The Makeover

by The_Blister_Pearl_Lady

Summary

Harry Potter makes a stray, accidental comment to Minerva McGonagall in his first year. The effects may just end up changing the entire wizarding world. What would have happened if Minerva McGonagall had decided to personally mentor a first year Harry? Would more than magical ability and practical plot have changed? A fic by a writer who was dissatisfied with how the series ended.
Chapter 1

He was sitting there beside me throwing doubles down
When he ordered up his third one he looked around
Then he looked at me
And said, "I do believe
I'll have one more."

He said, "I hate this bar and I hate to drink,
But on second thought, tonight I think, I hate everything."

Then he opened up his billfold and threw a twenty down,
And a faded photograph fell out and hit the ground.
I picked it up,
He said, "Thank you, bud."
I put it in his hand.

He said, "I probably oughta throw this one away 'cause she's the reason I feel this way.
I hate everything."
I hate my job
And I hate my life
And if it weren't for my two kids
I'd hate my ex wife.
I know I should move on and try to start again,
But I just can't get over her leaving me for him.
Then he shook his head, looked down at his ring, said, "I hate everything."

Said, "That one bedroom apartment where I get my mail,
Is really not a home, it's more like a jail,
With a swimming pool, and a parking lot view.
Man, it's just great.
I hate summer, winter, fall and spring.
Red and yellow, purple, blue and green.
I hate everything."
I hate my job
And I hate my life
And if it weren't for my two kids
I'd hate my ex wife.
I know I should move on and try to start again,
But I just can't get over her leaving me for him.
Then he shook his head, looked down at his ring, said, "I hate everything."

So I pulled out my phone and I called my house.
I said, "Babe, I'm coming home, we're gonna work this out."
I payed for his drinks
And I told him thanks
Thanks for everything.

- "I Hate Everything" by George Strait

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Minerva McGonagall began, “and the only daughter, of a Scottish Presbyterian minister and a Hogwarts-educated witch. I grew up in the Highlands of Scotland, and only gradually became aware that there was something strange, both about my own abilities, and
about my parents’ marriage.

“My father, the Reverend Robert McGonagall, had become captivated by the high-spirited Isobel Ross, who lived in the same village. Like his neighbors, Robert believed that Isobel attended a select ladies’ boarding school in England. In fact, when Isobel vanished from her home for months at a time, it was to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry that she went.

“Aware that her parents - a witch and wizard - would frown on a connection with a serious young Muggle man, Isobel kept their burgeoning relationship a secret. By the time she was eighteen, she had fallen in love with Robert. Unfortunately, she had not found the courage to tell him what she was.

“My parents eloped, to the fury of both sets of their parents. Now estranged from her family, Isobel could not bring herself to mar the bliss of the honeymoon by telling her smitten new husband that she had graduated top of her class in Charms at Hogwarts, nor that she had been Captain of the School Quidditch Team. Isobel and Robert McGonagall, my parents, moved into a manse - which is a minister’s house - on the outskirts of Caithness. There, Isobel, my beautiful mother, proved surprisingly adept at the making the most of a minister’s tiny salary.

“I was their first child, and proved to be both a joy and a crisis. Missing her family, and the magical community she had given up for love, my mother insisted on naming her newborn daughter after her own grandmother, Minerva, an immensely talented witch. The outlandish name raised eyebrows in the community in which we lived, and the Reverend Robert McGonagall found it difficult to explain his wife’s choice to his parishioners. Furthermore, he was alarmed by my mother’s moodiness. Friends assured him that women were often emotional after the birth of a baby, and that my mother would soon be herself again.

“But my mother became more and more withdrawn, often secluding herself with me for days at a time. She later told me that I had displayed small, but unmistakable, signs of magic from my earliest hours. Toys that had been left on upper shelves were found in my crib. The family cat appeared to do my bidding before I could talk. My father’s bagpipes were occasionally heard to play themselves from distant rooms, something I apparently found delightful.

“My mother was torn between pride and fear. She knew that she must confess the truth to my father before he witnessed something that would alarm him. At last, in response to my father’s patient questioning, my mother burst into tears, retrieved her wand from the locked box under her bed and showed him what she was.

“Although I was too young to remember that night, its aftermath left me with an… understanding, of the complications of growing up with magic in a Muggle world. Although my father loved his wife no less upon discovering that she was a witch, he was profoundly shocked by her revelation, and by the fact that she had kept such a secret from him for so long. What was more, he, who prided himself on being an upright and honest man, was now drawn into a life of secrecy that was quite foreign to his nature. My mother explained that she and I were both bound by a wizarding Ministry law known as the International Statute of Secrecy - no one outside a witch or wizard’s family who is Muggle can know about magic. We must conceal the truth about ourselves, or face the fury of the Ministry of Magic. My father also quailed at the thought of how the locals - in the main, an austere, straight-laced and conventional breed - would feel about having a witch as their minister’s wife.

“Love endured, but trust had been broken between my parents. A clever and observant child, I remember seeing this with sadness. Two more children, both sons, were born to my parents, and both, in due course, revealed magical ability. I helped my mother explain to Malcolm and Robert Junior that they must not flaunt their magic, and aided my mother in concealing from our father the
accidents and embarrassments our magic sometimes caused.

“I was very close to my Muggle father - I resemble him in temperament more than my mother. I saw with pain how much he struggled with his family’s strange situation. I sensed, too, how much of a strain it was for my mother to fit in with an all-Muggle village, and how much she missed the freedom of being with her kind, and of exercising her considerable talents. I will never forget how much my mother cried, when the letter of admittance into Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry arrived on my eleventh birthday; I knew that my mother was sobbing, not only out of pride, but also out of envy.

“As is often the case where the young witch or wizard comes from a family who has struggled with its magical identity, Hogwarts was, for me, a place of joyful release and freedom.

“I drew unusual attention to myself on my very first evening, when I was revealed to be a Hatstall. This means the Sorting Hat delayed for over five minutes, trying to decide which of two houses to place me in. After five and a half the minutes, the Sorting Hat, which had been vacillating between the houses of Ravenclaw and Gryffindor - cleverness and bravery - placed me in Gryffindor, the house of bravery.

“I was the top student in my year, with a particular talent for Transfiguration - the art of turning something into something else. As I progressed through the school, I demonstrated that I had inherited both my mother’s ability and my father’s cast-iron moral sense. By the end of my education at Hogwarts, I had achieved top grades in O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s - respectively, our fifth year and seventh year placement exams - and I was Prefect, Head Girl, and winner of the Transfiguration Today Most Promising Newcomer award. I say these things, not to brag, but simply because they are true. Under the guidance of Albus Dumbledore, my own Transfiguration teacher, I had managed to become an Animagus. This is a witch or wizard who can turn themselves into a particular animal, and the craft takes enormous time, dedication, and skill to master. My animal form is a tabby cat, with the distinctive marking of square spectacle marks around the eyes. These were duly logged into the Ministry of Magic’s Animagus Registry.

“I was also, like my mother, a gifted Quidditch player. I suffered a nasty fall in my final year - a foul during a Gryffindor versus Slytherin game which would decide the House Cup winner. It left me with a concussion, several broken ribs, and a lifelong desire to see Slytherin crushed on the Quidditch pitch. Though I gave up Quidditch on leaving Hogwarts, I am a competitive sort and so I later took a keen interest in the fortunes of my house team - and, as you know, retained a keen eye for Quidditch talent.

“Upon graduation from Hogwarts, I returned to the manse to enjoy one last summer with my family before setting out for London, where I had been offered a position at the Ministry of Magic’s Department of Magical Law Enforcement. These months were to prove some of the most difficult of my life, for it was then, aged only eighteen, that I proved myself truly my mother’s daughter, by falling head-over-heels in love with a Muggle boy.

“It was the first and only time in my life that I might have been said to lose my head. Dougal McGregor was the handsome, clever and funny son of a local farmer. Though less beautiful than my mother, I was clever and witty. Dougal and I shared a sense of humor, argued fiercely, and suspected mysterious depths in each other. Before either of us knew it, Dougal was on one knee in a plowed field, proposing, and I accepted him.

“I went home, intending to tell my parents of my engagement, yet I found myself unable to do so. All that night I lay awake, thinking about my future. Dougal did not know what I truly was, any more than my father had known the truth about my mother before they had married. I had witnessed at
close quarters the kind of marriage I might have if I wed Dougal. It would be the end of all my ambitions; it would mean a wand locked away, and children taught to lie, perhaps even to their own father. I did not fool myself that Dougal McGregor would accompany me to London, while I went to work every day at the Ministry. He was looking forward to inheriting his father’s farm.

“Early next morning, I slipped from my parents’ house and went to tell Dougal that I had changed my mind, and could not marry him. Mindful of the fact that if I broke the International Statute of Secrecy I would lose the job at the Ministry for which I had given him up, I could give him no good reason for my change of heart. I was not after all married to him, nor was I intending to be any longer. I left him devastated, and set out for London three days later.

“Though undoubtedly my feelings for the Ministry of Magic were colored by the fact that I had recently suffered an emotional crisis, I did not much enjoy my new home and workplace. Some of my co-workers had engrained anti-Muggle bias which, given my adoration of my Muggle father, and my continuing love for Dougal McGregor, I deplored. Though a most efficient and gifted employee, and fond of my much older boss, Elphinstone Urquart, I was unhappy in London, and found that I missed Scotland. Finally, after two years at the Ministry, I was offered a prestigious promotion, yet found myself turning it down. I sent an owl to Hogwarts, which is in the Scottish Highlands, asking whether I might be considered for a teaching post. The owl returned within hours, offering me a job in the Transfiguration department, under Head of Department, now Headmaster Albus Dumbledore.

“The school greeted my return with delight. I threw myself into my work, proving myself a strict but inspirational teacher. If I kept letters from Dougal locked in a box under my bed, this was - I told myself firmly - better than keeping my wand locked there. Nevertheless, it was a… shock, to learn from my oblivious mother, in the middle of a chatty letter of local news, that Dougal had married the daughter of another farmer.

“Albus Dumbledore discovered me, I must confess, in tears in my classroom late that evening, and I confessed the whole story to him. He offered me both comfort and wisdom, and told me some of his own history, previously unknown to me. We have been friends and confidantes with a strong and healthy respect for one another ever since.

“Through all my early years as a teacher at Hogwarts, I remained on terms of friendship with my old boss at the Ministry, Elphinstone Urquart. He came to visit me while on holiday to Scotland, and to my great surprise and embarrassment, proposed marriage in a rather cutesy and violently pink establishment in Hogsmeade, Hogwarts’s village, called Madam Puddifoot’s teashop. Still in love with Dougal, I turned him down.

“Elphinstone, however, had never ceased to love me, nor to propose every now and then, even though I continued to refuse him. The death of Dougal, however, although traumatic, seemed to free me. Shortly after Voldemort’s defeat, Elphinstone, now white-haired, proposed again during a summertime stroll around Hogwarts’s Black Lake. This time I accepted. Elphinstone, now retired, was beside himself with joy, and purchased a small cottage in Hogsmeade for the pair of us, whence I could travel easily to work every day.

“I have always been something of a feminist, and I announced that I would be keeping my own surname upon marriage. Traditionalists sniffed - why was I refusing to accept a Pureblood name, and keeping that of my Muggle father? Understand this, the wizarding world has none of the Muggle world’s issues with gender - or indeed, with race, or with sexuality, or with monogamy. A witch or wizard could be female, Black, a lesbian, and in a three-way marriage and go along just fine in the wizarding world. There are even magical ways for gay couples to have biological children. But Muggles and Muggle relations are horribly looked down upon, specifically because Muggle religious people like my father’s parishioners don’t like us, and indeed never have liked us. They don’t teach
this in Hogwarts History of Magic, but during the medieval witch hunts, many true wizarding children were caught and set fire to. That is why the two worlds separated.

“For all these reasons, it was my choice to keep a Muggle’s name, and not my choice to keep my father’s name, that made people talk. But I am a believer in the two worlds being able to function together, and to be honest I probably always will be. Albus Dumbledore is the same, it’s why we are friends - and if you’re looking further, I also happen to be friends with Professors Sprout and Flitwick. And besides, as a woman and a professor, I wanted my own name.

