no no...

"The Diadem. It is too close to me." Harry realized it was only six floors above.

"One of the cursed objects?"
'It must be, sensing me. Reaching out. As an empty host.' Influencing me. Trying to take over my magic.

'This fight against Dark Magicks is unending and... scary."

"The Dark Arts are many, varied, ever-changing, and eternal. Fighting them is like fighting a many-headed monster, which, each time a neck is severed, sprouts a head even fiercer and cleverer than before. You are fighting that which is unfixed, mutating, indestructible', " Harry quoted.

"Sounds about right," Jon agreed under his breath. "Who said that? It sounds like a quote from a book."

"Snape."

"Ah," Jon agreed. "It did have a familiar ring to it. Fucking coward."

"He's not. Not deep down. But he is a right bastard and keeps up the portrayal frighteningly easy. His good side is so fucking deep, it's like... diving into a well of darkness. But the water is clean. His patronus is the same as my mother's. Seemed he genuinely suffered after he betrayed her."

"That... sucks." Jon tried his hand at the common tongue. It felt weird using their slang.

"What? Why?"

"I would have enjoyed... making him regret what happened to Hermione. In a ...non-fatal way, of course. Just hurt him a bit. Turncoat Scum." Jon shrugged. "Ah. Such is life. So ...what are we to do about the Diadem."

"That one is probably the most dangerous horcrux. It has a personality. It thinks. Getting close to that one may not be a good idea for me."

"Leave that one to Tonks and myself, then," Jon nodded.

"Good idea. I can't risk getting too chummy."

Footsteps were approaching. "Lads, time to go. Granger would be kept overnight. I am taking Flint to London after I drop you two off," Drinkwater stated.

Harry decided he would test the waters. How good was Drinkwater at his job, anyway? "Shouldn't it be ok now that you've caught him?"

"He isn't psychotic. This was planned and he probably had an accomplice. He's just..."

"A bit thick?" Jon prompted.

"That's the word," Drinkwater said. "He obviously didn't expect to be caught. So whoever he's working for; or was working with him, if there is such a person, would be shitting themselves bloody as soon as they find out he's been detained."

"Hm. Right." Maybe he did know a thing or two, then.

"Wands out. Four paces, you know the drill." The three of them made their way through the silent castle towards Gryffindor tower.

"YOU DID WHAT?" Both Harry and Tonks cried Saturday evening in Hagrid's hut. Jon leaned
back and laced his fingers behind his head, looking out the window.

"I challenged Slytherin to a duel, or melee; either or, it does not matter. I wish to put an end to this before it escalates. Better they accept the challenge or back down. Let them know who they are dealing with one time."

"This isn't like Guild jobs. These are kids," Tonks reinforced.

"So am I. I will be careful," Jon smiled.

"Your knife ran through wizards like butter in France."

"Extreme measures, for extreme circumstances. I will be careful."

"Jesus," Tonks breathed. "Tell me what happened last night, again."

Both Jon and Harry took turns relating the tale. Tonks was adequately disturbed hearing it the second time.

"Hm. I think I've lost count. How many damsels have you rescued now, Harry?" Tonks said quietly.

"Are we counting you as well?" Harry raised an eyebrow. Tonks raised an eyebrow back at him. They struggled not to smile at each other.

"You two," Tonks scowled. "Are trouble magnets."

"Not I. He is," Jon thumbed across to Harry. Harry scowled at Jon.

"I didn't declare open war on Slytherin House," Harry countered.

"They declared open war on our house, Harry of House Hollow. You are our banner man, you wave the flag proudly."

"What?" Harry said, confused.

"Gryffindor follows your lead. You say, and it is done, through means of magic most foul, or rumours most prolific. Either one, whatever you do or say, it gets around. In a good way." Jon shrugged.

"He's right Harry." Tonks sighed. "Everyone likes you. People meet you for the first time and they... just do. I don't know."

Harry blushed. The last time around people were skeptical, or even downright hostile.

"That trick with the cowl. You have created a cult like following. A cheeky, binding piece of foolishness that only our house uses. Even some of the girls have adopted the practice. No one has divulged the spells required to their inter house friends. It is a Gryffindor trait exclusively."

"What is this, then?" Tonks enquired, curious.

"Just this," Harry touched his extended cowl hanging over the left side.

"Oh, that. Cute. Maybe you should call yourself the Dark Lord Potter," Tonks teased.

"Light Lord would be more appropriate, since his primary wand ...sucks." Jon thought it rolled off his tongue easier the more he used it.
"It doesn't suck. Just really good at Light magic. Anyway. So. We don't need to talk about the Slytherin situation right now. Jon and I could do that later. Right now we need to... deal with Michael."

"Agreed," Jon declared.

"Drinkwater is good. But I think Michael has the advantage over him right now."

"River has been an auror for about six years," Tonks said. "Dawlish is his partner. Dawlish been at it for twenty, I think."

"How old is he?"

"Drinkwater? I think thirty, thirty one or so."

Harry made a mental note of what year should be inscribed on his tombstone if he made any moves on Tonks.

"Last night. You said you had a crazy plan, Harry," Jon said. Harry took a deep breath. He pulled back his cloak from his head. The evening sunlight crossing Hagrid's windows were low enough that it didn't bother him as much.

"Some privacy, Tonks?"

"No problem." Tonks got up and ran a series of charms, barriers and created a ward out of her mug to anchor in the privacy spells.

"Wow. You're good at those," Harry commended. He didn't know how to do any of those spells at all. Tonks shrugged, pleased with herself. When she was done, she did a mock bow. She sat back down at the table.

"Ok. Don't freak out guys. I said it is crazy," Harry began.

"Spill it," Tonks prompted. "The suspense..."

"We give Michael what he wants. A way to open the chamber."

There was a heavy pause. His clan mates both looked at him, then each other; probably thinking that he was losing it, but not wanting to say anything directly to his face.

"Let me explain. Remember I said last week that Lucius Malfoy is behind the whole... blood purification campaign in the school? He would simply recruit another stooge if we don't shut him down. We need to stop him, too."

"Okay," Tonks said slowly, still unconvinced.

"Right. To summarize. We counterfeit a message from Lucius Malfoy using an owl similar to Draco's. We would need to swipe a legitimate one from Draco and copy his father's style of writing. Tonks, you need to subtly hint to Drinkwater that you think that Lucius might be plotting something sinister at Hogwarts. And he has an inside agent. Bring up the Dobby investigation Dumbledore was helping with during the holidays."

"Listening," Tonks nodded.

"In the letter, we tell Michael that the main column of sinks were built around a tunnel into the chamber. With the traps still intact that Michael has gotten past, hopefully he would not suspect that
anyone is unto him."

"You are playing a dangerous game here, Harry," Jon noted. Harry nodded in understanding.

"This is just a plan. It would need work and input from you two to really be... executed. The blood on the wall gave me inspiration. Drinkwater saw it and would also be curious to what Chamber they were talking about. Once we get him to monitor their post, he will become intrigued."

"But, wouldn't Michael be able to release the monster?" Jon asked.

"Only I know what is down there. Michael won't know what to look for. Remember, this place is a Secret. Only Vo-" Harry stopped his speech abruptly, almost exposing his knowledge of Voldemort's aim to return to life to Tonks. He tried not to, but his face turned slightly red at his near-miss mistake.

"Only...?" Tonks' eyes narrowed on him.

"Only... very few wizards can. Parselmouths," Harry said reluctantly. "He shouldn't be able to open the snake pit."

"Risky, but it could work. Once he opens the secret entrance, Drinkwater could nab him," Tonks deduced. "But now, there is a Basilisk just waiting to come out."

"Yeah. I thought of that. We go in after and kill it. Rooster method first, and just in case that doesn't work out... I believe we may need Alexandria to help us with another way to nullify its attacks. I can't depend on Fawkes."

"Alexandria?" Jon queried.

"This idea... came about when I saw Drinkwater and Flint under the bubble head charm. I thought about a magical dog muzzle. We would need a very special cauldron. Indestructible. But still enchantable to expand and contract with Engorgio. I open the pit, and as the Basilisk comes out, I cover its head by expanding the cauldron, then shrink it until it gets snug around the neck. That deals with the gaze and the bite. Then, we fight."

"Fiendfyre?" Tonks prompted.

"You're set on that spell huh?" Harry frowned. That magic was reportedly dark. "Why are you so eager? What do you really know about it?" Tonks grinned, shrugging her shoulders.

"I want to try it out. All Blacks have access to that curse," Tonks explained. "Jon here could put me to sleep when it destroys the basilisk."

"It attacks anything alive within its proximity. Its uncontrollable."

"I heard it goes for the biggest target first," Tonks shrugged.

"You 'heard'. Is there anyway, to test this fire spell first?" Jon asked. He did not like the sound of this spell, and the way Harry was reluctant to use it. Something was wrong here.

"We could. That's a great idea." Tonks said enthusiastically. Harry sighed.

"Ok. I still haven't worked out the details of the 'fight' part of this plan. Anything we can use, we should take into consideration."

"How did you do it before? Stabbed through the roof of the mouth, right?" Tonks asked.
"Yeah. Got the brain."

"Well if the cauldron's on the head, that's out." Jon noted.

"Obviously."

"So, we need to destroy the body," Jon said simply. "My offer still stands."

"If that claw is as potent as Ollivander says it is, it may come down to that. This snake is freaking tough. Which reminds me. Jon, did you see when Drinkwater did that cool transfiguration to chain Marcus to the ground? Snape was complaining to Dumbledore that it was permanent."

"I saw it, yes. Ask me to repeat it, I have no idea."

"We would need to lock down the beast," Harry said to Tonks. "What you got, hotshot?"

Tonks looked uncomfortable. "That is a really high level spell. Permanent transfiguration takes a lot of skill, and precision. The manacle charm locks in their magic, which is why Aurors use it. It is empowered by their captives magic. The weakness is sleep, or being knocked out. The manacles lose power and fades away. I got that Anchoring spell once in France, but that was when the fighting was done. I don't think I would be able to pull that off in the heat of battle."

"Show it to me," Harry insisted.

"Outside, then." Tonks got up.

The three of them went outside and took a fifteen minute walk in the cool autumn evening. Tonks led them to a rocky area overlooking the lake.

"It needs something solid to transfigure and anchor itself in. Non verbal- the spell incantation loosely translates in English 'Deep down in the sea, hold fast, forever more, Oh My Darling'. It was created by a pirate, supposedly."

Tonks did a smooth finger twirl and the wand danced between her thumb then the second and third fingers. Her wand flipped back to the normal ready position and then she tapped the ground. A solid square of metal sunk itself into the rock, with a ring of metal protruding. The ring looked more like a massive earring, and not like a stout dungeon ring like Drinkwater's.

"Well, it is something like that. Once it is created and fully formed, that's it. There is no reversal. The manacle charm can be infused into this, and released when necessary. This is my personal piece of Hogwarts landscape now," she kicked the ring with her toe.

"Looks complex. By chance do you remember the book you got this spell from, offhand?" Harry asked.

"Ministry restricted. But hear what, I will bring it for you. Got it back in my trunk. It's not in Hogwarts library. Or maybe you can come check out the place tomorrow in Hogsmeade. You guys still haven't seen it and decided if it is worth buying."

"Did you get the Cup?" Jon asked suddenly.

"Yeah, morphed into Lockhart, walked into the bank and used the key. Easy."

"Did you lock it away in Gringotts?" Jon queried.

"Not yet. I had to rush back here directly. Its locked away in my personal safe box back at the Clan
"I can't come there until you sequester it back in Gringotts," Harry said. "When did you come back?"

"Last night. Hedwig was waiting on me. Why can't you get close?"

Harry deduced the presence of two Horcruxes so close to him resulted in the bad feelings he experienced when his rage came to the front. He prayed that was the case and not something, like, internal.

He was not going down that road of suicide again. If he turned dark this time around, he trusted Jon, Ron, Hermione and Tonks to do the right thing.

"Allergic," Harry deadpanned. "Show me the manacle charm." Tonks nodded, eager to show off her auror training. Harry felt proud of himself. His deflection tactics were getting there, probably a few more atmospheric levels needed to climb and he should be at Dumbledore's echelon.

"Okay. It needs a recipient to be cast on. It doesn't work otherwise," Tonks explained.

"Go ahead. Use me."

"Vincula!"

A shiny metallic pair of handcuffs bound Harry's wrists. If Harry didn't know better, they looked more decorative than something used to seriously restrain someone. More like ... a toy used for pleasure.

Harry's right eyebrow went up. Tonks reddened as she stared at the flimsy thing binding Harry's wrists.

"It usually doesn't come out like that. That was embarrassing." She cancelled it.

"No worries. I just needed to see it. Jon. You mind if you be my guinea pig?" Harry drew his trusty Troll hair on Holly.

"That wand won't work, remember?" said Jon.

"I think it would," Harry smiled. Tonks had used it on him in France at the party. He just didn't get a chance to see how it was done.

"Whenever you are ready, then."

"Vincula!" Harry shouted. Chains shot down from the sky and wrapped itself around Jon's head, neck, chest and torso. His arms were bound crushing tightly to his sides.

"Fuck!" Jon screamed as he slammed sideways unto the hard ground.

"Jesus! Cancellation?! Quickly!" Harry cried. Did I just murder Jon?

"Rerserare!" Tonks screamed as she pointed her wand at Jon. The chains loosened a bit and Jon drew a huge breath in.

"Help! I can't breathe-" he gasped, only his face visible.

"Rerserare!" Panicked, Harry screamed the cancellation. The chains burst into pieces and flew in all directions. Tonks dove out of the way and tucked her head under her shoulder as she tumbled on the
rocky surface. Harry raised his bandaged left arm in reflex as deadly metal links came flying towards him with explosive speed.

_Not this again. Potter, you're going to die!

Something strange happened.

A tall spectral figure, robed head to toe in faded grey robes manifested into existence in front of him and swung what appeared to be a massive scythe. There was a sound of metal scattering metal and then it disappeared in a heartbeat. Metal links lay sprawled on the ground around him. His left arm now hurt something fierce.

Pomfrey did warn him not to use it.

"What the fuck..." Harry breathed. Did he just imagine that?

Tonks was in a crouch, her jaw opened in shock. Jon was on his back, gasping for precious air, rubbing his throat with one arm.

"Was that...a dementor?" Tonks whispered.

Harry knew immediately that it wasn't a dementor. It was something much, much worse.

"Yeah. Or something." He darted towards Jon. "Jon, you okay?"

"No," Jon wheezed. "My arm... and ribs.."

"Crap... Tonks! Diagnostic!" Harry shouted at her. She was at Jon's side in a flash.

"On it," Tonks wand flashed and twirled with surprisingly fast dexterity. "Not good. A few ribs are broken. He's getting trouble to breathe!"

"Shadow wing! One Ear!" Harry shouted, not taking his eyes off Jon's panicked expression. A black flash of lightning struck right behind Harry, and two threstrals were kneeling, wings laid perfectly flat on the stony ground. Harry levitated Jon carefully on One Ear.

"Jon, hold on the best you can. Don't drop him, girl." The threstral regarded Harry as if he had just hurt her feelings.

"Tonks, we gotta go," Harry said, mounting Shadow Wing. "Will send post soon," he said as the threstrals sped off towards the castle.

"Yeah. Ok. I won't hold my breath," Tonks murmured as the two of them sped off. She might as well plan for the trip down to London. Blasted cup refused to apparate with her.

Alexandria shot up from her evening nap. She grabbed her outer Hogwarts school robe and sped down the staircase from her room.

"Alex?" Angelina Johnson called as she saw the dark haired girl fly down the steps.

"Jon is in mortal danger," she breathed, not slowing down to explain. She was out of the Gryffindor portrait and running through the hallways towards the staircase at record speed. By the time she reached the front steps Harry was carting Jon along the main hall using his levitation spell. Jon was having difficulty breathing, his face was turning colour, veins popping on his neck and forehead.

"He can't breathe," Harry said as Alexandria caught up to him trying his best to keep running. Trying
to keep him steady while his bandaged left side screamed bloody murder was making it hard to move quickly.

"I know a medical charm for breathing difficulty. It will give him a temporary ease."

"He's got fractured ribs." Harry explained breathlessly. Damn, he was out of shape.

"It will release the pressure on his lungs," Alexandria drew her wand and waved it slowly over Jon's torso. "*Relaxat musculi, Respirare in spiritum sunt.*"

Jon's chest visibly expanded and he took a gaping breath of air. He grabbed Alexandria's free arm in a bone crushing grip. As he exhaled, his eyes met hers. He gasped and exhaled a few more times. Alexandria didn't flinch from the punishing grip, just allowed him to release his panic. She put his hand on his shoulder as his breathing became more regular and blood rushed back into his face.


"Roger that. Thanks," Harry breathed, adrenaline coursing through his system. The entire left side of his body was screaming at him to slow down, but he could not halt this jog. He didn't think he would be able to start again.

"How.." Jon breathed, relaxing his grip on Alexandria's arm. She took his hand in hers.

"Easy mate, we're getting you to Pomfrey." Harry huffed and puffed as they went up the stairs.

"I am magically sworn to you. A panic woke me up...It had to be a summons from My Lord Black," she shrugged. "It was a new, and wondrous experience. I knew exactly where to find you."

Harry cursed inwardly. That sounded like a Voldemort thing. No wonder his Death eaters called him 'My Lord'.

"Thank you... Alexa..." Jon closed his eyes. His breathing was getting laboured again. He began to squeeze her fingers painfully.

"The damage is severe. Let me hover him," Alexandria commanded. She took over the spell and began to sprint up the stairs. Within seconds she was out of sight and down the hall.

Harry could do nothing more than simply bend over double in agony on the staircase. Pain in his arm and his left side was getting overwhelmingly impossible to ignore. He looked around. No one was watching.

Harry poured magic into his bracer while simultaneously using his Troll Hair wand to combine, *Winguardium leviosa, Arresto momentum, Depulso et Mobilcorpus*.

Harry's wand and bracer began to glow a bright shining white. He took a deep breath as he concentrated on *Winguardium Mobilucorpus, Locomotor homenium*.

Harry felt his body being forcefully repulsed against the pull of gravity. He toppled over mid air, his upper body swung on the axis of his midsection. He was going to hit his head on the higher step!

He pushed out with his good wand hand and his body glided up with that movement, avoiding breaking his face on the centuries old stone.

Harry, you dumbass. How could I have forgotten the feel of the comet in France?
"Channel your magic through all the weapons on your body, not just the Troll wand and bracer."

"Winguardium Mobilucorpus, Locomotor homenium, Depulso, Arresto momentum, Winguardium minusimus leveiosa!"

Harry mixed and matched mobility spells in a random chant. Without warning, he was propelled forward at twice his fastest dash speed up the steps, and gaining.

The doors to the hospital wing were closed but he was barreling down the corridor headfirst, his arms and legs flailing wildly around him. He was going to break his neck!

"Alohomora!" he screamed just before impact. The door burst open and Harry flew through the length of the medical wing, bracing for impact. He twisted his body midair, trying to regain his balance. He suddenly veered to his right.

"Protegum elastico!" he screamed desperately as he flew into the surgery area's ICU curtain. He ripped down the curtain and bounced off the stone wall with his Rubber Ball Shield. A girlish scream greeted him as he fell painfully on Hermione's empty bed.

"Ow."

"Harry!" Hermione screamed, using her hospital robes as a shield and brought it up hastily around her bruised body. She was apparently caught in the middle of changing. "Wha?" her eyes were opened twice as wide.

"Sorry for, dropping in... unannounced," Harry gasped in apology, trying to lighten the moment with a joke. He lifted up his pullover and inspected the bandages wrapped around his torso.

He was bleeding, all right. His whole left side felt on fire, once again. He dropped his head against the foot of the bed; gasping in pain. His sling was damp at a few places with reddish brown stains. That magical block might have saved his life, but it earned him another night or two under Pomfrey's merciful care.

"Hi," Hermione breathed, clutching the airy hospital coverall over her bra. "Goodness! Were you thrown in here?"

"Sorta," Harry wheezed. "Medic?" whispered. The pain was unbearable now, more than ever.

"Medic!" Hermione screamed at the top of her lungs. At the same time they both heard the healer's voice emanate from the other end of the room.

"What was that racket?" Pomfrey shouted. "Hermione? What was that loud crash? WHO IS THERE? SHOW YOURSELF RIGHT THIS INSTANT!" Pomfrey flicked her wand and Hermione's curtains vanished. Hermione crouched and partially hid behind the bed.

Alexandria and Pomfrey had their wands out, ready to do battle.

"Oh. It's you." Pomfrey said with an air of resigned acceptance. She looked at the wide open double doors and the distance covered to reach the bed. She also took note of Harry's reverse orientation on the bed, his head hanging off the edge and the crashing and banging she heard before.

"Mr. Potter, I am not even going to ask. I will bring you the Murtlap essence and flesh knitting balm and potion. I am surprised you made it a whole week and a half, actually. Ms Potage, please help set up a new curtain on this station then wheel Jon closer, next to these two."
"Yes, Madame Healer," Alexandria said immediately. She turned to leave. Pomfrey levitated Harry and turned him so that his head was on the pillows.

"Hermione, I guess this bed's owner has come to reclaim it. Please take your things and occupy the bed on the right. I guess Gryffindor will have a little slumber party tonight."

"Yes, of course," Hermione said, still crouching and hiding her body. She didn't move an inch.

"Oh Ms. Potage!" Pomfrey called out in a voice larger than you would reasonably expect from the kindly matron. "Please grab a roll of bandages from shelf two, 'puncture wounds', and another roll from shelf five, 'muscle knit'. Painkillers are on my desk, Kit A. Also, my writing kit. Scribe a note to your House mistress stating that these two are in here, as soon as you can!"

"Yes, madame healer!" Alexandria replied from Jon's side the room.

"I will make an apprentice of that girl yet," Pomfrey said proudly, nodding to herself.

"Alexandria?" Harry asked, intrigued.

"That piece of spell work saved Jon's life. A highly advanced healing combination, executed perfectly," Pomfrey commended. "I have never lost a student in my thirty years here Mr. Potter. Never. I will not start with the Black scion, nor you, who have come frighteningly close last couple of weeks. I have had enough experiences with your father and that rascal already; to not see history repeating itself. Now, let me cut through those clothes. Whatever mischief you two were up to, I'm sure your father and Godfather would approve. Totally disgusting behavior."

By the time Alexandria came back with the bandages, Harry was feeling pretty good about himself inside, even though his injuries were screaming bloody murder. He heard it during the previous journey from the Professors how close he resembled his father.

But for the legendary Hogwarts Healer; Madame Poppy 'Composure-Beyond-Human-Capability' Pomfrey herself, to compare him and Jon to his dad and Sirius... and to say they would approve of their shenanigans with such a deliciously horrid tone...

That was an Honour.
"So it's true then, Weasley?" Draco asked outside the Herbology greenhouses as they queued up for class Monday morning.

"That you're a git? Yup, it's true."

"I don't see them around; Potter, Black and the mudblood Granger," Draco smiled.

"Don't call her that."

"They say Potter and Black sent each other to the hospital wing sparring." Draco proclaimed, making sure everyone was listening. "That sounds like typical Gryffindor genius through and through." Pansy squealed with laughter.

Ron reddened. Alexandria told the house that they suffered a magical accident 'trying spells'. Jon and Harry did not explain further over the weekend when the gang visited after Drinkwater's sparring practice session. The both of them said it was an accident and they didn't want to talk about it.

Contrastingly, Hermione was in bright spirits, uncharacteristically going through Witch Weekly with Ginny and Alexandria. Since Hermione did not appear upset about the two of them fighting or having a row, Ron left it at that. It was apparently an accident, not some dire falling out between the two friends.

"It's none of your business, innit?" Ron spat back, angry of not being able to defend his mates better.

Professor Sprout came outside the greenhouses and ushered the bickering second years inside. Ron and the second year Gryffindors all grouped up and took their seats, bristling as they took offense at the snickers and jibes thrown at them through the period when Sprout wasn't looking.

"You sure about this, Harry?" Hermione asked, inspecting the weapon in her hands. It was after lunch Monday afternoon. Hermione was still recovering from her injuries so she got to spend more time with Jon and Harry, who were both bed ridden for the weekend. Today was the first time all three ate lunch together at the table since that horrible Friday. The two boys managed to get out of bed and hobbled across to the eating area for lunch.

"Yes. We will make you a new wand, but until then, this is yours. Hippogryff feather on Birch. Very good at animating, and slicing and dicing. Most winged creatures' wands are okay at levitation, so give it a whirl," Harry encouraged.

"Winguardium Leviosa!" she swished and flicked at the magazine on the table. The magazine shot
up to the exact height as the tip of her wand, floating steadily. "Libernoctis!" the magazine opened smoothly. "Convertat page!" The magazine pages began to flip over one by one.

Hermione continued in this vein, adding modifications while hovering the book. It closed, opened, turned on the Y axis, rotated one hundred degrees away from her, she conjured a bookmark, and with another complicated combination, ordered all the magazines to stack in a pile by order of issue date and number.

Harry and Jon just stared, listening to all the Latin flow effortlessly off her tongue and marveled how her delicate and intricate wand movements controlled the magic with such precision.

"It'll do. I absolutely love its animation spells. What else did you say... slicing and dicing?" Hermione asked.

"Yes," Jon replied, watching her style of casting. This girl was a prodigy. He felt like a clumsy bison in comparison when it came to wand work.

"You guys don't want this apple right?" she indicated the fruit bowl placed by elves in the middle of the table.

"Go ahead. There's more where that came from," Harry shrugged.

Hermione levitated the apple. It rose to her command. "Spiralis secare!" It began to rotate in midair, an invisible knife peeling it precisely with a spiral cut. Harry picked up the fallen apple skin. It was efficiently perfect; no excess white flesh was wasted on the rind.

"Horizontali Segmentum!" The apple cut in half horizontally. "Alea Altitudenum!" she continued, her excitement building. The apple diced itself vertically.

The cut up pieces floated in mid-air, resembling a destroyed apple floating in space.

"Try Fructus ascetaria, segmentum alea," Harry advised. He showed her a salad toss motion with his wand and then a mixing spin. He remembered this spell from observing Mrs. Weasley the last time around.

"Fructus ascetaria, segmentum alea!" Hermione repeated, pointing at the fruit bowl. All the fruit in it were sliced, diced, and tossed into a delicious fruit cocktail.

"I take it back," Hermione whispered, looking between the wand in her hand and the dessert bowl before her. "This wand is ...amazing! A potions student's absolute dream!"

"Glad you like it," Harry beamed. "Hermione Jean Granger, I know proclaim you to be (he cast the gloom and boom charm on himself) My First Customer!" Harry's voice echoed grandiosely throughout the ward.

"What?" she laughed. "You made this?"

"Yes I did. Since you're special, it's free of charge. My gift to you."

Hermione laughed again, hugging the wand close to her in a frightfully girlish gesture. Jon smiled, absorbing how Harry had a knack of making sick and injured girls feel happy, and helping to put their unfortunate situation behind them.

Her laughter died down. "Wait, I never told you my middle name," Hermione noted.
"Overheard Mr. Drinkwater when he asked for your full name," Harry lied immediately. He felt halfway proud, halfway torn because of how easily his little fibs were rolling off his tongue. Hermione's eyes narrowed slightly, unsure if she ever had to answer that particular question.

"You seem to know a lot of things..." Hermione said suspiciously. "Not just about me. About people in general."

Harry shrugged. Dumbledore old chap, you've got to give me some pointers on how not-to-be-blurtng-out-random-future-knowledge techniques. He could see the questions forming on Hermione's face.

Uh Oh. The Big guns were needed to be unleashed. He swelled magic through his core.

Deflection level: Godlike! Prerequisite personal influential sway accrual: Complete!

Dumbledore persona: Execute!

"Hermione, are you ready for me to grow your hair?" Harry asked smoothly, eyes twinkling.

"Um. Once you're absolutely sure," she replied skeptically.

Harry deduced that he needed to work on his eye twinkle. That was definitely too much resistance.

"Don't worry. I got this. Here, I'll test it out on mine first." Harry watched Jon's longer, curly hair that came to rest on the top of his collar. He waved his Troll on Holly wand and tapped his head.

His hair grew a bit longer, and mimicked Jon's roguish uncombed look, except Harry's hair was more spiky naturally.

"Oh," Hermione looked between them with female appreciation. "Now that is something," she said agreeably. "The long hair and no glasses, hm."

"That is... disturbing," Jon said. "You do look completely different."

Harry translated that in Jon-speak as 'What the hell! Now we look like brothers or something and you're going to steal my thunder with the ladies! But you're my bro and all so... I can't hate too hard. Do your thing, mate.'

Harry smiled, then put on a solemn air.

"Do you approve, Mistress Hermione?" Harry copied Jon's knightly accent and demeanor. "I will style your hair exactly as you wish. This I swear," Harry bowed his head slightly.

Hermione raised her eyebrows, watching Harry's and Jon interplay. Jon was smirking, taking his ribbing in stride as he folded his arms. He winced as he did this, forgetting the injuries to his ribs.

"Alright then, this is the one I like." She unfolded a magazine page tucked away in her Hospital robe pocket. The picture was a model with a smooth, side-parted professional style with gentle waves at the end.

"It shall be done, Hermione of House Granger," Harry waved his wand and tapped Hermione's scalp.

Hermione's hair began to grow before their very eyes. Harry realized that it was growing out how it naturally would and probably needed some cajoling to style. He gingerly got to his feet and summoned a bedside mirror from one of the patient stations. "Hold this, milady," he said politely.
Hermione took the mirror and looked into it as Harry worked his charms. "A touch here. Oui! Gorgeous, simply gorgeous!" Harry used his wand like a stylist's comb, flitting here, gliding there. "Just fabulous, such volume and sheen!" he twirled here, preened there, all with an extravagant air. "The boys would absolutely die," he murmured in anticipation. When her hair had reached the appropriate length, he canceled the hair growing charm and executed a permanent transfiguration charm to prevent the spell fading.

He stepped back and bowed, a perfect replica of Jon's formal full bow. Jon finally laughed.

"Voila! It is done Mistress Hermione! Go forth, and Slay."

Hermione looked at herself in the mirror, smiling. With her teeth fixed and hair perfectly styled, she looked so ...different. She could not believe how dramatic the change was to her appearance. She blinked, and her eyes watered a bit.

"Miss Hermione?" Jon asked, immediately concerned. "Are you well?"

"You two, are the best friends I have. Thank you," Hermione said sincerely. Harry remembered that around Christmas time last time around Hermione was feeling terribly lonely due to Ron being a prat. Both Jon and Harry simply smiled, nodding. "And don't think it's just about the hair, which is lovely, by the way. I was more concerned about my eyes, and my wand ... in that order. The hair would have grown back. The perpetual darkness... was something I didn't think I would have gotten used to. Thank you so much, Harry." She got up and gave him a hug around his neck, careful to avoid his injured arm and torso. "And to you as well, Jon," she bent over and hugged him in the chair.

"The 'Light that penetrates the darkness'..." Jon mused.

Harry's eyes opened wide. Why was Jon throwing that out in front of Hermione?

"What?" Hermione asked, wondering where that one came from.

"Oh nothing. He seems to have a way with 'damsels in distress', doesn't he?" Jon teased Harry.

Now it was Harry's turn to give Jon a dark look. Hermione grinned at their attempts to one up each other.

"Don't mind him," Harry said. "He's just mad he doesn't have the mad hair styling skills I got."

"Surely," Jon agreed, rolling his eyes.

"I am not a 'damsel'!" Hermione pouted. After a few moments, she sighed. "I guess I was in dire need of help, and you two showed up. Perhaps, this time, I do fit the bill."

"And the last time, with the troll, remember?"

Hermione grinned and waved her hand in dismissal. "That was last year. However, Jon; you are absolutely right. I will be more vigilant... and maybe with your help I will get better at defending myself."

"Of course, that's what friends are for, milady."

Harry recognized that Jon used milady to females that he has accepted as more than acquaintances. And his use of first names by itself was only when the woman was personal. Harry didn't know what to call the relationship Jon had with Alexandria, but from what he knew of Jon, touching and calling a woman by her first name alone seemed much more intimate from the quiet and polite Lord
He just hoped that Hermione didn't take this crush on too seriously, if it was a crush. He could be reading this totally wrong, and Hermione would eventually like Ron as per normal and everything would work out fine.

Later that evening, Harry, Hermione and Jon were visited by Professor McGonagall. She had informed them that details of Marcus’ attack was not to leave the hospital wing. Auror Drinkwater wanted to investigate who would panic and either try to leave the school or get in touch with Marcus at the holding cell in London.

The three Gryffindor students decided that the less negative attention on Hermione, the better for her recovery.

"Mr. Potter has done a fine job, dear," she inspected Harry's work.

"Yes, I told him so already. Please do not let him get a fatter head than he has already, Professor."

"Speaking of 'fat head,'" McGonagall waved her wand above Harry's new hairstyle. She frowned, and nodded at the same time, impressed. "A permanent keratin growth transfiguration. Hmmmm... ten points from Gryffindor for unsupervised human transfiguration, but twenty points for successfully casting a permanent one. Next time, please inform me so I may... observe."

"Yes Professor McGonagall," Harry replied dutifully.

"Poppy has advised me that the three of you can be released under strict orders. So, I must give you the bad news. You are temporarily banned from playing Quidditch until I receive a clean bill of health from the healer, signed by the headmaster. A substitute seeker will be recruited in the meanwhile. The faster you allow yourself to heal, the sooner you shall be able to train. You have three weeks until the season starts. Our first match is on the second week in October. Please, I am reminding you, for your sake, do not overdo it."

"Yes, Professor McGonagall," Harry apologized.

"Jon. You are to watch yourself as well. You injury was complex and you will take at least a few weeks to feel at your best. Your clinic visits will be twice weekly. Madame Pompfrey will owl you when to visit."

"Understood, Professor."

"For your quick thinking and your bravery, the two of you are awarded fifty points each for your actions Friday evening concerning Ms Granger."

"Thank you very much, Professor McGonagall," Harry and Jon chorused, bouncing fists.

"Once we have an understanding that you will not be injured again, you shall remain in my good graces, the two of you." McGonagall gave them a stern, single nod and commanded them to follow her down to the main hall for dinner. "Now. With me."

There was a lull in the noise from the great hall as they entered. Jon walked over and stood up next to Alexandria. Cormac MacLaggen paused his eating and looked behind him. He scowled but eventually moved his plate aside, forcing other students to make space for him.

"Thank you, good sir," Jon dismissed him and sat down. Harry smirked as he observed this walking past. Harry and Hermione walked further down the table and grabbed an empty spot next to the first
years. Ginny looked positively shell shocked when he casually sat down next to her.

"Hey," Harry said, already summoning two plates and utensils from the rack in the centre of the table. It floated effortlessly towards them and Hermione thanked him for her set. Harry nodded and began piling food on his plate. Ginny was still frozen in place by Harry's proximity.

"You hair," she remarked, eyes wide.

"What?" Harry said distractedly, mouth full of food.

"It is longer," she squeaked.

"Oh. Yeah." Harry made a dramatic head-sweep, tossing his hair to make it fall more naturally over his collar. He grinned at her. The intended tomfoolery flew completely over her head and she simply stared at his green eyes and long hair, biting her lower lip.

Oh crap.

"Yeah," Ginny breathed. Her pale skin turned scarlet. Harry felt awkward now. He smiled, now totally embarrassed, and took a sip of his drink. The other first years were staring at Harry, snickering at Ginny's obvious infatuation.

"Why were you hiding your face last week, Harry Potter?" Colin Creevey asked in a voice which sounded more like a little girl's.

"My eye was injured. It's still a bit sensitive to light," he answered truthfully.

A round of whispers traveled through the first year bunch.

"We thought... you t-turned Dark," Colin explained. Some of the other first years nodded in agreement.

"Oh no. Not at all," Hermione defended him. "Harry will never do such a thing."

Another round of whispers traveled across the first years.

"Wow Hermione," Ginny said, finally seeing Hermione's hair. "Look at you!"

Hermione smiled shyly. "Thanks," she said, not knowing what else to say. Some of the second year boys, including Ron did give her longer looks than usual. Then some of them turned their attention to Harry, who was presently shoveling food in his face. He was sitting closely next to her, shoulder and elbow touching. Seamus, Dean, Lavender and Parvati decided that Hermione was trying to get a bit chummy with one of her best friends.

Why else would she do up her hair so nice all of a sudden?

Most of the student population did not know about what had happened to her and had no idea of the real reason the three of them were in the infirmary over the weekend.

Harry, oblivious to the undercurrents happening at the Gryffindor table, ate his dinner in complete ignorance.

The remainder of the week passed by without much incident. Hermione was complimented by her house mates during the week and the other houses actually took second looks when she walked down the corridors.
Potions was the last class on Friday afternoon. When the bell rang and homework assignments were handed out, Snape sat down at his desk, dipping his quill in his red ink bottle and began scribbling in his pile of essay papers to correct.

"Potter, Black, stay after class," he commanded over the din.

"Ron, Neville, make sure all of you stick together," Harry leaned over and warned the two boys sitting in front of him. "No deviations, keep a look out."

"Um. Sure," Ron said, confused.

"Just walk in a group, as usual," Harry smiled, clapping him on his shoulder. "We will come up when we find out what he wants."

"Cool," Ron replied. The majority of students filed out the class, eager to start the weekend. Harry and Jon approached the teacher's desk. Snape did not look up from his marking until he had finished that particular essay. When he tallied the marks, he circled it and the matching grade on the top of the parchment. With a tap of his wand it was bound with a conjured ribbon that saw much better days and sealed with a Slytherin-green wax stamp.

He raised his eyes under the greasy curtain of black hair and watched the two of them. Both boys waited patiently, not intimidated in the slightest. Snape stood up, slowly circling the both of them.

"The Auror has addressed the facilitators with your... foolhardy request," he drawled as he ran his finger across slim digests on a bookshelf. "Ah. "The Salute" by R.W. Higginbottom. Book one of the Chronicles Of Magical Battle Arena Tactics series." He deftly used his index finger to pull out the top, then slide out the entire narrow paperback.

Snape opened it to the first few pages, flipping pages as he scanned the diagrams and handwritten notes made by the author. He looked up, finally focusing on the two of them. He lifted it in front of him so that they may see the cover.

"Do you know what this is, either of you?" he drawled. Their expressions did not change one iota. Snape carried on without breaking stride. "Of course you don't. One of you were raised by muggles..." the way he said it made Harry want to slap the insult right out of his mouth- "the other fell from the blue sky."

There was a pause where Snape allowed either of them to retort with a hot-headed response. Harry said nothing, and let the silence hang. Jon was looking around the class, bored. Harry almost smirked when Snape narrowed his eyes at them, not understanding the lack of an easily provoked Gryffindor temperamental outburst.

Harry almost felt sorry for him. Almost. He decided that he would give Snape a pseudo-reason to dock points, since it appeared he might self implode if this silence continued.

He let the silence continue for another minute, anyway. Just to tick him off.

"Thank you for your astute observation, Professor Snape," Harry said respectfully.

"Ten-" Snape began, then corrected himself mid docking. "Be mindful of your cheek, Potter," he snapped, unable to rationalize where the cheek actually was. Harry said nothing. Jon patiently clasped his hands behind his back, as if he were the ranking officer awaiting a tardy status report from his subordinate.

He tapped his foot once, twice. Snape turned on his heel and walked back to his desk. He opened his
draw and took out a fine parchment scroll bound with a leather strap.

"This book is the first in a series of texts about the ancient art of magical dueling. It is an introduction of sorts, compiled from British historians and some international intellects over centuries. Transcripts of invaluable material that cannot be found anymore in its original form, has been summarized here."

He tossed the book on the school desk nearest to them.

"Since you were so formal, Black," Snape said coolly, "Drinkwater has begun the procedure. Each of the students in my House has been given a written transcript of your challenge: "I wish to make myself available to Duel challenges from your house. Any year, any student currently in this school. I will abide by whatever rules are in place by the Headmaster. My only personal limit is that the maximum amount of opponents I must face at once be no more than four. I cannot guarantee the safety of more than that. I hold on to my right to have a second." These were your exact words. Interestingly enough, it covers any loophole that can twist favour upon yourself, or my students, except for the insane condition that you will accept up to four combatants from any year in Slytherin house. Would Mr. Potter be your second?"

Jon looked at Harry. Harry nodded immediately.

"He will," Jon agreed.

"Very well. Potter, as second, it is your duty to try to convince Black here that he either seeks redress through negotiation, or, seek a peaceful resolution to the matter at hand in hopes of preventing bloodshed."

"Blood has already been shed, Professor Snape," Black insisted, his voice clear and unwavering.

"And the culprit has been caught," Snape countered.

"If it was a singular effort, I would see it end then and there."

"But you do not wish to retract."

"There are two in your house that I do not send this challenge to. I will notify them through post."

"Interesting. Potter, would you try to persuade him to drop this foolhardy request?" Snape asked in probably the most polite attempt at a request Harry has ever heard from the man.

"May I have a word with Jon?"

"Make it quick. You may step outside."

The two boys left the class and stood outside the door in the hallway. Harry drew his Fwooper feather wand and cast a silence spell on the door so that any eavesdropping spell Snape might have cast would be nullified.

"Physically, we're f**ked right now. We don't know what Slytherin has planned in that sealed scroll he has in his hand. Are you sure this is what do you want to do?" Harry dropped his voice to a murmur.

"The wording states the headmaster sets the rules. Not foreseeing anything seriously dangerous in those rules coming from him and the Auror; I see no problem. I can take on four of them, even without the aegis."
"Jon, your body isn't in top condition right now. Monday we couldn't even get up from the hospital bed."

"Magic makes things much easier," Jon dismissed his injuries. "As my second, you will protect me when the duel ends, in the unlikely event that I shall fail."

"Jon... we cannot lose to Slytherin... that would be a catastrophic *disaster.*" Harry shuddered at how the rest of his years here the second time around would be absolutely miserable if that were to happen. A pair of freaking second years challenging anyone from the entire Slytherin snake pit to duel and then getting their arse *kicked.* That would leave a devastating psychological scar.

*For life.*

No way he was going to let that happen.

"Jon, I have to make a judgment call here. We have to set some rules. Rule number one, both parties must agree on the date. Rule number two, both parties must battle on a uniform arena, with the same conditions for both sides. Rule number three, One on One, or the both of us against them up to four students. How about that?"

"Fair enough. Shall we?" Jon nodded, eager to get back inside. Jon's confidence was contagious. Harry grinned.

"Yeah, let's do this."

"Well?" Snape drawled as they came back in the room.

"As his second, I agree to the initial terms of Jon's challenge, but humbly request that amendments be made concerning the dueling conditions."

Snape strode over to his writing desk and procured a dictation quill.

"Think carefully. Then dip this quill into the bottle. It will transcribe what you say on this parchment," Snape ordered.

Harry did so. He cleared his voice.

"Three simple items. One; both parties must agree on the date, two, both parties must battle on a uniform arena with identical conditions for both sides... and um, three... the duels are either one on one, or the both of us against two, three and no more than four Slytherins."

"You are in luck. The headmaster was convinced by that ...man... that certain precautions must be in place and have made the rules list." Snape drew out another scroll tied with a ribbon and sealed with the headmaster's wax stamp. "Under careful consideration, four of my students agreed to the challenge. And your terms suit theirs. Please read, and sign this scroll, if you accept the headmaster's rules."

Harry and Jon read the headmaster's rules. Basically it drew the line on piercing, slashing, and permanent bodily injury spells: Sectum-class Reducto-class, Flame, Poison, Debilitation, and any hint of Dark Magic being performed will be dealt with by Auror Drinkwater and himself.

The Duel must be done on a weekend, on a floating wooden raft that would be placed on the lake. This raft would be circular and forty five feet in radius. Knocking a competitor off into the water during one on one battles will result in victory for the opponent. During a melee, all team members must no longer be able to compete or sent into the water to claim victory. No outside magical or
physical interference during the match would be allowed. Supporters would be present with installation of bleachers on the banks.

"He's making it into a show," Harry groaned.

"It is a spectator sport, Harry." Jon said offhandedly and signed without hesitation. Harry signed as well.

"Good. Here is the acceptance to the challenge. Montague, Carrington, Malfoy, and Bole await agreement on the date and time."

"Why am I not surprised," Harry sighed.

"You know them?" Jon asked.

"Flint's quidditch team..." Harry shrugged. "Must be missing their skipper." Jon took it and read it.

"Why all this flowery verbose?" Jon asked, confused. He continued reading. "Finally. Good. It says here tomorrow at high noon. Would there be any guarantee that my housemates will not be attacked in retribution of victory of this duel?

Snape sneered at them.

"Attacks on students are strictly forbidden in this school, Black," Snape reminded him not too gently. Harry noted the example of Snape's well-executed higher-level deflection and avoidance technique.

"Hm," Jon said, staring at Snape. *He never answered the question, Jon thought.*

"What?" Snape demanded. Jon refused to bait the man further.

"Professor. The ink on this agreement is almost a week old. And the parchment was high quality, but someone seemed to have kept it in a place with a lack of fresh air and sunlight. The leather ribbon is now crusty," Jon said calmly, without inflection.

"I rather you made your decision after classes. We all know how diligent you Gryffindor students are," Snape's mouth made the tiniest upward curve, a mere tightening of the cheek muscle.

"By chance were you wishing that we would back down on such short notice, Professor?" Jon challenged.

"Are you?" Snape drawled, raising his eyebrow.

Harry had to admit that Snape had a screwy way of getting things to go his way. He goaded Jon easily this time using Jon's own code of honor.

"No," Jon signed the acceptance to duel. Harry signed next to him.

Damn it. Snape still succeeded in manipulating us because we are agreeing to tomorrow's date. Bastard.

Harry was positive Snape had the rules letter in hand from Dumbledore and the Slytherin acceptance letter signed by his students that same Friday night.

"Very well. It is agreed. Be at the lake at 11:55 or you shall be considered as cowards who reneged." Snape smiled for the first time since the term started.
"Thanks for letting us know well in advance, Professor, so that we could prepare," Harry commended sarcastically.

Ah. He goofed up. There it was. The classic Gryffindor temperamental outburst.

"Ten points from Gryffindor for your cheek, Potter," Snape retorted, fully expecting the response this time. "Take the book and read the headmaster's rules. It will guide you in your code of conduct tomorrow. We are finished here."

The walk back up to Gryffindor common room was strange. Jon moved with a brisk stride, excited. Harry was deep in thought, struggling at times to keep up the pace. Only a few Gryffindor older students were there, some studying, while others were enjoying the afternoon playing games or reading a book. The majority of the house was outdoors enjoying the cloudless afternoon, a rare occurrence this late in September.

Except for the entire year two group. Ron, Hermione, Neville and the rest of the second years were all waiting for them by the fireplace. The conversations came to an abrupt halt when Jon and Harry entered. They moved as a group across to them.

"What did Snape want?" Ron asked bluntly.

"I think Dumbledore might want to make it an announcement at dinner," Harry replied distractedly.

"Oh come on," Hermione griped. Harry sighed.

"He would be the better person to explain-" Harry began.

"Tomorrow, we are taking on Slytherin in a duel," Jon nodded, dropping his bag on the ground and plopping down on the couch. He summoned a footstool from underneath a writing table and casually crossed his World Wizarding Gear Combat boots on it. He took out *The Salute* and began to read, a slight smile on his face. Their year two classmates looked at each other, perplexed, hoping that one of them understood what Jon meant.

"'Taking on Slytherins' ... what does that mean?" Seamus exclaimed. "The tournament roster and schedule is out?"

"No. I have challenged their house to honorable combat. Harry is my second. We shall fight on the morrow."

"Challenged their house!" Ron laughed. "Crikey!" He hit Dean on his back who was choking on his crisps.

"McGonagall is going to have her nut when she hears this one!" Seamus added, howling.

"As if you two couldn't be in more trouble than you usually are," Parvati scolded. "Is it war you want? Why make statements like that?"

Hermione and Neville were the only ones in their group who weren't laughing. Hermione stepped right up under Harry.

"No. You didn't, Harry. Youshan't! Please tell me *this is a joke!*" Hermione argued, suspecting that Jon didn't really tell 'jokes' and this was the blasted truth.

"Sorry," Harry said in apology. "Or... not sorry. I'm not sorry about doing it. Just..."
"You're sorry you are going to worry me to death or something?" Hermione suggested. Harry shrugged.

The rest of the crew's laughter died immediately.

"Ok. This is getting weird," Lavender said in the silence.

"What is getting weird?" Alexandria, Angelina, Katie, Alicia and Ginny Weasley came through the door. Fred and George came in after. Harry was grateful that Fred and George were taking on their undercover guard duty seriously. Oliver and Lee Jordan came in last. Jon immediately stood up from the couch when he saw Alexandria enter the room.

"We are going to be taking on Slytherin's Quidditch squadron in a duel. Harry and I, versus... whoever those three are and Malfoy." He watched Alexandria approach warily. His shoulders squared, and his posture became rigid. "Alexandria, you are well?" he asked politely, grimacing at her stern expression.

"Well, I was... until I heard... what was it that I heard? A Duel?" Alexandria hissed. Her face was getting red with anger.

"Yes," Jon explained simply. Alexandria walked over to him and forcefully poked him in his ribs. Jon flinched as if he had been stabbed. He rubbed the spot gingerly.

"No," Alexandria commanded. "Look at you. You are not yet healed. Madame Pomfrey will not allow it."

"Too late. We signed and sealed," Harry reinforced. "Snape has all the stuff and his guys are probably drilling as we speak. Dumbledore is gearing up to put on a grand show tomorrow."

Alexandria looked cross. "This Potions Master; Snape, is an idiot. He does not care about his charges," she huffed. "If it must be so, I will be ready as your medical backup, my Lord Black, if needed." She curtsied angrily and stormed up the staircase into her room. The door slam echoed in the resulting silence.

"She's mental! What was that she said?" Ron asked in the silence. "Snape... doesn't care about his charges? They have the advantage!"

Neville finally laughed. "Oh no. She knows exactly what she was talking about. You guys weren't there. Slytherin won't know what hit them." He came across and offered high fives to Harry and Jon. The three boys grinned as they connected. "You got this."

"What is this, then?" Fred asked. Harry told them that they were going have a melee on the lake tomorrow and the staff would facilitate the school by setting up bleachers. The Gryffindor quidditch gang was suitably impressed.

"So, you are saying, that the two of you," Oliver Wood jabbed two fingers at them; "Are going to take on three Seventh years, and Draco Malfoy in a duel?" he raised up four fingers. He looked quite ridiculous with his fingers waggling in the air like that.

"Yup," Harry nodded.

"And you are saying-" Oliver pointed to Neville; "that Slytherin won't know what hit them."

"Yup," Neville agreed.
"I am definitely missing something here," Oliver watched the two second year boys at the center of attention. "Those blokes know their stuff. Malfoy probably does too. You two are dangerously overconfident."

"Nah, they'll be fine," Neville insisted.

"There is no need to worry," Jon said calmly. "Harry is the Boy who Lived, not so? A legendary hero. Have you no faith?"

Harry groaned. "That was an accident, Jon. Remember? I had no part in that."

"Are you trying to convince them, or not?" Jon squared off to Harry.

"You're doing it wrong. That story had nothing to do with any aspect of my skill."


"Isn't there any way you could retract this challenge?" she asked Jon. Her expression blatantly conveyed that she suspected the real reason behind this foolish display of testosterone. It was Revenge.

Harry and Jon turned towards her.

"No. Nor do I wish to," Jon said simply. Hermione frowned, thinking. Harry knew that 'It's all my fault' expression all too well. He hated making Hermione worry. This time it could not be helped. The following questions and ambiguous statements of their chances of survival were getting on Harry's nerves. He decided enough was enough.

"Guys. Listen. Drinkwater and Dumbledore used our challenge to orchestrate our fight into a big show. Snape was probably drilling his guys the moment he got the Challenge and Duel documents in order."

"And only now decided to inform us, the craven," Jon snarled. Harry nodded in agreement.

"Yeah. We all know how Snape does things. And Dumbledore loves to throw a convenient blind eye at times. So if it is a show he wants, it is a show he'll get. We'll give the whole bloody school a show to remember."

"Hear, hear!" Ron exclaimed.

"Nice," Katie replied. "You two planned the whole boy band hair thing too?"

"Love the confidence Harry-boy," George nodded.

"Anything you need, we're your guys," Fred declared.

"Don't crash and burn," Angelina warned. "You'll never live it down."

"Have no fear, my friends. This is what immortal heroes do for fun. Come. Let us prepare," Jon hit Harry with the back of his hand and headed up to the bedrooms. The two of them squared off in the dorm.

"You're lucky I am around, you know that, right?" Harry scoffed. "I think you're being a bit cocky."

"You're lucky I am around. Saved your life a few times, didn't I?"
"You're keeping count?"

"Yes. The tally is climbing, I must say," Jon smirked. "I am accustomed to some sparring and skirmishes on a far more frequent rhythm. This peace, unsettles me."

"Getting chained and suffocated almost to death didn't excite you enough?"

"Bah. An accident amongst friends. Not the same."

"You really think you could fight right now?" Harry probed.

"Once I don't get hit, I'll be fine."

"It's a fight, Snow. That is what happens."

"With Roderick Hallow, the legendary Lord of the Light as my second, how can I lose?" Jon clapped Harry on his bad shoulder. Harry grimaced in pain. "Sorry. So weak," Jon shook his head with laughter.

"Anyway. You saw the rules. We can't damage them ... permanently, or even threaten to seriously damage them with our casting. Kinda blunts your edge, if you understand what I mean."

"I know. I was hoping you had a way around it."

"I don't. But! Damage doesn't always need to be blood and broken bones. We'll hurt them where it'll hurt the most... their Slytherin pride."

"Ah. Makes sense. They are like the Lannisters, feeling they are better than everyone else."

"Correct. Whoever those Lannisters are."

"The Red and Gold 'lions' of Casterly rock."

"What? We're the red and gold lions, Jon. Gryffindor, remember?"

"Ah. Yes. Bad comparison. Apologies."

"Anyway, here's the plan. Let me get some stuff from here than we'll go to the Room of Requirement. Remember that Excanduscent fireworks spell Tonks had at Beauxbatons?... I was thinking..."

The following morning Harry and Jon were late heading down to breakfast. There was a roar of voices getting louder and louder with each step closer to the great hall. Colin Creevey and another first year were waiting at the last turn before the entrance to the hall.

"There they come, Jean-Marc! Go! Get Alexandria!" Colin ordered. His friend took off at full speed down the hall and through the massive double doors leading to breakfast. Colin brought up his camera and took a photo of the two of them advancing down the hall. Jon and Harry glanced at each other, confused. "Guys! Jon! Wait a moment. She wanted us to... ok here she comes!"

Alexandria came into view with little Jean-Marc. Her face was calm, composed, but her eyes were ablaze with anger.

"You British love to fight."
"Morning, Alexandria," Harry grinned. "I thought you were coming to tell us something we didn't know."

"Alexandria," Jon approached, feeling contrite. "Yesterday. I did not wish to anger you so--"

"Jon. I will deal with that, later." She cut him off. "I must warn you. The other houses are hostile towards our House and the both of you, in particular. Three quarters of the school think that you two are arrogant enough to challenge the entire Slytherin house? Why is this lie so rampant?"

"It is the truth, Alex-" Jon began. Alexandria put the full force of her glare on Jon. Harry rubbed the back of his head.

"You...what?" she snarled. A long string of French curses rolled out her mouth for ten seconds straight. Jon stood there, chin up, hands clasped behind his back in the at ease position, absorbing the tongue lashing akin to the ancient oak absorbing the winds of winter. Harry's ears turned red. No matter the language, a proper cuss out was a proper cuss out. "This stunt has sent this school into war. No wonder McGonagall is in such a catty mood. Our points tally has been decreasing at an alarming rate as of last night. She is in a foul temper since dawn this morning. Right now, it is madness in there. It started off as a simple food fight. Now it is a totally different beast. She will have your heads when she returns. I cannot help you. Follow me." Alexandria turned on her heel and marched back down to the double doors.

"Die Potter!" a random Slytherin fifth year jumped out a nearby broom closet, readying his wand with a blasting curse. Alexandria flashed her wand without breaking stride and a massive mop attacked him, wrapping the disgusting dirty tentacles around his face. He was left writhing on the ground, both hands fighting the vicious monster trying to eat him alive. Colin Creevey and Jean Marc just stared at the back of her head, absolutely smitten with her.

Alexandria did not even look back as she led the four junior boys towards the double doors.

"You chose wisely not to come down for dinner last night. This school has become a mad house! The prefects had to part two serious fights last night. The heads of House were on patrol hours after curfew keeping the peace! Docking of points and detentions have been rampant up to early hours of this morning. You British are a rowdy lot when it comes to house loyalties and hooliganism. Those Slytherins... are the absolute worst. I am so glad I was not sorted into them."

"What about Dumbledore? What is he doing?" Harry asked.

"The Grand Sorcerer is treating all of this like some sort of joke. No one dares hex anyone else in front of him, but he seems to be totally unaware of the chaos unleashed as of last night. I am not sure if he is pretending, or not. He is down by the lake. Where were the two of you last night, anyway?"

Harry and Jon were frozen in the doorway, watching the utter chaos. "Training," Jon explained.

"Shea!" Alexandria summoned, sending a glowing light from her wand. A butterfly shaped patronus message flitted across to the Slytherin fifth year girl. Shea was at that moment casting a water charm on one of her first years being attacked by a swarm of conjured bees. Shea came over after attending to her, blocking random pieces of flying food and random spells as she calmly crossed the warzone. The moaning girl was levitated behind her across the main hall. Shea eyed Jon and Harry with a weird expression when she came in front of them.

Harry and Jon were witnessing a full blown breakfast war in the hall. The junior Gryffindors were hunkered down behind an overturned table, under siege. They were taking cover as Slytherins wearing plain black robes with handkerchiefs wrapped around their faces were hurling hexes and
magically projecting the remains of breakfast towards the Gryffindor end of the hall. There were no teachers or prefects around. Shea Carrow had somehow walked through that entire melee without fear, efficiently blocking stink spells and projectiles that veered too close.

"You guys are fucking nuts. Alexandria, you sure know how to pick 'em." She smiled anyway.

Alexandria ignored her statement, pointing over her shoulder.

"Montague, the younger one, will need murtlap potion and probably a helping hand," she advised her Slytherin friend.

"Oh? What did he do now?" she sighed. Shea blocked another dungbomb that was deflected back their way.

"A mop is trying to kill him!" Colin exclaimed excitedly. Colin and Jean Marc immediately brought down scuba goggles that were hidden underneath their cowls. A red and gold bandana that was wrapped around their necks were refastened around their nose and mouth. "We're going back in! Come on!" Both first years sprinted and slid behind the overturned breakfast table, reporting to Forge Weasley. Harry spotted a masked Ron priming what appeared to be Dungbombs from a large storage box. Seamus, McLaggen, and Lee Jordan were taking turns coming from under cover and spraying the room with blasts of magic.


"Ah. This is more like it," he nodded in appreciation. "Where are the authorities?"

"Somebody unleashed a termite jinx on the bleachers set up overnight. The teachers are trying to repair it before the parents and invited guests arrive. Some of the staff are helping Hagrid cut down trees to create new wooden planks. The prefects and upper classmen are also helping," Shea said. "Year five and down are well... here."

The enchanted ceiling had dark clouds reading *Die Slytherin, Die* floating across the entire hall.

"Why does that termite spell sound like a twins' sort of thing?" Harry murmured, touching his chin, watching on as spell fire exchanged across the hall like laser fire in *Star Wars*.

"Who is winning?" Jon asked.

"Gryffindorks, obviously," Shea viciously batted away a jelly legs jinx with a beater's bat held in her left hand. "They have dungbombs. Alexandria has been busy helping my house with medical attention, actually. Those with asthma have really bad reactions to the dungbombs. She has tried her best to help the more seriously jinxed students up to the medical wing. I must round up the next batch and help where I can."

"You two, you better fix this before the teachers come back!" Alexandria pointed her wand at the two of them, crouching as she went back into the fray.

"Harry!" Hermione had finally spotted him from her huddled position behind the overturned long table. "Stop this! Do *something!*" she screamed as she cast another umbrella charm to protect herself from splash damage from clashing spell fire overhead. Harry nodded at once. "Will do!"

He didn't move an inch, just stuck his right hand in his pocket and leaned against the doorframe.
Hermione rolled her eyes and covered her nose with the sleeve of her robes.

"Don't worry about us!" Fred bellowed, casting a volley of Vomiting hexes. Two runners got caught flush on their backs, falling to their knees and bringing back up a lovely mixture of sausages and eggs.

"We got this Harry!" George laughed. "Behold!" A loud, ripping, flatulence roared through the hall. George cast what appeared to be a toxic fart-throwing curse, the dark, noxious fumes spreading out of his wand like a flame thrower. A group of five Slytherins were caught trying to escape, flailing their arms and crumbling in a dying heap, the spell eating away at their bodies but more importantly, their souls.

The victims held their hands up to the Light, crying for their mothers to take them home.

"They'll give up, eventually," Ron shouted as he gave Jon and Harry a thumbs up. George and Fred immolated another retreating group of attackers with what appeared to be a combined fart-thrower. The mixture of the brownish-green blast of gas offered no solace to the innocent and guilty alike. The wails and coughing of the inundated souls penetrated deep within the hearts of the enemy.

Slytherin Fifth year Everest Hargreaves could not believe third year and second year Gryffindorks had them pinned under cover.

"Fuck this. Slytherins... ATTACK!" He vaulted over the bench. Many joined him, screaming "For Salazar!"

"No! Get back! God damn you! Back!" Blaise Zabini shouted, trying to order the older Slytherin attackers to stop climbing over their cover. They didn't take heed, too enraged to listen to sense. Blaise peeped over their overturned table, a grimace on his face as he watched his allies fall under the onslaught.

"May god have mercy on their souls," he prayed as he saw his comrades bravely charge across the hall. Out in the open, they were done for.

"They're suicidal!" Lee Jordan announced. "This is it! Artillery!"

Ron grabbed two dungbomb grenades from the box. He tapped his wand on the tightly wrapped bundle of burlap material and tossed it across to Neville, who caught it and expertly lobbed it across the room. The rushing wave of attackers were scattered by the noxious blast.

"Six more are down," Dean announced, picking off another with a well timed tripping jinx. He too, was soon overcome by the stench, and gave up the ghost. "Seven."

Ron repeated the priming charm on the second 'bomb and this was caught by Lavender, who surprisingly, also had very good aim. The Slytherin table was decimated as this one snuck through their Iron Curtain defense. Their dwindling numbers tried to escape, but the ghastly fumes eventually took them out. Some were left crawling on their bellies, the stench suffocating them quickly as the heavy, thick layer of bomb smoke permeated over that half of the breakfast hall. The few who were still on their feet, were sent stumbling, tripping, trying their best to escape through the eastern doors. Others simply passed out, noses bleeding in agony.

"That's ...fifteen. They're running. Let's finish them off," Dean announced, counting. He gave Seamus, Ron and Neville a bounce.

It was a massacre from then on out.
Blaise Zabini held on as long as he could, but it was futile. The Gryffindor tactics were overwhelming. He saw the dark, brownish haze settling in over his face, a monster created in the bowels of the Devil.

"I've... failed, Draco. It's up to you, now," he whispered, before the blissful dark took him.

An hour later no one would have thought that there was a Dung-bomb massacre in the great hall. Harry and the other Gryffindors helped clean up the ghastly mess, and used a combined banishing charm to clear the stench.

"We set it up well." George approached his twin.

"And executed like a boss," Fred agreed. The mind numbing Gryffindor Quidditch team handshake was performed once again.

"Victory," George faced the east. He let his face be warmed by the sun's rays, eyes closed in rapture. "Never smelled so sweet."

"Any casualties?" Fred asked.

"Not a soul. Flawless victory."

"You guys," Harry grimaced. "Have outdone yourselves."

"It wasn't our most meticulous scheme. But sometimes, brute force is all that is necessary," Fred said sagely.

Jon folded his arms, silently agreeing with this tactic. They were heavily outnumbered, but their ordinance was too advantageous. It was a complete and ruthless slaughter.

"You were our inspiration, lads," George came between Jon and Harry, draping his arms on their shoulders, still smelling of fart toxin. Both Harry and Jon covered their noses.

"A second year transfer challenging the house of snakes? You got to be kidding me. No one simply ups us like that." Fred snapped his fingers. He wagged his index finger at them. "Oh no, no, no, no. Not so easy, mate. You caused this, Black and Potter."

"Or Potter-Black?"

"Potter calling the kettle Black?"

"Ok, joke's over," Harry groaned.

"We owe this victory to you two," Forge said in unison.

"Really? Don't pin this on us. We weren't even participating. You're lucky McGonagall hasn't swooped down and cursed you into oblivion," Harry warned.

"Nah mate. We got that covered too. Check it out." Fred and George came in closer so the four of them made a rough circle, and produced the Marauders Map. "Behold. The secret to our success. Watch. Teachers are still a fifteen minute walk away. And down in the dungeons, look. We destroyed one of the dungeon loos too. Filch is cleaning that up. Snape has the four of them sparring since dawn. Malfoy, Bole, Montague and Warrington."

"He must really want this win," George said.
"The Marauder's map," Harry said automatically.

"Whoa. You know of this?"

"Yeah."

"How?"

"Seer's dream," Harry explained. It sounded like a good enough reason to know things he shouldn't know. This was a glorious opportunity. That map was important and he needed it. "I was wondering when it would finally pop up."

"Whoa."

"Whoa."

The twins were, for the first time Harry could recall, lost for words.

"Yeah. Whoa." Harry shrugged.

"So..."

"So..."

"Yeah?" Harry asked.

"You..."

"See things?"

"In my dreams. Sometimes." Harry replied.

"Wicked."

"Blimey."

"It belonged to my dad." Harry said earnestly.

"It did?"

"Who?"

"Prongs."

"Holy cricket."

"You ...want it back?" George offered.

"It... I don't know. I would like to. But... you.. well.. this..." Harry gestured to the now cleaned great hall. "Was epic."

"It was, wasn't it?" Both twins grinned at each other. Harry couldn't believe in the future that there could only be one of them still alive.

He will fix it, this time around. George was currently talking to him.

"Hm, what?" Harry apologized, lost in his thoughts.
"I said: if you don't mind lending it to us now and then, I'm sure your dad would have wanted you to have it. Here." Fred offered it to him. He told him the code words to activate it. Harry listened intently, pretending he didn't know.

"Thanks. It means a lot to me." Harry and the twins executed the mind boggling Gryffindor handshake.

Now he had a way to track Michael Ellewyn-Sare. He activated the map, and looked for his name. It was found down by the forest boundary. He was surrounded by other seventh years and a few teachers. Probably being the model student, helping out with the repairs.

Fucking snake.

"Come on Black. Let's owl Tonks. She might want to see the show."

At half past eleven there was a mass exodus of students out of the school, the students trimmed in green pouring out of the front doors.

"Who in Merlin's name told my house to go first?" Snape muttered to himself.

Snape watched the proceedings like a hawk from the Slytherin combatants' tent on a rocky area overlooking the lake. The solemn, forest green tent was without frills, without any sort of typical Slytherin boast. It was a salvaged muggle army tent, outfitted with proper enlargement enchantments of course, but the simplicity of it personified the task set out for those four boys.

No nonsense. No sense of entitlement. Only one purpose lay in front of them: To squash the Gryffindor upstarts who dared to come into this school and challenge Slytherin, the house which had over the years, produced the highest number of the most powerful wizards ever to walk the earth.

His sleeves billowed in the autumn wind as he paced outside the tent. Escorting his students was Professor Sinistra. There was something strange about his house procession.

"Draco!" Severus called out. "Retrieve the omnoculars on the desk. Bring them to me."

Draco dashed out of the tent and gave it to him. Snape noted that the crash course in dueling had him looking much worse for wear. No amount of counter potions could totally eliminate the number of spells he had absorbed during sparring. His skin and hair looked sickly, but he held himself erect, and ready for the fight to begin in a half an hour.

If Severus did not know his student from since birth, he would have presumed that Draco Malfoy had grown a spine over the past week. Volunteering to be on a dueling squad of much more experienced wizards and enduring the training took some sort of guts.

"What's going on?" Draco asked, peering across the lake towards the long snakes of students trekking down to the stands. Snape put the omnoculars to his face.

Are those, bubble head charms?

Many of his students were dropping vials of potion in their eyes as they walked, or coughing into handkerchiefs. They trudged down wearily, as if beaten, and broken.

"I don't know. There seems to be an issue with the lower years. The Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs are following them. Wait-"
"They could not be serious."

Coming out of the castle last was House Gryffindor.

"In Line, In Line!" Percy Weasley was bustling about, ordering miscreants here and there into a neat orderly fashion. At the front, Ron Weasley was holding a massive flag, a glittering Red Lion against a golden coat of arms banner flapping proudly in the midday sun.

They had organized themselves into a small marching band, complete with bagpipes, drums, flutes and trumpet. The pipes were played by the Scottish students; Cormac McLaggen, Jimmy Peakes, Jack Sloper, and Mary MacDonald, the boys dressed in red and black kilts. Snare drums were played by Oliver Wood, Katie Bell, and Seamus Finnigan. The tuba was held awkwardly by Neville Longbottom, who was grinning proudly. Lee Jordan was striking a massive bass drum with a *Thoom, Thoom* beat at the back of the band.

Minerva McGonagall, resplendent in deep forest green tartan robes and steep pointed hat, stood at attention in front of her charges. A red and gold ceremonial war banner was draped diagonally across her torso, the Sword of Gryffindor proudly belted at her hip.

Two loud battle horns were blown by Fred and George Weasley, signaling for the students to begin marching on the spot.

The bagpipes started, the snare drums followed, and the flute pierced the clear blue sky. House Gryffindor began marching down the front steps. The remaining students who were not playing instruments opened their voices loudly in song; singing a modified version of 'Scotland the Brave.'

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Hark when the night is falling
Hear! Hear the pipes are calling,
    Loudly and proudly calling,
    Down thro' the glen.
There where the hills are sleeping,
    Now feel the blood a-leaping,
High as the spirits of the Gryffindor men.

    Towering in gallant fame,
    Hogwarts my mountain hame,
High may your proud standards gloriously wave,
    House of my high endeavour,
    House of the Bow and quiver,
    House of my heart for ever,
    God-ric the Brave!

    High in the misty Highlands,
    Out by the purple islands,
Brave are the hearts that beat
    Beneath Scottish skies.
Wild are the winds to meet you,
    Staunch are the friends that greet you,
Kind as the love that shines from fair maidens' eyes.

