**Bring Me The Head of Harry Potter**

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**Summary**

Possibly the most demented crossover ever... Someone wants Harry Potter dead, and Dawn Summers and Angel Investigations are in the line of fire. BtVS, Angel, Harry Potter, Sopranos Highlander x-over - Spoilers for BtVS finale, character death, VERY AU for the last series of Angel.

**Notes**

Minor spoilers up to season 7 of Buffy. Set after Season 7 BtVS, after Season 4 Angel, after Harry Potter graduates, and nowhere in particular in Sopranos / Highlander continuity. This was originally written in the early days of Angel S5 and before Harry Potter book VI, and was soon hopelessly AU. I think I prefer my version!

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There are some story-wide errors in the way some Harry Potter spells are described, most notably *Accio*. It's probably best to assume that things work slightly differently in this world.
Tony Soprano liked his new London bank. In barely an hour they'd converted his dollars into untraceable gold, and assured him that he could get it from their vaults without notice, and get to the bank itself by portkey at any time, day or night. So most of the bankers weren't exactly human - hell, you could say that about most of the people he did business with. Once he was over the idea that the whole thing was a Prozac-induced hallucination he liked it so much that he was wondering when the other shoe would drop.

"There is just one other matter," said the young executive who was handling his account, handing over the vault key. "Nothing to do with your finances, which are entirely separate. You'll understand that we normally avoid doing business with the mug... mundane world, and in fact do our best to stay separate. However, recently the board has decided to broaden our scope and foster links with organisations such as yours."

"The garbage disposal industry?"

"In a manner of speaking. The families who own this bank have difficulty moving in the outside world. A matter has come up... someone who is going to give everyone a lot of trouble if he isn't taken out of the picture. They want to employ some contractors."

"And you would want these contractors to do what, exactly?"

"Arrange an accident."

"How accidental an accident are we talking about here?"

"Anything goes, provided it has no apparent connection to the wizarding world and eliminates our problem. Permanently. Something like a hit and run, or a fatal robbery, for example."

"What's the catch?"

"The target is a wizard. Still a student, but already moderately powerful. He is well-protected against magical attacks, but we're hoping that a sudden non-magical incident might prove effective. Of course your representatives would have to be careful not to give him time to use magical protection, but we don't think he'll be expecting trouble."

"So why me? There are contractors in Britain, I can point you at people."

"The person in question will be visiting the United States for several weeks this summer, and it would be... convenient if his accident takes place well away from these shores."

"It'll cost you. Unless he'll be in New York I'll have to do business with the local organisations, they'll want a cut."

"Not a problem, mister Soprano. We have a very high budget for this operation."

"Okay. Give me the name, as much information on him as you have, and the address where he'll be staying. I'll see what I can do and quote you a price."

"His name is Potter, Harry Potter. Here's the file. He'll be visiting Los Angeles, California, this summer. Again, the details are in the file. If you have any additional questions we can be contacted via our legal representatives, Wolfram and Hart. I think that they have offices in New York and Los
Angeles."

"Okay, that'd probably have to be arranged through the Los Angeles mobs. No promises but I'll look into it. Pleasure doing business with you, mister Weasley."

"Call me Charlie."

"Charlie."
"What do you mean, you won't sell me a beer?" asked Harry.

"This passport says you're under age," said the barman, "come back next year."

"I could buy a drink in Britain."

"Tough. The management has two big rules here, no violence and no selling alcohol or smokes without proof of age."

"I can't believe that a demon bar won't sell me a drink!"

"Demon kareoke bar," said a laughing voice behind him, "and no, this is neutral ground for our clients, not some sort of evil hell-hole. We obey the law. I'm Lorne, by the way, I own this place."

Harry turned to see a tall green demon in a smart green suit, who looked at him, smiled, and said "Here for the wizarding conference at UCLA?"

"How did you know about that? I thought it was being kept quiet."

"You may have noticed, the clientele here aren't exactly muggles. Looking around I can see two vampires, a werewolf, eleven assorted demons, two wizards and a witch from Industrial Light and Magic, one immortal, a reanimated evil lawyer, and four or five guys I don't recognise. And the 'Boy Who Lived', of course."

Harry self-consciously brushed his hair to cover the green scar on his forehead, blinked, and said "I'd appreciate it if you didn't spread that around. I'm old enough to vote, damn it, how long are they going to keep calling me 'boy'?"

"No problemo. Don't worry, most people on this side of the Atlantic won't recognise you, especially now you wear contacts instead of glasses. I use a clippings service, like to keep up with Rita Skeeter's show business column. If you'd like a magical disguise I can sell you one. If you'd like a coke or something it's on the house, Voldemort killed relatives of some of my friends."

"A pint of butterbeer?"

"Okay, that's legal. Gaston, pint of butterbeer for the gentleman, on the house. And another seabreeze for moi."

"Thanks, that's great." Harry sipped the butterbeer a little warily, then more enthusiastically. "That's really good. Old Warlock brewery? Didn't think it travelled well."

"That's right. I had a few barrels shipped over a couple of weeks ago, so that they'd be nicely settled before the conference. Tell your friends. So... what are you doing now that the Big Bad is out of the
"University, then maybe a teaching job." He turned to watch a beautiful girl about his age, who was singing something he didn't recognise.

...I know I'm not perfect but I can smile
And I hope that you see this heart behind my tired eyes
If you tell me that I can't, I will, I will, I'll try all night
And If I say I'm coming home, I'll probably be out all night...

"Lovely voice," said Lorne, "but she always sings such sad songs. Usually Dido for some reason. There's history there, of course, I try hard not to see it."

"See it?"

"I'm psychic, get an idea of people's lives and futures if I hear them sing."

"That's... interesting."

"You don't like psychics?"

"When you've spent your teens being stalked by the most powerful evil wizard in the world, predictions that you'll be in mortal danger get a little tiring."

"I get that. So, I'd heard you were thinking of becoming a Quidditch pro, what happened?"

"Quidditch is fun, but I don't think it's what I want to do with the rest of my life, though I'll try out for the Uni team next term. I was thinking more in terms of teaching Defence against the Dark Arts. Pass on some of the things I learned fighting Voldemort. Maybe coach Quidditch too."

"Can't think of anyone more qualified."

The girl finished her song, chatted briefly to someone at one of the tables, and came over towards the bar and the exit, saying "Goodnight, Lorne" as she went out. As she passed Harry felt an odd prickling, a sensation he sometimes felt near powerful magic.

"That kid packs one heck of an aura..." began Lorne, then stiffened and said "...and she's about to get herself killed. Damn, that'll teach me to pay more attention when someone sings. Harry..."

Harry was already half-way out of the door.

"Crap," said Lorne, and picked up the phone. "Come on, Angel, answer..."

* * * * *

The girl was nearly a block away when Harry caught up with her. "Excuse me, miss, just a second."

She turned. "Yeah? Do I know you?"

"No, but the demon at the bar said you're in danger."

"Must be Tuesday."

"What?"

"Old joke. What sort of danger?"
"He said you were about to get yourself killed." This close he could see that she was even more attractive than he'd originally thought. A little taller than him, athletic, and gorgeous, in tight jeans and a t-shirt that didn't leave much to the imagination, a black leather jacket rolled up under her arm. "He didn't go into details."

"Not very helpful, but..." a dark car raced around the corner, one of the windows on the passenger side down. As it passed the girl shouted "Gun!" and pushed Harry to the ground. She was still upright when the machine-gun fired.

Half stunned, Harry picked himself up to see her lying there, motionless and bleeding from at least three wounds. He found his wand and cast "Accio potion," summoning a flask from the stock in his suitcase. "Here, drink this." She didn't respond.

Harry raised her from the ground, and tried to make her drink from the flask. He felt numb as he realised that it was probably already too late. "What the...?" As he tried to make her drink tiny flashes of light moved across her chest, the wounds stopped bleeding, and seemed to close and heal by themselves. She coughed, gasped, and blinked.

"Damn it, I liked that shirt!"

"You're... alive."

"Well duh. Yeah, I'm alive."

"What are you?" He let go as she sat up and backed away, holding the wand defensively.

She stood, looked at the shirt, and swore, frowning as she noticed the nimbus of power around Harry's wand. Somehow she pulled a short sword from the jacket, and he vaguely wondered how it could have been hidden there as she assumed a defensive position and said "I am Dawn Summers, daughter of Joyce and sister of the Slayer. I am immortal and I cannot die."

"What?"
I pulled the folding sword from my jacket, flicking the blade out as I said "I am Dawn Summers, daughter of Joyce and sister of the Slayer. I am immortal and I cannot die."

Sometimes it impresses people, once a headhunter laughed so much I was able to stab him before he recovered. The cute British guy said "What?" and looked confused, but he was holding the rod in his hand like some sort of weapon.

"I said, 'I am Dawn Summers, daughter of Joyce and sister of the Slayer. I am immortal and I cannot die.'"

"Err... that's handy."

"Okay, so you don't want to cut my head off, I take it."

"What?"

"And you really have no idea what I'm talking about?"

"Merlin, no, not the foggiest."

"Sorry, just checking. It's a ritual challenge." I slid the sword back into its sheath, and waited for him to get his act together.

"You're an immortal?"

"Yes. Damn, this shirt's ruined."

"That'd explain the coming back to life. Never met one before. Just a second..." he screwed up his eyes in thought then said "Accio camisia" and waved the rod... no, wand. A scarlet T-shirt with a red lion logo popped out of thin air, and he caught it in his other hand. "It might be a little big for you but I think it's clean."

"Wow. And you're a wizard, I guess, I've met a few. Thanks, now turn your back for a second..." It was roomy, but not ridiculously baggy. Thr lion opened its mouth and gave a little roar. "... okay, but can you stop it roaring, might be a little conspicuous."

"Just say Silencio camisia."

"Silencio camisia." It stopped.

I rolled the old shirt up in a ball and dropped it down a sewer, and hoped that the police wouldn't find it if they ever got here. Not that it could be traced to me easily, but things like that make them start looking for bodies.

Another car squealed round the corner, and for a second I thought it was the shooters, coming back
for another pass. Then I recognised the Angelmobile, and said "It's okay, friend of mine" before mister wizard could turn it into a frog. In the distance I could hear sirens, but I judged it'd be three or four minutes before the first police cars arrived.

"Are you all right?" asked Angel, getting out of the car.

"Do I look all right? That was my favourite shirt I just threw away, and these jeans are going to need a good soak."

"Great sense of priorities, Dawn. Lorne called, said you needed help, good thing I was in the area."

"Yeah, well, drive-by shooting. No permanent damage, but I can't walk home like this."

"Who's your friend?"

"Dunno, but I think it was him they were after."

Mister wizard said "Me?" and looked horrified.

"He's some sort of magician, probably with that conference at UCLA."

Angel looked at him, and something seemed to click. "Harry Potter, right?"

"Err," says the wizard, "yes, I am. How did you know about the conference?"

"Two of our friends are speakers, and Lorne said you might be in town. He's a big fan, kept me posted in case your little war ever spilled over to the USA. I've seen enough pictures to recognise the scar. I thought Lord Whatsit was dead."

"Voldemort? We finished him last year."

"Looks like you have some new enemies. Better get in the car, we need to get out of here before the police arrive, and I think you could do with my help."

* * * * *

"So what type of immortal are you?" Harry asked as Angel drove us towards the Hyperion. "My class did it in Magical Beasts a couple of years ago, but I'm damned if I can remember much. There was the Klopta classification system, of course, let's see... natural, magical, magically-maintained, cursed, created and undead, with subclassifications for things like aging or unaging."

"Short version," I said, "someone who comes back to life if she dies, and heals ridiculously fast after the first time she's killed. There's also a long tradition of challenges, duelling and chopping off each other's heads to gain their power, that's what that 'daughter of' thing was about, but I won't go into that because it's pretty silly if you aren't involved."

I left out the part about the monks having made me immortal so that their precious Key could be used more than once, no way was a stranger, especially a wizard, getting that story.

"Then that wasn't the first time you've died?"

"No, think it's the fourth. No, fifth. First was about three years ago, just after I graduated high school. We were fighting demons, turned out they had guns. Luckily I recovered fast, before they did anything stupid to my body, and we worked out what was going on. Lorne has a couple of immortal friends, one of them showed me the ropes."
"And you fight demons?"

"Angel does it full-time, I'm still in college. If it wasn't the vacation I'd be at UCLA right now. I help out at weekends and in the vacations, Angel pays me and gives me a free room. Beats working for Doublemeat Palace."

"If you don't mind me asking, how old are you? I thought you were my age."

"Twenty-two, and I'll look this age when I'm two hundred and twenty. It's a real nuisance if I want a drink."

"Even so, you're young to be an auror."

"A what?"

"Sorry, you might call them magical police."

"Not exactly police. Angel's a private detective, helps the helpless, takes on the cases the police and the regular private eyes won't touch. Mostly they seem to have some sort of supernatural slant."

"If you're going to be spending time with us you might as well know I'm a vampire," said Angel. This didn't go down well with Harry, who reached for his wand.

"Don't worry," I said, "he's got a soul, doesn't kill people any more. Angel, next time try and break the news a little more gently, I think Harry got a little worried."

"I'm sorry..." said Harry, "I was a little off-guard with Voldemort out of the way, and I really don't want people getting hurt because they happen to be standing near me. Not again. Just give me a minute to get my act together, and I'm all yours."

"Promises promises" I muttered. He really was cute, especially when he was worried.

"What?" said Harry, and Angel snorted with suppressed laughter. I always forget how good his hearing is.

"Never mind. We're here."

* * * * *

"This is a detective agency?" asked Harry, "It looks like a hotel."

"Used to be one," said Angel, "we own the place now. Or rather about ten different finance companies do, they just haven't quite noticed yet."

Willow and Kennedy were in the lobby, chatting with Fred and Gunn and playing with their baby. When Harry saw them his eyes widened. Three guesses who he'd recognised.

"Guys," I said, "this is Harry Potter, one of the students from that conference. Harry, meet Willow, Kennedy, Fred and Gunn. And that's Alonna in the diapers."

"Professor Rosenberg, it's an honour." I knew he'd spotted her. Not that many witches around with her amount of power.

"The Harry Potter?" asked Willow. He nodded shyly. "The pleasure's mine. This is Doctor Berkel-Gunn, by the way, she'll be giving the talk on 'Reconciling Magic and Theoretical Physics' on Friday."
"Right, I read the synopsis. You're really going to disturb the wizards who think that they've nothing to learn from the Muggle world." Fred smiled self-consciously.

"What is all this 'the Harry Potter' stuff," I asked. "I've never heard of you, what's it all about?"

"It's a long story," said Harry, "and one that wears thin the fiftieth time you hear it. Briefly, I fought one of the most powerful sorcerers in the world, begging your pardon Professor Rosenberg, and managed to defeat him eventually. More by luck than judgement."

"He's being modest," says Willow, "everyone in the wizarding world knows him, knows what he's done. First thing I heard about when they contacted me after we closed the Hellmouth." Willow finally noticed my clothes, and added "Fighting again, Dawnie?"

"Drive-by. They were after Harry, I think."

"You're safe here," Willow said. "Three different anti-violence spells, as powerful as the ones on the new Caritas."

"The new Caritas?" asked Harry, "what happened to the old one?"

"The anti-violence spells weren't good enough," said Angel. "Shot up and fire-bombed."

"That's reassuring."

"I think we need to find you a room," I said, "I don't think it's safe for you to go back to wherever you're staying tonight. Most of this place still needs repairs, but there are a couple that are habitable down the hall from me on the third floor."

"That's a good idea," said Angel. "You guys get that organised, I'll go out and see if I can find out anything about the shooting. I'll start at Caritas, see if Lorne noticed anyone paying attention when you left. Gunn, you want to check with your friends?"

"Most of the guys I used to hang with are married with three kids now, but they might still have connections. Fred, are you okay with me heading out for a couple of hours?"

"Fine, so long as you're home for the four o'clock feed, I need to get up early for Willow's talk tomorrow."

"One thing," said Harry, "about payment..."

"That's okay," said Angel, "I know that money's tight when you're a student."

"Actually that's not what I was going to say. It's simply that I don't have much American cash with me, will gold be okay?"

"Gold," said Angel, "will be perfectly fine. Talk to you in the morning. Dawn, make sure that the bed is aired and there are towels in the bathroom."

He headed out, and Gunn followed. "I give it a day before he's matchmaking," said Willow, and Harry blushed.

"Come on, guys," I said, doing some blushing of my own.

"You know Angel thinks of himself as your stand-in dad. Harry's a good catch, he's rich and he isn't creeped out by our weirdness. A day tops."
I turned to Harry and said "I'd better get you out of here before she starts designing the bridal dress," and led him upstairs. Behind me I could hear them laughing, and the baby joining in.

* * * * *

"Have you known Professor Rosenberg long?" Harry asked as we were checking a room.

"Most of my life. She and my sister were best friends in Sunnydale, and she and Tara looked after me when Buffy was killed."

"Buffy was your sister?"

"She still is, Willow raised her from the dead."

"Wait a minute... Buffy Summers? The Slayer? Your sister? Professor Rosenberg's biography in the conference notes mentioned raising her, I hadn't quite made the connection."

"I did mention it earlier, but I think you were more interested in my sword."

"And Tara is..?"

"Dead. She was Willow's lover, another witch. She was shot about as randomly as I was, but she wasn't immortal and Willow couldn't raise her."

"I'm sorry."

"So am I. We all still miss her."

"Both of my parents were murdered when I was a year old. I never really met them, and I still miss them."

"That's horrible," I said, and hastily changed the subject. "I think this room's okay, you just need some sheets and towels and soap. I think I've spares in my room."

He came along with me, and I tried to remember if there was anything too embarrassing on display. No, I'd tidied it that morning.

"So what's Angel's story?" he asked as I was going through my jacket for the key.

"Evil scourge of Europe for a couple of hundred years, then gypsies cursed him to restore his soul. Luckily it turned out that his soul didn't like what he's been doing, 'cos I can think of plenty of mass-murderers that functioned just fine with souls in place. Hitler, Stalin, that guy you were fighting have one?"

"As far as we know. I don't think anyone got round to asking him."

I found the key, and went inside. Harry waited at the door, and I glanced at the mirror to check. He had a reflection, so he wasn't a vampire, just polite. I said "Come in, let me find this stuff. You want some pizza?"

"Now you mention it... yes please, I'm starving."

"Me too, coming back to life is a little draining. Here's a menu for the pizzeria down the road, choose what you want and we'll send out for it."

"At this time of night?"
"No problem, the management are Drelnik demons. Nocturnal."

"Demons?"

"They're nature balancing demons, look a little strange but they're nice guys provided you don't mind a lecture about unleaded gas and organic food whenever you go near them."

"So, how do you come to know Angel?" he asked, leafing through the menu.

"He used to be Buffy's boyfriend, when that didn't work out he came to LA. They're still friends, but one of the nastier parts of that curse is that he loses his soul if he ever gets perfectly happy. And he was really happy when they were together..."

"Nasty. Is he the only vampire with a soul?"

"No, there's at least one other. Spike. That's a really long story, and he's somewhere in Australia with Buffy right now so you won't be meeting him."

"What are they doing in Australia?"

"If I know Spike, playing koala bear poker."

"What?"

"Never mind. Fighting an invasion from the Aborigine Dreamtime, according to their last few postcards."

"Weird."

"Damn right. Last I heard they were on the track of a giant wombat that was eating trucks. You ready to order?"

"I think the meat treat with extra pepperoni sounds about right for me, how about you?"

"Why not, and some garlic bread, juice. Okay, I've got sheets, towels, and soap. You dump them in your room, go down, see if anyone else wants anything while we're sending out. I'm gonna shower and change my clothes. Knock me up if the pizza comes before I'm done."

He blushed scarlet.

"What?"

"Knock you up... sorry, it's British slang, you really don't want to know."

"Is it dirty?"

"Well, if I knocked you up we would have done something dirty first. It means to make you pregnant."

"Okay. Fine. Go order pizza."

* * * * *

"The pizza was fine, but organic spinach and pumpkin juice does not get the Dawn Summers seal of approval," I said three quarters of an hour later.
"I think Alonna likes it," said Fred, giving her another spoonful and munching on a taco. "If not we'll soon know about it."

Willow said "She likes it. She's showing her happy face, and her comfy aura. Anyone else want this last piece of garlic bread? Kennedy? Harry? Dawn? Fred?"

Kennedy lolled back and said "I think I'm stuffed," Harry said "Me too," I shook my head and pretended to belch, and Fred munched the last taco and waved it away.

"Anyone else? Going once.. twice.. mine, all mine. Nah-ha-ha-ha!" She scarfed it down.


"Better be heading up," said Willow. "Early start, and it'd be nice if I can stay awake during my own presentation."

"Works for me. Night, everybody." They went up, and I helped Fred get Alonna ready to go upstairs, while Harry cleared the mess. Another plus, he's reasonably house-trained. Eventually I said "Alone at last."

"Err..."

"Something I should explain. I'm not looking for any sort of long-term relationship, there are all sorts of reasons why it'd be a really bad idea. But I've died tonight, and I really want to do something to remind myself I'm still alive. I like you, and I get the impression that you're interested... so... coming to bed?"

He turned beet-red again, but he nodded.
"Think Dawn's after Harry?" asked Angel as he and Gunn headed out of the Hyperion.

"Looked to me like she's ready to jump the boy's bones."

"I worry about that girl sometimes."

"She's an adult, she seems to pick reasonably nice guys, and she doesn't have to worry about AIDS and the rest. She just doesn't want to settle down."

"Even so... I feel responsible for her. To Buffy."

"But you're not. Buffy knows that she can look after herself, and she wants her to have her own life."

"That's true, I guess, but Buffy told me that the real reason is that she doesn't want Dawn to see her die. Not again. You know the odds against Slayers, it's amazing she's lasted this long. Look what happened to Faith."

"The odds have changed," said Gunn, patting Angel's arm. "Faith was unlucky and she didn't call in backup fast enough. Look, Dawn isn't about to ruin her life over this, and she'll let Harry down gently before he decides she's the girl of his dreams. And she'll probably do a reasonable job of keeping him alive while we deal with this mess."

"I guess. Let's start dealing then."

"You're heading for Caritas, right?"

"Yeah, see if Lorne or anyone saw anything, see where that takes me."

"I'll see if any of the old gang are connected. Best you don't come with me."

"Right. See you later."

* * * *

"...So let me get this right," said Angel. "You got the vision of Dawn being shot, and the Potter kid ran out before you could tell him that it was aimed at him."

"That's right, Angel-cakes," said Lorne.

"Sounds like the hit-man was waiting for him to come out... but how did they know he was here? Dawn said it was a drive-by."

"I guess someone must have tipped them off when he left."
"That's what I was thinking. Anyone here earlier on that might be connected?"

"Angel honey, about a third of my customers are connected to the underworld one way or another. Demon bar, remember?"

"Okay, wrong question. Anyone seem to be interested in him?"

"Not really. Dawn was singing, most of the customers seemed to be enjoying it. I was talking to Harry at the bar, until she came over to say goodnight I doubt that anyone was looking our way."

"So who was here that you did know?"

"Let's see... some of the Industrial Light and Magic people, they're still here. That's a birthday party, booked several days ago. Most of them have sung, and I didn't pick up anything unusual from them, so I'd say they aren't involved... A couple of Chinese vampires, they left twenty minutes ago. Didn't sing but you know those guys, it's a point of honour with them to use magic or swords, not guns... A couple of Dawn's friends from UCLA, they left about half an hour after she did, both of them sang and the most interesting thing there was what they were planning to do when they got back to his apartment... There was a werewolf I didn't know, he was thinking about rabbits while he was singing so I doubt he was organising a hit... Lilah was by, but of course she doesn't sing... Couple of V'pod demons, their wedding anniversary..."

"Wait a minute," interrupted Angel. "Lilah was here? Lilah Morgan?"

"You know any other undead evil lawyers who've had their heads cut off?"

"On her own?"

"Let me think... Yeah, for about three hours."

"When did she leave?"

"About... it's a good thing you're the detective, not me. About ten minutes after Harry."

"See her making any phone calls?"

"No, but I was busy calling you, she could have made a dozen calls when I wasn't looking."

"Okay. It's been a while, wonder what they do with her when she isn't doing their dirty work..."

* * * * *

"Yo, Gunn, my main man."

"Alphonse, how's it hanging?"

"Okay, man."

"Great. Okay if I come in?"

Alphonse stood back from the shabby apartment door and waited without inviting him, Gunn said "thanks" and strolled in.