“My marriage - cut tragically short, though it was destined to be - was a very happy one. Though we had no children of our own, my nieces and nephews - children of my brothers Malcolm and Robert - were frequent visitors to our home. This was a period of great fulfillment for me.

“Elphinstone died accidentally, three years into our marriage. He was bitten by a particularly vicious kind of magical plant, a Venomous Tentacula, and he died. I could not bear to remain alone in our cottage, surrounded by pity from all our mutual friends, so I packed my things after Elphinstone’s funeral and returned to the study we are sitting in here at Hogwarts Castle. Always a very private person but determined to survive, I poured all my energies into my work, and I continue to do so to this day. Few people know any of this about me, and I would appreciate you not telling anyone else, including friends, what we have just discussed.

“I must keep secret everything you tell me - unless you become a danger to yourself or others. Therefore, I would appreciate the same in return. I would prefer for this to be a friendship of mutual respect and secrecy, unless it looks like physical harm will be done.”

“Of course, I won’t tell anyone! Ma’am… you and your story are amazing, but… why are you telling me all this?” Harry asked in wide-eyed wonder.

“Because, Mr Potter, I am asking you for a very private thing yourself. I am asking you to tell me your childhood, and that is for now your entire life story. Furthermore, I am being presumptuous enough to ask you to tell me honestly whether or not you have been abused. If you want trust, you must first earn it,” said Minerva succinctly, with piercing eyes.

“Well… a lot of your story did make sense to me,” Harry admitted. “Hogwarts is the first place I ever fit in, too - my Muggle relatives weren’t comfortable with my magic, either. I didn’t have the charmed childhood everyone is guessing. And… well, I guess I don’t really advertise the details of how I feel about things anymore than you do. I’m willing to answer questions on the surface, but when it comes down to it, I duck the emotional parts of hard questions. I’m…”

“Private,” Minerva said quietly. A strange and intimate understanding passed between them in the silence.

“So… I don’t really know where to begin. With my family. They’re not nice people,” Harry admitted frankly. “I… I guess there’s one day that always stands out to me. A day at the zoo, with my relatives - just a couple of months before I received my Hogwarts letter.”

Minerva watched him piercingly. “… Why don’t you tell me about that day,” she said at last. “In
your own words… take it from the beginning, and tell me the whole day.”

Harry took a deep breath - and began. From the morning sunlight hitting the living room and he waking up in his cupboard… all the way to the end of the day, he thinking to himself back in that same cupboard, in the darkness and the silence.

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It was, privately, a stunning story in its terribleness.

“… I would like to do further sessions with you,” was the first thing Minerva said at the end. When Harry looked up quickly, as if betrayed - “Not because you’re in trouble, or you’ve done anything wrong, or anything outward is going to change. You will just have to meet with me once a week.

“Here is how it will happen. You will talk about how things are going for you. We will take you through training plans for your future together. Think of it like a mentorship program - someone to help you through Hogwarts. A mentor figure. Someone who is required to keep your secrets unless it looks like someone is about to be hurt or killed.

“Do you trust me to mentor you in this way, Harry?” said Minerva steadily, purposefully hard to read. Her mind was still reeling.

“… Yes, ma’am,” said Harry, after an indescribable pause looking into her eyes. Then, tentatively, “Like what you had with Dumbledore?”

Minerva paused - and decided she rather liked that idea. “Yes,” she said. “I see potential in you, Harry. Certainly like what I had with Dumbledore. We can even keep up with letters during the summer, if you would like, and continue there. I can think of some very clever two-way mirrors and instant-response quills and rolls of parchment we can use.”

Harry brightened.

“Very well, then. You agree,” said Minerva, trying with difficulty not to get emotional herself. Harry was just so… childlike, so… earnest. “But for our first few sessions, we will focus on what led you up to this point. Up to the point of just having had your first Quidditch lesson with Oliver Wood. So for now, let me see if I can focus on how to make some sense of what you have already told me - what we can glean from this, and how we can turn it all into a strength.

“Does that sound okay?”

“If you can… take that and get any good out of it, I’ll take it and I’ll be impressed,” Harry admitted, frank and skeptical.

Minerva smiled grimly. “I always did enjoy a challenge.”

Harry smiled back as if despite himself. “So… you don’t judge me?” he added hesitantly.

“Certainly. I judge you to be an incredibly brave and clever young boy bearing up under things that were not your fault,” said Minerva, rather sharply.

Harry smiled warmly. “… Thank you, Professor McGonagall,” he said.

“… You are welcome… Harry,” she returned, with a bit more reserved emotion than she usually would have. “If you do not mind, I will use your given name in these private sessions, as Albus Dumbledore often did with me. Don’t expect any preferential treatment outside these sessions - you
will still be Mr Potter there, and you will still be expected to do your best.


“Mr Potter, I do not determine you to be in any physical danger. But I believe you have a right to know. You are being abused.”

Harry’s head shot up. “But - that’s ridiculous!” he said, half-laughing. “The Dursleys are horrible people, but they’re just so stupid. And I’m all right, aren’t I? When I think of abuse - I think of a traumatized person, I don’t know, of evil people.”

“Abusers are often morally grey people. They torment you with the possibility that they might be right, it’s what makes them effective,” said Minerva simply. “And I’m sure as a young child, you did feel that way at times.”

Harry suddenly went silent.

“Now, I believe you also have a right to know why you were left with the Dursleys. After I wrote out magically the address for your acceptance letter, I went to Dumbledore with the information that you lived in a cupboard. He explained, with the deepest shame, that you were not placed with your Muggle relatives to tamp down on an inflated ego - as most people assume.

“No, you were placed with the Dursleys for a different reason, one he explained to me that day.”

Harry sat listening closely.

“Your mother died defending you. She had the choice to step aside from Voldemort, and spare her own life, but she chose to die shielding you from a Killing Curse instead,” said Minerva very gently. “For reasons basically unknown to me or anyone else, Voldemort wanted you dead more. Your mother chose to die shielding you from a Killing Curse - one of the big three Unforgivable Curses there are. That would be the jet of green light you remember. That strong combination of love and blood left a curious effect: Voldemort, the person who had killed her, was now unable to touch you.

“And magic, an inborn ability to manipulate matter, is a physical extension of a person’s body.

“Voldemort’s next Killing Curse bounced off of your forehead - and hit him. No body was ever found. He had experimented on himself trying to achieve immortality so greatly that he was no longer really human anymore, so nobody knows what happened to him.

“And that is why you’re alive.”

Minerva paused - and then quietly handed Harry a handkerchief. He wiped his eyes and was very silent for a good few minutes.

“So… what does all this have to do with the Dursleys?” he asked at last, in a slightly shaky voice, staring at his knees.

“Your mother Lily was your Aunt Petunia’s baby sister. So she and Dudley are blood related to you. While you are living with blood, your mother’s protection extends to your entire place of residence. There, you are protected from any Dark harm that might otherwise befall you.

“Even in death, your mother protects the home you have with the Dursleys. That is why you must stay.

“But know this: I only agreed to these terms because you are in no serious physical and mental harm.
That does not mean you are not being abused.”

Minerva looked at Harry over the top of her spectacles - tender and concerned but stern.

“You are in no photographs in the house. You slept in a cupboard full of dangerous spiders. Sometimes you were locked in there - particularly when you displayed signs of magic, something that should be a point of pride and something you couldn’t help. You are given inadequate clothing and sometimes deprived of food. You were bullied at school, regularly beaten by your cousin, given an obscene amount of chores for a child, yelled at, and forbidden from basic things like imagination and questions. You are talked about and complained about over your head and to your face. You are threatened.

“If you had ever discovered your magic and attempted to suppress it to avoid punishment, you would in fact have become an Obscurial - a destructive entity of Dark magic, called Obscurus, created specifically from suppressed magic. You were ironically saved by your relatives refusing to utter the word ‘magic.’

“And, I believe, corporal punishment would not sound so farfetched to you. Hence your comment that brought you to this meeting.

“Nobody here is beating you, Harry. I can personally ensure it,” said Minerva in an iron voice.

Harry was staring at his feet. “It sounds really bad… when you put it like that,” he said in a tiny voice. “It’s not… funny, anymore.” And he did sound in that moment like a very small child.

“Yes, well. We will talk about your talent for humor and satire. Know for now, Harry, that being upset over how you are treated is perfectly valid - even healthy.” Harry looked up, and in that moment hopefully seemed to grow a little bigger. “I don’t know if I would advocate fighting back against your abusers, because that could go badly very quickly, but just know that they’re not right - and you don’t have to be okay with how they treat you.”

“… Voldemort, then. He not only killed my parents - he’s singlehandedly responsible for my childhood,” Harry realized.

“… Yes,” Minerva admitted cautiously.

Harry nodded. He was remarkably calm. “I hate him,” Harry decided simply. “And everything he stands for.”

“There is one thing I wanted to bring up,” Minerva admitted next. “You don’t like the way that you look?”

Harry snorted and gave her a ‘really?’ sort of glance.

“Harry, you’re not conventional-looking, but I believe it is the Dursleys telling you that’s important,” said Minerva. Harry paused in surprise. “Now I do not usually comment on the personal appearance of my students. But will you allow me to assess you the way a fashion designer would, without becoming uncomfortable? I shall remain completely objective sounding.”

“Like a fashion designer would?” said Harry, mystified. “… All right, go for it.” He sounded curious despite himself.

“You have the sort of smaller, slimmer form that is better suited for designer clothes. Luckily for you, you are rich. You do not like your knees, but that can be easily remedied by wearing pants instead of shorts. Your coloring is best suited for Winter shades.”
“Winter?” Harry questioned.

“We tend to sort complexions, who looks best in what colors, by season,” said Minerva. “Springs have a bright, clear sort of look to them. Summers have a bright but ashy and muted look to them. Autumns tend to specialize in stunning clearness but deep shades of red, gold, mahogany, and orange. And Winters specialize in deep shades of black and white with an icy sort of skin tone and an ashy skin undertone.

“You are a Winter, with very white skin and very black hair. This means you look best in snow whites, deep blacks, rich and jewel like shades, and particularly sparkling accessories like diamonds. Taken together with a smaller, slimmer form best fit for designer clothes, in the modern world these natural inclinations are actually quite striking.

“You also have messy hair - which, contrary to what you’ve been taught by your relatives all your life, is not a down side. Your face is thin, but the right messy haircut would not only look flattering but make your thin face look fuller.

“You don’t like your glasses? That’s fine. I can Transfigure their current shape into anything you’d like. And you must admit your eyes are striking - almond shaped, brilliantly bright green, with high cheekbones and smaller features - everyone used to comment on that in your mother.”

Harry sat there, staring. “Put it that way and I actually sound… good-looking,” he admitted, still sounding mystified.

Minerva sighed. “Harry, please repeat back to me what I just taught you about fashion,” she said patiently.

“Oh! Er, right!” Harry straightened nervously. “Designer clothes, long pants, and Winter shades of snow white, deep black, rich jewel colors, and sparkling accessories. A haircut that fills out my face and makes the mess look better. Good-shaped glasses. And my mother’s eyes and features and cheeks were nice,” he added quietly, blushing.

“Thank you,” said Minerva crisply. “You seem unconvinced, so shall I give you a practical demonstration?”

She waved her wand.

Harry sat there puzzled for a few minutes - and then his trunk floated slowly into the office.

“… That must have looked weird,” was the first thing out of Harry’s mouth, and Minerva tried hard not to smile at the frankness.

“Not as much as you’d think at Hogwarts,” she returned, imagining like him a mysterious trunk floating past casually chatting students’ heads by itself.

Harry’s clothes floated up out of the trunk before the pair - and looking determined, Minerva waved her wand.

All of the clothes suddenly shrank to fit Harry’s size and Transfigured themselves into the types of clothes Minerva had recommended Harry would look best in. The clothes he was wearing Transfigured to look the same. Another wave of a wand and his glasses were a square dark-framed pair. Another wave of the wand and a pair of scissors was cutting Harry’s hair - going with the mess instead of against it.

At the end, Minerva showed him a mirror. Harry stared.
“I look… good,” he said slowly to himself in wonder.