    Towering in gallant fame,
    Hogwarts my mountain hame,
High may your proud standards gloriously wave,
    House of my high endeavour,
```
House of the Sword of Silver,
House of my heart for ever,
God-ric the Brave!

Far off in sunlit places,
Sad are young Wizard faces,
Yearning to feel the kiss
Of sweet Scottish rain.
Where tropic skies are beaming,
Love sets the heart a-dreaming,
Longing and dreaming for Hog-warts again.

Towering in gallant fame,
Hogwarts my mountain hame,
High may your proud standards gloriously wave,
House of my high endeavour,
House of the Lion Banner,
House of my heart for ever,
God-ric the Brave!

Down the hill two contestants were vastly impressed.

"Bloody hell! A lot happened when we were in the Room of Requirement last night! McGonagall is wearing the Sword of Gryffindor!" Harry exclaimed as he watched their house come down the hill towards the lake. Their shabby tent was hastily set up not even fifteen minutes before, right next to the newly redesigned spectator bleachers. Harry was relieved Jon was good at these sort of things. Might have been a trifle embarrassing trying to figure out how to set up a muggle tent in front of all these people.

"You killed the basilisk with that? It's a ceremonial sword!" Jon said.

'Don't judge a book by its cover and all that."

"A sword, is not a book. It is what it is."

"Is your 'sword', just any sword?" Harry raised his eyebrow. Jon nodded in understanding.

"Ah- I see what you mean. Forgive me. I am still learning the ways of magic."

"Alexandria and Lee Jordan went all out with the preparations. Oliver told me she was working the entire night trying to get this done," Harry told Jon.

"I thought she was upset about this duel," Jon muttered. He felt a wave of appreciation and affection swell up inside of him that she would go to all this length in support of them.

"She was. But the French love their pomp. Maybe she channeled all that negative energy into organizing this for us. McGonagall is taking this on seriously! Actually, with that expression, she looks like she is the one heading to duel!"

"Aye, a true warrior, that one." Jon agreed one hundred percent.

"Do you think she knows about the battle this morning?"

"Alexandria has told me in an effort to prevent a total shutdown of all pastimes, she convinced Pomfrey not to report this directly to the heads of house. The healer's log book is still open to staff,
"Dumbledore seems quite happy," Harry said, leaning out to spot Dumbledore and the rest of staff sitting at the top tier of the bleachers. "Guess that is a good sign."

There were about forty to fifty visitors seated in the guest section. A few Ministry officials inclusive of Shackelbolt and Barty Crouch Senior, and others he did not recognize. He spotted Tonks who waved at him. He saluted her with a smile. She was sitting next to Sarah Clearwater, Penelope's sister and photographer for *Witch Weekly*. That Hag, Rita Skeeter was instructing her male photographer to take pictures of House Gryffindor's marching band.

By the time all the students were seated, it was five minutes to twelve. The Slytherin Dueling squadron flew down on brand new Nimbus 2001 broomsticks right in front of their house mates. There was a feeble groan of cheer, but mostly coughing.

Severus Snape stood at the edge of the lake where a magical rope bridge was suspended over the water leading towards the battle arena. Multiple ropes anchored on different points along the lakeshore held the floating platform immobile on the water.

"Purity of Magic," he declared, reciting their House's Watchwords.

"Purity of Magic," his boys responded, raising their wands in front of their nose in salute.

"Focus. Remember the plan." Snape stepped aside and the four of them traversed the bridge towards the battle arena covering the Black lake. Madame Hooch, the Quidditch referee stood dead centre on the platform, her broom held in her left hand.

"Names?" she barked, taking out a parchment. The four boys told her their names and their voices automatically registered a golden tick next to their written names on the list.

McGonagall eyed Snape as she came forward towards the bridge. Snape stepped aside, even though he was pretending he did not even see her. Jon and Harry came forward, Harry's hood covering his left eye from the harsh midday sun.

"I would have helped in your preparations, if I had known," she said in apology. "However, that is no excuse. In a duel, there are no excuses. You shall make our House proud this day," she declared.

"Yes, Professor McGonagall," Jon and Harry chorused. She nodded once, then let them proceed unto the bridge. They arrived at the platform and Madame Hooch asked for their names. When their names were ticked, the magical drawbridge slowly vanished from sight. The six boys all turned towards the spectators, as per instructions in the book; *The Salute*.

"Greetings, honored guests, fellow staff, and my dear students!" Dumbledore stood, his voice booming with the Sonorous Charm. "In a lucky turn of events, our Dueling Tournament this year has a chance to be opened with a Challenge!" There was polite applause at these words. "Never one to shun old customs, I have agreed to the dueling committee's request to allow this event, but with safety precautions, of course. In your hands-" (Dumbledore snapped his fingers and parchment appeared in everybody's laps) "Are the contestants' school profiles and the rules of engagement. Ah. It is now precisely noon. On to you, Madame Hooch!"

A concentric inner circle, half the radius of the entire floating platform, was painted on the arena. Half the circumference was painted green, the other was painted red.

"Slytherin- behind the green circle! Gryffindor, behind the red!" Madame Hooch mounted her broom and drifted out of the arena circle on the far side of the bleachers, so that she would not block the
spectators' view.

The two teams were approximately fortyfive feet away from each other. "After the duel begins, you may move anywhere you wish, but if you fall off, you are defeated!"

Jon and Harry took positions along the red arc, empty hands loose at their sides. The four Slytherins took position along the green, each with wands in hand. Harry and Jon mentally took note of their positions. Draco was the one closest to Harry's left along the painted circle.

"Turn around!" she commanded.

"On the count of three, you may turn and cast magic!"

"One!"

A hush fell amongst the crowd. Jon and Harry snuck out something from their robe pockets, now that their back was turned to their opponents.

"Two!"

"To arms," Harry said quietly at Jon.

"To arms," Jon responded with a grin.

"Three!"

Harry and Jon spun around but did not draw. Instead, they flattened themselves to the ground immediately. Red bolts of magic crisscrossed where they were standing microseconds before Hooch had finished the count. Harry had explicitly warned Jon about this happening. Harry grunted as he could only use one arm to cushion his fall because his left hand was still bandaged in a sling.

The items they had retrieved during the count were now lobbed in a high arc on their way down. Two small potion vials shattered at the feet of the Slytherin team.

Jon's vial broke and Instant Darkness powder exploded in a cloud on the Slytherin side. Harry's vial broke and Sticking Solution in gaseous form mixed within the darkness powder. Both Jon and Harry rolled away from each other on the platform exactly three times and came up on bended knee, almost ten feet away from the water's edge. The Slytherins' entire half was covered in thick, impenetrable smoke. That didn't stop them from casting spells wildly at the locations they thought the two Gryffindor were at the start.

"Maior Homenum Revelio!" Harry cast quietly with his trusty Troll Hair on Holly. A bright shining orb of blue magic expanded and immediately highlighted the boys with a glaring red outline. More wildly fired spells were returned from the blinded and confused Slytherins, none even coming close to either Harry or Jon.

"Pinnarum pice et malleolis!" Jon shouted, the one and only new low level curse he learned last night, specifically for this strategy. A wide stream of white feathers with tar-sticky nibs flew out of his Dragon heartstring on Olive wand, mixing into the instant darkness gas.

Spells were now being cast non-stop towards them, the four red outlines frustrated and losing composure within the pitch black cloud blanketing them. This caused even more turbulence for the steady stream of white feathers to stick onto their robes and bodies.

Jon stopped the feather spell. The multitude of feathers were swirling within the now-sticky Instant
"Now!" he commanded Harry. With uncanny precision both boys dug into their robes for each of the two ring boxes that Master Olivander had given them to test out their Niffler on Oak wands' Space-altering magic.

"Envisio finite!" Jon apparently caught nothing in mid air. Harry slid across his ring box towards Jon, who summoned it into his hand with a well practiced move. He cast the cancelling charm on the ring box and six funny looking arrows popped out, landing on the arena floor with a clatter. He immediately notched one in his invisible bow. The arrow was blunted with what appeared to be a large red and gold lollipop instead of a diamond shaped head.

"Hold," Jon commanded, his bow held taut at the ready. A spell shot towards him, narrowly missing his hair, but he didn't even flinch.

It was a flame curse, anyhow.

"Any second now," Harry agreed, crouching low, aiming at the red figures who were now trying various charms instead of attack spells to disperse the gas. One of them almost achieved a counter by casting a spelunking torch spell that seemed to be having some sort of minor effect.

As they predicted last night, Draco was first to run out of the darkness and into the Light.

"PULL!" Jon bellowed in triumph. Harry locked on his wand at a feather covered Draco and put all his magic into a new, never before seen modification on the hovering charm. He dubbed it the Skeet Shooter.

"Winguardium Depulso Mobilicorpus!"

Draco shot up into the sky as if blasted vertically from a cannon, his feathered arms flapping helplessly. Jon tracked him and let loose his invisible bowstring.

The *Depulso* Banishing charm combined with the *Excanduscent* Firework Charm enchanted on the arrowhead exploded when it connected solidly with Draco. Draco's upward trajectory was now sent horizontal. Simultaneously, fireworks erupted into the sky.

Red and gold Chrysanthemum decorated the midday sky, enchanted to shine bright no matter the hour. There was a loud "Ooooh" from the spectators. Draco eventually fell a mile or so away in the massive lake with a barely heard splash.

"Hit!" Harry snapped. "Next!"

"Hold..."

Montague came flying out of the darkness, unaware of what was to befall him. At least he had up a decent protego shield.

Unfortunately for him, *Winguardium* wasn't deflected by that particular defense.

"PULL!"

"Winguardium Depulso Mobilicorpus!"

Twang.
This time, the firework exploded into a Golden Lion with a green snake hanging limply from its jaws. The crowd clapped and screamed in delight. Snape just stared at the sky, his face impassive, his wand tapping his thigh in annoyance.

"Jon! That was for the finale!"

"Apologies," Jon shrugged as he stood up to see where he splashed into the lake. "Drat. Draco landed further."

"Oh! Careful!... Bole seems eager. NOCK!" Harry screamed.

Bole tried to do a neat combat roll as he dashed out the cloud, similar to what Jon could do almost naturally, but the effect was ruined due to his feather covered robes. Harry thought he looked exactly like a drunk ostrich falling over at top speed. Harry sent him up.

"Think you can hit him twice?" Harry shouted across the arena at Jon as Bole skyrocketed. Jon was tracking him with his invisible bow.

"Leave it to me."

Twang.

Red and Gold Carousels began spinning on first impact.

Bole shot off at the angle of deflection. Jon, with unbelievably fast hands, reloaded and brought his aiming trajectory lower at around sixty degrees, instead of the eighty five on the first release.

Twang.

Both Harry and Jon stood up, leaning awkwardly as they tracked the flight of the second arrow. They watched Bole fall, fall, fall...

A Bulls-eye Style pattern finally exploded in the far distance. The roar from the crowd was deafening.

"Fuck yes," Harry offered Jon his fist. Jon connected solidly. Bole skipped a couple times along the lake surface before he eventually submerged.

Carrington had obviously heard the roaring of the crowd and decided not to run out of the darkness. Harry and Jon waited patiently. They dodged a few random spells that edged close.

"Do it! Do it! Do it! Do it! Do it!" came the chant from the Gryffindor section.

Jon folded his arms, watching the red outline crouch low, shield in place. Harry turned towards Tonks. She was clapping and chanting along with the Gryffindors.

Harry put his hand to ear, miming he couldn't hear.

"Do it! Do it! DO IT! DO IT!" the crowd shouted louder. Harry raised his one good arm in recognition. A lusty round of applause was his reward.

"NOCK!" he commanded. Jon drew his lollipop arrow. The crowd roared even louder in excitement.

Carrington knew that something bad was going to happen to him, crouched low in a defensive position, hiding behind the strongest blocks that he knew. He just couldn't go out there. They...
Better he saved face than get his arse handed to him. Before he could change his mind, he dashed off to where the nearest edge was, ready to end this farce.

"Oy! A Runner!" Harry pointed with his open hand, exasperated. The crowd booed.

"PULL!" the crowd screamed collectively just before Carrington leaped off the edge.

"If you insist," Harry muttered to himself darkly. With an extravagant pull on an imaginary switch, Harry caught him just before his feet hit the water and sent Carrington into orbit.

Twang.

Jon and Harry waved towards the crowd as part of traditional custom. The crowd cheered as the last firework exploded into a lightning bolt in the midday sky, Carrington falling into the lake with a soft splash in the distance.

Madame Hooch flew across to the grinning duo. She pointed the wand at her throat.

"Decision! Within a round time of four minutes, twenty six seconds by arena elimination. Victory belongs to House Gryffindor!"

A tremendous roar blared from the bleachers. The majority of Slytherins were already heading down the stairs and making their way back up to the castle. Harry and Jon ran across the bridge and were enveloped in a surge of their housemates in a massive group celebration.

Tonks had found her way somewhere in the melee. Harry only knew this in the mad tangle when a girl that looked suspiciously like a younger version of Tonks grabbed him bodily and planted a wet kiss on his face. She winked at him and then shoved her way out, disappearing out of the crush.

The band started up again suddenly as the sound of bagpipes rang through the air.

_Towering in gallant fame,_
_Hogwarts my mountain hame,_
_HIGH may your proud standards gloriously wave,_
_House of my high endeavour,_
_House of the Black and Potter,_
_House of my heart for ever,_
_God-ric the brave!_

AN: Thank you for reading. "Scotland the Brave" (1911) Song Lyrics are credited to Cliff Hanley and Robert Wilson.
Snape is livid after the loss and drastically changes Slytherin's modus operandi. Harry is baffled how the cascading events he and Jon made come to pass is changing the culture at Hogwarts.

Severus Snape was beyond livid. He paced inside the tent, hands clasped behind his back. He stopped, looking outwards at the nauseating Gryffindor band making its victory lap towards the castle.

*Tower*ing in *g*allant *frame*...

It was already becoming the most vile thing he had ever heard. He used his occlumency to shut it out. The silence inside the tent was interrupted by faint dripping noises.

"They toyed with you."

The four Slytherin boys were silent, drenched, afraid to look at their head of house. Snape did not look at them, just glared outwards at the grounds. The silence stretched on.

"Well?" Snape snapped breaking the silence. "What do you have to say for yourself?"

"I- we- we couldn't-" Montague stuttered.

"Silence!"

The four boys dipped their heads again, watching the water pool at their feet. Snape turned around, his face contorted in barely contained fury.

"Useless! That performance, in front of outsiders... embarrassment is not the word."

Snape marched right up to them, forcing them to look up at his face. The meagre light that filtered in the tent was now blocked by his dark robes. "You have brought ruin to our house. I cannot make you fathom the consequences of what you have wrought upon this school."

"Sir, they cheated!" Draco complained.

Snape turned on Draco slowly, folding his arms.

"Jon Black...wait no- Potter... dispatched you with one arm in a sling. You were outclassed, outsmarted, and sent packing... by fucking second-years!"

The four boys flinched as if their Head of House had literally cursed them.

"Black sent the challenge, but that ...scheme was all Potter. He could have taken you all by himself!" Snape paced again, hitting his wand against his thigh. He eyed the four of them. "A disgrace."
"With all due respect, sir," Montgomery Montague cleared his throat. "We were totally unprepared."

There was a hushed silence as Snape turned on Montague. Snape remained unnaturally still, glaring at the seventh year.

"You will explain yourself, Montgomery," Snape replied in a soft, deadly whisper.

"Sir, we prepared to duel as individuals, attack versus defense, counters and reverse counters... instead of a team effort. They were fully prepared to counter our numbers and pick us off."

Snape continued staring at Montague. Silence lingered like a curse in the air.

"Even our pre-emptive strike was ...futile. As if someone coached them to think that we would strike early," Andrew Bole added.

Snape snarled and resumed pacing, hitting his wand against his thigh. The boys each had merit to their arguments.

"It was an ... unexpected strategy. I admit it. I had expected Black to cast defense and Potter to attack. However, in a duel there are no excuses."

Snape spun on his heel and pointed at Warrington. "You do realize why they chose their strategy, I presume."

"Flint. Because of what he did to the girl." Wilson Warrington nodded once.

"Yes. And you say you do not know how he alchemized that Sanity's Eclipse potion." He pointed at Draco.

"I only gave him the dried indigo baptisia powder that he requested. I did not know what he wanted it for, sir."

"You do know that is a key element of psychosis potions, do you not?" Snape asked, folding his arms.

"I... did not know that, Professor," Draco shrugged.

"It was a not so subtle message directed towards me, McGonagall and the Auror. Black and Potter have thrown the methodology of that fool's attack back in our faces. Then rubbed salt into the wound. Bole!"

"Sir?"

"All Gryffindor hostilities are to be ceased. Do you understand me?"

"Sir? But!"

"We will regain our standing through a concentrated house effort. Our house points must crush our nearest rivals. Nothing less than one of ours capturing first place in term finals would be accepted. I will assign subject tutoring for those who show talent in their respective subjects."

He paced across the tent, murmuring. Snape spun on his heel, twirling his wand between his fingers. With an abrupt slash he instantly dried their soaking robes.

"We will win the dueling tournament with skill, and mercilessness. Dominate by defeating all of the competition through sheer power- I want ninety percent win rate by knockout. I will also champion
the inter-year format so that we have a chance to pick apart either Potter or Black, if they put in any effort to actually win their matches. Concerning Quidditch, Potter is not eligible for our first match. And any accidental hand injury to Wood might be a bonus, Montague. You," Snape pointed towards Draco, "shall be prepared, to face either of them in the year finals."

Draco at first looked flabbergasted, then that transformed into pride because Snape believed that he would reach the finals of the year two tournament.

"That is, if you are even remotely capable of reaching the finals. The four of you will report to me after dinner. By then I would have decided upon a fitting, punishment... for this utter failure."

"Yes, Professor Snape!" the four of them chorused.

"Do not fail me again. Pack this up." Snape stormed out of the tent.

On his way up towards the castle he accidentally kicked hard against something immovable, sending a shocking pain up his foot.

He cursed aloud, hopping on one foot. On the ground was a solid anchoring earring, in the middle of nowhere. "Who in bloody hell did this?"

---

Harry and Jon had what appeared to be a permanent grinning charm plastered on their faces all the way back to the castle. Once or twice Harry would join in the chorus to Godric the Brave, but he did not know the other lyrics and was horribly off key. The jumping and jostling of his friends going up the hill was pure chaos and he was enjoying every second of it.

"Was that Tonks?" Jon came across to him, pointing over his shoulder.

"What?" Harry stalled, leaning his ear close to Jon, pretending he had not heard him.

"Tonks! I thought I saw a student I didn't recognize, but looked very much like her," Jon grinned.

Harry put his index finger to his lips, winking at him with that stupid grin on his face.

"It's mum with me," Jon congratulated him. "She seems to be the type to reward victory with...pleasure."

Harry laughed, awkwardly. He suddenly opened his mouth in song once again, joining in the victory chant. House Gryffindor was in boisterous rapture. The flag was waving proudly, the bagpipes were shrill and eardrum bursting, and the students were raucous in victory. After the few minutes trek back up, Lee Jordan raised his fist to proclaim a halt at the entrance to the castle. He waved his wand with an extremely strong Alohomora spell. The partially opened main hall doors slammed hard against the stone walls with a BADANG!

The rest of the students who were now settling down for lunch just stared at Lee.

"Whose house?!" Lee Jordan shouted as he entered the main hall. There was total silence. The other Houses' students just looked at each other in confusion.

"I said, WHOSE HOUSE?" he repeated, shouting at the top of his lungs. He opened his arms at his sides gloriously, expecting a response.

"OUR HOUSE!" the senior Gryffindor boys cried out behind him, pumping their fists in the air.

"WHOSE HOUSE?!!" Lee chanted, louder.
"OUR HOUSE!" came the chant from the entire house, now with added vigor.

"That's right!" Lee Jordan chanted. Lee Jordan let his housemates surge into the hall, the rowdy boys marching down the centre aisle.

"WHOSE HOUSE?" Lee asked again as they kept piling in.

"OUR HOUSE!" came the chant.

"The BEST HOUSE!?" Lee questioned as they marched through the great hall.

"GRYFFINDOR!" came the shout.

"WHOSE HOUSE?"

"OUR HOUSE!"

"THE BEST HOUSE?!"

"GRYFFINDOR!"

Harry's mates were frightfully obnoxious, keeping the loud chant going all the way to the Gryffindor tower. Harry didn't think he had such a good time in years.

Literally.

When they were all finally through the Fat lady's portrait they dispersed to pack away the instruments. Ron still waved the Gryffindor flag high. Loud conversations of the battle started up, with many comical re-enactments of the feather-tarred Slytherins flapping in the sky. After a few minutes someone had brought out a Wizard Wireless radio set and turned on the music. Jon heard the strange sounds and immediately went on combat alert, remembering the Elf playing music through its dark magic puppet spell.

"Potter!" Jon called, drawing his Diablo wand and summoning the claymore into being in the middle of the common room. Everyone stopped and stared at him. "The musical spell!" He dashed out from the crowd into a fairly open area, holding the great double edged sword in the Ochs defensive stance, pivoting expertly on his front leg as he scanned for the threat.

Colin Creevey snapped a picture.

The whole of Gryffindor simply stared at him, their jaws dropping. Harry ran across to the wireless and shut it off.

"Okay," Harry said with a loud, terribly forced, fake laugh. "Just a joke!" He raised his hands to the stunned children making a wide circle around Jon. Jon looked around, embarrassed. He relaxed and let the sword hang casually at his side. "Nothing to see here." He came across to Jon and clapped him on his shoulder. "Put it away," he whispered.

"Apologies... I ... wasn't sure...the elf..."

"I know. Just...chill. Just put it away now. You've spooked them enough," Harry whispered.

"All right." Jon flicked his wrist and with a smooth movement sheathed the shrinking blade/wand into his bracer on the left arm underneath his sleeve.

"What in Godric's left nutsack was THAT?" Oliver shouted, still not believing it. "Was that a
greatsword?"

Jon reddened. "Yes."

"Fucking awesome," Oliver whispered, dumbfounded. He came closer and pulled up Jon's outer sleeve. All he saw was the wiry pale skin of his arm. "That reminded me of the muggles' trick. Where... how... where did it go?"

Jon pulled his sleeve down.

"It is a custom-made weapon. I ... did not know where the music was coming from."

"He thought it was another elf doing dark magic," Harry explained. "Like in Lockhart's class." Even to his ears it sounded like a poor excuse. He forgot that Jon didn't know what a radio was.

"Drawing it was a mistake. I apologize," Jon raised both hands in apology to his house. Harry began to sweat. Everyone's expressions were varying shades of 'what, where, when, and how'.

"Sorry mates. He's a bit jumpy from the fight against Lockhart. Can't blame him..." Harry dramatically looked away. "Which reminds me. Jon, we've got a check up to go to."

Harry pulled up his hood over his head. "Thanks everyone for the support. Jon, let's go before she sends a howler."

Harry and Jon left their housemates talking fiercely about the sword Jon somehow had up his sleeve.

"Good rescue," Jon said flatly when they were in the corridor, embarrassed to the hilt.

"That is the type of thing that gets Hogwarts students talking. Don't draw a magical sword in front of these kids."

"Understood. I ... believed we were under attack," Jon shook his head.

"At least we have our Artifact creation licenses to go along with our apprentice papers. A stunt like that will have Dumbledore on our case like-"

Drinkwater bent the corner and spotted the two of them.

"Ah, there you are."

"Good day, Auror Drinkwater," Jon said easily.

"Good day," Harry said, wary.

"Good show. Very, very good show."

"Thanks," Harry said. Jon nodded.

"Pomfrey sent me a lovely red letter. I so missed those lovely things."

"Ah," Harry cringed.

"It said you two were supposed to be exempt from any 'potentially dangerous physical activity'."

Harry and Jon looked at each other. They looked back at the Auror, saying nothing.

"You two need a check up?"
"We're fine. Jon you good?"

"Unscathed," Jon deadpanned.

"The letter said you have a clinic appointment today," River Drinkwater frowned.

"Yeah, we're supposed to head on over there. Sometime today. On our way down, actually."

"And you are sure you are not injured?"

"Yeah, we're fine."

"Good. Pomfrey wants to write the head of MLE concerning my facilitation of this challenge, with you two still on the injury list. She thinks that I should have conferred with her." Drinkwater spoke as if this was nothing, but Harry could read in between the lines.

"Crap. She's in one of her moods," Harry murmured.

"In my defense, I prepared it and sent it on to Snape and Professor Dumbledore before I knew you two were injured, again. I hope that you can explain that it was your choice to accept the date and time while you were still not fully fit. I had no control over that."

"Sure, no problem," Harry agreed.

"Good. I promised her that I would still make sure you visit the hospital wing. Let's go."

They made quick time to the hospital wing. Alexandria and Madame Pomfrey were deep in discussion at the storage area. They came across to the men as soon as the door opened. "I've a mind to let the headmaster put a stop to all of your extra-curricular activities," Madame Pomfrey threatened. She pointed at the two prepared patient beds. "In! Take off your robes so we can check you out." Harry and Jon both went behind the curtains and stripped down to their trousers. They both sat bare-back on their beds.

Pomfrey came into Harry's station carrying a kit. She began carefully removing and changing Harry's bandages around his torso and his left arm. Alexandria was watching on before prepping Jon for his treatment.

"Miss Potage, one part Skele-heal and two parts Murtlap solution shall be used for Jon's ribs and throat area. Level one gloves are held in the second shelf."

"Oui. I have already prepped the Crystal cauldron. Heat over the fire for three minutes?"

"Correct. Then apply gently over his bruises." Alexandria went back into the laboratory to begin the potion mixture. She lit the Bunsen burner and measured out the correct ratio of potions.

"Jon," Pomfrey warned. "One hit, and you may have critically injured your ribs and lungs, again. Miss Potage told me she warned you. Why did you not listen?"

"We signed an agreement. I had the utmost confidence we would have won."

Pomfrey snorted unbelievably.

"Your uncle and your father would definitely have approved of this nonsense. All the more reason why you two worry me so," she grumbled while redressing Harry's bandages. "I think two weeks for this arm, again, Harry. It would have been healed properly by this weekend ...but..." she sighed dramatically. "You must have discipline, if you want it to heal. Jon, you will come every three days
"I'll try," Harry agreed.

"Yes, Madame Healer," Jon said.

"Right. Miss Potage will tend to you, Jon. Harry, let's take a look at that eye."

Jon and Harry were vigilant the next two weeks. Before dismissal of classes every evening the both of them scanned the map for Michael's last class. Harry, Ron and Jon stuck like glue unto Hermione and alternated shifts to escort the first year girls as well, especially anytime they had to cross paths close to Ellewyn-Sare. After dinner the both of them made it their duty to make sure any stragglers from the Library or detentions got back safely, through a network of friends willing to help out their fellow Gryffindor. Harry got the feeling that Ginny thought he was doing this just to be close to her, because she was beginning to talk openly to him without blushing scarlet every time.

The Friday before the full moon and the start of the dueling tournament they crossed paths with Michael. Jon's jaw tensed every time he saw Michael in the hallways at school, but now Jon stood rigid, ready for a confrontation. Michael didn't even spare them a second glance, just walked around them and diligently went about his school life. The map did not show him going anywhere near the chamber the last couple of weeks.

"He's laying low ever since Flint," Jon summarized.

"Yeah. It doesn't add up. Flint got framed, but he didn't snitch. It's like... he doesn't know he was framed."

"He is an idiot. Maybe he really doesn't know. And what about Tonks?" Jon asked. "Did she get through with the owl post scam?"

"No. She told me that Malfoy has never directly mailed Michael. Any sort of new communication won't work," Harry said. What he didn't tell Jon was that she also said that she had lost herself in the excitement after the melee and should not have risked doing what she did in front of so many people. Harry didn't know how he felt about her obvious backtracking.

"So how do we inform him of the chamber's entrance? Don't we want Drinkwater to catch him doing the act?"

Harry's head was dipped low, thinking. "I don't know. I think we may need to move this along quickly. There has to be something, anything we can do to get Drinkwater to corner him."

"How about, an anonymous message?" Jon said. "The secret entrance is behind the sinks.' And be done with it."

Harry stopped. Jon had walked on a few feet before he realized that Harry was frozen in place.

"That's brilliant." Harry said.

"What?"

"The reason why Tonks couldn't find Lucius' post going to Michael is because they use anonymous messages. I still have the message he sent to Malfoy in my apprentice bag. Dropped off at a pre-selected point."
"You need to think like the opponent, Harry." Jon criticized. "You are relying too much on how you would do things."

"Great dark wizard I'd turn out to be. I suck at framing people. Come on. Let's go talk to Penelope and Katie. We'll convince them to tell Drinkwater that they suspect Michael of poisoning them. Get the suspicion growing."

"All right. Okay. Then what?" Jon asked.

"Then we message him anonymously. And let Drinkwater nab him."

"Let's hope they convince him sufficiently."

"We'll meet them tonight, then," Harry agreed.

Later on that evening five students climbed the wooden ladder on the northern tower. It was half an hour before curfew.

"So. We're going to be forward here," Harry said to his audience. Jon, Hermione, Katie and Penelope were all present at the astronomy tower. "The three of you had something in common, being attacked by someone in this school. Penelope, your memories were wiped so you probably didn't know the extent to what happened to you. I know Michael Ellewyn-Sare is behind these attacks. Katie, I saw him potion your robes in Diagon. Penelope, he used a similar potion to poison your food and have you under his control."

"But, what does this have to do with me? They took Marcus Flint away," Hermione interrupted.

"That alchemic potion was not created by Flint. He was played, framed, and left to rot," Jon explained. The three girls all looked at the two boys with morbid curiosity. "The Headmaster and Potions Master could not counter it with their combined experience and knowledge."

"Hermione was poisoned too?" Penelope asked.

"Yes. And brutalized." Jon nodded. "We want the three of you to help us get the true culprit to justice."

"We want the two of you," Harry looked at Katie and Penelope, "to talk to Auror Drinkwater separately, that you suspect that Michael had some part to play in what happened to you. Penelope it should be easy for you, since the last time anyone saw you was on the train. We saw you two snogging. We know you two were close."

"Are you trying to make me vomit? If he really did this..." Penelope looked sick. "Why would he poison and even try a memory jinx? On me?"

"He probably tried to make you do something you didn't want to do," Harry suggested. Penelope looked horrified.

"Ah... " She cut herself off, enraged. "That bloody fucker."

There was an awkward silence as Penelope composed herself. "Casting suspicion on a student is serious business, especially to an Auror," Penelope said. She remained silent for a few seconds, contemplating. "I'm in. Definitely."

"Good. Katie?"
"If it stops him from doing this again, yeah I'm in. What do we do?"

"Ask Drinkwater for a meeting with him, one on one. Then tell him you remember pieces of what happened before you were hexed."

"Okay," Katie and Penelope agreed. "Will do it tomorrow after the first round of duels."

"First round of duels?" Harry asked.

"Starts tomorrow?" Jon also looked lost.

"Yes. Where have you been? Under a rock?" Penelope asked.

"Shite," Harry said. "How could I have forgotten?"

The three girls just stared at Harry.

"Nobody wants to duel the both of you anyway. I won't be surprised if your opponents just tried the losers bracket route to advance," Hermione stated.

"Give the school some credit. Who wouldn't want to see if they could take us on?" Harry countered.

Jon sighed. Hermione snickered.

"Harry," Penelope said in a calm manner. "Let me explain this to you simply: You routed seventh years with a display that has the whole school mocking them. Slytherin has their tail tucked between their legs. Have you seen the house points? They have the best disciplinary tally; no points deduction for the past three weeks. Maxwell Chamberlain has been acing all his NEWTs coursework. He's carrying the sixth year torch high and bright."

"I did notice Zabini and Malfoy have been working studiously. Zabini has been battling me for top marks in our joint classes, Harry," Hermione added.

"What the fuck?" Harry muttered. This was different. Slytherins being role model students?!

"We have shown them that we are not to be trifled with. Which was the point," Jon added. "But, back to this: Michael needs to be caught. We are simply asking you to arouse suspicion in the Auror."

The five of them agreed to keep this a secret and they left the dark astronomy tower. Jon escorted Penelope to the Ravenclaw tower and Harry walked with the Gryffindor girls back to their common room.

By the time Jon came back into the common room Harry was in a contemplative mood. His left arm was no longer bandaged, but still supported in a sling.

"So. Tomorrow is the start of the tournament," he said as he sat next to Ron.

"Yeah. You excited?" Ron asked.

"Sure." I haven't thought about it for one moment. "Can't wait."

"It's gonna be in the great hall from nine until four. I think they are using the house tables as the dueling platforms. Lower school Saturday, upper school Sunday."

"Roger."
"Harry," Jon interrupted. "Ron, I need to borrow him a moment."

"No problem."

Harry and Jon went upstairs to the second year boys' dormitory. "What's up?"

"You can cast the privacy magicks?" Jon asked.

"No, but a silence charm on the door should help," Harry cast it on the windows and door.

"We have a Mission request from Beauxbatons. Tonks' owl almost pecked my head off."

"Shit. Now?" Harry took it and opened the letter. "Maxime has reports of chronic nightmares in Estagal and Roucamoudour. And also from her students. She believes that a Diablo attack may strike the night after the full moon. Tomorrow, Saturday into Sunday."

"Yes. And here," Jon offered him a letter from Master Ollivander. "This is the letter of Apprentice Workshop leave for this month of October. Dumbledore has already signed this leave approval."

"Tonks works fast!" Harry read Ollivander's Guild request for release of his apprentices for the one weekend per month agreement. He then read the private letter from Tonks addressed to himself and Jon.

RH & Mr. B,

I have met with Mr. Ollivander this evening. The Southern Diablo infestation is increasing, and the French school has sent in their request for the Crows to be on call. Make your way to the clan base by nightfall Saturday. I am going into London to check Greyback for our clan portkey and complete the Guild request sign off. We need to set up camp at Beauxbatons for deployment as soon as their student curfew kicks in. From there we would be on standby for any word from the towns if any attacks occur. The only thing is, if there are three attacks in all three locations, this could be problematic. We'll hash it out when you get here tomorrow evening.

PS. We will need Ghost and Cloud to track the smell of the victims.

RD

"Tomorrow is going to be a busy day. Gather the arrows we fletched in the room of requirement. And a spare longbow for me. As back up. Send owl to Hagrid about borrowing Ghost and Cloud again."

"It shall be done," Jon bowed and left the dorm.

Harry stood there, frowning in contemplation. He cursed aloud in the empty room.

The Dark Arts... are never ending, uncontainable, a beast that attacks without mercy, a bane upon the victim and caster alike. Hogwarts is under magical attack. A rogue wizard and a basilisk lay dormant... two threats waiting to strike.

Could he leave this school unattended for a weekend?

Harry grabbed his hair with his right arm and pulled. Frustration was getting the better of him. He needed agents to keep an eye here while he was gone. He scribbled a summons on two pieces of parchment and sent it off with Hedwig.

Minutes later there was a knock on the door.
"Come!" Harry said distractedly, seated on the trunk positioned at the foot of his bed. Oliver Wood, Fred and George came in the room.

"That note sounded serious," Fred said. George nodded. Oliver crossed his arms.

"It is," Harry said, elbows on spread knees, his chin perched on top of interlocked fingers. He looked up at them and cast the eavesdropping barrier spell. Only the three boys lit up in red. "Jon is coming back soon. But I have work for you. Ten galleons each per day. Saturday, Sunday, maybe Monday."

"Fuck," Oliver said. "You don't kid around."

"No. Not with this." A minute later someone knocked on the door. "Jon?"

"Yeah," he opened the door. He placed the unstrung bow and the sack of arrows under his bed.

"Good. Jon, I want these three to do some work for me. Guys, this is serious. So, I need you to agree to a short term memory potion if you don't want to be involved. It's nothing against the rules or bad, but it cannot be shared outside. Not even to Ron, Percy or your other brothers."

"Count us in." Fred and George nodded immediately.

"I'm in," Oliver said.

"This is a list of students who are at high risk of attack," Harry handed out a piece of parchment. "Recite the names in your head."


"What is this?" Oliver asked. They handed back the list to Harry. Harry cast Reducto on it, such that an ash-reversal spell could not be cast to recreate the parchment.

"We have a rogue wizard in the school. He's playing it very safe, for now. But dark magic always strikes when the time is right, or wrong, in our case. His name is Michael Ellewyn-Sare."

"That potion geek?" Oliver laughed.

"He is the one that poisoned Katie."

Oliver got deadly quiet. "Bloody hell. I'm listening."

"I have been working with his previous victims to finger him to Drinkwater. However, we have no proof. Jon and I have been keeping close tabs on him, but we have to leave school tomorrow after the first round to go to our Apprentice workshop in London. We need you three to protect these students, and make sure that he doesn't enter the abandoned girls bathroom on the fourth floor."

"Our brother and sister are on this list. But Malfoy?" Fred argued. "We'd let that ponce get done in for free. Why protect him?"

"Any murder in this school would be blamed on Dumbledore. We definitely don't want that."

"Murder?" George whispered.

"Yes. He is on the dark path," Jon added. "It can only get worse."

"We need you two," he pointed at Fred and George "To track him. I'll give you back the gift you
gave me for now. Oliver, you need to somehow legitimately take him out of commission for the weekend. Something that makes him unable to transform while he's injured. He can turn into a fox."

"Whoa. An animagus?"

"Yeah. Allegedly. I haven't seen him do it, but the clues are adding up."

"Can't judge a book by its cover," Oliver said, pulling his beard. Harry got sudden inspiration.

"Guys wait. You two have the diarrhea concoction?"

Fred and George looked at each other, bewildered. "What are you on about, mate?"

"Oh," Harry realized he goofed up. They started the products in their fifth year. "Never mind. My bad. Oliver, you understand what you have to do?"

"We're on it," Oliver said. "Harry, this isn't a project over the holidays y'know. If you suspect there are kids in danger, I'd do it regardless. Not for gold." Fred and George agreed vocally.

"The reason why I offered is that Jon and I are going on a business trip this weekend. And we would be helping kids as well, but we would also get paid. It's only fair I offer something."

"Business trip?"

"Yeah. Apprentice stuff," Harry informed them.

"Alright. Send the money to this," Oliver shrugged. He took out piece of parchment and searched for a quill. "It's my personal account in Gringotts."

"We'll take ours in coin," Fred and George agreed. "So. Watch out for these kids, watch out for Michael, and help Olly here send him to the hospital wing without anyone being none the wiser. That it, then?"

"No. Any sort of attack on students is not what we want. We want Oliver to beat the shit out of him in front of everyone in a duel," Harry corrected. "If we injure him covertly, Drinkwater would think that it is someone else behind these attacks, since he's been attacked as well."

Harry thought about what happened in Estagal. Buck Trayard polyjuiced into Michael MacMillan and allowed himself to be tortured under the Cruciatus curse from lower ranking lackeys in the same network of criminals just to maintain his cover. Harry gave Jack his jacket.

Buck was a true Practitioner of the Dark Arts.

"Oohhh," Fred and George chorused. The three of them watched Harry sit there calmly, plotting against a model Ravenclaw Seventh year. The twins were getting concerned. "You sure you're okay, Harry-boy?"

"Yes. That guy is serious. He's been dabbling in some dark shit. This isn't a stupid pranking game. This is for the safety of our mates. Oliver, even if you can't incapacitate, just try to keep an eye on him. Be prepared to defend yourself if he loses it."

"Gotcha."

"Right. Thanks. That's it." Harry got up from the trunk. He offered his hand for the three older students to shake. The three of them did, with no stupid Gryffindor antics either, a simple, firm, handshake between men.
"We got this, Potter," George said, dead serious.

"I'm going to let StarScream stick around near to Hagrid's hut over this weekend. If you need to contact me, write a note and seal it in a weatherproof case. Give it to him."

"Good idea."

"Thanks for coming," Harry dismissed them. The three boys nodded and left the second year room.

"You are reluctant to leave. I was thinking the same thing too." Jon said when the other boys left.

"Everything is happening at once. From my past experience, that's when dark magic is at its strongest. Coincidences, plots, clues, all come to a head in a climax. Dark fucking shit - this weekend reeks of it."

"If Lucius Malfoy is also part of this Blood Purity network, along with his French relatives, a coordinated strike would send ripples of fear and uncertainty throughout your magical community, correct?"

"Bingo," Harry said, even more frustrated. "Recipe for disaster."

There was a poignant silence in the dorm room. Harry pulled at his hair again in frustration.

"Fate is fucking with us. If Ginny got that diary, Lucius would not be going all crazy trying to get this blood purity scheme going. He already had his agent in this school at this point in time. Now that we've been fighting against the Horcruxes, his efforts are going all over the damn place; if he had anything to do with the Boar infection and Diablo in France. I won't be surprised if he was the one who ordered the Castor siblings to attack the school."

"Harry. That man is a menace. You must be more direct. Send me to deal with Malfoy senior."

"Your magic will fuck you over, Jon. When We Walk in the Light, we do not assassinate people. You will get corrupted," Harry said solemnly.

"I am the Sword of the Light," Jon said softly. "It is my duty."

"No, no and fucking no!" Harry snapped, squaring off at Jon, anger rising within him. Harry was breathing hard. He looked up slightly, eyeing Jon directly in his face. "You... will not kill a man in cold blood. Do I make myself clear?"

Jon returned the glare momentarily, but backed off and offered a half bow. "I am in your service, Harry. I will follow your orders."

"Magic works... in a complicated way. The easy Dark arts stuff are the curses and jinxes, inflicting pain. The deeper you go into it, the more influence you have over magical coincidences, and emotional despair. It increases the likelihood of more people who will fear you, the more people who will kill for you. Your history is too, how should I say this? Volatile. And your combat ability surpasses most people I know. When we get our phoenix wands, you are going to be almost unstoppable. Just listen to your grandfather, okay? You Shall Walk in the Light."

Jon said nothing, he simply nodded. However, that description hit close to home in two ways.

One: it partially described himself when he was Lord Commander of the Night's Watch.

Two: it totally described Harry in his current quest and the effect he had on people around him, Jon
included. However, instead of pain and darkness, Harry brought out the best in those around him.

Those red eyes the night of Mistress Hermione's attack...

If Harry were to ever fall into darkness, Jon didn't know if he would stand up and face him, or fight mercilessly alongside him.

"Black, Jon!" Auror Drinkwater dug into the basket of names. "And his opponent will be, Bones, Susan! Duelists, come forward." It was eleven o'clock Saturday morning. The year two matchups were in full swing.

Jon stepped forward and so did Susan, however hesitantly.

"Do either of you have reason to refuse your match up?"

"No," Jon said. Susan looked across at Jon. There was awe in her eyes.

"No?" she said uncertainly.

"Up you go then," Drinkwater said. "Remember, from the classes of spells prescribed. Falling off will count as a loss. If one is unable to continue, that is also called a loss. On your mark!"

Both competitors climbed onto the long eating table. There was a loud cheer from Hufflepuff and Gryffindor. Harry came up to Jon's end.

"Clean, easy. Don't hurt her, if you can."

"Of course."

"Turn around!" Severus Snape commanded from the tall podium set up at the side of the table. Jon and Susan turned away from each other. The dueling distance was thirty feet apart along the wooden table. "On the count of three, you may turn and cast magic!"

"One!"

"Two!"

"Three!"

Jon turned, and had his Niffler wand at the ready. He began a light trot forward. Susan cast first.

"Expelliarmus!"

Jon kept advancing and let the sharp sting of magic disarm him. Susan's eyes widened as her disarming hex worked perfectly! Jon's niffler wand was sent flying towards her. She opened both hands, focusing on catching the wand hurtling towards her. Before she had a chance, Jon was upon her. With a flowing disarming maneuver Jon had her wrist twisted away from him. It forced her to drop her wand. He tossed her over his shoulder in a fluent Judo motion: a strong grip on the front of her robes and a simultaneous twisting of his upper body. She was sent tumbling off the table onto the charmed floor rugs placed on either sides of the long table.

"Ow!" Susan yelped, falling on the softly cushioned safety rugs in a heap.

"Decision!" Snape called. "Round time: five seconds, platform elimination. Winner, Black." There was muted applause from onlookers; only a formality. Nobody expected Susan to defeat Jon.
Jon retrieved his fallen wand, jumped down from the table and helped Susan to her feet.

"Your wand, Miss Bones," he gallantly offered her wand when she looked at him. She accepted it and frowned at him.

"You just... took the spell."

"I did."

"Why?" she asked.

"To demonstrate that magic isn't the only method of winning," Jon grinned.

"Um. Okay." Susan's frowned deepened.

Jon bowed slightly and walked off. Harry shook his head in laughter.

"Show off."

"In the circumstances, not showing off was what I had intended. This is only the first round. I remembered that she told the Auror about Expelliarmus in class. So, I decided to show her that relying too heavily on magic isn't a wise idea."

"Nobody in Hogwarts, as far as I knew, did martial arts."

"Even more reason why you should learn," Jon folded his arms.

"If it can get me fit...and a bit stronger, why not?"

"We will see to it after the more pressing concerns."

A few more match-ups passed and then Hermione was called upon to fight Pansy Parkinson, of all people. The match was set up and both girls were at the starting position. Pansy made a dramatic statement by pulling the hood of her outer robes over her hair and pushing up her sleeves, ready for battle. All four houses waited with baited breath for this match-up. It was probably the match with the most history behind it. Snape made the count.

"One!"

"Two!"

"Three!"

Hermione and Pansy turned at the same time.

"Expelliarmus!" Pansy cried. Hermione flattened herself to the table.

"Engorgio Selitxet!" Hermione countered. The cowl over Pansy's head tripled in size, falling over her face. Hermione stood up, casting as she moved. "Abara Cadascra Selitxet!" The hemming charm stitched both sides of the oversized hood closed. Pansy was now totally sealed within her hood. She tried to open the seam, to no avail. Finally she used a cutting charm to rip a hole across the robes covering her face.

She screamed in pain.

"Halt! Medic," Snape called in a bored tone.
Pomfrey came forward immediately and inspected Pansy's face. The girl was crying.

"She will need to go to the hospital wing, Professor Snape."

Professor Snape eyed Hermione with pure venom. She waited calmly, wand held straight up in front of her face, Dueling code's "Halt" command position demonstrated with perfect form.


Hermione had the most smug smile ever on her face. A cheer went up from her house mates. She hopped off the table. Ron approached and gave her a high five. Afterwards, Hermione came over to Harry and Jon.

"You didn't tell me this wand was pants at defense," Hermione smiled at Harry.

"Sorry, knew you'd figure it out eventually."

"No worries. It made me get creative. Out of the box, instead of 'From the Book' so to speak."

_Hermione J. Granger, not going by the book. What have I done?!_ 

"Congrats, anyway," Harry offered her a high five. Hermione ignored the raised palm and hugged him instead. Harry was surprised, but didn't pull away.

"Thank you," she said. "Good luck."

"Yeah, thanks," Harry smiled.

The second year matches dwindled down, some funny, some interesting, some a completely one sided affair. Harry made note that Slytherin were winning battles against the other two houses other than Gryffindor, and Gryffindor was winning all of their matches so far. They had a half an hour break for lunch, which was served on picnic tables set up in the main courtyard leading to the quidditch pitch.

Ron had an extremely detailed chart of the various years' battles.

"Look, this is the lower house results so far. Only three Gryffindor losses from years one to four! Spinnet got Chang, who won, and Ernie McMillan beat Lavender. And Ginny beat another Gryffie firstie, there had to be a mix up there somewhere, G vs G? And all three confirmed that they would go into the loser's bracket and re-enter the tournament."

Harry scanned the chart. Draco Malfoy, Parvati Patil, himself, and Ron were part of the group that didn't compete as yet in the second year. Crabbe, Terry Boot, Daphne Greengrass, Dean Thomas, Michael Corner and lastly Hannah Abbot were the remainders.

Harry really hoped he didn't get Daphne, Ron, or Parvati, who he liked and had a soft spot for since she did try to be nice during the Yule Ball. But being insensitive prats, Ron and himself spoiled it for them. He was itching to have another go at Malfoy.

Ron was the first to go after the lunch break. He drew Crabbe, which eventually turned out to be quite an interesting fight. Crabbe seemed to be good at hexes that froze, or slowed one down.

Ron was countering with stinging hexes, and the freezing spell, _Glacius_.

The clash made an impressive, but totally useless, stop animation parody of Crabbe dancing when he
got hit with the stinging hex, then frozen in spot for a few seconds later in a weird position before the spell wore off. Ron was moving underwater, casting his ice charm with inevitable slowness, the ice blue effect rippling in the air dramatically as he did the casting movement.

Crabbe was currently on one foot, locked in position awkwardly as he flinched from the stinging hex. Ron's super-slow movements were eerily graceful, probably the only time Ron appeared to know what he was doing. His spells came out powerful, probably due to the amount of technique and concentration he could muster mentally while his body moved so slowly.

"Time!" Snape called. "Halt. Match is a draw. Both contestants will go into the loser bracket." Snape cancelled the effects of the ineffective jinxes.

"Whew! That was intense! What a rush!" Ron said excitedly as he came down to the Gryffindor gang.

"Mate, what are you on about, that was a snail-fest," Harry criticized.

"What? I had him on the ropes! The old one-two!"

Harry, Neville, Hermione and Jon looked at each other, puzzled.

"Ron, both of you got called for time," Hermione explained. Ron looked bewildered.

"What?"

"Ron, it was a draw. You are going to the loser's bracket." Hermione consoled him.

"Bloody- I didn't get that at all! When did he say that?"

"Snape must have sped you back up and you didn't assimilate the referee's call in time. Anyway, you have to let Mr. Drinkwater know you want to go back in," Neville shrugged.

Ron slumped slightly. "Weird. I could swear I had Crabbe dancing like a ballerina there."


"Next time, stick to the objective, Ron," Jon advised. "Disarm them. Knock him off ...make it impossible for them to continue. Simple."

"Gotcha," Ron nodded.

The matches dwindled down until there were only two second years left. Harry grinned in anticipation.

_Fate really has a dark sense of humour._

"Malfoy, and Potter. Please step forward," Auror Drinkwater commanded. The two boys walked up to the Auror. They turned like prize fighters after weigh in; shoulders squared, faces grim as they stared at each other.

"It won't be like last time," Draco Malfoy promised. Harry had to remind himself he wasn't talking about his last life. He was talking about the Slytherin Duck Hunt at the lake.

"True. That took waaaay too long."
"Alright lads," Drinkwater intervened. "Do you have any reservations about facing your opponent?"

The two boys glared at each other, willing the other to speak first. Harry proved he could out wait Snape, Draco was a nobody in comparison.

"Scared, Potter?" 

_Oh Fate, you old girl you. This trope again. Really? Alright, I'll play along._

"You wish," Harry smiled.

"Up you go then," Drinkwater gestured. The two boys climbed the table and stood at their respective starting markers.

"You alright?" Jon said at his end.

"Yeah, going to test out this arm a bit," Harry cricked his neck, stretching his left arm. "I'm going to embarrass the shit out of him," he stage whispered.

Jon laughed. "Good strategy."

Snape and Malfoy appeared to have an unspoken message as his student made eye contact. Malfoy nodded confidently.

"Turn around!" Severus Snape commanded once again from the referee's podium. Draco and Harry spun away from each other. Both had their wands ready at their sides. Harry had his Niffler wand in his right and took out something small from his pocket with his left. "On the count of three, you may turn and cast magic!"

"One!"

"Two!"

"Thr-"

_Everte Statum!"_ Draco cried. An impressive bolt of magic shot forth.

_Should I take this hit?_

No. I didn't die and come back just to be punked by this ponce.

"Protegum elastico," Harry enchanted the tip of his wand with a rubber shield. To his horror, he forgot that this wasn't his Phoenix nor his Troll on Holly. The spell sputtered and Harry was sent flying.

Harry somersaulted and fell hard on his right side on the dueling platform.

"Your plan is working flawlessly," Jon told him covertly as Harry struggled to his feet. "Good job."

"Mistake. I got this," Harry grumbled. "Watch."

"Serpensortia!" Draco casted his Snake summoning spell.

Perfect. Right on time.

"Go Ringbox!" Harry slid his space altering ring box across the table from his crouched position.
"Alohomora Envisio Engorgio!" The tiny box opened on the table and swallowed the snake whole as it fell neatly into it. The lid snapped shut. Draco simply stared at the tiny box sitting innocently on the table, shaking a couple times. The whole crowd grew silent. Harry summoned the box into his hand. He caught it in his left hand and pumped his fist in triumph.

"Yeah! I caught Serpentsortia!" Harry declared. "Kleptopliss!" he cast at a dumbstruck Draco.

His wand and numerous items from his pockets came flying towards Harry. The wand Harry ducked underneath, but he caught something looking suspiciously like a muggle compact. Draco was stunned as his things fell out of his pockets onto the table and tumbled along towards Harry.

Draco eyed his wand that fell on the edge of the dueling platform ten feet behind Harry. Harry glanced at it, and then at Draco, a smirk on his face.

"Scared, Malfoy?" Harry goaded.

Malfoy looked at Snape, whose eyes were currently locked on the box in Harry's hand. Malfoy glanced fearfully at the crowd of students avidly watching. This was the last duel of the afternoon. All the students were watching them.

"Oh come on," Harry encouraged. "You're not even going to try?"

"Sod off, Potter. You disarmed me. The match is over."

"No it isn't. I don't have it in my hand. You can still retrieve it." Harry explained, pointing at it on the table behind him. "Isn't that so, guv'nor?" Harry shouted.

"Time is going, Malfoy," Snape hissed. "Ten points for your cheek, Potter."

Harry shrugged.

Draco just stood there, not knowing what to do.

"If you dare jump off this table, I will send you into orbit," Harry promised darkly. "Come and get it." Harry pocketed his Niffler wand and rolled up his sleeves, dropping his centre of gravity.

Draco began to sweat, his eyes darting around for options.

"Time is going," Harry repeated in Snape's monotone.

"Is muggle fighting allowed?" Draco asked in a high voice.

"It is not banned. The duel is not finished until you are off the table or unable to continue," Auror Drinkwater said loudly.

Draco brought up closed fists in front of his chin in a comically poor stance. He began circling his fists awkwardly as he advanced hesitantly towards Harry. Harry copied Jon's knife stance. He lowered his centre of gravity by bending his knees, legs spread apart slightly wider than shoulder span. Right arm low and open at the side, his left hand loose and directly in front of him.

"Lift the back heel, Potter," Jon instructed. "Keep an even balance between your feet!"

Harry did as instructed, and commendably, so did Draco, even though his circling fists and high stance did not appear terribly balanced.

Draco dashed the last few strides and swung wildly with his right, then his left. Harry weaved his
head back, then down. He slipped easily to Draco's left flank.

WHAP!

A fierce crack of a slap resounded through the hall. Harry had smacked Draco hard across his face. Draco touched his cheek, stunned and frozen to the spot. Harry didn't stop moving, he kept low, circling around Draco on the narrow dueling platform.

"Time is going," Harry said from behind him.

"You slapped me? Fucking arsehole," Draco cursed, swinging again wildly with his right with unbridled rage. Harry blocked with his left arm, stopping Draco at the wrist, then shoved as hard as he could with both palms. Draco stumbled backwards a few steps then fell on his arse.

"Behind you!" Crabbe yelled at Draco. Draco looked behind him, his wand was fifteen feet away. Harry grinned.

"Oops!" Harry shouted towards him. "Guess I wasn't careful!"

Draco scrambled to his feet, rushing awkwardly to pick it up. As Draco bent over to pick it up he felt the table vibrate with rapid footsteps.

"Crap-"

Harry dashed over towards him and planted a solid front kick on Draco's bent over backside. Draco went headfirst off the table into the crowd.

"Whose house?" Harry asked the Gryffindor crowd as Draco collapsed in a heap on the charmed rugs.

"Our House!" came the response.

Harry nodded in agreement, raising his fist in victory. He then turned to Snape for the official verdict. Harry knew the potions master was boiling inside, however, the git managed to keep his face dangerously impassive.

"Decision. Round time: one minute, fifty five seconds by platform elimination. Winner, Potter."

There was a healthy cheer from Gryffindor house and a respectable applause from the majority of onlookers.

Auror Drinkwater climbed up on the table alongside Harry. "Well! That was a great show! I hope you observed all the duels and absorbed everything that you could. Remember, even when you are not actively dueling, watching peers spar is crucial in learning self defense techniques! Round two will be in three weeks! Thank you for coming I will circulate the official round one results by next week."

Harry jumped off the table. Katie came over and congratulated him and gave him a hug.

"You guys are brutal! Where'd you learn to fight like that?"

Harry pointed at Jon. "He's pretty good at it, actually. I just copied what little I saw," Harry shrugged. Katie studied Jon in a different light. Ron was now approaching with Jon and Hermione.

"Oh boy. Can't wait to tell Bill and Charlie about this one! Disgusting kick by the way."

Hermione came up to him. "That was... different," she grinned. "Should you be using that arm?" her
"Feels okay. A little weak, but no pain." Harry smiled. "I think it's finally healed properly." The rest of Gryffindor house came over and clapped him on the shoulder and offered him congratulations on that clinical performance.

"Show off," Jon taunted at him.

"It was Draco. Of course I had to do him in. Kick his arse."

"I will need to show you how to effectively strike. That slap could have been a tad bit louder."

"It could? Damn. Thought I connected sweetly there. My hand is still stinging. Look." Harry showed him how red his hand was. Harry laughed inwardly. If his hand was this red, imagine Draco's face!

Jon and the gang surrounded Harry as they formed a procession back up to Gryffindor tower. Jon was pantomiming the proper technique and hip movement to execute a proper slap onto dissident lackeys. He laughed as Jon demonstrated a follow up knee strike to groin then a chop to the throat and ankle trip to make them fall on their back. Harry did appreciate the nice combo effect it portrayed in his mind's eye.

"You captured that snake... almost as if you expected Draco to summon it," Hermione criticized as soon as the crowd entered in the common room. She held on to his sleeve so that he couldn't run away.

"Saw the wand movement," Harry deflected. Students were piling in the room, Harry and Hermione an immovable pillar in the middle of the flow of Gryffindor students.

"Really?" Hermione raised her eyebrow. "That spell was-"

"That was amazing!" Ginny rushed over and grabbed him in a hug as soon as she came through the portrait. Hermione drew back as the feisty red-head grabbed him bodily. "You kicked him off the table! Brilliant! He'll never live that down!"

Harry awkwardly patted her back as he returned her hug. Her smell was almost the same as he remembered. A bit more, detergent-y, but her hair and slight smell of her perfume brought back memories. She gave him a tight squeeze at the end of the hug. This definitely didn't happen before.

Maybe the possession and the resultant depression had messed with her emotions, or something. She was behaving much more, natural, and full of life. How he knew her to be later on in Hogwarts.

"Thanks Ginny," Harry smiled at her.

"You're going to win this tournament, I know it!" she exclaimed, excited.

"We'll see," Harry said vaguely. Jon caught his eye and nodded upstairs towards the shared dorms. "I hope so."

"I'll be cheering for you," Ginny said, suddenly shy.

"Cool. I will cheer for you too," Harry replied with a friendly smile. "Catch you up later, yeah?" Harry excused himself and went up to the year two boys' room. Jon was already there with the Marauders map in his hands.

"Michael is in the Ravenclaws' library tower. I will give this to the twins. You get your gear sorted,
I'm already prepared to leave at a minute's notice," said Jon.

"Yeah. All right." There was something he needed to test, just to make sure. Jon left the room. Harry took out the ring box from his pocket.

He opened the lid carefully.

*Hello*, he said in parseltongue.

*Greetings*, a small voice came back.

*You ok in there?*

*Yes. Might I get something to eat.*

In Harry's previous experience, snakes were always talkative when they were hungry.

*Sure, do you want eggs, or meat?*

*Eggs would be delicious.*

*Do you smell any spiders nearby?*

*Yes. But they are small. And not filling.*

Harry breathed a sigh of relief. The basilisk was still dormant.

*Can you sense the Great Snake far below?*

*Yes. Sleeping.*

Well that was comforting. Sort of. Harry continued his line of questioning.

*Do you know if a Rooster's crow will kill the Great Snake?*

*Kill? Roosters are special delicacies for the King. The King will not attack the rooster until it crows in rapturous fear of death. The King cannot lay eggs. The crow of the rooster upon seeing the King will summon toads to invade that rooster's den. They will cover more eggs. To make more princes and princesses. To multiply and spread our glorious race.*

*Oh boy.*

Well. That settles that. Time to get Alexandria involved in his cauldron-muzzle idea. When Jon came back Harry introduced Jon to his new pet, Serpensortia. That was the first time Jon's face turned pale with fear.

"You, do this magic ... you talk to snakes. All the time you were saying it; in the back of my mind I thought it was in jest, but to actually hear it..."

"Yeah. It freaked out the whole school the last time me and Draco dueled."

"You fought Draco in the tournament before?"

"Yeah."

"And he summoned the magical snake?"
"Exactly the same."

"Harry," Jon said seriously. "Fate is trying to take over. *Coiled, my siblings squabble.*"

"What?"

"We need to change the game completely. Death, Time and Magic have helped us return. Fate, Life and Luck are still trying to align the tale you have lived prior, to repeat itself. The coincidences you mention are getting too close. This Horrible Cross battle will be for nought if you don't do something to stop this current flow of fate."

Harry frowned, remembering vividly the realm within the surreal train-station.

"I have noticed that Ginny is getting comfortable with you," Jon added.

"Yeah, she is, isn't she?"

"You must be very, very careful. These things are adding up. I cannot combat this Dark magic alone. But I will assist when possible; however I can. You must derail these sequences of events."

"Yeah. We can't kill the basilisk with the rooster. In fact: the Rooster crow upon seeing a Basilisk will actually set forward a chain of events to create a fucking *nest* of basilisks."

"By the gods," Jon breathed.

"Uh-huh. We definitely need to make a custom helmet or cauldron...something to make sure the basilisk can't use its gaze or bite."

"Alexandria?"

"Yeah," Harry nodded.

"I will go fetch her."

Harry sat down on his school trunk at the foot of his bed. Time was running out. Jon and himself had to leave soon. Alexandria and Jon came back a few minutes later.

"Hi, Alexandria, thanks for coming."

"You are well, Harry? You did not overdo it, non?" she eyed the boys bedroom in curiosity.

"I'm fine. So. We need a custom cauldron. Indestructible. Susceptible to *engorgio*. Resistant to poison from a Basilisk."

Alexandria was stunned. "The King of the Snakes! That is dangerous, *very* dark magic!"

"Yes. Tonks Jon and I are going to kill one."

Alexandria just stared at them, mute.

"He needs your help," Jon said in a no-nonsense tone.

"As my liege lord commands," Alexandria curtsied with an elegant bow of her head at Harry.

"Do you have anything like this in your father's inventory?"

"The only material capable of resisting such foul magic is Onyx. Once there is enough raw material,
we then contact a master smith."

"Sanguine?" Harry probed.

"Yes, that is the one. Very secretive individual. How do you know him?"

"We have gloves smithed by him," Harry deflected.

"Alexandria, how do we get Onyx?" Jon asked.

"From the hide of the Onyx Dragon."

Harry and Jon looked at each other, as if weighing their options. Alexandria stared at the both of them.

"You cannot be serious!" Alexandria said in a low, deadly voice. "Onyx Dragons are impervious to all magic!"

"So...how do people actually get it?" Harry asked.

"When it dies a natural death. Only the claw from le Diable is sharp enough to cut its hide."

"We have that. And we are going to get more. Have some faith." Harry and Jon explained their new mission this weekend to counter the Diablo scare her old headmistress had sent.

"I must come."

"What?"

"I shall kill two birds with one rock. I can help you both if you get injured, and also contact Monsieur Valmont secretly to find contacts with Onyx material. Or the location of a dragon."

"You can't just disappear from Hogwarts."

"I have documents to support a ...visit to my home if necessary."

"She will be an important ally in this mission. It all adds up nicely, Harry," Jon supported her argument. Alexandria smiled at Jon prettily. Jon was clueless and did not see it as it happened. When Jon turned to her, her smiled had already vanished, her expression haughty and proud, but there was a twinkle in her eye. Harry had to hide his smirk.

*She has the magical twinkle better than I do. Jon, she is smitten with you. You'd make a wonderful couple.*

"Okay. We would be leaving for Tonks' place in two hours. The faster we get cracking on this cauldron, the better."
THE GREAT HUNT

Chapter Summary

It's officially mission number 2 for the Crows. Tonks debriefs them and Master Ollivander discusses the way forward with regards to their apprenticeship. A Halloween season custom on the full moon adds yet another emergency that Harry must deal with.

"Good. You found the place. And what's this?" Tonks greeted them. Jon, Harry and Alexandria were waiting for her on the other side of the eight foot wrought iron gate.

"She's coming with us," Harry said simply.

Tonks looked at Alexandria quizzically, but said nothing. "Well, come on then." She took out keys to unlock the gate.

The property was behind Hogsmeade station. It was a grand, three story building with heavily slanted roofs, quite similar to the quaint buildings found in the town proper, except much, much larger. The house was surrounded by an unkempt lawn. The telephone pole with service lines and the large garage door at the end of the lighted driveway indicated that this was partially a muggle-influenced establishment.

Jon unleashed Cloud and he bounded inside as soon as the gate swung open. Ghost sniffed the air and disappeared into the wild grass bordering the stone cobbled driveway. Alexandria shouldered Harry's nimbus broom and greeted Tonks.

"Bonsoir, Mademoiselle Tonks! You guys really are something. Harry said that you are plotting to kill a basilisk?"

Tonks raised an eyebrow at Harry. "He did, huh?"

Harry levitated the trunk and their bags in front of them. "We'll talk inside. I want to be at the school as soon as possible. Let's hurry; get there and be prepared way before midnight."

"Agreed," Jon reinforced as he shouldered his Quicksilver broom. The three students followed Tonks along the wide, stone cobbled driveway. Jon examined the working lamp posts on either side of the driveway with keen interest.

"This place has electricity?"

"Yeah. It's dodgy though. The lamps outside work fine. Don't know about the ones inside. I bought torch sconces and candelabras." She opened the heavy front door. Harry eyed the large garage door on the left. More than enough space for their purchased Abraxan cart.

Maybe even two.

"Pardon the mess. I've been back and forth to London a lot, didn't really get time to clean. And, I wasn't sure how long I'd be here. Waited for you two to decide what we're going to do."
The ground floor was spacious. There were corridors heading left, right, and directly opposite the front door from the open central area, and a dual curved staircase leading up to the first floor landing. Harry looked up. The entire main area opened upwards throughout the three stories. Directly above the centre of the room was a massive chandelier hanging from the sturdy roof support frame. It was unlit, and covered in cobwebs. The third floor wall facing the driveway, directly above the entrance foyer; had large, dusty windows with wrought iron frames. The grimy windows barely allowed the late afternoon light to filter in. Furniture on the ground floor was covered in dusty sheets. Floor rugs were rolled up and stacked by the wall. The dark wooden floor was in good condition, but just needed a mop and some tender loving care.

"I prepared a room for you," Tonks told Jon and Harry. "There is a kitchenette upstairs... and a bath and shower. The hot water pump needs to turned on, by hand, in the cellar. The switch doesn't work." She gave them an abbreviated tour. "I think the garage is large enough to store the Nogtail barrels, and whatever else we get. Just to reinforce the walls and garage door, some security charms, and yeah... should be ideal. There's a drained pool in the back. And believe it or not, the property has a stable and a pasture. Guess Mr. Howard Humburlly reared horses."

Jon and Harry peeked into the various rooms and out the windows. It really was a large property. There were many bedrooms, numerous sitting rooms, an empty library, a dining hall and two bathrooms on each level. On the first and second floors one bathroom was en suite, the other was a standalone. There was a display room for what Harry presumed was their family crest and shield above a massive fireplace on the ground floor. On the wall were numerous mounting hooks, and a few old taxidermy heads were still in place. A stag with massive antlers dominated one wall.

"How much is it monthly?" Jon asked.

"It's fifty galleons," Tonks replied.

"And what is the sale price?"

"Thirty eight thousand. A steal, if you ask me." Tonks said.

"And probably another five thousand galleons for restoration," Harry added. "Why is he selling, did he tell you?"

"His kids are all grown and moved out. His wife was complaining about the cold, so they moved to Spain. It has been on sale since last year. Okay, this room is for the boys," Tonks opened a bedroom door on the second level.

It was very large, considering it wasn't a master bedroom. Harry thought that everything in this mansion was bigger than normal. There were two new queen sized beds, mattresses still sealed in plastic against the far end of the room. The room was so large that the two beds had tons of space in between them and the walls. Probably what made the room so large was that other than the two beds, the room was spotlessly cleaned and devoid of furniture. There was built-in closet along the northern wall.


Harry and Jon put down their brooms and deposited their bags and sole trunk. "Where's yours?"

"On the other side. Alexandria, I guess you can get ready in mine. This house is sort of mirrored down the middle. Come," she instructed. Tonks and Alexandria walked in front of them. Harry smiled as he watched her bum move under her well worn witches' house dress. How he missed
seeing Tonks every other day over the summer vacation.

"Okay. I wasn't expecting another guest, sorry I didn't clear a room for you. Or get a bed, for that matter. But we won't be getting much rest anyway." Tonks opened the bedroom on the opposite side of the first floor.

This room was the same size as Harry and Jon's room, except it was filled with a lot of Tonks' belongings. It felt as if someone recently moved in. Boxes were still unpacked, a few trunks stacked on each other, but the basic stuff was there - bed, writing table with chair, cushy armchair, dresser, full length mirror on the cupboard, photos of her parents, and -

"What's that?" Harry asked, pointing.

There was a wizard's moving picture of a ball of light streaking against the courtyard. At the end of the picture's cycle he saw the outline of a wizard emerge, clothes glowing with magic. The picture stopped at that moment, then replayed itself. There were other framed pictures from Alexandria's party on the dressing and writing tables. Jon, dancing with Tonks. The wide group shot taken with Alexandria in the middle and the British Crew when they came up the stairs. Tonks and Sarah posing for a picture. Harry and Tonks leaning together, grinning at the camera. Harry thought that he looked happy in the photo.

It was a nice photo. Very nice.

"Oh." Tonks subtly hid the picture of herself and Harry behind another picture. "That reminds me. Jon, Harry," Tonks said, opening her drawer and taking out posts tied together with string. "Sarah sent this for you."

"What is it ?" Jon asked.

"Your commission statements. The portkey picture was a big hit. Will be in Witch Weekly soon. And also, Alexandria's still shots with you two. Wizards' Almanac also paid her handsomely for the Comet and the portkey bit. So ...two sets of commission, upfront, and probably a little extra depending on sales."

Jon and Harry opened their mail. Jon whistled. Harry read through the details and added the sums in column. His picture with Alexandria earned him a Gringotts wizard's cheque for one hundred galleons from Witch Weekly. The Light Comet earned the Crow's Vambrace a whopping one thousand galleons from Wizard's Almanac!

"These are... what is this word? Cheques? Two hundred for the photos... from Witch's weekly, and five hundred from Wizard's Almanac. They would be willing to entertain me for further interviews when possible, one thousand galleons consultation fee upon agreement. What is Wizard's Almanac?" Jon asked.

"Europe's arm of the International Confederation of Wizards' society magazine. The most respected magical journal on the western hemisphere. I think they release a new edition every year. They gather any new information on magic and discuss it in their bi-annual conference held in various parts of the world. The last one Dumbledore went to was in Egypt."

"Sounds like a big deal," Harry said. There was an invitation for him as well with the same 'consultation fee' promise of one thousand galleons. He never heard of them before. "What did they want, Jon?"

"The port-key magic signature. Professor M. Dibaggio alongside Warlock Z. Zachariah sends me a
letter. They wish to discuss it," Jon replied, reading the correspondence.

"Oh. Their headquarters is in Switzerland. So forget about that for now," Tonks shrugged.

"That may be for the best. There may be questions that I cannot answer."

Tonks came close to the boys and spoke in a whisper. "She will need to be disguised if we take her to France. Their ministry is upset that our ministry has given her sanctuary without proper legal process. Along with whoever 'else' that might be after her."

"She will not be a hindrance," Jon responded flatly.

Tonks looked at Jon, then Alexandria, then Jon again. "That serious, huh? Predictable." Tonks spun around in her bedroom. She kicked open a trunk and brought out a set of WWG gloves, the dragon leather jerkin, and Ministry issued combat pants. "Here- Try these on."

"What are these?" Alexandria asked Tonks. Tonks snorted.

"Gear that Jon got me. And some extra gloves. And combat pants. What do you think it is?" Tonks muttered.

Alexandria picked up the Dragon Skin jerkin. "This is professional stuff."

Tonks sighed. "I hope you know what you are doing, Potter," she whispered to him. "Master Ollivander will be here on the six o'clock express. Our guild portkey window is from six thirty to nine thirty. You two get geared up and meet us in the dining hall for brief in fifteen minutes. He should be here by then. I'm going to shower and change. Come luv, try on the jerkin. And the pants." Tonks and Alexandria turned their backs on Harry and Jon, effectively dismissing them.

Jon and Harry made their way back to their room. "Oh. Harry. I asked Mrs. Potage to stitch a pattern on the armor badges we got from Mr. Bulistrode. The ones we need to fit on the dueling robes." Jon dug into his bag and produced three badges with a stylized crow landing on a human skull. "She used to be a Floo network specialist for the French Ministry before she was married. She enchanted a communication spell into them. A touch of the wand with the code words and we have means of speaking with each other; even when we are apart. I believe you explained to me what walkie-talkies were before?"

"Yup." Harry touched his badge with his wand. "Hello?" he said tentatively. Nothing happened.

"The keywords are Mr. B, RD, and RH to activate singular conversation. I believe she said 'CV' is the code to open team communications. CV," Jon tapped his wand on the badge in his hand. "Test."

A half a second later his voice came through, although much softer, on Harry's badge.

"'CV out' is the keyword to de-activate the communication." Their badges went silent. "The only thing to do now is stitch it in the allocated spot on our magical armor," Jon explained.

"I could do that. Learned through necessity."

"Good. Let's gear up."

Fifteen minutes later Jon, Harry and the two girls were seated at the dining table, each with a cup of tea in front of them. Harry was currently stitching on the communication patch on the allocated space on the sleeve of Tonks' blood red robes. Tonks looked sexy in her simple black vest and close fitting red pants.
Jon wore the flat black set and Harry was in the brownish grey set. Harry's and Jon's balaclava headpieces were pulled up over their forehead. Their dueling masks were placed next to their cups on the table. Alexandria was dressed in a simple black robe, MLE trainee combat pants and World Wizarding Gear index and middle finger 'cut out' gloves. The robes were a bit bulky on her small frame so Harry guessed that she had on the Dragon leather jerkin underneath. When Harry was finished with stitching the badge on the red robes, Tonks put it on, buttoned it up, and checked the clock.

"So," Tonks said. "Welcome to the headquarters of the Crow's Vambrace," she sipped her tea. She opened Guild scrolls and used the tea set to hold down a map of southern France. "This is the formal guild request. An alert has been put forward by the Headmistress on behalf of the Council of 'Le Estats du Sud de la Magie' (Southern States of Magic). They reported that the residents experienced a strong increase in insomnia and horrible nightmares in the past few days. This has also been observed at the school. They believe that a Diablo attack is imminent." She placed pawns from a chess set on two towns and the school. "The distance between-"

"One moment. Shouldn't we wait for Master Ollivander?" Jon asked.

"He knows this brief already. He should be here any moment now-" At that moment a fireworks spell ignited outside the window. "Speak of the devil. Give me a minute." She left the room. A few minutes later she returned, escorting Master Ollivander into the dining hall.

"Good evening, Master Ollivander," both apprentices rose from their seats and bowed slightly towards their trainer.

"Good evening, lads, and, Miss Potage, was it?" came his reply. He took off his traveling cloak and hung it up on the rack.

"Bonsoir, Master Wandsmith," Alexandria curtsied, still in awe that Harry and Jon were apprentices with this living legend. She had briefly met him once before during her short time at Jon's place.

"Right," Tonks said. "We're all here." They took their seats and Ollivander politely accepted a cup of tea. "The distance between the towns are approximately twenty minutes by broomstick. We are required to report to Headmistress Maxime. Then be on standby if and when an abduction or spotting of a Diablo is reported. Maxime has called upon us due to our ability to find the creature without problems and with such accuracy. Usually a search party, in the past, took at least five to twenty four hours, with a zero percent success rate on safe extraction of the child. We have Harry here to thank for our previous success."

Mr. Ollivander cleared his throat.

"Be careful. If it is attacked, or intercepted before it feeds, the Diablo is very, very dangerous. It is the only creature that can manipulate magic at will and has an arsenal of very powerful spells. It exhibits no defensive spells, as far as the history books say. Their skin is impervious to magic, as we know, quite a strong natural defense," Ollivander added. "Magical battles in the past have laid waste to entire towns and villages. Speed and accuracy is the key," Ollivander stressed. "We do not want a prolonged battle."

Harry and Jon nodded. Greyback, the guildsman at Knockturn Alley, said exactly the same thing.

"You never explained how you knew that the Diablo was in the forest before, Harry," Tonks probed.

"I saw it in a nightmare," Harry said simply.
"Are there no bounds to your powers?" Tonks asked sarcastically. Harry grinned. "This time, we're taking Cloud and Ghost. As trackers. So. This is where I am lost: Why is she here?"

"We want to source the location of an Onyx Dragon, or buy Onyx hide," Jon said calmly. "Alexandria has offered to inquire for us. For our battle with a Basilisk. She would also be an asset as a trainee healer with specific knowledge of our injuries, should they resurface."

Master Ollivander eyebrows went up. "A Basilisk?"

"Yes. But let's focus on this mission for now. We need to eliminate one in the near future," Harry explained. Jon didn't know when to keep his mouth shut sometimes.

"I know she is under your protection, but this isn't a drill," Tonks reinforced.

"We will keep her safe," Harry promised.

"Very well," Tonks said. "The only way we can take an underage witch on mission is if she signs up to be part of the clan."

Alexandria paled, looking at Harry, then Jon for support.

"Do it. I will keep you safe, Alexandria." Jon said.

"All right. I will join," she agreed.

"We will stop in London before we leave at Dover. When we are deployed, Harry you are our point man. Jon will ride dual with me, just like last time- when we find it. Mister Ollivander and Alexandria would maintain a distance of fifty metres behind. Mister Ollivander do you have any other information that could help us?"

Ollivander put down his cup of tea. "I can fire a muggle rifle. Haven't done it in years, but I'm a fairly good shot."

"Do you have a rifle?" she smirked. A magical weapon maker who can fire a rifle. Will wonders never cease?

"No. My friend had many. But he passed away years ago."

"I'm sorry to hear that. But, the rifle, how would you get one?" Tonks asked.

"I presumed we would borrow, or buy one down there," Ollivander's eyes twinkled as he pulled his short beard. Harry could almost feel Sage magic at work. He was jealous that these light-eyed men could pull it off at will. He wasn't surprised at all when Alexandria began to speak eagerly.

"My grandmother had rifles. We still have at our home," Alexandria offered. "C'est vieille école. Um... Old school? World War one weapons."

"Excellent. It shall work out, magic usually does," Ollivander smiled. Harry nodded grudgingly, watching the master smith demonstrate the finer elements of skill. He recognized the way powerful wizards such as he and Dumbledore wished events to go their way, and bam! It did.

That blasted twinkle!

"Well, once everything goes to plan, Jon here is a pretty damn good shot with his bow. Hopefully we won't need Ollivander's expertise. Oh, jolly good work on the fireworks display lads," Tonks congratulated them again.
"They should not have agreed to that," Alexandria scowled at Jon. "They were still injured."

"What is this, then?" Ollivander asked.

"A melee duel a few weeks ago. I'll get the omnocular recording for you," Tonks offered. Ollivander stared at the two boys.

"You two are always in something," he chuckled.

"Oh, Master Ollivander, the Diablo claw on Threstral Wing Bone was a success. It saved our lives against Lockhart," Jon added.

"Lockhart? Isn't he the... explain," Ollivander commanded. The two boys told him of the fight within the Defense class and the aftermath. The old sage nodded patiently.

"Show me this sword," Ollivander said.

Jon stood up and drew the light grey wand made of slender wing bone. With a flick of the wrist it transformed into a Claymore.

"Remarkable," Ollivander exclaimed. "May I?"

Jon held the sword towards him, hilt first. When Ollivander took it, it reverted into its original form.

"Ah. A custom weapon. How are its spells?"

"Haven't really tried it. I believe this is a wand specifically attuned to battle. I dare not use it in school."

"And Harry?" Ollivander asked politely.

"Mine is fine. I haven't used it yet, but I think that all my light based magic would work. But as Jon said, its a... it just feels aggressive. Something that I wouldn't use to stir my potions, if you understand what I mean."

"So how do you know that it's 'fine'?"

Harry hesitated.

"It saved his life. Summoned a... being to protect him from being seriously injured," Tonks described, eyeing Harry for his response. Harry simply nodded at Ollivander.

"A being?" Ollivander asked. "That sounds specific," he criticized. "Describe this 'being'."

"It resembled a Dementor. Except it had a scythe," Harry said reluctantly. Alexandria and Ollivander looked quite disturbed.

"Really now," Ollivander leaned forward. "Would you demonstrate again?"

"I can't. It was a life or death kind of thing. I don't know how I did it."

"Remarkable. I believe you have created your first Elite Class wands. The highest pinnacle of wand-crafting. This was how the ancient smiths used to work. Wands suitable for the intended user, manifesting magic that is unique and proprietary to the owner. Put them on the table. I must, as part of the International Council of Master Smiths, make records."

Jon and Harry drew their Threstral wands and laid them on the table.
With an intricate piece of wand work, Master Ollivander conjured a scale with iron weights. He weighed both of them, and borrowed writing material from Tonks. He measured the lengths with a ruler. Then with practiced ease, used a piece of string to wrap around the handle, the main stem, and lastly the circumference at the tip. He measured the dimensions of the marked string on the ruler.

"Jon, yours is eight inches. Weighs almost a pound. Harry, yours is almost ten inches. Weighs a quarter pound. Contradictory, isn't it? As I said: the wand, my dear lads, the only non-living thing with a personality. A larger wand that weighs less, a smaller wand that is heavier and can transform into a sword. Also a throwing spear; which petrifies upon impact. You registered these at the Curse Breaker's guild, correct?"

"Yes, Master Ollivander," the boys chorused.

"Aurors will detain you if they find this on your person without your artifact license," he reminded. "Sign this." He pushed across the parchments with the attributes and abilities of their wands. "I will transcribe it into your Guild achievement under your ownership and prototype design."

The two boys did so.

"Your apprentice books are safely secured, correct?"

"They are in our school trunks," Harry shrugged.

"Secure it properly. You two have created custom weapons that are highly potent. Do this as soon as you get back. This knowledge is revolutionary. And Miss Potage? How is your retooled wand?"

"Excellent, Master Wandsmith," she smiled at Jon. "My charms are precise, and powerful."

"May I?"

Alexandria handed over her wand. He weighed, measured, took notes. "It resonates with blood, and healing," Ollivander mused. He cast a paper cut spell on his finger. Blood pearled into a red drop. He cast a piercing counter charm. The cut was healed immediately without a trace. "Definitely a Healer's wand. Very good work, Jon," Master Ollivander commended, taking notes again. "Have you registered with Poppy? Signed documents from St. Mungo's?"

"Yes I have."

"Did you walk with your apprentice Log book?"

"Yes I did, Master-Smith Ollivander."

"Any healing or spell-casting you do on this mission, make note afterwards in the Log. I will countersign it for you. Field work for registered guilds or Cursebreakers will be accredited to your training."

"Thank you so much. This is a great Honor," she smiled at the old sage, excited.

"Poppy and I go way back. Over the years, some of her patients were victims of bullying because they had mismatched wands. We contacted their parents and lo and behold, knockoffs and hand me downs. Cripples the poor children." Ollivander gave Alexandria back her wand. Harry thought about Neville's hereditary weapon.

"Miss Tonks, would you need your wand examined? May I?"
"It's fine, but sure, go ahead."

Master Ollivander weighed and measured. He waved out a mild freezing charm at his empty cup. "Glacius!" A beautiful sculpture of a miniature butterfly formed inside the tea cup.

"Your wand is not highly suitable for combat," he frowned. "It is too far attuned to your...feelings. This wand resonates strongly with your Black heritage. It draws power from your emotions."

"Isn't that the way it should be?" Tonks asked, protective of her beloved wand.

Harry thought back to the shiny handcuffs and the earring anchoring spell she cast by the lake. It did seem kinky at the time, girlish and provocative. A far cry from the heavy manacles and anchoring stone she bound MacMillan's gang in France. No wonder she was embarrassed at the display. Ollivander gave her back her wand.

"Maybe for a sculptor, designer, or Spell Creator. This wand would be an artist's dream. I believe that you have mastered a wide variety of spells, but consistency is an issue?"

Tonks nodded.

"You would want your spells to be consistent when conducting Auror duties, that is extremely important. Maybe my lads can customize another wand for you. Always a good idea to have more than one. Will you volunteer, Harry; Jon?"

"Sure!" Harry agreed. He shot a smug look at Tonks. "Whip up one in no time. Oh, I also need to build one for Hermione Granger."

"Granger, Granger... oh!" Ollivander remembered with a smile. "A curious one that," Ollivander mused. "Muggleborn, if I remember correctly. What happened?"

Harry's countenance went dark.

"Attacked. Her wand was destroyed," he said calmly. Jon immediately went on the alert. That tone of voice-

_Did he get angry at Ollivander for calling her muggle-born?_ Jon thought.

"Mon Dieu, je suis désolée!" Alexandria breathed. "When was this?"

"The night before we had our accident," Harry breathed. Jon watched Harry carefully. He seemed to be trying to calm himself down.

"I didn't know," Alexandria said. "Madame Pomfrey refused to inform me when I asked. They destroyed her wand? But she dueled magnificently during the first round!"

"I gave her one of mine," Harry said.

"Oh? Which one? The Hippogriff on Birch?" Ollivander asked, eager for a response. Harry nodded. "How was it?"

"Worked perfectly for her. Same limitations on Shields, Barrier class, and Lumos. Poor at defense," Harry responded.

"Ah, as expected. I am glad she is not without one. I will order tools for you to be brought up to the school. Albus and I will work something out. She manages well with her school work?" Ollivander asked them.
"Yes. The girl is a prodigy at wand technique," Jon commended. Alexandria's eyes narrowed slightly, but said nothing.

"This would be a fascinating study. There is no prior bias due to knowledge of her heritage, or genetics. Literally, from scratch. Harry, please feel free to owl me during this build. I admit that custom wands for muggleborns are my weakness-"

"Please, don't call her that," Harry said respectfully.

The room went uncomfortably silent.

Ollivander bowed his head in apology, "Pardon me. I meant no offense."

"It's seven o'clock," Tonks said, eyeing Harry. "Time to get a move on, yeah? Jon, please get Cloud and Ghost. Master Ollivander do you need a room to settle your things?"

"No. I have what I need in here," he tapped his pocket.

"Good. We'll portkey from the front foyer. I need a few minutes with Harry, please," Tonks asked. Alexandria, Jon and Ollivander left the dining room. Tonks closed the door behind them.

"So: Alexandria. Are you out of your mind?" she hissed.

"She can handle it. And, I think since her dad passed, she's been itching to do something, anything."

"You've seen what it's like. Ranging is fucking dangerous," Tonks argued.

"She saved Jon's life. They're... complicated. And we need to get Onyx for the basilisk mask, muzzle, cauldron, whatever you want to call it. She has contacts, or so she says."

"Rooster is out, then?"

"Yes. My snake told me that the crow would magically summon toads to infest the chicken coup, and lay on the eggs. Creating more basilisks. Could you imagine that, a nest of them?"

Tonks just stared at him. "Your snake." She took a step in his direction.

"I left him under the whomping willow until we come back. Gave him some chicken eggs to eat. He's going to nap for a bit. I told him to avoid all the children."

"Ok. Your arm is out the sling. So I am to take it you're back to full fitness?"She came closer.

"Basically. Nice photo by the way. In your room," Harry pointed upstairs. She now was toe to toe with him.

"It is, isn't it?" Tonks blushed. She pulled him close and gave him a hug. "You are driving me nuts. You are way too young for me... did you cast a spell on me?" she muttered more to herself than into his balaclava covering his hair.

"No," Harry replied, just holding her. Tonks was usually passive aggressive, or just simply aggressive. Never this, composed, and heartfelt. Almost as if she were being completely serious.

"You ok?" Harry asked, giving her a squeeze. Right now he hated this high quality armor. Giving her squeeze when he was in his Hogwarts uniform and Tonks in her house dress would have been so much better.
"Now that we're actually going, I-" she stopped. They just stood there in the room, holding each other, saying nothing.

"The Russians?" he asked. She nodded imperceptibly. Harry only knew this by how her body tensed against him.

"It bothers me, sometimes. The barn. I didn't even dare go into the one out back, y'know? How this," she indicated the mansion- "could have been a ...short lived profession. I'm still young. How do you two do it? Fearlessly charge headlong into everything, just... brave the fuck out, no matter what?"

"I don't know. It's what Immortal Heroes do for fun," he countered her serious face with a broad grin.

"Stop having me on," she replied. "No one is immortal. You know that you two are dangerously psycho, innit?"

"Yeah; I know. And you like it."

"Shut up," she smiled. Their eyes searched each other. Tonks looked down at his lips. Harry felt anticipation growing. She suddenly let him go and picked up the maps and documents on the table, finding something else to do with her hands than have it wrapped around him. "Let's go, Potter," she said, breathing out. "I'll side along Alexandria back to London to sign her up after all of us portkey to the ICOP station at Devon. Then bring her back. If she doesn't chicken out."

"Tonks," Harry called. "Everything is going to be ok. It's going to work out. Magic usually does."

Harry summoned magic from deep inside and tried to get his eyelashes just so as he activated the twinkle.

Tonks froze mid stride. "You did not just try to Dumbledore me just now, did you?"

Harry said nothing, just put on a calm air of benevolent confidence.

"You are!"

Harry just raised his chin in silent response. Tonks approached him warily. "You are incorrigible Potter," she accused, a smile pulling the corners of her mouth. "You look the part, though." She gestured at his level 4 armor. "For good luck," she whispered, and gave him a soft kiss. "Don't get any ideas though..." she said immediately afterwards. "This can't go anywhere..." she muttered, trying once again to convince Harry, or more than likely, herself. Her hair turned the same hue of green as she watched deeply into Harry's eyes.

They just stood there for a few seconds, simply watching each other. Harry wished he could remove all the reservations she had. He just didn't know how. He (basically) was only twelve.

He raised his hand and twirled a finger in the long green curl trying to escape into her eyes. "Nice colour, by the way."

The spell was broken and Tonks just twisted her mouth. "Let's go, Casanova." Harry eagerly followed her out the dining hall. "Don't forget your mask," she commanded, without even breaking stride. Harry made a smooth about turn and picked it up from the long dining table, then double timed to catch back up with her brisk, purposeful gait.

"Oh. This is going to be one of those nights," Rook Littleborough said as Tonks stomped up the stairs, followed by Jon, Alexandria, Harry and Master Ollivander. Ghost walked obediently next to
Jon, while Ollivander held Cloud's leash.

"Business, I presume?" Rook questioned.

"Yes," Tonks replied, smiling at the ICOP wizard. "Clan business."

"Very well. Writ of goods leaving her Majesty's kingdom?"

"None," Tonks said. "Here," she put down the guild request and clan documents.

"Hm. I see four registered names. And you are?" he asked, not even looking up at the sage wizard while he scanned the documents.

"A Consultant," Master Ollivander said. "Order of Merlin Second Class, Senior Mugwump of the International Confederation of Wizards, Chief Guild Master representing the combined board of Magical Weapons and Livestock Guild, and these lads are my apprentices."

"You're Garrick Ollivander!" Rook exclaimed.

"Yes. That too," Ollivander chuckled.

"After so many years... Rook Littleborough. It is an honour, sir," Rook got up from his chair and extended his hand. Garrick shook it once, firmly.

"Unicorn on Cherry Wood?" Ollivander probed.

"So the legend is true, you never forget a wand."

"Never," Ollivander agreed. Rook stood there, distracted, until he realized he was being unprofessional.

"Um. Okay. Ladies first." Rook indicated the rune markings below the suspended cage. Alexandria went first, then Tonks. They were cleared for international travel. Jon and Ollivander went next. They were also cleared. Harry eyed the rune circle. He suspected that it would pick up on the basilisk venom circulating with the phoenix tears in his blood.

He stepped in. As before, it flickered green, then yellow, then orange, then back to green.

"You. Are you ingesting illegal potions?" Rook questioned.

"No. It's a thing that happened to me when I was a baby." Harry pointed at his scar. "Nothing to worry about, medic says I'm fine."

"Hm. Your Rank B means that the portkey will alert the French ICOP to summon an Auror to clear you. Don't do anything stupid, Crows. They are on security level three for the past few months."

"We'll be on our best behavior," Harry agreed.

"Safe travels."

The group drew their wands and touched the portkey, Jon holding Ghost and Tonks squeezing Cloud between her calves. The entire party arrived in the cellar of the cafe in Calais. Harry, to his amazement, was crouched on one knee. Jon was already on his feet, magic swirling upwards to the ceiling. Tonks Alexandria and Ollivander were awkwardly sprawled over the floor.

"Prefer boat, myself," Ollivander grumbled, dusting himself off. Jon offered him a sturdy arm to help
him up. Harry helped up Alexandria. He knew Tonks would refuse out of pride. They grabbed their brooms, called Ghost and Cloud, and went up the stairs. Tonks and the gang went directly to the sub office down the corridor. The five of them crowded the seating area.

"Ah. Bonsoir. Crow's, was it?" Monsieur Koman greeted. "Papers, s'il vous plait." Tonks gave them their stamped documents from Rook. "Oui, très bien. Wait one moment. Henri! Appelez-les!"

"L'a déjà fait! Presque là!" Henri replied from the inner office. The gang waited patiently for two minutes. There was the familiar sound of a fireplace floo fire roaring and more French voices.

Auror Bernard came out. "Good. You are here. Koman, let me see their papers." Auror Bernard scanned their documents. He looked at the hooded brunette. Alexandria was under disguise. She wore glasses, suffered under horrible acne and was unfortunate to have a boyish chin. "I do not know this girl."

"New recruit," Tonks supplied.

"Hunter's license?" he probed. Alexandria took out the leather amulet around her neck. Auror Bernard came close and inspected it. "Hm. It is legitimate."

"Merc- Thank you," Alexandria said. Auror Bernard stamped their papers.

"Remember, do not provoke our people. Things are very edged right now."

Tonks nodded. "We'll be careful with our work. Thank you for your time."

"They can go," Auror Bernard indicated to Monsieur Koman. The gang left the office and walked towards the busy pub at the port.

"Ghost, to me," Jon ordered as Ghost began to stray. "You are sure it would not be a problem?" he asked Alexandria.

"We will be quick. And we may as well stop off and get munitions."

They drew close the French Port Pub. It was apparently peak hours because the exterior front patio was full with all types. Port workers, Clansmen, Apothecary Guildsmen with their hired muscle, and other wizards dealing with trade. Harry cast the gloom charm on himself and Jon before they approached. Alexandria awkwardly tried to squeeze her way through the crowded entrance to get to the bar.

"A can of Floo Dust, at once!" she commanded in guttural French towards the open doorway behind the bar.

The bartenders glanced her way, but paid her little heed and took their time serving drinks to other customers. Alexandria was forced to wait. Tonks and Ollivander grabbed two nearby stools and sat. Cloud circled her legs, then eventually slinked under her bar stool. Ghost sat patiently next to Cloud. Ollivander smiled as he looked around.

"Haven't been in a place like this in a very long time," he remarked. "Very long." Jon and Harry stood nearby, facing the crowd. It was almost filled to capacity with hardened wizards, and some sinister looking witches.

"What is going on here?" Tonks said under her breath. She was watching the patrons with a trained eye.
"Full moon Werewolf hunting parties," Alexandria explained. "It is hunting season, Halloween. Very big custom. We are the only magical nation that allows this. This October there are two full moons; tonight and October 31st. Quite rare."

Harry turned at this. "They hunt werewolves?"

"Yes. We have a famous Hunter Clan, the Silver Lancers, which specializes in capturing Werewolves worldwide. They bring them here for the Great Hunt. It is an ancient custom observed by some. Mostly the Purists." Alexandria scowled, and with her pimply face and mannish features, was actually quite convincing. "A brutal sport, hunting humans." She looked ready to fight.

"I've heard of these Silver hunters. I think Fenrir Greyback was part of this clan, then he got bitten. He has been an outlaw ever since," Ollivander said.

"One of the most notorious werewolves in England, was once a werewolf hunter?" Harry said incredulously.

"Yes. A blood purist fanatic, who became what he hated most. He attacked a boy, one of your Father's friends I believe," Ollivander said. "His first victim, since then he's been on the run, turning innocent wizards and witches as he goes along. The South-Hampton guild has him as their highest target right now. Hasn't been spotted recently in England. Last sighting was in Ukraine, I believe."

"Is he related to Vince Greyback?" Jon asked.

"You bet. Fenrir is his older brother," Tonks spat. "Don't get it twisted. The Greyback family are purists as bad as they come. Vince may be the odd one out. Just like how Sirius was."

Finally, a bartender came to attend to Alexandria. "What do you want?" the bartender asked in a hurried voice.

"Canister of floo dust," Alexandria explained in French.

"Five galleons."

Alexandria paid the amount. When the bartender came back, he reluctantly gave her the canister. "You picked the worst night for local travel. The floo fires are very busy," the bartender replied. He eyed her companions and their expensive gear. "I can open up a spot for you for lets...say, fifty galleons more."

"What! That's outrageous!" she argued. The bartender shrugged. Jon came forward and Alexandria whispered in his ear. Jon took out the gold and gave it to her.

"I want a spot opened up immediately," she countered, holding the pouch in her hand.

"Open it," the bartender insisted. She loosed the string and opened it for him to see. He nodded.

"It is agreed- fuck!"

A flash of a spell arced across the bar counter. It hit Alexandria's hand and the gold pouch flew out of her grasp. The bag of gold was caught by a hooded wizard who was shoving his way through the jam-packed crowd. Jon made chase, Ghost growling at his side.

"Wait! Fuck!" Harry cursed at Jon.

"Colloportus inclusi in sempiternum!" Tonks cast at the front door and it slammed closed. The thief
banged at it, then tried a few unlocking spells, all to no avail. Two robed accomplices turned, drawing wands at their group. They closed ranks in front of Jon, who came to a halt. The crowd parted upon seeing the confrontation.

"It ain't worth it, lad," the one on the left said. "All's fair in the business, see?"

Jon ignored them and addressed the slim, robed wizard by the door. "Return what you stole! I will say this only once," he commanded. The two bodyguards did not back down, but they did look behind at their pickpocket. The person at the door turned, realizing they were locked in.

"English, eh?" the thief said in a woman's voice. "Release the magic on the door. Before they hurt you."

Jon drew back his hood. Some of the patrons recognized him. "C'est lui!"

"Le Chevalier Noir!"

Harry cursed under his breath. "Crows! On me," he commanded. His other three teammates positioned themselves so that they had clean lines of fire towards the three opponents. Thug number two hesitated, now that they were outnumbered.

Harry walked up next to Jon. "Do we need to do this, like, right now?" he grumbled.

"I will not let this thief escape," Jon responded calmly. "Last chance!" he warned. "Step aside or be cut down!" he commanded the two wizards in front of him. They had the stubborn, scarred faces typical of hired muscle. One even had a discolored eye and a scar to match.

"What you wa' us to do, missus?" Scarface asked. The two of them noted that Jon did not draw for his wand as yet. Rookie idiot.

"Da Fook is this lad? You want to die?" The other aimed his wand at Jon's face. Jon didn't flinch.

"They sound British," Jon said delightedly to Harry. Harry and the two bodyguards looked at Jon with the same dumbstruck expression.

What does that have to do with anything? Harry thought.

"Oi? What's it to ya then?" Cockney accent taunted.

"The authorities told us not to provoke the locals," Jon snarled as he attacked.

Jon drew his wand with a swift, upward movement, cutting off the nearer man's forearm. The slash was so fast the wizard simply could not believe that was his severed hand on the ground. He screamed, doubling over his amputated arm. He curled unto his side, crying in pain as blood poured freely over his robes. The crowd pressed against the walls, trying to get even further away from the fight. The female thief and her muscle simply stared at their bawling comrade, stunned.

Jon's blade gleamed bronze and red under the orange light of the overhead lanterns.

Harry tossed back his left sleeve with a quick flick of his arm and drew his Diablo wand in a slow, deliberate movement. When it was free from the bracer something strange happened. The Wingbone handle expanded a few feet on either side of his grip. The Diablo core grew into a wickedly curved blade at the end of the bone. A massive Scythe manifested. Harry definitely wasn't expecting his wand to transform into Death's Scythe, but he hid his surprise well and acted like this was his plan all along.
The crowd gasped collectively.

The two innocently-faced boys drawing massive weapons had the desired effect of stopping Cockney accent dead in his tracks. He put his hands up in surrender, dropping his wand. The sound of it clattering to the floor pierced the tense silence of the French Port Pub.

"On your knees!" Jon shouted. Harry was so shocked by the level of command in Jon's tone that he almost obeyed the command as well. "Woman! Come here, now!" Jon pointed his sword at the lone witch at the door, then pointed on the ground in front of the bleeding wizard. The woman came forward slowly, cautiously, and knelt next to the burly wizard who was almost twice her size. She raised her arms in surrender. They ignored the whimpers of their friend who was bleeding to death right next to them. Jon held the edge of the sword to her throat.

"Easy, Black," Harry said. He pointed at her hands. "Drop the wand. Then the gold," Harry commanded. "Fifty galleons is not worth your life, is it?"

The female thief did as instructed. She remained very still, the sword edge steady under her chin.

"Red, manacle them. Medic, please see to this man," Harry commanded. Tonks came forward and created the anchoring spell, and manacled all of their ankles to it. Jon dropped his sword to his side. Harry picked up their wands while Alexandria cast a magical tourniquet on the fainted man's arm. She dug in her pockets for a pouch of powder and sprinkled it on the amputated forearm and the bleeding stub.

"Accio!" she summoned an empty bottle from the bar and then cast a spell on it. The bottle grew in size, and the severed hand was magically teleported inside the bottle.

"You will have at most one hour to see a qualified healer to have this re-attached," Alexandria told the injured. "Be thankful it was a clean cut."

"Be thankful you are still alive," Jon declared, drawing back the hood of the thief's robes. The thief was a young blond woman with a gaunt face and bad teeth.

"Sorry m'lord!" the young woman cried, eyeing the massive scythe. "I am English, like you."

"You are a thief, and also deserve to have your hand removed from your body," Jon declared, touching her arm with the flat of the blade.

"Mercy!" she flinched. She began to sob uncontrollably into her hands.

"I'll go call the Auror," Ollivander said.

"No. Let us be on our way," Jon said, grabbing the gold. "Let the keep call them."

The patrons who were pressed against the walls simply stared at them. The Crow's Vambrace walked through the clear centre of the establishment into the next room with the fireplaces.

"Excuse me," Jon said kindly. The entire line let them go first. "Thank you."

"Le chevalier immortel..." a patron said in hushed tones.

Alexandria took the floo powder and whispered her home's address into the fire. Jon stood guard until it was his turn to step into the roaring green fire. He sheathed his wand, then ducked his head into the green flames.
"Jon, what part of 'We'll be on our best behavior' do you not understand?" Harry sighed.

"I was extremely lenient, you do realize that I could have ended them?" Jon argued.

"Jeez," Harry shook his head.

Alexandria was currently hyperventilating, trying her best to regulate her breathing by taking deep breaths through her nose and blowing it out her mouth.

"Calming drought, my dear?" Ollivander offered a vial out of a shrunken chest he had in his pocket. Alexandria was about to accept when Jon intervened.

