Peverell's Heir: Rise of Pendragon

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Summary

A disastrous encounter with the Dursleys over the summer leads Harry Potter to run away. He runs into a mysterious person, who introduces him to the extravagant, yet perilous elite of Britain's Wizarding society. As Harry takes the first steps along the journey to take his rightful place as the heir of an ancient and prominent family, he deals with rivals, an unexpected betrothal and discovers new links to his past; ones that could give him a new family or lead him into the clutches of a hardened killer, one whose act of betrayal led to the deaths of his parents...and possibly his own.
Harry Potter was a singular young man whose name evoked extraordinary reactions from various individuals, ranging from effusive praise to barely concealed disdain and disgust to total befuddlement. The only thing that everyone who heard rumor of him or had knowledge would likely agree to if they could be consulted was that Harry Potter was an unusual boy in a number of ways. And they would be correct. He was an unusual boy for a host of reasons, ranging from the fact that he was an orphan who lived with relatives that appeared to loathe the very specter of his presence to the fact that for a boy who was allegedly such a pernicious troublemaker in the streets of Little Whinging, he was oddly absent from the neighborhood for months on end and would only make brief appearances during the summer hols. These long stretches in which he disappeared from public view had been explained by his relatives as him attending a reformatory school for delinquents, but it was actually due to this little known and extraordinary fact:
Harry Potter was a wizard.

And he not just any ordinary wizard, but a national icon among the wizards hiding in plain sight within Great Britain. For he was known to them as the Boy-Who-Lived. For the past couple of years, he had been spending several months at a time at the country's most famous school for training young witches and wizards, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Now it wasn't always sunshine and roses at Hogwarts, and Harry as well as his friends often found themselves mixed up in harrowing events that pitted them in dangerous encounters with the darker elements of their world. In spite of that however, in his mind Hogwarts was the place that he felt most accepted and at peace. When the year would inevitably end, he would find himself back among the Dursleys, his relatives who were more than happy to never see him darken their doorsteps again. Nevertheless he returned summer after summer, which always led to him having an unfortunate and irritating conundrum that he was forced to deal with before his long hoped for return to the world of wizards.

His homework for the summer hols.

With minutes to go until the clock struck midnight, Harry was locked in his room with a blanket over his thin form, flashlight in the one hand and a thick leather bound book in the other as he peered through its pages in pursuit of his homework for the History of Magic. His textbook, the History of Magic by Bathilda Bagshot was ostensibly the official text utilized for this class (although in practice, it was barely referred to by his Professor, a ghost named Cultberth Binns, who died in the midst of his preparations for History of Magic many long decades ago. This was clearly evidenced by his unnatural emphasis on Goblin rebellions.), and his summer essay assignment was to explain why the witch burnings of the 14th century were largely pointless in attempts to root out the magical community.

As Harry pored through the section detailing the magical community's perspective on the witch hunts and burnings, he came across a passage that seemed to unveil a trove of information that could answer the demands of the essay. Reaching under his pillow, Harry pulled out his ink bottle and his eagle feather tipped quill, and after dipping the quill in the ink, began to copy down an interesting passage that he felt could shed light on the topic to which he was assigned:

Non-magic people (more commonly known as Muggles) were particularly afraid of magic in medieval times, but not very good at recognizing it. On the rare occasion that they did catch a real witch or wizard, burning had no affect whatsoever. The witch or wizard would perform a flame
Harry shook his head in disbelief as he copied down the relevant information down upon his sheet of parchment. Forty-seven times! It simply boggled the mind. Wendelin certainly earned her title, that much was certain. No amount of flame freezing charms could convince him to allow himself to be set on fire! Smothering a yawn threatening to overpower him, Harry faithfully completed the inclusion of this example for his History essay and after several minutes of scrawling across the parchment with his thoughts on the passage and how it related to the assignment, Harry replaced the cover on his ink bottle with a tired sigh and tucked the still unfinished essay into the book he gleaned the information from. It was getting pretty late. It might be better to try and finish it up the next day. Setting his school things away where he was fairly confident his loathsome relatives wouldn't find them, Harry swung bleary eyes towards the alarm clock that he had salvaged and set up on his bedside table only to freeze when he saw the time.

11:59 A.M.

Harry's heart pounded in a mixture of trepidation and reluctant excitement. He was only a minute away from crossing the threshold from waning childhood to young adulthood. When the clock struck twelve, it would be July 31st and he would officially be thirteen years old. His stomach flopped as he considered what it actually would mean for him. He had never really looked forward to his birthdays for most of his life, what with the Dursleys taking every possible opportunity to display just how much they hated and despised him for simply existing. It hadn't been until that fateful day two years ago, when pitifully wishing himself a happy birthday that the miraculous arrival of Hagrid, one of his first friends from the wizarding world caused him to start looking forward to the day of his birth. Even considering how horrible the last days of his stay with the Dursleys were last summer, the highlight of that birthday was when he had been rescued by his best friend Ron Weasley and his older twin brothers, Fred and George. While he still wasn't overly fond of birthdays the way that Dudley or even the other youth in the neighborhood often were, he couldn't repress the small shiver of excitement as he contemplated how the world he now considered firmly his own would weave itself into his birthday this year.

He stilled as the clock sitting over the mantel of the Dursleys' living room began in toll the midnight hour. Once, twice, three times it chimed and Harry couldn't help the intake of breath as each successive toll announced to the household- the world really, that he had managed to survive another year and was now a teenager. On and on it continued until twelve solemn chimes concluded the heralding of the 31st day of July, the day he had been born. It was his birthday.
Slipping out of his somewhat uncomfortable bed, Harry drew near the window of his bedroom and looked out towards the starry skies. He smirked mirthlessly to himself, though no one could see it. He had crossed such an incredible threshold, but yet he was alone. The Dursleys certainly wouldn't even bother to wish him a happy birthday; in fact, he could almost guarantee that they would do their endeavored best as they did for the previous eleven birthdays that he 'enjoyed' under their disapproving eyes to make this day particularly unpleasant and irksome. But that was a problem for the daylight hours.

Harry cast a longing eye towards the large and empty cage that served as the home for his faithful owl, Hedwig. The snow white owl had winged away two nights before and had not returned since. Harry wasn't really worried about her safety though. Hedwig had taken several similar flights over the last couple of years that they had spent together. No, he simply missed having a companion in the house who didn't flinch at the sight of him or blow up at the slightest hint of magic.

With a sigh, Harry continued idly staring out of his window unto the expansive sky. He wondered if Hedwig might return at any moment, dropping the carcass of a mouse or some other critter that she had caught proudly at his feet with the expectation of praise. He chuckled a bit at the sight that would be and began daydreaming about various comedic entrances when his eyes spotted something moving in the dark sky, moving towards Number Four.

The reflected light of the moon shone on the object as it came closer and closer into view and to Harry's amazement, he realized that it was some type of creature. It was lopsided in appearance and more worrying, it was definitely headed in his direction. Harry hesitated as his hand drew automatically to the latch of the windowsill. He was tempted to shut the window immediately and ward off whatever that thing was, but suppose it didn't slow down and simply plowed through the window, glass and all? He could only imagine the spectacle that would arise from Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia if the resultant racket spoiled their rest. He winced, almost feeling the blows that would rain on him by an enraged Vernon.

The matter changed however as the creature flew over one of the street lamps on Privet Drive and aimed straight for his window. Harry, realizing what it was, leapt to the side.

Through the window flew in two owls, incredibly holding up a third which appeared to be unconscious. They crashed into Harry's bed with a muffled thump, the aforementioned third owl keeling over immediately as the other owls relinquished their unexpected burden. Harry winced in sympathy as he realized the identity of the third owl, who had a large package tied to its legs. It was Errol, the aged and frankly overpressed family owl of the Weasleys. Rushing the bed, Harry hastened to remove the cords tying the package to the feeble owl. Once he had successfully untied it, he picked up the owl and brought it over to Hedwig's cage. Poor Errol managed to cast a bleary eye upon him and hoot feebly before proceeding to drink from the water dish.
That crisis abated, Harry turned to the remaining two owls who were still perched on his bed. One of them was his own Hedwig, looking very pleased with herself and carrying a parcel. She nipped Harry affectionately as he busied himself with untangling her burden and immediately winged her way to the cage next to Errol. He then turned his attention to the third member of that strange trio that had flown into his room and paused. The owl was unfamiliar to him, but was a handsome tawny owl. His eyes fell upon the burden it was carrying and lit up in recognition. It must be a Hogwarts owl, for tied to its legs was a package and a familiar envelope bearing the Hogwarts crest. He carefully removed both items from the owl and as soon as it was free, it ruffled its feathers a bit pompously and flew off into the night.

Trembling with anticipation, for Harry hadn't received packages from anyone, ever in his entire life aside from the hundreds of Hogwarts letters that had been sent to him by the school when he had failed to answer his initial letter, Harry reached for the package that was from the Weasleys. Ripping open the rather bland brown paper, his eyes widened as he withdrew a small box wrapped in gold colored wrapping paper and a card...his very first birthday card...

Shaken, but in a good way, Harry carefully opened the envelope. Withdrawing the card and opening it he noticed two objects falling out of the card, a letter and a newspaper clipping. Picking up the newspaper clipping Harry quickly noted it as from a wizarding paper, as the black and white photograph was moving. Curious now, Harry smoothed out the folded clipping and read:

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Ministry of Magic Employee Scoops Grand Prize!

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The editorial board of the Daily Prophet warmly congratulates Mr. Arthur Weasley for winning the annual Daily Prophet Grand Prize Galleon Draw. Held each year near the middle of July, the Grand Prize Galleon Draw is held at the Atrium of the Ministry of Magic in an event open to the general public, as has been tradition for the past forty-five years. The runners up for the Grand Prize include the winner of Second Place, Ms. Verna Blighley who drew the prize of 2,500
Galleons; Third Place winner Mr. Octavious Merkle, who drew the prize of 850 Galleons; and The Honorable Mention winner Mrs. Elphebe Mordaunt, who has won a free year's subscription to the Daily Prophet.

Mr. Arthur Weasley, as the Grand Prize Winner drew the prize of 5,000 Galleons and a free year's subscription to the Daily Prophet. In an interview with the winners a delighted Mr. Weasley told the Daily Prophet, "We'll be saving the bulk of it of course and using it as necessary to help our children with their schooling. We will however, be spending a bit of the gold on a summer holiday to Egypt, where our eldest son, Bill works as a curse-breaker for Gringotts Wizarding Bank."

The Weasley family will be spending a month in Egypt, returning for the start of the new school term at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry where five of the Weasley children are currently pursuing their studies.

Harry grinned at the photograph that had been taken of the Weasleys. There was Mr. Weasley, Mrs. Weasley who had spent so much effort trying to fatten him up the previous holiday and who had knitted him sweaters every Christmas since he started at Hogwarts, six boys, among whom was his best friend Ron, and Ginny. They were all standing in front of a pyramid and waving furiously at him from the photo. Ron in particular looked to have grown at least another three inches from the last time he had seen him, with Scabbers his old and mostly useless rat hanging on his shoulder and his arm over his sister's shoulder.

In Harry's humble opinion, there wasn't anyone who deserved a nice pile of gold more than the Weasleys who were gregarious and generous, but also often strapped for coin. Turning his attention to the letter that had been included in the birthday card, Harry opened it to see Ron's familiar scrawl:
Dear Harry,

Happy Birthday!

I hope that your holiday hasn't been as awful as it was last year with those bloody Muggles. If we weren't on a holiday to Egypt right now, I would have nagged Mum and Dad to let you stay over with us at the Burrow for a couple of weeks. We still have a few weeks of holiday left, but you just let us know if those Muggles are treating you poorly. We'll figure something out!

I can't believe that Dad won the Grand Galleon Draw! This is the first time that we've gotten a chance to visit Bill in Egypt. It's incredible! He took us all around the old tombs and you wouldn't believe the curses that those old Egyptian wizards placed on them. Mum wouldn't let Ginny enter the last one we saw (which brassed her off rather nicely, let me tell you), on account of all the mutant Muggle skeletons that were there, thieves I reckon who broke in there and grew extra heads and stuff.

We won't be back home until the end of August, maybe a week or a few days before we take the train. Dad already promised me that he'd buy me a new wand when we go down to London to get our things for school. Any chance that you'll be able to meet us there?

Don't let those rotten Muggles get you down!

Try to come to London,

Ron

Harry laughed at the post script to the letter where a clearly disgruntled Ron informed him that
Percy had been chosen to serve as Head Boy this year. He could see why. In the photograph taken of the Weasleys, Harry could easily make out the profile of the third eldest Weasley, thrusting out his chest to display the Head Boy badge on his shirt proudly. He bet that Ron and Ginny and the Twins must be getting an earful from him concerning proper decorum and appropriate behavior while at school.

He also appreciated the gift that Ron had bought for him in Egypt, a pocket sized Sneakoscope which was enchanted to alert you when someone nearby was preparing to do something nefarious. He snorted at the anecdote that Ron added in his note explaining the gift, of Bill casting aspersion on the quality of the device when it went off during the dinner, all the while ignorant of his younger brothers putting beetles in his soup!

Placing the Sneakoscope on his bedside table, he turned his attention to the parcel delivered by Hedwig. Opening it up, he discovered a wrapped present, card and letter from his other best friend, Hermione. Grinning broadly, Harry opened the letter to read Hermione's no doubt voluminous letter:

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**Dear Harry,**

*How has your summer been so far? I hope that everything is alright with your relatives.*

*I'm on holiday in France with my parents and I wasn't even sure if I'd be able to send you the present I got for your birthday, but then all of a sudden Hedwig showed up! I don't know if I've ever said it, but Hedwig is truly a treasure, Harry. I'm certain that she came all of the way here to France because she wanted to make sure that you got something nice for your birthday for a change.*

*I brought your present by owl order, thanks to the subscription that my parents got me for the Daily Prophet (something that you should consider as well Harry. Being kept up to date on all of the latest matters taking place in Magical Britain is an important objective.). I really hope that you'll enjoy it. Did you read about Ron and his family winning that prize and taking a trip to Egypt last week? I'm so happy for them. And jealous. I mean, it's Egypt! I bet Ron is learning loads...the Egyptian forms of witchcraft and wizardry are terribly fascinating!*
All the same, there's so much to learn about here in France as well. I've been learning so much since we've arrived here, France has such a rich and illuminating history involving witchcraft. Have you started on your History of Magic essay? Since I came here, I've had to add so much more to my essay. I hope that Professor Binn will be pleased with it. I ended up writing two more rolls than was required.

Did you know that magical France is under a form of monarchy still? It turns out that the fall of the royal family in Muggle France had absolutely no effect on the status of the royals on the magical side of the country. The royal family still holds political power today, though they tend to work through the auspices of the French Ministry. Utterly fascinating! I'm still trying to wrap my mind around the implications of it. I won't wax on about it here, but I'll definitely be updating you about it once we're back in school.

Ron told me that they'll be in London a week before the train leaves for Hogwarts. I managed to get my parents to agree to let me stay with the Weasleys once they return to Britain. We'll most likely be back in Britain sometime next week. Can you meet us in London this year? Will your relatives' let you? Hopefully they will, but if not, then I'll see you the train on September 1st!

With much love,

Hermione Granger

Harry's eyebrows were raised to his eyebrows as he finished Hermione's letter which much like Ron's carried the announcement that Percy would be taking over as Head Boy this year, although she seemed far more positive about it than him. Magical Royalty? That was not something that he'd ever really thought about, although now that he was thinking about it, it actually did make some sort of sense. With as long lived as a vast majority of the wizarding world was compared to the Muggles, it made sense that they approached matters like that of monarchies differently than Muggles did today. He wondered how that little tidbit connected with the information she had discovered that she considered too important to convey in her letter?
He was pleasantly surprised by the gift that Hermione sent. Knowing her proclivity to amass books of all types, shapes, sizes and topics, he had assumed that she would have naturally bought him a book. But to his immense surprise, she had ordered a Broomstick Servicing Kit for his Nimbus 2000. He definitely owed her a giant hug when he caught up with her on their way to school. It was perfect, including everything that he needed to keep his Nimbus in tiptop shape. Harry cast his thoughts longingly towards his Nimbus, locked with most of his other supplies in the cupboard under the stairs. He couldn't wait to use this on his broom once he got back to Hogwarts!

Turning his attention to his Hogwarts letter, Harry picked it up with curiosity as he noted absently that it appeared to be thicker and heavier than normal. Slitting the envelope open, Harry pulled out the first page of parchment inside, reading:

_Dear Mr. Potter,_

_Please note that the new school year will begin on September the first. The Hogwarts Express will depart from King's Cross station, platform nine and three quarters at precisely eleven o’ clock._

_Third years receive the conditional privilege of visiting Hogsmeade on select weekends to be announced later on upon arrival at Hogwarts. Please give the enclosed permission form to your parent or guardian to sign._

_A list of books for next year is enclosed._

_Yours sincerely,_

_Professor Minerva McGonagall_

_Deputy Headmistress_
His exuberant mood dampened, Harry pulled out the enclosed permission form. How on earth was he going to get any of the Dursleys to sign this form? Hogsmeade sounded incredible. He was aware that it was the only entirely wizarding village in all of Great Britain. He loved the idea of visiting it on the weekends. Dursleys however had a proven track record of taking great pleasure in denying Harry anything that would make him even remotely happy. Who's to say that they wouldn't spit on the form just to spite him even more?

Picking up the final parcel, Harry looked at it carefully. He grinned as he recognized the untidy scrawl of the Hogwarts gamekeeper, Rubeus Hagrid. He had a special place in his heart for Hagrid, seeing as he was the one to finally tell him the truth about his heritage as a wizard after all the years of the Dursleys trying to beat it out of him. He tore off the rough brown paper, just enough to see that it was something that was greyish-brown and leathery. Before he could unwrap it fully, the parcel gave as strange quiver, then whatever it was in there snapped furiously—as if it had jaws.

Harry froze. What on earth could Hagrid have possibly wanted to give him that was able to snap like that? He was sure that whatever it was, Hagrid didn’t consider it dangerous to send to him. The problem was, Hagrid’s idea of dangerous was quite a bit different from what other people considered dangerous. Harry decided to errors on the side of caution and wrapped the rough paper around the partially unwrapped- thing. He placed it underneath the loose floorboard and jumped as it rattled around some, before settling down. Clearly this was something better opened away from the Dursleys.

Harry went back to his bed and reached for the card sent by Hagrid.

Dear Harry,

Happy Birthday!
Think you might find this useful for next year. Won’t say no more here. Tell you when I see you. Hope the Muggles are treating you right.

All the best,

Hagrid

Harry was a bit worried about what could possibly be useful about a moving and snapping package, but decided to worry about it later. He put Hagrid’s card next to the first two and stared at them all, grinning. His first real birthday presents!

With a happy sigh he looked over at the alarm clock. It was two o’clock in the morning.

Harry took off his glasses and set them aside and laid down on his bed. He would worry about the form later. Maybe during breakfast later in the next few hours. He closed his eyes and began to drift off, counting the days until he would be able to go back to Hogwarts. At the very least, this was an excellent start to his birthday. Not even the Dursleys could spoil it for him…

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Unfortunately, as Harry learned later at breakfast that morning, even the best days could be completely ruined by the Dursleys. Harry went downstairs and found the three Dursleys sitting around the kitchen table watching the morning news on their brand new television which they had purchased for Dudley as a welcome home present following his return from Smeltings, a private school that he attended.

Sitting down at the edge of the table, Harry received his plate from his Aunt Petunia. Looking down at the pitiful food he saw that he had been given a single slice of toast, one thin piece of bacon and a lump of hard cheese. Harry turned his head and spared a look at the plates of his uncle Vernon and cousin Dudley. Both were practically overflowing with a huge mound of bacon, scrambled eggs, and fluffy pancakes. Harry was almost certain, that those plates held their second or even third helpings rather than their first. With a sigh, Harry began to munch on his hard toast.
It was always the same with the Dursleys. None of them greeted him or wished him a happy birthday. He’d never receive so much as a card from any of them. The most he could expect was birthday punches from his horribly obese cousin. They ignored his existence as much as humanly possible.

Harry turned his attention to the news which reported on an escaped convict of some sort who was considered to be a danger to the public safety:

“…The public is warned that Black is armed and extremely dangerous. A special hot line has been set up, and any sighting of Black should be reported immediately."

“Well of course that murderer is no good,” snapped Uncle Vernon as he stared over the top of his newspaper to look at the screen. Look at the state of him, the filthy rotter! Look at his hair!”

Harry didn’t miss the glare Uncle Vernon threw at him, or rather, his messy hair which was always a source of aggravation to the man. Ignoring him, Harry took a look at the picture of the escaped criminal.

He was pale and gaunt, with enormous black circles under his eyes and sunken cheeks. His eyes were a dark blue and were filled with anxiety and what to most would be madness, but what seemed to Harry as despair. Looking at those eyes for some reason pulled at Harry’s mind. Those eyes looked so familiar somehow. It was almost like he’d seen them before. Harry shook his head. Murderer he might be, but he somehow felt - sorry for the chap. Still, as he compared his untidy mop to the matted, elbow – length tangle on that man’s head, Harry felt very well groomed indeed.

He blocked out the noise around him as Uncle Vernon cursed at the screen as the news switched over to a report by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, and Aunt Petunia, a notable gossip and altogether busybody peered out of the window into the neighbor’s yard—as if a murderer would be hiding out in any house on Privet Drive!

Fantasies of flying on his Nimbus 2000 filling his head, Harry vaguely noticed as Uncle Vernon drained his cup of the last swallow of tea, set down his teacup, and glanced over at his watch. “Ah, I’d better get going now Petunia, darling. Marge’s train gets in precisely at ten.”

All thoughts of Quidditch flew out of Harry’s head and dropped back on to earth as his brain caught up to the worst words that could possibly have come out of Uncle Vernon’s mouth.
“Aunt Marge?” blurted out Harry, incredulously. “Surely she’s not coming here is she?”

If there was any one person that Harry despised with all of his heart, it was Uncle Vernon’s sister, Marge. She wasn’t related to Harry in any way thankfully, but he’d been forced to endure her cruelty for his entire life. She was the older sister of Uncle Vernon and lived out in the country. She was well to do, making a living of breeding bulldogs. The foul woman was practically a bulldog herself. Harry could never forget the ways Aunt Marge would humiliate him and put him down. Once, during Christmas she gave her precious nephew Dudley a brand new computerized robot. As for Harry? She gave him dog biscuits. Even as late as the year before he received his Hogwarts letter, she had her favorite dog, a rather rotten bulldog named Ripper chase Harry out into the garden and all the way up a tree. All because he accidentally stepped on Ripper’s tail. She refused to call off that bloody menace until midnight, much to the entertainment of her nephew, brother and sister-in-law.

Uncle Vernon scowled furiously at Harry.

“Marge is coming to spend a week here with us,” he snarled while jabbing a fat finger in Harry’s direction threateningly. “And while we’re on the subject Boy, we need to get some things straight before I go to pick her up.”

The loud volume of his voice was enough to capture the attention of the other two Dursleys who stopped what they were doing to watch the spectacle. Dudley smirked nastily as he watched his father verbally tear into Harry.

“First,” snapped Uncle Vernon, “you’ll mind your tongue when you’re talking to Marge. And as she’s not aware of your freakishness, you’ll see to it that no—no funny business occurs while she’s here. You’ll watch yourself, understand?”

“I will if she does,” muttered Harry bitterly as he listened to his uncle’s demands. Uncle Vernon of course simply ignored Harry’s response and continued to list his expectations.

“Lastly,” Uncle Vernon continued. “We told Marge that we sent you to St. Brutus’s Secure Center for Incurably Criminal Boys—"

“What?” Harry yelled, furiously.

“-And you’ll be sticking to that story, boy, or there’ll be trouble,” Uncle Vernon spat out as he
glared venomously at Harry.

Unable to believe it, Harry sat there staring at Uncle Vernon. Aunt Marge, coming here! This was possibly the worst present of any kind that the Dursleys could have given, even worse than that old pair of Uncle Vernon’s socks.

As if stuck in some kind of a trance, Harry barely noticed Uncle Vernon speaking to Aunt Petunia or Dudley as he sat there contemplating the hell that the upcoming week was going to be like. He sat there like a statue until an idea enter his mind. Quickly he roused himself and rushed after Uncle Vernon who had kissed Petunia goodbye and was at the front door, pulling on his long coat. As Harry approached, Uncle Vernon’s face grew red.

”I’m not taking you anywhere,” he snarled at Harry as he buttoned up his coat.

Harry snorted derisively. “Like I’d want to come,” he said coldly. “I want to ask you something.”

Uncle Vernon paused, eyeing him suspiciously. “Go on,” he grunted.

“At my school, third year students are allowed to go to the local village,” said Harry. “I’d appreciate it if you could sign my permission form.”

“Why in the heavens would I do that?” sneered his uncle.

Harry allowed a smirk to form on his face. “Well,” he said choosing his words carefully, “it’ll probably be hard to pretend to Aunt Marge that I go to that St. Bleecker’s whatsit.”

“St. Brutus’s Secure Center for Incurably Criminal Boys!” Uncle Vernon bellowed, a look of panic forming on his face.

“Yeah, that one,” Harry said as looked into his uncle’s purpling face. “It seems like rather a lot of work if I have to make it convincing to her. I’d hate to see what would happen if I…accidentally let something slip.”

“You’ll be beaten within an inch of your life if you don’t you bloody ingrate!” Uncle Vernon
growled, as he moved towards Harry with a fist raised high in the air. But Harry, despite the instinctive fear which sprang up at the sight, refused to cower and decided to stay firm. Straight as a board he stood and stared straight at his uncle’s reddened visage.

“Beat me if you dare,” Harry said in as biting a tone as he could, causing Uncle Vernon to stumble to a stop before his anger could escape his control. “But that won’t make Aunt Marge forget what I’d let slip. Accidentally of course.”

Uncle Vernon was completely still now, hand still raised in the air.

“But if you agree to sign this form,” Harry continued quickly, unwilling to lose his advantage, “I’ll see to it that no hint of my – my freakishness will reveal itself in front of her.”

Uncle Vernon bared his teeth in rage as he contemplated Harry’s proposal. Harry knew that while he wasn’t really afraid of Harry, he was deathly afraid the potential chaos that could form if certain parties were to somehow interfere with his sister’s visit.

“Fine,” he said at last. “I’ll be watching you throughout the week. If you stick to what you were told and keep yourself scarce – I’ll sign your bleeding form.”

Without another word, he pulled open the front door and slammed it firmly as he stomped out to the car.

Breathing hard, hardly believing what had just occurred, Harry didn’t bother to go back to the kitchen to endure his cousin and his aunt. Instead he trudged upstairs and flopped on his bed, drained of all of his energy by that encounter. Slowly he let his gaze rest on the spartan features of his bedroom. It was probably rather fortunate that all of his ‘special’ things were already hidden in a dirty pillowcase underneath the loose floorboard of his bedroom.

Suddenly a rush of fierce anger flooded Harry and he quickly grabbed his pillow to muffle the sound of him screaming into the thin fabric. Harry screamed out his rage at the news of Marge Dursley’s coming, the shame of having to lie and hide the truth of who he was, simply soaking up the vile invectives that would be hurled against him – why, oh why did he have to come back to this hell, and repeat this every single year?

After what seemed like an eternity to Harry – but in reality only a couple of minutes had passed since he had come in to his room – his anger emptied itself. He felt drained, and terribly heavy.
Slowly, he pushed himself up off the bed and trudged over to Hedwig’s cage. Errol, the old family owl of the Weasleys appeared to be in much better health than before; he and Hedwig were both asleep in the cage, heads curled into their wings. With a heavy sigh, Harry poked them both awake. Hedwig screeched as she was awaken, turning her baleful stare upon her master. “Hedwig,” Harry said gloomily, “looks like you’ll have to clear out for a week. Go with Errol. Ron will look after you. I’ll write him a note, and explain. Don’t look at me lie that” – Hedwig’s amber eyes were even more reproachful – “it’s not my fault. It’s the bloody Dursleys. You know how they are. It’s the only way I’ll be able to go to Hogsmeade with Ron and Hermione.”

Ten minutes later, Errol and Hedwig (who had a hastily scribbled note from Harry explaining the situation bound to her leg) soared out of the window and out of sight. Harry, now feeling terribly miserable, stared out after the two dwindling owls as they flew off. A great longing to fly away with them lodged itself in his throat. Knowing that nothing would change, Harry took the empty cage and stored it inside the wardrobe.

Much quicker than Harry would have liked, he heard the high, thin tones of his Aunt Petunia shrieking up the stairs for Harry to come downstairs and get ready to welcome their guest.

“Hurry up you silly boy!” commanded Aunt Petunia shrilly as he trudged unwillingly down the stairs. “And for goodness sake, do something about that wretched hair!”

Harry didn’t even bother to respond to her. Grudgingly he made a few, half-hearted swipes against his hair in an effort to get it to lay flat. It didn’t make a difference anyway, he thought resentful as he stared at the door. Marge (he refused to call her ‘Aunt’ in his mind) loved to criticize him at every opportunity. The untidier he looked, the happier she would be.

Far too soon for Harry’s liking, there was the dreaded crunch of gravel outside as Uncle Vernon’s car pulled back into the driveway, then the clunk of the car doors and footsteps on the garden path.

“Harry, HARRY! Get the door!” Aunt Petunia hissed at Harry.

Reluctantly, a feeling of trepidation settled in his stomach, Harry pulled open the door.

On the threshold stood dear Aunt Marge. She was very similar in appeared to Vernon and Dudley actually: large, beefy, and purple-faced. In one hand she held an enormous suitcase, and tucked under the other was an old and evil – tempered little beast of a bulldog, her precious Ripper.

Out waddled Dudley from the kitchen, his blond hair plastered flat on his fat head, a bow tie barely visible under the wobbly chins. With a grunt, Marge shoved the suitcase into Harry, knocking him a few steps back, and marched over to her only nephew, seizing him in a tight one-armed hug, planting a large kiss on his cheek.

Harry scoffed silently at the stomach–turning scene. He knew perfectly well that Dudley only put up with those nauseating displays because he would be well compensated for his efforts. Sure enough, when they broke apart, Dudley was clutching a crisp twenty-pound note in his meaty fist.

“Petunia!” cried Aunt Marge, sweeping past Harry with nary a glance. “You look lovely as always!” Aunt Marge and Aunt Petunia exchanged kisses, or rather, Aunt Marge bumped her large jaw against Aunt Petunia’s bony cheekbone.

Uncle Vernon now came in, smiling jovially as he shut the door. “Tea, Marge?” he said. “And what will Ripper take?”

“Ripper can have some tea out of my saucer,” said Aunt Marge as the Dursleys proceeded into the kitchen, leaving Harry the burden of lugging Aunt Marge’s large suitcase all the way upstairs to the guest bedroom. But Harry didn’t mind at all. Any reason to avoid having any contact with that repulsive woman for a moment was welcomed by Harry. Slowly, Harry began the arduous task of heaving the heavy case upstairs into the guest room.

By the time he made his way down to the kitchen, Aunt Marge had been well-supplied with tea and fruitcake. Ripper was lapping away noisily in the corner. Harry noted Aunt Petunia’s winces as specks of tea and dog drool made its way unto her clean floors. Aunt Petunia hated animals.

“Who’s looking after the other dogs while you’re here, Marge?” Uncle Vernon asked as he sipped at his tea.

“Oh, I got old Colonel Fubster managing them,” said Aunt Marge. “He’s retired now, good for him to have something to do. But I couldn’t leave poor old Ripper. He pines if he’s away from me.”

The aforementioned dog began to growl as Harry sat down at the table. At the sound, Aunt Marge looked up, eyes narrowing as she cast her gaze at Harry, focusing on his bed of untidy hair.
“So!” she barked. “Still here, are you?”

At the sound of her caustic, derisive tone, Harry glared openly at her.

“Yes,” Harry muttered behind clenched teeth.

“Don’t you say ‘yes’ in that ungrateful tone,” growled Aunt Marge. “It’s damn good of Vernon and Petunia to keep you. Wouldn’t have done it myself. You’d have gone straight to an orphanage if you’d been left on my doorstep.”

This wasn’t news to Harry. In fact, he knew very well that if steps hadn’t been taken by his headmaster Albus Dumbledore to ensure that he could stay, the first thing Aunt Petunia would have done was dump him in some distant orphanage. He wanted nothing more than to say that he’d rather live in an orphanage than with the Dursleys, but then he remembered his deal with Uncle Vernon, and he restrained himself. He forced his face into a painful smile.

“Don’t you smirk at me!” boomed Aunt Marge. ”I can see that you’re just as wretched as the last time I laid eyes on you. I hoped school would knock some decency and manners into you.” She paused to take in a great swallow of tea, before turning towards her brother. “Where is it you’ve sent him to, again Vernon?”

“St. Brutus’s.” Uncle Vernon replied promptly. “It’s a first-rate institution for hopeless cases.”

“I see,” said Aunt Marge. “Do they give out beatings at St. Brutus’s, boy?” she barked across the table.”

Harry hesitated, but saw the frown and curt nod that Uncle Vernon gave him behind his sister’s back. He figured it’d be safest to just go with her assumption.

“Er, yes,” said Harry. “All the time.”

Aunt Marge gave a grunt of satisfaction. “Excellent,” she said. “I won’t put up with this namby-pamby, wishy-washy sentiment that’s spreading around these days about not beating the people who deserve it. A good thrashing is what’s needed in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred. Have you been beaten often?”
“Oh yeah,” said Harry, as sincerely as he could. “Loads of times.”

His response only served to cause Aunt Marge to narrow her eyes suspiciously.

“I still don’t like your tone, boy,” she said darkly. “If you can speak of your beatings so flippantly, then it’s clear that their being too lenient on you. Petunia dear,” she turned towards her sister-in-law, “I’d write if I were you. Make it clear that you approve the use of extreme force.”

Abruptly, Vernon decided to change the topic. “Heard the news this morning, Marge? What about that escaped prisoner, eh?”

And that was the start of the week of hell, as Harry considered it. Aunt Marge went out of her way to make Harry as miserable as it possible to be. She would insist that Harry stay near her at all times, so she could boom out suggestions for his ‘improvement’. She made a point of comparing Harry with Dudley and belittling him. She delighted in buying Dudley expensive presents and daring Harry to complain about receiving nothing in return. Often, it took real effort for Harry to avoid flying into a rage whenever she would insult him. Only the thought of being able to join Ron and Hermione kept him civil.

However by the third day of her visit, Harry found himself beginning to crack.

It was lunch time, and while the Dursleys were eating, Aunt Marge was constantly throwing out dark innuendos about what made Harry such an unsatisfactory person.

“You mustn’t blame yourself for the way the boy’s turned out, Vernon,” she was saying halfway through their meal. “If there’s something rotten on the inside, there’s nothing anyone can do about it.”

Harry felt anger flare in him as he tried to focus his attention on the meager portion on his plate. He tried to hold his fork, but had to set it down as his hands began to shake. *Keep yourself calm,* he told himself. *Remember the form, think about Hogsmeade. Don’t say anything. Don’t give that woman the satisfaction –*

“It’s one of the basic rules of breeding,” she said while grasping her glass of wine. “You see it all the time with dogs. If there’s something wrong with the bitch, there’s something wrong with the pup -"
At that caustic jab, the rage in Harry spiked, and at that moment, the wine glass Aunt Marge was holding shattered in her hand. Shards of glass flew every which way. Uncle Vernon blanched, and Aunt Petunia shrieked. Dudley just focused on stuffing his face while watching the television. Aunt Marge sputtered and blinked, her great ruddy face dripping.

“Marge!” squealed Aunt Petunia. “Marge, are you all right?”

“No need to fuss Petunia,” Aunt Marge said while mopping her face with a handkerchief. “I have a very firm grip. Why just the other day I did the same thing while having tea with Colonel Fubster. I must have squeezed it too hard...”

Harry used the fracas as a distraction to skip out on dessert. Escaping from the table under Uncle Vernon’s pointed glare, he went quickly to his room and shut the door. He paced back and forth, replaying the scene that just took place downstairs. As those poisonous words rang through his head, his anger got the best of him again and he furiously kicked the foot of his bed, before throwing himself on it with a yell.

_How dare she_, he thought furiously. _How dare that – that monster say anything like that about Mum. Bitch? She’s the bloody bitch!_

As he lay on the bed, all his anger and hatred drained away and was replaced by a wave of fear that spread through him as he thought about what he’d just done. It had been a long time since he’d lost control like that. He couldn’t afford to make a mistake like that again. It wasn’t just the Hogsmeade form that was at stake – if he carried on like that, he’d be in trouble with the Ministry of Magic.

He was still underage, and it was against the law of the Ministry to do magic outside of school. He’d already had a close call last summer when he’d gotten an official warning that stated quite clearly that if the Ministry got wind of any more magic in Privet Drive, Harry would face expulsion from Hogwarts. That was the last thing he wanted. Hogwarts was the closest thing that Harry had to a real home. If he was expelled, what would happen to him then?

On that uncomfortable note, Harry shoved all thoughts of expulsions and Ministry warnings from his mind and tried to focus on nothing as the birds chirped in the tree outside his window. He wished -oh how he wished- that somehow, he could escape from this wretched place! If he could only leave, he’d be the happiest person alive. But, it didn’t seem like a wish that would come true for several more weeks.
Little did Harry know however that at that very moment, his sudden burst of magic had been noticed. Not by the Ministry of Magic, no. Nor by any of the staff of Hogwarts—for the Headmaster was currently in Switzerland at that moment, tackling a series of startling pieces of legislation that promised nothing good for his agenda. No, it was noticed by a man writing in an expensive leather-bound book many kilometers away in a small, but well furnished room in a rather dingy looking pub located in mundane and magical London.

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August 2, 2003

For Milton Ashcroft, returning to Magical Britain, or Albion as those who were more cognizant of the old days tended to refer to the Isles as, was a mixture of nostalgic pleasure and bitter memories.

He had been born here, naturally, and grown up in the environs of Scotland. He had enjoyed a happy childhood, studying at Hogwarts like so many of his ancestors had in the decades past and made many close friendships that endured to this day.

This was also the place that held both his greatest joy, and his greatest sorrow, for here he had met his closest and most intimate friend and distant kinsman for the first time.

Setting the quill to the side, he sighed as he considered the bittersweet memories of the times they had spent in each other's company, having all sorts of adventures and exploring all sorts of fascinating things.

Oh Charlus, he thought wistfully as he recalled the past, if only you and Dorea could be here now...

Charlus Potter had been his confidante, his shield-brother, his everything. They had explored together, played together, loved together and fought together when the Great War broke out, just as World War II began in earnest. He had been the best man at his wedding to his betrothed, Dorea Black and had celebrated when the couple after decades of marriage had celebrated the birth of their first-born son, James Ignotus Potter. He had followed the growth of their family closely.
whenever he could spare attention from his responsibilities as Headmaster of Ilvermony, and in 1977, the year of their tragic murders at the hands of unknown assailants, he had been entrusted with a sacred responsibility—their greatest secret...

That secret, he had kept safe and secure from all, even their eldest boy himself. Admittedly, he had withdrawn somewhat from James, as tensions grew throughout the Isles and even across the Atlantic as the terrorist and self-proclaimed Lord Voldemort began amassing his network of spies, assassins and supporters and began making incursions in America. He had been compelled to take on the mantle of Minister of the Eastern Territories while simultaneously serving as Headmaster of Ilvermony, and caring for the secret he still kept hidden from the British magical world.

And then, thirteen years later, he lost any opportunity to repair the strained ties with James as he and his good wife, Lily became the last victims of the murderous reign of Lord Voldemort, only for the madman himself to die at the hands of their infant son—Charlus’ grandson—Harry Potter.

Sometimes he wondered what became of that child, who was credited with the miraculous defeat of the one who would have successfully overthrown the magical government of the British Isles. He naturally attempted to gain access to the babe, but he was whisked away mysteriously and taken into hiding—where, no one knew. Since then, all that was known of him was what Albus shared during reports on the major matters of state concerning Britain.

At times, he wondered if the babe—well, the young man had anything of his grandfather, his beloved friend Charlus in him...

Shaking off the maudlin thoughts, he focused on the detailed notes that he had been scribbling in his records book. As nostalgic as it was to visit his old stomping grounds, he was here on business of a most serious nature.

The past spring had brought about a series of startling changes to the status of the educational facilities that fell under the auspices of the International Confederation of Wizards' Education Secretariat. As one of the leading Mugwumps with the Secretariat, Milton had nevertheless decided to take a hands off approach to the critical piece of legislation that concerned the Secretariat; the International Curricular Acceptance Protocol (ICAP), a series of reforms designed to affect all major institutions that were connected to ICW-member nations, due to the inconsistent standards in the respective countries and the graduates of those institutions (particularly First-Generation magicians) having to take years of remedial instruction in order to qualify for advanced studies or for apprenticeships internationally. It was expected that under the ICAP legislation, schools would adopt a common standard in instruction quality and in the standardized testing that would be required of all students in order to move on to more advanced studies. With a common base for evaluation, they would then be able to apply for apprenticeships or advanced studies or other forms of employment and have a fairly equal shot at gaining said opportunity, regardless of where their schooling took place.
To be sure, Milton supported the legislation and had endorsed it before the Council. Nevertheless, he left those battles to others; for he was focused on perfecting the curriculum that he would use for his own educational project: The Picquery Institute for Young Scholars. It was a project that he had long had plans for, ever since his marriage to the former President of the Magical Congress of the United States, Seraphina Picquery. In the early years of their marriage after the Great War had settled, the two of them would often discuss the events in the 20s that precipitated the crisis that ultimately culminated in the War against the forces of Grindelwald. His dear Seraphina often expressed regret over the consequences of her decisive, but ill-advised decision to order her Aurors to attack and destroy the Obscurial that had nearly exposed magic to the No-Maj community, which prompted the pair to devise an institution that would cater specifically to special cases like Obscurials, or other types of individuals who were somehow afflicted with a magical inheritance due to contact with a magical creature or being, an inheritance that would more likely stir the alarm of the magical community and their law enforcers who might judge the poor souls a threat and seek to imprison or eliminate them.

After his retirement from his post as President of MACUSA, and Minister for Magic over the Eastern Colonies of Albion, it became his focus to make the dream that he and his dearly departed wife had conceived decades ago a living reality.

It had been a long road to get the approval of MACUSA and more importantly, the ICW; but in the end, he and his small but growing staff had accomplished their purpose and now stood on the cusp of opening their doors to their inaugural class. They were hoping for no more than fifty, but were prepared to house twice that amount if necessary.

Just around that time, the Educational Secretariat—despite stiff opposition by the faction of supporters stirred up by the current Supreme Mugwump of the ICW—announced the successful passage of the ICAP Act, and sent a delegation to the site of the Picquery Institute to speak to him personally and lobby for his assistance concerning a series of sensitive political maneuvers that would have to take place in order to get the legislation ratified by Magical Britain.

The trouble that now threatened the success of the ICAP Act was the personal influence of the Supreme Mugwump; for not only did he lead the Mugwump Council, but he was also the Chief Warlock of Albion Proper's Wizengamot, and the Headmaster of the institution that above all would determine the future of the legislation in the Isles, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

With his control over the school, the proponents of the Act were very much aware that it would be next to impossible for the Act to be implemented with any degree of success—unless, someone with a similar political pedigree, enough pull over the Wizengamot and ability to dismantle whatever resistance Dumbledore would be able to cobble together in the Ministry of Magic and enough experience as an educator and administrator to ensure that the Act was fully implemented and proved successful within the halls of the oldest magical institution in Western Europe, would
volunteer.

With such a necessary portfolio, it left him as the only viable candidate to push the Act through.

He resisted the request from the Secretariat initially, of course. There were too many important details to focus on with regards to the Picquery Institute; but as the calls for his involvement grew more strident, Milton found himself relenting to the pressure of his colleagues. He knew full well that there was no one else that had the political capital to potentially tangle with an uncooperative and possibly hostile Chief Warlock and Headmaster as well as the Minister for Magic himself.

Delegating the rest of the details left to be finalized for the school in the hands of his two children, both of whom were in the States, he acceded to the demands of the Secretariat and subsequently received the commission as the special envoy of the ICW, authorized to oversee the observations of the educational facilities in Albion Proper, represent the official voice of the ICW during the ratification process, and implement the necessary changes in each of the institutions.

The hope was that with the clear sanction of the ICW behind him, coupled with his own political influence as the senior-most (if long absent) Lord of the Wizengamot and his reputation as the former President of MACUSA and Minister for the Eastern Territories of Albion and experience as the Headmaster-Emeritus of Ilvermony that he would be able to ensure the ratification of the ICAP Act, despite whatever measures Dumbledore and his allies might take to torpedo it in the Wizengamot or blunt its impact on the way Hogwarts was currently run.

As such, three days before, he returned to the shores of his native land for the first time in over twelve years—for the last time he had visited the Isles had been to escort his son to Wales to pay their respects to the late Lord and Lady Potter...

In that time, he focused on settling housekeeping issues with regards to his estate holdings in Scotland that his son had been unable to care for during his last business trip to Britain, and re-acquainting himself with some of the old stomping grounds that he had been fond of in his youth.

Now, he focused on preparing a viable strategy to force the cooperation of the Hogwarts Board of Governors as several interviews and extensive correspondence painted a picture of gross neglect and counter intuitive policies that appeared to find their source in Lucius Malfoy, the Marquess of Leinsfeld, and the leader of the faction of blood purists that bedeviled the broader Traditionalist bloc within the Wizengamot.

He had already paid a visit to the Chief Governor to inform him that he would be reclaiming his ancestral seat on the Board of Governors and informing him of the wisdom of cooperating with the
ICW with regards to the ICAP. Based on his last letter, the head of the Board had seen the wisdom of partnering with the ICW, preparing the authorization that would establish him as the Board's Observer of the current status of Hogwarts' program and staff. He was pleased to hear that the governor was also fully prepared to make a few changes to the staffing of the school, changes that Milton and made adamantly clear must be made regardless of whether the ratification of the ICAP Act passed or not. He was looking forward to their upcoming meeting with Headmaster Dumbledore in the next couple of weeks, when these changes would be announced. While Lucius and a few others would kick up their heels and potentially mount disputes over the additional staff and changes to the curriculum, Milton was confident that, with his assumption of the Ashcroft seat upon the Board of Governors, and with the support of Governors that he intended to replace the Ministry yes-men who had capitulated so shamefully to Lord Malfoy's insidious machinations during the previous school term, many changes would be made that would make the greater changes that the ICAP Act would force upon the school more palatable to both staff and student body.