“If I may, Harry? Your father looked just like you. He was very popular and had no trouble with women in school,” said Minerva wryly. “Your father was quite the popular sportsman. As I said, he was a Quidditch star.”

Harry looked up in surprise.

“So as you form your body’s type of musculature in Quidditch, or as you form your father’s jawline, you will look even better by the standards of someone of your sex and age group. So you wait to get older, and work out as hard as you can for Quidditch practice. Do you see?” said Minerva simply.

“… Yeah. I do,” said Harry, brightening. “So all this… it was just my relatives?”

“A common abuse tactic is to make the person feel unappealing and not worth caring about,” said Minerva, as kindly as she could. “That’s a common bullying tactic, too.”

“… I see,” said Harry, his jaw setting, and the first spark of anger flashed in his green eyes. Perhaps this was healthier, Minerva felt, than his previous denial and apathy. Then: “Can anyone make clothes look designer? I’m thinking of a friend of mine.” He sounded thoughtful.

“No. I am of unusual ability,” said Minerva.

“So I would have to form unusual ability,” Harry interpreted.

“To make your friend’s clothes look better? Yes. Why, do they embarrass him?” said Minerva, surprised.

“I get the funny feeling,” Harry admitted thoughtfully. “Hm. Okay. Did you have anything else?”

“Only that your ability to cook makes you unusually prone to being good at Potions,” said Minerva.

“Good at Potions?” said Harry incredulously. “My first Potions lesson was awful. So that’s just because Snape doesn’t like me?” he added on a sudden inspiration.

“While we’re talking about your mother,” said Minerva wryly, “you only deserve to know this since she was your mother and it affects you - But Severus Snape was in love with your mother, Lily Evans, while they were children together at Hogwarts. They ended up joining opposite sides of the war. He is…”

“Bitter,” Harry interpreted.

“… Almost right,” Minerva admitted. “Almost. In a way, you could see it like that. Your father and Severus Snape hated each other while they were in school. Severus Snape was a Dark Potions nerd, your father a Light Quidditch jock. And then your mother went on to marry your father.”

“But monogamy, didn’t you call it? It isn’t always a thing here, not even in marriage,” Harry pointed out. “I mean, that’ll take some getting used to for me… but it’s a point, right?”

“That is true, Harry. But sometimes, people want other people all to themselves. It depends on the couples,” said Minerva. “And I believe Severus Snape and James Potter both saw Lily’s marriage in exactly the same way - as a loss for Severus and a victory for James.

“So yes, a part of your teacher is bitter.

“But mostly, Harry, I just think he misses her. He is angry at anyone he perceives as having taken
“… But I miss my Mum too!” Harry protested, frowning. He looked at Minerva who was trying hard not to smile. “You were hoping I’d talk to him about this,” Harry realized. “Change things.”

“… Like you, your Potions professor did not come from a nice home. Like you, your Potions professor was bullied - sometimes by your father,” said Minerva gently. “The father you look so much like. But like you… your Potions professor misses Lily Evans.”

Harry looked sad - pondering, thoughtful. “That… explains a lot,” he admitted, “at the end of my second week. So my Mum and my Professor were… friends?” He sounded puzzled by the idea. “Could I get him to talk about her?”

“Tread cautiously,” said Minerva. “It is a sensitive subject and he is a temperamental man.”

“Yeah, I got that feeling,” Harry admitted.

“But if you play your cards right… You might. I will admit, Harry, you are much more like your mother than your father. You simply look more like your father on the surface. If you can get him to see more of a resemblance to Lily…”

“My Dad… it doesn’t even sound like I’d get along with him.” Harry was frowning. “When he was in school? He sounds like… I dunno, like a really smart and talented and good looking Dudley. Or like a Light side Draco Malfoy.”

“Your mother could not stand him until they were at least seventeen,” Minerva admitted wryly. “He calmed down a bit, his ego significantly deflated, and that is when they started dating. When she was forced to see a new side of him. They were Head Boy and Girl together.

“If you can get Professor Snape over to your side… Potions is much like cooking. It involves ingredients, instructions, and a set result. But here is the good part. Potions takes just as much experimentation, chemistry, and creativity as something like cooking or baking does. See Potions in that light, and get Professor Snape over to your side at the same time - and in Potions you’d be unstoppable.

“Which you really should be. It’s the only good thing to come out of all the chores you had to do,” Minerva pointed out.

“Good point,” Harry admitted firmly. “Okay, I’ll try it. I’ll try looking at Potions in that way, and I’ll try talking to him - about my Mum.”

“It will either go really well or really terribly. But either way I’ll be here to help you bear it,” said Minerva, and even she knew that she did not exactly give off the aura that much fazed her. “Now… while we’re on the subject…

“Since you know how to do it. Have you ever tried something like baking, for example… I don’t know, for fun? It’s… considered a hobby. Even an art. There’s creativity involved. It’s even seen as a girl activity. Quite frankly, I’m surprised your aunt and uncle let you do it.”

“Well, they wanted someone to make them food. They never actually thought I’d get good at it,” said Harry logically.

“Of course. But what better way to make them pay for the mistake than to get good at it?” said Minerva. “And have fun at the same time?

“I probably shouldn’t be telling you this, but the Hogwarts cooking and chores are all done by these
little creatures that are supposed to remain unseen called house elves. They all live down in the
kitchens, which are in the basement. You take the staircase down to the underground floors and stop
off at the basement level. Along that corridor, you’ll find a painting of a bowl of fruit. Tickle the pear
until it giggles and you’ll find yourself in the kitchens - directly under the Great Hall.

“Why am I telling you this? First, because it’s not actually against the rules for students to go there.
They can’t be out after hours, but a daytime trip to the kitchens themselves is fine - on a weekend, for
example.

“Second, because if anyone can teach you exceptional baking skills, or anything about more
exceptional tea-brewing, which is all you’d be practicing this first year anyway… It’s the Hogwarts
house elves, who also happen to do your laundry.”

“So… I talk to Snape about my Mum, I try experimenting in Potions the way I do with cooking, and
I get the Hogwarts house elves to teach me baking and tea as a creative and fun hobby. What else?”
said Harry steadily. The boy seemed quite determined to remember it all.

“You like watching television and playing Dudley’s video games. I’m curious - are you interested
more in the stories or the gaming?” asked Minerva. “They are different branches in our world.”


“Then you may want to take an interest in our books and our memory-theater,” said Minerva. “In
books there is a whole genre called magic fiction, similar to science fiction. You can mail-order such
books from magazines through the Owtery. Similarly, we have stone basins holding memories called
Pensieves. Among other things, you can watch a front row person’s memories of theater pieces
floating up out of these - dark cult pieces included. Rather like -“

“Television,” said Harry, catching on. “And I can owl order those, too.”

“Precisely. Do you have any problems sleeping?”

“Er - yeah,” said Harry, blinking. “Stay awake a lot. Lots of vivid, symbolic dreams. I talk in my
sleep.”

Minerva nodded. “I thought so. Your penchant for messiness aside, it is one of the little things I
 guessed about you.

“Dream-healing through the Pensieve, with your curtains pulled around your bed, might also be
useful. Memories of people giving soft voices and relaxing sounds to induce the prickling neck
magical sensation and help a person sleep. Given your odd dreams and your fiction choices, you
might tend toward the weirder, more eccentric and roleplay side of Dream-healing triggers. I would
recommend getting those memories as well.

“While you’re at it, get yourself a radio connected to the WWN - Wizarding Wireless Network. Now
that you’ve become a Quidditch player, why not start listening to professional matches and decide on
a team?”

“Now, I have noticed, in your descriptions, that you have a distinctive talent for visual caricature and
satire,” Minerva admitted. “Filius Flitwick runs the Hogwarts arts program. Have you considered
joining him, and asking him to teach you caricature drawing and satire writing? Your descriptions of
people from your childhood are quite vivid. You have a gift for taking the horrible and making it
funny. It has helped you survive.”

“Like… angry cartoons and joke stories?” Harry simplified.
“That’s essentially it,” Minerva admitted. “You seem to have a gift for it, it’s another art, and it might help you to vent some of your other feelings in… safe, ways.”

“… I’ll talk to him,” Harry admitted. “You’re right. I’d never thought about it, but images like that always come naturally to me. Flitwick, right?”

“Exactly,” said Minerva. “Between your weekend baking, your new art club, and your new Gryffindor Quidditch Team training, that’s quite enough extracurricularly to start out with. We’ve already settled your new designer look. You’ll mail order eccentric role-play Dream-healing, and dark cult and magic fiction stories through the Owler. You’re going to try a more considered cooking-based approach to learning Potions, and you’re going to try to talk very carefully to Professor Snape about your mother, try to get him to see that side of you.

“I will end… the way I began. With some things I just think you should know.

“The ability to speak to snakes - unlike accidental magic - is not common to witches and wizards. It is called Parseltongue. It stems from Hogwarts founder Salazar Slytherin, and has gained a reputation for being a sign of someone Dark - someone hung up on the wizarding Pagan Old Ways, and the wizarding fraught and violent history with Muggles.”

Harry had looked alarmed - but now just looked confused. “So because I speak snake, I’m stuck in the past?” were the first words out of his mouth.

“I… tried to phrase it in a way that emphasized how ridiculous the whole thing is,” Minerva admitted. “Saint Patrick was a Parselmouth, the Dark rumor is absurd. But it is a fact of wizarding life. So I would suggest keeping your ability for Parseltongue rather quiet.”

“So… I do belong in Slytherin?” Harry asked tentatively, wincing.

“You were almost placed there,” Minerva realized.

Harry was now frowning at his toes. “… I want to stay in Gryffindor,” he said quietly.

“… First. Just because you speak snake, that doesn’t make you a Slytherin,” said Minerva. “It simply means you have a very rare ability the house founder shared.

“Second. Contrary to what you might have heard, there is nothing wrong with Slytherin.”

Harry looked up in surprise.

“I thought you hated them,” he admitted.

“I hate their Quidditch team, and I have little patience for certain Slytherin traits - the two are related,” said Minerva dryly. “But that’s not an excuse to think badly of an entire house filled with my own students. That would be ridiculous.

“Let me try to explain Slytherin, and why you might have a connection to people there. Slytherins are very introverted and cerebral people. They are deathly loyal to any group they are a part of, but can be caustic to outsiders - particularly the ones they disagree with. They have a talent for sarcasm. They have a fascination with not only power but mystery. They commonly take risks in pursuit of mysterious knowledge, and treat a long-held and historical piece of magical power as sacred. They are inherently ambitious and want to prove themselves and do big things with their lives. They hit below the belt and immediately when they feel threatened, and only when they feel threatened - this explains their Quidditch tactics. They do not tolerate being held to an unfair standard, not even when it comes to a fellow house-mate.
“Do any of these things sound inherently evil?”

“No,” Harry admitted slowly. “So… I don’t get it, now explain Gryffindors to me.”

“Gryffindors,” said Minerva readily, “are wands first, charge forward kinds of people. They believe other people and connecting with them are inherently important. They love exploring, they wish more than anything to be trusted, they believe strongly in honor, and they most fear being trapped and helpless. They are not the most out-there of people, but nor are they close-minded. They believe bravery, courage, heart and daring - in short, adventure - they believe these things are inherently important.”

“And… one is seen as Dark and the other is seen as Light?” Harry looked confused. “I guess I can see that a little, but… It’s not accurate, Professor,” he said suddenly. “Is it?”

Minerva smiled. “You’re catching on,” she said simply. “Some of the Darkest witches have been Gryffindors. Some of the Lightest wizards have been Slytherins. Merlin himself, a medieval Muggle rights advocate, was a Slytherin.

“Gryffindor is associated with fire, and Slytherin with water, adding to the house rivalry and the negative stereotypes.”

“So… when you have a Gryffindor and a Slytherin together, like in me, you get…” Harry’s eyes widened. “A big boom,” he realized, looking up.

Minerva barked out a laugh. “Yes, Harry, a big boom,” she said, amused. “You get a wild card - someone capable, if stereotypes are to be listened to, of playing on either side of the board.”

“Both the people who value the past, and the people who believe in respecting others and a future,” Harry realized. “So… the Dark believes in religion and hurting Muggles, and the Light believes in being secular and being nice to everyone - the Dark is traditional and the Light is not - and I can be whoever I want to be?”

