**Novocaine**

by *Stardust_Warrior*

Summary

After the end of the war, Harry has a meeting in Gringotts that changes his life. Given a unique opportunity to rebuild the world, he takes it upon himself to restore what was once lost to the wizarding world, while falling for a charming witch at the same time.
May 15th, 1998

It had been a full two weeks, and Harry Potter was still having trouble believing that the war was really over. The rest of the wizarding world seemed to share his sentiments, because it was the first time in two weeks that Harry actually had a moment to himself. Between numerous funerals, cleanups, and not to mention rounding up Death Eaters and supporters, days had seemed to pass three times faster than usual.

The good thing was that it didn’t give him time to dwell on things. The funerals had been hard enough, and Harry felt that if he stopped and started thinking about everything that had happened in the last year, hell his whole life actually, he would need to be locked up in St. Mungo’s for the rest of his life.

“Good work, Potter,” called Gawain Robards, as he went to his office. “Take the next two days off, alright?”

“Yeah, you got it,” said Harry, trying not to frown. He knew Robards was being considerate, but Harry honestly had no idea what he was supposed to do with time off.

As it did turn out, when he returned to Grimmauld Place that evening, he had a letter from Gringotts waiting for him. And that letter, was the start of everything.

~

May 18th, 1998

Harry was not looking forward to another day of meetings. He had already spent way too much of his time in those with everyone from Headmistress McGonagall to Minister Shacklebolt. Not only did that take time away from Teddy, his godson and the only person Harry felt comfortable around these days, but it usually meant he had to make decisions and think about things he was trying to ignore.

Professor McGonagall had extended an invitation to come to Hogwarts to do a NEWTs year to him and others in his year. While many like Hermione had accepted, Harry knew he couldn’t return to Hogwarts, as much as he had thought of it as his home at one point in his life. Learning and education were not paths he wanted for himself.

Kingsley, on the other hand, wanted to make his temporary assignment to the Auror Department permanent. But Harry didn’t want to be an Auror either. After the Battle of Hogwarts, the smarter Death Eaters had decided to surrender. It honestly hadn’t surprised Harry, considering many had joined and remained out of fear of Voldemort and seeing him dead had made it very clear that they had picked the losing side. Instead of fighting further, they had surrendered and were currently awaiting trial in Azkaban. The more stubborn ones had tried to run, but hadn’t made it very far since the beaten down wizarding populace had not forgotten the atrocities wrought upon them this past year and had assisted Robards and his men to their utmost ability. Those raids had killed off most of the violent Death Eaters who had actually managed to survive the Battle of Hogwarts.

Currently, only petty criminals and some of the Snatchers remained at large, which was why Harry was considering turning down Kingsley’s offer as well. While it was rewarding work, he did not wish to jump back into a life of hunting down Death Eaters and dark wizards, when he’d done his
In all honesty, Harry just wanted to do something meaningful with his life. The war had been devastating on Britain. St. Mungo’s was struggling to treat those affected and swamped with trying to handle orphans, Muggleborns and others left alone after the war. The Ministry was no better, trying in vain to control their own internally crumbling bureaucracy. While Kingsley had been working like a madman to bring things to order, the Ministry was still rather unstable. All of this was not even mentioning the extensive property damage, breakdown of businesses all over the country, and an oncoming economical crisis.

His meeting that day was with Gringotts, and they’d invited him for a sit-down about some very important matters. He had no doubt they wanted to talk to him about his break-in and the heavy damage he had caused. He was surprised it had taken them this long to bring the matter up. It was going to be a long day of appeasing the goblins and their wounded pride.

To his surprise, when he did arrive at Gringotts, he received a lot of frightened looks, as opposed to angry or even joyful at the prospect of seeing him punished. He was already confused before Head Goblin Kord walked into the wide, spacious office that Harry had been led to.

“Mr. Potter,” greeted the goblin dressed in gold robes. “I am Kord, the head goblin of Gringotts in Britain.”

“Good morning, Kord,” said Harry politely.

“Please, sit,” said Kord, indicating a chair in front of his desk.

Harry nodded and sat down, trying not to let his curiosity show. Kord took a seat opposite him and surveyed him through his thick monocle.

“Let me begin this meeting by assuring you that Gringotts does not hold you responsible for the damage caused by your break-in. It is why you did not encounter any resistance in your dealings with us these past weeks,” he said. “We were saddened to learn that the person responsible was one of our own. He has been appropriately dealt with.”

Harry’s eyebrows flew up. “Right,” he said uncertainly, though he was relieved that they weren’t holding his vault and the contents hostage. “So, why did you want to meet with me?”

Kord paused and looked distinctly uncomfortable. “I was expecting you to bring legal representation with you to this meeting, Mr. Potter,” he said.

Harry vaguely remembered their letter mentioning bringing someone to represent him if needed. “I don’t have one,” he said honestly, wondering if it would have been a good idea to bring Hermione, even though she had left for Australia the day before.

“You are going to need one,” said Kord. “Or several.”

“Am I being accused of something?” asked Harry coldly.

“Hardly,” said Kord. “What do you know about the Death Eaters and their alliance to the one they called the Dark Lord, Mr. Potter?”

That wasn’t what he was expecting. “What?” asked Harry, taken aback.

“Do you know what they pledged him along with their support?” asked Kord.
“Apart from their loyalty? Whatever he asked of them, I suppose,” said Harry.

“Not quite,” said Kord. “The Dark Lord had several followers but only a few were part of his inner circle. Those that were, pledged their name, wealth, and fealty to him as their lord.”

“Right,” said Harry, remembering that the inner circle consisted mainly of the pureblood fanatics while there were plenty other Death Eaters who were just murderers that had joined Voldemort. “They shouldn’t be a problem, though. All of them are in Azkaban or dead.”

“Which is precisely a problem,” said Kord. “By right, their lord owned everything they had. Since you then defeated their lord, it all passes to you.”

Harry’s eyes went wide. “Er, what?” he asked, unsure of what Kord was telling him.

Kord leaned back in his chair. “All the wealth and titles pledged to the Dark Lord by his inner circle are now yours, Mr. Potter,” he said.

Harry stared at him thunderstruck. “How many?” he asked hoarsely.

“At our current estimate?” asked Kord, consulting a roll of parchment from his robes. “At least twenty-three of them owe you their loyalty, including fourteen of the Sacred Twenty Eight. You have your Potter and Black family inheritances, of course, so that makes…”

“Twenty-five, including fifteen of the Sacred Twenty-Eight,” said Harry, his throat dry.

Kord nodded shortly. “And then, there is the undiscovered bloodline,” he said.

“Eh?” asked Harry.

“The Peverell family,” said Kord. “We were finally able to trace the Peverell bloodline after it came to light that the one called the Dark Lord was the last heir of the Gaunt family before he adopted his persona. The second Peverell brother, Antioch’s family line ended with the Dark Lord, so the title now passes to the descendants of the third brother, Ignotus.”

“I’m related to Ignotus Peverell?” asked Harry, and then felt foolish because it was obvious since he had the cloak. “Right.”

“While the Peverell line doesn’t come with a Wizengamot seat and it precedes the Sacred Twenty Eight alliance, what it does provide you is the extensive estate that still remains to be inherited,” said Kord.

“Why didn’t Voldemort inherit it?” asked Harry.

Kord still flinched at the name, but pressed on. “Like I said, it was only after his death that even we goblins realised the connection,” he explained. “He certainly never came to us to check, and it wouldn’t be amiss if he actually had no idea of his own connection to the Peverell line.”

Harry blinked thoughtfully and finally nodded. “So, the Peverell estate comes to me now?” he asked.

“Yes,” said Kord. “It is a very valuable estate, Mr. Potter. More valuable than both the Potter and Black family combined.”

Harry sat back in his chair in shock. Kord gave him a few minutes before clearing his throat. “Now, you understand the full scope of things, don’t you, Mr. Potter?” he asked. “Some of these houses still have existing heirs, so there is no doubt that it will be up to you to deal with them,” he
said. “Apart from their wealth and titles, you also receive authority over their seats on the Wizengamot. I do not have to impress upon you what this means.”

Harry blinked and wiped the sweat beading on his forehead. “I need an attorney,” he said finally.

“Yes,” said Kord. “And a good one, too. He will have a monumental task before him if he is to help you navigate through this particular quagmire.”

“I don’t suppose you could recommend me someone?” asked Harry.

Kord paused. “There aren’t many left,” he said. “Ever since the Dark Lord’s return, the houses haven’t had use for them. Your best bet would be the Verdant firm. They are the last ones left who have previous experience in these matters. The others mostly deal with petty criminal matters or the like. Their offices are not far from Ollivander’s.”

“Thank you,” said Harry.

Kord clicked his fingers and a large stack of parchments covered his desk. With another click, they were all shrunk and placed into a thin manila envelope. He slid it towards Harry with both hands. “Show him this,” he said. “I have no doubt he will contact us for further details. And of course, you shall have the goblins’ silence while you deal with it.”

Harry took the manila envelope and put it away in his robes. “Thank you,” he said again and stood up.

Kord stood as well and bowed. “Of course,” he said. “Good day, Mr. Potter.”

“Good day, Kord,” said Harry, and left his office woodenly.

The bright sunshine outside the bank disoriented him momentarily, but he took a deep breath and walked down towards Ollivander’s. His mind was whirring at the implications of what he had learned, and he was in a daze by the time he arrived at the cluster of offices near Ollivander’s. He found a sign denoting the offices of Verdant, with a note telling him to ring the bell for assistance. He rang the small brass bell nearby, which tinkled beyond the frosted glass doors.

Nobody answered, and Harry was about to ring the bell once more when he just decided to try and open the door. To his surprise, the handle turned easily and the door swung open with a creak. The hallway before him was a little dark, but he could see an open office door beyond the darkened lobby and the row of closed rooms. Harry made his way towards the office, stopping short in the doorway when he noticed a woman with long golden blonde hair packing up the office in boxes. She had her back to him, so Harry knocked on the office door lightly to get her attention. She whirled around at the sound, and Harry’s memory vaguely provided him the name that went with that face.


She looked even more surprised, blue eyes widening. “Potter?” she asked. “What are you doing here?”

“You’re an attorney?” asked Harry.

She raised an eyebrow. “No,” she said. “We were in the same year at Hogwarts, remember?”

Harry went pink. “Y-yeah, I know,” he said hastily. “I meant, are you one now?”
She shrugged delicately. “I suppose,” she said. “But your timing is rather poor. Today is the last day
Verdant is in business.”

“Why?” asked Harry.

“This was my father’s business,” said Daphne. “Unfortunately, he was murdered by Death Eaters
two months ago.”

“Oh,” said Harry. “I’m very sorry to hear that.”

Daphne smiled a little. “Thank you. Believe it or not, hearing it from you actually comes across as
sincere,” she said. “Did you need an attorney?”

“Yeah,” he said.

“There are a few others here in Diagon Alley,” said Daphne. “I can give you a list if you want.”

“Do any of them have experience with title and estate planning?” he asked.

Daphne stopped short. “Not as such, no,” she said. “This firm was one of the last ones standing that
was capable of those matters. It’s been sort of a mess since my father died, so I don’t really know
how else to help.”

Harry nodded, understanding better than she probably knew.

“Is your sister alright?” he asked, concerned.

She stared at him in surprise. “How did you-?”

“We were in the same year at Hogwarts,” he said, repeating her words.

“Yes, but we never even spoke,” she said, still puzzled.

“Well, my experience with Slytherin was either Snape or Malfoy, neither of which was pleasant,”
shrugged Harry. “But I at least knew about other people in our year, especially in the later years.” He
suddenly remembered the last time he’d seen her. “You were there, weren’t you,” he said. “At the
Battle of Hogwarts. You were among the Slytherins who stayed.”

She looked a little embarrassed. “It’s not a big deal,” she said, glancing away. “It wasn’t as if there
was another place for me to go. I wasn’t much of a fighter, so I mostly just looked after the
wounded.”

“Thank you for doing that,” he said, sincerely.

She chuckled, her demeanour growing considerably warmer with the gesture. “It’s ironic you’re
thanking me, so please stop,” she said. “Astoria is fine. We were spared after our father was killed
since we were both purebloods and could be used as breeding stock to further any of the numerous
Death Eater lines.”

Harry winced at her blunt words, spoken in such a matter of fact tone even if they were true. At his
wince, she smiled a little. “Don’t worry, Potter,” she said. “My father was killed because he refused
to pledge his fealty to the Dark Lord, and since the war’s over, I’m just happy my sister and I are
alive because of you and what you did. So, how about you tell me why you need an attorney and I’ll
try and see if I can help.”

“Really?” asked Harry, surprised.
Daphne nodded firmly. “I understand you might hesitate considering we don’t know one another that well, and I’m not even fully qualified, really. But if I can repay the favour, I would be happy to do it.”

“Thanks, Greengrass,” said Harry, and then paused. “What do you mean, not qualified?”

“I mean, I don’t have a licence to practice as an attorney,” she said. “My father had been grooming me to take over the business, but without authorisation, I can’t officially get involved right now.”

“In other words, you are still qualified, aren’t you?” asked Harry. “At least, more than anyone else at this moment in matters of title and estate planning? Apart from having a licence?” he added when she opened her mouth to protest.

She chuckled again. “Why don’t you come in and tell me what it is that you want and I’ll see if I can help?” she asked.

“Thanks,” said Harry, walking into the office and closing the door behind himself. As an afterthought, he raised his wand to cast some privacy charms but before he could do so, a small seal glowed on the closed door.

“Don’t worry,” said Daphne, clearing some boxes off a chair and offering it to him. “The offices are all warded for privacy.”

Harry put away his wand and sat down. “Right, of course,” he said. He took out the manila envelope and handed it to Daphne.

She took it and paused. “I should inform you that this conversation will be entirely confidential but I cannot examine documents until you officially hire me,” she said. “It’s to protect both of us.”

“I trust you,” said Harry, before he could think too much of it.

Daphne looked startled. “Merlin,” she said, shaking her head. “You don’t know the first thing about me. You shouldn’t be so quick to offer your trust, Potter. It will be the ruin of you.”

Harry went scarlet. “Sorry,” he said. “It’s just...what you just told me. About your father and all, I feel like you might actually be the best person to trust right now.”

“And what proof do you have that any of what I said was the truth?” she asked. “For all you know, I could have been a Death Eater in hiding who was trying to ensnare you by making up a story that would get your sympathy.”

“No,” he said confidently. “That, I would have known.” No matter how harsh her words or how calm her demeanour, Harry knew grief when he saw it. Especially in those who had lost parents. Not to mention, he had seen her at the Battle himself, tending to the wounded.

Daphne sighed and shook her head. “Regardless, you should be careful,” she said. “Before I open this envelope, why don’t you tell me exactly what it is that you need?”

“The inner circle of Death Eaters pledged their wealth, fealty and titles to Voldemort. Since I killed him, it has all passed to me,” he said shortly.

Daphne dropped the envelope in shock. “Oh,” she said. “You need an attorney.”

Harry chuckled. “Yes,” he said.
She bent down and picked up the envelope with shaky fingers. “You have two options right now,” she said. “If you are on good terms with Minister Shacklebolt, use it to find a lawyer outside Britain who is an expert in these matters. That is your best bet.”

“And what’s the other option?” asked Harry.

“You hire me instead,” said Daphne. “I will need about three days to get a licence approved, and I cannot promise you the same level of expertise as my father but you can be assured of my loyalty and silence.”

“What changed your mind?” asked Harry curiously, remembering her vehement refusal to even consider it before.

Daphne’s jaw tightened. “Both my parents died because of Death Eaters,” she said, grimly. “My mother died in childbirth with Astoria due to a prolonged curse placed on her by the Death Eaters in the previous war because my father refused to join them. When he also refused them this time around, they tortured and murdered him,” she said. “And now, everything they had, everything they took from the wizarding world is in this envelope.” She smirked at the envelope in question. “I would love nothing more than to see it used to restore what was lost to our world.”

Harry surveyed her closely. She hadn’t been wrong when she had said that they hadn’t even spoken once in the six years they’d been at Hogwarts, but he remembered her. Specifically, he remembered some of the more uncouth of his classmates remarking on her appearance. She was definitely beautiful with long blonde hair, big blue eyes, milky white skin and a pretty face and body. But there was a look of such determination and intelligence in her features that he nodded slowly.

“I don’t need to tell you that this won’t be easy,” he said.

She smiled at him and set the envelope down. “I am prepared for a fight, Potter,” she said, holding out her hand.

Harry grasped her hand and shook it. “Good, let’s get started,” he said. “And call me Harry.”

~

22nd May, 1998

It took exactly three days for Daphne Greengrass to get her licence. She had explained that there was no formal education for an attorney offered in the wizarding world, just an exam set by the Ministry to get a licence to practice. She had sent off her application on the same day after he’d come to her, and her exams had been set for the very next day. Her results came in two days later, with her brand new licence.

The day after Daphne got her licence when Harry arrived at the offices of Verdant, he found that the darkened lobby had some light in it and an older witch with greying dark hair and round glasses sat at the reception, writing something down. She looked up when Harry entered and got to her feet.

“Mr. Potter,” she greeted. “Miss Greengrass is in her office.”

“Thank you, er-,” he paused.

“I’m Maribeth Cooper,” she said. “I worked with the late Mr. Greengrass until his death. Miss Daphne got in touch some time ago saying that the firm wasn’t shutting down after all and my job was there if I wanted it.”
Harry smiled. “Has she informed you of what we are doing here?” he asked.

“Yes,” said Maribeth. “You are the only client we have, and I have been sufficiently informed. Do go in. I shall be along with some tea and scones momentarily.”

“Thank you,” said Harry, and walked towards the office.

The door was ajar, and he glanced inside to see that the messy office had been cleaned and tidied up. Daphne sat at her desk, poring over a stack of parchments. Unlike their first meeting when her hair had been in a messy ponytail and she had been dressed in slightly shabby robes, Daphne looked like a different woman altogether. Her hair was in a tight bun on the top of her head, a few wisps of her hair hanging around her face. Her face was properly made up and she was dressed in fitted navy robes.

She looked up when Harry knocked and beckoned him inside. “Good morning, Harry,” she said.

“Morning, Daphne,” he said, and sat down in a chair. “How’s it going?”

She sighed a little and sat back in her chair. “Good,” she said. “Gringotts is very thorough with their record keeping, which is very helpful. I have already sent off requests for more details and they’ll get back to me before the day is over. In the meantime, I have a concise list for you.”

Harry took the roll of parchment she offered him and read it quickly. It was a list of the families who now owed their name, loyalty and wealth to him.

“It’s like a who’s who of scum, isn’t it?” asked Daphne. “My father was tortured because he refused to do the exact things these morons did. Well, that and he didn’t want to join the Dark Lord, of course. But you can see why it wouldn’t be a good idea to sign everything away to someone else.” She paused and smiled viciously. “Of course, now, you hold the leash.”

“I doubt they want to be loyal to me,” said Harry, setting the list down.

“They have very little choice,” said Daphne. “You could also order them to be executed, if you want.”

Harry glanced back at the list and frowned. “Most heads of those houses are in Azkaban or dead. The ones left are heirs who are not of age.”

“Yes,” said Daphne, dropping the smile and regaining her serious demeanour. “In a way, that is good for us. Eliminating them is within your rights, but I don’t think you are the kind of person who wants to do that.”

Harry chuckled. “Yes,” he said. “You have another option, I assume?”

Daphne nodded and pulled out a long roll of parchment. “These are all the assets owned by the Potter and Black families. I have also added up everything from houses that no longer have a viable heir. As you can see, it is a fairly substantial fortune.”

Harry read through the list and his eyes grew wide. “Is this number correct?” he asked.

“Yes,” said Daphne, dropping the smile and regaining her serious demeanour. “In a way, that is good for us. Eliminating them is within your rights, but I don’t think you are the kind of person who wants to do that.”

Harry chuckled. “Yes,” he said. “You have another option, I assume?”

Daphne nodded and pulled out a long roll of parchment. “These are all the assets owned by the Potter and Black families. I have also added up everything from houses that no longer have a viable heir. As you can see, it is a fairly substantial fortune.”

Harry read through the list and his eyes grew wide. “Is this number correct?” he asked.

“You and six generations of your family won’t have to work and could live their lives lavishly,” she
“Right,” said Harry, shaking off his shock.

“The good news is that you won’t lack for money,” said Daphne. “So we can actually let the rest of the heirs and such have their estates and wealth to themselves.”

“We do nothing?” asked Harry.

Daphne smiled. “There are fifty seats in the Wizengamot. The Sacred Twenty Eight seats get two votes each, as does the Minister of Magic. Everyone else gets one vote. You understand that this vote will count on every change in law, every trial, and any and every Ministry decree.”

Harry paused. “How many votes do I have?” he asked.

“57 out of a possible 80 votes,” said Daphne. “With all the seats that owe loyalty to you.”

“That…” Harry shook his head as the implications began to sink in. “That’s why we can afford to let them remain where they are.”

“Like I said, you would still be their lord,” said Daphne. “They cannot defy you, because doing so would rid them of their title and wealth immediately. They know that very well, so they wouldn’t have a choice except grit their teeth and do as you say.”

Harry started to laugh and couldn’t stop for a few minutes. Daphne let him have the moment, and chuckled a few times herself as Maribeth came in with tea and scones.

“You are such a Slytherin,” he asked finally.

“Thank you,” she said, sipping her tea. “I’m surprised you are taking this so well. I expected an honourable denial somehow.”

Harry picked up his own cup and smiled at Maribeth in thanks as she left. “I very nearly was Slytherin myself,” he said, and then focused back on the matter at hand. “As much as I don’t like the idea of them having any say whatsoever, using them to bring about the change they fought so hard to prevent sounds better and better.”

“I thought you might enjoy that,” said Daphne. “If word is to be believed, Hermione Granger intends to join the Ministry after her final year at Hogwarts to fight for creature rights. Now, imagine what fifty-seven votes could do for that.”

Harry paused in sipping his tea and set his cup down. “I have changed my mind,” he said suddenly. “I want to renegotiate our contract.”


“We agreed on your fees but now I have some changes,” he said.

Daphne was stone-faced as she pulled out the contract they had signed after their first meeting. “What would you like to change?” she asked.

“Your fees,” he said. “They are now doubled, with an added bonus.”

Daphne looked at him in shock. “Harry, you were very generous already,” she said.

“If this is what you did in after only one day of having your licence, I want Verdant on permanent
“The money will give you a chance to hire more people, and with all that will come our way once this is all set in motion, we are going to need it.”

Daphne smiled slowly. “Alright,” she said, and waved her wand. The contract was altered, and both she and Harry signed it once more before Daphne put it away.

“About the funds in their vaults,” said Harry. “The heirs,” he clarified. “What do we do about it?”

“The wealth they hold is still substantial, but I wouldn’t recommend taking it away from them,” said Daphne. “People care a great deal for money and if you want their loyalty, money is a great way to keep it. Of course, it will also help when we need to pull their leash a little.”

Harry grinned and started drinking his tea once more. “I want to set up a trust for my godson,” he said.

“I can do that,” said Daphne, writing it down. “It is pretty straightforward.” She set her quill down and surveyed Harry. “Honestly, we should focus on settling this thing with the heirs first. I heard a rumour when I was the Ministry to take my exam.”

“What did you hear?” asked Harry.

“As you know, the Wizengamot hasn’t been in session since the fall of the Dark Lord,” said Daphne. “And rightly so, because nobody even knows where to start. However, I heard that Minister Shacklebolt will be calling the first post-war session of the Wizengamot at the start of June.”

“If it’s true, we definitely need to sort this out before then,” he said. “June is almost upon us.”

“I suspect the first session will focus heavily on making sure we actually have a functioning Wizengamot with enough seats,” said Daphne. “The Minister won’t risk holding trials or changing any laws until the Wizengamot is functional.”

“I know,” nodded. “Kingsley has been using the Minister’s wartime power so far, but I guess people won’t stand for it much longer.”

“Which brings us to your Wizengamot seats,” said Daphne. “Once we have the loyalties of those houses, it’s likely that the family matriarch will sit on the seat until the heirs are of age. But then there are other seats that are no longer extant, so we will need to figure that out too.”

“Let’s do that now then,” said Harry.

“Okay,” said Daphne. “As you know, the Sacred Twenty Eight seats are the only permanent seats on the Wizengamot. The other twenty two seats are elected through a nomination followed by a vote of the full Wizengamot every four years.”

Harry hadn’t actually known that, but he nodded along. “Sacred Twenty Eight first,” he said, picking up the list of the current Wizengamot. “Abbott.”

“Viable,” said Daphne, consulting her list. “Hannah Abbott’s father sits on the seat, and he has a son who is younger than Hannah who will likely inherit.”

“Her mother was muggleborn, wasn’t she?” asked Harry, remembering the news of her being murdered in their sixth year.

“Yes,” said Daphne. They were both quiet for a while, before Daphne cleared her throat. “Next.”
“Avery,” said Harry, frowning darkly.

“In Azkaban, and good riddance too,” said Daphne. “He has a wife, Bianca, and a fifteen year old son named Marshall.”

“So, Bianca will hold the seat until Marshall is of age,” said Harry, and looked at the other list. “Oh, but they signed it all to Voldemort.”

“Which makes them loyal to you,” smirked Daphne. “Next?”

“Black, but I hold that one,” said Harry.

“You might need to nominate someone to hold it,” said Daphne. “It’s technically not proper to sit on more than one seat.”

“Andromeda Tonks, then,” said Harry. “She can hold the seat until Teddy, my godson, is of age.”

“She was formerly Andromeda Black, wasn’t she?” asked Daphne. “Then that’s perfect. You can make the nomination when the Minister asks you about it and no one will protest if she’s placed on it. Who’s next?”

“Bulstrode,” said Harry. “Is that Millicent’s family?”

“Yes,” said Daphne. “It was her father who was the Death Eater, but Millie is actually a half blood since her mother was a muggleborn. Millie's father murdered her mother on the Dark Lord’s orders last year.”

“He was killed in an Auror raid a few weeks ago,” said Harry. “Does Millicent have any other family?”

“No, it’s just her,” said Daphne. “Her father also signed everything away to the Dark Lord. She won’t put up a fight, to be honest. She hated her father and the Dark Lord with a passion.”

“Alright, then we can just ask for her cooperation,” said Harry. “Burke is next.”

“The older one is in Azkaban, and the younger brother runs the shop in Knockturn Alley,” said Daphne.

“Yeah,” grimaced Harry. “There wasn’t enough proof to arrest him as a Death Eater but I doubt he’s innocent.”

“A fight for another day,” said Daphne. “In the meantime, you can have him be loyal to you and do as you say.”

“I’m fine with that,” said Harry. “The Carrows are next, eh? Amycus and Alecto are dead, thankfully.”

“Yes,” said Daphne, face going dark with anger. “I wish I could have been the one to kill them, to be honest.” She sighed and took a deep breath. “The twins, Hestia and Flora, are of age. They weren’t a part of the main family but with Amycus and Alecto dead, they’re the only ones left to inherit it. The girls were not involved in Death Eater activities, so one of them will hold the seat.”

“The Carrows still signed it away, though,” said Harry. “The loyalty rests with me then?”

“Yes,” said Daphne. “Flora will likely inherit it being the older twin. Whoever she marries will take her name and hold the seat until she has a son or another heir. If she doesn’t marry or bear an heir,
then Hestia will be eligible.”

“Got it,” said Harry. “Oh,” he stopped when he saw the next name. “Crouch.”

“Yeah, that’s the extinct one,” said Daphne. “You got the wealth, so I’m guessing you were the closest relative left. Any idea who you’d want to nominate?”

“None whatsoever,” said Harry. “Any other relatives?”

“Unfortunately, Barty Crouch Sr. was an only son, as was his father so there are no cousins. His mother was Charis Crouch, formerly Charis Black, which is how you’re related,” said Daphne, consulting the Black family tree.

Harry followed the line as she traced it. “Charis Black had two sisters, eh?” he asked, noticing the names.

“Yeah, one of them married into the Longbottom family,” said Daphne. “The Longbottom family has a seat already, and Neville is the only viable heir. The other one…”

“Cedrella Black who married Septimus Weasley,” said Harry, remembering the tapestry in Grimmauld Place. “She was blasted off the tree.”

“Yes,” said Daphne, and then paused thoughtfully. “As the current Black family head, you can ask her status to be restored, which would give her descendants the seat.”

“It would go to Arthur Weasley?” asked Harry.

“Well, yes and no,” said Daphne. “The Weasleys are a Sacred Twenty Eight family but their seat has been empty despite having a number of viable heirs because the marriage of Cedrella Black and Septimus Weasley led to a whole lot of bad blood among the purebloods. The Black family at the time was powerful enough to quash any claim made by the Weasley family, even to their own seat.”

“So, if I restore Cedrella Black’s status, then the Weasleys would have two seats?” asked Harry.

“Yes,” said Daphne. “Arthur Weasley will likely hold one and hand the other to one of his sons.”

“Probably Percy,” said Harry.

“Isn’t he the third son?” asked Daphne, confused.

“Arthur’s seat will pass on to Bill, who’s the oldest,” said Harry. “Charlie might be returning to Romania, so Percy makes sense.”

“All right,” said Daphne. “Either of them, really, are suitable so it’s up to you to nominate the one you think is right.”

“I have to nominate them, not Mr. Weasley?” asked Harry, startled.

“Yes,” said Daphne. “You are the head of the Black family, remember? You legitimise them and then make the nominations.” She smiled a little. “You can always discuss this with them beforehand, you know.”

“Right,” said Harry, feeling a little foolish. “Next is, oh wait. If they get the Crouch seat, can they also inherit the Crouch wealth?”

“They will, if you order it,” said Daphne.
“Please do that,” said Harry.

“Alright,” she said, making a note. “I’ll write to Gringotts after the Wizengamot votes. Who’s next?”

“Fawley,” said Harry.

“Not involved,” said Daphne. “Straight as an arrow, that family. They mostly held neutral beliefs.”

“Flint is next,” said Harry. “He’s in Azkaban. Marcus is, anyway.”

“Yeah, he’s got a younger brother,” said Daphne. “Fortunately, he’s only twelve, so his mother will hold the seat. They also signed everything away, so they’ll do as you say.”

“Well, after that it’s Gaunt, but we know how that went,” said Harry.

“It’s actually a bigger problem than you realise,” said Daphne.

“How so?” asked Harry. “Voldemort was the last of his line.”

“Exactly,” said Daphne. “And no one will want to claim the seat for fear of that implication. You might actually have to hold onto it until you bear an heir.”

“Great,” said Harry, sarcasm dripping from his tone. “I thought it wasn’t proper to have two seats.”

“It’s not but they’ll likely make an exception this time,” said Daphne. “No one wants to claim a seat with no wealth and such a bad reputation.”

Harry groaned in annoyance but nodded. “Oh,” he said, when he saw the next name. “Greengrass.”

“Right, that would be me,” smiled Daphne. “Fortunately for you, I think I’ll vote in your favour.”

Harry couldn’t help but chuckle. “I appreciate it,” he said. “Are you and Astoria the only heirs?”

“Yeah,” said Daphne. “The next person to hold the seat would likely be my heir.”

“Ah,” said Harry, and hurried to the next name. “Lestrange.”

“Dead, all of them,” said Daphne. “I could sing.”

“You and me both,” said Harry.

“It actually took me a lot of work, this one,” said Daphne, searching around for something. “Ah, here it is! So, get this, the line ends with Rodolphus and Rabastan since neither of them had children. However, there is another line. The Corvus Lestrange line.”

“Never heard of it,” said Harry, startled that there were more of them than he realised.

“Long ago, the last Corvus Lestrange went to the States and he died without an heir a few years ago,” said Daphne, reading the newly found document. “However, he had a half sister named Leta Lestrange, who was from Britain and went to Hogwarts. Leta Lestrange married another wizard but they had no children.”

“So that’s where the line ended?” asked Harry, trying to follow it.

Daphne shook her head with a smile. “The man she married was called Theseus Scamander,” she said.
“Why do I know that name?” asked Harry.

“He was the older brother of Newt Scamander, the man who wrote…” began Daphne, but Harry remembered suddenly.

“Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them,” he said. “Right, wait, there was an old Auror named Theseus Lestrange in the hall of heroes at the Ministry’s Auror Department.”

“Yes, that’s him,” said Daphne. “He took Leta’s name when they married but they died without an heir, and Rodolphus’ branch of the family had much more of a right, so they got the Lestrange seat. However, with both lines dead, the line goes to Theseus’ only living relative.”

“Newt Scamander gets the Lestrange seat?” asked Harry, incredulously.

“Well, he has a claim to it, anyway,” said Daphne. “The most legitimate claim there can be.”

“Is he still alive?” asked Harry.

“Yes, he and his wife live in Dorset,” said Daphne. “He has a son, who unfortunately passed away two years ago from an illness. But he has an heir.”

“I didn’t know we had a Scamander at Hogwarts,” said Harry.

“He went to Beauxbatons, actually, since his mother is French,” said Daphne. “Rolf Scamander, Newt’s only grandson. He’s three years older than us and there are rumours that he is currently in Dorset to study with his grandfather. He’s the only legitimate heir to the Lestrange seat that I can find.”

“If he does claim it, he will have to do as I say, huh?” asked Harry, and looked uncomfortable. “I don’t like that.”

“Well, you can always release the Lestrange seat from their fealty,” said Daphne. “It will mean two less votes, though.”

“I can at least meet with him before the Wizengamot convenes and see if he’s interested,” said Harry. “If he does claim the seat, I will release the Lestrange family’s fealty and hand him control.”

“Alright, I’ll contact him for a private meeting,” said Daphne. “What will you do if he refuses?”

“I dunno, convince him to hold onto it until he has an heir, I guess,” shrugged Harry.

“That’s a good plan,” nodded Daphne. “Who’s next?”

“Longbottom,” said Harry. “Neville will probably claim the seat, now that he’s of age. Macmillan is next. Does it go to Ernie?”

“His father is still alive and well, so probably not yet,” said Daphne.

“Malfoy’s next,” sighed Harry.

“I heard you personally applied for a full pardon for all three of them,” said Daphne. “That was unexpected, to say the least.”

“Yeah,” said Harry. “Still, Lucius signed everything away, didn’t he?”

“He did,” said Daphne. “He’ll do as you say, though I doubt he’s thrilled at the prospect.”
“I don’t care, honestly, but yeah, it’s not like he has a choice,” said Harry. “What about Nott?”

Daphne gritted her teeth. “Yeah, that bastard is still breathing free air,” she said. “I guess none of what he did last year was technically illegal since it was authorised by Hogwarts professors. Even if that meant torturing first years.”

“Yeah, I don’t like it either,” said Harry, with a frown. “There are a few people like that. Robards said they claimed they were only doing as their teachers instructed, which is true.”

“Regardless, he has to do as you say,” said Daphne, with a vicious smirk. “Ollivander should be next, right?”

“Yeah,” said Harry. “Doesn’t Mr. Ollivander have two children?”

“Yes, a son and a daughter. I hear the daughter’s frail, but the son inherited the seat and will likely run the business too after the current Mr. Ollivander retires,” said Daphne. “It goes without saying…”

“Yeah, I know they aren’t Death Eaters,” said Harry. “Parkinson.”

“Pansy’s the only one,” frowned Daphne. “Her mother died when she was young and her father is in Azkaban right now. She was no angel this past year, but like Theo, she gets pardoned for obeying orders.”

“Well, like Nott, she still has to do as I say,” said Harry, with satisfaction. “Were you two friends?”

“Hardly,” snorted Daphne. “She hated my guts, but knew not to say that to my face. Parkinson family’s finances are in shambles, you see. She was clinging to Malfoy, hoping for a betrothal which still might happen, to be fair. Either way, she hated anyone she thought would be a prospective future Malfoy bride.”

“Right,” said Harry. “The less said about that the better. Huh, Prewett? That was Molly’s maiden name.”

“Yes, Molly Weasley was a Prewett,” said Daphne. “Her grandfather had two children, Molly’s father and Ignatius Prewett who married Lucretia Black. Ignatius and Lucretia had no heir, so that’s not an issue. As I understand, Molly Weasley’s younger brothers are dead.”

“Yes,” said Harry, glancing down at the watch on his wrist that had once belonged to Fabian Prewett. “So, one of the Weasley brothers gets it?”

“Yes,” said Daphne. “The nomination will be tricky, but you could likely make it. Speak to the Weasleys about who would be the most appropriate.”

“I will,” said Harry. “Rosier is next. Is Felix Rosier the last one alive?”

“No, he has a daughter who is still ten. As I understand it, he is currently in St. Mungo’s,” said Daphne.

“That would be my fault,” said Harry. “He tried to attack me during a raid two weeks ago and I blasted him through a wall. He will be put on trial after he recovers.”

“In the meantime, his wife will hold the seat, so they will do as you say,” said Daphne. “Since they signed it all to the Dark Lord.”
“Rowle,” read Harry, moving on with a nod. “Thorfinn Rowle is dead. Was he married?”

“Yes, and has twin sons who are six,” said Daphne. “It’s the same as Rosier. Who’s next?”

“Selwyn,” said Harry. “He’s in Azkaban.”

“Three children,” said Daphne. “His wife will hold the seat. Shacklebolt should be next.”

“Does Kingsley get four votes?” asked Harry.

“No,” said Daphne. “No Wizengamot seat is allowed more than two votes. It’s why you can’t have one person with more than one seat.”

“I get it,” said Harry. “No more than two votes by one seat, so while it wouldn’t be against the rules if you held more than one seat, it’s still a loophole, so it’s not considered proper.”

“Yeah,” said Daphne. “In cases where the Minister also happens to have a family seat in the Wizengamot, they are granted three votes, instead of four,” said Daphne. “If he has heirs who inherit the seat while he’s still Minister, then it will likely be put to the Wizengamot but they’d keep it at three votes, probably.”

It made Harry’s head spin, so he moved onto the next name. “Shafiq?” he asked.

“A good family,” said Daphne. “They went into hiding two years ago, but have returned recently, as I understand. No connection to the Death Eaters and definitely didn’t sign their fealty away.”

“Good,” said Harry. “Slughorn. Is it the Professor?” At Daphne’s nod, he moved onto the next name. Horace Slughorn was definitely not a Voldemort supporter and would not have signed away anything. “Travers.”

“Dead,” said Daphne, and Harry nodded as he knew that. “He has a son who’s thirteen.”

“So it’s like Rosier and those families, right?” asked Harry. “We have already settled the Weasley thing, so it’s the last one: Yaxley.”

“Corban Yaxley is in Azkaban,” said Daphne. “He had no children, but he has a younger brother who was killed for not joining the Dark Lord. The younger Yaxley brother has a daughter.”

“So, she’ll inherit the seat? What do we know about her?” asked Harry.

“She graduated from Hogwarts four years ago and is a Healer at St. Mungo’s,” said Daphne, looking at her notes. “She seems to be fine, from what I can tell. She will inherit the seat, but since the Yaxley name was signed away, it is up to you to deal with her.”

“ Invite her to a personal meeting too,” said Harry. “That does it for the Sacred Twenty Eight, right?”

“Yeah,” said Daphne, looking at her list. “Avery, Bulstrode, Burke, Carrow, Flint, Gaunt, Lestrange, Malfoy, Nott, Parkinson, Rosier, Selwyn, Travers and Yaxley are those from the Sacred Twenty Eight who now fall under your authority. That makes it fourteen. Not to mention the others like Crouch, Gaunt, and the Black family’s.”

“What about ones who aren’t Sacred Twenty Eight?” asked Harry.

“Crabbe, Dolohov, Goyle, Jugson, Macnair, Mulciber and Rookwood,” listed Daphne, with a disgusted frown.
“Crabbe Sr. is in Azkaban and Vincent is dead. Is there a mother in the picture?” asked Harry.

“No, without Crabbe Sr. the family is extinct,” said Daphne. “Since it isn’t a Sacred Twenty Eight seat, they will most likely lose it.”

“If it isn’t a permanent seat, then how have they held it for so long?” asked Harry. “I thought you said the non-permanent seats change every four years.”

“They do, except people keep voting in the same families,” said Daphne. “The Minister will ask for a nomination on this one, so if there’s someone you want to place there, this is a good chance. Someone else is bound to put up a candidate as well, so you can always refuse too.”

“Got it,” said Harry. “We’ll see how that goes then. Any of the others extinct?”

“No,” said Daphne. “Dolohov, Goyle, Jugson, Macnair and Mulciber all have heirs who were at Hogwarts this last year. But since some of them are of age, they will likely sit on those family seats currently. Which is good for us, of course, since they have to vote their way you tell them.”

“So, what does the tally come to now?” asked Harry.

“With your own seats and purely by making them obey you, you will have 39 out of the 80 votes, assuming you get Lestrange and Yaxley as well. With Crouch, Weasley and Prewett, you might get 6 more, so 45. You will have mine, which makes it 47,” said Daphne. “Those like Longbottom, Abbott and Fawley have 8 votes that will likely swing your way, depending on what’s being put to the Wizengamot. Same goes for Shacklebolt and Shafiq. It comes to 57, like I told you before. Vote is by majority, so those are very good numbers in our favour. There are several other non-permanent members in the Wizengamot who will vote your way as well, so I think it should be fine.”

Harry shook his head, a small smirk of disbelief on his face. “I still can’t believe it, you know,” he said.

“Well, get your head around it quickly, we have to move fast,” said Daphne, waving her wand and clearing her desk. All the files and documents arranged themselves neatly and flew to a filing cabinet behind her. “I will contact the Death Eater families first and get them to sign new contracts to reaffirm their fealty to you.”

“That won’t be easy,” said Harry. “But like you said, they won’t have a choice, will they?”

“Precisely,” said Daphne. “Those like Rolf Scamander for the Lestrange seat, and the Yaxley seat will be slightly different contracts, depending on how those meetings go. You have to speak to the Weasleys.”

“I’ll do it as soon as I can,” nodded Harry.

“We won’t have to make them sign any contracts, but since you will be making the nominations, it’s better to have it sorted out beforehand,” she explained. She stretched her arms lightly and sat back in her chair. “Well, that’s that on the Wizengamot thing. Was there something else?”

He paused and considered it. “The thing is, I have to make a decision about my future soon,” he said. “I assume you aren’t going back to Hogwarts.”

“No,” said Daphne. “I’ll do my five NEWT exams next month at the Ministry, but that’s all.”

“Yeah, I was thinking of doing the same,” he said. “But in my case, it was recommended because the Auror Department wanted me.”
“You’re thinking of leaving the Aurors?” she asked, in surprise.

He nodded. “I feel like there is so much more I could do with all of this at my hand,” he said, and raised his gaze to her in determination. “You said you wanted to restore what was lost to our world, didn’t you? What did you mean?”

Daphne smiled widely at him. “You noticed that, huh?” she asked, and then appraised him thoughtfully. “Do you know what a Borogove is?”

“Is it a tree of some sort?” he asked, confused.

“No, it’s a made up word,” she said. “You know my father would always say that people like the Dark Lord who ruled through fear, murder and mayhem, were always predisposed to losing because they fundamentally misunderstood what it meant to rule. Back in our fifth year when you and Dumbledore were running around claiming the Dark Lord’s return, my father started writing this book. He called it the Plight of the Borogoves.”

Daphne stood up and went to the bookshelf in the office and pulled out a handbound book.

“Borogove is a nonsense word, really,” she said, as she sat back down behind her desk with the book in her hands. “But my father said that a borogove is what becomes of the people in a land of war. Not soldiers who choose to fight, mind you, but everyone else. And the land itself for that matter. You must have noticed it, right? How darker the world seemed to get once the Dark Lord’s return was made public in our sixth year?”

Harry nodded at once, catching on to what she was saying. He remembered the tangible sense of fear in the air, the quietness and stillness of previously bustling and happy places. The look of terror and paranoia in the eyes of everyone from children to the elderly. “Borogove, huh?” he asked. “Yeah, I get it.”

“My father said that once the Dark Lord was defeated, someone will have to shake up the borogoves and return them to being human once more,” she said, and shook her head with a smile. “It sounds silly, but…”

“No,” said Harry, feeling himself smile too. “I think I understand how he felt.”

She looked surprised, but pleased. “He wrote this book, it’s more like a blueprint really, of ways in which the world could be revived,” she said, and opened the book. “Like here, he talks about one of the basic things to do would be to revive Diagon Alley. It sounds absurd but think about how Diagon Alley used to be before. It’s a place almost everyone in Britain visits at least once year.”

“I think I know what you’re getting at,” said Harry. “The war might be over, but everyone is still wary as if expecting a Death Eater to jump out from behind the bins.”

“You can’t blame them, really,” she shrugged. “But if they were to see a lively, safe Diagon Alley with open shops all over, the perception would begin to shift, wouldn’t it? Most people continued to make money this past year but they stopped spending it because no one thinks of going shopping if you’re likely to get killed. The economy begins to stagnate if people don’t spend.”

“Yeah,” said Harry. “One of the best things I remember is visiting the Weasleys’ Wizarding Wheezes back before sixth year and how lively the shop was compared to the rest of Diagon Alley. All because there was light and laughter inside and out, no matter how bad things were.”

“Humans are resilient creatures, witches and wizards even more so,” said Daphne, wisely. “We are born smarter than Muggles, gain basic comprehension skills faster, we age slower, live longer. We
have every advantage even before magic gets involved, but frequent conflicts are very bad for a society’s development. Or so my father hypothesised, anyway.” She smiled sadly. “His theories sound more like a fantasy, but honestly, with the kind of sway and wealth you have, I think it may not be as out of reach as I might have first thought.”

Harry nodded along. “I like it,” he said. “What else?”

“Well, charity is a big thing,” said Daphne, flipping through the book seemingly more enthusiastic now that Harry was onboard. “War always leaves orphans, so looking after them and securing their future is very important.”

“The orphans are housed at St. Mungo’s, aren’t they?” asked Harry.

“Yes, but they are beyond capacity at this point,” said Daphne. “Think of it this way. You can donate a whole bunch of money to an overworked and overcapacity hospital, or you can use one of those massive mansions you inherited and turn it into an orphanage.”

“I want to do that,” said Harry, at once.

Daphne laughed. “I know, just one step at a time, okay?” she said. “There is a lot that can be done. But this is basically what I meant when I said I wanted to restore what was once lost to the world. The war won’t really end until it ends in the minds of the people.”

Harry was silent as he considered her words carefully. “Alright,” he said, in a calmer voice. “First, we get the Wizengamot in order. That will make it easier to bring change. It will take a lot of time, and I’m sure none of it will be easy, but I am willing to do it.”

“Well then,” smiled Daphne. “I think you know what you are doing for the rest of your life, aren’t you?”

Harry smiled back, his heart feeling lighter than it had in a long, long time. “Turning Borogoves back to humans.”
Chapter 2

Thanks for all the love on the story so far. I will try and update weekly, so bear with me.

Let me just reiterate, this will be a Harry/Daphne story. That is all.

24th May, 1998

It was the Sunday after his discussion with Daphne, and Harry was actually excited for once. Hermione and Ron had returned to Britain the night before, though it had been quite late by the time they’d come back. Hermione had still sought to send him a quick message, inviting him to the Burrow for Sunday lunch. Apparently, everyone else was coming too, and it would really be the first time since the funerals that Harry would be seeing most of them.

After Fred’s funeral, Arthur, Molly, Charlie, Ron and Ginny had continued to live at the Burrow. Bill and Fleur had returned to Shell Cottage, Percy to his flat in London though he was apparently visiting frequently. George, to everyone’s surprise, had returned to work almost immediately after the funeral. Having been so busy with his own life, Harry had no idea how he was really doing and was looking forward to seeing him, albeit a little nervously. Hermione had been at the Burrow as well, though Harry wondered what she would be doing until September when she would go to Hogwarts.

Ginny was the only person he saw somewhat frequently, considering they were dating. They had reconciled not long after the Battle of Hogwarts, though they hardly had any time to date with the funerals, cleanup and their own brand of grief. She occasionally made a floo call to Grimmauld Place, but he was looking forward to seeing her in person.

He saw Teddy and Andromeda almost every day, visiting them at Andromeda’s house any time he had a spare moment. He had repeatedly tried convincing them to move into Grimmauld Place with him, but Andromeda had been steadfast that she didn’t want to cramp Harry’s life. Even then she was coming to the Burrow as well, so Harry was happy he would be seeing them.

There was a fair amount of apprehension and guilt mixed in, but these were people he considered the closest thing he had to a family, and he wanted them to be a part of his life. He woke early on Sunday, ate a delicious breakfast made by Kreacher, and then got him to give him a haircut and shave.

His unruly hair was cut short in the back and sides, leaving the messy part on top looking actually stylish rather than untidy. Harry was so astonished it was his hair that was doing it, that he couldn’t stop staring when Kreacher held up a mirror. His old glasses had broken in an Auror raid last week, so he had bought these new ones that were rimless, square frames that somehow made him look older and dignified instantly. With his face clean shaven, the new glasses and styled hair, he actually looked decent.

He had also grown a little taller, and with the past year’s skirmishes, despite frequent starvation, he now stood at just under six feet. He was still quite lean but his arms, torso and legs were muscled with years of fighting and Quidditch. With the new robes that Kreacher had made for him, Harry Potter looked like a proper wizard his age for the first time in his life.
He disapparated for the Burrow around eleven in the morning, and was greeted by a tackling hug from Hermione as soon as he arrived. He hugged her back, laughing as he did.

“I think you might have missed me a little,” he said, as she broke the hug and grinned at him.

“Maybe a little,” she said, and then looked at him closely. “You look like you’re eating well. That’s good.”

He wished he could say the same of her, but he thought Hermione looked rather miserable. She was still pale despite having been in Australia for a week, and her smile wasn’t quite reaching her eyes. There were bags under her eyes too, and Harry wondered what had happened. Before he could ask, Ron entered the living room and smiled at him.

Unlike Hermione, Ron looked perfectly at ease. He held out his hand to Harry with a shout, and pumped it eagerly when Harry took it. “How have you been, mate?” asked Ron.

“Not bad,” grinned Harry. “You two?”

“Really good,” said Ron, putting an arm around Hermione’s shoulders. “Did she tell you? We found Dan and Emma. They’re not coming back just yet, but that just means we get to visit them in Australia again, yeah?” He directed that question at Hermione, who nodded with a smile, but it fell off when Ron glanced away.

Harry raised an eyebrow but he was then tackled by a zooming red ball of energy and barely had time to catch Ginny in his arms. He managed to steady them both and immediately felt her kiss him. An involuntary smile burst onto his face as he kissed her back, despite hearing Hermione giggling and Ron groaning that he now needed to go gouge his eyes out.

“Hi,” said Ginny breathlessly, finally pulling away.

“Hi,” said Harry, noting that she looked more or less fine. She had lost a little weight but considering everything, she looked as beautiful as ever.

“Come on, mum and dad are waiting,” she said, linking her arm with his and leading him to the kitchen.

“How are they?” he asked, in a low voice.

“Mum still cries at the drop of a hat, so don’t take it personally,” she said, with a small smile. “Having you here is bound to put her in a better mood, though.”

Sure enough, Molly burst into tears as soon as she saw him and then hugged him until he couldn’t breathe. Arthur shook his hand vigorously, and Harry began to feel at ease.

“Look who I brought!”

Harry turned around when he saw a cheery Charlie Weasley pulling along George, who looked like he’d just rolled out of bed.

“You could have let me brush my teeth,” complained George, as Charlie finally relinquished his hold on him.

“You’re a wizard, use a teeth cleaning charm,” said Charlie, undeterred.

George looked awful. His hair had grown greasy and unkempt, his eyes were sunken and the red
beard on his face was patchy and scraggly. He was wearing shabby pyjamas that were torn in places and stunk of sweat and stale coffee. Molly burst into tears when she saw him, and Arthur immediately began to calm her.

“Charlie’s been staying with George since the funeral,” Ginny whispered to Harry. “He actually looks better than he did last week.”

Harry felt all his good mood sap out of him. George looked at him with bloodshot eyes and then, to his surprise, approached him slowly.

“Harry,” he said, his voice quiet and serious in a way that just didn’t suit him. “There’s something you must know.”

“What?” asked Harry, as everyone went silent around them.

George gave him a grave look. “I think Gilderoy Lockhart wants his hair product back.”

It took a split second, but Harry snorted, as did Charlie, and slowly, they were all laughing. The joke wasn’t particularly funny, but when Bill and Fleur came to the kitchen, they found them all laughing with tears in their eyes.

Molly returned to lunch preparations with both Fleur and Ginny assisting, so Charlie took George upstairs to tidy him up. Percy arrived and after shaking Harry’s hand, he accosted his father as they began talking about work.

Leaving them to it, Harry sat in the corner of the living room with Ron and Hermione, and listened to Ron fill him in about the Australia trip. Apparently, Hermione’s parents hadn’t been too hard to find, but once the memory spells were reversed, it had taken some time for them to accept what Hermione had done. Things had been settled, but they hadn’t felt like returning to Britain just yet, though Hermione was glad they were agreeing to stay in touch at all.

George came back downstairs looking fairly decent, and though his eyes were still sunken and bloodshot, his beard was shaved, hair washed, and he was wearing fresh, clean robes. Percy immediately went up to him and started fussing like a mother hen, which was surprising yet heartwarming to watch. Bill poured Charlie a drink and the two oldest brothers sat in a corner, talking quietly. Seeing them occupied, George beckoned Ron with a glance to be spared from Percy’s fussing.

When Ron left, Harry glanced at Hermione and lowered his voice. “Are you alright?” he asked.

“Yeah, of course,” she said, and then laughed. “That sounded like a lie, even to me.”

“What’s wrong?” asked Harry.

She shook her head. “Not here,” she said. “Can I come by Grimmauld Place later?”

“Sure,” said Harry. “I have loads to tell you as well.”

“Alright,” said Hermione. “Speaking of which, where’s Andromeda?”

“She should be here around noon,” said Harry. “That’s usually when Teddy wakes from his morning nap.”

As if on cue, Andromeda came through the floo with an infant Teddy Lupin swaddled in her arms. He immediately burst into tears, and Harry stood up to get him.
“Careful with his head,” said Andromeda, as she handed him over. “He still hates the floo, it seems.”

Harry rocked Teddy as she had taught him and smiled when Teddy began to calm down. “There now,” he said. “Hello, Andromeda.”

Andromeda looked almost as tired as George, but she smiled at him and went on to see Molly in the kitchen.

“He’s gotten so big,” said Hermione, as she stood up and looked at him.

Teddy stopped crying finally, and when he saw Harry holding him, he immediately changed his hair to black.

“That’s kind of amazing,” said Ron, glancing over to them.

“Right?” asked Harry, with a proud grin. “He changes eye colours too when he’s in a good mood. Give him some time and he’ll get there.”

The rest of the Weasley brothers gathered around him, and Teddy slowly began changing his hair to red.

“Lunch is ready!” called Molly.

Lunch was as boisterous as Harry remembered from nearly every summer holiday since starting Hogwarts. The tables were set out in the garden, groaning from the weight of delicious food that Molly had prepared. Teddy was held by either Harry or Fleur, who was sitting near him. Conversation flowed loudly and continuously, and it seemed Teddy was enjoying it too.

It took two hours, but every plate was empty by the time lunch was over. Arthur waved his wand to clear up as everyone retired to the living room, too full to even make conversation. Teddy finally fell asleep and Andromeda conjured a crib for him to sleep in. Sitting on the living room squashed between Ron and Charlie, Harry cleared his throat.

“I actually have something to talk about, if that’s okay,” he said.

“Go ahead, Harry,” said Arthur.

In quiet words so as to not wake Teddy, Harry explained his meeting at Gringotts. He didn’t go into the full details, but mentioned that he had decisions to make about some of the Wizengamot seats he had inherited.

“Weasleys haven’t sat on the Wizengamot since my parents got married,” said Arthur, his eyes faraway. “I had two older brothers, but neither of them lived past the first five years of their lives due to illness, and the traditionalists at the time claimed it was due to the unholy union of my parents.”

“Shows what they know,” said Ron, irritated. “Bloody idiots.”

“You said you can acknowledge my mother’s status?” asked Arthur, looking at Harry.

“Yes,” said Harry. “She was Black, and as head of the family such as it is, I can make it legal. It will return the Weasley seat back to you.”

“Thank you, Harry,” said Arthur, gratefully.

“That’s not all, really,” he said, and explained about the Crouch and Prewett seats too.

Arthur glanced at Bill, who nodded back. “I think I’ll hold the Weasley seat, which will pass on to Bill as the oldest,” said Arthur. “If you make that nomination and if it passes…”

“It will pass,” said Harry, firmly.

Arthur looked surprised, but smiled. “Well, Bill should have the Weasley seat, right?”

Molly nodded at once, as did the others.

“What about the other two?” asked Harry.

“No question, Charlie and Percy should get them,” said George, interested despite himself.

“You’re staying in Britain?” Harry asked Charlie in surprise.

“Yeah,” he said. “Well, I was thinking about it.” He paused and seemed to consider something as he looked around at everyone. “Yeah, I think I’ll stay.”

Molly looked happy as she smothered him in a hug and burst into tears.

“The Prewett seat can go to Charlie then, and Percy gets the Crouch one,” said Arthur.

“I think that should go well,” nodded Harry, as Percy looked wide-eyed. “I’ll make the nominations, and that should settle it.”

Molly, who had finally finished hugging Charlie, and came to hug Harry. “Have you decided whether to go to Hogwarts or stay with the Aurors?” asked Molly, as she sat back down and wiped her tears.

“Actually, the Wizengamot and things are going to keep me busy,” said Harry. “I am doing my NEWTs at the Ministry next month, and resigning from the Auror Department.”

“You’re resigning?” asked Ron, shocked. “But-”

“I think it’s a good idea,” said Hermione, nodding firmly. “I would rather you come to Hogwarts, but as long as you are getting your NEWTs, it’s fine. And you don’t have to be an Auror.”

“But it’s what he’s wanted,” protested Ron.

“True,” nodded Harry. “But it’s what I wanted while Voldemort was still around. I figured it would take the rest of my life to take him down, and being an Auror just made sense.”

“I think it’s a good decision,” said Bill, as Charlie nodded along.

“You could always join the Ministry in some other capacity,” said Percy.

“Yeah, of course,” said Harry, mostly to appease them than anything. He couldn’t actually tell them about Borogoves without sounding like he was losing his mind, so keeping it vague would have to do for now. “Uh, so what about everyone else?”

“I went back to Gringotts,” said Bill. “Fleur is still taking some time off.”

“I’m not sure if Gringotts is right for me anymore,” she said, shaking her head.
“You’ll find something,” said Hermione, and Fleur smiled at her gratefully.

“As for me, I’m still babysitting,” said Charlie, poking George’s shoulder who glared at him but without any heat in it. “I’m sure I can find something at the Ministry.”

“Of course,” said Percy. “There has been so much work to do. Father and I have been at work almost until eight every day.”

“I am reopening the shop,” said George, his voice quiet but determined.

“He’s not just saying that,” said Charlie, when everyone looked at him in surprise. “He has been working hard to restock in time for September.”

“Need any help with it?” asked Ron.

“I thought you were coming to the Aurors?” asked Harry, shocked.

“I was,” said Ron. “I mean, I still want to. But there’s no hurry, right? I can help out George for a while and do NEWTs in my own time.”

“Ron, are you sure?” asked Hermione.

“Yeah,” he said. “I’ll take a year off to help out with the shop and then join Ministry at the same time you do,” he added, with a smile at Hermione.

“A-alright,” said Hermione, still looking uncertain.

“Well, I’m going back to Hogwarts,” said Ginny. “This last year was horrible, but hopefully, I can get my NEWTs on time. I also need to focus on Quidditch if I want to play professionally, so I’m guessing we’ll all be busy.”

Conversation became much more casual after that, and around four, Harry decided to return to Grimmauld Place. To his surprise, Andromeda asked if she could visit. Surprised but curious, Harry took her and Teddy back with him. Hermione promised to stop by later in the evening.

“Sorry for the sudden visit,” said Andromeda, as they sat in the parlour. An excited Kreacher immediately came to serve tea and freshly baked muffins when he saw Andromeda.

“Don’t worry about it,” said Harry. “Is everything alright?”

“Yeah,” she said. “It’s just...I refused every time you asked me and Teddy to come live here, didn’t I?”

“Andromeda, I understand not wanting to…” he began, but she shook her head.

“No, I’m fine, really,” she said, wiping her eyes. “Dora was an Auror, and Remus might as well have been. When I heard you were going to be one as well, I wasn’t sure if having you around Teddy would be good.” She shook her head again. “It sounds horrible, I know, but I didn’t want him to get attached, if there was a high chance of you dying every day you step out of the house.”

Harry was stunned, and he blinked as he tried to compose himself. Andromeda continued to weep, and he understood, he really did. He’d had a reckless godfather himself. Sirius had only been a part
of his life for two years and most of it had been through letters. Losing him had been the worst pain of his life, and he couldn’t imagine putting Teddy through the same thing.

“Andromeda,” he said, finally. “I get it.”

“Harry, no, it’s…” she tried to protest, but he shook his head.

“I know I said I won’t be an Auror, but it still doesn’t change who I am,” he said. “I will probably be a target for the rest of my life. While I won’t go charging into danger at every chance I get, just me being Harry Potter is dangerous.” He took a breath to steel himself to say the next words. “If you don’t want me around, I will understand.”

Andromeda looked shocked. “D-don’t say that,” she said, finally. “You love him like a son. I’m not going to tear you away from him.”

Harry was confused. “But you said…”

“I know what I said, and it was horrible,” said Andromeda. “What I’m saying is, if it’s alright with you, Teddy and I want to move in here at Grimmauld Place.”

“Yes,” said Harry, immediately. “Please do.” Relief seized his heart as he relaxed.

Andromeda smiled through her tears. “Thank you, Harry,” she said. “Would you mind sending Kreacher over to help pack? I’d like to move in here by next week, if it’s alright.”

“Of course,” said Harry. “Kreacher!” he called.

Kreacher was only too happy to accept, and soon Andromeda took her leave with Teddy, planning to move into Grimmauld Place in three days. Harry was happy it had worked out, and that Teddy would be close from here on out. He’d also wanted them to come to Grimmauld Place because it was much bigger and more secure than the Tonks residence.

Hopefully, he would keep his promise of being the best godfather to Teddy Lupin, after all.

~

Around seven in the evening, Hermione Granger arrived at Grimmauld Place and found Harry writing something as he sat in an armchair by the empty fireplace in the study. When Hermione entered, he smiled and offered her the other chair.

“Where’s Kreacher?” asked Hermione.

“He’s at Andromeda’s,” beamed Harry. “She and Teddy agreed to move here.”

“That’s great, Harry,” smiled Hermione.

“So, tell me what’s wrong,” said Harry, bluntly.

Hermione glanced away and sighed. “I-I’m not sure,” she said.

“Did something happen?” asked Harry. “With your parents, I mean.”

“No,” she said, and looked sincere as she said it. “I was prepared for a lot worse, trust me.”

“Sorry,” said Harry, knowing she had done it for his sake as well.
“Don’t be,” said Hermione. “I couldn’t have walked into the war half-heartedly. Walking in half-heartedly it never works. You always end up leavi...” She stopped and closed her eyes.

“Is this about Ron?” asked Harry, realising what she was getting at.

“I thought I was alright with it, you know,” she said, and there were tears in her eyes when she opened them. “But he abandoned us.”

“He came back,” said Harry, though her saying it plainly somehow dug it into his mind as well.

“I know that, which is why I thought I was alright with it,” she said. “We were in the middle of a war, so it wasn’t like there was time to hold a grudge or even process it. But now, the war’s over. I didn’t realise it until I was in Australia that I am not over it.”

Harry sighed. “Did you talk to him about it?” he asked.

“He doesn’t even seem to realise it,” she said. “And I feel like a bitch if I even think about bringing up, especially since he’s still grieving Fred.”


“It’s not your fault,” she said. “I thought once the war was over, that would be it, you know. Happily ever after and all that.”

“Yeah,” said Harry. “But we get Borogoves instead.”

“Borogoves?” asked Hermione.

“Oh, right, they are...” Harry began

“I know what a Borogove is,” said Hermione. “I’m more surprised you know it. You like Jabberwocky?”

“What’s Jabberwocky?” asked Harry, confused.

Hermione shook her head with a smile. “You said we get Borogoves, eh?” She paused and considered that. “That’s actually clever.”

“I thought it was a word that meant nothing,” said Harry.

“It does,” said Hermione. “Jabberwocky was a poem by Lewis Carroll and it is full of made up words. But he later explained what those words were. Borogoves were these birds, said to be all cowardly and on edge. It is a good way to describe people in Britain these days. I didn’t notice it until I was in Australia.”

“Interesting,” said Harry. “Someone pointed that out to me recently too.”

“So, your turn then,” said Hermione, with a small smile. “What have you been up to? No way you did all the work after the Gringotts thing on your own.”

“True,” he said. “Do you remember Daphne Greengrass?”

“Yeah, of course,” said Hermione. “I fought for the top spot in our year with her every year.”

“Did you really?” asked Harry.
“Yes,” nodded Hermione. “She was also one of those Slytherin girls that didn’t just follow around Parkinson and her gang.”

“Well, I hired her as my attorney,” said Harry. “I kind of needed one after Gringotts dropped the bomb on me. She’s the one who’s done all the work, really.”

He proceeded to explain the full scope of his discussions with Daphne, including the plan to turn Borogoves to humans. Hermione listened with rapt attention and was smiling broadly by the time he was done.

“Harry, that is a wonderful plan,” said Hermione, and then shook her head. “My plans seem so much smaller in comparison.”

“But we need someone in the Ministry too,” said Harry.

“You want me as a spy?” asked Hermione.

“If you want to think like that, but I think of you as much more than that,” said Harry, sincerely. “We have been through hell and back together for seven years now. I don’t want the generation that comes after us to suffer like we did and I know you don’t want that either. We were the ones who ended the war, so isn’t it our responsibility to fix what is left behind too?”

Hermione beamed at him proudly. “You’re right, Harry,” she said. “You can count me in.”

“Thank you, Hermione,” said Harry.

“Can I just ask,” said Hermione. “Why didn’t you tell the Weasleys about this?”

“I don’t want to bother them with this when they’re still grieving,” said Harry.

“Did you tell Ginny at least?” asked Hermione.

“No,” said Harry. “Why?”

Hermione sighed patiently. “Harry, do you love Ginny?” she asked.

“Yeah, she’s my girlfriend,” he said.

“Okay, good, so part of being a boyfriend is communicating,” said Hermione. “I know it sounds hypocritical coming from me of all people, but if you want a relationship that isn’t just a physical thing, you have to talk too.”

“Ginny and I talk,” Harry protested.

“When exactly?” asked Hermione. “At Hogwarts, you were joined at the lips and only broke away to make fun of Ron occasionally. Harry, one of the reasons why I’m hesitating about confronting Ron is because I’m pretty sure we are going to break up when I do it.”

Harry looked shocked, and Hermione smiled sardonically.

“Sounds terrible, doesn’t it?” she asked. “But there really is no way around it. We were in the middle of a war that we weren’t sure we would survive. Once it was over, I was so relieved that most of us had somehow made it that I gave up on looking at things too closely. Like I said, going to Australia pointed out what I had been consciously ignoring. I’m not saying you and Ginny are the same, but you need to be honest about your feelings, otherwise you’ll end up hurting both you and her.”
Harry considered her words carefully. “I do care about Ginny,” he said, finally. “You’re right, we
don’t really talk, and most of our relationship has been physical. I don’t know if it’s such a bad thing,
though.”

“It is, if you and Ginny aren’t on the same page about it,” said Hermione. “I know Ron and I aren’t,
which is why I know we are not going to work out. He wants to get married soon, even though we
haven’t been dating a month and have kissed five times total. Talk to Ginny, Harry, and do it soon.”

“When Ginny and I got back together after the war,” said Harry, thoughtfully. “I mostly just
remember being glad that I was alive. I think we just really needed someone at the time, you know. I
don’t know, Hermione. What are you going to do?”

“Honestly, I expected him to join the Auror Department right away,” said Hermione. “I’m hesitant
about breaking up with him, but leading him on isn’t right either.”

“Is it just about him leaving us?” asked Harry.

“No, but that is a big part of it,” said Hermione. “I have to have it out, otherwise I’ll grow to resent
him. And I feel like once I let go of it, Ron and I won’t have much that would keep us together.
Desperation and fear of a tomorrow that seemed unlikely to come was what brought and kept us
together. It was wonderful, but it won’t be enough if we are to survive on it for the rest of our lives.”

“Even though you and Ron have always liked each other? Even at Hogwarts?” asked Harry.

“We were awkward teenagers with wild hormones,” said Hermione. “The war aged us. And the
older we get, the clearer we see things. I know Ron and I won’t work out. And you have to figure
out if you and Ginny will.”

Harry paused, thinking about her words carefully. Hermione stood up and patted his shoulder.

“You don’t have to understand it right away,” she told him with a small smile.

“Are you going back to the Burrow?” he asked, looking up at her.

“Yeah, I kinda don’t have anywhere else to go,” she said, sheepishly.

“You can live here, if you want,” offered Harry. “Andromeda and Teddy will be here too, and I’m
sure the Weasleys would want some time as a family.”

“Are you sure?” asked Hermione, looking relieved.

“Yeah, there’s plenty of room,” said Harry.

Hermione smiled gratefully. “I’ll go pack and be back in a bit then,” she said. “Thankfully, I don’t
have much stuff.”

“Take your time, I won’t be going to bed yet,” said Harry.


~

28th May, 1998

Dear Mr. Potter,
This is an official summons from the Minister of Magic for you to present yourself at the first session of Wizengamot following the end of the war.

Your presence on the morning of June 1st is required at 9 am sharp.

Sincerely,

Kingsley Shacklebolt
Minister of Magic

“Did you get one too?” Harry asked Daphne.

“I did,” she answered. “Good thing we got things started quickly, right?”

“Yeah,” he agreed. “So, who are we meeting today?”

“I thought we’d do the more difficult ones first,” said Daphne. “I left Rolf Scamander and Zinnia Yaxley for tomorrow, but everyone else I called in today.”

“Right, let’s do this then,” said Harry.

“Come along, this way,” said Daphne as she stood up and walked out of her office.

Harry followed her to a room down the hall which was a sitting room of sorts with two leather sofas opposite one another and a small coffee table between them. The rest of the room was sparsely decorated, but all the furniture and carpet and lighting looked expensive and luxurious.

“Are you aware of how we are to proceed?” asked Daphne as she and Harry sat down next to each other on one of the sofas.

“Yeah,” said Harry. “I mean, I guess.”

Daphne smiled at reassuringly. “Don’t worry, I will lead the meeting. You only need to step in if it feels like we aren’t getting anywhere.”

Harry agreed, and Daphne gave an approving nod. The door opened and Maribeth poked her head in. “We are all ready out here, Ms. Greengrass,” she said. “The first family is here.”

Daphne looked at Harry, who took a deep breath and nodded.

“Show them in please,” she said.

Maribeth nodded and left. A minute later, the door opened and a stoic Marshall Avery entered the office. He was fifteen years old and accompanied by his mother, Bianca Avery. They were both defiant in their expressions and upon seeing Harry, their lips curled just a little though there was fear in their gaze.

Daphne stood up as they entered. “Good morning, Mrs. Avery and young Mr. Avery,” she said. “Please take a seat. I am Daphne Greengrass, Mr. Potter’s attorney.”

The two of them took a seat, regarding her with narrowed eyes. Harry had actually done some digging of his own on Daphne and learned a lot. While the Greengrass family was a Sacred Twenty Eight family too, the family was not as intermarried as other purebloods, because they often married foreign blood, which drew criticism within the Sacred Twenty Eight circle. While not all families intermarried and some like the Malfoys did have a lot more half bloods and Muggleborns in their line than they’d ever admit, the fact that the Greengrasses married foreigners did not do them favours in
the eyes of the traditionalists.

Seeing the hostile gazes of the Averys, however, apparently had no effect on Daphne, and Harry was sufficiently impressed.

“You know Mr. Potter, of course,” she said, without missing a beat. “Now, are you aware of why you are being summoned?” she asked, sitting back down.

“Why is he here?” asked Marshall. “We thought this was about our estate.”

“Calm down, Mr. Avery,” said Daphne, with a hint of steel in her tone. “I do not need to remind you what would happen if you were to overstep your bounds here. Your father signed away your loyalty, remember?”

“Have we been called here to relinquish our titles and wealth?” asked Bianca, speaking for the first time.

“Hardly,” said Daphne. “Mr. Potter has no intention of taking anything away from you.”

Both of them raised their eyebrows in suspicion. “He’s just leaving us alone?” asked Bianca, disbelievingly.

“All Mr. Potter requires is your loyalty,” said Daphne, handing them the contract.

She and Harry had worked on the contract for a few days, finally boiling the details down to the families swearing their loyalty to him, in terms of their Wizengamot votes. They would also swear not to plot against him or cause him harm. In exchange, Harry would not strip them of their title and wealth, and leave them alone. The contract had then been charmed to uphold what they had signed. Harry had mentioned something about using Hermione Granger’s idea. An amused Daphne had shown him how goblins charmed their contracts. Suffice to say, he now knew that the effects of breaking the contract would be far more unpleasant than some embarrassing acne.

“We need time to consider it,” said Bianca, after examining the contract.

“You misunderstand me, Mrs. Avery,” said Daphne. “You either sign the contract or forfeit your right to your name and wealth. Mr. Potter is not a patient man. We require your answer at this very moment.”


“No, I don’t suppose it is,” said Daphne. “So, what will it be?”

“I’ll sign,” said Bianca.

“You both need to,” said Daphne, passing a blood quill to them.

“Marshall is not of age,” said Bianca.

“Yes, but he is the rightful head of the family,” said Daphne. “You both sign.”

Bianca sighed and took the blood quill. She signed her name on the contract, wincing as the quill drew her own blood to use as ink. She passed the quill to Marshall, who glared at Daphne and Harry but signed as well.

“Excellent,” said Daphne, taking back the contract and quill. “Keep an eye out for letters bearing your new lord’s seal. Wizengamot sessions will resume soon and you will be expected to do your
part. Thank you for your cooperation. Good day.”

Bianca stood up and placed a hand on her son’s shoulder. “Yes,” she said. “Good day.”

With that, she led Marshall out with her. Once they had gone, Daphne sighed in relief and looked at Harry. “So?” she asked.

“That went well,” said Harry, grinning at her. “Let’s hope they are all this easy, shall we?”

“Not likely, but we can hope,” said Daphne.

To their credit, the meetings with most families ended up going that way. Some like Millicent Bulstrode and the Carrow twins were all too happy to sign, while others like Pansy Parkinson and Theodore Nott glared throughout the entire process but did it. A few of the more stupid ones had tried to argue, and it had taken repeated threats for them to cooperate.

None had tried to draw a wand, of course, because no one was stupid enough to think they would be able to take on Harry in a duel. The fear of the way he’d defied death twice now was fresh in everyone’s mind still, and Harry had to admire Daphne’s initiative to do this quickly while they were still uncertain. Of course, once the contracts had been signed, they couldn’t defy him, since it would bear painful consequences for them. Above all, they were well aware that their days at the top were over, not that many had ever been there to begin with, but now especially it was obvious that Harry Potter held all authority over them, and it would be best to accept it. Having lived under the thumb of the Dark Lord already, most of them still had hope that this alternative would be better.

The meeting with the Malfoy family was the most interesting one by far. Lucius Malfoy had not been thrown in Azkaban at Harry’s behest, but it didn’t mean he was willing to throw away his influence. Surprisingly, it had been Draco who had superseded his father’s authority to agree to the contract. Lucius had even threatened to disown Draco, but Daphne had reminded him that if Draco signed the contract on behalf of the Malfoy name, Lucius could still be stripped of his position by Harry, and Draco would be named the head of the Malfoy family. A mutinous Lucius had finally signed.

All in all, they had all the acquired titles and estates renew their loyalty to him, and Harry was satisfied.

“So we only have Rolf Scamander and Zinnia Yaxley to deal with tomorrow, right?” he asked.

“Yeah,” said Daphne, looking exhausted.

“You know I just thought of something,” said Harry. “The Potter family isn’t a Sacred Twenty Eight but I still have a seat.”

“Yeah, apparently, Dumbledore held it in proxy for you,” said Daphne. “Fudge tried to bring in a motion to strip you of it back in fifth year but the rest of the Wizengamot refused to take it away. Good for us too, otherwise it would have been one more thing on top of everything we’d have to deal with.”

“Mm,” agreed Harry, and glanced at the time which showed it was almost eight in the evening. He and Daphne had been in meetings from 9.30 in the morning, stopping only for half an hour around 1 for some lunch that Maribeth had brought for them. “You headed home?” he asked, looking at Daphne.

“No, I still have some work to do,” she said. “I’m just going to ask Maribeth to get me some supper from the Leaky and keep working.”
“Mind if I join you?” he asked.

Daphne looked a little amused. “You don’t have to keep me company,” she said. “I’ll mostly be filing paperwork for your godson’s trust and preparing letters for Gringotts to be sent off after the Wizengamot session.”

“Usually I would be rushing to get home, but it’s past Teddy’s bedtime,” said Harry. “I’ll just end up doing nothing. Might as well be productive.”

“Sure, if you say so,” she said.

They returned to Daphne’s office, with Daphne telling Maribeth to get them supper on the way. Maribeth left and returned with a four-pack of Butterbeer and two batches of fish and chips wrapped in paper for them only ten minutes later.

“If it’s alright, I will retire for the night,” she said, placing the food and drinks on Daphne’s desk.

“Yes, thank you, Maribeth,” said Daphne, with a polite wave. “Good night.”

“Good night,” said Maribeth, and left.

Harry opened two bottles of butterbeer and handed one to Daphne and took the other for himself. “Can I ask,” he said, taking a sip. “Are there any other pubs in Diagon Alley? Or restaurants for that matter? I don’t remember seeing much besides the Leaky and Florean Fortescue’s ice cream parlour.”

“That is what they call monopoly in action, Harry,” said Daphne, unpacking the fish and chips and laying it out on her desk for the two of them. “Florean Fortescue had to fight tooth and nail to get his shop open because only the Leaky was granted the food and liquor licence by the Ministry. He managed to get his ice cream parlour open because of a legal loophole.”

“But why?” asked Harry. “Surely they’d want more business cropping up here, right?”

“The rule of thumb in these instances is typically one establishment of each kind in an area,” said Daphne. “At least, that’s what the Ministry abides by. The way to get around it is to show that you offer something that the other place doesn’t offer. The Leaky offered beds, food and liquor, but ice cream was considered unique enough for Fortescue to open his shop. It’s a dumb law, but an old one. Of course, in those days, the Alley was a much smaller place and they wanted to prevent oversaturation of the same kind of businesses in order to encourage expansion.”

“Can we change it?” asked Harry, taking a bite of his fish.

“Yes,” said Daphne. “We won’t have to, though. The exception to the law is if the Ministry decides to grant a licence. Problem is, anyone who wants to open a business needs backing from someone on the Wizengamot to sign off on their application for licensing. As you can guess, not many people are eager to help out in those matters unless they have something to gain.”

Harry ate his chips absentely, mulling over what Daphne had told him. She let him think it through, and ate her own food.

“I think,” he said, as they were halfway through their meal. “This might be able how we start.”

“I’m listening,” said Daphne, finishing her butterbeer and opening the second bottle.

“Both of us have the authority to sign off on the application for licensing, correct?” he asked.
“Yes,” said Daphne.

“Well, what if we were to start a service where those wanting to apply could submit a business plan to us and we can help them get started,” said Harry. “With money and the licensing stuff, too. If reviving Diagon Alley is a good place to start, then wouldn’t this help?”

Daphne considered it. “Yeah, probably,” she said. “But it’s a little out of my expertise. Legal stuff I am fine with, but the financing and business venture aspect is beyond me.”

“We can hire more people, though, can’t we?” asked Harry.

“Of course,” nodded Daphne. “It could be like a...Diagon Restoration Program, or something.”

“I like the sound of that,” said Harry.

Daphne smiled and then seemed to contemplate something. “I think it’s best to have an umbrella organisation,” she said, finally. When Harry looked confused, she chuckled. “Well, Diagon Alley is just one place, so I doubt we’d want to stop with just that. Plus, we could have a separate charity arm. We don’t have to make the larger organisation public, but it’s more for the benefit of making sure we keep everything connected and organised.”

“How so?” asked Harry, interested.

She wiped her hands and mouth daintily with a paper napkin and fetched a blank piece of parchment. “The larger organisation can be a Collective. The Diagon Restoration which would fall under something like a Business Development division would be one arm, charity would be another,” she said, drawing a diagram for reference. “A third could be all the logistical aspects of the Collective, you know, like the financing and investments, legal matters, public relations, human resources if we are going to hire more people, and so on and so forth.”

“And when we have new ventures, they can become a new arm of the Collective,” said Harry, starting to understand. “Brilliant!”

“I think so,” beamed Daphne. “Oh, that reminds me, we should look at the press aspect quickly.”

“Yeah, but why quickly?” he asked.

“Well, the reason why the Dark Lord was able to control the Prophet so thoroughly was because most of the families had shares in it and when they signed it away to him, he became the majority owner. He didn’t even have to threaten the Chief Editor to use it as propaganda,” said Daphne, standing up and rummaging through the filing cabinet.

“Does this make me the majority owner now?” asked Harry.

Daphne returned with a file that she opened and read through. Harry picked up the empty wrappers from their supper and began cleaning up. By the time he had cleared Daphne’s desk, she had finished reading. “So, by my calculations, you own about 78%, mostly because of some old Potter and Black stocks in addition to the others,” she said. “The Wizengamot session is going to cause a splash, so if we have the Prophet on our side, we can control how the news is delivered.”

“Excellent,” said Harry. “We should probably hire someone permanently to deal with the press, shouldn’t we?”

“That’s not a bad idea,” said Daphne. “I actually have someone in mind, if that’s alright.”
“Who?” asked Harry.

“Tracey Davis,” said Daphne. “She was in Slytherin with me. She is excellent at keeping her ear to
the ground and has a knack for using information well. I can speak to her tomorrow, if you want.”

“Sure,” said Harry. “Today’s Thursday, and the Wizengamot meets on Monday, so we should
hurry.”

“After I speak to Tracey tomorrow, we can go visit the Prophet’s Chief Editor, even if we have to do
it over the weekend,” said Daphne. “Armed with your PR person and attorney, you will be
unstoppable.”

Harry couldn’t help but laugh in agreement. Progress was still ways away, but they were moving
forward for now.

~

29th May, 1998

Harry wasn’t sure what he had expected Rolf Scamander to be like, but when he entered Daphne’s
office for the meeting, Harry was distinctly reminded of someone like Neville. Rolf was as tall as
Harry and quite thin, but there was a shyness to him that reminded Harry of Neville distinctly. He
was soft-spoken too, wore round glasses and robes meant for travelling. Curly brown hair, bright
hazel eyes, and a surprising untidiness that spoke of an absent-minded person further reinforced that
impression.

“Mr. Potter and Ms. Greengrass, I presume,” he said, holding out his hand. “I’m Rolf Scamander.”

Though he was older than them, his voice sounded a little younger and when he smiled, he looked
even more boyish.

“Yes, thank you for coming, Mr. Scamander,” said Daphne, shaking his hand with a polite smile.

“Nice to meet you,” said Harry, shaking his hand and feeling himself like the man immediately.
“Please sit.”

“Thank you,” said Rolf, sitting down on the chair that Harry offered him. “I was very surprised to
get your letter, even more so when you said I had the claim to the Lestrange seat. I spoke to my
grandfather, though, and he managed to clarify it a little.”

“Yes, we realise it isn’t a straightforward connection,” said Daphne.

“My grandfather and Leta Lestrange were at Hogwarts together,” said Rolf. “From what I could tell,
they were rather close until she got engaged to my great uncle Theseus.”

“You were the closest living relative we could find to the Lestrange family, Mr. Scamander,” said
Harry.

“Oh, please call me, Rolf,” he said, pleasantly. He frowned a little as he considered Harry’s words.
“I can’t pretend to be thrilled about that, to be honest. The Lestrange family isn’t something you
would feel happy about associated with.”

“I understand the feeling, but the Lestrange family, rather the branch with Rodolphus, signed away
their fealty to Voldemort and since defeating him, it falls to me to deal with it,” said Harry.
Rolf nodded. “I can appreciate that, but I don’t know what you want me to do,” he said. “I can sign it away if that’s what you want. I have no interest in keeping it.”

“It’s not as simple,” said Daphne. “Someone needs to sit on the Lestrange seat and we would rather it be you.”

“But I’m not much of a politician,” protested Rolf.

“Then consider doing it until you have an heir capable of inheriting it,” said Harry.

Rolf sighed and paused for a bit. “May I be blunt with you, Mr. Potter?” he finally asked.

“Sure, but call me Harry,” said Harry.

“Harry,” said Rolf, seriously. “I may not be much of a politician but I know that signing away their fealty like they did to You-Know-Who means you are now their new lord. Do you want me in the seat, because you will be able to control my votes that way?”

“Honestly?” asked Harry. “We made two different contracts for you and had planned on giving you a choice on which one you wanted to sign. You can sign a full fealty contract like we made the others sign, which gives me control of their votes. Just their votes, mind you,” he added. “The other contract stipulates that as long as you or your heirs sit on the Lestrange seat, you are entitled to the Lestrange estate and I will release you from the compulsory fealty.”

“You would release me?” asked Rolf, surprised. “Why?”

“You have nothing to do with the Death Eaters,” said Harry. “But your family is still an important part of the wizarding world and having you on the Wizengamot would only be a good thing.”

“Even if it may mean I could vote against you?” asked Rolf.

“I’m not Voldemort,” said Harry, plainly. “I don’t want blind followers, Rolf. I want to rebuild this world, not destroy it like he did.”

Rolf nodded slowly. “Like I said, I am not much of a politician,” he said. “But I will accept your nomination. I won’t swear you full fealty, but considering our conversation so far, I think we might not hold too different views.”

“I’m glad to hear that,” said Harry, as Daphne handed him the second contract.

Rolf accepted it and began reading through it carefully. Harry and Daphne waited patiently as he did, and when he was done, Daphne gave him a blood quill and Rolf signed it.

“Thank you so much, Rolf,” said Harry, as Rolf handed the signed contract back to Daphne. “The Wizengamot will meet on Monday morning.”

“I will be there,” said Rolf, as he stood up and held his hand to Harry.

Harry shook his hand with a smile. “Have a good day,” he said.

“You too,” said Rolf. “Ms. Greengrass.”

Daphne shook his hand as well, and with a bow to them, Rolf Scamander made his exit. “That was very well handled, Harry,” said Daphne, sounding impressed.

“I learned it from you, I think,” he grinned.
She went a little pink but rolled her eyes. “Don’t relax just yet,” she said. “Zinnia Yaxley will be here within the hour, and then Tracey is coming by after lunch. There is still a lot to do.”

The meeting with Zinnia Yaxley was somehow even more straightforward. She was not surprised that she had inherited the seat, but instead of asking to be released, she was willing to sign a full fealty to Harry. When asked why, her reason was surprisingly similar to Millicent the day before.

“You will use it well, Mr. Potter.”

“It’s a weird kind of pressure, isn’t it?” said Harry, as he and Daphne ate lunch together after Zinnia had left.

“I suppose,” said Daphne. “People have a lot of faith in you. Or maybe everyone just needs someone else to bear the responsibility of making the tough decisions. Not everyone wants to be a leader. Most are just content to follow.”

Harry sighed. “Don’t I know it.”

After lunch, Tracey Davis came in for her meeting with them. Harry remembered the grey-eyed, petite brunette vaguely, but she and Daphne were close it seemed, since he saw Daphne smile widely as she greeted her.

“So, what’s this about suddenly?” asked Tracey, once introductions and pleasantries were out of the way. “Is Potter your client?”

“Yes,” said Daphne. “We have a job that could use your skills, so I want to know if you’re interested.”

“What’s the job?” asked Tracey.

“It’s to handle press,” said Daphne.

“Ah, got it,” said Tracey. “Yeah, it’s a good call, especially now that you’re the Saviour and all,” she added, looking at Harry.

“That’s one aspect of it, but there’s more to it,” said Daphne. “If you’re willing to sign a confidentiality agreement, I can read you in properly. If you decide not to take the job, the confidentiality will remain in place, of course, but there won’t be any hard feelings.”

Tracey chuckled. “Sure, why not?”

Daphne handed her the agreement, that she read and signed. Once Daphne had the document back, she slowly explained Harry’s new position as well as their plans. Tracey listened carefully, and by the time Daphne was done, she looked excited.

“I take it you want the job,” said Daphne, slightly amused.

“Hell yeah,” she said, at once. “This sounds amazing.”

Daphne laughed and looked at Harry, who nodded with a smile. She pulled out an employment contract and gave it to Tracey.

“To think I was only aiming for a measly reporter’s job at the Prophet,” said Tracey as she read through the contract. She paused when she got to the salary. “Is this correct?”

“It’s higher than the standard rate, I know,” said Daphne. “But you will be the only PR person, so
it’s a lot of work too.”

“For this kind of pay, I will work 24 hours,” said Tracey. She finished reading it and signed the contract.

Daphne took it back and examined it properly. “Thank you, and welcome on board,” she said.

“Do you have a name yet?” asked Tracey.

“No,” said Harry.

“Well, that’s always a good thing to have,” said Tracey. “Something to call the wider organisation. We don’t have to necessarily make it public, either.”


“Sounds good to me,” said Daphne, as Tracey nodded approvingly.

“In keeping with your image, it would be better to make the charity arm public,” said Tracey, thoughtfully. “Harry Potter, the philanthropist, is a better image and it goes with the whole Saviour thing. It would put a better spin on things and detract from how you’re probably the most powerful lord in Britain right now. You should name the charity arm something personal.”

Harry was sufficiently impressed at her quick work. “Maybe...the Potter Foundation?” he asked.

“That could work,” said Tracey. “As for the Chief Editor of the Daily Prophet, it’s still that pushover Barnabas Cuffe,” she added, rolling her eyes.

“His office is not far from here,” said Daphne.

“I think it would be best if only Daphne and I went,” said Tracey. “I have met Cuffe before at one of Slughorn’s parties and he responds to power above anything.”

“Wouldn’t it be better for me to come too, if that’s the case?” asked Harry.

“No, a better show of power would be if you sent your employees to do the job that is clearly beneath you,” said Tracey, grinning wickedly.

Harry could see what Daphne had meant when she’d said Tracey had a knack for these things. She clearly saw things differently than anyone he knew, and a fresh perspective was always welcomed.

“There’s still time left today,” said Daphne, looking at the clock. “It’s only 3. We can still meet with him if we hurry.”

“Before we go, can you draft a contract?” asked Tracey. “As the majority owner, Potter has the right to approve and disapprove any and everything that gets printed in the Prophet. The quickest way to do it is to have one of the reporters who will become my go-to person in such matters.”

“Do you know someone?” asked Harry.

Tracey nodded. “He’s an older Ravenclaw alumni named Benedict Almeidus,” she said. “I know for a fact that he’s one of the last honest reporters left in that sham paper. If we sign a contract, I can coordinate with him to ensure that all the press regarding Potter and the GSC is controlled properly by us.”

“Do it,” said Harry.
“Give me some time to draft the contract,” said Daphne. “I already made one for Cuffe, so he can actually start cleaning house as well. The problem is people like Skeeter, who will always have an audience, even if we have her removed from the Prophet.”

“Skeeter’s an illegal animagus,” said Harry.

Tracey grinned. “I know,” she said. “We can always use that if it comes down to it. Hopefully, she understands which side her bread is buttered and doesn’t try to go after a prey bigger than herself.”

Around four-thirty, Harry headed back to Grimmauld Place while Daphne and Tracey went to the Daily Prophet’s main office. The place was bustling as they worked on the Evening edition of the Prophet, but surprisingly, when Tracey told the receptionist they were there to see Cuffe, they were shown to his office, even though they hadn’t made an appointment.

“This is surprising,” whispered Daphne.

“Not really,” said Tracey, as Cuffe walked in with a nervous smile on his face. “I think he might have expected something like this.”

“Ms. Davis, it is a pleasure to see you again,” said Cuffe.

“Yes, good day, Mr. Cuffe,” said Tracey, with a polite smile. “This is Daphne Greengrass, and we are here on behalf of the new majority owner of the Daily Prophet.”

Cuffe began sweating bullets but he tried to keep smiling. “Of course, of course,” he said. “The goblins said that the new owner had been informed.”

“I’m sure you have some idea of who the new owner is,” said Tracey, her grin like a shark’s. “Truth be told, you had quite a time slandering him all these years, huh?”

Cuffe laughed nervously. “I-it was, you know…”

“Oh, well,” said Tracey, with a bright grin. “The past is the past, isn’t it?”

He jumped on the chance. “Yes, of course, of course,” he said. “The future is what matters.”

“I am glad you understand,” said Tracey. “Now, here’s the new contract, and we would like a word with Mr. Benedict Almeidus.”

“Ben?” asked Cuffe, surprised. “Why him? He’s one of our newer reporters, not even been here three years.”

At Tracey’s raised eyebrow, he hastened to obey and went to go get Benedict Almeidus. When they returned, Daphne handed a contract to Cuffe, who immediately began reading through it. Benedict, on the other hand, looked at them suspiciously.

“Mr. Almeidus, my name is Tracey Davis and this is Daphne Greengrass,” said Tracey, holding out her hand.

Benedict shook hands with both of them. “Are you here on behalf of the new owner?” he asked, shrewdly.

“We are,” said Tracey.

“Does this one also want us to write what he says?” asked Benedict, bluntly.
Cuffe squeaked in fear, but Tracey smiled warmly at Benedict. “No,” she said. “We picked you because you were one of the most objective reporters on staff. Even in the past year when there was nothing but propaganda, you somehow managed to print the least biased stuff. No doubt the Chief Editor bent to the whims of the previous owner, but your work was noticed.”

“Oh,” said Benedict, slightly taken aback at the praise. “Thank you, Ms. Davis.”

“The new owner recognises your efforts and wants to grant you more access,” said Tracey, nodding at Daphne to give him the other contract.

Benedict took the contract and examined it. “Hang on, it’s Harry P—” he stopped and cleared his throat. “Right, I see.”

“As the contract states, you will have access to me as Mr. Potter’s press representative,” said Tracey. “Things will be changing politically and socially soon, and Mr. Potter is understandably wary of the Prophet considering all he has suffered because of it. You understand, don’t you?”

“I do,” said Benedict. “This says you will grant me access to Wizengamot transcripts as well.”

“Yes, no better way than to see unbiased reporting than hearing it from the horse’s mouth, right?” asked Tracey. “Just bear in mind, if the Prophet chooses to start twisting the truth again, Mr. Potter won’t hesitate to pull the leash.” She looked at Cuffe as she said that part.

He nodded quickly and signed the contract. Tracey looked back at Benedict. “Well, Mr. Almeidus?” she asked.

“I’ll sign,” he said, and accepted the blood quill from Daphne. “Is there a chance to have an interview with him? Many are curious about his plans for the future, not to mention a proper explanation of the end of the war.”

“I will put it to him to see if he’s willing to do it,” said Daphne. “However, about the future thing, there will be news regarding it soon, so we will be in touch with you then. In the meantime, please focus your attention on the Wizengamot.”

“Of course,” said Benedict, pleased.

Daphne took the signed contracts back from him and Cuffe and checked them before nodding at Tracey in confirmation.

“Clean house, Mr. Cuffe,” said Tracey, with a smile. “Have a good day.”

Cuffe stood quickly and bowed. “Yes, of course,” he said.

Tracey nodded at Benedict, who inclined his head in a short bow, and the two women left the Daily Prophet’s office together.
Chapter 3

31st May, 1998

It was Sunday, and once again, Harry had been invited at the Burrow for lunch. He was confused about it, until Hermione told him that Charlie mentioned they ought to make it a regular thing for the time being since both Molly and George had been in a better mood since last Sunday.

While Harry was happy about being invited, his conversation with Hermione the previous week was still at the forefront of his mind. Hermione had moved out of the Burrow and come to live at Grimmauld Place the same night that Harry had offered. While she’d told Ron that it was because there were spare rooms there, she’d confided in Harry that she was trying to put some distance before she mustered up the courage to open up to Ron about her feelings. Harry had no idea how Ron was feeling about the whole thing, but he’d given Hermione her space to figure things out.

His own feelings about Ginny were equally conflicted. She had greeted him with a kiss once again, and while it made him feel warm and wanted, he did wonder if there was more to them than a physical attraction. Something tangible, something that would keep them together for the rest of their lives.

Harry could feel his own melancholic thoughts building, so after lunch, he volunteered to put Teddy down for a nap while everyone else sat in the living room chatting. He had been rocking Teddy to sleep in Ron’s old room when the door creaked open.

He was expecting it to be Ginny or Hermione, but to his surprise, it was Fleur.

“Is he asleep?” asked Fleur, in a low voice.

“Yeah,” whispered Harry.

Fleur entered the room and sat down on the edge of Ron’s bed to look at Teddy. “He is so precious,” she said.

Harry smiled, and then thought back to what Fleur had said last week. “Fleur,” he said. “Can I ask you something?”

She looked at him in confusion. “Of course,” she nodded.

“Why don’t you want to go back to Gringotts?” he asked.

Fleur raised her eyebrows and then smiled a little. “Did you know why I went to Gringotts in the first place?” she asked. Without waiting for him to answer, she continued. “When I saw Bill, I knew wanted to marry him. I found out he was a curse breaker with Gringotts, so I took the job to be close to him.”

“You don’t want that anymore?” asked Harry.

Fleur was startled, and then she started laughing. “Ah,” she said. “You think Bill and I are having marriage problems?”

Harry went red. “Sorry,” he said.

“No, don’t be,” said Fleur. “I think it’s natural to assume that people who got married in the middle
of a war won’t survive once peace returns. But don’t worry, Bill and I are fine.”

“Really?” asked Harry, relieved.

Fleur nodded, with an understanding smile. “While it’s true a lot of relationships fall apart once war ends, that’s not the case for everyone. My reasons for leaving Gringotts are stupid, really,” she said.

“Was it because of Griphook?” asked Harry, remembering she’d hated his presence at the Shell Cottage.

“Close,” she said. “Well, Griphook was only a part of it. Goblins are not friendly to witches and wizards to begin with, but they are worse to someone like me whom they consider an abomination for having mixed ancestry.”

Harry felt like an idiot for not realising it sooner. “Fleur, I am so sorry,” he said.

She waved it away. “Don’t worry about it, Harry,” she said. “I bore through it because I wanted to be close to Bill, and then later because I can’t choose to hold a grudge during wartime. But now that we have peace, and Bill and I are together, I don’t wish to return to Gringotts.”

“That’s understandable,” said Harry. “Sorry for prying.”

“I don’t mind,” she shrugged. “Although, I was very surprised you thought that Bill and I were having problems.”

“Yeah, I might have been projecting a little,” he admitted.

Instead of being shocked, Fleur nodded in understanding. “Like I said, not all relationships survive in peacetime,” she said. “Think carefully when deciding to choose the person you want to spend the rest of your life with, Harry.”

“Thanks, Fleur,” he said.

“I mean it,” she said, firmly. “All those silly myths about Veela mates, but none of them really realise that we all have instincts that draw us to people that are compatible to us. Our magic has a tendency to guide us towards people who will become ideal partners to bond with and bear children with.”

“Really?” asked Harry.

“Of course,” said Fleur. “It’s why something as devastating as a war has a way to shake things up. But you see, couples who get together now during peacetime will form stronger connections because the war changed everyone to such an extent that you might not be the person you were when you entered it. Even if you were, the person whom you love might now be different.” She smiled as she looked at a sleeping Teddy. “We will see more children being born starting next year, and they will really bring in a brand new era. I know it may seem impossible right now, Harry, but you have to think about the kind of person you want beside you in the coming era of peace. It isn’t a decision to be made lightly.”

Harry was silent as he considered her words. “Thank you, Fleur,” he said, finally. “I will think about what you said.”

“Good,” she nodded, with a small smile. “And don’t worry about me, I’ll find a job.”

“Are there other jobs for curse breakers?” asked Harry.
“Oh, I wasn’t a curse breaker, Harry,” said Fleur. “I worked as a financial consultant.”

“What’s that?” asked Harry.

“Well, I had a list of clients that I handled. I looked after their investments, kept track of their ventures, drew up plans for them, you see. Things like that,” she explained.

Harry looked at her in surprise. “You analysed business plans?” he asked.

“Well, I analysed the financial aspect of them, yes,” she said. “We had someone else who was a business consultant, but I made the financial decisions.”

“Fleur,” said Harry, smiling a little. “I think I might have a job you are interested in.”

~

1st June, 1998

“Ladies and gentleman, welcome to the very first post-war gathering of the Wizengamot,” began Kingsley, sweeping his gaze over the court. “We are a day away from one month anniversary of the death of You-Know-Who, and though we emerged victorious, the price we paid was in no way insubstantial.”

There was silence at his proclamation, but many people bowed their heads in acknowledgement.

“It will take us time to rebuild, but I wish for you to join me in taking this first step,” said Kingsley. “The Wizengamot is the cornerstone of our governing system. Without it, we cannot hold trials or pass laws. Therefore, our first order of business today is to reorganise the fifty seats of the Wizengamot. Are there any objections?”

No one raised a wand, so Kingsley nodded once. “Per tradition, we shall address the permanent seats first,” he said. “Followed by the remainder twenty two seats.”

“Minister Shacklebolt, point of order.”

“Yes, Elder Fawley,” said Kingsley, looking at the older man.

Elder Fawley stood up. “We have a great many empty seats, among the permanent and non-permanent numbers. How are we counting if we have enough votes to pass a nomination?”

“Ah, I understand your apprehension, Elder Fawley,” said Kingsley. “While it is tradition to begin with the permanent seats, it is also a way around the issue in this instance. We will put together the permanent twenty eight seats first, and they will then vote on the non-permanent twenty two seats. As for the permanent seats themselves, the current permanent seats have the right to object a nomination and if there are enough objections, it shall be tabled and a vote shall be held once the rest of the seats are taken care of. Does that seem satisfactory?”

Elder Fawley nodded and sat back down.

“Well then,” said Kingsley. “Permanent seat number 1: Abbott. Currently held by Elder Robert Abbott. Any objections?” None of the wands were raised and Kingsley nodded. “Acknowledged. Permanent seat number 2: Avery.”

Bianca Avery stood up. “Bianca Avery, holding the seat for the current heir, Marshall Avery, who is not of age as of yet,” she said.
“Any objections?” asked Kingsley. No one in the permanent seats did, but there were mutterings from the non-permanent seats as hostile gazes were directed at Bianca. “Silence!”

“Minister,” said Elder Abercrombie, from the non-permanent seat. “This is an outrage! Families of Death Eaters should have no rights to…”

“Point of order, Elder Abercrombie,” said Elder Fawley as he stood up. “Young Mr. Avery’s father is merely incarcerated on charges of being a suspected Death Eater. Until he is tried, he is innocent, I may remind you. And even if he is found guilty, the Avery family has held a permanent seat on the Wizengamot all these years and sins of one man will not disgrace the whole house.” He sat back down.

“Ladies and gentlemen, to save us time, let me reiterate,” said Kingsley. “This will come up concerning many of the permanent seats, but the laws about the permanent seats are iron clad and we must follow them. Now, I ask again, are there objections to Madam Avery’s claims.” There was silence, and Kingsley nodded. “Acknowledged. Permanent seat number 3: Black.”

Harry stood up, and there were murmurings which immediately had Kingsley calling for silence.

“Mr. Potter?” asked Kingsley.

“I received the title of the Black family through my late godfather, Sirius Black,” he said. “However, I will not be taking this seat. I make a nomination for Andromeda Tonks, formerly Andromeda Black, to hold the seat.”

“Is Ms. Tonks here?” asked Kingsley.

The courtroom doors opened and Andromeda walked in. “I accept the nomination put forth by Mr. Potter,” she stated, clearly.

Elder Macmillan stood up. “Pardon me, Madam Tonks, but I was given to understand you no longer have an heir,” he said.

Andromeda’s face hardened but she nodded. “Yes, my daughter perished during the Battle of Hogwarts,” she said. “However, she did not die childless. I will be holding the seat for my grandson, Edward Lupin, until he is of age.”

“Silence!” called Kingsley as people began murmuring loudly. “Any objections to Madam Tonks? None? Then, it is acknowledged! Please take the seat, Madam Tonks.”

Andromeda gave a short bow and made her way over to the permanent seat of the Black family.

“Permanent seat number 4: Bulstrode,” called Kingsley. Millicent too, was sworn in without objections. “Permanent seat number 5: Burke.”

This one drew a lot more contempt, especially with the younger Burke still being a man in his late twenties and a suspected Death Eater. Still, after Kingsley’s firm words, there were no protests as he was sworn in.

“Permanent seat number 6: Carrow.”

Flora Carrow was sworn in without objections, just like Millicent.

“Permanent seat number 7: Crouch,” said Kingsley. “Since it is a-Mr. Potter?” he asked, when Harry stood up.
“Pardon me, Minister, but I have a letter here from Gringotts,” he said, banishing it towards Kingsley who took it and examined it.

“Ah, I see,” he said, and then enlarged the letter so everyone could read the words on it. “The Crouch family’s closest relative is the Black family, which makes Mr. Potter the head. Silence, silence!” He called as the buzzing got louder.

“I will not be taking this seat either, Minister,” said Harry, raising his voice to be heard over the commotion. “As head of the Black family, I wish to submit my formal request to acknowledge the legitimacy of the marriage of Cedrella Black to Septimus Weasley. Cedrella was a sister to Charis Black, who then married into the Crouch family and became Charis Crouch.”

Elder Fawley stood up. “Am I to understand, Mr. Potter, that you are handing the seat over to the Weasley family?” he asked.

Harry looked at him, but he sounded perfectly neutral and not prejudiced in any way. “Yes, Elder Fawley,” he said.

“I support Mr. Potter’s request,” he said, clearly.

It was nodded along by many of the other permanent seats, as well as non-permanent seats.

“Silence, please!” called Kingsley. “Mr. Potter, by accepting your request, both the Crouch and Weasley seats will be presented to the Weasley family.”

“And the Prewett seat as well!” said Elder Shafiq, firmly. “The Weasleys have long since been denied their rightful place and I say we should not stand for this.”

“Three seats held by one family is preposterous!” claimed Elder Abercrombie and Elder Zeller, but surprisingly, there were no protests from the likes of Lucius Malfoy and others. Little did they know that Harry had them strictly under his thumb and they were not allowed to protest one bit.

With a resounding positive, the Weasleys were granted the Crouch, Prewett and Weasley seats, with Arthur Weasley, Charlie Weasley and Percy Weasley sitting on them, and Bill Weasley being named the heir to Arthur’s seat.

Elder Fawley’s seat was acknowledged without issue, and for the Flint seat, Marcus’ younger brother Mitchell was named the heir with their mother holding the seat.

When he got to the next name, Kingsley frowned. “Permanent seat number 10: Gaunt.”

There was dead silence in the courtroom. The news of Voldemort’s true heritage had broken only days after the Battle of Hogwarts, so everyone knew who the last Gaunt member had been.

Harry stood up. “Minister Shackeibolt,” he said, over the deafening silence. “This is the seat I will be taking over.”

“Any objections?” asked Kingsley, his voice catching just a bit. The silence continued, and he nodded. “Acknowledged, Elder Potter.”

“Thank you, Minister,” said Harry firmly, and sat back down.

Kingsley cleared his throat before proceeding. “Permanent seat number 11: Greengrass.”

Daphne’s appointment went smoothly, but the seat right after was the Lestrange seat.
Harry stood up once again, and it was then that people started to understand what had happened. The smarter ones realised quickly how Harry had control of so many seats, and there were mixed feelings about it. While some like Fawley, Ollivander, Longbottom, Shafiq and even Slughorn were happy that Harry was the one in charge, many of the non-permanent members like Abercrombie, Zeller and Thompson who had all enjoyed long terms in the non-permanent seats and had been hoping for this to be a chance for them to seize power realised quickly that their hopes were being destroyed before their very eyes. Without a strong leader, the Wizengamot would have been divided, but the new leader had come in the form of the wizarding world’s Saviour. Among the permanent members Macmillan did not look happy in the slightest.

“He cannot hold two seats!” Elder Thompson still tried.

“I am not,” said Harry, looking at him sternly. “The Lestrange line is all but gone, however, I found a distant relative.” He picked up the paperwork and sent it towards Kingsley who examined it and then enlarged it so that the rest of the court could see it.

“Ah, I see,” said Elder Ollivander. “Newt Scamander’s grandson, is he?”

“Yes,” said Harry. “I nominate Rolf Scamander to be voted into the Lestrange seat.”

“Any objections?” asked Kingsley.

When none of the permanent seats protested, Kingsley acknowledged the vote and Rolf took his seat.

The Longbottom and Macmillan seats were taken up without issue. Augusta Longbottom handed the seat over to Neville, though the Macmillan seat was still held by Ernie’s father.

“Permanent seat number 15: Malfoy.”

Lucius Malfoy stood up and gave a curt bow. “Any objections?” asked Kingsley. All eyes automatically went to Harry, but he didn’t move a muscle. “Acknowledged,” declared Kingsley, and Lucius sat back down.

Theodore Nott was sworn in, in much the same way. Elder Ollivander was acknowledged instantly. Parkinson, Rosier, Rowle and Selwyn seats were quickly acknowledged as well, when they saw Harry didn’t object to any of them.

“Permanent seat number 23: Shacklebolt.” Kingsley smiled wryly. “As per precedent, I acknowledge that I will be granted three votes. Any objections?” There were none, so he was sworn in.

Shafiq and Slughorn seats were sworn in without issue as well, the Travers seat drew glares but no protests, and finally Zinnia Yaxley was sworn in at Harry’s nomination.

“That is all for the permanent seats,” said Kingsley. “Now to the non-permanent seats. We shall follow the existing seats, and if there are ones without viable heirs, we shall open nominations. This time, the seats will be decided by votes, not objections. Non-permanent seat number 1: Abercrombie.”

Elder Abercrombie stood up. Harry raised his wand, and nearly all of the permanent seats followed suit.

“Acknowledged,” said Kingsley, as Abercrombie looked astonished that Harry had actively voted to keep him in.
What he didn’t know was that Harry and Daphne had discussed the issue at length. Abercrombie
was the head of the neutral to light factions in the non-permanent seats. While he was still known to
be quite a power hungry bastard, he had served on the Wizengamot for a long time. Overthrowing
him and his faction would have been a piece of cake, but he was a popular public figure and to have
Harry Potter support him would win them favours from those who weren’t quite in Abercrombie’s
faction but admired him. It was also a matter of keeping your enemies closer and in sight.

The next three non-permanent seats were Bode, Brown and Corner, all three of which Harry
supported, so they were voted in.

“Non-permanent seat number 5: Crabbe,” said Kingsley. “The current heir is in Azkaban awaiting
trial. Since it is a non-permanent seat, it is an automatic forfeit without an heir or proxy. Does anyone
wish to issue a nomination?”

Harry stood up and there was palpable tension in the air. He had given it a lot of thought, and then
the answer had been so simple.

“I nominate Hermione Granger,” he said.

It was almost comical how everyone relaxed, as if they had expected him to claim yet one more seat.
Still, Hermione Granger was a war heroine and one of the brightest witches of her age. They also
knew she was one of Harry Potter’s best friends. While he wasn’t claiming a seat for himself or one
of his puppets, he was essentially lining the Wizengamot with numbers in his favour.

Hermione entered the courtroom, having agreed to it after Harry had explained his plan to her.

“We will now hold the vote,” said Kingsley.

Harry could have laughed out of sheer joy as Lucius Malfoy, Pansy Parkinson, and wives and
children of Death Eaters who had sneered at Mudbloods raised their wand to vote in Hermione
Granger into the Wizengamot. He wished he wasn’t in public because he wanted to do a stupid
dance in that very moment as Hermione took the seat that was formerly held by the Crabbe family.

Kingsley called for silence before continuing. “Non-permanent seat number 6: Dolohov.”

The heir had only recently turned 17, but he was voted in at Harry’s behest. Same with Goyle, as
Gregory took the seat.

The next two were the Hopkins and Jones seats that were considered light and very amicable, so
Harry voted them in.

The Jugson seat was granted to the matriarch since the son was not of age. The Macdougal seat was
voted in with a very popular vote, and Harry remembered Daphne telling him they were an old
family that was rather extensive and well-known for advocating business and development.

Macnair and Mulciber were voted in with some reluctance, and Harry could see Abercrombie
starting to sweat as he was no doubt counting the numbers and the votes. It wasn’t surprising though
as some of these nominations did not receive votes from those like Longbottom, Ollivander, or even
Rolf Scamander, and Harry could appreciate that they did not just wish to follow him blindly and
had their own principles as well. He did not begrudge them that.

Orpington was an older family that was a staunch supporter of Abercrombie, but Harry voted them
in as well. He and Daphne suspected that Orpington was the real brains behind Abercrombie’s
faction, but they didn’t know enough to prove it just yet. They needed him in their sights. The
current Orpington seat was held by Eugene Orpington, a thin black-haired man with beady amber
eyes and a permanently curled lip. He accepted his votes with a courteous bow before sitting down.

“Non-permanent seat number 15: Potter,” said Kingsley and then paused.

Harry stood up. “Minister, I am well aware that holding two seats goes against Wizengamot principles,” he said, and it was laughable because everyone in the courtroom was well aware that he held a whole bunch of seats indirectly. “However, I request to hold onto my family’s seat until my firstborn can sit on it.”

“I second Elder Potter’s request.”

Harry raised his eyebrows when he saw Eugene Orpington, of all people, second him.

“It will grant him three votes, same as the Minister, so it is technically not against the rules,” said Elder Orpington.

“Very well,” said Kingsley. “Let’s hold the vote.”

Overwhelmingly, Harry was voted into his family’s seat and he bowed before sitting down.

The last seven seats of Rookwood, Sayre, Steward, Thompson, Warbeck, Wright and Zeller were also voted in. Once all fifty seats were confirmed, they were all sworn in formally and new seats were given the gold Wizengamot pin and the plum robes that were to be worn for all official business.

“Thank you for your cooperation, ladies and gentlemen,” said Kingsley. “Before we end the session for today, there are some matters that require an urgent decision. Firstly, there is my own appointment to the Minister’s position, which was made rather hastily. I put my own position to the Wizengamot for consideration.”

Harry stood up. “I vote to uphold Minister Shacklebolt’s appointment to the position of Minister of Magic,” he said, and sat back down.

A lot of people looked relieved, because they had honestly believed he would have asked to be given that job himself. Harry wanted to roll his eyes, but as Kingsley was voted in by an almost full majority, he couldn’t help but be glad. He didn’t want to be the Minister in the slightest, and felt like sighing as he was once again reminded how very Voldemort-like this maneuver had been.

“Thank you,” said Kingsley, as his appointment was made permanent. “The next thing that needs our attention is we need to set a date for trials of alleged Death Eaters in Azkaban at the moment.”

“Minister,” said Elder Fawley. “I propose we wait until September to begin trials.” He looked at the rest of the Wizengamot. “Many Hogwarts students will be taking their OWLs and NEWTs here at the Ministry this month, and honestly, I wish to spend time with my grandchildren as well. We have all had a harrowing year, so I say we wait until the children go back to Hogwarts to turn our attention back to this.”

Harry felt his lips twitch into a smile at the older man’s tenacity. “Seconded,” he said, and just like that it was voted in.

“Excellent,” said Kingsley. “Our next matter for today is the position of the Chief Warlock. Elder Abercrombie has held the position since Albus Dumbledore’s dismissal by Minister Fudge.”

It was good that Daphne had told him about this beforehand, because Harry was sure his carefully kept facade wouldn’t have held up otherwise, and he would have glared or sneered at Abercrombie.
just purely on principle. He was still very conflicted about Dumbledore these days, having learned he had raised Harry as a lamb to slaughter, no matter if there was still a chance of survival. It didn’t excuse a miserable life and losing so many people around him for the greater good. At the same time, he couldn’t fault Dumbledore either. Voldemort needed to be stopped, and Dumbledore had done all he could to do that. A large part of him had forgiven him back in limbo, but feelings were never that straightforward, after all.

Still, he could see Abercrombie look towards him fearfully as if he would challenge him for it. Fortunately, when Abercrombie’s position as the Chief Warlock was put to the floor, Harry raised his wand in acceptance, a lead that was followed by a massive majority. Abercrombie looked relieved as he accepted the position once again.

“The final matter for today will be proposed by Elder Abbott,” said Kingsley.

Elder Abbott stood up. “I call for the permanent disbandment of the Muggleborn Registration Commission,” he said, his voice grave.

“Seconded,” said Harry, immediately.

Kingsley nodded. “The activities of the Commission have been put on freeze since my appointment but we will now take a formal vote for the disbandment,” he said. “All in favour.”