Setting his quill down, Milton leaned back in his chair and sighed as he contemplated the dances that would be taking place over the next several days, when he stiffened, as a flare of powerful wild magic abruptly manifested. Shocked, Milton sat still as the waves of magic washed over him. Closing his eyes, Milton took a deep breath and, concentrating on a wavelength that few, even among magicians could consciously access, allowed his ethereal form to leave his body and speed towards the source of the magical manifestation. As the bright magic drew his spectral form in, he found himself traveling rapidly in the southwestern direction. As mile after mile separating his physical body from the locus of the manifestation began to close, the energy he was tracing began to fade. Urging his astral form on, Milton raced towards the southwest of London, doing his best to keep a hold of the rapidly fading energy. He was disappointed however, as just as he closed in on the area of Surrey, the trail went cold—but not before the accomplished Adept, flinging tendrils of his own magic into the fading magic, caught a glimpse of a young face and brilliant green eyes. With a shake of his head, Milton let go and allowed his astral self to be drawn back to his physical body, grunting as the disorienting sensation of sinking back into flesh rocked his senses. After a few moments, he opened his eyes and brought one black gloved finger to his forehead, as he centered himself. After he felt relatively stable, Milton opened his eyes again. Releasing a deep breath, he looked out of the enchanted window to the sights of London, but he didn't register anything outside of the window.

The flare up of magic was concentrated thirty miles or so southwest of London. Most likely somewhere in the Surrey area, though a specific locality remained elusive to him. Most intriguing however, was the fact that the source of that manifestation was a young man with green eyes apparently, who was in distress and not fully in control of his burgeoning powers. Was he a student of one of the magical schools that existed in Albion Proper? Or had he somehow been missed by those institutions, powers remaining latent until some distressing event triggered them? Could he possibly be a potential candidate for the Picquery Institute?

“You are quite powerful young one,” said Milton quietly to himself, a pair of ice blue eyes staring out to a sight only he could see. “The time will soon come when you and I must have a little chat.”
With a twitch of his fingers, the thick, wooden door separating his room from the hallway opened. He began to whistle, a soft melody that rang with ancient memory. No sooner had he ceased the tune, when a great black raven with dark crimson tipped wings flew in, settling on the man’s left shoulder. Reaching a wrinkled hand to caress the bird, the man spoke softly, but urgently. Utilizing the long cultivated bond that tied him to his trusted familiar, he shared the memory of his spirit flight with the raven, emphasizing in their communication the need of finding the young man behind that burst of magic.

“A young one has been found, my dear Bran. It appears that situation might be direr than I thought. There was a strange flux of energy in the area. Something is not right.” He turned his head to face that of the raven. They stared at each other, and Bran began to caw, tilting his head. Milton nodded solemnly at the bird, for he knew what it was communicating. The bird squawked loudly and began to flap its wings. It left its perch and flapped its wings some more as it flew in a circle around Milton’s head. Then with one last musical croak, the raven flew out of the door. The man sat there quietly, as he listened to sounds that no other ear could hear.

“Soon.” he whispered to the air. An unexpected mystery, but one that he had every intention of pursuing to the end.

Chapter End Notes

raf1988:

This is a re-launch of a project that has been near and dear to my heart, forming a creative nucleus around all of the stories that I'm currently writing.

Three years ago, under a different name I wrote the first chapters of this story, Peverell's Heir. I was enamored by the idea of an AU world where Harry Potter and friends were involved with matters concerning royalty as well as concepts expanding or giving a twist on the various concepts of the Wizarding world established by the amazing JK Rowling.

Due to a series of unfortunate circumstances, the story was deleted from this website and I seemingly lost all of the months of writing that I had been engaged in. I tried to start it again from scratch, but ultimately I abandoned the project, moving on to different stories.

Recently however, I was digging through my old emails and was surprised to discover that a fascimile of my entire story had been sent to my email account by Archive of Our Own when it had been deleted. I had my story back! I was thrilled to sit back and re-read everything that I wrote all those years ago.

While I was happy to have a record of my old story, I quickly realized that with the stories that I'm currently working on, real life issues and more, that I wouldn't be able to devote time to updating the story, so I talked to a few people I know who are also fanfiction writers and in love with the HP fandom and ultimately, decided to pass this story on to an author that I'm currently working with on a couple of ongoing projects,
I chose emf911 because I know first hand how passionate they are about this story, having been one of my early supporters years back, and also that they would keep the spirit of my story alive while adding their own spin on things in order to make it their own.

With the agreement that I be listed as a co-author of the story, as emf911 intends to keep the bulk of the seven chapters that I have written originally, and update certain parts of it to better fit their style, I gratefully pass on the torch of completing this story that has been in my heart for so many years over to them.

I look forward to seeing the amazing worlds that they will craft as they take this story in new and exciting directions, and encourage any reader who might remember this title to support it and them as they move this story forward. Having gotten a few peeks at what they have planned, I can assure you all...you have no idea what is coming.

I can't wait to see how this story comes out!

Much love to all of my original supporters for this story. Your words and advice have helped me ever since! And much thanks to emf911 for taking on the mantle of authorship. You are amazing!

Brightest Blessings to all! And enjoy!

^_^
The Man in Magnolia Crescent

Chapter Summary

Matters with the Dursleys come to a head, causing Harry to make a break for it. He runs into two mysterious characters, both of whom will have a large impact on his future...

Chapter Notes

This chapter incorporates dialogue from the book and film adaptations of Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban. All rights belong to JK Rowling, Warner Bros., and the particular publishers associated with this work.

Original content belongs to raf1988 and emf911.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

August 3, 2003

The Hog's Head Inn was not a place that attracted a lot of attention and patronage, a fact that suited the proprietor of the establishment very well indeed. It was a dark and rather squalid place known to cater to the far more unsavory elements of the Wizarding village, Hogsmeade. It's dark and dirty stone frame and unwelcoming decor appeared especially forbidding under the harsh light of day.

For this and many other reasons, the inn was completely empty. The innkeeper was the sole person present. His tall form filled the room as he strode throughout the premises of his building, casting a cursory eye over the worn furnishings. He swept towards the back of the building where he kept his stock of ale and other forms of strong drink. His cerulean eyes were shadowed, and his weathered features were twisted in a furious scowl as he muttered to himself. Finding his alcoholic beverages thankfully stocked for the coming month, he swung around and began making his ways to inspect the few rooms available at the Hog's Head when he halted. Eyes narrowed, the aged wizard focused on an area of the inn that was completely empty, save for a thick layer of dust and cobwebs. He stared steady in that direction, his body completely still.
Had any onlooker been present, they would have taken his strange behavior as just an additional sign that this particular man was fast settling into cognitive degeneration, a rumor that persistently clung to this inn's owner for several years after some very public and erratic actions and incidents.

In truth however, he was perfectly sane and in possession of all of his faculties and common sense. For after a few minutes under his relentless gaze, the heretofore empty space began to vibrate with pulses of magical energy. As the old man watched, brilliant sparks of glowing eldritch energy spontaneously manifested, shifting in a swirling maelstrom of motes of light, with a shimmering mirage at its center. Stoically, the man watched the image at the center waver as parts of a familiar humble and somewhat rundown building grew visible, just behind the figure that was striding purposefully forward in the inn owner's direction. As the person stepped through the portal, it shrunk until it burst apart in a shower of fiery sparks. Coming to a stop, the person faced off with the owner of the inn. Silently they gauged each other for a few breathless minutes, the face-off ending as the old owner inclined his head towards the person in front of him in a silent show of welcome and deference. His grey and rather bushy beard twitched as he scowled at the new person in his inn.

"You're late," growled the aged wizard, his frown deepening as the person in front of him had the temerity to smile at him. Briefly, the old man ran his gaze up and down the new arrival.

The person was a fairly tall man, with strong patrician features. His face was lean and sharp angled. He also had blue eyes, which almost appeared to glow with hidden knowledge and raw power. He appeared to be a man in his mid to late 60s, his head and lined face cleanly shorn in a manner reminiscent of an Asian monk, though his eyebrows were greying. He was dressed in dark blue trousers and an over tunic, in an style most often associated with traditional Asian magical practitioners. His clothing was offset by a magnificent crimson cloak edged with half-invisible runic symbols which appeared almost sentient. It rippled around him gently. The most distinctive part of him however was the heavy silver ring that adorned his right hand. The setting for the stone was the figure of a raven, wings spread out protectively around an azure colored stone that had etched in its center an arcane symbol that would be unknown to most of the people of the village, yet well known to the man in front of him. It thrummed with tightly compressed power, infusing the man with an aura that commanded respect, or at the very least, a healthy fear.

A single eyebrow was raised as the newcomer stared back at the owner of the Hog's Head.
"As you well know, Master Aberforth," retorted the newcomer, his voice a rich contralto tinged with faint amusement, "a sorcerer is never late. He arrives at precisely the time and moment that he intends to."

Aberforth snorted. "Bollocks to that, you old windbag. Now come on, unless you plan on standing in that corner all bloody day."

He stalked off towards the entrance of the inn, where the bar was situated. Chuckling at Aberforth's terse response, the visitor followed him towards the bar where he made himself comfortable on a stool in front of the table while his 'host' scurried about collected two fairly clean mugs and a rather dusty dark bottle. The man frowned as he cast his gaze around the rather decrepit surroundings.

"Really Aberforth," said the slightly younger man, a faint hint of disapproval apparent in his voice, "do you have to insist on keeping this building in such a—rundown condition? Wouldn't you be able to accomplish and learn more from your 'guests' if this place was more...inviting?"

The aged wizard snorted derisively as he slid a foaming mug of butterbeer to the man on the other side of the table. He poured himself a small tumbler of 1873 Ogden's Firewhiskey, and saluted his guest before slinging back the drink, grunting slightly as the burning sensation and rush of liquid 'courage' swept through his body.
"Well, that just proves that you'd be a terrible information trader then," he growled. "If this place looks too neat and flowery, it makes the natives a wee bit jumpy. Wouldn't feel free to make their deals and share information with 'ol Abe then, would they?"

The sorcerer shrugged and shook his head fondly, before he lost his air of easy camaraderie and grew somber. His blue eyes gleamed as he fastened his gaze on Aberforth Dumbledore.

"How much have you heard about the newest legislation that the ICW has passed this past spring?"

Aberforth grunted as he poured another shot of firewhiskey into his mug.

"Not much," he said brusquely. "Just the rumor that it was in the pipeline and had my brother's flowery knickers in a twist, Merlin damn him. It's not like the almighty Supreme Mugwump would deign to lower himself to my humble squalor to actually share information with me. It wouldn't benefit him in anyway."

His companion sighed.

"The legislation that has your brother—twisting his knickers—is a law that is intended to craft an international standard for education that will require the revival of a great many subjects that dear Albus has taken great pains to eliminate from the courses offered at Hogwarts. It requires accommodation for the practice of the ancient cultural traditions that he has made no bones about spurning throughout his tenure as Headmaster and as Chief Warlock. It also requires first-generation magicians to receive instruction in those traditions and have every opportunity to adopt or at the very least, be cognizant of the significance of those traditions for traditionalists.

"You don't say?" breathed Aberforth, before he began chuckling darkly. "No, that wouldn't please my brother at all. Well done, Milton."

He raised his mug to his companion and knocked back the firewhiskey, sighing as the burn of it swept through his system.

Milton Ashcroft smiled, thinlly.
"I can't take any credit for the legislation passing," he said dismissively. "I supported it naturally, but have been focusing on other affairs. Unfortunately, considering your brother's political acumen, the Council has tasked me with ensuring that the Wizengamot ratifies the legislation, and hemming up Albus, so he can't sabotage the Board's efforts to implement the changes within the next year."

"Well it sucks to be you then," said Abeforth. "I wish you the best of luck corralling that brother of mine. He's more stubborn than a intransigent mule when he's convinced that he's in the right. The Greater Good and all that rot."

He speared Milton with a heated glare.

"But what I want to know," he growled, "is why you would come all the way to visit dear ol' Abe and regale him with news about a law that doesn't affect him in anyway outside of entertainment when reading how Albus tries to bollocks it all up, in the pages of the Prophet?"

Milton met his gaze squarely as the two men, who were also long-time friends studied each other over their mugs of firewhiskey. At last, Milton broke his gaze from the older man and sighed.

"I'm telling you this," he stated softly, "because I am negotiating a potential contract with a potential Professor who is a young woman of both of our acquaintances who would be perfect for a role not only in History, but in assisting me in correcting the decades of neglect that Albus has given to the instruction of the young ones. I did not wish you or your good wife to be the last to know."

"What in the nine hells are you blathering on abo—" breathed Aberforth before sudden comprehension dawned on him. A heavy scowl twisted his face as his eyes flashed with fury.

"No."

Milton sighed. "Aberforth—"

"No!" snapped Aberforth, a heavy fist landing on the sturdy counter, as his aura abruptly pulsed with the force of his rage, snarling and snapping. "No! I forbid it!"

"Aberforth!" snapped Milton, his own magic surging to the fore, blanketing the bar with a heavy pulsating flare of magic. "My old friend, see reason! Calm yourself and listen!"
Snarling, Aberforth surged from his seat and began to furiously pace back and forth, his magic slowly settling as he fought to master his anger. Milton cautiously remained seated as he watched his friend attempt to bring himself under control. Breathing slowly, he kept a tight rein on his own power, for he knew that any careless words spoken could damage nearly seventy years of friendship. He had anticipated the old barkeeper's ire, but had clearly underestimated how sensitive this topic would be. Care was needed.

"I understand the extraordinary steps that you and your wife have taken to keep your union far from the eyes of Albus, as well as the family that you two have raised over the years. I respect that you don't wish for Albus to interfere in anyway with your loved ones, or even to know of them. And I especially know how fond you are of dear Arianna. Her talent and knowledge of the Old Ways, however, cannot be denied. And in light of the harrowing experience that she has so recently gone through, I believe that it would do her a world of good to spend some time with her great-grandparents. I'm well aware of how fond she is of the two of you. And you forget yourself my friend. I am not one to dangle strings like Albus. I informed her of the risks of her accepting this provisional role, and she herself chose to accept the position. It is at her direction that I'm approaching you first. Would you deny her the chance for sharing her passion with others, connecting with those young ones who are ignorant of their own culture and history?"

"You know the reason why!" snapped Aberforth, breathing heavily as he glared at Milton. "You know how insidious and manipulative my brother can be! There's a reason that I've never told him about the existence of my children, or their children! If that bloody fool should know that I've propagated a new generation for our family, he'll stop at nothing to try and get access to her and mold her according to his whims! I will rather be stripped of my magic and forced to live as a penniless bum than permit all that is left of my daughter, my Arianna to become his little puppet!"

"And she won't," stressed Milton. "You already took the pains to alter the name of your daughter's family decades ago! They've lived in peace, with Albus none the wiser all their lives. You forget, he is the Head of your House. If there was a risk of him becoming cognizant of who exactly Arianna is, don't you think that he would have caught on by now? There are so many ways that he could have learned of their existence! But he hasn't, and why?"

He held the measured gaze of Aberforth, who had stilled at last and now seemed to be listening.

"Because he does not see you. If he loves you as any brother should, it has long ago been twisted into a faint bond, easily ignored. He focuses on himself, on his legacy, of his mold on the world. He will never pass on that legacy to any child of yours, and he knows as well as I that you would destroy him if he attempted to harm anything that you loved."

Aberforth grew very still for a long moment...then grunted in agreement, sitting back down in the
stout chair that he favored. Milton sighed in relief. The last thing that he wanted was to alienate his old friend.

"Speak to your wife," Milton urged, "and then talk to Arianna. She's been through a lot, yes, but you know how strong she is. She knows how to protect her secrets. And know that as long as I am involved in the process of the ratification of the reform act, I will keep two eyes on her to make sure that Albus doesn't get any ideas of treating with her as anything more than a fellow colleague and employee of Hogwarts. I am willing to swear an Unbreakable Vow to that effect, if you think that my word is insufficient."

Aberforth's eyes narrowed at that, and he stayed silent for a long time. After careful thought however, the younger scion of the Dumbledore family grimaced in agreement.

"Aye," he growled, "I know that your word is as good as a Vow. I'll—I'll talk to the lass. She deserves this chance and truth be told...it has been too long since the missus and I have seen her outside of a quick visit. It'll be good to have her under my eye, where I can keep watch over her, make sure she stays safe. I'll tell the missus, and keep her from flying off the handle."

"That is all that I can ask for," said Milton with a small smile that turned hard. "And I have every intention of making sure that Albus is too strung up with matters in the Wizengamot and the Board to have any occasion to dig into her past too closely. When the Board meets later this month, I will see to it that she as well as any other new hire that comes on board is under my direct purview as the ICW's official representative. She will be as secure as conceivably possible."

"Make sure that she is," barked Aberforth, before snorting into his mug as he took another deep draught of firewhiskey. "I can't wait to see the look on ol' Albus' face when he realizes exactly who is leading the ICW's delegation."

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August 7, 2003

Harry managed to get through the next few days by forcing himself to think about his Handbook of Do-It-Yourself Broomcare whenever Aunt Marge would get started on him. This method of remaining aloof worked out rather well, though it seemed to give him a vacant, glazed look,
because Aunt Marge began voicing the opinion that he was mentally unstable.

An unexpected by-product of the tension between himself and the most unwelcome guest was that Uncle Vernon found every possible excuse to get him out of the house and keep him out for as long as possible, while the Dursleys traveled to the cinema, or to the neighboring town to show Aunt Marge the sights.

During those hours, Harry would wander around Privet Drive and its adjoining streets, sometimes lulling away the hours at the local playground, and at other times making the twenty minute trip to the library, where he would lose himself in the stacks of books and magazines.

Oddly enough, over the days of Marge's presence at Number Four, he began to catch glimpses of a raven. It was larger than most and had strangely enough, crimson highlights on the tips of its wings. Oftentimes it was outside the corner of his eyes, never present when he would whirl around. A few times however, he would catch sight of that raven in the strangest places, like perched on the rooftop of the library, or one time, hanging on the branches of a tree growing in a neighbor's back yard. When Harry would stare at the raven, it stared back, silently...almost intelligently. It reminded him uncomfortably of Hedwig, for some reason.

Finally however, at long last, the final evening of Aunt Marge’s stay at Number Four Pivet Drive arrived. Everyone in the house appeared to be in high spirits. Harry was just glad to finally be shot of the foul woman.

Aunt Petunia cooked a lavish farewell dinner for Aunt Marge, and Uncle Vernon uncorked several bottles of wine. They got all the way through the soup and the salmon without Aunt Marge making a single mention of Harry’s faults; during the dessert portion of the meal, which consisted of a large lemon meringue pie, Uncle Vernon regaled them all with a long talk about the success of Grunnings, his drill making company; then Aunt Petunia made coffee and Uncle Vernon brought out a bottle of brandy.

“Can I tempt you Marge?”

Aunt Marge had already consumed a lot of wine and it showed. Her huge face was quite red, and she gave a small hiccup as she held out her wine glass to her brother.

“Just a small one, then,” she chuckled. “A bit more than that Vernon…and a bit more…that’s the ticket.”
Dudley was eating his fourth slice of pie. Harry had received a single, small piece which was easily consumed in two bites. He didn’t dare ask for more. Aunt Petunia was sipping coffee with her little finger sticking out, as if she was a lady of high society. Vernon was indulging in a small glass of brandy along with his sister. Even the bloody dog got some brandy, which he lapped at quite enthusiastically underneath the table. Harry, wanting to escape to his room made a move to get up, but quailed under the glare of Uncle Vernon’s angry little eyes and remained seated, realizing that he would have to sit it out.

“Aah,” said Aunt Marge, smacking her lips and putting the empty brandy glass down back down. “Excellent nosh, Petunia. It’s normally just a fry-up for me during the evening, what with twelve dogs to look after....” She burped richly and patted her great tweed stomach in satisfaction. “Pardon me. But I do like to see a healthy-sized boy,” she went on, winking at Dudley. “You’ll be a proper-sized man Dudders, like your father. Yes, I’ll have a spot more brandy, Vernon....”

“Now this one here -”

She jerked her head at Harry, who felt the faint stirrings of irritation and anger form in the pit of his stomach. *The Handbook*, he thought quickly to himself.

“This one’s got a mean, runty look about him. You get that with dogs. I had my old friend Colonel Fubster drown one like that last year. Ratty little thing it was. Weak. Underbred.”

Having gone through much of what he recalled from his Handbook, Harry tried to remember page twelve of his book: *A Charm to Cure Reluctant Reversers*.

“It all comes down to blood, as I was saying the other day. Bad blood will out. Now I’m saying nothing against your family, Petunia” – she patted Aunt Petunia’s bony hand with her shovel – like one – “goodness knows your parents were lovely folks and a credit to society for producing a fine woman like yourself, but your sister was a bad egg. They turn up in the best of families. Then she ran off with that wastrel and here’s the result sitting right in front of us.”

Harry was staring at his plate, a funny ringing in his ears. *Grasp your broom firmly by the tail*, he thought. But he couldn’t remember what came next. Aunt Marge’s voice seemed to be boring into his mind like one of Uncle Vernon’s drills.

“This Potter fellow,” said Aunt Marge loudly, seizing the brandy bottle and pouring herself a hefty portion. “You never told me what he did?”
Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia were looking increasingly tense at Aunt Marge’s line of questions. Even Dudley looked over from where he had been mindless watching a dance competition on the television to gape stupidly at his parents.

Clearing his throat a few times, Uncle Vernon sent a quick glance at Harry whose face had gone white. “He – didn’t work,” said Uncle Vernon shortly. “Unemployed.” He was clearly wanting to change the subject to a lighter topic, but he underestimated his sister’s tenacity.

“As I expected!” Aunt Marge bellowed as she took a huge swig of brandy and wiping her chin with her sleeve. “A no-account, good-for-nothing, lazy scrounge who -”

“He was not,” said Harry suddenly. The table went very quiet. Harry was shaking all over. He had never been so outraged in all his life. Petunia gave a start, as the lights around the kitchen began to flicker, and a breeze began to flutter through, even though the windows were closed. She cast one terror-filled glance at Uncle Vernon, who blanched at the display.

“MORE BRANDY!” yelled Uncle Vernon, who had gone very white. He emptied the bottle into Aunt Marge’s glass. “You, boy,” he snarled at Harry. “Go to bed, go on -”

Quiet, Vernon,” hiccuped Aunt Marge, holding up a hand, her bloodshot eyes fixed on Harry’s. “Go on, boy, go on. Proud of your parents are you? They go and get themselves killed in a car crash (drunk, I expect) -”

Harry exploded.

“They didn’t die in a car crash!” Harry yelled jumping to his feet, riding on a wave of pure rage. “And my mum and dad were worth ten of you!”

“They died in a car crash, you nasty little liar, and left you to be a burden on their decent, hardworking relatives!” screamed Aunt Marge in response, swelling with fury. “You are a filthy, insolent, ungrateful little -”

But Aunt Marge stopped speaking. It seemed like her words failed her. She seemed to be swelling with inexpressible anger – but the swelling didn’t stop. Her piggy fade began to expand, her tiny eyes bulged, and her mouth stretched too tightly for speech. She grew and grew and the fabric of her tweed outfit became too stretched. The buttons on her jacket suddenly popped off and pinged off the walls – a couple were hitting Dudley straight in the forehead as they scattered – she was
inflating like some human balloon, her stomach bursting free of her tweed waistband, each finger thick like a salami –

“MARGE!” yelled Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia together as Aunt Marge’s entire body began to rise off of her chair toward the ceiling. She was entirely round now, like a giant ball with piggy eyes, and her hands and feet waving wildly as she drifted up in the air. Ripper burst from under the table, barking madly.

“NOOOOOO!”

Uncle Vernon seized one of Aunt Marge’s feet, but was nearly lifted into the air himself. A second later, Ripper leapt forward and sank his teeth into Uncle Vernon’s leg.

“ARRGH! RIPPER!”, bellowed Uncle Vernon in pain as he stubbornly hung on to his sister.

Amid all of the bedlam and chaos, Harry tore from the dining room before anyone could stop him. He ran straight to his room and frantically pulled up the loose floorboard. He grabbed the old pillowcase filled with his gifts and school supplies and dashed back down the stairs. He was finished with all of this! He couldn’t take the constant degradation from his so-called relatives any longer. Even if he got expelled, anything had to be better than this!

He dashed towards his cupboard, the door magically unlocking itself and opening with a loud bang. He dragged out his trunk and set it down. The trunk opened and he pulled out his wand and pointed it at the pillowcase. It began to shrink immediately until it was small enough for him to stuff in the trunk without difficulty. A loud crash sounded behind him, but he didn’t pay any attention to it as he closed up his trunk. He was just getting back up when he noticed a shadow behind him. As he began to turn, a large burst of pain exploded at the side of his face. The force of the blow, knocked him into the wall. Dazed, he tried to figure out what was happening. Next thing he knew, a pair of thick, meaty hands were clamped about his neck, squeezing the breath out of him.

It was Uncle Vernon. His face was complete white, muscles twitching on his face. He looked deranged. With a roar, he tightened his hold on Harry’s windpipe.

“YOU SET HER RIGHT!” Vernon bellowed in fury as he throttled his nephew. “YOU SET HER RIGHT THIS INSTANT!”
Harry was seeing stars. He desperately tried to suck in some air as his thin fingers scrabbled on Uncle Vernon’s meaty paws in a vain effort to loosen his grip. Black spots began to dance in front of his eyes, and he could hear his aunt screaming at the whole situation, begging Vernon not to kill him. But Vernon was beyond reason.

Slowly, Harry began to black out. But with the last of his awareness he brought up one hand and pointed it at Uncle Vernon’s chest. Deep in his chest he felt something bubbling to the surface. Then a flare of pain, white-hot smashed into him as he willed Uncle Vernon to back off –

With a loud bang like a gunshot, Uncle Vernon went flying into the opposite wall across from Harry. His impact was so heavy, a series of small cracks began to form against the wall. Aunt Petunia let out a piercing wail as she rushed over to her fallen husband’s crumpled body.

Harry collapsed against the cupboard door where he had been throttled and coughed harshly, trying to breathe in much needed air. Clutching his throat, he wheezed as he found the strength to stumble to his feet. Head pounding, he took in the scene in front of him. Uncle Vernon lay crumpled against his wife’s bosom, the only indication of life being the rise and fall of his chest. He was unconscious. Harry grasped the handle of his trunk and heaved it up into position, his other hand catching his wand as it sprang through the air from the place where it had fallen into his hand. Stumbling, he began to pull it after him as he staggered towards the front door.

He was about to reach for the knob when a quiet voice, wooden and dead spoke.

“Once you step out of that door, boy, you are never to show your face here again.”

With effort, Harry turned and faced the person who spoke. His Aunt.

She rose from her crouch at Uncle Vernon’s side and stared at Harry, her eyes wild with black hatred. In spite of himself, Harry couldn’t help but gasp in shock as he saw the hate swimming in her eyes. He had never seen a look of such utter loathing directed to him. Not even Snape at his most venomous compared.

“Twelve years,” Aunt Petunia continued in that same flat, dead tone. “Twelve years ago I opened my door to see you cluttering my doorstep. Informed of my worthless sister and brother-in-law’s death, I was left with having to care for you, without so much as a – a by your leave.”

” I didn’t want you,” she continued quietly. “If I could have gotten rid of you – I would have done
it. Vernon suggested that we leave you at an orphanage, but I couldn’t. I knew that those people were watching the house, and I couldn’t risk anything happening to my husband or my dear Dudley. So I took you in. I took you in and put clothes on your back and food in your belly. I tried to shape you into a decent person, a normal person. But your blood ran true. Marge was right, bad blood will out.”

Harry stood very still as he drank in her diatribe. All along, she refused to raise her voice. And yet her words pierced deeper than anything Aunt Marge had ever thrown at him throughout the past several days. Was this really the way she felt? He attempted to stand tall in the face of her words, but he staggered back at what she had to say next.

Aunt Petunia continued to stare at him with those eyes full of hatred. Slowly, she moved away from her vigil over her unconscious husband, and walked closer until she was face to face with him. She smiled bitterly.

“If I could have only one wish, it would be that you had died that day with your parents. You have been nothing more than a source of grief and trouble upon our heads. But no more. Leave now, and never come back. I wash my hands of you. You no longer have a home here. Do you understand, Harry Potter?”

Impossibly, her voice grew even more breathy and quiet. Yet her poisonous words were louder than gun shots. As Harry swept his gaze over the foyer of the house he had been slaving for his entire life, a piece of him began to crumble. Even though he’d wanted to leave this place since he was small, it hurt to know that he was completely unwanted by his only family.

Squaring his shoulders, Harry looked at Petunia Dursley, his mother’s sister for the last time. Again a rush of anger filled him as he stared at a person who would happily see him dead.

“Fine,” he hissed at her coldly. “I’ve had enough of you all too. You hate me, do you? Wish I were dead, do you? Well so be it. This place isn’t my home anyway, it never was. No one wants to be shot of this place more than me. So don’t worry…I’m never, never setting foot in this place again.”

The second he uttered those words, a sharp burning sensation swept through him. A deep rumble like thunder echoed and Harry fancied that a flash of blood red light sped through the room.

Petunia flinched back at the sound. Her eyes widened and Harry knew she had felt the same things he did. She opened her mouth to say – something, but he ignored her. He didn’t care. Without another word, Harry turned, opened the door and left Number Four without looking back.
Milton sighed heavily as he leaned back in the high backed chair that was a part of the suite he was currently staying in at the Leaky Cauldron. It had been an exhausting three days, attention split as it was between two extraordinarily important tasks that he was determined to achieve success in. The first task, preparing the way for the ratification of the ICAP Act was proceeding fairly well. The second task, less so.

After his visit with Aberforth, Milton had doubled down on arranging matters to ensure that he had the support that he would need within the Board of Governors to set the school in motion to be ready to implement the provisions of the ICAP Act, upon its ratification by the Wizengamot. He found himself in meetings day and night, presenting the legislation to a number of the governors who he considered most likely to back him once he made his power play. He discovered to his dismay that under the dismal leadership of the Lords Malfoy over the past thirty years, much of what had made Hogwarts flower in terms of academic prowess had been permitted to languish. What wasn't neglected by the Malfoy Lord was quite tossed out by the machinations of Albus Dumbledore.

The sacred festivals were no longer honored at Hogwarts, or their history mentioned; rather, giving way to the mundane parodies of holidays such as Halloween, Easter and Christmas.

Classes that were once offered such as Alchemy, Fundamentals of Enchantment, Musical Composition, Fundamentals of Politics, and more had disappeared due to 'budget cuts' or 'lack of interest'.

Defense against the Dark Arts was a laughing stock, with the highest turnover rate ever seen in Europe. Professors of that class either grew unaccountably ill, found themselves involved in scandals, voluntarily resigned for various reasons or worse of all, died due to catastrophic accidents. It was getting to the point that nobody of good repute sought to put themselves at risk by agreeing to teach the class. Furthermore, Milton was disturbed to see that the application of one Severus Snape, the Head of Slytherin House for the post was constantly rejected by the Headmaster, despite his record of accomplishment on the dueling circuit. Arguably, it was to preserve him as the Head of the Potions Department (really, its sole teacher). Milton could only imagine how slighted and annoyed this Professor Snape must be to be so overlooked when it was abundantly clear that he held knowledge of the subject.

The budget was in disarray and many of the furnishings for school activities such as broomsticks
and the Quidditch equipment were nearing their expiration dates, with no provision being made for their replacements.

Worse of all, they still had bloody Professor Binns—Binns!—teaching History of Magic, because of his deceased state meaning less outlay of Galleons! It was atrocious!

He fully intended to push for much needed changes at the upcoming meetings and towards that goal had met with the widowed Lady Augusta, Duchess of Tillisglen*, Regent for the Ancient and Noble House of Longbottom. A formidable witch, she had spent much of the decade caring for her grandson after the fateful attack that left her son and heir and his good wife brain-addled and confined to St. Mungos.

The recent attacks that had taken place at Hogwarts over the previous term of school however, had caused her to re-evaluate her virtual hermitage within the confines of their estate, and when he dined with her earlier in the afternoon, he was pleased to note that she not only leveraged her maternal family's claim of direct descent to a Founder's Seat on the Board of Governors, but also elected to take back active control of the Longbottom seat within the Wizengamot.

"I've sat back and watched Hogwarts and the Wizengamot go to the dogs," she had said during their luncheon, "but no more! When a school becomes so dangerous that charlatans like that thrice-damned Gilderoy Lockhart can be invited to teach our children, and students are finding themselves Petrified of all things, then it's clear that things must change! I cannot in good conscience tolerate this state of affairs anymore, not with my own Neville being affected by what is being decided by the bloody Board!"

She was fully on board with the passage of the ICAP Act and had pledged her support for the measures that he would be introducing to pave the way for its ratification and for its implementation at Hogwarts and at all of the other Ministry sponsored schools.

She was a welcome breath of experience. Mr. Blishwick, the newly elected chief governor was unfortunately among the number who tolerated the sliding standards that had plagued Hogwarts over the past twenty or so years, but Milton's correspondence had lit a fire under his bottom, and he was learning to move faster than he ever had before.

His short meeting with Elphias Doge had been far less satisfactory. Doge was a good fellow, but unfortunately was also a firmly staunch ally of Albus Dumbledore.

"Dumbledore has been the best thing that has happened to Hogwarts!" he had declared stoutly as Milton attempted to present the matters related to the ICAP Act. "I refuse to consider any
legislation that will tie up his hands and force him to act in violation of his conscience. He knows what's best for old Hogwarts he does, and that should be good enough for the rest of us!"

The sad part was that there were many more on that Board who were only too willing to throw up their hands and abdicate responsible stewardship into the hands of the Headmaster, which would make the brewing fight more contentious than it ought to be. Even with a no-nonsense political powerhouse like Augusta Longbottom entering the fray, the odds were stacked against them.

As far as the matter of tracking down the source of the magical flare-up that had occurred three days ago, little real progress had been made.

Of course, in anticipation of successfully discovering the lad responsible for his search, Milton had made arrangements for the adjoining room to be reserved for the child. He was fairly certain that some trouble was brewing with this mysterious novice, as even accidental magic didn't broadcast over such a long range. Clearly there was a stressful situation occurring.

With the aid of his faithful familiar Bran lending his eyes and hearing to him, Milton had begun sweeping through the streets and neighborhoods of Surrey, England. He had made some progress, focusing the parameters to Little Whinging and just last night, down to a collection of a few streets, Wisteria Lane, Privet Drive and Magnolia Crescent, but he hadn't been able to find that young man! Strangely enough, it felt whenever he would search in that area that his mind was constantly diverted to other pressing matters that he needed to attend to, and he would often find himself wheeling around and around in dizzying circular patterns that left him no closer to solving the mystery than when he had started his search. It was maddening!

Bran was currently keeping watch over Little Whinging, which gave Milton some time to rest. As he put away his files and parchment in preparation of getting a quick kip, a sudden pull on the familiar bond that he shared with dear Bran brought him to full alertness as another strong wave of magic emanated from within the area that Bran was watching on his behalf.

Alarmed, Milton closed his eyes immediately and cast out his thought along the bond towards his familiar.

What has happened, beloved? queried Milton. Show me what you see...

A harsh croak emanated down the bond as a dizzying array of images, snatches of sound and location began to fill his mind. As quickly as possible, Milton began to organize the images and sounds into information that his consciousness would be able to comprehend. As he did so, his mouth thinned with dismay.
A young teenage boy, losing control of his magic and causing his tormentor to suffer for her crimes...

A heavy-set man, laying hands on the boy who holds a battered trunk and more importantly...a wand...

The boy releasing a brilliant pulse of magic that smashes the man against the wall...

A thin, unpleasant looking woman saying words that cause the boy to flinch backwards, before the boy speaks back and pronounces words that causes something to fall, a flash of crimson light as deep as the feathers Bran carries with pride sweeping towards the house...a protection that is no more...

With a gasp, Milton lurched to his feet. Allowing his familiar’s sight to fade, he fought past the disorientation that often accompanied the usage of their bond in such a way and wordlessly summoned his wand, securely contained in his cane, adorned with a raven's head. Another wordless spell switched out his nightclothes with more formal clothing that would nevertheless pass muster should any non-magical person catch sight of him.

Drawing upon his bond with his familiar once more, Milton focused not on the location of the boy, but rather, the location of his familiar and after pocketing his emergency Portkey, Apparated towards Surrey.

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Harry walked rapidly without stopping until he reached Magnolia Crescent, an area several streets away from Pivet Drive. He collapsed onto a low wall, panting from the effort of dragging his trunk. He sat there, very still, anger still surging through him as he replayed the events of the past few hours in his mind. His heart beat rapidly as he recalled Petunia Dursley's (he would never call her Aunt again, never) dead tone and wild, hate filled eyes as she ordered him out of her home.

But after fifteen minutes of solitude at the corner of the dark street, a new emotion filled him: fear. No matter how many ways Harry tried to dissect his situation, he was in the worst fix of his entire life. He was stranded, and alone on a street in the dangerous Muggle world. He had absolutely no
where to go. He knew that like him, Hermione lived in the Muggle world with her parents, but even that was no help, because they were all in France. Without Hedwig, he had no way to contact anyone in the wizarding world either. The worst of it was, he had just done magic, serious magic, which meant that he was almost certainly expelled from Hogwarts. He had broken the Decree for the Restriction of Underage Wizardry so badly, he was surprised that someone from the Ministry hadn’t already arrived to snap his wand.

Harry shivered and lowered his head into his hands. His thin shoulders shook as hot tears ran down his face. What would happen to him now? Would he be arrested and sentenced to Azkaban, or would he simply be banished from the wizarding world? Who could he turn to for help?

For a moment, he allowed himself to wallow in despair and simply cried. Never, had he felt so – alone, so helpless. Several minutes passed in this manner until at last, Harry sat up and angrily wiped at his face. He would not cry! Even if no one could help him, he could help himself. He was capable of caring for himself for years wasn’t he? He took a few deep breaths to calm himself, and decided to consider his rather limited options.

First thing to consider was his lack of money. He had no Muggle money on him. At the bottom of his trunk, lay his money bag with a small amount of galleons left over from what he withdrew from his vault at Gringotts. He had no way to get to the bank to access the rest of his money. Unless…

Harry looked down on his wand, which he still clutched tightly in his hand. If he was already expelled, surely casting a charm like the Feather-Light Charm couldn’t hurt. He could cast it on his trunk to make it lighter. And he could use his Invisibility Cloak he inherited from his father…

Quickly, Harry had the basic stirrings of a plan in place. He would lighten his trunk and tie it to his broom, then cover himself with the invisibility cloak and fly to London. Once at Gringotts, he could get the money out of his vault and…start his life as an outcast of wizarding society. It was a terrible future to contemplate, but he couldn’t stay at the low wall for the rest of his life – how would he explain his unusual possessions if he was picked up by the police?

Harry opened his trunk and began to rummage through it, searching for his Invisibility Cloak. After a minute of searching though, he froze, as a prickling feeling began to tingle on the back of his neck. He was being watched. He straightened up and cast his gaze down the dark street. The street however was deserted, and no lights shown from any the large, square homes.

He stretched his senses as far as he could, trying to find the source of the prickling feeling – heart beginning to pound in his chest rapidly – and sensed that it was somewhere near the fence and the garage behind him. Harry peered into the black alleyway. If only it would move, then he would know if it was just a stray animal – or something else.
Clenching his wand even tighter, Harry decided to use the Lumos Charm. "Lumos," he whispered, feeling a bit of his courage return as a orb of light shone from the tip of his wand. He held it high over his head, and the walls of house number two suddenly sparkled; the garage gleamed, and between them he saw a hulking shape of something, with wide, gleaming eyes.

Harry was rooted to the spot, fear and adrenaline flooding his system. He was tempted to back away, but he didn't want that…thing to jump out and attack him. He decided to edge forward a bit – maybe the glare of the Lumos would scare it off, but before he could forge ahead, the sound of a man clearing his throat caused him to wheel around in panic. And then stare.

There was a man – a rather old man by the looks of it – standing a few feet away from where he had been parked. The man was tall, more than likely six feet. He was dressed smartly in a dark coloured business suit with a pale blue shirt and a gold tie. He had a hat, coloured the same as his suit which was perched on top of his head. He had ruddy skin, and his eyes were a startling ice-blue. The man looked back at him appraisingly for a few moments, then he did something unexpected. He smiled.

"Good evening, young one," said the old man. "You appear to be having some form of difficulty, one that I believe I might be able to help you with. You do not need to be afraid, I am unarmed." He slowly raised his arms, showing Harry that he held no weapons in his hands. He didn’t move forward though – just stayed at the spot he was at.

That didn’t reassure Harry much. Keeping a good grip on his wand, he moved forward a couple of steps – making sure to edge around his open trunk – and pointed his wand at the man.

"Who are you?" said Harry suspiciously. "There was nobody here barely a minute ago. How did you get here?" Keeping his wand arm trained at the man, he took a quick peek behind him to see if that strange animal shape was still behind him – but he saw no shape at all, besides the shape of the house and garage. What was going on? Quickly, he turned back to the man. The old man peered into Harry’s face. It seemed like a lifetime as Harry waited for the man to answer. Finally however, it seemed like the man found whatever he was looking for in Harry’s face because he relaxed his study and smiled warmly.

"I thought you would have guessed already," he said. "I used magic to arrive here."

At those words, Harry stiffened and took a couple of steps back. Magic? Then this man was a wizard, though he didn’t see any wand on him. What if this was one of the ‘Aurors’ that he’d heard about? He kept his wand on him though – Harry didn’t want to lose any possible advantage he could have, even if he would be no match for the wizard police.
The man, far from looking threatened by having a wand pointed at him, slowly lowered his hands to his side and threw Harry a piercing look. He said nothing for several seconds, just stared at him. Harry felt like squirming underneath that penetrating gaze, but he stood his ground.

“You are wondering if I am an Auror,” the man said at last. “You are afraid that I will arrest you for your so-called crime. Rest easy, young one. I’m not here to take you to Azkaban.”

Harry’s mind whirled in shock. How did this man know what he was thinking about in his head? He must have shown his shock on his face, because the stranger smiled at him knowingly.

“It is true that I have a connection to the Ministry of Magic, but I am not now, nor ever have been an employee for the Ministry. I am here, young man in this charming town because I sensed that there was powerful magic being wielded here, and that the one using it was in some sort of trouble. I am here to render my assistance and counsel.”

Harry looked carefully at the man. He didn’t seem like a dark wizard, and it didn’t seem like he was lying about being an Auror. And he was willing to help…

Harry lowered his wand to his side and his shoulders slumped. He felt utterly exhausted. He narrowed his eyes at the man.

“Ok then. Say that I believe you. What’s your name then? And where are you from?” His words seemed to please the man, and he directed his steps closer to where Harry stood. He halted a feet or so away and smiled again. His smile was warm and inviting, and Harry found himself smiling back, in spite of himself.

“My name, young man is Milton Ashcroft. Like you, I am a citizen of Great Britain, though I have lived abroad for many years. I’ve only recently come back to my old stomping grounds. And your name?”

The innocuous question of Mr. Ashcroft made Harry a bit nervous. He was fairly certain that this man meant him no ill will, but he was still uncertain about sharing his name with him. Still, the man had given his own name, and since he wasn’t in any danger at the moment, Harry figured he could risk revealing his identity.

Seeing Harry’s hesitation, Mr. Ashcroft sighed. “Young man, I can assure you that simply telling
me you name will not cause me to harm you. I wish to help you with whatever problem you have, but that will require a measure of trust. I have extended my trust in sharing my name with you. Will you not do the same?”

Harry grimaced apologetically. “Sorry, it’s just that considering my situation…the last thing I need is to attract too much attention. I didn't mean to accuse you of anything. I’m Harry Potter.”

With that, he stared at Mr. Ashcroft to see his reaction. Mr. Ashcroft stood very still. He didn’t say anything for quite some time. And he did something quite unexpected. He carefully inspected his face. Of course, Harry expected that. What he did not expect, was Mr. Ashcroft completely ignoring his scar! He was carefully studying the shape of his cheeks, his nose, and his jaw. The silence stretched on for so long that Harry opened his mouth to ask him if there would be a problem, but the man beat him to it.

“Potter?” said Mr. Ashcroft sharply, stepping forward in his excitement, an expression of surprise on his face. “That is not a common name among those of us in the magical community. Are you related by any chance to Charlus Potter? Or James Potter?”

“James Potter is my dad,” Harry said in amazement. “You knew my dad?”

For some reasons, those words caused Mr. Ashcroft’s shoulders to slump. To Harry’s shock, the man seemed to wilt and fold in on himself. His surprise grew when he saw tears begin to trickle down his face.

“Yes, my boy,” Mr. Ashcroft said in a quiet voice that was almost a whisper. “I knew your father. I remember him as a boy. But we were not close. No, though I knew your father, I was thinking more of Charlus. Your father’s father. He and I were – were very good friends….”

He lapsed into silence, as did Harry, though he wanted more than anything to question this man—who knew his father, his grandfather!—about his connections to his family. Mr. Ashcroft managed to compose himself after a moment and looked closely at Harry, eyes narrowed as he studied his face. After a while, he held out his hand to Harry. Harry recognized the gesture for what it was, and grasped the extended hand. Mr. Ashcroft’s hands were marked with age, but his grip was firm.

"Harry Potter,” Mr. Ashcroft said softly. “Yes, I see it now. You truly resemble your father a great deal, though you have a different bearing than him. Still, now that I think of it, there is much of you that reminds me of your grandfather. You are a credit to your House.”
A flush of embarrassment mingled with delight swept Harry at the old man’s words. To hear that he resembled not only his father, but acted like his grandfather…

Slowly Mr. Ashcroft released his hold on Harry, and stepped back a couple of steps. When he spoke again, gone was the strains of old grief – long buried in him since he had learned of the Potter’s death – and in its place the voice of a man sure in his mastery.

“I was not aware of your identity when I sought you out young Mr. Potter, but knowing it makes my task that much more important. I do not know your exact situation, but I have been sensing bursts of magic coming from you, all the way from London. No” – he held up one hand to forestall the questions Harry was itching to delve into – “I will not explain how I felt that magic, or why I felt honour bound to come. There will be time for all such explanation, but now is not the time. There are other things which must take place before that.”

The man paused and looked over Harry, his swift gaze lingering on Harry’s face and neck.

“Harry,” Mr. Ashcroft said. “It is getting quite late, and a young man like yourself should be resting, not running in fear for his liberty. If you come with me, I will see to it that any potential trouble you might find yourself in with the Ministry will be removed. I will take you to a safe place for the night and help you take care of your affairs at Gringotts in the morning. Are you willing to accept my help?”

Harry looked into those ice-blue eyes, but couldn’t find anything nefarious in their depths. No, in fact all he could see was concern – for him. He didn’t look at his scar, though he must know of his status as the Boy-Who-Lived; didn’t hold any of the wild or unreasonable expectations others threw on him because of his fame. Though he was nothing more than a stranger to him, there was a grace and strength in him that reminded him of – well, Dumbledore.

