Attack of the Deranged Mutant Killer Monster Dark Lord

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Attack of the Deranged Mutant Killer Monster Dark Lord

by TheMM

Summary

Calvin's eleven years old - well, technically, but his shorts still reach his ankles - and not much has changed. Until the letter from Hogwarts, that is. *dramatic music* *sense of foreboding* *bloodcurdling screams echoing in the distance*
Chapter One - Not Sending Yourself Letters: A Guide

"Are you sure you didn't send this?" Calvin peered at his best friend accusingly.

Hobbes laid his arms out in front of him, paws up, as if to say 'nothing to hide here'. "Even if I had, you know I would've used cut-out letters from magazines, so that it couldn't be traced back to me."

Calvin nodded grudgingly. "And there's no cool skull icon where the stamp's supposed to be…" He trailed off as he turned the letter over in his hands. "In fact, there isn't anything where the stamp's supposed to be. It's addressed to my bedroom, too. Accurate."

Leaning over to get a better look, the tiger examined the front of the mysterious letter. "Gosh, I've never seen ink so shiny and…green, before. Who do you think would send you a letter, anyway?"

"What's that supposed to mean! Important people send me letters all the time - I just don't let you know about them because then you'd be jealous."


"Hey, wait a minute!" Calvin pointed at his furry friend, eyes narrowed. "You're the only one who'd know where my bedroom is that would send me a letter! You did send it!"

"So you admit that no one else would ever send you a letter, ha!"

"You mangy, flea-ridden-"

Hobbes gasped. "Oh you did not just-"

"-sorry excuse for a-"

"Oh you are in for it, buddy!"

"-friend," Calvin finished, glaring at Hobbes.

Hobbes stopped mid-lunge and furrowed his brow. "Oh, I guess that's all right." He folded his arms matter-of-factly. "It really wasn't me, though."

"Wait, what did you think I was going to say," Calvin asked, confusion written across his face in large, neon letters blinking fast enough to give anyone a seizure.

"Tiger."

"...You are a tiger."

"So you admit it, ha!" Calvin quickly turned to run as Hobbes' expression darkened. "Sorry excuse for a tiger, sorry excuse for a tiger," he sang as he rounded the corner and headed towards the stairs.

"Oh no you don't, you booger-brained scaredy cat!" Hobbes careened around the corner and leapt for Calvin, knocking him down the few stairs he'd since climbed. Their brawl quickly transformed into a cloud of sound effects and insults, with the occasional arm, leg, fist, paw, and tail protruding for a few seconds before being dragged back in.

"Help, I'm being mauled by a kitten!"

"You're one to talk, Mr. I-Might-Be-Eleven-But-My-Shorts-Still-Reach-My-Ankles!"

"Caterpillar butt!"

"THAT WAS ONCE!"

Just then, Calvin's mother poked her head through the nearest doorway, eyebrows drawn into a wide V. "Calvin, if I have to tell you one more time not to roughhouse inside…"

"But mom, it's called roughhouse, not roughyard! And it was this letter's fault - we were trying to figure out who sent it, and I thought it was Hobbes." Calvin uncrumpled the offending letter from his clenched fist, and halfheartedly smoothed it out a bit before handing it to his mother.

His mother took the letter, noticing the lack of both a stamp and a return address. "Calvin, I've told you before, if you're going to send yourself letters, you're going to get letters. Now go outside if you have to continue playing so loudly, I've got to finish preparing dinner." And with that, the notoriously skeptical Queen of the Narbogz placed the letter back in Calvin's hand and pivoted, heading back to the kitchen from whence she came.

"Typical Narbogz," Calvin muttered, plopping himself down on the bottom step of the staircase.

"It can only lead to their own downfall," Hobbes sympathized, joining Calvin on the steps. "Open it up already, I want to see who would actually send you a letter."

"Me too," the boy agreed excitedly, ripping apart the envelope like the wrapping paper of a Christmas present being opened way too early on Christmas morning. The paper inside was weird, less like regular paper and more...parchment-y. The same emerald green ink graced the surface, flowing cursive letters making it almost impossible to read. "Who even writes in cursive anymore? I haven't used it since third grade!"

"Maybe it's a third grader," Hobbes supplied. Calvin looked at him dubiously. The tiger shrugged. "Seems like the kind of prank you used to pull back then."

"Oh come on, my pranks were way more imaginative!" complained Calvin, slightly affronted by his friend's accusation.

Hobbes just smiled. "And involved way more water balloons, too." Calvin grinned, then turned back to the letter.

"Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry," he read out loud.

"This is one well-done prank, I'll say," Hobbes interjected. Calvin ignored him in favor of continuing to read.
"Headmaster: Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore (Order of Merlin, First Class, Grand Sorcerer, Chief Warlock, Supreme Mugwump, International Confederation of Wizards)." He stopped and took a much needed breath. "Wow, that is quite the title. Of course, I still prefer-"

Here Calvin cleared his throat and spread his arms out, sweeping across the space in front of him as if announcing a headline. "Calvin: Boy..." He paused dramatically. "...of Destiny. Just as impressive, and a lot easier to remember. I wouldn't mind being a chief of something, though." Calvin tapped his chin thoughtfully. "Being supreme sounds cool, too, but who wants to be in an order? And a class?" He shuddered. "I don't want to hear about class until after summer break - and preferably not even then. This guy does sound impressive though. I wonder what he did to get all the fancy titles. How do you become a master head? I mean, I'm pretty good at using my head, if only as a bumper when I fall down the stairs, which I haven't actually done in a while, come to think of it..." He looked at Hobbes, who had been oddly silent the entire time. "Are you okay, Hobbes?"

The full-grown tiger sat still for a moment longer, before slowly turning to the eleven-year-old boy sitting next to him on the stairs. He stared at him in silence for yet another moment, face twisted in confusion. Then he twitched and exploded in outrage. "What in the world is a Mugwump!?"

Calvin gave his patented shrug and answered, "Sounds like an enemy of the Narbogz. If so, I really wanna meet this guy!"

"Oh, that's okay then. What's the rest of the letter say?"

"Oh, right! Let see, Hogwarts, Brian, Confederation- ah, here we were:

Dear Calvin,

We are pleased to inform you that you have been accepted at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Please find enclosed a list of all necessary books and equipment.

Term begins on September 1st. A school representative will be by shortly to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Minerva McGonagall,

Deputy Headmistress." Calvin frowned. "What is it with the 'head' this and 'head' that - we get it, these people have heads!"

"Did you miss the part where you were invited to a school for wizards?" Hobbes asked incredulously.

"I was WHAT!?" Calvin did a picture-perfect double take and quickly grabbed the letter from where he'd set it down on the step, eyes zooming back and forth as he re-read it. Hobbes just leaned on his arm and sighed. "Hobbes!" yelled Calvin when he'd finished. "There's a school for Witchcraft and Wizardry! And they want me to come!"

"Heaven knows why," the amused tiger muttered, watching his friend's eyes keep on widening. "You'd they wouldn't want to equip the world's most deranged eleven-year-old with more tools of mayhem."

"I wonder if I'll have to do homework," Calvin speculated.

Hobbes plucked the letter from his friend's surprised fingers and looked it over. "Say, when did we
"Stop treating this like a prank and start actually believing that this is all for real?"

"Probably when we found out how many titles that Headmaster guy has."

"It is pretty impressive."

Calvin nodded in agreement. "Plus, when did something being absurd ever stop us from believing in it?" He grinned. "Man, magic, huh? Wonder what mom'll say. Bet she won't believe it."

"She still thinks you sent this letter to yourself," Hobbes pointed out.

"Right. Well, when this representative person comes to answer my questions, they can tell mom."

"Sounds like a plan. What do we do until then?"

Calvin gave a wide grin. "The same thing we do every time we know someone's coming, Hobbes."

The tiger smiled, his feline canines glinting in the artificial lighting of the house. "Water balloon time," he hissed mischievously.

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**AN: This was something I just needed to get out, as it was bugging me incessantly. I might write more, if this gets any reviews, and if those reviews tell me (not verbatim of course, but at least let me know in their own words) that this was received positively and said reviewers would like to read more of it. Thanks for reading!**

**[EDIT: This was originally two chapters, until I decided to combine them - so the second part is below, with its own author's notes]**

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*Splash*CRACK*

"Huh." Hobbes stared down from the bedroom window, watching the wet pavement in front of the door of the house as the water spread.

"Well that's never happened before," Calvin said curiously, studying the same section of wet pavement. There was no one in sight. Which was decidedly strange, as just a moment before there had been an oddly dressed woman with a pointy green wizard's had standing directly below them, about to knock on the front door. "Do you think we've killed her?"

"We? I didn't do anything, you were the one who threw a magic water balloon at her that apparently made her disappear," Hobbes said as if stating the obvious.

"Well standing by and watching would make it assisting a murderer, wouldn't it. And it was a regular water balloon, I swear!" The boy bit his bottom lip nervously. "Now how am I going to convince mom to let me go to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry?"

*CRACK-*"AHHH!" The two practically jumped out of their skin as the sound of a gunshot blasted into existence directly behind them. They whirled around, tripping over each other, sure they were being attacked by aliens.

"My goodness, boy," said the green-clad, pointy hat-wearing woman harshly in a thick Scottish accent. "I don't think I have ever seen such, such...such Gryffindorish action taken by a muggleborn on the first visit! Why, if term had already started, you would have lost your house a number of points already! Oh, I forgot to introduce myself - I am Professor McGonagall, a teacher at
"Why aren't you dripping wet?" asked Calvin, looking up at her. "And how'd you get inside my bedroom? And why did you disappear when the water balloon hit you? And how did you know where my bedroom was? And why didn't you put a skull on the letter, and how do I get cool green ink like that, and what kind of paper did you use, and why are you called a Headmistress and what is a Headmaster?"

The woman looked down at him with a kindly smile. "Magic, Mr. Calvin."

His eyes widened, and his expression was one of complete wonder and admiration - "Wait, that can't be the answer to all of the questions I asked," Calvin said confusedly, interrupting his own narration. "I mean, okay, you aren't wet because of magic, you got here by magic, you disappeared by magic, you knew where my bedroom was because of magic, maaybe magic is why you didn't put a skull on the letter though I doubt it, it's entirely reasonable to believe that I can get cool green ink by magic but I bet there are other ways too, there's a chance the paper was magic, if you are called Headmistress because of magic that's a weird title, and finally given that I know 'Headmaster' is one of the many, many titles of esteemed Mugwump Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore it would be unlikely that a Headmaster is 'magic' otherwise every wizard would have the same title." Calvin had been counting off on his fingers, and breathed a sigh of relief that he still had a thumb left and hadn't had to resort to using his toes, as he was wearing socks - and stopping in the middle of a quick-fire rant to take off one's socks just ruins the moment.

Professor McGonagall peered at him with a bemused expression, as if the situation was only slightly more absurd than what she was used to dealing with. "Are you quite finished yet, Mr. Calvin? I don't have much time, and I really must speak with your parents to make sure everything is taken care of. If you would follow me." With that she turned on her heel and exited Calvin's bedroom. He could hear her rather loud and intimidating footsteps as she headed downstairs.

"I think she's on to you, buddy," Hobbes said, crawling onto Calvin's bed and curling up, his tail laying itself across his paws.

"What do you think you're doing?"

"Not going downstairs, obviously. That woman scares me - she wasn't even slightly flustered!"

"Well I don't want to face her alone!" whined Calvin. He continued to plead with Hobbes for a few more seconds before he heard a knock at the front door. They met each other's eyes and tilted their heads in question. "I wonder who that could be," Calvin said, getting up from where he was kneeling by the bed and going to stick his head out the window.

"Well?" Hobbes was staring at Calvin's back, looking bored but curious.

"It's Professor McGonagall," answered Calvin, surprised. "But why's she back outside?" He turned to his furry friend, but Hobbes just yawned and stretched before curling up again, this time under the covers. "Fine, stay here you big lump. I'm going to go let her in." He descended the stairs quickly, but by the time he arrived the front door was already opened, and his mother was already standing there looking puzzled.

"-esenting the finest wizarding school in Britain," Calvin heard Professor McGonagall say as he walked up to his mother.

His mother inclined her head suspiciously. "Did you say wizarding? And why would a school from
Britain be sending a representative to America? Especially to our house."

"Hey!" exclaimed Calvin, hands on his hips. "I resent that statement!" Then he turned his head to the Scottish woman wearing green. "Why did you go back outside and knock?"

"Back outside!?" his mother asked loudly, looking back and forth between the oddly dressed woman in the pointy hat and her eleven-year-old son.

"Because it is good manners, Mr. Calvin," replied Professor McGonagall sternly. "Something you had better learn if you are going to end up in my house, which, unfortunately for everyone, I am quite certain you will."

"How do you know his name?" said Calvin's mother sharply. "And how did you get inside before if I don't remember ever meeting you?"

"Magic," Calvin said matter-of-factly. His mother, utterly baffled, looked to the woman standing in her doorway. Professor McGonagall nodded in agreement.

"...Magic," his mother deadpanned. "Calvin, is this one of your pranks?" She turned to her son, ready to reprimand him.

"I assure you," the Scottish professor began, holding out a hand placatingly, "this is no prank. Calvin is a wizard, and Hogwarts has invited-"

"Calvin is a what!?!" his mother yelled, incredulous.

"Not a what, mom, a wizard," replied Calvin helpfully.

His mother looked at her son, then at Professor McGonagall. "You really expect me to believe that my son is a wizard?"

"Expect the unexpected, that's what I always say," Calvin piped up.

"No you don't," interjected Hobbes, walking up to him. "You always say 'unexpect the expected,' not that it makes any sense."

Calvin raised an eyebrow - he'd had to practice that in the mirror for years - and said, "I thought you were going to stay upstairs?"

"Well there was hardly any chance that I was going to be able to fall alseep with all the yelling going on down here, was there?" shot back Hobbes, waving him off. "Besides, if she's going to do some magic to prove it to your mother, I want to see." Calvin shrugged. He did want to see some magic. Well, more magic.

"Would it be satisfactory if I were to perform some magic to convince you?" Professor McGonagall inclined her head to Calvin's mother, waiting for an answer. His mother glanced at him, then nodded. "Very well. Stand back, then." And right there, Professor McGonagall turned into a cat.

Hobbes hissed and jumped two feet in the air, and when he landed his fur was standing on end, his tail was stick straight, and his back was arched.

"Woah, Hobbes, calm down!" Calvin rushed over to his best friend and tried getting him to stop hissing and eyeing the McGonagall-turned-cat predatorially.
Calvin's mother, on the other hand, was just staring at the feline in shock. She was so shocked that when, in the very next moment, the McGonagall-turned-cat turned back into Professor McGonagall, she didn't react all.

With Hobbes finally calm, or at least calm enough and not thinking about trying to devour the Hogwarts professor, Calvin turned back and started clapping enthusiastically. "That was amazing!"

Professor McGonagall adjusted her glasses. "Well, thank you, Mr. Calvin."

"That was just incredible! It reminds of this one time when I turned into a tiger, except that first I became a slug, then a toad, then something else I think but I forget what, and even after when I was a tiger it wasn't all that awesome and I wasn't ferocious like Hobbes and I have to take a breath now." He took a deep breath and heard Professor McGonagall chuckling quietly. "How did you even do that?"

"Magic."

"SO. COOL." He turned to his mother, who still hadn't reacted at all. "So can I go, mom? Pleeeeeease? I'll be extra good and I won't jump out of any windows or eat my hall passes or insult everyone during show-and-tell or refuse to come in after recess or write about my classmates being eaten by velociraptors or just stare blankly at the chalkboard the entire day!"

His mom blinked, and seemed to return to reality. Professor McGonagall, meanwhile, whose eyes had kept widening with each new fact, turned to her in disbelief. "None of those things actually...happened...did they?" she asked hopefully. His mom swallowed and regarded the woman who had just turned into a cat and then back again.

"Take him. Please."

AN: My brain just would not shut up about how awesome it would be for Calvin to meet McGonagall. It was a lot of fun writing this chapter. If you liked it, please review!
Chapter Two - Greeting Gringotts: A Cautionary Tale

Calvin's mother was slightly disappointed when Professor McGonagall informed her that she would not be taking Calvin away to Hogwarts just yet, which worried the stern, yet caring, witch. She'd talked to the woman a bit longer, explaining to her that a portkey would be delivered to the house on the morning of September 1st, ready to take Calvin to King's Cross station. She told her that he would be coming home for holidays the same way, and gave her the dates of said holidays, as well as the end of term.

After that, they left to go shopping for Calvin's school supplies - all of which were listed on the parchment that had accompanied the letter - at a place called Diagon Alley. Professor McGonagall teleported them - wizards called it 'apparating' apparently - to a busy street in London, lined with shops. The teleport-apparating made his stomach feel funny, sort of like making a wrong turn in his wagon on the way down the hill and ending up dropping off the short cliff at the end.

"Ugh," Calvin moaned, stumbling a bit and placing a fist over his mouth. "Tastes like Chocolate Frosted Sugar Bombs."

"I'm sorry?" said Professor McGonagall, looking at him in concern.

"Nothing. So this is Diagon Alley?" He looked around. It was definitely bustling, but nothing about it really screamed 'magic.'

"Oh heavens no, Mr. Calvin, this is still muggle London - Diagon Alley is hidden from the muggle community, of course."

"Muggle?" questioned Calvin. Sounded to him like an obscure alien race.

"Muggles are non-wizards, people who cannot use magic. Now follow me, and don't dawdle." The green-clad witch set off across the street, and Calvin cursed his short legs as he tried to keep up. I always knew everyone else was an alien, he thought to himself as they reached the far sidewalk. They approached a large book shop, and Professor McGonagall pointed at where it ended and a record shop began. "That's where we're headed," she said. And suddenly, there was another shop there - he'd only noticed it once she'd pointed it out, but it must have been there the entire time. It was a small, greasy-looking bar.

"We're going to a bar?" Calvin exclaimed. "Gosh, I've always wanted to go to a bar! My dad went to a bar once, but he told me I wasn't old enough to go. Mom said that dad shouldn't have told me about it at all, and they started arguing, so Hobbes and I just headed out back to our treehouse for a G.R.O.S.S. meeting, but then Susie showed up and started arguing with us, and we tried to ignore her while singing the anthem, only by the time we'd finished all seventeen verses it was dark and we had to go in." He glanced up at Professor McGonagall excitedly. "Are we going to get wicked drunk?"
She thought back to her conversation with Calvin's mother. Perhaps the boy's tendency to talk until he ran out of breath stemmed from a lack of interaction with other people, and a need to say as much as he could to those who did pay attention to him. She dearly hoped he'd make friends quickly, and that that habit of his would be dropped. "No, Mr. Calvin, we are *not* going to 'get wicked drunk," the Deputy Headmistress of Hogwarts replied, sounding mildly offended at the mere thought of such activity. "This is the Leaky Caldron, and it is the entrance to Diagon Alley. Stay close, now." She stepped forward and entered the darkly lit bar, holding the door open just long enough for Calvin to slip through.

**Wow, I can't wait to tell Hobbes that I got to go to bar! I hope he's okay at home without me - I usually never leave him alone during summer vacation. There sure are a lot of old people in here. Professor McGonagall seems to be pretty well known, is she famous or something? That guy looks like he's had way too much to drink. Cool, I've never seen a pipe like that before, is the smoke supposed to be purple? I wonder if it's magic smoke.**

Calvin followed his temporary guardian up to the bar, where a very bald and very toothless old man stood on the other side, pointlessly trying to polish a grimy glass with an even grimier cloth. "Another one for Hogwarts, Professor?" he said with a gummy grin, setting down the glass and draping the cloth over his shoulder.

Professor McGonagall nodded to the barman. "Good day to you, Tom, and yes. We're rather in a hurry..." she trailed off, eyeing the door at the back left of the room.

"Of course, Professor, head on through, nice seein' you," Tom said happily, picking up the glass and resuming 'his polishing'.

They headed out of the bar through the doorway, into a cramped sort-of-courtyard that didn't appear to contain anything other than a rusted trash can. "Why are you in a hurry, Professor McGonagall?" Calvin asked, looking around the courtyard curiously. "Are the shops going to close or something?" There didn't seem to be any sort of door in the brick wall, which quite confused him.

"I was only in a hurry to get out of that place," the Scottish witch replied sharply. "I do not enjoy the...atmosphere. Now, let's see," she said, studying the bricks. Then she drew a smooth length of wood from her wide sleeve, and tapped a certain brick with it, three times. The tapped brick began to squirm.

"Is that a *wand*?" asked Calvin, staring at the polished wood in her hand. Meanwhile, the brick grew a hole in its center, a hole which continued to expand, eating away at brick after brick. "Is that how you do magic? Do I get a wand? How many wands do I get? I'm pretty good at losing things, so I think I'd need at least three to get through the year. Does everyone have the same wand? Can I get a yellow one? Or maybe orange or- wait, can I get a wand with flame patterns? Or, or, with the batman symbol on it? Oh! I want a wand that looks like a water pistol! Do they have those?" he finished, looking up Professor McGonagall and tilting his head in question.

Professor McGonagall, for her part, was staring at Calvin with a mixture of amazement and utter bafflement. The hole in the brick wall had expanded until it formed a perfect archway, far taller than her even with her hat on. Calvin was still looking at her, apparently waiting for an answer. Most muggleborns responded with much surprise when they witnessed the bricks transforming into the archway to Diagon Alley. Some simply stood in shock, staring at what had appeared on the other side. A few even fainted. Professor McGonagall shook her head to clear it, and walked through the magical archway.

"Come now, Mr. Calvin, we must first go to the bank, Gringotts, to exchange the muggle money
your parents have given me for wizarding currency. Your wand is one of the last things on our list for this trip, so you will have to wait to see what type of wand you receive." She pulled out the list of school supplies and scanned the contents. "And no, I highly doubt there are any that look like water pistols."

"Aw, really?" Calvin responded, disappointment evident in his voice. He rushed to catch up with the swift professor. "Are you positive?"

"I would bet my hat on it," came the reply.

The shops they passed on their way to Gringotts had odd names. Names like Eeylops Owl Emporium, The Apathetic Apothecary, and Madam Malkin's Robes for All Occasions - okay, so that last one wasn't too odd. But wizards sure seemed to like alliteration.

They passed stalls selling cauldrons - "All shapes! All sizes! All flavours!" - shop windows piled to the top with jars of...things floating in strange fluids - 'Buy one, get one, but only the one you bought' read the sign out front - and one shop selling ordinary-looking telescopes, the man standing by its door yelling loudly and fervently, "You can see the moon! You can see the stars! You can see the end of time and space! You can see the present! You can see what's happening, even if they don't have a clue! You can see that they'll fall in love! You can see the bottom line!" His voice faded behind them, but Calvin thought he could hear something about a trio being down to two.

As they rounded a corner, a grinning man in maroon robes bounded out from the shadow of a stall and placed himself in front of Calvin, grabbing his arm. "You, young man! I know what you need!"

Calvin was taken aback by the man's forthrightness, but answered, "What do I need?"

"You need a broom!" The man, still grinning - actually it was getting a bit creepy, his mouth muscles didn't seem to be working properly - pointed energetically to the window of the shop right next to them, which displayed an extremely polished broom resting on a shining stand, a plaque below it claiming it to be a 'Nimbus 2000.' "And not just any broom," the man continued enthusiastically, "the fastest broom in the entire world! With the Nimbus 2000, none of your friends - or enemies - will be able to keep up! So, what do you say, boy?" He smiled even wider and gave Calvin a hopeful thumbs-up.

"No thanks, I'm not really into competitive sweeping," answered Calvin with a shrug. The man frowned in confusion, his eyebrows slowly drifting down from where they'd been hugging his hairline. He didn't seemed to be about to say anything else, so Calvin returned to Professor McGonagall's side.

She chuckled and looked down at him. "The Nimbus 2000 is a flying broom, Mr. Calvin, and if you were to use it for sweeping anything I could not guarantee your safety - there are many Quidditch fanatics who would turn violent if they knew of a racing broom being put to such mundane uses."

"What's Quidditch?" Sounds like a nasty disease.

"It is the national wizarding sport, played in the air, on brooms such as the Nimbus." Huh, I was right.

They walked for a while longer before coming to a blindingly white structure that soared into the
sky, far taller than any of the surrounding shops. Two strange creatures stood outside the bronze double doors, wearing matching scarlet uniforms. Their faces were pointed and seemed to be made of greenish, wrinkled leather, and their unusually long fingers ended in yellowed claws.

"Aliens!" Calvin shrieked, quickly ducking behind Professor McGonagall. When nothing else happened, he peeked out, turning his head up. "Those are aliens, right?"

The bemused witch smiled dryly. "Those are goblins, Mr. Calvin. They run Gringotts. Try not to antagonize them."

The goblins bowed as they walked through the doorway.

"Why are there more doors behind the first doors?" asked Calvin, staring at a set of shining silver doors engraved with what, at first glance, seemed to be a poem.

"Different layers of magical security," answered Professor McGonagall. "There are wards that search for magical items or enchantments up persons entering Gringotts." The poem on the silver doors read:

Enter, stranger, but take heed
Of what awaits the sin of greed,
For those who take, but do not earn,
Must pay most dearly in their turn.
So if you seek beneath our floors
A treasure that was never yours,
Thief, you have been warned, beware
Of finding more than treasure there.

Calvin stared at the last line for a few moments before comprehension dawned on him. "So if you're good enough to get past all the security and steal something, you'll find treasure and more?"

Professor McGonagall, along with the two goblins standing next to the silver doors, just stared at him in disbelief. "Awesome! Sounds like they're good sports about it, at least." With that, he sauntered through the doorway with a very worried Professor McGonagall following, the goblins belatedly remembering to bow.

One of the squat creatures leaned over to the other, his face scrunched by confusion. "Is that kid for real?" The other shrugged, shaking his head in wonder.

The inside of Gringotts had an astoundingly high ceiling, and was constructed almost entirely out of white marble.

"Hellooo!" Calvin called, hands cupped around his mouth. The needlessly loud greeting echoed throughout the massive hall, and everyone inside instantly turned to stare at him. He gave a little wave and a grin as Professor McGonagall hid her face in her hands.

"Whatever I did to deserve this," she whispered, voice thick with emotion, "I've more than paid for it now. Please, end this madness."

"Professor McGonagall?" called Calvin, looking over his shoulder. "Are you alright?"
She straightened her robes and pushed the thoughts out of her head. *Just a few more hours, Minerva, you can do this!* "Yes, Mr. Calvin, I am quite alright. To the exchange counter now, we have to wait in that line," she said, pointing toward a line of people *not* dressed in robes and cloaks, but rather jeans, t-shirts, and hoodies. They joined the line, and only had to wait five minutes before they arrived at the counter, a grumpy goblin blinking boredly at them.

"We'll need it mostly in sickles," Professor McGonagall said crisply, plopping a bag down on the marble countertop. Calvin's eyes bulged at the sound of so many clinking coins. How much did they need just for school supplies? The goblin opened the bag and peered inside, curling his lip slightly and wrinkling his long nose. Then he closed it and dropped under his side of the counter, and handed them a much clinkier-sounding bag in return.

"Next," he intoned blandly, staring blankly ahead.

"On to shopping, Mr. Calvin, let's go." Calvin followed the green-clad witch out of Gringotts, wondering what kind of school supplies they'd be buying.

"Can I see the list, Professor McGonagall?" he asked as they exited the bronze doorway, lifting a hand to shield his eyes from the glaring sunlight.

"Of course. Here," she said, handing him the parchment with the glittering green ink on it.

They walked in silence for a few minutes, Calvin reading the list of required supplies for first-years at Hogwarts, Professor McGonagall just enjoying the silence. It couldn't last. *There are gloves made out of dragons!?* he exclaimed, stopping in place and staring at the parchment. He looked up to see the Scottish woman rolling her eyes. When she noticed he was watching her, she stopped and bit her bottom lip.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Calvin. Yes, the gloves are made of dragon hide. When handling potions it always pays to be cautious and safe, so dragonhide gloves are worn to prevent any contact with the ingredients, as well as the potion itself." She turned her head to the left, and pointed. "Your first stop, however, is Madam Malkin's, where you will be fitted for your robes. I am going to go get a drink, which I *sorely* need and *undoubtedly* deserve. Do try to stay out of trouble for ten minutes, all right?"

"Cool, I get to wear real wizard robes!" said Calvin, staring at the black robes in the shop's display window.

"Am I clear, Mr. Calvin?"

"What? Oh, yes, of course. Man, wait till Hobbes sees me in wizard robes! I bet they make me look mysterious and powerful!" He ran over to the shop, imagining how he might look in fitted robes.

"Stay there until I come to get you!" yelled Professor McGonagall as he grabbed the door handle. He opened the door and stepped inside, vanishing from sight. The Hogwarts professor was left with her fingers on her temples, muttering something along the lines of '...ridiculous Gryffindors...' and '...have lost so many points by now...' and '...did I get myself into...' Then she took a deep breath and headed off down the street, determined to enjoy the short respite.

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AN: I was planning on doing the whole of the Diagon Alley trip in one chapter, but this seemed a good place to stop, and I really should get to bed. Please review if you liked it - and thanks for reading!
The Robe Shop of Extraneous Dialogue

Chapter Three - The Robe Shop of Extraneous Dialogue

As his eyes adjusted to the dimmer lighting of the shop, he heard a voice saying, "Hogwarts, dear? Got the lot here - another young man being fitted up just now, in fact." The speaker was a short, compact witch in mauve robes, and she was talking to a boy about his own age. The boy was skinny, skinnier even than Calvin, and had a mop of unruly black hair spilling over his head. He wasn't wearing a robe, so Calvin assumed he was also from a muggle family.

The squat witch turned to Calvin. "You headed for Hogwarts too, dear? Come to the back and I'll have you fitted as soon as I finish with this young man." She headed to the back of the shop, where a boy with a pale, angular face and obnoxiously blond hair was standing on one of the two footstools, having his long black robes pinned up by a second witch.

"I'm Harry," said the boy with the messy black hair as they followed the witch in mauve, who Calvin supposed was Madam Malkin. "Are you also going to Hogwarts?"

"I sure hope so! Otherwise, this is one elaborate prank. My name's Calvin, by the way," he responded happily.

"So you're new to this magic stuff too?" Harry asked as they approached the footstools.

"Yep! I just got my letter this morning, and I've already seen someone turn into a cat! Professor McGonagall did it to prove to my mom that magic was real. It was pretty awesome."

Harry blinked in surprise. "Wait a second, you're American, aren't you - do you live here?"

Calvin shook his head, and as Harry was ushered onto the vacant footstool, he explained, "Professor McGonagall had to come and teleport me here. It was nauseating, let me tell you - though at least I got to have breakfast again."

Madam Malkin slipped a large robe over Harry's head, and began placing pins in here and there, making sure it was the right length for him. The blond-haired boy on the footstool next to him glanced at them both.

"Hello," he greeted airily. "Hogwarts, too?"

"There are two Hogwarts?" exclaimed Calvin. "Professor McGonagall never mentioned that - I guess I'm going to Hogwarts One, then."

"I think he meant also, not the number two," said Harry, holding an arm out to his side as Madam Malkin folded and then pinned some extra material.

The pale boy stared at them for a moment in incomprehension, then just shook his head dismissively. "My father's next door buying my books and mother's up the street looking at wands," he drawled in a bored voice. "Then I'm going to drag them off to look at racing brooms. I
"Oh, you mean the Nimbus 2000?" interrupted Calvin. "Some guy with a broken smile tried selling me one, but I told him I wasn't into competitive sweeping and he just seemed to cease functioning completely. Professor McGonagall explained to me that it's a flying broom, used in some wizarding sport called Quidditch, but I really don't see how that's any more exciting."

"So you're a muggleborn, then," said the pale boy, grimacing slightly. "What about you?" he demanded, sticking his chin out towards Harry.

"I grew up with muggles, but my parents were wizards, if that's what you mean," Harry answered. He really didn't like the other boy's attitude. He reminded him a bit of Dudley.

"Well why'd you do a stupid thing like living with muggles if you have wizarding parents?" said the boy, as if repulsed by the thought.

"My parents are dead," Harry responded a bit more crossly than he'd intended.

"Oh, sorry," said the pale boy, his expression not changing in the slightest.

"You don't sound very sorry," Calvin interjected, raising an eyebrow. "Man, I am so thankful I put in all that practice.

The boy turned, glaring down his nose at him. "What's an American doing here anyway, aren't there any wizarding schools in your country that'll accept a muggleborn?"

"I have absolutely no idea," replied Calvin matter-of-factly, choosing to ignore the boy's insulting tone of voice. "But there seems to be at least one in Britain, so here I am."

The blond boy snorted contemptuously. "I hope they don't sort any muggleborns into Slytherin - that's where I'm hoping to go, and all the Malfoys were there when they were in Hogwarts, so it's bound to happen. What are your surnames?" he then asked, nodding to both of them.


"A surname means your family name," Harry said, looking at Calvin with a wry smile. "Mine's Potter," he continued, turning back to the other boy.

"Potter?" the boy said, almost to himself. Then he frowned suspiciously. "What about you, then?" he asked, nodding in Calvin's general direction.

"Oh, I'm too much of an individual to have a family name," Calvin responded as if stating the obvious.

"What's that supposed to mean?" the blond-haired boy said indignantly. "Everyone has a family name!" He seemed to think family names were pretty important.

"So you said you're probably going to Slytherin?" Calvin asked curiously. "Professor McGonagall mentioned that I'd for sure end up in Gryffindor. How many houses are there?"

"Four in total," the boy replied, glad for the chance to prove his superior knowledge. "Slytherin, Ravenclaw, Gryffindor, and Hufflepuff. I think I'd leave if I were in Hufflepuff, don't you?"

Harry and Calvin shrugged simultaneously, and Calvin said, "Sounds like a brand of marshmallow. What's the difference between all the houses, anyways?"
The boy chuckled at the comparison between Hufflepuffs and marshmallows. "Well, Slytherin's the best, obviously, then there's Ravenclaw, where all the book nerds go, then Gryffindor, for the stu-" He stopped short, glancing at Calvin. "For all the rash people, and Hufflepuff for the nobodies."

"Doesn't really seem like a valid sorting system to me," Harry said thoughtfully. "I mean, what if you've got a rash book nerd? Or a rash nobody? And what does 'best' mean? Is there an objective best, or do the teachers decide?" Calvin was nodding in agreement, but the blond boy just snorted. "Nobody decides, the sorting hat sorts everybody into their rightful house," he said, rolling his eyes.

"How does it know which house is their rightful house?" asked Harry.

"Magic," Calvin guessed.

"Exactly," the boy replied, nodding at him as if complimenting a student on a correct answer.

The witch who was working on the boy's robes stepped back, clicking her tongue. "All right, you're done here," she said, and the boy stepped off the stool.

"Well, I'll see you two at Hogwarts, I suppose," he said, stretching.

"Not if we see you first," replied Calvin reflexively. He stepped onto the now empty footstool as the witch went to fetch a robe to be fitted for him.

The blond boy cocked his head. "I'm...not really sure it works that way. What's your name, anyway?"

"Calvin," said Calvin. "It's like Sir Calvin, but without the Sir."

"My name's Draco, Draco Malfoy," said Draco Malfoy.

"Nooo," Calvin said, mourning the loss of an opportunity. "You have to say your last name first! It's 'The name's Malfoy, Draco Malfoy.' Much more impressive that way."

"...Right. Anyways, I have to go take care of my sanity, or at least what's left of it after this conversation. Be seeing you, Calvin, Potter." He gave Harry a look, then left the shop.

"That was certainly entertaining," Harry said as the door shut behind Draco. "I hadn't realized that the wizarding community wouldn't know anything about James Bond, or any other muggle references, actually, though it makes sense now that I think about it - they don't have television."

Calvin's chin dropped so fast it opened a vacuum in the space it had left, and Calvin started coughing. When he'd finished, he turned to Harry, eyes wide as cornfields. "No...television?"

"They don't use any electricity, from what I've seen," Harry replied. "Magic must have replaced any need for it."

"...No...television...?"

"Um, yes, we've established that," Harry said, looking at Calvin worriedly. "Are you okay?"

"They've never...watched TV...once...in their lives…"

Madam Malkin stepped away from Harry. "That's you done, my dear," she said in a chipper voice.
Harry stepped off the stool, and waited while the other witch was finishing up with Calvin's robes.

"Calvin…?" Harry said, waving his hand in front of the spiky-haired boy's dazed eyes.

"Oh, sorry," Calvin apologized, snapping out of...whatever it was. "Anyways, why'd Draco look at you like that when he said your name?"

"Probably because he knows who I am," Harry muttered, looking down.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

Harry sighed and a resigned expression planted itself on his face. "Apparently, when I was just one years old, the most powerful and feared dark wizard in all of Britain, Voldemort, came to my house to kill me. He killed my parents, but when he tried to kill me, something happened that made it backfire, destroying him and leaving me with this." He lifted up the cascade of black hair covering his forehead, revealing a scar shaped like a lightning-bolt.

"Wicked!" yelled Calvin. "Way to go Harry! You defeated the most powerful and feared dark wizard, and you weren't even potty trained! That's talent."

"More like luck," Harry replied mutely. "It's not like I did anything. I'm just famous for not dying."

Calvin's eyes widened. "You're famous?"

"Look, it's not exactly something I'm proud of, so I'd appreciate if you didn't bring it up."

"No, sure, you won't hear another word about it from me," Calvin said quickly, miming locking his mouth and throwing the key away.

Harry gave him a crooked smile. "Thanks."

"You're finished too," the witch who was fixing up Calvin's robes said, stepping back.

"Nice!" Calvin leapt off the stool and struck a pose. "How do I look, Harry?"

"Like a boy wearing a black robe."

"Do the words 'mysterious and powerful' come to mind, by any chance?"

Harry tried to cover up a laugh and failed miserably. "If you were fifty centimeters taller and had some way to cover up that hair of yours, maybe."

"Ah well," Calvin replied. "Can't win 'em all. Or is it 'can't win a mall?' I forget." Harry shook his head, grinning, and headed to the front of the shop, Calvin right behind him.

The two were about to exit the shop when Calvin realized something. "Oh, wait, I'm not allowed to leave here until Professor McGonagall comes back." Then he looked at Harry in surprise. "Wow, I can't believe I remembered that!"

So they said goodbye, and promised to find each other at King's Cross on September 1st. As Harry left, a ridiculously large man came by and began talking to him, and then they walked off together. Woah. That guy is seriously gigantic. I wonder if Hobbes could take him in a fight, Calvin thought seriously.

His musings were interrupted by the door opening, and he turned to watch as a bushy-haired girl with bucked-teeth walked confidently into the shop, followed by two people who could only be her
parents, looking around cautiously as if they expected to be set upon by dragons at any moment. Madam Malkin walked past him to greet the three customers, and then led them to the footstools at the back. With nothing to do but wait for Professor McGonagall, Calvin decided to follow them.

"You're a muggleborn too, right?" he asked the girl as she stepped onto the footstool.

"Yes," she replied, pursing her lips thoughtfully and looking down at where her jeans peaked out from under the black robe Madam Malkin had given her. "I suppose you could tell from my clothes, couldn't you. That's why I wanted to come here first, you see, to get my robes, so that when I went around to all the other stores nobody would give me funny looks for wearing 'muggle clothing,' though that makes me wonder what wizards and witches wear when they go out among muggles. I mean, they can't just wear whatever odd robes and hats and whatnot they usually wear, right? People would notice, and because of the Statute of Secrecy they can't have people finding out about magic, which means wizards would have to do their best to blend in, though I don't think they'd be too good at it, do you, since none of them seem to know anything about the muggle world in general. I'm Hermione Granger, by the way, what's your name?" The girl's parents were looking at her worriedly, and her mother was biting her bottom lip. Her father glanced at Calvin - whose face was frozen in momentary surprise - and shook his head sadly, whispering something like '..done it again, dear…'

The next second Calvin was grinning widely, his face practically glowing. He cracked his knuckles, stretched his neck, cleared his throat, and took a deep breath. His words were launched from his mouth like a spitball from the end of a perfectly crafted pen casing. "No actually, it was the way your parents were looking around as they walked into the shop like they expected something terrible to happen and everything was under suspicion of being dangerous. This is my first stop too, besides for Gringotts, though I guess you had to go there as well to exchange your money for wizarding currency just like Professor McGonagall did for me. I've gotten a lot of funny looks since entering Diagon Alley, but I don't think they had anything to do with the clothes I'm wearing - one time it was because I interpreted a poem correctly, though I don't know what's so weird about that, but this other time was just because I made a James Bond reference that the wizard didn't understand, can you believe that wizards don't have television, or any electricity at all? I mean, sure magic can probably fill in for a lot, but look at the lighting in here - candles! There's no way that open flames are a better alternative to fluorescents, seriously. I'm Calvin, and it's nice to finally meet someone who knows how to talk efficiently."

Hermione beamed at him, blushing just a little. "Actually, I asked about the lack of electricity, and it turns out that magic interferes with it, so that's at least one of the reasons it isn't used, though I agree that the wizarding world is woefully ignorant of technology and muggle culture as a whole. Oh, these are my parents." She turned to said parents who were staring at the two of them in awe. "Mum, dad, this is Calvin." Her parents babbled their greetings, clearly too astounded by the proceedings to pay any attention to fine muscle control. Hermione glanced back at Calvin as Madam Malkin fixed up the back of her robes. "Are you waiting to get more robes done?"

"Nah, I'm finished here - I'm just waiting for my escort. I'm not allowed to leave the shop before she comes back. Aren't you going to point out that I'm American and ask why I'm here?"

The bushy-haired witch looked at him curiously, then her expression turned mildly annoyed and she said, "Oh, I can't believe I didn't think of that - it would make sense for there to be more than just one wizarding school in the entire world. So why are you here?"

She received the Calvin Shrug in answer. "No clue, but I plan on asking Professor McGonagall when she comes to get me."
"Professor McGonagall?" said Hermione, eyes growing wide. "She's a professor at Hogwarts, isn't she? Oh I just can't wait to meet all of them - what subject does she teach?"

"You know, I'm not quite sure. I don't think that came up during her visit to my house. Bet it has something to do with turning into a cat, though."

"She can turn into a cat!?!" asked Hermione incredulously.

"Well, I didn't say that, but yes, she can. Gave Hobbes quite the scare."

"Who's Hobbes?"

"My best friend. He's a tiger," Calvin added offhandedly.

"Of- of course he is. Yes. I see." She was eyeing him cautiously now, much like her parents had been eyeing their surrounding when they'd entered the shop. "And how long have you two been best friends?"

"Ever since I caught him with a tuna fish sandwich trap."

Hermione stared at him, then just shook her head as if to clear it.

"Your robes are finished, dear," Madam Malkin announced, tucking the extra pins into her hair distractedly.

"Oh, thank you," Hermione said, stepping down from the stool and examining her robe. "It fits perfectly," she added, smiling at the seamstress.

"You're such a dear, dear," Madam Malkin replied graciously. "Do come say hello next time you're in Diagon Alley, won't you?"

"I will. Thank you again." Hermione turned to Calvin. "It was great meeting you, Calvin…" She trailed off.

"Oh, I don't have a last name," Calvin said, guessing that she was waiting for him to supply one. She cocked an eyebrow. "Don't have a last name? How'd that happen?"

"Hobbes ate it," he said with a shrug. "I'm sure he got more out of it than me, anyways, so no loss there."

"I'll have to meet this Hobbes fellow," Hermione said suspiciously.

"No problem, I'm taking him to Hogwarts with me - you can meet him there. I'd say you could meet him at King's Cross, but I asked Professor McGonagall and it seems tigers aren't allowed on the train. Pity, too - Hobbes loves train rides."

"Well, Calvin of the tiger-eaten last name, I have to go get the rest of my school supplies now. I'll see you on September 1st?" she asked hopefully.

"Count on it," replied Calvin with a nod. "I'm happy I met you - I've never talked to a female before that hasn't tried to have me sent to either the principal's office or my room." Hermione giggled and tried to cover it up, causing it to become a full-blown laugh. Then she waved at him, and her parents led her outside, peering worriedly over their shoulders at Calvin. And everything else.
How ironic would it be if Hermione got me sent to the Headmaster's office at Hogwarts, Calvin thought with a quiet chuckle. He glanced around the now empty shop, wondering what was keeping Professor McGonagall. He was about to step out of the shop for a quick look around when the door opened again, this time ushering in a brown-skinned boy with short black hair, and a woman who could only be his mother. Calvin deliberated for a moment. Well, it's not like there's anything else to do...

He walked up to the pair as the door closed behind them, giving a little bow and a smile. "Another one for Hogwarts, I suppose? Right this way, then." Looking a bit unsure, they followed him to the back of the shop. What is it, muggleborn hour? Calvin mused as he noticed the muggle clothing the mother and son were both sporting, and the curious glances they gave every part of the shop as they walked past it.

Madam Malkin looked up in surprise as they approached, then smiled warmly. "Another one for Hogwarts, dear? This way, then," she said, gesturing to the footstool. The pair looked back and forth between Calvin and Madam Malkin in confusion. "What's the matter, dear?" the squat witch said when she noticed that the boy had yet to make a move toward the stool. The boy shook his head and stepped up onto stool, where Madam Malkin slipped a billowing black robe over his head.

That's certainly a lot of billowing. Does mine billow like that? Calvin twisted his head, trying to get a good look at the back end of his robe. When he turned back around in defeat, the short-haired boy was talking to Madam Malkin, pointing to a place on his sleeve.

"Do you think I could get some maroon and yellow accents along this spot here?" Madam Malkin just kept pinning. "And maybe the West Ham logo on the back - that'd look great. Don't you think?" he added, looking at Calvin.

"What's a West Ham?" Calvin asked. "Is it like ham, but only cooked on one end or something?"

"What's West Ham!?" the boy guffawed. "Only the greatest team in football! I mean, sure, they finished bottom of the league last year, but they've always been a bit inconsistent - this year I bet they'll go up twenty places, at least!" He noticed Calvin's expression of mild bafflement and stopped. The boy's mother cleared her throat loudly. "Wha- oh, right, forgot to introduce myself, sorry. I'm Dean Thomas, and this is my mum," he said, nodding towards the woman on his left. Why do I always wait for the other person to introduce themselves first? That's got to change, Calvin decided silently.

The woman lifted her hand in greeting and smiled. "Are you also going to Hogwarts, dear? We were so surprised when Dean got his letter - though now that I think back on it, his father was probably a wizard. Can't know for sure though." Dean looked uncomfortable at the topic being discussed, and was studying the carpet intensely.

"Yep, I'm going to Hogwarts too!" Calvin said quickly. "My name's Calvin. My mom didn't believe it was for real when I showed her the letter, or even when a Hogwarts professor showed up at our door. After she saw Professor McGonagall turn into a cat, though, she was convinced. And dumbstruck, too, at least at first."

"We have a teacher who can turn into a cat!?" said Dean, face lighting up in amazement. "Cool! I wonder what type of magic she teaches. Maybe we all get to learn how to turn into animals!" he said enthusiastically.

"That would be epic!" agreed Calvin just as enthusiastically.

"It would be so totally wicked!" Dean enthused, yelling.
"It would be beyond wicked!" yelled Calvin loudly.

"It would be flippin' amazing!" Dean loudly declared.

"It would be amazingly fantastic!" Calvin declared excitedly.

"It would be fantastically incredible!" Dean excitedly screamed.

"It would be incredibly mind-blowing!" Calvin screamed boisterously.

"It would be mind-blowingly magnificent!" Dean boisterously proclaimed.

"...Magnificent? Really?"

Dean shrugged apologetically.

"All right, you're finished, young man," Madam Malkin interjected, massaging her temples. The other witch and Dean's mother were both yawning determinately, trying to pop their ears.

"Great!" said Dean, hopping off of the stool. He turned to Calvin, smiling happily. "See you at Hogwarts then?"

"I'll look for you at King's Cross. See if we can't get a group of muggleborns together for the train ride," Calvin told him, thinking of Hermione and Harry (so Harry wasn't technically a muggleborn, but he was where it counted - namely, recognizing movie references).

"Sounds good! It was first-rate meeting you, Calvin!" Dean smiled and waved as his mother pulled him to the door.

"It was whiz-bang meeting you, Dean!" Calvin shot back as loud as he could before the door closed behind them. He smiled to himself. That kid's great. Hope he's in Gryffindor.

The door slammed open again, and the silhouette framed by the doorway seemed to exude anger like a slug exudes...that slime stuff. I've got to work on my similes, really. That was just completely unsatisfactory. "Mr. Calvin. If your yelling wasn't heard all the way back to your house then I shall eat my hat!" The stern Scottish witch stomped into the shop, teeth barred, and judging by her clenching and unclenching fists she appeared to be trying to get her emotions under control. Maybe. It was possible. "And if it wasn't the only reason I finally found you, I do not know what punishment I would be giving you! But know this," she seethed, leaning in close. "It would. Have. Been. Terrible."

Calvin gulped and tried to moisten his suddenly dry mouth. "Um, what do mean, found me?"

Professor McGonagall seemed to deflate, and she stared up at the ceiling, shoulders limp. "I had assumed," she began tiredly, "that since I'd spend a little over ten minutes away, you would certainly wander off, ignoring my instructions to wait. I started my pre-emptive search, which, of course, yielded nothing, as you were apparently here the entire time." She looked at him and frowned. "I continued this search anyway, thinking that by then you'd definitely have wandered off. It went on like that for a while. You really did listen to my instructions?" she asked as they left the robe shop, blinking in the afternoon sunlight.

Calvin gave an exaggerated shrug and held his arms out to the sides, his expression saying clearly, 'Who knew?' "I even surprised myself, Professor McGonagall. So, where to? We getting some gloves made out of dragons? A dragon made out of gloves? A cauldron made out of chocolate, perhaps?" he said eagerly, rubbing his hands together like a mad scientist mouse with a genius yet
dastardly plan to take over the world.

Professor McGonagall shook her head and gave him a weary smile. "During my prolonged trip around Diagon Alley looking for you, Mr. Calvin, I took the opportunity to purchase the rest of the items on your list. All that's left now is your wand."

"Oh, thank goodness, this scene was dragging on forever," Calvin sighed, placing the back of his right hand against his forehead dramatically.

"Excuse me?" Professor McGonagall asked, eyebrows furrowed in confusion.

_Huh. Seems everyone's eyebrows get some good exercise when talking to me._ "Nothing," he replied dismissively. "Wow, is that an ocean blue ferret!?!" he then exclaimed, rushing over to a nearby shop window.

Professor McGonagall took a deep breath and exhaled slowly through her nose. "Mr. Calvin, please do try to stay on task. We are going to Ollivanders, now, to buy you a wand."

Calvin whirled around and pumped his fist in the air. "All right! Magic time!"

The Scottish witch sighed. "Yes, Mr. Calvin, it is indeed," she rolled her eyes resignedly. "...Magic time."

Ollivanders was a run-down looking place, and much more narrow than the shops around it. The golden letters on the door were peeling, but Calvin could still read it just fine. 'Ollivanders: Makers of Fine Wands since 382 B.C.' it said.

Calvin whistled appreciatively. "That is _old_. How is this guy still alive?" he asked, looking up at Professor McGonagall. She just snorted half-heartedly and opened the door, gesturing for Calvin to go inside.

Somewhere deep inside the store a tinkling bell sounded faintly. The quiet that followed was so complete it seemed almost suffocating. Calvin shivered, wishing he'd brought a jacket. It was significantly colder in here than it had been in the other shop, though he didn't see how that was possible. He looked around.

Aside from a spindly chair near the entrance, the rest of the shop was dominated by row upon row of old wooden shelves, dust coating them like varnish. Crowding every level of every shelf were heaps of narrow boxes, and in some places the heaps had spilled over onto the floor, piling up until the ones on top scraped against the ceiling.

The quiet stretched until it somehow felt as if it had reached a breaking point. The air appeared to crackle with mysterious energy. The hairs on Calvin's neck and arms stood on end. He gulped nervously, waiting, waiting for...something, he wasn't sure what, but something had to happen, or he'd snap.

"Good afternoon," said a voice softly from somewhere above his left shoulder.

"GAHH!" Calvin yelped, jumping and twisting in the air. He landed heavily on his side, and looked up to see an old man with wide, pale eyes shining like headlights through the dim air of the shop. The man was staring at him, smiling blankly.

Calvin turned his head to Professor McGonagall, fear still frozen in his stomach. "Is- is he... safe?"
he squeaked, the air barely escaping his lips.

"Gah indeed," the old man breathed, still staring at Calvin. *Oh god. I'm going to be taken and sacrificed to the Zargord King, I'm going to be burned alive and fed to his pet pterodactyl morsel by morsel, strip of flesh by bleeding strip of flesh...He's going to torture me until I tell him all my secrets, and then he'll continue torturing me because he has nothing better to do and he finds it amusing and he's utterly insane and I'M GOING TO DIE.*

The old man slowly raised a hand to the side of his mouth, and leaned in until he was about two inches from Calvin's nose. His eyes were still locked on Calvin's. "Periwinkle," he whispered, winking.

"Wh- wha..." Calvin tried to find enough oxygen to speak, but his throat kept closing up. "What?" he finally choked out.

The old man leaned in closer, until his nose was almost brushing Calvin's. Still his eyes stared. "That's the color of the pterodactyl you were imagining being fed to. Periwinkle."

Calvin blinked. He swallowed, shaking. He tried to collect his thoughts.

And then he fainted.

AN: My crowning achievement - spending ten times as long inside Madam Malkin's shop as J.K. Rowling. This is my legacy, people. Remember it well. If you like it, review! Every time a new review appears I become what is normally referred to as 'ecstatic,' though it is far stronger a feeling than that, and then proceed to do a little jig. Thanks for reading!
Chapter Four - Last Stop Left, Right?

"Are you sure you are all right, Mr. Calvin?" Professor McGonagall asked, looking down at him with a concerned expression as they left Ollivanders. Calvin shook his head side to side, then up and down. He was staring at the long, thin wand gripped tightly in his fist, wondering how it had gotten there. "You are looking a bit pale - what do you say to some ice cream, hmm?" That ought to cheer him up, as well as get some food in him, she thought.

"Ice cream," Calvin repeated tonelessly, still looking at his wand.

Professor McGonagall bought the ice cream from a shop called Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlour. They stayed in the sitting area while Calvin mechanically worked away at the ice cream cone, his other hand white-knuckled, holding his wand in a death grip. He still couldn't remember how it had gotten there.

With the ice cream in his stomach, however, he was soon feeling back to his old self. Much to Professor McGonagall's chagrine.

"Oh pleasepleasepleaseeeeeeeeeaaaaaaseee?" Calvin said, kneeling in front of her, hands clasped together.

"Mr. Calvin, I will not let you spend your parents' money on such...such frivolous purchases!"

Calvin gazed longingly at the book displayed in the shop window, titled 'Whistles and Bells: Useless Spells.' "I mean, yeah, it's self-proclaimed to be useless, but I'm positive it'll come in handy at some point!"

Professor McGonagall looked at him and raised her eyebrows. "I hardly think that yet another book is going to help your tendency to lose things. In fact, we do have one more item to take care of before we leave Diagon Alley. Something to rectify your," She tried to search for a word that wouldn't offend. "Your...difficulty, with staying organized."

Abruptly, he looked up, fear and apprehension written clearly across his features. "You're not getting me a planner, are you?"

"That was not what I had in mind, no, though that's not a bad idea," the stern witch mused. "I was speaking of something to keep your things organized, however, so that you do not lose track of them. Your parents explained to me how your school books are always disappearing, and so thought this would be a good investment. And after seeing the state of your room," she added with a wry smile, "I can only say that I wholeheartedly agree."

Calvin looked at her dubiously, but was curious as to what form this 'investment' might take. They continued along the street they were on for a number of minutes, then turned onto a cramped side-road. After dozens more twists and turns, they reached a dead end.
"I think we're lost," said Calvin, scratching his head.

"You should have more faith in your professor," Professor McGonagall responded, mock-scolding him. She stepped forward and seemed to grab a handful of the rough stone wall in front of them, pulling it back easily. A door appeared as she did so, and swung open without a sound. "Coming, Mr, Calvin?" she asked lightly, looking back at him for a moment before stepping through the narrow opening. The door shut behind her as soundlessly as it had opened.

"Magic rocks," Calvin said, stepping forward and grabbing the same section of stone wall. Hey, I just made a double entendre! Or is it a pun?...his thoughts trailed off into nothingness. With a mental shrug, he pulled opened the wall-door effortlessly and stepped through.

Inside it was dim and musty, the air heavy with the smell of oil and leather. Is it a requirement that all wizarding shops have to be dimly lit or something? He saw Professor McGonagall a short ways ahead, talking quietly to a middle-aged wizard who was standing behind the shop's waist-high counter. Waist-height for most people, however, was about chest-height for Calvin.

As he approached the counter, he heard Professor McGonagall asking the man - presumably the shopkeeper - about a 'self-organizing trunk, with Expandable compartments and a voice-summoning retrieval system,' whatever that meant. Actually, it probably meant a self-organizing trunk with Expandable compartments and a voice-summoning retrieval system. It really wasn't that hard to understand. The shopkeeper nodded and retreated into the back of the shop, slipping behind a dark brown curtain that was patterned to look like the bark of a tree.

When he returned, he was holding a roughly rectangular trunk of deep brown wood, accented with leather straps and four large brass buckles situated over where the lid met the main body of the trunk. The polished wood shone subtly in the lamplight, speaking of high quality and masterful craftsmanship.

"How exactly am I paying for this?" asked Calvin, eyes wide as he watched the shopkeeper set the beautiful, magnificent trunk down on the countertop.

"You are not, Mr. Calvin, your parents are," answered Professor McGonagall, fishing through the bag of wizarding currency they'd received at Gringotts.

"Well how are they paying for this?"

"I did not ask. This should be enough," she said to the man behind the counter, placing the bag in front him, next to the trunk.

He hefted the bag, then looked up at them with a glint in his eye. "For ten extra galleons, it can have a modified tracking and self-apparation charm added, so you don't have to carry it..." He smiled, waiting.

Professor McGonagall frowned and looked down at Calvin's decidedly slight frame. "That would no doubt be helpful," she agreed, withdrawing the needed amount of gold coins from her pocket.

The shopkeeper leaned across the counter, pointing over his shoulder at the trunk with his thumb. "Just tap it with your wand and say 'follow the leader' to activate the effect," he explained. "To turn it off, tap it again and tell it 'make like a tree.' The phrases are customizable, of course, but most customers choose to just leave them at the defaults."

"Cool, thanks!" said Calvin, running a hand across the gleaming side of the trunk. "I can guess what voice-activated retrieval is, but how, precisely, is it 'expandable?'"
The man straightened up and reached over to the far end of the trunk, turning the front toward himself. "Well, see, if you open it up regularly," he said, tapping the buckles in a seemingly-random order and then lifting the top of the trunk. "You get this." He spun it back around, and Calvin went on his tiptoes to peer over the lip of the opening. The inside was divided into five sections, each labeled with one word that looked to be burned into the wood bottom of the trunk. "There's a place for books, clothes, food, potions, and miscellaneous. Each section can hold roughly twenty times its physical size. Here, you have anything on you that you'd like to store in it?"

"Um, I've still got this napkin from earlier," Calvin said, removing a crumpled, ice-cream stained napkin from his pocket.

The shopkeeper stared at it for a second, then shrugged. "That will do." He plucked the napkin from Calvin's hand and placed it in the section labeled miscellaneous. As soon as he let go of it, the bottom of the section flipped, rotating along its middle so fast that all Calvin saw was a blur. The napkin was gone.

"Niiiiiiice," Calvin said, impressed. Then he leaned over the trunk and spoke into it. "Napkin, please." The bottom of the miscellaneous section flipped again, and there lay the napkin, in the exact position it had been placed mere moments ago. "Now that's what I call ease of use." He look up at the shopkeeper. "There's more, right?"

The shopkeeper chuckled, taking the napkin out and placing it on the counter. "Of course!" He shut the trunk and turned it around, so the back was facing Calvin. "It's best to use the same code for both compartments, else you're likely to forget one of them, or get them mixed up," he said conversationally. He tapped the brass buckles again, then reached over the trunk and grabbed the back end, lifting it up the same as he'd done with the front.

"What would transpire if I were to, say, lose my balance, trip, and fall in?" Calvin asked, peering over the edge. The compartment was at least three times as deep as the trunk was tall, smooth brown wood all the way down. He looked up. "Accidentally, of course."

"This section's magically supplied with nutrient-rich, breathable air," the shopkeeper replied, smiling proudly. "Why, you could survive down there for an entire school year! Not that you'd want to, mind you. Mighty boring, the inside of a trunk." Then he closed the top and turned the trunk around, pointing to the brass buckles. "The code is left, right-middle, right, left-middle right now, but you can change it to what you want, and however many taps you'd like."

Calvin held up a finger. "So, just to clarify, the code is left, right-middle, right, left-middle, right?"

The man nodded, then said, "Right, unless that last right you said was referring to the direction."

"Right - left, right-middle, right, left-middle."

"No, it starts with left, not right. There are only four taps."

"That's what I said: left, right-middle, right, left-middle. Right?"

"Are you doing that on purpose?" the shopkeeper asked suspiciously, eyes narrowing.

"Doing what?" said Calvin innocently, his expression the definition of earnest. "I was just asking what the code was, right? Left, right-mi-"

Professor McGonagall grabbed him by the back of his robe and dragged him out of the shop.
"Now, here is your ticket for the Hogwarts Express - please do your best not to lose it. The train leaves at eleven o'clock sharp on September 1st, got it? Don't be late," she said seriously, looking him straight in the eye.

"You're one to talk, Prof- I, I mean, no, I won't, of course," he corrected, hurriedly backing away from the glaring witch.

She sighed and shook her head. "I apologize, Mr. Calvin. Today has been rather...trying for me. I should not be taking it out on you, however. Or at least, I'm not allowed," she added, almost as an aside. "We'll be owling you a portkey a right before you need to be at the station - just use it when you're ready to go, and it'll take you into a deserted building right down the block from King's Cross. Any questions?"

"Uh, yeah," Calvin said, looking down at the ticket she'd given him. "Why does this say platform nine-and-three-quarters? I didn't think they had fraction platforms."

Professor McGonagall smiled thinly. "The platform from which the Hogwarts Express leaves is hidden from muggles, directly in-between platforms nine and ten."

Calvin looked up, confused. "Directly between platforms nine and ten?"

"Yes, that is what I said, is it not?" Professor McGonagall replied, giving him a strange look.

"As in, right in the middle of the the two platforms?"

"Yes, Mr. Calvin. Is there a point to these questions?" She was about to start tapping her foot with impatience.

"So, let me just get this straight," Calvin said slowly and clearly, hands held out in a placating manner. "You're saying that the platform containing the Hogwarts Express is halfway between platform nine," he wiggled his left hand, "and platform ten?" He wiggled his right hand.

"Yes, Mr. Calvin, that is exactly what I am saying," Professor McGonagall replied rather crossly. "What exactly are you getting at?"

Calvin flung his arms out in bafflement. "Then why in the world isn't it called platform nine-and-a-half!?"

Professor McGonagall covered her face with her hand, stayed like that for a few seconds, then dropped the hand and took a deep breath. "If that is your last question, Mr. Calvin, then I will take you home now, if that's quite alright with you."

"Oh, wait, I actually did have another question," he said, remembering his conversation with Hermione in Madam Malkin's shop. "Why am I going to Hogwarts? I mean, as opposed to another wizarding school. Aren't there any in America?"

The Scottish witch pressed her lips together, wondering how best to answer his question. "You were originally enrolled for attendance at an American wizarding school, but they were...unable, to follow through with taking you on as a student. So Hogwarts was notified, and we agreed to have you come learn with us instead." She gave him a strained smile, hoping he didn't ask anything more on the matter.

"Works for me," Calvin said with a smile and a shrug.
Professor McGonagall sighed in relief. It was about time she caught a break, she thought. "That's your last question, then, correct?" she asked hopefully.

"I'm sure I'll think of something between now and when I arrive at Hogwarts - I'll ask you then. Oh, that reminds me, what subject do you teach?"

Professor McGonagall smiled and answered, "Transfiguration. You'll find out what that is when you visit my classroom for your first lesson."

Calvin tapped a finger against his chin thoughtfully. "Sounds like transmogrification - changing one thing into another."

She blinked, clearly surprised. "That is correct. How did you know that? You've only just gotten your books - I should know, I bought them."

"Well, my first transmogrifier terminated itself after only a few uses, and the second version would just turn everything into cheese, but the Mach Three works flawlessly! Aside from the occasional turning-something-inside-out part, but yeah, otherwise, flawless."

Professor McGonagall nodded slowly, noticing that he didn't actually answer her question. "All right then. Now, there is to be absolutely no magic done while at home, is that clear? You can peruse your textbooks to your heart's content, but you are not to use your wand, understood?"

Calvin nodded vigorously. "Okay, grab my hand - let's get you back." She turned, picturing the front door of Calvin's house, and they disappeared with the sound of all of the suspension cables of a bridge snapping at once.

Minerva McGonagall sat in a cushy armchair opposite the Headmaster of Hogwarts in his office, surrounded by...things. Things that ticked and whirred and zipped and zapped and crunched and crinkled, all at once, all the time. It was a wonder the man could get anything done in here, she thought.

"Yes, he did ask about it - I told him that the school he was originally enrolled under was simply unable to field him, and so Hogwarts took responsibility for his education."

"Good job, Minerva. I do appreciate you taking it upon yourself to be the boy's escort today," said Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, popping one of those sweets he seemed to favor into his mouth. Minerva shuddered, recalling the events of the day. She probably wouldn't have volunteered if she'd known what the errand would entail.

"Tell me, though, Albus, did they all refuse to house the boy just after seeing his school records?" she asked, curious.

Albus nodded and smiled warmly. "All sixteen of them," he said. He took one of the hard candies from the tray on his desk, holding it out to Minerva. "Lemon drop?"

"I'm home!" yelled Calvin into the house as he opened the front door. Suddenly, "AAUUGH!" Hobbes barrelled into him like a train, launching them both out of the house and into the air before making contact with the front lawn. The two tumbled out to edge of the grass before losing enough momentum to disengage from one another. Then they both lay on their backs, breathing heavily.

"Pleasure to have you back," Hobbes said happily.
"The pleasure is all yours," Calvin moaned. "Ugh, I think I've got a piece of my spine lodged in my kidney."

"I just thought you'd want to be reminded of what you'll be missing at Hogwarts, where there's no front door to open in fear every day."

"Oh, yeah, now I'm real sad to go. Give me a hand up, you fur-coated battering ram - my pants are twisted around and they won't let my legs bend. Oof," he wheezed as Hobbes yanked him to his feet.

"Nice bathrobe," said Hobbes mildly, hands on his hips.

Calvin grunted, looking down at himself. "The grass stains really pull it all together, don't you think?" Then he shook his head. "Great. It hasn't barely been two hours and I already have to throw it in the wash."

"You like to try to see how long you can go without washing something, right?"

Calvin looked up at his best friend and grinned with his entire face. "My best so far is almost four months. I would've gone longer, but mom followed the smell and found the socks under the couch cushions, even though I spent all afternoon spraying them with some of dad's most expensive cologne."

Hobbes scratched the back of his head. "That stuff in the glass bottle we replaced with vinegar last week?"

"Yup! All I can say is it's a good thing I was already grounded when he found out. Hey, do you know when dinner is by any chance? I've only had three bowls of Chocolate Frosted Sugar Bombs and some ice cream since yesterday."

"Did you save me any?" asked Hobbes hopefully.

"Sorry," Calvin said with a crooked grin. "I didn't want to ruin my robes."

They headed inside and then to the kitchen, Calvin shedding layers of clothing along the way.

"Hi mom, I'm back. When's dinner?"

His mother turned around, wiping her hands on the dark blue apron she was wearing. "Oh, Calvin, we were just- why aren't you wearing a shirt!? And how'd you carry that trunk next to you?"

"It's magic, of course. Are we out of squid?" Calvin's voice was muffled from inside the refrigerator. He leaned out and looked at his mom. "Are we?"

She just shook her head and turned back to the stove, where a pot of soup was simmering. "Close the refrigerator, Calvin, we're having dinner in a few minutes. So you got all your school supplies?"

"Yeah, but I didn't even get to see the dragons they make the gloves out of."

Calvin's mother, used to her son's overactive imagination, assumed he was kidding about the dragons. "Mhmm," she said, adding some salt to the soup.

"First we had to go to the bank, where a goblin who looked like he needed about a billion vacations gave us wizarding money in exchange for real money," Calvin said, counting off on his pointer
finger. His mother 'hmm'd in acknowledgement. "Then I went to Madam Malkin's, where I'm pretty sure I met every other muggleborn first-year going to Hogwarts. I met a nice boy with a scar shaped like a lightning bolt who defeated this really evil wizard named Voldemort and got my James Bond reference; I met a stuck-up boy with blindingly blond hair who acted like he was used to getting his way and who seems like he's going to be a lot of fun to annoy incessantly; I met a smart girl with voluminous amounts of hair and large front teeth who talks efficiently and didn't try to get me sent to the principal's office, at least not yet anyways; and I met an enthusiastic boy with dark brown skin who knows a lot of synonyms for the word awesome and screams almost as loudly as I do." By this point his mother had gone into 'That's nice, Calvin' mode, and was concentrating on setting the table.

"After that, Professor McGonagall returned and intimidated me a lot up until she acted nice again, then took me to receive my wand at Ollivanders, where-whe-where-" Calvin's tongue caught on the roof of his mouth and tripped, causing him to stutter. His entire body trembled like a sapling hit by a speeding red wagon as his mind skipped over certain memories like a malfunctioning record-player. A shiver ran through him from the nape of his neck to the heels of his feet. "Whe-whe-whe-then we went for ice cream at Florean Fortescue's Ice cream parlor," he said evenly, continuing speaking as if nothing had happened. "Then came our final stop, at this shop inside of a stone wall at a dead end, where we acquired this awesometastic magical trunk whose code is left, right-middle, right, left-middle, and can categorize all of my belongings for me so I don't misplace everything! Also, I can live in it for a year! Speaking of which, how did we pay for it? It seemed really expensive. I mean, not like brand-new-car expensive, but at least we-have-to-sell-our-tv-to-help-pay-for-it expensive."

"Hmm," said Calvin's mom. "Calvin, can you go get your father? Dinner's ready."

"Sure, where is he?"

"Living room," she said, taking the soup off the stove.

Calvin went into the living. For the next twenty-seven seconds, he did not move a muscle.

"Calvin!" his mom called. "What happened to getting your father?"

The next moment, every house in the neighborhood shook with the force of his cry.

"YOU SOLD THE TV!?"

"Stop screaming, Calvin!" said his mom, walking into the living room wielding a dripping spatula. "Oh, yes - how do you think we were able to pay for your trunk?"

AN: It seems that I was unable to escape Diagon Alley, and so spent yet another chapter on it. I'M SORRY. Please review if you liked it, and as always - thanks for reading!
And So It Begins, God Help Us All Part 1

DISCLAIMER: The world and characters of Harry Potter belong to their wonderful creator, J.K. Rowling. The world and characters of Calvin and Hobbes belong to the genius known as Bill Watterson. I thank them both for their parts in making my childhood as fantastic as it was.

Chapter Five - And So It Begins, God Help Us All, Part 1

Normally, Calvin would have stayed as far away from his schoolbooks as possible, but this was a special case - after all, they were books about magic.

"I've literally got my own spellbook, Hobbes!" exclaimed Calvin from where he lay on his bed. "The Standard Book of Spells (Grade 1), by Miranda Goshawk," he read out loud. "Wow, I've never been so excited to read a book before that didn't have a picture of a guy in a cape on the front."

"Just open it already," Hobbes said, rolling his eyes.

"I mean, I can learn actual magic from this book! Real magic!"

"Either you open it, or I eat it, take your pick."

"I wonder what kinds of spells this book has - it says it's the 'Standard' book, so there must be other types."

"I'll give you three seconds before I am forced to take action," said Hobbes, rolling his jaw to loosen it up. "One."

"Do you think there's a spell that allows me to shoot lasers?"

"Two."

"Or fly? I've always wanted to fly."

"Three-"

"-HEY, give that back! Okay, okay, I'll open it! Sheesh," muttered Calvin, cradling the book against his chest and glaring at the tiger next to him. "Can't I savor the moment in peace?"

"Not when that moment lasts five minutes, no," answered Hobbes, flexing his claws.

"Fine, I'm opening it, see? It's open now. No mauling."

They looked through the first few sections together, laughing at the funny names of the spells, ooh-ing and ah-ing and wowthat'ssocool-ing at what the spells were said to do. The first time they came across one of the book's black-and-white illustrations, they just watched it in silence for a couple minutes.

"Man, comic books would really benefit from magic," Calvin said, watching the moving picture of a wand spouting water from its tip into a cauldron.
Hobbes snorted and flopped onto his back. "Only you could discover that an entire magical world exists, see a woman turn into a cat, go on a shopping trip in said magical world, read a book about how to perform magic spells, and then have the first thing you think of applying magic to, be the comic book industry."

"Hobbes, the world already has people who think about important things! If I don't come up with a multitude of completely inane uses for magic, who will!? Actually, I doubt I'm the only muggleborn - that means a wizard born to non-magical parents - who thought of something so mundane when first exposed to magic. Dean would probably suggest some magical addition to West Ham's uniforms, or something."

"Who's Dean?" asked Hobbes, propping himself up on his elbow.

"He's this awesome guy I met at Diagon Alley - and he's apparently obsessed with football."

Hobbes made a face. "Sports?"

Calvin shrugged. "I know, he's not perfect. But he didn't bring up the fact that I was American like everyone else did and he joined in when I started a screaming match, so that's major points in my book. Besides, I figured the more people I got to know while I was there, the less effort I'll have to put into 'making friends' once we get to Hogwarts. Sort of a head start."

"I know your mom made you promise to make more of an effort at being social, but I had no idea you'd take it this far," said Hobbes, eyes wide in astonishment.

"Hey, I reckon since I'm entering a whole new world-"


"-I might as well take the opportunity to change my approach to some things. Oh man!" Calvin said, realizing something. "I forgot to introduce myself to the shopkeeper! I was going to start doing that! This 'change' thing is harder than I thought."

"It usually is," Hobbes nodded sympathetically. "But look at it this way - in this whole new world, you have a new, fantastic point of view. These people you'll be meeting don't know you yet, so whatever you choose to show them of yourself will be the 'real you' to them. And their expectations will make it easier to continue acting the same way, so make sure you enact this 'change thing' in the right direction."

"Thank you, Dr. Hobbes. I didn't know you were licensed to practice yet," said Calvin sarcastically.

Hobbes, now sitting up against the wall, leaned forward and pursed his lips, pretending he was peering over the tops of a pair of glasses. "And how does that make you feel?"

Calvin sighed loudly and looked off into the distance. "Like I'm under a lot of pressure, honestly."

"I see," responded Hobbes, scribbling away on a nonexistent notepad. "Please, tell me more about this 'pressure' you feel you are under."

"You know I'm not really good with people, buddy," Calvin said, sliding his hands under the back of his head and studying the ceiling. "I just can't relate to most people, and I guess I'm worried the ones I met today, even the ones I got along with, will get annoyed with me after a while, and just..."
"Just what?" prodded Hobbes, miming pushing his glasses further up the bridge of his nose.

"Just...decide they don't actually want to be friends with me." He looked at Hobbes and gave him a weak smile.

"There, doesn't it feel better after saying it out loud?" Hobbes smiled back at him, dropping the psychiatrist act.

Calvin's smile grew, and he let out a real sigh. "Yeah, actually it does." Then he rolled over to face his best friend. " Doesn't mean I'm not still worried about it, though."

Hobbes shrugged, pressing his lips together. "I'm sure you'll be fine. I believe in you," he said, leaning close and looking deep into Calvin's eyes, who reached up to shove the furry face away.

"Aw stop it, you're makin' me blush." Then he yawned, stretching. "I can't believe it's only seven-thirty - I'm whipped."

"You wanna turn in for the night?"

"Are you kidding?" said Calvin incredulously, hopping off his bed. "I'm not changing that much. Come on, let's go stuff ourselves with sugar and horse around till dad does his 'I've had enough' yelling face."

"Oooh, I haven't seen him do that face in a while. Last one downstairs starts in the negatives next time we play Calvinball!" Hobbes said, leaping over Calvin and racing for the bedroom door.

"Hey, no fair!" complained Calvin loudly, diving and grabbing the end Hobbes' tail.

The laughing tiger just continued out the door and down the stairs, dragging Calvin behind him like a gravitationally-challenged kite.

The next few weeks passed in much the same way, with lots of book-gazing (which confused his parents greatly), worrying about making friends, sugar, and goofing off. Calvin thought September 1st couldn't come fast enough, but on the fated morning he was having second thoughts.

"I don't feel too good, mom, I can't go," he groaned, pulling his covers over his head.

"Don't be silly, Calvin," his mom said, standing over him. "If you're late, you'll miss the train - you have to get up."

"I can't. I'm sick," he mumbled, burrowing deeper into his covers and pulling his pillow over his head.

"It's just nerves, sweetie. Come on, I made breakfast for you, and your dad's waiting downstairs to say goodbye before he heads off to work."

"Tell him to leave. I'm not going," mumbled Calvin.

"What about all those people you told me you were going to meet at the train station? They'll wonder where you are if you don't get up."

"They'll forget about me soon enough. I doubt they really wanted to see me anyways," he mumbled.

"Oh, stop this, Calvin! You're going, and there's nothing you can say to convince me otherwise," With that, she yanked on his covers, pulling them off and letting them drop to the floor.
"Yaieeeeee!" Calvin yelled, scrambling for the covers. "Don't do that!"

His mother raised an eyebrow and put her hands on her hips. "It's the mattress next, if you're not dressed and downstairs in five minutes." Then she turned and left, heading back downstairs.

"Fine. Be that way," he mumbled.

"Sheesh, Calvin," said Hobbes, prodding the spiky-haired boy's curled-up form with a paw. "You haven't had the Morning Mumbles this bad since the first day of third grade."

"No talking. Too early," mumbled Calvin grumpily, sliding onto the floor like a waterfall of molasses.