"Can we drop the jive now?" asked Alphonse, once the door was closed. The interior of his apartment was nicely furnished and clean, and classic jazz was playing softly on the stereo.
"Sure. Been a while. Still studying for the law degree?"

"Got it, man, last month. Got my CV out to every law firm in LA right now."

"Including Wolfram and Hart? I told you about those guys..."

"Don't worry, I left them out. So, Angel still good?"

"Yeah."

"Give him my card and tell him I'll cut him a good deal if he needs representation."

"Thanks. Hear anything from the rest of the gang lately?"

"Some... what's this about?"

"Someone tried a hit near Caritas tonight. Friend of mine was in the line of fire."

"Damn! He okay?"

"She took three bullets meant for the target. Machine gun."

"Dead?"

"Not exactly."

"What does that mean? Another vampire?"

"No. It's a long story, and not mine to tell. Important point is that someone did a hit, and wasn't real careful who else was hurt."

"What can I do to help?"

"Spread the word around that a friend of mine has been shot, see if anyone has heard of a hit on a British college kid. The phone number is 555-0162 if you get anything."

"Got a name for the kid?"

"It's Harry Potter, but don't spread that around if you can avoid it, might muddy the waters."

"It's nearly midnight, but I'll see what I can do."

* * * *

"That was fun," said Dawn the following morning as she was dressing.

"Was?" asked Harry

"Was. I told you it wasn't going to be a long-term relationship."

"Why not?" asked Harry a little sulkily.

"Think about it for a while," said Dawn. "Think about what I've told you." She pulled on a T-shirt and began to brush her hair.

"You're immortal. You'll be young and pretty forever. What's the problem?"
"I will, but you won't. I'm sorry, Harry, I like you, and you're cute enough that I wanted a one-night stand with you, but I don't think I love you enough to want to inflict the bad side of immortality on you."

"Bad side?"

"You're not an immortal, and you're not going to become one when you die. Nobody I know is, apart from Lorne's friends. The only reason I challenged you when we met is because I sensed your magic, and it feels a little like the buzz I get from another immortal."

"Oh."

"We don't look odd together right now, but do you fancy the idea of being with a girl who looks and feels young enough to be your daughter... or your grand-daughter... when you're old and grey? Think you could handle the jealousy? Even if you could, I'm not sure I could take seeing someone I loved die of old age."

"Umm... I see what you mean, I suppose."

"There's another reason, which is that immortal doesn't necessarily mean that I'll live forever. I've died, Harry, not just once or twice but five times in a little over three years. Sooner or later it'll be permanent if I'm careless or unlucky. There's lots of ways to die that an immortal can't survive. If that happened I'd rather not have someone I love die with me."

"Why? Why do you keep getting killed?" asked Harry, puzzled.

"What good is an immortal? How does immortality benefit the human race?"

"Err... it's a good thing if people live longer?"

"Good for me, maybe, but it doesn't benefit anyone else."

"You could have immortal children, spread the genes."

"No I can't," she said flatly, "natural immortals are an evolutionary dead-end. We're sterile."

"Oh."

"We also seem to be violence-prone, not just through the stupid Game but in our lives, sheer random fate. So the conclusion I've come to is that immortals were originally mystic warriors, kinda like the Slayers but less powerful, with better healing to make up for it, and some sort of mojo to make sure that we went where there was trouble. When the real bad-ass monsters were out of the picture we kinda lost our way. Some of us became monsters ourselves, warlords and murderers and worse. A few just went to ground and tried to keep out of trouble. And the best of us became champions. I'm not a monster, and I'm pretty sure I won't be able to stay out of trouble, so I've set my sights on being a champion like my sister. Damn, that sounds really conceited."

Harry grinned, and said "There are worse ambitions."

"Yeah. Ready for breakfast?"

"I need to shower and change my clothes, I'll have to summon my bag to my room. Be down in twenty minutes."

"Right. Oh, here's your shirt back."
"Keep it, souvenir of my team."

"Thanks, don't mind if I do. The lion is kinda cute. Oh, we'll be having breakfast in the kitchen behind the lobby. Just follow the smell of burning."

* * * * *

Harry followed the smell of bacon and a faint murmer of voices that gradually became understandable.

"...so she started singing the Hedgehog Song and that was it," said Willow, "they gave her the Talent prize to shut her up. She got Best Wart too."

"Leaving you to win Fairest of Them All," said Kennedy, "which on the whole I prefer, honey."

"It lacks witch-cred." said Willow. "Much more Buffy's style." She looked up, smiled, and said "Here's Harry."

Harry walked into the kitchens and smiled a little nervously at everyone. Angel was cooking bacon, eggs, hash-browns and fried tomatoes, Willow, Kennedy, and Dawn were eating them.

"How do you like your eggs?" asked Angel.

"Fried would be great. I could make my own if you like."

"No, I'm good. There's cereal and juice on the counter, make your own toast. Coffee's on the table."

"Angel likes to cook," said Dawn, "which is odd considering he doesn't eat."

"I can eat," said Angel, "I just don't get much from it. Cooking is okay though, I like the smells."

Harry helped himself to Weetabix and milk, put some rye bread in one of the toasters, and sat down to eat.

"What is it with Brits and Weetabix?" said Dawn. "That was always Spike's favourite. Except he has his with blood on them."

"There's a nice image while we're eating," said Kennedy.

"Says the girl who kills vampires for a hobby."

"Kills..." Harry began, then realised. "You're a Slayer?"

"Sorry," said Kennedy, "thought someone would have told you."

"I've never met one before. It's an honour."

Kennedy smiled and said "Damn right."

"Now that you're here," said Angel, bringing over a plate of food for Harry and a mug of blood for himself, "we should talk."

"Did you learn anything last night?" asked Harry.

"A little. Gunn's not down yet, but he left a message on my desk. He says that his contacts have heard that there's a contract on you."
"A contract? To kill me?"

"Sounds like it, though they didn't have a name. They just know that there's a contractor from the east coast. New York, New Jersey, he's not sure exactly where."

"Not a wizard? A muggle?"

"Sounds like it," said Willow. "But you might want to avoid using that word, it's not exactly polite even if most people have no idea what it means."

"I didn't mean to be offensive, I'm just trying to understand why they'd use a non-wizard."

"To catch you off-guard," said Dawn. "You're ready for magic, but you came within inches of being shot last night."

"I could have stopped them, I think."

"If you saw the attack coming," said Willow, "but did you?"

"No, Dawn spotted them. I see what you mean."

"Ever hear of some lawyers called Wolfram and Hart?" asked Angel.

"No.. wait a minute, yes, I think I've seen their advertising in the Daily Prophet. Office in the Gringrott's Bank building in Diagon Alley."

"The wizard's market in London?" asked Willow.

"That's right. Gringrott's handle most of the banking for the wizarding world in Britain, there's a few other companies with offices in their building."

"Well," said Angel. "Wolfram and Hart are basically evil lawyers. Conscienceless anyway, and most of them are pretty much soulless. They have a finger in every crooked and unethical pie you can imagine. I didn't know they had a wizarding branch but it doesn't surprise me. Once they turned out to be running the priesthood in a demon dimension I visited."

"Wow. And you think they're involved?"

"One of the clients at Caritas last night was Lilah Morgan. She's a lawyer, used to work for them until she was killed a few years ago. Except that the contract she'd signed didn't end when she died, and they reanimated her. She was at Caritas for a couple of hours last night, and since she only does what the company wants it's a safe bet that she was there on business. My guess is that she was looking for you, and alerted the hit-man when you left Caritas."

"How would they know I was going to be there?" asked Harry.

"They could have used a psychic," said Angel, "but I think you're asking the wrong question. I'm wondering how you came to be at Caritas."

"I.. I'm not sure. I wanted to get out for a walk, take a break from the conference and see a bit of the city. I wasn't looking for Caritas but I remembered the name from advertisements in the programme, thought it sounded interesting, and saw the sign for the place."

"So you went out into a city you didn't know, on your own, and just happened to end up at a bar nearly five miles from UCLA. By pure chance."
"Now that you mention it, it does seem a little odd."

"I'll bet," said Willow. "Okay, this is the same jacket you were wearing yesterday?"

Harry nodded.

"Same shoes and trousers?"

"Yes."

"Stand up, hold your arms away from your sides, and relax."

"Okay. Is this going to hurt?"

"Shouldn't."

Willow thought for a second then said "Acclaro!" and clicked her fingers. A shimmering green aura appeared around Harry, glowing red over his wand and three pockets of his jacket. "Let's assume for now that the wand is all right. Don't put your hands in your pockets. Take your jacket off and shake out whatever's in those three pockets without touching them." Harry complied; his breast pocket produced his membership badge for the conference and an Ever-Inked quill, the inner pocket a kit of small potion bottles, and the left pocket a device like a pocket watch. "Any of them unfamiliar?"

"No, it's all the stuff I normally carry."

"What's the watch thingy?"

"A couple of portkeys, one to Hogsmeade and one to the Burrow."

"Hogsmeade I know, what's this 'burrow'?"

"It's the name of a house, several friends live there."

"You haven't used either in the last few days, I suppose?"

"No."

"Okay, we'll leave them for now. Anything changed in the potions kit?"

"No, looks the same as usual."

"Your usual quill?"

"Yes."

"Right. Now name badges are interesting, magically speaking. They're mass-produced but every one is an individual. And if there's something more than a name badge, you can be sure it'll get to the right person. Kennedy, put yours on the table next to mine." Kennedy did as she was asked. "That's good. Commetior!"

The two badges glowed, one blue and the other yellow. Between them was a composite image, glowing green apart from the names written on the badges, which were green where the letters overlapped but the colour the original badge was glowing where they differed.

"Now that's about what I'd expect to see; there's a difference in the names, otherwise they're identical. Let's try that with Harry's badge and mine." She repeated the process; this time the
composite image was a swirl of yellow and blue with no green.

"Hmm.. that certainly isn't standard issue. Anyone want to volunteer to touch it?"

There was an awkward silence, then Angel said "I'll give it a try," and put a finger on the surface. He shrugged, finished his blood, and said "You know, I could do with a real drink. I wonder if Lorne has opened yet."

"Low level compulsion," said Willow, and clicked her fingers in front of Angel's eyes, "the sort of thing that takes hours to work, especially if you have magical defences. It's insidious because it builds up very slowly. Most people don't notice, so it doesn't trip their alarms the way a curse would."

"Hey, I've got defences," said Angel.

"Sure you do," said Willow, "I kinda negated them as you touched it, then raised them again once I was sure what it was. Don't worry, it's pretty much what I expected. Harry's badge is rigged with a compulsion spell on top of the pass spell that lets him into the conference. Someone either made an outright fake or put a spell on the real badge, I'm leaning towards a complete fake but I'll have to run more tests after breakfast. Whichever it is, someone must have got it into his membership pack. Could have been someone at the conference, maybe someone stuffing the packs or handing them out, even the guy who operated the badge machine. You could do the whole thing with teleportation, or a small familiar or animagus form to get you access to the stored packs."

"Any way to trace who did it?" asked Angel.

"I doubt it; they must have used a few tricks to cover themselves, but I'll try. After breakfast."

Angel finally got the hint. "You want something more to eat, Willow?"

"Thought you'd never ask. More bacon please."

"Anyone else? Okay, more bacon coming up."

"So what do we do now?" asked Dawn.

"I'll run the tests and cancel that spell so you can wear the badge," said Willow, "then I'll have to get to the conference for my talk. Harry, my guess is that you'll be safer there than anywhere else, especially if you take Dawn along for company. I'll arrange to have you comped membership for the rest of the conference, Dawn. After that I don't know."

"I do," said Angel. "In a couple of hours I'll call Lilah Morgan and arrange a meet, see what she has to say for herself. I would have talked to her last night, but they've rented her apartment to someone living and I'm not sure where they keep her when she isn't working."

"Do you think she'll tell you?" asked Harry.

"If I get the questions right she'd better. We own the company."

"You own... Wolfram and Hart?"

"Me, Fred, Gunn, and Lorne. It's a long and very weird story. Short version is that a few years ago, round the time Kennedy became a Slayer, they tricked us into signing a contract that gave us ownership of the LA branch of the company, without being able to control what they do in any way. The spell that bound us to them also blocks us from interfering. But if they lie to any of us the rules
"Sounds like we have a plan," said Gunn, coming into the kitchen with Fred and Alonna. "Let's eat, then you guys can get to the conference and bloodsucking fiend and I can go visit the evil undead."
"I know I said a couple of hours," Angel said half an hour later, "but I remembered that Wolfram and Hart always send a stretch limo if I make an appointment. Might as well take advantage, it'll be here about nine. Gunn and I can drop the rest of you off at UCLA, it's not far out of the way."

"That's the good news," said Gunn, "what's the bad."

"When I tried to speak to Lilah they put me through to Wesley. He's back in LA, looks like we'll have to go through him to get anything done."

"Damn."

"Wesley?" asked Harry.

"Wesley Wyndham-Price. He used to work with us," said Angel, "he was with us when we took ownership of Wolfram and Hart. But he was in love with Lilah and decided that he wanted to break her contract, let her soul rest in peace. That counted as interference under the terms of the contract we'd signed, and he forfeited."

"What did he forfeit?"

"His share of the company, and his soul."

"So he's... what? A zombie?"

"No, he's still alive, just a totally ruthless administrator. He always did have talents in that direction, without a soul to slow him down he's risen fast in their organisation. I might have known he'd have a hand in this."

"Is there anything you can do about it?"

"Short of getting his soul back, and god knows we've tried, the only leverage we have is that they hurt Dawn when they attacked you. That isn't really as useful as it should be because they know she's an immortal, but part of the original deal was that we and our friends would not be harmed by any of their actions. Dawn counts as a friend, I already knew her when we signed the agreement. Unfortunately it doesn't apply to friends we've made since then, so I can't claim you as a friend to get you out from under."

"Tell them I'm traumatised and that they destroyed my favourite shirt."

"Traumatised is good. Did the shirt have sentimental value?"

"It was my Christmas present from Spike, I was really annoyed that they'd ruined it. He'll be annoyed too when he hears."

"That'll do. Wes knows what Spike is capable of, and he isn't bound by any contract."

"I was thinking that you could threaten him with Buffy and the other Slayers," said Dawn, "but maybe that isn't a good idea this time round. Best save that until we really need it."

"One of these years Wolfram and Hart will do something that gives the Slayers an excuse to take them down, and they know it. I won't have to threaten anything. Nobody's going to be quite that crude."
"What should we do?" asked Harry.

"Go to the conference," Willow said. "Enjoy yourselves. I've de-hexed your badge so you'll be able to wear it without wanting to go to the bar. It's a fake, but it's obviously good enough to get you in. Dawn can stay close without attracting much attention, and Kennedy can stay around but in the background. I've got to prepare the demonstrations for my talk at eleven, but I'll be keeping my mind's eye on you. I doubt that you'll be in much danger at the conference anyway, it's outside that you need to be careful."

"Sounds good to me," said Kennedy, "it's the sort of thing I'd be doing there anyway. You know I'm not one for the more technical side of magic."

"So what's my excuse for hanging with Harry?" asked Dawn. "Won't your friends wonder who I am?"

"Not really," said Harry. "This is going to sound awfully conceited... I'm famous, more often than not I have to shake off unwelcome attention, and sometimes it isn't entirely unwelcome. I doubt anyone would be too surprised to see me with an attractive girl."

"So I've gotta play groupie," said Dawn, looking anything but delighted. "That'll be fun..."

"Come on, Dawn," said Willow, "he's male, reasonably attractive, and alive. I'm sure you can put up with him for a day or two."

"Oh, don't get me wrong, Harry's okay... I'm just not good at playing the brainless bimbo."

"You could be writing a thesis," suggested Harry, "there's all sorts of people want information on Voldemort and me for academic papers."

"That works better. If I carry a notebook and tape recorder and pretend to be interviewing you it ought to be reasonably convincing."

"Tape recorder?" asked Willow. "Not exactly common in the wizarding community."

"I'm not messing around with a quill."

"Well, you'll need to explain the recorder."

"Easy, I'll pretend I'm a techno-pagan, I know enough about that to fake it in casual conversation. If you can put a few hex-marks on my recorder and loan me the stuff you inherited from Jenny that's all the disguise I'll need."

"That's brilliant," said Harry, "everyone's heard of techno-pagans but nobody in the wizarding world knows much about them. To be honest, most wizards think they're a bunch..."

"Jenny Calender was an extraordinary person," interrupted Angel, "and totally committed to her faith. Don't make fun of things you don't understand." He stalked out of the lobby.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to upset him," said Harry.

"Angel feels responsible for her death," said Willow.

"Oh."

"He's right, though, she was a remarkable woman. She initiated me into the Art, although I took a more traditional direction. Without her I'd almost certainly be dead by now, and the Hellmouth
would probably still be open."

"What happened to her?"

"That's not my story to tell. Or yours, Dawnie. Apologise to Angel tonight, Harry, maybe he'll explain."

"Right."

* * * * *

Dawn walked across the enchanted section of the UCLA campus, amazed at the changes a little magic had produced. To anyone without a legitimate pass, or a magical fake as good as Harry's, the area was a dirty construction site, dangerous and heavily fenced; to those with a pass it was a wonderland of light and colour, littered with booths for wizarding supplies and organisations, with apparently small tents containing huge auditoriums and luxurious dormitories.

"I'm beginning to wish I'd been along for the first three days," she said. "Willow invited me but I thought it'd be a typical academic conference, this is more like a Renaissance fair."

A broomstick buzzed low overhead, enchanted to stay inside the area. "That's the new Firebolt XL5," said Harry critically, "Fast but I'm not sure about stability. I'd hate to have to control one and fend off a couple of bludgers simultaneously."

So far Dawn hadn't attracted much attention. About half the people at the conference wore muggle clothing, she'd added a mesh cap made of intricately braided transistors, a belt of silicon wafers laced with lengths of optical fibres, and for a pendant an old 80286 processor on a silver chain. Smaller chips worn as earrings and a kohl drawing of the symbol for an AND circuit on her forehead completed the ensemble. Most people that came near them seemed more interested in Harry anyway.

"So you're a student here normally?" asked Harry.

"That's right. Comparative religion, ancient languages, and art."

"No magic?"

"Not formal training, although I've worked with Willow occasionally. Apart from that I'm on the fencing and martial arts squads, and I'm Watchers Council liason for the Slayers that study here, go patrolling with them occasionally. Fortunately they're both on vacation right now."

"How do you find time to sleep?"

"I can get by on three or four hours a night, like my sister. I think it's in the blood."

"Must be."

"Hey, weapons! Mind if I stop to take a look, might be something nice here for Angel's birthday."

They paused at a display of swords and other medieval weapons, run by a jovial Japanese wizard in a silk robe. He watched anxiously as she picked up a sword, weighed its balance in her hands, and rejected it. "All of these weapons are perhaps a little heavy for a lady of your size," he eventually said, after she'd tried several swords.

"I can handle a little weight, but I'm after something for a friend. Something like a longsword with a sharkskin grip, silver inlay, centre of balance about here. A real working weapon, not an antique or
something for the tourist trade. Oh, and non-magical."

"Non-magical? Mmm... not something I'm often asked for in the community. Try this, then. Solingen blade, genuine muggle manufacture, sharkskin grip with a compartment in the hilt for balance weights. Leather case, leather scabbard with sharpening tool, and cleaning kit. The price is a hundred and eighty galleons."

Dawn lifted it easily and tried a few practice positions. The vendor relaxed as he realised that she knew what she was doing. "Okay... it's a little heavy for me, but it'd certainly be right for my friend. If I remember the exchange rate that's what... about eight hundred and fifty dollars?"

"Eight-sixty-four and change."

"Okay... can you deliver it for me in LA?"

"Sure, we're based in Hollywood. Do a lot of business with film companies."

"That's handy. Take Mastercard?"

"No problem, but I won't be able to process the transaction until I go off-site this evening so it won't go out until tomorrow."

"Not a problem. Here's the address, attention of Dawn Summers. Don't mark the box as a sword, it's a present for someone who might see it delivered. Oh, and put in a catalogue if you have one."

"Do you have some other form of identification?"

"Perhaps this."

He inspected a blank card she pulled from her wallet, looking puzzled. The scythe insignia of the new Watchers Council appeared when she touched it, and he bowed deeply. "The weapon is for a Slayer? You are perhaps a Slayer yourself?"

"No to both. It's for someone who works with us."

"We'll call it eight hundred even then."

"I can't accept that."

"If it were for a Slayer the price would be seven-fifty. I'm still making a profit."

"That's very generous. Okay, thanks." He ran her Mastercard through a manual machine, wrote in the details, and got her signature. "It's a little heavy to owl, so we'll FedEx it to you tomorrow."

"Not getting something for yourself?" asked Harry as they moved on.

"No, he didn't have anything there I could easily conceal under street clothes. Anything bigger than that I usually borrow from Angel or Buffy if I need it."

"Nice to have friends that share your hobbies. Wasn't that a little expensive though?"

"It's cheap for a sword of that quality. With the money that comes in from Wolfram and Hart Angel can afford to pay well, I got a nice bonus for the last case, and as near as we can figure it he'll be two hundred and eighty in a couple of weeks. I think that calls for a good present. I expect that everyone else has had the same idea but they'll be shopping for antiques, a really good modern weapon should make a nice change. By the way, is there somewhere here I can change some money? I've seen a
couple of things I'd like, but I have a feeling that most people here won't want to take dollars or a credit card for a small purchase."

"Most people won't know what a credit card is, let alone take one. Same for dollars. You were lucky with the sword. Gringrotts Bank has a tent, they ought to be able to help."

"Okay... let's see now, if I change a hundred dollars that's about twenty-one Galleons, will that be enough for a few small presents?"

"Gringrotts will probably give you twenty and small change. They're goblins, not exactly generous. It's enough for a few small presents and a couple of meals."

"Okay, I'll make it two hundred, might as well live it up while I've got the money to spend. Where's the tent?"

"Just along here past the magical supplies booths. We've just got time for a little more shopping before Willow's talk."

* * * * *

"Wesley, as always a pleasure," Angel said insincerely as Wesley invited them into his corner office. Angel tensed as he saw the sunlit room, even though he knew that that the necro-tempered glass would protect him.


"Thanks," said Gunn, "but we've both just had breakfast."

"A late start?"

"Yes," said Angel, "We all had a late night, what with people killing our friends."

"Oh dear. Which friend might that have been?"

"I'm sure that you'll remember Dawn. Lovely girl, has a very strong sister."

"Dawn Summers?" Angel nodded. "Then I would assume that no real harm was done."

"Apart from the traumatic stress of the incident, and destruction of a treasured possession. Given to her by someone who holds grudges and didn't sign any contracts with you."

"Oh dear. Buffy or one of her friends? Giles?"

"Spike. But don't worry, Willow saw her a few minutes after the attack, so I'd imagine she's not too happy either."

"Yes, that does sound unfortunate. I do hope that somebody brings the perpetrators to book."

"Actually, Wes, we were hoping you could help us with that," said Gunn, "seeing as how the sources we've talked to say that Lilah tipped off the killer."

"Really?" For a moment he seemed surprised, or feigned it well. "She actually told someone to attack Dawn? That seems very unlikely."

"Not exactly," said Angel. "There was another target, Dawn was in the line of fire."
"Ah. Who might that have been?"

"Wizard called Harry Potter, maybe you know him?"

"I've never had the pleasure, but I do know the name, of course. Interesting." He reached for the phone and said "Miss Jones, please ask Lilah to come up for a moment... Yes, Lilah Morgan." He hung up, and said "While we're waiting, what exactly was it that Miss Summers lost last night?"

"Her last Christmas present from Spike. Not hugely expensive, but of great sentimental value."

"Always hard to assess, sentimental value. As to traumatic stress..."

"Maybe we should experiment by shooting you three times and see how you like it," suggested Gunn.

"I don't think that will be necessary. I have had the misfortune to be shot before."

"And of course if young Potter is hurt I'd imagine she'll be feeling even more traumatised," said Angel. "They do seem to be very close."

"I see. That does put a different complexion on things."

There was a knock at the door, and Lilah came in. An attractive woman who walked with hesitant steps, with traces of blood at her waist and a scarf around her neck. "Angel, Gunn, nice to see you."

"Lilah," said Angel. Gunn nodded.

"Lilah," said Wesley, "perhaps you could tell us what you were doing last night."

"I spent the evening at Caritas, drowning my sorrows."

"Do you feel sorrows?" asked Angel.

"Not really."

"Kinda pointless then, wasn't it?"

"Oh, I kept myself amused."

"Did you happen to notice that one of the other customers was Harry Potter?"

"Odd you should say that... yes, I did happen to spot him."