"No," Jon said simply. "She needs to deal with it naturally. We are on mission, these things may happen."

"It's alright.. M-M-aster Ollivander, I just... need a moment."

"Come. You will be fine, Alexandria. Let us find Monsieur Valmont so that we may be on our way," Jon put his arm around her in encouragement.

"Good work there, Medic," Tonks congratulated Alexandria. "You will have to show me that stasis charm combination. We have to be more careful- flashing gold all over the place is asking for it. Someone tried to rob them before of almost half a grand in Knockturn alley."

"And what happened then?"

"They made front page," Tonks said disgustedly.

"Right. That. They may make front page again, have no fear," Alexandria noted. "Let's go talk to Uncle V and get a rifle for Master Ollivander." She straightened her shoulders, fighting off the adrenaline coursing through her and exited the main floo room. "Uncle V!" she called out.

The four of them followed her down the hall. Alexandria stopped momentarily out of habit in the kitchen to grab a cookie. "Oh, I've missed these," she moaned in pleasure. "Feel free," she passed around the jar. Harry was about to accept when a slight shake of Tonks' head made him refuse at the last second.

"Who's there?" came a voice from upstairs, suspicious.

"Pots and Pans, pauldrons and cauldrons!" Alexandria sang in a singsong children's rhyme. "Double, double toil and trouble, fire burn and cauldron bubble!"

"Lexi? Pet? It is you?" the voice called.

"Oui, oncle V!" she responded.

"It is you! What are you doing here?" Monsieur Valmont demanded as he came out unto the balcony overlooking the main foyer. "Oh. What happened to your face? What have you done with your hair? Lord Black! The Crows! What are you doing here?" he repeated, questions firing one after the other.

"Uncle, we need to get into the armoury," Alexandria explained. "We are on mission. Also, who do we know has a store of Onyx raw material?"

"Come, come," the faithful butler said as he came down the stairs. "Your face, this disguise, is horrendous!" he hugged her fiercely anyway. "I have been miserable without you, pet. Valerie says I should move into Beauxbatons, but I can't, it hurts my heart for this home to be so empty! I must take
"And Jasmine?" she asked. "Where is she?"

"She moved out after the funeral. She no longer has any time for an old man like me. Tonight she has gone on the Great Hunt. It is her first year! You must experience it at least once, pet."

"No," Alexandria stiffened. Hogwarts' blood prejudices and how it affected new bloods like Hermione had dramatically altered her opinion. "You allowed this?" she hissed in English.

"Why, of course? She is an adult. It is custom!" he responded in English.

Just then the floo roared once again.

"Papa!" A woman's voice shouted. "I just saw Harry Potter and Lord Black at Calais! And the clan woman! The Crows!" Jasmine LeBlanc, Edgar Valmont's daughter through marriage to Valerie, ran down the halls. Jasmine had always been like an older cousin to Alexandria. Jasmine came to an abrupt halt when she saw the entire Clan group in the Potage's family home.

"Oh. Bonsoir," she greeted them, surprised. Instead of the jubilant, pretty young woman Harry remembered as the hostess of Alexandria's party, she was dressed up in a garish costume, all black leather and carnival-esque black camouflage paintings on her heavily made eyes. In her hand was a decorative Silver bow with a prop arrow. Her jaw hung slack as she stared at Jon.

"Bonsoir, cousin," Alexandria said stiffly. The Crows nodded, not too sure where this tension was coming from.

"Lexie?" Jasmine asked, eyeing Alexandria. "You are home, in France?"

"Not for long. And no one could know," Alexandria said flatly as she crossed her arms.

"What are you doing here?"

Alexandria said nothing, only stared stonily at her. Jon and Harry were playing ping pong, watching the stand off between the French girls.

Tonks snarled in exasperation. "Told you bringing her was a bad idea."

"Girls, you know it is impolite to converse like this in front of guests. May I, Jasmine?" Monsieur Valmont said. Harry thought that was rich since he was just speaking in French with Alexandria the whole time. Impolite my arse.

Jasmine nodded. "Oui, papa."

Her father tapped his wand on her mouth. "You are friends with Jon Black and the Crows?" Jasmine asked abruptly. "What happened to your face?"

"I cannot speak of it right now. We are in a hurry. But...why?" Alexandria asked, pointing at the Silver Bow invitation.

"I have only heard rumours... the thrill and danger of the chase, and how it can only be truly understood through experience! It has not even begun and I can feel the excitement. And your friends have got the anticipation pumping at the party in Calais!"

"What?" Tonks snapped.
"The fight! It is all everyone is talking about! It has whet the appetite of the patrons! Blood has been spilled! Almost like... a taste of things to come!" Jasmine rattled off, breathless.

Their confrontation was being treated like a sick opening act? Harry’s dark thoughts were swirling inside his head.

"What is to come, Jasmine?" Harry finally asked, fearing the answer.

"The Great Hunt, of course!" she responded, displaying her Silver bow invitation. "Look, I am part of the Silver Archers Hunting party! Almost sixty galleons is the ticket, but I hope it will be worth it in the end!" Her exuberance was quickly snuffed with all the grim British faces eyeing her.

"Silver... Archers?" Harry asked dangerously. Jon recognized the tone of Harry's voice. He was getting mad. Jon quickly stepped closer to Harry's side, ready to stop him if he lost control.

"Yes. It is the name of our hunting party... almost forty of us! Our target tonight will be released at ten... in the vicinity of Salles."

"Your... hunting party...?" Harry closed his eyes.

This could not be happening.

Not tonight. Not this fucking weekend.

No. No. It can't be. All of these coincidences, Michael, the Basilisk, the Diablo, the full moon... Dark magic was definitely at work here. He prayed that this conversation was not actually happening, and he would soon awaken from this bad dream.

His eyes felt heavy. This was real. The rage was building steadily.

"Our Silver Archer's band will assemble there at eleven. It is a fresh werewolf, never participated before. Good for us beginners, easier to chase! His name is..." she checked her invitation card. "R. J. Lupin!"

Harry moved with lightning speed. Jon had no chance to stop him. He lunged forwards and snatched her brutally by the throat.

Jon caught a glimpse of Harry's face. Both eyes were completely Red.

Everyone screamed, including Jasmine. Jon grabbed at his arm, but a magical shield blocked him from taking hold.

"Where... is... he?!"

The last thing he remembered before he hit the ground was Jon waving the Dragon heartstring wand in his face.
With everything happening at the same time, our Heroes will be pushed to the limit. Harry finally gets to truly show off his skills.

"Jasmine!" Alexandria cried. She rushed over to her childhood 'cousin' and playmate as she crumpled to the ground. Jasmine's eyes were watery, holding her throat as she coughed and gasped, trying to get air back into her lungs. While the others rushed to check on Jasmine, Jon gently opened Harry's eyes. The red gleam was gone.

"Damn you," Jon whispered in relief. Keep yourself together, Harry of House Hollow. If they only saw your eyes...

"What the fuck was that?" Tonks demanded of Jon.

"I don't know. I presume R.J. Lupin was close to his father," Jon said simply.

"I believe I saw them many years ago in Diagon, together with Sirius Black, your uncle, Jon. They looked friendly enough. But many students who were once close friends, turned into bitter enemies. It affected...everyone," Ollivander said. "I saw my daughter with Regulus, only once, maybe twice. I had no idea that she would have run away..."

Jon turned on his 'Grandfather.' "I did not know my mother," he said truthfully, both of his real mother and the adopted mother of Harry's world. "I am sorry," Jon apologized. "For your loss," he added. Without further ado, he dragged Harry away from the group. From the position next to Harry's stretched legs, Jon rolled, grabbed the leg behind the knee, tumbled over Harry and scooped him up over his shoulders in a fluid motion.

Tonks and Ollivander simply watched him, impressed.

"What? Mr. Valmont, is there a bedroom where I can take him?" Jon asked.

Mr. Valmont was amazed that a wizard was carrying the comatose Boy who lived on his shoulders. "Um- Third door on the left down the hall, guest suite. What the hell was that? Why did he attack?"

Jasmine was taking deep breaths, rubbing her sore neck. Alexandria was digging in her pouches for Jon's healing potion.

"I'm not sure, actually. When I wake him up, I will find out. Tonks, please stay on guard. We will be back," Jon declared. Tonks nodded and immediately went to enchant intruder detection charms on entrances to the house.

Jon found the spare room and dumped Harry none too gently on the bed. He retrieved Harry's weapons. Jon put all of them in his pocket enchanted with the wood-attachment spell to prevent wands being easily removed.

"Incarcerous!" Black mummy-styled bandages wrapped Harry's arms to his sides. Jon tentatively
came close to release the Hundred-year sleep curse.

"Potter, do not kill me when you wake up," he prayed under his breath. He poured magic into the bracer, summoning the Aegis shield. Then, he touched his wand to Harry's temple.

Harry's eyes flashed open. The red gleam pulsed brightly, then Harry shut his eyes voluntarily.

"Potter, fight it," Jon hissed. "Control yourself!"

"Yeah, I know! Ok!" Harry hissed, screwing his eyes shut tightly. Jon saw the ties securing him starting to smoke. "Cut me some slack... I need to relax," he snapped.

"I cannot. Not until you are yourself. The Light, Harry. We must walk in the light. You... must walk in the light!" Jon encouraged. Jon ducked a bit lower behind his shield. Harry nodded, and took deep breaths, calming his racing heart. He stopped fighting against the restraints. The smoke died out.

For almost thirty seconds Harry just laid still, breathing in and out slowly, never opening his eyes.

"Ready," Harry announced.

"You're sure?" Jon questioned.

"I hope so."

"Open your eyes."

Harry did. They were back to normal. Jon released the binding spell, but did not lower his Aegis shield. Harry stood up. Jon gave him a few feet of space. His defensive stance was strong: knees bent, Diablo core wand in his right, Aegis Tower Siege shield shimmering over his left.

The two boys just stared at each other. Jon wasn't sure if Harry was crazy enough to attack even without any weapons, but he wasn't taking any foolish chances.

Harry was the wizard here, not he.

"I'm sorry. Is Jasmine ok?"

"Alexandria is attending to her now. Should be fine."

"Remus is the only one who could help me free Sirius, my Godfather, from wrongful imprisonment. I did not know if... before... if he had to survive a Halloween lynch mob. I met him by year three. I just don't know!" Harry cursed.

"Lynch mob?"

"Hunting party, except for people. They torture and do things... then kill them. Very fucked up."

"Ah. Village justice."

"What?"

"Justice from the people. Cruel, with no means of just defense for the hunted."

"Yeah. Something like that. That woman was going to engage in this, for sport! For a ticket costing fucking sixty galleons!"
"Easy there. It is their culture. Are these werewolves not 'dark' creatures?"

"It's a man! A human! They have no choice but to change every full moon. You think he wanted this? He's normal all the other nights of the year, basically."

"Basically?"

"I don't know anything else that makes them extra special than other wizards. But yeah. Basically a regular bloke."

"What happened the last time around concerning this werewolf?" Jon continued.

"He came to teach Defense. Sorta took me under his wing. I learnt a lot of my parents' past from his stories. He was integral to the resistance against Voldemort...he and Tonks..."

Crap. He and Tonks hooked up. How could he have forgotten?

"He and Tonks...?" Jon repeated.

"They were killed in the final Battle," Harry said softly. He couldn't tell Jon about their romantic relationship, neither the baby they had. However, he would make damn sure that they did not meet the same tragic fate.

Nobody was going to die like how they did before, not this time, not if he had anything to say about it.

"It sounded like you were going to say something else, Harry. Don't keep things back from me. I am your man. I will help you, no matter what. This, I swear."

Harry took a few more breaths. Dumbledore had his reasons, however cruel; in keeping secrets. He didn't, not really, and definitely had no reason to keep secrets from Jon. He could afford to be more open. Jon was a good guy. He had earned his trust many, many times over in the few months since they met each other.

"He and Tonks... had a son. Before they died. I was named his godfather."

"Oh," Jon said, releasing the shield and sheathing his wand back into the Phoenix bracer. "Oh."

"Oh? Oh?! That's all you can say?"

"Matters of the heart... I cannot help in this," Jon chuckled in apology. "But, we must help him. And also complete our mission. You are the driving force behind this clan, Roderick Hallow. Detach your emotions for now. Let us save this man, and drive away the dark magic lingering over this night."

"You're right. Let's get the rifle and the information we need and get the fuck out of here." He offered his fist and Jon hit it solidly.

"To arms," Jon smiled, relieved Harry was back to himself.

"To arms," Harry nodded. Jon returned his weapons to Harry.

Both of them found the rest of the gang in the armoury. Jasmine had a bandaged soaked in what appeared to be Jon's healing potion around her neck.

"Everyone, I am so sorry about what happened. Jasmine, you alright?" said Harry.
Jasmine just stared at him, watching his eyes intently. They were back to normal.

"Whatever it is that came over you, was damn scary. I thought I was going to die," she admitted bluntly.

"I am sorry, so, so sorry," Harry apologized.

There was a tense silence in the room.

"Ok. Just, watch it. And, don't ever come near me again," Jasmine said vehemently.

"Right," Harry said. He didn't think he would get anything better than that.

"Right," Jasmine said, touching her bandaged neck.

"This one should do fine, Edgar," Master Ollivander said, picking up one of the antiques. "You have rounds?"

"German Gewehr 98. Interesting choice. Yes, I do have clips that would fit. And I have a service kit. You know how to calibrate and clean?"

"Yes I do," Ollivander muttered, inspecting the rifle.

"Madame Solange, Alexandria's grandmother was the one who showed me everything. Pavel did not truly appreciate this muggle aspect of the family. I must admit that I am surprised a man such as yourself would know about these things, Master Wandmaker."

"I have lived quite a long life," Ollivander said easily, as if that explained everything in the universe. Monsieur Valmont dipped his head once in understanding. Harry wished, that one day, he could have that same sort of clout.

Within twenty minutes the Crows were airborne on their brooms bearing southwest towards Beauxbatons. Cloud and Ghost were carried in a pet case and Jon's knapsack, respectively. Harry was point man on this flight. The five of them rode single file, Tonks bringing up the rear with Cloud's travelling case suspended from her broom.

The group landed outside the main gates of Beauxbatons.

"Mask on, everybody. I will do the talking," Tonks ordered. Jon and Harry pulled down their balaclavas, and then attached the Dueling Mask unto it. The clasps fit snugly behind their head and under the chin. Alexandria drew up her cowl and put on Jon's apprentice mask underneath. Master Ollivander did the same, putting on his own smithing mask.

Tonks was the only one with her face exposed. She rang the bell at the gate with a sharp pull of the rope. Within minutes, light from a lumos charm came shining down the dark path towards the gates. Someone was coming.

"Who's there?" came a call. Tonks looked at Alexandria for translation.

"Crows," Alexandria responded clearly.

"Who did you capture here last time?" he asked in English.

"The Castor Siblings," Tonks offered.
"And what are your Codenames?" he asked.


"New recruits? Business is booming," Professor Allemons, the Defence against Dark Magic teacher laughed as he approached out of the shadows. He took out keys to unlock the gate. "And new outfits too. Come. The headmistress awaits."

Within five minutes they were before Madame Maxime. Valerie Valmont the Deputy Headmistress and Professor Allemons were also present for this meeting.

"Crows. I will be blunt. We believe that we have a Practitioner of the Dark Arts mastermind culpable for these attacks," the headmistress said.

The Crows glanced at each other. Tonks cleared her throat. "And how did you come to this conclusion?"

"The previous attacks were years apart. Now we have three in one year. And this one would be the fourth, and so close to the last. If there really is an abduction," the headmistress said.

"Is that even possible?" Tonks said. "They are controlling the diablo?"

"Necromancy. The Diablo manifest from the pain of the victim's families, and the corpses of the victims become their new bodies. Which is why retrieval of the corpse was critical. Gruesome task, but it must be done."

"But we killed the previous one," Tonks argued, "And returned the boy safe and sound."

"That is also a reason why I believe someone is behind this. It almost feels like retribution against the South for that failed attack," Maxime grumbled. She began to pace in her office.

"'You spoiled my fun before, now I'm going to make you suffer' -type of villain, huh?" Tonks added.

"Simplistic, but yes," Maxime frowned. "The Nogtail mission and the Purists behind it. If you did not know before, Nogtail urine cased in Iron Barrels are a key ingredient in necromantic magic known as Inferi. Have you heard of it?"

"Yes," Harry said. The French teachers looked at him hard, regardless of the mask.

*Ah, another goof.*

"I have explained this to them, yes," Mr. Grey said smoothly. Harry could have hugged the old man.

"We have been working with Auror Bernard. He has suspicion that there is a necromancer involved. We do not know how the Diablo is summoned, but with the frequency of attacks getting much higher, we have to acknowledge the possibility that France is under siege by a powerful wizard," the headmaster explained.

"Or witch," Alexandria said.

Madame Maxime paused, almost as if she recognized the voice.

"Miss Potage?"

"No, Headmistress," she replied, guiltiness dripping from her pseudo denial.
"Of course not, dear," the headmistress smiled. "I hope you will inform your mother of your whereabouts. Or I will."

Harry groaned silently.

"I might send a request to our Chevaliers de la Fable baguette clan to hunt this wizard down. I am losing faith in our Aurors."

Harry stiffened. This is what happened before, public distrust of the Aurors, and then further on unto the Judicial system. Maxime was not happy with the performance of the French MLE. Harry watched the time on the clock. It was a little after nine thirty. Remus was probably being transported to Salles even now.

"Who is this Chevaliers Clan?" Jon asked.

"Knights of the Wand Fable," Alexandria translated. Harry said that silently to himself a few times. Who names these clans, anyway?

"Oui. The equivalent to your Southampton AK guild, the' Gloryhounds', is that the name? Elite Hunters who hunt other wizards, usually known outlaws," Allemons added.

"So this necromancer is a known outlaw? Is there a name? Or is this all suspicion?" Tonks asked.

"Unfortunately, we have no clue who it is. A lot of the criminal networks have contacts, or even active agents, within our main Hunter Guild houses. Paris' Guild is full of leaks. And the Southern arms of the guild aren't as specialized in Dark Wizard Hunting. The Silver Lancers Clan from Paris are our most famous, and what are they known for? Hunting Werewolves for profit," Maxime snarled, disgusted. "They certainly have contacts involved with the dark side of magic. And ties in the Eastern European magical governments. Tonight is a very profitable night for them. I believe four werewolves have been brought in. The Aurors look the other way on this night -it's a bloody carnival out there!" Maxime cried. "Currently our Aurors are burdened with curtailing the Purists, who create mischief regarding muggles and new magicals during the Great Hunt."

"Someone needs to give your Auror Corps a kick in the arse," Tonks said disgustedly.

"The people of France want their Halloween custom. Dress up, pretend to be doing the world a service. France does not have a single werewolf who willingly lives here. We take pride in keeping our border secure from them," Valerie Valmont reinforced.

Harry now knew where her daughter Jasmine got her ideologies from.

"A cult of seven acolytes is needed to empower the main summoner. And necromancy, by nature, is so corrupt, that usually the supporting cast does not live long after a ritual. Our Southern Guild clans do not wish to risk lives infiltrating a cult. The Knights from Paris are known for tactical missions, not subterfuge. But they are the best shot we have at hunting down this Necromancer," Professor Allemons said.

"If we do come across this, Necromancer, what is the bounty?" Harry said immediately.

"I... did not draw up a request with our agent," Maxime said, astounded by this child asking about hunting a very dangerous wizard. Tonks and Ollivander looked skeptically at Harry. Harry found it much easier to ignore these looks under his dueling mask. "Usually Hit Squads are given a concrete target. Investigations are carried out by Aurors and their network of spies. Then they either do it themselves or subcontract services from clansmen."
"So... no average figure? Just asking... what was the previous reward like?" Harry pressed.

"Valerie, please bring the Library record of years, 1786 to 1816, please," Maxime requested.

"Of course, headmistress. I will be back," she said softly and stood. The beautiful wife of Edgar Valmont excused herself and went out the office.

"Crows, you think that you can find this culprit?" Allemons asked skeptically.

"With the rate of attacks increasing, if something happens tonight, it may be a good chance to turn the tables on him. We have been informed that this was a direct request, and not put up on the general Guild request boards," Harry said.

"Correct," Allemons said.

"That means, the other French guilds should not have knowledge of us being here?" Harry probed.

"Yes, the request was kept quiet."

Professor Valmont returned carrying a large tome in her arms.

"Headmaster Gerard Malfoy, circa 1799," Valerie read. "Accused of Rape, Murder and Necromancy. Dismissed from Beauxbatons 1804. Convicted for the rape and murder of twins Korelle Thomas, Kyrelle Thomas both aged fourteen, Emmanuelle Meredith-Thomas aged seventeen; and daughter Peppin Malfoy, aged ten; to empower Magical Rituals of the Dead. Sentenced to the Dementor's kiss after ten years of solitary confinement. He was imprisoned for twelve months then escaped. Fugitive suspected of committing numerous heinous crimes throughout Europe. Seventeen years later the Japanese Guild Clan Misutosamurai accredited with the kill. International Bounty Level S-1 Known Outlaw Recovery Status: Dead on Delivery for Two hundred and fifty thousand Galleons."

Tonks eyes opened wide. "Quarter million? For one man?"

"He was considered a Dark Lord, at the time. International bounties mean that the pot is split by numerous governments affected by the individual. The bounty kept going higher and higher after each attack on the victims. All of them were young, and female. His trademark was to remove their eyes, while they were still alive. He raped and killed all of his young girl relatives. The first victims were his nieces, and his own daughter. The Court determined that he was attempting to resurrect his son, who was captured by a Diablo and never seen again. Continued this ghastly research during his life on the run."

Harry was getting absolutely fed up of hearing Malfoy's stinking name keep popping up in his life. "How did the Japanese finish him, then?"

"The Samurai of the Mist were a large group, according to this. Almost twenty wizards. Only seven lived after the battle," Valerie stated. "And Malfoy actually went to Japan to continue his research for bringing back the dead."

"So, that was the last known convicted practitioner of necromancy we have on record. Unfortunately, necromancy does not specifically need wizards or witches as victims. Normal non-magicals can be used, but the rituals aren't as potent. These muggle killings were not as strictly policed by the lawmakers at that time. Practitioners who were caught using muggles were given a slap on the wrist. These type of muggle hunting stories did not make front page of the papers," Allemons said.
Jon folded his arms over his black combat robes. This world of magic had human monsters, just like in his world. Certain people were evil, no matter if they had magic or not.

"He was so powerful he could fight off this Japanese clan?" Jon asked.

"He resurrected their own fallen comrades to fight against them," Maxime explained. "He was so proficient in the dark arts he could animate the dead immediately, or so the Japanese wrote in the report."

"It was believed that he wasn't any good at dueling, the dark magic had crippled his body by that time. But resurrecting the dead was something he could do at will, without a wand. It was the undead that caused all those deaths."

"Hm. Maybe we can catch this new guy red handed," Harry mused. He didn't particularly want to focus too much on this Dark Wizard since Remus was in danger, but demons capturing children and cooking them in soup did not sit well with him at all. Not if he could help it. He had a suspect in mind. "Headmistress," Harry asked. "Do you know anything about the Silver Lancers?"

"Yes. They hunt werewolves. What about them?"

"Do you know how they operate? I heard they are releasing a werewolf in the vicinity of Salles."

"Yes. That. They capture them for the Great Hunt."

"That particular werewolf is a friend of my father," Harry said calmly.

"Mon dieu!" Maxime said. "I am so sorry. You wish to get him out?"

"Yes."

"What a night," Maxime apologized. "I do not know what to tell you. If you do rescue him, there will be repercussions. There would be a mob of angry magicals chasing after you, and the werewolf. And how are you going to help him? Tonight he will change."

Harry didn't know how he would help Remus, exactly. Just knew that he should.

"We have a curse that could put him into a deep sleep. Stronger than Stupefy. Nullifies Dark Curses' influence as well," Jon offered.

"The only curse I know that can do that is a hereditary Ollivander curse. Would it keep him asleep during the transformation?" Maxime asked.

The Crows shrugged, almost in tandem.

"Very well. I believe the starting point of the hunt is in the forest south of Salles. Werewolves chase the moon in night sky, so they head west. Do you have a map?"

Tonks took out their map and spread it out over the desk.

"Merci," Madame Maxime began to draw a line on the map. "The chase usually ends at Biscarrosse, where the lakes meet. Werewolves abhor large bodies of water."

"Do the werewolves ever escape?" Harry asked, desperate.

"Some of the willing ones do. They are the veterans. They are paid handsomely as well. The risk, to the patrons brave enough to undertake the more difficult hunts is ridiculous. These veteran
werewolves are known to bite careless hunters."

"Hunters become the hunted," Jon nodded. He recalled that Master Ollivander said that Fenrir Greyback was once part of the Silver Lancers clan but he eventually got bitten.

"Yes. The first timers... aren't so lucky. There were rumours that Fenrir Greyback willingly participated for years... earning a steep fee for some of the more, exclusive hunting parties. Tens of thousands of galleons were the cost of a single ticket. It did not turn out well for a few of the patrons. Three were killed, six were bitten over the years. Many of the turned patrons were captured for the next year, and were exterminated in the hunt."

Tonks felt sick. There were some fucking perverse wizards here in France. "And people keep doing this? Those Silver Lancers sound like organized crime."

"Close enough," Valerie Valmont said. "But they deliver, year in, year out."

Harry stood up. "The Crow's Vambrace will deliver as well." Harry used his wand to magically detach the stitching on his communication badge on the forearm of his robes. He demonstrated the communication charm. "Keep us informed of Diablo developments. We need to mobilize, at once."

"Very well," Madame Maxime stood, ending the meeting. She took up the guild salute. "May Glory shine her light upon you this night."

"Glory to the guild," Tonks, Harry and Jon chorused, returning the salute.

The five of them were escorted out the grounds by the Defense Professor. Harry was thinking about what the headmistress said about the Evil Malfoy headmaster.

"Alexandria. I need you to rack your brain. Do you know of any Thomas' boys? From the Thomas Family?"

"As you ask that, I believe all of the Thomas children I could remember are girls."

"And their mothers? Do you know any of them?"

"Sorry. I don't know."

"We met a Jean Thomas some months back, remember Jon?" Harry asked.

"I remember. His house had the serpent emblem depicted on the Malfoy Family crest."

"Did he seem even remotely happy that we saved the boy?" Harry asked Tonks and Jon. Tonks just stared at Harry.

"Take off your mask Potter. I want to see your face," she commanded.

Harry removed his mask and rolled up the balaclava underneath it. "That thing gets bloody hot. Ah better."

"Harry. Are you saying what I think you are saying?" Tonks asked, her voice going serious.

"Yeah. I think we got our necromancer suspect. That guy probably has some sort of connection to all of this. He never even offered a congratulations to us, nor the Rabiot family. Very, very wooden, yeah?"

"So. What do we do?" Ollivander asked.
"I want to rescue Lupin. And stop these Diablo attacks. The Aurors are looking out for muggle baiting and hooliganism during tonight's Hunt. Practitioners of dark magic usually use public events as a distraction- and they love to use symbolic days to strike. For example- I got this scar on Halloween. The Old Boogey man syndrome. What better cover up for a Necromancy summoning ritual than a bunch of tourists and locals alike going crazy over Werewolf hunting?"

"I for one, explicitly trust Harry's instincts for Combating the Dark Arts. I did not like that man on meeting him either," Jon agreed.

"Tonks," Harry said.

"You're now going to unveil a crazy plan huh?"

"Yep. Guys, lets head to Salles. We're going to infiltrate the town and listen in for the Silver' Lancers whereabouts. Knowing wizards, they love to cheat. Someone is probably trailing Lupin's convoy as we speak. Tonks, I need you to sneak in the Thomas property and cast the tracking spell on Jean Thomas. I'm going to give you something to help you out."

"Okay," she nodded.

"The rest of us will be nearby. I am hoping we could catch Lupin before he turns, or if not, anyone here has any ideas on capturing a werewolf?"

"An iron cage lined with silver is the only known restraint. What makes werewolves dangerous is that their inherent magic makes them excellent escape artists. They get stronger the longer they are entrapped, and will eventually break through any material that is not silver. Their weaknesses are silver, and large bodies of water. I am not even sure if the Sleep curse will override their transformation. Nobody has tested it before. If it works, it will be a service we can provide."

Ollivander pulled at his beard. "We must never touch ground if he has already turned. That is the mistake hunters make, thinking they can out smart or outmaneuver a full grown werewolf. Airborne only."

"Bollocks. A silver lined cage. Maybe if we steal one... from the Lancers themselves..." Harry said.

"Harry. Now you're going crazy. We have enough things going on to get into a fight with veteran guild hunters," Jon argued.

"Yeah. Let's get to Salles. Mount up."

It took them fifteen minutes of flying north to see the lights of Salles town below them. Harry veered west and put down at the tree line west of the town, probably half a kilometer away.

"Okay, its ten o'clock," Tonks said. "Jasmine said that the lancers were going to release him around this time in the vicinity of the town, and the Hunt officially starts at eleven. If it were me, I'd release him ten to fifteen minutes before he transforms, and transport him in a Silver cage for the entire night, just in case, y'know, our lad decides to come out and play early."

"Agreed. Maybe we could intercept them in the forest," Harry agreed.

"We shall strike swift, and accurate," Jon said. "I believe that if we do this quickly and quietly, no one will know the wiser."

"I'm going to put up a long detection line on the border of the forest south of here. It takes two- Homenium Cautus estos Versus!" Tonks interrupted herself mid-word and cast a spell at Harry.
Everyone flinched. A long beam of yellow light connected between them then faded away into nothing. "There. You got that?"

Harry felt magic coursing through his Troll hair on Holly wand. "I think so."

"It's usually used as an outdoor trip wire to protect camps. Alerts campers of bears, etc. I don't have the raw power to create one long enough at the southern tree line. But Harry here..." she winked at him. "Come on, hotshot. Lets go kidnap a werewolf."

"Jon, open up the communications."

"Done." Jon tapped his wand on the badge on his arm. "RD. Come in."

His voice came out from Tonks' sleeve. "Okay, gotcha, Jon," she replied, grinning. Her voice came out on Jon's badge. Both Harry and Tonks mounted up and sped a few miles south. They landed at the treeline of the forest where they found the Diablo a couple months back. "OK. Remember the spell?"

"Yeah," Harry replied.

"Cast it at me, then keep the magic going. I'm going to fly a couple miles down, using the receiving spell. It'll alert us to where and when someone crosses the border. It's a toned down version of Hogwarts Boundary wards." Tonks got on her broom.

"Wait, put on this cloak. It's really, really important, so don't lose it, yeah?" Harry gave her the Invisibility cloak. "Just in case."

Tonks gave him a brief hug. "To arms, Harry. Stay safe."

"You too. Homenium Cautus estos Versus!" Harry cast the border charm using his troll on Holly. A blinding white light connected to Tonks' wand. She shot off like a bullet on her Quicksilver broom, trailing her wand on the border of the trees. Harry kept pouring magic into the spell as she shrunken in size into a tiny firefly in the distance. After about three minutes, the spell settled on the ground, invisible. Harry stepped back behind the tree line, scanning the night sky for signs of Remus' captors bringing him to the forest.

Harry realized that without his badge, he and Tonks could not communicate with each other. Just then, a glint of something in the sky caught his attention. Harry's eyesight was fixed, but he couldn't make out what it was he was seeing in the dark night. The moonlight glinted off something metallic in the sky.

"Timing, Harry boy. You know how to get yourself into these situations," he muttered to himself. He strained his eyes tracking the glinting thing in the moonlight. "That's gotta be him." He mounted his broom, drew his Niffler and Troll wands and held them both in his right hand, main stem held in between his fingers like claws. He arced low and out of their line of sight, then accelerated from behind. By the time he could identify two broomstick riders carrying a large metallic cage below them, he had his spells ready.

"Stupefy! Stupefy!" two red beams of light shot out of his Troll wand and connected. The three of them began to plummet. Here was the tricky part:

"Accio Cage! Winguardium Depulso Mobilicorpus! Winguardium Depulso Mobilicorpus!"

The two broomstick riders shot up into the sky at mach speed, broomsticks included. The cage was pulled towards him, the poor captive bouncing around the bars helplessly as his momentum changed...
direction.

"Winguardium Leviosa!" Harry accelerated skyward as he guided the cage unto the ground stories below. It landed relatively gently on the field below, maybe a mile or so before the treeline of the forest. Harry gunned the Quicksilver for all its worth, chasing the unconscious Silver Lancers before he lost them. He caught up to one and cast "Ennervate!"

Harry did a back roll, plummeting out of sight and corkscrewing to his left towards the second Clansman. Again he cast the Ennervate spell, spiraling downwards and behind the Lancer's line of sight. He hoped to God that they would fully come to their senses before they died a sudden death. Harry shot off towards Remus' cage glinting on the open field.

He swished and flicked as he flew full speed towards it. "Winguardium Leviosa!" The cage, and Lupin, was yanked off the ground at incredible speed in Harry’s wake. Harry had probably four to five seconds before those two decided to turn around and make a search for their prized possession. He needed to get back to the camp on the western forest before they spotted him.

Harry poured magic into his Levitation Locomotor spell as he had never done before. The weight of the cage and forcing it to overtake his broom felt like yanking his arm against a taught rope. The human sized cage began to accelerate even faster than his broom, overtaking him going forward. Harry could see Remus plastered against the rear bars of the cage as he shot past, cheeks flapping, teeth and the whites of his eyes reflecting the moonlight. His long hair and tattered robes lay flat against the bars.

Remus's yell was heard a few seconds after he zoomed past. Harry hoped the g-forces acting upon poor Moony didn't hurt him too much.

Sorry old chap, but we need to get you out of here.

The entire flight was about ten seconds, but Harry was drenched under his robes with the effort of casting so much spells and pushing his Troll Hair on Holly to power levels he never thought possible. As they approached the western tree line, Harry slowed down Remus' cage hyper flight.

Just before they reached the tree line Harry caught up to the cage and hovered him in carefully. He brought the cage close to his broom and checked on Remus. He was unconscious. Harry admitted that Remus' supersonic journey was a bit rough. Jon, Ollivander and Alexandria were alert and came rushing towards him.

"Harry! You got him! Tonks said that two Clan men are now patrolling the forest. As if they are looking for something," Ollivander exclaimed. Alexandria rushed over to the cage, casting diagnostics through the silvery bars.

"Tell her to sneak behind them and regroup now!" Harry panted, out of breath.

"RD. Come in," Jon whispered into the badge.

"Here," came a whisper. Harry came over and spoke into Jon's arm.

"Target retrieved. Regroup."

There was a silence for about five seconds. A girlish laugh came through.

"Harry... you are impossible, you know that?"

"Just, get over here," Harry sighed. "Stay out of sight."
"Roger that, RH."

Within ten minutes Tonks returned to the camp. Alexandria and the others were talking to a drugged Remus Lupin.

"Get back," was all he muttering, over and over, barely coherent as he lay flat on the floor of the cage.

"He's been poisoned, sedated," Alexandria said, confused. "My charms aren't working on him as they should."

"He's almost ready to transform," Ollivander said. "We need to hide him."

"True. But where?" Harry asked.

"Mr. B to RH. Come in," Jon said into his badge, contacting Headmistress Maxime. 

"I'm here," came the reply. Jon offered his arm to Harry.

"Are you alone?" Harry asked.

"Yes. I'm in my office."

"I got the target," Harry informed.

"Already? You were here half an hour ago."

"We need a place to hide it. It is secured in the correct transport," Ollivander said.

There was a pause.

"Head west towards Biscarrosse. There is a lake house there. There is an old fishing boat house at the end of a very long pier. You cannot miss it. Suspend the cage over the water. Make sure he can see the moon from inside. Once he senses that he is above a deep body of water that should keep him a bit more docile. The Silver cage and large body of water should be enough to hide him for the night."

"Roger that Double M," Harry grinned.

"Double M?"

"Keep us informed. We're moving on our other target at midnight."

"Godspeed," Maxime said.

"CV out."

Harry and the others expanded Jon's invisible Madame Milkin's robes. It took a few tries, but they got it large enough to drape over Remus' cage. He was coughing loudly, moaning and screaming in pain. Cloud began barking like a rabid dog at Remus as soon as his pre-transformation began. Ghost was locked in a trance, howling at the moon and sometimes cowering behind Jon as they prepared for departure. They attached the carrying chain between Jon's and Harry's brooms.

"Silencio!" Tonks cast at the two dogs. Cloud began to go crazy at not hearing his own bark. Ghost just whined under his breath. "Master Ollivander, the calming drought, please." Tonks administered it on her dog and ushered him back into his traveling box.
"Crows, on me!" Harry said. All five of them took off in the night heading westward. This flight took half an hour. They kept low over the lake shore, searching for this long pier with the boat house. After almost ten minutes of searching, they found the pier and the rickety old boat house. With some tricky levitation, Harry managed to loop the chain over the rafters and suspend Lupin over the water. Harry peeped under the invisibility robes.

Remus had begun his transformation. His long, triple jointed legs had ripped out of his pants. His long snout and pointed ears were buried in his tattered robes. The forearms were lengthening, fingernails turning into long, razor-sharp claws.

"He's turning. I'm going to make a window for him." Harry flew on his broomstick and cast Reducto using his Fwooper on Cedar wand. A portion of the western roof was reduced to dust. The falling debris fell on the suspended cage, causing a snapping growl to emanate. Four brooms zoomed out of the boat house.

"You scared the shit out of me!" Tonks cried. The four wizards brought their brooms hesitantly to the wide entrance, peeping. The bottom of the silver cage was all that was visible under the modified robes. It was swaying, the low growl probably the most scary thing they had ever heard. Harry had heard it already before, so it didn't frighten him whatsoever.

"Jon, can you command Ghost to hunt Remus something to eat?" Harry asked.

"I will ask. He seems to understand me much better since I-"

"Yes, yes," Harry cut him off. "Great news. Can you?"

Jon flew Ghost back to the shore and released him. He spoke softly to him and rubbed the top of his head and behind his ears. He returned. "He'll be back shortly."

"Good. Take a short break. We're going for Jean Thomas in a bit. We have forty five minutes."

The Crows landed on the pier and took out water bottles and packed sandwiches from their packs. The low growls were now punctuated by long howls. Once or twice the whole boathouse structure would shake. Ghost came back, carrying a wild baby pig by its bloody neck. He dropped his prize at Jon's feet and dashed back towards the woods surrounding the Biscarrosse lake. Harry levitated it and flew back into the boat house. The smell of blood seemed to have fully awaken Remus. There was the snapping of jaws and a low roar as Harry approached.

Harry carefully lifted the robes off the cage, dodging quickly when a long hand slashed through the bars.

That was too close.

"Remus!" he snapped. "Don't!" he warned. Harry levitated the dead pig closer to the bars. Remus snatched it, and tried to pull it in. The size of the pig was too large. Remus then used both hands to rip it apart into pieces like a toddler ripping toilet paper. Remus devoured the creature within fifteen seconds. He let go a low, plaintive whine.

"I'll try, Remus. Give us a moment."

And so it went for two more hunting trips. Ghost brought meat, and Harry fed it to Remus. Harry filled a water skin full of lake water and emptied it over Remus' snout. The werewolf lapped it gratefully. Harry refilled it a few more times and Remus drank all given to him. The werewolf's behavior improved dramatically over the course of the feeding.
"We'll get you out of here soon," Harry encouraged. Remus scratched at the floor of the cage and decimated the robes he was wearing before. The werewolf spread the mess all over the bottom of the cage, faced the window to the moon, and curled up to sleep.

"We have twenty minutes before we have to get back to Salles," Tonks said. "Problem is, we might have to split up."

"Crap," Harry cursed. Someone had to protect Remus. "I didn't think of that."

The group all looked at each other. Ollivander pulled his beard.

"What we need are reinforcements," Alexandria said. He stared in wonder at Alexandria.

"I got reinforcements!" Harry said, grinning. Alexandria just stared back, then at Jon, then at Harry. Jon looked nonplussed as well.

"What?" she said, lost.

"You do?" Tonks laughed.

"Sure. Why didn't I think of this before! Good call Alexandria!"

Harry closed his eyes and raised his open hand to the north. The lake went eerily still. The gang all went to one knee without prompting on the slippery pier. "Shadow Wing, One-ear, Banshee, Tornado, Rudolph, WhiteStar, to me!" The group got up and gave Harry some space.

The gang waited for about five minutes, then six black bolts of lightning struck the pier.

"Rise. Shadow Wing, come forward." Harry closed his eyes again and put his hand on Shadow Wing's head.

Bidding?

Can you take this werewolf into the Forbidden Forest, far away from humans?

Forbidden Forest?

Your home.

Yes.

Wait. Better yet. Can you take this cage in my Clan House? There is a barn at the back. Store the cage in there.

It is partially your territory. It can be done.

Will you keep guard until morning?

There was a hesitant pause.

You will owe us a lot of meat for this. Full moon is our mating night.

You shall get it, Shadow Wing.

I prefer lamb. Harness the chains and bind us.
Harry opened his eyes. "Guys," he turned around. All of his mates were flattened on the pier, trying their best not to be squashed into bloody pulps. "Oops. Sorry. Should have warned you I was going to do that again."

"Yes you should've," Tonks complained. "Felt like I was being forced through the slats. Ugh, the slime!" she touched her filthy robes as she got up.

"They will take him to the base. Inside the barn at the back, and guard him until morning. Master Ollivander, can you transfigure this boat into a wagon?" Harry asked.

"Yes, that shouldn't be a problem."

The Crow's Vambrace got to work creating a wagon from the old wooden boat. The wagon had no wheels, but Harry doubted the sled-wagon would cause a problem for the threstrals. Then, Harry levitated the cage with the sleeping werewolf unto it. Harry ordered Shadow Wing and the others to back up on either side of the long chain connected to the transfigured sled.

"Take very good care of him. Find me immediately if something happens to him, Shadow Wing."

The threstral watched him with those weird, unblinking eyes, then looked towards the north. Harry guessed that was a yes. The chain transfigured into harnesses that connected the six regal beasts. "Off you go then. I'll bring you what you want when I return."

Without further ado, the six threstrals shot off into the north skies.

Jon offered Harry his fist as the flying sled disappeared into the night. "Success favors you, Harry of House Hallow," Jon said. "You change the tides of fate." Harry connected but did not return the smile.

"Let's get back to Salles first and see if Thomas is behind this. Then talk to me about 'success'. Remember, the Diablo strikes at midnight. Let's go fuck him up."

By the time they reached Salles, the Hunting festival was in uproar. The Crows had put on nondescript outer cloaks over their unique robes, and donned their masks before they set foot on the main road. Ghost went around the town proper and was somewhere in the woods. Tonks ordered Cloud to stay with him. With their masks and dark robes they fit in easily among the crowd of disgruntled hunting participants.

There was an angry mob surrounding the bed and breakfast along main street. There was a sign draped across the second floor balcony with a Silver Lancer Guild Emblem and a banner marked Grande Chasse. Many patrons were angry at the Silver-cloaked Clansmen who were arguing just as loud back at them.

"They are demanding to be put on another hunt. Some do not want refunds of their money," Alexandria told the rest of the group. "The Lancers are telling them that they would have to pay more for the harder chases, and that space is limited. The party goers do not want to pay the extra money. This does not bode well."

"Look. There is Jasmine," Tonks spotted her. She appeared to be enjoying herself with her friends, who were drinking at a roadside bar, watching the commotion.

Jon's expression grew hard. "Will she talk about us?"

"I don't know," Alexandria said. "We talked briefly at my party, but I have never seen her this tipsy."

"That's enough," Jon said sternly. "We have other things to do here. Let's get this done and then maybe we can talk about her later."

"Yes, Master Jon," Tonks said. "Let's get this done."

By the time they finished, the situation was under control. The Silver-cloaked Clansmen had accepted the Lancers' terms and the party goers were satisfied. Jon and Tonks returned to the Hunting lodge, where they joined the others in planning their next move.

"We need to find a way to get into the Diablo's lair," Jon said. "We can't just walk in and take him down."

"I agree," Tonks said. "We need to find a way to get inside."
before."

"Forget her," Harry said. "Let's circle around the back of the property when we reach the track."
They cut through the side street off the main road. As soon as they left the town proper, they came
off the road and walked through the bushes on either side of the track. They approached the
sprawling property owned by Jean Thomas. It was a good thing they did, because there were two
wizards dressed like the Russian hit squad guarding the gate. Harry raised his hand and brought it
down slowly, hand flattened. The five of them went down prone in the bushes.

"Fuck fuck fuck," Harry whispered, scanning the property. "We're too late."

"He is involved," Tonks replied softly. "What do we do?"

"If there are guards outside, there may be guards inside," Jon added.

"We need to search the perimeter, lads. It's almost midnight. The ritual would have started already,"
Ollivander chimed in.

"Jon. Scout around back. Here. Put this on." Harry gave him the invisibility cloak. Jon brought out
his ring box. He countered the space altering charm and released his bow and arrows. He took off his
plain black outer cloak and accepted the invisibility cloak. Ghost moved like a wraith at his side.
He tapped the badge on his arm. "RD."

"Hear you loud and clear, Jon..." Tonks whispered. Tonks cast the tracking charm on Jon. Jon
disappeared under Harry's cloak.

"Strike, the Crow's Vambrace," he said and trekked through the sparse wood surrounding the
property. Tonks shared the tracking spell with the team.

"Is he going to be okay?" Alexandria asked, her mouth dry and heart racing with fear.

"Should be," Harry said.

They tracked him for five minutes. Then Maxime's voice came through the badge.

"Crows! A girl has been kidnapped! Her name is Gabrielle Delacour. She was taken from her home
in Roucamoundour a few minutes ago."

"Acknowledged. We're on it, double M," Harry whispered. "We're awaiting confirmation if we're at
the Necromancer's base."

"You found him? What... already?"

"We think so. Waiting for confirmation. Give us a few minutes."

Jon was still moving, the pull on the tracking charm on their wands was strong. Finally after a few
more minutes his voice came through.

"I counted ten sentries I could spot from this approach. And yes, I see him performing a ritual in a
clearing around three hundred metres north west of your position. He has four naked women and
three naked men lying on a multi-sided shape burning on the ground. The acolytes are non-
responsive, but still alive. Should I engage?"

"Take him the fuck out Jon," Harry said. "Tell me when its done."
"Will do. Out."

Jon circled around the wizard dressed in a weird robe made of what appeared to be skin. He was doing a ritual, and stepping gingerly over the candles lit on the ground. The air felt heavy and stink, reminding him of a battleground a few days after the fighting. A place of death, and blood.

Jon drew his bow. He touched his Dragon and Heart string wand on the tip of his arrows, enchanting it with the Hundred-Year-Sleep spell. With a smooth pull and release, it pierced right through the left leg of Jean Thomas. He crumpled to the ground. The seven acolytes stirred.

Jon dashed out of cover and systematically put all of them to sleep before they came out of their trance. He crushed all of the candles with well aimed *Reducto* spells. The heavity and stench in the air dissipated.

"RD. I've taken them out. And destroyed the artifact inscribed on the ground. Eight hostiles are down.. but alive."

"Good work. Start taking out the guards from the back. We'll take out these two out front."

"Be careful," Jon warned. "Strike clean. Mr B Out."

Harry nodded towards Tonks. Tonks spoke up. "Wands free. Master Ollivander, Alexandria, maintain ten feet behind us, shields up protecting our flanks and rear. Harry, cast your chain binding, I will lock them down. Nice and slow, lets go."

The four of them crept closer towards the property fence. As soon as Harry was close enough he cast the chain binding spell. *Vincula!* Heavy chains manifested six feet above their heads and attacked the two guards out front. The chains whipped and snapped, and bound them from their arms down to their feet.

"Silencio!" Tonks cast before they could scream. Then she executed the anchoring spell on the stone wall. With practiced ease she connected the chains unto the anchoring ring.

"Ollivander, the sleep spell, if you please," Harry asked now that they were incapacitated. Ollivander came close and waved his wand in their faces. Between Jon's invisibility cloak and the rest of the Clan advancing from the front gates, the sentries were caught by surprise and easily taken out. All in all, they subdued twenty people, twelve guards and Jon's eight participants in the ritual.

"The hammer and the anvil. Executed to perfection," Jon commended. "How long did MM call?"

"Ten minutes. Now we've got to take care of the Diablo."

"I'm going to give her a call," Tonks said. "RH, come in. Double M can you hear me?"

"Loud and clear. What's the status?"

"We got your man. Hope you have something nice for us," Tonks said smugly.

"With this type of work you put in; the Ministry Contractor department would have nothing remaining. What about young Miss Delacour?"

"We're going on it right now," Tonks replied.

"Where are you?"

"We're on our way to Rocamoudour. We'll get her back within the hour."
"Good work. Let me know how it goes." Madame Maxime ended the conversation.

"Tonks. I need you to keep a watch out here. Jon, you stay with her." Harry said. "Alexandria, you and Ollivander are with me."

"Harry. Take my badge," Jon said.

"Right." Harry used his wand to cut the stitch on Jon's clan emblem. "We might need more of these. Tonks, please bring back our gear from the hiding spot," Harry asked politely.

"On it." She disappeared. Within a few minutes she brought back their broomsticks and bags. "Take my broom, to carry Cloud. I will hold on to your broomstick." She straddled it and made a rude up-and-down gesture so only Harry could see. She grinned.

Sometimes he just couldn't understand this girl. Serious one second, completely mental the next.

*And she thinks I drive her nuts.*

"Strike Clean, Harry. Aim steady, Master Ollivander," Jon said solemnly. He removed his mask as he stepped over to Alexandria. He brought her close. "Be safe," he gave her a firm hug.

"You guys are unbelievable," Alexandria said. "I- I- don't know what else to say."

"Do not be alarmed. This is what Immortal heroes-"

" 'Do for fun', yes yes yes we've heard that before. Get going, hotshot. Stay safe, Rookie," Tonks said, patting her on the back. "Aim true, Master Ollivander."

"Come, Cloud," Harry commanded. The Swiss Shepherd leaped up and Harry caught him awkwardly and settled him inside the traveling case. Master Ollivander was double checking the rifle and Alexandria was organizing her pockets and pouches of healing paraphernalia. Ollivander mounted his trusty broomstick and Alexandria jumped on Harry's school Nimbus.

The flight towards Roucamoudour took twenty five minutes. Harry opened channels with Double M.

"We need to get a piece of clothing from Gabrielle."

"They are expecting you. Meet the family at the two story home with a large blue fire lit on the chimney."

"Masks up, Crows," Harry said. Harry went directly towards the described rooftop as soon as they reached the mountainside town. Fleur's parents were awaiting them on the upstairs balcony. Harry and the others hovered next to them.

"Good evening," Harry said. "We will get her back."

"She's only my little baby why did this happen to her oh my God please go get her back I can't bear to tell her sister I spoke to Madame Maxime and she told me to expect you and I wish that nothing has happened to her and we put it all in the Father's hands -” A long string of french greeted them.

Harry just looked at Alexandria. Alexandria began speaking in French and eventually the couple brought the clothes Gabrielle wore that day before bed. Harry thanked them and told them they would be back soon.

They made their way out of town. Harry disembarked at the entrance and gave Cloud the clothes to smell. "Find her, boy!"
Cloud happily sniffed the clothes and began sniffing the ground. He ran this way, then that, then eventually found a scent. He began barking in the direction leading towards a swampy river land, according to the map.

"You ready, Master Ollivander?" Harry asked as he put Cloud back into the traveling case.

"Of course."

"Let's go get her, then."

The three of them flew for a few minutes. Suddenly Harry felt an itch around the back of his neck. "It's here," he announced.

"How do you...?" Alexandria whispered.

"I just do. Wands out. It is invulnerable to magic, but bludgeoning or piercing it with an object works just fine. Master Ollivander, I will attack it if you miss. Don't worry about it."

"Good to know, lad," Ollivander said.

"Alexandria, stay next to me," Harry warned. "I'm going to use the wide range reveal spell. It highlights humanoid shapes in red. You take the shot at the Diablo when you can. The last time, the victim was tied up in a bag. Just be sure you hit the right one."

"Will do," Ollivander replied.

"Maior Homenum Revelio!"

Harry cast the global reveal spell. The flat swampy ground lit up with close to six different targets.

"Holy shit.." Harry breathed. "Alexandria! Pilot for him!" Harry levitated him across behind Alexandria. "RD! There are multiple Diablos here!"

"Shit!" came Tonks' voice through the badge.

"We're going in. I will help if needed!"

"Stay safe, Crows!"

Ollivander leant forward and grabbed the back of Alexandria's robes in a firm grip with his left arm. He rest the rifle across his left forearm, aiming down the sight. "Silencio!" he enchanted the muzzle of the rifle to be silent. "Ready!" the old sage said.

"Let's go!" Alexandria agreed.

They charged down towards the closest red outline, a tiny blip growing in size as they got lower. It was a Diablo all right. There was a muted gunshot and that Diablo was shot down.

"Hit!"

There was the faint sound of Ollivander smoothly operating the bolt action of the rifle. Click-chick-clack-cak! Across the marshy swamp they zoomed for another mile. This one seemed to be stuck in mud. Another muted shot, a bit louder than the first.

"Hit!" Harry declared again. The next one was closer. Click-chick-clack-cak!
This shot rang out louder. The charm was wearing off.

"Hit!"

*Click-click! Click-click!*

"Harry! It's jammed!" came a shout from behind. Harry wasn't totally surprised. He suspected that casting magic on muggle machines was a risky endeavor, *especially* ones that did not belong to you.

"Roger! Catch my broom!"

"What?"

Harry leapt off the broom. Ollivander's jaw dropped. Before his very eyes Harry's bracer began to glow a bright white. Harry skydived like a fired missile, then swerved mid-air to home in on the next red outline.

Harry was feeling exhilaration, reminiscent of his first Broomstick ride in Year One. He yanked out the Diablo wand from his bracer. It expanded and formed a deadly scythe. He sized up both arms for a horizontal swing.

"*Protego!*" A powerful shield charm manifested in front of him. Before he crashed on the marshy, swampy ground he swung the scythe.

The scythe obliterated the five-foot Diablo. The head, arms, legs, went flying in different directions. With the momentum of his left to right swing, Harry shot back up from his dive. Dissected pieces of Diablo remain splattered against his *Protego* shield.

*Though so. The angle of my arms changed the yaw, angle of my torso is for pitch and roll, and magic through my legs are for thrust. Trying this with an injured arm and torso was definitely a bad idea.*

"HIT!" Ollivander screamed behind him. "Keep going lad!"

Harry responded by doing a quick barrel roll in midair.

*This was amazing!*

He veered right, spotting the last two shapes. This one was ready to attack. It raised its pitchfork at him.

"Oh shit- PULL OUT!" he shouted at Ollivander and Alexandria. Harry veered left as a weird, broad, purple beam of magic split the air. The beam of light remained in existence, almost as if it ripped reality in two. Harry glanced back. Alexandria had listened and was veering away from the otherworldly magic. The Red devil was doing a weird shuffle and dance with the pitchfork.

The ground itself was beginning to move, contorting, forming a roughly humanoid shape. Was it channeling an earth-based magic?

*Fuck that shit- I'm not waiting to find out...*

*"Winguardium Depulso Mobilicorpus!"* He aimed his bracer towards the creature. It didn't rocket up like how his Troll wand would have, but it hovered the creature a few stories high, ripe for the picking. Harry arched his body and made a wide turn, curving back towards the Diablo that was kicking its legs comically in the air. Without further ado, it was cleaved in half.
The purple rift streaking through the night slowly disappeared. The ground sunk back into the marshy, swampy landscape. Harry recited all the slowing charms and braking charms he knew on the *Locomotor* sub class of *Winguardium*. He finally stopped zipping around like a fly with no clear objective. He hovered now in the air, finally under control.

A young girl was looking up at him, the lower half of her white nightie and feet were covered in mud, her blond hair blowing in the chill night wind. She looked like she just walked out of a horror movie. A spectre of childish innocence in the middle of nowhere.

"Bonjour," she said, waving slowly.

"Bonjour," Harry replied, hovering in front of her. "Are you ok?"

"The Lord of the Light. I knew you would come."

Harry did not know what to say to that.

Little Miss Gabrielle Delacour raised her hand regally, as if requesting assistance to step down from a carriage. "Take me back to my home, Wizard of the Light. For the night is Dark, and full of terrors."

Harry just watched the little girl for a moment. She was a strange little witch, that was for certain. Reminded him a bit of Luna.

"No problem." Harry landed next to her, scooped her up, and shot right back into the sky. Within minutes they were back in Roucoumadour.

Harry landed on the balcony in a crouch, little Gabrielle still in his arms. The Delacours could do nothing but stare at them in disbelief.

"Merci," was all they could say. They were completely dumbstruck.

"You're welcome."

Alexandria and Ollivander hovered next to the balcony, holding Harry's broom, observing the silent interaction.

The parents grabbed their younger daughter and began to cry.

"CV," he tapped the emblem. "Target retrieved and delivered safe and sound. I guess that's it then," Harry announced.

"Success."

"Well done hotshot. Knew you could do it!"

"Fantastic work, Crows. We'll discuss business later. Double M out."

"Got something cool to show you, Rd, Black. You aren't going to believe this." Harry raised up his mask and Balaclava, looking at his other teammates. Ollivander was beaming with pride. Alexandria was frowning, still uncertain of what to make of it all.

"Whats with that face?" he asked her.

"I thought it was wild magic before," she said. "Now I know it was not an accident."

"Nope. It wasn't."
"I didn't think so. You were the Angel de La Mort," she breathed in awe.

"A what?" She didn't just call him a French version of Voldemort, did she?

"An Angel of Death."

"Ah." Harry said lamely. "What's in a name?" he shrugged. "Take the broomstick back for me, will you Lexie? I wanna try this out," he grinned and jumped off the balcony, then shot off into the night.
The Dark ritual site in the woods behind the Thomas' property was crawling with the French MLE.

"We're going inside. It's becoming a habit, but good work once again," Auror Bernard congratulated Tonks. He turned and addressed his Auror team in French. "Lucas, Robards, get these muggles to the healer and transport Mr. Thomas to detention level four. Robards come back as soon as you're finished and keep watch here. Doge, Petit, on me. Let's complete the sweep of the house."

The team of French Aurors got to work. Tonks was shining her wand at the signed documents in her hand.

"Nothing concrete for Thomas himself until he is convicted," Tonks grumbled. "And even then, no specifics on the amount. He was spotlessly clean: no previous criminal record of being a practitioner of the Dark. The muggle rescue and 'Dark Magic nullification' reward of a measly sixteen thousand," she cursed. "At least the Blood Purity Hit wizards got us a neat eighty."

"He did explain that on conviction the Ministry Contractor fee could go up to more than one hundred thousand. That is a huge bounty. In the meantime, let justice be its own reward, milady."

"Knowing how magical governments work, if it's not in writing ... it could be denied like that," she snapped her fingers for emphasis. "Maxime should be here just now. Maybe she could put pressure on their Wizengamot to get him put away immediately, or Kissed," Tonks spat. "All those poor kids..."

Jon didn't know what she meant by 'Kissed' but he thought better of showing ignorance in front of outsiders. "Harry and the others should also be here soon. He said they were rounding up the remains."

"Once he puts on the Onyx gloves."

"You did remind him, did you?" Jon asked, alarmed.

"I did. But that boy is mental. Absolutely fearless. He's going to make a mistake, sooner or later, with that recklessness," Tonks shook her head. "He snatched Lupin from right under their noses."

"That is why we are here, to cover for each other," Jon smiled. Something above caught Ghost's attention. He growled. Jon looked up into the sky at the white speck growing bigger against the black night sky. It was a massive carriage pulled by two regal Abraxan horses. "Look. Beauxbatons' crew has come."
"Let's go talk to her," Tonks agreed, and they walked from the ritual site around the property perimeter towards the front courtyard. Professor Allemons, Headmistress Maxime and an unknown wizard were having an intense discussion with the Auror on sentry patrol; Bentacour, if Jon remembered correctly.

"Wonder what that's about," Tonks said suspiciously. "Masks up, wands out," she ordered. As they came closer it was evident the Auror and the school staff were definitely arguing. Tonks approached confidently.

"Bonsoir Headmistress, pardon the interruption," she said. "Is there a problem?"

"There may be," she said. "I brought the Solicitor General from the Ministry to oversee this crime scene. Monsieur LeBouef, the British Clan *The Crow's Vambrace.*" The man stepped forward towards Tonks. Auror Bentacour seemed annoyed.

"Loic LeBouef," he extended his hand. Tonks shook it. "A pleasure."

"Red," Tonks introduced herself. "He's Black." Jon nodded, but did not approach. "And this is Ghost."

Ghost lazily scratched behind his ear.

"I heard there were more. The Wizard of the Light, if I recall?"

"You mean Roderick Hallow," Jon corrected. Madame Maxime did well to hide her mirth with all these lofty and elaborate code names.

"Yes, the white wizard in the photos," LeBoeuf remarked. "Very, very interesting."

At that moment Alexandria and Ollivander swooped down. Ollivander disembarked from Tonks' broomstick and set Cloud free from his cage. There were two bulging grain sacks tied to the spare broom. Jon and Tonks waved them over. Introductions were made all around.

"Where is Ha- Hallow?" Tonks corrected herself.

"He's coming," Master Ollivander said, pointing up. They all looked up.

"What is that?" Auror Bentacour asked.

"Is it a bird?" LeBoeuf asked.

"It's not a plane," Tonks said.

Harry shot out of the sky, his bracer glowing hotly through the sleeve of his dueling robes. He somersaulted just before he landed, using all the braking spells in his arsenal right before the moment of impact. A rush of wind assailed the impromptu meeting as he came to an abrupt stop on the walkway.

Harry landed in a kneeling crouch, both hands outstretched towards the ground just in case he couldn't maintain balance and fell flat on his face. He remained motionless for a few seconds. No one said a word.

Harry raised his masked head towards them and stood up. The night wind swirled around him, leaves and dust skittering on the cobblestones.

The group simply stared, except Ollivander, who had a wide grin on his face. Alexandria was
currently leashing Cloud, who was curiously sniffing the large bags full with Diablo corpses. Tonks was glad she had on her mask, because she would have sworn her jaw had detached and was touching her collarbone.

"Pardon the interruption," Harry's voice came through his mask. "Still need to work on my landing."

"Roderick Hallow, I presume?" Loic asked. This wizard seemed... smaller than he expected.

"That's right," Harry turned towards the well dressed wizard. If he didn't know better, he would have thought that Lucius Malfoy had a cousin, except with black hair and glasses.

"Loic LeBouef," he nodded. He presented Harry with a card.

"How do you do," Harry returned the nod and accepted it.

"Some of my colleagues would love to meet with you and your clan. Feel free to contact me if this could be possible," he said in immaculate English.

"Colleagues?"

"Pardon me, I did not explain myself fully. I am on the board of France’s Arithmancy Guild... and a member of the International Body of Senior Arithmancers. We present reports for debate during the Confederation's biannual meetings. You are an anomaly. A wizard capable of flight!"

"I see. I'll think about it," Harry replied, nodding. As in, I'll think about losing this card as soon as possible.

The conversation returned to the crime scene. Loic was here to personally observe the Auror's work tonight. Too many slip ups, Maxime had said. She wanted these Aurors to have an airtight case. The Crows listened in and eventually Loic left with Professor Allemons to oversee the investigations.

"How was Gabrielle?" Maxime asked as soon as they left.

"Unharmed. A bit strange. She was either in a trance, or one very cool customer," Harry responded.

"Oh? What happened?" the large woman pressed.

"She was ...sort of expecting me?" Harry explained. "She said, I knew you would come. Take me to my home, Wizard of the Light. For the night is dark, and full of terrors."

Jon's head snapped towards that quote. Harry was gesturing with his hands as he continued.

"There were five Diablo in the vicinity. Grey got three, I got the others. It was almost eerie... she was unrestrained, and calm. Strange. She was all ...confident about being rescued. She made me laugh. For a little girl, she has a swagger about her."

"I met her once. She was charming, and full of questions," Madame Maxime said. "I shall visit her family shortly and interview her."

"You brought the documents?" Tonks asked the headmistress. Harry liked that about Tonks. When it came to business, Tonks was straightforward and didn't let other frivolities get in the way.

"Of course. Come, there is light and privacy for us to work inside the carriage."

Twenty minutes later the meeting was coming to an end.
"All right. For the core request, I have informed the Council that more should be appropriated to the retrieval of the victim, since you have changed the game with Richard's rescue. Bounty reward, twenty thousand galleons for the safe and timely retrieval of Gabrielle Delacour."

Madame Maxime stamped this document.

"Secondary request, elimination of the Diablo itself. You have brought proof of death of five of them at thirty thousand each-" Maxime sighed, "-One hundred and fifty thousand galleons. This would be paid fifty percent lump sum and the remaining fifty percent over ten installments. I will lean on the authorities to seize liquid assets from Jean Thomas to help pay this bounty. Once he is convicted, of course."

There was another stamp.

"If he is not convicted, someone really needs to kick the Auror Corps' arse," Tonks retorted. "It's been laid out on a plate, innit?"

"There are problems in the ministry, I admit it. That is why I brought Monsieur LeBouef, to make sure that the Aurors are under scrutiny and exercise due diligence this night," Madame Maxime said haughtily. "He will be punished, one way or the other."

The finality of her tone convinced Harry that she was pushing for the Dementor's Kiss.

"Now. About this raid. I will fight tooth and nail for you. But there was no request for the capture of this dark wizard, as yet. For stopping such heinous Dark practices, I can safely say you will be rewarded the sixteen thousand Ministry Contractor fee as written here by Auror Bernard, and the capture of a few International Bounty level C's..."

She hesitated. Maxime was stuck between a rock and a hard place. "As far as Monsieur LeBouef tells me, the budget for Ministry approved contracts and Clan work are one hundred thousand galleons per month. This has never really truly been passed in one quarter."

"If he is convicted, what do you think would be the resulting offer from your ministry?" Harry asked.

"I may be pushing it, but you may get one hundred and eighty, two hundred."

Tonks whistled.

"I am of a notion that they might try to give you some of his fixed assets as collateral, instead of gold." Maxime explained with a wave of her hand. "That, will meet more resistance from certain French Wizengamot members, who do not wish to see mere Clansmen..." Madame Maxime nodded to the two girls in the carriage, "And clanswomen; get any sort of land or business equity on French soil."

"Well they better pay fully in gold," Tonks stated.

"That, will be the simpler way of reimbursement, but the harder to actually achieve. The Ministry would not want a British Clan taking credit and such large sums of money from them. And the people who are affiliated with the Malfoy and Thomas' families would not want their interests seized and handed out to foreigners. It is a matter of patriotic pride. It may also have adverse effects on stakeholders, who, out of principle, may refuse to continue business with English owners."

"If that is the case, they can give us his land and buildings- then we sell it back on the private market," Tonks shrugged.
"Obviously for a profit, yes," Maxime stated. "I thought you would say something similar. Whoever buys it would also be at risk. But it shall be their risk to take."

"Tough," Tonks said.

"This is all conjecture, anyway. I do not know what the Wizengamot will do. I do not have any ties or influence in the decision process, and willingly keep it so. Dumbledore may have his fingers on his webs, but I refuse to get involved directly. If I may be frank, unless someone high up has a new and suddenly colossal growth of moral fiber- you may not get more than the International bounty assigned to the wanted Wizards we found here, and your Sixteen thousand for stopping the muggle-baiting Dark ritual, even though we all know that this was some of the vilest magic performed recently in our country. I repeat, I will fight on your behalf, as this has been going on nearly ten years now, a constant source of worry for non-pure families. Over the years our children have gone missing, never to laugh or play again. It was a curse on the south."

"A monster," Jon said solemnly. A monster who targeted children. Jon was having second thoughts on capturing him alive.

"Yes, this time, we hope it has come to an end. You will get your professionalism bonus for Speed and Accuracy, and the No Collateral Damage, No breach of Wizard Secrecy, No violent altercations with Clans or Locals. Sixteen thousand. Foreign thugs and riff-raff are fair game," she laughed. "So far- your South Council Bounty stands at One Hundred and Five thousand gold coin full deposit, and seventy five thousand galleons over ten months -and sixteen thousand bonus. Total One hundred and ninety six thousand." She stamped this paper.

Alexandria made a choking noise behind her mask. Jon patted her back firmly to help.

"For this raid- ninety six grand is your confirmed MLE bounty. Total confirmed monies: One nine six and another nine six- two hundred and ninety two thousand. Twenty nine thousand two hundred Guild commission. So that leaves you with," Madame Maxime was crunching numbers on today's paper.

"Two hundred and sixty two thousand and eight hundred allocated to The Crow's Vambrace," the large woman nodded a few times, impressed. "With provisions that can make that shoot up to probably one hundred thousand more... Red Dora, you outdo yourself."

"Oh, it's a team effort, believe that," Tonks said amicably. Harry and Jon's fists connected immediately without having to make eye contact.

Madame Maxime duplicated the forms and handed it over to the three founding members. "One hint: keep the focus on the customer's request and not simply for the money, and you should always bear fruit," Maxime said. "It is easy for the gold to corrupt."

"Agreed," Ollivander said. "We shall ever walk in the Light," he announced, nodding at the two boys.

Maxime stood up and crossed her arms in the Guild salute. "That's all for now, then. Victory belongs to the Crow's Vambrace. And a fortune to boot."

"Thank you for your support," Tonks said, giving her a bow. Harry, Jon and Tonks returned the salute.

"Oh. And Harry. If you ever want to talk about...you know," Madame Maxime flapped her large hands twice with little flicks of her wrists. "Please contact me. It would be lovely, if for once, just
once, I have prior knowledge of magic that Albus has not figured out as yet! That old goat always has a trick up his sleeve... Consider it a little secret between friends. It would mean a lot to me," she smiled broadly.

"Who knows? I may take you up on that offer," Harry said gamely.

"Very well. I hope you have safe travels back home," Madame Maxime clasped her hands.

"Thank you once again, Headmistress," Tonks bowed slightly. "It has been a productive night."

"Indeed it has. Let's pray that everything goes smoothly. With Monsieur LeBouef here, there should be accuracy with the investigation and justice for all."

The Crows left the carriage and gathered their belongings. After everything was ready to go, Tonks opened the map and re-oriented the party with their starting position to head back to the ICOP office at Calais.

"Right. Back home we go. Dial in bearing 017 degrees on the compass. Should be an hour at full speed," Tonks ordered, dialing in the compass charm on the Quicksilver broom. "On me. Let's ride!"

"Five Diablos. You guys don't play around," the ICOP officer at Calais, Monsieur Koman, whistled approximately an hour later. "Documents," he requested.

Tonks had the documents ready and prepared for inspection. A few stamps and signatures later, and they were on the runic traveling circle ready to be port keyed back across the channel to Dover's ICOP office.

The gang re-emerged at the cellar of the Dover's Apothecary. Tonks grabbed her stuff and the others followed her up the steps.


"Yes. I have the licenses here," Jon produced his Apothecary's import license. Rook inspected the sacks of Diablo parts. He grimaced.

"Wow. Is this what I think it is? Your Clan specializes now?"

"You could say that," Harry shrugged.

"There is no charge for the corpses. Off you go," he stamped their French ICOP documents and made duplicates for them to keep. The gang exited Dover's Apothecary into the salty night air of the Dockyard. Tonks took off her gloves and picked up a handful of dirt.

"This mission went much smoother, all things considering." She rubbed the soil in between her hands then let it drop. "Potter. Come here."

Harry removed his mask and balaclava.

"What's up?"

"You did very well tonight. I'll give you that. But running off solo- that stunt with the Lancers- was way too risky. I know it was a spur of the moment decision, and it worked out ok; but that is the sort of action that puts our entire team in jeopardy. We'll have to make more communication badges to prevent this from happening again."
Harry just stared at her. Tonks just regarded him steadily. Harry knew she was right, but internally, he wanted to argue: that was his style—how he got stuff done. He sighed. "Understood," he nodded. "Safety is paramount."

Tonks held his gaze for a few seconds more. She turned from him. "Everyone, bloody fantastic shift. Medic. Excellent start— you followed orders and were quick to help. You did well. Remember to fill out your logs for Master Ollivander."

"Thank you, Mademoiselle Tonks. I have learned so much this night." Alexandria shook her hair free and countered the acne inducing poison with a sip from one of her vials. Her face returned to normal.

"We'll talk later about your Gringotts account. Oh. Jon—" Tonks stared at him in a funny way. "Why do I get the feeling that I should be reporting to you? But that's impossible, isn't it?"

"Impossible," Jon agreed.

"Huh. Your skill is impeccable, as always. You are a natural."

"I try my best," Jon said simply as he folded his arms.

"Thanks once again Master Ollivander. Your knowledge is invaluable. Are you sure you do not want to officially join? We work so well together."

"Ranging is for the young," Ollivander smiled. "I was one a long time ago, when I was doing research on dragon core materials. But feel free to contact me. I will help when I can."

"Right! I have the information you wanted." Alexandria turned excitedly to Jon and Harry. "The only place the Onyx Dragon is found is in the Siberian wastelands. The dragon tracker's latest report is that there is a very old Queen who has laid her final batch of eggs ten months ago. She has left the roost and one of the younger females are guarding the eggs and the nest. They believe the Queen dragon has left the roost to find a spot to die. The information from the tracker claimed this Queen is almost four hundred years old. So you are in luck. Around Christmas there would be more Onyx material on the market."

Jon listened carefully. He suspected that this tracker was forgetting certain details. The wand lore books Ollivander instructed them to read had extensive information on Dragons.

"Do you trust the source of this information?" Jon said simply. He was not there when the initial discussion with the butler was held, as he was with Harry at the time.

"I ...guess? That is the information one of Uncle V's people told him."

"I assume he did not mention the male dragon who laid with this... Queen?" Jon queried.

"No... he didn't," Alexandria stated, confused.

"Good point, son. Males are very protective of their last mate," Ollivander agreed. "He will pester her continuously until the female chases him away. And with her being so weak and at the end of her life, she would not have the strength to do so."

"So you're saying that the male would stick around until she dies?" Harry asked.

"Most likely," Ollivander replied.
"We can continue this Onyx business later. Let's get going. Harry, if you would?" Tonks asked.

"Um..." Harry hesitated.

"Something wrong?" she frowned.

"Star Scream is the only one free. The others are still hitched with Remus," Harry shrugged apologetically.

"Let's go talk to Rook," Tonks grumbled and went back into the Port office. They paid seventy galleons to get an application for a custom portkey. Ollivander bid his farewells and said he would apparate on home. The Crows bid him farewell and then sat down to wait. Alexandria tilted her head sideways on Jon's shoulder and within minutes they were sleeping. Ghost was allowed to roam outside. Cloud curled up inside his traveling case. Harry and Tonks talked softly, sometimes breaking the monotony by playing Wizard's rock-parchment-diffindo.

After an hour and a half of waiting, Rook finally received the Ministry approved Portkey to take them far north to Hogsmeade. By the time the gang arrived at the clan base, they were extremely tired and hungry. It was closing in on five in the morning.

"Tonks. The farm you raided for the roosters, did they also have sheep?" Harry asked her in the foyer, rubbing his gritty eyes.

"Yeah. Why?" she asked suspiciously.

"We need to snatch a couple. I promised."

"What? Promised?"

"The threstrals want lamb for interrupting their mating night," Harry laughed.

"You have to be kidding me."

Harry tiredly pulled down his balaclava. "Just give me some directions. I'll do it."

"It's ok. Jon, we'll be back. If you need us, get us through the badges," Tonks said wearily.

"Understood," Jon said, carrying the two bags of Diablo remains downstairs into the cellar. Alexandria was heading upstairs into the bathroom. Tonks tracked her movements, realizing that she would be leaving the both of them alone. She turned towards the corridor leading towards the cellar.

"Behave. No funny stuff!" Tonks warned as the sound of his footsteps receded down the steps.


Within twenty minutes Harry and Tonks were flying over the sheep pen of the farm. Five minutes later they had two sheep stunned and wrapped up in a dusty curtain they picked up in the storage cupboard.

They returned and immediately went to the stable house. It was smack dab in the middle of the vast expanse of property at the back of the mansion.

Harry was about to land when Tonks reprimanded him. "Don't touch the ground, remember? Better safe, than lycan."

"Right." Harry and Tonks approached the abandoned stable on broomstick. The main front doors
were open, but darkness enveloped the inside like a great mouth into the abyss. Harry thought it was far too quiet.

"Shadow Wing?" he called. A screeching noise responded from the inside. A breath of relief went through him. "Well, I guess they are still there." Harry and Tonks approached the building cautiously.

"This is giving me the willies. You think he got free?" Tonks whispered.

"I doubt," Harry said softly. "Homenum revelio." One red outline was highlighted inside the barn. "He's still in there."

"Lumos!" Tonks whispered, and light penetrated the darkness inside. Multiple pairs of glowing eyes reflected the magical light, and the largest was a pair of yellow eyes in the centre. Her initial thought was a many-eyed monster. Tonks would have screamed if she didn't know that there were six threstrals and a werewolf inside. She bit down on her tongue. "That is fucking creepy," she hissed. "I am not going in there."

"I hear you. Bring him out," Harry ordered.

The threstrals pulled out the sled holding Remus' cage. The werewolf was hunched over, snarling at them. "Tonks, I'm going to let them hunt the lambs. Wake them back up." Harry came down and released the harness on the sled. Remus kept his focus on Harry. When the threstrals were free he levitated the cage back inside the barn and closed the door. Remus snarled and thrashed against the cage when Harry shut the door to the barn.

The bleating of sheep penetrated the quiet pre-dawn. Tonks used a mild stinging charm on them and they ran off.

"You may hunt," Harry commanded after the sheep got a sizable head start. The threstrals raced on foot after the trotting sheep. The sheep accelerated with a burst of speed that Harry didn't expect was in them.

That's how I was before- Dumbledore's sacrificial lamb. Running from monsters my entire life, only to fail at the end when I had everything to live for.

That is not happening this time. Now I am the one sending the monsters.

They watched the winged beasts chase the sheep into the edge of the forbidden forest. The bleating peaked in desperation, then was quickly cut off. Harry grimaced as he walked towards the back door, Tonks trailing behind him. "We'll leave Remus in there until seven o'clock. I'm knackered. Sleep sounds really good right now."

A few hours later Harry woke up. He stumbled out of bed and made his way to the bathrooms. He glanced at the large clock in the hall on his way back to the bedroom. It read eight.

"Crap!" Harry dashed back into the shared dorm room with Jon. "Snow! I have to check on Remus!"

"Coming," Jon grumbled, rubbing his face and putting both feet on the cold wooden floor. He reached for his bracer and Diablo core wand underneath the pillow.

"You're taller than me. You brought any spare robes?" Harry asked in a panic.
"I have the Hogwarts outer cloak. It is all I could spare."

"You're going to freeze without it," Harry dug into the sole trunk they brought. Inside was arrows, potions, boots, and their Hogwarts uniforms. Nothing that would fit. Harry took off his loose pyjama pants.

"I won't. Trust me," Jon smiled. "My home was called Winterfell, remember? This weather is pleasant."

"Let's go then." He jumped in his school uniform and put on the boots. Harry grabbed his Troll on Holly wand, the pajama pants and the flimsy sheet off his bed. Jon threw on his uniform and followed him downstairs through the back door. There was the sound of someone trying to call for help, and the ting-ting-ting of a metal object hitting metal coming from the barn.

"Shit- he's awake. I overslept!" Harry sprinted over the icy cold grass.

He opened the door and shone light from his wand. "Remus! I'm so sorry!" Harry apologized.

"Who are you? You look like James...wait...no Harry?!" Remus croaked. "What- how...?"

Harry approached the bars. Remus had gathered what scraps of clothing remained and tried to cover what needed to be covered. "Look, hold this," Harry offered him the pajama pants, white sheet and the Hogwarts cloak. Remus accepted the pants and put it on. "We don't have extra clothes, but let's get you out of here first." He began inspecting the cage for hinges, a lock, anything. There was none.

"Get to Headmaster Dumbledore. Tell him I'm..." Remus cut himself off, then his personality changed. He had a panicked, sort of maniacal gleam to his eyes. He folded unto himself, eyes darting at all the corners of the barn. "Who am I? And where are you?" He took up a piece of shredded robe and began to chew on it.

"We're right here- and you are Remus Lupin," Harry answered.

"My name is Jon," Jon said simply. "This is Harry, of House Potter. I am a friend of his."

Remus wrapped himself in the sheet and draped the cloak over that. "No one! Won't be able to free me! The lock is under the bars of hell! Silver cages, yes. I will stay here. I know exactly what they are doing. They want... for me to bite them, haha!" Remus stamped his foot a few times awkwardly on the floor of the cage. Harry got a weird sense of deja vu, when Remus was desperately scratching the floor of the cage in his werewolf form. His personality reverted again. "Where are we?"

"Behind Hogsmeade station," Harry explained. "You're safe. I will get you out of here. Hold on. I'm going to levitate the cage and take a look."

Remus coughed and hacked with laughter. "You're going to do what?" Remus coughed again in laughter, his throat was still raw from the transformation. "This cage must be close to five hundred pounds- six hundred with me, if I'm lucky."

Remus abruptly sunk down to the floor, lying flat on his back. His face ticked repeatedly. His rambling began again.

"Prisoner's dementia," Jon explained. Harry just watched the grown man turn from one side to the next on the filthy cage floor.

"No food for days, or was it years? Silver silver silver, I should have listened- why do I trust people. I just need to bite. Why am I not hungry?" Remus muttered to himself nonsensically. "Locked up
like a criminal, a pet parrot. It can only get better. A kid says he's going to lift me up, maybe he can, maybe he can't? Lift me up from the bars of hell, can he? Or won't he?" Remus crawled over and began climbing the bars, going to the top, desperate for an escape, even though the top of the cage was identical to the rest. He began to laugh in glee. "Help!" he began shouting again to the rooftop, hitting the bars with a belt buckle.

Harry's heart went out to the man. Whatever he has been through all these years must have taken a tremendous toll on him.

"Brace yourself," Jon commanded Remus. "Hold on tightly, we shall get you out. Harry, do it."

Harry levitated the cage smoothly. He and Jon stood up underneath, inspecting it. Remus suddenly kicked up his legs and stuck his bare feet through the cross bars. Remus laughed, full of madness. "A dream of silver, a dream of bars, come to me my feathered pet, wings to fly! Sing your sweet songs in the morning dawn!" Remus crowed like a rooster at the top of his lungs, his face pressing against the cage.

Harry and Jon looked under the floor of the cage. There was an iron bar crossing below the floor, with a padlock that locked the two halves together.

"Keep it steady. Stand back." Jon drew his diablo wand and summoned the Claymore. He assumed a drill perfect stance for half a second, took a breath, then swung the sword. The lock was cut in two. The floor swung open like a trapdoor.

"Freedom!" Remus threw himself over backwards from his perch and landed like an agile monkey on the barn floor. Then he threw himself at Jon.

Jon was having none of it. He sheathed his wand with a fluid motion and pivoted on his right foot. He weaved as Remus slashed with his imaginary claws right, then ducked under Remus' left swing, perfectly mirroring Harry's technique versus Draco Malfoy. Remus growled and threw himself into a full bodied dive at Jon. Jon immediately dropped to his back while simultaneously planting his leg upwards in Remus' stomach. Remus was sent catapulting over him. Harry was desperately maneuvering the heavy cage out of the barn and threw it outside on the grass.

Remus was back on his feet and circling, snarling. His weight shifted, ready to attack again. Jon had both hands up, thoroughly enjoying this early morning fight.

"Potter, observe the point of impact. It is a vital weak spot!" Jon snapped. "Watch the footwork! Come!" he goaded Remus.

Once again Jon avoided the swings, but when he ducked under the taller man's third swipe, he countered with a smooth uppercut into his solar plexus. Remus coughed as he folded in two, completely debilitated. He hunched over, holding the center of his chest, gasping for air.

"Dart strikes Bull is the name of that technique," Jon breathed out as he took a sliding step to Remus right. "And this," Jon took a short step forward then spun on his heel. He connected with a fluid round kick to the side of his face, "-is called the Executioner's swing." Remus' head rocked hard to one side. He wavered comically for two seconds, then toppled face first unto the dirty floor, his limbs moving slowly.

Jon took a few deep breaths.

"These basic moves, executed with a short dagger and then finished with a long blade or mace, is the most humiliating way for a swordsman to die in battle. All squires are taught this technique when
they start the way of the sword, and hence forth; must know how to defend themselves against it."

"Fuck," Harry breathed, unbelieving of what he just witnessed. Jon was lethal, with or without weapons.

"He is not permanently harmed." Jon used his foot to push him over on his side so that he could breathe properly. "After the third swing, an untrained combatant needs to recover his breathing. That moment is the best time to counterattack with a strike here-" he poked Harry in the Solar plexus. Harry felt winded from the moderate pressure at that spot.

"Good to know," Harry breathed, rubbing just above his stomach.

"Right. That was a good lesson," Jon said with a nod. He grinned. "Ah- that got the blood pumping. How I miss early morning training."

An hour and a half later Harry, Jon and Alexandria were downstairs in the main foyer, ready to leave. "Right-o Tonks, we're off."

"Owl Madame Pomfrey if he doesn't get better by this evening," Alexandria said. "She will be present at the dueling club today. Send it to the main hall."

Earlier on while Harry had cooked breakfast, the three of them prepared a master bedroom for Remus' stay. Tonks enchanted the door and windows to be temporarily unbreakable, creating a makeshift detention center. The bathroom was conveniently en suite and also charmed against any means of escape. Jon and Alexandria brought in a desk, a comfortable armchair, some books to read and a change of clothes hastily bought at Hogsmeade's clothing store. Alexandria had left three vials of calming draught to help him along with his post-transformation erratic behavior. Harry covered a hearty breakfast with a plastic cover and left it there on the writing table.

Remus was currently sleeping on Harry's brand new mattress. A large purple bruise was on the right side of his face.

"No problem. I'll heal him and wake him up soon. I'll treat this as part of my Auror practicals; prisoner handling is what we've just started reading up on, actually. I know all the psychological stages and so forth. Once I convince him that he won't be held long against his will, he should be fine. And food and lots of rest, of course."

"Stay safe, remember: he's not himself," Harry said. "Don't underestimate him. Jon, loan her your least used wand."

Jon took out his Fwooper on Cedar wand. "This one is good for confusion, destruction, and other mind altering charms."

"Also, Levicorpus- it flips a wizard mid air," Harry said, a bit embarrassed by that spell. But he knew Remus was tough, any advantage Tonks had for her own protection would help. Tonks accepted the wand.

"Yes yes. Keep me informed. Don't use the badges unless you absolutely must. The enchantments on that castle are crazy strong- they screw up floo-based magic that aren't authorized by the headmaster. A security feature to stop older wizards trying to chat up you young hearts, yeah? Happened before. Owl. It'll be easier, trust me."

Alexandria blushed, but did well not to look at Jon. Harry was getting cold just watching Jon in his Hogwarts white shirt without the pullover and cloak. Alexandria and himself were bundled up to the
chin with scarf and cloak in this chilly early Sunday morning.

"Ghost, Cloud," Jon called out. "Let's go." The two animals got up from in front the main fireplace rug and joined them as they went outside. Cloud hesitated at the doorway when he realized Tonks was staying in the house. He began to whine.

"Leave him," Tonks said fondly. "He's a smart lad."

"Laters," Harry said, waving. The three of them said their goodbyes and mounted the broomsticks. Within ten minutes they were landing outside Hagrid's. Fang began barking from inside. The friendly half giant opened the door.

"Hey Hagrid," Harry greeted. "Just bringing back Ghost."

"Mornin' mornin," Hagrid greeted. "Wasn't expecting you lot back so early. How did the workshop go?"

"Better than expected. Everything went smoothly," Jon nodded.

"Must have been an all-nighter," Hagrid observed. "You three look like you need to get some sleep. And when did you start wearing Harry's glasses?"

Alexandria took off the frames she used for the disguise. "Oh, it was nothing. Was just trying them on," she said lamely.

"Alright," Hagrid eyed the three students. "You three were up to something, I know it. But once you're back safe and sound, that's all that matters. Ghost! you lookin' fit and fine for hunting, aren't ya lad?"

Ghost sniffed Hagrid's boots as a show of affection. "Alright, Jon. I'll look after him for ya- and get a bloody cloak on! You want to freeze? Get inside the castle, quickly now!" The three of them mounted their brooms and waved before they shot off. "Don't be afraid to pop in soon!" Hagrid shouted as he closed the door.

"Follow me," Harry said to the others. Harry flew around the grounds towards the Quidditch pitch. They dismounted near the side entrance and made their way in the castle through the empty hallways. Everyone would most probably be in the Great Hall. They made their way back into the Gryffindor portrait without coming across a soul.

"I've got to hurry. The fifth years are first this morning!" Alexandria raced up the steps. The Common Room was also empty. Jon and Harry went up to the second year dorms to drop their stuff. Jon regarded Harry with one of those stares.

"The little girl, Delacour," Jon stated. "What she said ... was something that I have heard before. And how you described her, it fits perfectly."

"What? What are you on about, mate..." Harry said, irritated. He was dying for a proper shower.

"The Servant of R'hllor who would have brought me back from the dead... her name was Melisandre, the Red Witch. Those were her watchwords when there was imminent danger- 'The night is dark, and full of terrors'."

Harry frowned. "Could be just a coincidence. The night was dark, and full of terrors; to be honest."

Jon and Harry enjoyed another of those weird stare-downs.
"You're the wizard here," Jon scolded. "What do you think?"

"I think that you are the only... person not from this reality, is what I think," Harry said. Inside, he was beginning to panic. "That girl was strange, but not- 'Hey I'm from Westeros, like Jon. I'm just chilling in this nine year old' weird." Harry replayed the whole scene. She did act older- more aristocratic and accustomed to men doing her bidding. Was there any sort of validity to Jon's suspicions?

Jon was pacing back and forth.

"Tell me everything she said, and everything she did," Jon demanded. "Every single detail is important."

Harry painstakingly described the Diablo Hunt and the rescue.

"She called you this; the 'Lord of the Light'?"

"Yeah."

Jon began to curse and call names of Gods Harry had never heard before. "R'hllor, is the name of the God she serves. The Lord Of The Light. She always watches in the flames for his signs, or visions. Whoever spoke to you, it is her. Or somehow, a projection of Melisandre. It has to be."

Harry tried to calm him down. "Well, nothing we could do now about it right now. Let's head down and make sure we see Lexie's duel."

Jon cursed again in frustration. "That woman is trouble, a lot of trouble. She prophecies about things in the Flames that she sees, visions, but sometimes, they are right, and a lot of times, they are wrong."

"We got one of those here already," Harry shrugged. "We have her before lunch on Tuesdays and Thursdays, remember?"

"This is different. The Red Woman is dangerous," Jon reinforced.

"Mate, we can't do anything about Gabrielle right now. Right now, I must take a bath. Meet me downstairs in a few minutes."

The upper years' duels were entertaining. Alexandria's bout was swift and to the point. She wiped the floor with Marlene Highlander, a fifth year Slytherin. Alexandria, despite her girlish ways, showed no mercy on the table. A simple combination of Protego, Incarcerous, Depulso and Expelliarmus was enough to totally overwhelm Highlander, whose Impedimentia Jinx was easily blocked. She had no counters for the binding and banishing charms. She was disarmed easily after she was knocked down and tied up.

Angelina Johnson and her fellow year five classmates congratulated her. Jon came over to offer congratulations as well, and she hugged him excitedly before he could open his mouth.

"Jon, I wasn't even nervous, or scared at all!" She grinned at him. "After last night, this seems like child's play," she whispered, her grin infectious.

Jon returned her smile. "You did well, on both counts. Twas an easy victory, Alexandria," Jon replied. "As I expected."

"The wand feels eager for offense as well, my attacks came out immediately after I thought of using
them, almost as if I silent cast! They flowed out smoothly, and true!"

"The Holly stem and white poplar mixture causes that. The Unicorn Hair is well suited to the Holly, but your handle has mated with your magical touch, so we decided to keep it. I believe the customization performs much better," Jon explained. "You were perfect up there."


Jon reddened. This pretty girl speaking to him like that was getting under his skin. "You flatter me. I did what I could, that's all."

Alexandria kept watching him, as if trying to figure him out. She took his hand in hers. "You are way too humble, if there is anyone in this school who deserves to be called a Knight, it is the both of you. And you have a Sword, and the Aegis. You are an enigma, Jon Black. I am still trying to understand what makes you so brave."

Jon shrugged.

"Sooner or later, I will bring out zis secret from you," Alexandria smiled at him. "One way, or the other," she promised with a glint in her eye.

Harry ate lunch methodically, not even tasting the food he was so sleepy. He was heavily cloaked, sitting by himself in the open area outside. Most of the students who braved the cold to eat outside were chatting about the seventh year duels commencing that afternoon. His second year classmates preferred the warmth inside of the castle. He didn't blame them, but Harry wanted some alone time to think.

"Success. I think I've got it rigged," Oliver sat down abruptly next to him.

"Hm? What?" Harry asked sleepily. He yawned.

"If my hypothesis is correct, I will get Michael as my opponent first thing once the Dueling contest resumes."

"Brilliant! You found a way?" Harry was immediately awakened.

"Yes. It is a weird muggle baiting spell- a cheat a wizard formulated to win the lottery."

"Is there a catch?"

Oliver shrugged. "It's a slightly Dark hex. It can work perfectly, or backfire. I think due to the nature of the result I want, even if it backfires, it wouldn't be that drastic... I mean... I'm rigging the draw so I can fight against a suspected Dark wizard. Usually someone will try to get out of that sort of confrontation."

Harry went on the alert. Oliver said it was a 'slightly dark hex'. He didn't like the sound of that. But technically, Oliver was academically far superior than he was, even compared to his seventeen year old persona on his previous journey. He could handle it. Harry thought quickly on how to help him.

Tonks was nearby- and she had Secrets Unveiled potion!

"Do you know a syringe curse?" Harry asked suddenly. Oliver thought hard a second.
"You mean the Poison Dart hex?"

"Yeah, that, anything that could deliver a poison in a fight?" Harry asked. A plan was formulating in his mind. He would have to be quick, though, it was only forty-five minutes for lunch. Ten minutes had passed.

"Yeah, I think I remember trying something similar a few times on a hunting trip with dad," Oliver touched his lip in thought.

"I want to get a truth serum from a friend in Hogsmeade. I'll be right back. Practice that spell in the meantime!" Harry got up and left his food behind on the table. He took off at a sprint towards the changing rooms behind the Quidditch Pitch.

"Potter! What the? Where are you going?!" Oliver stood up. "The place is bloody cold!"

"Practice!" Harry shouted behind him. As soon as he was out of sight, he leaped into the sky. The adrenaline rush of flight overtook him once again. As he accelerated higher, he realized that the Dueling mask protected his face and eyes from the biting cold wind in his eyes. He ignored the discomfort and took the direct route over the forbidden forest towards Hogsmeade and the Clan mansion. Star Scream and Tornado jumped out of the thick canopy and joined him for a few seconds, screeching as they flew in formation with him. Harry accelerated even faster and the threstrals eventually darted back into the forest. He flew for about three minutes, the cold air making his nose and ears sting with pain. The open horse ranch and the barn house came into view first, then the three story building. Harry landed on the first level balcony adjacent to the master bedroom. He took out his key chain and opened the balcony door.

"Tonks?" he called out. He sunk his hands under his armpits, trying to get warmth back in his hands. He made his way down one flight of steps on to the floor with their bedrooms. It was very quiet.

"Tonks?" he called again. No answer. He drew his wand, on alert. He hastily made his way to her bedroom. "Tonks?" he whispered at her door. He put his ear to it. The door felt warm to the touch. As far as he knew, there was no fireplace in the side rooms, only in the master bedrooms facing the backyard. He opened the door. His heart could have stopped.

Tonks was motionless. She lay face down on the bed, naked. There was a pillow lying over the back of her head. The room felt humid, pleasantly warm and relaxing. There was a smell of lavender, or some fragrance he could not put a name to.

"Tonks!" he called. She didn't move a muscle. "No!" he breathed. His legs felt weak. His heart began to pound behind his ribs. Everything in his vision went Red.

"No... no...!" Harry growled to himself. His anger was skyrocketing. Was she hurt? He had no time to waste.

He strode across the bedroom and removed the pillow from her head. Tonks shrieked as she rolled over and fell off the bed. She rebounded in record time and snatched her wand. Harry held up the pillow and his other hand in surrender, surprised. The pillow dropped to the ground.

"Harry! What the fuck are you doing here in my room!" she screamed.

Harry examined her naked body. She was unmarked, and unharmed. She snatched the second pillow from the bed head and covered her chest. She ducked behind the other side of the bed, embarrassed.

"What happened to your eyes?" Tonks asked, alarmed. She totally forgot about her nakedness. "They're glowing red!" She brought her wand to bear on him.
Tonks was okay. He overreacted to her unresponsiveness. He could have sworn she had been attacked. Harry closed his eyes and took a few deep breaths.

*Calm, Potter. Calm.*

"You're freaking me out! Say something!"

He felt the rage still simmering under the surface.

"By Merlin, I swear, if you do not answer me right now I'm going to hex you senseless!"

"It's okay, Tonks, I was ...concerned, that's all," he responded, keeping his eyes closed. The heavy magic was pulsing in his eyes, he could still feel it.

"What are you doing here? In my room!"

Tonks' normal bossy-yet-irritated tone somewhat eventually calmed him down. She was fine. Nothing to worry about. He opened his eyes.

He shouldn't have because Tonks was still naked, her wand pointed right at his forehead. Her hair was damp, as if she had not fully dried it from the shower. She was breathing heavily, her body was covered in sweat. He averted his eyes momentarily. There was an extremely large white towel laid on the bed and what appeared to be an oval hole with a cushioned border for her face. There was a small cauldron inside the hole, sitting over a lit Bunsen burner on the floor. That was where the lovely fragrance was coming from.

It was a strange setup, that was for sure.

"What is this?" Harry asked, his curiosity getting the better of him.

"It's a temporary bed transfiguration. I make the hole, set up a real cauldron and breathe in scented oils. Also, I charm those," she pointed at numerous charmed pots placed around the room filled with boiling water. "To create a sauna. You know what a sauna is right?"

"Um. I think so..." Harry said, uncertain. Wasn't that a running joke in most comedies where sweaty blokes sat next to each other in a wooden steam room?

At this point in time, Harry didn't care about the wand pointed in his face. He just stared at the teenager in front of him who was hiding her privates with a pillow. If he thought her visiting him and giving him a kiss on the cheek when he was injured was good enough for a new Patronus charm, this delicately balanced situation far surpassed that by miles. Everything about her right now, was perfect. The fearlessness, the taut lines of her muscles ready to do him in if he so much as flinched, the sweat on her beautiful body, her heavy breathing, her half attempt to hide her modesty, everything. She was a witch ready for the kill.

"Stop staring at me," she commanded, her voice going low and purposeful.

Harry ignored her.

She cursed and awkwardly backed away to get to her cupboard, never taking her wand off of him. She twisted her body so that he couldn't see her bits as she dropped the pillow to grab the cloak hanging on the cupboard door.

"Can you turn around or something, Potter?" she spat. Harry reluctantly turned around. "What in the devil are you doing here, in my room? And why were your eyes blood red?"
"I want to incriminate Michael. Now is the time. I have to be fast."

"What?"

"You decent as yet?" Harry sighed.

"Not really. Never mind that. But speak quickly. What is this, then?" she said in a rushed tone. Harry turned around. Tonks was blushing hard, and trying not to let it show. Maybe she was as embarrassed as he was. Her traveling cloak was wrapped around her. Her wand was still ready in her hand, but no longer pointing at him.

"I need your Secrets Unveiled Potion and the corresponding antidote. I'm doctoring it so that Ollie can face him in a duel, in front of the Auror, and the school at large. If I reach back in time, I can tell Ollie exactly what to ask him if he manages to land the Poison Dart spell."

Tonks stared at him for a few seconds.

"That's a good plan," Tonks said simply.

"Thanks."

There was a lull of silence where neither knew what to say next. She was flustered as she picked up the pillow off the floor. "I use silencio on the pillow when I do this. It blocks out the world. It calms me; the silence with the sauna."

"Oh. I tried calling, if that's worth anything now," Harry smiled. "At first, I panicked. It looked like you were... y'know..."

She realized what Harry was implying. Tonks shook her head and got busy bustling about, putting together the vials and flasks in a metallic traveling case. "Clearly not. This is a muggle hazmat case used to hold radioactive material. Even the strongest poisons cannot penetrate or leak out if the enclosures break. She demonstrated how to pack and secure the potions in the cushioned interior. It was the size of a pistol traveling case. "Do not charm security or any sort of magic on it. Some potions are agitated by being held in spelled enclosures."

"Thanks," Harry made to leave. "I will be careful."

"Potter," Tonks said to him. Harry turned. "Do not scare me like that again. Especially that eye spell. I thought... ah forget it."

"What?" Harry ventured. "I'm listening."

"Thought you were going to attack...or something..." her rate of breathing increased.

"I will never attack you, Nymphadora. Never," Harry promised in a low, truthful tone.

Tonks just looked into those green eyes of his. Her mouth twisted into a bemused smile. "I think that is the most romantic thing a wizard has ever said to me," she admitted. "Coming from you, who almost crushed that girl's windpipe for pissing you off, that's reassuring."

Harry had the decency to duck his head in shame. "I'm sorry for that. I... didn't know what came over me."

"Magic at these developmental stages can manifest in different ways. We didn't even get to talk about
"That's a long story. I have about fifteen minutes to get back. We'll talk about that another time. I'll tell you after how it goes with Michael."

"You're sure you are okay, though?" Tonks asked, concerned. Harry got the weird feeling that she didn't want him to go.

"I'm good, now, that is. Sorry if I scared you."

"Partially my fault. There's an auror who oversees some of the field work... 'Constant Vigilance' are his watchwords." Tonks folded her arms, which had the opposite effect of slightly opening the chest area of the cloak. "Guess I was too complacent. I didn't even lock the door."

"All's well that ends well," Harry shrugged in apology.

Tonks came closer and gave him a chummy one armed hug around his shoulders. "Having you and Jon around is growing on me. Be careful with Michael. He's quietly deceptive with his magic. Do not underestimate him. He fucked up Lockhart good and proper if what Jon said is true."

Harry thought his legs would go weak with her proximity and smell of her warm body. This room in itself was making his head spin. It was just too much...of her.

"Drinkwater and Snape would be there. We have him surrounded," he choked out, trying to get back on topic.

"I'll see you out," Tonks said, leading the way.

"You'll get...cold," Harry said, trying to keep a straight face and not watch the teasing cleavage.

"Cold, what..?" Tonks caught on and re-fastened the outer cloak over her slightly exposed chest. "Oh. You wanker. You've seen me like this before. Aren't you supposed to be... older?" Tonks queried. "This shouldn't have you dying of thirst. Like exactly what seems to be happening to you right now."

Harry reddened, his mouth opening a few centimeters. He had no idea what to say. Tonks was the first and only naked girl he had seen in both of his lives. And here she was, teasing him. He was stuck imitating a goldfish, trying to find words.

"Oh my god," Tonks said, catching on. She blocked his exit at the door.

"What?" Harry snapped, embarrassed. He looked away.

"You... you're still a virgin!" Tonks said incredulously.

Harry didn't say anything, just turned even redder. Yes he was. And died one as well.

Tonks' eyes flicked over his features.