Once he was in the kitchen, though, munching on a piece of toast and downing a glass of orange juice, he felt much better. When he finished breakfast, he even cleared his plate and brushed all the crumbs off the table and into the garbage. His mother smiled and wiped at the corner of her eye with a finger.

"My little boy's growing up," she said quietly. Calvin succeeded in not making a sarcastic comment, allowing his mother this small thing before he left for just about the entire school year.

When an owl arrive at the living room window with a tiny package tied to its leg, his mother rushed to let it in, not even remembering to complain when it swooped in and landed on the arm of the couch. Calvin untied the package, and the owl immediately took flight, looping around and right out of the window.

"It's...a piece of candy." He held it up so his mom could see it. It was small and round, pale yellow in color. "I thought I was going to get a 'Portkey' to take me down the block from King's Cross?"

His mother frowned. "Maybe that's coming in a bit. I'll be in the kitchen, let me know if another owl comes so I can say my last goodbye to you." Calvin rolled his eyes as his mother tried to hold back tears. She turned and walked to the kitchen, grabbing a tissue, and he could hear her blow her nose as she disappeared from sight.

"What's that you've got there?" said Hobbes, walking over to him.

"Piece of candy," Calvin replied nonchalantly, looking at the yellow circle in the palm of his hand. Then he sniffed it. "Lemon flavored, far as I can tell."

Hobbes scrunched his brow. "What's it for?"

"I think it's supposed to be something called a Portkey, but I'm not sure how a sucking candy is supposed to get me to London, even if it is lemon flavored."

"Eat it."

"What? But then how am I going to figure out how to use it to get to London?"

"Eat it," Hobbes repeated.

Calvin looked at his best friend warily. "Look, Hobbes, if I eat and it and-"

"Eat it," interrupted Hobbes, staring at him.

"Just because-"
Hobbes placed a paw on Calvin's shoulder and stared him calmly in the eye. "Eat. The candy."

Calvin looked down at the candy. He looked up at the tiger standing next to him. Then back to the candy. Then back to the tiger. Then back to the candy. "Ah, what the heck." He popped the candy into his mouth. "Hmm, it's not bad."

Suddenly, Calvin experienced a sensation not unlike a hook being placed slightly behind his navel and instantly tugging him forward. The world seemed to spin, everything blurred together, and Hobbes' hand on his shoulder was the only thing he was sure was real. Oh, and also the delicious lemon flavoured sucking candy in his mouth. He knew that was real. Real good.

Then he stumbled, hard pavement appearing with no warning beneath his feet. His knees buckled, and he fell onto his hands, disoriented. He looked sideways to see Hobbes spread-eagled on his back, eyes shut tight.

"Can someone stop the room," the tiger said sickly. "I'd like to get off."

"Oh, Calvin, I forgot to give you the sandwiches I ma- Calvin?" But the living room was empty, save for an expensive-looking wooden trunk with four brass buckles on the front. She glared at it suspiciously, then walked off to look around the rest of the house. When she got back to the living room, the trunk was gone.

They stopped momentarily, just outside of the train station.

"This is it," Calvin said, looking up at the entrance.


"What? No, I meant I'm finally going to Hogwarts, fuzz-butt. Finally going to learn magic."

"I know," said Hobbes, "I was merely stating what that meant for everyone else."

"Shut up and get in the trunk," Calvin said, grinning wryly.

"Oh, the indignity!" exclaimed Hobbes, leaning over to look inside as Calvin opened the back section of his trunk. "You're sure I can survive in there, right?"

Calvin gestured for him to hurry up. "The shopkeeper said so, so yes. Come on, it's ten-forty-five already, and I want to get a good seat, not to mention find all the people who I told I'd see at the train."

"Oh, so you get to be picky about your travel arrangements," said Hobbes, crossing his arms. "Well I guess now we know who wears the shorts in this relationship," he then chuckled, climbing in. "Let me out the second we get there, okay?" the still-chuckling tiger said, dropping to the bottom of the trunk-space. Calvin slammed the top down with more force than was strictly necessary.

"These are pants, actually," Calvin said smugly. "And I only had to roll them up twice." Then he wondered if Hobbes could hear him from within the trunk's magically expanded storage space. Man, I really don't know anything about how magic works. He looked up at the entrance to King's Cross and dug the ticket Professor McGonagall had given him out of his pocket. "Platform nine-and-three-quarters, eh? This should be interesting. I wonder how they managed to hide an
entire platform - sounds difficult." Then he glanced at the trunk beside him. "Ah, who am I kidding."

Calvin strolled forward into the station, glancing around. He spotted a guard to his left, and walked up to him, hands clasped behind his back. "Excuse me, good sir," he said as politely as possible. "Is there any chance you could point me to platform nine-and-three-quarters?" He looked up at the guard innocently.

The guard looked back at him, nonplussed. "Doesn't exist, boy."

"Hmm, well what about platform eight-and-seven-twelfths?"

The guard stared at him, clearly not amused. "No."

"Platform eleven-and-two-fourths?"

"No."

"Fourteen-and-thirty-two-fifty-sixths?"

"Look, boy, there are no platform with any sort of fractions on the end of the number, so you can stop asking," the guard said, clearly annoyed.

"I see. Thank you, sir," Calvin replied brightly. He heard the guard mutter something about 'them bloody americans' as he skipped away. Yeah, so they definitely don't employ undercover wizards here, that's for sure. Wonder how muggleborn first-years are expected to find the platform then. Seems like a system flaw to me.

"Oh, hey, Harry!" he called out, spotting the black-haired boy pushing a cart laden with luggage, and on top of it a cage containing a large, snow-white owl. Harry smiled in apparent relief and wheeled his cart over to where Calvin stood by platform ten.

"Hi, Calvin," Harry said, pulling back to stop his cart from rolling right on past the spiky-haired boy.

"Woah, that owl is white. It's beautiful, Harry," Calvin said, admiring the creature. The owl hooted happily, as if understanding that it was being complimented.

"Her name's Hedwig," Harry said, grinning. "Hagrid got her for me as a birthday present."

"Good deal. Do you have any idea how to get to platform nine-and-three-quarters? Should be called platform nine-and-a-half, but anyways, the train leaves in," Calvin looked up at the large clock situated above the arrivals board. "Nine minutes."

"I was hoping you'd know," said Harry, scratching the back of his head. "Honestly, I was starting to panic a bit before I heard you call my name, wondering if I was in the wrong place after all."

"No, this is definitely the place. Let's see if we can spot any...Ah, there!" Calvin pointed to a plump woman heading towards them from the direction of platform nine, a veritable crowd of redheaded children trailing behind her.

As the family got closer, they heard the mother say, "Now, what's the platform number?"

"Nine-and-three-quarters!" said the smallest redhead and the only girl, holding the mother's hand. "Mom, can't I go?" the girl asked, looking longingly at her brothers as they wheeled their carts
along. Calvin and Harry watched as the family stopped in front of the pillar between platforms nine and ten. The mother of the family finished saying something to the oldest-looking boy, and he push his cart toward the pillar, marching confidently closer and closer to the brick pillar.

"You don't think he's going to-" started Harry.

"Is he actually about to just-" said Calvin at the same time.

"-run into the pillar?" they finished together, watching in surprise as the cart and the boy disappeared from sight.

"He just disappeared," said Harry.

"Walked right into the pillar and poof, gone," agreed Calvin, shaking his head in wonder. "Did you see him tap a certain brick?"

"I was thinking the same," said Harry. "But no, I didn't. He just kept on going until...he wasn't there anymore."

The plump woman turned to another of her sons, who Calvin realized looked identical to the one standing on her other side. "Fred, you're next," she said.

The boy looked at her, taken aback. "I'm not Fred, I'm George. Honestly, woman, you call yourself our mother?" he said with righteous indignation. "Can't you tell I'm George?"

"Sorry, George, dear," his mother apologized.

"Only joking, I am Fred," the boy grinned at her, then strolled off towards the pillar. His twin yelled at him to hurry up, and he broke into a run, disappearing a second later. The twin followed on his heels, and then there was only one boy with a cart left.

"Quick," Harry said, turning his cart around, "let's go ask them what on Earth they're doing before they finish and leave." Calvin nodded, and together they pushed the cart fast enough to get there before the last redhead started toward the pillar.

"Um, excuse us," said Calvin apprehensively. He hated talking to adults.

"Hello, dears," the woman said warmly. "First time at Hogwarts? Ron's new, too." The last of her sons was tall and thin, with a long nose and freckles dotting his face.

"Hi Ron! I'm Calvin, and this is Harry," Calvin said, jerking a thumb in Harry's direction. Harry waved.

"Hi," replied Ron awkwardly, starting to raise a hand in greeting, and then halfway through deciding not to and dropping it limply to his side.

Harry turned back to the mother. "We were wondering, how, exactly, you get to platform nine-and-three-quarters?" he made it a question only at the very end. "I mean, we saw your other sons, but-"

"Oh, not to worry," she said, waving away the rest of his sentence. She pointed at the brick pillar. "All you have to do is walk straight at the barrier between platforms nine and ten. Don't stop and don't think about crashing into it, that's very important. Go on, go now before Ron."

"Alright," said Calvin, looking over at the pillar. He began doing some stretches like school had them do before gym class every time.
"Thank you," said Harry to the woman. He glanced at Calvin. "What are you doing?"

"Stretches," Calvin answered, as if it were the most normal thing in the world to be sitting on the floor of a train station trying to reach one's toes. "Wouldn't want to strain a muscle running through a brick pillar, of course."

"Of course," Harry said, smiling slightly. He was beginning to realize that things like this were normal for Calvin.

"I don't really think you need to," Ron spoke up, eyeing Calvin dubiously. "It's only like, four meters."

"Best to be safe," Calvin said seriously, getting to his feet and starting running in place, bringing his knees up as high as possible.

"Okay, yeah, you definitely don't need to be doing that," said Ron.

"I'm going to go run into a pillar now," said Harry. "See you two on the other side."

"No, no, no, no," Calvin admonished, rushing over to Harry. "You're doing it all wrong. It's," he cleared his throat and rolled his shoulders a couple times, turning to face the pillar. "I'm going to go run into a pillar now," said Calvin darkly, voice low. "I'll see you two-" he whirled around, knees bent, one hand outstretched before him, angling down, palm facing the ground. As he came to a stop he locked eyes with Ron, staring at him intensely. "-on the other side," he growled, gritting his teeth at the last word. Then he whipped his head back around and sprinted towards the pillar at full speed, screaming a wordless battle-cry of rage at the top of his lungs.

Several seconds of deafening silence followed Calvin's disappearance.

Ron turned to Harry. "Hate to break it to you, mate, but your friend's stark-raving mad."

Harry, who'd been staring at the place where Calvin had disappeared in shock, burst out laughing. "Yes," he wheezed, clutching his side, "but you've got to admit, he's also stark-raving hilarious."

When he got his breathing under control, he looked around. "I'm next, then?" Ron's mother nodded, looking at her son worriedly. "Don't worry, ma'am, it's not contagious. I think." Then he pushed his cart as hard as he could, shoving off the floor with his feet again and again, building up speed. "To Narnia through a wardrobe, to Hogwarts through a pillar of bricks," he muttered under his breath as he neared the pillar. No matter that he'd already seen four other people run through it - he was almost positive he was going to just bounce off painfully. He shut his eyes a cart's-length away from certain impact.

Harry felt a whoosh of air and opened his eyes. In front of him was an entire platform, crowded with people, a large scarlet steam engine waiting on the tracks. The noise was a mix of owls hooting, cats meowing, people talking, and about a million other things. The smell was of smoke, undoubtedly the smoke from the train that billowed up out of the engine's smokestack, gathering to hang lazily overhead. The multitudes of people bustling around the platform were wearing all different colors of robes, shirts, sweaters, dresses, pants, other items of clothing, and every kind of hat imaginable. Harry spotted a brightly-dressed witch with a classic pointed hat conversing with an old man in a tuxedo, a large sunflower stuffed into his lapel. To his right stood a group of three middle-aged men dressed in orange, turquoise, and gold robes respectively, each with a matching hat shaped like a weeping willow tree.
Over by a stall selling newspapers, a collection of men and women in striking white robes covering every part of their bodies from the chin down were chanting eerily in unison, saying, "We who come for news, come today. We who come for news, come to stay. We who come for news, shall not pay," over and over again, all the while shuffling steadily closer to the stall. The man behind the stall was sweating nervously, his gaze flitting back and forth between the ones on his left and on his right, looking torn between staying to defend his newspapers and running to avoid possible death. As Harry watched, the man chose the latter, scrambling over the back counter of the stall and running as fast as his legs could carry him, not stopping even when he lost a shoe.

"Rubber bands! Git yer rubber bands!" yelled an ancient-looking witch about three feet tall, hobbling through the crowd and flinging handfuls of completely ordinary rubber bands in every direction. "Only five galleons a rubber band - it's a steal!" she screeched, shoving a bunch of rubber bands into a young girl's face. The girl burst into tears and backed away, wailing and spitting out rubber bands.

Harry looked around, but couldn't spot Calvin anywhere. He pushed his cart forward, thinking he'd just get on the train and worry about finding his friend after he got settled. As he approached a large golden kiosk, the owner rang a bell on the counter enthusiastically and hollered, "Sunken treasure unsunk just for you! Step right up, we've got treasure up the wazoo! You there, boy!" he said, pointing at Harry. "Good morning - ahoy! Don't keep walking, stop right there, we've got jewels from everywhere!"

"No thanks," Harry said, hurrying on.

"Wait, don't leave, I've got just the thing!" the man pleaded as Harry rolled his cart past. "How bout a magical, cursed, golden ring? The stone is black as a night out at sea, wait- where are you going, just listen to me!" Harry walked a little faster, weaving haphazardly through the throngs of people until the man's cries faded.

Great, now I'm lost. Where in the world did the Hogwarts Express go? He couldn't see anything but more people scurrying around him. He noticed a bored-looking man leaning on the counter of his own kiosk, staring at the high ceiling and whistling tunelessly. Harry rolled his cart over to the man, planning on asking for directions, and cleared his throat. The man blinked, flicking his gaze to Harry. When he saw he had a potential customer, he perked up.

"Hello there, and good morning," the man said brightly. "Welcome to Gerard's Stall Counter: where every dozen is a baker's dozen!"

"Oh," said Harry, "what do you sell?"

"Dozens of things!" said the man, flashing Harry a glowing smile.

"What sort of things?" said Harry, intrigued despite himself.

"Why, dozens, of course," answered the man, still smiling.

"What's that mean?"

"Well it means we sell dozens, doesn't it?" The man's smile faltered for a moment, clearly confused by Harry's apparent confusion.

"But dozens of what, exactly?"

"Oh no, we don't sell What here," the man replied. "That's over at Albertson's & Sons What-Wear." He pointed over to a brown wooden stall a little ways away, where seven men stood motionless
behind the counter, faces blank and eyes staring straight ahead, all sporting the same brown winter
hats. It looked like they were wearing woolly sleeping bags instead of clothes. "They don't seem to
be getting much business these days, though. I wonder why." He turned back to Harry and spread
his arms wide, smiling again. "So, is there anything you'd like?"

"I'd like," Harry said, getting just a little bit aggravated, "to know what you sell, but you won't tell
me."

"As I said before - we sell dozens!"

"Dozens," Harry repeated with absolutely no inflection whatsoever.

"Yep! Twelves! Well, thirteens, actually, because of the 'baker's dozen' motto. Would you care to
buy some?"

"You sell the number twelve?" asked Harry, face screwed in utter bafflement. "What're they made
out of?"

The man behind the counter blinked. "They're not made out of anything - they're numbers."

"You can't just sell a number, you have to actually give something to the person!"

"Of course! We give them thirteens."

"But if it's not- nevermind. Look, I'm trying to find the Hogwarts Express, could you just point me
in the right direction?" Harry asked, exasperated.

"Certainly!" the man said happily. "Just head that way," he pointed to Harry's left, while looking
off to the right.

"Er, thanks," said Harry, opting to head in the direction the man was pointing. Just then the crowd
parted, and he saw the Hogwarts Express not ten meters in front of him. He glanced at his
watch. Two minutes to eleven! Cutting it close, Harry.

His cart rolled along in front of him, and as he neared the train a whistle's cry cut through the air,
and then a loud voice boomed through the platform. "LAST CALL FOR THE ELEVEN
O'CLOCK TRAIN TO HOGWARTS."

Harry hurriedly lifted his trunk off the cart, then looked at Hedwig's cage. "Great, How am I going
to do this?"

"Want a hand?" said someone to his left. He turned, coming face-to-face with one of the red-haired
twins.

"Don't go giving away your hands, George," said another voice to Harry's right. "You've only got
two, and god knows I'm not giving you any of mine. Maybe we can take one of Percy's…" It was
the other twin - Fred, Harry remembered their mother calling him.

"You're George," said the first twin, grabbing Harry's trunk and lifting it onto the train. He then
turned to his twin. "You must be mixing yourself up with me."

The other twin took Hedwig's cage from the cart and stepped onto the train. "I keep doing that,
don't I - it's hard to tell two people apart when they're this good looking."

"I hear you," the first one said sympathetically, hopping up after him and picking up the trunk. He
looked down at Harry. "Come on then-"

"-or the train'll leave without you," his brother finished. "And then what would we do-"

"-with all this luggage?" said the other. "Besides selling it, I mean."

"Right. Thanks," Harry said, boarding the train.

As soon as his feet left the ground, the train began to move, slowly pulling out of the station. They passed the twins' mother and younger sister, who began to cry as they waved and yelled their goodbyes.

"Cheer up, Ginny, we'll send you loads of owls!" one of the twins said.

"And a Hogwarts toilet seat!" said the other, giving her a thumbs up.

"George!" their mother screamed, but they were almost too far away to hear, now.

"And one of Percy's hands!" screamed back Fred. Then the train rounded a corner, and they were out of sight.

This is it, Harry thought, moving into the train proper. Excitement was building in his stomach as the train picked up speed. I'm on my way to Hogwarts.

AN: Finally, stuff is happening! This was way too much fun to write, I could have gone on forever with the wacky things happening around platform nine-and-three quarters. Anyways, if you like it, review! Thanks for reading!
Calvin rocketed out onto platform nine-and-three-quarters, colliding with a boy in a yellow and maroon shirt who was passing by. They tumbled to the ground in a heap of arms, legs, and startled cries. The boy looked up, wiggling his toes to see if they still worked, and his eyes widened.

"Calvin?" said Dean.

"Dean?" said Calvin, still lying where he'd fallen.

"Calvin!?" Dean said again, only louder.

"Dean!?" cried Calvin, matching him for volume.

"Calvin!?!"

"Dean!??"

"CALVIN!??"

"DEAN!??"

"CALVIN!??"

"DEAN!??"

"Hey, how's it going?" asked Dean mildly.

"Alright," replied Calvin, shrugging. "You?"

"The same." He looked around. "We should probably get up."

"Oh. Yes." They picked themselves up from the ground, brushing their clothes off. "Man, everyone's so tall. All I can see are legs."

"The train's that way," said Dean, pointing over his shoulder. "Come on, I've already got a compartment."

They made their way through the forest of people, dodging around legs and carts. Suddenly a man sped right between them, panting heavily, and tripped, losing a shoe. He got his balance and kept running, ignoring his one bare foot.

"Huh," said Calvin, bending down to pick up the boot. He examined the piece of footwear wordlessly, then turned to Dean, holding it out. "I got you a shoe."

Dean looked around the floor for a moment, then walked a meter away and grabbed something
from down near his feet. He returned to Calvin, holding out his hand, and said, "Got you a rubber band." They traded items and continued on towards the Hogwarts Express.

Dean's compartment was all the way at the back, so they walked along outside the train beside the cars, where students were sticking their heads out the windows and talking to people on the platform.

"Here we are," said Dean, entering the last car. They walked down the narrow hallway, sidestepping groups of congregating students, and entered the last compartment on the left. A sandy-haired boy with blue eyes was sitting next to the window, and turned as they entered. "Oh, this is Seamus," said Dean, gesturing to the boy.

"Hello," the boy said with a grin. "Seamus Finnigan, glad to meet you!"

"Calvin," replied Calvin, groaning inwardly. "More people? How many do I have to meet!? "I'll just leave my stuff here," he told Dean. "There's someone I promised I'd meet on the platform today."

"Alright, I'm going to stay here. If I go back outside my mum might find me again and try to suffocate me with hugs," Dean said with a shudder. Then he looked around the floor near Calvin. "Where's your trunk?"

Calvin glanced down, then to each side. Then behind him. Finally, he looked up. "There it is," he said, pointing to the luggage rack above the seats, where the gleaming brown trunk sat beside a worn green duffel bag.

Seamus twisted around to look up at the rack. "How'd it get up there!?"

"Magic," said Calvin. "What else? Hold on a sec." He pulled out his wand and climbed onto the seat, reaching up to tap it against his trunk. "Sit down and shut up," he told it, then pocketed his wand. "I'll see you in a bit, Dean. Nice meeting you, Seamus." Then he left the compartment, hopping off the train onto the platform. "Where can I guy get some peace and quiet around here," he mumbled.

"Peace?" said a voice to his left. It was one of the redheaded twins from before.

The other one walked out from behind the first, making it look like he'd split in two. "Quiet?" he said, aghast. "Now who would want-"

"-a silly thing like that?" finished his brother, eyebrows raised. "We saw you watching in awe-"

"-as we disappeared before your eyes. What be your name-"

"-spiky-haired first year?"

"Calvin," responded Calvin, wondering how they did that.

"I'm Gred," said the one on the left.

"And this is Forge," said the one on the right, pointing to the first one. 'No, wait-"

"-I think we messed that up. I can't go hogging-"

"-both our names."

They turned back to Calvin. "The friend you were with-"
"-with the black hair. He wasn't-

"-he couldn't have been-

"Who?" said Calvin, looking back and forth between them.

"Harry Potter," they chorused.

"Who's Harry Potter?" asked Calvin obliviously, tilting his head.

The twin's looked at each other. "Brother-mine, you don't think-

"-he doesn't know about Harry Potter?" Then they launched into the tale of a boy who, from a very young age, was defeating evil wizards every other day, rescuing princesses from castles, tricking dragons away from their caves to take their treasure, saving villages from demons, baking the most delicious pies the world had ever seen, traveling to places most people have never even heard of and even those who have heard of them can't pronounce their names, taming giants and keeping them as pets to guard his house, riding a broomstick out to space to catch a shooting star, and so on.

When they'd finished, they stood there, arms crossed, nodding in unison. "Yep, it's true. That boy you were with-

"-he defeated the great Ogre King before his eighth birthday."

"Before his seventh, too," added the other twin offhandedly.

"Oooooh," said Calvin, as if he finally understood who they were talking about. "That Harry Potter. Of course I know who he he is! We met in Diagon Alley after he fought a rampaging dragon that had somehow gotten loose from Gringotts." The twins' eyes widened. "After that, we went to get ice cream, only Florean said there was a problem and the ice cream wasn't cold enough. So you know what Harry did?"

They leaned in closer. "What'd he do?" they whispered conspiratorially.

"Why, he tracked down an ice elemental and wrestled it over to the ice cream parlour! Told it that if it didn't cooperate, he was going to punch it into the sun. Needless to say, we got our ice cream in short order. It was fabulous."

"This is big," said one of them, glancing at the other.

"We have to go-

"-spread the news."

"Sorry to run-

"-but you know what they say-

"-rumors wait for no opportunist!"

They hurried off into the crowd, yelling, "Lee! Oy, Lee, you'll never believe-

"-what we just heard!"

Calvin watched them as they met up with a boy with dreadlocks, and began telling over his story, no doubt with countless embellishments. That was actually-
-a lot of fun.

Wait, why did I-

-just do that?

Their speech patterns-

-are stuck in my head!

Ahhhhh-

-hhhhh!

The train was going to leave in four minutes, and Calvin still hadn't found Hermione. He wouldn't have cared too much normally, only she'd looked so happy when he'd said he'd meet her here that he would feel bad letting her down, and she was the only girl he'd ever enjoyed talking with.

He was about to give it up as a lost cause and head back to Dean when he spotted a familiar head of bushy brown hair off in the distance. The crowd shifted and he lost sight of her, but he pushed through the river of bodies in the direction he'd seen her heading.

"'Scuse me, coming through!" he yelled, elbowing legs out of his way. "Man with a mission here, make some room! Hey! Watch where you're stepping, that's my favorite right foot! Oof." Someone backed into him, and he fell onto his backside. "Alright, that's it, people. No more Mr. Nice Guy. This is a job for," he pulled out a deep red mask from his pocket as he climbed to his feet, slipping it over his head. It took a few seconds to get the eyeholes situated correctly. Finally, it was on comfortably, the attached cape reaching down to his lower back.

"...Stupendous Man!" he announced, extending a fist into the air, his other hand on his waist. "Mere pedestrians are no obstacle to Stupendous Man's stupendous intellect! Stupendous Man, defender of liberty and justice, ascends a nearby waffle-stand for a better look," Calvin narrated loudly.

"Oy, kid, get off my stall!"

"An enormous science-experiment-gone-wrong attempts to dislodge him from his perch, but the whirlwind wonder climbs quickly onto the rickety roof of the bulbous being's evil establishment!"

"Get down here!"

"With an incredible inhalation, Stupendous Man draws a deep breath, readying his lungs for the trying task to come!"

"I'll call security, don't think I won't!"

"HERMIONeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!"

Across the platform, dragging her trunk along and wondering worriedly if the boy she met at the robe shop had forgotten all about her - after all, she thought to herself, it had been a month - and she was going to have to sit alone all the way to Hogwarts, Hermione Granger heard the call. Surprised, she turned around, trying to locate the source. She saw a figure with a crimson mask and cape on the roof of one of the stalls, trying to evade the hands of the stall's owner as he grabbed at
him. "Calvin?" she said to no one in particular.

Back at the scene of the confrontation, Calvin hopped over the man's latest swipe and yelped when his foot went straight through the rooftop. He heard a creak. A crack. A snap.

"Uh oh," he said, right before the entire precarious structure fell apart around him, the roof teetering and then going down to the right, dumping him unceremoniously onto the back of a passing wizard.

"GET BACK HERE, YOU LITTLE RUNT OF A DISASTER!"

"Run like the wind, my valiant steed!" yelled Calvin, wrapping his arms around the man's head in an effort to stay on. The man, having no idea what had just landed on him, unable to see, and hearing the sounds of chaos all around, raced away, clawing at Calvin's arms and screaming.

"Ow! No oats for you tonight," Calvin scolded, dropping off the man's back and onto a passing bench. The man continued his flight of fear and confusion, and was instantly swallowed up by the crowd. Calvin let out a sigh, removing his Stupendous Man uniform and stuffing it into his pocket.

"Well, that didn't go as planned."

"No plan survives contact with the enemy," Hermione said brightly, dragging her rather large trunk up beside the bench.

"Hermione!" he exclaimed, jumping down. "I found you!"

"No, I found you, because you bellowed my name out to the entire platform." She looked at him sideways. "Did you actually just knock down someone's stall trying to look for me?"

"What?" said Calvin, feigning surprise. "I'm afraid I don't know what you're talking about. Someone as mild-mannered as me would never do something like that!"

"I hardly think that 'mild-mannered' describes you, Calvin. And you really shouldn't destroy people's property, it's not right." Calvin hung his head. "But thank you," Hermione added quickly. "I do appreciate it."

He smiled widely at her, then nodded towards the Hogwarts Express. "We'd better board, there's only-"

Calvin was cut off by the shrill cry of a whistle, and then a booming voice announced, "LAST CALL FOR THE ELEVEN O'CLOCK TRAIN TO HOGWARTS."

"...As I was saying. Come on!"

They weaved their way through the crowd, and Calvin helped lug her trunk onto the train. Dean and Seamus were nowhere to be found when they got to the compartment. Together they shoved the trunk up onto the luggage rack, and then Calvin stuck his head out the window as the train started moving.

The compartment door slid open, and a gangly redhead stepped in. "Anyone sitting there?" he asked, pointing to the space opposite Hermione.

She shook her head. "Nope. I'm Hermione Granger, and you are?"

"Ron Weasley, brother to the twin terrors. Oh, you again," Ron said, noticing Calvin.
"You haven't seen the last of me!" yelled Calvin out the window, shaking his fist at the people on the platform as train rolled out of the station.

The redhead grimaced. "Maybe I'd be better off just sitting outside in the aisle."

"Oh, you two know each other?" said Hermione, looking to where Calvin was pulling himself back from the window.

"Yeah," said Ron, lifting his trunk onto the seat and plopping down next to it. "We met outside the platform. He was doing stretches right before he ran at the pillar like an utter madman."

"Hmm," said Hermione, furrowing her brow. She looked back at Ron. "You've got a spot of...dirt, right there on your nose," she told him, pointing to the tip of her own nose.

Ron grumbled and rubbed his sleeve against the offending spot. "Hey Calvin, where's Harry gotten to?" he then said, asking after the saner of the two.

Calvin smacked his forehead - actually smacked it. Hermione cringed in sympathetic pain. "Ouch. Oh, right! I was going to go look for him after I got on the train! I hope he made it okay. I wonder if anyone asked him for a 'Harry Potter autograph'?

Hermione blanched.

Ron choked on absolutely nothing. "He's *Harry Potter*?"

"Well, his name's Harry Potter, but does he actually embody everyone's concept of who Harry Potter is?" mused Calvin. "I'm not sure. Am I really Calvin, or is it just what people call me? If you call a rock a leaf, it doesn't make it a leaf - but is it even any more of a rock, really? Maybe that's not a very good example, because those two things are so basic."

"Actually," said Hermione, looking very interested, "that's talked about in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* - he writes that 'It is correctly described by the name of its form, not by that of its matter. What is produced is a house or a man, not bricks or flesh.' And, as Jean-Paul Sartre said, 'Existence precedes essence,' which I think means that something is defined by whatever traits people attribute to it.' Then she tapped a finger against her chin thoughtfully. "Hmm, I guess Aristotle was an existentialist. Oh, you should probably go find Harry," she said to Calvin. "I'll come with you."

They looked at Ron, who shrugged and said, "Eh, why not."

"That's the spirit!" Calvin said happily. "Just shrug and go along with it! Works wonders for me. Now, onwards!"

"The only thing I'm 'just going along with' is you, mate," said Ron, getting up. "What do you have to shrug about?"

Calvin shrugged.

They exited the compartment as the train finished rounding a corner, and headed down the aisle.

Calvin poked his head into the first compartment they passed. "Anyone named Harry Potter in here? No? Okay, thanks," he said, sliding the door closed. "Next!"

He slid open the door of the next compartment. "Do you happen to have a lightning bolt on your forehead? No, not on your finger- oh, now that's just uncalled for."
"Oo, I want to do the next one!" said Ron, racing over to the closest compartment and pulling the door back. "Hey, anybody in here have, uh...messy black hair?"

"What?" said a confused voice from within.

"Lemme handle this, Ron." Ron stepped back, blushing furiously, and Calvin took his place. "Alright, if one of you recognizes me, raise your hand." A pause. "Wait, how do you all recognize me, I have no idea who you are!"

"You look a bit different without the mask on, but I'm pretty sure you declared yourself to be 'Stupendous Man.' Right before you exploded some guy's stall."

"Oh, you saw that?"

"Mate, everyone saw that," said Ron from behind him.

"Well, you're not Harry Potter," Calvin addressed the student inside, "So I'm going to have to take my leave now. Have a nice ride!" He quickly shut the door and stood there, biting his lip. "Man, I need to get a better disguise than the old mask-'n-cape."

"If the teachers end up hearing about this, you could get in trouble, Calvin," Hermione said worriedly.

"Been there, done that, got the t-shirt," Calvin replied, waving her off and heading towards the next compartment down the aisle.

"I'd be taking this more seriously if I were you," she said, slightly offended.

Ron stepped past her to follow Calvin. "You're definitely not him, Hermione. And you should be thankful for that. I know I am." They caught up with the psychotic, spiky-haired muggleborn as he was sliding open the door, Hermione's cheeks slightly pinker than normal.

Ron poked his head into the compartment above Calvin's. A round-faced boy was sitting on the right side of the compartment, across from a dark-skinned boy and a boy with sandy hair. The round-faced one was petting some manner of amphibian that rested on his lap.

"Has anyone seen a Harry Potter?" Calvin said. "I've lost one. Oh, hi, Dean. Hi, Seamus," he nodded to the boys on the left.

"Hey, Calvin, sorry we disappeared. Neville here had lost his toad, so we helped him find it," said Dean, gesturing to the round-faced boy. Neville smiled sheepishly.

"No worries," Calvin replied. He entered and walked over to Neville. "Can I touch it?" he asked excitedly, looking down at the toad.

"Uh, sure," Neville said with enough surprise that Calvin guess no one had ever asked him that before.

"Woah, he's cold!"

"Yeah, toads are cold-blooded animals," answered Neville. "So they don't regulate their body temperature internally like we do - to raise it, they have to soak up heat from the sun, or more likely from sun-heated stones."

"I did that once," said Ron, walking in to stand beside Calvin and look at the toad. "It was great, at
least until my back started aching from lying on rocks."

"Are we going to stand here all day chatting, or are we going to go find your friend?" a voice said from right outside the compartment.

"Who's that?" Dean asked, leaning forward to try and see into the aisle.

"Hermione," said Ron, rolling his eyes. "We're coming, Hermione, keep your hair on," he called out to her, turning around and grabbing Calvin by the arm. "Come on, mate, before she starts telling us off for leaving someone waiting."

"Ah, he's got me!" Calvin cried, pretending to be dragged out by Ron. "You'll never take me alive!"

"Stop, drop, and roll!" yelled Dean after him, laughing.

"Mate, that's for when you're on fire," Seamus told the short-haired boy. "I should know."

Harry wasn't in the next compartment they checked either, or the one after that, so they went to the car beyond theirs.

"Harry! There you are, we've been looking for you for hours!" Calvin sighed loudly, crossing his arms and shaking his head.

Harry, who'd been sliding back the door of a compartment, stopped and dragged his trunk over to them with one hand, the other holding Hedwig's cage. "We only pulled out of the station like ten minutes ago, Calvin. Seriously though, this train is packed, I couldn't find a seat anywhere!"

"We've got a compartment all the way at the back," said Ron, reaching out to take the owl cage from Harry.

"Thanks," Harry said gratefully.

"I'm Hermione Granger," said Hermione, sticking out her hand.

He shook the offered appendage. "Er, nice to meet you. Harry Potter."

"I've heard," she responded. "I read about you, you know, in Modern Magical History and The Rise and Fall of the Dark Arts and Great Wizarding Events of the Twentieth Century."

"Even I haven't read about me," said Harry, looking mildly interested. "What do the books say?"

"There are a lot of conflicting points, but they all agree that you're a powerful wizard who saved the wizarding world in it's darkest hours," said Hermione frankly, sounding as if she were quoting from the back of one of said books. Which she probably was.

"Oh," Harry responded. "Well, I haven't even done any magic yet, so I don't see how they could know I'm a powerful wizard."

"Really?" said Hermione, frowning. "I've tried a few simple spells just for practice and it's all worked for me. Of course, nobody in my family's magic at all, so I was ever so surprised when I got my letter, but I was ever so pleased, of course, I mean, it's the very best school of witchcraft there is, I've heard - I've learned all our course books by heart, of course, I just hope it will be enough. Well why are we standing here in the aisle? Let's go sit down. Here, let me help you with that," she said, taking Harry's trunk and starting off back to their compartment at the end of the
"I - you don't need - I can-" started Harry. Hermione continued into the next car, humming to herself. "...Thanks."

"Just let her, mate," Ron said, putting a hand on his shoulder.

"Oh, I met your brothers, Ron. They helped me get my stuff on the train."

"The twins?" said Calvin, perking up. "I met them too! How do they always finish each other's sentences so perfectly?"

"We've been trying to figure it out for years," Ron told him. "I think it must be an identical twin thing."

"I want an identical twin," said Calvin decisively.

"No thanks, one of you's more than enough," said Ron, looking scared at the thought of another Calvin running around.

"Shouldn't we be following Hermione to the back of the train?" Harry interjected.

"Oh, right," said Ron, hefting Hedwig's cage and starting walking.

"To the bat-compartment!" yelled Calvin, running back the way they'd come, arms spread out to his sides and singing, "Na na na na, na na na na, na na na na, na na na na, BATMAN!"

"He's a bit of a nutter, isn't he," observed Ron.

"Well, I think he's loads of fun," Harry said, stepping through the door between the cars.

"Like a barrel of monkeys," answered Ron sarcastically.

"Oh come on, let's keep him," Harry said good-naturedly.

"Fine, but I am not taking him out for walks at five in the bloody morning."

About five minutes after Calvin's stomach started rumbling and he realized that he forgot to take the sandwiches his mother had made him that morning, they all heard a clattering sound approaching the compartment from out in the aisle. Then the sound stopped, and a short, smiling woman wearing an old-fashioned apron slid back their door. "Anything off the cart, dears?" she said.

"Depends, what's on it?" asked Calvin curiously, mindful of his rumbling digestive system. The smiling woman started listing a dozen candies and sweets that Calvin had never heard of. He turned to Ron. "Any of those good?" he asked the freckled boy, who had started salivating as soon as the first food item was mentioned.

"Chocolate Frogs, definitely. The Pumpkin Pasties too, and the Licorice Wands - Cauldron Cakes aren't bad either, and Drooble's Best Bubble Gum is fun. Oh, and Bertie Bott's Every Flavoured Beans if you like surprises."

Harry ended up buying some of each of the candies Ron had recommended, and the four of them ate their way through the pile of treats, with Hermione participating only by trying a single Every
Flavoured Bean. It turned out to be wax flavor, and after that she opted to stay away from wizarding sweets.

"You got lucky, actually," Ron told her, opening a Chocolate Frog packet. "George swears he had a booger-flavoured one once."

"That's absolutely repulsive," Hermione replied, pushing away the bag of Bertie Bott's.

A while later, when Ron's long and enthusiastic explanation of the finer rules of the wizarding sport Quidditch started winding down, the compartment door slid open to reveal three boys standing in the aisle.

"Mo?" exclaimed Calvin, his skin paling, eyes wide as the waistline of a sumo wrestler who'd eaten another sumo wrestler for breakfast every day of his life.

"What!?!" said Draco Malfoy in confusion, turning to look where Calvin was staring. "That's Crabbe."

"O-oh, of-of course," Calvin stammered, holding a hand to his chest. "You almost gave me a heart attack, Crabbe. Don't do that."

The thickset boy with the wide face who'd been referred to as Crabbe looked back and forth between Draco and Calvin, utterly bewildered. "Do what?" he said blandly.

"Nevermind. Hey, Draco, what's up?"

Draco ignored his greeting, instead smirking smarmily in Harry's direction. "I thought you were him, when we were in the robe shop. Everyone's saying it's true. Wrestle any dragons lately, Potter?"

Now it was Harry's turn to be confused. "What!?!" he said, as Calvin tried to cover up his own laughter.

"Sorry, Harry, that's probably my fault."

"You started that rumor?" asked Malfoy, eyebrows rising up like a pair of balloons accidentally released by a toddler. "I thought he was your friend?"

"He is," Calvin replied. "That's why I did it. Besides, it's hilariously unbelievable anyways."

Draco studied him with a curious expression. "You're all right, Calvin," he said grudgingly, before quickly adding "...for a muggleborn."

"You're all right too," said Calvin with a shrug.

"...For a git," added Ron truthfully.

"What's this, another Weasley?" retorted Draco. "My father-"

"No, actually," said Calvin, interrupting the blond-haired boy. "He was 'another Weasley' eleven years ago - give or take. Now he's just a regular ol' Weasley."

Draco stared at him in disbelief for a moment, then turned to Harry. "Is he like this all the time, or just with me?"

"You learn to roll with it," Harry answered, grinning.
"Or get rolled over by it," said Ron, smiling despite himself.

Hermione, who'd simply been watching the curious dynamic of the strange relationship the new boy seemed to have with Harry and Calvin, spoke up. "I'm sorry, who is this?" she asked, gesturing to Draco.

"Dra-" He glanced at Calvin, who was watching him expectantly. Draco rolled his eyes. "Fine," he muttered. He looked back to Hermione and said, "The name's Malfoy. Draco Malfoy."

Calvin applauded loudly. Harry laughed. Ron looked at them like they were crazy.

"Did you just reference James Bond?" said Hermione.

"What?" said Draco.

Calvin and Harry were both cracking up now, and Calvin promptly fell onto the floor, whooping and slapping his thigh.

"I'm just going to leave now," Draco said, eyeing them cautiously. He turned to Hermione. "Trust me when I tell you that if you at all value your sanity, you should definitely find different friends." His eyes flicked back to where Calvin was lying on the floor, wheezing. "And you should probably find a new compartment, too." With that, he slid the door closed.

As Calvin picked himself up and he and Harry both caught their breath, Ron looked at Hermione. "Maybe we should take his advice. Even if he is a stuck-up weirdo who gels his hair."

Hermione just shook her head silently and went back to reading her book.

"What're you reading, Hermione," said Harry, leaning over to look at the contents.

"It's Hogwarts, A History, and it's really quite interesting - you should give it a read. Who knows," she said wryly, looking pointedly at Calvin as he sat back down. "You might even learn something."

Calvin waved a hand at the proposal, swatting it away. "Sorry, I only read the classics."

Hermione blinked, intrigued. "Really? I don't care for Shakespeare, but I've read Pride and Prejudice, Call of the Wild, Animal Farm, Lord of the Flies, and bunch of others and I loved all of them, even if Lord of the Flies was a bit gruesome. I don't quite understand some of Snowball's motives, either, and John Thornton's death came as a bit of a shock to me. That poor dog! What's your favorite?" she asked Calvin, who'd been waiting patiently while she talked.

"Hamster Huey and the Gooey Kablooie," he responded seriously. "But only if my dad does all the voices."

"That...sounds like a children's book," said Hermione.

"Oh, believe me, it's very nuanced. And never the same plot twice, though I wonder how that works."

Hermione just shook her head and went back to reading her book. A few minutes later she stood up and exited the compartment to go to the restrooms. When she came back, she announced, "I've just been up front to ask the conductor, and he says we're nearly there. You three had better change into your robes, and quickly."
Sure enough, as soon as they’d finished pulling on their black school robes, the train began to slow down. A cool female voice echoed through the train: "We will be reaching Hogwarts in five minutes’ time. Please leave your luggage on the train, it will be taken to the school separately."

The train turned a corner and, though it was starting to get too dark to see much, the four of them could pick out a gigantic, sprawling shape at the top of a hill in the distance.

"Hogwarts," Hermione said matter-of-factly.

"Hogwarts," Ron gulped nervously.

"Hogwarts," Harry breathed reverently.

"Why's it called Hogwarts, anyway - that's just a combination of a synonym for pig and those disgusting skin-bumps that toads have," stated Calvin offhandedly.

"Shh," said Harry, still gazing out the window. "You're ruining the moment."

AN: Oh Bertie Bott’s Every Flavoured Beans, you wonderfully double-edged candy, you. Anyways, I managed to confine the entire Hogwarts Express + platform nine-and-three-quarters scenes to two chapters, so there's an improvement! Here we get to see Stupendous Man, a Calvin & Hobbes classic, in action. I wonder if we'll ever get a glimpse of the elusive Safari Al...

Thanks for reading, and if you like it, leave a review! It only takes a moment, and it makes me happier than you know, so please do!
Chapter Seven - A Suitable Sorting of Sorcerers

To get to the castle, apparently, they had to take small wooden boats across a lake, four people to each vessel.

"Ah, the classic pre-game fishing trip, of course," said Calvin, climbing into a boat. He was joined by Hermione, Ron, and Harry.

"I'm not sure if anything lives in the lake, mate," replied Ron as the man Harry had identified as Hagrid bellowed 'FORWARD!' The boats began to glide across the water, leaving gentle ripples in their wake. The gangly boy leaned over the lake and peered down, but all he could see was his reflection.

"Actually," said Hermione, drawing her robes tightly around her. "A giant squid make its home in this lake, as well as several tribes of mermaids."

"How'd you know that?" asked Ron, looking up at her.

"It's in Hogwart, A History; honestly, Ron, don't you ever pick up a book?"


Calvin stared intensely down at his reflection in the lake surface. "I've decided I'm going to catch the giant squid. Do you think it's the same one that lives in the bottom of my toilet and drinks all the water whenever I flush it?"

Hermione gagged. "Eww. Why would you say such a thing?"

"Oh, that's what my dad said when I asked where all the water goes. Of course, he was trying to concentrate on something at the time, so I suppose he could have gotten mixed up. His Dad ratings were way down that week."

"Dad ratings?" Harry said, raising an eyebrow.

"Yep. If my dad wants to stay Dad, he's got to keep the votes of the people! Otherwise, what would stop him from becoming a dictator?"

"What people?"

"Me, obviously - though Hobbes gets half a vote every other week on odd-numbered months when there's a full moon," Calvin answered carefully.

The small fleet of boats carrying the first-years neared a great cliff, and they were all told to duck as they passed beneath it. They entered a tunnel of some sort, and before long the tunnel opened up
into a spacious cavern, a dock reaching out into the water from the pebbled shore. They climbed out onto the dock, then up a winding stone passageway before coming out onto a soft, springy grass clearing right in front of the castle. Then it was a short trek over to a set of stone steps, with a great oak door set into the wall at the top. Hagrid knocked three times with his mammoth fist, and the door instantly swung open.

"Hey, it's Professor McGonagall!" Calvin said, craning his neck to see through the door.

"She looks nice," said Hermione.

"She looks scary," said Ron, who didn't seem to be in a very good mood. He kept swallowing nervously and holding his stomach.

"I'll take it from here," Professor McGonagall was saying to Hagrid, pulling the door open as wide as it could go. The first-years followed as she lead them through the gigantic entrance hall, flaming torches lining the stone walls, each resting in its own metal mounting. She walked up to an enormous set of double doors and turned around, addressing them.

"Now, before we go in, I just want to welcome you all to Hogwarts," the Scottish witch said, smiling at them. "There is going to be a start-of-term banquet, but first you will all be sorted into your respective houses. The four houses, named after the four Founders of Hogwarts themselves, are Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Slytherin. Each house has its virtues, its strengths, and its history. Each house has produced its share of outstanding witches and wizards. Each house stands for something - but do not forget that while certain traits may be more celebrated within certain houses, a true witch or wizard tries to encompass all such traits. That said, the Sorting is very important, because during your stay here at Hogwarts, you will spend most of your time within your own house - it will hopefully become something like a family to you. Classes, free time, and sleeping quarters are all arranged by house.

"Throughout the year, everything you do reflects upon the rest of your house - triumphs will earn you house points, while rule breaking get those points taken away. At the end of the school year, whichever house has accumulated the most will be presented with the House Cup, a trophy, but more importantly a great honor. I wish you all much luck in whichever house you are Sorted, and I believe that you will prove to be people who your housemates can be proud of.

"Now, take a moment to tidy yourselves up and we'll go through these doors into the Great Hall, at which time the Sorting will begin." She surveyed the group of chattering first-years, gaze settling disapprovingly for a moment here and there, where students had their cloaks sliding to one side, or draped over their shoulders. Her eyes came to a rest on Calvin's spiky hair.

Calvin, noticing the look, shrugged helplessly. "It's no use, Professor McGonagall, the only way to make it look any neater is by shaving it off and replacing it with highlighter. And even then, it just grew back the next day."

Professor McGonagall shook her head, then straightened up and clapped her hands to get the students' attention. "All right, here we go now. Line up, rows of two, let's go - keep a hold on that frog, Mr. Longbottom. Mr. Finnigan, get back in line and put that flint away, we're wizards not cavemen. Everybody ready?" The double line of nervous children shifted like a single, living organism. "Right, then." She turned and pushed open the massive doors, and the sounds of
hundreds of people inside the Great Hall washed over them like a tidal wave of conversation. They marched in behind the green-clad witch, trying to take it all in at once. The walls were tall and sheer, and the ceiling depicted a midnight-blue sky speckled with twinkling silver stars. Candles floated in the air above their heads, flickering gently. Along both sides of the room were two tables, each as long as three buses and filled with students of all ages, talking and joking with each other.

At the far end of the room was a table on a raised stone platform, and seated at the table were people Calvin guessed to be the other teachers. The one seated in the middle, in a high-backed armchair, looked like he was born in the late cretaceous period at least, judging by the length of his white beard, and his eyes twinkled kindly from behind a pair of half-moon spectacles perched on his nose. That must be Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore! thought Calvin. To the esteemed Mugwump's right sat a crow of a man if there ever was one, with a hooked nose and long, greasy hair, his angry eyes glaring out from beneath heavy brows. There was also a nervous-looking man in a large purple turban, and at the right end sat the gigantic fellow who'd led them all to the castle.

Situated behind almost the entire line of students, Calvin didn't realize they'd stopped moving forward until he bumped into the person in front of him. He leaned out to the side, trying to see what was happening, and noticed Professor McGonagall on the raised stone platform, standing in front of the table. Next to her was a four-legged stool, and on the stool lay an old, pointed hat, stitched and patched in places. It had a rip near the brim, and seemed a bit washed out. Suddenly, the hat twitched, gave a little jump, and the rip opened wide like a mouth. The hat burst into song.

"I know what you are likely thinking -

Oh, it's just a dirty hat.
But let me let you let me tell you,
That I'm much more than that.
I've sat on heads both great and dull
And have perused their minds,
I've sifted through their myriad thoughts
While they rested their behinds.
I found inside their beating hearts
The reasons they were here,
And picked apart their wants and needs,
Their hopes and dreams and fears.
I listened in and made a choice
To Sort them in the place
That would serve their interests best,
That would cater to their tastes.
Whether it be brave Gryffindor,
For those with inner courage,
Or the loyal friends of Hufflepuff
Who never are discouraged.
Whether the clever minds of Ravenclaw
Who never cease to question
Or ambitious company of Slytherin
Who plot at their discretion -
Put me on and get excited,
You can even do a dance,
For though I have none, don't be fooled -
Your future's in my hands!

As the room thundered with applause the hat bent back and cackled loudly, then abruptly ceased moving, once again appearing to be just an ordinary hat.

The applause trickled off to silence, and Professor McGonagall stepped forward, pulling out a long scroll of parchment from her robes and unrolling it. She looked down at the gathered first-years. "When I call your name, please come up and sit on the stool, and put on the hat to be Sorted." She cleared her throat and lifted the scroll up.

"Abbot, Hannah!"

A girl with rosy cheeks and blond hair in pigtails rushed up, placing the hat on her head as she sat down. Being rather large, it slipped over her eyes. A second or two passed, then -

"HUFFLEPUFF!" the hat declared loudly from atop Hannah's head.

One of the tables on the right started cheering and clapping as the girl, smiling and blushing, went over to take a seat among the rest of the Hufflepuffs.

That's it? Calvin thought to himself, frowning. You just put on a hat and it screams out the name of one of the houses?

"Bones, Susan!" Professor McGonagall announced over the dying cheers.

Another girl scurried up to put on the hat.

"HUFFLEPUFF!"

I thought it would be more dramatic. This just seems silly. Not that there's anything wrong with silly.

"Boot, Terry!"

"RAVENCLAW!"
This time it was a table on the left that applauded, welcoming the boy to their table. A few people stood up to shake his hand and make room for him.

*Maybe there's some sort of test, afterwards, to see if you're really worthy of whatever house you were sorted into. I hope it's not a written test. I wonder where Harry, Ron, and Hermione got to? Oh, there they are near the front. Why's it so quiet?* He peeked around the person in front of him to get another look at Professor McGonagall.

The Scottish witch was staring at the parchment in her hands, mouth slightly open. She turned to glance at the bearded wizard with the half-moon spectacles, confusion written across her face. The old wizard smiled blankly at her, eyes twinkling, hands clasped in front of him. Professor McGonagall turned back to the room, flicking her eyes to the rear of the line of first-years, then down to the list of names. She swallowed.

"Boy of Destiny, Calvin!" she called resignedly. All around the room eyebrows were raised. Several people laughed out loud.

"Ooh, that's me!" Calvin ran eagerly up to the raised part of the room, grabbed the hat and jammed it onto his head, then hopped onto the stool. The hat didn't go very far down, held up as it was by his excessively spiky hair.

'You have got to be kidding me,' a voice spoke into his head.

'What?' thought Calvin. 'Is there a problem, Mr. Hat?'

'Well, at least you're polite.' There was a moment of silence during which Calvin felt something tickle at the inside of his mind. 'Sometimes, anyway. Hmm, interesting, quite a curious mind you've got. Always asking, always thinking - a bit of a philosopher, I see. What do you think of Ravenclaw?' the hat asked.

'Um, sounds pointy?'

'...Then again, maybe not. All right...' it trailed off again, and Calvin felt as if someone were flipping through his memories like folders in a filing cabinet. 'My, what a friendship,' the voice said, and Calvin knew it was referring to Hobbes. 'Hufflepuff, perhaps?' it mused.

'I'm not a marshmallow,' Calvin told it. He could sense the hat ignoring what he said.

'But no, there was your part in the Noodle Incident...'

'THE EVIDENCE WAS INCONCLUSIVE!' yelled Calvin into his own head.

'I can see everything, boy, you can't hide things from me. Now be quiet so I can Sort you.'

'Wait, you don't need to talk to me at all? That's boring. This should be more of an interactive thing.'

'The Sorting ceremony is as old as Hogwarts, and it's not going to change just because you are bored. Now shush.'

Calvin felt more memory-tickles, and after about half a minute of silence he said, 'Aren't you finished already?'

'I was trying to find some way out of it, but...'
'But what?'

The hat gave a mental sigh. 'You're ninety-one percent Gryffindor already. I thought I'd be able to temper that by placing you in a different house, but it seems it is not to be.'

'Why would you want to do that?' questioned Calvin, curious.

'To try what I could to avert a possible apocalypse,' the hat replied grimly.

'Why do people keep saying that!? It's not like I'm going to do anything bad with magic - I don't try to destroy things!'

'I swear, first-years get more naive every year. Now, to get you off my head before your insanity corrupts the ancient spells placed on me by the Founders...it's time I Sorted you into-

"GRYFFINDOR!" shouted the hat from right above him, making Calvin jump.

"Yes!" he yelled, dropping off the stool and punching the air.

'Annoying little cretinssaywhat?' spoke a voice rapidly in his head.

"What?" asked Calvin out loud, then realized what the hat had said. "Hey!" Professor McGonagall plucked it off his head before he could think of something to say back. He squinted angrily at the hat as she placed it back on the stool, pointing at his own eyes with two fingers, then turning the fingers towards the piece of headwear. "I've got my eye on you, Mr. Hat."

Professor McGonagall gave him a little push in the direction of the Gryffindor table, which had exploded into applause and cheers. He skipped over and stopped in front of the table, bowing to the redheaded twins on the left, one of whom was banging a pair of large cymbals together. The other one put down a ringing triangle that was as big as he was, and together they walked over to Calvin.

"Oh no," said their older brother, who had a silver badge with a 'P' on it pinned to his robes and was frozen in the act of getting up to shake Calvin's hand. "He's one of their kind."

"Welcome, Boy of Destiny-"

"-to the house of your destiny! Take a seat!" said the twin Calvin had decided was Gred, guiding him over to a seat at their end of the table and pushing him into it.

"Relax!" said the one he was calling Forge, reaching around from behind and tying a napkin around Calvin's neck.

"Have something to drink!"

"We promise it won't fill you!" They grabbed his cup and upturned an empty pitcher over it before placing it in front of him.

"I feel like Belle in Beauty and the beast," Calvin said to himself as the twins piled imaginary dishes onto his plate. "Be our guest, be our guest, put our service to the test," he sang, swishing his hands back and forth. "Try our air, it's the best! Don't forget to stop and rest!"

"We'll send you on a tasty quest," added on of the twins.

"To take part in this eating fest!" his other half finished.

"Granger, Hermione!" Professor McGonagall called.
"It's Hermione's turn!" said Calvin. He shoved the twins' hands out of his face as they tried to force-feed him spoonfuls of invisible food.

Hermione practically sprinted up to the stool, taking the hat and pulling it down quickly onto her head.

"She'd better be in Gryffindor," Calvin said to himself. "I'm going to need all the help I can get when they start giving us homework."

"If it's homework answers you're after-"

"-we've got you covered," the twins whispered to him.

"GRYFFINDOR!" yelled the hat, and Hermione took it off and headed to the cheering Gryffindor table, smiling with her entire being.

"Phew," said Calvin. "Well, that's at least one friend in Gryffindor that I already have. Keep it up, Mr. Hat. Hey, Hermione, over here!" Hermione hurried over, and Calvin help up his hand for a high five, saying, "Great job wearing the hat!"

She tentatively attempted a high five, but just ended up pushing at his hand with her own. "Thanks, I think."

"This is Gred and Forge," Calvin said, introducing her to the twins.

They bowed deeply. "We are at your service-

"-oh bushy-haired one." They turned to Calvin. "And you are aware those aren't actually our names-"

"-right?"

Calvin shrugged. "I like those names."

"Fair enough."

"So we hear you've decided to become friends with our ickle Ronniekins."

"A wise choice - not because of him, obviously, but we're more likely to help a family member's friend-"

"-than any old stranger. And our help can come in many forms." They grinned wildly.

"That's not a very nice thing to say," Hermione told them sternly. "And Ron is a great person."

"What's happening, Fred?" one of the twins said anxiously. "I thought we'd left mum at the station."

"It seems she's manifesting in this here Hermione," Fred replied, backing away in fear.

"We'd better make our escape-"

"-while we still can."

Hermione sat down next to Calvin as the redheaded duo scurried away. "Is everyone at Hogwarts as strange as you?" she asked. Normally she'd hurry to add 'No offense,' but she knew Calvin would
take it as a compliment, if anything.

"I sure hope not," Calvin said, looking around. "I pride myself on being the strangest wherever I go - If other people are as strange as me, I'm going to have to actually start working at it." He shuddered.

They watched while Neville Longbottom, the boy with the toad, was called. As he stepped out from his place in line, Dean yelled to him from behind.

"Put Trevor under the hat, Neville!"

Neville turned around and smiled before heading up to the stool. Thirty seconds later he was Sorted into "GRYFFINDOR!" and happily took off the hat before running over to their table.

"Toad-boy!" Calvin called out to him, waving. Neville hurried over, but Percy intercepted him to shake the boy's hand.

"Welcome to Gryffindor, Mr. Longbottom," he said pompously. "If you need anything, just come to me - I'm a prefect." Then he walked over to Hermione. "I apologize for not greeting you when you first arrived at the table, Ms. Granger, but the twins were here, and I try to avoid them when I can." He shook her hand and walked back to his seat.

"Does anyone in that family actually like any of their siblings?" Hermione questioned. "I'm an only child, so I can't be sure, but I don't think that kind of thing is healthy, do you?"

Calvin gave her one of his shrugs. "Wouldn't know, I don't have any siblings either." They turned to Neville, who had walked around the table and was taking a seat across from Hermione.

"Same here," he said.

Calvin looked back at the Sorting area just in time to see Draco put on the hat. He sat there under it for about ten seconds, brow furrowed, until the Sorting Hat yelled, "SLYTHERIN!" Calvin watched, intrigued, as the blond-haired boy walked over to the Slytherin table, frowning to himself. He took a seat next to the two large boys who'd been with him on the train and glanced over his shoulder, barely even noticing the thunderous applause he was receiving from his new housemates.

_Wonder what that's about, _Calvin pondered. _He was raving about going to Slytherin both times we talked, so why's he looking so edgy? _His thoughts brought him to the first conversation he'd had with Draco, back in Diagon Alley roughly a month before. Just about every time Draco had opened his mouth, he'd given off an impression of superiority and self-importance. Yet the arrogance with which he'd introduced himself and started telling them what his parents were off doing was at odds with the way he had responded to Calvin when interrupted. And the whole conversation on the train - apart from his initial words to Harry - had had a decidedly different feel to it.

His contemplation of the strange Slytherin was cut short when he heard Professor McGonagall say, "Potter, Harry!" and the entire Great Hall was promptly filled with urgent murmuring and hushed speculation.

Calvin and Hermione watched as their friend walked slowly up to the hat, fists clenched tight. The symphony of whispers died off as Harry sat beneath the Sorting Hat, fidgeting. Almost two minutes later they returned with a vengeance, as Harry had still yet to be Sorted. The hat lay motionless over his head, obscuring most of his face, but Calvin could see him biting his bottom lip. A moment later the messy-haired boy gave a small shake of his head, right after which the hat shouted as loudly as always, "GRYFFINDOR!"
Harry removed the hat and visibly let out a breath, relief evident on his face. The Gryffindor section erupted into the loudest cheer that evening. As he approached the table, Calvin got to his feet.

"All hail the slayer of the Ogre King!" shouted Calvin.

"All hail the defender of ice cream!" yelled one of the twins.

"The Sultan of Swashbuckling!"

"The Colossus of Claymores!"

"The Great Bamboozler!"

"Hi, guys," said Harry wearily, sitting down on Calvin's other side, where a space had suddenly opened up.

"Why were you under the hat for so long?" asked Hermione intensely, leaning across Calvin to peer at Harry.

Harry shook his head. "The hat said something about me being 'extremely well rounded,' and wouldn't sort me until I answered a bunch of its questions."

"That's not fair, it wouldn't even let me talk, barely!" said Calvin, offended. "Why didn't it just read your mind?"

"Hiya Harry!" said the twins happily, coming over to clap him on the shoulder. "Glad to have you on the team!"

"Now we've got the Boy of Destiny and the Boy Who Lived!"

"Hmm, what do we call her..."

"The Girl Who Scolded?"

Hermione hmph'd, rolling her eyes.

"The Girl Who Mothered?"

She ignored them, turning to watch the Sorting.

"The Girl Who Gave Us The Silent Treatment? Nah, too long."

"Don't worry, Hermione, we'll come up with something." With that, they strolled back to their seats, tossing potential names for her back and forth as they went.

Calvin looked back at the first-years still waiting to be sorted, of which there were four.

"Thomas, Dean!" called Professor McGonagall, and the tall boy bounded up to the stool, shouting enthusiastically.

"Yeah, let's do this!"

Calvin snorted. "As if it's even a question."

"GRYFFINDOR!" the hat announced the second it touched Dean's head.
"Nailed it!" yelled Dean, jumping back up.

"Perfect! Now all I need is for Ron to get Gryffindor and I'll never have to talk to anyone else for the rest of the year!" said Calvin happily as Dean sped over to the Gryffindor table amidst the deafening applause; their housemates obviously realized how much of a quality Gryffindor Dean was.

"What do you mean by that?" Hermione asked dubiously, raising an eyebrow.

"Well, five friends is more than enough, right?" said Calvin, turning to her. "My mom should be happy with me having five friends. Therefore, I don't need to make any more." He stood up and bumped fists with Dean, who was grinning widely. "Knew I'd see you here!"

"Didn't doubt it for a second, mate," Dean replied. "I'm going to go find a place to sit." Calvin looked around, but indeed there were no open seats at their end of the table.

"Alright, I'll see you later then."

"Unless I become invisible in the next couple hours, that is."

"Right. That's always a possibility," Calvin said, nodding.

He sat back down just as Professor McGonagall announced the second to last person, "Weasley, Ronald!"

"Ronald," Calvin chuckled. "I am so calling him that from now on."

"GRYFFINDOR!"

"Aaaaand that's a wrap!" declared Calvin, joining in with the clapping. Harry had stood up and was applauding wholeheartedly, smiling, while Hermione looked quietly pleased.

Ron walked up to the table and was instantly mobbed by his brothers.

"Ickle Ronnie, so glad you could make it!

"Now we can tuck you into bed every night!"

"Get away from him, Fred, George," Percy told the twins from the other side of the table. They were ruffling Ron's hair and pinching his cheeks, ignoring the embarrassed boy's protests. "Or mum will hear about this."

The twins gasped in shock. "You wouldn't."

Percy glared coldly at them.

"Okay, okay, we're going. We'll give you the full welcome later, little brother, don't you worry." They retreated.

"Fantastic job, Ron," the prefect told his brother proudly, leaning across the table and shaking his hand.

Ron rounded the table to take a seat that Percy had apparently been saving for him. "That was nerve-wracking," he admitted to them, running a hand through his red hair.

"Tell me about it," said Harry. Then he looked down at his gleaming, yet empty, plate. "I'm
starving. When's the food part of the banquet?"

"Shh!" Hermione said, pointing to where the Headmaster had pushed his chair back and stood up, smiling radiantly out at the entire student body.

"Welcome!" he said warmly, spreading his arms wide as if to hug them all. "Welcome to a new year at Hogwarts! Before we begin our banquet, I would like to say a few words. And here they are: Nitwit! Blubber! Oddment! Tweak!" He smiled even more radiantly than before and clasped his hands. "Thank you!" Then he sat back down. Everyone cheered.

"Go Mugwump Man!" yelled Calvin loudly, clapping. Dumbledore waved to him.

"You are contagious, aren't you," Harry commented, staring at Calvin.

"Nah, I heard Dumbledore's always been a bit mad," Ron said. "Woah, lamb chops! Haven't had those in ages."

Calvin and Harry gaped in amazement at the food that had literally just appeared on the table.

"You guys wouldn't be so dumbstruck if you'd read Hogwarts, A History," said Hermione, serving herself some potatoes. "It's in chapter seven - page six, line fourteen if I'm not mistaken."

They piled food onto their plates, passing around dishes and drinks. Calvin had never had pumpkin juice before, but found that he quite enjoyed it. He ate more than he ever remembered eating, devouring an entire platter of steaks by himself, not allowing anyone else to take from it. When they'd finished, and were all leaning back exclaiming how they couldn't eat another bite, the food disappeared, leaving both their plates and the serving dishes clean as a newborn's criminal record. After a few seconds they were filled once again, this time with all kinds of desserts, ranging from gigantic cake towers and puddings to wriggling gummy worms, the sheer volume of food making what they'd had on the Hogwarts express look like a collection of crumbs by comparison. They dug in.

Calvin munched on a wafer-like cookie with sparkling sprinkles coating it, and turned to listen to what Seamus was saying; everyone had shuffled around during the meal, and he and Dean ended up across from them and next to Neville, while Percy had floated further down and was talking to someone from his own year.

"I'm half-and-half," the Irish boy told them. "Mum's a witch. Dad's a muggle. Bit of a nasty shock for him when he found out - she didn't tell him about it till after the wedding." Everyone laughed.

"I think I might be half-and-half too," Dean said. "My dad left shortly after I was born, so we can't know for certain, but my mum reckons he was a wizard."

"What about you, Neville?" said Ron.

"Well, my gran brought me up and she's a witch," said Neville, "but the family thought I was all-muggle for ages. My Great Uncle Algie kept trying to catch me off guard and force some magic out of me - he pushed me off the end of Blackpool pier once, I nearly drowned - but nothing happened until I was eight. Great Uncle Algie came round for dinner, and he was hanging me out of an upstairs window by the ankles when my Great Auntie Enid offered him a meringue and he accidentally let go. But I bounced - all the way down the garden and into the road. They were all really pleased, Gran was crying, she was so happy. And you should have seen their faces when I got in here - they thought I might not be magic enough to come, you see. Great Uncle Algie was so pleased he bought me Trevor, my toad."
"I'm a muggleborn," said Hermione. "Not a drop of magical blood in my family."

"Way more than a drop in mine," Ron said wryly. "Way more family, too. All my brothers went to Hogwarts - the oldest two graduated already, and of course Percy and the twins are still here. My younger sister'll be starting next year, too."

"My parent's were wizards, but I don't remember them," said Harry. "I grew up living with my aunt and uncle and cousin - they're muggles, and they're bloody awful."

Everyone turned to Calvin expectantly. "Oh, I was a blue-light special at K-Mart. Hey Ron, can you pass some of those squirmy orange things?" he asked, ignoring everyone's looks of bewilderment. "Thanks. Mmm, slimy…yet satisfying."

"Ouch!" Harry said suddenly, slapping a hand to his forehead.

"What's wrong?" Hermione asked concernedly.

"My - my scar hurt. Just for a second. I was just looking at the table with all the teachers."

Hermione frowned. "Maybe you should go to the nurse, Harry."

"He'll miss the rest of the banquet!" complained Ron. "Come on, Harry, you're fine, right?"

"Yeah, the pain's gone now."

"See, Hermione?"

Hermione frowned. "If you're sure. If it hurts again though, you really should go."

"Yeah, I'll do that."

The desserts soon disappeared, though, heralding the end of the feast. Professor Dumbledore stood, and quiet instantly swallowed the Great Hall.

"Ahem - just a few more words now that we are all fed and watered. I have a few start-of-term notices to give you. First years should note that the forest on the grounds is forbidden to all pupils - that is why it is called the Forbidden Forest, after all. And a few of our older students would do well to remember that as well." Dumbledore's twinkling eyes flashed in the direction of the Weasley twins. They stood and held their hands up to let everyone know it was them the Headmaster was referring to.

"I have also been asked by Mr. Filch, the caretaker, to remind you all that no magic should be used between classes in the corridors, and that tormenting his cat in any way will result in a detention - and I quote - 'the likes of which have never been seen in this castle in the last century and a half at least, though God knows why not, the nine-tailed whip works gorgeously, just gorgeously.' Quidditch trials will be held in the second week of the term: anyone interested in playing for their house teams should contact Madam Hooch, and anyone interested in announcing should contact Lee Jordan, who will be auctioning off the chance to announce certain games throughout the season. And finally, I must tell you that this year, the third-floor corridor on the right-hand side is out of bounds to everyone who does not wish to die a very painful death. Unlike last year, when it was the middle dungeon on the left-hand side."

"So if we do want to die a very painful death, the corridor isn't out of bounds?" said Calvin to Harry, perking up. "As long as someone wants to die and yet manages to avoid dying, he can do whatever he wants in that corridor?"
"You know that's not what he meant," Hermione replied, looking at him. "Now shush, I want to listen."

"And now, before we head off to La-La Land, let us sing the school song!" proclaimed Dumbledore cheerfully. With a flick of his wand, a twirling gold streamer flew from the end of it, undulating through the air and coming to a rest above the tables. It began to twist, and Calvin could make out words becoming clearer in the streamer's form. "Everyone pick their favorite tune and key," said Dumbledore, "and off we go!"

Everyone roared:

"Hogwarts, Hogwarts, Hoggy Warty Hogwarts,
Teach us something please,
Whether we be old and bald
Or young with scabby knees,
Our heads could do with filling
With some interesting stuff,
For now they're bare and full of air,
Dead flies and bits of fluff,
So teach us things worth knowing,
Bring back what we've forgot,
just do your best, we'll do the rest,
And learn until our brains all rot."

Everybody stopped singing at different times. Finally, only the Weasley twins and Calvin were left singing, them to a very slow funeral march and him to the tune of 'Can You Feel the Love Tonight' in his best Elton John impression.

Dean joined Calvin on the last line, warbling, "And learn until our braaaaaiiiiinnns….all roooooooooorrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrooot."

Dumbledore smiled merrily and conducted their last measure with his wand, then clapped enthusiastically when they'd all finished.

"Ah, music," he said, bringing a finger to his eyes and wiping away a glistening tear. "A magic beyond all we do here! Why, I remember a time when I was lost in the woods, and had to sing a lullaby to a sapling to make it grow into a cabin for me. Of course, that is a story for another time - off you go now, to beddy-bye times!"

XXXxxxxXXXxxxXXX

After saying goodnight to Hermione at the landing below, where the girls and boys split, they stumbled into their dorm blearily. One of them yawned, setting them all off, and they almost fell asleep right there in the entrance, still standing.
They'd run into Peeves the poltergeist on the way up, and he'd started pelting Neville with pieces of equipment until Dean and Calvin picked up two of the walking sticks the phantom man had thrown, and entered into a swordfight with him. Outnumbered and outmatched, he'd flown off screeching about the unfairness of ganging up on him.

Calvin tottered over to where he saw his trunk and flopped bonelessly onto the bed face-first.

"What did you think?" asked Ron, opening his own trunk and getting out his pyjamas. "Good food, huh?"

Calvin flipped over over and wheezed, "So. Many. People."

"I'm used to it, for the most part," Ron told him. "Comes from having a family as big as mine. Mind you, even when Bill and Charlie were home I never slept in the same room as this many people."

While everyone was changing into their night clothes, Calvin fell asleep.


AN: I'm not sure about this chapter. It's two in the morning, and I'm not sure about anything. Here it is, though. You can read it. Or eat it, or whatever you do with words. I really enjoyed writing the Sorting Hat's song. I request of you that you review, as it is muchly needed and appreciated. Thank you for reading.
Masses of Classes and Magic Molasses

DISCLAIMER: The world and characters of Harry Potter belong to their wonderful creator, J.K. Rowling. The world and characters of Calvin and Hobbes belong to the genius known as Bill Watterson. I thank them both for their parts in making my childhood as fantastic as it was.

Chapter Eight - Masses of Classes and Magic Molasses

Calvin exploded out of his bed the next morning, making enough noise that everyone else was instantly awake as well, if not so enthusiastic about getting out from under their covers.

"Wow, I've never felt so rested in the morning before! I feel like I just slept for three days straight! Today's not a Saturday, is it? I just feel tip-top today!"

Ron rolled over and moaned. "Mate, you better not be like this every morning."

Pulling on his clothes, Calvin turned to the sleepy redhead. "No, usually my bed and I are inseparable before my mom comes into my room, yelling at me to get up cuz I'll miss the bus. After that, it's a regretful and reluctant goodbye."

"Mphumph," mumbled Seamus, sitting up. "What time is it?"

"Game time!" said Dean from the bed next to him, stretching and hopping to the floor.

"Hammer time!" yelled Calvin, donning his robes and striking a pose.

"Greenwich Mean Time!"

"Adventure time!"

"Epic meal time!"

Ron yawned and pulled back his covers. "Oh, right, breakfast! I guess I can get up for that."

"Is it in the same place we had the banquet?" asked Harry, rifling through his trunk for clean clothes that weren't hopelessly wrinkled.

"Yeah, the Great Hall," Ron said, doing the same.

Calvin finished tying up his shoes and got his wand from his bedside table, sticking it into his pocket. "What's after breakfast?"

"Class, of course."

Calvin froze. "Cl-class? I have to go to class? Already? What about orientation? Don't I get a week to recover from jet-lag? There's no adjustment buffer? There's no test today, is there? They didn't expect us to study over the summer, did they? I read through most of my books but only the most interesting parts and to look at the moving pictures! They can't do this to me!"

"Calvin, calm down," Harry said. "Hagrid never mentioned anything about summer work to me, so I doubt there's any sort of test on the first day. Right, Ron?"
"Fred told me they make you get up in front of the classroom and tell everyone about your summer - in *Latin.*" Ron replied, looking decidedly queasy.

"Oh, phew," said Calvin, letting out a breath. "That's a relief."

Ron looked at him in bafflement. "You *want* to do that? Do you even know any Latin?"

"No, of course not - but if Fred told you that, it must mean that absolutely nothing like that's going to happen." Calvin looked around to see if there was anything he was forgetting. "Alright, I'm going down to breakfast."

He walked out of the dormitory, a puzzled Ron staring after him. "You know, I never thought of it like that…"

XXXxxxxXXXxxxxXXX

After getting lost no less than fourteen and a half times, Calvin bumped into - literally - Percy the Prefect, who was just leaving for the Great Hall. It seemed Calvin had somehow wound up back at the entrance to the Gryffindor common room. He followed Percy through a long hallway that appeared to shrink the farther you went, through a large door shaped like a keyhole with a keyhole shaped like a door, and down many flights of stairs that apparently didn't have the presence of mind to *stay put.*

Breakfast in the Great Hall was a mild affair - where mild meant mountains of golden pastries and fresh, steaming breads, hundreds of mostly-unidentifiable spreads and dips and toppings, and pitchers of pumpkin juice set out every few feet along the tables.

"Good morning, Calvin," Hermione said brightly when he sat down across from her.

"I'm awake!" He spread his arms wide and grinned toothily.

"Um, yes you are...is that unusual?"

He grabbed a hot roll and dropped it quickly onto his plate. "Very. Can you believe they're starting classes on the first day!?"

"I just can't wait!" Hermione said, scooping some eggs into her mouth.

"But you're a girl, you can only become the Queen - and even that's unlikely."

She ignored his strange comment. "According to our schedule, first we have Charms with Professor Flitwick - I'm really looking forward to it because I hear the first spell we'll be learning is the Hover Charm, which I've already practiced quite a bit. Then we have Transfiguration, taught by Professor McGonagall; I read through the textbook a few times over the summer and then again last night before I went to bed and once more this morning when I saw my schedule, and I hope I'll have enough time for another read-through in between classes. Anyway, it says it's really, *really* dangerous, and the examples it gave of people who had Transfiguration-induced injuries were *beyond* terrifying, so I didn't dare try it out on my own of course, but it seems like Professor McGonagall is going to be a fantastic teacher and I can't wait to learn from her!"

"Mmm," Calvin said, stuffing food substances into the wide opening on the lower part of his face.

"Then, later this week, there's Herbology in Greenhouse one-"

"-Herbology?" asked Calvin dubiously. "Why's there a class for that? I already know everything I'll
ever need to know about thyme, and cilantro, and, umm...rosemary."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "It's not a class on seasoning, it's about magical plants! I talked to some of the students from the upper years, and they said we'll probably be shown some sort of plant that doesn't move of its own accord for the first day, but when we get further into the year we'll be dealing with some really interesting ones like the puffapod and the ruh-berry ring-plant and the eliseus tree! Oh, hello Harry! Hi, Ron!"

"Morning, Hermione," Harry greeted, sitting down next to Calvin and grabbing a few pieces of toast.

"Ghrmrmg," Ron said around a mouthful of eggs and hashbrowns.

"Ron, sit down before you start eating!" Hermione admonished. "And don't talk with your mouth full." Ron just stuffed more eggs into his mouth.

"Hey, Neville, can you pass that bubbling black sludge?"

"Honestly, Ron, have you ever even heard the phrase 'table etiquette?'"

"Too busy to answer questions, Hermione," Ron replied, reaching across the table to grab a full loaf of bread. "Class is in fifteen minutes and I have five more plates to clean."

"You wouldn't have to rush if you just woke up earlier!"

"I did!"

"What's our first class?"

"Charms."

"Those things girls put on their bracelets?"

"It means magic, Harry! And I do not wear bracelets."