"Lilah," said Wesley, "did you by any chance happen to call anyone when Mister Potter left the bar?"

"Of course, Wesley. I called the office as instructed."

"And did you happen to notice that he left just after Dawn Summers?"

"That's right. I think he wanted to catch up with her."

"I see. You didn't feel that it was necessary to inform us of this?"

"I wasn't asked to."

"I see. Lilah, perhaps you'd better go downstairs again."
"Of course, Wesley, your wish and so forth..."

She left. Wesley sighed and said "So difficult to get the staff these days, and we do have sentimental reasons to keep her on, but..."

"Wesley," said Angel, "I'm as patient as someone with my nature can be, but I think you've just proved my point."

"Yeah, Wes," said Gunn. "that was kinda careless, wasn't it."

"Indeed. Well, perhaps ten thousand dollars will be adequate compensation for Dawn's traumatic experience."

"And the sentimental loss?" asked Angel.

"Another five?"

"Why not make it a round twenty? The poor girl has college fees to pay."

"Very well. I'll have accounts draw up a cheque for you to collect when you leave. An unconditional ex gratia payment. That concludes our business, I think."

"Not really. Under section 3.57 of our contract I think that this can be considered as attempted harm of an existing associate of the party of the first part."

"Hmm... An interesting point."

"Now I'm not going to be unreasonable about this unless I have to be, since I'm aware that this might be considered an accidental infringement. Any further infringement will not be considered in the least bit accidental, and I think that it's highly likely that you'll have to go through Dawn to get at Potter."

"I see."

"Word is," said Gunn, "That there's a hit-man from one of the East Coast mobs in town. Not your usual class of client, I'd guess."

"Not our clients at all, Charles, although it does seem possible that one of our clients might have asked us to contact him."

"And which client might that be?" asked Angel.

"You know perfectly well that I can't answer that."

"Wesley..." Angel said warningly.

"However, I don't feel that it's necessarily a breach of our clients's confidentiality to tell you that Lilah's message was passed on to a cellphone belonging to a Furio Giunta of New Jersey. I'm sure that your contacts will be able to tell you more."

"Okay. I think we're done now. As a stockholder in this company I hope that you won't feel it necessary to tell your clients about this unfortunate lapse in judgement."

"Wouldn't dream of it. Do give my regards to Dawn and Willow. And Fred, of course."

"Sure, Wes," said Gunn, "take care of yourself."
"Naturally."

* * * * *

"That was amazing," said Harry enthusiastically, "the bag of knives trick alone is..."

"Lethally dangerous," said Dawn. "She learned it fighting a hell-god. Most wizards don't need that sort of mastery, at least I hope they don't. It nearly destroyed the world, remember?"

"I know, but.."

"Willow's extraordinary, I know, but you have to see past that to how much it's cost her. I think that most of the people in the audience got that, did you?"

"Yes... it's just that she has the sort of power and control most wizards only dream of. Even knowing that what she went through to get it..."

"Did you think that Willow was trying to encourage anyone to follow in her footsteps? That talk was a warning about the price of power, you idiot!"

"Let's get something to eat," said Harry, hastily changing the subject.

"Think about it. Okay, that's me done preaching. What sort of food have they got?"

"Anything you like, really. The refreshment tents are this way."

"Wait a second," said Dawn a minute later, looking worried. "Harry, I can sense another immortal here. I hope it isn't someone who'll want to challenge me, but if it is you mustn't get involved. Stay back whatever happens, if I'm defeated get to Willow or Kennedy fast."

She looked round, eventually locking eyes with an elderly bald wizard, standing at the entrance to one of the refreshment tents, who walked towards them. "Him, the old guy."

"Him? Are you sure he's..."

"Definite."

"But that's.."

"Shush. Leave the talking to me."

"Good morning," said the wizard. "Nice to meet you again, Mister Potter. Congratulations on your victory. If you would excuse us for a moment, I need a word with this young lady."

"It's okay," said Dawn, "you don't have to pretend. He knows what I am."

"And that would be..?"

"I am Dawn Summers, daughter of Joyce and sister of the Slayer. I am immortal and I cannot die."

He nodded gravely. "Ollivander of Tuscany, lately of Diagon Alley, likewise immortal. A pleasure to meet you."
Neither Dawn nor Ollivander drew a weapon, but Harry was sure that both were poised for action. There was a long silence. Harry noticed Kennedy watching, and wondered if she would help Dawn if a fight began.

Eventually Dawn said "Well?"

Ollivander asked "Are you here for my head?"

"No. I try to stay out of the Game."

"Good. I have no desire to take yours." He held his hands, palms outward, to show that they were empty, and Dawn followed suit. Harry relaxed a little.

Dawn shrugged. "Was there something else?"

"My card." He handed her a card reading 'Ollivanders: Makers of Fine Wands since 382 BC', with an address in Diagon Alley.

"382 BC?" asked Dawn, with raised eyebrows.

"I'm not that old, Miss Summers. Not quite. I took over the family business in 720 AD, and moved our headquarters to Diagon Alley shortly after the Norman invasion of Britain."

Dawn found an Angel Investigations card, handed it to him, and said "I'm not really in need of a wand."

"I wasn't offering to sell you one, although I would be happy to do so. Would you and Mister Potter be interested in joining me for lunch? At my expense?"

"Okay, I guess," said Dawn. "We were about to eat anyway."

They went into the tent, which inside looked like the dining hall of a 1920s luxury liner, and joined him at an empty table. Kennedy came in a few seconds later, found another table, and pretended to study the menu.

"The butterbeer is poor," said Ollivander, "but they have some reasonable wine and excellent coffee. Is it my imagination, or were we just followed in here?"

"You're very observant," said Dawn. "Yes, she's with us. Somebody's trying to kill Harry, we're trying to keep him out of trouble."

"Again? How tiresome for you."

"I get used to it," joked Harry. "One of these years someone won't be trying to kill me, and I'll probably die of shock."

"Just so. Are you ready to order?"

"I think I'll have a sirloin steak," said Harry, "well done, with a green salad and baked potato, sour cream on the potato. Oh, and a sparkling mineral water." A plate and a tall glass of mineral water appeared on the table in front of him, accompanied by cutlery, relishes, and condiments.
"I'll have the chicken Caesar salad, with a roll and butter and coffee," said Dawn, and moved her hands back as the food materialised.

"And I'll have mushroom soup, garlic bread, and a half bottle of red wine," said Ollivander.

"What's this about?" asked Dawn.

"Your safety," Ollivander said in a low voice.

"Go on."

"First, I must ask you both to promise not to discuss this with anyone else. Mister Potter, this especially applies to you, since I am to an extent placing my own life in your hands."

"Merlin! Okay, I promise."

Ollivander slowly blinked silvery eyes and sipped his soup, then said "I make it my business to know of immortals in the wizarding world. With the exception of various users of the Philosopher's Stone, who suffer all of the disadvantages of immortality and few of its advantages, there has only been one other in several hundred years; an extremely dangerous Japanese sorcerer who fortunately lost his head a few years ago. I had no idea that you existed, yet here you are. You are an extraordinary rarity."

"I'm not exactly a witch," Dawn said uncomfortably, aware that she was dressed as one.

"You could be. You have the power."

"Isn't it a little late for that? Shouldn't I have started training when I was a kid?"

"Didn't you?"

"Oh, I've done minor things, mostly summoning and protection spells, I've been on the receiving end of spells a few times, and I've been around witches and worked in a magic shop, but I've never had formal training."

"Nevertheless you are learning. And as an immortal you have time to learn."

"If it happens I'll probably go wandless like Willow... Professor Rosenberg, I've mostly worked with her. I don't think I'll be a customer any time soon."

"If I may ask... you have taken heads?"

"I already said, I try to stay out of the Game. I.. I've taken one. First time I killed a man rather than a monster. He didn't give me much choice." Harry studied her face and saw disgust.

"And fought how many others?"

"Three."

"What happened to the others?" asked Harry.

"The first was really stupid. He tried to cheat and attacked me without warning, and did it in front of Willow." Ollivander nodded in comprehension. "I held him off long enough for her to turn him into a gerbil, he's in a petting zoo in Cleveland. The second tried to fight me in a deconsecrated graveyard while I was working. I injured her, she ran, and a vampire smelled the blood and took her. She was eventually staked by Faith. The third attacked me at a dimensional hot spot, near as we can figure it
he killed me but got sucked into the world without shrimp before he could take my head. He's probably still trying to figure out why his credit cards don't work and he can't get a seafood cocktail."

"That's a curious chapter of incidents," said Ollivander. "Why the world without shrimp, incidentally?"

"It's a long story. As for the rest, I hang out with Slayers and work part-time for a supernatural detective agency, I tend to go where weird things happen."

"You were killed..." said Harry. "Sorry, it just seems so strange to hear you say that. Even after I've seen it happen."

"So far I've been pretty lucky; just a few seconds of pain, then I wake up as good as new. Try talking to my sister some time, ask her to tell you what it's like to be dead and in heaven for three months, wake in a coffin, and have to dig your way out with your bare hands. Then duck fast."

"Oh dear," said Ollivander. "how very unpleasant."

"Mister Ollivander, what is this about?"

"You are immortal. Unfortunately there are many wizards who wish to attain that state, and some are less than scrupulous about the means they use to do so. There are ways for such wretches to benefit from the death of a true immortal."

"From the Quickening?"

"Exactly. It is possible to absorb the energy of a Quickening magically, and gain a few years from it."

"Damn. I hadn't realised."

"The magical power of the victim is also transferred, so immortal wizards and witches are uniquely valuable in this practice."

"Did Voldemort...?" began Harry.

"Fortunately he appears not to have learned of it. There's a small flaw in the wands I sell; spells cast to detect the presence of an immortal don't seem to work very well when they are used, unless the magician already knows that he is using the wand on an immortal. And I sell most of the wands used in Britain, including that of the late Voldemort."

"Merlin! You cunning old fox!"

"Unfortunately there are other wand makers, none of them having my particular... ah... bias. I supply less than a quarter of those sold in the United States, for example. To protect myself from others, I use a minor concealment spell. I would strongly suggest that you ask Professor Rosenberg to help you create a charm containing such a spell and in future use it whenever you have any contact with the wizarding world. Or become sufficiently powerful to make the prospect of attacking you unattractive."

"How much danger am I in?" asked Dawn.

"A little more than you may have realised, but not so much that you should hide yourself away. Most in the wizarding world know little of immortals or the Quickening, and have no idea that such spells exist. Those who do know are mostly sensible to the moral objections; they have no desire to become
murderers. Of those who may have the desire, few have the skills needed to take a head. It must be done... ah... naturally, not by magical means. But such a wizard might use magic to render a victim defenseless before striking the final blow."

"So what you're saying is that as well as normal headhunters, I need to watch out for an occasional wizard with a sword. Any idea how many might be around?"

"None whatsoever. However, it is many years since I have encountered one. Their stolen immortality can be sensed, incidentally, and I haven't felt such a presence here. Again, Professor Rosenberg should be able to help you develop your own senses."

"Thanks. That's useful to know. If there's ever anything I can do for you..."

"My pleasure, Miss Summers. The best thing you can do for me is live a long and happy life, and occasionally call in at my shop to tell me of your exploits. I suspect that your adventures will become the stuff of legend, like your sister, and it would be nice to hear of them from the source. Sometimes one feels a little lonely..."

"Deal. Okay, but I've got some useful contacts. If there's ever anything I can do for you please let me know."

"Very well, I'll bear it in mind."

* * * * *

Furio Giunta liked the Los Angeles climate, which reminded him of home, but he was beginning to think that he was doing business with morons. "Perche mi dite che non potete trovarli?" he snarled down his cellphone: what do you mean, you can't find him?

The voice from the other end was apologetic; nobody knew where the Potter kid had gone. The police had arrived within a few minutes of the shooting and hadn't found bodies, so it looked like he and the girl that was with him had got him away. There was some blood, so he might be injured. Unfortunately nobody knew who the girl was, so he could be anywhere.

"Ragazza? Che ragazza?" asked Furio: Girl? What girl?

As he listened to the answer he became sure of his diagnosis. What sort of moron tries a hit with an innocent bystander in the line of fire, and does it so badly that nobody gets killed?

Eventually he snarled "Trovilo ma non faccia niente": Find him, but don't do anything. He'd have to take matters into his own hands.

About an hour later the phone rang again, and a stranger said "Signore Giunta?"

"Si?"

"Sono Angelo. Non lo conoscete. Conosco dove trovare il ragazzo. Dove possiamo venire a contatto di?" : I'm Angelo. You don't know me. I know where to find the boy. Where can we meet?

As he arranged a rendezvous he began to think that he might finally be dealing with someone who knew what he was doing.
"I'm going to have to pick up my stuff before we leave," said Harry. "The rest of my clothes and stuff and my owl. Can't accio animals, it's cruel."

"Owl?" asked Dawn. "Oh, right, your familiar."

"He mostly carries messages. Familiars are handy too, of course, but I've never really used them much."

"I guess. You're not the only one, Willow and Kennedy have about eight cats and I've never seen her use one to cast a spell. Let me think... Gunn's supposed to be picking us up at six, so we'd better leave your stuff until five or so. That gives us three hours."

"I'm supposed to be in the quiz game at three, Hogwarts versus Salem Witches Institute. Can't really get out of that."

"The perils of being a celebrity, I guess."

"I was supposed to be the reserve for the Hogwarts team, but Neville had to pull out of the conference so I'll have to play."

"And everyone knows you'll be there, I suppose."

"Fraid so."

"Well, we can't change it, so we'll have to live with it. Who else is on the team?"

"Hermione Grainger, Cho Chang and Draco Malfoy."

"Are they all trustworthy?"

"Hermione's fine, we were in the same house at school, when I was fighting Voldemort we saved each other's lives more times than I can remember. She's a brain, a bit like Professor Rosenberg, wants to go into research. Cho... well, I had a thing for her for a long while, we never quite clicked but we get on okay. I can't see her getting involved in any sort of plot, she's already got a job with the Ministry of Magic's trading standards department. Draco's a total bastard, I wouldn't trust as far as I can throw him. His father supported Voldemort, although he got off on a couple of technicalities, nobody I know doubts that Draco would have gone that way if we hadn't won first. They're rich so they could afford to hire an assassin, but the Malfoys hate muggles, there's no way he'd do business with one."

"Draco's father's lawyers... Wolfram and Hart, by any chance?"

"Damned if I know. Could have been."

"What about the other one, the one who pulled out of the conference?"

"Neville's a good guy, started out slow but he ended up top of our year. He's going to train as a forensic auror, join the Ministry of Magic's investigation branch. His grandmother was taken ill, that's the reason he couldn't come."

"Anyone else you know here?"
"Well, Fred and George Weasley on the Zonko's stand. You remember, the guys who wanted to give you the chocolate bat with the frothing fangs spell?"

"Oh right, them. Like I'm going to fall for something like that. Wasn't even dark chocolate."

"They're good guys, turned the company around and got it into the international market, still develop most of their own tricks."

"Any reason to dislike you?"

"No. I even gave them their start-up money, my prize from the Triwizard Tournament."

"Wonder if they resent that. Do you own a share of the company?"

"No, they wanted me to have ten percent but I turned them down, they give the money to wizarding charities instead."

"Okay, let's rule them out for now. Anyone else?"

"Some of the teachers from Hogwarts are here, of course, but they were all on my side against Voldemort."

"Harry... I know this may seem like an odd question, but can you think of any other reason why someone might want you dead? You seem to have this fixation on Voldemort, and some connection does seem likely, but there must be other possibilities."

"Such as?"

"Well, you're well off, who's your next of kin?"

"My Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia, I suppose, and my cousin Dudley. They're muggles, and they really hate magic, but they're too respectable and stupid for any sort of elaborate plan. I don't like them but I can't see them being involved."

"Do they inherit if you die?"

"I suppose so, I've never made a will, but they don't know that I've got money."

"As far as you know."

"If they'd known they would have tried to take every penny. For my own good, of course."

"Nice people."

"Not really. Oh hell, here's Hermione and Cho now."

Two girls in Hogwarts robes came out of the crowd towards Harry, one of them a stunningly beautiful Asian, the other an attractive brunette. Dawn thought she'd seen them in the audience for Willow's talk. "Introduce me," said Dawn, "keep it vague, I'll do the rest."

"Cho, 'Mione, this is Dawn Summers."

"Salem?" asked Hermione.

"UCLA." said Dawn.
"I didn't think there was a wizarding school here," Hermione said with a frown.

"I'm taking muggle courses here and studying magic privately."

"Who's your tutor?" asked Cho.

"Professor Rosenberg." Both witches looked impressed.

"And you're a technopagan?"

"Uh-oh," thought Dawn, and said "I'm mainly exploring the shamanistic and meditative aspects as a focus for magic. Like Jenny Calender, who introduced Professor Rosenberg to the art. I've come to magic late, so I'm having to try some rather unorthodox techniques. Still just a beginner."

"That's fascinating," said Hermione, "I'd love to talk about it some more, but I've got to throttle Harry first."

"Why?" asked Harry, moving back cautiously.

"Have you forgotten last night?" asked Hermione, "wasn't someone supposed to be taking the rest of the team to supper?"

"Oh bug... bother. Look, I'm sorry, I had some free time and went for a walk and got a bit lost in the city. Then I ran into Dawn and we started talking and I just plain forgot."

"I'll bet." she looked at Dawn appraisingly. "According to Draco you didn't come back to your room last night."

"What business is that of Draco's?" asked Harry. "Or yours, for that matter? And why was he poking in my room anyway? But yes, I'm going to be staying off-campus for the rest of the conference."

"Harry, I worry about you, I keep thinking that there's going to be some sort of retaliation by Voldemort's followers, and you just don't take care. And going off with strangers..."

"Shouldn't I be the one to worry about that?" asked Dawn.

"Everyone knows who Harry is," said Cho.

"I didn't. I'd never heard of him until last night, after we'd met, when someone explained who he was. Like I said, I'm pretty new to magic, and I'm still kinda hazy about this whole Voldemort thing."

"Oh, that explains it," said Hermione. "Harry always did like being liked for himself, not what he's done."

"His himself is okay," said Dawn mischievously. "The rest of him isn't bad either. Hey, I bet you never knew you could blush that colour, Harry."

* * * * *

Furio eventually found the underground car park he was looking for, and went down to meet Angelo. His first impression was favourable; a tough-looking man in expensive casual clothing, maybe a little too much hair gel but he looked like someone who could be worked with.

"Heard you were looking for a boy," Angelo said in Italian with a strong Neopolitan accent.
"What boy?" Furio replied, also in Italian

"Potter."

"What's it to you?"

"I'm an independent contractor. I heard you'd been let down, I thought you might like some competent help."

"How much?"

"You eyeball him, confirm it's him. If it is I want ten large to do the job, five as finder's fee if you just want to do it yourself. Oh, and your business if you want something like this done in the future. I'll work anywhere in the USA if the price is right."

"Expensive."

"This is the introductory special offer. I usually charge more, but I'm worth it."

"How do I know you'll do anything if I give you the money."

"You give me three up front, pay me the rest once you're sure it's him. Try to stiff me, I do the next hit free of charge..."

Furio knew a threat when he heard it, and decided to take it seriously. "Okay, I guess I believe you. So you know where he is?"

"Sure. He's hiding not far from here."

"How do you know where he is?"

"The girl he was with was hurt. A friend of a friend does medical work, no questions asked, and knows where she lives. I checked, and both of them are there."

"Let me get some muscle, and we'll go there."

"The same muscle that screwed up last night? No thanks. We keep this between ourselves, no witnesses."

"Okay, we'll do it your way. You packing?"

"In my car. You?"

Furio lifted his jacket to show a .38 revolver. Angelo nodded. "Good choice. Before Furio could react he seized the gun, emptying out the cartridges and drop-kicking it under a nearby van, then grabbed Furio's throat and began to squeeze. Furio struggled, but it was like hitting wood. Angel's face twisted, showing the demon beneath, and he said "Not good enough. You hurt my friends, now you're going to tell me why."

* * * * *

"Both teams," said the questionmaster, "Your starter for ten points, and probably the last starter of the game... which Hellmouth is currently active?"

One of the Salem witches produced a sphere of bright green light from her wand.
"Fletcher, Salem. What is the answer please?"

"Cleveland."

"I'm sorry, Cleveland is currently dormant. Hogwarts, any answers? No conferring please."

Harry hesitantly waved his wand, waited to be acknowledged, and said "Would it be Australia?"

"Can you be more specific?"

Harry racked his brains trying to remember what Dawn had said, couldn't remember except that it was something to do with aborigines, and eventually blurted "Ayers Rock?"

"Correct. Ten points to Hogwarts."

"How the hell did you know that?" whispered Hermione.

"Dawn said something about Australia, the rest was blind luck."

"Shut up," said Draco, "We need another ten points to win and we're running out of time."

"Hogwarts," said the questionmaster, "For five points each name four European species of dragon. You may confer."

"Norbert was a Norwegien Ridgeback," said Harry, "Does Britain count as Europe."

"Of course it does," said Hermione.

"I'll have to hurry you," said the questionmaster.

"Norwegian Ridgeback," said Draco loudly.

"Welsh Green," said Harry.

"Hungarian Horntail," said Cho.

There was a loud "Boing!", and the questionmaster said "And at the gong Hogwarts have beaten Salem Witches Institute by two hundred and thirty points to two hundred and twenty, and will meet Durmstrang Institute in the final tomorrow. Congratulations to both teams on a very well-fought contest."

The audience clapped, and a group of the invariable autograph seekers clustered around the Hogwarts table. Dawn moved to where she could unobtrusively watch, and noticed Kennedy taking a similar position on the far side of the crowd.

Cho and Hermione sat talking to their own admirers, who mostly seemed to be male wizards around their age. Draco, more or less ignored, noticed Dawn watching and moved around to her, thinking he'd have some fun.

"So you're a technopagan, are you?"

"That's right," said Dawn, knowing instinctively that she didn't like him.

"You're the people that dance naked around adding machines, aren't you?"

"Computers. And rarely naked."
"Basically muggles meddlig with magic, aren't you?"

"You could put it that way. We prefer to say that we're at the interface between the mundane and magical worlds, mixing the best of both."

"Yes, well... I suppose it comforts muddbloods to think that."

"I suppose it comforts you to think that your opinion matters."

"What?"

"I said, I suppose it comforts you to think that your opinion matters."

"You little bitch..." He glanced around to make sure that nobody was watching, then began to pull his wand from his sleeve. There was a quiet "snick", and he felt cold steel touching his neck, and a hand seize his wrist and begin to twist.

"Now you're probably wondering if you can hex me before I cut your carotid artery. And do you know, I'm not quite sure. I've spent most of the last seven or eight years working on my combat skills so I think it's unlikely, but I could be wrong. The question you have to ask yourself is... do I feel lucky?"

Draco stood there, frozen.

"Well, punk? Do you feel lucky?"

He slowly slid the wand back into his sleeve.

"Good boy," said Dawn, making the sword vanish as quietly as it had appeared, and letting go of his arm. "Now I'm going to give you the best advice you'll ever hear... never make enemies unnecessarily. Because there are people and things out there you really don't want to annoy, and I'm one of them. Do we understand one another?"

Draco nodded.

"I'm pleased to hear it. Now run along and play like a good little boy, Harry and I have things to do."

He backed away, muttering something Dawn didn't quite catch, and walked backwards into Kennedy, who had come up behind him and stood there with a stake in her hand. She took his arm and held him in a grip of steel. "This one human, Dawn?"

"I think so. Nominally."

"Better not slay him then. Kid..."

"Yes..?" said said Draco nervously.

"Next time you call someone a muddblood dyke, better make sure that there isn't a lesbian with lethal weapons and superhuman hearing standing behind you. Because some of us don't have my sunny disposition. Got that?" She let him go, Draco turned and bolted.

"I think he got the message," said Dawn. "Score Dirty Dawn and Kennedy a hundred, Draco Malfoy nil."

"Dirty Dawn?"
"I gave him the 'do you feel lucky' speech from Dirty Harry. He's one of the hard-core wizards that wants nothing to do with muggles, so he wouldn't know the film."

"Nice." Kennedy went back to the entrance and watched Draco leave.

"What the heck got into Malfoy?" said Harry, finally disengaging himself from his fans.

"He picked the wrong girls to insult," said Dawn.

"What do you want to do now? It's still a couple of hours until the car comes."

"Some more shopping, if that's okay with you, I've just realised I didn't get anything for Alonna or Cordy."

"Cordy?" asked Harry.