“I will,” he murmured. “Accept your help, that is.”

Mr. Ashcroft nodded solemnly. “Then our bargain is struck,” he said. “Now then, the first thing we need to do is take care of those bruises on your face and neck. We will need to get evidence of course, but until then I will place a spell to numb the area. Is that acceptable?”

Harry nodded. He didn’t know how Mr. Ashcroft was going to cast the spell, as he didn’t have a wand. He watched to see if he would pull one out, but was startled when, with a wave of his hand, a cool, soothing tingling sensation spread across his face and along his neck where Uncle Vernon
had attempted to throttle him.

“You didn’t use a wand!” blurted Harry. Mr. Ashcroft merely smiled.

“Now then,” Mr. Ashcroft said. “Why don’t we get your belongings together, and be on our way?” He waited patiently as Harry put away his Cloak and secured his trunk. Then he placed his hand into the beast pocket of his shirt and pulled out a ballpoint pen. “Now take a hold of this Harry. Keep a tight grip on your trunk, mind! Our next destination will be London in three, two, one –”

All of a sudden Harry felt a tug behind his navel, and the sense of being sharply pulled –

And the two wizards on Magnolia Crescent vanished into the night.

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A burst of rioting colors blinded Harry as he was yanked by something that felt like a powerful magnet. With a flash, he tumbled unto a hard surface. Waves of nausea beat at Harry, and he almost hurled up the remains of his meager dinner, but managed to keep a lid on his stomach. Dazed, he looked around in confusion.

This was certainly not Magnolia Crescent! He turned to his right and saw Mr. Ashcroft, standing calmly only a few steps away, looking none the worse for the wear. He was holding out his hand, which Harry accepted. Pulling himself up, he stood there for the moment, catching his bearings and scanned the street. His eyes widened as he recognized his surroundings.

“This – this is the Leaky Cauldron.” he breathed out in his shock. How on earth did they arrive here so quickly? What magic was that? He glanced at Mr. Ashcroft who was chuckling good naturedly.

“Ah, bless me dear boy, I didn’t realize that you hadn’t traveled by portkey before. It can be a bit – jarring I suppose, to one unused to such methods of travel. We will stay here for the time being…at least, once we take care of one more unwanted, but necessary item of business.”

The tone in his voice had changed sharply. Where he had been amused, he now sounded wary and stern. Startled at the change, Harry opened his mouth to ask him what was wrong –
“There you are, Harry,” said a voice behind him. Before he could turn, he felt a hand clamp onto his shoulder. Harry, alarmed turned to the owner of the hand and felt a stone drop in the pit of his stomach – the owner was no other than Cornelius Fudge, the Minister for Magic himself.

Harry gulped audibly. Minister Fudge was a portly man with a tuft of white hair underneath his bowler hat who was dressed in a long, pinstriped cloak. He looked cold and exhausted. And somewhat upset, judging by the frown that he now directed to Harry.

“We’ve been searching all over for you, Harry!” he said without so much as an introduction. “We have much to talk about, you and I. Starting with – ”

“Releasing my young charge at once, Minister. To be followed by allowing the poor boy a chance to rest, catch his breath, and get some hot food in him.”

At the terse command, Minister Fudge flushed an unflattering puce and peered over Harry’s shoulder – only to stumble back with a shout of surprise as his face blanched at the sight of Mr. Ashcroft, who stood there with a look of cold command on his face.

“Lo- Lord Ashcroft!” he cried, his eyes moving rapidly between the man standing silently a few feet away and an increasingly bewildered Harry Potter. “I – I didn’t notice you there. Did you say that Harry Potter was your ch – charge?”

“He is,” Mr. Ashcroft said grimly. “I offered him my support and he accepted it, so I consider him under my direct protection. You are aware, aren’t you that his grandfather and I were close working colleagues?”

“Of course, Lord Ashcroft,” Fudge said as he let go of Harry quickly. Harry shot Mr. Ashcroft a gaze as he rolled over to his side. What exactly did Fudge mean, calling him Lord? And why did it seem like the Minister for Magic was – afraid of him?

“And now, Minister, I think it would behoove you to take this conversation elsewhere,” Mr. Ashcroft continued. “Preferably indoors – in a private parlor, if you please.”

In a matter of moments, Harry found himself sitting across from Minister Fudge in the small parlor
that Tom, the innkeeper of the Leaky Cauldron had shown them into, Mr. Ashcroft seated to his right. On the table lay a pot of steaming hot tea and a tray of warm crumpets. Mr. Ashcroft had placed two of them on a plate in front of Harry and had him eat them both and have a cup of tea, while the Minister sat there rather uncomfortably, directing quick glances between the two seated across from him when he thought they wouldn’t notice.

Finally, as Harry took his last swallow of tea and popped his last piece of crumpet into his mouth, Mr. Ashcroft turned to the Minister.

“Cornelius,” he began with a regal nod. “I trust that the situation at young Mr. Potter’s home has been straightened out?”

“Yes, yes,” Minister Fudge affirmed. “I am happy to report,” he said, turning to Harry, “that two members of the Accidental Magic Reversal Squad were dispatched to Privet Drive a few hours ago. Miss Dursley has been punctured and her memory has been modified. She has no recollection whatsoever of the incident at all. So that’s that, and no harm done!”

He smiled broadly at Harry, clearly expecting him to be pleased about it. Harry, who was expecting a more severe speech was not really sure how he felt about what he heard. On the one hand, he was glad that his outburst of magic had been reversed, but a part of him couldn’t help but wish that Marge had been afflicted for much longer. He opened his mouth to say something, but closed it without saying a word.

“Ah, perhaps you’re worried about the reaction of your aunt and uncle?” said Mr. Fudge, mistaking his lack of speech for worry. “Well, there’s no denying that they were rather….upset. I’m sure however, that they’ll be prepared to take you back next summer after the end of term.”

A rush of anger filled Harry at the mention of his – no, the Dursleys.

“I don’t care how prepared they are,” Harry spat furiously. “I’m not wanted there, and I’m never going back there. Never!”

“Now, now, I’m sure you’ll feel differently once you’ve calmed down and have time to think things over,” said Fudge, clearly taken aback at the venom in Harry’s voice. “They’re your family after all! I’m sure that you’re all fond of each other – er – very deep down.”

Harry didn’t bother to set Fudge right. He was still waiting to learn what consequences he would be
facing for his magical outburst.

“So all that remains,” said Fudge as he buttered a scone, “is to decide where you’ll be spending the last week’s of your vacation. I suggest you take a room here at the Leaky – ”


Fudge blinked, then turned a bewildered glance to Mr. Ashcroft, who until now had remained silent. Fudge turned back to Harry.

“Punishment? What punishment?”

“Well, I broke the law!” Harry said, frowning. “The Decree for the Restriction of Underage Wizardry!”

“Oh my dear boy, we’re not going to punish you for a little thing like that!” Fudge cried impatiently, waving his hand. “It was an obvious accident! We don’t send people to Azkaban just for blowing up their aunts!”

He laughed incredulously and aimed another look at Mr. Ashcroft, who didn’t smile back. Fudge’s laughter quickly dried up, and he coughed twice in an effort to regain composure. Harry’s eyes narrowed at the sight.

“Last year, I got a letter from the Ministry just because a house-elf smashed a pudding at the Dursleys house!” Harry insisted. ” It said that if there was any more magic there, then I’d be expelled from Hogwarts!”

Now, Fudge looked decidedly awkward.

“Well…circumstances change, Harry….We have to take that into account…considering the present circumstances…Surely you don’t want to be expelled?”

“Of course not,” said Harry.
“Well then, there’s nothing to worry about!” exclaimed Fudge. “Now then, have some more crumpets Harry while I –”

The sound of polite coughing stopped Fudge in his tracks. Flushing, he looked at Mr. Ashcroft who was decidedly unhappy, judging by his frown and lowering eyebrows.

“There will be no need for you to trouble Tom,” he said. “I’ve already made arrangements for a room for Mr. Potter.”

“Oh – oh, of course,” said Fudge. His calm and humored demeanor underwent a swift transformation. Now he appeared as a school boy about to be chastened by his headmaster. Mr. Ashcroft smiled, but it wasn’t a pleasant smile.

“I see that you’ve failed to inform him of why it would be preferable if he remain here, where there are plenty of watchful eyes to keep him safe. No matter, I will have that taken care of myself. However, this Ministry notice that Mr. Potter has mentioned –”

He glared openly at the Minister. Harry, to his amazement saw Fudge flinch at the mention of the warning sent by the Ministry, as Ashcroft continued to lambaste him.

“In my time,” he said while looking pointedly at Fudge. “I would have a much more thorough investigation made into cases where magic was performed in a Muggle household. I am shocked that these days, even a house-elf’s mischief can rob Britain’s young men and women of a chance to be instructed at an institution of magic.”

His words caused Fudge to flush even more, but Ashcroft went on without mercy.

“Can it be possible that the Improper Use of Magic office is loosing it’s touch? Come now Minister Fudge, if the Ministry is being magnanimous enough to excuse this present incident because of the – circumstances, surely the fact that magic had been performed by a house-elf would warrant young Harry’s record being…cleansed? As Minister, I’m sure that’s in your purview?”

“Oh yes, yes,” mumbled Fudge. “I’m sure that in light of Harry’s testimony…well it would only be right…”
“Very good then,” Ashcroft said coolly. “Then I think that will be all for tonight, Minister. I will see to Mr. Potter. You will see to it that Mr. Potter can commence his third year of schooling without unnecessary – baggage.”

“Of course,” said Fudge hurriedly as he sprang from his seat. “Of course – that will be easy to take care of, and yes, you can inform Mr. Potter about the – the situation.” Fudge smiled a rather sickly smile at Mr. Ashcroft, then reached over to shake Harry’s hand.

“Well, then! I’ll be off! Good luck on the new term Harry – ”

Quickly, Fudge departed the room. Harry looked, flabbergasted at Mr. Ashcroft, unable to believe what he’d just witnessed.

“What in Merlin’s name was that?” questioned Harry. “Why was he – frightened of you? I mean, you basically ordered the Minister of Magic and he obeyed!”

Mr. Ashcroft smiled, grimly at Harry’s questions. He waved his hand at the tea left in the pot and over the remaining scones, heating them both again. Then he busied himself with fixing another cup of tea for both of them. When he was done pouring, he pushed the cup over to Harry.

“Drink some more tea,” he said firmly. “You’ve been out in the cold for hours and it’ll be good for you.” He waited patiently until Harry took up his cup and took a sip, then settled back into his chair.

“I will be quite honest with you, Harry. I will not be answering all of your questions tonight. It’s been quite a day – for both of us, and some answers can wait. However,” he held up a hand when it looked like Harry would interrupt. “I will explain briefly why it is that Fudge was so – willing to oblige me. I told you earlier this evening that I had connections to the Ministry, but did not work for the Ministry. I also said that I lived abroad for many years. Minister Fudge fears me for the same reason he fears and yet is constantly courting the opinion of your very own Headmaster – our political pedigree. You see Harry, I too am a Minister for Magic, or at least I was Minister, once. I am also a member of the elite families of Britain, or rather, I am the Head of my House. That is why he called me ‘Lord’.”

Ashcroft paused and took in Harry’s wide-eyed expression, and smiled.

“You see, Fudge fears what he cannot control. In spite of his current position as Minister for
Magic, the fact is that as a former Minister who ended my tenure in good standing, I am his political peer. That normally wouldn’t be a worry for him because I was Minister in the United States and am active to this day as a representative in their equivalent to Britain’s Wizengamot. I haven’t lived in Britain for many years after all. His problem, is that while I’ve lived abroad for many years, I remain the head of one of the principal families with power in the British Wizengamot, and to make matters worse, I am an influential member of the International Confederation of Wizards. That gives me a grasp on power that he cannot hope to achieve himself. That is why he dares not anger me. I could make his days as Minister – quite uncomfortable.”

Harry’s mind whirled with all of the information that had been revealed to him. Mr. Ashcroft, a Minister! And a member of the Wizengamot – though he wasn’t quite sure what the Wizengamot did actually…

Mr. Ashcroft chuckled into his tea cup at the look of confusion that Harry unwittingly revealed as he processed the older man’s words.

“That is also one of the reasons why he made made the effort to personally track you down.” he said lightly.

Harry frowned quizzically at that.

“Why would Fudge be – afraid of me? I’m just a student. I’m not even a fully trained wizard.”

For some reason, that caused Mr. Ashcroft to throw his head back and laugh – a rich, rolling laughter that invited you to share in the mirth. Harry couldn’t help but smile at the sight. Ashcroft quieted himself after a moment and turned towards Harry, a gentle smile on his face.

“My dear boy,” he said – in a manner that reminded Harry sharply once again of Professor Dumbledore – warmly, patting Harry’s hand. “Fudge is perfectly aware of your status as a minor. He is however, whatever his faults, a consummate politician. He seeks to curry favor with you for at least four reasons, though I suppose he might have more. First, you are the Boy-Who-Lived. Whether you truly defeated the Dark Lord or not is irrelevant, the public considers you a hero. He will not do anything that will turn the public opinion against him. Second, and something we must discuss in more detail tomorrow, you are a Potter. The Potter family is as old and influential as mine, more so in fact. Perhaps he thinks that if he curries favor with you, he will be rewarded with your approval, something that does carry a great deal of weight. Third, he seeks to hold some measure of power over you. Yes,” he insisted as he noted Harry’s indignant expression. “He does seek some hold over you. Remember, I told you that the Potter name holds great power. It is an old name with links to an even greater history. If you, the vulnerable heir of such a prestigious line were to owe, say your liberty to his clemency – well, imagine the power he could secure for his continued success! Why do you think he hesitated to offer to correct the errors of the Improper Use
of Magic Office even though you’ve clarified that the burst of magic you were warned for was that of a rogue house-elf? He wanted that to be in play, if ever you were to turn against him. That alone should tell you how valuable you are, politically. As for the last reason,” – And here, he hesitated – “there is a situation that is affecting much of Wizarding Britain at this time. It also affects you.”

He shook his head in the negative, when questioned by Harry.

“That is news which must wait for tomorrow, when we are both fully rested, and possess clear heads. I will not burden you with this information tonight. Tomorrow will do as well. Now, I believe it is time you be shown to your room.”

The pair exited the private room. As they approached a handsome staircase, they were met by the innkeeper, Tom. He was a wizened man with a bald head and a stooped figure. He smiled at the two of them, revealing his lack of teeth. Despite his off-putting appearance, he possessed a friendly aura.

“Ready to settle in, gentlemen?” inquired Tom, beaming at Harry. “The extra room you requested sir is ready. It is right next to your own room, sir.” Tom turned to Harry. ” If you’ll follow me Mr. Potter,” he said with a wave of his hand. “I’ve already sent your things up.”

The three men went up the staircase. Harry wanted to offer to help Mr. Ashcroft, but when he turned to do so, he saw to his surprise that his older companion was far from infirm and well able to nimbly climb the stairs with the other two. They went to a door with a brass number eleven on it, which Tom unlocked with a wave of his wand and opened for him.

As Harry and Mr. Ashcroft stepped in, they found that inside was a good-sized room with a very comfortable-looking bed, some highly polished oak furniture, a cheerfully crackling fire and, perched on top of a wardrobe –

“Hedwig!” Harry gasped at the unexpected sight.

The snow colored owl clicked her beak and swooped down unto Harry’s arm where she nipped at his ear while he stroked her wing in delight. Both Tom and Mr. Ashcroft smiled at the picture the pair made.

“That’s a right smart bird you got there Mr. Potter,” chuckled Tom. “Arrived about five minutes after you did. If there is anything you need, Mr. Potter, don’t hesitate to ask.”
“Thank you,” said Harry. He watched as Mr. Ashcroft passed a few shining gold coins to Tom, who murmured his thanks before bowing to them both, and leaving the room.

Mr. Ashcroft turned to Harry. “Get some rest now,” he said. “You are exhausted, and need to sleep. I myself need to retire. We will talk more in the morning over breakfast, which we will have around eight o’clock. If you should need me, you need only turn to the next room to your left. Room Ten is where I reside at the present time. Good night.”

He turned around and began to move towards the door when he was stopped by Harry’s quiet words.

“Thank you sir. I don’t know how you knew I needed help tonight, but it means a lot to me, that you were willing to help me even before you knew who I was. Very few people have ever done that for me before. Just – thank you.”

“It is my pleasure Mr. Potter,” replied Mr. Ashcroft quietly. With that he stepped out of room, the door gently swinging close behind him.

Harry flopped unto the bed and sat there for some time, absentmindedly stroking Hedwig, allowing his mind to go over all of the events that happened only a few hours ago. It seemed almost unbelievable that he had left Pivet Drive, was not expelled, made a new friend and now faced two more weeks without the Dursleys! He felt a wave of lethargy sweep him, and he knew that he’d better go to bed. He lowered Hedwig unto his bed and with his wand, made quick work of removing and enlarging her cage. She flew to her perch and watched him with her amber colored eyes as he shook off his shoes and flopped back on the bed.

“It’s been a very weird night, Hedwig,” he yawned.

Giving in to nature’s course, he slumped unto his pillows, and glasses still on his face, drifted off to sleep.

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While Harry surrendered to the delightful realms of Morpheus, Lord Ashcroft did not do the same. Back in his own rooms he made his way to the small, but serviceable desk provided by the innkeeper, and pulled some spare parchment over as well as a quill. He paused over the paper, quill
in hand as he considered the situation Harry was facing. He scowled as he remembered the images he had gleaned from the surface of the unsuspecting boy’s mind during their initial meeting. Miserable Muggles! To treat any child in such a cruel and negligent manner was the hallmark of individuals undeserving of guardianship over any child. But they dared to raise a hand to a child of the house of Potter! An heir of Charles…. He squeezed the quill in his grip tightly, glad now he had thought to place an Impervious Charm on the ones he purchased before his flight to London. In his state of mind they would all be snapped before being used for their purpose. He considered the blank parchment before him. He knew what he must do, who he needed to summon to answer for this outrage. There was only one person who could have arranged for Harry to be sent to those… people without concern of potential backlash. He must be made to answer for this grave error.

And yet, at the present time, his influence was too great. It would take time to forge the necessary links to ensure that Mr. Dumbledore faced the due consequences for his presumptuous actions. Until then, Harry would need to be placed in a secure position, where the Headmaster would not be able to dangle the strings of Harry's welfare over the poor child's head as leverage.

Taking a deep breath, Ashcroft let go of his fury and willed it to drain away. It would serve no purpose at this time. He then focused on his present task. He pondered the way he would word his humble 'request' in a way that would ensure the recipient's compliance. His words would have to be couched artfully, to avoid skirting the bounds of polite propriety. After a couple of minutes of thought, he summoned absentmindedly a bottle of ink, dipped his quill in, and composed his message. Once it was completed, he reviewed it carefully. Everything appeared to be well, so he had the parchment rolled up. Pouring a bit of hot wax from the candle shedding light in his quarters unto the rolled parchment, he then pulled out from his breast pocket a ring. He held it up to the light of the candles with a faint smile on his lips; in spite of the many years he had been using this ring, it never failed to send a thrill of delight through him at the sight of it. For a moment, he lost himself in the swirling eddies and swirls of the handsome, azure colored labradorite stone, etched with the crest of his House and set in a heavy band of silver, designed as the symbol of his House. It took an effort to turn away his gaze and focus on the task.

Ashcroft pressed his ring into the wax. With a quiet murmur of his House’s motto, he activated an enchantment on his ring. Beneath his hand a tiny flicker of blue energy flashed. After a few seconds, he lifted his ring. Where their had been just a blob of wax, there was now a seal. Etched into the wax was the crest of his House. Pleased, Ashcroft hefted the parchment in his hand. Through the enchantments embedded in his ring, the parchment was now an official document of the House of Ashcroft. One of the enchantments ensured that only the recipient of the parchment would be able to open it and read it’s contents. The seal of his House on the parchment would also make it clear to the recipient that this was a matter to be taken seriously. That would ensure his compliance with the – request.

With a satisfied smirk, Ashcroft turned to a perch where his faithful familiar, Bran watched him with sharp eyes. Ashcroft held out his arm, and the raven swept from the perch and was soon settled on his arm. Ashcroft stroked the glossy opaque feathers of Bran’s wings and held out the sealed roll to him.
“Forgive me my friend,” he murmured as with barely a thought, he conjured a light blue ribbon and secured the roll on the leg of his messenger. “You have worked hard these past few days, but my need is great. This message must reach its intended tonight. I can entrust this to no one, but you.”

Bran cawed and moved forward to nip his master on the ear, affectionately. Then with a few flaps of its wings, he flew out of the opened window and went towards the receiver’s location.

Ashcroft, watched his familiar go. As he lost sight of the rapidly flying raven, he sighed and rubbed the bridge of his nose. With any luck – and enchanted speed of his familiar, his request should be at his desk in an hour at the most.

“May it reach you swiftly my old friend,” he murmured to no one. “Your assistance will be both timely and paramount.”

Chapter End Notes

11/01/19 Notes:

Just wanted to touch on a couple of matters that pop up in this chapter and more in the next couple of chapters. As this is an AU that establishes a separate monarchy in Magical Britain to the Monarchy of the U.K., it behooves us to give a bit of background on the peers of Magical Britain.

Under the Pendragons, the territories of Albion are governed by the Ecclesia Arcanum, the twelve highest families that are of the nobility and advise and represent the will of the Sovereign. The thirteenth is the senior most cadet branch of the Imperial, Royal, and Sovereign House of the Pendragon and holds the unique title of Archduke of Albion. The two Houses immediately beneath the House of Peverell in dignity are the Houses of Black and Ashcroft, both of them the junior most Houses with any claim on the throne of the Pendragon should the House of Peverell become extinct. Together the three Houses are the Royal Houses of Albion. The other ten are the Noble Houses. Any other noble House not of the thirteen are either of minor Nobility or of the gentry (Ancient Houses) or commoners (Houses).

Of the Royal Houses, only the House of Peverell holds the title of 'Most Ancient and Royal', as the immediate cadet branch. The other two Royal Houses (of which Ashcroft is one) are the 'Noble and Most Ancient' Houses. Those titles belong to the House of Black and the House of Ashcroft.

The other Noble Houses that make up the Ecclesia are known as the 'Ancient and Noble' Houses. Of those Houses, there are 10 Houses in total. They are in total:

1. The Ancient and Noble House of Longbottom
2. The Ancient and Noble House of Prince
3. The Ancient and Noble House of Bones
4. The Ancient and Noble House of Malfoy (formerly Raeburn)
5. The Ancient and Noble House of Potter
6. The Ancient and Noble House of Shannessy
7. The Ancient and Noble House of Greengrass
8. The Ancient and Noble House of Prewett
9. The Ancient and Noble House of O'Rinn
10. The Ancient and Noble House of Dagworth

In the past, the Houses of the Ecclesia ruled the twelve divisions of Albion and Ierne. The House of Peverell held the stewardship of the entire kingdom. The Ecclesia had the right to collect taxes, controlled the law enforcement of that region, selected the local judges and in times of war, raised the quota of soldiers needed for the Royal Army. They also served as the progenitors of the Wizengamot and consulted with the King in determining the laws of the kingdom and judging the highest cases on behalf of the King.

With the disappearance of the Monarch in the 1500s, the power of the Ecclesia began to wane drastically. They lost control of their lands save for their personal Estates, lost much of their executive authority to the Wizards' Council and eventually the Ministry for Magic, and the ability to select judges.

The Ecclesia however clung to power and when the Wizengamot was formed, they assumed the position that is not atypical to the House of Lords. They have more voting power per seat, can override the Minister without needing the majority of the Wizengamot to back them (if they are unified...a rare case indeed, particularly as more of the Houses fell into abeyance), and can only be judged by their peers amongst the Ecclesia (Heirs also fall into that category, though scions may be judged before the general body). Coupled with their wealth, the Ecclesia continue to highly respected and feared. Their noble titles remain though it is as of this point, more ceremonial in nature.

*Concerning Dowagers:

A Dowager peer is the person who was the spouse of the individual who held the dignity of a specific noble title in his/her own right. If they have no child, they still hold the consort title as bestowed during the life of their spouse. If they have a child however, they are then known as Dowager.

They hold that dignity as long as they live, even if their child dies and their spouse becomes a Dowager while their grandchild holds the dignity. Their child's spouse then, would not adopt the title of Dowager but be acknowledged as Noble Style, Name, station (without 'the').

Thus in the case of the Longbottom family, Neville Longbottom's great-grandmother Callidora Longbottom nee Black is acknowledged as 'Her Grace, the Dowager Duchess of Tillisglen', as her husband was the regnant Duke. Her daughter-in-law, Augusta Longbottom as the wife of her son the subsequent Duke is also a Dowager, but is acknowledged as, 'Her Grace, Augusta, Duchess of Tillisglen'. Callidora's grandson, Frank is the reigning Duke though he is along with the Duchess-consort, retired at St. Mungos due to exposure to the Cruciatius.

Hints of this will appear in future chapters, but here's the basic gist! From time to time,
certain aspects of the world that we are building will be shared here.

Hope you enjoy!

-emf911
A Cauldron of Hot, Strong Love...and Dissolutions

Chapter Summary

The curtain is drawn behind the scenes of part of the escape of notorious, mass murderer, Sirius Black from the secure fortress of Azkaban; while the early morning following the meeting of Harry Potter and Milton Ashcroft, Mr. Ashcroft arranges a meeting with a potential ally to secure a much valued objective while uncovering some unsavory details about Harry's life on Privet Drive...

Chapter Notes

* - This chapter contains lyrics from the song, 'A Cauldron Full of Hot, Strong Love' by Celestina Warbeck which is featured at the Wizarding World of Harry Potter. All rights to that song and its associated performer belong to J.K. Rowling, Warner Bros., and all respective publishing companies associated with Harry Potter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

July 29, 2003

I've got a cauldron full of hot, strong love
And it's bubbling for you!
Say Incendio, but that spell's not hot
As my special witch's brew!

Don't you be afraid, come and take a sip
Of this steamy, tasty treat!
What's in my cauldron full of hot, strong love
Will make your life complete!*

As the Singing Sorceress belted out the lyrics to 'A Cauldron of Hot, Strong Love', Dekker Dyer
hummed along—horribly out of tune, of course, but then considering that he was nearing his 100th birthday, it was perhaps, excusable that his scratchy and hoarse voice couldn’t hold up against the bombastic flare of Celestina Warbeck.

Grunting as another stiff blast of icy wind flared through the tiny, near-invisible cracks in the mortar of his tiny brick watchmen's cottage, the old wizard scowled fiercely as he renewed the Warming Charms that he had on his robes, in an effort to insulate himself from the wet spray and frigid chill of the North Sea.

It was at times like this that Dyer was tempted to think that mayhaps, those Muggles had the right of it, introducing trousers for the men-folk. Now, no mistake, he was a proper law-abiding wizard and didn't truck with the modern fashions that advocated the wearing of trousers underneath the robes. All the same, when the weather was as poor as this, he wondered how it might feel to have his legs secure against the chill without having to expend magic constantly to keep warm...

Silently cursing to himself about the ruinous expense of self-warming robes, the old watchman puttered around his tiny dwelling place, putting the finishing touches to his special home brewed warming tea, as the water in the kettle boiled gradually underneath the flame of a Incendio-induced fire in the tiny hearth. It had been three days since the delegation from the Ministry had arrived to visit Azkaban and inspect the conditions of the prisoners. It had been a larger delegation than usual, since that Cornelius Fudge had finally stirred himself to actually visit the bloody prison for the first time since he was elected to the bleeding office!

He snorted derisively at the memory. The young sod was dreadfully out of shape and clearly out of his depth. Had been gibbering with panic when they had emerged from the secure Floo, didn't even have the decency to greet Dyer or his counterparts who had all gathered after long shifts to greet the Ministry representatives!

No, Cornelius Fudge was too much of a boot-licker, too pompous, too soft. Nothing at all like Madame Bones of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, who made monthly trips to Azkaban and had the bloody decency to exchange basic pleasantries like educated decent folk! Or Director Crouch, who would sometimes spend hours here at the cottage, conversing with the watchmen on duty about the conditions of the journey to the thrice-damned prison, making arrangements for the reinforcement of the highly classified protective enchantments that mimicked the properties of the Patronous Charm and kept the terrifying Dementors from neglecting their duties to prey upon hardworking, decent folk!

Hell, it was more likely that Fudge was trying to shore up support for his inevitable re-election bid that was set to begin early next year if the rumors were true—and as he had received the information from his cousin's nephew, Ozzy Mugwort, who worked in the Office of the Wizengamot, he’d bet his last good bottle of Ogden's that it was true—and was trying to show himself to be a gentle-wizard of stern principle...
As old Dyer recalled with derision memories of the way that Fudge had made an absolute ass of himself during the occasion of his state visit, he abruptly stilled as he heard a queer whistle of sound that seemed different from the howling of the winds and crashing waves.

"What is Merlin's good name?" he muttered to himself, lowering the dulcet tones of Warbeck with an irritable wave of his wand. Straining his ears, he willed himself to block out the typical sounds of the waves, the wind and even the faint echoes of the screams of the benighted prisoners who were getting their just deserts for their criminal obstinacy.

There!

A low-pitched, growling sound that gradually faded away...only to be replaced by a bone-chilling howl that split the air and caused all of the hairs on his skin to pitch straight up.

Dyer's blood froze.

What in the blazes was going on out there?

Muttering imprecations to himself, Dyer stalked over to the rack, snatching up his outer cloak. Swinging the thick material over himself, he made sure to cast multiple Warming and Water-Repelling Charms on it, before drawing up the hood over his stringy white hair. Wand in hand, he tapped the ward unlocking sequence that would lower the protections on the cottage before opening the door, cringing at the blast of wind that hit his face from the onset.

Steeling himself, he stepped out into the howling maelstrom that was a side effect of the natural conditions of the North Sea and the combined presence of the largest colony of Dementors located in the Western Hemisphere. Needless to say, it was a chaotic mess. Dyer peered into the darkness, trying to discern any unusual shapes, but couldn't see farther than his nose was the rain pelted against his face and bounced off of his cloak.

"Lumos!" hissed Dyer, extending his wand into the raging gloom. As the tip of his wand began to glimmer with light, the old man began sweeping the wand to the left and to the right, looking for anything out of the ordinary. Buffeted by the strong gusts of winds, Dyer fought to keep his purchase as he turned his head this way and that.

Nothing.
The ugly, naked water-lashed rocks were bare and inhospitable as ever. Nothing appeared to be out of place.

Dyer frowned.

Had he just imagined the howls then? He could of sworn that some kind of animal had been making that queer noise—

A sudden loud crack preceded a second before white-hot fire exploded across the back of old Dyer's head. With a strangled yell of surprised agony, the old watchman lost his grip on his wand as he fell onto the slippery, bare rocks and blacked out into unconsciousness.

Behind him—barely a feet away from where he lay, face down, a trickle of blood matting the snowy head of hair at the base of his skull—a tall, frightful looking man swayed on his feet, before his knees buckled and dropping the rock that he used to knock out old Dekker Dyer, slumped to his knees in abject exhaustion.

For several minutes, he stooped there, senseless and heedless to the wind ripping at his tattered rags and stringy, unkempt hair or the rain lashing at his emaciated form from every angle.

And then...

Laughter.

The sound of the man's laugh would have given even Dementors occasion to pause in consternation. Harsh and ragged, like one drawing ones fingers down a chalkboard, each vibration creating the sensation of knives ripping at his long disused vocal cords, nevertheless he laughed. Laughed in a chaotic mix of triumph, childish delight, consternation at how low he had fallen, and eager anticipation of the violence that he planned on inflicting on a certain traitorous wretch in due time...

As the broken sounds petered away in the face of the wind's howls and screams, the man dragged himself over to where the watchman had fallen. He didn't even know the old bastard's name, but as he quickly smothered the faintest stirrings of guilt that might have been far stronger a lifetime ago, he pawed at the man's clothing and hands, desperate to claim the object that had prompted his little act of baiting the man to come out of the safety of his warded nest.
Blinded by the stinging rain, he growled unconsciously as he rifled through the robes, desperation now burning its unnatural light in his eyes.

Where was it? It had been in the man's hands just moments before! It was the object of his desire, the thing that he needed most of all if his little scheme of escape and vengeance was to ever become more than a desperate, final gamble of a hopeless man. Where was the damned stick?!

With a distinctly canine snap of his jaws, the assailant left the prone form of the old man in disgust and blindly grasped out into the darkness, scrabbling against the rocks with bloody fingers as he sought out his prize. He needed it, had to have it, wanted it, needed it, needed it, needed it, needed it—

A flailing hand slapped down on a thin, grooved tapered piece of wood.

There!

Sucking in his breath, the man rejoiced in the sting and rush of stilted power that welled to the surface as his magic sought to connect to a wand that wasn't intended for his particular signature.

Once upon a time, in a different life, the man might have felt discontent with the limited magic that he would be able to push through this wand. But in this life? It would do, it would more than do!

Throwing back his head, the man howled in triumph, yellowed teeth bared in a rictus of a grin as thoughts of all that he would be able to do now rushed through his admittedly damaged mind.

It was a good quarter of an hour before he caught hold of himself, registering with faint shock the fact that he was soaked to the skin, and absolutely ravenous.

Spying the stone cottage that stood, not fifty feet away from where he was now sprawled, the man staggered to his feet. He took two wavering steps forward and froze.

Turned.
And studied the crumpled form of the man that he had lured out with a few howls.

After a few minutes of indecision, he extended the wand at the unconscious watchman.

"Mobilicorpus."

Only to scowl dreadfully when the old man didn't even so much as twitch.

With a growl, he stabbed the wand at the man and willed his power to flow through the wand.

"Mobilicorpus!"

The second time appeared to do the trick, as the old man began to float up. For a brief moment, the assailant was tempted to throw the wand up in delight, but managed to catch the impulse and stifle it. He had no compunction of knocking the poor blighter out, but the last thing he needed was to have the charge of yet another murder lodged against his name...

As steadily as he could, he drew the floating body after him as he staggered towards the cottage. Luckily, though the stones rang with a wealth of protective and repelling enchantments to prevent unauthorized persons from breaching the walls, they were for the most part, disabled. He successfully managed to draw the old man in and directed his form to the cot that appeared to be where the man slept.

That taken care of, the assailant fell upon the edibles out in the open with a vengeance. It wasn't much, just a strong tea, some Ogden's firewhiskey and bread and cheese, but to the man who had so rarely gotten anything of substance to eat, and when fed only given a thin, gray slop of a gruel, the simple repast was as ambrosia.

Shoveling down the food, he washed it down with the scalding hot tea, ignoring the burn as it swept down his throat and lit a veritable fire in his belly that swept through his bones and reverberated to the very tips of his fingers.

Sighing in contentment, he idly considered a place in the corner that would make the perfect area to shift and catch a quick kip, but he resisted the temptation. He had stayed nearby for far too long as it was. If the Dementors hadn't caught on to his little disappearing act, they would in a matter of hours and then the hunt would be on.
If he was to accomplish his mission before getting re-captured and killed, he needed to move and move, now.

Feeling far stronger than he had for a very long time, the man made a salute with the stolen wand towards the true owner.

"Apologies," rasped the assailant. "but I'll be keeping the wand. Much to do, I'm afraid. My best chance at killing him at last is with this. Your sacrifice is most appreciated."

With that, he gathered the bag containing the herbs to the tea that clearly was designed to keep one warm in the midst of severe chill and the remnants of the firewhiskey and tucked it into a cloak that he found hanging on a hook. Not nearly as good as the one that the old man was wearing, but--well, he'd taken enough from the poor bastard. Throwing the cloak over his thin shoulders, he absently began singing a hauntingly familiar tune to himself as he prepared to use a spell that if successful, would enable him to jump to any point that he wished:

"Happy birthday to you,
Happy birthday to you,
Happy birthday dear Harry...
Happy birthday to you."

Drawing on the tattered reserves of his magic, he spun in place and disappeared from the old stone cottage with a crackling snap.

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August 7, 2003
It was nearing the end of a long, long day at the practice that he had established with the Hon. Wimbledon Carrodock in 1952. Business had been good to their practice, as they had developed early on a reputation for fastidious research and able implementation of the laws on behalf of their clientele. Their reputation had received a significant boost in the mid-60s when the late Charlus Potter, Earl of Stinchcombe had personally visited the firm in order to hire Oliver as the chief solicitor for the Ancient and Noble House of Potter, with Marsden and Carrodock held as the de facto legal firm of the powerful and influential family. Although Oliver was no longer associated with that House, due to the chaos of the war and the unfortunate demise of Lord Charlus' eldest son and daughter-in-law, James and Lily Potter, he often thought about his time serving the Potters and the business relationship that had morphed to a warm collegial relationship with Charlus Potter. Since the demise of that family and the seclusion of the infamous scion of that House, he had often wondered about the House of his former employer and patron.

Despite that loss, Marsden and Carrodock had continued to attract a wide variety of work from all corners of the British Isles and so the firm continued to work, review and create contracts, investigate the various legal quandaries of their clients and continued to provide the best service that lay in their power to grant their retainers.

Old Carrodock had in recent years drawn back from the work as he got on in age, which left Oliver dealing with signing off of the paperwork and the filing of legal briefs, and subsequently led to his exhausted mien. He was beginning to think that it was high time to consider hiring a few more assistants in the coming weeks. This was the tenth time this month that he had ended up spending more than a fourteen hour work day locked up in the confines of their appropriately sized office, located in the easternmost Rhombus Alley that formed—along with the other five—the heart of London's magical business district. It was work that he enjoyed, but enough was enough. His body was beginning to feel the strain.

Sighing, Oliver massaged his hands briefly before steeling himself to take care of the last notarization of documents that had to be filed within three days' time, when a harsh croak and the repetitive taps on the window caused him to start in surprise and wheel around to investigate the sudden noise.

There, tapping away at the window was a large, ebony coloured raven. It appeared to have a roll of parchment tied to one of it's legs, clearly designating it as a messenger raven, akin to a post owl.

Surprised, for correspondence normally never arrived this late to the office, Oliver nevertheless waved his wand in the pattern that would allow the raven to pass through the window pane and
deliver its burden. Leaning forward in his chair, Oliver watched, bemused as the large and handsome creature flew in and landed upon the bare centimeters of his mahogany desk that wasn't overflowing with some form of paperwork. As it extended its wings, Oliver was startled as exposure to the magi's lights floating near the ceiling revealed glints of a startling crimson edging the raven's wings. It lifted its leg and extended it towards Oliver with another croak.

Setting down his wand, Oliver loosed the ribbon tying the parchment to the raven's leg and removed the parchment. He expected the raven to fly back as soon as its message was delivered, but the raven ruffled its feathers and merely cocked it's head to the side as it eyed Oliver silently. Clearly, it was expecting a reply back.

"Curiouser and curioser," murmured Oliver as he picked up his wand and ran through the many detection spells that lay in his repertoire; Years of experience as a solicitor had taught him the value of screening all of his incoming mail, for at times a client's adversary might attempt to strike back at the client through their legal representative.

Nothing. The parchment was free of coercive enchantments or poison of any kind, equally free of malignant curses. That was good.

Picking up the roll, Oliver looked it over with rising interest. Who could be writing to him at this hour, and for what purpose? As he turned the roll over, the seal that bound the letter came into sharp relief. He sucked in a breath when he saw the crest on the seal. It was the emblem of a raven soaring in flight, three stars in a triangular position around the great avian avatar. Below the feet of the eagle was a capital A, cunningly devised. This was certainly a seal of an Ancient and Most Noble House, an imprint of the signet ring of the Head of House. His suspicions were heightened when he brushed his hand over the seal. It flared with a bright light for a second, then the seal broke, unlocking it’s contents for his perusal. He scanned the parchment, eyes widening at the words found:

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To the Hon. Oliver S. Marsden, Esq.

o0o

Dear Mr. Marsden,
Greetings.

A matter of great urgency has arisen between us, one which must be settled, immediately. To that end, you are cordially invited to join me for an early morning tea, to be held at the Leaky Cauldron tomorrow, no later than five thirty AM. The innkeeper will direct you to the private room which will be hired for this purpose.

Please notify me of your reception of this notice promptly. You may direct your response to me via my familiar, who will wait to take back your response.

With many thanks for your prompt attention—

I remain,

HRH The Grand Duke of Henamoor

Order of Merlin, Second Class, Grand Sorcerer, Headmaster Emeritus of Ilvermony School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Pres. Emeritus of MACUSA, Minister Emeritus for the Eastern Territories of Albion,

Mugwump Councilor of the International Confederation of Wizards,

Head of the Noble and Most Ancient House of Ashcroft

The letter was signified below with the sigil of the House of Ashcroft.

Nerveless fingers allowed the parchment to fall to the desk, and Oliver rocked back in his chair in shock. Ashcroft! That was a name that he hadn't heard mentioned outside of historical records of the Great War for decades! The head of that family had not been seen in Britain for years, having accepted the post of Minister for Magic for the Eastern American Territories of Albion and simultaneously the post of Headmaster for Ilvermony School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, a remarkable institute of magic located in North America which was in many ways, a true sister school to Hogwarts.

Since the departure of the last known Ashcroft, a Milton Ashcroft if he wasn't mistaken, there had been no news of anyone invoking the name of that family or attempting to claim the Wizengamot
seat that belonged to that House. No proxies, or claimants, nothing. And now, out of the blue, a letter arrives out of nowhere written by the long absent Head of that reclusive noble House with an abrupt order to dine with him the next morning?

For that was what this message was—a pleasant and cordial worded order perhaps, but most definitely an order.

Flabbergasted, Oliver considered the parchment he had dropped out of shock. What in the name of Merlin could this be about? He had heard of the reclusive Grand Duke of course, but he had never been granted an audience with him, ever. Not even when he and his office had been the official solicitor of Lord Charlus Potter—

Oliver stilled.

Lord Potter? That struck a strange cord in his mind, something that he had learned about his former employer when evaluating the offer that the older gentleman had kindly offered a young, up-and-coming solicitor so many years before...

Rising swiftly, he stepped around his desk and rushed towards the large filing cabinet that contained much of his older records of past clients. Tapping it in a pattern designed to serve as a sort of password, he yanked the upper cabinet door as soon as the wards receded and began to rifle through everything that he had collected over the long years of his service to Lord Charlus, until he found sheaves of old parchment that held copies of his original interview notes. Yanking them out, he returned to his desk and settling heavily into the chair, began to pore through the notes he had taken. The next few minutes were full of the sound of rustling papers and muttered imprecations that peppered the air as he searched for anything that might have related to this mysterious summons.

As his eye trailed down the sixth page of the notes, he stopped suddenly as he located the information that he had recorded so long ago:

His Lordship appears to be unusually close to the Head of the Noble and Most Ancient House of Ashcroft, the pair reportedly constantly visiting restaurants and other places of leisure in the other's company when not accompanied by a companion for the evening (or in Lord Potter's case, his wife the Lady Dorea Potter. Possibly a cause for concern if potential enemies might make much out of it in the papers, but nothing that requires any immediate attention. Still, it pays to be
Oliver smiled grimly, his mind racing at the potential implications of what he had re-read. Was it possible that Lord Ashcroft desired a meeting with regard to a matter related to the late Lord Potter? If so, why now after so many decades of absence from matters especially concerning Britain? Why not before when the late Lord had passed away so many years ago?

Had Lord Potter mentioned Oliver to His Royal Highness, who might now be in need of legal counsel and representation?

More importantly, how should he respond to this letter?

Oliver considered carefully the pros and cons of accepting or refusing the offer of a social superior such as the Grand Duke of Henamoor. It was certainly possible to simply refuse to attend. A move like that however would create untold problems for Oliver and Marsden & Croddock, domestically and internationally. Not only was Lord Ashcroft reportedly a very elite dignitary as a former Minister for Magic as well as a former Headmaster of one of the top schools in the world, but he was one of the most powerful figures within the Wizengamot. To refuse would be a massive insult, which could lead to political and economic suicide. One other option would be to demand to know the reason why he was summoned, but again, that would most likely backfire. He briefly contemplated those options, but ultimately he had them discarded. In spite of the abrupt nature of the summons, there was nothing that could be done about it. He would have to attend. And the part of him that had been despairing over the monotony that he had been laboring under for the past several weeks was in all honesty, quite intrigued.

In the end, his decision was clear.

He would attend.

Swiftly, Oliver secured an envelope, parchment, quill and ink, and penned his response:
To His Royal Highness

The Grand Duke of Henamoor, O.M. 2nd Class, G.S., H.Em., P.Em., M.Em., M.C.

August 7, 2003
Room Ten
The Leaky Cauldron
Diagon Alley, London
Albion

Dear Sir,

I am most humbly honored to receive such a kind invitation to have tea with Your Royal Highness at the Leaky Cauldron, tomorrow morning. I write to inform Your Royal Highness that I accept the invitation and will be pleased to meet and discuss matters of import and mutual appreciation.

I look forward with great anticipation to an audience with Your Royal Highness.

I have the honour Sir, of remaining Your Royal Highness's most humble and obedient servant,

Oliver S. Marsden, Esq.,
After critically examining the address on the envelope as well as the contents of his response, Oliver removed any smudges with a wave of his wand and a whispered spell, and neatly folded and inserted his response. That done, he sealed it with the office seal for Marsden & Carrodock and securing it to the ribbon, held it out for Lord Ashcroft’s familiar to take.

“I will have you know my fine feathered friend, your master has cut it quite close with his summons,” he said to the familiar, a tone of mild reproach in his voice. “Still, I’m sure that there is a very good reason for such an abrupt invitation for a meeting. We shall see on the morrow. Fly swiftly.”

The raven cawed once as if in agreement, then held out its leg, taking off as soon as it was secure. It swooped about the room once and then aimed at the same window it came through. Another wave of his wand, and the raven familiar shot forward, harmlessly passing through the enchantments to soar out into the night.

Oliver turned back to his stack of parchment and letters, but after a few minutes of listless work allowed his mind to drift, his thoughts whirling around as he pondered the possible reason for the meeting. A feeling crept over him, one of great foreboding. Whatever the reason, Oliver had the uncomfortable feeling that this meeting would set in motion a series of unforeseen events that could prove momentous indeed for the fortunes of Marsden & Carrodock. And if the subject matter truly had some links to matters concerning the Ancient and Noble House of Potter...

Something was definitely in the works, though for good or ill remained yet to be determined...
The sun had barely begun to rise in the clear London sky the next morning when in a burst of emerald flame, Oliver Marsden strode out of the designated Floo area, and made his way into the parlor of the Leaky Cauldron. As it was quite early in the morning, most of the current residents were snoozing away peacefully in their beds. For a brief moment, Oliver longed for his own comfortable bed. He had been inundated with paperwork for the last several weeks and he had wanted to sleep in…

He broke his train of thought as he espied the manager of the establishment, Tom pointing his wand, setting up tables and chairs with his usual energy and cheerfulness. Tom, caught sight of him and with a whirl of his wand set the other tables and chairs to ordering themselves. He bustled over, bowing low when he arrived before him.