"How're you even allowed to be a girl, then?"

"What's that supposed to mean, Ron?!"


Professor Flitwick was shorter even than Calvin, a miniscule wizard who had to resort to using a pile of books as a stool in order to see over his desk. He started off the class by taking roll call, and when he got to Harry's name he gave a high-pitched squeak and promptly fell off the book pile. Calvin had to correct him on the proper way to say "Calvin, Boy...of Destiny," and how to insert the pause in the most dramatic fashion, which seemed to make the tiny professor rather flustered.

"Magic, magic, magic, magic, magic, magic, magic," Calvin whispered excitedly, rubbing his hands together as Professor Flitwick finished up roll call.

"Now, the first thing we will be learning this year is a spell called the Hover Charm," he explained to the class. "However, we will not be casting the spell until our third class." Noooooooooooooooooooooooooo, Calvin yelled with his thoughts. "Please open up your books to page seventeen, and we will begin-" Calvin's mind flew straight out the open window in the back of the classroom.
"Calvin!" an urgent whisper broke through his thoughts almost half an hour later. "Why aren't you practicing the wand motions?" It was Hermione, leaning over from two seats away, a worried look on her face.

"Oh, we're doing something? Must have missed that." He pulled out his wand and glanced up to the front of the classroom, where Professor Flitwick was showing them all the proper 'Swish, and flick' technique vital to casting the Hover Charm. Calvin managed to mirror the man's movements with his own wand a few times before getting bored.

When class ended, everybody streamed out into the hall, except for Hermione, who had stayed back to ask Professor Flitwick a few questions, and Neville, who it turned out had managed to go the entire class practicing the motions with his wand backwards and using the wrong hand.

"What've we got next?" said Ron, peering over Harry's shoulder at the crumpled schedule he'd just pulled out of his pocket.

"It says here we have Transfiguration with Professor McGonagall."

"Fred and George say she's really strict, and doesn't favor Gryffindor even though she's our Head of House. Unlike Snape," he scowled. "They said Snape only doesn't hate his Slytherins, and takes points from everyone else at every opportunity."

"That's awful," Harry replied. "He didn't really look like a nice fellow, that's for sure. Kept glaring out me throughout the banquet last night like I'd stuffed his pillow with porcupines or something."

"Hey, that's a good idea!" cried Calvin. "If he ever takes points from me, I'll do that."

"I hope you're kidding," Harry said wryly, but Ron just laughed. "How much time till class?"

"About three minutes," said Ron, checking his watch. "Why?"

Harry stopped walking as they came up on a dead end. The three of them stared at the blank gray wall in front of them. "Because we're completely lost."

"We should've waited for Hermione," groaned Ron. "She seemed to know where she was going when we walked to Flitwick's classroom."

"Yes, well, we didn't," said Harry, turning around and leading them back down the hallway.

"Is it bad to be late for class?" Calvin asked. "I mean, the less time spent listening to a teacher the better, that's what I always say. Though I do actually want to learn how to transmogrify."

"You mean transfigure."

"Yeah, that. How is this even possible?" asked Calvin, bending sideways and turning his head.

They had reached another dead end, even though they'd only just turned around and headed back the way they'd come, and there hadn't been any turn-offs along the way. They were now peering through a small window about the size of a cereal box that looked out onto the grounds in front of Hogwarts, including the lake they'd come across the day before. It was a beautiful morning outside, with plenty of sun and only a cloud or two in the entire visible sky. The lake was shimmering magnificently, and a giant squid broke the surface every now and again, splashing water up into the air. It would have been an absolutely magnificent, yet ordinary view, even with the giant squid taken into account. If it weren't for the fact that everything was upside-down.
"The grass looks so far away up there," Ron commented, craning his neck and pressing the side of his face up against the window.

Harry had turned around, and was staring in confusion at the opposite end of the long hallway, where the first dead end was, well, still there. The walls of the hallway were solid and gray and clearly didn't open up into any other hallways between the first dead end and the confused window.

"Um, guys?" he said quietly. They looked over their shoulders in Harry's direction.

"We're trapped," Ron breathed, face pale. "Hogwarts has eaten us!"

"Please," snorted Calvin. "We're at the top of the food chain! The phrase 'has eaten us' isn't even in our lexicon."

"What about 'hopelessly lost,' mate?"

"Curiously, no, not that either. This is certainly more exciting than sitting in a boring old classroom listening to a teacher read from a textbook, though, don't you agree?" said Calvin, grinning. He paced excitedly down the hallway, trailing his fingers along the stone and inspecting the walls closely. "There's got to be a hidden passageway of some sort."

Harry and Ron nodded, joining their spiky-haired friend in searching for a secret switch or a disguised doorway.

One was found about five minutes later, after Ron had already given up and resigned himself to dying a slow death trapped in a stone corridor.

"Woah!" exclaimed Harry, falling through the wall.

They arrived at the elusive Transfiguration classroom twenty minutes late, covered in chalk dust from a run-in with Peeves, and laughing heartily at a joke Ron had just made.

"You find it humourous, arriving late to my class, gentlemen?" asked Professor McGonagall sharply as they filed through the door. Their laughter died the swift and abrupt death of a fly being hit by a lightning bolt.

"Uh, no Professor McGonagall," Harry said nervously. "We're sorry. We got lost."

"And then Hogwarts tried to eat us!" interjected Calvin. Ron kicked him in the shins. "Ow, what was that for!"

Their Transfiguration teacher gave them a look, and they felt a combination of debilitating shame and crippling, icy fear. "One point from each of you for your tardiness. Find your seats, and maybe I can continue doing my job?" She raised an eyebrow severely.

How do you raise your eyebrow severely, Calvin wondered in awe as he walked to the back of the classroom and dropped into an empty chair. That must take years of practice!

"I am going to take a moment," Professor McGonagall said, "to repeat what I told you all at the beginning of the class, for the benefit of those who have recently arrived. Normally I will not go over something again just because someone did not see fit to get here in a timely manner, but I do not wish to see any dead or even maimed students that end up so because they are not aware of the dangers of Transfiguration and the cautions that must be taken." Her eye met Harry's, then Calvin's, and then Ron's. She had their undivided attention.
"Until you have at least graduated from this school and are no longer my responsibility, there are some rules that must be adhered to," she said seriously, eyes practically burning with intensity. "You will never, and I do mean never, attempt transfiguration without the supervision of either myself or Professor Dumbledore. You will never attempt any form of transfiguration that has not already been covered by this class. You will never attempt transfiguration on any living thing, on any food or drink or anything that looks even remotely like a food or a drink, or on anything that could, conceivably, enter someone's body, through the mouth or any other orifice. You will never transfigure anything into any type of currency whatsoever as it is a criminal offence. You will never experiment with transfiguration. You will not play with transfiguration." She had started pacing, but stopped now, standing straight in place and bringing her hands behind her back.

"On page fifty-three of your textbooks you will find a picture of a man who attempted to augment his bone structure by changing it to metal, also trying to give himself claws. Fortunately, his screams of agony lasted less than a minute, as he then ceased to be alive. Transfiguration is not a toy. It is not a game, it not something to 'have fun with.' It is not to be taken lightly in any way, shape, form, substance, or dimension. Is. That. Perfectly. Clear."

Even the people who had already been given this talk not twenty minutes before nodded energetically, as if wanting to make sure that Professor McGonagall saw them nod, and knew that they took it seriously and that she had no reason to suspect they would ever break any of her rules as long as there was yet breath in their bodies and blood running through their veins, and that they would try their very best not to break said rules even after those things did not hold true.

"That said," Professor McGonagall continued, adopting a kindlier tone of voice. "I do hope you enjoy this class, as transfiguration is a fascinating subject. If you ever have any questions, please do ask them - I am here to help you learn, not just to help you pass tests."

Calvin leaned over to Dean, who was seated to his right. "Did I miss anything worth noting?"

"She turned her desk into a pig," Dean whispered back. "Nothing too exciting." He grinned.

"Mr. Calvin and Mr. Thomas, I would rather you conducted your private conversations outside of the classroom, after class, when I am not talking." They gulped and nodded.

Calvin tried really, really, really hard not to space out as the Scottish professor began lecturing them on the underlying principles of Transfiguration - and for the most part, he succeeded. He took many notes - okay, he took some notes, and watched Hermione take copious amounts of notes - and only daydreamed about flying through space a couple times. Near the end of the period, Professor McGonagall walked through the room, placing a matchstick on each person's desk. The goal was to turn it into a pin. No, not a bowling pin, she explained to Calvin - a metal pin, as is used for clothing.

By the time class ended, the only ones whose matchsticks looked any different at all were Hermione's and Calvin's, much to Professor McGonagall's delight - and, in Calvin's case, complete surprise. She awarded them each five points for their outstanding performance, and praised Calvin on achieving an almost perfect transfiguration on his first try. Hermione, who had only managed to turn hers into metal and make it a bit pointy, seemed to take it personally that she hadn't done the best.

"I don't understand! I read the book six times, memorized every step, I did everything it said to do and everything Professor McGonagall told us to do!"

Harry leaned over to her. "Hermione. You did amazing. Judging by how excited she was, I don't think Professor McGonagall even expected anyone to make any progress! I mean, look at Neville,"
Neville's matchstick had sprouted a small flower bud, and it was blooming slowly as the confused boy explained to their Transfiguration teacher that he had no idea how it happened and hadn't been trying to do that at all.

"And even Ron."

Hunched over his desk, brow scrunched in determination, Ron was pressing the end of his wand against his matchstick and growling, as if he hoped to intimidate it into cooperating. Trickles of sweat made their way down the edge of his jaw.

Calvin wandered over to the red-faced boy and crouched down, looking up at him. "Kaboom!"

"Ah, Calvin! You messed me up - I was this close to getting it to change!" he complained angrily, picking up his chair from where he'd knocked it down.

Calvin shook his head calmly. "No you weren't. You were concentrating too hard."

"What's that even mean!?"

"As you said - you were trying to make it change."

"...As opposed to?"

Calvin shrugged. "Just letting the matchstick be a pin. If you imagine that it takes immense effort and intense concentration, it will. Imagine the matchstick being a pin, and it will."

Hearing their conversation, Professor McGonagall walked over to Ron's desk. "Not everyone accomplishes transfiguration with the same mindset, Mr. Calvin." Then she turned to Ron. "Though I do think, Mr. Weasley, that perhaps a change of tactics would help you. Mrs. Granger, what were you thinking of when you transfigured your matchstick?"

Hermione looked frightened at being put on the spot, but quickly replaced it with excitement at getting to explain her method to the teacher. "Well, first I just pictured the matchstick, every part of it. The irregular grain of the wood, the long flat sides, the edges and corners, the rough red end a bit more bulbous than the rest; the exact length and width and height Then, one by one, I imagined each of those aspects of the matchstick changing into those of a pin - the irregular grain of the wood flattening out into smooth metal, the surfaces curving around, the larger red end stretching its mass out until it reached a point, the corners melding together into a circular end." She took a breath, face flushed. "That's...that's it."

Professor McGonagall applauded when she finished, much to the bushy-haired witch's embarrassment. "Excellent, Mrs. Granger, take another five points." As Hermione blushed even more thoroughly, the green-clad professor explained, "That process was absolutely flawless, and allows for extremely detailed changes. It greatly diminishes the chance of making a mistake, and of leaving something out, as well, which is what one should strive for in one's transfiguration work."

A few minutes later, when they filed out of the classroom, handing in their matchsticks on their way out, Ron triumphantly presented their teacher with a questionably altered matchstick of his own.

"Did he actually change it at all?" Calvin whispered to Hermione as the left.

"I'm not sure - could be confirmation bias. Best not to mention that, though."

He nodded seriously.
As they had Hermione with them this time - and she'd figured out that, if you managed to determine which ones actually knew what they were talking about, the pictures could be asked for directions - they arrived at the Great Hall only ten minutes after lunch had begun.

"Hey, at least we didn't have to do that Latin thing," Ron said, piling multiple chicken legs and thighs onto his plate as he sat down.

"What Latin thing?" asked Hermione.

"Ron's brothers - the awesome ones - told him that we'd have to stand up in front of the entire class and tell everyone about our summer, but while speaking Latin," Calvin told her, pouring two pitchers into his cup at the same time so as to only spend half the time waiting for it to fill up.

"That's obviously not true," Hermione said to Ron. "They would never expect us to be fluent in Latin in our first year."

"I realized that," Ron grumbled, picking up a leg.

"Don't eat with your hands! It's unsanitary and unbecoming - beside, there are utensils here for a reason. So," she continued as Ron began to reply. "What did you guys do over your summers? Or at least after you found out you were going to be coming to Hogwarts. You two met at Diagon Alley, right?"

"Yeah," Harry replied. "I met him and Draco Malfoy in the robe shop."

"I must have just missed you, then - I met him there too."

"I met everyone important except the Weasley twins and Dumbledore there," Calvin commented, shoveling food into his mouth before he'd even swallowed the pumpkin juice.

"Hey, I'm important!" said a voice to his left.

"Oh, hi Neville, I didn't see you there. Are you sure you're a main character?" Calvin peered at him suspiciously.

"He didn't mean it," Hermione apologized to the round-faced boy, throwing a deadly glare Calvin's way. "Ron, who did-" she cut off, eyeing the overly large mouthful of chicken he'd just taken. "Harry, who did you go to Diagon Alley with? I know Calvin was escorted by Professor McGonagall - and I went with my parents." Then she cringed, realizing what she'd just said.

"I went with Hagrid," Harry answered, not noticing at all. "When we entered the Leaky Cauldron, everyone practically mobbed be, wanting to shake my hand and talk to me - it was really weird, and pretty uncomfortable. I met Professor Quirrel there - he's out Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher, though he-"

"Our what teacher!?" spluttered Calvin, reaching for a napkin to wipe at the forcefully exported pumpkin juice that had been launched onto his robes from his mouth.

"Defense Against the Dark Arts."

"Why in the world would anybody ever need to defend themselves against developing photography?" he asked, baffled. When Hermione opened her mouth to explain, he continued quickly, "Even if it means defending against ombromanie - yes, it is undoubtedly the creepiest thing since finger puppets, but I don't think anyone's in danger of being physically hurt by it." Hermione rolled her eyes and was about to start talking when he exclaimed, "Ohhhhh, it's
probably referring to those guys who go around in the middle of the night spraying graffiti everywhere! That makes sense. I get it now." Hermione gave up and continued eating.

"...Right," said Harry. "Glad you've cleared that up for us. So when Hagrid realised I was getting overwhelmed, he just told everyone we were in a hurry, and whisked me out to the back. I don't think I've ever been somewhere as noisy and crowded as Diagon Alley, but with Hagrid it was easy getting around - everyone got out of his way to avoid being trampled, not that he would do it on purpose, but he's...pretty big," Harry smiled. "First we went to Gringotts, to get the money for my school supplies."

"Me too!" Calvin said. "At first I thought the Goblins were aliens, and a bunch of thoughts ran through my mind about the wizarding world actually being another planet, or aliens who make themselves look human with magic, or- oh, sorry, you can continue your story. I was finished with what I was saying anyways."

"We went really far down under the building in this nauseating cart-"

"-You haven't seen nauseating until you've eaten a lemon-flavored sucking candy," Calvin chuckled.

"It's rude to interrupt someone when they are talking," Hermione told him harshly.

"Well when else would I interrupt them?"

She rolled her eyes. "Go on, Harry. Calvin won't interrupt again." She gave him another glare.

"Right, yep, no interrupting from me, no sir, I am the expert at not interrupting people, this one time I even didn't interrupt someone for the entire time they were talking, or at least-"

"CALVIN!" shouted Hermione and Ron at the same time.

"Riiiiight. Gotcha." He clamped his teeth together and smiled innocently.

Harry waited a few seconds before continuing. "It turns out my parents left me some money, so I had enough for my school supplies. Then we rode the cart to vault seven-hundred-and-thirteen, where Hagrid picked up this tiny little package for Dumbledore."

"Vault seven-hundred-and-thirteen!" Hermione exclaimed, eyes wide.

"Uh, yes, that was the number."

"Why is she allowed to interrupt but I'm not?"

"Didn't you guys read the paper? That was the number of the vault that was broken into over the summer! The goblin interviewed said that nothing was taken - of course nothing was taken, because you and Hagrid had already emptied the vault! I wonder what the package is? It has to something extremely important or powerful, otherwise they wouldn't have tried to steal it."

"Who says they were trying to steal it?" Ron said doubtfully. "They didn't have to know what was in the vault. Maybe they just thought they'd break in and see if there was anything worth taking?"

Hermione stared at him. "Ron. Gringotts is the most safe and secure place in the entire world, save for Hogwarts. Most people say it's security is ridiculously over-the-top. Whoever broke into that vault wouldn't have risked it unless they were looking to steal something specific - that package. Otherwise they are the most skilled idiot I've ever heard of. And that the package is now in
Dumbledore's possession means it's something *really* important."

Harry leaned in before Ron could take offense. "But Hermione, if Gringotts has such high security, then how did they know what was in the vault before they even broke in?"

"It doesn't necessarily mean that the security was compromised, Harry - the easiest flaw to take advantage of is always personnel."

Calvin perked up, suddenly interested. "You're saying it was an inside job. Someone infiltrated the alien- I mean, goblin ranks, gained their trust, then betrayed them!" He looked up and to the side thoughtfully. "Still, I don't really see either Dumbledore or Hagrid going undercover."

"Of course not! Dumbledore has absolutely no reason to try and steal something from his own vault after he's withdrawn it - and Hagrid was the one to take it out, so he would also have known it was gone. But I'm not saying that someone infiltrated the goblin's ranks. I'm saying almost the opposite - that information from our side could have been obtained by the potential thief."

"Mugwump Man doesn't seem the type to accidentally let something slip, or to let any information out that he doesn't want out. He's uber wise and magical."

"Regardless of your completely nonsensical reasoning, I have to agree with you," said Hermione, nodding.

"So it must've been Hagrid," Ron mumbled around his fork.

"Hagrid wouldn't do something like that!" argued Harry.

Hermione turned to him. "We're not saying he did it on purpose, just that maybe-"

"He was friends with my parents. He didn't maybe do anything like what you're saying," He stared steadily around at his friends.

"How well do we really know Hagrid, though?" questioned Calvin. "For all we know he could be the thief in disguise!"

"Then he would have stolen the package when he was at Diagon Alley with Harry," Hermione pointed out.

"It wasn't him, just drop it!"

"You guys are taking this way too seriously," said Ron, finishing off his last piece of chicken. "Whatever it is, Dumbledore's got it now, so it's safer than safe." The rest of them contemplated that in silence for the next few moments.

"Oh no!" yelped Hermione, looking at her watch. "We should have left for class five minutes ago - now we'll have to run to make it on time!"

"I'm not running anywhere after just finishing lunch," Ron said, stretching and standing up slowly. "I'd probably get points off for 'overly disruptive digestion' or something, and I'd like to keep lost points to the one from this morning, otherwise I'll be getting a talk from Percy, and Fred and George."

"Wait, Gerd and Froge would give you a lecture about losing points? They care about the House Cup that much?" asked Calvin curiously, as they followed Hermione out of the Great Hall.
Ron snorted. "Nah, the only cup they care about is the Quidditch cup, and maybe a mug of butterbeer - Percy's the one who would be lecturing me about that, and about ruining his image by association."

"So why would the twins care?" asked Harry.

"Oh, they wouldn't, really. They'd just give me a hard time about and then come after me to take part in all their shenanigans."

"Shenanigans."

"Uh, yeah, Calvin. That's what I said."

"Shenanigans!"

"Are you trying to say something?"

"Shoe-shine shenanigans."

"That makes less than no sense, mate."

"Shy, shivering, shell-shocked shrimp shared shallow shark shenanigans."

"I'll bet they did. Now hurry, I don't want to lose Hermione."

Near the end of the week was their first Herbology class - along with the first speed-bump in the four's friendship - and the weather could not have been more beautiful. The greenhouse was the first of four nearly identical glass structures standing behind the castle. The gathered outside under the warm sun - a welcome present in the cool morning air - with the rest of the first-years, and were greeted by a squat witch with a friendly demeanor called Professor Sprout. She was the head of House Marshmallow, the house they were having Herbology with, and despite her kindly manner she was no-nonsense when it came to her plants.

"Welcome, good morning everyone, it's nice to see you all. This being our first time together, we will be working with something relatively harmless. It is called the fire seed bush - also know as the fire seed plant - and it is very valuable as it's product, the fire seed, is used in many potions."

 Truly, Calvin thought, wizards must go to immense trouble to think up such creative and original names. Why, the part of my brain that appreciates such things has never been more tickled.

"We will be harvesting the fire seed from its bush, so I'm handing out the proper protective equipment," Professor Sprout told them, passing a pair of thick gloves to every student.

"Finally," sighed Neville from behind Calvin. "Something I can do without messing up."

When they'd all donned the gloves, the head of House Marshmallow opened the door to the greenhouse and told them to find seats.

"Five students to each fire seed bush," she said, walking through to the middle of the greenhouse. "You'll be working together together and will be graded by table, so be encouraged to help your classmates."

Calvin, Harry, Hermione, Ron, and Neville found a table near the middle and sat down, examining
the small, red-sparkling bush in a planter on the table.

"I've been waiting for this all week," Neville said, gazing happily at the bush. "Herbology is something I'm pretty okay at."

"How do you know?" asked Ron, scratching at his gloved hand. "Sheesh, these things are itchy."

"My gran has a greenhouse in the back of the estate," explained Neville. "I've been helping out there since I was little."

"All right, listen up!" said Professor Sprout from the center of the greenhouse. "The process of extracting the fire seed from the fire plant is a delicate one, and I don't want you losing any if it can be avoided." She went through each step, and had everyone repeat it back to her before moving on to the next. When she finished, she clapped loudly, telling them to begin. Then she started walking around, checking up on tables one at a time.

"I can do this," Neville said determinately. "If this is going to be the only class I'm good at, then I'm going to be the best."

"The very best?" asked Calvin, leaning close and squinting at Neville.

"Like no one ever was?" said Harry quizzically.

"DUN DUN DUNNUN!" yelled Dean from the next table over.

As the class progressed, it became evident that Neville had not been entirely truthful with them when he'd said he was 'pretty okay' at Herbology. He was more knowledgeable factually than even Hermione, and in the practical aspects he excelled even more so. With his expertise, their table was the first to finish, and achieved the highest marks anyone from their year had gotten in her class.

When they exited the greenhouse, Neville had a large smile on his face. Ron was wearing a scowl, and it fit him rather well.

"I told you not to take off your gloves, Ron. Honestly, you'd think she hadn't warned us at least five times about keeping them on while in the greenhouse."

"Oh, come off it, Hermione," Ron grumbled, wrapping his stinging fingers in his robe.

They headed back into the castle for their next class.

"Ron!" Hermione exclaimed when she saw that he was following them. "Professor Sprout told you to go straight to Madam Pomfrey!"

"I don't need to, I'm perfectly fine," he growled, staring at her defiantly.

"Seriously," she continued, heedless of the roiling waters she was treading into. "It could get infected! I told you it was a stupid thing to do. And then you won't even be able to hold a w-"

"I said, I'm fine!" he yelled loudly at her, face red in anger. "You can stop telling us how you know what to do, and that you were right all along, because no one wants to hear it!" Then he sped up, stalking off into the stream of students flowing through the halls.

"I'll go after him," Harry sighed, breaking into a reluctant jog.

Silence settled over the two remaining members of the group, punctuated by bouts of heavy breathing.
Well, this is awkward. He glanced at Hermione.

"Oh, um, Hermione," he said. "You- your'e saltwater glands are leaking."

She choked back a sob.

*She's crying, she's crying, what do I do? We haven't had classes on this yet, how do they expect me to be able to deal with a crying girl?! They should at least hand out pamphlets!*

"W-why d-did he have to say it s-s-so, mean?" Hermione sobbed quietly. "I was, only t-trying to h-help, him."

"Well, because he's an idiot, obviously," Calvin remarked.

She looked up at him, smearing the tears along the side of her face with a hand. "What do, you, m-mean?"

"He doesn't think about what's going on with anybody but himself - he probably couldn't see into someone's head if he attended their lobotomy." Hermione hiccupped a sad sort of laugh. *Wow, that worked! Great - all I have to do is keep insulting Ron, and I'll be good.*

"I mean, it's not like he was deliberately trying to cause you pain - in his mind he was defending himself. As a young, stupid male, having a girl tell him something that he doesn't listen to, then having him get hurt because of it, then having that same girl tell him something he knows is true but doesn't want to hear because he's a young, stupid male - that was just too much for him."

Calvin shrugged, studying the wall on his other side. "So he screamed. You just happened to be the person who was right, the person who was watching out for him. He doesn't want to be mothered by anyone but his mother, and probably not even her. Not that what you were doing was mothering," he added quickly. "Just that anyone who thinks they know what's best for him is lumped into that category, even if they're right. *Especially* if they're right." He looked back at her. "Are you better now?" he said hopefully. Then he mentally kicked himself. *As if she was sick? Nice going, Mr. Smooth.*

Hermione sniffed and started walking again, smiling slightly. "I think so. Thank you, Calvin."

"For what? Making fun of Ron?" Calvin asked, scratching his head.

Her voluminous brown hair bounced as she shook her head. "For helping me understand him." She was looking at him sideways, with a crooked smile and curious eyes. "You know, there's a lot more to you than you let people see."

"That's me," he said happily, skipping up beside her. "The human iceberg. Maybe I'll even get to sink a giant ship someday!"

Hermione laughed, and her smile reached her whole face, lighting it up like a Christmas tree. "Of that, Calvin, I have no doubt."

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The next day, Harry's large, snowy owl visited them at breakfast. "It's from Hagrid!" Harry told them. "He wants me to come down to his cabin after classes this afternoon."

"Wow, I want to meet him!" exclaimed Calvin, setting a biscuit and two waffles against each other to complete the outside of his 'breakfast house.'
"Oh right, I forgot we have Friday evening off," said Ron, shoveling some hash browns into his mouth.

"I'll ask if you guys can come too," Harry said, inking his reply and tying it to Hedwig's leg. He fed her a bit of toast, then watched as she flew off.

"We should use the free time to study and get ahead on our schoolwork, guys," Hermione said.

"Oh no."

"Oh come on, it's not that hard!"

"No, Hermione, it's worse." Harry was staring at his faded schedule, which, after being crumpled and uncrumpled so many time, was beginning to look like an ancient treasure map buried in the hot sand. "We've got Potions today."

"Ohhhhh man," groaned Ron.

"And that's not all. It's a double period, twice as long as normal classes."

"Ohhhhhhh maaaaaan!"

"You guys are overreacting," Hermione told them, sipping her pumpkin juice.

Ron turned to her. "You don't understand, Hermione, Snape is evil. He doesn't like anyone but Slytherins, and everyone else he takes points off of whenever he can. He loves handing out detentions to non-Slytherin students, it's like he takes joy from inflicting stress upon children. Actually, he probably does. Also, he's just a git."

"Ron!" shouted Hermione. "Professor Snape is our teacher!"

Ron nodded, subdued. "Yeah, of all the rotten luck."

"It get's even worse," gulped Harry, still staring at the schedule.

"How can it get worse!" exclaimed Ron, throwing up his hands.

"Oo, I got this one!" Calvin cried down to them from where he stood on the table, putting the finishing touched onto the parapets of his purely breakfast-food constructed castle. Dean stood on the other side of the ridiculously large structure, painting murals onto the walls using the dozens of condiments.

"Go ahead, but I doubt you get it," Harry said, grinning wryly.

"He's going to have us go out into the Forbidden Forest to collect our own potion ingredients, then we'll have to create the potion while blindfolded and suspended directly over a vat of pungent acid, held up by a slowly snapping robe and threatened with a painful and original method of torture if we don't get everything right."

"...Okay, that's probably worse. Maybe."

"Not that there's any way you could know that, so it couldn't be what you were going to tell us," said Hermione.

"So?" asked Ron, taking large bite out of his sandwich of toast, biscuits, waffles, muffins, eggs, bacon, cheese, strawberry and blackberry preserves, butter, syrup, and the bubbly black sludge
topping that had become a favorite of theirs. Calvin had dubbed the creation the 'Ron Gone Wild' Heartstopper sandwich. "What is it really?" He reach out to refill his cup yet again, cramming something else into his already-stuffed mouth.

"Ron, slow down!" Hermione shouted at him. "You'll-" She stopped short, biting her bottom lip.

"Ghwah?" said Ron, his face-hole full of...currently unidentifiable foodstuffs.

The smartest witch in their year took a deep breath, and said, "Nothing. Just try not to kill yourself with breakfast, okay?"

"Hur hing, 'ione," he replied, giving her a thumbs up. He swallowed and turned to Harry. "Well? Mind telling us how today could possibly get any worse?"

"We're having Potions with the Slytherins."

Beat.

"Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh maalalalalalalalalalalalalalalalalalalaaaaan!"

The Potions classroom was in the dungeons, the deepest part of Hogwarts they'd yet to experience. The dark stone room had a damp and dreary sort of feeling, and the air was permeated by an unavoidable chill that bit through any amount of clothing. The walls were lined with shelves, the shelves covered in jars, beakers, vials, and cauldrons of all types, many containing indiscriminate animal parts floating in murky liquid.

Over by the back corner of the room sat a cylindrical cauldron that was hissing like a viper, smoky gray tendrils reaching over the lip and curling as they rose higher. A wire contraption held a number of vials, each filled halfway with a different color of substance. One of them was pure black, yet somehow see-through; every few seconds it released a large bubble that floated in a straight, consistent line up to the ceiling, where it popped, releasing a small cloud of greenish gas that lingered until the next bubble began to rise.

When the Slytherins took their seats they started whispering and shooting looks towards Harry and his friends, but any conversation ended not a moment later.

The Potions master entered the room like an assassin entering his own armory, looking confident and ready to kill someone. His dirty cloak was a pair of broken black wings hugging his frame, his greasy hair a mysterious hood. His beak of a nose gave the impression that he was ready to rend flesh from bone, and his endlessly black eyes sucked in any light that dared to get within five feet of them. He swept towards the front of the classroom, and all who gazed upon him were inspired to jump out of the nearest window.

Calvin's heart beat frantically against the inside of his ribcage, begging to be let out so it could run screaming from the room. He was frozen in his seat, muscles taut and rigid. Don't look at me. Please don't look at me, whatever you do. Look at the Slytherins, in their beautiful green-trimmed robes. Look outside. Look at the ceiling and count the stones, look at the floor and watch your own feet, just don't look at me, if you look at me I shall surely wither and die, don't look at me, dont-ohmypteranadonhe'slookingatmewhatdidoloiokayhe'snotlookingatmeanymoreitwasjustaglancehe'snotgoin

The Harbinger of Doom began by calling out roll, not even bothering to take out the paper to read off of. He said their names like items on a particularly uninteresting shopping list, barely even waiting for the student to stammer out an answer before moving on the the next. When he got to
Harry name, he lingered on the 'r' of his family name.

"Ah, I forgot to welcome our own local celebrity," Snape drawled icily. "Do forgive me, Mr. Potter, if I do not beg for an autograph. Ink is just so expensive these days." Harry wasn't sure whether to answer that he was there or say that it was okay, but he was saved from answering at all when Snape chose to ignore him and continue with the next item on the student grocery list.

"I am aware that the other teachers have taken to calling you by your first name, as opposed to attempting to use your pathetic excuse for a last name, but I am not other teachers." Snape was now staring at Calvin, and Calvin was having trouble breathing. The knot of fear in his throat had tightened so much that it threatened to drag his tongue down his esophagus, and his lungs felt like they were encased in blocks of ice.

"I will utilize this so-called last name of yours," the Potions master continued. "If only the first part. Boy." Calvin didn't know if he nodded, or if he said yes, or if he belted out the star-spangled banner, but the next thing he was aware of was Snape staring out at the class, hands clasped behind his back, saying, "Why are you here." If he hadn't known what constituted a question he would have been certain that that was a command, an order. No one moved.

"Hmm?" The Nightmare of Nightmares blinked the lazy blink of a predator who at any moment could be chewing on its next meal, and was only not doing so because it did not currently feel like it. Even Hermione, who normally jumped at such an opportunity, was silent. "You are here," he sneered, "because your schedules told you to be here. You are here because Hogwarts requires you to take Potions until your sixth year, and you have your Potions books because your supply list told you to buy them. None of you have any actual reason to be here, and as such I do not expect you to understand the intricacies and beauties of the craft, nor do I expect anyone here to be anything more than perhaps competent at it."

"This is not a silly practice session where you will be waving your wand at a feather to make it dance!" He said sharply, making most of the class jump. Calvin would have commented, asking what they would be making dance, but he was too busy being scared for his life.

"There will be no turning of slippers into rabbits! No gazing at the planets and marking their pointless paths across the night sky! You will not be doing any of that in this class, and you may not feel as if you are doing anything at all."

"You will, however," his voice suddenly infused with steel, "do exactly what I tell you to do. You will do as I say, and anything I do not say you will simply not do. I tell you to stir twice; you stir twice. I tell you to add the ashfoot before the scarred belgour; you add the ashfoot before the scarred belgour, even if the book says otherwise. I tell you to stand up; you stand up. I tell you to shut up; you shut up. I tell you to drop to the floor and pretend as if you were on fire; you do so without hesitation."

Half of the students were now nodding jerkily and hesitantly, while the other half were still not moving a muscle. After all, Snape hadn't told them to.

"Potter!" he said, pointing his beak directly at the messy-haired boy. "What would I get if I added powdered root of asphodel to an infusion of wormwood?"

Calvin, forgetting the situation, burst into laughter. "Infusion...of Mrs. Wormwood," he wheezed, pounding the table.

"Five points from Gryffindor for a clear lack of intelligence and for interrupting a teacher."

Calvin's heart fell into his stomach faster than his toboggan after reaching the edge of
Dismemberment Gorge. He snapped his mouth shut and stared at the surface of his desk.

"Well, Potter? Don't know?" Harry shook his head. "It would seem that one cannot simply glide through life on the merit of one's fame, and not bother to do any actual work," the Devil's own servant said, as if offended.

"Let's give you another chance - Potter, where would you look if I told you to find me a bezoar?"

Calvin was getting annoyed at how the Potions professor seemed to be picking on Harry. What had he ever done to Snape? His fear of instant death disappeared, and his old instincts resurfaced. "Gosh, professor, I didn't know bumblebees went canoeing! That's the most fascinating thing I've learned all week!"

"Ten points from Gryffindor for disrupting a lesson!" Snape snarled, eyes burning. "Do not test me, boy, or you will regret ever having received your Hogwarts letter." Calvin's defiance started to wither beneath the man's gaze, but then Snape turned back to Harry.

"What is the difference, Potter, between monkshood and wolfsbane?" he asked angrily, forgetting that he had yet to berate Harry for not knowing the answer to the previous question.

Calvin had had enough of the man's least-favoritism. What is this guy's problem? Why does he keep hounding on Harry? Calvin stood up and ascended his desk, drawing gasps from students who noticed what he was doing.

"I don't know about a wolf's bane!" he shouted at Snape, who whirled around. "But I can tell you that I am going to be the bane of your existence if you don't stop picking on Harry!"

"Sit down," the Potions master hissed with thinly disguised rage. "Thirty points from Gryffindor and detention with me this weekend, boy, and if you make one more utterance before this class is over I will move to have you expelled."

Calvin was sorely tempted to simply say the word 'utterance,' but he'd accomplished what he'd set out to do - redirecting Snape's sadistic attentions - and didn't particularly want to get expelled, besides. He actually like it here at Hogwarts. A lot. Also he was afraid that Snape would kill him in his sleep.

The Avatar of the Underworld turned swiftly and walked up the front of the room. "As your fellow student does not seem to find potion ingredients exciting enough," he said, practically gnashing his teeth. "We will not be making use of any this lesson." He waved his wand, and the board began to write out its own instructions for a complex potion called Raghwin Injection Solution. "Your assignment for today is to copy down the instructions on the board behind me. Potion-making is a delicate and often dangerous process, and even a single mistake could cost you your life. Therefore, any mistake made in the copying process - a misspelled word, an absent punctuation mark, a smudged letter - will fail you. If you cannot complete this with a passing grade, then I cannot let you move on to actual potion-making. You will be here until you finish your first attempt. Begin." He seated himself behind his desk and watched boredly yet menacingly as they painstakingly copied the instructions from the board onto their parchment, slowly, letter by letter, so as not to make a single mistake.

Why didn't I bring any pens? Calvin complained silently. Quills are so last century.

When he handed in the assignment at the end of the class, he kept his eyes glued to the floor and his mouth shut.
He didn't want to risk cracking up before he was out of the room.

Snape looked down at the parchment with the words 'Calvin: Boy…of DESTINY' scrawled messily across the top. The equally messy potion instructions below it read:

*The Hokey Potion*

*Step 1* - Put the crushed bean in.

*Step 2* - Take the crushed bean out.

*Step 3* - See Step 1.

*Step 4* - Shake the cauldron all about.

*Step 5* - Stir it counter-clockwise.

*Step 6* - Turn yourself around.

*Step 7* - That's what it's all about.

*Step 8* - Hey.

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AN: If you liked it, please review! I read and cherish every review. I covet and re-read every review. I carry every review with me at all times printed on expensive card-stock, and go around showing them to strangers. I keep the reviews under my pillow at night, and if they are not there I cannot sleep. Thank you for reading.
Chapter Nine - We Repeat, You Are Not Cleared For Landing

The afternoon meet-up with Hagrid was beginning to wind down when Calvin voiced what they were all thinking. Or at least, what he and Hermione were thinking. So, half the group.

"Hagrid," Calvin said, planting both hands down onto the table in front of him and squinting up at the large, hairy man. "Did you or did you not get deceived into divulging the identity of the contents of vault seven-hundred-and-thirteen, and/or infiltrate the goblin ranks of Gringotts to steal it for yourself even when you knew that you had just emptied the vault the day before?"

"Er, what?" answered Hagrid uncertainly.

Hermione took the floor. Figuratively - it was a dirt floor, this being a cabin. "What he's trying to say is that whoever broke into the vault the day after you and Harry were there clearly knew about the exact nature of the contents of the vault." She didn't want to come right out and accuse Hagrid of accidentally betraying said information to the thief in question.

Hagrid glanced nervously back and forth between them. "You lot know 'bout the contents of the vault?"

Hermione began shaking her head, but Calvin jumped in front of her.

"Of course we know about the contents of the vault," he said nonchalantly. "Dumbledore's a good buddy of mine, and I had a talk with him about earlier this week. We think the thief may have weaseled some information out of you - against your will, of course - that led him to break into the vault."

The large groundskeeper suddenly went white as a front porch full of little kids dressed up as ghosts on Halloween night. "Dumbledore said that 'bout me?"

"Oh no," Calvin reassured him. "Mugwump Man would never say anything like that. But he did imply it. He told me to keep an eye out for any clues as to who might be trying to steal the..." He leaned in close and glanced back at the other three, then locked eyes with Hagrid. "...the you know what," he whispered secretively.

Hagrid's eyes widened. "I can't believe Dumbledore's trusting a firs'-year with this."

"Oh, I'm no ordinary first-year," Calvin told the bearded man. He heard Ron snort behind him. "In fact, I achieved an almost perfect transfiguration on my very first attempt, and Professor McGonagall couldn't praise me enough. And I certainly made an impression on Professor Snape, as well."

"Blimey," Hagrid said, thunking down onto his chair. "Tha's mighty extraordinary - Snape's not an
"As I said, I'm not an ordinary first-year," said Calvin with a brilliant smile. "Let me know if you remember anything about...that matter," he winked. Hagrid nodded, dumbfounded.

As the four of them made their way back to the castle in the failing light, Ron said, "I don't know why you did all that if you weren't going to find out about what the package actually was. Mind you, I don't why you want to find out about the package in the first place."

"This was just the first step, Ronald, my boy," replied Calvin slyly, wagging a finger at the red-haired boy.

"Don't you dare call me that!" Ron threatened.

"Okay, okay, no need to blow smoke out your ears. Anyways, trying to get Hagrid to actually reveal any information we shouldn't know, whether or not we say we know it, would most likely have made him a bit suspicious. So I'll let him get comfortable with the idea that I know what's going on - pretending like you guys are out of the loop to make it more believable - and string him along until he lets slip the key pieces of information!"

They stared at him, impressed and slightly scared.

Harry raised an eyebrow. "Are you sure you weren't the one who 'weaseled some information' out of Hagrid and broke into the vault?"

"Hmm, that's a good point," Calvin said seriously, pursing his lips. "I'll keep that in mind as I conduct my investigation. PI Spencer crawls around outside the mysterious castle," he said in a deep voice, crouching low and miming using a magnifying glass. "Clues are doing their best to evade his almost supernatural perceptive abilities, but he's nothing if not persistent. With his signature beautiful head of hair," he ran a hand through his spiky hair, "he continues the difficult search, knowing that only a combination of hard work, consistent effort, the right connections, and dumb luck will lead him to the prize."

His stomach rumbled deploringly. "...Right after a short break for snacks, that is. Man, I'm starving."

"I've got these rock cakes," Ron joked, pulling a handful of practically spherical gray cookies out of his pockets.

"Oooh, yes, thanks," Calvin replied enthusiastically, grabbing them.

"Are you kidding me, mate? Those things aren't even edible - think I chipped a tooth on one when Hagrid first offered them to us."

"I love 'em! They're like cake-flavored jawbreakers." He began to gnaw on one happily.

"Here, take mine too," Harry offered, emptying his pockets of the featureless lumps.

They looked at Hermione expectantly.

"What?"

"Don't tell me you actually ate them," Ron said, gaping at her.

She rolled her eyes and took her hands out of her pockets, a few rock cakes in each.
"Ha! Knew it!"

"I didn't want to be rude, but…"

Harry nodded sympathetically. "But you just can't physically eat them, I know." He glance at Calvin. "Well, he can, apparently, but…"

Ron nodded in understanding. "But he's certifiably off his rocker, and that's if he was ever on it in the first place." He observed as Calvin shaved off a layer of cookie with his front teeth. "He is completely insane, but…"

Hermione nodded and smiled fondly. "But there's something about him that makes you want to be his friend."

"Well, I wouldn't go that far," replied Ron with a wry grin.

"Anyone have a chisel?" asked Calvin.

Detention with Snape didn't really have anything in common with detention the way Calvin was used to it from back in elementary school.

"Detention my left foot," he snorted, dropping a folder from one ginormous pile into a slightly less-ginormous one. "More like child labor."

"Less complaining, more filing, boy," the Spawn of Satan snapped, eyeing him darkly from his desk, where he sat grading papers.

"I'll file you," Calvin grumbled quietly, reaching for the next folder.

...What in the world did I just say?

Apparently, weekend detentions mean the entire day on Saturday, and until lunch on Sunday. Since no one had bothered defining when Saturday 'day' ended in reference to detentions, whoever was giving the detention got to choose. Which definitely wasn't a good thing when that teacher was Snape.

Calvin glanced at the clock on the wall. I swear it was nine-thirty half an hour ago...there's no way it's only eight-forty-two. He looked over at where the Spectre of Horror was writing 'x's like a robot across a long parchment. Could he be...? Ah well, it's not like I've got anything to do anyways, and Hermione'll hopefully take care of my homework while she 'fixes up' Ron and Harry's.

So he continued picking up and dropping the thick folders from pile to pile.

"Every other folder, boy, do it right or I'll have you here next weekend to do it all over again."

Calvin blew out air like a horse, making his cheeks ripple. "And why can't you just do this with magic?"

"It builds character," replied Snape dryly, not even looking up.

Calvin froze. Well that's not a good sign. What are you trying to tell me, universe?

...Oh. Right. That. Thanks for the reminder, universe.
"Hey, Harry, can I borrow Hedwig?" he asked when he got back to the common room.

Harry looked up from the game of wizard's chess he was playing with Ron. "Sure. She hasn't delivered anything in a while, actually, she'd probably appreciate the job. Want me to take whatever it is that needs sending to her?"

"No, you're in the middle of a game, and I haven't even written the letter yet. Just tell me how to get to owl HQ."

"What's this?" Ron gasped, dragging his eyes away from contemplating the chess board. "Calvin considerably declined when someone's offered to do something for him? What's next, Hermione forgoing extra study time to play Exploding Snap with us?"

"Watch it," Hermione said from her seat at the table. "This is your homework I'm correcting here. We wouldn't want any mistakes to just...appear, now, would we?"

"I'm sorry Hermione thank you for helping us with our homework we are in your debt forever!"

She nodded in approval. "Better."

"I think the power's going to your head, Hermione," chuckled Calvin.

Harry explained to him how to the get to the tower with the owls, and he sat down next to Hermione, considering how to best begin the letter to his parents.

_Dear mom and dad_, he wrote. It seemed like a safe way to start. Too safe - he'd have to freak them out a bit, or they'd know for sure that he wasn't telling them something. _I've been at Hogwarts for less than a week, and I've already made blood pacts with four people! Don't fret, it was the non-eternally binding kind - when my soul leaves my body the pacts will be dissolved. Classes here are a lot more interesting than those at home, that's for sure. My least favorite teacher is a high-ranking Demon from the darkest depths of Hades who enjoys frightening little children and complaining about the rising price of ink. Today he let me organize his filing cabinets, which was a real treat. It just so happens that I'm a natural at turning things into other things, and I even won some points for my house by doing so. Not to worry, though, I'll make sure to lose just as many. Anyways, we're going to be learning how to fly next week, and I can't wait for my first crash-landing. I'm sure it'll be a blast. Well, that's all for now.

_Hope you miss me,

_Your life's crowning achievement,

Calvin, Boy...of Destiny

_PS That's really my name here! Even the Headmaster, the esteemed Mugwump Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, uses it. He waves to me in the Great Hall during meals and asks me about my hacky-sack skills when I pass him in the hallways. Okay, that's it for now, really. Bye. Maybe send a letter back with Hedwig - that's the owl's name by the way, she belongs to a friend of mine. Make sure to feed her something before you try and tie the letter onto her leg. Hope to hear from you soon. Not so soon, I'm really busy with all my stuff. But soon-ish. I love you. Bye._

The common room was filled with Gryffindors jabbering about the upcoming flying lessons. Most
of the jabbering was not about the flying itself, but rather who the flying would be done alongside.

Neville was complaining that both of his worst subjects were with the Slytherins, while Ron was going on about having to see 'their ugly mugs' in the air, too.

Calvin was thinking. Somehow, the universe did not spontaneously explode. Maybe it had already gotten its vaccine. "Have any of you seen Draco Malfoy around?" he asked.

"No, actually, I don't think I've seen him since the Sorting," Harry replied.

Hermione looked at them. "That can't be right - we had Potions with the Slytherins last Friday, he must have been there."

"I saw him," said Ron, munching on some item of food that they had no idea how he'd gotten his hands on. "Yeah, in Potions. I was planning on asking him if he enjoyed having Evil Incarnate as his Head of House, but soon as class let out he disappeared."

"I actually went over to the Slytherin table during breakfast," Calvin admitted. Ron shot him his 'are you insa- oh, right, you actually are' look. "Some girl with a face that looked like a silverback gorilla had used it as a bongo for about a week straight told me that he'd already eaten and left."

Harry looked at him. "You don't think he's...avoiding us, do you?"

"The less we see of him the better, I say," remarked Ron. "Here's to hoping he keeps it up until summer, eh?"

"What do you have against Draco?" Calvin asked the red-haired boy curiously.

"Besides the obvious?" came the sarcastic reply.

"He's not all that bad, actually," said Harry. "Sometimes, at least."

"Harry, he's a Malfoy."

"...Which means what, exactly?"

Ron climbed to his feet and began pacing. "I forget you lot don't know all this. You sure I didn't tell you about his family when we were back on the train?"

"I didn't hear you if you did."

"I was probably too focused on deciding whether or not I should have been leaving the compartment and finding new friends. Anyway, the Malfoys are the worst of the worst. After You-Know-Who's defeat-"

"What if I don't know who?" asked Calvin curiously.

"What? Everyone knows who You-Know-Who is."

"Well I don't," Calvin said, crossing his arms. "Who is he?"

"The Darkest wizard in centuries, the guy who gave Harry his scar!"

"Oh, you mean Voldemort. What was that?" he asked, raising an eyebrow at Ron. "You have the hiccups or something?"
"You said his name!" Ron's mouth was wide open, and his freckles stood out starkly on his paling face.

"I also said 'There are two types of people in this world - those who are cheesecake, and those who get confused whenever I open my mouth,' but that was last week."

"Uh, what?"

"Exactly. Anyway, why shouldn't I say his name."


"And what is that reason?" asked Hermione, looking genuinely interested.

Ron threw up his hands. "There are tons of reasons! There are more reasons than there are ways to die in the Forbidden Forest! I could keep listing reasons until we graduate!"

"Great," Harry said. "So then you'll have no problem giving us one or two right now."

"There are..." started Ron. Then he seemed to change his mind. "During the war, many people had family members personally killed or tortured by You-Know-Who. There are lots of bad memories from that time, and saying his name brings those memories to the surface for a lot of people...I guess."

Hermione was staring at him. "Ron..."

"What?"

"Did you just explain emotions that you don't have yourself? Guys, are you hearing this?"

Harry and Calvin nodded, smiling.

"But if saying You-Know-Who instead of his actual name is to avoid that," Calvin said. "Then every time someone says it, people think 'Oh, that guy who killed my family members' anyways, so what's the point? Plus, avoiding saying his name gives his name power, and since he's been defeated, we should be trying to do the opposite, no?"

"Th-thats, that's what I think, too," said a small voice.

"Ah!" Calvin flung himself back and tripped, tumbling to the carpet. "Oh, it's just you, Neville. Don't do that."

"Um, sorry, Calvin." The round-faced furrowed his brow. "What is it that I shouldn't do?"

"Don't enter the scene so suddenly. At least have the courtesy to announce your presence in the narration or something!"

"You're one to talk about courtesy, mate," said Ron, licking the wrapper of some sort of chocolate.

"Why should I curtsy, I don't wear a dress," Calvin answered him. Ron froze with his tongue still out of his mouth and looked at Calvin in confusion.

"You were saying something about what you think regarding You-Know-Who's name, Neville?" asked Hermione, doing her best to keep the conversation from being hijacked by Calvin messing with Ron.
Neville nodded. "My parents…" He trailed off, clearly uncomfortable talking about it. Then he swallowed and seemed to find some inner strength. "My parents weren't attacked by V-V-Vol, by V-Vold-d-dem-dem," he struggled, gritting his teeth. "By V-Voldemort," he suppressed a shiver.

"Oh stop it, Ron, it's just a name," Hermione said as Ron practically left his seat by force of flinching.

"His followers, though," continued Neville, hands clenched into tight, shaking fists. "His followers t-tortured, my parents. With Cruciatus."

"That's one of the Unforgivable Curses!" exclaimed Hermione, horrified. Neville nodded wordlessly.

"What happened to them, mate?" asked Ron, leaving any tact that he had managed to acquire in the past week behind him as he leaned forward. Hermione shot him a look that promised future lecturing, but he didn't notice.

"They're in Saint Mungo's," Neville whispered almost to himself.

"Neville, we're so sorry," Hermione told the boy genuinely. "We shouldn't have asked." She glared at Ron again.

"N-no."

"What?"

Neville looked up at them. "My gran, she told me that I should be proud of my parents. That they stood up to the Death Eaters and to V-Voldemort. And she's right. I'm not going to cower at the memory of what they sacrificed themselves to oppose - what they were willing to give their lives for, even though it was their, their sanity, that was taken. I'm going say Voldemort's name, and I'm going to be proud of what my parents did, and I'd be glad to one do something half as great as what they did!" He sat back down and started to shrink in on himself in embarrassment, noticing how loud he'd gotten. Then he looked up in surprise at the sound of a clap.

Calvin was standing on his chair, applauding slowly, picking up speed as more people joined in. The boy who was proud of his parents realized that everyone in the room was staring at him, and had been listening as he talked. They were all clapping now, and most of them had stood up - some, such as Dean, joining Calvin in standing on the furniture. The clapping was as rapid as a rainstorm now, and everyone was still looking at him.

Shock and awe and a little bit of confusion played across Neville's face. It was like he could not believe that these people were applauding him, and were applauding what he had said. He glanced around, checking to see if there was some famous person who'd just walked into the room.

"Yeah, it's you, mate," Ron said to him, still clapping. "You and your bloody amazing speech."

"Language, Ron!" Hermione berated, but she was smiling.

The clapping went on for almost a full minute, and when it was finished Neville was still in shock. He told them he was going to turn in early, and wandered up to the dormitory, apparently deep in thought.

The morning of Flying classes, Hermione seemed to be the most nervous person in the Great Hall. She was muttering facts about brooms and techniques for flying under her breath the entire time, and didn't even realize she was saying it all out loud until Ron asked her to 'shut up about that
useless information.' She was so nervous she even forgot to get offended.

Neville was also slightly nervous, but he seemed to have retained some of his newly found confidence brought on by the standing ovation he'd received the previous night.

"I've been waiting for this ever since I learned that there were such things as flying brooms," Harry said excitedly.

"We're going to fly!" yelled Calvin, virtually bouncing with joy.

"In the air!" shouted Dean, his entire face just one big smile.

"On the same object that my mother used to make me sweep the kitchen floor with!"

"Revenge at last!"

"Sweet, sweet revenge! Muahahahahahaha!"

The Slytherin girl who Calvin had talked to in the Great Hall that one time approached them once they were outside.

"Well if it isn't the pack of mudblood lovers and their pet mudbloods," she sneered.

Ron's face twisted into a rictus of fury as he stepped forward, but Calvin cut him off.

"You know, I'd try to come up with a good retort, but it seems your parents have already done me the trouble." He held up his hands to make himself look like the letter 'Y.' "I mean, Pansy, really? Some religions say that parents have prophecy when they name their kids, and I'm beginning to believe it."

As she stalked away, fuming, Harry turned to Ron.

"What's a mudblood?" he asked, eyeing the Slytherin group as they whispered and pointed in their direction. Malfoy was at the back, silent and brooding.

Ron struggled to get himself under control. "It's just about the worst insult there is. It means someone whose parents are both muggles."

"That's worse than having your parents name you Pansy?" Calvin said dubiously, raising an eyebrow.

"Ron, don't let the Slytherins ruin the class where you get to fly," Hermione said, putting a hand on his still trembling shoulder.

He breathed out quickly. "You're right. I'm sorry, guys, but if another Slytherin ever calls you that again I think I'm going to jump them."

"We'll hold them down," Harry answered with a grin.

"We will do no such thing!" Hermione said crossly. "Violence is not the right way to go about solving conflicts like this!"

"Fine, calm down, there won't be any violence," Calvin assured her. Then he leaned over to the two wizards and whispered, "Porcupines in their beds sound good to you?"
Madam Hooch, their flying instructor, had short gray hair and actual yellow eyes. When she walked out onto the grass, she shouted, "All right, enough socializing! Everybody line up beside a broom!"

There were broomsticks set out on the ground, around twenty in all, with spaces of about three feet between each one. The broomsticks didn't look to be in great condition, some of them missing most of their twigs from the back end.

"Do these things even have seat belts?" asked Calvin, looking at the broom he was standing next to.

"What's a seat belt?" replied Ron, rubbing his sweaty palms on the sides of his robe.

"Do they have any sort of protection or emergency stop?"

"Um, no, I don't think so."

Calvin grinned maniacally. "Good. All those years of toboggan and sled riding taught me that anything with a break or an airbag isn't half as fun."

"I have no clue what you just said," the gangly wizard told him evenly.

"Now I want everyone to place their right hand in the air over their broom handles!" barked Madam Hooch from in front of them. "And say 'Up!'"

There was a messy chorus of 'Up's, and Calvin watched as Harry's broom leapt into his hand. His was about the only one, though - most of the other students had to keep repeating the word until their brooms shakily rose through the air.

"Rise, my eldritch creation!" Calvin commanded his broom. "Rise, and grant me the ability of flight! Rise, and let me use you for your power!" His evil cackle was cut off when Ron, who had finally gotten his broom to listen, interrupted him.

"Mate, you're supposed to say 'Up.'"

"I have to get into the right mood," Calvin told him. "There has to be a certain...atmosphere." He looked down at the broom and raised his voice. "I will give you life, and in return you will serve me, and only me! I will give you life, and you will give it back with your service! I will give you life, and you-"

"We are waiting for you, Mr. Calvin!" yelled Madam Hooch. Indeed, everyone had their brooms in hand by now, and were all looking down the line to where he was speaking to his own.

Calvin cleared his throat loudly. "Rise, my faithful servant, and carry me to the heavens! Up!" The broom shot up with the force of a cannonball, slapping into his palm and continuing its journey. He was quickly carried off the ground as he gripped the broom handle tightly.

"Get back here, boy!" the flying instructor shouted at him.

"Houston, we have a negative on that orbit trajectory," Calvin noted as he rose higher and higher. Then he noticed he was flying. "THE INTREPID SPACEMAN SPIFF HURTTES THROUGH THE SKY OVER FOREIGN TERRAIN!" he screamed excitedly. He shifted his grip and the broom dipped and started forward, slowly gaining speed. "AS IF MURPHY HIMSELF WERE GAZING DOWN UPON OUR HERO, A FUSION THRUSTER SEEMS TO HAVE FAILED AT THE MOST
"INOPPORTUNE OF TIMES!" He quickly lost altitude, and the rest of the students dove out of the way as he neared the ground. "SPIFF IS GOING DOWN! IS THIS THE END FOR OUR FAVORITE SPACE EXPLORER EXTRAORDINAIRE!?" Right before impact his eyes locked with those of a boy who had apparently been too surprised to follow the rest of the fleeing students. Calvin's hand slipped off the broom handle. "COLLISION IN T MINUS."

XXXxxxxXXX

"Oh, I've done worse than this, believe me," Calvin told Madam Pomfrey as she checked him over with a few diagnostic spell. "I've fallen down stairs, hills, cliffs, gorges - just about everything, really. You name it, I've managed to collide with the bottom of it."

"I...see. I suppose that means I'm going to be seeing you a lot this year?"

"I sure hope not- no offense, of course, it's nothing personal, hospitals just aren't my favorite places. Even if it is a Hospital Wing."

"Well, everything seems to be in working order, though I've no idea how that's possible..." the bustling medi-witch said, glancing over at the end of the room where a white curtain surrounded another occupied bed. "Considering that Neville has two broken arms, a cracked rib, a sprained ankle, a twisted knee-cap, and a concussion."

"Wow, really?" said Calvin, eyes wide. "I had no idea my head was that hard."

She frowned at him and left to check on Neville.

"Spaceman Spiff does it again!" Calvin said happily, bringing his hands together over his head and shaking them. "A miraculous landing, and only one injured civilian! That's down nine from the last count, folks!"

Madam Pomfrey told him that he had to stay in the Hospital Wing overnight, even though there was nothing visibly or technically wrong with him, 'as per regulations.' And because she still thought it was strange that he hadn't been hurt at all.

Calvin was pleasantly surprised when Harry, Ron, and Hermione came into the Hospital Wing later that evening with plates of food from the Great Hall. He leapt out of bed and quickly went over to relieve them of their wonderful-smelling burdens.

"Are you...sure you're injured, mate?" Ron said, eyeing him as he hopped back onto his bed and began devouring the offerings.

"I'm sure that I'm not," Calvin replied, slurping a string bean from the end of his fork.

"Then why are you still here?" Harry asked, sitting down on the chair next to the bed.

Calvin shrugged. "Hogwarts regulations."

"Oh yes," Hermione said, "I read in Hogwarts, A History - it's ever such an informative book, really - that anyone visiting the Hospital Wing who stays there for over two hours past noon must remain there for at least one night. You are staying here tonight, right?"

He nodded. "Anything interesting happen after I left?"

Ron grinned widely and glanced at Harry. "You want to tell him, or can I?"
With a delayed smile, as if snapping out of some introspection or something, Harry replied, "You can if you really want to."

"Great. Okay so there we were, Madam Hooch had just dragged you two off to the-"

"-Wait, us two? Who else fell from the sky besides me?"

Ron blinked at him. "You fell directly on top of Neville. Knocked him right over like a human bludger - nice aim, really, I'm quite impressed."

"Then where is he now?"

"I'm right here, guys," said a voice from Calvin's left.

"Gahh! What did I tell you about narrating yourself in!"

"Hello, Neville, how are you feeling?" Hermione asked the round-faced boy, raising an eyebrow at Calvin.

"Okay, I guess. Wish I got to fly, though. Also I can't feel my left hand."

"I think Gorfe and Derg can get you an extra," Calvin said helpfully.

"What is it with you and not saying my brothers' names correctly?" Ron asked, shaking his head. "Anyway, Madam Hooch took you and Neville-"

"-Neville too? What happened to him?" asked Calvin curiously.

"You crashed into me!" yelled a voice from off to his left.

"Neville, when did you get here!? Sheesh, at least announce yourself or something, you're gonna give me heart attack. You were saying, Ron?"

Harry reached over to close Ron's mouth, chuckling dryly and shaking his head.

"Right, so - Madam Hooch told us to all stay put and not use our brooms, or we'd be expelled, then left with you and- then left with you." Ron smiled wickedly. "This is where it gets good. You see, Neville had gotten this thing called a Remembrall from his gran this morning, and when you knocked him off his feet-"

"-I did what!?

"-it must've fallen out of his pocket. It had landed next to Malfoy, who picked it up and was looking at it, trying to figure out what it was." Ron jerked his thumb in Harry's direction. "Then Harry tells him it's Neville's, and asks for it back so we could give it to Neville later. Malfoy get's this sort of constipated look before glancing around at the rest of the Slytherins, and that ugly girl who always hangs around him laughs in a really annoying, high-pitched voice and asks why Malfoy would ever do that. Then the blond git gets real angry at Harry - way out of proportion, if you ask me, it's not like Harry told him to stick the Remembrall up his-"

"Ron!" Hermione cut him off, glaring warningly.

"Right, sorry Hermione. So Malfoy's almost fuming, and he growls 'I can't do that, Potter,' then tells that ape Goyle to get on his broom! I mean, can you believe him!? Anyway, the oaf climbs onto his broom and Malfoy hands him the Remembrall with some instructions I couldn't hear. Harry loudly tells him to hand it over, but Goyle kicks off and soars up just about as high as the

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castle walls! So Harry, ignoring Hermione's pleas, gets on his own broom as Goyle chucks the Remembrall as far as he can, which is pretty far considering he's about about as big as a small troll, and easily just as ugly - I don't think he has any siblings, but I can guess why, I mean his parents must-

"Are we talking about Goyle's family, or what happened after Calvin left?" questioned Harry, peering at Ron.

"I was getting to it. So as Goyle throws the Remembrall and starts back down, Harry mounts his broom. Now, the Remembrall's already in the air, and headed for the far wall - it looked like it might've been headed over, if not for the wind - and Harry is just getting onto his broom, so there's no chance he's going to make it in time." The redhead took a breath, then said dramatically. "Or so everyone thought. But Harry gets this determined look on his face and when he kicks off he's leaning forward real low and he just \textit{blasts} through the air! He was off like one of Fred and George's firecrackers, it was unreal! He reaches the wall in about a second and then dives, following the Remembrall right towards the ground. He catches up to it and grabs it, then pulls up about a foot from the ground, and tumbles off his broom onto the grass. Malfoy had this funny expression like he wasn't sure what to say." Ron sighed. "You should'a seen it, mate. It was right wicked."

"As soon as I got to my feet," Harry picked up the story. "I heard Professor McGonagall shout my name. I don't think I've ever been so scared in my life. She told me to follow her into the castle - I was sure I was about to be expelled, and I think everyone else thought so too. As I passed Draco, I think - I'm not sure - but I think I heard him mutter something under his breath. He wouldn't even meet my eye."

"Probably so ashamed you had him beat," Ron said smugly.

"I- I'm not so sure," Harry replied, wrinkling his forehead.

"What'd he say?" asked Hermione, never one to leave potential knowledge untouched.

"It sounded like 'sorry.'"

"You're hearing things, mate," Ron told him. "A Malfoy would never apologize, least of all to a Gryffindor, and the one who foiled his plan at that."

"Yeah, maybe," said Harry with a frown. "Anyway, what happened next was the best part, really. I walked with Professor McGonagall over to Flitwick's classroom, and she asked him if she could 'borrow Wood.' I was so confused, I thought she might be getting a cane to punish me with."

Hermione gasped. "Harry, that's awful! Professor McGonagall would never do something like that!"

"I know, I know, I wasn't thinking straight. It turns out Wood is Oliver Wood, a fifth-year and head of the Gryffindor Quidditch team. I'm going to be Gryffindor's seeker!" He smiled as Ron punched him lightly in the shoulder.

"Youngest seeker in a century," the redheaded boy said proudly.

Calvin, who was just finishing up his dinner, looked confused. "What's a seeker?"

Ron gaped while Harry explained, "Oh, yeah, I didn't know what a seeker was either until Wood explained it to me - basically, there's this tiny little ball with wings called the Golden Snitch, and it flies around the field throughout the game. My job is to catch it."
“What happens if you catch it?” Calvin asked, licking his knife and ignoring Hermione's 'You really shouldn't do that' look. "Do you get to give the other seeker a noogie?"

“What? No.”

“Well do you at least get to take the other guy's broom?”

“No, that's against the rules!” Ron said, annoyed. "He gets one-hundred-and-fifty points for his team, and the game is over.”

“Oh.” Calvin thought about that for a moment. "Doesn't sound all that interesting to me, even for a sport - watching two guys look for a golden ball? The Easter egg hunt isn't a spectator sport, and Quidditch shouldn't be either.”

“What? They're not the only people on the field!” said Ron. "They're just the only people looking for the Snitch. Then you've got the three chasers for each team, who have to get the quaffle - that's the biggest of the balls - through one of the three hoops at the opponent's end of the stadium. And then there's the beaters - that's the twins, for Gryffindor's team - who knock around the bludgers - those're these two solid balls that are bewitched to fly around trying to knock people off their brooms. They keep them away from their teammates and hit 'em towards the other team's players. That's Quidditch. Best sport in the world," the gangly redhead finished.

“So it's sort of like two different games going on at the same time? That's kinda cool. How many points do you get for scoring a waffle goal, three hundred? Four hundred?"

"Ha!” scoffed Ron. "That would make for an insanely high-scoring game. No, each quaffle goal is ten points."

"...Ten? Are you sure?"

“What do you mean am I sure? Of course.”

Calvin scratched his head. "If you say so. And you said that catching the Snitch thing ends the game?"

"That's right, until the Snitch is caught the game keeps going - in professional Quidditch, there's been games that went on for months."

"So what happens if the seeker catches the Snitch right at the beginning of the game?” Calvin asked, licking his entire plate clean and ignoring yet another look from Hermione.

"Well, the game's over," Ron answered, shrugging.

"But what about the chasers doing the waffle thing? They don't get to play?"

"It's quaffle, and not if the game ended, no."

"That's not fair. It doesn't seem like anybody really cares about anything but what the seekers do.” Calvin smiled crookedly. "I'm going to have to teach you guys a real fun game."

Ron started backing away, hands held out in front of him. "No thanks, not interested. Anything you think is 'fun' is bound to end up with me at the bottom of the lake or stuck in a tree or something."

"Oh, come on, I listened to you explain Quidditch - you have to at least try it!”
"He will," Harry said. "We all will, right, guys?"

"I don't do sports," Hermione said quickly.

"That's okay, neither do I," replied Calvin brightly. "It's a game, not a sport."

"So what's this game called?" asked Harry.

Calvin rubbed his hands together comically and looked off into the distance, cackling. "Calvinball."

AN: Finally, some Spaceman Spiff action! I've been waiting to write that scene since I first decided to do this crossover. And since flying lessons are every Thursday, we'll be seeing more of the interplanetary explorer extraordinaire for sure. Thanks so much for reading, guys. Please consider leaving a review. And then after you've considered it, actually leave a review. After that, I don't know, go make a sandwich or something. Just make sure it's not a closed-faced, horizontally cut, smooth peanut butter sandwich on weird bread with jelly.
Chapter Ten - Once Upon A Midnight Marathon

"Calvin, over here!" called Harry as Calvin entered the Great Hall the next morning. He went over to sit down, yawning. "Glad you're back," Harry smiled at him.

"And my front, too," Calvin said, pouring himself some pumpkin juice. "Oh, Hermione, is there any chance that last night you…"

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Your homework's ready to be handed in, yes - though I had Ron do the actual writing, to make it more believable."

"You said it was because we all had to help out!" Ron sputtered, spewing bits of food across the table. "My handwriting's nowhere near as bad as Calvin's!"

Calvin patted the redheaded boy on the back consolingly. "With time, Ron, yours too can be as unreadable as mine. It just takes dedicated practice."

"Oh, Calvin, I found the 'lockpicking' spell you were talking about - it's actually only for unlocking magically locked things. I'll show it to you later, but it's supposed to be fairly high-level. And you really should try to improve your penmanship," Hermione said. "Both of you - it's absolutely atrocious."

"Never mind that," Ron said, taking a large bite of his trademark sandwich and glancing over his shoulder. "Has anyone else noticed how Malfoy's been staring at us ever since we sat down?"

"Very subtle, Ron," Harry chuckled, spearing a clump of scrambled eggs with his fork.

"No, I noticed it too," Hermione said thoughtfully - though, not being Ron, she didn't instantly turn around to try and spot the blond-haired Slytherin.

Calvin - not being Ron but still being himself - surreptitiously looked over at the Slytherin table, and caught Draco's eye a second before the other boy ducked his head. That's strange, Calvin thought, noticing the way Draco moved and held himself. He seems...afraid of something.

"He's probably wondering why you didn't get expelled," Ron gloated through a mouthful of hashbrowns, nudging Harry. "Wait till he hears you're seeker!"

"Wood wants to keep it a secret, at least until the first match," Harry said. "So don't go around telling everybody you see."

Just then the twins walked up to them, sticking their heads around either side of Harry's.

"We heard you made the team as seeker!" the one on the left exclaimed.

"Wood told us!" said the other.
"Keep your voices down!" Harry said urgently, but it was too late; the rumour wave was already rippling out, as students who had overheard turned to whisper to their friends.

Watching the whispers quickly expand to include the other house tables, Calvin shifted in his seat until he had a better view of the Slytherins. Whisper followed whisper, nudging the next along like one of those office desk toys with the shiny silver balls hitting each other. Soon the news reached Draco. The boy peeked around, not even aware of Calvin's gaze as his own settled on Harry for a moment.

*There it was, I'm sure of it. That was a sigh of relief.*

"Hey there, Destiny Boy-o," one of the twins greeted, sliding into the seat beside him.

"We heard about your little show during flying lessons-"

"-and were wondering if you'd be interested in helping a friend of ours out with a little something."

"You guys have friends? I thought you only had victims and accomplices," Calvin said.

The two redheaded third-years held their hands to their heart and did their best to look offended.

"So harsh," one complained.

"True, though. Anyway, an accomplice of ours, Lee Jordan, usually does the announcing for the Quidditch matches."

"He's brilliant at it, really. But sadly we've kidnapped him for one of our...projects."

"So we had to promise him we'd find him a good replacement, at least for the first match."

"And by good, we mean entertaining, of course."

"Preferably someone who has never watched a game of Quidditch."

Calvin raised an eyebrow. "Wouldn't you want someone who has watched many Quidditch games?"

They shook their heads, grinning. "We want a refreshing view of the game."

"Which can really only come from someone who has no idea what's flying."

"Pun totally intended."

"So, how about it?" They leaned in hopefully.

"Sure, why not," Calvin shrugged.

"Wonderful! Can't wait to hear your commentary on the pitch."

"Just try to make us look good."

"Not that that should be difficult." They headed off, discussing how fantastic they were at Quidditch.

"Anybody have any experience announcing sporting events?" Calvin asked his table.

"I'm your man!" yelled Dean, hopping up onto his seat and leaping across the table. He rushed over
to Calvin.

"So, I'm sure it's not that different from football," Dean began. "Just focus on the player with the ball most of the time, narrating what he's doing."

"Got it," replied Calvin, nodding. "But there are like four balls."

"Oh. Well, I'll help you out, if I'm allowed. We should be able to cover most of the exciting parts with two people announcing." He smiled widely. "This is like a dream come true! I wonder who we'll be playing in our first match. Ooh, I should make a banner! It'll be a big lion's head, roaring its superiority!"

"I'll help! Let me know when you start on it."

"Sure thing! I've got to go," the tall boy said, peering over to where he'd been sitting previously. "It looks like Seamus has managed to ignite his pumpkin juice again." He leapt back over to his side of the table.

_He's like Batman, without the whole 'my parents were killed in front of me when I was a child and I smoke ten packs of cigarettes every day' thing._

When they stood to leave the Great Hall, a certain Slytherin first-year walked hastily over to Calvin, who had arrived late to breakfast and so was still finishing up. Ron quickened his pace, pulling Harry out the doorway with him.

"I'd," the Slytherin hesitated. "I'd like to talk with you," he said through gritted teeth, eyes flicking up before returning to staring at the ground.

"Calvin, you'll be late for Potions," Hermione warned, eyeing Draco distrustfully.

"Why me?" Calvin asked the tense boy.

"I don't think the others would really be open to conversation after…"

"After you stole Neville's Remembrall and tried getting Harry expelled?" accused Hermione sharply.

"You don't know what you're talking about, Granger!" Draco shot back, eyes hard.

"Calvin…" Hermione pleaded with her eyes, nodding towards the exit.

He waved her off. "I'll be fine - plus, I wonder what Snape will do when I walk into class late with his favorite Slytherin. I've gained too many points this week anyways."

Draco looked at him in confusion, then shook his head. "No, I don't mean right now. Meet me tonight, in the trophy room. Eleven o'clock, got it? Only you." Calvin nodded, and the anxious boy headed back to his entourage at the Slytherin table.

"Calvin," Hermione said to him as they walked to the dungeons. "You shouldn't go wandering around after curfew - you could get caught! And then you'll lose even more house points!"

"Here's a thought," Calvin said to her, holding up a finger. "Suppose I want something really badly, a certain item in a store, say. And suppose said item is expensive. I don't currently have the funds to purchase this item, so I decide to work a few times a week to save up the money."

Hermione was nodding along, though uncertain as to the point of this exercise.
"Now, after I've saved up enough, I go to the store and am about to buy the item, when my father arrives and tells me I shouldn't waste my earnings on something like that." He turned to the bushy-haired witch beside him. "Thoughts?"

"Well obviously you wouldn't have the money if you hadn't wanted the item in the first place - it was the sole incentive that caused you to decide to work."

"And your conclusion is?"

Hermione rolled her eyes. "You should be allowed to buy whatever it is you were saving for - but this is different, Calvin!"

He shrugged. "I don't see how. I only try to earn House points in other classes so I can blow them on annoying the confetti out of Snape. And it's probably cathartic for the Terror of Reality to take points from me - it keeps him from going back to his apparent obsession with Harry, too."

By then they'd arrived at the Potions classroom, and class began only a moment after they'd taken their seats.

At the end of a long explanation about the potion they'd be brewing that period, Snape paused.

"Are their any questions before I move on," the Dread Herald asked blandly.

"Professor Snape, sir, I have a question," said Calvin politely, raising his hand.

"One point from Gryffindor for talking out of turn," replied the Potions master automatically. Then he squinted at the spiky-haired boy warily. "Yes, boy…?"

Calvin furrowed his brow and tilted his head to the side. "I was wondering, sir - what makes the red man red?"

"Another point off for not making any sense," sneered Snape. "And now onto the potion - not you, boy, you still have yet to complete the first assignment."

Calvin was told to copy down the complicated potion instruction that were back on the board, the same ones as last week. He sighed and began to write. *I haven't lost nearly enough points yet. Might as well come up with another bogus potion.* He scribbled down some detailed steps on how to best steal cookies from a cookie jar.

**Step 1: Who stole cookies from the cookie jar? It will be you.**

He took his time explaining the preferred methods, the advanced methods, and even a few of his own creation that could only be done if one owned a hang glider, pom-poms, and an EMP device.

When he handed it in, Snape barely glanced at it before sighing and setting the parchment on fire with his wand. He said nothing as the parchment turned to ashes, merely collecting the vials of potion samples from the rest of the class.

"Alright," Calvin told them as they headed out together. "Now comes the next part of the plan."

"What plan?" asked Ron, looking slightly apprehensive.

"The plan to find out what was in vault seven-hundred-and-thirteen, of course! We're going to see Hagrid again."

"I didn't get an invitation from him this morning," interjected Harry. "Did you?"
"Oh he'll be happy to see us - how many people do you think go down to his cabin to visit him?"

"I've got some studying to do," Hermione said. "But do update me tonight if you find out anything more. See you guys at dinner," she waved, turning into a hallway that - eventually - would lead to the Gryffindor common room.

Ron watched as she left. "I don't think I'll be coming either," he told them in apology. "I'm going to go...study. Yeah, gonna go catch up on that studying, for those classes and subjects that we have. The studying of information about things, things that we have to know, for tests and quizzes and life in general. Studying, studying, studying, where would be without it. Would you look at the time, it's already later than it used to be - I really must be going, got to do the studying thing, where I study...things. Just fascinating, the things that studying reveals about other things." He hurried off.

"That was peculiar," Calvin commented. "So, on to Hagrid's!"

"Jus' a second, hold your hippogriffs!" they heard from inside the cabin, Calvin having just knocked on the door to the beat of the American military wake-up call.

"Oh, hello, Harry, Calvin, come on in," Hagrid waved them through the door. "I was jus' putting on some tea, as a matter o' fact."

They sat there, sipping from mugs a quarter the size of Hagrid's.

"So, Calvin, how's the, uh, investigatin' goin'."

Calvin sighed dramatically. "Slowly, Hagrid, very slowly. It's hard, working with such little information. It's a shame I haven't found out more - the Dark wizard who tried to steal it in the summer is bound to come back for a second round. If only you remembered the circumstances of the event in which you were cruelly tricked, we might be able to figure out the identity of the thief, and take further measures to ensure the safety of the," he leaned in and cupped a hand around his mouth. "...artifact."

The large, bearded man grunted noncommittally. "Tha' sure is a shame, it is."

"But it's not your fault if you can't seem to recall anything," Calvin said, slumping low in his seat. "I do have an idea, though."

"Yeah, wha's that?"