Almost every wand was raised in acceptance, albeit Harry knew that if he didn’t hold the votes that he did, a lot of them wouldn’t have been so cooperative. He could practically feel the loathing being directed at him, but he only smirked in satisfaction as the motion was passed.

“That brings us to the end of today’s session,” said Kingsley. “Thank you very much for your cooperation, ladies and gentlemen.”

~

“That could have gone so much worse,” Harry murmured to Daphne, who was in the seat next to him since the Gaunt and Greengrass seats came right after one another.

“Yeah,” she agreed, as they glanced around.

Everyone was slowly filtering out of the courtroom, with more than a few fearful looks being thrown towards Harry.

“We should get going,” said Daphne, getting to her feet. “What time did you invite Fleur Weasley to the office?”

“Three,” he said, glancing at the time. It was just after 12.30. “You hungry?”

Daphne raised an eyebrow at him. “Don’t you have an appointment with Tracey and Ben?” she asked.

Harry grimaced but nodded. “Yeah,” he said. “I promised to give a statement about today’s events,” he said. “I was hoping to at least eat some lunch before then.”

“I’ll have something waiting for you at the office,” said Daphne, with a bright smile. “See you.”

Harry smiled as she left quickly, no doubt to go right back to the office and start working. He had already told Hermione to return to Grimmauld Place without him, and as he hurried towards the exit, he dodged the waiting mass of reporters and followed Tracey, who escorted him away until they
could disappear.

Arriving back in Diagon Alley, Harry smiled at Tracey gratefully. “Any chance we can do this after I’ve eaten lunch?” he asked, as they went towards the nondescript building that was used by the Daily Prophet reporters for conducting interviews.

“Sorry, Potter,” grinned Tracey, leading him into a small, neatly furnished room inside the building where a man in his early twenties with long brown hair in a ponytail was waiting. “Ben, sorry to keep you waiting,” said Tracey. “Ben, this is Harry Potter. Potter, this is Benedict Almeidus.”

“It’s a pleasure, Mr. Potter,” said Ben, holding out his hand.

“And for me as well, Mr. Almeidus,” said Harry, shaking his hand firmly.

“Please, make yourself at home,” said Ben, offering him a seat.

“Remember, we are just talking about the Wizengamot today,” said Tracey.

“Understood, Tracey,” said Ben, with a small smile. “Shall we get started?”

~

“Do all reporters like complicated questions?”

Daphne looked up when Harry walked into her office and just made himself at home. “Hello, Daphne,” she said, sarcasm dripping from her tone. “Sorry for barging into your office when you are working so hard for me, and were even nice enough to have lunch waiting like you promised.”

Harry smiled. “What’s for lunch?” he asked.

She rolled her eyes. “Sandwich and pumpkin juice from the Leaky,” she said, returning her attention to what she was doing.

Harry took the brown paper bag on the desk and unpacked his lunch. “We really need better restaurants here,” he said. “Some fast food, maybe like pizza or burgers or something too.”

Daphne set her quill down and shook her head at him. “How’d it go with Ben?” she asked.

Harry took a large bite of the turkey sandwich. “Tracey gave him a transcript of today’s session, so he basically just went through the whole thing and asked me questions about all of it,” he said, waiting until he had swallowed to answer her. “I don’t know how positive we’ll be able to spin this one. Half the people in that courtroom looked like I might as well have been Voldemort.”

To his surprise, Daphne smirked. “Have faith in Tracey,” she said. “Besides, didn’t you wonder why the Dark Lord never got rid of people like Abercrombie or Orpington? It’s not like they’re some great purebloods. They were just cunning enough to not kick up a fuss when the Dark Lord took over. People like them know there’s a pecking order in place, and the reason why they have survived so far is because they know not to go against an enemy that’s bigger than them.”

“How does that make me different than Voldemort then?” asked Harry.

“Really?” asked Daphne, raising her eyebrows in disbelief.

“No, I don’t mean the supremacy or the murder thing,” he clarified. “Voldemort employed the same tactics though. He could have been the Minister, Chief Warlock, hell the King of England if he wanted. But he put his puppets in place while he remained in the shadows.”
“That’s because it’s the prerogative of a ruler,” said Daphne, seriously. “The Dark Lord was one of the most brilliant wizards in the world, and you know that’s the truth. The reason he gained so many supporters was through fear and intimidation, true, but that only came later. When he got started, he was a poor half blood orphan who only had his own brains and charisma to rely on, didn’t he? But he gained power, and that power drew others to him. If he hadn’t been a twisted, murdering psychopath, he very well would have been a great leader of Britain. Being similar to him in some ways isn’t automatically awful, Harry. You are as powerful as he is, but what will set you apart from him is what you do with that power bestowed upon you.”

*It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities.*

Dumbledore’s words echoed in his ears, and Harry smiled slowly. “You’re right,” he said. “Sorry for getting all worked up over nothing.”

“Don’t mention it,” she said, picking up her quill again. “It’s good to be self-aware, but you could do with having a bit more of an ego, you know.”

Harry couldn’t help but chuckle at her bluntness. “My ego is only reserved for my Quidditch skills, unfortunately,” he said.

“Then think of it in Quidditch terms,” said Daphne. “When you have a player on the other team who is clearly a standout, everyone focuses on that player, right? The commentators comment on their actions, the spectators follow their every move, the opposing team’s Beaters aim for that player, and so on, right?”

“Yeah,” said Harry, not expecting a Quidditch analogy from Daphne, of all people.

“But you see, while everyone’s focusing on the standout, the rest of the team escapes scrutiny,” she smirked. “The standout works as a decoy and by the time everyone realises that they should have been looking at the rest of the pitch as well, the match is over.”

“You think I should be a decoy?” he asked, and then chuckled. “That’s brilliant.”

“They will be busy looking at you, and in the meantime, we will be changing the shape of Britain’s society like scoring one goal at a time,” she said, with a very Slytherin grin. “So, use that Quidditch ego of yours, Harry. And lighten up, for Merlin’s sake.”

~

Fleur Weasley wasn’t sure what she was expecting when Harry had told her to come to the Verdant offices in Diagon Alley. She knew that they were title and estate attorneys, though she had never dealt personally with the firm.

When she got there, an older witch led her to a small meeting room and made her some tea.

“Thank you,” said Fleur, accepting the cup with a polite smile.

The witch smiled at her and left, though only a moment later, Harry entered the meeting room with a blonde witch in tow. Fleur’s eyebrows shot up a little, but she hid her smile in her cup of tea before standing up.

“Thank you for coming, Mrs. Weasley,” said the blonde woman, and Fleur was surprised at her perfect French. There was no trace of an accent in her voice, and she seemed to have spoken with the fluency of a native. “I’m Daphne Greengrass, Mr. Potter’s attorney.”
Fleur shook her hand, still a little surprised. “Please call me Fleur,” she said.

“Of course, Fleur,” said Daphne. “Please sit.”

“Could you switch to English?” asked Harry, and Fleur was amused when Daphne rolled her eyes at him.

“Fine,” she said, speaking English. “It’s not often I get to speak French, you know.”

“Your French is very good,” said Fleur.

“My mother was French, so my sister and I got lessons,” said Daphne.

Fleur smiled warmly, though she noted the past tense when she spoke of her mother.

“Fleur,” said Harry, his tone a little serious. “This may sound strange but would you sign a confidentiality agreement before we discuss why we’re here?”

Though she was surprised, Fleur kept her expression neutral. “I will,” she said, and saw him sigh in relief.

Daphne handed over the agreement to her, and Fleur read through it calmly, noting it was a standard confidentiality clause that she had seen frequently in her line of work. She held her hand out for a blood quill and signed it after making sure there was nothing out of the ordinary on it. Once she had returned the document to Daphne, Harry took a deep breath and started explaining his meeting at Gringotts.

Fleur had already suspected something of the sort, particularly after the three Wizengamot seats that he’d handed over to the Weasleys. She and Bill had talked about it later at home too, and she had gotten the impression that Bill had known more than he let on, but understood that it was likely because of his confidentiality oaths to Gringotts that he hadn’t elaborated.

“Restoring Diagon Alley is very ambitious,” she said, when Harry paused for breath.

“We know, which is why we want to have the best people working on it,” he said, seriously.

Fleur nodded, knowing that it certainly sounded more interesting than going back to Gringotts. She and Bill were planning on starting a family in the next two years, so a job like this where she only had one client to focus on was actually ideal.

“Here’s a formal offer for your consideration,” said Daphne, handing her a contract.

Fleur read through it, her eyebrows climbing higher and higher when she saw the pay and incentives. Generous, was putting it mildly. “It’s a very good offer,” she said, finally. “I admit I’m well-versed in the financial aspect, but I cannot take on responsibility for assessing business plans.”

“That’s fine,” said Daphne. “We are looking for someone to cover that area as well, so it won’t all fall to you.”

“Then if that’s the case, I think I’ll take the job,” she said.

“Really?” asked Harry. “Thank you, Fleur.”

Fleur smiled and nodded at him. “You have very ambitious plans, but you seem to be working hard towards it, so I’ll do what I can to help,” she said.
“Do you feel comfortable handling the finances of the Collective as well?” asked Daphne.

“Yes, though I think we’ll need more than just me if expansion goes well,” said Fleur.

“But for now, having you join us is helpful,” said Harry.

Fleur grinned and read through the contract once more before signing it. “When do you wish for me to start?” she asked, handing the signed contract to Daphne.

“Whenever you can, really,” said Daphne. “The Diagon Restoration Program is still a while away until we hire someone to handle the business side of things but I could use a hand in sorting through all of Harry’s finances. It’s not my strong suit to begin with, and it’s more complicated than usual.”

Fleur nodded understandingly. “I will start tomorrow,” she said.

Harry grinned at her brightly. “Thank you.”

Fleur took her leave after that, promising to be at work around nine in the morning. Harry helped Daphne set up one of the empty rooms as an office for Fleur to use. As an afterthought, they added a second desk as well so whoever they hired to manage the business side of things for the Diagon Restoration project could use it.

“I should get home before Teddy goes to bed,” said Harry, realising it was almost six. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Yeah, alright,” said Daphne. “Don’t forget to read the Evening Prophet.”

“I won’t,” Harry promised, before walking out and disapparating to Grimmauld Place.

He spent the next hour or so entertaining Teddy with coloured bubbles from his wand, before putting him to bed. Andromeda was grateful for the help, and retired to bed early as well. As Harry was going back downstairs, he passed by Hermione’s room and found the door ajar.

“Hey,” he said, knocking lightly.

Hermione, who was sitting on the bed with piles of books around her, looked up and smiled. “Oh, hi, Harry,” she said. “Come in.”

“Did you get back here alright?” he asked, remembering how many reporters there had been outside the Wizengamot.

“Yeah,” she said. “I cast a disillusionment charm before stepping out.”

“Wish I’d thought of that,” he muttered, leaning against the doorway.

“No, it was very dramatic with Davis leading you away,” grinned Hermione. “It looked very official.”

Harry made a face at her, which made her laugh. “So, guess who I hired today? Fleur,” he said.

“That’s clever,” nodded Hermione.

“Really? I thought you weren’t her biggest fan,” said Harry.

Hermione shot him a look of pure annoyance. “You’re joking, right? I was a horrible bitch to her because I was jealous that Ron got all dopey-eyed around her, but she and Bill took us in and looked
after us at Shell Cottage,” she said. “Not to mention, Ginny and Molly were no saints either in the summer before our sixth year, but Fleur put up with it for Bill’s sake. I know it seems like she was unaffected but I could tell it bothered her a great deal. Fleur’s a wonderful person, and if she hadn’t already forgiven me, I would go apologise again.”

Harry smiled, not having known that Hermione and Fleur had reconciled to such a degree. “So, what are you up to?” he asked, nodding at the books near her.

“Oh, I’m just deciding what to keep and what to take to Hogwarts,” she said, and then paused. “Are you sure you don’t mind me living here?”

“Hermione, I said it was fine,” he said. “Besides, this house is bloody massive.”

“Yeah,” she said. “So, have you started studying for your NEWTs?” Harry shook his head, grinning. “Harry! They start in two weeks,” Hermione pointed out.

“I know,” he said. “Hopefully, I’ll have more time now. It’s just been so busy with the Wizengamot and everything.”

“Oh, speaking of which,” said Hermione, rummaging around. “Here, the Evening Prophet came while you were putting Teddy to bed.”

Harry took the copy from her and took a deep breath before looking at it.

THE FIRST OFFICIAL POST-WAR SESSION OF WIZENGAMOT

All Fifty Seats reaffirmed
Kingsley Shacklebolt to continue as Minister for Magic (See page 5)
Elder Hermann Abercrombie appointed Chief Warlock again (See page 6)
The Muggleborn Registration Commission permanently disbanded! (see page 8)
An exclusive with Harry Potter (See page 3)

by Benedict Almeidus

On June 1st, 1998, the first official session of Wizengamot was called by Acting Minister for Magic, Kingsley Shacklebolt, following the end of the war against He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named at the hands of the wizarding world’s Saviour, Harry James Potter (see page 9 for details of the Battle of Hogwarts). The existing surviving members of the Wizengamot as well as several younger heirs, including Mr. Potter, received summons. In an unorthodox move, yet without deviating from precedent, Acting Minister Shacklebolt ordered the permanent seats to be voted in via right of refusal, and the non-permanent seats voted by majority votes made by the permanent members (For a full description of permanent and non-permanent seats, see page 12).

The depleted numbers were apparent as nearly all the occupants of the permanent seats had to be voted in this session. In a surprising move, most of the permanent seats remained unchanged. Even those seats previously held by alleged Death Eaters, have been voted to be kept in the respective families. (For a full list, see page 12).

“I feel the decision to keep the permanent seats as they are to be a prudent one,” says Elder Archibald Fawley. “Those that are tried and found guilty by law will be punished, but we are not in practice of punishing the ones who have committed no crime. The permanent seats have been a part of the Wizengamot for a long time, and it ought to continue.”

The Chief Warlock, Elder Matthias Abercrombie, had similar views though he did express his
apprehension. “The last thing we need right now is to be divided,” he says. “However, if all the members, permanent or otherwise, are willing to set aside prejudices and grudges, the Wizengamot will be able to do much good for the wizarding world.”

The sentiment seems to be prevalent among many of the other long-serving members of the Wizengamot. Of course, one of the biggest shocks came in the form of the Saviour of the wizarding world, Mr. Harry Potter, inheriting several seats after his defeat of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named.

However, in the end, he only took over the permanent Gaunt seat and is holding onto the non-permanent Potter seat until he bears an heir.

“It is not my intention to defy Wizengamot protocol or traditions,” he says. “I have the utmost respect for them, and I am honoured to be a part of it.” (For more, see the exclusive on page three)

While there may be some apprehension about so many seats being inherited by the same person, Mr. Potter assuaged everyone’s worries by making nominations to ensure that he would have no control over the votes.

“Elder Potter does indeed have quite a presence, but he mitigated as much power as he could, and it won’t be remiss to say that he seems to hold fairness and justice in high regard with this move,” comments Minister Kingsley Shacklebolt.

“Indeed, Elder Potter was highly respectful and deferred to the Wizengamot’s rules and traditions,” agrees Elder Fawley.

With the Wizengamot reinstated, the Ministry seems to be getting a handle on fixing itself back up. Their decision to postpone the trials for alleged Death Eaters until after summer has drawn some criticism, but mostly everyone seems to agree that it can wait until things have calmed down.

“For now,” says Minister Shacklebolt. “We need to heal.”

EXCLUSIVE: HARRY POTTER WEIGHS IN ON NEW WIZENGMOT

by Benedict Almeidus

In a rare opportunity, I got a chance to sit down with the Saviour of the wizarding world himself, Mr. Harry Potter, after today’s first post-war session of the Wizengamot. This is the very first time Mr. Potter will be speaking to the press since the Battle of Hogwarts and the end of the war against He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named.

When I started by thanking him for his part in saving all of us and the wizarding world from He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, Mr. Potter modestly replied that he had only done his part for the wizarding world.

“Voldemort killed my parents. He destroyed many more families than just my own. He was a monster, and what I did was for the sake of people in our world who no longer have to live in fear of a madman trying to destroy them,” he says, quite grimly. “Many people laid down their lives in this fight, and if it hadn’t been for them, I would not have been able to do what I did.”

Indeed, the talk of the fallen seems to bring a truly sad look upon his face. And yet, there is a determination in him, and when prompted about the reason for it, he was surprisingly forthright about sharing.
“It’s over now,” he says, smiling a little. “We can finally rebuild our world back to how it was. When I entered the wizarding world at 11, it was the most wondrous place I had ever seen in my life. Voldemort’s return tarnished the wonder of our world, but now that he’s gone, we can regain it once more.”

I couldn’t help but ask how.

“Well, in the Wizengamot today, for instance,” he explains, calmly. “I’m sure people will wonder why I didn’t object to certain heirs who inherited the permanent seats.”

“Do you mean the families of alleged Death Eaters?” I asked.

“Yes,” he answers, without hesitation. “This isn’t the time to hold onto grudges, or even fighting over what kind of blood we have. At this moment, all that should matter is that we are all willing to come together to build our world back after these trying times. Those that caused us to suffer shall be tried under the law properly. In the meantime, everyone else should band together, not keep searching for reasons for fighting.”

It might seem like an overly optimistic statement from someone else, but his determination and resolve is unmistakable. Our saviour truly believes we are stronger together, rather than divided by blood purity or old feuds.

“But surely it won’t be easy,” I point out.

“It never is,” he says, bluntly. “But I believe we are all capable. I am not saying we have to forgive and forget. I’m not that naive, after all. I think the priority should be rebuilding and recovery, not revenge or retribution. That’s why I also wanted the Wizengamot to be balanced. Voldemort’s mistake was thinking that only purebloods deserved a place in our world. The truth is, this is a world for all of us. Purebloods, half-bloods and muggleborn, alike.”

When I suggested that the late Albus Dumbledore would have included muggles in that list as well, Mr. Potter surprisingly disagreed.

“I think the Statute of Secrecy exists for a good reason,” he says, and there is a weight to his words. “We ought to focus on the wizarding world. That should be our priority.”

Speaking of which, I also brought up his recent resignation from the Auror Department.

“I feel there is much I can do, and though working with the Auror Department has been an honour, I feel like my path lies elsewhere,” he says. When asked where, he only smiles and answers that he is focusing on taking his NEWTs. “Whatever comes next, I’ll be ready for it.”

Finally, I asked for his parting words to the wizarding world.

“We will be alright,” he says, firmly. “I truly believe that.”

So, there you have it, dear readers. Our Saviour believes in us, and our ability to carry on after everything our world has suffered through. With him at the forefront, we can be assured that we truly might be headed for an era of peace and prosperity.

Harry sighed and folded up the newspaper. “It makes me sound…” he struggled for words, but Hermione giggled.

“It’s good, Harry,” she said. “People need to be reassured. Sure, it’s a bit hammy, but I think that was the point. It’s actually quite clever.”
“Let’s just hope I can live up to it, then,” he said, with a small smile.

“Oh, Harry,” smiled Hermione. “You already have.”

~

2nd June, 1998

“We have something we need to do today,” said Daphne, when Harry got down to the Verdant offices the next day.

“Good morning, Daphne,” he said, raising an eyebrow at her abrupt manner.

“We are short on time,” she shrugged. “Fleur’s already here and she’s gotten started on your finances, so you and I need to do this.”

“What are we doing?” he asked.

Daphne showed him a parchment. He glanced down at it and noticed that it was - “A map?” he asked, surprised.

“Of Diagon Alley,” nodded Daphne. “I got it from the Ministry’s archives. It’s the most up-to-date version they have. Unfortunately, it’s still two years old.”

“What do you want us to do with it?” he asked.

“We are taking a walk around the Alley,” she said. “We will be taking note of all the shops in there. The ones that are occupied and seem to be operational, we’ll mark with green, the shops that seem to be struggling, will be marked with yellow, and the shops that are empty or abandoned, will be red.”

“Got it,” nodded Harry, catching on.

“And while we’re there, we will be keeping an ear out for any particular ways in which the Diagon Restoration Program can help them,” said Daphne. “We won’t be asking outright, just making a mental note of it for later. I feel like we need to get a scope of things as they exist now before we launch into the change.”

“Yeah,” said Harry. “Did you read the Prophet yesterday?”

She gave him a look. “Of course I did,” she said. “I thought it was very well-handled. I already owled Tracey to congratulate her on a job well done.”

“I should do that too,” he murmured, and then remembered he didn’t have an owl.

“Don’t worry, she’ll be here in an hour or so,” said Daphne, getting up and putting on a silver cloak over her charcoal grey robes. “She’s in a meeting with Ben, so she’ll have an update about how the article was received and all that by the time we get back.”

Harry nodded, as he followed her out of the office. They passed by Fleur’s office, and Harry waved in greeting. She looked up briefly to wave back, but seemed busy so he didn’t wish to bother her. Before they stepped out into Diagon Alley, Daphne handed him a flask. “Polyjuice,” she said. “We are being discreet.”

Harry took it and grimaced as he drank it down. His body twisted in the familiar way, but it surprisingly didn’t change much. He was the same height and weight, and when Daphne showed him a mirror, he saw a young man about his age, with caramel brown hair, brown eyes and rather
“It’s my cousin Pierre,” said Daphne, without him having to ask. “Just in case anyone gets suspicious.”

Harry nodded, and the two of them walked out and went towards the Leaky Cauldron, deciding to start at the entrance and work their way down to the other end. Daphne had the map in her hand, and each shop they passed, she would tap her wand to the map to mark them. Some of the shops, she entered with Harry, perusing the wares on sale but really looking to see what kind of an establishment it was. Harry himself was taking stock of things as well, noting how some shops seemed to be doing fine, while others were deserted, with the bare minimum on the shelves, covered by a layer of dust.

It took them almost four hours to finish their survey of the full Alley, and by the time they returned to the Verdant offices, it was almost 1 in the afternoon.

“You’re back, how was it?” asked Fleur, when she saw them.

“Productive,” said Daphne, with a tired smile. “How about you?”

“I actually managed to put it in order, believe it or not,” she smiled.

The door to Daphne’s office opened and Tracey poked her head out. “Hey,” she greeted, with a wave. “Maribeth said she was stepping out for a bit to buy us lunch.”

“Let’s meet up in the conference room and we can update each other,” said Daphne, and they all agreed and moved to the little conference room that just had a long table with six chairs around them. As they were getting settled, Maribeth came back with packed containers of spaghetti napolitana.

“Where did you even find this?” asked Daphne, surprised.

“I went to the Muggle side,” said Maribeth, with a smile. “Please eat, and I will go make some tea in the meantime.”

“You aren’t joining us?” asked Harry.

“I always have an early lunch,” smiled Maribeth. “Bon appetit.”

The food was delicious, as Harry, Daphne, Tracey and Fleur just ate quietly for a few minutes. Harry had never had any kind of pasta before, and it was by far the best thing he’d ever tried.

“We need to get a place that sells this,” he said, when he was halfway through his food.

“Agreed,” nodded Tracey. “The pasta isn’t handmade or anything, but the sauce is good and it beats the fried food and bland sandwiches from the Leaky.”

“Ah, the English, they fry everything,” muttered Fleur. “I agree with the sauce being good, though, Tracey.”

“So, how did everyone else’s morning go?” asked Daphne, changing the subject from the food.

“I got the finances in order for the most part,” said Fleur. “You had done most of the work already, Daphne, so it wasn’t too difficult. But, there’s something important you missed.”

“What’s that?” asked Daphne, sitting up at once.
“Don’t worry, it’s just the matter of residences,” smiled Fleur.

Daphne nodded. “Ah, yeah,” she said. “I knew there was something like that.”

“What’s this about?” asked Harry.

“You inherited a number of residences,” said Daphne. “We need to access them and check up on things. There might be repairs that need to be done, there might be weird things with the wards...any number of things really.”

“They are your residences now, so they are your responsibility, Harry,” said Fleur.

“Right,” nodded Harry, and looked at Daphne. “When should we start?”

“I have a list here,” said Fleur, passing the parchment to Daphne.

“We can get started tomorrow,” said Daphne, reading the list. “Is it cleared with the goblins?”

“Yes, of course,” nodded Fleur, and passed her a long, manila envelope. “The details are in there. It’s sealed since only Harry can open it.”

“Right,” said Daphne, and Harry saw the Gringotts seal on it. “And what about the vaults from the inherited seats?”

“Yes, I sent off the letters you wrote up,” said Fleur. “The goblins wrote back a little while ago, saying the transfers were done.”

“Is this about...?” asked Harry, having an idea already.

“Well, the Lestrange vault’s contents are going to Rolf, the Crouch and Prewett assets are going to the Weasley family, like you wanted, remember?” said Daphne, and Harry nodded as it was confirmed.

“I’ll write to the individual recipients this afternoon to inform them of the transfers,” said Fleur. “The goblins will no doubt send their own correspondence, but we should do it as well. It’s courtesy.”

“Okay,” nodded Harry. “Anything else?”

“They also sent a package,” said Fleur, passing him a small box. “They said you would need these.”

Harry took the box and saw the Gringotts seal on it as well. Curious, he broke the seal and unwrapped the box from the brown paper covering on it. The box, which really was no bigger than a snuff box, and was made of plain dark wood, contained four different rings.

“Oh, good, they’ve arrived,” said Daphne, glancing at the contents of the box. “They’re your family rings.”

“Why are there four?” asked Harry.

“One each for Potter, Black and Peverell families and the last one should be a signet ring,” she said. “It will have a seal that we need to put on all of your official correspondence.”

Harry nodded and saw the small, gold signet ring.

“That should go on your pinky,” said Daphne. “The other three, you should put on your ring finger.”
Harry put on the gold signet ring on his pinky, and then picked up the gold and ruby ring which he assumed was the Potter one. He put it on the ring finger of his right hand, where it shrunk to fit him. The Black family ring was a clear diamond set in gold. When he put it on the same finger, it vanished and the Potter ring acquired a clear diamond border around the ruby. The final ring was the Peverell ring, which was an unusual stone that looked much like a sapphire. When he put it on, instead of a border like the Black family ring had made, the blue colour seemed to branch out like veins or branches of a tree through the diamond and ruby, giving it a most unusual effect.

“That is quite a ring,” said Tracey, impressed.

“Is it?” asked Harry, even as he was admiring it.

“Most of them are just one colour,” said Daphne, showing him her right hand which had the Greengrass family ring on it.

Harry looked at the beautifully cut emerald set in gold that was on her hand with a smile. “It’s nice,” he said, and then turned to Tracey. “So, how’d it go with Ben?”

“Well, I met with him this morning,” said Tracey. “Yesterday’s edition of the Evening Prophet was very well-received.” She grinned at Harry. “Your words are being heard, and they are having an impact. Which is why, I think we need to get a move on and start the Diagon Program thing quickly. We need to ride this wave from the start, otherwise it’s hard to get the momentum back.”

“We still need to find someone experienced in business venture,” said Daphne.

Tracey paused. “One of the Leiden?” she asked.

Daphne snorted, as both Harry and Fleur looked confused. “Which one?” she asked, and then gave it some thought. “Isn’t he the only one?”

“Yeah, come to think of it,” frowned Tracey.

“What is it?” asked Fleur.

“It was an old, secret pureblood alliance,” explained Daphne. “A bunch of venturists formed a consortium of sorts to invest and manage their shares in businesses. It’s fallen apart by now.”

“So, who’s left?” asked Harry.

“You’re not going to like it,” said Tracey.

“Try me,” said Harry.

“Malfoy,” said Daphne. “The alliance kind of sold off their interests around the time of the Dark Lord’s return, and most of those involved are now dead or in Azkaban. Lucius Malfoy is the only one left. It’s a shame, really, that he’s such a scumbag because he was a good businessman, at least.”

“Well, all the gold to bribe people had to come from somewhere,” muttered Harry, darkly. He frowned a bit. “Hang on, didn’t you say you were groomed by your father to take over the business?”

“That’s right,” nodded Daphne, confused. “Why?”

“Does that mean Draco was trained in this business venture thing by Lucius?” asked Harry.

“Oh, yeah,” said Tracey. “Draco was an idiot, but he grew a brain somewhere along the way. He
was quite shrewd in business matters, and it’s a shame he didn’t really get to use the acumen for anything.”


“You trust him that much?” she asked.

“No, I don’t trust him at all,” said Harry. “He’s weak, self-serving and an idiot. But he’s also a talented wizard and he’s got potential that if used right can actually be of some use.”

“And you think he’ll work with us?” asked Daphne.

“Let’s ask him, shall we?” smiled Harry. “Invite him here tomorrow and we’ll talk.”

“Do you plan on speaking with him?” asked Daphne.

“Yes,” said Harry. “Besides, if you really think he’s capable, then we would be hiring someone qualified.”

“What’s to stop him from blabbing to his father?” asked Tracey.

Harry chuckled. “He owes me,” he said. “I kept him and his family from Azkaban. And besides, I don’t think his relationship with his father is the best at the moment.”

Fleur looked unsure, as did Tracey, but Daphne looked at him speculatively and gave a nod.

“Fine,” she said. “Could you send the letter, Fleur? Let’s see what comes of this.”
Chapter 4

3rd June, 1998

To say that Draco Malfoy was surprised to receive an invitation to a private meeting with Harry Potter was an understatement. He spent a sleepless night agonising over what he could want, and when he went down to breakfast, he only found his mother at the table.

“Good morning,” he said, taking his seat.

“Good morning, Draco,” she said, looking like she’d spent a sleepless night as well. “Do you have any plans for the day?”

“Yes, I have a meeting,” he said, eating his breakfast without really tasting it. “Where’s father?”

“He’s feeling under the weather,” said Narcissa. “He was up quite late last night.”

Draco winced, knowing that Lucius had been in a foul mood after...well, everything, really. It would have been funny if it weren’t so sad how quickly Lucius had bounced back to his old ways after being pardoned by the Wizengamot.

Until the meeting with Potter last week, he seemed fully confident that things would go back to the way they were before the Dark Lord’s resurrection. Draco was certain that Lucius was losing his touch if he’d ever thought that, but Potter’s attorney thoroughly hammering it in bluntly had seemed to shatter his illusions. The ensuing Wizengamot session had not helped.

“Does this meeting today have something to do with the one last week?” asked Narcissa, after a few moments of silence.

“I’m not sure yet,” said Draco.

“Right,” said Narcissa, setting her silverware down on her empty plate. “Be careful,” she added, as she stood up to leave.

Draco finished his own breakfast and nodded. “Yes, mother,” he said, and glanced at his watch. “I should go.”

Narcissa nodded, and left the dining room. Draco drank the last of his tea, and used the napkin to wipe his mouth. He was supposed to be meeting Potter at the Verdant offices in about half an hour.

“This is going to be unpleasant,” he muttered to himself as he fastened on his cloak and checked his reflection in the hallway mirror. “Might as well get it over with.”

~

Daphne Greengrass fought back a yawn as she got ready to head to work. Thanks to the hard work of their house elves, Greengrass Manor had finally been restored to the way it was after the Death Eaters had destroyed it when attacking her father. Some of the less used rooms still needed to be fixed up, but the main parts of the house that Daphne and her sister were using were now properly ready.

Speaking of whom, her sister was already up and eating breakfast when Daphne came down to the dining alcove near the kitchen downstairs. The big, formal dining room was still under repairs, but it
was only ever used for functions and events, with the family using the alcove for meals everyday.

“Good morning, you’re up early,” said Daphne, sitting down at the table. A plate of egg white
omelet on rye toast, hash brown, and berry compote appeared in front of her, and their house elf,
Jolly, poured her some coffee.

“I decided to get up early to study,” said Astoria, smiling at her sister in greeting. “OWLs are less
than two weeks away. You should get some studying done too, if you’re serious about NEWTs.”

“I will, I will,” nodded Daphne, as she began eating her breakfast.

Jolly went over to Astoria and poured her a fresh cup of tea, which she accepted with a smile. “I am
just grateful I get to start sixth year if I pass my OWLs like I want,” said Astoria, after a moment.
“They’re strict about grades for the Healer program.”

Daphne smiled proudly, mostly because Astoria was driven and knew exactly what she wanted.
Despite the horrible year at Hogwarts and the death of their father, she was still determined to carry
on. “You will do well,” she said.

Astoria grinned. “Thanks, Daphne,” she said. “I feel better knowing you’re doing well, too.”

“Huh?” asked Daphne, slightly confused.

Astoria smiled a little secretively. “You are actually enjoying your work,” she said. “Despite working
from early morning to well past midnight, you have been in a good mood everyday. I’m glad, and
very proud too.”

Daphne blushed and rolled her eyes. “I’m the older one,” she pointed out. “Shouldn’t this be the
other way around?”

“Yes, but I’m just more mature,” said Astoria, cheekily. “How everyone thought you were the ice
princess is beyond me! You are one of the most passionate people I know.”

“I am just better at hiding it,” said Daphne, ruefully as she finished her food and Jolly poured her
more coffee. “On the other hand, your sweet baby face makes everyone think you’re innocent when
you’re as Slytherin as can be.”

Astoria shrugged unrepentantly. “So, how is work anyway?” she asked.

“Productive,” said Daphne, adding a cube of sugar to her coffee before sipping it.

“And Harry Potter?” asked Astoria, nodding at Jolly to clear her plate. “What is he like? Is he very
much a Gryffindor?”

“In some ways, yes,” said Daphne, as she absentely drank her coffee. “In many ways, he is like a
Slytherin.”

“That’s surprising,” said Astoria.

Daphne nodded. “Either way, my job is not boring, so I’m fine,” she said.

“Good,” said Astoria. “I know you didn’t want to shut down the firm after Papa trained you so well
and all.”

“Well, it wasn’t like we had a choice before this,” said Daphne, finishing her coffee and getting up.
“Hopefully, we won’t have to keep surviving off the family fortune anymore, now that I’m earning
“Yeah,” said Astoria. “It’s not like we’re going to run out anytime soon, though.”

“Just because we have plenty, doesn’t mean we should get careless,” said Daphne, grabbing her things and fastening her cloak. “I’m off then. Study hard, I probably won’t be home for dinner.”

“I know,” said Astoria, waving goodbye as Daphne turned to leave. “Have fun at work.”

Daphne waved back and walked out of the front door and to the apparation spot in the garden, where she vanished, arriving in Diagon Alley. She walked briskly to the office, and when she made it in, Maribeth handed her a fresh cup of coffee and a stack of paperwork that needed Harry’s approval.

“Thank you, Maribeth,” said Daphne, accepting the coffee and contracts with a smile.

“Are you sleeping well, Miss Daphne?” asked Maribeth, peering at her.

“Trying to,” answered Daphne, honestly. “We will have a guest today for a meeting with our client. You might need to prepare yourself a little.”

“Dare I ask who the lady or gentleman in question is?” asked Maribeth, warily.

“Draco Malfoy,” said Daphne.

Maribeth’s eyebrows shot up, but she nodded once. “What kind of a meeting is it?” she asked.

“I’ll let you know once I see how it goes,” said Daphne, going to her office. She worked on things that needed her attention and the next hour passed in silence until she heard a knock and saw Harry enter.

“Good morning,” he greeted.

“Morning,” nodded Daphne. “Malfoy should be here in a bit, but I need you to authorise these documents.”

“You mean sign them?” asked Harry, as he took a seat.

“Yes, and you will have to seal them too,” she said. He glanced at his signet ring and nodded.

Daphne handed him the documents, and took back the ones he signed to put inside envelopes. Once all the documents were signed and they were left with a small pile of envelopes, Daphne stood up and walked over to Harry.

“I’m guessing you’ve never used the seal before,” she said, holding out a stick of hard red wax the size of Harry’s thumb.

“No,” he answered, taking the stick from her.

“Just cast a heating charm at the bottom and let some wax drip onto the envelope,” she said, and Harry obeyed her. “A bit more,” she instructed. “That should do it.”

Harry set the stick aside and then pressed his signet ring into the melted wax. As he did, a small gold glow lit up for the briefest moment.

“That’s enough,” she said, and Harry lifted his hand away to see a perfect seal in the wax. “It’s a magical seal, so it cannot be opened by anyone but the intended sender and receiver.”
“Cool,” he smiled.

“I’m glad you think so,” said Daphne, and nodded at the waiting pile. “Because you get to do it again.”

He chuckled but got to work. “You and I are still visiting the residences after we meet with Malfoy, right?” he asked, after a while.

“Yeah,” said Daphne. “Hopefully, if all goes well, Malfoy and Fleur can get started with the data we gathered yesterday.” There was a knock on the door, as Harry nodded his agreement and finished with his last seal. “Yes?”

The door opened and Maribeth stepped in. “Mr. Draco Malfoy is here,” she said, leading the man in question in.

Harry and Daphne both stood as Draco entered and gave a short bow. “Potter, Greengrass,” he nodded.

“Good morning, Malfoy,” said Harry, as Daphne nodded back.

Maribeth left after closing the door, and Daphne indicated for Malfoy to take a seat as she and Harry sat back down as well.

Daphne surveyed Harry and Draco from the chair behind her desk as they both sat opposite her, looking at each other warily. With a sigh, she rolled her eyes and cleared her throat.

“I’m sure you both have awkward memories of one another, but bear in mind we are all adults here and conduct yourselves accordingly,” she said, feeling like a schoolteacher.

“Fine, I’ll make it straightforward then,” said Draco, shooting her a look of annoyance before looking at Harry. “What do you want?”

Harry narrowed his eyes but took a deep breath. “I can’t believe I am saying this, but we need you to work with us, Malfoy,” he said. “Draco,” he corrected.

Draco’s eyebrows shot up. “Work with you in what way?” he asked, regaining his wariness.

Harry seemed at a loss, so Daphne decided to take over. “I’m sure you are aware already that yours wasn’t the only family we met with last week,” she said. When he nodded, Daphne continued. “The war caused a massive impact on wizarding Britain as you are well aware, and it wasn’t for the better.”

“I am aware of it,” said Draco, his eyes darkening. “I don’t need a business spiel, Greengrass. Be plain about it.”

“Fine,” said Daphne. “We are trying to fix it and we need someone who can help do that.”

“How are you fixing it?” asked Draco.

“In every way we can,” said Daphne. “But to start with, we need someone who can help us simulate business in Diagon Alley.”

He clearly hadn’t expected that. “You want gold from me?” he asked.

“No,” said Harry, finally finding his tongue. “We want you to join our organisation and oversee business venture plans.”
“So, you’re offering me a job?” asked Draco, still taken aback.

“Yes and no,” said Harry. “It is work, yes, but it’s also an opportunity to be a part of rebuilding the world back up.” He met his gaze squarely. “You and I have seen the war from both sides and we know better than anyone that it benefited no one. Voldemort destroyed everything he touched, and you and I were a part of it.” He took a deep breath. “I want to fix what he broke and I know you are capable of doing it too.”

Draco blinked at him in shock. “You are such a Gryffindor, Potter,” he chuckled, finally. “Harry,” he corrected. “Nah, I’ll stick with Potter.”

“No, call me Harry,” said Harry. “I’m not expecting us to become friends, but I do want us to work together, D-Draco.”

Draco rubbed his hands over his face and groaned. “Merlin, what the fuck,” he muttered. “I must be crazy, but I am actually considering it.”

There was a knock on the door and Maribeth entered with a tray of tea and snacks, which she left on Daphne’s desk and left immediately. Sensing that a break was needed, Daphne made the tea, pouring a cup each for Harry and Draco before taking one for herself. The three of them were quiet as they drank tea and ate the warm scones. Once their cups were empty, Draco cleared his throat.

“Why come to me?” he asked, and then held up a hand before either of them could interrupt. “There could be any number of people qualified enough.”

Daphne looked at Harry, who sighed. “I said we should ask you,” he said.

“But why?” asked Draco.

“Because I hate you,” said Harry, bluntly. “You were the first magical child I met in this world and I hated you from the moment I saw you. We hated each other all through school, we fought, we duelled, we cursed each other, we almost killed each other. More than once.” He chuckled bitterly. “Now imagine after all that, I am starting to actually understand you. I hate it. I hate that even though I would not have made the choices that you did, I can understand so easily why you did it.”

Draco narrowed his eyes at him. “Is that what this is then? A way for you to lord your victory over me?” he asked, his voice surprisingly blank. “Or worse, is it pity?”

“It’s neither, though I wish it could be either of those, really,” said Harry. “The truth is, we were children. It sounds stupid, but it is what it is. The adults in our life did us no favours and we were set upon the paths we ended up on long before either you or I had a say.” He took a deep breath. “That excuse ends now. We are adults. For the first damn time, we get to choose what we want to do. Unfortunately for us, our past will limit what we can, in fact, do. But the last thing I want, is to be the kind of adult who will set up children to fight a war for me. And I knew the one person who would understand that would be you.”

Draco inhaled sharply. “Fucking dammit,” he muttered. “I hate it, I really do, but I know what you mean. Which only makes me hate it more.”

“I understand that all too well,” said Harry, with a small grin.

Draco chuckled, and turned to Daphne. “What is it that you really want me to do?” he asked.

Daphne cleared her throat, her mind still whirling with the bizarre, yet oddly comforting, conversation she had seen unfold before her. “What we need is someone to oversee the process of
looking over business plans,” she said, her tone business-like. “We already have someone looking over the financial aspects. You were groomed to be the head of your family. Like I am well-versed into becoming an attorney, business venture and management would have been taught to you by your father as well, being one of the Leiden and all.”

Draco raised his eyebrows and nodded slowly. “True,” he said. “I doubt this is how my father intended me to use it, but I don’t really care what he thinks these days. If I say I’m interested, what would be next?”

“Honestly, you would be signing a standard confidentiality contract,” said Daphne, pulling out one from her desk drawer. “We have two other people apart from me and Harry, and should you choose to join, you would be the fifth one. We can fill you in on the details of what we have planned so far if you sign the confidentiality.”

Draco accepted the contract and began reading through it. Harry and Daphne waited patiently as he did so properly. Once he finished, he read it through once more. Finally, after thirty minutes, he looked up and nodded. “I’ll sign,” he said. “I can sign it as me, and not as head of the Malfoy family, you understand?”

“We know,” said Daphne, passing him a blood quill.

Draco took off his glove and signed the contract, wincing slightly when the quill took his blood.

Once he had finished, Daphne passed the contract to Harry, who signed as well. The scars on his hands went red as he signed, but he didn’t flinch. Daphne took the contract back and checked that it was in order before signing it herself.

“Now that that’s done,” she said, sealing the contract and putting it away. “I propose we hold a formal meeting tomorrow so we can discuss what needs to be done. In the meantime, I’ll introduce you to Fleur and she should be able to fill you in on the details.”

“Yeah, alright,” nodded Draco.

“Great,” said Daphne, and stood up. “Thank you for your time, gentlemen. I look forward to working with you.”

They both stood up as well, and Draco held out his hand to Harry. Harry smiled a little and shook it firmly.

Daphne nodded at Draco to walk with her. As the two of them walked towards Fleur’s office, she looked at him speculatively.

“You know,” she said. “I expected it would take more than this to convince you.”

He smirked at her a little. “If it had just been Potter, I would have refused, I think,” he said. Daphne raised an eyebrow at that, and waited for him to explain. “Potter’s capable of many things, but I’ll be honest, his moves lately have been very Slytherin-like. Clearly, it’s your influence.”

“I think you underestimate him,” said Daphne.

“No, I don’t, actually,” said Draco, bluntly. “I’m not saying he’s incapable of being cunning, because I am the last person who can accuse anyone else of that. But there’s been a shrewd edge to his decisions, so he isn’t just blundering in without a plan.”

“So, that’s why you accepted?” asked Daphne.
“Yes, that and I think it would piss off my father,” he shrugged. “And my mother, for that matter.”

Daphne snorted. “Fine, whatever,” she said, and knocked on Fleur’s door.

“Come in!” she called, and Daphne opened the door to find both Fleur and Tracey inside.

“Oh, hello,” said Daphne, smiling at Tracey. “When did you get here?”

“About five minutes ago,” said Tracey, and then saw Malfoy. “Hey, Draco.”

“Davis,” he nodded, and looked at Fleur. “Delacour, isn’t it?”

“It’s Weasley now,” said Fleur, raising an eyebrow as if daring him to comment.

“Nice to meet you,” said Draco, diplomatically. “I’m Draco Malfoy.”

Fleur’s gaze still stayed a little frosty, but she shook his hand when he offered it. Daphne shot a look at Tracey, who winked at her to let her know she would keep the peace.

“Harry and I are off soon,” said Daphne. “Fleur, would you care to tell Draco what we are doing here? He has already signed a confidentiality. I don’t know how long it will take me and Harry, but if we can meet again tomorrow around the same time, we can update each other.”

“That will be fine,” said Fleur. “Has he signed on officially?”

“Not yet, because I haven’t had time to draw up his formal employment contract,” said Daphne. “I’ll do that this evening, so it’ll be ready for tomorrow.” She directed the last part to Draco, who gave a nod.

“You and Harry go take care of the other thing,” said Tracey. “We’ll put our heads together and get started on this.”

Daphne nodded gratefully at her, and left them to it. Tracey would keep things diplomatic, so she knew she didn’t have to worry too much. She returned to her office and found Harry, who gave her a curious look.

“So?” he asked.

“Looks fine so far,” she shrugged. “We’ll see how it goes.”

He nodded, and pulled out the sealed envelope from Gringotts. “Should we start dealing with this then?” he asked.

Daphne consulted the list from her own files and nodded. “We could start with the Black family properties,” she said. “Aren’t you already living in one of them?”

“Yes, the one in London,” said Harry.

Daphne struck off the London townhouse off the list with a nod. “There are two more residences,” she said. “The Black Castle, somewhere in York, and Chateaux Black in Chamonix. Usually, we would need authorisation to go abroad, but apparently, there’s a loophole in the instructions for you.”

Harry unsealed the manila envelope and realised that the bigger envelope was filled with several smaller envelopes, each with the name of a residence on it. The individual envelopes were also sealed. He pulled out the one that said ‘The Black Castle’ and pulled out the parchment from inside.
“Oh, it’s under fidelius too,” he said, reading through it. “They also said it’s under a suspension charm. And there are instructions to update the wards.” He looked at Daphne, and held out the parchment. “Read.”

Daphne read the line that said ‘The Black Castle is located in Alioth Copse in York.’ She nodded at Harry, and he pocketed the parchment. “Let’s go,” she said.

The two of them walked out into Diagon Alley and when Harry touched his ring to the parchment, it glowed briefly. He and Daphne both touched the parchment and they disappeared, arriving on the outskirts of Alioth Copse, which was a densely packed forest of blackened, overgrown trees. A straight path through the trees led all the way to an ancient castle. It was made of dark grey stone, and even in daylight, the place seemed dreary.

“Cheerful,” muttered Harry, as they approached the polished iron gates that were over 60-feet tall with glittering onyx embellishments. There was a pure gold lock in the centre of it, and Harry glanced at the instructions once and pulled out his wand. Resting the tip of it against his chest, he pulled it away slowly. As he did, a silver thread led from his chest and touched the lock when he tapped it. The lock crumbled away and the gates swung open noiselessly.

Harry took a deep breath and stepped inside, but Daphne didn’t move. When he glanced at her, she chuckled. “You need to key me into the wards,” she said.

“Oh, right,” said Harry, and then muttered an incantation that he read from the instructions. A translucent piece of parchment appeared in front of him, and he frowned. “I’m crossing off most of the names on this. For now, I’ll just key you and me in.”

“That’s fine, you can key anyone in anytime,” said Daphne, and felt the wards accept her as Harry used his wand to trace her name onto the list. She joined him, and instead of walking through the overgrown woods, they both apparated right to the entrance of the castle. Behind them, the gates closed once again and the gold lock reappeared.

“It says here to lift the suspension charm first,” said Harry. “What is it exactly?”

“It’s a way to magically preserve the estate from damage,” said Daphne.

Harry nodded and cast the countercharm. Immediately, the eerie silence disappeared and the air around them started to grow warmer. The blackened trees came back to life, the air was filled with sounds of birds, the odd darkness dissipated and the summer sun shone down onto them once again. Gradually, the unkempt grounds also turned into a beautiful garden, with neatly trimmed hedges, and the empty fountain in the courtyard began flowing with fresh water.

“Well done,” said Daphne, with a smile. “Let’s go inside.”

Harry agreed and led the way up the main doors, which swung open as he approached, welcoming them into a tastefully decorated foyer with marble floors. As they entered, fifteen suits of armour marched up to them and sank into a bow in front of Harry, and there was a crack as four house elves appeared.

“We come to welcome the new lord of the castle,” said the suit of armour, that was slightly more embellished than the others. “The Black Castle has been kept safe in your absence, my lord.”

“Er, thanks,” said Harry.

“And we is the house-elves, sir,” squeaked the house elf that was a little taller than the others. “I is Batty, and these be Matty, Patty and Ratty. Would Master and Mistress be wanting a tour first?”
Daphne went red, but Harry apparently missed the implication. “Yes,” he said. “But I won’t be living here since I am currently staying in Grimmauld Place.”

“Aye, sir, we understand,” nodded Batty, as the other house elves nodded vigorously. “Matty be giving Master and Mistress the tour.”

Matty gave a deep bow to both Harry and Daphne, and started to lead them past the entry foyer.

It was quite the estate. The exterior structure was rather similar to a Jacobethan style of architecture, and the interior was quite well done. Most walls were painted silver, almost all the carpets and furnishings were black with silver accents, and the furniture was made of a glossy black wood like the trees in the copse. The foyer led to a grand staircase which led to the floors above. On the ground floor were several parlours and lounges, a large ballroom, three different sized dining rooms, and a study for entertaining guests, as well as the large kitchen which was bigger than the entire Dursley home.

On the first floor, there was a big library and study, full of so many books that Harry knew he would lose Hermione there for the rest of her life if he didn’t stop her. There were several bedrooms and bathrooms on the first floor as well, though Matty told him the main bedrooms were on the floors above.

On the second floor, were the guest suites, each one containing a few rooms meant for guests to the estate. The third floor had even more suites, and also the Lord’s chambers, which was a massive suite of rooms, decorated lavishly. The Lady’s chambers were further down the hall, and it was an equally beautiful set of rooms. The bathrooms in the Lord and Lady’s chambers were bigger than the dorm rooms at Hogwarts and were almost entirely done in marble.

There was another floor above them, which was occupied entirely by an observatory. A massive magical telescope was pointed at the sky and the ceiling, like Hogwarts, was transparent and open to the sky. Matty told Harry the enchantment to make the sky look like anything he wanted at any given point in time, if he wished to see certain constellations and other astronomical phenomenon.

There were four towers around the house, connected through the ground floor of the main part of the house. All the towers were wings meant to occupied by the heirs and their families, and as such could function as independent houses on their own if need be.

Behind the house were the massive, sprawling grounds, upon which was a lake smaller than the one at Hogwarts. The lake was filled with greenish-blue water, sparkling in the sun, and beyond it was a fruit orchard full of apple trees that Matty looked after.

The whole tour took nearly an hour and a half, and by the time they were done, they were quite tired already.

Harry instructed the house elves to keep the estate in good shape and that once he had taken stock of all the properties, he would give them further orders. Batty walked him through updating the wards properly and making sure all the enchantments on the estate were still working. It was an exhausting process, so when he was done, Patty made iced tea for them. They drank the cool drink gratefully and took a break before Harry examined the instructions to go to Chateaux Black.

There was a certain Latin phrase they had to repeat to be granted entry, and when they said it, they found themselves outside a massive mountain villa in the French Alps. Unlike the Black Castle, it didn’t have any house elves, but Batty and Patty had agreed to keep up with maintaining the mountain villa as well. Though certainly not as extensive an estate as the Black Castle, Chateaux Black was still a big property that sat upon private grounds, including a private ski slope. The villa
itself comprised of a number of independent two to three roomed cottages dotted along the hillside, as well as the main house which was an eight-bedroom property with a magical hot spring, several lounges and a massive kitchen. Once making sure the wards were checked and updated, Harry and Daphne returned to Black Castle, to consult their list again.

“What are all these properties?” asked Harry, looking at a few other residences listed under the Black name.

“Oh, those aren’t like manors or anything,” said Daphne, reading it over his shoulder. “They’re residential and commercial buildings. A few in Diagon Alley, more than a few in Knockturn, and a few commercial spaces dotted across villages. They’re all rented out and is one of the ways in which your estate makes money.”

“Alright,” nodded Harry. “So, what’s next?”

“Well, we could start with the Potter residences,” said Daphne. “I assume if we go to Potter Hall now, it will take us the rest of the day to sort it out.”

“Let’s do that then,” said Harry, and the two of them read the fidelius which granted them entry to apparate outside Potter Hall in Newport.

Unlike Black Castle, they were greeted with a dilapidated pile of rubble beyond broken golden gates. Before Harry could look too dismayed, Daphne prompted him to lift the suspension charm.

As he did, the ruin transformed into a beautiful stately home made of yellowish stone. It was rather eclectic and the architecture was the unusual English Baroque style with two symmetrical wings projecting to either side of a north-south axis, and an elegant crowning central dome. The golden gates swung open welcomingly into a perfectly manicured garden.

At the entrance foyer, they were greeted by several suits of armour, a few statues of griffins, and six house elves named Annie, Minnie, Tinnie, Kinnie, Finnie and Rinnie. Ecstatic to see Harry, Finnie gave them a tour. The front foyer led directly into a massive ballroom under the central dome. The ballroom was more than twice the size of the Great Hall at Hogwarts, and occupied nearly all of the central part of the property.

The rest of the house was divided into the East and West Ends. The East End was the official part of the house. It had several parlours and dayrooms for guests, as well as a few formal dining rooms and even a smaller ballroom. The floors above had the library, more than a few studies, and a few guest suites.

The West End had the rooms for the family’s use. The Lord and Lady’s chambers were on the top floor and the suites for the heirs on the floor below that. The ground floor had the family dayrooms, dining room and the main study.

Unlike Black Castle, all Potter carpets and furnishings were a beautiful deep red with gold accents. The walls were all painted warm golds and browns, and the whole castle just exuded a certain kind of warmth. The grounds were quite extensive as well, a crystal clear lake bigger than the one at Hogwarts sat behind the house, along with a Quidditch pitch.

Minnie insisted on making a late lunch for Harry and Daphne after the tour was done, and they ate in companionable silence in one of the massive dining rooms on the West End, occasionally chuckling at how ridiculous they looked sitting on opposite ends of the long table. Lunch was trout ceviche with avocado sorbet, grilled ribeye with watercress puree, and strawberry and cream panna cotta for dessert. When Harry expressed his surprise at the delicious spread, Minnie assured him that they had
gone shopping and made the lunch while he and Daphne were taking the tour.

After lunch, Annie approached Harry shyly. “Will Master be living here?” she asked.

Harry paused, and glanced at Daphne. She smiled. “It might not be a bad idea,” she said.

“But Andromeda and Teddy…” he said, and then glanced around longingly. Daphne supposed it was finally sinking in that this was the place where James Potter had been born and raised, and likely where he’d been married and living with Lily Potter until they’d gone into hiding.

“You can always visit them back in Grimmauld Place,” said Daphne. “It’s actually better if you live here. Not to mention, I like the ballroom here. When we start arranging events, it will make for a perfect venue.”

“What do you mean, events?” asked Harry, slightly startled.

“You’re going to be a philanthropist, remember?” she asked, rolling her eyes lightly. “Part of that is arranging a lot of events.”

“I don’t know how to do that,” said Harry.

“Well, lucky for you, I do,” smiled Daphne. “We’ll worry about it later. It’s almost six. We should get going.”

The house elves were sorry to see them go, but Harry assured them that he’d be back.

They disapparated from Potter Hall, with Harry going home to Grimmauld Place and Daphne returning to the office.

~

4th June, 1998

Harry woke up around six, his mind already buzzing. It had been an emotionally draining day, particularly visiting Potter Hall, but he wouldn’t have traded it for anything. He raised his right hand and looked at it thoughtfully. The gold signet ring and the unusual family ring sat innocuously on his fingers, the sight feeling like a weight on his chest.

The past few weeks had been so very unlike him, and yet at the same time, he was just a little bit proud of himself. Being the hero and defeating Voldemort were things that had always been expected of him, but what he was doing now was something no one expected Harry Potter of being able to do. This was down to his skills, and the people who would help him along the way. It was...exhilarating, in the same way he’d felt about Quidditch when he’d first started playing. He thought back to Daphne’s analogy, and smiled as he sat up in bed.

Andromeda was already at the table when he got there, and he smiled at her in greeting as he sat down. A plate of full English fry up was placed in front of him by Kreacher, and Harry nodded in thanks.

“Did you sleep well?” asked Andromeda, peering at him with a worried look.


“Managed four hours,” she said, smiling wryly. “But Teddy is still sleeping so I might take a nap after breakfast. So, why did you have a sleepless night? Was it just the usual reasons?”
“Well, yes and no,” shrugged Harry. “I took possession of Potter Hall yesterday.”

Andromeda’s eyes widened before melting in understanding. “It was your first time there, huh?” she asked.

“Yeah,” he said.

“That explains it,” said Andromeda, sipping her tea. “It can’t have been easy, knowing you would have likely lived there your whole life if not for...well, I can see why you’d lose sleep over it.”

Harry made an affirmative sound as he ate his breakfast.

“So, you took possession of the estate,” she said, brightening her tone. “What is it like?”

“Pretty big,” he said, glad that she didn’t linger on the subject. His smile dimmed a little.

“Andromeda...”

“Do you want to live there?” she asked, a small smile on her face.

“I don’t want to leave you and Teddy...” said Harry, and Andromeda shook her head.

“You won’t be leaving us,” said Andromeda, gently. “It’s not as if you’d forget about Teddy if we weren’t living under the same roof.”

“I feel bad, especially since I asked you to move here and then I’m thinking of moving out,” he said, honestly.

“It’s alright, Harry, really,” said Andromeda. “You’ll still be a floo call away, so it’s fine. With you taking over the lordships and doing all that you’re doing, you should be living on the family estate. It’s only appropriate.”

Harry nodded, albeit reluctantly. “Are you sure?” he asked.

“Yes,” she chuckled. “Besides, you’re young and you need your own space too.”

Harry went red, which made Andromeda laugh. She finished her tea and stood up. “Don’t worry so much,” she said. “I’m going to go back to bed. See you later, Harry.”

“Yeah, see you,” he said. “Er, Andromeda?”

“Yeah?” she asked, stopping and turning around.

“Don’t tell anyone for now,” he said, and then glanced around. “Where’s Hermione?”

“She was up until late working in the library,” she said. “I think she only went to bed a little while ago.”

“I’ll tell her when I get back then,” said Harry, finishing his breakfast.

“Alright, I won’t breathe a word,” said Andromeda. “Have a nice day.”

“Thanks,” grinned Harry. “And thanks for understanding.”

Andromeda gave him a cheery wave and trudged upstairs. Harry called for Annie, who he had learned was the head house elf of the Potter family, and asked her to move the things from his room to Potter Hall. An ecstatic Annie immediately got to work.
With that done, Harry walked out of Grimmauld Place and apparated to Diagon Alley, arriving at the Verdant offices a few minutes later.

“Good morning, Mr. Potter,” greeted Maribeth. “Everyone’s already here and waiting in the conference room.”

“Thanks, Maribeth,” smiled Harry, and went to the conference room where he saw Daphne and Tracey speaking quietly while Fleur and Draco sat opposite one another, avoiding each other’s gaze. “Did I keep you all waiting?” asked Harry, as he entered.

“No, we all got a bit of an early start today,” smiled Daphne, as she looked up. “I thought we’d hold a quick meeting to update each other before getting on with what we were doing.”

“Sounds good,” said Harry, sitting down in his chair and looking at them expectantly.

Neither Fleur nor Draco looked like they would start, so Tracey grinned at Harry. “We had a bit of a rough start, but there’s a truce in place right now,” she said. “We are being professional, is that right?”

“Right,” said Draco, as Fleur nodded.

“Good,” nodded Tracey. “So, care to tell him what we did yesterday?”

Draco and Fleur exchanged a look, before Draco picked up a parchment from the stack in front of him. “We looked through the list you and Greengrass made of the shops in the Alley and cross-referenced how many of those are premises were owned by one of your estates, Potter,” he said.

“And?” asked Harry.

“There’s quite a bit of crossover,” said Fleur. “The rent hasn’t really changed, but the goblins have been raising it to keep up with the market price. There are more than a few struggling shops who probably aren’t making enough to keep afloat.”

“If I may make a suggestion,” said Tracey. “Before we launch a public program for restoring Diagon Alley, I think we ought to do a few test cases.”

“I agree,” nodded Daphne. “Fleur, what about the potion business I mentioned?”

“Oh, yes, I looked at it,” said Fleur, digging through a file in front of her. “Madam Primpernelle’s Beautifying Potions. Taken over five years ago by Rosette Frost, who’s the current owner. Your notes said it’s not doing well.”

“Beauty potions are a big market,” said Daphne, as Tracey nodded in agreement. “I didn’t get to look around much because we only did a cursory check, but she looked like she had quite a different collection in the shop.”

“Really?” asked Fleur, intrigued. “That sounds promising. I mostly get my products from France, because the ones here in England are horrid.”

“You’re not wrong, so if Ms. Frost has something different then it’s worth looking into,” said Daphne.

“Well, the good news is that the shop premises are owned under the Potter trust,” said Draco, consulting his list. “I also heard a rumour that Florean Fortescue’s son is looking to reopen his father’s shop.”
“I knew Florean Fortescue,” said Harry, remembering the kindly shop owner who’d helped him with his History of Magic homework in the summer before his third year. “He was a good man.”

“Unfortunately, he was murdered by Death Eaters,” said Draco. “Not by the Inner Circle or anything,” he added, when he saw everyone’s gaze on him. “It was a bunch of lower-ranked scum who were extorting the shopkeepers in the Alley and Fortescue put up a fight.”

There was an uncomfortable silence in the room, before Harry cleared his throat. “Is the Fortescue shop owned by us?” he asked.

“Yes,” nodded Fleur, after checking.

“Alright, here’s how we can start,” said Daphne, calling the meeting to order with a sense of calm that Harry envied a little. “Fleur, would you please scout out Ms. Frost’s store? The old Madam Prinpernelle stuff was ghastly, so if she indeed has something new, we can probably help with that. The shop is in a prime part of the Alley, so if there’s a good shopfront, it will draw people’s eye, and most witches will be lining up to buy new kinds of beauty potions.”

“Understood,” nodded Fleur. “I’ll pay her a visit today.”

“And Draco, please look into the Fortescue thing,” said Daphne. “Florean Fortescue was a popular man and if his son is reopening the shop, it will do a lot for the general morale of the Alley.”

“I’ll start right away,” said Draco. “Might I make a suggestion too?”

“Yes,” said Daphne.

“I think we need proper offices for the GSC,” he said, and raised a hand when Daphne opened her mouth to protest. “There’s nothing wrong with the Verdant offices, but I thought we are trying to keep Potter’s involvement with the GSC a secret.”

“He has a point,” said Tracey. “If we will be meeting with prospective clients, it would be nice to have an HQ of sorts, independent of the Verdant offices.”

Daphne seemed to consider it, and looked at Harry. “What do you think?” she asked.

“It’s a good idea,” nodded Harry. “Do we have something that can be set up as an office.”

Both Fleur and Draco began looking through their files, occasionally whispering to one another. Finally, after about ten minutes, Draco pulled out a piece of parchment. “There’s an office building a little further down,” he said. “It’s not quite in a busy part of the Alley, but not obscure either.”

“It’s currently abandoned, so it will likely need repairs,” said Fleur.

“I can swing by and see what needs to be done,” said Draco.

“I’ll go with you,” said Tracey. “If it looks good, we can get about fixing it up right away.”

“Hold on,” said Harry. “Kinnie, Tinnie!” he called.

Two house elves appeared with a crack and bowed deeply. “Master be calling us?” asked Kinnie.

“Yes,” said Harry, and pointed at Tracey. “This is Tracey Davis. She has a job for you to do, so answer when she calls on you.”

The two elves nodded eagerly and smiled at Tracey, who waved at them. “It’s nothing bad, but we’ll
be fixing up an office for us to use,” she said. “I’ll call you once I’m there and then I’ll give you
instructions on how we want it fixed up, alright?”

“Ask Maribeth if you need help on how it should be set up,” said Daphne, and Tracey and Draco
nodded as the elves vanished with a crack. “Is there anything else?” Everyone shook their heads, so
Daphne smiled. “Well, then, we can all head off and get to work.”

Fleur, Draco and Tracey stood up and took their leave, and Daphne glanced at her watch. “Good,
we got done early,” she said, with a smile at Harry. “Should we get going too? I think we should
finish the rest of the Potter properties today, and get a start on the Peverell properties.”

“Sounds good,” said Harry, as he stood up.

The two of them walked outside after gathering what they needed and Harry consulted his list. “Oh,”
he paused, when he saw the property that was next.

“What’s wrong?” asked Daphne.

“Godric’s Hollow,” he said, his face expressionless.

“Oh,” said Daphne. “If you don’t want…”

“No,” said Harry, immediately. “Let’s go.” It wasn’t necessary to share the address because when
they disapparated from Diagon Alley, they arrived right in front of the ruined cottage. Harry exhaled
roughly, and he saw Daphne glance over at him in worry. “I’m fine,” he assured her. “It can’t be
fixed up, can it?”

“Not likely,” she said, with a frown. “It’s been magically torn apart. You can clear away the ruins
and build a new cottage…”

“It’s alright, we can leave it as it is,” he said, somehow managing to stay calm even as memories of
the last time he was here crawled to the forefront of his mind. Despite the morning sun, he found
himself thinking of a dark Christmas Eve and he turned away from the ruins. “I want to pay respects
to my parents before we go.”

“Sure, I’ll give you some space,” she said.

“I don’t mind you coming with me,” he offered, hesitantly.

Her eyes went wide. “A-are you sure?” she asked.

“Yeah,” he nodded.

She smiled a little. “Alright, lead the way,” she said, and Harry nodded as they walked towards the
cemetery that he and Hermione had visited.

The graves of James and Lily Potter were just as he remembered, and he bent down to brush off the
dirt that had accumulated on the gravestones. He felt Daphne nudge his shoulder and he turned around to see her holding two bouquets of white lilies that she handed to him with a smile.

He nodded at her gratefully and set the flowers down on the gravestones, before standing back up.

“I’m moving into Potter Hall,” he said, and looked at Daphne as he said it.

She looked a little startled, but then smiled slowly. “That’s good,” she said. “I meant what I said
about the ballroom there. You should think about what kinds of events you want to have and let me
know quickly because these things take a lot of time to come together.”

“Yeah,” he said. “But first, I want to think about opening an orphanage.”

Daphne paused thoughtfully. “Alright,” she said. “Let’s keep an eye on the properties today to see if one of them could be refashioned into an orphanage. I’ll also get in touch with Zinnia Yaxley and we can visit St. Mungo’s to see how many orphans there are and how we can help.”

“Thank you,” nodded Harry, gratefully.

Daphne gave him a serious look. “You have plenty of money, but running an orphanage is still an expensive venture,” she said. “If you’re serious about it, then the events have to double as fundraisers as well. With the Diagon Restoration Program, we will no doubt still make money if the ventures succeed, but that won’t be enough. Holding galas and events that will draw crowds is absolutely essential since it will get the most donations from the people who can donate, as well as attention from the general public.”

“I am serious about it,” he said, firmly. “And I know it isn’t just taking them in now. All the children that I take in to the orphanage will be there until they graduate from Hogwarts and their education and all their needs will be taken care of. They won’t be treated like…” He stopped and cleared his throat. “They will be looked after properly and given the best childhood possible.”

If Daphne noticed the way he’d cut himself off, she didn’t pry. Instead, she gave him a pleased smile. “If that’s the case, the events we plan matter more than ever,” she said. “I can do it for now, but this will eventually have to be handed over to Lady Potter, you know. It’s going to be like a fulltime job.”

“I’m not sure if that’s Ginny’s thing, to be honest,” he said, unable to picture her running an estate. From what he’d understood before, it was a lot of work and Daphne had essentially just confirmed it as well.

Daphne looked at him in surprise. “You’re still dating Ginny Weasley?” she asked, sounding genuinely shocked.

“Why are you surprised?” asked Harry, a little amused at the baffled look on her face. It was the first time he had seen her look so confused.

At his amused remark, she rolled her eyes and shrugged. “Honestly, I figured you’d end up with Granger when all was said and done,” she said.

Now, it was his turn to gape at her. “B-but Hermione’s dating Ron,” he said, remembering vaguely that this was a weird conversation to have in front of his parents’ graves but knew deep down they’d probably find it entertaining.

“Yeah, but that would never work,” she said, shaking her head delicately.

“How come?” he asked, curious despite himself. He was privy to what Hermione thought, but he wanted to know how Daphne viewed the situation.

Daphne considered it briefly. “Well, they’re just too different,” she said, finally.

“But I thought opposites attract,” said Harry.

“They do,” she nodded. “But that only works when a couple have complementary strengths and weaknesses. People who are too similar or too different don’t work out.”
Harry paused and thought about her answer. She was right; Hermione and Ron were different, too different. What about him and Ginny then? They both had a similar sense of humour, they liked Quidditch, were they...were they too similar? His consternation must have shown on his face, because Daphne quickly corrected hastily.

“But that’s just speculation,” she said, glancing away. “There are all kinds of couples, really.”

“Yeah,” said Harry, giving her the obvious out. Besides, even he needed to think through it properly. “Er, should we head on to the next place?”

“Yes, please,” said Daphne, glad that they were moving on.

Godric’s Pride in Dorchester was the next place on their list. It was a stately mansion on the river, and while it wasn’t as grand as either Potter Hall or Black Castle, it was still a self-contained estate with greenhouses, herb gardens, vegetable patches and fields behind the estate to supply food and produce. When the charms were lifted, they found two elves named Cinnie and Winnie, who agreed to keep up with caring for it. They also requested permission from Harry to start rearing animals as they had been doing before the estate was placed under suspension. They informed him that all the food, dairy and meat eaten by the Potter family always came from Godric’s Pride, so Harry allowed them to carry on and to speak to Annie if they needed help.

The mansion itself had a very uniform structure, and both Harry and Daphne realised quickly that it could be an ideal orphanage location. Apart from the large Lord and Lady’s chambers on the second floor, the rest of the rooms were quite similar in size.

The outside was quite good too. One side of the mansion ended at the edge of the river and there was an enchanted pool on the river bank for swimming, as well as a mini-Quidditch pitch on the other side. The gardens, greenhouses and fields were behind the house, while the front was quite simple and only had some flowering shrubs.

“How do the wards look?” asked Daphne, as they came to the end of their tour.

Harry spent a few minutes examining them using the instructions in his letter, smiling when he was done. “The wards are actually pretty up-to-date,” he said. “They have held up well.”

“That’s good,” nodded Daphne. “We would have to add more if children are to live here.” When Harry looked confused, she nodded towards the river. “Wards keep intruders out, but there are also child-safe wards which keep children out of dangerous places.”

“Right,” nodded Harry, feeling silly for not considering it before.

“We should put this on a list of prospective locations, regardless,” said Daphne.

Harry agreed, and after saying goodbye to the elves, they went to the final Potter estate on their list, which was the Potter Villa on the French Riviera. A beautiful ten bed roomed modern house sat on the cliff’s edge overlooking the blue ocean. There were steps carved into the cliff that led to the pristine beach below. Apparently, the beach was part of the property as well, and there were ten chalets lined up along the beach, all of them independent of one another. Since it was a vacation home, there were no elves, but it was also the first property that needed to be fixed up a little because of storm damage to some of the chalets. Harry called for Annie, who assigned two elves from the Potter estate to the job quickly.

Since it was close to midday at this point, Harry invited Daphne for lunch at Potter Hall. Annie informed them that she had already moved Harry’s things into the Lord’s chambers, and that Minnie would be making them lunch. Instead of the absurdly large dining room of the day before, they sat in
a private dining room near the kitchen, that was still big enough to hold ten people at the table with ease.

For starters, Minnie served them tomato, burrata and broad bean salad. It was followed by butterflied leg of lamb with lavender, honey and claqueret. Dessert was baked loganberry and white chocolate cheesecake, and the whole meal was served with elderflower gin poured on ice.

“If I eat like this everyday, I’m pretty sure I’ll be as big as Hagrid,” said Harry, once they had polished off their desserts.

“Master needs to eat more,” said Minnie, as she cleared the table. “Mistress, too.”

Daphne chuckled. “I can actually put away what I eat very easily,” she said. “Our elves are also fond of fattening up me and Astoria, but they haven’t succeeded yet. I don’t know how long my metabolism will keep up, though.”

Harry laughed in agreement, and poured her another glass of the elderflower gin, taking one for himself too. “Have you started preparing for NEWTs yet?” he asked, knowing they were just over a week away at this point.

“Not yet. You?” she asked. When he shook his head, she took a long sip of her drink. “Astoria and I were planning an intensive study session this Saturday. Do you want to come?”

“I’d like to,” he said. “Hermione’s been nagging me to get a move on and start studying.”

“Bring her too, if you’d like,” said Daphne. “She’ll be a good tutor.”

“Really?” asked Harry. “Great, I’ll ask her.”

“I would ask Tracey too, but she isn’t doing NEWTs,” said Daphne.

“What about Draco?” asked Harry.

“Would you and Granger be alright with me inviting him?” asked Daphne.

Harry sipped his drink and considered his response. “Yeah,” he said, finally.

“Alright, I’ll ask,” she said, though she raised an eyebrow. “I have to admit, it’s very mature of you.”

Harry shrugged and finished his drink. “We have to make a start somewhere,” he said.

“I’ll drink to that,” said Daphne, and emptied her drink. “Shall we go then? The Peverell properties are next.”

Harry stood up, feeling a little unsteady because of the alcohol. He thought Daphne wobbled a little as well, but he nodded in determination.

There was still work to be done.
4th June 1998

After a rather satisfying lunch, Harry and Daphne arrived at Iola Castle in Bath. Upon reaching the outskirts of the estate, they both just stared at it in stunned silence.

“This is as big as Hogwarts,” Harry was the first to say.

Daphne could only nod dumbly at his outburst. Iola Castle was indeed as big as Hogwarts and structured almost exactly the same, surrounded by gorgeous greenery all around. However, the castle was made of white stone, and all the interior was done in royal purple and gold, making it look much more regal than Hogwarts. When Harry lifted the suspension charm, they were greeted by ten house elves named Binky, Dinky, Finky, Hinky, Minky, Inky, Linky, Pinky, Rinky and Tinky, all of whom looked extremely delighted to see them.

Speaking to Binky, Harry realised that Iola Castle had remained sealed for over a hundred years, and the elves had grown restless, despite having been under the suspension charm which meant they hadn’t aged either. Unlike the Black and Potter house elves, Harry needed to bond with them specifically, which they were all too happy to do. After the elves were accepted, began a long tour and after the third floor, Harry stopped memorising the way and just let Binky rattle off what the hundreds and hundreds of rooms were supposed to be. It took three hours to go through the entire castle and the grounds, and both Harry and Daphne were exhausted by the time it was over.

Promising to call when he needed them, Harry instructed the house elves to keep up with maintaining the massive Iola Castle estate, and he and Daphne departed.

“I don’t even know what I’m going to do with that place!” said Harry, as they arrived at the beachside Sea Maiden Cottage in Newcastle.

Daphne chuckled, but nodded in agreement. “I’m sure we’ll find a use for it. If we don’t, you could give it as a gift to your children,” she said.

“That’s one hell of a gift,” said Harry, shaking his head. He finally glanced at their surroundings and raised his eyebrows. “Another beach property.”

“Yeah,” said Daphne.

Not as big as Potter Hall or Black Castle, but still bigger than Godric’s Pride, the Sea Maiden Cottage was far bigger than a cottage and was likely better described as a manor house. Both Harry and Daphne thought it was also a good location for an orphanage. The structure, both outside and in, was very similar to Godric’s Pride but there were more rooms in the Sea Maiden Cottage. However, unlike Godric’s Pride, there were no facilities for growing their own food. There was a private stretch of the beach within the estate’s limits, and an open field that could be used for Quidditch, but it would need a lot more work to make it a place for children to live.

“I’ll put it on the list, regardless,” said Daphne. “I won’t put Iola Castle on that list, mind you, unless we want to lose a child an hour in that massive place.”

Harry laughed and nodded. It was getting close to the end of the day, so they said goodbye to the two elves Ipsy and Kipsy, whom he had bonded with and instructed to look after the place, and decided to return to their respective homes for a much needed rest before tackling the remaining
Peverell properties the next day.

Instead of returning to Potter Hall right away, Harry made a quick stop at Grimmauld Place to play with Teddy for a while.

They were down in the living room when Hermione came in, clearly having been out for the day. “Hi, Harry,” she greeted, when she saw him.

“How’s it going?” he smiled. “Where have you been?”

“Ginny and I went to see Luna,” she said.

“How is Luna, anyway?” asked Harry, having seen her briefly at funerals here and there, though they hadn’t really had a moment to talk.

“She’s doing well,” grinned Hermione. “Their home’s being rebuilt so she and her father are going to visit some family in Greece.”

“When is she leaving?” asked Harry.

Hermione smiled at him apologetically. “She left this afternoon,” she said. “That’s why Ginny and I went to see her, because she probably won’t be back until it’s time to go to Hogwarts.”

“Oh,” said Harry, feeling a little odd. It would have been nice to see Luna properly, but mostly he was just a little upset that he hadn’t heard from her at all.

Hermione sat down and gave him an understanding look. “It’s not you she’s mad at, you know,” she said.

“What do you mean?” asked Harry, startled.

“She feels guilty,” said Hermione, and stopped him before he could interrupt. “She can’t be mad at her father, because he was doing what he could to protect her. And she knows you won’t blame him or her, for that matter, which is probably making her feel worse.”

“Then what am I supposed to do?” asked Harry, thinking of the odd girl who had been such a supportive friend for him these past few years. “I don’t want to lose her.”

“You won’t,” said Hermione, gently. “Right now, Luna isn’t sure how to face you. Neither of you are at fault, but Luna still feels responsible. It won’t be bad just to give her a little time. She’s been through a lot, and maybe she’ll feel better once she returns.”

“Luna’s always been so...she isn’t the type to not speak her mind,” protested Harry.

“True, but I suspect even Luna needs to sort her thoughts sometimes,” said Hermione. “And like you said, she will always speak her mind, so I’m pretty sure she’ll reach out to you the moment she gets back.”

“I hope so,” said Harry, smiling gratefully at Hermione. “I guess this is kind of a bad time to tell you this since you were trying so hard to make me feel better, but I moved out.”


“To Potter Hall, it’s the ancestral Potter home,” he said, sheepishly. “Daphne and I have been unlocking all the properties I inherited.”
“There are more?” asked Hermione, eyes wide.

“Yeah, we still aren’t done,” he said.

“What are you going to do with them?” asked Hermione.

“Nothing for now, but they will be useful in some way, I bet,” he shrugged.

Hermione nodded, and then shrugged a little. “I’m sad you won’t be here anymore,” she said.

“I’ll still be around,” he said, with a look towards Teddy who was starting to look a little sleepy. “I should put him to bed.”

“Alright,” said Hermione.

Harry stood and picked Teddy up in his arms, rocking him gently before he could start fussing.

“Before I forget,” he said to Hermione. “Daphne invited me to a study session at her place on Saturday. You want to come? And full disclosure, Malfoy will be there too.”

Hermione had looked eager at first, though at the mention of Malfoy she grew wary. “I’ll think about it,” she said, finally.

“Alright,” agreed Harry, and headed upstairs to put Teddy to bed.

By the time he returned to Potter Hall that evening, he was so tired that he barely tasted the delicious summer chicken stew that Minnie served him before trudging upstairs to the Lord’s chambers for a well-needed night of rest. The unfamiliar room might have been a problem, but he was so overcome with exhaustion that he was asleep the moment his head hit the pillow.

~

5th June, 1998

Draco’s eighteenth birthday was an absurdly sunny day, so much so that he checked twice that he was still in England and hadn’t accidentally apparated away in his sleep. The atmosphere inside Malfoy Manor was gloomier than ever though, when he came down for breakfast.

His parents were both at the table at the same time for a change, and were eating without looking at each other or saying a word. It was like having the Dark Lord back and living here again. Almost involuntarily, Draco looked at the head of the table and shivered a little as he remembered countless months of the Dark Lord sitting there. It made him wonder if his father avoided sitting there now because it reminded him of the same thing.

Draco wished them good morning and sat at his place, the suffocating atmosphere killing his appetite instantly. He would have skipped breakfast entirely, but that would invite fussing from his mother and derision from his father, and he was in mood for neither. He received a half-hearted mumble from his mother, while Lucius ignored him completely as he ate his breakfast.

Not that he’d expected a fuss at this point, and considering his last two birthdays had been the two worst birthdays of his life, Draco still felt the sting when neither remembered nor cared to wish him. His sixteenth birthday was when he’d taken the Mark that still sullied his arm (though it had thankfully started fading since the Dark Lord’s death), and on his seventeenth birthday, he had been forced to go on a raid with his Aunt Bella, as his coming-of-age gift. Thinking back to the Muggle village she had burned with fiendfyre while cackling like the deranged lunatic that she was killed his appetite two bites in, and Draco put his silverware down.
Unfortunately, that drew attention from his father. “Are you in a hurry?” he asked, his voice raspy.

Draco wondered how much he’d already had to drink for his voice to sound like that so early in the morning. Still, he was not going to sit here and take his abuse any more. “Yes,” answered Draco, plainly.

Narcissa went pale and looked at Draco fearfully as Lucius swelled in anger, blotches of pink appearing on his pale, gaunt cheeks.

“Ungrateful brat!” shouted Lucius, going for his wand, but Draco had been ready for it when he’d first talked back. He pulled out his wand first, putting up a shield in front of him, deflecting Lucius’ curse easily. Narcissa screamed and ducked as it bounced off and hit the wall behind her.

Using the split second that it distracted Lucius to cast a stunner at him, Draco rolled his eyes when his father slumped forward unconscious onto his half-eaten breakfast plate. He stood up and put his wand away.

“You can wake him up after I leave,” Draco told his mother, who brought a trembling hand to her mouth. He sighed, and tried to soften his tone. “I’m sorry about this, mother.”

Narcissa seemed not to hear him, and Draco grimaced and decided to leave. He wondered if he would be getting disowned on his birthday of all things, and while the thought had always frightened the life out of him, he found that it didn’t matter so much anymore. He had a new job, and it was odd enough to know he was actually happy about working after being raised to believe only peasants held stupid things like jobs.

He remembered Harry saying how they’d seen the war from two sides, and the words had struck a chord with Draco. He had done some unforgivable things, and knew there was no redemption for that. But at least, he was trying, unlike his parents who seemed to have given up completely, as if they weren’t even interested in picking themselves back up after falling as far as they had. He wasn’t sure if he was disgusted, ashamed, or if he just pitied them for it.

He flooed to Diagon Alley, wondering if he’d be the first one in that morning, but found Daphne already in her office when he got there.

“Do you just live here or what?” he asked, standing in her doorway.

Daphne looked up and smiled at him in greeting. “No, I just have a lot to do,” she said. “What’s your excuse? I thought you’d take a day off for your birthday, at least.”

Draco rolled his eyes. “What am I, a kid? People who celebrate birthdays after coming of age are the worst,” he said.

“And here I had a present for you and everything,” she said, opening a drawer in her desk.

He raised an eyebrow when she stood up and walked up to him to hand over a bottle of firewhiskey that had a small silver bow stuck to it. With an amused smile, he accepted it. “I’ll admit, it’s the best gift I’ll get today,” he said. “And not just because it might be the only one I get.”

“That bad, huh?” she asked, and Draco wasn’t surprised she had deduced his home situation as easily as she had. Greengrass was always uncomfortably aware of the people around her, thanks in part to Davis, but mostly due to her very cunning nature.

“Well, I stunned my father over breakfast today, so I would say yes,” shrugged Draco, figuring he might as well be honest.
“Well, there’s spare couches in the meeting rooms if you find yourself disowned today,” she offered with a grin.

“That’s cold, you won’t offer me a room in the Greengrass Manor?” he asked, half-joking.

She gave him a serious look. “If you do get disowned, it would be only until Harry gets wind of it and he moves to boot Lucius off the family seat and reinstate you,” she said, plainly.

Hearing it put bluntly, soothed Draco’s nerves a little, not that he had been too nervous to begin with. “Good to know,” he said, grateful just the same.

“Sure,” she shrugged. “Oh, and have you started studying for NEWTs yet?”

“No, why?” he asked.

“Harry and I are doing a study session with Astoria tomorrow at my house,” she said. “He’s inviting Granger as well, so I thought I’d ask you too.” Draco swallowed roughly, and Daphne seemed to guess where his thoughts were headed, because she smiled a little. “Harry’s fine with it, and he’s making an effort here,” she pointed out.

He heard the implied ‘You should too’ in her words and nodded once. “Alright,” he said.

Daphne beamed at him. “Wonderful,” she said. “We’re meeting here at nine tomorrow. Don’t be late.”

~

“So, Fleur how did it go yesterday?” asked Daphne, as they all held their morning meeting in the conference room.

Fleur smiled. “You were right, Daphne,” she said. “Rosette bought the business from Madam Primpernelle, but two years ago, she started developing her own potions that she’s been selling. Unfortunately, because she kept the business name as is and didn’t really have much in way of advertising, no one really knew about the new products.”

“And the new products are really something different?” asked Harry, since he knew virtually nothing about beauty potions.

Fleur nodded at once. “They’re unlike anything on the market,” she said. “She has a bunch of products, but instead of the standard kind you can buy anywhere, the ones she has come in a variety of scents and the texture is like water, on top of it.”

Daphne’s eyes went wide. “Scents? Plural?” she asked.

“Yes,” said Fleur. “She has four different kinds, depending on what people might be looking for.”

“And the effect of the potion isn’t compromised?” asked Draco, equally astonished.

“What am I missing here?” asked Harry, slightly confused.

“Beauty potions are very tricky,” explained Daphne. “The usual kinds you get, even the ones you import from France or Italy, rarely have anything other than a slightly slimy texture and a standard smell.”

“The best, most expensive beauty potions in the world have a water-like texture and don’t smell like anything,” nodded Fleur. “They do often have a horrible murky brown colour, though.”
“So, you see, her managing to make potions that actually work, and for them to have good texture and a range of scents is extraordinary, really,” said Daphne. “How did no one hear about this? Even with limited exposure, this should have been flying off the shelves.”

“Unfortunately, she’s a half-blood, so she went into hiding,” said Fleur, with a frown. “The business was closed during this time. She reopened some time ago, but the business is falling apart.”

“If she needs publicity, we can definitely do that for her,” said Tracey. “I have a few contacts in *Witch Weekly*, and we can pull some strings.”

“What about the business itself? What kind of a shape is it in?” asked Draco.

“The shop needs to be fixed up,” said Fleur. “There wasn’t massive damage or anything, but it needs repairs. I couldn’t really ask about finances or things, but I’d like to invite her to a meeting next week to discuss it in detail.”

“Is she interested in having us help her?” asked Harry.

“Well, she did say she wants to keep the business,” said Fleur.

“It’s worth inviting her to the meeting, at least,” said Draco. “This could be a lucrative market and it’s best to get a step in right now before the value skyrockets, which it will, once people hear about it.”

“Yeah,” nodded Daphne. “Beauty potions aren’t a necessity, but they will draw in crowds, especially if *Witch Weekly* does an attractive feature on them.”

Harry considered what they had said and nodded slowly. “Fleur, you, Draco and Tracey should meet with Ms. Frost then,” he said. “I admit, I don’t know much about beauty potions, but I know if it’s a good business we should invest in it.” He smiled a little as he thought of the thousand galleons he had invested in Weasleys’ Wizarding Wheezes on a whim. While he would never ask for a return on his investment from the Weasleys, if he could help businesses like Rosette Frost’s which would in turn grant him returns that could then be used to help even more people, then it was all the better.

“Alright, Harry,” said Fleur, as Draco and Tracey nodded. “I’ll do that.”

“Anything from Fortescue?” asked Daphne, looking at Draco.

“Well, the rumours are true, at least,” said Draco. “Finnian Fortescue is wanting to reopen and is looking for investors.”

“Invite him for a meeting as well then,” said Harry, immediately.

“Yeah, good idea,” said Daphne. “Speak to him and find out what we can do. Make sure both he and Rosette Frost understand that it isn’t just gold we can help them with.”

“I know,” nodded Draco. “Oh, and Davis and I scouted out the office building yesterday.”

“Yes, and we called in your house elves to help,” said Tracey, looking at Harry. “They said they should be done by this afternoon.”

“What’s it look like?” asked Daphne.

“It’s two floors,” said Tracey. “The ground floor has a lobby and reception area, and there are smaller office rooms that we thought would be perfect as meeting rooms. The floor above has more
offices we can use. The house elves were quick with their work so the place has been fixed up and they were almost done painting when I left last evening.”

“They’ll be done with it by now,” said Draco. “We would just need to get furniture and things set up.”

“Yeah, Maribeth drew up what we would need,” said Tracey, with a grin. “I showed the elves and they said they would build most of it and have it set up like we wanted by this afternoon.”

“Harry and I will likely be done by late afternoon today,” said Daphne. “We can all go and see it then and all of you can move your things in by the end of the day today, so that we have the proper offices when we are meeting Rosette Frost and Finnian Fortescue next week.”

“Splendid,” nodded Tracey. “Let’s get going then, shall we?”

There were murmurs of agreement as the meeting came to an end. Harry felt a rush of gratitude at the hard work that was being put in by everyone, including the house elves. The burden he’d felt the day before was a little lighter, knowing he wasn’t in this alone.

“Harry,” said Daphne, drawing his attention. “Should we go? We have the last three properties to cover today.”

“Right, yes,” said Harry, hastily. “Let’s go.”

With the next set of instructions unsealed, Harry and Daphne arrived at the Arc in Stratford.

“Er, this isn’t a mansion, is it?” asked Harry, once they had entered the foyer after lifting the suspension charm.

As it turned out, the Arc was much more of a museum than an estate. There was a wing of the estate used as residence, but the rest of it was filled with paintings, sculptures and various pieces of art and artefacts from all over the world. And the majority of the estate was a massive library, filled to the brim with books and tomes.

A team of four house elves resided with the Arc, named Irin, Mirin, Kirin and Lirin, all of them extremely well-versed in curating and caring for the artefacts and items on the estate. In fact, the library was so well-catalogued and had a very sophisticated system of finding what one needed with ease that Harry knew he would have been a much better student at Hogwarts if he could just write down what he was looking for and the relevant books would come to him.

“Can you put this in place in other libraries too?” asked Harry, as even Daphne seemed impressed at the level of enchantment.

“Of course, Master,” piped up Mirin, who was the house elf in charge of the library.

After bonding with the house elves, Mirin was sent to the other properties to put the system in place in all the libraries. The remaining house elves informed him that this estate had been closed for several decades and the previous lord had been a connoisseur who had accumulated most of the artefacts there. After promising to take a proper tour some other day, Harry renewed the wards before he and Daphne departed for the next estate on their list.

The Eustace Mansion was quite extraordinary, and not just because it was in the heart of England’s National Forest. It was a willowy structure with all the outer walls covered in crawling vines bearing little white flowers, and there was a hush about the place, even after the suspension charm was lifted.
“It’s beautiful,” murmured Daphne, and Harry was surprised to see the look of awe on her face.

Instead of the manicured gardens or even open fields of the other properties, the estate sat on a natural, undisturbed meadow, and when they went inside the main house which was no bigger than a large cottage, they were met by four house elves named Pip, Fern, Flo and Roz. While the main house only had six bedrooms, a kitchen, two studies and three day rooms, there was a separate building that was just as big that housed a massive Potions laboratory. On the grounds between the main house and the Potions lab were ten different greenhouses, each one of them twice as big as the ones at Hogwarts.

Pip showed them around, and even Harry was impressed at how extensive the Potions laboratory was. The greenhouses were extraordinary as well, with an aqueduct system on the inside to care for the plants of all kinds. The woods surrounding the property had a number of magical creatures residing in them, including a herd of unicorns, a couple of whom cautiously approached Daphne when they were taking the tour. The property had only been under suspension for about eighty years or so, the last lady having been a recluse potioneer who grew her own ingredients, cared for the creatures, and did her research which was kept carefully in a safe in one of the studies of the main house.

“You should properly examine the research,” Daphne advised him seriously. “Actually, that goes for any specialised magic we find on these estates. And don’t share them with anyone.”

“Why not?” he asked.

She gave him a slightly exasperated look. “It’s your family magic,” she said. “We all guard our family magic closely.”

“Well, what’s the Greengrass family magic?” he asked.

Daphne gave him a calculating look and then shrugged. “I can’t tell you the specifics, but it’s poison,” she said.

“Poison?” he asked, shocked.

She nodded, seemingly not bothered by his reaction. “Poison,” she said again, without elaborating.

He thought back to how the magic should be closely guarded, and nodded back. Curiosity was pushing him to ask, but he knew he wouldn’t get an answer out of Daphne.

“That is to say, just because it’s closely guarded, doesn’t mean you can’t use it,” said Daphne, smiling a little when he didn’t push the issue. “For example, I can manufacture and sell a poison that’s known only to my family. The secret to making it shall remain with the Greengrass family but the product can always be sold.”

“It could be another source of income you mean,” he said, understanding why she wanted him to take the time and look at all the new family magic that was now his.

“Well, yes, there is that,” she admitted. “But mostly because this magic has been lost all this time. You shouldn’t throw it out into the open, but definitely pass it on to your heirs.” She sighed as she considered her words carefully. “Magical research has been slow these past few years, and it’s another way we have regressed. I hate to admit it, but Muggles have continued advancing while the magic we use today isn’t too different from the one in the past. There have been a few discoveries here and there, but not on the scale of twenty, thirty, even fifty years ago. Bringing back older magic will push new research as well, and is one of the ways the wizarding world can advance.”
“How can we make it happen?” asked Harry. “I don’t really have the brains for this kind of work.”

“Neither do I,” said Daphne. “Magical researchers are their own brand of brains. But that doesn’t mean we can’t help. Most researchers just need the right funding and a lab to start. I know we are just starting out with the orphanage and the Diagon Restoration Program, but we can consider an institute of some kind in the future to further magical research.”

Harry’s eyes went wide as he thought about it. “That sounds incredible,” he said.

“Like I said, there are many ways to give back to the world,” smiled Daphne. “But, we cannot rush with any of it. It has to be a slow, but steady walk.”

“I know,” nodded Harry, and then grinned at her sincerely. “Thank you.”

She looked a little surprised. “Why?”

He shrugged, still grinning. “I always feel hopeful when I talk to you,” he admitted, honestly.

Daphne turned an attractive shade of pink and glanced away. “Even when I warn you not to rush into things?” she asked, her voice sounding a little breathless.

“Yes,” he said, seriously. “Because I know that means you are giving it proper thought. And if you’ve given it proper thought, then I feel like we can work towards making it happen. That gives me hope.” He felt Daphne’s gaze on him and it made him want to blush. Instead of turning into a stuttering mess, he quickly glanced at his watch. “Should we take a break for lunch?” he asked.

He heard Daphne clear her throat. “Yeah,” she said. “Yeah, let’s do that.”

~

After a quick lunch of pepper and lemon spaghetti with basil and pine nuts, followed by a decadent sangria cake, courtesy of Minnie at Potter Hall, Harry and Daphne went to the last property on their list, which was the Pride Farmhouse in Dundee. The lunch had been mostly silent, both of them feeling a little introspective, so when they got to the Pride Farmhouse, Harry made himself focus.

It was a cottage not unlike Eustace Mansion, but it was set in an empty field and surrounded entirely by rows and rows of…

“Grapes, yes,” said Daphne, with interest.

“It’s a vineyard,” said Harry, eyes going wide.

This was the only property on their list that hadn’t been placed under a suspension charm, and the house elves were surprised, yet delighted to meet him. There were seven of them that lived there. Merry, Terry and Sherry looked after the vineyards, Berry and Ferry were responsible for making and bottling the wine, while Gerry and Kerry looked after the rest of the house and maintained the wine cellar which was in a separate building to the main house and was twice the size of the Hogwarts Great Hall.

When Gerry gave them the tour, he pointed out the wine that was kept in casks, barrels and bottles in the cellar, and the various types of grapes and techniques that were used to make them.

“Hang on,” said Daphne, slightly confused. “Some of these grapes won’t grow here in Dundee. The soil and climate wouldn’t be right for it.”
“It be the family secret, Mistress,” said Gerry, cheerfully.

“Oh,” said Daphne, and Harry had to appreciate her restraint because she looked like she was dying to know.

Apparentely, despite his words, Gerry still informed them that the entire property was under an enchantment, with each part of the vineyard under different climate charms to mimic the conditions of different wine regions. Even the soil had been brought in specially and enhanced with magic for growing the grapes correctly.

“You’d better not say more,” Daphne told Gerry, and smiled when Harry looked at her questioningly. “The climate charms and the ones to enhance the soil like he’s talking about are the family magic. I haven’t heard of climate charms that can mimic a region, especially not several under one property. The most that climate charms can do is mimic basic weather patterns. To have something that’s so self-sustaining that’s been kept going for so long with house elf magic is...beyond everything we know.”

“Right,” nodded Harry, the implications sinking in. It also explained why the property hadn’t been put under the suspension charm, considering the complex charm work that had gone into making a property in Dundee capable of making wine from regions all over the world. The wards were also finicky when Harry had to update them, and he was exhausted by the time he was done. “We’re done, right?” he asked Daphne.

“Almost,” she smiled. “I think it’s a good idea to gather all your elves in one place. You did tell them you’d give proper orders once you were done.”

Harry nodded, and after they returned to Potter Hall, he and Daphne spent some time discussing the orders they would be giving the house elves. Once they had a tentative list prepared, Harry called all his house elves. It was odd to just think it and then forty elves, including Kreacher, were all in the day room of Potter Hall. With so many of them, Annie was quick to take charge as the head house elf, and she ushered them to be quiet and await orders. Harry would have been at a loss where to start, but Daphne was more than capable of handling it.

“All of you have special skills,” said Daphne, with a small smile. “So, you will be given tasks best suited to those skills.” She pulled out the list from her robes and consulted it. “Since Annie is the head house elf, she will coordinate everything. If there are issues, concerns or questions, they should come through Annie.” Daphne looked at Harry, who nodded and the gathered house elves agreed when he did.

“Harry also has rules he wants all the house elves to follow,” said Daphne, and nodded at Harry to go ahead.

“No punishing yourselves,” he said, firmly. “If you do something wrong, tell Annie and she will let me know and I’ll decide what’s to be done. But you won’t hurt yourself or each other. That is absolute.”

Some of the house elves looked surprised, but all of them looked relieved as they voiced their agreement.

“Secondly, I once knew an elf who liked to be paid and he sacrificed his life to save mine,” said Harry, feeling a lump in his throat. “He was an honourable house elf,” he added firmly, when almost all of them looked shocked at the suggestion of payment. “Now, Daphne told me that house elves who are bonded like all of you are to me, will grow stronger with my magic. I know house elves traditionally consider that the highest form of payment. However, if it is not sufficient, you may
approach me, privately if you wish, to speak about pay.”

All of them shook their head at once, a little horrified at their Master thinking that being bonded to him wasn’t sufficient payment already. Harry wasn’t surprised because Daphne had said as much when they’d talked about it before calling in the house elves.

“Next, uniform,” said Harry. “You may wear whatever you wish, since you all have different jobs. All I ask is that they should be clean and made to fit you properly. I won’t give you clothes, but you can approach Annie and she will find you materials you can make your uniforms with.”

“Can we be making a request, Master?” piped up Annie.

“Yes, Annie?” asked Harry.

“Minnie be making a sample uniform, Master,” she said, and clicked her fingers. Her faded tunic dress changed into a neat, white pinafore with a red ribbon tied in a bow around her waist. Finnie did the same to show the male house elf uniform, which was a pair of white calf-length trousers and a white short-sleeved shirt, with a red sash around the waist.

“You may wear that if you wish,” Harry told the house elves, many of whom agreed eagerly. In the end, all of the elves, even Kreacher, decided to wear the uniform, and Harry saw Daphne’s amused smile at the house elves all decked out in the new uniforms that Rinnie and Minnie had apparently made on Annie’s direction.

“And lastly, you will not work till you drop,” he said, remembering Daphne telling him to add that. “There are a lot of you and there will be lots to do, but do not push yourself beyond your magic. That’s an order. If I ask you to do something that is beyond your capacity, you will tell me, clearly and immediately. You won’t be punished for it.” Harry smiled. “And it goes without saying that since you will all be keeping my secrets, I will consider you as family. So, before I hand out your orders, I am going to tell you what I am planning to do.”

In quick sentences, he explained his plans to build an orphanage. When a lot of them looked extremely happy to the point of tears, Harry was a little confused.

“House elves hold children in high regard,” said Daphne, helpfully. “They make extraordinary caretakers and won’t allow anyone to harm them.”

“That’s wonderful,” said Harry, beaming at the house elves. “There is a lot I want to do for the wizarding world and I want all of you to help me in whatever way you are able. Alright?”

There were eager words of agreement and vigorous nodding from all the house elves.

“Now, then, some orders,” he said. “Kreacher, you should remain at Grimmauld Place. I am assigning you to look after the house and helping Andromeda. Her orders are to be followed like you would follow mine.”

“Yes, Master,” nodded Kreacher, pleased as can be.

“I would also like you to finish cleaning up all the upstairs rooms,” said Harry. “Ratty will come to help you.”

At the prospect of another Black family house elf coming to help, Kreacher looked eager. He quickly voiced his acceptance, promising to have Grimmauld Place in top notch shape before the weekend was done.
“Annie, you will remain at Potter Hall,” said Harry, and she nodded with a bright smile. “Minnie will stay here to cook as well. As for Finnie…”

And on and on it went, as Harry handed out orders that Daphne had painstakingly written out. There was at least one house elf on every property, charged with the upkeep, with a couple more at Potter Hall to clean and look after Harry. All seven of the Pride Farmhouse elves stayed on their property, continuing their work in making the wine. Mirin from the Arc was tasked with working on all of the libraries, and two others from that estate were sent to catalogue all the art works on the rest of the properties. Elves like Finnie and Matty who were at the Potter and Black estate and specialised in groundskeeping and farming were sent to Godric’s Pride to assist with that work. Many of the Iola Castle house elves were highly skilled at repair and renovations, so they were on standby for when they would be needed for various projects. The house elves at Eustace Mansion were joined by other elves good at Herbology and Potions to assist.

There was also a standing agreement that if there was work that needed urgent attention, Annie would coordinate with one of the house elves who was free and send them along to help. Of the two elves who had fixed up the new GSC HQ, one was assigned there permanently to clean and look after the HQ. While there were quite a few house elves without direct orders for the time being, they knew that once the orphanage got underway, they would have lots of work as well. For now, they were all pleased that they were considered part of Harry’s family, and when he nodded at them to leave, they all disappeared with a series of loud cracks, excited as can be.

“That went very well,” said Daphne, looking as tired as Harry felt.

“Don’t suppose I can call it a day and go right to bed,” he said.

“Afraid not,” smiled Daphne. “We should pop by the new HQ, especially since Kinnie said it’s ready, and Tracey, Fleur and Draco have moved their things in.”

Harry nodded, eager to see the new HQ, despite being tired. It was almost five in the evening, but he and Daphne went to the Verdant offices, and then all of them walked down to the new GSC HQ which was further down from Gringotts and away from prying eyes while still being in a good part of the Alley, just like Draco had said.

The outside was nondescript, but there was a large mahogany sign that said ‘GSC Consultants’ in neat gold letters on it above the doors. A pair of glass double doors opened into a sunny front lobby that had an empty reception desk and a waiting area. There were neat brown leather upholstered chairs and sofas in the waiting area, and all the furniture was polished mahogany with gold accents. The walls were painted a light shade of beige and the carpet was the same dark brown as the furniture. The warm lighting made the lobby look inviting, yet professional at the same time.

The hallway next to the reception desk led to a corridor that had two meeting rooms on one side and a conference room opposite it. Both meeting rooms had brown leather sofas, coffee tables and empty filing cabinets. The conference room was bigger than the one at Verdant and had room for eight people.

“This is all for visitors,” said Tracey, nodding at the meeting rooms and conference room. “We have another bigger conference room for staff upstairs.”

The stairs were at the end of the hallway, and Draco pointed out another door near the stairs.

“We can use this entrance to enter and leave,” said Draco. “Especially you, Potter, since you can’t really just walk past the reception and waiting area if your involvement is a secret.”
“Where does it come out?” asked Daphne.

“An empty dead end, so you can just apparate there and then walk in,” said Tracey.

“It’s one of the reasons I liked this building,” said Draco, and Harry nodded back gratefully.

Up the stairs, and there were many more rooms than ones downstairs. Draco and Fleur had adjoining offices with a door in between, while Tracey had the office opposite them. There were a couple more empty offices, and a larger conference room like Tracey had said.

Harry’s office was the biggest room on the floor and was at the end furthest from the stairs towards the front of the building so he had a view of the Alley from his window, though Fleur assured him that people wouldn’t be able to see him from the outside.

“There’s a floo in here too,” said Fleur, nodding at his office which was bare for the time being but had a desk and some chairs, and a couple of filing cabinets and empty bookshelves just the same. “One of the smallest rooms has been made into a floo room, but it isn’t connected yet. I sent off the authorisation request to the Ministry, so it should be sorted out by next week.”

“Thanks for doing that,” smiled Daphne gratefully.

Fleur smiled back, as they continued the tour. There was also a break room on the floor with a small kitchenette for their use, and next to it were facilities for toilets and showers. Another room had been turned into an archives and records room to store all their files properly.

Harry looked at Daphne. “You could even move the Verdant offices here,” he suggested.

Daphne paused. “Better not,” she said, finally. “I’ll use an empty office when I’m here, but I think it’s better to have the offices separate. In the meantime, I’ll ask Maribeth to come work here to assist with the admin work until you find someone specifically.”

“That will be a big help,” nodded Fleur gratefully.

“Oh, and Kinnie will be staying on as a permanent house elf,” said Harry. “If you need anything, call for her.”

“She did a great job,” grinned Tracey. “This looks wonderful, doesn’t it?”

“It does,” nodded Harry, pleased at the new HQ. He fought back a yawn and realised that everyone else looked exhausted as well. “Thank you for all your hard work,” he told them, seriously.

“Don’t mention it,” said Tracey, cheerfully while both Fleur and Draco looked a little embarrassed. “You pay a good salary, so it’s fine.”

The joke dispelled the awkwardness, and with that, they all started taking their leave, ready for the weekend after a busy week. Harry saw Daphne speak to Draco with a serious look, but he shook his head with a smile and then left.

“What was that about?” asked Harry.

Daphne sighed a little. “He’s having issues with his family,” she said. “I said he should stay at the Leaky or something, but he said he’s going home.”

Harry frowned with worry. “Should I…?” he began, but Daphne shook her head.

“It’s not our place to interfere unless he asks for help,” she said. “He’s trying his best to be better, so
even if it’s hard for us to watch from the sidelines, it’s not about us. If he wants to stand up to his family, he will do so on his own. We’ll help if he wants us to, but not until then.”

“Right,” said Harry. “Did you ask him about tomorrow?”

“Yeah, he said he’ll come,” said Daphne. “You and Granger should get here around nine as well, and I’ll let you all in through the wards.”

“Alright,” agreed Harry. “You going home?”

“Yeah, believe it or not, even I’m tired,” she said, smiling a little.

“Good night then,” said Harry, as they walked out to the apparation spot outside the back entrance together.

“Good night,” said Daphne, and disapparated away.

~

When Draco got back to Malfoy Manor, he fully expected to be ambushed, so he was already on edge. But when he did arrive through the floo, he only saw his mother sitting in an armchair nearby, a half-empty bottle of sherry in her hand.

Resisting the urge to sigh or scream, Draco approached her warily and took the bottle out of her hands, worried when he saw her unfocused gaze and the smell of alcohol on her breath.

“Draco,” she said, not resisting as he took the bottle away.

“Yes?” he asked, still on edge as he set the bottle on top of the fireplace.

“You should move into the townhouse,” said Narcissa, her voice surprisingly steady while her gaze was still shaky. “I’ll send Mitty to cook and clean for you.”

“Was it Father’s idea?” he asked, realising that Lucius wasn’t around but still not relaxing his guard completely.

“I managed to talk him out of disowning you,” she said, her gaze finally focusing on him. Draco almost flinched at the bloodshot eyes, knowing she would have to have been crying for it to happen. “But if you stay here, you’ll kill each other.” She choked back a sob. “I don’t know what you have been doing, and I am not sure I want to know. I just want you to be able to live your life.”

Draco swallowed against the lump in his throat. “Will you be alright if I leave?” he asked.

She shrugged, apparently not caring. As much as Draco wanted to ask her to come with him, he knew she wouldn’t.

“Fine,” he said, finally. “Tell Mitty to pack up my room and move it into the townhouse. I’ll go on ahead.”

“Mitty already did and is there waiting for you,” said Narcissa, summoning the sherry bottle with her wand and taking a long sip.

Draco fought back a laugh of disbelief. He had been kicked out of his family home on his birthday, and he wasn’t sure if that made it the best or worst birthday. Without another word to his mother, not that she seemed to care judging by the way she was drinking, Draco flooed to the townhouse.
Not a stately manor by any means, the Malfoy townhouse in London was still a substantial property that his father used occasionally. When Draco got there, it was tidy as ever, and he found Mitty waiting for him. Draco actually liked Mitty quite a bit, mostly because he had come with Narcissa as part of her dowry, and he tended to favour Draco a lot.

“Welcome, young Master,” greeted Mitty, brightly. “Mitty arranged young Master’s new room. And dinner be ready too.”

“Thanks, Mitty,” said Draco.

“Mistress also asked Mitty to give you this,” he said, handing him a sealed letter.

Draco accepted it with a cautious nod and unsealed it, wondering what she needed to say in a letter that she couldn’t when he just saw her.

Dear Draco,

You might think of this as a cowardly way of telling you, but I doubt I was in a state to speak much sense by the time you came to Malfoy Manor. Don’t worry, as pathetic as I might have seemed, I am still in control of my faculties and won’t do anything foolish.

Lucius and I have hit rock bottom. There is no getting around that. The only good thing is that you haven’t fallen with us, my son. It will take time for your father and I to regain our determination to rise once again. But I realise that if you stay around us, we will drag you down, and hurting you is the last thing I want. I meant it when I said I didn’t let Lucius disown you, but the truth is that even he knows deep down that disowning you won’t help in the slightest.

The Malfoy name is mud and being under the thumb of Potter isn’t doing us any favours, and I don’t know if it is envy or pride that we feel towards your determination to carry on so resiliently, despite it all. I don’t know if I will ever know the answer, but you are still our son, mine and Lucius’, and we love you more than anything in this forsaken world. That is an unshakeable fact and it has never changed. For the time being, I think some time apart is needed, for both Lucius and I, and for you. We are still family and shall always remain so, no matter what, but I think this is what we need right now.

In the meantime, I have asked Mitty to bond with you as your personal house elf and told Lucius to turn over the townhouse ownership to you as well. The instructions to update the wards and such are in the envelope with this letter. Your trust vault in Gringotts is still yours and if you need more, you only have to ask.

I hope you will find your own path in this world, Draco. Remember, I love you more than anything.

Love,

Narcissa.

P.S. I asked Mitty to bake your favourite vanilla chiffon cake. Happy Birthday, my darling boy.

Draco dropped the letter, tears rising in his eyes. He let out a loud scream of frustration, and sank into an armchair by the floo. Slowly, he exhaled and leaned his head back, smiling despite the tears in his eyes.

It was messed up, horrible, and yet so, so kind, considering his parents. He wondered how a normal person would see this situation, and as soon as he thought that, he felt himself scoff. He was a Malfoy. He would always be a Malfoy, as his mother said. Normal was never even on the cards.
With a sigh, he picked up the letter and envelope he had dropped and took out the instructions to update the wards. He crossed off all names, allowing only himself to enter the townhouse and then bonded with Mitty.

The townhouse only had four bedrooms, a study, parlour, and a kitchen and dining room, but they were all big rooms and all the bedrooms had ensuite bathrooms, so Draco figured it was better than living at the Leaky or on a couch in the office. It was his own space, and he supposed this was his new start on life.

The past wouldn’t be erased, but like the Mark on his arm, it was fading slowly as he wrote a new future for himself. It wouldn’t be easy being alone and fighting against the current, but he had to do it.

That was the only path he could see before him, and as terrified as it made him, he couldn’t wait to start walking on it.
Chapter 6

6th June, 1998

Harry spent a bit of a restless night, even more so than usual. The day before had been exhausting, but the worry about Draco actually weighed a lot heavier on his mind. To think he was actually concerned about Draco Malfoy was a little hard for even him to comprehend. He woke up early and ran the length of the grounds because he realised he might as well if Minnie was going to feed him for every meal. The exercise helped calm his mind, and by the time he returned to the house and showered, he was more relaxed than he had been after waking up.

Breakfast was delicious as always with perfectly cooked bacon and eggs, with beans and fried tomato on the side. Freshly squeezed orange juice accompanied the meal, and Harry polished off his plate, looking up when he noticed it was already eight thirty.

Calling out a thank you to Minnie, Harry took the floo in the kitchen to Grimmauld Place, managing not to smash face first through it. Hermione giggled when she saw him stumble a little but still stay upright.

“Shut up,” he murmured, and she burst into laughter.

It was nice to see her relaxed, and he smiled back. Dressed casually in a pair of jeans and carrying her Hogwarts satchel, it was almost easy to think of her as usual, but he could see the thin scar on her neck made by Bellatrix’s knife that was visible because she was wearing a v-neck t-shirt. He frowned a little, realising that it was the first time he’d seen it in a while.

Hermione noticed his gaze and smiled sheepishly. “Yeah, I stopped covering it,” she admitted. “I figured hiding it behind closed collar shirts or scarves was...well, it’s not like I’m ashamed of it.”

“As long as you’re alright with it,” said Harry, trying not to remember the screams that had come out of Hermione when Bellatrix had tortured her.

Hermione came over and placed a hand on his shoulder, and he flinched a little before relaxing. “I’ll admit, it’s a little because you told me that Malfoy was going to be there too,” she said. “I...well, I guess it’s complicated now. I doubt we’ll all be friends or anything, but I can try and get along. He tried to help us back then, in his own fucked up way, and I guess, if he’s working with you, I’m going to have to get used to him. And get used to what we all went through as well.”

Harry was so shocked about her cursing so easily that he almost didn’t respond. Usually, she just muttered curses under her breath, and it was the first time he had heard her do that while speaking normally. “Hermione, you don’t have to push yourself,” he said, seriously. “I know Ron will probably deck Draco if he sees him, but...what?” he asked, when he saw Hermione smiling.
“You called him Draco,” she said. “That tells me a lot more, believe me. And Ron and I spoke a bit about what happened back then in Malfoy Manor.”

Harry nodded, wondering if it was his place to tell her how Ron had fallen apart when he had heard her being tortured.

“I don’t doubt that Ron loves me,” she said. “And I care a lot about him. But I also want to come to terms in my own way, and facing Malfoy, being cordial to him, is also a step I need to take. It’s for my sake, alright?”

“Alright,” agreed Harry. “Let’s go then.”

Hermione nodded and summoned her summer cloak that she put on, while Harry went off and said a quick hello to Andromeda. Teddy was sleeping, so Harry decided not to bother him and went back downstairs. He took her by side-along apparition to the back entrance of the GSC HQ. The door was unlocked, and he saw Daphne leaning against the stairs when he opened it.

Harry almost forgot to speak because it was the first time he had seen Daphne in casual clothes. A thin, white summer cloak was thrown over a calf-length pink skirt and white top, and Daphne had her golden hair in a ponytail. She smiled in greeting when she saw them.

“You’re right on time,” she said, and then glanced at Hermione. “Nice to see you again, Granger.”

“Hermione is fine,” said Hermione, shaking the hand that Daphne offered.

“Sure,” nodded Daphne, with a small smile. “Thanks for agreeing to be our tutor today.”

“Oh, please, like you need a tutor,” said Hermione, and Harry was relieved when he saw both Daphne and Hermione relax as they spoke to each other. “So, this is the new office?”

“Yeah, I’ll give you a tour, c’mon,” said Harry.

Hermione nodded, and Harry took her around to show her the HQ. She was sufficiently impressed at how put together and organised it looked, and he told her that they were looking to help some of the shopkeepers in Diagon restore their business, and she was beaming so much that Harry started to get a little embarrassed.

“I’m really proud of you, Harry,” she said. “You said you were going to do it and you’re doing everything to make it happen.”

He was spared having to respond when he heard the sound of apparition and knew Draco must have arrived. He glanced at Hermione, who took a deep breath but then smiled and nodded before leading the way back downstairs herself.

Harry followed her, and saw Draco standing with Daphne at the bottom of the stairs, both of them talking quietly. It was almost comical to see Draco dressed so casually in a pair of black slacks and blue v-neck jumper under a grey summer cloak, and even his usually slicked back hair was a little casually styled. He looked up and froze when he saw Hermione.