“Ah, Mr. Marsden,” he said in greeting. “Right on time, as usual.”

Oliver smiled openly at the gregarious innkeeper, giving a short bow of his own.

“It has been too long, Tom.” Oliver said in reply. “I assume you will show me to the room?”

With another bow, Tom guided him over to one of the private meeting rooms. The door was closed, but Oliver sensed the presence of a wizard of immense power, tightly held under control. It appeared His Royal Highness was already waiting inside.

With a swift knock, Tom opened the door and bowed Oliver through. He left quickly, closing the door behind him. Hesitantly, Oliver slowly surveyed the room, noting the cheerfully crackling fire in the small fireplace, and the sparse yet well maintained furnishings of the room. He then turned to a table near the fire which was set for tea. Already a steaming pot of tea rested there, along with two place settings and a plate bearing a selection of scones, and various types of biscuits. Other bowls held selections of fresh fruit, clotted cream, and sugar or honey for the tea. As he examined the table, he noticed that one side of the table held an empty chair. The other side, however, held two chairs. one of which was occupied. In the chair sat a man, of middle age in appearance, completely bald, like Tom the innkeeper. He was dressed in a crisp Muggle suit of tweed, with a dark red cashmere vest over a white dress shirt. His eyebrows were grey, though he bore no beard or mustache. His eyes were an ice cold blue, and glimmered with hints of his mastery of magic.

His Royal Highness the Grand Duke of Henamoor, Milton Ashcroft held an assessing gaze as he eyed Oliver. Flushing slightly at the scrutiny, Oliver bowed his head in greeting, very much mindful of his authority.
“Your Highness,” said Oliver, reverently. The man looked faintly amused as he inclined his head in turn.

“Mr. Marsden,” he said pleasantly. “Thank you for coming. Before we get to the matter at hand, perhaps you would like to join me for some tea?”

He gestured towards the tea service, and Oliver smiled slightly as he made his way to the empty chair across from Lord Ashcroft and sat down.

“Thank you sir,” said Oliver, solemnly. “I must admit to being a mite peckish. These scones do look quite lovely.”

“They should,” said the high noble with a faint smirk on his face. “I asked Tom to prepare them specifically for our meeting. They are raspberry scones with a hint of essence of orange and honey. They are quite good. And as we are here to discuss matters of mutual importance to the both of us, I must insist that your speak comfortably to me. I admit that I’m plagued with a myriad of titles, but 'Mr. Ashcroft' will do fine, 'Lord Ashcroft', if such informality offends your sensibilities.”

Oliver's eyes grew brighter upon hearing that. He had been concerned that this meeting would include a great deal of bowing and scrapping, as some of the Heads of the Noble Houses tended to prefer. He was admittedly surprised at the older wizard's refreshing candor. That was not something seen very often among the affluent and elite of magi society.

Lord Ashcroft presided over the tea, pouring the tea and mixing it according to their preferred specifications. As they had tea for the first ten minutes, they kept the conversations to benign topics such as a rather humorous incident that befell one of the representatives of the negotiation dispute Oliver had been called to oversee the previous week, or a brief overview of the improvements made to the Grand Duke's newest venture, a private boarding academy for young people in need of assistance or trapped in unfortunate circumstances who possessed magical gifts.

It was an enlightening half-hour overall, as the two men became acquainted with each other and shared the highlights of their respective professions with the other. Oliver was pleased to discover that the nobleman was a well learned and open minded man, who clearly had a passion for teaching and reaching out to the underprivileged and those whose powers were often triggered by traumatic and frankly horrendous incidents that often threatened harm to their persons. And there were times when the older man would make a certain turn of phrase, or share a humorous anecdote that Oliver was strongly reminded of his former patron and employer, who too had often reminded Oliver that if formality had to be observed, to simply refer to him as 'Lord Potter', but preferred to be acknowledged as simply, 'Charlus'.
At last however—after the last scone had been consumed, and the final cup of tea drunk—Lord Ashcroft brought the conversation over to the purpose of their meeting.

“I myself have only recently arrived here in London,” began Ashcroft as he faced Oliver over the small table. “Only a week ago in fact. I’ve been tasked with business by the Educational Secretariat of the ICW and elected to lodge here, while members of my staff check on some of the holdings of my House to determine an appropriate site to establish my residence. A few days ago, something rather remarkable occurred. I was working on business matters when I sensed a strong outburst of magical energy. This appeared to me to be quite unusual Mr. Marsden, because of two things I was able to note about it. One, it was clear that whoever had released that wave of magic had to be a young witch or wizard, one under a great deal of stress or danger. The second thing was even more remarkable, as that outburst manifested itself outside of magical London and in an almost wholly Muggle area of residence.”

Oliver frowned thoughtfully as he listened to Lord Ashcroft’s account. A powerful burst of magic from an entirely Muggle area? From a partially or even untrained witch or wizard? This was not his area of expertise, however he imagined that the Ministry should have procedures set in place in the event that a prospective magi, living among Muggles would be detected. It appeared however, by the sound of things that such procedures were evidently not in place. He focused upon Lord Ashcroft, who continued his narrative.

“I sensed that whoever this young individual might be, it would behoove me to get involved and at least investigate it’s cause, to determine if any aid was needed. I set a watch on that area, so that I could be alerted if any further outbursts occurred. Imagine my dismay, when another pulse of magic, an even stronger one than the one I felt a few days previous erupted in that exact same spot. A burst of energy, that this time was strong enough to be detected by the Ministry of Magic.”

Ashcroft paused at this point to pour himself a fresh cup of tea, while Oliver sat back, flabbergasted. Powerful enough to be sensed by the Ministry and Ashcroft? The child must be powerful indeed!

After taking a sip of his tea, Ashcroft continued. “I knew I must get to the source of that power first before the Ministry workers came and mucked everything up. So, I Apparated at once to the location of the disturbance. I found myself in a charming Muggle town,” and here he flicked Oliver an inscrutable glance, almost as if he were searching for something, “on a street known as Magnolia Crescent, in the town of Little Whinging, where I met the most interesting young man, heavily bruised on his face and neck, with all of his possessions in an old school trunk.”

And now, he speared Oliver with a charged look.

“Imagine my shock and great dismay when during our introduction to each other, I learned that the
source of the outburst was none other than the grandson of my closest ally and friend, Lord Charlus Potter?"

Oliver frowned.

Grandson? Why, but then that would mean it was—

Alarms burst in Oliver’s mind and his eyes widened in unfettered shock, his face blanching white as he sat very still in his chair. *Outrageous!* His mind cried out, *Impossible!* It couldn’t possibly be…

Harry Potter? *The Boy-Who-Lived*?

And yet, one look at Lord Ashcroft confirmed the conclusion that Oliver's own mental processes had led him to. Unnerved and appalled, Oliver began to feel waves of heavy, rich magic begin to beat around him as it flooded the room. The man across from him, hadn’t moved as much as an inch from his spot. His face maintain a pleasant, neutral appearance. His eyes, however blazed with wrath as he shared his tale with him. He was enraged.

As was Oliver for that matter.

Lord Charlus had been one of his earliest patrons and one of the kindest and most personable men that Oliver had ever had the pleasure of working on behalf of, before or since. He had dearly treasured the memories of his association with the deceased Earl, and to think that his grandson, Charlus's grandson had been harmed by Muggles...

His magic was hardly at the level to compete with the behemoth force that was the Grand Duke's magical aura, but Oliver's eyes sparked with his own rising fury as he stared, open-mouthed at Lord Ashcroft. The elder statesman, for his part smiled grimly as he observed Oliver's reaction to the startling and scandalous news.

"Do you know who could have placed Mr. Potter there?" inquired Oliver, after finally recovering his ability to speak coherently.

"Not as of yet," scowled Lord Ashcroft. "I'm beginning however to draw a very short list of potential suspects who could be responsible for Harry's placement with his clearly unbalanced
Muggle relatives. Young Harry is the son of a member of the Ecclesia Arcanum*, a scion of an Ancient and Noble House. He still has living relatives, however distant, who could have fostered him in Albion, rather than the United Kingdom. I could have easily have accepted the task, had I been consulted on the matter. The fact that he was not, and that the facts have been covered up, is most alarming and indicative of only a few high placed individuals within the Ministry or potentially the Wizengamot who could have the political reach and the will to keep him in anonymity, completely unknowledgeable of his family's historical significance to the fabric of our society and their place within the hierarchy of nobility, while successfully fooling the rest of the magi public into believing that he was being raised by suitable persons who were helping him prepare to assume his place when he returned to public view, upon attending Hogwarts."

Oliver winced at the outrage, the picture that the Grand Duke painted with his reasoning evoked. To keep a young man as affluent politically—for the very fact that he defeated You-Know-Who alone!—and socially was a unforgivable violation of custom, and smacked of manipulation of the highest order. He could hardly imagine how the poor lad must have felt, making social gaffes unwittingly, possibly sparking potential feuds and stirring resentment amongst his social peers without a clue of what was occurring!

It was insanity of the lowest order! And yet, had not the papers waxed on rhapsodically in years past about how Harry Potter's training and development were proceeding apace? Had not the Chief Warlock himself, in public statements within the halls of the Wizengamot itself spoken about how happy and adjusted the orphaned boy was in his secure location—

And then, Oliver's heart froze.

Incredulously, his eyes snapped forward to Lord Ashcroft, who eyed him knowingly.

Unconsciously, Oliver could feel himself shaking his head in a vain attempt to deny the thought that suddenly blossomed in his mind as he considered what he had read in the papers and heard over the Wizard Wireless.

Could Albus Dumbledore, Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, the head of the Mugwump Council in the International Confederation of Wizards have illegally fostered the Boy Who Lived with abusive Muggles?!

Mouth agape, he stared in horror at his host who sighed, heavily.

"I know what it is that is in your mind," he murmured in quiet rage. "I found myself unable to rest at all last night, attempting to trace together any clues that would enable me to determine who must
be called to account for this horrendous betrayal, which would have sent Charlus and James, to speak nothing of Lily into apoplectic fits of fury, were they still alive to witness this. And I find myself suspecting the very one who you seem to have connected the dots to."

He didn't name who he suspected was responsible, but he didn't have to. Oliver could hear the unuttered name as clearly as if it had been shouted from a rooftop.

The two men lapsed into a dark and brooding silence that endured for a number of minutes as they considered the mounting evidence. Finally when Oliver could endure the silence no longer, he lifted his head and focused his gaze upon the Grand Duke.

"What would you have me do, Lord Ashcroft?" he asked.

Lord Ashcroft considered him silently for a moment more before a small smile of satisfaction emerged.

"If you are amenable to work with me on this matter," he said carefully, "then I would like to invite you to join me for a early morning excursion to the lovely town of Little Whinging, Surrey. I believe that it would behoove us to confirm our suspicions, and evaluate the circumstances before making further movements."

Now it was Oliver's turn to hold Lord Ashcroft in careful scrutiny as he considered the statesman's words.

"And should the results of our investigation be confirmed?" he inquired.

The Grand Duke smiled, but a smile that promised only unpleasant things to his foes.

"Then my good sir," he replied, "I would like to request your professional advice on this potential solution...".

As Oliver listened to the proposed solution from the nobleman, his eyes grew wider as he considered the implications and attempted to map up the potential challenges and consequences of such a solution. He remained silent as Lord Ashcroft completed the revelation of his strategy and studied him for a few moments as Oliver pondered what he had heard. Finally, he heard Lord Ashcroft sigh as he leaned forward in his chair towards Oliver.
"I see that you are mapping out the various trails that will develop through this action," he deduced shrewdly. "Is this viable?"

"It sounds, sir that this could indeed be a viable solution should the worst be proven true," said Oliver thoughtfully. "The question lies however, in your authority to enforce such a solution. Without a viable legal rationale or provision given by the Estate...this can be challenged by the Ministry at the very least and seems indeed to be a certainty should he decide to throw his weight behind such a movement."

"Ah yes," drawled Lord Ashcroft, his eyes gleaming with an unreadable emotion. "My old friend. Should he attempt to get involved, it will be a bother, yes, but ultimately of no avail. I have one ace up my sleeve that will countermand any argument that disaffected parties might seek to bring to bear."

Noting Oliver's confusion, Lord Ashcroft lowered his voice and shared what he had shared with no other soul for over twenty years save for the subject of his brief addendum. When finished, he leaned back and sipped on his cooling tea as Oliver stared, completely unmoored by what he heard.

"By all of the gods..." breathed Oliver. "This will change...everything!"

Milton smiled thinly.

"Precisely."

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As the sun shone over the houses lined around Privet Drive, many of its inhabitants were still asleep. It was the summer holidays still, so it was considered perfectly acceptable to sleep in until eight o’clock or even nine…

In any case, it was well that the streets were practically deserted at this early hour. For moving down the street of Privet Drive were two strange men. The first man was well dressed in a tweed suit over a white shirt and red vest. The most unusual thing about his appearance was that he bore a
cane that strangely enough was topped by a silver effigy of a raven's head.

The second man, on the other hand was quite a few years younger than his companion and a couple of inches shorter. His state of dress however, would alarm all of the good housewives of Privet Drive and set the street aflame with gossip, for he dressed very strangely; a long, flowing robe was his outfit, with a strange cap upon his head. The crowning jewel of his...atypical attire however was the long, slender stick that he carried in his right hand. He would have been the talk of the neighborhood if even one gossiping biddy would have noticed him that morning.

But of course, no one did. Because they had no idea that the strange pair were even there. For as they strode towards their target destination, the man in the strange dress, one Oliver Marsden, had his wand extended, even as they moved forward, quietly murmuring a spell of concealment. To the uninitiated eye, there was nothing there.

Both Oliver Marsden and the man next to him, Lord Milton Ashcroft, had grim looks on their faces as they stood in front of Number Four, Privet Drive. As they faced the house which to all appearances seemed perfectly normal, Lord Ashcroft observed Oliver’s look of hesitancy and doubt which had to be gnawing at him deep within the labyrinth of his mind.

“There's nothing for it, Mr. Marsden.” Ashcroft said, as gently as he dared. “The truth must be made known. You would never forgive yourself if it were otherwise.”

His words at first did not seem to register with the younger wizard and solicitor, but after a moment, Ashcroft observed as the slumped shoulders rose some, and a look of stern resolve affixed itself upon Oliver's face.

“You're right of course, sir,” murmured Oliver quietly. "We need to uncover the truth."

Lord Ashcroft nodded, pleased at the response. Closing his eyes, he lifted his hand and began feeling for any emanations of ambient magic. It had not escaped his notice that every time he attempted to See through the eyes of his familiar, Bran, he would constantly find it almost impossible to focus on his task and would inevitably re-direct his focus to less important matters or find his mind wandering in circles. That was no accident. He suspected that it was the work of a powerful ward of some kind. And if the one he was increasingly beginning to think responsible for this travesty was in truth responsible, it would be a work of magic both subtle and yet extraordinarily powerful. Even if the brief flashes his bond to Bran had allowed him to glimpse, of a flare of crimson energy collapsing as heated words were exchanged between the woman who must be connected to Harry's mother and Harry himself was correct, there should still be significant residual magic that lingered. It was a fundamental principle of the mystic arts that powerful magic left lingering traces.
And...there.

He smiled grimly as he felt the spark of energy push against his probe. It appeared that their hypothesis was proving more and more sound...

Opening his eyes again, he turned to meet the bemused glance of his companion.

"It appears, Mr. Marsden that our suspicions are nearer the mark, as I feared. There was a powerful field of magic that emanated from this house until very recently. I can only assume that it was some kind of repelling ward. Protective most likely, but designed to prevent human practitioners of magic to gain any access to this place, and presumably, the child inside. It appears to be tied to blood, though I'm not fully certain how or why. Those questions however will have to wait. Thankfully I can get a clearer picture of what kind of magic once emanated from this place. There is a spell that should do the trick nicely."

Turning back towards the house, he squared his shoulders and closed his eyes once more, reaching within himself for the reserves of powerful magic which led him to be both beloved and sometimes feared by much of the magical community which he had served for several decades. He raised his hands and extended them towards the house as he felt the slumbering energies begin to stir.

“You might want to strengthen your concealment charms,” he suggested wryly as he focused on his task. “This might be more colorful than expected.”

Without anymore warning, Ashcroft’s eyes snapped open, and he loudly uttered a sharp Word of command. Oliver’s eyes widened as a rich spring of magic began to well up from the former Headmaster and percolated between his palms. Hastily, he extended his wand and drawing upon his own reserves of power, reinforced the concealment charms blanketing the street and containing the other wizard's magic. Again, he was sharply reminded that the Grand Duke of Henamoor was among the few Grand Sorcerers of the likes not seen in the Isles since the days of the Founders of Hogwarts, and the brothers Peverell. clearly on a par with the wizard famous for the defeat of the Dark Lord Grindlewald. He felt the heavy weight of the older man’s magic as it pooled in front of him.

When Ashcroft had his power focused as densely as he dared, he brought to his mind the image of Lily Potter as he remembered her, young and vibrant with beauty and magic, the way she had been when she had served as the apprentice of the Charms Professor at Ilvermony during the 80s, when he had been Headmaster. He focused on the truth of her likely willing sacrifice for the sake of her infant son. He then focused on the bonds of blood which should be linking the protection Lily’s death laid upon Harry with his blood relatives.
“Sit vincula sanguinis, qui effusus est esse revelatum,” Lord Ashcroft intoned in a stern voice, sharp with his Mastery. “Ego, ut vincula familia esse ostendiur.” As he completed his chant, he winced as the magic in his grasp stretched taut and jerked, but he threw his will, sharp as a knife into the writhing energies and pulled with all of his strength.

Slowly, crimson tendrils of magical energy began to swirl and materialize before their eyes. At the sight of the tendrils however, both men bit back gasps of dismay. There were a large mass of crimson tendrils; for the most part however, they appeared to be frayed and disconnected, some fading into thin sparks before winking out of existence.

At the sight, Oliver let out a sigh of great disappointment. He turned to his companion sadly.

“So it is true,” he said. “The Chief Warlock was responsible for this ward. For this fraying mess of magic to still have such strength to it despite what you shared with me sir, it seems incontrovertible.”

“Yes,” said Ashcroft as he peered at the waving tendrils of magic. “I believe your right, Mr. Marsden. Nevertheless, I must admit that Albus outdid himself, for these wards are rather masterful. Had this been a home worthy of Charlus’s heir, I dare say the enchantments would have prevented not only He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named and his remaining servants, but any wizard or witch or creature which would have sought Harry harm from coming close to him. They wouldn’t have been able to step within a mile of his location. It was a very well considered plan. A pity that these…people have proven to be utterly faithless when entrusted with someone of great value.”

The older wizard sighed wearily as he waved his hand and the tendrils of magic faded away.

“Due to their unnecessary hatred, these Muggles have eliminated a most powerful protection that would have served them as well as young Mr. Potter. They will have to answer for their neglect of familial duty.”

His tone was deceptively mild, but Oliver was gifted with, was seeing beyond the surface. He knew perfectly well that it was taking a severe effort for Lord Ashcroft to avoid blasting this house, and everyone in it into vapor. In fact, with the older man’s anger aroused, it would fall to him to be the voice of calm and stern reason during the imminent confrontation to come.

The irony of that was not lost on him.
The two wizards proceeded to the front door, and silently opened it with another spell and strode into the house. Ashcroft gave a cursory glance over the décor and looked away, unimpressed. This was a quaint home to be sure, with enough room for a fair sized family to live in, comfortably. It was however, so bland. It appeared the owners were so obsessed with looking like everyone else, that their obsession was channeled into their furnishings.

He moved to enter their kitchen, where he and Oliver had agreed to confront them in; but he halted in front of a broom cupboard, a look of unmitigated fury on his face.

“Lord Ashcroft, what is it?” asked Oliver sharply, turning around to stare at the venerable statesman. “You look like you are about to burn this house down around our ears.”

Without a word, Ashcroft merely waved his hand. The padlock on the cupboard was removed, and the door swung open. Moving to investigate, Ashcroft and Oliver both found themselves having to bite back an oath as they saw what must Ashcroft had sensed and reacted to in his anger.

The cupboard was a fairly good-sized one, filled with the normal dust and cleaning supplies. However, there were drawings clearly made by a young child; of trucks and cars. There was even one of a man flying a motorcycle. There was an old and ratty set of blankets set in one corner of the small space, and most incriminating of all, a paper with a child’s scrawl with the words ‘Harry's Room' written on it and secured to the cupboard.

A wave of anger began to build in Oliver’s mind. This is where they extended the poor boy a home? This was the only place suitable for a scion of Charlus Potter’s House? Angry sparks began to spit from his wand as his magic roared at the injustice that the grandchild of his patron had been subjected to. He noticed that the Grand Duke's eyes were glowing with the force of his rage as he beheld the handiwork of the people that Albus Dumbledore, the champion of Muggleborns, and face of the Progressive faction of Albion Magi had entrusted with his dearest's friend's descendant.

“Let us come away from here;” he whispered harshly to Oliver after a long moment, ruthlessly stomping down on his own outraged senses. “There is little that can be done now about this. This is merely another thing to take up with them.”

Oliver nodded in agreement and turned away from the wretched sight. The two then silently entered the kitchen. Taking a seat, he watched as Lord Ashcroft buried his face in his hands. Oliver pitied the man; if he, an employee of the late Earl could feel such outrage and grief at the liberties taken against a vulnerable child like Mr. Potter, how much more must this pain the heart of a man who by all accounts could be counted as the most intimate friend of the boy's grandfather? He remained silent, and allowed the older man his moment to reflect and grieve.
Around 7:15, the pair heard a series of footsteps coming down the stairs and a pair of voices. Ashcroft tensed, and Oliver tightened his hold on his Concealment Charm as the door opened and two of the most miserable Muggles, either men had ever seen entered the room; or in the man’s case, waddled.

The man that had attempted to throttle Harry in his rage – Vernon Dursley, was an enormously fat man with greyish-brown hair and a greying, bushy mustache. His face was bloated and he barely had a visible neck. He was a good size, height wise, but that was all that was going for him. He was at that very moment grabbing a chair and plunking himself at the table, unaware that two powerful, very irate wizards were sitting to either side of him.

“Pet,” he said absently as he picked up the remote to watch television. “What do you say to the three of us taking a drive out to London, tomorrow? We can stay for a couple of days, rent a hotel room, one with a bar, and a swimming pool?”

He turned to face his beloved wife. Ashcroft did as well, and saw to his astonishment that Harry's memory of her did not do her justice. This was Lily Potter’s sister? There was absolutely no family resemblance whatsoever. He remembered the bride of James Potter the last time he had ever seen her alive, during the Yuletide celebration held at the home of the late Lord Edgar Bones in 1989. She had been a stunning picture of beauty in a well cut set of black dress robes, her auburn hair shining in a loose chiffon, her emerald eyes flashing in delight.

Clearly, all of the beauty had been taken by Lily, leaving nothing for Petunia. Petunia was tall, bony and almost horse-like in appearance. She had dull brown eyes and curly brown hair. It was no wonder she had held so much animosity for her younger sister, looking like that…

Petunia was currently getting fixings together for breakfast, bacon by the looks of it. She spared a look to her husband.

“That sounds lovely dear,” she simpered as she stooped to grab a heavy cast-iron skillet. “It will be the perfect time to treat Dudley before he goes off to school.”

She turned around to glance at her husband just as Oliver, nodding once to Lord Ashcroft, released the Concealment Charm over the pair. Her face blanched and she opened her mouth to scream, the skillet falling from nerveless fingers to clatter on the floor. Before she could scream, Oliver waved his wand and muted any sound coming out from her mouth. At the table, her husband, still oblivious to the two wizards glanced over incredulously at his wife.

“Petunia,” he said surprised. “What on earth has happened to you?”
Petunia tried to warn him, but no words would come from her mouth. She grimaced in a soundless wail as she pointed at the table frantically.

“Now come dear,” reproached Vernon. “that is a really ridiculous way to—"

He screamed out himself when he felt a hand on his shoulder. Turning to his right, he saw Lord Ashcroft who smiled unpleasantly at him.

“It is rather ridiculous, isn’t it Mr. Dursley? Alas, that seems to be a disease that all of the inhabitants of this house appear to be infected with, one that I’m sure will not be cured anytime soon.”

A negligent wave of his hand, and a charm to ensure Mr. Dursley remained silent was erected and another one placed upon the door so no one else would hear the conversation to follow. Another quick spell summoned Petunia to a chair where she was none too gently seated. That done, Lord Ashcroft took to his seat again and smiled chillingly at the two terrified Muggles, while Oliver settled himself to act as a witness for the swift justice that would be brought upon these disgraces to the Muggle community.

"A pleasant morning to you both," began Lord Ashcroft, "my companion and I both thank you for granting us the opportunity of conversing with you two in the midst of your lovely little home. We’ve traveled quite a bit to settle some business of paramount importance. My name, is Milton Ashcroft, but you may refer to me as His Royal Highness, the Grand Duke of Henamoor, Lord of the Noble and Most Ancient House of Ashcroft."

He sneered as both of the Dursleys’ eyes bugged at the bald pronouncement. Their surface thoughts rang out with the conflict that was running through their feeble minds. They loathed him and Mr. Marsden as a matter of course, because they clearly exhibited magic which was, in their small-minded and pathetic reasoning, freakish. Simultaneously however, their avarice and greed immediately echoed in their minds as they considered that he held quite a lofty noble title. They were the type of people who would disdain to help a poor child up if he or she fell in the street, but would endlessly boast if they were paid a visit with a member of the peerage.

He waved his hand in the direction of Oliver Marsden, who twiddled his fingers in greeting.

"This is my companion and assistant this morning," he continued, "as well as a very sought after solicitor among our people, Mr. Oliver Marsden. Mr. Marsden has been kind enough to serve as a
witness this morning as we conclude a piece of unpleasant, but necessary business concerning your charge, Mr. Harry Potter."

He hissed, as the obese wretch snarled silently at the mention of Harry's name, his mind filled with rage against the unnatural spawn of Satan who had nearly killed him...

Even Oliver, despite his lack of ability in Legilimency, scowled fiercely at the sour looks that had enveloped the Dursleys' faces.

"None of that!" snapped Lord Ashcroft, harshly. "Your thoughts betray you. It reveals how you have treated a child who belonged to your own flesh and blood. Throwing your vitriol and shameless bile towards him for over eleven years. Treating the poor child as if he were less than vermin, forcing him to do the cooking, the cleaning, the dusting, the washing even. All while collecting the nearly five thousand pounds that you receive on the dot every month for your—expenses."

His eyes began to glow once more, and the sight of them had Petunia and Vernon silently screaming, struggling to move away.

Lord Ashcroft stared coldly at the two cringing Muggles.

"You sicken me madam," the Grand Duke bit out, withdrawing his wand from his staff and raising it threateningly at the terrified woman when she opened her mouth to silently protest. "You were given a chance to care for the last and most precious treasure of Lily Potter's that you could ever have received. You had the opportunity to extend the love you denied the sister who treasured you so much to her son. What have you done? You've allowed your husband to abuse her child, and you not only sanctioned it, you encouraged your own son to be party to such hideous actions. You treated this boy as a slave, and for what? To cause as much pain as you could to someone who couldn’t defend himself, to punish an innocent for the power you so desperately desired?"

"Oh yes," he hissed, off the flare of resentment and hate that flashed from her eyes. "I’ve seen the pathetic scraps of what masquerades as a soul for you. I’ve seen the pettiness and cruelty. All here," he tapped the side of his head. "All bottled in your mind."

"And you," he snarled as he turned his wand upon Vernon, "are filth of the lowest order. You, a lowly peasant dared to lay hands on the scion of a Ancient and Noble family that knew affluence and power when your ancestors were still scrabbling at stone to try and eke out a living. You abused and did what could amount to irreparable harm to a child that only ever wanted someone to love him for who he was. You—you filthy excuse for a human being tried to murder my charge,
over a punishment that your worthless sister richly deserved? You should get on your knees and praise every god that your kind worship that my young friend is here to bear witness, for had he not been...your life would be forfeit this day."

He nodded curtly at Oliver, who flicked his wand causing a thin folder to appear before the shocked Muggles' eyes, with a strange looking writing implement on top of it. He stabbed Aunt Petunia with a look, causing her to clench her teeth.

"Petunia Dursley," he said biting, "due to your severe negligence of the young man who was entrusted to your charge, you have forfeited all rights to the legal and financial protections and compensation that you and your husband have pocketed for the past twelve years. By all rights, I should have you two clapped in chains and dragged kicking and screaming to the magi prison of Azkaban for your abuse of my Charlus's Heir. You will sign over your guardianship to the guardian of my choosing, effective immediately. Should you refuse—I have no compunction with informing you that I will be exercising the fullest extent of my authority as the senior-most member of our magical equivalent to Parliament and a member of the equivalent Council to what amounts to our United Nations to squeeze every pound out of you, down to the last one pence coin until I have ruined you and you are clapped in chains and forced to sign over your rights by force. And then promptly executed by our law enforcement officials. Do you refuse?"

At that point, Oliver had to look at the elder statesman askance, for the tone of his voice clearly indicated that Lord Ashcroft would love nothing more than for them to refuse.

The two Muggles appeared to be trying to spontaneously combust on the spot.

Lord Ashcroft sighed, deeply.

"Such uncouth behavior," he muttered aloud. "Really, I suppose I should be thankful that dear Harry hasn't turned out more like you worthless savages...despite your best efforts. Do. You. Refuse?"

Each emphasized word was punctuated by his wand stabbing in their direction, sparks sputtering out of it's tip, causing Petunia to silently scream in terror—rather shrilly by the looks of it, while Vernon and lost every ounce of blood in his face and was beginning to look like a passable imitation of an Inferi.

Finally, Petunia agreed, with a desperate glance at Vernon, who was nodding his head frantically at his wife.
He glanced at Oliver, who pushed the folder and strange looking pen towards the unpleasant looking woman.

“It's really for the best, madam,” said Oliver with a conciliatory smile. "Really, considering the legal ramifications of your crimes against my client, His Royal Highness is being most generous in granting you a legal penalty. He's giving you the opportunity to do what you've always wanted to do for years. Though you and your husband are the worst specimens of human beings that I’ve seen in years, truthfully you really did not have a choice in taking Harry in. His Royal Highness is now giving you the choice you were denied ten years ago. He is far more generous than Mr. Albus Dumbledore.”

He hid an internal smirk and desire to crow in triumphant as he caught the flash of recognition and loathing that lit up on the odious Mrs. Dursley's face at the mention of that name. He glanced to Lord Ashcroft who returned his glance pointedly. They had their culprit.

“Fill out that form,” ordered Lord Ashcroft, tersely. “What you see before you is a binding contract, both in this world and the magical one. By signing this, you agree to relinquish all rights, privileges and responsibilities related to Harry Potter and transfer them unto myself, a co-guardian of my choice and any guardian who may have been appointed by the Potters themselves. You will be barred from having further contact with Harry Potter through any conventional or magical means. Any proxies appointed to carry out your responsibilities in the magical world will lose their shared authority. Once signed, the effects will be irrevocable. You will no longer be considered as family to Harry or to any descendants that he might have in the years to come and will no longer ever be able to claim benefit from said relationship. That being said, Harry Potter and myself will never seek to impose ourselves upon you or your husband’s relations or associates for as long as you or your son shall live. In addition, you will not be charged with embezzlement of funds or requested to make restitution of the money illegally pocketed, due to dereliction of duty.”

The Grand Duke stared intently at the woman. “You and Vernon will have the life you always wanted,” he said, not unkindly. “A life free from magic. A life that is perfectly normal. Do you consent to this arrangement, with full mental cognizance and of your own free will?”

The two wizards looked on as Aunt Petunia looked at the contract, up at them, then a side glance at her husband. Oliver wondered what she was thinking, in that moment. Was she regretting anything that she, and Uncle Vernon had done?

Aunt Petunia answered that question in the way she glared at the pair, pouring it seemed, all of the hate and malice that she could summon. Then she snatched up the pen and began to sign her name in all the spaces indicated. Halfway through the document, she winced in pain and scratched at her hand which was beginning to look reddish and slightly inflamed. Still she persevered, and after
once last glare, signed her name on the last line.

Neither wizard offered to heal her hand.

Lord Ashcroft held out his hand, the folder shooting straight into his hand. As the two Muggles grimaced at that fresh display of magic, the old man set down the folder, flipped to the last page and after a grim nod, pressed his ring near the bottom.

There was a flash as his sigil was affixed to the triplicate document. Wordlessly, the Grand Duke passed the documents over to Oliver, who, after perusing the signatures and sigils, affixed his firm's sigil to the forms as well, another flash of light indicated that it had been sealed and replicated on the copies in triplicate. He nodded significantly to the older man.

"All appears in order, Your Royal Highness," he said at last. "In the name of Marcia Proba*, may She bear witness; the law is satisfied."

Lord Ashcroft nodded sharply.

"Sic Fiat."

With that final pronouncement the folder vanished into a golden vapor that had the Dursley couple making silent noises of fresh outrage. Neither man paid them any heed as they glanced at each other.

"The contract should now be filed with Gringotts, with copies filed with the Wizengamot and the Ministry," stated Oliver. "I'm certain that the goblins will ensure that copies have been placed in your respective vaults."

"Excellent," replied Lord Ashcroft. "I will see to it that a copy is also filed to yourself, Mr. Marsden. Once matters related to Mr. Potter claiming his place are settled, I imagine that the lad will be more than willing to have the office of Marsden & Carrodock represent the interests of his House, as his grandfather did before him."

Oliver bowed.
"You do our office great honor, sir." he answered, gravely.

Lord Ashcroft smiled, before glancing at his pocket watch. With a nod, he turned his gaze over to the Dursleys who were still affixed to their places at the table, quivering with fear.

"Well then!" he said brightly, standing with Oliver. "I believe that does conclude our business with you. Thank you for your cooperation with us, Mr. and Mrs. Dursley. I assure you, this will certainly be the last time that I or my companion choose to enter the environs of your...delightful domicile."

The two wizards made their way to the door leading out to the entrance, but Lord Ashcroft paused and turned to face the still magically bound couple.

"A shame really," he said with mock disappointment. "Had you treated young Harry with dignity and genuine affection, the dear lad would have been the key to everything you could have ever desired. For his 'wastrel father' was in truth, His Lordship, The Most Honorable James Ignotus Potter, the Earl of Stinchcombe. And just think, young Harry is set to inherit his earldom today! A pity really; all of that wealth and affluence, forever beyond your reach. Good morning!"

And with that, he waved his wand, cancelling the spells that bound them, laughing silently to himself as a chorus of shrill screams and angry bellows erupted out of the magically enforced silence.

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As Ashcroft and Oliver Marsden departed the premises, the elder statesman turned to Oliver and bowed.

"I owe you a debt of gratitude, not only for your presence here with me this morning, but for helping me investigate Harry’s situation and aiding me in taking decisive action. I'm very pleased
indeed to have made the acquaintance of another friend who loved the Lord Charlus well, indeed. I will be informing young Harry of these matters in due course as we visit with the Bank later today. I'm certain that he will also be well pleased with your assistance and wish to retain your services. Perhaps you would like to accompany us, Mr. Marsden?"

Oliver bowed to Lord Ashcroft again, but as he lifted his head shook it in the negative.

"I thank you, sir for your kind words. It has truly been my humble privilege to assist Your Royal Highness in this matter. I'm afraid however, that I must decline your most generous invitation. I'm afraid that I'm called to the duties of the office once again, until my partner is able to shoulder more of the administrative tasks."

A faint twinkle shone in Lord Ashcroft’s eyes at the ancient pronouncement, and he accepted the polite refusal with a gracious inclination of his head.

“Once again, my thanks.” he said solemnly. “Rest assured, Mr. Marsden that your office will be compensated handsomely for this endeavor. With the assumption that the young Heir will choose to retain your firm as his grandfather did before him, I look forward to meeting with you in the near future.”

Oliver smiled.

"As do I, Your Royal Highness."

With that the two men departed the neighborhood of Privet Drive, two sharp cracks announcing their respective Disapparitions.

It was unfortunate indeed, that they failed to note the long haired, mixed breed cat hidden under the bushes of Number Four who, upon their departure, dashed towards the home of his Mistress.

She wouldn't be pleased at what he had witnessed. No, not pleased at all.
So this chapter is the first chapter that receives a heavy revision from the original post of this story. While raf1988 originally envisioned a repentant, cooperative Dumbledore to work along with Harry Potter and Milton Ashcroft, we decided to make him more of an antagonist (albeit not a true villain!), and this chapter reflects this. The biggest change from the original is the inclusion of a partial look at the escape of Sirius Black from Azkaban. This is something that raf1988 shared with us as something that had been overlooked in the original planning so we were honored to craft this scene to show a bit of how Black escapes.

We also get a couple of new names and faces!

First off is our OMC character, Oliver S. Marsden, Esq. He is a solicitor whose career launched in part due to an association with Charlus Potter. His office Marsden & Carrodock took care of the Potter Estate legal work until Charlus and Dorea's deaths. James unfortunately didn't renew the contract over the next decade. He will be popping up here and there, but he won't be a major character in the story overall, just here.

Second, is the name of Marcia Proba, who Oliver invokes near the end of the chapter. Marcia Proba was a queen of the Britons according to legend around 358 B.C. Some sources name her as a goddess among the European pantheons and we decided to take that thought and run with it, as it is surprisingly hard to find a god or goddess of law or justice in Celtic mythology.

So, we hope you enjoy this chapter! In the next chapter, we go back to Harry as he confronts unknown details about his family and their legacy, and we get introduced to our story's co-star who finds himself in a pickle of his own.

Enjoy!

-emf911

1/10/20 Note: Just a quick edit, with some additional dialogue included for this chapter. Also an update for new and returning readers. Chapter 4 will be posted between the dates of 1/11/20-1/12/20. The hope is that Chapter 5 will be posted by 1/17/20 at the latest, but further updates will be given after Chapter 4 is posted!
Training, Traitors, Gold and Goblins

Chapter Summary

A new player, destined to have a significant role in the life of Harry Potter receives news of his own that startles him and forces him to take a careful look at his ability to accept responsibility; while in Diagon Alley, Harry and his new ally make a trip to Gringotts to settle the matter of his inheritance - only to discover a shocking development with the potential to shift the balance of political power in a fashion not seen since the Middle Ages...and hints of a secret with the potential to affect Harry's life in a radical way...

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains dialogue taken from the book, Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban. Any dialogue and/or plot taken from this book remains the property of J.K. Rowling, Warner Bros., and all related entities.

Original dialogue and plot belongs to the authors of this fanfic.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

August 1, 2003

"Get up! You're too slack on your feet! Again!"

Fighting back the urge to swear at his instructor, Blaise Zabini - soon-to-be 3rd Year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, and son of the late Marquess of Myrdino Oman Lucare and his mother Countessa Amarilla Zabini - sucked in a deep breath and forced himself back to his feet, clutching in his left hand his father's old wand (snakewood, eleven inches with runespoor heartstring as its core) and in his right, an ancestral blade of the Zabini clan. He seared his instructor, Gallido Sontana with a fierce glare that belied the frustration that was nearing its boiling point within him. He moved back into the traditional fighting stance of professional blade and wand duelists, and set himself at the ready, body tensed, waiting for the first hint of vulnerability.

Señor Sontana's lip curled with derision as he stood in battle stance that nonetheless was considerably less formal than that maintained by Blaise.

"Pathetic," he sneered derisively. "Shameful. Hundreds of hours of rigorous drill, most careful
instruction and still, you can barely maintain proper posture like a wizard of actual breeding and station. You're a -

'Expulso!'

"- pitiful scion to the noble blood of the Zabinis," continued the man as he carelessly batted away the curse, re-directing the pale bolt of energy to the side, where it fizzled against the powerful enchantments protecting the integrity of the gymnasium set up for his exercise and martial training by his mother. "My aged father, stricken by gout and nearing 120 years of age could do better than you, stupid boy. You shame your father's memory, make him roll in his grave. How deeply mortified must the man be to have spawned such a wretched, squalid little infant who can barely hold up a blade!"

Teeth bared, Blaise fought with every ounce of his being not to attempt to cast a deadlier curse such as the Cruciatus at the man with the temerity to mock him and deride his father within the domain of his family. But the duelist wasn't finished yet with his vitriol.

"I dare say that even the Countess could make a better showing than you, callow pup!" snarled Sn. Sontana. "You disgust me! How can you be the son of Oman Lucare? No, no, no...is it possible that the lady has deceived you? Is it not rather, more possible that you are the son of a common street beggar, or some drunken lout who managed to pick his way underneath your mother's fine skirts? That you are a result of the Countess cuckolding the Marquess?"

With a bestial scream, Blaise rushed the foul mouthed man, his mind lit aflame by the venomous insinuations. He dared to impugn his mother's honor and cast doubt on his bloodline, with his filthy lips?

'Bombarda! Expulso! Confringo! Expulso! Expulso! Expulso! Bombarda Maxima!'

Sn. Sontana batted away the first three spells in seconds and the chain of Expulso with a silent shield charm. Clearly however, he considered Blaise to be incapable of inflicting real harm with his spells as the final spell, Bombarda Maxima broke the shield, producing a shockwave that had the instructor stumbling back several feet, though he remained upright.

The effort expended to protect himself from the last curse gave Blaise enough time to leap at him and he fell on the man with a vicious will, snarling and snapping as he swung his blade in an effort that, had the blades not been dulled with cushioning charms would have been enough to bite deep into the older wizard's waist.
Sn. Sontana however was no novice. He caught the heavy blow with his own blade and the resultant clash of the blades produced a flash of light as the cushioning charms interacted with the other. Blaise quickly whirled around and aimed at his flank, but Sn. Sontana anticipated the move and lept back, thrusting his blade at Blaise's throat. The young teen knocked the thrust aside only to be blasted back by the silent Expulso that shot out from his opponent's wand.

For the next half-hour, the two combatants exchanged a series of blows, thrusts, parries, and ripostes with their blades, while exchanging the occasional round of spells when they were far enough apart to safely cast them without getting caught by their own incantations. The fight was uneven, clearly favoring the stronger and more experienced Sontana, but Blaise wouldn't relent, calling on his slighter figure and speed to dodge the worst of the spells and doing his endeavored best when in close contact to hack his opponent to death.

The air shimmered with the flux of energy produced by the many spells that were flung at the other, making visibility that much more difficult but Blaise powered through fueled with the desire to get vengeance on behalf of his parents who this man had insulted, determined to honor them by teaching this man a lesson.

A sharp blow caused a fiery sensation to flare as Blaise's body was flung into the protective barriers, the impact causing the barrier to flare a brilliant silver before fading away from sight. The teen collapsed in a bundle, barely clutching his blade and wand. He groaned as pain flared through his body from his neck, where he had been struck. Had the blades not been protected, he knew that he would be dead.

Desperate for a way to win, Blaise closed his eyes, feigning unconsciousness and listened as he hear the footsteps of Sn. Sontana approach.

"Ara, blast it!" he could hear his instructor curse as he stand over his body. "Boy! Get up! We're not nearly done yet!" Blaise kept is eyes tightly closed and dug deep, deep within the depleted reserves of his magic to drag up the last bursts of power that he be able to muster. Focusing on the spell he wanted to use, he pushed as much magic as he safely can. His wand arm twitched, infinitesimal arcs of electric currents racing along the edges of the wand.

Inwardly, Blaise smirked with vicious satisfaction. He might have lost, but he'd drag his enemy down with him.

A slight stir, the tightening of his grip on his wand was all the warning that Sn. Sontana got before Blaise struck.
"Fulminis!"

The older man's eyes widening with alarm, he leaped back, but he couldn't shake off the bolt of lightning that burst from the tip of Blaise's ancestral wand, the electrical discharge slamming into his body. Sontana cried out, in shock and unanticipated pain as arcs of electricity raced through his blade, creating a cascade of light as it interacted with the protective enchantments and was conducted by the metal and dispersed throughout his body for several seconds as Blaise poured every ounce of menace, every drop of rage and anger into the final spells until the boy collapsed again, this time like a marionette with its strings cut, drained of his magic. As the electricity flow ceased, Sontana fell upon his knees, trembling as his burnt hand released the blade. Falling to his side, he endured the jolts that continue to travel through his body as stoically as possible, heaving for breath as he attempted to ride the pain.

Their harsh, gasping pants were all that filled the space above them for several minutes as both combatants endured the unpleasant sensation of their ailments. Finally however, Sontana managed to recover enough strength to sit up as he cradled his burnt arm to his chest and eyed the prone form of Blaise narrowly. Blaise, drained as he was still managed to glare up at the older man, anger still crackling in his eyes.

Then the Señor laughed.

It was more of a wheezing hack at first, but in spite of the pain, Sontana laughed and laughed and laughed some more until he couldn't anymore as he pressed his good hand to his ribs.

"And that, my young student is how you behave if you wish to survive," he wheezed, still alternating between the occasional chuckle and hisses of pain from his burnt hand.

Blaise remained on the charm cushioned floor, body completely spent. What in the seventh circle of Tartarus was the man blathering on about? His confusion only grew as the instructor calmly went about casting various healing charms on his burnt hand, muttering an oath of relief as his injuries faded away and then pushing himself up to his feet with a groan before walking over to Blaise and extending his hand out, a friendly smile on his face that was quite unlike his venomous demeanor less than a hour ago. Blaise continued glaring up at him, confusion and anger still warring in his eyes as Sn. Sontana sighed, before muttering an imprecation in Portuguese and reaching down to yank Blaise to his feet.

"Señor Zabini, let us put this unpleasantness behind us. I understand that you are upset because of the harsh words that I used to describe your performance. I understand your anger at any perceived slight against the Marquês de Myrdino - may Aradia hold him in Her embrace - and the Countessa.
Rest assured however, that I hold your father and mother in the highest esteem. Keep in mind that your father and I have been friends since our days in the dueling circuits of Iberia, and that your madre is one of my most generous patrons. Why then, would I say such despicable untruths about your family?"

Blaise opened his mouth to angrily retort, but paused and considered the older wizard's words. Why had he spoken so, indeed? In all of the times that he had worked with him over the past two years, he had been unfailingly polite: harsh in his critiques, unyielding in his drive to push him beyond his limitations, but polite. The dueling champion was methodical and deliberate in his actions and strategies. So why...?

The room fell silent save for the soft hum of the protective enchantments as Blaise considered the matter. After a few minutes, he glanced at his instructor again, this time with a wary, considering glance.

"Were you trying to...provoke me on purpose?" ventured Blaise, cautiously.


"You...wanted me to lose control of my form."

"Very good. Anything else?"

"There was something wrong with it?"