"I think we should bring Harry on board. He'll be a huge help, I'm sure," Calvin told him.

"Ye' haven't told 'im already?" Hagrid questioned, peering at Calvin from under his heavy brows.

"Oh, of course not - Dumbledore mentioned that he only trusted you enough to decide who else to tell about it, besides for himself. So it's your choice."

Hagrid practically beamed. "Yeah, well, I have proven myself to Dumbledore in the past, it's true," he said, smoothing out out his shirt. "All right, Harry, I might be tellin' ye', but only so ye' can help Calvin here with the investigatin'. But there'd be no tellin' anyone else, ye' hear?"

Harry nodded seriously. "You got it, Hagrid, this is purely to help protect the package. It's what Professor Dumbledore wants to do, and he trusts you to help get it done, right?"
"Ye' got tha' right. So," he cleared his throat, glancing at Calvin. "It's yours to tell," the spiky-haired boy said.

"Right. Harry, the thing I picked up during our trip to Gringotts was," he licked his lips. "It's called the Philosopher's Stone. Now, I'm not sure exactly wha' it does, but it's extremely important, a very powerful magical object. Dumbledore's real serious about keepin' it safe - tha's why he chose to bring it to Hogwarts, and asked me to borrow Fluffy ter help guard it." Hagrid looked at Calvin. "You'll know all about Fluffy of course, right?" He inclined his head at them, question hanging in the air.

Harry froze, then quickly glanced at Calvin, who had paused with a rock-cake halfway to his mouth.

"Yes, yes, of course I do," Calvin covered, scoffing at the query.

Hagrid nodded and then saw the clock above their heads. "You lot should be headin' back now, I've got to start on my patrol. Ye' can tell Harry about it all when ye' get back to the castle."

"I will," Calvin agreed, standing. I hope it's not self-explanatory... "I have a question, though, Hagrid - why'd you name it Fluffy?"

"Oh, tha's simple. Everyone assumes a giant three-headed dog-" Calvin choked on his tea "-is goin' to be ferocious and mean. But if they hear his name's Fluffy, they'll know he's really jus' a sweet, lovin' creature. I do hate it when animals are misunderstood." The hairy man unhooked a gigantic lantern from its place on the wall, and opened the door. "I'll see you guys next week, then?" he asked hopefully.

Harry gulped before saying, "Yeah, you bet, Hagrid." They walked out into the night, glancing at each other and mouthing 'giant three-headed dog!'

"Where in the world are they keeping a giant three-headed dog in a school?!" exclaimed Ron incredulously, when they told him about their meeting with Hagrid back in the common room. "One of the classrooms?"

Hermione looked at them sternly. "I can guess, but I can also guess that if you go looking for it, you're going to get yourselves killed."

"Wait, you know where it is?!" Harry asked her.

"I said I can guess, I don't know for sure, and no I am not going to tell you. Now if you can stop yelling, I'd like to finish up this essay for History of Magic, as it is due on Monday."

"I was never assigned an essay," Calvin said curiously, peering over at her parchment.

She glared at him crossly. "You would have been if you decided to show up for class at all."

Calvin shrugged helplessly. "I tried, really - but I don't need to sit in a classroom to daydream, I can do it more comfortably here."

Their first History of Magic Class, Hermione had spend ten minutes trying to convince Calvin to attend, and she had eventually succeeded. History of anything sounded way too much like old-school school to Calvin, and he told her he hadn't come to Hogwarts only to learn about 'that stuff'
again. Still, he'd gone along with them as they found seats in the lecture-hall oriented classroom, and waited for their teacher to show up.

Professor Binns, it turned out, was a ghost. Calvin got excited when he saw him float through the board at the front of the room and over to the teacher's desk. Then Professor Binns had opened his mouth, and Calvin's attention span had changed channels faster than a speeding toboggan over ice-slicked mud.

_We join our hero on the distant planet Zcholla, where the vile Nequazm live in deep tunnels beneath the planet's surface. A single, white star burns hot in the sky, sucking the will to live from any being ignorant enough to be caught under its harsh gaze. 'Must...escape...' gasps Spiff, crawling along the barren rock on his hands and knees, uniform tearing with each movement of his limbs. 'Must...leave...before I am left...a husk of...my former self....'_

Then Calvin had stood up, slid his History of Magic books back into his back, and walked out. Hermione gave him the evil eye as he passed her, but the professor didn't seem to notice. And that was the last time Calvin had ever attended a History of Magic class.

Another odd teacher was Professor Quirrell. While walking into the classroom the first time, he'd stopped, turned, and started walking in the other direction - five times. Once he finally got to the front of the classroom, he'd greeted the students kindly, then scowled at them. His movements were always jerky, as if he couldn't quite decide what he wanted to do. At least the material was interesting enough, if sometimes hard to understand through his constant stuttering.

Calvin remembered one such period when Professor Quirrell hadn't even been able to complete his first sentence.

"Today we- we will- we'll be l-learning ab-ab-about a certain cr-cr-creature ca-called the- the bu-bu- the bu- the budda-bud-bud-bud- the bud-bud-buddabee-buddabee-"

"That's all, folks!" Calvin had yelled, throwing up his hands in exasperation.

They never did find out what the creature was called, as Professor Quirrell had then opted to just skip the introduction and get straight to the lesson itself, never again trying to say the name.

They's started on the basic shield charm two days before, and it was one of the only actually useful spells Calvin felt they'd yet to hear about. After seeing the effects of the Hover Charm in Charms class, he'd thought he could use it to get himself things without having to move, but was disappointed to find out that it wasn't really the equivalent of telekinesis.

So, as Hermione finished up her essay, and Ron goaded Harry into another game of wizarding chess, he flipped open a book he'd checked out from the library and got out his wand.

"Accio Hermione's essay," he said, with the accompanying wand movements detailed on the page in front of him.

Hermione yelped as her parchment gave a little twitch, and her quill trailed across the surface, crossing through a few paragraphs. "Calvin! Honestly, if you're going to practice spells, don't do it on someone's work!"

"Sorry," he cringed.

"Especially not while they're working on it. _Inperium Zatus_," she declared, touching her wand to the parchment. The haphazard line of ink disappeared. She turned to Calvin. "Wait a minute, were you using Accio? That's a fourth-year spell!"
"It's the only one I found that let's me summon things. It is called the Summoning Charm. Wonder if it works on demons...or would I need a blood pentagram for that?"

"Just stay away from my essay," Hermione told him, eyes wide.

After dinner, Calvin attended an impromptu prank powwow held by the Weasley twins.

"We've gathered you here today-"

"-because we have nothing better to do. And we were bored."

"Our current project won't bear any fruit-"

"-or vegetables-"

"-for a while. Anyone have any ideas?"

Lee Jordan, sitting to Calvin's left, leaned back and put his hand behind his head. "We could just put laxatives in the Slytherin's water supply again."

"We just did that the end of last year," one of the twins said. Calvin decided he was Fred.

"I was thinking a prank involving a little more...panache. Something everyone will see," said George.

Calvin wasn't quite sure what was going on. They were all just sitting there, collaborating on ways to prank people. It was unreal. He didn't think he'd ever felt so...at home. I don't think I've ever felt so...at home, he thought.

"We could stage something," he suggested.

"Like what?" asked Lee.

"A fight!" George exclaimed.

"We can't use offensive spells in front of teachers, though."

"And there are only four of us..."

"It could be like a flash mob," Calvin said.

"What's a flash mob?" asked Fred, intrigued.

"It's where you get a bunch of people to enact some prearranged action - say, a dance - at a prearranged time, at a prearranged place." He paused. "There's lots of prearranging."

The twins were looking thoughtful.

"You could be onto something, Destiny Boy," George said with a grin.

"Something wondrous," said Fred, a glimmer of an idea in his eyes. "Yes, this could do nicely."

"Perhaps just the thing we've been looking for." He turned to his brother, smiling mischievously. "This might take some time-"

"-but it'll be worth it. Let's go start on the preparations. Lee, coming? You too, Calvin."
Calvin checked the clock above the fireplace. "Sure, I've got an hour or two before my mysterious meeting."

They planned and discussed, discussed and planned, threw discuses and plants, and generally had a lot of crazy ideas.

"It'll take some work to get everyone in their proper places," George mused, looking at the Master Plant, a vine they'd charmed to branch out into words and pictures of what they were planning.

"I can call in some favors," Lee told him.

"I'll do whatever I can," Calvin said.

"I don't think anyone's done this in the history of Hogwarts," Fred said proudly.

"Or at least not in the capacity we're trying for," George added with a grin. "Though there's no reason we can't make a few galleons along the way."

"Call it payment for the show."

"A return on our investments."

"And an investment in future returns."

"The future returning our investments."

"Investing our returns in the future."

"Resting our ferns in the accoutrements," Calvin agreed, nodding heartily.

"That's not a bad tag-line," noted George, rubbing his chin.

"I can see it now," Fred said, eyes drifting up and to the left. "Trunk stickers, pins, t-shirts - The Hogwarts Ballyhoo Brigade: "Resting Our Ferns in the Accoutrements."

"Since 1991."

"We'll write 1661, of course."

"So when people ask about we can just say they're upside-down."

"And when they turn their heads and complain that the words are then upside-down -"

"-we tell them the shirt recalibrates gravity every time they turn their heads to read it."

"Not that that's a very good explanation."

"But it will certainly confuse people."

"And that's the main goal, here."

"The logo can be a sleeping fern growing out of an earmuff."

"Or a golden monkey dancing on top of a fruit salad."

"Holding a windmill over his head."
"And screaming something insulting about politics."

"So, anything at all about politics."

"Or better yet, have the shirt charmed to scream insults at someone-

"-whenever they turn their head upside-down!"

"Why aren't you pitching in with anything, Calvin, we'd love to hear your ideas."

"Right," Calvin said, backing away. "I hate to leave so suddenly, but I have to go, um, meet some hair gel about a...souvenir place. You guys keep at it." Then he turned and sprinted away as fast as his legs could carry him, only stopping once he was alone and far away, in an unfamiliar hallway, out of breath and most likely lost beyond all imagination.

"I've changed my mind," he panted to the air. "I don't want to be the strangest person everywhere I go." He slid down along the wall, resting his against it. "Not if it means being weirder than those two. Whew, I am really out of shape."

Getting to his feet, he made his way toward the dead end, making sure to keep a hand in contact with the stone wall at all times. If I'd known I'd be back here, I would have memorized where that exit was. When he reached the dead end, he crossed to the other wall and started down the hallway again, this time in the direction of the confused window. "Do I just end up here whenever I'm not paying attention to where I'm going? In any event, I'd better find that false piece of wall and get to the meeting place - it was ten-thirty when I left, I think."

He looked around. "Hey! It's this place!" To his left, a dead end. To his right, an upside-down view of the outside of Hogwarts seen through a window the size of a cereal box. "Do I just end up here whenever I'm not paying attention to where I'm going? In any event, I'd better find that false piece of wall and get to the meeting place - it was ten-thirty when I left, I think."

"Well that can't be good." He stood there for a good minute, thinking. "You're not actually planning on eating me, are you, Hogwarts?" There was no answer. "Okay, just checking." He looked around, biting his bottom lip. "Alllllllrightly then. How we gonna' do this? You want to just spit me out, or what? Should I check the ceiling too? The floor? Hey, I actually should check the floor." Calvin went to the middle of the hallway, width-wise, where he hadn't yet walked because he'd been sticking close to the walls. "Okay, approaching the halfway point and still no exiting happening, that's cool. Approaching two-thir-AHHHHH!"

"Ouch," Calvin muttered, picking himself up from where he'd been deposited by the Malevolent Hallway of Unintentional Visits and the Shifting Exit. "Oh hey, the trophy room! Thanks for that," he said, looking up at the Misunderstood Hallway of Sometimes Opportune Yet Unintentional Visits and the Shifting Exit.

He entered the trophy room, admiring all the shiny, shiny trophies and medals. They were just so shiny. So very shiny. He reached for one.

"Calvin!" hissed a voice from the hallway. Calvin stepped out, looking wistfully back at the almost tragically shiny trophies.

A small figure stood right outside the room, shrouded in a cloak far too big for whoever wore it, though it did do a good job of hiding the figure's identity.

"Hi, Draco," said Calvin, walking up to the hooded figure. He vaguely remembered someone
telling him to never approach hooded figures, but knew that it didn't apply here.

"Are you alone?" Draco hissed cautiously, drawing back his hood.

"All alone," sighed Calvin dramatically, placing the back of his hand against his forehead. "With no one here besiiiiiiiiide me..."

"What?" hissed Draco, face screwing up in confusion.

"My problems have all gone, there's no one here to DERIIIIIIII-

"Shut up!" he hissed urgently. "No one followed you here, right?"

Calvin snorted. "The would have had a pretty hard time of it. Why are you hissing?"

"I'm not hissing!" hissed Draco. "Oh. That. Sorry."

"What's this all about, anyways?" asked Calvin. "And why'd you do that stealing-the-Remembrall-
thing yesterday?"

Draco looked at him, then at the wall. "I didn't have a choice," he said uneasily.

"Uh, yes, I'm pretty sure you did."

"You don't understand."

"I would if you explained it to me."

The robed boy gritted his teeth and closed his eyes, leaning back against the wall. "The things I said in Madam Malkins...those were things I was supposed to say."

"Supposed to say?"

"Just listen!" Draco let out a breath slowly, calming himself. "They were things I was told to say. Like reading off a script."

"Why does someone tell you-"

"Shut up! Shut up for a second and let me talk!" he hissed, hands curling into fists.

"You're hissing again," Calvin commented.

"Agh!" Draco threw up his hands, large sleeves obscuring them completely. "This isn't even worth it!" He turned away. "Forget all of this, I'm going to bed."

Calvin got a bad feeling that started...well, somewhere in his spleen, actually. It soon made it's way to his gut, though, and he stepped out in front of the blond Slytherin. "No, wait! Don't go, really, I just...I have a hard time not talking over people. I'm working on it, but it's still a problem." Draco hesitated, then moved to brush past him. "Keep talking and I promise I'll listen. I won't interrupt you and I'll listen to everything you say." Draco stopped, his back to Calvin. If he walks away, something terrible is going to happen. I know it. "Draco, please." He didn't move. Not forwards, but not backwards either. "I'm sorry." A moment ticked slowly past. And Draco Malfoy turned around.

"I am the Malfoy Heir," he said mutely. His eyes were pointed in Calvin's direction, but he wasn't seeing him. He was looking directly at him, but what he was seeing was years removed from the
current situation. "Anything I say or do reflects onto my family." He swallowed, and blinked, and hesitated. "Onto my father."

Calvin had questions - he always had questions, mountains of them - but he kept them to himself. To speak now would be to break a promise, and with it any chance he had of figuring out Draco Malfoy.

"When I go out in public, I am the avatar of the Malfoys. I am my father's son, and I must act like it. I must speak like it. I must live like it. My first conversation with you began with reciting lines my father had drilled into me over the summer. The words I would say to anyone I met who was going to Hogwarts - what to say to others from Noble Houses; what to say to purebloods who had stood with Dumbledore in the war; what to say to mud-" he clamped his mouth shut. "To muggleborns."

Then he looked at Calvin, actually looked at him, and saw him. "You weren't anything like what my father told me about muggleborns. You shattered my illusions." His gaze sharpened. "I hate you for that."

Calvin didn't say a word.

"But then you open your ridiculous mouth, and along with starting to worry about how contagious complete insanity is..." Draco looked away. "I start to worry about if what I know, if what I've been living my-"

Footsteps sounded, echoing from far off.

Draco whirled on Calvin, eyes narrowing. "You."

The spiky-haired boy had a bewildered expression on his face. "Um, should we be running, or what?"

"Of course you wanted me to stay and talk," Draco spat, looking up at the ceiling. "I must've been in the grasp of your idiocy to ever have believed it for a second - you just needed to buy time for someone you'd tipped off to come and find the Heir of the Noble and Ancient House of Malfoy out of bed after hours." He glared at Calvin. "Father was right after all."

"Draco, I have no ide-"

"Shut up!" Draco seethed, shoving his face an inch from Calvin's. "I was talking to you, I was telling you things. Things I have never told anyone! You worthless sack of filth, I was going to trust you!" he screamed at Calvin, shoving him back.

Tripping over an uneven part of the floor, Calvin put his hands out to catch himself, but he had forgotten the wall was behind him. He slid down it, falling, and his hand hit the stone floor when he wasn't ready for it. He felt pain shoot through his wrist as it bent farther back than it should have been able too.

"Wait, Draco!" The Slytherin had drawn his hood back up and was hurrying away. "Draco, I didn't tell anyone about the meeting!" Calvin yelled after him. The robed figure turned a corner and disappeared. "Popsicle sticks," Calvin muttered angrily, pushing himself to his feet using his good hand.

The footsteps echoed again, a lot closer - whoever it was had definitely heard their voices once they'd started shouting.
"Someone out in the hallways, I know it, I hear you!" Filch's hoarse voice skittered around the corner at the far end of the hall, and Calvin knew the man - and his infernal cat - wouldn't be far behind. "You won't get away from us, it's a whipping for you, yes it is!" the man croaked excitedly.

He's mad, and incredibly creepy, Calvin thought as he cradled his injured wrist and hurried after Draco. The bipolar Slytherin was nowhere to be seen, but Filch sounded like he was catching up, so Calvin broke into a run.

"You hear that, Mrs. Norris? There he is!"

How is that spindly hobo so fast!?

"We're getting closer, yes we are, we'll catch them yet!"

Calvin rocketed down the hallway, turning, turning again, he had no clue where he was going but it didn't matter because he could hear Filch behind getting closer still and he turned another corner and pounded through corridor after corridor and into a classroom and out into another, and down a passageway so narrow he had to squeeze in his stomach to get through which was difficult since he was breathing so hard and then he was through and hurtling down a wide hallway and he could still hear Filch behind him and he slammed into a door at the end and he twisted the doorknob but it was locked he tried to get a breath while he wracked his brains searching for the spell Hermione had shown him just earlier that day oh what was it, it was something flowy, something airy, something like-

"Alohamora," Calvin wheezed, knocking his wand desperately against the doorknob.

Click.

He scrambled to turn the knob and yanked open the door, slipping inside and then hastily shutting it as quickly as possible without making any noise. He pressed his eye against the keyhole and tried to silence his own heavy breathing.

Filch was just entering the hallway, squinting around in the near-darkness and whispering to Mrs. Norris, who padded ahead of him, eyes glowing. "We know you're here, we know you're hiding," Filch said maliciously, peaking into a classroom. It was the only classroom in the hall besides the one Calvin was in, yet when Filch failed to find anyone inside, he wandered out, scratching his head. "Maybe they took the shortcut around the connecting hallway," he grumbled, shuffling off.

Calvin felt his heart shudder and sigh in relief as the caretaker left. Then he realized that he could still hear his heavy breathing, and had indeed been listening to it for the past minute-and-a-half. Despite having been holding his breath for much of that time.

The spiky-haired boy slowly turned around, and stared. Six eyes stared back. Calvin gulped. "You must be Fluffy," he said weakly. "Hagrid's told me so much about you - all good things, of course," he chuckled hoarsely, flinching as one of the dog's great black heads lowered to sniff at him.

He grabbed the doorknob and quickly made his escape before he became a midnight snack for the canine guard of the Greek underworld. No wonder Filch didn't bother checking behind that door. Tiptoeing down the hallway, he realized that the classroom Filch had checked was a familiar one. They're keeping Cerberus - not to mention the powerful and magical 'Philosopher's Stone' - next to the Charms classroom!? Dumbledore's nuts. Well, more nuts than I thought he was. The bad kind of nuts. Also the good kind - but now also the bad kind.
By the time he get back to Gryffindor Tower, he was bone-tired and could barely keep his eyes opened. He stumbled over a body in the hallway and toppled onto the floor, right in front of the Fat Lady's portrait.

"Hlnns urk," he mumbled.

"You're going to have to do better than that," the Fat Lady told him, crossing her arms.

Calvin gave her the only reply he was capable of. He lost consciousness.

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AN: This chapter took a lot more attention than most of the others. There's more in it, though, or at least that's how I feel. I hope you enjoyed it. Please write a short review, if you would be so kind. Or a long review if you would be so, so kind. Or no review at all if you are okay with simply being kind. I jest; you are all the kindest of people. But maybe leave a review anyways. Thank you for reading. Good night.
Chapter Eleven - The Enemy Zone

"I told you Malfoy's a git," Ron remarked, after Calvin had finished telling over the events of his nighttime adventure.

"Yes, I think I heard you say it a few times," Harry said sarcastically. "Still, now at least our conversations with him make sense. The way he flipped back and forth between stuck-up rich kid and confused stranger did strike me as a bit odd, but I thought that was just him."

"It is just him," said Ron.

"It's his father." Hermione was chewing on the end ends of her hair, something she only did when something was really bothering her. "If what he said is true...that's terrible."

"Of course it's not true," Ron replied, scoffing. "He's a Malfoy and a Slytherin, all they do is lie and manipulate people."

"Sounded true to me," Calvin told him. "I was there. I heard the way he talked. He was acting extremely paranoid, like he was absolutely terrified that someone would find out what he was saying, and that he was talking to me."

"That's probably why he split the second you guys heard someone," Harry said.

"I bet that the entire time, his mind was just running through all the possible scenarios where you betrayed him, and he was found out," Hermione hypothesized. "He was taking a huge leap of faith in meeting you, and he wasn't sure it was the right thing to do, by the sound of it. So when he heard someone around the corner, he jumped to conclusions - the conclusions he'd been fearing all along. Paranoia will do that to people."

"So you're an expert on Malfoy now, are you?" asked Ron, raising an eyebrow.

"Oh, quit it, Ron. Draco at least confronted his misconceptions - you won't even acknowledge yours exist."

"Hmph," he replied.

Calvin saw Fred and George climb into the common room through the hole of the Fat Lady's portrait. He waved them over and regaled them with a slightly-embellished version of the previous night's tale, then proposed a quest.

"Of course we'd love to see a gigantic three-headed dog!"

"I can't think of a better way to spend a Saturday!"

"Keep your voices down," Harry told the twins, glancing around the common room.
"You guys cannot just go gallivanting around the third-floor corridor! It's forbidden!" Hermione said, stomping her foot.

"We're just going to have a bit of a look, Hermione," Ron replied, rolling his eyes.

"Don't roll your eyes at me! You could get killed, or worse - expelled. I thought you didn't care about the Philosopher's Stone anyway - which you still don't know anything about, because god-forbid you should ever do any research - seeing as it's 'safer than safe.'"

"Yeah, well, maybe it's not - Calvin's right, the thief could come back. And I thought you wanted to find out all about it!" shot back Ron.

"You're only interested now because it's dangerous," Hermione said. "Typical boy."

"Well I can guess why you're not interested."

"Because it's dangerous!"

"Because it's exciting." Ron sneered. "Because it's actually something here, something real - when it was all hypothetical, all out there beyond you, you were fine, but the minute it's closer to your body than your brain, you flip out!"

"You should try thinking with your brain instead of your body for once!" she yelled at him.

"You should try something beside hiding behind a book for once!"

"Fine then, get yourself killed, see if I care. Just don't come crawling to me the second you figure out you have no idea what you're doing."

"No problem there," Ron said haughtily. Hermione stormed off.

"Wow," commented Calvin, staring at the redhead. "You are really bad at the whole girl thing. Worse than I used to be, even."

"What do you mean, the girl thing," muttered Ron, plopping down into a deep armchair.

"Hermione," said Calvin, pointing at the retreated witch. He leaned in close to Ron and said flatly, "She's a girl."

"I know that, but what's it got to do with anything?" said Ron grumpily.

Calvin shook his head and glanced up at the twins. "You guys want to help me out here?"

They laughed. "Believe us, Destiny Boy, you're not getting anything through that thick skull of his right now."

"We gave up years ago."

Calvin shrugged. "So," he said, looking around at the twins, Ron, and Harry. "Who wants to take a trip to the forbidden third-floor corridor?"

The twins led them to secret shortcut, making them promise never to divulge the location to anyone.
"Hey, this is the way I got there last night!" exclaimed Calvin, squeezing into the narrow path.

"How'd you find it?" asked Fred. Or George. Let's say George.

"I was running away from Filch."

"Same here!" said Fred. "Only it was after we sprayed a dungbomb with catnip and bounced it down a hall after Mrs. Norris."

"The best of times," George said wistfully.

"When was that?" Harry asked, coming out at the other end and moving aside to let the rest of them through.

Fred came out behind him and stretched. "The second day."

"You guys did that just two weeks ago?" asked Ron, popping out of the passageway.

"More like two years ago, little brother," George clarified, exiting in front of Calvin.

Calvin dropped to the floor and turned to him. "Your *second day of Hogwarts*! Awesome!"

"That's it, then," Harry said, pointing down the hallway to the large, nondescript door Calvin had encountered the night before.

Footsteps echoed from around the corner.

"You have *got* to be kidding me," Calvin moaned, slamming the heel of his hand against his forehead.

"Quick, back into the passageway!"

They crammed themselves into the narrow path and spent an anxious couple of minutes squeezing their way through it as fast as they could. They came out behind a tapestry, and Harry held it aside as the others climbed out.

"Back to the tower," Fred told them. "Flich knows the secret passages almost as well as we do."

After the trek back, they slumped back into the comfortable chairs and couches of the Gryffindor common room.

"Well, that was disappointing," Ron declared.

"Filch must be constantly patrolling those hallways," said George.

"That's probably because of last night," grumbled Calvin, resting his chin on his hands.

"We'll think of something to distract him," Fred told them, grinning, and he and George headed off to their rooms.

"Anybody up for a game of wizard's chess?" asked Ron.

"Sure," answered Harry, and they began setting up the board, coaxing the pieces into place.

Calvin tried to pass the day with practicing the Summoning Charm and losing to Ron at chess, but his heart just wasn't in it. He couldn't stop thinking about, theorizing about, and daydreaming about
the Philosopher's Stone and its guard-dog. It sounded so mysterious, the 'Philosopher's Stone,' but he had no idea what it did. He thought about what Hermione had said, and considered trying the 'research' method of obtaining information. This he quickly discarded in favor of asking Hermione to do it for him.

She refused, as he'd known she would, but he planned to ask her many more times. If all he did was badger her about doing research, she couldn't very well just ignore him the way she was ignoring Ron, and, following the black-haired boy's 'discussion' with her on behalf of his friend, Harry too.

"Come on, Hermione, what harm could looking through a few books do? I just want to know, you know?" She hesitated, but told him no.

"Guess what I want to do today," he told her after classes on Tuesday. "Research about the Philosopher's Stone! But I just don't know how to go about it, and I wish someone would show me." She was showing signs of giving in. But she didn't.

He lost some ground on Thursday when Harry received a large, broom-shaped package during breakfast, that turned out to be...a broom, yes. Hermione, who definitely did not approve of the apparent reward for disobeying Madam Hooch's instructions to remain on the ground, got rather frustrated when Calvin took Harry's side.

As he, Ron, and Harry were walking out of the great hall with the wrapped broomstick, they were stopped in the hall by none other than Draco Malfoy.

"Mo!?!" Calvin backpedaled into the wall.

"That's Crabbe," Harry whispered to him.

"Right, knew that. Draco, there you are!" Calvin said, relieved he'd finally found the blond-haired boy, who he hadn't seen since the incident outside the trophy room. "I really di-"

"Shut it, you," Draco told him coldly before pretending he didn't exist. He turned to Harry. "You think you can just walk onto the Quidditch team and buy yourself a new broom to celebrate, Potter? Better think again. Crabbe, Goyle," he said to the two hulking first-years at his side.

They stepped forward and wrested the broom from Harry.

"Don't you dare," said Harry.

"Give it back!" Ron yelled angrily.

"Or what," Draco answered, his voice toneless.

"Or I'll knock your teeth all the way to your room in the dungeons."

The blond-haired boy gave an empty smirk. "You, Weasley? You couldn't knock the teeth out of a mosquito."

"Draco, don't do this," warned Calvin. "I never told anyone about our meeting, I wouldn't-"

"Do you know why I picked the trophy room?" Draco whirled on him, gritting his teeth together with enough force to obliterate a walnut made of adamantium. "Because Filch never patrols there. There is only one way for him to have known I was going to be there, and that's if you told him."

Calvin gave up on convincing the Slytherin that he hadn't told Flich about the meeting, and instead
tried to save Harry's new broom.

"That broom is from Professor McGonagall, Draco. She bought it for Harry, so he could play on the Gryffindor team."

"Is that supposed to make me happy for him? Now I'm even more inclined to have it meet a tragic end," spat Draco, glaring at Calvin as if he could kill him by narrowing his eyes enough.

Calvin looked him in the eye. "If you do anything to it, we will go to her, and we will tell her what you did. And she will believe us, because there are a dozen witnesses in the Great Hall who saw us walk out with the broom still in its packaging, and Neville is in the common room, so he would know if we never reached it with the broom in hand. The only people more reliably truthful than him are the Marshmallows. In fact..." He stuck his head into the Great Hall and yelled, "CAN I GET A HUFFLEPUFF OVER HERE!"

Four or five curious Hufflepuffs peeled themselves away from their house table and walked over to Calvin, who motioned them into the hallway.

"This is Draco Malfoy," Calvin said to them, pointing at Draco, who was scowling darkly at him. "He has just implied that he is going to in some way break, hide, or otherwise sabotage Harry's broomstick." He turned to Draco. "Do you deny this?"

"How the hell did you end up in Gryffindor, you backstabbing chimera," Draco growled furiously, staring daggers at him. Then he grabbed the wrapped broom and shoved it at Harry, nearly knocking him off his feet. With one last sharp look at Calvin, he stalked off.

"Why won't he believe me!" Calvin complained as the Hufflepuffs filed back into the Great Hall.

"As Hermione said, the, what were they called...preconceptions!" Harry said. "The preconceptions that his father instilled in him, they guide just about everything he does. So when you tell him 'I didn't do it' he obviously thinks you're lying."

"So," mused Calvin. "We have to instill some different ones in him, that's what you're saying.

"He said no such thing, mate," Ron interjected quickly. "We're not here to redeem Malfoy."

Calvin turned to the redhead. "I'm not trying to redeem him, I'm just trying to manipulate him!"

"Er, what? So you don't want to be friends with him?"

"No, I do - but if he doesn't want to be friends with me, and I try to make him become friends with me anyways, that's totally manipulation, not redemption."

"You're mad."

Calvin shrugged. "If I wasn't, this would probably never work."

"I'm going to go put this in the dormitory," said Harry, hefting the broom. "I'll meet you guys in Defense, Professor Quirrell doesn't really seem to care if people are late."

"We'll come too! Anything to arrive late to class. Defense Against Speech Impediments is finally getting interesting, though," commented Calvin.

"Good thing, too," said Ron wryly. "If I had to go through one more class learning about how to knock out a lower-atmosphere jellyfish without killing it, or how to best distract a horde of howling
swamp-bats, I might have pulled a Calvin and just walked out."

"I don't understand why you guys still go to History of Magic, though, seriously," Calvin said, shaking his head in a disappointed manner.

They dropped off the broomstick and headed to Quirrell's class, Ron and Harry talking Quidditch and Calvin remembering his promise to teach them Calvinball. All through Defense class, he daydreamed about different ways to initiate them into the game. It all came down to the spirit of Calvinball, though - they couldn't have too much of an idea of what they were doing.

They stood outside of the castle in the afternoon sunlight, listening to Madam Hooch shout at them the proper way to descend from the air. As they moved on to hovering and turning, Calvin was struck by a number of thoughts.

_This would be a great place to play Calvinball. Grassy, wide-open - it's perfect. All I have to do is add the wickets and other props I brought in my trunk, and we'll be set. What else can I do to-HOLLYCONTINENTALDRIFTWECANPLAYCALVINBALLWITHFLYINGBROOMS._

He'd gotten so excited at the thought of adding flying brooms to his epic game that he had inadvertently pulled upwards on his broom handle. He was now high above the rest of the class, and Madam Hooch was yelling at him to get down that very instant.

Trying to ease the broomstick towards the ground, Calvin leaned down just a little. The broom shot downwards like a crazed bottle-rocket. "SPIFF IS HIT, HE'S GOING DOWN! OUR HERO TRIES DESPERATELY TO REGAIN CONTROL OF HIS SHIP, BUT THE CONTROLS SEEM TO BE ONLY A BROOM HANDLE THAT DOESN'T RESPOND TO ANY AMOUNT OF VOICE-COMMANDS, AND IS STUCK IN THE DOWN POSITION. AS SPIFF NEARS THE GROUND, HE REALIZES HE ONLY HAS ONE CHOICE: EJECT OR DIE!"

"You aren't going to make a habit of this, are you?" Madam Pomfrey asked him, hands on her hips. Calvin hastily shook his head. The medi-witch could be extremely intimidating when she wanted to. "Good. Yet again, there doesn't seem to be much in the way of injuries, though I did notice a badly-healed sprained wrist…" She raised an eyebrow inquiringly.

_Whoops._

"The Hospital Wing is here for accidents other than crashing a broomstick into classmates, you know." She walked off, muttering about irresponsible kids and the hazards of letting them fly.

"Wonder what she meant by 'crashing them into classmates.'" Calvin said to himself. "Weird."

"Hey, Calvin, could you-"

"AH!" Calvin jerked around, heartbeat increased by thirty-five percent. "Seriously, Neville. You have got to get that under control." "I have no idea what you're talking about, but I will do my best," the round-faced boy said, massaging his bandaged leg. "Could you get me a glass of water? I would, only I'm not allowed to stand up for another eight hours."

Calvin got up and went to fill a glass of water with water from the tap. As he handed it to Neville,
he said, "What happened to you?"

"Do you really just not remember anything that happens during flying lessons?"

"Of course I do. So what happened?"

Neville sighed. "Well, I actually managed to get out of the way this time, as you fell out of the sky like a dragon whose wings suddenly disappeared."

"So how'd you get hurt?"

He stared at Calvin with a complete lack of expression. "You decided to jump off of your broom. At the last second. Straight at me."

"What was I supposed to do, not eject? It's not a sinking ship, Neville, and as a space explorer I have a duty to keep myself alive."

"No, no, it's not your fault, but I honestly don't mind that much. I realized I hate flying lessons."

"Why's that?" Calvin asked, going to sit down on his own bed.

Neville gave a shudder. "The second my feet left the ground I had my entire life flash before my eyes, each year like a series of silent pictures. I glimpsed my own mortality, Calvin, in that moment." He went quiet, and took a breath. "And then my stomach flipped and I felt like I was going to hurl. That's when I decided flying wasn't for me."

"That's a tale to tell the grandkids, all right," Calvin commented, leaning back onto his pillow.

They rested in silence for a bit, until Calvin spoke again.

"I wonder what the last hour and fifty-five minutes of flying lessons is like."

"I bet there's loads of flying," answered Neville humourlessly.

Friday arrived like a vampire bat alighting on a branch in the shadows of the night, only to have the branch break off and send the bat plummeting into a field of singing melons.

"Your assignment, boy," the Destroyer of Hope drawled, "should be a direct copy of what is on the board. Please try to improve your eyesight, or I will be forced to keep you away from potions and automatically fail you." Snape looked away, and spoke without inflection. "It would be the greatest of tragedies and I would be saddened beyond belief." He walked on, checking on the other students' cauldrons.

Calvin tried to remember how many points he'd gotten that week. When he finished counting, he nodded to himself and left his desk, strolling over to Draco.

"Draco, I ne-"

"I will dismember you into a thousand pieces and drop you into this cauldron." The blond Slytherin's eyes were wide, red tinging the edges. The veins around them stood out against his pale skin. Calvin gulped, and retreated to his desk.

"One point from Gryffindor for interrupting a classmate," the Potions master said in a bored voice.

"What!? He was clearly incredibly distressed by my interruption - that calls for at least five
points, I'd say," complained Calvin.

Snape stared at him with heavy-lidded eyes for a few seconds. "Five points from Gryffindor for arguing with a teacher," he intoned. Then he went back to grading papers.

"I cannot believe you are doing this," Hermione whispered, crushing a pile of sliced tubers with the flat of her knife.

The spiky-haired boy settled into his chair and dipped his quill into the inkpot at the corner of the desk. "The Monarch of Misery and I have an understanding of sorts. Which is why I am about to write a step-by-step guide on how to wash one's hair."

At the end of class, Calvin dropped the assignment onto Snape's desk and skipped out of the room. Snape looked at the parchment, his features hardening.

"Ten points from Gryffindor."

When everyone left, he sighed to himself and slumped onto the desk, mumbling, "Not that it'll do any good."

Okay, everybody listen up!

They were back in the grassy clearing used for flying lessons. Calvin was holding a white volleyball and standing on top of his trunk. Harry, Hermione (who still wasn't talking to Harry or Ron, and wasn't all that happy with Calvin), Ron, Dean, and Seamus waited patiently on the grass.

"I've never played with this many people before, but I'm sure it'll work just fine. Here are some things you have to know. The first rule of Calvinball is don't talk about- no seriously though, the first thing to know is that you can't play Calvinball without wearing," he pulled a length of black cloth out of his pocket. "One of these."

"Is that a scarf?" asked Seamus.

"There's no way you're getting me to wear a scarf, mate," said Ron with a shake of his head.

"It's not a scarf," Calvin said, tying it around his head. "It's a mask!" It covered from his brow to around halfway down his nose.

"Any game where you get to wear masks is all right by me," Dean said happily, taking his own mask from Calvin.

"Why masks?" asked Harry, receiving one.

"DO NOT QUESTION THE MASKS!"

Once everyone had theirs on, Calvin returned to the top of his trunk. "Second thing to know! This is the Calvinball." He held up the ordinary white volleyball. "Got it?" Everyone nodded with differing levels of enthusiasm. "Okay, that's it."

"What do you mean that's it?" Hermione asked, shifting her mask. "How do you play the game?"

"Oh, right, I forgot. One more thing: you can never play the same way twice."

"But how do you play!?!"
"Any way you want! Now come help me set up the field!"

Hermione sighed exasperatedly. "There have to be rules," she huffed, as everyone helped Calvin unload all manner of objects from his trunk compartments.

"You brought a traffic cone?" Harry said bemusedly, placing the orange pyramid on the grass. "How do you even get one of those?"

"There are a lot of flags here," Ron commented, dumping an armful of the things onto the ground.

"Stick them in the grass all around the field," Calvin told him.

"What's the bucket for?" asked Dean.

"Anything you want!"

"What's this thing?"

"A birdie."

"Doesn't look like any bird I've ever seen."

"Isn't this what muggles use for catching fish?"

"That's a lacrosse stick."

"How many of these do we need?"

"Oh, those are the wickets! Use all of them, stick them into the ground like the flags. Make a path or spread them out, whatever you want."

"Are these bedsheets?"

"For going undercover."

"This is just a stick."

"It's a pole!"

"What's with the long hammers?"

"They have many uses. I stole them from my parents' croquet set."

"A cardboard box?"

"Two, actually! I'll set them up."

"This is a rock, Calvin."

"Good eye, Ron."

"Oo, a frisbee!"

"It's actually a discus."

"Where do I put the bags?"
"Potato sacks, not bags - hide 'em somewhere!"

Calvin turned a full circle, examining the field. *Not bad, not bad.* "Now, sing along with me as I recite the Calvinball theme song!" He cleared his throat.

"Other kids' games are all such a bore!

They've gotta have rules and they gotta keep score!

Calvinball is better by far!

It's never the same! It's always bizarre!

You don't need a team or a referee!

You know that it's great, 'cause it's named after me!"

Then he chucked the Calvinball at Dean. "Dean's been hit with the Calvinball in the Mandatory Retaliation Zone! If he doesn't hit someone back in the next ten seconds, he has to let me act out the scene from Hamlet where he gets his head chopped off as the Uncle!"

"What!?" yelled Ron.

"Cool!" exclaimed Dean, bonking Ron on the head from four meters away. "Ron's the Field Monster until he gets a bucket over someone's head!"

"Oogity Zap-Wap Billitong-Pa!" screamed Calvin. "I've got the red team's flag!"

"Who's on the red team?" shouted Harry, scooping up the bucket while running by, before Ron could get to it.

"Nose goes!" said Seamus, touching his finger to his nose and catching the flag Calvin tossed to him.

"What's going on," whispered Hermione, watching her friends devolve into nonsense-spouting and running around screaming.

"Just run with it," Harry told her, handing her a rock. "Try to have fun."

"What's this?"

"This is the Messenger Rock. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to get this rock to Ron without anyone noticing." He caught her eye and smiled. "Do you understand, Agent Granger?"

Hermione smirked, then put on a more serious expression. "Yes sir, you can count on me!"

That was when Ron came up behind Harry and dumped a second bucket over his head. It was filled with water.

"That's another point for the Rotary Villain," announced Seamus, grabbing the discus off the ground. "Now I'm him, right?"

"You've got at least Sparkly-Poo by now, I reckon," said Ron, walking away crab-style.
"You've crawled into the Battle Zone, Ron," Harry said with an evil chuckle, throwing off the Blanket of Forced Ignorance from where he'd been lying under it.

"What's it this time," asked Ron, narrowing his eyes. He climbed to his feet, eyeing Harry. "Charades to the Death? Float-a-Competitor?"

Harry took a step forward and thrust his hand out towards Ron, pointer finger extended. "I CHALLENGE YOU TO A GAME OF ROCK-PAPER-SCISSORS-LUMOS THUMB WARS!"

"Psst, Ron, take this Messenger Rock. Get it to Seamus without anyone knowing."

"Got it," the redhead whispered back, taking the rock.

"I said it before, no secrets during Teamplay!"

"It ended before, no secrets during Teamplay!"

"But Harry found the TARDIS Zone, so we're back at the beginning!"

"You didn't use the word 'it,' that's the end of Vorpal Vocab!"

"Quick, tell us the last thing you added to your fantasy schedule, Calvin!"

"I CREMATE THE JABBERWOCK EVERY TUESDAY!" screamed Harry.

"Harry stole my Spotlight Thunder, that's a violation!"

"I call Desperation Plea on that!" shouted Hermione.

"Motion passed!" bellowed Ron.

"It's getting dark, the Twilight Zone Zone has been activated!" shouted Calvin, somersaulting around the Acrobat Pole.

"No declarin' new zones in da Stasis Zone, ARGH ME MATEY!" Hermione yelled, tiptoeing around a wicket.

"Cross-rule Penalty!" Dean yelled back. "Pirates aren't allowed in the Tulip Zone!"

"The Twilight Zone Zone is activated under the rule of the Falsely Accused Feel-Bad Session!" Harry called. "Sound off!"

"One! Calvin's great at magic, his prowess makes me sigh!"

"Two! It would be oh-so tragic if tonight he were to die!"

"Three! His zones are full of flags, his poems do inspire!"

"Four! If he were to make a swing, it would be made out of a tire!"

"Tiebreaker between Dean and Hermione, COMMENCE!"
"You're holding the Flag of Mysterious Impulses!" hollered Dean quickly. "You have to eat a sandwich before you can say anything!"

"As you are standing in the Slow-Mo Zone, your words have not yet reached me - but you invoked the Ancient Flag Magic, so you have to make a worthy sacrifice to the Flag God before you can say anything!" Hermione hurriedly ran around the field, spinning through a square of wickets and stopping to kick the Calvinball into a bucket, which took her a few tries.

When she returned to her Operations Base Headquarters Cave, she dropped the supplies she'd gathered in her robe. Slices of bread tumbled onto the ground, along with cheese, a small jar of olives, and a vial of the black sludge topping. She hastily spread the sludge over the first slice of bread.

"The Voices of the Pantheon of Calvinball hereby declare Sir Lord Duke Dean's sacrifice to be adequate," chorused Harry, Ron, Seamus and Calvin. "And do sentence him to confinement in the Zone of Mere Adequacy until he has completed the Preparational Tasks of Zewlog!"

Dean rushed over the Zone of Mere Adequacy, stopping on the way to pick up a yoga mat. He set it down next to a traffic cone and began to stretch.

Hermione, meanwhile, had just slapped the second piece of bread onto her completed sandwich. She began to devour it in large, messy bites.

"Oh Zewlog of the mighty Tasks, might I answer someone's asks?" warbled Dean.

"WHAT is your favorite name?" asked Ron.

"Dean Thomas!"

"WHAT is your quest?" asked Harry.

"To perform the Preparational Tasks of Zewlog!"

"WHAT is your social security number?" asked Seamus.

"Trick question, that's a secret and Teamplay's been in effect for only eight minutes so far!"

"WHAT would you do for a Klondike bar?" asked Calvin.

"Everything!"

"You may start your next task!"

Dean picked up the traffic cone and put it on his head, then pulled out his wand. "Wingardium Leviosa!" A horseshoe floated up from around the Acrobat Pole, and he directed it over to the bucket. It dropped in with a hollow thunk.

Wiping her mouth, Hermione stood up and yelled, "No utilizing anything blue while casting spells! That's a Specific Outlaw violation! I invoke Alien Overlord Law Eleventy-Eight B, and postpone the end of the game!"

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After wearily packing everything away into the trunk, the six of them headed up to Gryffindor tower. Calvin was oddly pensive.
"I feel like there was something missing," he told Ron as they climbed the stairs.

"Well, I know Fred and George would absolutely love to join in next time."

"Something I've forgotten…"

"We did forget to go see Hagrid," Harry pointed out rather sheepishly.

"Something important…"

It was a few seconds before anyone noticed that Calvin had stopped walking.

"Uh, Calvin?" said Ron, looking back down the stairs at where the spiky-haired boy had frozen mid-step.

"Are you okay?" Hermione asked.

"Lingering effects of the Freeze-Tag Dowsing?" suggested Dean.

"Calvin, speak to me," Harry said, walking down and shaking Calvin's shoulder.

"Ehhhhhhhhhhhhhh," Calvin replied, right eye twitching.

"What's wrong?" Seamus asked.

His mouth opened and closed, opened and closed. Then he turned to them, eyes showing a fear greater than any of them had ever experienced. "I've made a terrible mistake."

"Calvin, what did you do?"

Calvin gulped, visibly trembling. "Do any of you know how wizarding wills work?"

"I do," Hermione answered tentatively. "Why, Calvin? What's this all about?"

He sank to the floor, curling into a ball, whispering over and over again, "I've made a terrible mistake…"

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**AN: Please review if you liked it! Or just to tell me you exist! Or even to tell me you don't exist - that would actually be a lot more interesting. Thanks for reading. Goodnight, readers. Goodnight.**
The Problem With A Tiger Is That

Chapter Twelve - The Problem With A Tiger Is That

"Calvin, are you coming to breakfast?" asked Harry, halfway out of the dormitory.

The spiky-haired boy was sitting on the edge of the foot of his bed, staring hollow-eyed at his trunk on the floor in front of him.

"Calvin?"

"Where do we go when we die, Harry?"

Harry stepped back inside and raised an eyebrow at his friend. "This is purely hypothetical, right?"

"Do you think there's an afterlife?" Calvin wet his lips.

"What are you talking about?"

"Is there a separate place for humans and animals, say, for instance, tigers?"

"...Okay, unless you want to finally tell me what this is about, I'm going to go to the Great Hall and eat."

Calvin shifted his haunted gaze to Harry, who flinched a little as he met the boy's eyes. "Have you ever forgotten someone's birthday?"

"Uh, not someone that I wanted to do anything for, no."

"Well, pretend you know what I'm talking about. Now pretend that person is a ferocious carnivore." Calvin swallowed. "Now, pretend that instead of forgetting their birthday, you forgot that you locked them in your bedroom."

"Are you sure this is still pretend?"

"For two and a half weeks."

"You did what?"

"And while we're pretending they were locked in a bedroom, let's pretend that the bedroom is actually a pit, about six feet deep and oh, say three feet wide."

Harry's eyes were wide, and he was leaning away from Calvin even thought they were at opposite ends of the room. "What did you do, Calvin..."

Calvin reached out with a shaking hand and brushed the top of the trunk. "In such a situation, would it be better to release said being from said confinement? If release means the end of your life, is it better to leave the tiger in- I mean, the being, the person, inside?"
"I...I think I heard Ron owl me a telephone. I should go see what he wants. In the Great Hall. Bye."

Calvin slipped down to the floor, crouching on his knees in front of the trunk. He reached out with both hands and grasped the sides, turning it so the back faced him. Taking a deep breath, he tried to steady himself. He grabbed the lid. Warning bells rang in his head like the time he'd pulled the fire alarm at school. A bead of sweat crawled down his back. Wind whistled through an open window somewhere, even though there were none in the room. His heart thumped an ancient tribal beat against his chest, heralding the imminent sacrifice. He opened the trunk.

"Oooawwwwhhhhhhhh," yawned Hobbes, stretching. He leaped up to grab the lip of the trunk, and pulled himself over. "Best nap ever." His head turned, and he raised an eyebrow at Calvin. "Why are you...staring at me like that?"


Hobbes stretched again, flexing his claws, and Calvin whimpered. Hobbes smiled. "Yeah, I know you left me in there overnight. I'm not mad."

"O-over-overnight, y-yes," agreed Calvin hastily. "Th-that is exactly what happened. I left you in the trunk overnight, and forgot to let you out until this morning. The first morning at Hogwarts. That is a true thing that happened. I am so sorry!"

The tiger stopped mid-stretch to peer suspiciously at his best friend. "So, Calvin," he said evenly. "Yes, what, it wasn't my fault what do you want?!! Calvin caught his breath. "I, yes, I mean, yes, what?"

"So how do you like it here?"

"Oh, that is a great question, I like that question very much, it is a question I would very much like to answer," he answered, nodding enthusiastically. "Yes. I like it here."

Hobbes leapt onto the bed, padding around in a tight circle before settling down with his head on his paws, eyes pointed at Calvin. "What kind of magic have you learned so far?"

"Magic! Yes, I have learned magic! I learned a spell, it is magical. Just magical. I will show you now, watch me, I will do it." Calvin shakily pulled out his wand and said, "Accio dirty sock!" A lone sock jumped into the air, then dropped to the floor before it could get all the way to Calvin. "It is a work in progress, yes it is, I am working on it and progressing, mhmm." He took a deep breath and sat down.

"You know, Calvin, I always thought that lying to one's best friend is one of the worst possible things a person, or tiger, could do," Hobbes said, eyes narrowing.

"L-lying? What ever g-gave you, that idea?" Calvin scooted backwards, bumping into the next bed over.

"If this was the first morning of Hogwarts, you wouldn't have learned any spells yet," Hobbes growled.

Calvin gave a strained smile. "Hehe."

"How long. Was I in. That trunk."
"...Two? And a half?"

Hobbes barred his teeth and leaned over the edge of the bed. "Two and a half *days*?"

"Um, if days were seven times longer than they actually are...then yes?" The tiger's eyes narrowed to slits. A tumbleweed blew in from nowhere and rolled between them. "Listen, bud, pal, partner, I di-AH MY POOR DEFENSELESS LEG-FLESH!"

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When Calvin limped into the Hospital Wing, scratched, bruised, and battered, the first thing Madam Pomfrey said to him was, "But there are no flying lessons today!"

Calvin mumbled something about a train wreck and a tiger.

"Excuse me, young man? What on Earth could have happened to you this early in the morning? Where were you?"

"My room."

She squinted at him sternly. "Did you get into a fight with one of your housemates? I know how Gryffindors can be, but this is beyond even..."

He shook his head. "There were some complications with-"

"Yes, with what?"

Calvin bit his bottom lip. "With my trunk."

The medi-witch looked at him blankly. "Your trunk," she repeated.

Calvin nodded a few times in quick succession. "It was amazing, really! I was trying to get something from one of the magical compartments, when suddenly a horde of goblins burst into the dormitory and demanded that I hand over all of my belongings! I had to think quickly, and I came up with a clever plan to trap them inside, but not before two of them-"

"Never mind," Madam Pomfrey interrupted, shaking her head and ushering him onto the nearest bed. "I've decided I no longer want to know how these things happen." She checked him over and performed a few standard healing charms, then went to get a potion for the excessive bruising.

"I won't have to stay here tonight, will I?" he asked after finishing the repulsive liquid. He shuddered and scraped his tongue against his teeth.

"No, as it is not yet noon, and you haven't even been here for an hour yet, you may leave as soon as I see some of the swelling go down."

Twenty minutes later, he was given permission to leave.

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"So it was Hobbes you were so worried about?" asked Hermione dubiously, sitting at the table and finishing up the rest of her homework that wasn't due until Wednesday.

"Worried? I was *terrified*! And rightfully so - if not for Madam Pomfrey there'd be scarring for sure." Calvin sunk lower in his armchair. "I still can't believe I forgot about him. I'm a horrible friend."
"I'm going to agree with you their, mate," said Ron from where he was taking Harry apart at chess. "Who forgets their friend in a trunk for two weeks?"

"Ron! Don't say that, Calvin feels bad enough already," Hermione scolded him.

"It was two and a half weeks," mumbled Calvin, sinking even lower.

"So what kind of cat is he, anyway?" asked Harry.

"He's not a cat, he's a tiger!"

"Mate, I know you call him a tiger, but what is he? Kneazle? Wildcat mix?"

"More like a mix of terror, sarcasm, and claws sharper than the blades of a samurai."

"Let's just go see him," Ron said, getting to his feet.

"NO!" Calvin rushed over and pushed Ron back into a sitting position. "I will not let you get yourself mauled. Wait until tonight."

"I have to wait until tonight to go into the dormitory just because you're afraid of your own cat?"

Calvin leaned in front of him and stared him in the eyes. "Trust me. You do not want. To go inside. Right now."

"...Right, fine. Whichever. But you'll show him to us tonight, yes?" Ron returned to concentrating on the chessboard.

"I too would like to meet 'Hobbes' tonight," Hermione said with a dry smile.

"Hey, I heard those quotation marks!" shouted Calvin, pointing at her. "You don't believe me, do you. You'll see."

"I'd like to see him too. Any ca- pet that can rough you up like you said, when falling off a broom at high speeds hasn't even scratched you, is bound to be interesting," said Harry, losing his second knight to Ron's bishop.

At lunch a few hours later, an older Gryffindor walked up to them, smiling widely.

"Harry! I managed to book the pitch before the Slytherins today, so we're heading out after dinner. It still doesn't get dark till late - we'll have a few hours."

"Great, I can't wait! See you there, Wood." Harry turned to his friends as the Gryffindor walked away, almost skipping. "That's Oliver Wood - he's the Quidditch captain, and the team keeper."

"D'you mind if I come watch your practice?" Ron said, swallowing a large bite of kidney steak.

"Sure," answered Harry. "Just don't distract me, I don't want to make a fool of myself in front of the rest of the team."

Ron took a large swig of pumpkin juice. "Mate, from what Fred and George told me Wood said about your flying, everybody's going to be impressed."

"Fantastic. Now I have to live up to the expectations Wood's planted in everyone's head."

"Cheer up, Harry," said Ron, elbowing him lightly. "You get to play Quidditch, at least. I'd kill -
Malfoy, specifically - just for a chance to be on the team."

"You can help me and Dean announce the first game, if you want," offered Calvin, pouring some gravy into the mashed potato moat he'd molded around his ground beef fortress.

"We can all focus on narrating different parts, so we can cover everything!" Dean agreed, placing a gravy boat into the gravy moat and giving it a little push. Calvin took out his wand and pointed it at the gravy, using a charm the twins had shown him to keep it moving, essentially turning the moat into a lazy river.

As the gravy boat came around again, Ron leaned forward and dropped a forkful of kidney steak into it. "I guess that would be kinda cool."

"Infiltration!" yelled Calvin, clambering onto the table and reaching into the middle of the fortress.

"Stop the invader!" shouted Dean, carving a hole in the side of it. Calvin threw a meatball down into the fortress, and a moment later it shot out the side, blasting the gravy boat out of the moat, and soaking Ron.

"Really?" complained Ron, dabbing uselessly at his robes with a napkin. "How did you even do that?"

Calvin smiled and said, "A combination of chicken sinew, forks, and good ol' American ingenuity." Dean coughed pointedly. "And magic. The twins showed us a spell that creates this sort of field that accelerates objects to one and a half times their current velocity when they enter the field. A bit of tweaking can allow for control of the direction they're launched in, without even losing any speed. Dean's the one who cast the field, I'm no to good at it - mine usually just catches the object and then starts spinning it, if it doesn't drop it first."

"You're mad," replied Ron. "And crazy, too. And insane, utterly insane, with a massive helping of loony thrown in there."

"I don't know," Calvin said. "If I could pick one word to describe myself, it would probably be…"

"Malfoy and co. alert," Harry whispered to them.

"No, I was thinking more along the line of fl-"

"Hello, Gryffindorks," the blond-haired Slytherin sneered. Crabbe and Goyle loomed at his sides.

"It's Mo!" Calvin blanched. "Ohhhh wait no, no, that's what's his name. Crabbe. Yeah."

Draco's eyes passed right over Calvin as if he wasn't there. "I just wanted to wish you luck on your first Quidditch practice, Potter." He glared at Harry. "Break a leg." Then he pivoted and started back to his table.

The blond girl with the squashed face who followed him around everywhere, also hilariously known as Pansy, gave them a nasty grin, then turned and headed after Draco.

"What was that all about?" Harry turned to Calvin. "Any clue?"

"I guess he just wanted to wish you luck? Break a leg means do well or something, right?" said Calvin, shrugging.

"The way he said it it sounded more like 'break your neck,'" provided Ron.
"I'm sure Harry's glad to hear that," said Hermione, standing up. She turned to Harry. "I'll be at your practice, but right now I'm going to the library for some...research. You guys are welcome to join me."

"Oo, pick me, pick me!" Calvin exclaimed, jumping out of his seat and running after Hermione.

"Since when does he do research?" asked Ron, squeezing some gravy out of his robes and onto his plate, before dipping his steak in it.

"Okay, even I think that's gross," Harry commented, getting up.

"Wha'," grunted Ron around a mouthful of gravied steak. "I sti' goo'."

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"So I went through every book in the library, just about, and I still haven't found anything mentioning the Philosopher's Stone," Hermione said, sitting down at a table. "So now you can stop asking about it."

"You looked through every book in the library?" asked Calvin, eyebrow raised.

"Every book that was likely to mention a powerful magical object, yes."

"Did you look in the back section? You know, where it's really dimly lit - it's practically a rule that dimly lit places are magical and mysterious."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "No, I did not go into the restricted section."

"Well why not?"

"Because it's restricted."

"Well, so is the third-floor corridor," countered Calvin, folding his arms.

"Yes, and you shouldn't have gone there!" She inclined her head at him suspiciously. "You haven't gone back, have you?"

Calvin scowled. "Filch is patrolling it nonstop - it's like he's always there, though he can't be, because I've seen him around the halls all the way on the opposite side of the castle."

"Well, anyway, now that you're here you may as well finish up your homework. I'm going to do mine here too."

"It's not due for another three days! And besides, I didn't bring-" He cut off as Hermione took two pieces of parchment from her bag and placed them on the table in front of her. "This is last week's stuff!" Calvin groaned. "Why me?" he said, looking beyond the ceiling.

"Because you're further behind on your work than either Harry or Ron, and your grades in both Potions and History of Magic are unbelievable."

"I bet you thought magic was unbelievable before you got your letter."

She got out a quill and pushed it towards him. "Now, a one foot essay on the second goblin wars. Go."

"What goblin wars?"
"The ones you would have learned about if you were in class all of last week," she said sternly. "Looks like you'll just have to read about it. That's right," she continued when Calvin's expression turned haunted. "Research."

Then he shrugged and sat down, picking up the quill. "Or I can just make it up. I doubt he reads them all anyways."

"You cannot make up history, Calvin!"

"I can if it's more exciting than what actually happened. Hey, do you think the goblins ever used giant slingshots to fling themselves behind enemy lines?"

Hermione put her head in her hands and sighed. Calvin could hear a muffled, "Why me?" from her before he shut everything out to concentrate on the tactics that the goblins should have used for defeating the opposing army of giant scorpions.

*Tunneling beneath them to create pit-traps? Ambushing them and drowning them in a valley? Enlisting the help of visiting alien dignitaries? So many possibilities, so little space...*

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"Wooo!" yelled Ron, watching Harry fly through some of the maneuvers Wood had the entire team doing.

"What's this?" said one of the twins in mock surprise, gliding over to the stands.

He was quickly joined by the other. "Is Ickle Ronniekins here to cheer on his brothers in an astonishing show of family support?"

Ron scowled darkly.

Fred - please, let's just assume he's Fred - glanced behind him and brought a hand to his mouth. "Brother-mine, methinks that other-brother is here only to cheer for the famous Boy Who Lived!"

"Gasp! How it hurts us!"

"So deep in our hearts!"

"That we are disregarded so-"

"-in favor of someone not related to us!"

"Yet! At the same time, the warmth that-"

"Enough with the Shakespeare in the Pitch," Hermione interjected.

"YOU GUYS GET BACK HERE," screamed Wood from out in the middle of the Quidditch pitch.

The twins chuckled and barrel rolled away, coming up on either side of Wood and proceeding to start serenading him.

After half an hour of watching them practice, Calvin spoke up. "So you're both telling me you'd rather watch Quidditch than Calvinball?"

"No, actually," said Hermione at the same time Ron turned to him and said, "Of course."
"I mean," continued Ron, "Calvinball is great fun, but I can't imagine watching other people play it."

"I think it would be a lot more interesting than watching people play Quidditch," Calvin responded, gesturing out at the pitch. The chasers were throwing the quaffle back and forth while weaving and diving.

Ron nodded. "It might be. I didn't mean that it would be boring - I really just can't imagine watching other people playing it, my head actually won't let me imagine it." He stood up, peering down to the end of the pitch. "Hey, is that the Slytherin team? What're they doing here?"

The other team rose up into the air until they were level with the Gryffindor flyers.

"You can't be here, Flint," Wood shouted at the long-limbed Slytherin captain. "We booked the pitch until nightfall."

"We just wanted to come welcome the new Seeker to the game," Flint replied, grinning with a mouthful of crooked teeth.

"Sheesh, do wizards not know what dentists are?" said Calvin.

"What's a dentist?" asked Ron.

"My parents are dentists," Hermione told him. "They work on people's teeth."

"Great, now you've welcomed him. Get going," said Wood evenly.

"I would, except it seems we've lost some of our equipment. Whoops," said Flint, looking down. An open trunk lay on the sandy floor of the pitch. It was empty.

"You let out the bludgers!?" cried Wood angrily. "Are you mad!? We don't have any beaters bats up here! Everyone down!" he yelled to the Gryffindor team, descending quickly. He veered hastily to the right as a dark brown ball shot up through the space he had previously occupied.

Harry flew over to the opposite side of the pitch, hovering right in front of the stands.

"We'll do our best to protect you," smirked Flint, drawing an arm-length, gnarled club from inside his robes. A bludger came at him from the left, and he swung, knocking it away with a crack.

One of the Gryffindor chasers yelped as the bludger glanced off her side, almost knocking her from her broom.

"Angelina!" yelled one of the twins. Fred. Definitely Fred.

"My apologies," Flint said blandly.

"You're dead, Flint!" said the other twin. Totally George.

"Next time there's an unidentified meat for lunch, it's going to be you!"

"In many pieces, if you catch our drift!"

They shot up into the air from where they'd been about to touch down, heading for the Slytherin captain. Flint dropped like a rock, then swerved to the left as the twins followed. The rest of the Slytherin team had pulled out bats of their own, and were redirecting the crazed bludgers towards the Gryffindors while simultaneously apologizing for their aim and grinning wickedly.
"HARRY, WATCH OUT!" screamed Hermione.

Harry had just ducked to avoid a bludger when a cloaked figure stepped out from the shadows of the stands with a beater's bat and swung it hard, connecting with the bludger and launching it right back at Harry. If not for Hermione's warning, it would have collided with his head for sure. As it was, the bludger slammed into his leg while he quickly brought his broom higher, twisting him around and making him cry out in pain. He dropped from his broom, landing in the stands a few feet below.

"That was Draco!" Calvin exclaimed, as the three of them hurried down to the pitch, so they could get to the side Harry was on. "That was the same cloak he wore to our meeting at the trophy room, I'm sure of it!"

"That slimy, cheating, arrogant, no-good, rotten, evil little-"

"Ron, shut up and concentrate on getting to Harry," Hermione huffed as they ran across the field.

When they reached Harry, he was struggling to his feet, leaning heavily on one of the seats. Ron ducked under his shoulder to support him.

Calvin looked out at the people still out on the pitch. The twins had inexplicably, miraculously, wrestled both of the bludgers back into the trunk; next to the trunk sat a dazed Flint, trying to staunch the stream blood flowing from his nose. The other Slytherins were beating a hasty retreat, helped along by a raging Oliver Wood behind them.

"We have to get you to the Hospital Wing, Harry," Hermione said frantically. Harry nodded, gritting his teeth.

Ron and Hermione accompanied him to Madam Pomfrey, while Calvin headed down to talk to the Gryffindor Quidditch team.

By the time he'd gotten down to the pitch, they were all in the locker room, collectively hating on the Slytherins.

"Wood, you have to let us get back at them!" the twins complained.

"That would make us no better than them," Wood replied while grinding his teeth.

"I'm with the twins on this," Angelina said, massaging her side. "Flint's a bastard."

The other two girls nodded in agreement. "Let us know if we can help," one of them - Katie, Calvin had heard Wood call her - whispered to the twins.

"No!" yelled Wood. "We'll get them back on the pitch. By murdering them with Quidditch. By beating their hides and making them look like fools."

"Why can't you go to the teachers about this?" Calvin piped up.

Wood scowled. One of the twi- Fred. It's always just going to be Fred from now on. Fred snorted and said, "Snape was the one in charge of scheduling for practices today, he's the one who we had to go to to book the pitch."

"He'll just deny we scheduled it for tonight," George continued. "And that would mean we were intruding on their practice time. Which makes it completely plausible that they had the bludgers out for practice."
"And would make us look like idiots for entering the pitch without bats."

"Therefore any injuries sustained would be our own fault."

"Thus, Snape is a greasy git."

"Amen."

"Amen!" echoed everyone but Wood.

"Yes, he is," their furious team captain agreed after everyone had quieted. "But there's nothing we can do about that. We just have to train harder." Everyone but Wood groaned. "Train longer."

Everyone but Wood groaned. "Train more often."

Everyone but Wood groaned. "We will do whatever it takes to show them that the Gryffindor Quidditch team cannot be messed with! Who's with me?" Silence. "Well come on now - I said WHO'S WITH ME!" Everyone but Wood groaned.

XXXxxxxXXXxxxxXXX

Later that night, Calvin and the twins sat in a huddle by the unlit fireplace in the common room.

"Calvin," said one of the- said Fred solemnly. "Do you remember the idea you proposed during our first brainstorming session?"

"What? Who told you that! They're lying, I didn't propose to any- Oh. The idea. That I- ah, yes. Yes I do." Calvin raised both eyebrows. "I remember you saying something about the integrity of Quidditch, too. And that it was too risky."

George clenched his fists. "The wind has spoken to us, Destiny Boy."

"It has asked us to throw something to it."

"Do you know what the wind asked for?"

"Do you know what we were asked to throw to the wind?"

Calvin eyed them warily. "What?"

Both of them slammed their right fists into the open palms of their left hands and then cracked their knuckles. "Caution," they snarled.

XXXxxxxXXXxxxxXXX

"Harry's still in the Hospital Wing?" Calvin asked Ron on Monday morning, pulling on his robe.

"Yeah, the bone was pretty much shattered. He'll be there for a few days at least."

"Is he going to be able to play in the first Quidditch game?" said Dean

"Probably," Ron answered, rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

"We should go visit him," Neville said. "All together."

"Neville!" exclaimed Calvin. "Where've you been? It's been so long!"

"Umm, nowhere. Except when I was in the Hospital Wing with you."

"Let's go at lunch," Seamus suggested.
"We'll bring him food," Ron added, heading out of the dormitory.

"Fine, don't wait for me," Calvin said as everyone walked out.

"I'm still here," said Neville.

"Oh, Neville. I didn't notice you there. I was kidding, you don't have to wait for me."

"Okay. See you in the Great Hall."

Calvin bent over his trunk. "Air horn." He grabbed the canister as it appeared. "Permanent marker. Paper."

"What are you doing?" asked Hobbes, peeking out from beneath the covers.

"Making sure Harry has visitors even when we're in class."

"So he gets visitors even though he's only been there for less than a day, hm?"

Calvin closed the trunk and turned around. "I'm sorry! I even sang all the verses of Tigers Are the Greatest! What more do you want?"

Hobbes shrugged. "A little remorse. Maybe some suffering. Perhaps you would like to spend two and a half weeks inside the trunk?"

"I have classes. That I sometimes go to. I can't go in the trunk."


"It's the same as when I was going to school!" argued Calvin, throwing up his hands.

"Oh yeah? I don't seem to remember you locking me in your backpack for the first two and a half weeks of school!"

"I'M SORRY!"

"I'm not feeling it," said Hobbes, shaking his head.

"I'M REALLY SORRY!"

"Nope."

"I'M SOOOOO SORRY!"

"Uh uh."

"I'll get you a tuna sandwich if you forgive me."

Hobbes narrowed his eyes. "Maybe I've been too harsh. Perhaps a tuna sandwich will...help me change my mind."

"That's not the deal, I said-"

"It's the best you're going to get," the tiger said through bared teeth.

"I'm being threatened by someone huddling beneath a pile of covers on my own bed," Calvin
"There'll be a pile of bones if I don't get that sandwich."

"Okay, okay! I'll get you the sandwich. It better be worth it," mumbled Calvin, grabbing his things and exiting the dormitory.

It took him almost an hour to go through the entire stack of papers he'd brought with him, and the marker he was using had started to dry out. He entered the Great Hall just as people began leaving. Pulling the small metal canister from his pocket, he held it up in the air and pressed down on the top.

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remember the audience being a lot less accepting," he said as he dodged a food projectile from the Slytherin table. "I'll skip straight to the tunes, then," he said, clearing his throat. "This one's for our very own Harry Potter! Back me up, DJ Thomthom."

Dean leaned over to Fred, who pointed his wand at the boy's throat. Then he jumped up next to Lee Jordan and began to beatbox.

"I thought magic was only true in fairy tales!" sang Lee, and Calvin joined in as he ran up to the Gryffindor table.

"Meant for Cinderella, not for me!"

"It's just special effects!"

Dean filled in the beat.

"That's the way it seemed!"

"Realism tore apart my dreams…"

Silence covered the Great Hall.

"AND THEN I FOUND THIS PLACE!" bellowed Lee.

"BUM BUM BUM BUM!" sang Calvin, dancing now.

"Now I am a wizard!"

"BUM BUM BUM BUM!"

"Not a trace!"

"BUM BUM BUM BUM!"

"Of muggle in me!"

"BUM BUM BUM BUM!"

"I can flyyyyy!"

"OHHH!"

"I am a wizard, I can make lizards, dance you see!"

The singers had to dodge a few more edible missiles from the Slytherin table, but there were no casualties. When the song ended, the entire Great Hall, sans the Slytherins, erupted in applause, with the Gryffindor table chanting for an encore.

From that meal on, it would become Hogwarts tradition to have a mock radio show during breakfast every Monday.

Harry got a seriously ridiculous amount of visitors that day, and every day after until he left the Hospital Wing. They tried showing up even after that, and Madam Pomfrey had to post a sign outside that said 'Harry Potter is NOT here.' The 'NOT' was removable, of course, in the event that he would end up in the Hospital wing again. The papers that Calvin had used a Sticking Charm to stick to the walls all around the school - which depicted arrows pointing toward the Hospital Wing
and underneath was written, 'The Boy Who Lived is still alive, but he was hit by a bludger; it doesn't look good' - survived in bulk for weeks, even with Filch actively seeking them out and tearing them down.

By the middle of October, only a few remained, but each time Filch found them, others appeared elsewhere around Hogwarts. They said different things, too, like 'If it's Thursday after three forty-five in the afternoon, go visit the Boy of Destiny in the Hospital Wing,' and 'If you have found and eaten from an unattended box of chocolates, make your way to the Hospital Wing as fast as humanly possible.'

Calvin and Harry, and sometimes Ron and Hermione, visited Hagrid every so often, to say hello, and also to try and get more information out of him. He didn't know anything more about the Stone, however, though he did mention that Fluffy wasn't the only thing guarding it. He told them offhandedly that a bunch of the teachers had done something to help with the security, each designed around their specialty.

The third-floor corridor itself seemed to be perpetually haunted by either Filch or Mrs. Norris, even with Filch often wandering the school trying to eradicate the Hospital Wing themed pamphlets. Neither Calvin and his friends nor the twins had any luck trying to get a peek at Fluffy. They enlisted Lee Jordan, Dean, and Seamus into their Fluffy Quest in the meantime, and once in a while one of them would sneak down to see if the corridor was, by some chance, unguarded. It never was.

Calvin resorted to using break times to practice spells that made him feel like a superhero, and was getting steadily better at the Summoning Charm. He told Harry and Ron that his goal was to be able to summon his clothes right onto the correct parts of his body without even leaving his bed in the morning. It would save him over twenty-three minutes a week, he assured them. Ron said he would stick to the old-fashioned way, and not risk being strangled or thrown across the room by his own pants. Calvin mourned the absence of the redhead's spirit of innovation.

During a particularly boring weekend near the end of the month, Calvin found himself alone in the common room. Ron was watching Harry's Quidditch practice, Fred and George were at said Quidditch practice, Hermione was in the library, and Dean and Seamus were in detention for somehow - detonating a pitcher of pumpkin juice that had been, at the time, in the hands of a third-year Slytherin girl.

When asked why, and how, they had done this, their reply was, "Backwash. It's disgusting, and she shouldn't have been drinking from the pitcher in the first place." When asked again to answer how they had made a the pitcher of harmless juice explode with enough force to embed pieces of the pitcher in a nearby wall, Seamus had repeated, quite certainly, "Backwash."

He'd tried going to find Draco, who he took every opportunity to annoy incessantly by following him around repeating the sentence, "It wasn't me I didn't do it," over and over again while Draco pretended like he wasn't there, until the Slytherin boy would snap and have Crabbe and Goyle remove Calvin to the next hallway over. Today, however, Draco was not to be found. Which left him with nothing to do - making things zoom across the room into your hand wasn't nearly as exciting when there was nobody to surprise with it. No quill to yank from someone's grip. No book to pull magically from the hands of an unsuspecting Hermione. No card to snatch from the bottom of a carefully crafted house of cards, and watch it topple over as the builder's face melted in despair.

"Hey, Calvin, do you know wh-"

"GAAAAAH!" Calvin toppled out of his chair. "Neville Eleanor Longbottom, what did I tell you
about-" He paused. "Hey, wait, you're here. Why aren't you in detention or watching Quidditch practice or librarying or something?"

"Am I actually supposed to answer that?" replied Neville hesitantly.

Calvin shrugged. "I just thought I was the only one here."

"Oh, well, I was actually going to ask you if you knew where Hermione was. She said she'd help me study for the astronomy test."


"Okay, thanks." The round-faced boy climbed out of the portrait hole, tripping and almost slamming head first into the floor.

"Well this is boring. Why aren't I doing anything. Today's Saturday, I should have had something planned for- Oh. Oh righhhht. Right. Right right. Hobbes."

Calvin eased open the dormitory door to peek inside. And was instantly blasted out and down the stairs, tumbling in a chaotic tangle of bumps and bruises, intertwined with an ecstatic tiger.

"It's SATURDAY!" cried Hobbes as they came to a rest at the bottom of the staircase. "That means no classes!"


Calvin stumbled to his feet, and almost instantly fell back down.

"Get a hold of yourself, Mr. Merry-go-round," Hobbes said, leaping out of the way as Calvin's body became once again parallel with the floor.

"You could've at least cushioned my fall," Calvin told him angrily, sitting up.

"What, and risk permanent spinal injury from your thick skull? Not likely."

Calvin rubbed the back of his head and winced. "Ouch. There's a bump the size of a bowling ball on my head now, you psychotic feline. Thanks a bunch."

"You're very welcome," replied Hobbes, sticking out his tongue. "Serves you right for locking me in your trunk for two and a half weeks."

"Are you still bringing that up?"

"Two. And a half. Weeks."

"Yeah, I know, I was there."

"No you weren't - that was the problem."

"Yeesh, this really hurts." Calvin hoisted himself up using the arm of the couch, and made his way unsteadily across the common room. "Excuse me while I try and take myself to the Hospital Wing without falling down any more stairs."

Hobbes grunted. "That's right, way to end the conversation when it's not going your way. Now you're just going to leave me here again. All alone. On a Saturday."

"You know what, I'm not even going to cover for you this time," Calvin said, wobbling over to the
"You deserve the blame, and you're going to get it. No stories about aggressive goblins this time, no siree." He carefully put one foot over, then the other.

"You ratted on me three weeks ago, and last week too!"

"Yeah, but they didn't believe me and I didn't push it. This time, the truth is out. All of it."

Hobbes raised an eyebrow. "Even the truth about the Noodle Incident?"

"THAT TRUTH IS SUBJECTIVE!" Calvin glared at his striped friend "If I'm not back in five minutes, the space-time continuum is malfunctioning and it would be extremely unsafe to try to utilize any time-traveling device or wormhole technology, at least until I return."

"I'll keep that in mind, Slinky."

"See that you do."

"Mr. Calvin, you have a concussion. I cannot simply simply stand by and allow such injuries to come to a student of this school!" Madam Pomfrey stood over him, hands on her hips, obligatory intimidating expression on her face. "You will tell me right now or I will contact your head of house: how did this happen?"

"Hobbes tackled me as I was entering the dormitory, and we fell down the stairs. I hit my head at the bottom. Maybe in the middle too. Probably at the top as well, now that I think about it."

She looked at him suspiciously. "I don't recall anyone named Hobbes in you dormitory."

Calvin rolled his eyes. "Hobbes is a tiger."

"Not this again - that excuse definitely won't work a third time, so you'd better start talking the truth, young man."

"I'm not kidding! Hobbes is my pet tiger and my best friend - he's been with me since I was six! That first time I came in here - well, the first time that wasn't because of flying lessons - was also his fault." The spiky-haired boy gulped. "I'd left him in my trunk since right before the train ride here, and he was a little bit...miffed, when he found out."