"That's right, you didn't meet her yet. Cordelia Chase, Angel's girlfriend. She used to be a seer but she was injured pretty badly and lost the power, so she went back to being an actress, now she's on TV. She's been on location, but she ought to be around tonight. She's got perfect taste and money to burn, so what I'm looking for is something unusual and really pretty."

"Better get the girls to help, I wouldn't know where to start."

"Good idea. You can carry the shopping."

Harry groaned.

"Let's face it... you're doomed."
"So what do we know about her?" Hermione asked Cho as they freshened up after the quiz.

"She's Dawn Summers, she's muggle-born and only recently learning magic, and Professor Rosenberg is teaching her. And I'm pretty sure she's had Harry."

"I'm certain of it - he's got that 'Oh Merlin what have I got myself into' look again, and he looks like he didn't get much sleep. I was more interested in the sword she's carrying."

"Sword? What sword?"

"Didn't you see it? No, you were chatting to those boys. Draco was being his usual charming self, I think he was going to hex her and she pulled a sword on him. He practically ran away screaming."

"Blast," said Cho, "I would have paid good money to see that. Who on earth carries swords around?"

"Damned if I... wait a minute, I'm an idiot. Her name is Summers, and she knows Professor Rosenberg and carries a sword. She's much too young to be the Slayer, but wasn't there something about the Slayer having a sister?"

"I think so. Don't have the last few years of the Prophet handy to check, though."

"Sarcasm will get you nowhere. Look, if it is her she was in Sunnydale when they closed the Hellmouth, she must have seen the whole thing. The biggest magical event since Tunguska. Maybe she even saw Professor Rosenberg cast the spell."

"She's a little young, isn't she, can't be much older than us."

"Which would make her thirteen or so when the Hellmouth was closed," said Hermione.

"Seventeen actually," said Dawn, who had come in unnoticed, "I'm older than I look. And no, I didn't see Willow cast the spell, I was fighting vampires in another part of the building."

"You're a Slayer?" asked Cho.

"Nope, just trained with my sister and the Potentials."

"That must have been weird," said Hermione, "being the only girl around that wasn't... I'm sorry, that was tactless."

"Don't worry, not being a Slayer doesn't worry me. I've got my own talents, and I'm just as glad not to be in a profession where the average age of death used to be eighteen."

"It's just difficult to imagine. I'm sorry, I don't mean to pry."

"Don't worry, you'll know if I'm upset."

"Are you really carrying a sword?" asked Cho.

"Might be. Why?"

"I was just wishing I'd seen you use it on Draco."
"Well yeah, that was fun. Could I ask a favour?"

"What sort of favour?" asked Hermione.

"I want to pick up some presents for a couple of friends, I thought you might be able to help me choose something interesting. I want something for a baby about six months old, and something for Cordelia - she's a woman the same age as Professor Rosenberg who has very good taste. What I'm looking for is presents that have some magic about them but can be used safely by anyone. I was thinking a toy of some sort for the baby, jewellery or clothing for Cordelia."

"Okay, if you'll tell us why you're carrying a sword."

"Force of habit. It's like a security blanket, just don't feel right without it. Or an axe or something heavier..."

"And I thought Fred and George were weird..."

* * * * *

Furio woke slowly, wondering why the bed was so uncomfortable, then realised that he was lying on a concrete floor. He was in a cage of massive steel bars in a corner of a larger room somewhere. There was a dim lightbulb overhead, outside its pool of light endless shadow. He checked his pockets; no gun, no wallet, no phone.

"Looking for this?" asked a voice from the shadows in perfect Italian.

Angel came forward, out of the gloom, dangling Furio's rosary from one hand.

"You some sort of crazy?" asked Furio.

"I don't think so." He put his other hand under the crucifix and lowered it onto his palm. Wisps of smoke began to rise, and Furio could smell burning flesh. "But the longer I do this, the crazier I get. You might want to interrupt me before I really lose it." As Furio stared his face slowly twisted to the nightmare mask Furio had briefly seen in the parking garage, and he began to growl.

"Stop!" said Furio after a minute or so. "I'll talk."

"Better make it good," said Angel, pulling the cross from his hand to reveal a cross-shaped burn and slowly morphing his face back to human, "because pain makes me hungry. If I don't like what you're telling me I'll have to do something to take the edge off my appetite."

* * * * *

"I was told something today," Dawn said as Gunn drove everyone back to the Hyperion later that afternoon. "I'm not sure if it was the truth, or if he was trying to manipulate me."

"Who? Harry?"

"Of course not. Someone Harry and I met this afternoon."

"Do you want to unvague this for us at all?" asked Kennedy.

"Okay. Briefly, I met a guy who claimed to be an immortal wizard. Don't glare, Harry, I'm not gonna name him unless I have to. What he told me is that wizards can steal the quickening if an immortal is killed, use it to buy themselves a few years."
"It sounds plausible," said Willow. "Can't say I've heard of it, but I can see it could happen."

"What he told me was that he was wearing an amulet to stop other wizards detecting his immortality. The problem is that I could sense him and he could sense me, I would have thought an amulet would have blocked that too. If he was lying most of the scenarios I can think of end with him murdering me to steal my quickening, for himself or for someone else. I don't know that I can tell difference between a true immortal and someone wandering around with stolen power, or which he is."

"I think he was telling the truth," said Harry, "He's in a business where you really do have to be trustworthy. He could cause endless mischief if he wanted to, and I've never heard a thing against him."

"It could be genuine," said Willow, "it might be that your ability works in a different way to magical detection. I'll have to give it some thought, run a few tests."

"I think it is genuine," said Dawn, "I didn't get any wrong vibrations from him, but I'd just like to be sure. If it is genuine it sounds like I need an amulet like that for myself."

"That I can probably do.

* * * * *

"This is the place," Hermione thought to herself that evening, staring across the road at a gated entrance and watching a dot of light in the crystal she carried. "Looks like a hotel. Not many lights."

Hermione hadn't really wanted to be suspicious, but there was something about the situation she didn't like. Harry was hiding something, she was sure of that. Dawn and he both seemed to be watching out for something, and there was another woman watching them from a distance. She was certain Harry was in trouble again, and trying to keep her out. That's why she'd put a tracer spell on his owl. She crossed the road, slipped into the grounds through a half-open gate, and hid in a dark corner while she rummaged through her backpack and found the invisibility cloak she'd bought with part of her share of the reward for Voldemort.

As she finished putting it on and was checking that she was completely concealed the gate swung open and a tall figure walked in, dressed in a spotless cream-coloured suit. She held their breath until he had gone inside. "That," she thought, "was a demon." The horns and green skin give it away. "What in Merlin's name has Harry got himself into?" Whatever it was, it called itself 'Angel Investigations', according to a brass plate fixed to a much older sign reading 'Hyperion Hotel.'

Hermione was wondering how she'd get in without attracting attention when a car drew up outside. She froze to one side of the entrance, and watched as a beautiful blonde in her late twenties or early thirties walked down the path, followed by a chauffeur carrying two matching suitcases. The blonde was saying "..unless my plans have to change I'll need the car again for six tomorrow evening, for the airport. Take the morning off, if you don't hear from me by four assume that I'm going ahead as planned." Hermione was sure she recognised her from programmes she'd watched on TV. Some sort of American sitcom her mother liked, The something Show... The Cordy Show, that was it. Must be the Cordelia that Dawn had mentioned. The woman opened the door, holding it wide for the chauffeur, and Hermione slipped in after him. Inside it looked much like the lobby of any hotel, overlooked from the floor above, with huge electric chandeliers. The chauffeur took the bags to a lift and left them, then went out again, saying "good night" as he left. He seemed to be completely indifferent to the sight of the demon, who was scratching the head of Harry's owl, perched on the banisters of a huge flight of stairs.

"Hi Lorne. New pet?" said the woman.
"Name's Hedwig, sugar. Belongs to Dawn's new boyfriend, I think. They're upstairs somewhere."

"New boyfriend?" asked Cordelia, with great interest, "What's he like?"

"Eighteen, British, a wizard, and someone's trying to kill him."

"So of course Dawn's decided to date him. That girl is so like her sister..."

"Hey, honey, he's younger than her, not a couple of centuries older, and she saved his life last night, I guess she feels entitled to a cuddle or ten. You might know his name, Harry Potter, I'm pretty sure I mentioned him."

"Oh, the one that guy Vole-something was trying to kill."

"That's the one, sweetcheeks. Except that this time they're using machine guns, not magic. Hey, did you just hear something?"

Hermione tried to keep extra quiet, knowing that Lorne must have heard her gasp of surprise.

"Don't think so. Where is everyone anyway?"

"Angel's downstairs talking to a hit-man, Willow's making coffee, not sure about anyone else."

Professor Rosenberg came out of a side room, carrying a tray of cups and a large insulated coffee pot, and smiled at Cordelia, who waited for her to put the tray down on the receptionist's desk then went over and gave her a quick hug. "Willow, you look younger every time I see you." Hermione began to feel that she'd been foolish to come here, Dawn was obviously who she said she was. But why was a demon there?

"I wish. I've spent most of the last month training some of the Watchers, I feel about a hundred years old. They're all so young and keen..."

"Ouch. Reminds me, I'm spending a few days there next month helping out with the fencing class, I need to make some time to practice with Angel first. So what's the Potter kid like?"

Lorne stopped petting Hedwig and went to get a cup of coffee. Hedwig stayed on the banister, looking a little bored.

"He's okay," said Willow, "people have been trying to kill him since he was eleven, he seems to have come out of it pretty well. He's a celebrity in the wizard's community and doesn't seem to be too spoiled by it."

"So what happens now?" asked Cordelia, taking coffee.

"Angel and Gunn found out who arranged the hit, some sort of Mafia guy from New Jersey. There's got to be some sort of client or boss behind it, I suppose, Angel is trying to find out who it is."

"Where is Gunn anyway? And Fred?"

"They're upstairs bathing the baby and having some family time."

"And Kennedy?"

"She's downstairs with a Taser, keeping an eye on things. Making sure Angel doesn't get too enthusiastic."
"Always a good plan. Heard anything from Buffy?"

"Got an e-mail this evening, wants a lot of information about duck billed platypuses."

"Platypuses?"

"Platypi, platypodes, whatever."

"No, I meant why platypuses?"

"Just part of the general weirdness in Australia, I think. Or she's trying to freak me out with a gratuitous Dogma reference. Just a second." She looked around, apparently trying to think of something, then said "Thicken!" Suddenly Hermione found herself trapped in something that felt like thick tar. Willow said "Slowly drop your wand and take off the cloak. Don't try to move fast, it won't work. Better get on with it, the air you're breathing isn't circulating, if you leave it too long you'll pass out."

"Company?" asked Cordelia.

"Invisible wizard, I think."

"Crap. Just a sec." Cordelia went to a nearby cabinet and opened it to reveal neatly arranged weapons, taking out a crossbow and cocking and loading it with the air of someone who knows exactly what she's doing.

"Over there, in front of the water cooler."

"Knew I'd heard something," said Lorne.

"Don't shoot!" said Hermione, and did as she'd been told. Suddenly Hermione could breathe again, although the rest of her body was still entangled.

"She's just a kid," said Cordelia.

"She's about the age we were when we were blowing up the high school," said Willow, "so I don't necessarily find that reassuring. Who are you, and what do you want?"

"Um.. Hermione Grainger, Professor. I just wanted to make sure that Harry was safe."

"I know that name," said Lorne, "weren't you one of the ones that helped Harry get rid of Voldemort, sweetness?"

"That's right."

"Thought so."

Willow said "Now we're none of us trusting people here, so we're going to have to ask you to prove that you're telling the truth before I let you go."

"How do I do that?" asked Hermione.

"Sing something," said Cordelia. "Anything will do."

"Sing?"

"Just do it."
"Err... Ten green bottles, hanging on the wall, ten green bottles, hanging on the wall, and if one green bottle should accidentally fall there'll be nine green bottles, hanging on the wall. Nine green bottles.."

"That's enough, sugar," said Lorne, "don't give up the day job. She's telling the truth."

"Sure?" asked Willow. Lorne nodded. "Okay, Release!"

The air returned to normal. Hermione felt around on the floor and found her cloak, put it in her backpack, then put the wand away in her sleeve. Cordelia relaxed, uncocked and unloaded the crossbow, and put it away. Hedwig flapped over to perch on Hermione's shoulder for a scratch.

"Coffee?" asked Willow, pouring a cup.

"Um. Yes please. Look, I'm sorry, Professor, I was sure Harry had got himself in trouble again, and the idiot wouldn't let me help."

"Honey," said the demon gently, "you know that Harry isn't a big part of your destiny, don't you? You'll always be good friends, but not much more."

"It's his power," said Cordelia, "he can see your destiny if he hears you sing."

Hermione took the coffee and sipped. It was a little stronger than she liked but good. "I suppose I've known for a while. But he's still my friend, so I want to make sure that he's okay. Err... do you know who I will end up with?"

"Hard to tell," said Lorne, "I don't see any names but I do see a lot of cute red-headed kids. Does that help?"

"It's probably Ron."

"Or some other red-head. Maybe one of Willow's relatives, or a total stranger. Maybe you end up baby-sitting for the red-headed league. All I know is that I see you with a bunch of red-headed kids."

"What about Harry, do he and Dawn..?"

"So far I haven't heard Harry sing, and as for Dawn... well, let's just say she has a knack of upsetting prophecies, like her sister. Anyway, this isn't getting much work done, I only dropped by to make sure that things are okay and it looks like they are. You stay here, honey, if you ask nice I'm sure that Willow will explain things. Toodles."

"What is he?" asked Hermione once she was sure Lorne was gone, "He looks like a demon but he seemed... well, nice, really."

"He is." said Cordelia, "He's from one of the demon dimensions, moved to Earth because he didn't like violence and they didn't have music in his home world. Runs a karaoke bar called Caritas, a safe haven with some really powerful anti-violence spells. The only place you can take a drink with a demon and be sure you're not on the menu."

"I think I saw it advertised in the programme for the conference."

Harry came downstairs, showered and looking a little fresher, and said "Hermione? What in Merlin's name are you doing here?"

"I wanted to make sure you're okay. You and Dawn were making such a big mystery of everything"
that I got suspicious. Harry, what the hell is going on? I heard enough to know that someone is trying to kill you again."

"That's about it, really. Someone tried to kill me last night, Dawn saved me. She's a student at UCLA but works for Angel in her spare time, they're private detectives specialising in supernatural cases. They're helping me sort it out."

"Death Eaters again?"

"Doesn't look like it, whoever it is tried to have me shot. Death Eaters wouldn't use a muggle hitman. Anyway, Angel found out who gave the order, and he's questioning him downstairs."

Dawn came downstairs, wearing casual clothes without the technopagan regalia, talking to Fred and Gunn, who was carrying Alonna. She saw Hermione and said "I had a feeling you weren't satisfied with what Harry told you. Decided to play snoop?"

"Sorry," said Hermione. Hedwig gently nibbled her ear then flew over to Harry, who pulled a packet of owl treats from his pocket and started to toss them into the air for Hedwig to catch.

"Don't be," said Dawn. "I spent most of my teens Scoobying, it's sometimes the only way to be sure that things are okay."

"Scoobying?"

"As in Scooby-Doo," said Willow, "the Scooby Gang. There were a bunch of us in Sunnydale, used to help out the Slayer when it was just Buffy. Cordy was part of it too. May not mean much if you're from a wizarding family, I know they mostly don't have TV."

"Oh, my parents aren't wizards, I see it during the holidays. Reminds me to say that they really like Cordelia's show."

Cordelia smiled, revealing perfect teeth, and said "I'll give you some PR stuff if you like, photos and T-shirts and baseball caps with our logo. Tell me the sizes, I'll get it organised."

"That'd be great. Thanks."

"Angel surfaced yet?" asked Gunn.

"Nope," said Willow, "still talking to mobster guy."

"If it's taking this long he's covering for someone pretty important, way up in the mob. Not sure how long I'd hold out if Angel was questioning me."

"Kennedy's with them, so I guess Angel is being restrained."

"Not especially," said Angel, coming in from the cellar, followed by Kennedy, "he told me everything he knows an hour ago. I've just been making sure that he wasn't holding anything back." He saw Hermione and said "Hi, I'm Angel, this is Kennedy. I'd offer to shake hands but it's a little grimy downstairs."

"I'm Hermione," she said a little uncertainly. "Harry's friend."

"Relax," said Willow, "Lorne checked her out, she isn't involved."

"So what's the story?" asked Gunn.
"Our friend Furio works for the Soprano family in New Jersey," said Angel. "He was given his instructions by Tony Soprano, he's apparently the real boss although there's nominally someone else in charge."

Gunn whistled. "Tony Soprano has to be one of the top ten or twenty mobsters in America. Getting to him won't be easy."

"Relax," said Angel. "I've got a plan."

"And those always work out so well..."
"I have to admit this is a really good plan," Gunn said to Angel the following evening, watching Cordelia chat to David Letterman in New York, "good thing Cordy thought of it because the one you came up with sucked rocks."

"I've spotted Soprano in the audience," said Willow, "just where he's supposed to be. Must be his wife next to him."

"Proves one thing," said Angel, "he doesn't have any magical protection. If he had he never would have fallen for the compulsion spell on those tickets. So maybe walking in and grabbing him would have worked."

"It's basically the same spell that was used on me," said Harry, "he could still have magic."

"What part of 'bullet-riddled corpse' are you having trouble with?" Dawn asked Angel. "Don't you think the rest of his goons might have objected? Enough lead and even you have trouble moving. Then they chop up the body to get rid of it and whoosh, no Angel."

On screen Cordelia was saying "...my boyfriend really hates publicity, and since he owns a law firm that has the motto 'sue early and often' the papers just seem to respect his privacy."

"Come on, Cordy," said Letterman, "last week you told Jay Leno that your boyfriend was a private detective and had to keep his identity secret, when you were on the Jonathan Ross show in London three weeks ago you claimed that he owns a hotel. What's the real story?"

"I just like to tease you guys, I guess. He's kinda a private person, well to be honest he's very shy, tends to brood a lot, absolutely hates being in the public eye. I love him, but he while he respects my career choice he doesn't want to be part of the show. Except one time he tried karaoke. Boy, did he suck. Imagine the worse version of Mandy you've ever heard, then imagine it about ten times worse." There was more laughter, and Angel frowned and muttered "I wasn't that bad."

"The important thing," said Willow, "is that you believe that."

"Cordy, there are persistent rumours that the real story is that you're dating billionaire David Nabbitt. Got anything to say about that?"

"Well, it's true that David and I did date a couple of times, before my career really got off the ground, but there was no sparkage. We're still friends, but that's all. And David, if you're watching this and want to say anything different, remember that I still have the photos!" She blew a kiss to the camera, and the audience laughed.

"About a minute to go to the ads," said Gunn, "Hermione ready with her part of the deal?"

"Let's hope so," said Dawn, "She's sitting next to Soprano in the aisle seat, where she's supposed to be. How about you, Harry?"

"Ready."

"Kennedy? Willow? Fred?"

"We're all cool," said Willow. Fred waved her loaded crossbow from the upper landing above the lobby.
On screen Letterman said "Cordy has to dash across town for the charity show we mentioned earlier, so let's all give her a big hand before she goes... after the break our final guest on tonight's live show is former White House Communications Director Toby Ziegler, who's going to be communicating with us about his new book...."

"Turn the sound down," said Gunn, "it could be any time now."

In New York Cordelia walked off the set, pausing to sign a few autographs in the front row of the audience. One of the books she signed belonged to Hermione, who squealed, took the book back, then pretended to slip and dropped it into Tony Soprano's lap. Without thinking he touched the Hogwarts crest embossed on the cover and instantly vanished. Before anyone really had time to notice Hermione stood, pulled her wand from her sleeve, and said "Obliviate!"

In moments nobody else in the theatre remembered that the seat had ever been occupied. Hermione sat in the empty seat and gave Carmella Soprano some individual attention before the spell wore off. Soon she remembered that she and Tony had argued in the car and he'd left her outside the theatre, she expected that he would come home sooner or later, probably drunk. Hermione had been sitting next to her all evening. One of Cordelia's assistants took Hermione's place in the empty aisle seat.

Hermione relaxed and settled back to watch the rest of the show. Later she'd catch up with Cordy at the airport and travel back to Los Angeles on the studio's Learjet. It wasn't quite as convenient as a portkey, but she didn't fancy trying to apport that distance, and the plane was far more comfortable than any airline she'd tried.

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Tony Soprano appeared in the lobby of the Hyperion, crouched in a sitting position, and Harry instantly waved his wand and said "Petrificus Totalus!". Tony slowly toppled onto his back, rigid, his jaws locked, paralysed except for his furiously twitching eyes. Willow stepped forward and said Acclaro!. A shimmering green aura appeared around Tony, glowing red over one of his jacket pockets.

"Okay," said Willow, "there's something magical there, apart from that he seems to be clean. No weapons." She concentrated for a second, and a bunch of keys fell out of the pocket and floated up to eye level. Harry snagged them on the end of his wand and said "That's a Gringrotts Bank vault key. What the hell is a muggle doing with one of those?"

Willow squinted at the bunch. "What's the little key fob thing? It looks like it opens, and it's the main source of the magic. There's a spell on the key too, but it's so subtle I wouldn't have picked it up on its own."

"That's a portkey to the bank's reception area. They started giving them to valued customers a couple of years ago, when someone worked out how avoid accidents if two people tried to port in at the same time."

"You don't have one."

"I got my vault key a long while before they started giving the portkeys out and I've never bothered to collect one, they're more trouble than they're worth. Bloke I knew touched his accidentally while he was looking for... umm... something else, trouble was that he wasn't actually wearing his trousers at the time, by the time he sorted things out at Gringrotts and got back his girlfriend wasn't... well, never mind."

"Kennedy," said Angel, "could you lean Mister Soprano against a seat for me? I think I put my back
"Sure." Kennedy picked Tony up by a rigid arm and leg, without apparent effort, and propped him against one of the seats in the middle of the lobby.

"Okay. Feeling all right, Mister Soprano?" Tony's eyes moved from side to side, but he couldn't speak. "Oh, sorry about that. I'd ask Harry to let you loose but you tried to have him killed and he's a little sensitive about that, he might just turn you into a frog by mistake. You do know Harry, of course? Harry Potter? I thought so."

Willow said "You may be thinking that your wife is raising the alarm. Slayer, could you turn him so that he can see the TV screen? Dawn, if you could wind the tape back to the last audience shot and pause it... there we are. Now if you look at the screen, you'll see that the young lady who gave you that book has moved into your seat, and another young lady has taken hers. Now the odd thing is that your wife and everyone else in the audience thinks that they were sat there all along. Someone who watched the show on TV might know better, but neither of them is going to be hanging around to answer questions. That's called magic, Mister Soprano, and I can assure you that we know a lot more about it than you do."

"Now your man tried to have Harry killed last night," said Angel, "and that's annoying. What's more annoying is that a friend of ours was shot. Fortunately," he moved to where Tony could see him and morphed into vampire form, "that's not a huge problem for some of us, which is why you're not already dead. Now if you understand me so far I'd like you to blink twice."

Tony blinked. Twice.

"My name's Angel, by the way, you may have heard of me. No? Your loss. Now in a moment I'm going to ask Harry to release you. When he does that I'd suggest that you sit down and answer our questions, without lies or hesitation. Because if you don't I might start feeling a little... peckish, or my friends with the wands and the spells and the cattle prods..." he pointed at Gunn "...might decide to get busy. Kennedy, lean him back against the seat... Okay Harry, go ahead."

"Finite Incantatum!"

"Wha't'fk didja do to me?"

"That's no language to use in front of ladies," said Angel warningly, showing his fangs again.

"T'hell with you and t'hell with your..!"

Kennedy casually slapped him before he finished. His head thudded back into the upholstery, hard.

"We've most of us seen hell," said Kennedy, "some of us have spent vacation time there, and there's no way anything you say is going to impress us, unless it's giving us answers. Understood?"

"Don't break his jaw or give him concussion," said Angel, "we need him awake and talking."

"Ah, you're no fun." She gently patted Soprano's other cheek.

"Let me make this easy for you," said Angel. "We don't want to know about your family's business, unless it concerns Harry, and we aren't cops or feds. When we finish we'll be letting you go, if you help us, and nothing you say here will be admissible as evidence. If you don't help us... well, it's a big cellar, plenty of room next to your friend Furio."

"Huh. You tell me that, tell me who you are, then say you'll let me go, think I'm a f'kin moron?"
"You won't remember us. Magic, remember?"

"You promise me this is just about the Potter kid, nothing else?"

"Nothing else."

"Wha'd'ya wanna know?"