His instructor sighed.

"Señor, the question you should be considering is, 'why'? You guessed part of my reasoning, so I will explain the rest. You were too reliant on rote stances and forms. To know correct form is excellent...if you are planning on an exhibition duel. That is not why you have secured my services though, is it? What is the purpose of our lessons together?"

Blaise frowned thoughtfully.
"To learn how to defend myself by blade or wand should I be assaulted by enemies who wish me physical harm."

"Precisely. You are fighting for your life. Never forget that. Your enemies will do all in their power to throw you off balance, cause you to lose control of your emotions, shake you from your defense or offensive stratagems. They will say and attempt anything to weaken you so they can gain victory, and if you allow your emotions to control your responses when insults are paid to those you love and cherish, you will always be vulnerable to them. It will be that much more easier to dismantle your defenses. You must expect that, and you must plan to fight as viciously, and yet as cold and methodically as possible to maintain the highest chances for surviving. It is your life that is your prize, not a trophy or prize money."

Sn. Sontana huffed a bit before stepping forward and placing a warm hand on his shoulder.

"You have talent boy," he said quietly. "You have wits, and clearly you possess the ambition to gain knowledge to gain strength and maintain your family's safety as well as ample motivation. Use them. This is our last session together before your departure for Britain. Consider all that you've learned these past weeks and continue to find opportunities to refine your blade skills and spell repertoire. Practice as often as you can, for when next we meet, I will not hold back. You understand?"

"Sí, Señor Sontana."

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They made quick work of setting the furnishings of the gymnasium back into proper order and with the supply of restoratives provided by Paje, Blaise's personal house-elf, Blaise was quickly feeling his strength returning. When Señor Sontana apparated away, Blaise called Paje again to take him to the baths.

Blaise spent the next half-hour in the baths soaking in the steaming water which was accentuated by several herbal restoratives infused in the water to aid in physical as well as magical recovery. After the harsh training, he didn't feel a bit guilty about enjoying the water work on his sore muscles, even though he knew that he would be pushing his appearance in the main house for afternoon tea with his mother dangerously close to tardiness - a trait that his mother absolutely despised.
Finally, after taking as much time as he dared, Blaise dried off and slipped in the loose Egyptian style trousers and cassock that he tended to favor from time to time. Watching himself in the mirror that Paje had conjured for him in the baths, Blaise ran a critical eye over his appearance. His caramel mocha skin was fairly unblemished, the bruising from the painful strike to his neck had largely gone away, thanks to the restoratives and the herbal bath. He used a few grooming spells to gather up his glossy, dark curls into a bun. His hazel eyes stared back from the reflection, until he grunted with satisfaction and silently summoned Paje.

"Young Master has called?" croaked the centenarian house-elf as he Apparated in with a soft 'crack'. "Paje hopes the Young Master realizes that he has only forty-five seconds to be seated in her Ladyship's salon for tea."

"The salon?" exclaimed Blaise in surprise, swinging to face his old guardian. "Mother normally takes tea at the dining room hall."

"Fifteen seconds."

With a muttered curse, Blaise extended his hand to Paje, who snapped his fingers, Apparating them from the baths and delivering Blaise to the Hyacinth Room, his mother's private salon where she conducted her personal affairs and correspondence. She was already seated at the round table, eyeing him with light exasperation.

"I'm so pleased to see my son arrive punctual yet again," she said dryly, shaking her head fondly at Blaise's wince. "Thank you Paje, for bringing him here by the skin of his teeth. You may go."

"My lady," said Paje as he bowed to her, turning to Blaise and doing the same. "My young Master."

Blaise swiftly walked over to where his mother sat, stunning as always in a set of fashionably cut lavender robes. Her hair cascaded down her shoulders, a curious choice since she was wont to keep it in an intricate braid. Her olive skin gleamed as the sun glinted off of her skin. She seemed to be rather relaxed today, which piqued his curiosity, but Blaise didn't question her appearance as he bent down to kiss her gently upon her cheek in greeting.

The Countess smiled at Blaise's courtesy, caressing his face in her hands for a moment as she smiled at him.
"Hmm...my darling, mio caro figlio. Come, sit."

As she released him, he made his way to the other side of the small table and sat down in the velvet backed chair, as his mother clapped for their tea to begin. A faint shimmer signaled the work of their house-elves as the china and cutlery for afternoon tea appeared, followed by a steaming pitcher of lemongrass and ginger infused tea. Small bowls of sugar cubes, cream, fresh berries and biscuits settled into place, along with sliced pound cake - a personal favorite of Blaise. Small goblets of water also materialized to the side of the repast.

Quietly, they tucked in, pouring the fragrant tea into their cups and selecting toothsome portions of the pound cake. For the next several minutes, they ate and drank in restful and companionable silence, the only sounds aside from the tinkling of their spoons and forks against the china was the lilting, pure tones of Madame Illyana Guchezzio, a fixture of the Italian stage in Magi circles.

At length, his mother set down her tea cup and fastened her green eyes on Blaise.

"I have something for you, my beloved," she said softly as she extended one of the two envelopes that Blaise only noticed now, off to the side away from the food. Reaching out, he took the envelope, noting the feel of heavy parchment. Curious, he glanced at her and then turned the envelope around, only to tense as he noted the sigil which marked the central bank for those countries that formed the Iberia region of the Maggia, the Bank of Emir. It was a large 'B & E' with two crossed axes below it and the motto of the Bank adorning the ribbon. A halo of stars encircled the sigil. Sucking in a deep breath, he glanced at his mother, who stared at him with a sad, wistful smile.

"You are thirteen years of age, mio figlio. Today, you have passed the division between childhood and youth. Though you are not yet a man full grown, your final years of development begin. In light of this great ascension, and in accordance of the laws governing the peers of the Iberian Ecclesia, you are now of age to receive full inheritance of your father's -my dear Oman's- family. You are now legally the Marquês de Myrdino, Conde de Alcipe, Visconde de Arbarca."

Blaise's hand trembled as he clutched the letter from the Bank of Emir, painfully aware of the import of what he held in his hand. He now held the responsibility of administering the duties of his late Father's domain in Portugal, now held the weight of his father's position of trust amongst the Iberian Ecclesia, who though similarly kneecapped in terms of executive authority by the Ministry of Magic for the Iberian Peninsula, still held significant legislative powers.

He knew this day would come, had prepared for it. Now that it was here though...was he ready to live up to his father's reputation and capabilities?
Blaise was so caught up in the consideration of what might befall that he didn't notice his mother moving until her silky and warm hands gently covered his arm, moving it and his gaze to focus on her. She was blinking back stray tears, and her smile was tinged with old pain.

"Do not doubt yourself, my love," she said, pleadingly. "Your father was a good administrator and legislator. He was an even better man. You are so much like him. He was strong, and cunning. Bold when necessary, reticent when it served his purposes. And he abhorred injustice, just like you do. I have no doubt that you will honor him, your ancestors and me as you represent the Lucare and Zabini families. Be strong! You have power now, and an influence that sets you above your peers. Listen. Learn. Accept appropriate counsel, and serve the Patrons of our families well. Do that and you will be successful my son."

"I - I am willing to accept this responsibility," ventured Blaise, his mouth dry and heart pounding. "I will carry forward the Lucare and Zabini names and do them honor. But - But I need someone to help me with administering the estate, and serving as my proxy should the Supreme Council be summoned...I need you."

His mother's hands convulsed, tightening over his almost painfully before the Countess got ahold of herself. She peered searchingly into Blaise's face, though for what, he didn't know. After staring at him for several seconds, she nodded tremulously and inclined her head in acceptance.

"For you, meu filho angelico? I will serve."

Raising his mother's hands to his lips, Blaise kissed them in gratitude, prompting a throaty laugh to be emitted by the Countess. Brushing away the stray tears, she rose to her feet and walked back to her seat. Blaise stared again at the letter, but then an entirely unwelcome thought rushed into his brain, causing him to frown.

"But mamma," he queried. "What about Genspar? He's never been accommodating to anything to do with Father. He won't agree lightly to you becoming my proxy to the Ecclesia."

Studying his mother, he noted the lazy, dangerous smile that often crossed her lips whenever she accomplished a goal that led to -

Blaise gaped, wordlessly for a moment.
"Mamma!"

"Peace, meu filho," she replied, looking for all the world like a cat that had caught a particularly tasty treat. "That brings me to my second piece of news. I'm burdened to inform you that your step-father, our dear Señor Genspar will no longer be able to rejoice over this momentous occasion with us. Sadly, my poor husband's health has been most disagreeable, and took a turn for the worst days after your arrival. I've arranged for a private ceremony to be held at the Temple of Ara, tomorrow morning after which I must make preparations for the settlement of his estate. He is the seventh and the last to fall under the curse engendered by the loss of your dear father."

"Ah, I see. My condolences for your bereavement, Countess."

"I thank you, my son," answered his mother, with another flash of that dangerous smile. "Incidentally, that leads me to my third piece of news. I've been invited to dinner by her Ladyship, the Marchioness Leinnsfeld. She is holding a dinner in two weeks time and wishes us to attend. I understand that you have been training most prodigiously so far this summer, but I would be truly grateful if you would consent to accompany me. Would that be possible?"

Blaise fought the urge to sigh. He was certain that he would be swamped with matters of import over the next two weeks while he set things in order for his new estate. He wasn't annoyed at the prospects of spending an evening with Lady Malfoy. The Marchioness was a truly genteel witch and held fabulous soirees, and though he couldn't say that he sought to spend time with him, he could appreciate how charismatic and cunning her husband, the Marquess of Leinnsfeld, Lucius Malfoy could be as well.

No, the problem was that due to his age, there was no doubt that he'd be expected to spend time in association with their son - Draco. When they had been younger, he could admit that Draco had been fun to be around. They were never friends, but they had also enjoyed several childish adventures and mishaps when their parents and peers came to the balls and dinners that were thrown among the British Ecclesia and other well to do from time to time. But age had not, unfortunately, brought wisdom to the young heir to the Malfoy family. Draco had developed a sickening rivalry with the so-called 'Boy-Who-Lived', a rivalry that had grown to ridiculous proportions and cost Slytherin victory in the quest to claim the House Cup. He always paraded like a peacock in the dorms, strutting around and waxing on in rhapsodical fashion about his father's reputation as Chief Governor for the Hogwarts Board. It was tiresome, and he didn't want to have to endure that mess until he had no other choice.

All the same, he knew that his mother valued the friendship that she had cultivated with the Lady Narcissa. Both had experienced the difficulties of being associated with 'the Dark' and looked upon at times with suspicion by others due to ties of blood or tragic circumstances. She had done so much to please him in every way and help him to reach this important phase of his life. He wished...
to please her as much as she had pleased him.

And due to the fact that he didn't wish to wave the new status he had attained to, it would be improper to refuse a gracious invitation with no valid cause. His mother was Countess of Soleil, but she was not a Countess of Britannia, and as such was considered lower on the social scale than Lady Narcissa’s husband, a Marquess. He was considered only a Viscount by courtesy and thus could not lightly insult a powerful family like the Malfoys.

"Yes Mamma," he replied. "It would be my honor to attend dinner with Lord and Lady Malfoy as your escort for the evening."

The bright smile that she bestowed upon him made up a great deal for what he foresaw as a great deal of stress approaching in his near future...

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August 8, 2003

Harry found himself waking up to the sound of screeching tires and furious shouting. He shot out of bed and stared wildly around him, confused by how different his room looked. Where was his old, weathered and beat up wardrobe which stood solitary across the foot of his bed? And for that matter, what happened to his bed? His cramped, ratty bed which always pinched at his toes when he stretched himself fully out on the bed? When did it become a – a four poster bed? The Dursleys would never –

He halted mid-turn as his sleep-addled mind caught up with him, and threw an incontrovertible fact at him:

The Dursleys were gone now. He wasn’t in Surrey; he was at the Leaky Cauldron in London. He would be staying there for the rest of the summer. And he –
He never had to go back to the Dursleys again.

The joy that bubbled forward and burst from him was so strong and thick, that Harry collapsed back onto the much larger and far more comfortable bed and laughed almost hysterically. He was free! No more having to get up early to cook the breakfast, only to receive a mere pittance of food while others stuffed themselves to their hearts’ content. No more getting chased by Dudley and his gang of miscreant friends all through the neighborhood! No more Dursleys…

It took several moments, but slowly the bout of uncontrollable laughter petered to a close, and Harry was able to master himself once more. He stretched languidly, then got off the bed, his body humming with energy as he moved to the window to find the source of the noise that woke him up. Peering out of the – enchanted! – window, he felt a grin form on his easy he saw a bunch of delivery trucks all backed up next to a series of stalls and small stores, with several angry drivers milling about, arguing loudly with their hands flying around emphatically as they pointed and yelled. The scene was sheer chaos, and terribly disorderly.

Harry thought it was brilliant.

After a few moments of observing, he turned away from the window just as the room began to shake, a rain of dust falling unto the floor as a train rumbled along the adjacent track to the marketplace. Wrinkling his nose at the dust that fell on his shoulders and hair, Harry began to brush himself off with his hands. He looked to the small clock that was fixed upon the wall. It was 8:45 in the morning.

Harry’s eyes widened as he did a double take at the clock. 8:45! Mr. Ashcroft had told him that they would be having breakfast by 8! He’d need to hurry if he wanted to get avoid any trouble. Especially, after everything that the older man had done already for him last night…

As quickly as he could, Harry rushed into the bathroom and took care of his necessary business, then brushed his teeth and took a quick bath. After he finished, he rushed back to his trunk and opening it, looked in dismay at the scraggly pile of oversized rags that he called Dudley’s old cast offs. Nothing in his trunk was appropriate for eating with a man like Mr. Ashcroft, who was important enough that even the Minister for Magic himself went out of his way to oblige him. But with the exception of his Hogwarts uniform – which were quite a few inches too small for him (he'd finally gotten a growth spurt and now stood at five feet and two inches) – those were the only clothes he had. Finally, he spied a t-shirt an a pair of trousers that weren’t as baggy and wretched as the rest, and threw them on.

He caught sight of a mirror near the wardrobe and hurried over to it, desperately running his
fingers through his hair in a vain effort to keep it from sticking every which way. He sighed as his attempt merely served to make it look more wild. Finally, in frustration Harry gave up. He spared one quick look to Hedwig (sleeping still upon her perch), then exited the room.

Closing the door softly behind him, Harry looked around. He wondered where they would eat breakfast. Perhaps downstairs in the pub? Or maybe in a private room? He started off towards the stairwell, then halted. Didn’t Mr. Ashcroft say that he should go to his room if he needed anything? Wasn’t it Room Ten?

Changing his direction, Harry walked up to the doors that were in the corridor and looked at their number. He looked carefully, but didn’t see a ten on any of the doors. Frowning now, Harry went back to his room, then noticed another door just off to his right near the end of the hallway. He walked over to the door, smiling when he saw the brass number 10 at the front of the door. He raised his hand to knock, but then hesitated. What if Mr. Ashcroft was still sleeping and wanted to wait to have breakfast? What should he do then? He was of half a mind to turn back, and he started to do so, when the door slowly swung open silently. Harry looked on, surprised. Did that mean that Mr. Ashcroft was inside? Should he go in?

Harry dithered in front of the open door for a few moments as he debated the wisdom of entering another person’s room unannounced. Finally, though, he screwed up his courage and cautiously stepped into the room.

As he stepped through, Harry was impressed by what he saw. The room was large and airy, with a small bookcase off to one corner, and a fair sized fireplace off to the opposite side. He saw a couple of other doors, and figured that they must be to the bathroom and the bedroom. He saw a small writing desk with some parchment on its surface, along with a bottle of ink and a quill. There were also a few books on the table. Another longer table stood a few feet from where Harry had halted, and had two chairs set up.

Mr. Ashcroft was no where in sight. A bit befuddled now, Harry went over to the larger table. Where could Mr. Ashcroft be, he wondered a bit gloomily as his stomach rumbled. Did he forget about breakfast or something?

His thoughts were scattered when the loud, harsh caw of a bird filled the room. Harry jumped, and spun towards the source of the sound. There, over on the window sill, was a rather large raven. It flapped its wings a few times and cawed again. Then it launched itself towards Harry.

Harry stumbled back and lifted up his arm, in an effort to protect his face from any scratches. He needn’t have worried though. The bird fluttered onto his outstretched arm, and cawed again, it’s head cocked to the side. It eyed Harry through beady, opaque eyes. Harry found himself stroking the glossy feathers of the raven, black with a strong hint of crimson on the tip of it’s feathers.
Harry’s eyes widened with recognition. It was that bird that kept on following him everywhere! The one that had stared at him so uncannily on that branch that was hanging over the Dursley’s fence!

“Hullo raven, I remember you.” Harry murmured as he stroked its head. “Do you belong to Mr. Ashcroft then? Would you happen to know where he is then?”

He wasn’t actually expecting an answer, so he found himself jumping again at the sound of someone, chuckling. He turned swiftly, and saw to his surprise, Mr. Ashcroft standing in the doorway. He was already dressed, in a tweed suit, and he had the look of someone who had been out and about for some time.

“Mr. Ashcroft!” said Harry, in surprise. “I didn’t see you there! Have you been there long?” He could feel a faint blush creep up around his neck.

“No long at all, Harry my dear boy.” Mr. Ashcroft said with a small, but warm smile. “I had a couple of pieces of early morning business to take care of. I apologize for being late. I see though that my familiar, Bran has been kind enough to keep you company.”

Harry smiled back, though he still felt somewhat embarrassed at be caught in another’s room. The raven lifted off from him and went over to Ashcroft, who stroked its feathers and murmured to it. Then it flew off of his shoulders and went back to its perch. Mr. Ashcroft walked over to the head of the large table and sitting down, motioned to Harry to join him there, which he did. Mr. Ashcroft smiled as Harry sat down to his right, and reached over to pat him on his hands.

“I apologize for being late,” he said. “Let’s just say that the meeting that I had to attend, took an unexpected turn. Still, it seems that you’ve gotten some much needed rest. How do you feel?”

He peered at Harry’s face and neck, which while still bearing the marks of being struck, didn’t hurt Harry really. Harry smiled at Mr. Ashcroft’s concern.

“Oh, I’m good.” said Harry easily. “I feel loads better than yesterday.”

Mr. Ashcroft nodded and reached into his tweed jacket, pulling out a pale wand, decorated with a silver carving of a raven’s head on its hilt. Harry looked up at him, the question plain on his face. Mr. Ashcroft shrugged.
“I figured that before we settle down and have our breakfast, that now was as good a time as any to remove those bruises from your face and neck. With your permission, Harry?”

Harry nodded at Mr. Ashcroft, his throat tightening in anticipation. He was more than ready to be rid of the evidence of his rela – the Dursley’s cruelty. It didn’t really hurt, but the sight of the bruise marks did make him somewhat self-conscious.

Mr. Ashcroft lifted his wand and pointed it at Harry’s face. Softly he chanted, as a pale blue light shone from the end of his wand. Harry felt a warm tingling all over his jaw, where he had been punched by Mr. Dursley, and his neck where he had been throttled. The spell Mr. Ashcroft was using, was repeated three times, until Mr. Ashcroft, carefully inspecting his work pronounced himself satisfied. He lowered his wand, and conjuring a mirror, held it out for Harry to grasp.

Harry took the mirror and looked at his reflection, eyes widening as he saw only smooth skin where just yesterday, there had been livid purplish-black marks on his face and neck. Harry broke into a wide smile.

“Its all healed!” Harry exclaimed in wonder as he tilted his face and angled the mirror around. “There’s no marks at all.”

He handed the mirror back to Mr. Ashcroft, who setting it aside, looked at him with barely hidden amusement.

“Well so it is,” he said with a smile. “I’m no medi-wizard, but I dare say that caring for a few bruises is within my talents.”

Harry blushed, but threw a quick smile back as he finished the inspection of his face. “What kind of spell was that?” he asked curiously. “It seems like something that would be nice to know.”

“Ah, this is a spell of my own invention actually,” said Mr. Ashcroft. "It is fairly simple as far as the incantation and wand movements are concerned, a spell designed to heal physical wounds. It is however quite powerful, and not a spell that I would expect a young wizard like yourself able to master. Still, it never hurts to learn of new magic. Would you like to learn the incantation?”

“Yes sir,” replied Harry. “If you’re willing to teach me.”
Mr. Ashcroft nodded approvingly. “Very good,” he said. “This is the incantation. *Ut tua vulnera curavit.*”

He repeated the phrase a number of times, until Harry was fairly certain he had memorized it all.

“Now then,” Mr. Ashcroft exclaimed. “It’s time for a spot of breakfast. We have much to accomplish today and much to discuss.”

Harry gasped, in spite of himself as with a wave of Mr. Ashcroft’s wand, platters of fried eggs, bacon, pancakes, and toast materialized on the table. Another wave revealed a steaming pot of tea and a pitcher of pumpkin juice, as well another one bearing orange juice. A final wave, and all the necessary cutlery and dishes appeared.

Mr. Ashcroft smiled at the wide-eyed expression on Harry’s face.

“Don’t think too much about it,” he suggested gently. “Go on, tuck in!” With that said, he reached for the platter of eggs and began serving himself. Harry shook himself out of his stupor, and dug in as well.

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Finally, when Harry had eaten all he wanted and couldn’t stuff one more piece of bacon into his mouth, Mr. Ashcroft banished the remaining bits of food away with another wave of his wand, and without a word, began to pour the tea. He left it to Harry to fix his tea up the way he liked it, but added a squeeze of lemon into his own and added two cubes of sugar for good measure.

They sipped at their cups of tea, allowing the meal to settle into their stomachs. It was silent, but a comfortable silence. Harry felt at ease for the first time all summer. *It was strange,* he thought as he discreetly looked at Mr. Ashcroft while he drank his tea. It was strange that he felt more comfortable with a virtual stranger than he ever felt when with the Dursleys. He wasn’t quite sure what to make of it.

Finally, after several minutes of companionable silence, Mr. Ashcroft set down his empty cup with a heavy sigh and focused his attention on Harry. Harry looked back at the man, steadily. He knew
that there was a lot more to their previous discussion that had to be addressed. He had so many questions – about his family and their ‘legacy’, what would happen to him now that he truly was an orphan, about the real reason that Minister Fudge went out of his way to excuse his blatant use of magic outside of school – questions that needed to be answered. The two held each other’s gaze for a long moment, until Mr. Ashcroft nodded, apparently satisfied by what he was looking for in Harry’s eyes.

“Earlier this morning,” Mr. Ashcroft began without preamble, “I met with a lovely gentleman named Oliver Marsden, a solicitor of some note within local Magi circles to discuss your treatment at the hands of the Dursleys and potential solutions to that particular problem.” He ignored the way that Harry stiffened at that bald announcement and continued on without a pause. “Among the many things that we discussed was the issue of your guardianship. We carefully reviewed the evidence of your stay with those Muggles and conducted a final interview with them. Both Mr. Marsden and I have come to the firm conclusion that it would be…unwise to allow them further control over you. As I promised you last night Harry, you will never have to return there again.”

Harry’s shoulders trembled with the repressed emotions that he felt at the news. Oh he had hoped, that Ashcroft would be able to keep his promise to him, but in his inner heart, a part of him couldn’t help but wonder if that promise would prove empty and hollow like so many others had in the past…

Ashcroft paused, and quietly waited for Harry to regain his composure. When Harry felt that he had calmed down enough, he nodded at Mr. Ashcroft to continue.

“This of course leads us to the question of who can act as your guardian,” continued Mr. Ashcroft. “For the moment, due to my political pedigree, I will be able to maintain guardianship over you – provided of course that you are amenable to this arrangement.”

He speared a look at Harry and relaxed when Harry nodded in agreement.

“Keep in mind though Harry,” Mr. Ashcroft warned, “this arrangement cannot last forever. As fond of you as I find myself becoming, I still have a duty to the school which I operate in the United States. I do have a very important project to complete here this year, but after that I can make no promise that I will be able to stay here for very long. My reputation will keep the Ministry at bay long enough for you to arrive safely at Hogwarts. Once there, you will be shielded by the protection that being a student there will provide you. That will buy you some time – perhaps a year at the most. However, make no mistake. As soon as you leave the protection of Hogwarts walls by the summer of next year, the Ministry – and by ‘Ministry’ I mean Fudge – will do everything in their power to claim you as their ward.”

Harry blanched and felt a cold feeling in the pit of his stomach.
“Can they really do something like that?” Harry asked in shock.

Mr. Ashcroft scowled fiercely.

“They can and they will. I told you last night about Fudge and his ambitions. He seeks to have some kind of hold over you. He will use every political tool in his grasp to secure your patronage. As he cannot use the threat of criminal charges as a way to gain your allegiance, he will use the pretext of your guardianship. He already has ample proof that the Dursleys are not suitable for you.”

Harry scowled at the thought of gaining his freedom…only to become some kind of tool of the Minister. He was never going to be mistreated by anyone trying to be his family again, never!

Mr. Ashcroft smiled grimly at the look on Harry’s face.

“That is one reason why we will need to make our way to Gringotts.” said Mr. Ashcroft. “In addition to having you formally declared as the Potter heir, we must get access to your parents’ will. There we will see who your parents intended to serve as your principal guardian.”

Harry twitched slightly at the mention of a will.

“Nobody told me anything about a – a will.” Harry said darkly.

Mr. Ashcroft sighed and patted his hand in sympathy.

“That is because a geas – a magical prohibition – rests on everyone who could possibly have knowledge of such a thing,” said Ashcroft. “The will is sealed. Only two people – well, three actually in this case – can speak of the existence of a will or request that the will be unsealed. The Heir – which would be you – may of course, your guardian, or the chosen executor of the will.”

He looked extremely grave at that moment, and he hesitated before continuing.
“The problem is, that until our agreement, your guardians were Muggles. They wouldn’t have a clue about the will of your parents. You, had no knowledge that your parents even had a will. Thus you wouldn’t know to ask. And as for the executor –”

Ashcroft grimaced.

“That would lead into the final reason why Fudge was so willing to excuse your use of magic.”

“Why?” Harry asked eagerly. “What is the reason?”

His eager response prompted a deep sigh from Mr. Ashcroft, who for a moment, looked very aged. He looked sadly at Harry, who was now thoroughly confused.

“I will tell you this, Harry, because you need to know what has occurred in your absence. I will not lie; this is news that will hurt you terribly. I only ask one thing of you; that once I begin the tale, you will listen carefully to every word I’m saying, and maintain an open mind. Can you do that, Harry? Do I have your word?”

Harry hesitated. What could be so horrible, that Mr. Ashcroft would wish to extract an oath from him? He felt a sense of foreboding hovering over him as he considered the older man’s words.

In the end however, he agreed to the older man’s terms. Mr. Ashcroft gave a smile as he promised, and settled back into his chair as he thought of where to begin. Finally, he pulled out his wand, and flicked it, conjuring a copy of the Daily Prophet. He handed it over to Harry, whose eyes were drawn immediately to the front page article. His eyes widened as he read what it said:

![BLACK STILL AT LARGE!](https://example.com)

- by Clarisse Whistletruckle
eluding capture, the Ministry of Magic confirmed today.

“We are doing all we can to recapture Black,” said the Minister for Magic, Cornelius Fudge, this morning, “and we beg the magical community to remain calm.”

Fudge has been criticized by some members of the International Confederation of Wizards for informing the Muggle Prime Minister of the crisis.

“Well, really, I had to, don’t you know,” said an irritable Fudge. “Black is mad. He’s a danger to anyone who crosses him, magic or Muggle. I have the Prime Minister’s assurance that he will not breath a word of Black’s true identity to anyone. And let’s face it – who’d believe him if he did?”

While Muggles have been told that Black is carrying a gun (a kind of metal wand that Muggles use to kill each other), the magical community lives in fear of a massacre like that of twelve years ago, when Black murdered thirteen people with a single curse.

According to a spokesperson from the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, Black escaped from Azkaban around midnight of July 27th. He somehow managed to survive the currents of the North Sea and assaulted the Watcher on duty that evening, managing to steal some of the Watcher’s personal belongings, including most importantly a wand.

Officials are mobilizing all available Aurors to search for Black, and anticipate that Black will be apprehended and placed back Azkaban well before the start of school.

Harry stared at the large photograph of a sunken-faced man with long, matted hair and deep blue eyes which blinked slowly at Harry. The image was awfully familiar to Harry.

“That man!” Harry said, startled by what he saw. “I’ve seen him before! He’s that convict that’s been on the Muggle news!”

Mr. Ashcroft nodded sharply.
“Yes, Sirius Black. A powerful wizard indeed, to be able to survive twelve years in Azkaban with his sanity and powers intact. Most prisoners would have lost both years ago. He is known for the murder of thirteen people, but what this article will not say, is that those murders were only a part of the crimes to which Sirius Black was considered guilty.”

He went quiet then, and Harry looked askance at him. He seemed very reluctant to say anything. What could this man have done that would affect him?

Ashcroft looked up then, as if he heard what Harry was thinking. He gave a sorrowful glance to him and then started to speak.

“The reason why this article affects your need for a guardian lies in this man’s past. Like most wizards here in Britain, he studied at Hogwarts. He was a very bright student by all accounts, although terribly mischievous. And he was extremely close to one friend in particular. Your father, James Potter.”

Harry jerked back in his seat in astonishment.

“I said before, that I wasn’t particularly close to James, due to the differences in our ages and temperaments. I was however, close with James’s father. According to him, Sirius was more like a brother to James Potter than just a friend. They stayed close all through school, they even became Aurors together.”

Harry hungrily drank in the information, eager to learn more about his father and his past.

“Sirius fought with your parents against the followers of Voldemort, time and time again narrowly escaping death. His daring and skill attracted the attention of Voldemort himself, and he dueled against him personally, and managed to survive.”

“Eventually,” Ashcroft said quietly, “things got bad enough that under the advice of Dumbledore, your parents took you into hiding, in Godric’s Hollow. They chose to employ an ancient and powerful charm as their defense, known as the Fidelius Charm.”

“The Fidelius Charm,” Ashcroft explained, “is an extremely intricate and complex spell, that enables a secret to be magically concealed inside a single, living soul. That person is known as a Secret-Keeper, and as long as that person refuses to divulge the secret, it is secure, impossible to
discover by any means. With that kind of protection, even if Voldemort were to pass the home of one under the Fidelius – he would never see or even consider that the one he was searching for was in that house.”

“It is said,” said Mr. Ashcroft cautiously as he eyed Harry, “that your father insisted that no one else would serve to be your family’s Secret-Keeper save for Sirius Black. Even Dumbledore’s offer to serve in that position was refused outright. He trusted no one else more than Black…which, according to some, is the reason they are dead.”

Harry froze.

“Wh – What?” Harry said, as a ringing sound began in his ears.

“It is claimed that Sirius Black divulged the secret location of your home to Voldemort. That is how he came to attack you all that Halloween night. After Voldemort’s destruction, Sirius was said to have gone mad with rage, and fled into the Muggle world, closely pursued by another friend of your family, Peter Pettigrew. Pettigrew, it is said, confronted Black in a crowded street, and accused him of being the traitor. Black responded by casting a curse, powerful enough to kill not only Pettigrew, but twelve Muggles who were at the scene. The Ministry caught up to Black shortly thereafter, but he stood in the street, laughing hysterically while the bodies of the dead lay scattered around him. Pettigrew’s body was never found, save for an index finger. It is assumed that the rest of his body was vaporized by the curse. What has aroused the horror of those with full knowledge of events is this: Sirius Black was not only named as the executor of your parents’ will, he was and to this day remains – your godfather.”

Rage, such as Harry had never felt before surged through his body and veins. He slammed his hands on the table and stood up suddenly. A stiff wind, blew through the room and the remaining dishes on the table began to shake.

Sirius Black betrayed his parents to Voldemort! They might never had been killed if only he had just kept faith! Harry burned with the desire to find this murderer. Let him come, he would make him pay for his crimes, he would –

A sudden feeling of calm stole over Harry just then, and he felt all of the anger, all of that hate draining out of his body. A weight, like a giant hand pressed on him, forcing him back into his seat. The dishes stopped rattling.

Harry looked up, shocked out of the red haze that he had been under to see Mr. Ashcroft staring steadily at him. His eyes were narrowed, and he wore a very displeased expression on his face.
“I believe that you promised me to listen, and keep an open mind.” Ashcroft said softly.

The flush of rage gone, Harry squirmed uncomfortably in his seat, as he stared down on the oak wood that comprised the table. He didn’t respond, and Ashcroft sighed.

“Harry,” he said, “I did not tell you that story to cause you to desire revenge. Or death. You must remain calm, for there is one part to this story that has not yet been told.”

He kept quiet until Harry lifted his head up to stare him in the eye.

“As horrible as these list of crimes may be,” he said, “the fact is, Sirius Black was never formally charged for his alleged crimes. And I do not remember ever hearing of any records pertaining to the trial. If he had no trial….”

And then Harry understood, and a wave of confusion flooded him, as well as a prickling of shame over his outburst.

“You mean to say,” Harry ventured, “that it’s not yet clear if Black really is guilty?”

A slow smile crossed Ashcroft’s lips.

“Yes,” he said. “That is exactly what I mean. The circumstantial evidence is damming, I agree. But the due process of law was not followed, and without the records of the investigation, we may never know the truth.”

“What does that mean as far as my guardianship is concerned?” Harry questioned Ashcroft.

Ashcroft looked pensive.

“As far as your guardianship is concerned, it is imperative that we discover the validity of the accusations against Black. If there are records, then I have contacts in the Ministry who will be able to discover it. I have already begun my inquiries. Should the legal steps not have been taken, it
is possible Black could lay claim to your guardianship. He would have the strongest right, due to the possible provisions of your parents' will.”

Harry shuddered. Even if Sirius Black hadn’t received a trial, until there was proof that he hadn’t betrayed his parents, he could never, ever stay with a man like that.

“That portion will be made clear once we take the steps to get the will of your parents read. There may be alternate guardians assigned. There may be an alternate arrangement that can be made to give you as secure a guardianship as possible. That however, is a conversation that we must have later. As far as your personal safety is concerned…”.

Ashcroft turned to Harry and laid a warm hand upon his own. His blue eyes glittered as he looked hard into Harry’s face.

“I implore you Harry, don’t go looking for trouble. Until we know the truth, it is dangerous for you to seek out Black. He is a wizard who was skilled enough to duel the Dark Lord and live. His powers are great, and he is desperate. Should he truly be a traitor, he will either seek to kill you or hand you over to Voldemort. Let the Ministry deal with Black. You must stay safe, understand?”

Harry nodded, his throat thickened so he couldn’t say a word. Ashcroft eyed him for a bit, then relaxed.

“Good. Now, if you’re ready, then let us be on our way. We have much to do today in Diagon Alley, and we can no longer delay.”

It was a matter of moments for Mr. Ashcroft to remove the used dishes and have the table clean. That done, Harry and Mr. Ashcroft began to trek down to the entryway into Diagon Alley. As they were going downstairs, Harry decided to ask the question that had begun to weigh on his mind.

“Mr. Ashcroft,” asked Harry, “How is it that you’ve already begun an investigation into Sirius Black? What makes you think that there might have been a mistake?”

Ashcroft didn’t answer for a while as they bypassed various witches and wizards going about their business. At first, Harry thought that Mr. Ashcroft hadn’t heard him. But just before they reached the entryway to Diagon Alley behind the Leaky Cauldron, he halted and held Harry back from going forward too.
Ashcroft turned to Harry and was smiling grimly. That smile made Harry feel a bit nervous.

“How, Harry?” Ashcroft said. “Why, simply by this fact: Sirius Black had the chance to kill you last night when you were sitting there all alone at Magnolia Crescent. He didn’t take it.”

Harry’s head whipped towards Mr. Ashcroft’s faster than a darting Snitch.

“Wh – what?” he gasped.

“Oh yes,” said Ashcroft, “He was there last night, in the shadows. He’d arrived there minutes before I did, and that was a good fifteen minutes before you sensed his presence. I had time to study his aura, and I tell you, as I am a wizard, his aura has not been stained by betrayal or deliberate murder. That’s why until this mystery is solved, you’ve got to keep your wits about you…”.

And with that, he tapped out the configuration for the archway and moved ahead as it opened, without another word.

*****

Diagon Alley was full of a bustling crowd of witches and wizards going about their business. Harry, as always was in awe of the various shops and stalls that were lined up all along the alleyway. It was tempting to stop and say, grab a sundae at ol’ Fortescue’s or press his nose over at Quality Quidditch Supplies like the gaggle of young boys (with the stray girl) that were doing that very thing. But he didn’t have very much money left in his moneybag, and Mr. Ashcroft was insistent that they make their way over to Gringotts first.

So it was with a slightly heavy heart that Harry resisted the urge to stop at those stores and continued walking along with Mr. Ashcroft, as they made their way through the thick crowd towards the bank. In any case, thought Harry as they walked, it makes sense to ask about the will and see how it would affect my vault. He said that to Mr. Ashcroft as well.

He was rather puzzled, when Mr. Ashcroft threw back his head and burst out laughing. It took a couple of minutes for Mr. Ashcroft to settle down, and then for him to establish privacy wards to
allow them to talk freely.

“Oh Harry,” gasped Mr. Ashcroft as he got himself under control. “I’m sorry for laughing, but I must correct you. Why would you only have one vault? The Potters are a wealthy family which reaches back over a thousand years, and which has always held great influence within the British magical community. I assure you dear boy, you hold significantly more than merely one vault.”

“I don’t understand,” breathed Harry in surprise, “I’ve only ever held a key to a single vault. Vault 687.”

Mr. Ashcroft smiled. “That Harry, is most likely your trust vault. It is a common feature among the noble families and those families who possess considerable wealth. As a minor, the Lord or Lady of the family will arrange for a vault to be set aside for their child to manage. Assuming that their education has been paid for in advance, the contents are for their school supplies and for their desires before they reach their majority. It may also serve as the basis for establishing their own independent fortune, for the more successful noble families will expect their children to add to the collective coffers of their vaults rather than just subtract. They can not access the main vaults of their family without leave from their Head until they reach their majority – which would be the age seventeen. The trust vaults as well as the lesser vaults of the commoner families will therefore require a key. The greater vaults of a noble family and the ancient vaults however – those are protected by far greater defenses and cannot be opened with any key.”

Harry continued walking beside Mr. Ashcroft in a daze. Multiple vaults! It was embarrassing enough, holding one vault. His mind went towards the Weasleys, whose vault was more often empty than not. They struggled so much, on so little! And he was alone, and had so much…

He looked at Mr. Ashcroft, who sighed at the look on his face. He halted near a stall and had Harry stop as well.

“I understand that this will be trying for you Harry,” he said gently. “You have never had much until recently and it must be a shock to learn how wealthy you are. You must however, keep this in mind. Never be ashamed of your heritage. You are the next in line of a long and proud lineage of wizards and witches who have ever endeavored to use their wealth and temporal prestige to create change – change that would open doors of opportunity and prosperity to hundreds of thousands. Yes, you are rich. Understand though, that the true wealth of your family is not the gold in your vaults. It is the legacy and honor of your forebears. It is the history of their triumphs and defeats. That, Harry, is the true wealth of the Ancient and Noble Houses. Never forget that.”

“Yes sir.” said Harry, subdued as he thought about what he had been told.
The rest of their walk to Gringotts was in contemplative silence.

Entering the marble building, the two wizards passed through the entrance hall to the silver doors that concealed the main hall of the bank. With a polite nod at the goblins stationed at either side of the doors, Ashcroft and Harry were bowed inside.

The main hall of Gringotts was as always, a hive of bustling activity. Scores of goblins were seated along the long counter conducting transactions with lines of witches and wizards. Others were busy weighing precious jewels, or scribbling madly in account ledgers. Still more were conducting customers through various doors which led to the vast and intricate caverns which housed the wealth of tens of thousands of families across Britain.

As Ashcroft guided Harry over to a free teller, Harry couldn’t resist the small shiver that trailed up and down his spine as he watched the goblins go about their work. They were very well dressed, but after two years of hearing of nothing but goblin wars and rebellions since he set foot in his History of Magic class – well, he had a healthier respect for these small but cunning creatures.

The teller that Ashcroft directed them to appeared to be in a bad mood, judging by the snarls and muttering that were being made over some figures in a ledger he was scribbling in.

“I’m not available, wizard.” the teller snarled as it scribbled furiously in its ledgers without bothering to lift his head. “Check yourself over to where the lines are. I don’t care how busy you think you are, but you’ll just have to suck it up and wait.”

Harry looked over to Mr. Ashcroft who merely smirked at the surly behavior of the goblin. With a sharp tap of his wand against the marble counter, he began to hover until he was the one looming over the grumbling goblin. He extended his hand, and Harry noticed a ring – with a wide silver band, etched with a raven, wings spread out in flight, clutching a blue stone between its body, some kind of symbol etched into the stone.

“You, dare…” breathed the goblin, as he looked up from his work, to deal with the wizard worm who dared to order a goblin of Gringotts –
– only to stand, frozen in shock as he beheld the signet of a Noble and Most Ancient House.

The rude teller’s voice quickly became oily as he bowed low, to Harry’s astonishment.

“Ah, my Lord Duke… such an honor to see and serve your Grace… I will alert Acct. Mgr. Hadfang of your arrival at once… let me show you into a private room…”

The next thing Harry knew, they were ensconced in a large private office, richly furnished as they waited the arrival of Mr. Ashcroft’s Account Manager.

As the impertinent teller scuttled out of the office, Harry turned to Mr. Ashcroft, who sat in one of the velvet-backed chairs that the teller had directed them to, looking completely unruffled by the entire affair.

“Lord Duke?” Harry said incredulously. “Lord Duke? Do you mean to tell me sir, that – that you are – royalty?”

Mr. Ashcroft smiled.

“I told you Harry that I am a member of the elite families of Britain.” he said.

Harry’s mouth opened in shock.

“I didn’t know the magical community had royalty!” he exclaimed.

“Well, now you do.” Ashcroft responded as he patted Harry’s arm reassuringly. “But more of that later. Hadfang should be here now.”

Harry was unable to respond, because at that moment the doors opened as another Goblin walked in. This Goblin was older in appearance, and dressed in far more luxurious robes than the teller. He went over to the chair across from them and sitting down, speared one look at Mr. Ashcroft.
“Ah...” said the Goblin, “so you have returned, my Lord Ashcroft.”

Ashcroft inclined his head in greeting. “Hadfang.” he murmured.

Hadfang then turned and noticed the third person in the room. He smiled, showing a sharp row of teeth.

“And you’ve brought along a companion, how charming. Mr. Harry Potter…an honor.”

He bowed his head, and Harry copied the movement as best as he could. Hadfang stared at him for another moment, then turned back to Mr. Ashcroft.

“My Lord Duke, I had not realized that you would require a personal accounting for your records. I’ve just held a meeting with your steward, two days past. Was there anything…amiss?”

Ashcroft waved off the question with his hand.

“I’ve already spoken with Master Belltram about that meeting.” he said. “I am perfectly satisfied by the meeting’s outcome. Your work, as ever was impeccable –”

Hadfang inclined his head.

“– but I,” continued Ashcroft, “require your aid with a matter that requires some…delicacy. Mr. Potter and I have some questions regarding the state of affairs with his family’s estate.”

Hadfang’s eyes narrowed in interest as he looked from Mr. Ashcroft, to Harry, who swallowed hard.

Relax, said a voice suddenly. *Make your request. It is your Right to be heard, you cannot be denied*…

Harry looked at Mr. Ashcroft, for the voice sounded like his. But Mr. Ashcroft had not spoken, rather he was watching Harry closely, smiling encouragingly.
Harry turned to Hadfang, taking a deep breath to settle his nerves. *It’s my right,* he reminded himself. *He must listen to me.*

“I wish to lay claim to my family’s vaults, and take up the position my family has held within this society.” Harry said. “I am not aware however of the identity of the current manager of the Potter Accounts. Would it be possible to have the Account Manager for my accounts meet with us?”

Hadfang leaned back in his chair, considering Harry’s request with a long look. Then he smiled again, although it was more like the baring of teeth.

“Very good Mr. Potter,” he said, “I will have a teller summon him now.”

Hadfang summoned a teller and gave him his instructions, sending him off with a sharp bark of Gobbledygook. As they waited for the teller’s return, Hadfang and Mr. Ashcroft entered into a quiet discussion concerning some of the figures that had apparently been covered in the goblin’s meeting with Mr. Ashcroft’s son. It was not long however, until the doors opened again and the teller returned, a second goblin walking swiftly after him with a thick number of parchments and ledger books under his arm. They halted before Hadfang’s seat and bowed low, before doing the same to Mr. Ashcroft. The teller left, and the remaining goblin turned to Harry Potter and bowed low.

“Mr. Potter. It is an honor to serve you and your House.”

Harry narrowed his eyes as he took in the appeared of this manager. He looked strangely familiar…

“Hang on,” Harry blurted out. “Haven't I seen you before? You’re the one who took me and Hagrid to my vault two years ago. You’re Griphook, aren’t you?

Both Hadfang and Griphook turned sharply towards him. Mr. Ashcroft’s eyebrows raised as well. Then Griphook smiled.

“Yes, I took you to your vault when you came into our halls at the age of eleven. I’m surprised that you remember our meeting so well. And to call me by name…most unusual.”
Standing up, Hadfang walked over to where Griphook stood and bowed to the room.

“I believe my presence will not be necessary,” he said. “Griphook will see to your affairs. Once again, an honor to serve you my Lord Duke. And Mr. Potter…. Gringotts will be following your career with great interest.”

With one last bow, Hadfang left the office. Griphook went over to the chair recently vacated, and settled himself. Once he had things settled to his liking, he focused his attention to Harry.

“I will be blunt Mr. Potter,” began Griphook without preamble, “your family’s records are…quite complicated. Due to the nature of the War, many decisions were made which has rather diminished your family’s liquid assets. If the previous Head of your family had lived, I am certain things would have been quite different. In addition, in the past, your family made the decision to… conceal the extent of their holdings. It has been quite a chore, cleaning up and consolidating your interests into a cohesive report. However, it has been done. We do have a…couple of small problems however.”

Harry frowned.

“What problem?” he asked, throwing a worried glance at Mr. Ashcroft.

“Merely this,” said Griphook, “that these matters cannot be made public to you until you lay claim to your inheritance. Only as the acknowledged heir, can I release information concerning your holdings to you or your -” throwing a glance at Mr. Ashcroft, “- guardian. May I presume, that it is your wish to lay claim to the Potter inheritance, and all of the duties, and privileges it entails?”

“Yes, it is.” Harry answered firmly. Next to him, Mr. Ashcroft though silent, nodded in approval.

“Very well.” Griphook replied. With a sharp snap of his fingers, a number of items appeared before them.