"If you were my age, as you proclaim... you'd look alright enough. Were you... like... awkward with girls or something?" there was a Dumbledore-esque twinkle in her eyes. When females did it, it was unfair.

"Not really..." Harry was feeling a bit self conscious. "I- I..." he trailed off lamely.

"It's okay, luv," Tonks smiled. "Not everyone goes shagging willy-nilly just because," she said in a
comforting tone. "Especially not renowned heroes such as the Boy-Who-Lived." Her expression was strange, but in a good way. Could it be that she was proud of him? Harry didn't think she was taking the mick out of him.

There was something about the way she said the word 'because'. It had him thinking... what if...?

Only one way to know for sure.

_Sweetheart_, Harry thought. _Please don't hate me for this._

He cupped her face gently by her jawline and searched her eyes. Using his _Leglimens_ ability, he delved into her thoughts.


_She's still a virgin as well._

He broke off the mental contact. Tonks was never with anyone. _That_ was surprising. Or maybe not, since she was only eighteen. Maybe he had this preconception that with her... provocative ways she would actually have done the deed.

"Tonks?" Harry watched her glazed over eyes. She blinked a few times, stepping back.

"I had the weirdest feeling that...we shared something there," Tonks said, confused. She focused on his eyes.

Harry cupped behind her neck to bring her back close and kissed her, slowly and surely. Tonks accepted the kiss, too shocked to move.

"We did," he smiled. "I have to go." Harry gave her a quick hug then jumped over the banister overlooking the open central area of the front of the mansion. He shot off upwards towards the stair well between floors, through the master bedroom and out the balcony doors.

Harry and Jon were tense as they watched the first seventh year match-up after lunch. Oliver had succeeding in drawing Michael Ellewyn-Sare as promised. Oliver's wand tip was dipped in the potion prior to his coming to the front. The carefully constructed questions were drilled into him not even five minutes ago. All he had to do was land the Poison Dart hex and get him talking.

"On the count of three, you may turn and cast magic!" Severus Snape commanded. Harry crossed his fingers in morbid anticipation.

"One!"

"T-"

"Foramen acus transire iecit!" Oliver didn't even wait for the full count. He cast the poison spell directly on Michael who spun too late to cast his shield spell.

"Halt!" Professor Snape called. "Foul!" Oliver ignored him, his wand still pointing at Micheal.

"Did Katie reject you? Why did you do that to her?" he asked forcefully.
"Yes, that pompous half blooded bint. She has her eye on someone else. I did it for revenge, and partially because I was paid to, of course," Michael blurted. He was shell shocked. He covered his mouth with both of his hands.

The crowd went eerily silent.

"Oh? Were you lacking the equipment to please Penelope...?" Oliver cast an arm locking curse at Michael. His arms straightened at his sides, like a wooden toy soldier.

"Of course not! She screamed and screamed when I gave it to her!" Michael bit down on his tongue so hard he began to dribble blood. Auror Drinkwater was walking forward towards the stage, intrigued.

"Yeah right. You must be making that shit up," Oliver goaded him. "She thinks she's still a virgin."

The crowd gasped.

"That's because I wiped her memories after I used the lust potion you fuckwit!" Micheal spat, enraged. Blood splattered on the dueling platform. Michael, unable to stop his confessions, turned to run. Oliver grabbed him with a lasso charm.

"Looks like the only thing you can do to get a girl is poison her. But you didn't have that problem with Flint! You boned him good!"

"I'm not gay! I only wiped his memories after Imperio! Fuck! Professor Snape! Help me please! He's making me say things..." Michael began to cry, his mouth leaking blood.

"Are your answers the truth?" Snape asked, cool and composed. His wand had somehow appeared in his hand. Snape shot off two Patronus messages to various points in the castle.

"Yes! They are!" Michael screamed in frustration. He began to gnaw on his bloody tongue.

"Continue, Mr. Wood," Snape said coolly, now the Judge of the proceedings.

"The only thing that links your victims was that they were half-bloods. You didn't want to kill them, did you?"

"No! Stop talking to me!" he sputtered more blood from his mangled and bleeding tongue.

"So, why did you give Flint a potentially fatal potion, called Sanity's Eclipse?"

"Because it is mine! All mine! I can do the fuck I want with it!" Michael was stamping his feet, trying to escape the ropes. Oliver put more magic into the lasso spell. He needed to change the angle of questioning.

"But why her? Did you have a crush on her? Was it her intelligence?" Oliver left the question open to interpretation.

"Perish the fucking thought! Mudbloods deserve to die!" Michael bellowed. He screamed in rage. Blood was now running down his mouth, his chin, and over the white shirt of his uniform.

Hermione ran out the main hall, crying. Ginny, Ron and Neville all chased after her. Harry made to dash after her as well but Jon snatched him lightning quick by the back of the robes.

"Do not. When a man is about to break, is when he is the most dangerous," Jon said solemnly. His Dragon-string on Olive wand was already drawn and ready. "Look," Jon pointed.
Harry drew his wand. The ropes binding Michael Ellewyn-Sare were smoking where his spilled blood landed. Michael's arms were actually regaining mobility once again. Harry saw on Ellewyn-Sare the face of a man who was willing to die for his cause.

"OLIVER, WATCH IT! DISARM HIM!"

"I will open the Hidden Chamber! YOU CUNTS WILL ALL FUCKING DIE!" Michael screamed. Magic suddenly burst free from the lasso spell. A blast of raw blood magic pushed the crowd off their feet. The podium Professor Snape stood on shattered, throwing him to the ground. Oliver was physically and mentally prepared to stand his ground and shielded himself from the blast. Michael didn't hesitate with this opportunity. Blood flew out his mouth as he screamed-

"Sectumsempra!"

Oliver had no counter. His arm, from the shoulder down, went flying off behind him. There was a massive spray of his blood over the crowd. The students screamed in terror. Drinkwater was still too far away from Michael's end of the table to be truly effective. He began desperately pushing his way through the crowd struggling to get to their feet. Harry cursed as he and Jon got up. He tracked who Michael's next intended target was. The Auror wasn't expecting it and didn't even have up a shield.

"Ossio Reductimius!" Micheal hissed.

Drinkwater had no idea what spell that was. He countered by using a boomerang spell in conjunction with a basic shield charm. "Ad Mittens Protego!"

The curse shattered his shield and a sickly purple magic wrapped around his arm. The spell was automatically returned towards the caster by Drinkwater's wand then it exploded into fine fragments of wood. There were loud crunching noises coming from his arm. He screamed in pain, grabbing the shattered bones and mangled flesh of his right arm then crumpled to the floor in agony.

Michael easily countered his own magic with the correct block.

"Adsum octo caligo!" A black jet of inky substance shot out of his wand, absorbing his Sinew and Bone Reducing curse.

Harry could not believe what was happening. Pandemonium ensued. Michael cast a wide range mist spell and enchanted it with bees. He made a mad dash off the table towards the front main doors. The students began to run as far away as possible from him towards the exits. Harry and Jon ran after Michael, ignoring the stings that came their way.

"Homenium Revelio!" Harry cast. One second there was a human outline of Michael running away, then it vanished.

Harry and Jon kept running towards the exit of the main hall, but their quarry had disappeared. "Fuck!" They spun on the spot, searching.

The mist suddenly vanished. Dumbledore had arrived and cast a banishing counter spell. He was immediately attending to Oliver; who was pale, gasping for breath, and screaming at the top of his lungs. "Severus! Get Rivers to the hospital wing!" Dumbledore summoned Oliver's arm and levitated the seventh year out of the Hall. "Prefects! Do what you can to corner the culprit!" Dumbledore shepherded the students away from the bloody scene. Percy Weasley, Andrew Bole, Claudia Howard and Rachael Corner came together, panicked. They began to argue on what to do next.

"The fox spell!" Jon barked. "That was the only way. He did not turn invisible."
"Animagus," Harry agreed. He didn't know the correct tracking or revealing spells. He could be anywhere by now. He had escaped...just like Pettigrew in his third year. "For crying out loud!" Harry screamed in frustration. This was a disaster. He waved his wand in frustration, casting *stupefy* with a twirl instead of a stabbing motion. A faint red orbital release of magic expanded. The bees around all of them fell to the ground. The dueling table was covered in swashes and smatterings of blood.

How could I have screwed this up so badly? Harry remembered what Tonks told him not even fifteen minutes ago: *Be careful with Michael. He's quietly deceptive with his magic. Do not underestimate him.*

He should have taken her words more to heart. They were *this* close to catching that blood-spitting snake!

Jon was standing unnaturally still. His head was tilted upwards to the ceiling. The entirety of his eyes had gone a pale, cloudy grey.

"Jon?" Harry asked, bewildered. "Jon!" Jon stood as still as a statue still for half a minute. Harry waved his hand in front his face. He didn't even blink.

"It is done," Jon finally responded. He watched Harry with those weird cloud filled eyes. Harry's jaw dropped in shock when Jon's irises flickered momentarily and turned into the brilliant red of Ghost's. After a second, it faded back into Jon's natural brown colour.

*At least I'm not alone.*

"What WAS THAT?"

"Ghost has captured him. I made sure he crushed his right foreleg. Right now he has him by his neck, roughly halfway towards the front gates. I have commanded him to maintain a firm grip, but do not puncture further."

"The fuck?" Harry said, lost.

"I was telling you my connection with my familiar has grown stronger last night, but you cut me off. You really thought a wolf pup would willingly give up his hunt for a creature he is scared to death of?"

"I didn't really think of it at the time," Harry responded. "What does that that have to do with all of this?"

"Now, I can embody Ghost when needed. This is the Old magic of my House Stark, and of the people North of the Wall," Jon walked towards the smaller entrance hall.

"And here I thought I was the wizard here," Harry breathed, completely taken off guard. He was impressed that Jon never mentioned this. "That's awesome."

"Nothing to shout about, really," Jon took off at a trot towards the grounds.

"Right. Normal stuff. What 'Immortal Heroes do for fun', huh?" Harry stated.

"Exactly. As a knight, I cannot allow wastrels to escape. It is our way of the North."

Jon paused, looking abruptly at the sky. An icy flake melted as it connected with his misty breath. The coldness of the morning had now manifested into a light snowfall. "So be it. Michael, Winter
"What a weekend. Told you Dark magic strikes all at once," Harry cursed as he drew his cowl over his head. They trotted down the slope together.

"I have no fear. For you are fighting to protect this school. You are the Beacon of the Light. Be it Slytherins, human monsters who summon creatures to attack children, the Silver Lancers, Michael: it does not fucking matter. All are welcome to challenge us... when we work together, there will be a reckoning."

Harry looked at Jon for a long moment. This man truly believed in Harry's cause, and what he was trying to do. It made Harry feel uncomfortable. They eventually found Ghost, holding down a fox by the throat. Anytime the fox twitched, Ghost would snarl and wring his neck slightly, warning him that only a few inches more was all it took to end him.

"Ghost, release!" he commanded.

Jon stunned the fox as soon as Ghost was clear. The fox slowly reverted into Michael. Blood was everywhere on his uniform, face and neck. Jon waved his dragon heartstring wand in his face to put him into the deep sleep. Jon pushed him unto his side, so he did not choke on his own blood.

"See? A true knight shall persevere against all odds, with unwavering determination, honor, and justice for all."
Harry makes a promise to Oliver. Remus asks Tonks for help. Katie channels her innate Gryffindor traits when it comes to Harry.

Gryffindor Hero, 17, is grievously injured facing a Dark Wizard.

Harry put down yesterday's Daily Prophet on the tray alongside the Healer's clipboard at the foot of Oliver's bed. Four days had passed since the capture of Ellewyn-Sare. They were in one of the more comfortable rooms used for long term Curse Recovery at St. Mungo's.

"Ollie, mate, you're the real deal. Not some stupid newspaper's gimmick to sell copies," Harry reinforced. "I don't know if you can hear me. But I'm so, so sorry. I wish I could have done more, anything, something.. I should've helped, instead of.. just blurt out-

Oliver Wood lay sleeping, deeply sedated. Harry watched the young man's chest rise and fall evenly, and the amputee dressing on his right shoulder. The memories of what happened to George's ear after Snape used the same curse was vivid in his mind's eye. The Healers confirmed to the Headmaster and Oliver's parents what Harry knew all along: the Sectumsempra curse was incurable when it cut clean through.

St Mungo's afternoon visiting period was now finished. The Hogwarts contingent that came to visit had eventually trickled out the room. Jon and Katie were the last to leave a few minutes before. Professor McGonagall and all of her students who chose to visit today were currently waiting for him in the public seating area six levels down.

Harry had asked Professor McGonagall if she would allow him to stay behind for a bit, he wanted some time alone with Ollie. She agreed and gave him ten minutes to come down. He thought about Oliver's future plans of becoming a Quidditch player. He contemplated if Oliver knew that his dream was over at the precise moment his arm was severed in the Great Hall. Harry felt the pressure of responsibility weigh heavy upon him. He was the mastermind behind the whole incident.

It was his fault.

Did blaming himself really matter now, though? He needed to fix it; damn it, not wallow in guilt. Right now, he did not have a bloody clue about how to fix this. Nobody, except Snape and himself, knew how dangerous this spell really was. No, that was not one hundred percent correct.

Michael knew.

For him to know about Sectumsempra- that Ravenclaw snake must have found the 'Half Blood Prince' textbook. That potions text in the wrong hands was an aspiring Dark Wizard's dream. Especially to a genius-level Alchemist like Michael. A genius-level Azkaban detainee by this time next week. Harry hoped they somehow incriminated Lucius Malfoy in the process, even though he knew that was going to be a longshot.
"I knew you wanted to go pro. The others and I followed your debut match on the wireless." Harry's voice choked up. Memories of his previous life kept pressuring him with added guilt. Some of the students downstairs that died alongside him that terrible night; Colin Creevy, Lavender and Fred, were part of that listening party that weekend. The were all so proud that Oliver made it into the big leagues.

"You didn't do it for me, or for the money. You did it because of what you believed in. Gryffindors protect those who need it, and are brave enough to stand up for what's right. You didn't do it for the bloody boy-who-lived, neither all the galleons in the world. He... that *fucker*... *raped* Penelope- and almost killed Katie and Hermione! I would have taken him out myself if I..."

*I wasn't afraid I would instantaneously fall into the Darkness and become another Voldemort...*

The Horcrux inside of him was no more. He knew this. But that didn't mean Harry James Potter of Godric's Hollow could not be corrupted. In fact, due to his soul being cleaved *twice*, he suspected that he was prime material for the Darkness to embrace him. Harry was afraid to think that was why his eyes turned Red when he descended into one of his magically empowered rages. That was another problem he had to figure out.

"I don't know for sure what is going to happen ...about this..." Harry murmured in frustration, both of his own predicament and also about Oliver's grave injury. Harry thought about Voldemort's 'Metal Hand' spell he used on Pettigrew's severed wrist. Useful as it was, he was afraid to even *research* it. If he found that Dark magic spell the temptation to actually use it and re-grow Oliver's arm would surely drive him insane. Anything Voldemort did couldn't be good, he was sure it would negatively affect the both of them in the long run. Harry cursed in frustration.

"Gryffindor will remember. *I* will remember the sacrifice you made."

Harry patted Oliver's good shoulder. Harry felt a hollow tug on his heart, watching his first mentor's tragic fate. He rubbed his face, trying to centre himself before the tears came. He forced a positive tone upon what he said next, trying to push back the sorrow building up.

"Oh yeah. I didn't forget what you said on the first day back either. You wanted the Double championship, right? So here's the latest: there's been a repeat of a first year becoming Seeker. She owned the tryouts, I hear."

On the bedside table was Oliver's Special Award For Services To the School. Next to it, was his wand and his well-used but immaculately cared for Keeper's reinforced gloves.

Harry stood up, ready to leave and join the others downstairs. He picked up the gloves. "I'll let Ginny do the Snitchin'. I'm going to win your Cup back. I think I have some mighty big gloves to fill..." Harry wiped back tears that escaped. "And an arm to replace," he promised quietly.

Harry picked up the quill and wrote his message on Oliver's Get Well Soon card.

*To Ollie the Brave*

*Stay strong. We will fix this, together.*

*Harry*

Two weeks after Oliver's duel Hogwarts was finally getting back to normal. Over the course of the first week Aurors interviewed Penelope, Katie and Hermione separately. Marcus Flint's trial was
cancelled and he was allowed to return home. Due to his official expulsion, his parents opted not to send him back to Hogwarts, but to ship him off to finish his NEWTS in Durmstrang. Auror Drinkwater was hospitalized for a few days at St Mungo's and was sent home for bed rest while his arm healed.

The majority of students were either angry or somber, going through the motions of class with the tragic events of the fight weighing down on their minds. Also, the surge in school spirit brought about by the extra-curricular dueling practices waned without a Defense against the Dark Arts instructor/ facilitator to Champion the tournament. The Gryffindor Quidditch team was still mourning the absence of their Captain, being severely injured and hospitalized under observation. Practice was unofficially cancelled for those two weeks.

Harry did not tell anyone as yet of his plans to volunteer as Keeper. It felt too soon. The first Quidditch match was coming up in a few weeks, so sooner or later he would have to let Angelina know. Jon had encouraged him to learn combat techniques in the Room of Requirement during the Defense free periods and after dinner. Harry felt like a punching bag after some of these sessions.

During the month of October Harry and Jon kept Tonks informed of what was happening through owl correspondence. Tonks reported that their guest had recovered sufficiently by Monday night, and she gave him the 'all clear' to leave by Tuesday morning. Remus implied that he would be in touch, but Harry didn't think that he would actually keep to his word. He got the impression that Remus remembered the things that he did while he was a werewolf, and it embarrassed him. Tonks, being Tonks, had persuaded him to leave reliable contact information as a courtesy for his rescue and her hospitality. Remus had reluctantly agreed before he eventually left the mansion Tuesday after lunch.

Focused solely on finding a way to help Ollie, Harry brainstormed with Katie, Hermione, Penelope and Lee Jordan every other evening after dinner in the Constellation Skydome Tower.

On their third meeting, Hermione eventually came up with a great idea. She put forward that they copy the same knowledge group format that the Official Arithmancy Guild used. Basically, they should encourage Professional Spell Creators to work together in a network to research ways to cure Oliver. Harry nodded enthusiastically. He should have thought of that as well, as he and Jon did sign up to the Guild to facilitate the legal creation of their bracers.

Ironically, it was Michael Ellewyn-Sare who had initially signed the both of them up. It was also how he came to know of Hermione's lack of magical heritage in the first place. Going into Diagon to fix his wand this second time around definitely made a big splash in the pond of Fate.

"Hermione- you're brilliant. Simply wonderful," Harry raised his hand for a high five. Hermione grinned, and connected. However, she did something strange at the end of the friendly gesture. Instead of simply clapping their palms, she lightly entwined her fingers between his.

To Harry, it felt very intimate and personal; and a tad bit awkward. She held his hand between them lightly for a few heartbeats, smiling at him. Harry got the impression that Hermione forgot that there were three other people in the room. Katie and Penelope frowned from the other side of their makeshift meeting table. Eventually Hermione caught on.

"Um," Hermione gently moved away her hand, leaving Harry's hanging in mid-air awkwardly. She cleared her throat as she composed herself. "No problem. That's what we're here for, right?"

Harry looked at her face, partially hidden behind her once again bushy hair. She was blushing, all right. He gave her a reassuring smile.
"Right," Harry agreed, nodding, taking back up the quill and dipping it into the ink bottle. He could feel Katie's eyes boring into the top of his head as he wrote down notes.

*You're an idiot, Potter. And you thought it was Jon she fancied.*

Harry cleared his mind and emotions using all of his occlumency ability to keep a straight face as he finished writing down her idea. When he knew his expression was composed, he looked up from the parchment. He opened his palms in an inviting manner towards the other three. "So, how about it? Sounds good? Suggestions? Bell? Penelope, Lee?"

Lee Jordan nodded, oblivious to the undercurrents happening between the junior Gryffindor students. "Great idea, Granger. I think his mom would like that. She's a researcher herself, works in magical transportation. Very pro-academic when it comes to things like this."

The other two girls nodded in agreement, but did not add anything further.

"Good. I'll discuss this with my Instructor, see how he can get things moving. As soon as something concrete happens, I'll let you guys know." He began to pack his things.

"Potter. You're a cheeky one," Penelope said suddenly. Harry froze. "Very informed and ... organized. How old are you, again?"

Harry raised an eyebrow. Ever since Michael's confession at the duel, Penelope had become very direct with him, and Jon. Like if she suspected that Harry had a much larger role in what happened. She remembered that the three girls were supposed to meet with Drinkwater after that weekend, but everything escalated very quickly that fateful Sunday. Oliver and Michael had put on a show, similar to what Jon and Harry had done at the lake, just with vastly greater stakes.

He wasn't sure what suspicions she had, but he had to tread carefully. Ravenclaws were perceptive. Very perceptive.

"Thirteen next July," Harry answered calmly. "And yourself?"

Penelope scowled at him. "Seventeen next September... I'll be in seventh year."

"And I'll be in third year," Harry said smoothly, using the same obvious tone.

"Hm," Penelope said, folding her arms. Her eyes contested his with a glare.

Harry got the feeling that Penelope was investigating him. He would have to get Alexandria or someone he trusted to find out if the revelation of what happened to her was causing this aggressive shift in personality. Finding out you were forced into having sex but having no memory of it happening could mess a girl up.

"The chill is coming through the barrier," Katie said abruptly, cutting the confrontation off and rescuing Harry. She pulled her outer cloak tighter around her. "If that's all, let's get going."

"Yeah, good idea," Harry said under his breath. The five of them got up and made their way to the drop ladder used to climb into the Telescope Skydome. Lee offered to escort Penelope to wherever she was going from there, but she shook her head, all the while giving Harry strange looks. The Gryffindors waved bye at her, and she waved in return, a skeptical smirk on her face.

"What was that about?" Lee asked as they walked back to the common room.

"I'm not sure," Harry said. There were times he got the vibe from Penelope that she considered him
her hero rescuer from the severe hex that had her in the hospital wing. Other times he got the impression that she might somehow be interested in him, strange as that may seem. Now he suspected that she had a morbid fascination with him being the key puzzle piece to solve the critical mysteries going on right now in her life.

He couldn't really blame her. Since interrupting that kissing session on the train ride things went downhill for her, fast. Putting himself in her shoes, he could understand her weird behavior.

A psuedo-boyfriend on the Dark path who robbed her of her virginity; forcing her to walk on a Confundus trap under control from lust potion- and now on the other side of the scale, a fabled boy hero who conveniently was able to rescue her from her sickness and then orchestrate a campaign against the same boyfriend, bringing him to justice.

He wasn't sure if he should talk to her one on one, or somehow let it all settle down on its own. He would ask Jon later for advice.

The following week Harry and Jon asked Tonks, with the help of Master Ollivander, to create a non-profit Arithmancy Organization called Walk In The Light. Using this as a vehicle to put forward an agenda, they appealed to the Seniors in the Arithmancy Guild to research new methods to cure Witches and Wizards who were crippled by Dark Magic. Harry, in his alias role as Roderick Hallow, wrote a letter to Monsieur Loic Lebouf, Remus Lupin, Mr. and Mrs. Wood, and Senior healer Wanderley Warthington Jr.; inviting them to be the lead Researchers of their magical Charity Foundation. The Crow's Vambrace donated a sizable amount of gold into this organization's newly created Gringotts account, with Nymphadora Tonks, Eleanor Potage, and Master Ollivander as the Board of Directors. Remus was the only one yet to respond via post.

The last Friday in October, Angelina held her first formal meeting as Quidditch Captain. It was the evening before Gryffindor's launch of the Quidditch season with the highly anticipated match against Slytherin.

"Right. Thanks for coming, everyone. I'll get straight to it. I apologize for not getting around to this before. It's hard to get motivated... with everything about Ollie and all. This team, this school, meant so much to him." Angelina's eyes were slightly red from crying. Harry always thought she was strong, but Olliver's injury had hit her hard. "That, might have changed. I've visited him at his home a couple times. He wouldn't want me to say it to you guys, but I've never seen him like this before. Before, even when he's sad, or upset, he's passionate about it, you know? Now, it is almost like he's gone...cold."

The rest of the team nodded, waiting for her to continue.

"He didn't mention anything school wise; other than he was following the trial. And that Auror Drinkwater came and visited him with his arm in a sling. I got the impression those two are getting along well since the fight."

Harry nodded gravely. Jon told him that men who didn't connect initially usually did after surviving a battle.

"About the team- he didn't give me any hints, tips, or even a blessing. In fact, he didn't say anything at all. I'm not sure that visiting him so soon was a good idea, come to think of it. He wasn't rude or anything, very polite, but...I don't know. He came across, indifferent to the point that maybe we weren't as important as I thought we were. It's hard to explain. I didn't want to pry. I can't really blame him... he might be still trying to adapt. But he did ask me to deliver a message to you, Potter."
“What? What did he say?” Harry asked.

“Keep your promise,” Angelina said solemnly.

“I will,” Harry nodded. Oliver had heard him!

“May I ask what promise is that?” Angelina asked politely. Harry thought that the night before the match was a good time as any to bring this up.

“Um. I don’t know if you have a shortlist - from tryouts...”

“I have the list of attendees here, but that was mainly for your spot,” Angelina said. She pointed at Ginny who was simply sitting there, listening quietly. "She was our pick, as you know. Nobody else made reserve members, yet. Now that you're back..." Angelina shot Ginny a quick glance. Ginny nodded at Angelina briefly, and smiled, as if to say "It's okay."

"Right." Harry dug in his bag and took out Oliver's gloves. "I want to take Ollie's position. I want to be keeper."

"What?" the twins said at exactly the same time. Angelina's eyebrows shot up. Ginny looked flabbergasted.

"I don't really care about anyone else you think might be good enough. It's mine. That was my promise."

“Oh," Katie breathed in awe. She studied Harry with hero worship in her eyes. It was a good thing at that moment Harry was having an intense stare down with Angelina, because he would have buried himself into the couch in embarrassment at her expression. Angelina smiled, nodding immediately.

"Done. That message was the only thing that made him...come alive. So I assume it means a lot to him. It's yours. Any objections? Anyone?" Angelina asked. There was none.

"Glad to have you back," Katie said, her eyes slightly damp with emotion. She got up. "You are something else, Potter. Give up the glory position to take on the scapegoat role? Only you would do something like this." She performed the mind numbing Gryffindor handshake with him. "Now I know why that Carrow girl calls you two heroes."

"Harry. Would I still be able to ride on your broomstick?" Ginny asked. The twins blanched in mock horror. Harry and his perverted mind thought instantaneously of Tonks' naughty gesture in France when she mounted his Quicksilver. Harry nodded to Ginny immediately. He was not entertaining any thought that Ginny would have meant what she said in any other way.

Tonks was Tonks. Ginny was just another little girl. An eleven year old girl.

Now he knew exactly how Tonks felt. Sorta. He, on the other hand, was a special case.

"Sure," Harry reassured. "I have another."

"Well! That solves that issue!" Angelina said delightedly. The somber atmosphere of the meeting vanished. Angelina spoke up, revitalized. "Tomorrow... stick to strategy A, nothing fancy. Flint is gone as well... so Bole probably took over. He's a beater... doubt he has any good strats to worry about. And Malfoy thinks new brooms can compensate for a lack of skill. Easy win, then. We'll make Ollie proud! Bring it in you lot!"

Angelina offered her hand face down in the middle of her teammates. The rest of them immediately
got up and placed their hands on top of hers.

"Roar, the Red lions!" She chanted.

"Gryffindor!"

"Roar, the Red Lions!" She demanded.

"Gryffindor!"

"Roar, the Red Lions!" She cried.

"Gryffindor!"

The group chant completed, Angelina folded her arms and scrutinized her team. "Ok. Be at the dressing room promptly at 11:30. Match on at noon." With the meeting finished, the rest of the team filtered out the empty classroom. "Harry, thanks," she said as he passed.

"Don't mention it," Harry waved off. Angelina watched him go, fascinated. Something was off about those two lads.

"Tonks has mailed again," Jon said quietly as soon as Harry sat down for dinner in the great hall. Jon had already eaten and was waiting on him to finish his Quidditch meeting.

"What's up?" Harry asked. Any mail from her around full moon, or a weekend, had him uneasy. Jon shook his head as he got up.

"Eat quickly. Then meet me in the dorm." Jon left the table. Ron and Hermione watched him leave. Harry could have sworn that she looked disappointed as her eyes followed him out.

*That couldn't be, could it? Bookish Hermione fancied both Jon and I?*

Harry sighed. He dished out a plateful of mash potatoes, beans, mutton, and vegetables. He attacked it with vigour. Katie plopped down right next to him. Very close, in fact.

"Careful," she warned. "Sleeping on a heavy stomach is bad luck for Keepers," Katie teased.

"Mm-hm," Harry dismissed that talk. Katie was wearing a perfume that smelled nice. It definitely caught his attention. He looked across to her. "Hey," he greeted.

"Hey," she said, pouring herself some juice. "You want?" she offered to pour a glass for him.

"Sure," Harry agreed. Ginny and Hermione's eyes narrowed.

"So," Katie lowered her voice. "You are a tough one to find. Where do you disappear to sometimes?" Katie's eyes twinkled mischievously.

"Looking out for me, huh?" Harry smiled, spooning another mouthful.

"Maybe. You're dodging, though," Katie teased.

"What's it to you?" Harry asked, intrigued. Katie never really paid this much attention to him.

"Um. I was kind of wondering... Next week is my first Hogsmeade visit. I know you sometimes disappear on the weekend. Maybe you could set it up with your Instructor so..." Katie trailed off,
nodding encouragingly for Harry to connect the dots.

Harry watched her for a few moments, Katie anxiously waiting for his response. It finally dawned on him. Harry's eyes widened a bit, and he sipped on the juice she graciously put in his hand.

Katie was asking him out on a Hogsmeade visit!

"So you know about my apprenticeship then?"

"A girl has her sources," she said airily. Harry touched his chin in thought.

"I'll try, I will have to mail him," Harry said truthfully. He didn't know if Master Ollivander would put in a request for them to leave school grounds next week. Wait, next week was the first week in November. "Is next weekend the eight and ninth?"

"Yeah, that's what the form says," she double checked the permission slip.

"Right, I think I do have a workshop thing going on. The Hogsmesde trip, um.. day off is on Sunday, right?"

"Yes..." Katie bit her lip. "Will that be a problem?

Jon and himself had to travel to London that weekend to meet Master Ollivander. He informed the both of them that as part of their training, they were required to shop for the heavy press and bench carver they would need to set up a functional workshop at Hogwarts. Also, they would have to source the hand held tools themselves.

"I will technically have permission for the weekend off, so once we bring everything back by Saturday evening, I could hang out with you on Sunday."

Katie beamed prettily. Harry smiled back at her. Katie was radiant when she smiled, usually she was taking the mick out of other girls with her partner in crime Alicia Spinnet. She could be mean with her insults when she was ready, but that was her style. She was funny, and was a steadfast teammate and friend.

"So..." Katie rolled her hands, eager for a response. "That's a Yeah?" she indicated between the both of them; subtly out of view under the table.


"Sweet," Katie drained her juice and touched him on his arm as she got up. "Remember to go in early and get some rest. Tomorrow we're going to be a bit rusty, seeing as we had no practice for a while. We need everyone to be sharp," she winked at him.

"Right-o," Harry agreed. Katie left with a happy smile on her face. Harry caught Hermione spying and she immediately ducked around to talk to Ron. Ron, on the other hand, looked a bit down. Harry hoped that allowing his younger sister to use his Nimbus wasn't a sore spot for him. Knowing Ron, that was probably the exact reason he had such a gloomy look.

Harry pushed those thoughts aside and hurriedly ate his dinner. Jon was waiting on him.

"Remus mailed Tonks this morning. She says that he wants to come back and spend the full moon locked away. Something about the silver cage helping him to curtail the self mutilation cuts and injuries."
Harry read through her post. She was coming in that evening on the Hogwarts express because she had lecture whole week in London, along with all the errands the *Walk In The Light* Foundation pressed upon her. Eleanor Potage handled most of the administrative work, but moving around freely in the Ministry of Magic and various other locations was Tonks' responsibility.

She also gave him a heads up that Drinkwater would return the next weekend. Her main concern was getting the silver cage back inside the barn, and making sure it could be locked again. Precious metals were resistant to magic and her levitation spell barely nudged the heavy cage. Remus would be popping in around eight, and was hoping to spend the night and following day under 'supervision'.

"Jon," Harry's brain was in overdrive. "This is not good."

"What do you mean?"

"Life and Luck are *fucking* with us!" Harry retorted.

"You forget that I do not know everything that happened before," Jon shrugged.

"They got married before, man. If this becomes a regular thing, as it's every full moon... Damn it all to hell!"

"Ah. There is a term we used in my world. Remus is going to be a massive problem in your future... romantic endeavors. That, Harry of House Hollow, will be a Cock Block of the highest order."

"We use the same term. And it's not funny," Harry deadpanned. Jon laughed at him. "I need to put in some serious leg work for about three years before I am old enough to be remotely in her league. Remus already has this broken wizard with a mysterious past thing going on. Plus he is a man... while I'm just... well, I don't know what I am, actually..." Harry sighed dramatically.

Jon folded his arms. "And you say assassination is completely out, yes?" Jon's eyes twinkled.

"Even Jon's twinkle ability surpassed his. What the hell was he doing wrong, dammit!"

"Ha. You're a funny guy, Snow." Harry did well to suppress his chuckle.

"My advice is to divert his attention away from Nymphadora."

Harry felt a pang of jealousy how Jon called Tonks by her first name. Nobody called her by her first name, except for him of course. But Jon was on to something... a diversion? Hm.

"Diversion you say. Like what?"

"Freeing your godfather of course," Jon stared at Harry. "You forgot, didn't you?"

*Holy shit. He did forget!*  
"I'm surprised you remembered, to be honest." Harry was putting all his energy focusing first on Michael and the basilisk, then Ollie, that he totally forgot about Peter Pettigrew and Sirius.

"I'm Jon *Black*, Harry. I cannot forget my own last name."

"Right, silly me. It's a bit after seven. I have to think about that plan in detail sometime soon. For now, we'll need to sneak out."

Harry and Jon used the Marauder's map to plot a course out of the castle relatively unobserved.
When they emerged at the exit to the Quidditch pitch, Jon mounted his broom. Harry put on his apprentice mask and took a running leap into the sky. Jon was going completely the wrong direction until Harry tapped him on the shoulder in midair, indicating they should fly over the Forbidden Forest instead of following the road to Hogsmeade and then east towards the station.

To Harry’s discomfort, there were random Threstrals already doing their mating rituals, aggressively jumping in and out of the canopy.

"JON!"

"YEAH!"

"ARE YOU GOING FULL SPEED?" Harry shouted right next to him.

"YEAH!"

"WE'RE ATTRACTING A CHALLENGER!"

"WHAT DO WE DO?"

"I'LL HAVE TO GO FASTER. IT'S ME THEY WANT! TRY TO STAY ON ME!"

Harry accelerated like a slingshot. Jon tried his best, but Harry shot off so fast, he was nought but a speck of magical light in the distance within the night sky. Jon leaned lower on his broom coaxing as much speed as he could. Harry was already gone and out of sight. Within five minutes he was clear of the forest and bearing down on the horse pasture and Barn.

Jon landed next to Harry. Harry shot up the Fireworks spell using his Fwooper on Cedar. Minutes later a warmly bundled Tonks, and a heavily cloaked Remus Lupin walked across the backyard and met them at the frost covered cage.

"Wotcher, Jon, Harry!" Tonks waved. "Come and meet a (sane) Remus Lupin. This is Jon Black," Tonks introduced.

"Jon who?" Remus searched his face as they shook hands. "I don't know anything about another Black," Remus countered.

"Regulus Black and Gemma Ollivander are my parents," Jon bowed slightly. "They passed when I was very young."

"Gemma? She was the sweetest, quietest girl ... why would she choose him, I wonder..." Remus muttered. "Pardon me young man, I am sorry for your loss."

"I have grown accustomed," Jon said simply. "I take no offense."

"Right," Tonks said awkwardly. "So I got the lock," Tonks clumsily dropped it as she took it out a shopping bag. Remus instinctively caught it but dropped it immediately upon contact with his skin.

"Ow!" he hissed.

"Sorry about that," Tonks picked up the sturdy Silver Lock and key set. "Harry, move this back in please."

Harry levitated the cage off the lawn and carefully manipulated it back into the barn. Remus pursed his lips as he followed them inside. Tonks stood up casually under the five hundred pounds or more Silver Cage. She made sure the trapdoor floor was still intact.
"Aren't you... worried, Miss Tonks?" Remus was uneasy seeing this young girl shining her wand underneath the heavy contraption.

"About?" she asked absentmindedly, making sure all the moving parts were not frozen or rusted over.

"The cage falling!" Remus snapped.

"Course not. Harry has it," she began fiddling with the keys and lock in her hand, making sure it snapped shut and opened freely.

"It's... disturbing."

"Harry's strongest magical spell is levitation. He can also fly," Jon said simply.

Remus laughed at his joke. "I like you lad, wait..." Remus looked around the barn. "I fought with you in here!"

"Yes." Jon nodded. Tonks was now watching the both of them avidly.

"I distinctly remember... getting my arse kicked," Remus said, embarrassed.

"You were not yourself," Jon explained.

Remus and Jon stared at each other for a few moments. Remus grinned. "Dart hits bull. And the Executioner's swing, right?" Remus prodded.

"Correct."

"I've been experiencing a strange dream. Of the White Wolf. A wolf in a man's body, and man in a wolf's body."

"Really," Jon folded his arms, defensive.

"Really," Remus said, intrigued. "I believe this wolf kept saying those two terms in my dreams: Dart Hits Bull, Executioner's Swing."

"A remarkable coincidence," Jon deadpanned.

"It still works," Tonks declared. She demonstrated the trapdoor mechanism and snapped the padlock on the bolting pin. "We have a problem, though."

"What problem?" Remus asked, coming next to her and looking up.

"I can't lift the cage without Harry here. How am I to lock you in, then set you free?" Tonks put her hands on her hips. "Ten o'clock you start to transform, right?"

"That is the earliest time, yes," Remus agreed. "The reverting stages usually start around dawn."

"I can lift it, whenever you are ready," Harry offered.

"Harry, that will be late, then very early. You can't spend the night," Tonks said absentmindedly. Harry felt a tingle run down his spine at those words. Memories of her Sauna incident jumped into his mind. Tonks pointed towards the roof of the barn. "And I'm not trusting those beams to support the weight, especially if I have to stand under this, with Wolfie inside."
"Wolfie?" Remus repeated, chuckling.

"Put the cage on it's side." Jon offered.

"No," Remus said. "We get exponentially stronger the longer we are locked up through the night. The cage is designed like this so we can't reach the lock. It must be physically impossible to reach." Remus demonstrated crushing an object with his bare hands.

"Then, you may need a geared windlass," Jon said.

"A what?" Harry asked.

"The chain and pulley system back at my home."

"Oh, a winch, you mean," Harry translated.

Jon stared a Harry a few seconds. Jon had no idea what a winch was. "Yes." Jon hoped that Harry was thinking of the same thing.

"The Silver lancers would design special broomsticks designed for flying with heavy weight. They attach a chain to two or more of them and carry us around," Remus said quietly.

"How long were you captured for?" Tonks asked.

"Twelve days."

"I'm so sorry," Tonks said, her heart going out to him. "How did they get you?"

"I was looking for work in Romania. Charlie Weasley works there, thought I'd visit him."

"What happened then?" Harry asked.

"Their ICOP wizards seized me when I entered the country. I didn't know their Runic Circle could sense the Lycan Curse. It appears that their new regime has made Werewolves illegal in Romania. Within the hour the Lancers came, and offered them a tidy sum. They broke my wand too. I've been using Miss Nymphadora's Fwooper feather on Cedar. It's a bit wonky, but I get by."

'She loaned out Jon's wand, to a stranger?' Harry thought. The Tonks he knew simply would not do that. Was their thing happening already? Harry's stomach clenched in uncertainty.

"We can make you a new wand, we have a few requests lined up already, Ser Remus," Jon nodded.

"What?" Remus asked, confused.

"We're Ollivander's apprentices," Harry explained. "Believe me, we need to get as much real top class wands out as soon as possible. We'd be happy to help," Harry said halfheartedly. He was beginning to dislike this man, through no fault of Remus'. It was all on his own personal agenda.

"Can I suggest a combination?"

"Sure," Harry said.

"Hair from a white wolf, braided with hair from my alter ego, on Silver Fir," Remus said confidently. "Full bough, no sanding, twelve inches." Harry and Jon repeated the combination to themselves a few times.
"Was that your previous wand?" Harry asked.

"No, not at all. I just had a strong inclination right at that moment to tell you that," Remus shrugged.

"Interesting combination. You wish to be able to counter your Lycan curse with a Wolf themed wand?" Jon asked.

Remus looked at Jon strangely. "Yes, actually. I believe that the wand will counter balance the curse. Hopefully, if my theory is correct, I can at least suppress the blood lust. Or the combination fails and I have a nice stick to play fetch with."

"You will need blood of an enemy to polish this wand," Jon said. "I believe blood spilled unwillingly is the final element for Elite wands."

"Elite wands?" Remus asked, fascinated.

"Wands that are unique to the wielder, custom weapons that are superior to All-purpose wands." Jon stepped back and drew his Diablo claw on Threstral wingbone. "This is an elite wand." With a flick of his wrist it turned into the Claymore sword. "This cut through the original lock like butter."

Remus watched the gleaming sword in Jon's hand. "I'm a lucky man, then. You could have put me out of this misery easily," Remus pointed at the cage.

"I Walk In The Light," Jon said solemnly. Remus regarded the young man with acute interest now.

"A Black that will not turn to the Dark?" Remus muttered. "Very peculiar." Harry resisted correcting him about Sirius. Now was not the time.

Tonks coughed.

"A male Black, that is," Remus corrected himself. "Apologies, Miss Tonks."

"The Ollivander Family has never produced a Dark Wizard, or so I am told," Jon explained.

"You know; that could be true. All records of the Sacred Twenty Eight claim the Ollivanders were an ancient family of smiths that never went rogue, or brought any scandal to their House. Gemma having you with Regulus Black is as pretty far reaching as it gets."

Jon raised his eyebrow.

"I seem to have my foot permanently stuck in my mouth. Sorry, Jon," Remus raised both palms in apology. "Harry, after dinner, you can put me in. I've a few potions to help me sleep. Miss Tonks, you may use whatever means to topple the cage in the morning to unlock me, as you see fit."

"Alright," Tonks said hesitantly. "The Fish and Chips are getting cold. And I could whip up a cottage pie pretty fast. Come on in, before I freeze."

After dinner was finished and Remus and Tonks enjoyed a tumbler of Whiskey, Remus slowly got to his feet. He focused his attention to the west, staring directly through the wall. "It's time for Mr. Hyde," he sighed. "Might you have an old rug, and a bathrobe that you will not miss?" Remus asked his hosts. These items were brought for him. Remus changed in the bathroom, donning the bathrobe and wrapping the old dusty rug around him like a blanket. "Water," he coughed. "Bring me a couple buckets and I'll fill it from the taps. I vaguely remember being fed and watered... I was content for a while. Maybe in another life I was somebody's pet!"
Nobody laughed at this attempt of a joke.

Jon and Harry filled a bucket each and offered to carry it for him. The night was frighteningly cold as they walked across to the Stable House.

Remus went inside, and hesitated when he saw the gleaming silver cage. His whole mannerism deflated. "This is for the best," he reinforced, straightening his shoulders once more. "Come Harry, what you are doing for me is a great service. Thank you in advance. Put the cage on its side."

Harry levitated the cage and rest it smoothly on its side. Tonks looked sad as she slid open the massive dead bolt below the trapdoor. Remus got on all fours, spread the heavy rug on the inside of the cage wall so he wouldn't touch it more than he had to.

"Here," Remus picked up something frozen on the floor of the cage. It was a clump of bloody Werewolf hair. "For the wand project."

Harry took it and put it into a pocket. He felt terrible doing this, locking Remus in a cage. Looking at his friends, he knew they felt the same.

"Tonks, a dozen boiled eggs in the morning and some fresh water and I should be fine, if you can. Do not come within arms length towards the cage. And thanks, once again. You can lock it now."

Tonks came forward slowly and locked the trapdoor with the silver lock. Remus curled up on the rug, gripping tightly to the bars with the rug as insulation. "Put it right side up, I'm ready."

Harry gently maneuvered the cage to the upright position. Remus stood up in the cage, looking at his feet. "Can you tie a rope to the buckets and leave it in arms reach? When I feel thirsty, I will figure out how to pull the buckets close. Miss Tonks, the spell to create a window illusion is *Demum Speculo,*" Remus said sadly. "Can you please put it there," he pointed towards the western wall of the barn. "It lasts only a few hours, but it should be enough for me to get settled in."

Tonks sniffed a couple times as she cast the spell on the wall. The moon was now visible behind the clouds in the night sky. Remus began to cough, loud, racking coughs. "Thank you, everyone," Remus said. He opened a potion bottle and swallowed it down. He sat down with legs crossed, facing the moon. "Lock the doors behind you. All of them."

"I'm sorry," Harry said truthfully. This was tearing him up inside. Remus did this willingly, even though he was imprisoned like a zoo animal in this same cage not even a full month ago. Every full moon, for *years,* he had to endure something like this.

"You were in Gryffindor, correct?" Jon stated.

"Yes."

"I can tell," Jon nodded gravely. "Fare thee well, Ser Remus," Jon bowed slightly. "We shall be in touch." The Crow's Vambrace stepped out the massive barn and Jon shut the heavy doors with the long two by four length of lumber. Tonks was sniffling as they walked back to the house. She took a deep breath and composed herself.

"No way for a man to live," Tonks said sadly. Jon picked up his broomstick that was leaning up against the wall.

"Agreed. It is a very unfortunate state. Stay safe, milady," Jon gave her a hug.

Harry approached and hugged her after. "We have to go. Stay safe," Harry said sincerely.
Tonks nodded, distraught. "I'll owl you two tomorrow," she promised. "Be careful on the way back."

Harry leapt into the sky, hovering while Jon mounted his broom. The both of them put on their apprentice masks to protect their face against the chill. With a few final waves and a round of goodbyes, they two boys shot off towards Hogwarts.

Harry woke up minutes to nine the following morning. There was a post from Tonks.

'Our guest was nearly frozen in the morning. Had to stun on release. I have him safely secured in the master suite. Showing split personality traits, similar to last time. He should fully recover by Tuesday. Good luck today!'

Harry smiled and thanked Hedwig for getting his post. Hedwig sat on top of her cage, watching him. "Wake me up in fifteen minutes," he yawned sleepily and turned back into bed.

"Harry! What are you doing still in bed!" Ron came charging up the stairs. Harry turned slowly. Ron yanked the sheet off.

"Mwha?" Harry said blearily.

"It's almost half past eleven! Ginny asked me to check up on you!"

Harry shot up in bed. He jumped on the floor and completely missed the bed rug, and the shock of the cold stone surged through his spine. "Yow!" Harry literally jumped six feet in the air.

Ron froze as Harry collapsed in a heap on his bed.

"Mate- how did you do that..." Ron's jaw was detached.

"Kick those over please," Harry begged, pointing at his trainers. Ron tossed them on the bed for him. "Didn't know it was so late! Can you let the others know I will be there in the changing room in ten minutes?"

"Make it five!" Ron pointed a finger at him and dashed back down the steps.

Ten minutes later Harry came skidding into the changing rooms, his Quicksilver in hand.


"Yeah."

"Those are the fastest propulsion brooms available," she stated.

"I think they're pretty fast, yeah."

Angelina huffed. "Potter, those aren't Quidditch brooms. They are designed for long distance travel."

Harry shrugged.

"As a keeper, you need to be agile, and able to change direction quickly."

Harry saw where she was getting at. A seeker may need a quick burst of forward speed much more than the keeper. "I got this," Harry said confidently, pulling on his gloves and then adding the keeper vambrace from Gryffindor's gear trunk. The rest of the gang came over to inspect the broom.
"This is a heavily rear-distributed stabilizer propulsion model," Fred said. "Straight-line launch and top end speed of one hundred and eighty six kilos per hour! Brakes are like non existent," George said. "You planning to punch through on a Keeper-counter?"

"That's a Tornados' tactic, Potter," Alicia Spinnet laughed. "Too bad they are only a mid table team!"

"No, I'm planning to pick up the slack when these two don't protect our... delicate Quaffle handlers," Harry nodded at the twins.

"Cor- he's late and cheeky. We're offensive beaters, you know that. Ollie could have handled it just fine. Crying about buckling under pressure already, Potter?"

"Unlike you two, I make Quidditch look easy, gentlemen. This is what an Immortal Hero does for fun," Harry shrugged nonchalantly. Angelina used her hand to stifle her laugh at the two red-heads.

"Ouch," Fred said.

"Nice," George nodded in defeat.

"Conditions?" Harry asked Angelina.

"Snow, a lot of glare off the Ravenclaw tower windows. If we get the southern hoops, I think they would attack from that angle to blind you."

"Got it," Harry nodded.

"Let's get acclimatized. Mount up!" Angelina ordered. The team took to the field and warmed up for ten minutes. Harry saw the students filling up the stands. He didn't spot Tonks in the visitor section. She must be still guarding Remus.

Harry felt a bit of panic. Tonks was really affected by Remus' circumstances. Jon had a point. He had to get them away from each other or it was all over before he even had a chance to begin. Sometimes he hated knowing future events. It made him believe he could change everything through manipulation. Long term strategy was never one of his stronger points.

Before he even knew it, both sides were hovering above the pitch, Angelina Johnson and Andrew Bole listening attentively to Madame Hooch's instructions. Lee Jordan's voice came over the megaphone.

"And Good Day to everybody out here on this chilly Saturday! Welcome to the first match of the season, the eternal rivalry- Gryffindor vs Slytherin! Alongside me assisting with the color commentary is the new kid on the block- give it up for Jon 'Defense Against Defense Against the Dark Arts' Black!"

There was a cheer and a round of applause from the crowd. Harry looked across to the commentator booth. Jon seemed to be quite a popular student. He was simply dressed in his white shirt, Gryffindor tie, with only the Hogwarts pullover as protection against the cold. His hair blew free in the chilly breeze.

"Hello, fellow students. Honored guests." Jon's voice joined in without emotion.

"Aren't you cold?" Lee Jordan laughed.

"No. This is wonderful."
"Alright then. Make that Jon 'Defense Against Defense Against the Dark Arts aaaaaand Hypothermia' Black! Bell and Bole are poised and ready for the Quaffle toss! Katie Bell has a 14 out of 15 stat record for first possession! Bole doesn't have a chance! She is lightning at tip off!"

"The toss goes to Bell of House Gryffindor." The Gryffindor section cheered.

"Yes it does! 15 out of 16! Tip off specialist stats we're seeing here, folks!"

"Challenge on Miss Spinnet from behind. This is allowed?" A boo came from the Gryffindor section.

"It isn't! First foul!" Slytherin's supporters whistled the call.

"An act of intent. A sign of things to come- the Cowards."

"That it is! Slytherin form up defensively!"

The Gryffindor team executed a perfect set play of four passes and a dummy catch. Angelina swooped down and caught the defense unaware.

"And Angelina sinks it in the middle hoop! 10-0!"

"Slytherin's vanguard was decimated into a feast for maggots."

"Um, Yes! What he said!"

Draco Malfoy made a sweeping dive towards Harry's hoops. Harry glanced in his line of sight. He definitely would have noticed if the Snitch was in his vicinity. Draco changed direction and was charging directly towards him in front of the posts. Ginny was quick on his heels.

"Is it a feint? Or Has Draco spotted the snitch?!" Lee cried. "Gryffindor's new Seeker, First year Ginny Weasley is giving chase!"

Draco wasn't feinting. He was simply charging Harry down. Harry hovered protectively in front of the three goal hoops. He continued tracking the Quaffle, ignoring Draco's chicken run.

"It's a ram! Ladies Gentlemen we are witnessing Durmstrang's The Viking's Lance maneuver!"

Harry wasn't impressed and Draco eventually had to veer off before he slammed into the goal hoops.

"A Lion does not waver when the baby snake hisses."

"So true! So True! Uh Oh! Here comes Slytherin's first attack on Gryffindor's new keeper, Harry Potter! Slytherin's attack strategy assigns Bole to escort their top goalscorer, Montgomery 'Canon-Ball' Montague as a Wizard-guard!"

The two largest Slytherin seventh years rode in tandem from the angle Angelina warned Harry about. The glare off the windows was shining right into his eyes.

"Forge can't Bludger him off! Forge number two is coming in for a body check! Montgomery Montague shields the Quaffle strongly and deflects the shoulder barge! Ouch! Katie's attempted steal is intercepted by her opposite number Montell Montague! Good brotherly combo that!"

Harry swerved left and right, randomly hesitating before his three hoops in preparation for the shot off Montgomery's powerful right arm. Fred and George were scrambling to get back in formation to protect him, but the three Slytherin attackers and their beater Bole had excellent flight trajectory and
were bearing down on him, unimpeded.

"It's four on one!" Lee wailed. Montgomery executed perfect technique and slung the quaffle while simultaneously whipping his broom around. Harry had never seen a Quaffle blur that fast. Harry instinctively darted to his left.

There was a loud SMACK and Harry's right palm was ringing in pain. His muscles trembled with the shock running through his arm. Time appeared to come to a standstill as his breath misted against the back of Ollie's glove. At that speed, it would have broken his face.

The four Slytherins flew past in celebration, sure it had gone in.

"SAVE!" Lee shouted over the megaphone.

"He is the Light that Brings the Dawn. The Shield that Guards the Realms of Men."

"The 'Realms of Men'? Really? It's only Quidditch, Black!"

"Pass it off, Potter!" Angelina's shrill scream broke Harry's momentary lapse in concentration. He launched it towards her. Angelina caught it and the three Gryffindor girls swerved in a synchronized u turn. Harry's heart began to race. Adrenaline ran through his veins as his team's counterattack sped towards the opposite end of the pitch. They scored easily without the Slytherins in proper defensive formation.

Wow. If this is the adrenaline Ollie and Ron went through, I've been playing the wrong position this whole time.

"Alright! Defence!" he encouraged his mates as the Slytherins were once again on the attack.

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Harry trudged through the light snow on the pitch. The noise of the crowd was nothing compared to the ringing in his ears. He felt as if he was struck in the head with Jon's boxing gloves, or better yet, Tonks' high kick to the ear. He stared at the immediate path in front of him, lost in a trance. His teammates were a dozen or so yards behind him, being swarmed by the Gryffindor supporters.

Harry had slipped free, mindlessly putting one foot in front the other as he made his way towards the slightly warmer conditions of the Gryffindor changing room.

Ron ran up to him. He realized Harry wasn't in the crowd celebrating with them.

"You all right, Harry?" Ron said, concerned, yet full of infectious energy. The mob was chasing after them, he could hear the chant and their rushing footsteps.

"I think so," Harry nodded.

"This has never happened before!" Ron said excitedly, out of breath. "Bill and Charlie are going to go absolutely nutter! Oh shit, here they come!" The entire Gryffindor house had sprinted upon them from behind. Fred, George and Alicia were the last to reach and literally threw themselves on top the swarm of heavily bundled up students that crushed around Harry.

Harry could have sworn that George's knee guard was pressing painfully into his neck. There was a girlish scream as Cormac had to frantically grab Alicia by her hips because she was falling head over heels into the mosh pit. Colin Creevy was somewhere in the mud, almost trampled by the crush. So was his mate, Jean Marc, but both boys didn't care. They contributed relentlessly to the raucous house chant; regardless of potentially being trampled by seventy-something Gryffindors.
Harry himself could not have believed it. Twelve catch and returns, sixteen blocks, one steal, and one kick out. Thirty saves on thirty shots on target. Even to his vast and articulate Quidditch knowledge, that was impossible.

"Harry, you were a fucking demon out there!" Angelina cried in joy. She grabbed him in a headlock. Out of all the Gryffindors, Angelina had the most poise and elegance of all his housemates. This unexpected scandalous behaviour brought him back to reality.

"Erm... thanks," Harry grinned. He didn't know what he was feeling inside. This was impossible.

By the time Angelina managed to kick all non-players out of the changing room, it was snowing heavily.

"Ladies and gentlemen. Ollie wanted records to be broken," Angelina said solemnly as they geared down.

The team all looked up to her. Her face cracked open in the widest smile Harry had ever seen on her face.

"We bloody shattered them!"

There was a rousing cheer from the team, with fists in the air.

"Two hundred and ninety to zero!" Angelina screamed in victory.

"Zero!" George screamed.

"Zero!" Fred chorused.

Harry smiled at their antics. He unstrapped the leather reinforced vambraces on his arm. His hands were smarting something terrible. Montgomery Montague and his younger brother Montell both had a rocket of a shot. When he took off Ollie's gloves and protective Vambraces, he hissed in pain.

Both hands were swollen and painful, and there were two large black and blue bruises on his forearms, the force of impact still managing to do this much damage even under the Quidditch protective gear. It hurt to even try to make a fist.

"Yowza," Alicia said, spotting his hands. "Katie! The rub!" she called. Katie looked across. She frowned at her friend's concerned expression.

"I'm on it," Katie said, digging in Angelina's Quidditch bag. When she came to use the healing balm she looked at Harry seriously.

"This is going to smart like a bloody hell, but it will stop it from keeping you awake overnight in pain. Hold still."

The balm was hot on his hands. Katie tended to the welts and swollen joints. Harry flinched suddenly when she pressed a spot on his right hand. "Crap. You might have broken one of the metacarpals. Pomfrey time. Skip, I'm taking him to the Hospital wing," Katie said over her shoulder towards Angelina.

"Smashing job, Potter. Keep it up. I'll see you later," Angelina said as they walked out. When they
were alone, Harry cradled his right arm in his left hand.

"You don't have to walk with me," Harry smirked. "I know where it is."

"It's team etiquette that someone walks with the injured to the medical wing," Katie countered with a smile.

"Oh, since when?" Even in the previous life he had never heard of that. Probably because he was the one usually knocked unconscious. Thinking back, people must have thought he was a soft-bellied little flower to be fainting and passing out every other month.

"Since I said so," she chummily walked sideways into his shoulder, pushing him playfully to the side. Harry returned the favour. "And... I wanted to. That's what counts, actually."

"Fair enough."

"Good game. I had my doubts. You're a bit .. on the slight side."

Considering that Ollie was over six foot, that was an understatement. "I have to bulk up a bit to take this on a regular basis."

"Oh I don't know. The Montague brothers train with a professional shooting coach. But they're dumb. They never went for a lay off."

"True. It's like they wanted to score right through me, each and every time," Harry agreed.

"Well there was the couple of times Carrington got a few trick shots off. That kick was probably save of the match!"

"You're a fucking cheat, Potter!" Draco shouted at him from across the hall. Harry turned at his voice, but kept walking.

"Don't mind him. He's a sore loser," Katie tugged at his arm. Harry nodded as he ignored Draco.

"And who is this? Oh- another half blood. Why don't you go on off and open some boxes or something?" Draco taunted, making a figure eight with his finger. Crabbe and Goyle laughed at Katie. Katie looked straight ahead, increasing her pace. Her eyes began to water.

"Yeah. Go and cry into your little Diary," Draco said. Katie doubled the pace, but Harry was no longer walking with her. He had frozen still.

"I'm going to give you a fucking haircut, Malfoy," Harry declared.

"Is that so? With what, your shoelaces?" Crabbe and Goyle laughed at Malfoy's joke with synchronized idiocy. "Oooh, I'm scared!"

Harry shrugged his left sleeve free from the wrist. With his right hand he pulled out the wand from
A bit off the top," Harry whispered darkly. With the practiced motion Jon helped drill into him, he spun the wand around his wrist and snapped the massive scythe down in front of Draco's face with a fluid motion. A chunk of blonde hair fell across Draco's nose. Draco flinched a lifetime too late.

Crabbe and Goyle were long gone by that time.

Harry slowly turned his wrist and rest the flat of the Scythe's blade on Draco's shoulder. Draco whimpered, not daring to move a millimeter. The blade radiated a dark heat against the back of his neck.

Katie covered her mouth with both hands. Draco inched forward, trying to avoid the feel of the blade against his collar.

"Listen to me, you little shit," Harry whispered. He was so close he could smell the minty potion on Draco's breath. "I will cut you if you, or Lucius, tries anything like that shit again." Harry delicately maneuvered the blade against Draco's collar. It cut cleanly through the material. Draco's hands went up slowly in surrender.

Harry finally looked at Malfoy in his face, the Red glow searing from his eyes. "Do you hear me, Draco?"

Draco nodded approximately fifteen times in rapid succession. Tears were rolling quietly down his face.

"Say it," Harry commanded, silky smooth.

"I hear you," Draco said. "Please," he begged.

After ten seconds, Harry released the magic on the wand. "You may go. Speak of this to no one." Draco took a few steps away from him, then broke out into a run.

"Ammm... Harry?" Katie said hesitantly. "What was that?"

"My custom wand," Harry said simply, making sure his eyes were back to normal before he turned around.

"Fucking awesome," Katie whispered.

Harry shrugged. "I hate that guy."

"No shit. I would never have guessed."

"Over the hols; his father was the one who was working with Michael. He tried to plant a cursed object in your purse," Harry explained. "I nicked it before you could open it, which is why you were casting *Alectrono* obsessively. You were trying to open the package he wanted you to use."

"So that's it. I did have some strange nightmares about Lucius Malfoy. Now I know why..." Katie grumbled. She came up closer to him. "Hm. How many times is that now? What...so... you're like my fairy tale hero, then?" she joked.

"I ..." Harry shrugged. "I don't like seeing things go down and... no one stands up to them," Harry pointed over his shoulder as they continued on to the hospital wing. 

"The 'Hero of Wizardry' is a heavy title to live up to," Katie teased. She looped her arm around his
elbow, and leaned a bit into him. They walked together like this for a couple halls before she sighed and continued speaking. "Don't stop though. I don't know... what might've happened to me. Just keep doing what you do best, yeah?"

Harry looked across to her. Katie smiled at him. He ducked his head in embarrassment as they walked on. They walked a few more steps when he felt her lips on the side of his face. Katie had kissed him tenderly on his cheek.

"Thanks, anyway," she said gratefully. They reached the front of the Hospital Wing's double doors. She embraced him in a firm hug. "Let's get your hand checked out."
Chapter Summary

Jon continues to train Harry how to become a stronger fighter. Master Ollivander gets clearance for the boys to leave school to go to South Hampton. The Crows are informed that their reputation is making the rounds in the mercenary underworld from a 'former' A.K. Gloryhound.

"Your footwork is adequate, maybe still a bit heavy, but..." Jon said, breathing heavily. He lowered the heavy mitts on both of his hands. Harry knew better than to immediately drop his guard, he kept his World Wizarding Gear gloves up and defending his face. He had received enough sucker punches in October to still be caught off-guard in November. "Your pad work is superb. For a beginner, you have extremely fast hands." Jon pulled off the padded leather gloves.

Finally! Harry thought. There was such a thing as positive reinforcement from the Lord Commander of the Night's watch. Harry took that as a great compliment. Jon always told him he was weak. Continuously hearing his lack of physical strength at this age and how shameful it was drove him harder and harder in Jon's training. When classes were finished, Jon was quick to nod upwards to the seventh floor any time he spotted Harry relaxing too much.

The room of requirement magically converted into an Archery and Sparring Yard when Jon conducted these sessions. Presently Harry and Jon were standing on a large patch of dusty, pebbly ground encircled by a heavy rope. The rough surface definitely did not make for soft landings, as Harry learned the hard way. The Ring of Life, as Jon named it, was where squires were either gloriously blessed to be cut out for life as a Ranger and Knightly duties, or damnation struck them into service to the Watch through other trades.

Harry never complained, but getting beaten up during drills wasn't exactly fun. However, he was definitely getting much more agile, physically stronger, and learning a lot of techniques.

They were surrounded by different types of armored dummies propped on wooden stakes. Against one wall were racks of training weapons. Against the other were large striking bags made of leather, hanging from a crossbeam. Those stations were called the Gallows of Bliss. Disturbingly, they did look like a hangman's gallows; the sacks' necks were broken, and lifeless.

When Harry asked him why they were called that when they started training, Jon simply said that those tough, ugly, leather bags were the 'closest thing to soft bodies his men were permitted to embrace'.

"Do not be alarmed, Harry of House Hallow. Sure enough, they yearned for their soft embrace."

"And why would they embrace these... things?" Harry had asked.

"They are our Wenches." Jon rubbed the punching bag tenderly, as if fondly remembering an old flame.
"What?!" Harry barked out in laughter.

"The usual drill was three hundred strikes on alternate afternoons. Most novices cannot reach anywhere close, and hold on to the bags for dear life while they catch their breath. The rules stated that they must be caressed, touched, and kept wet without fail. If the trainer sees that you have abandoned your lovemaking for more than a few seconds, you enter the Ring Of Life to be used as Striking demonstration for Masters at Arms." Jon gallantly offered his arm towards the patch of ground circled by the heavily stained rope. "They must come back and continue, which is harder after the wooden blade's teaching. Sweat and tears, and yes, even blood, whet the Wenches' lust."

"That's ...torture," Harry said in amazement.

"Either way, the Brothers would become strong," Jon shrugged.

"I'm not doing that, so don't get any ideas," Harry said vehemently. Jon gave him a smile that Harry had never seen before in the four months he knew Jon. It was almost, angelic.

That memory made the hairs on the back of Harry's arms rise with goosebumps. Harry was warped back into the present.

"I think we can do some disarming drills now. From our last mission, I believe that Wizards are far too relaxed, even when on guard duty. The presence of this... magic," Jon flicked out his Dragon Heartstring on Olive wand; "totally overshadows that we are still human, and easily dispatched by non magical means. You told me that each time you and Tonks squared off, she aimed her weapon at your forehead, correct?"

"Yeah. Most Light magic-wizards aim to the head for Stupefy, or some other non-fatal attack. Dark wizards, usually do this," Harry drew and jabbed his wand downwards towards the torso area. "Crucio, the killing curse and most other fatal attacks need aggression to empower the magic. Dark Wizards won't 'stick you up', they just draw and that's it, you're out."

"Figured as much. Ellewyn-Sare and the mages in France simply attacked from the onset. When I stopped Flint from drawing on Neville, I believed that he would not have hesitated either. It is a good tactic, actually," Jon nodded.

"You didn't hesitate in the Pub either," Harry remarked. Thinking of it, that guy got his arm severed as well. Maybe he should talk to Alexandria about how a severed limb would usually be magically re-connected. Understanding how these injuries are healed would get him closer to figuring out how to attack Oliver's unique situation.

"The one who drew on me was unstable. The other two were open to parley. I had to make an example of him. That works best, in my experience, to stop an all out melee."

"Or just drawing the sword probably did the trick," Harry grinned.

"That too," Jon shrugged. "In this world, no one uses swords anymore. 'Tis a shame. Anyway. What I want to show you is a technique men of the Watch use to disarm Knife wielders. Anybody could hide and draw a knife, the young, the old, woman or man. I think wand wielders could be disarmed just as easily, or even easier."

Jon assumed Kicking Maai: the distance between Harry and Jon was exactly their combined arm-spans apart. Jon took up a neutral standing position.

"Draw and point your wand at my face, half speed."
Harry did so. Jon immediately slipped to Harry's right using a combination of a duck and a shuffle step.

"One," Jon snapped his hands upwards. He grabbed the wrist with both hands. "Two!" Jon swung a dummy kick to Harry's groin. "Three," Jon extended Harry's elbow with a sharp yank, and applied pressure to the back of Harry's right shoulder. "From here, an elbow to the temple, or simply-" Jon wrenched the weapon out of his hands. "Grabbing the wand should do it. Remember, in a fight, desperation would make things unpredictable. You try."

Jon allowed Harry to practice the motion on him multiple times. When Jon showed him a few different variations and Harry was confident of the technique, he put his hands on his hips, thinking about Jon's duel with Susan Bones.

"I think I got it. But the move you used on Susan was much flashier."

"Yes, that takedown is a throw that floors the opponent. I rather not attempt this on you upon this ground."

"Change it," Harry said simply.

"How?"

"Wish the ground to be...I don't know, mattresses or something. You're in control."

Jon blinked in confusion. "I will never get accustomed to magic. Alright." Jon closed his eyes a second. When he opened them there was a Hogwarts-soft mattress on the ground. "Wow."

Harry nodded. "You'll get there." Jon frowned. Magic was overwhelming at times. He continued the training.

"The arm throw counters an overhead attack, usually a mace or short axe. The balance and footwork is complex, but it can be used against a drawn wand... about the chest area and higher. Demonstrate how a Dark Wizard might draw and attack, full speed."

Harry drew his wand from his pocket and thrust it forward as if he was throwing a hook. Jon slipped inside, grabbed the wrist with his left hand and around Harry's bicep with his right arm. Jon bent over and used his hip as a fulcrum to toss Harry over his back. Harry saw the room spin about him as he fell in a heap on the mattress.

"Blimey," he breathed. He stared at the ceiling of the Room of Requirement, catching his breath from being flung about like a rag doll.

"This, is what the Master at Arms refer to as the 'Dead Man's Gamble'. Do not get within striking distance of an armed opponent unless you have no choice. Especially within grappling range. Vambraces and heavy plate make this grip almost impossible. But against young girls, easy game."

"Are you insinuating zat I am a young girl, mon chevalier immortel?" Harry said in a horrible girlish French accent on the mattress.

"With that long hair, you could pass for a fair maiden," Jon replied in a contemplative tone, rubbing his chin in an exaggerated motion.

"Shut up. Your hair is longer," Harry laughed as he got up.

"My jaw is harder. And I have a stronger neck. Have you been doing the pull ups on the shower
curtain rod before your bath?"

"Yeah. I'm up to thirteen now."

"Let's see." Jon snapped his fingers and a wide chin-up frame materialized. Jon jumped up and caught the bar in an underhand grip. Harry did the same a foot next to him.

At fifteen, Harry could do no more. He dropped down, resigned to his weakness.

"By next calendar year, you will be able to do this." Jon demonstrated a chin-up directly into a press up with one smooth motion. He lowered himself down into the chin-up starting position, then repeated the process. "A strong body, with a sound mind, will make stressful situations much easier. You are mentally battle hardened, but your body is not resilient enough. Your physical needs to be on par with your magical skill. Do not depend too much on magic alone; as I have also learned not to underestimate this new magical world. I am attending my studies very seriously, and wish to learn as much as I can. One mind, any weapon."

Harry thought that sounded familiar. Where did he hear that before? One mind, any weapon.

"Speaking of weapons, did I tell you I cut off some of Draco's hair with the scythe after the match?" Harry grinned. Jon turned on Harry.

"He stood still and allowed you to do this?" Jon asked angrily.

"I caught him by surprise. The strike was swift. He was scared shitless."

"Harry, our bladed weapons are far too dangerous to be swinging at someone's head. These weapons can cut through Dragon hide!"

"I had it under control, mate."

"If you were off by this," Jon put his index and thumb a few inches apart. "He would have been dead. You would take that risk?"

Harry frowned. "No, I guess I shouldn't," he said softly. "But! The Scythe feels so... attuned to me. It's like, I can't miss."

Jon clasped his hands behind his back. "I felt the same way about my weapon. It makes me feel, overly confident, Harry," Jon said solemnly. "We have been having recent successes, and vast monetary reward. Remember this same pattern over the summer? Our good fortune spikes; and then-" Jon slashed his hand down like a guillotine. "Lockhart happened. Miss Penelope and Miss Hermione were attacked."

"I understand what you mean. An up and down ride of good fortune and luck, then ... I almost die in a classroom against a Voldemort-possessed ponce. Oliver just lost his arm after our successful raid in Salles."

Harry and Jon were silent for a few seconds.

"We must be vigilant. Keep your acquaintances safe, Harry. The pattern appears to be recurring."

"Yeah..." Harry trailed off. Jon sighed.

"For now, let us continue the shoulder toss."

All Harry could think about while tossing and being tossed was how Tonks was doing. Would she
be the next victim to counterbalance their recent successes?

Friday afternoon around half three Jon and Harry awaited Master Ollivander at the main gates to Hogwarts. It was a clear, cold afternoon. Both Harry and Jon were heavily bundled up as they sat on an old base of a broken statue that was covered with frozen moss. Jon got bored quickly and decided to use his Niffler on Oak wand to cast the Spade charm and dig the cold ground. He foraged for some dry bark and twigs and put them in the small fire pit. Within minutes a comfortable fire was burning merrily at their feet.

After a short time had passed, Master Ollivander came walking up the path from Hogsmeade, his breath misting in the afternoon cold.

"Ah, thank goodness. Good afternoon lads. Great idea." Mr Ollivander approached the fire and stooped low to warm his hands.

Jon and Harry stood up and they greeted the Sage Wizard. "Good afternoon to you as well, Mr. Ollivander."

"All is well?" Ollivander asked politely.

"Yes, and yourself?" Jon replied.

"Good. Cold. I forgot how long the walk from Hogsmeade to the gates is. Should have doubled up on the gloves."

"You do not use magic to... keep warm?" Jon trailed off lamely. Ollivander chuckled.

"Over time, I believe that the ordinary wizard loses this aspect of their humanity. Every slight inconvenience, every little thing that makes us feel the wonder of nature and the fullness of life, we turn to magic. Have you failed to notice how older wizards, such as Dumbledore, only draw their wands when absolutely necessary? I, myself, hardly dip into my pocket for it."

Harry nodded in understanding. The experts didn't see need to magic everything.

"We are human first, and magicians after," Jon said flatly.

"Exactly, dear lad." Ollivander offered Jon a rare grandfatherly smile. He pointed towards the fire. "Did you know, I was wishfully thinking for a real fire to warm my hands while walking up," he chuckled at the two lads. "And voila, here we are, men sitting around a fire. The basis of the first council of human civilization. Fire, as a servant, brings people together."

"Powerful magic, indeed," Jon said sagely, poking the fire. Harry felt a bit left out. All this talk of sitting around a fire with others reminded him that there was a lot of normal things he was yet to experience. He had never gone camping before.

"Yes. But your fire spell, Jon..." Ollivander frowned.

"What of it?"

"It appears to be Dragon fire. Look closely at the base."

Harry and Jon inspected the fire. At the bottom of the kindle it curled and churned, instead of flamed and flickered.

"What does this mean?" Harry asked. He had never heard of any magic like this.
"I don't know. You may need to experiment in a safe environment. I apologize for being late, by the way. Let's meet with Minerva," Ollivander straightened. Jon and Olivander turned towards the path to the school.

"Jon."

He stopped, looking back at Harry.

"That's a Dragon heartstring wand. You're immune to fire. And you're immune to the cold, as far as I can tell. Your Enflamare spell also casts Dragon fire..."

"Yes... and?" Jon encouraged.

"Well, those are kinda... those are traits of Dragons."


Ollivander looked between the two boys.

"Harry, maybe your deductions can help us when we need to get the Onyx hide. Jon, don't worry about it," Ollivander said as he kicked the overturned soil over the small fire. "We have to make a few stops, faster we start, the better." Harry hustled to catch up and the three of them made their way up to the castle.

"Come!" Professor McGonagall replied to the knock on her office door. Garrick Ollivander came in and took off his hat and coat.

"Good afternoon, Minerva," he said cordially. "Thank you for seeing me. I know you are a busy woman."

"It is a pleasure to see you, Master Ollivander. Please, have a seat."

Ollivander took the chair offered, and crossed his legs. "So. All is well?"

"Things have been very, very strange. Did your lads tell you about the incident during the Dueling Tournament?"

"Which incident?" Garrick said, leaning in. The boys had informed him of the bloody duel, but he wanted to hear from another perspective.

"A seventh year student, Michael Ellewyn-Sare, turned on the school. It appears he was responsible for cursing Gilderoy Lockhart and other attacks on students. Oliver Wood, another seventh year, managed to interrogate him during the Duel, but Michael attacked and... he cut off his arm. With a Dark Curse. The Auror was also injured."

"Merlin," Ollivander said with just the right amount of distress and shock.

"Those two boys... they're so..." McGonagall shook her head, speechless. "With all the commotion going on with Michael fleeing and Oliver losing so much blood, those two boys calmly chased him down and within minutes captured him."

"You should have seen Severus' and the Auror's faces when they dumped Michael in front of them. I would have done anything for a photograph. I have never seen Severus so, dumbstruck is the only word I can think of. Utterly stupefied."

"I could only imagine. He has never struck me as someone who should be around children, but I'm sure Albus has his reasons."

"You are not alone in that regard, Master Ollivander. Full of promise, the two of them. Harry could aspire to be Auror material, once he maintains his grades and learns to control that temper, of course. Jon is humble and polite, yet... I believe we may have the first prodigal battle mage Hogwarts has ever seen. He just knows what to do when it comes to ... incidents like this. You must be very proud of him."

"I am. He has been like a blessing; a gift from the past. Having him in my life is a remedy to the pain I have been suffering for a long time..." Ollivander said gravely. And Harry has the Cloak of Invisibility, one of the fabled Deathly Hallows. Those two are full of secrets, he added silently. As with most things magical, patience and timing, is key to solving these mysteries.

"About Gemma, I am so sorry for your loss. She was such a sweet, even tempered girl."

McGonogall shuffled the papers on her desk. "She went missing around the same time the Potters went into hiding, I believe. Those times were dark, and no one knew what happened to those who disappeared."

"Yes. I searched for her for many years after." Ollivander crossed his arms. "I think I have never stopped, actually. Jon has put my search to rest."

"That is good to hear. Those two have become almost inseparable. And with the amount of trouble they seem to attract, it is almost as if history is repeating itself," she said with a hint of warning. Ollivander smiled, dismissing her suspicions.

"Do not fear, Minerva. My lads shall Walk In The Light," Ollivander said firmly.

In the quiet of the office, McGonagall could have sworn she heard a faint phoenix song emanating after those words. She leaned back in her chair, scrutinizing the Sage wand maker. Now she knew, after speaking with him at length, why those two boys held this wizard in such high regard. Besides Dumbledore, this wizard was the only man she knew who commanded such a presence, without even trying.

There definitely was more than meets the eye when it came to the friendly wand sage.

"So. The headmaster said that you wished for a room for your apprentices to use as a workshop, am I correct?" McGonagal asked.

"Yes. We will be using this weekend to get the tools necessary. Did he tell you about the conditions?"

"Yes, away from high traffic areas, and yet close to the Infirmary. I believe we have such the place. Come with me."

"How do you like it, lads?" Ollivander said fifteen minutes later.

"Um..." Harry stalled.
"We shall have it cleaned within the week. Its perfect. It will rival your workshop, Master Ollivander," said Jon.

The room was basically the entire tower behind the hospital wing. The narrow circular structure was initially a watchtower, with a sentry bell at the top. Its original purpose was to be the lookout for the rear of the castle. A spiraling staircase wound its way up the walls, the wooden banister rotten and in need of repair. Their voices echoed throughout the seven storeyed chamber. There was abandoned glass blowing equipment strewn at the far wall, with a forge and stone basin used for cooling.

The main area had various rusty and broken workbenches, tools, saws and mallets. The entire place was a graveyard of broken school furniture and bed parts. Apparently, it was a service workshop for the previous caretaker. Filch was more interested in cleaning and torture. Which made sense, since house elves could probably do fixing and maintenance faster than a wizard who knew nothing of muggle crafting or building.

Since Harry had never seen this place on the Marauder's Map, he believed that it was of little significance to his dad and his friends. Ollivander walked around, inspecting the remains.

"This tower is ventilated well, and those shelves would serve for a limited inventory. Everything else could go. Anyhow, here are the keys. Let's get going, I want to be in SouthHampton before five o'clock. The Antiques place closes at six. We'll go out the back." Ollivander pointed at a heavy door at the other side of the circular tower. Harry opened the door and a blast of cold air flew in, making a howling noise in the tall structure. They descended a staircase built into the exterior wall with a stone banister. The staircase circled upwards to the lookout seven or more storeys above. The three of them cautiously made their way down the slippery steps to the grounds below. "We need to go there and get the treadles." Ollivander unfolded two pieces of parchment and gave them one each.

"Here is the list. The owner of the antique shop is a muggle named Francis Otamendi. As part of your training, you will need to deal with different types of individuals, with and without magic. Francis is getting on with age, and I believe his young son takes over in the afternoon. You will need some Pounds sterling and good negotiation techniques to acquire the items on this list. I will wait for you at the wizard's pub a couple blocks in. You two Immortal heroes should be able to handle it."

Jon and Harry looked at each other, conveying the same message. Did Ollivander just crack a juvenile-level joke?

"His young son, you say? How old is he?" Harry asked, watching the item list. The treadle models were from the eighteenth century. He may not be an expert when it came to antiques, but these items weren't just decorative antiques. They were functional pieces used in fine crafting. Must be hard to keep them in good order.

"I would say probably twenty years old, could be slightly older."

"I know just the person to handle these negotiations," Harry winked. Harry summoned Shadow Wing, Rudolph and Tornado. The three threstrals jumped out of the forest and dived smoothly into a graceful bow in front of Harry. The three of them mounted and a few minutes later they were having tea on the first floor kitchenette at the Clan House with a tightly bundled up Nymphadora Tonks.

"You what?" Tonks asked. "You're taking me out to South-Hampton?"

"Yup. Need your help in getting some stuff."

"Me?" Tonks asked, pressing a hand against her house coat.
"Yes," Jon smiled at her.

"This is a surprise... short notice to say the least," she grumbled, patting her hair (which looked tousled and slept in).

"No time like the present' a wise person once told me," Harry smiled. Tonks made a face at Harry.

"You can't go into a muggle place looking like that," Tonks said. "Go buy some clothes at Hogsmeade and come back. I'll be ready by then. Ollivander feel free to make yourself at home."

She spun on her heel and went into her room.

Jon and Harry mounted once again and made the short flight towards Hogsmeade proper. They landed behind Gladrags and walked through the narrow alley between the buildings towards the main street. They stepped unto the wooden patio and pushed open the door. A Christmas-themed chime rang through the shop.

"Good evening young men," a mature woman greeted them. "How may I help you?"

"We need clothes that would not stand out among muggles," Harry said simply.

"Ah. We have just the thing. Come this way, please."

Minutes later Jon and Harry inspected themselves in the mirror. Jon was wearing a Black leather jacket, on top of a black turtleneck, faded denim jeans and black motorcycle boots. He also fascinated by a pair of black shades, and spontaneously bought them. Harry was wearing a heavy white woolen sweater, a bowling hat and a dark grey trench coat. A fashionable heavy scarf protected his neck.

"You boys look dashing," the shop clerk, Mrs. Johnstone, gushed.

While they were paying for their goods, Harry added two more shades to the bill. They thanked Mrs. Johnstone for her help and within minutes were back at the front door to the mansion once again.

Tonks greeted them downstairs in a cream, slim-fitted trench coat. It was buttoned up and tied at the waist. Mid calf high heeled boots and a pair of WWG 'finger cut out' gloves finished the ensemble.

"You love the color black, don't you?" Tonks nodded appreciatively at them. "You two look good though."

"You do as well," Harry said politely. Ollivander got up from the couch.

"Your familiars are frightfully fast. We'll be there in no time. Shall we?"

Tonks ran a security charm by making a lasso movement with her wand above her head. Harry's heart skipped a beat. That was the same spell Ginny, his wife, used before she allowed Ron, Hermione and Neville entry into their home. The four of them then simultaneously murdered him, re-incarnations of Lord Voldemort.

"You alright there?" Tonks asked suddenly. Harry felt ill. Even the memory of that awful green light almost gave him a heart attack.

"I'm...Fine. Let's go. Here," Harry breathed. He offered her a pair of shades.

"What's this for?"

"To protect your eyes from the cold."
"Oh. Right. Hold on. Let me get my Red Scarf." She hustled back up the steps. When she came back, she took her time, making sure she didn't topple down in her high heeled boots. With the exaggerated shades and Red Ora Kill Scarf colour-blocking her outfit, she looked like a movie star. Harry couldn't stop looking at her. She power walked past him. Ollivander and Jon were already waiting outside. Harry was stuck in place. She turned, beckoning him out quickly. "Come on, luv. The security wards are going to kick in a few minutes. Out out!"

The journey to South Hampton was cold, and blissfully shorter than broomstick travel. They covered half of Scotland and all the way down to South Hampton within forty minutes. They landed in the South Hampton Common, a large park situated in the middle of the city. It was a little after five in the afternoon.

"We'll be back shortly. I'm just getting her oriented." Ollivander took a hold of Tonks' hand and apparated the both of them away. Within a couple minutes they returned. Ollivander took hold of Jon's arm and Tonks took a hold of Harry's. Tonks hesitated when she signaled she was ready. Ollivander nodded and both he and Jon disappeared. Tonks just looked at Harry for a moment.

"You were staring!" Tonks accused. "Can you be any more obvious!"

"You look... like a film star. Straight out of a fashion magazine. It's a good look on you." You're a fit woman, was what he really meant to say. He always felt a bit inadequate around her. She made him very conscious of himself, whatever he was; stuck in between. And with Remus popping in regularly...

Tonks smiled. "Thank you. It's nice to be able to buy fancy things once in a while. Glad you like it. You don't look too shabby yourself, Potter. Maybe in a few years you'll have all the girls fawning over you."

Harry smirked at the roundabout compliment. "Shall we?" he offered her his arm, similarly to how Jon did it with Alexandria.

Tonks raised an eyebrow over the edge of her shades and slipped her hand through his bent elbow. They disappeared and reappeared at an alleyway. They were standing behind a quaint stone building in the middle of muggle South Hampton. They went around front and spotted Jon and Ollivander waiting on them.

"Ah. There you are. Let's go in." Ollivander pushed open the door and entered. It was a Wizard's pub alright. Drinks were floating towards customers and tall steeple hats were common. It was fairly busy, as the bar stools were all occupied. A few of the tables had witches and wizards enjoying beers.

The four of them took seats at a table. Tonks was attracting random looks as she looked like a muggle, but something about the blood red scarf was magical enough to convince the other witches and wizards that she was one of them. Jon, on the other hand, looked like a poster boy for a James Bond movie.

"Uh oh," Tonks said.

"What is it?" Jon asked.

"To the left of the barman with the bow tie. You see it?"

Harry looked at where she indicated. Wait, wasn't that a Special Mission guild request board?
"This is the South Hampton Hunter Guild house," Harry breathed. "The Glory Hounds."

Ollivander casually looked around. "It seems to be a typical wizard's pub to me. Arthur Knight's is the name of the place, as far as I recall. I've stopped here before, doing business with the Antique shop on a few occasions. Nothing out of the ordinary."

"When was the last time you were here?" Tonks asked.

"Oh, about fifteen years ago."

Harry and Jon looked at each other, then at Tonks. Tonks sipped the drink she ordered.

"Things might have changed since then," Tonks muttered. "Guys, we're here at the Hit Wizard guild. Let's just be cool, yeah?"

"The AK guild?" Jon queried.

"Yep, that's the one," Harry said, on the alert.

"Oh. I see. The original owner, generations ago; his name was Arthur Knight. They took the initials and... developed into a venture a bit more.. risky." Ollivander pulled at his beard.

"Risky? A Hunter guild that specializes in bringing in outlaws, better dead than alive is more than just risky. Keep on your shades, everyone. Master Ollivander, we will go to the Antiques store. Where is it?" Harry asked, a bit uneasy.

"Right there," Ollivander pointed out the window at a building a couple blocks down. There was a sign marked 'Frankie's Museum of Wonders'. "Go on ahead, I think I will enjoy my drink. The barkeep will help you change galleons into pounds. Talk to him first."

"How much do you think we will need?" Harry asked.

"I think, to be safe, a thousand pounds should be more than enough."

"That's wot, one Gallie to a fiver?" Harry asked. "Two hundred Galleons roughly?"

Tonks shrugged. "I don't know. I let Sarah do the muggle stuff when we go shopping," Tonks explained.

"I think so. Let's go talk to him," Harry sighed.

The three of them went to the bar. After a couple minutes, Harry and Jon put up the gold and got notes of muggle currency. They nodded at Master Ollivander as they left the bar and made their way down to the Antiques store. Before they got close, Harry stopped Tonks and pulled her aside.

"So... um. We need you to buy these things for us," Harry said hesitantly as he took out the shopping list.

"What? Why me?"

"The son runs the shop in the afternoon. I think a pretty girl would get better results than two blokes," Harry shrugged.

"Why you cheeky bastard," Tonks laughed. Harry scratched the back of his hair. "You're probably right though. Okay. Sounds harmless enough. Wait here." Tonks took the cash and confidently walked in the store, taking off her shades. Jon was fascinated with the hustle and bustle of cars and
people walking all around them. Harry decided to pass the time with small talk.

"Snow. You wear black most of the time. You aren't the leader of the Black watch anymore. You can mix it up, you know."

"True. I did not really think about trivialities such as clothes before. Before I took on the black, I had only a few garments of color, given to me on my name day from my brothers and sisters. I did not wear them, to be honest."

"Why?" Harry asked.

"Certain patterns and vibrant colours were usually signs of nobility, or higher House standard. I was a bastard, and did not wear family emblems and such."

"That sucks. Your father was the highest ranking noble in your area of the Kingdom, not so?" Harry asked.

"The Warden in the north, yes. The king's right hand man, before he was betrayed."

"That sounds pretty high to me."

"Titles mean different things to different people. If I were to tell you I am the rightful heir to the throne in my homeland, would that make a difference to you, in this modern and magical world?"

"Not really. It would be cool though. Being a King sounds bad ass."

Tonks rushed out the store and approached. "Guys," Tonks interrupted. "I didn't get through," she explained with a sigh of embarrassment. She looked unsettled. Harry took off his shades.

"You're kidding, right?" Harry said.

"Nope. That guy... he's a wizard. He made me out as soon as I walked in." Tonks bit her lip.

"He's still a man, though..." Harry was confused. Tonks was the hottest girl he knew. He might be biased, but he saw the looks she got wherever she went.

"Yeah. He wants to meet you two, actually," Tonks said. Jon and Harry looked at each other, then shrugged.

"Let's see what he wants, then."

"Ah, *Le chevalier Immortel*, and *The Lightning Comet*. Today is my lucky day," a young man greeted from behind the counter. "Our mutual lady friend said that she knows you two."

"She does," Jon agreed.

Harry stared at the guy. He was vaguely familiar. Where did he see his face before?

Oh no. This can't be happening.

Harry recognized this bloke. This was Tonks' boyfriend in the Leglimens episode where she was about to celebrate her graduation in the hotel and get laid. They had an argument which culminated in her slapping him. She bolted after that.

"I don't think Nym here knew that my mother married Mr. Otamendi last year. Small world, darling," the young man winked at her. Tonks looked pale.
"Guys, this is Reagan." She had a fake smile full of hatred plastered on her face. "Small fucking world," she cursed so softly only Harry could have heard it. She stared at Harry as if meaning to say 'This is all your fault.'

Harry decided to go brave and pretend nothing was amiss.

"How do you do? We're here to purchase these items." He showed him the list. Tonks was watching everywhere in the store except at Reagan.

"Funny isn't it. You send in this beautiful woman to buy stuff on your behalf. You don't even recognize me, do you?"

"I do," Jon said, body tense. Harry felt his hackles raise.

Reagan pointed at the security camera screen that showed the pavement outside the store. "The three of you stand out like Santa Clause at a house elf convention, even in muggle clothes." He rubbed his ribs in a habitual manner. "It was a very interesting piece of magic you two displayed. Tonks here was so efficient she didn't even take a look at my face when she locked me down."

Harry was completely lost. "Who are you?"

"I'm the guy that stunned Mr. Potage."

"What?" Tonks snapped.

"I chose to act first because I knew the others were playing for keeps- they would have used something fatal. I'm sorry it turned out how it did." He stepped around the counter. Jon was vibrating with contained rage.

"You bloody-" she snarled. "Can't say I'm glad you're alive," Tonks said sarcastically. "What are you doing here? The French didn't want you behind bars eating out of taxpayer's money?"

"Oh, no need for insults, we're past that, aren't we?" Reagan countered. He rubbed his side again. Each time he did Harry tensed, thinking that he was going to draw for his wand. "I'm actually pretty lucky to be alive. That comet magic broke a lot of stuff, my chest cavity included, nearly suffocated on my own blood."

"Let's leave," Jon said between clenched teeth. Tonks was almost out the door when Harry spoke up.

"So why did the Aurors let you go?" Harry asked. It took a lot of willpower not to attack.

"I was undercover. I volunteered to infiltrate the Grindelwald's Legacy cartel. It was supposed to be my Rank Up mission for my AK Hunter group. My assignment was to track down Buck Trayard. I had already done my legwork and infiltrated the French Arm in Paris ever since I dropped out the Academy."

"Dropped out? That was ... almost like two years ago," Tonks said.

"Yeah."

"You've been undercover since then?"

"Yes. Until Carcassone."

Tonks just glared at Reagan. She never knew.
"When we got word that one of the Russians talked after being captured in Estagal... Trayard's trail was hot once again. Buck is a rank B in the International Bounty list, so obviously, a good payout. He was the one who gave orders to contaminate their farms or something."

"He was using an alias. Michael MacMillan," Harry offered.

"Yeah. I heard after I was healed. That fucking rat was right under our noses... for like four months straight."

Jon relaxed slightly. It appears he made a hard decision to try and save Pavel's life. Tragically, the stunning spell affected him with the same outcome.

"My first solo Hit and I blew it. The French Aurors were willing to lock me away for life until I told them everything I knew about the Blood Purity network and that I was an undercover agent in that organization for a couple years. I believe by now, Grindelwald's Legacy cartel knows I ratted to the French. Oh by the way, one of the higher ups in the French Corps may be a leak. Because of that, I'm basically persona non grata on the continent. Guess I have to look for gainful employment once again." He spread his arms in glory at his current situation.

"Do you know who the leak is?" Harry said.

"I think it could be Auror Bentacour or the administrative woman, Paige. My money is more on Paige. Bentacour could be her legit 'informant', but I think he doesn't know that she's a double agent. He's probably enjoying the perks of her job, if you know what I mean," he gave the a look. "From one Hunter to another; don't trust a girl with any intel, especially if you are in the life and death business. If she doesn't take you home to see mom and dad, keep your work quiet."

Harry, by default, didn't like this man, but he made sense with that piece of advice.

"You say you had no clue that the knockout spell would have killed him," Jon demanded.

"Swear," Reagan confirmed. "I tried to stun him before those other guys took him out... permanently. Fate is an ugly beast. It must have been his time."

Jon's stance shifted, almost on the verge of drawing.

"Easy," Harry put a calming hand on Jon's shoulder. "It's a small fucking world," Harry told Jon. "You wanted to see us to... I don't know, confess and get this off your chest?"

"Probably. Also to warn you. I think the Blood Purity network is going to launch an investigation into you two. And might probably set out a hit within the coming months. Roderick Hallow, Mr. Black and Red Dora's names have been making the rounds in the talk of the underworld. And Lucius Malfoy is somewhere in the mix waiting for his son to turn sixteen to take another shot at the Potage estate."

"That's years from now," Harry retorted.

"And word is that she is in Hogwarts, which means she won't get any other formal proposals until she graduates. From the French pure bloods, that is. That gives Lucius more time, so it works out for the scion," Reagan inspected his fingernails, apparently disinterested.

"That is not going to happen," Jon declared.

"Oh really? If I were you, I’d probably watch out and stay low for a while." He grinned at them, then clapped his hands together. "Anyway, give me three hundred pounds and I'll fulfill this list. Deal?
Take it, it's useless to me anyway. The Old Man loves to hoard and tinker. It's better if he allows me to do what we're supposed to do, and that's sell."

Harry counted out the cash and gave it to him. The whole situation was surreal. A minute ago he was ready to shorten him by a head. Now he was gathering vital information and paying for some antiques in the store.

"Where do you want me to ship it to?"

"Gringotts. Vault 107," Harry replied, still feeling annoyed and a tad bit jealous of this bloke.

"Diagon? That'll be twenty galleons extra. Sign here, and here." Reagan said. Harry paid the balance and signed with an X. "Looking good love," he winked at her again. Tonks walked out the store instead of answering how she really wanted to, with a phrase that rhymed with luck two, glass bowl. Harry and Jon followed her out. "Pleasure doing business with ya, please come again!" came his voice as the door swung closed behind them.

The three of them were in a foul temper coming back into Arthur Knight's Pub. They joined Master Ollivander at his table.

"Lads, you won't believe who just walked in the door," Ollivander said.

"You won't believe who we had to deal with," Jon said, frustrated and angry. Harry rarely saw Jon in such a state.

"Look," Ollivander, pointed. "Look who it is."

The gang looked across the pub. Surround by two other wizards who were animatedly asking questions, was a haggard and gaunt 'Michael McMillan'. He seemed to be in good spirits though, laughing and talking with his two mates.

Jon stiffened. "That is not Trayard."

"No, it has to be the victim he got the hair from... for the Polyjuice Potion," Tonks frowned.

"Seems like he's known here, or at least, in friendly territory," Harry breathed. "Wait. He's really drawn, and unhealthy." Like Sirius. "Probably held captive."

"Do we want to talk to him?" Ollivander asked.

"I am really curious to at least know his name," Tonks said. "After all we've been through, getting to the bottom of the mystery seems like... closure."

"No," Harry said in finality. "In fact, I strongly suggest we get out of here."

"But-" Tonks argued.

"No. We probably made a huge mistake coming here unannounced. This place is sort of like the wizard's version to the MI6," Harry explained in a low tone.

"The what?" all three of his colleagues asked.

"Non-magical folk's Intelligence and Spy department for their Military," Harry breathed.

"Ah fuck," Tonks cursed. "When We first walked in, I thought everyone was like, totally oblivious to us. But it's... actually the opposite, innit?"
"Bingo," Harry said. "We've literally walked into a den full of wizards who deal in espionage, gathering info on other wizards of interest."

"And the French underworld think we're pretty interesting right now," Tonks said, holding her head in her hands.

"I'd bet that guy is the missing A.K. guildsman Greyback told us about a looong time ago," Harry breathed.

"I remember that story," Jon said, now on the alert.

"Hm. My apologies, lads. Once you were successful in ordering everything, I see no reason to really stay. Let's go," Ollivander nodded. As they all got up, the bow-tied bartender came across towards their table, balancing a stainless steel platter on the gloved fingers of his right hand. He bowed to them formally.

The gang all looked at each other, then slowly sat back down. He lowered the silver platter upon which was an elaborate envelope.

"Good evening, The Wizard of the Light, The Immortal Knight, and The Red Witch, welcome to our establishment; the Arthur Knights. Our Guild master Mr. Knights bids you Good tidings and sends this invitation to your Clan, The Crow's Vambrace. You are formally invited to our Christmas Invitational Function this Yuletide."

"Um," Tonks nodded uncertainly, and the man offered her the platter. She drew her wand and levitated the envelope towards the table. She ran a series of counter-tampering spells and anti-bewitchment charms. There was no flare of magic signifying the envelope had any charms or curses in place. The bartender smiled knowingly, obviously accustomed to this type of behavior.


"You can post your response to this address. Thank you for your patronage and have a Good evening," the serviceman bowed formally and returned behind the bar, handling customers' orders and fixing drinks.

"You were right, Harry. They're fast," Tonks breathed as she read the invitation again. When she was finished she passed it around. Jon was the last to read it and tossed the invite back on their table.

"If we were nobodies before, we're definitely somebodies now," Harry muttered darkly as they left the bar. Within minutes they were airborne, heading back into London.

Harry spent the night at Jon's place in Diagon Alley. Mrs. Potage was surprised and elated to see them. Harry bunked on the brand new couch in the main area upstairs. Tonks came over for breakfast. They visited Ollivander's shop in the morning and took detailed diagrams of the custom wand crafting presses and coring machines. Ollivander explained that the equipment evolved over time and that was why they had to engineer and assemble their own machinery as part of their training. They spent the rest of the morning visiting Gringotts and handling errands, buying the hand tools and other parts used to build their equipment.

Lunchtime, Mrs. Potage was happy to feed them and chat about Hogwarts and how her daughter was faring. While sipping tea after their meal she gave them critical updates on their Arithmancy Organization, Walk In The Light.
"All the experts say the same thing. Custom spells, especially curses, are linked to the Architect. Information on the Architect, alongside an intimate familiarity to their style of casting and general proficiency, is crucial for counter-curses. You need to find out how Michael found out about Sectumsempra. The Healers have deduced that the curse aspect means 'Cuts Forever' ... and so far, cannot find a counter."

"And what about his arm?" Harry asked, desperate. "They have a way to keep it from decaying?"

"His arm has been locked away in St Mungo's vault in a massive custom Fairy Cauldron. With the money you donated, we could keep ordering more fairy cauldrons to keep the arm fresh and help with research expenditure."

"How long can we keep this up?" Harry nodded.

"The rate of decay is almost negligible, but when it comes to regular amputee healing, the usual time frame is within an hour or two. With the rate of slowdown almost nil, we have at maximum, one and a half years, with three purchases of new fairy cauldrons at three thousand galleons each. After that, the arm will be unable to be reattached."

"A year and a half..." Harry murmured, thinking. That time would fly so fast for the researchers, but to Oliver, would be counting down the days of a death sentence for any Hope of living his dream.

"Healer Wanderley Warthington says the bone can be removed and regrown from the shoulder, and the tissue would need potions to re-stimulate circulation, but Oliver would need a serious amount of diligence and fortitude to endure the physiotherapy. Months of re-learning to use the arm and finger dexterity would be required. Could be painful, depending on how successful the counter magic is."

"But would he be able to have both arms capable of playing quidditch?" Harry asked.

"Yes. They believe the arm would be at peak human condition, its just the human brain is a fickle thing. Having an arm, then not having one, then having it back, is a phenomena that wizards have never encountered. This Research project has created a buzz in the world of Magical Healing. I have been invited to the first of the two meetings of the International Confederation of Wizards alongside Mrs. Judith Wood, who will be our speaker presenting their findings on Counter Curse Healing, specifically based off this Charity's work, of course."

Jon nodded solemnly as he clasped Harry's shoulder. "The Lion roars, and his allies heed the call. He shall be the Light that shines through the Darkness."

Mrs. Potage looked completely lost. "What is he talking about?"

Harry shrugged, giving Jon a glare.

"Your work is far reaching, Harry. Your influence will span the globe like the stars in the summer night's sky."

"Quit that," Harry hissed at Jon. "Don't mind him, he's part of the poetry club at school," he grumbled to Eleanor Potage.

"He's what?" Eleanor Potage asked.

"The Knight of Poetry," Harry reinforced. "With guitar and prose, he shall slay his enemies."

"You can play the guitar?" Eleanor asked Jon, impressed.
"Yes," Jon admitted. "How did you know that?" he turned on Harry, shocked.

"Psalms of Flowers in springtime and tavern songs of maiden fair. Just like in a fairy tale," Harry chuckled. He had absolutely no idea that Jon knew how to play the guitar. He was only teasing.

He felt his latent sage magic went up a notch by one rung. Progress!

After lunch the two boys got a workout loading up the massive Abraxan cart with their new tools, their purchased Antiques, Nogtail barrels, and other clan related stuff. During a break Jon took a sip of his drink and suddenly blurted out, "So what if I could play the guitar?"