“Hey, Malfoy,” said Hermione, her voice betraying her nervousness though Harry doubted anyone except him heard it.

“Granger,” he nodded, his nervousness even more apparent.

Harry waited as a long, awkward silence stretched on, wondering what they were supposed to do.
He looked to Daphne for help, who rolled her eyes at him but cleared her throat.

“Well, shall we get going?” she prompted.

“W-wait, before we go,” said Hermione, regaining her composure. “I’m sure this is...well, I don’t know, abnormal, awkward, fucked up, all sorts of things really, considering everything.”

Draco flinched violently, but to his credit, he swallowed and nodded, looking like he was bracing for a curse being thrown at him.

“But,” said Hermione, forging on. “Harry says you are making an effort, and I believe him. I don’t think we can make a fresh start, really, but we can say that the past made us into the people we are, and we should choose who will be in the future.” She stuck her hand out for him to shake.

Draco inhaled sharply and then slowly grasped her hand to shake it. As he shifted, Harry saw the inside of his left arm where there was a fading Dark Mark, and he remembered once again that Draco had been wearing full sleeves for the past few days. Him making a choice not to hide it today must have been a step forward for him as well, Harry realised, so he smiled in relief when Hermione nodded and smiled tentatively.

He met Daphne’s gaze and saw a smile on her face. “Alright,” she said. “I’ll be taking you by side-along one at a time. Hermione, would you like to be first?”

“Sure,” said Hermione, and walked past Draco to the back entrance with Daphne. The two of them vanished a moment later, and Daphne reappeared alone almost instantly, and then took Draco, before coming back for Harry.

When Harry opened his eyes after being taken by side-along apparation, he found that they were in the middle of an empty field with nothing in sight in any direction.

“Now,” said Daphne, holding up a piece of parchment to all three of them. “Read this.”

Harry read her neat writing that said ‘The Greengrass Manor is located in the Viridian meadows of Inverness.’

As the words registered in his mind, Harry blinked and realised that they were in front of a giant white stone archway that was covered entirely in ivy, beyond which was a long pathway. There were some sorts of lilac coloured trees on both sides of the pathway, the trees having formed a natural archway over the path with the branches from both sides having become tangled with one another. The ground was covered with the same lilac leaves and Daphne told them they could apparate to the end of the pathway.

Upon reappearing on the other side, they saw there was an elegant gothic mansion made of greying stone and crawling with ivy in front of them. It was a big property, as big as Godric’s Pride, at least, and Daphne led them up to the front door and into the foyer.

“It’s beautiful,” said Hermione, and Harry had to agree when he saw the foyer with the high ceilings and the wide stained glass windows that brought in natural sunlight inside. It looked like an old-fashioned church Harry remembered from the Muggle world.

He was still admiring the decor, when a tiny female house elf dressed in a dark green tunic dress appeared and gave a bow. “Welcome home, Mistress,” she greeted squeakily. “Can Jolly take Mistress and her friends’ cloaks?”

“Thank you, Jolly,” said Daphne, taking off her cloak and handing it to Jolly.
Draco followed suit, as did Harry. He noticed Hermione look a little hesitant, but she took off her cloak and handed it to the house elf as well. Jolly bowed to them and vanished with a crack.

He was about to ask Hermione if she was alright, when they heard footsteps and a girl walked up to them, smiling in greeting. Judging by her similar appearance to Daphne, despite the straight dark hair and jade green eyes as opposite to the wavy blonde hair and blue eyes of her sister, Harry figured this was Astoria Greengrass.

“Harry, Hermione, Draco, this is my sister, Astoria,” said Daphne. “Tori, these are my friends, Harry Potter, Hermione Granger and Draco Malfoy.”

“Nice to meet you,” said Astoria, smiling prettily as she shook hands with all of them. Harry thought he saw Draco go a little pink when she did, but Daphne mentioned they were setting up in the library, so he followed her up the stairs into a massive library.

Harry was amused when he heard Hermione gasp when she saw the place, and Daphne must have heard it too, because she offered her free reign of the place while she was here. Having known that some of the books weren’t meant to be shared with others, Harry figured that Hermione wouldn’t be able to access them because Daphne wouldn’t have offered otherwise.

There was a long table set up by one of the high windows, and they all sat down in the comfortable chairs around it.

“We should probably start with the theoretical parts first,” said Daphne. “We’ll go by the exam timetable and start with Herbology, then Potions, Charms and Transfiguration, making our way to DADA.”

There were murmurs of agreement, and they spent the rest of the morning going over Daphne and Hermione’s neatly written notes from sixth year. Harry found that he remembered more than he thought he would. It also helped that Hermione had done a lot of research on past NEWTs, so she narrowed the scope of what they needed to revise based on the kinds of questions that came up in exams. Astoria worked through her own OWL work quietly, occasionally raising a question when she was stuck.

They decided to take a break around one in the afternoon, all of them exhausted at the hours of studying. The Greengrass house elves had made a lovely lunch of sticky onion cheddar quiche and bread-baked chicken with summer salad for all of them. The meal was paired with a crisp white wine for everyone, except Astoria who was still not of age.

“I’ll be seventeen in November,” she grumbled, as she drank water instead.

“And you can have wine then,” said Daphne.

It was Harry’s first time drinking wine, and he liked the taste, particularly since it went well with the food.

“Once we’re done eating, we can go down to one of the greenhouses to revise for our Herbology practical,” said Daphne. “After that, it’s just Potions. We can practice spells in our spare time, so as long as we get the Herbology and Potions practical revision out of the way, it should be fine.”

“That’s a good idea,” nodded Hermione, approvingly.

“You lot have fun with that,” said Astoria. “I am going to go take a nap.” At their incredulous looks, she grinned. “I have been studying every day. Don’t worry, I’ll get the OWLs I need to be a Healer.”
“You want to be a Healer?” asked Draco, with interest.

“Yes,” nodded Astoria. “It’s what I have always wa-”

There was a sound of the fireplace flaring, and Astoria paused and glanced towards the living room. With the way Daphne stood up and quickly drew her wand, Harry didn’t think they were expecting a guest, so he quickly followed suit, as did Hermione, Draco and even Astoria.

But the visitor who had come through the floo called out a cheerful “Daphne!” and she lowered her wand and rolled her eyes, just as a familiar dark-skinned boy walked into the kitchen.

“Hey, you home or-?” Blaise Zabini stopped dead in his tracks, and Harry honestly couldn’t blame him.

“I regret keying you into the wards,” said Daphne, putting her wand away. “Why are you just standing there?” she asked, noticing his thunderstruck look.

Blaise looked at her in pure incredulity, but then his face smoothed over in an instant. “Oh, no, I was just a little surprised, considering the hundreds of times I have seen Potter, Granger and Malfoy hanging around in your kitchen,” he said, sarcasm dripping from his words.

“Well, as long as we’re clear on that,” shrugged Daphne, equally as sarcastic. “Wine?”

“I’ll take the whole bottle,” he said, approaching the table cautiously.

Harry put away his wand as he did, noticing that everyone else had already done it. As he sat back down, he wondered how close those two were, if he could just walk into the Greengrass home unannounced.

“Since we all know each other, I won’t do introductions,” said Daphne, pouring a glass of wine for Blaise. “We’re revising for NEWTs,” she told Blaise.

“Yeah, that still doesn’t explain much,” he said, accepting the glass and sitting in the empty chair next to Astoria. “Hey, Tori.”

“Hi, Blaise,” she said. “How was Italy?”

“Nice and warm,” he said, taking a sip of his wine. “So, how’d this study group form anyway?” His tone was casual as can be, but his eyes were sharp as he glanced around warily.

“A series of events,” said Daphne. “Don’t worry, everyone here is just as surprised that we are all sitting at the same table.”

“I’ll say,” murmured Draco. “Were you in Italy this whole time, Zabini?”

“Yeah,” he answered. “I took off pretty much right after the Dark Lord fell.” He paused and glanced towards Harry briefly before returning his gaze to Draco. “I figured I’d give Britain a wide berth for some time.”

“I’m surprised you’re back after a month,” said Daphne. “I wasn’t expecting you until September.”

“Yeah, but Anita changed her mind and there was a whole thing…” he said, shaking his head.

Harry glanced at Hermione, and saw that she was just as lost as he was. Blaise, Daphne and Draco were talking in a way that people who had known each other for years did. It wasn’t as if they were trying to exclude the others, but Harry could relate to the feeling. People at Hogwarts, particularly
those in your own house, ended up being people you grow close to in all sorts of ways. He knew
little things about every one of his housemates, whether he was close to them or not, and those were
the kinds of things one learned after sharing a table and a common room. Like how Seamus Finnigan
carried a bottle of hot sauce because he found the Hogwarts food too bland, or how Parvati Patil
always ate her vegetables first, or how Oliver Wood always left his Charms homework to the last
minute.

Fortunately, Daphne noticed and Harry was slightly surprised that she did it without him having to
ask for help, but he was beginning to understand that Daphne was very sharp when it came to her
surroundings.

“Blaise over here has family in Italy,” she said, for his and Hermione’s benefit, Harry was sure. “I
thought he wouldn’t be coming back until it was time to return to Hogwarts.”

“Oh, are you coming back to Hogwarts too?” asked Hermione, her voice nervous but at least she
was attempting to make conversation.

Blaise glanced at her and Harry could have sworn his cool gaze drifted to the scar on her neck for the
briefest moment as he did. The movement had been so quick that he wasn’t sure if it had happened
or not. “Yes,” he answered, his voice regaining a bit of the cautiousness from before.

“Well, it will be nice to have company,” said Hermione, undeterred in her friendliness despite it,
though Harry could hear how her voice was pitched slightly higher than usual.

Blaise looked at her incredulously, and Harry wondered if he needed to intervene, but to his surprise,
he smirked in the same way he had when he’d approached Daphne. “Sure, but I doubt most people
will think having a Slytherin around to be good company, Granger,” he said.

Hermione went red and tried to stammer out a diplomatic reply, but Daphne rolled her eyes at Blaise.

“It’s only because she doesn’t know you well,” she said. “If she did, she would know you’re awful
company, Slytherin or not.”

Draco and Astoria both snorted, and Blaise smirked at Daphne. “So cold,” he said, making a face
like he was wounded. “Just as I would expect from the ice queen.”

“You make me want to stab you,” said Daphne, in a bored voice.

“Ooh, naughty,” he shot back, and Harry resisted the urge to snort.

Hermione looked torn between disapproving and laughing, but neither Draco nor Astoria had any
such reservations and Draco chuckled into his glass of wine while Astoria burst into peals of
laughter.

“Don’t mind them,” Astoria told Hermione between laughing. “They’ve always been like this.
Believe it or not, they’re actually best friends.”

“We are not,” said Daphne and Blaise in unison, rolling their eyes simultaneously.

“See?” grinned Astoria.

“Though, I’ll say this is a surprise,” said Blaise, his eyes regaining a slightly wary look. “No offence,
Malfoy, but you wouldn’t have associated with Daph or I back at Hogwarts, let alone Potter and
Granger.”
“I thought you two were friends,” said Harry, speaking up for the first time and looking at Blaise in surprise.

“What gave you that idea?” asked Blaise. “No offence,” he told Draco, who shrugged.

“None taken,” he said, and looked at Harry with a slightly embarrassed face. “We weren’t really friends. That time...well, the kind of person I was…”

“Let’s just say he was an arse to everyone, not just Gryffindors,” said Daphne, helpfully.

“Too right,” said Blaise. “But it was worse in a way for us ‘cos if his father would have heard about it, so would the Dark Lord, and nobody wants that.”

Draco winced, but didn’t attempt to deny it.

Harry thought back to the Hogwarts Express ride before his sixth year and fought the urge to scratch his nose as it tickled lightly with the memory of being broken by Draco. Now that he thought about it, Blaise had been quite sullen while sitting with that lot, and it had seemed more like an interrogation with Draco asking about Slughorn while Parkinson needled Blaise about liking Ginny, of all people.

“Right,” said Harry, uncertainly.

“Well, enough about the past,” said Daphne. “If we keep rehashing things, we’ll be here all day and we’d need a lot more alcohol to deal with it.”

The awkward tension dissipated slightly at her blunt words. “Fine by me,” shrugged Blaise. “The last thing we need is more misery, and that is something we can all agree on.”

“More than you know,” said Harry, before he could stop himself.

To his surprise, Blaise chuckled. “Potter, anybody foolish enough to suggest to you otherwise will deserve a curse right to the face,” he said, and then glanced away. “I know it doesn’t mean much, considering we don’t know each other at all, but I’m grateful to you for vanquishing the Dark Lord this time around as well. I’m not arrogant enough to believe you did it for a bunch of Slytherins, but it wasn’t just your lot you were saving when you did that.”

Harry felt his face go red with embarrassment and he struggled for words. Thankfully, Hermione came to his rescue. “It can’t have been easy to be at Hogwarts last year for you all either,” she said. A dark look appeared on all of their faces, even Astoria’s. “That is putting it mildly,” said Daphne, finally. “Other houses at least had solidarity within their own numbers. Slytherin was…” She stopped and took a long gulp of her wine.

“It was sickening,” said Draco, his eyes downcast. “Children of Death Eaters, they were all so happy because they thought we’d won. What the fuck did they know? The Dark Lord wasn’t sitting in their dining room, torturing people and cutting them open on the table where you had been eating breakfast since you had been eating breakfast since you could remember.” He lifted his left arm and glared at it in disgust. “They don’t know what it takes to have this placed on you, they didn’t know a damn thing.”

“The ones who understood it were people who had already known,” said Blaise. “It only became clearer as time went on that the Dark Lord didn’t give a damn about anything but his own power. You were one of the unfortunate ones who only realised when it was too late, Malfoy, but the rest of us whose families remained neutral in the conflict did so because we were all too aware of that fact. Of course, Potter and Granger had their own reasons to fight, so I guess in the end, none of us won,
really. The Dark, the Light, the neutrals, all equally weary and exhausted, taking up daytime drinking as a hobby."

“At least it’s at the same table,” said Harry, quietly. “Voldemort was a miserable bastard. He always had been. Anyone who spent any time with him knew that. He took far too much from me, took a lot more from the wizarding world, but I’ll be damned if I let him continue destroying the world even after he’s gone from it.” He paused and looked at the way all of them were paying rapt attention to him, even as most of them had flinched at his use of the name. “You’re right, none of us won, because there was no winning in this war. Everyone is delighted to hold me up as a Saviour but only a couple of months ago I was Undesirable number 1. The first time I spoke to Voldemort, he told me there was no such thing as good or evil, just power. Looking back, I think that was the most sane thing he ever said to me.”

“Oh, Harry,” said Hermione, but he avoided her gaze.

“I got stuck with the Boy-Who-Lived, Chosen One, and now the Saviour crap, but the fact is, our entire generation got fucked over by Voldemort,” he said, unable to stop now that he was finally unloading the stuff that had been giving him sleepless nights. “We were children, for fucks’ sake. And we had to take the Dark Mark and watch our parents die and defeat a megalomaniac. What part of that was winning exactly? None of us won, all of us lost what childhood we had because of him, but come to think of it, the fuck did the adults in our lives do either? The Ministry is less stable than Dementors, Hogwarts was Dumbledore’s kingdom, and the wizarding populace moves like sheep to the whims of whoever is in charge.”

A pindrop would have been louder than a horde of crashing hippogriffs in the silence that followed his words.

“That is why you are doing what you are, aren’t you?” said Daphne, finally. Her gaze was collected in a way that eased the tension in Harry’s chest. It wasn’t quite understanding or even sympathy reflected in the blue orbs, but there was a sense of determination arising of a different viewpoint but with similar goals. “You’re right. We all got screwed. But at least we can admit it. The blame game is fun, but it doesn’t help anyone. If there can be one good thing that comes out of all the misery we suffered, it can be that we’ll be the generation that will reshape the world.”

Harry felt something in his chest tingle and he slowly nodded in agreement. He glanced at Hermione, and saw the stricken but calculating look on her face. Astoria’s face was like her sister’s, quiet and determined, while Blaise seemed much more calculating like Hermione. Draco looked very different than Harry had ever seen, and seemed almost relieved in a way.

The rest of the afternoon was rather subdued. They went down to one of the greenhouses behind the manor, and Daphne instructed them through some of the most commonly asked plants on past NEWTs. Hermione and Blaise hung around while Harry, Draco and Daphne worked through their Potions practical revision as well. Finally, around four in the evening, they decided to call it a day.

Astoria joined them once more as they sat out in the garden with some tea and finger sandwiches. Over tea, Harry filled in Hermione, Astoria and Blaise on what they were doing. He saw Daphne look surprised when he first started telling them, but Harry knew deep down that keeping secrets would do more harm than good. They needed allies, and at the moment, the only people he trusted were people like them, who had seen the war in different ways and were determined for things to be different. He also couldn’t help but be amused when Daphne demanded that both Astoria and Blaise still sign a contract to not share Harry’s secrets with anyone else.

“You don’t want me to sign?” asked Hermione, as Astoria and Blaise agreed.
Daphne looked slightly uncomfortable. “Unfortunately, that is up to Harry,” she said. “I would feel better if you did, but that’s because I’m not as trusting as him. No offence.”

Hermione shrugged, and paused thoughtfully. “I’ll sign one too,” she said.

“Hermione,” said Harry, surprised. “You don’t need to—”

“I know that,” she insisted. “But I want to. What you’re planning to do is very important, and like I told you, I want to help in any way I can. I always knew there would be a lot more to do once the war was over, but hearing that you are actively doing something about it makes me unbelievably happy.” She paused and gave a tentative smile to everyone else. “I’m even happier that whatever we were to one another in the past, we are willing to set it aside to be better.”

Daphne nodded once and drew up a third copy of the contract. Harry realised she was getting quite adept at drawing those up, knowing which clauses to keep and which to strike out, depending on who the contract was for. Once she was done, she gave them to Harry for perusal, who read through them and nodded before handing them over to Astoria, Blaise and Hermione to sign. By the time all three contracts were signed, they were all exhausted by the rather study-filled and emotional day they’d had.

“Thank you,” said Harry, sincerely. “This means more than you know.”

Blaise smirked at him. “Make no mistake, Potter,” he said. “We signed the contract because we are choosing you to lead us. It will be up to you to use our skills to reach the world we all want to get to.”

“I know that very well,” he nodded. “I won’t let you down.”

~

7th June, 1998

It was Sunday lunch at the Burrow once more, but Harry made his excuses this time. He needed to spend more time with Teddy, and after an exhausting day at Greengrass Manor the day before, he really wanted to be alone for a while. Andromeda was surprisingly understanding when he said he just wanted to spend the day with Teddy, and told him she would go in his stead.

Harry was grateful she didn’t push him to talk, but made sure to let him know she was there if he needed to, anyway. Hermione had looked a little reluctant as well, but she ended up going anyway, especially after Harry told her she should.

After a late lunch that Kreacher made, Harry sat in the living room of Grimmauld Place while Teddy napped in his crib nearby. He thought back to Blaise saying that the Dark, Light and neutrals picking up daytime drinking as a hobby and couldn’t help but snort. He’d never really thought of it like that. The three sides sitting together part, not the daytime drinking part.

Although, he immediately make up his mind not to let the drinking become too much of a thing. Occasionally on the weekend was fine, but he’d seen what alcohol had done to Vernon, Marge, and to his shame, Sirius. In Sirius’ case, it was much more of a coping mechanism, and Merlin knows, he had a lot to deal with. Harry would never begrudge him that escape, but he wouldn’t let it become a part of his life either, no matter how much it helped him vocalise his thoughts.

He’d never really fully understood the neutral position before. Like Dumbledore, he’d naively thought you were either for Voldemort or against him. To him, those who claimed to be neutral were cowards who couldn’t pick a side. It made him feel ashamed, knowing it was rarely as simple as that.
People like Blaise and Daphne, whose families were purebloods, should have been Dark. Except they saw Voldemort for what he was. They saw his greed for power would mean he would never make for a good Leader. That he would kill and destroy anyone and anything in his path, purebloods or not. They could never go Dark.

And yet on the other side was Dumbledore. A man so dedicated to defeating to Voldemort that he raised a weapon to die at the right time. A man running from his own past, determined to be a moral compass to the world that needed it. Perhaps, the neutrals had seen it too. Seen the blue twinkling eyes and known the past that lay behind it, or perhaps they simply disapproved of his methods, or the most obvious explanation was that they knew there was a facade behind his persona, just like Voldemort.

Stuck between a man bent on destruction and a man you could never fully trust enough to fight for, perhaps the neutrals had had the right idea after all.

Teddy began to fuss, and Harry stood up to check up on him. But he just twitched a little and continued sleeping. Smiling at him, Harry wondered what kind of a man he wanted to be.

Dumbledore had been too afraid of power after everything, and Voldemort had sought nothing but power. A pureblood whose father had murdered Muggles, a half-blood whose father had been a Muggle. A wizard who had accidentally murdered his sister, a wizard who had killed over and over, including his own family. Two people deathly afraid of the other, both of them betting their survival on a boy. The two most powerful wizards in their history, and the two men who had shaped Harry into the person that he was.

He thought back to Daphne making a contract that she had her best friend and little sister sign, and the way Blaise and Astoria had accepted immediately. To them, it hadn’t meant she thought of them as any less, as if it only made sense for her to be that cautious.

On the other hand, Harry had been blurting out his plans to Hermione without so much as a thought. He knew she wouldn’t betray him, but like she’d said, he should have just asked when he was considering undertaking something so difficult.

Voldemort had been too rigid with his trust, branding his followers and instilling a deep fear in them, so they couldn’t betray him. Dumbledore, in a way, had been too liberal with his trust, believing and giving second chances, even if they weren’t warranted.

Harry couldn’t go around trusting everyone like Dumbledore, but he couldn’t keep everyone away like Voldemort either. He needed allies, needed people to help him achieve his plans.

He was glad he had Daphne, someone who could check his more reckless side by being rational. Gathering allies was fine, but making sure there wouldn’t be a betrayal was equally as important. Hell, he was in this whole mess because it had started with a betrayal. Snape betraying his mother to relay the prophecy to Voldemort, Snape betraying Voldemort by turning a spy for Dumbledore, Pettigrew betraying his friends to Voldemort…Harry’s whole life had been written by betrayal.

Even Ron, the person Harry considered his best friend, had turned his back on him. Twice. It wasn’t quite the same as a betrayal, but like Hermione said, it had happened. Even if he came back, it didn’t change that he’d left in the first place. Perhaps it had been a good thing that Hermione had signed the contract, because Harry was sure that any allies he might make in the future would be signing it before he took them into his confidence.

He also made a note to himself to thank Daphne when he saw her the next day. His rather Gryffindor traits must have been exhausting to her, but to her credit, she didn’t complain and like the Slytherin
that she was, found ways around his foolishness to protect him from his own actions. It really made him appreciate her a lot, especially since he was sure that wasn’t actually a part of her job.

There was a cry from the crib as Teddy woke up, and Harry hurried over and picked him up, rocking him gently. Since he was always cranky after waking up, it took a bit of humming and rocking for him to calm down, but once he had, Harry took him upstairs to change his diaper. If there was one time he was happy about magic, it was when it came to this. A quick vanishing charm, a couple cleaning charms, and he had Teddy in a new diaper without fuss.

“Here we go, Teddy,” said Harry, once the baby was all changed and ready. “What do you want to do now?”

Teddy only looked at him in interest, one eye emerald green while the other was still brown. Harry couldn’t wait until he was a little older so he could actually start playing with him, since right now, Teddy only found sleeping and eating to be his desired activities.

“Right, food it is,” grinned Harry, and carried him back downstairs calling to Kreacher. By the time he got downstairs, Kreacher had the baby formula waiting in a bottle on the dining table.

Feeding Teddy was a whole song and dance, and by the time he was done, Andromeda had returned. She offered to burp him and put him back to sleep, and when Harry said he would do it, she only pointed wordlessly towards the fireplace.

Confused, Harry handed Teddy over to Andromeda and went to the fireplace, where he found Ginny waiting.

“Hi,” she said, waving sheepishly.

“Hi,” he said, surprised. “What are you doing here?”

“Er, I just wanted to see you,” she said. “Because you didn’t come to the Burrow, I mean.”

“Right, sorry,” he said, automatically. “I was just tired from studying for NEWTs, and I had to spend some time with Te-”

“Harry,” she interrupted, with a small smile. “It’s fine. You don’t have to explain.”

“Are you sure?” he asked.

She nodded firmly. “I am,” she said. “Like I said, I came because I wanted to see you.” She bit her lip. “We don’t really get to see each other, huh?” When he opened his mouth to explain, she quickly shook her head. “I’m not saying it’s your fault or anything. I mean that, we have both been so busy...I guess, I just miss being a couple.”

“Do you want to go on a date?” Harry blurted out.

Ginny’s eyes started shining with excitement. “Really?” she asked. “When?”

“Now,” said Harry, spontaneously. “We can go out to dinner.”

“Alright,” said Ginny, at once. She beamed brightly at him. “I’d really like that.”

Harry found himself returning her smile. This was a long time coming. He had promised Hermione he would at least try and talk to Ginny, after all.

~
In her private study of the Greengrass Manor, Daphne stretched her arms lightly. She preferred working in here instead of the big, main study in the manor because she’d always associated it with her father, and she missed him terribly still.

Work really never stopped for her, it seemed. With all of yesterday taken up by NEWT prep, she was really behind on all she had to get done for Harry. Annie had handed her a list of expenses and she needed Harry to authorise it before she sent it to Gringotts to be paid. It was a big amount, but most of it was a one-time expense since all the house elves had gone back to work after the residences had come back into use.

Handling an estate as big as the one he had was no easy feat, even with the house elves doing most of the heavy lifting. There were still materials they needed to purchase to keep up the maintenance of properties, since they couldn’t use conjured materials for fear of them failing after the magic had worn off. Thankfully, Annie was exceptionally organised, which made Daphne’s job a lot easier.

Once the expense report was made, a copy kept for the estate’s records, and the main one ready for Harry’s signature and seal, Daphne turned her attention to the next item on her list.

She finally had word back from Zinnia Yaxley, and she had invited Daphne and Harry to come visit St. Mungo’s the next day to speak to the Healer in charge of the war orphans. Zinnia hadn’t been able to share details, but she had assured Daphne she would do all she could to help, and Daphne knew she meant that. She also had word from Fleur that she and Draco would be meeting with Rosette Frost and then Finnian Fortescue later in the day, while Daphne and Harry were at St. Mungo’s. Knowing that, Daphne requested Tracey to go look into her **Witch Weekly** contacts and that they’d have a meeting at the end of the day to discuss what would be happening.

It was getting closer to dinner time, but Daphne was not done yet. The meeting at St. Mungo’s was happening sooner than she’d anticipated, which meant she had to start looking at the first event they’d be planning. She was sure that as soon as Harry saw the orphans, he would want the orphanage to become first priority, so she had to have a plan in place for funding that place, instead of just relying wholly on the estate he had inherited. She also knew that she was the one who had to be mindful of this, because it probably wouldn’t occur to Harry at all, not that he had any idea of what went into planning an event of this kind, particularly the very first event organised by the Potter-Black-Peverell estate.

She pulled out a fresh roll of parchment and wrote down the words ‘Halloween Charity Ball’. Considering it would be the first event Harry would host, not to mention the first proper event in wizarding society after the war, this was their chance to build up Harry’s presence in society. If they were to rely on Tracey’s idea of Harry Potter, the philanthropist, the event had to be a success at all costs.

There was a crack, and Daphne jumped slightly. “Annie?” she asked, surprised. “What is it?”

Annie bowed deeply. “Sorry for bothering you, Mistress,” she said. “But Annie is wanting to help Mistress.”

“Help me?” asked Daphne, and glanced at the parchment. “You want to help me plan the Halloween event?”

Annie nodded eagerly, and handed her a thick ring binder. “Annie brought the event binder from Potter Castle,” she said.

Daphne looked at the binder like it was the holy grail. An estate’s event binder was a treasure trove of all planned events that had been thrown by the family in the past, and had everything from
invitation cards, guest lists, menus, decorations, even clothes worn by the hosts. She had the Greengrass event binder, of course, but that wouldn’t have helped in this matter at all.

She was so grateful to have the Potter event binder that she was about to take it, when Astoria came in, looking a little surprised when she saw Annie. “Hey,” said Astoria, warily.

“Ah, sorry, Tori, this is Harry’s head house elf,” said Daphne, as Annie bowed to Astoria. “She was just here to drop off the event binder.”

“His family’s event binder?” asked Astoria.

“Yeah, why?” asked Daphne, and then her eyes went wide. “Oh.”

“Yeah, oh,” said Astoria, crossing her arms.

Daphne smiled sheepishly at a confused Annie. “Sorry, Annie,” she said. “I think I’ll speak to Harry first before I use the event binder. Thank you for offering to help, though,” she added, when Annie looked a little downcast. “If it’s alright with Harry, I’ll have you help me when I do get started on this, alright?”

Annie looked slightly mollified and bowed to Daphne. “Annie is understanding, Mistress,” she said. “Annie will wait for Mistress to call.” She vanished with a crack, taking the event binder with her.

“It’s not like you to miss the obvious, Daph,” said Astoria, walking up to her and taking a seat in a nearby armchair. “The house elf is treating you like the lady of the house.”

“I didn’t realise until you pointed it out,” said Daphne, wincing at how defensive she sounded.

Astoria fixed her with a look. “She was handing over the event binder to you. She might as well have given you the estate keys,” she said. “You, no, Harry needs to set her straight.”

“It isn’t like that,” said Daphne. “I already told Harry I would be planning the events and have everything organised. Annie probably knew that and jumped ahead a couple of steps.” When Astoria still looked skeptical, Daphne rolled her eyes. “I’m not an idiot, Tori. I’m just keeping it organised until I can hand it over to the rightful Lady Potter.”

Astoria sighed a little. “I believe you,” she said, seriously. “Question is, do you want to?”

Daphne stared at her. “What do you mean?” she asked. When Astoria only raised an eyebrow, Daphne shook her head. “Harry has a girlfriend.”

“Then ask her to handle the event,” said Astoria.

“She...Harry said it isn’t her thing,” said Daphne.

Astoria rolled her eyes. “Who cares if it’s her thing? If she’s going to be Lady Potter, she is going to have to do all of this,” she said. “Unless you want to do it.”

“I’m his attorney, not his wife,” said Daphne, firmly.

“You sure as hell are acting beyond the scope of your retainer then,” said Astoria.

“Harry is not a traditional client, you know that,” insisted Daphne.

“Right now, I don’t care about what kind of a client he is,” said Astoria, bluntly. “Daph, you’re my sister, and if you are getting in too deep...”
“What? I need to get out?” asked Daphne. “After all that was discussed yesterday?”

“If you are getting in too deep, you need to decide what you want,” said Astoria, undeterred. “Do you like Harry? And I don’t mean as a person, because he is quite likable as a person.”

Daphne opened her mouth and then closed it. “I don’t know,” she said.

“Then figure it out,” said Astoria. “And until you do, keep a strict boundary between personal and professional matters.”

Daphne met her sister’s serious gaze and nodded. “Fine,” she said. “I still think it’s not as complex as you think, but the last thing I want is my judgment to be compromised.”

Astoria rolled her eyes. “It won’t be the worst thing if you did end up falling in love with Harry, Daphne,” she said.

Daphne shook her head. “Now isn’t the time for it,” she said. “Not for him and not for me. If it’s something we both want, and I mean both of us mutually, then maybe in the future. But right now, I have a lot more important things to focus on.”

“I hear you,” said Astoria. “For the time being, let’s go down to dinner. That’s why I came here in the first place.”

Daphne nodded, and put away the documents on her desk with a flick of her wand, including the parchment that was meant to hold the plans for the Halloween event.

A strict boundary, she decided.

~

The corner cafe was not the fanciest place for a date but since they were both underage in the Muggle world, a proper pub was out of the question. They could have gone to the wizarding side of London, but Harry didn’t fancy their date making the pages of Witch Weekly. Ginny didn’t seem to mind, and looked fascinated at the television mounted on the wall which had a football game rerun playing on mute.

“What can I get you, loves?” asked the kindly waitress who couldn’t have been older than twenty.

“Two orders of hamburgers and chips, please,” said Harry. “And some fizzy drinks.”

“I’ll take the orange one,” said Ginny.

“I’ll have the same,” nodded Harry.

“Alright, I’ll be back in a jiff,” smiled the waitress and left.

“I’ve never had hamburgers before,” said Ginny. “There’s a place in Ottery St. Catchpole, but I’ve never been inside.”

“I like them a lot,” said Harry. “Though I haven’t really had one in a long time.”

“Well, I’m glad we’re having it together now,” grinned Ginny and leaned over the table to kiss him.

Harry went a little red as he kissed her back. They heard a polite cough, and pulled away when they saw their waitress return with their drinks in tall glasses with a straw each.
“Sorry,” he murmured, as Ginny sat back down in her seat.

The waitress just giggled and placed the drinks in front of them. “Enjoy,” she winked, before leaving.

“That was embarrassing,” laughed Ginny, and took a sip of her drink. Her eyes went wide. “It’s really fizzy!”

Harry smiled at her reaction and immediately made a note to tell Daphne about the possible business opportunity. He wondered how many Muggle things would be so very unique to the wizarding world, and the benefits of introducing those things into their world. He thought back to Daphne’s suggestion of a research institute and it made him consider if there were inventors who were capable of making wizarding equivalents of things in the Muggle world.

“Harry?” asked Ginny, and he jumped.

“Sorry, I missed that,” he said.

“I said, aren’t you going to drink?” asked Ginny.

“Oh, right,” said Harry, taking a sip. It was a nice, cool drink, though a tad sugary. “So, uh, how is everyone?” he asked, remembering that the date was supposed to be for them to talk.

“Fine, I guess,” said Ginny. “Ron is moving to George’s place soon. He was already grumbling that Hermione came to live with you.”

“Did that bother you?” asked Harry. “That I asked Hermione, I mean.”

“No, why?” asked Ginny, confused.

Harry shook his head. “Never mind,” he said, and they both sipped their drinks in silence. “Is Ron okay? Should I talk to him?” he asked, after a few minutes had passed.

“It won’t help,” said Ginny, rolling her eyes. “He’s being a right prat when Hermione’s not around. It’s like he’s going through withdrawal because she isn’t right in front of him.”

“I guess it’s normal when you’re dating,” shrugged Harry, wondering if that was the way it was supposed to be.

Ginny pursed her lips in thought, and their waitress returned with two baskets of hamburgers and chips that she placed in front of them and left with a cheerful ‘bon appetit’.

Harry ate his chips absently, as the silence dragged on. Talking, communication, he reminded himself, wondering if it was supposed to be this hard.

“So, uh,” he said, wincing internally. “What else has been going on?”

“Oh, well, I, uh,” said Ginny, shrugging with a wry smile. “I guess I’m helping out around the house. Mum is...well, she isn’t exactly doing great, so I’ve been helping with the chores mostly.”

“That’s good,” said Harry. “You helping, I mean.”

“Yeah,” said Ginny, and then decided to take a bite of the hamburger. “Mm, this is so good,” she mumbled, through a mouthful.

Harry smiled a little and decided to focus on eating as well, and they ate in silence for the next few
minutes. The hamburger was a little greasy, but it was tasty and the chips were good, so he couldn’t complain. Ginny loved it immensely and she had it polished off by the time Harry was only half done with his. He slid his basket of chips towards her, and she accepted with a grin, popping a couple into her mouth.

“I guess you’ve been busy as well,” said Ginny, and Harry looked startled. “With the Wizengamot thing, right?”

“Yeah,” he said, eating the last bite of his burger. As he chewed, he thought about his earlier resolve not to blurt out things without making sure he was protected. But he was supposed to communicate as well. “Er, Ginny,” he began, trying to work around the two contradictory decisions. “What do you think of the wizarding world?” he asked, lowering his voice.

“What do you mean?” she asked, clearly confused.

“I mean, after everything,” he said.

“Oh,” she said. “Well, I’ll be honest, I’m happy things ended up this way, you know. We lost so many people, but we won in the end.” Her eyes were a little teary, but she was smiling.

“But what about stuff that comes after?” asked Harry, insistently.

“The Ministry, you mean?” she asked. “Dad and Percy say it’s all coming together. I’m sure it will go back to normal before long.” She looked at him in confusion. “Are you worried about the Ministry coming after you or something? They won’t do that, you know.”

Harry just nodded, not wanting to explain. He went to sip his drink but found it empty. “There’s sort of a reason I asked you on a date,” he said, slowly. He was done beating around the bush. He just had to come out and say it. “Ginny, I need you to be honest.”

“Of course,” she said, at once.

“Are you happy?” he asked. “With me, I mean?”

“What kind of a question is that?” she asked, a little indignant. “Of course I am.”

“Even though we don’t really talk all that much?” he asked.

“We talk,” she said, sounding just like he had with Hermione the other day.

“When exactly?” he asked, repeating Hermione’s question to Ginny. “I don’t mean just catching up, but we...it feels like we don’t really talk about things that matter. It’s not just you, I’m not good at communicating either, but...”

Ginny’s brow furrowed. “Harry, you aren’t making sense,” she said. “We talk.” This time, her words were tinged with a little bit of doubt.

“Think back on this date we just had,” said Harry. “And that was me making my best effort to talk things out.”


“I’m not saying you aren’t,” said Harry, placatingly. “I care about you, Ginny.” She smiled when he said it. “I just...I guess I want us to be closer.”
“Oh,” she said, and then nodded determinedly. “I can do that. We just have to talk, right?”

“Right,” nodded Harry, glad that she was understanding what he was getting it.

“How about this then?” she asked. “I’ll floo call, every evening. And we’ll talk to each other. Not small talk like we usually have, but properly. About our day and the things we want, all of it.”

Harry nodded eagerly. “I’m fine with that,” he said.

Ginny beamed at him. “Alright then,” she said, and laughed a little. “You had me a little scared at first. I thought you were breaking things off again.”

“I want us to work out, Ginny,” said Harry, seriously and then took a deep breath. “But it’s not like we’re at Hogwarts anymore. You’ll be of age soon, and now that the war’s over, the world is different than it used to be. We might not want the same things anymore.”

“It shouldn’t matter if we love each other,” she said, firmly.

“Maybe,” said Harry. “But just because we love each other doesn’t mean we would make a good couple.”

Ginny looked a little confused and a little wary, but accepted his words with a nod. Harry gave her a weak smile, and the two ended the night on a sombre note, with the promise of trying hard to salvage their relationship.
8th June, 1998

Rosette Frost checked her reflection nervously and patted her strawberry blonde hair into the neat coiff that she’d carefully put up. She had washed and ironed out her best dark purple robes, and though they were just a touch too loose to be really stylish, it wasn’t like she could afford to splurge on clothes these days.

She glanced at the letter she had received a couple days ago and took a deep breath. Ms. Fleur Weasley, the beautiful French witch who said she was a financier working with an investor interested in Rosette’s business, had invited her to a meeting. Well, at first, it had seemed a little too good to be true and it still did to an extent.

Madam Primpernelle had sold Rosette the business after the elderly witch was looking to retire. Rosette had just graduated Hogwarts and though she was an excellent potioner, Professor Snape’s rule of no students without an ‘Outstanding’ in his NEWT class had meant she hadn’t been able to take the subject for NEWTs. No NEWT meant no applying for an apprenticeship to do a mastery. It wasn’t like her interests were truly academical to start with, so she wasn’t too disappointed about it. Her parents had passed away around that time and with the money they had left her, she bought the business, knowing she was very good at brewing beauty potions.

The first two years hadn’t been too bad, really. The products weren’t the best on the market, but there had been many loyal customers, mostly middle aged witches, who came in regularly. Rosette brewed what was needed and watched the shop, making enough profit so she wasn’t going hungry or living on the streets. In the free time she had between customers, Rosette started experimenting with improving the potions. It was fiddly work, but she was determined to have better products so she could start bringing in more business. She succeeded in having a good consistency to her potions, and a year later, she managed to infuse them with a proper scent as well.

Rosette thought that was when things would turn around, but then news broke of You-Know-Who’s return. There had been murmurs and rumours, though Rosette had never really believed it until she saw the shops in the Alley closing down one by one and illegal stalls opening up everywhere. Even her own customers came in less and less and then not at all. She managed to stay afloat a little by speaking to the Weasley brothers and allowing them to display her potions in the witch’s section of their shop. They took a small cut of the profits, but at least her products were selling. For a time, even that was enough to get by.

Then came the order. Muggleborn registration. Rosette was a half-blood but her father had been a Muggle and her mother a muggleborn. In the eyes of the Ministry, she didn’t count as a half-blood. Thankfully, she’d had the foresight to abandon shop and go into hiding. She went to the Muggle world, living with her half-deaf old aunt. It was safe, but very boring when it came down to it. The only good thing was that it gave her even more time to perfect her potions, and she developed three more scents.

When news of Harry Potter saving them all came, Rosette breathed a sigh of relief. She returned to the shop only a week later and immediately reopened with the three new scents and the one from before, determined to make a fresh start.

Only to find that there were hardly any people around, even though the war was over. Places like the Leaky had opened, but nobody was coming to get beauty potions. Having used a lot of her funds on supplies, Rosette was running out of money and hope, until Fleur Weasley’s visit. At first, she was
afraid she was looking to buy her out, but then she’d sent a letter saying an investor was interested. She did wonder if Fleur was related to the Weasley brothers somehow, but hadn’t been brave enough to ask. Rosette would be the first to admit she was a good brewer but had no head for business, so she really had no idea what to expect for the meeting.

She wore her best robes, did her hair and makeup properly and then made her way to the address written on the letter. They GSC Consultants office came into view as she made it past Gringotts, and she paused, admiring the sharp, clean decor of the offices. Apparently, the shop had only just popped up, so it could be a scam for all she knew, but she was desperate enough at this point not to question it.

Taking a deep breath, Rosette approached the double doors and opened it. There was a cozy waiting room and reception area in the sunny lobby, the air smelling of fresh paint and new furniture.

“Welcome,” said the older woman sitting at the reception desk. “Are you Ms. Frost, perhaps?”

“I am,” said Rosette, walking inside cautiously.

The witch stood up with a small smile. “Hello, Ms. Frost,” she said. “This way, please.” She turned and walked down the hallway, and Rosette followed after her a little apprehensively. The older witch knocked on one of the doors in the hallway and opened it a little. “Ms. Frost is here.”

“Send her in, please,” she heard from inside the room and recognised Fleur Weasley’s voice.

The woman held the door open for her, and Rosette gave a nervous smile and nodded as she walked into the room. It was a small, but well-decorated meeting room with two leather sofas and a coffee table in the middle. Fleur Weasley was sitting on one of the sofas, and next to her was a pale, blond young man, whom Rosette recognised. She stopped dead in her tracks, her eyes going wide with fright.

“Ms. Frost?” asked Fleur, standing up. “You don’t have to be afraid of Mr. Malfoy.”

Rosette found that to be of little comfort. The Malfoys disliked people like her, that much was well-known.

“Ms. Frost,” said Malfoy. “I understand your apprehension, but I assure you, I am an employee here and my only purpose is to put forth our client’s proposal to you. If you are uncomfortable with me being here, I can just sit and observe while you deal entirely with Ms. Weasley. Is that acceptable?”

Rosette blinked, and then slowly nodded. “T-that’s fine,” she said, walking into the room and taking a seat on the other sofa, directly across from Fleur which put her in the furthest spot from Malfoy.

Fleur cleared her throat and sat back down. “We’re just waiting for a colleague of ours - oh, here she is,” she said, and Rosette glanced up when she saw a young woman dressed quite stylishly enter the room. “Ms. Frost, this is Ms. Tracey Davis.”

“Hi,” said Tracey, with a friendly smile. “Oh, I remember you. You were in Hufflepuff, weren’t you? You graduated what? Five years ago?”

“Yes, around that time,” nodded Rosette, her apprehension easing slightly.

“I knew it,” grinned Tracey, sitting down easily between Fleur and Malfoy. “Sorry about being late, but I think I broke my alarm clock.”

“Not the time,” said Fleur, but Tracey grinned at Rosette, who smiled back and started to relax a
The door opened and the older witch entered with a tray of tea. She poured the first cup and handed it to Rosette, who took it with a shaky nod. After everyone else had their cups too, the older witch left the meeting room, as Tracey called out a ‘Thank you, Maribeth!’

“Ms. Frost, shall we get started?” asked Fleur.

“Uh, yes,” said Rosette, taking a small sip of the delicious tea and shaking her head to focus. “Your letter said your client was looking to invest in my business.”

“Yes, that is correct,” said Fleur, with a small smile. “When I came in to your shop, Ms. Frost, I was very impressed with the products you had. Could you tell us a little about them?”

“S-sure,” said Rosette. “I have five different products I am selling right now. There’s a hair conditioning potion, a hair styling potion, a wrinkle reduction potion, a skin smoothness potion, and a foot cleansing potion.”

“Foot cleansing?” asked Tracey, looking interested.

Rosette nodded. “You put a couple drops in warm water and soak your feet in for about thirty seconds,” she said. “Then you cast a quick Scourgify and all the dead skin on your feet is cleaned off, leaving it all soft.” She trailed off, going pink when she realised she was giving the sales pitch.

“That is incredible,” said Fleur, as Tracey nodded and even Malfoy sat up in slight interest. “Did you come up with it?”

Rosette blushed at their praise and nodded. “Yes. All my potions are application based, and they work fast,” she said.

“And they come in different scents as well?” asked Malfoy, before quickly realising he had promised not to speak up.

Rosette had jumped a little, but knew he had been genuine when asking, so she nodded at him. “Yes, they come in four scents. British Rose, lavender, ginger and jasmine,” she said.

He looked surprised, but pleased that she had answered, and he made a note on the parchment in front of him.

“Those are very exceptional products, Ms. Frost,” said Fleur, as Tracey nodded eagerly. “And the potions aren’t compromised in anyway?”

“No,” said Rosette. “I—” She stopped herself, before speaking.

“Yes?” prompted Fleur.

“I have ideas for more products too,” she said.

“Like what?” asked Tracey, her eyes wide with fascination.

“Bath oils and massage oils,” said Rosette. “Muggles have them, of course, but these will have wizarding properties too.”

“Have you been able to develop them successfully?” asked Fleur.

“Yes, but,” Rosette shrugged in embarrassment. “I don’t have enough to start selling it.”
“I see,” nodded Fleur, making a note. “Any other plans for expansion?”

“I have a couple more ideas for scents, depending on what kind of ingredients I can get,” said Rosette, finally beginning to relax when she saw they were really paying attention to her.

“Is that an issue? Finding supplies for the potions?” asked Malfoy.

“A little,” answered Rosette. “They’re a bit expensive, and I run out quickly when I am developing, since there really is no reusing. It’s a lot of trial and error.”

“Do you have a supplier?” asked Malfoy.

“Yes, the Apothecary on the north side of the Alley,” she said.

“You buy retail?” asked Fleur, surprised.

“No, the owner gives me a discount, but it’s not too far off the retail price,” she said, sheepishly. “It’s the best deal I could get.”

“I see,” said Fleur. “Ms. Frost, can I just ask, do you know what kind of money you would need to get started on these expansion ideas?”

Rosette flushed in embarrassment. “I-I don’t really have a head for these things,” she admitted. “But,” she added, in a slightly determined voice. “I know I want to keep this business and I want to make it work.”

“That’s good to hear,” grinned Tracey.

Rosette smiled back at her. “I know the shop needs some repair, and I suppose having a cheaper supplier would be better,” she said, thoughtfully. “Maybe even an employee who can run the shop, so I can focus on developing the products.”

“Now, you are thinking,” nodded Tracey. “But don’t be afraid to think big. The thing is, I have been buying beauty potions forever and I had no idea we had a place in Diagon Alley with the quality of products that you are selling. So, I think what your business needs first is an image overhaul. They need to be yours, not the old Madam Primpernelle stuff, as good as it had been back in the day.”

Rosette stared at her in astonishment. “B-but that would…” she shook her head, unable to imagine the cost of all of that, which probably included advertising and all sorts of things she couldn’t afford.

“Ms. Frost,” said Fleur, calmly. “We believe, and I’m sure once we put the idea to our client they will too, that you have the potential to have a very, very successful business. We would very much like to invest in it, and that would mean helping you set up what you need to get started. It would include shop repairs, image overhaul, even advertising. We can even help find an employee, if you want.” She paused and gave Rosette a reassuring look. “We want you to succeed, Ms. Frost.”

“Why?” she asked, finally asking the question that had been nagging at her. “Why would you help me out so much?”

“Isn’t it obvious?” asked Fleur. “Our client is interested in investing in good businesses destined for success. And you, Ms. Frost, certainly fit that category.”

“Oh,” said Rosette, going pink. “Really?”

“Absolutely,” nodded Tracey, as even Malfoy gave her a small smile.
Fleur beamed at her. “We will obviously have to speak to our client to get the go-ahead, and you should take some time to think about it as well,” she said. “We can book you in for an appointment tomorrow afternoon, and if you are interested in proceeding, we can have an investment proposal ready for you then. We can discuss how we want to take things from there. Is that acceptable?”

“All right,” nodded Rosette. “I mean, yes, that seems acceptable.” She grinned at Fleur, unable to contain her excitement.

“Wonderful,” smiled Fleur, and held out her hand. “We look forward to seeing you soon, Ms. Frost.”

“Please call me Rosette,” she said, shaking her hand.

“Of course, Rosette,” nodded Fleur.

Rosette shook hands with both Tracey and Malfoy, and then all three of them saw her out of the meeting room. The witch from before, the one Tracey had called Maribeth, led her out, and with an excited skip in her step, Rosette waved goodbye and headed back to her shop.

Things were finally turning around for her.

~

“I wonder how things will go,” muttered Harry.

“I’m sure they have it handled,” said Daphne, as they entered St. Mungo’s. They walked right past the rude Welcome Witch, towards the elevator. They both got in, managing to avoid gawking from people since they were all squished in rather uncomfortably. The elevator was almost empty by the time they got to the fifth floor. “11 am,” murmured Daphne, checking her watch. “We’re right on time.”

They exited the elevator onto the fifth floor, making their way towards the tearoom. It was thankfully not that crowded in there, so a few people gawked at Harry as he walked past. They finally spotted the person they were looking for sitting with another Healer at a nearby table, and she stood up when she saw them.

“Good morning, Harry, Daphne,” she greeted in her soft voice. “I’m glad you could make it.”

“Not at all, Zinnia,” smiled Daphne. “Thank you for taking the time for us.”

Zinnia Yaxley smiled back. “It’s my pleasure,” she said. “May I introduce Healer Lim? He’s the one in charge of the Orphan Wing.”

Thierry Lim was a tall man of Asian descent with a friendly smile and he stood up and held out his hand. “Nice to meet you both,” he said. “I’m Thierry Lim.”

“Harry Potter,” said Harry, shaking his hand. “This is Daphne Greengrass, my attorney.”

“Ms. Greengrass,” nodded Healer Lim, shaking her hand as well. “Shall we sit?” The four of them took a seat at the table, and Zinnia ordered tea for all of them. “I must say, I was rather surprised when Zin told me you wanted to speak to me.”

“Why is that?” asked Harry.

Healer Lim smiled a little sadly. “The Orphan Wing doesn’t really get much attention,” he said. “It never really has.”
“What about the fund organised by the Ministry?” asked Daphne.

“It covers our yearly expenses, barely,” he said, with a grimace. “Well, I should say that it used to.”

“You’re over capacity?” asked Daphne.

“That is putting it mildly,” he said.

“How bad?” asked Harry.

“The Orphan Wing can hold fifteen children all year ‘round, and maybe five more during summer when Hogwarts lets out,” he explained. “And right now, we have twenty five children, all under the age of ten, and about twenty who attend Hogwarts.”

“So, you’re more than twice over?” asked Harry, shocked.

“That’s also not including special cases,” he said.

“Special cases?” he asked, confused.

“Children with long-term illnesses, curse effects,” explained Zinnia, and then frowned. “Werewolf bites and such too.”

“We can’t afford the Wolfsbane potion, so they are isolated during transformations,” said Healer Lim, with a frown. “It’s...not good.”

Harry felt sickened, and he was unable to speak. “Surely, there are Healers at St. Mungo’s capable of making it,” said Daphne.

“The problem isn’t potioneers, Daphne,” said Zinnia, gently. “The ingredients themselves are quite expensive. There isn’t enough money in the budget.”

“We can pay for the ingredients but we’d have to cut down one meal from all the children for a week,” said Healer Lim. “You understand what kind of situation this is, don’t you?”

Daphne grimaced as well. Harry snapped back to attention. “So, what’s the final number?” he asked.

“Fifty five,” said Healer Lim. “Twenty five between the ages of three and ten, twenty Hogwarts students, and ten special cases. We don’t take any children over the age of fifteen, so all things considered, the number is still manageable.”

“Most Muggleborns managed to go on the run and many just stayed on the Muggle side in the past year,” said Zinnia, softly. “The unfortunate ones caught by that horrid Commission or by Death Eaters...” She trailed off.

“They didn’t survive,” said Healer Lim, bluntly. “They were put in Azkaban, and if the poor hygiene and the constant Dementor presence didn’t kill them, the Death Eaters surely did. Which is why most children we have here are half bloods, maybe a few purebloods but almost no Muggleborns.”

Harry felt a white hot burning rage, and if Daphne hadn’t stepped hard on his foot under the table, he would have blasted something with accidental magic. The sharp pain in his foot temporarily distracted him, and he saw Daphne shoot him a look to calm down.

“And the children you have here have no other family?” asked Daphne, turning back to Healer Lim. He gave a nod. “If there is someone else who can take them in, even if it’s a distant relative, we
refuse them,” he said. “The children we have are ones who have absolutely no one.”

“Can you tell me a bit about the special cases? There are ten, you said, right? How old are they?” asked Daphne, taking notes.

“Two of them are fourteen, they both have mobility difficulties from prolonged Cruciatius,” said Healer Lim, listing them off. “Three have an aggravated case of the childhood dragon pox, they’re eight, ten and eleven, respectively. The other three have breathing difficulties that need frequent potions administered.”

“How frequent and what potions?” asked Daphne, sharply.

“I can give you a list,” nodded Healer Lim. “They need to be administered twice a day. Those three are nine, eleven and twelve. And then the last two are the ones with werewolf bites. They’re twins, five years old.”

Harry saw Daphne’s note-taking falter before resuming and he didn’t blame her. The idea of five year olds having to transform in isolation was horrific.

“There are some among the others who need frequent potions, but their conditions are much more manageable,” said Healer Lim. “With respect, can I just ask? We are indeed in need of funding, so is that what you’re offering, Mr. Potter?”

Harry had to admire his bluntness, and he got the distinct impression that Thierry Lim was not one to beat around the bush. “To start with, yes,” he answered.

“And what does that mean?” asked Healer Lim, slightly suspiciously.

“It means, that funding is only a temporary solution to a much larger problem,” said Daphne. “Even with money, you will be overcrowded, and I assume, understaffed.”

“True,” nodded Healer Lim. “So, what is it that you plan to do?”

Harry glanced at Daphne, who gave a slight nod. “I am planning to open an orphanage,” he said.

Thierry Lim’s eyebrows shot up. “Pardon?” he asked. “Mr. Potter, do you realise…?”

“I do,” he said, firmly. “Take it from an orphan, Healer Lim, I really do.”

To his credit, Healer Lim flushed. “If you are serious about this, and I think you are, it will be an enormous undertaking,” he said.

“No, it is a valid question,” said Harry. “And yes, I am not just doing this on a whim or out of some sense of a saviour complex. This is something that will be given proper thought and planning, and coming here and getting a scope of what we were working towards was just the first step.” He paused once more and looked at Daphne, who nodded again. “We also have a few locations scouted out, so it isn’t as if we are rushing in without thinking.”

Healer Lim gaped at him in astonishment. “Zin?” he asked.

“I believe him,” nodded Zinnia. “And Daphne, for that matter.”

Healer Lim nodded slowly and took a deep breath. “If you are serious about this, and I think you are, it will be an enormous undertaking,” he said.

“Yes,” said Harry. “But I have a lot of people willing to help.”
“That is good to hear,” said Healer Lim. “For what it’s worth, Mr. Potter, I hope you will succeed. The Orphan Wing was never meant to be a place for children to grow up. It was only ever temporary housing until an appropriate guardian could be found. Hopefully, if you do indeed make a place where orphans of our world could live and grow up, then the Wing could go back to being just a temporary home.”

“I hope so as well,” said Harry.

“Healer Lim,” said Daphne. “I must ask, since this matter is still under works, would you sign an agreement for confidentiality? Until the project goes public, at least?”

Healer Lim considered it. “Will you be assisting with the funding until it does?” he asked.

“Of course,” said Harry.

“Then I will sign it,” he nodded.

“Were you a Slytherin by any chance, Healer Lim?” asked Harry, a little amused despite the mood he was in.

“Slytherin?” he asked. “Not at all, Mr. Potter, I was a Hufflepuff.”

~

After a very busy morning meeting and a quick lunch, Draco and Fleur went down to the meeting room before they were due to meet with Finnian Fortescue. After Rosette had left, they had drawn up the first drafts of her business and finance plan, ready to be presented to Harry and Daphne after they returned from St. Mungo’s. Tracey had taken her leave right after lunch, promising to track down her contacts in *Witch Weekly* on Daphne’s instructions, so for the meeting with Fortescue, it was just going to be Fleur and Draco.

“Will you be alright?” asked Fleur, looking at Draco.

“Worst case scenario, I will sit out,” said Draco, though Fleur could tell it bothered him. To his credit, he didn’t claim sympathy nor did he deny he didn’t deserve the mistrust, so Fleur was actually finding herself on his side.

There was a knock and Maribeth opened the door. “Mr. Fortescue is here,” she said.

Fleur and Draco both stood up as the stout man in his late thirties entered the room and gave a quick bow.

“Welcome, Mr. Fortescue, I’m Fleur Weasley, this is Draco Malfoy, and we are glad you accepted our invitation to this meeting,” said Fleur, holding out her hand.

“Call me Finn,” he said, with a polite smile and shook her hand. His smile became a little fixed when he looked at Draco, but he still shook his hand.

“Please sit,” said Fleur, and he nodded as they all sat down. “As my letter stated, Finn, we heard you were looking to reopen your father’s shop, so our client was interested in investing in it.”

“Well, it is true that I wanted to open the shop, but there are a lot of different things,” he said, reluctantly.

“Such as?” asked Fleur, curious.
“For one, I don’t just want to start an ice cream parlour,” he said. “Father had plans for expansion and I want to put those in place too. The current shop is too small, but the place two shops over is the perfect size.”

“Have you been able to secure a lease?” asked Fleur.

Finn nodded. “It was abandoned and then Gringotts picked it up. It’s reasonable and at market price, though it’s one hell of a fixer upper,” he said.

“Any estimations as to costs?” asked Draco.

“Yes,” he said, but then paused. “Before I go into that, could I ask a question? Is your investor Lucius Malfoy?”

“No,” said Fleur, firmly. “Rest assured, Finn, our investor is someone who holds your father in great regard, and is not and never has been, a Death Eater.”

“That is reassuring,” nodded Finn. “No offence.”

“None taken.” shrugged Draco. “I’m happy you are even willing to give me a chance, but I assure you, I’m just an employee here, like Fleur. I am also contracted, quite thoroughly by our client’s lawyer, to provide the best advice. There are no independent parties here, Finn.”

“Right,” said Finn, looking a little more relaxed. “To answer your question, I have a plan drawn up already.” He pulled out a roll of parchment from his robes and handed it over.

Fleur took it with a smile and unfurled it, holding it towards Draco as well so he could read it. The more they read, the more their eyebrows shot up.

“This is very well done, Finn,” said Fleur. “Did you draw these up yourselves?”

“My wife did,” he said. “She was my father’s bookkeeper too, which is how we met. She has a bit of a knack for this.”

“I’ll say,” nodded Draco, sounding impressed.

“The money needed to fix the shop isn’t much, but the expansion is rather pricey, isn’t it?” asked Fleur.

“Yes,” he said. “We have all the equipment for making the ice cream, but we are planning to add pastries, tea, coffee, some cakes and milkshakes as well. There will also be a little seating area. Not much, mind you, just a few tables. The appliances will be built from scratch, and the materials are expensive,” explained Finn.

“The equipment, is it Muggle?” asked Fleur.

Finn shook his head. “Muggle equipment is fine, but the ones we have are enchanted by a technomage,” he said. “He takes the basic parts and then uses enchantments to make them work. It works better than using wandwork on the ingredients directly and we won’t land in trouble with the Ministry for fiddling with Muggle things.”

“A technomage? I didn’t realise Britain had one,” said Fleur, as even Draco looked surprised.

“We don’t,” frowned Finn. “The one I know is a British chap but he moved to Germany because they have better appreciation for technomages, he said. The Ministry’s never been a fan of
technomages to begin with, even though they’re fine importing the things they make, the idiots. They haven’t funded a proper program for technomages in decades.”

“Interesting,” said Fleur, and saw Draco make a note of it too. “Well, back to this equipment.”

“Yes, as you can see, I pay for the materials and for the technomage’s labour costs, and he sends me the completed products,” said Finn. “The food comes out better than just using magic and won’t leave our cooks fainting from magical exhaustion every day.”

“I see,” nodded Fleur. “Well, we do have someone who can do the renovations for you, so if you have specifications, we can go ahead and dispatch them anytime. If we take that cost out, it’s just the money for your equipment, as well as a starting loan, is it?”

“Yes, for ingredients, shop furniture, and employees,” said Finn.

“We can take care of the furniture with the renovations,” said Fleur. “How many employees?”

“My wife and I, and a cousin,” he said. “If it goes well, we might hire one more person to serve the food and drinks.”

“Since we are cutting out the costs for renovations and furniture, we can add in an extra employee,” said Draco. “It will definitely be successful.”

“That’s the other thing, I need approval from the Ministry,” he said.

“Have you put in the application?” asked Fleur.

“I have,” he nodded. “But it wasn’t signed off by anyone on the Wizengamot, so it will go through the slow route.”

“Can you withdraw it and reapply?” asked Fleur. “We have someone who is willing to sign it.”

“Someone from the Wizengamot?” asked Finn, shocked.

“Yes,” nodded Fleur.

“R-right away, then,” he nodded. “Honestly, that was my biggest concern.”

“Well, we already have some approval from our client, but we do need to update them about what you told us today,” said Draco. “We will draw up a contract and have it sent to you, so you can have your lawyer look at it and let us know. It will outline what we will be investing, what we will be assisting with such as renovations, and it will have our offer for the share of the business too.”

“It will be negotiable, of course,” said Fleur. “It will be a tentative contract until we finalise.”

“Of course,” nodded Finn.

“Excellent,” smiled Fleur. “We will discuss this with our client and have a contract drafted for you. In the meantime, you could withdraw your application and have a new one ready to be signed off.”

“Oh, and one more thing, what about the old shop?” asked Draco.

“It was on lease and I was going to apply to have it released,” he said and then grimaced. “I wonder how much that’s going to cost.”

“I’m sure we can work something out,” said Fleur, smiling mysteriously.
“Can I ask, are you willing to help other shopkeepers with their application? If it’s a business that needs a licence but there are other shops of that kind around, I mean?” he asked.

“Yes, of course,” said Fleur.

“Oh, alright, then,” he said.

Fleur wanted to ask more, but held back, knowing he was likely waiting to see if things worked out with them before introducing them to more people. She hid her smile, knowing they had just found a great avenue for future clients.

“If that is all, Finn, then I think we can call it a day,” said Draco.

“Certainly,” he nodded, and held out his hand. “I will wait for your contract.”

Fleur and Draco shook hands with him, and then Maribeth saw him off. “That went better than expected,” said Fleur.

“Yeah,” said Draco, checking the time. “3.15. Those two should be back soon, too. Should we get started on the draft?”

“Let’s,” nodded Fleur.

~

“He is different from what I expected,” said Healer Lim.

Daphne smiled a little. “We were in the same year at Hogwarts for six years and I still think that everyday,” she said.

Healer Lim smiled back and then sighed. “I really hope he will be able to do what he says for these children,” he said. “I’m sure Zin will tell him as she’s showing him around, but we really can’t raise these children here. The Wing has a single common room, a tiny playroom, cramped dorms and not much else. We take them out once a day, but children need to play, they need to experience more than being locked in a ward.”

“I’m sure Harry agrees,” said Daphne, as she continued drafting the contract for Healer Lim to sign. Zinnia had taken Harry to show him around the Orphan Wing, so it was left to Daphne to draw up the contract and make the donation stipulations. Harry hadn’t explicitly said so, but she knew he would want there to be money specifically set aside for the two children with lycanthropy to be given regular Wolfsbane among other things. “About what you said before,” she began, remembering something from their conversation. “How many children have you had to turn away?”

“A fair number,” grimaced Healer Lim. “Some relatives cannot or do not want to care for them, you see.”

“Do you have any records about them?” asked Daphne.

“Yes, of course,” nodded Healer Lim.

“Excellent,” smiled Daphne, and finished writing up the contract. “We’ll just wait for Harry to return so he can approve this before I give this to you.”

“Right,” said Healer Lim.

Harry and Zinnia returned only ten minutes later, and Harry had a stricken but determined look on
his face.

“Well?” asked Daphne.

Harry looked at her and just held his hand out for the contract. Daphne handed it over wordlessly and he read through it quietly. When he saw the stipulations she had put in for children who needed special care to be given the potions needed, he nodded absently as if it had already been on his mind. He looked at the final amount that would be donated, and before he could interject, Daphne spoke up.

“It’s a half-yearly fund,” she said, sure that he was about to ask her to raise the amount. “Not a one-time payment. It will be donated every six months until they are moved to the orphanage.”

“Alright,” he agreed, and then passed the contract to Healer Lim, who looked curious.

Healer Lim read the contract and he let out a shocked exclamation when he saw the donation amount. “That’s almost twice our yearly budget,” he said, looking at Harry and Daphne as if they were playing a bad joke on him.

“It’s not just to cover the regular expenses,” said Daphne.

“With this we can make sure all the children have the proper potions that they need,” said Healer Lim, still in shock. “And have more than a fair bit leftover.”

“We don’t know how long the project will take so I’m sure the Hogwarts children will have other expenses,” said Daphne. “Many of them would have had their wands taken away, and those don’t come cheap.”

“And please buy them more clothes, if you can,” said Harry. “New ones, preferably.”

Healer Lim nodded, still in disbelief. “It says here the donation will go in after tomorrow,” he said.

“Yes, we need some time to set up a few things,” said Daphne. “And I’m sure a few reporters will want to speak to you once the news becomes public.”

“The donation will be public?” asked Zinnia, surprised.

“It’s on purpose,” said Daphne. “We want to use this opportunity to draw more attention to the Orphan Wing.”

“I’m fine with that,” said Healer Lim, and held his hand out for a quill.

The contract was signed by both parties, and after making sure they had the copies as well, Harry and Daphne thanked a very grateful Thierry and Zinnia.

“If you need any assistance with the orphanage project, feel free to contact me,” said Healer Lim.

“Thank you,” nodded Harry, with a smile.

Zinnia came to see them off, and once they had left St. Mungo’s, Harry and Daphne disapparated to Diagon Alley, arriving at the GSC HQ.

They found an extremely busy Fleur and Draco sitting with Tracey in the upstairs conference room. When Harry and Daphne arrived, they decided to bring everyone up to speed.

“You first then,” said Daphne, nodding at Fleur and Draco. “How’d it go with Rosette Frost?”
“Very good,” nodded Fleur. “We put together a draft proposal and she’s coming in tomorrow afternoon to look it over.”

“Basically, what we were thinking was we forgive her rent for six months, and dispatch a house elf to spruce up the shop,” said Draco. “From what Fleur said, there don’t need to be a lot of repairs to the shop.”

“Our main focus is rebranding and relaunching, so a good decor and an attractive shop window will go a long way,” agreed Tracey. “I spoke to my contact at *Witch Weekly*, and she’s willing to do a feature and even run ads, depending on how the feature is received.”

“What else does Rosette Frost need?” asked Daphne.

“A cheaper supplier for ingredients and maybe an employee,” said Fleur.

“What about Eustace Mansion?” asked Harry, looking at Daphne.

“That might work,” nodded Daphne. “One of the residences has very well-maintained greenhouses. We can agree to provide the supplies as well,” she explained to the others.

“If that’s the case, we can increase our share of profits as well,” said Draco, and Fleur nodded in agreement.

“As for the employee, see if she has anyone in mind first,” said Tracey. “If not, we can always run an ad in the Prophet to find someone.”

“So, is that it? Rebranding of the image, renovations to the shop, and cheaper supplies?” asked Daphne.

“And we’re forgiving the rent for six months as well,” pointed out Draco. “That about sums it up, yes. We will be asking for a share of her profits in return. Once the six month period passes, we will also be getting rent from the shop premises.”

“I trust your judgement, Fleur, Draco,” nodded Harry.

“Thank you, Harry,” beamed Fleur, as Draco looked a little surprised but pleased. “We’ll put the proposal to Rosette tomorrow and see how she feels.”

“Was there anything else? Or should we move on to Fortescue?” asked Daphne.

Fleur briefly explained their meeting with Finnian Fortescue, and Daphne raised her eyebrows at a few points that had been raised.
“It seems he has it in order,” said Harry.

“Exactly,” said Draco. “We’ll help cover his expenses for the launch. Our share will be much smaller in comparison, but I assume this one wasn’t so much for the monetary return.”

“Yeah,” said Daphne. “This could be much more valuable in the long term.”

“Fine by me,” nodded Harry. “Make the contract and send it to Finn.”

“Got it,” nodded Fleur. “If we do this well, we will get more clients from him.”

“Oh, speaking of which,” said Tracey. “Remember the pasta we ate last week?”

“What about it?” asked Daphne.

“The couple who runs the shop are Muggleborns,” said Tracey, with a shrewd smile. “I dug around and learned that they couldn’t get a licence to open their shop in the Alley so they had to open it on the muggle side.”

“That has potential,” said Draco, interested. “It’s worth talking to them.”

“I agree,” said Daphne, as Fleur nodded emphatically. “Especially since the old Fortescue shop will now be empty. It’s a great location.”

“I’ll get in touch with them,” said Fleur. “I think that’s all from us. How did it go at St. Mungo’s?”

Harry scowled but then sighed. “There’s a lot to be done,” he said. “For now, we are setting up a half-yearly donation fund to the Orphan Wing.”

“I prepared the paperwork for the launch of the Potter Foundation,” said Daphne. “I’ll file it with the Ministry tomorrow and set up a trust with Gringotts. Tracey?”

“Of course,” she nodded. “I’ll make sure Ben is ready to cover it. We will make the foundation and the first donation public at the same time. How long will all the setup take?”

“Private charity foundations are a no-fuss matter,” shrugged Daphne. “I’ll file the documents in the morning and it should be approved and set up by afternoon, at the latest. The donation will likely go to St. Mungo’s before the day is over.”

“So we should aim for the Prophet the day after that,” said Tracey, making a note. “Who’s your contact at St. Mungo’s?”

“Thierry Lim,” said Daphne. “He’s in charge of the Orphan Wing.”

“Got it,” nodded Tracey. “What’s the donation amount?”

“5000 galleons,” said Harry.

“For a half-yearly fund?” asked Draco, his eyes wide.

“They need it,” said Harry, firmly.

Daphne saw Draco glance at her as if to confirm it, and she only gave a nod.

“Generous, but it’s good,” said Tracey, writing it down. “I’ll make sure Ben gets a statement from you as well, so keep tomorrow free.”
“We need proper premises when the Potter Foundation goes public,” said Daphne. “I’m sure we can mention in the article that donations can be made to Gringotts directly but people might want to come and give their donations in person.”

“What about the Verdant offices?” asked Draco. “It’s semi-public knowledge that you’re Potter’s attorney, so it wouldn’t be odd.”

“True,” said Daphne, and considered it. “What do you think?” she asked Harry.

“It’s fine with me,” he said. “But doesn’t someone need to be there all the time?”

“Yes,” said Daphne. “Donations that go through Gringotts are easy, but ones in person have to be dealt with properly. We need to issue a receipt of acceptance, and then the amount needs to be deposited at Gringotts at the end of each work day.”

“So, we need to hire someone?” asked Fleur.

“I could ask Astoria, but it needs to be someone who is of age,” frowned Daphne.

“I’ll ask around,” said Tracey. “Worst comes to worse, we could take turns handling it until we find someone trustworthy.”

“Alright,” agreed Daphne, as Harry nodded.

“The foundation and donation is only the beginning,” said Harry, seriously. “We need to get started on the orphanage project.”

“I know you mentioned it before, but I think there should be someone handling it full-time,” said Draco. “Fleur and I can help, of course, but with a project this size, we will need someone with a lot more experience.”

“Well, experience like that is hard to find,” said Daphne. “The last wizarding orphanage existed more than seventy years ago and it went bankrupt within a year. This is a new venture, all on its own.”

“I think you’re looking at it wrong,” said Tracey. “Think about someone who can handle a massive undertaking like that. It’s not quite like a business, but more like handling a household, isn’t it?”

“A very, very large household,” said Fleur.

“Almost like an estate,” said Draco, pointedly. Daphne furrowed her brows, and he rolled his eyes at her. “Think of a witch trained to be the lady of an estate.”

“Yeah, I got that part,” said Daphne. “Who did you have in mind?”

Draco looked at Harry. “You just nominated her,” he said.

Daphne’s eyes went wide at the same moment as Harry said, “Andromeda?”

“She’d be perfect,” said Fleur, smiling in realisation. “If she wants to do it, of course.”

“I’ll ask,” said Harry, wondering why it hadn’t occurred to him.

“It could be great if she could take it over,” admitted Daphne. “Fleur and Draco can assist with the finances and other matters, so long as Andromeda is willing to supervise and run the project.”
“I’ll talk to her,” he said, and glanced at the time. “Should we call it a day?”

There were murmurs of agreement, and they all departed to their respective offices to finish off their last bit of work before ending a very busy day.

~

Harry watched Andromeda sip her tea thoughtfully and waited patiently. As soon as he’d left the HQ, he’d gone to Grimmauld Place and spoken to her. She had signed the confidentiality that Harry had gotten Daphne to draft without a single protest or question, and then listened to him without interrupting, as he’d described what he had seen in St. Mungo’s. Her jaw had tightened imperceptibly as he’d mentioned the conditions the children were living in, and when he finally got to the donation and the orphanage project and what he was asking of her, she had only nodded and told him to give her a moment to think.

That had been about fifteen minutes ago, and she was yet to respond. Another ten minutes passed before she cleared her throat.

“I’ll do it,” she said, and then smiled. “Well, I knew that twenty five minutes ago, but I am certain now. I do have questions, though.”

“Sure, ask away,” grinned Harry, happy that she was accepting.

“Will you be funding all of it yourself?” she asked.

“Yes, although Daphne says the events should double as fundraisers,” he said. “And the Potter Foundation will be taking donations as well.”

Andromeda nodded. “Do you have any idea what kind of staff you want?” she asked.

“No,” he said, honestly. “But I know I want the children to be well-cared for.” He paused. “One of the things I missed the most about not having a family was not having someone to write to, and someone who would write to me.” He met Andromeda’s gaze squarely. “I want to give these children the chance to have a family. I know I can never be their actual family, but I want the orphanage and the people in it to become a proper part of their lives, beyond just caring for their basic needs.”

“Well,” sighed Andromeda, though she looked proud. “That is very ambitious of you, Harry.”

“I’m fine with that,” he said, firmly.

Andromeda chuckled. “I hope so,” she said. “Very well, when do you want me to start?”

“The Foundation will go public on Wednesday,” he said. “Maybe then?”

“Sure,” nodded Andromeda. “Wednesday, it is.”

~

Returning to Potter Hall after speaking with Andromeda, Harry had a delicious dinner of Greek roast lamb. It felt a little lonely to eat a meal by himself in the massive house, so once he was done eating, he went over to the fireplace and dropped some floo powder into it.

“The Burrow!” he said clearly, and stuck his head in the fireplace.

The brief whirling sensation passed, and he found himself looking at the nearly empty kitchen of the
Burrow. Before he could call out, he realised that there was someone at the table already.

“Hello?” he said, and the man looked up. It was Charlie Weasley, and unless Harry was mistaken, it looked very much like he’d been crying.

“Oh, hiya, Harry,” he said, plastering on a smile that looked a little too happy to be real. “How are you?”

“Not bad,” said Harry, feeling slightly awkward for interrupting what was possibly a private moment of mourning. “Er, you?”

Charlie chuckled, as his manic smile dimmed. “Been better,” he said, and then shrugged. “Mum had a bit of a...well, Dad took her upstairs and gave her a calming draught. Do you want me to get Ron?”

Harry just nodded awkwardly, wondering what he was supposed to say. He was never good at comforting people, least of all someone like Charlie who always seemed so easy-going and cheerful. Charlie left with a quick nod, and Harry waited patiently as Ron came in, but without Charlie.

“Hey, Harry,” grinned Ron, looking like he hadn’t slept in a day.

“Bad time?” asked Harry.

“Nah, this is par for the course,” he said, sitting down in front of the fireplace. “Charlie and Ginny were talking about Quidditch and F-Fred’s name came up...so it just sort of...” he trailed off.

“Sorry,” said Harry, looking away. “Er, I'll just go...”

“No, wait,” said Ron. “It’s alright. What brings you here anyway?”

“I was just going to chat with Ginny for a while,” admitted Harry.

“Yeah, she’s gone flying to clear her head,” shrugged Ron. “She’ll be back soon though.”

“Are you alright?” blurted out Harry, and then cleared his throat. “I mean, how are you?”

Ron looked surprised and then chuckled. “Could be worse, but I’m moving in with Charlie and George above the shop soon,” he said. “It’ll be a bit cramped, but the shop’s books are a mess and I need to get started on that. George is busy developing the products and Charlie is running between babysitting George and his job at the Ministry, so it’s not like he can do it.” He shook his head slightly. “Enough about that. What have you been up to? Still dealing with the Wizengamot mess?”

“Yeah, and NEWTs too,” he said.

“Don’t envy you that,” said Ron. “Hermione must be...” he paused and cleared his throat. “Well, good luck with that.”

“Just give her some time,” said Harry. “We’ve been through a lot, and we all have a lot on our minds.”

“Did she say anything to you?” asked Ron, at once. “Because all I’ve been getting is she needs space to figure things out. After everything, I thought...”

“Like I said, just give her what she needs,” said Harry.

Ron nodded a bit reluctantly, and they both jumped when they heard a door slam.
“I’m back!” they heard Ginny call.

“Your boyfriend’s here,” said Ron, and they heard footsteps coming towards them as Ginny ran into the kitchen.


“Charming,” said Ron, rolling his eyes at her. “I’ll see you later, mate.”

“Yeah, see you,” grinned Harry, as Ron left.

“Come on through,” said Ginny.

“No, this is fine,” he said.

“Are you at Grimmauld Place?” she asked curiously, sitting down in front of the fireplace.

“No, I...er, I moved out,” he said.

“Moved out where?” asked Ginny, confused.

“To the Potter family home,” he said. “Not the one in Godric’s Hollow that was destroyed. This is the ancestral home.”

“Oh,” said Ginny, and then opened her mouth and closed it as if thinking better of whatever she was about to say or ask. Instead, she grinned widely at him. “So, Charlie said the Ministry is reinstating the Quidditch League.”

“Good,” said Harry, already thinking of letting Daphne know.

“I know, right?” beamed Ginny. “They might even be ready for the start of the Quidditch season in October. I can’t wait for the Harpies to start playing again.”

“Yeah,” said Harry, amused at her enthusiasm.

“Puddlemere had been doing so well, and if they get their team back, it won’t be easy for the Harpies,” continued Ginny. “Not to mention, the Magpies…”

Harry found his attention drifting as he listened to her ramble on about Quidditch. He thought of the faded Puddlemere flag he’d seen in the playroom at the Orphan Wing earlier in the day, and whatever amusement he’d felt vanished. The children weren’t living in squalor, in fact, they were quite well-cared for. But they were still children living in the wing of a hospital instead of a proper home. They still had to wear threadbare hand-me-downs and many of them had complications from several health conditions. They played with each other, but they were all so quiet and subdued that Harry couldn’t imagine the horrors they’d witnessed to sap all enthusiasm out of them like that.

“...and the Cannons are the worst, but no surprise there…” Ginny was still saying.

“I have to go,” said Harry, suddenly.

Ginny stopped talking and stared at him. “Is everything alright?” she asked. “You said we should talk…”

“Not now,” he said.

“But,” she tried to protest.
“Not now,” he repeated, and was surprised at the snappish quality of his tone. He took a deep breath and softened his voice. “Sorry, I can’t do this right now.”

“Harry…” began Ginny, shocked, but he pulled his head out of the fireplace.

As if moving on autopilot, he stood and picked up more floo powder that he dropped into the fireplace. Before he even thought about what he was doing, he knelt in front of the fire and said, “Greengrass Manor!”

~

Daphne was walking out of the kitchen when she heard the living room fireplace flare. She almost dropped the cup of tea she was carrying in her haste to pull out her wand, but she recognised Harry’s voice.

“What happened?” she asked, jogging out to the living room. She waved her wand so that the sconces in the living room lit back up after being dimmed to nothing for the night.

“Er, hello,” said Harry, glancing away awkwardly. “I, er…”

Daphne raised an eyebrow. “Come on through, I’ll make more tea,” she said, her words plain like an order rather than a request.

He hesitated, but then nodded, vanishing briefly before the fire flared up once more and he walked out through it into her living room. He was still dressed in his day clothes unlike Daphne who was wearing her dressing gown over her night dress. Harry noticed it too, and blushed in embarrassment.

“Sorry about this,” he said, avoiding her gaze.

“Did you speak to Andromeda?” she asked.

He clearly hadn’t expected that, but Daphne figured if he couldn’t outright say whatever had brought him there so late, she would just have to dig it out of him. Tactfully, that is.

“Er, yes,” he said, sitting down on the sofa that Daphne indicated with a wave. “She agreed.”

“That’s good,” said Daphne, sitting down on the same sofa with some distance between them. She set her cooling cup of tea down on the coffee table, and turned towards Harry slightly. “When is she coming in?”

“Wednesday,” he said.

“Wednesday will work out well,” she nodded, summoning a small tin and a teacup. She set it down on the coffee table, and vanished the cool tea out of her own cup. Opening the tin, she carefully dropped a pinch of the blend into each of the cups and cast an Aguamenti charm to fill both cups with water. A quick heating charm had the water warming, as the aroma of the tea filled the room. “It will give us time to get her acquainted with everyone and the work since you, Draco and I will all be out for three days next week doing our NEWTs at the Ministry.” She picked up one of the cups and handed it to Harry, and took the other one for herself.

“Er, what kind of tea is this?” asked Harry, no doubt confused at the pale green colour of the beverage.

“It’s a special blend, Greengrass family recipe,” said Daphne, taking a sip. “Try it.”
He obeyed, and Daphne almost smiled as his eyes went wide. “It’s delicious,” he said.

“I know,” she said. “A cup before bed works wonders.”

“Thanks,” said Harry, and Daphne didn’t push as they drank their tea in silence. By the time he was halfway done, Harry sighed. “Sorry about barging in. I’m just...a little frustrated.”

“What happened?” Daphne asked again.

He shrugged his shoulders. “I don’t know how Ginny and I are supposed to…” he began, and sighed. “It’s fun talking Quidditch, but…”

“Finish your sentences, for Merlin’s sake,” said Daphne, rolling her eyes. “Let me see if I’ve got this. You and Weasley are having relationship troubles?”

“Yes. No. Well, maybe,” he said.

“Those are all three answers, yes,” she said automatically, before sighing patiently. “No offence, but don’t you have bigger concerns right now?”

“That’s exactly it!” he said. “Ginny and I agreed we’d try and make things work, but I am so distracted by everything else going on that I can’t even focus throughout a single conversation.”

“Yes, I can see how that would be frustrating,” said Daphne, taking a hearty sip of her tea. “There is an easy solution to this, you know.”

“What?” he asked, at once.

“How much have you told her about what you’ve been up to?” she asked.

“Just that I’ve been dealing with some Wizengamot stuff,” he said.

Daphne raised her eyebrows. “So, virtually nothing then,” she said.

“Yeah,” he admitted. “Well, I don’t want to go blurring out stuff.”

“And you don’t want to make your girlfriend sign a contract either,” nodded Daphne.

“Right,” he said.

“You know, it’s kind of unfair of you to not tell her anything and then get upset because she doesn’t know what you are dealing with,” said Daphne, delicately.

He blinked owlishly, as if it hadn’t occurred to him. “Oh,” he said. “Now that you say it, it’s a bit obvious, isn’t it?”

Daphne managed not to roll her eyes but it was close. “Not that I’m not fond of pointing out the obvious to you,” she said. “But my point is, something has to give. You either make her sign a contract and tell her. Or…”

“Or what?” he asked. “I break up with her?”

Daphne wondered how this had become a part of her job. Astoria’s warning about keeping things professional rang in her ears, but she sighed and forged on. “A relationship built on keeping secrets is no relationship at all,” she said, bluntly. “Although I’d prefer you didn’t, you could always just tell her without involving a contract.”
“No,” he said. “You’re right, I will only tell her if there’s a contract involved first. It’s not that I don’t trust her, but if things don’t work out…”

“It will be a loose end, yes,” agreed Daphne. “I don’t envy your position.”

He snorted. “Thanks,” he said.

Daphne thought about it briefly, before sitting up quickly. “Oh,” she said. “The Foundation will go public by Wednesday,” she said.

“Yeah, I know,” he said.

“I was already planning on talking to you about this,” said Daphne, smiling a little. “But we should hold the first event at Halloween.”

“O-okay,” said Harry, clearly not getting it.

“You want to clue her in without giving up all your secrets, right?” asked Daphne. “Then ask her to plan this event. I’ll help, of course, but you can tell her about the Foundation and ask her to be involved in the planning for the event at Halloween.”

“I don’t know if she would want to do that,” he said.

Daphne gave him a severe look. “Then let me be very, very blunt with you, Harry,” she said, seriously. “Planning events will be the job of the future Lady Potter. These events will be a crucial part of your role in the wizarding society.” She took a deep breath. “This may be none of my business, but if you are in a relationship where you cannot envision being partners in the future or even hold a simple conversation in the present, then you really must question if the relationship is worth pursuing.”

Harry exhaled heavily but nodded. “Alright,” he agreed. “I’ll ask her.”

“Good,” said Daphne. “Another cup?”

Harry smiled at her tiredly. “Yes, please.”
Chapter 8

9th June, 1998

Harry blinked awake, having had one of the most restful nights of a sleep in a very long time. He was ensconced very warmly, though his neck did feel a little bit strained. Confused, he opened his eyes properly and then almost shrieked at the amused pair of jade green eyes peering at him.

“Good morning,” said Astoria.

“Er, good morning,” said Harry, realising he was sleeping on the sofa in the Greengrass living room. He sat up slowly, fighting back a wince when his neck cracked.

“You looked very peaceful so I hate to wake you, but it’s almost ten in the morning,” said Astoria.

“Ten?” asked Harry, shocked that he’d slept in for that long. He also realised that he’d been sleeping alone, though someone had covered him with a cosy lilac fleece blanket. “Er, where’s Daphne?”

“She went to work almost three hours ago,” grinned Astoria. “She said you fell asleep between conversations last night, and she didn’t want to wake you, so she just tucked you in before heading upstairs to bed.”

Harry’s face burned with embarrassment, though he did realise it was odd for him to fall asleep so easily around someone, especially these days. It was one thing if it were Ron or Hermione, or even one of his dorm mates back at Hogwarts, but he’d only known Daphne for a few weeks.

“The tea worked, huh?” asked Astoria.

“The tea?” he asked, before remembering. “Oh, yeah, Daphne mentioned it was good to drink before bed.”

“It’s more than that,” said Astoria. “It’s a family recipe. More specifically, our father developed it for our mother.” She smiled a little sadly. “Did Daphne tell you how our mother had a slow-acting curse placed upon her?”

“She did,” said Harry.

“It left her in a lot of pain and she would often be unable to sleep or rest because of it,” said Astoria. “None of the usual pain relieving potions and remedies worked, so our father had to develop something that would. The tea wouldn’t really get rid of all the pain but she could at least sleep soundly enough as a respite.”

“I’m sorry,” said Harry. “So, the tea is like a sleep aid?”

“Not really,” said Astoria. “It doesn’t use the same ingredients as any of the sleeping potions, and if
you’re not tired it won’t work on you. I think it just has sort of a soothing effect and you get relaxed enough to want to sleep. Daphne and I have had it before bed for years, but we do fine even if we don’t have it, so it’s not like it’s addictive or anything, either.”

Harry nodded, wondering if Daphne would lend some to him. And Andromeda, for that matter. Come to think of it, a lot of people would benefit from it.

Astoria smiled at him. “Enough about that,” she said. “Come on, Jolly will make you a late breakfast,” said Astoria.

“No, it’s alright,” said Harry, smiling back gratefully just the same. “I’ve got a few things to do today. Thanks, though.”

“Are you sure?” asked Astoria.

“I’m sure,” he nodded. “I’ll see you later, Tori.”

She waved goodbye as he headed towards the fireplace. “Bye, Harry,” she said.

Harry travelled through the floo, coming out in the kitchen of Potter Hall. Calling to Minnie to have breakfast ready, he went up to his room to brush his teeth, shave, take a shower and get dressed for the day. No matter how many charms for hygiene he had learned, nothing quite beat the satisfaction of proper grooming, he realised, as he came back downstairs, freshly clean and dressed.

“Annie, can you take a message to Daphne?” asked Harry, as he sat down at the table to eat breakfast.

“Of course, Master,” nodded Annie, while Minnie made his tea.

“Tell her I have something to take care of, and I’ll be at the office around noon,” he said.

Annie nodded and vanished. Harry ate his breakfast quickly, going over everything he had to do. He was halfway done with his food when Annie returned.

“Mistress says alright and that Master be having meeting with the Prophet at 3,” said Annie.

Harry mumbled a thanks and quickly finished his breakfast. “I’m off,” he told the house elves.

Annie and Minnie called out a goodbye as Harry took a deep breath before going through the floo to the Burrow.

“Goodness me, Harry, you gave me a fright,” said Molly, clutching a hand to her chest.

“Sorry,” he smiled. “Er, how are you, Mrs. Weasley?”

“Oh, I am doing fine, Harry, don’t you worry about me,” she said, though her voice sounded wobbly. “I cleared up breakfast already, but I can whip something up for you if you want…”

“No, it’s alright, I just ate,” he said. “Is Ginny around?”

“She’s out back,” nodded Molly. “Go on, go and see her.”

Harry smiled at her and went into the back garden, spotting Ginny sitting under a tree with a book open on her lap. She looked up when she heard the door open, and grew a little hesitant when she saw him.
“Hi,” he said, walking up to her.

Ginny stood up, letting the book fall to the ground. “Hi,” she said, warily.

“I’m sorry about yesterday,” he said.

“Did I...say something?” asked Ginny. “I thought we were doing fine, but then you almost bit my head off.”

Harry fought back a wince. “I am really sorry,” he said. “It had been a very long day, and I took it out on you. I’m sorry.” He took a deep breath. “I went to St. Mungo’s yesterday.”

Instantly, she looked concerned. “Are you alright?” she asked.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” he reassured her. “I, uh, I actually am starting a charity.”

Ginny’s eyebrows shot up. “A what now?” she asked, surprised.

“A charity. The Potter Foundation,” he said. “It’s all a bit hush-hush for now, but it will be public knowledge by tomorrow, probably.”

“Wh-when did you even do all the work for that?” asked Ginny.

“It’s kinda what I’ve been doing these past few days,” he admitted.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” she asked, and then smiled sardonically. “I see what you mean about us not talking.”

“Sorry,” he said.

“Me too, I guess,” she said. “No wonder, huh? I was babbling on and on about Quidditch when…”

“It’s not your fault, we are both terrible at communicating,” he said.

“You got that right,” she chuckled. “So, this charity thing? What are you doing with it?”

“Well, I am donating to the Orphan Wing to start with,” he said. “That’s also something I wanted to talk to you about. I am holding an event at Halloween for fundraising.”

“Really?” asked Ginny, her eyes wide.

“Yeah,” he said. “Daphne, er, she’s my lawyer. Daphne said…”


“Yes,” said Harry.

“I didn’t know you two were friends,” she said.

“We weren’t, not really, but Daphne has been a huge help these past few weeks,” he said, honestly.

“Right,” said Ginny, looking a little wary once again. “So, uh, what did she say?”

“Well, she will help plan the event, but it’s not really a part of her job,” he said. “I was wondering if you want to do it.”

“Me?” asked Ginny, surprised. “I don’t know anything about...planning events, and all.”
“That’s why Daphne will be helping,” he said, and glanced away awkwardly. “The event isn’t just a one time thing. If we continue dating, this is something that will fall to you on a regular basis.”

Ginny looked confused for a brief moment before her face went red. “Oh,” she said, sounding very happy. “I see.”

“So, you’ll do it?” he asked, hardly daring to believe it.

“I will,” she nodded, eagerly. “When do we start?”

“This evening, hopefully,” he said. “I’ll come and get you after dinner. Is that okay?”

“That’s fine,” said Ginny, and surprised him by jumping into his arms and giving him a kiss. “Thank you.”

“What for?” he asked, slightly confused.

“Never mind,” she said. “Do you have to go?”

“Yeah, sorry,” he said, apologetically. “I have an interview with the Prophet in the afternoon.”

“It’s alright, I’ll see you later,” she said, sounding considerably more cheerful.

Harry grinned at her and waved goodbye, deciding to go to the GSC HQ. When he got there, he found Daphne waiting for him in his office.

“Hey, sorry about last night,” he said.

She looked up from what she was reading and gave him a small smile. “It’s fine, you must have been really tired,” she said.

“Thanks for lending me your sofa for the night,” he grinned, taking a seat in his chair. “And sorry about abandoning you this morning too.”

“Pretty sure I abandoned you first,” she said, handing him some documents. “Could you sign and seal these?”

“Sure,” he said, getting to work. “What did you get up to?”

“I went to the Ministry first thing and got the application approved for the Potter Foundation,” she said. “Then I went to Gringotts with the paperwork to open the trust for the Foundation.”

“What about the donation?” asked Harry.

Daphne glanced at her watch. “It should have gone through by now,” she said. “Fleur and Draco are in a meeting with Nate and Sara St. James. That’s the couple who own the pasta shop,” she added, when he looked slightly confused. “They are meeting with Rosette Frost later today as well, and we sent off the contract to Finn Fortescue, so hopefully we hear back from him before the end of the week.”

“Great,” grinned Harry. “Oh, and I spoke to Ginny. She wants to help with the event at Halloween. Does today work for you? After work, I mean.”

Daphne shrugged. “Yeah, that’s fine,” she said.

“So, do I have anything to do besides the interview at 3?” asked Harry, handing her the signed and
sealed paperwork back.

“No,” she said, taking it from him and examining it properly. “Well,” she added, looking at him. “You do need to go home and change.”

“What’s wrong with these?” he asked, having worn his best dress robes.

“You wore those for the first Wizengamot meeting,” she pointed out.

“I don’t have any other dress robes,” he said.

Daphne gave him a slightly scandalised look. “Well, alright then, we’re going shopping, I suppose,” she said.

“Why?” he asked.

“Ben will want to take pictures for the article, not to mention, this is a big deal to be announcing,” she said, like he was an idiot for asking. “You should look your absolute best.”

Harry shrugged, knowing better than to argue. “Alright,” he said.

“I would have asked Tracey to take you, but she’s meeting with people from Witch Weekly,” muttered Daphne, and checked the time again. “If we hurry, we…” She was cut off by a knock at the door.

“Yes?” asked Harry, and the door opened to reveal Fleur and Draco. “Hello.”

“Hello, Harry, Daphne,” smiled Fleur as Draco gave a nod. “We just got done with the St. James couple.”

“How’d it go?” asked Daphne. “Wait, let’s move to the conference room.”

The four of them reconvened in the conference room, and Fleur cleared her throat. “It actually went really well,” she smiled. “They are a lovely couple.”

“Their main problem was the license,” said Draco, looking at his notes. “Also, apparently their rent in the Muggle world is sky high so they are barely breaking even despite running an otherwise profitable business.”

“Even if we look at a prime location here in the Alley, their rent will still be considerably less in the wizarding world,” said Fleur. “Sara does most of the cooking and Nate serves the customers, but they’re so busy they could use another employee to help Sara.”

“Will they have that many customers here as well?” asked Daphne.

“They already have some wizarding customers,” said Draco. “And yes, they will lose their Muggle customer base when they move, but they will be gaining new wizarding customers here.”

“Fair enough,” nodded Daphne. “Did you suggest the old Fortescue shop location to them?”

“We did, and they were very interested,” said Draco. “They want it to be a takeout-type of place, they said, so that works for them.”

“So, cheaper rent and another employee?” asked Daphne, writing it down.

“Essentially, yes,” nodded Draco.
“It will free up a lot of money for them,” said Fleur. “Sara wants the pasta to be home made but they just couldn’t afford it, but with this move, they can expand and do it the way they want.”

Daphne looked at Harry. “Well?” she asked.

“Do they have a business plan and all that?” asked Harry.

“Yes, a well-made one too,” said Draco.

“Then I don’t see why not,” said Harry. “I’ll leave the particulars up to the two of you.”

“Are you sure, Harry?” asked Fleur.

“I hired you both because you know this stuff better than I do,” he said, honestly. “I would like to be kept in the loop, but like I said yesterday, I trust your judgment.”

“Thank you, Harry,” said Fleur. “We’ll draft up an agreement. That’s what we told them as well, so hopefully, it should work out in the same way as the Fortescue matter.”

“Excellent,” said Daphne. “Now, Fleur, Draco, you must excuse us. I have to take Harry out for an urgent matter.”

“Sure thing,” shrugged Draco. “We’ll get started on the St. James agreement and then we’re meeting Rosette Frost after lunch, so we’re busy too.”

“Great, we’ll see you later,” said Daphne, shooting a look at Harry to get moving.

He was slightly amused, but he obeyed as the two of them left the HQ. “So, Madam Malkin’s?” he asked.

“No,” she said. “Have you been getting your dress robes from there too?”

“Yes,” he said. “Why not?”

“Because she does school robes well, but for dress robes, you go here,” she said, leading him inside Twilfit and Tattings. It was a much more subdued shop than Madam Malkin’s, and was empty of customers, though the interior was immaculate and well-kept. As Harry and Daphne entered, a short, stout man dressed in tailored silver robes approached them and gave a courteous bow.

“Good afternoon, Madam Greengrass, Elder Potter,” he said. “How may I be of service today?”

“Good afternoon, Mr. Saville,” said Daphne. “Elder Potter requires dress robes for an urgent press matter this afternoon.”

“I see,” said Mr. Saville, unfazed. “What did you have in mind, Elder Potter?”

Before Harry could answer, Mr. Saville was already ushering them towards a quiet corner of the shop.

“Nothing too subdued,” Daphne answered for him. “Acromantula silk, of course, and maybe an interesting colour or pattern.”

“You have impeccable taste as always, Madam Greengrass,” said Mr. Saville and clicked his fingers.

A dozen different dress robes flew off the shelves and floated up to them. With another click of Mr. Saville’s fingers, they straightened out as if an invisible person was wearing them. Harry glanced at
the different styles of the plain black dress robes, and figured this one was better left to Daphne’s expertise.

“I like this style,” said Daphne, pointing at an open robe that looked almost like a tailcoat that went all the way down to the calves. It was cut extremely stylishly, too.

“Excellent choice, and I think it will look better once we pick the right colour and pattern,” said Mr. Saville. “Elder Potter, if you will.”

Daphne stepped away as Mr. Saville summoned a screen and indicated for Harry to strip behind it. Harry took off his shoes and dress robes, leaving the trousers, shirt and socks on. Mr. Saville stepped behind the screen as well, and helped him into the new robes that Daphne had indicated. It was a tad too long and a bit broad in the shoulders, but Mr. Saville carefully fixed it with quick taps of his wand.

“Well, Elder Potter, Madam Greengrass?” he asked, banishing the screen away.

Harry rather liked the new robes, but Daphne frowned a little. “A bit shorter,” she said. “Dragonhide boots will work better under those.”

Mr. Saville nodded contemplatively and adjusted the length by two more inches so that it ended just at the top of his calves. “If we are to choose dragonhide boots, I would recommend a darker colour as well,” he said. “Navy, perhaps?”

“Too subdued,” said Daphne. “Maybe not a solid colour, at all, but I don’t want the pattern to be too loud either.”

“Ah, yes,” said Mr. Saville. “Pinstripes are rather old-fashioned, but we did have this new pattern.”

He summoned a bolt of fabric that was a rich, dark brown colour with bronze threaded through it. The pattern was seemingly random yet not without symmetry, giving it a most unusual look. Harry thought it was really pretty, as did Daphne, since she gave an approving nod.

“How long will it take?” she asked, as Mr. Saville helped Harry out of the robe he was wearing.

“One hour,” he said. “I will have Winston help you with choosing the appropriate shirt, trousers and boots in the meantime.”

Harry almost said there was no need to buy those new, but knew Daphne would likely stop him. He just gave a nod of thanks towards Mr. Saville, who bowed and left. A younger man, not quite as dignified as Mr. Saville, came to help them. Harry assumed this was Winston.

“You know, you are allowed to speak up,” Daphne told Harry, slightly amused.

Harry realised he hadn’t really spoken since entering the shop and grinned at her. “I’ll leave it to you,” he said. “I have no sense for these things, really.”

She rolled her eyes at him, before turning to Winston. “The trousers in the same dark brown and the shirt in the bronze, please,” she said. “And where are the boots?”

“Th-this way,” he said, blushing a little.

Daphne gave a nod, and Harry almost smiled in sympathy at the young man. Harry tried on a few pairs of shoes, finally narrowing the choice down to a pair of boots made from the hide of a Norwegian Ridgeback. With a silent apology to Norberta, Harry took the boots, the newly picked
out shirt and trousers, and changed into them in one of the changing rooms in the back of the shop. Mr. Saville returned with his finished new dress robes and helped him into it, completing his outfit. When Harry stepped out in front of the mirror, his eyes went wide.

“I actually look decent,” he said, before he could help it.

“I would say much more than decent, Elder Potter,” said Mr. Saville, unruffled. “Madam Greengrass?”

Harry glanced at Daphne and he could have sworn her cheeks had been pink but he blinked and her face was as calm as ever. “It will do,” she said. “Could you please pack up the old things he was wearing?”

“Certainly,” said Mr. Saville, shooting a look at Winston, who hurried away quickly. “Is there anything else we can do for you today?”

“No, that’s alright,” said Harry, giving him a small smile. “How much do I owe?”

Mr. Saville named an amount, and if Harry wasn’t aware of precisely how much money he had in his vault, he would have been shocked at it. As it was, he just calmly paid the man, who bowed to them in thanks, and handed them a bag with Harry’s older things packed neatly inside.

“Thank you for your help, Mr. Saville,” nodded Daphne.

“It was a pleasure as ever, Madam Greengrass,” bowed Mr. Saville, as Winston bowed hastily too. “We hope to see you back in our establishment, Elder Potter.”

“I suspect I will be coming back,” said Harry, knowing that his wardrobe needed a serious upgrade if he were to be seen as the Lord that he was.

They left the shop together, and Daphne glanced at the time. “Just after two,” she said. “Have you eaten anything?”

“I had a late breakfast, so I’m fine,” he said. “You?”

“Starving,” she said. “I’ll stop by the Leaky for a bite before going to the Verdant offices.”

“Why are you going to Verdant?” he asked.

“I need some files and I’ll just work there until you’re done, and then we can meet up with the others at the HQ to see how everything went with Rosette Frost,” she said.

“I’ll go to Verdant too, then,” he said. “It’s a shorter walk to the interview than going back to the HQ.”

Daphne shrugged. “Suit yourself,” she said. “You want something to eat?”

“Maybe just a butterbeer and some chips,” he said.

“Sure,” said Daphne and disapparated, while Harry set off towards the Verdant offices.

He was almost to the office when he heard his name being called. He was used to whispers that seemed to follow him everywhere these days, but it was rare for someone to call out boldly. Turning towards the voice warily, his eyes grew wide when he recognised the girl who’d called for him.

“Parvati?” he asked, approaching her.
Parvati Patil’s once beautiful face was marred horrifically by barely healed over scars, but she was beaming so brightly at him that the scars all but seemed to vanish. “I almost didn’t recognise you,” she said, as he reached her.

“Yeah, new clothes,” he said, knowing better than most that people staring at scars were the worst but being unable to look away from Parvati’s face. “How have you been?”

She shrugged, not seeming to mind him staring. “Not bad, considering Greyback almost carved my face off,” she said.

“Sorry,” he said, automatically.

Parvati giggled. “Why are you apologising?” she asked. “The bastard is rotting in the ground where he deserves to be. I won’t be winning a beauty contest any time soon but at least people don’t get me and Padma mixed up anymore.”

Harry gave a weak smile. “How’s Padma doing?” he asked.

“She’s fine, they’ll let her out of St. Mungo’s by next week,” she said. He must have looked worried, because she smiled reassuringly. “She just had a minor allergic reaction to one of her pain relieving potions. That bastard Travers nicked her with a dagger dipped in poison and it’s been messing with all her treatment. All things considered, she definitely got the better end of the deal.”

Harry barely stopped himself from apologising again, before he remembered something even more sickening. “Parvati,” he said, glancing away. “I’m sorry about Lavender. I know you two were close.”

At the mention of Lavender, even Parvati’s relentless optimism faltered as tears filled her eyes. “Yeah,” she said, shakily. “Maybe if I’d stopped Greyback before he reached her…”

“Don’t do that,” said Harry, at once. He also noticed they were garnering curious looks, so he took her elbow gently. “Come on.”

Leading her towards the Verdant offices, Harry walked inside and into one of the empty meeting rooms. Parvati followed him easily and once they were in the meeting room, she let out a loud sob and burst into tears. Harry watched helplessly before conjuring a handkerchief and handing it to her. She took it with a grateful nod and blew her nose.

“I’ll get you some water,” he said.

By the time he returned, Parvati’s sobs had quietened to sniffs. She took the goblet of water with a shaky smile and drank half of it. “Thanks,” she said, her voice thick with tears. “Damn it, and here I thought I was coping well with everything too.”

“You are,” said Harry.

“Not really,” she said. “I had my third job rejection today.”

Harry noticed that she was dressed up quite formally. “You’re not doing NEWTs?” he asked.

She shook her head. “I was never much for studying. That’s all Padma,” she said. “My treatment doesn’t come cheap and I don’t want my parents to break their savings.” She sighed deeply. “But apparently, being savaged by a werewolf leaves surprisingly few opportunities for employment.”

“You weren’t bitten and it wasn’t a full moon,” said Harry, but he knew how deep prejudices against
werewolves ran.

“Tell me about it,” she chuckled, without humour. “It’s bad enough I won’t need a mask for Halloween, but being treated like some sort of a...well, it’s not nice, is all I’ll say.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” he said. “What kind of a job were you looking for?”

“At this point, I’ll take anything,” she said, and then glanced around at the meeting room. “Where are we?”

“Er, my attorney’s office,” he said, sheepishly.

“Look at you, all fancy,” she said, her voice gaining a slightly teasing tone.

Harry heard the doors outside open and he stood up. “Parvati, can you give me a minute?”

She shrugged in acceptance, so he left her and went out in the hallway where he saw Daphne.

Hey, got your food,” she said, handing him chips wrapped in newspaper and a bottle of butterbeer. “You alright?”

“Yeah,” he said. “I’ve got Parvati Patil in there,” he added, pointing at the meeting room.

“Why?” asked Daphne.

“Long story, but we were still looking for someone to join the Potter Foundation as an employee, right?” he asked.

“Yeah,” nodded Daphne. “Are you thinking of asking Patil?”

“Won’t hurt,” he said.


In the end, Harry made it to his meeting with Ben with only five minutes to spare. An impatient Tracey gave him a look.

“She’s got Parvati Patil in there,” he said.

“Should I even ask?” she asked, her arms crossed.

“In my defence, I was working,” he said.

Tracey rolled her eyes and gave him a critical once-over. “Good job, Daphne,” she muttered. “So, what was so important?”

“We hired a new person,” he said. “To run the Potter Foundation offices.”

“That’s excellent,” said Tracey, brightening up a little. “Is it someone I know?”

“Parvati Patil,” he said.

Tracey looked like she had questions, but Ben walked into the meeting room and they stood up to shake hands with him and the photographer he’d come with.

Meanwhile, Daphne and Parvati had finished finalising Parvati’s employment contract, and were debating how to use the offices.

“I mean, all the rooms downstairs, except my office, are empty, but they are still very clearly Verdant
“offices,” said Daphne.

“How about upstairs?” asked Parvati, pointing at the stairs near Maribeth’s empty front desk.

Daphne bit her lip. “Well, it’s covered under our lease, but my father used it as storage and I haven’t ventured up there at all,” she said.

“No time like the present,” said Parvati, already rolling up her sleeves. “We can put up a sign that the Potter Foundation offices are up the stairs so it won’t get confused with yours.”

“Alright, but we can speed up the process,” said Daphne. “Kinnie!”

The tiny house elf who looked after the GSC HQ popped in with a bright grin. Parvati laughed when she saw the house elf. “I like how you think,” she said. “Let’s get started.”

Around four, Harry returned to a pair of tired but pleased young women. The front lobby of the Verdant offices had a brand new dark red sign with gold writing indicating visitors to go upstairs if they were looking for the Potter Foundation’s offices. Upstairs, there was an identical reception desk to the one downstairs, and a few empty offices. The entire upstairs area had a fresh coat of the same beige paint from GSC HQ, and dark cherry wood furniture.

“Wow,” said Harry, looking around.

“Right?” asked Parvati, grinning brightly. “We still need a few paintings and maybe like a desk plant, but it’s shaping up well, isn’t it?”

“Definitely,” said Harry. “Are the rest of the rooms set up as well?”

“Not all of them,” answered Daphne. “We have an office for you, and one for Andromeda all ready to go, but the other rooms are bare for now. I moved my father’s things in one of the rooms downstairs.”

“We also have a sign for the outside, but we’ll put it up tomorrow after the Prophet article comes out,” said Parvati.

“Speaking of, how did it go with Ben?” asked Daphne.

“Pretty well, I’d say,” said Harry. “I think I’m getting the hang of this press thing.”

“Good to hear,” said Daphne, and checked her watch. “We’d better head to the HQ. I want to introduce Parvati to the others, and we need to hold a meeting before we finish up for the day.”

“I still can’t believe you have Malfoy working for you,” said Parvati.

“Is it going to be a problem?” asked Harry, warily.

“Dunno,” said Parvati. “Depends on how much of an arse he is, I guess.”

“Fair enough,” said Daphne. “Let’s go, shall we?”

The three of them locked up the Verdant-Potter Foundation offices and went to the GSC HQ, with Daphne taking Parvati by side-along apparition to the entrance at the back. Parvati was suitably impressed by those offices as well, and when they entered the conference room where Tracey, Draco and Fleur were already waiting, it led to a round of awkward introductions.

This time, it was Fleur who dispelled the tension, welcoming Parvati easily. Harry supposed Fleur
would be the one to understand Parvati’s situation best, and as he saw Parvati start to relax as Fleur mentioned Bill, he glanced at Daphne who met his gaze with a smile.

“So, who wants to start?” asked Daphne.

“I’ll go,” said Harry. “The interview with Ben went well, and it should make tomorrow’s Prophet. He was heading off to interview Healer Lim at St. Mungo’s when we said goodbye. I didn’t bring up the orphanage yet, though.”

“Yeah, we were holding off on it until we have more of a timeline and plan,” said Tracey.

“Which we should, once Andromeda starts,” nodded Daphne.

“Yeah, she’ll start from tomorrow,” said Harry. “I’ll be jumping between this office and the other one, but I expect Parvati and Andromeda will be over there.”

“From what Daphne showed me, I need to be at that office pretty much all the time,” said Parvati.

“Yes,” said Daphne. “People who come in to give their donations in person need to be met with and issued a receipt for their contribution. And I’m sure once Andromeda starts, she could use an extra pair of hands.”

Parvati seemed to hesitate, and Harry saw her glance towards Draco briefly before looking at Daphne. “And you’re sure you want me to be the person who meets with them?” she asked.

“We went over this,” said Harry, firmly.

“I know, I know,” said Parvati, turning towards him. “But I’m not exactly a pretty face anymore.”

“You’re plenty pretty still,” said Fleur, bluntly. “Whatever that monster was capable of, he could never destroy how beautiful and wonderful someone is on the inside. My Bill is still the best person in the world.”

“And if anyone has anything to say about it, let me know,” said Harry.

Parvati smiled at him and Fleur, heartened by their words.

“Either way, I’m not the bleeding heart kind so if I thought you to be incompetent, I wouldn’t have offered you the job, no matter what Harry said,” said Daphne.

“She’s not lying about that, by the way,” said Tracey, as Draco gave a nod.

“Thanks,” said Parvati. “I’m looking forward to working with all of you, as well.”

“Good, what’s next?” asked Daphne.

“We met with Rosette,” said Draco. “She was happy with our offer and was ready to sign on right away, but we asked her to take the contract to a lawyer first before agreeing to anything.”

“And we drafted the agreement for the St. James couple too,” said Fleur. “We kept it quite similar to the agreement with Fortescue and sent it to them, so hopefully we’ll hear from them in the next few days.”

“It’s moving along well then,” smiled Harry. “What else?”

“Since Zinnia signed over the *Witch Weekly* shares, I was able to meet with the current Editor in
Chief,” said Tracey.

“You met with Marian Giles?” asked Parvati, eyes wide.

“Yeah, and boy, that woman is intimidating,” said Tracey.

“You’re intimidated by someone?” asked Draco, with an amused tilt of his lips. “Will wonders never cease?”

“Shut up,” said Tracey, rolling her eyes.

“Focus, children,” said Daphne.

“As I was saying,” said Tracey, glaring at Draco briefly. “Marian is...well, we can’t really deal with her like Cuffe. She is very rigid, but she knows how to run a magazine and keep a following.”

“Did you talk about Rosette’s business?” asked Fleur.

“I didn’t mention any particulars, I brought up the possibility of doing a feature,” said Tracey. “She was interested, so that’s good, at least. But, she did do me a huge favour.”

“What’s that?” asked Daphne, sharply.

“Nothing bad, I promise,” said Tracey. “She said if we are doing an image overhaul for a shop, she would lend us Penelope Clearwater as a consultant.”

Parvati gasped and Daphne’s eyebrows shot up, but everyone else was confused.

“The Ravenclaw prefect?” asked Harry, remembering Percy’s old girlfriend.

“Yes, the Ravenclaw prefect,” said Daphne, a little amused. “She went on to join the magazine after graduating, and runs a very popular section on interior decoration.”

“She is incredible,” said Parvati. “Her taste and style is so...impeccable.”

“And the prices she charges exorbitant,” added Daphne. “Though, she is quite skilled.”

“Isn’t she a Muggleborn?” asked Harry.

“She was able to forge a family tree,” said Tracey. “We’ll be lucky to get her, and I’m pretty sure Rosette will faint from shock when we tell her.”

“What’s the favour costing us?” asked Daphne.


“No,” he said.

“I agree with him on that,” said Daphne. “The Prophet’s one thing but…”

“Hang on,” said Parvati. “This could be great opportunity. A lot of people read Witch Weekly.”

“It’s not about how many people read it,” said Harry. “I don’t want sordid details of my personal life splashed all over their pages.”

“We can approve the questions beforehand,” said Tracey. “I’ll make sure they don’t delve too deep.”

When Harry still looked reluctant, she smiled slyly. “This could be good publicity for the Foundation
and any events you will throw in the future.”

Harry turned towards Daphne, who didn’t look too pleased and he suspected it was because she agreed with Tracey’s reasoning.

“Fine,” said Daphne. “But you pre-approve the questions, get Harry’s answers straight, and get a reliable reporter to write it. And have Marian Giles send us a copy before publishing.”

“I’ll do my best,” said Tracey, but at Daphne’s slightly frosty look, she held up her hands in surrender. “I’ll get it done.”

“Was there anything else?” asked Daphne.

“Yeah, I heard the Ministry’s reviving the Quidditch League,” said Harry.

Fleur and Draco perked up immediately. “There are a few existing investments that we have tied with Quidditch,” said Fleur, summoning a stack of files from her office. “Here it is, the Potter family has a standing 30% ownership of the Puddlemere United Quidditch team.”

“The Black family didn’t have an interest in Quidditch teams but they invested in broomstick development,” said Draco, taking a file from the stack in front of Fleur and reading through it. “They have shares with both Nimbus and Cleansweep.”

“But the biggest investment is from an old offshoot of the Peverell side,” said Fleur, with a triumphant grin.

“Another team?” asked Daphne.

“No,” said Fleur. “Quidditch armour.”