Harry leaned forward for a closer look, and saw an elaborately etched obsidian bowl. This bowl had swirling pictographs and rune etched all over its exterior, but was smooth stone within. To its right, was a blade, also of obsidian with a silver handle. It was a small blade and unadorned. Next to that, was a blank parchment and a black quill.
“Um, not to be rude or anything,” Harry asked nervously, “but, what do you need a knife for?”

Griphook’s eyes flicked over to Mr. Ashton, who sighed.

“Harry, here at Gringotts, one of the most effective and secure ways of claiming an inheritance is through the use of blood. This is needed to prevent any pretender or usurper from stealing from the vaults of another. It is also the only way to activate your family’s vaults. With the exception of your trust vault, the Potter Accounts were locked down, upon the death of your parents. With the complications with your executor and custodial arrangements, it cannot be opened again without your blood.”

“Well said my Lord Duke,” agreed Griphook. “Blood Mr. Potter, can evoke the most powerful of enchantments, enchantments that cannot be undone easily. It is old magic, beyond that of the word. For our purposes, I will prick your finger and you must shed seven drops of your blood into that bowl. The blood will be analyzed in the bowl; if you are not a Potter, but in fact an imposter –” here, Griphook bared his teeth in a wicked grin “– the enchantments will extract the price…of your life.”

Harry’s eyes widened and he gulped, audibly.

“If however, you are who you say you are,” continued Griphook, “then I use this quill to absorb the blood. You will then sign your full name. The inheritance rite will be completed, and you will receive your Heir ring. As the confirmed heir, I will be allowed to present the financial report of your holdings and assets, and matters such as any outstanding wills can be dealt with. Shall we begin?”

Mr. Ashcroft coughed and raised a finger.

"Before we move to the examination," he said quietly, "I must understand the nature of the second problem that you alluded to."

Harry glanced at Mr. Ashcroft curiously. Though his voice was quiet, there was an edge almost, an intensity to his voice that caused faint alarm bells to ring in Harry's mind. Straightening himself in his seat, he turned to Griphook and narrowed his eyes at the almost...hesitant glance that the goblin made in Harry's direction before clearing his own throat and turning to the older wizard.

"My Lord Duke," began Griphook, "it isn't a problem per se so much as a...complication. To be
quite frank with you, this account was bequeathed to me upon the unfortunate passing of Mgr. Orcist, who served under the previous head of the House of Potter. Before his passing, he mentioned that there were matters that had not been accounted for...secrets that might affect any possible distribution of assets to beneficiaries in the event of Lord Potter's death. He wasn't very specific, I'm afraid, but he stressed the importance of ensuring that the Potter accounts not be disturbed or altered until the Heir himself was physically present."

"I see..." breathed Mr. Ashcroft, a curious look of unease briefly suffusing his face before clearing. "Then we will speak no more on that matter then Master Goblin, until young Harry here fulfills the requirements to register as the next Head of the family."

With another glance at Mr. Ashcroft, who nodded encouragingly, Harry extended his forefinger. Grasping the obsidian blade, Griphook made a small cut. He then brought the stone bowl over to Harry’s finger.

"Add seven drops." The goblin said solemnly.

Wincing at the sting of the cut, Harry grasped his bleeding digit with his other hand, and began to squeeze. He watched, breathlessly as drop by drop, blood began to drip into the bowl. After seven drops had fallen, Griphook yanked the bowl away and watched it closely as the runes and pictographs began to glow, a pale blue.

Harry looked at his bleeding finger and debated the merit of popping it into his mouth. A tap on his shoulders however, revealed Mr. Ashcroft, who with a fond shake of his head, healed the cut instantly. They turned back towards the bowl, only to see the pale blue light grow stronger for a moment, before winking out of existence.

Griphook looked up from his study of the bowl and smiled a deadly smile.

“Well, well,” he said. “You will be pleased to know that you are who you say you are. Congratulations, Mr. Potter.”

Grasping the bowl, he picked up the black quill, and dipped it into the bowl. He held it there for a while, and Harry began to wonder what was so special about the quill, when he noticed a thin line of red light trailing up the quill. It was now clear, that the quill was etched with various runes as well. When the light faded, Griphook slid the blank piece of parchment over to Harry, and held out the quill.
“Sign your full name,” he said.

Taking a deep breath, Harry wrote out his name on the parchment – Harry James Potter. The words glimmered with a red light…then faded away. Confused, he looked up to meet Griphook’s narrowed stare.

“I – I wrote out my name!” Harry exclaimed. “What happened to the words?”

“The words faded, Mr. Potter because what you put there wasn’t your full name.” said Griphook.

Harry gaped at the goblin.

“What does that mean?” asked Harry. “That’s the only name I’ve got!”

“No, it isn’t.” said Mr. Ashcroft

Bewildered, Harry turned to him for an explanation. Mr. Ashcroft sat there, tapping his finger against his chin.

“When you were born, your father sent out invitations to trusted members of the elite to attend your Naming ceremony. I wasn’t able to attend, but your full name was written out in the invitational letter. It was, if I’m not mistaken, Henry James Charlus Potter. ‘Harry’ is merely a nickname for ‘Henry’. Its commonly done here in England. Why, if I’ve got my facts right, you share that name with the second son of the muggle Prince of Wales. Anyway, why don’t you write that out on the parchment?”

Head bursting with questions, Harry did as Mr. Ashcroft suggested. After writing Henry James Charlus Potter on the parchment, he viewed the parchment. Once again, it began to glow.

Harry held his breath. Would the words fade away once more?

The glimmering words stopped glowing after a moment…and soon, more words began to flow out across the parchment.
Both Harry and Mr. Ashcroft exhaled sharply as they saw the words appear. Griphook rapidly read all of the things on the parchment carefully, eyes narrowed at first, but growing wider and wider the longer he read. At one point, the goblin manager speared Harry with a look that almost approximated...fright, before swinging back down to the parchment, which shortly thereafter, magical split into a second page which began to fill up with words that Harry couldn't make out as well. Harry cast a bewildered look at Mr. Ashcroft, who was uncharacteristically tense, his clenched knuckles turning white on the armrests of the chair he'd been provided. What was going on?

After a few more moments, the words stopped forming. Griphook picked up the quill and held it over the bowl. He snapped the quill over the bowl and dropped the pieces into the bowl. The runes suddenly lit up again, only this time, the light was blood-red. It shone steadily for about a minute or two, as a heavy scent of metal and ozone permeated the room. After one last flare, the light once again went out.

Griphook pushed the bowl over to Harry.

“Pick it up,” he said, gruffly.

Slowly, Harry peered into the bowl. Where there had once been a broken quill, there was now a golden ring. Awed at the sight, Harry put his hand into the bowl and withdrew the ring, holding it up for inspection. It was slightly heavy, but not uncomfortably so. The square cut stone was made of ruby. It sat, embedded into the ring band, which was pure gold, with the motif of a phoenix head on one side, and a strange horse-like creature's head on the other.

He looked at Mr. Ashcroft, and at the ring. Now, he was filled with doubt. Was he really worthy of being a part of a legacy that had apparently been very prominent in history? He wasn’t anything special, aside from his scar, and his propensity for being drawn into trouble. What was so special about him?

Mr. Ashcroft laid a weathered hand on top of his free hand. His eyes warmed as he smiled encouragingly at the young teen.

“Do not doubt Harry,” he said. “You are every bit as worthy to take up this birthright as any other of your ancestors. I do truly believe dear boy, that you will accomplish extraordinary things. You will do your father and mother proud.”
Letting out a deep breath, Harry picked up the ring and slid it onto his third finger. The stone glimmered, a faint tracing of crimson light danced around his hand, and a faint shock of energy went through him.

Griphook sucked in a sudden breath, and then slowly nodded approvingly at the display.

“Good. Good. Everything seems to be in order.”

Taking hold of the parchment, Griphook held it out towards Harry, a curious light in his eyes.

“This is the last account of the summary for the Ancient and Noble House of Potter before the vaults were locked down, my Lord. As a duly confirmed heir of the Potter family, I present this to you for your perusal.”

With shaking fingers, Harry accepted the parchment from his Account Manager. He looked down on the words written and gasped in utter shock at what he read:

Summary of Account Holdings for:
His Lordship, Henry James Charlus Potter
Viscount Tawley
Heir Presumptive of the
Ancient and Noble House of Potter

Liquid Assets:

- Vault 687- Current balance: 37,679 £; 8,522 S; 476 K (50,000 £ limit)
- Vault 609- Current Balance: 250,000 £ (250,000 £ limit)
- Vault 763- Current Balance: 163,797 £; 2,904 S; 673 K
- Vault 032- Current Balance: 3,374,088 £; 7,235 S; 382 K*

*Per instruction of the Archduke of Caerleon, all Jewels, Heirlooms, and Artifacts pertaining to Vault 32 (Potter Vault) were moved into Vault 002 (Peverell Vault) as of August 23, 1991. Estimated value of all Jewels, Heirlooms, and Artifacts located in said vault stand at 16,000,000
G. All contents of Vault 633 have been transferred under the stewardship of the Archduke of Caerleon, as of August 31, 1991.

**Investments**

*Sleekeazy’s Production Company*: 39%

*Obscurus Books*: 9%

*Quality Quidditch Supplies*: 17%

*Daily Prophet*: 3%

*Witch Weekly*: 9%

**Properties**

*Potterer’s Cottage*: Location- Potter's Hill, West County, England

*Gryphon Hall*: Location- Gryphon’s Valley, Entshire, England, Albion

*Château de Potterer*: Location- Nogent le Rotrou, Val de Loire, France

*Potter Flat*: Location- Hampstead Village, Hampstead, London

The parchment had far more listed on there, but Harry was completely overwhelmed by what he had already read. He thrust the parchment away from himself, and stared wildly at Mr. Ashcroft and Griphook. He thrust his head into his hands, completely missing the concerned look that Mr. Ashcroft threw his way before summoning the parchment and reading its contents for himself. He certainly missed the look of confusion and awe that crossed his face when perusing a certain point.
of clarification within the document, as well as the sharp, questioning look that his guardian threw at Griphook, who remained stony-faced. It wasn't until he felt an arm touch his shoulder, that Harry lifted his head to gaze almost beseeingly at Mr. Ashcroft, who frowned and shook his head with a sigh.

Mr. Ashcroft spoke before he could utter anything.

“Harry,” he said sternly, “You mustn’t be scared by your family’s assets. Yes, it seems overwhelming now. The truth of the matter is; you will not have to unduly worry about your wealth. Your Account manager will oversee and manage your monetary wealth and investments. In addition, your parents will have appointed a suitable Seneschal to care for your properties. That person, whoever it is will also assist you in making any major financial decision. You will have time – time to grow and develop the skills and understanding you will need to effectively manage your affairs. Trust in yourself. You can accomplish much.”

Slowly, Harry’s panic attack faded, and he found it easier to breathe. He looked at Mr. Ashcroft pleadingly, unable to take anymore news concerning his fortune. Mr. Ashcroft however turned towards Griphook, who was clutching the second parchment with a look of awe on his face, or at the very least, great surprise.

"I know that you feel overwhelmed by what you have read so far, Harry." Mr. Ashcroft said while staring steadily at Griphook. "These assets are significant indeed when one considers the conditions mentioned before by Master Griphook. You aren't aware however of what this parchment represents for yourself as far as your relation to the assets of the House of Potter is concerned. Though you are the son of the last legal Head of the Ancient and Noble House of Potter, because of...circumstances that I will make clear to you momentarily, you are not listed as the Head of the family, merely as the heir presumptive. It is not your responsibility to oversee any of these assets apart from the funds from your trust vault. Your financial situation remains the same, at the present time."

Harry let out a great sigh of relief at that, but tensed again as Mr. Ashcroft held up a warning hand.

"But before you celebrate Harry, it's important that the appropriate distinctions are made. You are the heir presumptive for the House of Potter. Evidently however, with Master Griphook’s kind permission, we will learn that another House has greater claim to you at this time. Master Goblin?"

He held out his hand and Griphook carefully delivered the second parchment to him. Mr. Ashcroft directed his gaze upon the parchment and began to read silently to himself when he froze. His eyes widened in unadulterated shock. It was a look that Harry had only seen once before with Mr. Ashcroft, when he had given his name to him while meeting him the night before in Little Whinging. Harry looked on with trepidation at the parchment that now trembled along with the
older man's fingers as he glanced from it, to Griphook, back onto the parchment, then to Harry.

"I'm afraid dear boy, that the situation has just gotten quite...complicated. I'll explain what I can, but you'll have to forego questions until later."

That said, Mr. Ashcroft carefully extended the parchment to Harry, who honestly didn't want to even touch it if it was causing these two beings such anxiety, but he decided to buckle up and so reached out and grasped the second piece of parchment. Bringing towards him, Harry began to read the words that had appeared on the parchment, his own eyes widening at what was set therein:

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**Summary of Account Holdings for:**

His Royal and Imperial Highness, Henry James Charlus Potter

The Archduke of Caerleon

Prince of the Pendragon

Lord Regnant of the

Most Ancient & Royal House of Peverell

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*Liquid Assets/Jewelry/Heirlooms*

**Peverell Ancestral Vault** (Vault #002): LA- 9,475,794 £; 76,543 S; 15,068 K

\[ J/H- 16,029,385 £ \]

**Heir Trust Vault** (Vault #31): LA- 1,579,216 £; 393 S; 133 K - 2,000,000 limit/per annum

**Dowager Vault** (Vault #135): LA- 100,000 £ limit/per quarter
The Cottage: Location- Godric's Hollow, Brandywein, Wales, Albion

The Tower: Location- Unplottable, Brandywein, Wales, Albion

Castell Pevensey: Location- Dyffryn y Dreigiau, Pevensie, Wales, Albion

Caerleon Fortress: Location- Caerleon Township, Newport, Wales, U.K.

Legislative Seats:

The Archduke of Caerleon holds the seat of the Most Ancient and Royal House of Peverell, and the honour of acknowledgement as Archmagus of the Wizards' Council, now acknowledged as the Wizengamot. As the Marquess of Brandywein, the Archduke holds the seat of the Noble House of Gryffindor.

*In accordance with the Act of Ascension, the Wizengamot must be notified no less than seven days before a regular session of the intent to ascend to the designated seat(s).
The parchment slipped from nerveless fingers, as Harry Potter began to fall into a swoon. With a muttered oath, Ashcroft leaped out of his chair to stabilize the young teen, as Griphook summoned the falling parchment with a snap of his clawed fingers. Murmuring an old enchantment to simulate a sense of peace over the boy's head, Ashcroft closed his eyes and focused a small portion of his energy in, just enough to take the wind out of the whirlwind that no doubt was conjuring up a storm to end all storms within Harry's mind. He let out a sigh of relief as Harry sucked in a deep breath, then another and so on until he was breathing normally and his heart was ceased beating uncontrollably.

Sending a silent prayer of thanks to his Patron deity, Ashcroft helped Harry settle back into his seat. As Harry opened his mouth - no doubt to offer some form of apology - Ashcroft raised his forefinger to his mouth.

"Steady there, my young friend," he said carefully. "There's no need to explain anything. Both Master Griphook and myself were just as shocked as you were, and when we get the chance I will explain the reasons why, as well as the significance of what we have witnessed here in this room. Just continue taking deep breaths while I conclude our meeting with Master Griphook."

Waiting until Harry nodded in agreement, Mr. Ashcroft turned toward his own seat and speared Griphook with a probing glance. The relatively young goblin flushed pink at the charged scrutiny, then sneered and cocked his head away, though it was readily apparent that he was listening very closely.

“Mr. Potter will require a copy of his holdings and assets to be sent to him securely, so he will have the leisure to carefully study the contents of his vaults. As you can see, he is a bit overwhelmed. For now, the last business we will need taken care of is the status of his parents’ will. It has not yet been executed, for reasons that you are sure to be aware of.”

Griphook frowned as he sorted through the stack of documents on the desk. Pausing, he snatched one parchment up, and looked closely.

“Ah yes, this will, is quite an issue. Had matters not become so…complicated with the executor, the provisions of the will might have been in effect years ago. As it is, until the will is read, all of the assets of the Pe--Peverell and Potter Accounts apart from the trust vaults will remain...
inaccessible. This makes the will reading a necessity.”

“Your Grace,” said Griphook, “in light of the unique nature of the inheritance which has come to view, I must inform you that without the Executor, only with the consent of the Head of the House of Potter can the Will be unsealed. If that is your wish, then inquiries will have to be made to ensure an optimal time for such a reading.”

Ashcroft frowned. “I agree with your words in principle, Master Griphook, but I must insist that no inquiries are set in motion. I have a...contact who can help Harry make the arrangements for the will reading.”

The swarthy goblin nodded, slowly. "If that is what you wish," he said. "In that case, matters with regards to the Potter Estate will be settled at a later date. I suggest you hurry though. There is only so much that we can do to prevent the Ministry from attempting to interfere with this matter. With regards to the estates of the House of Peverell however...as young Mr. Potter was the direct heir of Lord James and is the sole relative with the legal rights to ascend to this...position, it falls to him to authorize the reading of the Last Will and Testament of the Archduke."

Griphook extended a parchment over to Harry, who picked it up. It was a document stating that the Heir of the House of Peverell would authorize the unsealing and execution of the Last Will and Testament of the Archduke of Pevensie. Harry stared at the document for a moment, then silently pressed his ring against the parchment.

The parchment glowed for a few seconds, then disappeared into wisps of energy which quickly faded away. Griphook nodded approvingly.

“Everything looks to be in order,” he said. “Gringotts will contact you as well as any other beneficiaries with the details of the date for the reading of the will. Once the will has been read, and its bequests executed, we will need to meet to discuss possible investments, and study the health of any investments that are currently in your possession. Until the reading of the will, I will remind His Grace that any withdrawals that are to be made, will only be allowed from the trust vault 31. As far as the Potter assets are concerned, naturally Vault 687 will remain fully accessible to you as well.”

Harry nodded and turned to Mr. Ashcroft, who leaned forward.

“That seems acceptable to us. We thank you for your service, as well as your most stringent discretion.”
Griphook rose from the seat, and bowed low before them.

“The honor is all mine, my Lord Dukes. Gringotts looks forward to continuing a most profitable and amicable relationship with your Graces.”

And with that, Griphook bowed them out of the office.

Chapter End Notes

Whew! As promised, the next chapter in this developing saga is complete. Definitely one of the most exciting chapters that we have written, even though much of the chapter contains an edited version of the original fourth chapter of this amazing story.

As you can see, we have chosen to introduce our interpretation of a minor HP character who literally only has one appearance in a book and a couple of lines in said book: Blaise Zabini. Blaise Zabini has always been a fascinating character for us as the character has been shrouded in shadows for years until recent comments and clarifications by the wonderful mistress of the Wizarding World, Her Illustrious Highness, JK Rowling. Fandom thought for years that Zabini was a girl, before we learned that not only was he not a girl, but he was a POC. It is assumed in most fanfics that Zabini is Italian by birth or at least nationality. Honestly, we have no clue if that is even true or not, but it is something that we decided to play with here. It isn't as well represented in this chapter as we would've liked, but we'll give a bit of head canon about Blaise.

Blaise Zabini for this story is as stated conclusively in canon a person of color. His father, Oman Lucare is of Afro-Portuguese descent. His mother, here named Amarilla Zabini is of course, of Italian descent. He also has links to Britain through more distant ancestors who might be touched upon in future chapters. He is of the noble class, though his status is nebulous in Britain and outside of it.

Most of the noble families in Britain consider the Zabinis to be of middling to minor nobility. Madame Zabini is a Countess in Italy, but has no noble titles in Britain proper and Blaise is considered a Viscount by courtesy. The truth however is more complicated. His father, Oman Lucare is in fact a Marquess of Portugal, with significant historical ties to Britain through his ancestry. This fact isn't bandied about in Britain because when Madame Zabini was betrothed to his father and just fell pregnant with Blaise, his father was murdered by a mysterious group of wizards who targeted him for unknown reasons, with ringleaders coming from Britain. Since then, Madame Zabini has made it her life's mission to hunt down and avenge her husband's death and has elected to do so in the most shocking way possible - by marrying, then murdering each of them, gaining their wealth and property in the process. She has never been caught in the act, but the gossip-mongers have given her the title of 'Black
Widow’. This has prompted Blaise to become very protective of her and take pains to learn powerful, dark magic as a child in order to defend himself and her, an act that continues when we meet him for the first time. For this story, he is actually younger than Harry Potter by a day, with his bday falling on August 1, when we meet him.

Where certain phrases have been italicized, Blaise and his mother are speaking either in Italian or in Portuguese. You guess which phrase is which!

Expect more from him in the future as he will be headlining this story along with Harry Potter for reasons that we hope will excite a lot of you, as well as new readers!

As for Harry...his story is mostly unchanged from when raf1988 wrote the original edition of this story. He meets up with Ashcroft after being rescued the night before and learn some facts before going to Gringotts to claim his inheritance. Older readers will note however that some things have been changed, as he is not able to claim the Lordship of House Potter. Why?

Well...we can't tell you exactly why, but part of that answer is due to his father James Potter. The Potters are descendants of the Peverells, but for this story have kept that hidden for reasons that will be addressed in the next chapter. Almost no one knows of this save for the Head of House and the Heir. James made a discovery at some point in the war and decided to do what he could to make Harry as safe politically as possible. For that reason, he abdicated his rights as the Head of House Potter and took up the mantle of Head of House Peverell, which carries with it a very hefty noble title. As such, Harry is only the Heir Presumptive (why? stay tuned...) of House Potter, but Heir Apparent of House Peverell. And coincidentally, James’ decision neatly ties in with a certain secret that Lord Ashcroft has been keeping for some time after the death of his closest friend.

What's the secret? Check in around the 17th later this month to find out!

Many thanks as always to raf1988 who allowed us to take over his sandbox and continues to build sandcastles with us from time to time. And a special thanks to all of the readers who have given comments to either alert us to an error or ask some questions or offer a few friendly suggestions or just say how they enjoy the story. We love you all! Thank you for your support! - emf911
To be of Noble Blood - Part I

Chapter Summary

As Harry wraps his mind around what he has inherited from his family, Mr. Ashcroft steels himself to share a secret entrusted to him by Harry's grandfather years before. Harry learns his first lessons on being a member of the British nobility while encountering an old foe, and meets a person who carries a long-buried secret that will change Harry's perspective of his past...

Chapter Notes

This chapter includes some dialogue from the book, Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone written by J.K. Rowling, who holds all rights to that book along with Warner Bros., Scholastic Books, and other companies affiliated with this franchise.

August 8, 2003

As Mr. Ashcroft and Harry made their way towards the atrium of Gringotts, Harry battled the urge to pinch himself. A part of him was still shaken by the information that had been revealed a few minutes prior. He had no idea that his family was as wealthy and influential as what he had discovered. He wasn't a genius - far from it, to be honest - but he knew what it meant to be considered a Viscount, and what it meant to be considered a Duke...Archduke...whatever.

Somehow, Harry - the freak who slept nearly his entire life in a cupboard under the stairs - was a Noble. An extremely high ranked noble, he'd wager. What kind of world was he living in?

He spared a look at the older gentleman walking at his side. As comforting as Mr. Ashcroft had been earlier, Harry had also gotten the impression that something had bothered him when he had learned that Harry was apparently this Archduke. Or maybe it had been earlier than that, when Griphook, his family's account manager had revealed that Harry was not in fact, going to inherit the title of Earl. He seemed...distressed, for a brief moment; it had been quite uncharacteristic of the older man that Harry was quickly beginning to consider an honorary uncle, like Mr. and Mrs. Weasley. What had disturbed him so?
He broke his train of thought when Mr. Ashcroft suddenly stilled, causing Harry to nearly trip when he caught on a few seconds afterwards and scrambled to make re-trace his steps so he could be in sync with his guardian.

"Sir?" ventured Harry hesitantly. He watched Mr. Ashcroft's face as he appeared to be carefully considering something, before his face hardened and he released a short sigh before turning to face Harry.

"Harry, my boy," said Mr. Ashcroft, "I do believe that we've forgotten an important task. You still have to withdraw the money that you'd like to use for the upcoming school term. Would you like to go to your vault and withdraw what you feel to be reasonable? Do you have the key to your trust vault?"

"Uh, yes sir, I do." replied Harry, pulling out the key to his vault - trust vault, according to the papers that he'd seen in the past hour - and showing it to the older wizard.

"Ah, very good then," said Mr. Ashcroft. His eyes seemed strangely clouded, and his voice seemed almost absent minded. "I wonder then, if you would excuse me for a few moments? I realize that we still have a great deal more errands to do together before we can rest and enjoy a good dinner, but I've just realized that I have something that is most pressing to take care of. I need to see to it at once, but I don't want to leave you unattended."

"Oh." Harry frowned, slightly. "Did you want me to gather my supplies and meet you back at the Leaky? I don't mind sir, if you have more important -."

"Nothing is more important than me being here, at this time, with you," interjected Mr. Ashcroft. He gave a small smile to Harry and his eyes twinkled somewhat. "While this errand is important, it will not take me a great deal of time to make the necessary arrangements. Take your time to gather the funds that you will need. And get a bit more than normal. We'll have to make arrangements later with Griphook to allow you access to your trust vaults even if you are unable to visit the bank personally...but that is a matter for later this evening. My errand shouldn't take longer than a half-hour at the most. If I am kept back a little however, I must ask that you do not go off into the Alley on your own. Stay in the vicinity of the bank, okay Harry?"

Bewildered, all Harry could do is nod in answer to Mr. Ashcroft's request.

"Good lad." replied Ashcroft, as he clapped Harry lightly across his shoulders. "Go to the nearest
teller and inform them that you wish to visit your trust vault, and I'll meet you back here with the Lady's blessing, in thirty minutes. Now then, if you'll excuse me?"

And off he went. Harry watched as the tall man strode through the crowd of customers milling about the hall, swiftly heading towards the exit. He frowned to himself. He just couldn't shake the feeling that there was something that Mr. Ashcroft wasn't telling him...

After a moment however, he shrugged internally to himself and directed his steps towards the shortest available queue. He might as well see if there was a way to get something that would make it easier to gather a larger amount of Galleons than normal. He had a feeling that he'd be spending quite a bit of money with Mr. Ashcroft as the day progressed.

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*Eastern Territories of Albion (U.S.A.)*

While it was nearing the noon hour in the British Isles, the sun had barely begun to crack across the sky over the the handsome Victorian-era castle that was currently being renovated to serve as an academy for underprivileged and at-risk youth with connections to the mysterious realm of magic who might otherwise be persecuted for their unique links to the hidden world.

The past three years planning and altering the structure of the old castle to suit the needs of the small, but passionate group of educators, and their allies had not been easy. Most involved in the renovations had long ago been used to waking up at ungodly hours to toil at the task of love that they volunteered to bring to fruition.

Today however, one of those volunteers was fast asleep in one of the finished rooms that would be part of the faculty's living quarters once the school gained the green light to enroll the prospective students and launch out on their endeavor. He had pulled a double-shift over the past three days in order to complete the renovations and had deservedly given himself permission to have a well-earned, and sinfully indulgent lie-in until 11 AM.

So one could understand his feelings when his delightful slumber was interrupted by the feeling of an ice-cold chill falling over him. Jerked awake by the unpleasant shock with a yell, Ambrose
Ashcroft jackknifed to an upright position, his magic roaring within his veins. Dark brown eyes were widened in shock, then anger as they fell upon the youthful house-elf who had been hired along with several others to help with the renovations and eventual maintenance of the future school grounds.

"What. In. The. Name. Of. All. That. Is. Sacred. Are. You. Doing?!!" Ambrose snarled, forcing himself not to give in to the temptation to let loose a blast of wandless magic and send the unfortunate creature smashing into the wall. "You've interrupted the first decent sleep I've had in over a freaking week! You'd better have an excellent reason for this, Ozzy, or you'll be experiencing what it's like to simulate a mundane's rocket being blasted off into the stratosphere!"

Ozzy, the poor bastard was trembling there, wringing his hands in clear consternation. His bulbous eyes were wide with distress and apology.

"Begging your pardon, sir," squeaked Ozzy nervously, "but Ozzy was told to wake Master Ambrose and immediately get Master dressed. Orders of Lord Ashcroft it was, sir!"

"Impossible," frowned Ambrose, "My father is still in flipping England on an extended leave." His paranoia kicked up a notch when Ozzy shook his head violently, bat-like ears flapping vigorously by the motions.

"Again, begging your pardon Master Ambrose, but that isn't being true! Lord Ashcroft is being here, in the Headmaster's Office! He is being very pressed for time, sir!"

Alarm bells rang in Ambrose's mind. Why in the nine hells was his father here, now? He had made it very clear last week, when they had spoken last that he would be obliged to remain in Britain, to push through the ratification of the new laws designed by the ICW Educational Secretariat to set in place a more standardized education in all institutions under the auspices of the ICW, since that flamboyant, preening ass Dumbledore would no doubt be trying every Machiavellian maneuver to torpedo the ratification of the new international statute in his own backyard.

What could be so important that he'd cross thousands of kilometers to come back to summon him at...5:33 in the damn morning?

His scowl caused Ozzy to bow and stammer apologies, but Ambrose waved him off, irritably. As pissed off as he was by the method used to wake him, it really wasn't Ozzy's fault. He was following his master's request and clearly there was something that his father needed to discuss with him urgently and couldn't trust to a letter or even a Floo-call.
"Help me get dressed, Ozzy and all will be forgiven," he said gruffly as he slipped out of bed, clad only in a pair of black silk boxer shorts. "Let's see what's bothering dear old Dad...".

Diagon Alley

It's been nearly an hour...Harry thought to himself, while pacing a corner of the vast atrium of Gringotts, a bag full of galleons burning a hole in his pockets. What's going on?

After Mr. Ashcroft's abrupt departure, Harry had followed his advice and gotten the attention of a teller in order to access his trust vault. The long trip down was as exhilarating and breathtaking as ever, but Harry felt his mind fully occupied by the possible magnitude of what he had inherited from his late father, James.

Entering the trust vault, he had attempted to use his old pouch to gather as much galleons, sickles and knuts as he could in light of his guardian's cryptic remarks of gathering more money than typical for his school supplies. The pouch however had grown more and more bloated and heavy, leaving Harry no choice but to carefully consult the goblin attending him about the cost of procuring a bottomless pouch.

"Ah, our bottomless pouches..." Fleckclaw, his attendant had drewled, "very convenient when wanting to carry larger amounts of coin. Very valuable...very expensive."

In the end, his attendant had somehow managed to signal his superiors up at the surface, for in less than fifteen minutes, another goblin had arrived with a standard bottomless pouch and a parchment for Harry to sign, pledging the sum of 150 G for the pouch - which, Fleckjaw had assured would be taken from the vault twenty-four hours after the signing of the order form.

"It carries up to the equivalent of three thousand Galleons comfortably," Fleckjaw explained after
Harry completed the purchase. "Most useful for an extensive day of shopping in any of the Alleys, or for purchasing a particularly expensive item like say, a top-of-the-line broom if one were to be so inclined. Of course, Gringotts carries a range of bottomless pouches that can house up to a hundred-thousand Galleons, as well as more...exclusive modes of transferring large amounts of coin in transactions. No doubt, your account manager will acquaint you with those options at a later date..."

In the end, Harry withdrew 1,000 Galleons, 750 Sickles, and 300 Knuts. He knew that now, he had far more money to use from his second trust vault, but he was still terribly uncomfortable with the idea of withdrawing and utilizing such large amounts of money. Already, he was carrying more money in his pockets than he'd ever held in his life up to this point.

After that, Fleckjaw had conducted him back to the surface, bowed and proceeded to his next customer, leaving Harry alone as he waited for Mr. Ashcroft to return.

That had been nearly twenty minutes ago.

By this point, Harry was itching to do something, and had been eyeing the exit more and more. It was becoming hard not to wander, but he didn't want to alarm or in any way make this uncomfortable with Mr. Ashcroft, not after everything that the older man had done for him over the last 24 hours. Without him, there'd be no telling how he would have made out after the disaster of what had occurred with the Dursleys. He didn't want to mess things up, when they had become better for him than ever before.

Harry sighed, irritably.

When was Mr. Ashcroft going to get here?

Completing the circuit of the imaginary circle he had been traveling for the past several minutes, Harry turned towards the direction of the doors to make his way to the starting point once again, when he caught the flash of a gleaming smooth head moving in his direction. Focusing his eyes as much as he could, Harry released a heavy sigh of relief as he saw the tweed-clad Mr. Ashcroft smoothly making his way past the thickening crowd towards the corner where Harry had ensconced himself.

"Mr. Ashcroft!" exclaimed Harry, as he waved his hands to attract his attention. He noted Mr. Ashcroft grin and nod in his direction as he swiftly made his way to Harry.
"Ah, Harry my lad," he said once he reached the younger wizard. "Once again, my sincerest apologies for the unexpected delay. Matters took a bit more time to settle than I anticipated, but everything is settled for the moment. Thank you for staying in the bank, I know it must have taken considerable patience."

Harry flushed slightly.

"It wasn't all that bad," he said quietly. "I had the time to get some more money like you suggested, and managed to get a bottomless pouch as well. After that, it wasn't too much of a wait."

Mr. Ashcroft, laughed heartily as he clapped Harry across the back. "Oh really? Then you are more gracious than I deserve, Harry. I'm glad that you were able to avail of a bottomless pouch. Later, we'll consult with Mgr. Griphook and find a far more secure way to get you access to whatever amount of Galleons you might need in a pinch or for purchases once you start your classes at Hogwarts this fall. Assuming all business is finished here for the moment, I think it'd be advisable for us to purchase a few important items for yourself, before getting something to eat. Shall we go?"

Heading off towards the doors, Harry and Mr. Ashcroft were soon out of Gringotts and traversing the streets of Diagon Alley. Harry walked around in a daze. He couldn’t believe the things he had discovered! His family, or rather his father's family was known as Most Ancient and Royal, they were among the elite families, he was far more wealthy than he could have ever hoped to guess, and he had the title of Archduke! Archduke!

Unfortunately, the trip led to more questions than Harry could shake a stick at. Why were there noble families in the wizarding community, and what kind of role did they play? What were the ramifications of laying claim to a Dukedom? How was he, Harry Potter connected to the Muggle Queen? Did she have control here? And how could it be possible that his name wasn’t even his real name?

More importantly however, was a question that had begun to stir uneasily in Harry's mind once all of these revelations had unfolded over the course of the morning:

Did Professor Dumbledore, or any other members of Hogwarts staff know anything about him being the next in line to be a noble? Both his mum and his dad were students at Hogwarts years before. And if the Professor knew about this...why did he never explain this to Harry? Why hadn't Hagrid?
Harry recalled what Hagrid had said years before, when he had broken down the doors of the old cottage that the Dursleys had fled to in their effort to escape the multiplying letters:

"Took yeh from the ruined house myself, on Dumbledore's orders...".

He had never before considered the implications of those words, he had been so grateful for the possibility of a world where he wouldn't be treated like trash, where he could be happy. Now however, in light of all that he learned, those words took on a far more charged connotation.

If Hagrid had taken him from the ruins of the house he had lived in as a baby with his parents, and brought him to the Dursleys on Dumbledore's orders...then that meant that Dumbledore was somehow involved in making the Dursleys take him in, for he had no doubt that if they could get away with it, they would have cheerfully drowned him, or tossed him out with the trash, or dumped him at the footsteps of an orphanage.

That meant that Dumbledore was the reason why he had to stay with the Dursleys. Why? Why, if he had relatives within the wizarding world who could have cared for him? Why, if he was meant to be this - this Archduke title. What did he know about all of this?

And why did Dumbledore never inform him about this? Why leave it to a virtual stranger to tell him the truth?

So focused was Harry on all of the questions roiling around in his mind, he almost slammed right into a stone wall. Only a hiss from Mr. Ashcroft and his own considerable reflexes, honed from two years of Quidditch saved him from adding another scar to the one already there.

Mr. Ashcroft tugged Harry over to a quiet corner away from the bustling crowd and withdrawing his wand, set up a privacy charm. He peered at Harry, concern etched into his face.

“All right there Harry?” he asked. “You nearly brained yourself just now. Whatever could be the matter?”

Harry groaned in frustration as he tugged at his hair.

“It – it’s just that – I can barely deal with all of this! I’ve spent the better part of my life in a cupboard. And now, I’m suddenly going to be expected to eat at fancy restaurants and attend fancy
parties and act like...well, like Malfoy!"

He scowled down at his dirty trainers.

“It’s just too much,” he muttered, resentful for a brief moment towards everyone. He hadn’t asked to be born into—into nobility! He hadn’t asked to become the bloody Boy-Who-Lived! It was already hard enough, dealing with the pressure of that title. What would happen now that he could add, “Duke” to his list of hyphenated names?

Mr. Ashcroft’s face softened with sympathy.

“Look at me Harry,” he commanded.

Reluctantly, Harry looked up, only to see a fond look of exasperation on Mr. Ashcroft’s face.

“You know Harry,” he said, “people might tell you how much you resemble your parents. But I must disagree. You remind me so strongly of your grandfather Charlus when we were students at Hogwarts.”

That got Harry’s attention. He stared, wide-eyed at Mr. Ashcroft.

“My grandfather?” asked Harry.

Mr. Ashcroft chuckled, softly.

“Oh yes, you are remarkably similar in temperament to your grandfather. When he was young, he too was quite disgusted at all of the social requirements for a young man of his station. Why, I remember once, when he actually wished himself to be disinherited! He was quite talented, but he always had that gnawing feeling of doubt, doubt in his worth as an heir to the Potter legacy.”

“Note this however young Harry,” he said earnestly. “When the time came, when your great-grandparents died due to a virulent outbreak of Dragonpox, and he was forced to take up the Lordship; Charlus proved to be an excellent Lord and he did honor to the family legacy. You face great challenges, I will not deny that. It will be a terrible weight on your shoulders. I strongly
believe however, that you possess your grandfather’s strength of character, the ability to rise up to the occasion and prove the strength for which your family is legend.”

“You will do well my boy,” he said, drawing closer and grasping Harry’s hand.

“You will do well.” he repeated, squeezing Harry’s hand lightly. “For now, set aside your doubts and fears; you will have time enough to deal with them in the days to come.”

Harry nodded, throat thickened as he swallowed heavily. With one last squeeze, Mr. Ashcroft let go of his hand and moved back slightly.

“Now then,” he said roughly. “Let's take care of a more pressing matter. As Charles Potter’s heir, I cannot allow you to wander the streets anymore in those frightful rags of your cousin. We will, I believe, begin your reeducation with a lesson in selecting suitable clothing, that reflects your place in society.”

Harry smiled at Mr. Ashcroft, warmed by the recollection of his grandfather. He took a deep breath and started walking with Mr. Ashcroft up the street of the Alley, ready to face his first challenge as an Heir…shopping.

Harry had expected for them to stop at Madam Malkins; that was where he had gotten his Hogwarts uniform two years ago. Mr. Ashcroft however, took them past Madam Malkins, and directed them to a store, Harry had never noticed before: Twilfitt and Tatting.

Mr. Ashcroft smiled at the curious look thrown to him by Harry.

“You’ll find that there are many varied places to procure clothing suitable for the wizarding community,” he said. “While Madam Malkins is a fine establishment for clothing; here in Diagon Alley, the premier clothier for those higher up in the echelons of society is Twilfitt and Tatting.”

He laughed heartily at the dubious expression on Harry’s face.

“Never fear Harry,” he chuckled. “All that you will require for your new station will be right here at this store.”
As the pair stepped through the door, the change from the rowdy, raucous bedlam of the street to the solemn air of high-end sophistication was startling. The interior was much larger than its exterior appearance; it was clear to Harry, that there was some sort of spell work involved there. A few customers were either milling about, fingering the various robes and various other clothing on display, or being directed by the impeccably attired assistants to rooms where they could be fitted. Another assistant took care of the transactions at the front counter.

Harry and Mr. Ashcroft made their way over to the front counter; waiting patiently as the assistant completed a lengthy transaction with an elderly wizard who, judging by his robes, was visiting from India. When the wizard swept away with his purchases in hand, Mr. Ashcroft moved towards the assistant.

“I would like to secure the services of your manager,” he said to the young man at the counter.

The assistant’s eyes widened as he caught sight of Mr. Ashcroft’s signet ring, which was carefully displayed for his benefit.

“Of course, my Lord,” said the assistant meekly as he waved his wand at the statue of a Greco-Roman figure. “Mr. Creigh will be along shortly. May I offer you some tea while you wait?”

“That won’t be necessary.” said Mr. Ashcroft kindly. “I thank you for your consideration.”

The assistant bowed to Mr. Ashcroft and left the counter to help another assistant with an inquiry. Harry looked at the retreating figure, then at Mr. Ashcroft, who stood watching him with a calculating look.

“This is the social power that is associated with the Noble Houses, Harry.” Ashcroft stated simply. “While you might not enjoy the fawning and subservience of those who seek to cater to your status, you must learn how to accept it, and use it effectively to carry out your chosen purposes. To accept their loyalty and their service does not mean that you belittle them, or treat them like bugs beneath your feet. On the contrary, that gives you an even greater responsibility to be fair and just in your treatment of others.”

Harry nodded pensively.

“I think I understand that.” he said.
Mr. Ashcroft smiled.

Just then, a tall man in a well cut set of pinstriped robes stepped forward to the counter. He bowed towards Mr. Ashcroft.

“Welcome, my Lord,” said the man. “How may Twilfitt and Tatings assist you today?”

“You must be Mr. Creigh,” Mr. Ashcroft responded. “I am here to commission a complete wardrobe set for my young friend here” he pointed to Harry “who is in need of the necessities. I would also like to have him fitted up for formal Muggle style wear, should he ever need to mingle in the Muggle world. Of course, I expect your complete discretion.”

Mr. Creigh’s eyes narrowed, then widened in surprise as he noticed Harry’s scar.

“Ah yes, of course my Lord.” he said smoothly. Turning to Harry, he bowed low. “Mr. Potter, it is an honor to serve you today.”

Trying to imitate Mr. Ashcroft, Harry straightened his back and nodded once at the manager.

“Mr. Creigh, I thank you for your timely assistance.”

He looked to Mr. Ashcroft, who nodded in approval.

Mr. Creigh was very efficient at his job. At once, he ushered Harry and Mr. Ashcroft into private area for high scale customer fittings. With a flick of his wand, he began recording Harry’s measurements; these were recorded in a ledger by a Quick Notes Quill (“for economy of time,” he said.), which would jot down the measurements he called out as he measured Harry.

That done, the manager then brought out various materials for Harry to inspect: velvets, brocade, silk (acromantula), and even various types of dragon hide skin. Once the materials were chosen, he asked after the colors for the clothing. Harry chose from shades of red, green, gold, black, silver, and even blue. With the colors selected, Mr. Creigh sent the details off and bustled away to calculate the price of the purchases.
Exhausted, Harry dropped down onto a bench and stared forlornly at Mr. Ashcroft. The entire transaction had taken the better part of an hour.

“I never want to go through this again.” Harry declared, to Mr. Ashcroft’s great amusement.

A few minutes had passed, when Mr. Ashcroft decided to go back to the front of the store to look at some designs for winter cloaks. He moved away with firm instructions to Harry to stay near the fitting rooms.

Harry watched him go off, then slumped on the bench. He was more than happy to oblige with the man’s request; he didn’t think that he had any energy left to move!

The minutes passed in a foggy daze for Harry as he waited for either Mr. Creigh or Mr. Ashcroft to return. He struggled to keep his eyes open, and barely managed to hold in a yawn. By Merlin’s beard, how long did it take to ogle one winter cloak and ring up some purchases? Before long, Harry was beginning to debate the wisdom of sprawling out upon the bench for a nap when the sharp tones of a nasal voice pierced the fog of his brain.

“What’s this? Harry Potter, for once in a reputable establishment? Surely, the Daily Prophet should be alerted!”

Harry’s drowsiness went away instantly, and he swung his head over to see none other than Draco Malfoy, standing at the entrance to the private fitting rooms, wearing a malicious grin. He was dressed in fairly formal dark green robes with silver buttons accentuating the color. Curiously enough, his hair wasn't slicked back like it usually was whenever Harry had the misfortune of clapping eyes on him, but it was still carefully coiffed. He looked even more pompous than he normally did in school robes, which was saying something.

“Malfoy,” said Harry coldly. Eyes narrowed in displeasure, he glared at the boy who had made it his mission to make his life, and those of his friends as miserable as possible.

The other boy swaggered down the steps and came to a halt just a few feet away from Harry.

“Looking to see how your betters conduct themselves, Potter?” sneered Draco. His eyes glittered with malice as he stared at Harry. “Certainly a sight better than those gangling lot of grubby, ginger Weasels you always sully yourself with.”
Harry clenched his fists tightly against his sides, struggling to strangle the overwhelming urge to reach out and knock that sneer off Draco’s pointy face. Of all the places where that rotten git had to show himself, it had to be here?

“I can’t say I’ve noticed any of my betters in this room, Malfoy.” Harry replied through gritted teeth. “If I had known that this store accepted all of the riff-raff like your good self, I would have looked for a better establishment.”

The retort wiped the smug look off of Draco’s face, replacing it with a look of fury as he flushed.

“Riff-raff, Potter?” he snarled, a hand reaching into the pockets of his cloak. “I’ll show you, you jumped up, scrawny, little –”

“That’s quite enough, Draco.”

The tone of the voice that spoke was distant and cold. Harry watched with interest as the foul invectives coming out of Draco’s mouth dried up at once. His interest peaked even higher as the speaker of those words came into view at the top of the steps.

The speaker was a woman; tall, thin, and breathtakingly beautiful. She was clad in shimmering silky silver-grey robes, with a matching cloak, threaded with a bright silver thread in a dizzying array of patterns. Her hair was swept up in an elegant bun. Curiously, to Harry, her hair was two-toned; the bottom half of her hair was a white-blond color, while the top half of her hair was a dark brown, almost black. Her face was pale like her son, and she had chocolate colored eyes.

She had a haughty air about her, as she looked down at the two young wizards. Swiftly, she descended the steps and aimed a reproving look at her son, who flushed. She then turned towards Harry, who held his breath as she held him in a calculating gaze.

“So, you are the infamous Harry Potter that Draco has spoken so much about,” she said. She extended a gloved hand towards Harry, while Draco spluttered in the background.

Harry eyed her hand carefully. He knew, that this was not a woman to trifle with, no matter how fair she seemed. Hoping against hope that what he was about to do wasn’t an egregious social faux pas, he lifted her hand to his lips as he bent his head in acknowledgement of her presence.
“Lady Malfoy,” he murmured as he released her hand.

She had a most interesting expression on her face as she watched him, and Harry swore he could detect the barest hint of a smile on her face before it shifted to an expressionless mask. It didn’t escape his notice either, the way her eyes had sharpened when they caught sight of the ring that he had been given by Griphook. Draco, the ignorant sod, hadn’t noticed it at all.