“It is your choice,” said Minerva quietly. “Possibly even more than it is for other people.”

“Where do you fall, Professor?” said Harry suddenly.

“I… understand the Dark. I just don’t agree with it,” Minerva admitted.

“Yeah.” Harry smiled, as if his confidence had not been misplaced. “I feel the same way. I guess I can understand believing in a religion that’s nice to all these different kinds of people, and I guess I can understand being angry that wizarding children were set fire to. I just don’t think that’s a good reason to go around killing people because they’re not like you, over something that happened hundreds of years ago.”

“That,” Minerva said before she could stop herself, “is the wisest thing an eleven year old has ever said to me.”

Harry smiled. Then he paused and said: “Wands - do they say things about us just like our houses do? Mine is holly and phoenix feather, eleven inches, supple.”

Minerva gave him a piercing look. “Holly is one of the rarer kinds of wand woods; traditionally considered protective, it works most happily for those who may need help overcoming a tendency to anger and impetuosity. At the same time, holly wands often choose owners who are engaged in some dangerous and often spiritual quest. Holly is one of those woods that varies most dramatically in performance depending on the wand core, and it is a notoriously difficult wood to team with phoenix feather, as the wood’s volatility conflicts strangely with the phoenix’s detachment. In the unusual
event of such a pairing finding its ideal match, however, nothing and nobody should stand in their way.

“In other words, yes, Harry, you have a very powerful and volatile wand.”

“So I have… an emotional wood and an unemotional core,” said Harry curiously.

“Yes. Sort of like the way you are reserved yet have a native fire and intensity to you. Now, phoenix feathers are the rarest core type. Phoenix feathers are capable of the greatest range of magic, though they may take longer than either unicorn or dragon cores to reveal this. They show the most initiative, sometimes acting of their own accord, a quality that many witches and wizards dislike.

“Phoenix feather wands are always the pickiest when it comes to potential owners, for the creature from which they are taken is one of the most independent and detached in the world. These wands are the hardest to tame and to personalize, and their allegiance is usually hard won.

“Neater wand lengths favor more elegant and refined spell-casting. A supple wand shows someone with a wand who is adaptable but not a pushover.”

“So… it’ll take a long time for my magic to show itself?” said Harry hesitantly.

“Well, not if you start practicing hard with it right away,” said Minerva.


“But Harry, that is not what all kinds of magic learning is,” said Minerva, frowning, puzzled. “Plenty of powerful wizards practice hard at magic simply because they have an image of themselves that they want to be - and are willing to put in the effort to achieve that. Such is the case with you, I think.”

“… You really think I can do it?” said Harry hesitantly, wincing.

“Certainly I do!” said Minerva, almost indignantly. “I saw potential in you, didn’t I?”

“But… I’m still not good at rote memorization and book learning,” said Harry.

“But I bet you’re very good at physical magic creativity and experimentation,” said Minerva on an inspiration. Harry paused in surprise. “And, forgive me, but Miss Granger seems to be the type of person who always follows the rules - and won’t pursue alternate routes of knowledge. This might not apply to you either.”

“I am interested in nonfiction books about practical magic - morbid subjects and curses included,” Harry admitted. “And… seeing magic as a creative experiment. I hadn’t thought of that. I guess… it would be good practice for my wand core.

“But Hagrid said I can’t work the curses in those books yet.”

“That is no reason to quash your imagination! Go ahead, buy them, read them ahead of time, anything that sparks your curiosity and imagination! Within reason, even try to work ahead!” said Minerva. “I’ll tell you something - usually there are two top students in every year, the highest boy and the highest girl. A Slytherin boy was my coupling in my year at Hogwarts.

“Couldn’t you compete with Miss Granger for top position? You each have different strengths. She is dedicated to hard work and achievement, you to proving yourself and becoming a powerful
wizard. She is good at memorization and book learning, you at experimenting and creating physically in magic and spells. She follows the rules, you are interested in alternate and even morbid subject matters and practical application magic texts.

“They are just two different ways of achieving the same thing - top marks. Together with our plans for Potions, you could really do that. And your problems with mastering your wand core would be solved faster. You might even get ahead,” Minerva finished, somewhat proud of this idea.

“I… I could try,” said Harry, tentative but growing to the idea. “It sounds like a dream come true, looking from starters here at Hogwarts. I’d have to change the way I look at learning magic… and owl order some practical application and alternate magic texts.”

“But you could do it,” said Minerva positively.

“… I could do it,” Harry decided, straightening slightly in what seemed to be an unconscious gesture.

“Now. What are you going to say if someone asks you whether you set a boa constrictor on your cousin Dudley in the zoo once?” Minerva added sternly.

Harry answered readily: “Tell them the truth: He pushed me, it hurt, and it was only once and you’ve never met Dudley but that’s pretty good.”

“… Fair enough. I do see the Slytherin coming through.”

“I was wondering, Professor,” said Harry. “In our religion, the wizarding one, what are the traditions behind Halloween and Christmas?”

“Halloween was called Samhain by the Celtics, and to this day it is the most powerful and important magical holiday,” said Minerva. “It is seen as the division between the lighter half of the year (summer) and the darker half of the year (winter). It is on this day that the world to the spirits is seen to be thinnest, and that some spirits pass through. Now, this can mean our ancestors from the Otherworld, but it can also mean magical spirits. Muggles, as you know, disguise themselves as spirits - this started as an attempt to avoid detection and attack.

“Wizards and witches have never needed to dress up during Samhain, because we believe we are the spirits. People with magic are seen as spirits among the world of the humans, Muggles and living - it is seen religiously, not as a genetic gift, but as a spirit visitation. This is part of the reason why people born to Muggle families are to highly traditional and dim-witted people seen as controversial.”

Harry couldn’t help a smile.

“Bonfires and feasts have always played a large part in Samhain celebrations. Hogwarts has a Halloween feast every year, on the night of, when the time of the spirits is seen to be strongest.

“Christmas is Winter Solstice - exactly midwinter, and the shortest day of the year. Nature is important to wizarding medicine and lore - indeed, we used to use magical plants and creatures even more than we do today, and our God and Goddess are seen as a part of Nature itself - and so this matters. Again, traditionally, bonfires are lit, stories are told, and feast and drink happens. Greenery is decorated everywhere, candles are lit, and presents are given. The greenery reflects not only our use of nature but our worship of nature. This is why you will see greenery and candles around Hogwarts at Christmas, but not Christian imagery.

“Christians actually got most Christmas traditions from Winter Solstice - another example of Muggles taking our rituals and making them their own, something that is also seen as controversial to Darker
“and more traditional sorts.”

“More close-minded sorts.” Harry interpreted.

“Precisely. There is one more thing to cover, Harry,” said Minerva. “You admitted you know nothing about your parents…” She reached into a drawer and pulled out a moving wizarding photo. A man who looked just like Harry, but with hazel eyes and broader features and rounder glasses, was standing with his arm around a woman with Harry’s eyes and long crimson hair and a pale, heart-shaped face that carried Harry’s high cheekbones and delicacy. “This is for you.”

She handed it over.

Harry saw the photo - and just sat and stared hungrily at it for a long time. In that time, tears filled his eyes and then went away, leaving only a fierce kind of love and sadness.

“Check the back,” said Minerva, smiling. “I was their teacher, and they were kind enough to invite me.”

Harry checked the ink on the back of the photo. James Potter and Lily Evans, Wedding Day.

Harry turned the photo back around to see his mother’s beautiful white dress robes. “Old and new,” he said. “Like with our music. And the altar… it’s not Christian.”

“You’ve heard a lot about your father,” said Minerva, “the wealthy jock. He went on to become a Transfiguration specialist and a Duelist for the Light Side during the war.”

Harry looked up, big-eyed, clutching the photo tightly.

“Your mother went on to become a Charms specialist and a Healer for the Light Side during the war - Charms being the art of changing the properties of something without Transfiguring it,” said Minerva. “She was - well, everyone loved her. Brilliant, passionate, sensitive, loving, and kind - all the biggest emotions, all the time. She had a fiery temper but only because she wore her heart so constantly on her sleeve.

“And she was an amazing witch. Quite talented. From a poor Muggle family, not that she ever let it stop her. Your father was the one from the ancient and wealthy wizarding family. He had quite the mischievous sense of humor, too.”

“… So, was it a big deal, when they married?” Harry wondered.

“Oh… they’d already made their allegiances clear, but…” Minerva smiled. “Yes. It shook our whole world up. And then they had you - and they died for you. Your father did, too. Your mother shielded you, but your father shielded you both. He just didn’t have the choice to step aside that your mother did.

“Your parents named you, you should know, after a medieval ancestor of yours, Henry Potter. He was a Muggle rights advocate. His more casual and relatable nickname was Harry, the name they gave you. Your middle name is James, after your father.”

Harry sat and thought about this for a while.

“We were both named after ancestors, but with meaning,” he said. “And I named my snowy owl, Hedwig, after an ancient witch burned at the stake I found in A History of Magic.”

“Hedwig - elegant, creative, literary, historical. Perhaps this is your taste in names, Harry,” said
“Minerva.”

“… Maybe,” said Harry.

“Your fortune, on a somewhat related note, derives from an ancient wizard ancestor of yours who invented several commonly used medicinal potions - among them the Pepper-Up Potion, a cure for the common cold, and the Skele-Gro Potion, a limb-regrowing potion. He was always pottering around with the magical herbs in his garden, hence ‘Potter.’ Another reason to become good at Potions,” said Minerva. “You get money every time either a Pepper-Up Potion or a Skele-Gro Potion is sold.”

“So… my money won’t run out?” Harry asked tentatively.

“Run out? Good Lord, dear, no. Your father was planning on living off of that money,” said Minerva, half-laughing. “Any Potter with a career only has a career by choice.”

“That’ll probably be me,” said Harry matter of factly. “I think I’d get bored.”

“That’s very level-headed of you,” said Minerva approvingly, favoring Harry with a rare smile. Harry smiled back, more freely than he once might have. “But in all honesty, I suspect there is at least one main Potter family vault and one main Potter family home for when you come of age at seventeen. The cottage in Godric’s Hollow was not that home, and in fact no one is quite sure why your parents were living there, except perhaps if they were in hiding. Until you turn seventeen, the family vault constantly replenishes your trust fund, which is what you can access now.”

“But I have to be in London to get the money?” Harry confirmed.

“Incorrect; there are Gringotts Bank branches all over the world, and you can ask for an amount you own from anywhere,” said Minerva matter of factly.

“Professor,” said Harry, “on the matter of careers, I was wondering… what does a wizard do once he leaves school and graduates? I’ve learned a lot of the other basic stuff - that the wizarding world uses magic and is hidden in pockets, that it has different forms of transportation I don’t understand yet, that it has a Ministry, that it has most basic things like a Muggle world’s. And you’ve taught me a lot more today.

“But no one can tell me what exactly we’re supposed to do once we leave Hogwarts School and stop taking magic classes.”

“There are four main types of jobs,” said Minerva. “There are the ordinary working-class jobs: shop clerk, bartender -“

Harry made a face.

“No. Very good, some ambition, then. Moving right along,” said Minerva, dryly amused.

“I just… I want to prove myself. As more than just a name,” said Harry.

“Then we get to the other three job categories: First, there are the famous pop artists and sports stars, the ‘celebrity’ and ‘artist’ sorts of jobs. There are the wizarding equivalent of all the so-called respectable jobs in the Muggle world - Healer is a doctor, Unspeakable is a researcher, Ministry worker is a government worker, there are Professors, journalists, magical creature specialists, lawyers, merchants selling wizarding goods, Aurors are our policemen, some humans do work at Gringotts Bank, etc.
“And finally, there are magical professions: Potioneers are rather like pharmacists, but then you have specialists in every branch of magic there is - from Charms to Dueling to Arithmancy. There is actually a professional dueling circuit. Good duelists all right with a little risk can make a living off of it.”

“There’s a lot to choose from,” Harry realized.

“It’s easier to focus on the school subjects that interest you first. You don’t have to come to a career decision until the end of your fifth year,” Minerva admitted. “For now, just consult with me when it comes to future class selections. Take what seems useful and what interests you. Trust me, you do not have to figure out all your career ambitions at eleven.