"Who's behind this?" asked Angel. "Who paid for the hit on Harry? And how do we stop it?"

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"Let's see if I've got this straight," said Angel. "You were contacted by Gringrotts bank who offered to exchange your money for untraceable gold. You agreed to this, and once you'd arranged the money transfer they asked you to arrange the hit on Harry. This was all arranged by someone called Weasley."


"That's impossible..." Harry began, Angel made a throat-cutting gesture and said "Can it. We'll get to that soon enough." He turned back to Tony and said "What was Wolfram and Hart's part in all this?"

"They passed on all the details I needed to arrange the hit; where he'd be, what he looked like, that sort of thing."

"But they were working for the bank, not you?"

"That's right."

"Okay. Now, Harry, what's wrong with the story."

"None of it makes any sense. To begin with, Charlie Weasley never worked for Gringrotts bank. His brother Bill does, but Charlie works with dragons in Romania. Or did, anyway."

"Did?" asked Angel.

"That's what's so wrong. Charlie's been dead for nearly a year. He was one of the ones killed in the final fight against Voldemort."
"I must be missing something," said Willow. "I thought that the final battle was about six months ago. You said that Charlie's been dead nearly a year."

"I'm sorry," said Harry, looking grim. "I didn't explain it well, it was the final phase of the war, not the final battle. By then everyone knew that Voldemort was back, and we'd taken out most of the Death Eaters in Britain, but we learned that Voldemort was building up his forces on the Romanian border, the area that used to be called Transylvania. They'd taken over an abandoned castle and the area around it and were recruiting allies; vampires, dark witches, werewolves, giants and so forth."

"F'kn Dracula?" asked Tony.

"He's dead," said Dawn, "My sister killed him a few years ago."

"No loss," said Angel, "Always hated that poser."

"It was his castle," said Harry, "and even with him gone it was unplottable and fairly thoroughly protected, but it happened that a couple of hundred years ago some aurors looking for Dracula worked out how to get past most of the defences. There was no way to get in by magic, but someone came up with the idea of taking a small group in on foot and attacking the place with muggle weapons, spelled to get through the defences."

"What sort of weapons were they carrying?" asked Angel.

"Mortars and a couple of rocket launchers."

"Against a stone castle? Were they out of their minds? You'd barely scrape the moss off the walls."

"I think someone got their ideas from Rambo movies. I only heard about it afterwards. Anyway, the attack was mounted from the dragon reservation in Romania, Charlie was their guide."

"So what went wrong?"

"Nobody's really sure. All that we know is that the bodies were found a few miles from the reservation, long before they should have been in any danger, they'd all been inverted."

"Inverted?" asked Kennedy.

"Turned inside out. It kills you pretty quickly. One of the nastier spells Voldemort came up with towards the end of the war."

"Gakk."

"Anyway, Charlie was definitely killed; his body was identified magically and by his family and several other people once they'd re-inverted what was left of him."

"So wh't'fk was it I gave my f'kn money to?" asked Tony.

"I thought he was paying you," said Willow.

"Well yeah, for the f'kn contract on the kid, but it started out with me changing some of my f'kin money for gold."
"How much?"

"Seventy thousand dollars. The Limey bastard gave me ten thousand of those gold coins, galleons."

"That's not right," said Harry, "That's not the proper exchange rate at all. Should be more like fourteen thousand."

"Huh? He gave me gold value less a five percent handling fee."

"Muggle gold value's got nothing to do with it. The goblins mine plenty, the wizarding world uses it for cauldrons and plumbing fixtures, it's not worth much more than brass. The Galleon is backed by goblin workmanship and magic, not gold. Every coin is hand cast and finished, and enchanted to show it's genuine. I'm not sure how the exchange rate is calculated, but everyone knows that they're worth more to muggles as gold than as coins. But it's illegal to sell them that way, or even melt them down and sell the gold, because they're often contaminated with magic they pick up from the authentication spell and from being handled by wizards."

"Contaminated?" asked Angel.

"It can be very nasty, the Ministry of Magic has a whole section that does nothing but keep our stuff out of muggle hands. Imagine a normal human given magical power and no idea how to use it safely."

"No need to imagine," said Willow. "We've been there. More than once."

"You're saying I've been f'kin conned?" asked Tony.

"Definitely. Charlie's dead, and there's no way that anyone really working for Gringrotts would let you have our money, so whoever it was you were dealing with was some sort of imposter. Better hope that they gave you real gold, at least."

"T'fuk you say?"

"Watch." Harry looked around the room, picked up a coffee cup, muttered "Aurum" and flicked his wand. The cup filled with gold galleons, and Harry's hand sagged a little under the sudden weight. He handed it to Tony. "That's magical gold. Wouldn't fool a wizard for long, but it'll pass all the normal muggle tests until the spell wears off in a few hours. It's one of the oldest tricks in the wizarding book, much easier than genuine transmutation or transfiguration. Bloody leprechauns can do it, and they're about as bright as chimps."

"Crap" said Tony, stirring the coins with a finger.

"What now?" asked Willow. "I think we've got as much as we need from mister Soprano, I think it's time we got him back. And the other guy, Furio. I'll need a few minutes to work on their memories and make them forget about killing Harry..."

"Hey, you f'kin said Furio was dead!"

"I lied," said Angel. "He's locked up downstairs."

"Anyway, t'fuk with that. If someone's conned me I want f'kin payback. An' I want to see wha't'fuk's happened to my f'kin money."

"What do you think, Harry? You're the client here."
"I think we might need him, or at least his memories, and we may need him to get into his vault and see what's really there. There's bound to be more questions we want to ask as we get into this, it'd be a shame if he couldn't answer them. Provided he isn't trying to kill me, of course."

"T'fuk with that," said Tony, "no pay, no hit, an' it sounds like there's no pay."

"And no retaliation for this little interview?" asked Angel. "That really would be a very bad idea, so far you've only seen me and my friends in a good mood."

"No f'kin harm done."

"Where do we go from here?" asked Willow.

"London," said Angel, "but there are some practical problems for me if we go right now, it's already morning there. Harry, are there windows in the place that the portkey takes us?"

"No, the walls are solid stone. The goblins have old-fashioned ideas about bank security."

"Convenient."

Dawn looked at the world clock on a PDA, then said "What hours does the bank keep? I don't like the idea of Angel being trapped in there if we have to go somewhere else during the day."

"I don't think they ever close," said Harry.

"Then maybe it'd be a better idea to wait until noon tomorrow, our time, we'd get there just after sunset in London."

"That's a plan," said Angel. "Mister Soprano, I'll get your boy Furio up here, maybe you two need to talk. I can offer you a room here for the night, it isn't fancy but it's habitable."

"What about my wife?"

"She thinks you had an argument and went off, I doubt she'll worry much overnight, but if you're worried you can always call her. I expect she's still on her way home though. Willow, how long do you think we can get away with this?"

"I'm pretty sure we're okay so far, the counter-spells I set up before we ah.. borrowed Mister Soprano haven't been touched, so it looks like the DOM didn't spot what we were up to. If they had we'd be knee-deep in aurors by now."

"DOM?" asked Tony.

"Department of Magic, reporting to the Secretary of State for Wizarding Affairs, she reports to the President. They try to run the magic world in this country, try to keep things under control."

"T'fuk you say. What'f'ks an auror?"

"Magical cop. They won't be interested in you so long as you stay out of our business, but you want to watch out, you wouldn't stand a chance if they went after you. You crossed the line when you tried to have Harry killed, that could have bought them down on you, fortunately nobody was hurt. Not permanently, anyway."

Angel came back with Furio, who said "Hey, you said someone had been shot."

"I was," said Dawn. "I got better."
Furio crossed himself. Tony said "You another f'kin vampire?"
"No. I just live right."
"More f'kin magic."
"Something like that."

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"The tall dark guy is some sort of monster," Furio said in Italian. "I think he's a vampire."

"Yeah?" said Tony, throwing a sheet onto one of the beds in the room Angel had found. "Tell me about it. What t'fuk's the idea of telling them I'm your boss?"

"He pretty much knew anyway, he was gonna tear my throat out if I didn't confirm it."

"What about loyalty until death, whatever happened to that?"

"It wouldn't have been death, he was talking about making me into another f'kin vampire so I'd be his slave."

"Oh.. He can do that?"

"I've seen the monster movies, for all I know he can do all that Dracula shit."

"Well... Okay, I guess I'll let it go. Next time don't get caught. 'Specially by f'kin monsters. Whad'ya know about the others?"

"The boy, the one I was supposed to kill, he's some sort of wizard. Don't know what the brown-haired girl is. The hitter I used said he was sure she was dead, if she came back from that..."

"What about the rest?"

"The black-haired woman's some sort of freak, she picked me up one-handed. A couple of times the vampire called her 'slayer'..."

"And?"

"There's an old legend I heard when I was a kid about women who kill vampires, they call them Slayers. They're supposed to be that strong."

"So why t'fuk isn't she killing the f'ker?"

"I don't know. I haven't seen the others before. They kept me in the f'kin cellar."

"Find out all you can, and play along. I wanna know what we're dealing with, and who the rest of them are. Once I've found out what's happened to my money I'm gonna have a few scores to settle..."

Two floors below Angel stopped listening and said "Okay, Soprano's planning to stab us in the back as soon as he knows what's happened to his money. No big surprise there. Everyone stay on your toes, and try to remember that they're both dangerous men."

"More dangerous than you might think," said Dawn.
"How do you mean?" asked Harry.

"I need to make a call, I want someone's advice. Angel, I'll need to use the phone with the scrambler."

* * * * *

Dawn dialled a Boston number, and hoped it wasn't too late for the elderly lady on the other end. After a few rings she picked up. "Mrs. L., this is Dawn. Can you scramble please?"

"Dawn? Lorn's friend?"

"Yes."

"I'm scrambling." There was a brief warble as the phones synchronised their signals, then the slightly metallic tones of a scrambled call.

"I have a problem, I could do with some advice."

"Headhunters?"

"No. Ran into someone today, he's either a pre-immortal or already immortal, I think immortal. Whichever he is, I'm pretty sure he doesn't know."

"People usually know if they've died, Dawn."

"Not always, could have been in a car crash or something, thought he had a miraculous escape."

"You know what to do; find out if he's immortal, if he is tell him what he needs to know to survive. If not, try to make sure he gets some training... That's not the problem though, is it?"

"No."

"What then."

"He's a monster. A gangster, a multiple murderer, he's just tried to kill a friend of mine. There's sort of a truce at present, but I think eventually he'll be coming after us again. If he ever gets into the Game I'm pretty sure he'll be a headhunter, probably start by coming after me."

"He knows what you are?"

"He's learned enough to guess if he ever knows the score."

"Dawn... some immortals, some of the best of us, began as soldiers, mercenaries, thieves and murderers. Enough time, and the knowledge that you'll have that time, changes your perspective. You're young, you have no idea what things were like for many of us. You think of me as a cute old lady, I can assure you that you wouldn't have liked me as I was in my youth, in the eighteenth century when I lived by my wits. It's probably fortunate for the world that I became old before I was killed, as it was I've always had to think my way out of difficulties, or outlast them, rather than fighting."

"So what am I supposed to do... train him the way you trained me? Teach him to fence, tell him all of the little tricks that'll help him survive? Hope that if it comes to it I'll be able to take his quickening, absorb a life like that without going mad or being corrupted?"

"Ideally yes. But there's no urgency. You could wait to see how things turn out before you tell him,
for example."

"That's probably best. I'd better go, it must be getting late there."

"That's all right dear, I don't need much sleep. Let me know how it goes."

"I will. Good night."

"Good night dear."

* * * * *

"Well?" asked Angel.

"Well what?"

"Which one is it?"

"You listened?"

"I'm a vampire, Dawn, it's difficult not to."

"Um... okay, let's just say that if Tony Soprano is killed, it might be a good idea to incinerate his corpse or cut his head off to make sure he stays that way. Good night."
"Okay, people," said Angel, "This is a visit to a bank, not the invasion of Normandy. Let's sheath those swords and stakes and put the crossbows away until we need them."

"I wanna gun," Tony said for the third time.

"Forget it."

"You go into Gringotts with a gun," said Harry, "any weapon that's ready for use, they'll have you paralysed and knocked out inside ten seconds. Security's tight there. Sheathed swords and knives and crossbows in bags are probably okay, but no naked blades, no wands ready for use. And for Merlin's sake let me or Professor Rosenberg do the talking."

"Make that you," said Willow, "Those goblin guys creep me out."


Everyone except Fred joined the chain; she was going to stay in LA to keep the business ticking over. Cordelia and Hermione weren't there; there was no good reason to let the gangsters know that the famous Cordelia Chase was involved, so she and Hermione were staying at her apartment in Hollywood and would be joining Fred once Tony and Furio were out of the way.

"Stand as close together as you can. This may take a while," said Harry, "the area we apparate to has to be completely clear and there are a lot of us, if the bank's busy it may take time to find a suitable space."

With his free hand he flipped open Tony's key fob and touched the portkey surface.

* * * *

They materialised in the lobby of Gringotts, and a goblin in a porter's uniform gestured for them to step clear of the reception area. "Come on," said Harry, "don't want to keep other customers waiting."
"Holy crap." said Gunn, looking around the huge hall and taking in the ugly goblins behind the long counters. "You sure these guys aren't evil?"

"They're bankers," said Harry, "Honourable businessmen in their own way. Just don't get into debt."

"What happens if you do?" Dawn asked nervously.

"Just don't..."

"Mister Potter," said the swarthy goblin clerk Harry approached, rubbing his hands with glee. "A pleasure as always."

"Good evening, mister Goldfoot, we need to speak to the security manager please, I think that there may have been a fraud involving the bank."

"Fraud?" he whispered, horrified, then bellowed "Mister Gougegelt!"

In seconds the security manager arrived, a muscular goblin who looked like he'd been taking steroids, and took the group through to his office, which had a Victorian look with wooden panelling, leather padded seats, and dozens of small cupboards and racks for books and scrolls.

"...so what I think happened," Harry said several minutes later, "is that someone knew that there was a Weasley working at the bank but picked the wrong one to impersonate. Neither Bill nor Charlie spent much time in London, but they did share ownership of a flat, used it when they were in town. I imagine Bill still owns it. Maybe someone broke in to steal some hair to make polyjuice potion and got the wrong brush or something. Mister Soprano, before he said he was Charlie, had anyone else said his name?"

"No... t'fuk, yeah, some guy we passed in the lobby said something, 'morning Charlie,' that was it."

"Okay. Now, when all this happened Charlie's death wasn't really common knowledge, his family knew and there was a brief announcement in the Prophet, his name was towards the bottom of the list of casualties, but he was killed just after Voldemort's Death-Eaters took out Durmstrang and that filled the papers for weeks..."
"Durmstrang?" asked Angel.

"One of the big magical schools, in Northern Hungary. Voldemort's Death-Eaters attacked it to show that they still had teeth and more or less flattened the place, their protection spells just cracked under the attack. I don't think there were any survivors. Our chaps couldn't stop it, but they traced Voldemort back to his base, and Charlie and the rest set off for their raid a couple of days later. Anyway, that filled the papers, and the Ministry of Magic didn't exactly want to publicise how badly they'd screwed up, so for a long while most people didn't know he was dead. So I'd guess some casual acquaintance saw someone he thought he knew, said something, and after that the imposter just kept pretending to be Charlie."

"That's all very well," said Gougegelt, "but what has this to do with the bank?"

"I talked to this f'kin guy in one of your offices," said Tony, "so you're f'kin responsible."

"I suppose that it's possible that one of our offices was used, we do occasionally let customers hire them for meetings, but as for being responsible... When was it?"

He consulted a huge ledger, then said "Here we are, hired by... why, by Charles Weasley."

"Figures," said Angel, "You wouldn't have thought to check that he was who he said he was?"

"Why should we? The money was good, that's all that concerns us."

"I'm a patient kinda guy," said Tony, "but your attitude is beginning t'piss me off. You're a respectable bank, you saying it isn't your job to stop fraud on'a premises?"

"Speaking as another customer," said Harry, "it is a little alarming. And we haven't even checked the vault yet."

"What number?"
Tony produced the key. "Vault 8343"

"Hmmm..." Gougegelt went to a rack and pulled out another huge scroll, rapidly rolled through, and said "Account opened by... Hmm, by Mister Tony Soprano with Mister Harry Potter witnessing the signature, three days before the meeting."

"What?" asked Harry, echoed by Tony.

"This is very irregular," said Gougegelt. He went to the door and shouted "Pinchpenny!" There was a pause then a goblin wearing glasses with bottle-green lenses and carpet slippers shuffled in. "Pinchpenny, take a look at this, tell me what you think."

He looked at the scroll and scratched his head, and the lenses of his glasses glowed, casting an eerie green light onto the scroll. "Forgery sir, most definite," he said in an oddly incongruous Cockney accent, "o's and y's and r's in both names are by the same hand, virtually identical, same slant on the letters, and the capital S and p of Soprano and the o's and r's match the signature of the clerk authorising the opening of the account, mister Spoonore. I think that the e on the end of Spoonore is also the same as in Potter, but that isn't as clear."

"As I thought," said Gougegelt. "Stay here a moment, while I fetch mister Spoonore..." He started out, cracking his knuckles thoughtfully, but Pinchpenny said "You won't find him, sir. Don't'cha remember, he went missing months ago, when there was that nasty outbreak of pustules and half the staff was out, never came back. Had to check a couple of hundred accounts to make sure there wasn't any money missing."

"Blast. Very well, we'll check the vault contents. You'd better all come as witnesses."

"You'll never get all this lot in one wagon, sir," said Pinchpenny, "I'll call for a train to be made up."

* * * * *

The train of a half-dozen tiny wagons rattled through endless tunnels at breakneck speed. Gunn, Angel, Tony and Furio hung on grimly, Harry and the goblins treated it as an everyday occurrence, and Willow, Dawn, and Kennedy tried to pretend that it was the best amusement park ride they'd ever ridden. Eventually it shrieked to a halt outside vault 8343.
"The key, please" said Gougegelt, and Tony gave it to him. He gingerly pressed it to the door, which slowly creaked open. Inside was an empty chamber; empty except for the dehydrated body of a goblin. "Mister Spoonore, I presume. Must have been here for months."

The eyes of the emaciated body slowly opened, and he said "Yes sir..."

* * * * *

"It's a good thing goblins have strong constitutions," said Angel when they were back in the office. "Do we know anything yet about how he got there?"

"He claims it was the Imperio curse," said Gougegelt. "Made him open the account then help the imposter with the fraud. The aurors are checking him now, it looks like he's telling the truth."

"Do we know how it worked?" asked Willow.

"Very boldly. Just before the meeting the false Weasley and Spoonore came down to the vault, put a glamour on the vault and the corridor outside to change its appearance slightly, altered the number on the door, filled it with magical gold, and went to collect Mister Soprano. As soon as they'd agreed on the amount of gold he was supposed to be purchasing, Spoonore took them down to the vault and they collected it, leaving bundles of muggle money in its place. Once the door was shut the false Weasley cast a full body bind on Mister Soprano, took the key out of his pocket, went back into the vault, packed the muggle money into pockets under his robes, cast Finite Incantatum inside the vault to get rid of the magical gold and change its appearance, then went back outside, returned the key, moved to exactly the same position, then quickly removed the body bind while obliviating ten minutes or so of Mister Soprano's memory."

"That's bloody clever," said Harry admiringly, "must have worked pretty fast to get it all done without you noticing anything." Tony swore.

"As far as Mister Soprano was concerned," said Gougegelt, "they came out of the vault and got onto the cart, then drove through the tunnels before coming to his new vault. What really happened is that they went around in a long complicated loop, changing levels several times. As they approached the vault again Spoonore distracted mister Soprano for a second, while the impostor quietly cast Finite Incantatum ahead of the wagon and changed the corridor and the door back to their original appearance."
"So this time he saw vault 8343 as it really was?" asked Willow, fascinated.

"That's correct. After that Mister Soprano simply left the money in the vault, having been assured that he had the only key. In reality the false gold had probably vanished before he even left the bank."

"That was taking a chance," said Gunn, "What if you'd changed your mind, or gone back later to take some of it out, or put more in?"

"They probably used a geas for that," said Willow, "It's not as flashy as wand magic but it's easy enough if you have any power." She turned to Tony. "You would have invented your own reasons not to do it. They may also have used a geas to make you agree to organise the hit on Harry. Do you remember anything like that?"

"One time I wanted to get some of those gold boats, galleons, to have some jewellery made for Carmella. But I kinda decided that there might be awkward questions about the coins."

"That's the way it works," said Willow. "Even if you were desperately short of money you would have found some reason not to go to Gringotts."

"So I've changed seventy thousand dollars, for what? For f'kin nothing?"

"Looks like it," said Harry. "I'd be more sympathetic if you hadn't tried to have me killed."

Tony lunged at him; Kennedy caught him by an arm and held him until he calmed down, easily blocking several blows he threw at her, then threw him into a chair.

"Behave," said Willow. "Arguing isn't going to settle this or get anyone's money back."

"The last thing the imposter did before leaving," said Gougegelt, "was to order Spoonore to go back to the vault a week later and try to open the door without a key."

"What would that do?" asked Dawn.
"He was sucked inside magically and left there," said Harry, "with no way out. A few months more and we would have found a corpse."

"So it's common knowledge that the doors are booby-trapped?" asked Willow.

"Certainly," said Gougegelt, "We make sure that anyone thinking of robbing us is aware of some of our precautions."

"So rather than robbing you directly, they used your facilities to rob a customer."

"Gringotts cannot be held responsible for the actions of anyone other than our staff. And we do not accept responsibility for staff acting under the Imperio curse."

"What about compensation?" asked Gunn.

"Gringotts cannot be held responsible for the actions of anyone other than our staff. And we do not accept responsibility for staff acting under the Imperio curse."

"Who're your f'kin lawyers?" asked Tony.

"Wolfram and Hart, of course."

"Figures," said Willow.

"What in Merlin's name do we do now?" asked Harry.

"I think the question," said a newcomer, "is what in Merlin's name do you think you're doing here in the first place?"

"Oh balls," said Harry. "Bloody Percy."
"Hello Harry," said Percy. "Going to introduce me to these muggles."

"Not all exactly muggles here," said Willow, "and there are those of us who think that word is a little racist."

Percy took another look at the group and belatedly recognised Willow. "Professor Rosenberg, this is an unexpected honour, but..."

"But nothing," snapped Willow. "Everyone here has some involvement in magic and the supernatural. Do you really want me to spell out how badly you're mistaken?"

"I know that some muggles do dabble..."

"Percy," said Harry, "shut up." He turned to the others and said "This is Percy Weasley, one of Charlie's brothers. He works for the Ministry of Magic's Intelligence Branch, and he's really not nearly as stupid as he pretends. He spent the last couple of years of the war pretending to be one of Voldemort's dupes, and he did it so well that most of our community hated him until the truth came out."

"For Merlin's sake, Harry!"

"Oh, did I spoil your little game? What a pity."

"Something tells me you two don't get on very well," said Angel.

"Who is this f'kr?" muttered Tony.

Harry said "Percy's way of pretending to be a fool was to spend nearly a year claiming that I was a liar and that Voldemort wasn't alive, which rather annoyed me, then a couple more pretending to be a social climber, boot-licking the Malfoys and others like them. His family practically disowned him, and Charlie died believing he was in Voldemort's camp. And I like the rest of the Weasley family a lot better than I like Percy, so anything that hurts them upsets me."
"All right," said Percy. "Maybe I could have found another way. It's over now."

"So why are you still playing the fool?"

"It's often the best way to find out what's really going on. Now, would you please introduce me, I really would like to know who I'm talking to before I start screaming at you."

"Okay. Professor Rosenberg you know, Kennedy is a Slayer, and Miss Summers is the Watchers Council representative at UCLA and the Professor's student. Mister Angel here is a detective specialising in supernatural cases, and is currently working for me. Mister Gunn here works for Mister Angel. Finally, we have mister Soprano, who was duped by the imposter and his associate mister Dante. I believe they're both in the waste disposal business."

Percy pulled out a tiny scroll, tapped it with a quill, and waited a second as it whizzed from one roller to another and stopped, hanging in mid-air. "When you say Angel, would that be Angelus?"

"Formerly," said Angel. "Angelus was a soulless blood-sucking fiend that'd rip your heart out in a second. I'd have to think about it a little first."

"I don't believe there are currently any warrants for your arrest in this country, but I'd advise staying out of the Republic of Ireland, France and Italy, the wizarding communities there have long memories. And they have reciprocal extradition treaties with Britain."