"Miffed? You were more purple than skin-colored, young man!" The medi-witch was looking quite angry now. "How did this tiger survive in a trunk for over two weeks, hmm? If you're not telling me who did this because you're afraid they'll find out, you don't need to worry about that, their head of house will take care of them."

"It's a magical trunk! The compartment he was in can support a full-grown man for an entire year! And I'm telling you who did this, it was Hobbes." Calvin met her eyes and crossed his arms stubbornly. "It's the truth."

Madam Pomfrey sighed wearily and rubbed her eyes. "I'll have to get Minerva to check into this. She turned back to him, once again stern. "If I find out that you've been lying to me so that whoever did this can get away without any repercussions, you will have to find someone else to mend your numerous and sudden injuries."

Calvin gave an exaggerated nod. "You got it."
"All right, you'll have to stay here overnight tonight, so I can keep an eye on you. Head trauma is serious, so don't move around any more than is needed. If you need anything, just call me, I don't want you getting up at all."

He nodded again and she bustled off to the back of the room, frowning to herself.

Monday's Defense Against the Dark Arts class was a lot more enjoyable than usual, as Professor Quirrel seemed to have almost complete control of his speech functions, and seemed far less indecisive as well. Because it was a double lesson with Ravenclaw, they were brought into a larger classroom by the turbaned Professor for a 'practical lesson,' and told to group off into twos.

Calvin ended up with Dean, and he saw Harry and Seamus pair off to their left. Hermione and Ron had both gotten paired with Ravenclaws.

"Today, we are going to learn the Disarming Charm. Yes, it is called a charm and thus you would expect it to be taught in Charms, but they seem willing to slap the word 'charm' onto any spell these d-days, regardless of whether or not it is actually a charm." Professor Quirrel walked up and down the floor in front of them, rarely placing a foot backwards or turning around mid step.

"I want you to watch me as I demonstrate the wand motions, and then practice them yourselves." He raised his wand in front him, making sure he was visible to the entire class, and performed the motion for the Disarming Charm, which Calvin still wasn't sure whether or not was actually a charm. In fact, he wasn't really sure what a charm was, or how it differed from any other type of spell.

Calvin tried the motion out himself, as Professor Quirrel strolled from one end of the room to the other, stopping every few feet to step in and correct someone's movements. After a minute he returned to the front of the room to demonstrate the wand motions again, then resumed strolling.

"Very good, you all seem to have the wand motions down. Now, the incantation for this spell is as follows. Expelliarmus." He said it again, slower, with an emphasis on each syllable.

"Everyone got it?" Everyone nodded. "Mr. W-Weasley, what is the incantation for the Disarming Charm?"

"Expelliarmus?"

"Tell me again, M-Mr. Weasley."

"Expelliarmus."

"Correct. Ms. Patil, can you tell me the incantation for the Disarming Charm?" Professor Quirrel asked a Ravenclaw girl who Calvin was certain looked exactly like one of the first-years in Gryffindor.

"Expelliarmus," the girl said, her expression bored.

"Exactly. Mr. Calvin, what is the incantation for the Disarming Charm, and why don't you have a last name?"

"Expelliarmus and I used to have a last name but at recess this one time I was insisting that the swings were for everyone and the school bully punched me so hard he knocked it right out of me." Calvin smiled brightly.
"Th-that is correct," said Professor Quirrel. "And I'm t-terribly sorry to hear that."

Calvin shrugged. "They're overrated anyways. I feel less restrained without it, and I've got more room for dessert, too."

"R-right then, moving on. If everybody is confident that they c-can both correctly pronounce the s-spell, and perform the motions? Fantastic. Face your p-partners, make sure there is some s-space around you, and at l-least ten f-feet between you. When everyone is r-ready to begin, please put y-your wand behind your back."

There was a moment or two of shuffling, then silence as everybody situated their wand arms behind their backs.

"When I s-say a w-word that begins with the letter P, you m-may attempt to Disarm y-you opponent with the Disarming Charm only." The entire room tensed. Professor Quirrel walked through the pairs, and said calmly, "Sacred." He reached the opposite side of the room and turned around.

Calvin's fingers tightened around his wand, and he focused on Deans own wand, ready to recite the spell at the drop of a hat, or a cat, or a bulldozer or anything else.

"C-carpet," said Professor Quirrel. "Moonbeam. Peril."

"EXPPELLIARMUS!" yelled Calvin, and he would have drowned out anybody else except for the fact that it was over twenty anybody elses saying the same thing at the same time, and Dean had at least matched him for sheer volume. "Ow."

Dean had let go of his wand, and it hit Calvin straight in the stomach. "Sorry, Calvin."

"Why didn't mine work?" Calvin asked, handing the wand back to his friend.

"I don't think you did the motions at all."

"Oh yeah. I was so focused on the incantation I totally forgot."

"Back to y-your places," Professor Quirrel told them. "Wands behind your b-backs when you're r-ready and we'll try it again."

He paced along the edges of the room, hands clasped behind his back, head jerking to the left every so often. "Sacrosanct. R-rhinoceros." He pivoted, walking the other way. "Bread. Hover. W-white. Filthy. Under, st-rong, ignorant, money, flapjack, pack rat-"

"EXPPELLIARMUS!" yelled Calvin. Dean's wand flew out of his hand and jabbed Calvin's knuckle. "Ow. Stop doing that."

"I didn't throw it!"

Calvin's eyes went wide. "You mean...I DID IT! WOOOOO, oh, sorry Dean, here's your wand."

"Stop gloating, you'll be losing your wand next, you know," Dean said with a smile.

Quirrel had them do it another dozen times, and Calvin and Dean ended up about even in their number of wins.

One of the Ravenclaws, an Anthony Goldstein, managed to lose his wand to his opponent only once the entire class, earning Ravenclaw House ten points. Hermione came in second place with a
record of ten wins and two draws, where both her and her partner had been Disarmed. Ron reckoned that she should have gotten the same score as Anthony, given that she'd never actually lost at all.

The rest of the day's classes went along as usual, with Calvin spending History of Magic in the common room, and Hermione getting mildly annoyed at him for doing so. She was slowly becoming accustomed to it, but brought it up every week or so when she realized that she should have more of a problem with him skipping class.

On Tuesday, they started learning a new spell in Charms, but were first required to write three paragraphs on creative uses for the spell in question. Calvin, for once, had a great time writing his paper, going above and beyond the requirement for 'creative,' and venturing well into the realm of 'impossibly ludicrous.'

Professor Flitwick gave him extra points for writing five times more than the needed three paragraphs, but warned him that should he use nearly any of the ideas he had written, he would most likely find himself in detention.

At the end of Transfiguration class the next day, Professor McGonagall asked Calvin to stay behind.

"I was going to talk to you about this earlier in the week, but I was unusually busy." She peered down at him from over her spectacles. "I was told by Madam Pomfrey that your...tiger, Hobbes, was responsible for many of your injuries these past months?" She ended it in a question, as though she didn't want to act like there was even a chance that she might believe it.

"Yep, that's what I told her," nodded Calvin. "He's pretty reckless, and he is a tiger."

"I see," responded the Scottish witch evenly. "Mr. Calvin, I know tomorrow is Halloween, but I must ask that you come to my office with this Hobbes, if that's quite alright?" She raised an eyebrow, and Calvin knew that if it wasn't quite alright he'd better have a grand explanation for why not.

"Sure, that's fine. Can I come in costume? I don't want to have to go all the way back to the dormitory after to get it, and then all the way down again, plus my costume is kinda unwieldy and I don't know how it would hold up if I ran with it to save time, and I don't even have it all put together yet so I need to do that tonight. Also I might not even wear that costume and just go with my first idea which would be a lot easier but maybe not as impressive. I should ask the twins for some help with the parts that-"

"Yes, Mr. Calvin," interrupted Professor McGonagall. "You may come with your costume on. It will be only a short meeting, so please come by on your way to breakfast. Good luck with your costume."

Relaxing in the common room later, Ron asked Calvin what he was going to dress up as. "I know it's supposed to be something scary, but don't go overboard, mate."

"I'm going to as the scariest thing in the universe..." Calvin said, crouching low. "THE TRUTH."

"That's really deep, Calvin," said Hermione approvingly.

Calvin tapped his chin. "Either that or a radioactive grizzly bear, I can't decide."

"Go as both," Harry recommended. "The truth: that everyone, deep inside, has a bit of radioactive grizzly bear in them."
"This Halloween..." Calvin declared, dropping his voice as low as it could go and narrowing his eyes. "Find out how much of you is you...and how much of you is really..." He jumped onto the nearest chair and growled, clawing at the air. "A RADIOACTIVE GRIZZLY BEAR!"

Ron moaned and put his head in his hands. "I already can't wait for Halloween to be over."

"Don't be like that, Ron," Harry said, grinning. "You just have to get in touch with your inner radioactive grizzly bear!"

"Oh joy."

"Starring: AN ACTUAL RADIOACTIVE GRIZZLY BEAR!" yelled Calvin, jumping onto Ron and knocking him over.

"AHH, GET OFF OF ME YOU RABID MANIAC!"

"You can't run from the truth, Ron!"

"I don't want to, I'm just trying to run from you!"

"That's what I'm telling you, Ron... I AM the truth."

"NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!"

AN: ...It Definitely Is Not A Cat. Hope you enjoyed the chapter, please review! You wouldn't want to become a...RADIOACTIVE GRIZZLY BEAR, WOULD YOU?! It's a trick question, you see, because you don't get a choice in the matter. Only the radioactive grizzly bear gets a choice. Does it merely eat you? Or does it messily devour you while irradiating your body with its extreme proximity? Don't worry too much - remember, the choice is not yours. Have a great night.
Not The Adventure You're Looking For

Chapter Thirteen - Not The Adventure You're Looking For

It all started when Hobbes wouldn't get out of bed.

"Come on, jungle-butt, breakfast already started!" said Calvin, tugging on his friend's tale. "If I don't get to eat because of you, I'm not bringing you back anything from the Halloween feast."

"I'm not coming out until it's as warm out there as it is in here," replied Hobbes from beneath the covers. "Go away."

"I really don't want to get on Professor McGonagall's bad side! Just get up!"

"I don't want to get on any of her sides," grumbled Hobbes, poking his head out. He furrowed his brow as he looked at Calvin. "Why are you wearing a billboard?"

Calvin grinned and pointed up at the billboard. "Scary, huh?" In large, scarlet letters, it read, "YOUR LIFE IS FINITE. EVERY SECOND THAT PASSES BRINGS YOU CLOSER TO THE END. YOU CAN NEVER GET THAT SECOND BACK. DEATH IS COMING FOR YOU. THERE IS NO ESCAPE.'

"You are one weird kid," Hobbes commented. "Alright, I'll come, but only to see cat-lady's reaction to your Halloween billboard." He stretched and slithered out from under the covers, dropping to the floor, then shook himself. "Brr."

"Let's go, let's go! Get your rear in gear, puddy-tat."

"Call me that again and you'll never get to Professor McGonagall's office," responded Hobbes, licking himself.

"You can clean yourself after! No coughing up hairballs in the meeting!" Calvin was bouncing with impatience.

"Okay, I'm ready," Hobbes yawned. He smacked his lips. They headed out. "Do you think she'll have any tuna?" he asked as the walked through the halls.

"Who knows, maybe there's a spell to make tuna appear. What's wrong?" Calvin turned to Hobbes, who had stiffened at the bottom of the stairs, refusing to place a paw upon the first step.

"I am not climbing this thing," the tiger stated.

"What!? Tiger's are master climbers, right? You guys climb trees all the time. What's the problem?"

"Trees don't shift ten feet to the left every few seconds!"
Calvin sighed. "You have got to be kidding me. I'm totally going to miss breakfast now."

"Better your stomach suffer than I lose one of my lives."

"If you really believe you have nine lives, Hobbes, then you shouldn't have any problem with this."

The tiger gasped, then drew himself up to his full height. "I beg your pardon! A tiger's nine lives are not to be thrown away so willy-nilly! We have standards! There are rules, or at least guidelines, of things that are worthy of our lives - climbing a moving staircase doesn't even make the bottom of the list."

"So, basically, you're scared," Calvin deadpanned.

"I am not scared, I'm just following the rules. You wouldn't know anything about that," said Hobbes, crossing his arms and looking away.

"Scaredy-cat, scaredy cat. The big bad tiger is scared of the staaaaaiiiiiirs, oooo, so scaaaaaaarrrryyyyyy." Calvin raised his arms and wiggled his fingers spookily.

"Watch it, buster, or the only scary thing here is going to be the amount of blood on the floor."

"Ouch, someone's prickly," Calvin chuckled. "Da puddy-tat doesn't wike being cawd a scawdy-cat, does he. Hey, no claws!" He exclaimed, jumping out of the way as Hobbes swiped at him.

"Come on, this is not called for, I was just teasing!"

"That was just the cinderblock that broke the tiger's back, pineapple head!" yelled Hobbes, chasing his best friend down the hall.

"Pineapples have green leaves, fuzz-brain!" Calvin sidestepped the leaping tiger and legged it down an adjacent corridor, almost colliding with a suit of armor holding a bronze feather duster. The billboard above his head rebounded off the wall, sending him into a spin.

"Get over here and let me cause you bodily harm!"

"Not a chaAAAAAOOH NO." Calvin stopped short and Hobbes hit him harm from behind, throwing them both down to the end of the corridor, where they rolled and slammed up against a small window. Calvin's costume wedged itself between the walls.

"Mh fs 's prsd 'p 'gnst d' wndw. Gt 'ff 'f mh."

Hobbes clambered to his feet, allowing Calvin to pull his face away from where it had been pressed against the glass.

"Nice view," the tiger noted. "A little strange, though - I can't pick out just what it is, but there's something not right..." The tiger trailed off, staring thoughtfully out the window.

"The whole world's upside down, you idiot," said Calvin, trying to get to stand up without scraping his costumer.

"Ah, that's what it is! Knew there was something about it."

"Not again," Calvin groaned. "Come on, help me look for a part of the stone that's just holographic. It could be the wall or the floor - maybe the ceiling too, though I've never found it there. Or there might be a trick stone you have to push, or something you have to say - I'm not sure if that was coincidental or not."
"You've been here before?" asked Hobbes, still admiring the upside-down view of Hogwarts' outside.

"Yeah, like four, five times. I end up here whenever I'm not paying attention to where I'm going." He narrowed his eyes at Hobbes. "Which is your fault this time, bub."

"Let us out!" the tiger shouted at the hallway.

"Good one. Help me look for the exit."

"Show us the path to victory!"

"Stop with the phrases that probably don't do anything and help me look!" Calvin said crossly, feeling along the walls.

"Open caraway! Wait, that doesn't sound right."

"Yeah, like that's gonna work. You're useless."

"It's more like, open, what was it...open sesame?"

"Hobbes, just get- w-w-w-o-o-o-o-a-a-a-a-a-h-h-h-h-h-h-h!" the corridor had started shaking and rumbling, the stones grinding against each other. Dust rained down from above, and the ground trembled. "W-w-w-w-h-a-a-a-t-t h-h-a-a-a-a-v-v-e-e-e-e y-y-y-o-o-o-o-u-u d-d-o-o-n-n-e-e-e-e!?" screamed Calvin, falling onto his back. The entire corridor was shifting and tilting now, causing them to slip away from the window, toward the blank wall at the other end.

"T-t-h-h-i-i-s-s-s s-i-i-s-s-s s i-i-s-s-s t-t-h-h-e-e-e-e e-e-e-n-n-n-n-d-d-d-d-!" stuttered Hobbes, trying to claw his way back up with little success.

They slid down the incline, picking up speed as it steepened, approaching the dead end.

Dean looked around the Great Hall. "Where's Calvin? Shouldn't he have been back from Professor McGonagall's office by now?"

"Who knows," Ron answered around a piece of toast. "He's probably pasting things to walls or something."

The unyielding wall of stone loomed.

Calvin opened his mouth in terror, then shut his eyes and cried, "B-b-b-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-y-y-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-h-h-h-h-h-h-h-h-!-!-!-!-!"

The wall split suddenly, and they were dumped into a nondescript classroom filled with pillows.

"Huh. At least the Misunderstood Hallway of Sometimes Inopportune Yet Completely Unintentional Visits and the Shifty Exit had the good sense not to let us splatter across the floor when we dropped out."

Hobbes propped himself up. "Why is there a room where the floor is covered by pillows?"

"This is Hogwarts," Calvin replied with a dry laugh. "There's probably a room where the floor is
covered by tropical beach sand, or geckos, or anything else you can think of."

The classroom opened up into, peculiarly enough, another classroom. The only unusual thing here was the plethora of offensive words scribbled across the board at the front of the room, and that the chairs and desks seemed to be painted a light purple.

"I wonder what they teach here," Hobbes mused, walking to the door.

Calvin glanced at the board. "Eh, I know it all already."

Opening the door revealed a spiral stairway that rose to the left, and, by the looks of it, should definitely have broken through the wall into the classroom they were standing in.

"You're going to have to take off the billboard," Hobbes pointed out, eyeing the narrow opening.

"Phooey. I shouldn't have to sacrifice my costume just to get out of here."

Fifteen minutes later, they were still on the staircase.

"This," panted Calvin, "is ridiculous. I hate, stairs, so much, where, is it, taking us."

Hobbes leaned against the curved wall and laid a hand against his heaving chest. "How long, do you think, it would take, to fall down, this staircase."

"The better question, is how many, lives would it take." Calvin coughed a few times, then sat down on the stairs. "Magical, transforming castles. The perfect place to house a school for children," he said wryly.

"Do we keep climbing, or head back down?"

"Keep climbing. I didn't see any other ways out of that classroom."

xxx

"Don't tell me Calvin's started skipping Charms too," Hermione said, glancing at her watch.

"I wonder where he's gotten to now," Ron said, heading to his seat at the back of the classroom. "He was only at McGonagall's office, he can't be too far away."

xxx

"IT NEVER ENDS." Calvin collapsed onto the stairs, breathing heavily.

"Keep, going, I think, I see, a light," gasped Hobbes, reaching slowly for the next step.

"Why, is the light, blue."

"Who, even cares, anymore."

xxx

"He's going to miss both morning classes if he doesn't show up soon."

"I bet you he decided to 'go on an adventure' like last week," muttered Ron. "Probably having loads of fun while we're stuck in class."
"Water, water," Calvin croaked, crawling forward.

"Tuna, tuna," breathed Hobbes almost inaudibly, pulling himself across the floor.

"I've never known him to miss lunch," said Harry. "Must be some adventure."

"He could've invited us," Ron replied grumpily, stuffing a large piece of meatloaf into his mouth. "Rather rude of him, I think."

"I think we have to jump," Calvin said, gulping. The hole before them reached down into darkness. The door behind them didn't have a handle.

"I'm not jumping down there!"

"Fine, stay here. WEEEEEEeeeee…"

"I think we should go look for him."

"He'll be fine, Hermione. What's the worst that could happen?"

"He could be bleeding out in a hallway somewhere and we wouldn't know!"

Ron sighed. "This is a school, he's not going to die wandering the halls. Go back to complaining about my handwriting, that was more productive."

"Do you think we've missed lunch?" asked Calvin, studying the seven-way intersection.

"I wouldn't be surprised if we've missed next month."

"Okay, heads we go back, tails we do eeny-meeny on the hallways in front of us. Call it in the air."

"Man, where's Calvin with an incomprehensible insult when you need him," Harry said angrily, watching Malfoy walk away with his ever-present group of Slytherin admirers.

"He could be dying, maybe," inserted Hermione. "Injured and unable to move."

"He's fine, Hermione! The teachers would know, Dumbledore would know if someone was dying! I'm not going to miss the feast looking for him just because you're a chronic worrier."

"I am not a chronic worrier, Ron!"

"Are we even in Hogwarts anymore?" said Hobbes, brushing aside a curtain of hanging vines.

"Safari Al stomps through the jungle, searching for signs of civilization!" said Calvin, kicking undergrowth out of his way. "If only he'd brought some supplies, the future wouldn't look so dim."
"The future's not the only thing that's dim. I can barely see anything."

"He spies a trapdoor hidden beneath a carpet of moss! Is this what he's been looking for? Is this...the way out?"

They climbed down the ladder under the trapdoor, and found themselves in a damp, musty hallway, the stones almost black.

"This is hardly any better," Hobbes commented.

"At least it's more familiar than that freaky jungle."

"Yeah, who knew toucans were so cruel to their prey."

"I think this hallway slopes up at the end there."

"What?" said Hobbes wryly. "No moving staircase? No tunnel of fear? No zip line across lava or monkey bars over a pit of spikes?"

Calvin shrugged. "Just looks like a slope to me. Though it doesn't seem to be getting any closer..."

Professor Quirrel galloped into the Great Hall, arms straight out behind him. His body looked like it was practically being ripped in half. He only got a few steps past the beginnings of the house tables before his left leg planted itself firmly in place - his right leg continued forward, almost throwing him to the ground.

He opened his mouth and gargled loudly for a second, then started walking backwards out of the Great Hall. "Troll!" he yelled, spasming. "In the dungeons!" Then he whirled around with haste and knocked himself out on the doorpost. As he crumpled to the floor, the Great Hall filled with noise and movement.

BANG! BANG! Purple fireworks exploded from the end of Dumbledore's wand, and everyone fell silent.

The bearded headmaster was standing straighter than Harry had ever seen. "Everyone, please follow your House Prefects to your dormitories. Stay together!"

"Man, Quirrel looked like he was about to have a seizure," Ron said, following as Gryffindor gathered around Percy, who was calling out to the first-years.

"You would too, if you ran into a troll in the dungeons," Harry replied.

"Calvin," said Hermione, eyes widening.

Calvin hit the ground amidst a sea of rubble. "NOW THIS IS JUST GETTING RIDICULOUS, HOGWARTS!" He coughed as particles of crushed stone invaded his windpipe.

A large, shapeless silhouette appeared in the cloud of dust that spanned the corridor. "RAAAAAWWWEEEEWWWWWGGGGGGRRRRRRRRRRAAAAAAHAAAAAAHIIIIHHH!" The bone-crushing roar was one of utter madness, deep anger and unbridled fury, and it shook Calvin like a paper airplane in a hurricane.
"Holyjalapenosthatthingisgoingtokillmeeeeeeeee!" Calvin struggled to his feet, hard as it was to keep his footing when the floor was covered with pieces of the wall. "Hobbes, RUN!" He couldn't see his friend, but Hobbes' tiger instincts should have had him out of there as soon at the whatever-it-was had burst into the hallway.

The dust was starting to settle, and even though he still couldn't make out what the creature was, Calvin could tell that it was shuffling steadily closer. A sound like the air conditioning of his house switching on and off repeatedly caused the dust to stir.

It's sniffing for me! Did I take a shower recently? I wonder what I smell like. Calvin stepped carefully around a block of stone the size of Hagrid's head, making his way back down the hallway, where he and Hobbes had been coming from. The mountainous creature was coming into sight as the air cleared, and Calvin froze as he finally saw it clearly.

At least fifteen feet tall, its skin looked like the side of a volcano, rough and gray. It was thicker than even the largest tree Calvin had ever seen, and its head was squat and round, squashed in between its shoulders without the need for a neck. Its freakishly long arms almost brushed the floor, and one of the hands held a massive piece of wood, like a supersized beaters club. It grunted and kicked out with flat, horned feet, scattering a pile of stone. Any pieces still beneath it as its foot met the floor were ground into powder.

Calvin broke into a run, but this only served to catch the monster's attention. He felt its footfall through the stones under his sneakers as he rounded the corner, searching for the ladder back to the trapdoor in the jungle.

I'll take carnivorous toucans over getting smashed to bits by a...what is it, a giant? A troll?

The behemoth bellowed again, and Calvin's heart almost stopped. Wait, giants speak actual words, don't they. So definitely a troll. Where's the ladder!? The hallway was empty of any and all ladders, so Calvin dashed through the nearest door. The troll crashed through it as he reached the furthest wall of the room he'd entered, which thankfully led out into another hallway.

This is crazy, why does Hogwarts have trolls in the corridors! AHH, no fair, he has a weapon! That was close, I need to get more distance between us - it's not you, Mr. Troll, it's- okay, yeah, it's you, and your apparent need to squish me like an ant. Stairs, good, the troll should have a harder time with thoOOOOOOOOOOOse wow, he is a lot faster than he looks. Left or right? Oh, another staircase down there, perfect. How is he still follo-

"AHHHHHHH!!"

The floor in front of Calvin opened up like a great stone whale surfacing to try and devour him. He leapt to the side of the hall, where some floor still remained, his lungs expanding and collapsing at an alarming rate. Need, breathe, air, breathe, aaaaah! The troll's club shot through the hole, hitting the ceiling with a thunderous crash before falling back through the opening in the floor. The ceiling began to crumble, raining small pieces of stone.

Calvin couldn't get to the next staircase now, as the gap in the floor extended to the walls not ten feet from him. He stumbled to the right, down the part of the hall that was still intact. The troll swung and Calvin was forced to throw himself back to avoid becoming paste, as the giant club destroyed the hallway floor in that direction as well.

Can't go left. Can't go right. Wish me happy landin', Hogwarts, all that's left to do is "JUUUUUUUUMP!" yelled Calvin, jumping into the hole the troll had made. His breath was driven right out of his body as his stomach collided with the troll's shoulder and he bounced down the creature's arm to the thickly torn, yet still cushy, carpet. He scrambled out of the way while
wheezing, as the troll lumbered forward, apparently not having felt the miniscule human land on it. It roared in frustration and thrashed the wall with its club.

Sprinting down the hall away from the violent creature, Calvin wasn't paying much heed to what was in front of him. The crash of the suit of armor he tripped over broke him out of his daze. It also alerted the troll, which turned surprisingly quickly for something so large, catching sight of Calvin as he tripped around the corner. It roared and gave chase.

YOU HAVE GOT TO BE KIDDING ME. THIS ISN'T EVEN FUNNY ANY MORE. HOGWARTS, STOP. JUST STOP IT.

xxxXXXXxxxXXXXxxx

"Did you guys hear that?" asked Harry, slowing down.

"I think I felt that," said Ron.

"It was from right below us!" Hermione started running, heading for the nearest staircase down.

"Not the dungeons," Ron complained, following.

At the bottom, they were greeted by the sight of a hallway almost completely blocked up by debris.

"What happened here, the apocalypse?"

Harry whistled. "Looks like the troll went on a rampage."

The followed the destruction down a string of similarly ruined hallways, sometimes having to spend a few minutes climbing over piles of broken stone.

A high-pitched scream echoed around them.

"That was definitely Calvin," Ron said, glancing around.

"I couldn't tell where it was coming from, could you?" asked Hermione, pulling out her wand. Harry and Ron shook their heads. "Get out your wands. We should have had them out in the first place, I can't believe how stupid I am."

"I wouldn't believe it if you told me," replied the redhead. "So, which way?"

The ceiling rumbled, and loose dust settled on their robes. Above them, they heard the enraged shout of a troll.

xxxXXXXxxxXXXXxxx

"STOP FOLLOWING ME!" screamed Calvin, frantically diving out of the way of the mammoth club.

"GRAAAAAWWWWWW," said the troll.

"GRAW YOURSELF, YOU BIG BULLY!"

The troll stomped forward, and Calvin breathlessly rounded the next corner, coming out into a wide open cavern of moving stairs, where he could see down and up to the other floors. He slid on the smooth flagstones, and got his feet under him just in time to avoid being flattened by another swing of the troll's club.
He sprinted towards a set of stairs to the lower floors. As he approached, three familiar faces appeared, climbing hurriedly up to the top.

"INITIATE EVASIVE MANEUVERS!" a crazed Calvin yelled at the top of his lungs, launching himself over their heads. He tumbled down the staircase and slammed into the railing at the bottom. His vision went fuzzy for what seemed like only a moment, but when he got to his feet he could see Harry, Ron, and Hermione were almost at the bottom as well.

"Whatdowedowhatdowedo!?" cried Ron, reaching the landing and following Calvin down the connecting hallway.

"I didn't plan any further than finding him!" screamed Hermione.

"Hi Harry!" Calvin called over his shoulder before coughing loudly.

"Hi Calvin!"

The stairs collapsed behind them as the troll landed in the middle, before making another leap into the hallway.

"Left, go left!" Hermione told them, gasping. They went left.

"We're back in the dungeons!" complained Ron. "I hate the dungeons!"

"Shut up and run for your life!" Harry shouted at him.

"Did, you guys, save me, any, food!" wheezed Calvin, ducking so as to not be decapitated by a flying piece of wall. The troll was making great use of his club.

"No, just your life!" answered Hermione shrilly, leading them around a tight bend and behind a washed-out tapestry. "Quiet."

They held their breaths as the troll stampeded past the turn-off, continuing along the larger hallway.

"I think we lost him," Ron said.

"Shh!"

They waited for another minute or so until Hermione deemed it was safe to talk.

"Troll's have an excellent sense of hearing," she explained as they ducked out from behind the tapestry. "Are you all right?" she asked everyone.

"I think I'm in shock, but otherwise, yeah." Ron wiggled his fingers. "I'm good."

"Same here," breathed Harry.

"I need, to take, a breather, for, the next, ten, years," Calvin said hoarsely, hand around his throat. "But I'm not, dead, as far, as I, can tell." He coughed painfully, doubling over. "I haven't, ran this much, since ever, in ever, for ever. Ever." He coughed again, and didn't stop for almost twenty seconds. "Ugh, pieces, of my lungs, are stuck, in my windpipe."

"Lovely," said Hermione. "We need to get you to the Hospital Wing."

They'd gone perhaps thirty feet when the wall in front of them disappeared, replaced by flying
debris and a raging troll. They screamed in unison and turned, hastily changing direction.

Hermione, however, had tripped over her robes and was sprawled on the floor, staring up in pure fear. The troll roared in defiance and raised its club.

"WINGARDIUM LEVIOSA!" cried three first-year wizards simultaneously. If synchronized swish-and-flick-ing were an Olympic sport, gold would have been theirs. If they were performing the spell in said Olympics.

The troll's gigantic hand smashed the floor a club's-length from Hermione. It raised its empty hand to eye-level and grunted in surprised confusion.

"Drop the club on its head!" suggested Ron. They quickly Hovered the club over the brute's head as Hermione scrambled to their side, and Ron counted out loud: "One, two, three!" The club dropped with a hollow thunk onto the troll's skull. The troll screamed in outrage. The Gryffindors ran.

"Why did we give it back the club!"

"It's okay, I think it was too angry to pick it up again before charging us!"

"Gee, that's the best bloody news I've heard all day!"

***

"You know, Albus," Professor McGonagall said conversationally. "We should really look into having some sort of magical map of Hogwarts made. So that we can find intruders easily. Or even students."

"It could identify each individual with their name below a set of footprints showing where they're heading!" squeaked Professor Flitwick. "That would be helpful in uncovering imposters, as well."

"Oh no, definitely not," said the Headmaster, Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, Order of Merlin, First Class, Grand Sorcerer, Chief Warlock, and Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederation of Wizards. "Why, just think of the trouble it could cause if it fell into the hands of a pair of students!"

"Why a pair of students?" asked Professor McGonagall curiously.

"Oh, I'm feeling a disturbance in the dungeons - we'd better go check that out immediately!"

***

"This is the staircase we were at before!" moaned Ron, looking over the edge of the landing at the steep drop below them. "The one the troll broke!"

"Wait, where is the troll?" asked Harry. "Did we lose him again?"

"No," Hermione gulped, staring down the way they'd come. "He just went back for his club."

This can't be happening. WHY IS THIS HAPPENING! WE'RE IN A SCHOOL, FOR CRYING OUT LOUD. Calvin's thoughts were racing as the troll trudged towards them, building up momentum. It was holding the club above its head, and was wearing an ugly expression of pure hatred on its already ugly face. It was like a whole party of ugly.

"Joint Hovering Charm!" Harry yelled. They raised their wands. Calvin's thoughts chased each
other in a mobius strip of panic.

This won't help, we're still trapped and the troll's still a troll without his club!

"WINGARDIUM LEVIOSA!"

The troll skidded to a stop as his club was yanked out of his grip. He narrowed his dull black eyes and snorted. Calvin's thoughts collectively flicked a switch, and a mental light bulb blinked into existence.

"Guys, get ready to jump out of the way! Hermione, you know the Summoning Charm too, right?" he asked the trembling witch.

"Calvin, that's a fourth-year spell!" she responded. Her hand was shaking, and her eyes were glued to the troll, who had decided to forget about his club and was stomping slowly yet determinately towards them. The hallway was an unusually long one, but he'd get to them eventually, and they had nowhere to run.

"Do you know it or not!?"

"Yes I know it!" Hermione screeched. "But not very well!"

"When I say 'now,' cast the Summoning Charm on the troll's club!" He looked at her. "Get it?"

She nodded shakily. "Got it."

"Good. Wait until it's almost on top of us." Calvin adjusted his grip on his wand and took a deep breath, trying to calm himself.

"Whatever your plan is, do it now!" screamed Ron.

"Ron, shut up."

"Why would you wait, don't wait, do it before-"

"Ron if you don't shut up I am going to haunt you every night for the rest of the year and whisper insane anecdotes about my childhood to you as you try to fall asleep."

Ron snapped his mouth shut so hard they heard his teeth click together.

"Alright, Hermione, get ready," Calvin said, wishing his heart would stop flopping desperately around in his chest like a fish out of water. "When we cast the spell, get out of the way as fast as you can!" he told them.

The troll started to sort of shuffle-jog, leaning forward ever so slightly. It grunted continuously as it made its way ever closer to the four first-years.

"Not yet!"

"I know," answered Hermione somewhat angrily. Calvin didn't hear her. All he could hear was the blood pounding in his ears.

"We're gonna die," whispered Ron mutely.

"Not yet!" Calvin said again.
"I know!"

It wasn't far now, maybe thirty feet.

"Get ready!"

"I'm ready!"

"Get ready!"

"I said I was ready!"

"Now!"

"ACCIO CLUB!"

They leapt to the side, and the troll skidded to a stop mere feet from the edge of the landing, turning his head. That was when the grizzly-bear-sized club collided with its spine at high speeds. Calvin couldn't be sure, but he thought he heard a distinct *crunch* before the troll was flung over the edge, roaring piteously.

It took ten long seconds before the sound of the creature's final impact reached them. None of them leaned over to get a better look. None of them moved. None of them wished each other a job well done. They just sat there, pressed against the wall, breathing heavily. Some of them might have been crying.

It was in this exact position that the teachers found them minutes, hours, or days later. Calvin's sense of time had died with the troll. And so, apparently, had their voices. They were silently - on their part, at least - led away to the Hospital wing, where a concerned Madam Pomfrey efficiently checked them over before ordering the hovering teachers 'out of her workspace.'

That night, not one of them had an easy time falling asleep. The whispered to each other every so often, but for the most part they just rested, and thought, and experienced the wonderful sensation of not being dead.

"So," Harry asked Calvin softly at around two in the morning. They were all still very much awake. "How was your meeting with Professor McGonagall?"

Calvin started laughing. It was a sad laugh, a desperate laugh, and it brought tears to his eyes. It was a contagious laugh as well, because before long they were all laughing, all crying, all wheezing hysterically.

When they'd run out of breath and laughter and tears - when they'd run out of emotion - the Hospital Wing lay quiet once again. Soon after, the night claimed their thoughts, and they were asleep.

Calvin woke and fell back asleep many times before dawn touched the horizon, though he wasn't aware enough to be certain that it was the first dawn. He lay awake in the white bed, staring at the ceiling. He sat up a bit and looked around. He looked around at the three people sleeping in the three other white beds. He looked at each of them in turn, assuring himself that they were there, that they were okay. Then he lay back down, and felt sleep call to him once more.

His thoughts were fuzzy, but a nice, safe kind of fuzzy. The kind of fuzzy that made him feel warm. The thoughts floated to the top of his consciousness, and he heard them speak inside his head.
So this is what it's like to have friends.

AN: Thanks for sticking with me. If you liked it, please review. Feedback is what it's all about. High five, readers. High five.
The aftermath of the troll chase came in three parts: points lost, points gained, and information.

The points lost by Harry, Hermione, and Ron for disobeying the order to return to their dormitories - while there was a troll stomping about, no less - added up to thirty house points lost. This was a disappointment, to say the least, but of course they were still glad they'd done it, as it was to save a friend.

The points won by all four of them for killing a troll added up to one hundred points won. This was a fantastic turn of events, to say the least, but they still resolved to never come within five miles of a troll ever again, unless it was to save a friend.

The information gained by Harry, Hermione, and Ron, and then told over to Calvin, concerned the forbidden third-floor corridor.

"I'm telling you, Snape was using the troll as a distraction to try to get to the Stone!" Ron was leaning almost all the way out of his armchair, whispering as loudly as possible. They'd been deemed fully recovered and let out of the Hospital Wing only an hour ago. "Why else would he have been heading to it while everyone else was on troll-watch?"

"I know you don't like him, but that's no reason Professor Snape would try to steal something that's under Dumbledore's protection!" said Hermione in exasperation.

"Hermione, I heard my dad say once that Snape used to work for You-Know-Who!" Ron hissed. "The Gringotts spokesgoblin said there was a Dark Wizard after whatever was in the vault, and my dad also says Snape's in league with the Malfoys - who we all know are Dark as the inside of a dragon's belly."

"Okay, that's...a better reason. Still-"

"Oooo, so he's trying to steal it for Voldemort!" said Calvin, nodding.


"Oh, right. But what if the Stone can bring Voldemort back to life?"

"Stop saying the name!" Ron said urgently.

"That's not...that's not possible, is it, Hermione?" Harry turned to the bushy-haired witch, who was chewing the ends of her hair.
"I haven't read about anything that can do that, but I also haven't read anything about the Philosopher's Stone, and we don't know what it does. Still, I think that's a little bit far-fetched. But we are forgetting one thing, guys - Dumbledore wouldn't have hired Snape if he was still Dark!"

Ron slumped, mulling it over.

"Isn't Dumbledore completely bonkers, though?" supplied Calvin.

"He's the greatest wizard of the century!" Hermione exclaimed.

"Aaaaand, he's also completely bonkers, as shown by last week's incident, among others," replied Harry. He turned to Calvin, who gestured for him to go on. "About a week ago, we were on our way to Herbology, and the Headmaster stopped us in the halls to challenge Calvin to a hacky-sack competition."

Calvin nodded. "He walked in front of us, bent down and took off one of his socks - it was really fuzzy-looking - and threw it to the floor at our my feet. Told me that if I didn't pick it up and accept the challenge, he would take away house points. And I'd already spent all my house points that week."

"So did you do it?" asked Ron, both eyebrows raised.

"I think so."

"What do you mean, you think?"

Calvin shrugged and said, "Well, he insisted on using his invisible set of hacky-sacks, so I essentially just acted out doing it."

"The Headmaster pretended to play hacky-sack?"

"I think…"

"Meaning what, exactly?"

"Well, I thought he was doing the same thing as me, until a student passed by."

"What happened?" said Hermione.

Harry laughed. "Dumbledore told the student to get ready, and mimed passing the hacky-sack to him. The guy didn't really react, as there was clearly no hacky-sack in sight. Until, of course, the hacky-sack hit him in the stomach."

"Right, so Dumbledore's completely bonkers," Ron reiterated.

"Oh right, that's what we were talking about," said Harry. "The Stone."

"So what do we do?"

"We do nothing," Hermione told them sternly. "If there's a problem, Professor Dumbledore will—" she paused as everyone stared at her with raised eyebrows. "Fine, but there are other teachers besides the Headmaster."

"Yeah, and one of them's Snape!" said Harry. "Remember how Hagrid told us that each of the teachers helped with the security for the Stone? Snape already knows how to get past his own, he's just got to figure out the others!"
"We have to let Hagrid know not to tell him how to deal with Fluffy!"

"It sounds like we're talking about a bunny when you say that," said Calvin. "A ferocious bunny who could tear you apart, yes, but it still sounds like the name of a bunny."

Hermione glanced at the clock above the fireplace. It was only mid afternoon, so they had some time. "Let's go see him now," she proposed. The rest of them nodded, and they quickly left the common room.

"Professor Snape'd never try to steal the Stone," Hagrid told them, taking a whistling kettle off the fire. "He's even helpin' protect it, after all." The four of them shared a glance. Hagrid set the kettle down on the table, then plopped himself down into his massive chair.

"I went ter Dumbledore, yesterday, you know, ter ask him why he thought it was a good idea ter put a bunch of firs'-years on the case of findin' out who's after the Stone." The large man picked up his giant tea-cup and sipped it slowly, unaware that the four children in his hut were no longer breathing. He set the cup down with a clink and sighed. "He made a good argument fer it, though, and I trust his judgement."

Calvin made a smothered choking sound deep in his throat, and then turned around and planted his face in the couch pillows.

"Oh yes," said Harry, hiding his disbelief. "Dumbledore's judgement, just the best thing in the world, mhmm."

"Never met a man with judgement better than his, yessiree," Ron agreed, taking a quick gulp of tea to quell his sudden coughing.

"Can't go wrong trusting Professor Dumbledore, such a great wizard, such a great man," added Hermione, hanging her head to hide behind her hair.

Hagrid was looking at them in confusion.

Calvin recovered enough to turn around, and cleared his throat. "All the same, Hagrid, we'd like you not to tell Snape anything about how to deal with Fluffy - for the sake of caution, you know. Can't be too carefull."

"Ha!" replied Hagrid, slapping his knee. "I don't imagine Professor Snape'd know much about makin' music, so ye don't have ter worry about that."

"Oh, yes, well I wasn't sure what type of music it had to be," said Calvin evenly.

"Any type of music, so long as it's on tune," the groundskeeper answered proudly. "It'll put 'im right ter sleep, it will. Only way to get past Fluffy."

"That's quite reassuring, Hagrid," Calvin said, nodding. "Thank you for your cooperation."

"Er, you're welcome. Anything ter help the investigatin'. Here, have some more cakes," Hagrid told them, placing a platter of lumpish rock cakes on the table. Calvin grabbed for one and started gnawing on it.

They talked a bit more, about classes and the terrifying troll chase, then hiked back up to the castle.
Harry bid them goodbye and headed off to another Quidditch practice - Wood was really working the team hard, as the first match was in exactly one week. Their opponents would be Slytherin, and the enthusiastic Gryffindor keeper couldn't wait to take out his anger on them on the pitch. By blocking goals. On the occasion that the equally upset Gryffindor chasers would even let the quaffle get anywhere near him.

Calvin stopped short when they arrived back at the common room. A thought had occurred to him. "What is wrong with me!?"

"I've been wondering that for months, mate."

He hastily scaled the stairs to the dormitory and pulled open the door. "How could I have forgotten-"

A bored tiger waved lazily from his bed. Calvin let out a shaky sigh of relief.

"Glad to see you got away in one piece, pineapple head."

The spiky-haired wizard ran over and tackled the tiger, hugging him tightly. His saltwater glands may have been leaking a little bit. "I knew your survival instincts would get you out of there, buddy."

Hobbes patted him on the back. "I always was an expert at running like heck."

"Just like from rhinos, hm?" Calvin pulled back. "How did you get back here, anyway?"

"I wandered around a bit until a talking picture of a lady throwing slippers at a dragon got my attention. In between dodging blasts of flame, she tried directing me to the jungle. When I explained that I was actually trying to find Gryffindor tower, she told me how to get back here."

"Then I fell asleep for a couple days."

"You seem to be doing a lot of that, lately," laughed Calvin. He told Hobbes what had happened after the initial appearance of the troll, and how they had finally finished it off, then what he'd learned about Snape.

"You sure showed that troll," Hobbes said as he ended the tale.

"Showed him the bottom floor, that's for sure. Up close and personal."

"So Snape let the troll in as a distraction, huh?"

"Actually, Snape was at the Halloween feast when it got in." Calvin leaned back and chuckled. "I missed the initial uproar in the Great Hall, but Ron told me what happened. Apparently Professor Quirrel came hurrying in, all out of breath and twisting around, shouted something about a troll in the dungeons, then ran into a wall and knocked himself out! I mean, talk about uncoordinated."

Hobbes scratched his head. "I thought you said Snape was the only teacher weird enough to use the dungeons."

"No, I said that he's the only teacher crazy enough to use the dungeons. And it's freezing down there," Calvin said, shivering at the memory of the last Potions class. "It's got to take some serious dedication to being scary to want to keep your classroom in the dungeons."

"So what was Quirrel doing in the dungeons, then?"
Calvin opened his mouth, then realized he didn't actually know. "Hey, you're right. That's pretty suspicious. Maybe they're working together, and Quirrel let the troll in? Hmm, I have to tell everyone else." He looked at his watch, then slid off the bed. "I'm going down for dinner, want me to bring you back something?"

"Four or five plates of meat ought to be enough," the tiger replied.

In the Great Hall, Calvin found Dean and Seamus sitting with the twins, waiting to hear the whole story.

"Well?" said Fred expectantly.

"Come on then, tell us how you destroyed the dungeons!"

"Tell us how you caused more damage to Hogwarts than any student in decades!"

"Tell us the secrets of your destructive ways!"

"Tell us how you-"

"I'll tell you guys if you let me," said Calvin with a smile. He sat down, clearing his throat. "Now, listen closely, because I'm not going to say it twice. Hmm, maybe I should just write the story up on one of those pamphlets so I don't have to waste time telling it over and over. In fact…" He stroked his chin contemplatively, then turned to the twins. "Could you cast that volume-enhancing charm on my voice? I'd use the microphone Dean got me, but it's in my room. Gotta start carrying that thing around with me."

"What do you have in mind?" asked Fred, getting out his wand.

Calvin told him. Fred had a suggestion. The twins beckoned over Lee Jordan. The three of them took to the tabletop.

"Attention all Hogwarts students!" announced Fred in the reverberating tone that was an effect of the voice-enhancing charm.

Calvin heard some people down the table say 'Is it Monday already?' and 'I could've sworn it was Saturday when I woke up.'

"We don't usually hog the airtime unless it's Monday, but we've got something special for you tonight!"

"Breaking news about the Halloween troll debacle!"

"Get ready to hear how the dungeons were trashed, people!"

"I'm going to hand the spotlight over to our very own Jee Lordan for the interview."

Lee Jordan smiled and waved at everyone. "Well folks, they're here - the four first-years who saved our hides! But how? What happened? What went on in Hogwarts' hallways Thursday night? You're about to find out! Get on up here, you guys!"

Harry, Ron, Hermione, and Calvin stepped onto the table beside Lee Jordan.

"There are rumors flying every which way about the events that occurred on Halloween night," he said to them, though his voice carried throughout the entire room. "People are saying you let in the troll yourselves, just to see if you could take it down! What do you say to these rumors?" He held
his wand out like a microphone towards them.

Calvin leaned forward, clearing his throat. "Codswallop." Then he stepped back, apparently finished.

"Anyone who thinks that is mad," said Ron.

"We almost died," said Hermione. "And there's no way I would have gone through that for fun."

"So, tell us then, how'd you end up almost getting killed?" asked Lee Jordan.

"They came looking for me," Calvin answered.

"And where were you?"

"Wandering the many different time zones of Hogwarts, off being completely lost. The usual."

"When we heard about the troll," Harry explained, "we realized that Calvin wouldn't have any idea about it, and went to find him."

"At first, all we could find were demolished hallways and huge piles of rocks," continued Ron, waving his hands for emphasis. "Then, we heard it."

Lee Jordan leaned in theatrically. "What did you hear?"

"The troll."

"We also heard Calvin's voice," said Hermione, "and we knew he was in trouble, so we raced off to find him."

"That's when I entered the Cavern of Stairs!" Calvin exclaimed. "The troll was right behind me, and I'd just seen them coming up the staircase I was heading towards!"

"He leapt over our heads like a flying squirrel," said Harry. "Shouting about evasive maneuvers. We changed directions in an instant, and when we'd gotten back to the bottom of the stairs, the troll jumped down onto the staircase."

"It crumbled like a house of cards in the Gryffindor common room in Calvin's line of sight," said Ron with more hand motions. "Then Hermione led us into a narrow corridor and we all held our breaths as the troll stomped past us."

"We thought we'd lost it," Calvin cut in. "But we were wrong!"

"It burst through the wall ahead of us," said Hermione. "I'd never been more scared in my life. Then they saved me from becoming flattened, all using the Hovering Charm on the troll's club as he tried to smash me to bits!"

"You should have seen the beast's face," Ron laughed.

"We tried knocking the troll out with his own club, but it just made him even angrier," said Harry. "Not the smartest idea. It gave chase, roaring in frustration! We ran right back the way we'd come, but we didn't anticipate one thing."

"What's that?" prompted Lee Jordan, eyes wide.

"The staircase had been ruined by the troll! It was a dead end!"
"It was too late to double back, though, because the troll had appeared at the other end of the hallway, and he'd gone back for his club!"

"We were sure we were dead meat then."

"We tried for the Hover Charm again, but it only delayed the troll for a bit, before he left his club behind and continued towards us."

"It started thumping towards us, mean as anything."

"Then Calvin here had a brilliant plan."

"He waited until the troll was right in front of us - I totally thought we were about to die - and then he and Hermione cast a spell!"

"What spell?" asked Lee Jordan obligingly.

"We cast the Summoning Charm...on the club!"

"As we all jumped out of the way, the club rocketed into the troll, flinging him off the balcony and down into the depths of the school!"

"And I'm pretty sure it broke his spine, too!"

"The rest is history."

"Well, that part was history, too. But the rest is boring history."

"Can I get a big round of applause for these heroes!" yelled Lee Jordan, his hands in the air. "Let's hear it for the troll slayers!"

The next few days saw them mobbed with attention every time they walked through the halls between classes. People wanted to know what the troll looked like, how big it was, how they'd come up with the plan, how to fight a troll if it didn't have a club, how to fight a werewolf, how to cast the Summoning Charm, how to make a paper crane - yes, many of the questions were completely unrelated to the event - and how much a piece of parchment with all four of their autographs would cost.

They had well-wishers and admirers, cynicists and stalkers. Everyone was telling Harry that if a troll showed up at the Quidditch match on Saturday, they were sure he could catch the snitch and then kill the troll, all in record time.

One night, when Calvin couldn't fall asleep as scenes from the troll chase bombarded his mind, he tiptoed down to the common room. Curiously enough, the light was still on.

"Harry!?"

Harry whirled around, wand pointed at Calvin. His eyes were wide, tinged with red. He was breathing heavily.

"Are you...sweating? It's two in the morning! What are you doing and why didn't you tell me so that I could join in?" Calvin crossed his arms.

"I'm...never mind. I'm just going to take a shower and go to bed," the black-haired boy told him,
running the back of his hand across his forehead. "Goodnight." He walked past Calvin, still breathing hard.

_Huh._ Calvin flopped onto the couch and stared at the ceiling until he fell asleep.

Following his post-flying-lesson Thursday night in the Hospital Wing, Calvin decided to head back to the dormitories instead of the Great Hall, since Madam Pomfrey had let him go early. When he stepped through the portrait hole, he saw Harry asleep in the armchair by the fireplace, which contained only dead embers. His glasses were on the table, and his hand, dangling over the arm of the chair, still held his wand.


"What are you doing!" Harry asked, looking around, clearly disoriented. "Why are we in the common room?"

"I am in the common room because I am on my way to the dormitory. You are here because you're being all secretive and doing sinister magical rituals all night and tiring yourself out."

"Wha- I'm not doing any rituals," said Harry, running a hand through his messy hair. He stood up and pocketed his wand, starting for the stairs.

"Then what _were_ you doing in the middle of the night?" asked Calvin. He followed Harry up the stairs, poking him in the back along the way. "And why won't you tell me?"

"Stop poking me."

"Only if you tell me," sang Calvin, poking him twice more.

Harry stopped at the top of the stairs and turned around. His voice was hard as he spoke, and his eyes bore into Calvin's.

"I'm making sure I won't be helpless again," Harry said slowly through gritted teeth, hands clenching into fists. "I'm making sure that if anything like what happened with the troll happens again, that I'll be ready. That I'll be able to _protect my friends._" His shoulders were shaking, and the intensity in his eyes was enough to make Calvin flinch.

"H-Harry, you helped save Hermione just as much as the rest of us."

Harry snorted angrily. "That was Ron's idea, and it would've worked without me anyway. Then your plan was the one to kill the troll, and Hermione was part of that. I couldn't help because I didn't know the spell. All I could do was try to use Ron's tactic of levitating the club again, and it didn't do a thing."

"If you hadn't had us do that, I wouldn't have been able to Summon the club to knock the troll off," Calvin pointed out.

"You don't have to try to make me feel better, Calvin," Harry told him, sighing. "That's not what this is about." He sat down on the top step, hanging his head. "What would have happened if you hadn't known the Summoning Charm? Or if the troll kept a hold on his club? Or if Ron hadn't come up with his idea in the first place? Hermione would be...she'd be dead. We'd probably be dead. A million things could have gone wrong."
"But they didn't. We survived."

"They could have!" shouted Harry. "I couldn't do anything because I don't know enough magic! So I'm training, and I'm practicing every night, and I'm going to be able to protect people when I need to!" He fell silent, chest heaving.

"I'm sorry I was screaming, Calvin. I just- I can't stand the thought of something happening to you guys because I just stood there, unable to do anything."

"Okay, no, you're right. And it's awesome that you're practicing so hard to learn more magic, beyond what we just do in class." He caught Harry's eye and gave him a smile. "But don't you think it's a little crazy to stay up all night doing it? Being exhausted won't do you any good in a fight. Or anywhere. And speaking of which, you've been doing this in addition to the crazy practices Wood's been holding?"

Harry nodded mutely.

"You're insane! And that's saying something, coming from me. You can't keep this up if you want to be able to kick Slytherin's heinies on Saturday."

"I know, I know. But I-"

"No butts! Or any other body parts! The only thing I want to hear is 'Yes Sir, Calvin, I will get a full night's sleep tonight!'"

Harry rolled his eyes. "Okay. Fine."

"I said, the only thing I want to hear is 'Yes Sir, Calvin, I will get a full night's sleep tonight!'"

"And I said yes, now just-"

"I said, the only thing I want to hear is-"

This time Harry was the one who interrupted. "Yes Sir, Calvin, I will get a full night's sleep tonight!"

"Yes you will, maggot! Now get your rear in gear and get dressed! We've got a Potions class to attend, and the Slavemaster of Suffering isn't going to annoy himself!" Calvin declared, poking Harry in the chest as he stood up.

"Sir, yes sir!" Harry saluted.

"Aboooouuuut FACE!" They both pivoted. "Forwaaaaaard MARCH!" They entered the dormitory.

"Shuuuuuuut UP!" yelled Ron from beneath his pillow.

Potions class was exciting as always, which meant that Draco tried to sabotage Harry's and Ron's potions, and Calvin tried to annoy the living daylights out of Draco and Snape.

This time, Calvin's potion instructions were rather long, as he was in a generous mood.

Step 1: Plant roses.

Step 1.5: Plant violets

Step 2: Water the roses.
Step 2.5: Water the violets.

Step 3: Water them both every day - don't forget or *they will die.*

Step 4: Wait a while, however long it takes for roses and violets to grow.

Step 5: Knit something for your grandmother while you wait.

Step 6: Maybe write a song.

Step 7: Learn a second language or something, this is going to take a while.

Step 8: Now look at the flowers you have grown.

Step 9: Reflect upon the beauty of Mother Nature.

Step 10: Resolve to be a nicer person.

Step 11: Rescue a kitty from a tree.

Step 12: Say the word 'kitty' over and over until it doesn't even sound like a real word anymore.

Step 13: Look at the flowers again.

Step 14: Notice their lovely hues.

Step 15: The roses are red.

Step 16: The violets are blue.

Step 17: This step is pointless.

Step 18: And so are you.

Step 19: Have a terrible day.

- Calvin, Boy of Destiny, Student of Your Nightmares, You Know Which Ones I am Talking About, Yes, Those, Those Nightmares, You Know They Haunt You, We Both Know It, Don't Deny It, Embrace it, Embrace the Madness, Embrace the Terror, Welcome the Fear, Cry Yourself to Sleep at Night Knowing There is Nothing You Can Do About it, Nothing at All, Ha, Ha, Ha, I Laugh at Your Pain, Ha, Ha, Ha

It only cost him half of the points he'd earned that week. Totally worth it.

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"Umm, Calvin, I thought you said Hobbes was going to paint a lion's head roaring," said Dean, holding the banner.

Calvin shrugged apologetically. "He said he would, but when he called me over to say he'd finished, well…"

The banner depicted a ferocious tiger devouring an entire village of people dressed in green. Beneath the picture were the words, 'SLYTHERIN JUST CANNOT WIN, THEY SURELY WILL BE CREAMED, 'CUZ SLYTHEROUT WITHOUT A DOUBT IS WORSE THAN OUR TEAM.'

"Don't get me wrong," Dean told him, "I think this is awesome. But I also think we should maybe
have a banner with the Gryffindor lion on it."

"Fine, but someone should still hold this one up at the match."

Dean's artistic skills produced a magnificent lion, mouth open, teeth barred. At their suggestion, Hermione had enchanted the painting - the mane flowed as if in a breeze, and the mouth opened and closed menacingly. Calvin wanted to know if there was a way to make it roar.

The morning of the match, the Great Hall buzzed with anticipation.

"How am I supposed to eat when I'm about to go up against Slytherin in my first Quidditch match ever!" Harry said after Hermione told him he should eat something.

"Like this," replied Calvin, skewering a piece of egg and moving it towards Harry's face. "Say 'ah,' here comes the flying broomstick- wait, what sound do broomsticks make?"

"Whoosh?" suggested Ron.

"Stop it, Calvin, seriously. I can't eat right now."

"But what if a Slytherin knocks into you in midair?"

Harry turned to him. "That can happen regardless of whether or not I eat."

"Sure," grinned Calvin. "But don't you want to be able to puke on him as you collide? You know," he continued, oblivious to everyone around him making exaggerated gagging sounds, "there's a frog that holds water in its mouth all the time, just waiting for enemies to approach, and when they do, he spits out- Hey, where's everyone going? Wait up!"

Calvin quickly shoveled the rest of his breakfast into his mouth, then ran to catch up with his friends. Harry had to go early to prepare with the rest of the team, so he, Ron, Hermione, Dean, and Seamus headed to the entrance to the stands.

In the corridor that led to the stands, they found Professor Quirrel.

"Are...are you all right, Professor?" asked Hermione, looking concerned. Professor Quirrel was jerking to and fro like a ragdoll in a tornado, ever so slowly making progress down the hall.

"Do you want some help?" offered Dean, moving towards the man.

"N-n-no!" Quirrel did a sort of pirouette in the opposite direction, down the hall, away from the stands. Then he took a few shuffling hops back in their direction. "I n-n-n-need t-to g-g-get a-w-w-w-w-w-w-a-stebasket!"

He skipped angrily forward, putting himself in front of them, then abruptly bent backward at the waist. He was now staring at them upside down, hands propping himself up. "P-p-p-please st-st-sto-STAND me up!"

Calvin stepped forward, but Quirrel grunted loudly and flipped into a handstand.

"N-n-n-never, d-d-don't, g-g-get, a-w-w-w-w-w-w-wastebasket!"

"O-okay, we're just going to go now," said Dean, sidestepping away. They passed Professor Quirrel, who was doing some sort of jig with his legs in the air, and exited the hallway.

"Well folks," said Calvin, starting up the stairs to the stands. "You heard it from our very own
Defense Against the Dark Arts professor: 'Never don't get a wastebasket!'"

"I remember not a getting wastebasket, once, though," Seamus commented.

Dean and Calvin converged on him, eyes wide. "Bad jujú!" they chorused, then clapped their hands and danced around like monkeys.

"...What?"

"Oh, it's okay now, we dispelled the effects," replied Dean, patting him on the shoulder. "Come on, I see some open seats!"

The teachers had prepared one entire side of the stands for Gryffindors and people supporting the Gryffindor team, and the other side for those in or supporting Slytherin. They knew how easy it was for fights to break out in this sort of situation.

"Aren't you commentating for this match?" asked Ron, looking for open seats.

"Oh right! You and Dean too! Come on!"

"Wha-? No, I didn't-"

They dragged Ron down with them, then went to the commentator's podium. Professor McGonagall was standing there, looking at them with one eyebrow raised.

"I am aware that you have never before announced for a Quidditch match before - let me tell you now that blatant favoritism will not be tolerated, and hate towards the Slytherin likewise."

They all nodded, then took the magical microphone from her.

"Bpbpbpbpbpb," said Calvin into the microphone, lips flapping. "Bdba, bdba, bdba."

"What are you doing?" asked Ron.

"Getting my voice ready." He cleared his throat. "The arsonist had oddly shaped feet. The arsonist had oddly shaped feet."

"Okay, now you're just saying nonsense."

"The human torch was denied a bank loan."

"Calvin, start already."

"Ahem. In the event of an emergency, please panic as chaotically as possible and run like your life depends on it, making sure to trample as many of your fellow students as possible. Thank you."

Are you quite finished, Mr. Calvin?" said Professor McGonagall. "The teams are about to fly out, after you announce each one. Here are the team rosters, so you know who's who."

"Wait, so they only come out when I announce them?" asked Calvin, a wicked gleam in his eye.

"That is correct, so you should do so now."

"Oh no, he's doing that low chuckle thing," said Ron, hiding behind Dean. "He's doing the low chuckle."
"The Gryffindor team captain, the man behind their late nights and unfinished homework, he's certainly a keeper, he's the keeper, he's OLIVER WOOD!"

Wood flew out onto the pitch, smiling, but also confused as to why he was the only one of his team to be announced.

"The three lovely chasers, proving that yes, it is possible to be both beautiful and amazing at Quidditch, ANGELINA JOHNSON, KATIE BELL, and ALICIA SPINNET!"

The three bemused Gryffindor chasers took to the air, smiling and waving.

"The scourge of the skies, the Duo of Doom, the Twins of Terror, the Pair of-

"Calvin!" shouted Professor McGonagall.

"-The Gryffinor beaters, GRED AND FORGE!"

The redheaded twins flew out, weaving and crisscrossing, beaming at the crowd. They waved their beaters bats in the air, then tossed them to each other and caught them behind their backs.

"Weighing in at far less than anyone else on the team, with eyes the color of a field of summer grass, he's the youngest seeker in a century, he's the one you've all been waiting for, he's probably wishing I hurried this up so he can just get out here, he's HARRY FREAKING POTTER!"

Harry shot through the air, reaching the rest of his team and executing a masterful stop, slowing down completely within only a few feet. To say that the crowd went wild would be to say that Calvin was mildly unhinged, that magic was slightly interesting, or that Hagrid's size was merely above average. To say that the applause sounded like a tidal wave bashing through a screen door would be- well, completely preposterous - what kind of sound does that even make.

"Calvin, the introductions are not meant to take this long," Professor McGonagall told him as the clapping and hollering quieted down. "Do speed it up a bit."

Calvin gave a hearty sigh. "Well, if you insist, Professor."

"Introducing the entire Slytherin Quidditch team, please give a cold, heartless welcome-"

"Calvin!"

"-to FlintPuceyMontagueBletchleyBlakeDowdenandHiggs!"

The Slytherin side wasn't sure whether to 'boo' at his introduction or applaud the entry of their team, resulting in a hesitant, half-hearted combination of the two that quickly devolved into the awkwardest of silences.

As the players from both teams took their places, Madam Hooch rose up in the middle and said something about a fair match with 'little to no' casualties, then blew her whistle while tossing the quaffle up.

"And it's one of the Slytherin chasers with the waffle, I have no idea which one he is, but he just lost possession anyway so I doubt it matters-"

"That was Montague," Professor McGonagall told him.
"And now Katie Bell has a hold of the waffle, heading down-field-"

"It's the quaffle!"

"-if you can even call it a field when they're in the air. What does that make it, an airfield? Wait, that's for airplanes. But most of you don't even know what airplanes are anyways, so I guess- And Gryffindor scores! That's one point to-"

"It's ten points, each goal is ten!" yelled the Transfiguration Professor. "Do you even know any of the rules of Quidditch?"

"Not even a little bit, Professor. Anyway, Gryffindor's in the lead after that fantastic bit of teamwork."

"AND THERE SHE GOES AGAIN!" shouted Dean, taking over. "Bell with the ball- sorry, the quaffle. She's heading up the airfield, passes to Spinnet, back to Bell, to Johnson, she's going for the- ouch, and a nasty hit by a bludger from Dowden, that guy who looks like a constipated gorilla about to throw a tantrum."

"Dean Thomas, not another word!"

Ron nervously took the microphone that Calvin offered him.

"Um, Slytherin has possession, and that's- that's Flint, I think, with the quaffle, he's taking it up, dodges a bludger, loses the quaffle as he's hit by the bludger that came in right behind the first one. Nice one, Fred."

"I'm George!" yelled the redheaded beater.

"Sorry, George."

"Joking, I am Fred!"

"Go fly into a goalpost, Fred."

"Mr. Weasley, kindly forfeit your hold on the microphone to Mr. Calvin," Professor McGonagall said crossly. He did so, blushing a deep crimson.

"So apparently Slytherin's scored two goals and Gryffindor's gotten another one as well, which would make it a tie game! Everybody put on your ties! That was a terrible joke, why am I still holding the microphone. Oh, and there's Wood with a B-E-A-U-tifull save! We love you, Olly - can I call you Olly? No? He's shaking his fist, is that a no or a 'heck yes,' I can't tell.

"Harry seems to be just hanging around up there, flying back and forth, I don't think he's caught sight of the Easter Egg- what? Right, the snitch, that's what I meant. Anyways, back to the game. Blake just lost his beaters bat to a bludger hit by one of the- by Gred, let's say. Fifty-percent chance, right? Flint slams into Alicia in a terrible display of sportsmanship, grabbing the waffle as she reigns in her spinning broom.

"Luckily, he drops it while dodging another twin-propelled bludger hit by, again, we're just going to say it was Gred. Sorry Forge. Actually, it's going to be Forge from here on out. Gryffindor scores! The score is now one number to a smaller number, what a surprise! And- what's happening? Is that...has Harry made some headway in the Egg Hunt? He's spotted something, either that or some massive weights have just materialized in his pockets, he's diving for all he's worth, and- oh come on, that was the most blatant foul I've ever seen. There are fouls in this game,
right, that's a thing? It looks like Harry's lost the weights, folks. Flint - you, sir, are a party pooper.

"Oh, good, Madam Hooch called him on it. What's happening now? A what, Professor? I'm being told that what we are now witnessing is called a penalty shot, which has nothing to do with shooting anybody, unfortunately. Talk about a letdown. Alicia takes the waffle across the airfield - I guess we're calling it that now, it's much cooler than 'pitch' - and hovers in front of the many goal posts. There are one, two, three - okay, yes, there are indeed three of them. Seemed like more before I counted. She makes the shot, Gryffindor extends its wonderful lead!

"What, that wasn't biased, Professor, it's objectively wonderful- wait, Harry's seen it again! He's speeding off to the corner of the airfield, he dodges a bludger, Forge comes up from beneath to deflect another, why in the world are the Slytherin chasers all chasing Harry instead of the waffle!? Harry swerves up, he swerves left, he's after something that obviously only he can see, he doubles back OH NOW THAT'S JUST- one of the Slytherin chasers has grabbed the end of Harry's broom just as he was passing! Are you kidding me? You should not be allowed to send five-year olds to Hogwarts just because they weigh as much as- no, Professor McGonagall, I am not sorry, were you even watching!?

"Oh, yes, there is another penalty shot, this one being taken by Angelina. She scores! This just in, the Slytherin keeper cannot save a thing - and that's just an observation, Professor. Anyways, way to go, Bletchley. You da man. The Slytherin beaters are now completely focusing their violent, insatiable blood lust on Harry, not giving him even a moment's peace to resume the Egg Hunt. The twins are now running interference on the bludgers, forcing the Slytherin beaters to take a break and defend their teammates. Speaking of which, the Gryffindor chasers are absolutely dominating, their opponents just cannot keep up, except for the occasional, legally questionable grapple resulting in Flint holding the waffle.

"That son of a mantis, he's done it again. What, Professor? How is that insulting, preying mantis are wicked cool, they even have saws on their arms! There goes the Slytherin mantis, in possession once more, I hope his eventual wife eats his head. That's just a fun fact about preying mantis, Professor - this is a school, right? Don't you promote education even on the airfield? It's got to be at least ten billion to nothing in Gryffindor's favor by now - oh, it's ninety to thirty. Eh, close enough.

"Once again, Harry is making a bee-line for something no one else can see! I sure hope he's not just imagining things, wouldn't that be embarrassing. The entire Slytherin team including the keeper is now trying to obstruct Harry's flight path! He does a loop back around and heads across the airfield upside down, righting himself as he flies. I'm not sure what he's flying towards anymore, because he's going in the complete opposite direction from his initial dive.

"Meanwhile, the Gryffindor chasers are using the opportunity to score a frankly ridiculous amount of goals - can you even do that, just hover there and pass it back and forth? The Slytherin team is still occupied with trying to stop Harry from going wherever he's going, though it's unclear if he even has any idea where the golden eggball is anymore - he's still looking determined and is crouched low over his broom, though, so he might actually still be after it.

"At this point, Harry, you should really let the Slytherin seeker get the egg as a consolation of sorts - Gryffindor is now literally ahead by two-hundred and seventy points and counting- Oh, it looks like the Slytherins just noticed that Harry has been faking it the entire time in order to give his team's chasers this very opportunity! Too late, guys, even if you catch the golden egg now, you lose.

And Harry's gone into another dive just as the Slytherin team scatters, heading back to their
places! He's rapidly approaching the ground, it looks like an extremely powerful tractor beam's got him. He's pulling up right before impact, pointing his broom almost straight up- he's- Harry is jumping from his broom! His hand is outstretched, he's in the air and his momentum is almost gone- he's pulled his hand in, WHAT DOES IT MEAN!? He's hit the ground now, a picture perfect execution of the classic cannonball, someone ought to remind him that's supposed to be done in water only- IT'S THE GOLDEN EGG, HE'S GOT THE- sorry, Professor, yes, I know it's the snitch.

"Harry has caught the snitch and Gryffindor wins, four hundred and seventy to a pitiful thirty points! HA! Oh, man, that was great. Nice flying, Harry. Great game of catch, Katie, Alicia, and Angelina. Fantastic game of Protect Harry and Break the Slytherins’ Noses With Bludgers, Gred and Forge. Incredible keeping, Wood. Just a wonderful job all around, everyone, give yourselves a pat on the back.

"Up next, an interview with the dreadfully ashamed Slytherin Quidditch team- wait, Professor, I'm not finished- no, I don't want- no, no, no, noooooooooooooooooo-"

AN: What an inspiring Egg Hunt, just absolutely heartwarming. Truly a tale worth telling to the grandkids. If you enjoyed reading this chapter, please review! Thank you for your continued existence, and high five, readers. High five.
Chapter Fifteen - Digging For Gold In A Deep, Dark Hole

Two boys walked into the shop, one with unruly black hair, the other with yellow-blond hair that stuck straight up in a startling defiance of normalcy. He watched with detached curiosity as they approached, trying not to seem like he was listening to what they were saying. The black-haired one stepped up onto the stool beside him.

He readied himself. "Hello, Hogwarts too?" he asked, using the tone of voice for greeting strangers clearly below one's own stature.

"There are two Hogwarts?" said the spiky-haired boy loudly - far louder than was proper for speaking inside. The boy continued talking, oblivious to his lack of manners. "Professor McGonagall never mentioned that - I guess I'm going to Hogwarts One, then."

"Did he purposefully misconstrue my words?"

The black-haired boy responded with a smile. "I think he meant also, not the number two."

"You think so? He shook his head, clearing his thoughts. What comes next, I said hello, now... "My father's next door buying my books and mother's up the street looking at wands." He was using his effortlessly superior voice, now. "Then I'm going to drag them off to look at racing brooms. I don't see why-"

"Oh, you mean the Nimbus 2000?" asked the spiky-haired boy, interrupting him.

"Was he brought up in the woods?"

The boy went on to say how one of the Hogwarts professors has explained to him about flying brooms. Ah, muggleborn. That explains it. Being brought up in the woods would have been better. "So you're a muggleborn, then," he said, putting on his best grimace. Then he turned to the other boy, sticking out his chin. "What about you?" If he's also muggleborn I'm going to have to get out of this place this instant.

"I grew up with muggles, but my parents were wizards, if that's what you mean," said the boy tentatively.

"That's the strangest thing I've ever heard. Father would be disgusted to hear of such a thing. What would he have me say?" Well why'd you do a stupid thing like living with muggles if you have wizarding parents?" he asked the boy.

The boy's face hardened. "My parents are dead."

"Whoops. Sorry. No, I can't show that I made a mistake. No emotion; it's not my tragedy. "Oh,
"Sorry," he said instead, hoping he didn't look nearly as sorry as he felt.

"You don't sound very sorry," said the spiky-haired muggleborn. He raised an eyebrow like he thought it meant something.

You're not supposed to call me out on in, don't you know anything? And what's with his accent - it's American by the sound of it. I'd better go in that direction, don't want to have him questioning me, I'm supposed to be the one asking questions. "What's an American doing here anyway, aren't there any wizarding schools in your country that'll accept a muggleborn?" Should I have said mudblood there? But he doesn't even know what that means, does he, if he's only just got his letter. I wish I'd paid more attention to Father's lessons.

"I have absolutely no idea, but there seems to be at least one in Britain, so here I am."

That makes sense. What now? I haven't been showing enough derision, have I - I can't let him think muggleborns are equal. He gave a snort of contempt. It seemed appropriate. "I hope they don't sort any muggleborns into Slytherin - that's where I'm hoping to go, and all the Malfoys were there when they were in Hogwarts, so it's bound to happen. What are your surnames?" There. Established the hierarchy, mentioned my family, and asked their names. That's everything, Father. Now to see where this black-haired boy stands.

"Sir Calvin," the spiky-haired boy said quickly with a blank expression.

What? Is he making a joke? Or making fun of me?

The messy-haired boy smiled again and answered patiently, explaining what a surname was.

Why doesn't he get angry with him? He doesn't have to pretend to be nice, the boy's a muggleborn, and this one's apparently wizard-born. Doesn't everyone know what that means?

"Mine's Potter," the boy said, turning to him.

Potter? He's probably Harry Potter, right? Father told me what to do if I were to meet the Boy Who Lived. But...this boy seems too nice. If I demand his friendship like that, as an ultimatum, he'll surely reject it - he seems to be friendly with the other boy, and I doubt he'll drop it so suddenly, even if the boy's a muggleborn. He seems not to know any better.

"What about you, then?" he asked the spiky-haired one, who had somehow become fast friends with the most famous person in the wizarding world.

The boy gave a slight shrug. "Oh, I'm too much of an individual to have a family name."

Um, what? "What's that supposed to mean? Everyone has a family name!" Your family name is the most important thing in determining where you stand on the pyramid of influence, how can he be making jokes about it? Does he not respect his family? I thought I was the only one.

"So you said you're probably going to Slytherin?" asked the boy, brushing past his righteous indignation. "Professor McGonagall mentioned that I'd for sure end up in Gryffindor. How many houses are there?"

It doesn't seem like he's trying to be rude, but he can't actually be this...what's the word? Ah, who cares. Do I answer him? It would showcase my education from home, so that would shine a favorable light on my family.

"Four in total. Slytherin, Ravenclaw, Gryffindor, and Hufflepuff. I think I'd leave if I were in
Hufflepuff, don't you?" That line doesn't really make much sense here, Father, why did I have to include it? The two boys didn't seem to understand. That's right, if he really is Harry Potter he wouldn't know anything about the wizarding world. Father says that's one of the stupidest decisions Dumbledore ever made. So I guess it's not Potter's fault.

"Sounds like a brand of marshmallow. What's the difference between all the houses, anyways?" asked 'Sir Calvin.'

That was actually funny. Hufflepuffs rather are like marshmallows, according to Father - simple and bland. Now, to answer the question. Father's answer won't really give them much information, but he said it was the truth...here it goes...

"Well, Slytherin's the best, obviously, then there's Ravenclaw, where all the book nerds go, then Gryffindor, for the stu-" Wait, I don't want to insult him personally, he said he was probably going to be in Gryffindor. Though Gryffindor's are stupid, this boy seems to be harmless. Plus, if I want to end up with some connection to Potter, I'd better not insult his friends. "For all the rash people, and Hufflepuff for the nobodies." Rash is okay, right? He does seem extremely rash, he won't take it badly, will he?

Potter furrowed his brow. "Doesn't really seem like a valid sorting system to me," he said. "I mean, what if you've got a rash book nerd? Or a rash nobody? And what does 'best' mean? Is there an objective best, or do the teachers decide?"

Heh, I thought the same things when Father explained it to me. I can't tell them that, though. I have to 'reaffirm my superiority' as Father would say, inserting it in every exchange, so they can't forget. How to do that here? Their ignorance, I guess.

He rolled his eyes, as if thoroughly annoyed at having to explain it. "Nobody decides, the sorting hat sorts everybody into their rightful house." This is weird. Why can't I just tell them like a normal person? One of them's even wizard-born - he's the Boy Who Lived for Merlin's sake! Father says the most important thing to accomplish during my time at Hogwarts is making connections, but wouldn't that be easier if I acted nicer towards people?

"How does it know which house is their rightful house?" asked the Potter boy.

The spiky-haired one shrugged. He seemed to do that a lot. "Magic," he replied.

'He's caught on pretty quickly. This calls for a patronizing nod of agreement. "Exactly."

"All right, you're done here," said the witch who was working on his robes, stepping back.

'Thank goodness, this is nerve-wracking, keeping up this act. How does father expect me to do it the entire year? How does he do it all the time?"

But all he said was, "Well, I'll see you two at Hogwarts, I suppose." He stepped off the stool and stretched. Staying in the same position for so long made his back stiff.

"Not if we see you first," answered the spiky-haired boy right away, taking his place on the stool.

"I'm...not really sure it works that way." This boy is strange. But...different. Not necessarily a bad strange? I'm not sure. "What's your name, anyway?"

"Calvin," the strange boy replied. "It's like Sir Calvin, but without the Sir."

He talks so freely, like he doesn't even think about the words he uses. Like he doesn't worry about
how to say anything. How does he do that? Oh, now I have to tell him my full name.

"My name's Draco, Draco Malfoy."