“And on that note, goodnight, Harry. I will see you at the same time and day next week.”

Harry stood - went to the door and then paused.

“Professor McGonagall?” he said firmly. “I’ll take all your advice. And… thank you. This is more help than I’ve gotten in my whole life before.”

“I think such help will prove fruitful, Mr Potter. I trust you not to let me down,” said Minerva, in a purposefully light tone of voice.

Harry seemed to grow bigger in his iron, dark determination. It was obvious he had decided to himself that he was indeed not going to let Minerva down. He nodded firmly, and left the office.

His determination was cute now. If he became powerful, Minerva couldn’t help but wonder if it would still look ‘cute’ in a few years.

Still, she smiled slightly as Harry left and shut the office door behind him in the evening castle shadows. The fireplace to her right had magically lit itself in the quiet.

Nonetheless: “… This will be difficult,” she whispered to herself, hands steepled before her at the desk. “Unless he or someone else is in immediate danger of dying… I won’t be able to do anything concrete about anything he tells me. And some things… I can’t tell him.

“Not won’t. Can’t.”

The fact that this bothered her at all was probably a sign she was already too far in. Oh, well. She’d made her bed, and now she’d have to lie in it.

Somehow, she couldn’t say she minded too much.

Thank goodness an opportunity had come for her to talk with Harry about what had obviously from the first envelope been a terrible childhood.
Chapter 2

Chapter Two

Harry

Harry took Professor McGonagall’s advice that weekend. By himself, having told no one of his meeting with Professor McGonagall - not even Ron, something he felt a twinge of guilt about - he walked down the marble staircase and across the entrance hall, and went rather hesitantly down the echoing steps to Hogwarts’s underground levels.

There was something private, almost sacred, about that meeting with Professor McGonagall. Quite apart from having promised to keep everything a secret, there were some things he simply didn’t want to share with anyone else just yet.

He didn’t head down to the dungeons, as he would have for Potions class. Instead, he stopped off at the basement level, as Professor McGonagall had told him to, and walked down a warm stone corridor, obviously window-less. He passed by a big pile of barrels and arrived at a painting of a bowl of fruit.

Feeling rather silly, but trusting Minerva McGonagall, he tickled the pear. It moved and giggled - and then the portrait swung aside, revealing an entrance hole.

Harry was greeted inside the kitchens by what seemed at first a blur of high-voiced green and brown around his ankle-level.

House elves, as they were called, were tiny creatures with big, bulbous eyes, pointy faces, and big, bat-like ears, dressed in neat little towels with the Hogwarts crest on them. They had wide, excited beams and high, shrill voices and seemed chalk-full of emotion. Their skin colors seemed to be mainly green and brown.

“Master Potter! Master Potter!” they all squealed, cheering, crowding around him. “What would Master Potter like to eat?!”

Harry bent down to talk to them more eye to eye, fascinated. He had expected his first magical creature experience to be scary, but house elves seemed so… nice.

“How do you know my name?” he asked, curious.

“It is part of our’s magic, Master Potter,” said one female house elf with green skin and a big, round nose.

“So house elves have magic, too? They just use it to help us?”

There were high chirps of agreement.

“How are you all wearing towels?” Harry asked next.

“Wearing household items is a mark a house-elf belongs to a place,” said a brown-skinned male house-elf with a pointy nose. “Being given wizard clothes is banishment, and is a sign of deepest shame.”

Even their bat-like ears seemed to wilt and they all nodded solemnly.
“Well… I actually came here for something a little unusual,” Harry admitted. “You all seem really helpful, though, so I’m sure you’ll be able to come up with something.”

“Master Potter is so nice…” The house-elves clutched their hands together and looked up at him with misty eyes.

Harry cleared his throat. “Er - right,” he said, bewildered. Were people not normally nice to house-elves? That was a horrible. They were just so eager to please. “Well, listen - I was wondering if you could teach me how to bake and brew tea myself, you know, teach me recipes so I can learn how to do it better.”

The explosion of sudden noise was startling.

“Master Potter does not need this!”

“We’s can give Master Potter anything he needs!”

“Does Master Potter not like his food?!”

They were not angry or outraged. Actually, typically expressive, they seemed horribly upset.

“No, it’s not like that! The food here is great! Best food I’ve ever had!” said Harry, raising his hands, alarmed.

The house-elves calmed down. “Master Potter is so kind to us poor house-elves… But then, why’s he want to learn food and tea-making?” said the brown-skinned male house-elf from before, puzzled.

“This is going to sound weird… I’m trying to do it to have fun. You know, like a hobby. Something I want to do. Something I want to be creative with,” said Harry awkwardly. “I wanted to come here during weekends. I figured, if anyone could teach me… it would be you.”

Their eyes were wide and for once there was a total, stunned silence.

“But if you don’t want to part with your recipes…” Harry continued uneasily.

“House-elves… teach Master Potter something?” said the green-skinned female house-elf in wonder.

“Well, yes. That was the idea,” said Harry uncomfortably, looking around at them all. “I mean - you all know more about this than I do, don’t you?”

And equally suddenly, there was another tearful explosion of noise.

“We’s help Master Potter! We’s help Master Potter!” And they all crowded around him, and as Harry stood, in a great tidal wave he was pulled forward into the kitchen.

It was a wonderful, warm stone kitchen with a vast counter and countless brass and copper instruments, shelves stuffed full of ingredients. There were four stone tables, probably placed exactly under the golden Great Hall tables so the food could be sent up. A roaring fireplace was set into a far wall.

“Tilly is one of the heads of the kitchen,” said the green-skinned female house-elf with the bulbous nose matter of factly.

“Manny is the other,” said the brown-skinned make house-elf with the pointed nose in a naturally stony, serious sort of manner.
“What does Master Harry want to learn?” said Tilly.

Harry sat slowly down against the counter. The rest of the house-elves flurried out around him, going back to their duties in a pleasant bustle.

“Well, that’s the thing,” he said slowly. “I haven’t had the chance to try a lot of different kinds of food in my life…” Here, he felt another shot of anger toward the Dursleys, for denying him even this basic thing. “So I don’t really know in detail what kinds of foods and teas I like yet.

“I can tell you I usually prefer strong, sweet tea - I don’t like weak, milky teas. I can also tell you I usually like baked desserts more than cooked dinners. I like lemon-flavored treats, and I really like treacle tart - but not treacle fudge.”

“This makes sense,” said Tilly. “Treacle tart’s got no treacle fudge. It’s a traditional light, flaky pastry with golden syrup, breadcrumbs, and lemon zest.”

“So I like lemon,” Harry realized. “Okay… I also like lots of meat and potato sorts of dinners. Casual stuff, you know.”

“Now’s, we’ve got’s to know how to make anything, it’s part of our magic and part of our job,” said Tilly.

“So we can give Master Potter some recipe ideas, and Master Potter can tell us what he thinks,” said Manny, still sounding an awful lot like he’d never done this before and it bewildered him.

“Hold on - let me write this down,” said Harry, scrambling in his book bag for quill, ink, and parchment. He looked up to find the house-elves gazing at him in worshipful fondness, and he cleared his throat uncertainly. “Okay - I’m ready.”

Manny cleared his throat, obviously feeling very important. Harry tried to hold back a smile. “For traditional English tea, Manny recommends Builders Tea. It’s a very strong black tea, with the tea bag kept in the mug, and a good deal of sugar but a good deal less milk. Chipped teacups are usually preferred, because this is a working class type of brew.”

“Wonderful. My relatives would hate that. Let’s do it,” said Harry.

“For a black Builders Tea, Tilly recommends smooth, mellow blends of Indian and African black teas,” Tilly added helpfully.

“For other strong and sweet kinds of tea, Manny recommends recipes from Morocco, Tibet, India, Thailand, Taiwan, Pakistan, and Malaysia,” said Manny.

“I could even become interested in those cultures,” Harry realized curiously, trying for a moment to think like McGonagall.

“Morocco,” said Manny matter of factly, “makes Mahgrebi mint tea. Mint, green tea leaves, and a generous serving of sugar, poured from up high into slim, delicate glasses.”

“Tibet,” Tilly added kindly, “makes strong Po cha black tea, with milk, salt, and yak butter mixed into a strong, soupy consistency.”

“India,” Manny continued, “makes Chai blends, mixing black tea leaves with spices like cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger, cloves, cardamom, and pepper.”

“Thailand,” said Tilly, “makes Thai iced tea or Cha Yen, a blend of Ceylon or Assam tea with sugar,
condensed milk, and spices like star anise, tamarind, and orange blossom, served over ice in a tall glass. Topping it off with evaporated milk creates an ombre effect.”

“Taiwan,” said Manny, “makes bubble tea. Manny recommends black or green iced tea, in Master Harry’s case, with powdered milk and sugary syrup. Small balls of tapioca are put in at the end.

“Pakistan makes Noon Chai. This tea includes pistachios, almonds, salt, milk, and spices like cardamom, cinnamon, and star anise. It has a distinctive pink color, that can be enhanced with baking soda -“

“Not a big deal since there are so many other things in Noon Chai anyway,” said Tilly in a friendly, humorous sort of way. ‘And finally, Malaysia makes Teh tarik or ‘pulled tea.’ Black tea, sugar, and condensed milk made into a frothy texture, the texture made by pouring the mixture elegantly back and forth between cups - this takes practice.”

Harry looked down at his list. “I end up at the end,” he said thoughtfully, “with an interesting blend of strong, working-class, more masculine traditional black brews and lots of eccentrically flavored and colored Southeast Asian and African brews - and cultures.

“I like it,” he decided. “So.” He looked up, determined. “What about food?”

“For only desserts,” said Tilly, “Tilly recommends starting out with things like this. Ricotta hotcakes - a lemony breakfast pancake, the flavor of a cheesecake combined with the texture of a soufflé hotcake. Served with a topping of chopped ripe strawberries.”

“Banana and butterscotch upside down tart,” Manny added. “A warm, gooey, caramel-sticky banana tart. Can’t leave it lying or the banana will get soggy.

“Anglo-Italian trifle. Blackberries, a layer of mascarpone cream, and golden toasted almonds on top. Anglo is the fruit, while the Italian part is the lemon liqueur and tiramisu-like mascarpone cream layer.”

“So in coffee shop terms, I’d order a Chai and one of those yogurt, berries, and nuts breakfast cups,” Harry realized curiously. “Okay. What else?”

“White chocolate and passion fruit mousse,” said Tilly with shy eagerness. “Acerbic passion fruit combined with rich white chocolate to give flavor, intensity, sweetness, and lightness. The delicate balance and sweetness counteracting the rich intensity makes this one of the few chocolatey desserts Tilly thinks Master Harry would really like.”

“Coconut slab,” said Manny. “Coconut cake in a roasting pan. Best served with fruit.”

“Gooseberry fool,” said Tilly. “Gooseberries against cream, with elderflower cordial to taste.

“Chilled caramelized oranges with yogurt - never to be made too far in advance.

“Lemon rice pudding. Master Harry likes rice pudding?”

“Yeah. Jelly and Jell-O, too. Some people don’t like that, either,” Harry admitted. “But I love the stuff. Both of them.”

“Lemon rice pudding,” said Tilly eagerly, “is infused with lemon and whipped cream, best served with blueberries in a tumblr.”

Harry was starting to realize that house-elves were a good deal smarter - and, if this was all their
magic, a good deal more powerful - than they probably let on to most people. He was sitting there completely impressed. How was no one else trying this the way he was?

“Lemon cupcakes with little lemon jelly halves on top,” Manny added, “with lemon oil and royal icing.”

“Eastern Mediterranean cheesecake,” said Tilly. “Made with cottage cheese, cream cheese and sour cream. Light and fragrant, almost mousse-like, with no biscuit layer.

“Strawberry meringue layer cake. Pavlova meets Victoria sponge, with a layer of mascarpone cream and a layer of strawberries in the middle between the two cake halves.

“Vanilla shortbread. Easy to make shortbread biscuits for a simple bake-day. This could be your go-to of choice for tea-time.”

“Mint julep peaches,” Manny added. “Peaches, poached in sugar-syrup and bourbon and sprinkled with mint.

“Summer crumble. The crumble is almonds and the fruit used is apricots.”