"I'll bear it in mind."

The rollers whizzed again "As for mister Soprano and mister Dante, the Department of Magic in America will probably be interested to learn that American organised crime is venturing into our world."

"They didn't venture," said Willow, "They're.. They're witnesses. We had to bring them in to get to the bottom of this."

"That's f'kin right," said Tony, "I'm a f'kin victim here."
"What a shame," said Percy, with a total lack of conviction. "Harry, are you prepared to accept responsibility for these people?"

"I'll consider it, if you'll tell me what the hell's going on."

"Death Eaters, of course. With Voldemort and so many others out of the picture the remaining sympathisers are running scared and are very short of funds. Defrauding muggles seems to be one of the easiest ways they've found to replenish their coffers, so much so that the Ministry now tracks all muggle to magical currency exchange transactions over a thousand Galleons. And of course it's a bonus if they can find a way to discredit someone like Charlie or harm someone like you while they're doing it."

"It's kinda elaborate, isn't it?" said Dawn.

"Wizards sometimes over-complicate things, and the Death Eaters aren't exactly rational at the best of times, it's one of the reasons we beat them. I'll give you an example. A few years ago they managed to plant one of their agents as a teacher in Harry's school, with endless chances to harm him. Their goal was simply to get Harry out of the school and portkey him into Voldemort's clutches, so that they could use his blood in a ritual. The scheme they came up with took most of a year to come to fruition, and relied on first rigging the entries to the toughest sporting contest in the wizarding world, which Harry was incidentally too young to enter under the normal rules, then on Harry winning the contest and being the first to touch a disguised portkey. It was sheer bloody madness, I could have done the same thing in a few days if I was a teacher that Harry trusted. Or even one he would obey for five minutes."

"How?" asked Harry.

"You go to Hogsmeade. That takes you out of the protection of the spells that stop apportation in and out of the Hogwarts grounds. You see a teacher struggling with too many parcels. He says 'Hold this a minute, Potter,' and when you touch the parcel he gives you the portkey activates and takes you to their base. They keep you prisoner, paralysed and unconscious and wandless, until they're ready to use you for their ritual. Any questions?"

"No, I suppose not."

"Good. Now, are you prepared to take responsibility?"
"If I must."

"I'm pleased to hear it. Now be a good chap and push off, this is Ministry business, and take your friends with you."

"What?"

"This is now an official Ministry of Magic investigation, and I think I'm the only one here that works for the Ministry."

"What about my f'kin money?" asked Tony.

"If we recover it you'll get it back," Percy said in a tone that made it clear that he thought it was unlikely.

"Wait a minute," said Dawn, "What about the mutual aid agreement between the Watchers Council and the Ministry of Magic?"

"What about it?" said Percy, tapping his scroll again, and peering at the result. "Hmm... applies to situations in which either group is in hot pursuit and requests aid. I hardly think a fraud that's several months old qualifies."

"And that's it?" said Angel. "You don't plan to keep us informed, or let us participate in the investigation?"

"Sorry..."

"Okay then, I think we'd better go talk to my lawyers."

"Your lawyers?"
"Wolfram and Hart. I usually do business with their LA subsidiary, I'd imagine they'll be happy to represent us here."

"Good idea," said Percy.

"But.." began Harry.

"Let's talk about this outside," said Angel. "Come on, everyone, let's let the guy do his job." He went to the door, and the others gradually followed him, leaving Percy in the office.

"Okay," said Angel, gesturing for the others to join him. "Let's just talk for a second. Willow, a little privacy please."

"Sure. Sileo" There was a sudden deadness to the air, and a total lack of sound until Willow spoke. "That ought to block out any eavesdropping, magical or otherwise."

"Are you really just going to let that prick tell us what to do?" asked Kennedy.

"I want to get out of here before we don't have an alternative. Okay, Harry, we need somewhere to meet up in about forty-five minutes. Suggestions?"

"Flourish and Blott's bookstore. It's big, it's open until late, and this time of the year it shouldn't be too busy."

"Perfect. Where is it from here?"

"Third shop on the left as you go out of the bank, this side of Diagon Alley."

"Okay, Willow, Kennedy, you take mister Soprano and mister Fiore for a walk, try to get back to the book store in about forty-five minutes, if possible without being followed. Harry, you take Dawn and go shopping, again try to shake off any followers but be there in forty-five. Gunn and I'll go talk to Wolfram and Hart, we'll meet you there. Any questions?"
"Is this gonna get my f'kin money back?" asked Tony.

"No idea, but do you want the magic cops on our backs while we try to find it?"

"'Kay. I'll go along wit' you."

"Pleased to hear it. Willow, you're in charge of them, if they give you any trouble I'm sure you and Kennedy can handle it. You guys really don't want to see what Willow or Kennedy are like when they're mad, understand?" They both nodded.

"Dawn, look out for Harry, I think his death's a lot more important than Weasley claims, maybe the main aim of the plot. And Harry, don't let Dawn get killed unnecessarily, understood?" They nodded too.

"Okay, let's roll." Willow broke the spell, and the groups separated.

* * * * *

"Hi. My name's Angel, this is Charles Gunn. We need an immediate appointment."

"I'm sorry, mister Angel, at this time of night..." said the receptionist.

"Look in your files under 'people Wolfram and Hart really really don't want to piss off unnecessarily', and do it now."

"Just a moment..." she pulled out a scroll, similar to Percy's, tapped it, then said "I'm so sorry, Mister Angel, why didn't you say you own one of our affiliates? Someone will be out for you in a second."

They waited, while Gunn counted slowly. He'd reached nine when a witch in her thirties wearing tailored figure-hugging black robes apparated into the room and said "Mister Angel? I'm Titania Ambrosius, a junior partner here. Can I help you."

"Good thing I'm a married man," muttered Gunn, casting an appreciative eye over her figure, and
said more loudly "You related to a Lilah Morgan?"

"Distant cousins, I think."

"Figures."

Angel said "This place shielded against eavesdroppers and spying?"

"Naturally."

"Good. We need a travel pack. Portkey, preferably difficult to trace. Another to get back to our offices in Los Angeles. Accommodation for eight people, needs to be lightproof and portable. Maps and currency. Food for several days, including blood. And some sort of fast all-terrain transport anyone can use, not just wizards. And we need it in the next thirty minutes or so. Oh, and a way to get out of this building without being followed."

"Where do you need to go to?"

"Romania. Dracula's castle, or somewhere as close as possible to it."

"Hmmm... tricky."

"But I'm willing to bet you can do it."

"For a fee."

"Take Amex?"

* * * * *

"What do you think Angel is up to?" asked Harry.
"Nothing I want to talk about here," said Dawn, "we've got two guys and a cat following us, and I'm willing to bet the cat's a wizard or someone's familiar. Why don't we just go get ourselves a coffee or something and do a bit of shopping, get back to the bank in an hour or so like Angel said."

"Err... okay, yeah, that sounds good," said Harry, realising that Dawn thought someone was eavesdropping on their conversation. "I think the ice cream parlour sells coffee."

"I know what we must get. At the conference I noticed a sweet stall selling blood-flavoured stickers for vampires, I was gonna pick some up for Angel but I forgot. If there's a shop around here let's get some now."

"Stickers?"

"Lollipops."

"Right, I'm with you. Yuck, what a horrible idea. There's a sweet counter in the ice-cream parlour, we might get lucky there... Here we are. I'll get the coffee. Small cappucino for me, and you?"

"Medium mocha, I think, with caramel and whipped cream."

Two mugs appeared on the table, and they picked them up appreciatively. "That's one good thing about magic," said Dawn, "you get really quick service." she took a sip and grimaced a little. "Shame that this is the British idea of coffee, not American."

"Seems okay to me."

"You don't know good coffee. The sooner Starbucks gets a concession here the better."

Harry looked around nervously, but nobody seemed to have recognised him. The contact lenses really did help immensely.

"No chance, unless they've got wizarding connections. There's one in Charing Cross road if you
want to go outside Diagon Alley, can't be more than a hundred yards."

"I don't have any ordinary British money on me, it'll have to wait for another trip. Besides, this isn't that bad, it's just I'm in a grumpy mood."

"Umm... are you still upset about last night?"

"Last night?"

"I sort of made a pass at you after you'd made your call, don't know if you really noticed."

"Okay. Yes, I noticed, and it didn't upset me, but I had some bad news and I just wasn't in the mood for anything like that. Anyway, I told you that it wasn't going to be any sort of long-term relationship, and the reasons are just as good now as they were the night we met. Better, if anything."

"Why?"

"Because of the news I got."

"Anything I can help with?"

"No. We can't discuss it here anyway," said Dawn, glancing at the old-fashioned clockwork watch Angel had given her before they left, knowing that digital watches wouldn't work in the wizarding area, and said "Let's see about the stickers then get some shopping."

* * * * *

Two goblins walked out of the staff entrance at Gringrott's bank and set off down Diagon Alley towards Flourish and Blotts, carrying heavy leather satchels. "I feel like an idiot," muttered one.

"Shut up and think goblin, Gunn," murmured the other. "We've got about five minutes before this spell wears off, we need to be in the book store and out of sight of the windows and the other customers first."
"Sure. Here it is."

"Wait for someone to talk to the clerk, I get the impression goblins aren't their typical customers... okay, here we go, that's Harry and Dawn at the counter."

Angel pushed the door open and they went in, sidling to a dark corner obscured by shelving. They heard Dawn say "..no, I want the Etruscan version. Don't you guys have anything in its original language?"

Angel and Gunn suddenly snapped back to their original form and size. Gunn bumped his head on a shelf as he grew.

"We may have it in the antiquarian department," said the clerk, "but that's madame Blott's speciality and she's gone home for the evening. If you could come back tomorrow?"

"I guess. We might as well look round while we're here, see if we can find anything else for the council library."

The door opened again and looking over a low bookcase Angel saw Willow and Kennedy enter. There was no sign of Tony or Furio, but Willow was carrying a glass jar containing two annoyed-looking newts and Angel guessed that the gangsters had been giving her a hard time. Angel thought he could see several people lurking outside, assumed they'd been following the others, and wondered how long it would take someone to come inside. He reached into one of the satchels and pulled out an object that looked like an old-fashioned pocket watch. "Link hands, wait for the chime!"

The three groups quickly joined, and the watch chimed loudly. Angel flipped open the case and touched a gem inside. For a second they seemed to feel the whirling effect of a portkey, but it ended without them travelling. "Willow," said Angel, "this is supposed to be a portkey out of here, something's gone wrong. Any ideas?"

"Anti-shoplifting spell," said Harry, "won't let anyone apport or portkey out. We'll have to go outside."

"We can't," said Angel, "There's company waiting for us."
"Let me try," said Dawn, flicking out her sword and making a small cut in her hand. "If the spell's already running this might work." She slapped her bleeding hand onto the portkey as the shop door slammed open. There was a blinding flash and they vanished from the shop, leaving a seething whirlpool of white fire, a few inches across, which sent out a few miniature lightning bolts then vanished.

* * * * *

"Where the hell are we?" asked Harry, looking around at a dark forest, dimly lit by a quarter moon, "And how in Merlin's name did you activate the portkey?"

Dawn watched pale sparks dance across her hand as the wound vanished, but didn't answer.

"We're in Romania," said Angel, looking at a map. "About thirty miles from Dracula's castle. What's the time?"

"Nine forty-five."

"Change that to eleven-forty-five, we've moved through a couple of time zones. Gunn, unpack the weapons then transport, this area's dangerous and we need to find somewhere safe to camp before morning. We've got some tents including a couple that are rated safe for vampires by daylight, unless anyone has a better suggestion we'll travel by night and camp by daylight, keep the lowest possible profile. Willow, why did you turn the gangsters into newts?"

"They were bugging me. Don't worry, they'll get better. And they won't remember a thing about it."

"Better cancel it now, we may need them to fight."

"Rats." She tipped them out on the ground, stepped back a few feet, and said "Finite Incantatum."

"What t'fuk?"

"We had to disguise you," said Willow, "transport you here without anyone noticing. Are you guys okay?"
"Where are we?" asked Furio.

"Romania."

"Why f'kin Romania?" asked Tony.

"Because Weasley was lying to us," said Angel. "I could smell his sweat, hear his heartbeat. Whatever happened here is what this is all about. The money's part of it, so's killing Harry, but the heart of it is here."

"What happened back there?" Harry asked again as Gunn was unpacking, taking care that the gangsters couldn't overhear.

"You've seen the power in my blood," lied Dawn, feeling a little guilty, " kinda electric. Sometimes it makes spells work better." She hoped that the tiny portal her blood had made with the transport magic of the spell would have closed by itself; she thought so, by now she'd probably be feeling something if the world was about to end.

"I suppose it worked. What gave you the idea?"

"It's something I've seen a couple of times before. Not something we want to rely on, sometimes it just doesn't work."

Gunn handed out crossbows and made sure the gangsters and Harry knew how to use them, then opened another box and put it on the ground. Inside were ten white mice; as he watched they grew, first to the size of rats, then dogs, then ponies, then horses. Eight had bits and saddles, and seemed to be waiting patiently for their riders, the others had pack saddles. "Cute," said Willow.

"Okay," said Angel, "let's stow the supplies and saddle up."

"Where are we going?" asked Harry. "Castle Dracula?"
"No, although I hope that Wolfram and Hart think that's where we're going. Percy was telling the truth when he said that the raid never got that far. We're heading for the dragon reservation, see what we can find out what really happened. It's about a hundred miles so let's start making tracks."
"Why didn't we leave all this stuff in the Mary Poppins satchels?" Dawn asked as they were loading the mice. "Would have saved us a lot of packing."

"Because they sold Angel the cheap one-shot version," said Harry, "only works until the bag is opened."

"Okay," said Willow, "before we get into the trees and have to ride in the dark, everyone who needs it drink one of these potions, they'll let you see pretty well in dim light for about forty-eight hours. But try to be extra careful about looking at bright lights and the sun, that might be pretty painful. Wear sunglasses if you've got them."

"Did I ever mention I'm allergic to mice?" asked Kennedy, eyeing their mounts apprehensively.

"Why didn't you say?" asked Willow.

"Not something that comes up very often."

"What can we do?"

"I'll walk. Slayer strength, remember. Besides, I'm probably more useful on the ground."

"That won't work. The mice are spelled, they'll be pretty fast. You'd get tired before long. Just a moment..." she touched Kennedy, and both of them glowed white for a second. "Okay, that ought to keep you okay for a few hours, I'll work on something better once we've set up camp."

"All right, but if I get any rashes you're gonna have to kiss them better."

"Okay," said Angel, once everyone was in the saddle, "try to keep alert, but pay attention to where you're going, the mice ought to avoid obstacles but they probably won't spot things like overhanging branches. I'll lead the way, Kennedy bring up the rear, the rest of you watch out for trouble."
"One thing I was wondering," Harry said as they rode through the woods, "how on earth did you get a map showing the Dragon Reserve and Dracula's castle? Both of them are supposed to be unplottable."

"They are," said Willow, overhearing, "but that spell's not as useful as it used to be. The way it works, places on opposite sides of the unplottable area seem to be next to each other when any ordinary map is drawn, even on things like satellite photos. That's all well and good, but given a sufficiently powerful computer and enough information you soon start to notice things; places supposedly a mile apart that have GPS coordinates that put them twenty miles apart, sudden jumps in the earth's magnetic field declination, roads that take big detours for no apparent reason, discontinuities in cloud movements on weather radar and satellite images, that sort of thing. You can't plot the unplottable area itself but it kinda distorts the world around it, like a black hole, and you can use the distortion to plot its boundaries and work out the real map of the surrounding area. That's why the castle and the reservation are just blank areas on the map, not even labelled; if they were marked in any way the spell would cut in and change the map. I found the California Sasquatch Reserve that way, before I even knew that the wizarding world existed."

"What she said," said Angel with a shrug. "Explains why the map was so expensive."

"That's probably why they don't protect Hogwarts that way," said Harry. "Dumbledore must have realised it wasn't safe any more."

"There'll be other defences when we get closer," said Willow, "muggle repelling spells and so forth, but nothing we won't be able to handle. After all, the place is set up for wizarding visitors, they can't keep everyone out."

There was a distant wolf-howl, then another and another.

"On the other hand," said Angel, "it isn't necessarily going to be easy. Let's get the pace up a little, get moving before those wolves come looking."

* * * * *

There was a hint of light in the Eastern sky when Angel signalled for a halt. "We've made good time, about another twenty-five miles to go, and this clearing looks as good as anywhere. Willow, Harry, you want to scan for danger?"
"I think it's clear," said Harry. "No magic, no animals worth worrying about."

"No it isn't," said Willow. "There's something metal buried about half-way across, feels old, maybe fifty or sixty years. Could be a bomb or a mine left over from world war two. Let's see..." Her eyes blazed silver... "Bomb, I think, could still be live. Just a second." She climbed down from her horse and rummaged into one of her bags, pulled out a small translucent grey bottle, and sent it floating through the air across the clearing. About half way across it slowly tilted until a stream of glowing liquid dribbled down to the ground, and grey smoke and fumes rose where it landed. "That oughta be enough." The bottle went back to upright and flew back towards Willow, hovering in front of her. She looked carefully for droplets on the outside of the bottle, then stoppered it and put it back in her pack. In the clearing a thick cloud of dense grey smoke slowly vanished.

"What t'fuk was that?" asked Tony.

"Alkahest," said Willow, "an alchemical potion. Speeds chemical reactions, turns metal into rust, breaks down explosives into harmless residues. They used to think it was a route to the Philosopher's stone but it turned out to be a dead end. Too dangerous to handle until they came up with Teflon bottles."

"Merlin!" said Harry, "How the hell did you get a permit for that stuff? It's lethal."

"Permit?" asked Willow, looking innocent. "Okay, we're clear now, bomb's gone. But don't go off too far into the woods, there may be others around."

"We've got six tents," said Gunn, "looks like four for people and two for the animals. It says on the labels they're self-erecting, 'so easy a child can do it,' but I guess that's if you're a wizard 'cause I can't even figure out how to open the packs. Harry, you want to try it?"

"Okay. These'll open up to about five by ten feet but they're larger when you get inside, we just need some clear spaces to set them up." Harry walked around the clearing, putting the canvas cylinders down on the ground. "This look okay?"

"Fine," said Angel.

"What about digging f'kin latrines?" asked Tony.
"They ought to have all mod cons," said Harry, tapping the first with his wand then walking on to the next. Behind him there was a complicated explosion of tent poles, canvas, and ropes, and a paisley tent appeared. The next had barber-shop stripes, then polka dots, searing fluorescent orange, an op-art black and white spiral that somehow hurt the eyes, and luminous lime green.

"Not exactly inconspicuous," said Angel, "can you do anything about that?"

Harry went round the circle again, muttering and tapping the tents with his wand, and the colours changed to camouflage patterns. "Okay, anyone notice which had the 'safe for undead' stickers?" asked Angel.

"This one and the one over there," said Harry. "At least I think so."

"Okay. Gunn and I'll share this one, Willow and Kennedy, Mister Soprano and Mister Fiore, Harry and Dawn. Everyone happy? Let's get the mice into the stables, my skin's starting to itch."

"You'd better get inside," said Willow, "the rest of us can handle things."

"Okay, but give me a few minutes before you move into any of the other tents in case Harry's wrong about this one being sunlight-proof and I have to sprint for cover."

** * * * *

"This is cool," said Dawn, looking around the interior of the 'tent' she was sharing with Harry, which from the inside looked like a modern city apartment. There were two bedrooms, a communal living area, a kitchen, and a bathroom, all with the appropriate furniture. Windows that had been invisible from the outside looked out onto the clearing and the woods. Dawn tried the taps, and got hot and cold running water and heat from the stove. The cupboards and refrigerator in the kitchen contained a wide range of foods. The wardrobe in her bedroom was empty when Dawn looked, but as she opened the door a dozen tape measures whipped out and briefly encircled her, measuring everything from her hat size to her feet; before she had time to protest they vanished, and the wardrobe filled with clothing in her sizes, ranging from formal wizarding wear to rugged outdoor styles. The only other overt sign of magic was a soft glowing light from the ceiling instead of electric light; Harry showed Dawn how to turn it on and off by saying "lumos".

"Last time I went camping," said Harry, "it was a tent a lot like this, except that it'd belonged to an old lady and smelled of cat pee and damp, and didn't have the wardrobes. This is the luxury model
and looks brand new." He sat down on the sofa and groaned slightly.

"You okay?"

"A bit sore, and my legs are a little cramped."

"I'm okay, guess super-fast healing has its advantages. Do we make breakfast, supper, or just get some sleep?"

"I could do with some breakfast, I think."

"Better make it then, I'll grab a quick shower. I'll have bacon, scrambled eggs, and toast. Oh, and milky coffee."

"I walked into that, didn't I?"

"Sucker." She went to her room, changed into a bathrobe, and came back, humming, to find Harry already under the shower. "Hey, that's cheating."

"From the sound of things I need this a damn sight more than you do. Besides, breakfast'll make itself when we're ready, I just need to start the spell going. You could always join me if you're desperate for a shower."

"I told you all the reasons why I'm not getting into a relationship."

"And I accept them. So let's have a brief mad fling instead."

Dawn thought of protesting then laughed, shrugged, took off her bathrobe and joined him in the shower.

* * * * *
"Everyone settled in?" asked Angel.

"I've shown the hoods how to work the cooker and the lights and stuff," said Willow, "can't say they seemed particularly grateful."

"We don't need gratitude. I'm not sure we need them at all now, but they might come in useful eventually."

"Whoever set this up was thorough," said Gunn, coming in from the kitchen, "Especially from Angel's point of view. Double doors to keep out as much light as possible, necro-whatsit glass in the windows, there's even blood in the 'fridge."

"Probably comes as standard with the 'safe for vampires' model, or tailors the food to the occupants."

"All I've gotta do now is figure out how to get it warm without a microwave," said Angel.

"Heat some water and put the bag in that for a couple of minutes."

"Good idea. How's Kennedy? Any sign of that allergy?"

"Not so far. But I'm gonna check her out fairly closely."

"I'll bet..." muttered Gunn.

"How about Dawn and Harry," Angel asked hastily, "are they okay?"

"I popped my head around the door, but they seemed kinda busy so I left them to it."

"Busy?"

"With things."
"Things?"

"Let's just leave it at that."

"Oh..kay."

"Anyone else in this tent think he should have bought his girl along?" Angel asked after Willow left.

"Oh yeah."

* * * * *

Late afternoon found Willow sitting by the crater in the middle of the clearing, apparently meditating. Dawn and Kennedy were practicing with swords fifty feet away, far enough that they wouldn't disturb her too much, close enough to help her if there was any trouble. Harry was trying to keep track of the combat, the way he could follow a Quidditch game, but his magical senses kept being drawn towards Willow. She was doing something, he just couldn't work out what.

Eventually Kennedy scored a hit on Dawn, hard enough to draw blood from a long gash in her leg. Kennedy started to back away but Dawn dropped, rolled, and came up inside Kennedy's guard. The move finished with Kennedy disarmed and Dawn’s sword at her throat, and she said "Okay, you're dead." Small flashes of light moved up and down the wound, healing it. "What did you do wrong?"

"Underestimated your determination, I guess." They separated and began to clean their blades.

"Corr-rect, give the Slayer a coconut. It takes a lot more than a cut to put me down, and since I don't have to worry about injuries I can fight through them. When I was training my instructor got himself impaled, ran up my sword to get me. If he or I can do that, imagine what a determined demon might be able to do. Here endeth the lesson. I'm gonna shower and find another pair of jeans." She went back into the tent.

"Is Dawn really that good?" Harry asked after she'd gone.
"She isn't Olympic class and she doesn't have Slayer strength or speed, but yeah, she's pretty good, she was taught by a guy who's been fighting for hundreds of years. But it's not having to worry about wounds that makes her a really tough proposition. I could go all-out on her with full strength and speed and do enough damage to put her down, but that'd be a very bad habit to get into, if I did that to any other sparring partner I'd kill her permanently."

"That must be difficult."

"First thing we learn in training is always to keep it under to control. Slayers that don't learn that kill the people they're supposed to be protecting."

"I can see that." There was a pause, then he asked "What's Willow up to? I've been trying to figure it out, but it isn't any kind of magic I know."

"It's Wicca, elemental earth magic," she said fondly. "She's trying to heal the damage from the bomb and the Alkahest."

"She's healing a hole in the ground?"

"Don't ask me, it isn't my scene, but it works for her. Apparently what she did left the ground polluted, poisoning the Earth-Mother or something. She's speeding up the chemical changes, getting rid of the poisons, that sort of thing. You've gotta remember she gets a lot of her power that way, from the Earth, she really doesn't want to piss it off. That's what opens Hellmouths."