Calvin's face did a funny twist of sadness. "Noo, he said, as if watching his favorite broom being tossed in the fireplace as a punishment for embarrassing the family name at a dinner party. "You have to say your last name first! It's 'The name's Malfoy. Draco Malfoy.' Much more impressive that way."

It does sound better, actually, but why is he telling me that? Okay, I should leave now, father's probably waiting. How do I say goodbye? I have to let him know how weird I find him, otherwise he'll think this is normal for me, which it isn't. But I don't want to be to insulting. Should I try to make it funny?

"...Right. Anyways, I have to go take care of my sanity, or at least what's left of it after this conversation." Was that good? He doesn't look insulted. Would he try to hide it if he was? No, it was fine. Now I leave before I over think myself into a coma. "Be seeing you, Calvin, Potter." He nodded at them each, gaze resting for a moment on the messy-haired boy. He is most likely the Boy Who Lived. A lot...quieter, than I'd thought he would be. Doesn't seem too aware of his fame, either. It could be an act. In fact, that's exactly the thing to do if you're the most famous person in the wizarding world. Pretend to be humble, and quiet, even shy, until the time is right. He's good, I'll give him that. When he gets to Hogwarts I bet he'll drop the act here and there, when he needs to get his way.

He walked out of the shop, blinking in the bright sunlight.

"Draco, dear, there you are!" His mother hurried up to him, long blond hair spilling down her back. "I'm going to go meet up with a friend; your father's still picking up your books, so go in and help him out, will you? Mr. Ollivander said he has some wands that you should try out, so head over there afterwards." She bent down to plant a kiss on top of his head.

"Not here, mother!" he complained, pulling away. Still, he smiled as she pulled him back and succeeded in kissing his forehead. She never had agreed with father's views on what was acceptable in public and what was not.

"I'll see you in an hour or two, be good," she smiled warmly at him, her blue eyes sparkling.

"I will, mother," he mumbled. She straightened up and hurried away. She was always hurrying - not that she was in a rush, but simply because she didn't see any reason to move any slower. His mother was the one who had actually raised him, no matter the amount of time he'd spent in his father's lessons. She'd been the one to comfort him when father's impatience with his failures had brought him to tears. The one to praise him when his father scolded, to tuck him back into bed after an impromptu midnight lesson with father.

He watched her walk happily away, then turned to the bookstore at his left. Time for some quality father-son time.

The head of House Malfoy was standing imperiously by the counter as the clerk counted out change. He turned as his son approached. "Something is on your mind," he stated.

Always straight to the point with you, isn't it. And after all those lessons, I still can't hide my bloody emotions from you. But yes, there is something on my mind.

"Father, is there any reason a sufficiently...odd, individual might pretend to be a muggleborn?" he
asked, expression neutral.

His father almost sneered, but kept it to a twitch of his thin lips. Somehow, the meaning was exactly the same. "They would have to be odd enough to have a permanent room in St. Mungo's to have made such a claim by their own will." His pale grey eyes stared dispassionately down at his son, evoking the familiar emotions of anxiety and tension. "Did you meet a muggleborn?"

The son thought for a moment. Did you? he asked himself. Did you meet a filthy, stupid animal, unworthy of magic? Did you meet the bane of wizarding kind? Did you meet the creature that must be eradicated and expelled from the wizarding world? Did you meet a muggleborn?

"No," Draco Malfoy finally answered. "Just a strange boy."

"Now, remember, Draco," his father told him, fingers gripping his shoulder like the claws of a dragon. "The Boy Who Lived. He is your main objective. Find him, introduce yourself to him, ingratiate yourself with him." Then his father crouched down and met him at eye-level. Behind him and to either side, Crabbe and Goyle senior stood stoically, hands on their wands inside their robes. Draco met his father's gaze. "But do not forget, you are of House Malfoy. He is not above you. Remind him of this. Make him a friend, but do not let him think you are on the same level, regardless of who he is. Because what is a friend-" He paused.

"-but a willing tool," finished Draco obediently. "Yes, father, I know." He wiped his hands along the sides of his pants, but the sweat was only spread around.

"Make your family proud, Draco," his father told him, holding his eye.

"I will."

He turned to his mother, who hugged him tightly. He felt wetness on his cheek as she her face against him. When he was released, he nodded to his father, then bid his trunk follow him and headed towards the pillar.

'Make your family proud, Draco.' As if the family is some collective being that feeds on my success. Well, it is, in a way. It's never 'make us proud,' or even 'make me proud.' Always the family. The Malfoy name is a vault, and the contents are connections and favors and pride and a good image, and we all work towards filling it every day. Nothing I do is for me. Not for me, not for my parents, definitely not for anyone else, Merlin forbid. All for the family. The individuals that make up the family, apparently, are not allowed to have lives of their own.

We were born into the deep, dark pit of the Malfoy name, and our lives are spent digging, making it deeper and deeper, never looking up. So maybe there is gold in the pit. Maybe we dig because the gold takes work to uncover. But the more time we spend looking for gold, the deeper we dig, the less of a chance there is of ever climbing out.

He glanced to his left and right. At some point during his walk from outside the pillar to the Hogwarts Express, Vincent and Gregory had taken up positions at his side, slightly behind him. Crabbe and Goyle. Just like his father.

As if an eleven-year-old going to Hogwarts needs bodyguards. If father thought there was a chance of something happening to me, he most likely wouldn't be sending me. And if there was, and he did, it wouldn't be with only the protection of two other eleven-year-olds. Draco eyed his companions. No matter how large.
"You guys can walk next to me, you know. I hate it when people read over my shoulder, and this isn't much different." The two looked at each other, unsure if that was an order or not. "Walk next to me," he sighed. They inched closer, but were still noticeably behind him.

They were probably instructed on how to 'guard' me, and won't take my orders over their fathers'. I'll have to get used to it.

They found an empty compartment and stored their luggage. Goyle went off to buy some drinks for them. Crabbe stood in the entrance to the compartment, facing the closed door.

"You can sit down, Crabbe," Draco told the wide-set boy.

Crabbe turned his head a fraction. "Uh, Greg isn't here, so I thought obstructing the sole entrance would be the optimal use of our depleted forces."

Greg? I guess they use first names with each other. "Do you even know what that means?" questioned Draco, raising both eyebrows.

Crabbe turned to stare ahead. "Block the door."

Huh. I suppose the fact that they didn't take lessons from my father doesn't mean they didn't take lessons at all.

"There's a window, too, though," said Draco, rapping his knuckles against the glass.

"Oh," replied Crabbe, looking at the window and frowning.

It would be too much for them to actually think before blindly following the first course of action that goes through their heads, I guess.

Draco sighed again. "Don't worry about it, it's too far up for anyone to get into anyway." Crabbe didn't look convinced, but he didn't move from his spot in front of the door.

When Goyle returned they all sat down to drink, though Draco was forced to sit between them for 'optimal protection.' The train started to move soon after.

Draco watched the scenery fly past with increasing speed, and felt something within him lighten - both in terms of fleeing darkness and weight being cast off. He was, for pretty much the first time, out from under his father's eyes. Sure, he'd have to owl his father with 'updates' to report on the goings-on at Hogwarts, but that wasn't the same as being there in person, having to sit through another lecture on how he'd messed up, or how he had been perfect 'but not perfect enough.' Whatever that meant. 'Everyone should strive for perfection, Draco. But the Malfoys are not everyone. A Malfoy must try for beyond perfection, so that perfection will surely be within his grasp.' Blahdy blahdy blah, superiority, noble House, ancient, blahdy blah image, representing the Malfoy name, blahdy blahdy blah.

Oh look, a mountain. And what's this? I can look at it without hearing anything about how it's height and majesty are a metaphor for our family? This is certainly a first.

An hour or so later, they were visited by the trolley lady and her trolley of endless food. Malfoy bought one or two sweets his father had never let him try. Crabbe bought two entire cakes. Goyle bought thirty bottles of a shimmering drink called Taebelo's Taste-Testing Solution.

As Draco was chewing his way through a ridiculously, impossibly chewy orange disk, the compartment door rattled. Crabbe had locked it, of course. It rattled some more.
"You'll have to knock," Draco called. "Only civilized persons are allowed in." He glanced at Goyle, who was slurping loudly. "Make that no more than one uncivilized persons at a time."

"Or you could just open the door," whined a nasal voice from outside.

Oh no. Draco swallowed and gestured for Crabbe to unlock it. When the large boy had done so, the door slid open. Draco managed a strained smile. "Hello, Pansy."

"You didn't tell me where you'd be sitting, how was I supposed to find you!" the blond girl complained, hands on her hips.

You weren't. "My apologies, Ms. Parkinson. It must have slipped my mind."

"Now I have to go tell everyone I found you, so wait right here," she scolded. Then she pivoted and walked out, turning to the left.

Draco motion to Crabbe, who stuck his head out into the aisle. After a few moment, he looked at Draco and said, "Line of sight is no longer intact."

"Right, get your trunk," snapped Draco. "We're moving compartments."

They chose a compartment two cars away.

"Our compartment's empty now, two cars up, second one on the left," Draco told the four occupants.

"You just want to switch?" asked the tall girl on the left, closest to the door. She looked to be about fourth-year.

"Yes."

"Why?" asked her friend.

Draco looked at her innocently. "No reason, just a change of scenery." The occupants shared a glance, but in the end agreed to switch, and pulled their things. It was clear that they thought this was a scheme of the heir of the House of Malfoy, and that they didn't want to get caught obstructing it. "Oh, and if a first-year with a face like a used dinner plate and limp blond hair asks you any questions, tell her that Draco Malfoy was sucked inside a genie bottle that you then traded to someone for a Pumpkin Pasty."

They settled their things up on the racks, then sat in silence. For a few minutes, anyway.

"Harry Potter wrestled with a dragon at Gringotts," said Goyle, draining his twelfth drink. He licked his lips and peered into the bottle with one eye, as if looking for a secret well of extra drink at the bottom.

"What?" said Draco sceptically. "Who did you hear that from? And when?"

"Someone," the solid boy replied, upturning the bottle over his open mouth and waiting for the last drops to fall. "At the platform."

"How helpful," said Draco, sarcasm baked into every syllable. "Did you happen to hear where he is on the train, or is that information too relevant?"

Goyle was busy tapping the back of the bottle in order to coax out the last drops, so Draco got up and told them they were going to find Harry Potter. After asking around, they found that they were
not the only one's searching for the Boy Who Lived. They were told that their best bet was to find 'Stupendous Man,' who was apparently at the back of the train.

Alright, here we go. Don't think too much, Draco, just follow instructions. He'd decided that if his father thought the best way to 'become friends' with the Boy Who Lived was by acting a certain way, then that was the way he was going to act. He didn't much experience with making friends, or even acquaintances, but his father did. He would trust his lessons for now. Think superior thoughts, Draco. You are a Malfoy. They are nothing. You are a Malfoy. They are nothing. They are pieces on a game board, and you will move them as you have been taught. It didn't quite feel right, but again - he didn't have much experience with these sorts of things.

Pretend you are only now certain that he is the Boy Who Lived. But it doesn't matter. The Boy Who Lived is below you. Put him on the spot, put him off balance - mention the dragon-wrestling rumor. Crack his armor, break his mask, force him to reveal the true him. Then prove you are above the true him.

Draco took a deep breath, steeled himself, then slipped into his role as the haughty heir of House Malfoy. He slid back the compartment door.

"Mo?"

Back in his compartment, Draco fumed. He wasn't sure who he was angry at - himself? Father? Calvin? The spiky-haired boy had completely thrown him off his track; Draco simply couldn't hold his act when talking to him. When he'd tried slipping back into character, to deliver a father-written line to the Weasley, Calvin had interrupted him again. And Draco hadn't gotten angry. It was more confusing than aggravating, and even a little bit amusing. Mostly confusing, though.

And that girl - he hadn't even found out who she was before he'd started treating her like an equal! Of course, almost no one was an equal to a Malfoy, but she might even have been a muggleborn for all he knew! No, not a muggleborn, she was far too composed and civilized. Still, she could have been from any number of pureblood or even non-pureblood families that ranked far, far lower than an Ancient House like the Malfoys. Likely she wasn't a pureblood, otherwise he was sure he would have recognized her.

The Weasley was, well, a Weasley, but it's not as if he annoyed Malfoy more than Calvin, who somehow managed to do it without being annoying himself.

The end result of it all was: he'd failed. No, that wasn't right. He'd done everything he'd been instructed to do. What had failed were his tools. The lessons that had prepared him for this had failed. Father's lessons. The lessons hadn't been enough. Who knew it would be so difficult? People were strange, and they didn't move like pieces on a gameboard. Sometimes they jumped backwards even though the rules dictated that only forward movement was allowed. Sometimes they ventured off the board, where rules did not hold. Sometimes they switched teams halfway through the game. It was completely baffling.

Draco groaned and laid his head against the window, watching the sun sink lower in the sky.

Why does it have to take so much effort just to act how I'm supposed to? If it's how I'm supposed to act, shouldn't it be easier?

With those thoughts, he nodded off to the rumble of the train, cheek pressed against the smooth glass of the window. Crabbe was staring at the door, bored. Goyle was finishing off the last of the
bottles of drink, and looking mournfully at the pile of empty ones that had collected at his feet. Half an hour passed.

A voice rang through the train, announcing that the train would arrive at Hogwarts in only five minutes. Draco struggled to blink the sleep out of his eyes, and looked at himself in the reflection of the window. He fixed his hair, then straightened his robes. He looked himself in the eye.

Why does it have to be so complicated? He'd dreamed about his questions. They'd written themselves out in the air all around him, then tied him up and left him helpless. All right, Draco. Just get through the Sorting and you can face this in the morning.

"Malfoy, Draco!" called Professor, McGonagall.

Draco set his shoulders and walked calmly up to the stool. I'm calm, I'm calm, I'm calm, I'm so calm, there's never been anyone more calm than I am right now, I am as calm as a very calm thing being very calm. Yes, that's a good one, Draco, you're certainly at the top of your game today. Shut up, me. Hrgh.

He took a deep breath and put on the hat.

'I need to be in Slytherin.'

'Are you sure? I see more than a hint of-’ The voice in his head cut off as his thoughts trampled its words.

'Slytherin. It has to be Slytherin.'

'You are lying to yourself, boy.'

'That I need to be in Slytherin is no lie.'

'You know what I mean.'

'And you know I have to be in Slytherin.'

The hat seemed to sigh. 'Very well. Watch yourself, Draco Malfoy - no one wants what's best for you but you in-'

"SLYtherIN!" yelled the hat, and Draco felt some tension melt away. But it didn't completely thaw, and the cold fist of apprehension still had a death grip on his insides.

That was the right choice, he told himself as he headed over to the Slytherin table. Whatever is happening, I can deal with it, now that I'm here. This is where I'm supposed to be. His earlier thoughts echoed in his head. No, this will be easier. This is how it has to happen, this is where I belong. He turned his head to catch sight of the Gryffindors, who now included Calvin and the bushy-haired girl he'd met on the train.

I have nothing in common with them. This is my place. Slytherin is my house. I just have to keep acting like it now.

The first week of classes went by slowly. Draco kept his head down, and didn't invite attention, but that didn't mean attention didn't come his way. His father's first letter had turned his thoughts into a
tornado, and the icy fist of apprehension had turned into a veritable glacier of indecision. He avoided the Gryffindors as much as he could, but the thursday Potions session was a double-up with them. Draco wasn't sure why he was avoiding Calvin, Potter, and the other two. But he was sure that he wanted to keep doing so.

He sat quietly through the class as Calvin, again and again, challenged Snape, losing more and more points for his house, and ultimately earning himself a detention.

*Did he just sacrifice forty-five points and get himself detention on the first weekend at Hogwarts...to defend Potter? They've only known each other less than a week - I doubt they saw each other between Diagon Alley and Platform Nine-and-three-quarters. Can he really be worth that much? I mean, he is the Boy Who Lived, but it didn't seem like Calvin would care all that much about a thing like that.*

Draco tried to remember his father's words. 'If there is no apparent reason for someone to be doing something, there is obviously still a reason. You either do not know enough about the person or situation, or the person is purposefully hiding their motives. Often, it is both.' Calvin seemed like a straightforward person, if rather strange. So it seemed like he knew all he needed to about him - unless he was hiding his true self, just like Potter. Either way, that pointed to the second option. *So what's his game?*

The question followed Draco for an entire week, until his next encounter with its origins.

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Pansy Parkinson - who had taken to following him around wherever he went, no matter what his objections - peeled herself away from him as soon as the by-now infamous, and the already-famous, Gryffindors stepped out onto the grass. Draco looked away, unwilling to witness the confrontation. Before long the girl walked back over to his side, face beet-red.

*Way to go, Calvin. What am I saying? No, wait, am I allowed to dislike Pansy more than them?*

Madam Hooch called for them all to line up by a broom, and chose one at the far end. When told to say 'Up,' his broom shook a bit before rising through the air to his palm. He wrapped his fingers around the smooth wood, frowning at the obvious disrepair of the broom.

*They should take better care of their equipment.*

"We are waiting for you, Mr. Calvin!"

Draco looked up, then down the row of brooms. Calvin was standing next to his broom, back hunched, both arms stretched towards the sky, fingers curled. The spiky-haired boy cleared his throat, then said, "Rise, my faithful servant, and carry me to the heavens! UP!"

Apparently he'd done something right, because the broom blurred through the space between it and his hand and kept on going, pulling Calvin up into the air.

*What in the world does that, inherent magical ability? That proves he's not a muggleborn, right? So he's acting. He's playing a game. The words felt...wrong, somehow, even as he thought them. He pushed the wrongness away for the moment and watched as Calvin's broom suddenly dipped. He was yelling some nonsense throughout his flight.*

Everyone scattered as the falling broom and its passenger neared the ground at tremendous speed. Everyone except a certain round-faced Gryffindor who was rooted to the spot, eyes wide in fear. Draco winced at the resulting collision.
Madam Hooch ran over to the two boys; Calvin was getting to his feet, but didn't look like he could keep his balance for more than a few seconds. Neville, on the other hand, was lying on the grass and moaning in pain. The strict flying instructor instructed the rest of them to stay put on the ground while she took the two injured students to the Hospital Wing, threatening expulsion if disobeyed.

Something on the ground by his feet flashed, reflecting the sunlight. Draco crouched down and wrapped his hand around it - it was a small, round ball of glass, with swirling white mist contained within it.

"Oh, that's Neville's," a voice said.

Draco glanced up. It was Potter, looking at him from across the grass, hand held out expectantly.

"Should I just give it back? Can I do that? Neville's a Longbottom, they're purebloods - his grandmother's even on the Wizengamot. Sure, she usually opposes my father on almost all votes, but I shouldn't have undue prejudice against another pureblood, right? Well, except the Weasleys, according to father, but I think that's just because he has a personal vendetta against the Weasleys' father. What would the other Slytherins say? They shouldn't have too much of a problem with it, right? They look to me anyway, so if I say it needed to be done, they'll accept that.

"Can you toss it here? I'll give it back to him when I see him," said Potter.

I guess there's no harm in-

"Ha! Why in the world would Draco listen to you, Gryffindork?" whined Pansy Parkinson, face scrunched up in some crude perversion of laughter.

No. No, you idiot. No, now you've made this a confrontation. Now you've made it me against Potter. This was nothing, and now you've made it so that I can't give it to him without looking like I'm giving in to him. Why couldn't you have stayed quiet, Pansy? Why couldn't you have stayed quiet in the first place, Potter? Just wait to see what happens to the thing - what's it matter to you, anyway, it's not yours, and Longbottom's hardly your best friend. Currying favor with the purebloods in Gryffindor or something?

Draco looked around slowly. There's no way I can give it back now. Damn you, Parkinson. And you, Potter. He grit his teeth and turned back to the Boy Who Lived. "I can't do that, Potter." Now what, I'm supposed to be getting friendly with Potter, not making him my enemy. How the hell did Parkinson get into Slytherin with so little tact? Okay, calm down, Draco. How can you get the ball back to Potter? You can't fight him and lose, that's not an option. Fighting and winning wouldn't do much to help your actual cause either, not that you've been trying for that since you got here, though. It'll have to be indirect - I'll have Crabbe or Goyle- but no, he could never beat them in a fight. There's a chance...no, I can't risk that. They can, though.

He beckoned Goyle over. "Take this," he whispered. "Fly up and chuck it at the wall, but make it look like it could go over." The large boy nodded and climbed smoothly onto his broom.

I guess they can be useful. This is all I can give you, Potter. Take it or leave it. A failure would be Goyle's, not mine. Don't make me regret this, Potter.

Goyle loosed the glass orb from high in the sky, then began to quickly descend. Draco glanced to his right - it seemed the Boy Who Lived had made a decision.

The surprise Draco felt as Potter shot off after the ball was tempered by the sudden knowledge that
Goyle had thrown it too hard - it was going to go over the wall. Then it looked as if the orb entered a gust of strong wind. It began to drop steeply. Draco looked over at Goyle.

"Topspin," said Goyle simply.

Draco watched as Potter dove like a falcon, snatching the glass orb out of the air and leveling out just in time to avoid injury-inducing impact. He tumbled off the broom, and Draco let out a breath he hadn't even been aware he was holding. Nice one, Potter. Wait, so Potter's definitely putting on airs - he's clearly experienced at flying. So he is acting. Probably. Maybe. He could be. Argh, this is ridiculous, I should just ask him.

Just then a sharp, stern voice yelled loudly from Draco's left.

"HARRY POTTER!" Professor McGonagall stalked out across the grass "Come with me this instant!"

The student in question froze, then shakily made his way to Professor McGonagall. As Potter neared Draco, his mind buzzed like a disturbed beehive. What do I do, should I say something? He's probably going to get expelled now. It's my fault. My plan was overly complicated, it shouldn't have involved flying at all, it was too risky, what was I thinking?! I shouldn't-

And then the Boy Who Lived was stepping past him, and without barely thinking about it or even looking up at him, Draco breathed, "I'm sorry."

He wasn't sure Potter had heard him. He wasn't sure it mattered.

Should I not be guilty? Should I be more guilty than I am? Draco mechanically spooned porridge into his mouth. As he was chewing, he snuck a glance at the Gryffindor table. He's still here though, why is he still here - is he not being expelled, or are they just waiting until the weekend? Maybe Professor McGonagall had a fit of mercy and decided not to expel one of her own Gryffindors.

He doesn't look sad, he'd be sad if he was getting expelled, right? Maybe he's sad and he's just acting like it's all okay, to keep up appearances. No, his friends aren't sad either, and they can't all be acting. Can they? What if they're all acting? The girl, Granger, she's getting top marks so far, she must be smart enough to hold up an act, and Calvin's probably acting too, unless he isn't. Weasley, though, he's definitely not acting. He can't be. Man, why am I so unsure of everything?

Father, your lessons have done the opposite of what they were supposed to - instead of enabling me, they've crippled me. I can't rely on them for this, I need to go with my own thoughts. I should talk to them. But no, if Potter's getting expelled that won't work, just talking...

His view of the Boy Who Lived was blocked by the Weasley twins for a moment. A second later, he could practically see the ripple of rumor spread from where they stood, like a stone dropped in a still pond.

He told them he's getting expelled. Other people just heard it. It's for sure now. Stupid, stupid, stupid, why did you have to make him fly to get it back!? Could you have been any more stupid?

The whispers caught and spread, making their way across the Great Hall. Draco heard snippets from far-off conversations. Phrases like "-can't believe it-" and "-unheard off-" echoed around him.

I've done it. I've gotten the Boy Who Lived expelled on the second week of term.
Then the full rumor reached him.

He turned his his seat, catching a glimpse of Potter eating breakfast. He wasn't acting. I...I didn't get him expelled. I actually did him a favor. I didn't get him expelled. He realized something else. I can talk to him now, I can explain and then- no, he wouldn't believe me, what reason does he have to think I wouldn't be lying? It'll look like I'm only telling him because of how it ended up. Then who...

Draco was lucky; when the Gryffindors stood to leave, Calvin was still eating. Unfortunately, it seemed the Granger girl was being nice and waiting for him to finish. Draco didn't bother slipping into an act - he just stood up and walked over to the Gryffindor table, mentally crossing his fingers.

"I'd-" He stopped. Calvin was looking at him exactly the same way he'd looked at him the first two times they'd met. Why aren't you angry, I just almost got your friend expelled. "I'd like to talk with you." Just say yes and I can set the time and then get back to my table before they start wondering why it's taking so long for me to insult you.

"Calvin, you'll be late for Potions," said the Granger girl. Draco kept looking at Calvin, waiting for him to answer.

_He is angry, isn't he, he was just hiding it. He's been acting the whole time, just-

"Why me?" Calvin finally said.

Draco swallowed anxiously. _Just say no or yes already! _"I don't think the others would really be open to conversation after…"

"After you stole Neville's Remembrall and tried getting Harry expelled?" Granger was looking at him, clearly annoyed.

"You don't know what you're talking about, Granger!" he said sharply, glaring at the bushy-haired girl.

She turned back to her friend. "Calvin…"

_Go away and let him make his own decision._

Calvin waved a hand lazily. "I'll be fine - plus, I wonder what Snape will do when I walk into class late with his favorite Slytherin. I've gained too many points this week anyways."

_He's what? Nevermind, this is taking way too long, I have to wrap it up. Where to meet? The trophy room isn't patrolled by Filch at night, meeting there should be fine. _"No," said Draco, shaking his head. "I don't mean right now. Meet me tonight, in the trophy room. Eleven o'clock, got it? Only you." _He's not playing me, is he? Is he really him, or is he acting? _

Calvin nodded. Draco hurried back to the Slytherin table.

_This better have some positive effect on...on something._

"What were you doing over there, Draco?" whined Pansy, leaning over the table towards him as he sat down. "You took an awfully long time," she pouted.

_Ich. Why can't she find a hobby other than Follow-the-Malfoy._ "Potter didn't get expelled," he said to the girl, making sure to pitch his voice so that the rest of the people around him could hear if they wanted to. _Father's lessons do come in handy, though, in these situation. When working with
other Slytherins, at least. "So I challenged his friend to a wizard's duel, to show what happens when you mess with a Malfoy. A warning, of sorts. Tonight, eleven-fifteen, in the trophy room. We'll see how he handles a real fight." He gave his combination sneer/dark grin.

As he walked to Potions, his thoughts ran restless circles around his mind. I can't believe them - challenging him to a duel? Two first-years in their second week of school, in a wizard's duel? Right. This is just as idiotic, though. I really shouldn't be doing it. What if Calvin's acting? He'll give me away as soon as he can. No, I said I'd trust my own brain over father's lessons for this. I can do this.

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This was a terrible idea. He's going to talk afterwards, tell everyone. Father will hear about it, he always does. He'll disown me. I'll be put out on the streets. No, that's silly, that could never happen. But something else could. Why did I think I should do this?!

He paced along a hall a few minutes away from the trophy room, his overly large cloak trailing around his feet. At least it made him unrecognizable.

I can't go ahead with this. He's probably waiting in the trophy room with the rest of his Gryffindor friends - his friends! They would never let him just meet me here, not after yesterday. And Granger heard too, that was careless of me. There's no way she'll just keep quiet! They're all there waiting for me, maybe even with a teacher - no, if they told a teacher, they wouldn't also come themselves. All they had to do was tip off a teacher - they could have done it anonymously, even. So there's a teacher in the trophy room, and they know I'm supposed to show up at eleven o'clock.

Draco stopped pacing. I'm going back to my room. Nothing can happen then. Catastrophe averted. If I don't leave an opening, nothing-

No. That's father talking. Calvin said he'd meet me here alone. I decided to go through with this, and I will go through with this. I can run at the first sign of trouble, and without anyone catching me, I can't be incriminated if I can't be recognized.

Draco pulled up his hood and headed to the trophy room.

He found Calvin inside, alone. Supposedly. He could be acting…

Draco was so nervous he wasn't even paying attention to what either of them were saying, until Calvin started singing loudly.

"Shut up!" Is he actually that stupid? He can't be signalling someone like that, right? That's not a signal. "No one followed you here, right?" Of course he wouldn't tell me, if he was just acting! And if he's not but someone did follow him, he wouldn't know.

Calvin snorted. "They would have had a pretty hard time of it. Why are you hissing, anyways?"

"I'm not hissing!" Draco replied, simultaneously realizing that he was hissing. "Oh. That. Sorry." Any second now, someone going to come down the hallway, a teacher, the other Gryffindors...I shouldn't be doing this, this is dangerous.

"What's this all about, anyways?" asked Calvin. "And why'd you do that stealing-the-Remembrall-thing yesterday?"

No, I have chance to talk to him, I can explain myself here. "I didn't have a choice."

"Uh, yes, I'm pretty sure you did."
He's stalling, isn't he, just waiting for someone. "You don't understand."

"I would if you explained it to me."

Draco shut his eyes, leaning back until the hard stone wall greeted his shoulders. I need to leave. *Now. No, Draco, just tell him! Fine. Fine. Just say it. How to explain it all, though? "The things I said in Madam Malkins...those were things I was supposed to say."

"Supposed to say?"

Stop interrupting me! "Just listen!" He's definitely stalling. No, wait, he could just let me talk if that were the case. "They were things I was told to say. Like reading off a script."

"Why does someone tell you-"

*What is wrong with him! "Shut up! Shut up for a second and let me talk!"* he hissed. He felt his hands clench into fists. *One more time, and I'm leaving, this is ridiculous and he's probably just stalling.*

"You're hissing again," said Calvin matter-of-factly.

*I can't do this! "Agh! This isn't even worth it!"* Draco exclaimed, turning. "Forget all of this, I'm going to bed." *Great, good, get out of here, Draco, go back to your room, this really isn't worth it since he's probably acting anyway.*

His retreat was stopped when Calvin stepped out in front of him. "No, wait! Don't go, really, I just...I have a hard time not talking over people. I'm working on it, but it's still a problem."

*He sounds so...but no, he could easily be acting. This here is definitely him trying to stall me.* Draco kept walking. *Right?*

"Keep talking and I promise I'll listen. I won't interrupt you and I'll listen to everything you say."

That's exactly what he would tell me if he were just waiting for someone to come, and needed to stall me. That's exactly the type of thing he would say. He's stalling, I'm sure of it. *So why am I not leaving?*

"Draco, please." A voice should not have been able to sound so earnest.

*He's a good actor. A really good actor. He's acting. He's...just acting.*

"I'm sorry." He could here Calvin's voice crack, just a little.

*I...no, I can't. What if he's acting? I...*

He slowly turned to the other boy. *He can't be this good of an actor. It's real. It has to be. Right?*

Draco began to talk. He began by telling Calvin who he was, who he had to be. He continued by telling him why, and then what that meant practically. Throughout it all, though, his only thoughts were, *This is it, he's going to call out and Professor McGonagall will come around the corner. Right now, someone's going to come. He's still stalling. He's waiting for something. For someone. This was a horrible idea. If father finds out, I'm done, over, forever. Why am I still talking, I need to stop talking.*

But...I trust him. *Is that was this feeling is? When he said 'I'm sorry' with that voice, and I felt something change. Is that trust? Can you fake trust? Yes, of course you can act a certain way to*
get someone to trust you, father does it all the time. Is Calvin faking it? Is he acting? Is he stalling, waiting-

Footsteps sounded, echoing from far off, yet far closer than was safe.

Someone's coming. He tricked me. He was stalling. He was acting!

He whirled on Calvin, fear and anger warring for control over his face. "You."

The spiky-haired boy was showing him a bewildered expression. "Um, should we be running, or what?"

I knew it, he was acting! "Of course you wanted me to stay and talk, to buy time for someone to come and find the Heir of House Malfoy out of bed after hours."

"Draco, I have no ide-"

"Shut up!" How can he do this? Why would he act all that? But he did, and he played the game and he tried to trap me! How dare he! "I was talking to you, I was telling you things. Things I have never told anyone!" How could he!? I actually talked to him. I told him to come alone, and he said he would! He lied, of course he did! "You worthless sack of filth, I was going to trust you!"

Draco's voice was raw from whispering loudly, and held-back tears, and ice-cold fear. He shoved Calvin away from him. I was going to trust you! he screamed in his own head.

Pulling up his hood again, he started jogging away.

I need to- to get out of here. I can't go back the same way. I trusted him! He was acting! He was faking it all!

"Wait, Draco!" Calvin yelled after him. Not a chance. I trusted you! "Draco, I didn't tell anyone about the meeting!" The only other person I ever trusted was my mother, and I was going to trust you! You were acting!

Draco's vision blurred. I'm going to black out. What did he do to me, I didn't see- He realized tears were storming down his face. He mashed the sleeve of his robe against his eyes.

I was going to trust him...

He really was just acting. Just lying. His eyes kept blurring, all the way back to his dormitory. Father was right. He stumbled into bed, stormy face pressed against his pillow. He was right about everything. And sleep came. He was right.

AN: I felt this needed to be done. I hope you liked it. If you did, please review. Thank you for reading about a confused boy with an inner monologue longer than Rapunzel's hair. Sleep tight. Don't let your inner monologue keep you up all night.
Chapter Sixteen - Arresto Addendum

Calvin gave the letter to Hedwig and watched as she flew off. Soon she'd disappeared into the starry night, and he was left watching nothing in particular. It was later than it should have been, as he'd put off writing the letter for the entire weekend, which was par for the course for him, really. The only reason his homework ever got done on time was because the four of them usually did it together, with Hermione prodding them along.

Not that most of it was hard, exactly; Transfiguration essays were the worst, because they required lots of writing about very technical things. History of Magic essays, on the other hand, just required him to write about practically whatever he wanted - Professor Binns seemed to grade only the length of the essay, apparently. Probably. He couldn't be sure, because he never actually saw him grading them, but when he'd hand his work to Harry, who would then hand it in to Professor Binns, it would always come back with full marks.

Chars was what Calvin did in his spare time anyways, so he was constantly impressing Professor Flitwick with his proficiency in the subject. In that he was engaged in a friendly rivalry with Hermione, who of course constantly sought to be at the top of every class.

This rivalry was present in Transfiguration as well, which just came naturally to Calvin. He didn't think much of it, because to him it didn't seem like it was anything special: you imagine the thing, you get the thing. How? Magic, of course. The technical process wasn't of particular interest to him. He had more important questions.

"Is she a person who turns into a cat, or a cat who turns into a person?" he pondered aloud one time on their way out of the Transfiguration classroom. "There's no way to know!"

"Of course there is," replied Hermione, rolling her eyes. "Cat's can't turn into people. She's an animagus."

"Or is she a cat who is a homomagus?" said Calvin, raising a finger.

"How would she know how to act like a person if she were a cat, then?"

"Well she obviously knows how to act like a cat, and you're saying she's a person, so I don't see why it wouldn't work the other way around."

"Fine, but if Professor McGonagall is actually a cat, and not a person - I can't believe I just said that - then she wouldn't be able to do magic." The bushy-haired witch turned away, sure the conversation was finished.

"Or," said Calvin, smiling widely, "every animagus is really a homomagus, a very rare type of animal who can transmogrify into a human, and also use magic."
"That's absurd."

"Oh, but people turning into cats isn't? You know what, I bet you she can't use magic in her cat form."

"Yes, animagi are unable to use magic while in their animal form, that's true."

"Or, homomagi are only able to use magic in their human form! Wait, what if all animals, or at least a portion, are actually wizards! Except that only the few of them that have the ability to be homomagi can use the magic, because it's only accessible to humans?"

Hermione just shook her head.

Ron, however, had his mouth hanging open. "Woah. That could be true, mate. We'd never know."

"Um, but don't they have parents? You know, human parents?" asked Harry.

"If the Ministry wanted to keep it a secret, they'd memory charm every homomagi and then do the same to a wizard couple," explained Ron, eyes widening further. "There's no way to know."

Such conversations were frequent where Calvin was involved.

The night air chilled him as he made his way back to the dormitory, leaving the owlery behind him.

Sheesh, can't they heat the halls or something? There's gotta be a spell for that, so why do they leave it cold? You know what, I bet Dumbledore's also into 'building character.' That's gotta be it.

"Hi-ho cherry-o," he told the Fat Lady. She swung open, revealing the moonlit common room, which was currently lit by another faint light source as well.

The chairs and couches were pushed up against the sides of the room. In the cleared space stood Harry, wand out in front of him, and in front of his wand shimmered a curved wall of barely visible white light.

The black-haired boy lowered his wand, and the light disappeared. Calvin saw Harry's silhouette shake itself and then bend its knees, balancing on the balls of its feet. The next second he was leaping to the side, rolling across the carpet, jumping to his feet, whisper-screaming, "Protego!" The shimmering white wall shot out of his wand to hang in front of him. Again Harry dismissed it. Again he crouched, sprang, rolled, jumped, saying, "Protego!"

Calvin watched without moving, not wanting to startle his friend. Minutes passed. Harry changed spells.

"Depulso!" The crumpled ball of parchment which he'd thrown in the air soared across the room. This was repeated many, many times, until Harry kneeled on the floor, panting. His wand dropped from his fingers. A moment later he reclaimed it and struggled to his feet.

"You're not going to stop this, are you," Calvin said, stepping further into the room.

Harry whipped around and brought his wand up in an instant. Then he stumbled, and his hand went to his head. Calvin hurried over to help him to one of the armchairs that now rested along the wall by the fireplace.

"I don't know if you guys have forgotten," said Harry seriously, putting his wand down next to
him. "But for all we know, Voldemort could be coming back." He held his head in his hands, shoulder blades pointing towards the ceiling. "If we don't stop Snape, then the man who killed my parents, who tried to kill me - the man who terrorized all of wizarding Britain and took countless lives - will return. This goes beyond trolls, Calvin."

*I'm an idiot, of course he's taking it so seriously, he has a personal history with the guy! Calvin berated himself. I can't tell him to not train at night. First of all, extra training is just a smart thing to do, and secondly he would never listen to me. He'd probably take offense that I'd be trying to stop him, which is reasonable, as there's no logical reason for him to stop besides 'You'll be tired, and maybe not do so well in classes,' which withers under the shadow of impending Dark-Lord-resurrection.*

So Calvin sat down across from his friend, and said, "How can I help."

Harry blinked at him. "You- you're not going to tell me to forget about it, that I shouldn't be up this late?"

"Nope," replied Calvin, smiling lightly.

"Oh. I was ready to give a whole talk about being able to defend ourselves, not just against the chance of Voldemort's return, but against any hazard, and how Hogwarts doesn't seem to be all that safe, and being prepared is always good, and...well, anyway. Thanks."

"So, what other spells have you been practicing?"

Harry picked up his wand. "Protego, mostly. I figured an all-purpose defensive spell would be the most singularly useful thing I could learn right now. Then I thought about the troll, and how you and Hermione used the Summoning Charm as an attack. It made me realize that what's really amazing about magic is its versatility. So I decided to learn some spells that aren't for anything specific, unlike stunners or shielding charms, and then I could use them in different ways."

He stood up, catching himself as he began to stumble. Once steady, he walked to the middle of the room, where a few crumpled balls of parchment littered the carpet. "Depulso is the opposite of the Summoning Charm - it repels things. But it's not an object-specific spell like Accio; more of a beam that affects whatever it's pointed at, like the Hovering Charm." Harry picked up one of the balls of parchment. He tossed it to Calvin. "Throw that at me."

Calvin looked down at the ball of parchment. Then he lobbed it casually over his shoulder and grabbed a book from the table to his left. "I saw you repelling those. Let's see how you do with something heavier."

"Uh, I haven't practiced with any."

"I know, but if you only practice things you know you can do, you're not really stretching your limits, are you. Ready?" He grinned and hefted the book. Harry gulped. "Ghost runners on first and fifth," said Calvin, looking left, then right. "Bottom of the thirteenth. It's seventy-two to seventy for the team at bat. Three runs will win the game. Any less means another chance for the other team to grab the win. The crowd is holding its breath. The pitcher winds up." Calvin windmilled his arm, lifting his back knee up high. "Fire in the hole!" he announced with a strong step forward, releasing his hold on the weighty textbook. It flew towards Harry, pages flapping.

"Depulso!" The book practically stopped in midair, moving ever so slightly back towards Calvin before dropping to the carpet with a muffled thump.
"Huh, it didn't get repelled." Calvin went to pick up the book. "I guess Depulso just exerts a certain amount of force in whatever direction you point it, so if the object is heavy enough or moving fast enough, it just cancels out? Can you control how much power you put into it?"

Harry slumped into the armchair again, wiping a hand across his forehead. "I've just been putting everything into it, but I think I'd be able to put less power into it, if I tried. Not right now, though, I'm drained."

"That reminds me of the spell Hermione showed me while we were in the Library finishing up my homework," said Calvin. "It was...arrest something, movement, or momentum. That was it, arresting momentum! It just stops things from moving, takes away all their momentum." He dropped the textbook onto the table. "Depulso can do that by pushing in the opposite direction just as hard as the object is pushing, but the momentum spell just takes away all momentum, no matter what. Or it could just be redirecting the momentum to push in the opposite direct, I guess, canceling it out.

"Wait, no, if it took away the momentum and made it push in the opposite direction, it would travel in the opposite direction just as fast as it was traveling in the first place." Calvin frowned. "Maybe it sort of, copies the momentum? And then applies it in the opposite direction?"

"It would look the same either way, though," said Harry, rubbing at his eyes.

"Right, but if it is taking away the momentum, where does it go? I mean, I know magic can somehow make it look like things appear and disappear, like with Aguamenti, and the Vanishing Spell. But the Vanishing Spell can't just be erasing them from existence, that doesn't converse matter or whatever - so it must just be putting them somewhere. They still exist, so there's probably a spell to call them back too!"

"You think the same thing would work for the momentum spell?"

Calvin nodded excitedly. "That's exactly what I was thinking - if you take away the momentum, can you give it back? Can you store momentum? Can you use it on something else? Imagine being able to redistribute momentum. Say someone's running at you," he said, miming running. "You just take their momentum," he stopped moving. "And then give it back, but in the opposite direction!" He threw himself backwards, slamming onto the couch cushions beside Harry. "Or, you could take it away and then give it to, to a book or something! Have it hit the guy in the head! Normally that would take two different spells, and therefore more time and energy, but if you're just moving the momentum around, it would be way easier!"

Harry grunted. "Can we save the hypothesizing until we've had some sleep?"

"Man, what was the name of that spell. Arrest Momentum? No, it had some flair, like Arresti, or Arrestum." Calvin hopped up, and handed Harry the textbook. "Here, toss this up, I'm terrible at hitting my own pitches."

Harry shrugged and threw the book into the air in front of him.

"Arrestum Momentum!" The book reached the top of its arch, and then made its way back down to hit the carpeted floor. "Okay, that wasn't it. Arrestal? Arresto? That sounds like it, actually. Once more," he told Harry, handing him back the book, whose pages were not all that smooth by now. He decided not to tell Hermione about this. Harry threw the book. "Arresto Momentum!" The book hit the floor with nothing odd happening in the interim. "No, I definitely felt something that time. The spell just didn't take. One more time?" he said hopefully, smiling toothily at Harry.
"Last one." The exhausted black-haired boy tossed the book.

"...One more time?"

XXXxxxxXXXxxxXXX

"Mmphmrrk," mumbled Calvin, rolling over and gathering his blanket over his head. "Goway."

"You're going to miss the Ballyhoo Breakfast Radio Show," said Ron, nudging the near-comatose Calvin. "The twins'll bug you about it."

"Deyk'n dowaddey wan,'" he grumbled in response.

"What is it with you two?" asked Seamus, leaning over Harry's still-snoring form. He turned to Calvin. "You're not on the Quidditch team too now, are you?"

"There wasn't even any practice last night," said Ron, sighing. "They were probably having a crazy Calvin-inspired adventure or something late into the night. I told you to invite me the next time you do that," he told the hibernating Calvin. "You can't have all the fun to yourself."

"Mmyeah, get almos' eat'n by Fluffy ana troll an' then tell me that." Calvin burrowed deeper into his cover. "Now goway an' lemme sleep another five hours."

"I know I'm not really one to talk, but you should only need about eight hours of sleep, or at least that's what my mum says."

"Righ', so lemme sleep five more hours," answered Calvin, sitting up and pulling the curtains around his bed.

There was a second of silence as Ron understood what Calvin meant. "You only went to bed three hours ago?" sputtered Ron. He walked over to Harry. "What on earth were you doing?" he demanded of the sleeping boy.

"On'y wuh more," mumbled Harry, eyes twitching behind his lids.

Ron walked back to Calvin's bed and yanked open the curtains, but the spiky-haired boy was already dead to the world once more.

"Come on, we can cover for him," said Dean happily, sliding a pair of overlarge sunglasses onto his face. He pretended to hold a microphone in front of him. "Welcome to breakfast hour with the Hogwarts Ballyhoo Brigade, the source of absolutely everything interesting and even mildly exciting that happens within these walls! Today's schedule looks slightly similar to that of last week, but we're sure we can find some way to shake it up. I'll hand it over to Wonald now. Wonald, what's the weather wook wike?"

"Cloudy with a one-hundred-percent chance of something unpleasant in your bed tonight if you drag me into that madness," Ron said seriously, walking towards the door.

"That's an odd forecast," commented Seamus, following him out.

"And now for the menu musical!" shouted Dean, pulling the door closed behind him.

Silence reclaimed the dormitory. Both Calvin and Harry remained completely motionless, except for the rise and fall of their chests, for the next few hours. When they awoke, Harry found that he
had a terrible head-cold. Calvin helped him to the Hospital Wing.

"You are severely under-rested," Madam Pomfrey told Harry as he lay on one of the white-sheeted beds, head propped up with extra pillows. "You've been overworking yourself, plain and simple. I'm afraid you're going to have to sit out the next Quidditch match if this keeps up, young man," she said, hands on her hips. "As well as practices."

"No, I can-" Harry paused as a cough settled in his throat. "I'll be fine, I can't miss a game!" he protested insistently. "There's no one to replace me! We'll lose!"

The medi-witch looked down at him sternly. "Then I suggest you regain your strength quickly. No practices in the mean-time - we'll see how you're doing later this week. You," she added, turning to Calvin, "are not sick, and will be returning to classes this evening. Your head of House will hear about it if you don't."

"It's not your fault, Calvin," said Harry as the medi-witch walked away.

Calvin laughed. "No kidding, this would've happened eventually - you've been overworking yourself for weeks. I just happened to join you for your latest practice session."

"Well, you did extend the session by four or so hours," said Harry with a wry grin. "If I'd had the strength to get up from that couch, or a pair of earplugs, I'd have gone to sleep."

"Is there an earplug charm? One that just makes you unable to hear?" Calvin was tapping his wand absentmindedly against his knee.

"If you can take away momentum, I'm sure you can take away noise." The messy-haired boy snorted, then coughed a few times and breathed out hard to clear his nose. "Let me know when you find it, it will really come in handy when I'm back in the dormitory trying to block out Ron's snores."

"You can just use Arresto Snorum," chuckled Calvin. Then he cocked his head. "Wait, would Arresto Momentum make his lungs stop moving too? Does it stop all movement, or just in a singular direction, and the greatest of them? If it stopped all movement it should freeze things, because it would stop all the atoms from moving and bring it down to zero Kelvin. Hey, it reacts to gravity!"

"What?" Harry's brow was furrowed, and he was looking at Calvin with a distinctly confused expression.

Calvin gestured with his wand, pretending to draw a circle in the air. "The earth is spinning and moving through space simultaneously, but Arresto Momentum doesn't stop our movement in any of those respects - only our movement relative to the earth!"

"Well, yeah, if it stopped us from following the earth's movement we'd die."

"There goes my idea for stealing momentum from the earth using a momentum redistribution spell." Calvin stood up and began to pace. "There's got to be one, I just have to find the incantation."

"It's Latin, isn't it?" said Harry, shifting the pillows behind him and sitting up straighter. "The 'Momentum' will obviously stay the same, it's just the first part that needs to be changed. Arresto means to arrest, probably, as in to stop." He glanced at Calvin. "Do you happen to know the Latin for redistribute?"
"No, but there's got to be a Latin/English dictionary of some sort in the Library. I'll go find one," said Calvin, slipping his wand into his pocket and heading to the door of the Hospital Wing.

"You're supposed to be going to the next class though, right?"

"Our next class is History of Magic." Calvin grinned. "I'll be back with the dictionary as soon as I find it."

Madam Pince did not bother to hide her surprise when Calvin approached her desk to ask her about a Latin dictionary. He only ever took out what he called 'useful' books, as in, books with practicable magic, and books on magical creatures. There were over a dozen Latin dictionaries, and each seemed to be from a different time period. Calvin took the most modern-looking one, and with a promise not to set it on fire or damage it in any way, he headed back to the Hospital Wing.

As he walked, thoughts he had not been awake enough to notice came to his attention. This is serious. Harry is in the Hospital Wing right now because of the fear of Voldemort returning. Whether or not it's even possible doesn't matter any more. I need to do something.

"You found it?" asked Harry with a cough, propping himself up as Calvin walked into the silent room.

"Yeah, this one looked the newest, but there were a bunch of other ones too. I'm not sure what the differences are."

"Well, let's see it, then."

Calvin pulled a chair over and set up the large dictionary on the bed. "We want to redistribute the momentum." He flipped through the book to the R section. A minute passed in silence. "They don't have redistribute."

Harry looked up. "What about transfer?"

"That's actually a better word for it anyway. Alright." Pages crackled. "There are a lot of different translations for transfer."

"There's no way to know which one is used for the spell."

Calvin rubbed his hands together and smiled thinly. "We'll just have to go through all of them."

"Transporto Momentum!"

Calvin's shoe sailed through the air and bounced off of Harry's mattress, coming to a rest on the floor on the other side.

"Feel anything?" the messy-haired boy said, then brought his arm up to cough heavily into it.

Calvin shook his head.

"There's only one more: trafero."

"Well then, trafero it is! Give me my shoe, will you?"

Calvin caught his shoe and tossed it back out. "Trafero Momentum!" Bounce. "Popsicle sticks. It wasn't any of them."
"Want to try another word?"

"How about redirect?"

Harry turned back a handful of pages, then another handful. Then a single page. "Okay, the first one's redirect."

"Shoe."

Harry flung Calvin's shoe by the laces. Calvin bobbed it for a few seconds, then caught it. Then he tossed it forward again.

"Redigo Mo-"

"Mr. Calvin!" shouted a stern voice, immovable as a mountain, sharp as the edge of a glacier. The shoe bounced off Harry's mattress. Professor McGonagall stomped into the Hospital Wing. "You are supposed to be in class, not practicing spells that do not exist." She glanced at Harry, who had pulled the covers up to right below his eyes. "And definitely not disturbing students who are supposed to be resting."

"Professor McGonagall, what's the spell for redistributing momentum from one object to another?" asked Calvin, hopping over to retrieve his shoe.

"What?" The Scottish which looked more than slightly confused at the question. "Which class is this for?"

Calvin dropped onto Harry's bed and pulled on his shoe. "Oh, it's not for a class. I was just thinking that since Arresto Momentum takes away momentum, there's probably a spell that can use that momentum and give it to something else, but not by using the momentum taken by Arresto Momentum, just as a spell on its own, redistributing the momentum with a single spell. It would be able to work like Depulso on moving objects, in a way, but would be much more useful besides, probably wouldn't take nearly as much energy to cast, and can push the objects in any direction." He looked up at the stunned Transfiguration professor, tilting his head in innocent curiosity. "Is there a spell like that?"

Professor McGonagall clearly didn't know what to say. Her mouth hung slightly open as she shifted her gaze to Harry, who had pulled his covers completely over the top of his head. Then she turned back to Calvin. Her voice was low as she said, "You just described a spell used by Aurors and duelists. Traducto Momentum." She blinked. "Are you telling me that you can cast the two charms you mentioned?"

Calvin finished tying his shoe and jumped to his feet. "Well, Harry can do the Repelling Charm, and I spent all last night practicing Arresto Momentum. We figured out some useful stuff. Watch this - geronimo!" he yelled, taking a running leap over Harry's bed. Midair, he pointed his wand at his chest and said, "Arresto Momentum!" His flight ended prematurely, and he seemed to hang in the air for a split second before dropping onto the mattress below him, bouncing a few times.

"Did you have to land on my foot?" Harry exited his cocoon of covers and leaned forward to rub at his toes as Calvin slid off the bed.

"See? Now I can go skydiving without a parachute!" said Calvin, smiling widely. Then he wobbled slightly, and sat down hard on the mattress. "Woah. My magic's all wonky still from last night."

"Don't use your wand for the rest of the day," Professor McGonagall told him. "That goes for you as well, Mr. Potter." She shook her head in disbelief. "Two first-years magically exhausting
themselves practicing charms they haven't even been taught. If not for the part where one of you ended up in the Hospital Wing because of it, I would be telling you how very Ravenclaw that is. No," she said to Calvin as he attempted to get to his feet again. "You stay here too, I'll get Poppy to take a look at you."

She narrowed her eyes at both of them, frowning ever so slightly. "I expect the two of you to have more sense in the future, and not run yourselves ragged every time you practice a new spell?"

They both nodded.

"Professor McGonagall," started Calvin, looking thoughtful. "Can any student start a club?"

"It has to be approved by their head of House, but yes. What did you have in mind?" asked the green-clad witch, expression wary.

"A club for practicing and experimenting with new spells, ones that aren't taught in class."

Professor McGonagall was now the one looking thoughtful. "Normally such a thing would not be done, but I can see you two would be continuing on this track anyway, and better to do it in an official capacity. I will see if I can find a teacher willing to supervise such a club - and not every spell will be allowed. There will be a catalog of spells allowed to be practiced, and no transfiguration unless otherwise stated." She tapped her chin. "This could work." Her gaze hardened as Calvin's grin grew wild. "There's a chance. I will halt this project if you abuse it in any way, Mr. Calvin. This is not a dueling club, and no spells will be used upon another student's person, is that clear?"

Calvin nodded enthusiastically, his wild grin unchanged.

"Only the spells expressly allowed by the supervising teacher."

Calvin grinned wider and nodded.

"And do not attempt to use the Momentum Transference spell I mentioned, it's far too dangerous."

The same grin answered, accompanied by a generous nod.

"No experimenting with transfiguration under any circumstances," said the stern witch, eyeing him suspiciously.

He grinned. He nodded.

"No making up spells."

Grin and nod.

Professor McGonagall looked back and forth between Harry and Calvin, lips pursed. "I have your word that you will follow all of these instructions?"

They both grinned and nodded happily.

"And if a teacher tells you not to do something that even these rules allow, you listen to them."

There was more grinning. More nodding. Professor McGonagall was looking extremely uneasy.

"And...and no pranking of any kind."
More grins and nods. Her eyes flicked back and forth between them.

"Well. Good. I will let you know what is decided." She walked quickly out of the Hospital Wing with one last, vaguely fearful glance back over her shoulder.

Harry and Calvin burst into laughter, which led to another bout of coughing by Harry.

"Sometimes," wheezed Calvin, "being compliant can be a rebellion of its own."

"It's like she was just waiting for you to challenge her on one of those," chuckled Harry, grabbing a tissue from his bedside.

Madam Pomfrey hurried in a minute later, and ushered Calvin onto a bed of his own, where she made his swallow a sweet-smelling potion that tasted like liquid glitter that was supposed to help 'regenerate his magical reserves' or something technical like that.

Calvin returned to the common room alone that night, as Harry was still confined to the Hospital Wing with a bad cough and cold.

"What happened? Are you okay!?" exclaimed Hermione as Calvin climbed through the portrait hole into the common room.

"Is Harry still in the Hospital Wing?" said Ron.

Calvin stopped mid step. "What? How do you guys know we were in the Hospital Wing?"

"The Hospital Wing flyers said something mysterious had happened to you guys," Ron answered, unwrapping a piece of chocolate and popping it into his mouth.

Calvin laughed and dropped into an armchair. "Those things are still up? I thought Filch would've found them all by now, at least."

Hermione shook her head. "They're not the same ones you put up for when Harry was hurt. These are parchment, and you made yours out of printer paper. So other people must still be putting them up. There was one outside of the Great Hall that just had a list of all the anagrams of 'Hospital Wing.'"

"What, so piling?" asked Calvin nonchalantly, stretching.

Ron stared at him. "Uh, what?"

"Yes, that was one of them," giggled Hermione. Then her expression turned worried. "Is Harry okay?"

Calvin leaned forward. "You know how he's been rather tired lately?"

"It's like he's not getting enough sleep," said Hermione, nodding.

"I haven't noticed anything," said Ron, looking at them both. "What are you talking about?"

"Harry's been up late every night for weeks, practicing spells for self-defense," answered Calvin. Then he shrugged somewhat guiltily. "Last night I may have kept him up a bit later than usual, but it would've happened regardless. He's just got a cold now, and his magical reserves have been 'continuously stretched' according to Madam Pomfrey. Mine are 'completely exhausted,' which is exactly how I feel."
"Well why's he doing that? Quidditch practice would be more than enough for me, honestly," Ron said, licking melted chocolate off his fingertips.

"It's because he thinks about something other than his stomach, Ron," Hermione replied, rolling her eyes. "Remember when we were talking about what the Philosopher's Stone might do, and said that it might be able to bring back Voldemort? No wonder he's up every night, he's probably scared out of his mind!"

"Oh. Right, he killed Harry's parents. You talk to him, Hermione, tell him he doesn't need to worry about it, so he doesn't keep doing this."

Calvin shook his head grimly. "He won't stop just because you tell him. Not if nothing changes."

"Then something needs to change," said Hermione. "His class work's been suffering, and if it continues he might fail Transfiguration!"

"That's really what we should be focusing on in the face of what we were just talking about?" said Ron, raising both eyebrows.

Hermione's face flushed and she gestured helplessly. "Well, classes are still important, even if you don't take them seriously."

"I do take them seriously!" argued Ron. "Some of the time."

"Regardless, we need to help Harry somehow," said Hermione. She shot a dark glance at Ron. "It's not healthy, what he's doing."

"I'm with you there," the redhead answered. "Got any ideas?"

Calvin clasped his hands in front of him. "Ronald, if you had to describe these times, what word would you use?"

"You're not allowed to call me that."

"Would you perhaps use the word," Calvin grasped at the air, miming searching for something. "...Desperate?"

"I'd use the word 'bedtime,' actually."

"Did you hear that?" said Calvin suddenly, cupping a hand around his ear.

"Hear what?"

"I think it was the times."

"Great, you're spouting nonsense again."

"The desperate times. They're calling..." Calvin trailed off. "They're calling for something. What are they calling for, Ron? Do you know what desperate times call for?"

"Oh, Merlin, no," said Ron, covering his face with his hands.

Calvin stood up abruptly, and a thin slice of a smile carved itself across his face, faint and cruel. "Yes, Ron. Desperate times," he hissed with a dark sneer. "...call for desperate measures." He began to chuckle, a low chuckle starting deep in his chest, crawling up and out to sweep across the room."
"I'm going to bed." Ron scampered out of his chair and up the stairs to the dormitory.

"Calvin, please...don't do anything rash, okay?" pleaded Hermione.

The spiky-haired wizard just kept up with the deep chuckle, shoulders rumbling. "Hehehe, hahahaha, HAHAHAHAHAHA!" He coughed, then turned to face the rest of the people in the common room, all of whom were now staring at him. "CAPTAIN FINNIGAN, I REQUIRE YOUR ASSISTANCE! TO ME!" His voice crashed through the sudden silence, and an answering crash followed the echoes.

"I HEAR THE CALL OF DESTINY, AND I ANSWER!" Seamus marched quickly across the room, and everyone's eyes were upon him as he came to a stop before Calvin. He snapped his feet together and whipped his hand up in a salute. "WHAT IS IT YOU REQUIRE OF ME, OH BRIGADIER OF THE BALLYHOO BRIGADE?"

Calvin spun his wand and caught it with both hands, then pointed it at Seamus. "I NEED YOU," his voice rang out. "TO BLOW SOMETHING UP!"

By Tuesday, Harry was out of the Hospital Wing. By Wednesday, he was back to his nightly practices. Calvin joined him, but made sure they kept the practices short, and switched off casting. By Thursday Ron had decided to join them too. That practice went a bit later than they'd planned.

Friday's Potions class arrived, and Calvin set his plan in motion.

"Finished," he said brightly, handing his parchment containing immaculately written potions instructions to Professor Snape.

The Pharaoh of Fear glared at him and snatched the parchment from his fingers. His eyes whipped back and forth across the page. They glanced up at Calvin, and narrowed. "What do you think you are doing."

Calvin had to suppress a shiver as the Potion master's gaze met his own. He smiled. "Copying the potion instructions. This is Potions class, is it not?" he said, gesturing to the students behind him, all leaning over their cauldrons and chopping ingredients.

"This..." drawled Snape, glancing back down at the parchment in front of him. "It is adequate. You may join the class on today's assignment." His eyes drew a groove in the air as they rose to meet Calvin's. "You will not play around with a real potion as you have done with this," he said, icy words dropping from his pale lips to shatter upon the floor. "This is your only warning."

Calvin nodded and tried not to whimper. The Apotheon of Apathy looked out at the working students. Seamus was the only one not working with a partner. As planned.

"Weasley, you will join Finnigan at his fire. Boy," the potions master said, flicking a hand dismissively at Calvin. "You will work with Longbottom." He lowered his head and began scribbling checks and x's on the next paper in the stack to his left.

"Wha- Neville's here?" He craned his head round to catch a glimpse of the round faced boy rolling his eyes. "Can't I work with-"

"No." Snape's voice was emotionless, flat and without inflection. It left no room for argument.

Calvin walked over to Neville, thinking hard. *I needed to be partnered with Seamus, as he's the
only one who can definitely make a large enough explosion to warrant a detention. Snape would have blamed it on me, of course, if I were working at the same cauldron. Now how do I get detention without appearing like I'm trying to?

He arrived at the cauldron he was sharing with Neville, and looked around the room. At the back of the classroom he saw Draco hunched over his own cauldron, focusing intently.

"Hey Draaaaaaco," called Calvin. The blond-haired boy whirled around to glare at him. "It wasn't meeeeee," he sang. "I didn't doooooo it!" Draco's eyes smoldered with barely restrained rage. Calvin folded his arms theatrically. "You're being a giiiiiiiiiit!"

Draco turned shakily back to his cauldron. As Calvin watched, Draco leaned over to one of his first-year bodyguards. The hulking boy nodded curtly, then gathered up a few ingredients from the wooden board in front of them. He waited a moment while Draco dipped a glass vial into his cauldron and then capped it, handing it to the boy.

*Perfect*, Calvin thought to himself. *Now to let them sabotage our potion.* He surreptitiously poured a small container of black sludge into the cauldron, then swept a pile of finely chopped mushrooms onto the floor.

"Oh, Neville, it seems some of the mushrooms have fallen. Perhaps we should pick them up."

Neville looked over, then grimaced and fell to his knees, gathering the pieces. "Man, it was going so well, too. Now I have to cut up another one." Calvin joined him, scattering the pieces as he flailed his hands across the floor.

Behind them, Goyle made his way up to Snape's desk. As he passed their cauldron, he seemed to trip, and had to throw out a hand to catch himself against the desk. Then he found his balance, and lifted his hand up and over the cauldron, continuing on his way. Calvin smiled as he heard the contents of the cauldron begin to bubble. He tossed a piece of mushroom over his shoulder into it, and the bubbling increased.

"Oh, there's a few more over there!" he said, elbowing Neville and indicating some mushroom pieces about twenty feet away.

"What, how'd they get all the way over there," moaned Neville, stumbling to his feet and heading towards the wandering mushroom pieces. Calvin followed quickly, glancing back at the cauldron. Angry red steam flew to the ceiling in gradually darkening clouds.

"What have you done, boy," snapped Snape, pushing his chair back and standing up. He'd taken a single step around his desk when the smoking cauldron suddenly shot a geyser of blood-red potion into the air. The liquid steamed as it hit the ceiling, and the stones above it began to drip molten rock.

"Everyone vacate the classroom," commanded the Entity of Endless Suffering, pulling the collar of his teachers robes up to cover his mouth. The clouds of now-crimson smoke were spreading across the ceiling, and drops of melting ceiling were falling everywhere. Snape gave a deliberate wave of his wand. The glowing drops turned to pebbles as they fell through the air, pattering noisily off of cauldrons and desks.

Once the room was empty, the Potions master joined them in the hallway. "Detention with me this weekend, boy," he said, clearly furious. He didn't like having his class time interrupted. "And next class we will start you on a potion more suited to your lack of talent. Everyone else will redo their potions from today, whether or not you have handed it in. The room will take a few hours to clear
"But I'd already finished!" complained Hermione as the crowd of students dispersed. She narrowed her eyes at Calvin. "I suppose this was all according to plan?" she said huffily, shifting her bag on her shoulder.

Calvin smiled and skipped past her. "Yes, actually. Walk with me, Harry," he said to the black-haired boy as he passed him.

"You're not walking, you're skipping," Harry replied. "I don't skip."

"Even if we were going to see Mugwump Man?" questioned Calvin, turning and continuing to skip backwards.

"What's that got to do with it?"

"He's the epitome of what a wizard should look like."

"So?" he hurried to keep up with Calvin.

"And he's wonderful, wouldn't you say?"

"I guess so…"

Calvin skipped forward to meet Harry, and pivoted, hooking arms with him. "Then we're off!"

"To where?" asked Ron, brow furrowed.

"To see the wizard."

"Which wizard?"

"Not a witch, a wizard."

"The wonderful wizard?" said Harry, raising an eyebrow.

"Of course!"

"That's which wizard, exactly?" asked Ron.

"No, not the witch-wizard, the wonderful wizard!"

"Why's he called the wonderful wizard?"

Harry shrugged, a smile tugging at the corner of his mouth. "Because of the wonderful things he does."

"Doodedeedoodedeedoo!" sang Calvin happily, skipping off down the hall.

"So how does one go about seeing the Headmaster?"

They were wandering through the halls, asking students at random; nobody seemed to know the location of Dumbledore's office.

"This is hopeless," Harry said, leaning back against the wall and sliding to the floor.
Calvin looked around. "We need to find someone who's been there before."

"The main reason a student would have gone to the Headmaster's office is if they got in a lot of trouble," replied Hermione, frowning.

"A lot of trouble?" laughed a voice to their left. One of the- Fred stepped out from behind a suit of armor. "Us?"

"Why, I've never been so insulted," said a voice to their right. George walked up to them, shaking his head.

"We don't get in lots of trouble," Fred whispered conspiratorially, leaning down to eye level.

George approached from the other side and leaned in too. "We get in heaps of trouble," he whispered, expression serious as Professor McGonagall explaining to them the rules of transfiguration. He leaned closer. "Heaps."

"So you know where Mugwump Man's office is?" asked Calvin excitedly.

"That depends," said Fred, turning to the spiky-haired boy.

"It depends?"

George nodded solemnly. "Yes. Our knowledge of the location of the headmaster's office is conditional on your answers to one or more questions."

"Our question is this: why do you want to know?"

"Also: how many licks does it take to get to the center of a tootsie pop?"

"Also: what is a tootsie pop?"

Calvin grinned. "I'm preparing for my detention this weekend by asking Mugwump Man how much Snape knows about the Stone and what's guarding it, then I'm going to use that information to see if Snape really is after the Stone to resurrect Voldemort. If you use a drill, it takes approximately zero licks. A tootsie pop is a lollipop. No."

"No what?"

"That was the answer to your next question: am I kidding about Snape? The answer is no."

Fred's eyes widened. "You really think Snape is after the Stone? How do you know that the Stone can resurrect You-Know-Who?"

"We don't," shrugged Ron. "Hermione just mentioned a while ago that since we don't know what it does, we can't rule that out, and now they're running away with it."

"Hmm, either way, whatever Snape wants, we don't want him to get it." The twins nodded at each other. "Alright, we'll take you to Dumbledore's office."

The twins lead them through a number of corridors and up one flight of stairs, then into another hallway, bare except for a single gargoyle situated in the middle of the hallway, its back against the wall.

They walked down the hallway and stopped in front of the gargoyle.
Fred gestured with a flourish. "Here we are."

"The office of the great Albus Dumbledore," said George, smiling at the wall.

"Um, okay, but where is it?" said Ron.

"Ronniekins, you must look beyond what you see," scolded George.

"Beyond what I see? What in the world's that supposed to mean?"

Calvin jumped forward. "Ooo, it's a hidden entrance." He started feeling along the gargoyle's wing, searching for a lever of some sort.

"Five points to the house of Destiny!" said Fred. "Though you won't find the way in like that. It's password protected."

Calvin glanced at the redhead twin. "So what's the password?"

Fred shrugged helplessly. "No clue."

George started walking off, back the way they'd come. "Well, that was a nice walk, but we've got to get back to our work." He winked. "Wouldn't want to fall behind." The twins rounded the corner, whispering amongst themselves.

"I don't think they were talking about schoolwork," said Harry.

"Hacky-sack," said Calvin.

"What?"

The gargoyle failed to give any sort of indication that it had heard the correct password.

Calvin scuffed at the floor with his shoe. "Rats. I thought that would work. Anyone else know what the password might be?"

"Try 'knackered knick-knacks.'"

"What's that mean?" asked Calvin, turning around.

An old, tall wizard with a long flowing beard and half-moon spectacles smiled at him, eyes twinkling. "I suspect it means knick-knacks that are knackered," said Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts. And a bunch of other things.

Harry, Ron, and Hermione all gulped at the same time, and began to think of different ways to explain what they were doing.

Calvin didn't even blink. "I need to ask you how much Snape knows about the Stone and what's guarding it so that I can trick him into revealing something he shouldn't know, thereby proving that he is trying to steal the Stone to possibly resurrect Voldemort because Harry is slowly killing himself over worrying about it by staying up late every night practicing his spellwork in order to be able to defend himself and others because he believes that if anyone gets hurt while with him, or possibly not while with him, it is his responsibility, and while this might be stupid, it's just how he thinks so something needs to be done to remedy the situation, don't you agree?" He looked up at Dumbledore, his eyes questioning.

The old wizard laughed, a resonating, mellow sound bursting from his throat to dance through the
"My dear Calvin, Professor Snape is no more likely to steal the Stone for Voldemort than I am to suddenly retire and move to Atlantis."

"Is that because Voldemort can't be resurrected by the Stone, or because Snape isn't evil?" asked Calvin, arms crossed.

The Headmaster's laugh cut off, and he simply stared at Calvin for a moment, then shook his head and smiled. "You are quite the detective, aren't you? It speaks good things about you that you would go to such lengths for a friend. You are a credit to your house."

"I suggest that you listen to your friends' advice, as they are only trying to look out for you. I understand that you proposed the idea of a practice club to your head of House?"

Harry nodded. "I will see that it happens - do not neglect your studies to pursue your late-night activities."

If you will all kindly excuse me, I seem to be late for an appointment in my own office." His next words drifted down to them as the gargoyle slid back into place. "But that does not mean there are not those who would choose to retire."

The wall became flat and unbroken once again. The gargoyle stood motionless, hunched, wings spread slightly beyond its back. The four first-years stood motionless, minds still processing the Headmaster's words.

"He didn't really answer your question about Snape, did he," said Harry.

"Not directly," replied Hermione, frowning. "I think he was using the retirement comment as a parallel to Snape stealing the Stone."

Calvin nodded. "Mugwump Man wouldn't retire, but someone else might."

"Does this mean someone is trying to resurrect Voldemort?" whispered Ron, blood draining from his face. His freckles stood out against the white skin like tiny flecks of ink.

"He didn't confirm that," Hermione said quietly.

"But he didn't deny it, either," said Calvin. "Which he would definitely have done if it wasn't a possibility. There would've been no reason not to. So! he shouted, holding a finger up in the air. "Who do we have as a suspect?"

"There's Quirrel," said Harry, unconsciously reaching into his pocket and gripping his wand. "You thought he might have let the troll in, right?"

"I thought he was working with Snape," corrected Calvin. "But if Snape isn't trying to get the Stone, then he can't be. Which means my theory that he let the troll as a distraction so that Snape could get the Stone doesn't hold any hot chocolate any more."
"You mean it doesn't hold any water," corrected Hermione.

"If it doesn't hold any water it's not likely to hold hot chocolate either," Calvin replied.

Ron spoke up as they started back to the common room. "Wait, I thought we weren't trusting Dumbledore's judgement concerning Snape, seeing as he's mad as a garden gnome in a tutu."

"I don't know about you, but after hearing Dumbledore in person, I'm inclined to believe him - someone's trying to steal the Stone, it's just not Snape."

"So if Snape's guarding the Stone just like the other teachers, why was he heading to the third-floor corridor during the troll attack?" said Harry.

Hermione brought a strand of hair to her mouth. "If you were guarding something in your house, and suddenly the door was broken down, what would you do?"

"Make sure the thing I'm guarding is protected," answered Ron, nodding in understanding. "So you're saying Snape was just checking on the Stone."

"That still doesn't explain why Quirrel was in the dungeons when the troll got in," Harry pointed out.

"As a distraction for himself to get the Stone?"

"If I set up a distraction," said Calvin, rolling his eyes, "I wouldn't then go tell everyone about it and knock myself out."

"He did seem rather conflicted when he came into the Great Hall with the warning," Hermione mused.

Ron laughed. "Rather conflicted? He was practically tearing himself in half!"

"There's definitely something odd about Quirrel, that's for sure. If he is the one trying for the Stone, though, we should keep an eye on him," said Hermione.

"I like Quirrel's class," grumbled Harry. "We actually learn things."

Ron sighed. "I'm just waiting till he teaches us the Stunning Spell. Now that's useful. Wish we'd have known when we went up against the troll."

"Actually, mountain troll's are resistant to most types of spells, that included" said Hermione. "And we won't be learning Stunners until third-year."

"What?! But that's one of the most widely-used self-defense spells!" exclaimed Ron. "Hope McGonagall includes it in the club catalog thing."

Hermione shook her head. "I doubt it, the Stunning Spell is most useful against animals and other wizards - I got the impression that's not what the club was going to be about."

"Well then, our nightly practice sessions shall continue!" proclaimed Calvin.

Harry smiled and said, "If you insist. Dumbledore did say I should listen to my friends' advice."

That night, Hermione joined them in the common room for spell practice.

"Only this once, because I want to see what exactly you guys are doing - I can't afford to be tired in
classes." The bushy-haired witch looked around at the three boys rolling their eyes. "Well someone has to make sure all our homework gets done correctly!"

"No, no, you're right," said Calvin placatingly. "We definitely wouldn't want the quality of our essays to drop."

"Right," Hermione nodded. "Okay, how do we start?"

Harry scratched at the back of his neck and looked around uncomfortably. "Um, I've just been working on the Shield Charm and a few others like Depulso. Calvin's doing the Shield Charm too. It's definitely something everyone should know."

"I'm also practicing Arresto Momentum," said Calvin happily.

Hermione gaped at them. "You guys, those spells are far beyond our grade level!"

"Hermione, I don't think a lot of the spells they don't teach us are because they're too difficult - some might be because we don't have enough raw magical power, but that doesn't mean they're impossible to perform at all." Calvin grabbed 'The Standard Book of Spells, Grade Three' from the table. "Gerd and Froge lent this to me." He flipped it open to a certain page, and held the book out to Hermione, who took it from him curiously.

"This is Reparo. I learned it from a book I got at Diagon Alley." She looked up. "Why is this a third-year spell?"

Calvin shrugged. "You tell me. It's ridiculously useful, and it's a single-point casting."

"Single-point casting?"

"That's what Calvin calls a spell that isn't constant," explained Harry. "Stunners, Reparo, and the Cutting Charm are all single-point castings, while spells like Agumenti and the Shield Charm are continuous castings."

"Right," said Calvin. "And generally speaking, continuous castings should be harder, due to the constant drain of magic - but we've already learned both the Hovering Charm and Agumenti from Professor Flitwick, while spells like Arresto Momentum aren't even part of the curriculum. I don't think it has anything to do with the level of difficulty in some cases, it's just that the school year is only so long, and they have to prepare us for whatever's on the exams first and foremost." He shrugged and took back the spellbook. "So we're just improving our curriculum."

Hermione frowned, then nodded seriously. "Okay. That does make sense."

They pushed the furniture of the common room to the sides, clearing a space large enough for the four of them to practice comfortably. Hermione decided she would start with the Shield Charm. She picked it up quickly, which she was visibly surprised at, and was soon able to have her shields hold up to a full-power Cutting Charm from Calvin.

Ron was practicing Depulso with Harry, and they had some fun repelling objects back and forth across the room, seeing how long they could keep it in the air.

"Give me back my shoe!" demanded Calvin, leaping off the arm of a chair to try to snag his footwear as it zoomed past.

"Depulso," Ron said in reply, and the shoe reversed, heading back to Harry.
"Accio shoe!" The shoe jerked out of its flight-path and was pulled towards Calvin, who stepped forward and kicked out at it, saying, "Hiyah!" His foot slid perfectly into the incoming shoe, and he stood there, grinning, leg still in the air. "I did it! Woohoo!" Then he gave a yelp as the shoe suddenly pushed him backwards, and he toppled onto the ground.

Behind him, Hermione hid a smile and looked away as Calvin turned around. She began to whistle, gaze roaming around the room.

"Don't think I don't know that was you - you're the only other person here who knows the Summoning Charm. That wasn't fair, I was savoring my success." He pushed himself to a kneeling position.

She put a hand to her chest, aghast. "Are you accusing me of foul play?"

Calvin bent down to tie his shoe, pointing his wand at Hermione as he blocked her view with his head. He whispered something, then got to his feet. "I am. I challenge you to a contest of Summoning - whoever Summons that book first, wins!" He pointed to the spellbook on the table by the side of the room. "Go!"

Hermione whipped her wand towards the book and shouted, "Accio book!" But her voice came out high-pitched and squeaky, and she was so surprised that she forgot to pay attention to the book she had just summoned. Her hand slapped against her mouth as her eyes went wide. Then the book collided with her stomach. She staggered, lost her balance, and fell.

Calvin was rolling on the floor, laughing, tears streaming down his face. Harry and Ron were cracking up as well, though trying not to look as amused as Calvin.

"What did you do to me!?" Hermione squeaked, then clamped her hand across her mouth again and glared at Calvin.

The spiky-haired boy collected himself and wiped at the tears of laughter covering his face. "Oh man, that was the best thing I've seen all week. The look on your face!" He started laughing again, great galloping laughs from his stomach. "Priceless!" he gasped.

"What did you do?" Hermione blinked in confusion. "Hey, it's gone. What was that?"