"I was just taking the mick out of you. It's cool." Harry and Jon continued working. After a few minutes Jon spoke again.

"Knights who could play the guitar... were suspected... of... of.." Jon looked away, ashamed.

"Of?" Harry prodded, using his considerable willpower not to burst out laughing.

"Being effeminate."

"Jon, I know you don't go down like that. The girls go crazy over you, anyway."

"No. I still have not seen this," Jon denied. "Maybe Alexandria...but..."

"You know nothing, Jon Snow."

Jon sighed as he cursed under his breath. That shit again.

"In this world, being able to play the guitar is cool. Manly, even," Harry continued. "I'll show you some music videos when next we're in a shopping mall in London, or something."

Jon recalled his secret attempts of writing songs of a brave knight saving damsels in distress and immediately dashed them from his mind. They weren't manly in any shape or fashion, more like, a way of escape. A balance to all the bloodshed. Not even Sam knew of his hobby. "All right. I am still learning the ways of this world."

"That reminds me. Do you celebrate Christmas?" Harry asked.

"No. What is that?" Jon asked.

"The most wonderful time of the year." Harry explained how the Christian religion works and the significance of the day. Jon was inspired by the Nativity scripture.

"God born as man, an event worthy of the highest praise," Jon nodded.

"Yes, it is a holy and happy time, gifts, family gatherings, celebration, romance, and so on."

"I will have to get her something," Jon nodded.

"You better!" Harry warned as they got back to work. "She's going to have a tidy sum in her Gringotts account to play with. She's going to shower you with gifts."

After another hour of packing had passed, Jon double checked their list of goods. "I think we have everything. You can go ahead and notify Tonks. We're ready to head back to base."
"Okay, yeah, over there is good."

Tonks was supervising the unloading at the clan base. The threstals had taken the Abraxan cart and parked it in the massive garage. Harry and Jon were breaking their backs taking off all the stuff. Jon had made a deal with Harry. Instead of the usual weekend strength workout, Jon insisted they offload everything without magic. Jon knew lifting the heavy barrels was too much for them so he had the presence of mind to purchase a loading trolley at the muggle hardware in London. Jon would maneuver the heavy barrels to the edge of the cart, and Harry would take it from him and stack it on the trolley. He then toted it to the storage one room over using the trolley.

"Did you get the security trunk vaults?" Tonks shouted, standing up on the cart, checking the goods against their list. "I see four on the bill, but there is only three here!"

"Oh we gave one to Mrs. Potage, milady!" Jon called out from the storage room. Both of them were working together to lift a barrel to stack upon another. Harry was dripping with sweat. He took off the Iron Man jersey he confiscated from Jon's place. The garage was warm and toasty with multiple torch scones lit on the walls.

"Okay!" Tonks said as she approached. "You guys are hilarious though. Why not let Harry levitate-" she walked in the storage room. She stopped, a bit surprised. "Harry? Where is your jersey? Is that... definition I'm seeing?"

Harry was bareback, loading up the barrels. Harry shrugged. "Could be."

"And Jon, you've been training him?"

"Every day, milady."

"Shit," Tonks nodded, impressed. "What are you doing? Weights?"

"No. Sparring, striking, and full body resistance exercises."

"Sparring? As in martial arts?" Tonks said, confused. "We have a program like that in the Academy. Most of us wonder why we even do it."

"Tonks, have you ever seen Jon fight?" Harry said rhetorically.

"Well... yeah..." Tonks said. "But usually with a sword, or knife... which is pretty bad ass, by the way."

"One mind, any weapon," Jon said confidently. "The human being, is the weapon," Jon put his hand on his chest. "The tools can change. The physical skill and ability of the user is what makes the difference between a combatant and just somebody with a weapon."

"You sound like our physical trainer at the Ministry," Tonks accused. She watched Harry's slightly wiry build and defined stomach. "You actually put muscle on him. You also carry yourself like you know how to fight."

"I am fair enough," Jon said humbly.

"Jon, you destroyed Remus when he was still rabid like a werewolf. Tonks, don't mind him, he knows how to fight. He's lethal with martial arts."

"Ser Remus is untrained. He was swinging wildly, thinking he was far faster and stronger than he really was. Wasn't much of a challenge."
"Give me a moment. I want to see what you can do. I'm going to slip into something... more comfortable...?" She wagged her eyebrows at Harry then ran off to her room. Harry just watched her leave, dumbfounded. Why does she do these things, out of the blue?

She returned wearing a cut off sweatpants, padded gloves and a short exercise spandex top that showed off her stomach. The ensemble was so... skimpy, Harry couldn't help but stare at her, um, female attributes. "Here!" she threw a pair of padded mixed martial arts gloves at Jon. She immediately began touching her toes in a stretch. She turned side to side, up and around, doing her stretches.

Harry could not help but notice that everything bounced just right.

"Whatcha waiting on? Put them on!" She scolded Jon.

"I... cannot," Jon said, embarrassed. "I cannot spar with you. It is against my code of honour."

"What?" Tonks protested.

Harry got the impression that Jon was hesitant to spar with her, and it had nothing to do with honor. He came close. "What's wrong?"

"I see what you mean, Harry of House Hollow. She is...a man's dream, but in your situation, the worst nightmare," he whispered in his ear. Jon pushed the gloves in Harry's midsection.

Was Jon uncomfortable seeing so much of her body?

"I'll do it," Harry said. He put on the gloves.

"Okay," she nodded, watching Jon strangely. "First to land three clean strikes wins, yeah? I have to do this every week on a Thursday. I wonder if it even paid off." She began bouncing on the pads of her feet. Harry sized up her fighting stance. It appeared that her main style was kicking by the way her right leg and heel lifted with each bounce. In fact, he knew first hand that kicking was one of her strong points.

Tonks drew her wand and made a chalk circle on the garage floor. "Ring out is a strike. Don't hold back, slim," Tonks teased, but her face was combat ready and serious. Harry was beginning to think that she wanted to release some steam from seeing Reagan yesterday. She was in a foul mood on the flight back from South Hampton yesterday.

"I will be the judge," Jon said. "First to three clean strikes, or first to be taken down."

"Taken down?" Tonks asked.

"Yes."

"As in, wrestling?" Tonks halted her bounce, uncertain.

"By any means. Let's avoid blows to the back of the head, and, personal areas, please."

"Um, er, I don't know how to wrestle," Tonks said, her confidence waning.

"Harry doesn't either," Jon shrugged.

Harry and Tonks squared off. Harry took on a southpaw stance, with left hand blocking his face and right hand at his hip. He did not bounce, but kept his back heel slightly off the ground. He was predicting that she would unleash a kick to face sooner or later.
"Whoa, nice stance," Tonks said. "Working on those arms eh?" Tonks poked fun at him. She resumed the bounce, apparently confident once more.

"Touch gloves!" Jon commanded. "Remember, this is friendly sparring. Go!"

Tonks began to circle Harry, light on her feet. Harry feinted forward, and Tonks sized up a counter kick, but cancelled it and kept to her light circling.

*She wants to see what I can do.*

After they exchanged starting places with their circling, Harry carefully staying out of her kicking range as he pivoted, Tonks smiled.

"Can't hit me, can you Casanova?" She said in a tone meant to attack his masculinity.

Harry summoned all of Snape's innate condescending magic and replied, "Oh I'm just waiting on you. Ladies first and all that." He bowed gallantly, mocking her.

"Cheeky little!" Tonks attacked with a textbook left jab, right cross combination. She then sized up for the middle kick. Harry weaved both punches easily then caught the kick with his lowered right hand. With a violent yank he pulled up her leg and Tonks had to stumble backwards before she fell on her bum.

Tonks managed to regain her balance just before she reached the chalk circle but Harry had followed through and was upon her, sizing up a hook with his right. Tonks tucked her head behind her hands to block but Harry abruptly targeted low and shoved his left palm just above her Solar plexus. Tonks felt the pressure below her breasts and took a massive step back, partially winded. She stumbled backwards, breathing out.

"Strike!" Jon called. "You stepped out of bounds."

"Hey," Tonks argued. "Thought you said no... personal areas!" She breathed out heavily.

Harry shrugged. "It's a vital weak spot," Harry quoted Jon.

Jon shook his head in disbelief. Harry intentionally did that to assert his chauvinism by making her feel that she needed special treatment because she's a woman.

"This time, I will favor Milady. But if you choose to taunt him about not being man enough to hit a girl, then don't complain when he gently touches you on your body. He could have jabbed instead of an open palm maneuver."

Tonks snorted at Harry.

"I predict you will not be able to land even one," Harry taunted.

"Okay that's it, come on then!" Tonks began to feint closer and closer.

Harry darted left and tried to flank her. He tossed a lazy jab to her right shoulder. He knew the hidden blindside punch was coming from the left. So said so done, Tonks blocked the jab and swung her left hard and fast. Harry was already ducking way before it was even close. Tucking his head and shoulders low, he grabbed both of her legs behind the knee, took one step forward and *lifted.*

The maneuver didn't take much effort. She was already off-balanced by her left hook, so with a smooth motion he tackled her to the ground. She immediately went into a ground guard by wrapping
her legs around his waist, pulling his body into hers. Within seconds she had his arm and neck wrapped up against her chest, preventing him from using that arm to strike her face. She locked her ankles behind his back, clenching all her legs muscles to squeeze him.

Harry couldn’t move, but that was okay. He got what he wanted, and she felt like heaven underneath him. He didn't care about Remus and what happened before. No way was he getting this woman, no fucking way. Using his free hand he gently tickled her exposed ribs.

"Tonks," he gasped for air against her chest. She squeezed in the leg lock and neck choke even tighter in response."I win," he said smugly, not even putting up any effort to get free.

Tonks froze. "Right. Takedown." She abruptly let him go. Harry looked up, a grin on his face from his position. She playfully put a hand in his face and pushed him off. She scrambled away from underneath him.

"That was a good defense for being pinned," Jon nodded. "You almost got the choke locked in."

"Thought you said you didn't know how to wrestle," Harry laughed. He was breathing heavily. Jon was right to refuse, this girl was driving him nuts. He wished he could just... turn back to eighteen like... right now.

"A girl can't have her secrets?" Tonks said, dusting off her back. "You're a right wanker, you know that? You just wanted to cop a feel!"

Harry didn't deny, nor admit to her accusation. He simply watched her, his left guarding his chin, his right low and firm, taking deep breaths. He might have had a hint of a smile on his face, but it was up to her to translate that any way she wanted.

"Rematch!" she demanded.

"Okay," Harry said. They re-entered the chalk ring.

"All right, hotshot. That was just the warm up."

"Okay," Harry repeated, unfazed.

Tonks attacked with a sudden right high kick. The same one she connected with in France. Harry arched his back and then ducked low, moving his head in a circle. When she followed up the motion with a left spin kick, Harry blocked, then rapped her smartly on her ear.

"Ow!" Tonks retaliated with a right, then left, then right punch combination. Harry blocked all. Harry returned the boxing combination, then finished with a low kick. She blocked all the punches, but didn't check the kick.

She jumped back, limping. Harry applied consistent pressure on her defense with right hand jabs. He knew a big move was coming, she was getting desperate. After the next exchange of block and attack, Tonks did a sudden switch kick, almost catching him flush to the face. If it wasn’t for his southpaw stance, he would have been floored.

Instead he absorbed the blow with his left hand, lunged diagonally forward with his left leg, then threw her by her upper body over his leg and hip. She stumbled to the ground, breaking her fall with her hands and rolled over.

"Damn," Tonks slapped her hand on the ground, frustrated.
Harry helped her up. "Jon beats me up all the time."

Tonks was catching her breath. She looked at Harry. He wasn't buff by any means, but he was toned and in proportion. When he got older, the girls would be crawling all over him. Tonks cursed.

She shouldn't care if girls would be crawling over him. She should not. But she did.

"Good sparring," she mock punched him tenderly on his chin. Harry smiled at the affectionate gesture. She scrubbed the top of his hair like an older sister would to her younger brother, but her hand lingered for a half a second longer than it should. She clapped him on his shoulder in congratulations. "Next time, I'll be better."

"Can't wait," Harry's eyes twinkled. Tonks froze. She had a sudden urge to slap him for being so forward. But, Harry didn't say anything, and he wasn't forward at all. Why did she suddenly get the feeling that he was implying something much deeper than another bout of sparring? She searched his eyes, trying to look for an explanation.

"You two done?" Jon asked after a couple seconds, breaking the spell.

"Yeah?" Harry asked.

"Yeah," Tonks breathed, uncertain of what just happened there.

"Touch gloves."

They did.

"Let's get back to work, Harry," Jon commanded. Jon was sure that Harry was casting some sort of magic on Tonks. Something he could not see, but he was doing something. Tonks appeared confused, and... angry?

"Yeah. I'm going to shower. Thanks for the workout, hotshot." She touched him again on his shoulder. Harry wished she wouldn't do that, but sorta wished she did it more. Harry gave her the gloves she brought.

"Keep them," Tonks said.

"They're pink," Harry complained.

"So you learn to fight and suddenly can't cast magic? Charm them whatever color you want." She turned on her heel in a smooth motion like she usually did, but her kicked leg buckled. "Ow!"

"Sorry!" Harry shouted, giving her a helping hand.

"It's nothing," she winced. She gingerly put her weight on it. The tendons at the side of the knee was hurting something fierce from Harry's low kick. "I'll just, take a shower and use some balm. A good rest and it should heal properly."

"Let me help you up the stairs," Harry offered. "Jon, I'll be back."

Jon folded his arms. "No funny stuff," he ordered Tonks.

She laughed as Harry took her weight off her bad leg. By the fourth step Tonks was leaning heavily into him. "Jesus, what was in that kick?"

"Sorry," Harry apologized again. "There's no real way to pull back on kicks."
"Yeah. Sorry for kicking you way back then," Tonks agreed. Harry hooked her arm even more firmly over his shoulder. She really was struggling to put weight on the knee.

"Want me to levitate you?" he offered.

"No. We're almost there." Tonks face was so close to his neck he could feel her breath against his sweaty skin. Wait...Was she, smelling him?

"You've gotten stronger, Harry," she said against his ear. "Stronger than you look." Harry felt a warmth radiate from where her soft body pressed into his side.

"A bit, but not much, really." Harry said, uncomfortable. Tonks did something really strange right at that moment. She tasted the skin on his neck.

"Um.." Harry said, unsure of what to do. Her lips on his skin sent fire running down into his midsection.

"You taste nice."

Harry could have exploded at that moment.

"Bathroom's down the hall, almost there," Tonks leaned heavily against him. She was hopping now, not even bothering to put any weight on her bad leg. He carried her into the main bathroom and sat her down on the edge of the tub. "Be a dear and turn on the heater in the basement, please," she moaned, rubbing her sore leg. "And bring the balm in the second drawer of my bedside table."

"Roger," Harry got on one knee and unlaced her running shoes. He took them off and gently pulled off her socks. Tonks' legs were dusty and scraped in a few places from where she fell. "Ouch. Didn't mean for this to happen." Tonks chuckled at his attempt to help.

"Are you going to help with the rest too?" Tonks asked as she touched her shorts. Harry didn't know if she was joking or not. He hated being such a novice at these things. He looked in her eyes. There was a smirk on her face. He decided to ignore the question.

"I'll go turn on the hot water for you. And get the rub."

"Yeah," Tonks dismissed him. "You do that."

Harry looked back when he reached the door, Tonks didn't move, she was eyeing him strangely. "Be right back." He ran down the steps and further down into the basement. He found the correct valve marked "Hot Water First floor". By the time he entered her bedroom and found her balm, he could hear the sounds of water filling. When he straightened, he noticed that the picture on the bedside table was the one of both of them at Alexandria’s party, the one she tried to hide before. Harry could have sworn phoenix song was emanating from inside him. She had a picture of them as the first thing she saw in the morning!

"Harry! Can you also bring the cream towel folded in the closet?!" Tonks' voice shouted from down the corridor. Harry flinched, startled at hearing her voice. He did as instructed and made his way down the hall towards the bathroom. The door was still wide open. Harry stood outside the view of the tub and knocked on the open door.

"Harry. It's not like you haven't seen me before. Toss it here."

"I... It's not proper," Harry stammered.
"Fine," Tonks said. There was some fervent splashing. "You can come in now." There was a layer of bubbles covering the surface of the water. Her back was propped high; her arms comfortably laid around the rim of the tub. Basically only the tips of her breasts were under the level of the bubbles.

Harry thought that this girl would be the end of him. Why was she teasing him so much?

Harry inched into the bathroom. He placed the folded tower on the towel rack near to her arm. He gave her the balm in her hand. "Thanks," she sighed. She raised her injured leg and gingerly propped it up on the rim of the tub. She leaned forward and began rubbing the balm on her knee. The soap was running off her chest as she worked in the salve.

"Ok. You're welcome," Harry was frozen to the spot. The soap bubbles were subsiding. His breathing began to speed up.

"Don't you have something to do? Help Jon with?" she said calmly as she applied more to the surrounding muscles of her knee. The soap bubbles had completely disappeared. When she was finished she rest her head back against the tub, and closed her eyes. Her face was the epitome of calm, and composure. "Get moving. Don't let me keep you back."

"Uhm... okay." Harry's tongue felt like cotton in his mouth.

"Thanks again," Tonks said, eyes still closed. Harry could swear there was a tiny smirk on her damp face.

"Yeah. Later," Harry said as calmly as possible, then turned to leave. He closed the door behind him gently. She was intentionally driving him insane. Was it revenge for trouncing her in the spar downstairs?

Harry kept replaying her antics in the tub over and over in his mind. He completely missed the first step and fell down the long curving staircase headfirst. Without hesitation, he propelled himself into the open area before he broke his neck. He gently landed on the ground floor, heart racing with adrenaline. With the height of the staircases in this massive house, that tumble could have been fatal.

That girl would literally be the absolute end of him.

She was driving him insane.
FADE TO BLACK

Chapter Summary

Harry is frustrated by his 'situation' with Tonks and goes to clear the air. Alexandria encourages other like-minded students to have a Christmas concert. Dean Thomas comes up with a rather revolutionary magical spell.

Chapter Notes

AN: Bridge Chapter. I own nothing. The Chapter's title song from Metallica's Ride the Lightning album resonated with me when I was coming up with the overarching theme to this story. It embodies this story's twist on 'The Forest Again' chapter in JKR's Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows.

RECAP: Our Immortal Heroes must rearm themselves as they are dumped into Harry's summer before Year Two. Garrick Ollivander mandates them to acquire rare materials to salvage Harry's Phoenix Core to convert it into magical Bracers, weapons which channels magic slightly differently than regular wands. Needing help, they hoodwink Nymphadora Tonks into being their Clan Witch to facilitate them going on Ranging missions in search of components. Their reputation increases abroad as they thwart plots brought about by an Eastern European Cartel called Purity of Blood.

Now, they must watch over their shoulder from Hit Wizards while still trying to find and completely destroy Voldemort's scattered Horcruxes; including the one left beyond the veil. Follows Canon up to Deathly Hallows Chapter 34: The Forest Again and HBO/ G.R.R. Martin's Game of Thrones Season 6

"What's wrong?" Jon asked as Harry came back into the garage.

"I don't know. I..." Harry shook his head, frustrated. "Where is this going?"

"What are you talking about, her?" Jon nodded upstairs.

Harry nodded.

"Matters of the heart... I only know one simple rule. Time is precious. You do not know what the future holds. But in your situation..." Jon opened his arms wide to his sides and let them fall, helpless.

"I know. I'm an anomaly. I kinda know what the future holds. I changed the rules...she's... confusing, confused, or doing something... weird." Harry pulled Jon into the storage room. He came really close and spoke in a low tone. "She's driving me nuts, intentionally. Then she feels bad afterwards. Then I feel weird because I'm always staring and she feels weird because I look so young... it's a hot mess."
"Hm. I wonder, did you know you were doing something with your magic just now?" Jon pointed at the chalk circle.

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"You were casting a spell on her, literally," Jon said. "Something about you had her ready to strike, or flee. After the bout. Her facial expression... she looked ready to fight, or flustered... heated," Jon said, shrugging. "Or maybe she was blushing. I do not know," Jon laughed.

_I was thinking of ... being eighteen... of being able to actually be with her... as in, 'man and woman' together._

Was there a thing as 'wild' magic to influence attraction, or sexual intent?

"Do you think, that she likes me? As in, likes _likes_ me," Harry asked quietly.

"Hm. She, is _interested_ in you. And I think she wants you all to herself, possessive. But, apart from that, who knows? Does she do things to make you believe differently?"

"Yes, she does," Harry replied, remembering all her stolen kisses. "That's the issue. I don't know about your world, but the age gap between us is a _huge_ issue. How was it for you?"

"Once a girl has her first moon blood, she is of age and ready for marriage. Squires and lads of standing can be lawfully betrothed at the age of fifteen years. Apart from that, it is not uncommon for boys to have impregnated girls at our age."

"Damn, that's really young," Harry grimaced. "I don't actually mean doing that, I mean.. well," Harry blushed. "I mean, the issue is there being an 'us'. Being a couple. It's not going to happen."

_Or it has to be one very, very well kept secret._

Jon hefted a barrel of nogtail urine unto his shoulder and stacked it on top another. Harry had to admit he was impressed at that feat of strength. Jon thought a moment, facing the barrel he just stacked against the wall. He spoke solemnly, not even turning around.

"Harry, our mission is the reason why we are here. You must protect your housemates from what you told me; a future of being possessed by the Evil Wizard. My role is to support you, for I am the Sword of the Light. You have to accept the possibility that you may not be able to engage with meaningful relations with milady, at this moment, or even as you get older. She may even enter relations with another man, and yet your task remains. What she does with her love life, does not change what _you_ must do."

"Everything, you just said... is ... exactly it. I... just don't know if I could just, ignore her or let her go. I get all," Harry scrubbed his hair in frustration, "Barmy around her."

"You have her under your spell?" Jon asked. "Or does she have you under hers?" he chuckled.

"She thinks I do. And, I'm not sure, I think I _am_ doing something, something that triggers her namesake curse to pop up. You don't know how it is when we're alone. She gets very, very, touchy-feely."

"I noticed," Jon grinned. "She has been named well."

Harry just grumbled under his breath. "Maybe this is all some weird twist- Life having a joke at my expense."
Jon didn't respond, just continued working. A couple barrels later he spoke up. "Ginevra also makes me feel the same way- a sick twisted joke of life. Every time I see her, I think of Ygritte. Other than the physical similarities, I can sense a fire within her, something about her personality, which reminds me too often of the love I have lost, the ..." Jon rubbed his eyes. "It is the thing I have regretted most, partially the reason I could not spar with milady. I cannot, and will not, strike, or even bear arms against a female I care for."

"Mate, that's how it should be," Harry said. "And this is training. Not real fighting."

Harry and Jon did more unloading. After a few minutes Jon spoke again.

"I drew my bow on Ygritte. She was ready and willing to kill our men. Tell me, Harry, if Tonks were to be cursed or magicked into attempted murder upon mistress Hermione, Ron, or even me, would you stop her if it meant that you must take her life?"

"No! I would find another way, something!"

"I..." Jon hesitated. "Did not. I drew, and I shot her. It haunts me. I will lay down my life as a shield to protect, if I was in the same situation, but I cannot strike Tonks, or bear arms against her. Do you understand?" Jon said quietly.

"Mate, defending yourself or someone else is completely different than that situation. You can't just let someone attack you because she's a girl. With your ability, you could probably stop her without... really hurting her."

Jon said nothing.

"You have the Sleep Curse! The Aegis!"

Jon shrugged.

"You're serious about this, aren't you," Harry argued.

"I will..." Jon folded his arms. "...have to come to these terms myself. My feelings also do not change what we must do. I just know that, since Ygritte, I could not bear to strike at a familiar female face," Jon reinforced. "The nightmares still remind me."

Harry was starting to understand. It was a psychological issue Jon needed to deal with. He would let him deal with it in his own way. With an unsaid agreement, both lads stopped conversing and offloaded everything that did not need to be taken to Hogwarts.

"Tonks?" Harry knocked on her bedroom door an hour later.

"Yes?" she called out from inside.

"Finished with the moving. We're leaving," Harry said.

"Hold on," she replied from inside. The door opened partially and she watched him from inside. Harry just looked at her, a respectful distance away from the door. Tonks folded her arms in her plush white bathrobe. They said nothing.

"How's the knee?" Harry asked.

"It is much better, actually."

"Hey!" she called him. Harry stopped.

"Yeah?"

"Thanks for helping me. I- I-" Tonks rubbed her face. "I don't know why I do some of the things..." she tucked her hair behind her ear, not looking at him.

"It's okay," said Harry.

"It.. isn't. I don't know. I... wouldn't like someone to..." she trailed off. "This is so... weird."

"I think I know what you mean," Harry felt a sensation like a sinking stone in his stomach. He didn't like the tone, nor the direction this conversation was going. He'd rather have these weird, and random glimpses of Tonks being completely flirtatious. It wasn't right, but he wanted her to do her thing. "But weird is good. I like..." Harry smiled guiltily.

"You do huh?" Tonks lips curled in a slight smile. "Of course you do." Her expression changed and she was contemplative once more. "I don't know why I do it, but, I think..."

NO NO NO!

A possessive fire, white hot with magic, surged through his chest, his heart, he wasn't going to let whatever this was, go down like that. He just wasn't. He might as well find a cure for Lycanthropy and invite Remus to live in this house. Every logical thing Jon just said, went out the door.

Harry gently pushed open her door. He tentatively took her hand. "Hey... its cool. Just be... yourself, I like you just the way you are. Everything will work out."

Tonks looked at his hands. Every boy who was interested in her before liked her because she could manipulate her proportions, or some relative aspect of her metamorph ability. Around Harry she never felt like she had to be somebody else. In fact, the one time she did change her appearance to kiss him at the lake, she got the impression that he wasn't even that interested.

"Even if I looked like this?" Tonks appearance changed, and she subtly turned into a younger version of herself. She became shorter by a couple inches, her cheeks fattened a bit and her bathrobe fell a little more loose on her body.

Harry was now slightly taller than her, which felt weird. He liked Tonks as she was. He touched her cheek, pushing the hair that fell back behind her ear.

"You were pretty then, but you are just as pretty or even more so now," Harry said truthfully.

"This was how I was on my sweet sixteen," Tonks said, coming closer. Harry could sense another 'Nymphadora moment' kicking in.

Harry found sudden inspiration. The Diablo Core wand was made with threstral bone, and had an uncanny response to his magic. "Change back to how you are," Harry ordered softly. She did. "Close your eyes."

Tonks gave him a look, as if saying 'no funny stuff'. Harry drew his Diablo wand and summoned magic from within, a glamour with expertise fueled by actually living through his previous life.

Harry grew. His vision turned blurry. He looked down at Tonks passive face, her lips upturned as if
she awaited a kiss. His hands were blistered and he had plenty healed spell burns on his arms. He was wearing the dirty clothes he escaped Gringotts bank with.

"Open your eyes," he commanded, his voice deeper.

Tonks did, and she stared. She looked up into his green eyes, and spotted the angry lightning shaped scar on his forehead. Harry's face was angular, more weary, his eyes were colder, as if he was perpetually tired. His jaw and brow were harder, more defined. His shoulders weren't muscular by any standard, but he was lean, and square.

"This was how I was a couple months before I turned eighteen," Harry said, intentionally not telling her that he never even reached the ripe old age of eighteen. "A lot of things were going on. None of the girls were 'crawling all over me'."

"You look really-" handsome "-tall," Tonks exchanged before she let that slip.

"Five foot eleven isn't that tall," Harry shrugged. Tonks smiled. She looked at his hands in consternation.

"You were an Auror or something? Look at the spell feedback scars on your fingers and hands!" she touched his hands tenderly.

"Not really," Harry said, opening his palms. There were blisters and magical scars everywhere.

"Your scar also looks angry."

"Yeah it was," Harry said. "I was angry," Harry muttered under his breath. Too much stuff was going wrong, too many people were dying because of him.

"And what's with the scorch marks in the clothes... You look like you were in a fight," she said. "All heroic and stuff."

"Just broke out from robbing Gringotts actually," Harry twinkled. Tonks laughed at his joke. The laughter faded and they just stared at each other.

"What are you waiting on, Casanova?" Tonks asked softly.

"Hm?"

"When you tell a girl close her eyes, usually you're supposed to kiss her," Tonks whispered, leaning into him. Harry wrapped his hands at the small of her back, taking her in an firm embrace. She grabbed the back of his hair and kissed him. At this height and size, she fit perfectly. Harry knew that this is who he really was, but this was just a glamour, a facade. Now, he was only a kid. When the kiss was ended, he reluctantly let the glamour fade with a sparkle of magic.

"I'm sorry," Harry said as he returned to his younger self. "This is who I am, now. The changes are happening already: I'm taking care of myself better, I'm stronger, wiser, more willing to learn and accepting of life, in general. I want to be happy. Before, all I wanted was to have parents, a family. I always held a sort of a grudge, that my parents were taken away from me. I didn't think of actually... how should I say it, *enjoying* life. Now I do. I hope you understand, and could... bear with me for while." Harry thought his speech was sappy, and corny. He was genuinely surprised that Tonks smiled at him.

"Having parents as a kid is important, and totally understandable. I'm glad we had this talk. It makes me understand you a bit more. Not the Gringotts bit, you're too much of a White Wizard to do
anything that dark."

"You'd be surprised."

Tonks sighed. "Now that I definitely know what to expect, maybe..." Tonks bit her lip. "You better get going then," she cut herself off, backing off into her room. "Bye, Harry."

"Later," Harry said. Well, Jon's speech went right out the fucking window. Here he was, initially trying to sorta stop whatever was happening between them, but in the heat of the moment, he intensified it.

Good job, Potter, great job indeed.

"So, you've been awfully quiet since we left." Jon was helping to unload the goods at the base of the tower at the back of Hogwarts.

"Mmhm," Harry said. He was standing on the back of the Abraxan cart. He hefted a crate and heaved it towards Jon. He caught it, then stacked it on a sturdy pallet at the base of the exterior staircase to the tower.

"Are you going to make me ask? How did it go?"

"Um, depends on how you look at it." Harry hefted another box.

"What does that mean?" Jon caught it easily.

"She was trying to, um, straighten things out. But I changed her mind," Harry admitted. "Last three." He tossed a smaller crate.

"What did you do?" Jon caught the box.

"I showed her what I really look like, before, you know."

"By the gods," Jon muttered. "That is a magic spell?"

"Yeah, it's called a glamour. But it isn't permanent. The threstral hair for the bracer and the wingbone for the wand really ties in nicely with my magic. The whole 'Master of Death' business. I gave her a glimpse of when I was seventeen."

"You stroked the fire, instead of buried it," Jon sighed. "You are a trouble magnet. I thought you said a relationship couldn't work."

"I was being... pessimistic. Where there is a will... there is a way!" Harry grinned as he threw the last of the crates. "Here, the keys," he tossed them to Jon. Jon caught them and opened up the sturdy metal door to the workshop. Within minutes Harry levitated all the new goods inside. He removed all the rubbish and broken furniture from the room and piled it on the back of the massive cart. Dust swirled inside the workshop, agitated by the cold draft. The sun was already setting in this early winter season. After he was done, Harry hopped into the driver seat.

"Ok. I'm going to take this rubbish back to base, probably leave the cart in the barn too. I'll zip on back. Wait for me, Jon."

"Be quick. All this work has left me ravenous."

"Be back in ten minutes. Listen out for me, okay?" Harry took the reins of the threstral team. "Yah!"
Harry shot up into the sky and banked hard towards the Clan base. Within ten minutes flat he had reversed the cart in the large barn, freed the threstrals, and slammed the heavy wooden doors shut. He felt eyes on him. He looked up at Tonks' window. She was there, alright, sipping a cup of what he presumed to be tea, watching him. He waved. She indicated that she saw him with a wave of her fingers, then allowed the window drapes to fall into place.

Harry wrapped his scarf around his nose and mouth, and jumped into the evening sky. Within three minutes he landed at the staircase leading to the tower. Snow was beginning to fall heavily. At the second knock Jon opened. Apparently he was handy with a broom and scoop, because the floor was devoid of debris and well swept.

"Good work. You weren't kidding about having this place cleaned up within the week."

"Let's go eat something, Harry of House Hollow."

"What -hold up. It's not brothers of the black down in the great hall, it's girls. We stink. We need to clean up."

A half an hour later Harry and Jon were clean, dressed in fresh uniforms and were heading down to dinner this cold Saturday evening. Most of their house mates were already seated.

"There you are!" Katie said as soon as he walked towards the table.

Harry smiled. He almost forgot about their Hogsmeade visit tomorrow. "Hey, yourself," Harry replied. Katie scooted closer on the bench towards Alicia, offering him the newly created spot.

"Haven't seen you since lunch yesterday," she whispered as he sat. "What have you two been up to?"

"Apprentice stuff," Harry said. "Just came back."

"You're not alone. Look who is back," Katie indicated the teacher's table. Auror Drinkwater had taken the first empty seat, and began muttering something out of the side of his mouth with Snape. Snape appeared to be regretting sitting next to an empty seat.

"Well, that's ...good, innit?" Harry whispered back to her.

"Not really. There are notices up. Word's out he's cancelled this weekend's trip. He advised Dumbledore that until Auror Scrimgeour gives resources for extra protection at Hogsmeade, they weren't allowing us to leave until that business with the Chamber of the Blood thing, investigation, case, whatever you call it; is closed. These hard-ass types love to lock people up huh?" She tried to keep her voice buoyant, but Harry could tell she was disappointed.

"Chamber of Secrets," Harry corrected. "That's not fair," Harry agreed with her, even though he knew Drinkwater had reason to be vigilant. "Sucks, actually."

"And the timing! He couldn't have, like, took another week off?" Katie grumbled.

"Bastard," Harry agreed, eating. He felt horrible, because even though Katie was venting about the cancelled visit, Harry wasn't actually. As usual, he was thinking about Tonks. What would she think about him going on an innocent Hogsmeade visit with Katie?

"Hey Jon," Katie greeted the other boy.

"Mistress Katherine," Jon nodded, drinking his juice. He didn't spot Alexandria at the table. Neither
Ginevra. Maybe those two were in the Library.

"You guys got through?" Katie made small talk.

"Yes. We went to South Hampton and acquired the main tools and so forth."

"South Hampton!? Main tools?"

"For our workshop," Jon offered. "Harry didn't tell you?"

Harry was surreptitiously doing a slash neck motion for only him to see, but Jon either ignored it or didn't know what it meant.

"No..." Katie raised an eyebrow. "But that's cool. It's not really my business," she shrugged. Harry didn't buy that nonchalant act one bit. He was pretty sure she was dying to find out what exactly they were doing.

"It's not supposed to be a general knowledge thing, there might be core materials and so on that can be volatile," Harry explained as he ate. "We don't want anyone blowing up stuff in there."

"I can keep it quiet," Katie reinforced. They continued eating in companionable silence. "So, ...you have any plans for tomorrow?"

*Rest, and homework. My body aches from all this lifting.*

"No, I made time for us to go Hogsmeade, remember," Harry said. Katie smiled.

"Well, we came up with an idea. Hermione is trying to help," Katie said. "Remember the band thing we did for the Lake fight?"

"Yeah," Harry said. How could he forget?

"It sparked some interest in Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw. Even a couple of the Slytherins were interested when Alexandria and that Carrow girl talked about it. A music club. We want to put on a Christmas talent show, or something. Carols, or just simply any sort of music. I can play piano, and snare. Dean is fairly okay on the bass and strum guitar, but his real forte ...is kinda cool. Thomas," Katie called. Dean looked up from chatting with Michael Corner, from Ravenclaw. "Come and explain it to them."

"What, those two? Don't they have some Dark Wizards to capture or something?" Dean teased.

Jon and Harry grinned. "Nah. We're kind of on holiday mode this weekend," Harry shook his head.

"Full moon is when Dark Wizards are ripe for the picking," Jon added. "We catch them by the dozen." Jon and Harry connected without even looking.

"Right," Dean deadpanned. "Anyway. So, me, Hermione, and Justin and Corner, we have something in common, and I know you think it's that we're not from a wizard bloodline, but actually, we were working on getting ...um... avenues to allow our instruments to get amplified. We all play instruments, and we're accustomed to electricity and so on. Here, we can't use our amps and powered stuff because of magic interference and all that. Hermione looked up her knowledge club and is trying to figure out how some households could use both magic and electricity, and I think she's cracked it in a roundabout way."

"Smart girl," Michael Corner admitted.
"I learned sound-staging and setting up everything from my mom. That's what she does, a Sound engineer and instrumentalist. My stuff just came in off the train. Tomorrow I'll pick it up from Hagrid’s."

Harry had to sift through that information and try to decipher what he was saying. "You want to have a rock band?"

"Knew you were a bright boy, Potter," Michael nodded.

"Well," Katie interrupted, "The muggleborns came up with that electrified idea, but the whole Christmas show is what the other houses want to get into, y'know mainly good cheer, Carols, falalalala la-la-la-la and all that good stuff, yeah?"

"Yeah..?" Harry agreed, unsure of the question. Jon frowned, not following at all.

"Ron and Hermione said they would come," Katie called. The two Gryffindors heard and looked across to the discussion. "Tomorrow we're on, right?"

"Yup! Are you two coming? I can play the flute, and a soprano in the choir at church!" Hermione asked Jon and Harry.

"Yeah, so do you want to come tomorrow? You two heroes play instruments, or can sing?" Katie asked.

"Either group, or both, we're not picky," Dean offered.

"Jon plays guitar," Harry volunteered immediately. Jon snarled, rubbing his long hair back from his face.

"Right on!" Michael said enthusiastically.

"Harry sings," Jon countered.

"I do not," Harry denied.

"Yeah we need another guitarist. You two got a 'boy band' thing going on with the long hair," Katie teased. "Was that intentional, by the way?"

"I can't sing," Harry repeated.

"We'll be there, miss Katie," Jon elbowed Harry in the ribs.

"Okay!" Harry rubbed that spot. "I'll come."

"Right. We've found an unused classroom that should be good for the choir. McGonagall and Vector gave us the okay for this little project," Katie beamed.

"Who came up with this idea?" Harry asked.

"Um, Alexandria. And I. And Hermione volunteered to help. Dean and Corner are more for the rock and rolling business. Shea from Slytherin seems interested. I think Montell Montague likes her so probably he's coming too," Katie admitted.

"Sounds cool," Harry nodded.

That night, in their dorms, Harry had to explain the concept of Christmas Carols and on the other
side of the scale: what a Rock band was.

"I understand singing of praise and music that sounds pleasant to the ear, but this Rock band, it sounds like it contradicts everything I know about music."

"You'll see."

Harry and Jon showed up to the ‘practice’ late the next morning at the spare room on the third floor. This was the room Fluffy was in last year. They were greeted by Alexandria and Shea, who asked them if they knew any of the songs on the Carols list, and if they could play instruments.


"You never said a thing! And you 'Arry?"

"I can't play anything, really," Harry said. "I'm here to support," Harry tucked his hands in his pockets.

"No problem. Come on, it'll be fun. Go and talk to Hermione, or Dean, Hermione sorta is the Choir master, Dean has the electric band thing in the next room-" she pointed at the massive cupboard that joined the main chamber to the secret room behind. "Through there."

Jon and Harry went into the sub room. A couple Ravenclaw seniors; Youri McQueen and Lewis Hillsborough, Dean Thomas, Michael Corner, Lee Jordan and surprisingly Penelope Clearwater were there. A Slytherin boy he didn't recognize was also there, un-boxing new equipment and helping assemble the drum set.

Jon's eyes grew wide at the gleaming black electric guitar Dean was holding. Penelope was standing behind a microphone stand, connecting signal cables to an electric amplifier.

Katie nudged Harry. "You made it!"

"I said I would, didn't I?" Harry accepted her quick hug.

Hermione rushed across. "Harry! Glad you could come! We kind of cracked a roundabout way to get small electrical appliances to work in Hogwarts. It's a Property and Blood Ward combination."

"A what?"

"It's pretty revolutionary if I say so myself," Hermione gushed, proud. "Rule no.1 Basically, the person needs to own the thing, as in, buy it, gifted. It can't be borrowed, stolen, etc. Rule no. 2, a drop of blood on the device and a simple warding ritual will protect it from other 'property' type magic, claiming it as 'property of the owner'. This blocks other outside interference, e.g. the presence of all the magic in this school. The reason why mixed families whose parents are not magical could use electricity is that because they 'own' their stuff, and we, the children, are sort of bound by that balance. You get it Harry? We sort of borrowed that muggle family dynamic, then rule three: it uses your magic as a power source. A brand new 'Tethering' spell, Penelope, Dean and I were working on. So far, Dean is really good at making it work. It substitutes the equipment's need for Alternating Current."

Hermione walked over to Penelope's microphone. "Testing, one two three!" Her voice was amplified through the amplifier. "And voila!"

"I think I got it," Harry said, even though he had no clue what she said. "The three of you came up
with this Tethering spell?"

"The idea was Dean's, Penelope and I did the research. Dean put the work together, spell casting, technical know how, and theory. I convinced him to sign up at the Arithmancy Guild over the Holidays, so he could put it forward to the Seniors!" Hermione was really excited. "Can you imagine, we'd be bridging the gap! Another step forward in making Muggle relations the norm, rather than, a quandary!"

Jon was listening intently.

Harry was instantly on alert. He dragged her away from the others. "Hermione. Listen to me. You're right, this spell is revolutionary. But you have to be very careful. There are people who do not want the magical divide to be crossed. In fact, they are willing to ...disappear people that try," Harry warned quietly.

"What? Why?"

"Enemies of the blood?" Harry reminded her.

"Oh." Hermione's eyes widened. "Oh no!"

"You see?"

"We'll cancel the submission for now, maybe when things quiet down a bit and..." Hermione frowned, a troubled look across her face. "I overheard a Hufflepuff sixth year in the choir room talking, about muggle lovers bringing technology into the school, and how its a disgrace and all that. I paid him no mind, but now that you mention it... I'll tell the others to keep it quiet."

"A school project like this should be okay, but letting this out in this political climate might be a bit... too revolutionary," Harry grimaced.

"What political climate?" Hermione asked. She regarded him suspiciously for a couple seconds. Her tone lowered to a secretive whisper. "You know something we should?"

Ah. Another goof. Harry was about to make up another fib when Dean called out.

"Black!" Dean called. "You look like you've seen death itself. You like it? Wanna try?"

Jon was mesmerized by the sleek, black electric guitar in Dean's hands. It was shaped like a dual bladed battle axe, except, sexy, in it's own way.

"If you don't mind," Jon nodded.

"Come! I'll tether you." Dean drew his wand and plucked a hair from Jon's head. He wrapped it around a warding stake, and jacked it into the amplifier where the power cord should be. He cast a short spell in Latin and Jon felt a tweak of magic surge through his bracer. "Right! That should be it."

Jon plucked the strings tentatively, then started as the clear electric note came out the amplifier's grill.

"Play!" Dean encouraged him. Jon strummed and a harsh, aggressive sound emanated.

He began strumming a familiar tune played in the north. The synthetic strings and lack of a guitar hole was strange, but he liked it.

"Lewis. Play something for the man," Youri McQueen grumbled.
"How about Metallica?" Lewis Hillsborough nodded. "Lee, Penelope, do you know *Fade to Black*? Best track of that bloody good album from across the pond."

"That's rich," Harry chuckled at their choice of songs, satisfying the coincidence that he was known as the *Lightning Comet* and Jon as the *Chevalier Noir Immortel*. He sorta knew the song, from hearing it through the walls of Dudley's room above him.

"Rumour has it you have a wolf on the grounds, Black," Lewis said, flicking switches on his distortion pedal. A disgusting growl came from his speaker as he ran his fingers down the fretboard. "Great familiar to have."

"I do. His name is Ghost." Jon did the same thing as Lewis, and a heavy squeal came forth from his amp speaker. Jon watched Harry, a glint in his eye.

"Where can I get one of these?" Jon said immediately, his mouth agape.

"I'll hook you up," Dean offered. "I'll talk to you after."

"Lee. Whenever you're ready," Penelope said. "I hate when practice is held back because the drummer always needs something tweaked, or the hi-hat needs a bit of polish."

"I hate when female Bassists think they're all that just because they can play with the big boys," Lee countered. He took the seat behind an acoustic drum set they found stashed away in an abandoned storage room in Hogwarts. He clicked a three count with the drumsticks.

"Youri, you know the lyrics?" Lewis said, beginning the intro.

"No. I played this before, but I don't sing. Lead guitarists don't *sing*. We fucking *play*," Youri said quietly. He joined in with Lewis when the dual guitars started. Penelope did as well on the bass guitar.

Jon was liking this. He was liking this a lot.

"What do I do?" Jon asked, adjusting the guitar strap over his shoulder and settling in with the heavy instrument.

"You'll jam with us. This same sequence of strumming I'm playing, you can back me up. Hop in, try not to suck. Potter. You know the lyrics?"

"I do."

"The verse is after this. Quickly- the mic!"

"I'm pants at singing," Harry took the mic.

"This song isn't really singing-" Lewis did a four count. "-'Life it seems'...let's go!"

Harry sung/spoke into the mic.

"*Life, it seems, will fade away...*

"Wow," Hermione said, hearing his voice. It was a bit high, but it was clean, and true.

"*Drifting further, every day*

*Getting lost within myself*

Nothing matters, no one else
I have lost the will to live
Simply nothing more to give
There is nothing more for me...

Lee banged on the drums, beginning the crescendo for the chorus.

"I need the end to set me free."

"Alright!" Penelope came across to face Lee on the drums. Her hair came loose as both of them collaborated for the chorus. She spread her legs in a wide stance, holding the bass guitar askew as her hair bounced in time to the drums.

Harry realized that strong sage magic was at work here. Jon was doing pretty well, considering, as he played the main rift, even though he missed the notes sometimes. It didn't deter him, in fact, it gave the song the tragic twist it needed.

The lyrics were freaking Harry out, yet at the same time, therapeutic. He put his gut into the next verse. Jon was facing Lewis, watching the older boy's hands play the chorus. At the appropriate times Jon strummed hard, fitting in with uncanny precision in his role as dual rhythm guitar.

"Fuck!" Lewis encouraged Potter. "Put your gut in it! Next verse!"

"Things're not what they used to be
Missing one inside of me
Deathly loss, this can't be real
I cannot stand this hell I feel..."

Emptiness is filling me
To the point of agony
Growing darkness, taking dawn

"Black, watch! C! A5 -D5 Good! E5! Pedal, now!" Lewis instructed as he smashed the device by his foot. Jon tentatively pressed his as he mimicked his guitar partner.

"I was me, but now he's gone..."

Harry felt inside go hollow. The song was about him, before he walked into the Forbidden Forest. He took off the microphone and held on to the mic stand with the other hand for dear life. His scar was burning. His eyes began to surge with rage at his fucking useless sacrifice. He flung his neck forward, letting his long hair cover his face, before the Red came. He hunched over, hiding his face as he felt magic empower his voice. The air went still with an otherworldly pressure, merely a fraction compared to his summoning ritual, but heavy nonetheless.

"No one but me
Can save myself
But it's too late
Now I can't think
Think why I should even try?"

Penelope Clearwater, the straight A's bookworm of Ravenclaw and currently the focus of Hogwarts gossip, was going ape crazy facing Lee's drumset. Her hair was swinging crazily as she murdered that bass guitar.

"Yesterday seems as though
It never existed"
Harry made sure and kept his head bowed with his hair thrown over his face. He remained eerily still as Youri took center stage next to him. Youri's fingers were fast as lightning over the cutaway frets. He wasn't sure if his rage was real, or it was just the memories the song brought out. Jon had stopped playing and was watching Harry, because his bracer began to pull at his magic. Jon grabbed Harry and put his back to the crowd, blocking them from seeing Harry's predicament. Youri, the lead guitarist, was showing off his skills front and center during the exit solo. He appeared to be quite the showman.

Jon was grateful for the distraction.

"Look at me!" He ordered as the music thundered about him. Watching the red glow this close was the scariest thing he had ever seen. "Fuck!" Jon grabbed him about the shoulders and pulled him behind Lee and the drum set.

"It just came to me..It's fucking Snape... the Ocular restorative!" Harry gritted.

"Keep them closed!" Jon ordered. Lee was still playing but shooting the both of them curious glances.

"He's... making me a pliable vessel, or something. For Him," Harry cursed.

"You said he was on the side of the Light."

The intricate guitar solo was over and the guitars were once again in sync, supporting the end of a drum and bass duet. Jon drew his Dragon Heartstring wand. Harry threw up his forearm, blocking his attempt at the sleep curse. Both their bracers touched.

The Phoenix core bracers glowed and Harry felt Fawkes' magic surge through him. Jon had to shield his face from the sudden bright light swelling from Harry's body. There was a blinding flash.

"Whoa!" Lee ended his part with a hi hat roll, sensing magic pouring out from the two of them. Penelope's bass continued for one more bar then her bass trailed off. Youri added a personal flair of intricate fretwork then slid his fingers down the fret, ending the song with a sudden palm mute.

There was a shout and a polite round of applause from the choir students who crammed into the small sub chamber.

"You two alright?" Lee asked, watching them intently.

Jon looked at Harry's face. Thankfully his eyes were back to normal, but the Hogwarts sweater and his pants were bleached white with magic. "Not this shit again," Harry laughed.

"Better that than-" Jon pointed at his own eyes. Harry dropped his voice.

"We have to get a book from Snape's cupboard. It has spells that could help Ollie- and..."

Katie and Hermione ran around the drum set that moment. "What happened? What's with your clothes!" Hermione demanded.

"You okay?" Katie asked. Hermione huffed. She was about to ask him the same thing.
"Never better," Harry said with a straight face. "Freak accident, nothing to worry about," Harry answered before Jon spout some Wizard of the Light nonsense. He was right, Jon abruptly closed his mouth next to him.

"Could be the tethering... it is experimental, after all," Hermione put her fingers to her chin in thought.

Penelope sauntered over, the bass guitar still strapped on her. "You were feeling that song, Potter. Did you break down at the end?"

"The Tethering magic was screwy," Harry fibbed.

"Oh. You were like, really emotional."

Harry shrugged.

"And for a first time; this Gryffindor Ravenclaw jam, collab, whatever you want to call it; was, surreal. We meshed well. I've played with Youri and Lewis before, but something about you... makes others do shit they wouldn't usually do," Penelope stated. "Look at my condition." Her hair and previously neat uniform was in a complete mess. "What is it with you two?" she asked seriously.

"Nothing. You were just enjoying yourself," Jon smiled. "I was too."

Harry thought about Tonks' weird behavior. The only wizard he knew who made others do things without actually doing anything was Dumbledore. He instilled a sense of doing selfless things for others that was really hard to ignore. Snape was a good example. How does once convince a wizard to risk being a spy on Death Eaters and The Dark Lord himself?

Jon told Harry before that he brought out the 'best' in others.

He was now questioning himself. Did he trigger other's latent magic?

Michael Ellewyn-Sare was a nobody the last time around. Harry meets him in Diagon alley and he turned Dark. Oliver was a good bloke before, but his bravery skyrocketed to an all time high in that duel. That weekend he had summoned him to protect the school. Tonks was relatively sane before, now that name curse seemed to pop up whenever they were alone. Even Jon's immunity to Fire and cold was something new he 'saw' in his future life. His hand was burned before, but after resurrection, he reported he saw visions of himself surviving Dragon Fire and Winters touch.

And little Gabrielle Delacour was apparently projecting or possessed by the Red Witch, according to Jon.

Was his presence making these changes happen?

"You changed the mind of a lot of the more, old fashioned students who were totally against the rock band. They said that they could appreciate what we're trying to do," Hermione beamed. "You two do change people," Hermione reinforced.

"I think people change for themselves," Harry said simply. "You guys continue. I have to go."

And snatch the Half Blood Prince's book.
Harry and Jon work on countering Snape's Eye restorative. They are invited on mission and arrange for the Crows to assemble immediately at the Clan base.

Breaking into Professor Snape's personal chambers was easier than expected with the help of his invisibility cloak. Snape's bedroom was surprisingly normal, the only thing he found remotely interesting in it was a small chest with a bundle of letters tied together marked 'Evans' above the wardrobe.

Harry knew he was snooping, but prying on personal letters between Snape and his mother was beyond dishonorable.

Those bastards were duplicated with a quick flick of 

\textit{Gemino!} \textit{and} his copies were put into his backpack a heartbeat later. With his magical pet snake Serpensortia draped around his shoulders, the both of them eventually found what Harry was looking for: a secret tunnel.

\textit{air is sseeping through the gapss.}

Serpensortia indicated with a flick of his tongue at the shelving against the bedroom wall. Harry crouched low in front of it.

How do we get in?

\textit{it is guarded by a blood ward, my human.}

Any idea how to get past?

\textit{a ssimple offering should do, my human?}

Harry used the paper cut spell and ran his finger along the edge of the shelf. There was an audible click, and the shelf moved fractionally. Harry pulled at it, and it swung towards him smoothly. A short dark corridor led to a small chamber further down. From inside the bedroom he could see a few fairy lights hovering over a relatively clean work table and potions kit. The narrow passageway smelled like chemicals.

Anything else you sense? Any traps?

\textit{a rat may have passsed this way but no more magic, my human.}

Good. Thanks.

Harry took out the Marauders' map. Snape was having lunch in the main hall. Harry went in further and immediately duplicated the open text still on the table. The name of it was \textit{The Vitruvian Man}, with the accompanying famous image on the cover. In the corner he found a trunk that looked like it was used for over twenty years. This had to be it.
"Alohomora!"

Harry used *Lumos* to inspect the trunk’s contents. It was packed neatly with school texts. Harry opened a couple, and on the inside of each front cover was a handwritten message:

This Book Is Property of the Half Blood Prince.

Charms texts, Defense, Runes, Herbology, all of the subjects Severus Snape took during school were here, sorted into piles, from year one to year seven.

"Oh Harry, you fucking jammy," Harry whispered. He commanded his snake to be on the lookout. The snake slithered towards the entrance door of Snape's living quarters. With painstaking care he began to copy the books using *Gemino*, one by one, starting with the senior books first. Harry used the space altering charm on his Ringbox, and was packing his copies one by one into it.

After ten minutes there was a low, dangerous hiss.

*they are coming, my human!*

With surprising speed Harry felt Serpensortia slither up his outstretched arm. Apparently, the snake could sense him without any issues, even under the invisibility cloak. The snake wrapped around his forearm and stuck his head out from under the sleeve of his bleached pullover.

You don't need to see me to know where I am?

*i ssense you through your heat, your ssmell and the thunderous sshakes you make on the ground.*

Harry thought it was a damn good thing they didn't try to go invisible and attack the basilisk. Harry closed the trunk and hastily made his way back out the secret room and closed the shelf behind him. Within moments he was waiting against the wall, three feet away from the door to Snape's chambers.

Surprisingly, it was Auror Drinkwater who stood in the doorway. He stood quietly for a few moments, surveying the room. His wand was in his hand, pointing at the ground.

Harry cursed inwardly. He stood deathly still against the wall, waiting for an opportunity to slip out the room. After a few seconds, Drinkwater looked both ways down the hall, then came inside. He closed the door behind him. The auror scanned the room, looking for obvious hiding places, stamping on the floor boards at random places in the living area, probably testing for a hollow sound below. After a minute he went further in, towards the bedroom.

Harry silently opened the door and left, heart racing. Within minutes he was back in the Gryffindor dorm. He changed out of his bleached white clothes and put on jeans and t-shirt. After a quick detour to drop Serpensortia by the Whomping Willow Harry casually walked into the great hall for a late lunch.

"Harry," Jon greeted, seated next to Alexandria and Shea Carrow at the end of Gryffindor's table. He raised an eyebrow, as if to ask, *Success?*

"Jon," Harry nodded, confirming the message. Jon returned the nod and continued talking with Alexandria and the Slytherin fifth year. After Harry sat down at an empty spot and served himself, Penelope, Youri and Lewis sat down right next to him.

"What happened?" Lewis asked him. "Why did you run off like that?"

"The best front men are emotional, I thought we agreed on this," Youri, the lead guitarist said,
watching his nails in a bored manner.

"Leave him be," Penelope said. She slid close to him. "So. You did this before?" Harry shook his head. The three Ravenclaw seniors looked at each other suspiciously. "Oh boy."

"A frontman is born," Youri scoffed.

"No," Harry said.

"Why?" Penelope asked, a bit dismayed, but not totally shocked.

"I-" Harry stammered, then forked some more food into his mouth.

"We've a band, jammed over the holidays. Penelope was the singer, but..." Lewis shrugged.

"Yeah I know," Penelope agreed with a huff. "I'm not that great."

"Harry pulls it out from here," Lewis tapped his own chest. "That's heart, from the gut."

"Even now, all this bitchiness is tell-tale frontman syndrome," Yuri muttered.

Penelope watched Harry's attempt at being indifferent to the older boys' ribbing. Something about that performance definitely bothered Harry. She was adamant in finding out what caused that. Harry shrugged and kept eating.

"So, what do we have to do?" Penelope asked, bargaining.

"Find someone else?"

Penelope continued as if he had not spoken. "We want to have a performance for the night before the leaving feast in the Hog's Head. Hermione and Shea are organizing the carols session..."

"That is right after the feast," Youri corrected. "In Hogsmeade square. We want our show to be the night before, so no clash."

"That's good," Harry said, eating some more.

"You're really going to be like this?" Penelope snapped.

Harry stopped eating. "Hm?"

Penelope just glared at him. "My sister told me that you two were the most powerful wizards she has ever met," she said solemnly. "She saw something in France that should not be possible. I've tried to convince her by owl to tell me what happened, but she said she couldn't. She sent me this, instead."

Penelope dug into her pocket and took out a wizard's photograph. The two boys looked over her shoulder. The photograph was of a ball of light crashing into the ground, burning out, then a silhouette of a wizard in glowing white robes appearing. The animation repeated itself after that.

"This is you, innit?"

"What the fuck?" Youri mumbled. Lewis just stared at the wizard photo, lost.

"Your uniform was magically altered after our jam," Penelope declared. "It is the same. You are the Wizard of the Light in this," she tapped the photo with her finger. There was a tense silence when the three Ravenclaws stared at him.

"What thefuck?" Youri mumbled. Lewis just stared at the wizard photo, lost.

"Your uniform was magically altered after our jam," Penelope declared. "It is the same. You are the Wizard of the Light in this," she tapped the photo with her finger. There was a tense silence when the three Ravenclaws stared at him.

"And?" Harry said. Penelope sighed. She crooked her finger at the younger boy. Harry leaned
across. Apparently blackmail, or the more appropriate term, whitemail didn't work on Potter. Penelope came even closer and leaned into his shoulder. She began to whisper softly.

"It will mean a lot to me, and to Hermione and Katie, if you did this for us," she breathed into his ear. "Your three damsels in distress," she continued, "all require your services." She leaned back and watched him intently, eyes twinkling.

Harry just looked blankly at her for ten seconds.

"All right," Harry agreed. That blasted female version of that bloody twinkle.

Lewis pounded the table once with a closed fist in victory. "Bloody fantastic. Next jam is tomorrow night, right after dinner. We have some ideas for a set-list. Bring Jon."

"Right," Harry grumbled. The things he gets himself into.

"Let's go find Jordan," Lewis said and the two senior boys got up. Penelope didn't move. She sat there, watching him. Harry turned to her.

"Yes?"

"Why didn't you do it yourself?" Penelope asked in a serious, low voice.

"What?"

"Michael."

"I'm in second year?"

Penelope kept watching him. "You would have wiped the floor with him!" She hissed. "Wood was too lenient-"

"We needed him to confess, or give himself away by making a mistake. 'Wiping the floor' won't solve anything," Harry cut her off, then took up a napkin and wiped his mouth with it. He crossed the utensils on his cleared plate. He took a sip of water and calmly regarded her. Penelope was watching his mannerisms carefully. He didn't even seem bothered that she was interrogating him on being responsible for what happened to Oliver. "I'm only a second year. I'm not that crazy to take on someone in seventh."

"You beat the Slytherin squad," she countered.

"That was a regulated melee, with rules. Michael didn't play by any rules. He definitely went dark. Anything goes. His final descent was when he attacked Lockhart."

*And planted a fucking horcrux on him.*

"I see." Penelope did not back down from his stare. "Um... something... Just wanted you to know. The nightmares have stopped. Finally."

"Nightmares."

"Yeah. The images while I was locked away in madness... sometimes I remember seeing a lot of fucked up stuff. Michael and I... you know. It. The pain. He was laughing. I was crying, unwilling, but somehow, I couldn't fight it. Other times I saw you... glimpses... fragments... and you were older. I saw you walking past Hagrid, tied up in the forbidden forest. Black cloaks. A... a high voice... then green magic. That freaked me out. I'm either going barmy; or having seer dreams. I
think I prefer the first option, actually."

Harry went still. His Confundus spells mixed with Michael's mind altering spells and potions were giving her nightmares... events linked to the worst moments of both Penelope's and his past.

"I'm really glad that's over," Harry deflected smoothly. "I am so sorry for what he did." Penelope just stared at him.

"Me too," she nodded, still trying to figure him out.

"I'll come tomorrow." Harry got up. Penelope took a light hold of his wrist.

"Harry. Thank you," she said softly, then let him go.

"Yeah." Harry smiled at her then walked off. By the time he left the great hall, Jon and Alexandria caught up with him.

"What happened with those Ravenclaws?" Alexandria asked. Harry looked very tense talking with that Penelope girl. Jon had noticed as well.

"They wanted us to come back, Jon," Harry replied. "Practice tomorrow."

"Something else was bothering you," Alexandria insisted.

"Penelope saw the picture of the comet. Her sister must have given it to her."

"You do not want zis school to know," Alexandria deduced. Harry grimaced as he shook his head. Jon flanked Harry on his right.

"What did she say?" Jon asked.

"She tried to convince me to join... using that as a sort of... bargaining chip? Then she pulled out the big guns."

"What's that?" Alexandria asked, with a hint of a smile.

"You knew, didn't you?" Harry smiled, catching on.

"She did ask me what would make you come back," Alexandria shrugged. "They need all the help they can get. It'll be fun."

"Big 'guns'?" Jon asked.

"Rifles," Harry explained. "Muggle term."

"Everyone knows that you care deeply for Hermione," Alexandria said easily. "She, especially, would be sad if you didn't at least try to help. Didn't you enjoy the practice?"

Harry nodded his head sideways, neither here, nor there. "I agreed."

"Wonderful!" Alexandria gave him a one handed hug around the shoulders. "This school needs something to raise the spirits, other than quidditch!"

"Where are you headed?" Jon asked.

"To study some ...extra texts. Come with?" Harry invited Jon with a nod towards the Gryffindor
"Yes," Jon agreed. He turned to Alexandria and said something softly. She nodded and both of them shared a quick peck on the lips. She waved at Harry.

"A plus tard!"

"Later," Harry waved back. As soon as she turned the corridor Harry went close to Jon. "I copied all of Snape's old texts. We are going to look for counter measures to help Ollie. And strangely enough, Drinkwater came snooping as well. I had to sneak out of there like a thief."

"Like? You are a thief," Jon said. "And what did she mean about Mistress Hermione? Are you stealing fair maiden's hearts as well?" Jon lifted his eyebrows.

"No, of course not," Harry replied. Hermione was acting a bit strange though. "I'm beginning to think that witches that consider me their 'hero' are catching feelings. It happened with Ginny .. back then. Thinking about it, I wonder if she plotted for the entire four years on how to catch me. And she did. She knew my temper was my weakness... jealousy is a hell of a thing. She was with Dean and it drove me mad."

"You wear your emotions on your sleeve," Jon agreed. "And your anger-" Jon put two fingers to his eyes. "What are you going to do about Snape's hand in that?"

"I have an idea. Magic has a balance- Dark vs Light, and all grey area in-between. Let's go on up to the ROQ."

Hours later in the Room of Requirement Harry and Jon had compiled the majority of notes from Snape's various corrections. The Vitruvian Man was where Harry found the notes for Voldemort's and Pettigrew's Regeneration Potion. Also, it was in there that they found the instructions for the eye restorative.

"You believe you can alter this into a Light version- type of regeneration?" Jon asked, watching the numerous chalkboards around them. Formulae and theoretical Latin phrases with shorthand wand motion diagrams were drawn all over the boards.

"Yes. My blood should be a potent catalyst. Blood of an ally, freely given, will counter the Sempra part of the cutting curse Snape created." Harry pointed to the counter spell he formulated, written under the chant Pettigrew used. "The problem is, I believe at that time, is when they would immediately need to heal him and re-attach the arm."

"And you are not a healer," Jon muttered.

"Right. And according to Snape, the eye restorative potion also uses the same Dark principle as the Regeneration Potion," Harry checked his notes. "Usually, darker magic is a trade: something taken away, to be the base for what will be given," Harry muttered. His eyes began to water as the thought of what Snape had to add in the fourteenth step. He gingerly touched his left eye. "They added my mutilated eye into this potion."


"No wonder Pomfrey didn't attempt this. She knew Snape is adept in the dark arts. She wouldn't even dare try this type of magic."

"So, what can we do?" Jon asked.
"How confident are you in rushing me to Pomfrey, in lets say, under five minutes?" Harry said seriously.

"Not very," Jon raised his hands in a 'don't do whatever it is you are thinking about' manner. "Should I call Alexandria?"

"Yeah... I think she can join us somewhere close, the workshop, and test this out. She can meet us there. I don't forsee it turning out that bad."

"What are you going to test?" Jon asked.

"I'm going to drip my blood in my eyes," Harry shrugged as he packed up the books and put them into his Ringbox. He found out that the more times he correctly enchanted and disenchanted this ringbox, the longer each enchantment lasted. So far, it had increased from only ten minutes, to a generous two and a half hours. The space enchantment charm made the space inside almost as big as a closet. The Ringbox was becoming a very useful tool in holding items that were resistant to shrinking and transfiguration.

"You are liking this 'my blood will fix everything scheme'," Jon folded his arms.

"I doubt it would have a negative effect. But, I have been wrong before."

"No time like the present," John sighed. They left the room of requirement.

"Jon," Harry called. "Alexandria, and you?"

"I have asked her to be my girlfriend, yes."

"Was that ever in doubt?" Harry congratulated him.

"She said she knew she really liked me the moment she kissed me after you were injured. It was spontaneous," Jon reminisced.

Harry and Jon made their way down to the Gryffindor dorm. It was an hour before curfew. Both lads were hungry, but the amount of knowledge Snape had in his text books was invaluable. They made cheat sheets of all the useful spells/magical theory alterations underlined with 'Tested +ve'.

"About that," Harry hesitated. "Voldemort did something similar- accepted an offering from his servants. They then referred to him as My Lord."

"What?" Jon snapped.

"I think the ritual you performed may be a Light magic version of it though. The Death Eaters offered something... more radical. A piece of their soul, loyalty, and a sacrifice of pain. It all connected their magic with Voldemort. A nasty radicalization of the Protean Charm. You, on the other hand, offered protection and sanctuary, something to the tune of service, without any expected reward. Sounds like you can't get any more light magic than that."

"So why did you compare the ritual to Voldemort's?" Jon asked, still not clear.

"Your connection. She immediately knew when you were injured, and knew exactly where to find you. And her duel- I believe you amplify her magic. Her magic seemed completely in tune with the wand you crafted."

"She said so herself," Jon mused. "But I think her confidence came from watching you," he
revealed. "She has been in awe of your flight magic. It is all she asks about when you are the topic of conversation."

"I was thinking about that too..." Harry said sadly. "The phoenix bracer helped me unlock the principle, but... but if my theory is correct, I may not even need it," he shook his head.

"What do you mean?" Jon asked. "I thought it was your unique interpretation of the Bracer magic," he added.

"A wizard needs to die to be able to fly," Harry muttered as they reached the portrait of the Fat lady. "Forget that for now. Call her, please."

Half an hour later Jon, Alexandria and Harry were in the workshop. Harry was sitting on top of the sturdy wooden desk made of thick planks of wood. His hands were bound behind his back. He waited patiently as Alexandria used her wand to siphon some of his blood. She had her surgical gloves on, and a pain potion ready on the table.

"Right. Remember the evacuation procedure. Jon, knock him out if he loses control. I will levitate him to the infirmary. Harry, you ready?"

Harry gulped, but nodded. He tilted his head back. Alexandria gently held his eyelids open and dripped a drop of his own blood in his restored left eye.

At first, Harry felt nothing. Slowly, a sensation of an undulating wave of pain spiked, then subsided into a soothing wash of calm relief. He felt magic begin to pulse in both eyes.

"More," Harry instructed. Alexandria nodded, and repeated the process.

This time the pain came faster, stronger, with a sensation of rage building up within him. Harry gritted his teeth, trying not to hiss in discomfort.

"Again," Harry said. Alexandria looked curiously at Jon, who shrugged. She added another drop.

This time, the pain came like a stab to the heart, a desperate grip on the inside, almost as if he was suffering under Secrets Revealed's sense of a burning heartache, except ten times as bad. He felt as if the Basilisk had sunk his fang right into the center of his chest, a crushing physical pain alongside a surge of venom running through his veins.

"STOP!" he screamed, throwing himself forward unto his knees. Pain radiated through his body, driving him into a rage. He felt magic building up behind his eyes as he hunched over, his nose almost touching the ground.

"Harry?" Alexandria asked tentatively. Harry was panting hard, his whole body heaving. Harry's blue jeans began to smoke.

"Behind me!" Jon commanded, and dragged her away from him. He summoned the Aegis shield, and drew his Dragon heart String wand. With a fluid motion he stepped around Alexandria and shielded her with his body.

The pain was lancing through him now, so much Harry thought that he was going to explode outwards at his joints, and crushed inside at the same time. It was worse than the Cruciatius, due to the fact that spell came from an external source. This pain came from within.

Harry gave in to the scream. With a simple flex of his shoulders, the ropes tied around his wrists burst open. He could feel pain fueling a powerful magic into his eyes.
"Back!" Jon commanded Alexandria as he hastily back-stepped to give himself some room. Alexandria crouched behind him, peeking around Jon to see what was happening. Harry was on his feet, his skin and clothes were glowing a blinding white. Harry screamed, pressing the heels of his hands into his eyeballs. Suddenly, the pain was gone. Harry squeezed his eyes shut, gasping heavily, clenching his hands into fists. Magic surged through him like it had never done before.

"Harry?" Jon barked. "Harry!"

Harry opened his eyes.

"Oh fuck," Alexandria and John said in tandem. Both of his eyes were glowing white as the Sun.

Jon dashed forward and flashed his wand into Harry's face. Harry crumpled like a puppet cut from his strings.

"Bien. His heart rate and magic has reverted to normal," Alexandria said an hour later in the Hospital wing. There was a damp towel over Harry's forehead, and medium sized orbs wedged into his palms. Inside of each glass orb was a miniature version of Newton's Cradle. The tiny metallic pendulums were finally clicking at an even rhythm. For the past hour it was working at an incredible pace, showing signs of magical distress going on inside.

"Wake him?" Jon asked.

"Yes. Be carfeul."

Jon summoned the Aegis and touched his wand at Harry's temple. Harry's eyes shot open, but they were dormant.

"You alright?" Jon asked calmly.

"Yes. What happened?"

"We sort of eliminated the Red eye magic," Jon said flatly.

Harry looked at the both of them, hunched behind the shield.

"But...?" Harry said, sitting up. Both of them retreated a few steps.

"Your eyes were glowing a blinding white, instead of blood red."

"Ah," Harry said lamely. "Guess that is something, right?"

Both Jon and Alexandria nodded in tandem. Harry laughed. Jon straightened, and released the shield. Alexandria took a deep breath, and let it out through her mouth. "We have to get back, before Professor McGonagall checks in with the house!" Alexandria warned.

"Let's go," Harry said taking the Marauder's map out of his backpack. The three of them hastily exited the hospital wing, using secret passageways to remain undetectable all the way to the Gryffindor Tower.

Monday was class as usual. During Defense Against the Dark Arts, Auror Drinkwater presented the match ups for the L Brackets and the W Brackets.

"This time, since the purpose of the tournament is to learn how to successfully subdue an opponent; the stakes are a bit higher. The second round will put in the element of a bit of espionage, and
preparation. This is the criteria: both the W and L Brackets will face named opponents who were closest in their Round times. So if you defeated your opponent quickly, the Duelist with the nearest round time would be your opponent. So, the fastest winners were," Auror Drinkwater paused for dramatic effect, watching the eyes of all the students with a slight smirk on his face- "Black, and Granger!" There was polite applause. "Come to the front!"

Jon and Hermione came towards the front of the class. Auror Drinkwater waved his wand at the board and their names appeared: 1st. Black vs Granger.

"In my experience, fighters who knew who they were going to face, may cheat to gain an advantage. As a deterrent towards that, I proposed to the Headmaster and Professor Sinistra that all opponents should bow in salute and shake hands as soon as the roster is out. Go on ahead, as per Duelling code Section 1 Article 6."

Jon and Hermione both drew their wands formally and bowed at the waist, Jon with front leg kept straight, the other leg slightly bent behind him. Hermione held her wand straight up and curtsied, hand on the side of her skirt. Jon did not smile. In fact, if you ignored how graceful he was on his feet, Jon looked very uncomfortable.

"Perfect! Excellent form, the both of you. Now shake hands!" Drinkwater said jovially. Jon and Hermione sheathed their wands before shaking hands. Hermione smiled at Jon, who could only manage a twitch of his lips in response. Both students then did a slight bow to the class then retook their seats. "Very good. Respect your opponent, and due courtesy to the spectators. This will be the only time such formalities would be necessary, and I advise you to take this seriously. In the old days, any slight at parley could be taken as insult, and that could turn ugly. For the purpose of the tournament, this is to remind everyone that no hard feelings are involved, and student life goes on after as per normal. Next: Dean Thomas and Blaise Matuidi!"

The two boys came up, bowed, shook hands without much preamble, and returned to their seat. And so the winners bracket paired up from fastest time to the longest, culminating in the last winning duo: Harry Potter and Daphne Greengrass.

Harry had a lopsided smirk on his face after they bowed. They came close to shake hands. Daphne had a bit of a twinkle in her eyes.

"I think this might be a good time to call in that favour you owe me, Harry," Daphne said cheekily as they shook hands.

"Hmm.. I dunno about that..." was all Harry could say. Both of them grinned at each other, remembering their dance in France. They bowed to the other students and returned to their seats. In the loser's bracket Ron drew Crabbe again since both of them defaulted on time. Draco drew Justin Finch-Fletchley and Pansy got Susan Bones.

At the end of the period Auror Drinkwater gave them their spell lists and the Match date, which was the Saturday after the week of first term exams. "So! I hope you had paid attention to your opponent's previous duel! Always keep in mind that everyone has a certain style. Analyze it and find ways to exploit their weak spots. Next round is in three weeks. Best of luck to everyone."

The bell rang. Everyone was abuzz about the next round, which had the added excitement of a public roster to be circulated on the various notice boards throughout school. Everyone except Jon.

Harry, Ron and Jon were leaving the class. Jon was watching Hermione solemnly, who appeared quite excited as she talked with Padma and Parvati Patil.
"I cannot," Jon said softly under his breath. Harry barely heard him, but chose not to respond. This was something Jon had to figure out himself. The three of them made their way to their next classes without another word.

After dinner Jon and Harry walked with the three senior Ravenclaws, Dean Thomas and Lee Jordan to the third floor. Ginny Weasley, Colin Creevy and Michael Corner followed them afterwards. Harry and Jon were shown how to set up equipment by Dean and Timothy Turner; a Slytherin Fifth year. Timmy didn't speak much, but was frighteningly skillful at staging equipment and with the help of Dean's tethering spell, had the mixing boards, cords for the amplifiers, guitars and microphones up within half an hour.

"Ok, guys. So here is a bunch of songs we could choose from. For any piano bits, Katie has volunteered. And for any female backup vocals, Hermione and Shea say they belong to a choir, and could hold their own," Lewis came forward. "Right. I did some research through a muggle cousin of mine, who was quite helpful in mailing me tabs and stuff. So, here we go-" He flattened the parchment on the bass amp.

"Bryan Adams 'Summer of 69'?" Lewis asked, pointing at the first song. There was a general positive response. Lewis tapped his wand on the parchment. Copies of sheet music and lyrics magically appeared for each of them.

"I put this one here because I think we should have a song where one of the girls can do vocals, and get a Ballad in. The Pretenders 'I'll Stand By You'?"

"Youri, do you mind playing that?" Penelope asked the lead guitarist. It wasn't really a guitar focused song.

"Once I'm on stage and its rock and roll, I'm easy." Youri continued shadow playing on his guitar without directly looking at her.

"Yeah, I'll do it," Penelope agreed. Lewis tapped the parchment.


"Insane guitar," Youri grinned. "Let's do that one. Potter, think you can do ol' Freddie justice?"

Harry shrugged. "Sure." More parchments came into being.

"Black Sabbath's 'Paranoid'?" Everyone agreed immediately.

"Motorhead's 'The Ace Of Spades'?"

Harry put his finger to his lips. "My voice can't do that gritty thing he does," Harry interrupted.

"Jon?" Lewis asked. "Your voice got a bit of power behind it," he encouraged.

"I can do it," Jon said immediately. Harry raised an eyebrow. Jon had no clue about any of these songs. Jon shrugged, grinning at Harry confidently. Harry returned the grin.

"Whitesnake - 'Here I go Again'?" Another agreement all around.

"Pearl Jam's 'Alive'?"
"Ooh yes," Penelope said.

"Well, that's the full monty. This set list could possibly be longer than the allotted time. As we practice we would know if we need to drop a couple. But we're missing something." Lewis put his index finger to his chin.

"Let Clearwater do the Ballad first. Then maybe cut the lights ... bridge into Fear of the Dark... dramatic entrance of Potter on vocals. We also need something to make the crowd go wild for the finale," Youri said in exasperation as he continued practicing a solo silently on the guitar. Harry realized that he didn't speak much, he was far more focused on his guitar than actually taking part in decision making.

"Sounds awesome. Any suggestions?" Lewis asked the group members.

Timothy Turner spoke out aloud from connecting the mixing board. "It's got be Filth's *Her Ghost in the Fog*. You've got two trained mezzo sopranos in the other room, and a pianist. Might as well use them."

"Get them in here, Timmy," Lewis said. Timothy shrugged and fetched Katie, Shea and Hermione.

"Hey guys!" Hermione said enthusiastically. "What's up?"

"You girls say you can sing high?" Lewis asked. "Opera style?" Shea and Hermione nodded, but Katie shook her head. "You can play piano, Bell?"

"Yes..." Katie said, intrigued.

"Ok. So, look at this set list. We will need all three of you for *Bohemian Rhapsody*, and *Her Ghost in the Fog*. You two girls should be able to handle the female vocals," Lewis told them.

Shea scanned the list. "Looks good. Who picked *Her Ghost*?"

"I did," Timothy said.

"That's taking the biscuit, Timmo, nice one," Shea nodded. Timothy blushed at the praise from his pretty classmate. Lewis tapped his wand and more sheet music was created. "Okay. As we have the girls here, let's take a listen to some of the songs on the trusty '45. I will have to get the *Ghost in the Fog*. I don't have that one. Let's do the Queen first, and then run through the tracks. Lee. I hope you can handle yourself because as far as I know, only Dean would be able to help you out. I have no clue about drums."

"No fear man," Lee Jordan took out a SONY Walkman. "I'll get the cassettes and do some work on the ones I don't know, outside of practice times. Dean got this to work, I'm already tethered here."

"What is that?" Jon asked, intrigued at the small device. Lee Jordan offered him the headphones. Jon started when music came into his ears.

"Oh yes," Jon said eagerly, listening. He continued watching Lee operate the buttons. "Do you have another?"

"Talk to Dean. He can order it in Newcastle, blood ward it and have it tethered to you in a day or two."

"I will speak with him, thank you."
"Alright you lot, let's check out the set list." Lewis took out the Queen record and began to play it. "Tonight, we'll just try the catchy parts of anything we like. Tomorrow, we could probably start on a whole song. Agreed?"

The group consented and the practice eventually turned into a hang out listening session, with a bit of chorus work. Snacks and drinks were brought up. Harry was feeling relaxed, just hanging out among friends, old and new. He felt truly happy for the first time in a long time.

The first two weeks in December rolled on with a fun yet exhausting routine of class, physical training, Quidditch practice, band practice and Sectumsempra research using Snape's school texts. Harry and Jon also kept plugging at engineering the treadles to turn the wand clamps smoothly, and incorporate the 'raw wood' coring bit. The wood shaving tool was also an enigma that they spent many hours on trying to solve. To get that smooth, pointed shape of the main stem was much much harder when you needed to figure out how to align the blades at just the right angle alongside the main coring shaft.

Unfortunately, meal times were an awkward affair due to the fact that Harry barely had time to put his fork in his mouth when inevitably a witch would drag him into conversation, with varying levels of success. He was seriously considering commandeering an unused office and circulating a flyer with office hours and appointment schedules.

Friday during dinner, however, he was pleasantly surprised. It wasn't Angelina, Penelope, Ginny, Daphne, Professor McGonagall nor Claudia Howard, the Gryffindor Head Girl. It was Alexandria. "Hey," he said warmly. Only Hermione and Katie seemed to get warm responses from him these days. To be fair, Alexandria hardly sought him out.

"Hi! Can we speak? I do not know where Jon runs off to. We all need to talk somewhere private," she showed him a scroll tied with a ribbon. She lowered her voice and leaned into his ear. "Clan business!" she whispered.

"Okay," Harry nodded, and quickly finished his meal. "I assume you haven't checked his room."

"That is far too forward!" Alexandria opened her eyes wide. Harry shook his head with a wry smile. They got up and left the hall, heading up the stairs towards Gryffindor Tower. Harry spotted Daphne and Hermione watching him intently as both of them left the great hall. When they arrived at the second year boys' dormitory, Harry opened the door. A blast of sound greeted them. Jon's recently acquired guitar and amplifier was at full blast, drowning out a small radio playing a scratchy version of Motorhead's Ace Of Spades. No one else was apparently in the room.

So that was what Jon was up to after he inhaled his food. For the past week and a half he disappeared during breakfast, lunch and dinner!

"Jon!" Harry called. The noise was too loud. Alexandria came in and closed the door. Jon's back was turned towards them. He was singing into the microphone hanging from a belt tied to the canopy bed. Jon's legs were spread, his long hair bouncing as he practiced. His singing and playing had gotten much better, Harry admitted. Harry folded his arms and allowed him to finish the last verse.

"Read 'em and weep, the dead man's hand again
I see it in your eyes, take one look and die
The only thing you see, you know it's gonna be
The Ace Of Spades, The Ace Of Spa-"
Jon had finally noticed his audience at the doorway. The guitar abruptly cut off.

"Sorry!" Jon called out. He flicked off the power switch to his Randall amplifier. "Was practicing," he said, embarrassed. He took off his jet black guitar and laid it gently on his bed.

"Sounds top," Harry admitted.

"You've been skipping meals to practice?" Alexandria asked, almost relieved that the mystery was easily solved.

"I eat quickly," Jon shrugged. "This is the only time I am sure that no one will be in the dorms. I cast the silence magic on the door. You weren't hearing me outside, were you?"

"Nah, it was fine. She has Clan business to talk about," Harry gave Alexandria the floor.

"Uncle V has said that The Supreme Dragon Lancer, The Beowulf himself, has finally tracked the resting place of the Queen Onyx dragon, affectionately christened 'Elizabeth'. He has eyes on the roost. He will send his protege back to the base town, where he says she will escort the Crow's Vambrace this weekend if they wish to be the first to acquire dibs on the Onyx Queen-mother. His consultation fee will be seventy thousand galleons."

"Hedwig!" Harry summoned and immediately opened the window using Alohomora. A gust of cold and the snow white owl swooped in the room. Harry closed the window behind her. Soon they would be able to work on fighting the Basilisk and neutralizing the Dark Soul magic embedded in the Horcruxes. Hedwig circled the room then landed on his shoulder. She nipped affectionately at his hair. "No time to waste, girl."

Harry ascribed two quick messages. One to Tonks, the other to Ollivander.

"Good evening,

Please meet us at base we were invited to go ranging immediately for the Onyx.

-RH, Mr. B, Medic."

"Is it full moon?" was the first question Jon asked.

"No, thank God," Harry replied, tying the messages unto Hedwig's legs. He opened the window and the pretty owl took to the sky. Harry immediately dug into his school trunk and took out an Atlas book.

"Where did he say the base town was?"

"Sasklyak, Siberia. A town roughly two hundred miles north of the Airport at Olenyok. There is a wizards' inn named Posledniy Ogon. I did a little research. That's Russian for 'The Last Fire'."

"Sounds lovely," Harry grimaced, trailing his finger on the map.

"I take it this place is cold," Jon muttered as he looked over Harry's shoulder. "We will need to be prepared."

"Let's get going to base. We'll need to build a carriage for the Abraxan cart. Probably use the scrap on it ... transfigure a hard top.

"A mobile base," Jon nodded.
"Hopefully, the floo is working and Ollivander could come quickly and sign our leave forms," Harry told Jon. He watched Alexandria with a resigned expression. "Alex-"

"Oh no. I am definitely coming!" she said immediately. The two boys looked at each other, then at her.

"How?" Jon asked.

"I don't know, but..." Alexandria bit her lip. "I will have to convince Mademoiselle Tonks to write a letter to Madame that I am a Clan apprentice and am needed on mission. It is the truth. The truth is best," she said hopefully.

"We will need warming potions and anything that can help counter the low temperature. Can you?"

"I have access to the recipes. But we will have to acquire ingredients at an Apothecary. I cannot take it out of the the Medical wing store room... there is one in Hogsmeade, I believe."

"All right," Harry said.

"Get your warmest stuff, and we'll meet up at the workshop," Jon said, already digging in his trunk.

"Done," Alexandria nodded.

Within half an hour the three of them were disembarking off their brooms outside the back door to the Clan Mansion. Harry and Alexandria were layered and bundled up tightly against the cold. Jon had on his apprentice robes over his dueling armor as his sole protection. Harry fumbled with the keys and they were finally inside.

"Tonks!?” Harry called out.

"I'm upstairs! Be down in a bit!” came her voice.

"I'm lighting a fire in the great room!” Harry called out.

"Right on! Down in a few!” came the response. The three of them walked through the dimly lit halls towards the largest room on the ground floor. This room had a long banquet table, taxidermy hooks and a regal red rug running the entire middle of the long room. The banquet table could have seated eight on the long sides, and had a larger throne-like chair at the head. The massive fireplace was on the far end of the room, a comfortable distance away from the back of the head chair.

The dark wood and the deep red runner underneath the table and chairs gave the place a regal atmosphere. A large, faded banner was hung over the mantelpiece.

"Lexie, can you transfigure that banner into this-?” Harry pointed at the CV logo on Jon's communication patch.

"Sure,” Alexandria said. With a wave of her wand, she transfigured the faded and dusty banner into the Crow's Vambrace logo.

"Looks good there," Jon nodded. The three of them watched it for a few moments, then settled their broomsticks and suitcases against the wall.

"I'll start coffee, and a pot of tea," Alexandria dashed out the room.

Harry tried to light the torch scones on the walls, but his fire spell was futile, no matter the wand. He dare not try it with the Diablo Core.
"Jon," Harry grumbled as he thumbed the fireplace.

"Enflamare!" Instead of a fireball shooting out of his wand, there was a low *fwoosh* and a stream of white hot Dragon breath pushed through the wand's tip like a flame thrower, churning and curling as it ignited the logs in the fireplace. The temperature rose considerably. Jon and Harry stared at the fire, then each other. Jon shrugged.

"Well, well, well! The Black proficiency for Flame based magic runs strong in you, Lord Black!" Tonks announced at the doorway with a grin on her face. "Makes me even more eager to try out the *Fiendfyre* spell!"

Harry turned at her voice. Tonks was dressed in her Red Dueling armor, complete with the scarf, cowl and cape. She flicked her wand at the torch scones along the walls and at the chandelier hanging on the high ceiling. The place lit up and warmth radiated throughout the room.

"You three are waaay too hasty," Tonks reprimanded the two boys. "Master Ollivander floo called me as soon as he got the letter. He's in Hogsmeade, floo'ed through Rosmerta's fireplace. He predicted that you would be here, but you need to hurry back. Meet him at Hagrid's. He has to sign the permission form for you two, and get Pomfrey's signature for Alexandria. Take her broom, Jon, she's waiting out front for you. Eager beavers," she laughed.

"At once," Jon agreed and grabbed her broom and his Quicksilver. Harry followed him out but Tonks stepped across him before he could leave the room.

"Yeah?"

"Sarah told me that her younger sister is obsessed with you," Tonks said calmly.

Harry froze. "She showed her the picture," he said. "Why would she do that?"

"Penelope performed a ritual of fealty," Tonks sighed. "Sarah pressured her into telling her what was going on. She was suffering insomnia and nightmares for a long while. She is now sworn to be your ally."

"Fuck," Harry said. "That's why she told me that they were gone."

"Yes. A magical purpose to another wizard is one of the few ways to counter Wizard's Dementia. It balances us, if needed."

"I wonder if that's how Voldemort managed to recruit all those crazies- he promised them a way out of that slow creeping disease."

"Harry. The Fwooper on Cedar is the only combination that can recreate that in a spell. Remus mailed me about the wand I loaned him, and how dangerous that is. Did you use that wand to trap Myrtle's bathroom?"

"Yes," Harry cursed at himself. That was a mistake. He could not have known the repercussions down the line.

"Your first servant," Tonks said dangerously. Harry didn't even see the wand until she pressed it into his stomach. "You are already more powerful than any seventeen year old wizard I have ever heard about. Except one," she said softly.

"Who?"
"He has the same affinity for red eyes. Just like yours," she snarled. Harry said nothing, just glared at her.

"You said you broke out of Gringotts, one of the most secure places in Britain. You attract followers like moths to a flame. What am I to do with a Dark wizard, who can only do Light magic?" she asked seriously. Her wand trailed up his torso and prodded the bottom of his chin. Harry raised his chin in defiance.

"I am not a dark wizard," he proclaimed.

"No dark wizard ever admits it, until he has enough power and influence behind him. At that point, he is no longer a nuisance. He's now a legitimate threat to society," she said softly in his ear.

"I'm not a dark wizard," Harry repeated.

"You have a Battle Mage as your strongest ally. He has two witches under his protection. And now a girl has sworn fealty to you," she pressed her wand firmly under his jaw. "You are a dangerous wizard, Harry. When I enrolled into the Auror trainee program, I swore to stop threats like you. Are you a threat, Harry?"

"I'm not a dark wizard," Harry repeated. He was getting mad.

Tonks circled around him and began plucking his wands out of his pockets. With a quick flick she shut the door to the great room. "You are channeling magic as we speak. Every time I get close, I do some weird stuff. Penelope has mailed her sister and said that she feels your emotions, your rage. She said it was the most exhilarating sensation, especially when you tried out for the band. Am I to ignore this?" She was standing right behind Harry, talking softly in his ear.

"I- I... did not force her into performing any ritual," Harry reinforced. He didn't know what to tell her. Tonks' wand was at his neck. "I had no clue she did it. Please, let me go. You know me, Tonks. I am trying to stop -"

Harry shut his mouth, but it was too late. Tonks pressed the tip of her wand dangerously into the hollow underneath his jaw bone.

"Stop what? Speak, damn you!" she hissed, grabbing the top of his hair and pulling it back with a sharp jerk. Her wand felt like a warm knife against his jaw.

"I'm trying to stop Voldemort from rising from the dead," he said softly. "That is why I did this, why I came back!" he bellowed.

"I don't believe you," Tonks said, her hand gripping even further into his hair. "You're lying."

"I know things I should not know. The true Lord Black, Sirius is innocent and willingly renounced his innocence as penance for thinking that he has failed me, his godson, and blames himself for the death of my parents. Peter Pettigrew is the traitor. He is alive and I know where he is. Sirius' younger brother, Regulus defected from the Dark Lord. Lucius Malfoy claimed he was under the Imperious Curse to avoid prosecution. Your aunt Bellatrix tortured the Longbottoms, which is why you are so deathly afraid of the naming curse Betelguese Black inflicted upon the Black daughters."

"Liar!"

"You think you can't control who you choose to be your mate!" Harry snapped.

"I- no.. you're lying!" Tonks breathed.
"Your father is muggle born, and your mother's portrait has been burned off the Black family tree for her perceived 'treason,'" Harry spat angrily.

"Shut up," Tonks warned.

"Your family, your mother knew that Sirius wasn't dark, but did nothing to defend him. She let him rot!" Harry's anger was skyrocketing. "All those years, no visitors, no true representation for his innocence. Judged guilty, and to hell with the key."

"Shut up," Tonks hissed, but Harry could sense her indecision.

"He is innocent," Harry said in a low tone.

"Sirius turned! He is as dark as it gets! I've had enough of this! Stup-"

Harry twisted, and with a fluid motion tossed Tonks over his hip, holding her wrist and the front of her robes. Tonks fell hard with a reverberating thud on the red rug in front of the door. Harry immediately wrenched her wand out of her grasp. He pressed his knee against her collarbone.

"What is wrong with you?" Harry demanded. "I had nothing to do with Penelope! What do I need to do to make you trust me?"

"You're hiding something," Tonks snarled from her pinned position underneath him. "No one can reverse their lifespan. You claim you traveled through time. Either that version you showed me is the real you, and this is just a very strong glamour, or you killed the real Harry Potter and have taken his place!" she hissed. With a surprise motion she kicked from the ground position, connecting solidly on Harry's head. Harry toppled over.

Tonks rolled to the side and sprung to her feet. She drew Harry's confiscated Troll on Holly and cast the manacle charm at him. Stout chains wrapped around his wrists and his ankles. They immediately began to smoke.

Harry's head was ringing with that kick. He could sense that he was now chained, once again, but he could barely tell which way was up, the kick was so hard. He hated being kicked in the head. It was embarrassing, and aggravating.

Anger and humiliation surged through him.

"ENOUGH!" Harry shouted, wrenching his arms free. The chains burst into a white flame, disintegrating instantaneously into a fine grey dust. Tonks instinctively shielded her face from the bright flash of magic. His body levitated off the ground. At that moment Jon kicked open the door and he and Alexandria rushed into the room, wands drawn. As soon as they did, they were pressed into the floor with a heavy, otherworldly magic.

They were all forced unto one knee, the entire room vibrating between this reality, and the misty white in-between of the train station beyond the veil. Tonks felt magic as she had never felt it before. It was vibrating through her, making reality warp as she struggled to remain in a kneeling position.

Harry hovered a few feet before her, his eyes burning white.

"Harry! Stop!" Jon bellowed from his kneeling position, but the next moment he was face down on the rug, his limbs pressed painfully into the ground. Alexandria was trying her best to force air into her lungs.

Tonks clenched her fists, willing her magic to counter this pressure on her spine. It was futile, the
heavy magic pressed down on her, causing her to bow even closer to the ground. Then, all of a sudden, it vanished. The room reverted to normal. Harry had all of the wands Tonks confiscated back into his hands. He gradually lowered himself to the ground.

"If you only knew the sacrifice I made to come back, you would believe," Harry said simply, eyes still aglow. "I will, and forever shall, Walk In the Light." He offered her wand back to her, handle first. Tonks stared at his glowing white eyes, and her offered wand. She glared at him, but accepted it. Harry closed his eyes momentarily, and then reopened them. Alexandria, Jon and Tonks rose shakily to their feet.

Harry didn't move an inch as Tonks stood up in front of him. There was a tense moment when Jon thought she would have attacked. The both of them stared at each other. Tonks leaned in, almost nose to nose.

"You make any fucking mistake, I'm taking you down myself," Tonks promised. "A fucking fealty ritual. She is my best friend's sister!" she accused Harry.

"What, you're blaming me for that? I had nothing to do with it!" Harry re-iterated once again. Tonks disregarded everything that came out of his mouth.

"Watch yourself, whoever you are," she growled, and spun on her heel. "You are to meet Ollivander at Hagrid's," she snapped at Jon and Alexandria. "I am going to London to get Clan travel documents."

Harry just watched her leave. She slammed the door behind her with gusto. Alexandria started, watching both the door, then Harry, in amazement.

"What just happened?" Alexandria asked in a high tone, shocked beyond belief.

"A misunderstanding," Harry gritted through clenched teeth. He was rubbing the back of his ear tenderly. The same fucking ear too.

"Come. Let us focus on the task ahead," Jon turned to open the door and was lucky enough not to lose his head as it slammed back open abruptly. Tonks stormed past the two of them with a mumbled 'excuse me'. She kept her head low and focused, not even bothering to avoid Harry as she strode towards the fireplace. Harry didn't retaliate when her shoulder rudely collided with his. She took some floo powder from the retrieved canister and threw it in the roaring fire.

"Leaky Cauldron!" she shouted and stepped into the green flames.

"She is livid," Alexandria noted. She examined Harry closely. Harry was watching the flames turn green, then back to red.

Well. That went rather swimmingly.

"Let's go," Jon commanded. Harry took a deep breath, then let it out.

"Yeah." Harry grabbed his broom and the three of them left for the short jump to Hagrid's.

By the time Tonks came back from London, Harry had made the shopping errand to the Apothecary and bought the list of ingredients Alexandria needed. Jon had also fetched Ghost from Hagrid's. Alexandria and Master Ollivander managed to transfigure the discarded mattresses and wooden furniture piled upon the Abraxan cart into an enclosed carriage. It was equipped with two rows of cushioned bench seats on either side of a narrow middle table. There was a window large enough for the driver to get into the cart at the front, a windowed door at the side, and a large double door exit.
out the back. There was even a way to flip open a portion of the roof, almost identical to a tank hatch.

Tonks circled the cart, inspecting it. She did this without even acknowledging Harry's presence. Harry folded his arms, and focused his thoughts and feelings on the mission ahead instead.

Ollivander looked mightily pleased with himself. "What do you think, Miss Tonks?"

"It's a great idea," Tonks admitted. Harry did not put forward that the idea was his. It would have just pissed her off even more.

"Now for the finishing magical touches. Who was the one responsible for the purchase of the original Abraxan cart?" Ollivander asked.

"I am," Harry said.

"Are you confident about using the Space Altering enchantment?" Ollivander asked. Harry nodded.

"The magic works much easier for the direct owner. For a volume of this size, permanent enlargement must be done in stages, over a period of time. The safe method is a one tenth increase in size, over the span of ten minutes, then a cancellation. That minor difference in volume will not affect the integrity of the construct. Go on, then." Harry cast the space altering charm. When they looked in, the seating area look a tiny bit roomier. "Good. Do this a few times over the next few months and you should be able to have a roomy and comfortable mobile base." Ollivander climbed in through the double doors at the back.

Harry nodded. After a few trips back and forth in the house, the Crows had packed all their equipment and a wizards' cooler box filled with frozen meat and canned goods. Two boxes filled with muggle water bottles were pushed underneath one side of the benches. Blankets and a stretcher were stashed underneath the other side.

"Right. Let's get moving. It's almost eight o'clock. I say we should reach there and grab some rest before we head out ranging with the Dragon Tracker," Tonks told Ollivander. Jon's and Ollivander's eyebrows raised exactly the same time at Tonks' blatant disregard of the driver, to whom she should be talking to about the flight plans. Harry said nothing, just wrapped his cloak tighter around his dueling armor. His hands were covered with multiple gloves, and he pulled down top-notch quidditch goggles over his eyes. He jumped up into the driver's bench.

"First stop, Latvia," Ollivander said through the driver window after all of them had loaded up. "Here. Use this." Ollivander pushed through a crystal ball with an intricate compass as the base. Ollivander leaned half of his body out the window behind Harry. He shone a light on a map of Europe. "From our starting point, we are going directly East to the capital, Riga. Tonks is right. We should use this night for the long journey to Siberia, and meet with this protege first thing in the morning. Your familiars seem to accelerate indefinitely regardless of distance, hopefully the flight would be shorter than we expect. Tap your wand on the Compass ball and say 'East', Harry."

Harry did so. A red arrow swam into view in the mist of the ball. It began to pulse strongly, pointing East.

"Good. According to this map, the coordinates of the city Riga in Latvia are 56°57′N 24°6′E. The arrow will turn bright green when we get close. Use it to land. We'll take our first break there. You got that, lad?"

"Yes, Master Ollivander," Harry said rigidly.
"Whatever is going on, Harry, we will deal with it, afterwards. For now, just focus," Ollivander said calmly.

"I will."

"Good."

Jon had finished circling the cart and threstrals, inspecting the mobile base. He came up next to Harry. "Everything is ready. Are you ready?" Jon asked.

"Yeah. Hop in," Harry pointed behind him with his thumb, holding the reins connecting the seven threstrals. Jon looked at Harry's bundled up neck and head, then the carriage, then Harry again.

"One second," he said simply. Jon went around back, and jumped in. Within ten seconds he was back out, holding what appeared to be a heavy rug. Without saying anything, he vaulted up next to him, pushing the folded rug in between them. "Just in case it rains," Jon smiled. Without any further ado Jon secured the Compass Ball with a sticking charm on the middle of the front barrier. Jon settled in next to Harry on the uncomfortable driver's bench, taking a firm grip on the side rail. He looked towards the sky. Harry just regarded Jon silently.

After a few seconds, Jon spoke. "Whenever you are ready, Harry of House Hollow." Harry looked at him, then back inside the relatively warm and comfortable cabin, and smiled knowingly.

"You don't have to," Harry scoffed. Jon kept looking forward.

"Fly, Harry. Just fly."

"Yah!" Harry shouted, and the threstrals got to a running start then leaped into the sky. The carriage tilted dramatically towards the open night. Jon laughed aloud suddenly.

"What?" Harry asked, shouting over the onrushing wind. "What's so funny?"

"A children's tale of fantastic feats and deeds- it is now my reality," Jon responded, gripping tightly to the sturdy bars at the side and in front of him.

"Welcome to my world," Harry replied, completely relaxed as he expertly maneuvered the flying team of horses to head east. The arrow now pointed directly ahead.

"The Black Knight and the White Wizard, flying off in the middle of the night to have a dance with dragons."

"What Immortal heroes do for fun, eh?" Harry said solemnly. He would have done anything for Tonks. Anything. Maybe it just wasn't meant to be. That just wasn't fun at all.

Jon glanced sideways at Harry's focused expression. Harry stared directly forward, periodically wiping the quidditch goggles with his scarf. After a few moments had passed, Jon sighed.

"Yes. What Immortal Heroes do for fun."
Chapter Summary

Harry loses consciousness while flying the team over the Siberian wastelands in the middle of the night.

"The wheels on the bus go round and round," Harry recited, teeth chattering. They were on the second leg of the trip, three hours after touching down for a short break in Latvia. "Round and round, round and round...the wheels on the bus go round and round, all through the cough, cough.."

Only Harry's face and the tips of his gloves were visible underneath the heavy rug. Jon began ignoring Harry after numerous inane repetitions of the *Wheels on the Bus, Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* and *The Sun Will Come Out Tomorrow*.

"Jon," Harry croaked weakly. Jon thought he was still singing and didn't acknowledge him. "Jon!" Harry coughed again. "I have to land. It's gonna have to be... fast," Harry's vision was spinning. He couldn't feel his legs anymore.