"I suppose that makes sense, most wizards don't get their magic that way so it isn't something we learn about at school."

"There's a lot of things that aren't taught at school. Life, love, that sort of thing." Suddenly she sounded a lot more serious. "You love Dawn, don't you."

"I... I think so. I like her a lot anyway."

"Thought so. Keep an eye on Willow while I get something." She went into her tent, came back a minute later with a shoulder bag, and pulled out a wallet of photographs "Take a look at this." The picture showed a short blonde woman, Harry guessed that she was in her late twenties, standing between Dawn and a man with bleached hair. Harry thought he'd seen one like it in Dawn's room at
"Dawn's the youngest in this picture, which of the other two would you say was the oldest?"

"Dawn's sister."

"She's just coming up to thirty. The guy next to her is Spike, her boyfriend. Can't remember his exact age, think he's about a hundred and forty or fifty."

"He's immortal?"

"He's a vampire."

"Oh. I remember now, Dawn said, another one with a soul like Angel."

"The point I'm trying to make here is that when Buffy's sixty, if they last that long, he'll still look the same, like he's in his early twenties, and Dawn will still look eighteen. But Buffy won't, and by then I expect she'll be starting to feel a little bitter about it. And you won't look eighteen either."

"Dawn's already said this. I know that there'd be problems."

"The big thing about loving someone is that you do things together. Part of that is growing together, getting old together. Willow and me, we don't exactly have what you'd call a conventional relationship, but if we both make it to sixty and still love each other we'll be little old ladies together, probably keep a dozen cats and dress up in pointy hats to terrorize the neighbourhood kids at Halloween. I'd imagine that by then Dawn will have changed her identity three or four times, maybe disguised herself a little to avoid embarrassing encounters with old friends. Maybe enrolled in college for the fifth or sixth time, it's a good way for someone who looks eighteen to keep a low profile. But any boyfriend she has now will be sixty, and he'll look and feel it."

"I know all this."

"You know it, I don't think you feel it yet. Let's see if I can make it clearer. Why are you listening to me at all?"
"Because you know Dawn, and you seem to know what you're talking about."

"Any other reason?"

"Because you're older than me, I suppose."

"You're starting to get it. What you maybe don't get is that I'm not that much older than Dawn, I was only eighteen when I met Willow. I look my age, Dawn doesn't. But you're treating her as a girl your own age, not as a woman in her twenties. You can't help it, nobody can, not entirely, our perception of age programmes the way we react to people. Intellectually you know that she's older than you but you don't feel it in your gut."

"I think I see what you mean."

"I hope so. What I'm saying is that once this is all over be ready to let her go, and look for someone you can have a proper relationship with. Dawn knows that there's no future in it, not for you, I'm hoping that you do too."

"What about Dawn, isn't she entitled to happiness?"

"She is, but not if she ruins other people's lives. She's still new to this, remember, it's only been four years, so she has trouble letting go. I think you'll have to help her with that. Maybe she'll find someone eventually, another immortal or someone like Spike or Angel, but in the long term I don't think it can be you. Here endeth my lesson."

"Thanks... I think."

"You're welcome."

* * * * *

"Those f'kin bitches can fight," said Tony, staring out from one of the windows of his tent. "beats
American Gladiator any day. Put this on the stage in the club, maybe wit'm naked or wearing chainmail bikinis, or topless, we'd make a..." He stopped talking as he saw the violent end to the fight.

"Look at her leg," said Furio. "She was cut, cut bad, now it's healed."

"I saw. Loadsa little sparks, like electricity. What t'fuk is that?"

"I don't know. Maybe she's a monster like the vampire."

"Maybe. Or maybe it's more of that magic. Wonder if she's as bullet-proof as she said."

"I don't have a gun. I could try a crossbow."

"It can wait, but think about it. Think about all of them. These bastards know too much about me, and dead men tell no tales."

* * * * *

Angel lay on his bed listening and waited for dusk. In the living room of their tent Gunn was sharpening weapons, further afield he could hear Dawn and Kennedy practicing, and voices. Soprano and his henchman. He eavesdropped for a while, heard almost nothing he hadn't expected, then turned his attention to Harry and Kennedy's conversation. It wasn't exciting, but it was marginally more interesting than reading the month-old copy of the *Daily Prophet* that was the only reading material in the tent, and he approved of most of what Kennedy was saying. Some of it reminded him uncomfortably of his relationships with Buffy and Cordelia; there were encouraging signs that Cordy's demonic traits included longevity, but it would be years before they were certain. If that turned out to be wrong he'd have to find a way of easing out of their relationship without hurting her.

* * * * *

As soon as the sun set they were on the move again. This time Angel was at the rear, and found excuses to keep Tony and Furio near him, a long rambling conversation about gangsters he'd known in Las Vegas and his visits to Italy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and during the second world war. At the end of it he was reasonably sure he'd killed some of Tony's ancestors,
unfortunately not the right ones, or not soon enough. He stayed close enough to make certain that he would be able to stop either of them trying to test Dawn's invulnerability, or attacking anyone else in the party.

At about eleven they started to feel something; an urge to go back, turn another way, avoid a wasted journey, and the mice slowed to a halt and looked confused. Willow raised a hand and said "This is it, the edge of the reserve. Looks like the key is simple, you just have to know that it's there and promise not to harm any dragons and mean it. Repeat after me... This is the Romanian Dragon Reserve... I will not disturb any nests... I will not harm any dragons unless I am attacked... If I am attacked I will do the minimum of damage to defend myself... I enter at my own risk... and am aware that it is a dangerous place."

They all repeated it, except for Tony and Furio. "If you don't say the words," said Willow, "and mean them, you'll be feeling nauseous within half a mile, and unconscious soon after. Alternatively, you could just stay here in the woods. We ought to be back in a day or so. Trouble is you may be inside the area where dragons hunt for food and that could be nasty if you don't have magic for protection."

"Okay," said Tony, "Take us through it again." Willow did, and they reluctantly joined in.

"All right," said Angel, "we're looking for something like a camp site where a small military force could prepare for the mission, once we find that I can track them to the place where they were killed. It'll probably be somewhere on this side of the reservation, nearest to Dracula's castle, but that's still hundreds of square miles. Any suggestions?"

"If they practiced with the mug... err, with modern weapons that might have left traces," said Harry, "like that bomb Willow found."

"Maybe," said Willow, "metal splinters in the ground, in trees. Let me try it. Goddess, hear my plea, lead us to the place where men's weapons have harmed you."

A tiny golden speck appeared amongst the trees and flew to Willow, circled her twice, then landed on the head of her mouse, a tiny ball-shaped bird with red eyes and a long beak. "What is it?" she asked.

"Bloody hell," said Harry, "it's a snidget, they're practically extinct. Wizards used to use them in Quidditch games." It took off again, flew a few yards, then back to Willow.
"I think it wants us to follow it. I think we'd better, the Goddess might have sent it."

"Anything for a weird life," Angel muttered, then said "Okay, let's give it a try. Follow that snidget."

They set off, into the woods, at a slight angle to their original course. Occasionally they saw a flare of flame in the distance, and guessed that a dragon had flown by. None came particularly close.

About twenty minutes later the bird flew off, and Willow said "I can feel it now, somewhere not far ahead. There's been death here, and damage to the woods."

"Okay," said Angel in a low voice. "Everyone be on your guard. Tether the mice here, we'll go the rest of the way on foot."

They set off into the trees, and after a hundred yards or so emerged in a clearing where trees were shattered and there seemed to be no living plants. "Here, said Willow. "People died here, at least five or six, maybe more. Something hurt the trees and the plants, poisoned the soil."

"This isn't their camp," said Angel, "this is where they died. I can smell old blood, decay, body fluids. Looks like the Goddess was feeling helpful. Now we need to find out what really happened."
"This just isn't adding up," Willow said an hour or so later, looking up from a sketch map of the clearing. "We've got seven places where Harry and I are picking up the psychic residue left by a violent death, but Angel says he can smell eleven distinct bodies."

"I'm surprised there aren't any ghosts," said Harry, "with this many violent deaths you'd think someone would hang around to tell the tale."

"We'll just have to do it for them. So, Angel, eleven bodies?"

"At least," said Angel, "possibly twelve. And the smell I'm getting from the other places is a little different."

"How different?" asked Kennedy.

"More abrupt, is the best way I can put it. Like the bodies were already decaying when they were turned inside out."

"They were already dead?" asked Harry.

"I think so. Maybe two or three days."

"You can distinguish the smells that precisely?"

"I've had plenty of practice."

"I can't remember exactly how many were supposed to have died here," said Harry, "but I think the Daily Prophet said ten or twelve. There were no survivors, the bodies were found by one of the dragon reserve wardens about a week later."

"Looking at this plan," said Dawn, "I'd say that the main attack came from above; the area affected is oval and kinda stretched to the west, like someone up in the air to the east did the damage, maybe"
"That's right," said Willow, "it must have been a very powerful attack, possibly Voldemort himself. It turned all the bodies inside out, turned most plants inside out too, poisoned the soil with complex organic molecules that were suddenly the wrong isomer." At their blank looks she said "A lot of organic molecules have 'handedness', two different forms according to the way they fit together. Sometimes a molecule that's safe in one form is deadly the other way around."

"Just one attack?" asked Angel.

"That's another oddity," said Harry, "if we're interpreting things right the spell was used once in the initial attack, at very high power, then a couple of times afterwards at much lower intensity."

"Like someone was mopping up survivors?" asked Gunn.

"No. People didn't die in those places, although there were bodies there."

"Then how did they get here?"

"Somebody planted the f'kirs" said Tony. "One time some guys I heard of wanted to get rid of someone, they were on their way to the swamps when they came across a four-car pile-up on the freeway and stopped to lend a helping hand. They dumped the body under one of the cars that was on fire, everyone assumed it was a hitch-hiker or something. Police called them good Samaritans for stopping to help, never figured it out." The memory seemed to cheer him.

"That makes sense," said Angel, "if someone had a few bodies on their hands and wanted to cover up how they'd really died."

"Brother Caedfel," said Kennedy. "Medieval murder mystery, can't remember which of the books it was. Someone wants to cover up a murder in the middle of a war and dumps the body on the battlefield. I think there was a Father Brown mystery like that as well."

"Did anyone on your side know how to cast the inversion spell?" asked Angel.
"I've heard it's easy enough to duplicate it if you have the right training," said Harry, "it's basically a high-powered version of a spell medi-witches use for surgery with all the safeguards taken off. I'd guess it's easier to cast than the surgical version, if you have the power."

"So there's the initial massacre," said Willow, "and presumably another one occurring somewhere else, killing Charlie Weasley and some of the other victims. For some reason nobody wanted to explain what really happened to them."

"Someone heard about this ambush," said Angel, "and realised that it'll be easy to add a few more bodies. It had to be someone pretty senior in the Ministry of Magic to do it, there'd be a lot of records to change."

"Percy," breathed Harry, "maybe even Arthur Weasley, their father, by then he was pretty much running the Ministry. But why? Why would either of them want to hide the truth about Charlie's death?"

"Friendly fire?" asked Dawn. "They were accidentally killed by their own side?"

"It's an answer," said Angel, "maybe not the right answer, but an answer. They're killed by their own side, and for some reason the Ministry doesn't want to reveal that another operation has gone wrong. Was there any sort of political crisis going on at the time?"

"You're joking, right?" said Harry, "Fudge was on his way out then, five or six different factions were trying to get their own candidates into his place. Arthur Weasley was the popular choice but he didn't have enough political pull to make him a forgone conclusion. Lucius Malfoy had a lot of backing, even though most people guessed he was working for Voldemort, and there was a looney faction that wanted to appoint that bitch Umbridge. Another lot tried to persuade Dumbledore to do it, but he turned them down. There were even people that wanted to ask you to do the job, Professor Rosenberg, once they knew about Sunnydale."

"You're kidding," said Willow. "I hardly knew wizarding society existed then, and in any case I'm a US citizen."

"They thought a really powerful witch..." He tailed off.

"Thought what? Thought that because I was seduced by the Dark Arts once they could get me to use them again? To kill Voldemort and his followers?" Her eyes turned black, and her hair darkened.
She rose into the air, floating above the ground, the air around her crackling with dark energy.

Harry stepped back a few feet and said "Yeah, I think that was pretty much it. Really stupid, you would never have done it."

Willow landed, her eyes cleared, and her hair turned back to red. "They wanted the real dark forces, not just that illusion?"

"I think so."

"Morons. How many times do you have to tell people not to play with fire before they stop getting burned? Oh, push me far enough and I would have probably done it, but you wouldn't have liked what you got in his place. Voldemort was an amateur, he just wanted power over people. I had the power to destroy the world and came within minutes of doing it. I helped to destroy a goddamned city, even if we didn't know it was gonna happen."

"I know."

"And maybe, just maybe, you're starting to believe it. How many others will I have to convince?"

"Relax," said Kennedy, "they were fighting a war, and in wars people do stupid things if they think it'll help them to win. I doubt anyone would want you to do it now."

"They'd better not, because stupidity makes me cranky."

"Okay," said Angel loudly, "let's not get distracted here. At the moment all that we really know is that it looks like the official account of what happened here has deliberately been changed. We really have no idea how it ties into the bank fraud or the attempt to murder Harry. Kennedy, I think you just said something important. People behave stupidly in wars. Harry, what else was going on around the time Charlie was killed? Apart from the politics, what was happening in the war?"

"Not much," said Harry, "not on our side anyway. We were still building up our forces to attack Voldemort's bases in Europe; this raid was always a long shot, they weren't even sure that Voldemort was in Dracula's castle although some of his people were definitely based there. I think the Ministry thought there was a chance they could take him out without a full-scale battle, then mopping up the rest would be a lot easier."
"What about Voldemort? What were his people doing?"

"Some small-scale raids on villages in France and Germany, we'd pretty much wiped out their organisation in Britain."

"There was something else though, something you mentioned. A reason why Charlie's death didn't get much attention."

"Durmstrang. It was a few days earlier though."

"Did it happen a few days before Charlie was killed, or was that just the gap between the reports?"

"I think... I think I heard about Durmstrang at the weekend, someone heard about it in Hogsmeade on Saturday afternoon and bought the news back to Hogwarts. A lot of us knew people from Durmstrang, and it really upset everyone. We were still trying to get to grips with it when we heard about Charlie and the rest, I think Wednesday or Thursday."

"I hate to say it," said Dawn, "but the timing of that is kinda suggestive."

"I don't get it."

"I do," Angel said grimly. "How was Durmstrang destroyed?"

"Fire. There were no survivors."

"And Charlie was an expert on dragons, and we think that whatever went down was staged from the dragon reservation. Suppose he was killed on another raid, one that went so badly wrong that the only way out was to blame it on Voldemort. Maybe they had faulty intelligence, thought Voldemort's men had taken over Durmstrang. Maybe Voldemort's guys had seized the place and it was supposed to be a rescue mission, and they got over-enthusiastic. Whatever, I don't think we're talking friendly fire any more. I think we're talking war crimes."
"How long to sunrise?" shouted Angel, looking at his watch and trying to make himself heard over the wind of their passage.

"Nearly two hours" replied Dawn, checking her PDA and peering over the edge of the carpet at the Hungarian forest a few hundred feet below.

"Why t'fuk didn't we use this f'kin thing the first time, instead of f'kin mice?" asked Tony.

"Too risky," shouted Willow, looking tense, "the spell that makes it fly and keeps us off everyone's radar draws a lot of power, it's taking everything Harry's got to keep us in the air and I can't help much."

"How come?"

"I get my power from the Earth, can't do that at this altitude."

"If she did it," shouted Kennedy, "we'd be trailing lightning all the way, and that'd be kinda conspicuous. Might burn the rug too."

"How far do we have to go?" asked Gunn.

"We're already inside the unplottable area," said Harry, without looking around or relaxing his grip on his wand, "and I think I'm starting to recognise landmarks. I visited once, a few months before the place was destroyed, did a little flying abound the area. I don't think it's more than seven or eight miles now."

"Are you sure this is a good idea?" Dawn asked Angel, "What are we going to find?"

"Maybe witnesses. A couple of hundred people died there, some of them must have seen something. I'm sensitive to ghosts, so are Harry and Willow. You've seen some too, I think."
"Yeah, but that was in Sunnydale with the First around, you can't really count them."

" Granted, but it's worth trying."

"Think I can see something," said Kennedy, "Mountain ahead and to the left, about five miles ahead. Looks like ruins on a plateau."

"You must have good sight," said Harry, "Can't see anything but the mountain yet. I think you're right though, that's Durmstrang."

* * * * *

"Over here," shouted Willow, "looks likes steps leading down to a cellar. Clogged with rubble."

"Let's see how much I can shift," said Angel, "if I can get underground before sunrise I can spend the day exploring, has to be better than being cooped up in a tent." He started to pull lumps of rock from the hole. Kennedy joined him, and Willow and Gunn hastily backed away as the first rocks were thrown clear.

"About twenty minutes to sunrise," said Dawn, looking up from Harry, who had almost collapsed once he'd landed the carpet and put the tents up. Willow came over to join them, and said "Do you want to see if you can draw some power from me, recharge yourself a little?"

"I don't think so," said Harry, "I ought to be fine once I've had some sleep, and I don't think it's a good idea to depend on other people's power instead of my own resources."

Willow grinned, and Dawn said "I guess you did pay some attention to Willow's talk then."

"Of course I did."

"But you were all 'hey, she's so powerful', not 'hey, let's be careful with the power I've got.'"

"Dawn, I spent seven years learning that lesson, with Voldemort as my bad example. You really
think I needed to hear it again? I was impressed, but mostly I was winding you up."

"Winding me up?"

"Teasing you." He added an "Oww" as Dawn hit him in the shoulder, none too gently.

"How's it going," asked Willow, looking towards the excavations.

"Nearly through," shouted Angel, "looks like some extended tunnels down here, lots of fire damage, like someone took a flame thrower to the entrance."

"Or a dragon," said Harry.

"I oughta talk to my wife," Gunn said to Tony, "make sure she and the baby are okay. But I can't get a signal on my phone. How about you?"

"Not here, and not in f'kin Romania."

"You won't," said Willow. "The cell network doesn't extend to these unplottable areas, you can't even get a satellite signal out."

"You can always send her a message by post," said Harry, looking up. An owl was gliding down towards him, and landed on his shoulder. "Hello, Hedwig." The owl made pleased-sounding noises as Harry ruffled her feathers and gave her some owl treats, then untied the scroll from her leg. "Message from Hermione for me, oh, and a personal scroll for you, Gunn, and another for Angel." He handed them over then read his own.

"How the heck did Hedwig get here so fast, and what does Hermione say?" asked Dawn.

"Owls have their own way of doing things, the best guess is that they apparate, but only when nobody is looking. Let's see... Hermione says the hotel was visited by the Department of Magic, asking some routine questions about using portkeys in public. She doesn't think they really know anything, they probably just traced the one we used to get mister Soprano to the hotel. Sounds like Percy hasn't told them anything, wonder why."
"They're probably trying to keep things quiet if it's as bad as we think," said Willow.

"I suppose you're right," said Harry. The sun's first rays appeared above the horizon, and Willow shouted "Are you all right down there."

"Fine," Angel replied, "if you one of you can warm a couple of bags of blood and bring them down to me I'll have a snack then start exploring."

"I'll take care of it," said Gunn, and went into their tent to warm the blood and read his scroll.

Returning to the letter, Harry said "Hogwarts won the quiz final against Durmstrang, they got George Weasley to stand in for me."

"I meant to ask about that," said Dawn, "who exactly was on that team if the place was destroyed?"

"Former students, you'd call them alumni, just a year or two older than our team. I thought you realised, most of the profits from the conference were going towards funds to rebuild the place. That's why I agreed to take part in the quiz, it was being broadcast and the fees were going to the charity."

"Oh... wonder why there isn't anyone working on the place now?"

"No point at this stage, they still need another million galleons or so, and they'd need to start in spring to get the job done before the snow sets in. Look, it's the middle of summer and you're all shivering."

"It's easy to feel smug just because you went to school in the Arctic. Some of us come from places with a normal climate."

"Scotland isn't the Arctic. This place practically is. Anyway, what else does Hermione say? Umm... professor Berkel-Gunn's speech got a standing ovation, and Hermione goes on for about six inches about how important it was. I think I'll wait for the Daily Prophet's version."
"Rita Skeeter's gossip column in the Daily Prophet had a picture of Kennedy talking to Malfoy, describes her as his mystery girlfriend."

"That'll come as a shock to Kennedy," Willow said with a grin.

"Apparently Malfoy is spreading rumours that I've run off to join a techno-pagan commune run by a homicidal muggle, wonder where he got that idea?

"I couldn't begin to guess," said Dawn, looking annoyed.

"Dawn, your sister sent an e-mail asking for information about the Bunyip, Hermione and professor Berkel-Gunn have answered it for you. There's also apparently a picture of her standing next to a dead demonic kangaroo with the caption 'you should have seen the one that got away.'"

"Anything more about platypuses?"

"Not that Hermione mentions. Oh, a package has come for you, sounds like the present you bought at the conference. Okay, there's some stuff for me, hopes I'm being careful, that's about it."

Kennedy came out of the tunnel and dusted herself off. "Angel says there's plenty for him to explore down there, but watch out if you come down because the ceiling is cracked in places and he's worried some of it might collapse."

"Later, maybe," said Harry. "I need to get some sleep first. Anyone wants any messages sent, get them written out on scrolls, there are some rolls of parchment and quills in each tent. I'll send them off later when Hedwig is rested."

"If you want to put in something for your wife," Willow said to Tony, "we can have it posted from Los Angeles or New York, wherever you prefer, or send it by e-mail or phone. Please don't say anything about what's going on, that would cause a lot of problems and we wouldn't be able to send it."

"Don't worry, I don't tell her nutt'n about my business."
"Okay, I think we all need some sleep," said Willow. "I don't want to try talking to dead people without being properly rested."

"Do we have to wait until nightfall?" asked Dawn.

"There might be ghosts we can talk to in the tunnels. It's just after six, how about we all try to get some sleep then meet up for a brunch about twelve, maybe out here if the weather's good, we've got everything we need for a barbecue in our tents."

"Sure," said Tony, "I say it myself, I'm a pretty good barbecue cook."

* * * * *

"Soprano's up to something," said Gunn, as Angel drained his bag of blood.

Angel nodded and said "I heard. There's no way he'd volunteer to cook for you if he wasn't. He and the other guy have both spent a lot of time practicing with their crossbows, and they want to get out of this without leaving witnesses. With me stuck down here he probably thinks that they'll be able to take the rest of you while you're eating, then take care of me when I come out at nightfall."

"Yeah, right. Willow, Kennedy and Dawn, just easy targets. Harry and I aren't exactly pushovers either."

"Don't underestimate Soprano, he isn't stupid, nobody gets that high in a crime family if he is, and I can smell his anger and frustration. He hates us because he isn't controlling the situation, and I think he has what they call rage management problems. He's taking some sort of drug and it isn't working too well, and since we're the only people around he's going to take it out on us. He probably hasn't even thought about how they're going to get home."

"Drug?"

"I can hear the pills rattling in the bottle when he walks, and it's changing his body chemistry a little. I can smell that too. Maybe Valium, maybe Prozac, something like that."
"What do you want us to do?"

"Warn the others to stay alert, and keep me posted if anything seems to be happening. Oh, and come
down here before you eat, maybe I'll have news for you."

* * * * *

"Okay," Tony said in Italian, "the medicine cabinet's like a f'kin pharmacy, that gives us an edge.
This says it's a sleeping potion, 'take two or three drops for a full night's slumber', we mix that with
the drinks and they'll be out for the count. Then we can take care of things, maybe have a little fun
before we finish them off."

"That's good," said Furio, "but how do we get home afterwards?"

"Easy. The vampire's got one of those portkey things in his tent, heard him talking about it with that
Willow bitch. It'll take us back to Los Angeles, we can finish things there then head for home."

"What about the vampire?"

"Put some crosses around the entrance, the black guy and all three of the women have them, then
when he comes out at dusk we throw another cross behind him then shoot him while he's trapped."

"That oughta work."

"There's plenty of wine, we put the stuff in that and they won't notice they're feeling sleepy until it's
too late."

"I don't think the wizard kid or the girl drink wine."

"Okay, good thinking. Doctor some soft drinks too."

"Right, I'll see to it."
"Anything?" Gunn asked a few hours later.

"Explored a lot, seen a couple of vague shapes that might have been ghosts, but I think I scared them."