“And as far as ice cream flavors,” Tilly finished triumphantly, “Tilly recommends strawberry, peach, cheesecake, margarita, a honey-flavored semi-cold custard called semifreddo for Master Harry’s custard of choice.”

“And brioche is an ice cream like breakfast dessert from Sicily best served with coffee,” said Manny. “So if Master Harry wants a snack to go with a coffee…”

“Right,” said Harry, catching on. He was still writing. He had also noticed he had graduated to ‘Master Harry.’ He looked up expectantly. “Anything else?”

The house-elves exchanged a look.

“Tilly and Manny were wondering… if Master Harry might also be willing to learn how to cook food?” said Tilly tentatively. “Now that we know his tastes…”

“Sure,” said Harry, open to trying anything at this point. “What did you have in mind, based on my dessert choices?”

He was curious, despite himself.

The house-elves relaxed. “For breakfast,” Tilly began, “either orange breakfast muffins, or apple and blackberry kuchen - a slab of sweet dough topped with fruits and nuts.”


“For quick meals,” Tilly continued, “Mozzerella in Carrozza - a golden-crusted fried mozzarella sandwich. Chicken with chorizo and cannellini. Linguine with garlic oil and pancetta. Thai yellow pumpkin and seafood curry - this would go well with Master Harry’s Southeast Asian teas. And bitter orange ice cream.”

“For party foods,” said Manny, “bagna cauda - a melted butter, olive oil, garlic, and vegetable dip.

“For rainy days - pasta, raspberry and lemongrass trifle, and simple rainy-day biscuits. Also good for tea dunking.”

“For dinner - Couscous, which is lamb, as a main course, and creme brûlée as dessert. Warm shredded lamb salad with mint and pomegranate, as a main course, and Turkish delight as dessert. Sides - potato gratin and savoy cabbage. Also - salmon with greens and shiitake mushrooms, or Vietnamese chicken and mint salad. These would go well with Master Harry’s fancier teas.”

“Finally, for a snack,” finished Manny, “peaches and blueberries - cooked with yogurt and sugar, or eaten plain with orange flower water. Orange flower water would be good for thirst.”

They were finished. Harry looked down at his list.

“Wow,” he said, “that’s impressive. It’s a good thing I have a number of years to learn all this stuff.”

Tilly and Manny beamed.

“So, I end up,” he said, “with a love for summer foods, and fruit with light cream desserts - as well as a dislike of too much richness and not enough balance in my bakes. In food, I seem to particularly like salmon and Italian food. There is also a side-helping of plainer, more traditional meat and potato dinners, or fried sandwiches. I see a lot of lamb, and I did spot that my salad of choice includes lamb, too. There’s some mint scattered in here as well.”

“Master Harry’s preferred tea and his preferred food form a nice contrast and blend,” Tilly offered. “Tea could be a very frequent - what is called ‘palette cleanser’.”

“All right. That’s enough for today,” said Harry, standing. “But I’m coming back tomorrow,” he said when the house-elves looked disappointed, “and we’ll get started then. You guys did great today.”

Tilly and Manny looked almost absurdly happy. Note to self, Harry thought, tell a house-elf they did great and be nice to them, and they love you forever.

“You can call any one of us, Master Harry, from anywhere in the castle,” said Tilly firmly, “and we’s will come with our magic to help. We’s can find things, make things, protect things, know the castle, all sorts.”


The thing was - he knew they meant it. They really would try to help him.

And then he was promptly crowded back out of the kitchen by cheering, excitable house-elves, food stuffed into his hands and pockets as he went.

Next up, Harry got some magazines from a little table in the Owlery, a great open space with high ceilings full of big, bright windows whose floor was littered with straw and countless owl droppings. Owls sat on perches high up nearer the rafters. Hedwig swooped down to meet him, landing on his shoulder and nibbling his ear affectionately.

“Hello, Hedwig. You’ll need more than one owl coming back. I’m using my fortune to order a lot of things to be delivered,” said Harry firmly.

He took up a quill, pushed the magazines up against an Owlery wall, and leafed through them,
circling items. The pictures in the magazines, glossy and beautiful, moved and shone, and the lettering beside each item scrolled down for a full description and then began rewriting itself again.

He ordered books from the fiction section labeled “Magic Fiction.” Then he ordered books from the non-fiction section labeled “Practical Application Magic”, then from “Alternate Magic” and “Darker Interest Subjects.”

“Information is information,” he decided to himself firmly. “It’s what you do with it that counts.”

Next, he ordered a Pensieve, the most expensive of the lot, a carved stone basin full of swirling silver liquid-vapor memories. For memories, he ordered “Dark Cult” genre memory-theater in the fiction memories section. In the non-fiction memories section, he ordered “Eccentric Roleplay” under the Dream-healing genre.

Finally, he ordered a WWN radio.

He tied it all up with a magical glowing thumbprint proving who he was so his money could be taken out, and he sent Hedwig off through the Owlsery windows and into the skies. He watched her for a while as she left, the wind blowing softly through his hair, determined.

Then he headed down into the Great Hall, sat down at the Gryffindor table - and paused in surprise.

Some of his favorite foods and teas were gathered together on his plate.

Harry smiled. The house-elves were sending his favorites up to him in the Great Hall because he was nice to them. It was comforting to think of the whole crowd of them, being able and willing to help him from anywhere in the castle.

Perhaps this was why he had noticed more chores being mysteriously done for him, and done better, around other parts of Hogwarts as well…

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When Monday came, Harry’s new look was commented on - a lot. Of course, he wore his black Hogwarts robes, but he wore them open and underneath them, or in off-class hours, were nonetheless his new clothes - slim fit, designer, in vivid Winter color shades with long pants. And some parts of his new look - his better messy haircut, his new square sophisticated dark-framed glasses - could be seen anywhere.

The entire look put together changed his whole demeanor. He had suspected as much, but he knew it when classes started up again, because he got a lot of attention and a lot of comments.

More girls were prone to giggling at him when he passed in the hallways now. Harry had little idea what this meant and thought there should be a worldwide ban on giggling anyway, so this mostly just bewildered him. Harder to ignore were the guys who also looked at him with bigger eyes when he passed.

Ron was totally in awe. “Just how extensive was that meeting with McGonagall?” he asked. “With all the new stuff that came in the owl-mail for you, and all the new food on your plate…”

“It’s like she’s giving you a makeover.”

“In a good way?” Harry asked, wincing. They were walking together down a Hogwarts corridor between classes.
“No, Harry,” said Fred Weasley suddenly as he and George passed from behind. “Girls are giggling over you, you’re a walking fashion plate, you’re eating foods no one has ever seen before, and your belongings actually have a personality now.”

“But it’s all horrible,” George finished flatly.

Harry grinned. “Cheers, guys,” he said as Fred and George left.

Ron was still staring at him in some amount of disbelief, not even looking where he was walking.

“Do I have this right, Potter? You’re getting *counseling sessions* from McGonagall?”

Harry gritted his teeth - and turned slowly around to face a gleeful, sneering Draco Malfoy flanked by Crabbe and Goyle.

“Does she talk to you a lot about your Mummy and Daddy? Did she tell you people would like you more if you dressed like that?” Malfoy sneered.

Harry’s temper sparked for a split second - and then he tried to imagine McGonagall’s face if he lost his temper and attempted to hex Malfoy in the corridor, so he forced himself to take a deep breath and calm down. Instead, he confined himself to what he had already realized Malfoy hated most.

Icy, on the mark comments.

“You should talk to her, Malfoy,” he said instead. “You obviously have some issues with your Daddy, and maybe she could do something about the bloodless pointy-faced look.”

It was such an unusually low blow that even Ron looked shocked and a little delighted. But Harry was a Slytherin, he might as well accept it, and to be fair Malfoy had just targeted his dead parents and his childhood secret fear that everyone disliked him.

This all registered in a split second, and then Malfoy’s face had flushed and he’d pulled out his wand. Harry pulled out his, too, with lightning-fast reflexes. He and Malfoy stood pointing wands at each other. Crabbe and Goyle pulled out their wands, Ron pulled out his, and then everyone was at a stand-still.

The whole corridor had stopped to watch.

Then Professor Flitwick came up, Percy behind him. “What’s going on here, boys?” he squeaked, as Percy stood behind him looking stern and important.

No one was hexing anyone now, so Harry lowered his wand from a glaring Malfoy’s face. “Nothing, Professor,” he said quietly, “I was just trying to get to class.” And he turned and walked away, Ron behind him.

The message to Malfoy was silent: I’m not the one who picked the fight. And just because I have a mentor, that doesn’t make me easier to pick on.

-  

The part about McGonagall’s instructions that made Harry most nervous also came up when classes were in session again.

This was why he was standing uncertainly waiting in the Potions classroom long after the rest of his class had left. “I don’t know what’s going on, but better you than me,” Ron had muttered as he’d
passed Harry and left.

The door shut behind them all, and then Harry was alone with Snape. Snape looked up from his desk. Realized what had happened, and his eyes narrowed.

“Potter, I’m not giving you extra credit for staying around after class,” he sneered.

“Professor, does it make sense to you why my Aunt Petunia hates me?” Harry asked suddenly. He’d thought about this long and hard, and it was the one true opening he could see.

Snape, to Harry’s credit, was genuinely caught off guard. “If you’re looking for pity -“ he began, obviously trying to recover.

“I don’t want anyone’s pity. It’s why I don’t talk about her,” said Harry in a hard voice. “But I heard you were friends with my Mum as a kid. Why would her sister hate me?”

It was a question he’d always wanted to know.

Snape was extremely hard to read, standing there completely frozen over his desk for a full minute. “Because she was ugly and your mother was pretty. And because she’s always wanted to be a witch, but she wasn’t,” he said at last curtly. “Instead, your mother, her baby sister, was a witch instead of her. And their parents loved her for it.”

“Aunt Petunia wanted to be a witch?” Harry asked disbelievingly.

Snape gave a grim smile. “It is ridiculous. She’s extremely nosey and shrewish and obviously not magical at all,” he said.

“… She felt ignored,” Harry realized. “Looked over, outshone. Like my mother was spoiled. But my mother wasn’t spoiled, sir,” he added, “… was she?”

Snape stared.

“It’s just - I heard my Dad was kind of a bully.” Harry shifted uncomfortably. “My aunt always let my cousin bully me, so I’m not okay with that. I just… it would be nice to know at least one of my parents was a good person her entire life.”

“… She was. One of the best people I ever knew,” said Snape simply - and the thing was, it sounded like he was being honest. Some of his nasty guard had come down. “I’d have thought,” he said softly, “that any family would have been delighted to take in the great Harry Potter.”

“They used to lock me in a cupboard full of spiders when I did magic,” said Harry, totally matter of factly. “I think it frightened them.”

At this, at last, Severus Snape - Dark in religious tendencies anyway - became truly angry. But not, interestingly, at Harry. His nostrils flared and his black eyes shone.

“Foolish Muggles,” he hissed softly, something deadly behind his voice.

“I never knew anything about my parents. My aunt and uncle never told me. I’m taking these mentor sessions with McGonagall, and she mentioned you and my Mum used to be friends… So, I don’t know what I expected. I just wanted to talk with someone who knew her,” Harry admitted, also being honest. “Anyway, those sessions - they’re why I’m dressed differently and everything, now.”

“… You look less like your father,” Snape commented reserved.
“I like the way I look now better,” said Harry simply. “Not because I hate my father, or anything… I don’t know if I like him, either… I just, I want to be me,” Harry decided. “Just me, and not anyone else.

“I know I haven’t done anything important enough to deserve being famous yet. It was weird, going from a place that hated me to this. So… I’ve decided I want to prove myself as more than just a name.”

“… And why are you telling me all this?” Snape asked at last.

“Because - I want to get better at Potions,” said Harry firmly. “My aunt and uncle were always telling me to cook for them, and I heard Potions is a lot like cooking. So, I want to get good at it, even though I was just okay for my first few sessions.” Harry looked up, determined. “I was wondering… if you could help me. Because everyone says you’re really good at Potions.”

Snape just stood there and stared at him. For the first time since Harry had met him, he was completely caught off guard. “Well,” he said at last, “I am the teacher.” The comment didn't carry the same bite of before; Severus Snape clearly had no idea how to respond.