"Understood," Jon said, not interpreting that he was under distress. He got up from the seat and twisted awkwardly through the window. A cold, wet onrushing of air swirled into the cabin. "We're almost at *The Last Fire,*" he announced. Alexandria immediately turned her back to the window, protecting her cauldron and Bunsen burner potions apparatus. She hastily covered the cauldron with the metal lid and cast a *Protego* around her brewing setup on the small table.

"Jon!" she exclaimed. "Next time knock or something to warn us!" her teeth began to tremble at the invasive cold.

"Sorry!" he apologized. "Harry said that the descent will be fast, so... just letting you know!" he shouted over the onrushing wind. Master Ollivander pulled his cloak and hood closer around his face. Tonks wrapped the *Ora Kill* scarf high up over her nose and folded her arms against her torso. Jon shut the window and the inside was once again silent.

"That boy is *immune* to cold! Mon dieu!" Alexandria muttered between chattering teeth.

Tonks straightened. "I know he is... but Harry isn't..." she said worriedly. "How much longer would the *Mother's Embrace* take?" she asked the younger girl.

"Two more hours simmer at this heat, but it must be steadfast," Alexandria explained.

"You mean consistent," Ollivander corrected. Alexandria nodded, adding the word to her vocabulary as the correct synonym. The carriage tilted gently. "Miss Tonks, do you know the Ever-steady levitation enchantment?"

"That is the one they use on broomsticks and ...um...the school's floating chandeliers right? Keep things level in a boat or something?"
"Yes," Ollivander agreed. "I do not know how to do it correctly," he admitted. "We need to keep this steady, or her work would be for nought." He pointed to the Warmth potion being created on the centre table.

"Sorry," Tonks shook her head. "Harry is probably the one who would know how to do it."

The carriage tilted even further downwards.

Alexandria pursed her lips at the mention of his name. She had avoided asking Tonks what happened between them at base. Harry and Tonks had a magical squaring off and a heavy talk about Sacrifice, belief, and 'taking him down herself'. At least Harry was in control. When he grabbed Jasmine, Alexandria felt a terrible fear come upon her. She genuinely believed that Harry would have strangled her to death. The threstral summoning magic she experienced in the great room was extremely powerful, but she never felt, not even for the slightest moment, that her life was in danger.

She believed that Tonks was of the same opinion. Her hostile manner was still in place, but Alexandria thought that was a facade now. Even her concern about Harry's vulnerability to the cold was genuine.

"I have an idea!" Alexandria said. She rummaged around and found a glass bottle filled with methylated spirits. With a flourish she tapped her wand on a full plastic water bottle, emptying it. The methylated spirits was then poured into the empty water bottle. Then, she used Engorgio on the empty glass bottle. "Master Ollivander, please levitate this bottle steadily."

Ollivander swished and flicked, and the bottle hovered in midair.

"Mademoiselle Tonks, do you know the fire resistant charm for glass?" she asked politely.

"Yes. Ignus repugnant!" the large bottle glowed hotly for a few seconds then was dormant.

Another incantation was completed and the bottle transfigured into an hourglass shape, the waist of the bottle slimmer than the top half and bottom half. At that moment the entire carriage slanted dramatically, angling down. Ghost jumped off his spot on the bench. The lid slid off the potions cauldron and clattered on the ground. The carriage titled even more and the cauldron stand began to slide off the table.

"Merde! Vite!" a long string of Latin rolled off Alexandria's tongue and the lit Bunsen burner was magically teleported inside the bottle. Alexandria desperately stretched across, tapped her wand on the cauldron just as it fell off the table then tapped the wand on her magical bottle. It disappeared and reappeared, sitting snugly on the waist of the floating hourglass. Unfortunately, some of the potion sloshed over the edge of the cauldron and extinguished the Bunsen flame.

The three of them, and Ghost, just watched the large potions bottle hovering uselessly in midair. Any attempts at re-igniting the flame was futile. Alexandria pulled at her hair and cursed.

"It was a fair attempt, dear," Ollivander consoled.

"It's not over yet!" she said with Gryffindor determination. She snatched the massive bottle and pointed her wand downwards into the neck. "Enflamare!"

A flame shot out from the tip of her wand, igniting the top of the potion. Suddenly the carriage nosedived. The three of them abruptly slid along the cushioned benches. Ollivander grabbed Alexandria's robes just as she was about to topple over. Tonks quickly conjured criss-cross safety harnesses on the seat backs. Ghost was sliding comically downwards, desperately using his claws to gouge the wooden floor. The brooms and other equipment began rolling about under their feet.
towards the bow of the small vessel.

"What the hell?" Tonks shouted as they struggled to strap themselves in. There was a scream from outside and suddenly Jon's sword punctured the ceiling. Alexandria shrieked as the blade sunk in a foot above their heads.

"Jon's in trouble!" Tonks unbuckled herself, climbed up and unlatched the top hatch. She pushed it open and Jon dived headfirst into the carriage, falling on top of her and crashing down the narrow table. A roaring blast of cold air accompanied him. Tonks stretched up into the wind and closed the hatch. She immediately threw herself towards the driver's window to check on Harry. Jon tumbled off the table into Alexandria and Ollivander. The carriage suddenly tilted vertically. His sword fell out his hand. Ghost snatched up the handle in his jaws and swung it into the side wall. Ghost hung suspended from the handle as the carriage began to free fall. Jon fought inertia and clambered downwards towards the driver window. Alexandria screamed as she desperately tightened the restraints. Tonks' entire top half was hanging out the front window.

"Harry!" she screamed against the biting wind.

Harry was slumped in the foot area between the front barrier and the driver's seat. The threstrals were nowhere to be seen. Tonks' heart fell into her stomach as they plummeted through the clouds. Freezing raindrops slapped against her face. The icy grey of Siberia's frozen landscape was rapidly approaching. Without warning Jon folded himself out of the window next to her and was in freefall for a microsecond before he grabbed the front rail. His legs dangled and swung left to right against the open atmosphere.

"Jon!?" Tonks screamed, her eyes watering against the onrushing wind. She stretched her free arm to him, while holding on tightly to the window frame. She felt someone grab her ankles and cape, trying to keep her from falling out as well. Jon pulled himself up, hooked his leg over the barrier and scrambled up. Harry was motionless, his cloak and the heavy rug flapping in the wind. With a mighty yank Jon grabbed Harry under his arm.

"TAKE HIM!" Jon struggled to heft him up into Tonks' reach. Tonks grabbed the front of Harry's cloak and robes.

"Pull me back in!" she screamed into the coach. Ollivander levitated the both of them back in from his relatively stable position. Alexandria scampered over Ollivander and extended her arm out to Jon's. He grabbed her hand and with her help managed to climb inside.

"No... he's almost frozen solid," Tonks said in finality as she touched his face. She put her ear to his mouth. Without hesitation she broke the bottle holding the cauldron.

"It isn't finished!" Alexandria shouted as Jon closed the window beneath him. He took deep breaths as he surveyed the madness inside of the lopsided carriage. Was that Ghost hanging by his sword?

"It's what we have! Do you want to fucking die?" Tonks spat as she charmed his mouth open and poured the potion inside. She used the swallowing curse to make him ingest the potion. "Wake up, love," she said softly as she gently slapped his face. "Wake up!" she whispered. Tears began running down her face.

They all tried re-ennervating spells, warming charms, invigoration draughts. Harry's only response was shivering violently, his mouth chattering on blue lips. Seconds were passing in agonizing finality. "The potion wasn't finished," Alexandria whispered morosely in French. Her breath drew short as she panicked, hyperventilating. A gripping fear was taking over. Her eyes rolled into the back of her head as she passed out. Ollivander immediately administered the invigoration draught to
her lips. Alexandria moaned, her eyelids fluttering.

"How did you not know this was happening?" Tonks screamed at Jon, holding Harry close to her chest.

"He was singing random songs... he said we were landing... then... he just let go the reins and toppled over. I was thrown," Jon breathed, desperate to find a solution. He drew his knife. Tonks watched Jon's actions suspiciously. "My liege, forgive me." Jon made a cut on the meat of Harry's palm and then shoved the wound into Harry's eyes.

Harry screamed and thrashed against Tonks. Jon waved his Dragon heartstring on Olive and put him into the deep sleep. He immediately touched it to his temple. Harry reawakened with a huge gasp of air, his eyes burning white. Ollivander stopped attending to Alexandria, shocked at Harry's magic.

"You need to save us! We're falling!" Jon demanded, pointing through the window Harry was lying against.

Harry looked at Ghost dangling from a sword, and the completely wrong orientation of the carriage. "On it," he coughed wearily. Without further ado Harry scampered up, using Jon and Tonks as human ladders. He unlatched the hatch and jumped out. The cold air once again rushed into the carriage. Tonks flicked her wand and closed it. All four of them looked through the front window. The ground was getting rapidly closer.

Two hands smacked against the glass window. The carriage immediately slowed its descent. Tonks began to cry in relief. She grabbed Jon in a crushing hug. Jon returned the hug, laughing. The four of them held their breath as the carriage began to turn right side up.

"I'm going out front, just in case he needs to talk to us," Jon declared, and climbed back out to the driver's seat. He leaned all the way over the edge. Harry was slowing the carriage's descent with his flight ability, neck bent, hands supporting the weight on his shoulders; the spitting image of Atlas propping up the World.

"YOU ALRIGHT?" he shouted.

"NOT REALLY!" Harry shouted. His energy was fading, he was feeling to pass out.

"GET US DOWN AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE, THEN!"

"WHAT THE ... I WAS HOLDING ON UNTIL YOU GUYS JUMPED ON YOUR BROOMS!"

Harry shouted. Jon felt like an idiot.

"AT ONCE!" Jon agreed. He turned towards the window and opened it. "Mount up! The carriage is done for!" Jon climbed inside.

"Roger that!" Tonks and the others immediately released their safety harnesses and scrambled under the bench for their brooms. Tonks felt so embarrassed that her leadership crumbled in crises. Why didn't she think of that?

You were panicking over Harry's condition. You instinctively turn to him for leadership when things go downhill, and couldn't handle it when it really mattered, a tiny voice inside told her. Tonks closed her eyes for a second, thinking of all the times she doubted him. Harry was the bravest wizard she knew. He was even willing to go down alone to destroy the Basilisk if it was freed again.

Then again, those red eyes and young teenaged witches in servitude couldn't be a good thing, could it?
Everyone grabbed their brooms. Jon retrieved Ghost and he jumped in his battered knapsack. He plucked the sword out of the wall and sheathed it. All four of them shot out of the rear double doors of the doomed carriage, then circled lower so that Harry could see them. Harry allowed the carriage to plummet and immediately flew over towards Alexandria, who was holding his Quicksilver out to him. Harry ignored it and crashed into her, struggling to climb on. Alexandria struggled to maintain balance until he seated himself.

"I can't," Harry coughed into her ear. "Take me down, Lexie." He slumped against her back, exhausted.

"Ok!" she shouted over the wind.

"The gold!" Tonks screamed and shot off towards the falling carriage. "Follow me!" The Crows began to give chase at the rapidly falling construct. They chased it through low lying clouds and then through a thick mist over a mountainous valley. By the time they were low enough to be in the snow covered valley the swirling mist and darkness hampered their vision.

Harry abruptly fell off from behind Alexandria.

"No!" she screamed, and dived for him. She stretched for him, grabbing him by his robes. She wasn't a seasoned broom flyer like Tonks and Harry, and struggled to keep a grip. Tonks darted across and used a levitation spell to bring him unto her broom.

"I've got him," she commanded, and used a mild sticking charm on his front. She maneuvered him such that he was almost riding piggyback against her. With the distraction, Tonks had completely lost any orientation of where the carriage fell.

Seventy thousand galleons locked in their trunk wasn't a laughing matter, especially since she didn't think the Master Dragon Tracker with the title of 'Beowulf' was bluffing, nor open to payment after the job was done.

"Let's find shelter for Harry," Tonks commanded. "Then we find the wreckage. I've got a strong feeling we're going to need the gold or the deal is off. _Lumos_ up everyone, stay close to each other!"

They scoured the dark valley for civilization. Jon eventually spotted an outcropping of rock that hung over the slope below. "A cave!" Jon pointed his blue light. They flew under the rocky awning and landed in the damp cave.

Master Ollivander drew his wand and began an incantation of a long string of Latin, lifting his arm high and low in a slow, ritualistic dance. Magic poured out of his wand, forming a barrier to the elements at the mouth of the cave. "Jon, please make a fire," he instructed as he snapped the barrier into place. The cutting wind and snow began piling at the foot of the barrier. Ollivander then cast a sweeping motion at the ground near the mouth, and swept the dirty snow and debris out towards the slope. It tumbled out and down into the dark abyss below them. "The snow would cover any evidence of the wreckage within a short time," he said. "We must make haste."

"Ghost and I will find it," Jon said. "Take care of him," he nodded to the others. "Ghost, to me." Jon grabbed his broom and Ghost jumped back into his knapsack with a growl of agreement. "Tonks, the tracking charm." Tonks nodded and cast the spell on Jon and Ghost. Jon made his way out of the cave.

Alexandria and Tonks laid Harry on the heavy rug near to the fire. Alexandria began to undress him, taking off his boots and gloves.
"He's soaked right through. We must get him dry," she said. Within minutes they had him in his shorts, using their magic to dry his feverish body.

"Laundry charms aren't working on his robes," Tonks muttered. "We'll have to hang it out," Tonks said. "We better do the same in the meanwhile, before we catch cold too."

And so the Crows spent the next couple of hours, sitting around the fire, keeping Harry's fever under control and allowing their damp outer robes to dry. Alexandria was dressed in leg warmers and her Hogwarts pullover, Tonks in athletic tights and black vest, and Ollivander in suspenders and white shirt.

Meanwhile, Jon was allowing Ghost to track the wreckage. The young wolf had exceptionally good vision at night, and was racing down the slope towards another pass. Jon kept up the Warg connection, following him on his broom. The snow during the night made flying hazardous, a strong rush of wind could unseat him and send him to his death. He flattened himself as close as possible to the broom, using their connection to track his familiar.

After a couple hours Ghost found the snow covered wreckage. Jon used a flame spell to melt the snow. He found the trunk of gold among the broken pieces. It was intact.

"RD, come in," Jon said into his dueling armor. He repeated this a few times until Master Ollivander finally answered.

"Here, son," Ollivander said.

"The others?" Jon asked, now on the alert.

"Sleeping. I'm on watch."

"Right. I found the trunk. I have lost my bearings somewhat. I think I am an hour by broomstick heading west. Grandfather, is there a way for you to create a beacon so that I can find my way back easily?"

There was silence for a few seconds. "The only thing I could think of is using a proximity charm on this badge. The closer you come to it, the louder and faster it will make a chime. Find the Compass ball then head back 'East' Jon, on the way back you should hear the beacon coming through this badge."

"Understood. Coming back in."

Ollivander returned to his post at the mouth of the cave. Jon's dragon fire was an anomaly. It radiated warmth in waves, instead of a focal point of heat. The whole area breathed with warmth instead of waning with distance. He glanced at the three youngsters sleeping together on the large rug. Tonks had snuggled up next to Harry. Alexandria had curled up in a ball on the edge of the rug closest to the fire. Initially he thought that the fire would have been uncomfortable at that short distance, but when he checked on her, she was unscathed.

Jon's fire spell was definitely a strange phenomenon. No, _Jon_ was a phenomenon. He jumped out of the carriage to Harry's rescue without hesitation. He didn't even think about using Magic as his first option. Garrick pulled at his short beard. Something was very, very strange about those lads.

By the time Jon returned, the sky was brightening, casting a yellow glare off the snow covered slopes of the valley. Alexandria was fully dressed, on watch at the mouth of the cave while Ollivander slept. Harry was incoherent, mumbling in a fitful sleep. His temperature was on the rise once again, the fever had returned. Jon was completely covered in snow, and his white wolf.
camouflaged literally like a ghost against the slope.

"Finally," Alexandria breathed. "You've been gone for three hours!"

"The beacon was harder to home in than I thought," Jon explained, brushing off the snow off his cloak. He hefted the trunk and dropped it inside the cave. He threw off his cloak and immediately gave her a hug. Alexandria wrapped her hands around him. "You're a sight for sore eyes," Jon said truthfully.

"You had me worried sick!" she whispered into his ear. "Aren't you cold?"

"I'm fine," Jon responded. "How is Harry?"

"He's really sick. And the blood in his eyes has done something strange, he's delirious. I think he may be poisoned."

"Poisoned? He said his blood is an antidote to poison!" Jon exclaimed.

"It is? He said that? That has to be a mistake!" Alexandria grabbed Jon by his elbows. "That bloody wound might have had an adverse effect, believe it or not..."

"Can we help him?" Jon asked.

"I don't have any ingredients, or a cauldron for brewing. We have to get him to an apothecary. And we have to get some clean water. And food. He's burning up with fever."

"I have the compass ball, and the gold. The crash site was a mess... a lot of our belongings were scattered over a large area." Jon cursed. "I should have searched thoroughly for necessities. The snow definitely covered up the smaller items. We need to find shelter, and reach the Wizard's Pub."

"Master Ollivander had the map in his pocket, but..." Alexandria sighed. "We have no idea where we are. It's over there." She pointed where they hung up their robes on a clothesline. The map was draped over the line, hanging out to dry. Tonks woke up to their voices. She immediately put the back of her hand to Harry's forehead. He was burning up.

"Jon! Good. You're back," she said in a scratchy voice. "Your fire spell is the best, I give you that."

"You have a plan?" Jon asked simply.

"Yes. Find the inn. Get help. Find the dragon and move forward from there." Tonks walked over to her dried Dueling Robes. She hopped on one foot, putting on the tight pants.

Jon regarded Tonks with a solemn expression. That plan wasn't that elaborate.

"Yes, I know it's a bit simplistic. However, we could probably break it down from there," Tonks grumbled. "This is going to be an issue," she said softly. "He's poisoned, and also has a severe case of Wizard's flu. He could be like this for a couple days, if he isn't treated. I don't know what caused this delirious state."

"Jon, do you think Ghost could find us a way out, or the closest town?" Alexandria asked. Jon walked across to the map. It was not very detailed. A simple x marked the spot of the town, but they had no clue where their starting point was.

Ollivander stirred at the moment. The four of them stood over the map, trying to decipher where they could be.
Harry coughed suddenly, drawing their attention. He rolled over, threw up, then passed out again, right next to the vomit. Alexandria magicked away the mess.

"That can't be good," Jon remarked.

The four of them crouched next to him. "Harry?" Jon called out. Harry did not respond to his voice. "Master, is there a way to get a more detailed version of this map?"

"Not that I know of, it's a muggle map," Ollivander shrugged. Everyone looked at Tonks.

"What?" she said defensively. "I never did geography, or mapwork."

Jon regarded her with one of his long stares. "We need him," he said simply. Alexandria and Ollivander nodded in agreement. Everyone present knew that Harry was the driving force behind this clan. Without him, they were kind of lost. Alexandria and Jon glared at her accusingly.

"Look, I'm sorry, ok?" Tonks argued. "You guys don't know him like I do. All my training, all my instincts: he fits the bill, warning signs all over the place. It's a lot to take in, what he can do, how powerful he is."

There was an awkward silence. Jon raised his eyebrow. "You can change your body, is that right?"

"I am a metamorphmagus, yes. How does that help?"

"Can you ...make your eyes like a hawk?" Jon tried to explain.

"Like a hawk?" Tonks asked, confused.

"To see over a very long distance," Jon made a gesture, taking his index finger from his eyes to the great white beyond over the opposite slope of the valley. "It is clear outside right now, but the glare, I cannot see past it. We can fly high on the brooms, and search for a town, or some signs of civilization."

"I can try. But I will need to ride double. I don't know what the side effects could be."

"No time like the present," Jon said. "Let us attempt this before the sun's glare is too bright."

Tonks mounted up behind Jon on his broomstick. Jon flew up right above the cave. Tonks shivered in the cold air. She wrapped her arms around his midsection. "Hold on. Let me do the eye thing," she said. Tonks focused her morph magic to her eyes. She stared at the furthest point she could see on the horizon, then pushed.

Her vision zoomed in dramatically.

"Yes!" she cried. She turned her head and the vision snapped back to normal. "Ok. I've got to try again. Go higher, Jon."

After an hour of scouting, Tonks found what appeared to be an abandoned airstrip with a landing tower covered in snow. The both of them took note of the direction, and then flew back down into the cave. Tonks immediately threw off her outer cloak and ran towards the Dragon fire.

"Any change?" she asked Alexandria as she warmed her hands.

"No," came the response. "You found something?"

"Yeah, but it's really far. It's a muggle plane house, dockyard, port ...whatever."
"Wait. My research said that the inn was north of an airport. What direction is it in?" Alexandria said.

"East, north east towards the rising sun. About three hundred miles... two hours flight away if we push it," Tonks said. Jon nodded.

"Wow, you could see that far?" Alexandria said, impressed.

"I now have a splitting headache, but yeah, I saw it," Tonks said. "Let's get going. The longer we stay here..." Tonks looked sadly at Harry. "We don't know what's going on with him."

"I know a comforter warming charm," Ollivander said. "Will need to keep him somewhat comfortable for this flight. We can't risk him freezing again." They loaded him up on Tonks' broom, wrapping the rug around both Tonks and Harry. Master Ollivander cast the warming charm on the rug and the five of them set off into the glaring sunshine.

Three hours later the Crows were in sight of the Airport. Alexandria recognized the weird symbols on the signs. "This is it: the airport at Olenyok! Alright!" They landed inside an abandoned hangar. Jon immediately created a fire and they allowed Harry to lie down next to it. "From what I remember of my maps... Master Ollivander may I see yours?" Alexandria asked. The four of them stood around a metal barrel as Alexandria laid the map flat on it. "Yes, we head directly north until we find Anabar- this large river. The wizards' inn is at Saskylakh, roughly two hundred miles from here, on the eastern bank."

"Would Harry be all right for this journey?" Jon asked the party at large. Harry was having more fits, limbs trembling and coughing randomly. During the flight to the airport he awoke a few times, spoke some gibberish, threw up over Tonks once or twice, then slumped against her once again.

"I don't know if he should make that trip right now," Tonks muttered as she checked on him. She stood up, straightening her shoulders. "You three go, and get help. Those two brooms, the slower ones, leave them here. Take the three Quicksilvers, and hide the gold somewhere close outside the town. Master Ollivander, I ask that you please make landmarks on the map as apparition points back to facilitate a quick return and let us know what is the situation. I will stay and protect Harry."

The three of them glanced at Harry, then Tonks. It was the safest course of action, once Tonks didn't go crazy again like last night.

"We shall return as soon as possible," Jon vowed, staring into her eyes. "He will be in your care." Tonks gulped. Jon was scary sometimes.

"Make sure and keep him warm," Alexandria reminded her, switching brooms.

"Stay safe," Ollivander said to them. "I will make the apparition jumps and return as soon as we get supplies."

"Stay safe Crows," Tonks returned. "Godspeed."

"Keep your ears open. We will contact you via the communication badges," Jon said as they mounted up. "Secure the building. Alexandria, you take point on this flight."

"Okay," she said haltingly. "I mean, yes. I will," she said more confidently. The three of them shot off, heading north. Tonks wrapped Harry in the rug and cast a disillusionment charm on him.

"Be right back," she said softly. She apparated to the top catwalk of the abandoned plane hangar. Using her newfound eye ability, she scanned the nearby buildings. The airport was snowed in,
maybe not totally abandoned, just closed during the winter months. She began enchanting security charms on the main perimeter and the most obvious entryways. On the southern side she saw what appeared to be an eatery sign over a section of the main building.

"Major Homenium revelio!" The eavesdropping spell shot out of her wand and connected with the building. No red shapes were highlighted. The cafeteria was on the other side of the airstrip and command towers. Tonks peered down at the fire burning merrily on the ground floor. Harry's fate was literally in her hands. She apparated back down and crouched next to him.

"Come on hotshot," she sighed. "Let's go ranging for something to eat." She levitated him unto her back and awkwardly mounted his school Nimbus broom. Taking it slow and steady, she made her way over the open airstrip towards the cafeteria.

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Every fifty miles Ollivander made them stop at a landmark. It could be a cliff, a very tall tree bare of leaves, a massive boulder, anything that could be spotted from the air. At these landmarks he landed, and using a simple location charm, made a circle on the muggle map. For the first stop, he apparated a few times within the vicinity, getting a feel of the area. When they reached another fifty miles, he would repeat the process, then apparate to the previous spot, creating an apparition trail. By the time they reached the town of Saskylakh, the sun was nearing its zenith in the sky.

They hid the chest of gold outside the town, then found the Wizard's Inn, Posledniy Ogon, roughly translated in English as The Last Fire.

The town in itself consisted of muggle structures around wide meandering dirt roads, with the majority of households concentrated at the bank of the river. The Wizard's pub was a large three-storied log cabin sitting on a knoll overlooking the town proper. The three of them made the trek up the meandering path, their hoods pulled up over their heads to keep out the chill. By the time they ascended the incline, Alexandria's breath was misting in front of her face. Jon drew his wand but tucked it in his sleeve, ready to slip into his palm, just in case it came to that. He opened the door and stepped in.

There were only two people on the main floor. One was the barkeep, the other was a young girl eating a hefty bowl of steaming hot soup. The girl had dirty blonde hair, was wearing a heavy white fur pelt around her shoulders and what appeared to be a full Dragon leather tunic. What certified her identity as the Dragon tracker's apprentice in Jon's mind was the massive greatsword propped against the chair next to her. On the pommel of the sword was what appeared to be a dragon claw.

"Who are you?" came the barkeep's voice in heavily accented Russian.

Ollivander spoke first. "Friends. Do you speak English?"

"A bit," came the barkeep. The barkeep was a wizard, probably in his early forties. He had a round, red face with an even redder nose. His head was covered in a snow hat that covered his ears. "You are the clan?"

"Yes," Ollivander agreed. "And you are?"

"I am called Heraldo. And this is Wiglaf," he pointed at the young girl. "She is here for you, I believe."

Wiglaf watched the three of them, then focused on Jon. She tilted the bowl of hot soup and drank directly from it. Then, she washed it down with a few gulps of Vodka directly from the bottle. She wiped her mouth with the table napkin provided and stood up, slinging the sword harness over her
right shoulder. She simply held it there like how a soldier would carry a rifle on the strap. She watched the three of them approach, stepping away slightly from the confines of the seat.

Jon watched her closely. She was young, her face unblemished and beautiful. If Jon were to put an age, he would say that she was seventeen, or younger. She carried herself like a fighter, with an easy balance and a calm confidence that she could use the massive weapon on her shoulder.

"Yes," Jon said cautiously. "However, we are in need of an apothecary, or a healer to treat one of ours. Do you know someone who could provide this service?"

Heraldo began speaking to the young warrior in a language Master Ollivander did not recognize. Wiglaf nodded a few times, saying something in return. After this conversation went on for a few seconds, she nodded at Jon, and beckoned them to follow her. She drew up the hood of the white pelt, which to their surprise, was the skin of a polar bear. The upper jaw was partially kept, such that the canines and the front teeth covered her hairline. At the doorway she picked up a large red shield that the Crows did not notice was propped up against the wall. This she strapped on like a backpack, the red leather shield like a turtle's shell on her sturdy frame.

Tonks had foraged for snacks and drinks at the cafeteria. The closest thing she got to real food were massive packs of frozen french fries that needed to be cooked. She grabbed what she could, and all the crates of water she could levitate in a large box. During the two trips back and forth she kept up a light-hearted one way conversation with Harry, who she carried on her back with a featherweight enchantment. Ghost accompanied them, darting off here and there in hopes of a rabbit, or some other tasty morsel.

"- And then Winona Merrythought told Dumbledore 'I would never do such a thing!' and then I said, 'Maybe you should've, so your boyfriend would know what type of kisser you were!'" Tonks laughed. "Dumbledore is the best. He just shook his head and gave me detention, and then made me swear not to impersonate anyone else in school, or he would be forced to expel me. At the time, I was deathly afraid. I never had to go up into his office for disciplinary matters before. Anyway, so that's how I met that arsehole, you know, the guy in South Hampton. He was a couple years ahead, a seventh year with a calm confidence about him. He seemed to be a perfect gentleman too, especially when it came to Merrythought. She was the Ravenclaw boob queen, her chest was enormous! But she was so shy and so...ugh... not even willing to even kiss him! I knew it was wrong, but at that time I was a twig, late bloomer and all that-

Harry groaned against her back, making a semi hiccup sound.

"Hey, Potter, you listening? Don't you vomit up on me again, mister!" she complained. "Right. What was I saying? Oh yeah, I spied on her a night in the Ravenclaw showers, I must admit she has some wonderful assets, and I really wanted my first kiss to be with a really dreamy guy, so.. yeah. Reagan was hot, back then, still kinda is, but, when you're young, and silly, you think it's only looks that matter. And yeah..." She trailed off as they entered the hangar. She gently laid Harry on the warm rug. "I was jealous. I didn't have her looks, her brains, her princess charm, her naive innocence and... she was everything I wasn't really. And she was a good person too. I felt awful afterwards, like waaaay after, but I did eventually. I never had a boyfriend in school, like, you know, 'I'm your girl, and you're my guy', kind of way. There were two boys I kissed afterwards that year and then in year six... on a Valentine's Day visit at Hogsmeade, but they got creepy and asked me to do the Merryboobs thing. After that episode I hated Hogwarts, and myself, for a while. It was a horrible prank, and then the news spread that I could make myself have boobs like Winona... and.. yeah. Fucking love life went downhill from there."

Tonks made a thumbs down motion then a squashing sound.
She took out a pot that she shrunk and put in her pocket. She transfigured the tool cart nearby into a primitive stove grill that could roll over the fire. She emptied a small container of frying lard into the pot, and within a minute of using a flame spell directly on the creamy gunk it melted into a boiling oil. She dumped a quarter of the frozen fries into her newly made deep fryer. The resulting hiss was music to her ears. She was bloody hungry. Tonks opened a packet of chocolate candy and poured them into her hand. With a quick motion she tossed the handful into her mouth.

"Sixth year was different. I started to...blossom. Fifth year I lost a lot of baby fat, but sixth was when I finally got some real girls of my own. I was so happy. I was unfortunate to be a bit square and pudgy when I was younger, sort of like my dad, but then those Black genes kicked in and bam! Sixth year I was hot! And no mighty morphin' power Nymphadora either! Just me, myself, and I!" she chuckled and she gently propped up Harry's head on her lap. She opened a water bottle and tenderly poured sips of water in his mouth. Harry garbled something unintelligent, but eventually drank. Half of it dribbled down his chin, but Tonks was glad he was responding to it. She dried up the spilled water with her red Ora Kill scarf.

"Then, that arsehole Reagan began mailing me, then we arranged for late night chats on the floo fire after everyone went to bed. He said he was going to be an Auror, and I should apply. He said I had what it takes," she smiled at the memory. "I felt, like, empowered, yeah? A boy I played a prank on, eventually started to take a real interest in me. Told me it took guts to do that, and skill. I must admit I did my research on Merrythought, how she talked, the way she dressed, what her likes and dislikes were. I mean, it was a great snog, he had no clue it wasn't her. I had Merrythought down to the T! I mean, the second T. Not Tits T from 'T and A', I mean... I had her down, a perfect doppelganger. Reagan had the hots for her, and only her it seemed. She was the Ravenclaw princess, after all, and he was the Gryffindor good guy that everyone likes, and wants to be his friend."

Tonks fed Harry some water again, petting his long hair in smooth long strokes.

"I don't know what I saw in him, now that I've met you and Jon. His Gryffindor-isms were like... text book. Do well in school, excel in a subject, do the right thing and defend some poor shmuck with a mismatched wand in the halls, yadda yadda."

She looked down at Harry's relaxed face. Drinking water over the past couple hours had brought down his fever a lot.

"But everything was like, low stakes. He did nothing for a true cause, a purpose. If it was easy for him to help, or intervene, he did. But from what I heard, he's a bitch when he's really up against it. I like my heroes, to be heroes."

Harry coughed up some more bile. Tonks helped him unto his side, and he promptly threw up the little bit of water he swallowed. With a quick wave she magicked the mess away. She pulled him back on her lap, continuing as if nothing had happened.

"I like my heroes, to rally a squad and save a boy they don't even know in a different fucking country, because it is the right thing to do. And that they would do their best, no matter the circumstances, to get it done."

"I like my heroes, to nick a cursed object from Lucius fucking Malfoy, Voldemort's right hand man, to save a girl from a horrible fate- be it either a sex toy for that disgusting bigot, or food for a Basilisk. You're good at stealing things, aren't you?"

Harry twitched, and mumbled something incomprehensible.

"You're stealing girls' hearts, Harry. And you know what gets me mad? You don't even know it."
"Why did you have to come back at this young age? Why couldn't you have come back... like... older?"

"And why did you have to somehow inherit all the textbook traits of a Dark Lord Rising?" she muttered. She gently prised open his left eye. "You've done something to stop the dark magic... now it's bloody white. What is a girl to do? Sooner or later, Penelope is going to be coming after you. And when she does, I can't do anything to prevent it. You aren't going to be able to resist her, would you? She'll wait until you're older, I know that girl. She's patient and cunning when she needs to be. Sarah is more like me, spontaneous and fun loving. Hufflepuffs don't take themselves on that seriously, you know. We dig in, get the job done, and enjoy life as it comes."

She flicked her wand and pulled out some golden fries to drain on her newly acquired strainer. The smell wafted through the empty hangar. She plucked one and shook off the excess oil. She blew on the fry until it was cool enough to bite.

"Dammit to hell. I forgot to pick up salt. What was I saying? Right. Penelope would find a way, probably influence other female candidates to find better options than you. She can make a compelling argument. She isn't Ravenclaw's current 'Princess' for nothing. Debate club president, straight A's, pretty face, good body. You won't have a chance when she's ready for you. And don't get me started on Granger. She's going to weather every storm for you. I can see it. If you decided, even against better judgement to run through fire, she would allow you to if it meant that you would come into her arms to be healed."

Harry coughed, once, twice. Tonks didn't even flinch as flecks of spit hit her face. She calmly wiped it away with the Ora Kill scarf.

"You're too young for me. So, please... don't.. make this harder than it already is by watching me like how you do. It's wrong. Just wrong!" She blew on the edge of the fry and pushed it into his mouth. Harry sucked on the fry, then chewed it slowly and eventually swallowed. Tonks brought up the water bottle and gave him a sip. Harry was more coherent and allowed the water into his mouth without resistance. "You're not going to steal my heart though," she promised in a soft whisper.

Because I've already given it to you. Its like a bloody Shakespeare tragedy. Dark Wizard or not... I really like you. But you're just a boy.

At that moment the wide-range security ward pinged. Tonks disillusioned Harry quickly and levitated him behind a few crates. She cast the disillusionment charm on herself and made her way towards the direction of the breach. It was Ollivander and Jon. Ollivander disappeared the next moment.

"Milady!" Jon called out. "Help is on the way!"

"Draw your sword!" came Tonks modified voice.

"What?" Jon shouted aloud. "Ah!" he caught on. It was a verification test. John drew his wand and it transfigured into his claymore. "Very good!" he commended her. Tonks removed the stealth charm. Jon sheathed his wand and came towards her.

"You found help? A healer?" she asked eagerly.

"Of a sort," Jon said. Ollivander came back, this time with Alexandria in tow. She was holding an open toolbox with a carry handle. In it were numerous bottles and potions. In her next hand was a large woven basket covered with a checkered cloth. Ollivander disappeared, then reappeared with a newcomer. A young woman dressed midway between a bear and a dragon. The Dragon leather
tunic fit close like a second skin. The bear fur pelt made her shoulders even broader than they really were. "This is Wiglaf, the Beowulf's apprentice."

Wiglaf nodded at Tonks, then stared at Harry, seeing through his disillusionment charm. She suddenly drew her sword, holding it at the ready in Harry's direction. Jon put his body between her and Harry.

"Basilisk!" was the first thing they heard her say.

"We know," Jon said simply. "The venom is in his veins." Ollivander's and Alexandria's eyebrows went up.

"How is he alive?" she asked.

"He is special," Jon explained. Wiglaf ignored him and advanced. Jon drew his claymore in response. He pointed at the large square tile in front of her with the tip of his sword. "Do not cross that line." Ghost appeared at Jon's side, growling in warning.

Wiglaf halted her advance. She eyed Jon's stance, his eyes, the sword. She tilted her chin upwards by a fraction, shrugged, then sheathed the massive greatsword. She slung it over her right shoulder, once again at ease.

"If he has survived that, then this is all that is needed," she said in fluent English. She took out a bezoar and tossed it to Alexandria. "He has taken a potion that has not been brewed properly. That," she pointed at Harry's trembling form. "Is an allergic reaction. He is not poisoned. He must stay here and recuperate. Do not carry him north into the cold. You," she pointed at Jon, "my master awaits."

"Me?" Jon said, surprised.

"Yes. You. Bring your allies. Witnesses are needed for the ceremony. It is custom. Do you have the gold?"

"Yes," Jon replied.

"Good. I believe everything will go smoothly. Come." Wiglaf walked over to Ollivander and offered him her wrist. Ollivander grabbed her arm and they disappeared. Within moments he reappeared.

"Alexandria? How is Harry?" he asked as he came closer.

"One minute," she inspected a drop of his blood in a clear solution. "She is right. He isn't poisoned, he was reacting badly to the Mother's Embrace. But he still needs to ride out the Wizard's flu. The bezoar is already taking effect. Madame Tonks, would you be okay for a bit longer?"

"Course!" Tonks said. "We're just ...making chips, that's all." And pouring out deep secrets.

"Take this," Ollivander handed Tonks a detailed map. "Touch your wand to the glowing spots, then apparate in sequence. I've made a nice spell trail to lessen the strain on Harry if you need to find us."

"He needs peaceful sleep now," Alexandria said thankfully. "I've given him his first dose for the Wizard's flu. The bezoar has already begun taking effect on his delirium. Keep him warm, and look," she presented Tonks with a basket of food. It had bread, soup, meat, cheese, coffee tea, and water bottles. "Give him the soup for now until his stomach settles." Alexandria took one of the fries from the strainer and ate it. "Hm. Needs salt."

Tonks scowled. "I know. Do you trust her, Jon?"
"She has been helpful, so far. And she has interesting abilities," Jon shrugged.

"Such as?" Tonks queried.

"She saw through the stealth charm and immediately recognized the poison in his blood. And she knows a better swordsman than her on sight."

"Cocky, aren't you?" Tonks grinned.

"A disciple of the sword, recognizes a disciple of the sword, milady," Jon bowed slightly, a slight smile on his face. "And she instinctively knows that a wizard who could draw a sword from up his sleeve should be taken seriously. Hers is forged from high quality steel. Mine is from magic. No contest."

Wiglaf re-appeared with a pop! The intruder siren began to wail. Tonks cancelled it. "The time is near. You must hurry." She offered her arm to Jon. "Weapons-smith, take the girl."

"You heard her. I have here under control," Tonks said. "Thank you everyone. Stay safe. I'll be here."

Jon and Wiglaf reappeared midway up a snow covered slope. "I am going for the two others. Do not cast magic past this point. The Onyx will know." She nodded at the next peak about half a mile away. Within a minute she returned with Ollivander and Alexandria. "Come. The Beowulf awaits," she ordered. She began to climb up the rocky path towards the crest of the mountain. At the top was a cave similar to the one they took refuge in overnight. Wiglaf crouched low and threw two stones upwards into the cave. One stone came back.

"Remember, no magic from this point on. The Queen mother will sense it." She beckoned them to follow her into the cave. The three of them arrived at the cave, and their eyes had to adjust to the darkness after being exposed to the early afternoon glare of snow covered earth. "Master, the Crows Vambrace."

Jon took in the cave with a quick eye. It looked lived in, for probably a week or two. Furs, bottles, salted meat and wooden bedframes with mattresses were spaced out in an orderly fashion. A telescope with a tripod faced outwards.

"Ah, yes. From England, correct?" A large pile of fur said from the rocking chair in the shaded corner of the cave. "I see you made it."

"Yes, we did," Ollivander said calmly. "So, what happens now?"

"What I've been destined to do my whole life. Go and kill a dragon," the large pile of fur said. "I am the Beowulf. If your gold is good, it is a pleasure to meet you."

"Our gold is perfect," Ollivander said in a light tone. "But may you point out the dragon's resting place?"

"Sure, look through the looking glass there," he pointed at the telescope. "The Onyx hide bends light differently, so you need to pay attention for when the scales move." He stood up from the rocking chair, and pointed over the chasm to the cliff face a mile away. The Beowulf was quite tall, maybe six and a half feet. He was tall and frightfully skinny, but the layers of furs made him seem bigger. "Elizabeth has been sick for a while now. I'll put her out of her misery."

"The Beowulf finally came out into the light. He was old wizard, with a long grey beard. A shaggy, heavy mustache blocked his mouth. His eyes were a sky blue, and his thinning hair was grey."
"Half now, and half when it is done," Ollivander negotiated.

"Sixty now, forty when it's done," Beowulf countered.

"Agreed," Ollivander offered his hand. Beowulf took it and shook it once.

"Wiggie, take him back and store the gold," Beowulf commanded. Ollivander walked back down the slope with the young witch and offered her his arm. The both of them disappeared.

"So! Vodka? Mountain goat stew?" Beowulf offered, pointing at the pot hanging over the fire.

"No thanks. How do we get across the gap?" Alexandria asked, watching through the telescope.

"With this," he pointed at the rug laid out in the main space between the beds. "Flying carpet. For some reason dragons can't sense this magic." He put his foot on it and the carpet lifted off the ground. "It's not necessary for you to actually come. But you must be here to witness me departing. You will sign your names into that," he showed them a well used registrar that was about fifty parchment papers thick. Ollivander and Wiglaf came trudging back up the path and joined them.

"We're good?" Beowulf asked his young charge.

"Yes. I have stored the gold. Did they sign?"

"Not yet," Beowulf gallantly offered them a quill and ink bottle. "You have first dibs. This book certifies you to be the rightful owner of the carcass, and any profit to be made from it."

"And what else?" Jon asked as he took hold of the quill.

"If I fail, Wiglaf here would become the Beowulf, and will try to finish the job," the tall man laughed. "How about it, you're ready for the lance?"

"This jest is getting annoying," Wiglaf said with a frown.

"Right." Beowulf took up a long spear with what Jon recognized to be a Diablo Claw attached as the head. "It's time then."

Wiglaf bent the knee as Beowulf shed the skins in exchange for Dragon Hide armor. With head bent towards the ground, she began to recite a creed.

"Yet the prince of the rings was too proud
to line up with a large army
against the sky-plague. He had scant regard
for the dragon as a threat, no dread at all
of its courage or strength, for he had kept going
often in the past, through perils and ordeals
of every sort, after he had purged
Hrothgar's hall, triumphed in Heorot
and beaten Grendel."

"Hail, Beowulf, the Slayer of the Dragon," she struck her arm to her chest in salute, then stood up. Beowulf put his right hand on Wiglaf's shoulder. With a solemn voice he recited the response.

"And now the youth
was to enter the line of battle with his lord,
his first time to be tested as a fighter."
"His spirit did not break and the ancestral blade would keep its edge, as the dragon discovered as soon as they came together in the combat."

"Be ever brave, Wiglaf, let courage be your strength, and honor your shield. Do not be afraid, for Beowulf rides with you. Glory to the Dragon Lancer!"

Alexandria and Jon crossed their arms across their chest, offering their salute. "Glory to the Dragon Lancer!"

Ollivander dug into his robes and lit his pipe. Puffs of smoke curled up into the cold, thin air.

Beowulf offered the inside of his arm to Wiglaf. With a comfortable ease she drew her greatsword and made a delicate cut next to the seven other scars on his right forearm. She repeated this process with the blooded edge on her left arm, however, she no had scars on her pale, unblemished skin.

"I'll be back," Beowulf said and stepped on the flying carpet. Wiglaf folded her arms and watched him hover across the chasm without emotion. She went behind the telescope and peered through the eyepiece.

"So, I understand why he has numerous scars on his arm- those are the dragons he has slain?"
Alexandria asked.

"Yes," came the other girl's response.

"So why do you cut your arm?"

"Once he kills the dragon, the cut will be sealed."

"And if he doesn't?" Jon asked. Alexandria squirmed upon hearing Jon's lack of tact. Wiglaf paused, then looked up from the telescope, watching Jon with a glare. Jon simply folded his arms.

"It will remain open. Then I must finish the job."

"Ah," Jon replied.

A few minutes passed. The wound did not seal. Wiglaf stiffened, looked up from the telescope, then back down again. A scream finally made its way across the chasm, echoing from various points. Jon looked across the gap. There were two halves of a man falling, bouncing along the cliff face.

"By the gods," Jon whispered. Alexandria put her hands to her lips in shock. Ollivander leaned over, eyebrows furrowed in disbelief. He drew a metallic nip from his robes and poured a dash out into the open chasm. He then took a hearty swig.

Wiglaf dashed to the edge of the cliff, going on all fours as she watched the previous Beowulf's gruesome demise. She stared at the spot for a long moment, stunned. She looked at Jon and Alexandria, then back down into the misty covered valley. She clasped the wound on her arm, letting the blood seep through her fingers. With a firm determination, she smeared the blood on her cheeks, her forehead, her chin.

"My test has come. Will you bear witness?" she asked Jon and Alexandria, bending the knee. Her chest heaved with unshed tears.

"Yes. And I shall do more than that." Jon offered Wiglaf his hand to help her rise to her feet. "Rise, noble warrior."
"What?" Wiglaf said, two lone tears running down her cheeks. Jon hefted her up by her arm. Wiglaf stood up, scrutinizing Jon. Recognition dawned. "No... it is impossible! Can you be...?"

"Alexandria," Jon said seriously. "Do not be afraid." Jon began to take off the *World Wizarding Gear* Duelling armor. "Hold this for me." Jon stripped down to his pants he wore underneath the robes. He took up one of the bear skins and draped it over his bare chest like a tunic. He took off his boots and put on one of Beowulf's leather sandals.

"Um..." Alexandria held Jon's robes awkwardly. "This can't be happening."

"Oh ho," Ollivander said. "You two... are indeed special. I have faith in you lad."

"Thank you, grandfather. Come, Beowulf." Jon stepped unto the floating carpet that calmly returned to the cave.

"What... why? Why would you do this?" Wiglaf asked.

"Because this is what Immortal heroes do for fun," Jon grinned at her, offering her his arm once again. This time, Wiglaf returned the smile and accepted it with a firm grip. The two of them allowed the flying carpet to take them across the chasm.

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Tonks was preparing a late lunch for both herself and Harry. His sickness was improving as the afternoon waned. Sometimes he would awake, look at her, say something unintelligible, then drift back to sleep. As she was cutting bread and meat to make sandwiches, Harry's voice mumbled something consistently.

Tonks looked across to him. He was still asleep, but he was saying something. She came closer to listen.

"Harry?" she said chummily. "You ok?"

"I... wanna love you but I better not touch..." he whispered softly, his eyes still closed.

"What?" Tonks said, stunned. She froze, listening.

"I wanna hold you but my senses tell me to stop..."

Tonks began to chuckle. "What is that you're saying?"

"I want to kiss you but I want it too much," he breathed.

"Is that.. a poem or something?" she inquired. She leaned in close to hear what he was saying clearly.

"I want to taste you but your lips are venomous poison. You're poison running through my veins. Poison. I already broke your chains. Poison."

Tonks just stared at him. Harry rolled over on the rug, finding a more comfortable spot to sleep. Alexandria's voice suddenly came over Tonks' CV badge.

"RD! Come in!" came Alexandria's voice.

"What is it?" she snapped, on battle alert. "Is Jon okay?"

"I don't know. I guess so. The Beowulf is dead... Jon's gone to face the onyx dragon!"
"The fuck?" Tonks stood up immediately. "What? Why?"

"Because that's what Immortal heroes do for fun," Harry said weakly from the ground.

"Hush you," Tonks said, fanning him away like a fly. "Tell me what happened!"

Jon and Wiglaf stepped off the docile flying carpet and into the cave. There was a pulsing heat emanating from the rock face, as if the cliff itself was breathing warm air across them. Jon activated the Aegis Bracer and summoned the Claymore. "On me, five paces." Wiglaf followed suit, her shield and sword held at the ready. After a few dozen steps Jon paused. "Look, the Lance."

Wiglaf paused, then picked it up. She sheathed the sword, then slung the sheath diagonally against her back. She wouldn't be using it in here. The Dragon Lance was the weapon of choice.

"You're comfortable with a spear?" Jon asked.

"Yes. Am I comfortable with a spear against an Onyx dragon? Probably not."

"Seven paces, at seven o'clock, overhand grip, then. My aegis will cover you."

"Understood," Wiglaf said smoothly, moving over to Jon's left side. "My shield is impervious to Dragon fire, maybe I should go in front."

"No. I am impervious to Dragon fire. And my shield blocks everything, except maybe the unforgivable curses. Let me be the vanguard."

A coughing noise was heard coming from inside the cave. A bad, coughing noise of something on the verge of death.

COME AEGON

Jon stopped. "Did you hear that?"

"No."

"Apologies," Jon sighed. He was hearing things.

FINALLY, REST

Jon stopped again. "I believe the Dragon is talking to me," Jon said simply.

"Thought it might do that," Wiglaf said.

"Oh really?"

"Yes. I can see your blood."

"That's a very good skill to have," Jon responded. He didn't know if that was a good skill or not. It just felt like the polite thing to say.

"Just in case I don't make it back alive. My name is Valerian. Valerian Kozlov."

"You honor me with your courage," Jon responded. "The Dragon awaits. Let me do the talking."

Valerian hummed a soft "Mm-hm" in agreement. Jon entered a large cavern deep in the rock. There was the smell of cooked meat and burned stone.
AEGON, YOU HAVE COME. GREETINGS.

"I have come," Jon agreed aloud. "You were expecting me?" they approached. Two large yellow eyes shone from the shadows. The Onyx dragon was totally camouflaged in the darkness of the cavern.

MY SON. MY ONLY SON. PROTECT HIM. I WILL GIVE HIM TO YOU, YOUNG TARGARYAN.

"... Targaryan? What?"

YOUR FATHER IS RHAEGAR. YOUR MOTHER IS LYANNA. YOU ARE THE PRINCE THAT WAS PROMISED- AEGON, THE DRAGON KNIGHT.

Jon could not believe it. He could not. He put those thoughts aside and focused on the here and now.

"You want me to take care of your son?"

HIS NAME IS MIRACLE. THE FATHER WILL KILL HIM IF HE SEES HIM.

"Your mate."

YES. GO. TAKE HIM WITH YOU.

A small shape fluttered towards him, then landed. The baby dragon was the size of a massive vulture. It breathed fire in short, hot puffs. The baby dragon lay down, and curled its tail around its torso in a protective manner. Jon immediately fell to one knee before the Queen Mother. "This is an honour of the highest magnitude. I have nothing to repay you."

PROTECT HIM. THAT IS MY PRICE.

"So be it," Jon said, rising to his feet. "Majestic Mother Dragon, what is your name?"

'I AM ONYX.'

The Dragon spoke aloud for the first time. The baby dragon shrieked in a mournful tone.

'BEHIND YOU IS WINGSCALE FROM THE FATHER. TAKE IT.'

Jon turned and shone his wand at the entrance to the cavern. A large piece of the dragon wing was pinned against the wall with what appeared to be a Dragon lance. The severed wing was approximately the size of the second year boys dormitory. Jon summoned the Lance to his hand, and the wing scale fell slowly to the ground like a parachute.

"Thank you," Jon said sincerely to Onyx. Valerian and Jon folded the surprisingly supple wing into a manageable size. "Miracle, on me!" Jon commanded. The tiny dragon shot off a blast of fire in delight and scampered upon his shoulders. The two knights rolled up the dragon material like a carpet and slung it over their shoulders. Valerian carefully bowed at the mother Dragon before she left. Miracle was running back and forth along the rolled up wing, sinking his foot claws into the scales.

Alexandria cried out in relief when she saw two figures carrying what appeared to be a black log between them. Within minutes they were back across the chasm, stepping off the flying carpet.

Miracle jumped off and began attacking the pot of mountain goat stew.

"What happened? And why do you have a baby dragon?" Alexandria asked. "Is that Onyx hide?"
Valerian looked down at her arm. The cut was sealed. "The Onyx Dragon is dead. He has been given charge of the young. His name is Miracle. Only the Dragon Whisperer is capable of such magic." Without further ado, Valerian drew her sword and bent the knee. She offered her sword across both palms above her bent head. "If it pleases my Lord, I beg thee to be of service."

"What about your family, Mistress Valerian?" Jon asked.

"None. I am alone, except for Kastav, who took me in when I was abandoned. He has met an Honorable death."

"He was your father?" Alexandria asked.

"Yes, and no. He was the closest thing I had as family."

"Come with me, noble warrior. My name is Jon. Jon Black," he declared, implying that his other names were to be kept secret.

"It is an honour to be in your service, Lord Black," Valerian said solemnly. She laid the sword at his feet.

"Rise, Valerian. We are done here." Valerian sheathed her sword, and took a last look at the possessions her father left behind. She took up his trusty knife, and slid it into her belt. "Grandfather, please take Alexandria back to the inn." Jon clicked at Miracle and the baby dragon ran up his back and perched on his shoulder. He offered his arm to Valerian. She was taller than him by a few inches. "Are you ready to depart, Lady Valerian?"

"As you command," she said with a smile. She took his arm, and disappeared.
Immediately after their return from the Beowulf's lookout Ollivander, Alexandria, Jon and Valerian were having an impromptu meeting in the Wizard's inn. Heraldo offered them use of a private gambling room while he went to prepare the largest suite for his British guests. The Crows were sitting around a poker table. Jon had secreted in Miracle through the backdoor. Right now the baby dragon was curled around his feet, like a massive, smoothly-scaled house cat. Jon was still garbed in the Beowulf's bear hide, arms bare, tall leather sandals strapped up his calves. The previous owner's bear pelt was so long, it fell below his knees. Alexandria shivered just by watching Jon with all the exposed areas by his neck, legs, and armpits.

"RD, come in," Alexandria said into Jon's communication badge which was placed in the middle of the table.

"Here," came a faint reply. "Alexandria, how did it go?"

"How is Harry?" Ollivander asked abruptly.

"Resting. Much better, he seems to be sleeping much more peacefully."

"That's good to hear," Alexandria sighed.

"Is everyone else ok?" came the delayed response.

"Yes," Alexandria said sadly. "But I still can't believe it..."

Beowulf was talking jovially with them one minute, offering vodka, then dead a few minutes later. This ranging mission was absolutely terrifying her.

"Dragon work is highly unpredictable," Ollivander spoke into the communication badge. "However, we have acquired Onyx hide, freely given. The Queen mother has also passed," Ollivander said in a solemn tone.

"Jon killed it? Figures," Tonks said, not surprised in the least.

"No milady, Onyx, that is the Queen Mother's name; was very sick. She was waiting for a person to...um, offer sanctuary and protection for her young," Jon explained, not completely sure of the exact circumstances. "It was a peaceful encounter. I did not kill her."

"The dragon's name is Onyx," Tonks said disbelievingly. "What, she told you this?" There was laughter coming out of the badge. There was an awkward pause around the table.

"Master Beowulf was expecting to put the dragon out of its misery. He did not know she also had a
young one to protect inside that cave," Valerian Kozlov said.

"Um... is that the Bear Girl?" came a confused voice.

"Tonks, Lady Valerian is also with us. Lady Valerian, you are speaking with Nymphadora Tonks, our Clan Witch," Jon introduced.

"Hello," Lady Valerian said.

"Hello," came the response. "I'm sorry for your loss." Tonks' voice was contrite. "But how does Jon know its name?"

"Lord Black is the Dragon Whisperer," Valerian declared.

"What? Dragon who? What is that?"

Another awkward pause. Valerian bent low towards the badge, lowering her voice. "It is hard to explain. But Lord Black has the baby dragon now. His name is Miracle."

"HE WHAT?!"

"It is true," Jon explained. "The Dragon was on its dying breath. She needed someone to protect her only son."

"And she chose you, of course," Tonks argued.

"Yes," Jon said calmly, as if this was nothing unusual.

"He is the Dragon Whisperer, Madam Tonks. The blood of the Dragon is his birthright," Valerian declared.


"Suspected something like that was the reason for his fire spell..." Ollivander muttered.

"Just as you have the blood of the shape-shifter," Valerian told Tonks.

"Oh," Tonks said, perturbed. She remembered what Jon said about seeing through her concealment spell. "Oh. I see what you mean, Jon."

Inside the hangar, Tonks frowned. This Wiglaf girl was a bit dodgy.

"Milady. I have volunteered to help her find Master Kastav, so she may pay homage with proper burial rites," said Jon.

"You are popping in before? It's getting late in the afternoon. There might be some bad weather coming soon," Tonks said. "And I can't wait to get out of here."

"Yes. We shall be there shortly. I will need Ghost to help us find him."

"Your sick comrade. The wizard with the Basilisk venom. Do not apparate him. It will be bad for his health. Very bad. The ailments are severe, and he needs to recuperate," Valerian said.

"So... what do we do?" Alexandria asked. "Are we to risk flying him here through the cold on broomstick?"
"No. I have an idea that may work. There is an abandoned Soviet black operations training base near that compound. I am a trained pilot with specialization on the M-I- Mil-Two-Four assault chopper. Once we can find fuel, I can fly it."

"What did she just say?" Tonks asked. "Can you please repeat that?"

Valerian looked at the other participants in the meeting. All of them had the same lost expression on their faces. No one here knew what a 'chopper' was. She reddened, embarrassed.

"I will be able to explain myself better in person. The helicopter base is close to you. It is across the Olenyok river," she explained.

"If you say so," Tonks said dubiously.

Jon cleared his throat. "We will talk shortly. Expect us within ten minutes."

"Gotcha, Jon!" Tonks breathed.

"Mr. B out."

Tonks ended the conversation. She rubbed her face downwards, stretching her sleep deprived skin. Another strange witch has appeared. What was it with these two?

"Who is... Valerian," Harry asked in a gritty voice. He was resting on the rug, eyes closed, his head propped with a transfigured pillow. The table cloth was being used as a makeshift blanket.

"You heard all of that?"

"Bits. Pieces. She is magical?" Harry said softly.

"Yes. The Dragon tracker's apprentice."

A witch who could fly an attack helicopter. This sounds interesting.

"How are you feeling?" Tonks asked, sitting down next to him on the rug.

"Like fucking shit. I can't move without a lot of pain," Harry whispered. Tonks patted his hair, passing her hand from his hair line towards the back in long, smooth strokes.

"You just rest up. We're going to get you out of here and somewhere more comfortable, soon."

"Okay," Harry smiled. A few minutes passed in silence, Tonks idly petting his hair. "You're not mad at me anymore." It was a statement, not a question.

"Good way to ruin the mood, hotshot," Tonks chuckled, but did not stop rubbing his hair. She smiled down at him. Harry tried to open his eyes, but it was painful to do so.

"For what it's worth, coming from a 'dark wizard' and all, I am sorry," Harry said weakly. Even the subdued light coming through the louvers was playing havoc on his vision.

"You see what I mean? You are too cheeky for your own good." Tonks huffed with a grin. She grabbed a bottle of water, and maneuvered herself so Harry's head was on her lap once again. Harry gratefully took a few sips from the bottle. "Sorry about what, exactly?"

There was a slight pause where Harry forced himself to turn his face towards her. He kept his eyes closed, light entering them was making his nausea return.
"Throwing you down like that. Making you suspicious. Not being, like, totally open."

He still wasn't being totally open. He couldn't tell her that he returned from the dead. That, was the true and final nail in the coffin to cement her accusations of 'Dark Wizardry-ism'. Tonks paused her soothing petting of his hair to wipe spilled water with her Ora-Kill scarf. When it touched his chin Harry flinched.

"That's cursed," Harry said tiredly.

"What, this?" she held up her scarf. An extended period passed as Harry struggled to talk.

"Yeah... it feels so."

"Potter, how do you know it's cursed?" she asked, curious. Harry took almost a minute to open his mouth and respond. His lips, no his entire face; was hurting from talking and sipping from the water bottle.

"If it's one thing I am experienced in, it's fighting cursed objects," he explained haltingly. "It's not malicious, but it is cursed."

Tonks thought about last night, and the anger that surged through her when she read Sarah's mail and the duplicated copies of Penelope's correspondence. Sarah had trusted her, as her 'bad-ass dark magic fighting Auror-material best-friend'; to question Harry about it and get answers. Tonks, on the other hand; was livid that Harry was attracting that sort of response from the sixth year.

That was a powerful feat of magic indeed. Harry's secret was just that, her secret. A Sorceror capable of reliving his past, not some stupid result of any Department of Mysteries' restricted artifact.

And maybe, just maybe, she was jealous a teeny-tiny little bit.

"Voldemort is coming back, isn't he?" Tonks said softly. Harry nodded once.

"I'm doing my best to stop that from happening."

She took off the scarf, and tossed it in Jon's dragon fire. Tonks screamed when she felt a burning sensation on her skin. Harry's eyes shot open.

"Tonks?!" he croaked, too weak to do more than lift his head.

Tonks immediately summoned the scarf out of the fire. She opened up her dueling armor with a desperate panic. Without hesitation she cast a water charm on the black vest smoking on her chest. The burning sensation began to ease. She diverted the hose unto the Red Ora Kill scarf. The smoldering piece of material was put out, and the dark burned spots immediately 'healed', reverting into its blood-red color.

"Merlin's mother," Tonks cursed, watching the innocent looking scarf like a deadly snake.

"Told you," Harry's voice whispered. "Are you ok?" he turned to her. His eyes opened wide. Tonks' simple black vest was basically destroyed, giving Harry a glimpse. Tonks huffed and drew the outer robe closed. She levitated the red piece of material to eye height, inspecting it.

"Harry, why is it I am always exposing myself indecently around you? Is that your Dark Magic at work?" she scowled with a bemused shake of her head.
"Could be."

_Sounds like a pretty nifty ability, anyway, Harry thought._

"Bulistrode said that it wasn't enchanted at all!" she cried. "That wanker."

"You _are_ a descendant..." Harry muttered. "Could be a hereditary thing. Maybe your erm, _moments_, you know, the ones I like... maybe it's because of the Red OraKill scarf."

Tonks carefully folded the scarf and packed it away in one of the travel pouches. He had a point. But there were also 'moments', where she was nowhere close to the scarf. The majority of her bad moods did coincide with it. She was extremely angry at Reagan in South Hampton. She was definitely wearing it then. _And_ it was in the guest room when she interrogated Harry in France. The same applied both times when she squared off in Hagrid's cabin and back at base.

Harry _might_ be on to something here. "Not a word about this, Potter."

"Of course," Harry agreed, closing his eyes once again. He was getting tired frightfully easily. Exhausted, and in pain.

"I mean it!" she reinforced. "Any link to a cursed object is automatic disqualification from the acceptance program. I can't risk it. My exam is in two weeks. Don't even tell Jon, ok? He blurs out stuff sometimes."

"You can trust me," Harry said softly. Tonks just stared at the young wizard in front of her. Even with all the obvious signs of Dark wizardry he exhibited, Harry's heroism was beyond question. She sighed heavily.

"I'm sorry, you know. You did work me up, though. How you talked about my family..." Tonks sat back down next to him and put his head in her lap. She began stroking his hair again. Harry closed his eyes in contentment. "I hated that in school. There was a girl in my house, Amber Bagshot, who used to call me 'Dark mudblood'. It sort of stuck with some of the other zealots. I wasn't that popular in school, if you didn't realize that by now. Ah, not like you would know about that, anyway."

_You would be surprised._

"I grew up with non-magical relatives who hated magic. Um, _hate_. Present tense. I'm not like that. Pisses me off, actually."

"I know." Tonks resumed her slow petting of Harry's head. After a couple minutes of silence she spoke again. "I'm terribly sorry about last night. I shouldn't have... I just... bugger it all up sometimes..." she sighed. Tonks paused in stroking his hair. "You aren't dark. A Dark Wizard can't fathom to risk themselves for someone else. And do that Superman bit."

"Superman?" Harry asked, lost.

"Saving us? The carriage?"

"Oh," Harry groaned. "That."

"You saved all of us," Tonks said solemnly. "And you're here like: no big deal." She chuckled. She ran her fingers through his hair once more, and gently turned his face towards her. "You have a 'saving people thing', don't you?" she asked softly, a slight smile on her face. The first thing that came to Harry's mind was Hermione saying the same thing to him at a point in time. He couldn't remember when, but it still felt fresh in his memories.
"Yes. I guess. It got me into a lot of trouble before," he admitted softly.

Sirius.

As soon as they returned to England, he would get a legal team together to plot a course of action, then immediately start proceedings over the Christmas break. It had been far too long already.

"Just keep doing you, Harry. This world needs heroes," Tonks said softly. She dipped her head and kissed him softly, almost barely a touch of lips. "Thanks anyway. I won't doubt you again, luv."

"You're welcome," Harry whispered, a slight smile on his face. The kiss and restored confidence felt wonderful, but tying to keep up this conversation was drilling screws into his brain, and behind his eyes. "Pain potion?"

"No problem," Tonks lifted his head and gently placed it back on the pillow. She got the potion and gave him the corresponding dose. Harry closed his eyes, thankfully drifting off to a painless sleep.

Jon and the rest of the gang made the numerous apparition hops southwards towards the airport. Within ten minutes of Harry falling asleep the security ward chimed. Tonks was prepared, having hidden Harry and blending in with the background using the disillusionment charm. She almost attacked when Jon appeared with Wiglaf, or Valerian, whatever her name was, and with a small jet black dragon on his left shoulder. He looked completely different, dressed in a huge bear pelt and sandals. Valerian stared straight at her, not for one second fooled by the stealth magic.

Jon looked around, bewildered that no one was here.

"Milady?" he called.

Tonks did not answer him. She hoped Jon knew what to do. After watching them for a few seconds, Jon finally caught on and drew the sword from the bracer. "It is me, milady."

"Over here," Tonks said from her hiding place. She cancelled the spell and was once again clearly visible.

"How is he?" he asked. Alexandria and Ollivander popped in next. Alexandria was wearing Jon's dueling robe over the Dragon leather jerkin, minus the pants. It looked ridiculous on her. She approached the fire quickly, then spun around, searching for Harry.

"Careful," Tonks warned. "You could step on him." She cancelled the magic hiding their sleeping comrade.

"Oh! Thank you," Alexandria said, then immediately tapped her wand on his finger, drawing a spot of blood for her vial. She checked it in a clear solution. "The allergens are waning. Which is good." She placed her hand on his face. "And no fever, thank Merlin."

"He's been talking a little bit, in and out of sleep. Says he's still in pain," Tonks informed them.

"Alexandria, stay with him. Ghost, to me," Jon said offhandedly to no one in particular. A half a minute later Ghost came in silently through an open window, watching Miracle perched on Jon's shoulder. He bared his fangs at the dragon. The dragon flapped his wings once aggressively, spreading it wide. Jon moved the wing away from his face. The dragon hissed at the wolf, and the wolf snarled at the dragon. "Easy there lads," Jon said in a stern manner. "Miracle, behave!"

The dragon closed his wings, climbed on Jon's head then settled himself on his right shoulder, away
from Ghost. Ghost seemed pleased to have won that confrontation.

"The dragon's name is Miracle?" Tonks asked.

"Yes it is. A fitting name," Jon offered his hand up to the dragon and the baby dragon pretended to bite him, gnawing gently on his finger. Ghost immediately came closer and lay down next to Jon's foot. Jon had to crouch awkwardly and scratch behind his ear. Miracle appeared bored and jumped off to inspect the basket of food.

Jon found a piece of meat and fed it to him. The dragon gobbled it, then burped with a sight puff of fire. Jon offered him a large bottle of water, which he promptly bit out of his hand and began gnawing on the plastic, water spraying everywhere.

Yes. Feels good on my bite.

Jon watched the little dragon. This was the first time he heard his voice. It sounded like a young boy speaking from the bottom of a well in his head. "Your fangs are hurting you?"

Yes. Feels good on my fangs.

The baby dragon curled up on the rug near to Jon's fire. The plastic bottle made cracking, snapping noises. "You like my fire?"

Yes. Feels good on my scales.

Jon crouched down and offered Miracle his hand. The dragon licked it affectionately. "Ghost! Guard the building." There was an affirmative yip. "Stay there. I will be back, Miracle."

Yes. Do not be long.

Miracle wrapped his tail around himself and curled his wings around his entire body, reminding Jon of a bat. The baby dragon settled down, gnawing on the water bottle and staring attentively into the fire. Jon addressed Ollivander and Alexandria. "He will be fine. We will be back shortly."

The two of them observed the docile dragon nesting at Harry's feet next to the fire. "He talks back?" Alexandria asked Jon, shocked.

"Yes. In whispers," Jon tapped his ear with a smile. Ollivander drew his wand.

"Right. I'll take precautions, just in case," Ollivander said. Alexandria just stared at Jon. Valerian came closer to him.

"The base is on the other side of the bridge. About a mile south from here. By your leave, Lord Black." She offered him her arm.

"I want to come and see the 'assault chopper'," Tonks said, watching the girl warily.

"We will stay here and help keep watch," Ollivander offered. Tonks noticed he and Alexandria were also watching everything Valerian did. Only Jon was at complete ease. Something strange was going on here. Tonks sized her up.

Valerian was tall; well, taller than everyone here except Master Ollivander, and she had the build of a track athlete. Powerful legs and back, and strong shoulders. The dragon tunic reminded her of a tight leather jumpsuit. The bear jaw and pelt over her hair was intimidating, and if it weren't for her female proportions, Tonks thought the getup was quite manly with the sword hilt protruding diagonally
above her shoulder and the weird spear in her right hand.

"As you wish, madam Tonks," she said with a slight head bow.

Tonks looked aghast at the knightly gesture. She looked at her, then Jon.

"You two related?" Tonks eyebrows went up.

Jon laughed. "No."

"Once we find a fueling buggy, all will be fine," Valerian said. "Come with me. I will return for you shortly." She offered her arm once again to Jon. She disappeared with him, then returned for Tonks.

They appeared at a training base surrounded by tall pine trees. Large buildings surrounded a snow covered tarmac of four large helicopter landing zones. The buildings were painted with grey and brown camouflage patterns. Valerian walked across to a hangar with an angel painted in black on the large metallic gate. She drew her sword and swiped at the rusty chain securing the lock. She struck it once, then twice, but only nicked the chain.

"Allow me," Jon commanded. She stepped aside. Jon drew his Claymore and cut the chain with one swing. He helped her pull the gate open on the poorly lubricated rail wheels. It made a loud, metallic rolling sound.

"Ah. Why am I not surprised. The '78, right where I left it," Valerian said.

"What is that?" Tonks exclaimed. Jon just stared at the metal creature in disbelief. It was a dusty, dull-white and grey camouflaged helicopter sitting on a large, wheeled platform. In front of the platform was a towing hinge.

"This is a Soviet Attack helicopter. The models like these are M-I MIL 24 series, commonly called Hind. This one is disarmed and outfitted for quick infiltration missions. The munitions are stored elsewhere, but can be fitted, and configured by a trained engineer." Valerian ran her hand on the dusty cockpit. "Serviced a year ago. Not bad, at least they treated you fairly" she said vehemently. She checked a large chalkboard near to the Quality Control inspection office. "Last flight, sixteen months ago."

Using her enhanced eyesight, Tonks noticed that Valerian did not read the words, she simply found dates, and numeric codes written on the board.

"Ah, there is the fueling buggy." She went across to what looked like a forklift, except with a towing bar behind it and two massive barrels with gauges attached on the front, instead of the lifting fork. She struck the metal barrels with the pommel of the Beowulf's heavy knife. She nodded in satisfaction at the short, full sound. She climbed in the driver's seat of the towing buggy, turned the ignition switch and expertly positioned the sturdy, compact vehicle in front of the helicopter platform. Within ten minutes she towed the helicopter out unto the landing pad, fueled and prepped.

Valerian expertly climbed up the service rungs on the side of the machine and opened both cockpits. Tonks was impressed.

"Valerian, can I call you that?" she said over the bitter wind.

"Yes," she paused before she sat inside. She pushed her shield into the lower cockpit. She frowned when the large sword could not fit as well.

"How old are you?"
"Fifteen years," she responded.

"Right. Fifteen- and you know what you are doing?"

"Yes. It's hard to explain. I will tell you all I can, after I bury my Master. My Lord Black, if you may, please hold this for me." She threw the sheathed sword effortlessly, without even waiting to see if Jon caught it. Jon snatched it out the air, inspecting the craftsmanship. The pommel was forged with a dragon claw. The sheath was masterfully made, covered in what appeared to be dragon leather. The cross guard was designed in a stylized X with curved, pointed tips. It felt lighter than Bearclaw, his sword while Commander of the Night's Watch.

A high pitched whine emanated from the machine as Valerian flicked numerous switches in the cockpit. "Please stand back, and take shelter inside the hangar!" She closed the hatch.

Jon and Tonks stepped away from the circular landing pad, returning to the doorway of the hangar. A loud roar came from the engines and the rotors began to spin. The helicopter took off smoothly. She gained altitude, turned anticlockwise in midair and did a few maneuvers. Afterwards, she landed it smoothly. The rotors slowed down and came to an eventual stop.

Valerian disembarked and ran across to them.

"It has been well taken care of, and flight ready. I can take your injured to the inn. He needs maybe a day or two of rest. Do you wish to come for the ride?" she asked, almost eager.

"How do you know how to do this?" Tonks asked, amazed.

"I... was handpicked for combat, by an organization known as 'Helvetets Anglar', which means 'Hell's Angels' in your language."

"How long ago was that?" Tonks asked.

"Seven years ago."

"What?! That would make you what, eight then?"

"Yes," she said sadly. "We shall talk more later. Let us make haste back to town, please. I wish to recover the body before the snows come in tonight. All aboard?"

"Very well," Jon said, intrigued.

"Okay," Tonks said, watching her with a strange expression.

"Good. Let me open the main hatch for you." Jon and Tonks followed her as she trotted across the tarmac and scampered into the cockpit like a trained professional. The hatch opened.

Jon pulled the sliding door open then he and Tonks boarded. The cabin was designed to carry six troops. The loud rotors sped up and Valerian took to the air. A couple of minutes later they completed the short hop, landing outside Harry's sick bay hangar. "Keep your head down!" she warned as they touched down.

"Amazing!" Ollivander raced outside. "This trip is full of wonderful surprises!" He held down his hat over his head as he watched the vehicle land.

"Crows, inside the Steel Dragon!" Jon shouted as he jumped out, carrying a stretcher. Tonks followed right behind him. They ducked low to compensate for the downwash, running inside the
building to fetch him. Alexandria levitated Harry on the stretcher, and Tonks and Jon carried him by hand under the strong pressure of the helicopter blades. Alexandria and Master Ollivander gathered their things and erased all signs of the fire. "Miracle! Ghost!" John snapped. Without further ado, Ghost and Miracle bounded up the side ramp and settled into the war machine.

"Dustoff complete!" Valerian's voice came through the public announcement system. "All crew strap in, prepare for takeoff."

With all their things packed, the Crows strapped themselves in for the long journey. There was a loud surge of the engines and the HIND took off into the cold wind. "Press the red button in front of you, Tonks!" came a voice over the intercom. Tonks did, and the door slid closed. The Crows held their brooms uneasily, except Jon, who was more concerned with Harry's ability to sleep through the noise. At top speed, the journey north took less than an hour. The helicopter landed on a flat field outside of the town proper, a couple hundred meters behind the The Last Fire pub. After getting Harry and the others settled into a room with more single beds crammed in, Valerian begged her leave.

"Please. I will answer your questions when I return. But first, allow me to honor him properly," she said sadly. Jon could see that her master's sudden death had affected her deeply.

"Ghost, Miracle, with me!" Jon commanded. Miracle jumped on his back, sinking his claws into the bear pelt. Ghost followed them as they walked out the backdoor. Jon put Ghost in his knapsack then allowed Valerian to take his arm. They disappeared.

"She's just like him," Alexandria said, a bit disturbed.

"Tell me about it," Tonks breathed as she stretched out on the bed. "All I want to do is sleep, but I've got the strangest feeling that we're not done yet." She plopped back on the pillow. "So what happened with you three?"

Alexandria and Master Ollivander regaled her of the Beowulf meeting and what happened in the mountains.

"He is extremely powerful," Ollivander said solemnly.

"Which one?" Tonks laughed, eyeing Harry's sleeping form on the next bed. Ollivander nodded in understanding.

"Yes, they are both exceptional. Very, very interesting. Valerian Kozlov is yet another enigma," he chuckled. "She doesn't have a wand."

"No? I thought Jon said she's a witch!" Tonks argued.

"She is. Just she isn't British trained. If I were to guess, I think she is..."

There was a knock on the door. "Dinner is ready!" The owner's footsteps drifted away. Tonks cast an eavesdropping barrier on the door.

"She said she was handpicked to be a 'Hell's Angel'. Learned how to fly the Helichopper when she was very young too," Tonks explained. "Did she tell you anything else?"

"The Dragon tracker had high hopes for her," Alexandria added. "She said that his jest of making her the Beowulf was getting annoying. Maybe he thought she was ready?"

"I believe she thinks Jon to be the next one," Ollivander said solemnly.
"What?" Both Tonks and Alexandria said.

"The oath: it said something about a man without fear of the Dragon's strength, because he has faced such terrors before. And if my memory of the tale serves me well, Wiglaf, the Beowulf's young relative, followed his 'Lord' to face the dragon for the first time. *His spirit did not break and the ancestral blade would keep its edge*. Substitute the male pronoun for a female, and you have Jon as the Beowulf, and Valerian as Wiglaf."

"You're right! Jon took her to face the dragon for her first time," Alexandria said in understanding. "You mean this is a prophecy?"

Ollivander pulled at his beard, eyes twinkling. "I don't know. She called him the Dragon Whisperer. And he seems to be able to communicate with the young dragon. It is confusing. I have never heard of a wizard talking to an animal, except snakes."

"Like Harry," Tonks agreed.

"What?" Alexandria breathed. Ollivander also looked shocked.

"Uh-" Tonks stammered. That wasn't meant to come out.

"Harry could talk to snakes?" Alexandria said. "That is extremely dark magic! Was that why you two fought?"

"You two were fighting?" Ollivander asked.

"Misunderstanding!" Tonks tried to quell the questions. "My bad. It was... is... complicated. Harry's fine."

Alexandria looked at Harry's sleeping form. "Basilisk...she called him. And Jon said the venom runs through his veins."

"I remember that Jon did say that they needed to kill one. I wonder if he was bitten and somehow survived... this Basilisk... must be forwarded unto the Aurors. Was that the reason his eyes were glowing during the crash?"

"Um, that's something totally different..." It was now Alexandria's time to go red in the face, trying to cover Harry's secrets.

"We shall discuss everything when everyone is available. I will watch over him if either of you two need to shower," Ollivander offered.

By the time all three of them rotated shifts and were able to freshen up, Jon and Valerian had returned. The sun was setting low in the sky.

"We have prepared a grave not far from here," Jon said solemnly.

"I would be honored if you were to attend with us," Valerian bowed. Her knightly gesture was ruined due to uncontrollable sniffling.

"I will stay," Tonks offered, indicating Harry's sleeping form.

"Very well," Valerian said, rubbing her nose with her bear pelt. "We would not be long." The four of them left, with Ghost and Miracle staying close to Jon.
Tonks watched Jon and the others leave out the window, then glanced at her patient. Harry could talk to snakes and threstrals. Jon could talk to dragons, and had an uncanny connection with his white wolf, who had already doubled in size since she first met him. Now, Ghost was almost the size of a grown wolf. Those two lads kept coming up with even more surprises. Tonks made the rounds outside the Inn, running intruder detection spells on the main entries. She was getting quite skilled in doing security sweeps on their temporary bases, no matter where they were. She apparated back inside the Clan bedroom.

"Where," Harry breathed, awakening at the sound of her arrival. He looked sleepily at Tonks.

"This is the Last Fire Inn. Where we were supposed to meet Valerian."

"I missed her again, didn't I?"

"Yeah. She's a helichopper flyer," Tonks said seriously.

"Helicopter pilot," Harry corrected. His body still ached but at least it was easier to talk. "Anything to eat?" Harry begged.

"Sure," Tonks said and retrieved the soup. She pulled up a chair next to Harry's bed, and began to feed him.

"Sorry," Harry apologized, feeling embarrassed that she had to baby him.

"It's ok. Least I could do, really. Um, I let slip to the others that you can talk to Snakes. Master Ollivander also knows that you were bitten by a Basilisk. Are you going to tell them about the Chamber? They're going to ask as soon as they come back from burying the Dragon tracker."

"I don't know," Harry said in between spoonfuls. "These robes are itchy," Harry complain, squirming.

"Yeah. And they smell a bit too. If you could stand, I could probably carry you to the shower. I'm dying for one as well."

Harry paused. That was an innocent goof, right? No way in hell did she mean for them to take a shower together. No way. Tonks was stirring the soup and blowing on it to feed him. She probably didn't mean anything by it. Harry struggled to sit up against the bed head. His legs felt heavy, and painful.

"I can't. Why am I feeling so... ugh?" Harry complained, indicating his legs.

"We fed you a potion that wasn't finished. The Bezoar is working to fight off the allergic reaction, but it takes time. Also, you contracted Wizard flu, but Alexandria gave you two doses of medicine already. You have a horrible combination going on."

"Damn. I was useless this mission," Harry said morosely. Tonks huffed and fed him another spoonful, a bit more aggressively than before.

"Harry. No. Just no. Everyone was, um... a bit agitated without you. We need you," Tonks reprimanded him, a bit embarrassed about her performance in his absence. "Jon has been doing a fantastic job... he's really good with dangerous situations. But you're the one we need to fight against dark magic, holistically. You're the key. Just, take it easy and rest up, yeah?"

Harry nodded, unconvinced. He didn't feel like any type of 'key'. Right now he just felt like a burden. Tonks fed him some more.
"Let me try," Harry grumbled. He took the bowl and spoon, but his hands were shaking too much with strain to effectively eat for himself. Tonks grabbed it from him, and made sure he finished it.

"Thanks, RD," Harry said gratefully. He eased back to lie flat in the bed. "I am feeling a little better, though."

Tonks patted the blanket covering. "Good. You take it easy." Harry closed his eyes and dozed off again.

At nine that evening everyone had returned and was finishing eating. Jon and Tonks went to freshen up and change into hastily purchased clothes. Valerian had retreated into her room to also bathe and get changed. The Crows were now sitting in their crowded bedroom, awaiting Valerian's return so that she may tell them her story. Harry had a few hours rest and managed to sit up in bed.

There was a polite knock on their door.

"Lady Valerian?" Jon asked.

"Yes. May I come in?"

Jon opened the door for her. Valerian was wearing a sleeveless hoodie over a hand knit sweater and woolen tights. The sleeveless hoodie had a sickle and hammer logo, with "V V S" printed in a militaristic font.

"Lord Black," she half curtsied.

"Lady Valerian," Jon tilted his head fractionally.

"Good evening, everyone." Her eyes met Harry's. "You are awake."

"Yes. Thank you for bringing me here, Miss Kozlov," Harry said.

"Your Clan thinks highly of you, Harry. It is the least I can do. So," she hesitated, then grabbed a free chair and sat down. "My name, well, my Russian name, is Valerian Koslov. But my original birthplace was in Norway. My father's name was Lukas Goldstein, my mother was Rachel Highlander, a Scottish born witch."

"There is a Marlene Highlander in our school!" Alexandria exclaimed. "I dueled her in the tournament!" Everyone looked at her quizzically. "Pardonez-moi," she said sheepishly.

"At an early age it was apparent I was different. I learned three different languages at age four. Could do mathematics and ride horseback at age five. Then, I began exhibiting magic. My father never knew my mother had a magical heritage. From what I have investigated, she lost the use of her magic through a tragic experience. The strange phenomena that kept happening scared my father, who knew nothing of the magical world. They took me to a medical facility, but they could not find anything wrong with me, except abnormal brain activity. My father accepted me for a little while longer, until by age six, he began to suffer maddening dreams and fits of psychosis. He enrolled me into a boarding school for young children, hoping that keeping me away from him would help."

Valerian looked sad at this moment. "It didn't. He killed himself."

The Crows all expressed sympathy at her loss. "My mother knew I was a witch, but didn't know what to do with me. Her magic was quite weak to begin with. I do not know how she lost access to it. She eventually blamed me for my father's death. She contacted a person who knew a man called
Igor Karkaroff, then sent me away to him. This Karkaroff interviewed me, and gave me a few questions to answer. However, ever since my parents shunned me, I have had a problem. I could no longer read nor string together letters; my brain interprets it as garbage. Symbols, drawings, numbers, technical plans... those are fine. Karkaroff thought I had a mental disability. He decided to send me to an acquaintance of his: a muggle member of the USSR's Black Operation military unit. I was accepted as prodigy, due to my ability to accurately absorb information and techniques rather quickly through visual, and verbal communication.

She paused, taking a sip of water.

"I am fluent in twelve languages, and have extensive hands-on training in commandeering many types of military craft."

"Impressive. Do you still have this reading issue?" Ollivander asked.

"Yes. I have learned to use braille for typical texts, and other methods such as imagery, and playback tapes for educational purposes. I was eight when the Russian instructors decided that my brain was a very good receptacle for pilot training, both in a jet, and helicopter. I aced all the simulations by nine, and was flying training missions within the year. At ten, I was inducted into an elite Black Operations Helicopter Unit, called the Hell's Angels. We were categorized under the Russian Military air forces: Voyennno-Vozdushnye Sily Rossii," she pointed at the hoodie she wore, "VVS for short."

She took another sip of water.

"My code name was Black Angel One."

Harry looked at Jon, who appeared to be quite lost with all the strange terms.

"My missions were mainly Helicopter extraction over enemy territory. Our ground unit will infiltrate various parts of the world, and I would extract them, entering hot zone after hot zone for almost three years. I was never shot down, and I never failed a mission. My comrades joking called me Vasilisa the Wise, a character of old Russian myth. She was supposed to be a supernaturally wise young girl. With my command of so many languages and skill in physics and mathematics, the tales were in alignment. No one knew that I couldn't read, most military documents has numeric codes and diagrams that I understood once I saw them. Our Helicopter unit became the most requested unit for tricky missions: rescuing prisoners of war, high stakes extraction of enemy targets, that sort of thing."

She folded her arms and crossed her legs at the knee.

"I became hard. I was no longer a child. I was an Angel of Rescue to my allies, but also an Angel of Death, according to enemy intelligence. The dual title earned me my code name: Black Angel One. We did not even scramble our communications when executing assault raids, we wanted the enemy to hear. My code name struck fear into the radio personnel, causing chaos when the name 'Black Angel One' was intercepted by their spy equipment. That helicopter we rode in, was my first training aircraft. Since then I have completed forty five missions, twenty three in a hot zone, all without friendly casualties. The other missions were routine support runs, deployment, and pick ups. A flawless record."

"Wow," Harry said, impressed. "So... what happened?"

"Puberty happened. I was always tall, and developed early. A few days after I turned twelve, there was an attempt on my... femininity, by a superior. I fought him off, and he... well, he died. He was my physical combat and pilot instructor. He took me under his wing, like a second father to me. A
strong, good man, until he thought that I was no longer a child, but a woman. Even though I fought, I did not intend to kill him. The Military court did not know what to do with me. While awaiting trial, I was placed in a remand centre. A few days later I was accused of witchcraft, due to medical scans showing he suffered a crushed heart, yet no external damage. 'Witchcraft' was a demoralizing fear among non-magical soldiers. The evidence was conclusive that I was physically incapable of inflicting such a deathblow."

"After the trial, which I had a farce of a defense, I believed there was a conspiracy to execute me and be done with it."

"That night was when I first met Kastav. He rescued me. How he knew my dire situation and where to find me, I never knew. Over the years, even though I asked numerous times, he maintained his stance that it was his 'little secret'. One night I was in the prison, the next morning I woke up on a Romanian farmstead, on a comfortable bed in a dormitory with friendly, curious faces. I suspected that he wanted an apprentice, and contacted Karkaroff about my whereabouts. I assume Karkaroff kept in touch with whoever it was that recruited me into the military."

She took another sip of water, collecting her thoughts.

"It was a school for Dragon Lancers, a magical school. There were only thirty to forty students there at one time. Kastav was a previous headmaster, until he passed on the job to go on the field as a Dragon researcher. Professor Doholov was the current headmaster when I was a student there."

"Antonin Doholov?" Harry asked.

"Yes. You know of him?"


"Life was good for a while. We learned how to use simple muggle weapons, the knife, the sword, staff, spear and bow. I was the only female who chose to learn how to wield the two handed greatsword. They trained us how to survive in the wilderness. Hunting, tracking, and being able to remain hidden. Most importantly we learned of Dragons, and theoretical ways of combating them, capturing them, breeding them. Master Kastav visited for a few months when I was thirteen, and many of the older boys were trying to one up each other during that time in an attempt to catch his eye. They all hoped that a few of them would be chosen to be his apprentices. He was a professional tracker at that time for some of the well established Hunter Clans, and a consultant to the Dragon Aerie in Romania. He had dinner in our dining hall the night before he left, among the students. After, he spoke to me in confidence. He said he would choose me to be his apprentice in the morning, if I wished it, and I would leave with him to go on a great adventure. I agreed immediately. He saved me from prison. I was so excited."

"Word of his choice somehow spread. In the middle of the night two older boys attacked. My time at the children's school made me terribly soft. I almost felt like a child again, with friends and peaceful routine. While I slept, they silenced and bound me with magical means. I was tied up in a blanket and thrown off the edge of a cliff. I thought I was going to die. That was the first time I apparated. I ran back to Master Kastav's quarters at the school and begged him to let me in. I cried and cried as I told him what happened. He consoled me and immediately took me to safety. Over the next few days we traveled to Hungary, where his current home was. His wife was sick, and we stayed by her side for her final months. When she passed, Kastav declared he would do what he always wanted to do: hunt and kill dragons. His wife was always adamant that actually facing the creatures were not for him. Now that she had passed, he decided that he would make an attempt. I was thirteen at the time.

"Over the next two years we had tremendous success. He killed a nest of three Horntails on his first
commissioned job. They were old and sickly, yet still quite dangerous. Using the trusty carpet, he infiltrated into their lair while they were sleeping and pierced their hearts. The Dragon armor we wear were made of their hide. The next four were also quickly achieved, and he became renowned as the Master Dragon Slayer. Master Kastav told me his secret: *Draco dormiens nunquam titillandus."

"Never tickle a sleeping Dragon," Tonks, Harry and Jon translated at the same time. Harry was seated between them. He offered both Jon and Tonks his fists and they connected instantly. He chuckled at their synergy.

"You know of this secret?" Valerian asked, astounded.

"It's our school motto."

Valerian frowned. "Master Kastav always had a sense of humour. The book we retrieved, Lord Black: was his life's work. He has successfully tracked thirty three dragons, and killed seven later on in his life. The Onyx would have been his crown jewel. The Sentient One. Wizardbane, that species was called historically. It detects any magic that is cast, and willingly targets Wizards. He was a man of grandeur, but also of impeccable skill. He weighed his risk versus reward very, very carefully."

"He was in Ravenclaw six years above me," Ollivander finally remembered. "He had a funny accent."

"Valerian, did you, well... learn, or figured out what the secret meant?" Tonks asked, curious.

"Basically, kill the dragon quickly when it is sleeping, right through the heart: there is no other efficient way of fighting them otherwise. They are magnificent creatures, and facing one in full flight or when they are protecting young is almost certain death."

Miracle cooed softly and crawled into Jon's bed. Without further ado, he squirmed under the covers and fell asleep.

"He was granted title of Beowulf by peers in the field after his fifth kill. No wizard in recent history has achieved five kills in such a short time to his name. Kastav always credited me as his guardian angel, his good luck charm." She smiled sadly. "Today is the day I have killed my third father."

Tears fell down her face. She wiped her eyes on the sleeve of the sweater.

The room grew silent.

"No you did not," Harry said. "Life is cruel sometimes. Sometimes, we lose those we love. Please don't blame yourself."

"Yes," she sniffed. "I have seen death, and lost close comrades of the VVS. But... losing each father figure I had- I cannot," she dried her eyes, composing herself. "I cannot believe that it is all coincidence. Every time the Beowulf joked about giving me the Lance I felt heavy. Almost as if he was taunting Death itself."

"Better to laugh in the face of death, than crush the spirits of the rank and file," Jon quoted.

"What?" Harry said with a chuckle. That made no sense. If you saw Death's face, it was no laughing matter. Ask him, he knew that from experience.

"His words are true," Valerian said. "I believe that a positive attitude is best when faced with adversity."
"You aren't that positive, though," Alexandria countered under her breath.

"I'm working on it," she sighed.

"If you are coming with Jon, I will have to acquire documents to take you on as my ward. Do you have any identification or student registration?" Ollivander asked.

"Yes. I have all: hospital birth paper, military identification, school records and Guild association papers. Master Kastav was strict about documentation. He said parchment and pen will live on, even though we must eventually die. 'Live a life someone will write about' he told me once."

Harry regarded her with a newfound respect. *A child soldier. What a tragic way to grow up.*

"Your past is already novel worthy," Harry agreed. "Now on to forge the next chapter: the future." Valerian stared at Harry. Harry didn't shy away. He was accustomed to these stares by warriors *ages* ago, about August. She had nothing on Jon.

"One of my talents is seeing the radiance of magical blood." She frowned.

"That's... interesting," Harry mused, encouraging her to continue.

"You two are special. I have never seen the like."

The room looked at Harry, then Jon, intrigued. Jon said nothing. Harry shrugged.

"So the healer tells me."

Valerian smiled at him, and nodded. She dropped the subject. She stood up, facing Ollivander. "You are Jon's grandfather," she addressed the wand Smith.

"Yes."

"I have sworn allegiance to him, the Dragon Whisperer. Please allow me to be accepted in your care as your ward." She curtsied and made it look perfectly elegant, which was no mean feat when one was wearing woolen tights.

"Yes, of course, dear." Ollivander smiled at her grand gestures, a female version of Jon's behavior.

"I must warn you, I may need to change my surname. Right now I am still classified as a highly skilled deserter. No one has chased me in Hungary, as far as I know, but ... better to be cautious."

"How about your father's?" Ollivander prompted. "Goldstein, was it?"

"Maybe a bit too obvious," she shook her head.

"We'll get to that in due time. Everything will work out, dear."

"Steel," Jon said, inspired. "Valaryian Steel."


Tonks laughed. "Honey, you're in the right place. I hope you know what you're getting into." Valerian looked confused.

Harry carefully swung his legs out of bed. He gingerly got to his feet, offering her his hand to shake.

"Welcome, Valerian. I'm Harry, Harry Potter. It is a pleasure to meet you."
Her eyes opened wide as she shook his hand. "I... I thought you were only a legend. The Boy Immortal... the Slayer of the Dark Lord," she breathed, awestruck.

"Yeah, that's a bit of an exaggeration, though." Harry shrugged. There was an awkward silence as the handshake finished. She looked down at his toes.

"Forgive me. I thought you were a transfigured dark creature before. I beg your pardon."

"No problem," Harry sat down, already exhausted by the simple act of getting up. "Honest mistake." He leaned to his left. "The notion of me being a dark wizard seems to be catching," he stage whispered as he nudged Tonks playfully with his elbow.


"We can make plans for the return trip tomorrow," said Harry. "I think we all could use some rest. It's been a long day."

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Aegon, he is coming! Aegon, he is coming!

Miracle was perched on the bed head, looking down at Jon's sleeping face. John slept bareback, the sheet covering up to his stomach. Jon was having a strange dream, someone was telling him that danger was close, and he should head immediately to the wall.

Aegon, wake up! Aegon, wake up!

Miracle pounced on his chest.

Jon flew up, smacking the startled Dragon off of him. Miracle flapped a couple times in the almost pitch dark room. A small puff of fire ignited the air above Jon's head as Miracle complained.

"Why did you do that?" Jon snapped, rubbing the scrapes on his chest.

Sire is coming! Hide me!

"Fuck me with the Stranger's cock!" Jon breathed as he jumped out of bed, panicked. The dragon buried himself under his covers. "Crows! To arms!" he commanded, throwing on his World Wizarding Gear armor. "The male dragon approaches!"

The others got up in varying states of awareness. Jon sped out the door and found Valerian's room. He tried the handle and it opened. "Lady Valerian!" he called. The girl roused from her bed wearing a spaghetti strapped nightgown that she outgrew years ago. It hugged her body almost like a cocktail dress. Her shoulders were strong with contoured muscles. Her arms and legs were lean and powerful. Her long blond hair fell loose around her face. Jon averted his eyes, clasping his hands behind his back. "Apologies, Lady Valerian. The male Onyx dragon approaches. Is there any way to alert the townspeople?"

The girl jumped out of bed and grabbed her boots. She hastily put them on and tied her hair back with a band. She grabbed her sword and shield. "Yes, the Beowulf has informed the town council of an emergency evacuation procedure when we mobilized here. Heraldo knows what to do... the floo fires here are the only way out! I am going to ring the alarm."

She disappeared with a pop!

Jon ran down the stairs and searched the ground floor for Heraldo. He found him sleeping in his
main quarters behind the stock room. "A Dragon is coming," he shook him roughly. He had to repeat this with increasingly powerful shakes until the man woke up.

"Wake up!" Jon shouted. "A dragon is coming!" The town's church bell began to ring in the dead night, loud and startling.

"Fuck fuck fuck fuck!" Heraldo swore in Russian as he got out of bed, looking for his wand and boots. "I have two floo fires. The magical townsfolk have been notified that there is a dragon within attacking distance... but that was almost seven years ago, we have never spotted one even close."

"Magical folk?" Jon asked, perturbed. "What about the non magical people?" he asked.

"What about them?" Heraldo snapped, confused.

*He doesn't care about the common folk.* Jon almost drew his sword on the overweight wizard. He kept his cool by taking a deep breath.

"Do what you can to evacuate," Jon snapped. He had to rally the others to assume defense until the people could escape.

Jon raced back up the stairs. Ollivander, Tonks and Alexandria were hastily getting dressed. Harry was still dead asleep. "Why is he still sleeping?" Jon asked angrily.

"I gave him a powerful dose of Painless Sleep," Alexandria explained. "He's heavily sedated. I'll have to take responsibility for him," Alexandria made quick work and strapped him into the Military stretcher from the *HIND*. "What's the plan?"

"Let's get out of here! Where's bear girl?" Tonks said, donning her Red Dueling robes.

"You hear that ringing? It is her. She has alerted the town," Jon closed his eyes a second. They were not going to like this. "We can't simply leave."

"What?" Ollivander said, confused. "Why not?"

"The non magical people would be defenseless. The barkeep did not cater for non magical folk."

"Non.." Alexandria breathed, aghast. At that moment Ghost began to howl at the moon.

Jon's eyes turned slate grey. Ghost was racing along the northern ridge. He sent his conscious into the wolf and looked up. A dragon was flapping high in the sky. The wingspan was huge.

"It's about sixty miles out," Jon breathed as his eyes returned to normal. "The commonfolk! Can they be transported through the chimney place?"

"No," Ollivander said. The old man, Jon noticed for the first time, looked fidgety and nervous. "Floo fires only work on wizards. A male Wizardbane..." He breathed. "We must hurry!"

Valerian apparated right into the room. Jon flinched in surprise. "What is the plan, Lord Black?" she said. Alexandria frowned at her skimpy nightwear. She instinctively wanted to cover Jon's eyes.

"How many people are in this town?" Jon asked, pacing.

"I believe Heraldo mentioned around two hundred, thirteen are magical," she responded.

"Quickly, now. There is no statute of secrecy here, so we don't need to be covert. From what I have learned, the town folk are all dependent on Romania's Armoring And Gregorvitch's wand making
industries. Some of the children are magical as well. Business has been slow since the fall of Voldemort," Ollivander said.

"There was a dragon attack thirty years ago," Valerian said. "This place is still trying to recover. The older heads, the Council were witness to the slaughter last time."

"Slaughter?" Jon asked.

"The magicals tried to evacuate the non-magicals. The dragon did not hesitate and burned everything," Valerian said. "Or so my study books said."

Jon scanned each of their faces, analyzing the situation. "So they know the danger of being attacked," Jon breathed. "Those buildings did look new, far too new for this remote place. You three will have to side along as many people as you can to a spot on your map, Grandfather. Alexandria, you are to oversee them when the small folk arrive, and watch over Harry." Jon grabbed Harry's *World Wizarding Gear* and handed it to her. "Put this on so we can speak. How many people can you side along at once?" Jon asked the three of them.

"Only one," Tonks said. Jon rubbed his face, thinking.

"The map!" Jon demanded. Ollivander spread it out over the table. Jon shone his blue light "This second spot, beneath the tallest tree- take who you can, form a camp-"

There were numerous pops and elevated voices came from downstairs. Jon opened the door and peeked. "Fuck, they are here already." An idea came to him. "Grandfather, Lady Valerian! You two must convince them that they should help evacuate the normal folk. Show them the map and meeting spot!"

"They would refuse," Valerian shook her head.

"Convince them! Try!" Jon ordered with a sharp bark. Valerian and Ollivander disappeared and reappeared downstairs. "Tonks," Jon snapped. She snapped to attention at his tone. "Take Alexandria, then Harry. Alexandria you are to take command of the rescue area. Be wary of panic, and deserters!"

Tonks nodded, and grabbed Alexandria. They vanished. A quarrel was happening downstairs. Jon turned to head downstairs the same time as Tonks re-appeared. Before she took Harry she grabbed him by his robes.

"What are you going to do?"

"Parley," Jon said.

"Parley!?" Tonks snapped. "With who?"

"With the dragon," he said solemnly. "But first, I must quell whatever is going on downstairs. You three must take charge of the evacuation. Take Harry to safety. Tell him, 'I am the Shield that Guards the Realms of Men'. He will know, and he will forgive."

"What?" Tonks said.

"Tell him!" Jon drew his sword and immediately vaulted over the banister of the first floor balcony. Tonks swore.

"I hate it when he does that," Tonks grumbled. "Come Harry," Tonks crouched over Harry's
stretcher that lay across two beds, took his arm, and disappeared.

Jon landed in a crouch between Valerian and the most irate wizard in front of her. The wizard shouted in surprise at the boy literally cutting into the conversation. Ollivander and Valerian were blocking access to the Floo fires. Heraldo was sleeping peacefully on the ground next to the fireplaces. That was definitely Ollivander's work.

"We must hurry, get out of my fucking way!" the Russian shouted. "You can't keep us here!"

"Translate," Jon commanded Valerian. "Do not abandon your fellow man. We have a meeting point, a safe zone, many miles from here. Help apparate the others. You must. It is the humane thing to do."

Valerian spoke a string of Russian. There was an uproar of the thirteen magical and their immediate families who were packed into the pub area.

"What did he say?" Jon snarled, not breaking eye contact with the larger man.

"He says he is leaving, one way or the other. I think he means violence," Valerian said.

With a smooth motion Jon sliced the man's wand in two. He brought the flat of the blade unto the spot where his neck connected to his shoulder. "Tell him, that I will defend this place and his people, with my life if needed. But he must agree to help the common folk. We have a rallying point." The crowd drew in a collective breath. He eyed the crowd with a cutting glare. Valerian began to translate.

There were a few denials, and counter arguments. A few of them began nodding, trying to convince the others. Jon did not get the impression that Valerian said exactly what he told them to.

"What did you tell them?" Jon asked, suspicious. The Russians started to argue among themselves.

"I told them the Dragon Whisperer has come. You will save the town if they save the muggles. Some do not believe."