“I wasn’t aware that Twilfitt and Tattings was your preferred choice of clothier?” said Madam Malfoy lightly, an elegant eyebrow curved upward.

“It wasn’t in the past, Madam.” admitted Harry. He spared a look at Draco, who was looking nauseated at the exchange. “I find however Lady Malfoy, due to a change in circumstances that it behooves me to secure clothing that more…accurately reflects my station. I have assurances that Twilfitt and Tattings is without peer in Diagon Alley.”

"Indeed not, Mr. Potter." replied Madam Malfoy. "It is pleasing to see that you have realized the worth of this establishment."

Strangely enough, it didn't seem to Harry as if Malfoy's mum found it irksome to converse with him. If anything, it appeared that Lady Malfoy was quite pleased at his words. Harry found himself bemused by the situation, while Draco was looking at his mother as if he didn’t recognize her.

“Mother,” he said at last, seeming to have found his voice. “There’s no need to exchange pleasantries with someone like – Potter,” staring disdainfully at the Gryffindor.

Lady Malfoy frowned, and turned to say something to Draco. However, someone else beat her to it.

“I disagree young man. It is always a mark of good breeding to be pleasant with your peers – even if they are the deadliest of foes. An Heir of an Ancient and Noble House should be aware of such a basic etiquette, I would hope.”

Harry swung towards the voice, a rush of relief flooding him as Mr. Ashcroft made his way to the room. As he stepped towards Harry, Draco sneered contemptuously. Lady Malfoy on the other hand gasped lightly, eyes widening in surprise, before dipping into a deep curtsy.

“My Lord Henamoor,” she said smoothly. “What an unexpected surprise.”
Draco’s face blanched so quickly, Harry had to cough into his hand to hold back his laughter.

As Lady Malfoy rose, she extended her hand to Mr. Ashcroft, who raised it to his lips in greeting. Harry, as he witnessed the exchange, gave a soft sigh of relief. He hadn’t screwed up his own greeting after all.

“My dear Lady Leinnsfeld,” said Mr. Ashcroft with a smile, “it is wonderful to see you again. You have only grown more beautiful in my absence.”

Lady Malfoy inclined her head, graciously.

“I do my best to honor the lessons my mother taught me.”

She did not look at anyone but Mr. Ashcroft as she said that, but Draco jumped slightly at that, a faint blush on his cheeks.

“You are a credit to your mother indeed,” Mr. Ashcroft replied. “In fact, you resemble the Lady Druella even more now than you did in the past.”

He directed a searching gaze towards Draco, who blanched again at his scrutiny.

“And who is this young man?” asked Mr. Ashcroft.

Lady Malfoy moved over to Draco’s side, placing a delicate hand upon his shoulders.

“Young Grace, may I present to you my son Draco Malfoy, Earl Avenbourne, and the Heir of the House of Malfoy? Draco, I present to you His Grace, Lord Milton Ashcroft; the Grand Duke of Henamoor,” and with a quick dart at Harry, “and the patron of Harry Potter.”

Her emphasis on ‘patron’ was unmistakable, as was the warning flash from her chocolate brown eyes.
Draco swallowed thickly.

“It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance, your Grace.” Draco said, with a bow.

Mr. Ashcroft nodded once, and looked pensively at him.

“I see that you resemble your father a great deal…in more ways than one,” said Mr. Ashcroft, “though one hopes that you will begin to show more of your grandmother’s legendary acumen and poise.”

Harry watched, intrigued as Draco managed a smile that was more of a grimace. Lady Malfoy herself blushed slightly, but quickly regained her composure.

“Will you be in Britain for long, your Grace?” she asked.

“For a time,” answered Mr. Ashcroft. He turned to Harry.

“Harry my boy, I would hate to interrupt what must be a pleasant exchange with a schoolmate, but we must be going. Mr. Creigh has rung up our purchases, and made arrangements for its delivery. Come along now.”

With a nod towards Lady Malfoy and Draco, he began to make his way towards the steps. Harry followed along, but turned back towards the pair standing alone.

“Until we meet again, Lady Malfoy.” Harry said, choosing to ignore Draco in his farewell.

Draco stiffened, but Lady Malfoy smiled.

“Until we meet, Mr. Potter.” she said, quietly.

Turning, Harry scrambled after Mr. Ashcroft, who was exchanging some quiet words with the manager.
“Ah, are you ready now Harry?” he said. “Excellent.”

Harry said farewell to the manager, who bowed them out of the shop.

“Come again, Mr. Potter,” Mr. Creigh said jovially. “We thank you for your patronage.”

*****

After the exhaustive trips to Gringotts and Twilfitt and Tattings, all Harry wanted to do was take a nap back at the Leaky Cauldron; but under Mr. Ashcroft’s prodding, the pair found themselves purchasing clothes at a Muggle establishment, in London. There Harry purchased new trainers, several pairs of dress shirts, t-shirts and; to Harry’s acute embarrassment, several pairs of new underwear.

All in all, it was running towards evening, when Mr. Ashcroft and Harry staggered towards a small Indian restaurant, clutching their multiple bags. The restaurant was only a few blocks away from the Muggle entrance to Diagon Alley through the Leaky Cauldron and had been selected by Mr. Ashcroft as a nice place to experience international cuisine. Harry was just thrilled to experience takeaway food, the first time in his life he'd ever had the opportunity.

As they approached the entrance to the small restaurant, Harry noticed that while Mr. Ashcroft maintained a cheerful demeanor throughout their shopping trip in Muggle London, for some reason he had a look of trepidation on his face as they approached the place where they would have an early dinner.

"Sir," ventured Harry as they paused and waited for the signal light to turn green and allow them to cross the bustling street, "is there something wrong? You seem to be...worried about something. Why?"

Mr. Ashcroft eyed Harry, a pensive expression on his face, before he chuckled quietly to himself.
"You are far more observant than I gave you credit for," he said to Harry. "While we're waiting for the light to change, I suppose we can address a few things."

"Sir?" questioned Harry. "What things?"

"Questions, Harry," said Mr. Ashcroft with a sigh. "Questions concerning the unusual circumstances surrounding your inheritance. What we've learned this morning at first glance seems very incomprehensible; what, with you being ineligible to inherit the title of Earl of Strichcombe - a title last held by your father, but somehow able to claim a title that admittedly I never dreamed your family eligible to inherit."

"This Archduke title?" pressed Harry.

"Yes. The title of Archduke of Caerleon. I suppose it tells you that everyone has secrets. Your grandfather and I were the closest of friends. Closer than brothers, even. We shared everything together once upon a time. For all of that, Charlus never told me that the Potters had any relation or connection to the House of Peverell. Not even a hint. I suppose I can understand why of course. That title has had a complicated history behind it, a history that I hope to explain in part to you during dinner. How James discovered this information, much less ascended to such a position, all in total secrecy is beyond my ken."

"I can't complain of course," he continued with wry glance at Harry, "I myself had held onto a great many secrets in my time, secrets that I never imagined might have bearing in your particular situation."

Harry swallowed, attempting to moisten his suddenly dry throat.

"These - these secrets," he ventured hesitantly, "what are they?"

Just then, the lights flashed to green and the sign for pedestrians to cross the street began to flash. Harry cursed in his mind as Ashcroft looked around suddenly, and placing his hand upon Harry's shoulders, steered him across the street.

"I promise Harry, that I will explain myself fully very soon." he said quietly once they crossed the street. "These aren't matters that are to be bandied about in public. Even the restaurant is not truly secure, but there will be ways to fix that once we get down to it. Patience, my boy. Soon, you shall have all the answers that are within my power to provide."
They reached the small restaurant, Greedy Girl and pulled open the door, stepping inside. The interior of the restaurant was a warm red and contained lots of small plants and paintings of strange buildings and mythological beings from Indian legends. Harry was struck by the sight of the large statue of a creature with an elephant's head, multiple arms and several objects in those arms along with a host of jewelry adorning the figure. Harry couldn't help but crane his neck to get a better view of it as they stepped to the counter where a dark skinned woman with unfamiliar, but beautiful clothing stood, smiling as they approached.

"Welcome to the Greedy Girl," said the woman, brightly. "Am I right in assuming that you are the party that had reservations for $pm? Under the name, Ashcroft?"

"Ah yes," smiled Mr. Ashcroft. "That would be correct, madam."

"Right this way, sirs."

The proprietor led them down three small steps, and towards the back of the building, to a large room closed off by a glass door. Opening the door, the proprietor ushered them in."

"The other member of your party is already seated, Mr. Ashcroft." said the proprietor. "We've taken the liberty of setting the menus at the table with your party. Ring the bell at the table when you are ready to order. We hope that your experience here will be very enjoyable."

Harry glanced at Mr. Ashcroft in confusion. The other member of their party? Mr. Ashcroft hadn't mentioned another person joining them. The older man didn't respond to the pointed glance that Harry had aimed at him, but warmly thanked the proprietor before gently steering Harry towards the large table that had three chairs set around it, in addition to the plates and cutlery.

They weren't alone.

Harry observed that a man, probably in his early twenties by the looks of things, was already seated at the table. He glanced up and immediately stood up, the legs of his chair scraping the tiled floor in his haste.

The man was tall, far taller than Harry himself, around the same height as Mr. Ashcroft, around 6 feet. He had shoulder length black hair and deep, chocolate eyes that burned with an energy that was nearly palpable around him. His skin was pale, with a scattering of moles and he had larger
ears than Harry did. He seemed fairly good-looking all in all, though he still held traces of awkwardness in his features that Harry could readily empathize with. His frame was broad and liberally muscled, though he didn't seem like a one of those muscle guys that Harry would see sometimes on the telly when he was stuck cleaning up after Dudley. He was dressed in grey slacks and jacket, with a black silk button up shirt underneath. As Harry's eyes met his, he was struck by the intensity of the scrutiny to which he was subjected. Underneath his penetrating gaze, Harry, still dressed in the ratty hand-me-downs from Dudley felt very scruffy indeed.

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Ashcroft, "I see you've been kept waiting. Apologies, my boy."

The man snorted.

"What else is new, old man?" he replied, shaking his head with a quirk of his dark eyebrows.

Harry was confused. And slightly unnerved at the manner in which this stranger addressed Mr. Ashcroft. Mostly confused though. He glanced at Mr. Ashcroft, then at the man, and then back again. Who was this guy?

Mr. Ashcroft chuckled and stepping towards the strange man, enveloped him in a tight hug.

"Thank you again for coming," Harry could hear him say into the younger man's ear as they embraced, briefly before separating. Mr. Ashcroft pulled out the chair opposite the man and indicated for Harry to sit there, electing to take the chair at the end of the table.

He smiled, as Harry seated himself, still hopelessly confused.

"I'm sorry Harry, if this seems out of place for you," he said, patiently. "I'd like to introduce you to a most special person. Harry, this is my youngest son, Ambrose Henrich Ashcroft. Amby, this is Harry Potter. James' son."

Harry thought that particular emphasis on 'James' was rather queer, but shook the thought off, as Ambrose Ashcroft held out his hand for Harry to shake. His grip was very firm, and his eyes flashed with an unidentifiable light as he stared at Harry.

"A pleasure to meet you, Harry." he said, his voice a curious mix between a rich tenor with traces of bass. "I see you've managed to put up with this old fossil, here. Well done."
"Fossil!" barked Mr. Ashcroft with clearly feigned outrage. "I'll have you know that I still turn heads when I stroll along the street. Fossil indeed!"

Ambrose smirked, and withdrew his hand. Mr. Ashcroft pursed his lips at Ambrose and turned to Harry, who still seemed unsure.

"Ambrose has come here at my request," explained Mr. Ashcroft, "to help me explain to you some of the circumstances surrounding the unique results that we received from Gringotts earlier this morning, and to help explain some history that you will need to know if you are to successfully push forward, now that you have attained the title of Archduke."

Ambrose's eyes snapped to Mr. Ashcroft in shock, but Mr. Ashcroft shook his head.

"But that is a matter for a bit later," he said, his tone firm. "Let's order now, shall we? I'm utterly famished."

Mr. Ashcroft took the lead in ordering from the menu, clearly aware of his son's preferences as well as his own. Harry, having never tried Indian food was open to just about anything. In a matter of minutes, the three diners were well supplied with water and lassi, a milky drink that was sweet and refreshing, and were soon enjoying plates of delicious and spicy Indian cuisine.

As they ate, Mr. Ashcroft kept the conversation away from the matters that were most pressing on Harry's mind and focused instead on lighter topics. Harry discovered that Ambrose was one of the personnel renovating the castle that Mr. Ashcroft was planning to turn into a school for students gifted with magic, but for whatever reason unable to mingle at one of the other schools that were available for young students with magical potential in America. He also learned that Ambrose had never played Quidditch - apparently it wasn't as much of a sensation with young witches and wizards as it was in Britain and other nations around the world. Harry dived into a description of Quidditch and his experiences on the Gryffindor Quidditch team, that had the entire table laughing it up as they enjoyed the food.

It was only after finishing their courses, and while they started in on their desserts, that Mr. Ashcroft discreetly withdrew his wand – after making sure no one was nearby of course, and began casting a series of charms designed to ensure privacy. After he set his spells, he turned to Harry and Ambrose, replacing his wand and sipping on his own glass of lassi.

“I’m surprised Harry.” he said. “I thought that you would have been plaguing me with questions
since we left Gringotts earlier.”

Harry swallowed down the bite of ice cream he’d just popped in his mouth, and swallowing, shrugged.

“I figured that you would regale me with information at some point this evening,” he replied with a quick grin, “so I figured I could manage to hold my tongue until then.”

Mr. Ashcroft shook his head in mock dismay, clucking his tongue.

“Such cheek!” he murmured. “See what this young generation has been reduced to!”

He laughed as Harry tipped his imaginary hat to him, but quickly turned more somber as he thought about what he would be sharing that evening.

“You need to become aware,” Mr. Ashcroft began, “of your history. It is one that is long and varied, and a necessity if you are to effectively take your place as the next Archduke. If your parents had lived, you would have been instructed in the histories and the social dances from an early age. Unfortunately, I will only be able to teach you for a short time. You will have to search and learn much on your own. But as long as I am here, I will share all I can. Are you ready, Harry?”

Harry nodded quietly. It had been one of his earliest wishes to learn more about his family, ever since he could remember.

"Before we get into any detailed discussion of the history of Magical Britain and it's noble class, I believe that it would behoove us to address what in my mind the more pressing issue: the question of your lineage. This is something that you might have heard a few things about, but there are many things within your family's history that you do not know, things that I believe may be addressed for the first time with all surviving heirs present."

Harry frowned, noting the peculiar phrasing of his last statement, but not understanding what it meant. A glance across the table however, found Ambrose suddenly tense, hands clenched into trembling fists as deep eyes bored into his father's own.

Seeing his reaction, caused Harry to become more alert. This was something that was incredibly
"Well many years ago," began Mr. Ashcroft, "I was fortunate enough during my early years at Hogwarts to make the acquaintance of a young boy who became my dorm mate at Hogwarts, your grandfather Charlus Potter. He helped me through a low point in my early weeks at the school and volunteered to stick by me, help me get into the swing of things and we became instant friends. As the years passed, we rarely became separated for anything. We did everything together. He was unfailingly kind and fiercely protective of those he considered a friend. He had an awfully low estimate of himself, but I was always there to give him a boost to his spirits.

When we graduated from Hogwarts, around 1920 thereabouts, Europe was just beginning to feel the threat of Grindelwald, who was in his time and in many circles still is, the deadliest practitioner of the Dark Arts to rise in over a thousand years. As skirmishes broke out across the continent, we both elected to join a private peacekeeping force who aimed to monitor Grindelwald's activities and if possible, sabotage his plans so he would be unable to push forward with his oppressive agenda. Much of this was covert work, with Charlus and I taking on different trades, he focused on gaining a Potions Mastery and I moving into the educational disciplines of history, and ancient magical studies. The years passed, but our friendship got ever closer, taking on increasingly intimate contours while matters in the Continent grew more and more strained.

I had just been offered a position as an assistant Professor of Ancient Magi Studies at Beauxbatons to complete the last year of requirement towards my Mastery, when the thin veneer of peace ruptured and open conflict began between Grindelwald's followers and the various Ministries of Europe that culminated in a disastrous series of circumstances down in New York, near the end of the 1920s.

We fell into war and joined the forces of the ICW who battled with Grindelwald across many different hotspots for several years. We were in the same company, along with a brave young woman who was an heiress of the haughty Blacks. Together we crossed wands and swords with the zealots of Grindelwald and waged a long and bloody war that influenced and in many ways was influenced by what would come to be known by the non-magical populace as the Second World War.

In the end, Grindelwald was defeated in a duel by one Albus Dumbledore, and our company managed to capture one of Grindelwald's chief lieutenants. Ah, I well remember the day that it was announced that Grindelwald would be imprisoned in his own fortress, Nuremgard. We danced and drank and caroused all day and night long!

After that, matters relating to our respective estates and responsibilities became more pressing. We both lost our parents during the war, and knew that it was vitally important to ensure the promulgation of our family lines. As such, we took a step back from our friendship and began to court the women who would one day become our brides. I, was lucky enough to wed Madame
Serephina Picquery, the former President of MACUSA and a formidable witch. Your grandfather, on the other hand, married our old companion and friend, Dorea Black.

I moved to America after that, focused on establishing my career as a Professor at Ilvermony School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and serving the colonies as a representative of the Wizengamot. Eventually I became a Senator of MACUSA and then after my wife's passing the President of MACUSA. Charlus invented Sleekeazy Potions and turned it into a multimillion Galleon company that was hugely successful.

We had our daughter, of course and Charlus and Dorea eventually had their son, James Potter. Their miracle child. They spoiled him rotten, of course. I well remember how often Charlus would boast about that little boy, whenever we'd have the chance to catch up on old times...".

For a moment, he seemed to lose sight of his surroundings as he recalled images from the past before he blinked, and re-focused his attention on Harry, who was eagerly hanging on to every word. He turned to Ambrose, observing the conflict brewing in his eyes. Much of what he was explaining now, he had explained to a younger Ambrose many years before. He was aware of the conflict in Ambrose's mind about how he felt concerning this unveiling of these matters, and what this might mean for him, to say nothing of how it would possibly impact Harry, now that he was under Ashcroft's guardianship. He could easily detect the unease that he had towards airing these matters.

In spite of his reticence however, he couldn't in good conscience keep these matters away from Harry. This concerned his family in large part, and would play an integral role in the next steps that they would have to take with regards to navigating the potential firestorm that was all but certain to ignite once the Ministry, or the general public caught wind of Harry's political ascension to a title previously believed to be extinct.

As much as he desired to preserve what Charlus had desired to remain hidden, circumstances now dictated that an entirely different course of action be taken. He could only hope that by revealing this secret, that neither of these two remarkable young men would be adversely affected by what he was about to reveal.

Clearing his throat, he smiled at the youngest among them and continued his tale.

"Unfortunately, due to the responsibilities of my offices within MACUSA and Ilvermony, I was unable to become very close to James; I did however, keep an eye on him from time to time, and learned about his mischievous exploits through his parents. The years passed, and times grew darker as the political movement launched by Voldemort agitating for change morphed into an illegal militia that began to terrorize the Ministry and the citizens of Magical Britain. Soon, open war broke out."
I urged Charlus and Dorea to leave Britain and stay with me in the States until the crisis would be resolved, one way or another. Your grandfather however wouldn't hear of it. He was outspoken in his criticism of the polemic spread by supporters of Voldemort and had equally harsh things to say about the Order of the Phoenix. When James and Lily accepted Dumbledore's invitation to join their ranks, that is one of the few times that I observed Charlus truly exhibiting disappointment at the choices that your father had made. They had several terrific rows over the matter, but your father couldn't be dissuaded from his decision. Charlus had to accept his choices in the end, but he made no secret that he opposed the actions of the Order and preferred to act through the mechanisms of the Ministry, he even rebuffed Dumbledore to his face when he approached him for funding.

Around that time, Charlus became very withdrawn, and communication with him ceased. I didn't know the reason why, but I could hazard a guess. The war against Voldemort and his forces wasn't going well. The Ministry tried it's best to mobilize against the movement, but supporters of the Dark Lord struck against the Ministry through many insidious ways, including it's funding. Simultaneously, skirmishes were beginning to take place between the Death Eaters and strategic allies of the British Ministry on the Continent and also in America. Our government, MACUSA were fortunate enough to be able to repel the espionage attacks of the Death Eaters, but tensions were running high. No one knew who to trust, and the bonds that united much of the West were fraying rapidly.

After several months of no communication, Charlus abruptly sent a letter urging me to come to Britain. It was 1979, during the Yule season. In that letter, he shared a secret with me - a secret that he had shared with no other ally or associate, not even his own son. He was frightened of the disaster that could occur if this secret were to be made known to agents of the Dark Lord, or other unsavory parties. While he hadn't made a final decision, he was entertaining the offer that I had made to him long before and wished to meet with me in person to counsel over the logistics of this asylum- not merely for himself, but for James...Lily...and most importantly, dear Dorea."

He paused, noting how Harry's fists had clenched at the mention of his parents, his green eyes shimmering with what suspiciously looked like tears. Ambrose too was clearly affected by this, as he directed his entire focus on the glass that he was now gripping with a trembling hand.

"Unfortunately," murmured Ashcroft, his voice dropping to a whisper, "the letter was delayed by three days; I received it on December 25, shortly after Yule. I dropped everything and took the next available international portkey to London and from there made my way to the grounds of Charlus and Dorea's estate...only to discover it in flames. It had been attacked, though by whom I didn't know. I made my way through the burning building, calling out desperately for Charlus or Dorea, but heard nothing. I yelled for Geoffrey, their chief house-elf, I even called for James. I don't even know how long I was in the midst of that inferno, attempting to drive back the flames and find my friends. I found myself growing more and more desperate with every minute that passed, with no response. I made my way to the approximate location of the dining hall and prepared to send out an alert to any witch or wizard near or around the vicinity via Legilimency. Before I could attempt that, a house-elf Apparated to my side, a young one by the name of Doddie. It was absolutely
distraught as he told me that the worst had occurred: Charlus and Dorea had been attacked while preparing to retire for the night, and had been unprepared for the ferocity of the assault that had descended upon the Manor. Dorea was already dead, but Charlus still lived, though I was informed that he too, was near death. It broke my heart, when the elf transported me to the spot where Charlus and Dorea had fallen, to see him lying there. He had been severely burned by the onslaught of curses that had rained down on them, had nearly bled out by that point. But he was still as perfect in my eyes then as he had when we first met as children. I ordered Doddie to use his magic to heal Charlus, but the old codger managed to rustle up enough strength to belay that order.

I tried to do what I could, but he pointed out to me that his injuries were fatal and couldn't be mended by any magic. Then, with the last of his strength, he order Doddie to loosen the glamour that had been placed mere feet away from where he lay; and he revealed to me the secret that he and Dorea had hidden from the rest of world - including James, your father."

By this point, all of the three men seated had tears trickling down their cheeks; Harry's eyes narrowed as he observed the reactions of the other two men. He was moved by the portrayal that Mr. Ashcroft had woven about his grandfather, who he'd never gotten the chance to meet. He couldn't decide if he was angry on his grandparent's behalf for the terrible injustice done to them, or just empty.

It hadn't escaped his notice, the multiple times that Mr. Ashcroft had alluded to a secret; this was something that he had hinted about before they entered the restaurant, earlier. He had the nagging suspicion that it had something to do with what had occurred at Gringotts when Griphook had reacted as strongly as he did over the contents of the first parchment that referred to him as an Heir Presumptive. He needed answers.

"Sir," he ventured, "this secret that you've been alluding to; does it have something to do with why you and Griphook reacted the way that you did when we did that inheritance test?"

The older man sighed heavily and inclined his head in affirmation.

"Yes Harry, it does indeed. This is the reason why I'm explaining a bit about your grandfather's history. It all ties into what we learned earlier this morning while at Gringotts. I should have realized how the matter of your inheritance might be affected by what your grandfather revealed to me all those years ago, but without the knowledge of your connection to the House of Peverell, it never occurred to me to question the matter of your inheritance. I had no reason to believe that Charlus was concealing something so momentous and fraught from me. Still, it wouldn't have changed what he requested of me, and it wouldn't have changed what I did to honor his wishes."

He paused then, directing a glance at Ambrose, who to Harry's confusion looked unusually distressed by the tale about his grandfather. Ambrose refused to meet Mr. Ashcroft's or Harry's
eyes, but glared into the glass of lassi that he held in his hands, as if waiting for a blow to fall down on him. He turned back to Mr. Ashcroft, whose eyes gleamed with fresh tears as he watched his son's reactions and Harry's observations. Before the younger boy's puzzled eyes, Mr. Ashcroft extended his hand and gripped Ambrose's clenched hand while holding Harry's eyes.

"Harry, your grandfather was the former Earl of Stinchcombe, as was his father and his father before him; but though I didn't know this, he was apparently also the heir presumptive to the title which you now bear - the Archduke of Caerleon. He never bore that title, but your father somehow learned of this, and elected to abdicate his role as the Earl of Stinchcombe to claim the title of the Peverell family. Even with that title however, it was expected that you would become the next Earl of Stinchcombe...but you weren't deemed as the next in line for that title, due to your father's abdication. As a Potter, you still are considered an Heir, but as of now you are the second in line to one day claim the title of Earl. Why? Apart from your father's actions, which we've already touched upon, the reason for this strange discrepancy is explained by the secret that Charlus entrusted into my care. A secret that I now entrust to you."

Mr. Ashcroft squeezed the hand of Ambrose as if in an attempt to comfort him before he shared what he'd promised his oldest friend to keep safe twenty-three years before.

"I believe it's time that I introduce you properly, Harry. You might have wondered why Ambrose was present for this discussion. I once again would like to introduce to my son - my adopted son - Ambrose Henrich Ashcroft...Potter, Heir Presumptive to the Noble and Most Ancient House of Ashcroft, Heir Apparent to the Ancient and Noble House of Potter. In short, your uncle."

Harry whipped his head from Mr. Ashcroft to Ambrose, who held his gaze evenly.

"Uncle?"

Chapter End Notes

And so the dynamic changes...

We hope that you enjoy the first part of two chapters that aims to cover some of the personal history of Mr. Ashcroft's connection to the Potter family as well as give some
of the history surrounding the place of the ancient Monarchy and the Noble lineages in the history of Magical Britain.

This, along with the following chapter was originally one chapter...however with some of the changes that we wanted to add to this story and areas that needed to be fleshed out, we decided to split it into two, especially when the draft of the original chapter was nearing over 20,000 words!

We will be tweaking this portion of our two parter for some time, as we are still a bit ambivalent about our feelings about the big reveal of our newest OMC who will be playing a significant role in future chapters - Ambrose Ashcroft-Potter. As much as we love Milton Ashcroft, who will continue to be a prominent character in this world that we are building, his place in this story will change after the events of Year III. Harry will need someone who can serve as his legal guardian, whatever may befall the fate of Sirius Black by year's end. Our Ministry will be stopping at nothing to get the BWL under their control, as well as Dumbledore, who will be popping in this story very soon. We felt that in order to ensure that Harry would remain independent of their manipulations, that he would need someone who could have strong legal rights to ensure that any custodial dispute works to Harry's favor, hence our introduction of Ambrose. Not to fear though! He will not just be Harry's glorified babysitter; our Ambrose will be rocking Britain in a number of ways in the chapters to come. We're not sure if it comes through in this particular chapter, but Ambrose will be dealing with his links to the famous Potter family, and addressing potential issues with being hidden away from his older brother and friends as well as issues of resentment, towards his birth family which will only be more complicated when he has his older brother's child to look after. How will things work for these crazy kids? Stay tuned!

As older readers will recall from the original version of this story, we see here the first introduction of Draco Malfoy and his mother, Narcissa. The Malfoys are going to be an interesting family to write about in the chapters to come as they deal with the fallout of the events of the Chamber of Secrets...something that might push Draco to not being such a douchebag. Will he take Ashcroft's advice?

Thanks again to everyone who commented, dropped a kudos, bookmarked...and shown your support of this story. You are all awesome, and we're privileged to be able to play in this amazing world created by JK Rowling, and this particular story made by raf1988!

Next chapter- The revelations continue as Harry adjusts to the shocking knowledge of new family while learning more about the mysterious origins of the Most Ancient and Royal House of Peverell...
To be of Noble Blood - Part II

Chapter Summary

Rocked by the unexpected revelations surrounding a secret entrusted to his guardian by his grandfather, Harry continues to learn startling information as Mr. Ashcroft and his son run Harry through the history of Britain's nobility and history...

Chapter Notes

This chapter includes mentions of limited M-Preg and non-explicit non-consensual sexual activity. The reader's discretion is advised.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

August 08, 2003 - London U.K. - Greedy Girl

The room was still as an abandoned tomb.

Neither of the occupants of the private room at the fusion Indian takeaway restaurant spoke, in the wake of the revelatory pronouncement uttered by the oldest man in the room; the bald words echoing like a gunshot, reverberating in the minds of the two younger men who were most affected by the unveiling of the secret held by Milton Ashcroft for over twenty years.

Harry Potter stared in abject shock at the older, but youthful man sitting across from him. Of all the revelations that he had mentally prepared for throughout the day, this had never been even a concept within his vaguest imaginings of this moment. On the other side, Ambrose was locked in the searing sight of those emerald eyes, widened in shock, his own hand squeezing so tightly the glass of cool lassi that had been prepared for each of the men dining, that phantom cracks began to spread throughout the surface of the glassware. Ever since his father - adopted father - had revealed that he had gained a temporary guardianship over a teenage boy who was nearly the spitting image of his deceased biological brother, and needed him to reveal himself to that boy, he had wondered at what the possible response of this child, this link to his own history, might be.
Would he consider him worthy of admittance to what by all accounts was a close-knit family? Would he wish to keep contact with him? Would he be willing to accept him as a guardian for him in the years to come? Or would he reject him, choose to attack him for never pushing, never striving hard enough to establish whatever ties he could to his birth family? Would he condemn him for choosing to remain willfully ignorant for so long of what had become of his birth parents' House, clinging rather to the sanctuary of the Ashcroft family?

Milton Ashcroft gazed at both of the young men that he had taken into his life and care, painfully aware of how confusing, how traumatic it could be to learn such a startling, life-changing secret in the manner in which it had just been revealed - the manner in which he had unveiled the truth. He knew of the incredible conflict that Ambrose had in his heart concerning the family that he had lost before he could even comprehend the beginnings of life. He had witnessed the pain that must have been a constant companion to young Harry - so often treated as the lowest scum of the Earth by those who were charged with his protection, who should have cherished him as a dear member of the family. He knew the trauma that could potentially be unearthed as Harry was faced with another uncle - would he fear for his safety and life, the way he did for so many years in that cupboard, dependent on the largesse and mercy of another uncle who had chosen to grind him into the dust in every possible way, rather than love him.

Could there be union? Could the bonds that were critical to the long-term success of the strategy that he had employed with the aid of Charlus' old ally and solicitor, Mr. Marsden be forged?

For what seemed like an age, the three wizards sat there, as their minds raced, as they considered implications and measured what they could glean from the other's reactions and attempted to calculate what the outcome could be. The silence stretched on and on, until Ambrose decided to take the first step. Slowly, deliberately, he pushed his chair back as he rose from the table - noting the near invisible flinch that was produced by Harry as he loomed above him. Time seemed to stop as he walked around the chair filled by his father and stepped next to his newfound nephew, whose head snapped in his direction, those green eyes glassy and an expression of wariness shadowing the younger boy's face.

Ignoring the stab of guilt that flared through his heart at that look, Ambrose halted and slowly knelt, falling upon one knee as he, extending one large, calloused hand, grasped the trembling, thin hand of his nephew. Then as slowly and deliberately as he'd risen, Ambrose tugged the frozen youth into a hug.

Like a dam breaking, Harry's breath hitched and hot liquid trickled down his face, a sound that was both a sob and a laugh bursting from his mouth as he wrapped his thin arm around Ambrose as best he could with one arm caught in the older man's and returned the embrace.

And as the last scions of the House of Potter forged their bond as family, Milton remained, seated and smiled, helplessly as tears streaming down his own face as the two ties to his beloved Charlus
were restored, one to another.

The young men remained that way for some time, both of them overcome with emotion, until with a muffled laugh, Harry released the tight grip that he had on his newfound uncle and withdrew to examine the features of the other's face. As he took in the wavy hair, the dark eyes and the angular features, Harry frowned thoughtfully. Ambrose quirked an eyebrow at his expression in a wordless demand for an explanation.

"What?" protested Harry weakly at the pointed look, before caving. "It's nothing, it's just...I'd heard so much about how I look like my dad and Mr. Ashcroft said that I held some resemblance to my grandfa - to your dad, I guess? I just wondered why you look so different?"

"Are you calling me ugly, kid?" retorted Ambrose, smirking as a look of panic washed over Harry's face and the younger kid shook his head violently in disagreement.

"No! No. You're not - that's not what I - I just meant tha - "

"Don't tease the poor boy," said Milton, aiming a reproving look at his son, who rolled his eyes good naturedly, before directing his attention to the flustered teen. "Harry, your observation is astute. Both Charlus and James share a strong resemblance that has passed on to you for the most part, but Ambrose here shares a strong resemblance to the men of the House of Black. Remember, your grandmother Dorea was a Black, before she wed Charlus. If some of the younger male scions of that family were with us today, no doubt you'd note that they hold a strong resemblance to each other as well."

The somber mood broken, the three wizards settled themselves into their respective seats, as their server entered the room and cleared their plates, noting Harry's request for more lassi. In a matter of minutes, the young teen received his drink and Milton received the bill for the evening. As their server left to take care of another customer, the old man surreptitiously drew his wand and cast a spell to divert the attention of the staff away from their location as well as another spell to keep their conversation concealed. Once the spells had been cast, he slipped his wand back into it's hiding place and cleared his throat, catching the attention of the reunited relatives who were engaged in a discussion over the merits of Quidditch versus the American sport of Quodpot.

“Now, Harry,” said Mr. Ashcroft, leaning back into his chair. “I believe that I did promise to explain the significance of the title which you bear and it's history. Before I share the early histories with you, I’d like to ask you about your understanding of the title that you have inherited from your father. How do you understand it?"
Harry frowned thoughtfully, while sipping at the milky sweet drink he'd ordered earlier.

"I guess I a bit - confused?" Harry ventured after a long moment of silence. "I mean - I understand that apparently I'm a noble of some kind...I know the difference between a Viscount and a Duke; but what I don't get is how I, or you or even the Malfoys have any title whatsoever. I mean, are we linked to the House of Windsor? Do they know about our world? Am I related to the Queen or something?"

He watched as Mr. Ashcroft considered his question, the older man drumming his fingers on the surface of the table as he considered Harry's response. Mr. Ashcroft looked towards Ambrose, who raised his hands in silent protest.

"I'm not going to be delving into all of that history," he said quickly while standing up from his seat. "You're the historian in the family, Dad. I'm going to step out and call Allana, before she wrecks havoc at the Institute trying to find me. Harry, enjoy your history lesson. It's absolutely fascinating."

With a smirk and a wink, his uncle strode out of the room. Harry lowered his head quickly to hide the smile that broke out as Mr. Ashcroft rolled his eyes in supposed disgust at Ambrose's retreating back and tried his best to assume a neutral expression when the older man faced him again.

"To answer your question, Harry...no, your status as the Archduke of Caerleon is not related to the peerage presided over by the House of Windsor. You and your classmates should have learned this since your first year as a student at Hogwarts, but no matter - I'm happy to clear up any misunderstanding you might have about Magical Britain's relationship to the government of the U.K. and their Royal Family. Consider Magical Britain - Albion, as some of the elders of the conservative Families tend to insist on calling our world - as a separate political entity to the United Kingdom. We share in general, the same landmass and have people who could be considered duel citizens of Albion and the U.K. You, would be considered such a citizen. Those of us who are considered Muggleborns would also be considered as such. Certainly, there is a certain - cooperation between the Ministry of Magic and the non-magical government. Certain individuals within the government such as Her Majesty and the Prime Minister are aware of our existence and receive regular updates on matters of mutual importance through the appropriate channels. To be clear however, the Queen and Her government have no control of the affairs of Albion, and it's citizens have no obligation to the U.K. and the House of Windsor. Naturally, if a witch or wizard were to do mischief in Muggle London for example, they would be subject to the laws of the land they committed the crime in as a British citizen would be if they did something similar in France, or in America. There is a shared history of course, though much of what is considered historically accurate by non-magical historians has in fact been altered significantly by our people over the centuries. Nevertheless, our nobility, our royal history diverges quite early on and has remained separate ever since."
Harry blinked, not expecting that answer. As he considered it, ran it over in his head, he found himself in agreement. It was strange to him, since he didn't find out about the magical world until a few years ago, but it made sense that whatever status he'd attained wouldn't be recognized by the Muggle world. He focused his attention on Mr. Ashcroft, who observed his reaction closely before relaxing and continuing his explanation.

"Let us begin," continued Mr. Ashcroft, "by noting the various tiers of peerage in Magical Britain. I belong to what until today would be considered in these modern times, the highest class of peerage: The Noble and Most Ancient Houses. Within this class, exist only two families, members of which endure to this day. These families are as follows: the Ashcrofts, and the Blacks. The next tier is known as the Ancient and Noble Houses, represented by the Longbottoms, the Princes - formerly known as the Urquarts, the Bones, the Malfoys - formerly known as the Raeburns, the Potters, the Shannessys, the Greengrasses, the Prewetts, the O' Rinns, and finally, the Dagworths. We also have several families who form a lower tier amongst the peerage as the Noble Houses. We then have the Ancient Houses, who could be considered the gentry class. Finally we have the Houses - the general citizenry of Albion. The family that you have inherited the title of Archduke of Caerleon from - the Peverells however, are of a tier higher than even the Noble and Most Ancient Houses. The House of Peverell is the sole House to be recognized as being a Most Ancient and Royal House. It is this history that I intend to share with you this evening."

He paused to drink some water. Harry listened to him, spellbound.

“"To be the Lord of a Noble and Most Ancient House,” continued Mr. Ashcroft, staring solemnly at Harry, “is to wield tremendous power, both magical and political; enjoy august privileges, and bear the heaviest of responsibilities. In a very real way, the Noble and Most Ancient Families shape the tenor of our society – as well as its fate.”

The heavy tone in Mr. Ashcroft’s voice spoke of intimate knowledge of that kind of burden. Harry was tempted to question him, but held his peace as the older man continued to speak.

“While the peerage of Albion no longer commands the influence that it once historically possessed, these Houses are still considered amongst the most influential families within our society. Each of these Houses possess a measure of power over the legislation of the Wizengamot. It is similar to the House of Lords in the U.K. . Outside of these families, there is of course the voice of the Ministry of Magic who shares some legislative authority with the Noble families upon the Wizengamot. The Ministry tends to be the way for members of Ancient Houses to make their voices heard within the Wizengamot; unfortunately, the same does not hold true for the Muggleborn. It is rare, truly rare that one considered a Muggleborn ever gains enough political power to influence the flow of society.”

Harry was horrified.
“But that’s rubbish!” he exclaimed, angrily. “Some of the most talented witches and wizards are Muggleborn!”

Harry’s thoughts were drawn out towards students like Hermione, Dean Thomas, and Justin Finch-Fletchly. How horrible it would be, he thought, to study so hard and graduate – only to find that your opinions and ideals would never be acknowledged. His fists clenched in anger.

Mr. Ashcroft nodded grimly.

“It is indeed, as you say – ‘rubbish’. Nevertheless, that is how – for the present time – the society is structured. Now, as I’ve stated before, in order to gain a better appreciation for the power your family name commands, you must know something of its history. I’ve gone through the trouble of speaking of the Great Families, because the history of all those families are intertwined; all to a figure in history whose origins continue to plague the greatest minds of historians within the Muggle world.”

“Tell me,” said Mr. Ashcroft, giving Harry a peculiar glance. “Have you heard of the legends of King Arthur, the Pendragon?”

Harry frowned at the question.

“Well, yeah,” he said confused, “that’s one of the earliest stories I’ve been able to read…”

Harry’s eyes widened in shock.

“Hang on,” he said, “you don’t mean to say he really – really lived in real life?”

Mr. Ashcroft smirked.

“He did.” he said. “And you’d do well to be grateful for that, for if he didn’t truly exist – you wouldn’t be alive today to learn of this. Neither would I, for that matter.”
Harry gaped.

“Are – are you saying that m – my family is descended from King Arthur?” he gasped.

Mr. Ashcroft looked at Harry – his face as grave as stone – and nodded once.

“Yes, Harry – you are among the descendants of King Arthur.”

He fell silent, giving Harry some time to think. King Arthur! The one who wielded Excalibur and reigned from Camelot! The stories were actually true!

Harry shook his head in belief. It was so much to take in!

“Why do you think the inhabitants of our community make expressions that call upon the name of Merlin, or Morgana?” asked Mr. Ashcroft. “Why are they featured on our Chocolate Frog Card collections? They are revered in our society because they existed. They helped to form the foundations of our community and by our lives, we continue their legacy.”

“We begin,” said Mr. Ashcroft, “by hearkening back to a time that predates any written record that currently survives today. It is said in the oldest of legends that the wizards were once rulers over a great mass of land, surrounded by the Sea; it was where the oldest of magics were taught and honor was given to the Elder gods. Over time, there came a great rebellion which resulted in the destruction of that, land – known as Atalante, or Atlantis. Only few survivors from that land made their way to our shores. As centuries passed, the survivors multiplied throughout many lands, bringing with them the remnants of the knowledge, forms of worship, and magics which survived the destruction of that ancient land. The descendants of the ancient Kings it was said, lived on within the borders of the lands we now call Great Britain. Some rose up for a time, and ruled some of the tribes. That rule, was eventually challenged by the ancient Romans, who swept across western Europe in their numerous expeditions. The tribes however endured, and waged war upon that Empire over a period of hundreds of years. The Romans stranglehold over Western Europe eventually broke, and from that period of uncertainty and chaos rose a mighty war leader – the king known as Uther. For a time under his leadership, magic flourished. It was not despised or feared – but rather, it was held in awe by the peoples of the land. It was an honor – a mark of the favor of the gods – to be gifted with a talent for magic.

“Dark days however, soon swept over the tribes and nascent kingdoms. Uther’s brother, Aurelius was cursed to the death with magic. In his rage and fury, Uther relentlessly hunted down those responsible for his brother’s death. It isn’t known if those responsible were punished for their crimes or not, but Uther didn’t stop there. He began passing edicts that severely oppressed those
who held the gift of magic. His hate and disgust for magic soon began to fill the land, and before long he issued a law outlawing magic on pain of death.”

Mr. Ashcroft sighed sadly.

“Those were dark times, Harry. Witches and wizards were hunted down like animals. The remnants of the ancient Druids – the high priests of the tribes of old – were slaughtered. There was very little hope that the practice of magic would survive. However, light tends to spring up even in the darkest of places. Uther married a beautiful maiden named Igraine who – unknown to him – was a daughter of the hidden realm of Avalon. He impregnated her, and she gave birth to a daughter. From birth, this child showed signs of sorcery. Though Igraine tried to hide it, Uther discovered this and in bitterness, condemned the child to death. The child was left in the forests to die, but was rescued by a peasant family who practiced magic. Not knowing of the child’s fate, Uther impregnated Igraine again. She feared however that this child would also show signs of magic; therefore, she summoned a protector for the child, offering her life as payment to ensure his survival.

"When the child was born, it was discovered that it was a boy. Igraine was terribly weakened by the birth; she knew that she would die, however she was visited by a mysterious old man who possessed great powers, including that of prophecy. He declared himself merely as the Merlin, and with her blessing, took the child away to a peasant family. Using the last of her magic, Igraine created a glamour; using that to deceive the king into thinking the child had died. Uther took no other wife, but became even more vengeful and cruel. For the next fifteen years, he attempted to stamp out all the magic out of the land."

Harry leaned forward, captivated by the tale. While long, this re-telling of history was far more interesting than Professor Binns’ monotone droning on Goblin rebellions.

“What happened to the child then, the girl?” he asked. “And how did Arthur become King?”

“Well,” said Mr. Ashcroft said, “the girl child, as I stated before, was taken in by practitioners of magic. She exhibited magic very young, and was carefully taught all of the magic that the family could teach her. She grew to be a very beautiful young woman, and the rumor of that beauty – and her magic – passed into the King’s ear. Uther realized that this young woman was his own daughter, and his hate knew no bounds. He sent an army to invade the lands where her family lived, and personally came out and slaughtered them all, down to the last child. His daughter, fled to the realm of Avalon, and was taken in by the ruling priestesses. Taking the name of Morgaine, she was trained in the arts of Avalon and developed her powers. She developed the talents of a Seer, and through that Art, learned of the true circumstances of her birth and the attempts of the King to murder her. Already bitter because of the deaths of her family, she began to nurse her hate and weave plans of vengeance. Eventually, her bitterness led her to depart from Avalon, and she traveled in secret to the kingdom of Uther. Using the knowledge, she learned, she created a deadly
poison – which she slipped into the cup of the King. That poison drove Uther to insanity and soon to death. After his death, she withdrew and departed abroad; travelling to many lands and learning the secrets of the darkest of magics.

"As for the boy? He too was taken in by a peasant family, where he was given the name of Arthur. He grew into a strong lad of fifteen when Uther died. At that time, the Merlin appeared before the leaders of the kingdom. Wielding his Art, he revealed a sword – trapped within a thick stone. He declared that whoever could pull the sword from the stone, would be crowned the king of the tribes of the Britons."


“Yes,” mused Mr. Ashcroft. “That is a famous tale, even among the Muggles.”

“How did Arthur really get the sword?” asked Harry.

“Not as quickly as the Muggles tales like to imply.” answered Mr. Ashcroft. “It took a number of years. Of course, all of the warlords, chiefs, and other men of renown sought to free the sword and claim the Kingship. All of them failed. In a series of visions, sent from Avalon, Arthur began to become aware of his heritage as the sole heir of Uther. Arthur however, was gentle and timid. He did not believe that he had the strength of will to take up the Kingship and right his father’s wrongs.”

Pausing, Mr. Ashcroft gave Harry a pointed look. Harry flushed at the comparison between himself and the young Arthur.