“Hang on,” said Harry, leaning forward in his chair. “All standard Quidditch armour is made by one company, Pridwen Quidditch Armour Company. Everyone from Hogwarts house teams to professionals at the World Cup get their armour from them.”

“Exactly,” said Fleur. “That is why I said it was the biggest investment.”

“Incredible,” said Parvati, her eyes wide.

“What does the rest of the ownership for Puddlemere look like?” asked Daphne.

“Puddlemere is the oldest team in the League,” said Draco, with a frown. “I expect a bunch of investors own part of it.”

“Look into it, would you?” said Daphne. “The specifics, I mean. Puddlemere is a decent team and if we had more control over it, it could be pretty profitable.”

“You want to buy the other owners out?” asked Draco.

Daphne glanced at Harry. “Well?” she asked.

“I don’t see why not,” said Harry, thoughtfully. “Wouldn’t hurt to consider it at least, right?”

“Of course,” said Fleur. “We’ll look into it.”

“Excellent,” smiled Daphne. “Should we call it a day, then?”
There were nods of agreement, as the meeting came to an end.

~

Ginny bounced on her toes with excitement as she waited by the fireplace for Harry to key her into the wards for the Potter family home. Over a month after the end of the war, and they were finally, finally doing something couple-like. Well, there had been that date two days ago, but it had been...

“Hey,” said Harry, his head popping out of the fireplace. “Come on through. It’s Potter Hall.”

Ginny nodded and picked up a handful of floo powder, as Harry vanished. “Potter Hall,” she said, clearly, travelling through the floo and arriving into a massive entrance foyer with marble floors and a magical crystal chandelier taller than her casting a warm light all around.

Her mouth fell open. When Harry had said it was a family home, she had not expected something that looked like a palace from a fairy tale.

She looked around quickly, realising she was alone. “Harry?” she called, wondering if she had somehow come out of the wrong fireplace. She heard footsteps coming towards her, the click of heels on the marble floor, making her frown slightly before a beautiful, blonde woman walked out from a pair of double doors on the left.

“I found her!” she called when she saw Ginny. “I think she came out of the visitor’s fireplace in the main foyer instead of the one in the kitchen.”

Ginny recognised her as Daphne Greengrass and a knot of unease settled in her stomach. Daphne had been widely considered one of the most beautiful girls in Harry’s year at Hogwarts, and it seemed even dressed in normal work robes with her hair in a bun, did nothing to diminish her looks in any way. With her looking rather professional, Ginny felt a little shabby in her faded blue jeans and dark green jumper, but she gave herself a shake and dismissed the thought immediately.

Harry walked out from behind Daphne and smiled at Ginny, and she found the unease starting to dissipate. “Hi,” he said. “Ginny, this is Daphne Greengrass. Daphne, this is Ginny Weasley.”

“Nice to meet you,” said Daphne, with a polite smile.

“Yeah, same,” said Ginny, returning the smile nervously.

“Come on in, Ginny,” said Harry. “Daph and I got done with dinner and we were just about to get started.”

“You had dinner together?” asked Ginny, before she could help it.

“Yeah, we came here directly from work,” he said, as he and Daphne led her through the pair of double doors on the left into a sitting room towards the end of the long hallway of doors.

The sitting room had a fireplace (though definitely not one big enough to be connected to the floo), sofas and armchairs upholstered in red with gold embellishments, and a wide, glass floor-to-ceiling window looking out into the manicured garden outside. It was near the window that there was a table set up with four chairs.

A small stack of writing supplies was placed neatly on the table in front of one of the chairs. As they all walked in, Daphne sat in the chair with the writing supplies in front of her, and Harry slipped into a seat next to her. Ginny blinked a little, the knot in her stomach growing slightly.
“Ginny?” asked Harry, confused.

She smiled quickly and made her way to the chair opposite him and sat down. “So,” she said, hating how false the enthusiasm in her voice sounded. “Where do we start?”

Daphne looked down at the parchment she had been writing on. “Well, as we were discussing before, the event will be at Halloween,” she said. “A traditional Halloween event is a ball.”

“Like the Yule Ball? The one we had at Hogwarts?” asked Ginny, determined to be involved in this properly.

“That’s what I said, but Daphne made a good point,” said Harry. “The Yule Ball had a feast and then dancing. Daph reckons this first event should be slightly less formal.”

“Instead of a feast, I suggested we have drinks and hors d’oeuvres being served to the guests,” she said. “It will give Harry more of a chance to socialise and make connections,” she added, looking at Harry, who agreed with a nod. “The event will be to benefit the Foundation, so we have to be careful to not go over the line into extravagance, but it still needs to be an event that will draw in attention. So, we will have the music and dancing, kind of along the lines of a New Years’ Ball.”

“Is that alright, though?” asked Harry. “I mean, shouldn’t we be more traditional?”

“Well, a traditional event at Halloween is a masquerade ball,” said Daphne, and Harry grimaced.

“Why not? I like that idea,” said Ginny.

Daphne glanced at her and then shook her head. “I think people have had enough of masks these days,” she said. “It would be rather insensitive.”

Ginny went red, feeling like a little first year getting an answer wrong in McGonagall’s class. “R-right, of course,” she said.

“Being traditional isn’t necessarily a bad idea,” said Daphne. “But I do think this should be our own spin of things. A new generation coming out of the war, so to speak.”

Harry nodded at her with a serious look on his face, and then they smiled at each other as if they were privy to a joke Ginny wasn’t in on.

There was a flash as a thick, three-ring binder appeared on the table between Harry and Daphne.

“Ahh, here it is,” said Daphne. “Thank you, Annie.”

“Is this what you were telling me about?” asked Harry, looking at the binder curiously.

Daphne nodded. “It will make our lives so much easier, you have no idea,” she said.

“What is it?” asked Ginny, feeling more and more left out.

“It’s the Potter family’s event binder,” said Daphne.

Ginny just looked at her blankly, wondering what that was supposed to be.

“It has details on the events thrown by the Potter family in the past,” explained Harry, opening the binder. “It even has a checklist.” Ginny was sure no one, except Hermione, would have been happy about a checklist. “Oh,” he mumbled, his expression changing slightly. “I-I think my mum made this.”
“I’d believe that,” said Daphne, looking at the list. “It looks newer than the rest of this stuff. Do you recognise her writing?” Harry gave a nod, not looking away from the piece of parchment tucked inside the cover page of the binder.

Ginny fidgeted awkwardly, thinking of what she could say to make him feel better. She knew Harry didn’t really like talking about things that were very personal to him. He usually just let it bottle up before exploding. Only Ron and Hermione were close enough for him to open up, but even then Ginny suspected he didn’t often share anything about his parents with them.

“Well, I like her style,” said Daphne, and Harry looked at her. “That is exceptionally organised, and will make the planning process go a lot smoother. She must have been a very meticulous woman. No wonder Slughorn said she was good at Potions.”

A small smile curled on Harry’s lips as he gave a nod, and Ginny felt like a bludger had hit her in the gut. Maybe she was reading too much into it, but it seemed as if…

“The guest list, then?” asked Harry, clearing his throat briefly as he and Daphne read the checklist together. “Makes sense to get a scale of things first.”

Daphne nodded and wrote down ‘Guest List’ on a blank parchment in front of her. “The guest and a plus one for each of them is standard. What do you think?” she asked, and Harry gave nod. “Everyone from the Wizengamot is a given. And the Heads of Ministry Departments, as well.”

“Yeah,” agreed Harry. “Everyone from-” He stopped himself from continuing, and Ginny raised an eyebrow when he glanced at her.

“Yes, I know,” said Daphne, apparently getting what he was saying without him having to say it.

“Who?” asked Ginny, crossing her arms in irritation at being left out again.

“Employees,” said Daphne, without missing a beat.

“Oh,” said Ginny. “Y-you have employees?” she asked Harry.

He gave a nod, avoiding her gaze. “Who else?” he asked Daphne.

“Friends and family,” she said. “People from Hogwarts you’d want to invite. I’d also invite any teachers from Hogwarts you were close to.”

“How big is this going to be?” asked Ginny, her eyes going wide.

“I’d estimate about 300 people. I doubt people will be turning down the invitation to the very first event hosted by Harry Potter,” said Daphne, and turned to Harry. “You should look through past guest lists in the binder to see if there were certain people who were close to your family. This will be your chance to re-establish relations with them.”

“Good idea,” said Harry, flipping through the pages of the binder, occasionally pointing out a name to Daphne who would either nod or shake her head. Sometimes, they would talk about the family’s current state of affairs.

Ginny sat through it silently, her mood plummeting with every second that passed. She tried to interject when she could, and they always answered her when she asked questions, but she got the feeling that they were being a little evasive about some of the things. Ginny also began to realise that when Harry had talked about planning an event, it hadn’t just been a big party like she’d been thinking. This was big, really, really big, and Ginny had no idea how it was all supposed to come
When the large grandfather clock in the sitting room struck nine, both Harry and Daphne looked up.

“I think we should call it a night,” said Daphne. “We almost have the tentative guest list ready.”

“The invites are next, right?” asked Harry, looking back at the checklist.

“Well, we are picking the invitation cards, yes,” nodded Daphne. “You will also have to enchant them to grant people entrance into the estate. But that comes later, when we are sending them off.”

“Got it,” said Harry. “So, I guess tomorrow we can pick the type of card we want.”

“We should get some ideas on decorations before we do that,” said Daphne. “We wouldn’t want things to clash horribly.”

“If you say so,” grinned Harry. “Er, Ginny, you alright?”

Ginny plastered on a smile, her mind racing in a thousand different directions. “Yeah,” she said. “I-I should go,” she added, standing up quickly.

“Same time tomorrow then?” asked Harry, looking confused at her abrupt manner.

“Absolutely,” said Ginny, and then nodded awkwardly at Daphne. “Bye then.”

“Goodbye,” said Daphne.

“I’ll see you out,” said Harry, and Ginny nodded as he came with her to the floo in the entrance foyer. “You can use the one in the kitchen, if you want,” he offered.

“No, it’s fine,” said Ginny, wanting to be alone to do some thinking. She turned back to kiss him goodnight but stopped herself at a peck on the cheek. “Goodnight.”

“Goodnight, Ginny,” said Harry, a slightly baffled look on his face.

~

10th June, 1998

**HARRY POTTER OPENS THE POTTER FOUNDATION, MAKES 5000 GALLEON DONATION TO ST. MUNGO’S ORPHAN WING**

by Benedict Almeidus

Just over a week since the first Wizengamot session following the end of the war, Elder Harry Potter, the Saviour of the wizarding world, has made another astonishing move. In his exclusive interview with the Prophet (see page 8 for a summary of the exclusive), Elder Potter insisted that we should focus on “rebuilding and recovery”. In keeping with that philosophy, he has launched the Potter Foundation, a private charity organisation for the benefit of the wizarding world.

When asked about his reasons for starting a charity, Elder Potter had this to say: “Considering the kind of damage this war has wrought onto the wizarding world, it only made sense to start something that could help us recover. I was fortunate enough to make it out of this war somewhat whole but I know so many people who did not make it, or ones who did with serious consequences to their health, magic and even their place in the world. The Potter Foundation is an organisation to benefit those people.”
Elder Potter certainly put his money where his mouth is, as the saying goes, by donating a very generous five thousand galleons to St. Mungo’s Orphan Wing.

“St. Mungo’s has always done incredible work for the sake of the wizarding population,” says Elder Potter, quite earnest in his praise for the hospital. “Everyone from the Healers to their staff deserve all the help we can provide.”

St. Mungo’s Orphan Wing has largely been used for temporary housing of young orphans until they could be placed in foster homes or adopted. However, during the past year, the Orphan Wing has become something akin to a permanent home for quite a lot of children.

“We have over fifty children in our care, presently,” says Thierry Lim, the Healer-in-charge of the Orphan Wing at St. Mungo’s. “Our budget from the Ministry has run dry and we were in dire straits until the donation from the Potter Foundation came in.”

“Children are the most vulnerable members of our society,” says Elder Potter, when asked about his decision to make his first donation to the Orphan Wing. “These children have lost their family, their home, and so much more. I know better than anyone that nothing will be able to replace that. But I still want to try and make their lives better in any way that I am capable of.”

Private charity organisations have been something of a rarity in the wizarding world for the last twenty years, with most of the funding coming from the Ministry of Magic. However, with even the Ministry going through their rebuilding, it seems the true devastation of the war is finally setting in.

“As I have said before, this is a time to come together and build our world back up,” says Elder Potter. “The Ministry, the Wizengamot, and every citizen are all parts of this world, and we ought to do all we can to help one another on the road to recovery.”

Five thousand galleons is certainly an unprecedented amount for a donation in the wizarding world, but Elder Potter insists it is for a worthy cause.

“It isn’t about how much money we can give. Anyone and everyone is welcome to donate,” says Elder Potter. “The Potter Foundation is non-profit, meaning any donation that is made will go directly and in its entirety towards benefitting those who need it. Now, more than ever, every knut, sickle and galleon matters.”

“Mr. Potter was insistent he wanted to do everything he could for the orphans here at St. Mungo’s,” says Healer Lim. “And you only have to listen to him once to know he is telling the absolute truth. His efforts for the Orphan Wing are very much appreciated.”

The sentiment is echoed by the current director of St. Mungo’s, Collette Peakes. “With the Potter Foundation’s generous donation to the Orphan Wing, St. Mungo’s can focus our resources on other areas of the hospital that need funding,” says Director Peakes. “With so many people admitted to the hospital, we are running low on resources, not to mention our outpatients who still need regular potion treatments for various afflictions they have suffered because of the war.”

“The Orphan Wing is only one area of focus,” insists Elder Potter. “The Potter Foundation and I intend to do all of what we are able, and we hope you will all contribute what you can.”

The Potter Foundation opened its brand new offices at Number 19 in Diagon Alley, above the Verdant firm’s offices. Donations can be made in person to the organisation’s offices or at Gringotts.

Elder Robert Abbott folded up the copy of that morning’s Prophet and nodded to himself. The
picture above the article showed Harry Potter dressed in impeccably tailored robes, giving a proud, firm nod.

“Hmm,” he said, stroking his chin thoughtfully. “Twiggy!” The family house elf appeared with a crack and bowed. “Get me some parchment and quill.”
Chapter 9

12th June, 1998

Daphne read her Transfiguration notes as a summer storm raged outside her window. It was past her usual time for bed but since the next day was a Saturday, she figured she would sleep in for a change. Not to say she had the day, or the weekend for that matter, free in any way, but at least, she could sleep an extra hour or two in the morning.

The rest of the week had been busy to put it mildly. On Wednesday, the Potter Foundation had gone public. Daphne thought the article turned out well and got across what they wanted. It also showed that Harry was delivering on his promises and wasn’t all words.

While the wizarding world digested that news, they had already started taking their next steps. Andromeda Tonks had come in to the GSC HQ for their morning meeting on Wednesday. After some introductions, slightly awkward ones in case of Draco, Andromeda had started working right away. Her first order of business had been to survey the properties Harry had inherited to inspect them as prospective locations with the numbers they had in mind. Since little Teddy was still young and she didn’t wish to leave him in the care of a house elf the entire time, Harry offered to watch him while Daphne took Andromeda around to all the properties.

They spent almost all morning and the better part of the afternoon surveying the properties that Harry and Daphne had shortlisted, and during the course of the day, Daphne found herself admiring the older woman immensely. She had only ever known Andromeda as a blood traitor in the pureblood circles, infamous for being the sister of Narcissa and Bellatrix, and having married a Muggleborn. While eerily similar to Bellatrix in appearance, Andromeda had a quiet grace like Narcissa. But more importantly, Andromeda had what both sisters seemed to lack, which was heartfelt compassion and kindness in both her appearance and demeanour.

During their survey of the properties, Andromeda took careful notes, noting the ins and outs and asking the house elves about the wards and the capabilities of each of the properties. Upon returning to the GSC HQ, she immediately met with Fleur and Draco to get started on the planning. In the meantime, Daphne checked up on Parvati and learned that they’d already had some of the existing shopkeepers in Diagon Alley come in to give some donations.

The numbers were not massive, but Daphne knew the wealthier members of their society would make their moves soon, eager to use this as an opportunity to present themselves as rubbing shoulders with Harry Potter while being generous benefactors to the needy. When Daphne mentioned that to Harry, he merely shrugged in response, claiming that he was fine with it as long as they kept the gold coming in for the people who needed it.

Their end of the day meeting proved quite enlightening. With the Potter Foundation public, Parvati had been quite busy minding the office and accepting donations and issuing receipts. She was also dealing with a lot of mail being sent to the office, some of them with congratulations and grateful words but a large amount of them with people asking for money. She had called in Tracey to help since Daphne was away with Andromeda, and Tracey had taken one look at some of the letters and immediately put up a mail ward.

“Isn’t that harsh?” Harry had asked. “Those people genuinely might need help.”

“If they need help, they will go to St. Mungo’s or the Ministry,” said Tracey. “If we start giving out handouts, there will be no end to this. Our purpose is not to give out free money. We do this
properly.”

Daphne could tell it didn’t sit well with Harry, but he was in the minority there. Andromeda had agreed with Tracey, pointing out there was no way to verify any of those stories. There could be people who genuinely did need the money, but like Tracey had said, they had to do this properly and one step at a time instead of throwing money around.

In the meantime, Finn Fortescue had dropped by the office around midday. They had only sent him the contract the day before so they hadn’t been expecting him so soon, but he had come in to speak to Fleur and Draco. Thinking he wanted to negotiate the contract, they met with him, only to be surprised when he told them his lawyer was still examining it and that he had something else to discuss.

Apparently, he was quite happy with the contract the GSC had presented to him. Barring any legal issues, he was ready to sign and had withdrawn his application from the Ministry so he could make a new one with proper approval from a Wizengamot member. Being so happy with how they’d handled things, he had asked them to meet with a friend of his named Vikram Kale.

Vikram Kale dealt with books, mostly wizarding fiction, history and poetry, and wanted to open a bookstore in Diagon Alley. Finn informed Fleur and Draco that Vikram already had a business he operated with Owl Order and was looking to expand but had failed to get approval from the Ministry in the past. Flourish and Blotts had a monopoly on the bookshops, though there were a couple second hand stores here and there who’d managed to get approval. But if people wanted to buy books new, their only option in the Alley was Flourish and Blotts.

Grateful for Finn’s request, Fleur and Draco had agreed to meet with Vikram Kale, and Finn had taken his leave, promising to have the signed contract back to them soon.

On Thursday, they had a bit of a surprise. A letter was waiting for Harry at the Potter Foundation offices in the morning, bearing the seal of the Abbott family, inviting him to dinner on Saturday. While it seemed like a simple enough invitation, Harry and Daphne knew there would be more to it than that. Harry had written a reply with Daphne instructing him and they had sent it off to Robert Abbott, confirming Harry’s attendance.

While Harry and Daphne were busy with that, Fleur and Draco met with Vikram Kale, who was a pleasant and well-read Indian man in his 40s, looking to open a bookshop. His Owl Order business was moderately successful as he had very good contacts with many publishers around Britain and the rest of Europe, as well as a dedicated customer base, who knew his ability to get them the books they wanted.

“The issue isn’t customers or the books,” he’d explained to them. “Without a proper shop front, not many people are aware they don’t have to pay Flourish and Blotts their ridiculous prices.”

“They inflate the prices?” asked Fleur.

“For both the customers and the publishers,” nodded Vikram. “If publishers want Flourish and Blotts to stock their books, they have to pay them a massive cut. And most customers have no idea how much cheaper they can get the books for. Keeping my rate same for the publishers, even if I charge customers 30% lower than Flourish and Blotts, I will make a bigger profit than I do now.”

“Flourish and Blotts make most of their money through textbooks, though,” Draco pointed out. “Finn said you focus on fiction and poetry.”

“I have all kinds of books,” he’d said. “I can even get the textbooks, through my publisher contacts.
Because Flourish and Blotts can make such enormous profits on the textbooks, they don’t bother carrying many other books, and charge publishers even more to carry those in their store.”

Sensing this to be a lucrative opportunity, they had agreed to get back to him with an offer. When they had presented the idea to the rest of them at their end of the day meeting, both Daphne and Harry had given them the go-ahead.

“Any chance we can get some of his publishing contacts?” Daphne had asked.

“Why?” asked Harry, curiously.

“The Arc has a lot of books which could be published,” she pointed out. “Not all of them, of course, but old stories, history, poetry…it could see the light of day again.”

In the end, they decided to draft an offer for Vikram Kale, granting him the lease to a shop owned by the Black family which was directly opposite Flourish and Blotts and would make a beautiful bookstore. In exchange for a rent-free six months, as well as repairs and renovations to the shop, they would get a small share of his profits and contacts of some of his publishers.

Friday was the busiest day they all had. Finn Fortescue returned his signed contract, and the whole thing was finalised in the morning. Two house elves originally from Iola Castle were dispatched to start the repairs and renovations on the new ‘Fortescue Cafe’. The application was sent off to the Ministry for approval with Daphne’s signature and seal. She and Harry had agreed that she would be the one to do it since she could always claim that GSC was one of the Verdant clients, just like Harry, if anyone actually did decide to dig deeper.

With Harry’s dinner with Robert Abbott coming up the next day, Daphne took him shopping again, and this time, Mr. Saville at Twilfit and Tatting fitted him for a full wardrobe. It would be ready by the next morning, and the price was lower than Harry had expected, judging by how expensive the first pair of robes had been. Daphne explained to him in a whisper that Mr. Saville had charged them higher for a rush job.

On Friday afternoon, Rosette Frost dropped off her signed contract as well. True to Tracey’s prediction, she did almost faint when Fleur told her that Penelope Clearwater would be consulting on the rebranding of her shop. A grateful and ecstatic Rosette took her leave from the GSC HQ.

Since Draco, Daphne and Harry would be out of the office for three days next week doing their NEWTs, a lot of their Friday was spent making arrangements so that Fleur, Andromeda, Tracey, Parvati and Maribeth could keep the two places running without issue.

Andromeda announced that she would have a tentative plan for the orphanage ready by the time they would be back in the office on Thursday of next week. She had been working out of the Potter Foundation offices, and she brought Teddy with her as she had requested Harry turn the smaller room next to her office into a nursery. Kreacher came with her to assist and he watched Teddy as Andromeda worked, and both she and Harry checked up on him regularly throughout the day. Daphne knew Harry had offered to hire a nanny, but Andromeda said she preferred this arrangement a lot more.

A sudden clap of thunder broke her attention and Daphne sighed and decided to call it a night. Busy days aside, she and Harry were still meeting with Ginny Weasley in the evenings to work on the Halloween event. What was supposed to be a way for Harry to reconnect with his girlfriend was anything but. Daphne had no idea if Harry was being deliberate or deliberately obtuse that he just couldn’t see that he was leaving Ginny out. And Ginny was no better, looking like she wished she was anywhere but there, planning an event she was not interested in at all.
Daphne knew better than to complain, so she was just glad they were taking a break for the weekend and the NEWTs and she didn’t have to deal with that weird atmosphere anymore. She had expected things to come to a head sooner or later, but it still happened earlier than she’d thought.

Friday evening had started per routine. They were in the main ballroom, trying out the decoration patterns in the binder to decide on what they’d be going with. Harry had to cast the spells to transform the ballroom himself, though Daphne had pointed out that any Potter by birth or marriage would also be capable of using the spells. For the time being, it was only Harry.

“Isn’t black and orange the standard for Halloween?” Ginny had asked. “It’s what Hogwarts has, anyway.”

“True, but we want it to be a little more sophisticated than that,” said Daphne, trying to soften her tone. If it had been Tracey, Blaise or Astoria, or even Harry, she would have said it with much more bite but she knew Ginny Weasley would likely think she was being talked down to, rather than Daphne’s blunt nature. “Carved pumpkins, live bats, dancing skeletons, and black and orange everywhere is all well and good for children.”

“I’d rather it be a little subdued as well,” said Harry.

“How about black and gold?” asked Daphne, not needing to ask his reason since it was obvious to anyone with half a brain. “Gold is still a Halloween colour.”

“It is?” asked Ginny, surprised.

“Per the old ways,” said Daphne absently, as she flicked through the binder to look at any pre-existing photographs with that colour scheme.

“What do you mean, the old ways?” asked Harry.

Daphne looked at him and then towards Ginny. “Er,” she hesitated.

“She means the Dark ways,” said Ginny, crossing her arms.

Daphne’s eyes flashed with anger and she bit the inside of her cheek to stop herself from snapping. She never should have brought it up.

“What are the old ways?” asked Harry, looking at Daphne.

Daphne had to stare at him incredulously. Behind him, Ginny blinked at him in shock as well.

“Harry, she’s talking about the Dar-” she began, but he turned to her and shook his head.

“That’s not how the Dark works,” he said, and there was a maturity to his voice that made even Daphne feel like a child for once.

She looked at his inscrutable expression, wondering how many of the Dark Lord’s secrets he’d known. The rest of the wizarding world, even someone like Daphne, had known nothing of the Dark Lord’s past until the exposé after his downfall last month. She suspected Harry knew much more than that and there had been a lot to how the Dark Lord had managed to survive being vanquished the first time.

Daphne was no expert, but even she knew that to cheat death must require delving into the darkest of Dark Arts. She had even entertained the thought of Harry dabbling into it in some ways which would explain how he’d survived the killing curse twice, but knowing him as she did now, she knew
he would never. But his reply to Ginny told her a lot more; Harry Potter understood the Dark Arts, but he had never fallen into the temptation. Daphne felt her respect for him rise considerably.

She took a deep breath. “The old ways refer to the traditions of the wizarding world,” she explained. “These were the traditions set out centuries and centuries ago, around the time even Muggles were aware of us. Witches and wizards do not worship any gods or deities like Muggles do. We have our own...way of doing things.” She bit her lip and contemplated how to say the next part delicately. “Over the years, some families have kept the traditions while others have-” abandoned them - “not,” she said, instead.

“You mean us blood traitors are the ones who didn’t keep the old ways,” snapped Ginny, angrily.

Daphne gave her a measured look. “I have nothing against families who do not keep the old ways,” she said. “But to call the ones who do Dark, is rather ignorant and inaccurate.”

“You-Know-Who’s followers always boasted of the old ways,” she said, clearly not ready to back down.

“Considering nearly all his followers were pureblood fanatics, that is hardly surprising,” said Daphne, trying not to lose her patience. “Purebloods are the only ones who were taught the traditions because of-” ignorant people like you- “people who think anyone who keeps to the old ways is Dark.”

“It’s the truth,” shrugged Ginny.

Daphne clenched her fists so she wouldn’t draw her wand.

“What do the old ways include?” asked Harry, and Daphne relaxed slightly at his words.

“Not bigotry, if that’s what you’re wondering,” she said, turning to him. “There were plenty of half-bloods and Muggleborns who integrated the old ways into their lives. It was only when the Dark Lord rose to power back in the day that the old ways became synonymous with the Dark for both his followers and the ones who opposed them.” She looked at Ginny, who glared at her. “You were likely taught that if you continued to practice the old ways, you were Dark and just like the other pureblood fanatics, wanting to destroy anything less pure than themselves.”

“I don’t believe you,” said Ginny, mistrustfully.

“I don’t really care,” said Daphne, without missing a beat. “It’s not my job to convince you of anything. Least of all, telling you what to believe in.” Before she said anything more than that, she took a breath. “We should call it a night, I think.”

It was far earlier than usual, but Daphne needed to leave before she lost her temper and did something very unlike herself. Not a lot ruffled her, but the traditions which her father had so lovingly taught her and Astoria being lumped in with the likes of scum who had misappropriated them into an agenda for bigotry incensed her like nothing else.

Giving a short nod to both Harry and Ginny, Daphne had taken her leave, and come home to Greengrass Manor.

~

Unbeknownst to Daphne, as soon as she had left, both Ginny and Harry had stood still in shock for a few moments. Ginny was torn between her earlier anger and a little bit of shame. Daphne had been right in that Ginny’s parents had taught them that the old ways were what the purebloods who
supported You-Know-Who practiced, and Ginny had simply accepted it as the truth and never given it further thought.

But now, she could see a bit of Daphne’s point as well, and it annoyed her more than anything. She didn’t want to agree with Daphne Greengrass who, for all intents and purposes, had shown over the past few evenings that she was an incredibly capable woman. That in itself wasn’t an issue. The issue was that Harry was close to her, he relied heavily on her (admittedly good) advice, and more than anything, she knew how to talk to Harry, when Ginny often felt like she couldn’t. Well, it would be more accurate to say Ginny had considered that only Ron and Hermione were able to get through to Harry, having watched them from the sidelines all these years, and a part of her had accepted that even as his girlfriend, she could never understand Harry as they did.

But Daphne Greengrass had come as a slap in the face. Ginny had been forced to witness over and over these past few days that someone who had been a virtual stranger to Harry until a few weeks ago, was able to talk to him with such ease. It made Ginny jealous, but not for the usual reasons when she thought of a girl getting close to Harry. She envied Daphne’s ability to keep up with Harry, and she envied the connection they shared. The only other girl Ginny had seen Harry that relaxed around was Hermione. But with Hermione, Ginny knew she and Harry did not feel anything beyond friendship and a deep respect for one another.

She glanced at Harry, who was still in shock about Daphne’s abrupt departure. Ginny knew he would never betray her trust by going behind her back because he was too noble for that, but she didn’t know how he truly felt about Daphne either.

“I have to apologise to her,” he murmured, and Ginny looked at him in surprise.

“You don’t need to apologise for something I said,” said Ginny.

He looked at her and shook his head. “It’s not your fault,” he said. “You only said what you were taught to believe in.”

“You’re...on my side?” she asked, more shocked by that than anything.

“There are no sides here,” said Harry. “I believe Daphne, because I know she isn’t the type of person to lie about such things.”

“So, you think I was out of line?” asked Ginny, wondering why he couldn’t just say that instead of trying to placate them both. Especially when Daphne wasn’t even here for him to defend her.

Harry glanced away. “Like I said, it’s not your-”

“No,” said Ginny, sharply. “Say it like it is. I was out of line and you think your Daphne was right.”

He stared at her. “My Daphne?” he asked.

Ginny flushed, not having meant to accuse him of something. It had slipped out in a moment of jealousy and she dearly wished she could take it back.

“Ginny, do you think Daphne and I are-?” he began, and then paused uncomfortably.

“Are you?” she asked, in a small voice.

“No,” he said, and Ginny believed him. “Why would you think that?”

“I-I don’t know,” she said.
“Daphne has been of enormous help to me,” he said. “Believe me, I wouldn’t have been able to do half the things I’ve done if it weren’t for her. I’m grateful to her.”

“So, that’s all there is to your relationship with her?” asked Ginny, and took a deep breath to brace herself before asking her next question. “You don’t think she’ll be a better girlfriend to you?”

Harry opened and closed his mouth. “Wh-what?” he asked, sounding genuinely shocked.

Ginny blinked back tears and tried to keep her voice steady as the frustration that had built up for the past days reached the breaking point. “I hate it,” she said, her voice small.

He came up to stand right in front of her. “Hate what?” he asked.

“This, all of it,” she said, nodding towards the open binder on the table. “I don’t think I can do it.”

She closed her eyes, not wanting to see the look of disappointment that was sure to be there.

“I-I thought you said you wanted to be involved,” he said, finally. With her eyes closed, Ginny wasn’t able to gauge his emotions properly, but she thought he sounded surprised more than disappointed. “I know you can learn this stuff, Ginny.”

She opened her eyes but looked at her feet instead of him. “That’s not it. I mean, I don’t want to,” she confessed. “I don’t want to plan a party for hundreds of people. I don’t want to decide what colours to use, what food to serve, what music to play...none of it.”

“I-is this because you think there’s something going on with me and Daphne…” he began, but Ginny shook her head.

“She has nothing to do with it,” she said, honestly. “I was so happy when you asked me to come and plan this, because even if you didn’t say it properly, I knew it meant you were thinking of our future.” She finally looked up at him. “Harry, what kind of a wife do you want?”

He looked distressed and Ginny realised it was because she was tearing up. She hated to cry and hated to cry in front of Harry even more, but it was becoming more and more apparent what they were headed towards.

“Tell me the truth,” she said, her voice shaking as the tears began to flow in earnest.

“A partner,” he said, finally. “I-I have a responsibility and I want someone who can walk that path by my side. Planning an event like this may seem unnecessary, but it is really important to me.”

“Now ask me what I want,” she said, choking back sobs.

“What do you want, Ginny?” he asked, his eyes starting to water a little.

“I want to play Quidditch,” she said. “I want to play professionally...for the next ten years, at least. And then I want a family, where we’ll live in a small, comfortable home in the country.” She nodded around at the lavish ballroom they were standing in. “I don’t want this, I don’t want any of it. Even two months ago, if you would have wanted me to do it, I would have grit my teeth and set aside my dreams and everything I wanted, to be with you.”

“I don’t want you to make yourself miserable for my sake,” he said, sounding horrified at the thought. “I don’t want to take your dreams away from you, Ginny.”

“I know, and I know you would never ask that of me,” she said, smiling a little through her tears.
“Ever since F-Fred died, I keep thinking of how life can end in the blink of an eye. There is so much he must have wanted to do and he never got the chance.” Unable to hold back, Ginny let out a loud sob and ran into his arms. “Damn it. Damn it, damn it, damn it, damn it!” she swore, weeping into his chest. “You were right. The things we want are too different.”

“I’m sorry,” he said, as her cries grew louder at his apology. “I’m really sorry, Ginny. I didn’t mean to hurt you when you were in so much pain already.”

Her sobs quietened a bit at his words. “I know,” she said, her voice slightly hoarse. “I really do love you, you know. I wanted us to be together and get married and have children and grow old together.” She felt rather than saw his quick inhale at her words. Slowly, she lifted her head from his chest and looked up at him. “We should break up.”

He looked shocked but then nodded miserably. “I’m sorry,” he repeated.

“Me too,” she said, not bothering to stop her flowing tears. “Can you kiss me? One last time?”

He nodded slowly and leaned down. Ginny closed her eyes and relished the final kiss she would ever share with Harry. It lasted too long and not long at all, and Ginny was crying as she pulled away.

“Be happy, Harry,” she said, turning away before she could lose her resolve.

She heard his whispered apology once more, and she fled blindly towards the floo, making it through to the Burrow’s kitchen just as it began storming outside. Hurrying upstairs, she closed and locked her room, having managed to avoid running into any of her family.

Ginny Weasley stumbled to her bed, finally unleashing the torrent of tears she had been holding back, and the sound got lost in the cacophony of the storm, as she left behind her first love.

~

13th June, 1998

Daphne was in the main study of the Greengrass Manor when Astoria found her. After a restless night, Daphne had woken up earlier than usual instead of sleeping in and finally decided to start putting away her father’s things. The house elves could have done it easily and even Daphne could have done it faster with magic, but she was doing it the Muggle way, making sure to carefully put away Elias Greengrass’s books, memorabilia and other belongings in boxes. It was slow work, and she had to stop more than once to collect herself when she found something that triggered a memory of him.

Elias Greengrass had been very typical of a Greengrass, which made him very atypical in Britain’s pureblood circles. The Greengrass line could be traced back to one of the oldest pureblood lines in Britain, but they had married foreign blood so frequently that a lot of other pureblood families weren’t happy with them. Not many of them were stupid enough to voice it though, mostly because the Greengrasses had always married purebloods and were quite wealthy. A lot of speculation went into how they had managed to amass such a fortune, and even Daphne had only learned about it around the time she came of age.

Poison being the family magic was not a complete lie that she’d told Harry when he had asked. However, it wasn’t just poison that could kill people that her family magic could create. There were other poisons and concoctions that could render people infertile, damage their magical core, and cause any number of physical and mental disorders. Daphne wasn’t proud of the past of her
ancestors since they had made their fortune by providing the poisons that had led to the rise and fall of many bloodlines around the world for a price.

It was around her great-grandfather’s time that their family had ceased their less than honourable activities, and turned their focus to title and estate planning. Being intricately aware of varying bloodlines and factions within the pureblood society in Britain and Europe as a whole, made their new focus of business a prosperous one as well. Elias Greengrass had been the third of the Greengrass lords to inherit the Verdant firm, and like his father and grandfather before him, he’d been a very capable lawyer. He’d also held the Dark Lord in great disdain, though he had been smart enough never to broadcast that.

He’d married the second daughter of the prestigious Corentin family in France, soon after finishing Hogwarts. Juliette Corentin had been a vivacious woman with long, dark hair and deep blue eyes, and though it had been a marriage of formal arrangement between their families, the two fell in love over the course of their engagement. Daphne had been born three years after their wedding, a mere two months after the death of Elias’s parents.

The Greengrass family was attacked on the Dark Lord’s order only a month after Daphne’s birth. They’d done it in a cowardly way too, by cursing Juliette at a society event for the pureblood ladies. The curse, slow-acting and painful, had been placed on her by Hortensia Nott, who’d then drank poison to kill herself right then and there. Daphne knew that her father suspected that Hortensia’s husband, Theodore’s father, had been the one to place her under the imperius to compel her to attack Juliette and then kill herself.

Daphne’s memories of her mother were vague, but she remembered the sound of her voice quite well. She also had fleeting memories of Astoria being born, and the final moments of Juliette’s life where the dying woman had clutched both her daughters close until her grip had gone slack. Daphne wasn’t sure if it was a real memory or just something she had made up, and she’d never had the courage to ask her father.

Juliette’s death had hit Elias hard, but he’d raised both his daughters to be intelligent and bright young women, like their mother. He had taken Daphne under his wing to train her as the next head of the Greengrass family, and it wasn’t until she was older that Daphne realised that he’d never blamed her or Astoria, or even Juliette, for there being no son to carry on the name, nor had he treated them as bargaining chips to foster better relations in society.

Daphne and Astoria had loved their father immensely, and when news came of his death, it had taken every single bit of strength that Daphne had not to break down completely. As Astoria cried and cried until she couldn’t, Daphne calmly started brewing the deadliest poison in their family’s repertoire, imbuing two silver hairpins with it. When she was done, Daphne gave one of the hairpins to Astoria and kept the other for herself. She knew that as soon as she was out of Hogwarts, she would be thrown to a Death Eater as a wife and she would die before letting herself be used in that manner. Thankfully, neither of them had needed to use it and though Astoria had discarded the pin pretty much immediately after the war had ended, Daphne still wore it in her hair out of habit.

“Have you been here all morning?”

Daphne turned around and saw Astoria in the doorway of the main study. “I thought it was high time I tidied it up,” she said, instead of answering her. The clock showed it to be just before midday, and Daphne had been at it since six am.

Astoria rolled her eyes and walked inside. “It would be better if you took some time to deal with it,” she muttered, and Daphne ignored her.
It was true, but Daphne wouldn’t admit it. She hadn’t properly mourned her father. She had done the proper traditions, of course, but she hadn’t let herself grieve and cry like Astoria had.

“Got any last minute studying to do?” she asked Astoria, changing the subject.

“Sure,” she said, unimpressed. “What happened yesterday?”

Daphne looked at her warily. “What do you mean?”

“I mean, you came home in a bad mood, and this morning, you are in Papa’s study after avoiding it all this time,” said Astoria, crossing her arms.

“The two things are unrelated,” she lied, and finished packing up the last of the boxes. “Jolly!” she called. The house elf appeared with a crack. “Finish dusting in here and put the boxes away properly.”

Jolly nodded and got to work. Daphne started to leave, but found Astoria right on her heels.

“Have you had anything to eat?” asked Astoria, persistently. In response, Daphne’s stomach growled loudly. “I’ll take that as a no. Come on, let’s have an early lunch.”

Daphne thought about protesting, but her stomach growled again, and she just sighed with a nod. Since Jolly was busy cleaning, Dolly made a simple brunch of chicken casserole with olives and artichokes aplenty, and a refreshing summer punch to wash it down. Daphne requested to have her punch without alcohol like Astoria, figuring she was already a little frazzled without needing alcohol to exacerbate it.

Astoria didn’t ask anymore questions as they ate, but kept shooting her concerned looks until Daphne gave a sigh.

“Cut it out,” she said, finishing her second glass of punch. “It’s been a long week, alright?”

Astoria gave her a scrutinising look but didn’t dig further. “Is Harry coming over today?” she asked, after a few minutes.

“Yes,” said Daphne. “He has an important dinner later and I promised to prepare him for it.”

“Who is the dinner with?” asked Astoria, curiously.

Daphne considered whether she should answer and then shrugged. “Robert Abbott,” she told her.

Astoria’s brow furrowed in confusion. “What does he want with Harry?” she asked.

“Who knows?” asked Daphne. “It’s been weighing on me as well.”

“I mean, knowing the Abbott family, it can swing any way,” said Astoria, thoughtfully. “Is it a party or-?”

“Didn’t seem like an invitation to a party,” said Daphne. “Which is a good and a bad thing. But Harry was on good terms with Hannah Abbott at Hogwarts, so we might be overthinking things for all we know.”

Astoria shrugged in agreement, and they finished the rest of the brunch in silence. “Well, I’m off to get some last minute studying done,” she said, getting up. “When does Harry get here?”

“Soon, I should think,” said Daphne. She wanted to go swim in the lake out back but it was still
miserable weather outside after last night’s storm, so she decided to go down to the greenhouses and check up on some of the plants to calm down.

That was where Harry found her a few hours later, as she put together a bouquet with fresh guelder roses, cow parsley and Solomon’s seal.

“That is very pretty,” he said, as she carefully tied the bouquet using a broad, white lace ribbon. “Who is it for?”

“It’s for you,” said Daphne, without looking up from what she was doing. When he didn’t say anything, she looked up and found him gaping at her. “I meant, it’s for you to take when you visit the Abbots.”

“Oh, right,” said Harry, collecting himself. “I guess, it’s natural to bring something for the hosts.”

“It is,” said Daphne, setting the bouquet aside. “I’d also advise having one of the elves from Pride Farmhouse bring a bottle of wine to present to Robert Abbott. “A grand cru from Cote de Nuits, something from Musigny, I would suggest.”

“I have no idea what any of that means, but sure,” shrugged Harry. “Gerry!” he called.

Daphne almost rolled her eyes as the head house elf of Pride Farmhouse popped into the greenhouse. There were enchantments preventing house elves from just showing up inside another home, but Harry’s house elves seemed to think nothing of popping into Greengrass Manor, and oddly enough, Daphne didn’t mind enough to ask them to stop. Gerry left eagerly after receiving Harry’s instructions and returned moments later with a selection of ten bottles in a crate.

“So?” asked Harry, nodding towards the crate. “What do you think?”

Daphne examined the bottles, her eyebrows shooting up higher when she saw some of the labels. They looked professionally done, and even though she knew it was the elves making the bottles and labels as well, she could have easily seen it as a collector’s item. After examining all ten bottles, she picked the one that she felt was most appropriate, and Gerry bowed to them before leaving with the rest.

“Oh,” said Daphne, finally noticing his clothes. “Mr. Saville finished with your wardrobe, then?”

He nodded, with a baleful smile. “I sent Annie to collect it this morning,” he said. “What do you think?”

Daphne examined the well-tailored black robes with sky blue piping and polished silver buttons, and nodded approvingly. “Well done,” she said, and took a deep breath. “I’m sorry about last night. I can usually keep my temper…”

“It’s alright,” he said, looking slightly uncomfortable for some reason. “Although, er, I should mention. Ginny and I broke up.”

Daphne stared at him. For a full ten seconds. “Oh,” she said, finally. “Was it-” because of me - “er, I mean, what happened?”

“Honestly, I think it just all…” he paused and sighed heavily.

“Was it because of what I said?” she decided to ask, bluntly.

“What? No,” he said, and Daphne raised her eyebrows. “Well, it sort of started from there. I’m sorry
about Ginny, by the way. She’s a good person, I swear, but the Weasleys are sensitive to judgment from other purebloods.”

“Yes, I realised that,” said Daphne. “I should have been more delicate, I suppose, but it’s a subject that gets my back up quite easily.”

Harry grinned a little. “I don’t think I’ve seen you like that ever,” he said.

Daphne rolled her eyes but went pink, nonetheless. “Enough about that,” she said. “What happened exactly after I set off the argument?”

“It’s not that you set off the argument,” he said, and he seemed honest as he was saying it. “Ginny pointed out that she didn’t want the life of...Lady Potter, I suppose.”

“Ah,” said Daphne, succinctly.

Harry gave her a look. “And what does that mean?” he asked, though he sounded more curious than angry.

“It means that it was obvious,” said Daphne, but at Harry’s blank look she sighed. “Harry, she didn’t want to be there when we were planning the event. She was trying very hard, but it was clear that it wasn’t something she was interested in doing. You were right when you said it wasn’t her thing.”

“Then why did she agree to it in the first place?” asked Harry. “Why not just tell me in the first place?”

Daphne stared at him and realised he was serious. “Harry,” she said, gently. “She was doing it for your sake. I am sure she thought she could get used to it, until she realised just how much work it was. I wasn’t joking when I said it’s like a job all on its own.”

“Yeah,” said Harry, shoulders slumping slightly. “She said her dream is to play Quidditch, and I don’t want her to keep her from what she wants. So, we broke up.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” said Daphne, and glanced away. “I wish I could say we should cancel your dinner with Robert Abbott, but it would be rather rude.”

“No, it’s fine,” he said, at once. “Hermione and Fleur both told me that not all relationships will make it once we were out of the war, and even Ginny and I knew it would take work. We just want things that are too different.”

“I’m glad you realise it, but I would guess it is still quite painful to end a relationship,” said Daphne. “Plus, we have NEWTs starting on Monday, not to mention the GSC and all the work.”

“Honestly, I like being busy,” he said.

“I think I know how you feel,” said Daphne, thinking to her busy morning. “Regardless, if you feel like you need a break, just let me know and I’ll try and see what we can rearrange.”

He smiled at her in slight amusement. “Thanks, but I’d rather work,” he said. “So, tell me all about Robert Abbott.”

“Sure,” said Daphne, handing him the bouquet and bottle of wine, and leading him to a table and two chairs set up under a gazebo outside the greenhouse they were in. Jolly popped in with a tray of tea and poured them a cup each.
“I mean, I know Hannah’s mother was a Muggleborn,” said Harry, taking a sip of his tea. “But I don’t really know much about the family, or Hannah’s brother.”

“The Abbott family is certainly interesting,” said Daphne. “They are an old line, pureblood as can be, and very staunchly rooted in traditions.”

Harry’s eyebrows shot up. “That was not the impression I had of Hannah,” he said.

“I suspect that to be her mother’s influence,” said Daphne. “Robert Abbott was very typical of his family, you see. A pureblood Slytherin through and through.”

“And he married a Muggleborn?” asked Harry, astonished.

“Yes, and it was scandalous to the entire society to say the least,” said Daphne. “It was rare enough for such a pureblood line to marry a Muggleborn at all, let alone someone like Robert who could very easily have been a prized recruit for the Dark Lord.” She smiled at the look of shock on his face. “But, despite being raised in a family of purebloods, and being a Slytherin himself during a time when being in that house saw you recruited to that side at once, Robert was neither an idiot nor a bigot. His marriage to a Muggleborn Hufflepuff woman was as clear a statement as it could get. He wasn’t joining the Dark Lord.”

“That was enough for Voldemort?” asked Harry, and Daphne suppressed a shudder at how easily he said the name. “My father married a Muggleborn too, and Voldemort still tried to recruit them both.”

“I didn’t know that, though it doesn’t surprise me,” said Daphne. “The Abbott family was quite large back then and very strong, politically. They stood by Robert and supported his marriage and honestly, I think the Dark Lord was cautious because of that. And then of course, there was Celine Abbott.”

“That’s Hannah’s mother?” asked Harry.

Daphne gave a nod. “Celine became involved in a lot of political aspects of wizarding Britain not long after the fall of the Dark Lord at your hands back in the day,” she said. “She campaigned heavily for rights of Muggleborns and wizarding creatures, and since she had her husband’s strong political support to back it up, she managed to get rid of a lot of old and bigoted laws.”

“Sounds like Hermione,” smiled Harry.

“It’s not a bad comparison,” agreed Daphne. “It also made her a lot of enemies, especially within the pureblood circles. Unfortunately, when the Dark Lord rose this last time, the Abbott family was just Robert, Celine and their two children. There are some distant cousins, I think, but it was in no way as strong as it had been back in the day. Celine being killed was a statement made by the dark side.”

“I had no idea,” said Harry, looking aghast. “I thought she was killed for being a Muggleborn.”

“Well, I’m sure that was a part of it too,” said Daphne, sympathetically. “Robert took his children and went into hiding pretty much immediately after Celine’s death. The Wizengamot session was the first time I’d seen him in public since, I think.”

“But Hannah was at Hogwarts this past year, wasn’t she?” asked Harry. “I remember seeing her at the Battle, at least.”

“She did return but the Carrows made life hell for her,” said Daphne, darkly. “I think she was spending more and more time with Longbottom, and then most of the people that Longbottom was leading sort of disappeared. The rest of us thought the Carrows had finally killed them...but the
Carrors were furious they couldn’t find them, so I suspect they found a way to hide out somewhere in the castle.”

“Yeah, I know that part,” he said.

Daphne was curious, but focused on what she’d been telling him. “Anyway, my point is, I don’t know what Robert Abbott could want,” she said, seriously. “It could just be his way of introducing himself to you, but I think he might have done it during a Wizengamot session or something, instead of inviting you to dinner privately.”

“What could he want then?” asked Harry. “From what you’ve told me, he might be trying to abolish old laws like his wife. I mean, he was the one who raised the disbanding of that stupid Muggleborn Commission.”

“Yes, I had considered that,” she said. “If it is something along those lines, then it will be all well and good. Just be on your guard and don’t promise anything. Tell him you will consider it, even if it sounds like it is something straightforward.”

“You think he’ll try and deceive me?” asked Harry.

“No, but it never hurts to be prepared for it,” said Daphne, sensibly. “Or, we could be overthinking it and he just wants to arrange a match with Hannah.”

“A match? Hannah doesn’t play Quiddi-” he stopped and went red. “That’s not the sort of match you meant, huh?”

Daphne laughed. “You’re too easy, sometimes,” she said, and glanced at her watch. “I think you should go. You’re expected in about fifteen minutes.”

“Right,” said Harry. “I’ll drop by tomorrow morning to let you know how it went.”

“Bring your books, too,” said Daphne. “We might as well get some studying done.”

Harry grinned at her. “You got it.”

~

Arriving through the fireplace into an entrance foyer not unlike the one at the Sea Maiden Cottage in Newcastle, Harry stood up and glanced around. He cast a quick cleaning charm that Daphne had taught him to brush off the soot from his person, smiling when he saw that the flowers and wine had not been ruined during the floo travel.

“Harry?”

Harry looked up at Hannah’s voice and smiled in surprise at her appearance. “Hello, Hannah,” he said, noting that her long, blonde hair had been cut into a short, pixie-like style. “Er, this is for you.”

She took the flowers and wine with a surprised smile. “Thank you, Harry,” she said, greeting him with a kiss to the cheek. “Come on, I’ll introduce you to Daddy and Connor.”

Harry followed her past a neatly decorated dayroom into a formal dining room. He recognised Robert Abbott, who stood as they entered, while a boy around eleven years of age stared at Harry with wide eyes.

“Daddy, meet Harry Potter,” said Hannah, introducing them. “Harry, this is my father, Robert and
my brother, Connor.”

“How do you do, sir?” asked Harry, shaking Robert’s hand.

“Very well, Mr. Potter,” said Robert, with a small smile. “Thank you for agreeing to my invitation, and none of this ‘sir’ business. Robert is just fine.”

“Of course, but please call me Harry,” he said, and glanced at Connor, who still looked awestruck. “Nice to meet you as well, Connor.”

Connor nodded and shook Harry’s hand when he offered. Hannah poked her brother’s shoulder.

“It’s a surprise he’s this quiet,” she said. “Usually, he can’t shut up.” Connor stopped staring at Harry and glared at his sister, who grinned unrepentantly. “Harry brought us flowers and wine.”

“Thank you,” smiled Robert. “Please, let’s sit.”

Harry sat down in a chair at the other end of the table facing Robert, who sat at the head, with Connor to his right and Hannah to the left. It was a long table, but there were only four chairs set up. A stout little house elf appeared and took the flowers and wine from Hannah before vanishing. As they were all sitting down, the flowers reappeared on the middle of the table, now set in an elegant crystal vase. Even Harry who knew nothing about flowers could tell how perfect Daphne’s selection had been. The flowers might have been rearranged by the Abbott house elf but the bouquet itself had been put together very well.

He had to wonder just how many skills Daphne had, and how there were so many things that he still did not know about. He wanted to ask her about the ‘old ways’ as she’d called them, especially since he also remembered Draco saying a long time ago that certain wizarding families did things differently than others. This morning out of curiosity he’d asked Annie if his parents had practiced the old ways, to which he’d received a slightly confused look followed by her declaration that those were the only honourable ways of the wizarding kind, and of course Master James and Mistress Lily had followed them. Harry’s curiosity had only deepened since then.

“Let’s start with some food, shall we?” said Robert, and Harry forced his attention back. “Business can wait until later.”

So he did wish to talk business, surmised Harry, as the soup was served. It was some kind of clear broth, which tasted delicious. It was served alongside a small glass of sherry. Harry hated the smell of sherry, but he didn’t mind the taste so much.

“How have you been Harry?” asked Hannah, as they ate. “Things were so insane, we never really got a chance to chat.”

“I’ve been alright,” said Harry, with a small smile. “What about you? I heard it wasn’t...well, the last year at Hogwarts, I mean.”

A dark shadow passed over Hannah’s face but she nodded firmly. “I was expecting it,” she said. “Daddy didn’t want me to go at all, but I couldn’t hide out while those monsters had the run of the castle.”

“I’m sorry I wasn’t around,” said Harry.

Hannah chuckled lightly. “Harry, I don’t know where you were but I doubt you were doing nothing this past year,” she said. “There were rumours you broke into Gringotts, though that sounds insane even for you. And you came when it mattered and rallied us to fight.”
“I never meant to involve everyone in the fight,” he admitted.

“The choice to get involved was made by people of their own volition,” said Hannah, sensibly. “You taught us how to fight and defend ourselves. Trust me, the casualties would have been much worse without you and the DA.”

Harry gave her a grateful nod, and noted out of the corner of his eye as Robert watched the interaction with slight approval in his gaze. He instantly remembered Daphne’s joke of this being a meeting to scout him out as a possible son-in-law, and immediately turned his attention to food, lest it seem like he was interested in Hannah as more than friends.

“I heard you aren’t going back to Hogwarts,” said Hannah, after a couple beats of silence.

“Yeah, I’m doing my NEWTs starting Monday,” he replied.

“Just like Neville then,” she said, going very pink for some reason.

“Oh, I didn’t know that. I haven’t really had the chance to talk to him in a while,” said Harry, wondering if there would be some time while they were at the Ministry for their exams.

“He mentioned he’s been wanting to talk to you too, but he’s been so busy taking over from Augusta for the Longbottom family, y’know,” she said, still very pink in the face.

Harry wondered just how close Hannah and Neville had grown over the past year and hid his smile. “That’s good to hear,” he said. “What about you? Are you doing NEWTs too?”

“Well, my education is all over the place,” she shrugged. “But I have my OWLs and honestly, I am just thinking of looking for a job.”

“You don’t want to go back?” asked Harry.

Hannah shook her head. “I don’t particularly have a career in mind that would need NEWTs and if I change my mind, I can always take them later,” she said. “Right now, I just need a break of sorts, you know. But when Connor starts at Hogwarts, I can start focusing on what I want, I guess.”

“Oh, are you starting at Hogwarts this year?” asked Harry, turning towards Connor in interest.

Connor went red and nodded quickly, looking down at his nearly empty bowl of soup instead of Harry. He was inexplicably reminded of the first time he met Ginny, and his gut twisted painfully. Apparently, it was going to be some time before he’d be able to think of her without it feeling like someone had punched him.

“He is, he only turned eleven three months ago,” Hannah answered, shooting an annoyed look at her brother.

“I hope you have a good year,” said Harry, truly meaning it. With Hogwarts now somewhat back to normal after a tumultuous few years, he supposed the students would finally be able to get a proper education and enjoy their childhood.

The soup was cleared away as they finished eating, and fish was served next. Harry didn’t recognise the kind of fish it was, but it was served with a soft mousse-like sauce that tasted different but not unpleasantly so. He was also grateful that Aunt Petunia, of all people, had taught him how the silverware worked. Not because he was expected to sit at the table, of course, but he’d set the table for countless of Uncle Vernon’s dinner parties before he was either locked in his cupboard or his room.
Ignoring the unpleasant memories, he reached for the correct silverware without needing to be prompted, as he and Hannah continued to chat, mostly about Hogwarts and how their friends were doing these days. Connor seemed too embarrassed to speak to Harry, and Robert was observing the whole thing but not saying much at all, which was starting to worry Harry a little. Fortunately, Hannah was a very easy person to talk to, so there were no awkward silences as Harry finished the fish and the dry wine that had been served with it.

The main course was served, and it was beef tenderloin with potatoes and roasted vegetables. The wine accompanying it was from the bottle Harry had brought as a gift, and it was his first time tasting wine made by the Pride Farmhouse house elves.

“Oh my,” said Hannah, as she took the first sip. “This is divine.”

Harry had to agree, as he drank the wine. He was new to wine, but even he could tell how the rich taste and slightly floral scent worked harmoniously. Making up his mind to get some lessons in the basics with Gerry, Harry glanced at Robert, who looked very impressed as he tasted the wine.

“Delightful,” said Robert. “I admit I’m not one for red wine, but this is quite delightful.”

“I am glad you like it,” said Harry.

Connor looked a bit put out that he wasn’t allowed to drink, but he apparently thought better of trying to throw a tantrum when Harry was around.

Dessert was served next, and it was simple French vanilla ice cream, though not as good as the ice cream at Hogwarts. Once again, it was accompanied by some sort of a sweet wine, and Harry wondered if each dinner party was planned this elaborately. They hadn’t gotten around to discussing the menu for the Halloween event, but he was glad they weren’t doing a full feast like he’d initially assumed, if feasts were expected to be this way.

It was halfway through dessert that Hannah finally brought up the Potter Foundation.

“I’ll admit, though, it was a bit of a surprise,” she said. “You starting a charity and all.”

“Was it?” asked Harry.

“Don’t get me wrong, it seems just like you to want to do something,” she said, worried that she’d offended him somehow. “But Daddy told me private charities haven’t been set up in a while.”

“Yes, but we did just go through two wars one after another,” said Harry, glancing at Robert who was listening raptly.

“My mum used to say we needed more private organisations,” said Hannah. “She even tried to organise one, but it never went anywhere.”

“Well, the Potter Foundation is just getting started, but we are hoping to do what we can,” said Harry, carefully.

“And what would you say that entails?” asked Robert, and Harry supposed they had finally arrived at the business part of the evening.

“We are starting small and focusing on providing assistance to St. Mungo’s for now,” he said, which was neither a lie nor the complete truth. Daphne would be proud.

“I wouldn’t say that donation was small by any means, Harry,” said Hannah.
He smiled a little in her direction, but returned his attention to Robert. “I just did what I could,” he said, modestly.

“What about people who aren’t able to do that?” asked Robert.

“What do you mean?” asked Harry.

“While it is true that a large majority of the wizarding population continued working and earning an income through the war, a lot more, particularly Muggleborns and a lot of half-bloods suffered quite a bit,” said Robert. “Wouldn’t you say?”

“Of course,” said Harry.

Robert gave a measured nod. “They lost their jobs, their homes, many of them lost family to Death Eaters or that forsaken Commission,” he hissed the last words with disgust. Harry merely nodded and waited for him to continue. “That is why I invited you here today, Harry,” said Robert, collecting himself. “I am putting together a bill that would establish an employment program with the Ministry to help people get back on their feet.”

Harry’s eyebrows shot up with interest but he remembered Daphne’s warning of not agreeing to anything until he knew and understood it properly, even if it seemed wonderful on the surface. “What kind of a program will it be?” asked Harry. “And how do you think I’d be able to help?”

The dessert plates were cleared away, while Robert contemplated his response. “Why don’t we speak in the parlour?” he said, standing up.

Harry nodded and stood up as well. Hannah said she would take Connor upstairs while they talked, so Harry and Robert went to the parlour where a cheese platter was laid out. Robert poured him a flute of sparkling wine and Harry accepted it with a nod. They sat down at a small table near the fireplace with their drinks and the cheese platter on the table between them.

“I am still in the process of drafting the particulars,” said Robert, picking up as if there had been no interruption. “However, when I read about the Potter Foundation, I felt a collaboration would make the program function better. Twiggy!”

The same stout house elf from before popped in and handed a sheaf of documents to Robert, who took it and dismissed the elf with a nod. “These are my proposed objectives, and I would love to know your thoughts, Harry.”

Harry took the documents from him and began looking through them. He could feel Robert watching him closely, and worked to keep his face neutral. The objectives were as he had said previously, to assist those struggling to get back on their feet. Instead of mere charity, it would include assisting them with finding and keeping employment, finding housing, and even a proposed care plan with a mind healer at St. Mungo’s to help cope with everything.

“It looks fine so far, but I would like to see the particulars,” said Harry.

Robert smiled. “That is very smart of you,” he said. “And yes, once I have drafted the particulars, we could discuss it further. I am not expecting a firm answer tonight, Harry, but I wanted to make you aware of what I am working on and if I could count on your support in the Wizengamot and beyond.”

“What do you mean by beyond?” asked Harry.

“Well, even if by some miracle we get most of this passed through the Wizengamot, I doubt the
Ministry will readily provide us with funds to assist,” said Robert. “This is where I thought the Potter Foundation could come in to help.”

“I cannot make any promises,” said Harry, firmly. “But I am sure we would assist if we are able to do so. You’re right, there need to be measures taken beyond just giving out gold. I am definitely interested, Robert, but as I said, I would like to hear particulars before agreeing to anything.”

“And if the particulars are to your liking?” asked Robert, raising an eyebrow.

Harry gave a short nod. “Then I would make sure we get it passed through the Wizengamot and see how the Potter Foundation can help.”
15th June, 1998

“Have you got your spare quills?” asked Hermione. “And your wand?”

Harry smiled at her in amusement, probably because he knew she was more nervous for his NEWTs than he was. “Hermione, do you think I’d let my wand out of sight?” he asked.

“That’s not the point!” she said, though she went pink. “I’m just checking.”

“I am fine,” he said. “I’ve got what I need, so take a breath, alright?”

Hermione nodded and went quiet. For about ten seconds. “Do you need me to go over-?”

“No,” he said, firmly. “No more studying. Daphne and I did some revising yesterday, so I’m fine.”

Hermione raised her eyebrows in slight surprise, but nodded.

“I should head out,” said Harry, smiling fondly. “They told us to get there at least half an hour before starting.”

“Alright,” said Hermione, and gave him a tight hug. “Good luck, Harry.”

“Thanks,” he said, patting her back.

Hermione sighed as he left. It was good that he was dealing with things in his own way, but it felt like they were all drifting apart more than ever. She missed seeing Harry every day, even though she understood intellectually that their relationship was just maturing. From spending everyday together, whether at Hogwarts or during holidays or on the run from Voldemort and Death Eaters, they had always been together. It was not feasible anymore, but that didn’t mean she didn’t miss him.

Ron was the other thing. In some ways, she missed him almost as much as she missed Harry, and it was made worse by the fact that they were still technically dating. With another heavy sigh, Hermione walked over to the fireplace and dropped some floo powder into it.

“The Burrow!”

Travelling through the fire, she arrived in the Burrow’s kitchen. She spotted Ginny in the midst of clearing up breakfast and smiled in greeting.

“Morning,” she said.

Ginny smiled back weakly. “Good morning,” she said.

“Where is everyone?” she asked.

“Work,” said Ginny. “Mum’s upstairs. I sent her to take a nap after…”

“You told her about the breakup?” asked Hermione.

“Yeah,” shrugged Ginny. “There would have been no point in hiding it, I guess.”

“Did she take it badly?” asked Hermione.
“Well, not exactly,” said Ginny, reluctantly. “When I told her that Harry and I broke up, she just said we’ll work it out. I think she figured it was just a falling out and we’d make up or something.”

Hermione winced. She could imagine Molly saying something like that, but from what Ginny had told her, it had been a pretty final thing. She hadn’t asked Harry’s side of things, mostly because she didn’t want to interrogate him before he went off to do his NEWTs. There would be time after the exams were done to hear him out. Besides, she had been the one to point out that he and Ginny should discuss their relationship properly in the first place, so it wasn’t like she hadn’t completely seen this coming.

“I guess she just expects things to remain the same as ever,” said Ginny, and took a seat at the table. “It would be comforting, if nothing else.”

“I’m sorry, Ginny,” said Hermione. “I wish it would have worked out between you and Harry.”

Ginny swallowed heavily and nodded. “Me too,” she said. “I keep second guessing myself, you know,” she admitted in a low voice. “I have always known I loved him. Even before I met him. But the more I think about it, the more I feel like I never really knew him. I just heard about him from the people around me. From mum, from Ron, even from you. Was I even in love with him? Harry, the real person, not Harry Potter.”

Hermione pressed her lips together in sympathy. She understood what she was saying, and it was unfortunate that it had taken so long for Ginny to realise it. She remembered a twelve year old Ginny following Hermione around, asking all about Harry Potter. At the time, Hermione had been a little amused at the crush, so she’d answered Ginny’s questions, unaware that she was fanning something along the lines of worship that Ginny had for the dashing hero that she’d built up in her imagination.

“Ginny,” said Hermione, gently. “I am sure you loved Harry in your own way. And you made him feel loved, when you were together, I know that.”

“But it wasn’t enough, was it?” asked Ginny, looking like she was trying not to burst into tears. “Not for him and not for me either. If I really loved him, I would do what he wanted, wouldn’t I?”

“No,” said Hermione, making her voice firm. “No matter how much you love someone, nothing is worth giving up every part of yourself over to them, expecting nothing in return. That isn’t a partnership, that is just punishing yourself for the sake of someone else. You made the right choice, Ginny.”

“But it still hurts so much,” whispered Ginny.

Hermione put an arm around her shoulder comfortingly. “I know,” she said. “It’s alright to let it hurt you. You are a wonderful, brave, strong woman, Ginny. You will be okay.”

~

Arriving in the busy Atrium of the Ministry, Harry shook his head to clear it. Hermione had all but demanded to see him before his exams to make sure he was prepared. In the craziness of the war, he’d truly forgotten how frantic Hermione tended to get around exam time, but he strangely found it comforting. There would be no going back to the days when exams were the worst of their problems, but it was nice to have the familiarity, even if it were likely for the very last time.

She hadn’t asked about Ginny and the breakup, and Harry was a little grateful for it. He didn’t want to talk about it, mostly because he was ashamed to say that he was strangely alright with it. He still felt horrible about leading Ginny on and nearly making her do something without considering her
wishes, and he hoped she would one day feel like forgiving him for it. And yet deep down, he was a little relieved as well. He wondered if he had on some level already realised that he and Ginny had no future together, which was why he’d never opened up to her properly.

Taking a calm breath, he decided it was best to focus on work, like he’d told Daphne. He still had people around him who were working hard for the sake of the wizarding world and he had taken on the responsibility of leading them and there was no way he was giving up on that. He would fix their broken world, no matter what it took.

It had been a while since he’d come to the Ministry, certainly not since resigning from the Aurors and the first Wizengamot session, and though the place was still just as tense as it had been since the end of the war, the Atrium looked a little more organised than the overly subdued air he’d found so repressive. Or maybe it was only his outlook that was better than it was when he’d been working for the Aurors.

He garnered more than a few curious looks, some people not even bothering to hide the fact that they were staring at him and blocking everyone else’s path while doing so.

“Ah, should have known it was you holding up traffic,” said a very familiar voice and Harry turned around with a wide grin to greet Neville Longbottom.

“Can’t seem to help it,” joked Harry, and Neville laughed and walked over to him to clap him on the shoulder. “How have you been?” he asked, lowering his voice as they walked over to the examination hall together.

“Not bad,” shrugged Neville. “Mostly, I’ve been too busy taking over the estate to deal with anything, y’know.”

“I can imagine,” nodded Harry.

“Yeah, that was some performance back in the Wizengamot two weeks ago,” grinned Neville. “And I heard about the Potter Foundation too. Well done, mate.”

“Thanks,” said Harry. “Doing what I can, y’know.”

“That’s more than we can say for most people,” said Neville.

“I’m surprised you aren’t going back to Hogwarts,” said Harry.

“I can’t,” he confessed, with a wry smile. “Too many memories. Bad ones, unfortunately.”

Harry almost apologised, but knew of all people, Neville would never appreciate it. “We should meet for a drink once we get done with the exams,” he said.

Neville grinned. “I’d like that,” he said, as they reached the examination hall and went to the room marked for NEWT students.

They opened the double doors together, and found a hallway full of waiting students, all of them falling silent when they entered. Harry recognised almost every single one of them and found it to be a mixture of all four houses.

“Er, hi,” said Harry, awkwardly.

Neville laughed, and most of them joined in. Former DA members were the first to come up to them, and Harry got caught up in talking and catching up. He noticed Nott, Goyle and Parkinson standing
at the very end of the hallway and trying and failing not to glare over at him. He also spotted Draco, who was standing away from them, and not looking at anything in particular. Daphne was nowhere in sight, and as Harry spoke to Seamus and Dean, the door behind them opened and Daphne walked in.

Her gaze met Harry’s, and despite her completely calm face, he saw a look of urgency in her eyes. She gave the tiniest tilt of her head and left, clearly a request for him to go with her. Harry muttered something about finding a bathroom and hurried outside. He saw Daphne open the door to the women’s bathroom and Harry did a quick glance to see no one was around before following her.

As soon as he walked inside, she shut the door and locked it, putting up a quick seal for privacy that he recognised from the Verdant offices. Harry did another quick glance around them, noting with relief that all the stalls were empty and that the Saviour of the wizarding world wouldn’t be labelled a pervert for being in the women’s bathroom at the Ministry. He dearly wished he’d had the foresight to bring his cloak, and made a note to keep it on him regularly from now on.

Watching Daphne closely now, he realised that she was trembling.

“What happened?” he asked, at once.

Daphne looked at him and he saw the anger on her face. “We got played,” she hissed in a low voice, and thrust a letter at him. “Abercrombie called an emergency Wizengamot session starting in…” she checked her watch, “…about twenty minutes.”

Harry’s eyebrows shot up. “I didn’t get a letter,” he said.

“He only sent them out half an hour ago,” she said, eyes spitting blue fire. “That conniving, old bastard. He knew we would be doing NEWTs.”

He’d never seen her so angry before, and the sight was shocking enough for him to remain calm. “What happens if we aren’t there?” he asked.

“Well, the idiots we have under contracts won’t know which way to vote, so it will be all over the place, or worse, they’ll follow someone like Lucius,” she hissed. “The votes of those that aren’t present will be noted as abstentions.”

Harry frowned. Abercrombie had to have a plan, and he shared Daphne’s unease when it came to the votes. Sure they were under contracts to vote the way Harry told them, but if he weren’t there, they could vote of their own volition, of course. “What do we do?” he asked her, his voice measured.

“How can you be so calm about this?” she asked.

“I’m used to things going wrong at the last minute,” he said, honestly. “And besides, we’re on a deadline. So, what do we do?”

Daphne took a deep breath and exhaled slowly. “Did I see you with Longbottom in there?” she asked.

“Yeah,” he nodded, wondering why she was asking about Neville.

“Get him in here,” she said.

Harry left, and quickly called Neville out, mentioning wanting a word in private. Neville followed immediately, probably noting the seriousness of his demeanour. If Neville was surprised when Harry led him into the women’s bathroom, he didn’t show it.
“Here, sign and seal it,” said Daphne, handing Harry a letter that she had just finished writing as soon as he walked in.

Harry read through it quickly and saw that it was his power of attorney, giving Andromeda Tonks the authority over his votes. He saw the genius in her idea immediately and got to work.

“Elder Longbottom,” said Daphne, turning to Neville. “I apologise for my abrupt manner and the unfortunate choice of venue, but are you able to write a letter granting power of attorney to Lady Augusta?”

“What’s going on?” asked Neville, though he didn’t sound particularly opposed to her question.

“Abercrombie called an emergency session, knowing a bunch of us would be here,” said Harry, without looking up from what he was doing.

“Why would he-? Never mind,” said Neville. “Tell me what to write, er, Madam Greengrass.”

Daphne dictated the proper words to put in a power of attorney letter, and Neville quickly wrote it down. Harry handed the signed and sealed letter to Daphne.

“Annie!” she called. The house elf arrived immediately. “Take this to Andromeda. Tell her to stall and call for an adjournment.”

Annie vanished with a nod, and Neville finished signing and sealing his letter as well. He also had a note on a separate piece of parchment, and when Harry looked at him in question, he just grinned.

“Trust me, Gran is a big fan of the rules, especially when it comes to the Wizengamot,” he said, as Annie returned. “I’m not sure what’s going on, so I wrote that Abercrombie is up to no good, and knowing her, she will probably raise all seven hells for him in today’s session.”

Harry almost felt sorry for the Chief Warlock, but as heard the slight hitch of tension in Daphne’s voice as she instructed Annie to take the letter and note to Augusta Longbottom, he figured the slimy old man deserved every bit of the seven hells.

“We should head back,” said Neville. “We have less than ten minutes before the first exam.”

“You go on, we’ll be right behind you,” said Harry. Neville looked between him and Daphne with a slightly perturbed expression, but gave a nod and left.

Harry turned to Daphne, who seemed slightly calmer, though her hands were still shaking. “Daph, you have to calm down,” he said.

“I know that,” she snapped, and then took a deep breath. “I’m just furious.”

“We’ll make Abercrombie pay,” he said.

“It’s not just that,” she said, and glanced away. “I should have seen this coming.”

“Daph,” he began, but she shook her head.

“It’s my job to anticipate sneaky moves like these,” she said. “I should already have had something in place since we would be busy. Some Slytherin I am...”

Harry grabbed her arms gently, and she stopped and stared at him in shock. “Daphne,” he said, making his voice firm yet without anger. “Unless you are a seer, you can’t foresee every move. We dealt with it for now, and we will deal with the rest once we have time. I’ll help you curse
Abercrombie’s oily old face when we see him next, alright?”

She narrowed her eyes at him, but then sighed. “Yes, although I do not appreciate the patronising attitude,” she said, shaking free from his grip easily.

“Consider it payback,” he said, giving her a grin. “It’s a role reversal, with you freaking out and me being calm for once.”

“Apparently, you deal better with last minute surprises,” said Daphne.

“Comes from a lifetime of coasting on the infamous Potter luck,” he muttered.

She gave him a slightly curious look before smiling. “While I’d love to hear more, we have an exam starting in less than two minutes,” she said, and turned to leave. “Oh,” she added, glancing back at him. “Thanks. For calming me down.”

“Anytime,” he smiled, feeling a little warm under the collar. “Let’s leave the rest to Andromeda.”

~

Hermann Abercrombie glanced around at the half-filled Wizengamot chamber and hid his satisfied smirk. It had been an underhanded move, certainly, but it had worked. He looked at Eugene Orpington, who only gave him a curt nod, which made Abercrombie bristle. Eugene had warned him against this move, but if it worked, the conniving bastard would be sure to claim the credit. Abercrombie’s alliance with Orpington was one of convenience and necessity, but personally, Abercrombie couldn’t stand the man.

“This will work,” murmured Cassius Zeller, and Abercrombie smiled gratefully at his old friend. The rest of their alliance members might defect to Orpington completely if this failed, but he knew he could count on good old Cassius to be on his side. “We’ll finally get it passed.”

The reason for this risky, underhanded move had been Motion 3987-E. A motion tied to the Wizengamot process and one that had been introduced and rejected 18 times in the past. It would have been rejected in today’s Wizengamot too, but Abercrombie had thought to give a heads-up to like-minded people while calling this emergency session when he knew the rest of the factions would be occupied or just plain confused. They were getting Motion 3987-E passed today, no matter what.

Motion 3987-E had first been introduced after Voldemort’s defeat back in 1981. It had been an ideal chance to wrench some power free from the elite purebloods. While getting a bill passed involved a lot of debating, multiple sessions, and votes and tallies, a motion (especially one brought by the Chief Warlock) only required majority votes to pass. Motion 3987-E had been brought in as one of the “equalising measures” following the end of the first war, and it essentially would alter the Wizengamot process so that every seat had only one vote. While this wouldn’t mean much otherwise, it would slash the votes of the permanent seats by half.

Suffice to say, the motion hadn’t passed, though people like Abercrombie had never stopped clamouring for it. They’d thought the end of this war would be ideal to reintroduce it until Harry Potter had thrown a massive wrench in their plan.

But Potter wasn’t here now, and while they could still be outvoted by the remaining permanent members, Abercrombie had done his research. Most of the new permanent seats were off doing NEWTs, Fawley was in Italy on vacation, Slughorn was assisting the Wizarding Examinations Authority and was unavailable, and even the Minister was in a diplomatic meeting with the German Minister of Magic. Abercrombie’s whole faction was present though, and he was confident even the
non-permanent members who weren’t included in that group were sure to grasp this chance to level the playing field, so to speak.

Abercrombie had complete faith they would finally get the motion through, no matter what Orpington thought.

The clock struck nine, and Abercrombie stood up. “Ladies and gentlemen of the Wizengamot,” he began. “On my authority as the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, I hereby commence this session.” He glanced around at the seats once more and did a mental tally. He did spot Andromeda Tonks in the Black seat who could be potentially an issue, seeing as how Potter was technically the head of her family, but he doubted it would prevent their plans from being carried ou…

“Point of order, Chief Warlock.” Andromeda Tonks stood up, and Abercrombie felt the first frisson of doubt though he dismissed it.

“Yes, Madam Tonks?” he asked.

“May the Wizengamot know the reason for a session being called out of time?” she asked.

*Damnable woman,* thought Abercrombie. “The Wizengamot Charter states clearly that the Chief Warlock has the authority to call a session out of time, Madam Tonks,” he said. “I realise you are new to this, but I would recommend reading the Charter, at the very least.”

“I am well-aware of Regulation 50.34 under the Chief Warlock’s powers of the Wizengamot Charter, Chief Warlock,” she said, without missing a beat. “My question was, why was this session called on a Monday morning, with half an hour’s notice, when more than half of the members are missing?”

“That is something I would like to know as well,” said a formidable voice and Abercrombie jumped a little as the doors opened and Augusta Longbottom strode inside. Out of the corner of his eye, Abercrombie saw Orpington’s clear shake of head which was meant to indicate they’d already lost. But Abercrombie knew it was too soon to make that call.

“Madam Longbottom, this is a closed session for members of the Wizengamot,” he said. “As I understand, you are no longer the rightful occupant of the Longbottom seat.”

She paid him no mind and took her former seat, which made him bristle at the disrespect. He opened his mouth to have her thrown out, when she banished a folded piece of parchment towards him.

“Power of attorney,” she said. “Signed and sealed by Elder Neville Longbottom, the current head of the Longbottom family and the occupant of this seat.”

*Shit,* was Abercrombie’s thought.

“That should suffice, shouldn’t it, Chief Warlock?” asked Augusta, sternly.

Abercrombie enlarged the letter for the benefit of everyone else in the chamber and gave a curt nod. “Yes, that is sufficient,” he said.

“Well then, I apologise for interrupting, Madam Tonks,” said Augusta, inclining her head in a short bow towards her.

“Thank you, Madam Longbottom,” said Andromeda. “Though, you did remind me that I have a document to present as well.”
Abercrombie felt a chill as he saw the smirk on Andromeda’s face that reminded him distinctly of Bellatrix Lestrange.

“Power of attorney. From Elder Potter.”

Chief Warlock Hermann Abercrombie tried to anticipate just how bad this was going to be.

He didn’t even come close to the reality.

~

While the Wizengamot was witnessing a spectacle of epic proportions as Augusta Longbottom unabashedly tore the Chief Warlock a new one for his blatantly unimpressive move of calling an emergency session for no damn reason while the Wizengamot was half-empty, an unaware Harry finished his Herbology written exam. It had never been his best subject, but he felt he did decently enough, considering all the revising they had done in Greengrass Manor.

“Quills down,” said Professor Horace Slughorn, who was filling in as an examination supervisor for the day. “I will be collecting your papers now”

With a wave of Slughorn’s wand, the scrolls of parchments all flew to the front and stacked themselves neatly on his desk. He did a quick count and gave them all a nod.

“We will begin the Potions written exam in five minutes,” he said.

Harry stretched his arms lightly and listened as Slughorn gave them the same instructions that he had before the Herbology exam. Minutes later, they all had a blank exam paper in front of them.

“And begin,” said Slughorn.

Harry unfurled the scroll of parchment and sighed as he started writing. The answers for Potions definitely came to him easier than Herbology, thanks in no part to his thorough study of the half-blood prince’s book. He wondered if Snape was rolling in his grave at this very moment, and thinking of his old Potions Master was even more conflicting than thinking about Dumbledore these days. Deciding to ignore it for the time being, he wrote his answers steadily, only looking up when there were ten minutes to the end of the exam.

Once Slughorn had collected their Potions written exam as well, he dismissed them with a smile, telling them they had an hour for lunch before they would do their practical exams for Herbology and Potions. As everyone exited the examination hall, Harry saw Daphne almost fly out of her chair, and he assumed it was to go find Andromeda to see what happened. Considering she didn’t wait for him, he supposed she would let him know later.

“You coming?” asked Neville.

“Yeah,” said Harry, gathering his things and following Neville. “Er, where are we going?”

“Seamus said they set up lunch in the next room for all the students,” said Neville.

Sure enough, there was a table with platters of sandwiches, and tea and coffee for the students in the room next doors. Apart from the NEWT students, Harry saw a few younger students as well, Astoria Greengrass among them. She appeared to be looking around, probably for Daphne.

“I’ll be right back,” Harry told Neville, and walked up to her. “Hey, Tori. Are you looking for Daphne?”
“Oh, hi, Harry,” she said. “Yeah, where is she?”

“Er, she’s just...gone to check up on something,” he said.

Astoria lowered her voice. “Is it about the Wizengamot?” she asked. “Daph got the letter just as we were getting ready to leave and she was in a right state.”

“Yeah, she managed to handle it, but I guess she went to make sure it worked,” he said.

“That sounds like her,” shrugged Astoria.

“I’ve never seen her like that before,” he admitted.

Astoria chuckled. “The thing about my sister is that she has a plan upon a plan upon a plan upon a plan. Every single time, without fail. But those plans depend on her ability to anticipate the issues that might come up. So when something unexpected happens, she gets...a little frazzled,” she said.

“But she still dealt with it,” he said, feeling like he had to defend Daphne.

“Of course she did,” said Astoria, like there was never any doubt. “She is brilliant, and you hired her for a reason, didn’t you? Just because she gets frazzled for a moment doesn’t mean she can’t pull it together.” She paused and looked at Harry speculatively. “It’s funny, though, she never lets anyone see when she gets like that.”

Harry stared at her, wondering what that was supposed to mean. He was about to ask, when Astoria looked past him at someone and waved.

“Speaking of whom,” she said, and Harry turned around as he saw Daphne approaching. “Hey, everything alright?”

“Yes, everything is just fine,” said Daphne, as she reached them. She did appear a lot more relaxed than before, and if anything, Harry thought she looked like she might burst into laughter at any moment. He went to ask her, but she shook her head. “Not here,” she whispered. “We’re drawing too much attention.”

Harry realised that a lot of people were trying and failing to look as if they weren’t staring at him, and he wondered if poor Astoria was going to be hounded. He quickly excused himself and returned to where Neville, Dean and Seamus were sitting, leaving the Greengrass sisters alone.

“What was that about?” asked Seamus, as Harry got to them.

“Seamus,” said Dean, shaking his head.

“Oh, come on, you saw him talking to the ice queen’s sister,” said Seamus, in a low whisper. “Since when are you friends? And also, can you introduce us?”

“To the ice queen or her sister?” asked Dean, amused despite his initial disapproval.

“Not introducing you to either of them,” said Harry, firmly.

“Oh, don’t be like that,” said Seamus. “You have a girlfriend. Have pity on the rest of us.”

“I don’t, actually,” said Harry.

“What, have pity?” asked Dean.
“Well, yes, but also I don’t have a girlfriend,” shrugged Harry.

“You and Ginny broke up?” asked Neville, surprised. “When?”

“Last week,” he answered.

There was an awkward silence, before Dean cleared his throat. “Sorry to hear that,” he said.


“So, are you dating the ice queen now?” asked Seamus.

“Seamus, not the time,” said Neville, shaking his head.

“It’s fine,” shrugged Harry. “And no, I’m not dating her. Daphne is my lawyer.”

“Oh, right, the Verdant firm, that makes sense,” said Neville, like a piece had clicked into place. “I wondered how you had been handling all the estate business. Gran had been managing ours, but I can’t even imagine how complicated yours was.”

“Is it a big deal?” asked Dean, clearly out of the loop.

“Of course,” answered Seamus, surprisingly. “Both the Potter and Longbottom families are old lines. There are no titles in the wizarding world like the Muggle ones, but lordships are still very much present, though there are very few families apart from the Sacred Twenty Eight who can claim the privilege.”

“Even among the Sacred Twenty Eight, I doubt there are many who still have their lordship status,” said Neville, and Harry fought to keep his face neutral. “Gran says she wouldn’t be surprised if the idiots handed it over to Voldemort.”

“So, do they get it back now that You-Know-Who is gone?” asked Dean.

“Who knows?” shrugged Neville. “I doubt it, though. They will be lord in name, mostly, and not much else.”

“Buncha bastards,” muttered Seamus.

“Good news is that most of them are rotting in Azkaban,” said Dean. “Doubt they’ll see the light of day again.”

“You’re right about that,” said Neville, and Harry privately agreed. “Well, enough gloominess. Let’s get something to eat.”

As they all returned with their food, Harry got more of a chance to learn what they had been up to and what their plans for the future were. Both Seamus and Dean had been recruited for the Auror Department by Robards, not long after Harry had resigned. They had accepted, though Harry could tell their interest lay elsewhere and they had only taken it on out of need for a job. Neville mentioned he was still deciding what to do and had turned down Robards, citing family reasons.

While they were talking, they were joined by Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws from their year. Ernie Macmillan was training to take over for his father and would likely apply to work somewhere in the Ministry once he had his NEWTs. He also informed them that Justin was returning to Hogwarts, since he had missed the entire previous year having been in hiding. Word also had it that Zacharias Smith was going back to Hogwarts, but Harry didn’t much care for the slimy bastard.
“What about you, Susan?” asked Harry. “Staying on with the Aurors?” She had been one of the few people who had joined around the same time that he had.

Susan Bones smiled at him. “Yeah, Robards is still cross you aren’t around, so he’s making sure we keep our numbers and recruit more,” she said.

“How’s it looking these days?” asked Harry.

“Not bad,” she shrugged. “War’s over but crime is still a bit rampant, so the field Aurors are busy. Then, of course, we have the Death Eater trials starting in September, so I have mostly been helping Robards prepare.”

“Robards is prosecuting?” asked Terry Boot, looking surprised. “Who’s the head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement?”

“Billington’s the temporary head,” said Harry, remembering the slightly absent-minded older witch. “When I was around, there were rumours Thicknesse would be named the permanent head.”

Susan gave a nod. “Thicknesse is still at St. Mungo’s,” she said. “Yaxley’s Imperius did a number on him, but Robards said he’s a stubborn bastard. He’s still determined to come back and set right the things he did, he says.”

“Well, I should hope so,” said Seamus, darkly. “He was the damn Minister when the Death Eaters had their way.”

“He was under the imperius,” defended Susan. “A genuinely strong imperius. Thicknesse was close to my auntie and it must have torn him apart to become a puppet of the people he despised with every fibre of his being.”

“Sorry,” said Seamus.

“So, what about everyone else?” asked Neville, effectively diffusing the tension.

It turned out that most Ravenclaws were returning to Hogwarts, with the exception of former DA members Terry Boot, Anthony Goldstein and Michael Corner. A recently recovered Michael was applying to the Aurors once he had his NEWTs, while Anthony was looking for a job.

“Something at the Ministry, probably,” he said, when Neville asked him about it. “I’d like to work in research, so the Department of Mysteries is my best bet.”

“What kind of research are you interested in?” asked Harry.

“I don’t have a specific area in mind, but definitely something to do with runes,” he answered. “Warding, in particular, is very interesting to me but I doubt I’d find work unless I get taken on as an apprentice.”

“Have you tried applying?” asked Ernie.

“Yeah,” shrugged Anthony. “One of them was even happy to take me on, depending on my NEWT result, except the Ministry slashed his grant, so he can’t anymore.”

“What was his name?” asked Harry.

“Why?” asked Anthony, as everyone else looked confused.

“Er, curiosity,” said Harry.
Anthony gave him a weird look, but shrugged. “Sure, er, he’s called Noah Desford. He’s a Runes Master who specialises in warding,” he said.

“What about you, Terry?” asked Neville.

“Joining the family business,” he said, with a small smile. “My Dad’s been on my case about joining up, ‘cos he needs the help.”

“What is it that your family does, Boot?” asked Seamus, curiously.

“Well, we used to run a travel equipment shop, but we evacuated out of Diagon Alley when it got dangerous,” he said. “My dad opened up a smaller store in our village so we mostly operate through Owl Order these days. It’s not as big as it used to be, but Dad says if we raise enough funds, we could get the old shop back.”

Harry made careful notes in his head, planning on speaking to Daphne about all of it. The hour ended all too quickly, and they were instructed to wait in the hallway outside the examination hall to be called in four people at a time for their practical exams.

The Herbology practical involved picking three plants out of the many set on a long table, and extract important ingredients in the most efficient way. Under the keen eye of Professor Tofty who had beamed at Harry when he entered, Harry chose Bubotuber, Venomous Tentacula and Snargaluff as his three choices, since they were among the ones he remembered best. Thanks to Daphne’s guidance back in the Greengrass greenhouses, he didn’t mess up too badly, only fumbling once with the Snargaluff, and received an approving nod and a “Well done, Mr. Potter” from Professor Tofty.

There was only a short time to wait before their Potions practical, and Harry could have laughed when he saw they were to brew the Draught of the Living Death. Probably the potion he remembered best, Harry worked methodically and used techniques from Snape’s textbook to make sure it would be perfect. Remembering how Slughorn had tested it, once it was done brewing, he tested it on a leaf, smiling in satisfaction when it disintegrated. Professor Sinistra, who was one of the other supervisors helping out, looked impressed at his work.

“And time is up!” said Professor Sinistra. “Please step away from your cauldrons and wait until I have collected your vials.”

Exhausted at the very stressful day of exams, Harry was all too happy when Sinistra dismissed them. Saying goodbye to Neville and the others, Harry hurried off to the Atrium and went to Diagon Alley, arriving behind the GSC HQ. Daphne arrived only a moment after him, and Draco right after her.

Upstairs, they found the others hard at work, and even though it was almost the end of the day, they decided to get some work done together.

“So, what happened in the Wizengamot?” asked Harry, unable to be kept in suspense much longer.

“We ended with an adjournment,” said Andromeda. “Augusta also made sure Abercrombie wouldn’t do something so stupid again.”

“Oh, and I’d keep an eye on the Prophet,” said Tracey, grinning wickedly. “After Andromeda let me know what had happened, I provided Ben with the transcript of today’s failed session. I doubt it’s going to be very pretty for the Chief Warlock.”

Harry grinned, but he noticed Daphne didn’t look much happier than before. He would have thought she’d be overjoyed that Abercrombie was getting his comeuppance, but she appeared unruffled.
“That’s that, then,” said Daphne. “What about everyone else? Any progress?”

“The house elves will be done with the Fortescue Cafe’s renovations by tomorrow,” said Fleur. “Finn said he’ll do a soft launch on Friday, and then open from Monday.”

“So soon?” asked Parvati, surprised.

“He had most of it ready to go, and considering everything else has been fast-tracked, he is fine to start as soon as possible,” said Fleur. “The application also came in approved from the Ministry, so there’s no more red tape to worry about.”

“That’s good,” said Harry. “Can we get some publicity for the launch?”

“Already on it,” said Tracey. “I spoke to Cuffe and Marian, and they’ll both have someone covering the launch on Friday. I’d also suggest you go to the launch, Harry.”

“Why?” asked Harry.

“No better publicity than the Saviour of the wizarding world stopping by,” said Tracey, like it was obvious. “Finn doesn’t know you’re the one behind GSC and that won’t change, but it wouldn’t hurt to have you be seen in public more often.”

Harry looked at Daphne, who gave a nod at Tracey’s words. “Alright,” he agreed. “Anything else?”

“We introduced Rosette and Penelope,” said Fleur. “Penelope is already drawing up plans for the shop’s new layout and we have a new name for the store: Rosette’s Beauty Potions. It’s still being planned, but Rosette should have a decision made soon, and we can get to work on that. In the meantime, Rosette managed to find an employee. It’s an old friend of hers from Hogwarts, who will be working the storefront while Rosette focuses more on development.”

“Did Pip manage to get the supplies that she wanted?” asked Harry.

“Yes,” said Fleur. “Rosette was very happy with the quality and she’s already stocking up to get ready for the relaunch.”

“Excellent,” said Daphne.

“We also received the signed contract from the St. James couple for the pasta shop too,” said Fleur, handing Daphne the documents in question.

“I’ll look through it and sign off on their application,” nodded Daphne. “When does their lease in the Muggle world end?”

“End of June,” said Fleur. “They want to reopen here at the start of July.”

“Good, that gives us some time,” said Daphne.

“Oh, that reminds me,” said Fleur. “I spoke to Penelope and mentioned Vikram Kale’s case, and she said she’s willing to do another consultation for his shop.”

“Aren’t we still waiting to hear back from him?” asked Harry.

“We are,” nodded Fleur. “But I mentioned it to Penelope and she seemed interested.”

“It will be expensive,” Tracey pointed out.
“Considering the kind of work she is doing with Rosette, I agree that she’s very good at her job,” said Fleur.

“Up to you,” said Daphne, when Harry looked at her.

“Let’s wait until we hear back from Vikram,” said Harry. “I’m not opposed to the extra cost or anything, if you think it’s worth it.” Fleur nodded in thanks, and made a note of it. “How’d it go at the Foundation office?” he asked, turning to Andromeda and Parvati.

“I was away most of the morning, but I managed to get some work done in the afternoon,” said Andromeda. “I got started on the plan for the orphanage, and I’ll have it ready by Thursday, like I said. I would actually like to meet the current Healer-in-charge, in the meantime.”

“I’ll write to him,” said Daphne. “Is there something particular you wanted me to tell him?”

“No, I just have a few questions,” she said.

“Alright, thank you, Andromeda,” said Harry, gratefully. “Parvati?”

“It’s not as busy as before, but we had a couple visitors who gave their donations in person,” she said. “I’ve been helping Andromeda, mostly.”

“That’s fine, we aren’t expecting a lot of personal donations just yet,” said Daphne, and looked at Harry. “Do you want to share what we discussed yesterday?”

“Right, yes,” said Harry, and turned to everyone else. “I had dinner with Robert Abbott on Saturday. He’s going to introduce a bill in the Wizengamot to help with employment and housing of those displaced during the war. The particulars are still being drafted, but he asked for my support and for the support of the Potter Foundation.”

“In what way?” asked Andromeda.

“Funding, mostly, but we won’t know until we see the details,” said Harry. “But I had some questions for all of you, first. Do we own any residential buildings?”

“Uh, I think so,” said Draco, exchanging a look with Fleur. “A couple here and there in Diagon, but the Black family has more in Knockturn. These are buildings with the shops at the bottom and apartments on top.”

“And the apartments are all leased out?” asked Harry.

“Most of them should be,” said Fleur, checking through the files. “Gringotts has been managing them, and they are very strict about collecting.”

“My question is, if we were to open something like a boarding house, how would we go about it?” asked Harry.

He and Daphne had discussed it the day before, and it had been her idea to have a boarding house to provide room and board for people getting back on their feet. The rent would be minimal and it would be for those who would qualify under assistance of the new measures, and be fully funded by the Potter Foundation.

“A boarding house?” asked Draco. “That’s certainly a unique idea.”

“A lot of families who had multiple residences used to open boarding houses,” said Andromeda.
“The trend has fallen off in recent years, but it’s certainly something that could work.”

“I’ll start looking into the details,” said Fleur. “What are the legal aspects of it?” she asked Daphne.

“If it’s in Diagon Alley, we need to make an application to the Ministry like we’ve been doing for Rosette and Finn and the St. James couple,” said Daphne. “But since it will be likely funded as part of the new bill, it would depend on the kind of measures Robert Abbott comes up with. The legal aspects are sort of up in the air right now, so I’d like to know the business part of it for the time being.”

“Got it,” said Fleur. “So, you want both room and board?”

“Yes, think something like the Leaky Cauldron but having a mess hall instead of a pub, if that makes sense,” said Harry.

“That’s a good idea,” said Andromeda.

“I wonder if Hannah would want to run it,” said Harry.

“You could certainly ask,” Daphne pointed out. “Did Robert say when he’d have the details to you?”

“By the end of the week,” said Harry. “He said we could discuss it once I had the chance to look it over.”

“Are you going to introduce it into the Wizengamot immediately?” asked Andromeda, slightly alarmed.

“No,” said Daphne. “Once the bill is drafted, it has to be formally filed by Robert Abbott with the Wizengamot. The members are then given seven days to peruse the bill and a session is held to discuss the particulars. If any issues are raised, they are discussed and voted on. The bill will go through several redrafts and amendments before a final vote is held. Only after the final vote passes does it become law.”

“That sounds like it could take a long time,” said Parvati.

“That’s not even the end of it,” said Daphne. “Even after it passes, the execution can take some time. Usually, it is up to the Ministry and they can drag their feet, but since the Potter Foundation will be funding it, we can certainly work faster. We do have time to work on the boarding house, but ideally, we would have it up and running by the time the bill is passed.”

“What can we do with the press to help the process along?” asked Tracey.

“We will need a lot of good publicity once Robert introduces the bill,” said Harry. “I doubt it will be popular with some of the older members of the Wizengamot.”

“You can get it passed with the votes you have, don’t you?” asked Draco.

“Probably, but like Daphne said, it’s not just one vote,” said Harry. “It will be a constant raising of issues and resolving them to appease a large majority and that’s much harder.”

“You’re not wrong,” said Daphne. “Either way, let’s start looking into it for now.”

“Oh, and can you also look into the Boot family’s business?” asked Harry. He quickly explained his conversation with Terry, and Fleur took notes, nodding that she’d do it.
“Will you be alright dealing with all of this on your own?” Draco asked her. “We still have exams for two more days.”

“It’s fine,” she said. “Maribeth is an enormous help, so I will be alright.”

“Let’s call it a day then,” said Harry, fighting back a yawn.

Everyone began to depart, and Harry checked up on Teddy whom Maribeth had been looking after during the meeting. Once Teddy and Andromeda left, he went to the Verdant offices where he found Daphne in the midst of approving the St. James application, and she looked surprised when she saw him.

“I thought you would have headed home by now,” she said.

“Are you alright?” he asked, taking a seat in the chair in front of her.

She raised a delicate eyebrow. “If it’s about this morning…”

“That’s not it,” he said, and his lips quirked up in a smile. “Not gonna lie, it was a little surprising to see you that flustered, but you managed to fix it, so I’m not worried about that.”

“So, what is it that you’re worried about if not my ability to do the job you hired me to do?” she asked bluntly.

“Before, when Tracey told us about Abercrombie, I thought you’d be more satisfied,” he said.

She tilted her head at him. “I am,” she said. “I was furious at him, so hearing that he will pay for what he did is very satisfying.”

“Then why don’t you look happier?” he asked, wondering if he was crossing some sort of a line.

“Why does it matter?” she asked, slightly defensively.

“It matters if there’s something bothering you,” he said, knowing he was definitely crossing some sort of a line this time.

She stared at him and then glanced away. “The blame doesn’t just lie with Abercrombie,” she admitted, finally.

“Huh?” he asked.

Daphne stood up and started pacing around the office. “I should have seen this coming,” she said. “It was an obvious ploy, and if my father were here, he would give me 3 out of 10.”

“3 out of 10?” he asked.

Daphne paused and went a little red. He continued to wait for her to expand, so she sighed a little. “Did I ever tell you how my father trained me?” she asked. Without waiting for him to respond, she continued. “Ever since I was young, he would give me little riddles to solve. And everytime I gave an answer, he would give me points out of 10.”

“Don’t riddles just have a single answer usually?” asked Harry.

“They do, but these weren’t the kind of riddles you’re thinking of,” said Daphne. “For example, a lord has three sons with his wife and one daughter with a mistress. When he dies, his will states that each of his children is to receive a quarter share of his assets. If he has an estate worth a million
galleons, how much does the daughter get?”

Since she was clearly waiting for him to respond, Harry spoke up. “A quarter share, so it would be 250,000 galleons, wouldn’t it?”

“2 out of 10,” she said.

“Why?” he asked. “Oh, is it because the daughter is with a mistress, so she doesn’t get anything?”

“2.5 out of 10,” she said, smiling a little. “You’re thinking like a Ravenclaw, not a Slytherin.”

He paused and thought about it some more. “Can I ask questions?”

She beamed at him. “4 out of 10,” she said.

Encouraged, he sat up. “Is there a particular law of succession?” he asked.

“The will is to be followed to the letter,” she answered. “If there isn’t a valid will, then the law states the assets are divided equally among all children acknowledged as legitimate by the deceased.”

“Was the daughter acknowledged as legitimate?” he asked.

“Yes,” she answered. “Not that this isn’t interesting, but you haven’t asked the most important question yet.”

“Is the will valid?” he asked.

“Yes, but that’s not the right question,” she said.

“I give up,” he said, amused despite being confused.

“The most important question to ask is, what does the daughter want?” she said.

Harry blinked at her. “Oh,” he said, realising how things fell in place when she asked the question.

“Don’t feel bad, it took me a whole summer to get the right answer,” she said. “Granted I was only nine, but this is how my father would train me. He would give me scenario after scenario, growing in complexity as we went on, and I had to find the right answer until I got to 10 out of 10. Usually, by the time I had gotten there, I would have considered almost every possibility surrounding the circumstances. Often, a choice would branch out further, such as what would happen if one of the sons wasn’t the lord’s but his brother’s?”

“Sounds difficult,” said Harry.

“It was, but it was something I had to learn and master in becoming the head of the Greengrass family and inheriting the Verdant firm,” she said, and glanced down. “I failed to see an obvious flaw and nearly undid all of our work today.”

Harry wanted to deny it, but hearing her explanation made him understand her side a lot more. It wasn’t just planning for the sake of it, like he’d thought after speaking to Astoria. Daphne took it upon herself to analyse the circumstances and make sure to protect what was important, that being her client. Still, as Harry stood and walked up to her, there was one thing she wasn’t thinking about.

“Daphne,” he said, seriously. “I get what you’re saying and yes, from your perspective, you did make a mistake.” She winced as he said it, but he continued speaking. “But as your client, let me make one thing very clear: it’s okay.”
She looked up at him in shock. “Huh?” she asked, confused.

He shrugged. “I said, it’s okay,” he said. “You made a mistake, and your client says it’s okay.”

She opened and closed her mouth a few times, before chuckling. “That’s—that’s not what you’re supposed to say,” she said.

“I know,” he admitted. “But I’m saying it anyway.”

She chuckled again and he swore there was a sheen of tears in her eyes. “You’ll be a terrible client if you say that,” she said.

“I’ll live with it, I have a brilliant lawyer,” he said.

She turned away and Harry pretended not to look as she swiped at her eyes so quickly that he would have missed it if they hadn’t been standing so close.

“And just so you know,” he said, clearing his throat and glancing away. “I think you’re a fantastic head of your family and the perfect person to lead Verdant, if you give such thought to every decision you make for my sake.”

He could feel her staring at him, but he was too afraid to look up and see the expression on her face. As a beat of silence passed, he dared to raise his gaze just a little and felt his heart slam into his ribcage with sheer force. Daphne’s deep blue eyes were filled with tears, her cheeks were rosy with a delicate blush, and her lips were parted just a little as if his words had knocked her speechless. He’d always known Daphne was pretty, but in that moment, Harry was sure she was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen in his life.

When she saw him looking, she blinked and the tears from her eyes flowed down her cheeks. A slow smile lit up her face as she reached her hand up and wiped the tears from her cheeks, without bothering to turn away.

“Harry,” she said, her voice low in a way that Harry knew his knees would buckle at any moment. “Thank you.”

Harry exhaled slowly, realising he’d been holding his breath from the moment she’d said his name. “Anytime,” he said, realising that his voice had gone quite low as well.

She closed her eyes for a moment, and then took a very deliberate step back. “I think we should call it a night,” she said, regret colouring her tone unless he was much mistaken.

“Yeah,” he said, because it was becoming obvious that his body had other ideas. “I’ll just...go. See you tomorrow.”

He turned around and decided to leave before he did something colossally stupid. He barely caught her whispered goodbye, and it took every bit of willpower Harry possessed not to turn right back around and snog the living daylights out of one Daphne Greengrass.
17th June, 1998

“What time do you get done today?” Astoria asked Daphne as they made their way to the examination hall from the Atrium on the third day of exams.

“Before noon, probably,” said Daphne, having finished Herbology and Potions on Monday and then Charms and Transfiguration the day before. “We have the Defence Against Dark Arts theory exam until 10.30, and then practicals immediately afterwards. That’s it for me.”

“Lucky you,” sighed Astoria. “I still have a full day. Why didn’t you want NEWTs for Arithmancy and Ancient Runes again?”

“Don’t need them. I got the OWLs, that’s enough,” shrugged Daphne. “Will you be alright getting home by yourself later? I’m going to work after I’m done here.”

“Yeah, yeah, I’ll be fine,” said Astoria.

Daphne gave her a concerned look, despite her reassuring words. “Be on your guard, regardless,” she said.

“I will,” promised Astoria, and then smiled at someone over Daphne’s shoulder. “Hello, Harry.”

Daphne turned around and saw Harry walking up to them. “Good morning, Daphne, Astoria,” he nodded, with a smile.

“I have to go find my friends, I’ll see you both later,” said Astoria. “Don’t forget to ask Harry about Saturday.”

Daphne and Harry waved goodbye as she left. “What’s happening on Saturday?” asked Harry, curiously.

“Blaise is throwing a party,” she said. “He says it’s to celebrate the end of NEWTs, but knowing Blaise it’s more of an excuse to get everyone drunk and stupid. He asked me to invite you and Hermione.”

“Not sure about Hermione, but I’ll go,” said Harry. “I could use a break.”

“Yeah, you probably could,” nodded Daphne.

“So could you,” he said.

Daphne rolled her eyes at him, but had a slightly pleased smile on her face. She figured it was useless to pretend that Harry being concerned over her didn’t make her just a little bit happy. There weren’t many people who fell into that category; her father, Astoria, Tracey and Blaise being some of them, so it was nice to possibly add Harry to that list.

Her smile dimmed when she saw a familiar man stopped in his path in front of them. She nudged Harry, who exchanged a puzzled look with her.

“Elder Shafiq?” asked Harry, as they reached him. “Is everything alright, sir?”

Wael Shafiq jumped a little as if startled and looked at them in surprise. “Ah, Elder Potter, Madam
“Greengrass, pardon me,” he said, and then glanced around. “I must have spaced out.”

“Did something happen, Elder Shafiq?” asked Daphne.

He shook his head, though he still looked a little dazed. “I swore I saw… there he is!” He shouted the last part and pointed at someone. “Zane!”

Daphne followed his line of sight and saw that he was pointing at Dean Thomas, who had stopped and was staring over at them in confusion, as were a lot of other people.

She wondered if someone had hit him with a confundus charm, but Dean made his way over to them before she could check. “Were you talking to me, sir?” he asked, politely.

Elder Shafiq blinked when he saw him up close and looked a little embarrassed. “Ah, pardon me, young man,” he said. “I think I mistook you for my son.”

“Your son?” asked Dean. “His name was Zane?”

“Yes,” said Elder Shafiq. “You look extraordinarily like him, though he… well, he…” He shook his head and looked at Harry and Daphne. “I apologise for causing a scene.”

“Not at all,” said Harry, but Daphne noticed the startled look on Dean Thomas’ face.

“Everything alright, Thomas?” she asked.

He jumped when she said his name and nodded. “Yeah, yeah, sorry,” he said. “It’s just… that was my dad’s name.”

“I thought you never knew your father,” said Harry, and Daphne would have stepped on his foot for being so tactless had she not been watching Elder Shafiq so intently.

“I didn’t,” said Dean. “But my mum told me his name. He took off before I was born, though.”

“By great Merlin,” said Elder Shafiq, staring at Dean in a whole new light. “We knew Zane had fathered a child with a Muggle woman, shortly before his death but…”

“He’s dead?” asked Dean, looking horrified.

Discreetly, Daphne cast a charm to silence the air around them. Most people had moved on, though a few were still looking on curiously, but she figured this was private enough to not be made a spectacle of in the middle of the Ministry.

Elder Shafiq nodded heavily, his shoulders slumping. “The Death Eaters got him before You-Know-Who’s fall the first time around. He… he didn’t want to leave you and your mother, but he said they would come for you if they knew,” he said, sounding very much like he was holding back tears.

“I never knew,” said Dean, looking like he would faint.

“He didn’t want you to know,” said Elder Shafiq, smiling faintly. “The Shafiq family is ancient and connected, and when we refused to join You-Know-Who, most of the family was hunted down and killed. I am so glad to see that you are alive, oh goodness, I didn’t even ask your name, dear boy.”

“Dean Thomas,” he said, and awkwardly held out his hand. “My name is Dean Thomas.”

“It is very nice to meet you, Dean,” said Elder Shafiq, shaking his hand.
“Er, I don’t mean to be rude,” said Dean. “But...are you saying you are really my grandfather? That I’m a half-blood, not a Muggleborn?”

“I am absolutely convinced of it, yes,” nodded Elder Shafiq, and then noticed Harry and Daphne were still there. “Ah, Elder Potter, Madam Greengrass, I seem to have rather inconvenienced you both.”

“Not at all. We apologise for intruding on a private moment,” said Daphne, easily. “If I might impose just a moment further, a visit to Gringotts may not be amiss.”

Elder Shafiq nodded vigorously. “I will make an appointment at once,” he said. “Dean, I apologise for being pushy, but I would appreciate you accompanying me to Gringotts for an inheritance test.”

“I...have the Defence Against the Dark Arts exam in twenty minutes,” said Dean, clearly still a little out of sorts and Daphne honestly didn’t blame him.

Fortunately, Harry jumped into action and clapped Dean on the shoulder before looking at Elder Shafiq. “We will be done by noon,” he said.

“Very well,” said Elder Shafiq. “Your exams are very important, of course. I shall return at noon then.”

“The examination hall is just down the north corridor,” Daphne told him helpfully.

“Thank you,” said Elder Shafiq, to both her and Harry before smiling at Dean. “I’ll see you in a few hours, Dean. Good luck on your exam.”

“Yeah, I mean, thank you,” said Dean.

Elder Shafiq hurried away, and Harry shot a look at Daphne to go on, which she was all too happy to do. It wasn’t like she knew Dean Thomas that well, so this was best left to Harry. It was entirely possible for him to be Zane Shafiq’s illegitimate son, and if true, Dean could very well become the heir to the family, considering Zane had been the oldest son, and Elder Shafiq’s other son had died childless. The family was still extensive, despite being hunted by the Death Eaters, but none would have a claim as strong as Dean if he really were to be Zane’s.

It stayed on her mind throughout the exam, though she did see that both Harry and Dean returned in time. Once the written exam was done, they were all waiting in the hallway to be called in a few at a time for their practicals, and the entire time, she saw Harry and Dean talking quietly together with Neville Longbottom. After her practical exams were done, Daphne returned to the Verdant offices.

A copy of the Daily Prophet from the day before was still sitting on her desk, and she briefly smiled at the headline of ‘Chief Warlock Abercrombie: Ignorant or Incompetent?’ Ben had pulled no punches in the article, reporting in detail how the Chief Warlock had called a session out of time for no reason. Augusta Longbottom had been heralded as a champion of justice for ensuring that he didn’t get away with it. Abercrombie hadn’t lost his position but Daphne knew he was on thin ice and once they had the next official session, it was likely he would lose it.

Daphne was all for making sure he was removed from the position of Chief Warlock. It had been on her advice that Harry had voted to keep him in, but it seemed like Abercrombie would be more trouble than he was worth, so it was time to kick him out. They could win over his faction some other way.

Tossing away the Prophet into the rubbish bin, she saw a letter waiting for her and tore it open.
Dear Daphne,

Thank you for your letter. I spoke to my grandfather and he is happy to meet you and Harry at his house here in Dorset tomorrow around six. My grandmother insisted that you both join us for dinner before we talk about the matter, so I hope you will agree to it.

I am not sure what you think my grandfather will be able to do for you, since he has never been one for politics, but somehow I get the feeling that you have something else to discuss with him. I look forward to your reply confirming your attendance, because I admit that even my curiosity is piqued.

I will come by the Verdant offices around quarter to six tomorrow to lead you and Harry past the wards, if that is alright.

Awaiting your reply.

Best,

Rolf Scamander.

Daphne smiled in satisfaction. Rolf’s intuition was on point, and surprisingly, it had been Harry’s suggestion to ask Newt Scamander and Daphne had been extremely impressed by it. Ever since Harry had told her about Anthony Goldstein and how many magical researchers had had their funding cut by the Ministry, she had been racking her brains over the issue. They needed someone at the helm of the research institute project and Daphne had said it would be better to speak to someone well-versed in the field of research, to which Harry had suggested Newt.

It was a novel suggestion, certainly, but Daphne had agreed. Even if Newt didn’t wish to join, he could point them in the right direction at the very least. She began writing a reply to confirm their attendance, and Harry walked in just as she was getting done.

“How did it go?” she asked.

“The exam? It was a breeze,” he shrugged. “If you mean how did it go with Dean, then I just went with him to Gringotts with Elder Shafiq. I didn’t stay, of course, but we’re meeting later with the others for a drink.”

“Alright,” she said. “I hope it works out.”

“I do, too,” he agreed, with a nod. “What are you doing?”

“Replying to Rolf,” she said. “He has invited us to dinner tomorrow.”

“Oh, is this about what we talked?” he asked, and smiled when Daphne gave nod. “Good, and what time does Healer Lim get here?”

“I’d say about half an hour,” she said, with a quick glance at her watch.

“Alright, I’ll be upstairs with Teddy until he does,” he said.

“Oh, hold on, there is something else,” she said.

“What is it?” he asked.

“Fleur sent this over,” she said, holding up a scroll of parchment. “Vikram Kale signed the contract, and he gave us the names of some of his publishers. I wanted to ask you about the books at Arc.”
“Yeah, you mentioned that, but can we just publish those books?” he asked.

“Well, we would check the copyright and things,” she said, trying not to laugh.

“No, I know that,” he said. “I meant, who knows what’s in there.”

“True,” she nodded. “We need someone to comb through it and quickly.”

“I could ask Hermione,” he said.

“Okay,” nodded Daphne. “I know she’s returning to Hogwarts but there’s still time over summer.”

“It’s likely she’ll do it even after she goes to Hogwarts,” smiled Harry. “Or when she starts working at the Ministry. You give Hermione a book and there’s no chance she wouldn’t read it.”

“Good to know,” said Daphne. “I’ll go over to the Arc once we’re done meeting with Healer Lim and get Mirin to help me shortlist some of the books, if that is alright with you.”

“Of course,” he said, easily. “You’re already keyed into the wards, so feel free to come and go as you like.”

Daphne opened and closed her mouth, before sighing. “You should be more careful when saying something like that,” she said, knowing it was an exercise in futility.

He grinned at her. “I mean it,” he said. “Of course, you could rob me blind, but I should warn you that I have a very good lawyer so you won’t get away with it.”

Daphne felt her lips twitch in amusement. “Go see your godson,” she ordered, trying to sound stern.

Harry laughed and went upstairs, and Daphne finished writing the letter to Rolf. She was getting comfortable around Harry; she realised. From the time she had taken him on as a client, she had been the dependable one, leading him using her skills and the information she had. But lately, she had begun depending on him in small ways here and there, especially since she found that he could get through to her with his words quite well. Even her friends and Astoria sometimes had trouble with that, because Daphne could admit that she was stubborn as a mule.

It was nice, nonetheless, to have someone who could call her out like Harry. Almost involuntarily, she touched the pin in her hair.

It would be better, she thought with a sigh, if she could grow comfortable enough to not wear it anymore.

~

Harry cooed to an alert Teddy, trying to coax him to sleep. He had already been fed and changed, so he should have been sleepy, but he kept getting distracted by everything.


Teddy just blew a bubble at him, finding the ceiling to be much more interesting than sleeping. Harry sighed and began rocking him, hoping the motion would put him to sleep.

The door to the nursery opened just a little and Daphne poked her head in. “Healer Lim will be here in less than five minutes,” she said.