"Miracle! To me!" The baby dragon let out a puff of fire in delight and flapped down from the room unto his shoulders. There was a collective gasp. "Light the torches." The dragon flew around the room lighting the scones on the walls. The Russians screamed and ducked, frightened of the Dragon. Miracle landed on Jon's shoulder. One by one the Russians bent the knee, awestruck at the tame dragon under Jon's control.

"Drakonski Shepot!" a few of them whispered, staring at the young onyx dragon sitting proudly on his shoulder.

"You've convinced them," Ollivander said grimly.

"Whatever works," Jon said. He looked at the man kneeling at sword-point "Does this fellow agree?"

Valerian hissed something aggressive towards Jon's captive. The man nodded. Jon allowed him to stand. "Show them the map, Valerian." She laid the map down on a drinking table, giving instructions. The townsfolk circled around to see. "No one is to be left behind! Are all in agreement?" Valerian translated once again. Ollivander came forward and duplicated his map and gave each person a copy.

Within a minute the plan was agreed upon. The townsfolk who were magically powerful enough disappeared with multiple *pops*. There were five people left who could not. "Can they send for
help?” Jon asked Master Ollivander.

Master Ollivander talked briefly in Russian with them. They nodded. "I have asked them to contact the authorities and show them the map. This fellow here, says his brother and his sister in law are Law enforcement. He will alert them."

"Good, take him with you," Jon said, pointing at Heraldo's sleeping figure. The craven.

Tonks reappeared. "Where did everyone go?" she asked.

"They are helping the evacuation," Ollivander explained. "Come Jon, we could oversee-"

"No," Jon said calmly.

"What?" Ollivander snapped.

"I must stop the dragon."

"Don't be ridiculous!"

"Grandfather, it was an honor. Lady Steel, take me to the ridge north of us. It approaches." Valerian took his arm. "Stay safe, Crows. Tonks, remember to give him my message."

"Jon, don't you dare do this," Tonks warned.

"Strike, the Crows Vambrace!" Jon commanded. Miracle, Valerian and himself disappeared.

The rendezvous spot was approximately eighty miles south of the town. Alexandria was coordinating the influx of refugees coming into what was now being called Zone two. She had conjured a register and encouraged everyone who was being brought into the area to sign. The Russian magical community worked quickly, bringing their non-magical neighbors, friends and families using multiple trips of side along apparition. The main issue now was the bitter cold.

After a few minutes Tonks and Ollivander appeared. "We've scoured the town with my wide reveal spell. I think we got everyone!" Tonks declared. She immediately went to check on Harry. Harry was bundled up to the nose under a heavy blanket.

Ollivander enchanted the Sonorous spell on his voice and passed on the information in simple Russian. He explained that the ones that are missing went to get help. There was a general cheer throughout the crowd. Bottles of alcohol and cigarettes were being shared.

"Where is Jon and Valerian?!" Alexandria demanded.

"They've gone to face the dragon," Tonks said angrily.

Alexandria immediately crumpled to the ground in a faint.

Jon stared at the night sky. The wind was strong on the rocky ridge they stood on. The ridge served as a windbreaker for the town, protecting the cold winds blowing through the valley of the Anabar river. It was almost flat along the ridge, extending for a couple miles in each direction. It reminded him of the Wall.

He looked to his left. Valerian had shield and spear ready, her too-small nightdress barely reaching the top of her thighs. She stood proud, watching the sky, her long blond hair blowing in the cold.
The silvery nightgown and dirty blond hair gave her body a mythical glow in the moonlight. The half moon was massive this far north.

"Aren't you cold?" Jon asked, returning his gaze into the sky. He could sense the Dragon coming, a small dark speck against the frosty moonlight.

"*Do not be afraid, for the Beowulf rides with you,*" was her only response. She glanced across at him, then once again focused on the sky.

Jon thought that she reminded him of the *Valkryie*, a bard's song believed to be borne of a legendary female knight whose ability was to choose those who lived and those who died on the battlefield. Jon studied her strong posture and figure. His limited understanding of magic was growing, but he was still an amateur. However, Harry's casual conversations on how magic worked were fresh in his mind.

*Wizards, no matter how idiotic or unskilled, can achieve impossible things. Magic also manifests from determination with a bit of help from luck, skill, and desperation.*

"You said you were an Angel of Rescue, or an Angel of Death, depending on perspective, correct?" Jon asked.

"Yes."

"Why are you staying?"

"It is my duty."

"Duty to who? You have convinced them to evacuate. Your duty has been fulfilled."

"*You* convinced them, my lord, not I. My duty is to *you*."

"I have protection against the dragon," Jon argued. "You do not."

Valerian laughed. It was the first time he heard her laugh. She was solemn and sad since they met yesterday.

"You know nothing Jon Black," she scoffed. Tears rolled down her eyes as she faced him. She was angry. "Do you actually believe you have any chance against an angry dragon?"

"I am immune-"

"The Dragon would quicker swoop down and bite you. Breathing fire slows it down. The fire is used mainly for marking territory, or displays of aggression. When a dragon wishes to kill, it will use its jaws first, pouncing on you like a bird of prey. You will be a mouse in its grasp."

She returned her vigil, staring at the sky. "And so it comes. You are a good man, Dragon Whisperer. It is a shame," she spat in frustration. Jon focused on the incoming bat-like shape outlined against the massive moon. With a simple spell he conjured a fire in front of them.

"I am the Sword in the Darkness. I am the Fire that Burns the Cold." Jon drew his claymore, and activated the Aegis. "You, are the horn that wakes the sleepers."

Valerian crouched behind her red shield, pointing the dragon lance at the incoming Dragon.

"Who are you, really? Is your name really 'Jon Black'?"
"Yes, and no. In a different life I was the nine hundredth and ninety eighth Lord Commander of the Night's Watch. Technically, I will be twenty one in a week's time."

"What nonsense are you talking about?" Valerian asked, watching him intently.

"Now, I am the Risen, the Sword of the Light, Sworn into service of the Lion." Jon sunk his Diablo Claymore into the fire in front of him. The blade of the sword caught afire. "He will come," Jon breathed, holding his flaming sword at the ready, tip pointing around his magical shield. Jon grinned at Valerian for a fraction of a second.

"You are mistaken, I am not your fabled 'Whisperer'. My name is Aegon, the Dragon Knight. Follow the fire, Lady Steel. Follow the fire!"

Valerian just stared at Jon as if he had gone mad.

"Come!" Jon screamed at the massive Dragon.

**GIVE ME MY SON**

"No. He is mine now," Jon growled in defiance.

The Dragon swooped down and destroyed the ridge where Jon was standing with a deafening boom. The rushing wind and impact sent Valerian sideways into the air. She braced her fall with her shield. She felt her shoulder pop with the impact. Stunned, she eventually got to her feet. Where was once hardened, weather beaten mountain stone, was now a massive hole the size of a house.

"JON!"

Jon was holding on to the sword sticking into the back of the neck of the dragon for dear life. His plan worked out, sort of. Timing that skeet-shooter spell on himself just before the Dragon pounced was more luck than skill. It allowed him to avoid its jaws, but the tiny sword was a mere pin prick along the hardened scales on his back. With grim determination he pressed all his weight on it, sinking the blade deeper inch by inch. The Dragon was twisting and turning, trying to unseat the tiny parasite in between his shoulder blades.

"Rah!" Jon screamed, drawing the heavy knife out of his weapons belt. Holding tightly with his left hand on the hilt of the halfway sunken claymore, he began stabbing at the wound with his right, opening it further. "Cut, you fucking son of a whore! Cut, damn you!" After the fifth strike a squirt of blood finally sprayed out like a pig being slaughtered at the neck. "Finally!" Jon discarded the knife, and began to wiggle the Diablo blade side to side, now that he had some slack to play with. The back to forth motion opened the wound wider, finally making the Dragon scream in agony. It went berserk, unleashing a hellish blaze into the sky. Jon felt his fingers slip against the bloody hilt, then heat.

Valerian watched the flames engulf the night. Finally understanding, she disappeared.

Eighty miles away at Zone Two the villagers screamed as the sky suddenly came alive in the distance. The horizon lit up like reverse red lightning, flashes of fire striking the clouds.

"From so far?" Tonks breathed. "CV come in!" she screamed into her badge. "Jon! JON!"

There were sounds of a dragon shrieking, and rushing of wind.
"Miss Tonks!" Ollivander rushed over towards her. "A dragon that could produce that much flame has to be a Super-giant. We need to move these people immediately! We are still in its range!"

"Holy fuck," Tonks said, staring at the distant night sky. "Jon is fighting the dragon, he's stabbing it in the back!"

"What!?" Alexandria, recently roused, now passed out again. She crumpled to the ground. Ollivander caught her instinctively. One of the Russians who understood English passed on what Tonks said to his comrades.

"Privetstvuyu, Beovul'f!" came a loud cheer, bottles of vodka clinking in cheers.

"What are they saying?" Tonks hissed to Ollivander, who was once again using smelling salts to awaken Alexandria.

"Hail, the Beowulf," Ollivander translated.

"That fucking idiot," a voice snarled.

"Harry, you're awake!" Tonks said gratefully.

"There's a whole town chanting all around us, Tonks," Harry grumbled from his strapped down position on the stretcher. He shook his head, unbelievably. He sighed loudly. "Jon is fighting a dragon, you say."

"You can't be awake already. You're supposed to be sedated," she argued. Harry just stared at her.

"Right, you're special, I forgot."

At that moment Valerian and a burning figure popped into existence ten feet above the center of the camp. Both fell with a dull thud. The crowd screamed as they made a wide circle around the newcomers. Valerian pushed herself up from the ground, her immodest nightgown's strap hanging off a shoulder that looked dislocated. She circled unsteadily on her feet, looking around in a daze.

"It's coming," she breathed. She fell unto her knees, holding her useless left shoulder, her face grimacing in pain. "I'm sorry, Aegon," she cried at the burning body. "I'm so fucking sorry...!"

She screamed, letting all of the painful emotions she suffered through yesterday come to front. Two masters, in the space of forty eight hours- dead. Mucus, tears and saliva mixed on the cold ground as she simply bawled her lungs out. Miracle dived out the sky like a wraith, landing on Jon's immolated body and began licking his face.

Tonks rushed to the scene holding her wand in two hands at her hip like a firehose. "Clear!" she screamed. A powerful jet of water shot out, dousing Jon and his familiar, pushing both of them along the muddy ground. The baby dragon rolled over a couple times, flapping and shrieking as he fought to regain balance. He darted away from the jet of water and shook his entire body like a drenched dog, scales vibrating like a rattlesnake's tail. "You alright Jon?"

After a tense minute of silence Jon finally spoke.

"As much as I could be," Jon muttered. "The wails of a maiden fair crying over my corpse is growing on me," he acknowledged with a cough. Valerian stopped her crying and just stared, unbelieving. She, and the entire town crowded around Jon's prone form, his pale chest and arms bare and unscathed. The Dueling armor pants was blackened to a crisp. Valerian inched forward on her hands and knees, and gently touched his face. It was hot against her fingers.
"I do not believe it," she said, her eyes shining with tears. "Are you truly immortal?" she sniffled. Jon's eyes were closed, his body was hurting too much to even try to move.

"You were aptly named, Black Angel. The Valkyrie of Legend," Jon touched her hand in response. "You did well," he thanked her sincerely. Valerian's mouth moved, but no words came out. She knew twelve different languages, but had no idea what to say.

A stunned silence rippled through the crowd. Some of the townsfolk took their hats off their head, holding it to their chest.

"Harry," Jon croaked into the quiet night air.

"Yeah," Harry said, still strapped in his uncomfortable stretcher some distance away. Another ten second silence ensued.

"I can see Orion's belt very clearly right now," Jon said tiredly, finally opening his eyes.

"Yeah," Harry responded. He could see it too.

"I warmed the Dragon up for you."

"Fucking idiot," Harry grumbled.

"What was that?" Jon asked.

"I said, 'how considerate'," Harry responded a bit louder.

"You're welcome. He knows we are here."

"Figured as much. Tonks?"

"Yes?" Tonks said carefully.

"Please get me out of this."

"Right fucking on!" Tonks grinned. She released the straps and helped get him to his feet. A dingy white rescue blanket donated by Russian Spetnaz draped over his head and shoulders, he leaned heavily against Tonks as they walked across towards the prone figure of Jon. Valerian just stared at Harry as he approached. At that moment numerous pops of incoming wizards pierced the night. Russian Aurors were on the scene.

"Oh fuck," Harry breathed. "Think up a good cover story," he whispered to Tonks. Harry looked up to the sky. The flames were getting closer. That Dragon was coming here, and he meant business. Ollivander was finally successful in rousing Alexandria. She sat up slowly, shaking her head. She looked at Harry, leaning heavily against Tonks.

"What are you doing awake?" was the first thing Alexandria said upon coming back to her senses. She didn't even see Jon's condition as yet. Valerian just knelt at Jon's side, staring at both young men as if she had seen a miracle occur right before her eyes.

"Black, watch the point of impact. It is a vital weak spot," Harry tsked as he stood over him, shivering under the stained off-white rescue blanket.

"You're a funny guy, Harry of House Hallow," Jon deadpanned. He weakly offered him his fist. Harry bent slowly, and connected, then cursed as his knuckles got burned. Jon closed his eyes and chuckled softly in satisfaction. Harry snarled, but did not seek retribution. There was work to be
"Ladies, I'll be back." He winked at Tonks.

"Go get him, tiger," Tonks grinned, returning the wink. Harry stumbled drunkenly into a crouch, paused, then blasted off into the sky. The well used blanket flapped through the camp in his wake.

"What the fuck...!" Valerian screamed as her long hair blew across her face from his takeoff.

"As I said, you really don't know what you've gotten yourself into luv," Tonks said. She stared north; using her Hawk-eye spell to zoom in. "Block your ears. This is going to get loud." Harry's glowing bracer shrunk into a speck of light against the night sky. A few seconds later she exclaimed in warning: "Brace yourselves!"

There was a thundering crash of something massive falling into the forest. Harry came back at full speed, causing the loose snow to disperse in his wake over the townsfolk. He somersaulted just before he landed, touching down dramatically. His knees were bent in a crouch, and hands were touching the ground slightly in front of him. In his right hand was a bloody scythe. A fraction of a second later, a severed dragon head the size of a small house splattered a short distance away, making a loud distinctive *crunch*.

Harry half straightened, half limped across the camp and gingerly crawled inside his stretcher. He drew the heavy outer blanket material up to his chin.

The Crows make a hasty exit from Siberia. Harry learns about how things work in the Salvage and Armouring aspect of the trade, starts the process of crafting Hermione's new wand, and rescuing Sirius legally. Alexandria feels threatened by the Valkyrie in their midst.

"Move!" Valerian hissed.

"What's going on?" Tonks asked.

"Do not allow the authorities time to detain you for further questioning. Let us depart." Valerian's breath misted in the cold night. The Dragon's decapitated corpse was a sufficient distraction for the Crows to levitate Harry's stretcher and Jon out of sight from the Aurors. Valerian led them to a random clearing about fifty meters away into the forest.

"You need a healer's attention," Ollivander pointed at her arm. Valerian shook her head, putting down her shield and Dragon Lance. She strapped the sword sheath diagonally in the valley between her chest, freeing up both hands.

"It can wait. I must do a few things immediately at the crash site. And retrieve his sword," Valerian looked at Alexandria's badge on Harry's borrowed armor. "Is that your Clan Standard?"

"Yes."

"I must brand it into the Dragon. A registered tracker must do this to seal clan ownership." She disappeared immediately.

"Hasty girl, isn't she," Tonks scowled.

"Master Ollivander, some light please," Alexandria breathed as she set down her potions kit next to Jon. "How are you feeling?"


"How long did you take to recover last time?" she asked, mixing potions into a flask.

"Hours," Jon whispered.

"Hours?" she cried. "That's terrible! Why so long?"

"I let Madame Payet believe that the robes protected me from the fire... and simply needed rest," Jon admitted reluctantly.

"He's stubborn like that." Harry reluctantly opened his eyes. So much for sleeping. All the moving around was disturbing him from his beauty rest.
"Pot calling the kettle Black," Jon responded.

"Enough," Tonks whispered. "She is right. The Aurors would be looking for us soon. I rather not answer why we are here."

Alexandria swiftly concocted a Burn Salve consisting of Aloe Vera, Murtlap Essence and Roses' Dew. When it turned a light green colour, she crushed turmeric and dropped it in. Miracle came close and supervised her potion making. He sniffed the remains of the turmeric and flapped away in disgust. When the potion thickened, she added a large dollop of honey.

"Your skin is impervious, but your nerve endings still register the pain. This will help you." She held the flask to Jon's lips. Jon drank it down without hesitation. The pain eased slightly.

Valerian popped back into existence, nearly making Alexandria drop the flask. "Mon dieu!"

Harry did not pay much attention to her when he awoke to face the dragon. Now he did. His jaw opened a few centimeters at the skimpy outfit she was wearing and how the strap of the sword between her breasts accentuated her strong figure. Valerian was feeling cold, alright.

"It is done," she announced. "Kill is registered to the Crows and the standard is branded on the carcass. Lord Black, your blade," she came closer, offering Jon his bloody sword. In her other hand was a soaking wet blanket scrunched into a gooey ball. Jon was impressed that it did not revert into the wand when she held it. He took it from her and released the Claymore transfiguration.

"I am grateful. I would have forgotten. Thank you."

"The injury - you were very close. A few feet higher up the neck and it would have been a paralyzing blow. Speaking of that..." Valerian turned to Harry's stretcher. "Did you know of the gap in the fifty-first spinal vertebrae?" She asked Harry. Her stomach was at the same eye level as his levitated stretcher.

Was that a six pack? Damn, Valerian is killing it!

"What?" Harry stammered, lifting his eyes towards her face.

"The spinal system- there is a dual hinge between the fiftieth and fifty-second vertebrae- a vital weak spot. It allows the dragon to turn the neck almost two hundred degrees. The weakest point on the back."

"Yeah, of course I knew that," Harry lied. Or maybe with that Scythe he just couldn't miss. He shivered under his heavy blanket. He could not believe this girl was only wearing that flimsy top, boy-shorts and dragon hide boots. "Aren't you cold?"

He could not help but notice what the temperature was doing to her. I mean, like who wouldn't?

Jon probably didn't.

Harry laughed internally.

"Yes. But I know a potion to counter the short term effects." Valerian tried to shrug, then grimaced in pain. She held unto her left shoulder tenderly.

"Really?" He was starting to like this girl.

"A simple brew. I will mix it." Valerian went next to Alexandria's kit. She paused before reaching
for ingredients. "I'm sorry, Ms. Alexandria. May I?" she indicated the apothecary kit and the potions vial.

"Go ahead," Alexandria huffed. She averted her eyes when the blond bent at the waist to pick out a few bottles. This girl really needed to put on some pants.

Valerian took out the Skrewt Stinger Oil and a bottle marked Parliament. She mixed these two ingredients in a small vial and offered it to Harry. Tonks stepped between them.

"You first," she said.

Valerian sized up Tonks. She was lean, but a bit top-heavy. She exuded territorial behavior, and firm determination. Valerian tipped back the potion. Immediately her lips lost their blue tinge and her face blushed with warmth. It spread everywhere, defeating the cold. She mixed another dose and offered it to Harry. Tonks nodded, allowing her to proceed.

Harry swallowed it down in three. He immediately felt better. "Wow. That is good." Harry rolled off the stretcher and put his feet down.

Toes! Thought I would never feel you again!

"That's it?" Alexandria argued petulantly. "Skrewt stinger oil one to one mixture with Vodka?"

"Yes. All eastern European Clans know of this," she said calmly. "Ranging without it during Winter is a crime. Or should I say, highly irresponsible."

Alexandria's confidence was immediately destroyed. She had Alcohol, and Skrewt Stinger oil in her potions kit when they left the base. It was on the list of ingredients she sent Harry to buy at the Apothecary in Hogsmeade. She could have averted catastrophe if she had known this simple concoction. Valerian only took a few seconds to create such an immediate response.

Alexandria looked at Tonks, then Harry. "I am so sorry! I-I didn't know. I-I was thinking the Mother's Embrace anti freeze counter potion would be more effective..."

Valerian eyed her, then Harry. She cleared her throat. She had no intention of making the girl feel ashamed. "Harry, how do you feel now?"

"Still a bit nauseated, but I can move much easier, and without pain. The chill in my bones is gone. This is wonderful, thank you," Harry smiled at her. He took the floating stretcher and held it under his arm. Tonks pocketed her wand.

"Lord Black, and you?" she asked Jon, who was floating randomly under Ollivander's magic.

"Getting there."

"Rub this on his skin," she gave the wet blanket to Alexandria. "It is coated with Dragon saliva. The fastest burn remedy there is."

Alexandria took it, and touched a corner of Jon's shoulder with it. "How does that feel?"

"Spread it some more," Jon asked. She did so. "It does remove the pain," Jon nodded to Valerian. "Give it here," he held out his hand. He rubbed from the bottom of his bare feet then up his entire body. Miracle wailed, digging his snout into the cold snow on the ground.

You smell like sire!
"Sorry," Jon told the small Dragon.

Lick yourself clean!

"I will, but later," Jon laughed. "Grandfather you can put me down, please." The burning sensation was gone. "Thank you once again, Lady Valerian."

"I am in your service," she recited the typical response when a Master thanked his Apprentice.

"Enough of the formalities," Jon smiled warmly at her. "You are my ally, not my apprentice. Alexandria, can you please attend to her shoulder?"

Alexandria bristled. "Of course," she smiled at Jon, daggers in her eyes. While treating Valerian she gritted her teeth.

How dare he tell Valerian thanks and smile directly at her!

Using the pain salve generously on the swollen area of her shoulder, she gently rotated it back in. With a tap of her wand and a few strings of Latin, Valerian's shoulder was repaired.

"Thank you, Miss Alexandria. It feels perfect."

"You're welcome," she replied softly. An awkward silence ensued.

"There would be many celebrations tonight," Valerian said to the group. "I will enter records into the Dragon Chronicle on your behalf, asserting your clan's claim to the dragon. Once the council signs the document of ownership, an agreement would be drawn up. I advise that you let me contact the Dragon Aerie to allow a team of Coroners to oversee the dissection."

"I leave it in your capable hands," Jon said, clasping his hand firmly on her right shoulder in a show of trust. Valerian dipped her head once in agreement and humble recognition. His strong hand felt hot on her bare skin. He came across to Harry. "O mighty Dragonslayer," Jon offered Harry his fist.

"Show off."

Both young men connected.

"Someone had to do it. Oh, and Jon. Your pants is blowing away," Harry said. Jon's burnt armor was breaking up into pieces and dispersing into the cold wind. Jon hastily wrapped the slimy rescue blanket around his waist before it was too late. Harry would have felt cold just by watching Jon's skin exposed to the elements if he wasn't under the effects of the Skrewt oil potion.

"Miracle!" he called, extending his forearm to him. The dragon took his head out of the snow and jumped, flapping his wings above Jon, sniffing him. He flapped away and settled on Harry's shoulder instead. Harry froze deadly still.

"He's not going.. to .." he asked, not daring to move his shoulder. "...Bite, or anything?"

"Come Miracle!" Jon cajoled. The dragon climbed down Harry's petrified body and slunk across, wings dejectedly dragging on the ground and head limp. He hopped on Jon's head, as far as possible from the saliva towel.

"Good lad. It is only for a short while," he explained, annoyed at his dragon familiar sitting on his head. "Valerian, back to the room, please," Jon commanded. He held out his arm, and Valerian took it. Tonks took Harry's arm, and the four of them vanished. Ollivander came across to Alexandria. She was crouching, packing away the potions kit with angry movements. Alexandria was feeling
"Everything will be alright, dear," he consoled, reading her body language.

"I hope so," Alexandria smiled sadly. "She's just like him," she snarled under her breath. She offered the Wand Sage her arm. He accepted her hand in the crook of his elbow, patted it in a comforting manner, then disappeared.

The Crows and Valerian were almost finished packing their things a half an hour later. It was four in the morning. Ghost growled when there was a soft knock on the door.

"Crows?" came a male voice with a heavy accent.

Everyone froze still. "Who is asking?" Tonks said cautiously. Jon slipped to the side of the door, wand at the ready.

"Igor," came the response. "Heraldo's son."

"Hi?" Tonks asked. There was a slight pause.

"This is a bit embarrassing. May we speak face to face?"

Jon looked at the group. Most of them shrugged. Jon sheathed his wand and opened the door.

"Thank you, and I am sorry for the late hour. My name is Igor Hristov." Igor was a young man, in his early twenties. "I heard from my wizard friend, Allen; what happened when the alert was made. My father," Igor sighed, frustrated. "Was willing to abandon us."

"You are not a wizard?" Harry asked, disturbed.

"No," Igor said. "Neither are my children."

Jon's rage skyrocketed.

"He was willing to leave his own flesh and blood behind?" Jon snapped, furious. Igor shrugged.

"That's why I am here. I wish to relocate... by any means necessary."

"You are asking for asylum?" Ollivander said. Tonks heart went out to him.

"You fear repercussions," Tonks deduced. "He's a purist, isn't he?" Igor rubbed the back of his head, uncomfortable.

"He is a... strange man," Igor made up a vague excuse. "I know I failed him, but for the sake of my little girl and boy- it is just, I do not know how safe we would be when he returns."

"What do you want us to do?" Harry asked. Igor brightened at the encouraging words.

"I can work! I am a magical hide armorer. And metal smith. My wife is a... scout, you can say- for magical schools. She has magical ability, but it is weak. However, she can sense magic in young children. She is a distant relative to the Sare family."

"Sare?" Alexandria said, curious. "From the French Sare family?"

"Yes. You heard of them? Eleanor Sare, Pavel Potage's wife; is supposedly a relative of Galina's, or
so my wife says. I used to work for Potage's Pauldrons and Cauldrons. When the owner of the Dynasty recently passed, the board closed the Russian branch in Moscow. I've been back here for a few months, doing odds and ends."

"I know, of them, yes," Alexandria said curiously. "You're an Armorer?"

"Yes, as a side job for various magical clans, and a contractor for World Wizarding Gear. But my main source of income was working for the Potages. You sound knowledgeable of the family."

"My name is Alexandria Potage," she said simply.

Igor was stunned. "You... you're the the Heiress of the... Potage dynasty?"

"Yes, I am," she replied.

"Small world," Tonks chuckled.

Immediately he took off his hat and bent the knee. "Forgive me, I did not know. I would not have been so forward, if I knew. I am sorry, Madam Heiress Potage."

"Oh it's fine! Please, don't!" she came close and gently lifted him back up by his arms. Igor grinned widely.

"You are even more beautiful than in the stories. When I joined as a lad, the higher ups used to motivate us by saying that one day the Dynasty Princess would visit. Years later when I became a supervisor I told the recruits the same thing."

Alexandria smiled. "Occasionally father would take me on overseas trips to visit the various worksites. This is how I met Jon. I have never been to Russia though."

"There were rumours that you disappeared. There were also rumours that two 'Invincible Heroes' spirited you away." He stared at Harry and Jon. "You..."

"Yes," Jon nodded.

"And you?"

"Yeah..." Harry shrugged.

"The Dragon Slayer, and the Dragon Whisperer," he breathed. "It is an honour," he said honestly. "Those rumours: one was called, The Immortal Knight, the other-"

"The Wizard of the Light," Harry said tiredly.

"Yes..." Igor said dumbly, staring at the two boys. "The rumour painted you two as hulking men over seven feet tall!"

"Don't believe everything you hear," Harry said almost routine. He was accustomed to tall tales.

"What brings you here in this remote town?" Igor blurted.

"Clan Work," Ollivander cut in, before Jon blurted everything. "We would kindly ask that her identity and their participation in that event be kept in strict confidentiality. Can you do that for us?"

"Of course!" he replied eagerly.
"Excellent. Alexandria, can you help this family?" Ollivander asked calmly. She was already searching through their things for writing material.

"Please visit this address in Marseille, with your family." Alexandria quickly wrote an address on parchment. "It is the main branch. I will send word that you require asylum, and employment."

Igor accepted the parchment with shaking hands. "Luck like it has never come before, it has now come," he whispered with a gracious bow of his head. "My family and I are in your debt. My father... unfortunately, is a strange man, and after this night, he might be ...disagreeable. Thank you so much, Crows."

"You're welcome," said Alexandria.

He turned to leave. Jon regarded the man. "Igor. Keep in touch. When you are settled in, contact me at this address." He wrote the address of Eyelops's Owl Emporium on Diagon Alley. "I may have a side job for you."

"I would be honoured to work for your clan," Igor agreed.

"Safe travels upon you, and your family," Jon nodded.

"Feel free to take any supplies from the pantry," Igor grinned with a broad wave. "I'm sure Heraldo won't mind."

"Good luck! I wish you a safe journey!" Alexandria said as he left.

"With your blessing, I am sure luck will be at my side," he smiled, and closed the door with a soft click.

Valerian folded her arms as he left. She was dressed in her VVS tactical outfit. "You are the Potage heiress," she stated, surprised. "That must be nice," she congratulated her.

"It used to be," Alexandria said sadly. The two girls looked at each other, trying to understand each other's hidden messages.

"Let us depart," Ollivander said. Everyone looked at Harry, except Valerian, who was looking off into the distance, calculating numbers.

"Not a good idea," Harry said immediately. He knew they were silently asking about Threstral travel. Valerian dug into her military duffel bag, which was stuffed with the Dragon Armor and a few other personal items of clothing. She took out a smaller satchel, with detailed maps.

"The '78 can do it. I know a route." She spread a map of the European continent. There were flight routes and circled x's originating from Russia. "The x's mark fueling depots, helicopter bases, and other Military strongholds. We will have to steal fuel, and oil. As wizards, this should not be an issue. The trip to Norway's Stavanga's facility should take ten hours. From Stavanga, across the North Sea and into Britain would be the most dangerous part of the trip. I have done this before, but with planned fuel stops."

"Can't we just take extra fuel with us?" Harry asked.

"The HIND cannot compensate for all that extra weight and space," Valerian replied without looking up. She was studying the map.

"We're wizards here," Harry said. "We can shrink barrels, store them in a Magically altered space."
Valerian looked up. "That is possible?"

"Can I see your sword?" he asked politely. Valerian picked it up from where it was propped up against the wall, offering it to him.

"And now for my next magic trick," Harry grinned, taking out his Ringbox. With a showman's flourish he tossed the sword in the air, flicked open the lid of the ringbox and allowed the sword to fall into it. He snapped the lid shut and threw the Ringbox at Valerian. For the first time since meeting her, she was caught off guard and was ungainly trying to catch the small object. She fumbled but eventually caught it, examining it in wonder.

"What sorcery is this?" she breathed, inspecting the tiny black box. Harry cancelled the spell and the sword popped out towards him. He caught it in midair.

"Simple enough? You get the idea?" Harry grinned. Valerian nodded, accepting the sword. All their things were packed.

"There is a fueling facility at the base. By your leave, Lord Black." She offered him her arm.

One hour later the Crows were finished fueling six extra barrels and magicked them into the three Ringboxes they had. The Ringboxes were the only items which underwent enough enchantment cycles to be stable enough to store the heavy objects.

"We'll be heading as the crow flies, with two fueling stops. Arkhangelska in Northwest Russia, then Stavanga in Norway," came Valerian's voice over the P.A. system. "I calculate with our full tank and the extra fuel, our trip could be shortened by three hours, seeing as we have no need to find a specific fueling LZ. Strap in, and prepare for take off."

The engines roared and Black Angel One took off into the early morning sky.

The flight was uneventful. Six hours and five extremely bad headaches later the Crows were touching down near to the Barn at the back of the Clan property. Tonks and Alexandria promptly vomited when they disembarked. Jon felt extraordinarily dizzy, but managed to stumble across the cold grass towards the house. Ghost dashed off into the forest, most probably to hunt. Miracle had confiscated the wolf's space in Jon's knapsack and was curled up inside, asleep. Only Harry, Valerian and Ollivander made their way across the lawn to the back door without issues. Harry used his keys and opened up. Valerian hesitantly stepped in. Alexandria excused herself, muttering something about whipping up a headache potion. Ollivander dropped off his broom, then returned outside, inspecting the helicopter at his leisure. Jon said he was going into the great room to light the chimney fire and put Miracle to rest in front of it.

"Nice place, Crows," Valerian said. "Where should I store your gold?"

"What?" Harry said.

"I have a large sum of your Clan's gold in my trunk. It's in the ammunition storage bin."

"Oh, okay- don't worry about it. I'll bring it in," Harry offered. "You want to join, Right?"

"Yes. Of course. And I will help with the unloading," Valerian offered. The both of them went back to the helicopter. Harry magicked all of their luggage and stuff with multiple flicks of his wand. Valerian's eyes opened wide as she hefted the rolled Onyx wing on her shoulder. Harry grabbed that up too, despite her protest that she was capable of carrying it.

"Is that a multi cast?" she asked.
"Hm?" Harry asked, floating them in front of him and back through the house.

"Multiple objects consecutively affected by one spell."

"I guess.." Harry dumped the goods into the main foyer inside the front of the house. "You don't have a wand?" he asked.

"No. I was never formally trained."

"We will make one for you. Ollivander is our trainer, and we have a quota to make."

"You will do this for me?" Valerian said, shocked.

"Yes, what are friends for?" Harry said easily.

Valerian blushed. "I... wouldn't know..." she said softly, propping up the Onyx hide against the wall. Her moment of vulnerability was squashed and she stood up straight. "Please direct me to your correspondence room. I will make contact with Romania's Aerie and contact a few coroners we are accustomed to hiring. Things have been slow for them recently." The both of them went to the study on the ground floor. Valerian stood up next to the writing table and immediately faltered, looking embarrassed. "Master Kastav was the one who did the writing, he would write what I dictate."

"I'll do it, no problem," Harry sat down. She composed a letter to Mister Andrey Mulu and Miss Jinelle Hamsic, requesting quotation and writ of services for work to be done on the Dragon. Harry recited what he wrote down for her. Valerian listened and deemed it sufficient. She signed her name underneath.

"The onyx carcass will make your clan very rich. And the town will benefit from the downstream business the salvage operations would create. The piece of wing alone is probably worth forty thousand galleons."

"Wow," Harry said. "Won't we have to hire security to protect the remains?"

"Yes, but not in the same context you are thinking. Dragon remains are still very magical. The rightful owners will benefit from all the magical properties of the carcass. Thieves could only get the physical, but not the magical aspect of the parts. That is why Killing, branding, and signing off with registered trackers are important. There are a few organizations that do specialize in obtaining stolen and contraband goods and restoring the magical qualities of the product. However they need to hire a vampire to 'fool' the ownership process."

"Sounds hardcore," Harry whistled.

"Yes, and vampires willing to do this work only want human blood-willingly given. Very hard to convince someone to volunteer. But for a prize like a male Onyx dragon, who knows. Anything is possible in the hunter guild trade." They left the study and returned to the main foyer.

"There is a whole magical underworld out there I have no idea even existed," Harry listened attentively.

"Yes. The Hunter and Trade Guild is the largest international Magical organization there is." Valerian opened her weapons trunk and picked up her sword. "The smallest is the Armouring and Metalsmith Guild. The reason for that is that non magical members of the community seem to achieve the best results. Squibs, I believe the British call them. It has to do with magical resonance. Wizards will leave a magical taint, interfering with the final product, be it for better, or for worse. Armor Merchants want a consistent product, reliable and safe."
"Ah. It's like the complete opposite to the Wand-smithing process. The Smith usually has a style, and leaves a faint magical signature on the weapons. The more practice and experience the crafter has, the more compatible the wands to customers."

"Correct. Which is why the Ollivander Family is held in such high regard. Generations of wand crafting - absolutely top notch." Valerian's expression turned sour. "There is even a black market in squib trafficking, the buying and selling of children to put to work in forges and tanneries."

"That's even more hardcore," Harry grimaced.

"My armor and the sword's sheath and pommel were created with Hungarian Horntail leather and claw from our first kills. The blade is made from steel forged in dragon fire, meticulously crafted on site after territorial burnings. It is lightweight, unbreakable and capable of piercing dragon hide. However, its reach is too short pierce the heart of the larger species. A clean stroke on the weak spot of the neck," she smirked at Harry, "is the sword technique to kill it. This shield was created from the hide of a Diablo and reinforced with the gums of the Chinese Fireball."

"There were four Non-gifted at the Lancer academy. A little bit older than I was; two girls, two boys. Fifi, Georgina, Samson and Piotr. They were the armormen and weaponsmiths. They were treated well, considering their non-gifted status, and were permitted to socialize with the students. Samson was my first and only kiss. As soon as Headmaster Doholov found out, he banned us from seeing each other. Later on I found out that the school had a tradition of finding young non-gifted craftsmen of the opposite sex, so that they may eventually fall in love and create more non-gifted children to continue the cycle. I found it disgusting, but ... what was I to do?"

"Squib slavery..." Harry said sadly. "Death Eaters will be Death Eaters... I guess."

"They were paid commission on their work. But they were of lower station, and not allowed to get romantically involved with students, or so I heard."

She pointed at the two spears propped against the wall, the tip covered in what appeared to be a slim, metal sheath. The Lances were retrieved on this mission, one belonging to her fallen Master, the other was summoned from the wall on the dragon cave, left there by unknown means.

"The Dragon Lance's tip is made of Diablo claw, the sharpest material available. The shaft is from the trunk of a tree that has remained standing after being razed with Dragon fire. The claw is rare, and nearly unattainable. What makes this the weapon of choice is that it is long enough and sharp enough to pierce the heart."

Harry thought that Slaying Dragons was probably a job created with this girl in mind. The way she spoke so passionately about her Dragon Lancer Guild and weapon craft was inspiring. Also, she managed to pierce the heart of the Human dragon who earned her love and trust, then ultimately tried to rape her as a child. Born to be a dragon slayer.

"Diablo claws aren't that rare for us. We have like, twenty of those downstairs," Harry shrugged, organizing their cargo.

"What!" Valerian snapped. "Is that true?"

"Yes," Jon came up behind them from the great room.

"The Romanian coroners use Steel blades forged in Dragon-fire to do their cutting. But if you loaned them a couple claws, the work would be so much faster! You can be rich within a few months!"

"I am already rich," Jon said easily. He frowned. "Those claws are very dangerous to be giving out
Valerian watched the two boys. "Black, Ollivander, Potage. And are you rich as well, Slayer of the Dark Lord?" she asked.

"Not really. I'm okay. Much more than I need."

"I have heard of the Ollivander Family, as well as the Blacks, they are part of the Western European Sacred Twenty Eight. The Potages are relatively well known across Europe. I am at a loss, why would all of you do this dangerous work if it isn't for the money?"

"We need the components for our quest," Jon stated. Harry turned on him, unbelieving he would just blurt that out. Jon rubbed the back of his head. "For now, that is all that is necessary for you to know."

"Diablo cores, Onyx hide..." she mused. "It is obvious you are acquiring components to make weapons, and armor. Which means you plan to fight a foe at a given future date." She watched the both of them squirm. "Anything that Immortal heroes believe to be worth fighting is also worthy of being written into history." She nodded solemnly after her proclamation. "I wish to be part of that history. Count me in!"

She snapped her heels together and offered them a Russian salute. "Starshina Steel, at your command, sir!" she barked. Her face lit up in a grin.

Jon titled his chin fractionally in acceptance, thumping his right hand to his heart. "An honor for you to join our ranks," Jon replied.

Valerian drew her Dragon sword. Jon drew his Diablo Claymore and both of them immediately stabbed it into the wooden floor with a simultaneous thunk. They grabbed each other's right forearm in a knightly handshake. "Comrade Aegon!" she announced.

"Lady Steel!" He replied. "Welcome to the Crows' Vambrace."

Harry couldn't believe these two nutcases with all their ridiculous pomp. Then he realized he did something similar with his Quidditch mates. Now he wondered if their antics also looked as ridiculous to outsiders.

"Turn it down you two, I already have a headache!" Tonks shouted over the banister then disappeared into the upstairs bathroom. The two warriors stood at ease with a stupid grin on their faces. "Harry, be a dear and open up the hot water valve, please!" She shouted down.

"Sure," Harry breathed. Kicking him in the head a couple nights ago, then back to normal; asking for favors. Tonks was crazy.

"I will show you to our guest room. It should suffice until we acquire bedding and furniture for your own personal quarters. We have many free rooms here." Jon escorted Valerian up to Remus' temporary guest room.

Harry watched them leave, ran down to the cellar to turn on the hot water, then immediately returned to the study. He began writing correspondence to Remus, Eleanor Potage, and Gringotts. Mrs Potage already has a legal counsel. He needed her lawyer to get a legal team together. Oh, and he also needed to get a new pet for Ron, because his current pet was going to be in a very sticky situation, very, very soon.
That Sunday afternoon after everyone had a chance to bathe and take a short rest, Tonks suggested that that they all head into Diagon to have dinner. She also wanted to return the trunk of gold, set up Valerian as a clan member and open up an account for her.

Master Ollivander invited Valerian to a quiet meeting to speak with her about plans moving forward. He had to register her as his ward with the Ministry of Underage Magical services as well as submit her documents with the Ministry of International cooperation.

"Do you wish to become a British citizen?"

"If you think that is best, Master Ollivander," she said, seated in the comfortable loveseat. Master Ollivander was sitting across from her in the armchair, looking through her documents.

"The reason I asked - I served as a rifleman in the Korean War. Technically I was an enemy of the Soviets," he peered at her over his reading glasses.

"That doesn't matter now. I am an ally to your grandson, the Dragon Whisperer, and I hope you still have no reservations of accepting me into your family." She dipped her eyes meekly as she crossed her legs.

"Of course. I would love for you to be formally trained in magic at his school. Would you agree to this?"

Valerian sipped her tea, gathering her thoughts. She frowned.

"I have difficulty reading. The magical community does not use Braille... or technology for training."

"I believe Alexandria's trainer has encountered similar issues with students during their time at Hogwarts. Magic is all about balance. Do you know what a Patronus Charm is?" Ollivander asked.

"No, I have not heard of this spell, sorry."

"It is Light based magic, borne from a single powerful, happy memory. You may have been magically injured by your father's circumstances and your parents' treatment of you at such a young age. It makes me think that you have been subjected to the opposite end of the emotional spectrum of magic, an experience so dire to your development that it has impaired your ability to read. I hope Professor Dumbledore and Healer Pomfrey may be able to help you. Tomorrow, we shall go to the school and have a meeting with them."

Valerian leaned forward, her hands clasped at her chin in hope.

"You really think they can cure me?" she asked eagerly.

"The Grand Sorcerer, Headmaster Dumbledore, is the most decorated magical intellect in the world. If he cannot, we will find someone who can."

She jumped out of her chair and hugged the old man around his shoulders. "I do not have words to thank you. I had given up long ago... things like simply enjoying a book as a pastime. It was near impossible to acquire fantasy and thriller novels in Braille," she sighed.

"All hope is not lost, dear. Everything will work out. Magic usually does," Ollivander said, patting her arm.

Later that evening while the others lined up at the great room to use the floo network to go into
London for dinner, Harry hung back so that he and Valerian were the last to leave.

"What's the matter? You look a bit down," Harry asked.

"I no longer have access to my Russian military account. Nor my saved gold in Hungary. Master Kastav used to allocate a sizable gold coin stipend to me, and opened a trust account in Norway, my homeland. I do not wish to be a burden," she admitted.

"It's alright. I remember, not too long ago, when I felt the same. My relatives used money as a reason to make me feel like they were doing me a favour. When you join the guild, we will also create a Gringotts account for you. Everything will work out."

"Everything will work out," Valerian repeated. "Your trainer said the same thing a few minutes ago."

"He's a powerful sage. Master Ollivander has been a true mentor to Jon and I, in more ways than simply crafting. I truly believe that because of his influence, our magic has become stronger, more focused. We shall Walk In The Light."

"A noble creed. The Weapon-smith who chooses to use magic in his craft, must by International law, agree to that rule: The law of the Paladin."

"Really." This girl knew a lot about magic that he had never heard about. "Well, don't worry about dinner. You are among friends now."

"Friends," Valerian nodded, a hint of a smile on her face. She offered her hand.

"Friends," Harry shook it. "Dinner is on me. My treat."

"Thank you, Dragonslayer," Valerian said. Harry broke out in laughter at how serious she sounded.

"You and Jon really are alike. Please, Harry is fine... After you," Harry offered.

"I thought you British wizards love your pomp and titles."

"Not me," Harry said. "Shall we?" He gestured to the fires.

"Thank you, Harry." Valerian ducked into the chimney and vanished in the green flames. Harry followed after her, a small smile on his face.

"Well fuck me in the ass and call me Susan," Vince Greyback said as Tonks, Harry, Jon and Valerian walked in the Guild House after dinner. Alexandria went to visit her mother at Jon's place, while Ollivander went into his shop to check his post. "Fastest ever S rankers in this establishment's history walking through the door. Officially in the record books lads! Signed and bloody well sealed by the Hunter and Trade Guild Council. London is King of the fucking hill right now because of these rooks! Drinks on me gentlemen!" Vince rang the bell twice. There was a general positive cheer.

"Greyback," Jon greeted. "All is well?"

Vince offered his hand to Jon. Jon accepted the handshake firmly. Vince pulled him close, leaning over the bar to talk to them.

"Please tell me you are not secretly British warmages hoping to start shit with the French," he whispered.
"No, were not," Harry laughed.

"Right. I'm going to cancel that bulk order for more tactical armor then. You had me worried."

"War?" Valerian asked, intrigued.

"We may not be the most friendly neighbors but no reason to fuck them over by taking all of their bloody gold innit? And some historical properties too. I've received statements of some insane commission." Greyback began pouring them drinks. "You. You look like a Ruskie. Parliament or wot, something else?" He offered Valerian a few choices of vodka.

"That is fine," she responded.

"Sweetums, you are one hell of a clan witch. You destroyed their Ministry's yearly Contractor allocation in wot, a few months?!" Vince congratulated her. "And properties too. Lucky girl- we can't take commission off those."

"That must be Thomas' bounty. I hope he got the Kiss. Good riddance," Tonks snarled. "Money is in the bank, lads!" she raised her shot of whiskey in toast. The Crows all drank to that.

"As S Rank, your clan earns a percentage of the Guild House commission. Once percent of all received commission from clans B ranked and under. Once you don't fuck up or stop taking missions for longer than six months."

"That's a good way to keep your best Rangers," Jon nodded. "Mercenary loyalty is a fickle thing."

"Speaking of that... got word that South Hampton's Glory Hounds are willing to offer insane job rates for you guys. They want you bad."

Tonks looked thoughtful. "Oh really. We're here to add another member to the Crows."

"All right. You have the look of a professional," Vince commended Valerian with a critical eye. "You're a soldier."

"Was."

"Guild affiliation?" He asked, all business.

"The Dragon Lancers from Romania."

"Ah. They're a rare lot. Well let me sign you up. That'll be twenty galleons." Tonks paid it. Greyback brought documents for Valerian to sign. After that was complete, he gave her the leather amulet and string in her hand. When they were about to leave Vince pulled Tonks gently at her elbow.

Tonks looked down incredulously at his touch.

"You really aren't considering the A.K. are you? Usually when Clan Witches or Wizards have a meteoric rise and get rich, they have a look like yours on their faces. You want out."

Tonks narrowed her eyes, then pulled her arm away. "No, I am not considering the Glory Hounds."

"You've had my admiration from the first day. But now you have also earned my respect, Red. Fantastic work. Your lads are killing it out there." Tonks nodded once in recognition. "Hail, the Crows Vambrace." He crossed his arms in an abbreviated salute. "It won't be the same without you."
Jon and Harry watched the interplay between the barman and Tonks. Tonks was on the verge of saying something, then hesitated.

"Glory to the guild," she said instead, touching her right fist to her heart. "Let's go." The four of them walked off, not even noticing the few mugs held up in salute as they exited.

Monday, while escorting Alexandria to lunch Jon spotted Headmaster Dumbledore, Ollivander and Valerian walking towards the infirmary.

Alexandria frowned. "It seems Madame Pomfrey will be needing me shortly."

"Grandfather did say he would try to help."

Alexandria turned to Jon, taking the tips of his fingers in hers. "See you at dinner," she tiptoed and kissed him quickly in full view of the other students. A couple catcalls ensued. Jon was temporarily stunned when their lips parted. Alexandria headed off towards the infirmary. Jon decided to check up on Harry, who told him he would be in the workshop at lunchtime.

To his pleasant surprise, Hermione was also there with him. Harry had a wand crafting text book opened on his lap. Hermione was sitting close to him on the wooden work table.

"Hi Jon!" She greeted him. "How was your workshop weekend?"

Harry raised an eyebrow at him. "Keep it simple."

"Good. Cold."

"Tell me what you think." Harry showed him his apprentice logbook.

"Onyx dragon heartstring on Holly, eight inch stem, five inch Pine handle. Custom pommel made of Onyx horn. Polished with ... Rose essence? This is for you, I presume."

"Yes! My own custom wand! I am so excited!" Hermione said.

"I was waiting for you to pop in. Where is Alexandria?" Harry picked up his tape measure, coiling it into a tight cylinder between his fingers.

"Hospital wing," Jon said. "Do you need her?"

"I wanted her as a ... um... chaperone. I need to take Hermione's measurements. To fine tune the wand dimensions to her structure. All purpose wands are quite tricky, it seems. It needs to work for the intended user, for all and any type of spell casting. The more custom it is, the higher the compatibility. That book we have," He gave Jon a significant look, "has some interesting theory on human proportion and it's role in magic."

"Ah yes. The Vitruvian Man," Jon nodded. Harry laughed at how Jon simply didn't know when to be subtle. Tonks was right about him blurting out stuff. The book in itself wasn't dark, but it had information on how to twist elements of human physiology to create some really fucking dark magic. "She will not be available. She is with the Headmaster and the healer."

"Ah," Harry glanced at Hermione. She was biting her lower lip, thinking. "And tell me what you think about these," Harry showed Jon another page.

"Onyx spinal cord tendon on Holly, thirteen inches stem, six inches on handle, 1/8 drill bore. Finished with Diablo Brain polish mixed with threstral Wingbone marrow. Why thirteen inches?"
"Minimum. That was the length of spinal tissue caught on my blade," Harry said. "And the long handle ... I'm going to try to make it a two handed wand." He mimicked holding a sword with his Troll on holly. Jon raised his eyebrow.

"You are crafting a wand for Lady Steel similar to mine, with a balanced magical resonance for instinctive magical attack. You think wand waving won't be her forte."

"Kind of. And for Tonks - check this out. Turn two pages down."

"Onyx dragon optic nerve core, Onyx dragon second talon wingbone... with custom leather grip at the Y Joint. Dragon eyeball viscous matter encased in a spell globe made of crystal as the pommel. Coated with elven batwing boiled in nogtail urine. Four feet long?" Jon frowned at the diagram of the wand, no, weapon; Harry sketched.

"Yeah. Alexandria showed me the Mission log. Oh, she's been assigned that job, by the way. She said it would go hand in hand with her Medical logs. Plus, it would make a great story one day. Tonks confirmed that you encouraged her to use her metamorph ability to see very far distances. This would be a prototype ... a sniper rifle styled weapon."

"With the batwing and urine polish to tweak the size of the main stem, allowing adjustments to the thickness of the core." Jon re-read the entry. "Very good Harry. I think Master would be pleased with this project in particular. You may not have the temperament for being a jailer, but weapons design seem right up your alley. Attack, is definitely your strongest suit."

"It's so wonderful you get to broaden your magical horizon on these trips. I wish I could too. My parents would never allow it though," Hermione sighed.

"She knows?" Jon looked at Hermione.

"Yup. He told me!" Hermione put her right arm around Harry's shoulder and gave him a chummy hug. She rest her head comfortably on his shoulder.

"Yes. That we go abroad looking for components for wand making," Harry said with a strict emphasis. Jon caught on. Enough to explain why they were in possession of these rare materials, but not exact details on how they acquired them. "I will also try my hand with a regular all purpose school wand for both of them," Harry nodded. "But I am taking your theory to heart: focus on one's strengths."

"The long handle wand. Whose wand is that going to be for?" Hermione enquired.

"A friend of ours. She might join Hogwarts as well. Valerian is her name."

At that moment Miracle swooped down from the bell tower and landed on Jon's shoulder. "Hungry, lad?"

Hermione screamed. Miracle flapped his wings once, Harry's cue that the baby dragon meant Yes.

"I will bring something for you shortly. Miracle, meet Mistress Hermione."

Hermione stared at the little dragon. "He reminds me of Norbert." Miracle sniffed Hermione's shoes, then jumped on the table, sniffing her hand. He allowed her to pet his crown gently, then flapped off towards the forge fire, lying down on the rug placed there especially for him. "Hagrid must really trust you guys."

"Miracle is my familiar, not his," Jon said simply.
"Wow," she breathed. She looked at Harry seriously. "Jon is here. If you so insist on taking my measurements with a chaperone around, I trust the both of you."

Harry looked a bit embarrassed. "I will try to be quick, then. From the notes that I have here, it's similar to taking lengths for tailoring a suit... except... um..."

"Yes I know. Against skin. You will be a perfect gentleman, Harry!" She ordered. She took out the hospital gown out of her backpack. "Please lock the door, Jon. I don't even wish to know what could happen if we are caught doing this. Face over there!"

Jon and Harry turned around. After a couple minutes Hermione cleared her throat. "Ok. Ready." She was dressed a light green, loose garb covering her front from the base of her collarbones to her legs. The open back area was tied shut with two simple knots. The hospital gown showed her bare arms and the legs from mid-thigh to the bare feet.

Harry approached her. "Jon. Write this down for me, please." He guided her against a wooden column. "Stand straight. Okay chin up a bit." He made a mark at the top of her head. "Five foot two."

Jon wrote that down.

Harry untied the top knot and measured her arm starting from the point of her collarbone on her slender shoulder to the tip of her middle finger. Her skin was soft, and warm. He called out shoulder to elbow distance, elbow to wrist, and length of the middle finger.

Jon wrote down those dimensions.

Now came the harder parts. The bust, the third rib, her waist, and the length of her spine. And finally the outer and inner seam of her legs. He was seriously having second thoughts on doing that last one. The books all referenced that the craftsman must take the measurements himself or it simply would not work.

Magic was a very intimate thing, it seems. It made sense considering how many factors were at stake. He turned her around, so that her back was facing him. Her pink bra and matching undies peeked out the gap of the loose hospital robe.

"Lift your hair, Hermione." She did. Harry undid the second knot holding the garb halfway closed. Her entire back was now exposed, the hospital gown hung loose on her shoulders. He placed the tip of the measuring tape at the base of her skull and draped it along her spine. "This might tickle," he warned. Trying to be as professional as he could about it, he gently lowered the waistband of her underwear and pressed the tape against the coccyx bone between the buttocks. He quickly called out that length and released the tape measure.

Jon wrote it down. Harry was doing his magic, again.

"Um... you need to unclasp this. Sorry. Only for a few seconds."

Hermione unclasped her bra, and raised it up, facing away from him.

He gently wrapped the tape measure around her bust, trying his best not to touch her. He called out the dimensions.

Jon wrote it down. Hermione tried to re-hook the underwear with shaky fingers. She couldn't.

"Harry can you?" She asked softly.
Harry connected the clasp quickly without making an issue of it.

"Thanks."

He measured around the rib cage, then waist. Hermione's skin felt hot against his fingers. He called out these measurements. Harry was focusing on getting this done quickly, and accurately.

Jon wrote those down as well.

As non-sexually as possible, he measured from her hips to the floor, then crouched in front of her to measure the inner thigh by her groin to her ankle. She stood perfectly still, but her skin was burning. He called out the measurements.

Jon wrote it down, focusing on his task, ignoring her little gasps and tickles.

And now the easy part. Harry stood up, looking at her face. Hermione was red. She gave him that look.

Harry pretended he didn't notice.

_Oh fuck. This was not happening. You can do this. You are a budding professional. She doesn't know you are from the future. She thinks you are the same age._

Harry took a deep breath. "Okay, now I will take the measurement of the distance of the outer edges and inner edges of your eyes."

"Ok," Hermione breathed. She watched his lips.

_Oh fuck oh fuck oh fuck._

Give him a dragon any day instead of an aroused Hermione Granger.

_You sick motherfucking fuck. Fuck you Harry._

"Close your eyes," he commanded. She did. He immediately took the readings and stepped away.

Jon wrote it down. "Good. I'll be outside." Jon escaped immediately, very uncomfortable by what he just witnessed. He closed the door behind him.

"Done." Harry breathed. Hermione opened her eyes and took a step closer, looking up to him.

_When did she get so much shorter than him?_

"Ok." She reddened further as she leaned in.

Harry did the only thing he could do when he saw what was happening. He leaned in and hugged her, keeping her face away from his, burrowing it in her hair. He felt cruel ruining her first kiss, but, but...

He couldn't. He didn't like her like how he assumed she liked him.

Hermione purred into his hug, holding him close. Harry rubbed her back, trying to escape with subtle movements. Her arms tightened a bit.

"Thank you, once again," she said softly, looking up to him. Her arms raised behind his neck and slowly brought his head down. She kissed him, shyly, just a brush of her lips against his. Then again,
with a bit more pressure. She sucked gently on his bottom lip. Harry broke it off gently.

"Um-" he smiled at her. Hermione's eyes were half closed. He gave her a quick peck again so that she didn't feel rejected. She opened her eyes and blushed.

"Sorry," she whispered, totally not sorry.

"Don't be... you feel, um.. nice." Harry stammered. Here he was, holding Hermione way too close, her body pressing into his uniform. His hand had found the warm skin of her back. He immediately let her go. "As in, you.. um.. yeah, nice lips.. um."

"Sorry," she said again, dipping her eyes. Then she looked at him again. Then she stepped away. Both of them just looked at each other.

Fuck my life. I didn't expect her to be this way. I have to nip it right here, right now.

"Not bad, for our first kiss," Hermione giggled, rubbing her lips together quickly. "It's fine Harry. No need to panic. It's just a kiss," she explained. "It's perfectly normal."

"Yeah," Harry agreed. He didn't have the heart to tell her it wasn't his first kiss. When did he get so old, and Hermione get so young? He gathered up his notes and the measurements parchment. "I'll leave you to change. Later, then." He smiled at her. Hermione waved a small wave as he opened the door. Harry closed the door behind him and leaned against it. He set off one floor down towards the great hall for lunch. Jon was already seated, eating. Harry plopped down next to him.

"Fuck," Harry breathed. He began dishing out food for himself. After a couple minutes of companionable eating, Jon spoke.

"You will never make a custom wand for Alexandria." Jon continued eating, having already issued his command and there was no need for further talk. A few seconds after chewing, Jon sipped his drink.

"Do we have an understanding?" he added, now watching Harry as he ate. Jon leaned close and dropped his tone to a deadly grumble. "You will not steal her heart, or we will have words."

"I understand." Harry's eyebrows creased. He actually felt a bit threatened.

"Good." Jon watched him a few seconds longer, then nodded, satisfied.

Wednesday during Drinkwater's dueling session after classes, Harry skivved off and went upstairs into the boys' dormitory. Without further ado he stunned Ron's rat and picked up his cage. Yesterday Mr Farnsworth, the Potages Senior Legal Counsel; gave him the green light to get the ball rolling. Remus and Auror Dawlish had replied to his summons, agreeing to meet him at Hagrid's hut at seven p.m. that evening.

Auror Jon Dawlish was the young Auror who bravely 'caught' Sirius Black after Peter Pettigrew's staged 'death' and slaughter of twelve muggles. Mr. Farnworth and Master Ollivander were the executors of his plan. They confered through owl post multiple times over the past few days. Harry kept to his dormitory since the workshop incident with Hermione, eagerly waiting updates from Hedwig. He needed to focus, and make sure everything was in place. He hoped Hermione didn't think it was about her.

After Dueling practice, Harry approached Auror Drinkwater.
"Got information on another Dark wizard in this school."

"So I hear. My partner dropped some hints about a meeting, and to stay sharp today."

"It's going down by Hagrid. Starts in ten minutes," Harry nodded, then walked off. "Are you coming, Sir?"

The Auror regarded Harry strangely, then led the way down. Hagrid was busy talking to his guests on his front lawn when Auror Drinkwater and Harry approached. Harry was carrying Scabbers' cage by the handle. The cage itself was covered with an old towel.


"Good evening, everyone," Harry said. Remus immediately came up to him and leaned low to speak in his ear.

"Harry, what is going on here?" Remus said, uneasy. "If it's something to do with my condition or Miss Tonks, we can talk about this..." he pleaded.

"No, nothing like that." Harry said easily. "But it does concern your past, and my advice is, just be calm," Harry added seriously. Remus straightened, thinking about what happened in his past that would make this young man gather these wizards. Harry nodded at Mr. Farnsworth. The elderly wizard initiated the required legal legwork over the past few days. The only thing needed was Auror intervention to begin the process. This all hung on the suspect being apprehended.

"Mr. Hagrid," Harry called the friendly half giant. "Ready?"

"Sure," Hagrid said, eyeing the covered cage. "Come on in, gentlemen!" He opened his door, beckoning them inside. The guests and Harry sat down around the table.

"Thank you everyone. Allow me to introduce my legal counsel, Mr. Farnsworth, whom some of you may know. Mr. Farnsworth, I open the floor to you." Harry sat down. The adults, except Mr. Farnsworth, just stared at him, a bit dumbstruck.

"Evening all. Straight to the matter," Mr. Farnsworth passed around rolled copies of parchment. "With regards to Wizengamot Hearing 946 on date November the fourth, 1982. Case file 19821104SB, the Black trial." The wizards present, including Harry, opened their scrolls. In it was a summary of the major findings, the probable cause, the victims, and the testimony of one Sirius Black, taken on record in the witness stand.

"To summarize: Mr. Sirius Black did not plead guilty to his charges. He chose not to speak at that critical moment. In British legal practice, silence to the Judge's question of 'How do you plead' is not technically a denial. Due to the evidence, the jury was convinced of his guilt. Mr. Potter wishes to bring forth new critical evidence to re-open the case."

Remus stared at Harry.

"I've been doing research," Harry said. "I've come across magic called Animagi. The ability to transform into an animal."

"That's very advanced magic," Drinkwater said.

"Yes. Micheal Ellewyn-Sare turned into a fox when he tried to escape. That piqued my curiosity. I always found my friend's pet to be, extraordinarily resilient, and long lived." With a flourish he took off the cover to Pettigrew's cage. "I believe this person to be an animagus - and the person
responsible for the muggle killings that Sirius Black has been wrongly convicted of doing. Remus?"

"It is him," he breathed. "That is Peter Pettigrew."

"What!" Dawlish said, rereading the parchment. "He's dead!"

"No he isn't," Remus snarled. "Hagrid, please call the Professor, quickly!"

While Hagrid was lighting the fire, Dawlish took out the unconscious rat and laid him on the floor. "Drinkwater, engage the Vocal recording globe." Auror Drinkwater took out a small chest out of his pocket, opened it and plucked out a striped marble. By the time Albus Dumbledore flamed outside Hagrid's hut, all wizards present were surrounding the open area around the massive rat, wands aimed.

"Yes, Hagrid," Dumbledore came in, taking off his cloak automatically. "I am here-" he paused, taking in the scene. He eyed all the wands drawn on the rat. "This is interesting. Harry?" he eyed the young boy who had his hands in his pockets. "May I ask what you are doing here?"

"You'll see, sir."

"On my count, the reversal spell, Drinkwater. Start the recording," Dawlish commanded. River Drinkwater tapped the recording globe.

"Auror's log, December fifteenth, 1992. Location, Hogwarts, Hut on the southern border three hundred metres from the main entrance gates. Present, Headmaster Albus Dumbledore, Senior Smith Garrick Ollivander, Groundskeeper Rubeus Hagrid, Senior Counsel Inglefield Farnsworth, Aurors R. Drinkwater and J. Dawlish, private magical citizen Remus Lupin and student of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Harry Potter. Also present is an incapacitated animagus, who is supposed to be dead: Peter Pettigrew. Executing reversal. On my count: three, two, one!"

Both Aurors executed a spell in tandem. The rat's body began to expand, the short arms and legs growing, the round torso stretching at a rapid rate. Within a few seconds a dirty, rotund man with a scraggly beard almost reaching his chest and thinning hair on his head appeared.

"Vincula!" said Auror Dawlish. Auror Drinkwater transfigured the dungeon ring simultaneously and the chains seamlessly locked Pettigrew down. Harry thought that was an excellent display of coordinated spell casting.

There was a strained silence. Auror Dawlish came closer and examined the man's face. "It's him. I've never heard of a wizard maintaining the transformation for so long."

"It may have to do with the size to magic ratio. A rat, is not a man: but this man, is definitely a rat," Dumbledore said. "I always doubted that Sirius would do such a thing- but this is simply miraculous."

"I have applied for the case to be re-opened, with an initial hearing forthwith." Mr. Farnsworth began packing away his things, pleased with proceedings.

"Peter Pettigrew is alive and well, under the effects of stupefy. Showing signs of permanent transfiguration, clawed nails, disproportional facial structure, hunched shoulders and spine curvature. Smells like a filthy cage too," Drinkwater added to the log.

"Administering Veritaserum for onsite hot off the tongue preliminary statements," Dawlish announced. He drew a small vial, dropped it in his mouth, then awakened Peter from his stupor. Peter eventually came around, then moaned in pain.
"What is your name?" Dawlish asked.

"Scabbers. Scabbers."

"What is your birth name?"

"Peter," he squeaked.

"DID YOU KILL THE MUGGLES?! DID YOU BETRAY JAMES?" Remus literally pounced on him, holding the Fwooper on cedar to his neck. Auror Dawlish calmly cast a spell, nullifying Remus's assault. Hagrid stepped towards him and lifted the rabid man by the back of his robes.

"Yes, I killed them. And I did betray James," Peter said easily. Peter had fully regained his senses by this time and tugged at his chains. He scanned the faces and finally laid eyes on James son. Harry's teeth was bared in a grim smile. In Pettigrew's drugged perspective, he saw a seven foot tall spectre hovering behind the young boy, a dusty, dark grey cloak like a Dementor holding a massive scythe casually across its shoulders.

"Oh fuck."

Later that night, Claudia Howard, the Head Girl of Hogwarts came up to Harry's dormitory. Harry had secluded himself since being dismissed from the meeting, speaking to no one. Jon had informed their friends that he was recovering from Wizard flu and wished to be alone this evening. Miracle was currently hiding in the bell tower above their workshop.

"Headmaster Dumbledore wishes to see you," she said when he opened the door. "Come with me." Within minutes the both of them reached the Gargoyle guarding the entrance to the spiral staircase.

"Peppermint Candy Cane," Claudia told the Gargoyle. Harry went up the stairs and knocked.

"Come in," came the headmaster's voice.

Harry entered, his heart racing. Dumbledore's expression was grave. "Good evening, Harry."

"Good evening, Professor," Harry replied, gulping.

"Please have a seat," Dumbledore indicated one of the two straight backed chairs in front of his desk. Harry did so. "I'll get straight to it. Excellent work, Harry." Albus smiled.

"What, what has happened?"

"The case has been re-opened. Sirius' exoneration hearing would be a week from now. They are rehabilitating him in St Mungo's hospital from tonight."

"Does that mean..?" Harry knew he had orchestrated this, but to actually experience a free, legal godfather, felt like a dream come true.

"Yes. He has been released from Azkaban, under heavy Auror guard. The legal process has begun, and the formalities shall soon be done with."

"Would he be able to receive visitors?" Harry asked eagerly. "I mean, soon, like before he goes to hearing."

"For you, yes. With your legal counsel, I have arranged for the visit to be tomorrow, during regular visiting hours. I believe he may want to meet his nephew, Jon."
Harry felt such a surge of joy that he needed to take deep breaths to keep calm. "I can't wait."

"You have done your Godfather a great service, Harry." Albus congratulated him. "The evidence against him was too strong, even I was convinced that he had turned. I did not expect James to use Peter as secret keeper, neither believed that Peter was capable of such grievous duplicity."

"You're human, just like everyone else," Harry said, wise beyond his years. Dumbledore peered at him above his half moon glasses.

"Indeed Harry, we all make mistakes."

The next day Jon, Harry and Professor Dumbledore stepped through the fireplace at the reception area of St Mungo's. The Headmaster stood in front of the magical elevator, humming a merry tune. Harry was using all of his occlumency training to keep his cool. They entered the elevator when it arrived. Jon held on for dear life when the small compartment ascended. He braced himself in the corner, spreading his arms on the mirrored walls and legs wide for balance. Harry ignored him. The elevator stopped on the fourth floor; Dementor Trauma.

They stepped out and approached the first person dressed in St Mungo colors. Dumbledore called out.

"Hallo!" He interrupted the quickly walking witch. She paused, looking up from her clipboard. She looked up, then looked around, astounded that Albus Dumbledore was speaking to her. She gave him her full attention.

"Yes, Headmaster? Can I help you?"

"We are here to visit your patient."

"Are you sure you are on the right floor?" She asked. "We have only one patient here at the moment, and he is currently under guard." She came closer. "A notorious mass murderer, too," she whispered.

Harry kept his temper in check. Now was not the time for outbursts. Jon was examining the hospital, watching for entry and exit points.

"Yes, that is he," Dumbledore said jovially, as if he was picking out a hat.

"One moment." She turned and left. Dumbledore pushed both hands in the opposite sleeves, the embodiment of calm patience. The witch returned with Auror Jon Dawlish in tow. He beckoned them over and nodded to the healer.

"It's ok. They are expected."

Dumbledore and the two boys fell into stride next to him. "The healers have been pumping him with cheering potion, nutrients and chocolate. He has suffered atrophy. His speech is also poor. He is eager to meet you, Jon. And you too, Harry. This way."

Sirius was propped up in a reclining bed. His head was supported by a neck brace, his body frail and malnourished. There were ugly splotches on his skin. His hair was trimmed without much styling, and his mustache and beard were also attacked by a scissors, a dull one by the looks of it. A lopsided smile, almost as if his cheek muscles had failed on the left half of his face, showed yellowed and blackened teeth.

Sirius looked horrible, but at the same time, perfect.
He was going to be free.

"Little... little... James. And you... you look nothing like Regulus." Sirius cackled, a dry retching cough.

"Greetings, Uncle." Jon bowed.

Harry didn't think he could be genuinely happier about his return. Sirius looked like a smiling threstral with teeth, a bag of angular bones with loose skin. His hospital coverall drowned him. Only the slight up and down of his breathing convinced Harry that there was actually a man underneath the polka dot garment.

"You look ready to enter Witch Weekly's Bachelor of the Year competition," Harry grinned at him, coming closer. "At least you smell clean."

"Tell nursey.. I .. I... needed that. Real... warm water.. been years.. more than," Sirius drifted off abruptly, looking sullenly at the bed sheet covering up to his waist. "More than a decade. And.. and.. hair potion!" Sirius' bony fingers struggled to bring his hair to his nose, smelling deeply. "I-I know.. I sound like... like... a... retard. Sorry." He pointed at his slack left side. "You two... look... strong. Healthy. In a-"

Sirius gazed off into the distance, eyes twitching.

"...few days, I'll reclaim.. my.. my.. Bachelor Of the Year Trophy!"

"You've won it before." Jon said simply. Sirius looked like he needed a few moments of thought to remember who he was talking to.

"Of course. Once at eighteen.. the other at.." Sirius looked out the window. He twitched in a strange manner. "Anyway. Jon. R-R-Regulus was ..a bigot. Who... your mother?"

"Gemma Ollivander."

"He landed that bird. I ... t-taught him well. Aim for the biggest ... brightest... star."

"He finally understood what it meant to love, when it mattered," Harry said in pseudo code. A Death Eater's only hope of redemption was through love. Sirius stared at Harry, then nodded in relief. His body might have wasted away, but he managed to keep his wits.

"The Light... was reignited. I knew it. I-I did eventually succeed, then. Good. Come."

Both boys approached. "Snape... I know what he is..." he whispered. "Prison has taught me patience. I have waited a long time ... a long .. fucking time. I have it all p-p planned."

Harry immediately dropped his twelve year old persona. "Shh! Not another word... we will talk at home," Harry warned. "Don't mention his fucking name again. Do you hear me Sirius? You aren't free yet. Keep that bark quiet."

"I'm.. not going ... Grimmauld!" Sirius grabbed Harry's hand in a firm grip. Sirius' prison glare was impressive. Auror Dawlish approached, but Harry waved him off.

"Don't you worry about a thing. You're coming to live with us. At a new home, if you want."

Sirius squeezed Harry's hand again. "Good. I don't care where. I've dreamed about ... about.. what I would tell you ... if. I g-got out. But.. your invite sounds better than anything I could say, Little
James. Home is where ...the heart is."
Happiness, Hope, Healing and the Hog's Head. Christmas is the most wonderful time of the year.

"Do not despair my dear. We shall resolve this issue soon," Professor Dumbledore said. "For now, you may use this to enjoy some light reading." He gave her a custom spectacles. The spectacles were charmed to read words aloud to her, which was transmitted into the ear through the arm of the frames.

It was a short term solution to help get her ready to be able to start the January term in year four. A downside to the spectacles was that there was a low murmur of the voice enchantment when she used them.

The other downside to the spectacles, in Alexandria's biased opinion; is that it looked very cute and girly on her strong physique. It softened her overall appearance, which was intimidating because Valerian preferred tight, long-sleeved sweaters and pants, and tall dragon hide boots.

In fact, she reminded Alexandria too much of a female version of Jon.

Valerian had the most defined and cut abs she had ever seen on a girl. Sometimes Alexandria wondered how the hell Jon, Harry and Valerian managed to achieve any muscular definition. Wizards didn't really need muscles. One time while Valerian changed after clinic, Alexandria found herself subconsciously poking her own flat, but soft, stomach. Maybe she could put a little effort into some sort of exercise.

Valerian had spent the entire week between the Hospital Wing and the Clan Mansion. She would attend clinic appointments for nine in the morning, then leave after lunch. Alexandria was mandated to be present during these sessions, which was both a blessing, and a bit of an annoyance.

Firstly, it was both a privilege and a great learning experience when Albus Dumbledore, Garrick Ollivander and Poppy Pomfrey allowed her to be present in meetings, and follow on nearby when they cast diagnostic magic on Valerian. As Pomfrey's apprentice, all spell work and research material used were to be referenced by her in the patient treatment log. Headmaster Dumbledore was capable of casting extraordinarily complex magic that he made look as rudimentary as first-year Charms. However, the magical sessions were rare occurrences.

Dumbledore spent the majority of his time asking simple, non-invasive questions, while referencing various texts and journals. The Headmaster took a lot of short hand notes and made frequent use of a bowl he called a Pensieve. And, to her surprise, most of the sessions he had directly with Valerian they used a chalkboard. Simple exercises taught at Montessori level - drawing symbols, capital and common letters, numbers and shapes. These experiments were used to determine the extent of the damage. His wand was also quite strange. There were knots of bulbous wood spaced in even increments along both the handle and the stem. When he did draw his wand, his technique was simple, even delicate, as if he dare not flourish, or jab it too hard on their young charge.
It was an interesting study. Valerian was capable of drawing letters individually. Once she wrote more than two letters consecutively, her handwriting failed. The third letters became squiggles, shaky trails, and when she tried to force out more, her muscle response in her writing hand simply failed.

Valerian was genuinely positive about her treatment and whenever the headmaster and Ollivander left, talked to her non-stop about all that she was learning about magic. Also, the girl was curious about everything. With her ability to literally remember everything that someone said or demonstrated, Alexandria had to be careful of what she did. Valerian was very friendly towards her, something that she couldn't reciprocate as naturally, seeing as she was so much like Jon, which could be a problem.

What got Alexandria really annoyed wasn't the girl herself, but when Jon and Harry came to visit. Jon treated her like a cherished soldier injured on the front lines. Valerian beamed every time the two boys visited her, claiming honour this and grateful that.

Secondly, what was really aggravating was that Alexandria felt that Harry and Jon's brotherly friendship was including Valerian more and more by the day. Valerian brought back updates about the salvage operation, along with a couple large packages of components that Harry had asked to be delivered immediately to the Clan property.

Every time Alexandria saw Harry receive one of these packages, it was like Christmas came early for him. Harry visited more than Jon, who was in a panic mode concerning studies for the Christmas exams. Harry apparently was not concerned about the term end tests in the slightest. Over the past week since returning from Russia Harry was quite nonchalant about schoolwork. It was evident he was in the workshop most evenings, even after band practice with Jon.

Harry came to visit Valerian after dinner on the last day of exams. This time he was alone, and a bit nervous. He was grateful when he saw both girls in the wing, Valerian quietly reading a story book with her glasses on, Alexandria sitting at the reception desk, studying. Alexandria looked stressed.

"Hey," Harry greeted. He didn't need a seer to tell him his luck wasn't with him tonight. "You look busy."

"Yes," Alexandria sighed. She smiled at him though. "Studies, and added research assigned by Madame Pomfrey."

"The Magical Brain," Harry briefly peeked at the tome's cover. "A real page turner, eh?"

"That is a joke, right?" Alexandria grumbled. She held up an English to French text, which was almost twice as thick. "This one is even more exciting," she sighed. Harry leaned down close, so he could talk softly.

"I would like to borrow Valerian for a few minutes. Could you spare the time as well? In the workshop."

"I can't. Madame Pomfrey went out, and would be back in the morning. I have to be at the front desk until Claudia Howard and Bole takes over at curfew."

"Andrew Bole, the Slytherin?"

"Oui. He's head boy, you know."

"I didn't even know. We sent the head boy of Hogwarts into the drink?" Harry chuckled.
"If I recall, he was the one Jon hit twice," Alexandria chuckled. "You two go on ahead. Hagrid is supposed to escort her to Hogsmeade at eight so you have ample time. Master Ollivander will meet her there at Rosemerta's."

"Thanks," Harry breathed. Once again, Alexandria wasn't available for chaperone duties. Valerian seemed confident and battle hardened, but a girl was a girl. No man would know what to expect when they were put in an awkward situation. He straightened his shoulders and approached Valerian.

"Hey," Harry said in greeting. Valerian lifted the glasses and perched them on her hair. The soft voices stopped.


"So! Are you excited for your own custom wand?"

"Oh yes!" Valerian said eagerly. "Is it ready?"

Harry had a weird feeling in his stomach at her enthusiasm, because the tone and the expression was a mirror image of Hermione's when he showed her the diagram of her Onyx heart string on Holly project.

"Nearly. I have the components all portioned out, and the wood material has been shaved into usable Raw components. I need to customize the dimensions, tailored to you... the owner." Harry rubbed the back of his hair in a nervous gesture.

Valerian's eyes narrowed a tiny fraction. "I sense a hesitance in your tone."

"I need to take your measurements."

"Oh. The Ritual of Anthroprometry. Shall we?" Valerian swung her legs out of her bed and put the book down on the bedside table. She stood up and made up the bed quickly. Valerian was dressed in dark green tights and a fitted white turtleneck sweater.

The first thing Harry noticed was that she wasn't wearing a bra, again. He struggled to keep his eyes on her face.

"Alexandria is not available to be your chaperone. You're okay with that?" Harry asked as they walked between the beds. Valerian's physique was intimidating. The top of Harry's head only reached her eyes.

"Of course. Why would I need a chaperone?"

"The measurements need to be taken against skin."

"Yes, that is usually how it is done," Valerian frowned. "I don't understand."

"You're okay with me taking your measurements alone?" Harry asked.

"My sword, shield and armor were commissioned in a similar manner. I have done this before, Harry."

Harry nodded and Valerian followed him around the bend to the door to the workshop. Harry took out his keys and both of them entered the well lit tower. Miracle swooped down and greeted them with a high shriek.
"Jon sends this," Harry took out a hefty portion of Christmas Ham from his ringbox. "You want it charred?"

The dragon made a singular powerful flap of his wings in front the both of them.

"Remember the rules! No fire at ground level! Here ya go!" Harry threw the meat as high as possible in the seven storey tower. Miracle sped after it, unleashing a stream of fire at it in midair. He snatched it before it fell and smoothly continued upwards towards the watchtower guard post. Harry and Jon constructed a magical trapdoor that would allow Miracle to enter and exit his tower, yet still keep out the cold. Miracle flew upwards, hooked upside down on the ceiling of the tower then pulled at a chain, opening the trapdoor. He scrambled into the lookout tower, and out of sight.

"He is fond of the both of you. Soon he will want to further his territory, and hunt for his own food."

"Yeah," Harry admitted. The dragon was unusually smart. "The Sentient, you described him."

"Yes. Also known as the Mageslayer. The smartest of all dragons: Wizardbane."

Both of them stared at the trapdoor high above. Harry was lost in thought.

"Jon is very lucky-" Valerian said as she hooked her hands underneath the hem of her tight sweater and lifted. "-to have adopted-"

"Whoa! Easy there-" Harry said, stopping her arms right before the sweater came over her chest. Harry gulped as he saw her firm belly flex smoothly with her movements. "I have this," Harry gave her the hospital gown from his bag. "I'll give you some time to put this on first."

Harry turned around to offer her some privacy. He made another mental list of the various types and lengths of wand material he and Jon had prepped. Thickly cut lengths of holly, pine and fir were on the cutting worktable. Dragon soft parts were itemized in neat, separate cauldrons clamped shut with the latch. Harry was so excited when the specific Dragon parts came in. The long Dragon wing talon bones were laid evenly on the sanding table. Two magnificent, lightweight hollow bones that kept the shape of the wing membrane during in flight were gleaming in the firelight. It was perfect-magically potent, strong yet flexible, with natural hollows to be filled with wand core material. For Remus' project Jon had sourced Ghost's hair, and the werewolf hair from the silver cage.

He couldn't wait to build Tonks' custom weapon. All he needed to do was get the jewel smith to cut the crystal and Tonks to visit the workshop to get her measurements. These days she was studying hard for her own exams.

"Ready," Valerian said. Harry turned around, and froze.

Valerian did not understand how the gown was meant to be worn. Instead of tying it at the back, she wore the gown back-to-front like a jacket. Her breasts were barely hidden by the flimsy garment with the strings hanging loosely down her front. Harry miscalculated with the difference between Hermione and Valerian. Where the gown could sufficiently cover Hermione, it did nothing but look like a skimpy waistcoat on Valerian. It barely covered the waistband of her underwear. Valerian's entire cleavage and firm torso was exposed. If a draft blew in, her entire chest would be on display. She wore a comfortable pair of light blue cotton underwear, simple and adorned only with a tiny print saying "cutie pie" underneath her right hip.

"You work out," was all Harry could say. These blasted seventeen/twelve year old hormones!

"Yes, it is one of the few things I love to do."
Harry gulped as she approached. He guided her to the wooden column and took her height. She was five foot nine inches.

He wrote that down. A bead of perspiration began to form on his forehead. The place was warm, but he doubted that was the reason. Then he realized to take her spinal measurement she needed to remove the hospital gown. When he stepped behind her, she shrugged the gown halfway off her shoulders, then hesitated. She stopped immediately.

"You were right," Valerian said, suddenly shy.

"About?"

"My crafters for my armor and weapons were women. This feels a bit sexual," she admitted, embarrassed. "A boy has never seen me... before."

"Do you want to stop?" Harry said, watching the contours of her shoulders peeking above the light green garment wrapped around her arms.

"No. We have already begun. You will be, gentle, will you?" She asked, turning around. There was a slight fear in her eyes.

"Yes, um," Harry stammered. "Is there a rough way to do this?" He asked dumbly. Gentle? He was taking measurements, not...

"My attacker," she began softly. "He stood behind me, like how you were just now. He was close, but when I felt his hands, I didn't know what was going to happen. I thought it was a massage for tense muscles after physical training. Then it..." she took a breath. "Became possessive, frightening. He was strong, so strong."

Oh fuck. She was freaking out.

"Val," Harry said softly. "You don't have to say anything if you don't want to." She ignored him, just looking towards her toes as she went on.

"He was saying all these nice things, about how beautiful I became, how proud he was. I was petrified. I didn't know what to do. Hearing praise coming through his voice, but feeling his hands touching, pushing me down. I... froze. I was so stupid. I," Valerian paused. "I allowed him to massage my back... for a little while. Then he..." she covered her chest protectively. "took off my undergarments. He... put his hands..."

"It's okay," Harry consoled her. "You're okay now."

"When... it started... that was when I fought. A short struggle later he abruptly collapsed. I have never told anyone," Valerian confessed, still staring at the ground between them. "I do not know why I am telling you now. You are not Kolarov. You are the Slayer of the Dragon."

"Yeah, I guess." Harry stood there with his measuring tape dangling from his fingers, feeling like an idiot. He knew girls could do weird things when put in a compromising situation; but he didn't expect Valerian to go this deep though. Maybe what she really needed was a proper one on one talk. He may not be the ideal person to have this chat with, but it was happening, so he remained patient, quietly listening to her.

Valerian stood silently, her hands covering her chest, still looking at her feet. Despite all her physicality, she looked vulnerable, lost, and alone. Harry took off his Hogwarts outer robe and covered her shoulders. Another minute passed in silence.
"Can you show me what a Patronus charm is?" she said quietly. "Master Ollivander said it is a spell using a powerful, happy memory."

Harry thought that it was a strange request. "Sure. But you need to keep this a secret. Second years should not be able to do this magic." He drew his Troll on Holly wand.

Valerian laughed. "Are other second years capable of flight and slaying a dragon in full rage?"

"No, I guess not." Harry returned her smile.

"Your secrets are safe with me," she pulled his cloak tightly around her.

Harry thought about a really strong, happy memory. His first thought was Tonks' and his shared kiss in his older form, but then the incident in the great-room overshadowed that. Life and Fate were at it again. Being doubted and accused of being the heir to Voldemort happened before in his second year. Now it had happened again, from Tonks, of all people.

He was mature enough to admit that it still stung. The happy memory of their kisses weren't strong enough. Dumbledore's office swam into his memory.

"Excellent work, Harry."

"Sirius' exoneration hearing would be next held week."

Dumbledore spoke to him in a manner of one powerful wizard recognizing another's exceptional magic at work, instead of congratulating a student for doing well at studies. The headmaster was pleased, with genuine respect that a young wizard had proved him wrong, and not done it to simply show him up, but to help those that could not help themselves.

A true Gryffindor.

He felt happiness swell within him.

"Little James."

Magic pooled inside of Harry. Sirius' voice was different this time around. Regardless of his speech problem, his voice was relaxed, positive; instead of a hoarse growl, suspicious and always wary of being caught. Harry had made sure that was not happening this time.

"The Light was reigned."

Sirius' dread of his brother dying as a Dark wizard was rebutted. Harry's eyes began to glow a blinding white.

"Home is where the heart is..."

Sirius being free, really free and able to live life as a British magical citizen, was the happiest feeling he could summon right now.

"Expecto Patronum!"

A massive, larger than life Lion leapt from his wand. The Lion grumbled a low roar, hunched over, then spread beautiful phoenix wings from his back. The Lion flapped twice, and levitated in front of Harry, regarding him with curiosity.

Valerian's eyes opened wide, her hands blocking her nose and mouth in awe. Harry was astounded.
Was this what he sent to summon the others when Hermione was attacked?

"'The Risen, the Sword of the Light, Sworn into service of the Lion'," Valerian whispered, remembering what Jon told her on the ridge. "You are the Lion," Valerian deduced, coming close to inspect the creature. Harry did come, a bit late though, to finish the dragon.

Better late than never, she thought.

"Jon likes to make these epic proclamations," Harry explained, trying to use as much deflection magic as possible. "I am me. That's all."

The Lion faded away. Valerian felt a warmth and contentment envelop her after seeing that spell. She smiled at him, feeling her confidence return.

"Come. Let us finish the Ritual," she ordered, folding his cloak on the table. She faced away from him and removed the hospital garment entirely. She pulled down her underwear to the middle of her buttocks and lifted her hair. "Spine first right?"

"Arms, I think," Harry gulped. She extended her arm out from her body. The smooth, lean muscles rippled slightly across her toned back and shoulders. This girl was a work of art.

"Very well. I put myself in your capable hands."

Harry took the measurements of her arm. Her skin was cool, and her arms were firm. Then she lifted her long hair away from the base of her neck. Both of her shoulders contoured with a smooth flex of muscle. Harry ran the tape measure down her spine, and ended at the coccyx bone.

Harry felt like he was cheating on Tonks, Hermione, Katie, and even Ginny, to some extent. That should not have even made any sense. He wasn't in a 'relationship'.

Wait. Penelope.

Harry used his occlumency and shut out any entry to his feelings. The strange feeling faded away.

"Harry?" Valerian asked.

"Yes?" Harry said, snapping himself back to reality.

"If you are trying to tickle me, you are doing a great job," Valerian said with a soft laugh. Harry immediately removed his hand from her backside.

"Sorry. Now, are you ok with the..." Harry gulped.

"Yes. Go ahead."

Harry took measurements of her chest, ribs, waist, and legs. He didn't even blink when he stood up in front of her to take measurements of her eyes. But he had to admit her body was amazing. As soon as he was finished he thanked her and told her that her wand would be ready before Christmas.

"Thank you. May I borrow your wand for a moment?" Valerian asked after she had dressed.

"Um. Okay. What do you want to try?" Well she wasn't one to beat around the bush.


"It's complex, but sure. My wand is excellent at Light magic. Envision and feel a powerful happy
memory, and try to summon the Light to protect you, at the same time. Use this combination and picture an entity that would best serve you to come to your aid."

Valerian took the wand, and closed her eyes. She summoned her happiest memory. "Expecto Patronum!"

A Pegasus formed from Harry's wand, serene and clad in shining battle armor. The patronus reared then ran around her.

"Wow, on the first try too!" Harry exclaimed.

Valerian felt an epiphany. She immediately went to the table.

"Height, five foot nine inches," she read from his log book. "Thirty two bust, twenty three waist, thirty six around the hip." She positively beamed. She began to laugh with joy. "Onyx spinal cord tendon on Holly, thirteen inches stem, six inches on handle."

"You can read?" Harry said in excitement. "Brilliant!" Harry congratulated her. He offered her a high five. Valerian ignored it, and to Harry's amazement, grabbed him in a hug and planted a firm kiss on his cheek. Harry vaguely registered that her body was soft, and feminine, even though she was in excellent shape. Her unexpected kiss on his cheek was feeling hot on his face.

"Master Ollivander hinted that the Patronus Charm was the embodiment of happy Light magic! And my ailment may have been inflicted by my grief when I was young!"

"You countered it?"

"No. I conquered it," she grinned. "Thanks to you, Harry." She was still holding unto him.

"That's great, Val! I'm really happy for you." He let her go.

"Jon chose well," Valerian said, reading through his notes. "I can't believe it. Thank you so much," a tear rolled down her eye as she read through the different pages. "Truly the Wizard of the Light."

She came across and hugged him again, tightly. "Even me hugging you is a sign of healing. I have never hugged anyone like this. The last full hug I remembered was my father's." She squeezed him once more for emphasis. "Thank you!"

No wonder she considered the creepy trainer and Master Kastav as father figures. Any sort of paternal care was an automatic fill in. Harry rubbed her back in congratulations. This Ritual had very strange side effects on girls. Or was it him? At least she was fully clothed, albeit in her tight outfit.

"You're welcome," Harry said.

The both of them left the workshop. When they told Alexandria of the good news, the girl just looked in disbelief between the both of them. "Read this." She turned the heavy book towards Valerian.

"The posterior of the parietal lobe is responsible for attention. The left parietal lobe is responsible for reading, writing, arithmetic, and the recollection of learned information. Its other function is speech."

"Congratulations!" she excitedly gave Valerian a hug. She hugged Harry as well. "Figures you'd be the one." She clapped him on his shoulder. Alexandria opened Valerian's treatment log and wrote: 'Cured by Harry J. Potter and Valerian V. Steel. Patronus Charm.'
She shut the heavy book *The Magical Brain* with a solid thud. "I will send word to the Professor, and Madame Pomfrey. I will also cancel with Hagrid. You will need to spend the night until Madame comes back in the morning to check you out. She will want to hear of this." Alexandria studied the tall girl. "I am *sooo* curious. What happy memory enabled you to cast the Patronus?"

If Valerian mentioned anything about Jon, well... she will cross that bridge when it comes. However, she didn't expect her to say anything - memories that powerful would be private, and guarded. But her Gryffindor inner voice meant that she should at least try to glean the information.

"The Winged Lion made of the purest Light. The Mighty Gryffon that guards the mythical realm of Asgard."

Harry choked. Jon and Valerian definitely needed to start a Hogwarts Poetry Club. Probably name it "Nothing is Sacred" as well. Valerian abruptly wrapped Harry in a one armed hug around his shoulders. She tugged him into her side. Harry was still amazed at how strong she was.

"He has a beautiful patronus."

Harry felt somewhat objectified by that statement. But it was kind of empowering too. Every guy wanted to hear how beautiful his 'Patronus' was.

Alexandria stared at Harry for a few seconds. "Hermione told me about you. Then, I did not believe. Now I do. Truly the 'Light that Pierces the Darkness'."

"Not you too," Harry argued, defeated. The club membership was growing by the minute.

"I was skeptical before, but the truth is the truth," Alexandria shrugged. "With your permission, may I record your happy memory in the treatment log?"

"Only if Harry agrees," Valerian smiled at him. Harry was getting uncomfortable with all the smiles, and all the hugs. Scratch that, the hugs felt really nice.

"Is that log confidential?" Harry asked. Valerian had relaxed next to him, now her body felt more soft and feminine. He put his arm around her waist and gently returned the squeeze. It felt good there. Valerian didn't seem to mind.

"I can enchant the confidentiality clause. It will be unlocked upon direct request."

"Sure, go ahead," Harry agreed.

"Done." Alexandria tapped her wand on the file folder. Harry and Valerian thanked her and then walked arm in arm towards her medical station. Valerian was prattling eagerly about all the catching up of reading she had to do. Harry let her speak as they took their time to reach down the aisle. At her bedside she let him go, then snapped her feet together.

"Lord DragonSlayer," Valerian put her fist to her chest in salute. "I am in your debt."

"Stop it," Harry sighed. "You saved me first, remember."

"You have repaid that debt a hundred fold by saving all of us and the townsfolk. This debt is brand new." There was that bloody female twinkle in her eye. Harry grinned at her, shaking his head. As soon as he could he was going to petition to the Confederation of International Mugwumps to have that practice banned under "advantageous magic deemed unacceptable in peacetime."

"Stop, stop, no. And no. There is no debt or anything like that. Carry on, Starshina Steel." Harry
commanded. He had to resort to a language these soldiers used.

"Very good. You're catching on," Valerian grinned and took his right hand in both of hers, a touching gesture of thanks. "I was only joking by the way."

"You don't joke," Harry said, suspicious.

"Now, it seems I can!" she giggled. She spontaneously grabbed him again in a hug. "I'll see you tomorrow, Harry. Thank you once again," she whispered in her Russian accent into his ear.

"Cool. Tomorrow then." Harry waved as she sat on her bed. In this aspect she was just like Jon, and needed to work on her jokes. "Later." Why did walking away from her feel like he just escorted Valerian home from a date? Maybe because their short encounter had all the emotional range probably associated with getting to know someone with a lot of baggage going on.

Alexandria grinned at him as he came back to the front desk. "Good work, Roderick Hallow. No wonder my mother trusts in you. And thank you for laying to rest my anxiety.

"How is she going? Tell her thanks again. And you're sure she's okay with Sirius staying by Jon's place until school is out?"

"In her last letter she says that he sleeps most of the time, and eats. He's walking without the walking stick, but he is still weak. He enjoys breaking his fast on the porch. He hasn't seen sunrises in a long time. He said he will write you as soon as his hand gets better. He doesn't want to dictate it to mom."

"That's alright." Harry felt a sense of contentment. Sirius was on the mend and most importantly, a free man.

"And how did your tests go?" Alexandria asked as the conversation died down.

"It was fine," Harry shrugged.

Harry absolutely murdered those easy exams. He had to make sure Slytherin didn't win the year prize, after all. They might have had the upper hand during term coursework, but the term finals was his.

Fuck Snape and his academic 'warfare'. He and Hermione had this, even though Hermione had no idea Harry was suddenly going to become a genius second year. Hermione was giving him eyes during the past week. Harry didn't avoid her, but he always made sure that they were among friends. "Later then."

"A plus tard, Harry," she waved with a smile. Harry left, feeling much better about things than he did in a long while.

The next day was Saturday. Exams were finished and the second round of the dueling tournament was in full swing.

Harry did not waste any time with Daphne Greengrass. He immediately dazzled her with a Lumos Sun Flare spell, then levitated the charmed rugs on either side of the dueling platform to grab her in a soft, cuddly, Daphne sandwich. He gently levitated her off the table and put her down next to her Slytherin house mates.

"Decision. With a round time of four seconds by platform elimination. Winner, Potter." Snape shook his head in resignation as Harry jumped down without a word, heading over to Daphne to shake her
"You could have at least made it look like I was a challenge..." she grumbled, blinking rapidly. "I'm still seeing stars a bit."

"Drink any alcoholic beverage. That'll clear your vision immediately," he whispered in her ear.

"I don't drink alcohol! I'm twelve!" she giggled.

"It will clear completely in a couple hours. It isn't permanent," he placated her. "Wait, I can get someone to sort you out." He called Valerian over, who was dressed in a plain black Hogwarts robe, without house insignia. She was standing next to Alexandria and Madame Pomfrey. He whispered something in her ear and she nodded.

"I will be right back." Valerian ran upstairs towards the hospital wing. Harry chatted with Daphne, telling her what was happening in Draco's duel. Draco was on a mission, and kept using a combination of a tripping jinx, then *Expelliarmus*, attacking low, then high, then low again. Justin had obviously done some research on counters, because he managed to block *Expelliarmus* with well timed *Expelliarmus* casts of his own, creating some impressive spell collisions. Justin countered the tripping jinx with a leg locker block, causing his feet to remain firmly planted on the table.

"*Rictusempra!*" Justin shouted in between volleys. Draco got caught with the simple tickling charm, rubbing his ribs and laughing uncontrollably. A well executed *Expelliarmus* later and Justin was the winner.

Harry laughed at Snape's disgusted expression after he announced Justin as the victor. He cancelled the tickling charm on Draco a bit harder than warranted, making Draco jump off the table, rubbing his sore bum where Snape's counter hit. Daphne scowled.

"He's out for good then," Daphne said, squinting at Draco's red face. "Two losses."

"Yeah." Valerian returned and gave Harry a small vial in his hand. "This is a drop of Russian Vodka mixed with Skrewt stinger oil. Go ahead. It's fantastic, and you won't feel cold for the rest of the day."

Daphne drank it down, and immediately felt her cheeks warm up, even in the chilly great hall. The dazzling effect hampering her vision was gone. "Wow. That is good!" she said, colour rushing to her cheeks. "Thanks!"

"Same thing I said," Harry agreed. "You going back in?"

"Nah. Only the strongest would be in round three- then its the pyramid stage. I think I prefer to watch, and brush up for next year, if there is something like this again."

"Alright, catch you up later, yeah?"

"Later, champ," Daphne said amicably.

Harry came across to his Gryffindor mates. Jon was watching the proceedings carefully, his arms folded across his chest. He was wearing plain clothes today. He was dressed in a fashionable white short sleeve shirt with a dragon stitch artfully embroidered on the sleeve. He was also wearing his black Jeans and motorcycle boots.

"Casual Dueling Saturdays?" Harry asked. Jon smiled, but did not divert his attention from the stage.
"Ron is doing well," Jon responded. Harry looked up to the stage. This time Ron had Crabbe literally on the ropes, trying his best to absorb or deflect Ron's continuous banishing spells. Crabbe teetered on the edge of the table, and was eventually pushed off. There was a lusty round of applause from the first and second year Gryffindors.

Jon clapped a few times as well. Harry immediately noticed that Jon wore a slim black band on his wrist, with a tiny black cauldron as a pendant.

"Is that a favour?" Harry asked, intrigued.

"Yes. It is my name day."

"Oh. Happy name day, Jon."

"My real name is Aegon," Jon whispered. "But that is between us."

"Oh, that's why she called you that."

"Yes. Valerian. She knows I am the Risen, and the Sword of the Light. She doesn't know what it means though."

"Oh ho, about that- yes she knows," Harry said. "She put two and two together last night. You need to stop it with your heroic statements before you do something quite idiotic. I haven't told you off for facing a dragon, have I?"

"Have you faced a dragon before?" Jon countered out the side of his mouth. Dean had destroyed his opponent in two moves. Patil was up next.

"Yes. And ridden one as well. You know nothing, Jon Snow."

"Oh? My father was the heir apparent to the Dragon King. The Targaryen family. My full name is Aegon Targaryen."

"Orrrr- that name sounds bad ass. Well, happy name day, Aegon," Harry offered him his fist. Jon connected absently.

"I have decided that I will defend myself against Mistress Hermione. Hopefully go for a draw so that I may re-enter against a different opponent."

"A draw is a loss. You never came across to me as someone who accepted defeat easily. And what would Alexandria think? Isn't that favour supposed to be a symbol of showing her total commitment and support for your eventual victory?"

Jon inspected the gift from Alexandria with a fond expression. "You are right, Harry of House Hollow. Victory, is what is due to Alexandria on this day. Nothing less." He nodded in thanks. "You are borne to be a General, Dragonslayer."

Harry blanched. "Um-"

"Hermione will face the full brunt of my attack. May the Gods show mercy on her soul," Jon declared, looking across to Hermione with his best battle glare. Hermione waved at the both of them, oblivious to their conversation. Harry hesitantly returned her wave. Jon tipped his head in due respect to a worthy opponent.

"No- wait, I don't mean-" Harry whispered, panicking.
Jon smirked. "Prepare the flowers and incense for ship burial rites over the Black Lake. Gather your scribes to compose her eulogy. You should do well to honor her life with a great speech of bravery, and hair styling."

Harry finally caught on. Jon really needed to work on his delivery. "You are simply ghastly with your jests, good ser."

"Similarly to that joke, I did not prepare a sequence of attack. I will have to improvise." As if on cue, Drinkwater's voice boomed over the lower school assembled in the great hall.

"Black and Granger, you're up!"

Jon nodded to Harry, then immediately went across to Alexandria.

"Your beauty and kind heart radiates through this token of favour, milady. It shall augment my strength, and your smile empowers my spirit. This victory will be offered in your honor, dearest Alexandria." Jon took her hand gently and bowed over it.

"Oui," Alexandria whispered as she blushed. Angelina, Shea, and Susan Bones begin fanning themselves dramatically, giggling at Alexandria's shocked face.

At the same time Hermione came up to Harry, smiling uncertainly. "Any tips?"

Harry returned her smile. "I don't know. Whatever you do, you need to attack his weak spot, and do it quickly. He's a tough son of a witch," Harry said jokingly.

"Ok," Hermione agreed. "A hug for good luck?" she asked shyly, opening her palms face up. Harry immediately enveloped her in a hug. Hermione squeezed her appreciation with a strong grip.

"Good luck, Hermione," he smiled at her with sincerity.

"Thanks," she smiled, then went up on the dueling platform. Harry could not see the lowered eyebrows of Katie watching their encounter.

Immediately after the count, Hermione crouched and cast a sticking charm on the middle of the table, then an animation spell to make Jon's end of the table curve into a steep slide, making him slide towards the sticky trap in the centre.