“After a time,” continued Mr. Ashcroft, “Merlin himself arrived at the home of Arthur’s adopted family. Disguised as a beggar, he sought the aid of the poor family. Though many there spurned him, Arthur showed him compassion. When Merlin revealed himself, he showed Arthur that it was his compassion for those less fortunate than him that proved his worthiness to become the King. He endeavored to change Arthur’s mind. Finally, after many days of persuasion, Merlin managed to persuade Arthur to attempt to pull the sword from the stone. Merlin, however – being wise and discerning – realized that Arthur was not yet strong enough to keep hold of his crown, so the sorcerer challenged him to a series of tasks. These tasks were to test his fortitude and develop his courage and strength. It took a year and a day for Arthur to fulfill all of the tasks, and he learned much about himself and about the needs of his people. At last, Arthur was ready to lay claim to the throne. Under the protective enchantments of Merlin, he traveled at last to the lands of Uther.
By that time, the kingdom Uther had been forging was in tatters; broken up among various war-chiefs, many of them as cruel and intolerant of magic as Uther had been, but lacking his cunning and skill. When Arthur was finally revealed, they mocked him for the sheer nerve – a mere boy, claiming to be king! With Merlin’s protection however, they could not stop him; and so, a young man at the age of seventeen made his way to the enchanted stone, laid hands upon the sword – and pulled it effortlessly out of the stone. Arthur proved himself worthy in the eyes of the people, to become King.”

Harry drank it all in. So even King Arthur struggled with the idea of ruling! And he had been poor as well – none of the stories Harry had heard mentioned that fact. He looked over at Mr. Ashcroft, a contemplative look on his face.

“I’m assuming,” mused Harry, “that the other chiefs somehow weren’t too happy about that.”

“And you’d be right,” said Mr. Ashcroft. “While the people celebrated and reveled in the fact that a king had been chosen, the war-chiefs rebelled, to a man. They refused to surrender their power to an upstart boy, and they were willing to wage war. Under Merlin’s power, the war-chiefs were banished from Arthur’s presence; the king knew though that he would have to prove himself in battle in order to wrest control of the former territories of his father from the chiefs. Arthur summoned all of the men of the realm loyal to him, who were willing to go to war. Many came to his call, but the amount was far too small to combat the might of his enemies. Merlin therefore advised him to rescind the edicts of Uther condemning the practice of magic, advice which he followed.

“This won to Arthur the love and loyalty of the surviving magic practitioners and those few remaining Druids who had escaped the Purges. Thus the Reunification Wars began. For the next ten years of his reign Arthur waged war; traveling throughout the territories of what we now call England, Wales, and Scotland – subduing the traitorous chiefs, forging alliances with neighboring kingdoms, and restoring the liberties of the practitioners of magic. He established himself as a fair ruler, kind and just. He showed his enemies however that he could be just as cunning and ruthless as the sons of Ambrosius, of whom through Uther, he was the last descendant. It is during this time that he became known as the Pendragon. The surviving records do not fully give the reason why. All through this time, he had the complete loyalty of the magical communities. Quite remarkable, given that to all accounts, King Arthur was a Squib.”

“A Squib!” exclaimed Harry.

“Oh yes,” replied Mr. Ashcroft, “a Squib. Again, this is the opinion of the greatest historians of the Wizarding community. This is evidenced by the fact that he relied on Merlin as his emissary to the magical communities and notably, to the realm of Avalon.”
“Avalon?” questioned Harry. “You’ve mentioned that name before. What was it?”

Mr. Ashcroft frowned pensively.

“It is hard to say, even amongst us wizards,” he said. “Avalon, to the best of our knowledge was a realm that at one time existed within the confines of Britain. The people of Avalon, were said to be the last bastions of the realm of Atalante, or Atlantis. Some historians say that the source of our magic comes from Avalon, its people mingling with mortals and producing wizardkind. We cannot even truly classify them as human, really. As I said before, Arthur’s mother was of that ancient people. Some say that even Merlin was the son of a ruler of that realm who consorted with a mortal man, a bard. There are even some whispers among the historical societies that conjecture that the realm of Avalon may have spread throughout Great Britain, as well as Ireland. Possibly as far as the territories of the ancient Gauls. Thus the rumored Avalon of British tales may have been merely an entrance, a gateway. Of course, nothing is truly certain. What is certain, is that some of Arthur’s greatest allies in the early years of his reign hailed from that mysterious land.”

Harry nodded, to show he understood. It made sense that even wizards didn’t know everything about the ancient world.

“Near the end of the Reunification Wars, Arthur traveled to the north-westernmost borders of what we now call Wales, overlooking the land of Ireland. His efforts to gain mastery over the realm of his father had been fulfilled beyond his wildest hopes; he was now the acknowledged supreme ruler of what we call Great Britain, through direct conquest or through the forging of alliances. The edicts of Uther had been utterly overthrown, and now magic prospered throughout his realm. He now took the time for rest, though he set his sights upon the lands of the Emerald Isle. It is here – far from the reach of Merlin and the loyalists of his budding empire that Arthur met his greatest enemy, an enemy who’s act of treachery and malice planted the seeds of Arthur’s eventual downfall.”

“Who was that enemy?” asked Harry, eyes narrowed in concentration.

“That enemy,” continued Mr. Ashcroft, “is unto this day both reviled and reverenced by practitioners of magic worldwide. The greatest practitioner of dark magic ever to walk the lands of Britain: Morgaine, or as she is better known as – Morgan le Fay. The eldest daughter of Uther and Igraine, had fled the lands of Uther after she poisoned him and traveled throughout the world, searching for knowledge of the darkest and most abominable magics that she could discover. Returning, she became aware of the existence of the Heir of Uther, who had reunited the scattered territories of the former King. Using her gift of second sight, she discovered that Uther had a son. It was her ambition to claim Uther’s throne and punish the Muggles who participated in the Purges while exalting the various communities of magic. Despising the idea of Muggles and magical practitioners ever co-existing in harmony, she was angered by the success of Arthur, and endeavored to engineer his ruin.”
"Learning of his location, she used her magic to disguise herself as a native of that land. It was the time of Beltane, and she ensnared Arthur with her beauty. Under the bonfires of the night, she seduced him. When he awoke the next morning, she was gone. Arthur searched for her among the villages, to no end. Finally, he gave up his quest, and turned his attention to plans for a final campaign for the mastery of Ireland; not knowing that Morgan had – through powerful fertility spells – become pregnant with his child, a child who when born, was prophesied to play the role of his Destroyer. Morgan hid in solitude for nine months until the birth of her only son – Mordred."

Just then, a waiter came over, forcing Mr. Ashcroft to pause his account and alter the spells to allow communication with the waiter, who took their empty plates and gave them some more tea. Once the waiter departed, Mr. Ashcroft replaced the privacy spells so he could continue his tale.

“As the years progressed,” he said, “Arthur succeeded in his campaigns and secure in his power, enlisted the help of Merlin, architects from the realm of Avalon, and select builders of his kingdom to build an edifice to signal the beginning of his dynasty and goals of uniting the peoples – both Muggle and Magical as one. Built within the valleys of Wales, with its mountains as its roots grew the great castle, and city that is known as Camelot. Upon its completion, Arthur moved his Court from the estates of his father Uther, to Camelot. There he was inaugurated as the High King of Britain, and Ard Ri of Ireland, and his territories as the Realm of Albion. Thus was ushered in the Golden Age of Camelot, a period of over twenty years which was marked with general peace and prosperity throughout all of his realm."

"This was also the time which marked the formation of the Knights of the Round Table, and the Wizards Council. While the Knights were principally concerned with maintaining the peace of his territories which were largely Muggle, the Council was a gathering of twelve wizards of great power who were his most loyal supporters during the beginning of the Reunification Wars. These men, he ennobled and set them over twelve counties that were to be set aside for the growing Wizarding community. Both the Knights and the Council were loyal to him, but none so as the Duke of Pevensie who not only served as his most trusted advisor among the Council, but also held his trust as the only Wizard among his Knights of the Round Table. Among Muggle legends, this remarkable man was known as Lancelot. Among the wizarding records however, his true name is recorded as that of Galahad Aislinn Peverell. Not only was he a wizard, he was rumored to be the son of the fabled Lady of Avalon. In fact, the tales state that this Lady was an elder relative to Igraine, the wife of Uther. Thus Galahad, or Lancelot was the cousin of the King. No one, save Merlin was trusted as much as he.”

Harry sat back in his seat, amazed at everything he’d heard so far. He was related to Lancelot! Almost every child in the world knew about the Knights of the Round Table. And to think, he was his descendant! It was amazing, it was utterly – not making sense. He snapped his gaze to Mr. Ashcroft.

“Hang on,” he said with a frown. “I thought that the Peverells were the direct descendants of
Mr. Ashcroft slowly began to smirk.

“They are.”

Harry’s eyes narrowed suspiciously.

“Yet you say that the Peverells are also direct descendants of Lancelot, or Aislinn.”

The smirk grew more pronounced.

“That is so,” Mr. Ashcroft agreed.

Harry scrunched his eyebrows and leaned back.

“But that’s impossible!” he protested. “First off, everyone knows that Arthur’s wife was Guinevere. And then there’s all those stories about how she betrayed him with Lancelot of all people. And for that matter, I’ve never heard of Arthur having any children with Guinevere. So how can it be possible that I’m the direct descendant of the King, who’s only wife betrayed him and left him no heirs, and yet be descended from the very man that she betrayed him with?”

Mr. Ashcroft’s smirk had morphed into a broad smile, by the time Harry had come to the conclusion of his reasoning. He picked up his glass of water and raised it towards Harry before taking a drink.

“Your questions are well justified Harry,” he said as he put down his glass, “which leads us to the strange events that marked the decline of Arthur’s reign.”

“We were, I believe,” said Mr. Ashcroft, “at the point in the time that was known as the Golden Age of Camelot. While Arthur never truly knew complete peace all the day of his reign, within the environs of Albion his people enjoyed a great measure of peace. With the Knights maintaining the territories of his realm, and the Council overseeing the replenishing of the wizarding community, Arthur turned his attention to forging alliances of trade between Albion and the neighboring
nations. In addition, he sought to prepare for any invasion by the Saxons. No one, not even Merlin had reckoned that Morgan would choose this time of peace to launch her own plans. By this time, she had been raising Mordred up in secret, teaching him all of her arts. She realized that she would need a strategic place to spin her webs. So she traveled to the realms of Arthur’s ally, the King of Orkney and through her charm and natural beauty, became his lawful wife. There, she set her plan in motion.

"She learned of a treaty to be held between Arthur and Cador, the Duke of Cornwall and that his foster daughter, a beautiful maiden of Welsh descent named Guinevere was promised in marriage to Arthur as a condition of their alliance. Morgan decided to use her as a tool to subvert Arthur. The two were married, and reigned peacefully over Camelot for many years. It wasn’t until Mordred had become twenty-one years of age that Morgan took the next step.

"First, she began to select young men and women who showed signs of magical talent, and began teaching them dark magic. She used these practitioners of dark magic to spread discord in different areas of the kingdom and divert the attention of the Wizards Council. While they were distracted, she began to sow seeds of discontent with those Muggles who thought of magic as wholly evil. As these Muggles began to rise in rebellion, she used the time to begin poisoning the Queen’s mind. As beautiful and fair as the Queen was, she was unable to give birth to a child. This grieved her to the point of near madness; Arthur too was discontent, for without an heir, he knew his kingdom could never survive. He turned more and more to his cousin, Lancelot for comfort and began to spend less time with his Queen."

As Mr. Ashcroft entered into the events that led to Camelot’s fall, his tone darkened and shadows grew more pronounced around them. Even the lights of the restaurant above them appeared to dim.

“Finally,” continued Mr. Ashcroft, “came the moment that Morgana had longed for; her servants had stirred up revolt in the southern portions of Scotland. The tributary kings of the tribes there sent word to Camelot begging for the King’s assistance. He went with a small force comprised of both Knights of the Round Table and two members of the Wizards Council. Leaving the Queen at Camelot – for war was no place for a Lady – he entrusted her care to Lancelot, for he trusted none other to defend her. Soon after his departure, a group of disgruntled Muggles turned assassins, and a small group of dark wizards attacked Camelot. Pushing past the guards, and overpowering the existing magical protections, they swept through and kidnapped the Queen. They took her to the Summer Country, the realm of Melwas who had fallen into alliance with Morgan, who promised him the High Kingship for his pains. There she was locked in a dank tower, sealed with powerful dark magic by Morgan herself. There she languished for many weeks. When Lancelot learned what had befallen, he immediately set out to find her, but he was hindered by dark magic. Morgan thought to seduce him in turn, and use him to wrest the kingdom from Arthur, but she did not know he was a wizard of the Council. She came forth to snare him…and met her match. The subsequent battle of magic reverberated throughout the Melwas’ realm. It was not known, what weapons they used or what spells they cast. Only the outcome is known; Lancelot, though not as versed in magic as Morgan, was able to subdue her and caused her to flee. Weakened and yet victorious, he sped to the tower where the Queen was held, and broke the enchantments, just in time to save the Queen from being ravished by the lecherous King Melwas. That is where the true danger arose.”
Harry stirred uneasily. “How?” he asked.

“The Queen by that time had lost all hope of rescue and had given herself over to die. When she was rescued by the dashing and noble Lancelot, she formed an unhealthy attachment to him. By the time Arthur had settled the disputes and returned home, she was safe and he was glad. The Queen however, lost all affection for him. She did her duties and presented a smiling face, but in her heart of hearts it was Lancelot she would be wife to, and no other. This was hidden for many months; for Lancelot had departed to broker an alliance with a small kingdom hidden magically in southern Germany, the kingdom of Arhvanion. But in his absence, Morgan learned of the Queen’s affection, and took a bold step, to accomplish her goals. The puppet-king of Orkney, her husband, allowed her leave to spend time in the courts of Camelot. She visited and wormed her way into the Queen’s confidence, taking the guise of her counselor and friend. As the Queen poured out the bitterness of her soul, Morgan nurtured her discontent, weaving her webs and subtly encouraging her to betray her vows. It was a delicate work, dependent as it was upon persuasion and not sorcery; but Morgan was more than equal to the task, having learnt the arts of subtlety in Avalon.”

“What about the King?” demanded Harry, as Mr. Ashcroft paused to take another drink. “Was he completely blind to Morgan’s presence? He just let this happen under his own nose?”

“Arthur was not all-knowing,” retorted Mr. Ashcroft. “He was aware of her unhappiness, and sought to comfort her, but he was High King; constantly he was called to arbitrate disputes and dispense High Justice throughout his vast realm, always he had to weigh the needs of the realm against his wish to comfort his wife. And understand Harry, that this was a sickness of the heart. The Queen no longer had any love for the King. What can a man do when his wife spurns every attempt to bring her some happiness? He threw himself into the affairs of his kingdom and was away from Camelot much of the time. Thus he was not aware of Morgan’s presence, or of the work of sedition and treachery she sought to bring about. After many weeks, he himself departed to southern Germany, to finalize the terms of the alliance with Arhvanion. Lancelot was sent back in his stead. And Morgan sprung her trap.’

‘Having encouraged the Queen’s secret passion, when Lancelot returned to Camelot, Morgan used a spell to stir up the Queen. She concealed herself, and watched as the Queen herself turned to magic to secure her wish. Of course, the Queen was a Muggle, but Morgan unseen, lent her power to enchant Lancelot’s food. After the feast, he became faint and took to his bed. That night, the Queen snuck into his chambers and enflamed by passion, began to ravish him.’

Harry’s face went white. He was only thirteen, but he was aware of what such acts would entail.

“She – she forced herself on him?” he asked, aghast at the thought.
Mr. Ashcroft nodded grimly.

“She had him bound to his own bed with bindings unknowingly enchanted by Morgan to disorient him, and weaken his natural resistance. When he became aware of what was going on, he tried to deter her from her purpose. It was of no use. She forced herself on him and did what she would. What no one knew, at the time, was that Arthur’s caravan to the final negotiations had been delayed; for the King had a sudden premonition of foreboding, and realized that evil was afoot in Camelot. He summoned Merlin, and with his magic, returned to Camelot. This proved to be a move which ruined Morgan.”

“How?” asked Harry.

“While Guinevere sought to have her way with Lancelot, Morgan began to spread word that the Queen had been unfaithful, and had been conducting an affair with Lancelot. The whole castle was stirred by the rumor. Guards, loyal to the King, went to Lancelot’s chambers and caught the Queen and Lancelot in the most compromising position. The Queen was forced away and banished to her chambers, and Lancelot – thought to be the instigator of this act of treachery to the King, was arrested and thrown into the dungeons.

"Camelot was in an uproar. The council was assembled and it was utter madness. Some fought not only for Lancelot’s arrest, but his execution. Others, knowing full well the devotion he had for his King, insisted that there was sorcery at work. Tempers were roused and Morgan added to the chaos, revealing herself and reviling both the Queen and Lancelot, producing letters which she claimed had been passed between them. It was her hope that Arthur would return to find his government in shambles and his most loyal follower dead, resulting in Albion being destabilized.

"Things however, did not go as planned. Just as the Council threatened to come to blows; the King arrived, unlooked for – Merlin at his side. Merlin had been absent from court for many years, but he knew at once that dark magic had been employed. Working quickly, he put barriers in place to prevent escape, then with the King’s authority began investigation of the charges hurled against Lancelot and the Queen. In short time, the truth was revealed. Arthur learned of the enchantments that had been woven against his Queen, and his most loyal companion, and the outrage that Lancelot had been subjected to. Merlin broke the enchantments and questioned the Queen harshly, using his own magic to try and trace the evil to its source. Morgan would fain have escaped, but she was prevented from leaving. She therefore set herself to wield a darker magic.

"After several interviews with the Queen, who proved most reluctant, Merlin discovered the face of her confidant. Moving quickly, he reported to the King, who summoned a tribunal to pass judgment. Morgan was captured, and brought forth as well as Lancelot and the disgraced Queen. When Morgan was revealed, both Arthur and Lancelot recognized her; Arthur, that she was the one to seduce him during the Beltane fires many years past, and Lancelot, that she was the dark witch who he battled in his quest to save the Queen. Morgan proudly admitted the role she had played in
the Queen’s capture and her subsequent lust for Lancelot. Haughty and fey, she revealed before the tribunal that she was the eldest child of Uther and claimed the right of ruling the kingdom. Laying eyes on her younger brother, she reviled him and pronounced a terrible curse upon him. The order was given to execute her for her treason, but it was not carried out – for the castle came under an unexpected assault.

"When Morgan knew that she could not escape, she used her magic to summon to her a protector. Her arts summoned a Great Fire Drake from the North, a dragon ancient even in the days of Arthur. It spewed dragon fire upon the great castle, its wings whipping up terrible winds which spread that fire far and wide. It smashed through the gates into the outer court and set all in its sights a blaze. Hundreds died in that initial onslaught. The tribunal came to a halt, everyone fleeing in fright or rallying to defend the King. In the tumult that followed, even Merlin was unable to keep his barriers intact, and Morgan used that as her chance to escape. The Knights attempted to overwhelm it with weaponry, but were repulsed. The Council attempted to slay the dragon with magic, but that too failed. The Merlin sought to protect the defenseless among the Court, and so was unable to strike at the dragon. In spite of their best efforts, the dragon forced its way into the throne room of the King. Arthur attempted to use the gift he had been blessed with, though no other gift of magic had ever been discovered: the gift of command over dragons and serpents that earned him the name Pendragon. But even he failed, for this dragon, ensured in the web of Morgan’s magic, was impervious to the King’s voice.

“All hope seemed lost.” said Mr. Ashcroft to a horrified Harry. “The defenses were in tatters. Many of the bravest of Arthur’s soldiers were slain. The King himself was facing certain death. It was Camelot’s darkest hour. There was one though, who did not give up. One, who still raised sword and magic to save his Lord. Lancelot – who had been forced into treachery against his will, and shamed and reviled for his pains – alone came to the Kings defense, wielding his magic to hold back the dragon. He created a shield of pure magic to protect Arthur from the blasts of dragon-fire that were hurled against him. Anything that could be used to strike at the dragon was used: burning masonry, discarded swords and spears, even tables and chairs were put to use. These tactics bought Arthur the time needed to summon Excalibur, that mighty blade forged by the ancient magic of Avalon. The dragon was enraged by this resistance and his wrath would have been enough to overwhelm Lancelot’s defenses, but the King rallying to his side, thrust into the dragon and wounded it in the lower belly. Slowly, the dragon was pushed back from the ruined castle, under the combined efforts of Lancelot and Arthur. Soon Merlin was able to come to their aid, and against the wrath of that mighty sorcerer, even the dragon became hard pressed. Its prey snatched from its grasp, wounded by the combined efforts of those three men, the dragon chose to flee. It sped away from Camelot and disappeared from reckoning.

"The dragon gone, Arthur now faced the task of setting his house in order. Camelot lay, burned and broken. Many of his court had been consumed by the dragon-fire, the rest scattered. And the greatest blow was yet to come. Lancelot, grieved by the dishonor that had been visited upon him by the Queen and despairing of retaining the King’s trust, withdrew from the Council and from the fellowship of the Knights, choosing to accept self-exile. His departure – though well intentioned, proved to be what robbed Arthur of the will to rule. He fell into a deep despair, and left the rule of Albion to Merlin and the Wizards Council. He departed to the lands of Pevensie; his final act before his departure being the removal of Guinevere from being Queen, and her banishment to Caerleon – the one-time capital of his father, Uther.”
Mr. Ashcroft smiled bitterly as he spun the tale.

“Finding Lancelot gone from his own lands, Arthur took up rulership. He contented himself with the hills and streams of his dear friend’s home. There, the struggles of power seemed vain and without honor. There, he could mourn the loss of a friend he loved well. There, he could vainly hope that Lancelot would return to him. With the King gone, the Queen banished, Camelot damaged and burned, and his closest advisor disappeared; Albion seemed to be on the brink of dissolution, despite the best efforts of Merlin and the Council. Many of the tributary kings began to lose faith in Arthur’s vision, and began to plot to rule in his stead. In this time, Morgan sought to consolidate her power. Returning to Orkney, she slew her husband and ruled in his stead. She began to draw under her banner the dark witches and wizards, and made alliance with many of the discontented kings. She knew that soon, it would be time to wage open war – and what hope did Albion have, when its own King deserted them? Her son Mordred, in an act similar to her when young, was traveling to distant lands and delving into the most forbidden arts of magic. He was becoming strong, his name already striking fear in men’s hearts.

“This sad state of affairs continued for several months. At last Merlin, with select members of the Council traveled to the lands of Pevensie; Arthur could not allow his kingdom to fall apart for one man, no matter how precious. Entering the estates of Lancelot, Merlin found the King. Sharply, Merlin rebuked him for refusing to encourage and build up his realm. He remonstrated with the King, showing him the inevitable results of that type of policy. He implored him to take up the rule of Albion once more, lest Morgana achieve victory at last.”

“I assume he did, since we still bear the titles he gave to his Council,” said Harry.

“That he did,” said Ashcroft. “The entreaties of Merlin, served to lift him from his despair as he realized how his weakness would to the ruin of all. Arthur regained courage, and purposed to prepare the kingdom for war. But before he could do so, he had one task to perform. He bade Merlin to send him to Lancelot, wherever he was hiding. Arthur knew that he would be much more prepared if he had that man on his side. Merlin obeyed the King, and sent him to a small monastery which was in the mountains. He entered and found his dear Lancelot making penance for his sins. He interrupted his rituals and revealed himself to the man. He told him how he had mourned upon his departure and shared the grave news told him by Merlin. He reminded him of their many adventures together and of the bond they shared. Lancelot sought forgiveness for his crimes, but the King refused to absolve him, for in his eyes, he had done him no wrong. He then confessed to the Duke his deepest and most protected secret – which he had fully been able to comprehend during his self-imposed exile in Pevensie: that his highest affections, passion and desire was for Lancelot, and him alone. That news shocked the Duke, for though he himself had thought of such things, he had never dared to hope that such a desire could ever be returned by the King. Though hard pressed to believe the King, he was finally convinced when Arthur knelt and begged him to return to him; offering him his armies, his crown, and even the sword Excalibur – which signified his right to reign. When he promised he would return, the King embraced him. And there, within that monastery, they surrendered to their love and were united as one.”
Harry, who had taken in a swig of tea; spit the tea from his mouth, sputtering and coughing. Mr. Ashcroft quickly waved his wand, Vanishing the mess from the tables and clearing Harry’s airway, so he could breathe.

“Goodness me,” said Mr. Ashcroft in surprise. Whatever could be the matter, Harry?”

“That’s…there’s no possible…they’re…but, why?” sputtered Harry, rearing back in shock. “Are you having a go with me? They’re both…men!”

Slowly Mr. Ashcroft’s eyes narrowed. He looked stern all of a sudden, and forbidding. Harry gulped and shrunk back under that gaze.

“Harry,” said Mr. Ashcroft, and even his voice was deeper, more resonant. “to love and to be loved was, and continues to be a gift, most precious and fragile. Is it a sin to rejoice in that beauty and joy giving gift, or rather, to repress that gift and label it unclean, or abomination?”

Harry frowned as he considered that. The Dursleys had always been outspoken in their hatred for people who were – in their opinion, more ‘freakish’ and ‘monstrous’ than even Harry at his worst. Why then should he share in their opinion of what was ‘normal’? He was a bloody wizard for crying out loud! He would be dammed before allowing any possible fear about something unknown lump him together with those…people. He looked up at Mr. Ashcroft and shrugged sheepishly.

“I wouldn’t really know sir, but I suppose love is love, isn’t it?”

Mr. Ashcroft looked at him carefully, and smiled. Suddenly the air around them seemed less – well, heavy.

“It is indeed Harry,” he said approvingly. “It is indeed.”

“You must understand something,” he continued, eyes fixed on the boy sitting across from him. “to love is something sacred in the most ancient of magical traditions. It bypasses flesh and blood, it encompasses souls, something beyond the ken of even the wisest of men. In our present society, unlike in the Muggle world, two people of the same gender falling in love is not considered monstrous. While certainly, there are some who view such joinings with distaste, by law and by magic it is perfectly suitable to form a loving partnership with someone of the same gender.”
Harry frowned thoughtfully as he thought about that. Well, if it was accepted by law and no one was harmed by it…to each their own.

“But we must get back to our tale,” said Mr. Ashcroft, frowning at his watch. “I will try to be as brief as possible.”

“Having admitted their desire for the other,” he said, “they felt empowered to return to the kingdom and set things right. They found that they had arrived not a moment too soon. A number of minor territories had broken faith and alliance and were even then, marching upon Camelot for assault. The Court was in disarray and the remaining Knights struggling to keep the standing garrisons together. The arrival of both King and Duke was an unlooked for boon. Quickly, they gathered the garrison into formation and prepared for battle. When it came, it was short, and furious. But Arthur’s wrath was aroused, and Merlin was returned to his side, and Lancelot. Under their hands, the rebellion was quickly rooted out. Over the several months that followed, Arthur and the Council sought to repair the damage done to Camelot and the reputation of Albion. Forging an alliance with the dwarves – the Ancient master-builders of old, Arthur began the reconstruction of Camelot. During that time, he moved the Court to Ireland, leaving Merlin and the Council in charge of the work.

“You can imagine,” said Mr. Ashcroft wryly to the enthralled teen before him, “that Morgan was sore displeased. Though her plans had succeeded in part, she had failed to collapse Arthur’s rule. And she wondered, as reports of Lancelot being sighted in Camelot reached her ears. As the Wheel had almost fully turned to Beltane, she decided to attempt the magics of lust and potency to strike at Arthur’s heart. She brewed a dark fertility potion, terrible in its potency and effects, and commissioned one of her slaves to travel to Camelot and slip it into the drink of Lancelot. This was done, and she rejoiced.”

“Why was she happy about that?” asked Harry.

“Harry, the potion she crafted was designed to enflame the victim’s heart with a powerful lust,” said Mr. Ashcroft, “so powerful that the only thought of the victim is to sate that lust. Once the victim found its target, the magic would tear down all defenses and leave that target helpless to do anything but endure the outrage. The end result would be the impregnation of the victim’s target.”

Harry's face twisted with revulsion at that news.

“Morgan’s plot was to induce him to travel to Caerleon and brutally rape Guinevere, who she knew had been banished there. Under the mistaken impression that the banishment was merely the result of jealous anger on Arthur’s part, she thought that for the King’s wife to be raped and impregnated
by his trusted friend would crush his spirit and complete her goal of rending Albion asunder.”

“There was however,” said Mr. Ashcroft with a smirk, “a few things that she had not accounted for. She did not know that Guinevere had been deposed from her throne. She did not realize that Lancelot was not merely a wizard, but a son of Avalon as she herself and her brother were. She did not account for the fact that Lancelot did not hold any love – or lust for woman. And finally, the idea that not only did Lancelot not hunger for a woman, but was completely in love with the King – a love that was reciprocated in full, didn’t enter her wildest dreams.”

“So you mean to say that she failed?” exclaimed Harry, eyes wide.

“No,” said Mr. Ashcroft, “I will not say that she failed, per se. Her potion was quite effective. It just didn’t conclude in a manner that she ever considered possible. Lancelot was well, and truly ensnared by that insidious magic. But the only one he desired was Arthur. So he swiftly traveled to the kingdom of Tara, which was the high seat of the King in the Emerald Isle. He arrived there during the night of the Beltane fires and made his way to the King, who had refused the touch of man or woman and sat on the ancient hill alone. When Arthur saw Lancelot, he thought he beheld a vision – for Lancelot was naked and fay, and burned as it were, with the fires of Beltane. Arthur too was caught up in the magic that Morgan had wrought, but far from helpless, he himself took to ravish his Duke. They made love by the light of the fires – so alike to that day, decades past when Arthur and Morgan took each other in the wilds of Wales. And as that day, so too the results of Arthur and Lancelot’s passion soon revealed; for twenty-one days after Beltane, the Duke of Pevensie found himself to be with child.”

“Circe’s sagging tits!” swore Harry, jumping up out of his seat. “That’s not possible. There’s no bloody way that that could be possible! A man! A man, up the duff?!”

Mr. Ashcroft stared pointedly at him, until Harry, face red sank back unto his chair.

“But that can’t be,” Harry protested more softly. “It defies all the rules of biology and genetics!”

Mr. Ashcroft shook his head in wonder.

“It is a rather unusual idea, isn’t it” he said. “A male becoming pregnant. Certainly, for Muggles such a thing absolutely impossible. Even for wizards, the concept boggles the mind. I urge you however, Harry to keep one thing in mind. You will remember earlier on, I stated that it was not clear if the people of Avalon were quite human, yes? While it is certainly not a design of the male body, it may very well be that the male among the ancient people of Avalon possessed that capability. We can only surmise. If so, then it is possible that the potion which had been ingested,
reactivated that gene within Lancelot. Also, consider this. While Arthur, aside from a few unique talents, never exhibited the powers of a wizard, he was still also a son of Avalon, through his mother, the Queen Igraine. When combined, those factors support the concept of Lancelot bearing Arthur’s heir."

Harry shook his head in disbelief. This was really, the most unbelievable thing he'd ever heard in his life! He scowled at the visibly amused Duke sitting across from him.

“So that explains your smirking before.” he muttered.

Mr. Ashcroft chuckled as he observed Harry’s reaction.

“Quite so,” he said, “but now we turn back to our tale. When Merlin confirmed that Lancelot was with child, all of Albion was a stir. Something like this had never happened before. Arthur was of course, delighted, but very much worried for Lancelot’s safety. He sent Lancelot back to the lands of Pevensie, and had Merlin set up every protective ward conceivable during that time. No one was permitted on those lands, save by the King’s leave. Morgan was enraged when she heard the rumors, for her plans lay in ashes. While far stronger now, than she had ever been, she was not yet ready to wage open war. So for a time, Albion had peace.

"In due time, Lancelot gave birth to a daughter. It was at this time that Arthur and Lancelot were formally married, in accordance with the ancient rites. Lancelot was declared the King Consort of Arthur, and co-ruler of Albion. This news was met with much grumbling among the Knights, who envied his rise to power, even as they derided him to scorn in private. Many among the people found this new change intolerable, and softly at first, but in the years to come more openly, discontent and a rising sentiment against magic of all kinds began to spread. This was as Morgan would have it, for she lay in wait in the shadows, encouraging and stirring the elements of unrest.

“And now,” said Mr. Ashcroft, “we come to the twilight years of Arthur’s reign. He is recorded as having one more child with Lancelot, this one a son. The years passed, and when the youngest was seven years of age, construction of Camelot was once again completed. The Court returned to that great fortress, which had been greatly enhanced and strengthened. Spells of endurance and strength were interwoven into every stone; the main gates were constructed of a remarkable mineral called mithril, a material both light, and incredibly durable. These gates were further enchanted with the strongest protective charms that could be devised. No dragon, could make its way past the gates, now. The citadel rose several levels high and each level boasted a gate, though these were gates of steel, rather than the precious dwarvish metal. It was built out of the very mountains itself, and gleamed in the light of the sun. There was much rejoicing as the the citadel of Camelot was dedicated to the gods. A dark note however, marred that day. Merlin was taken in a vision and when brought back to his senses, warned that Arthur would not long wear the crown in that city; for a Shadow fell upon Camelot, and he saw the King’s life snuffed out.
"Following Merlin’s counsel, a Great Council was held, with all the tributary kings in attendance. Arthur in the midst of that august assembly, publicly declared his children the rightful heirs of the Pendragon line, and thus, of the realm of Albion. He had the kings swear a magical oath on the realm of Albion itself, that any rulers in any territory of Albion both current and to be gained by conquest would rule subject to the Pendragon’s authority. Then, he declared that the line of succession would run through the lineage of his eldest child, and would only pass to his second child upon the death of all descendants of his daughter.

"This was news ill to bear to the kings, for women were never well thought of among the Muggles of that age. He did however, declare that the descendants of his son would be the lawful heirs of Lancelot. Furthermore, he declared that the line of Peverell would always be acknowledged as a Royal line, though they could not take the throne without the conditions of inheritance being met. He declared his son to be the first Archduke of Caerleon, the right to be passed down through the ages to his descendants. He then chose to be bolder. He had the Wizards’ Council kneel, and ratified through Royal Letters Patent, that their noble rank would also pass down to their descendants and the territories they were granted, to be linked to their bloodlines alone. He had the Royal Charter of Albion made, which detailed the rights of inheritance and the scope of the powers of the Wizards’ Council’s authority. He had Merlin weave the magics into the very blood of the Council. Many other things were dealt with that day before the assembly was dismissed. These actions set the territories aflame, and many among the Muggle portion of the realm began to mutter of black sorcery and corruption and heathen worship."

Harry sat in his seat drinking in the information. He had wondered how his family was considered Royal and how they were accorded such an honor. He thought of something then and looked to Mr. Ashcroft.

“Sir,” said Harry. “whatever happened with Morgan and her plans?”

“That Harry,” said Mr. Ashcroft heavily, “is where we will conclude our story. It was at this time when Mordred, Morgan’s son and the eldest child of Arthur returned from his journeys. He did not however, come alone. He had delved into the most forbidden of magics in his quest for power. His hate and malice was so great that it stirred from the ancient prison to which it had been condemned for eternity, a power only known as the Shadow. While it still remained bound; much of its spirit was able to depart and find a foothold in this world, and in its search, it discovered Mordred. It seduced him, and twisted him until he was hardly recognizable. Mordred learned of secret things; fell creatures, servants of Shadow that had been bound in the bowels of the earth, ancient and forgotten magics so potent, that they had managed to fell that mighty country of sorcery. Yes, he learned many things, and bound himself into perpetual servitude to the Shadow. He began to recruit followers, like his mother before him and bound them in fellowship to himself. They too desired power and were willing to stop at nothing to achieve it. They became fell sorcerers and necromancers in their own right, though they were lesser in raw power and cunning to Mordred. Using the teachings of Shadow, he summoned monstrous demons and twisted many magical races like those of the goblins and the great wolves and serpents and even birds. He raped, pillaged and experimented on people of all lands who fell into his hands. It was Mordred who through his
sorcery created the first Inferi. He invented the dark spells of Fiendfyre. He also invented the darkest of spells, the spells later to be known as the Unforgiveables: The Imperius, Cruciatux, and the Killing, or Death Curse.

Harry’s hands clenched tight and he gritted his teeth, as he heard the Killing Curse mentioned – the curse which robbed him of his family. Mr. Ashcroft paused, a look of concern on his face, but continued when Harry remained silent.

“Above all of the abominable acts of which the firstborn son of Arthur was guilty, one of the most heinous experiments Mordred ever did was those which brought about the Dementors. The exact knowledge of how he created such creatures has never been discovered, but they were among the deadliest or his servants. He also had many men in his train. When his dark army entered Albion, Morgan rejoiced – at last she had an army strong enough to topple Camelot into the dust, and wrench control of Albion out of Arthur’s hand. With redoubled effort, she set herself to poisoning the minds of the tributary kings, many of whom had begun to murmur and take issue with Arthur’s rule. Meanwhile, Mordred invaded the estates of Caerleon with his army and took swift possession of the estates of his grandfather Uther. Guinevere disappeared from that time, although it is not known what became of her. Some historians agree that she entered a nunnery and remained there until her death. Others however, claim that she was seduced by Mordred through his magical arts, and bore him a son.

"This uncertain period lasted for several months. Merlin conducted his own experiments during this time, and developed spells that are still known today; spells such as the Patronus Charm and other protective spells. Possibly the greatest spell invented by him that is still used today is the Fidelius Charm, which he used to protect the secret of Camelot’s location, entrusting the secret to Lancelot, the first Secret Keeper. The Council gathered scores of witches and wizards to serve as support for Arthur’s armies. Arthur sent emissaries to the various magical races such as the unicorns, the phoenixes, the Ancient skin changers, the centaurs, and greatest and deadliest of all, the dragons. He also sent his husband, Lancelot to be his personal emissary to the Lady of Avalon. When a year and a day passed, battle was joined. The combined forces of Mordred and Morgana met in battle against Arthur’s forces in Camlann.

"The battle was terrible and fierce; many of the remaining Knights still loyal to the King died in the first onslaught. The numbers of Mordred and Morgan far outnumbered those of the beleaguered High King. It isn’t known how long the battle was, and the exact numbers of the slain; it is known however, that the Merlin fell in battle against an elder demon after he struck down Morgan le Fay as she finished the summoning, and that his body was never seen in mortal lands again. Among the Council, fell the Lords Bones, Dagworth, and Shanessy. Mordred, with his circle of followers attacked Arthur, though he was soon aided by the eight remaining members of the Council. Mordred entered into one on one combat with Arthur – a fight that lasted for hours and was waged on sea, sky, and land. At last, Mordred cut down his father just as Morgan faithlessly murdered her own father. Though stricken with a mortal wound, Arthur had the final victory as he pierced Mordred through with Excalibur, and Mordred fell to his death. For a time, his armies fled upon his death, notably the human soldiers who had been victims of his Imperius Curse. During that lull, Arthur was carried back to Camelot where he was bewailed by his servants and by his children.
Before he drew final breath, Lancelot returned from his mission, at the head of an army of Avalonians, sent by the Lady of Avalon. Stricken to the heart, he was charged with ruling and defending Albion until his daughter should be prepared to reign as Queen, and kissed farewell. Thus Arthur, the Pendragon, first High King of Albion passed into death. He was entombed in Camelot.

Mr. Ashcroft and Harry sat quietly as they considered the events of the past. Finally, Harry looked up, a question burning in his eyes.

“What happened to his children then? And his kingdom?” asked Harry.

Mr. Ashcroft sighed.

“As you can imagine,” he said quietly, “Arthur’s death sent the realm into chaos. Morgan le Fay was well and truly dead, having been slain by Merlin in that great battle, however her son, Mordred endured. Though Mordred had been slain, his spirit endured – a result of his experiments and his devotion to the Dark Powers. He returned again, though he no longer retained a human form, and waged war upon Camelot for the next fifty years, until he and his followers were apprehended and bound and cast into ancient tombs so deep and strong, that unto this day, their site remain unknown. Lancelot ruled in Arthur’s stead until she was strong enough to bear the crown. Afterwards, it is said that he laid down near the tomb of Arthur and never woke up. His passing marked the great schism that emerged between the magical and Muggle communities. It was in the days of his daughter the High Queen Vivianne when, due to the outbreak of jealousy and bitterness, the Muggle kings who served her father demanded she surrender her crown. They thought to intimidate her but failed. For she was strong and proud, and unwilling that Arthur’s legacy be wholly destroyed. Although she conceded to withdraw from active rule over the Muggle territories within the realm, she wrested oaths of perpetual loyalty to her line. Thus, any ruler or government within any of the Muggle territories of the realm rule by the clemency of the sovereign of Albion, and are subject to Albion’s Crown. The sovereign retains however, full authority over and magical portion of the countries that fall under the pall of Albion, by right, inheritance, and conquest.

"As for her brother? He reigned over the duchy of Pevensie and his grandfather's territory of CaerLeon as Archduke and served as the counselor of the Queen along with his fellow Lords of the Wizards Council. His children, married into the families of the Blacks and the Ashcrofts, and by virtue of their children being the great-grandchildren of Arthur, the Houses of Black and Ashcroft were elevated and their Lords given the title of Grand Duke. Thus while the House of Peverell is the preeminent House among the Council, the Houses of Black and Ashcroft join it in being historically known as the Royal Houses of Albion.”

Harry leaned back as he took in all of this information. To think, that he was a part of the continuing legacy of Arthur and Lancelot! It scared him, but also filled him with determination;
determination to honor his family’s past, and strive to honor the future of his family by being the best wizard he could be. As he looked to Mr. Ashcroft, it seemed as if the man had already guessed what lay upon his face because the man was staring at him with a look of pride.

“I hope that you will understand now how much you have to live up to, and what potential lies within your blood. You will go far, and accomplish extraordinary things.”

He glanced then at his watch and blanched.

“Good heavens, is this really the time? Come along Harry, it is high past time that we make our way to the Leaky Cauldron.”

He swiftly took down the privacy charms, sending a wordless spell to Ambrose, who was no doubt embroiled in a intensive discussion with his daughter, who no doubt, was lambasting him for his abrupt disappearance. Luckily, it turned out that Ambrose had completed his lengthy chat with his sister and his son arrived as Harry gathered his bags, announcing that he’d paid the bill for their meal while the pair had concluded their discussion a few minutes prior. With Mr. Ashcroft exchanging a few appreciative words with the manager of the restaurant, the trio were soon out of the restaurant, and out and about on the bustling streets of London.

“Sorry about the bags,” Mr. Ashcroft said suddenly as they moved along the street. “it completely slipped my mind to shrink them when we left the store. Luckily we’re only a few blocks away from the Cauldron. I think even a scrawny boy like you can endure that much.”

Harry made a face at the older man, which sent him into a burst of rolling laughter, while Ambrose shook his head in mock despair. Content, and full, the trio of wizards made their way to the Leaky Cauldron, and their beds.

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Unbeknownst to Ashcroft and his two companions heading for bed without a care in the world, they were not the only wizards out and about, that warm August night. One other was out among the crowd, seated in a dirty corner of the street, watching them go up the block.
With a huff, the figure took off after them. Using his legs, he sprinted without stopping until he saw the two enter a small, dingy, tavern. With a low whine and a snap of his jaws, the figure pattered over to an empty side alley, several feet away from the pub’s entrance. Had anyone been in that alley, when there glare of a car’s headlights briefly illuminated the dirty space, they would have seen a ragged looking, large, black dog.

The dog whined low in its throat again and shook its fur. Then it suddenly began to grow; four limbs turned into legs and arms; shaggy, unkempt fur turned into human hair equally shaggy and unkempt; and in a moment, the dog was now a man.

The man; emaciated, pale, face almost corpse-like, crept to the opening of the side alley and peered at the old pub that the two had walked into, mere moments before. He still wasn’t too certain of the two older men, especially the eldest of the pair, given how he’d once forced him away moments before he could have gotten a good look at his boy; his godson, his Harry.

But he had gotten a good glimpse, at last. And he was in awe. The boy looked so much like his parents; his features and coloring very much like his old friend and soul brother James, his father; and his eyes - gods above his eyes – a perfect replica of sweet Lily’s. Dear, dear, dead, sweet Lily.

He had been worried, when Harry had been taken away by that old man – but it seemed that the man, powerful and strong, was looking out for his boy’s best interest. He seemed trustworthy enough around Harry, for the boy seemed to be a good judge of character. Harry was smart, like his parents.

And he was strong. Oh, he’d smelt the power wafting off him as he had hidden in the bushes not two days ago. He was certainly as powerful as his old man James; perhaps far more, even, considering what he had to suffer thanks to – to him.

The gaunt man’s face twisted into a dark smile. Yes, he would get what was coming to him – he would make sure of it. It was almost time for the children to go to Hogwarts, and when they arrived….

The man known as Sirius Black slowly backed into the shadows of the side alley. It wouldn’t pay for him to be seen by anyone now. His picture had been pasted on every news station on the Muggle telly for the past several days. He needed to be wary…he needed to stay safe…

But soon…
He smiled, as he began the transformation from man once more into beast. He padded along to the opening and stared once more at the ol’ Leaky Cauldron. First, he needed to find a safe shelter to rest for the night; and in the morning, he would have to begin his long journey. It would be difficult; it would take a great deal of his strength.

But he was strong, he would endure the hardship.

Only a few more weeks before his mission would begin.

Soon.

He would find him.

And he would pay.

Chapter End Notes

And thus another chapter reaches it's close...

Whew! This chapter is the second part of the two-chapters titled "To be of Noble Blood". These chapters are basically info dump chapters to catch Harry up to speed on the secrets within his family and get a basic course about the Royal Family of Albion. We've done our best to avoid altering too much of this chapter from it's original format, but it's been tailored to include the follow-up to some changes introduced in the previous chapters.

As stated at the top, this does include certain topics that might turn off some readers. Bear with us, we want this fic to work for the most people who read this story. That being said, we will take this story in directions that some may not particularly prefer, which is totally fine. As long as we respect each other, there's no harm in having a potential difference in opinion. Will these topics pop up again in the story? Maybe. Maybe not. We'll see.

For those of you hankering for the debut of certain characters who have hitherto been absent from the story (like a certain puppeteering Headmaster...or our favorite ginger clan...or our beloved whimsical goddess, Luna...) never fear! While the last several chapters have been focused mainly on Harry, Mr. Ashcroft and the links that both have to the Potter family and legacy, we will be branching out in future chapters to focus on other characters who will be having major roles in the story and those who may not play as great a role as some might expect. Dumbledore will be coming along in due time and he is whipping up a host of bewildering 'delights' for Harry and co.
There should be about two or three more chapters before we get Harry set up for his new year at Hogwarts. Plenty of changes await him and his friends!

As always, many thanks to all of the amazing readers who have shared their thoughts, questions and polite critiques! We appreciate you all and are humbled that you are following this project. We hope to update a bit faster this month, but no promises! This chapter was delayed for about a week and a half, because we've been dealing with RL and a host of other delights (such as binge watching the entire Naruto series plus it's sequel series Boruto - over 700 episodes! :D). Hopefully though, we will have two more chapters out by the end of the month.

Enjoy!

2/17/20- Update to list of assets on Chapter 4, 'Training, Traitors, Gold and Goblins'. Legislative seats added to House of Peverell assets.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!