“I want to be a good student, like my Mum,” Harry told Snape. “I don’t want to be the person my Dad was in school. I want to be the person my Mum was in school.”

Snape looked into Harry’s eyes, piercing, assessing…

“I believe you’re being honest,” he realized aloud. Then, challengingly: “… And were you a good cook?”

Harry grinned. “I passed muster for two people who didn’t even like me. I’m better at experimenting than at memorizing texts, anyway.” He shrugged. “I heard that’s a plus in Potions.”

“It is,” Snape agreed, reserved. “Recipes can be worked from out of a book, but experimenting is a talent not as easily taught.” He paused, staring at Harry, who looked up at him hopefully…

“I would be willing to tutor you,” Snape decided at last, “and see if you have some modicum of talent. Just don’t expect me to go easy on you. The ‘dunderhead’ clause still applies.” His voice had become cold again, but the hatred in his eyes was gone.

Harry grinned. “No one’s ever gone easy on me in my whole life, sir. I wouldn’t expect anything of the sort. It’s nice,” he added, “being friends with somebody who was friends with my Mum.”

Snape’s eyes widened and he stared after Harry as Harry hurried out of the classroom.

“The boy,” Snape could be heard saying in disbelief after Harry, “thinks we’re friends.”

So Harry’s Potions tutoring with Snape began. Harry supposed he’d proved he wasn’t a dunderhead, because Snape kept tutoring him, and his Potions abilities and marks started going up.

The more he learned from Snape, the less Snape was mean to him. The first time Snape held Harry up as an example to the class of how to do a step in Potions class, Neville Longbottom was so surprised he fell off his stool.

Snape didn’t talk about Harry’s mother much yet, and Harry didn’t ask. He supposed it was a sensitive subject. For now, their conversations stayed on Potions. Harry thought he might have been
proving in the whole process, here at the beginning, how little like his father he actually was.

He was determined to learn from anyone he could.

On that note, he stopped taking class advice from Ron - who was nonetheless still a good friend - and started trying to look at learning magic the way McGonagall had advised instead. Ron called him eager, but idly, not as an insult. Harry stayed on his goal of wanting to prove himself and be powerful. He began seeing and experimenting with magic as a form of physical creativity, and he began reading his new practical application and morbid subject texts.

He could feel the difference, now that he knew the tingling sensation that meant magic, if he paid attention closely. The more he practiced with his wand core, the easier wand magic became - the more his core of phoenix feather began to trust him and understand his brand of Grey magic.

This made Harry feel warm and good inside.

One of the most surprising affects of this was that Hermione Granger broke her “not talking to them” rule - but only by approaching Harry.

“You’ve caught up to me in classes. I just don’t understand how.”

Harry looked around in surprise in a corridor one day, alone back from the library, which was good for practicing. He supposed he shouldn’t be surprised that Hermione Granger had been near the library. She was standing there looking frustrated.

“I just have a different way of achieving the same result - top marks,” said Harry cautiously. He explained what McGonagall had told him about the pair of them, and what she and Snape had told him about Potions.

Hermione looked openly excited by the end.

“… Don’t you understand, then?!” she cried in excitement.

“Understand what?” said Harry, puzzled.

“We should study together! We could be very good for each other!” Hermione said eagerly.

“True enough. But I thought you didn’t like Ron,” said Harry, grinning reluctantly.

“Well, I notice he’s not at the library,” said Hermione flatly.

“… Well,” Harry said at last, thoughtfully, “I suppose there’s no ban on me having only one close friend.”

Hermione paused - and turned red. “Really?” she said, and Harry could tell this meant a lot to her. He realized he’d never seen Hermione Granger with any friends.

“Yeah,” said Harry, “Ron is better for the fun stuff, but he’s not a good study partner. It makes sense. You each have your own thing to bring to the table. There’s no better or worse than the other.”

He shrugged.

“Sure,” he said. “I’ll study with you. We each have our own thing, and we’ve already talked about why my following the rules less often occasionally has magical merit. The way you do things has merit, too. Why not? I mean, the top people in our year -“
“We could do great things together,” Hermione smirked, for once looking positively devious.

Harry grinned. “Exactly.”

He went back to the Gryffindor common room and told Ron what had happened.

“Making friends with Hermione,” said Ron, his eyes widening. “You really have gone mad.”

Harry merely smiled.

“So you want to join art club, Mr Potter?” tiny Professor Flitwick squeaked thoughtfully in Charms as the rest of the class was leaving the wide, airy, tiered classroom one afternoon. “And you say you want to learn caricature drawing and satire writing?” “Yes, sir,” said Harry. “As a side to my Quidditch practice.”

“Well, of course, Mr Potter, of course, I’m always willing to teach eager new students the arts,” said Flitwick, smiling fondly. “We meet here in the Charms classroom two afternoons a week, for art - Tuesdays and Fridays. I will help you in any way that I can. This fits perfectly with your schedule - I believe Quidditch practice is Mondays and Wednesdays, for the Gryffindors.

“How is your Quidditch practice going, Mr Potter?”

“Good, sir. I’m taking Captain Wood’s extra workouts,” said Harry, grinning, backing up to leave the classroom with everyone else. “They’re exhausting. Not in the bad way. And I like getting to know my teammates.”

“A glutton for punishment, Mr Potter? I’ll have to introduce you to the art club students as well!” Flitwick called after him, grinning.

Harry laughed and left the classroom.

He had been listening to the radio, following Quidditch matches, and he had decided what professional team he liked. Harry had discovered he had a fondness for a big show - for obvious creative magic, and for symbolism. These were the grounds under which he had picked his team:

The Kenmare Kestrels.

The Kenmare Kestrels were an Irish Quidditch team from the town of Kenmare, County Kerry, in the South of Ireland, that played in the British and Irish Quidditch League. Founded in 1291, they had leprechauns as mascots, and their fans also sometimes played the harp at matches. Their robes were emerald-green with two yellow ‘K’s back to back on the chest.

Harry liked not only the beauty and the show, but the fact that they didn’t seem to be involved in what he saw as any underhanded viciousness or nastiness. So he had become a Kestrels fan. Harry had decided he was a fan of the Irish, and a big believer in everyone getting along. “I approve,” Seamus had said, grinning, on his way out of the dormitory the day the poster had come.

Harry went back to his dorm room between classes and climbed onto his four poster bed to admire his new Quidditch team poster. It was taped right above his bed, the Kestrels logo complete with moving figures of Quidditch players below the logo. Ron and Dean had both already called him traitors, for differing reasons, but the wonderful part about being here at Hogwarts was that neither of them had meant it in anger; they were just teasing him.
Sort of like how Hogwarts hadn’t expelled him at the first sign of trouble. Harry realized he was slowly moving beyond his abuse.

He smiled up at the Kestrels poster he had owl-ordered, and then looked around his dormitory. There was the Pensieve, with the labeled vials of Dark Cult and Eccentric Roleplay Dream-Healing silvery liquid-vapor memories. There were his new practical alternate magic and magic fiction books. There were his new slim-fit designer clothes. There was his Nimbus Two Thousand broomstick, carefully preserved. There was his growing portfolio of recipes. It was all a perfect mess, scattered around his space.

There was his radio, there were his new drawing and writing materials. The radio was playing idly; a cold, chipped cup of black tea sat forgotten in a corner. His history book was open, names circled in ink; Harry had begun circling all the names of his favorite literary and historical characters, and sure enough, all the names he liked best were creative and elegant. On his nightstand were some neatly stacked library books on the ancient wizarding cultures in the Southeast Asian and African tea countries he had taken an interest in. The moving photo of his parents on their wedding day also sat on his bedside table, in a silver frame he had gotten from Hermione, as a surprisingly kind gift when she’d heard he didn’t have a frame for the only photo he had of his parents.

Fred and George were right, he thought. His dormitory was starting to have true character at last.

And to top the week off: the Hogwarts house elves adored him, Snape liked him, Hermione was his newest close friend, he was meeting new people at Hogwarts, he’d stood up to Malfoy without getting himself in trouble, he’d joined a second new club, and he’d established himself both as Grey and as one of the top students in his year at Hogwarts. If he hadn’t seen it all up close, Harry would have come across even to himself as almost absurdly perfect.

It was amazing, what a bit of mentorship from the right person could do.

It sounded eager, but he actually couldn’t wait until his upcoming next session with McGonagall. They were going over the next part of his past: What had happened after his first Hogwarts letter had arrived.

Harry wondered how far they’d get, and what Professor McGonagall would make of all that.
“I wanted to thank you guys for looking into more things for me,” said Harry, impressed, eyeing his ever-growing baking and tea-brewing list in the Hogwarts kitchens. It was by now on a long, ink and parchment, seemingly endless scroll.

Manny and Tilly practically glowed. “It was no trouble to help Master Harry!” Harry had continued coming to learn from the house elves and they had come to adore him.

“To add to my tea,” said Harry slowly, looking over his list with a keen eye, “we added tea from Turkey to my list. I’d like to visit an authentic Middle Eastern tea garden someday, and the Turkish people have strong black tea with sugar that becomes a peculiar crimson color.

“I’m also interested in South Egypt saïdi tea - strong, bitter, and dark with much sweetening added. Morocco has intricate tea making ceremonies that I’m fascinated by, and I’d like to see a real one someday. Kenya has Indian Chai, which I already love, at English tea-time. And traditional Chai from India is supposedly a dream to behold, so I have to try that someday.

“I’ve found I’m mainly a black tea specialist, well versed in all its varieties, which is interesting.

“And since I told you I like baking, you found me more baking recipes to try! In biscuits and scones, pecan shortbread biscuits, peanut butter sandwich biscuits, praline and lemon flavors of biscotti, farthing biscuits - crumbly with home-made butter - and maple and lemon drop scones, also known as Scotch pancakes.

“In breads, plaited rich saffron bread loaves, pizzettes or mini pizzas, rye and spelt roles, sticky honey cinnamon buns, stuffed focaccia, banana bread, and ciabatta bread.

“In cakes, orange cake, Dundee whiskey cake, Victoria sandwich cake, fairy cakes or miniature sponge cakes, Christmas cake for emergenices, and lemon curd Swiss rolls for tea. Also Swedish cardamom almond cake, and cherry cake.

“For tarts, Somerset apple tart, and tropical Manchester tart, a citrus flavored egg custard tart with exotic fruit and rum. Also snowball merengues, choux caramel puffs, golden millefeuilles - a kind of refined pastry - and raspberry and lemon cream horns. Finally on our list, summer four-berry pie, apricot custard tart, and lemon and raspberry eclairs.

“For savory bakes, salmon coulibiac, feta and spinach filo triangles, roast vegetable and goat’s cheese torte, boeuf bourguignon pie, cheese ham and chive tart, lamb apricot coriander and green chili pie, and little crab souffles.

“Finally, for heavier desserts, hot white chocolate sponge puddings, and summer pudding Alaska, which involves three ice cream flavors, almond sponge, homemade jam, and piped Italian meringue. Finally, blueberry and lemon bread pudding, hazelnut and summer berry roulade, and tiramisu cake.”

Harry stood back, finished and satisfied.

“So at the end - we have a black tea specialist, more African and Middle Eastern teas and tea rituals to add to Southeast Asia, lots of French baking recipes, more summer cream and berry bakes, a bit
more white chocolate… And a surprising great love for nuts, spices, and savory bakes.”

“Combined with what we’s talked about last time, does Master Harry think this is enough to work on?” Tilly asked with tentative hopefulness, teetering on her tiptoes, as if genuinely uncertain whether this would be enough. Manny perked up, trying not to seem too curious, and the other house elves had paused in their bustle to listen…

Harry looked up, determined, and smirked.

“I’m ready,” he said, rolling up his sleeves in the Hogwarts kitchens to reveal slightly more slim, healthy, toned arms than before. “Let’s get started.”

The house elves exploded into excited chatter and bustle again. They were starting to become natural around and trust Harry at last.

Harry had been right, he thought as he listened to them haggle over cleaning and ingredients. House elves were much smarter and more human than they initially appeared on the surface.

-

Albus Dumbledore

Albus looked out the window of his office to the Hogwarts grounds, his eyes distant and misty. “So Harry is getting on better than predicted. Minerva is helping him…” he murmured, his breath fogging the glass on a dark green and rainy evening.