“Ah,” said Harry. He’d been hoping Teddy would be asleep before the meeting, but no such luck.
“Is he still awake?” asked Daphne, walking into the room. Teddy turned his head towards the noise, and as was common as soon as he saw someone new, he began changing his hair from black to gold. “It’s impressive he can control it so well this young.”

“Apparently, his mother was the same way,” said Harry.

“Still, I guess it’s true what they say about hereditary abilities,” murmured Daphne.

“What do they say?” asked Harry, as Teddy’s eyes began to droop.

Daphne glanced at him in surprise. “The Black family has had metamorphmagus quite consistently, well, it would be more accurate to say that they used to,” she said. “When they started intermarrying, the ability began growing less and less frequent until it became a rarity.”

“Andromeda’s husband was a Muggleborn,” said Harry, even though he was sure Daphne already knew that. “So you think because Andromeda married new blood, Tonks was a metamorphmagus?”

“I have no proof, but it’s possible, of course,” said Daphne. “More than that though, the ability passed down immediately to the next generation instead of skipping a few which was more common. It might have grown stronger.”

Harry took a deep breath. “Teddy’s father was a werewolf,” he said. She didn’t look surprised. “You knew?” he asked.

“His name is Edward Lupin,” said Daphne. “Not many Lupins left, so it wasn’t a reach that Professor Lupin was his father, especially with you being his godfather.”

“Right,” said Harry. “Do you think the lycanthrope gene has something to do with it?”

“Honestly, I have no idea,” said Daphne. “It may be that, or it’s simply diversity in blood that made the ability stronger. I never really understood why my family married foreign blood so much, until I saw how other pureblood families grew weaker the more they intermarried. My mother was French, my father’s mother was from Russia, his grandmother was Swedish, and on and on it goes. All those marriages were arranged carefully, keeping in mind that the bloodlines shouldn’t cross.”

Harry listened to her, nodding along until he heard the last part. “Arranged?” he asked, getting a strange feeling in the pit of his stomach.

“Yeah,” she said, like it was obvious. “It’s a common practice to arrange marriages, especially when it comes to the heads of families.”

“Does that mean you-?” he began, when they heard a knock.

“Hey, Healer Lim is here,” said Parvati. “What are you two doing?”

“Just waiting for- oh, he’s asleep,” said Daphne, and Harry glanced down to see that Teddy had fallen asleep, his hair still a golden blonde.

Harry set him down the crib and after telling Kreacher to look after him, the three of them headed towards the conference room. Healer Lim was waiting inside and he stood up to shake their hands when they walked in.

“Thank you for coming, Healer Lim,” said Harry.

“Not at all, I promised to assist, after all,” he said. “It is nice to see you both again, Mr. Potter, Ms.
“And you as well, Healer Lim,” said Daphne. “This is Parvati Patil, an employee of the Potter Foundation.”

“How do you do, Ms. Patil?” said Healer Lim, shaking her hand as well.

“Very well, thank you, Healer Lim,” said Parvati.

The door opened and Andromeda walked in. “I apologise for being late- Thierry?” she asked, stopping when she saw Healer Lim.

“Mrs. Tonks?” asked Healer Lim, looking surprised.

Andromeda smiled. “I think you are old enough to call me Andromeda, Thierry,” she said. “You’re not at Hogwarts anymore.”

He went slightly red and laughed. “Of course, Andromeda,” he said.

“You know each other?” asked Harry.

“Thierry went to Hogwarts with Nymphadora,” said Andromeda, her smile dimming slightly. “The two were thick as thieves.”

Healer Lim lowered his gaze. “I heard about Dora,” he said. “I am so very sorry, Andromeda.”

“Thank you,” said Andromeda, her voice wobbling slightly.

Healer Lim cleared his throat. “Are you working for the Potter Foundation as well?” he asked.

“In a manner of speaking,” she said, indicating for everyone to sit. “Harry brought me on board for the orphanage project.”

“I didn’t know you two knew each other,” Healer Lim, looking between Harry and Andromeda.

“Harry’s the godfather to my grandson,” said Andromeda.

Healer Lim’s eyes went wide. “Dora has a child?” he asked.

“He was born in the middle of the war,” said Andromeda. “I will introduce you to him if you want.”

“I would like that very much,” said Healer Lim, gratefully. “Er, so what can I do for you?”

“Right, I asked Daphne to invite you,” said Andromeda. “I am just about done with the preliminary planning for the orphanage project, and I wanted to consult with you on some details, if that’s alright.”

“Of course,” nodded Healer Lim.

Andromeda glanced at Daphne and gave a nod. “Healer Lim,” said Daphne. “Would you consider terminating your employment with St. Mungo’s to work at the orphanage full time?”

Healer Lim’s eyebrows shot up. “You’re offering me a job?” he asked.

“Yes,” said Andromeda, bluntly. “We need an onsite Healer, considering so many of the children have ongoing treatments, and since you’re the one who knows them best, we would very much like
Healer Lim blinked at them in shock. “I don’t know what to say,” he said.

“I know it’s a bit abrupt,” said Harry. “But I spoke to Zinnia and she told me that the children are very attached to you, and making the transition from the Orphan Wing to the orphanage would be smoother if you were to be a part of the process.”

“I-That makes sense,” he said, still looking a little taken aback.

“Please take all the time you need to consider it,” said Daphne. “We have a formal offer for you.” He took the document she handed him. “Even if you choose not to accept it, we would be grateful if you continued to act as a consultant.”

“I will think about it,” he said, and took a deep breath. “I am not opposed to the idea, you see. I am attached to those children as well, and I want to make sure they will be looked after properly. It’s just...I know virtually nothing about the project and how you plan on running the orphanage.”

“I can help with that,” said Andromeda. “I’ll take you through what I have so far and I’d like your help to finetune it before we present it tomorrow.”

“Harry and I are yet to hear about it,” explained Daphne. “Andromeda and Parvati have been working with our finance and business advisors, and with your input, the plan will be ready for us to consider.”

“What do you say, Thierry?” asked Andromeda. “Would you like to help?”

Leaving Healer Lim with Andromeda and Parvati, Harry and Daphne took their leave, as Daphne departed for the Arc and Harry headed out towards Weasleys Wizarding Wheezes. He had time before meeting his friends at the Leaky Cauldron, and he was hoping that Ron could join them as well. As he passed the ‘Opening Soon’ sign on the new Fortescue Cafe, a small smile appeared on his face. He noticed the slightly interested looks that people were casting towards it, and the smile widened.

The shop front of Weasleys Wizarding Wheezes was closed up, but when Harry knocked on the door, it was opened by a surprised Ron.

“Harry, what are you doing here?” he asked.

“Is it a bad time?” asked Harry. “I was hoping we could talk.”

Ron shrugged and stepped aside to let him in. “George is in the lab and I was about to take a break, anyway,” he said.

As Harry walked inside, he noticed that the shop was empty of products but the interior was partially fixed up in many places and the whole place would need a thorough cleaning before it could open. “Have you been doing all this yourself?” asked Harry, sitting down on an upturned crate that Ron offered him.

“Yeah,” said Ron, sitting down on another crate and summoning two bottles of butterbeer. “The whole place was vandalised and torn apart. I’m fixing it up and cleaning the whole thing.”

Harry opened the bottle of butterbeer that he offered and took a long sip. “How’s George?” he
“Better, actually,” said Ron. “He does best when he’s working.” He drank his own butterbeer and glanced away uncomfortably. “I heard you and Ginny broke up.”

“Yeah,” said Harry, looking away too. “Sorry.”

“Dunno why you’re apologising to me,” said Ron. “Ginny said it was mutual, so not like you dumped her or anything this time.”

“Still, I should have told you,” said Harry. “Honestly, I didn’t know...y’know, if it was alright...”

“I’ll stop you right there,” said Ron, making his voice firm. “No matter whether you and Ginny are together are not, you are still important to the Weasley family. That won’t change, alright?” Harry looked at him in shock, and Ron’s ears went red with embarrassment. “And just for making me say something sappy like that, I have half a mind to hex you.”

“You can try,” grinned Harry, and Ron chuckled.

“So, what brings you here?” asked Ron, slightly more relaxed.

“I’m meeting Neville and the others for a drink later and I was wondering if you wanted to come,” he said.

Ron blinked at him. “Yeah, sure,” he said. “Was that it? You could have just sent a letter instead of coming all the way over. Didn’t you just finish your NEWTs?”

“Yeah,” he said, sheepishly. “Well, I guess I wanted to see...well, after Ginny and I broke up, if you and I would still be alright.”

“Didn’t I already say not to worry about that,” said Ron. “But I see your point about wanting to see me in person. It feels like you, me and Hermione were together all the time and now we barely know what each of us are doing. I mean, I mostly read about what you’re up to in the Prophet.”

Harry flushed uncomfortably. “Right,” he mumbled.

“It’s fine, mostly, but I would be lying if I said I’m not concerned,” said Ron.

“Concerned?” asked Harry, confused.

“There had been rumours but then Ginny confirmed it,” said Ron. “Is Daphne Greengrass the one who’s been helping you?”

“Yes,” answered Harry, warily. “Daphne’s my lawyer.”

“And you trust her?” asked Ron.

“Yes, I do,” he replied.

“That’s exactly what concerns me,” said Ron, leaning forward. “We don’t know anything about her. At Hogwarts, she barely even talked to anyone, even in Slytherin. And that’s the other thing. Since when are you onboard with trusting a Slytherin?”

Harry felt a stab of annoyance at his words, but knew Ron was telling the truth when he said he was concerned. For someone looking at him and Daphne from the outside, it would be an odd relationship, certainly. He was more surprised that Hermione had accepted it as easily as she had.
“Ron,” said Harry, carefully. “You are my best friend, and you and your family have gone above and beyond for my sake. But I won’t tolerate you badmouthing Daphne. What you said is true, but you don’t know how much she has done and is still doing for me. I consider Daphne a friend, Slytherin or not.”

“Yeah, but how do you know she isn’t just lying to you or trying to get at your money or something?” asked Ron. “Harry, you can’t really believe she’s helping you out of the goodness of her heart.”

“She is doing her job, which I hired her to do,” he said, at once. “And she doesn’t need to get at my money or whatever you might think.”

“Is she the reason you broke up with Ginny?” demanded Ron.

“I didn’t break up with Ginny, we both agreed we weren’t working out,” said Harry, frustrated. “Daphne had nothing to do with it. What, you think she slipped me a love potion or something?”

“Did she?” asked Ron.

“I’ll pretend you were joking when you said that,” said Harry, narrowing his eyes at him.

Ron clicked his tongue but nodded. “Yeah, whatever, just be careful, alright?”

“Sure,” said Harry, knowing Ron would only get defensive if he pushed the issue. “Er, we’re meeting at the Leaky Cauldron around 7.”

“Are you leaving already?” asked Ron, looking surprised.

“I have something to do,” he said.

“Like what?” asked Ron. “No, I am asking seriously. Is it just running the charity or are you doing something else too?”

Harry paused and contemplated how to answer that. “There are other things I am doing as well,” he said, finally.

Ron looked at him questioningly. “Are you going to tell me what those are?” he asked.

“Do you want to know?” asked Harry.

Ron stood up, glaring at him indignantly. “What kind of a question is that?” he demanded. “Of course I do. We’re best friends.”

Harry got to his feet slowly and met his gaze. “Alright, but first—”

He turned around as the shop’s door opened, interrupting him before he could bring up anything. Charlie Weasley walked in, looking exhausted down to his bones. As soon as he was inside, he collapsed and fainted to the ground.

Harry blinked in shock, but Ron just sighed impatiently. “Can you get him up? I’ll go fetch a pepperup,” he said, walking up the stairs.

Still in shock, Harry levitated him over and cast an Ennervate on him. Charlie stirred and woke up, looking surprised to see him. “Harry?” he asked, voice slightly hoarse.

“Yeah, it’s me, just take it easy. Ron’s gone to fetch the pepperup,” said Harry. “What happened?
Were you attacked?"

“No, nothing like that,” he said, closing his eyes. “I’ve just been going too long without sleep, that’s all.”

“And I told you to quit doing that,” said Ron, as he returned with a vial of the potion. Charlie tried to hold up his hand to take the potion, but Ron none too gently barked at him to open his mouth and poured the potion directly into it.

Steam escaped from Charlie’s ears as he swallowed the potion, and he sat up quickly, looking refreshed, though the dark circles under his eyes did not disappear. “It’s a lifesaver,” he mumbled.

“It’s bad for your health is what it is,” snapped Ron, and then sighed. “Harry, do you mind looking after this idiot for a while? The other one needs attention upstairs.”

“What’s wrong with George?” asked Charlie at once, looking ready to rush right to him.

“You just sit down and catch your breath,” said Ron firmly, sounding remarkably like Molly.

“Go on, I'll keep an eye on him,” said Harry, and Ron nodded gratefully.

Charlie sighed as Ron went upstairs. “It’s embarrassing being scolded by your younger brother,” he muttered, almost as if he were saying it to himself.

“Ron means well,” defended Harry. When Charlie looked at him in surprise, he smiled sheepishly. “Sorry, I know it’s none of my business.”

Charlie laughed a little, and shook his head. “No, you’re right,” he said. “Ron’s heart has always been in the right place, even if he doesn’t always know how to think before acting. Mind you, I’m no better.”

“I think it’s the Gryffindor in all of us,” said Harry.

“You might be right about that,” grinned Charlie.

“Is it really so busy at the Ministry?” asked Harry.

“Well, not quite,” confessed Charlie. “We’re short-handed, but it’s in order. All department heads were elected by Kingsley and the people he put in charge are making sure to run their departments properly. Most funds and manpower are heading to the DMLE and Department of International Magical Cooperation. Those of us over at the Department of Magical Accidents and Catastrophes have nothing more than the occasional splinching to deal with.”

“You’re not with the Department of Magical Games and Sports?” asked Harry, surprised.

“No, they really did not need any new manpower. The new department head just hired back all the staff that had been let go under the Death Eater regime,” he said. “It would be more fun, I guess, even if it’s still working in an office.” He sighed. “It sounds selfish to complain but I hate being confined in a damn cubicle day in and day out.” Quickly, he looked at Harry. “Not that I don’t know it’s important work. I have just never been good with the indoors.”

“Isn’t there anything else you want to do if you don’t like it?” asked Harry. “What about the dragon reserve in Wales?”

Charlie shook his head. “They don’t need any handlers, I already checked,” he said. “The job at the
Ministry is fine, but I guess it’s just the stress of everything making me unable to sleep.”

“Sounds like you need to get a new job,” said Harry.

“You might be right, so if you find something that would let me be outside in the fresh air, tell me,” laughed Charlie.

“I might, you never know,” smiled Harry.

Ron came back downstairs. “Don’t worry,” he said, before Charlie could ask. “He just went into a panic because he couldn’t find Fred’s old notes about one of their products. He’s fine, he found them.” He let out a tired sigh and looked at Charlie with narrowed eyes. “Go take a bath or something. I’ll make dinner before going out.”

“It’s alright,” said Charlie, getting up and placing a hand on Ron’s shoulder. “You should go. You and Harry look like you’ve got plans. I’ll make dinner for me and George.”

“Are you sure?” asked Ron.

“Yeah, ‘course,” said Charlie. “Sorry about earlier. I’ll be more careful from now on.”

Ron rubbed his eyes tiredly. “Fine,” he said.

Charlie clapped him on the shoulder and grinned at Harry. “See you, Harry,” he said.

“Yeah, bye,” said Harry.

Charlie went upstairs, and Ron sighed before turning to Harry. “Sorry about that, what were you saying before?” he asked.

Harry shook his head, with a small smile. “Don’t worry about it,” he said, knowing there was already a lot Ron was dealing with. He didn’t want to burden him any further. “Come on, we can get started a bit earlier. I’m buying.”

“Won’t refuse that,” said Ron. “Let me just grab my cloak.”

~

18th June, 1998

Harry opened the door of Daphne’s office and was surprised to find her standing in front of a long mirror. Two dresses were hovering next to her, and she was holding them up over her normal work robes, clearly trying to decide between them.

He cleared his throat and she turned around. “Oh, good morning, Harry,” she said, waving her wand. The two dresses folded up neatly and went back into an open case on her desk.

“Got plans?” he asked, hoping he kept his tone light.

“Yeah,” she said. “We’re going out tonight, remember?”

Harry blinked and then wanted to hex himself for forgetting about the dinner with Newt Scamander. “Right,” he said.

It had been a few days since he’d first realised he was attracted to Daphne, but the fact remained that he’d only just ended a relationship and he had no idea about Daphne’s personal life at all. She had
mentioned that marriages in her family were arranged, so he wouldn’t have been surprised if she were already betrothed or something. His relationship with Ginny had taught him that he had a bit of a jealous streak, so it was no wonder his rationality fled when he thought Daphne might have had plans with someone else. He wondered if it would be alright if he were to ask her outright if she had someone like that in her life. If she did, he could end the little crush he had on her which would otherwise ruin their very good professional relationship.

“Are you alright?” asked Daphne, walking up to him.

He jumped slightly. “Yeah, I’m fine,” he said.

She gave him a critical look. “Are you hungover?” she asked.

“No, I didn’t drink much,” he said, honestly.

Ron and Seamus had been the two who’d had the most to drink and Harry didn’t envy the morning they must be having. Dean had been too preoccupied with the confirmation that he was Zane Shafiq’s son, proven and made legitimate by Gringotts as of the evening before. Harry and Neville had mostly just gone between trying to keep everyone’s spirits up and making sure none of the depressing topics came up.

“So, what happened with Thomas?” she asked.

“He’s been named the heir to the Shafiq family,” said Harry.

“Already?” asked Daphne, raising her eyebrows.

“Apparently, Elder Shafiq wanted to make it official as soon as possible,” he said. “Sounded like he really was stumped about a successor. Dean is visiting his mother and stepfather today to explain everything, before he moves into the Shafiq family home by the end of the week. Elder Shafiq is going to start preparing him to take over.”

“How did he take it?” asked Daphne. “It can’t have been easy to ask him to give up his life and come play heir of a Sacred Twenty Eight family.”

“No, but Dean wants to do it,” shrugged Harry. “He feels like he’s honour bound to keep his father’s legacy.”

Daphne muttered something that sounded distinctly like ‘Gryffindors’ but smiled nonetheless. “Either way, sounds like it will work out,” she said. “Should we head upstairs? Andromeda said she’s ready to present the plan.”

“Yeah, let’s go,” he said.

Sure enough, Andromeda and Parvati were setting up a magical projector in the conference room when they walked in together.

“Good morning,” said Parvati, when she saw them. “The others will be over any moment. Fleur just sent a patronus and said Maribeth’s watching the HQ.”

“Alright,” said Harry, taking a seat at the table. “Do you need any help?”

“No, we’re done,” smiled Andromeda, gathering the documents in front of her and stacking them in a pile.
They were only waiting for a short time before Fleur, Draco and Tracey arrived, and once they were all seated, Andromeda stood up.

“Before we begin, bear in mind that this is the only the first outline for the orphanage project,” she said. “I am hoping we will be able to refine it properly over the course of our discussions, so feel free to speak up at any point.”

There were murmurs of agreement and Andromeda smiled before nodding at Parvati, who flicked her wand. The projector whirred to life and displayed the first slide onto the wall behind Andromeda.

“After much deliberation, I decided that Black Castle will make the best location for the orphanage,” she said. “It’s bigger than both Godric’s Pride and the Sea Maiden Cottage, and once you’ve seen the way I’ve decided the layout, I think you will agree.”

Parvati flicked over to the next slide, and it showed the blueprints of the Black Castle.

“For children who are at Hogwarts, we will use the rooms in the towers. They are used to living in dormitories at Hogwarts, so it will be easier for them to have a bit of their own space when they come home for the holidays,” explained Andromeda. “For now, we will only open up the first tower, considering there aren’t that many older children. We have three more towers for when we have others. It’s one of the reasons why I picked Black Castle, because it gives us room to expand.”

“How many children to a room?” asked Fleur.

“The older children will get their own rooms,” said Andromeda. “The rooms in the tower have ensuites, and I suggest turning the large dayroom into something of a common room for their sake. Of course, they can come and go into the main house as they please, since the tower is connected with an entrance on the inside as well.”

“And the younger children will share rooms?” asked Tracey.

“Yes, I was thinking two to a room,” said Andromeda, and with a flick of her wand, some little squares on the blueprint lit up. “These are the rooms on the first and second floor we will be using for the younger children. As you can see, there is an unlit square between every three rooms.”

“Yes, what is that for?” asked Draco, curiously.

“That is the room that will be occupied by their caretaker,” said Andromeda, and smiled a little. “Harry, you said you didn’t just want a staff taking care of their basic needs, didn’t you? Hence, this unorthodox method.”

Harry leaned forward with interest.

“Instead of a regular staff, we will have a caretaker assigned to a group of 5-6 children,” said Andromeda. “This caretaker will look after their basic needs, but also provide them with support in any way they need.”

“I don’t mean to be rude,” said Tracey, raising her hand sheepishly. “But isn’t that saying we are hiring someone to fulfil the role of a parent? Are there people who will be willing to do it?”

“I will be quite honest, I anticipate it to be quite difficult to find people who would be willing to go so far for the sake of orphans they barely know,” said Andromeda. “Difficult, mind you, not impossible.”

“One caretaker for a group of 5-6 children, certainly sounds difficult,” said Daphne. “What about the
older children?”

“We will have one caretaker for all of them, mostly because they are capable of looking after themselves and they will only be around for the holidays,” said Andromeda. “All caretakers will report to a matron-in-charge, who in turn will keep an eye on the day to day workings of the orphanage. We will have a separate Healer on-site, as well as a groundskeeper and any house elves we can spare to lend a hand with the chores.”

“It helps if you think of it like Hogwarts,” said Parvati, helpfully. “The matron-in-charge will be like the headmistress. The caretakers are teachers but instead of teaching, they will be looking after them. Unlike Hogwarts where they are responsible for seven years worth of students, each caretaker will be looking after their own little group that they are responsible for.” She flicked her wand quickly and changed the slide, showing a long list of names divided into groups. “These groups were designed specifically, keeping them balanced so that no caretaker will be given more responsibility than they can handle.”

“Thierry helped me with those,” said Andromeda. “We took into account children who are already close to one another in the Orphan Wing, those who need more attention because of their treatment, and we tried to keep it balanced. You’ll see some groups are a lot smaller, that’s because those are the children who would need a lot of long-time care and attention, and we didn’t want to burden the caretaker with additional responsibility.”

“House elves will be doing the cooking, cleaning and maintaining the place, so the caretaker will mostly be responsible for, as my mother called it, cat wrangling,” said Parvati.

Tracey giggled but then sobered up. “It’s still a lot to ask for, but I see what you mean,” she said, and turned to Harry. “What did you have in mind when you said you wanted the caretakers to be their support?”

Harry fidgeted uncomfortably, especially when everyone else in the room looked at him curiously as well.

“I assume, it’s because of the high number of children that the orphanage will have,” said Daphne, and Harry could have kissed her. “A single matron could not keep track of all of them, even if she had staff assisting. The caretakers will be able to give closer attention to the children, especially since most of them have lived through a horrific ordeal and lost any family they had. It would be arrogant of Harry to assume he can take on the responsibility of over fifty children and provide them with the proper care and support they need.”

“Yes,” said Harry, grateful that she had summed it up so well. He hadn’t explicitly said any of it to her, but he supposed his clumsy hopes had gotten through to Daphne somehow. “I told Andromeda as well, but it’s not like I’m going to be their real family because there is no replacing a real family. But I want them to have adults in their lives whom they can depend on, and feel happy about writing to when something happens, good or bad.”

He received dazzling smiles from Fleur and Andromeda at that, while Parvati and Tracey grinned approvingly. Daphne just had a quiet smile on her face as she wrote something down, but Draco frowned thoughtfully.

“That brings up a good point,” said Draco. “Who is actually going to be their legal guardian?”

Daphne looked up from what she was writing. “An orphanage is counted as its own entity, meaning the orphanage is their guardian. Obviously, that means whoever leads the orphanage is their legal guardian. In this case, it would be the matron-in-charge,” she explained.
“It wouldn’t be Harry?” asked Parvati, surprised.

“Well, when we do hire the matron we can make the stipulation in her contract that Harry has the final say on all matters,” said Daphne, before turning to Andromeda. “With the number of children we presently have, how many caretakers will we be hiring?”

“Ten, for now,” said Andromeda, changing the slide. “One for the older children, eight for the younger ones, and one more because I anticipate we will be getting a lot more older children who were turned away by St. Mungo’s. I think it’d be better to say we’d have two caretakers to look after the older children and eight for the younger ones.”

“Ten caretakers, one matron, one Healer, and one groundskeeper,” said Draco. “It’s quite a robust staff.”

“We were also thinking of tutors for the younger children, for when the older ones go to Hogwarts,” said Andromeda. “But that isn’t an immediate hire, so we can hold off until things settle down past the initial phase.”

“Makes sense,” said Harry. “How does it look in terms of the budget?”

“Well, less than if we didn’t have a lot of your other resources, Harry,” said Andromeda, as the slide changed. “Fleur?”

“Of course,” said Fleur, taking over. “With the house elves doing most of the labour work, the biggest expenditure we are getting are things like food and clothes.”

“We can reduce those significantly,” said Daphne.

“Yeah, food can come from Godric’s Pride,” said Harry.

“That’s what I was thinking too,” said Andromeda.

“Even clothes can be made and we would only be paying for the materials,” said Daphne.

“How many house elves do you have?” asked Parvati, looking at Harry with wide eyes.

“A lot, and they are very eager to work,” said Harry, honestly. “What about other expenses like their Hogwarts stuff?” he asked.

“Students of Hogwarts who live in any authorised orphanage in Britain, wizarding or otherwise, receive an automatic scholarship to cover their Hogwarts fees,” said Daphne.

“I know that,” said Harry, remembering Dumbledore telling a young Tom Riddle about it. “Does it also cover their schooling expenses?”

“It covers the most basic expenses,” said Andromeda. “An average student will spend just a little bit more than what the scholarship covers, and we can make up the difference. That was the other thing. A lot of these children have money left to them by their families but they do not have access to that money until they are of age.”

“Hang on, I could access my vaults when I started at Hogwarts,” said Harry.

“Some families made an exception but most didn’t,” said Fleur. “Once we have the children officially under our care, we can help them access their vaults, so they may have their own money to spend. Those that don’t, we can give them an allowance of sorts, depending on how old they are.”
“Sounds reasonable,” said Tracey. “We can’t just take over their vault though, can we?”

“No, but we will oversee the spending,” said Andromeda. “It will be one of the responsibilities of the matron.”

“So, apart from the children, the other big expense would be the staff, correct?” asked Daphne.

“Yes, although we will be giving them free room and board, they will still need to be paid a salary for doing their job,” said Andromeda. “We’ll be getting a grant from the Ministry as well, and though it’s not massive, it will alleviate the costs a bit too.”

“There’s a Ministry grant?” asked Draco, surprised.

“Yes, I found one, back when Harry first brought up the idea,” said Daphne. “It hasn’t been used in a long time, but there will be no issue with us getting it.”

“The Ministry has been cutting down grants left and right,” said Draco.

“They won’t cut this one down, not unless they want to make themselves unpopular right off the bat,” said Tracey, shrewdly. “It’s good for their image to have that grant in place, and if they cancel it just as we become eligible, the uproar would be...well, as big as I make it, I guess.”

Harry bit back a chuckle and nodded. “Is there a timeline on how things will happen?” he asked.

“Yes, I think we should aim to open before the end of July,” said Andromeda, changing the slide. “Most of the furniture in the bigger rooms of Black Castle is well and intact, but the individual bedrooms will need the basics. You know, beds, dressers, desks, those sorts of things. I was thinking you could assign house elves to start building the furniture. As I understand, most furniture at Black Castle was built with the trees in Alioth Copse, so the materials shouldn’t be a problem.”

“Yeah, I’ll speak to Annie about that,” said Harry. “And clear the place out to make sure no dark artefacts are lying around. And sweep the library for any books that shouldn’t be in the hands of children.”

“Good call,” said Draco, as Andromeda gave a nod.

“The most time consuming thing will be hiring the staff,” said Andromeda. “But as long as you are happy with the plan, I will turn my attention to that. Oh, that reminds me. Thierry signed on.” She handed a document back to Daphne, who took it with a smile.

“That’s wonderful,” said Daphne. “He’s the first employee then.”

“Yes,” said Andromeda. “He has also agreed to help me recruit.”

“Excellent,” grinned Harry, happy that Healer Lim was onboard officially.

“I have put together the details for the rest of it in this prospectus of sorts,” said Andromeda, passing them all a thick file. “Read them through and if there is something you think needs discussing, bring it to me and we will sort it out.”

“Thank you, Andromeda,” said Daphne, and looked at Harry. “Well?”

Harry took a deep breath and smiled gratefully at Andromeda. “Thank you for all the work you did, Andromeda,” he said. “Let’s get started on this plan.”

Andromeda beamed at him. “Just one more thing,” she said. “The orphanage needs a name.”
Harry’s heart thudded in his chest. He’d decided on the name the moment he’d told Daphne he wanted to open an orphanage while standing before the graves of his parents.

“Lily Potter Home,” he said, quietly. “That’s what we’ll name it.”

~

“More wine?”

Daphne smiled and shook her head. Rolf approached Harry with the same question, and she took a moment to think back on their evening.

Newt and Porpentina Scamander were not quite what she had expected, considering he was a genius with magizoology and she was supposed to be an infamous Auror who had tangled with the likes of Grindelwald back in the day. A legendary couple in all the deeds, but in reality, they were quite a sweet, loving pair who had welcomed her and Harry into their home like they were old friends. For someone like Daphne who was used to stiff, boring parties with sharp words disguised underneath a sweet tone, the Scamander family was a welcome surprise.

She glanced down at the simple dark purple dress she was wearing and was glad she’d decided not to dress up too much. It was still a little too fancy, considering how casual the atmosphere of this dinner ended up being, but Daphne knew if she wore something like this at a party in pureblood circles, she would be labelled as dowdy and there would be rumours of the Greengrass fortune dwindling. Thankfully, she’d had the foresight to keep her jewellery even simpler than her clothes.

Dinner had concluded some time ago, and Newt was currently reading the proposal that Daphne had put together with help from Fleur. It was still tentative, but their aim had been to get Newt to helm the research institute, and she was hoping their rough proposal would help make that happen.

She looked up when Newt finished reading and removed his glasses, casting a significant glance toward his wife. The two didn’t speak but Tina chuckled. He just tilted his head at her and her chuckling turned into full-blown laughter.

“Alright, alright,” she said.

Newt just gave her a soft smile, before turning to the rest of them. “Were you the one who put this together, Daphne?” he asked.

“Yes,” said Daphne. “I apologise if it wasn’t quite up to par.”

He shook his head. “I have never been too fond of reading long paperwork,” he admitted. “This was much simpler and got to the point quickly. So, you want to open a magical research institute?”

“Yes,” said Harry.

“I should say it is about time we had a proper institution like this in Britain,” said Newt.

“We realise you are retired, but we would like it if you were to join us in making it happen,” said Harry, but Daphne was certain that the reason for Tina’s amusement was because she’d already known her husband was going to agree.

“Oh, I am absolutely joining,” said Newt, bluntly. “I still get plagued with owls from people asking for my recommendation for the Ministry’s grants that they hoard worse than nifflers hoard trinkets.” He glanced down at the rough proposal and gave a firm nod. “There are some things I would like to clarify, though.”
“Of course,” said Daphne, already ready with her quill and parchment to take notes.

“The Ministry grant amounts are confidential so this is understandable, but you are severely overselling,” said Newt.

Rolf glanced at the proposal over his grandfather’s shoulder and his eyebrows shot up. “Yeah,” he said. “That is quite a bit higher than normal grants.”

“We want to help any way we can,” said Harry.

“That is admirable,” said Tina. “But I think the point here is that there is a standard that is followed in these circles.”

“We could tailor the grant amount based on the researcher and their research,” said Daphne.

“That is certainly novel and is an acceptable compromise between standardised grants and just throwing gold,” said Rolf. “It will be a lot more work, though.”

“No matter, I will do it,” said Newt.

“Do you already have a researcher in mind, Pops?” asked Rolf.

“I have several,” said Newt. “It says here you already have a facility picked out.”

“Yes, it is an extensive estate, but it can be converted based on the needs of the researchers,” said Daphne. She and Harry had agreed that a wing of Iola Castle could become the new institute. Eustace Mansion was also available as a secondary location, but that could be saved for researchers focusing on Herbology and Potions.

“Do private grants in Britain follow the same process afterwards like the Ministry ones do?” asked Rolf, curiously.

“Yes, for the most part,” nodded Newt.

Daphne tried to remember the brief information about Ministry grants that she had been reading frantically over the last few days. “As I understand it, if there is successful research or invention, it is filed and patented with the Ministry with the researchers getting the royalties,” she said.

“The Ministry gets a cut as well, but that is only if they sponsored the research,” said Rolf. “That’s why I was wondering if it would be different if it’s a private grant.”

“There have been plenty of researchers who patented their research without ever receiving a grant, myself among them,” said Newt. “The Ministry still gets a cut, though it is significantly smaller. I am no attorney, but I doubt they will be able to claim anything more than the usual patenting fees. I assume the institute will be receiving a share of the royalties.”

“You will have to, unless you want to go out of business,” said Rolf, sensibly.

“Yes, quite right,” said Daphne. “We will do what we can to enable commercial distribution as well, though that is something for the future.”

“You have the means to do that?” asked Rolf, while both Newt and Tina looked surprised.

“I’m sure we will work it out,” said Daphne.

“I would believe her when she says that,” said Harry, with a small smile.
Rolf and Tina laughed as Newt gave a slow nod. “The rest of it is fine,” he said, looking back down at the proposal.

“Then I will add in the alterations you mentioned and put together a more official proposal for you to consider,” said Daphne. “I also have a contract for you to sign, if that is alright.”

“Yes, thank you,” said Newt, as Rolf took the contract from Daphne and handed it to him. “I’ll have Rolf look it over later. I do have a request, though.”

“Sure,” said Harry. “What is it?”

“I would like Rolf to join me,” said Newt.

“Really?” asked Rolf.

“It’s not a problem, but is there a particular reason?” asked Daphne.

“Two, actually,” said Newt. “I am still his mentor and it is my responsibility to see his Mastery through.”

“Of course,” said Harry. “What’s the other?”

“I am an old man, Harry,” said Newt. “Recruiting researchers is not difficult but it will be significantly faster if I had Rolf helping me.”

“We understand,” said Daphne. “We were going to recruit an assistant for you regardless, but this is something we can do for now. I’ll have another contract ready for Rolf by tomorrow.”

“Thank you,” nodded Rolf. “I am actually getting kind of excited about this now.”

“That’s good, dear,” said Tina, beaming at Rolf. “I hope that means you will be staying in Britain longer.”

“Gran, I already said I would,” laughed Rolf. “This is just the cherry on top, you might say.”

“Well, whatever it is, I am happy for it,” said Tina, as she stood up. “Enough about business now. Time for some dessert.”
“So, remind me,” said Hermione, as she was nearly blinded by a camera flash. “Why are we doing this again?”

“I told you, I needed to talk to you, but this is something I have to do as well,” said Harry, as they made it past the crowd of reporters and inside Fortescue Cafe.

Hermione was about to argue, but she went quiet as she was hit by the mouth-watering aroma of cakes, pastries and freshly ground coffee. She remembered vaguely that this was supposed to be the soft launch of the cafe, and the place was quite crowded on the inside, with nearly all tables full of people. It was a pretty little cafe, certainly, with bright sunny yellow walls, white furniture, and the delicious treats displayed like gorgeous gems behind glass.

“Come on, there’s a table at the back,” said Harry, leading her towards it.

Hermione followed quickly, noticing how many people stared and whispered as they passed. She was glad when they finally reached their table and sat down, so she didn’t have to make awkward eye contact with strangers.

“I think we have to order at the counter,” said Harry, glancing past the crowds.

“I’ll do it,” said Hermione. “If you go, you will be mobbed,” she added, when he looked surprised.

“Alright,” he agreed. “But take this.”

Hermione took the small money pouch he passed her and nodded as she left. As she stood in line at the counter, it gave her more of a chance to observe, and it was truly remarkable that Harry had helped bring this place into existence.

“Pardon me, are you Hermione Granger?”

Hermione glanced down at a young girl, around seven years of age, staring at her with wide eyes. Behind the girl, her parents were casting apologetic looks at her.

“Yes, I’m Hermione,” she said. “What is your name?”

The girl’s eyes went wide. “Emily,” she said.

“Nice to meet you, Emily,” said Hermione, shaking her hand.

Emily went very pink and nodded. Suddenly, she seemed to be overcome with shyness and quickly darted to hide behind her mother.

“I’m sorry,” said Emily’s mother. “She tends to be a bit outgoing sometimes but we’re not over the shy phase yet.”

“No matter,” said Hermione, politely. “I’m surprised she recognised me by name.”
“Of course she did,” said Emily’s mother, at once. “You are one of the people we owe this new peace to.”

Hermione went as pink as Emily. “Oh, no, I just-” she began to deny it, but then took a breath. “Thank you,” she said. “But I was just one among many.”

The diplomatic answer was something she’d been giving every time she’d had reporters or strangers ask her questions or thanking her. Initially, she had made the mistake of saying she hadn’t done anything, only to see the dismayed looks in return, and so she had taken to giving this answer instead. She wondered how much worse this must be for Harry, considering he was more recognisable than anyone. Even now, a few people had already approached their table and a young boy was shaking his hand while his parents seemed to be gushing at Harry.

The person in front of Hermione moved away, and she quickly said a goodbye to Emily and her parents before approaching the counter.

“Good morning, Ms. Granger,” greeted the woman working at the counter. “What will you be having today?”

“Oh, um,” she faltered, having forgotten to ask Harry what he wanted. “What do you recommend, er-?”

The woman beamed at her. “I’m Sylvia Fortescue,” she said. “I would say everything’s good, but personally, I’d go for a large slice of our chocolate cake, and the ham and cheese croissant. Oh, and our coffee, of course. And we have meat pies just for today.”

“I guess we’ll take one of each,” said Hermione, glad that she had skipped breakfast. “Are those milkshakes?” she asked, noticing a tray floating over neatly to one of the tables with a large family sitting around it.

“Yes, would you like to try one?” asked Sylvia. “The vanilla one is my favourite.”

“I’ll take that instead of the coffee then,” said Hermione.

“Certainly, it comes to seven sickles,” said Sylvia.

“Huh?” asked Hermione, knowing it couldn’t be that low.

Sylvia shook her head with a smile. “It’s a discount for you and Mr. Potter,” she said. “I feel bad about charging even that, considering everything you have done for us.”

It took Hermione a second to realise she meant the war and not the GSC, since the Fortescues would have no idea that Harry was behind it. “Mrs. Fortescue, I would feel bad getting a discount on your very first day,” she said, with a smile. “I plan on coming here often, considering how good everything looks, so please, I would like to pay the full price like everyone else.”

Sylvia chuckled and nodded. “Alright, but I shall hold you to that promise,” she said. “It comes to thirteen sickles.”

Hermione handed over the money and after thanking the kind woman, she returned to the table, knowing the food would be delivered to their table.

“Everything alright? You were there for a while,” said Harry, casting a Muffliato around them for privacy.

“I’m not sure I did anything,” said Harry, amused.

“You did,” reassured Hermione. “You did whatever you could, and that is more than we can say about most people.”

Harry smiled sheepishly. “I would be lying if I said I wasn’t happy the cafe is nice and crowded,” he admitted.

“I saw an opening soon sign on the old location of the ice cream parlour, is that you as well?” she asked.

“Yes, it will be a takeaway pasta shop,” he said.

“I’m very proud of you, Harry,” she beamed. Not wanting to embarrass him further, she leaned back in her chair. “So, what did you want to talk to me about?”

“Oh, right,” he said, his embarrassment vanishing. “One of the people we are helping is opening a bookstore soon.”

Hermione sat up quickly. “That sounds wonderful,” she said.

“Glad you think so,” he said. “Remember how I inherited a lot of books across all the properties?”

She just nodded, trying not to look too envious. She had stopped herself short of asking him to let her see all those books, knowing it would be crossing a line. Her younger self wouldn’t have hesitated at all, but with age came wisdom as they said.

“The man we’re helping, we are also working with his publishers, and Daphne suggested we should get those books back into circulation once again,” he said.

Hermione gasped in delight, grateful for the *Muffliato* because it was embarrassingly loud.

“I’m glad you’re happy because I need your help,” said Harry. “Someone needs to comb through those books and make sure they are alright to be published.”

Hermione almost said there was no need to do that before remembering that Voldemort had first seen the word horcrux in a book in the library at Hogwarts. Dumbledore had removed those books later, but the damage had been done. “Right,” she said. “You want me to make sure there’s nothing dangerous, right?”

“Exactly,” said Harry. “So, will you do it?”

Hermione started to answer, but a tray of food floated over to them and the sight of food made her stomach rumble. Harry was no better, as his eyes widened.

“This looks amazing,” he said, immediately reaching for a meat pie.

Hermione agreed and went for the croissant. She and Harry spent the next half hour or so or so finishing their food, commenting frequently how delicious everything was. The milkshake was an excellent recommendation, though Hermione could say the same about the coffee when she tried a sip from Harry’s cup because the aroma was so irresistible. Despite the large amount of food, they polished off all of it, grinning in satisfaction once it was all gone.

“Definitely coming back here,” said Hermione.
“I know, me too,” said Harry. “So, what do you think? The books?”

“Like you even need to ask,” said Hermione. “Of course, I’ll do it.”

“Great, Daphne has the books at the HQ,” he said.

“I thought you said Daphne still worked out of her old office,” said Hermione, slightly confused.

“She does, but she is there today, working with Fleur,” he said. “We met with Newt Scamander yesterday and the institute is going ahead. Daphne and Fleur are working on the proposal today.”

“That was fast,” said Hermione, surprised. Mentally, she counted everything that the GSC was doing, plus the Wizengamot, and NEWTs, not to mention the Potter Foundation, and had to marvel at all the work being done by Harry and the people around him. Andromeda had even told her they had their plan for the orphanage put in place. It was awe-inspiring and nothing short of ambitious, to say the least. “Is there anything I can do to help?”

“You’re helping with the books,” said Harry, like it was obvious. “Don’t worry, I saw the stack of books that Daphne brought over. You’re going to be busy, too.”

“Alright, but if you need something, just ask,” said Hermione. “Don’t try to do everything by yourself.”

“I’m not,” he said, honestly. “Trust me, everyone has been helping.”

Hermione smiled a little and nodded. “Well, in any case, I’m glad things are going well,” she said. “Should we get going?”

“You go ahead,” he said. “I still have to talk to the press and give them a statement. That was my whole reason of stopping by here today.”

“Oh, right,” nodded Hermione. “I’ll get going then.”

Harry nodded and waved goodbye. Hermione stopped by the counter to thank Sylvia and compliment the cafe, so when she came outside, Harry was already speaking to the assembled reporters, which allowed her to quickly disillusion herself and sneak away unnoticed. As she was leaving, she heard Harry’s answer.

“...yes, Mr. Florean Fortescue was a kind man, so when I heard a new cafe was being opened by his son, I had to stop by and show my support,” he was saying, and Hermione was impressed. She wondered if Tracey had helped him come up with answers, because she knew Harry was not usually that eloquent when it came to the press.

“Why so much support for just a cafe?” asked a reporter.

“It’s not just the cafe,” he said. “It’s more what the cafe represents. Look around you, the Alley is full of people and laughter today. What can be more perfect than this when it comes to rebuilding and recovery?”

Hermione’s smile grew wider as some of the people assembled behind the reporters cheered at his words. His words were having an impact, a good one at that.

She left quickly, grinning proudly as Harry continued answering the questions with a sense of practised ease. Slowly but surely, things were falling into place, and she would do everything she could to help Harry in making the wizarding world a better place.
Harry sat in his office at the HQ, going over the draft bill that Robert Abbott had sent over. It was very well-written, and said what he had proposed at dinner. It was an employment program that would be overseen by the Ministry. There were plenty of jobs within the Ministry itself, but he was also proposing a scheme for places like St. Mungo’s and other businesses to receive a small rebate from the Ministry for hiring people who qualified under the program.

The requisite conditions were also quite lenient and broad. Anyone of age, with minimum of two OWLs and who were currently without suitable employment were eligible. Those without OWLs could take the W.O.M.B.A.Ts instead and with a satisfactory score could qualify. No restrictions on blood, and if there were any criminal records, they would be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

The housing part was a little too ambitious. Even Harry could see that Robert’s solution to have the Ministry pay for their housing would be difficult to get passed, so he was happy he and Daphne had already discussed the boarding house idea with the others. He finished reading the bill, and was about to go and show it to Daphne so they could send their reply with the boarding house plans, when there was a knock on his door.

“Come in,” said Harry, and was surprised when Draco walked in.

“You got a moment?” he asked.

“Oh course,” nodded Harry. “What’s going on?”

“I have a new business idea,” he said.

“Who is this for?” asked Harry, curiously.

“Well, it is sort of connected to the Boot family business,” said Draco. “Fleur and I met with Todd Boot yesterday afternoon, and while their usual business is the outdoor camping and equipment supplies, we also learned he does work as a travel agent.”

“I didn’t know we had those in the wizarding world,” said Harry, surprised.

“There are some like Mr. Boot who build up a client network and do it as a side-business,” said Draco. “It’s mostly for middle income families. The poorer ones likely prefer to do it themselves, and I know our family vacations were planned by my mother.”

“So, you want to suggest the travel business to him as a proper business on its own?” asked Harry, slightly confused.

“No, I only said it’s related to the Boot thing,” he said. “I looked through your properties. Didn’t you inherit Chateaux Black?”

“Yeah, what about it?” asked Harry.

“I remember Chateaux Black because I have been there once when I was young,” he said. “The land it sits on is private, including the ski slope. And the cottages are independent, and there is also plenty of room in the main house.”

“You know a lot,” said Harry.

Draco went a little pink. “My father assumed he would inherit the Black family title and made plans on how to use Chateaux Black once he got his hands on it,” he said.
“And you’re telling me your father’s plans? Is that alright?” asked Harry. “Not that I’m complaining, mind you.”

“It is a good business idea,” he shrugged. “He proposed turning it into a winter resort of sorts.”

“Oh,” said Harry. “Alright, I’m interested.”

“Here, I drew up a business plan,” he said, handing him a roll of parchment.

“That was fast,” said Harry, surprised as he took it.

He looked a little embarrassed. “It’s been on my mind since we met Todd Boot,” he said. “Besides, I just reworked my father’s plan a little. He was going to make it an exclusive resort for the pureblood circle, but my idea is to use it as an affordable holiday resort for middle income families. Todd Boot already has a client network and if we cooperate with that, we shouldn’t have an issue keeping a steady stream of visitors to the resort.” He sighed. “Fleur showed me some of your finances, and while they are substantial, it never hurts to have more, especially with the orphanage and institute also coming into play. This is a good opportunity to make some additional revenue.”

“Well, you’re not wrong,” said Harry, and started reading through the business plan. “What did Fleur say about this?”

“I, uh, haven’t told her yet,” he said.

“Why not?” asked Harry, looking up in surprise.

“I wanted to hear what you thought first,” he said. “If you think it’s alright, I’ll bring it up at the meeting today.”

Harry gave a nod, noticing it was a well-drafted plan, though there were some tentative parts, especially with the financial aspect and he could see that Fleur would need to go over it to make sure it was viable. “Are there any issues with it being in France?” he asked.

“I’m sure Daphne will have to look into it, and we would have to apply to the French government to grant us permission,” he said. “It’s still in the early stages, alright?”

“Fine,” nodded Harry. “It seems interesting, so let’s bring it up at the meeting. I have another property on the French Riviera which is a little similar.”

“Yes, that could be a summer resort, but I think we should see if this can work first before thinking of expanding,” he said, taking the plan back and standing up.

“Thank you for this, Draco,” said Harry.

“I’m just doing my job,” said Draco, glancing away in embarrassment.

“I’m pretty sure this is beyond your usual job,” said Harry.

Draco chuckled. “Well, you’re not wrong, but the thing is, everyone else is doing it too,” he said.

“Doing what?” asked Harry, slightly confused.

Draco looked at him incredulously. “Going beyond what’s expected of them,” he said, like it was obvious. “Forget me, just think how much Daphne is doing. Isn’t she also helping you plan some event? That isn’t her job either, you know.”
“I know that,” he said, feeling slightly defensive and just a tiny bit guilty. Was he asking too much of Daphne?

“Look, the point is, everyone is working hard,” said Draco. “Don’t worry so much about it. Everything we are doing here is as unorthodox as it gets, so we might as well just go all the way with it.”

“I never thought I’d hear you say that,” grinned Harry, cheering up a little.

He rolled his eyes in response. “I can be nice, you know,” he said.

“News to me,” shrugged Harry, smiling to let him know he was joking. “Still, I’m grateful.”

“I should be saying that,” he said, shaking his head. “How about we mutually agree not to bring it up?”

Harry laughed. “Fine by me.”

~

20th June, 1998

In the main parlour of Zabini Villa, Daphne sat opposite her best friend as they played cards quietly. They had done it frequently when they were at Hogwarts, usually betting a few knuts here and there. Now, as adults, they had progressed to sickles.

This particular game was quite popular with witches and wizards in Japan, and Blaise had learned it from one of his stepfathers. It had taken Daphne some time to learn what the flowers cards were supposed to be, but she had to admit it was a fun game to play when she wanted to relax. Betting wasn’t a part of the game, but she and Blaise had added their own rules to make things interesting.

“Something on your mind?” asked Blaise, as they finished their fourth game of the afternoon.

Daphne didn’t answer immediately, gathering the cards and shuffling them absently as she collected her thoughts.

Blaise shrugged lightly. “I am only asking because it’s not like you to lose by this wide of a margin,” he said, casting an eye towards their individual pile of coins. “And also the party isn’t until this evening, not that I mind the company since Anita took off for Bali yesterday.”

“Why is she in Bali?” asked Daphne.

“Scouting out her next husband,” he said. “So, what’s going on with you? Are you worried I’ll throw one of my usual parties? Even after I promised you it would be a casual dinner with a few of us?”

“No, I believe you,” she said. “Thanks for agreeing, by the way.”

“Sure, it’s no problem,” he said, easily. “I can throw one of my amazing parties some other time.”

“I’m not all that sure they could be called amazing,” smiled Daphne, and he grinned at her.

“But you can’t deny that they are fun,” he said.

“I suppose not,” she admitted. She paused for a moment before speaking again. “I think I’m falling for him.”
Blaise gave her a considering look before reaching over and taking the cards from her and shuffling them. He began dealing them for their fifth game.

Daphne raised her eyebrows. “You’re not surprised?” she asked.

“Well, I’m surprised you admitted it, but I’m not surprised about you falling for Potter,” he said, as he finished dealing. Instead of picking up his cards, he met Daphne’s gaze seriously. “So, what are you going to do about it?”

“He just got out of a relationship, and it’s not the right time for either of us,” said Daphne.

“That isn’t what I asked,” he said. “I didn’t mean what are you going to do about it now. A decision doesn’t have to be made right at this very moment.”

“I know that,” she said. “I mean, as far as a husband goes, I could do far worse, I suppose.”

Blaise laughed and shook his head. “You know I was expecting something along the lines of it being too much of a bother to date the Saviour of the wizarding world,” he said.

“Well, I don’t really care about the Saviour part,” said Daphne, honestly. “I am grateful, of course, but if I had never met him that day in Verdant, I wouldn’t have felt anything beyond that. My feelings developed over the course of getting to know him these past few weeks.”

“That doesn’t surprise me,” he said. “You have never been one for heroes. So, what made you fall for him?”

Daphne blushed a little, but knew if there was anyone she could tell, it would be Blaise. Despite his dry, sarcastic personality, he was never one to judge and content to listen, much like her. It was why they got along so well, and in another life it would have made them ideal romantic partners as well, but much like Harry and Hermione, their relationship was strictly platonic and would remain that way.

“He could get through to me,” she admitted in a small voice.

“There have been other people who could do that,” he pointed out. “Why him in particular?”

Daphne’s blush grew darker, and she struggled to put into words exactly why Harry was special to her.

“It’s alright, I can already guess,” said Blaise, with a soft smile. “You can relax around him.” Daphne jumped slightly as he hit the nail right on the head. “And not in the Saviour way of him being capable of protecting you. You can relax around him and be yourself. Just as you are, without barriers. Am I wrong?”

“No,” said Daphne. “You’re right.”

“Thought so,” he said. “He already knows you are smart and he’s shown he appreciates that rather than being intimidated by it. You’ve shown him your cunning side and he hasn’t taken off running. If anything, he has relied on that side of you.”

“He has also seen me lose composure,” she admitted quietly. “I think that’s when it happened...or when I realised it, at least. Because he could cheer me up and he said just the right thing without even knowing how much it would mean to me.”

“That’s because you haven’t opened up to him properly yet,” he said, and reached over to tap his
knuckles against her forehead. “You’re still wearing that fucking pin.”

Daphne made a face at him before sighing. “I can’t take it off,” she admitted. He narrowed his eyes, and she continued speaking before he could interrupt. “I don’t mean that I don’t want to. I can’t, alright? I tried.”

“What are you so afraid of?” he asked, and his tone was utterly serious. “You are a capable witch with decent duelling skills. Daphne, at some point, you have to admit that the pin isn’t about a backup plan in case you were married off to a Death Eater anymore. You are using it as a crutch.”

“What are you talking about?” she asked, though she had a sinking suspicion she knew what he meant.

“Daph,” he said, softly. “Elias was a wonderful father. He kept you and Astoria safe all these years and he loved you dearly. But he is dead. I can see why knowing that he isn’t around would be so frightening, but that doesn’t mean you should stop living your life.” He took her hands gently in his. “Having the pin makes you feel safe. Tells you that you have a way out if something goes wrong, because with Elias gone, you are the first line of defence for House Greengrass and Tori.”

Tears filled Daphne’s eyes as he hit the nail right on the head once again. Blaise smiled sadly and gathered her in his arms.

“It is not wrong to be afraid, Daphne,” he said, stroking her back like he was comforting a child. “But I don’t want you to stop living out of fear. You have to let go of that pin, because you’re right. It isn’t the right time for you and Potter just yet. You don’t have to rush into a relationship. It’s fine to take it slow and let yourself heal. I’m not asking you to take that pin off right now either. Just, recognise that it’s fear that’s making you hold back, and learn to grow comfortable once more with yourself before taking steps towards him for a relationship.”

“It’s not that easy,” she mumbled, though she could see his point.

“I don’t think it’s meant to be,” he said. “We lived through a hellish ordeal, and for a time, that pin was your best option for escape. But the ordeal is over, and you have to come to terms with it.”

Daphne pulled away a little and looked at him. “How do you know so much?” she asked.

He rolled his eyes. “What do you think I was doing in Italy after the Battle of Hogwarts?” he asked. “You mean you weren’t spending your days on a sunny beach with a new model every day?” she asked, her tone just the little bit teasing.

“You mean you weren’t spending your days on a sunny beach with a new model every day?” she asked, her tone just the little bit teasing.

“I was in therapy,” he said, chuckling. “Nothing extensive, but I was meeting with a Mind Healer to talk through some things. She pointed out something obvious, really. We’re still young, we have over a hundred years left to live. There’s no damn hurry to get anywhere. It made sense why everyone was eloping and popping out brats left, right and centre in the middle of the war, but there’s no harm in doing things the slow way.”

Daphne pulled away from his arms and sat back as she thought through his words. “So, what you are telling me is, I don’t have to do anything,” she said.

“For now,” he corrected. “Fall in love with Potter, let him fall in love with you. Go on dates, enjoy dinners and drinks together, and most importantly, open up to one another. That’s what you should be doing.”

“Your therapist tell you that?” asked Daphne, though she was feeling considerably lighter after his
advice.

“Of course she did,” he said. “Over breakfast the next day,” he added with a wink.

“You’re disgusting,” said Daphne, though she couldn’t help but join him as he started laughing. She ordered him to make sure the last minute preparations were done and went to the bathroom to freshen up before she had to bring over Harry and Hermione since it would be their first time to Zabini Villa.

No matter how uncouth he could be, Blaise was still a really insightful person. Daphne knew she would never stop being grateful for his advice and his concern over her.

~

21st June, 1998

Hermione opened her eyes slowly in an unfamiliar place. Her left arm felt numb, there was a crick in her neck, and her mouth and throat felt dry. As she blinked, a dull ache started building in her head, and it took her a moment to recognise the symptoms of a hangover. Shifting slightly, she realised she was curled up in an armchair in the living room of Zabini Villa.

Hermione wasn’t one to drink enough to get a hangover and she only remembered one such occasion in Australia the day after finding her parents. It hadn’t been pleasant then, and it was even less pleasant now, as she moved tenderly to sit up properly. A quick glance around the room told her that she wasn’t the only one having a difficult morning.

Blaise was asleep on another armchair, lying on his back at an awkward angle that made Hermione wince just looking at him. Daphne was curled up on the sofa, and Harry was asleep sitting up on the floor with his back against the same sofa. By far, the most comical sight was Draco asleep face down on the rug. There was no sign of Astoria, but Hermione remembered that she hadn’t been drinking being underage still.

Hermione was about to wake someone, when Astoria walked in and smiled cheerily.

“Good morning,” she greeted.

The sound rang in Hermione’s head and she winced. “Quieter, please,” she murmured. “What time is it?”

“About eight,” said Astoria. “I woke up earlier and went home for a shower and change of clothes before coming back.”

“Why?” asked Hermione.

She grinned and held up a few vials. “I went to get this. Hangover remedy,” she said. “Daphne had made some in anticipation because she knows how Blaise is. How much do you remember?”

Hermione racked her brains, vaguely remembering a bottle of turquoise liquid that Blaise had set down in front of them after dinner. “Not enough,” she answered, accepting the vial with a grateful nod.

Pinching her nose, she quickly drank the remedy, barely managing not to gag at the slimy texture and bitter taste. It worked though, as her headache began to clear, and Hermione quickly cast a teeth cleaning and breath freshening charm on herself, as Astoria woke up the others.

There were vague mumblings and exclamations as Daphne, Harry, Draco and Blaise woke up and
took the hangover remedy.

“I am never drinking again,” said Draco, still lying on the rug though he had moved onto his back after taking the remedy. “What the fuck was in that drink?”

“Alcohol,” said Blaise, the only one who looked about as refreshed as Astoria.

“Yeah, how much?” asked Daphne, gathering her hair into a messy bun on top of her head. Hermione’s sharp eyes saw Harry’s surreptitious gaze towards her as she did it, and hid her smile. He was too obvious.

“Enough to be fun,” answered Blaise. “Breakfast?”

“I’ll pass,” said Hermione, needing to freshen up properly. “Thanks, anyway.”

“Yeah, me too,” said Draco, apologetically. “I don’t think I can keep anything down if I eat now.”

“Do you need me to get you something else?” asked Astoria, worriedly.

He sat up and smiled a little. “No, it’s fine,” he said. “I’ll just go home and sleep it off.”

“Alright,” she said, still looking a little concerned.

“I think I’m in the same boat,” said Harry, stretching his arms. “I’ll get Minnie to make me something a bit later.”

In the end, even the Greengrass sisters were returning home, so goodbyes were said as they all parted ways. Hermione finally had the fog of alcohol lift and she remembered it had been an eventful evening with the six of them. The talks had remained on lighter topics at first, and Harry, Daphne and Draco had filled them in on everything else they were doing currently with the GSC, leading to some very open discussion. Hermione was even more impressed, and she also added that she had started reading through the books that Daphne had given her and was sorting through them.

About halfway through the bottle of that turquoise liquid, things had turned serious. Hermione got to hear a firsthand account of Hogwarts in the past year and what the Slytherins had been doing. She had a newfound respect, especially for Blaise.

As Daphne and Astoria left through the fire, Hermione took the floo after them and arrived home in Grimmauld Place. It was just before nine, so she expected Andromeda to be around, but to her surprise, Ron was waiting for her in the living room.

“Ron?” she asked, taken aback at his sudden appearance. “What’s going on?”

“That’s kind of what I want to know,” he said, dropping a newspaper and magazine on the floor in front of her.

Hermione noticed it was the Evening Prophet from the day before and the latest issue of Witch Weekly which had to have come out just that morning. On both publications, were photos of her and Harry attending the opening at Fortescue Cafe.

She had a brief moment of panic wondering if there had been a Rita Skeeter-esque article speculating about an alleged relationship between her and Harry, but as she picked them up and read through, she saw that it was an honest account of Harry Potter and his friend, Hermione Granger, attending the launch of Fortescue Cafe. The rest of it was praise for the cafe itself and later, the focus on Harry’s words. It also included a lot of comments and responses from other people who had attended
the launch.

Hermione slowly looked at Ron’s red face in confusion. “What?” she asked, not having seen anything that would account for his apparent anger.

“What do you mean?” he demanded. “You and Harry went out.”

“Yes, to brunch,” she said, rolling her eyes. She should have guessed it was something stupid, but she had foolishly hoped that Ron was over the whole business with her and Harry. She didn’t even understand why he was so fixated on the thought of her and Harry becoming more than friends. Neither she nor Harry felt that way about one another, and she wished Ron understood it already. “Didn’t you and Harry go out drinking the evening before?”

“That’s different!” he said, his ears going redder.

“Not for me, it isn’t,” she said, feeling her headache starting to return though it wasn’t because of a hangover this time. “Did you even read these or just see the pictures?”

The look on his face told her he’d taken one look at the pictures and rushed over to demand answers without even reading through the articles properly.

“Yeah, thought so,” said Hermione, tossing them away. “Just because I said we should take a break from one another doesn’t mean I have been cheating on you. And how many times have I told you that Harry and I aren’t that way?”

He crossed his arms and nodded, but then looked at her suddenly. “Where have you been?” he asked.

“Huh?” she asked, thrown off by the sudden change in tone.

“You’re just getting home, and your clothes and hair are a mess,” he said.

“Thanks, Ron, it does wonders for my self esteem when you say things like that,” she said, trying to tame her hair which she only just realised was standing on one end. The others must have been too hungover or too polite to point it out, she realised. “If you must know, I was at a party and had a bit to drink, so I slept it off.”

“A party? Where?” he asked.

His tone made her bristle, because the accusation in it was clear. Though she knew she had done nothing wrong, being spoken to that way, automatically made her not to want to answer. “At a friend’s house,” she said.

“What friend?” he asked.

“What does it matter?” she asked, knowing she couldn’t tell him she was at Blaise’s house. Harry had told her how Ron had reacted to learning Daphne was Harry’s lawyer, but it would be so much worse if he knew that she and Harry were also friends with Blaise. Not to mention, Draco. If Ron were in a calm mood, she could have brought it up tactfully but since he was in a defensive mood right now, she would only make it worse. “Harry was there too, and I was far from the only girl at the party.”

“Harry again,” he said, and Hermione lost her temper.

“That is enough!” she snapped. “You know what, I was at Blaise Zabini’s house. You want to know
who else was there? Harry, and Daphne and Astoria Greengrass, and Draco Malfoy. Do you want to know why? Because that is not the first time we have met up and probably won’t be the last.”

Ron’s face grew thunderous. “Why were you with a bunch of Slytherins?” he demanded, getting right up to her. “With Malfoy, of all people.” He narrowed his eyes at her. “Have you been going around with him behind my back?”

_Hermione trembled as she struck Ron across the face. “What the fuck is wrong with you?” she demanded, her voice low with fury. “Why does it automatically mean I am fucking around like a whore if I am around another man? Do you really think so little of me?” Her entire body shook with anger and suppressed sobs. “I am friends with those people, you jealous twat. And yeah, despite everything that happened. No, you know what, because of everything that happened. Is it easy? Fuck no. But people are trying to rebuild their lives after this damn war and some people are trying to be better than what they were in their younger lives.”

“Is that the line he fed you? That he’s changed and he’s sorry for what he’s done?” demanded Ron, his voice equally furious. “And the rest of them as well. Why are the Slytherins all flocking to Harry now?”

“We’re no longer children, you immature prat,” snapped Hermione. “Just because they were Slytherin doesn’t make them bad people, and both Daphne and Blaise fought at the Battle of Hogwarts. As for Malfoy, knowing he was wrong and doing something to correct his mistakes and be a better person is not an easy thing to do. But he’s trying, they are all trying. As am I, and as is Harry. We are all trying to survive and find our place in this new world after everything we’ve been through. You don’t get to belittle their experience, without even knowing anything about what they went through.”

“Yeah, I bet it was real tough when Death Eaters had the run of the school,” he shouted, refusing to back down. “I bet they cried after they tortured children.”

Hermione only just managed to stop herself from drawing her wand as she remembered what they had talked about the previous evening.

It had been Blaise who had gathered like-minded older students in Slytherin and taught them a harmless charm that they could cast instead of a Crucius curse to fool the Carrows and protect the younger children from being tortured. They’d also used their privilege as Slytherins to set loose the children in dungeons whom the Carrows had chained up and keeping them company under pretext of guarding them.

It was incredibly dangerous and the price for getting caught would have been unimaginable, and more than once, they had to obliviate people who would have blabbed to the Carrows. They would never get any gratitude for the risk they took, and often the very children they were protecting would turn around and accuse them of being Death Eaters like all Slytherins. Even the teachers had written off Slytherin house, no matter whether their parents were Death Eaters or not, so they also had to fend off attacks from the other three houses on top of everything else.

“Ron,” said Hermione, slowly. “You don’t know anything.”

“Damn right I don’t,” he said, evidently under the impression that he was winning this argument. “They are cowards, the lot of them.”

Hermione’s eyes blazed with anger. “They are not the only ones, are they?” she asked, her voice
dangerously quiet.

Ron paled. “T-that is…”

“What? That’s different?” she asked, her tone rising. “Tell me how, Ronald. Tell me how a Slytherin doing what little they could with Death Eaters breathing down their necks is somehow more cowardly than a Gryffindor bailing on his best friends because things got a little tough.”

“It was the locket,” he whispered. “I told you…”

“We all wore the locket!” screamed Hermione. “WE ALL WORE THE LOCKET!” She screamed incoherently in frustration. “Don’t you fucking put this all on the locket!”

“I came back,” he said, his face crumpling. “Hermione, I came back.”

“Yeah,” she said. “And I thought that meant you had matured. You understood that life can get difficult sometimes and we can’t always do the right thing. But nothing’s changed! You have gone back to being the same person you were before the war. Thinking Harry and I are going to get together, thinking I am going behind your back with any bloke I see, thinking all Slytherins are evil, thinking people can’t change and do things to be better! You are still acting like a child, Ronald. And I’m sick of it. That’s why I wanted us to take a break, and you know what, that’s given me perspective too.” She took a deep breath and blinked back the tears gathering in her eyes. “We are breaking up.”

He gasped. “You don’t mean that,” he said.

“I do,” she said, and then buried her face in her hands. “I’m sorry, Ron. I know you are going through a lot as well with your family but if I keep this going just because I don’t want to add to your problems, I would only be punishing myself and making myself miserable. You couldn’t be happy that way either.” She lifted her face and shook her head. “It’s better if we break up.”

He stared at her, his mouth opening and closing in apparent disbelief. “Tell me why,” he said. “You want me to be nice to Slytherins? Is that it?”

“I’m not asking you to do anything, Ron,” said Hermione, sitting down in an armchair near the floo tiredly. “But the world isn’t as black and white as you paint it, and I thought you understood that. Even I haven’t really forgiven Draco for anything, but at the very least, I can look at him and see the person he is trying to become rather than who he was.”

“So you think Death Eaters deserve a second chance?” he asked.

“Of course not,” she said, plainly. “Second chances have to be earned.”

“And you’re saying I didn’t earn a second chance,” he said, bitterly.

“You did,” she said. “When you came back to the Horcrux hunt after leaving, I thought it meant we could move forward together. The entire week we spent in Australia told me I had thought wrong. It isn’t that I don’t forgive you for leaving us. That’s not entirely why I’m breaking up with you.” She took a deep breath before looking at him again. “The person I am now will never be happy with the person you have always been. It was fine when we were younger and we could shout and scream our way through life, but I can’t live that way anymore. You exhaust me, Ron, and if we keep this up, I will end up hating you.”

He looked at her with narrowed eyes, and then without saying another word, he went to the floo and vanished. Hermione stared at the fireplace for a long moment and then burst into tears.
She registered Andromeda hurrying to her and putting a comforting arm around her shoulders. Hermione vaguely made a note to apologise to her later for the row which would have surely disturbed her and Teddy since she and Ron had been screaming their heads off at one another.

At that very moment though, she was too tired and angry and sad to do more than hold onto Andromeda and cry her eyes out.

~

Harry had just finished eating a greasy breakfast courtesy of Minnie, and was about to head upstairs to the library, when Ginny’s head appeared in the visitor’s floo in the foyer. He was so shocked that he didn’t say anything for a moment and judging by her expression, she was equally uncomfortable and awkward about it.

“Ron wants to see you,” she said, not meeting his gaze.

“Uh, yeah, alright, give me five minutes,” he said.

Without another word, Ginny vanished. Still thrown off, Harry keyed Ron into the wards, wondering what was going on. He dropped floo powder into the fireplace and spotted Ron waiting in front of the fireplace at the Burrow. His expression told Harry that something major had happened, so he told him to come through.

Ron appeared into the Potter Hall’s foyer almost immediately.

“Er, what happened?” asked Harry, watching his expression as he looked around at the foyer open-mouthed.

“You live here?” asked Ron, looking flabbergasted.

“Yes,” said Harry, squirming uncomfortably. “Ron, what’s going on?”

Ron looked at him and snorted without humour. “You tell me, because I have no idea,” he said.

“Hermione dumped me.”

Harry hoped he looked appropriately surprised, considering Hermione had already told him she would be probably breaking up with Ron. He had to wonder at the timing of it, since Hermione wouldn’t have been at Grimmauld Place for longer than an hour, having left Zabini Villa at the same time as him.

“She also told me she was at some party with you and Greengrass and Zabini and Malfoy, of all people,” he said, crossing his arms.

“Yeah, that’s right,” said Harry, truthfully.

“That’s right, he says,” muttered Ron, shaking his head. “Has everyone lost their bloody minds? Malfoy? Slytherins? Am I the only one who remembers what they did?”

Harry wondered if he and Hermione had argued about it which had led to the breakup. It would make sense. Ron had blinders on when it came to Slytherins. Harry would have considered himself no better, but they were no longer at Hogwarts and house rivalry was a pointless thing in the face of everything else that took importance.

“What do you want from me, Ron?” asked Harry, warily. “Knowing Hermione, she would have already told you why…”
“I want to know what happened to my best friend because he sure as hell isn’t here right now,” yelled Ron, making Harry jump. “Right now, you’re a stranger who lives in a bloody palace and goes around traipsing with Slytherins.”

“Ron,” began Harry, trying to maintain his calm but Ron shook his head.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” he demanded.

“I was going to,” said Harry, regretting the fact that he’d decided not to when he had gone to see him the other day. “You were already doing so much, and I didn’t want to…”

“Spare me the false concern,” shouted Ron. “You have no idea what I have been going through while you have been living it up in your bloody palace, traipsing around with the murderers who killed my brother. Guess that’s something you have in common.”

Harry could tell Ron regretted saying it as soon as it left his mouth. But the damage was done.

“Murderer? You are right about that,” said Harry, his lips barely moving as he spoke. “The only reason I am alive is because of every other person who threw themselves between me and Voldemort. Their deaths are all on me. Did you think for a moment that I didn’t know that? Did you think I forgot the way my father told my mother to run while he would hold him off? How my mother pleaded for my life until her last breath? How the reason why I am living in this palace is because every member of my family is dead and I’m the last one left? How Teddy will never know his parents? How I let so many people die? How so many people suffered because of me?”

“Harry,” whispered Ron.

“NO, I DID NOT FUCKING FORGET THAT, RON,” shouted Harry. “I LIVE WITH THAT KNOWLEDGE EVERY BLOODY DAY OF MY LIFE. I GET UP IN THE MORNING AFTER A NIGHT FULL OF NIGHTMARES WHERE I SEE THEM ALL OVER AND OVER. DEAD AND DYING. AGAIN AND AGAIN. I DON’T FORGET, NOT FOR A MOMENT, NOT WHEN I’M AWAKE AND NOT WHEN I CLOSE MY EYES TO SLEEP. IT’S ALWAYS THERE, SO I DON’T NEED YOU TO REMIND ME.”

Harry took a breath, noticing the chandelier and sconces in the foyer had all flared up with his outburst. But he still wasn’t done.

“And the murderers you mentioned?” he demanded of Ron. “Yeah, I’m working with them. BECAUSE NONE OF THEM WALKED OUT OF THIS WAR WITHOUT A PIECE OF THEM GETTING DESTROYED. AND GUESS WHAT, THEY STILL WANT TO DO SOMETHING WORTHWHILE SO THAT OUR CHILDREN AND OUR CHILDREN’S CHILDREN DON’T HAVE TO FIGHT A FUCKING WAR LIKE WE DID.” He lowered his voice and glared at Ron. “Everyone is suffering, Ron, and I know it’s my fault. So, I will do whatever I can to fix this, even if it means working with people who might have been an enemy before. Because that enemy is trying just as hard as I am to fix the wrongs their actions wrought onto this world. Because we can admit that we all did things that caused people to lose their lives and made them suffer. WE CAN ADMIT WE MADE MISTAKES, AND TRY AND MAKE OURSELVES INTO BETTER PEOPLE WHO LEARNED FROM THEM INSTEAD OF HOLDING ONTO OLD PREJUDICES AND HATRED.”

Harry’s chest was heaving and now the chandelier and sconces had extinguished themselves completely, his anger and fluctuating emotions affecting the magic around his home.

“And if that means I have to turn an old friend into an enemy, I am willing to do that as well,” said
Harry, hoarsely.

“Y-You don’t mean that,” said Ron, aghast. “I’m sorry, Harry. Of course, it’s not your fault. Not Fred and not any of the others. I’m sorry.” He dissolved into tears, apologising over and over.

Harry was startled enough to calm down when he saw Ron lose his composure. With a heavy sigh, he waved his wand so that the chandelier and sconces lit back up. “Stop it,” he said. “If you want to apologise, start with Hermione. We will always be friends, Ron, but I am not going to have this fight with you again. It’s tiring.”

Ron looked startled at that, and Harry had to wonder why.

“Feels like I can’t do anything right these days,” murmured Ron. “First Hermione and now, you. I feel like a worthless friend.”

“You’re not worthless,” said Harry, automatically. “You need to stop thinking you’re the only one suffering.”

“I just want things to go back to how they were,” said Ron. “Is that too much to ask for?”

“Things are not going back to the way they were,” said Harry, bluntly. “Not ever. That isn’t me being cruel. It’s that simple, because I won’t let things go back to the way they were. The way things were, led to us fighting a war where we lost so much. I want things to be better than they were, going forward.”

“So, that’s what you have been doing?” asked Ron. “With the Sly-, with Greengrass and them?”

“Everyone suffered in this war. Just because they didn’t suffer in front of you did not mean everything was great for them,” he said. “But we are all moving forward and trying to fix this broken world in what little ways we can. If you can’t accept that, then I can’t help you.”

Ron rubbed a hand over his face. “I don’t even know anymore,” he said. “I need to think about this. This, and a lot of other things.”

“Yeah,” said Harry. “I will still consider you a friend, Ron, until you make a decision. And even if that means we shall no longer be friends afterwards, I am grateful for your friendship from all the way back on our first Hogwarts train ride.”

Ron nodded awkwardly and left through the fireplace once again, leaving him standing alone in the foyer.

~

Harry finished his run around the grounds of Potter Hall which had become a habit at this point. After his confrontation with Ron, he had tried to sit and read but couldn’t focus. Finally after a light lunch, he had decided to go for a run. He did not wish to lose Ron as a friend, but he couldn’t keep fighting with him like this either. Whatever decision he made this time, Harry supposed it would change their friendship forever. Either Ron would come to accept Harry as he was now instead of the boy he had grown up with, or they would end up going their separate ways. Harry knew he was willing to make peace with either of those options when the time came, though he would certainly prefer the former over the latter.

Sweating profusely because of the strenuous exercise and the muggy weather, he was going to jump into the shower immediately, but he heard Daphne’s voice in the kitchen and a quick glance at his watch showed it was already two in the afternoon. He had invited Daphne the previous evening,
telling her he wanted to discuss something important with her, and she had promised to stop by after lunch.

Making his way to the kitchen to apologise to her for losing track of time, he paused when he saw both Annie and Minnie chattering excitedly at Daphne, as she listened patiently. It was remarkable how much his elves adored her, and he thought Daphne indulged them quite a bit too. House elves were notorious for being too attached to the ones they served, but he wondered if it was normal for them to be so devoted to Daphne when she wasn’t their mistress, despite what they called her.

Daphne noticed him and raised a hand in greeting. “Did you take a dip in the lake with all your clothes on?” she asked.

“Funny,” he said, rolling his eyes though his lips quirked up in the first smile since Ron’s visit. “I went for a run and lost track of time. I’ll just shower and be right down.”

“Take your time,” she said. “I’ll go set up in the parlour.”

“Thanks,” he said.

When he returned, she was standing near one of the floor to ceiling glass windows of the parlour, looking out into the garden. He was getting used to seeing her in casual clothes more often, though he seldom saw her with her hair down. This morning had been an exception because she had just woken up and she had immediately put her hair back up, but now, her hair was loose and he was surprised at how long it was, stopping just past her waist. The front of it was pinned back with a glittering silver pin that he noticed she always wore.

Harry cleared his throat and she smiled as she turned to look at him. “Sorry to keep you waiting,” he said.

Instead of the table where they would usually sit, he led her to the sofa. She looked a little curious, but joined him as they sat side by side together.

“So, what did you want to talk about?” she asked, turning towards him slightly.

“I want you to tell me about the old ways,” he said. Her eyebrows shot up in surprise. “It’s been on my mind since you mentioned it. I tried looking it up in the library here but I couldn’t find anything.”

“That’s not surprising,” she said, smiling a little. “The traditions are passed by word of mouth and there’s very little about them written down.” She looked at him speculatively. “I’m not particularly opposed to telling you, but why are you so curious?”

“I guess, it is idle curiosity for the most part,” he admitted. “But I think my parents practiced them too, and I know nothing about any of it.”

Her eyes melted in understanding, but there was a slight hesitance in her demeanour. “The thing about the old ways is that every family has their own way of practicing them,” she said. “There are things in common, of course, but the traditions that I know are the ones my father taught me, and he learned those from his parents, and so on. I can tell you what I know, but I won’t be able to teach you the Potter family traditions.”

He gave a nod. “I would still like to know,” he said. “As much you can tell me, of course,” he added, not wanting to be rude and have her divulge her family’s traditions for the sake of his curiosity.

Daphne chuckled. “It’s not like they are a big secret,” she said. “I’ll tell you everything I know, but
history has never been my strong point, so you’ll have to bear with it.”

“I’ll do my best,” he smiled, his mood lifting.

“Well, like I said before, these traditions supposedly go back to the time when Muggles and wizards coexisted,” she said. “Magic comes from the blood, and so traditions of wizards were always rooted in the aspects of nature. The common theory is that Muggles and wizards shared these traditions once upon a time, but as time went on and wizarding kind was persecuted, the Muggles established their own traditions and co-opted the older traditions. That’s why there are remnants of the old ways in the Muggle and modern magical traditions.”

“So, what are these traditions exactly?” asked Harry. “Is it like religion? Worshipping nature instead of a deity?”

“It’s more like a mutual respect than worship,” corrected Daphne. “It is acknowledging nature and the passage of time, and respecting the life that exists alongside us. The traditions aren’t binding, as I have said, but there are elements we have in common. Most notably, the Sacred Days.”

“What’s that?” he asked, fascinated by this aspect of the wizarding world that he was completely oblivious to.

“There are eight days of the year that are considered sacred,” said Daphne. “The summer solstice, the winter solstice, the spring equinox, the autumn equinox, Samhain, Candlemas, Lammas and Beltane. There are traditions to celebrate each of those days.”

“And these traditions are different for different families?” he asked.

“Yes, though there are things in common,” she said. “Traditions tend to get mixed up and talked about through marriages and alliances.” She smiled a little. “Even if you don’t find out precisely what the Potter family’s traditions were, you can start your own and pass them on to your children, if that is what you wish.”

He smiled back gratefully, heartened at her words. Then he thought back to the days that she had mentioned. “Aren’t those pagan holidays?” he asked.

“Pagan?” asked Daphne, confused.

“Yeah, uh, I think it used to be a Muggle religion a long time ago,” he said, trying to remember something he might have read in a book back when he was still in primary school.

“Well, the celebration of Sacred Days is the most well-known aspect of wizarding traditions here in northern Europe, and it was practiced by half-bloods and Muggleborns as well, so it’s possible for the traditions to have migrated to the Muggle world,” she shrugged. “Or perhaps, there are remnants from before the Statute of Secrecy.”

“That makes sense,” he nodded. “But why did the old ways go out of practice in the wizarding world? Was it because of Voldemort?”

She shuddered at the name, but shook her head. “He wasn’t the first wizard to clamour for blood purity. There has always been a powerful, sometimes vocal, faction of purebloods who have advocated for the whole nonsense,” she said. “The old ways being so vague means they are also easy to turn into propaganda quickly, so it went out of practice for people who feared being labelled a bigot. Then again, another theory is that it was done deliberately at the height of the witch hunts to protect wizarding children from being persecuted by Muggles. Wizards began following the co-opted Muggle traditions and practiced the old ways in private to keep magic a secret. If you ask me, that
seems more likely. Yule became Christmas, Samhain became Halloween, and so on.”

He gave a measured nod. “So, that’s how you knew what colours were appropriate for Halloween, I’m guessing,” he said.

“Yes,” she said. “There are certain colours, fabrics, scents and foods and rituals specific to each of the eight days.”

“Is Halloween, I mean, Samhain the next of the Sacred Days?” he asked.

“No, we have the summer solstice tomorrow,” she said.

His eyes went wide. “Really?”

“Yes, June 22nd.” she answered. “And then Lammas on July 31st and the autumn equinox on September 21st.”

“What happens on the summer solstice?” he asked.

Daphne beamed with excitement. “It is one of the more fun ones,” she said. “We build a large bonfire, prepare a meal from the fruits and vegetables we picked from our gardens, and find the fern bloom.”

“Fern bloom?” he asked.

She nodded. “It only blooms on the summer solstice and has to be picked on that evening or it will vanish by the next day,” she said. “It’s a rare potion ingredient so our father would take Astoria and I outside to try and find it. Trust me, it is a lot of fun, and the whole hunt gets you in the mood for the meal. Then, we light the bonfire and eat together. It’s a way to spend time with family, enjoy an outdoor meal together and pay respect to the nature which grants us the means to continue using our magic. It’s also a good night for certain rituals.”

“What kind of rituals?” he asked, fascinated.

“Nothing that would interest you, I’m afraid,” she laughed. “Summer solstice rituals are for young maidens to perform. Our father would prepare the seven flowers for Astoria and I. It’s said that if you sleep with those under your pillow, you shall dream of your suitor.” He must have looked startled, because she laughed again. “It’s not really true. Children dream of Father Christmas even though he isn’t real, don’t they? There’s no real Divination with the seven flowers, just a symbolic tradition.”

“Right,” he said, feeling something like relief when she clarified it. He decided to take a massive leap of faith. “Uh, is there?”

“What?” she asked, confused.

“A suitor,” he said, feeling the back of his neck getting warm. “Do you have one?”

Daphne’s eyes went wide as she gaped at him. “No,” she said, turning away quickly. “I mean, I don’t have a suitor.”

“Oh,” he said, even more relieved this time around. “I was just wondering since you mentioned marriages being arranged in your family.”

“Right,” she said. “But I wasn’t betrothed. My father was waiting until I finished Hogwarts.”

She still wouldn’t look at him, and he could see that her cheeks with pink with embarrassment. “Is
that still something that might happen?” he asked, summoning all his Gryffindor courage. “You know, hypothetically speaking.”

Daphne finally turned to look at him and though her face was as pink as he’d ever seen it, she met his gaze with determination. “Only if I fall in love. I intend to marry the person I love, not a match made for convenience,” she said, before looking away once again. “You know, hypothetically speaking.”

Harry felt his heart soar for a brief moment, before remembering he had broken up with Ginny only a week ago. Daphne knew his goals and ambitions better than Ginny had and she was willing to stand by him, but it didn’t mean she would join him in becoming his partner for the rest of their lives. He had told Ginny that he wanted the kind of wife who could walk with him on the same path. Perhaps, there would never be anyone willing to take on something of that magnitude for his sake.

“Harry,” said Daphne, and he looked at her quickly, realising his thoughts had drifted.

“I’m sorry, what?” he asked.

“I asked, do you want to?” she asked. “See the summer solstice celebrations, I mean. It will just be Astoria and I this year, so I was going to invite Blaise, probably Draco if he isn’t going home to his family. You should spend it with Andromeda and Teddy, at the very least. Celebrations like these are precious and meant to be shared with the people around you.”

“I would love to,” said Harry, sincerely. “Is it alright, though? Isn’t it a family thing?”

Daphne smiled at him in a way that made him want to forget his depressing thoughts from earlier. She said a simple word that answered both his questions and put his mind at ease.

“Yes.”

Chapter End Notes

I realise people are wondering about the pace of the Harry/Daphne romance, but as you can see, they both have a lot of issues to work out on their own before approaching a relationship. But it doesn’t mean they have to resolve everything on their own before getting together. They will learn that slowly and learn it together, so please be patient and enjoy the journey!
Chapter 13

22nd June, 1998

After an emotionally tumultuous weekend, going back to work and the normal routine was a welcome relief. Harry and Daphne spent their Monday morning drafting a reply to Robert Abbott, outlining the boarding house idea for his consideration. They hoped it would work out in time for the bill to be filed at the next Wizengamot session.

Hermione stopped by around noon, with two books from the Arc that she had cleared for publishing. One of them was a home remedy potions book with really beautifully done illustrations. It contained a number of techniques that were virtually unknown which would either cut the brewing time in short or even require less ingredients than thought possible. None of the potions were beyond a fourth year level, and it fit their criteria perfectly.

The second was a book of short stories about students attending Hogwarts in the early nineteenth century. They were fictional adventures like the kind Enid Blyton would write, as Hermione described it. Fictional books, particularly ones aimed at teenagers, were rare in the wizarding world, so that book was a welcome surprise and why Hermione had chosen it to be published.

Since Fleur and Draco were due to meet with the head of Phoenix Wings publisher later in the afternoon, they were happy they already had books that could be published.

Sensing that a talk was much needed, Harry and Hermione met in his office to discuss Ron. Harry was surprised to learn Hermione’s words to Ron had not been too different from his own.

“I thought he would come see you when he stormed off,” frowned Hermione. “I can’t believe he would blame you for Fred’s death, though. What was he thinking?”

“He wasn’t thinking and it just slipped out,” said Harry.

“Stop defending him,” said Hermione, sharply. “We always defend him, no matter what he does.”

Harry sighed, not arguing the point because he knew it was true.

“You know it’s not your fault, right?” asked Hermione, appraising him carefully. When he didn’t agree, she sighed. “Oh, Harry. It’s not your fault.”

“It is, though,” he admitted, in a small voice.

“No, it isn’t,” she said, firmly. “Listen to me, Harry, I know you feel responsible and that’s why you are working so hard to change so many things. But that responsibility shouldn’t come from a place of guilt. If doing all this is somehow your way of repenting, you should just stop.”

“I can’t stop, you know that,” he snapped.

“Then shift your perspective a little, or you will destroy yourself,” she said, and then sighed deeply. “Have you heard of novocaine?”

“What?” asked Harry, completely confused.

“It’s a drug,” she said. “My parents used it as an anesthetic, though they stopped using this one a while ago now, because it was considered too dangerous and addictive.”
“Alright,” said Harry bemused, as he wondered where she was going with this.

“When I found my parents and undid the memory charms, we had to have a lot of difficult conversations,” said Hermione, looking more serious than he had ever seen her. “They had a hard time accepting my reasons, and when I tried to explain, my mother pointed out it sounded like using novocaine to do brain surgery. Basically, using a temporary and destructive solution for a problem that is very serious and extremely delicate.” She shook her head, and Harry got the distinct impression that there had been much more to that conversation than she was willing to share at the moment. “My point is, you have to talk about these things, Harry. If not with me, then with Daphne, at least.”

“Daphne?” he asked, surprised.

Hermione just smiled. “I know you like her,” she said.

Harry turned ten different shades of red. “Er,” he said.

“It’s alright, I know it’s too soon after breaking up with Ginny,” she said, with a placating smile. “I’m not asking you to jump into a relationship. But I can tell you feel comfortable opening up to her. Even if it isn’t romantic, if talking things out with her can make you feel better, you should do it. The downside of being such close friends is that you, me and Ron have the same shared experience and very similar thoughts on everything. People like Daphne and Blaise have a very different viewpoint than us, so it will offer you fresh perspective, if nothing else.”

Harry nodded reluctantly. “I’ll try,” he said. “I don’t think counselling me is a part of her job, though.”

“Probably not, but I doubt she would mind,” said Hermione, smiling cryptically.

She took her leave after that, promising to give Ron his space, not that she was keen on seeing her ex-boyfriend again. Harry hoped that even if he and Ron didn’t reconcile, he would at least apologise to Hermione. It did leave both Harry and Hermione in an awkward bind as to how they were supposed to interact with the rest of the Weasley family, so they just agreed to keep their distance for a time.

It seemed though, that Harry would always have Weasleys in his life, since Andromeda informed him that Thierry had suggested they hire Charlie Weasley as a groundskeeper for the Lily Potter home. Apparently, Thierry and Charlie had been quite close at Hogwarts as well. Harry knew Charlie hated his current job and would be the perfect fit for the new role, so he gave Andromeda the go-ahead to hire him.

At their end of the day meeting, Draco and Fleur informed them that Phoenix Wings would be publishing both the books that Hermione had chosen and they had worked out the details of the contract. Penelope had also begun consulting with Vikram Kale, so the bookstore project was moving ahead as well.

And finally, a date had been set for the launch of Rosette’s Beauty Potions for that Friday. Apparently, the issue of Witch Weekly from Sunday had contained a feature regarding the new shop, and Tracey happily informed them that there was a lot of buzz around the whole thing, and the launch was slated to be a success.

With a very productive Monday behind them, Harry was excited to attend his very first summer solstice celebration. What was meant to be just a small celebration had grown into a much bigger event. Andromeda had been excited to learn of a summer solstice celebration because she hadn’t
attended one since being disowned. Draco wasn’t going home, so he was happy to still keep to the old ways. Fleur was coming with Bill, as she too hadn’t attended a summer solstice celebration since moving to Britain. Tracey had begged off, since she had her own celebrations with her family, but Blaise had agreed to attend, as had Hermione.

As evening fell, Harry, Hermione, Daphne, Astoria, Draco, Blaise, Andromeda, Teddy, Bill and Fleur gathered on the grounds of Greengrass Manor. They had all dressed in casual summer clothes, with all the younger women in white dresses. Both Daphne and Astoria were also decked out in emerald jewellery and when Harry asked, Daphne informed him that emeralds, apart from representing the Greengrass family, were also the gemstones of the summer solstice.

“The Greengrass traditions have been passed down to me by my father,” said Daphne, as she addressed all of them. “I realise it is unorthodox when we have members of many older families with their own way of doing things but Astoria and I would be honoured if you were to join us in these celebrations.”

“Don’t be so formal,” said Blaise, clapping her on the shoulder. “The fern bloom hunt is first, isn’t it?” At Daphne’s nod, he grinned at the others. “I’ll build the bonfire while the rest of you go hunting for the fern bloom.”

“Are you sure?” asked Daphne.

“Yeah, I have to use oak, right?” he asked.

“Yes,” said Daphne.

“I’ll help, if that’s alright,” offered Bill.

Harry had been the most surprised that Bill was here. He knew Fleur couldn’t divulge details of her job to her husband due to her employment contract, but if Bill found the people gathered there that evening to be quite different from the people Harry would usually associate with, he didn’t let it show. He did seem a bit unsure, but excited to see what the evening would hold, so Harry supposed he did have an open mind about the old ways. Or he was merely curious since Fleur had kept to the ways with her family as well.

“Alright, if Blaise and Bill are building the bonfire, the rest of us can hunt for the fern bloom,” she said, and held up a picture of a beautiful gold flower. “This is what it looks like. Gather as many as you can. Are we ready?”

Harry nodded along with everyone, excited despite not knowing exactly what to expect. Daphne smiled at them and waved her wand with a flourish. As she did, little will-o-wisps glowing silver rose out of the ground and scattered in all directions.

“Follow them to find the fern bloom!” shouted Astoria with excitement, as she already ran after one.

Wanting Andromeda to enjoy the evening as much as she could, Harry took Teddy with him, making sure he was strapped securely on his back. Everyone dispersed in different directions, and Harry and Teddy followed a will-o-wisp into the woods around Greengrass Manor. Teddy appeared to be enamoured by the shiny will-o-wisps and wouldn’t stop making happy baby noises the entire time, his eyes wide as can be every time Harry looked back at him. They found their first bloom and Harry picked it, placing it carefully into his pocket. And then there were off, following a different will-o-wisp for another fern bloom.

An hour or so passed as they all ran around chasing will-o-wisps, and by that time the sun had set...
and night had fallen completely. The will-o-wisps led them out of the woods and back to where Blaise and Bill had managed to build a substantial bonfire. They had all gathered quite a few of the fern blooms and Daphne told them graciously they were welcome to keep what they had found.

The next part had been lighting the bonfire, so Harry indicated the burlap sack he had brought when he’d come over. “I asked Annie some of the Potter family traditions, and this is one of them,” he said. “This is used as kindling to light the bonfire.”

“What kind of wood is that?” asked Blaise, with interest as Harry carefully pulled it out of the sack.

“The five scents of summer,” realised Draco. “We have a similar one, but we just throw it in the fire.”

“We used to burn ours as incense,” added Fleur, looking intrigued.

“Yeah, this is a little different,” said Harry, remembering the specifics that Annie had explained as she and Minnie had made the kindling. “We take a branch each of lemon, rose and pine, cover them with myrrh and then bind them together with vines of wisteria.”

Daphne smiled as Harry passed everyone some of the kindling. “We have something similar as well,” she explained. “Lemon, myrrh, pine, rose and wisteria, the five scents of summer, are considered sacred for the summer solstice. We use it to light the bonfire as well. They represent your worries, troubles, regrets, illnesses and sorrows. The fire will not take them away, but by offering it to the bonfire we affirm that we do not bear the burden alone and that Mother Magic has made us strong enough to persevere despite them.”

The mood was solemn as they each used the five scents as kindling to light the bonfire. Almost everyone had had tears in their eyes while lighting the fire. Harry held Teddy as Andromeda wept openly. Both Greengrass sisters held hands with each other as they offered their branches to the fire. Draco’s face was set in a grim mask, and even Blaise looked solemn for once. Harry saw tears on Hermione’s face, while Bill and Fleur held each other closely.

Harry thought of all the people who had died for his sake, all the damage that had been done to the world, all the people who had suffered and were still suffering, and hoped that it really was true that offering the burden to the fire would make it easier for him to carry it. With that quiet prayer, he offered his branch to the fire as well, the bonfire grow bigger and bigger.

They all watched in silence for a long while, and Harry didn’t know if it was just the atmosphere around him or the knowledge of offering his troubles to the fire, but he was feeling his mood getting better. He wasn’t the only one, it seemed, as the melancholic atmosphere started dissipating, and their spirits rose once more.

The Greengrass elves brought out the meal then, which was mostly cold foods with a lot of different kinds of fresh salads, fruits, and a fruit punch. Harry had also requested the elves make a special lemon sorbet that was apparently a Potter tradition, started only a couple generations ago. Minnie was the only one who knew the recipe, though she confided that Harry’s mother and grandmother had both known as well. Harry had expected her to be reluctant to share it, but she had handed over the recipe to the Greengrass elves easily, Jolly just accepting it with a beaming smile and secretive look that she exchanged with Minnie that Harry hadn’t been able to interpret.

All the fruits and vegetables used in the preparation of the summer solstice meal had been grown in the greenhouses of Greengrass Manor and as they all tucked in, Harry was surprised to see people he would have never expected to be around one another, sharing a meal and talking and laughing and crying together, and he understood what Daphne had meant when she said it was precious to have
something like this and share it with people around you. It was a shame that so many people had
given up on these traditions, because Harry felt he could definitely get used to it.

“More punch, Harry?”

Harry turned at the sound of Bill’s voice and held his glass out with a smile. “Thanks,” he said, as
Bill poured him punch from the pitcher.

“Don’t mention it,” grinned Bill, setting the pitcher down. The two of them drank in silence for a
while. “I haven’t attended a summer solstice celebration like this one,” he said, after a while.

“You’ve celebrated it before?” asked Harry, in surprise.

“Yeah, I mean there was a version of it in Egypt, but the traditions were completely different. A
colleague of mine would invite me to celebrate with his family,” he explained.

“I’m glad you came here then,” said Harry, sincerely.

“Me too,” he said, and then looked towards Fleur who was rocking Teddy to sleep. “I know Fleur
misses celebrating with her family, not that she would say it, bless her. If I can learn for her sake,
then I would do anything, you know.”

Harry nodded, going a little red at the frank admission from Bill. He had always thought Bill and
Fleur to be a very passionate couple, even in public, but to hear a sincere declaration like that was
something else entirely.

“I heard about you and Ginny,” he said, and Harry froze. “I’m sorry things didn’t work out.”

“Y-yeah,” said Harry, looking at him to gauge his expression.

Bill just smiled. “Don’t get me wrong, I would have been thrilled if you and Ginny had ended up
together, but sometimes things don’t work out and that’s alright,” he said. “You have done a lot for
our family and the wizarding world, so don’t feel so awkward.”

“Thank you, Bill,” he said, wondering if he should bring up Ron and then decided not to. “And
thanks for, you know, not raising a fuss about the guests today.”

“Well, I wasn’t exactly thrilled when Fleur told me she was working with Malfoy, but I trust her
judgment and though she can’t tell me the details, I can tell he is working as hard as he can,” he said.
“I also know you and Malfoy didn’t have a good history so if you are putting that aside to work
together, then I trust your judgment as well.”

Harry felt his heart swell with gratitude and Bill clapped him on the shoulder with a grin.

“Gather around, everyone,” called Andromeda, and the two of them went to join the others. “It’s
time for the seven flowers.”

The house elves brought up a neat stack of cut flowers. Andromeda picked out one each of a rose,
honeysuckle, lily, daisy, carnation, poppy and sunflower, and waved her wand, fashioning them into
a gorgeous chain.

“It’s delightful,” beamed Astoria, as Andromeda handed the first one over to her.

Andromeda smiled back at her, and made two more chains, handing them to Daphne and Hermione.

“May you dream pleasant dreams,” said Andromeda.
“Young maidens are supposed to sleep with them under their pillow tonight,” Daphne explained to Hermione, who was nodding along in fascination as she had been doing all evening. “It’s said you will dream of your suitor.” She turned to Andromeda and inclined her head in gratitude. “Thank you for doing this, Andromeda. It means a great deal.”

“Of course,” said Andromeda, smiling despite tears in her eyes. “I am the oldest one here and it’s the least I can do.”

They all decided to take their leave as it was already quite late. Daphne and Astoria thanked everyone for coming, and Fleur pointed out that it should be the other way around since they had invited virtual strangers into their family’s traditions without hesitating.

On that high note, Harry’s first summer solstice celebration passed.

24th June, 1998

Fleur read the letter she received from her father and smiled in satisfaction. She would have to bring it up at the meeting at the end of the day, she decided, setting it aside for the time being. She was going to go inform Draco, when Maribeth knocked on her door and popped her head in.

“Pardon me, Fleur, but Mr. Fortescue is here and wishes to speak to you and Mr. Malfoy,” said Maribeth.

Fleur looked confused but nodded and told her to show him into a meeting room downstairs.

“Do you think he has brought another new client for us?” asked Draco, as the two of them headed downstairs to meet with Finn.

“I hope so,” said Fleur, and opened the door to the meeting room. “How do you do, Finn?”

“Ah, Fleur, Draco, it is nice to see you both,” said Finn, standing up and shaking their hands. “I apologise for dropping in unannounced but this is the only time I could get before we get overwhelmed at lunch.”

“It’s no trouble at all,” said Draco, as they all took a seat. “How is the new shop going?”

“Extremely well,” beamed Finn. “We anticipated the shopping crowd, but since the Prophet and even Witch Weekly did those articles, we’ve been getting a lot more customers. And it’s still summer, so the young crowd is quite active as well.”

“That’s good to hear,” said Fleur.

“I am quite grateful for all your help,” nodded Finn. “Word spreads fast around the Alley, you see, so I put together a list.” He handed over a long roll of parchment to Fleur. “These are all the ones I could think of, and a couple who have approached me since we opened the new shop. They could all benefit from your help, the way I did.”

Fleur read the list, her eyebrows shooting up. “There’s quite a few here,” she said.

“I don’t know who your client is and even if I never find out, they will still have my gratitude,” he said, sincerely. “The least I can do is give you this list, because something Mr. Potter said—oh, did I mention? Harry Potter came to the launch of Fortescue Cafe.”

“Yes, we saw,” smiled Fleur.
Finn beamed proudly. “He said something to the reporters that stuck with me, you see,” he said. “The Alley being full of people and laughter. It wasn’t until he said it that I realised why the Alley had been feeling so odd even after the war. Diagon Alley is one of the most important places in wizarding Britain, and I wish to see it return- no, get even better than it used to be.”

“We feel the same way, Finn,” said Draco. “We are very grateful for the list.”

“We will do what we can,” promised Fleur.

Finn stood up and offered his hand. “That is all I ask.”

~

“So, what do we have today?” asked Daphne, as they began their meeting at the end of the day. “Andromeda?”

“I hired Charlie Weasley, officially, as the groundskeeper,” she said. “And Thierry promised to introduce me to his mentor, Belinda Sawbridge. She used to run the Orphan Wing before Thierry’s predecessor and quit when she had her own children. They are all grown up now, so I wrote to her and she’s coming in for a meeting tomorrow.”

“Are you thinking of hiring her as the matron?” asked Harry.

Andromeda gave a nod. “She has the right credentials and experience, so it’s at least worth trying,” she said.

“That means we have the Healer, groundskeeper, and possibly a matron,” said Harry.

“Yeah, then it leaves the caretakers,” said Parvati.

“We could always advertise the positions,” suggested Tracey.

“Not yet,” said Andromeda. “I want to hire the matron first, so she can have a hand in recruiting as well.”

“That’s a good idea,” nodded Daphne.

“That’s all from us, I’m afraid,” said Andromeda.

“It will be getting busier for the Potter Foundation now,” said Harry. “Daphne and I had lunch with Robert and Hannah Abbott today.”

“Did they like the boarding house idea?” asked Parvati, eagerly.

“They did,” said Harry. “Hannah wants to lead the project, so she will be working with you at the Potter Foundation offices from next week.”

“She won’t be joining us, just working alongside us on this project,” clarified Daphne. “That means we cannot discuss the orphanage or anything that the GSC does.”

“Understood,” said Parvati. “Will I be assisting her then?”

“You’re coordinating between her and the Potter Foundation,” explained Harry. “Hannah is drafting the plans, as we speak, and said she’ll have them ready by next week.”

“That makes sense,” said Parvati. “I’ll be sure to do it well.”
“Thank you,” smiled Daphne. “Harry and I won’t be at work tomorrow because we are visiting Eustace Mansion to clear it of research and making sure Iola Castle is ready for the institute. We also have an appointment with Newt and Rolf Scamander to get an update.”

“Sounds busy,” said Tracey. “Do you need help with anything?”

“Yes, actually,” said Harry. “We need a name for the research institute.”

“If people are going to know Harry Potter is founding the institute, we can name it along the lines of the orphanage or the foundation,” suggested Tracey.

“The Potter Institute?” asked Harry.

“Doesn’t have the same ring to it,” said Draco, shaking his head.

“James Potter Institute, perhaps,” said Andromeda. “James was quite brilliant, you know. If it hadn’t been for the war, he would have easily done a Transfiguration or Defence Mastery.”

“Oh,” said Harry, and then gave a nod. “That’s what we’ll name it. Any objections?”

No one spoke up, so Daphne cleared her throat. “That settles it,” she said. “What’s next?”

“The pasta shop renovations are done,” said Draco, checking it off the list. “We reached out to the St. James couple, and they said they are ready to open on July 1st, barring any complications. Vikram Kale’s shop is next on the list, but we are waiting until we have Clearwater’s final layout to begin renovations.”

“I think she should have it ready before the end of the week,” said Tracey. “I’ll follow up.”

“Please do,” nodded Fleur, and passed out copies of a parchment to all of them. “Finn stopped by to give us this list. As you can see, there are a lot of different kinds of businesses on there that we can help.”

“He gave us this voluntarily?” asked Daphne. “And here I thought we would have to ask him.”

“We were surprised too, but we shouldn’t waste the opportunity,” said Draco, seriously. “There’s more than a couple restaurants, a hairdresser, shops for clothes and jewellery, you name it.”

“We already got started and reached out to one of the names on the list,” said Fleur. “It’s a magical cleaning services business run by the Clarke family. We have a meeting with them tomorrow.”

“You know,” said Tracey, speculatively. “Our initial plan was to do a few test cases and then go public with a Diagon Restoration Program, but I think we should continue this way.”

“Really?” asked Daphne. “I agree that this list is quite thorough, but…”

“I think we should let the results speak for themselves,” said Tracey. “The little talk Harry had with the press at the launch of Fortescue Cafe is gaining excellent momentum. Of course, if it doesn’t continue, we will go public with a program, but for now, this is working well. People are coming to us, instead of us having to go seek them out.

“You’ve got a point,” nodded Draco. “The more shops and businesses appear in the Alley, the more word spreads.”

“I guess we could hold off then,” said Harry, as Daphne gave a nod. “So you can get started on the list.”
“Absolutely,” agreed Fleur, and pulled out a letter. “Speaking of which, I wrote to my father about the winter resort idea. He got back to me with the French government’s requirements.”

Daphne took the documents that she passed her and nodded. “I’ll read through them,” she said.

“From what my father said, the paperwork won’t be too difficult, but they do have a policy that any business in the region has to have a staff that is at least half locals,” said Fleur.

“Well, we did discuss hiring the management ourselves and letting them handle the rest of the staff recruitment,” said Draco. “No reason why we still can’t do that, right?”

“Right, and it would be much less of a hassle concerning paperwork if they are locals,” said Fleur. “It isn’t an inconvenience, per say, but I just wanted us to remain aware of it.” She looked at Harry questioningly. “Should we go ahead with this project?”

Harry paused thoughtfully before giving a nod. “While Daphne is analysing the formalities, Fleur and Draco, you can start refining the business plan,” he said. “How will that work with the Boot family?”

“We are still drafting an offer for Todd Boot, but we’ll add in a stipulation so he can help advertise for the resort, whenever it is ready,” said Draco.

“Alright,” said Daphne. “Anything on the Puddlemere front?”

“Oh, yes, thank you for reminding me,” said Fleur, searching through a few documents. “As we suspected, there are a lot of people who own Puddlemere United in parts. The other share as big as the Potter family is the Longbottom family with 30%.”

“What do you think?” asked Daphne, looking at Harry. “Do you want to buy out Longbottom and the others?”

“Can we afford it?” he asked.

“We can,” said Fleur. “But I wouldn’t recommend it. It would be better if you and Neville were to buy out the others and own it in a partnership.”

“Makes sense,” said Draco. “A Quidditch team makes money in a lot of ways and a team like Puddlemere which has ties to a ton of sponsorships and deals does better than most in the league. Owning it as partners with Longbottom might not be a bad play.”

Harry nodded. “I’ll speak to Neville,” he said. “If there’s nothing else, let’s call it a day.”

There were murmurs of agreement, as everyone gathered their things and said their goodbyes, ready to go home after another long day of work. Daphne was about to head out as well, when Harry called her name.

“Mind if I have a word?”

“Sure,” said Daphne, as she remained in the conference room while the others left.

“I want to talk to you about the Halloween event,” he said, bluntly. “I think we should get back to working on it.”

Daphne looked at him in surprise and then chuckled. “I was trying to be respectful and give you time,” she said. She’d guessed it wouldn’t have been easy for him to return to work on the project
that would probably remind him of Ginny.

“I’m fine,” he said. “No, really,” he added, when she raised an eyebrow. “We can have dinner and start working tonight.”

“Alright,” she said. “Give me some time to read through these documents Fleur gave me. I’ll be over in an hour.”

“Sure, I’ll have Minnie make something,” he said, taking his leave.

Daphne waved at him and returned her attention to the documents, sorting through them quickly and making notes of the important points. It took her a bit longer than expected, but she finally got it done.

“Better head over,” she murmured to herself, and let her hair down from the tight bun she usually put it in. As an afterthought, she produced a small mirror from her pocket and checked her appearance, touching up her lipstick before abruptly wondering what the hell she was doing. “I’ve got to stop,” she muttered.

Checking to make sure her pin was still securely in her hair, Daphne took the floo and arrived in the kitchen of Potter Hall.

Harry looked up from what he was reading when he heard her, and smiled in greeting.

“Sorry to keep you waiting,” she said. “What are you doing?”

“Looking through the binder,” he said. “There is a lot of detail here.” He closed it and invited her to sit. “Dinner first?”

“Sure,” she agreed easily.

They were halfway through their chicken and red wine casserole, when Harry cleared his throat.

“Ron and Hermione broke up,” he said.

Daphne paused and gave a nod. “Yes, Hermione told me at the solstice celebrations,” she said. “She wanted to apologise, since she told him that Draco and I were working with you.”

“She didn’t break the contract, did she?” asked Harry, worriedly.

“No, of course not,” said Daphne. “Besides, I didn’t know you were keeping it a secret from him.”

“I wasn’t keeping it a secret,” he said, slightly defensively. “Either way, things aren’t great between me and Ron, or Ron and Hermione for that matter.”

“Right,” said Daphne, wondering why he was telling her. Get to know him, Blaise’s words flashed through her mind, so she sighed. “What happened exactly?”

He looked slightly happy that she had asked, so Daphne was relieved that she hadn’t crossed a line.

“Ron’s not a bad person,” said Harry, and Daphne had to smile a little at how loyal Harry was. “He sometimes tends to react before thinking things through, and he’s never been a big fan of Slytherins. I wasn’t very different either, mind you,” he added, when she smirked. “It’s just that it seems petty to focus on that now, when there are more important things going on.”

“Well,” said Daphne, carefully. “I’m sure not everyone can realise that. We are only at the end of
June. It’s been less than two months since the war ended. Some of us have started taking the steps towards the future, but I assume things will take time for most people.”

“Yeah, maybe,” he said, looking unconvinced. “But just because we have started working towards those things, doesn’t mean we are over what happened.”

“Of course, it doesn’t,” said Daphne, firmly. “It is likely to take years, or maybe we will never be over what happened. But everyone needs to come to that realisation on that own, and forcing matters might just do more harm than good.”

“Yeah, I realise that now,” he sighed.

Daphne sat back in her chair and decided that since the topic had been brought up, she might as well go for it. “How have you been sleeping?” she asked.

He looked startled at her abrupt question. “W-why do you ask?”

“I’m concerned, and because I know I haven’t been sleeping well either,” she said, deciding that honesty was warranted if she were expecting it in return. “You have a lot more reason than me to have restless nights.”

He smiled a little, the expression bitter. “Well, you aren’t wrong,” he said. “I did sleep well with that tea you gave me the night I stayed over at Greengrass Manor, though.”

“You know, you should see someone about it,” she said.

“You mean like a mind healer?” he asked. “Out of the question. The last thing we need is speculation about whether I am crazy or not.”

“Blaise knows someone,” she said. “I think she’s in Italy, and if need be, I’ll draw up a contract that’s even more binding than the confidentiality oaths taken by Healers. I’m the last person to advocate this, but maybe you do need to talk to someone.”

“I’m talking to you,” he said.

“Yes, and I’m glad you trust me enough to do that,” she said, sincerely. “You can still talk to me, in fact, I would be happy if we could speak like this often, because I also like talking to you.” Her face went pink, as did his, but she continued on with determination. “But it may not be a bad idea to talk to a professional as well, because they might be able to provide you with the kind of help that I am not qualified to give.”

He didn’t say anything, but she could tell he was thinking about it. They ate in silence for a while, and it was only after the dessert was served, did Harry speak.

“I’ll consider meeting with the mind healer, provided it will be confidential,” he said.

Daphne smiled. “I’ll speak to Blaise,” she said. “And I’ll send over a tin of the tea tonight. Have Minnie make you a cup before bed.”

“Thank you,” he said, gratefully.

“I’m a little surprised you agreed so easily, though,” she said. “I thought I would have to convince you more.”

“I haven’t agreed completely,” he corrected. “I will meet with her once but if it doesn’t work out, I
“You won’t keep up with it.”

“That is fair,” she said.

“Besides, I don’t want to burden you with my problems either,” he said. “It’s not your job to deal with my issues.”

She blinked at him. “I suppose so,” she said, finally. “But I don’t mind. In return, I hope you will let me burden you with some of my issues as well. We could balance it out that way.”

He looked surprised and then nodded. “I am absolutely fine with that.”

~

25th June, 1998

The North Wing of Iola Castle was ten storeys tall and stood independent of the main part of the castle, like the rest of the three towers. It was this tower that was to be the new location of the James Potter Institute.

“Every floor has at least four to five rooms, each one big enough for a laboratory and a small office,” said Harry, as he and Daphne gave the tour to Newt and Rolf. “There are also three floors under the tower but they connect with the dungeons of the entire castle, so unless we need more room, we will keep those warded off for the time.”

“And the rest of the castle is warded off as well?” asked Rolf, as they climbed up the stairs.

“For now, yes,” said Daphne. “But there is plenty of room to expand, as you can see, and the grounds are open.”

“As for the rooms themselves,” added Harry. “They are empty for now, except for your office, Newt, which is on the top floor.”

“I won’t need much,” he said. “A desk and chair is enough.”

They finally reached the top floor and Newt’s office, which a wide spacious room with a beautiful mahogany desk, high backed chairs with dark purple upholstery and the walls lined with empty bookcases. There were two high windows behind his desk, looking out to the rest of the castle, and a fireplace connected to the floo network.

“I hope it will do,” said Harry. “Binky!” The head house elf of the castle appeared and gave a bow. “Binky will be staying on as a permanent house elf for the institute.”

“Well, you seem to have things well in hand,” said Rolf, as Newt just looked astonished. “Should I even ask whose castle this is?”

“I inherited it,” said Harry, truthfully. “I can’t think of a better way to use it.”

“Shall we sit and discuss what we came here to do?” prompted Daphne, seeing both Scamanders at a loss for words.

“R-right, of course,” said Newt, taking a seat behind the desk. “I have been speaking to the people I know and I’ve managed to gather quite a few. Rolf, the list.”

“Yes, Pops,” said Rolf, passing him a roll of parchment.
Newt unfurled it as the rest of them sat down. “So far, we have three Runes Masters, one of whom you mentioned, Harry,” he said, reading from the list. “Two Potion Masters, one Herbology Mistress, a Transfiguration Master, four Arithmancy Masters and two technomages. Some of them have apprentices as well. I am still ironing out the details with a Charms Mistress who has a team of apprentices that she works with, but I should have an answer soon.”

“Do we hire the apprentices as well?” asked Harry.

“No,” answered Rolf. “We hire the Masters and they pay their apprentices from their grants. Often, they provide them with room and board, though.”

“Yes, that is something I wanted to bring up,” said Newt. “I was going to ask if we have space to have dorms, but we clearly do.”

“Perhaps East Tower could be turned into a dormitory,” suggested Daphne. “We have a secondary location for Herbology and Potions experts as well.”

“And we were also looking for a magizoologist,” said Harry, sheepishly. “Because Eustace Mansion, that’s the other place, has a lot of magical creatures that need care as well.”

“Really?” asked Rolf, his eyes shining. “Pops?”

Newt chuckled. “Oh, alright,” he said. “Rolf will go there, if that is alright. I will manage here, especially with a house elf to help.”

“Have those people you mentioned signed on officially?” asked Daphne.

“They have signed the tentative agreement that you sent us,” said Rolf, handing her the stack of paperwork.

“We still need to finalise the details once we decide on their grants,” said Newt. “I was hoping to introduce you both to them to see what they are working on, and based on that, we can prepare the final grants.”

“That is fine by me,” nodded Harry.

“If it goes well, I have a lot more people I would like to bring on board, but for the time being, this should do,” said Newt.

“Excellent, we’ll get the dormitories sorted in the meantime,” said Daphne. “I will block off Monday as a day to meet the researchers, if that is alright. We have a Wizengamot session on Tuesday, so I hope we can finish it in one day.”

“We will,” nodded Newt. “Just one question, when are we hoping to open officially?”