When Calvin had once again caught his breath, he dropped onto one of the couches, still smiling widely. "Yeah, it doesn't last very long if you don't put a lot of power into it. It's a spell that makes someone sound like they swallowed helium. The incantation is Helio Sonum."

Hermione stood up and brushed off her robes. "Well, it looks like I won that challenge, then, seeing as I was the one to first Summon the book." She headed to the stairs that led to the girls dormitory, throwing a glance and a wicked smile that looked out of place on her back at Calvin as she passed. "I'd watch your back if I were you next time we're practicing spellwork," she quipped lightly.

"Does that mean you'll keep practicing with us?"

She started up the stairs, not looking at him. "It means I'd watch your back if I were you next time we're practicing spellwork." Then she was gone.

"You've done it now, mate," chuckled Ron. "Hermione's out for blood."

Calvin yawned and shrugged. "Makes it more fun. I'm done for tonight, how bout you?"
"We can do more tomorrow, we have all day," said Ron, starting for the staircase.

"Calvin doesn't," said Harry, smiling. "He's still got detention with Snape - part his elaborate plan to reveal Snape's efforts to steal the Stone, remember? Hey Calvin, how'd that plan work out for you?"

Calvin groaned.

Saturday was to be spent scrubbing the floors of the Potions classroom. Luckily, he had help.

"My fur's getting soggy," complained Hobbes, shaking drops from his paw.

"Yeah, well my knees are killing me. I'm a two-legged being, and I'm not meant to crouch down on hard stone floors." Calvin pulled out his wand. "I've got an idea." He attached the sponges to the bottoms of his feet with Sticking Charms. Snape had told him that he was not allowed to use any magic to clean the floors besides for Agumenti, but technically, the sponges were still the things cleaning the floors. After doing the same for Hobbes, along with an added water-repellent charm, they began to skate.

They figure-skated their way across the stones, Calvin's wand providing a small stream of water in front of him as he glided along. They pirouetted and twirled, leaped and danced. They finished with hours to spare.

Calvin looked around the bare classroom. All the usual bubbling vials and cauldrons had been cleared out, along with the teacher's desk and the bookshelves. Parts of the ceiling still resembled a Salvador Dali painting. The floor, though, was now spotless. "Well this is boring."

"Do some magic," suggested Hobbes, lying down and stretching.

Calvin sat down and tried to transfigure his robes orange. He'd turned the entire left sleeve a blinding shade of orange by the time he lost interest. Hobbes had begun to snore. Calvin stared at the wall for a few minutes, pretending he was watching television. That soon lost its charm. He wandered over to the napping tiger and lay down against him, settling into a hazy sleep. They both woke up an hour or two later, and talked lazily for a while.

"What? No they aren't," said Calvin. "You're making that up."

Hobbes nodded. "I'm telling you, it's the truth."

Calvin poked his head out into the hallway. Snape's office was just down the hall, and the door was shut.

"Professor SNAAAAAAALAAAAPE!" yelled Calvin. The office door swung open, and the black-robed Caliph of Calamity rushed out, eyes stabbing angrily at Calvin.

"What is it!" he demanded, his voice cold as his heart.

"Do people grow from spores?"

The Potions professor closed his eyes and breathed out slowly through his nose. When he looked at Calvin again, he was gritting his teeth. "You called me out here in the middle of brewing a delicate solution to ask if people grow from spores?" he hissed incredulously. Then he turned and stalked back into his office, slamming the door behind him.
Calvin re-entered the classroom. "He must not know."

The next week saw the first few days of winter, but there was no snow until Thursday. The grass crunched with frost as Calvin ran outside. Flying lessons had been canceled, which left the rest of the afternoon free.

"Dean, tell me I'm not dreaming," whispered Calvin as a tiny speck of white drifted lazily down to the ground in front of him.

"You're probably not dreaming, unless you walk and talk in your sleep, and sleep with your eyes opened, and are perfectly aware of what's happening around you while you're sleeping, in which case I don't really think that counts as sleeping."

"So, basically, no," added Seamus. "You are not sleeping."

"Oh hey, it's snowing," said Ron, holding out a hand and watching as a snowflake melted upon it.

"It's snowing," said Calvin softly. Then, louder, "It's snowing! It's SNOWING!"

"Yeah, mate, that's what I said."

Calvin dropped to his knees and threw his arms up, staring into the depths of the sky. His eyes locked on a dark grey cloud right above them. "All hail the snow cloud!" he cried emphatically. "ALL HAIL THE SNOW CLOUD!"

Dean kneeled next to him. "ALL HAIL THE SNOW CLOUD!"

Harry and Seamus joined them on the ground and added their voices. "ALL HAIL THE SNOW CLOUD!"

The twins appeared out of nowhere and prostrated themselves upon the frozen grass. "ALL HAIL THE SNOW CLOUD!" they yelled, offering up plates of steaming porridge to the sky.

"Ron," said Hermione softly. "I think we should run before we catch whatever they have."

"Join us!" called Calvin. "Join us in celebration of all that is white and soft and frozen! Join us in celebration of the crystalline form of water!"

Hermione turned to Ron, who seemed to be considering it. "Don't you dare."

"Join us, brother!" called Fred.

"Join us!" echoed George.

Ron smiled and dropped to the ground. "Tis the season," he said with a shrug.

Hermione covered her face with her hands and pretended not to know who the people kneeling on the ground were.

Together, the seven boys cried out to the sky. "ALL HAIL THE SNOW CLOUD!"

AN: Many, many sincere apologies for the wait. Reality jumped me in a dark alley and smacked me across the back of the head with a two-by-four; I was dealing with the injuries.
Also my Cerberus ate my homework. Thank you so very much for reading - if you liked it, please review! And now, all together: ALL HAIL THE SNOW CLOUD!
Chapter Seventeen - On The Zeroth Day Of Christmas

"We'll see you after the holidays then, mate."

"Don't have any fun without me!" yelled the spiky-haired wizard. "Or chocolate!"

Ron and Harry gave him a wave as he headed off to the Headmaster's office, where he was going to be Portkeyed home.

Calvin strolled through the empty hallways, his trunk appearing next to him every time he looked down. Hobbes was riding inside, and Calvin swore to himself that he'd let him out the moment they got home. The train bringing students home for the holidays had left that morning, and only a small fraction of the students had opted to stay at Hogwarts.

*Good thing I know where Mugwump Man's office is now,* he thought as he approached the stone gargoyle.

Leaning in close, he whispered, "Knackered knick-knacks." The gargoyle ignored him. Calvin frowned. "Popsicle sticks, I thought that was it." Suddenly the gargoyle jerked, beginning to step to the side. "AH!" Calvin jumped back, heart racing. "Sheesh, give me a heart attack, will ya'?" He took a breath and headed past the stone figure and onto the spiraling staircase.

"I would rather not," spoke the gargoyle, again making Calvin jump. The moving staircase bore him up to a large door, which swung silently open as he raised his fist to knock on it.

"I suspected I'd be seeing you here today, Mr. Calvin," said Dumbledore with a wise smile, sitting in an ornate high-backed chair behind an impressively large, solid wood desk. His hands were clasped on the desktop, and his eyes twinkled knowingly over his half-moon spectacles.

"I should hope so, seeing as you're the one who told me to come," Calvin replied, head turning every which way as he examined the headmaster's office.

Every surface of every piece of furniture in the room was completely covered with objects of mysterious purpose and origin, whining, humming, clicking, twirling, puffing, filling the room with a veritable storm of background noises and distracting movements. They pulled at the corners of his eyes, causing him an itch in the back of his mind telling him to turn, to look, no matter how many times he had already looked. He forced himself to turn back to Dumbledore.

"I didn't know the gargoyle could talk."

Dumbledore chuckled, leaning back. "It can't. That was me. It is useful for speaking to those waiting outside my office without letting them up."

"Oh. What's the password?"
"Why, you said it yourself," said the headmaster, eyes twinkling like twin stars in night sky. "'Popsicle sticks, I thought that was it.' Now, on to business." The old wizard reached over to uncap a tin sitting on his desk, then slid it over to Calvin. "Lemon drop?"

"Hey, that's the piece of candy I ate to get to King's Cross!" The small, round yellow candies lay innocently at the bottom of the tin. "Those are Portkeys?"

"Right now they are only delicious sweets, actually." The headmaster produced his wand from - seemingly - thin air, then removed one of the yellow candies and placed it on his desk. "Portus." For a moment, a radiant light pulsed from the candy, then faded. "Now it is a Portkey." Dumbledore leaned over the desk, staring intensely at Calvin. His expression was as serious as any Calvin had seen in his young life. "Do not create Portkeys at home," said the headmaster gravely, his voice deeper than normal, sounding as he was artificially adding some bass to it. "Creating Portkeys is an act that must be officially allowed by the Ministry of Magic, and should not be attempted by anyone without permission of the proper authorities."

Calvin nodded in understanding, but Dumbledore wasn't finished.

"The actors in this commercial are trained professionals, driving on a closed course," intoned the Headmaster of Hogwarts.

"Um, what?"

Dumbledore leaned in closer. "Any injuries sustained while attempting to duplicate this scene are not the fault of Hogwarts, and Hogwarts has no legal obligations to help the injured in any way. Do not create Portkeys at home."

"Okay, I got it," said Calvin earnestly.

"Hogwarts and its associates take no responsibility for any apocalyptic effects of actions taken by individuals not associated with Hogwarts and its associates."

"Um, Dumbledore, sir-"

The old wizard shot to his feet and continued speaking, voice rising. "Hogwarts and its associates are not responsible for any bruises, injuries, cuts, scrapes, breaks, sprains, snaps, crackles, pops, concussions, contusions, confusions, confessions, conditions, contractions, convictions, coalitions, constipations, coup de tas or Constantinoples brought upon or about by any individual whatsoever no matter what realm they call home or what their favorite breakfast cereal is! Is that perfectly clear!"

Calvin nodded cautiously.

"Fantastic," said Dumbledore happily, smiling and lowering himself into his chair. "If you need to contact anyone here while you are at home, simply hold your letter high in the air in the middle of your own back garden and shout, 'Letter for Hogwarts, can I get an owl?!' And that's it! Well, would you look at the time - your ride is here! Better get going, don't want to make them wait." Dumbledore flicked the small sucking candy into Calvin's slack-jawed open mouth, then waggled all ten fingers at him as a goodbye.

The universe hooked Calvin right behind his navel, then dragged him through the cramped insides of a demented vacuum cleaner.

XXXxxxxXXXxxxXXX
"I'm home!" yelled Calvin loudly in the middle of the living room. "Wait, this isn't right." He walked out of the house and closed the door behind him, just as his mother rushed into the living room.

"Calvin?"

The doorknob turned, and the door swung open as Calvin voiced his usual greeting. "I'm home!" yelled Calvin loudly from the doorway, stepping into the house. "Wait, no, it's still not right."

"Calvin!" His mother ran to him and tried to sweep him into a hug, but he pushed her away, protesting.

"Wait, wait, wait," he said, sidestepping her next hug and holding up a finger. "Go back into the kitchen. Make lunch or something. Do what you always do. Is Dad at work? Good." His bemused and slightly teary mother retreated to the kitchen, then stuck her head back out. "It's not the same unless you're actually doing stuff in the kitchen!" shouted Calvin. He tapped the buckles of his trunk and pulled it open from the back. Hobbes sprang out.

The tiger stretched, yawning. "What'd I miss?"

"Operation Welcome Home, commence," said Calvin curtly, pivoting and exiting the house. The door shut behind him.

A second later the doorknob turned, and the door swung open as Calvin voiced his usual greeting. "I'm hoooollllllllooo-" his words stretched as he was catapulted back through the doorway and out onto the lawn, boy and tiger rolling together like an escaped ferris wheel almost to the edge of the grass.

"Pinja 'gain," said Hobbes with a smug grin, front paws on Calvin's shoulders.

Calvin tipped his head up, looking past Hobbes. "Wow, my sneakers are still in the doorway. That was a good one."

"I tried my best," answered Hobbes wrly, letting the slightly rattled boy get to his feet. "I don't suppose you're going to let your mother say hello to you now?"

Calvin smiled sharply. "Get the water balloons, Hobbes. Meet me by the hose."

Hobbes threw his hands in the air. "It's the middle of December!"

"Yes, but unfortunately it has not snowed here, unlike in Scotland. We will have to resort to plain old H2O."

"Snow is H2O."

"So is water. Get the water balloons."

"Yes, but you were implying that-"

"Get the water balloons."

"And still," Calvin sniffed, "no television." The blank wall stared back at him, mute, devoid of flashing lights and senseless violence.
His father walked into the living room. "Just think, now you might even do something worthwhile on Saturday mornings!" He exited the room.

"He came in here just for that, didn't he," said Hobbes.

"Worthwhile!?" said Calvin, clearly distressed. "I can't do anything worthwhile on a Saturday morning!" He plopped himself down on the old armchair, pulling at his hair. "What would the public think? What would Susie think? My reputation, ruined! Hobbes, we can't let this happen!" Calvin clutched at his best friend.

Hobbes rolled his eyes and gently extricated himself from Calvin's grip. "I'm sure you'll find other ways to waste six hours of your day."

Calvin gazed mournfully at the blank wall, tearing slightly. "But they'll never be wasted like they used to."

"Good news, Dad." Calvin propped up an easel and unfolded a long line of papers stapled together. "The polls of late speak highly of you."

"And what exactly are they saying?" asked his father, putting down his book and leaning his elbow on the arm of the chair, head against his open hand.

Calvin ruffled some papers. "Specifically, that you've been 'behind the scenes' more than usual, and this has been received with much happiness."

"Calvin, I've been 'behind the scenes' because you've been away at school for the past three and a half months!"

"Furthermore," said the spiky-haired boy, adjusting the graph, "there seems to be a sharp rise, here, in your popularity among eleven-year-old wizards and sarcastic tigers. My advice would be to look into what could be the cause of such a sudden rise, and repeat that action many times."

His father looked at him with lidded eyes, unimpressed. "That was when I raised your allowance and sent you some extra spending money."

"Don't worry," said Calvin, unrolling the graph further. "I made some good investments with the funds."

"But apparently not with your time," grumbled his Dad, eyeing the long stretch of papers.

"Shh, I've still got two hundred and ninety eight more pieces of advice, twenty nine more polls of every single eleven-year-old in Hogwarts, four submitted essays titled 'Dads of the Household,' a Powerpoint presentation, and a transcript of a lecture Professor McGonagall gave me about using class time for things not related to the class. Calvin looked up. "Hope you didn't have anything planned for today. This has been three months in the making."

The lone velociraptor prowls along the edges of the forest. Waiting. Where is the rest of his pack? Why is he by himself? A rustle in the undergrowth announces an approaching brontosaurus. The velociraptor readies itself.

"AH! Calvin, what are you doing!? Get back here with the cookies! They're still hot!" His mother
quickly shook off her oven mitts and started after him.

Hobbes confronted him as he slammed the bedroom door closed. "You said you'd wait for me!"

"What are you doing here, I told you to wait in the living room!" yelled Calvin, panicked.

"Looks like someone was trying to get all the cookies to himself…" said Hobbes, growling.

Calvin put up a hand placatingly. "N-no, I was just trying- you know, to save you the trouble…"

He trailed off.

_The lone velociraptor is torn apart by the pack, brutally punished for disobeying the natural order of things. He has learned his lesson._

"Snow!" exclaimed Calvin, face pressed against the window. "For the second day in a row! Though yesterday's was only good for a few snowballs. This looks like a good haul though, and it's about time - Scotland is way ahead of us. You know what this means, Hobbes."

"I wish I didn't."

"The annual Winter Business Olympics!"

Hobbes sighed. "This has got to be the least lucrative business convention on the planet."

"Well sure," said Calvin, hopping down off the bed and racing over to a cardboard box, "that's what makes it such a challenge."

"So what's it gonna be this time?"

"My apologies," Calvin dug a black marker from the bottom of his sock/underwear/shirt/shorts/goggles/cape/helmet/swimsuit drawer, uncapping it with a pop.

"What are you apologizing to me for?" asked Hobbes. "You can't tell me?"

Calvin chuckled, scribbling on the side of the brown box, then turned it around to face his best friend. "No, that's what I'm selling - my apologies." On the front of the box, scrawled in large, black letters, was the word 'Apologies.' Under the word was written '50 cents.'

Hobbes rolled his eyes, walking out of the room ahead of Calvin. "This should be good."

Once they were set up outside, it was only a few minutes before Susie came by, as if following a script.

She glanced at the words on the cardboard box, then up at Calvin, who was grinning. With a grim set of her teeth, she withdrew two quarters, placing them on top of the box. "I'll take one for that snowball you hit me with yesterday," she said as Calvin slid the coins off the box and into his coat pocket, grin growing wider. "And those thirty that you missed me with, as well."

Calvin shook his head. "Sorry, you don't get to choose what the apology is for."

"That's stupid. Then what are you going to apologize for?"

His grin grew even wider. "I just did."
Susie's face reddened, and she grit her teeth. "That was the biggest waste of money. You're a thief, Calvin."

Calvin inclined his head solemnly. "I'm sorry you feel that way."

She stalked away, hands clenched at her sides, fuming.

"That'll be another fifty cents!" he yelled after her.

"I take it the apologies didn't sell very well?" Hobbes looked on as Calvin crossed out the previous title of the box and scribbled a new one beneath it. It now read, 'Generalizations, 10 cents.'

"I'm hoping the lower price will help sales," said Calvin, turning the box back around and placing the chair behind it again.

Hobbes read the front of the box. "You can't sell generalities."

"Sure I can, it says so right here. They're only ten cents - want one?"

"They don't belong to you!" argued Hobbes, throwing his paws in the air.

"Neither does the concept of lemonade."

"That's a mistaken analogy."

"You're a mistaken analogy."

Hobbes growled, then pounced. The spiky-haired boy yelped and leaped out of the way, watching in horror as Hobbes shredded the cardboard box into pieces the size of cornflakes. The tiger stood up, brushing himself off. Then he grabbed an armful of the pieces of ex-box and flung the confetti over Calvin before walking calmly away.

Calvin sighed, propping his head up on his arms. "Everyone's a critic."

"Here we are, Hobbes."

They sat at the top of Dismemberment Gorge astride the toboggan, looking down and contemplating their mortality.

"Yep. Why are we here again?" asked the tiger, eyeing the drop nervously.

Calvin breathed in the silence. "Why do people fight those things which they cannot hope to triumph over?"

"Why don't I wait inside?"

"Is it the futility of the endeavor that draws us to it? Do we find surety in hopelessness? In the concrete presence of failure?"

"This is purely metaphorical, right?"

The spiky-haired boy grabbed the rope in front of him. "Why do we so often fight against gravity?"
Would it not be easier to give ourselves over to it? To place our trust in its capable hands?

"It's not the capability of gravity's hands I'm worried about."

"To experience life, we must experience failure, Hobbes. That is the way of things."

"The only thing in danger of failing right now is my heart," gulped the tiger.

"So I say now - will you fail with me? Will you find surety with me? Will you experience life with me!"

"I'm gonna have to say no," answered Hobbes, stepping back onto the snow. "See you inside."

"Oh come on!"

"Only three more days!" announced Calvin happily, strolling through the living room. "Threeeee more days til Christmas, yessiree." He stopped in front of the occupied armchair. His dad looked up from the book in his hands.

"Three more days until the end of the holidays is even closer, that's right." He turned back to his book.

"Phooey," said Calvin. "Now I feel like I'm counting the days until it's over."

"Well," replied his dad, "if we went with my idea and cancelled the holidays, you'd never have to worry about how many days there are left!"

"Cancel the holidays!?” sputtered Calvin.

"Oh, the vacation's all right, but the holidays seem to eclipse that perceived break with a sense of urgency and more responsibilities, rather than, say, letting one enjoy the small respite from the hecticness of bustling, everyday life in the modern world."

"You want to cancel the holidays!?"

"We could go camping for a whole week!" continued his dad, eyes glazing over with longing. Calvin began to choke. "Get away from it all, experience nature the way it's meant to be experienced - not through the filter of electronic distractions and screened windows."

"We're still having Christmas this year, right!?" asked Calvin, frantic.

"Really connect with the earth, you know? The joy of living off the land, relying on your skills for survival!"

"Did you cancel Christmas!?"

His dad sighed, sinking lower in the armchair. "Getting up before the sun, watching it rise over the horizon. So much more meaningful than a pine tree and some presents, don't you think?"

"MOM, DAD'S TRYING TO CANCEL CHRISTMAS!"

"I've figured it out, Dad." Calvin walked out from behind the chair, then started pacing the length
of the living room.

"Oh?"

"Yes, this Santa thing wasn't really the truth - I know this now."

"Oh…” his dad intoned, eyes Widening behind his glasses. He slowly set his book down, preparing for the worst.

"It took me a while, but the real clue was that no matter how good I was, I never got most of the presents I asked for - the rocket launchers, flame-throwers, nukes, and tear gas, to name just a few.” He pivoted to face the front of the chair. "And now I know why."

"Calvin, we-"

"You guys are in league with Santa!” shouted Calvin, pointing a finger at his father. "All parents work in tandem with Santa, to make sure he doesn't give their kids something they don't approve of! It's the only explanation!"

His father cleared his throat, picking up his book. "Well that bullet dodged itself," he mumbled appreciatively. "Yep, you got us - your mom and I know Santa, and we told him not to give you anything dangerous."

"Right," said Calvin, nodding in understanding. "So I'm going to make a deal with you. You let Santa give me everything I ask for, and I'll share the loot with you."

"Share the loot?" asked his father, amused.

"I'll give you and mom twenty percent of everything I get." He folded his arms. "Deal?"

"Sorry, Calvin, the no-dangerous-loot contract was signed when you were born, and won't expire until you do. We bought the life-long contract just in case you tried to pull something like this."

"What!? That's no fair!"

"Life's not fair." Shrugged Calvin's father, turning back to his book.

"Why won't you let me have anything dangerous?"

"It builds character."

"You say that about everything I hate."

"Everything you hate builds character."

"What a coincidence."

"Happy holidays."

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"This is shaping up to be a lousy Christmas, Hobbes, ol' buddy."

"At least it snowed again last night."

"Which just means I have to shovel again."
They were sitting on the front steps, Calvin bundled against the cold, Hobbes with only a scarf. In front of them lay a shovel, ice crusting the gray plastic.

Hobbes grunted. "Your dad still won't get into the holiday spirit?"

"He's insisting we should forget about the holidays and go camping."

"In this weather? He's a fanatic."

"He's crazy is what he is. You know what?" spoke Calvin, kicking at the shovel with a boot. "I think I hear something."

"Hmm?"

"It's that time again, Hobbes."

"Time to go in?" asked the tiger, tucking his paws under his armpits.

Calvin shook his head. "Desperate times. And you know what those kind of times call for?"

"Oh boy."

"I can hear it now, they're calling, calling-"

"Yes, they're calling for desperate measures, we know," said Hobbes, hunching his shoulders against the wind.

"Well you don't have to ruin it for everyone else," mumbled Calvin. "Come on, I've got an idea."

Calvin poked his head into the kitchen. "Hey mom, can I have a flamethrower for Christmas?"

"Calvin, I already told-"

"Oh wait," he said, cutting her off. "Nevermind, I already have one."

His mother whirled on him, apron whipping around through the air. "You what?"

"A flamethrower," he answered, expression blank. "I have one already."

"What do you mean, you have a flamethrower?" prodded his mom, eyes narrowing.

"Magic." Calvin pulled his wand out from behind his back and held it up. "There's a spell that shoots fire - it's just like flamethrower."

"O-oh. Alright." She looked more than slightly worried. "But it's safe?"

"Don't worry," said Calvin with a big smile, "they wouldn't let us do it if it wasn't safe, right?"

"R-right. I guess that makes sense." She turned back to the stove, stealing a glance at her son as he tucked the wooden flamethrower into his pocket.

"Here's the last of it," said Calvin, handing his mom a stack of papers.
"A List of Presents That Must Be Delivered To Calvin, Written by the President of the United States, Completely Legitimate and Really, Really Important," she read aloud. "Of utmost urgency are the following items: a dagger, a sniper rifle, a tranquilizer gun, a helicopter."

"Whoops, I forgot to cross some of those out," said Calvin, grabbing the papers. He fished a pen out of his back pocket and ran the tip over some of the words. "Dagger, tranquilizer, tractor beam, forcefield..."

"You don't want those?" asked his mother, surprised.

"That's not it," he replied, continuing down the list. "Where was it...ah, portable hose with an endless supply of water."

"Then why are you crossing them out?"

Calvin capped the pen and deposited the papers onto the kitchen table. Then he smiled at his mom. "With the magic they taught us at Hogwarts, I already have them." He marched out of the room.

"But he's so happy there, and he even made friends!" said his mom, biting her bottom lip in indecision.

"On the other hand, apparently he has the equivalent of a well-stocked, futuristic military base?" interjected his dad.

"I know, you're right. Perhaps it's too dangerous."

"What if he accidentally sets the house on fire? We can't just let this keep going."

At that very moment, their son somersaulted into the room from the hallway, then jumped to his feet, arms extended outwards.

"Ooowooooooor, send me to Hogwarts for the holidays!" he exclaimed.

His mother looked at him incredulously. "And how exactly would that assuage our fears of you knowing how to do so many dangerous...magics?"

"Well," said Calvin, holding up a finger, "for one, an untrained wizard can use accidental magic - and, say, accidentally set the house on fire." His parents' eyes widened, so he hurried to the next part before they could interrupt. "Therefore, in the interest of not setting our house on fire in any way - even though it would be really cool - I should spend as much time as possible at Hogwarts, learning more about how to control my magic." His mom opened her mouth to respond. "And, since dad seems adamant about holding on to his restraining order for holiday cheer, and won't let it within a mile of this house, I would enjoy celebrating Christmas at school." His mother opened her mouth again. "With my friends," he added decisively.

She closed her mouth, eyes glistening with tears soon to come. And she smiled at him, and she nodded.

"Before you leave, though," said his dad, adjusting his glasses. "I do believe the walkway out front needs to be shoveled."

Calvin struggled with the objection that was pushing its way out of his mouth, finally clenching his teeth and saying, "Okay. It's for a good cause. And besides, there's something I need to do out
there anyway. Can't have them forgetting about me just 'cause I'm not here.

His mom and dad stood at the window, leaning into each other and looking out at the snow-coated front lawn. Various nightmare-inducing monstrosities prowled the snowscape, joined by a handful of posh snowmen admiring the scenes as if at an art gallery. The walkway was shoveled clear for the most part, except for the arches spaced along it every ten feet or so. Unlike conventional arches, these did not extend from one side of the walkway to the other, but rather stood solidly across the walkway, a solid half-oval of snow with no opening.

Calvin's dad smiled wistfully.

"You didn't really care about him shoveling, did you," said his mom, looking sideways at her husband.

"What? Of course I did," he answered, turning and heading over to his armchair. He slumped down into it and picked up his book, flipping it opened to where the bookmark sat between the pages. "It builds character." He glanced back over his shoulder, through the window to where Calvin was putting the finishing touches on what looked like a giant, three-headed dog. "Lots of character," he said to himself.

"Right after the weather?"

"Yeah, just a quick introduction or something."

"It'll have to be better than that-"

"-if you want people to remember it."

"I didn't say I-"

"Relax-"

"-you're in good hands."

"The best."

"All four of them."

"I haven't even given any of mine away."

The Great Hall was unusually quiet for the time of day. Breakfast during the holidays was later than normal, but students were still shuffling in in their pyjamas, blinking sleep out of their eyes and shaking dreams out of their minds. The head table was the only table that was full, all the teachers staying at the school over the holidays. Dumbledore chuckled at a joke he'd just made, though he seemed to be the only one to find it funny. Snape glared around at everyone who seemed to be even slightly happy, as if it were a crime, and he the sheriff.

There was only one table for the students, set out vertically instead of the usual horizontal orientation of the four house tables. Since there weren't even enough students to fill one table, it would have been silly to enforce the separation by houses during the holidays. Plus, holiday spirit
and all that.

A pair of identical, redheaded third-years stepped up onto a platform erected at the head of the table. They both held what seemed to be microphones, and as they tapped on the surface of the microphones a hollow thumping echoed throughout the hall. What few conversations where in progress petered off, all eyes and ears and mouths and noses turning towards the platform, and to the twins upon it.

"Ahem," said Fred, looking out at the students.

"Ahem," said George, nodding in agreement.

Fred continued, "Welcome to the Extra-Special Holiday-Exclusive Ballyhoo Breakfast Radio Show, day number...what is this, Eorgejay, four? Fourteen? Christmas is tomorrow, so that would make it..."

"Who knows," replied George with a shrug. "Welcome anyway. News is a bit slow at the moment, as most of the Hogwarts student body is away at home, totally missing out on the great times we're going to have here, am I right?"

A few half-hearted cheers rose up from the audience.

"Well that was just pitiful," commented Fred. "You lot are barely awake."

George hmm'd thoughtfully. "I think I know what we need here, Edfray."

"Are you thinking what I'm thinking?"

"Yeah, though I'm not sure there are enough spoons in all of Europe for that."

"True," said Fred begrudgingly. "How about we just have some music?"

"Sounds good to me. Let's call up our resident eejayday, Eejay Ordanlay - Eejayday Eejay Ordanlay, come on up and give us some tunes!"

Lee Jordan ran up to the platform amidst genuine cheers of excitement, dreadlocks bouncing. He hoisted himself up beside the twins and procured a microphone of his own.

"What do you have for us this morning, Eejayday Eejay Ordanlay?"

"Well, Eorgejay," said Lee Jordan, smiling out at the audience, "I've written up something special, in honor of a special holiday guest we'll be seeing today."

"A holiday guest?" asked Fred in mock surprise. "Who could it be?"

"He's traveling through the aether to us as we speak, so it shouldn't be long now."

"Very well. Let's hear this special song then, shall we?" said George, addressing the seated students. 'Wooop's and 'Woooh's greeted his question.

Lee Jordan cleared his throat as the twins sidled off to the sides of the platform to be support vocals. "Ahem," he said.

"Ahem," said Fred,

"Ahem," said George.
And they began.

"Ooooooooooooooo-" said Lee Jordan.

"-oooooo0000000-" continued Fred.

"-oooooo0000000on the first day of Christmas my teachers gave to me-" said George.

"-some homework graded with an E," completed Lee Jordan.

"On the second day of Christmas my teachers gave to me-" started George.

"-two winter gloves-" said Fred.

"-and some homework graded with an E," finished Lee Jordan.

Dumbledore clapped along, smiling and humming. And so it went, the three spitting lines back and forth, picking up speed as they sang, faster and faster. Soon every student in the room was clapping and humming along, caught up in the spirit of the song, the excitement and exuberance of the performance.

Despite the fact that they were constantly switching off lines, by the middle of the song all three singers were starting to get out of breath. By the last stanza it was a frantic, tumbling race of lyrics, the notes speeding downhill, the singers trying not to lose their footing before the finish line.

"On the twelfth day of Christmas my teachers gave to me-"

"-twelve chasers chasing-"

"-eleven wizards wizzling-"

"-ten majors majing-"

"-nine daughters daughting"

"-eight favors faving"

"-seven bogarts boging-"

"-six victors victing-"

"-five Golden Snitches-"

"-four flapping owls-"

"-three legs of turkey-"

"-two winter gloves-"

"-and some homework graaaaaded with an EEEEEEEEEEEE!"

There was much applause, much yelling for an encore, and much rolling of the eyes - the last accomplished solely by Snape.

The Ballyhoo Breakfast Radio Show moved on to other subjects, mentioning here and there the supposed guest of honor soon to arrive.
Dean took to the platform to recite, with Seamus, the menu musical of the day, and then handed the stage back to Fred and George for the weather.

"You know, Eorgejay, I can't help but wonder if there's some complications with the aetherial weather today, making it difficult for our special guest to make it through to this realm."

"I'm inclined to agree with you, Edfray. Why don't we give him a bit of help?"

"What do you say, guys?" said Fred, looking out at the audience. "Will you accompany us in the Chant of Aetherial Wayfaring?"

"Will you join us in opening the gate between the realms?"

"Will you stand with us as we wrench apart the very fabric of the universe in order to summon through from the other side our very special guest?"

"Will you remain by our sides and together dismantle the very laws that hold him back from manifesting here in the physical plane of existence?"

"Well?"

"Will you?"

The crowd jumped to their feet, shouting, "YES!"

"Then chant with us!" screamed Fred.

He and George raised their arms up above their heads, hands hanging limply from their wrists, swaying slowly from side to side. Lee Jordan, Dean, and Seamus began to hum eerily, their voices overlapping and blending in a discomfitting counterpoint of anti-harmony. The twins started chanting.

"When time of nations failing falls."

"Behind the burning, failing walls."

"When honest words of honest men."

"Come close to dragons in their den."

"When words of anger beasts become."

"So black of heart beneath the sun."

"Then call to one who Chaos sows."

"Upon the fields in hectic rows."

"Upon our hearts in patterns lost."

"Upon the land beneath the frost."

"Call forth the one who Chaos crossed."

"Drive back the dark at any cost."

"WE CALL HIM FORTH, WE CALL HIS NAME!"
"WE KNOW THAT THIS, IT IS NO GAME!"

"WE CALL TO HIM, TO BRING HIM HERE!"

"THE MAN CALLED CHAOS PUPPETEER!"

"IT IS HIS TOOL, HIS WEAPON AND-"

"-HIS FAITHFUL, LOYAL, STRONG RIGHT HAND!"

"CALVONIUS DESTINUS!"

"APPEAR TO US!"

An ear-shattering CRACK sounded from the entrance to the Great Hall, accompanied by a massive cloud of black smoke and a miniature shock wave that caused the cups to vibrate with a high-pitched hum, at the very edge of the human spectrum of detectable sound. Students stared with trepidation at the menacing cloud of black that was hanging in air about the ground, rather than dissipating like normal smoke. Thin tendrils crept out, as if feeling around it. Some students whimpered, others simply sat there, unable to make themselves get up and run, their muscles frozen in icy fear. A spine-tingling sound of mysterious, hollow scraping emanated from within the shadowy cloud. The smoke began to twist and swirl. The scraping increased.

And Calvin rode out into the Great Hall in a giant hamster ball, trailing smoke and grinning like a—well, like an eleven-year old riding in a giant hamster ball. The clear plastic scraped along the stone floor as he rolled to a stop at the far end of the table, next to the platform where the twins stood, smiling.

Behind him, a first-year Hufflepuff hit the ground, unconscious.

"Woah," said Calvin in complete awe, staring at the twelve giant pine trees ringing the Great Hall. His jaw dropped like an indestructible bowling ball re-entering the atmosphere and quickly reaching maximum velocity before drilling a hole through the earth's crust and somehow causing an earthquake. "There's so much room for loot!"

"There is the annual Christmas snowball fight," provided Fred, leaning back and crossing his legs on top the table.

"Snowball fight?" asked Calvin, perking up.

The Ballyhoo Brigade was convening in the Gryffindor common room, discussing mischief and mayhem that could be had during the holidays.

"Sure," said George. "Christmas day, giant snowball fight out on the grounds - sometimes Dumbledore even makes an appearance. Fred swears he shaved half his beard off one year with a well-aimed throw."

"Yes, yes, yesyesyes," said Calvin, rubbing his hands together. "Snowball fight at Hogwarts, this should be perrrrrfect. Hehehe, ohhhhh yes." He began to chuckle.

"What're you thinking, Destiny Boy?" prodded Fred.

Calvin grinned, pushing Ron away.

"Tell us, Calvonius," added Harry, the newest member of the Brigade.

Calvin grinned wider.

"Enlighten us, oh Puppeteer of Chaos," George said with a flourish.

"Reveal to us your plan," said Seamus, "oh...giant human hamster?"

Calvin stroked his chin, still grinning.

"JUST TELL US ALREADY!" yelled Dean, grabbing the front of Calvin's robes and shaking him like a slinky tied to the whomping willow.

"Okay, okay!"

And he told them what he was thinking. They all loved it.

"It's brilliant," lauded Fred.

"It'll be so much fun," agreed Seamus.

"Thank you so much for finally letting us know your intriguing and awesome idea," said Harry, nodding enthusiastically.

"I don't know what I'd have done if you'd kept it a secret any longer," said Dean.

"It's a good thing you told us," said Ron.

"A very good thing," said George.

"The best," said Harry.

"Thanks again for telling us your epic plan," said Seamus.

"Thank you so much," said Dean.

They looked around at each other.

"Well, now we know the plan," said Fred.

"Yes, we do, don't we," said George.

"We do indeed."

"The plan. A great plan."

"So simple."

"Elegant."

"It will be excellent fun in the holiday spirit."

"Mmm."
"Yup."

"Yep."

"Indeed. Now that we know the plan, let's go do something else."

"Something entirely unrelated."

"And as we already know about the plan, there is no need to talk about it while doing said other thing."

"No need to even mention it, until the execution of the plan itself."

"Not even a little."

"Sounds good."

"Okay."

"Let's go."

Calvin strolled through the empty hallways, on his way to the Library. If Hermione hadn't gone home for the holidays, he was sure she'd be spending all of her time there. But she had, and so she wasn't, and so the Library was bound to be empty. The perfect lounging spot. Sure, with most students away for the holidays, most places in the castle were empty - but the Library was a place that usually wasn't empty, so the fact that it was empty now made it- oh, forget it.

"Hey Calvin, come take a look at this." Hobbes had stopped a few feet behind him, and was examining something on the wall.

Calvin backtracked over to him. "Hey, it's one of those Hospital Wing flyers! Except this one has nothing to do with the Hospital Wing."

"'IT IS COMING,' read Hobbes. "'IT WILL SPREAD LIKE FIENDFYRE. IT WILL CONSUME EVERYONE. NO ONE IS SAFE. IT IS COMING.'" Hobbes scratched his head. "Huh, wonder what that means." He turned to Calvin in question, but the boy just shrugged. They continued on to the Library.

It was a few hours yet until the convening of the Ballyhoo Brigade at 'no specific location' - or so read the paper he'd received - so Calvin passed the time browsing the Magical Creatures section, filling in his knowledge of the strange animals with the same enthusiasm he had for dinosaurs. Along with the enthusiasm he had for staying alive - next time there was the equivalent of the troll chase, he wanted to be ready, to know everything about the creature that was trying to rend their flesh from their bones and devour them messily.

"There are actual sphinxes! For real!" He grabbed the book and pressed the picture up against Hobbes' face. The tiger pushed it away and then took the book from him.

"That's gotta be the absolute least majestic member of the feline family I have ever seen."

"It's a sphinx, Hobbes! There's actually a creature that tells riddles to people, and only lets them pass if they get it right!"
Hobbes licked the fur on the back of his paw. "Must be a boring conversationalist."

"This is so cool."

"Terrible creature to ask for directions, I bet."

"If you answer the riddle wrong, it eats you. Talk about high stakes."

"More like steaks."

"That's what I said. Anyways, it seems a bunch of magical creatures became myths and fiction in the muggle world - look, here's a centaur!"

Hobbes blinked at the picture on the page, then screwed up his face. "But how- where does- is that-? What?"

Calvin flipped to the next page. "Oh, and a griffin! It's sorta weird that it's a mix of a couple of regular animals."

"Why is that weird? It's magical."

"I mean, magical creatures aren't just magical versions of regular animals - they're entirely new species unto themselves. So why is a griffin a mashup of a lion and an eagle? Why doesn't it have any parts that aren't recognizable as already-existing animals? The only regular animals I know of that are like that are things like ligers - and they're the product of human breeders."

"They're an affront to my kind," said Hobbes with a huff.

Calvin's eyes widened. "Wait so...that means wizards probably did this - with magic, even animals that normally can't mate...woah."

"And thus, a creature that is both eagle and lion. Of course, they gave it a new name, as opposed to resorting to a portmanteau of the two names."

"Portmanteaus are awesome! They should have called it a leagle."

Hobbes chuckled. "Or an eagon."

"A leagon," added Calvin.

"A leagion."

"A leagleon."

"An eagiole."

"An ealiogle!"

Hobbes waved the suggestion away. "Okay, now you just sound ridiculous."

"A leenoglia!"

"Sit down before you hurt yourself."

"A lanegolie!"

"A gnela- AGGHMYLEG!"

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After being chased out of the Library by Madam Pince for making 'such unbelievable racket,' Hobbes returned to the dormitory, while Calvin opted to wander the halls aimlessly. He soon found himself in a long hallway - a familiar hallway. At one end was simply a wall, and at the other-

"What are you guys doing here!?!" exclaimed Calvin.

"Oh hey, Calvin, how's it going?" said Dean, smiling.

"You're just in time," said Fred, beckoning him over.

The Ballyhoo Brigade was sitting in circle beneath the mind-bending window that looked out onto an upside-down view of the grounds of Hogwarts. In the middle of their circle lay a few open books.

Calvin sat down between Harry and Dean. "So what's the meeting about?"

"Fred and I have been planning a little game for those of us who stayed here for the holidays," said George. "It's our version of Aurors and Dark Wizards."

"Is that like Humans and Zombies?" asked Calvin, turning to Harry.

The black-haired boy shrugged. "Basically."

"With a twist, of course," added Fred.

George nodded. "You see, your entrance this morning worked so well, we decided to integrate a certain aspect of it into the game."

Calvin broke into an elated grin. "The hamster ball."

"The hamster ball," confirmed the twins.

Lee Jordan held up a finger. "Now, yours was a temporary construct, but still not exactly easy to make."

Fred pointed to the open book in front of him. "So we were researching variations on the Bubble Shield Charm as a replacement."

"Sheesh, they really do overuse the charm title," said Calvin. "Why do they do that? Seems like a pretty loose categorization."

Harry cleared his throat. "They must think it's pretty...charming." He tried to keep a straight face, but couldn't, his mouth quivering before becoming a full blown face-grin, laughter spilling out like water from a collapsing dam.

"Really, Harry?" said Ron. "Not you too," he mourned.

"Make a perimeter," said Dean, sliding backwards away from Harry. "It may be contagious." The rest of them began scooting nervously across the stone floor.

"Oh come on, it wasn't that bad," said Harry.
Calvin nodded mockingly. "And the sun's not *that* hot."

"The Chudley Cannons aren't *that* terrible at Quidditch," added Seamus.

Ron turned to him, clearly insulted. "Hey!"

"Snape's not *that* oily," said Fred.

"Hogwarts hallways aren't *that* confusing," supplied Dean.

"House-elves aren't *that* short and ugly," said George.

"Neville's not *that* prone to injuries," said Lee Jordan.

Harry rolled his eyes. "Okay, I get."

"Hermione's not *that* smart," said Calvin.

"I said I get it, you can stop now."

"Fine, fine, as long as you've learned your lesson." Calvin turned back to Fred. "So, you basically found a Hamster Ball Charm?"

Fred smiled eagerly, standing and brandishing his wand. "It's a dead-easy spell, and it only takes a weak Finite to get rid of it. Ready?"

Opposite him, Lee Jordan got to his feet. "I am one with the rodent," he said, wiggling his nose and putting his palms together.

"*Criceta Arma!*" shouted Fred. A yellowish membrane ballooned up around Lee Jordan, stopping its expansion with the sound of a giant rubber band being flicked by God. It was completely see-through, and extended about three feet above the boy's head.

"All of you, on your feet!" shouted George, heeding his own instructions. The first-year members of the Brigade followed suit, standing at attention.

"*Petrificus Totalus*," said the twins, a few times in quick succession.

"First of all," said George, poking his younger brother in the nose, "you all need to learn how to duel."

"Second of all," continued Fred, "you are now unable to move, and thus make perfect pins. Thank you for telling us about this game, Calvin - I'm sure it'll take off. Perhaps we can even get a committee going to get it into the official Ministry Games Department. Your turn, George."

"I am ready," said George, stowing his wand. One Petrificus Totalus later and he too was a human bowling pin.

Fred spent a minute arranging the six of them into a pyramid setup. "Walk with me, my good fellow," he said to Lee Jordan. They walked/rolled down to the other end of the hallway. "Here we go," said Fred, shaking back his sleeves. "*Citura,*" he whispered, and Lee Jordan's Hamster Shield sparkled gold, as if coated with glitter. "Number one, cannon boy!" he shouted. Then, "*Depulso!*

The sparkling ball of Lee Jordan slid quickly away from him. After a moment the golden sheen faded, and it began to roll instead of just slide.
"AHH-HH-HHH-HHH-HHH-HHH-HHH-HHH!" yelled Lee Jordan, now tumbling along inside it, his legs unable to keep up with the ball's speed.

The giant hamster ball collided with the six Gryffindor students standing smartly at attention, knocking them aside like matchbox cars being kicked by Godzilla.

"Woo!" exclaimed Fred, punching the air. "Perfect score!" He sauntered over to the fallen bowling pins, smiling.

Lee Jordan joined him after using Finite on the Hamster Shield. "Do you happen to have some ink on you, Fred?"

"Why, would you look at that," said Fred, pulling a new bottle of ink from within his robe. "It just so happens I was carrying some around with me the entire day!"

After thoroughly decorating their comrades, Fred and Lee Jordan used Finite on them, and then proceeded to be instantly frozen by George and Harry.

"You've been practicing," said George with a hint of respect. Harry gave him a hard smile.

"First of all," said Ron smugly, poking a body-bound Fred in the nose, "we are learning how to duel - we practice every night."

"Second of all," said Calvin, "you are now unable to move, and thus make perfect Christmas decorations."

"Alright, listen up!" announced George. He pointed at Seamus and Ron. "You guys look for the exit." He turned to Harry, Dean, and Calvin. "You three, help me make these two turncoats into the most festive statues in the castle. Everybody got their job?" Five nods. "Break!"

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"I've been seeing these things everywhere," said Dean, pausing to look at the pamphlet on the wall beside them.

Calvin walked up next to him. "Sounds ominous, right? 'IT IS COMING.' Wonder what it's talking about."

"Oh, that's just the signs for the game," said George, passing behind them. "IT IS COMING." He gave them a cheery wave before heading into the Great Hall.

Dean raised an eyebrow. "Seems a bit much for just a game."

Calvin grabbed him by the shoulders. "IT IS COMING. I dunno, I kinda like it."

"Hey Dean, Calvin," said Seamus, approaching them from down the hall.

"IT IS COMING," they chorused, causing Seamus to pause, look back and forth between them, and then sidle along the wall and dart through the giant doorway.

Harry poked his head out into the hall. "Seamus looks like he just saw a- wait, everyone sees ghost here. He looks like he just saw a dragon. What happened?"

Calvin and Dean jerked their heads towards him, eyes staring blankly ahead. "IT IS COMING."

"...Right. But dinner's here right now, so I'm going to go eat." Harry backed out of sight.
"Uh, you guys are blocking the way," said a voice from behind them. "Do you think you could-"

They whirled around, necks crooked, limbs swinging limply. Eyes staring dead ahead, unfocused. The Hufflepuff girl yelped, taking a step back and almost tripping.

"IT IS COMING."

She gulped. "I- I'll just go around another way, then." Her legs shook as she backed away, rounding the corner without ever taking her eyes off of them.

"That was awesome," said Dean, straightening up. "We should do this more often."

"What, you mean freak out everyone we talk to? We pretty much do that already."

Dean tapped his chin. "Point."

"Wish we could've done it to Draco, though," said Calvin, heading into the Great Hall. "We'll try it when he gets back after the holidays."

They found seats at the mostly empty table and filled their plates with delicious, magical food, and also some delicious non-magical food.

The enormous room was decorated with countless gleaming baubles and tinsel. Twelve enormous pine trees stood in a semicircle around the room, strung with decorations of their own. Red and white swirled candy canes floated above everyone's heads in place of the usual candles, bobbing calmly as tinkling music played in the background.

At the head table, only Dumbledore and Professor Flitwick were present - the teachers didn't always show up for all the meals during the holidays, even if they were all staying at Hogwarts. The headmaster was smiling and refilling Flitwick's goblet as the miniature professor laughed. He caught Calvin's eye from across the room and winked at him, then nodded his head to the side and gave a thumbs up of approval.

"They really do make wonderful statues, don't they," commented Ron, following the direction of Dumbledore's nod.

"That they do," agreed Calvin, admiring their handiwork. Both Fred and Lee Jordan stood smug - and motionless - under layers of ribbons, sequins, and wrapping paper. "We did some excellent work, if I do say so myself."

"And you do," pointed out Dean.

"Do I?"

Harry wiped his fingers on his napkin. "You just did."

"Did I, though?"

"Um, yes," said Harry, frowning.

They stared at each other, Calvin squinting more and more as the seconds passed. Then Calvin blinked and glanced to the left. "Oh look, Ron's making a sandwich out of every available ingredient at the table again!"
They decided to forgo the spell practice that night, as they'd be up late the next night preparing for
the epic plan Calvin had told them about that morning.

Instead, Calvin had some setting up to do.

"You're trying to *trap* Santa?" Ron's sputtered, looking on as the spiky-haired wizard finished
erecting his complicated apparatus in front of the fireplace. "What even is that?"

Calvin smiled proudly. "An ingenious combination of tinker toys, magic, and a tranquilizer." He
admired the invention for a few minutes, hypothesizing on what type of magic Santa used to
accomplish his impossible job each Christmas. Upon returning to the dormitory, he made each boy
promise to wake up extra early, so that they'd have time to open presents before the execution of
the plan. The amazing plan.

"It will be quite amazing, won't it," said Dean, pulling his covers up over himself.

Ron climbed onto his own bed, flopping down face-first. "Can't believe it hasn't been done before,
to be honest."

"It is rather simple," said Calvin, smiling.

"Hey, do you think- nah."

"What is it, Harry?" asked Ron.

"I was just thinking that-" he cut off again. "Nevermind."

Seamus propped himself up on his elbow. "What were you thinking?"

"That maybe we should discuss the plan a bit before going to sleep - but I don't think we need to."

"You sure?" said Dean. "We could go over it once more."

"No, it's fine. We all know the plan."

"It's not like it's all that hard to remember," said Ron, chuckling. They all laughed.

"Goodnight, fellow Brothers of Ballyhoo," said Calvin, yawning.

"Ballyhoo hoo hoooooooo," responded Dean, recently appointed Brigadier-in-training.

"Hoo hoo hooooo," echoed the rest.

"You guys are weird," said a voice off to the side.

"AHH! Neville, stop doing that!"

"But I wasn't even-!" Neville stopped himself and just rolled his eyes. "Never mind."

And they slept, and they didn't dream about the plan, because they already knew what it was.

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**AN:** I'd go over the plan in detail here, but you already know it. No need to repeat
information. Thanks for reading.
Chapter Eighteen - Enter Chaos, Stage Everywhere

Outside, delicate flakes of frozen water drifted to the ground like descending winter angels. The canvas of white covered the entirety of the Hogwarts grounds, and the lake was frozen over.

The crackling of the common room fire accompanied the silence without breaking it, its warm light flicking out across the floor and walls.

"Merry Christmas, Hobbes," said Calvin quietly, leaning against his furry friend.

"Merry Christmas, Calvin," responded the tiger. He glanced at the clock above the common room fireplace. "I know it's Christmas morning and all, but this is early even for you."

Calvin grinned. "I wanted time to open up my presents before going to prepare for the plan. You know, I used to think Christmas was all about the presents - but I've grown, and I've learned."

Hobbes snorted. "Oh?"

Calvin flipped open the back of his trunk and leaned over, eyes sparkling. "Christmas is mostly about the presents."

"What else is it about?"

"I haven't figured that out yet. Anyways, you can't go starting your Christmas day without opening your presents - it's blasphemy! It's like…" Calvin grabbed at the air, searching for good analogy.

"Like finishing your homework before watching tv?" Hobbes supplied, rolling his eyes.

"Exactly!" said the spiky-haired boy. He snapped his fingers. "It's like playing a game of Calvinball that turns into regular baseball! Unnatural."

"Like taking a bath without flooding the entire bathroom?" added Hobbes wryly.

"Like going through an entire school day without confusing and/or scarring Ron. It just can't happen. So let's open these quickly before we have to get ready for the plan."

Hobbes nodded. "Oh yes, the plan! Sounds like it'll be fun."

"You bet. Hmm, should I open the bigger ones first, or the ones wrapped in fancy paper?" Calvin scooped out an armload of presents from the trunk and laid them out on the table, arranging them by size.

Hobbes studied the table surface. "Go with biggest first."

"That's what I was thinking. Oh, I almost forgot!" He dove into the back of the trunk and returned
with a circular something covered in shiny red wrapping paper. He handed it to Hobbes with a slight bow. "For you, Sir Tiger."

"Why thank you, Sir Calvin." Hobbes took the present delicately in his paws, then stripped off the wrapping paper methodically from left to right. He gasped lightly, placing the back of a paw in front of his open mouth. "A plate! You shouldn't have!"

Calvin shrugged, moving to take the plate. "Fine, then, I'll just-"

"My plate!" hissed Hobbes, holding the dinnerware to his chest.

"Easy there, fluffernutter. It's not just a regular plate, anyway. Every mealtime, it'll fill up with fish - usually tuna, but with some variation."

Hobbes gasped for real now, gazing at the plate in his hands with new eyes. He looked back up to Calvin. "This is without doubt the most spectaculistic present I have ever received." He regarded the plate again before adding, "Provided it actually does what you said it does."

Calvin smiled proudly. "You're welcome. Now, onto my presents!" And suddenly he was no longer an eleven year old wizard, but instead a whirlwind of wrapping-paper-ripping, ribbon-snapping, tape-slitting, twine-tearing chaos. In seconds, no present was left covered, the ground strewn with the wreckage of their unveiling.

"Well that was...entertaining to watch," commented Hobbes. "Correct me if I'm wrong-"

"Don't worry, I will," interjected Calvin.

"-but is there not a spell that could have done something similar, while leaving less of a mess?"

"Maybe, but what's the fun in that?" Then he fell upon the presents, examining each one like a jeweler examining a new shipment of questionable gemstones.

From Dean, he'd gotten an adjustable microphone that required no setup and worked everywhere, even outside. From Harry, a book on dueling for beginners. From Ron, an entire bag of different kinds of magical bubblegum.

"Chewing Magazine's got nothing on this," Calvin exclaimed, reading the descriptions of the gums' effects.

Hermione had gotten him a book on how to handle the most dangerous magical creatures in the world, working with only a small repertoire of basic spells. The twins had gotten him an assortment of pranking-oriented gadgets that he'd have to go through individually later. A curious brown cylinder with no apparent opening was accompanied by a card that said it was from Seamus, and that the cylinder was a puzzle whose prize would come in handy at some point. Lastly, Lee Jordan had given him a record of all the songs they'd made up together for the Ballyhoo Breakfast Radio show thus far - if he tapped it with his wand, the record would rise up into the air and begin spinning, playing the songs for his enjoyment.

"There's something else down there," said Hobbes, leaning over the still open trunk.

"What? But this is everything that was at the foot of my bed, I'm sure of it." Calvin tapped the record, and it descended, the wizarding rendition of Living on a Prayer (Flying on a Broom) trailing off.

"Take a look for yourself."
Calvin did; a square box wrapped in dark blue, star-speckled wrapping paper lay at the bottom of the trunk.

"Accio strange box that totally wasn't there when I put my presents in the trunk ten minutes ago!" The box quickly rose up into Calvin's hands. "Huh. Wasn't sure it would work like that. Wow, this thing is heavy."

A moment later the starry, starry wrapping paper was lying on the floor, and a polished wooden box sat on the couch next to Calvin. Its deep brown wood shown in the firelight, the gleaming silver clasp on the front dancing in the reflected flames. As Calvin pressed his finger against the clasp to release it, the wood on the top began to boil and churn, and a letter floated to the surface.

"This is weird, even for wizards," said Hobbes.

Calvin nodded in agreement. He slit the opening of the letter and withdrew the emerald-inked message from within.

"Dear Calvin," read Calvin. "Your parents left this in my possession. I believe it is time it was returned to you. Use it well, and in good health. A Really Very Merry Christmas to you." There was no signature.

"It's obviously from Dumbledore." Calvin set the letter down and regarded the box. "What thing of my parents did he have, though?" He pressed the clasp again, and this time the box popped open with a click. Inside he found a small cardboard box, with a store-bought greeting card taped to the top.

The spiky-haired wizard stared at it for a few seconds. "It's my parents' Christmas present to me," he deadpanned. He turned to Hobbes, blinking pointedly. "He took my parents' Christmas present to me, repackaged it in a fancy, ornate wooden box, wrote a melodramatic letter about it, and hid it at the bottom of my trunk."


Calvin rolled his eyes and read his parents' card. It was a bunch of mushy stuff about them missing him, and being so proud of how he had made friends, and how he was growing up. He skimmed half of it, then tossed it aside in favor of discovering the contents of the cardboard box.

After clearing away the requisite couple of tons of packing peanuts (how did they even fit them all in such a small box, and have room for the actual present besides?) he dumped the object out onto the couch.

"It's!..." He trailed off, unsure.

"What is it?" asked Hobbes, craning his neck over to look.

"I have less than no idea."

"You can't have less than no idea," argued Hobbes.

"You can have less than zero," Calvin pointed out.

"But there's no universally agreed system to definitively quantify knowledge," Hobbes countered.

Calvin paused in the act of opening his mouth to deliver a scalding comeback. "Say what?"
Hobbes plopped down onto the couch. "What? You're in class all day - you expect me to do nothing but sleep while waiting? I read through all your schoolbooks."

"I don't recall my schoolbooks sounding anything like that."

"Well, your schoolbooks didn't last me longer than two weeks," said Hobbes with a shrug. "So I read everyone else's books as well - at least those that weren't just copies of yours."

Calvin furrowed his brow. "No one else has books like that either, unless…” Comprehension dawned on him.

Hobbes nodded at his expression. "I may have gone through Hermione's books too."

"Wait, you were in the girls' dormitory?!"

"Get up get up get up get up get up!" Calvin bounded through the room, yanking covers from beds. "It's SUPER SECRET PLAN time!"

"I will use you as a Beater's bat during Quidditch practice," Harry mumbled, sliding his head beneath his pillow as Calvin attempted to reflect sunlight into his eyes.

With a few more minutes of none-too-gentle prodding and bellowing, the rest of the boys, sans Neville were up, and for the most part, dressed.

"Now let's goooooo!"

"Wait," said Harry, heading over to the pile of presents at the foot of his bed. "I actually got presents!" He looked around the room. "You guys are the best. Come on, let's all open up our presents before we go set up."

"You can do that after!" said Calvin, tugging on his arm. "Besides, what if one of your presents is wrapped with an infinite amount of wrapping paper? WE DON'T HAVE THE TIME!"

"I guess since we've waited a whole year, we can wait a bit longer," said Dean with a shrug.

"Fine. We'll do presents after the feast then?" asked Harry. Nods were given all around.

Calvin smiled and turned to Neville, the only boy still in his pyjamas. "When you come down, you're going to need to dress warmer than that."

"Why?" asked the round-faced boy, looking around the room. Everyone else was bundling up in winter coats, hats, gloves, mittens, scarves, boots, and thick socks. "Does the secret plan you've been talking about take place outside?"

"Oh, Neville," said Dean amiably, laughing.

"Poor, naive Neville," said Seamus, shaking his head.

"Outside," laughed Calvin softly, shaking his head with a sad smiled.

Theo skipped down from the Ravenclaw tower, ready for some Christmas-morning breakfast. His mind was elsewhere - as is often the case with Ravenclaws - and so he didn't notice anything was
amiss until he found himself struggling to walk, dragging his legs forward against an unusual amount of resistance.

Then he realized that his legs were rather cold, and not a little bit wet. Then a snowball struck him smack in the face.

"I cannot believe you remembered!" shrieked Emily with glee, clutching her best friend's arm as they headed down for breakfast.

The long-haired girl smiled. "Of course I remembered, it's your birthstone!" She rubbed at her arms. "Is it just me, or is it getting really cold?"

"Is that ice?" exclaimed the third member of their group, a short, waifish girl with strawberry-blond hair.

"It is!"

"Look over there, just ahead!"

"It's...snowing? Inside?"

A perfectly crafted sphere of snow puffed by just in front of them, smashing itself to powder against the wall.

"Hey, who threw that?"

Another snowball hit Emily in the leg from behind. The three girls huddled closer together, peering around fearfully. "Who's there?!"

The long-haired girl gave a yelp as a snowball impacted the back of her neck, and ice-cold slush dribbled down her shirt.

Two more impacts occurred within the next second. Then five more.

"RUN!"

The Hufflepuff whistled as he walked to the Great Hall, noting the large piles of what seemed to be snow lining the halls. As he neared the Great Hall, the snow was present in greater and greater amounts, and he was soon forced to pull out his wand to melt it away, in order to move forward at all.

This was his third year at Hogwarts, and he'd witnessed quite a variety of strange things in his time as a student - but he'd never seen anything quite so marvelous as the view that greeted him upon entering the Great Hall.

Over a meter of snow blanketing the entire room. The tables completely buried beneath the wintry powder; still more fell from the bewitched ceiling, dusting the scene with a fresh coat of white. Students were constructing snow forts, snowmen, snow-woman, snow-wizards and snow-witches, snow-trolls, snow-sandwiches (that would be the Weasley twins' younger brother, no doubt), and even snow-Dumbledores. A bit creepy, really.

He looked around at the myriad students and realized that there were a lot more people in the room
than were even supposed to be at Hogwarts for the holidays. Word hadn't traveled *that* fast, surely?

A snowball was launched his way and he ducked instinctively, letting it sail out of the doorway.

"Hey, watch it!" he yelled to the owner of the arm that had propelled said snowball.

Another ball of powdery ice crystals was thrown in his direction; he backhanded it into oblivion.

"You've brought this upon yourself, you know!" he called to the boy, cracking his neck as he simultaneously wrapped a scarf around it menacingly. Yes, he wrapped the scarf in a menacing manner. The way in which he covered up his neck with the scarf, by wrapping it around, just exuded menace. He rolled his shoulders and appraised the contents of the room. Tables, platters, foods. Some students were using the platters as surrogate sleds, sliding across the Great Hall at surprisingly high speeds.

A grin spread across his face, starting at the corner of his mouth and slowly gaining speed, like an epidemic making its way through a particularly susceptible population of weak, elderly people whose immune systems resembled nothing more than a sign saying 'Keep off the grass. Please?'

He flicked his arm up into the air and snapped his fingers, setting off towards the nearest table. "Jenden!" he shouted, grin now in control of one-hundred-percent of his facial features. "My finest stallion, at once!" With an armful of platters and a smile so foreboding as to be capable of giving an entire herd of thestrals the heebie jeebies, Cedric Diggory laughed. Every student in a thirty-foot radius shivered, whether or not they had heard him. His voice rang through the Hall as he announced, "This morning, we shall fight a glorious fight! TO YOUR BATTLE STATIONS - HUZZAH!"

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They stood in the entrance to the Great Hall, neck deep in shining, powdery snow. The torches burning in sconces along the hallway wall cast flickering patches of blinding light rebounding off the snow and into the eyes of innocent passersby. Snowflakes still fell from the ceiling, materialising as if from nothing under the imitation white sky.

Snowballs flew every which way, propelled by arm, catapult, and magic. War cries and calls for reinforcements filled the chilled, morning air. Bands of students struggled to gain control of enough ground to build a fort upon, while being bombarded with icy projectiles from every direction. Wintry chaos reigned supreme.

"Guess what the plan was," said Calvin, vibrating with excitement.

Neville looked down, his chin dipping into the snow, then raised an eyebrow at the spiky-haired boy. "Really?"

Calvin nodded eagerly.

"Calvin, it's not as if it isn't obvious what-"

"Come on, come on, come *on*!" cried Calvin. "Just guessssss!"

The round-faced boy gave a sigh of resignation. "You filled the Great Hall with sn-"

"WE FILLED THE GREAT HALL WITH SNOW!" exclaimed Calvin, flinging his arms in the air and launching a cloud of crystalline snowflakes in Neville's direction.
Neville shielded his face until the snow cloud settled. "I dunno, I kind of thought it would be something...more, I guess. You oversold it."

Calvin snorted. "This was hard, Neville. The amount of work that went into this..." He nodded to himself and then glanced at Neville, shaking his head. "The best things in life don't get handed to you on a silver platter."

"It's a great deal more than just the Great Hall that's snowed over, mate," said Seamus, sliding by crouched on a silver platter. "Here, have some cider!" He handed Calvin a flagon of warm cider before sledding off down the hallway, propelled from behind by Dean yelling "Depulso!" every few seconds.

"Sled race!" yelled Calvin, downing the cider and rushing into the Great Hall. Since the snow was almost taller than he was, only his hair was visible as he practically swam through it. A seemingly disembodied hand poked out of the snow to grab a platter off the table. The hand beckoned Neville over.

"I am not getting on that thing," the boy told him determinately, crossing his arms. Well, he probably crossed his arms - the snow shifted, and his shoulders did that thing where it looked like he'd crossed his arms. It was hard to tell with the whole snow-up-to-his-neck thing. "Especially not with you doing the pushing."

"Neville!" said Calving loudly, climbing onto the table and pointing straight at him. "This is the chance of a lifetime! Do you want to ride with the Ballyhoo Brigade and our kind, or do you want to sit with the Marshmallows at the table, scared of having fun! Well, except for that guy," he added as a third-year Hufflepuff shot by. The boy had somehow fitted dozens of platters together to make a life-sized sleigh, and was hooting with maniacal laughter as he rocketed around the room at terrifying speeds, chucking unusually large spheres of snow at anyone who dared challenge him.

"That's Cedric Diggory," said Neville as he made his way over, shoulders slumped. "Gran says he got all the crazy daring of his entire house." Then he mumbled, "Even a Hufflepuff's more Gryffindor than me."

"Cedric Hickory Dickory Dock, huh?" mused Calvin, stroking his chin. "Wonder if he's on his house's Quidditch team."

"He is," Neville answered glumly. "He's the Seeker."

Calvin perked up. "So Harry must have played against him, right? And he's crazy daring? This could be good...I'll have to talk to Orgeef and Gerd. Anyways, you're not going to let a Marshmallow out-Gryffindor you, are you?" He waggled his eyebrows and nodded at the platter sitting at Neville's eye level on top of the snow.

Neville sighed. "I guess not."

"WOOOOOOOOOHAAAAAAGHHHHHH!" yelled Neville, Calvin, Dean, Seamus, Harry, Ron, and an assortment of students from other years and houses. After sledding - or rather, silver-plattering - through every nearby hallway making snowdrifts, so that it was possible to slide around a corner by sliding up against the wall, everyone had come together in a winter conga line of silver-plattering, each person Depulso-ing the person in front of them. Of course, that meant there was someone in the back who was just working to propel the person before them and not plattering themselves, but that was far down the winter conga line, and thus not Calvin's problem.
Suddenly, a hooded figure in yellow zipped by on Calvin's left, weaving in front of him to then pass Neville.

"Don't let him get to the front!" Calvin shouted, launching himself off his platter.

"Ouch!" said Neville as Calvin landed on him before quickly leaping to the next platter along the line.

"Ouch!" said Seamus as the same thing happened to him.

"Ow, stop it, Calvin!" said Dean as he was landed on.

"WE CAN'T LET A MARSHMALLOW BEAT US!" shouted Calvin, continuing his mad dash.

Dean raised his head, surprised. "That was a Hufflepuff?"

"A Puff passed us?" asked Seamus, aghast.

From further up the winter conga line came a cry of, "HEY PUFF, WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING!? GET BACK HERE!"

"That was Ron!" exclaimed Dean, leaning to the left as they rounded a corner. "That means the Puff's almost at the front!"

"AUTOBOTS, ASSEMBLE: BALLYHOO STYLE!"

There was a moment or two of confusion as the Brigade members, plus Neville, found themselves in a different order than the one they'd trained in, due to Calvin's jumping ahead. They quickly sorted themselves out, however, and a brief moment later came together into their ultimate silver-plattering formation…

"GIANT TOBOGGAN TIME!" yelled Calvin, standing up on the reflective surface of what was, indeed, a gigantic toboggan.

The rest of them cheered and pumped their fists in the air. "We ride!" shouted Dean, taking the reigns.

"After the Puff!" urged Ron enthusiastically.

"How in the world did we do this!?" screamed Neville, holding on with a white-knuckled grip for fear of being flung violently off and smeared across the nearest wall.

In their larger, more durable snow vehicle, the Brigadiers plowed through the silver-platterers ahead of them. Pun intended.

"Kinda sorry but it's totally for the good of the people!" Calvin called out as a Slytherin flipped uncontrollably over their heads, shaking his fist and shouting 'You'll pay for this!' before dropping into a couple feet of snow.

They slid beneath a stone archway and through a fluttering curtain. Upon coming out the other side, they were promptly bombarded by an absolutely, ridiculously, incomprehensibly, mind-bendingly, impossible amount of snowballs.

The unanimous cry of "GAHH!" accompanied the lot of them being almost completely thrown free of their transport. As they sped away, quickly using their gloved hands to shovel off the large piles of snow weighing down the toboggan, a cheery call sounded from behind them.
"Merry Christmas!" announced the twins from the two sides of the arch, smiling widely and waving goodbye as the toboggan careened around a corner.

"They will definitely pay for that somehow," said Ron, shaking himself free of snow.

Harry scooped a wad of slush out of his mouth. "Brrbblechhh. I did not see that coming."

"I was sure they were at the end of the conga line," said Calvin, emptying a snow-filled boot over the side.

"Speaking of which, how long is this line?"

Calvin grinned a dark grin and said dramatically, "There's only one way to find out…"

"Um, I'm almost positive that's not true," interjected Neville, pulling his head out from under the crook of his arm.

The spiky-haired boy ignored him, stepping up onto the raised front of the toboggan. The wind pushed at his hair. On either side the walls sped by, gray blurs.

He glanced back at Dean, who had gotten into position right behind him. "Ready?"

Dean nodded, crouching low and angling his wand up at Calvin's backside.

"Oh not this again," Ron muttered. "There's no way this is going to work."

"They've been practicing a lot lately," said Harry. "And the snow makes a good cushion just in case."

"There's definitely another way to find out, guys," Neville said nervously.

"Depulso!" yelled Dean, and Calvin went soaring through the air.

At the top of his arc, Calvin twisted around and yelled, "Accio Dean!"

Dean went soaring through the air. Calvin landed on a platter four people away, then leaned in as the tall boy fell, pointing his wand backwards at Dean's far side. "Depulso!" Dean popped back up and continued to fly forwards like a stone skipping across the lake.

"I don't believe it," whispered Ron back on the toboggan. "They're doing i-"

"SHH!" Seamus slapped a hand over the redhead's mouth. "You'll jinx it!"

As he spoke, his eyes tracked Dean's path through the air, far ahead of them. The boy was heading, not for any shining platter, but rather a pile of snow. He reached back and Summoned Calvin, who was pulled into the air after him.

Seamus let his hand fall. "See? Now you've done it."

"Oh come on, you knew they weren't going to last."

"Depulso!" yelled Dean, and Calvin went soaring through the air. Calvin landed on a platter four people away, then leaned in as the tall boy fell, pointing his wand backwards at Dean's far side. "Depulso!" Dean popped back up and continued to fly forwards like a stone skipping across the lake.

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Seamus let his hand fall. "See? Now you've done it."

"Oh come on, you knew they weren't going to last."

Dean came down and disappeared beneath the snow, Calvin following a moment later. A second later two pairs of arms reached out from beneath the snow, and were grabbed as the toboggan sped by.

"Well, that didn't go as planned," laughed Dean, as he and Calvin clambered onto the toboggan.
"And we still don't know how far ahead the Puff is," Ron sulked. "We're not moving fast enough."

"Anyone know any spells to speed things up?" asked Harry.

Calvin crossed his arms. "If McGonagall let me use the momentum transferring spell, we could steal speed from the other platterers."

"We could take a detour from the main hallways and try to cut him off," suggested Ron.

Seamus snorted. "And have the castle rearrange on us or something? No thanks."

The redhead poked Seamus in the chest. "Well if you've got a better idea I'd love to hear it."

Seamus held up his hands and leaned away. "I'm just saying, I don't want to-" He cut off and turned around.

A high-pitched whistling sound reached their ears, getting louder every second.

"What's doing that?" asked Neville, eyes widening.

"It's coming closer," said Harry. He calmly got out his wand, setting his feet in a dueling stance.

The whistling vibrated all around them, though they could tell it was coming from behind. The toboggan sped smoothly over the snow as everyone stood to face the origin of the sound, wands gripped tightly in small fists.

Three blindingly sparkling forms rounded the corner into the hallway behind them, and the whistling grew louder.

"BALLYHOO HOO HOOOOOOOOO!" bellowed Fred, George, and Lee Jordan as they rocketed past the giant toboggan, their platters trailing streaks of golden sparkles.

"HOO HOO HOOOOOOOOO!" responded the first-year Brigadiers, fists punching the air.

"Of course!" exclaimed Calvin as the sparkling trio sped off. He smacked his forehead with an open hand. "The friction-reducing spell Fred used during the Hamster Shield Bowling Event!"

Then he smacked Ron's forehead for good measure.

"Hey!" protested the redhead, swatting Calvin's hand away.

"Alright, hold on to your teddy-bears, boys, we're upgrading!" Everyone scrambled for a handhold as Calvin pointed his wand down at the toboggan itself. "Citura!"

The toboggan was instantly coated with golden sparkles. Everyone except Seamus - who was holding onto the reins - was suddenly no longer standing on the toboggan, having been left behind by the speedy, sparkling, almost-frictionless vehicle.

As the toboggan and Seamus rounded the next corner, the rest of them looked on in stupidity.

"I should have thought about that first," Calvin mused, climbing out.

"You think?" cried Ron. "Now we're never going to catch up to the Marshmallow!"

Calvin smiled and held up a finger. "Not so fast, Ronald."

The redhead looked up hopefully. "You thought of a better way to catch him?"
"No, you were just speaking too quickly." Calvin tapped a finger against his chin. "Though now that you mention it, I did just remember something I've been wanting to try."

"Will it help us catch the Puff?" asked Seamus.

"Will it help us forget about falling off the toboggan?" asked Harry.

"Will it be less terrifying?" asked Neville.

"Will it be awesome?" asked Dean.

Calvin rubbed his hands together and chuckled his evil chuckle, the sound starting deep in his throat. "All of the above." The chuckling paused. "Well, except for maybe the first one. Not sure about that." He shrugged. The chuckling resumed.

"Depulso!"

"Depulso!"

"Depulso!"

"Depulso!"

"Depulso!"

"Depulso!"

Six translucent Hamster Shields, outside surfaces outfitted with rigid white flippers for traversing the winter terrain, shot down the hallway. Inside each shield was a first-year Gryffindor, wand out and pointed downwards at an angle of about forty-five degrees. Also inside each shield was a coating of golden glitter, covering all available surface.

Calvin curled himself tighter into a ball and shouted again, "Depulso!" giving the Hamster Shield a renewed burst of speed. The shield spun faster than his eyes could track, but inside the practically frictionless cocoon, Calvin could not be dislodged. The walls of the shield slid against him, and he was pressed up against the side as it rounded a turn.

"This is actually - Depulso! - really cool!" shouted Nevilled from behind him.

Seamus whooped. "We're like a pack of - Depulso! - giant hamsters!"

"I don't think hamsters - Depulso! - travel in packs!" yelled Harry.

"Giant hamsters - Depulso! - do!" Dean yelled back.

They rolled along, revelling in the speed, in the absurdity. Unfortunately, after a while their magic began to tire, and they were forced to switch back to the toboggan. This time, they made sure to use the counter-charm on themselves and their shoes before glittering the toboggan.

"Sheesh, the line never ends!"

"Hey, you!" called Ron, shouting at a tall Ravenclaw girl using a long platter like a snowboard. She was several people ahead of them.
"Oh, it's the Ballyhoo Brigade!" she called back. "This is AWESOME! What can I do for you guys?"

"Do you know how far this sled line goes?"

"Gimme a sec," she answered, pulling out her wand. A flash of blue emanated from the end of the wand, and a ghostly figure about as tall as her hand flew off down the hall, quickly disappearing from sight.

It returned after a minute, and was sucked back into the wand. The girl looked back at them and shrugged. "It doesn't end!"

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It was another hour before they caught sight of their quarry.

"There he is!"

Their ride knocked into an empty platter, and it was shoved away.

"Move aside!" roared Ron, bumping another and sending it tumbling into the wall. That one had been occupied.

"Ron, calm down, this is just a game-"

"IT'S NOT A GAME!" the redhead growled. "WE CAN'T BE OUTRACED BY A MARSHMALLOW!"

"You really need to calm down, mate," said Seamus, who they had picked up a few minutes ago.

Ron ignored him, instead pulling out his wand and pointing to a hooded, yellow-clothed figure about eight people in front of them. "There's the Puff! Criceta Arma!"

A marble-sized sphere of condensed yellow light shot out of the end of his wand and collided with the hooded figure's back.

"Ron, no! You'll ruin the integrity of the race!"

The hooded student was thrown off his platter, a translucent yellow bubble instantly ballooning into existence around him. He slowed to a stop as the Hamster Shield bore down into the snow. In quick succession, the eight platterers behind him collided with the mostly-buried yellow bubble and took to the air, flying almost to the end of the hallway before touching back down, just in time to speed along the wall and around the turn.

The Ballyhoo Brigade's enormous toboggan drifted up beside the Hamster Shield-encased Hufflepuff, and they all hopped off.

"Finite Incantatem," said Harry; the shield disappeared with a pop.

The angry Hufflepuff pushed himself to his feet, turning to face them. "That was unsporting and hurtful," he said briskly, brushing snow from his robes. He flung back his hood and dumped out a clump of snow that had gotten in.

"We're sorry about that," Seamus apologized, giving Ron a nudge.

"Mmmyeahsorry," mumbled Ron, staring at the packed snow underfoot.
"Not yet you are not, though by my efforts you shall be so before the minute is up," said the Hufflepuff. It appeared he had been trying to dramatically withdraw his wand from his pocket in a dramatic, theatrically appropriate fashion, but was now fumbling with it and cursing under his breath.

"STOP RIGHT THERE, UNDERLING!" boomed a voice from behind. And up rode Cedric Diggory on a gleaming, shining, dazzling, awe-inspiring silver sleigh that inspired much awe and may even have invoked some slight vestiges of fear, in a less well-lit hallway and under different, scarier circumstances. "There will be no retaliatory magicking performed by a housemate of mine during a day such as this!" the Hufflepuff declared, leaping from his sleigh down to the snow-covered ground of the hallway.