Very little happened in Hogwarts Castle without Albus Dumbledore’s knowledge.

“I hope,” said Albus quietly, “that Harry might have a better early life than I myself allowed him. I hope that for him. An old man’s guilt, perhaps… knowing the inevitable of how it will still all end… I wish my plan were different.

“I predict that the Dursleys are not quite bright enough to think of opening Harry’s trunk and taking his things away from him before locking them underneath the staircase, so if it all goes correctly… And especially if Minerva steps in again… There is hope for happiness in Harry’s later childhood and teenage years.

“Yes… A happier younger life may still fit into my plans…”

“Or,” said Albus with quiet shame, his eyes swimming with unshed tears, “perhaps I simply want it to.”

He turned away from his reflection as Fawkes the phoenix made a single, low, musical sound.

“Yes,” said Albus quietly to himself. “Of course my friend Minerva will be allowed to continue.

“This does not alter the plan,” he said, as if willing himself to believe it. “The plan is merely modified. It can continue…”

Perhaps he was lying to himself. But perhaps, thought Albus, perhaps everyone did that.

-

Quirinus Quirrell

“So he is making great progress, my lord,” said Quirinus’s voice in a dark and seemingly empty
room. “Much more than predicted. The new look, the near perfect grades, the teachers’ approval, Severus Snape on his side, Quidditch team, art club, cooking and baking, sessions with his head of house… a Gryffindor… hobbies… a powerful wand he has talked of with others… Even a great deal of money and an expensive owl regularly sending him gifts… He has made several unexpectedly useful friends and only the Malfoy boy’s followers openly dislike him.”

“Then they are fools,” hissed a voice, seemingly from nowhere, in the black room. “To challenge such a boy. Of course, he would always have grown to be a worthy adversary. It is merely expected… He sounds not unlike someone else I once knew…

“I want you to keep a close eye on him,” the voice decided quietly, almost thoughtful.

“Of course, my Lord,” said Quirinus. “Of course…”

- Minerva

Harry came into their next meeting a changed boy, and Minerva was strangely proud of him. Felt for a few moments nearly emotional with it.

“Sit down, Mr Potter,” she said, and only when he’d sat down uncertainly across the desk from her did she smile. “I hear you have been doing well. I am impressed.”

Harry brightened. “Thank you, ma’am!” he said, obviously glad he had made her proud. He surely hadn’t gotten much of that in his home life, that was for certain, Minerva thought with a flash of anger.

“So.” She straightened with dignity and purpose. “We left off, I believe, at you being locked in your cupboard after the boa constrictor fiasco.”

Harry sobered, as if reminded of a dark time he had started to choose to forget. “Right,” he said seriously, and he began the next part of his story.

He went all the way from leaving his cupboard again… and straight through falling asleep in the hut on the sea beside Hagrid, having just gotten the basics of his own story, looking forward to going shopping in Diagon Alley tomorrow.

“You learned a great deal from your cousin Dudley, didn’t you, Harry?” said Minerva thoughtfully. “In this, the last session we truly focus on your early life and the Dursleys.”

“… Yeah. I guess I did,” Harry admitted, as if considering it for the first time, sitting back. “I learned to hate bullying. I learned to value my possessions. Of course, a lack of money added to that.”

“Good things to take from horrible happenings. You also, if I may, seem to have employed the victory of intelligence over your cousin,” Minerva reminded him. “You pride yourself on being smarter than him, your childhood bully, and I think through him developed a distinct talent for sarcasm and sass that is somewhat separate from your need to vent what happened to you through your drawing.”

“They’re different things,” Harry clarified, realizing with eyes widening. “Yeah. I can see that. I vent anger though my art… But I’m sarcastic because I value my intelligence.

“So… I was unusually prone to being a good wizard?” said Harry with tentative hopefulness. “A smart one?”
“I think you have already proven, Harry, in this past time through your quick adaptation, that you have a kind of natural genius to you when it comes to magic,” said Minerva quietly.

Harry blushed and though he was silent, it was obvious this meant a great deal to him.

“Just don’t let that go to your head and make you lazy,” Minerva added sternly, and Harry smiled fondly as if amused.

“Of course, ma’am,” he said cheerfully. “With you as my mentor, I wouldn’t dream of it.”

“Yes, well.” Minerva fussed with herself, but was privately very happy with this answer. “Now, you seem to have had only what you called ‘tiny rays of hope’ throughout your childhood. You seemed to feel an intense desire for connection, even if just through a letter.

“Were you lonely, with the Dursleys? Pessimistic?”

“… I didn’t think I was ever finding anyone or getting out,” Harry muttered, looking away. “That’s why Hogwarts means so much to me.”

“… Understandable. Be sure to find connection, happiness, and love with people here. Do not be afraid of them,” was all Minerva said gently.

“Yes, ma’am,” said Harry solemnly, half-laughing. Then, when Minerva continued to give him a stern look: “I mean… maybe,” he realized tentatively, shrinking in his chair. “It just felt so dumb… Being afraid of Uncle Vernon.”

He looked away, looking in that moment very small.

“He was your abuser, and behaving dangerously,” said Minerva. “It was not dumb, and it is certainly nothing to be ashamed of - or feel whiny over,” she added perceptively.

Harry relaxed. “… Thank you, ma’am,” he said quietly, looking at her meaningfully.

He really was very earnest, as a small child, wasn’t he?

“Some other observations: You seem to have an instinct for both fights and tricks - at least as a boy and between these two houses. Learn this about yourself.” Harry looked interested, thoughtful. “We see another instance of you not sleeping - the night of the hut on the sea.

“It is also clear why you have loyalty to Hagrid.”

“Because he’s a good person!” said Harry fiercely.

“No doubt. But is he perfect?” said Minerva piercingly.

“Well… No, but… You’re saying I’m so loyal to him because he saved me,” Harry realized.
“In part,” Minerva admitted. “Hagrid has his heart in the right place, but you may have a bit of a blind spot where Hagrid is concerned. And while we’re at it… Were your bullying and abuse possible reasons why you accepted ‘not bad’ marks, even in your own eyes?”

“You’re also saying I didn’t even like my grades myself,” Harry said. “Well…” He seemed to think about this. “It’s true that I wasn’t supposed to better marks than Dudley. That left a lot to be desired. And maybe, because no one was ever proud of me…”

And then he trailed off, blushing.

“No, Harry, that is a very good point and not something to be afraid of,” said Minerva immediately. “Anyone, I think, would have lost an interest in marks if no one ever believed in them. That is not just confined to you.”

“But now you believe in me,” said Harry, brightening.

“…Yes,” said Minerva, her voice suspiciously hoarse. “Yes, I do.”

“Professor,” said Harry, “why couldn’t a car crash kill a witch and wizard?”

“Because our magic protects us. It is weirdly sentient according to our whims, which explains accidental magic,” said Minerva. “We also don’t use cars as transport. Instead, aside from flying, we choose three main areas: Flooing, Apparition, and Portkeys. To travel from one ‘pocket’ of the wizarding world, as you said, to another.

“Flooing is traveling through fireplaces - all witch and wizard abodes have a fireplace, because electricity is incompatible with the strongest forms of magic. This explains our old-fashioned world.

“Apparition and Disapparition are essentially teleporting - from one place to another. A license of sorts is needed, and can only be gained at sixteen. Training is also needed, because wizards and witches can sometimes ‘splinch’ themselves - Disapparate and leave parts of their bodies behind. The Ministry has to be called in to fix the problem.”

Harry winced. “…Do they live? Splinchers?”

“Usually,” said Minerva cryptically. “Portkeys are used by the Ministry. Ordinary objects disguised as pieces of trash, placed ahead of things like concerts and sports matches in specific places to take everyone magical in those places somewhere else. The objects are timed, and must be touched at the correct time. Portkeys are staggered by the Ministry.

“The final reason that a witch and wizard is not prone to such a death is the increased age limits for wizards and witches. We age slower, and can live to be almost two hundred years old. This is another problem with marrying a Muggle - my father, for example, is long passed, but I myself still look like a middle-aged woman and my elderly mother is still alive.”

Harry sat and thought about this for a while.

“The true story of the war -“ Harry’s head shot up. “Is a bit more elaborate than what Hagrid told you,” Minerva admitted. “Here it is.”

Harry was listening closely.

“It was called the Blood War, and it was started when Voldemort - a Dark wizard experimenting on himself to achieve immortality - gathered a rebel army and tried to overthrow the British Ministry of Magic.
“His goals were simple: To kill everyone except so-called Pureblood witches and wizards. Hence - Blood War. He also wanted the Old Pagan ways reinstated.

“Voldemort’s army called themselves the Death Eaters, and placed a glowing mark in the sky over any group they had killed. Called the Dark Mark, it was their calling sign, a glowing green skull with a snake tongue that they also had tattooed onto themselves at Voldemort’s beck and call.

“The army opposing him, led by Dumbledore and joined by your parents, was called the Order of the Phoenix. The phoenix being Dumbledore’s symbol. This is one of the reasons Dumbledore, also a prominent political figure, is beloved by the Ministry to this day. The Order of the Phoenix believed, no matter beliefs and history, that innocent people should not be killed.

“You already know the story that led to Voldemort’s downfall. He attacked what turned out to be the wrong family, one with both blood and love magic in its protectiveness, and his very body and magic itself disappeared without a trace.

“Afterwards, his army disintegrated without him. They were rounded up. Some took plea deals, or pretended bewitchment at the hands of the Unforgivable Imperius mind control curse, or ratted each other out.

“And in the end, most of them went to Azkaban. Azkaban being our wizard prison. It is an island fortress, guarded by Dark creatures called Dementors.”

“Wow…” said Harry in quiet amazement to themselves. “Did they get trials?”

“Usually,” said Minerva, also with typical crypticness. “Of course, with laws and lawyers, we also have courts and trials.

“Now. You have a certain ingrained skepticism, it seems. You were skeptical both at the idea of wizards and at the idea of you being one. Explain that to me.”

Minerva sat back, neutral and tough.

“Well,” said Harry, “I guess growing up with the Dursleys, I just always thought… I mean, they suck the magic out of everything, don’t they? I guess I’m a bit of a scientist at heart. Here, is that… bad?” Harry winced.

“No. We have rules of magic, too. Look up Gamp’s Laws of Magic after our session. Among other things, we cannot create food, water, life, or real money. So no, an understanding of the more scientific aspects of magic is not bad. It would just make you a fine researcher,” said Minerva simply.

“Great,” said Harry, relieved. “A researcher and an experimenter. I should remember that. Maybe being an Unspeakable job might be for me.”

Minerva smiled. “I think you’d be very good at it. You wouldn’t be able to talk to anyone about your experimental work, under Ministry law, but you’d be on the very exciting, dangerous cutting edge of magical discovery.”

“I should consider that,” said Harry thoughtfully. “In a weird way, I guess it would kind of go with some of my new hobbies.

“As for the other reason… I guess I just… never thought I was cool enough to be something like a wizard,” he said quietly, his eyes sad.

“Well. Look at your marks here now. Turns out, you were wrong,” said Minerva simply, and Harry...
“Now,” Minerva continued, sterner, “I should tell you, cursing and doing magic on or near Muggles is not allowed. By law. If Hagrid hadn’t already been allowed to do magic, he could have gotten into serious legal trouble.”

“He was protecting me!” Harry protested.

“He lost his temper,” said Minerva with a voice of iron. “And it nearly cost him dearly. Obviously he thought you were worth it.”

Harry was struck silent and emotional by these words.

“It could have meant a spell in Azkaban. Harry, I can understand why you might want to curse your relatives, see them hurt. But I must emphasize to you - you cannot give into these baser and uglier urges. You must place yourself above them. For your own moral and legal good.”

“… Yes, ma’am. I guess… I did like seeing them hurt, the way they hurt me,” Harry admitted. “That can’t be good. I’ll have to try to overcome that. Ma’am… can I talk about all this with Ron and Hermione? Even Hagrid?”

“Yes. I think it’s a good idea,” said Minerva, a combination of gentle and stern. “Actually… I think discussing these things with them, and also with someone besides me, might even be healthier.”

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