“How about a week from Monday?” asked Daphne, consulting her diary. “It will be the 6th of July.”

There were no objections to that, so after a quick trip to Eustace Mansion, both Harry and Daphne went to Potter Hall to continue working on the Halloween event. They’d already had a long day, having cleared out all the research at Eustace Mansion and brought it over to Potter Hall to be stored securely. Most of it were improvements and discoveries that had already been made since the time of the mistress of Eustace Mansion, but some pieces of research had stood out. Most notably, all the research around a potential lycanthropy cure.

“It looks like the beginnings of the Wolfsbane potion, but the rest is different,” Daphne had
commented when they’d read it. “We should have an expert examine it.”

“Wasn’t it Marcus Belby’s uncle who invented the potion?” Harry asked now, remembering the nervous boy from the start of his sixth year at Hogwarts.

“Yes, Damocles Belby,” nodded Daphne. “I’ll mention it to Newt, but I’ve heard Damocles is bit of a recluse.”

“Lycanthropy is important enough,” said Harry, firmly. “What about the letter that Andromeda had Kinnie bring to you in the afternoon?”

“Oh, that,” said Daphne, pulling out said letter. “She said she has hired Belinda Sawbridge as the matron, and Belinda’s oldest daughter, Meredith, as one of the caretakers. They have other meetings with potential candidates fixed up as well.”

“That’s great,” said Harry. “Let’s get started on the Halloween thing then…”

“No, wait,” said Daphne. “I remembered earlier, but we need a plan for the Wizengamot session on Tuesday.”

“Why?” he asked, slightly confused.

“Abercrombie,” she said, her voice full of irritation. “We’re not just going to let it go, are we? He’s more trouble than he’s worth, so we should have one of the families under you call for his resignation from the position of Chief Warlock.”

Harry was about to agree, when he paused. Abercrombie was a pain, that much was true, but he was still the Chief Warlock, no matter on how shaky ground.

“Or,” he said. “We could get him to pass Robert Abbott’s bill.”

The look that Daphne gave him in return made him want to blush down to his very roots.

“Daphne?” he asked, when she just continued to stare at him.

“I’m...about to do something quite unlike myself,” she said. “I apologise in advance.”

He opened his mouth to ask what she meant, but suddenly found himself with an armful of witch as Daphne threw her arms around him and hugged him tightly. Harry blinked in shock but tentatively returned her hug, realising that her perfume smelled like lavender and that her hair really was as soft as he’d always assumed.

She pulled away just as suddenly as she had hugged him and grinned brightly. “It’s the perfect revenge,” she said, pink-cheeked with excitement. “Even if he can’t get his whole faction onboard, if we get the Chief Warlock’s official support for the bill, it will make a huge difference.” She was already grabbing a blank piece of parchment and writing a letter, to Tracey it seemed when he looked over.

“You’re brilliant, Harry,” she said, still continuing to write.

“I’m pretty sure it’s your influence,” he said, blushing even darker than he was.

She looked up at him and smirked. “No, this is all you,” she said, and returned to writing.

Harry swallowed roughly and nodded, though she didn’t see it as she finished writing and immediately started another letter, this one to Blaise.
His body still felt warm from the hug, and he figured if he could elicit that sort of reaction from Daphne, he wouldn’t mind displaying his Slytherin side more often.

~

26th June, 1998

“Thank you very much for your patronage. I hope you enjoy these.”

Daphne accepted the bag with a nod, and exited Rosette’s Beauty Potions, brushing past an excited gaggle of girls around fourteen years of age. It had only been an hour since the doors had opened that morning, but the shop was almost full, and an excited Rosette and her friend were busy tending to all the customers, answering questions and ringing up purchases.

Suffice to say, launch day was going well. Daphne herself was quite impressed by the polished, well-designed interior of the shop with clean, cherry wood furniture and amber lanterns casting a serene glow around the whole place. Even the air inside smelled like wildflowers and vanilla. Penelope Clearwater had done an excellent job with the aesthetic of the entire place, and Daphne had caught more than a few conversations from customers about how beautiful the shop was. Hopefully, that meant they would buy the products and from what she could see, a lot of them were doing just that.

Stepping out in the morning sunshine again, Daphne decided to take a short walk around the Alley. Seeing Rosette’s shop full of customers had put her in a good mood already, so she made a quick stop at Fortescue Cafe for a cup of coffee which she decided to have sitting at a table outside to enjoy the rare bit of sunshine they got in London. Everyone was hard at work, and Harry was at a meeting with Neville Longbottom to discuss the ownership of Puddlemere United, so Daphne had decided to take a bit of a break that morning.

Fortescue Cafe was still relatively crowded, though Daphne had seen that the morning rush was insane, with many people dropping in for a cup of coffee or a bite to eat before work.

She was halfway through her coffee when Blaise slipped into the chair opposite her. “What are you doing here?” she asked, surprised.

“I was on my way to see you at Verdant when I stopped by for cake,” he said, and Daphne had to roll her eyes at the enormous slice of chocolate cake that floated to their table on a tray. Blaise’s sweet tooth was legendary.

“Well, it wasn’t so much my idea as Harry’s,” she said. “And it isn’t blackmail, not really.”

“Why did you want to see me?” she asked, sipping her coffee.

“It’s about the very interesting letter you sent me last night,” he said. “I figured you’d be preparing to keelhaul Abercrombie, but I guess blackmail is the way you decided to go.”

“Well, it wasn’t so much my idea as Harry’s,” she said. “And it isn’t blackmail, not really.”

“Colour me impressed then,” he said, raising an eyebrow. “Abercrombie is weaker than soggy parchment, especially since the debacle with Augusta Longbottom. Word is that Orpington’s withdrawn his support, but Abercrombie has a few loyal ones that’ll stick with him regardless.”

“If Abercrombie is voted off, it’s likely that Orpington or one of his cronies will end up as Chief Warlock,” said Daphne, thoughtfully. “No one from our faction has served longer than any of them.”

“What about someone like Abbott?” he asked. “I don’t think Orpington would go for the position himself, but Abbott would be a much better option.”
“Yes, Abbott’s viable, but for the time being, we can get some use out of Abercrombie before bringing him back down to Earth, so to speak,” she said.

Blaise smirked. “What do you need me to do?” he asked. “I assume you want Pucey.”

“Ideally, yes,” she nodded.

“Fortunately for you, I got in touch with him as soon as I got your letter,” he said. “He’s currently on vacation in Aruba, but he’ll be back by Sunday.”

“The Wizengamot session is on Tuesday,” said Daphne, checking her diary. “Can he get it done before then?”

“He’ll likely charge more for a rush job, but it will be worth it,” said Blaise.

“I’ll draft up an agreement,” nodded Daphne. “Thanks for doing this, Blaise.”

He shrugged. “You and Harry have to keep your hands clean,” he said. “That doesn’t apply to me.”

“Still, I’m grateful,” she smiled.

“If you are really grateful, you can buy me more cake,” he said, almost done with the first slice.

“You don’t need more sugar,” she said, rolling her eyes. “How you still manage to stay in shape is a mystery to me.”

“I get plenty of exercise,” he winked.

“And that is my cue to go back to work,” she said, finishing her coffee and standing up. “What about the other thing?”

He dropped his smirk and nodded seriously. “I spoke to Ivanna,” he said. “She’ll be coming to Britain in two weeks, so you can introduce Harry to her.”

She nodded in thanks again, and popped inside the cafe to order him another slice of cake. He waved at her in thanks, and she smiled as she left towards Verdant. She passed the entrance to Knockturn Alley on the way, and was surprised to see Aurors around. There was also a small crowd gathered nearby, and Daphne blended in to eavesdrop.

“Ought to do away with the whole place,” muttered an old woman, shaking her head. “No cause for it now.”

A few people murmured in agreement.

“Move along now, nothing to see here.”

Daphne’s eyebrows shot up as she recognised Susan Bones, ushering the crowd away. As far as she knew, Susan had been working with Robards, not out in the field.

“Nothing to see, she says,” said the same old woman. “With the Head Auror himself here and all.”

Sure enough, Gawain Robards came out of Knockturn Alley with a grim look on his face and a couple of field Aurors behind him, one of them Seamus Finnigan. Susan shot an annoyed glare at the old woman, but hurried over to her boss, who barked out orders at all of them. Daphne decided to slip away, but Robards’ sharp eyes spotted her and his look clearly told her to stay.
Annoyed she hadn’t been faster in making her escape, Daphne moved to the side and waited as the rest of the crowd was dispersed by the field Aurors, while Robards made a beeline towards her.

“May I help you with something, Head Auror?” she asked politely, though not without caution.

“You can tell me where Potter is,” he said, narrowing his eyes at her.

“Do I seem like his keeper?” she asked. “I’m sure you can reach him by owl post.”

“I know you’re his lawyer,” he said, shooting her an annoyed look.

Daphne sighed and decided to stop being difficult, despite his attitude rubbing her the wrong way. Robards clearly didn’t think much of her, and considering that it was the first time she had ever spoken to him, she knew it probably had to do with him disliking anyone remotely “dark”. An admirable attitude to have, but certainly not without prejudice.

“I need to see him,” he added. “Urgently.”

“Fine, but I’m afraid he’s in a meeting right now,” she said, managing not to roll her eyes. “You are welcome to wait at my office. He should be done soon.”

He was clearly unhappy with having to wait, but Daphne started walking to Verdant without seeing if he followed her. Despite what he might think, Harry was in a meeting with Longbottom at Longbottom Manor, so it wasn’t as if she had lied to the man. Behind her, she heard him call to Susan to come with him, and the two of them followed her to Verdant.

As they reached the offices, Daphne graciously showed them into a meeting room where they could wait.

“Can I get you anything?” she asked. Just because Robards didn’t like her, didn’t mean she wouldn’t be a gracious hostess, particularly inside Verdant which was the pride of their family.

Robards merely glared at her and said nothing, but Susan shot her an apologetic smile. “No, thank you, Greengrass,” she said.

Daphne nodded politely at her, ignoring Robards. “My office is down the hall. If you need something, please feel free to ask.”

“We will, sorry for imposing on you,” said Susan.

“Not at all,” she said, and took her leave.

As she was closing the door, she saw Susan shoot a disappointed look at her boss, who huffed but looked embarrassed just the same. Daphne returned to her office, hoping Harry would be back soon. She was only waiting about half an hour, when he returned, with a beaming smile no less.

“Neville agreed,” he said. “He’s gathering the paperwork as we speak, so we can discuss the specifics…”

“You have visitors,” she interrupted. “Bones and Robards are waiting down the hall.”

He stopped in confusion. “What happened?”

“That you would have to ask them,” she said. “Though I am quite curious as well.”

He nodded absently. “Well, better go see them then,” he said. “Come on,” he added, when she didn’t
“You want me in there with you?” she asked, slightly surprised.

“Of course I do,” he said, like she was odd for questioning it.

Daphne blinked in surprise but smiled as she followed him. He really did have a way of saying just the right thing without saying much at all, and she could completely understand why people flocked to him as a leader, even though he didn’t project that image right from the get-go.

“Sorry to keep you waiting,” said Harry, as he opened the door and the two of them walked inside.

Susan smiled at him and shook her head. “Not at all,” she said. “We were the ones who dropped in unannounced.”

Robards merely gave a nod before narrowing his eyes at Daphne. “I wanted to speak to you in private, Potter,” he said.

“Certainly, but Daphne stays,” he said, firmly.

Daphne tried not to shoot a childish look of smugness at Robards as she and Harry sat down next to one another. Susan just looked amused, almost as if she had expected it.

“So, what can I do for you?” asked Harry, looking at them expectantly.

Robards still seemed to be reeling from the fact that Harry wasn’t throwing Daphne out, so Susan cleared her throat.

“We have had incidents in Knockturn Alley over the past week,” she said, looking at Harry seriously. “Now, that isn’t something out of the ordinary, but Knockturn Alley had been quiet for some time, but it’s become active again.” She pulled out a folder from her robes and arranged the documents neatly on the coffee table. “This morning, one of the shopkeepers was murdered by what we think is a gang of thieves. They were mostly doing petty stuff before with a minor bout of assault, but this is the first time they have progressed this far.”

“We can’t let Knockturn become a criminal haven once again,” snapped Robards. “If the Death Eaters were good for one thing, it was to keep scum like that hiding in their nests. Now, they are getting bold again, and my people are spread thin trying to be everywhere at once.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” said Harry, and Daphne could tell that a part of him still felt guilty about resigning from the Aurors. “If there’s anything I can do…”

“There is, actually, which is why we came here,” said Susan. “We need your help, Harry.”

“If you want me to return to the Aurors…” he began shaking his head.

“No, that’s not what we mean,” said Susan.

“Though I wouldn’t exactly mind,” Robards couldn’t help but add.

“The point is,” said Susan, shooting a glare at her boss. “We want you to put our case to the Wizengamot. We need a bigger budget to raise recruitment and training measures. If we have more people, we will get this in hand.”

“Then you would only be treating the symptoms not the cause, yes?” asked Daphne, raising an eyebrow. She received three confused looks in return and resisted the urge to sigh. “A bigger budget
is all well and good, but you’re overlooking the bigger picture. The problem isn’t a gang of thieves. It’s a place like Knockturn.”

“What do you suggest we do? Burn it to the ground?” demanded Robards, snorting derisively.

Daphne wasn’t deterred. “Essentially, yes,” she said. “More specifically, you petition the Wizengamot for a Knockturn cleanup measure and get them to grant you the authority to raid the place.”

“The Wizengamot will never…” began Robards.

“It will,” said Harry, firmly.

“The only reason Knockturn was left to becoming a festering cesspool of dark arts and criminals was because the old purebloods had their claws deep in some of the things that went on in there,” said Daphne. “The criminals weren’t quiet when Death Eaters were around, Head Auror, they were being treated like employees, and now their bosses are in Azkaban or dead, so they’re free to go wild once more.” She fixed Robards with a steely look. “You want to stop them? Clear out Knockturn Alley and treat it like an extension of Diagon that it used to be. Crime will go down soon after.”

There was silence following her words, as Robards just gaped at her.

“She’s right, sir,” said Susan, being the first to recover. “If we could go in there and conduct proper raids...we could be proactive instead of reactive.” Daphne nodded at her, and Susan grinned back. “That’s brilliant, Greengrass. May I call you Daphne?”

“Of course,” nodded Daphne.

“Oh, and do call me Susan,” she said, and smiled at Harry. “I can see why you hired her.”

“One of the many reasons,” he said, and Daphne would have loved to ask what he meant by that if they didn’t have company.

“It’s not a bad idea,” admitted Robards, slowly. “The public will tear us apart, though.”

“On the contrary, you will find the public on your side,” said Daphne. “You should have seen the crowd this morning. Wizarding Britain is tired of letting criminals and supremacists do as they please, and with Diagon looking much better these days, they will be happy to see that extend to Knockturn as well.”

“We’ll get started then,” said Susan, eagerly as even Robards gave a reluctant nod. “We will amend the proposal we were preparing to present at Tuesday’s session.”

“Good,” said Harry, firmly. “And I’ll see to it that it gets passed.”
Chapter 14

29th June, 1998

Adrian Pucey strode into the study of Hermann Abercrombie’s home in well-tailored robes of teal with brass buttons. His expensive hand-made Italian dragonhide boots made a neat clicking sound as he walked.

“Grandfather will be along in a moment,” said the young man leading him inside, and Adrian had a vague memory of Euan Abercrombie being sorted to Gryffindor during Adrian’s last year at Hogwarts.

“Thank you,” said Adrian, politely. Euan gave an awkward shrug and left the study, giving Adrian an opportunity to glance around.

Modest or not, the Abercrombie family was still quite well-cared for, judging by the interior of the small, yet neatly decorated house. Adrian was about to take a seat when he noticed someone’s gaze on him and turned around just in time to see a girl around fourteen years of age squeak with embarrassment. He inclined his head in a polite bow, and she went red before awkwardly shuffling out of sight. Adrian resisted the urge to sigh. Who was teaching them manners?

The Chief Warlock barged in about five minutes later, looking highly irritated about something. He paused when he saw Adrian, before his glare intensified.

“I was expecting it to be your father, young man,” he said, taking a seat in a huff. “How old are you? 15?”

“Almost 20,” corrected Adrian. “And I have taken over my father’s duty since coming of age.” He sat down in a chair opposite Abercrombie, since it didn’t look like the man would be courteous enough to offer him a seat. Nothing rubbed him the wrong way like a lack of manners. “I gave my name to young Euan when I arrived.”

Abercrombie merely glared at him. “So?” he demanded. “What do you want?”

Resisting the urge to sigh or roll his eyes, he pulled out a roll of parchment from his robes and held it out.

Abercrombie looked at it apprehensively and made no move to take it. “Who is it from?” he asked.

“You know I cannot tell you that,” said Adrian. “The extent of my job here is to approach you on my client’s behalf. I only act as an agent, nothing more. The contract should tell you what you need to know.”

“Hmph, I won’t be coerced into doing what you want,” he said, accepting the roll of parchment just the same.

“You know I cannot tell you that,” said Adrian. “The extent of my job here is to approach you on my client’s behalf. I only act as an agent, nothing more. The contract should tell you what you need to know.”


Resisting the urge to sigh or roll his eyes, he pulled out a roll of parchment from his robes and held it out.

Abercrombie looked at it apprehensively and made no move to take it. “Who is it from?” he asked.

“You know I cannot tell you that,” said Adrian. “The extent of my job here is to approach you on my client’s behalf. I only act as an agent, nothing more. The contract should tell you what you need to know.”

“Hmph, I won’t be coerced into doing what you want,” he said, accepting the roll of parchment just the same.

“Abercrombie, darkly. “Apparently, you have a knack for persuasion.”
“I use nothing more than my words to achieve that,” he said. “Besides, if you weren’t interested, you could have had me turned away at the door. Perhaps even you realise how precarious your position has become since being abandoned by Eugene Orpington…”

“I have not been abandoned!” snapped Abercrombie.

“Well, we shall know for certain at tomorrow’s Wizengamot session, won’t we?” asked Adrian, lightly. “Your failed stunt should be the first thing on the agenda. How many of your own will stand by you, I wonder.”

Abercrombie glared again, though Adrian could see a trickle of sweat run down his brow. He waited patiently, as the older man finally unfurled the parchment and began reading the contract. His expression went from anger and humiliation to one of reluctance and intrigue.

Adrian hid his smile. Abercrombie was going to sign.

~

“Well, it certainly was worth it,” smiled Daphne, as she showed the signed contract to Harry. “Pucey’s work is impeccable as always.”

“I’m still not sure about his methods, though,” said Harry.

“I told you, he only presents his client’s case to the other party,” she said. “There’s no subterfuge involved. Legal contracts signed under duress or influence of magic won’t be validated, and the Pucey family pride on doing things above board.”

“I mean, Pucey was probably the only one on the Slytherin Quidditch team to play by the rules,” conceded Harry.

“It’s in his inherent nature, apparently,” she shrugged. “He had been the official Slytherin House negotiator all throughout his years at Hogwarts. If you had problems with anyone but wanted things to be resolved discreetly, he would approach them on your behalf. For a price, of course.” She looked at him squarely. “We couldn’t go up to Abercrombie ourselves and ask him to cut a deal with us to support Abbott’s bill in exchange for keeping his position. It’s too risky.”

“Wouldn’t he figure it out anyway after I defend him tomorrow?” asked Harry.

“Oh, absolutely, but he has no proof,” she said. “That’s the whole reason for using Pucey. It’s less about keeping our involvement a complete secret, and more that there will be no direct evidence linking us to it. Negotiations like these often happen behind the scenes, and as long as it is done discreetly and without resorting to threats or pure blackmail, it’s considered fine, almost expected even. People in these circles understand that very well. Abercrombie may not be jumping with happiness right now, but we can damn well assume he’s feeling relieved.”

Harry was silent as he considered it, before finally nodding his acceptance. “Alright,” he said. “This was my idea to start with, so as long as it works out, I’m fine with it.”

“If it makes you feel any better, playing the game as it is will be better for us until we are able to change the rules ourselves,” said Daphne, seriously.

“I know that,” he said. “So, should we get back to the Halloween event?”

“Yes, let’s,” said Daphne, putting away the contract and returning her attention to the binder. “We have to finalise the ballroom decorations today.”
30th June, 1998

“Good morning, Harry.”

Harry turned around and smiled at Hermione. “Morning,” he said. “You’re early.”

“So are you,” she said. “The session doesn’t start for another half hour.”

“I woke up early and couldn’t go back to sleep,” he said.

“Nightmares?” she asked, worried.

“Not this time, thankfully,” he said, honestly. “Daphne gave me this tea...I sleep better most nights with it. Yesterday was a long day so I fell asleep earlier than usual, and woke up early as a result.”

“Well, I’m glad that’s the case,” she said. “So, how did it go yesterday? You and Daphne were meeting with Newt, weren’t you?”

“Yeah,” he said. “It was great. He introduced us to each of the researchers and we finalised the grants for all of them, and got them officially onboard. They will be bringing over equipment and setting up their laboratories over the week, and the house elves will be done with the dorms, so by Monday, we will be ready to open.”

“That’s wonderful, Harry,” grinned Hermione. “What kind of researchers were they?”

“Three Runes Masters,” he counted off. “Noah Desford, that’s the one Anthony told me about is one of them. He has an apprentice and will likely taken on Anthony once he sees his NEWT results. He is working with another Runes Mistress, Shirley Hemming, and her two apprentices to develop wards. Noah and Shirley were the ones responsible for the new Azkaban wards after Kingsley got rid of the dementors.”

Hermione’s eyes went wide. “I’ve heard about those,” she said. “Wards are difficult to overlap and maintain in a way required for prison, especially since they still wanted the Auror guard capable of using magic while the prisoners could not. I can’t even begin to imagine how complex all the warding must have been.”

Harry nodded in agreement. “From what Robards told me when I was still with the Aurors, the Gringotts goblins helped put a bind on the magic of all prisoners, in addition to all the wards,” he said. “But yeah, the warding was complex and they’re developing it even further, looking at it from the perspective of protecting homes and buildings as well.”

“That’s two of the Runes Masters, right?” asked Hermione. “Who’s the third?”

“He’s a Polish wizard, around Newt’s age if I had to guess,” said Harry. “He’s got a team of four apprentices, and they decipher Ancient Runes.”

Hermione’s eyes went wide. “You mean Henryk Pankiewicz?” she asked.

“You know him?” asked Harry, surprised.

“Know him?” she all but shrieked and then lowered her voice when a few of the people waiting outside the Wizengamot chamber looked at her disapprovingly. “Of course I know him! Henryk Pankiewicz discovered half the runes we know today. He all but wrote the dictionary we use at
Hogwarts. Professor Babbling was his apprentice at one point too. He’s a legend when it comes to Ancient Runes.”

“Huh, I didn’t know that,” he said, though now that he thought about it Daphne had seemed a little awestruck too upon meeting the elderly wizard. “Well, apart from the Runes Masters, we have a Transfiguration Master from Ireland who’s working on Human Transfiguration.”

“Does the Ministry know?” she asked, in a low voice. “There are a whole bunch of restrictions on what kind of Human Transfiguration is allowed, you know.”

“Yes, Newt made sure and his contract is very thorough as well,” said Harry, putting her at ease. “He’s looking at it from a research perspective and doing it legally.”

“Good to know,” she said. “Does he have an apprentice?”

“Two of them,” said Harry. “Then we have four Arithmancy Masters, three of whom are associated with the curse breakers of Gringotts. This isn’t purely research-based, since they often lend their assistance on the expeditions undertaken by curse breakers, but they are constantly developing their technique and refining established methods, or so Newt told me.”

“Makes sense,” nodded Hermione. “Arithmancy is incredibly useful for curse breakers, and you’d need Arithmancers, not just regular curse breakers for most if not all expeditions. There’s one more, isn’t there?”

“Yes, she’s...a bit of a different case,” said Harry, wondering how he was going to explain that one. “She’s an Australian, called Emily Holsbury and she’s...weird.”

“ Weird?” asked Hermione, raising an eyebrow.

“Yeah, weird,” he said. “Apparently, she’s a genius with Arithmancy and does calculations in her head that most Arithmancers need hours to solve. She’s young too, maybe two years older than me. Newt scouted her out personally.”

“What is she researching?” asked Hermione, with a look of fascination on her face.

“Apparently, her skill can be used by researchers across multiple disciplines, so she’s the resident Arithmancer of the institute,” he said. “Newt’s words, not mine.”

“That’s quite smart, really,” said Hermione. “An important aspect of any kind of magical research is having an Arithmancer on hand who can calculate the odds and risk in a proper, rational manner. If she is as talented as you say, she will be the best asset you could have in that place.”

Harry nodded, knowing Daphne had said something similar the day before. “She doesn’t have an apprentice, but Newt said she’ll have no shortage of applicants.”

“Who else? Didn’t you say something about technomages?” asked Hermione, curiously.

“Yeah, there’s two of them, they’re brothers,” said Harry. “Hogwarts alumni from Ravenclaw but they got their Mastery in Germany. Matthew and Morgan Cornfoot.”

“Any relation to Stephen from our year?” asked Hermione.

“Cousins, apparently,” said Harry, with a smile. “I asked the same thing. Their work is the most fascinating one out of the lot. They’re developing a bunch of products to be used around the house that combines magic and Muggle technology.”
“Doesn’t one cancel out the other?” asked Hermione. “I mean, in the simplest sense. Wizards have managed a few inventions but Muggle technology just doesn’t fare well in the wizarding world. Combining the two would be even more difficult to accomplish.”

“Yes,” said Harry. “But they’re building it in a way that magic is the thing that powers it. Apparently a lot of other countries around Europe have managed to implement it in one way or another. It’s tricky work, but they’re hoping to be able to mass produce, given time and resources.”

“Commercialising those products will be difficult,” said Hermione, thoughtfully. “Why buy a refrigerator, magically-powered or not, when you can just cast a freezing charm?” She grinned at Harry. “But then again, an average freezing charm wears off in two hours. Wizards are all about convenience, so they’ll grumble at first but I’m sure they’ll see the benefit once they realise they won’t have to learn household charms anymore. You’d be surprised how many people know nothing of those.”

“The Cornfoot brothers said something along those lines,” laughed Harry. “Their father is a Squib, so they were fascinated by the Muggle world and decided to bring parts of it to the wizarding world. Still powered by magic, of course, but pushing the boundaries in a way that hadn’t been done before.”

“Sounds incredible,” said Hermione, eyes shining. “As much as I love the wizarding world, I missed the convenience of many things, especially when I was younger. It will be like getting the best of both worlds.”

“Yeah, Daphne and Tracey are working out a strategy with Draco about their inventions and how we’ll be dealing with it,” said Harry. “I’ll let you know how it goes. Let’s see, who else? Oh, right, Madam Quinton. She’s a Charms mistress, with a team of fifteen apprentices.”

“Fifteen?” asked Hermione, her eyes wide. “What kind of research does she do to need so many? I mean, Charms is the most diverse branch of magic, but still.”

“Apparently, every one of her apprentices has a unique area of expertise,” said Harry. “Newt told us all of them, but I’ll be damned if I can remember any. But I know she’s got some of them inventing new ones, a few others looking at charms that have gone out of practice, and others who are refining existing ones.”

“It’s true, charms are constantly evolving,” nodded Hermione. “I’ll be honest, that sounds like the most fun.”

Harry hesitated briefly before meeting her gaze. “Is it something you would like to do?” he asked. “After Hogwarts, I mean.”

Hermione gave him a look that was far too understanding. “Of course I would love it,” she said. “But I have decided to join the Ministry and that’s what I’ll do.”

“Why?” asked Harry. “I mean, all I could think yesterday was how much you’d love the whole research thing, Hermione. You’ve really got the brains for it.”

“Thanks, Harry,” she said, blushing in delight. “Research would be...my dream, actually.” She grinned and shook her head. “What would your dream be? You know, something you would love to do for the rest of your life.”

“Huh? Mine?” he asked, confused.

“If I had to guess, it would be to play Quidditch professionally,” she said.
“Well, yeah, I’d love it, of course but…” he paused and got what she meant. “Right.”

“Dreams are nice,” she said. “But there are much more important things to do right now. Once I’ve accomplished all I’ve wanted at the Ministry, maybe I’ll retire to do research of my own.”

Harry nodded in understanding, impressed at Hermione as always. It was a part of her he admired a lot, even if it had occasionally driven him barmy when they were younger. Once Hermione made up her mind, nothing would deter her from accomplishing her goals. She would fight the whole world on stubbornness alone, and he supposed that tenacity was why she’d been a Gryffindor instead of Ravenclaw.

“So, is that all of them?” she asked.

“All of them at Iola,” he clarified. “There are three more and Rolf at Eustace. Two Potion Masters and a Herbology Mistress. Oh, that reminds me, I have to find Neville.”

“Why?” asked Hermione, realising that it was almost time for the Wizengamot session. They would be invited inside the chamber at any moment.

“The Herbology Mistress, her name is Sophia Sayre,” he said. “She’s the oldest daughter of Elder Sayre,” he added, nodding towards the older man speaking to Elder Macdougal. “She needs an apprentice and Neville’s always been interested in Herbology so I was going to ask if he was interested.”

“Well, Neville did say he’d love to go into research,” said Hermione. “I’m sure he’d be interested, if you ask.”

Harry gave a nod, and the chamber doors opened as they were all invited inside. He glanced around to look for Daphne, and saw her speaking to Robert Abbott, who looked a little nervous, but something Daphne said made his eyes go wide with surprise. Harry guessed she had told him that the Chief Warlock would be endorsing the bill, and hid his smile. Poor Robert had been nervous, no matter how much he tried to play it off, but that must have eased his mind a little.

He said goodbye to Hermione, as she went to the other side with the non-permanent seats, and climbed up to the Gaunt seat. Daphne dropped into the Greengrass seat next to him a minute later.

“Good morning,” he greeted.

“And to you,” she smiled. “I have an early update from the others. The dorm renovations at Iola Castle have begun and should be done by Friday. And Fleur and Draco have a meeting in the afternoon with the owners of a bottle shop in Diagon. They’re thinking of expanding, apparently, according to Finn’s tip-off.”

“Great,” nodded Harry. “Remind me to talk to you about that.”

“If you mean Pride Farmhouse, I have already thought of it,” she said, and Harry grinned. He was always pleased when they managed to get on the same wavelength that way.

His attention was diverted by the arrival of Andromeda, who gave a hug to both him and Daphne before sitting down, much to the surprise of a lot of people in the permanent section. Harry’s face was pink at being hugged so easily by Andromeda, but he noticed Mr. Weasley who waved with a small smile. He was about to return the greeting when Kingsley stood up and silence fell over the Wizengamot chamber. Shooting an apologetic look at Mr. Weasley, who nodded in understanding, Harry turned to Kingsley with the rest of the Wizengamot.
“Ladies and gentlemen of the Wizengamot, on my authority as the Minister of Magic, I hereby commence this session of the Wizengamot,” he said, and then grimaced. “I realise that traditionally the Chief Warlock is in charge, but the first item on our agenda makes this rather awkward.”

“Say it like it is, Minister,” said Elder Fawley, standing up. “Elder Abercrombie called a session out of time with most of us absent and had to stopped by Madam Longbottom.”

Kingsley’s frown deepened as Abercrombie looked nervous but not as much as others expected.

“Yes, quite,” said Kingsley.

“Minister,” said Abercrombie, getting to his feet. “While it is true I called a session out of time, my only reason for doing that was to deal with minor administrative matters that would otherwise hinder regular process.”

He spoke with such confidence that had Harry not known what a slug he really was, he would have been a little drawn in as well. A few people started looking certain, but a large majority looked completely unconvinced.

“I have served on the Wizengamot for over twenty years,” continued Abercrombie. “With utmost respect to Madam Longbottom, I was never given a chance to explain why I had called the session.”

That was a blatant lie since that had been the first thing Andromeda had asked him, but she didn’t correct him, though she looked like she very much wanted to do it.

“Be that as it may, there was a legitimate concern raised with regards to you, Chief Warlock,” said Kingsley, uncomfortably.

“I am willing to put my position to a vote,” he said, swiftly. “I did no wrong and acted as was my duty. If the Wizengamot sees fit to remove me as Chief Warlock for that, I will accept that decision and continue serving loyally as any other member.”

Harry had to be impressed by the man. Abercrombie knew he wouldn’t be voted out thanks to the contract he signed, so it was incredibly politically-savvy to call the vote himself before it could be called for him.

There were quiet murmurs from the people inside the chamber, including the gallery where some members of the Ministry were sitting.

Daphne gave Harry a look, and he cleared his throat. “Point of order, Minister,” he said, standing up. As he did, silence fell in the chamber.

“Yes, Elder Potter?” asked Kingsley.

Harry glanced at Abercrombie who gave him the look of a man who knew exactly who was holding out a lifesaver for him.

Taking a deep breath, Harry looked around at the Wizengamot. “Ladies and gentlemen, this is only the second session of the Wizengamot since the war,” he said. “And the very first session since the new Wizengamot was formed. If we are to vote out the Chief Warlock not even one session after forming the Wizengamot, what kind of a message will that send to the public? The Chief Warlock was generous enough to call for the vote himself, but I think it is enough that we acknowledge a blunder was made and move past this whole thing entirely.”
He gave a firm nod and sat down. As he did, he noticed the barest smirk from Daphne, telling him he’d done enough.

“Well, Elder Potter makes a good point,” said Kingsley, collecting himself.

“Yes, he certainly does,” said Eugene Orpington, and both Harry and Daphne stiffened. “It was rather odd that it was Madam Tonks who was as vehement in her opposition as Madam Longbottom at that failed session, and yet now Elder Potter is speaking in defence of the Chief Warlock.”

“You misunderstand me, Elder Orpington,” said Harry, thinking very quickly. They knew they could still keep Abercrombie in if it came down to a vote, but they wanted to deal with this without that happening. “Madam Tonks acted within her authority and I support her decision wholeheartedly. I am not denying that the failed session never should have happened. My point here was that it was a missed step, that’s all. It is certainly not worth voting out a man who has served loyally for over twenty years.”

He sat down and he saw Daphne exhale, which told him he’d handled it well. Orpington had a sour look on his face.

“I concur with Elder Potter’s assessment of the whole situation,” said Andromeda, daring Orpington to deny it.

Elder Fawley was frowning as he stood up. “While the whole business leaves a nasty taste in my mouth, I must say Elder Potter has pointed out something quite astutely. The Wizengamot needs to be strong in these uncertain times, so we cannot waste it splitting hairs amongst ourselves,” he said. “I concur as well.”

Harry gave a quick bow towards him, which Elder Fawley returned before sitting back down.

Kingsley looked around the Wizengamot and gave a nod. “Is there anyone who wishes for the Wizengamot to call for a vote?” he asked. No one raised a wand, so he nodded. “Acknowledged. I turn over today’s process to Chief Warlock Abercrombie once more.”

Harry let out the breath he was holding, as the Chief Warlock stood up.

“I thank the Wizengamot for their decision,” he said. “The first order of business relates to the determination made last session regarding trials for alleged Death Eaters and other war criminals. The trials are due to begin from September 2nd and I will be passing out a copy of the trial dates as set out by the Wizengamot Administration Services.” With a flick of his wand, copies dispersed to all members of the Wizengamot from a stack in front of him. “If there is a change that needs to be made, it will have to be brought up in writing within 7 days, or during an official session.”

Harry read through the list quickly, noticing the list of imprisoned Death Eaters, Snatchers, as well as Ministry employees like Umbridge, Runcorn and the like. While not everyone who had participated in that vile Commission had been arrested, those like them who had actively supported Death Eaters beyond self-preservation had been brought up on charges. One of the highlights of Harry’s short-lived Auror career had been to arrest Dolores Umbridge.

“This looks fine, Chief Warlock,” said Kingsley. “Yes, Elder Fawley?” he asked, when the older man stood up.

“I call for the trials to be open to the public,” he said. “Including the press.”

“That is quite odd, Elder Fawley,” said Elder Shafiq. “You despise the press.”
“Yes, but the Daily Prophet has been printing the truth for a change,” said Elder Fawley. “These monsters tormented the wizarding world and their crimes and punishment need to be seen by the people they tormented.”

“Careful, Elder Fawley,” warned Elder Macmillan. “You would not wish to sound as if you have already determined the guilt of these people.”

“Not at all,” said Elder Fawley. “That is another reason I call for the trials to be public. To dispel any notion of bias.”

“If that is the case, I propose that the accused be questioned under Veritaserum,” said Elder Sayre.

“Elders, one at a time, please,” said Abercrombie. “First, let us hold a vote for Elder Fawley’s proposal for public trials. All in favour?”

Harry raised a wand, and a large majority followed all across the board.

“Acknowledged,” said Abercrombie. “Now to Elder Sayre’s proposal to question the accused under Veritaserum.”

“I see no reason why we shouldn’t do it,” said Elder Sayre. “It is a standard practice across Europe, and we ourselves have held trials where Veritaserum was used. The only reason so many people were able to get away with being Death Eaters the last time around was because the Wizengamot at the time did not question people under Veritaserum.” He threw a dirty look at Lucius Malfoy, who stared back impassively.

“I support Elder Sayre’s proposal,” said Harry.

“Let us begin the official vote then,” said Abercrombie. It was passed with ease, and he acknowledged it. “Onto….yes, Elder Thompson?” he asked, warily when the man stood up.

Harry vaguely remembered Daphne telling him that Thompson fell into the Abercrombie-Orpington faction but had aligned himself with Orpington following the alliance breaking.

“I call for a measure to exclude certain members of the Wizengamot from participating in the trials of alleged Death Eaters,” he said, eyes glinting. “More specifically, those whose family members shall be on trial.”

Harry blinked in shock, but he saw that Daphne looked relaxed, and a little pleased, if he were to be honest.

“Outrageous!”

That would be why, Harry guessed, as Elder Fawley stood up. “Exclude officially elected members from trial? What do you take the Wizengamot for, Elder Thompson?” he demanded.

Much of the older crowd was agreeing with Fawley. Apparently, it was a very big deal to exclude members from participating. Harry had to wonder why Thompson had done it, knowing it would likely fail. Then, he took a closer look at the man and saw that Orpington was glaring at Thompson as well, because he had likely done it stupidly without thinking through the consequences.

“Well, a vote shall be called regardless,” said Abercrombie, looking like he was trying not to smirk. “All in favour of Elder Thompson’s proposal.” A couple wands were raised, but the measure was soundly defeated. “That’s that then,” nodded Abercrombie. “Moving on, we have a bill being introduced by Elder Abbott that has been endorsed by me as Chief Warlock. Everyone shall be
Copies were sent to everyone, and Abbott stood up. “Thank you, Chief Warlock,” he said, as people looked surprised, especially at the fact that the bill was being endorsed by the Chief Warlock.

“Ladies and gentlemen of the Wizengamot, this is the bill for the Post-war Employment Act. As stated, the bill aims to increase employment in wizarding Britain following the end of the war. A large population was left without jobs during the war and even in peacetime they have not regained their means of earning a living. This bill proposes measures that will offer them an opportunity to get back on their feet on their own terms rather than through charity. Elder Potter has been generous enough to lend the assistance of the Potter Foundation to sponsor the housing measures, but I ask that the Ministry adopt the employment measures to lend assistance to those struggling after the war.”

He sat back down, as people began murmuring to each other. Abercrombie stood up and cleared his throat. “Members of the Wizengamot have seven days to examine the bill. First reading will be held on July 8, and the measures shall be discussed in detail then. Members shall have the opportunity to debate and argue upon the specifics at that time and votes will be held over every section of the bill,” he said. “For now, the bill is officially filed with the Wizengamot. Acknowledged.”

“Thank you, ladies and gentlemen of the Wizengamot,” said Elder Abbott. “I hope you will keep an open mind as you read the bill.”

“Next, we have the Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement to discuss budgetary measures,” said Abercrombie. “Madam Billington, if you please.”

The older witch who had been sitting in the gallery stood up and made her way to the podium downstairs in the chamber. “Thank you, Chief Warlock,” she said. “Following the new budget granted to us by the Minister after the war, the rest of the divisions of the Department are doing fine. However, Head Auror Robards has a proposal he wants to put to the Wizengamot.”

“We will hear from Head Auror Robards then,” said Abercrombie, and Billington returned to the gallery as Robards walked down.

“Ladies and gentlemen of the Wizengamot,” he said. “With an increasing amount of crime emerging from Knockturn Alley, the Auror Department is proposing a Knockturn Cleanup measure. The details are here, Chief Warlock.” He sent a stack of copies to Abercrombie, who distributed it to the members of the Wizengamot. “As you can see, currently the Aurors can only respond to criminal activities once they have happened. We are proposing the Wizengamot grant us powers to conduct raids in order to root out criminal activities.”

“Bear in mind, this is not a change in the law,” said Abercrombie, probably for the benefit of the new Wizengamot members. “There is already a law that bestows special powers upon Aurors, but they need Wizengamot authorisation in order to act upon them. That is what Head Auror Robards is seeking today.”

“Do you have the numbers?” asked Elder Zeller. “For such a task, I mean.”

“Yes,” said Robards. “I am creating a taskforce that will conduct the raids, and they will be the only ones who will be granted the power to do so.”

“And it’s just in Knockturn, not anywhere they feel like it, correct?” asked Elder Ollivander.

“That is correct,” said Robards. “Knockturn has gone unchecked for a long time. The raids will root out criminals who will then be tried by the Wizengamot, and any and all dark artefacts will be confiscated and subsequently destroyed.” He looked up at them with determination. “It is also why I
propose this part of today's session be subjected to the Wizengamot's secrecy measures. We don't want this getting out before we've had a chance to conduct the raids."

"Then before we proceed, we shall invoke the secrecy measures," said Abercrombie. "Regardless of our decision, the matter discussed by Head Auror Robards shall be subjected to secrecy. Does anyone wish to object?"

Harry's gaze slid towards Royce Burke, the only owner of Borgin and Burkes who wasn't dead or in Azkaban. The man looked like he was sweating bullets, but he only cast a fearful look at Harry before keeping his mouth shut.

"Acknowledged," said Abercrombie, when no one objected. "Any and all record of this matter will be redacted from the official records and will be available only to Wizengamot members. Further discussion of this matter outside the Wizengamot will be forbidden, unless it is with fellow Wizengamot members or Ministry employees with appropriate clearance."

"Thank you, Chief Warlock," said Robards. "We plan on moving quickly and conducting these raids over the next week or so, before the criminals have time to mobilise and disappear, or worse, decide to fight back."

"Surely other occupants of Knockturn will notice the raids being conducted," said Arthur Weasley.

"Yes, but we plan on doing it as discreetly as possible for as long as we can," said Robards. "The entirety of Knockturn is only a third the size of Diagon, and we are devising the best course of action to keep things under wraps."

"And what about the few honest businesses left in Knockturn?" demanded Elder Macdougal. "Surely, they won't be condemned as well."

"We are being very thorough in gathering intelligence," said Robards.

"But you cannot be sure," said Elder Macdougal. "You talk of raids, but if your plan is to go in ham-fisted and beat down every door you find and harass citizens then there's no point. The Wizengamot has to protect the rights of ordinary citizens."

"We will be thorough, Elder Macdougal," said Robards, though there was gathering support for Elder Macdougal's words.

"I acknowledge that Knockturn needs to be dealt with, but I'd rather hear exactly how you plan on conducting these raids before we give you a free pass to go wild," said Elder Macdougal.

There was vocal agreement in response to his words. A couple people applauded. Even Harry could see his point. He felt a nudge and turned as Daphne handed him a note. He read it quickly and stood up.

"Elders," he said, as the chamber quieted down. "Perhaps we ought to take a break. It will give Head Auror Robards some time to outline his plan to us as well."

He looked at Abercrombie, who stood up. "Yes, Elder Potter is quite right," he said. "It is almost time for lunch, so we ought to adjourn for one hour and return to this issue."

~

As soon as an adjournment was called, Royce Burke made his escape from the Wizengamot chamber with quick steps, doing his best not to draw any attention to himself. If the damned security...
measures hadn’t been put into place he would have disapparated to Knockturn Alley and warned his trusted network about the Aurors, but since it was no longer possible, he had to look out for himself. An hour was not a lot of time, but it was enough to empty Borgin and Burkes and hide the merchandise.

He made it into the hallway outside the Wizengamot chambers before anyone else and was all but jogging towards the Atrium, when someone stepped in his path. Someone who, ignoring the empty hallway around them, stepped directly in front of Burke.

“Mr. Burke,” greeted the young man.

Burke glared at him, wondering who the hell he was supposed to be. The teal robes he was wearing looked more expensive than what Burke made in a year.

“Who are you? I’m in a hurry,” he said, as rudely as he could get away with.

“Oh, pardon my manners,” said the young man, inclining his head in a bow. “Adrian Pucey. It’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance.”

Burke paled. A damned Pucey, at the worst time possible. “Nice to meet you, Mr. Pucey,” said Burke, forcing his best customer service smile. “If you will excuse me, I have some urgent business to take care of.”

“I’m sure it can wait,” he said pleasantly, but enough to let him know it was anything but. “This comes from your lord and master, you see,” he added in a low voice.

Defeated, Burke gave a nod and allowed Pucey to lead him into a quiet corner. Pucey cast a few privacy charms before smiling at Burke like a hunter looking down at a prey he was about to slaughter.

“Frightful business in the Wizengamot today, I expect,” said Pucey, in that same pleasant tone. “I doubt a lot of members are completely on board with what Head Auror Robards has proposed.”

The secrecy measures kept Burke from confirming or denying it, but it seemed Pucey had been made aware of what Robards would be doing prior to today’s session. Damn that Potter.

“Of course,” continued Pucey, undeterred by his silence. “You could always lend a hand to the Auror Department. The fine, upstanding citizen that you are.”

Alarmed, Burke realised he’d misjudged why Pucey had cornered him. He’d thought Potter would want him to surrender quietly and not tip anyone off. And yet, it was now painfully clear that he expected a lot more than that.

“The details of what you are to do are in here,” said Pucey, handing him a scroll of parchment. “When the Wizengamot reconvenes, follow the instructions. In return, you may go and destroy what you wish from your shop and keep your family’s name and wealth. Of course, you are free to refuse but I doubt the consequences of defying your lord and master are...pleasant.”

Royce Burke was not a courageous man, nor was he particularly bright. But he knew self-preservation like any beast did. Nodding in defeat, he accepted the quill that Pucey held out to him.

~

“Do you think it worked?” asked Harry in a quiet whisper, as they filed back into the chamber an hour later.
“I expect so,” said Daphne. “Pucey can be very persuasive. I’m just glad things turned out like this and we didn’t pay him all that advance in vain.”

“He does not come cheap, does he?” said Harry, shaking his head. “Even if it was worth it.”

“With the kind of secrets that family knows about people, they can blackmail anyone with ease, but their high fees are basically meant as a deterrent for just that,” she said. “If you pay their fees properly, they won’t come after you for more. And they don’t sell their information either, so there’s that. Discreet and above board, though certainly grey when it comes to morals.”

“Yeah, I’m getting that,” nodded Harry, and then lowered his voice even further. “Is it bad if a part of me wishes Burke doesn’t take the deal and reneges on his allegiance to me? I hate that slimy bastard.”

“You and me both,” she said. “Borgin and Burkes has always held an unofficial place of honour in Knockturn Alley. He could know secrets none of us would even have a clue about, so him becoming an informant for Robards helps everyone out a great deal. The bastard managed to evade Azkaban, but certainly he won’t escape punishment as he destroys the criminal network his family lorded over all these years with his own two hands.”

“The session will now continue,” said Abercrombie, as the doors were sealed. “Head Auror Robards, could you take the podium once more?”

Robards nodded and made his way downstairs. As he did, Elder Macdougal stood up. “Have you come up with a plan of action to protect ordinary citizens during the raids, Head Auror?” asked Macdougal.

Before Robards could answer, Burke stood up and Harry almost smiled as he realised the plan had worked.

“Pardon me, Elder Macdougal,” said Burke, his face smooth despite a hint of nervousness in his tone. “But I have a way of protecting ordinary citizens while weeding out the criminals in Knockturn Alley.”

“Enlighten me,” said Elder Macdougal, looking at him with barely disguised loathing. “Especially since your family’s shop is right in the centre of the whole mess.”

“I do not deny that my family has done some terrible things,” he said. “Even my older brother sits in Azkaban, awaiting punishment for his crimes. I merely wish to be a good citizen and lend my assistance to bring down the criminals in Knockturn Alley.”

“Are you saying you will be an informant?” asked Robards, taken aback. “Voluntarily?”

“Yes,” said Burke. “I will guide you to the dangerous ones and keep you away from the ones who are carrying on a legitimate business.”

“And you expect us to believe you will be honest?” demanded Elder Macdougal.

“No, I suppose my family’s name is too tarnished already,” said Burke, and took a deep breath. “I will take an Unbreakable Vow.”

There were loud gasps in the Wizengamot which had Abercrombie calling for silence as even he looked shocked at Burke’s words.

“Elder Burke,” said Elder Fawley. “Are you aware of what you are saying? If you renege on an
“Yes, I am quite aware,” said Burke. “And I am willing to do this just the same. I will provide full cooperation to the Auror Department’s Knockturn Cleanup measure and not willingly mislead them regarding the information I give. Nor will I attempt to subvert the oath in any way. It shall hold until the raids are all completed.”

“Calm yourselves,” snapped Elder Fawley as more whispers and shocked exclamations rose in the chamber. “Chief Warlock, call for order.”

“Yes, of course,” said Abercrombie. “Silence, silence!”

It still took a while, but once silence fell, Elder Fawley stood up and appraised Burke. “I understand wanting to set right your family’s mistakes, Elder Burke, but the Wizengamot cannot approve an Unbreakable Vow. However,” he added, when the noise rose once more before quieting down at his harsh glare. “Elder Macdougal’s concerns are legitimate and your cooperation with Head Auror Robards and his Aurors will be invaluable as well. In light of that, I suggest a magically binding contract be signed instead.”

“One thing at a time, Elders,” said Abercrombie, regaining his composure. “We must first vote on whether we accept Head Auror Robards and his Knockturn Cleanup proposal.”

“The issues are connected,” countered Elder Macdougal. “I won’t approve the proposal until we have a guarantee that will protect innocent citizens and only target the criminals. And the only way to have the guarantee would be to have assurance of Elder Burke’s words. I am willing to accept a magically binding contract as suggested by Elder Fawley.”

“I concur with Elder Macdougal,” said Elder Fawley. “The issue should be voted on as one.”

Abercrombie sighed and nodded. “Very well,” he said. “The vote shall be held on the following basis: does the Wizengamot approve the Knockturn Cleanup measure as proposed by Head Auror Robards, conditional upon the signing of a magical contract by Elder Royce Burke assuring his cooperation in the matter?”

Harry raised his wand along with a large majority, and Abercrombie acknowledged that the vote had been passed. The next hour or so was spent drafting a contract by a representative of the Wizengamot Administration Services which was then read out to the whole Wizengamot, outlining the same promises that Burke had made earlier. It was then signed and sealed by Burke, Robards and Abercrombie and lodged in officially, along with the approval for the Knockturn Cleanup measure.

“Ladies and gentleman,” said Abercrombie. “With this, we shall conclude today’s session of the Wizengamot. The next session shall begin at 9 am on July 8.”

~

“Not making a habit of drinking,” said Harry, as he poured two goblets of wine. “But I think days like today warrant it.”

The plan had been to continue working on the Halloween event but Harry and Daphne were both so tired that they were yet to get started, even after coming back to Potter Hall and having dinner. In fact, it looked very much like they would not be getting around to it, since they were lounging in their favourite parlour, and Harry had asked Gerry to bring over a bottle of wine from Pride Farmhouse for them to share.

“Touche,” said Daphne, accepting her goblet with a nod. She took a small sip of the red liquid and
her eyes went wide. “My, it’s gorgeous. I haven’t had wine this good outside France.”

“I really should take the time to learn more about all of this,” said Harry. “Weren’t you telling me something about Fleur and Draco meeting with a bottle shop owner?”

“Yeah,” said Daphne. “The wine from Pride Farmhouse is good quality, and it’s bottled and labelled, not to mention it’s hard to get really good wine in Britain these days. If we sell to the bottle shop, it could make for a good source of income. Though, I have a few other ideas as well.”

“Like what?” asked Harry.

“Well, I would need to take a closer look but I suspect some of the wine there is too high quality to be sold in shops,” said Daphne. “And with the Potter Foundation holding events throughout the year, one of them could be a wine tasting party, with guests being able to bid on the more expensive wines for charity.”

“That’s a thing?” he asked, surprised but he knew he really shouldn’t be anymore.

“Of course,” she said. “When I said events, I didn’t just mean an evening ball. People are more likely to donate if they get something in return and with something as public as an auction, the rich would take the chance to show off as much as possible.” She smiled a little, as a look of understanding spread across his face. “Unless you plan on drinking all the wine yourself.”

“Funny,” he said, as she chuckled. “I’d never thought of that, but now that you say it, it does make sense. There are so many things I inherited that have no particular use but we can make money off of those for some of the other enterprises. I mean, we are already doing it with the books at Arc, so the wine at Pride Farmhouse makes sense as well.” He laughed a little and shook his head. “I keep being surprised at how many things you keep considering for my sake.”

Harry almost laughed but then pretended to consider his response. “If we must,” he sighed, before grinning. “How do we get to know one another better then?”

“That is obvious,” said Daphne, finishing her goblet of wine. “Ask me something and I’ll answer. With honesty, of course. And then I get to ask something that you must answer. Again, with honesty. We agreed to share our issues, remember?”

“Fair enough,” he said, pouring her more wine and taking some for himself.

“Go ahead then,” she said, though there was an undercurrent of wariness as if she were unsure what he would ask. “You first.”

Harry paused, wondering where to start. The playful atmosphere that they’d started this conversation with was still lingering and he was loathe to break it, so he decided to keep it simple. “Do you like Quidditch?” he asked, and as soon as he did he wished he had asked something more meaningful and not as childish.

She looked stunned but then burst into laughter. “That’s...that’s what you ask?”

He went red, but couldn’t help smiling at her amusement. It was rare to see her laugh that openly. “Yes, that’s what I’m asking,” he said, firmly.
She chuckled a few more times before adopting a serious look on her face. “I suppose I do,” she said. “I like watching it more than I like playing it, I’m afraid. Our father was a Pride of Portree fan, but Tori and I have always been a bit partial to the Ballycastle Bats. I do like flying, though.”

“You do?” he asked, surprised.

She nodded, with a small smile. “Not the kind of flying you do, just so we are clear,” she said. “That damn near Wronski Feint you did back in our third year almost gave me and half the school a heart attack.” She shot him a reproachful look before chuckling. “Flying gives me time to think. That, and swimming. I can let my thoughts just drift off.”

“I know what you mean, though I happen to like the kind of flying I do,” he said, and then frowned as he remembered his lost Firebolt. “I haven’t in a while, though.”

“You should,” she said. “You always seemed at ease in the air in a way that you never quite managed anywhere else.”

“I didn’t realise you noticed,” he said, surprised yet pleased.

She went pink but rolled her eyes. “I noticed a lot of things, not just you,” she said. “My turn then, is it?”

He saw the obvious attempt to change the subject, but grinned and nodded. “Your turn, go for it,” he said.


“Because it is something I don’t know,” she said, calmly.

Harry sighed and finished his wine, as he tried to gather his thoughts. He chanced a look at Daphne who was waiting patiently for his response, and took a deep breath. “I grew up in the Muggle world,” he answered, slowly. “With the Dursley family. Er, it’s my Aunt’s family, my mother’s sister. They are Muggles. My aunt, uncle and cousin, I mean.”

She gave a measured nod. “And what were they like?” she asked.

“Not fond of magic,” he answered, quietly.

“I see,” she said. “Where are they now?”

“They were in hiding during the war,” he said, glad that she didn’t push that particular topic too hard. “After the Battle of Hogwarts, I went and saw them. They are now back to living at Privet Drive, that’s where I grew up.” He smiled bitterly. “They also told me in no uncertain terms that I was never to darken their doorstep again as long as I lived.”

“Charming people,” she said, and then visibly hesitated. “Do they know about you? About who you are in this world?”

“No,” he said, unable to suppress an unamused chuckle at the thought of telling them.

“Do you wish revenge upon them?” she asked, in that same level tone of voice.

Harry looked at her so quickly, he would have gotten a whiplash. “What? N-no,” he said.
“Well, too bad,” she said.

“Why would-?” he began, wondering how best to phrase it. “How did you kn-?”

“The thing about growing up in the wizarding world is that everyone heard tales of the heroic Harry Potter who defeated He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named,” said Daphne. “When I first came to Hogwarts, I admit that even I was curious. What I saw instead was a boy who could have used a few more square meals and a new pair of glasses. It didn’t fit with the image of a hero raised in luxury.”

“Don’t worry, you weren’t the only one to notice,” he said, bitterly. Knowing that Dumbledore had been aware of what life with the Dursleys had been like and that he’d continued to send Harry there every summer, protective wards or not, was still something he found difficult to forgive. “And people much older and more in control of me than you decided I was better off being raised that way.”

“Yes, I figured that, since it continued throughout the years,” she said, tucking a strand of golden hair behind her ear. “Which is why I asked if you wished revenge.”

“It wouldn’t do anything,” he said. “I don’t have to see them again so it doesn’t matter.” He looked at her contemplatively. “Or are you saying it should matter because it’s family?”

“Don’t worry,” she said. “I am the last person to advocate for the family nonsense. Blood only goes so far. My mother’s side of the family is proof of that.”

“What do you mean?” he asked, curiously.

“My mother’s side of the family are a bunch of money grubbing insects is what I mean,” she said, bluntly. “Have you heard of the Corentin family of France?” He shook his head. “Well, take my word for it, they are rather well-known. It is one of the oldest pureblood families in France, and are the only surviving wizarding family there to hold a title. The rest lost them around the time of the Revolution in the Muggle world when the rebellion spread. But the Corentin family managed to hold on, somehow. Unfortunately, title does not equal money. They had their family name and the estate but little else. On top of that, my grandfather’s older brother gambled what little they had, until he had an accident and my grandfather became the head of the family.”

Harry knew enough to understand that the accident had been no accident, but he was fascinated by this aspect of Daphne’s family too. He realised she never really discussed her mother’s side of the family and had mistakenly assumed they were dead as well.

“My grandfather had five children. My mother was the middle one. She had an older brother and sister, and two younger brothers,” continued Daphne. “My grandmother, hateful and greedy bitch that she is, decided that the only way to restore some of the family’s glory was to trade her children off for money through marriage. Plenty of families were willing to marry into the prestigious Corentin family, financial circumstances notwithstanding, so there was no shortage of suitors for any of the five children.”

She sighed and shook her head. “The Greengrass family was wealthy and titled, so my mother was offered up as a bride to my father,” said Daphne. “I suppose they figured that with my father being the sole heir, my mother’s children would inherit everything. They were positively ecstatic when there were no male heirs born before my mother’s death.” She looked at Harry furiously. “Can you imagine something as despicable as being glad at the death of your daughter because it meant there was a chance to get at the wealth of her husband by way of her children? Children, who I might add, were a toddler and a newborn who had just lost their mother.”

Harry suppressed a wince, but shook his head.
“As soon as my mother died, they had my father update his will,” she said, eyes flashing in anger. “They didn’t even wait until my mother was cold in the ground to demand that I should be named heir to the Greengrass family. They were afraid my father would remarry and have a male heir, you see, and wanted to secure their hold on the Greengrass wealth.”

Daphne’s breathing was laboured as she described the situation, but then took a deep breath which seemed to calm her down a little. “He did as they asked, mostly because I think he never had the intention to remarry,” she said. “Tori and I had to spend a month of summer in France every year as per the grandbitch’s demands, and that time would be spent trying to set me up with one of my male cousins so they could get at the money.”

“Set you up?” he asked, horrified.

She nodded, visibly trembling with anger. “Started around the time I was eight. None of the other marriages worked out that well, you see. My oldest uncle’s wife brought in a hefty dowry but she was also a rather wasteful person who spent most of it herself. My older aunt married into a wealthy family but her husband was a horrible beast of a man who ended up being disowned which robbed her of anything she might have received. The younger uncle was married to a lovely woman who he ended up driving to insanity with his womanising ways, finally shacking up with a mistress so the dowry they received was taken away. The only decent person in that family is my mother’s youngest brother and he had enough sense to leave for America the moment he turned seventeen. I was the only golden goose, you might say, so they figured if I married one of my cousins, they would get the Greengrass wealth. My father was furious when he found out what they were scheming and he let them know in no uncertain terms that if they pushed, he would never let me or Tori near them. It worked for a time, I suppose.”

“Did they—?” asked Harry, remembering that Daphne’s father had passed away. “Since your father’s—?”

She nodded. “The day after, as a matter of fact,” she said. “Mind you, the war was still going on. Death Eaters were teachers at Hogwarts and it was very likely that Tori and I would be thrown to them once the year ended, and my lovely grandmother wrote to tell me how my cousins missed me and now that Elias is dead, I should think about which one of them I would choose as the next Lord Greengrass. Revolting!”

Harry had to agree with that sentiment, and he reached out and took her hand that was resting on the sofa between them, almost without thinking. She jumped as if electrocuted but seemed to calm down as he held it comfortingly. “I’m sorry to hear that,” he said, sincerely. “I had no idea.”

She smiled weakly. “You can’t know if I never told you,” she said, her voice soft. “So, yeah, I’m the last person who’ll tell you that everything should be forgiven because it’s family. The only people who have the luxury of saying that, are people fortunate enough to have a good family. Tori and I were fortunate we had our father, and I’m sorry you didn’t have anyone that was on your side when you were a child. It’s not about the Dursleys. It’s about you and what you want.”

Her smile became a little brighter. “It was Tori who told me that, you see. She realised I detested going to France because even if they backed off because of my father, they would constantly try to push me to get closer to one of my cousins. Back then, that family was the only connection I had to my mother so I did my best to try and please them, no matter how much I disliked playing nice. Tori took it upon herself to point out that blood only goes so far and a family that cannot be bothered to look at you as anything but an obligation or a means to an end has no business receiving anything from you.”

Daphne laughed, as if remembering something funny. “She did it in full view of the family too,
loudly and proudly, calling my grandmother a greedy b***h, her sons and older daughter wastrels and money grubbing insects, and my grandfather a power-hungry bastard. It was quite the spectacle, and I think she did it knowing how much I love spectacles. They have hated her ever since, but seeing that they couldn’t do a thing about it, made me realise that the people I care about will stand up for me, no matter what, and there will always be a difference between blood and family.”

Harry jumped a little as she shifted her hand that he was still holding, but instead of letting go, she linked their fingers together and squeezed it. He stared at their joined hands for a long moment, before nodding.

“They weren’t outwardly terrible,” he began in a low voice. “But they hated magic, which means they hated me...I think it started when my mother and Aunt Petunia were little. My mother could do accidental magic, and Aunt Petunia was always jealous that mum had magic and she didn’t. They grew apart as they grew older, and the more my mother became immersed in this world, the more Aunt Petunia resented magic and anything to do with it. Uncle Vernon is worse, in a way, because to him, all magic is just...freakishness. In his eyes, we are all freaks.”

He felt Daphne squeeze his hand again, and he took a grateful breath before continuing. “Then I was dumped on their doorstep by Dumbledore after my parents died. There were these blood wards that would protect both me and them because we were connected by my mother’s blood,” he grimaced. “Unfortunately, the wards didn’t protect me from what was happening inside the house. They figured they could...knock the freakishness out of me.” He heard a sharp inhale from Daphne, but her grip on him grew tighter instead of faltering. “I was made to live in a cupboard under the stairs, fed scraps, and had to do chores around the house, while my cousin Dudley got fifth servings at mealtime and almost forty different birthday gifts every year. The accidental magic didn’t help, because it was a reminder that no matter what they did, I still remained a freak.”

She looked very much like she wanted to interrupt, but he was glad when she didn’t because it was easier to keep going now that he had started.

“Once I started at Hogwarts, it got better and worse. Better, because they were terrified of what I might be capable of doing to them, and worse for that reason, too,” he said, and sighed deeply. “The summer after my first year, after they realised I couldn’t do magic outside Hogwarts, they figured putting bars on my windows and feeding me through a catflap was the right thing to do. Eventually, I just learned to be smarter and hide things better around them.” He looked at her, and saw that she seemed torn between anger and sadness. “Do you remember the dementor attack before our fifth year?”

“Yes, it was big news,” she said. “It really happened, didn’t it?”

He nodded. “Dudley and I were attacked when we were outside. I managed to drive them away, but the experience did a number on Dudley. He’s...well, he’s changed. I think he realises the kind of person his parents raised him to be, and the kind of people they were to me. When we last saw each other, he made me promise to stay in touch with him, no matter what his parents said. He will likely be moving out of Privet Drive soon. He might have been a bully who tormented me through childhood, but at least, he acknowledges it and is trying to do better. My Aunt and Uncle are beyond that, I’m afraid.”

Daphne sighed and slowly released his hand. He thought he’d said something wrong, when she wrapped her arms around him and gave him a hug. “I’m sorry,” she said, rubbing the back of his head soothingly. “I’m sorry you had to live with them, and sorry that the people who are supposed to love and protect you did those terrible things to you instead. I am truly sorry, Harry.”

He exhaled heavily and rested his head on her shoulder, closing his eyes and letting her comfort him.
“But more than that, I am angry,” she said, her tone still soft as she continued stroking the back of his head. “I am fucking furious. Both at the Dursleys and people like Dumbledore who put you in the hands of those monsters and kept you there.”

“You aren’t the only one,” he said, without lifting his head though his lips curved into a smile at the righteous fury in her words despite her calming tone.

“Yeah, well, since you aren’t one for revenge, I might do it for you, anyway,” she grumbled. “At least, go scream my head off at them or something.”

His smile grew wider, not that she could see it since his head was still resting on her shoulder. “Because you enjoy a spectacle?” he asked.

“Well, yes,” she admitted, and finally pulled away a little so he had to lift his head to meet her gaze. “But also because the people I care about will always stand up for me. And I will always stand up for them. No matter what.”


A loud chime made them both jump, and they glanced towards the grandfather clock in the room which showed that it was nine pm, which was the usual time Daphne went home.

“Er, I should let you go,” he said, slowly untangling himself from her.

“Yeah,” she said, smoothing down her clothes and standing up. “Thanks for...just, thanks.”

He nodded. “And you, as well,” he said.

She smiled and began gathering her things, before pausing. “We should do this more often,” she said.

“I would like that,” he agreed, as he stood up to see her off.

They walked to the kitchen floo in comfortable silence, and just before taking the floo powder, Daphne turned around and smiled at him.

“Good night, Harry,” she said, and leaned forward to kiss his cheek lightly.

A warm blush rose up on his face. “Good night, Daphne,” he whispered, as she gave him a brilliant smile and disappeared through the flames.
Hey, everyone! Sorry for disappearing, but real life and holidays crept up on me and I hit a massive block. It seems resolved for the time being, so weekly updates will resume. Thanks for all the lovely messages in the meantime, urging me to continue. Hope you had wonderful holidays and a great start to the new year!

3rd July, 1998

**HARRY POTTER CREATES THE JAMES POTTER MAGICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE**

Newt Scamander to lead the first ever private magical research institute in Britain

by Benedict Almeidus

Less than a month since starting a private charity organisation, Elder Harry Potter, the Saviour of the wizarding world has announced he is opening the first ever private magical research institute in Britain. The James Potter Magical Research Institute will be the first of its kind in Britain and is slated to open its doors on July 7th. The Institute shall be led by renowned magizoologist Newton Artemis Fido Scamander, Order of Merlin Second Class and author of ‘Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them’.

“Magical research is the path forward,” says Elder Potter. “It has never been my area of expertise but I have always admired those that have made discoveries and inventions to allow us to progress further.”

Traditionally, all magical research has been through grants offered by the Department of Mysteries or through the researchers paying from their own pocket. A private research institute is quite the norm across the world, but not in Britain.

“It is ridiculous really,” says Newt Scamander. “We have a reputable institution like Hogwarts for educating young wizards and witches, but magical research is entirely dependent on the Ministry of Magic, especially for young researchers who cannot afford to finance their own research. When Harry came to me with the plans to start a research institute, my answer was obvious. Of course this institute must exist. It is high time we had something like it in Britain.”

Even though the institute is yet to officially open, several researchers have already been confirmed among its staff, including prominent Runes Master Henryk Pankiewicz.

Mr. Pankiewicz, 93, is the foremost authority on Ancient Runes in the world, and has lived in Britain for the last thirty years. “My research grant was substantially reduced over the past three years,” says Mr. Pankiewicz. “With the money offered at the moment, I could barely afford one apprentice, let alone the four I currently have. Mr. Scamander and Mr. Potter’s offer was much more generous and considerate. We need more people who understand the importance of magical research.”

Apart from Mr. Pankiewicz, renowned Charms Mistress Madam Quinton is also slated to join the researchers. Madam Quinton, 55, is behind the Caterwauling Charm and the Amplifying Charm,
among other major discoveries. “Research is a vital aspect of development, and with Newt Scamander leading the charge I know that my apprentices and I shall be in good care. I must commend Mr. Potter for recognising the importance of magical research and taking the initiative to make a difference.”

Not everyone seems as happy with Elder Potter’s move regarding the research institute. Head Unspeakable Mittermeyer of the Ministry’s Department of Mysteries criticises the move as being “hasty”.

“The grants were cut for a reason,” says Unspeakable Mittermeyer, 61. “Now is the time to work on whatever projects we still have, and wait until the Ministry can grant us more funds before beginning new research. Besides, I have heard rumours of that institute hiring technomages, a frivolous and rather useless field of magical research, so I don’t wish to put too much stock in the whole business.”

Technomages, for the uninitiated, is a term commonly used for witches and wizards with the ability to develop a combination of Muggle and magical inventions. While Britain has traditionally not fostered this type of magic, it is well-developed in several European nations, including Germany, France and Switzerland. However, even if Britain has not supported research for technomages, we still continue to import products made by those very same technomages, including the wizarding wireless.

“It is rather foolish,” says Finnian Fortescue, proprietor of the recently opened Fortescue Cafe in Diagon Alley. “Most businesses like mine where food needs to be made in large quantities is made possible by the equipment created by technomages. With Britain turning away this important area of research, business owners are left paying copious amounts of gold to technomages that have been driven away to Germany or one of the other countries.”

Mr. Fortescue’s words ring full of truth, and were corroborated by Morgan Cornfoot, one of the two technomages hired by the James Potter Magical Research Institute. Mr. Cornfoot, 24, got his Mastery in Germany and returned to Britain with his brother because they wish to see this field of magical research develop further. “Times are changing, and Britain is already behind because of the war. Now, more than ever, progress should be at the forefront of our priorities. There are many inventions that are used across homes in Germany that Britain would benefit from as well, but importing all of them is ridiculous, especially if we have capable wizards and witches who can learn and create their own inventions.”

“It is blatantly incorrect of Unspeakable Mittermeyer to say it is a frivolous and useless area of magic, since the inventions are already being used in Britain, imported at overly high costs,” says Newt Scamander. “We have talented witches and wizards in our midst and rather than driving them away, we should be embracing their talents and nurturing them. That is exactly what the James Potter Magical Research Institute hopes to do.”

The problem of Britain losing out on talented witches and wizards who often choose other European nations or America to further their education after Hogwarts, has been growing since the first war against He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. The Department of Mysteries has been accused of being narrow minded in their view of research, and most breakthroughs in magic have been from researchers who received their Mastery outside Britain. It raises important questions regarding the role of the Department of Mysteries and whether they are acting to the full extent of their potential in fostering magical research.

“Whether the Department of Mysteries is doing what they should is not for me to say,” says Elder Potter, when asked for a comment. “I do think Unspeakable Mittermeyer had a point that the
Ministry currently does not have sufficient funds to further research, but I disagree with his thoughts that we ought to abandon new research because of it. The James Potter Magical Research Institute will bridge this gap, until the Department of Mysteries is once again able to help magical researchers in any way they can. We are on the same side here.”

It is a rather mature approach to take, but it does not come across as naivety, nor does it seem purely diplomatic. Elder Potter seems determined that rebuilding and recovery should not be limited to just charity work, and as with his efforts before, we place great faith and confidence in his abilities. The fact that this announcement comes mere days after his announcement of support for the Post-war Employment Act proposed by Elder Robert Abbott (see page 7 for a summary) sends a clear message that when Elder Potter said he would do all he could, he meant just that.

Applications to the James Potter Magical Research Institute remain open for both Masters and apprentices, and should be addressed to Mr. Newt Scamander at North Tower, Iola Castle, Bath.

Harry sighed and set the copy of the Daily Prophet aside. Andromeda looked up from her cup of tea and smiled warmly.

“That sounded like a heavy sigh,” she said. “Do Mittermeyer’s words bother you that much?”

“Yes, they do,” he said, bluntly. “I’ve never met him but he sounds like an old man set in his ways. Those are the kind of people I dislike the most.”

“You cannot expect every move you make to be universally popular,” said Andromeda, wisely. “Tracey did well in establishing your stance, and you come across as someone rational and more mature than Mittermeyer, who just sounds like a bitter old man. It was a good idea to get Finn Fortescue’s testimony too. People connect more to the working man than they do to bureaucrats.”

Harry nodded. He sometimes forgot that Andromeda had been a Slytherin too. “Tracey thinks we should start laying the foundation for the technomages and their inventions if we want to create a way to commercialise it in the future,” he said. “Hermione said something like it too.”

“They’re right,” said Andromeda. “Wizarding Britain is adjusting to change well, but even they have their limits. Slow and steady, Harry, slow and steady.”

“Speaking of which,” he said, shaking his head to focus on the other matter. “When does Ms. Sawbridge get here?”

Andromeda finished her tea and checked her watch. “She should be along soon,” she said.

“I can’t believe you already managed to hire all ten caretakers,” said Harry, impressed. “At this rate, we might be ready to open soon.”

“Yes, the renovations shall be done before the end of next week, so I was thinking we should do a full tour with the new staff and the Potter Foundation employees one week from today on Friday,” said Andromeda.

“That’s fine,” said Harry. “I haven’t had the chance to go back and see what the house elves have been doing, so it will be good to do it together. How soon do you think we can open?”

“By mid-July would be my guess,” said Andromeda. “There was something else I wanted to talk to you about.”

“What is it?” asked Harry.
“I want to move Teddy and I into Black Castle,” she said, with slight hesitation. “In one of the towers that will be unoccupied by the children.”

“How?” asked Harry, surprised. “There are other properties, if you don’t like Grimmauld Place…”

Andromeda shook her head with a small smile. “It’s not that I dislike Grimmauld Place,” she said. “I have grown attached, I’m afraid, to the orphanage and I suspect to the children once I meet them. Belinda could use a hand too, especially until things get settled. The caretakers we hired are capable, but it never hurts to have an extra pair of hands. Besides, Teddy will be around other children as well.”

“Yes, but…” said Harry, wondering how he could say it delicately.

Andromeda’s eyes softened. “You don’t want him to feel like an orphan,” she said.

Harry nodded. “He has me and you,” he said. “It feels hypocritical but I want him to grow up in a home of his own.”

“I can’t fault you for that,” said Andromeda. “How about this then? Give me a year. I’ll live at the orphanage for the first year and after that, Teddy and I will move back to Grimmauld Place.”

“One year?” asked Harry.

“One year,” nodded Andromeda. “No more.”

“Alright,” agreed Harry. “Let Kreacher know to prepare your tower at Black Castle.”

“Thank you, Harry,” she said. “You’re welcome to come and visit, of course, but I suspect you will be doing that, anyway.”

There was a knock on her office door and they looked up as Parvati led a woman around Andromeda’s age inside the office. Harry stood up, realising the petite, dark-skinned woman was Belinda Sawbridge.

“Ms. Sawbridge, it is a pleasure to meet you,” he said, holding out his hand.

She smiled pleasantly and shook his hand. “Do call me Belinda, Mr. Potter,” she said. “The pleasure is mine.”

“Call me Harry, please,” he said, as they sat in front of Andromeda. “Thank you for all your help so far, and I apologise it’s taken so long for me to meet you.”

“Nonsense, you have been busy,” said Belinda, nodding towards Andromeda’s desk which had the Prophet open on the article Harry had been reading before. “I’ll admit, we have had philanthropists in the past attempt an orphanage, so I was sceptical when Thierry reached out, but one look at Andromeda’s plan tells you everything has been put in place meticulously.”

“Yes, Andromeda did a wonderful job, as did our whole team,” said Harry, pleased at the praise for them.

“So did you, Harry,” said Andromeda, and Belinda nodded in agreement. “We were just discussing how the renovations will be done soon, and we should take a full tour next Friday, Belinda.”

“Sounds splendid,” nodded Belinda. “It will give us a chance to examine if any additional wards need to be placed in any of the areas. In the meantime, I spoke to Thierry and he has invited us to
meet with Collette Peakes on Monday.”

“The Director of St. Mungo’s, yes that makes sense,” nodded Harry. “Andromeda mentioned we need to discuss how the children will be transferred and start the paperwork for transferring custody.”

Belinda nodded solemnly. “I don’t anticipate resistance, because Collette is a fair woman, so I’m sure once we set out the whole plan, she shall cooperate fully,” she said. “If possible, I’d like some of the caretakers to start spending time at the Orphan Wing before the transfer to get them used to the familiar faces.”

“Alright,” agreed Harry, easily. “Anything to make it easier on them.”

Belinda beamed at him. “Thank you, Harry,” she said. “Not just for starting this project, but for agreeing to take such steps to ensure the care and future of those children.”

Harry went red at the praise. “I know what it’s like to grow up in a place where it feels like you have no one,” he admitted. “I don’t wish to see any of them go through it any more than they already have.” He cleared his throat. “So, er, we were going to discuss the staff.”

“Yes,” said Belinda, taking out a folder from her handbag and setting it down on Andromeda’s desk. “We have me, Thierry and Charlie Weasley, of course, as the matron, Healer and groundskeeper. Then, we have the ten caretakers. Six women, four men,” she added, showing him the list and pointing out the names of the ten caretakers next to the groups they would be in-charge of.

“We decided who should be assigned where based on their personalities and capabilities when we interviewed them,” said Andromeda. “It can be changed, of course, but we should stick with this for now.”

“We also asked for long-term commitments,” said Belinda. “It’s the same process when we hired for the Orphan Wing. A minimum of five years, which is what we put in their contract. Unless there is a serious issue that leads to their employment being terminated, we should stick to that.”

Harry nodded, reading through the names. He recognised Meredith Sawbridge, whom he knew to be Belinda’s daughter. There were a couple surnames that he recognised from Hogwarts, but the first names were unfamiliar which led him to conclude that they were relatives. “Seems to be in order,” he said. “What about their salary packages?”

“Yes, we discussed them and finalised it as per the contracts that Daphne drew up,” said Andromeda. “Room and board will be free, but they will be paid wages for their work, like we discussed before.”

“Excellent,” said Harry. “Is there anything else we need to discuss before meeting Director Peakes on Monday?”

“Nothing in particular,” said Andromeda. “Belinda and I have to prepare for the meeting, but that’s all we need from you, Harry.”

He stood up and nodded gratefully. “I’ll let you get to work, then,” he said. “I have a lunch appointment, anyway. It was nice seeing you, Belinda. I look forward to working together.”

“As do I, Harry,” smiled Belinda. “As do I.”

Harry nodded in farewell and left Andromeda’s office, but stopped in his tracks when he saw a visitor speaking to Parvati.
“Elder Macdougal?” he asked, recognising the older man. “What are you doing here, sir?”

Alexander Macdougal looked surprised to see him, but smiled in greeting. “Elder Potter, I didn’t realise you would be here,” he said.

Harry shook his hand. “Is everything alright?” he asked, confused as to why the man would be there if not to see Harry.

“I came to make a donation on behalf of the Macdougal family,” he said.

“Oh, of course,” said Harry. “Parvati?”

“I’ll get the paperwork ready,” she said, with a smile.

“Thank you for doing this,” said Harry, as Parvati hurried away.

“Not at all,” said Elder Macdougal. “I admit, I wasn’t sure how you were planning on using the donations you receive. Even with helping St. Mungo’s. But then I saw the housing measures in Abbott’s bill and I came here myself to make the donation because that is one excellent piece of legislation.”

“Really?” asked Harry, glad that they had the outspoken man onboard. “It was all Robert, I just offered the Potter Foundation’s help with the housing.”

“You’re being modest, I’m sure,” laughed Elder Macdougal. “Regardless, you can count on my support when the bill goes to vote. I’m a businessman, Elder Potter, so I understand charity has a place, but more than that I believe in working hard for everything in life. The Macdougal family is vast, but all of us hold a job or run a business as soon as we are out of Hogwarts. Abbott’s bill is doing just that, you see, giving everyone an opportunity to get back on their feet of their own volition, not just throwing gold at them.”

“Yes, that was the aim,” said Harry.

Elder Macdougal nodded firmly as Parvati returned. “Exactly,” he said. “I’ll let you get on then, Elder Potter. I’m sure you have places to be.”

“Yes, I apologise,” said Harry, and then got an idea. “Perhaps we could speak over dinner sometime. I would love to know more and I’d also like a chance to thank you for the donation. How does this Sunday sound?”

“Sounds excellent,” nodded Elder Macdougal. “My wife and I would be honoured to attend.”

“I shall send along an invitation then,” said Harry. “Have a good afternoon, sir.”

“And you, Elder Potter,” he said.

“Harry,” he corrected.

“Harry,” nodded Elder Macdougal. “Call me Alexander then. I’ll leave my address with Miss Patil.”

“Thank you,” grinned Harry, and took his leave. He had to hurry a bit to make his appointment, but he reached the newly opened Sara’s Pasta with a couple minutes to spare.

The St. James couple had opened their shop just two days ago, and already they were busier than they had been in the Muggle world. Harry wasn’t surprised, considering the food quality had gone up, and like Fortescue Cafe, Harry had attended the opening day when the press was there,
skyrocketing the popularity of the place. In a mere two days, Sara’s Pasta had become a place to get lunch and dinner for the Alley’s residents, shoppers and shopkeepers, as well as a massive Ministry crowd that descended every lunchtime. Draco had suggested to the couple that if this kept up, they could open an Owl Order delivery service for lunchtime, and Harry had wholeheartedly agreed.

The shop still had one or two tables for dining in even if the majority of it was takeout, so as Harry navigated the long queue and went inside, he spotted the person he was meeting with sitting at a table right in the back.

“Sorry for being late,” said Harry, slipping into a seat at the table.

“Not at all, I just got here myself,” said Arthur Weasley, with a small smile. “I wasn’t sure what to get but the young man said something called a spag bol would be good, so I ordered that for both of us. Is that alright?”

“Of course,” said Harry.

Mr. Weasley gestured to Nate at the counter, who finished serving a customer and gave a nod, shouting out an instruction to an employee in the back working with Sara. A moment later, a tray with two plates of steaming hot spaghetti bolognese floated over to their table.

Harry’s mouth watered at the scent wafting up from the food and his stomach rumbled lightly.

“Let’s dig in, shall we?” said Mr. Weasley, looking like he was eager to try the food as well. “We’ll speak as we eat.”

Harry put a forkful of pasta in his mouth, and looked at Mr. Weasley expectantly since the older man had been the one to invite him to lunch in the first place. However, it seemed that Mr. Weasley was quite amazed at the food, and didn’t immediately start speaking. While it amused him a bit, Harry was still anxious about this meeting.

“Mr. Weasley?” he finally prompted.

He jumped a little and smiled sheepishly. “Sorry, Harry,” he said. “I have never had anything quite like this. I should stop by on my way back from work to take some home for Molly.” He cleared his throat as his expression grew serious. “We never got a chance to talk in the Wizengamot the other day. Truth is, I have a couple of things I want to bring up with you.”

“Of course,” said Harry, on his guard just the same, as Arthur cast a privacy charm around the table.

Mr. Weasley gave a measured nod. “Firstly, I have been tasked by Minister Shacklebolt to raise a matter with you,” he said. “Your birthday is at the end of the month, and there has been a push from the wizarding public to name it as a day in your honour.”

“What?” asked Harry, horrified.

“The Minister’s been getting letters left and right about establishing July 31st as Harry Potter Day,” said Mr. Weasley, looking uncomfortable. “Kingsley wanted me to tell you, even though we are both sure how you feel about that.”

Harry nodded, suppressing a shudder. “I don’t want it,” he said. “Not one bit.”

“I know that,” assured Mr. Weasley. “But I wanted to let you know just the same. In the public’s eyes, you have been doing a lot. Setting up the Potter Foundation and now the institute as well, on top of working with the Wizengamot. The public seems to think the Ministry is not doing enough
and we are not appreciating you enough.”

“And you want me to tell them the Ministry is doing a good job?” asked Harry, trying not to let his distaste show.

“No,” said Mr. Weasley, with a sad smile. “Kingsley would never ask that of you, and even if he did, I would never agree to be so shameless. You have done enough, and you are doing plenty on your own. The Ministry is ours to fix, so don’t worry about it.”

“What then?” asked Harry, relieved just the same.

“Kingsley wants to award you the Order of Merlin,” said Mr. Weasley. “He wants it to be a whole ceremony at the Ministry’s banquet hall.”

“Flattered as I am, I wouldn’t feel right accepting it,” said Harry, shifting uncomfortably in his seat. “A lot of people fought in the war. They all deserve recognition, not just me.”

Mr. Weasley nodded. “From what I’ve heard, the Hogwarts Board of Governors already has plans to erect a monument for those that fell at the Battle of Hogwarts, but with the repairs that need to be done to the castle, the memorial won’t be ready until next year,” he said. “I wouldn’t be surprised if the Ministry were to hold a proper ceremony on the anniversary.” He sighed deeply. “But in the meantime…”

“I see,” said Harry. “I still wouldn’t feel right if it were just me…” His eyes went wide as he got an idea. “What if it were the students?”

“What do you mean?” asked Mr. Weasley, puzzled.

“Students were evacuated from Hogwarts once the battle began, but there were plenty of people who stayed,” said Harry. “What if it wasn’t just me, but all the students who fought in the war?”

Mr. Weasley considered it. “I’ll put it to Kingsley,” he said. “I can’t promise anything, of course, but if it means you’ll agree, then it’s the least we can do.”

“Thank you,” nodded Harry.

Mr. Weasley smiled. “Now that the official business is out of the way, there are a few other things I wanted to talk about,” he said, somehow looking even more serious than before. “Charlie has quit his job at the Ministry, and refuses to say why. All he said was that he had a new job lined up.”

“Right,” said Harry, warily. Until the orphanage went public, all their potential employees were under strict confidentiality agreements.

Mr. Weasley gave him a searching look. “Is he working for you?” he asked. “And if so, what is he doing? For that matter, what have you been doing? Because Ron said some concerning things a while ago.”

Harry exhaled sharply, and he tried to see if there was disapproval or anger in Mr. Weasley’s gaze but only found confusion and a little bit of concern.

“I did offer Charlie a job and he accepted it, yes,” he said.

Mr. Weasley nodded. “That is a relief, but only partly,” he said. “Ron mentioned...well, that Green, er- that Daphne Greengrass is your lawyer.”
“That’s right, I hired her right after Gringotts told me about my inheritance,” said Harry. “And she has helped with setting up the Potter Foundation and the institute. Fleur is an employee, as well. Bill knows about it.”

Mr. Weasley’s eyes were wide. “It’s not that I don’t trust your judgement, Harry,” he said. “It’s just that you and Ginny broke up, and then Ron told us Hermione had broken things off with him, and that you and him had had a fight.”

“Did Ron tell you what we fought about?” asked Harry, crossing his arms.

Mr. Weasley nodded uncomfortably. “He told us he said something unforgivable to you,” he said. “And you fought because of that.”

“Partly,” said Harry. “Ron wanted things to be just like they were before, but the world’s changed and we have all changed. I want to make a difference, Mr. Weasley, and I have been working very hard for that. He took issue with the fact that Daphne was my lawyer, and that I had grown friendly with some Slytherins.”

“I’m sure he is just concerned,” said Mr. Weasley, placatingly. “So are Molly and I. We hardly see you these days.”

“I apologise for not being around but I don’t wish to make Ginny uncomfortable,” said Harry, bluntly.

“Ginny wouldn’t—” he began, but Harry shook his head.

“It would be uncomfortable for both of us,” said Harry. “I appreciate you and Mrs. Weasley being concerned. It makes me really happy, believe me, but I am doing fine. The people I am working with are very capable and they are not out to get me.”

“I know that being Slytherin does not equal being evil, Harry,” said Mr. Weasley. “There were plenty of Slytherins at the Battle of Hogwarts.” He sighed and rubbed his temple. “The things you have managed to do in such a short amount of time have been nothing short of extraordinary, Harry. I couldn’t be prouder. I just can’t help but be concerned, because it feels like you areshouldering so much responsibility by yourself. Ginny didn’t say much about why you broke up, but I wouldn’t be surprised if the two of you decided to separate because you no longer found yourselves able to be partners in the direction your lives were headed.”

Harry flushed, but confirmed it with a nod.

“If that’s the case, I hope you meet someone who can share your life with you,” said Mr. Weasley, with a small smile. “Molly has always said you have been as good as a son, and I agree completely. But just because you have newer people around you, doesn’t mean you can’t come to us if you need something, Harry. If there is any way we can help, we absolutely would.”

Harry went redder when he called him as good as a son, in such a firm voice. “I just didn’t want to impose…” he muttered.

“Family does not impose,” said Mr. Weasley, without missing a beat. “And I will be having a word with Ron, as well. He needs to grow up and learn to talk things out rather than being ruled purely by emotion all the time.”

“Please let him come to that conclusion himself,” said Harry. “I am fine with waiting until he does.”

Mr. Weasley pursed his lips but gave a nod. “If Bill and Charlie know what you are doing, that’s
“Good enough for me,” he said. “The rest of us are here if you ever need anything.”

“That goes for all of you, too,” he blurted out. “I mean, if there is anything I can do…”

“You have done more than enough, Harry,” smiled Mr. Weasley. “And something tells me there is a lot more you are planning to do. Just know that we are right behind you and ready to stand by you.”

Harry just nodded, because he didn’t trust himself to speak.

Mr. Weasley gave him a wide smile. “Alright then, let’s enjoy the rest of our lunch,” he said, attacking his plate of spaghetti with gusto. “The sauce is most extraordinary.”

~

4th July, 1998

Harry walked out through the fireplace at Grimmauld Place and made his way to the dining room. It was still early for a Saturday but Andromeda was at the table, like he knew she would be.

“Good morning,” he greeted, with a smile.

Andromeda looked a little surprised to see him. “Morning,” she said. “Breakfast?”

“No, I already ate,” he said, taking a seat at the table. “But don’t let me interrupt you.”

She gave a nod and continued eating, though with a look of curiosity. “I thought you were headed to the Pride Farmhouse with Daphne today,” she said.

“I’m meeting her in a bit,” he said. “I’ve been thinking about something since seeing Mr. Weasley yesterday, so I wanted to know what you think.”

“Sure, what’s bothering you?” asked Andromeda.

Harry paused, wondering how best to phrase it delicately. He’d been accused of being tactless in the past, so he didn’t inadvertently want to say the wrong thing and hurt Andromeda’s feelings. “D-do you think Mrs. Weasley would...like to...I mean, something to do with the orphanage?” he asked, stumbling over his words as he glanced away. “You said it helped you, so I...sorry.”

He heard Andromeda chuckle a little. “Harry,” she said, gently. “I think I know what you are getting at. Did you and Arthur talk about the orphanage?”

“No,” he said. “But…”

“But you want to do something for Molly,” said Andromeda, and sighed. “Harry, losing a child...there is nothing that will help with that. You’ll understand one day when you have your own, but the moment that little life is born, your entire world shifts on an axis.” Her gaze was far away as she spoke, and he realised that without the makeup she wore at work, Andromeda truly looked as exhausted as she had since the funerals, maybe even more. “Still, I can’t deny that doing all the work on the orphanage has been better than being alone with my thoughts,” she added, meeting his gaze. “Do you want me to speak to Molly?”

“Yes,” he nodded. “Maybe it won’t help, but...Mrs. Weasley is a good mother. She’s been sending me Christmas presents even when all she knew about me was through Ron’s letters and one meeting at Kings Cross.”

Andromeda nodded slowly as she finished her breakfast. “I was going to meet her for tea today, so
I’ll bring it up,” she said. “Are you alright with me telling her about the orphanage?”

Harry drew out the contract he’d had Daphne draw up the evening before and passed it to Andromeda. “You can bring it up like a job if you want,” he said. “For now, it’s just as a general contractor, so it’s up to you to come up with the specifics.”

“I’ll do my best,” she said, taking the contract from him.

“Thank you,” said Harry, and stood up. “Do you want me to take Teddy?”

“Will you be alright with that?” asked Andromeda, with a slight look of surprise. “You and Daphne will still be working.”

“Yeah, but it would give you and Mrs. Weasley a chance to talk properly,” said Harry. “I don’t mind looking after Teddy for the day.”

Andromeda smiled at him. “Alright then,” she said. “I’ll have Kreacher pack his things.”

Harry nodded gratefully and went upstairs to get Teddy. He saw Hermione on the landing, on her way to the bathroom in her pyjamas, bedhead and all.

“Morning,” he greeted.

“Harry?” she asked, squinting at him. “You’re here early.”

“Just here to get Teddy,” he said. “I’m headed to the Farmhouse with Daphne. We’re sorting through the wine there today. You wanna join?”

She fought back a yawn and shook her head. “I am in the midst of reading those books,” she said. “The last couple I read were no good.”

“Dangerous?” he asked.

“No,” she said. “Outdated, mostly. It’s taking longer than usual, because I have also been double checking the copyright.”

“Was there a problem?” asked Harry, confused.

“No, Daphne said she only did a cursory check and asked if I could follow up,” said Hermione. “Just to make sure we aren’t breaking any laws or cheating any of the existing authors or their estates of rightful royalties.”

Harry thought it sounded like Daphne to make sure no stone was left unturned, so he nodded. “Thanks for that, Hermione,” he said. “Oh, and Vikram’s shop will be opening on Monday, by the way.”

Hermione nodded. “I am definitely stopping by,” she said. “It’s opposite Flourish and Blotts, you said?”

“Yeah, it’s called the Claw Bookshop,” he said.

“I can’t wait to see it,” grinned Hermione. “Have fun today then.”

“I will,” he promised, with a smile. She waved and went on towards the bathroom, and Harry fetched Teddy from his room. Downstairs, Andromeda handed him a bag with Teddy’s things, which Harry shrunk to fit in his pockets. With a quick goodbye, he took Teddy and went through the
fireplace, arriving in the main cottage of Pride Farmhouse.

Teddy burst into tears as soon as they went through the floo, since it was his least favourite way to travel it seemed. Harry started rocking him to calm him down, but Teddy just plain refused, as his cries grew louder.

“Hush, Teddy, it’s alright,” said Harry, starting to panic a little. The fireplace flared behind him, as Daphne stepped through. “Ah, Daph, he…” He felt a spell that brushed the soot off both him and Teddy.

“Hand him over,” said Daphne, putting her wand away and holding out her arms.

Harry did as she asked, and watched as she held him correctly, adjusting his head so that it rested right over her heart. There was no change to Teddy’s cries, but she began singing slowly, an unfamiliar song in a language he thought might have been Russian. Harry could only watch in amazement as Teddy began to calm down, the loud cries quieting to sobs and eventually sniffles.

“There, now,” she said, and looked at Harry. “Can you clean up his face?”

Impressed, Harry unshrunk the bag and pulled out a towel that he used to wipe Teddy’s face in soft, gentle motions. “You’re good at this,” he told Daphne, as she held Teddy more closely and began rocking him to sleep.

“I have a younger sister, remember?” she asked, raising an eyebrow, though there was a palpable blush on her cheeks. “Mind you, Tori and I are quite close in age, and I haven’t done this in a while. Tori used to hate going through the floo until she was well over five, and I remember our father doing this each time it happened. I think it’s the soot that bothers children, more than the travel.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” said Harry, relieved to see that Teddy was drifting off to sleep. Absently, he realised that the song had been Russian because her grandmother had been Russian and her father would have likely known that better than anything in French.

He conjured a crib like he’d seen Andromeda do often, and Daphne placed a sleeping Teddy gently inside, with a small smile.

“Andromeda is visiting Mrs. Weasley, so I said I’d look after him for the day,” he said.

“Alright,” she said. “We should get as much work done as we can while he’s sleeping then.”

He agreed, as they headed to the warehouse with the crib floating along behind them gently so as not to disturb Teddy. Daphne asked to see the main ledger, so while Teddy slept, the two of them took inventory of the bottles and barrels stored in the warehouse and what was currently being grown in the vineyards. Teddy woke up needing to be fed some time later, and they decided that a little break was warranted.

“I wonder how it’s going with Mrs. Weasley,” said Harry, as he held the bottle to Teddy’s mouth.

Daphne looked up from the list she was checking and frowned. “I’m sure it will be fine,” she said. “Do you need help?” she asked, nodding towards Teddy.

“No, I’ve got it,” he said, smiling gratefully just the same.

“You are very good with him,” she said, and Harry went pink.

“I don’t know about that,” he shrugged. “I try and spend as much time with him as I can, but the
most I have been doing is looking after him for a few hours here and there. Andromeda has been doing everything else.”

“That is easily corrected,” said Daphne. “Godparents in the wizarding world hold quite extensive parental responsibilities. Especially when there are no parents in the picture.”

“How do you mean?” he asked, intrigued.

“For starters, you hold much more of a claim as Teddy’s guardian than Andromeda,” said Daphne. “They might be related by blood, but it is sort of expected that you will be the one who raises him like one of your own.”

“I didn’t know that,” he said, slightly startled. “Andromeda never said anything…”

“I’m sure she doesn’t want an almost 18-year old to become a father,” said Daphne, placatingly. “Teddy is still young, but as he grows up, you would be responsible for his education and upbringing. If you mean to name him the heir to the Black seat on the Wizengamot, that means you also have to train him to take over for that.”

“When does that start?” he asked, even more worried now.

“Not for a few more years,” she said, quickly. “For now, perhaps he could live with you over the weekends, or something of the sort.”

“I like that idea,” said Harry. “I’ll speak to Andromeda and see what she thinks.”

Daphne nodded. “You should do that,” she said. “He is young still, but there are things you could teach him.”

“Like what?” he asked, curiously.

“He is old enough to learn how to swim, for one,” she shrugged.

“At his age?” asked Harry, glancing down at Teddy.

“Infants learn to swim very quickly,” said Daphne. “Both Tori and I have been swimming from as far back as I remember. It was fun, you know. Every Sunday morning, we would go swimming, and then have a picnic lunch by the lake on the manor grounds. It was a nice way for us to spend time with our father. Even during cold months, he would cast a simple climate charm, so we could have that Sunday ritual.”

“It sounds nice,” admitted Harry. “Unfortunately, I...er, I don’t know how to swim.”

She looked slightly surprised. “You managed quite well in the second task of the Triwizard Tournament,” she said.

“That was mostly the Gillyweed,” he said, and then hesitated slightly. “The Dursleys didn’t see it fit to give me lessons like the ones Dudley got.”

Daphne’s expression grew cool, like it did everytime the Dursleys were mentioned. It was almost a relief to Harry that far from pitying him or worse, thinking he was lying or exaggerating like most adults had done in his life, Daphne was firmly angry on his behalf when it came to the Dursleys.

“Well, you’ll learn quickly enough,” she said, after a moment. “You and Teddy could learn together. It might be fun.”
“I’d like that,” he said, smiling.

She gave a nod, and then examined the list that she had set aside at the start of their conversation instead of meeting his gaze. “I could help, if you like,” she offered.

He stared at her wordlessly. “Y-yes,” he said quickly, before she could retract the offer or change her mind.

Still looking at the list instead of him, she gave a nod. “Tomorrow, then,” she said. “I was going to stop by to plan out the dinner with the Macdougals, so it works out.”

“Yeah,” he agreed, and couldn’t help but smile back when Daphne finally looked at him and gave a small smile. “Yeah, I’d like that a lot.”

~

5th July, 1998

Harry wasn’t sure what to expect from a swimming lesson from Daphne, but he was excited nonetheless. He had never really had the time nor opportunity to do something like it, and despite how busy his life had become, he really did want some downtime as well. The fact that he got to spend it with his beloved godson was a bonus.

He went and got Teddy from Grimmauld Place around nine in the morning. If Andromeda was surprised at what he had planned for the day, she certainly didn’t let it show. She did hand him a signed contract from Molly Weasley.

“We spoke about what she could do to help out, and decided that she would supervise the house elves,” Andromeda had said. “You know, plan out the meals, assist with making clothes, and supervise chores. She refused to sign on as an employee, though, and wanted this to be purely voluntary.”

“Why?” Harry hadn’t been able to help but ask.

“She didn’t feel right being paid to look after children. Orphans, especially,” Andromeda had explained. “She said she’d do it for nothing, but I managed to talk her into a small award package.”

It hadn’t surprised Harry to hear that, but he was glad Andromeda hadn’t backed down either. With Mr. Weasley now working with Kingsley’s office, and all but Ginny having their own jobs or work, the family’s finances had to have been doing better. They had also inherited the wealth that came with the Crouch seat, which was still a modest sum. Harry knew they would never accept any help from him, had known it since he was young, so he was glad that he would be able to repay them in some way for their kindness over the years. Especially since Mr. Weasley had said he was as good as family just a couple days ago.

Getting back to Potter Hall, he put up the requisite climate charms over the lake, since the day was a little cloudy. Gerry helped with the process, and Harry was able to practice until he got it right and the area around the lake had a bright, sunny glow. Harry wrote down the instructions for the charms, making up his mind to have them used at the Lily Potter Home as well, so the children could swim whenever they wanted.

Daphne arrived not long after he finished putting up the charms. “Good morning,” she greeted, waving with one hand while the other held a large picnic basket.

“Morning,” said Harry. “You didn’t have to,” he added, nodding at the basket. “Minnie could have
made us something.”

Daphne shook her head with a smile. “Minnie is going to be busy with dinner preparations,” she said. “Speaking of which, I finalised the menu for tonight.”

Harry took the list from her with a nod, noting that she had set out a full six course meal with the accompanying drinks.

“I kept it simple,” she said. “The Macdougal family is not much for snobbery, but it would do well to have a good relationship with them.”

“Alright,” he agreed, as Minnie appeared and took the list from him before disappearing once again. “So, er, how do we do this?”

Daphne laughed as she set the basket down by the lake’s edge. “Don’t look so nervous,” she said. “We’ll be starting with the basics. Today, it’s all about learning to float.”

“Right, sure,” he said, still nervous. He didn’t feel like admitting that he wasn’t afraid of not being able to swim but that he’d make a fool of himself in front of Daphne.

“You’ll be fine,” she said, braiding her hair into two plaits and then rolling them into two buns at the back of her head with a few quick flourishes of her wand. “Go get changed.”

He nodded and hurried up to his rooms. He debated whether he should wear a t-shirt of some sort over his swimming trunks, but decided against it, though he did examine the myriad of scars along his torso with a grimace. He didn’t think Daphne was the kind of person to judge the scars or make him feel uncomfortable about them, but he realised with a start that there was a part of him that wanted her to think of him as someone potentially attractive. Cursing the sudden blush that rose on his face at that realisation, he gave himself a shake and returned to the lake.

He had almost returned his face to a normal expression, but as he got closer to the lake and he saw Daphne, he went even redder than before. She was standing in knee-deep water in a pale ivory one-piece bathing suit, with her wand sheathed away in a matching holster on her wrist.

Harry was no stranger to pretty girls, having shared a locker room with his female Quidditch teammates from before he was old enough to properly notice girls, but he wasn’t as oblivious now. Daphne’s bathing suit was modest, but like any bathing suit, it outlined her figure well, and it was a very pretty figure to start with. He would have just stood and stared at her like an imbecile, but she looked up when she noticed him and gave a short wave.

“Just getting a feel for it,” she called out, indicating the water. “Can you get Teddy?”

“Y-yeah,” said Harry, hurrying over to the crib by the lakeside that had Teddy in it. The sight of Teddy knocked the haze of Daphne slightly from his mind, but not by much. Harry took a deep breath and made himself focus. This was about Teddy, about bonding with his godson and being a responsible godfather. His wild hormones could cool it for the day.

Though it seemed that was easier said than done. True to Daphne’s word, they didn’t learn anything complicated. Daphne taught him how to float on his back and his front, and then helped him teach Teddy do the same. Despite her reassurance, Harry was still surprised how well Teddy was doing, splashing easily and gliding along with just a firm hand to support his body as he did it. Harry was almost envious at the ease with which he was learning, when Harry himself needed several tries before he could float on his back and not sink and flail around like a trapped fish.

He felt himself flush with embarrassment each time it happened, but Daphne was patient with her
instructions. After an hour or so, Harry took Teddy out of the water and changed and fed him, before putting him down for a small nap. The usually fussy at naptime Teddy fell asleep almost immediately, thoroughly tuckered out by his swimming lesson.

Harry turned away with a smile and looked at the lake where he saw Daphne swimming the length of the lake in powerful, elegant strokes and couldn’t help but just admire her lithe form as it cut through the water. He looked away only when he heard a house elf arriving and smiled at Annie in greeting as she laid down a picnic blanket and unpacked the basket that Daphne had brought over.

“Thanks, Annie,” said Harry. “How are the dinner preparations going?”

“Preparations be going well, Master,” squeaked Annie, cheerfully. “Does Master have a preference for the dining room tonight?”

“Something in the East End of the house shall do,” he said, after a moment of thought. “The one next to the arboretum, perhaps. We could retire to the study next door after dinner for cheese.”

Annie nodded. “Understood, Master,” she said, and vanished.

“Well done.”

Harry jumped a little as he saw Daphne emerge from the lake. He hastily averted his eyes, only looking up when he heard the swish of fabric, and saw that she was putting away her wand in the holster once again after drying herself and her hair, and putting on a white dress over her bathing suit that she had summoned from her bag on the shore.

“You’ll be an old hand at organising dinners like this in no time,” said Daphne, taking a seat on the picnic blanket.

“I hope so,” he said, joining her. “How was your swim?”

She beamed at him. “Heavenly,” she said. “It’s rare to get such a nice warm swim in Britain, and these climate charms are just marvellous. I might bother you to put one around the lake at Greengrass Manor as well.”

“I’d be happy to,” he said, honestly.

She grinned and shook her head. “What about you? Did you have fun?”

“Yeah, I guess so,” he said. “I mean, thanks for not laughing, because I’m sure Teddy has me beat as the better student.”

She did giggle this time, though she hadn’t during the lesson. “You’ll get the hang of it,” she said, and reached for the finger sandwiches and cut up fruit that Annie had unpacked and arranged neatly in trays and bowls. “Let’s tuck in. Swimming always makes me ravenous.”

His own stomach growled in response and he agreed as he wolfed down a triangle of cucumber sandwich in two bites. Daphne ate hers more daintily, though she smiled at his enthusiasm out of the corner of her eye.

“So,” he said, after a while of eating in silence. “What do I need to know about the Macdougal family?”

Daphne didn’t answer immediately as she was pouring lemonade for the two of them. “Honestly, I could tell you about the family tree but apart from that, I don’t really know much about them,” she
said. “They’re a well-established family and respected in several areas of business, though I’d be hard pressed to know exactly which ones. I can tell you it’s all legitimate, though.”

“That’s mystifying,” said Harry, and Daphne shrugged apologetically.

“They ran in very different circles to my family,” she said. “Actually, it might be more accurate to say that the Macdougal family has never had any patience for rubbing shoulders with the wealthy and titled. If I were to hazard a guess, based on Elder Macdougal’s attitude in the Wizengamot, he’s a very common man’s man.”

Harry was inclined to agree, but he knew there had to be more. “Tell me about the family tree then,” he said.

Daphne gave a nod. “Alexander Macdougal is the current head of the family. He’s married to Cynthia Macdougal, whom you will see this evening as well, and they have five children. The oldest, Isolde, is their only daughter. She never married, didn’t have any children, and she currently runs a boutique shop that sells jewellery,” explained Daphne. “The second son, Graham, he’s Morag’s father by the way, works at the Ministry in the Department of International Magical Cooperation. The third son, Richard, that’s Isobel’s father, owns and runs a green grocer’s shop in Diagon Alley. There is an adjoining butcher’s shop run by the fourth son, Colin, and the youngest, Nicholas, works at the Ministry as well, in the Department of Magical Transportation.”

“You know, Elder Macdougal did mention all of their family either work or own their business right out of Hogwarts,” said Harry.

“I have heard that as well,” nodded Daphne. “That’s about all I know, apart from the fact that the entire family lives together on the family estate in Scotland. This dinner might be a good opportunity to form a good relationship with them.”

“No pressure then, eh?” asked Harry, with a smile but an undercurrent of tension as well.

“Don’t worry, you’ll be fine,” said Daphne. “Hosting a dinner party isn’t your forte but you have learned a lot these past few weeks. Elder Macdougal seems like a talkative man, so it will go well.”

“I hope so,” said Harry, slightly reassured. “I really hope so.”

~

It was just past one in the afternoon when Daphne returned to Greengrass Manor. Harry had gone to take Teddy back to Grimmauld Place and then get ready for his dinner with the Macdougals, and Daphne had her own list of things she wanted to get done before the day was over.

However, a curious letter was waiting for Daphne when she got home. It was a polite request for a meeting by Adrian Pucey. Considering Blaise had been her point of contact for all communication with Pucey, Daphne was a bit surprised and wary at the letter which stated that Pucey would be stopping by Greengrass Manor around six. It didn’t mention Harry in any way, nor did it say anything about their previous dealings with Pucey, which only made her warier.

Regardless, she replied to the letter accepting the request, and asked the elves to prepare food befitting a formal meeting. She decided to dress up properly too, acutely aware that if this didn’t have anything to do with Harry, it would be one of the first meetings she would be holding as the head of the Greengrass family on their family estate.

“Breaking out Mama’s emeralds, huh?” asked Astoria, as she peeked in the doorway of Daphne’s room.
Daphne rolled her eyes and stroked the heavy emerald and diamond necklace around her neck that had belonged to her mother. It had been part of a wedding gift to her from Elias, and Daphne hadn’t worn it before this.

“Too much?” she asked Astoria. “I could go for this one,” she added, holding up an egg-sized emerald attached to a neck ribbon to be worn as a choker.

“Sometimes it’s best to keep it simple,” said Astoria, as she walked into the room and began rummaging through the meticulously organised jewellery boxes that Daphne had laid out on her vanity. “Here, try this one.”

Daphne raised an eyebrow but took the simple princess necklace with small emeralds clustered to form roses, and replaced it with the one around her neck.

“Dare I hope this is for a date of some kind?” asked Astoria, as Daphne looked for appropriate earrings to go with the necklace.

“Not even close,” said Daphne. “I’m getting a visit from Adrian Pucey.”

“Why?” asked Astoria.

“No idea, which is not doing well for my nerves,” said Daphne.

“Maybe go with Mama’s emeralds, after all,” said Astoria, pursing her lips nervously.

“No, those are best saved for a special occasion,” said Daphne, finding emerald stud earrings, which she affixed with a sense of practised ease.

“Can I help you with your hair?” asked Astoria, as Daphne rummaged through the various bracelets.

“Yes, thank you,” said Daphne, absently. “A chignon, if you can, Tori.”

“You got it,” said Astoria, as she grabbed a hairbrush and began brushing Daphne’s hair. “Did you tell Harry about Pucey coming to visit?”

“No, Harry’s busy this evening,” said Daphne. “Besides, this might have nothing to do with Harry.”

“That’s not very comforting,” mumbled Astoria, with pins in her mouth. “Think he’s making a play for you?”

“I sincerely hope not,” said Daphne, startled. “No, I’m sure this is a professional visit. Which, I realise, is no comfort either.”

Astoria chuckled and finished pinning up the chignon and then held up the single silver pin which was sitting on the vanity. “I usually hate this thing but maybe wear it tonight,” she said.

Daphne took it from her and tucked it inside the neat chignon carefully. “I was planning on it,” she said. “Which dress do you like?”

Astoria glanced at the three options laid out on the bed and picked up the champagne coloured evening gown. “This one, definitely.”

“The sequins on the skirt don’t feel like too much?” asked Daphne, as she stood and held it against herself in front of the floor-length mirror.

“No, you’ll look beautiful,” said Astoria. “Maybe you’ll charm him into revealing his evil plans.
You’ll excuse me if I stay in my room for the evening, won’t you?”

“Sure,” grinned Daphne. “I’m not sure about evil, though,” she added, as Astoria took her leave so Daphne could get changed. “Definitely dubious, but I doubt, evil.”

~

Adrian Pucey reached the front door of Greengrass Manor just as the storm began rolling in overhead. He rang the elaborate knocker twice and waited, unsurprised when the doors swung open magically only a moment later. He stepped inside, and handed his cloak to a waiting house elf, who bowed and disappeared silently.

It was his first time at Greengrass Manor, and it only took him a single glance to realise that their wealth had not been exaggerated. A young woman, familiar to Adrian from his years at Hogwarts walked into the foyer, and he gave a small smile and customary low bow to her.

“Madam Greengrass, thank you for accepting my request,” he said.

“Certainly,” she said, giving a short curtsy in return. “Welcome to Greengrass Manor.”

Adrian raised his head from the bow, and could have almost chuckled at how refined and put together Daphne Greengrass looked. Elaborate gown, carefully selected jewellery, and perfectly coiffed hair; she was a vision befitting the head of a Sacred Twenty Eight family.

“Come, tea is laid out,” she said, leading him down a long hallway towards the back of the house.

Perfect manners, too, he thought absently, as he followed her. His was a lesser house than hers, so she spoke less formally than him, though he didn’t sense the haughtiness he’d come to expect from the higher houses. Then again, House Greengrass had never been conventional.

“I hope you weren’t caught in the storm,” she said, as they passed an open window and heard a loud crash of thunder.

“No, I managed to avoid it,” he said.

“Here we are,” she said, opening the doors to a well-fashioned day room. “Have a seat.”

“Thank you,” he said, taking a seat at the table which overlooked the lake from the large bay window, noting that it was set up for high tea with neatly matching china, polished silverware, and a bouquet of fresh flowers in a glass vase.

“How do you take your tea?” she asked.

“Milk, two sugars,” he answered.

Instead of calling for a house elf, she poured the tea herself for the two of them.

“Help yourself,” she said, passing him his cup with a small smile.

“Thank you,” he said, and took a sip. “I don’t intend to take up too much of your evening, Madam Greengrass, so I shall get right to it, shall I?”

“Certainly,” said Daphne, with a neutral expression on her face. “I can’t say I wasn’t surprised to receive your letter, and I am rather curious.”

He nodded and set his cup down before reaching into his robes to pull out a rolled up scroll of
parchment. “My services were acquired to deliver this contract,” he said. “However, as is my policy, I inspect every contract I am to present to ensure they toe the line of legality.”

“Of course,” said Daphne. “I assume you found something that crossed the line in that contract.”

“Not quite, though I am unaware of the specifics and thought I should err on the side of caution,” he said, handing her the scroll.

Daphne frowned slightly as she took it, and Adrian saw that she recognised the crest as that of the Nott family. The frown became more prominent as she read through the contract, before she looked downright murderous.

“I assume the recipient of this contract has not seen this yet,” she said, setting it down on the table.

“You would assume correctly,” said Adrian, taking a long sip of his tea. “The two dealings we have had in the past meant that I had some idea of how things were being handled, and when I saw the current head of the Nott family ordering the heir of the Jugson family to indulge in some...unpleasant business concerning your client, I was naturally worried.”

Her eyes narrowed at him, and she leaned back in her chair. “Let’s dispense with the niceties, shall we? You didn’t come here, in a direct violation of what your family stands for, on a whim. What do you want?” she asked, bluntly.

He had expected it, yet somehow not in such a blunt fashion. But he was never one to waste an opportunity. “I want you to hire my services on a permanent basis for your client,” he said, equally as bluntly.

She looked surprised, though she did very well to hide it. “I thought the Pucey family did not believe in taking sides,” she said.

“They don’t, but I do, and as the current Head, what I say, goes,” he said.

She looked intrigued now. “It is a very drastic change of stance,” she said. “Even for you.”

“Well, let’s just say I have had a wake up call,” he said, trying not to squirm under her steely gaze. He sighed when she didn’t relent and kept looking at him expectantly to expand on that. “My family always stayed out of everything, while knowing people’s deepest, darkest secrets. We facilitated a lot of deals, always proud of our neutrality. When the war ended, I picked up right where I left off, but I felt something was wrong. Like there was a rule I was breaking, without even knowing what it is.” He met her gaze squarely. “That is, until I presented the two contracts on your client’s behalf to the Chief Warlock and later to Royce Burke. I don’t know exactly what your client is doing, though I have some idea, but I know I want to have a greater role in it.”

“And so, instead of facilitating deals for everyone, you just want to do it for my client,” said Daphne, raising an eyebrow. “It’s an interesting proposition, but you would be severely cutting down your own client base. I’m not sure we could make an offer that would compensate for that loss.”