"But Cedric, sir, one of them-" protested the smaller, hooded Hufflepuff, before Cedric stopped him with a mere tilt of his head.

"We will fight by the rules, or we will be fought by them, Smith! It is the way of the world," he continued, nodding gravely. Then he whipped around and hauled himself back up onto his sleigh. "Hup! And I'm off!" The sleigh headed off around the next corner, a demented humming echoing in its wake.

Calvin lifted a finger as the yellow-clad Hufflepuff seemed about to pull out his wand anyway. "Now, now, Smith," he gently admonished. "We wouldn't want to go and disobey Mr. Hickory Dickory, would we?"

The boy glared at him, audibly grinding his teeth. Then he turned on his heel - or rather, gave it a valiant effort, instead simply losing his balance for a moment before straightening up again, this time facing away from them - and stalked after Cedric, throwing a last look of venom back at Calvin.

"This isn't the last you've seen of me!" he yelled, pausing a moment. "This isn't over, not by the longest shot ever taken in any situation, period. Your skullduggery acts of, of..." He licked his lips, staring at them. "...of skullduggeriness, shall be repaid in kind! Just you wait! For I, Zacharias Smith of the House of Smith and the Family of Smith and the Name of Smith and the Essence of Smith and the unfortunate future Occupation of Smith -" Here the Hufflepuff boy was forced to stop and gasp for breath awkwardly, holding a hand up to show he was not yet finished. He caught his breath - or at least got a passing handful - and continued. "- will not rest until you have suffered as I have! I will not rest!"

Then he continued around the corner, breathing heavily and sounding like he was trying his hardest not sound like he was.

Ron opened his mouth, a decidedly baffled look on his face, but Calvin interrupted him, screaming and waving his hands.

"Wait, don't say anything! He just dramatically declared himself my rival - he just issued a challenge! Cut the scene, cut the scene!"

"You're bonkers, mate."

"CUT THE SCENE!"

AN: Aaaaand we're back. I'm going to start doing more chapters of this length, as I've realized that for this kind of fic, ten-thousand word chapters are just not flowing. Also, since
I'm working on writing my original fiction as well, shorter chapters will mean that updates don't take so long that you forget this story even exists. Huzzah! If you have any comments, criticisms, questions, requests, raccoons, or suggestions, then I DO DECLARE YOU SHOULD write them down and submit them as a comment. I look forward to seeing any such writings. Thank you for reading! High five, readers. High five.
Chapter Nineteen - In The Silence Of The Castle

"Mate...that's an invisibility cloak!" sputtered Ron in disbelief.

"Nice," said Harry appreciatively, throwing the shimmering cloth around his shoulders and watching as everything from his neck down disappeared. "Works really well."

Calvin nodded in agreement. "It could use some sleeves, though."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, a floating hand carrying something - a lantern, for instance - would be a dead giveaway."

"It's still pretty cool," said Dean, shrugging.

Ron looked back and forth between them all, his disbelief evolving into something far greater. "It-what- you- it..."

"Spit it out, Ron."

"IT'S A FLIPPING INVISIBILITY CLOAK, YOU IDIOTS!"

They all nodded, looking at the cloak.

"Yes, Ron," said Seamus calmly, patting the redhead on the shoulder. "We know."

"No, you don't! Things like this are incredibly rare - it's really powerful magic!"

"Uh, yeah, but it just turns you invisible."

"And not even completely reliably," added Calvin, gesturing to one of his arms with the other, referencing his earlier comment.

"Besides, one gust of wind and you're done for." Dean pulled out his wand and demonstrated, directing a strong breeze at the bottom of the cloak. It billowed about, momentarily exposing Harry's stockinged feet.

"Still, it's really comfortable," said the black-haired boy, pulling it tight around himself. "Warmer than it looks."

"I can't believe you guys," Ron said quietly. He flopped down onto his bed. "I'm going to sleep."

Harry glanced at the clock on the wall between their beds. "It is pretty late. I'm going to clean up from my presents, then turn in too."

The boys started to clear the floor of the boxes and wrapping paper that had housed their presents.
Calvin didn't move an inch, staring into the unseeable distance, his face beginning to show hints of epiphanic enlightenment.

"Wait," he said, almost to himself. "Wait, waitwaitwait!" He whirled around, grabbing the front of Seamus' shirt as the boy passed with an armful of trash. "Wait, wait, WAIT!" he yelled, shaking the boy and sending paper everywhere.

"You're cleaning that up," said Seamus.

"Wait, wait, wait, waitwaitwaitWAIT!" Calvin ran over to where Harry was smashing a ball of wrapping paper into a larger ball of wrapping paper, and grabbed a handful of the invisibility cloak. "Guys!" he said excitedly, jumping up and down.

"What is it?" asked Harry.

"Guys!"

"Yes, Calvin?" responded Dean from across the room.

"GUYS! Guys guys guys gu-"

"Spit it out already!" groaned Ron, sitting up quickly and flinging his pillow. Calvin caught the pillow against his chest and waved it in the air. "We can be invisible."

"Yeah, I think we've established that, Calvin," said Harry.

"Well?"

They stared at him. "Well what?"

He rolled his eyes and tossed the pillow back to Ron. "Well, what have we been trying to do that we found we were unable to do, due to us not being invisible?"

"Umm...be invisible?" provided Seamus.

"Need I remind you of a certain, ahem, three headed dog?" Calvin prodded, raising an eyebrow. Seamus' eyes widened in understanding. "Oh."

"Oh," said Harry.

"Oho!" said Dean.

Ron groaned and rolled over, slamming the pillow over his head. "Oh no."

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"Shh!"

"Quit elbowing me in the stomach."

"Quit stomaching me in the elbow!"

"Watch what you're stepping on, that's my foot!"

"No it isn't, it's mine!"
"Shh!"

"Be quiet!"

"You be quiet!"

"Both of you shut up or Filch is going to hear us!"

"SHH!"

"Enough with the 'shh' already!"

"I'm just filling in for Hermione."

"Ron, if she were here she wouldn't be going along with this."

"I think our feet are visible."

"This cloak isn't big enough for all five of us."

"Quiet! I hear something."

...

"False alarm."

"Man, my heart almost dropped straight through to my feet."

"How does that even work?"

"Well, first it burns down through the bottom of your rib-cage, then drops into-"

"Calvin, stop talking!"

"Oh, so Ron's allowed to impersonate Hermione, but I can't talk about how your heart would bring your stomach fluids to a boil and pop your intestines like an overfilled balloon hitting the pavement!?"

"Mate, I think I just lost my appetite for the rest of the year."

"Hah, yeah right. I'm sure you'll be back to making ridiculously large sandwiches of everything available at the table and a few things that aren't by this time next week."

"Guys, we-"

"Shh!"

"No, we-"

"Be quiet, Seamus!"

"But the-"

"Do you want to get us caught?"

"We'd have to do detention, maybe with Snape!"
"And then Harry'll miss Quidditch practice or maybe a game and Wood will be mad and irritable and run practice late and Groke and Freed will be worn out and tired and won't have time for pranks and I'll feel lonely and do something stupid and get myself expelled and you'll all feel so bad your grades will drop and you'll stop magic practice at night and you won't be prepared when the Dark Lord Moldywart comes back from the dead and attacks and everything will go horribly wrong and you won't know what to do without me and you'll all morn the loss of my presence and wish I was there but I'm not because Seamus talked to much and got us detention that time so you'll all just die and I'll be at home reading comics and I'll be terribly distraught when I hear what happened but eventually I'll get over it and later when I'm dictator of the world I'll erect a monument in your memory but that will be all that's left of you guys and won't that be a shame, Seamus, and it will have been all your fault."

"...Okay, but-"

"Seamus, did you not hear everything I just said!?"

"No, not really, but guys, we're here!"

...

"So we've been standing here arguing in front of the door for how long, now?"

"I'd say about a good five minutes."

"Sounds about right."

"Shall we?"

"After you, Dean."

"Alohamora!"

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"It's massive!" whispered Ron, staring up at the black-furred beast. "Can't believe Hagrid named this dog Fluffy."

The three heads lay across the creature's equally giant paws, which were crossed in front of it. Its fur shone like the night sky without any stars, its long claws as passively threatening as an unused guillotine; certain to cause death to all who felt its blow, but not currently in killing mode. Behind eyelids large as curtains, the beast's eyes flicked from side to side, experiencing whatever dream such a beast would dream.

"Calling that a dog is like calling a manticore a kitten," said Seamus.

It snorted suddenly, and the head closest to them opened its eyes.

Harry stiffened. "I think it knows we're here."

"Of course it does, it's a dog - great sense of smell and all," said Calvin.

"I thought we said we're not calling it a dog."

"That was just you, Seamus," replied Dean. "It's definitely a dog."

"With three heads," added Ron.
"And it's ridiculously bigger than a regular dog," said Seamus.

"And it's guarding a magical stone that may or may not be able to bring Moldywart back from the dead," said Calvin.

"Wait what?!" said Seamus.

"Aaaand it's looking straight at us," said Harry, taking a step back.

The head they were looking at lifted itself, and its companions followed, blinking open another four eyes. Drops of slobber the size of water-balloons fell from its lips, hitting the floor and spreading out into puddles. A growl started in the back of one of its three thoats.

"This was great, and we should totally do this agaion some time," said Harry, backpedalling and dragging the rest of them along. "But right now we should totally run for it."

"I'm inclined to agree," said Seamus, gulping.

They backed up against the door, and Ron reached behind to twist the handle.

"Oh, come on, we just got here!" Calvin complained.

"Mate, if we stay here any longer, the only way we'll be leaving is out the other end of Fluffy."

Fluffy shifted his paws and began pushing himself to a standing position.

"Calvin, come, on," Dean said, tugging at his friend's arm.

"But I didn't even get to pet it! No!" he grunted as all three of them dragged him out of the room by his feet. "I'll be back for you, Fluffy! I promise I won't forget youuuuuuu- Hey, is that trap-door? Ahhh, guys, watch where you're dragging me!"

The door shut behind them with a muffled thump.

"Well you guys are just a pair of party-poopers, you know that?" said Calvin, tugging his shoes back on.

"He was going to eat us," Ron hissed, arranging the cloak to give them all as much cover as possible.

"Just a couple of killjoys, that's what you are."

Harry took a rattling breath. "Let's never do that again until at least next week."

"Just a bunch of buzzkills."

"My life span was just shortened by a decade," wheezed Seamus.

"A duo of downers."

"Most of those words mean two people, Calvin," Dean pointed out. "Pair, couple, duo. All two."

Calvin huffed. "You try thinking up words for 'group' to use with impromptu alliterative phrases." Then he bounced to his feet, suddenly smiling. "Anyway, since our adventure was cut short, how about we go exploring the castle with the invisibility cloak? I've never been anywhere but the owlry and the kitchen after lights-out." His eyes glazed over and his mouth slackened. "Mmm,
midnight truffles…I bet there's all sorts of things around the castle happening at night that we never see during the day! Whaddya say?" He grinned toothily and stuck two thumbs up on either side of his face, elbows out, eyebrows raised expectantly.

"I am going back to the dormitory and going to sleep," replied Ron. "I am not going on any more life-threatening adventures tonight, and I am going to be rested when my brothers announce the start of the game tomorrow morning."

Seamus grinned. "Oh right, I forgot that was coming up tomorrow."

"IT IS COMING UP TOMORROW," chanted Calvin and Dean hauntingly.

"Night, weirdos," said Ron, rolling his eyes as he stepped out from under the cloak and headed towards the secret passageway.

"What about you guys?" asked Calvin, eyes lit with the golden gleam of hope. And maybe a smidgen of maniacal insanity.

"I'm gonna go up, too," said Seamus. "I doubt you'll find anything exciting happening this late."

He disappeared after Ron, heading back to Gryffindor tower.

Calvin leaned in close to Dean and Harry, expression serious. "And then there were two."

Dean shrugged. "Eh, why not."

"I guess I'm up for it," said Harry. "The adrenaline's still in me from facing down Fluffy, so I won't be able to get to sleep for a couple hours anyway."

"Fantastifries," chuckled Calvin, hunching his shoulders and rubbing his hands together.

"Fantasti-what?"

"French fries, freedom fries, chips - you know, fried strips of potato in all their golden glory? The snack of gods." He looked at them brightly. "So, any ideas for adventures?"

"We could sneak down to the kitchens again," offered Dean, leaning against the wall.

Harry blinked at him, then turned to Calvin. "Again?"

"Long story," Calvin said, waving the subject away.

"We are literally doing absolutely nothing," Harry deadpanned, staring at him. "We've got time for a long story."

Calvin held up a finger. "Actually, if we were literally doing absolutely nothing, we'd be dead. Wait, no, then all our blood would be rushing down to our back - at least, if we were laid out face up on a horizontal surface. Then we'd be entering rigor mortis and all our muscles would lock up. Then our skin would start receding from around our finger nails making it look like-"

"Calvin," Dean interrupted. "Story."

"But it's so long!"

"It's not that long."
Calvin shrugged, saying, "I don't think I can remember all of it. It's pretty long."

"Come one, let me hear it. We've got nothing better to do," said Harry.

"Fi iiiiiine. You tell it, Dean."

Dean turned to Harry. "A few times we've gone down to the kitchens in the middle of the night. The end." He turned back to Calvin and crossed his arms.

"That was a long story?" Harry laughed.

Calvin sighed. "Well, if I'd told it there would have been gorilla ninjas and an exploration to the Bermuda Dodecahedron in the middle there, but yeah, if you just want the essential facts, that was it." He looked around. "Now that we've exhausted that goldmine of entertainment, what do you guys want to do?"

"You're the one who always comes up with the adventures," said Dean, raising an arm to cover up his yawn.

"Let's just camp out here in front of Fluffy's door and brainstorm," said Harry. He motioned to them, and they all settled down on the floor, shifting the invisibility cloak so it didn't get caught beneath them.

They sat, thinking. And thinking. And maybe, in Calvin's case, wondering if a mountain troll with a flaming mace could defeat an extra-cranky woolly mammoth in medieval armour.

"Booby-trap the floor outside of Snape's office?" said Dean.

"Ooooohhhh yes," replied Calvin. "We should have done that this morning, along with the snow."

Harry, however, shook his head. "Too risky. Since Dumbledore had the cloak, Snape could know about it - and if Ron's right about it being really rare, then I doubt many other people have one. We'd be at the top of the list of students who could sneak around at night and not get caught."

"Well, maybe right under the twins," said Dean.

"How do they even do that?" asked Calvin in wonder. "It's like they've got...magic powers or something." They all laughed, then fell back into a thoughtful silence.

The silence stretched over the minute mark. Then again. And again. Then it crossed the five minute mark. It approached ten. Dean was beginning to nod off. Harry was looking calmly pensive. Calvin was biting his bottom lip and studying the ceiling.

On the other side of the door, a faint snoring could be heard. The silence passed ten minutes and hurried on towards fifteen.

"I think we should just call it a night," said Harry finally, trying to stretch without lifting up the invisibility cloak.

"Mmm," agreed Dean.

"No, we can't give up yet!" pleaded Calvin. "It's barely late enough for my over-tired-senses to start tingling!"

"We haven't come up with anything to do besides sit on the floor, and it's honestly pretty uncomfortable."
"Give me sixty more seconds," said Calvin slowly, staring into Harry's eyes, "and I will make this night as epic as the time we tried sneaking into the Slytherin common room."

"First of all that did not end well, and secondly we al-"

"Sixty. Seconds."

"Yes, b-"

"Epic."

"Calvin, yo-"

"Epic."

Harry sighed in resignation. "Fine. If you can't come up with anything, we go up, okay?" He looked down at his watch. "Your sixty seconds start...now."

Calvin settled into lotus position and cupped one fist inside the other, bowing his head slightly. He took a deep breath and closed his eyes. Darkness greeted him. Also the backs of his eyelids. Alright, Calvin, you've got this. All you have to do is think of something exciting. It has to have some sense of mystery to it, or it won't be enough to get them interested. But it can't be a wild goose chase or they'll tear you apart afterwards... Something with the Hospital Wing flyers? No, those are over done. The Forbidden Forest? Hmm, I'd rather save that for later in the year. Why can't I think of anything! This was so much easier at home with just me and Hobbes. Lazy feline's just sleeping off all that fish now. Come on, think! THINK!

No perfect adventure presented itself to him, and his attempt at a brainstorm only ended up producing a pathetic drizzle of half-baked ideas. He pressed his fist into his other hand, gritting his teeth, willing himself to come up with a good adventure.

The silence of the castle in the middle of the night permeated his thoughts, stilling the tumultuous waters of his mind. His thoughts slowed. His mind cleared. His breathing evened out, and his entire body relaxed.

The thoughts flowed like meandering tributaries into the river of his consciousness, sometimes wandering off to the sides. Ideas streamed in and out, but the waters remained calm and clear.

"...fifty eight, fifty nine, sixty," spoke a voice from outside the black expanse of his mind.

Calvin's eyes snapped opened, and in the silence of the castle in the middle of the night, he saw. He saw the answer. And it was beautiful.

"Times up, Calvin. If you couldn't think of anything, I'm going up to bed, and I'm taking the cloak with me."

"Harry," said Calvin evenly. "Dean."

"Mmwhat?" mumbled Dean blearily, blinking awake.

"Prepare yourselves for a night of epic." Calvin grinned wickedly and unfolded himself from the meditation position, pushing himself to his feet. The slick material of the invisibility cloak slipped off of him as he rose. He looked down at his friends, and his grin settled into the delighted smile of a child receiving a present.
"Should I just go to bed, or what?," prodded Dean, rubbing at his eyes with the heal of his hand. Calvin cracked his knuckles, then stretched his jaw until it clicked. "I bet you guys I can slam a revolving door."

"You what?" said Harry, both eyebrows rising into obscurity beneath his messy black hair. "I bet you that I can slam a revolving door," said Calvin matter-of-factly.

"Does Hogwarts even have a revolving door?" asked Dean. "I've never seen one here."

Calvin laughed. "You've probably never seen a bottomless pit, a ladder in the shape of a mobius strip, or a terrifying jungle in Hogwarts either. I'm sure we can find one if we look hard enough."

"This is ignoring the fact that you cannot, by definition, slam a revolving door," interjected Harry, standing and throwing part of the cloak back over Calvin.

"Then you shouldn't have to worry about losing the bet, hm?"

Dean joined them in the vertical orientation known as standing, stretching his back. "What do we get when you can't do it?"

"You pick the terms for your win, I pick the terms for mine," said Calvin.

"As long as its reasonable," said Harry. He glanced at Dean. "What are we betting for?"

The leaned their heads in and began whispering, flicking their eyes to Calvin every few seconds.

This is perfect! You've got them interested, long-term. There's a sort of mystery to it as well, because they want to see if we can find a revolving door, as well as find out how I plan on trying to slam it. I don't even think it's possible, but that's not the point - the adventure is the point; the journey. There's totally a proverb in there somewhere. Anyways, as long as I don't have to do anything too terrible upon losing, this will be fine. Epic, even.

Dean cleared his throat. "We've decided on our terms."

"Oh? Lemme hear it."

Harry poked Calvin in the chest. "If you lose-"

"When," corrected Dean, grinning slyly.

"When you lose, you..." Harry smiled, letting the suspense build. "...have to show up to History of Magic for the rest of your time at Hogwarts."

Calvin blanched. "The rest of my time at Hogwarts? That's seven years!"

"Fancy that," said Harry, whole face smiling.

"But that's the time I hang out with Hobbes - he'll start pouncing again!"

"This adventure is epic already," said Dean brightly. "Shall we get started looking for the revolving door?"

"I'll have to be in class while Professor Binns is talking!"
Harry gave a tug on the cloak, and they started down the hall. "What a tragedy, having to attend class like everyone else."

This is bad, I can't start going to History of Magic - it'll ruin my street cred! And my bill of health, courtesy of Hobbes. Wait! Maybe I can make them back out of it with my own terms…

"Alright, alright," Calvin agreed, walking behind them. "It doesn't actually matter, as I'll be the one winning the bet. You guys don't think I would've proposed such a specific task if I didn't have a way to complete it, did you?"

They glanced at each other, but didn't say anything.

"So, my terms, now. How about, when you guys lose…" It's gotta be really out there, Calvin, or they'll still think the bet's worth it. "When you guys lose, you have to be my Crabbe and Goyle for the rest of the year."

"Hah! Like that's going to happen," snorted Dean.

"Not in a million years," said Harry, shaking his head in amusement.

"Are you saying you're backing out of the bet?"

Dean looked over his shoulder at Calvin. "Nope, we're saying there's no chance we're going to lose. Revolving door, here we come!"

Gulp. Time to grovel.

"Heyyy, Dean, ol' buddy, ol' pal - the mean, Dean, fightin' machine, any chance you want to just drop the bet? It was silly anyway, eh? I mean, a revolving door in Hogwarts, seriously?" They turned around and gave him toothy, psychopathic grins, eyes glassy. "Heh. Heheh."

"We're off to discover a door," sang Dean.

"A wonderful, revolving door!" finished Harry.

"Come on, guys, let's just go to bed, yeah?"

They began to skip.

Curse you, brilliant ideas in the silence of the castle in the middle of the night!

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"We'll split up here," said Calvin, slipping out from under the invisibility cloak. "Filch doesn't come up to the higher floors very often, so Dean and I should be safe. Harry can go search the third and fourth floors with his cloak." He looked at Dean and Harry, who nodded. "Alright, break on three." He put his hand out in front of him. "One, two- hey, you're supposed to stay for the 'break' cheer!"

Moments later he stood alone in the hallway.

Well, at least they're participating in the adventure, if only so they can win the bet and force you to go to History of Magic. Shudder.

Calvin jogged down the hallway, keeping an eye out for his objective. He poked his head into deserted classrooms, lifted dusty drapes, almost knocked over suits of armor, and on one occasion
almost tripped over what looked to be just a featureless boulder in the middle of the hall.

"Now if I were a revolving door, where would I be?" he mused, walking around a corner and colliding with a sudden dead end. "Ouch. Not there, apparently."

What felt like a week later but was probably closer to half an hour, Calvin was exploring the crowded back of a dark room when he heard footsteps out in the hall.

*Plot twist alert! It's Flich and for some reason he decided to check up on the higher floors and he's going to catch me and I'll be expelled and the exact scenario that I thought up before will actually-

The footstep got closer. "Psst! Calvin!" whispered a voice from the hall.

"Harry?"

"Calvin, you there?"

"In here!" he said, louder, making his way to the door.

Harry opened the door and Calvin stepped out. The black-haired boy was out of breath, his cheeks flushed red from excitement. "Calvin," he huffed, throwing the cloak over the other boy. "You need to see this."

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"Holy. Frequent. Flyer miles." Calvin gaped at the scene in front of him. "It's…it's…"

"Do you see them?" asked Harry, peering over his shoulder at the large mirror.

"Yeah…" said Calvin in wonder.

"Isn't it amazing?"

"They're all...they're all bowing to me," whispered Calvin, amazed.

Harry turned to him, forehead scrunched in confusion and surprise. "My parents are what?"

"What about your parents?" asked Calvin, leaning closer to the mirror. Within the intricate frame, an awe-inspiring scene was unfolding. Entire planets of aliens were proclaiming him their fearless, devilishly handsome, incredibly competent leader, vowing to serve him. Statues and monuments and billboards and firework shows were done in his honor, and three-quarters of the calendar was dedicated to celebrating his greatness.

Harry leaned in front of him. "Wait, what are you seeing?"

The Intergalactic Council of Extraordinary Explorers was resigning in favor of him taking over, and they'd written a song about it as well. His mom and dad were there, and so was his old class, and all the kids were apologizing and begging him to forgive them their terrible deeds, and Mo was being forced to dance in a tutu for everyone's entertainment. There was an playground filled only with swings, and on each swing their was a sign that said RESERVED FOR CALVIN, BOY OF DESTINY AND OVERLORD OF ALL OF EVERYTHING EVER.

Calvin brought himself out of the reverie and turned to Harry. He smiled lightly, and said, "Me beating Hobbes at checkers ten games in a row."

"So, you don't see my parents?"
Calvin pointed to the bottom of the mirror, where a single sentence was inscribed in flowing script. "It just shows everyone what they desire."

Harry squinted at the words. "You can read that? What language is it?"

"It just written backwards," Calvin laughed. "It says, 'I show not your face but your heart's desire.' Hobbes and I sent each other secret notes that way before we discovered how to make actual cyphers. Of course, mom and dad never really seemed interested in the notes anyway, so I'm not sure if there was much of a point. We sometimes spent all afternoon making up complicated codes - so I guess it kept us out of trouble." He paused, then snorted. "Well, more trouble. Hey, we should show this to Dean! See what his 'heart's desire' is."

"Oh. Yeah, okay," said Harry, gazing at the mirror whistfully. "You go get him, I'll stay here."

"Alright, I'll be back before you can say the second-to-last stanza of 'Once in a Windmill'. Because I just made it up."

*Once in windmill, once on a tree,* he sang in his head. *Twice by the mountains, alone with the breeze.* He skipped up a flight of stairs. *Thrice over waters colliding with rock - but never again by the bay on the dock. For the bay, with its boats, and its ships setting sail, was barraged by weather of rain, sleet, and hail.* Arriving at the next floor, he started checking classrooms for his friend. *And the notes I composed with my parchment and pen, were sodden and ruined - so never again!*

He was partway through the second refrain when he found Dean napping on a bench on the sixth floor, drooling onto the cushions.

"Captain Dean! Why are you sleeping on the job!" he barked.

The sleeping boy jerked awake and shot to his feet, snapping a salute. "My apologies Commander Destiny! It won't happen again Commander Destiny! Have you found the revolving door Commander Destiny!"

"Actually, Harry found this magic mirror - cliche, I know, but come give it a look." They headed down, Calvin continuing making up lyrics for his song. He turned to Dean as they entered the storeroom where the mirror was. "What rhymes with 'sophisticated corpse'?"

"Whatnow?"

"Oo, nevermind, I got something better. Here we are."

Harry was sitting cross-legged in front of the mirror, and hadn't given any indication that he'd noticed their arrival.

"Hey, Harry Potter Tater Totter, scootch. Give Dean a look."

Harry glanced up. "Oh, sorry." He got to his feet and moved to the side. "Go on then, Dean."

The tall boy stepped in front of the mirror. "What am I supposed to see?"

"The fuuuuuuuuuture," whispered Calvin earily, waggling his fingers.

Dean stared. "Are you serious are you serious are you serious because if you are this is the most amazing thing in the entire-"
"I'm not serious," Calvin interjected. "Actually it just shows you 'your heart's desire' ."

Dean looked crestfallen. Sorta like crustfallen, except without all the imagery of a piece of crust falling to the floor. "Oh."

"What do you see?"

"I'm playing for West Ham, and we've just won the World Cup. Blimey, there's so much detail! I can see the crowds, the scoreboards, the ref in the background - man, I look good in that jersey."

"That's your heart's desire?" questioned Calvin skeptically.

Harry snorted. "Yours was winning a game of checkers."

"And- and what's that!?!" exclaimed Dean, taking a step closer to the mirror. "It- it can't be- oh, but it is! I do believe it is!"

"What! What is it?" Calvin peeked around Dean, although he knew there was no way he could see what the other boy was seeing.

"It really is!" whispered Dean, reaching out with a slightly trembling hand to touch the face of the mirror.

"What do you see!?" Calvin cried, clutching the other boy's robes.

"I- I see it so clearly. It's...it's you, Calvin."

Calvin froze and peered up at Dean quizzically, taken aback. "Me?"

"Yes, you! And you're...you're sitting there."

"Where! Where am I sitting?"

Dean instantly stopped trembling in wonder and straightened up. He looked over his shoulder and smiled tightly at Calvin. "You're sitting in Professor Binns' classroom. For the next. Seven. Years."

Calvin dropped to his knees and reached up towards the heavens. "Nooooo- wait, is that really your heart's desire?"

The taller boy shrugged. "I don't need to see it in the mirror to know it's what I really want. Let us resume our search, hmm?" He smiled again and skipped out of the room. "Heeeere door-y door-y door-y, heeeeere inanimate object! Come on, we're not gonna hurt ya!"

Harry glanced at the mirror and sighed, then said, "We should finish the search soon, it's getting pretty late even for us. Another hour sound good?"

One hour to search all the rest of Hogwarts for a revolving door that may or may not exist. "Sure! Sounds great! Fantastic! Hurray!"

Harry gave him a look. "Oookay then. I'll take the lower floors again."

"Dean's still on six, so I'll go one higher. If none of us find anything, meet back here in one hour, yeah? I'll let Dean know."  

Harry nodded, then turned back to the mirror. "I'm just going to stay here for a few more minutes."
He wants to stay and stare at a magical representation of his parents because he doesn't remember them as they were killed by Moldywart when he was a year old, what do I say, WHAT DO I SAY!?

Calvin waved as he left the room. "Have fun!"

Nailed it.

"No, not another stupid broom closet! Where's your revolving door closet, Hogwarts!"

Calvin was getting desperate. With just over ten minute's left until the end of the hour, he raced around the seventh floor, overturning everything in an attempt to find some never-before-discovered secret passageway to a revolving door. Or something to that effect.

Now there's only the other end of the hallway left to search, and then I'm finished with this floor.

He sprinted down the hall, noticing a locked room passing on his right, next to a tapestry of some ancient idiot apparently trying to teach trolls ballet.

Woah, didn't see that door before - I'll come back for it in a second.

Calvin reached the opposite end of the hallway and, still running, quickly flicked his eyes around the space, noting nothing of use. He skidded to a stop and launched himself back the other way.

Wait, there was a curtain there, maybe there was a door behind it! Argh! I'm moving to quickly and not paying enough attention!

Resolving to return and check the curtain right after the locked room, he slowed to a stop in front of the tapestry of the trolls doing ballet and approached the door next to it. "Alohamora!" The lock clicked, and the door swung open...to reveal another door, this one without any visible handle. "You've gotta be kidding me, Hogwarts!" A glance at his watch told him he had three minutes until the hour was up.

On his last legs, each gulped breath like icy claws on his throat, Calvin staggered back to the other end of the hallway. "Come on...curtain...don't..." He swallowed and focused on breathing for a moment. "...let me...down."

The absurd scene of the dancing trolls mocked him as he passed it. Upon reaching the curtain, he shoved it aside. There was nothing but wall behind it.

Calvin dropped onto his hands and knees, wheezing painfully. "No...no… this cant, be the end." He leaned back into a sitting position before flopping onto his back, arms and legs splayed.

This is it. The start of purgatory. From now until I graduate - and there is no certainty that I will, considering my antics, though now that I think of it my larger pranks never really earn me any retribution, apart from the stuff I do to annoy Snape. Anyways, from now until I leave Hogwarts, I will be attending... He shivered. ...History of Magic.

He tilted his head back to look down the length of the hallway from an upside-down perspective. It always amused him to see everything hanging down, the ceiling and the floor inverted from his perspective.

On the left of the hall a suit of armor stood on the ceiling, like a shining bat in armor. Human armor. With no bat inside.
Slightly further down a red-cushioned bench pointed towards the floor.

Beyond the bench, a tapestry depicting someone attempting to teach trolls how to do ballet hung upwards along the wall.

Opposite the tapestry-

Wait, there's not supposed to be anything opposite the tapestry- is- is that- ? What!?

Calvin flipped himself over onto his stomach, then scrambled to his feet and hurried down to the gleaming metal-and-glass wonder of engineering that stood opposite the tapestry, where before had stood nothing.

"It- it is! Oh my Tyrannasaurus Rex, it's a revolving door! Thank you, Hogwarts, you scurvy castle! Oh yes!"

He walked up to the door, brushing a finger along its shining metal frame set in the stone wall. In a daze, he walked into the semi-circle cut into the wall and pushed at the glass door, turning it until he exited after a full revolution.

Remembering the time, he looked down at his watch to see the second hand tick past the twelve, marking the end to the agreed upon hour.

Now I just have to figure out how to slam it before I bring Harry and Dean up here…

"And it's just a door! There's nothing on the other side, just a space cut into the wall for the revolving door to do its revolving in."

Dean frowned. "That seems a bit odd, even for Hogwarts. Lets go find Harry, then you can show us."

They searched all of the third floor and most of the forth, creeping as quietly as possible - they didn't have the cloak, after all - before they found Harry.

"Harry, did you stay here the entire hour?" Calvin asked, stepping through the doorway and into the storeroom.

Harry looked up from where he was sitting in front of the mirror. "...Yeah. You guys going up to bed now?"

Calvin grinned wickedly. "Nope. You're coming with me - I've found the revolving door."

"I swear by the gods of Tinker Toys and Lincoln Logs, it was right here!" Calvin enthused, gesturing to the blank stone in front of them.

"Uuhh," replied Dean, clearly not impressed. "Well, if we can't find it, you can't slam it, so it looks like the bet's ours!"

"And now, sleeep," said Harry, yawning and lying down on a bench. He started snoring moments later.

Dean looked around. "Not a bad idea." He strolled over to another red bench and fell asleep before
even touching it. His body fell limply, ending up half draped onto the bench, his legs trailing behind him on the floor.

Calvin sat down heavily against the bare stone wall, staring at the tapestry across from him. "Stupid stupid person trying to teach trolls ballet."

Soon he, too, was asleep, and in his dreams the entire castle was made out of revolving doors, and all of them could be slammed. Snores punctuated the silence of the castle in the middle of the night.

For the moment, all was well. The future, however, held many hours of torture. Hours of class time. Hours of History of Magic with Professor Binns.

In his sleep, Calvin shuddered.

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AN: It seems that Calvin's stumbled onto something...a little over his head. *gets yelled at by Calvin for making fun of his height* Please consider leaving a review, and thanks for reading! High five, readers. High five.
To Battle We Ride

Chapter Twenty - To Battle We Ride

*Curses,* thought Draco angrily. *Of course they're here.* Draco didn't usually look forward to Christmas as much as he had this year - indeed, it wasn't actually Christmas that he had been looking forward to. What he had been excited about was the prospect of having some time alone, and being able to walk five feet without Crabbe, Goyle, Pansy, and a load of other Slytherin parasites attaching themselves to him like, well - parasites.

And now they were at the Malfoy Christmas party.

*I should have asked to see the guest list beforehand,* the blond-haired boy thought, berating himself. *At least I would have had prior warning.* He straightened his robes and braced himself as his fellow students approached him through the crowd of well-dressed adults, all milling about and pretending to be important.

"Miss Parkinson, Miss Greengrass," he said aloud, giving a slight bow in the direction of the two girls. Not too low, of course - it was the bow of a powerful host allowing guests into his presence. "Welcome to Malfoy Manor. Crabbe, Goyle," he nodded to the hulking boys. *Really, there is absolutely no way eleven-year-olds can get that large and muscular without- oh. Well duh.*

"Draco," Pansy whined in her utterly aggravating voice, "you disappeared so fast-" *Quickly,* he corrected absentmindedly, barely listening to her, "-at the station that I didn't get to say goodbye!"

Crabbe nodded, his expression void as a statue's. "You indeed were hurrying quite quickly, as if in a hurry." *Gee, no kidding, Sharlock the Helmsman, no wonder you're a world-class detective.*

"I had something to take care of," he replied simply, trying to think of a similar excuse to use for the present. Maybe Pansy would go away if he pretended he had suddenly developed an allergy to her terribly overused perfume. He turned to Goyle, who had somehow managed to get his hands on one of the pastry-wrapped entrees, despite the fact that they had yet to be served. The broad boy was munching wordlessly, disconcerting eyes on Draco.

*I'm surrounded by creeps. This party had better be over soon.*

"Crabbe, what time does this gathering end," he asked his first-year bodyguard. Crabbe made it a point to always know what was going on around the object of his responsibility - namely, Draco. Whether that meant counting the number of accessible exits in a building or memorizing the schedule of everybody who interacted with Draco, Crabbe was aware of it all.

"Precisely five and one quarter hours from now, Boss," Crabbe said crisply.

"Oh, don't worry about not getting to see me enough," Pansy giggle, causing Draco's annoyance to shoot up exponentially.
Merlin's beard, but her voice is grating. "What are you talking about, Pansy?"

She giggled again, and he had to convince himself that grabbing the pastry from Goyle's hand and smashing into her revolting grimace of a smile was not a course of action that he would benefit from in the long run. "There's always tomorrow's party," she explained haughtily, twirling the ends of her hair around a finger. "And the four after that."

Draco's malicious thoughts froze, grinding to a halt and sending up sparks. "Wait, what four other parties?" Father didn't mention anything about more parties - he was going away tomorrow, wasn't he?

"Of course," Daphne Greengrass cut in gleefully. "Tomorrow's is at my family's estate, and then we rotate around to the other important peoples' places. Aren't parties awesome?"

What.

It was going to be a long holiday.

Draco barricaded himself in his room for the time being. He'd pay for it later, but at the moment he just couldn't care. He couldn't handle Pansy and the rest. Crabbe and Goyle weren't so bad, honestly, but they mostly kept quiet - the leech Pansy was the real problem. The only times he could get away from her at Hogwarts was when he was in his private rooms - she even followed him when he went to watch the Slytherin quidditch team on the pitch!

And she just never shut up. Yes, he understood that those first-year Gryffindors were backstabbing slime to be trodden on and insulted; that didn't mean he wanted to hear about it all day long, every day of the week. He'd long had suspicions that Pansy was making them out to be worse than they were, and he was pretty sure that one of the horrible pranks they'd supposedly pulled on him was actually her doing - but that didn't matter. Even without the constant pranks and stories of their cowardly actions, even without anything else at all, he would hate them forever. He would hate Calvin.

Pranks and taunting could be forgiven, forgotten even. It was inconsequential, really. The one thing he would never forgive was betrayal. Betrayal of trust. Like a Cutting Charm straight to his heart. If only he'd never let down his guard, the strike wouldn't have hit so hard.

Still, Pansy would have to be dealt with. She was getting bolder around him, and the blind hatred of the Gryffindors she constantly spouted was frankly disgusting - what did she have to hate them for? Of course she shouldn't like them, but dislike shouldn't lead to white-hot hatred, not without a distinct reason.

Just Crabbe and Goyle following me I can handle. Without Pansy fueling the sycophant train, the others should get a lot less clingy. Then it'll be just us. Just me and two bodyguards. That's what you want, Draco, right? Peace and quiet. No one to bother you. No one to annoy you. No one to talk to you...

He buried his face in his enormously fluffy pillow and grunted loudly. An hour or so later, a rapid tapping at his bedroom window caught his attention, and he stood to open it. The owl didn't even hop in - it just shook its leg vigorously, sending the small roll of parchment sailing into the room, then waited patiently on the windowsill.

Curious, Draco picked the parchment up, returning to his bed while he examined the strange seal.
The deep green wax was impressed with a picture of what look a single earmuff, and some plant growing out of it.

_Dear Hogwarts student_, the letter read. _Or to whom it may concern. Or, to who may be concerned. It is our immeasurable honor to invite you to the event of a lifetime, as long as your lifetime is considerably shorter than the average. On the second day of Christmas, one day after the first day and two days after the day before the first day, there will be a jolly good competition of unimaginable enjoyability taking place at the Castle of Warthogs. The rules are currently unknown, but we are sure it will be at least as fun as we think it should be, if in fact it is._

_Please come if you can't, and wear your best clothes if you haven't any. Admission is one and a half Bertie Botts Every Flavored Beans of different flavors, to be presented for inspection upon arrival._

_Stay tasty,_

_Gred and Forge of the Ballyhoo Brigade_

_PS_

_Don't let the one with the beak near any power tools._

Draco glanced up at the owl, who hooted at him self-consciously.

Then he went through the letter again, because he had no idea what he'd just read. After the third read-through he understood that the only thing to be understood was that there was going to be a competition of some sort at Hogwarts, on the second day of Christmas. He wasn't sure if the part about the Bertie Botts Every Flavored Beans was a joke or not.

He couldn't go, of course, as it was being directed by the Weasley twins, two of the most Gryffindorish Gryffindors to ever be sorted into Gryffindor. No one associated with the Malfoys would ever risk showing up at such an event.

Draco 'hmm'd to himself. No one...including Pansy Parkinson. It was purely wishful thinking, but if he did go back to Hogwarts tomorrow, there was no way she would be there. He dropped down onto his silk-sheeted bed and sighed, tossing the letter to the side. Up on the windowsill, the owl hooted softly. _Why is it still here? Does it want the letter back?_

He rolled over and stretched down to pick the letter off the floor, and saw that there was more writing on the back of it.

_Please RSVP by sunrise or risk the wrath of Shagog the Demon Emperor_

Right.

"I'm not going," he said aloud to the owl, then threw the letter off his bed. The owl hooted again and cocked its head, black eyes staring unblinkingly at him. "Do whatever you want," Draco said. "I need to go put in an appearance at my father's private table before he comes looking for me."

As he left his room and headed towards the main wing of Malfoy Manor, the sounds of the party began to reach his ears. Subdued conversation, polite laughter, clinking glasses and silverware.

"Evening, Boss," a voice at his shoulder declared the moment he stepped into the feasting hall.
Draco looked around. "Where's Goyle?"

"He is indisposed at the moment, Boss," answered Crabbe solemnly.

Draco snorted. "Ate too much?"

"Ate too much," Crabbe agreed with a nod.

They neared his father's private table, hidden from eyes and ears by thick, black silk curtains falling from the ceiling like liquid obsidian.

A hand pressed on his shoulder.

"Crabbe?" Draco asked with a raised eyebrow. "You know you are not to touch my person."

"Your father said you should be let in to see him once dessert is served," the hulking eleven-year-old replied stonily.


"Boss, you should... I..." Crabbe bit his bottom lip in what looked liked indecision, something he didn't show very often. Not that he showed emotion very often at all.

"Whatever this is about, it shall have to wait. I need to see my father. Now remove your hand from my shoulder."

Crabbe looked up and met his gaze. In his eyes - determination, and...

*Is that...pity?*

"Gregory and I will be right behind you, Boss." What exactly was he talking about? Nobody came in with him when he saw his father. "The floo powder will be in your room."

Then his hand slipped off Draco's shoulder, and he turned away.

"Crabbe, what are you-"

"No time. Go in now if you want to end the lies. And Boss- Draco. For what it is worth...I am sorry." He disappeared into the crowd without a backward glance.

*Did Crabbe just get sentimental on me? Someone must have been hanging around the drinks station tonight.*

Draco took a steady breath, casting aside all irrelevant thoughts. He let the breath out. He stepped into the glassy black curtains, and the voices behind him faded away. Two new voices could be heard ahead.

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"...instead of spiky sprouts in the Clearness Concoction! Oh, except the next time it exploded over the whole room and Professor Snape had to stop class to clean it up." This was followed by a nauseating giggle and a smirk you could hear a mile away. "The mudblood boy got detention for that."

"Your family will be proud of you, Miss Parkinson," the voice of Lucius Malfoy said, somehow
both frigid and smooth as warm honey at the same time. "You have served the Malfoy's better than I would have ever imagined. Yes, even Draco, young Pansy. I see you think him unhappy since you had his little midnight powwow interrupted, but time will show the good you have done him."

A glass *tink* echoed in the air.

"Ah, it seems desert is being brought out presently. Do go indulge in the festivities, Miss Parkinson. Send my son in after you."

"Merry Christmas, sir," Pansy said cheerily, skipping out into the main dining area. She did not see Draco, wrapped as he was in the muffling black fabric.

"Merry Christmas," whispered the grimly smiling voice of his traitorous father.

Draco stumbled out, almost knocking into one of the hovering trays of cream puffs that was bobbing and weaving through the room distributing desert.

He was surprised at how...little surprise he actually felt. He was shocked, yes, but he almost felt as if he's already known the truth, and had only refused to acknowledge it.

*I...I could never believe…* 

In a daze, Draco took off across the room, back into the hallway leading to the wing of the manor that housed his bedroom. Over plush carpets, past richly dressed wizards surrounded by picture frames.

He arrived at his room and slammed the door closed behind him, withdrawing his wand as he turned around.

"Collo- Co- Colloportus," he said shakily. The spell didn't take.

He collected himself, again casting aside all thoughts irrelevant to the current situation.

"Colloportus." The door was now magically locked.

He had to get out of here. His father was expecting him in his private dining room any moment now. What was it that Crabbe had said?

'Gregory and I will be right behind you, Boss.' That part didn't make any sense.

'The floo powder will be in your room.' So that he could leave?

Draco flicked his eyes around the room, looking for- there, on the window sill, a pouch of floo powder. An owl must have dropped it off. He hurried over to it, stepping over the letter from earlier.

Wait, so Crabbe had known?

'For what it is worth...I am sorry.'

Draco wasn't sure how he felt about that. Crabbe and Goyle weren't exactly his *friends*, but he'd thought he'd had their loyalty.

The small white pouch of floo powder felt heavy in his hand. Well, maybe he did at that. There was a problem with the whole 'floo powder out of the manor' plan though. The fireplace in his room wasn't hooked up to the floo network.
"Draco."

Draco jumped, almost dropping the pouch, and jerked his wand around the room.

"Draco, dear. Over here."

His mother's face peered at him from the fireplace, glowing green between the ashes.

"Mother." He'd had all the surprise squeezed out of him by now.

"I've connected this fireplace through the greater floo network, Draco. You can get to the Great Hall in Hogwarts in just one jump." She smiled sadly. "Stay safe, Draco. Find your friends, and stick with them. Trust them. More importantly - trust yourself. I love you." The face-shaped lump of ashes collapsed suddenly, sending up a miniscule cloud of gray dust.

Draco hefted the pouch of floo powder and gulped. He wasn't sure what exactly was happening, but it seemed his mother was on his side. As she always had been. That was enough.

He hastily lit a fire emptied some of the floo powder into his hand, tucking his wand in the appropriate pocket of his robes.

*Here we go, Draco. You're on your own, now.*

"Great Ha-"

"Psst, Boss!" Two faces poked in through the still open window. "A little help, if you don't mind?" whispered Goyle loudly.

'Find your friends,' his mother had said. Friendship, loyalty - what was the difference?

"I brought some cream puffs, Boss! For the road!"

"Hell if I know," Draco muttered to himself, stepping out of the fireplace. Then, out loud, "Get your leg down, Goyle, you're going to end up on your back in the snow." Once the window space was clear, Draco tapped on the latches and the wall below sank into the floor, allowing the two easy access into the room. "Hurry up, father's bound to have noticed my absence by now, even if he hasn't already gotten word of my mother messing with the floo network connections going out of our house."

"Cra- Vincent," Draco greeted with a nod of appreciation.

Vincent returned the nod. "We're with you, Draco."

Draco turned on his heel and stepped into the ornate fireplace. "Stop saying things like that. They make me uncomfortable." He threw his handful of floo powder onto the ashes below. "Great Hall, Hogwarts!" A wall of green flames rose about him, and his room disappeared.

He stepped out into snow, and chaos.

*I thought I was going to the Great Hall, what-*

A snowball creamed him up the back of his head.

"What in Merlin's blood-*"

Another one smacked him in his open mouth.
"AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHAHAHAHA!" laughed a Hufflepuff boy manically from atop a dazzling silver sleigh built of food platters. "TO BAAAAAAATTLE WE RIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIDE!"

Someone bumped into Draco's back as he wiped snow out of his eyes. "Hey Boss, why are we outside and inside at the same time?"

Looking around, Draco realized that Goyle was right - despite the voluminous amounts of snow and snow-related activities ongoing around them, they did still appear to be in the Great Hall.

Another bump against his back, and a hand pressed down on his shoulder. "Duck."

Draco did so, and a barrage of snowballs whistled overhead. "What is going on!?"

"Looks like a snowball fight, Boss," Goyle said amicably. "Like something Calvin would do, this here snow inside the castle. Can we join in?"

"It could be an assassination plot," Vincent mused.

"FOR PONY!" screamed the sleigh-riding Hufflepuff.

_I miss home already_, thought Draco glumly.

A snowball splattered against the side of his neck, icy water dripping down his back.

First, he was going to find Calvin, and somehow find the words to apologize to him.

Another snowball pasted his leg with slush.

Then, he was going to kill him for ruining Christmas.

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_AN: A figuratively literally endless amount of apologies for the ridiculous hibernation period this fic took. A literally figuratively endless amount of thanks for sticking with me and the story. You guys are awesome. Please consider taking a few seconds to leave a review if you enjoyed reading the words I typed. Prepare yourselves - the coming chapters are going test your sanity._

_If you fail, you must retake the test. Calculators are not allowed. Snacks are mandatory. Good luck, readers, and high five. High five indeed._
OBLVTD

[[OBLVTD]]
Chapter Twenty-Two: Out Of The Bag

A man with stiff black hair and a bushy mustache leaned over the bed, as six-year-old Calvin drifted between the conscious and unconscious worlds.

"Mmgmph?" mumbled Calvin.

"Shh," said the man. "No need to wake up." The man was holding a thin stick in his left hand, and something familiar in his right. The familiar thing was snoring obliviously.

"You dropped this guy on the floor, buddy," the man said, smiling, as he placed the sleeping tiger next to Calvin. "You found him caught in your tiger-trap, remember? Tigers are suckers for a tuna fish sandwich. Always keep him with you, Calvin. He'll keep you safe even when you forget what you need to be kept safe from."

"Mnnn?"

"I'll visit soon. Before I cannot visit at all. Someday, we'll meet on different terms, I think. For now, sleep."

And Calvin slept, slipping into dreams as his eyes locked shut like deadbolts sliding home.

xXx

Calvin's eyes snapped open, giving him a perfect view of the ceiling.

"I have got to stop with the chocolate-cake-before-bed thing," he told the ceiling. "My dreams are getting a tad surreal."

"We didn't go down to the kitchens last night, Calvin," mumbled Dean from across the room. "We were busy studying, remember? Your dreams are always surreal."

Calvin paused in the act of pulling the covers over his head to try and return to lala-land. Huh, Dean's right. I actually did study last night.

XXXxxxXXXxxxxXXX

"Good morning, Harry, Calvin, and Mr. Grumpy Face," Hermione said brightly, sitting down across from them and serving herself a generous helping of eggs. "Ready for the Transfiguration test today?"

"I...yeah, actually," said Calvin, furrowing his brow. "I am."

"See? Doesn't it feel good to be on top of your school work? You three have been much better about it these past few days. I'm glad you're finally listening to good sense." She poured herself a
cup of pumpkin juice while Calvin's brow furrowed deeper and deeper.

Listen to good sense? Me? That doesn't sound right. Who am I becoming?

"Studying so much just doesn't feel right, Hermione," said Ron, staring at his empty plate. "I think it stole my appetite."

"Nonsense," she responded. "Maybe you just care about the test this time, and are nervous."

Ron laughed dryly. "Believe me, if I was nervous I'd be eating even more than usual."

"It does feel nice to be prepared for once," interjected Harry, giving Hermione a smile.

Calvin sat back, putting his hands on the bench to steady himself. The light blurred and cut off as he slowly closed his eyes. I sense a disturbance in the Force. Namely, there are no disturbances.

"Uh, Calvin? You alright?" Dean elbowed him lightly in the side, bringing Calvin back to the present.

Calvin turned abruptly to face his friend, seizing him by the front of his robes. "Something is wrong, Dean! Something is terribly wrong!" Then he spun to confront Harry. "What did I do last night?"

Fork halfway to his mouth, Harry shifted his eyes to his left. "Study for the test today?"

"And the night before that?"

"Study for the quiz we had yesterday?"

"WHAT CLASS WAS THE QUIZ FOR, HARRY!?"

Harry raised an eyebrow. "History of Magic?"

Calvin shivered, wrapping his arms around himself. "Something is terribly, terribly wrong…"

There were other things that tipped Calvin off throughout the day. Like the feeling of intense annoyance he felt bubble up inside himself whenever he spotted Draco, because two days previous Draco had come to Hogwarts just to sabotage The Game.

Like the memories filled with afternoons of studying and the hours spent actually listening to Professor Binns' mind-numbing lectures.

Memories of Neville actually being there.

Too many things didn't add up.

The final straw was the startling lack of pranks inhabiting the memories of the days since The Game. These were all the clues Calvin needed to deduce the truth of the situation.

It was at dinner that he finally confessed his fears to the rest of his friends. They did not take it so well.

"You think we were what?" replied Hermione incredulously.
"It's obvious when you look at the facts," Calvin exclaimed, hands waving in the air. "We were transported to an alternate reality! Somewhere between me, Harry, and Dean falling asleep in the seventh-floor hallway, and waking up with morning, we were snatched from our rightful reality and sent to a twisted reality much like our own, yet terrible beyond imagination."

"I think you're reading too much into this, mate," said Ron, talking around a mouthful of meat. "Just 'cause you haven't pulled any crazy pranks lately doesn't mean you're in a different reality." After having explained to the redhead earlier in the year what, exactly, and alternate reality was, Ron had shown a peculiar attraction to the idea, often wondering aloud if there was an alternate reality where he was a quidditch star like the twins, or where he became a prefect like Percy, or where he got to ride a dragon like Charlie, or any number of completely preposterous things that could never happen. Now, however, it didn't seem like he was willing to believe.

"I'm telling you guys, it's the only thing that makes sense! The only question is...why did I only realize this today?"

"Because you're mad?" suggested Ron.

"Hmm..." Calvin mused. "No, I don't think that's it..." He clapped Ron on the shoulder. "Good thinking, though. Keep up the good work, and let me know if you come up with anything else."

"Er, yeah, sure, I'll do that."

"It's called change, Calvin," Hermione said with a roll of her eyes. They're going to roll right out of her noggin if she keeps that up.

"It's what happens due to the passing of time, and the experiences one goes through. There's nothing wrong with it."

"You don't think it was a little...abrupt, though?" said Harry. "I mean, Calvin hasn't tried to drag me into anything these past couple days. It is a bit weird."

"Thank you! Now we just have to find a good, sturdy cardboard box with enough room for all of us so we can get back to our home reality. Though I guess I could make multiple trips if it's too small for all of us at once..."

Ignoring the results of Calvin's unusual thought process, Hermione turned to Harry. "Don't let him drag into this either, then. We have a difficult assignment due tomorrow for Potions, and I won't have you boys making a mountain out of absolutely nothing and distracting me from my work. I suggest you follow your own example of these past few days and actually do the work too."

"Mione's right," said Ron, cleaning his plate of the last bits of food. "As usual. It can get annoying, but it's better if you just accept it." He stood up and stretched, then, before leaving the Great Hall with Hermione.

"If you find a suitable cardboard box, let me know." Dean grinned, then headed off with Seamus for a game of Exploding Snap.

"Harry?" Calvin said, turning back to the skinny boy with an appraising look.

"Sorry, Calvin," Harry said, eyes averted. "You're on your own for this one."

And then there was one, Calvin thought, looking around at the empty seats.
"How's it going, Calvin," said Neville, reaching over to grab the pitcher of pumpkin juice.

"Gah! Neville! What did I say about- Wait, Neville! You're here!"

"Ah, gerrof!" yelled Neville, trying to push Calvin away. Calvin, who had his arms wrapped around the unsettled boy, was crying tears of relief.

"Oh, it's good to be home," he sobbed, burying his face in Neville's shoulder. "It's good to be home."

"Uh, it's uh, it's al- alright, I guess…” stammered Neville in embarrassment, patting Calvin's back awkwardly. "P- please let go of me now."

"Can't do that, Neville," said Calvin suddenly, springing backwards and straightening up. "No time. I have to go tell the good news to…” He stopped, realizing that everyone had already professed a lack of belief in them having been transported to an alternate reality in the first place. Surely there was someone he could tell? Someone he had always talked about these things with? Someone...someone who would listen, without expecting anything in return? Didn't someone like that exist?

Calvin stumbled out of the Great Hall, unsure of why he felt so...unsure. He headed to his room, to sit on his bed and think. He didn't do that to often, but a situation of such uncertainty certainly called for some action. Even if that action was just sitting and thinking.

The stark red bedspread provided the perfect meditation spot. Not that he intended to meditate, not really.

"Yesterday...the day before...the day before…”Calvin strained to recall some discrepancy in the remembered timeline that could prove this reality was not his own. Despite Neville's sudden appearance at dinner, he still felt it was a possibility. "I woke up the morning of The Game, and hurried to prepare everything with Gordee and Ferg and the rest of the Ballyhoo Brigade. Then, soon after it started, Draco and his goons came marching in, going around and messing it all up."

The empty room might have added something, had it not been so empty. Even the open window admitted no breeze.

"Why? Why would Draco do that? He never did anything like that before, and even the things he did were only when I provoked him, like in Potions class. So why this? He was never so malicious.

"And what of my apparent decision not to pull any pranks or anything these past few days? Even the Ballyhoo Breakfast Radio show felt...rehashed. Recycled. Uninspired. What's been going on? And why in the world am I talking out loud!" He screamed the last part, but there was no response from the empty room. "I know I should be talking to someone - not that I should go and find someone to talk to, but that right now there should be someone here listening to me talk to them! A friend. My friend. My...best friend?"

Some...something. There's something there. Who is...my best friend? He tried to say 'Harry,' but his mouth would not comply. He tried to say 'Dean,' but his mouth would not comply. He decided not to try and say anything, and just let himself say the truth. "Who is my best friend?" And he knew it to be true as he answered, for his best friend answered with him.

"Hobbes," they said together.
"I-" started Calvin, staring at the ruffled tiger as he leapt up from beneath the bed.

"I-" began Hobbes, kneading the bedspread with nervous paws.

"I missed you," said Calvin, trying to hold back tears. "But I- I don't know why."

"I have a lot to tell you," said Hobbes, distractedly licking his paw and dragging it over the unkempt fur on his head. He paused and suddenly looked up, meeting Calvin's eyes with an intensity usually reserved for those times Calvin had woken him up prematurely from a nap in the sun.

His voice was serious; strained. His gaze foreboding. His tongue flicked out and withdrew just as quickly before he spoke again.

"You've been Memory-Charmed."

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AN: I'll be reinvigorating the story-line from here on out with an actual plot for this arc, though the updates will be sporadic. Hope you enjoy it. Thanks for sticking with me. High five, readers. High five.
Chapter Twenty-Three: Raise Your Swords And Shield Charms

"...I was what?" The crimson bedspread beneath them seemed to stretch, growing vast and incomprehensible, taking up all of existence.

"Memory-charmed," Hobbes repeated, still grooming himself between breaths. "Your memories were-"

"Charmed?" interrupted Calvin.


Calvin scowled. "Disgraced. I knew I was in an alternate reality - or something similar."

"I have to tell you what actually happened - what you remember is what was artificially placed in your head."

Calvin's fist gripped the sheets, twisting them. "That's some seriously powerful magic." Then he gave a roguish smile. "Guess they didn't count on you, huh, buddy?"

Hobbes smiled back. "Fortunately. So," he said, licking flat one last patch of unruly fur. "Ready to hear what really happened?"

"Hit me."

...

"Ow! I didn't mean actually-"

"Shh, this is important," said Hobbes, settling comfortably onto his haunches. "Listen carefully."

As it turned out, Draco had shown up at The Game. Hobbes recounted the events, and as he spoke, Calvin remembered. He didn't see it in his mind's eye, like a story imagined - he remembered it. Crystal clear, as though it had happened only a few days before. Because it had.

"What's he doing here?" said Ron, grimacing. "The twins said they'd owled him an invitation as a joke, but I never thought he'd actually show up. Now what do we do?"

"It's too late to put him into The Game," said Calvin. "He'll have to wait for the next round."

The Great Hall had just emptied of students, all those participating in The Game running off to their various starting points throughout the castle. The Ballyhoo Brigade (plus Hermione), having been the ones to help the twins organize it just that morning, were the only ones left, about to head
"What's this?" exclaimed Fred, approaching from the front of the Hall, rolling over in his magical hamster ball.

George rolled up beside him, cradling what looked to be an actual hamster in its own hamster ball. The furry creature was staring suspiciously at Draco. "Has the Scion of the Noble and Most Ancient House of Killjoy come to join the fun?"

"I don't believe the Noble and Most Ancient House of Killjoy believes in 'fun', brother-mine. Nor do his two frowning symbiotes."

"It's not Mo," Seamus whispered reassuringly to Calvin, as Draco approached framed by Crabbe and Goyle."

"How can you suuuuure," Calvin whispered back.

"Well, Draco?" said Dean, stepping forward. "What do you want?"

Draco hesitated, biting his lower lip. "I'm...not sure."

"Ah, the troubles of adolescence," sighed Fred, laying the back of a hand against his forehead. Then he pulled his hands behind his back and leaned forward, slowly rolling his hamster ball around the Slytherin trio. George joined him, and they both circled repeatedly, eyes peering sharply out.

"Why are you really here, young Draco?" said George, stroking the hamster ball like it was the hamster itself.

"Yeah, Draco, I thought you haaaaaated me," Calvin said. "I thought you despiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiised us. I thought you looooooooollllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllusted our very existence. "I thought you abhoooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo-"

"I get it!" Draco seethed, teeth bared. "Okay! I know how I was! I was being as stupid as I thought you were."

"Ouch," said Calvin, feigning a gunshot to the heart. "Is this how the Noble and Most Ancient House of Killjoy apologizes?"

"Why are you apologizing?" Hermione cut in. "If that is indeed what you are doing. I've yet to hear an actual apology."

Draco's eyes flicked to the large fireplace behind them for a moment, his eyes almost distant. "I...I learned something, yesterday. I came here to talk to you, but you everything was chaos, snowballs flying everywhere, silver platters being-" He stopped, bit his bottom lip again, and took a deep breath, not quite meeting any of their eyes. "My father..."

"Is a horrible man," said Hermione, eyes hard. "But that doesn't excuse any of your behavior. If you're going to apologize, you have to take responsibility for the things you did and the way you acted."

"Sheesh, Hermione, ease up on the parent-talk a little, will you?" said Calvin.

"No, she's right."
They all turned to Draco in surprise.

The blond Slytherin scowled. "What, you think I don't know how to behave like a decent human being?"

... "The evidence is certainly against it, yeah," said Harry, raising both eyebrows. Calvin resolved to teach him how to do one at a time.

"I was acting on false information," Draco said darkly.

"Only because you refused to see the truth."

"I- yes. Yes, I may have been blinding myself. If I'd only- but that's done, and I...I'm sorry."

The eight Gryffindors stood silent, facing Draco, Crabbe, and Goyle. Facing Draco facing his mistakes, water in his eyes, brave as any Gryffindor. No one knew what to say, after that. What could be said, except for-

"So how'd you find out you're dad's an evil git?"

"RONALD!" cried Hermione, aghast. Calvin had seen her about to respond, probably with something along the lines of 'We accept your apology.'

"What, it's what everyone was thinking!" the redhead shot back, defensive.

"I'd love to see your dictionary's definition of 'everyone,' Ron. And come on, even I have more tact than that. That being said..." Calvin turned to Draco. "How did you find out the truth?"

"My father is not an 'evil git.'" Draco said vehemently. "He may be wrong about some things, but he's a good man. Being wrong doesn't make you evil."

"But being evil does," said Ron. "So your dad's evil."

"You're really going to have to show me your personal dictionary one of these days, Ron," said Calvin. "If we merge it with mine, we can have a dictionary that's twice as large and makes half as much sense!"

"What about these two," said Harry, nodding at Crabbe and Goyle. "I haven't heard a word out of them, and that definitely doesn't count as an apology."

"They did what I told them to," Draco said, gritting his teeth. "Anything they did is on me."

Hermione shook her head. "'I was just following orders' is not in any way-"

"He's our friend."

It took a few moments before they realized that Crabbe had been the one that said it.

"...What?"

"We trust him," Goyle added, face calm and controlled. "That is why we did what he said. But we, too, extend our apologies."

"Yeah," said Crabbe. "We pretend to 'pologize."
"That's, umm...that's good," said Hermione, blinking.

"What now?" said Calvin, checking his wrist. "It's been at least a certain amount of time since The Game began, which amount I would actually know if I bothered wearing a watch." He looked up, then around. "Hey, where'd Gred and Forge go?"

Ron scrunched his face, closed his eyes, and put his fingers to his temples. "Mmmmmmmmmmmmm..."

"Ron," began Hermione. "Whatever are you-"

"My twin-sensing powers tell me they're probably off doing something like decorating Draco's bedroom with 'Welcome To The Family' banners, or filling his trunks with sequins. Maybe both, if they're feeling generous."

"Wait just a cotton-pickin' minute," Calvin exclaimed, eyebrows drawn in. "Ron can think like a prankster!? He's been holding out on me!"

"So you said," replied Hobbes. "Now shush, let me finish."

Calvin stared at him. "Wow. That's pretty spot on, I bet." Then he grabbed Ron by the shoulders. "Why didn't you tell me you were awesome!?"

"I've only lived with them my whole life," said Ron dryly. "I just don't usually like trying to think like them. Reckon it'll make me go bonkers way faster than just being around them."

"But being bonkers is what it's all about!"

"Says you."

"Yes, says me!"

"Anyway," Dean said, cutting off the coming tirade of 'Yes, you," and "Yes, me!"s before it began in earnest. "Are we going to join The Game, or what? I've waited too long to miss out now. Criceta Arma!" The Hamster Ball Charm sprang up around him like a quickly inflating balloon, perfectly spherical and slightly golden in color.

"Criceta Arma!" said Seamus, following Dean's lead. "We'll see you all on the battlefield." The two of them saluted the rest of the Ballyhoo Brigade, then headed out of the Great Hall.

"THEY SEE ME ROLLIN'," yelled Dean as he turned into the hallway.

Ron turned to Calvin. "I don't want to get left in the dust. Let's go, we can figure out what to do about Draco afterwards."

"It's impolite to talk about someone like they're not present when they are, Ron," said Hermione. "Hmmmm," Calvin said, mulling it over. "You'll have to redeem yourself in the eyes of the group, it seems, beyond merely saying you're sorry."

"I don't - what could I do, to prove that I really mean it?" Draco seemed conflicted, like he was constantly trying not to snap at them. But he didn't.

"I can't believe Draco unbrainwashed himself," Calvin mused, falling onto his back to stare at the ceiling. "I mean, I can, because I now remember him apologizing and everything. But still."
"It doesn't end there," said Hobbes, paws kneading the bedspread, as he did when he was anxious.

"Right, I still don't know how or why I was Memory-Charmed!"

"That part comes now."

Calvin grinned, raising his wand. "Gentlemen," he said, nodding to Harry and Ron. "You know what to do." They followed suit, wands in hand.

"This is not how one goes about-" Hermione was cut off by three screams of-

"Criceta Arma!" Hamster Shields ballooned into existence around the three baffled Slytherins, who were now stumbling about, trying to keep their balance.

"Calvinbots!" shouted Calvin, heading for the doors. "Roll out!"

"Oh fine," Hermione muttered, casting her own Hamster Shield. "But after this is all over you're all sitting down and letting me teach you how to apologize, and how to accept an apology, and then what to do after that."

"Wheeee!"

They rolled toward the giant doors of the Great Hall, Calvin trying - though not very hard - not to laugh at the Slytherin's attempts at propelling their hamster balls.

He swiveled around in his as they neared the hallway.

"Hey, guys, you think you could hurry it up a bit? My birthday's going out of style."

"These blasted contraptions are not meant for wizards, Calvin," said Draco, clearly frustrated that he was absolutely terrible at being a hamster.

"Not with that attitude they aren't," Calvin answered. "Now let me see some hustle, soldier!"

"It would be much easier to concentrate without your-"

He was interrupted by a furious crackle and flurry of sparks from the direction of the large fireplace at the opposite end of the room. They all turned to look, and Calvin saw the swish of a cloak and the shimmer of silver hair through the haze of greenish smoke that had spilled into the room.

"What on Earth is-"

"R-run," stuttered Draco in barely more than a whisper, stumbling and pushing frantically at his Hamster Shield, rolling quickly into the hallway.

"See, I knew you had it in you! Just keep-"

"Run, Calvin!" He yelled it this time, terror warping his voice.

"I think you mean 'roll'. See, we're clearly-"

A shimmering red bolt flew out of the smoke and scarred the gleaming marble floor behind them.

Draco bumped into him, knocking him forward. The rest of them were already ahead. "Shut up and
AN: They're clearly rolling. Next chapter will be up later this week, Shagog The Demon Emperor-willing. High five, readers. See you soon. Real soon. Reeeaaaal soon. Lock your doors.
Chapter Twenty-Three: The Best of Times, The Worst of Times, So Many Times

"So what happened!?!" Calvin leaned forward, eyes wide, teeth gnawing on his nails. "Did we make it? Were we overtaken?" He grabbed Hobbes by the shoulders and shook him vigorously. "Did I die, Hobbes!? DID I PERISH IN MAGICALLY-ENHANCED AGONY!?"

"Yes, you died," said Hobbes dryly, pushing Calvin off of him. "Everything since then has been the afterlife, and I must say, I am not impressed."

"I knew it," Calvin whispered, peering around furtively. "This must be limbo. An alternate reality, of sorts. If only I could find-"

"Would you shut up long enough to hear the rest of what happened? Of course you survived!"

Calvin squinted at the frustrated tiger for a moment. "Ooooo, you're the caretaker of this limbo and you're just trying to get me to stay."

Hobbes slapped a paw over his face. "Would you just let me talk?"

"Ha! That's exactly what the caretaker of limbo would say!"

"Because of-!" Calvin stopped, finger raised as if in triumph. "Because of reasons!" He crossed his arms. "So there." He shrugged as Hobbes began to sigh. "Still, it can't hurt to hear what you have to say. Besides, I really want to know what happened next; this a great story!"


Seven yellowish spheres, each large enough to contain a frantic first-year madly dashing for their life, careened down the hallway, away from the Great Hall. Behind them, a voice bellowed.

"They've kidnapped my son! Do whatever you have to, just GET. HIM. BACK!"

"Quick," said Harry from up front, "there's a secret passageway down the right hallway!"

They all turned down the aforementioned hallway with varying degrees of success, the three Slytherins bumping into the far wall in the process. Seven cries of Finite Incantatem later, they squeezed behind a suit of shining armor, the helmet tilted to the side giving the knight a quizzical look. Down the squat tunnel they hurried, rough stone brushing against them on either side.

"Why is your dad saying we kidnapped you!" hissed Ron, craning his neck to look back at Draco. "We're going to get thrown in Azkaban for this!"
"You're fine, don't worry. It's because I wasn't supposed to be here, and he has to frame it in a way that saves the Malfoy reputation for...well, being Malfoys." Draco frowned, looking even more worried. "Though there is a small chance that he actually thinks you kidnapped me."

"Great. Kill me now."

"Shut up and move like my life depends on it, Weasley. I can barely breathe in here."

They emptied out into the adjacent hallway, brushing dust from their clothes onto the red carpet underfoot. They stood for a moment, listening for signs of pursuit.

"We'd better head for Dumbledore's office," Hermione said decisively, starting off down the hall.

"No!" spat Draco reflexively. "Dumbledore can't be trusted!"

"Why not?"

"He's..." Draco shut his eyes, hard, and massaged his temples. "Argh. Fine. Dumbledore's office it is. Let's go." He stomped past, lips pressed against each other in a firm line. He stopped short at the end of the hallway. Turned around. "Where is Dumbledore's office?"

Calvin laughed the deep laugh of someone who knows so much more than the foolish person they are laughing at. "You must follow the sound of the invisible hacky-sack, of course!" He mimed dropping a hacky-sack and kicking it up, then set off down the hallway, still kicking. "And we're off to see the wizard!"

"Boss," said Goyle a few minutes later, breaking the tense silence that accompanied the group's anxious journey. "We're being followed."

"What? Why didn't you tell me earlier!"

Goyle blinked. "We weren't being followed."

"How many people, and how far away are they?" asked Hermione, as they all picked up the pace.

"Can't tell," came the terse reply.

Footsteps sounded distantly.

The seven first-years, Gryffindor and Slytherin alike, broke into a flat-out run.

At the end of the corridor, Ron, who had been running frantically as if from a giant spider or something equally terrifying and impossible, stumbled to a halt. The rest of them tried stopping, bumped into the people in front of them, and generally failed at standing upright.

Hermione began to open her mouth in order to berate the wheezing redhead, but just then caught sight of what had stopped Ron so suddenly.

Two cloaked figures blocked the way.

This is it, thought Calvin. This is the end. He leaned over to Harry. "It's been nice knowing you, pal. See you on the other slide."

"We didn't-" Hermione said, only to be cut off by a voice from behind.

"Ha! Got you cornered!"
They whirled around to find another figure in a cloak throwing back their hood.

"Smith!?"

"That's right, Gryffindor scum! Prepare to meet your doom!"

"Wait, why are there Slytherins with them too? Is that—is that Draco Malfoy?" The other two cloaked figures had lowered their hoods as well, and Calvin wondered why he hadn't noticed that they were all far too short to be Draco's dad and his crew. "Why're you guys with him?"

Calvin recognized these two others as Puffs. He did not recognize them as individuals, and therefore did not know their names.

"Irrelevant, Justin!" cried Smith, pushing his sleeves up to his elbows. "We are here for one reason only, and that is—"

"Hey, Zach, I think there's something going on," said the third Hufflepuff, a blonde girl Calvin didn't remember ever seeing.

"Of course there's something going on, Hannah!"

Well that was awfully nice of him, telling me their names so conveniently like that.

"We're showing these miscreants what being so miscreantly will get them! It will get them—"

"I think she's right, Zach," said the boy called Justin, scratching his nose. He brushed his dark hair to the side, and continued, "The were running from something, even though they didn't know we were here."

"We did know you were here—well, not here, here, but we knew someone was around." Calvin stuck out his tongue at Smith. "We wouldn't run from you in a gazillion years, Smithers!"

"That is not my name!"

"Are we all forgetting that we are still in danger of being violently dismembered by Draco's dad?!" said Harry, hopping restlessly from foot to foot.

"Let us pass, Hufflepuff," said Draco coolly, stepping forward.

Hannah wrinkled her nose. "Maybe we should come back a different time, after they're finished with whatever weird plot they're stuck in the middle of right now." Justin nodded in agreement.

"No! It's a trick, you fools!" Smith exclaimed, pointing at Calvin. "He's always tricking people! Don't fall for his tricks!"

"Hey, don't call us fools just because you're paranoid," said Justin.

"It's not paranoia if they're named Calvin," Smith replied. "He's always up to something!"

"Yes, I am up to something! Right now I have this secret plan that I like to call TRYING TO STAY ALIVE!" Calvin dove to the side of the hallway, the rest of the Gryffindors knowing enough to know that they didn't have to know what was going on to know they should follow suit. "Now, Mo!"

"My name's not Mo," mumbled Crabbe, chucking a pair of small, black spheres in either direction.
Smoke filled the corridor, and the Slytherin-Gryffindor group hurried past the distracted Hufflepuffs in front of them.

*Cough* "What dastardly tomfoolery is this, you miscreants? Justin, Hannah, after them!"

"D'you think he understands half the words he uses?" said Ron as they exited the cloud of dark gray smoke.

"Needlessly high-level lexicon? Susceptibility to being stalled and then thwarted by a simple escape plan? Unexplained prejudice towards the main character? He's the perfect cliche villain," Calvin replied. "It's everything I've ever wanted!"


"Conservation of Narrative, eh?" said Calvin. "Makes sense."

"Huh?" said Ron.

They rounded the next corner, and two cloaked figures filled their view. Calvin had just enough time to confirm for himself that they were not particularly short before everything went dark.

"Darnit!" Calvin yelled, slamming a fist against the bed. "We were so close!" He looked at Hobbes. "We were so close, right?"

"So very close," the tiger answered with a sad shake of his whiskered head. "But you're still not allowed to interrupt."

"Right, right. Do go on."

"I think I will."

A man with stiff black hair and a bushy mustache leaned over the bed, as six-year-old Calvin drifted between the conscious and unconscious worlds.

"Mmgmph?" mumbled Calvin.

"Shh," said the man. "No need to wake up." The man was holding a thin stick in his left hand, and something familiar in his right. The familiar thing was snoring obliviously.

"You dropped this guy on the floor, buddy," the man said, smiling, as he placed the sleeping tiger next to Calvin. "You found him caught in your tiger-trap, remember? Tigers are suckers for a tuna fish sandwich. Always keep him with you, Calvin. He'll keep you safe even when you forget what you need to be kept safe from."

"Mmmnn?"

"I'll visit soon. Before I cannot visit at all. Someday, we'll meet on different terms, I think. For now, sleep."

And Calvin slept, slipping into dreams as his eyes locked shut like deadbolts sliding home.

xXx

Calvin's eyes snapped open, giving him a perfect view of the ceiling.
"I have got to stop with the chocolate-cake-before-bed thing," he told the ceiling. "My dreams are getting-
"

"Woahwoahwoahwoahwoah. Hold up there, tiger," Calvin said, wagging a finger at his furry friend. "I know this part of the story, this just happened this morning."

Hobbes looked up and blew air out of his mouth, letting it flutter his lips with a sound like an asthmatic whoopee cushion. "If you would stop interrupting, Mr. I-Have-A-Mind-Like-A-Steel-Trap-If-Such-Traps-Were-Actually-Made-Out-Of-A-Particularly-Weak-Piece-Of-Fine-Mesh, I might be able to actually finish telling you what happened, and you wouldn't feel the need to keep saying stupid things."

"Ha! Like that'll ever happen! In your dreams, bug-breath."

"Anyway. As I was saying."

"I have got to stop with the chocolate-cake-before-bed thing," he told the ceiling. "My dreams are getting far too surreal." The ceiling, being a ceiling, did not respond. Ceilings were funny like that.

No one else responded either, though, which was not quite as funny. Calvin heaved himself off his pillow and looked around. Apparently, he was the last one to wake up, as the room was devoid of any and all signs of intelligent life, aside from himself, which probably counted more as hyperin-

"That's not how it went!" Calvin protested. "Dean responded to me, he said that-"

"Alright, bub, who's telling the story? If it was just what you remember happened this morning, I wouldn't need to fill you in!" Hobbes growled, a low rumble that Calvin could feel in his bones. "If you don't let me finish telling you what happened I am going to eat your comic books. This is important!"

The spiky-haired blond chuckled absurdly. "What, was I Memory-Charmed again or something?"

..."Oh come on!"

AN: HahahahahahahaHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA

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