Jon maintained his balance on the slide then threw himself into a forward dive. He cleared the sticky trap with a neat combat roll, closing the distance with a fluid grace. Hermione cast a powerful banishing charm at Jon, but he simply blocked the spell with the invisible bracer on his left arm, not even breaking stride. The crowd gasped in wonder at that impossible display of skill. Jon kept coming, his quick strides eating up the distance between them.

Hermione got flustered, casting Expelliarmus at Jon. Alexandria's favor shot off his wrist in a high arc towards her. Hermione saw her mistake- Jon had not drawn his wand as yet. Glancing up at the flying bracelet, Jon closed the distance upon her. He expertly countered the jabbing motion of her next incantation by deflecting her wrist. He slipped inside and brought her down with a hip toss.

Harry grimaced. He had practiced that same move over and over with Jon.

Hermione shrieked at how easily she was thrown. She put up a fight when she fell hard against the table. In a fluid motion Jon wrenched the wand from her fingers then knelt on her collarbone, pinning her underneath him. In that same motion he caught the small band with cauldron pendant with the tip of her temporary wand. The bracelet fell neatly around his fingers.
Jon let out a deep breath. Hermione was panting heavily, defeated and disoriented. She admitted that Jon was *fast*.

"Decision! With a round time of six seconds by wand disarming-" Snape's terminology changed to allow the word 'wand' before disarming, considering what happened to Oliver Wood- "Winner, Black."

There wasn't much applause, except from Alexandria and her crew of Jon fan girls. Jon helped up Hermione, who was rubbing her shoulder area. He returned her wand. Everyone was whispering on how Jon appeared to be invincible against magic. He won both duels without casting a spell.

"You fought well, Mistress Hermione," he said simply. He gave her a short bow and stepped off the table. Hermione rotated her right arm, working out the pain. Hermione blew out a deep breath, blowing away the bushy hair that had escaped over her face.

Harry sighed. At least it was over. Anyway he looked at it, they were both his friends. And knowing Hogwarts, throwing a duel because of some psychological issue would not go down well with the rest of the school. He was pretty sure that the whole school was betting on Jon to win the second year trophy. After all he took out Lockhart, while Harry had gotten himself seriously injured, almost killed.

Actually, considering how bets worked, gambling on Jon had the least return on investment. If everyone thought he would win, then the payout would be low, shouldn't it?

Harry came over to Hermione, who was rotating her shoulder in her socket to work out the kinks. "Sorry. Told you he was tough." He consoled her with a hug. At this rate he would be the Hogwarts tri-witch champion.

"I tried to stop him charging me with the sticky trap. He is freakishly agile, and fast. Kind of like a cat." Hermione rubbed his back, once, then twice. She even drank in his smell while doing it. "Thanks for the advice, which went completely out my head when he *looked* at me. He has this... I dunno... warrior glare. Unsettling."

"I'd say more like a wolf, actually." Jon came back next to him after receiving his customary hug from Alexandria. Hermione excused herself and retreated towards Ron and Ginny.

"Jon. You did what you had to."

"Yes."

"How do you feel?"

"Akin to ripping out my rib with my bare hands and flaying a kitten with it, slowly, over the course of a day."

"Ah," Harry said lamely.

"Oh. I was supposed to tell you. Some of Alexandria's friends wish to spend Christmas time with her near to Hogsmeade. Word has spread that Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry would be singing Carols in the square. And to those interested in our band, the night before that there would be our performance in the Hog’s head."

"Really?"

"Yes. I believe Miss Tonks has agreed to let Alexandria's friends stay over at the Clan house for the
few days. One of her very good friends, I believe her name was Fleur, is celebrating her sixteenth birthday on the same night. She is coming along with her younger sister and some of the ladies from the party would also be coming. Melisse Payet, Ramellie and Rylai, some others.

"Fleur is turning sixteen? You danced with her at Alexandria's party."

"Yes, I remember."

"And her friends," Harry repeated.

"Yes, for a few days. Tonks, Alexandria and I already ordered furniture, supplies, and Master Ollivander fixed the hot water pipes."

"Oh, okay," Harry said. "This is news."

"You have been busy in the workshop. Spending long hours past curfew, if I recall correctly."

"True. How many guests are we talking about?"

"About eight."

Considering Sirius and Eleanor Potage were also coming up for the holidays, the place would be full. Add to the list the female members of the Crow’s Vambrace, the mansion would be full of girls. And he was only freaking twelve years old. Life and Fate were definitely having a go this time around.

"A convincing victory, Jon," Valerian congratulated him as she came across.

"Mistress Steel," Jon acknowledged. "You are well?"

"Yes I am. Quite well, and healed." She smiled across at Harry, who appeared to be embarrassed. Jon stood between the both of them, arms folded, facing the stage. The three of them subconsciously assumed the same stance, shoulder to shoulder, taking in the duels.

Jon could feel that things had changed.

"You measured her." Jon declared, his eyes never leaving the combatants on the dueling platform. Harry grunted positively, while Valerian bit her bottom lip. The Crows stood side by side, silently taking in the performance. Jon sighed.

"You wish conflict upon our happy house, Harry of House Hallow?"

"What conflict?" Harry replied, feigning ignorance. Tonks and he had a crush/puppy-love/kick in the head type relationship. Jon wouldn't understand.

"Once our agreement stands, I shall stay out of it." Jon clapped at Seamus Finnigan's victory. "Good. An emphatic house victory, excepting for Mistress Hermione. It has been a good second year performance. Time for lunch."

While the rest of the school filtered to the other side of the great hall to settle down to eat, Harry escaped through the Quidditch exit. He put on his World Wizard Gear dueling mask and jumped out into the bright, cold sky. Time to pay Tonks a visit.

"To what do I owe this pleasure, Harry?" Tonks was dressed in a plain black witch's over robe. Harry was standing in the doorway of the correspondence room. She was currently filing books on the shelves, creating a library.
"Take a look at this," Harry offered his apprentice logbook for her to see. Tonks looked at the diagram and list of components necessary for her build.

"Four feet?" Tonks said, baffled. "How am I supposed to cast with this?" She glanced at him, then studied the diagram again. Harry grinned at her. He sat down at the stationery table and sketched a passable semblance of Tonks holding the Dragon talon-bone against her shoulder, aiming down the length of it. The weapon was jammed against her shoulder, the right hand holding the Y intersection handle roughly halfway down the length, with the spell crystal located at the bottom of the grip.

"The crystal is in the wrong place." She frowned, touching her hand to her chin. "Shouldn't it be at the tip?"

"That's the beauty of this design. I'm taking the principle from the Auror's Spell Globe. You know what they are?"

"Yes, tools designed for specific magical tasks."

"This would be your Spell Reservoir, or ammo clip. You charge up the crystal with spells that can resonate within the flat surfaces inside it, aim, and channel a spark of magic to activate it. Rapid fire, or one single, powerful shot, which the optic nerve would be able to constrict, or expand, based on the distance. Would work really well with your super vision."

"If this works..." Tonks bit her lip in anticipation. "This is genius. Great idea." Harry accepted her praise with a grim nod. "So," Tonks drawled. "Unless you have it in your back pocket, this could have been handled by post."

"The Ritual of Anthroprometry. You've heard of it?"

"No. What is that?" Tonks asked lightly. "Wait, no, let me guess, some pervy way of you getting my clothes off?"

"In a nutshell, yes."

"Figures."

"I need to take your measurements, against your skin."

"Your Darkness knows no bounds, Dragonslayer," she grinned. "Man, for a wand like that," she shrugged, then give him a wink. "We actually have a darning room, with mirrors and all that. Follow me."

Tonks led Harry into a servant's quarters near the back door, then through another door on the inside. The room was rectangular and twice as long as it was wide. On both walls of the room were ceiling high wardrobes, designed for double hanging of garments. Two long hanging rods ran down the length of both walls, with a few coat hangers left abandoned on them. Two sewing treadles, steam presses, full length mirrors, rocking chairs, lounges and cushioned footstools were scattered throughout the room.

"This room has the best lighting in the whole house, magical and non magical." Tonks clapped her hands and the lights came on. She turned dramatically, "I love this room. It feels like a theater production- costumes, wigs, bickering, I love it."

She froze when she spotted Harry. Harry was wearing super puffy earmuffs. She frowned at him, then pointed to her ear.
"Oy, what's that? Couldn't hear you."

"What are those for?" she complained.

"Better safe, than swollen," Harry said with the straightest face possible.

"Oh, that's good," Tonks twisted her mouth. "So- how do we do this?"

"Let me zip on up and get you a bathrobe-"

Tonks shrugged. Harry levitated on the spot, leaned backwards and glided out the room. By the time he came back with the robe, the room was dimmed, with the recessed lighting only illuminating the empty wardrobes. A fire was lit in the tiny fireplace at the end of the room. Tonks had taken off her robe, sitting on the lounge in underwear.

Suddenly, Harry knew that this was his sternest test yet. The room whispered of secret meetings and private trysts. The multiple mirrors created a romantic flickering of the fireplace, casting a warm glow on the beige carpet.

Tonks stood up. She was resplendent in her simple white underwear and matching bra. Her hair was her natural black colour. The glow of the fire highlighted her smooth, gentle curves. Harry gathered his courage and let the innocent measuring tape unravel between his fingers like a whip, arming himself for battle. When he stepped close, his gut started to clench with butterflies.

Tonks stood at ease, her hands hanging limply at her sides.

Oh my gosh

"So hotshot, how do we do this?" Tonks asked. Harry was slightly taken back. He had grown at least two inches since the summer. He didn't have to look up as much to see in her eyes. He got the impression she noticed this as well.

"Height, arms, Spine, bust and torso, then hips and outer and inner seams of the legs. Finally, distance between the eyes."

"You know I can change these at will. Would the ritual still work?"

"I am designing the weapon with the ability to expand or constrict the wand core thickness. I took your specific ability into consideration already."

Tonks offered her arm, Harry took the reading and wrote it down.

"Right, you need to unclasp this, lift your hair, and lower the waistband of the undies. I need to measure base of skull to coccyx."

"Ooh, way down there?" Tonks questioned. "Bet you couldn't wait to do this. Be careful with those hands." She unclasped her bra, and inched her underwear lower on her butt. Harry took a deep breath, and took her measurements. When he had finished taking the inner seam of her leg, Harry's head was swimming.

"Cripes. That was more intense than I expected," Tonks said hoarsely. She quickly summoned the bathrobe and covered herself. She looked at Harry, who was definitely blushing. He stood up in front of her, the measuring tape shaking between his fingers. Tonks gently held his shaking fingers in both hands. "Whoa there Casanova. Deep breaths," she smiled.
Harry nodded, and finally managed to get the measurements of her eyes. When he wrote this down, he took a few moments to compose himself.

"Harry," Tonks said softly, right behind him. "I have some great news," she said in a tone that seemed like the news was actually the complete opposite.

Harry turned towards her. "Hm?"

"I've been accepted into the second phase of the Auror program. I'm officially going to be one in two years." Her enthusiasm level was absolutely zero.

"Congratulations," Harry said, not sure if he should hug her, or not. Tonks made the decision for him.


"You're leaving," Harry said softly, not letting her go.

"Yes. I've been streamed into warmage training. The most demanding career: theoretical knowledge-wise and intelligence gathering skills-wise; aspect of British foreign policy."

"Does that you mean you-" Harry trailed off.

"Yes. Come January second, I will no longer be an active participant of the Crows."

"What does a warmage do?"

"A warmage is a trained diplomatic agent, with specialization in Legal, Societal, and Political intelligence. I would be trained in languages, culture, and clandestine operations. Totally top secret stuff. I report to both the Department of Mysteries, and the office of Ministry of International co-operation. I will also need to keep tabs on potentially dangerous political figures and wizards of influence."

"Dark Lords Rising."

She nodded sadly. "It is more than I had ever hoped for. My practicals were the highest scores this year. That, and my natural shape shifting ability were the main reasons my shot in the dark application came back positive. Plus I'm young, and a woman. I don't have the browbeaten bureaucratic resistance that experienced Aurors are affected by."

"Greyback was asking us if we were warmages the other day. Who are the others?"

"Yeah. We have four experienced ones right now. That's all that I know. They operate all over the world. I'm going to train under our only female operative. I don't even know where, or who she is."

It did not escape Harry's attention that he was actually hugging her inside of her bathrobe, his bare arms against her skin. She was soft, much softer than Valerian, and her ample chest was pressed against his. Tonks was looking into the fire, her arms simply draped over his shoulders, idly touching the back of his hair. She was staring into the flames, something that Jon told her his red witch from Westeros did. Tonks was relaxed, composed, not even doing her thing. Harry experimented by gently rubbing her back, and to his immediate pleasure, she snuggled closer into him.

She rest her head on his shoulder.
"I couldn't have gotten this without you, and Jon."

"We worked together, luv," Harry responded. She raised her head and looked him in the eyes.

"This would be our first, and probably, only Christmas together in a long while, Potter."

Harry groaned an affirmative. *Together. That sounded, like, nice.* Tonks re-assumed the comfortable spot on his shoulder. "I'll come to the show, then stick around until Christmas eve. Mrs. Potage will take control of base at that time, and probably Sirius too. I wonder if he even remembers me?"

"He's recovering. But he still remembers most things." They just stood there, holding each other. Harry's heart was breaking.

"I'll be home with my parents for the holidays, then, yeah." She made a gesture, opening her closed fingers into a flourish.

"Gone," Harry translated.

"This may sound selfish... but..."

"Yeah?"

"How long can you do your glamour for?"

"Indefinitely, I guess."

"Do it," Tonks commanded. Harry grew, right where he was. Tonks grinned at him and conjured a mistletoe above their heads. The both of them looked up, smiled, then they came together for a kiss. The snog became heated and Harry's hands were roaming all over her body. When he unclasped her bra, and ran his hands over her breasts, Tonks hesitated. Harry continued to explore but she eventually stopped his hands. She pushed them down to a safe zone on her hips, and kissed him possessively. She pulled away slightly.

"I can't, Harry. This is still too, y'know, taboo. I would definitely regret going further, even though..." -she looked up at his older face- "this is who you really are. But we aren't in a bubble, luv. The world turns, and there are people in our lives. I can't be *that* girl you only visit in secret." She kissed the tip of his nose in a cute, girlish manner. "I really, really like you, Harry. But maybe... maybe now isn't the time."

Harry knew this was going to happen ever since Jon had that one on one with him in the storage room behind the garage. The timing was horrible. She pulled him back into a firm hug.

"I'll see you at the show, hotshot. You better get going before you're missed," she said, her eyes damp with emotion.

Harry's heart was descending into the pit of his stomach. His lips were still tingling from their snog. His voice came out in a croak. "Yeah. I will make sure you will get your gift before you leave, Nymphadora."

"Ok," she nodded absently. She stared into his green eyes. "You'll be fine," Tonks said sadly, her hands light on his shoulders. She rubbed the hairs on his cheek softly.

"Maybe," Harry said with a fake smile on his face.

"I'll be fine too..." A teardrop actually rolled down her cheek. They stared at each other for a few seconds. "Kiss me, damn you."
He did, passionately. The mistletoe magic eventually faded. The spell was broken.

"I'll see you in Hogsmeade next week," she said sadly when they parted.

"Yeah," Harry replied.

"Till then, luv."

"Later, Tonks." Harry left, waving once at the doorway to the darning room. He didn't see Tonks sink unto the cushioned footstool, and begin to cry.

That Saturday evening Harry contacted Eleanor Potage, Judith Wood and Healer Wanderly Warthington requesting a meeting at Hogwarts before school closed. The Leaving feast was December twenty third, and students were being sent home for the holidays on Christmas Eve. To his surprise, Hedwig brought him a swift response. They would meet him on Sunday.

The adults were present for a meeting nine o'clock Sunday morning. Present was Alexandria’s mother Eleanor, Oliver’s mother Judith, Healer Warthington, Professors McGonagall, Headmaster Dumbledore, Madame Pomfrey and Alexandria in the Infirmary waiting room.

Harry had brought down his chalkboard diagrams, theories, and written notes he and Jon had researched from *The Vitruvian Man*. He tried his best to write a concise essay about the Sectumsempra spell.

After tea was served, Madame Pomfrey stood up before Harry could explain the summary.

"Before you start, Harry, please let me inform those present of your remarkable accomplishments since the summer break. Katherine Bell, poisoned and hexed by a rogue student, has been healed by Mr. Potter's quick intervention with help from a past student, Miss Tonks. Also, Penelope Clearwater, Marcus Filch, and Hermione Granger, have all been healed by this extraordinary young man. And his latest success, a young witch named Miss Valerian Steel, has been suffering under an emotional curse inflicted upon her for close to ten years. She was unable to read for all that time, after being analyzed as a genius level prodigy fluent in four languages by age five. Within a week of being treated at Hogwarts with little success, Mr. Potter and Miss Steel have since last night, found a way to counter the curse, with the expert use of a Patronus charm."

There was a general murmur among the visitors, impressed.

"I will champion his efforts, and will personally make sure there is due diligence before any decisions are made. I just wanted to say that I am proud of you, young man, and hope you continue to excel."

Harry was speechless. He clasped his hands together, smiled and simply said, "Thank You, Madame Pomfrey for such kind words!" He rubbed the back of his head. "I have come across a text: *The Vitruvian Man*, a text that hints the connection between human physiology and magic." Harry presented a brand new copy hastily ordered from Obscurus Journals and Fine Literature, the bookstore on Diagon Alley.

"In summary, I propose a counter to the Sectumsempra Curse, but, reconstructive healing must be immediately done within minutes. The Curse can be countered with a Light magic version of a suspiciously dark blood ritual."

"There is no such thing," Healer Wanderly Warthington countered.
"Oh?" Harry had a feeling the most resistance would come from him. "What about the Ocular restorative used on my left eye?"

"That," Healer Warthington hesitated, "was an exception."

"This can be another exception," Harry nodded, agreeing with the man, yet showing him that his previous statement was incorrect. "Instead of unwilling sacrifice, which is a core element of Darker magic, willing donation would be the main catalyst of healing, a prominent branch of the Light. But, as with all complex magic, timing, bonds, willingness, and intent must all be in alignment."

Harry brought together the four chalkboards he had leaned up against the wall. He expertly levitated the first one and begun his presentation.

"The problem before us: Sectumsempra- the Cutting Curse that Lives Forever. The tissue is cursed to never be fully healed." He tapped his wand on the diagram of a hand holding a wand. The drawing came to life, mimicking the motions and even the sound of the curse, a sword cutting through the air. He was immensely relieved that the animation charm and audio charm didn't fail him before this audience. "Dark, and more effective when the caster is full of hate."

"I propose to counter this with a willing donation of my own blood, which has healing properties of Phoenix tears in it. Then, qualified healers would work to re-attach the severed limb."

Murmurs were exchanged between the main researchers of his Walk In The Light Charity foundation. Dumbledore and McGonagall were taking notes periodically, allowing him to do his presentation without interruption. Alexandria was transfixed, watching Harry. Her quick notes quill was dictating his voice unto parchment.

"When I visited him when he was hospitalized, I promised to help him get his arm back. Oliver was my first mentor, and a good friend of mine. His bravery against the dark wizard was astounding. So now, the details of how to achieve these two objectives."

Harry levitated the second chalkboard. "The counter curse I have developed must be executed with a Unicorn Core, on Holly. Aqua Lustrasonis, roughly meaning 'to purify with water' will counter the 'Cut' aspect of the curse- Sectum. According to your research papers, Healer Warthington, most magical cuts needs a pairing cleansing spell to facilitate healing. I believe this spell would suffice, with the requirement that it be cast with the healing properties associated with the Unicorn and Holly combination."

"Do you know a healer with such a combination?" Healer Warthington objected.

"Alexandria Potage has such a wand," Harry responded. "The cleaning should be routine, once she can successfully cast the spell."

Alexandria nodded dutifully. Madame Pomfrey glanced across to her protege's wand on the table. Harry levitated the next chalkboard.

"The tricky part is countering the Sempra, 'Lives Forever' aspect. This will need Purification by Fire, but not just any Fire. It needs an element of Phoenix tears, which is hot in temperature, yet creates a crisp cool sensation on injuries. In fact, if phoenix tears were to fall on unbroken skin, you will get burned. Also, it would need the fire of blood."

"Blood and fire are elements of the dark, Mr. Potter," Judith Wood cut in.

"'Fire, as a servant, brings people together', Master Ollivander once told me. 'Fire, as a master, is a harbinger of ruin'," Harry quoted Elfric the Eager, one of the heroes in the Goblin Revolution.
"Ten points to Gryffindor," Professor McGonagall said under her breath. That quote was a famous line from the History of Magic text, year One. Harry smiled at her.

"And you are correct, Mrs. Wood. Blood, when used in unwilling sacrifice, is a potent element of the Dark. However, I will, and ever shall, Walk In the Light."

He paused for emphasis.

"My blood, the blood of an ally, willingly given, heated to a boil over a handmade fire, should purify the Sempra aspect of the curse. The Phoenix tears will cast rebirth on the damaged cells, and allow for healing surgery to be completed."

He levitated the final Chalkboard with three diagrams of a wounded amputee in bed. The first diagrammed the depiction of Purification By Water, the Second was Purification by Blood and Fire, the Third showed a team of healers reconnecting the arm.

"I am willing to volunteer my part anytime you are ready. More references and details can be found in my essay. Thank you." Harry took his seat, and sipped his now lukewarm tea. He twisted his face. Almost twenty minutes had passed since his presentation began. It felt like four minutes. His heart was racing.

"Amazing," Madame Pomfrey whispered as she scanned the excerpts taken from various texts proving his theory. "Truly revolutionary."

Harry felt slightly guilty. A lot of this work was reverse engineered by the books Professor Snape accumulated during his time at Hogwarts. At this point in time, if he was responsible for creating the curse, he might as well be plagiarized to help counter it.

Dumbledore conferred between McGonagall on his right, and Pomfrey on his left. There were positive nods of heads and murmurs of agreement. "Once again, excellent work Mr. Potter. I believe this should work, once Aqua Lustrasonis is the correct water Purification Spell. I believe Per Baptismum Aquae might be used as an alternative. Baptism by water. The Curse might have spread through his entire body since the injury occurred. He has not been exposed to objects that can cut, break, or otherwise tear the skin, as precaution."

Mrs. Judith Wood rose from her seat. The resemblance to her handsome son was definitely there. She came forward and offered Harry her hand to shake.

"Very, very good work young man. I shall bring this essay and the presentation notes copied by Miss Potage to the head researcher in St Mungo's. You have brought hope to our family. Thank you," she pumped his hand a few more times. "Thank you, Mr. Potter," she repeated, a dampness coming to her eyes.

"Please, call me Harry. I think it's going to work. I have a really good feeling about this," Harry reinforced with a smile.

"So do I, Harry," she nodded. "And from what I am seeing here, Oliver is going to have a real fighting chance."

Three days later, on the morning of the band's performance in Hogsmeade, Professor Dumbledore informed the heads of house to assemble their students for an impromptu assembly.

Harry knew the reason for this. He had only returned from St Mungo’s a few hours prior. The majority of students, already in holiday mode due to lecture being finished and classes simply being
examination review, were reluctant to congregate early.

Hermione was biting her lip, talking fervently with Katie Bell downstairs in the common room. Dean Thomas and Jon were listening intently, a grim expression on their faces. The other Gryffindors were hastily making their way out the portrait.

"Oh! There you are!" Hermione shouted at Harry, waving him over. "I absolutely hate coincidences like this! We have a concert later tonight and all of a sudden the Headmaster calls assembly! He's going to cancel, I just know it!"

Katie Bell and Hermione were worried, and already frantic to the point of panic. "I can't catch a break," Katie said sadly, watching Harry, then Hermione. Harry had noticed that Katie wasn't pursuing him as much. "I've worked so hard to get this off the ground, but I think she is right."

"No-"

"Oh Harry! I just got word!" Angelina Johnson, the Quidditch captain ran down the girls dormitory at full speed, a letter in her hand. Her long plaits bounced with each step. She was still in her sleepwear, large baggy pajamas and an old t-shirt. Harry recognized the t-shirt as being one of Oliver's, actually. He suspected, but he never knew the two of them were an item. His refusal to offer Angelina any sort of blessing or team tips was probably the reason her meeting as Quidditch captain was so tearful. Maybe they broke up, he didn't know for certain.

Harry smiled at her, but simply put a finger to his lips.

She ran over to him and grabbed him up in a hug. Harry's foot almost left the red rug of the common room. She pulled up, grabbing her lower back, laughing. "Ow! You're heavier than you look, Potter!" She twisted uncomfortably as her back spasmed, yet her laughter was full of joy.

"What's up with you?" Fred and George asked.

"You'll see," Harry yawned. His hand was bandaged. Jon and Katie noticed the new injury. Katie came over to him.

"What happened to your hand?" she asked, taking his hand tenderly.

"Nothing bad, it's for a worthy cause. How you going, Bell?"

"Good, could be better," Katie said, a hopeful smile on her face.

"Come, let's head down and see what's up," Harry said with one his mysterious smiles. He draped his arm over her shoulders in a friendly manner. They exited the common room and headed down to assembly. Katie brightened immediately.

"You've shot up," Katie noted now that they were so close. She touched his arm around her neck.

"Your arm feels heavy."

"Exercising," he yawned.

Katie poked his belly. It was solid. "I did notice you got something going on here when you kit down."


"Maybe. You've been scarce."
"Yeah." They chatted all the way down. Harry felt bad that he didn't really make any effort since the last band practice to talk to her. He suspected something was going on between the Gryffindor girls. When the school was assembled, Headmaster Dumbledore stood up and spread his arms in a grand gesture for silence.

"Good morning, my dear students," he greeted them.

"Good morning, Headmaster," came the robotic response.

"I know many of you associate assembly with dire news, but this time, it is far from that. In fact, I bring tidings of great joy. With some excellent application and dedication from two of our very own, Oliver Wood has been healed. In fact, he's right here." He began clapping towards the sub room behind the teachers table.

Oliver stepped unto the dais, waving his reattached right arm. The motions were a bit stiff, but apart from that, he looked like he had never left.

"For extraordinary services to the school and Bravery in the face of mortal peril, the Board of Hogwarts wishes to reward you with this token of appreciation." Dumbledore presented Oliver with his award for Special Services in Defense of the School, a Ministry recognized Merit of Valor.

After waiting two hours since Harry completed his part, he was told that the procedure was a resounding success. Oliver was resting comfortably at that time. Harry couldn't believe it when he was allowed in to see him. Oliver was in bed. He weakly offered his healed right arm for a fist bump. Harry connected.

"Red lions, for life," Oliver said simply, touching his healed arm to his heart. "Knew you could do it. You kept your promise."

Harry had spent a few minutes with him before they had to put him under with his second dose of painless sleep.

Harry felt a surge of school pride from Oliver's warm reception. Even the Slytherins cheered for him. Oliver made his way down to the Gryffindor table, accepting congratulations and low fives as he walked down toward Harry. The Gryffindors stood up in applause as he passed. Harry stood up when Oliver approached.

"Harry," Oliver called. "Nothing more I can say man, but thank you." Oliver offered his right arm to shake. When Harry took it, Oliver grabbed him up in a firm bro hug. Oliver broke down on Harry's shoulder, crying and laughing at the same time. He thumped Harry's back hard a few times. When they broke apart, Oliver offered him his award. "Put it up on the mantel in the common room, will you? Hold on to it until you graduate. Then bring it back."

Harry accepted the award, and rest it on on the table. "I'll bring it back. And your double championship." Harry performed the mind numbing Gryffindor quidditch team only handshake with him. Oliver didn't miss a beat.

"Almost good as new," Oliver said. "But I've been doing home schooling with the left. It's going to take a while to cast magic with the right again. Something about healing cycles and blah blah blah."

"Quidditch?" Harry asked. Oliver shook his head.

"One whole year to fully recuperate before that happens."

"Damn."
"Man fuck that. I got back my arm!" Oliver grabbed him again. After lots of manly back thumping, Oliver took a seat next to him. "Heard you're going to be a rock superstar."

"No," Harry laughed. "It's just a school thing for tonight."

"You've got a crew of girls from Beauxbatons crowding Hogsmeade station. I should know. I was just there."

"Oh yeah," Harry grinned. "They're actually here for Jon, though. Watch and see."

"You two are bad motherfuckers, Black," Oliver complimented him.

"Don't look at me. You're sitting next to the Wizard of the Light," Jon returned with a grin.

Harry shook his head. "When are they going to serve breakfast?" he deflected the ribbing with a groan of dismay.

Penelope Clearwater was a nervous wreck when she finished dressed. She was standing in front of the mirror, watching her outfit. She and her sister were alone in the room Katie, Shea, Hermione and Alexandria had rented at Rosemerta's for the evening. The other four girls were working with Dean Thomas and Timothy Turner whole evening, organizing and making sure all the preparations were complete.

"You look great. That skirt. Yes. Yes." Sarah nodded. Penelope's skirt was a red and black tartan mini with a chain hanging across the hip. It was scandalously short. "You're lucky. I never got mom's legs. It looks good with the Japanese tall socks."

"What about these?" Penelope lifted the leather knee-length high heels.

"Too cliche?" her sister asked. "Wait, I can transfigure some criss-cross straps to go a bit higher..."

A few seconds later Penelope was comparing a high leather strapped boots on the left leg, the mid-thigh super high socks on the other.

"Do you think he would notice?" Penelope said.

"Peenie, you know what I think about that."

"Yeah," Penelope said, running her hand through her hair. "But he'll get older. Everyone gets older."

"He's dangerous," Sarah warned. "I'm telling you, just... try to stay away."

"He knows," Penelope said remorsefully. "He is a master of Occlumency. And I felt something, something akin to him performing a Patronus charm. That shouldn't be possible."

"Penelope," Sarah said calmly. "You can't. Tonks said not to. Just, trust her, if you don't trust me."

Penelope picked up a small vial Harry had given to all of the crew tonight. It was Skrewt Stinger Oil mixed with Vodka. It was supposed to help combat the cold. After she had taken it, she felt that her original idea of a black mini-vest and bare arms were the way to go.

The top showed off her flat stomach, and sort of nullified her lack of boobs. Her arms were toned from playing the base guitar, and the skirt really was deliciously short.

"Fuck it, I'm going like this," she said finally, deciding on the transfigured leather high heeled boots.
Her make up accentuated her eyes and bright red lipstick was painted on her lips. The only truly magical accessory was a slim golden band that ran up her right forearm, periodically twisting and turning like a tiny snake without a head.

"Yep. Less is more in this case," Sarah agreed. "Almost showtime. You okay?"

Penelope picked up her practice bass guitar, posing with it in front the mirror. She huffed. She turned around abruptly, facing her sister once more. "How do I look?" Her light tartan skirt blew up with the movement, showing off a large expanse of her derriere. Tonight she was going brave by wearing a thong.

"Back to this again? You look great!" Sarah offered her another sip of wine, just to quell the nerves. "Let's go." Penelope plucked a few bars on her guitar in mock practice, then was forcefully grabbed by her sister.

Harry, Youri, Lewis, Jon, and Lee Jordan were sitting on large barrels of whiskey in the Hog's head store room. The cramped storage area was their 'backstage'.

A bottle of Vodka, mixed with skrewt stinger oil was being passed around. The conversation was relatively relaxed, considering that the five boys were warned of the growing monstrosity two rooms down in the bar.

It appeared that over one thousand patrons were crammed into the magically expanded space of the Hogs Head. The dirty, dreary bar was designed to hold a hundred, if so much. The tiny wizard wireless had to be magically enhanced by Albus Dumbledore himself to allow background music to play over the din. The stage was the only place with floor space.

Aberforth Dumbledore, Albus' brother, was a busy man tonight, but if you watched him, you would have thought that it was a normal night with only the few regulars.

The lads from the village who were helping man the bar were doing a decent job, considering that they had to also police who could order alcohol, and who couldn't. Harry suspected as the night went on the more daring underage patrons would begin smuggling in their own stash.

"Alright lads. We've got a massive turnout. This is going to be brutal," Lewis said enthusiastically. His face was a bit red from drinking. He wore a simple ensemble of a beaten old robe, with holes all over the place. It was supposedly a robe his great great grandfather used during the last Goblin Rebellion. It surely looked like it went through a war. Youri, the lead guitarist wore a Weird sister's t-shirt, and spikes on his left wrist. A heavy, flowing, witches' black skirt cut haphazardly diagonally across the legs and white Adidas sneakers completed his getup. His sleek, black hair hung in a curtain over his face, reminding Harry of Snape.

Jon wore a well-used black vest, black jeans, and his motorcycle boots. On his hands were black 'finger cut out' metal-smith gloves. His arms were quite defined for a thirteen year old boy. Lee Jordan wore a cut off Iron maiden t-shirt and short beige golf pants. His dreadlocks hung free down his back. Harry had to admit seeing those long locks swing round and around when he played was very cool.

Harry wore a plain black t-shirt, a black leather jacket, dueling armor pants, and his WWG black combat boots.

"Myrtle?" Harry called out.

"Yes Harryy?" she appeared from the ceiling.
"You ready for your part?" He had recruited her to help them with *Her Ghost in the Fog*. He convinced her to float through the crowd and sing the lyrics of the slain witch near the end.

"Anything for you, Harryy..." She took off her glasses and freed her hair in a provocative manner. Her face transformed horrifically into a burnt, eyeless visage with mouth opened in a scream. "Like that right?"

"Yep," Harry encouraged. He waved a bit of patronus mist at her and she gobbled it up, moaning seductively. His band mates mocked throwing up behind her.

"I can still see yoouu," she warned, still sniffing the patronus mist into her nose.

Jon shook his head, still trying to accept the concept of a shape-shifting ghost. Hermione burst through the door. She was wearing a long, loose white skirt and a white tube top. On her arms were long white satin gloves reaching her bicep. The get up reminded Harry of a witch bride condemned to being burnt at the stake. Her eye makeup was intentionally allowed to run down her face in two dark tears. Her hair was styled perfectly, (thanks to Harry) earlier that night.

"Okay, ten minutes to showtime!" she breathed. She took out a compact mirror and checked her look. "Oh my gosh, isn't this exciting!" she gushed. There was nowhere for her to sit. She came across to where Harry was sitting on a crate and without warning settled down on his lap. "Give me that," she demanded from Jon, who was holding the bottle of Skrewt and Vodka. She took a healthy swig.

"Ugh!" she coughed.

"You've never had alcohol before," Harry said unnecessarily. She was about to wipe her tears from her eyes, then changed her mind and allowed them to ruin her make up some more.

"I never thought I would sing in a rock band," she said excitedly. The warming qualities of the potion made her blush. Katie walked in at that moment.

"Hey everyone. Did you guys check? Outside is insane!" She frowned a bit at Hermione sitting on Harry's knee. She was wearing a fitted white mini dress. Harry noticed that she had a really nice bum, and her chest wasn't bad either. Then Penelope walked in after. The boys literally froze.

Penelope looked hot.

"Okay," Penelope huffed. "I'm ready. Dean says he is ready to cut the lights." There was a bit of mumbling and picking up of fallen jaws from the ground.


"Wait, what do we call ourselves?" Katie asked suddenly.

Everyone looked at each other, lost. Penelope smiled secretly at Harry.

"How about, *Beyond the Veil*."

Harry and Penelope locked eyes. She knows. She fucking knows.

"Cool," Youri said, practicing his solo silently.
"Anything is fine with me," Jon said.

"Sounds awesome," Katie added.

"Lovely. *I'll Stand By You* is first. Penelope you ready?" Lewis asked.

"Born ready." She watched Harry in a strange way.

"Good. Bring it in," Lewis put his hand palm down in the center of the room. The others came in and put their hands on top of his. Harry thought he was last, as that was what the keeper did in Quidditch, but he miscalculated. Penelope put her hand on top of his.

Multiple scenes of both of their pasts flashed in his mind. Penelope smiled at him in a way he didn't think she should. Then again, she knew how old he was before he died. Shit was getting complicated.

*This song is for you, Harry.* She communicated telepathically.

A feeling of intense pleasure ran through his spine.

*What are you doing?* Harry sent back.

*Mindfucking you, of course.* She winked at him.

*Oh. Okay... but not okay.*

*Don't worry. It's only this strong because of the personal gift of alcohol you gave me. Great psychic bridge, that.*

*Really.*

*Yeah. I can probably milk you dry right now if I wanted.*

*You better not.* Harry tried to think in the safe corner of his mind that sounded pretty interesting.

*I heard that.*

*Fuck!*

*You can shut me out anytime you want, you know. You're an Occlumens. This is just me teasing. I won't do that to you. Unless you ask, of course.*

*Fine. Just keep me in time for the verse entry. You know how I sometimes slip up.*

*Okay 'Chosen One.'*

*Shut Up, Penelope.*

*You're cute when you mentally spank me.*

"On three. One- two- three-" came Lewis' pep talk.

"Beyond the Veil!" came the response. The band filed out of the tiny storage room and unto the stage.

Much later that night, seventeen year old Harry Potter and eighteen year old Nymphadora Tonks
were sitting hip to hip on the bar, eating fish and chips. It was after two in the morning. Tonks looked like a rock groupie, a Madonna "Like a Virgin" era type of chick. Her hair was bubblegum pink, and she wore a cut up tank top, beads around her neck, a very tiny miniskirt and fishnet stockings.

Tonks pointed at a discarded bra on the ground. "You should have seen your face when that fell on your head."

Harry laughed. "I thought it was a massive spider. Whose own was it?"

"One of the locals. Could be Rosmerta herself, who knows. That's a big cup."

Harry laughed again. "Those Weasley twins surprised me. They could incite a mosh pit!"

"The younger one, Ron, was the one who did that. I think the twins got all of the lads a bit drunk tonight, that's why," Tonks explained. "So. Penelope."

Harry froze. Not this again.

"What are you going to do?" she asked casually.

"With her? Nothing. What do you mean?" Harry said, cautious.

"Out of all the girls that were throwing eyes at you, she's the only one I think is really serious about it."

"Oh. I didn't notice." Harry denied. This fucking harem shit was getting out of control. Wait. Did he just think that?

"She looked good tonight. Sexy. Sounded soulful too on her Pretenders bit."

"Hmm-mhm," Harry agreed, eating his fish. Tonks was playing the jealous girlfriend game, probably looking for him to slip up.

Tonks jumped down and stood up between his knees. She bent her elbows on his thighs, then propped her chin on her hands. "The long hair suits you."

"Thanks," Harry replied.

"The rock life suits you too. You have some talent. And that levitation bit. Those Frenchies ate that up. Nice touch to end the set. Good show."

"Yeah. Knew they would like that." Harry grinned, recalling the crowd response when he flew around with Myrtle on the final verse of Her Ghost in the Fog. The lads lost their fucking shit in the pit.

"Hm. And why did you land in the pit? This was a perfectly good t shirt." She pulled at the remains of his destroyed clothes.

"That part of the song I had nothing to do. I think this happened because of the Beauxbatons sisters, actually," Harry pulled the tatters barely covering his older self.

"Alexandria is going to have her hands full over the next few days. Those gals are determined to steal Jon."

Harry grinned at her. "So... you aren't worried?"
"About?" Tonks grinned at him.

"Me being stolen and ravished against my will?"

"You're a free agent," Tonks said trying to maintain her grin. Harry saw right through it. He titled her chin up and kissed her softly.

Tonks closed her eyes briefly. "Mhm-mnm! Not allowed. We're not a couple."

"True."

"So don't make it a big deal."

"I won't."

"Good." Tonks sighed contentedly as she wrapped her arms underneath the remains of his jersey.

"Merry Christmas, Red," Harry presented her with a black satin Ringbox.

"You better hope its not a ring in there," Tonks warned, grinning.

"You wish," Harry joked. There was strange lull when both were considering the what ifs? "Open it."

She did. A long, narrow dragon wingbone, polished and gleaming with an immaculate finish, popped out. Midway along the main stem, where one branch of the Y joint was severed, was a handle wrapped in onyx leather. At the base of the handle was a crystal pommel. Tonks positioned the weapon against her shoulder, and looked down the wingbone. The final product was just over three feet, instead of the four originally planned. She unscrewed the crystal pommel. To her surprise, the crystal pommel was the head of a threaded crystal prism that screwed into the handle. It reminded her of an elaborate key.

"Cast Reducto into it a few times, like this." Harry demonstrated by using his Fwooper on Cedar on the crystal pommel. A shimmering grey swirl of magic began to pool into the diamond-etched crystal prism. "Screw it back in like this." He twisted it a few times back in. "You will feel the threading catch, then-" he snapped it all the way in with a quick movement- "It's locked in. Ready to go. I've commissioned a few more spell prisms, identical to this one, so you have an option to store some pre-loaded. Only one spell at a time per prism. From my calculations, you would be able to use either short rapid fire bursts, or one powerful shot at a distance up to two miles."

Tonks examined the handle and the crystal magazine clip.

"Ready to try it out?"

"Sure," Tonks said, holding it like a rifle against her shoulder. Harry picked up an empty bottle. "Pull!" she snapped. Harry tossed it towards the ceiling. She channeled a trickle of magic through the knot of cartilage where a trigger would have been. The cartilage felt firm, yet responsive to her magic. A flash of magic shot out and obliterated the bottle into fragments.

"It only works for line of sight magic, so far. No shields, or warding spells. Designed specifically for attack."

Tonks examined the weapon again. "It's beautiful..." She watched the custom engraving along the main stem. "Mageslayer, huh?" She leaned in on him, bringing his head down so she could talk in his ear. Her chest was pressed against his left thigh. "I like it."
Harry felt the man downstairs move when she said that. When they first met, every time she said that he felt all warm inside. Now she did it on purpose. God he was going to miss her.

"Keep the box too. I designed a custom onyx leather carrying strap. It's in there somewhere."

"Thanks. This is for you." She offered him a soft package wrapped in gift paper. Harry opened it. In it was the Red Orakill Scarf.

"Tonks..." Harry said, stunned.

"Treat it well. That's sorta like, my life in your hands. I couldn't get anything to cancel the link. Keep it safe for me, Harry. And when you think of me, just give it a nice hug. I'll feel it."

"This is... deep," Harry said lamely, lacking a better word. "Thanks. It's an honour."

"Remember me Harry. The good times, mainly," she chuckled. She tenderly touched his ear. "I'm sorry," she repeated.

Harry knew that the apology was not just for kicking him, but for all the times she doubted him, and also for leaving. It was from the heart, and sincere.

"We'll see each other again, right?" Harry said hopefully.

"I hope so," she smiled. She cast the mistletoe above them again. Harry slipped off the bar, taking her in his arms. "You are learning. Finally."

"After a couple kicks, I had to catch on eventually."

"Good." Tonks and Harry smiled at each other. "What are you waiting on, Casanova?"
CHRISTMAS PT. II

Chapter Summary

Harry and Jon go on a quest giving out presents to their friends. They escort their guests at the Clan Mansion to Carols in the square.

Jon entered the second year boys' bathroom early the morning after the concert. He stopped in his tracks when he heard the sounds of retching.

"Fuck you, Ron," Seamus croaked from one of the stalls.

"Twas," Ron emptied his guts with an impressive deluge of splashing in the toilet "-worth it. Blaugh."

"Fuck you. And Blaugh... fuck your brothers too!" Seamus' stall sounded like a bucket of slop being thrown out the second floor window.

"How... was I to know...?" Ron gasped between projectile barrages. Seamus punched the barrier between their stalls.

"Anything bought from a guy called Dung was a bad idea in the first ..." Seamus gasped and emptied again "Blaugh...fucking place!"

"We got it on the cheap!" Ron countered.

"Fuck yooou..." came a whisper. Seamus rested his cheek against the rim of the bowl, finally dead.

"Mate?" Ron asked in between spitting after a few seconds of chilling silence. "Finn. Finn? Seamus! BLAUGH!"

Jon finally braved past the door frame, making sure he didn't step in a suspicious trail of blue tinged liquid spotting the ground.

"The Stranger has come to take him away. I will do what I can in a minute." Jon went into the final stall and relieved himself. That Skrewt on Vodka was wonderful, but the piss burned something fierce, quite uncomfortable.

Minutes later after a quick visit from Alexandria Seamus was reborn, with the help of a bezoar.

"I'm running out. I had a fresh set of one hundred bezoars. Now I'm down to six," Alexandria said to Jon as they went down to breakfast. "I'm dead tired. I haven't slept a wink."

"Your dedication to the students of this school is beyond the call of duty. What caused this?"

"Contraband firewhiskey. Those twins are horrible. They smuggled it in for minors."

Jon did find the rowdiness was much more frenetic than expected for a simple musical gathering. A concert, they called it. He had felt adrenaline, and the surge of a hyped crowd before. But usually, it was before a skirmish. Most noticeable was two days of the Wall Defense against the wildlings. The
adrenaline of battle was the byproduct of anticipating the taking of life. Performing with *Beyond the Veil*; on the other hand, was infectious, and simply put, *thrilling*.

"I agree with Ron. It was worth it," Jon smiled, a true, happy, boyish smile on his features. "When this ugliness is over, I may look further into this Rock musician thing."

"You?" Alexandria asked, shocked. Jon didn't seem the type. He was a battle mage if she had ever seen one. "Don't you want to be... an Auror?"

Jon was pensive, thinking. "I don't know. I have time." Living in a peaceful community had its merit. He trained as a squire since a lad, and actively fought for the final six years of his life. Since he was fourteen he had made the journey north to the Night's Watch. Finding another calling felt, like a true escape from his tragic past.

A Hufflepuff student intercepted her in the halls. "Cho is also sick. Do you have any more?" a tall handsome boy said.

"Cedric, you didn't!" Alexandria said in disapproval. "Weren't you looking out for her?"

"She wanted to try it," Cedric Diggory shrugged in apology.

"Here. And take two more," Alexandria said, digging into her pouch. "I'm pretty sure Marietta is suffering as well. Keep one for yourself, just in case you need it."

"Lexi, you're the best!" Cedric thanked her. "Lord Black," he nodded in greeting, and left.

Jon stared at the handsome lad. Now he knew how Harry felt about seeing the living dead. He had told him how he died during Voldemort's Restoration Ritual. That story was very detailed. Harry wanted to prevent that incident re-occurring as one of his main objectives. Removing Pettigrew was a large step in that direction.

"Hey," Alexandria nudged him. "You alright?"

"Yeah."

"I need you to do me a favour. Find Harry, and ask him to zip down to the Apothecary and get some more bezoars, and Coconut water."

"Have you seen him?" Jon asked. He didn't see him come in last night.

"Yes. He popped in late while I was making my midnight shift. He looked a bit down. You may find him in the workshop."

"Let's go to the main hall first. I'll bring him something to eat."

Jon found him in the workshop after eating. Harry had on his mask, and white hot blue magic was sparking in a controlled rhythm at the wand press. Jon blocked his eyes as he approached. He brought up a covered plate and a parcel of meat in a wrapped cloth. He put down the plate and climbed the stone spiral staircase going up to the guard tower.

Miracle poked his head out of the trapdoor, sunk in his talons and crawled upside down on the ceiling. He let out a cry of welcome. With human-like politeness as to not disturb Harry, he closed the trapdoor quietly behind him. He swooped down and landed on the rickety wooden banister preventing Jon from certain death if he fell. Even with Miracle's slight fifty pound weight, the entire wooden structure shifted and squeaked.
"Hard boiled eggs. Sausages. Bacon. And some slabs of beef." Miracle sniffed appreciatively at the opened parcel.

No sweets?

"Cake I can bring after the feast."

I want cake.

"Not now, Miracle."

I want cake.

"Miracle, if you continue, you shall get no sweets!"

Promise I get cake when the Moon visits?

"Yes. I will bring it. Eat. And here." Jon offered Miracle a pigskin of warm goat milk. "I did bring you a little treat."

Miracle puffed a ball of fire in glee and hopped frantically from banister to step, to wall, then to Jon's shoulder. The little dragon dipped his snout eagerly to the full leather drinking gourd.

"Sit here," Jon commanded. Miracle did so. Jon also sat on the cold steps and held up the pigskin so Miracle could suckle. By the time Jon had finished feeding the dragon Harry was putting on the final sealing glue and applying a fragrant polish.

"Burning the midnight oil?" Jon said as he approached. Harry was still wearing his ripped jersey and Clan Armor trousers.

"Yes. Valerian. Hermione. Both done, with time to spare." He gestured proudly at the two slightly shiny wands held horizontally in the drying stands.

"The Rose essence was a good choice," Jon admitted. "She is a rose amongst thorns, a true diamond in the rough."

"I know," Harry said, recalling her heroic feats during their seventh year. "I see you've finished Remus' project." A stout, light coloured wand was recently placed in a cushioned box on the shelf.

"I have. But I am not pleased. The requirement of no-sanding, nor polish makes my work look sloppy," Jon snarled.

"Does it work?"

"Yes. When I hold it, I can sense Ghost much, much clearer. I believe it should help him with his moon cycle. Ripping, cutting, and the Eviscerating curse feel eager to flow out. Lumos also has a strange effect, it exchanges all present light and creates moonlight throughout the room."

"Huh. A lumos that replaces light?"

Jon shrugged. "The wand, the only non living entity with a personality. Grandfather knows what he is talking about. Alexandria asks if you could go to the Apothecary and get Bezoars and Coconut water. The students are sick from the alcohol."

"On it." Harry turned to the door.
"Harry, your clothes."

"Oh. Right," Harry looked down.

"And your face," Jon smiled.

"What about it?"

"You have lipstick all over. Purple. Suspiciously like Miss Tonks' colour."

"Ah. That," Harry smiled sadly. Tonks was heading into London to help Sirius and Mrs. Potage move into the base today. "Right. I better wash my face too."

"Yes," Jon nodded grimly. Harry cleaned his face with a semi-clean washrag and a bucket of clean water stored in the workshop. However, after a couple tries with all his wands, Harry could not repair his shirt. Jon had no clue either how to do Darning charms.

"Fetch Hermione will you?" Harry asked, getting inspiration. "She'll get her present early."

"At once," Jon nodded and returned to breakfast one level down. A few minutes later Jon escorted Hermione into the workshop. Harry was in the middle of wolfing down the breakfast Jon brought.

"Lord Hallow, may I present Mistress Hermione of House Granger," Jon bowed, offering due pleasantries. He kept his head bowed slightly. "And was the meal to your liking, Lord Hallow?"

"It was, Ser Black."

"I wish only to serve," he intoned grimly as he walked backwards and closed the door with a soft click.

Hermione frowned at Jon's weird behavior, but dismissed it as his periodic Knightly foolishness. "Hey, what's up?" She hesitated when she noticed Harry's ripped clothes. "You've been up whole night?"

"Yeah. Come," he invited her. He pointed at her newly minted wand. Harry picked up a clean cloth and gently picked up the wand by holding it at both ends, careful not to let the tips of his fingers touch the dried finish. He artfully demonstrated the wand by turning it this way and that.

"Onyx heartstring on Holly, nine and a half inches stem, handle five inches of Pine. One-eighth bit used to core six and a half inches. Fifteen grams of the left ventricle artery. Both stem and handle sanded from 150 initial grit to 500 grit final smoothing. Sealed with ten inch Troll on Holly, with high gloss polished finish from the essence of *Rose Bonica*. The pommel is engraved with your initials using a three millimeter chisel."

Harry *tsked*. One item in the build was not incorporated into the final product.

"Unfortunately, the custom 'Onyx' horn' pommel was not on the cards. Attaching it as a bludgeoning instrument cancels the main strengths of the build: Innocence, Thirst for Knowledge, and the search for Peace." He pounded the side of his fist in his other palm like a hammer. "A striking element would hamper this wand. Your measurements fell within the *Rune of Innocence* -" he showed Hermione a diagram of a stylized M. It resembled two triangular flags mirrored along the center point of the M.

"-Which works exceptionally well with *Rose Bonica* essence, which is a mixture of pink and white."
Hermione approached the gleaming wand with small steps, a bride walking the aisle. She could not take her eyes off of it.


"Yes, I researched your component list. It looks gorgeous, Harry," she breathed. "May I?"

He offered it to her, the wand laying on the clean cloth across both palms.

"Merry Christmas," Harry smiled. Her hand hovered centimeters above the handle for a few heartbeats, then she took it.

Hermione felt as if the wand she had originally bought from Mr. Ollivander was a ruler in comparison. Useful and precise, yet somewhat limited. This wand was magic.

"Oh," she said simply, feeling ecstasy run through her fingers, her body, her toes. She let out a deep breath. She had to close her eyes and concentrate to stop a moan escaping.

"Oh?" Harry asked. "Just Oh? Is something wrong?"

"Ah..." Hermione stammered shaking her head. She couldn't stop examining her new wand. It resonated with her, energizing her hidden potential. It was ...intoxicating.

"Give it a twirl! No heat, nor animation spells near the equipment, please," Harry cautioned.

"Protego!" She was wishing that her borrowed wand could have cast shields properly last Saturday. It might have stopped Jon from tossing her about like a training dummy.

Immediately, a multi-layered shield snapped into place in front of her, the structure gracefully overlapping like the petals of a rose, clustering protectively in a spiral at the centre.

Harry inspected the shield. "Very, very nice! How does it feel?"

"Like it was meant for me," Hermione breathed, not believing how easily that spell came out. "I always felt that the wand I had before was the closest match of the bunch, but not truly mine. This is much much better. Perfect."

"Keep that up. I'm going to test it. Hold on," he retrieved a cleaned portion of Onyx wing folded on the shelf. He walked behind her and wrapped it like a towel around her torso. With the subtle rippling effect of the scales of the Onyx, she looked like a dark witch casting a prismatic rose-shaped shield.

Harry stepped away from the equipment and into an open area. He drew his Fwooper on Cedar and cast a mild Reducto at her.

The shield held true. The magic sizzled and swam through the crevices and layers like a magical pinball looping around a gaming machine. After a half second, the spell spat back out, towards him. Harry flinched as he dodged the bolt of magic.

"Whoa!" Harry breathed, seeing the bit of mortar on the wall behind him flake off into a shower of light dust.

"Sorry!" Hermione cried, releasing the shield. "I didn't mean to!"
"A boomerang shield. Auto-counter?" Harry grinned, taking the Onyx wing from her. "The Onyx is the only dragon completely impervious to magic. You're in the game now," Harry boasted.

Hermione attempted *Lumos*, *Winguardium*, and even a *Glacius* on a portion of the floor. All were precise, and leapt out of her wand. A nice mirror-like patch of ice manifested on the ground. She did not try out animation, heat or transfiguration due to the sensitivity of the wand materials in the workshop.

But she felt.. as if the true potential of this wand was yet to be touched. She couldn't wait to go outside and test it for herself. This wand spoke to her... a soft song of Ice, and a climaxing call to *Fire*.

"Wow..." Hermione breathed, watching the gorgeous finish of the wand. It even *smelled* beautiful. "What a gift..." she whispered, truly emotional. She took a deep breath. She was feeling to cry. "Thank you. It's perfect! Oh! And congratulations on making your first All-purpose wand!"

"Thanks. And thank you for being..." he cast the gloom and boom spell on himself- "My first repeat customer!"

His voice echoed grandiosely throughout the tall structure. Hermione grinned and came closer, watching him intently. Harry got the impression of a cat approaching prey.

His emotions were all over the place right now with Tonks leaving. This was dangerous ground, but Hermione was a situation he had no counter for, right now. She was his best friend, and he didn't want her to feel like he was rejecting these hugs of hers.

Harry intercepted her and took her up in a hug before... well, before she stole another kiss.

This time, the hug was different. Her hands were *possessive*, was the only word he would use to describe it. With his typical forgetfulness, he forgot about his destroyed clothes. His shirt was ripped right down the back. Her hands felt soft as they slid beneath the fabric. Small, feminine and warm, caressing his skin.

Hermione held on to Harry without restraint. She closed any gap between them, and smelled the front of his jersey deeply. She had wanted to hug him in private, like this, ever since their first kiss. Now, with his shirt all ripped, she didn't hesitate to run her hands along his back, his sides, his shoulder blades. He had filled out a bit, and shot up a couple inches. She sighed softly. She just didn't know how to 'make' him want to kiss her back, without it feeling awkward.

In the meantime, she would simply accept these 'friendly' hugs, with hope that it may turn out to be something more.

*Hermione, you need to control yourself. Don't be one of those girls who...well. don't be like Pansy.*

Harry began patting her back, a sign of ending the hug. She ignored it, pressing herself closer. Her lips gently kissed the hollow above the collarbone and just below his adam's apple. To her girlish excitement, she felt something press into her stomach.

Harry stepped away immediately.

"Sorry," Harry said, turning away from her slightly.

"It's ok."

*No it's not ok. I'm hugging you and thinking of Tonks.*
"Um," Harry rubbed the back of his head in a nervous gesture. Hermione loved it when he did that. "Can you repair this jersey?"

"Yes. But you need to take it off," Hermione fibbed. Harry did so without hesitation. Hermione had seen both Ron and him bareback before. Nothing to be embarrassed about.

When he saw her expression, he totally forgot that she wasn't eighteen and had seven years of being around him.

"You work out?" was all she could say. Harry had defined abs. His chest was still scrawny, but it was shaped, with a hint of muscle coming in. His shoulders and upper triceps were actually cut, and his flanks were lean and beginning to taper with the contours of the external obliques. He looked fit, strong, with early signs of bulk coming in.

"Yeah. Twice a day." He gave her his jersey.

"Reparo!" It instantaneously reverted like new. She closed the distance, watching his body. "Your stomach is..." she rubbed her fingertips over the muscle. "Nice."

Harry rubbed his belly, a bit embarrassed. "Hermione," Harry warned. How was he to say this?

"Shh," Hermione put her finger to his lips. She folded the jersey up in her hands, pulling open the hole for his head. "Sit." She commanded as she pushed him down on the bench. "Up!" she held the jersey over his head. Harry smirked as he lifted his hands. She slid the jersey over his hands and over his hair. She pulled it down and smoothed it over his shoulders. Harry noticed that she may have smoothed the fabric a couple seconds longer than warranted.

Hermione's smile slowly turned into a frown.

He's.. hot. I think my best friend in the whole wide world is actually...hot.

"Where were you last night?" she asked, her eyes looking at a random spot on his bent knee.

"Here, working," Harry said smoothly.

"Okay," Hermione said, dubious. However, she was in no position to pry. That would be a bad move. She put a pretty smile on her face. "Will you be coming to the Carols later in the square?"

"Of course!" he said.

"Good. Bring some more of that wonderful warmth potion, please?"

"Sure."

"Thanks again," Hermione said, coming to stand in front of him. She brought his head and shoulders close, hugging him to her. Harry had to turn his head to the side to accept her hug without nosing her soft, small chest.

Harry was running the gantlet of emotional confusion. Hermione obviously liked him a lot, and he valued her as one of his best friends.

The problem was, he liked someone else, but Hermione always held a soft spot in his heart. He couldn't intentionally hurt her, could he?

She petted his hair a few times.
"Best Christmas gift, ever," she said, briefly kissing the top of his forehead. Harry felt a surge of magic run through his dormant scar. "I'll give you mine later. Okay?"

"Okay," Harry said, slightly muffled in her embrace.

"Are you coming to watch choir practice? Lecture is off today so we could pack and socialize before the leaving feast."

"Yeah, why not? I'm a bit busy right now, so a bit later."

"See you then, Harry," Hermione twinkled, the most powerful one he encountered yet. She waved and left.

When the door closed, Harry cursed in frustration. She was going to be a force to be reckoned with, that was for sure. He adjusted his pants to ease the discomfort. These girls were becoming an issue. And Jon left him alone with Hermione, the bastard.

"Fuck you, Snow," Harry laughed to himself. He intentionally left him on the front lines, with no backup. He'd get him back over the holiday, this he swore. Trying to push Hermione's latest encounter out of his mind, he opened the rear exit and shot off towards Hogsmeade's Apothecary.

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Harry, we need to talk.

A girl's voice came to him in the lightest part of his after lunch nap. His internal sleep cycle was thrown off by the performance and staying up to finish work last night. When he returned from Hogsmeade this morning he spent all his time before lunch transcribing his scrap notes into his Apprentice Log. After lunch he retired for some rest.

Penelope?

Yes. Can we meet?

Give me ten minutes and meet me in the corridor outside the medical wing.

Ok. Thank you.

Harry got up from bed, shaking off the vestiges of sleep. He put on his modified Hogwarts outer cloak, with the cowl that hid the left side of his face. He felt like he was preparing for a confrontation. Was performing the Fealty ritual the only way out to counter the long term Wizard's Dementia disease?

He'd find out soon enough.

The fifth year met him at the door a few metres away from the medical wing hallway. Penelope was dressed in muggle jeans, and a white button up blouse. A regular scarf protected her neck. She smiled sheepishly at him.

"Hey, Potter," she greeted.

"Hey," Harry returned, glaring at her from his right eye. "Inside," he ordered, taking out his keys to the workshop. Penelope followed him in. Harry found the box of long sulfur matches and began lighting the torches, warming up the cold, still tower. Harry climbed up on the normal table with the attached bench. He now realized it was the same picnic bench that they had butchered the threstral on so many months ago. Penelope did the same, both of them with their feet on the seat. After a few
"seconds, Penelope spoke.

"So. How are you, Harry?"

"I'm fine."

"Did Tonks talk to you?"

"Yes she did. Interrogated me. Accused me of being dark. Drawing her wand on me."

"How did that go?"

Harry shrugged. "It ... worked out in the end." He had to almost die, to finally make her believe.

"Oh. Why did you do it?" Penelope blurted. "That was the bravest, most Gryffindor- reckless thing I have ever seen. I mean, to take the killing curse from the Dark Lord, just like that... why?"

"It's a long story. A very long story. But to put it simply, I had to, for any chance of saving anyone."

"But here you are," Penelope countered. "Back from the dead."

"Yes. How much do you really know?"

"The worst parts, from what I've seen. Before, it was every other night I saw these dreams- Cedric Diggory dying, of all people. Fighting against him, at a graveyard... then in the Ministry. Being chased by him in a flying motorcycle... then... the forest again. Why you?"

"I am his nemesis. The nemesis of the Dark Arts, Penelope. Now-my turn. Why the fuck would you do this?"

"I had no choice. I was showing acute signs of Dementia. I would have turned dark within a couple years if i didn't do it as soon as possible."

"If you had come to me, I would have helped you!" Harry spat, turning to her. Penelope flinched, almost as if he would have struck her physically. Her hands were raised, ready to deflect a blow.

"I didn't know that! My sister hinted that you and Jon were the most powerful wizards she has met! I didn't know what type of guy you were! And when you barged in on that fucker and I in the train, I thought you would have done him in, right then and there!"

"You thought I was... dangerous?"

"You woke me up from a nightmare with half of your face bandaged, and coolly told me that you two took out Lockhart. Of course I thought you were dodgy. At first." Penelope relaxed a bit. "Then I found out you made the French daily with an obscure tale of a Wizard of the Light stopping an attempted kidnapping of the Potage heiress. Lo and behold, a week after school opens I wake up from a literal nightmare, no longer a virgin, with Alexandria Potage attending Hogwarts. I couldn't remember the last entire week before that either. You saved me from hell, Harry."

She tentatively reached across, opening her palm face up.

"May I?" she asked softly. Harry sighed and put his hand in hers. She stood up then knelt before him. She bowed her head. "My lord."

Harry just stared at the girl. He yanked her back to her feet. "What is this?"
"The ritual isn't totally complete. I need you to witness and accept my offering to finalize it."

"Why should I? What happens if I don't?"

"From what I have researched, the nightmares and insomnia may return. Then I slowly go crazy," she sighed.

"Why me, though?"

"Why not you?"

"I got kicked in the head because of your 'attempt'," Harry snarled. Penelope didn't laugh, she just stared into his eyes.

"You're not joking."

Harry glared at her.

Does it look like I'm joking?

I'm so sorry, Harry. She sent back, her eyes downcast. I truly am.

"I need a bond with someone I admire, someone who is a leader, someone with power. You fit all three, Harry. Please accept this. I'm begging you."

She was sincere. Harry tilted his head in acknowledgment, standing up before her. "Go ahead, Clearwater," he said in resignation. Penelope smiled, took his hand, then knelt once again, one hand covering her heart, the other in his.

"My lord," she breathed, her hand soft, yet firmly gripping his.

"Rise, Penelope," Harry commanded. "I accept your offering of fealty. I, Harry James Potter will protect you with all of my strength, honour, and earthly resources."

There was a rush of magic surging through the tower. Miracle shot down from his trapdoor and circled above.

"Heal me, my lord," Penelope said, putting his hand on her head. "Wish the madness, begone!"

Harry put his hand on her forehead, and instinctively pushed with his Patronus magic. Penelope smiled a wondrous smile, then her jaw went slack. She slumped. Harry caught her before she crumpled on the ground. He physically picked her up and laid her gently on the picnic table.

After a few seconds, Penelope woke up.

"You're okay?"

"Yeah. Thank you." She stared at him for a few seconds. "Why are you so strong?"

Harry frowned. "I'm not that strong," he said defensively, rubbing his bicep self consciously.

"Not like that. Why is your magic aura so strong?" she breathed.

"I united the Hallows. I am the master of death now."

"Lovely!" She nodded. "I feel complete now- the impulses of madness... feels like they are... floating at the back of my head, instead of ready to burst like a bubble. I can also feel that you have fought off the taint in your eyes," she sat up, bringing her fingers close to his face. Harry closed his eyes. Penelope ran her fingers down his scar, down his left eyelid. "You did well. Now you should have No Fear of the Dark."

"Penelope, does this ritual, like, benefit me in any way?"

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I sorta know what this entails. I fought Voldemort, remember? What are the side effects of what you have done?"

"I will never harm you willingly. I can keep your secrets, even under the strongest truth serum, without fail. I can also come to your aid if I am able," she explained.

"Fuck, do you have a curse tattoo or something?" Harry panicked. If she did, he was a dead man.

"No. You summon me through intent, I believe. It causes no pain, and I can refuse. I am not your slave, just your ally."

"Thank Merlin," Harry breathed. "You're not going to do that... thing again, right?"

"What. This?" Penelope squeezed his hand gently and a rush of pleasure surged down his spine.

"Yes. That," Harry growled. Penelope was teasing him, again.

"No. This needs physical contact. It gets stronger if you offer me an alcoholic drink, cool huh?"

"Ah okay." Now he understood how she could do that. "So, do I order you to not do it, or something?" Harry asked.

"If you want. I doubt it can forcibly prevent my magic, but I'll stop if you say so."

"Please do."

"Oh. And when we are near, I feel your emotions. And... should she tell him this? "...If you really need to break the bond you must offer my hand in marriage to a husband. Hopefully at that time I won't be in fear of the Dementia coming back."

"Gotcha."

Penelope came closer. She was his exact height. "I'll stand by you. Even in your darkest hour." She held his hands in hers, then very faintly, kissed both sides of his cheek. "Merry Christmas, Harry."

"For you. Open it."

It was a Ringbox. A simple one, but it was still a ringbox.

"You aren't proposing or anything like that, are you?" he stared at the gift as if it was a grenade without the pin.

"No. It's a muggle ring. No charms or anything. Cost about a hundred pounds. It is just a gift. Open it." It was a simple gold band with an engraved snitch on it. It fit perfectly on his middle finger. It was kind of cool, actually. And it was his first item of jewelry he had ever owned.

"It's great, thanks," Harry said, genuinely appreciative. "Um I don't have anything to give you
though."

"A hug?" Penelope opened up her arms to him.

"Sure," he smiled, and gave her a hug. Penelope returned the hug with gusto, sighing.

"I was so scared. But thank you for doing this for me. I didn't want to be poked and prodded at St Mungo's. And I didn't want to lose it and curse someone in school. I've seen what you two do to Dark Wizards in here. Michael got forty years. I wish to enjoy my youth, thank you very much."

"Would have warning me first worked?" Harry said. Penelope still held him loosely around his waist.

"Nope. You might have refused. And then... I would have been screwed. Refusal at the initial stages cannot be reversed. At least this way, I had some sort of bargaining chip."

"Right," Harry nodded. He looked down at her arms resting on his hips. "We done?"

"Yeah," she drew him in a hug again. "You smell good," she whispered.

"Penelope!" he snapped.

"Sorry," she chuckled. "You've got a temper, Harry. I won't bite."

"I wonder if I made you my magical servant without you knowing if you would have been pleased," Harry countered. Penelope smiled at him in a strange manner. Her eyes twinkled. "Forget I ever said that. Jeez."

"A girl could hope," she chuckled, mock cuffing his chin. The way she did it he was immediately reminded of Tonks doing the same thing after their sparring. "Enjoy your holidays, Harry. See you next year."

"You aren't coming the Carols tonight?"

"No, Sarah and I are going to Estagal to visit some distant relatives tonight. That's in France. I even heard there is a statue of a young British wizard up there. That's not you, is it?" her eyes narrowed.

"Nope. It's Jon."

"You two get around. So what, he's immortal like you?" She laughed. Harry didn't return the laugh.

"Le Chevalier Immortel is the name of his statue."

"You're joking right."

"No. He's just as 'immortal' as I am."

"No wonder you two kicked Slytherin's arse."

"Our secret, right," Harry reminded her. Penelope nodded a couple times.

"Sure. Its mum with me. Enjoy," she waved and left. "Have a happy New Year!"

"You too," Harry said. She wasn't that bad, was she?

The Leaving feast was jubilant. Harry was in good spirits. The last time around, there were petrified
students and a student populace under siege. This time, there were highly competitive duels, a resident apprentice Healer who everyone liked, even the Slytherins, rock shows and Carols. Alexandria and Shea told them that the event had attracted a lot of the parents to come up this far north into the cold to see their children sing. Christmas spirit was in full force.

Harry had his clothes trunk packed, along with the books necessary for his holiday homework. He probably didn't need it, but he might need to help Jon. Jon was fitting into magical society pretty easily. His grades were above average, and even though he knew Harry was quite knowledgeable of the easy second year work, he never asked for help.

"Ready?" Jon asked after they had dressed to attend the Carols. It was almost six o'clock.

"Yeah. So what, we're going down early?"

"I have offered Mrs. Potage and her young charges an escort to come into Hogsmeade. You will come with me," Jon said. "Valerian is also there. She enjoyed the show last night and is coming as well."

"Okay," Harry agreed. "Bit of a walk from the base."

"Fifteen to twenty minutes by carriage. You may catch Tonks if we hurry. She said she is leaving before dark."

Harry looked into the dull, cloudy sky. "Crap- why didn't you say something sooner?"

"She told me not to."

"Why?" Harry asked, just before he leapt out the dormitory window.

"I assume that goodbyes for her are difficult."

Harry came back inside.

_She told him not to._

He took a deep breath. This was it. She was going. And she didn't want to say goodbye, again. He looked out the window, across the forbidden forest.

_She told him not to._

Why couldn't he be more, mature about this? Why did she always seem to hold all the cards?

_She told Jon not to let him know she was leaving before dark._

Was it a game? I hate.. not knowing how these things are done. Harry admitted that never having a proper girlfriend was a disadvantage here. The last time he left Ginny, he was the one doing the leaving. This time, the tables were turned on him. Now he knew how Ginny felt.

"What do you think I should do," Harry asked Jon, staring outside.

"I... don't know. You are in a no win situation. She would be mad at me for telling you, and mad at you for coming. I cannot really help here."

"I don't know. I really just do not know."

"Sirius said he would come," Jon offered as consolation.
Harry nodded. That was good. Sirius getting out, enjoying his freedom. Harry sat down abruptly on his bed. The fastest he ever reached the mansion was four and a half minutes.

She told him not to.

At that moment, Raven, Jon's owl now under the care of Mrs. Potage; came swooping into the window. It came directly to Harry. It was from Tonks.

RH, Mr. B.

I hope you had a pleasurable Christmas Feast. Our guests are finally settled in. I have informed Greyback of my indefinite suspension of active duty from the Clan. I am letting you know I allocated half of my share of the previous jobs into my personal account. The other half would remain in the Clan vaults to be used as you see fit.

You will need a wizard or witch of age to become your Clan spokesperson to continue. I know both of you are capable of impeccable leadership, a quality that I have not yet earned, and am hoping to rectify through my second phase of Auror training. The most obvious is Master Ollivander, but he has already mentioned that ranging is for the young. If you manage to convince him, he would be a source of wisdom, skill, and of impeccable leadership quality.

Secondly, Reagan Fairweather. He has finished the first phase of Auror training, like me. And according to him, he was sent to infiltrate the Purity Of Blood network when he became a member of South Hampton's Arthur Knights "Glory Hounds" guild. He has experience in how the criminal underworld works. Regardless of my personal beef with the douchebag, he is a solid wizard and is apparently in need of employment.

Thirdly, if you solely want a wizard of age to be your representative i.e administrative work based in London and be local support on your missions, Remus. His werewolf status would be a high legal and physical risk. He would not be able to step into many countries in Europe. I do not know how proficient he is in battle magic. Also, he has a keen interest in Pettigrew's incarceration. Keep an eye on him before he tries something drastic.

And lastly, Sirius. He is experienced in espionage, dueling and understanding the Purists' agenda. He disrupted many plots during his short time fighting Voldemort's followers in the past. However, I cannot in good conscience truly recommend him, because from talking to him over the past few days, he is a man bent on vengeance. He holds a vendetta against many well known persons in society. He needs more time to recover from his ordeal, which I believe is more than just physical rehabilitation. He also has not used magic in a long time, and his memories are scattered. Volatile. I believe he may have a death wish. Please take care of him.

Just letting you know that you will not be able to contact me from January. Be safe, Crows."

-Red

"Well. That settles that," Jon said after he finished reading. "I believe she might have already left."

"Yeah." Gone. Sorta. I could still find her at her folks-

Harry clenched both fists. He said his goodbyes. Tonks had given him the snog of his life.

"Come. I asked Hagrid to loan us a couple of the carriages to bring them from the mansion. You will be surrounded by beautiful girls," Jon clapped him on his shoulder, trying to cheer him up.

"Gabrielle, Jon," Harry said suddenly.
"Who?"

"The red witch you were harping about after France," Harry reminded him.

Jon's face went grim. "I will have to talk with her. Does she know who you really are?"

"I don't know. I had on my mask. Knowing witches, if she is as dangerous and powerful as you say, when we meet she might... see my aura or something."

"The Lord of the Light, right?" Jon grinned.

"Maybe. We've handled Dragons and necromancers. A little girl should be a piece of cake."

Harry and Jon borrowed two carriages from Hagrid. Harry called his familiars and harnessed Shadow Wing, One Ear, StarScream and Tornado to pull them. Harry took the lead carriage, with Jon driving the one behind. Harry was in control of both, Jon just held the reigns for show. Within half an hour they arrived at the large gates of the clan mansion. The gates opened smoothly and they parked the carriages in front of the garage.

Valerian came out first. She wore a long, severe, black witch's gown with a high collar. "It looks horrible, doesn't it?"

Jon forcefully rejected that notion. "Of course not."

"Those girls are really... girly," Valerian said. "They've been getting ready for hours it seems." Her mouth twisted, not understanding.

Harry thought the robes looked like something McGonagall would wear to a formal function. Like sentencing a Dark wizard into Azkaban's finest suite, for life.

"Who... gave you that?" Harry asked. It looked like nothing Valerian would willingly wear.

"Healer Pomfrey. It was the only one she had that could fit when I left. Saturday."

"You don't have other clothes?" Harry asked politely.

"I knew it," she sighed. "Come in. It's getting a bit chilly, don't you think?" she asked him. "I'll have to find something quickly."

Jon and Harry followed her up to the first floor. Their voices caused Mrs. Potage to step out her room. "Lord Black, Mister Potter! You are here!" she gushed. "Ooh you two look dashing!"

Harry wore his outfit he bought to head into South Hampton. Nobody here saw that outfit anyway. He ditched the hat because he had no reason to try and hide his scar in Hogsmeade. Jon actually wore the white shirt and bomber jacket Alexandria got him for his birthday. He finished the look with black jeans and highly polished motorcycle boots.

"Thank you, Mrs Potage," Jon nodded.

"You look, lovely yourself," Harry smiled. Mrs. Potage wore a long gown with a bit of a sparkle. She had lost weight since the passing of her husband, and her face wasn't as round and full. She also fit into the dress very well.

"Thank you, and Miss Valerian.. oh.. that is an interesting get up," she commented. "Very, Victorian era. Come darling, with me. Let's see how I can make it look even better."
"Let us go and make some tea while we wait," Harry offered. "Maybe I should think of getting a house elf to help out around here."

Jon and Harry went downstairs to the main kitchen and prepared tea. Within minutes Harry was carting the set into the great room. When they opened the door, Jon almost had a heart attack.

Sitting in front of the fire in the throne like chair meant for the head of the long table, was Gabrielle Delacour, dressed in a vibrant red gown. Harry calmly set the service down on table, drawing his wand and concealing it in his sleeve. Jon circled, trying to gauge the young witch.

"Hello," she said simply in a french accent. "How do you do?" she stood up. The girly dress hugged her slender arms and fanned out at the waist. She wore simple, sturdy black boots on her feet. On a small table next to her, was a cup of cocoa and an opened pack of mini marshmallows.

"Hello," both young men said at the same time.

"You're Harry Potter, and you are Lord Black, oui?" Gabrielle said, smiling. She was cute, with fair blond hair and almost invisible eyebrows. There was the slightest hint of eye shadow but apart from that, the young girl was just that, a young girl.

"Yes, we are," Jon and Harry said at the same time, still on the alert.

"I am Gabrielle, it is a pleasure to have you," she said in passable English. Harry shook her hand. When they broke apart she looked into his eyes.

_Ah. The Lord of the Light. We meet again._

Harry snatched his hand away. Gabrielle smiled at him, unfazed. He stepped back, nodding towards Jon to shake her hand. Jon bravely did so.

_Jon Snow. Or is it Aegon now? The Prince who was promised. It did not turn out well for you, did it?_

"YOU BROUGHT ME BACK!" Jon bellowed. He drew his sword immediately. "You should have let me die!"

Jon took a full step forward, raising the sword high above. Harry moved without thinking. Jon was suddenly grabbed, and amazingly, thrown over Harry's back and crashed into the ground. Gabrielle Delacour smiled as she took her seat and daintily sipped her cocoa. Harry pressed his knee into Jon's rib-cage, bent the wrist the wrong way and disarmed him, using his knee to absorb Jon's left punch. With an agility drilled into him, Harry re-positioned his centre of gravity, threw his legs across his neck and chest, capturing Jon's sword arm in an arm bar.

Jon felt his elbow buckling under strain. He began to tap Harry's knee repetitively.

"You good?" Harry shouted. "Answer me, Jon!"

"I'm good, I'm good!" Jon gasped. His elbow was giving out!

"Alright, letting go-"

At that moment Fleur and her friends opened the door. "Gabi? Are you in here?"

They spotted Harry and Jon in a weird tangle, with a wand thrown in the corner of the room. Gabrielle Delacour was calmly sipping her cocoa, watching the two boys horseplay. Harry and Jon
froze at the crowd of girls peeping around Fleur. Harry let Jon go immediately. Jon rolled over, cradling his damaged right arm.

"Fuck, Harry, why did you lock it in so hard?" Jon seethed.

"You taught me that if I had to use that move, to put everything into the initial effort... remember? Stop the opponent before he gets a chance to resist and all that."

Jon grumbled something about the blasted gods underneath his breath. Fleur was quickly upon them, her wand drawn.

"What is the meaning of zis?" Fleur demanded. "Are you okay?" she asked her little sister.

"Fine. They were showing off ze muggle disarming techniques," Gabrielle said smoothly, taking another sip.

Harry had gotten up. So did Jon. Both of them looked at the innocent girl, wary. She smiled at her sister, reassuring her in french that she was fine. The five girls including Fleur came into the room. Fleur was wearing a coat with two pairs of buttons running down the front. It was white with a trim of brown fur. Warm white leggings and high black boots completed her look. The other girls he recognized were similarly well attired, in the height of witch fashion.

Jon doubled over his right arm, nursing the pain. "Greetings," he said awkwardly. Jon hardly looked the part of the Immortal Knight. "Nothing to worry about."

"Let me see," Melisse Payet, the healer's daughter from Estagal came forward. "Can you take off your jacket?" Jon did so, grimacing in discomfort. He gasped audibly when he had to remove the right sleeve of his arm. "It iz hyper-extended. You play too rough, Harry. In front of this little one too?" Within seconds Melisse had healed Jon's arm. "Tell Lexie to make a muscle knit potion for you. Rub it on for the next couple days first thing in the morning and before bed, oui?"

"I thank you for your expert care, Mistress Payet," Jon bowed, flexing his arm. He gave Harry a dark look. Harry shrugged. Gabrielle slurped the last of the cocoa and sprung up.

"Let's go!" she said happily. "You two boys shake hands now! All these glares, non non non! C'est noel!" Gabrielle picked up a tiny red handbag off one of the other chairs and looked into a tiny mirror. "No chocolat on my teeth, non?" she grinned her teeth at her older sister.

"No, but here," Fleur offered her sister a candy. "Zis is the mint flavour bean, with whitener. Take your shawl too. I do not know if ze place will be charmed for warmth."

"Almost forgot!" Gabrielle gushed, picking up her shawl from the rack at the door. The French contingent looked up at the two boys, waiting expectantly.

"I will check on the others," Jon offered, still suspicious of the little girl. On his way up, he met Sirius coming down. The week out of prison had done Sirius a load of good. He looked healthier, his face had filled out a bit, and his teeth were clean. He looked casually dapper in a long black trench coat over a slim fitting wizards robe. His hands were gloved in black, and a grey scarf was elegantly wrapped around his neck. He wore a full top hat, with a severe brim. In his right hand was a cane with the Sigil of the House of Black, a gauntlet covered fist as the handle.

If Jon didn't know Sirius was on the side of the light, he would have struck a menacing figure.

"Jon, m-my boy. You look well. Nice cozy place you have in London. Great view of the sunrise."
"Yes. It is humble, but adequate. How are you feeling, Uncle Sirius?"

"Better. Much..." Sirius lost his train of thought. "Much better. Ollivander is telling me that you . . . you will be able to craft a wand for me?"

"Yes. We are his apprentices."

"And his grandson," Sirius added.

"Correct."

"I get the impression... that... you... and young Miss Potage... are an item?" Sirius said in halting speech. He frowned at himself every time he tried to speak smoothly.

"Yes, we are seeing each other, as a young romance," Jon explained, using careful words to paint a respectful picture.

"Three rich families- tied together by you. A b-binding of fate."

"I did not look at things this way," Jon said humbly.

"My parents would have been weeping in joy if they could see you now," Sirius scoffed. Jon did not understand the derision in Sirius' tone. "Where is Harry?"

"In the greatroom, entertaining the visitors."

"Ah. I will wait for you outside, then," Sirius nodded, drawing a pipe. He packed the bowl with trembling fingers. "Could do with a fag, actually. You smoke?"

"No." He had no idea what a fag was, or a smoke.

"Ah," Sirius said, slightly disappointed. "What do you like to do?"

"Train. The bow. The sword. Sparring."

"Ah- a fighter?"

"Yes."

"Done any fighting recently?"

"A bit," Jon said vaguely.

"Sirius!" Harry came over suddenly.

Sirius frowned at the boy. Why did Harry seem like, eager, almost as if he knew him already and was just waiting for him to start up a conversation about a past joke or something?

"Young James," Sirius greeted. "Harry. You look d-dapper. I have heard from these lasses, you fancy yourself a s-singer?"


"What are you smiling about all the time, lad?" Sirius asked, a bit suspicious of this young version of James.
"Good to see you, that's all."

"You, you talk like we've been talking... a lot.. or.. am I missing something? I.. mean I am happy to be out, and all, thanks to you, I hear."

Harry understood the confusion. He still had it in his mind that Sirius would have continued, just like he did, back from the dead. This Sirius didn't know him at all. He had to start over.

"I'm just glad you're out. Poppy says we're the next generation of troublemakers," Harry said, giving Jon a chummy headlock. Jon punched Harry briskly in his ribs. Harry laughed with feigned pain.

"Really?" Sirius lit up at that. "Well! Guess w-w-we will have to talk about that sometime. Now I think we have some ladies to ... shit." Sirius looked up and behind the two boys. He took off his hat with reverence.

Mrs. Potage had added the final touches to her own outfit. She looked gorgeous in her sparkling gown and dainty gloves. Her black dress had a full high bodice with a delicate diamond window at her cleavage. The sleeves were a sheer netted pattern with a narrow vine embroidered into the knit, and finished off with sleek wrist-high gloves.

Valerian walked timidly behind her, which in Harry's opinion was definitely not her usual modus operandi. She wore a sleeveless white bodycon dress ending mid thigh. Her hair was let down, artfully tousled and charmed into style. Her lean, strong legs and arms seemed to go on forever. She had on a set of silver earrings to finish her look.

"Ouch," Sirius sighed. "This, is magic right there lads."

"Voila," Mrs Potage said airly. "Monsieur Black, you clean up expertly!"

"I try. You two ladies, are absolutely stunning," he bowed gallantly. He signaled discreetly to his nephew to help his potential mother in law down the stairs.

Jon took the steps two at a time to help escort Mrs. Potage down. Harry took his time and met Valerian halfway. She was looking down at her ankle strap high heeled boots.

"Hey... wow," Harry congratulated her transformation. "You look really top."

"I have never worn a dress like this before," she said in a whisper. "I look, statuesque and... I do not show off my arms and legs. It was not allowed in the service."

"Soldiers don't show off their arms and legs?" Harry countered, shocked. He had a stigma of soldiers being in wife beaters and shorts, running around in the cold and rain.

"Well, I was not allowed. I always wore a flight suit with tactical gear for missions, long sleeves and woolen tights at base."

Harry did recall that she only wore body hugging outfits, but they covered her from her neck to the wrists and ankles. She didn't seem shy when she was only wearing her nightie though.

"I look like a tree. Tall, with branches bare," she said self consciously. Valerian actually had on a little bit of eye liner and lipstick. Harry thought she was a natural type beauty, but the touch of makeup accentuated her looks, rather than changed her appearance.

"You have great arms and legs," Harry said truthfully. "You should feel proud. Any guy would be blind not to see how beautiful you are."
"Really?" Valerian rubbed her toned arms self consciously. "Thanks," she said meekly.

"Come, Val, you're with me tonight," he offered her his arm. He peeked into the open door of Tonks' bedroom when she took his arm. It was empty. Harry frowned.

"You have a stash of Skrewt Potion made?" he remembered suddenly.

"Yes, as you requested." She patted the matching handbag.

"You look really nice tonight. It's going to be great. And I have your present."

"Present?" That finally put a smile on Valerian's face.

"Yep. You'll see." He felt her hand tighten briefly on his arm. Within minutes the ladies were all piled in the thestral carriages.

Sirius chose to ride up front with Jon, instead of himself. When he thought about it minutes into the trip back to Hogsmeade, that made sense. Jon was supposedly flesh and blood. Harry was 'just' his godson. A bit of jealousy rose up in Harry's chest. Even though he knew it was immature, Sirius choosing to bond with Jon irked him.

_You changed things, Harry. Jon is here. Magic made him a wizard, and Life made him a Black. Deal with it._

Sirius packed his pipe, using his little finger to even it out. "Light?" Sirius asked Jon gamely. Jon cast a _Lumos_ on the strange object in his uncle's mouth. Harry heard Sirius' loud, raucous cackle from way in front of them. Harry's mood immediately grew darker.

"A lumos!" Sirius breathed, trying to catch his breath. "Jonny boy, you're the best. We'll get along just fine," he laughed, clapping his back. Jon caught on after a minute of heckling.

"My fire spell isn't tempered enough for such a small flame," Jon said grimly.

"Oh?"

"Yes. I cast Dragon fire," Jon said simply.

"Ho ho!" Sirius chuckled. "Pull close to that tree," he ordered Jon. Jon guided the thestral closer to some branches overhanging along the dirt track. Sirius reached up and grabbed one. It broke off in his hand. "Flame on, mate," Sirius ordered, holding the branch as far away from him as possible. Jon cast his fire spell and the branch was engulfed in a white hot streak of flame. Sirius whistled, holding the blazing leaves away from him. With careful movements, Sirius puffed his gentleman's pipe underneath his engulfed branch.

"Ellie, be a d-d-ear and wash this down, s'il vous plait!" Sirius shouted into the carriage cabin. He tossed his "light" on the side of the muddy track. A gloved hand stuck out the window and Eleanor cast a water charm, outing it in a hiss of steam. "Merci Ellie!"

"No problem, Monsieur Black!"

"Nice bird that," Sirius nodded as he puffed away. "Ah, the smell of Hogwarts, Scotland."

"Yes," Jon breathed in. It smelled like Winterfell; ice, mud, and pine.

"Try?" Sirius offered Jon the pipe.
"Sure," Jon agreed. He puffed, tasting the bittersweet tobacco. He coughed a couple times.

"Give it here," Sirius said. "Harry seems, a bit... excited to see me?" Sirius asked casually.

"You are his only living relative that is magical."

"Those muggles... d-d-did they treat him well?"

"No," Jon said.

"I'll kill them," Sirius said easily.

"I don't think he'll like that."

"He'll get over it. They didn't do right by him, or am-am-am I mistaken?"

"Do not kill them, Uncle," Jon reinforced.

"If you say so," Sirius continued puffing his pipe.

By the time the carriages arrived, Harry was back in a foul temper. Right now he wished Penelope was nearby so he could scold her and make her feel just as annoyed as he was. He could hear Sirius' bouts of laughter and Jon's steady voice a few times. Sirius was having fun. And knowing Jon, he was keeping conversation while plotting how to take out the red witch as soon as it was possible.

Not on Harry's watch though. He would have to reel Jon in. At no point were they to commit murder on non-aggressive people. He had never seen Jon lose it like that. He parked the carriages at the square and jumped down, helping out the ladies from the high seats. Gabrielle offered her hand with an aristocratic flair, palm down, the exact same way she did in France.

"Merci, Harry!" she said delightedly as she alighted. She wrapped a red shawl around her head and shoulders, protecting herself from the cold.

*The Red Witch.*

Fleur and her other friends followed suit, all smiling prettily at him in thanks. The girls began chatting in their own language. Within minutes both carriages were sent on their way, with Jon escorting Madame Potage and Harry escorting Valerian. When Valerian offered everyone a small vial of potion, all the girls agreed to it. Harry took his own in thanks, watching Sirius' easy going behavior with the stoic Jon.

"Is something wrong, Harry?" Valerian asked right next to him.

"No." Harry looked around. The square was full of people, young and old. Many were holding candles in the twilight. Cocoa and snacks were being sold by students dressed up in Santa outfits at a few stalls surrounding the square. A team of Aurors were here as security. "Everything is fine. Oh, there is Alexandria."

Alexandria was dressed in Hogwarts' official choir uniform; red robes, with white trim. She greeted the both of them then hugged her mother. Her mother introduced her to Sirius. Sirius shook her hand firmly. Then she began speaking to Jon, and her friends. Within minutes she came back across to Harry.

"Hermione is looking for you. I have to go. We are about to start soon. Here is the program and song list. If you get a Christmas candle, it has an ever-warm charm burning on it. It has been a very
popular item for sale across there-" she pointed at a crowded tent. "Wish me luck!" she said, waving at them. She scampered back into the crowd, heading towards the stage.

Just before the choir started Harry spotted Hermione. She was discussing something avidly with Shea and Timothy Turner. Dean Thomas was currently double checking the microphones and piano that Katie was sitting behind. Hermione smiled when she saw him, but her expression faltered when she saw the tall girl on his arm. She squared her shoulders and approached.

"Hi! Glad you could make it! Nice outfit. And would you introduce me to your friend?"

"Hermione, Valerian, Valerian, Hermione Granger."

"Pleased to meet you," Valerian said, offering her hand.

"Pleased to meet you too," Hermione responded. Hermione eyed the hand on Harry's arm for a fraction of a microsecond. "Harry, did you bring the warmth potion?" She asked sweetly. Far too sweetly in his opinion.

"Yes, it is her concoction, actually." Harry offered her a bottle.

"Thank goodness. I'm going to share this with the choir. I'll chat with you later," she gave Harry a big hug and waved bye at Valerian.

"Shall we?" Jon asked as he approached. At that moment Gabrielle came up next to them.

"Jon, can you walk me over to the candle booth, s'il vous plait?" She asked cheerfully, rubbing her arms underneath her red dress. Harry immediately thought of little red riding hood and the big bad wolf. Jon towered over her and looked imposing with his bomber jacket. She folded her hands demurely in front of her, looking up at him with bright, innocent eyes. Jon glanced at Harry.

"Walk in the Light," Harry reminded him. Jon's shoulders straightened as if receiving orders.

"Miss Gabrielle?" Jon gallantly offered his arm to her. The little girl slipped her gloved hand into the crook of his elbow with a grace that contradicted her young mannerisms.

"Merci!"

Jon set off with the little red witch. "What are you doing here?"

"The servants of Rhllor are assigned to their tasks," Gabrielle said simply. "I have just found a voice, that is all. Do not mourn this girl, she is fine. I only speak through her when needed."

"And this 'task'?"

"The Horrible Cross, it has twisted the living, and the dead. Your foster mother, Lady Stark, she walks again, an abomination. She would be the first of many. I am here only as a messenger, and a guide, for you and your friend."

Jon kept his face impassive. He would never let this woman guide him, or any he cared about.

"You brought me back to life. Why?"

"It matters not anymore, that boy's magic is stronger than mine. He pulls in everything around him, takes what he needs. Changes fate with a whisper, brings hope to the hopeless, Light into the
darkness. Now that you were brought here, everything has changed. The living dead march south, undeterred. Within the next decade, that land must be engulfed in flames. The dead are rising again. The *true* long night will be upon them."

"By the gods. Is there no way to stop them?"

"Only the fires of Rhllor can purify the world," she patted his sleeve in gleeful anticipation. "One candle, s'il vous plait!"

Jon smiled at Susan Bones as he paid her the few coins. Gabrielle accepted the candle with a charming smile. "Anything else, a hot chocolate, perhaps?" Jon offered sarcastically.

Gabrielle leant on his arm, patting it gratefully. She stared into the flame of the white candle. "Darkness is still within him. There must be balance. Ooh, 'Do you hear what I hear.' Mon favori!"

Jon took note of the sequence of her words. That description was not him. If he was the Sword of the Light, then her statement aligned with Harry, not he.
"Do you fear the flames?" she teased.

"No," Jon responded.

"Put your hand in the fire, Jon Snow." Jon did so. The pain was nothing more than the pins and needles of sleeping on it for too long. "Unburnt, the Dragon Prince cannot be killed by fire, as do all other men. The flames do not lie Aegon."

"But your Rhllor speaks to you in the flames? Did you not convince Stannis that he was this promised prince as well? You burned his daughter at the stake as offering for victory, yet he still lost! This prince could be anyone, you could fall off your horse and the one who helps you up could be this 'prince'. You take me for a fool? Your whole belief system revolves around purification by flames. Your fellow red witches must be rejoicing for the upcoming war against the dead. 'Only the fires of Rhllor can purify the world'. Bullshit. What sort of genocidal nonsense is that?!"

"You are mistaken. Fire as a servant, brings people together-"

"And Fire as a master is the harbringer of ruin," Jon countered. "You serve the flames, Melisandre. The fire is your master. Rhllor is a lie. It is an evil false god you serve."

Gabrielle said nothing more, just cuddled more unto his arm, humming softly to the carols as they walked. She halted, something had caught her eye. "Ah, ze chocolate cookies, come Jon. I must simply try one!"

The little girl steered him towards another stall, holding his hand with youthful innocence. Jon sighed, dipping into his pocket once more.

That night when Jon and Harry dropped off their guests Valerian immediately stepped out of the heels as soon as she came into the house.

"Never again," she said, picking them up. The girls all streamed in, chatting animatedly about the evening. Jon held the door open for Sirius and Eleanor, who appeared to have enjoyed quite a bit of wine. Sirius was surly, and in one of his moods.

"I'll fix you dinner, girls!" Mrs. Potage was in a cheerful spirits. "Dining room in half an hour!" There were voices of assent coming from the various rooms in the house.

"Jon," Harry came in last, toting a large bag full of gifts. Jon closed the door behind him. "Gabrielle?"

"She speaks through her. You must ignore everything she says. As I said, her lies are dangerous. Any truth that may come forth, is comparable to a grain of salt in the sugar."

"Okay. Sounds like Trelawney."

"Yes. Except more convincing to the untrained ear."

"Mate, anyone could be more convincing than her."

"Melisandre uses grand statements, snatching tidbits of truth from various sources to make up a large, elaborate tale."

"She'll do well in the Ministry of Magic," Harry nodded. "In my experience, when you hear the truth in a prophecy, you can feel it. Trust your own judgment, as much as it is reasonably possible. Let's
take this into the sitting room," Harry hefted their stash of gifts. "Right, here's yours for Mrs Potage, and Sirius. These.. gifts for the girls... mine for Alexandria, yours.." Harry and Jon spent a few minutes placing gifts artistically underneath the large Christmas tree.

Valerian popped in still wearing her dress, a pair of flip flops, and holding a book in her left hand, a cup of coffee in her right. "Oh. I thought you had left," she smiled at them. "That's nice of you," she spotted the presents going under the tree. "Give me a moment!" Valerian left in a rush. The last gift in the bag was a long narrow box wrapped in silver. Jon peeped inside the bag, eyed the dimensions of the box, nodded, and walked to the door.

"Where are you going?" Harry said abruptly.

"To talk with Sirius. Being around such a large crowd has unsettled him."

"You cupid, or something?" Harry challenged. John smiled his angelic smile.

"You do prefer them leggy, with the capacity to kick you in the head," Jon grinned. "Good work earlier, Roderick Hallow. A trainer's greatest joy is seeing progress in leaps and bounds."

"You're a deadly fighter, Jon. Your methods work," Harry returned the compliment.

"Far too well it seems," Jon dipped his head once in acknowledgement. The door opened behind him and Valerian returned. "Miss Valerian, I must attend to my uncle. Tomorrow, if I do not see you again for the night."

"Goodnight Lord Black," Valerian said, her right fist over her heart.

"Good night, Valerian," Jon returned the salute. Harry thought that Valerian could execute protocol in only a tea towel and make it look legit. Harry frowned. Why was he thinking of her in a tea towel? The sound of the door closing with a soft click snapped Harry out of his thoughts. Jon had never really approved of Tonks for him. Maybe he saw this separation on the cards. Harry didn't know what to think of his suspicions. Jon was calm, and even though he teased him about not knowing anything, Jon actually was spot on most of the time.

It had only been one day. Tonks wasn't even here and still driving him up a wall.

"Hello, Dragonslayer," Valerian said. She flip flopped past him and placed three wrapped packages under the tree. After a moment's hesitation, she took up one. "I know that tomorrow is Christmas Eve, but.. here," she presented a gift. Harry could tell it was a book, or something of similar dimensions. Valerian held it straight out to him, like a baby with a dirty diaper being carried to the changing area. On her face was a toothy, hopeful grin. "Merry Christmas!"

Harry wondered if it was her sage magic at work that the last gift in his Santa bag was hers. He took it out.

"Hello Val," Harry said. "Merry Christmas," he presented her gift. They exchanged packages, then immediately shook them. Harry watched the expression on her face. She knew what it was.

She flexed her ankles a few times, bobbing on her toes in excitement.

"Go ahead," Harry chuckled.

Valerian ripped into it like a child. When she opened the simple white box and opened the soft silk wrap, she stared. "It's beautiful." Valerian took it out gingerly. "Expecto Patronum!"
Her Pegasus leaped out of her wand, bathing Harry in its soft silvery light. Valerian was upon him in a heartbeat, wrapping him up in a firm hug. The magic of the Patronus charm ran through them, making laps around the room, wings opening in preparation for flight.

Harry held her gently, even though she almost crushed him. "Thank you, thank you..." she kept whispering in his ear. He rubbed the soft material of her dress. After a minute had passed, Valerian had released her firm grip, but didn't let him go. She just stood there, leaning on him, simply holding him.

"I must be dreaming," she said sadly.

"Hm? Why?"

"Because I am so happy, but tears are coming out my eyes," she said huskily, a hitch in her voice. "The gift of reading, now the gift of magic. A home. A school. A new family. Allies. Happiness and Hope for a better future. Truly the most wondrous time of the year. Thank you, Dragonslayer."

"You're welcome."

Funny thing, life. Everyone else kept thanking him, but inside, he felt desperately alone. Maybe this self pity would pass in time. But as of right now, even Valerian's heartfelt hug was only a substitute.

"Mine is just a book," Valerian said sheepishly. "I hope you will read it."

"I will. It's not a sappy romance or something?"

"And if it was?" Valerian countered, looking into his face.

"I'll read it anyway," Harry smiled.

"You better," Valerian said, grinning. "It's a book on Norse Mythology. Gods and Myths of Northern Europe. Lots of ye olde magic and battles."

"Sounds good," Harry agreed.

"I hope you enjoy it," Valerian said softly. "I can't wait to practice with my new wand!"

"Maybe for a beginner you should wait until it's warmer outside. Wand safety one-oh-one and all that."

"I've been reading The Book Of Spells, level one. I can't wait to test them out. When would you two be coming in?"

Harry realized that she still didn't really let go of him. Was Jon a seer? She felt wonderful in his arms. But she wasn't Tonks.

Harry reluctantly let her go. He immediately missed her warmth in the chilly room. Valerian was inspecting the wand in her hands. "It's big."

"Tomorrow morning. I still have to craft an all purpose wand for you. That one should be able to transfigure into a sword, or weapon. When we settle down tomorrow I will ask Jon to help you out."

"Yes. His claymore transfigures from that wand. Your scythe does too?" Valerian asked.

"Correct. Our wands are highly customized, though. They don't respond well to wand waving. They
Valerian examined the wand in her hands, every bit of detail. "Those are my initials!" she exclaimed, inspecting the pommel.

"Inscribed with a three millimeter chisel, yep."

Another hug ensued. Over the last two days he was definitely the undisputed, reigning Hugwarts Tri-witch champion. Harry, even though he wasn't in the best of moods, was getting quite familiar with the curves of her back, and how she pressed in front of him. Even though it was a bit scummy on his part, he was enjoying it immensely.

"Merry Christmas, Harry," she squeezed him in one last show of appreciation. She gave him a soft peck on the cheek. "You should head back before you are missed."

"Right. Later, then," Harry agreed, squeezing her back. He didn't expect to hear her soft laugh of appreciation. That made a tingle run up and down his spine. He made his way to the front door. Jon was waiting near the front exit with his Quicksilver.

"Those girls are a curious bunch," Jon said. "They wish to know every detail of all our adventures."

"Tough," Harry said. "Clan business is clan business. Let's go."

"You were in there quite a while," Jon said as he mounted up.

"You seem to enjoy this. You always leave at the crucial moment."

"Seeing you squirm is highly entertaining," Jon said calmly. "But seeing you work your magic on the ladies is also quite disturbing. Once was enough."

"Fuck," Harry cursed, jumping into the air. "The girls are becoming an issue. I just don't know how I feel right now. Is this what heartbreak feels like?"

Jon shrugged. "If it is anything like what I felt when Ygritte died, I can empathize."

"Tonks was feisty, spirited. Didn't give a shit about my 'legend'."

"And she has a great high kick too."

"Yeah. I love that the most," Harry agreed sarcastically. "These girls... maybe I should just keep my distance."

"That, Harry of House Hallow, would be a feat of the tallest order. Maybe you should focus on our next challenge, the Basilisk muzzle. That should keep you occupied. Take your mind off these dangerous female encounters."

"Yeah. And how to even kill the blasted thing."

"Correct. But that will be for the new year. Let us enjoy these holidays." Jon mounted the broom and rose above the mansion. "Come. It is getting late. We still have presents to deliver before our friends leave on the morrow."

Harry glanced at Jon. The bastard was actually enjoying spreading cheer and presents, and taking the mickey out of him. Seasoned warrior with a horrible sense of humour from another dimension notwithstanding, Jon was a good friend.
"On me!" Harry rallied, feeling his mood turn for the better.

"Let's ride!" Jon replied with gusto as they shot off into the night sky.

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