He shrugged lightly. “There are things more important than money,” he said. “Though I think you misunderstand when I say you must hire me for your client.”

She looked puzzled for a brief moment, before she looked at the open contract on the table and up at him with wide eyes. “Well, that’s certainly bolder,” she said. “So, you wish to be a spy.”

“Of sorts,” he said, pleased that she had gleaned his meaning without him having to spell it out. “My family’s neutrality is well-known so I would be ideal for you and your client to root out the
unsavoury kinds in wizarding society. No one except you and your client need to know that there have been any changes to the way I conduct my family’s business. Having me on retainer would give you insight on every deal that happens in wizarding Britain. You cannot deny that is an attractive prospect.”

She smirked. “It is, although the divide is razor thin,” she said, shrewdly. “Bringing you into the fold would also grant you insight into my client and every deal he conducts as well.”

“True, though I am willing to sign my loyalty to him,” he said, without hesitation.

“Why?” she asked. “And don’t give me the wake up call and feeling of broken rules. Plain and simple, why do you want to work for Harry Potter at the risk of everything your family has ever built up?”

“I would say it’s for the same reason as you setting aside your family’s neutrality to support him in his endeavours,” he said, and then sighed. “I wasn’t at Hogwarts this last year but my younger sister was, as you are aware. My family might have built up this enormous legacy, but it didn’t count for anything when my sister had Death Eaters as teachers.” He exhaled heavily. “I won’t be put in that position again. No legacy is worth the people I care about. I feel like you understand what that’s like.”

She did, though she looked reluctant to admit it. Adrian pointed to the contract which Theodore Nott had commissioned him to deliver to Xavier Jugson, ordering Jugson to harass certain people at Hogwarts, focusing particularly on Ginny Weasley since it was rumoured that she and Potter had rekindled their relationship.

“This is what I can deliver,” he said, his voice firm. “As far as Nott and Jugson are concerned, the contract will exchange the proper hands, but you will have the intel, so you and your client can take what actions you need to in order to deal with it. Nott and Jugson will be the none the wiser where you got your information from.”

Daphne’s expression was hard to read as she slid the contract back towards him. “I cannot promise anything,” she said, and his heart soared with hope. “But it sounds like a conversation worth having.” She finished her tea and sat back in her chair. “Deliver the contract to Jugson as you were asked to do, and I’ll discuss this matter with my client.”

He smiled as he took the contract and rolled it back up. “I look forward to hearing from you and your client,” he said.

“Rest assured, you will,” she said, her tone firm. “One way or another.”
5th July, 1998

While Daphne had her meeting with Adrian Pucey, Harry welcomed Alexander and Cynthia Macdougal into Potter Hall. The elderly couple brought a bottle of Firewhiskey instead of wine, and both of them seemed very impressed with both Harry’s home and the food served to them.

Cynthia kept the conversation going almost completely from the beginning, so Harry didn’t have to worry about doing it. He didn’t glean any more information than what Daphne had already told him, as Cynthia spoke at length about the Macdougal family through the first three courses.

“Isobel and Morag were both delighted when we said you had invited us,” said Cynthia, as the salad was served.

“How are they?” asked Harry, remembering both Ravenclaw girls who had been in his year at Hogwarts.

“Oh, they are very well, dear,” said Cynthia. “They’re returning to Hogwarts in September for their last year of education.”

“That’s good to know,” he said. “I didn’t see them when I took my NEWTs so I’m glad they are doing well.”

“You have had quite a busy time since the end of the war, Harry,” said Alexander.

“I like being busy,” said Harry.

“Good answer,” nodded Alexander. “Truth be told, I can’t stand being still either. Especially now that there’s so much to do.” He chewed his salad thoughtfully before looking at Harry speculatively. “I was very impressed by that speech you made outside the Fortescue boy’s new cafe.” He exchanged a glance with Cynthia, who gave a small nod. “Truth be told, Harry, I was hoping to speak openly with you about something..”

“Of course,” said Harry, hoping he didn’t sound too wary.

“Have you heard of livery companies?” he asked. Harry hadn’t, and his blank expression must have given it away, because Alexander smiled a little. “Don’t worry, Harry, I would have been shocked if you had. It’s a Muggle thing, but we had something along those lines in the wizarding world a long time ago, though the past hundred years have not been kind in that regard.”

“What is it exactly?” asked Harry, curiously.

“They were trade associations, guilds, if you will,” explained Alexander. “Many countries across Europe still have them in one form or another, as do the Muggles in Britain. Cynthia’s family, you see, came from liverymen in the Muggle world.”

“You’re Muggleborn?” asked Harry, surprised.

“I am,” smiled Cynthia. “I was shocked when Alexander had no idea about any of this when we first married. Out of curiosity, we began looking into history of merchant and trade guilds in wizarding Britain.”
“Imagine our disappointment when we discovered that all guilds were abolished by the Ministry nearly a hundred years ago,” said Alexander.

“What were the guilds for?” asked Harry.

“Oh, any number of things, really,” said Cynthia. “There were ones for every kind of trade, from butchers, farmers, fishmongers, grocers to blacksmiths, tailors, distillers, even musicians and artists.”

“Of course, that was back when there were enough people to form guilds within every trade,” said Alexander, shaking his head as he took a long swig of the wine accompanying the salad. “The dismantling of guilds meant people began hoarding their trade secrets instead of sharing them. And as families died out, their secrets died with them.”

“The loss of intellectual property must have been catastrophic,” said Cynthia, gravely. “I cannot even begin to fathom how much was lost, because we have no idea how much knowledge even existed.”

“Some families kept going,” said Alexander. “Ollivander, for one. Wandmaking is an extensive trade but theirs is the only one that exists in Britain now. The only reputable one anyway.”

“Doesn’t the Ministry keep track of the trade secrets?” asked Harry, thinking to the patents kept by the Department of Mysteries.

Both Alexander and Cynthia chuckled. “You can thank Aretha Broadbent for that one,” said Cynthia. “She was the head of the biggest merchant guild in Britain when the Ministry was getting ready to pass reform to dismantle them. Aretha and her lot fought till the end to save all guilds, not just their own, but when it seemed like the Ministry would be going ahead anyway, the guilds all got together and collectively decided they would take their secrets with them. The Ministry didn’t think to include a provision to force them to surrender their secrets, and by the time the Ministry realised their folly, the former guild members told them to stick it where the sun doesn’t shine.” Cynthia laughed heartily. “Pardon my language, dear, but Aretha is something of a hero of mine.”

“Hero or not, it doesn’t help us now,” said Alexander, though he looked amused at his wife’s mirth. “They might have stuck it to the Ministry then, but nobody won in the end.”

Cynthia’s smile dimmed as she nodded. “True,” she agreed. “My family were all goldsmiths in the Muggle world. Most entered the company as apprentices, the later ones through patrimony, and the secrets are still known to us. The wizarding techniques of goldsmithing are all scattered in the wind, or under lock and key by goblins. When our daughter opened her jewellery shop, she had to develop her own methods using magical means because the Muggle techniques could not hold up to the goblin standards that everyone adheres to in the wizarding world.”

Harry thought it sounded remarkably like what Newt and other magical researchers had said about development in research. “The guilds took in apprentices?” he asked, just to make sure he had it right.

“That’s how most people got in, unless their family was already involved in the trade,” said Cynthia.

“The reason we bring this up, Harry, is because we want to revive guilds once again in the wizarding world,” said Alexander. “Think about it, especially with Abbott’s new law, there would be a wave of people who could be trained in various tradecrafts and make their living without relying on the Ministry or any of the pre-existing institutions for a job.”

“I’m sure you considered this when you opened the magical research institute,” added Cynthia. “Not everyone can be an academic. Some people are more technical in nature.”
“That makes sense,” said Harry, neutrally. He remembered Daphne’s warning of never agreeing to anything outright, but the Macdougals were making very good points. Their claims would have to be verified, of course, but he was sure that Daphne and the others would be up to the task. “It would certainly be an area I hadn’t considered before.”

“Business expansion is going to be a crucial area now,” said Alexander, as their plates were cleared for the main course. “We have Diagon, and if things go well, even more.”

Harry nodded, knowing they couldn’t talk about Knockturn Alley openly just yet, since Cynthia was not a member of the Wizengamot. “May I ask something, Alexander?” asked Harry, remembering something from the previous Wizengamot session. “Pardon me if it sounds like I’m prying.”

“Do go ahead, dear,” said Cynthia, as Alexander nodded.

“Does your family have dealings outside Diagon?” he asked.

Alexander laughed as Cynthia chuckled. “We do,” said Alexander. “You may not know this but it’s a tough business to get a license in Diagon Alley.” Harry did know that, better than they would think, but he just nodded at him to continue. “But it’s much easier to get it outside of Diagon. In the general area, if you catch my drift.”

“I see,” said Harry, realising he was talking about Knockturn.

“Mind you, it is all within the bounds of law,” said Alexander. “I always insist on it. They are investments, and I won’t ever support something illegal, no matter how profitable.”

His tone was no nonsense, as if the very thought of making profit at the risk of breaking the laws was outrageous.

“Tell him about the new one, dear,” said Cynthia, as the main course of roasted squab on cress was served with a red wine from Pride Farmhouse.

Alexander looked puzzled for a moment before nodding. “Oh, yes, but I am still attempting to get to the bottom of it,” he said, and turned to Harry. “Have you heard of it? A new company popped out of seemingly nowhere. GSC Consultants, they have an office in Diagon.”

Harry’s heart jumped, but he nodded calmly. “Yes, I have heard,” he said. “Mr. Fortescue said something about it.”

“Apparently, they have been investing heavily in a lot of businesses in Diagon,” said Cynthia. “I spoke to Whitney Clarke, and she said they helped out with everything from licensing to renovation to marketing for their family’s cleaning business.”

“Must have some reach,” said Alexander, sounding reluctantly impressed. “No one in Britain these days has that kind of reach, so the popular theory is that it’s a foreign investor. They hire locals, though, it seems.”

“I’ve heard they have been doing good work,” said Harry, cautiously.

“Oh, no doubt about it,” admitted Alexander. “I only hope they continue doing it, though I wouldn’t mind knowing exactly who is behind it.”

Harry took a large sip of wine, instead of responding to that. “Tell me more about plans for reestablishing guilds,” he said, changing the subject.
Both the Macdougals perked up. “Well,” began Alexander. “To start with…”

~

6th July, 1998

Hermione apparated into Diagon Alley just before 11 in the morning, and immediately had to duck under the awning of a nearby shop since it was raining. Fortunately, she had arrived only two shops down from her destination, so she navigated it with ease, but stopped short when she reached the storefront of the Claw Bookshop.

A large glass display window, spotless and shiny immediately drew her attention, and a smile of unbridled delight lit up her face. The large sign above the window was navy blue with white letters spelling out the words ‘Claw Bookshop’ with the silhouette of a white bird between the two words. There was a grand opening banner right underneath the sign, and Hermione hurried to the glass door that led into the shop.

The navy blue and white seemed to be the theme of the interior as well, and as soon as she entered she was hit with the smell of books, which only made her smile widen. It was nowhere near as crowded as Fortescue Cafe had been, though it was empty by no means either. Hermione supposed that was the best they could hope for with a new bookshop in the middle of summer.

It was a cozy little shop, with rows upon rows of bookshelves, with floating signs above them designating various sections. Hermione decided she might as well take her time and explore through all of them, and set about doing just that. However, it seemed as if it wouldn’t stop at just exploring, since she found almost half a dozen books she wanted just in the first section she perused.

Gold wasn’t really in shortage for her, having inherited the modest wealth that had come with the Crabbe family’s Wizengamot seat. It wasn’t even a fraction of what Harry had, but since she wouldn’t be working until she finished her last year at Hogwarts, she was being frugal about her spending. There was some money she was making by vetting the books, so she supposed that money could be spent on books that she wanted. That’s how she was justifying it, anyway, as she picked out two more books that caught her eye.

Moving on into the next section, she stopped in surprise when she saw a familiar face browsing through the books.

“I see you found your way here, too,” said Hermione, approaching quietly.

Fleur turned around in surprise and gave a small smile. “Oh, good morning, Hermione. Yes, I thought I ought to stop by,” she said. “Harry and Daphne are in a meeting with Collette Peakes at St. Mungo’s, and Andromeda and Ms. Sawbridge are with them, so I had some free time.” She eyed the stack of books in Hermione’s hands. “You seem to be having fun,” she added, summoning a basket which floated up to them.

Hermione grinned and tipped the books into the basket gratefully. “The collection here is marvellous,” she said.

“I agree,” said Fleur. “It is severely trying my restraint.”

“I lost the battle about forty seconds after entering the shop,” said Hermione, and then remembered something she had been meaning to bring up. “Fleur, do you have a moment?”

“Certainly, what do you need?” she asked.
“The final details of the Crabbe estate were settled a couple days ago,” she said, lowering her voice. “It’s all sorted out, except for their family home.”

“Was there a problem with it?” asked Fleur, worried.

“No, no, it’s just...I don’t know what to do with it,” she said, honestly.

“Have you inspected it?” asked Fleur.

“No, but I looked at the floor plans and the wards and things,” said Hermione. “It’s a decently sized property, no bigger than Grimmauld Place, really. I have no desire to live there.”

“Do you want me to look into selling it for you?” asked Fleur, without missing a beat. “I can’t promise what the housing market is like these days, but it will fetch a decent price.”

“I’d like that,” said Hermione. “Harry and Andromeda have been generous but I’d like to move into a place of my own once I finish Hogwarts.”

“That’s understandable,” nodded Fleur. “I’ll speak to Daphne and we’ll see what we can do.”

“Thanks,” smiled Hermione, and cast a quick glance around. “What do you think of the shop?”

“It’s lovely,” said Fleur. “Penelope Clearwater is exceptional at what she does. The crowd is smaller than expected, but we’ll see how it goes when it comes time for back to school shopping.”

“Wish there was more I could do,” murmured Hermione, nodding in agreement. “The collection here is so amazing, I’m sure more people would come if they knew.”

Fleur glanced at her speculatively. “I have a very weird idea,” she said. “And it will eat up your time even more than it already does.”

“I’m fine with that,” said Hermione, immediately. “What were you thinking?”

“Tracey mentioned that Witch Weekly is looking for more writers to contribute to their publication,” said Fleur. “You could write a column about the book you’re reading that week.”

“Like a book club?” asked Hermione. “You think the Witch Weekly crowd will enjoy that?”

“Well, I think they’ll enjoy something written by you,” said Fleur, bluntly. “I’ll tell you what I tell Harry. Even if you don’t like your fame, it doesn’t mean there is no good use for it.”

“It will certainly be interesting,” said Hermione, her mind already racing.

“Tracey can set up a meeting with Marian Giles as early as tomorrow,” said Fleur. “Think about it and let me know.”

“I will, thanks, Fleur,” said Hermione.

“Alright, have fun then,” smiled Fleur. “I have to get back to the office.”

“Goodbye,” said Hermione, with a short wave as Fleur left with only three books in her arms.

Fleur’s words stayed on Hermione’s mind as she wandered through the rest of the shop. In one of the fiction aisles, she found a particularly fascinating book which she felt would be great for readers of Witch Weekly.
“Might as well give it a shot,” she decided, planning to send Fleur a message about setting up a meeting with Marian Giles. “If it’s for the books.”

~

“Thank you for your time, Collette,” said Harry, shaking her hand as the meeting came to an end. “We’ll be in touch.”

“I look forward to it,” smiled Collette Peakes. “Good day to you all.”

“And you,” smiled Belinda.

Collette saw them out of her office, and as Andromeda and Belinda headed to the Orphan Wing, Harry and Daphne decided to take their leave and return to the office.

“What else have we got planned for today?” asked Harry, once they were in the elevator.

Daphne sighed and checked her diary. “I’m meeting with Pucey,” she said. “Do what we discussed this morning.”

Harry gave a nod. “I have to speak to Fleur and Draco about the guilds,” he said, and then his face hardened. “And about Nott…”

“Yeah, the sooner we deal with it, the better,” said Daphne. “You’d think he would have used his brain a little bit more. Some people never learn.”

“Bet he thought getting it done through Pucey wouldn’t violate the contract he signed with us,” muttered Harry, darkly.

“As far as he’s concerned, that’s how we knew,” said Daphne, as they left the elevator and apparated out of the lobby, arriving at the back entrance of the GSC HQ. “That his actions alerted us of breaking the contract.”

“I know,” said Harry. “Doesn’t make me any less angry.”

“You and me both,” she said, as they went upstairs to the conference room. “How do you want to deal with him?”

“Call him for a meeting at Verdant,” said Harry, nostrils flaring in irritation. “Since there was no harm done this time, he can get off lightly. We have control of his vaults, right?”

“Yes,” said Daphne. “You want to seize the contents?”

“No,” said Harry. “But maybe he can express his remorse by making a generous donation to the Potter Foundation.”

Daphne smirked. “Sounds good to me,” she said.

“Oh, and make sure the rumours out there are quelled about me and Ginny,” he said. “Go public if you have to, saying we are no longer together.”

Daphne gave him a scrutinising look but nodded. “I’ll speak to Tracey,” she said.

The door to the conference room opened as Tracey walked in. “Speak to me about what?” asked Tracey.
“That Ginny and I are no longer together and I want it to be known,” said Harry, firmly. “I don’t want idiots like Nott to go after her because they want to get to me.”

Tracey glanced at Daphne, who just gave a slight nod. “Consider it done,” said Tracey. “Mind you, putting out the news that you’re back on the market will make it substantially harder for you.”

“I’ll bear with it,” said Harry.

“If you say so,” said Tracey. “So, how did it go at St. Mungo’s?”

“Quite well,” said Daphne. “We finalised the custody arrangements, Andromeda and Belinda will be spending their time at the Orphan Wing regularly with the caretakers, and we decided on the date to open the orphanage: July 16th.”

“Ten days away, wow,” said Tracey. “You’re still doing the tour with the staff on Friday, right?”

“Yes,” said Harry. “How’s it going with the media campaign for Robert’s bill?”

Tracey beamed at him and showed them a copy of that morning’s Prophet. “Ben and I have been busy,” she said. “Interviewing Ministry employees, the public, the unemployed, you name it. There are a few naysayers and sceptics, though that’s to be expected. The public perception was wary when the law was announced, but the trend’s been shifting over the past few days, because of us. By the time the bill goes to session the day after tomorrow, we’ll have managed to spin this as positively as we possibly can.”

“Great,” said Daphne. “Keep at it.”

“I’ll head off then, get to my latest assignment about Harry’s return to singledom,” she said, with a cheeky wink.

“Please don’t let that be the tagline,” Harry called after her, and she just laughed as she took her leave.

“You should go and talk to Fleur and Draco,” said Daphne. “I’ll set up a meeting with Nott for this afternoon and speak to Pucey.”

“Right, thanks,” said Harry, as he left her to it, and went to Fleur’s office. “Harry! You’re back,” smiled Fleur. “You’re not interrupting at all. Did it go well at St. Mungo’s?”

“It did,” he said. “What are you both up to?”

“We finalised the business plan for the winter resort,” said Draco. “We are in the midst of completing the paperwork for the French government.”

“Papa said he will speak to his contacts in the French Ministry on our behalf so we can expect it to go well,” said Fleur. “We might have to make a quick trip, but only if it doesn’t go well.”

“Wonderful,” said Harry. “I had another assignment for the two of you, once you’re done with that.”

“About what?” asked Draco, as Fleur looked curious as well.

“I had dinner with Alexander and Cynthia Macdougal yesterday, as you know,” he said. “They brought up some history of guilds in the wizarding world. I want you both to look into them. Daphne
is looking at the legal part, but the Macdougals want to get the laws changed, as well as reinstitute the guild system for various tradecrafts that need them.”

“Guilds, huh?” asked Draco. “I don’t know much about them, but I know my father and the Leiden fought hard to make sure they didn’t come back. One of the main functions the guilds served was making sure that every craftsman involved was reputable and could be trusted to be a pillar of the community. Even stand up to the Ministry, if needed.”

“Yes, the general notion at the time of banishing them was that they were a threat to the Ministry’s authority,” said Harry.

“Foolish,” said Fleur, shaking her head. “Guilds are a cornerstone of magical society in France. They are essential to business and growth. The British focus too much on their Ministry.”

“Look into them, please,” said Harry, stopping the debate before it could begin. “I doubt we have the numbers to have guilds as extensively as we did back in the day, but we can make a start somewhere, especially since many people could benefit from learning a trade skill instead of a job under Robert’s bill.”

“That’s a good plan,” nodded Draco, as Fleur murmured in agreement. “We’ll do that.”

“Thanks,” said Harry. “Oh, and the next time you have a meeting with Polly Winterbotham from the bottle shop here in Diagon, let her know you have a wine supplier called the Pride Farmhouse who is willing to sell.”

“You and Daphne sorted it out?” asked Fleur, delighted.

“We did,” said Harry. “There is enough stock for us to be a regular supplier, and Gerry has agreed to raise production if needed.”

“We are meeting with her on Thursday,” said Draco, checking their schedule. “We’ll get it done.”

“And where are we with the Clarke family?” asked Harry, remembering that Cynthia had mentioned them.

“They returned their signed contract this morning,” said Draco. “Unfortunately, we don’t have much work we can bring their way, but they have a stable client base already.”

“I might have more, but we’ll discuss it some other time,” said Harry, with a quick glance at his watch. “I’m going to go check up on Teddy.”

“Sure,” nodded Draco.

Harry smiled at him and Fleur, and took his leave. He stopped briefly by the conference room where Daphne was done with her letter to Nott. “Hey, I had an idea to help the Clarke family,” he said.

Daphne looked confused. “The family with the cleaning business?” she asked. “What about them?”

“Once Robards starts doing his thing in Knockturn, the Ministry is going to need to hire cleaners to get Knockturn back to normal,” he said. “Right?”

“Well, yes,” said Daphne, catching on. “Dark magic leaves a trace, which is why the place is such a mess. Not to mention it hasn’t had a proper clean-up, actual clean-up not the kind Robards will be doing, in a long while. I’ll see if we can get a government contract for the Clarke family. It will be a huge opportunity.” She beamed at Harry. “Nicely done.”
He grinned back. “Thanks,” he said. “What time are we expecting Nott?”

“Three,” she said, with a scowl. “I was just about to send the letter.”

“Isn’t that rather short notice?” asked Harry, knowing it was almost midday.

“Absolutely,” said Daphne. “I don’t want him to weasel out of this somehow. The less warning, the better.”

“I see,” said Harry. “I’ll be with Teddy until then.”

“Alright, just head over to Verdant when you’re done,” said Daphne. “I’ll go on ahead.”

~

Adrian Pucey reached the Verdant offices and sighed before entering. The letter from Daphne had only mentioned for him to arrive there at midday and nothing else. There was an empty reception desk in the lobby, and he wondered briefly what he was to do when he noticed Parvati Patil descend the stairs.

“Oh,” she said, when she saw him. “Daphne’s in her office. You’re expected.”

He gave her a polite nod, suppressing a shudder at the horrific scars on her face. He remembered her vaguely from Hogwarts, but had always dismissed her as a bit of an airhead. He had to commend her fortitude now, though. “Thank you,” he said, heading to the office on the ground floor that she had indicated.

He rapped his knuckles on the door, and it was opened a moment later by Daphne Greengrass. “Good afternoon, Madam Greengrass,” he said.

“Good afternoon. Come in,” she said, as she closed the office door and indicated for him to sit. “And let’s forgo the formalities.”

Her words gave him some hope, and his heart all but soared when she handed him a neatly drafted contract before taking a seat.

“Have a read through it,” she said. “Take your time.”

He gave her a nod and began reading. The words were simple but eloquent, without being overcrowded by legal jargon, and the gist of it was clear and apparent. He was being invited to work as an independent consultant for the Verdant firm and their client, Harry Potter. The client was involved in several ventures (though details were not specified) and if were to accept the position, he would be invited to be a part of those ventures. The extent of his duties were to attend a meeting at the beginning and end of every work day, and contribute to the best of his ability.

“Could you be more specific about these ventures?” he asked, after he finished reading the contract.

“I can’t tell you until you are officially hired,” said Daphne.

“Worth a shot,” he said, knowing it would have been in the contract otherwise. “The salary package is…?”

“Less than what you normally charge, yes,” she said. “However, you will still be able to carry on your own practice.”

“I was going to say it is sufficient,” he said, slightly amused. “May I have a quill?”
She handed him a blood quill, and he raised an eyebrow but signed the contract. She took the contract back from him, verified his signature and put it away in her desk drawer.

“Now,” she said, turning to him with a small smile on her face. “Let me tell you about these ventures. Adrian, have you ever heard of GSC Consultants?”

~

Theodore Nott stared at the letter in his hand in shock. It was clipped and to the point, with Daphne Greengrass’s elegant writing ordering him to attend a meeting at the Verdant offices.

*They couldn’t have known,* was his first thought. Pucey was discreet, so it wouldn’t be him. Jugson was an idiot, so it wouldn’t be him either. Which meant, it had to be the contract he had signed with Potter. The provision had been not to cause harm to Potter or plot to do it. Theo thought he’d circumvented it by asking Jugson to go after the blood traitor Weasley girl, instead of Potter directly.

If he had been smarter, he would have realised that the contract’s enchantment wouldn’t have notified them until after it had been broken. As it was, he hoped against hope that they didn’t know what he’d been planning, as he hurried to get dressed in order to make the meeting on time.

It seemed it was in vain when he was led into a meeting room with Potter and Greengrass, both of whom looked at him grimly. Despite his fear, indignance curled in his chest and he glared at them in greeting.

“Take a seat,” said Greengrass, voice as ice cold as her school nickname.

He did, though he couldn’t seem to help but sneer at her as he did. He had been planning to ask his father to petition the Dark Lord to have Daphne given to him as his wife. In fact, had Potter not meddled, the previous week would have been their last at Hogwarts, and he and Daphne could have been married by now. He could have had her under his thumb and have her do his bidding. The lost opportunity only made him more furious.

“Well?” he demanded rudely, once he had taken a seat. “I haven’t got all day.”

Greengrass raised an eyebrow at him frostily. “Quite an attitude for someone in your position,” she said.

“Funny, I’d say the same thing to you,” he sneered.

“Enlighten me,” she said, eyes narrowing slightly, but what angered him the most was the dismissal in her tone.

“Don’t you dare,” he spat, before he could stop himself. “You might be sitting on a gilded throne now, but don’t forget, I could have just as easily had you on your knees before me like a filthy little whor - aaarrghhhh…” His words were brought to an abrupt halt as his tongue was locked to the roof of his mouth. He went for his wand, but it flew out of his robes before he could reach it, and a moment later, he was struck with a body-bind curse.

He looked at Greengrass in horror, but realised it hadn’t been her since she hadn’t even drawn her wand. Slowly, his eyes moved over to Potter and even in his petrified state, he somehow seemed to shrink inwards at the furious aura rolling off of him in waves. Potter was on his feet, wand drawn, and eyes spitting green fire as he looked down at Theo as if he were little more than a bug to be squashed.

“Daphne,” said Potter, and even Greengrass seemed to tense at how cold his voice seemed to have
gone. “Could you give us the room, please?”

Theo moved his eyes to her, begging frantically not to leave him alone with Potter. For a moment, she looked like she would refuse, but then she stood up and left without a word, closing the door behind her. As soon as she had gone, the furious aura around Potter seemed to grow tenfold.

“You listen to me, you pathetic excuse for a wizard,” said Potter, in a low voice. “You had the bright idea of trying to harm people close to me, forgetting you signed a magically binding contract signing away your name and fealty to me. I was in a generous mood, but considering your attitude, I have half a mind to put an end to your family line, right here and now. Permanently.”

His eyes seemed to glow even brighter at the last word, and cold sweat broke out on Theo’s forehead. There was immense power emanating from Potter, and Theo was reminded horribly of the Dark Lord’s presence, and with a flash, he remembered the Dark Lord’s body falling at Potter’s feet in front of everyone at Hogwarts. The feeling of dread grew worse, as Theo went paler than he ever had in his life, more so than he had when taking the Dark Mark.

“Good, you seem to be realising a few things,” said Potter, eyes narrowing at him in disgust. “Now, for your punishment. You will donate a very generous two thousand galleons to the Potter Foundation, as a way of repenting for your actions. It would have been a thousand, but since you decided to mouth off and disrespect Daphne, I figured doubling the amount will be a better lesson. If you try anything of this sort again, I will empty your vaults, take your name and see to it that you’re cast out of wizarding society with your magic bound.” He leaned in closer. “And in case you think I’m joking, that is exactly the kind of power and fealty your poor excuse of a father signed away to Voldemort, and that’s the power I hold over you.”

He leaned back and the aura around him seemed to quieten. “I would have asked you to apologise to Daphne for your disgusting words, but I don’t want you anywhere near her,” he said, waving his wand and releasing the tongue-locking jinx and the body-bind curse.

Theo stared at him in fear, unable to speak despite no longer being jinxed. Potter tossed him a quill and parchment.

“Sign it,” he ordered. “It authorises your donation. And then clear off.”

Theo scrambled for the quill with shaking hands. Two thousand galleons was a large sum, nearly a tenth of his entire fortune, considering their family wasn’t too well-off to begin with. His father and him had been counting on getting a wealthy pureblood bride for Theo who would bring her family fortune as dowry. He had the briefest flash of anger at the thought of the vast Greengrass fortune but it was immediately replaced by abject terror at what Potter would do to him if he even suspected that the thought had crossed his mind. He signed quickly, and Potter took it from him, examined it carefully, and gave a curt nod.

“Get out,” said Potter, throwing him his wand.

Theo grabbed it with fumbling hands and decided to hurry off. He disapparated the moment he stepped out into Diagon Alley, nearly splinching himself as he appeared back at the Nott residence. He took a few gulps of air to calm his racing thoughts, before hurrying inside. Inside the parlour, he reached for a bottle of Firewhiskey and chugged down a fifth of it.

As the fear began to pass, it was slowly replaced by shame and anger.

Potter and Greengrass.
They would pay. He would make sure of it.

~

Daphne was pacing in her office when she heard Nott leave. She paused and wondered whether to go and see if Harry was alright, but the door to her office opened as Harry walked in. He looked calmer, though his expression was quite troubled. Daphne stared at him, waiting for him to speak, but he looked so lost, that she sighed deeply and approached him slowly.

“Harry,” she said, in a gentle tone. “Talk to me. Please.”

He glanced at her and then looked away. “Di-did I scare you?” he asked, keeping his distance. “Back there.”

He had, but Daphne didn’t say that as she took a step closer until they were standing right in front of one another.

“I haven’t...felt that way in a long time,” he said, still looking away instead of at her.

“When was the last time you did?” she asked, softly.

“Back in May,” he said, his voice equally as low. “Amycus Carrow...he spat at Professor McGonagall.” His voice hardened. “I cast the Cruciatus on him. Successfully.”

Daphne suppressed a shiver, and reached out her hand to touch the middle of his chest. He flinched as though she would strike him, but she pulled him down towards her using the front of his shirt and placed a soft kiss on his forehead. He inhaled shakily as she did, and she felt a little tension leave him. She kept her lips pressed to his forehead, even as his arms came to wrap around her waist, pulling her tightly into a hug.

“I’m sorry, darling,” she murmured, against his forehead. “I’m so sorry.”

He pulled away just a little to look down at her, though his arms stayed firmly around her. “What are you sorry for?” he asked, surprised. “I should be the one apologising.”

“No, you shouldn’t,” she said, keeping her gaze locked on his so he could see that she meant it. “I’m sorry if I gave you the impression that I would turn away from you. That won’t happen. Not ever.”

His eyes went wide. “Y-you can’t promise that,” he said, looking away once more.

She touched his cheek and waited until he looked back at her. “Yes, I can,” she said. “And I am promising it.”

“Daphne,” he murmured, his gaze drifting down to her mouth just for a brief moment.

Daphne leaned up on her tiptoes and kissed his forehead again. “You defended me,” she said, pulling away and meeting his gaze once more. “Yes, you were scary, and I can’t say it didn’t surprise me, since I haven’t seen you like that often. But you defended me from the filth Nott was spewing. As for the incident you mentioned before? Amycus Carrow was a despicable man and he deserved what you did to him, because trust me, he did much worse to students last year.”

“I don’t want to scare you,” he said, closing his eyes and leaning his forehead against hers. “Not you.”

Daphne’s heart jumped and she closed her eyes with a small smile. “It won’t happen again,” she
said. “Forgive me.”

“Only if you forgive me,” he said.

“I will,” she promised. “No matter what.”

He didn’t say anything, but his lips curled into the smallest smile.

A moment passed.

Another moment.

And then another, as the two remained in each others’ arms, foreheads resting together, lips formed into smiles.

Daphne was the first to pull away, as she kissed his cheek and gave him a bright smile. She went to step out of his embrace, but Harry caught her hand, which made her turn back to him in surprise.

“Harry?” she asked. “What is it?”

“I don’t claim to be good at this,” he said, looking nervous once again. “In fact, I am...terrible at this.”

Daphne chuckled nervously. “As am I,” she confessed. “In fact, I might be worse than you.”

“But I want to try,” he said, meeting her gaze earnestly. “I want...I want us to try.”

“Harry,” she said, stunned. “Do you know what you’re saying?”

“I am,” he said, nodding firmly before his confidence faltered once more. “I don’t know if I am ready, though.”

Daphne exhaled shakily and squeezed his hand. “I don’t know if I am either,” she said, honestly. “It feels like the world around us is spinning too quickly but time isn’t moving quickly at all. As completely mental as that sounds.”

Harry chuckled. “I think I know exactly what you mean,” he said.

Daphne smiled at him, her eyes softening. “We could take our time, you know,” she said. “We could...take things one day at a time. The world might be spinning, but we can only control how fast we move.” She took a deep breath. “Will you wait? Until I’m ready to take this step?”

He held her gaze for a long moment, before nodding. “I will,” he said. “And will you...?”

“Wait for you?” she asked, before he could finish. “Yes, I will.”

He smiled wistfully and then raised the hand of hers that he was holding and pressed a long kiss to the back of it like the one she had pressed to his forehead before.

“Then we’ll wait,” he promised.

~

8th July, 1998

“Ladies and gentlemen of the Wizengamot. On my authority as the Chief Warlock, I hereby
commence this session. First on the agenda, is the matter of the Post-War Employment Act introduced by Elder Robert Abbott, endorsed by the Chief Warlock.” There were murmurs of agreement as Abercrombie addressed the gathered members of the Wizengamot.

“For our new members, I shall explain how the process for the first reading of the bill is carried out,” he continued. “Each part of the Act will be announced by its designated chapter and discussed. If there is an issue to be raised concerning the sections in the chapter, members of the Wizengamot may speak up. If there are none, a vote shall be held to either include or exclude the section from the Act. If an agreement cannot be reached or if the votes amount to a draw, the issue shall be tabled for the second reading. Are there any questions?”

No one seemed to speak up, so he nodded in satisfaction. “Very well then,” he said, putting on his glasses as he opened up the bill. “Chapter 1: Introduction.”

~

“How are we still on Chapter 1?” Harry asked Daphne in a low whisper, as the Wizengamot took a break for lunch. “It’s been 3 hours.”

“The first chapter covers the name, objects, definitions, and application of the Act,” she said, slightly amused. “Prime material for Wizengamot members to debate until they are blue in the face.”

“I thought you were kidding when you said it takes ages to pass laws,” he said.

“Things will move along faster now that this part’s over,” she said. “We’ll get through the entire thing today, just you see.”

“I’ll hold you to that,” said Harry, sceptically. He noticed Mr. Weasley waving him over. “You go on, I’ll be right along.”

Daphne followed his gaze, and gave a nod as she hurried off and Harry made his way to Mr. Weasley.

“Hello, Harry,” he smiled. “I wanted to update you since I spoke to Kingsley about your birthday.”

“Right, what did he say?” he asked, slightly wary.

Mr. Weasley looked a little apologetic. “I’m sorry, Harry, but awarding the Order of Merlin to that many people, especially children, it will be difficult to do,” he said. Before Harry could be too disappointed, he held up a hand. “However, these children did fight in the war. So, here’s what Kingsley agreed to do. Order of Merlin, First Class for you, Second Class for Ron, Hermione and Neville Longbottom, and the Minister’s Special Recognition Award for the rest of the students who fought at the Battle of Hogwarts.”

Harry looked puzzled. “I’ve never heard of the Minister’s Special Recognition Award,” he said.

“That’s because it will be awarded for the very first time on your birthday,” smiled Mr. Weasley. Harry thought about protesting but thought better of it. “Alright, I’m fine with that,” he said. “How will you find all the students who were there?”

“Minerva has agreed to help,” said Mr. Weasley. “She spoke to the other Heads of Houses as well, and they are getting lists to me to make sure we cover all our bases and not miss anyone.”

“Thank you, Mr. Weasley,” said Harry, sincerely. “I am sorry for making all this work for you when
“It’s alright, Harry,” he said. “Every one of these people put their lives on the line for the peace we are enjoying. They weren’t Aurors or Hit Wizards, most of them weren’t even of age. But they still fought when they could have evacuated to safety. They deserve to be recognised for their bravery and valour.”

“Yes, they do,” agreed Harry, swallowing against the lump in his throat.

“And they will be,” said Mr. Weasley. “I’ll let you go, I have to speak to Kingsley before lunch is over. Get something to eat.”

“I will,” smiled Harry, and took his leave. He meant to find either Daphne or Hermione, but found both of them together, reading something on a roll of parchment. “What are we doing?” he asked, sneaking up behind them.

“Harry, goodness, you scared me,” said Hermione, as they both jumped. “I was just showing Daphne my article before I send it to Marian.”

“I thought you already showed it to Marian when you met her yesterday,” said Harry.

“I showed her the first draft,” corrected Hermione.

“Which she loved,” said Daphne, pointedly. “Tracey told me Marian looked like she wanted to kiss you.”

Hermione blushed at the praise. “I’m sure she was exaggerating,” she said.

“I doubt it,” said Daphne, handing the parchment back to her. “It’s excellent and making me want to read the book now. And it’s a nice touch to add where you’d find the book at the end of the article.”

“Marian also wants me to include the next book I’m reading, so I’ll add that too,” said Hermione. “So it can really be like a book club.”

“Are we starting a book club?” they heard and turned around as Neville approached them with a grin.

“Hermione is, but you’d have to subscribe to Witch Weekly,” grinned Harry.

“What makes you think I’m not already?” winked Neville, making them all chuckle. He glanced around to make sure no one was paying too much attention to them and lowered his voice. “I had the last meeting to buy out my share of Puddlemere. How are you faring?”

Harry glanced at Daphne, who consulted her diary. “We have one more meeting tomorrow morning before we’re done,” she said, snapping it shut once more.

“Excellent,” said Neville. “I’ll go ahead and set up a meeting with the team manager for Friday then.”

“Oh, we have something on Friday,” said Harry, remembering the orphanage tour.

“That’s in the afternoon,” said Daphne. “Your morning should be free.”

“I’ll make it a morning meeting then,” said Neville, and Harry nodded gratefully.

“So, how was yesterday?” asked Harry.
“Amazing,” said Neville, eyes shining. “I don’t start officially as the apprentice until my NEWT results are out but Sophia had me help around yesterday a little bit. Eustace Mansion is brilliant.”

“Glad you think so,” said Harry.

“How’s it going at the main location?” asked Hermione.

“Newt said it went well,” said Daphne. “Yesterday was mostly about getting settled into the dorms and setting up their laboratories and offices, so today should be their first proper day.”

“The masters and their apprentices seemed to be well-oiled machines and Newt is making sure everything is running smoothly, so I think it should be fine,” added Harry.

“Have there been new applicants since the article last week?” asked Hermione, curiously.

“A few,” said Harry. “Newt is sorting through them still.”

“Here, you should eat something,” Daphne told Harry, handing him a neatly packed sandwich. “Lunch will be over soon, and we’ll likely go until six, considering how much more of the bill we have to get through.”

“Thanks, Daph,” said Harry gratefully, knowing it would be impossible for him to navigate his way to the Ministry’s cafeteria without being ambushed by every other person who wanted to chat.

He busied himself with eating, missing the pleasantly surprised and speculative look exchanged by Hermione and Neville, as they observed that interaction.

The break came to an end quite quickly, and Harry had to stuff his last bite of food in quickly before they were called back into the chamber. True to Daphne’s prediction, the afternoon session wasn’t as tedious as the morning’s had been.

Chapter 2 of the Act dealt with the eligibility criteria for candidates, which raised some debate about whether it should be broader, but in the end, it was Robert’s original criteria that was voted and passed. The next chapter focused on establishing an Office of Employment in the Department of Employment and Labour which would oversee candidates, facilitate placements and keep track of their progress. The following chapter addressed what institutions beside the Ministry and places like St. Mungo’s could be eligible under the program. That drew some debate until it was finally agreed that business owners who needed employees could make their request to the Office of Employment free of cost to save on advertising and searching for employees through other means. The chapter after that detailed the rights and obligations of employers who hired people under the program.

The final chapter of the Act, was the one that handled the housing plan.

“Ms. Hannah Abbott is here to answer any queries pertaining to this chapter of the Act,” explained the Chief Warlock, as Hannah took the stand. “The measures were included in the draft bill presented to all members last week. We shall begin by getting an update on the progress made with regard to this, Ms. Abbott.”

“Thank you, Chief Warlock,” said Hannah, with a small smile. “Ladies and gentlemen of the Wizengamot, it is my very greatest pleasure to announce that the Celine Abbott Boarding House is in its final stages of completion.”

“Is there a tentative date when it might be completed?” asked Elder Macdougal.

“By the end of this week,” answered Hannah.
“That was quite quick work,” said Elder Orpington, eyes slightly narrowed. He examined the bill in front of him with beady eyes. “I presume that everything that’s mentioned in the bill has been accomplished to the degree claimed.”

“It has, actually,” interjected Harry, before Hannah could. “With the Potter Foundation’s resources, the premises have been renovated and made ready exactly in the way mentioned in the bill.”

“Elder Potter is right,” added Hannah. “We currently have room for anywhere between fifty to a hundred candidates, with two people each to a room, a large mess hall that is capable of serving three meals a day, as well as a recreation room for hobbies and activities.” She took a deep breath and met Orpington’s gaze squarely. “I would welcome any and all members of the Wizengamot to visit the boarding house for a proper tour of the premises in order to quell their anxiety regarding this matter.”

“Or better yet, have someone from the Prophet do it and publish the results,” added Neville, and Hannah beamed at him. “That way everyone, not just the people in the Wizengamot, can see exactly what it looks like. Problem solved.”

Orpington pursed his lips, but didn’t say anything to that.

“What happens if you run out of space?” asked Elder Fawley. “Is there a plan if the number of candidates exceed the room available?”

“The goal is for the boarding house to be a temporary place of shelter for people under this program,” said Hannah. “Once they are back on their feet and earning a regular wage, the plan is to help them find housing of their own. However, if we find ourselves reaching capacity, I believe we can work towards a secondary location.”

“And is there any such location available?” asked Elder Zeller, curiously.

“Not yet, but if we do reach fifty candidates at the first boarding house, we shall start looking into the secondary location,” said Hannah.

“And is the Potter Foundation willing to support that as well?” asked Elder Zeller.

“Yes,” said Harry, without hesitation.

“Let’s address the other issue with this whole thing then,” said Elder Thompson, snootily. “We are giving these people a job, food and shelter for virtually nothing. What’s to say they won’t just lounge around for the rest of their lives? Mark my words, handouts never helped anyone.”

“I agree,” said Elder Macdougal. “But these people will be working and earning an honest wage. That is as far from a handout as it gets.”

Elder Thompson narrowed his eyes at him. “And you don’t think they’ll just hoard the money they earn and continue to live a rent-free, easy life in that boarding house?” he demanded.

“Perhaps you weren’t paying attention, Elder Thompson, but the Office of Employment will be keeping an eye on the candidates and monitoring their cases,” said Elder Macdougal, rolling his eyes. “If it seems there is any impropriety or mishandling of funds, they can address it. That was the whole purpose of debating that chapter of the Act.”

“Elder Macdougal is right,” said the Chief Warlock, seeming to get happier and happier each time someone from Orpington’s faction was torn down in debate. “Cases will be reviewed on a regular basis to avoid the kind of scenario you brought up, Elder Thompson.”
“Besides,” added Robert, with a cool look at Elder Thompson. “You’ll find that most of these people were capable members of society and they want to get back to being that once again. We are only helping the process along.”

Elder Thompson scoffed but didn’t add anything further. Some more minor debate followed, with questions directed at Hannah regarding the running of the boarding house, before the measure was voted in as well.

“That brings today’s session to an end,” said the Chief Warlock. “Considering the progress made, the second reading will be held 7 days from today on the 15th of July. If there are any issues that need to be discussed concerning the bill, they need to be raised at that session, or else, we might move on to a final vote in that session as well.” He glanced around at the Wizengamot and gave a nod. “That is all, ladies and gentlemen. Good night.”

~

“It looks wonderful.”

Harry smiled at Daphne, as they looked at the fully decorated ballroom at Potter Hall. After weeks of debate, they had finally arrived on the decorations that would be used for the event at Halloween. The colour combination they had decided on was red, black and gold, with the decorations being in black with red lining and highlights, while there were gold filigree lamps that would be used for lighting to keep it from being too sombre.

“I think so, too,” smiled Daphne. “In keeping with the gold, the goblets, trays and things should also be gold, I think. The whole effect will be understated yet definitely impactful.”

“Since we have the decorations down, should we move on to the invitation cards?” asked Harry.

“There was an invitation card in the binder that I feel we can modify,” said Daphne, as she hurried over and began searching. “Here it is.” She held up a black invitation card with red borders and white elegant writing. “We can change the white to gold instead, and use gold envelopes instead of red like they did back then.”

“How long ago was that?” asked Harry.

“Almost sixty years ago, for a Christmas party during the war with Grindelwald,” she said, checking. “No wonder it was sombre.” he mumbled. “That should do, I think. What’s next?”

“The music,” she said. “We can splurge for a band, but I think Halloween warrants enchanted instruments.”

“I’d like that,” grinned Harry. “Gives it a feeling of mystery and intrigue.”

“Exactly,” laughed Daphne. “Since we’re doing it in the form of a New Years’ Ball, the songs will obviously have to be classical in nature, ideal for dancing.”

Harry chuckled nervously. “Dancing, right,” he said.

Daphne looked at him in surprise. “You...do know how to dance, right?” she asked, cautiously. “I mean, apart from the thing you did at the Yule Ball back in fourth year?”

He rubbed the back of his neck sheepishly. “I think that’s about all I can do,” he admitted.
“B-but that won’t do,” said Daphne, her eyes going wide. “As host, you’ll be required to dance with your guests.”

“Really?” he asked.

“Yes, really,” said Daphne. “Annie!”

“Yes, Mistress?” asked Annie, arriving immediately.

“Could you bring a record player and some records in here?” asked Daphne.

“Right away, Mistress,” said Annie, and vanished.

Harry sighed a little. “Does this mean dancing lessons?” he asked.

“I’m afraid it does,” said Daphne. “You know, dancing is a skill taught to boys and girls alike within families like ours, from a very young age.”

“And I have to learn all of that before Halloween?” he asked, looking alarmed.

“Not all,” she said. “We’ll just focus on the basics.”

“What does that include?” he asked, still wary.

“Waltz, tango and foxtrot,” she said. “Maybe even quickstep, a bit later on, but I doubt we’ll need it on Halloween.”

“Do I have to?” he asked, as Annie returned and set up the record player as Daphne had asked.

“Yes, you do,” said Daphne, moving to stand in the middle of the ballroom. “Slow waltz, please, Annie.”

“Yes, Mistress,” said Annie.

“Come on,” said Daphne, beckoning him towards her as music started playing. “This is the easiest one to learn.”

He made his way over to her reluctantly. “I should warn you, I’m really not good at this,” he said.

“I know,” she said, waving her wand over her feet. When he looked at her questioningly, she smiled. “I just hardened the tops of my boots so even if you step on my feet, my toes will be spared.”

“Wish I’d known of that spell back in fourth year,” he said, as Daphne placed her left hand on his back and held out her right.

“Oh, believe me, Parvati said the same thing,” she said. “Hold my right hand and place yours on my back.”

“Did she really?” he asked, as he did what he was told.

“She did, it was news around the castle,” said Daphne. “Step forward with your right foot.” He did, and her left foot moved back easily at the same time. “Move your left foot to the side.” He stumbled a little but managed to do it as her right foot moved in synchronisation with his. “Now bring your right foot to your left. Good,” she praised, when he did. “Now, this is what we are going to practice. On one, step forward with right, on two, move the left to the side, and on three, bring your right foot to your left. Got it?”
“I think so,” he said, looking down at their feet as he spoke.

“Don’t look at the feet, look at me,” she said, and he raised his gaze. “I could lead and it would be easier, but I want you to learn how to lead. Ready?”

“Not even slightly, but let’s do it,” he said, which made her chuckle.

“That’s the spirit,” she said. “One-two-three, good. Once again, one-two-three, make your stride longer. One-two-three. Alright, pause.” They stopped, having moved across the ballroom. “Back to the middle. We’re going to learn to practice in circles. So after the one-two-three, there will be four-five-six. On four, you move your left foot back, and turn with your right on five, and bring your left foot to your right on six. Then, back to one.”

“Alright,” he said, looking down at his feet again before quickly meeting her gaze again.

“You’ll be fine,” she said. “Slowly, okay? One-two-three, four-five, no, the other one. Four-five-six. Good. One-two-three, four-five-six. Don’t look down. One-two-three, four-five-six. Well done.”

They kept practising in a circle until Harry could move without Daphne having to count out loud. The music continued to play, and slowly, Daphne began to feel Harry relax as he got the hang of it.

“You’re doing well,” she told him, after they’d been practicing for about forty minutes. “Let’s take a break.”

He nodded, and the two of them sat on the small dais meant for musicians in the corner of the ballroom as Minnie brought them some water to drink.

“Phew, it’s hard work,” said Harry, downing a goblet of water. “Thankfully, I have a good stamina.”

“You’ll need it too, there’s a lot to learn,” said Daphne. “I might bring Blaise around when it comes to the more complex stuff so you’ll have a point of reference as you learn.”

He didn’t say anything to that, as the two of them took a few more minutes to relax and catch their breaths.

Harry finally broke the silence when they returned to the middle of the ballroom five minutes later. “Can I ask you something?” he asked, as they began practising in a circle once more.

“Sure,” she said. “I think it’s your turn to ask the question, anyway, since I went last,” she added, remembering that he’d told her about the philosopher’s stone incident back in their first year when she had asked out of curiosity.

He smiled a little, before his face grew serious. “It’s about Blaise,” he said, and seemed to hesitate.

Daphne observed him quietly and sighed. “Is it about Blaise, or about his mother?” she asked, shrewdly.

“Sorry,” he said.

“No, it’s alright,” assured Daphne. “It’s the most known thing about Blaise. I don’t blame you for being curious.”

“I know he’s your friend,” said Harry. “I don’t want to come in between that.”

“Wanting to know if there’s any truth to the rumours is very different from hindering my friendship with Blaise, Harry,” said Daphne, honestly.
“I see,” he said, and nodded determinedly. “So, is there? Any truth to the rumours, I mean?”

“Well, yes and no,” said Daphne. “Anita, that’s Blaise’s mother, is a black widow. She has had a handful of husbands, all of whom died and left behind their wealth for her. Their deaths weren’t entirely accidental. That’s the yes part.”

“And what’s the no part?” he asked.

Daphne shrugged apologetically. “Unfortunately, that story isn’t mine to tell,” she said. “I can tell you there is much more to the whole thing, but Blaise told me in confidence and it isn’t something a lot of people are privy to.” Before he could look too disappointed, she smiled. “But, if you ask Blaise, I’m sure he’d tell you.”

“He would?” asked Harry, confused.

“Yes, he would,” said Daphne, firmly. “I’m sorry I can’t answer you, Harry, especially since we agreed to be honest with one another, but this is something you ought to hear from Blaise.”

She let him think about it for a while, as they continued dancing. After a few moments, Harry gave a nod. “Alright, I’ll ask Blaise,” he said. “And don’t worry. I know you’re only keeping your friend’s secret. Our agreement about being honest isn’t broken or anything.”

Daphne beamed at him. “Thank you for understanding, Harry,” she said, and then lightened her tone. “And since it’s my turn again, I have a question for you.”

He smiled in amusement. “Go ahead,” he said.

“We already talked about our first year, so let’s move on to the next,” she said. “Tell me about the Chamber of Secrets.”
Chapter 17

10th July, 1998

HARRY POTTER OPENS THE LILY POTTER HOME FOR CHILDREN

The Potter Foundation’s first project is an orphanage for wizarding children

by Benedict Almeidus

It is only a week later since the announcement for the James Potter Magical Research Institute was published, and the Saviour of the wizarding world, Elder Harry Potter, has already announced the next project that his organisation, the Potter Foundation, will be focusing on: the Lily Potter Home for Children.

“As I said when I started the Potter Foundation, children are the most vulnerable members of our society,” says Elder Potter. “They deserve a proper home to call their own. A place where they can learn and grow and play, and find a support system that shall care for them. It’s something I understand and connect with deeply, being an orphan myself.”

The wizarding orphanage is set to welcome fifty-five orphans from St. Mungo’s Orphan Wing on the 16th of July, under the guidance of former Healer-in-charge of the Orphan Wing, Mrs. Belinda Sawbridge.

“I admit, I was rather sceptical when I first heard the orphanage proposal, but since being involved, I can appreciate the care and attention to detail that has been given to this project by the Potter Foundation, especially Madam Andromeda Tonks, who oversaw the project on the organisation’s behalf,” says Mrs. Sawbridge, 51. “The children who shall grow up here will be raised with the all the affection they they deserve.”

Madam Andromeda Tonks, who is the grandmother of Elder Potter’s godson, Edward Lupin, was responsible for putting together the plans for the orphanage with Elder Potter.

“Harry wanted a proper home for these children,” says Madam Tonks, 47. “Bearing that in mind, we have opted for a system where we have caretakers responsible for each of the children, as well as an on-site Healer, to make sure they are looked after properly and their needs, physical, mental and educational, are met. I will also be personally responsible for helping run the orphanage for the first year along with other volunteers to lend assistance to Matron Sawbridge.”

The current Healer-in-charge of the Orphan Wing Thierry Lim shall also be joining the staff at the Lily Potter Home as the aforementioned on-site Healer. “I have been caring for these children for a while now, and I am aware of the kind of help and support they will need,” says Healer Lim, 25. “When Madam Tonks and Elder Potter asked for my assistance, there was no way I could refuse. These children are dear to me, and I want to see them grow up safe and happy.”

Though the initial count is that of only fifty-five children, there are further plans to provide a home for any children under the age of 17, which is an improvement on St. Mungo’s restriction of not taking in children over the age of 15. There are also provisions to take in young witches and wizards who are of age but are yet to finish Hogwarts.

“We don’t say the word ‘home’ lightly,” says Elder Potter. “Everyone deserves one, until they are able to have one of their own.”
The director of St. Mungo’s, Collette Peakes, corroborates Elder Potter’s words. “At St. Mungo’s we are bound by our Charter and the Ministry’s rules regarding which children we can take in,” says Mrs. Peakes, 64. “As a private institution, the Lily Potter Home has no such restrictions, and can help all the children that need assistance. It will keep families together instead of splitting apart siblings like we have had to do in the past when placing them in foster care. It shall also allow children who have relatives unwilling or unable to care for them, to grow up surrounded by other children in a safe, nurturing environment.”

“We are in the process of tracking down children who did not qualify for St. Mungo’s assistance,” assures Madam Tonks. “Meanwhile, we have already sorted out the custody transfer of those who are currently at the Orphan Wing. In less than a week, they shall be able to come and live in their new home.”

The Daily Prophet, as well as other publications, have been invited to a tour of the Lily Potter Home prior to its doors opening, so readers can expect details about the residence in the coming days.

“Wizarding orphanages have had a short shelf life in the past,” says Elder Potter. “But we hope to change that. We shall do everything in our power to make it happen.”

“That’s a little embarrassing,” said Harry, as Tracey finished reading the article out loud.

They were in the conference room, their morning meeting having been moved to midday. It was also Adrian’s first time attending, and Daphne was interested to see how he would be dealing with getting a closer look at the workings of their operation. He had been blown away when she’d explained the full scope of what they had managed to accomplish so far, and she was curious to see how he’d interact with the others and more importantly, what he’d bring to the table.

“It is a little cheesy,” admitted Tracey, folding the newspaper and setting it aside. “But it will make the impact it needs to.” She reached for her fork to eat the pasta in front of her. “It’s gone cold,” she complained, after taking a bite.

“Cast a warming charm then,” said Daphne, without missing a beat. “I told you, today is as busy as can be, so we have to have a working lunch.”


“It’s the weekend tomorrow,” said Draco, rolling his eyes at Tracey. “All the break you need.”

She made a face at him, but Daphne cleared her throat to stop the bickering before it could begin. “Is there something else?”

“Yes,” said Tracey. “Harry, you have an interview with Witch Weekly on Monday. It’s for the favour we owe Marian for lending us Penelope Clearwater, and I figured it would be a good chance to let the world know you are single once more, since you’re keen on having that public.”

“Yeah, fine,” he said.

“Make sure Marian adheres to all the conditions we agreed on before,” warned Daphne.

“I will, you know I will,” said Tracey. “That’s all from me. Who wants to go next?”

“I’ll go,” said Harry. “Neville and I met with Isaiah Crickerly, the manager of Puddlemere United this morning. It was an interesting meeting.”

“How so?” asked Fleur, curiously.
“Well, the team is mostly fine,” said Harry. “But they lost their starting and reserve seekers over the past year. One of them was a Muggleborn and was killed by Death Eaters, and the other was arrested for working with Death Eaters. Or Snatchers, to be more precise.”

“They don’t have any other seekers?” asked Parvati.

“No, but that’s not the worst of it,” said Harry, consulting his notes. “Their stadium is in need of overhaul after Death Eaters burned half of it to the ground with fiendfyre. The reserve team needs new brooms, they need a new trainer and an equipment manager, as well as someone to oversee public relations and sponsorships since Isaiah’s been handling it by himself.”

“Fantastic, sounds like a right mess,” said Draco. “You thinking of trying out for seeker?” he asked Harry.

“No, though Isaiah did ask the same thing,” said Harry, ruefully.

“Right, let’s deal with one thing at a time,” said Daphne. “The stadium needs work, correct? The house elves tasked with renovation and clean up are done with the orphanage and the institute so they can be sent to start clearing up the stadium. I’ll speak to Annie and see who we can spare.”

“Good plan,” said Draco, with a nod. “The Clarke family could use some business, so we can get them to assist if needed.”

“No, they’re going to be busy,” said Harry. “We got them a government contract.”

“Let’s leave it to the house elves, then,” said Draco, though he looked a little curious. “The trainer and equipment manager positions can be advertised.”

Adrian, who had been observing quietly until this point, spoke up. “No need,” he said, pulling out a leather bound diary that he began thumbing through. “You need Camille Gibson. Australian, specialising in both Quidditch and Quodpot. She has a team who work with her. Trainers, equipment managers, even a healer focusing on sports healing. Here are her details.” He copied it from his diary onto a blank piece of parchment that he handed to Harry. “They’ve been doing temp jobs for the Quidditch league in Australia but what they want is a permanent post with a team in Britain.”

There was a moment of silence before Harry nodded. “I’ll let Isaiah know, thanks,” he said.

“I’ll get on the PR person then,” said Tracey, clearing her throat. “Ben could put me in touch with former Quidditch correspondents who are no longer with the Prophet. The Prophet cut down their staff massively in the last two years, so there are plenty of talented writers and publicists who could use the work.”

“Wonderful,” said Fleur. “I’ll speak to our contact at Nimbus and see if we can work something out and get the brooms for the reserve team.”

“That just leaves the seekers,” said Harry, crossing the other items off his list. “Isaiah said he’s been trying to recruit but has had no luck.”

“How about looking into foreign players?” asked Draco. “That’s a much larger talent pool.”

“Is that permitted in the League?” asked Parvati, curiously.

“It is,” said Adrian. “They just can’t play in the national team unless they are a citizen. For League matches, you could have players from across the world, with the condition they maintain a residence in the area where the team is based.”
“Which all the players do, regardless,” nodded Harry. “The Puddlemere team has a small hostel near the stadium where players live during Quidditch season.”

Fleur looked at Harry speculatively. “Have you thought about asking Viktor?” she asked.

“Ask him to recruit or ask him to be a Seeker?” asked Harry, though it looked like the cogs in his brain were already turning.

“Ask him to be a Seeker, of course,” said Fleur. “He only plays for the national team because Bulgaria has no proper Quidditch league.”

“It’s worth asking,” said Daphne. “Viktor Krum is one of the best seekers in the world.”

“I’ll say,” nodded Draco.

“I’ll speak to Isaiah and write to Viktor,” said Harry. “Could I trouble you for his address, Fleur?”

“Of course,” she said, writing it down on a piece of parchment and handing it to Harry.

“That takes care of that,” said Daphne. “What’s next?”

“The Celine Abbott Boarding House is ready,” grinned Parvati. “Hannah gave me a tour just this morning.”

“Good to know,” said Tracey, making a note of it. “Ben and I will head over first thing next week to do a feature on it. The public’s been waiting eagerly since the article came out following the Wizengamot session this week.”

“How’s the public response doing?” asked Daphne.

“Better, since the first reading happened,” said Tracey. “I think it helps a great deal to hear dissenting views in the session transcript and the arguments countering them, because it is reassuring to the public to see that all points are being considered. Ben was talking about getting some opinions from experts in the International Confederation of Wizards. Give it more legitimacy.”

“Careful not to overdo it,” said Daphne. “Some Brits get their backs up when the ICW members air their opinions on domestic policies. We don’t want to ruffle too many feathers.”

“True, but Ben was telling me Minister Shacklebolt has been angling for a better relationship with the ICW, so it might work out,” said Tracey. “We’ll be careful, regardless.”

“Do we have someone in the Ministry?” asked Adrian, curiously.

“Plenty of people but none that know exactly what we do here,” said Daphne.

“Hermione’s our best bet, but it will be another year still until she gets involved in the Ministry,” said Harry.

“We do need someone in the Minister’s office,” said Draco. “It’ll help immensely to realise where Shacklebolt’s leading the masses.”

“Did you have someone in mind?” Daphne asked Adrian.

“Afraid not,” he said. “I will look into it, though.”

“Great,” nodded Daphne. “Is there anything else?”
“Papa spoke to his contact in the French ministry and we sent over the completed paperwork,” said Fleur. “It’s hard to deal with bureaucrats, but hopefully, we’ll hear from them over the next two weeks.”

“Oh, and we met with Polly Winterbotham, and she wants to check the product from Pride Farmhouse before agreeing to stock it in her bottle shop,” said Draco.

“I’ll have Gerry send her a crate with sample bottles,” nodded Harry.

“If that is all, we should tidy up and take our leave,” said Daphne. “Andromeda and Belinda are at the Orphan Wing with the caretakers, and Harry, Parvati and I are expected at the Lily Potter Home in half an hour to start the tour.”

“Which reminds me, when are we allowing press access to the orphanage?” asked Tracey.

“Tuesday, perhaps,” said Daphne. “That way there’ll be time to fix things up if there’s something we don’t like today.”

“Got it,” said Tracey.

“Well done today,” said Harry, as the others began filing out of the conference room. “And thanks for joining us, Adrian.”

Adrian nodded and gave a small smile. “If I am honest, I was a little apprehensive about this whole thing when I first approached Daphne, but everything I have learned since makes me think I made the right call,” he said. “See you next time.”

Harry and Daphne waved at him, and Adrian left, leaving the two of them alone.

“Did Susan stop by this morning while I was in Puddlemere?” asked Harry.

“She did,” nodded Daphne. “The Aurors have begun the Knockturn Cleanup as of late last evening. They managed to clear out a substantial chunk, and Susan said they’re moving quickly so as to not arouse suspicion from the other occupants of Knockturn. Burke has been keeping his word, it seems.”

“Good,” said Harry. “Any idea how long it will take?”

“Susan mentioned that barring any complications, they should be done before Sunday,” said Daphne. “She said she’ll let us know after the final raid is carried out, so that the Clarke family can take over.”

“Alright,” he said. “Should we head over as well?”

Daphne smiled and stood up. “Let’s go.”

~

Joshua Appleton looked around the Orphan Wing with a quiet, grim expression on his face. Before the first war with You-Know-Who, he had been a father, but Death Eaters had robbed him of that, and for many years, he’d dedicated his life to hunting down as many of them as possible as a Hit Wizard. An injury had forced him into early retirement in his mid forties, and he thought he would waste away with nothing to occupy him when he’d seen the advertisement in the Daily Prophet about potential employment for the Orphan Wing.
That had been a cover, of course, for Andromeda Tonks, Belinda Sawbridge and the Potter Foundation to interview people for the Lily Potter Home. Josh had hardly believed they were serious about opening the orphanage, until he’d learned more about their plans and the system they were employing. When he was asked for his answer, there hadn’t been a doubt in his mind that he would find a purpose in caring for these children.

In his second meeting, Belinda and Andromeda had told him who his charges were going to be. Unlike other caretakers who had four, sometimes five, charges, Josh was only assigned two. But they were a special case.

“They are twins,” Belinda had said, gravely. “They were infected with lycanthropy. You’re a registered Animagus and you have experience with combat. The Minchin girls will be given Wolfsbane, of course, but they need to be watched over and given extra care and attention.”

He glanced down at them now, and felt his heart constrict. They were tiny, smaller than any of his children had been at five years old, pale as can be, and already with some grey peppered into their caramel-coloured hair. They were even more tired since he’d last seen them as it had been a full moon the night before. It was his second time meeting them, but they were yet to speak to him. Thierry had warned him they hadn’t really spoken much since being brought to St. Mungo’s and that it would take time to get them to open up.

His fellow caretakers were all occupied with their own charges, some of them bonding instantly with the children while those assigned special cases like him having to try harder to establish a bond. It didn’t help that the interior of the Orphan Wing was dismal as could be, and the poor children had been essentially imprisoned there for the past year.

Josh jumped a little when he felt a nudge and saw that Antonia, the older of the Minchin sisters had pushed a picture book towards him. He peered at the page and saw that it was a picture of a dog, which made Josh’s heart soar with hope. “You’d like to see me transform again?” he asked, and changed into his Animagus form of a Siberian husky.

Antonia and Aurelia held onto one another as they almost always did, but Antonia still reached out one hand, which he nudged with his nose affectionately. Encouraged, Aurelia followed her sister’s lead and slowly stroked one of his ears with her finger.

After they had patted him for a bit, Josh transformed back and smiled at them. “It’s alright,” he said, when they seemed to shrink back just a little again. “You can ask me to transform any time you like, alright? I won’t be mad.”

They didn’t say anything, but ever so slowly, Antonia gave a nod.

Progress, decided Josh, nodding back at her. He noticed Belinda motion to the caretakers that it was time for them to leave, so he turned back to the twins.

“I have to go now, but I’ll be back on Sunday,” he said. “It won’t be much longer, alright. We’ll all be going to a new home soon. I’ll look after both of you, I promise.”

He gave them another wide smile and then joined the other caretakers as they filed out of the Orphan Wing slowly.

“Never gets easy to leave them, does it?”

Josh turned to look at the young Japanese woman in her late-thirties who had introduced herself as Miki Asano on his last visit. She was also one of the caretakers, assigned to three children, two of
whom were recovering from dragon pox and were on a careful regimen of potions.

“No, I suppose not,” said Josh. “How are yours doing?”

“Well, I managed to talk to two of them, so I count that as progress,” she said. “Benjamin is still having difficulty. Poor boy saw his mother cut down in front of his eyes. Damned Death Eaters.”

Josh couldn’t help but agree. “Mine haven’t spoken yet, but we are communicating,” he said.


“Gather around, please,” said Andromeda, as all of the caretakers, plus Healer Lim and Belinda gathered in a hallway outside the Orphan Wing. “Since it will be your first time to the location, we will be taking a Portkey. Once there, Harry will key you into the wards, so you can come and go by the floo or apparation later on.”

She held out a goblet, and all of them maneuvered around so that they could touch their finger to it. A minute or so passed and the goblet began glowing blue before Josh felt the familiar tug as they were all carried away from St. Mungo’s before landing outside suddenly.

Josh stumbled back as some of the others lost their footing, especially since there had been so many of them using a single portkey. He took a quick glance around and saw that they were outside polished iron gates towering before them. There was a small group of people standing near the gates, and Josh immediately recognised Harry Potter.

The young man in question smiled at them in greeting. “Welcome,” he said. “I realise most of you must only be seeing the gates at the moment, so listen carefully. The Black Castle is located in Alioth Copse in York.”

As his words washed over them, Josh realised there was a copse of dark wood trees beyond the gates and a straight path between them that led to an ancient castle made of dark grey stone. Josh’s mouth fell open. The castle was massive. This was to be the orphanage? It couldn’t be farther from the cramped Orphan Wing. Andromeda and Belinda had never brought up how big the new home would be, and he had expected a small country home, not a whole castle, but he wasn’t about to complain.

He glanced back towards Harry Potter, who was currently keying people into the wards of the place, and Josh had to marvel at the security measures. A portkey access to the outside of the gates, a fidelius, and then additional wards. Safety was incredible.

“Done,” he declared, about two minutes later. “I’m Harry Potter,” he introduced, as if any of them hadn’t recognised him immediately. He indicated the two women standing next to him. “My lawyer, Daphne Greengrass, and many of you know Parvati Patil already. And this is Charlie Weasley,” he added, pointing at the stocky, red-headed young man who waved at them. “He’s going to be the groundskeeper.”

Introductions continued, as Belinda introduced all the caretakers to them one by one, and Josh shook hands with Harry and his group.

“We should head inside,” said Daphne, once they were all acquainted.

Harry gave a nod and with a wave of his wand, the lock on the gates vanished and they swung open with ease. “Batty!” he called, and a house elf dressed in a neat white uniform with a red sash around his waist appeared with a crack. “We are ready to begin the tour.”
“Yes, Master,” said the house elf, Batty.

“Batty is the head house elf of the property,” Harry told all of them. “There are other house elves whom we shall meet once we are inside, but I ask that you treat them with kindness. They have worked very hard to get the place ready and are eager to help you and the children in any way they can.”

It was slightly surprising to Josh to hear Harry talk about them in such a manner, like they were humans themselves. Josh felt his respect rise just a little.

“Ready when you are, Batty,” said Harry, turning back to him.

Batty nodded eagerly. “This be the woods,” he said, indicating the trees on either side of them as they walked towards the castle on the wide path. “We is listening to Mistress Tonks and putting wards around woods to keep children out.”

“Anything dangerous in here?” inquired Elizabeth Whittington, one of the other caretakers.

“Nothing more dangerous than what you’d find in woods of these kind,” said Daphne. “Safe for the adults, though caution is advised, of course.”

She nodded, as they continued up the path and arrived at the large garden that had trimmed hedges and a large, circular fountain.

“There are wards around the fountain as well, just to prevent drownings,” said Andromeda. “The gardens are safe enough.”

“We wanted them to have a place where they could play as much as they’d like,” said Harry. “There’s more behind the house, if we want to do the outside first.”

Batty nodded and led them around to the back of the castle where Josh had to marvel at the sprawling grounds with countless space. There was even a lake that Harry assured them had safety wards and even climate charms to make sure the children could swim all year round if they wanted. There was an apple orchard at the edge of the property, and Charlie promised he would make sure they could take the children there to go apple picking in autumn.

They returned to the front of the castle, and Josh was surprised when they were welcomed in by some suits of armour, who bowed at them before clomping off to their own places in the castle.

“They won’t harm the children,” Daphne assured them. “They are sworn to protect the occupants of the castle and defend it from uninvited guests and intruders.”

Past the large front doors was the foyer with the grand staircase and a large fireplace which was to be used to floo in and out. They toured the ground floor first, and there was a large dining room on the left with several round tables and chairs.

“Main dining room,” proclaimed Batty, proudly. “We is making the tables and chairs ourselves, young sirs and madams.”

“We thought it better to have smaller tables instead of just a long table,” explained Andromeda.

There were two other dining rooms, but they had both been changed into classrooms with rows of desks and chairs and a large blackboard at the front.

“Tutoring rooms, for when we need them,” explained Harry. “There is also another dayroom next
door that’s a reading room, and the lounge next to it is a toy room for the younger ones.”

Both the rooms were extraordinary, and the reading room had squashy armchairs and sofas, and tiny toddler sized chairs. The entire room was lined wall to wall with books. The toy room had soft carpet on the floor, and various toy chests and stacks of games arranged neatly in shelves.

“The kitchen be through there,” said Batty, leading them further left in the main part of the house. In the warm, homey kitchen, they met the rest of the cheery house elves, whom they could call on for assistance if needed. They left the kitchen and reached the farthest left end of the house which had a large archway.

“This be leading to the West Tower,” squeaked Batty.

“The West tower is for the boys,” said Belinda. “Isaac, that makes you in charge of it,” she added, with a glance at Isaac Ackerley, who nodded back.

Josh realised that this was one of the towers where the older children would be staying. He was a tiny bit apprehensive, particularly about separating the older children to an entirely different part of the house, but as they took the tour, he realised it was no less comfortable than the main house. There was a common room and a dining room on the ground floor of the tower, and the stairs led to individual rooms, with four rooms to each floor of the seven-storeyed tower. Each room had a four poster bed, clean bedding and sheets, a dresser and plenty of shelves for storage, as well as an ensuite. At the top of the tower was a lovely sitting room with an extraordinary view of the surroundings that was another common room of sorts.

“In case they’d like to read with a view,” said Andromeda, as they left the tower and made their way back to the main house.

On the right of the staircase on the ground floor, they were shown to a couple of sitting rooms to receive any guests, a large ballroom that had been turned into an infirmary with the room next door being Thierry’s quarters. Charlie’s quarters were also on the ground floor with an exit right out into the grounds. The biggest sitting room was also sort of an assembly room that could be used if everyone needed to be gathered together, and the study was to be Belinda’s office.

They didn’t explore the East tower which would have the older girls residing in there, since it was structured identical to the West tower. Naomi Turpin was the one who would be in charge of the girls in that tower.

On the first floor, they were shown the rooms that the caretakers and the younger children would be occupying. Belinda and Andromeda directed them to their assigned rooms, and Josh realised he’d be on the third floor. They did have a chance to examine the rooms, and they were wonderfully decorated as well. The children’s rooms, which would be shared by two children, had twin beds and two each of dressers and shelves, and an ensuite. The caretakers’ rooms had a queen-sized four poster bed, dresser, a desk by the window as well as an ensuite.

With Naomi and Isaac assigned to live in their respective towers with their charges, Miki Asano, Rahul Singh and Erica Midgen were the caretakers who would be living on the first floor. There was also a big library, and an adjoining study on the same floor.

“The library and study is open to all of you, but the library is out of bounds to children if they aren’t of Hogwarts age,” said Andromeda.

“Have the books for the children younger than 11 been moved to the reading room?” asked Miki.
“Yes,” nodded Harry. “The older children can take out books, of course, but there’s an house elf named Irin, who’ll make sure they are lent out properly, so follow her rules. Irin is very protective of the books.”

“Onto the second floor,” said Andromeda.

It was structured similarly, but there were a lot more suites on the second floor. Meredith Sawbridge, Wylan Hopkins and Deirdre Robbins were assigned rooms for themselves and their charges on that floor.

The third floor was to be largely empty, since it had the biggest suites that belonged to the Lord and Lady of the castle. The largest set of rooms were given to Belinda, and her sitting room would also be used as a meeting room for the staff when needed. Josh was surprised when he was assigned the second largest set of rooms.

“You have your own room, of course, and the Minchin twins have theirs,” said Belinda. “The sitting room can be used on full moon. It’s far enough away from other children, but we didn’t want to lock you or the girls away.”

Josh appreciated that they needed to be safe with transforming werewolves, Wolfsbane potion or not, and he really was glad they wouldn’t be put away in the dungeons or something.

The fourth floor was an observatory, and Josh was pleasantly surprised when Belinda said they should have a designated night when they gathered all the children to do some star gazing and have a sleepover in the observatory.

The tour came to an end and they convened in the large sitting room downstairs, exhausted but, above all, excited.

“Thank you for your patience,” said Harry, with a smile at all of them. “I hope the place is to your liking.”

“I think it’s magnificent,” said Naomi, firmly. “It’s an excellent place for children to grow up.”

“I’m glad you think so,” said Harry. “I’m really quite grateful to all of you for taking on this enormous responsibility. Belinda, if you could take over.”

Belinda gave him a nod and stood up to address them. “Since the location is now known to you, you can move in at your leisure at any time after midday on Tuesday,” she said. “In the meantime, keep up with your visits to your charges. You’re also no longer under confidentiality oaths since the orphanage is public knowledge, but you still can’t go blabbing about the location of the castle or your charges, as you know.” She waited until they all nodded to continue. “The children will be brought over on Thursday. Harry is preparing portkeys for the younger children and the older ones will be using the floo. Make sure you are settled into your own quarters before it’s time to bring the children over.”

She passed a folder to all of them, including Thierry and Charlie. “This has information about mealtimes, rules for libraries, curfews as well as other housekeeping details,” she said. “It also has your holidays and time off in it, so keep it safe. If there is anything that is bothering you, please raise it with me. I am here to coordinate, as is Andromeda. We also have a volunteer, Mrs. Molly Weasley, who will be joining us, but her primary job is to oversee house elves, so Andromeda and I should be your first point of contact if something happens. Of course, if it’s something medical, reach out to Thierry, and if it has to do with the outdoors, speak to Charlie. Andromeda?”
“Yes, thank you, Belinda,” nodded Andromeda. “I will be living here as well, in the South tower at the back of the main house with my grandson, so I’m here if needed. I’m sure it will take all of us some time to get used to things, but we’ll do what we can to make sure these children have a wonderful home here. Any questions?”

Erica raised her hand. “Where are we with the children turned away by St. Mungo’s?” she asked. “Two of my charges have an older brother whom they keep asking about.”

“We are tracking them down,” said Daphne. “The ones who are related to the children in the Orphan Wing have been located for the most part, and Andromeda and I will be working on their custody arrangements next week. They should be able to move in at the same time as the other children.”

“As for ones who have no relations to the Orphan Wing, we have tracked down a few but it will take some time,” said Andromeda, and then sighed. “We have also had requests from several relatives of children in their care, asking where to leave them.”

Josh felt a flash of anger at the relatives who were essentially abandoning children meant to be in their care. “Are they being brought here?” he asked, immediately.

Andromeda looked at him and nodded. “Daphne and I are working on custody,” she said. “It’s a little bit more complicated.”

“But rest assured, we won’t leave them in a home where they’re not wanted,” said Harry, firmly. “Anything else?”

“Oh, yes, about those classrooms downstairs,” said Rahul. “You mentioned something about tutors.”

“Yes,” said Belinda. “It’s for children who won’t be going to Hogwarts just yet. Just the basics. Reading, writing, arithmetic. Some magic theory a little later on. But we won’t begin until the older ones leave for Hogwarts in September. Let’s use the summer to get them settled in and learn to enjoy a holiday.”

“Once the initial settlement period passes, I’ll start looking for tutors,” said Andromeda. “If any of you have someone in mind, feel free to let me know.”

There were murmurs of agreement, and Josh was feeling much better about the whole thing. Choosing this, choosing to raise Antonia and Aurelia in this wonderful home, had been one of the better decisions he had made in life.

He glanced at Harry Potter and made a silent promise to follow through on the trust that the young man had placed in him.

~

11th July, 1998

Harry went through the fireplace and arrived at his destination. With a quick spell, he brushed the soot off himself and tried not to fidget due to his nervousness.

Blaise walked into the room with a small smile. “Right on time, Harry,” he said. “Come on, I’ll introduce you.”

Harry nodded and followed him, wishing Daphne could have come with him but knew this was something he had to do on his own. Blaise led him into an office, where a gorgeous, well-dressed woman in her mid-twenties was sitting. She stood up and held out her hand.
“Mr. Potter?” she asked, no trace of an accent in her voice. “I’m Ivanna Lansing. It is a pleasure to meet you.”

Harry shook her hand and tried to muster up a smile. “Nice to meet you, Ms. Lansing,” he said.

Ivanna turned to Blaise and nodded. “If we could have the room, please, Blaise,” she said.

“Of course,” said Blaise. “Good luck,” he told Harry, and then left, closing the door behind himself.

“Please sit,” said Ivanna, indicating the chair opposite hers.

Harry sat down, and watched as Ivanna cast a privacy charm before picking up an unusual quill. “That’s not a Quick Quotes Quill, is it?” he asked, remembering Skeeter.

“No,” she said, reassuringly. “It’s a Self-Writing Quill. It will transcribe this session. I use it to keep record for my patient notes.”

“I thought this wasn’t going to be an official session,” said Harry, startled.

“It isn’t, and if we do not continue, I shall return the transcript to you,” said Ivanna, taking a seat opposite him. “How does that sound?”

“Alright,” he said, noticing that the quill began writing on a blank piece of parchment as soon as she had finished her question.

“Excellent, how about we start with me first?” she asked. “My name is Ivanna Lansing, as I told you, but I prefer to be called Ivanna. I’m half-English, half-Italian, raised in England though I spend my time off in Italy with my mother’s relatives. Considering the state that Britain was these past few years, I stayed in Italy permanently, but I have moved back to England as of yesterday.” She smiled a little. “I usually don’t make house calls, particularly since this isn’t even your house, but since this is for a trial run, I made an exception. I have an office in London. It’s on the Muggle side, to make sure my clients can be assured of their privacy.”

“Do you have Muggle clients too?” he couldn’t help but ask.

“I do,” she said. “I don’t use the Self-Writing Quill in front of them, though.”

He almost chuckled, but his nerves weren’t completely settled yet. “And you signed the agreement Daphne, er, my lawyer made?” he asked.

She pulled it out of a folder next to her and showed it to him. “I take this kind of thing very seriously, Mr. Potter,” she said. “My clients need to feel safe, and need to know I’m not going to bleat out their secrets to my friends or worse, the press. I can see why someone in your position would be worried, but rest assured, whatever you say to me shall be held in utmost confidence. Not even a truth serum shall pull it out of me.”

He must have looked surprised because she chuckled. “Oh, yes, there are provisions for Veritaserum, torture, the imperius, you name it,” she added. “I can’t share your secrets with anyone, Mr. Potter. Or do you prefer Harry?”

“Harry’s fine,” he said, starting to relax just a little.

“Well, Harry, is there anything else you wish to ask me?” she asked. “This is your trial run, remember?”
“I don’t need a mind healer,” he said, feeling like he should say it despite not being completely convinced of it.

Ivanna just looked at him with interest. “Why do you believe that?” she asked.

He’d expected her to say that he did, instead of asking him about it. “I dunno,” he mumbled, glancing away.

“Harry, if I am to be honest, most people need a mind healer at some point in their life,” she said. “Whether it’s for stress of work, peer pressure, trauma, academic pressure, attacks using Mind Arts, you name it. Not all of them need therapy, in fact, majority of my patients are on a combination of medication and occasional therapy sessions.”

“Do you think that’s what I need?” he asked.

“Honestly, I don’t know what you need yet, Harry,” she said. “I haven’t diagnosed anything, and without diagnosis, I won’t be recommending anything.”

“Well, how long does it take to diagnose?” he asked.

“Depends on the patient,” she said, calmly. “Some people can’t wait to spill their guts, with others, it’s like pulling teeth. Even when they open up, I have to judge whether what they’re telling is the truth or an exaggerated version of events. There are no absolutes with mind healing, Harry. That’s why it’s so complicated.”

“So, if I open up, will you doubt my version of events?” he asked, asking the thing that had been bothering him the most since Daphne had brought up seeing a mind healer. “I have been called a crazed, attention-seeking brat for years now. And if we get to trauma, it will be hell of a lot more than you might be expecting.”

“Harry, I expect nothing more than what you are comfortable with sharing,” she said. “If there are things you would rather not discuss, you don’t have to. This is not an interrogation, nor a fishing expedition to root out every bit of your trauma.” She leaned forward slightly with a serious look on her face. “The whole purpose of therapy is to reach a point where you are satisfied with where you are, mentally. That’s my philosophy, anyway.”

He was quiet for a long moment after she said that. “You know, I expected a lot more of you trying to convince me I could be cured or something if I just told you everything,” he admitted.

“A lot of people do think that at first,” she smiled. “The only cure is the one where you feel comfortable living your life on your terms, Harry. It’s the best we can all hope for. Nothing more.”

Harry thought about her words, and she was silent as she gave him the space to process them. After a few minutes had passed, Harry sighed. “Alright,” he agreed. “I don’t know how I’ll get there, but I’m interested to try, anyway. I have had little control over my life thus far, but I am finally beginning to think and act of my own accord and I want to be able to keep doing that without being held back by what happened in the past.” He met Ivanna’s gaze, who smiled encouragingly at him. “I want to do this.”

“Good,” she said, simply. “That is an excellent choice, Harry.” She handed him a Muggle business card that said Dr. Ivanna Lansing and had a London office address. “We shall meet once a week, every Tuesday afternoon at 3.”

Harry pocketed the card and held out his hand. “Okay,” he said.
She shook his hand, with a smile. “Okay.”

~

“You look like you could use this,” said Blaise, and Harry chuckled as he accepted a crystal goblet full of wine which Blaise had poured as soon as Ivanna had taken her leave. “I know you can’t say how it went, but what did you think of Ivanna?”

Harry took a long sip of wine before answering. “She’s interesting,” he said, finally.

“Funny, that’s what I thought when I met her,” said Blaise, pouring wine for himself. “But she has helped me, no doubt about that.”

Harry nodded, as the two of them continued in drink in comfortable silence for a while.

“So,” said Blaise. “Daphne mentioned there’s been something on your mind lately.”

Harry looked at him in shock. “She told you?” he asked.

“Yes, because she knew you’d probably hesitate to ask me outright about my mother,” said Blaise. “I don’t blame you, we don’t know each other that well, of course.”

“Right, sorry,” he said.

“It’s fine, I have heard and endured way worse, trust me,” he grinned. “Ask away.”

Harry took another long sip of wine. “Daphne said there was more to the story than the rumours,” he said.

Blaise set his goblet down on the table between them before speaking. “Yes, in a manner of speaking,” he said. “I suppose I should start at the beginning. My mother’s family is Italian, and I mean, old-school Italian purebloods, and she’s an only child. They sent her to Britain to attend Hogwarts where she met my father.” He sighed a little. “Well, they fell in love and all that, and my mother got pregnant with me. At 16 years old. It was just after they finished their OWLs.”

Harry’s eyes went wide. “Oh,” he said.

“My father wanted to marry her and was willing to drop out and take a job to support the two of us,” he said. “He came from a poor English family in Blackpool, and on top of that, he was black. Suffice to say, my mother’s family was less than pleased about the whole business.” He inhaled deeply. “They had him killed. Him and his family. Parents and two younger sisters, slaughtered.”

Harry hissed in shock. “Blaise, I’m sorry,” he said.

He nodded in shock. “Blaise, I’m sorry,” he said.

He nodded slowly. “Worse still, they told my mother he had taken a payout to abandon her, and that she should stay in Italy and forget about the whole thing,” he said. “My mother was heartbroken, so when I was born, I was given the Zabini name and not my father’s. But then she found out, when I was about three. She overheard my grandparents talking and it...it changed her.” He shook his head. “She didn’t tell me about this part until I was much older, but she confronted her parents and didn’t let up until they gave up the people they’d hired to kill my father and his family. Then she killed them and inherited the Zabini fortune.”

It took Harry a moment to realise that it meant that Anita Zabini had tortured her own parents to exact that information regarding her lover and his family.
Blaise stood up and beckoned him to follow, which Harry did after a moment’s hesitation. He led him towards one of the immaculately spotless sitting rooms that had a wall full of photographs. As Harry got closer, he realised that all the photographs were wedding portraits.

“See those first three,” said Blaise, pointing them out. “They were the mercenaries hired by my grandparents to kill my father and his family. She tracked them down, one by one, seduced and married them, before killing them in revenge. And inherited their wealth.”

Harry was struck speechless, but realised there were a few more portraits than just those.

Blaise chuckled without humour. “Once she was done, I guess...she just got a taste for it or something,” he said, and pointed to the next four portraits. “That one is a slave trader from Somalia, the one next to him is a Muggle weapons’ dealer from the Balkans, that one’s a war lord from central Africa, and the last one is a Muggle militant from Russia.”

He turned away from the wall of portraits and indicated the room they were in. “This is a trophy room of sort to her,” he said.

Harry glanced around at the various knick knacks arranged on shelves like priceless artefacts and decided he was better off not knowing. He looked at Blaise, at a loss for words.

“I don’t blame you,” grinned Blaise, at his blank look of shock. “I don’t even know and the woman’s my mother. I asked her once why she keeps all this stuff, the portraits, especially, and she told me it was because she had nothing to remember my father by. He was the only man she ever truly loved and she has nothing of him. No photographs, not even gifts he gave her because she destroyed them when she believed he had abandoned her.”

“She has you,” said Harry.

Blaise smiled. “You know, Daphne said the same thing when I told her,” he said. “Yes, she does have me. And she loves me dearly. Always has.” His smile vanished as he looked back at the portrait wall. “Something in her is inherently broken, though. I can acknowledge that much. The people she kills have it coming, sure, but it’s still…”

“It’s still murder,” finished Harry, and Blaise nodded.

“You know, apart from the first three, she didn’t keep the wealth she inherited from the others,” he said. “She collected the official bounty that was on them, but the rest of the wealth she inherited, she gave away, usually to the same people they had terrorised. I’ve known her for eighteen years and I am beginning to think I’ll never understand what’s going on in her mind.”

“Where is she now?” asked Harry.

“In Bali,” said Blaise. “Scouting out the next husband. Before she left, she joked it was too bad her skills couldn’t have been used to bring down the Dark Lord.” He shook his head with an amused look of disgust. “Nightmare of a woman, but I love her dearly.”

Harry nodded as they stood in silence, before Blaise led them back out to where they had been drinking before and quietly topped up their goblets with more wine.

“I’m sorry, Blaise,” said Harry, as the silence just seemed to stretch on. “I don’t know what to say.”

“Hey, join the club,” he grinned. “You know, at some point, I just decided I would let her do what she wants and live my own life. I still care about her and if she were in trouble, I would run to protect her without hesitation. Ivanna was great in helping me get to this point.” He looked sideways at
Harry. “Does that change your opinion of me?”

“It does,” confessed Harry, truthfully. “But it’s not any better or worse than before. Now I just know more about you, and I’m not sure what I’m supposed to feel about it. But I value this friendship, however new and awkward it is.” He hesitated visibly before speaking again. “And I know how dear you are to Daphne, as well.”

Blaise’s eyes widened and then a slow smile lit up his face. “So, you do care for Daphne,” he said. “No, don’t say anything,” he added, before Harry could even think to confirm or deny it. “Thank you, Harry, for being honest. Truly.”

“Sure,” nodded Harry, and they finished their wine in a silence that wasn’t quite as comfortable as it had been before learning about Anita Zabini but not completely awkward either.

Once they were done, Harry shook Blaise’s hand and thanked him once again for introducing him to Ivanna. He returned to Potter Hall, got some reading done and tried to relax but Anita Zabini and her twisted path refused to leave his mind.

Frustrated, after dinner, he decided to visit Greengrass Manor and was through the floo before he could change his mind.

“Harry, this is a surprise,” said Astoria, as he entered through the living room. “Everything alright?”

“Uh, yeah, sorry for dropping in,” he said, kicking himself internally for not realising what a stupid move it had been to come through without a warning. They were no longer in the war, but he knew that everyone, even him, reached for their wands immediately if the floo in their house flared when they weren’t expecting visitors. “Where’s Daphne?”

“In her reading room,” said Astoria. “Come on, I’ll show you up.”

“Thanks, Tori,” he said, and Astoria nodded with a smile as she led him up the stairs towards the opposite side from the library.

She knocked twice on the door at the end of the hallway. “Harry’s here,” she said.

“Come in,” said Daphne, from the other side.

“Thanks,” he said, taking a seat. “Sorry to interrupt your quiet time.”

“It’s fine,” she said. “Jolly!” she called. “Fresh pot of coffee, please,” she told the house elf when she appeared.

“Right away, Mistress,” she said, and disappeared.
“What were you reading?” he asked, glancing at the book.

“It’s the one Hermione wrote about,” said Daphne. “Her article’s coming out in tomorrow’s issue of *Witch Weekly*, and I wager it’d get harder to find the book once that happens, so I got ahead of things.” She shot him a bright smile.

He couldn’t help but smile back, the tension in his chest easing a bit. “Using your insider knowledge to get ahead,” he teased. “For shame, Lady Greengrass.”

“What use is the knowledge if not to read a very well-written romance between an up-and-coming Hit Wizard and a no-nonsense Healer,” she grinned.

“It’s a romance novel?” he asked, surprised.

“Part of a series, too,” she said. “You’re welcome to borrow it after I’m done.”

“No, thanks,” he said, remembering a horrifying memory from his childhood when he’d found a romance novel belonging to Aunt Petunia while cleaning. He’d been unable to look his aunt in the face for a month.

“Your loss, it’s surprisingly compelling,” she shrugged. “I mean, the setup is all tropes and whatnot, but it’s engaging and avoids the worst cliches.”

“I’ll just read Hermione’s article to try and make sense of the story,” he said, and his smile dimmed as he thought back to the reason for his visit.

Before he could say anything, Jolly returned with a fresh pot of coffee, which Daphne poured for them.

“How did it go with Ivanna this morning?” she asked, passing him his cup.

“It went well,” he said. “I’m seeing her again on Tuesday. At 3.”

“That’s good to know,” she said.

“We never spoke about her fees,” he said, remembering suddenly.

“Don’t worry, it was in the contract,” said Daphne. “It’s taken care of.”

He nodded and drank his coffee, trying to reassemble his thoughts. “Did you talk to Blaise?” he asked, finally.

Daphne gave a nod. “He stopped by for dinner,” she said. “Mentioned you spoke about Anita.” She gave him a scrutinising look. “Is it bothering you?”

“It is, I guess,” he admitted. “Sorry.”

“No, no, it bothers me, too,” she said. “I can appreciate that Anita loves Blaise and never mistreats him and I can even understand her need for vengeance to avenge the man she loved. What I find difficult to reconcile is her need to seek out prey to murder.”

“Does Blaise know that?” he asked, genuinely curious about their dynamic.

“He does,” she nodded, and smiled a little. “Blaise and I have talked about this more times than you can imagine over the years. Ultimately, we figured it was better for our sanity and friendship if we stopped agonising over Anita’s actions, because neither of us could fully understand them, nor could
we stop her from doing what she pleased. Some things are just beyond our control. And that’s something I can speak of from experience.”

“We are the only ones we can control, huh?” he murmured, remembering their conversation following the confrontation with Nott.

“Yes,” she said, softly. “Don’t let this get to you. You can’t fix everything, neither should you be expected to. Not by anyone, but especially not yourself.”

“I thought that fixing things was what we were doing,” he said, though her words made him smile.

“We are,” she assured him. “We are doing what we can, remember? Shaking up the Borogoves and all that. Fixing what we can, helping those whom we are able to help. Anita’s not one of them, and despite how conflicted that might make us feel, we have so much more to do.”

“I know,” he admitted. “I think I need to remind myself of that from time to time.” He held out his hand from where he was sitting and she smiled as she held it, squeezing it comfortably.

“Well,” she said, as a long moment passed of them sitting in the quiet reading room holding hands. “Anytime you need a reminder, you know I’ll be here.”
14th July, 1998

“How are we doing on the jasmine bath oil?” asked Rosette Frost.

Imogen Bunnt, her friend and the only other person working at Rosette’s Beauty Potions, did a quick count. “We have two dozen vials in stock in the back but only about five or so out front,” she said. “You might have to make more. The jasmine is popular.”

Rosette nodded and made a note of it. “We’re almost out of lavender, too,” she frowned. “It’s going to take me all day tomorrow to brew. You’ll have to handle the shop by yourself. Sorry, Gen.”

She shrugged. “It’s alright, I’ll manage,” she said.

“The two of us can barely manage when we’re both out front,” said Rosette.

“Rosie, that’s a good thing,” said Imogen. “Being busy ‘cos the shop’s full of customers is the dream, remember?”

“I know,” admitted Rosette, with a small smile. “But we need time off, as well. We work six days a week, and the only day off we are supposed to have is spent brewing and doing inventory. I don’t want to work you to the bone, Gen.”

“Well, a break would be nice,” admitted Imogen. “I have this book I’ve been meaning to read since I read Hermione Granger’s article in Witch Weekly.”

“Oh, me too, but I have to buy the book first,” said Rosette.

“Good luck with that,” said Imogen. “They were sold out before noon on Sunday. I only got one because I went in early. Apparently, there’s a four day waiting list for more copies.”

“I’ll borrow yours then,” grinned Rosette.

“Sure, but I have a feeling it would be worth buying a copy,” said Imogen. “The shop’s nice, though. They have an excellent potions section.”

“I might visit then,” said Rosette, and they were interrupted by a knock on the door of their shop.

Rosette’s brow furrowed and she headed over to tell the customer that they had already closed for the evening, but standing beyond the glass door was one of the people who had helped make the shop what it was.

“Fleur, what are you doing here?” asked Rosette, opening the door.

Fleur stepped in and gave her a small smile. “I was on my way home but I received some good news and thought I should stop by and tell you now instead of waiting for tomorrow,” she said.

“Oh?” asked Rosette, as Imogen joined them as well, equally curious.

Fleur pulled out a scroll of parchment and handed it to them. “We managed to speak to a distributor who deals in beauty potions,” she said. “Suffice it to say, once we showed them some samples from your shop, they were very eager to help market and export your potions outside Britain.”
“Really?” asked Imogen, as Rosette just stared wordlessly.

“Of course,” said Fleur. “Go on, take a look at the offer.”

Rosette unfurled the scroll and her eyes almost bulged at the figures. “I-is this real?” she asked, slightly breathless.

“We told you, didn’t we?” said Fleur. “Yours is going to be a lucrative business. The shop was only the first step.”

“This is incredible,” said Rosette. “Fleur, I-I don’t know what to say.”

“You don’t have to say anything,” said Fleur. “Just have your lawyer look it over and then return it to me, yes?”

Rosette started to nod, but then read the contract once again. “As amazing as this is though, Imogen and I can barely manage when it’s just running the shop,” she said, her mood dimming. “If we are to meet these numbers, I would have to be brewing full-time, maybe even more.”

Fleur seemed to consider it for a moment. “Have you been reading about the new law they’re bringing in?” she asked.

“Oh, I have!” said Imogen, immediately. “I heard a customer talking about it. She runs that pasta shop that opened in place of the old Fortescue place, remember?” Imogen looked at Rosette as she said it, and she nodded. “They need another employee and she was saying how it will be easier after the new law goes through, because we can just register with the Ministry and they’ll send us people, instead of having to do the whole rigmarole with advertising and interviewing and all that.”

“It’s true,” said Fleur. “The Ministry will find suitable candidates, ensure they are up to the task based on your requirements and send them along. You could put in for a junior brewer to help you, Rosette, and one or two more people to help Imogen out on the floor.”

“Yes, that does sound good. And I saw that boarding house too, in the morning’s Prophet,” said Rosette. “I thought the law hadn’t passed yet, though.”

“Apparently, the Wizengamot will hold a vote tomorrow,” said Fleur. “It will probably go through, but in case it doesn’t, we will do it the old-fashioned way. How does that sound?”

“Sounds wonderful,” smiled Rosette, the reassuring words easing her worries substantially. “I hope the law goes through tomorrow.”

Fleur smiled. “So do I.”

~

Dear Harry,

It is good to hear from you. I have been hearing of your triumph over the Dark Lord in newspapers here in Bulgaria, and it is good to know you survived and that your country is slowly building things back up. Hermione and Fleur have both written to me in the past few weeks, and I am glad you are all doing fine.

I was very surprised when you asked me about playing in the British League. I have been recruited before, but none of the teams I met could offer a deal that my manager would accept. I get very little say, since the manager has been hired by our Ministry. However, my contract with him will be
ending at the end of this month, after which I will be free to make my own choices regarding my Quidditch career.

Since your letter came, I have been looking into the Puddlemere United team that you mentioned and they seem to have a good, strong team and well-balanced players. If you are serious about recruiting me to Puddlemere, I would like to meet the team and the coaches and managers before I decide whether I join you or not.

To that view, I will be coming to England toward the end of this month. I shall send you along the proper dates of my arrival soon, and I hope we can work things out.

Best,

Viktor Krum

“Well, that’s optimistic, at least,” said Daphne, setting the letter aside. “Have you let Neville and Isaiah know?”

“I’ll tell Neville when I see him in the Wizengamot tomorrow and then write Isaiah,” said Harry, and took a bite of treacle tart from his plate. “Isaiah has already been in touch with Camille Gibson, and she is coming to Britain next week. Hopefully, we’ll have most of the team put back together before Viktor arrives.”

“I hope so,” said Daphne, finishing her dessert and letting Minnie clear her plate. “Tired?” she asked, keeping her tone casual when she noticed that Harry asked Minnie to bring them coffee.

“Yeah,” he said. “Just a bit.”

“Well, you’ve had a long day,” she said, glancing at the folded copy of the Evening Prophet which had published a tour of the Lily Potter Home that Harry and Tracey had taken the press through that morning.

They were quiet as Minnie returned with coffee for the two of them. They drank in silence for a few moments, and Daphne glanced at Harry ever so often, wondering how to bring it up.

He smiled ruefully after a moment. “You can ask,” he said.

She went pink but sighed. “How was it then?” she asked. “Your first proper session with Ivanna.”

He exhaled heavily and looked into his cup of coffee as he spoke. “I’m not sure,” he said, slowly. “We talked about a lot of things. Mostly about what I’ve been doing these days. About the orphanage and the institute. We even discussed some politics.”

“I see,” said Daphne, encouraging him to continue.

He set his cup down and smiled a little at her. “I also talked about the Dursleys,” he said. “Because Ivanna brought up my words from the article in the Prophet about the orphanage announcement.”

“About wanting to provide a home for children?” asked Daphne, and he nodded. “That’s good.”

“I suppose,” he agreed. “I couldn’t tell her all of it. Not what I told you.”

Daphne couldn’t help but smile at that. “That makes me very happy, Harry,” she said, and then met his gaze. “But, you shouldn’t have to hold back on my account. I won’t be offended if you share more of your secrets with Ivanna than you do with me.” She sighed and took a sip of her coffee. “I don’t mean to pry and I am very aware that I can’t help you in the same way that she can. I’m really
glad you agreed to see her regularly. It won’t diminish our bond, I assure you.”

“Do you really?” he asked. “I am asking seriously, because I want to be able to tell you everything as well.”

“Of course,” she said, at once. “I told you, you can always talk to me. You told me about your childhood and your first two years at Hogwarts. You know about my family, about my father, about my friendship with Blaise.” She gave him a fond smile. “I like that we are able to see parts of one another we don’t share with many other people. That is immensely precious to me, and I hope it is to you as well.”

“It is,” he assured her. “It really is, Daph. I feel like there is nothing I can’t tell you and...there hasn’t been anyone like that. Ron and Hermione are the people closest to me, but even they don’t know things about me that you do.”

His words made her go all warm inside, and she fought to control the pleased blush that coloured her face. “I’m sure they know you better than I do, though,” she said.

“Probably,” he agreed. “But...I want…”

“I know,” she said, as he struggled to find the words. “I want to know you better than I do, too.”

“I’d like it if we could do that then,” he said, seeming to make up his mind. “On Tuesdays, after I’ve had my session with Ivanna, I want to talk to you over dinner about what we discussed.”

Her eyes went wide. “Are you sure you’ll be comfortable doing that?” she asked.

He shrugged a little. “I’m not sure,” he admitted. “But I would like to try. That is what we agreed on, didn’t we? That we’d try, at the very least.”

“We did,” she nodded. “We certainly did.” She smiled at him. “I think it is worth doing then. Whatever you feel comfortable about sharing, I shall be here to listen, if nothing else.”

~

15th July, 1998

“Elder Potter, I just wanted to say my congratulations,” said Elder Shafiq, as he shook Harry’s hand vigorously. “The orphanage looks wonderful.”

“Thank you very much,” said Harry.

“I’ll tell Dean to stop by at your office next week to make a donation on our family’s behalf,” said Elder Shafiq. “Excellent work.”

“I’m truly grateful for the support,” smiled Harry, as Elder Shafiq took his leave, and Madam Steward came over to give her congratulations as well.

He was shaking hands with people and talking until the chamber doors opened to admit everyone inside the Wizengamot. Saying a cordial goodbye to Elder Bode, Harry made his way inside and slipped into his seat next to Daphne, who smiled at him.

“Busy morning?” she asked.

“Yes, but considering how many people offered donations, I am fine with it,” he said. “I guess tangible proof really does work wonders, doesn’t it?” He grinned slightly. “I honestly thought it
would backfire,” he added, as an afterthought.

“How so?” she asked, with a confused look on her face.

“I thought if they saw the orphanage they would feel less inclined to donate,” he said.

“That might be true for some of them,” she said, and then seemed to think better of it. “Actually, it might be true for a lot of them. Promising to donate and actually donating are very different things, as well. But some of them may come through, so let’s hope for the best.”

He shrugged in agreement, as Abercrombie called the Wizengamot to session. The second reading of the bill began, and the amendments made during the first reading were read through and checked for any further debate. There seemed to be much less dissent than before, and Harry supposed Tracey and Ben’s fervent campaigning had worked.

“That concludes the second reading of the bill for the Post-War Employment Act,” said Abercrombie, around the two hour mark. “Considering that there appears to be no further debate over the particulars, we shall now be holding the vote to pass the law. Members, please hold up green for yes, red for no, and white if you wish to abstain. Any objections?” When none were raised, he nodded. “Ladies and gentlemen, please cast your votes.”

Harry raised his wand, the tip of it lit green and glanced around the chamber sharply before relaxing. They had the majority, not just because of people they had under contract, but from a significant number of people like Elder Macdougal and Elder Fawley and the people they influenced. A lot of Orpington’s faction had chosen to abstain, though some had held up red as well. On the permanent side, Elder Macmillan had chosen to abstain as well.

“Right,” said Abercrombie. “That is sufficient. The bill has now passed. The Post-War Employment Act of 1998 shall officially move to be put into place. Thank you for your participation.”

There was some applause and Harry joined in, shooting a look of congratulations at Robert, who grinned back widely.

“Since the Wizengamot has passed the bill, the Ministry has 7 days to outline their strategy for implementing the new law,” continued Abercrombie, once the chamber had gone silent again. “The strategy shall be presented in a Wizengamot session on the 22nd of July for approval.”

“It will be done,” said Kingsley, with a firm nod.

Abercrombie nodded back, and shuffled some documents. “The second matter on our agenda today is an update from Head Auror Gawain Robards on the Knockturn Cleanup measure,” he said. “Head Auror Robards?”

Robards walked down to take the stand and gave a small bow to the Wizengamot. “Thank you, Chief Warlock,” he said. “As proposed by the Auror Department, we conducted raids in the Knockturn Alley part of London from the evening of July 9th until the early morning of July 12th. We were aided by Elder Burke in this endeavour as decided by the Wizengamot, and I can now report that the Knockturn Cleanup measure was a success.”

There was an audible sigh of relief, but everyone was still waiting for details.

“Thanks to the squad of Aurors consisting of Harley, van Diemen, Gore, Thornsby and Finnigan, we have managed to make 35 arrests,” he said, as he sent over a stack of documents to the Chief Warlock who distributed it to the rest of the members. “There were six casualties, but none on our side. Aurors Thornsby and Gore suffered minor injuries but have since recovered and been approved
to return to the field by St. Mungo’s.” Robards flipped the pages in the folder in front of him, before continuing. “We managed to shut down upwards of twenty three establishments carrying on illegal activities ranging from distribution and use of dark artefacts to forbidden magic to mercenary activities. The artefacts, substances and objects recovered have now been delivered to the Department of Mysteries to be analysed and then destroyed. Here is a list.” He banished a list to the Chief Warlock, who once again sent out the copies to the members.

“Does Head Unspeakable Mittermeyer have a plan on how to destroy the artefacts?” asked Elder Slughorn.

“He does,” nodded Robards. “I believe they mean to disenchant the objects so that they lose their magic before sending it through the Veil of Death.”

Harry stiffened at the mention of the veil and his hands curled into fists almost involuntarily. He missed the quick, concerned glance that Daphne gave him as his attention remained fixed on Robards.

“You are certain you managed to root out all the criminal facets in Knockturn Alley?” asked Elder Fawley.

“We have done what we can,” said Robards with a look of grudging acknowledgement towards Burke. “However, crime cannot be completely vanished. Regardless, we believe we have managed to put a significant dent in the whole affair and those who may have slipped our grasp this time will know better than to stick their necks out anytime soon.”

“Well, let’s hope so,” said Elder Fawley, eyes slightly narrowed at Robards.

“What of the emptied premises?” asked Elder Macdougal. “Surely leaving them vacated will see the arrival of more criminals and illicit activities.”

“The Ministry has a solution to that,” said Kingsley, as he stood up. He gave a nod to Robards, who bowed and returned to sit down in the gallery. He sent a thick stack of documents to Abercrombie to be distributed to everyone else. As the copies flew out to the other members, Kingsley enlarged one of the copies so that everyone in the Wizengamot could see it. “Ladies and gentlemen of the Wizengamot, I propose that the rebranding of Knockturn Alley is in order,” he announced, as they saw a beautifully rendered model of Knockturn Alley on the document. “I give you, the new and improved, Platinum Alley.”

Harry’s eyebrows shot up and he glanced at Daphne, who looked shocked as well. Murmurs began rising in the Wizengamot, and Harry began to realise that none of the other members, except Mr. Weasley and Percy, perhaps, had had any idea about this.

“Minister Shacklebolt, what is the meaning of this?” demanded Elder Macmillan. “The Wizengamot was not notified of any such measure following what Head Auror Robards initially proposed.”

“Quiet, please,” shouted Abercrombie, as several people shouted their agreement at his words. “Silence!”

The chamber quieted down as Kingsley turned to Macmillan. “Elder Macmillan,” he said, his deep voice as calm as could be. “It is true that this was not discussed with the Wizengamot. However, this falls within the purview of the Ministry, not the Wizengamot. It’s not a change of law nor something that needs Wizengamot approval. It’s a matter of governance and falls under my authority at the Ministry.”
Judging by the annoyed look on Daphne’s face, it seemed to be true. Elder Macmillan still looked furious, as did a lot of the other senior Wizengamot members. Elder Macdougal was glaring openly at Kingsley.

“It is still courtesy to inform the Wizengamot,” barked Elder Macdougal.

“I am aware,” said Kingsley. “And this is the courtesy. The Wizengamot is the first to know. The press shall be informed after the session.”

It led to more angry murmurings, and Harry leaned towards Daphne. “Suggestions?” he asked, in a quiet whisper as Abercrombie tried in vain to get people to speak one at a time.

Daphne was reading the Platinum Alley proposal rapidly and didn’t answer right away. “It’s not a bad plan,” she whispered back. “Nothing’s changing, except the name, but rebranding it into something new will go a long way in dispelling the previously terrible reputation.”

“So why do they all look so angry?” he asked, glancing around the chamber.

“Hurt pride,” she muttered. “Which I understand, as a matter of fact. We got blindsided again.”

He nodded and was sharply reminded of when they had discussed having someone within the Ministry just last week.

It took a loud bang from Abercrombie’s wand for everyone to settle down once again. “Ladies and gentlemen,” shouted Abercrombie. “You forget yourself. Minister Shacklebolt has not acted out of his authority on this matter.”

“What about the existing business owners in Knockturn Alley?” demanded Elder Macdougal. “Will they be driven out as the Ministry seizes the place for their pet gentrification project?”

“No,” said Kingsley, firmly. “If you look at the proposal, you will see that no ownership will change nor will the Ministry attempt to seize any property.” He looked around the chamber with a steely look on his face. “The rebranding is only to ensure that we step out of the shadows of Knockturn and the association to dark arts and embrace it as an extension of Diagon Alley that it has been. That is all. No more, no less.” He sighed. “I realise it might seem like I am overstepping, but this is perfectly within my purview, and I ask that we not focus on bruised egos and seize this opportunity for rebuilding.” His glance shifted to Harry.

Suppressing a sigh, Harry stood up. “Minister Shacklebolt is right,” he said. “However,” he added, realising Daphne was still not done reading the whole thing. “We need to analyse the proposal and ensure it is within the Ministry’s bounds and has not overstepped. If all is well, then nothing would make me happier than seeing this go through, and if there is something worth debating, I am sure my fellow Wizengamot members will understand that we can discuss this in a civil manner.”

He sat back down, and received an impressed look from Daphne.

“I support Elder Potter’s suggestion,” said Neville.

“Seconded!” Both Hermione and Rolf added at the same time.

“It is fair, I suppose,” relented Elder Fawley. “You may have the authority for implementing the proposal, Minister, but the Wizengamot does have the right to examine it to ensure that you have not exceeded that authority, which is what I propose we shall do.”

“I understand,” said Kingsley. “I shall stand by the Wizengamot’s judgment but you will find that I
have not overstepped in any way.”

Abercrombie cleared his throat. “It is settled then,” he said. “The matter shall be discussed 7 days from today on the 22nd of July. That shall be sufficient time for the members to examine the proposal.” He turned to the Minister. “The Wizengamot has no authority to prevent you from breaking the news to the press, so as such, the privacy laws will not be exercised. You may announce the proposal to the press if you wish.”

“Thank you,” said Kingsley, and sat back down.

With a sigh, Abercrombie examined the documents in front of him. “The final item on the agenda for today is being brought by Elder Macdougal,” he said, turning to the man in question. “You have the floor, Elder.”

Elder Macdougal stood up and gave a curt bow to Abercrombie. “Thank you, Chief Warlock,” he said, his tone still tense. “Following the success of the Knockturn Cleanup measure and the rise of businesses in Diagon Alley, I am of the belief that it is time to re-examine one of our older laws. Especially since this concerns a decision made by the Ministry that placed their own importance over the people,” he added, with a scathing look towards Kingsley. “I bring forth an action to reverse Ministry decree 118 which banned guilds within the wizarding world.”

“Here is a copy of the law and the banishment enacted,” said Abercrombie, distributing it to the members. “It will be discussed in the session of the 22nd of July. Elder Macdougal has also put together a proposal of the amendments that should be made to that piece of legislation.”

“Examine it carefully,” said Elder Macdougal, sternly. “We need to raise our economic conditions after this blasted war, and investing in trade and technical skills is the way to go forward.” He sat back down.

“Well, that is all for today’s session, ladies and gentlemen,” said Abercrombie, after a moment of silence. “Thank you for your attendance.”

~

The conference room was already in a scramble by the time Harry and Daphne returned to the HQ. Both Fleur and Draco were shuffling through parchments at a breakneck speed, occasionally shouting out instructions while Maribeth and Parvati ran to comply. Adrian was seated but he was writing down something with the leather bound diary propped open in front of him. Tracey was nowhere to be seen but she entered a second after Harry and Daphne, her hair in a messy bun and carrying a bunch of files.

“STOP,” shouted Harry, and it was almost comical how everyone just froze and then slowly relaxed. “I’m guessing news reached you of the Ministry’s newest project,” he said, taking a seat.

“It did,” said Draco, scowling deeply. “We don’t have the details yet, but we heard the whole Platinum Alley thing.”

“Here are some details then,” said Daphne, making a few copies of the proposal and passing it around to all of them. “Take some time, read it through, and then we can decide to panic.”

As everyone sheepishly relaxed, Daphne instructed Maribeth to get them all coffee with just a little bit of whiskey added as well as dinner because they were going to be a while. Maribeth complied with an understanding smile, and by the time she had returned with their coffees and packed containers of ravioli for dinner, everyone had finished reading the Platinum Alley proposal.
“Less terrible than we imagined,” said Parvati, finally.

“Yes,” agreed Daphne.

“But still terrible,” said Adrian.

Daphne nodded in agreement. “We need to strategise,” she said. “There’s nothing in this proposal that would incur a Wizengamot intervention, so the discussion bound to happen next week is pointless. The Minister acted within his authority, and as much as we got blindsided by this, I am sure we can work this in our favour.”

“How did the Wizengamot react?” asked Draco, looking curious more than anything.

“Not well,” grimaced Harry. “The older members, especially, took great offence.”

“Harry had to placate them and he managed to do it well,” said Daphne. “He agreed with the Minister but said the Wizengamot should take time to examine the proposal before losing our cool.”

“Good call,” nodded Adrian. “That gives us some time then.”

“Yes,” said Fleur. “Do we have any information on what premises were cleared out in the raid?” Daphne passed her a copy of both the arrests and the list of premises. “I’ll cross-check and see how many properties there are owned by us. The Black family’s dealings were er,…”

“Questionable,” finished Harry, as Fleur paused awkwardly. “No, just awful, I guess.”

Tracey looked at Daphne. “Since we technically own those premises, will we be held responsible?” she asked

“No,” said Draco, at the same time that Daphne shook her head.

“The Black family made sure to include that they couldn’t be held liable for any illicit activities their tenants carried out on the premises,” said Daphne. “The contracts are air-tight. Believe me, I checked to make sure this wouldn’t come back to bite us.”

“Good to know,” smiled Harry.

“I wonder if they got Prisma,” muttered Draco, as he leaned over Fleur’s shoulder to look at the list.

“What’s that?” asked Harry, as both Daphne and Adrian sat up at that as well. “What’s Prisma?”

“You ever been inside Knockturn?” asked Draco. At Harry’s nod, he smirked. “It’s the tall building made of red brick.”

“The Prisma Hotel,” explained Daphne. “Dubious as can be, but it’s a landmark. I have never had the pleasure of entering the premises myself, so I only know it by reputation.”

“It’s the sort of place one would wake up after losing half their organs to harvesters,” said Adrian. “I have been there a few times, to meet with some of the more...reserved of my clients.” He shook his head with a small smirk. “It is surprisingly well-kept than a place like that has any right to be, though it’s not somewhere anyone with any decent intentions should be venturing.”

“That being said,” said Daphne. “In the brand new Platinum Alley, the Prisma Hotel can be a reputable establishment once more. The exterior is recognisable and if what Adrian says is true, the interior isn’t in shambles. Some renovation and we can turn it into a very profitable business.”
“Absolutely,” said Draco. “And seems like the Aurors got it and cleared out the place of lowlifes and dark artefacts. Half our work has been done for us. We’d be stupid not to pounce on this opportunity, and turn it around into a proper hotel. The location is amazing, and the Leaky is the only halfway decent place in the area to have beds, so competition isn’t that high.”

“We should get working on that right away then,” said Fleur, nodding firmly.

“Does the licensing for Knockturn Alley work the same way as it does for Diagon?” asked Parvati, curiously.

“It does,” said Daphne. “Knockturn used to be a part of Diagon, you know.”

“It was just the more adult part of it,” said Adrian. “Regular shopping district during the day, but come evening a lot more bars and a few clubs would open their doors. Nothing criminal, besides petty stuff, but the sort of place people go to after a hard day’s work to socialise before going home. That’s what it used to be, anyway.”

“If the rebranding goes well, it will likely be that way again then,” said Harry. “I say we go ahead with working on Prisma and help out clients who wish to open their shop in Platinum Alley instead of Diagon if we can. Let’s look at this as an opportunity for expansion.”

“You’re right, Harry,” said Fleur.

“Still doesn’t mean there was no cause to panic,” said Adrian.

“Yes,” said Daphne. “This works out in our favour, but it might not the next time. We need insight into the Minister’s dealings.” She looked at Adrian. “Did you manage to find anyone?”

“No,” he grimaced. “But I’ll keep looking. With greater urgency.”

~

16th July, 1998

“Keep it moving, don’t crowd the area in front of the floo,” said Naomi Turpin, as she ushered in the older children into the foyer of the Lily Potter Home.

“It’s bloody massive,” cried out Letitia Pascal, staring around open-mouthed.

“Language, Tisha,” chided Naomi. “Help me wrangle them, please.”

Letitia shook her head in disbelief at the interior once more, but came to help Naomi. Having turned fifteen recently, Letitia had been one of the oldest people in the Orphan Wing, and as such, had a bit of a sway on the other children.

“You heard Naomi, move to the side,” said Letitia. “Are the younger ones here?” she asked Naomi.

“Not yet,” she answered, as the last of the older children came through with Isaac right at the end. “We’ll get you settled first and then bring them in.”

“What about our things?” asked Ioan, a boy around twelve years of age.

“They’ll be brought over in a bit,” said Isaac. “Shall we do the tour first or show them to their rooms?” he asked, turning to Naomi.

“The rooms first, please,” said Andromeda, as she walked in from Belinda’s main office. “Once
they’ve picked out their rooms, we can do the tour while their luggage is sent up to the proper place.”

“Thank you, Andromeda,” said Naomi. “Alright, girls with me, boys with Isaac. Let’s go.”

“How big is this place?” asked Letitia, as the girls followed behind Naomi.

“As big as Hogwarts?” asked Jolene Chambers, who had only recently turned eleven and would be going to Hogwarts in September for the first time.

“No, Hogwarts is much bigger,” said Naomi. “But this is a fairly substantial estate.”

“Will we have dorms like back in school?” asked Ruby Liu, as they walked past the long hallway and into the East tower.

“No, you will have your own rooms,” said Naomi, opening the doors to the tower and ushering them into the common room. “This is East tower, the boys are on the other end of the house at West tower. There’s a common room and dining room on the ground floor of both towers and you are free to visit one another there or in the main house, but upstairs is out of bounds to boys and the same for you in the other tower. Hogwarts rules.”

“But girls can go in the boys’ tower at Hogwarts,” pointed out Ruby.

“Only in Gryffindor, which still makes no sense,” said Letitia, and turned back to Naomi. “You said there’s a dining room here?”

“Yeah, this way,” she said, leading them into the room next to the common room. “You can have your meals here or there’s a big dining room in the main house. I know some of you have siblings so if you want to be there at mealtimes, that’s completely fine. Mealtimes will be the same as they were at the Orphan Wing. With better food, trust me.”

“Anything would be better than hospital food,” muttered Jolene, as a few others nodded in agreement.

“Well, just between you and me, most of us have been living here for a day or so already, and the food is delicious,” said Naomi, with a smile. “Come on, let’s head upstairs. You’re free to pick out a room and then let me know so I’ll put your name on the door.”

With an excited laugh, most of the girls took off upstairs, while others followed at a slower pace. Elsie Ward and Mila Fontaine, two of the girls who were counted among the special cases for their injuries, lingered behind with Naomi.

“Mila, there’s a bedroom on the first floor we have already set aside for you,” said Naomi, knowing the girl had difficulty breathing and it would be easier for her not to have to climb stairs. “Elsie, yours is right next to Mila’s. You’re still recovering as well so it would be better to have you there. Once your treatment is complete, you can choose a different bedroom, if you like.”

“Sure, but I doubt it will be complete,” said Elsie, as Naomi led them to their rooms. “Healer Lim says I’ll be alright in time for Hogwarts but I don’t know if I believe him.”

“If Healer Lim is confident, you should trust his word,” said Naomi, wisely.

“Yeah, but I looked into it, alright?” said Elsie, frowning. “They say prolonged Cruciatuus means mobility will be permanently altered. Already, I won’t be able to play Quidditch, but if I don’t heal up, I’ll be walking with this cane my whole life.”
Naomi ushered Mila into her room, before showing Elsie to hers. “I understand, dear,” she said, quietly. “But you must know, healing is forever developing. We have new cures and discoveries every day. And your prognosis was optimistic and Healer Lim says you are responding well to treatment. Until we hear otherwise, let’s not worry about what might happen.” Elsie gave a nod, and Naomi patted her shoulder. “And just because you can’t play this year, doesn’t mean you won’t ever be able to play Quidditch,” Naomi added. “You will only be in your fourth year in September. There’s still time, both at Hogwarts and after it. Now, go see your room and I’ll go check up on the others.”

Elsie smiled and went to explore, so Naomi set about finding the others, breaking up a few minor arguments and making sure that everyone had a room and that their names were on the door. There were privacy wards that were activated when the names were put in, so that only the staff and the room’s occupant could enter, and anyone else who wished to come in would need permission from the occupant. After everyone had a room, Naomi showed them the reading room at the top of the tower, and there were audible gasps as they finally saw the entire estate from top of the tower.

“Is that an honest to goodness lake?” asked Letitia, craning her head a little since they could only see the edge of it from where they were.

“Yes, it’s at the back of the house,” said Naomi. “Charlie, our groundskeeper, has said he’ll look into arranging times for everyone to swim, once things are settled.” A quick glance at the time told her it had been about forty minutes since arriving. “Alright, let’s head back. We’ll do a tour of the main house and then it’s time for lunch.”

There was much more tangible excitement in the air as the group returned to the foyer, where the boys were already waiting with Isaac.

“Are we ready to do the tour?” asked Naomi.

“Not yet,” said Isaac, and then leaned in to whisper to her. “Apparently, we’re expected in the main sitting room. Harry and Daphne just arrived.”

“With the others?” asked Naomi, wondering how many they had managed to track down.

“The younger ones are there already, so let’s head over,” he said.

“Change of plans,” said Naomi, turning back to the girls. “This way, come on.”

“No tour?” asked Ruby, confused.

“This is something better, I promise,” said Naomi, and followed after Isaac and the boys.

As they all entered the main sitting room, the room was full with the younger children, though there were a couple of older children scattered around. Naomi glanced back at her charges and gave a small smile, and with a squeal of half-laugh and half-cry Ruby ran forward into the arms of an older girl.

“Opal!” she cried. “You’re here!”

Other people began to notice their older siblings, children who were older than fifteen and could not live at the Orphan Wing anymore.

“Blimey,” said Letitia, as they watched the tearful reunions of siblings who had been torn apart. “They’re going to be living here too?” she asked Naomi.
“Of course,” she said. “They’re not that much older than you. We won’t leave them to fend for themselves.” She spotted Daphne speaking to Andromeda, and excused herself to make her way over there. “They really made it, huh?”

Daphne gave her a small smile, and Naomi thought she looked exhausted underneath the carefully applied makeup. “Yes, we managed to track down all the siblings,” she said. “Twelve more, for you and Isaac to care for.”

“Absolutely,” nodded Naomi, realising suddenly that Daphne was only a year or so older than some of the children. She smiled kindly at her, with no shortage of wonder.

“We’re still looking into other children who were turned away,” said Andromeda. “Most of the ones we found were living at ramshackle boarding houses around Hogsmeade.”

“Their custody is a bit of an issue,” said Daphne, when Naomi gave her a confused look.

“They need to come in voluntarily,” explained Andromeda. “It wasn’t hard to convince the ones here, because they want to be with their siblings. The others have no reason to come here, to a place which might be worse than where they are, for all they know.”

“How about arranging a tour-?” suggested Naomi. “Just so they can see what it’s like and decide if they want to come.”

Andromeda grinned. “Daphne was just saying that,” she said. “Besides, for some of them, it’s just this summer and they’ll be at Hogwarts until graduation. They’re of age, so they can refuse easily.”

Naomi pursed her lips with worry but nodded. “Er, should we get on here then?” she asked, looking around at the full room.

“Yes, Belinda said we should have an early lunch,” said Daphne. “A proper tour of the estate can wait until after that.”

“You and Isaac should show the new ones to their rooms,” added Andromeda. “And tell everyone they have to eat lunch in the main dining room today, at least.”

“Certainly,” said Naomi, and got to work.

Another forty five minutes later, all sixty seven children, the staff, including Molly and Andromeda, and Harry and Daphne were in the main dining room. Lunch was mushroom and zucchini frittata and some baby caprese salad, served with fresh fruit juice, and the entire room was humming with conversation and some laughter as time went on.

After making sure her charges were all filling up their plates with enough food, Naomi went to help the other caretakers who had much younger kids to look after. An hour or so later, the plates were cleared away, and the younger ones were starting to get sleepy, so their caretakers took them upstairs for naptime. Naomi and Isaac took the older children (and even some of the younger ones who were around 9 and 10, and no longer needed naptime) on a tour of the entire estate.

“Do we really get to live here?” Naomi heard one of the boys ask Isaac in awe as they finished looking around the library.

“You do,” replied Isaac, in a gentle tone.

The looks of awe only grew when they showed them the observatory, and later as they saw the climate charms around the lake that would let them swim around the year. The wards were still up,
but when Charlie saw them, he promised he would let the older ones swim for a couple hours before lunch the next day, provided he could be there to keep an eye.

“Your things should be up in your room by now,” said Naomi, as the tour came to an end. “It’s almost four, so take some time to unpack, set up your rooms and explore if you like. Dinner’s at six.”

“Do we have to eat in the main house again?” asked one of the older boys, Ethan Nettle.

“No, you can eat in the tower,” said Isaac. “Dinner ends at 7.30, so be sure to eat before that. Curfew is at 9pm for those under 14 and 11pm for the ones older, the same as it is at Hogwarts. The grounds are out of bounds after 8 pm to everyone.”

“Your rooms should have an envelope on the bed,” said Naomi. “It has all the mealtimes and curfews and also a map of the estate, so you can use that if you’re forgetful. As always, the trace on your wand is active so no magic if you aren’t of age. Are there any questions?”

When no one spoke up, she gave a nod. “Those of you who weren’t at the Orphan Wing until yesterday have an appointment with Healer Lim tomorrow morning in the infirmary after breakfast,” she said. “He just needs to give you a once-over and make sure you are well,” she added, when some of them looked worried.

“If there’s nothing else, off you go,” said Isaac, and they all dispersed.

Some of them went to the towers, others out to the garden, while a few headed straight upstairs to the library.

Naomi gave a tired sigh and smiled at Isaac. “They will be alright, won’t they?” she asked.

“Yes,” he said, firmly. “We will make sure of it.”

~

While the tour was going on, Harry and Daphne were sitting in a quiet corner of the kitchen with a pot of tea between them.

“...the conditions aren’t great, but they’re of age,” Daphne was saying, and Harry nodded as they discussed the other children who had chosen not to come to the orphanage.

“Well, we can try showing them around, but like you said, we can’t force them,” he said, finishing his tea and sitting back in his chair. He let out a tired sigh and took off his glasses to rub his eyes.

“You’re still tired from making all those portkeys?” she asked, and he smiled a little.

“Yeah,” he said, putting his glasses back on. “They are quick to make but drain a whole lot of energy.”

“More tea then,” she said, pouring him another cup. “And bring some scones, Pinky.”

The tiny house elf nearby nodded and immediately started loading up the fresh scones on a plate for Harry.

“How are you doing besides being exhausted?” she asked, and he gave her an almost fond look.

“I don’t know, relieved, I suppose,” he said, taking a bite of the fresh scone. “And nervous. Seeing all of them in one place...was nerve-wracking.”
“Yeah,” she said. “I felt that way, too. I know most of the older kids. We went to Hogwarts with them. Really puts it into perspective and it’s terrifying, to say the least.”

He laughed shakily in agreement. They were quiet for a while, and he made sure to eat a little bit more, before verbalising the other thing that had been bothering him. “What should I be doing now?” he asked, in a low voice.

She looked surprised. “What do you mean?” she asked. “There is still plenty to do, you know that.”

“I know,” he assured her. “I meant with this place. What should I be doing now that it’s opened and functioning? Should I be spending everyday here, should I just leave it alone, should I only come here if there’s a problem...I don’t know. I don’t know what I should do. What will be the most helpful thing?”

“Honestly, darling, I am not sure,” she said, and Harry would be lying if he didn’t feel his heart skip a beat at how casually she slipped in the term of endearment. “What do you feel like doing?”

“I don’t want to stay away completely,” he said, stating the one option that was unthinkable to him. “I definitely want to be here if there’s trouble or they need help in some way.”

“Those things sound feasible to me,” she said. “I assume you’d want to be involved and keep an eye on how things are going besides that too.” He gave a nod, and she took a long sip of tea before speaking. “You could set aside a day,” she suggested. “Like you’re setting aside Sunday for Teddy and the swimming lessons, and Tuesday afternoon for Ivanna, Saturday could be a day you spend here.”

He perked up with interest at that. “I could see Teddy on Saturday as well, then,” he said, already seeing the upside of it. “Yeah, that could work. If I’m around, I can see if there’s anything I can help with, and if there isn’t, I could always use more time with Teddy.” He grinned brightly at her. “Thanks, Daphne.”

“You’re very welcome,” she said, smiling back.

They heard a throat clearing behind them, and Harry turned around quickly, noticing Mrs. Weasley walk into the kitchen.

“Oh, Mrs. Weasley,” said Harry, as he stood up. “We didn’t hear you come in. Is everything alright?”

“It’s fine, dear,” she said, with a small smile. “I was just coming in to check on the dinner preparations before going back to the Burrow.” She frowned slightly as she looked him over. “You still look exhausted. Should I get you something to eat?”

“No, Daphne already made sure I ate,” he said.

“Well, that’s nice,” she said, though her smile became decidedly fixed. “But I’m sure you don’t have to bother your lawyer about your health, dear.”

“I don’t mind,” said Daphne, and he chanced a quick look back and saw that her face was pulled back into a neutral mask that he remembered her wearing at Hogwarts. “If you’ll excuse me, I will see if Belinda or Andromeda need any help.”

Without waiting for either of them to respond, she gave a quick nod and left. He almost called out after her to make sure they were returning to Potter Hall together for dinner, but something made him realise it would be better if he didn’t broadcast that.
“You do look tired,” said Mrs. Weasley, as if there had been no interruption. “Why don’t you stop by the Burrow for dinner? I’m sure Ginny would love to see you again.”

He seriously doubted that, but he saw the tired lines of Mrs. Weasley’s face, and found it hard to say that out loud. “I think I’ll just go home and sleep,” he said, instead. “But thank you, anyway, for inviting me.”

“On Sunday then,” she insisted. “A brunch, like before.”

“Oh, Daphne teaches Teddy and I to swim on Sundays,” he said, before he could stop himself.

“I see,” said Mrs. Weasley. “You seem awfully close to Daphne, Harry dear.”

“We’re friends,” he said, wishing he hadn’t brought her up.

“I understand that, dear,” said Mrs. Weasley, though she didn’t sound like she did. “But you mustn’t rely on her for everything. I’m sure Bill or Charlie could help teach you how to swim.”

“I’m sure they could, but Daphne offered and I accepted,” he said, starting to get annoyed. He knew it came from a place of concern, but he was tired of having his association with Daphne questioned, especially when she had done nothing to warrant the suspicion apart from being a Slytherin pureblood. In fact, none of what he had accomplished would have been possible without her help, but no one seemed to be willing to see that.

Mrs. Weasley likely sensed his annoyance, because she sighed deeply. “I just want you to be careful, dear,” she said. “I know a thing or two about the world...and about women. You have to watch what you accept when she offers something.”

Harry bit his tongue and gave a nod. “Of course, Mrs. Weasley,” he said. “Thank you.”

She nodded, seemingly satisfied that her point had been made. As she went on to speak to the house elves about dinner, Harry left the kitchen, getting angrier with every step. He would never lose his temper at Mrs. Weasley, would never rebuff her concerns, but that didn’t mean he wasn’t furious at her for her words. The implication that Daphne would...trap him into something or cheat him out of money or titles, or dose him into a marriage...it was preposterous and baseless. It was entirely uncalled for, and as he marched towards the foyer, he stopped short when the fireplace flared and two people stepped out.

His surprise at their appearance overrode his anger momentarily. “Fleur? Hermione? What are you doing here?” he asked, as he approached them.

“Oh, hello, Harry,” smiled Hermione, as Fleur waved. “I thought I should stop by here today.”

“And I came to give Daphne an update,” said Fleur. “Where is she?”

“In Belinda’s office, probably,” he said, pointing it out to her.

Fleur smiled and left towards it. Harry turned back to Hermione and smiled. “You want a tour?” he asked.

“Maybe some other time,” she said. “You look exhausted.”

“I’ve been told,” he nodded, as they took a seat in a quiet corner of the foyer and cast a charm for privacy.
“So, what’s wrong?” she asked.

He looked shocked, but then he supposed he shouldn’t have. Hermione knew him better than most people. “It’s nothing,” he said, and when she gave him a disbelieving look, he chuckled without humour. “Mrs. Weasley, er, she...said something...about Daphne...”

“Oh, and I can guess what it was,” said Hermione, rolling her eyes. “That she’s a gold digger out to get you and you should stay away and come and have dinner with Ginny instead.” Harry just gaped at her in shock, and Hermione laughed a little. “What? I find your surprise insulting.”

“That was too close to the truth,” he said, still reeling. “Have you been dabbling in Divination?”

“That is just uncalled for,” she said, making a disgusted face. He laughed, and she joined in a moment later. “Honestly, Harry, it isn’t that hard to imagine. Did you lose your temper?”

“No,” he said. “I couldn’t just go off on her like I did with Ron.”

“I know, and it’s good that you didn’t,” said Hermione, sympathetically. “I’m sure she means well, but Mrs. Weasley is protective of you, just like she is of all her children.”

“I know,” he said. “She treated you horribly back in fourth year and then Fleur before our sixth.”

“Yes,” said Hermione. “There is a certain tendency, particularly when it comes to women who grow close to people that she thinks are hers to worry about and fuss over. Getting angry is understandable, justifiable even, but you can’t let it affect you so much.”

“I just don’t understand her anger at Daphne when she barely even met her before today,” he said. “And Daphne has done nothing to warrant this.”

Hermione looked amused. “So it isn’t the interference bothering you as much as the implied insult to Daphne?” she asked. Harry went red, and Hermione’s eyes grew mischievous. “I knew it!” she said. “I knew it. You like her.”

“I don’t know what you mean,” he said, trying and failing to lie.

“Sure you don’t,” said Hermione, knowingly. “Have you told her?”

“No, not exactly,” he admitted. “We...said we wanted to try. But Ginny and I only broke up recently...and I don’t know. I don’t want to rush into things, Hermione.”

Hermione’s eyes melted in understanding. “Oh, I understand, Harry,” she said, and then slapped his shoulder. “I understand that you’re making excuses.”

“Ow!” he said, rubbing his shoulder even though it had been just a light tap. “I’m not making excuses. It’s the truth.”

“Oh-huh, sure,” said Hermione, disbelievingly. “You said ‘we’ wanted to try. So you two have talked about this.”

“We have and we said we would wait until we’re both ready,” he said.

“Hmm, well that’s better, I suppose,” she said. “You like her, don’t you?”

“I do,” he admitted, properly for the first time. Even to himself.

“And she likes you?” asked Hermione.
“I think so,” he said. “I don’t want to speak for her,” he added defensively, when Hermione gave him an exasperated look.

“Then that’s fine,” said Hermione. “Though I think it is rather pointless to wait if you both like one another.” She gave him a contemplative look. “You said you’d wait until you’re ready. What does that mean to you? Being ready, I mean.”

Harry stared at her, unable to formulate a response. “I-I’m not sure,” he said, finally.

“Then figure it out,” she said, sternly. “Otherwise, you’re just making an excuse and stringing Daphne along because of your lack of decisiveness.”

“I just...I don’t want things to end up like they did with Ginny,” he said.

“That won’t happen,” said Hermione, like there was never any doubt. “You and Daphne are nothing like you and Ginny were. Ginny knew very little about you and she was happy with you in the same way one lives out a fantasy with a prince. The only things you related on was Quidditch and having a part of Voldemort’s soul. That’s not a good foundation for a relationship, Harry, and you both realised that once all that was left was Quidditch. You both knew it wasn’t enough.”

“Yeah,” he said, quietly. “Yeah, I know what you mean. I can talk to Daphne. Hermione. I mean, really talk to her. And she can talk to me. And sometimes, we don’t talk at all.” When Hermione narrowed her eyes, he held his hands up defensively. “Not like that,” he clarified. “We haven’t...it’s not like that.”

“That’s good, at least,” said Hermione. “You and Ginny, hell even Ron and I, jumped to the beat of the hormones far more quickly than we should have.” She shook her head and focused her attention back on him. “You and Daphne have a good foundation, Harry. You trust each other, you can open up to one another, and I don’t know about her, but I know you find her attractive. Those are all good starting points that tell me you are ready for this.”

“But there’s so much more,” he protested. “I haven’t even told her the full story yet. We barely scratched the surface of the Triwizard tournament.”

“And you think you need to tell her everything before you begin a relationship?” she asked.

“Yes, I do,” he said. “She should know what she’s getting into.”

“Oh, Harry,” sighed Hermione.

“Hermione, I couldn’t bear it if...after all this, she didn’t want anything to do with me,” he confessed.

“That won’t happen,” said Hermione, even as he shook his head. “Daphne wouldn’t turn away from you if she learned about everything.”

“You don’t know that,” he said, though he couldn’t help but remember that Daphne had promised him essentially the same thing.

“You’re right,” she said. “But if she did walk away from you because of that stuff, then she never deserved you in the first place.” She sighed and gave him a comforting smile. “Daphne isn’t the sort of person to walk away, and you know it.”

“I do,” he said. “She told me.”

“Then what are we arguing about?” asked Hermione, throwing her hands up in exasperation. “What
“Is it that you’re worried about?”

“I don’t know, Hermione,” he said. “I feel like a mess.”

“Harry, we are all a mess,” she argued back. “And that’s fine. You don’t have to wait until you’re no longer a mess to pursue Daphne. That’s ridiculous. Did it ever occur to you that being with her would help the process along? That having her support as a partner, a proper partner, would help you in feeling less like a mess?” He looked at her blankly and she patted his shoulder like he was a bit slow. “Of course, you didn’t.”

He sighed as he thought about her words. “Alright,” he said. “Thanks, Hermione. I’ll think about it.”

“Hopefully, you do more than think about it,” said Hermione, but seemed to accept it.

Daphne and Fleur walked out into the foyer together, so Harry cancelled the privacy spell and he and Hermione approached them.

“Hi, everything alright?” asked Harry.

“Yes,” said Daphne, and her expression was calm and no longer the neutral mask that it had been before. “Fleur just stopped by to let us know the French government wrote back. The paperwork for the winter resort is through.”

“That’s amazing,” said Harry.

“It is,” beamed Fleur. “We are beginning renovations from next week. There isn’t too much fixing up to do since it is a well-kept estate already, but there are some minor modifications needed to make it into a proper holiday resort.”

“Sounds wonderful, congratulations,” said Hermione, smiling at them. “Do you need to go back to work now?”

“I’m done for the day,” said Fleur. “Bill’s expecting me for dinner.”

“I still have some work back at the office,” said Daphne, and looked at Harry. “I also promised Astoria dinner tonight. Sorry.”

“No, it’s alright,” he said, still a little disappointed.

“Guess it’s you and me,” said Hermione, giving him a smile. “Let’s get a drink and you can help me edit my next book club article.”

Harry shrugged his acceptance. “Sounds like a plan.”

With a last proud and wistful look at the Lily Potter Home, Harry took his leave for the day.
20th July, 1998

When Harry came down to breakfast on Monday morning, there was a small pile of letters waiting for him along with his food. Usually, all his mail went to the Potter Foundation, so he was surprised when he saw the stack and decided to deal with that before eating.

The first letter was from Belinda, giving him an update about how the orphanage was running. He hadn’t been able to spend Saturday at the Lily Potter Home since the GSC had met up to discuss a whole lot of pending matters, including but not limited to, the winter resort. Sunday would usually have meant a swimming lesson, but Blaise’s mother arrived in England and Daphne was invited to lunch, which she didn’t wish to miss, so Harry and Teddy had spent time together at the Potter Hall instead.

Belinda’s letter detailed that the older children had taken to the new surroundings quickly. Even some of the younger ones, especially after being reunited with siblings and such. There were a few who were still struggling, and the unfamiliar surroundings and people would take some getting used to. Healer Lim had examined the newly admitted children and some of them would need a few nutrition potions to get back on track, but apart from that, things were slowly finding their groove and no major mishaps had occurred.

Harry set it aside, making up his mind to reply and confirm his attendance for next Saturday.

The second letter was from Alexander Macdougal, with some discussion about the pending reform over the guilds. It was a thinly veiled attempt to make sure that Harry would be supporting it in the session two days from now.

The third was from Viktor Krum, confirming that he’d be coming to England on the evening of 30th of July, and staying at a private hotel in Dorset. Harry made a mental note to give a heads up to Neville and Isaiah regarding the matter.

The final letter was from the Wizarding Examination Authority. Harry’s eyes went wide and he tore open the letter immediately, knowing they were his NEWT results.

NASTILY EXHAUSTING WIZARDING TEST RESULTS

Passing Grades
Outstanding (O); Exceeds Expectations (E); Acceptable (A)

Failing Grades
Poor (P); Dreadful (D); Troll (T)

HARRY JAMES POTTER has achieved:

Charms - E
Defence Against the Dark Arts - O
Herbology - E
Potions - O
Considering he’d had maybe three days of studying after a harrowing year of war, Harry figured this was absolutely the best he could have done. He did wonder if Severus Snape was rolling in his grave at Harry getting an O in both Potions and DADA, but decided he didn’t care, as he let out a whoop and put the letter in his pocket.

Seeing the delicious breakfast laid out in front of him, he started eating with gusto, his good mood making the food taste better. He was halfway done, when the fireplace flared and Daphne walked in.

“Good morning,” he said, surprised. She rarely came over before work, but he was happy to see her since he hadn’t the day before.

“And to you, as well,” she said, taking a seat at the table. “Sorry for calling in early, but we have a busy day ahead and I wanted a chance to talk beforehand.”

“Sure,” he said. “Have you eaten yet?”

“I have, though I wouldn’t mind a cup of coffee, Minnie,” she said, addressing the little elf, who beamed at her and got to work.

“How did you do on NEWTs?” he asked.

“Quite well,” she said, passing him a piece of parchment. Four Outstandings and one Exceeds Expectations in DADA, he noted with an impressed nod.

“You?” she asked, and he handed her his letter, which she read with a pleased smile. “Congratulations, Harry.”

“And to you,” he said, returning her letter as she did the same.

“How did you do on NEWTs?” he asked.

“Update from Belinda,” he said. “Things seem fine. Alexander wants to know he still has my support. Oh, and Viktor’s coming to England on the evening of the 30th.”

“Hmm, topical,” she said, handing him the copy of that morning’s Prophet. “The Ministry has announced they are reinstating the Quidditch league.”

“Good timing,” he said, skimming the article. “Playoffs start in October.”

“Hopefully, Viktor Krum will only take one visit to convince,” she said, and then passed him a magazine. “I figured you wouldn’t have seen it yet even though it came out yesterday.”

He took it and grimaced at his own picture on the cover. His Witch Weekly interview had come out yesterday but he hadn’t seen the cover page that had him looking like one of those daft pretty boys like McLaggen.
“Whose idea was it to ditch the glasses?” asked Daphne, slightly amused at his revolted look.

“The photographer’s,” he scowled, tossing the magazine aside. “Apparently, the glasses were blocking those emerald orbs,” he added, in a bad Scottish accent.

Daphne laughed. “Well, the interview was printed fine,” she said. “Nothing that we didn’t inspect in the draft.”

“Good to know,” he said, finishing his breakfast. “Enough about me. How was your lunch yesterday?”

It was her turn to scowl. “Anita’s getting married in September,” she said. “In the Bahamas, this time.”

“Won’t Blaise be at Hogwarts?” he asked, confused.

“Yeah,” she said. “He stopped going after her third wedding.”

“Right,” he said, still unsure about how he was supposed to respond to that whole situation. He and Ivanna had discussed it briefly during his session and her advice had been surprisingly similar to Daphne’s. “Well, let’s change the topic again, shall we?”

“Yes, please,” she said. “Though we might get a move on. Newt’s expecting us in twenty minutes. You should write any replies you need to.”

“Yeah,” said Harry, as Annie brought him blank parchment, quill and ink. “Can I ask you something?” he asked, after a moment of quiet between them.

“Sure,” she said, proofreading his letter to Alexander. “This looks fine, by the way.”

He began to sign and seal it and waited until it was done to ask. “Were you...mad?” he asked, looking at her. “Back at the orphanage. When Mrs. Weasley said…”

“Ah,” she said, her confusion clearing. “Well, I suppose I was a little irked.”

“Are you still mad?” he asked.

“A little, but not as much,” she said. “Fleur and I spoke a little, so I know not to take it too personally.”

“I’m sorry,” he said.

“You don’t have to apologise,” she said, and sighed. “I’d rather have this conversation when we’re not running to make an appointment. Can we discuss this later?”

“In the evening then,” he said.

“Alright,” she agreed, with a small smile. “Shall we?”

He nodded, and the two of them left Potter Hall and arrived inside Newt’s office at the James Potter Institute for Magical Research. Newt looked up at them from his desk as they arrived and took off his glasses.

“Ah, good morning, Harry, Daphne,” he said, setting his quill down. “You’re right on time.”

“Good morning, Newt,” said Harry, as Daphne smiled. “Where are we meeting?”
“In the conference room, next door,” he said. “We have been using it for staff meetings.”

“Alright,” said Harry, as he and Daphne followed Newt who led them to the conference room.

There were already people sitting inside, and they murmured their greetings to Harry and Daphne as they entered and took a seat.

“Who are we missing?” asked Newt, as he sat at the head of the table.

“Just Emily,” said Morgan Cornfoot, with a heavy sigh.

As if on cue, the door burst open and a wildly-dressed young woman sauntered in with a bright grin on her face. Unlike the first time Harry and Daphne had met her, Emily Holsbury now had bright lavender hair with streaks of lime green and pink in it. When she saw their stunned look, she grinned brightly.

“I’m helping test a variation of the hair colour changing potion,” she said, bouncing over to her chair and sitting down.

“Seems like it’s working,” said Daphne, raising an eyebrow.

“No,” said Llewellyn Browning, one of the two Potions Masters at the institute. “Her hair was supposed to turn a light brown with blonde streaks. Turning a solid colour is easy, but combining different ones has not been so straightforward.”

“We’ll get there,” said Emily. “I have some ideas.”

“I’m sure,” said Newt, bringing everyone’s attention to the meeting. “But today’s meeting is to give Harry an update about how we have fared over the past two weeks. Who wants to start?”

“Before we do,” said Daphne. “Have there been any housekeeping issues? With the dorms or meals or anything?”

“Good point,” said Newt, and looked around at all the Masters employed by the institute, both at Iola Castle and Eustace Mansion. “Have there been?”

“No,” said Madam Quinton. “The house elves here are quite accommodating and efficient.”

“That’s good,” nodded Harry, as Daphne made a note of it.

“We would like to start, if that’s alright,” said Shirley Hemming, the Runes Mistress with a glance at fellow Runes Master Noah Desford.

“Certainly, Shirley, Noah, go ahead,” said Newt, encouragingly.

“When we took on employment at the institute, we were still finishing up some of the final warding work we were commissioned to do for Azkaban,” said Shirley. “As of last week, we are officially done with all of that. Since then, we have been brainstorming some ideas as to what we would like to do next, and I believe we have something that would benefit both the wizarding world and the institute.”

“Sounds promising,” said Daphne, with interest. “Can you elaborate?”

She nodded and glanced at Noah, who cleared his throat. “The Azkaban wards were complex,” said Noah. “We had to keep prisoners in, but we also had to keep them protected inside the walls. Additionally, we had to find means of letting the guards use their magic freely to do their jobs. A lot
of it was experimental, and the wards we have designed in pursuit of reaching those goals are quite new and an improvement on the old warding techniques.”

“What he means is that these wards surpass the ones currently used around people’s homes and other buildings,” said Shirley.

“How different are they?” asked Newt, sitting up.

“Much more advanced,” said Henryk Pankiewicz, in his thick Polish accent. “On Noah and Shirley’s request, I examined them and they are a very good breakthrough on combining runic wards to safeguard dwellings and premises.”

Noah and Shirley both preened at the praise levelled to them by the renowned Runes Master.

“We are confident that ordinary citizens can benefit with these new wards around their homes,” said Shirley. “One of the reasons why wards of this calibre couldn’t be put around homes is the sheer magical energy needed to cast and sustain such wards. Only older properties belonging to the noble and ancient families and places like Hogwarts could have protection measures of this sort.”

“Our methods eliminate the need for massive magical energy needed to hold up the wards,” said Noah. “They can still be dispelled, but because of the intricacies involved, it would take years and years, if that, to untangle the web of runes to bring down the wards.”

“And the two of you are the only ones capable of creating such wards?” asked Daphne, as she wrote down everything they were saying.

“No,” said Shirley. “Our current apprentices are equally good at it.”

“And there are three of them, right?” asked Daphne.

“Yes, Shirley has two and I have one, presently,” said Noah. “Although, I would expect to hear from Anthony Goldstein soon regarding his NEWT results. It was actually Cillian Montgomery, my current apprentice, who suggested that we could use these new wards as a way to benefit the institute and the citizens.”

“And what did young Mr. Montgomery come up with?” asked Newt, curiously.

“He suggested we market these wards as methods of protecting one’s home,” said Shirley. “We have a number of wards, and depending on the kind of protection the customer wants or needs, we charge a fee to erect those wards on their property.”

“It is a very good idea,” said Harry, and glanced at Daphne.

“Yes,” she said, with a nod. “If you could put together the kind of wards there are and the time needed to cast each of them, we have someone who could look at the business and financial aspects concerning them.”

“Certainly, we already have a list but we’ll add the casting time and the materials needed and send it along by tomorrow,” said Noah.

“If it is viable, we could have some premises in Diagon Alley and cater to customers who might be interested to have their homes protected with the new wards,” said Daphne. “Have these wards been patented yet?”

“Yes,” said Newt. “Fortunately, when Noah and Shirley worked on Azkaban, their contract was
issued under Minister Shacklebolt’s wartime power as Minister and there were no stipulations regarding the patents going to the Ministry.”

“I suppose they thought that it was obvious the Ministry would be getting them,” said Madam Quinton, shaking her head.

“So the patents are registered as…?” asked Harry.

“They’re registered under the James Potter Institute,” said Newt. “We put in an application and got it approved the minute Noah and Shirley were done with Azkaban.”

“Mittermeyer grumbled and complained, but approved it,” said Noah.

“In that case, we should proceed as planned,” said Daphne. “I have been meaning to bring this up, but I know someone who will be of use regarding the matters of patent and representing the institute in a legal sense. Her name is Pearl Proctor-Langley and she deals almost exclusively with patents and trademarks. I’ll be in touch regarding that soon.”

“Thank you,” nodded Newt. “I am happy to do it, but I would appreciate the help of an expert.”

“That’s all from us, I suppose,” said Shirley. “We are getting new apprentices, like Noah said, but that’s about it.”

“I have been continuing my research,” said Henryk. “We have made progress on the new runic dictionary, and I think it shall be ready to be published by the end of the year.”

“Alright,” said Newt, nodding in acknowledgement at the Runes experts. “Mr. Cornfoot, would you and your brother like to go next?”

“Thank you, sir,” said Morgan. “Well, this is based on something Harry mentioned when we were first brought on at the institute.”

“Is it about the mirrors?” asked Harry, sitting up with interest. He had mentioned the two-way mirrors that Sirius had given him and how they could be used as a handy tool for communicating. The Cornfoot brothers had agreed that it was much like a telephone that one could carry around in their pocket.

“Yes, it is,” said Matthew. “Like we previously talked about, the problem is that we could only enchant a pair of mirrors. It meant you can only talk to the person in possession of the mirror. If you wanted to talk to more people, you needed a different mirror.”

“We managed to eliminate that problem,” said Morgan. “We got Emily here to help us, as well as one of Madam Quinton’s Charms apprentices, and we found a way to enchant mirrors to connect to anyone who also has a similarly enchanted mirror, as long as you say their name.”

“And then we ran into a different problem,” said Emily, brightly.

“Which was?” asked Harry, confused.

“Think about it,” said Emily, peering at Harry. “If you have a mirror, anyone in the entire world who has one could say ‘Harry Potter’ and they will connect with you. I imagine that would get annoying very quickly.”

“Yes,” he said, at once. He thought about it for a moment. “If we think about telephones again, people can only call other people whose numbers they know.”
“That is exactly what I said!” said Emily, excitedly.

“She did, and that’s sort of how we decided on a solution,” said Morgan. “Mr. Pankiewicz lent us Wilhelmina, who is one of his apprentices, and this is what we designed.” He pulled out three hand mirrors and handed one of them to Harry and the other to Newt. “Ready?” he asked, and with a smile, looked at the mirror in his own hand and said, “Newt Scamander”. The mirror in Newt’s hand glowed briefly and Morgan’s face appeared in it.

“This works as it did before,” explained Matthew. “The mirrors are enchanted as a pair, so Morgan and Newt can speak to one another by just saying the other person’s name. Harry, if you could try calling Newt now.”

Morgan ended his connection and as Harry spoke Newt’s name, his face appeared in Newt’s mirror.

“As you can see, Newt can connect with Harry on the same mirror,” said Morgan. “Now, I’ll try calling Harry.” He did, but the mirror in Harry’s hand stayed an ordinary mirror. “I can’t call him, see. Because I don’t have his number, or more accurately, the information to call him.”

“But if Harry and Morgan were to take their respective mirrors and touch the backs of it like this,” said Matthew, as he demonstrated it. “Then, they will connect.” There was a brief purple glow as the backs of the two mirrors touched one another. “Now, try calling again.”

Morgan called Harry’s name, and the mirror in Harry’s hand lit up and showed Morgan’s face in it.

“That’s fascinating,” said Daphne, amazed. “How did you manage to do that?”

“Using runes,” said Emily. She plucked the mirror from Harry’s hand and showed the back of it to them. There was nothing there, but as she cast a spell, a brief rune lit up in silver on the back of the mirror. “Think of it like a phone number, though not really, because if one person has the number, they can call the other person without permission. But with the mirrors, both parties need to consent in order to communicate.”

“And once the mirrors are connected, they stay that way?” asked Daphne.

“Yes,” nodded Matthew. “Harry can still call either Newt or Morgan. Or any number of people, really.”

“A finite amount of people, still,” corrected Emily, as one of the other Arithmancers nodded.

“How many?” asked Harry.

“About two hundred,” said Emily.

“Two hundred different people?” asked Daphne, her eyes going wide. “That is incredible.”

“It is,” agreed Emily. “Well, it is a start, at the very least.”

“How long do they take to enchant?” asked Newt.

“About an hour, especially if we have someone who is good with Runes and Arithmancy helping out,” said Matthew.

“Can we spare anyone?” asked Newt, looking around the table.

“Well,” said Katja Petrov, one of the four Arithmancers at the institute and the one who had nodded along earlier at Emily’s words. “I am currently between jobs for Gringotts, so my team and I can
assist. It’s only the three of us, so you will have to make do.”

“Thanks,” nodded Morgan.

“I’ll ask Wilhelmina to assist you as well,” said Henryk. “She is my newest apprentice and she has expressed her wish to pursue the runic enchantment that she made on the mirrors as the subject of her Mastery.”

“Excellent,” said Newt, and turned to Harry and Daphne. “I expect you mean to turn this into a product that can be sold commercially.”

“Yes,” said Daphne. “How long will the patent take?”

“A couple of weeks, I should imagine,” said Newt, thoughtfully.

“Longer if Mittermeyer means to make our lives difficult,” said Morgan, rolling his eyes.

“Regardless,” said Newt, shooting him a reproachful look. “We can begin the process right away.”

“Thank you,” said Daphne. “We have been giving things a lot of thought and we did discuss the idea of having a shop that would sell and display inventions made by the institute. It will also be a good place to try out products and test out the responses and feedback, and perhaps even receive commissions for custom work.”

“Technomancy is brand new to some people in Britain,” nodded Harry, as everyone looked at Daphne with raised eyebrows. “If we hope to expand it, they need to see more of it. Words only go so far, both ours and those like Head Unspeakable Mittermeyer’s.”

“I think the surprise is because I’m not sure you realise what an enormous endeavour it would be to have a shop of the sort you are saying,” said Madam Quinton. “You’re not the first person who’s thought that commercialising inventions is just a matter of opening up a shop in Diagon Alley.”

“I realise that it might sound like we’re being overly ambitious, but we assure you, we aren’t the only ones working on this,” said Daphne. “We have been consulting with experts in business, finance, and even marketing and PR. And our reason for telling all of you is to ensure we also incorporate your feedback in this process.”

“And what of our research in the meantime?” asked Madam Quinton. “Should we expect that once there is an invention that seems commercially viable, we shall be expected to focus solely on manufacturing it?”

“Not at all,” said Daphne. “In fact, you might have already heard rumours of Elder Alexander Macdougal attempting to revive magical guilds in Britain.”

“And what does that have to do with us?” asked Katja, confused.

“No, no, I see her point,” nodded Madam Quinton. “If he succeeds, it would organise labour and help regulate the standards of products that we invent here at the institute. It will also encourage further research and expansion.” She looked at Harry and Daphne with a contemplative gleam in her eye. “Does it look favourable for Elder Macdougal?”

“It does,” nodded Harry. “His amendments are quite well-drafted.”

He nodded at Daphne, who reached into the folder in front of her to pass copies of the proposed amendments to everyone at the table.
“As you can see, he is pushing hard for standardising practices and ensuring the Ministry does not hoard patents or bind us in monopolising policies like before,” said Daphne.

“What about new fields like technomancy?” asked Morgan, reading through the amendments rapidly.

“The idea at present is to form a single magical guild,” said Harry, remembering the plan outlined by Alexander and Cynthia when they’d come over for dinner. “Perhaps it is more accurately called a trade association but they will keep calling it a guild for consistency.”

“And then is the plan to create offshoots of the guild as membership grows?” asked Madam Quinton.

“Yes,” said Daphne. “We are acutely aware that it won’t be sustainable to expect all of you, or even your apprentices, to keep being involved in the manufacturing process. It is only for the time being, until we have a proper labour force that can be trained and employed to manufacture products that the institute will develop.”

Madam Quinton nodded slowly. “Yes, that is certainly much more well thought out,” she said. “We won’t know if it will work, but I suppose we shall find out.” She looked at Harry and Daphne sharply and nodded. “You have my support, for what it’s worth.”

“Thank you,” said Harry, and turned to the Cornfoot brothers. “As for technomancy, I already have more ideas based on something Madam Macdougal mentioned.”

“What is it?” asked Matthew, curiously.

“She mentioned their daughter had to develop magical means of goldsmithing to stand up to the goblin standard that is set in the wizarding world,” he said. “However, it is largely spellwork and it is extremely delicate work which makes it not ideal. When I mentioned using technomancy, they were both astounded at my suggestion.”

“Not surprising,” said Morgan. “Goldsmithing and even things like gem-cutting are delicate work in the Muggle world as well, but the machinery they have developed is improving at a rapid pace.” He glanced at his brother. “I’m afraid we don’t know much about it, but we will begin looking into it.”

“The point is, even if technomancy cannot become an area of interest right away, it is an excellent means of supporting the more traditional trade practices in the meantime,” said Harry.

“We understand,” nodded Matthew. “Thank you.”

“If that’s all from the two of you, how about we hear from you, Sophia?” prompted Newt, looking at the Herbology Mistress.

“Oh, certainly,” said Sophia Sayre, with a smile. “Well, first of all, I’ll be getting a new apprentice soon…”

~

“Exciting article?” asked Draco, as he walked into the office.

Fleur looked up from her copy of Witch Weekly and smiled. “It’s Harry’s interview,” she said. “Parvati was complaining about the fanmail coming in since it was published, so I thought I should read it.”

“Anything of note?” he asked, taking a seat in a chair opposite her.
“A few questions about the orphanage and one about the institute,” she said. “The rest is about his love life and the type of witch he prefers.”

Draco rolled his eyes. “True to brand for the magazine,” he said. “Have you made any progress on the Sayre matter?”

Fleur set aside the magazine and handed him a stack of paperwork. “Yes,” she said. “They have a sound plan. I’m surprised there aren’t more stores like the one they want to open.”

“Most people prefer to brew their own potions;” he shrugged. “Those that can’t usually buy it from St. Mungo’s or commission a potioneer to do it. There are a few common potions available at the apothecary, but the Sayre brothers want a dedicated potion shop that sells common remedies and lets them have proper premises to take commissions for special order. It’s not a novel business idea, but the competition is slim and since Sophia Sayre is at the institute, we can set up a good supply line for their products and put us ahead of the competition.”

“I know,” said Fleur. “That’s why I said it was sound. I’ll prepare the details for Daphne, so she can draft a contract.”

“Sure,” he said.

“How was your visit to Prisma?” asked Fleur.

“A pain in the arse,” he complained. “There’s still a heavy Auror presence in the area but I got in. Pucey was right, the interior won’t need too much work.”

“We should still see if we can get Penelope Clearwater to design for us again,” said Fleur. “She can do a sample room, and then the house elves can emulate that for the rest of the hotel.”

“Not a bad idea,” he said. “I’ll speak to Davis and get it started.”

“This looks wonderful, Minnie,” praised Harry, as he saw the platters of hors d'oeuvres laid out on the table in the kitchen of Potter Hall. “You outdid yourself.”

“Thank you, Master,” grinned Minnie, pleased at the praise.

“It really does,” agreed Daphne, and smiled at Harry. “Let’s begin, shall we? I know you’ve been looking forward to this part the most.”

“Oh, absolutely,” he said. “Menu tasting is going to be my favourite part about any event we ever plan.”

Daphne shook her head with a smile, and Harry grinned as he moved to the first platter. “First up: caviar and creme fraîche tartlets,” she explained. “Bon appetit.”

They each took the tiny tartlet and ate it in one bite. “Oh,” said Harry. “That’s an interesting texture.”

“First time eating caviar?” she asked, handing him a glass of sparkling water to clear his palate.

“Yes,” he said, grimacing slightly. “Not sure what to make of it.”

“Is it the taste?” she asked. “Because this is quite good caviar, so it can be a little intense.”

“I don’t mind the taste,” he said. “And the creme fraîche keeps it from being overpowering. It just
feels weird to eat, that’s all.”

“You get used to it,” she said. “I’ll put it in the ‘maybe’ column.”

Harry tried another and now that he was expecting the texture, this one didn’t feel as weird to eat. “Alright,” he said. “Maybe for now.” He took another sip of the sparkling water and sighed. “I’m going to go and see Damocles Belby.”

She looked at him and gave a nod. “I expected you would,” she said. “Despite Newt saying he hasn’t responded to any correspondence about coming to the institute, I knew you wouldn’t let it go so easily.”

“It’s important,” he insisted. “He invented the Wolfsbane Potion, and it makes him the best authority we have on lycanthropy in Britain. With the research we uncovered at Eustace Mansion, we need his help if we want to work towards a cure.”

“I know,” she said. “It wouldn’t be like you to give up easily.”

He chuckled in agreement. “What’s next?” he asked, looking at the second platter.

“Snapper crudo with chilli and sesame,” she said.

He ate it and grinned. “Much better,” he said. “We definitely need this one.”

“You’re really fond of spicy food, aren’t you?” she asked, with a laugh.

He looked at her in surprise. “I guess,” he said. “I haven’t had a chance to eat much of it.”

“Remind me to feed you the spicy Spanish rice that Jolly makes,” she said. “You’ll love it.”

“Sounds delicious,” he said. “I haven’t really had rice that often.” He paused contemplatively, realising he’d seldom had anything besides traditional English foods. “Huh, I just realised there is a pattern here.”

Daphne scowled. “I am going to make sure you get to try all sorts of cuisines,” she said, firmly.

He felt a rush of affection for her, and he smiled before eating another piece of snapper. “Is it time to talk about what we didn’t discuss this morning?” he asked.

“Yeah, probably,” she said, and he noticed that she added the snapper hors d’oeuvres in the ‘yes’ column.

“I am really sorry,” he apologised again. “Mrs. Weasley is protective, like Fleur no doubt told you. But she’ll come around.”

Daphne chuckled a little. “You’re being very sweet, but Molly Weasley’s reaction is likely to be the norm when it comes to…” she paused and went a little pink. “When it comes to me, I guess.”

He wondered if she had been about to say ‘us’ instead of ‘me’, but tried not to get his hopes up too much. “That’s their problem,” he said, firmly.

“No, not really,” she sighed. “It kind of is our problem, too.”

She stared at him for a few long seconds, and nodded slowly. “Yeah,” she admitted, softly. “I do like you. I like you a lot.” Her face grew melancholic. “But you should care what everybody else thinks as well. No, listen to me,” she said, when he opened his mouth to protest. “In the eyes of the wizarding world, you are their Saviour. You started a charity, an orphanage, a magical research institute. You are a valued member of the Wizengamot. Even though they don’t know your connection to the GSC, you are still considered one of the most prominent people in wizarding society.” She exhaled heavily. “So, it matters. It matters when it comes to the person who will stand beside you.”

“Y-you don’t want that?” he asked, wondering if this would be like Ginny like all over again.

She laughed, without humour. “Harry, I am already doing that,” she said, and then her expression grew shy. “And I do want it.”

“Then what’s the problem?” he asked, his heart soaring with hope.

“The problem is that most people aren’t going to want to see someone like me as Lady Potter,” she said.

“Someone like you?” he asked. “What? Smart, kind and beautiful?”

She gaped at him, and they both went red at the same time. “Thanks,” she said, finally. “But I meant...a Slytherin pureblood girl who also happens to be your lawyer. I know the conclusion I would come to.”

“It doesn’t matter, though,” he said. “I don’t care what anyone else thinks.”

“And I am saying you should,” she argued. “What we have managed to do in this short period of time is nothing short of spectacular. Your place in society is important, and I’ll be honest, so is mine.”

“So, that’s it?” he demanded. “We give up before it even starts?”

“I’m not saying that,” she said, calmly. “I’m asking you if you’re sure you want this. Asking if you want...me, I suppose.” She held up a hand before he could answer immediately. “I know your feelings and you know mine, but this isn’t just about us. It’s everything we have built together so far and everything we still plan on building.”

“I know that,” he said. “And you promised to be by my side through it.”

“Yes, I did,” she admitted. “And I plan on keeping that promise, too. But I wasn’t counting on my feelings towards you developing in the way they did.” She approached him and placed her hand on his cheek gently. “I want you to be sure, because right now, we are walking a dangerous line. I am beginning to realise that I am a very all-or-nothing kind of person, so I can’t keep up with the uncertainty anymore.” She took a deep breath and stroked his cheek. “I need you to think about this, because this is the one time that you will make the decision and I will follow instead of the two of us deciding together.” She waited until he nodded to continue. “We can either keep things completely professional, or we commit to a relationship. And before you agree to either, remember what I said. It is still early enough that we can return to being professionals and only see one another at work or the Wizengamot. It will be something neither of us want, but it is something we will get used to in time, and who knows, one day we will both be married to different people and working together with ease.”

“And the other option?” he asked, knowing she was right but finding it painful just the same.
“The other option is that we begin dating,” she said, meeting his gaze. “Commit to one another, both personally and professionally. It would make us happy, but there will be wider repercussions to the whole thing. Our efforts might be jeopardised, our, well my, I suppose, reputation will be questioned.” She took a deep breath. “And Merlin forbid, if things don’t work out...it will be a lot worse in both personal and professional sense of things.”

He stared at her wordlessly, the gravity of her words sinking in painfully. She smiled sadly and leaned up on her tiptoes to kiss his cheek.

“Think about it,” she told him, pulling away. “Take your time and make your decision. Then, you can let me know. In the meantime, we will continue as we have.” She gave him a playfully stern look. “But don’t keep waiting me too long. Whatever decision you make, do it soon. The uncertainty is not fun.”

He nodded slowly. “Understood.”

~

22nd July, 1998

“...and with that, further discussion on the matter of Platinum Alley is no longer necessary,” said Abercrombie. “There has been no breach of authority, and the Ministry’s project shall proceed as planned.”

Kingsley nodded back in satisfaction, as there were a few mutters here and there, but the matter was settled.

“Minister Shacklebolt, shall we proceed with the Ministry’s proposal for how the Post-War Employment Act will be put into place?” prompted Abercrombie.

“Certainly,” said Kingsley, as he stood up. “Madam Kathleen Ulysses, the Head of the Ministry’s Department of Labour and Employment, will be discussing this.”

A stocky middle-aged witch in dull orange Ministry robes approached the podium and gave a bow. She placed round, wire-rimmed glasses at the tip of her nose and examined the documents in front of her before clearing her throat.

“Ladies and gentlemen of the Wizengamot,” she began. “As per the Wizengamot’s ruling, we have established the Office of Employment within our department. It will be staffed by four people, at present, and overseen by me personally. The Office shall begin handling cases from 9 am on the 3rd of August, 1998. Words to this effect shall also be published in the Daily Prophet from today to ensure that the public is made aware of it.” She flipped to the next parchment. “Applications from candidates looking for employment as well as employers looking for employees can be sent in from the 27th of July via owl post. They shall be contacted once the Office becomes operational on the 3rd of August.”

“And the process will be as discussed?” asked Robert, sharply.

“Yes,” said Kathleen, peering up at him. “One of the employees shall handle requests from employers while one of the others is in charge of the administrative duties. The remaining two and I shall sort through candidate applications, conduct interviews and make appropriate matches. If they qualify for residence at the Celine Abbott Boarding House, we shall help along that process as well by coordinating with Ms. Hannah Abbott.”

“Thank you, Madam Ulysses,” said Abercrombie. “Are there any other questions?”
No one spoke up, so he nodded at her to leave, which she did after a nod at the Wizengamot members. Harry glanced at Daphne, who gave him an encouraging smile.

“Minister Shacklebolt has a further announcement he wishes to make,” said Abercrombie.

“Thank you, Chief Warlock,” nodded Kingsley, as he stood up. “Ladies and gentlemen, we are almost to the three month anniversary of the Battle of Hogwarts which signified the end of the Second Blood War. Many people died valiantly on that day, and most of those who fought were students. Our Saviour, Elder Potter, was among those students as well.” Harry went red as several eyes turned to him, and a few even applauded. “As such, the Ministry shall honour the students who fought in the Battle of Hogwarts in a ceremony on July 31st to take place in the Ministry’s ballroom at 9 am. Invitations shall be sent out within the week, and I urge Wizengamot members to attend the ceremony and honour the brave students. Thank you.”

He sat back down, and there was scattered applause in the chamber. Harry just gave a nod of acknowledgment at Kingsley and wished he could disappear.

Abercrombie nodded and cleared his throat. “Next on the agenda, is the question of Ministry decree 118 and the motion brought to overturn it by Elder Macdougal,” he said, and Harry was relieved they were moving on.

“Thank you,” nodded Alexander curtly, as he stood up. “Members of the Wizengamot, I shall hope you have all had the opportunity to examine the legislation as well as the Ministry decree that overturned it. I ask that you join me in overturning decree 118 and pass the proposed amendments to the legislation. With it, we shall have a proper magical guild in Britain once more, so that we may encourage trade and craftsmanship like our ancestors did.” He glanced towards Kingsley and gave a small nod. “I also have assurance from Minister Shacklebolt that should this measure be a success, the premises of the guild shall be within the brand new Platinum Alley.”

“We really need someone in that damn office,” muttered Daphne, in irritation as a few people nodded with interest.

“Yeah,” Harry whispered back. Alexander had been furious the week before, but somehow he and Kingsley had buried the hatchet and come to a compromise, it seemed.

“Since this is not a new piece of legislation, we shall discuss the proposed amendments only,” said Abercrombie.

Alexander nodded and stood back up. “The first of these amendments concerns the guild itself,” he said. “We had a number of guilds prior to decree 118, but my proposal is to begin with a single magical guild, which is to be simply named ‘the Magical Guild of Great Britain’. With that, it shall be…”

~

“So it passed?” asked Parvati.

“It did,” nodded Daphne. “The Magical Guild of Great Britain. To be run by a committee that includes Cynthia Macdougal, Garrick Ollivander, Wael Shafiq, Saffron Sayre, Quyen Nguyen, Royce Burke and Avinash Sharma. Descendants of the old guild families who still kept up with their trade,” she added, when some of the people at the table looked confused.

“Wasn’t Cynthia Macdougal a Muggleborn?” asked Tracey.

“Cynthia isn’t a descendant but Alexander argued that her experience in the Muggle world should
grant her a place,” said Harry.

“There was some hubbub, but you’d be surprised how cautious some people are about not voicing anti-Muggleborn rhetoric these days,” said Daphne.

“So, the committee will be overseeing the guild?” prompted Fleur.

“Yes, they will be opening the doors on the 3rd of August as well,” said Daphne, as she looked at her notes. “They have been recruiting members from various trades and professions already, and have even sent invitations to expats. We won’t know the actual numbers but they have a solid enough membership to start.”

“How are they admitting members?” asked Adrian, curiously.

“By invitation, for now,” said Daphne. “Though it will be through redemption going forward, unless four or more committee members agree to extend an invitation.”

“Redemption?” asked Tracey, confused.

“It means they have to pay a fee and pass an interview to be admitted,” explained Draco. “It’s to see that they shall be valuable to the guild and that they won’t abscond with secrets or cheat the guild.”

“They have the assistance of the Department of Labour and Employment as well as the Department of International Magical Cooperation,” said Harry. “Right now, they are gathering as many members as they can, so once the guild opens at the beginning of August, the members can start finding apprentices.”

“And they will also coordinate with the Ministry and have a request board in the guild hall,” said Daphne. “It’s mostly to help people who may not qualify under the Ministry’s new Post-War Employment Act or those who just need short-term work or day labour.”

“Sounds fairly well done,” said Adrian. “Will the Celine Abbott Boarding House be extended to them as well?”

“No,” said Harry. “The Ministry did not get the trade secrets when they banned the guilds but they did not forget to confiscate their funds. The gold has been sitting in Ministry’s coffers and it will be handed back to the new guild per the new law.”

“Bet the Ministry fought that one hard,” muttered Draco.

“They would have, but Kingsley apparently decided to make amends by handing it over,” said Harry.

“That’s a wise political move,” said Adrian, impressed. “If he stays in good graces with the guild, his term as Minister will be a lot smoother.”

“Yes, and with those funds, the new guild hall shall have a boarding house of sorts as well,” said Daphne. “The good thing about this guild thing is that we don’t have to organise any of it. It has sort of taken on a life of its own, and it might be good to just let it.”

“Do we have someone on the inside?” asked Fleur, and glanced at her notes. “Oh, it would be Burke, I suppose.”

“Yes,” said Harry. “Adrian, could you-?”
“Consider it done,” said Adrian. “I’ll talk to Burke and make sure he passes along information regularly.”

“Good, though we really do need someone in the Ministry, particularly since Alexander Macdougal and the Minister have made up,” said Daphne.

“What about one of the Weasleys?” asked Parvati.

Harry shook his head. “Not likely,” he said. “They wouldn’t agree to it and I wouldn’t feel right asking either.”

“We could dig up dirt on someone and blackmail them,” suggested Tracey.

“No,” said Daphne, as Adrian shook his head. “Let’s not resort to that just yet.”

“I’ll continue my efforts,” said Adrian. “Honestly, the best bet would be someone from your Hogwarts class who will be joining the Ministry after getting their NEWTs this week. People you already know and trust to an extent, I guess.”

Harry considered that and nodded. “Let’s wait awhile then,” he said.

~

23rd July, 1998

Harry took a sip of his coffee and hummed quietly in delight. He had always been one for milk and sugar in his coffee, but ever since he had tried black coffee at Daphne’s behest back when he’d gone over to Greengrass Manor to talk about Anita Zabini, he had really begun to find the pleasure of a well-brewed cup of coffee without any additives.

“Another cup for you, dear?” asked Sylvia Fortescue, from the counter and Harry nodded with a small smile.

As a coffee pot floated over and topped up his cup once again, Harry checked his watch and sighed. He was waiting for Daphne, who was meeting with Pearl Proctor-Langley, the patent lawyer they were looking to hire to help Newt at the institute. She had promised to be done by four, which was still half an hour away but he’d been hoping she would be done early.

Their conversation from earlier in the week was still hanging over his head quite heavily. The worst part was that Daphne had made quite a few good points. Dating her at Hogwarts would have been hard enough, but now with the still-hostile attitude of most of the wizarding world towards Slytherin purebloods, things had grown a lot more complicated. The attitude was understandable, though he didn’t agree with lumping everyone into either column A or column B with no room for exceptions. It was something he’d hoped people would have grown out of by the time they were of age.

Having Daphne as Lady Potter, hell even as Harry Potter’s girlfriend, would bring a lot of unpleasant attention her way. As much as he didn’t care what people thought of him, he didn’t wish to put Daphne through all of that. Neither did he wish for any of their ventures to suffer because of them.

And yet, he knew deep down that he truly cared for Daphne. She was his partner and none of those ventures would have been anything more than a vague dream if it hadn’t been for her help. He wouldn’t have been able to embrace his lordship as completely as he had. Harry Potter wouldn’t have been a pillar of wizarding society; he would have likely stayed with the Aurors, married Ginny, and lived a life of quiet mediocrity without his ambitions ever taking shape.
He didn’t want that. No matter what, he didn’t want that life. He thought of the children at the Lily Potter Home, the researchers at the James Potter Institute, the business owners who had been helped by the Golden Snitch Collective, he even considered the elaborate Halloween event they had been planning. It was a life he and Daphne had brought into existence bit by bit. Each piece had been discussed and dissected, their thoughts and feelings laid bare out to one another as much as they could have for having known one another for such a short amount of time.

He liked Daphne. He liked the life they had built together. He wanted more. He wanted to know what kind of a life they would continue to build if they were to cross that line of uncertainty and embrace their partnership in its entirety.

“Harry?”

Harry looked up and blinked in surprise when he saw George Weasley looking at him in concern and confusion.

“George,” he said. “What are you doing here?”

“Grabbing an afternoon snack,” he said, holding up a paper bag with some kind of a Danish pastry inside it. “Can I sit?” he asked, indicating the seat opposite Harry in the booth by the door of Fortescue Cafe.

“Of course,” said Harry, giving him a quick smile. “Want some coffee?”

“Might as well,” he shrugged, and Harry nodded as he indicated that to Sylvia who grinned back and sent over a cup of coffee for George who unpacked his pastry.

“You alright?” asked George. “You were glaring at the table like it had bitten you.”

“Oh, right, sorry,” he said, quickly. “I was just thinking about something.” He cleared his throat and shook his head. “Er, how are you?”

“Tired, but what’s new about that, eh?” he asked, taking a long swig of his coffee and looking surprised at the taste. “This is really good.”

“Yeah,” agreed Harry. He quietly assessed George and realised he did look slightly better since the last time he’d seen him. His beard was still rough and scraggly but he seemed to be clean and well-dressed. “How’s the shop coming along?”

George’s lips curled up in a small smile. “Really well,” he said. “Ron’s done with fixing up the interior, and I have the catalogue decided, so we are starting to manufacture now. Hence, being tired. Enchanting takes a lot out of you.”

“You haven’t thought about getting someone to help?” asked Harry.

“There isn’t a lot of money I can spend right now,” said George. “I can pay wages, that’s about all, but advertising and all that will eat up more time and gold than I’m willing to spare.”

“You’ve heard about the guild, haven’t you?” asked Harry. “It’s been in the Prophet since last evening.”

“Oh, yeah, I did hear something,” said George. “Ron might have mentioned it, but I don’t think I was listening very attentively.”

Harry chuckled. “Well, you could always have them look for someone,” he suggested. “Or you
could apply to the Ministry to find someone to run the shop while you and Ron focus fully on making the products.”

“That’s not a terrible idea,” said George, nodding along as he thought out loud. “Ron’s fine, but I’d really like another developer now that…” He stopped and his face fell into deep sadness.

“Sorry,” said Harry, trying not to wince at his expression.

George seemed to give himself a shake before gulping down more of his coffee. “Anyway, thanks for the idea, Harry,” he said.

“Have you thought about talking to someone?” Harry blurted out quickly.

George stared at him. “What-?”

“I know, it sounds stupid,” he said, realising that he might as well tell George. “But I’ve heard it is helpful to talk to someone.”

“Harry, I’ve talked to someone, alright?” said George. “To Mum and Dad and Bill and Charlie and Percy and Ron and Ginny, and now, you.”

“I don’t mean it like that,” he said. “I’m sure they helped in some way, but maybe you should talk to someone new. Someone who is an impartial expert in all of this.”

“You mean a Mind Healer?” he asked, and snorted. “Charlie had been bugging me about it, but I’m not really interested. I’m surprised you are being so eager about it.”

Harry sighed. “I have been seeing one,” he confessed, softly.

George’s look of confusion turned to surprise. “Are you serious?” he asked.

“Yeah,” said Harry. “I don’t know if it will help or not, but…I’ve been seeing one. Regularly.”

“What is it like?” he asked, more curious now.

“Honestly, I have no idea,” he said, truthfully. “The Healer encourages me to talk and I do, sometimes. We’ve only done two proper sessions, so maybe I’ll know more as time goes on or something.” He shook his head. “I don’t know. I’ve learned to just go with it.”

“What a winning endorsement,” chuckled George, before growing serious. “You know, it is kind of nice to hear you being uncertain about this thing. Charlie seemed so adamant that I should talk to someone even when I wasn’t the only one mourning.”

“None of them lost a twin,” said Harry, gently.

“No, but they still lost a son and a brother,” said George. “If I need to talk to someone, so do they. I’ll only do it if everyone else agrees to it as well, and we can bloody stop walking around on eggshells with one another.” Harry didn’t know what he could say to that, so he drank his coffee. After a few moments of awkward silence, George sighed. “Sorry, Harry. It’s not your fault. I’ll think about it.”

Harry nodded and decided to drop the subject. The door to the cafe opened and a familiar witch walked in, and he called out instinctively.

“Angelina.”
Angelina Johnson, dark-skinned and beautiful, with hair cut in a professional bob, turned around at the sound of his voice and smiled. Her eyes moved over to George and she all but rushed over to their table.

“George, Harry, hello,” she greeted, without taking her eyes off George. “It’s been a while.”

Harry looked at George, who was avoiding her gaze, and kicked him under the table. “Oh, right, yes, it has been a while,” said George.

“Why don’t you join us?” suggested Harry.

“Are you sure?” asked Angelina, her smile dimming when George didn’t seem to want to look at her.

“Of course,” said Harry. “Right, George?” He kicked his shin again.

“Ow, yes,” said George. “Please do, Angie.” Angelina nodded and headed over to order at the counter. “What was that for?” demanded George, rubbing his shin.

“You were being rude,” said Harry, slightly amused. “What’s wrong? I thought you two got along.”

“We did. We do,” nodded George, and glanced over quickly to make sure she was at the counter before speaking again. “I, er, I did something. After the Battle of Hogwarts.”

“What did you do?” asked Harry, leaning forward since George had lowered his voice.

“I was in a state...for obvious reasons,” he admitted, squirming uncomfortably. “Angie, she er, you know she and Fred went to the Yule Ball, right?”

“Right,” said Harry, wondering where this was going.

“Well, after the ball, Angie and I actually started seeing each other,” said George. “Everyone thought it was still Fred and we played it up for laughs, but we knew. And Angie knew, of course. She is one of the few people who can...who could...tell us apart.”

“I didn’t know that,” said Harry, surprised to know that Angelina and George had been together for that long.

“Yeah, well, it didn’t last,” he said. “We got busy with the shop, Angie was looking after her family, and with the war, we just drifted apart. And then after the Battle, in that weird state of grief and shock, I er...I...”

“He proposed,” said Angelina, and Harry jumped as he realised that Angelina had returned with a milkshake. She set it down on the table and slid into a seat next to George.

George seemed to shrink in on himself. “Angie, I...I’m sorry,” he said. “It shouldn’t...I...”

“You’re right, it shouldn’t have happened,” she said, quietly. “Not like that, not at that moment.” She traced her fingernail along the trail of moisture on the outside of her milkshake glass absently. “But maybe...someday, if you want to ask again...my answer will be the same.” She smiled at him gently and George’s eyes grew wide as he met her gaze.

“You accepted?” asked Harry, more out of shock than anything.

They both jumped as if they had forgotten he was still there. Once they realised, they both blushed in embarrassment.
“Yeah,” said Angelina, finally. “I did accept.”

George let out a shaky breath and reached his hand towards Angelina, who clasped it for a brief moment before the two embraced one another shakily. Harry decided to give them some privacy and quickly made his escape, casting a quick privacy ward around them as they both began whispering quietly with tears in their eyes.

As he left the shop, he ran into Daphne as she was headed towards him. They both stopped and smiled at one another.

“How did it go?” he asked, as they walked back to Verdant together.

“It went well,” she said. “I introduced Pearl to Newt and she has agreed to take on the institute as a client.”

“That’s good news,” he said, his mind still partly on George and Angelina. He glanced at Daphne out of the corner of his eye, and realised that he had already come to a decision. The timing, though, had to be better. That much he had just learned. “Hey,” he began, an idea starting to take form. “Isn’t July 31st the next Sacred Day?”

She looked at him in surprise. “Yes, it’s Lammas,” she said.

“And what are the traditions for Lammas?” he asked, curiously.

“Quite similar to the summer solstice,” she said, as they reached Verdant and went inside her office. He watched her as she undid her light summer cloak and hung it up before sitting behind her desk. “We bake a lot of bread, eat apples and berries, and plant the seeds from the fruits we eat. It’s meant to spent by the side of water, so we usually have a picnic by the lake on our manor grounds.”

“No bonfire this time?” he asked, taking mental notes.

“No,” she said. “It’s usually considered a good time to hold competitions or attempt matchmaking, I’m afraid. The year and a day marriages were traditionally held on Lammas.”

“What are those?” he asked, momentarily forgetting his own plans.

She grinned and shook her head. “Couples commit to a marriage that shall last a year and a day. The following year on August 1st, they can make the marriage permanent or break up with no consequences to either party,” she explained. “However,” she added, with slight amusement. “It’s an old tradition and one that’s no longer practiced.”

He took a seat opposite her and met her gaze calmly. “Then it’s as good of a time as it can be,” he said.

Her amusement faded and she looked at him with a wary gaze. “Harry,” she said, cautiously. “What are you saying?”

“I have thought about what you said, and I am not making this decision lightly,” he said. “You made good points for both sides of the argument, so let’s commit to a year and a day. I’m not saying we should get married next week,” he added, when she looked alarmed. “I’m saying we should start dating. In secret, at first, if that would make you more comfortable. And in a year, or maybe even before, when we feel like we have reached a point where things can become either permanent or need to be broken off, we can make that choice.”

She stared at him for a long moment and sighed. “Oh, Harry,” she said. “I need you to be sure of this
and not commit to me on a whim.”

“I am sure,” he said, firmly. “Even before you told me of the year and a day marriage, I was already planning a way of asking you out that day since we’d likely celebrate the Sacred Day together.” He reached across the desk and took her hand, grateful when she let him do it, despite her wary expression. “There was no right decision to be made here, Daphne. Both options would have brought us grief, so if that is an inevitability, I’d rather choose the one where we get to have one another. We’ll deal with the challenges that the choice will bring us, and we’ll do it together.”

Daphne smiled a little and squeezed his hand. “I’ll set aside my carnelian jewellery then,” she said. His heart thumped in his chest. “Does that mean-?” he asked, hardly daring to hope.

She nodded. “A year and a day,” she said. “Together.”

Chapter End Notes

I’ll be taking a break next week since I’m going on a trip. Chapter 20 will come out the week after on the Monday of the 18th. Thanks!
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

I’m back! My trip was awesome but I got sick right as I got home, hence the delay. I’m doing better now, so here’s the newest chapter! Enjoy and let me know what you thought of it.

27 July, 1998

“Harry, are you sure about this?” asked Parvati, as she scribbled down the details on a spare piece of parchment.

“Very,” he told her. “I have to do this Parvati. You know I do.”

She pursed her lips but handed him the parchment. “That’s his last known address,” she said. “But who knows if he is still living there.”

“I have to try, at the very least,” said Harry, gathering his cloak and getting ready to leave. “I’ll be back in time for the end of the day meeting.”

“Is Daphne going with you?” asked Parvati.

“No, she’s meeting with Pearl in an hour to help sort out some stuff for Newt,” he said. “I’m doing this myself.”

“Good luck,” said Parvati, and he smiled back at her before leaving the Potter Foundation’s office and heading down to see Daphne. She was in her office, putting together documents in a folder, a small crease between her eyebrows as she did.

“Daph, I’m off to see Damocles Belby,” he said, popping into her office just for a moment.

She looked up and blinked. “Oh, right yes,” she said. “Parvati got you the address, didn’t she?”

“She did,” he said, waving the parchment at her.

“Good,” she smiled. “I hope it goes well. If there’s anyone who could talk him into it, it would be you.”

“Maybe, maybe not,” he said. “Adrian would be better at it, I suppose.”

She shook her head at once. “Not with something like this,” she said.

“I hope you’re right,” he murmured. He glanced around quickly and snuck inside her office, closing the door behind himself. She looked a little amused as he went up to her and placed a kiss on her cheek. “I’ll be back before the end of the day,” he whispered.

“Alright,” she agreed, with a sweet smile. The two of them smiled at one another like goofs, before Harry remembered he had an important appointment to make. He waved goodbye to her and went out into Diagon Alley so he could disapparate.
Since their agreement the week before, they were now tentatively dating though there was an unspoken agreement that they wouldn’t officially be dating until the Lammas celebrations, which Harry would be hosting at Potter Hall. With the Ministry ceremony in the morning, and then a birthday party in the afternoon at Grimmauld Place planned by Hermione, there wouldn’t be a big celebration in the evening for Lammas, but he and Daphne had agreed to set aside some time for just the two of them. In the meantime, they had been spending time together as before, and had grown comfortable exchanging proper hugs and a kiss on the cheek here and there.

It was a brand new territory for Harry. Both his relationships prior to this had been born in a moment of passion, sparked by a kiss that was completely unplanned. He didn’t know what Daphne’s prior dating experience was like, but it was definitely a first for him to progress at such a slow pace in a relationship. The day before during their swimming lesson, it had taken everything in him not to snog her several times.

Their sombre topic of conversation afterwards, which involved him telling her about his sixth year and learning of Voldemort’s past, had helped him focus a bit more, though he still hadn’t worked up the courage to talk about horcruxes. It was a secret not known to many people, and though he knew he could trust Daphne with it, he wasn’t sure if he wanted to open that depressing can of worms, especially now that he was so happy.

“Might as well speak to Ivanna tomorrow first,” he decided as he disapparated and arrived on a quiet end of the main street of the sleepy village of Wolfwood near Oxford. It was just past two in the afternoon and there weren’t many people about, and those that were didn’t pay much mind to Harry as he turned down a side street and walked to the address that Parvati had written down.

It was a small house at the end of the lane, the shabby exterior and peeling paint making it not the most appealing sight in the world. The little garden around it was surprisingly well-kept with trimmed flowering shrubs and a massive pear tree that cast a cool shade over the house. Harry opened the wrought iron gate, and walked up cautiously to the front door, making sure to keep an eye out for any defences that might react to his presence. Wizards were a paranoid lot, and he knew that from experience.

Surprisingly, no flying bins or particularly rigid wards attacked him as he reached the door and used the brass knocker to knock twice. The door opened a little after a few seconds had passed, and then opened wider as a young Black woman in her late twenties stared at him in shock.

“Mr. Potter?” she asked, surprised.

“Yes,” he said. “Pardon me, I was looking for Damocles Belby.”

“Of course, of course, come in,” she said, stepping aside to welcome him in. “He said he was expecting you but I thought he was just joking.”

“So, the letters have been coming through?” he asked, as he walked into the house. “Oh, and I didn’t get your name, sorry.”

“Right, my mistake,” she said, looking a little embarrassed. “I’m Suki Wickersham, Mr. Belby’s apprentice.” She shook his hand when he offered. “Yes, your letters have been coming through, but Mr. Belby is...well, you’ll see.” She led him inside a small but tidy sitting room and offered him a seat. “I’ll fetch him and make some tea.”

“Thank you, Ms. Wickersham,” smiled Harry.

“Just Suki is fine,” she said, before her smile dimmed. “Please be patient with him. His heart is in the
right place."

“I don’t need you to make excuses for me, Suki,” came a snappy voice from the other doorway that led out of the sitting room. Harry looked around Suki and saw an irate man in his late forties wearing a worn maroon dressing gown over shabby pyjamas.

“Mr. Belby, for Merlin’s sake, I asked you to be dressed,” said Suki, looking apologetically at Harry.

“I will dress however I please in my own home,” he said, making his way into the room and sitting down in an armchair near Harry.

As he got closer, Harry’s eyes went wide as he noticed the familiar wide gashes of barely healed over scars on Damocles Belby’s face, and he saw Parvati enough to recognise scratches made by werewolf claws.

“Fetch some tea, Suki,” barked Damocles, before narrowing his eyes at Harry. “Getting a good look at the scars, are you? At least, with you, I can return the favour.” He stared at Harry’s lightning bolt scar unabashedly, as Suki hurried off to make tea.

“How long ago were you attacked?” asked Harry.

“Getting right down to it, aren’t you?” snorted Damocles.

“You know how I got my scar so it’s only fair I get to know how you got yours,” he said, before he could stop himself.

For a moment, it looked like Damocles would explode at him but then he laughed sharply. “Fair enough,” he said. “I was attacked not long after I graduated Hogwarts. I wasn’t bitten.”

“Was it Greyback?” asked Harry.

Suki returned with a tray of tea, and Damocles shook his head. “No, not Greyback,” he said, grimacing at the name. “It was a young woman. She was the reason I began working on the Wolfsbane Potion.”

“Was it someone you knew?” asked Harry, his curiosity piqued now. He accepted his cup from Suki with a smile, before turning back to Damocles.

He sighed and drank a couple sips of his tea before answering. “No,” he said. “She was a stranger.” His eyes were far away, fixed on a distant memory, with infinite sadness. “She didn’t survive the encounter.”

“You had to defend yourself?” he asked, keeping his tone gentle and respectful.

“Not at all,” said Damocles, with a bitter chuckle. “She clawed her own neck out and killed herself.”

Harry felt his insides turn to ice at the visual those words provided.

“There I was, walking along on a full moon, when she attacked me out of nowhere,” said Damocles. “Clawed me up horribly, and she had me flat on my back without my wand and no chance to call for help. I thought that would be it. I would be turned or killed at any moment, but then she spoke.” He set his cup of tea aside and produced a silver flask from his dressing gown and took a long swig of something that Harry was almost certain was alcohol.

“What did she say?” asked Harry.
He took another swig. “I’m sorry,” he said, and looked at Harry with cold eyes. “That’s what she said. She apologised to me and then clawed her neck out.”

“That’s enough now,” said Suki, summoning his flask to her.

He made a sound of protest but at her stern look, he sighed and gave up. “There, now you know the story of my scars,” he said, standing up and wobbling a little. “If that’s all, I would like to go back to bed.”

“Mr. Belby,” said Suki, appalled. “You’re being rude.”

“No, he’s being rude,” snapped Damocles, pointing at Harry. “Who does he think is, coming into my house and asking me things he has no business asking about?”

“You’re right,” said Harry, standing up as well. “That was rather rude of me. I know I hate it when people stare at my scar, but I didn’t ask this of you out of idle curiosity. You’re not the first person in my life who has scars like that and worse still, there are some who didn’t escape with just scars.” Damocles stared at him, and Harry took a calming breath. “Please, just hear me out on this.”

“Do it, please, Mr. Belby,” said Suki.

Damocles looked at her and sighed reluctantly before sitting back down. “Well, what is it then?” he asked. “I am in no mood to join some institute. I have my own research to do.”

“Which you hardly ever work on,” said Suki, and ignored his sputters of annoyance. “He has been attempting to work on a cure for lycanthropy, but the Ministry cut his grant two years ago.”

“I don’t need money to do my work,” snapped Damocles, sulkily.

“Yes, you do,” she said. “You have been dipping into your royalties for paying my wages.”

“I am considering stopping your wages altogether,” he said, but Suki just rolled her eyes at him.

“Please, say what you came here to say, Mr. Potter,” she said, turning to Harry.

Harry cleared his throat. “I discovered some older research that was left unfinished,” he said. “It concerned a cure for lycanthropy.”

Suki looked interested but Damocles snorted unkindly. “And do you think that researcher was the only one in history to ever assume they had discovered the cure to lycanthropy?” he demanded. “It’s the territory every researcher heads off for a while when they have nothing else to do.”

“I realise that,” said Harry. “However, I showed the research to Newt Scamander and he believes if an expert like you were to continue working on it, a cure might not be out of the question.”

Damocles stared at him, and Harry could see that he was fighting his inherent stubbornness out of respect for Newt. It never stopped surprising Harry how much of an influence Newt had on people even remotely connected to the magical research community in Britain.

“Please, sir,” said Harry, striking while the iron was hot. “I have a godson whose father was a werewolf and we still aren’t sure if he inherited any abilities. The orphanage I started has a pair of twin girls who transform every full moon. They are only five, and the one thing that keeps them even remotely safe is the Wolfsbane Potion that you made.” He inhaled a little and looked at Damocles seriously. “I do believe that if there is anyone who may be able to discover a cure for lycanthropy, it would be you. Please consider coming to the institute and examining the research at least, before you
refuse.”

A long silence followed his plea, but Harry held Damocles’ gaze with sincerity.

“There is no harm in looking at the research,” said Suki, finally. “Is there, Mr. Belby?”

Damocles got a surly look on his face but he nodded once. “Tell Mr. Scamander I will stop by his office tomorrow,” he said, and pointed at Harry sternly. “I’m not promising anything, you hear me? I’m just looking at the research.”

“Of course,” said Harry. “I’ll be honest, sir, I don’t care if you join the institute or not. As long as a cure for lycanthropy is found, I’ll be happy.”

Damocles laughed sharply and held his hand out. “Fine,” he said.

Harry smiled and shook his hand. Damocles gave a nod and then left the sitting room, discreetly summoning his flask from where Suki had stashed it.

“That was practically civil for him,” said Suki, as they heard him trudge up the stairs out of sight. “I apologise for his manners, Mr. Potter.”

“Harry, please,” he said. “Thank you for your help and the tea, Suki.”

“Of course,” she smiled, and then lowered her voice. “He is a good man, Harry. He dedicated his life to helping werewolves, despite being attacked by one. His family practically disowned him when he began focusing on this area after his accident, so he doesn’t have many people he speaks to anymore. I keep the house and garden clean and make sure he eats and doesn’t drink too much, but it’s just the two of us.”

“Don’t you want to focus on your mastery?” asked Harry, curiously.

“Of course I do,” she said, with a sad smile. “My brother was bitten by Greyback and then killed by hunters when he attacked a village. The Wolfsbane Potion was invented only a year after he died, and all I could keep thinking was if he’d had that, he would have lived.”

“I’m so sorry,” said Harry.

“Thank you,” she said. “You know, most researchers at the time were coming up with better and more efficient ways to kill werewolves. They were only thinking of the people who were being attacked, not the werewolves themselves, but Mr. Belby was different.” Her smile grew fond. “He refused to take me on as an apprentice when I first approached him,” she told him. “I camped out on his front porch until he agreed. And I stayed ever since, because I believe in his abilities, but more than that, I believe in him as a person.” She held her hand out to Harry. “I’ll make sure he makes his appointment with Mr. Scamander and that he examines the research properly.”

Harry grasped her hand and shook it. “Thank you, Suki,” he said. “Thank you very much.”

~

Belinda looked up in shock when Harry burst into her office.

“I’m here, I’m here! What happened?” he asked, with a frantic expression on his face.

She took off her glasses and held up a hand. “Harry, calm down, nothing’s wrong,” she said.

He blinked in shock. “Parvati told me you wanted to see me as soon as possible,” he said, with a
confused expression on his face.

Belinda made a mental note to be less ominous in any messages she left for the poor young man in the future. “Harry, sit down, please,” she said. “It wasn’t anything bad. I just needed to give you an update and I should have been more specific. I’m sorry.”

“So, nothing’s wrong?” he asked, seemingly just to make sure.

“No,” she said.

“Alright, that’s good,” he said, sitting down. “Er, did something happen from the time I was here just two days ago?”

“Yes, the Hogwarts letters came today,” she said.

“Oh,” he said. “Yeah, that makes sense. The OWL and NEWT results came out last week and we’re towards the end of July.”

“Yes, Headmistress McGonagall seems to be on top of things,” said Belinda. “We have 37 children who will be going to Hogwarts in September, four of whom will be first years. Since the letters are here, Andromeda and I sat with Isaac and Naomi and we drew up a schedule so all of them can go to Diagon Alley in small groups to do their shopping.” She passed him a scroll of parchment. “We split them in groups of four or five, and Isaac and Naomi will be alternating taking them with Andromeda throughout this week.”

He nodded along to her words as he read the document. “Yeah, that sounds good,” he said. “Thank you for doing this.”

“Of course,” she said, easily. “I just wanted to give you a heads up and I couldn’t have brought it up when you were here on Saturday since the letters only came this morning.”

“Can I make a request?” he asked, looking up from the list. He pointed to the schedule on Wednesday, the day after the next one.

“Yes, the first years will be going along with Naomi and Andromeda,” she said. “What about it?”

“Could I go with them instead?” he asked.

“Certainly, but may I ask why?” she asked, more out of curiosity than anything.

He seemed to consider his response carefully. “The first time I...stepped into Diagon Alley, it was the most wonderful day of my life. Going to Hogwarts, starting that journey, was incredible,” he said. “But it was also lonely. Hagrid was lovely and he got me a present and helped me buy my things...but it was really alone.” He sighed. “I am not saying they will feel the same things that I did.”

“But you want to be there for them,” nodded Belinda, understandingly.

“Yes,” he admitted.

She smiled, respect and compassion rising for him. “I see,” she said. “Alright, I’ll let Andromeda know that you and Naomi will be taking the first years.”

Harry smiled back at her. “Thank you,” he said.

“No, dear,” said Belinda. “I should be thanking you.”
Mila Fontaine swung her legs absently as she sat out on the edge of the fountain, letting the sound of
the flowing water relax her. She was fifteen minutes early but she had been up since six that
morning, too excited to go back to sleep. It was a day she had been looking forward to since her
parents had told her what Hogwarts was, and now that her letter had finally come, they weren’t
around to see it. Her eyes burned with unshed tears but she inhaled shakily and refused to cry. She
was not a baby anymore. She was eleven and she was going to Hogwarts in September.

Trying to inhale made her lungs burn and she had to do the breathing exercises that Healer Lim had
taught her in order to not hyperventilate. The organ liquefying curse that she had been hit with had
impacted her lungs and even though they had been repaired, some of the damage had been
permanent. Her mother had taken the brunt of the attack and died instantly, but Mila had been lucky.
That’s what the Aurors who had transported her to St. Mungo’s had said. That she was lucky.

Lucky to survive with only a minor issue with breathing while both her parents had gurgled and died
choking on their own blood and liquefied organs.

“You’re frowning at the sky.”

She jumped a little and glared at the boy who had joined her at the edge of the fountain. Kai Braxton,
like her, was going to Hogwarts in September.

“I am frowning at you, not the sky,” she said.

“Whatsoever,” he shrugged, apparently unbothered, and it irritated her because that was Kai in a
 nutshell. He had been at the Orphan Wing longer than anyone, and there were rumours he had been
abandoned as an infant, but Mila had no idea if that was true and she’d never known anything to get
to him. “Your hair’s different.”

“One of the older girls, Violetta, did a Dutch braid for me,” she said, smiling a little at the memory.
Her dark, painfully straight hair was dull and boring, but the braid that Violetta Riley had put it in
made it look pretty for the first time in her life.

“That’s Sebastian’s older sister, huh?” asked Kai. “He hasn’t shut up about her.”

“Give him a break, they haven’t seen each other for a year,” defended Mila. “I think it’s sweet.” Kai
pretended to gag and she rolled her eyes. “Just because we have no one doesn’t mean we should be
mean to people who do.”

“I don’t need anyone,” said Kai, as the remaining two members of their group came out to join them.
Jolene Chambers was smiling brightly and chattering at a pace that would terrify anyone, while Luca
Williamson did his best to keep up.

“Oh, we are all here,” said Jolene, when she saw them. “Good morning.”

“Morning, Jolene, Luca,” said Mila.

“Good morning to you too, grumpy,” said Jolene, smiling at Kai. He rolled his eyes at her, but she
seemed unfazed. “I am so excited.”

“We all are,” said Luca, hastily and Mila smiled at him gratefully. Jolene was sweet but she could
talk for all of England.
“Where are Ms. Naomi and Ms. Andromeda, I wonder?” said Jolene, looking at the front door. “It’s almost nine.”

As if on cue, Naomi walked out towards them. “Good morning, you all made it,” she said. “We’ll be taking a portkey today, so let’s just wait a moment.”

“Where’s Ms. Andromeda?” asked Luca, curiously. “I thought she was supposed to come with us too.”

“You are getting a different chaperone,” she said, and Mila thought she smiled rather mysteriously.

“Oh, Merlin, I can’t wait,” said Kai, tone dripping with sarcasm.

“Shut it,” Mila told him.

“Now, now, settle down, you two,” said Naomi, calmly and with just a hint of firmness. Mila hadn’t seen Naomi lose her temper so far, but she knew that when her tone grew firm, even the most unruly of the older girls fell in line and obeyed her. She rather thought Isaac was a lot more timid in comparison, though the boys all seemed to like him well enough. “You will be respectful to your chaperone and listen to him as you would do to me.”

“Who is it?” asked Jolene, her eyes wide. “Is it Mr. Charlie?” she guessed, her cheeks going pink.

Mila didn’t blame her. More than a few of the girls had a crush on the ruggedly handsome groundskeeper, who was always cheerful and smiling.

“No, it’s not him,” said Naomi, as another man walked out of the main door. “Ah, here he is.”

Mila looked past Naomi and her eyes went wide. She heard both Luca and Jolene gasp, and even Kai looked stunned as Harry Potter walked over to them and smiled at Naomi.

“Sorry to keep you waiting,” he said. “I was getting the portkey ready.” He looked at all of them and smiled, holding up an empty crystal vial which began glowing blue. “Grab on.”

They did, and ten seconds later, the portkey pulled them away as they all landed at the entrance of Diagon Alley. Mila lost her footing as she suddenly grew lightheaded and almost fell but a strong arm held her up. She steadied herself and looked up at Harry Potter, who smiled kindly as he released her.

“Are you alright, Mila?” he asked.

Suddenly finding herself blushing, she could only just nod. He nodded back and then checked on Luca, who also looked a little worse for wear. Considering Luca also had his share of medical problems, Mila knew it was no surprise.

“Are we all doing fine?” asked Naomi. “Alright, good. We will begin with Gringotts then.”

“Why do we have to go to Gringotts?” muttered Kai.

“Because Mila and Luca need to get money from their vaults,” said Naomi, who had sharp hearing.

“What about us?” asked Jolene, looking at Kai nervously.

“Yours comes from the orphanage,” said Naomi. “Don’t worry. You will all be getting the same things.”
Jolene looked satisfied but Kai just had a sour look on his face. Mila shifted uncomfortably but thankfully, Harry said they should get a move on and began leading the way towards Gringotts.

“He’s so handsome,” gushed Jolene as she fell in step with Mila.

“Mr. Charlie?” asked Mila, confused.

“No, Harry Potter,” whispered Jolene. “Did you see the Witch Weekly article last week? Apparently, he’s single.”

“I’m sure he’s not into 11 year olds,” Mila whispered, glancing at his back to make sure they weren’t being overheard.

“We’ll be of age in six years,” protested Jolene.

“Good luck thinking Harry Potter will be single for that long,” muttered Kai.

“Shh,” said Mila, as Jolene looked annoyed at Kai.

“I think he’s so cool,” whispered Luca.

“Not you too,” said Kai.

“Kai, Jolene, let’s head off to get the textbooks while Harry takes Mila and Luca to Gringotts,” said Naomi.

“What about our books?” asked Luca.

“The textbooks are the same. We’ll get a set each for the two of you as well,” said Naomi. “We’ll circle back to the bookshop when we’re done if you want to browse for other things. Alright?”

Mila nodded, and waved goodbye to Jolene and Kai, as she and Luca went with Harry.

“Stay close, it’s fairly crowded,” said Harry, with a smile as they saw the snowy white building a few yards away.

“Why did you decide to come with us today?” asked Luca.

“Luca,” said Mila, warningly.

“No, it’s fine,” said Harry. “The four of you are going to Hogwarts for the first time. It’s special.”

Mila swallowed heavily as they climbed the steps of Gringotts. Harry slowed his pace, being considerate of both her and Luca, and she got the sudden urge to cry. She wanted her mum and dad. They should have been here to see this. To take her through the Alley. To hold her hand and make up different lies about how Sorting took place at Hogwarts.

“Mila, are you alright?” asked Luca, and she blinked and realised that tears were already streaming down her cheeks. She brushed them off quickly, but Harry had seen.

“You’re thinking of your parents,” he said, quietly. Before she could answer, he had led her and Luca deftly away to a quiet part of the stairs. “It’s alright. I did, too, when I did this. I think about them everyday.”

“I want them to be here,” sobbed Mila, finding it hard to stop, especially when she realised he had figured it out so easily. She was not a crier, not in front of others, at least, but it was like a dam had
broken. Even Luca looked shocked to see her sobbing uncontrollably.

“I know,” said Harry and handed her a clean handkerchief. She took it and wiped her face, but more tears continued to fall. “It’s alright, Mila. It will be alright.”

“D-do you stop missing them?” Luca asked Harry, looking like he was close to tears now as well.

“No, not really,” said Harry, and Mila thought it was rather kind that he had been blunt and honest rather than treating them like children. “But you find more people. You make friends, you find guardians. None of them will ever replace your parents, but they will make you feel not so alone anymore.”

That set Luca off as he began crying as well and Mila passed her handkerchief to him. Harry waited patiently, murmuring words of comfort as the two of them cried it out. Once their sobs had quietened, he cast a quick charm to clean them up, and gave a soft smile.

“Shall we?” he asked.

They nodded, and Harry led them into Gringotts. After a quick chat with a teller, one of the other goblins took them to their vaults, first Mila’s and then Luca’s. Harry helped them count out the decided amount into their money pouches, and thirty minutes later, they were back out into Diagon Alley once more.

Meeting up with Naomi, Kai and Jolene, they began their shopping, getting their robes, equipment and supplies in various shops around the Alley. Mila was eager to get a wand, but it was decided that wands would be left to the end. Around midday, they went to lunch at Fortescue Cafe, and Mila was delighted at the taste of strawberry milkshake.

“It’s my first time having it,” she defended, when the others giggled at the wide-eyed look on her face.

“You looked like a bug,” said Kai, and she glared at him. There was a bite to his teasing that usually wasn’t so obvious, but before she could ponder that, the rest of the table began making plans for the second half of their shopping trip.

Following lunch, they went to get their pets. Mila had initially wanted a cat, knowing there was no one really that she had to write to, but Harry had said they could write to anyone, including him, at the orphanage, so she decided on a dreamy-eyed horned owl that she named Swordstorm.

“That’s the stupidest name I’ve heard of,” complained Kai.

“Shove off, you’re being rude,” said Mila, admiring her owl who hooted at her. “What owl are you getting?”

“None of these,” he said.

“Oh, are you getting a cat then?” asked Mila. “You should have gone with Naomi, Luca and Jolene to the magical menagerie if you wanted a cat.”

“I don’t want a cat either,” he said, sulkily.

She raised an eyebrow at his attitude, but Harry came over to them with two bags of owl feed.

“Kai, you haven’t picked out yours yet?” asked Harry.
“He said he doesn’t want one,” said Mila, when Kai didn’t say anything.

“No one asked you, so shut up,” he snapped.

“What’s your problem?” she asked, irritated.

“My problem is that you’re all idiots and I’m done being around you,” he shouted, gathering the attention of some of the other people in the shop.

“Enough,” said Harry, and Mila’s angry response died on her tongue at the authority in his tone. He hadn’t raised his voice, in fact, it was the same quiet tone that it had been all day, but there had been a weight to it that not even Naomi could have managed. “Mila, let’s pay for your owl and wait for the others.”

Kai had gone quiet when Harry had spoken, and he didn’t protest as Harry paid for Swordstorm and they left Eeylops Owl Emporium.

“How about another round of milkshakes?” asked Harry, looking at the two of them. Without waiting for them to respond, he ushered them back to Fortescue Cafe. As they took their seats in a booth, he sent off a stag patronus.

“Just to inform Naomi where we are,” he said, when Mila looked curious. He glanced at Kai, who had crossed his arms and was glaring at the table. “Kai, what is bothering you?”

“Why do you care?” he demanded sulkily. “If you want to punish me for yelling in public, you can go ahead and do that. See if I care.”

“I don’t want to punish you,” said Harry. “I just asked what’s bothering you.”

Kai lifted his gaze from the table and glared at him. “Why are you doing this? Why do you care about any of us?” he demanded.

Harry looked genuinely confused at his question. “What do you mean?” he asked.

“We aren’t related to you, you’re not a Healer or something, so why do all of this?” demanded Kai, and Mila realised with shock that he sounded close to tears. “The orphanage, and taking us shopping, and buying us nice things. What are you playing at?”

“I’m not playing at anything,” said Harry, calmly. “I did all of this because I want to help. There is no secret agenda here, Kai.”

“Bullshit,” snapped Kai. “Is it like for publicity? Or to make money? ‘Cos some of us don’t have anything so you can’t take anything from us.”

Harry sighed and leaned his elbows on the table. “Kai,” he began in a gentle tone of voice. “Why are you so adamant about this? Did someone make you feel like there was anything at play other than helping you out?”

“No,” said Kai, sounding frustrated now. “No one did.”

“Then why?” asked Harry.

“Because she didn’t!” shouted Kai. No one in the cafe reacted and Mila realised that Harry must have put up privacy charms around them. She turned back to Kai, who now had tears streaming down his face, and she was so shocked that it took a moment to register his words.
“Who didn’t?” asked Harry, in that same gentle voice.

“My mum,” said Kai. “She...she left me. In that Orphan Wing, when I was nothing more than a baby. She left me and she ran away. She gave birth to me and tossed me aside like I was nothing, so why should a complete stranger give a shit?”

“Language,” said Mila, automatically, and Kai jumped as if he had forgotten that she was there. He wiped his face with his sleeves, avoiding her gaze.

“Kai,” said Harry, finally. “I am really sorry that happened to you. I doubt there are many who can understand what it is like to have parents only for them to leave us by choice.” He sighed deeply. “You’re not wrong to be suspicious and not trust me or anyone at the orphanage. But I want you to listen to me when I tell you that none of us want anything other than to provide a good home for all of you. You may not believe me,” he added, as Kai scoffed. “And I will understand if you don’t. But I hope you will, in time.” He smiled at him. “Until then, why don’t we go back and get you an owl? Even if you think we’re all out to get you, that’s no reason for you not to have a pet, is there?”

Kai opened and closed his mouth, unable to come up with a rebuttal. “Fine,” he said, at last. “But I want a cat.”

Harry chuckled and Mila couldn’t help but smile. “A cat it is,” he said. “Let’s take those milkshakes to go, shall we?”

Kai ended up choosing a fluffy white cat with one green and one blue eye. Both Jolene and Luca had cats as well; Jolene had a Siamese kitten while Luca got a half-blind ginger cat, saying she was a little broken just like him. Once the pets had been acquired, their final shop was Ollivanders to get wands.

Mila and Jolene went first with Harry, and Mila got a beautiful ash wand with a dragon heartstring from a Chinese fireball, and Jolene got a wand made of oak. The two of them waited outside with Naomi while Harry took the boys, and once all four of them had their wands, they did one last sweep of the Claw Bookshop to browse and buy any other books they wanted, besides their textbooks.

“This shop is so much more crowded than Flourish and Blotts,” said Jolene, as she and Mila looked at the poetry section. “Naomi said it’s ‘cos the prices over there are extravagant.”

“It’s really nice, especially for a new shop,” nodded Mila, having noticed that textbooks, even brand new ones, cost way less in there than over at Flourish and Blotts.

She ended up buying two fiction novels that looked interesting, and once their purchases were rung up, they reconvened outside in the Alley.

“That does it, I suppose,” said Naomi, with a quick glance at her list. All their shopping bags had been placed into a bottomless handbag that she was carrying, and Harry had lightened the cages that their pets were in so they could carry them around with ease. “Let’s go home.”

They had to wait a few minutes as Harry made another portkey, but they got back just after four.

“The house elves will bring your things to your room,” said Naomi. “And you know the rules for pets. They can stay in your room but you must feed them and take care of them responsibly.” She smiled at them. “Please thank Harry for chaperoning you.”

“Thank you, Harry,” they chorused, even Kai, though he looked away and did it half-heartedly.
“Off you go, then,” said Naomi.

Mila watched as both Jolene and Luca hugged Harry goodbye while Kai made his escape with barely a wave. She approached Harry as Luca pulled away and held out her hand shyly.

“Thank you,” she said. “For what you said at Gringotts.”

“Of course,” he nodded and shook her hand. “And I meant it, you know. Anytime you need to talk, we are all here for you.”

Mila smiled, feeling a certain warmth settle in her chest. She waved goodbye and returned to the East tower, feeling for the first time in a long time that she could breathe properly again.

~

“...and the stadium is back in shape,” Daphne was saying. “I expect it will be done by Friday.”

“That’s perfect, ‘cos Viktor arrives on Friday evening and I promised him a tour on Monday,” said Harry. “Isaiah also finalised the contract with Camille Gibson and her people, so they are officially signed on to Puddlemere United.”

“That’s wonderful,” smiled Fleur. “It means Viktor can meet everyone next Monday.”

“Yes, apart from the reserve seeker,” said Draco.

“I spoke to Viktor and he said he might know someone suitable,” said Harry. “Let’s take it one step at a time.” There were murmurs of agreement in the meeting room. “Is there anything else or should we call it? I’m rather exhausted.”

“Oh, yeah, you took the children shopping today,” said Parvati. “How was that?”

“A learning experience,” said Harry, fighting back a yawn.

“Alright, let’s call it a day,” said Daphne. “Good night.”

People returned the sentiment as everyone began to disperse. Harry stretched his arms and yawned loudly.

“You coming over?” he asked Daphne.

“Yes, but I’ll pop home for a bit,” she said. “I’ll see you in half an hour for dinner.”

She pressed a quick kiss to his cheek and took her leave, and he left not long after her. Returning to Potter Hall, he took a shower, his mind whirling with thoughts of his tumultuous day. He hadn’t had a chance to tell Daphne yet, but he was hoping to remedy that over dinner, because her perspective mattered most of all to him.

He expected her to be there when he got downstairs but the kitchen was empty. He checked the time and realised it had already been close to forty minutes, and it wasn’t like her to be late. Early, yes, but Daphne was not one to be late for no reason. Usually, he would have reasoned that she’d had something come up, but after a really emotionally exhausting day, he wasn’t thinking straight and his brain just kept coming up with one morbid scenario after another, until he was going through the fireplace to Greengrass Manor.

The living room was empty when he arrived, and he was about to call out when he heard running footsteps and saw Astoria rush in.
“Oh, thank Merlin, it’s you,” she said, when she saw him. “She won’t come out.”

“What?” he asked, as she started running towards the stairs and he had to jog to keep up with her.

“She’s locked herself in her reading room and refusing to come out,” said Astoria.

“What happened?” asked Harry, shocked.

“The grandbitch made a floo call,” said Astoria, irritated. “I was in the library so I missed most of it, but she said something to Daph, ‘cos she’s now shut up in the reading room.”

Harry quickened his pace and touched Astoria’s shoulder. “I’ll talk to her, Tori,” he said. “Could you just have some food and maybe some wine brought up to us?”

Astoria nodded. “You got it,” she said, and went back downstairs.

Harry nodded gratefully and made his way to the reading room. The door was closed and there was no answer when he knocked. He tried listening in but he was sure it was enchanted to prevent sound from escaping if the occupant chose to do so. He knocked again, insistently.

“Daph, it’s me,” he said. “Open the door, please.”

A long moment passed and he was about to draw his wand when the handle turned under his grip and the door swung open. He walked in cautiously, noting that the sconces had been dimmed but they brightened as he entered. Daphne was sitting in an armchair near the fireplace, and he was shocked to see that her eyes were rimmed red and she had clearly been crying.

“What happened?” he asked, closing the distance and kneeling in front of her.

She shook her head firmly instead of answering and as she did, a few strands of golden hair escaped her usually impeccable hairdo. He reached over to tuck her hair back but she caught his wrist with a quickness that shocked him.

“Careful,” she said, her voice a little hoarse. She released his wrist and tucked her hair back herself, sliding it under her silver pin delicately.


Instead of answering, she pulled out the pin from her hair and held it pinched between her thumb and forefinger like she was holding something dangerous.

“Tori had one too,” she said, her gaze on the pin instead of him. She pressed it and Harry was startled to see a sharp point shoot out of the pin before retracting slowly once she released the pressure. “I made them. After our father died.”

He reached out and slowly took her hand, the one that wasn’t holding the pin. “Is it poisoned?” he asked, knowing he was almost sure it was.

“Yes,” exhaled Daphne, heavily.

“And you made it to protect yourself,” he nodded.

She smiled bitterly. “Yes, but not in the way you are probably thinking,” she said. “The poison was meant for me and Tori.”

He stared at her in shock, unable to find words. “Would you really have…?” he asked, finally.
“To avoid the fate planned for me? Without hesitation,” she admitted. “I heard Theo was making a bid for me, though if rumours were to be believed, his father also wanted a chance. Either way the Greengrass fortune would have gone to the Nott family.”

Harry felt a wave of revulsion and he wished he had done more than just threaten Nott previously. Another thing occurred to him and he looked at Daphne with even more concern than before.

“You still wear it,” he said.

She sighed deeply. “Yes,” she said. “I can’t seem to stop. I feel...weak.”

“You’re not weak,” he retorted immediately. “Not in the slightest.”

Daphne chuckled bitterly. “Really?” she asked. “Because it feels like most days I am barely holding it together. And she saw right through that.” The sheer venom and emphasis when she mentioned the ‘she’ in question led Harry to wonder if she was talking about her grandmother.

“What did she say to you?” he asked.

Daphne rubbed her forehead as if staving off a headache. “It doesn’t matter,” she said. “I know she said most of it to get under my skin and I suppose she succeeded.” He looked at her imploringly and she sighed again. “She might have implied that I was incapable of being the head of the Greengrass family on my own. That I was running Verdant and the lordships of one of the Sacred Twenty Eight families of Britain into the ground over my pride and stubbornness over wanting to do it all alone when I am clearly in over my head.”

“And you believed her?” asked Harry, stunned. “Daph, she is dead wrong. You have to know that.”

“I didn’t believe all of it,” she protested. “Just...some of it.”

“Well, you should have believed none of it,” he said, sitting down in the armchair opposite hers. “Verdant is doing well, and no one knows that better than you and I do.” He squeezed the hand he was holding in comfort. “I can’t say much about the lordship because I am new to all of it, but people hold you in high regard. You’ve done nothing to disgrace the Greengrass name.”

Daphne smiled. “Oh, Harry,” she said. “You’re being very sweet.” Before he could look too confused, she clarified. “People don’t hold the Greengrass name in high regard, we are much more of an afterthought. Wealthy but distant, with ambiguous motives. That’s how Slytherin used to define me anyway. People who associate with us, do so out of necessity rather than genuine warmth or affection. And that’s fine,” she added, when he frowned. “It has suited us well, and kept us under the radar most of the time. But with the Dark Lord, it all changed. My mother was attacked as a warning, and my father was killed because we refused to budge from our corner and get with the program, one way or another. My grandmother suggested I was being no different, and without a proper lord or an heir, I would destroy the legacy of my family over my ego. The same way my parents did.”


Daphne stared at him and then burst into laughter. “That is pretty much what I said to her,” she said, and her brief moment of humour faded slowly. “It wasn’t so much what she said that bothered me. It’s been a variation of words she has been saying to me since I was a child and I have developed an immunity of sorts to them.”

“Then what made you so upset?” he asked, concerned.

“Isn’t it obvious?” she asked, with a weary smile. “I am no longer in the same corner of neutrality
that my family was. I chose a side, your side. The grandbitch doesn’t know that, but her words still made me think. I allied myself to you, publicly, as your lawyer. I allied my name and my family’s reputation.” She inhaled deeply and met his gaze. “And privately, I am choosing you. As much of a decision of yours it is to make about who Lady Potter ought to be, so is mine to choose who Lord Greengrass shall be.”

“And do you think you’re choosing wrong?” he asked.

“No,” she said. “Or more precisely, I don’t know. Neither of us do, not yet anyway. It is something that time will tell and until then we must operate on faith that we are right for one another in the way we have come to believe.”

“I do believe it,” he said. “Trust me, I have thought about this ever since we first had the conversation. And you’re right. It is absolutely your prerogative to choose who Lord Greengrass shall be, and I don’t envy the decision you have to make because I know it was a difficult decision for me as well to weigh what I want and what my duty is. All I know is that I was relieved when I finally got there.” He glanced at her other hand that still held the pin. “Are you still afraid of having to use it?”

She followed his gaze and nodded slowly. “Ever since my father died, I can’t seem to let go of it,” she said. “I tried and tried, but I felt vulnerable...exposed, without it.”

He smiled a little. “You know the mirror that Sirius gave me?” he asked, and she nodded curiously. “I broke it after he died, but I still kept the pieces.” He shrugged. “I was never quite sure why I did, it was just broken glass. Might as well have been junk. But when the time came, those shards helped me. It saved us in Malfoy Manor and later in the Forest of Dean.”

She frowned at him in concern and he remembered he was yet to tell her about the Horcruxes and what they’d been doing during the past year.

“I’ll explain later,” he said, in response to her look. “But my point is, I kept it. The broken glass. No reason for it, but it made me feel like...there was hope. Or a connection, at least.”

Daphne nodded slowly and held up the pin. “When I left for Hogwarts last September, my father advised me to keep my head down and protect Astoria,” she said. “When I came home for Yule, I could see how stressed out he was. He’d been asked numerous times to come before the Dark Lord and swear his allegiance. He had managed to make excuses and avoid it for some time, but he knew his time was running short.” Fresh tears began to gather in her eyes and Harry stood up, pulling her up with him and wrapped his arms around her tightly, tucking her head under his chin. “H-he gave me the pins. And the book with the instructions to make the poison. He never told me what to do with it...he didn’t have to. It was the only Yuletide present I received last year. A way to end my life. A way to end Astoria’s life.” Her body began to shake with sobs and Harry exhaled sharply, still holding her as she cried into his chest. “It was the last present my father gave me.”

Harry had no words, and he knew there would be nothing he could say that Daphne hadn’t already considered before.

“I am so sorry, Daph,” he said. “I am really sorry.”

“He did it to protect us, he didn’t want us to suffer,” she sobbed.

“I know, love, I know he did,” he said. “But it still hurts, doesn’t it?”

She nodded into his chest and sobbed harder. “I feel like a mess,” she managed to say between
“You are a mess,” he said, remembering what Hermione had said. “So am I, so is everyone else. And that’s alright, Daphne. You took on me and my mess when I showed up on your doorstep with an envelope full of unimaginable power and influence and you helped me make it into something meaningful. You are helping me change the world, Daphne, and agreeing to stand with me through all of it. So you get to be a mess as well, because you have fucking earned it as far as I am concerned.” She chuckled through her tears and he kissed the top of her head. “There is no one else I would rather have with me, mess or not. Nothing that bitch you call a grandmother, nor anything that happened in the past gets to change that. Everything that happened to us will always be there, but we get to choose how much of it affects us. Ivanna told me that, and I think that’s true here as well.” He pulled away slightly and cupped her face, slowly wiping her tears with his thumbs. “You can hold onto that pin. Wear it everyday if you want to. Just know that you are still capable of dealing with things, with or without it.”

“You put too much faith in me, Harry,” she said, though she gave a small, reluctant smile. “I am not as perfect as you think.”

“You’re not as much of a mess as you think you are, either,” he countered, easily. “And I don’t think you are perfect. I think you are amazing.”

“I think you are amazing as well,” she said, looking up at him.

He suppressed a gasp as they held each other’s gaze for a long moment before Daphne’s eyes fluttered shut and she tilted her head up towards him. Harry closed his eyes and leaned down, their noses brushing one another slightly as their lips drew closer.

Just before they could touch, a loud knock sounded in the room and they both jumped apart.

“Daph, Harry, is everything alright?” came Astoria’s voice from the other side of the door. “I brought the food and wine that Harry requested.”

Daphne glanced towards the door and sighed in annoyance. “Yes, everything is fine. Just leave the tray outside,” she said, and turned to Harry. “As much as I love my dear sister, she has the absolute worst timing.”

Harry was inclined to agree, but considering he’d been the one to tell Astoria to bring the food and wine, he felt it was partially his fault as well.

“All right, I’ll give you two some privacy,” said Astoria, and they heard her leave.

“Too late now,” muttered Daphne, and glanced at Harry sheepishly. “Sorry.”

“No, no, it’s fine,” he said. He was about to suggest they return right back to it, regardless of the interruption, but his stomach growled loudly which made Daphne laugh.

“Let’s see what’s for dinner, shall we?” said Daphne, and went to fetch the tray.

“Daph, are you sure you’re alright?” he asked, still wanting to make sure.

She returned with a tray laden with food and wine, and smiled at him. “Not completely, but I will be,” she said. She set the tray down on a table between the armchairs and held up the pin once again. “I don’t think I’m ready to let go of it yet, but I feel better about telling you.”

“That’s fine,” he said. “You should take your time with things.”
“I will,” she assured him. With a flick of her wand, her face was wiped clean and her hair arranged into a neat braid. She tucked the pin into the braid carefully and leaned forward and kissed his cheek. “Thank you, Harry. For letting me fall apart....and for everything you said.”

“Of course,” he said, with a smile. “Anytime, Daphne. It’s no less than what you’d do for me.”

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!