"Figures. What about Soprano?"

"They've been talking a lot, I tried to listen to what they were saying but there's just too much rock in the way, I couldn't make out the words."

"Damn."

"With that much talking they have to be up to something."

"What's the weather like out there?"

"The weather, what's that... oh. Yeah, kind of overcast."

"That might be useful. Okay, this is what I think you'll need to do..."

* * * * *

"Okay," said Tony enthusiastically, wiping his hands on an apron with an 'I've Seen The Short-Snouts of Sweden' logo, "We've got steaks, we've got fried onions, baked potatoes and salad. To drink we've got wine, beer, some stuff called butterbeer, coke and lemon squash. Better eat quick, looks like it might be going to rain!" He started loading his plate, and most of the others followed.

"This wine tastes a little odd," Willow said to Tony a few minutes later. "Kinda corked, maybe. What do you think?"
Tony pretended to sip a little and said "Seems okay to me."

"This butterbeer's a little off too," said Harry, "must be the altitude affecting the way we taste things."

"Maybe," said Gunn, yawning and sitting back in his folding chair. Soon he began to snore, gradually the others followed.

"Okay," said Tony, in Italian, "that went pretty well. Let's take them out, then get set up for the vampire." He pulled out a hunting knife.

"Right," said Furio, "What should we do, just throw them off the cliff?"

"No, better cut their throats first. I'm not sure the fall would kill all of them." Furio pulled his own knife.

"Or you could just drop your weapons," said a quiet voice behind them.

Tony and Furio turned to see Angel standing behind them, holding his coat over his head to protect himself from the diffuse sunlight.

"You can't do that!" said Tony, pulling out a cross and holding it up to defend himself. Angel snarled, and with blurring speed closed the distance between them and knocked it from his hand. The crucifix flew from his hand and spun out over the edge of the plateau. Before Tony could react Angel followed up with a punch to the jaw which lifted him from his feet and sent blood and teeth flying. Tony staggered but came back at him with his knife. Meanwhile Furio frantically raised his knife and ran at Angel, who was trying to keep the coat over his head. He was half-way towards him when Harry raised his wand and said "Stupefy". Furio collapsed, but the spell missed Tony, who stabbed Angel in the chest.

"I liked that shirt," said Angel, staggering back. He pulled the knife from his chest and threw it back at Tony, who was trying to back away. The knife turned once and hit him in the throat. There was a meaty thud and a bright spray of arterial blood, then flickers of light began to play over his body.
"Another immortal?" said Gunn.

"Yes," said Dawn, looking again, then shouted "get to cover, Angel must have cut his spine!"

Angel dived for the cellar opening, while Willow said "Thicken!", erecting a barrier between the rest of them and the corpse.

"Come on," screamed Kennedy, grabbing Dawn and Harry and pulling them behind a mound of stone blocks, "unless you want to absorb that bastard's quickening!"

"Not if I can help it."

Gunn pulled Willow down behind another pile of rubble; seconds later there was a massive explosion, spraying rocks and fragments of stone in all directions. Lightning danced across the ruins and the corpse for a few seconds, then gradually faded away. Light rain began to patter down.

"Okay," said Willow shakily, "everyone all right?"

"I think we're all okay," said Kennedy, wincing as a last chunk of rock crashed to the ground a few feet away. The barbecue was on its side, and some of the nearby bushes were on fire, but the rain was slowly putting them out.

"You all right down there?" shouted Dawn.

"A little singed and I've had a knife through my chest," shouted Angel, "but I'm okay."

"What about what's-his-name?" asked Willow.

"He's kinda bloody," said Gunn, checking Furio's pulse, "but I think he'll be all right."

"Newt time, I think," said Willow, "we can decide what to do with him later," then shouted "Angel, it's raining now and pretty cloudy, I think you'd be okay to make a dash for your tent, we can fix you up properly in there."
"More of a slow hobble," said Angel, covering himself again as he came out of the tunnel and took shelter. The others followed him into the tent.

"Good thing we were feeling paranoid," said Gunn, "but I didn't expect anyone to end up dead. Not when we were so careful."

"We had to find out what they were up to," said Dawn, "they might have just planned to leave us here unconscious or something, or known more about the impersonation and what happened here than they were saying. Good thing Harry was here to petrify them while we checked things out, then obliviate them once we'd got rid of the drugged drinks."

Harry shrugged and said "They should have just given up once they knew we were on to them, you can't blame yourself for what happened."

"I don't," said Gunn, getting out some surgical tape, cotton wool, and antiseptic, "but we're gonna have to cover our tracks on this one, last thing we need is the mob after us."

"Don't worry," said Angel, "Between Wolfram and Hart and Harry we ought to be able to do that pretty well. He didn't even call home from the Hyperion, so it's not like he left much of a trail to begin with."

"The magical authorities might be more of a problem," said Willow, coming in with a glass jar containing a sleeping newt. "Sooner or later the DOM will work out what went down."

"Is that Furio?"

"Yep. I think you can say I've newtralised him." There was a chorus of groans. "He's a sleeping newty." Kennedy threw a cushion at her, and she hastily dodged and put the jar down on the table.

"Keep him alive and well, we'll want him as evidence that what happened to Soprano was self-defence."

"Was it?" asked Dawn, "That was kinda a lucky shot there, seeing as you'd just been stabbed through the heart."
"What can I say?" said Angel, "I pulled the knife out, had to do something with it. I was trying to hit him in the shoulder."

"And the fact that I'd told you he could only be killed by severing his spine?"

"I'd pretty much forgotten," he said innocently.

"All I can say," said Dawn, "is that it's a good thing that you're pretty much immune to magical lie detection, 'cos if you were Pinnochio I think your nose would be about three feet long." She kissed him gently, and added "Thanks, I didn't want to have to deal with him," then hugged Willow and said "and thanks for getting your shield up so fast, I really couldn't have taken having his memories and personality in my head."

"That's what I thought," said Willow, "glad I could help."

"Okay," said Gunn, "Now that we've dealt with that little problem, is there any way that we can get back to business so that I can go home to my wife and kid?"

"Sure," said Willow. "Just let me get this little fellow parked safely and I'll start trying to see if we can get any help from the..." She tailed off as she realised that nobody was paying any attention; all of them were staring at the door behind her. She turned to see a tall thin man with a large curved nose and thick black eyebrows, wearing a black travelling robe and holding a thick wand.

"Bloody hell," said Harry, "Viktor? Viktor Krum? Is it really you?"
Chapter Notes

Apologies for moving Hungary a couple of thousand miles North in the previous chapter; in the first draft the setting was Finland, unfortunately I changed that but forgot to remove references to the weather and Arctic circle. Hungary is, of course, a lot further South than Scotland.

"Hello, Potter," Krum said with a thick accent, "what the hell are you doing here?"

Behind him another stranger entered the tent, holding an odd-looking wand, a cylinder nearly an inch thick and more than two feet long, fitted with a shoulder stock and telescopic sights. He moved to where he could cover everyone without endangering Krum.

"Whoa," said Angel, "don't need heavy weapons in here, I hope we're on the same side."

"That depends," Krum said grimly, "there's a body outside, you've just released enough psychic force to knock out seers fifty kilometres away, you're trespassing on the site of an investigation, and you're a vampire. I'd like an explanation."

"It's complicated," said Harry. "Could you please put that away, at least."

Krum said something in a language Angel recognised as Albanian; the other wizard silently shouldered the weapon and drew a more normal wand from his sleeve.

"That's not much of an improvement," said Dawn. "Now I'm gonna reach into my pocket nice and slowly and get some ID, maybe it'll help." She slowly pulled her card and showed it to Kroum, saying "Dawn Summers, Watchers Council International."

Krum looked at the card, saw the scythe appear as she touched it, and said "I see. You are here for the vampire?"

"No, he's working with us."
"You are a Slayer working with a vampire?"

"I'm a Slayer," said Kennedy, "she's a Watcher, Angel's a vampire with a soul. Sounds like a bad soap opera, I know."

"Angel. That would be Angelus?" asked Krum. "But what is a soap opera?"

"You're well-informed," said Angel. "Angelus is the monster I used to be. A soap opera is a popular form of muggle entertainment."

Krum said something and the other wizard put the wand back in his sleeve. "Perhaps I should introduce myself to those who don't know me. Captain Viktor Krum, Eastern Wizarding Alliance Special Forces. This is Sergeant Stok. The rest of my unit are outside."

"Captain?" asked Harry. "You were a lieutenant last time I saw you. And whoever it was that's been giving you English lessons is bloody good."

"The paperwork from the final battle finally came through, and I think winning the World Cup again helped. As for the language, I spent two months on a training course while I was waiting for my promotion. It seems to have worked."

"Special Forces? Is that like the Rangers or Delta Force?" asked Gunn.

"Similar."

"Lorne told me about them," said Angel. "More like Spetsnaz or the SAS." Gunn's eyes widened.

"You flatter us," said Krum. "Now, would someone please tell me why you're here?"

"It's a long story," said Harry, "but basically we're trying to find out what really happened here, and see if there's any chance that the Ministry of Magic was involved."
"I can tell you most of what happened," said Viktor, "if you don't already know it. As of now you are our principal suspect."

"What?" Harry asked incredulously.

"Tell me how you come to be here, and I'll explain."

* * * * *

"So that's about it," Harry said about twenty minutes later, "Soprano tried to kill us, and Angel had to kill him in self-defence. When he died there was that weird lightning thing, I suppose he must have been some sort of warlock. None of us had a clue until it happened." He'd carefully avoided mentioning Dawn's immortality, fearing it would cause problems for her, otherwise he'd told the truth.

"Possibly an immortal," said Krum, "I've read that it happens if you sever their spines."

"I guess you're right," said Angel. "Certainly he seemed to fight like he expected to live forever."

"And the newt is another gangster?"

"That's right," said Willow. "Furio something, uh, Furio Giunta."

"And none of this has been sanctioned by the Department of Magic in America or the Ministry of Magic in Britain?"

"I'm afraid not," said Harry, "the Ministry seems to be going out of its way to be awkward, I think they would have tried to stop us if they'd known we were going to end up here."

"Very well. For now I'm prepared to accept your story. It fits in with our intelligence," he glanced at Willow and added "and I doubt we have the firepower to stop you if you're lying."

"Okay," said Harry, "I think we've been good about answering your questions. You said you know
"What happened to the school, are you going to tell us?"

"What we know," said Krum, "is mostly circumstantial. We started off assuming that it was a magical attack, but we couldn't detect any of the usual signs that one had taken place. No obvious spell residues, nothing except a fierce all-consuming fire and explosion."

"Explosion?" asked Gunn.

"The school wasn't just destroyed by fire, it was blown apart, seemingly from the inside, at about four in the morning." He tapped his wand and muttered something, and a three-dimensional image of the school appeared in mid-air, then exploded in slow motion, seeming to burst on all sides simultaneously. "From the distribution of the rubble we know that the blast was spread throughout the school, rather than coming from a single source."

"Not a bomb then," said Gunn, "that'd be a single source. Unless... are we talking a fuel-air explosion?"

Krum swore. "It took us two months to work it out, and any muggle with a little knowledge of military weapons could have given us the answer in five minutes. Yes, it was a fuel-air explosion."

"So someone dropped a bomb," said Angel, "why suspect Harry?"

"Not a bomb. Once we knew we were looking for a non-magical weapon, we found a forensic scientist who was able to analyze the ashes and determine the fuel. It was something called liquefied propane, which is apparently used in the muggle world. Approximately a hundred to a hundred and twenty tons of it, I'm told."

"When I was a kid," said Kennedy, "I went on a vacation to Spain, I remember hearing about a camp site where a propane tanker had exploded, the fireball killed three hundred people. And that would have been ten or fifteen tons of the stuff, not a hundred."

"How did it get there?" asked Harry, "You couldn't move that much on a carpet or even a dragon, and it's way too much to apparate or move with a portkey."

"Some sort of portal spell?" asked Willow.
"Precisely, far enough above the school to be outside the defences. We have detected its residue, although we do not know its precise nature. It showered down like a storm, flooding the central courtyard and flowing into the buildings. As it spread it released vapour and those who breathed it began to suffocate. Eventually the vapour reached something that ignited it; there wouldn't have been many fires alight, Karkaroff only allowed them for magical purposes, but there were probably torches in the dungeons and burners in the potions laboratory. Or someone may simply have lit it from above. Once it was ignited, the rest was apparently inevitable."

"You seem to know a lot about it for someone who isn't a... a muggle," said Willow.

"I've had to learn. And there were witnesses. They couldn't explain what happened, but they described the suffocation and the explosion."

"Ghosts?"

"Exactly."

"Couldn't something have been done?" asked Dawn. "Some sort of magical protection?"

Krum shrugged. "There were defences, but they were defences against a magical attack. They would have stopped the gate opening inside the building, but wouldn't have seen rain as a threat."

"Unless you knew it was coming and what it was," said Willow, looking appalled, "and were prepared to transmute it into something harmless, about the only defence would be to enclose yourself in a barrier spell powerful enough to resist the blast and wait it out. That must have been like ground zero with a small nuke. I'd guess that most of them either died in their sleep or were trying to cast spells to stop themselves suffocating when it detonated. Or couldn't make the barrier strong enough."

"Earlier you said I was your chief suspect," said Harry. "Why?"

"Because you'd been here, could have led the attackers here, and came back here."

"But that must apply to most of the dark wizards in Europe. It certainly applies to everyone who
came here for the inter-school Quidditch tournament."

"Which is why our students and visitors are spelled against revealing that information or using it to harm the school."

"But you let me in without any of that... why?"

"On the contrary, all of you were thoroughly spelled, although you would not remember it. I'm surprised that you were able to lead others here."

"He didn't," said Angel. "I bought the location of the unplottable area from Wolfram and Hart, and Kennedy spotted the ruins before Harry said anything. All he did was steer the carpet as we directed."

"That makes sense," said Krum. "The spell would not stop him from doing that if they already knew where to go, it would be futile. If you would be so kind, I will have our wizard test the spells to make sure that their integrity is complete. He is outside."

"And if I object?"

"That would be regrettable."

"Okay, provided that Willow and Dawn can watch."

"Very good, Harry, you're learning how this game is played."

"Game?" asked Willow.

"Better a game than any of the alternatives, Miss Rosenberg."

"I guess."
"Harry's clean, then?" asked Dawn.

"Yes," said Krum, looking relieved. The wizard who had examined Harry packed away a kit of curious tools and said something to Krum. He translated, "The spell has never been removed or modified."

"Okay," said Harry, "now tell me why you thought it might be me."

"Until Durmstrang was destroyed the Alliance was lukewarm, at best, about fighting against Voldemort. He had his supporters here, and some of them were as bad and as well-organised as your Death Eaters. Ever wonder what happened to them?"

"I just assumed that your aurors..."

"No. The Baba Yaga had a grandchild at the school. She was not pleased by her death."

"Oh shit," said Willow, in a very small voice.

"You know of her?"

"Met her once. Invulnerable, unaging, and scarier than the First Evil. She wanted me to re-open the Sunnydale Hellmouth."

"Why?" asked Dawn.

"I didn't ask."

"What was she offering as payment?" asked Harry.
"Tara. I think she could have done it too."

"And you turned her down," Dawn said flatly.

"You know how many people died to close the Hellmouth. Anya, your friend, a dozen other potentials. Would Tara have thanked me if I'd made it all for nothing? If I did to her what I did to Buffy, pulled her out of Heaven?"

"You could have closed it again. Not like anyone lives there now."

"No I couldn't. Not the way she wanted it opened. I'm not sure much of California would have survived."

"Oh. Okay, I guess you were right." Dawn hugged Willow, then turned to Krum and said "So what did she do?"

"Killed Voldemort's supporters, and their families, overnight. Several hundred of them. Followed by the few officials who dared to complain. And suddenly our forces were let loose against Voldemort."

"So you're thinking it was kinda convenient for the Ministry of Magic and the other guys fighting Voldemort?"

"It's an obvious theory. So obvious that we need to disprove it. If we don't, or if it is found to be true, there will probably be another war."
"Okay," Angel said the following evening, "I think we've got all we're going to get here. We've talked to five ghosts, and none of them know more than we knew yesterday morning. Someone did it exactly as Viktor said they did, there's no getting around it."

"So what do we do now," asked Harry.

"Damned if I know. If someone like Willow had been around just afterwards she could have maybe traced the portal, but it's way too late now, damn thing doesn't exist any more and all the traces are gone."

"You know," said Gunn slowly, "that isn't true."

"How do you mean?" asked Willow.

"Who's the leading expert on portals right now?"

"Fred, of course." At Krum's blank look she added "Professor Winifred Berkel-Gunn, Gunn's wife."

"I've heard the name," said Krum, "but I'm not familiar with her work."

"I am," said Gunn, "guess who sat through three rehearsals of her paper the night before this wild goose chase began."

"Fred's much deeper into the theory than I am," explained Willow, "when I handle portals it's mostly at the instinctive and magical level, Fred's down there into multi-dimensional physics and quantum mechanics. She can open them with a computer, without any magic at all, just by calculating the right equation."

"Okay," said Gunn, "so I'm not into the deep theory, but if I'm remembering this right a portal doesn't just go away. It's kinda like a wormhole, like Star Trek or that X-Treme programme, becomes part of the permanent structure of the universe. And the universe is one hell of a lot more complicated than it looks, eleven physical dimensions if I'm remembering it right, all of them mixed
"So?" asked Krum.

"So part of her paper was about tracing portals; since time and space are mixed up in those extra dimensions you oughta be able to create a portal back through time to another portal before it closed, kinda tap into it. Maybe we could use that somehow, find out where the other end was."

"But..." began Harry.

"Holy crap," said Willow, "why didn't she mention it to me? That doesn't just... Oh boy. It blows causality out the window. You could send messages back through time, change the outcome of events, provided you could find a portal to lock onto. We could even go back to Sunnydale before the Hellmouth was sealed, change things. Save everyone who was killed fighting the First Evil."

"No we couldn't," said Dawn. "I mean we could, but we'd kinda cease to exist, our past would be different so the present us wouldn't be the same and on the whole I sort of like things the way they are. How could you be sure you wouldn't ruin everything, like distracting everyone so much that the earlier version of you got killed or couldn't close the Hellmouth?"

"I know," said Willow, "it's kinda like wishes, sounds good until you have to make sure that nothing goes wrong. Besides, you try tapping into the Hellmouth there's a pretty good chance you'd come out in Hell. Okay, forget that one, no messing with causality. Harry, you were going to say something?"

"Well, it's just that if you start tapping into that portal, aren't you going to get a hundred tons of propane coming out?" There was an awkward silence. Eventually Willow said "That's a good point. We'll need to work on that. Backfires are definitely a bad idea."

"We're wasting time," said Kennedy. "If we're gonna solve this one we'll need Fred, computers, equipment, the whole enchilada."

"You're right," said Angel. "We need to get back to L.A. When's the next window for our portkey?"

"Ten, that's mid-day in L.A," said Dawn, checking her PDA. "That's in two hours and fifteen minutes."
"Okay, let's get packing."

"What about me and my men?" asked Krum.

"Want to come?"

"Of course."

"The building we'll be porting to is pretty big, but it was never designed for an army. Maybe you and two or three of your men, any more and I'd be worrying about someone materialising in a pillar."

"Very well. Myself, Sergeant Stok, Professor Gödel," he indicated the bearded wizard who had examined Harry, "and Corporal Kuryakin," a tough-looking blonde witch with an eagle owl on her shoulder wearing camouflage robes and carrying the first firearm they'd seen in wizarding territory, an AK47 with grenade launcher attachment. "The others will stay here."

"So does the gun and grenades," said Angel. "There's a child where we're going."

"Very well." He spoke in Russian to Kuryakin, who sullenly handed her weapons to one of the other soldiers and moved her wand from a sheath to her sleeve.

"Paranoid much?" said Dawn. "Come on, guys, this is a hotel we're going to, not a fire-fight. Lighten up a little."

"We'll try," said Krum, "but it won't be easy."

"What about notifying the Department of Magic that you're coming?" asked Willow.

"Did you notify us before you trespassed here?"

"Point taken," said Angel. "We'll worry about the legalities when we have to. Let's move it, people."
At precisely noon the group materialised in the disused ballroom of the Hyperion hotel. At once there was a piercing cry of "They're back!" and Cordelia ran forward to hug Angel. Fred arrived a moment later, carrying Alonna, closely followed by Hermione.

"Hermione!" shouted Krum, his eyes lighting up, and he grabbed her hand and shook it vigorously.

"Viktor? What on earth brings you to Los Angeles?"

"You, of course. What else could... Demon!" The last word was shouted as Lorne came into the ballroom, and Krum reached for his wand. Lorne hastily ducked behind a pillar as all four of the Special Forces wizards fired spells in his direction. A huge mirror shattered, and the pillar he was using for cover turned into a tree then crumbled to sawdust. There was an ominous creaking noise from the ceiling.

"Thicken!" said Willow, encasing the wizards in one of her strongest force fields, which also engulfed Hermione and Kennedy.

"Take it easy guys," said Angel, "Lorne's on our side."

"Okay," said Willow, "no shooting spells at the friendly demon. If I let you guys out do you promise not to be so trigger-happy?"

There was a brief pause, then Krum nodded and the other wizards followed his example.

"Release! Now fix things before the damn room collapses!"

All four wizards began to cast spells, to support the ceiling and replace the pillar and mirror. Within a few minutes things were more or less back to normal. It would take Angel a week to notice that the mosaic pattern of the replacement pillar was upside down compared to the others in the ballroom, while the new mirror reflected vampires but not ordinary humans.
"That's better," said Angel. "Okay, it was ten at night when we left, none of you guys have eaten and it's just gone noon here. I think we should grab a bite to eat then get some rest or we'll have the jet-lag from Hell. Anyone got any particular preferences, or should I just send out for a few pizzas?"

"No need," said Professor Gödel, raising his wand. Everyone hastily dodged as four trestle tables materialised, followed by chairs, cloths, silverware and plates, then serving bowls and tureens containing cooked vegetables, savoury lamb stew, salad, and bottles of wine and butterbeer. "I hope this is to everyone's taste?"

"Oh, I think we can rough it," said Kennedy. Everyone sat down to eat.

* * * * *

"Okay," said Fred three days later. "let's see if we can get this sucker to work this time." She clicked an icon on her computer, there was a hum of power as the equipment it was controlling came to life. A tiny spark of white light appeared inside a tank made of armoured glass, with some small ports to allow instruments to be inserted. "Okay, that's where it's supposed to be and it looks pretty stable. We have a portal, not leading anywhere right now. I'll keep it small until we tap into something. Checklist time. Charles, is the camera ready?"

Gunn peered through the viewfinder of a video camera fitted with a bulky image intensifier and a surgical endoscope, a flexible fibre-optic tube a half inch wide and five feet long. He twisted control knobs and the end of the endoscope bent through ninety degrees then turned round like the head of a snake, its lens gleaming in the lights of the Hyperion's ballroom. He said "Most obscene gadget I've seen outside a sex shop," then straightened the tube and waited.

"Dawn, video recorders?"

Dawn stood by a bank of five VHS recorders and monitors. She scanned their displays, then said "All running."

"Willow, containment spell ready?"

"Ready." Her hair was already standing out slightly, as though she were charged with static electricity.
"Hermione, you got the time turner spell ready?"

"Ready."

"Harry, Viktor, got the mobiles ready?" Harry waved his wand and a dozen wasp-like replicas of insects lifted from the table and began to orbit his head. Viktor raised his hand to show her six spider replicants, piled as a neat pyramid in his hand. All of the insects were actually complex robotic units, magically shrunk and animated.

"Okay, everyone with magic, remember not to cast any spells directly into the computer, don't want another explosion. Right, Angel, main switch?"

"Ready." Angel stood ready to cut the power if the portal became dangerously unstable or moved outside the tank, or began to dump propane into the ballroom.

"Cordy, maps?"

Cordelia sat with a pile of paper maps, including the charts generated by Wolfram and Hart, and a laptop running a GPS mapping program. "All ready."

"Everyone else, watch the monitors but be ready to run if anything seems to be going wrong. Okay, I'm gonna start to look for something to connect to in ten seconds... five... four... three... two... one..." She clicked another icon, looked at the co-ordinates it was displaying, and frowned. "Okay, that's the... whatever the heck it is... under that mountain in Colorado, their energy density is way too high for us to tap into. Starting the search cycle again. And... nope, Colorado again."

"Can you exclude those co-ordinates from the search?" asked Dawn.

"Maybe." Fred added to the program's parameters. "Hmmm... yes, that's got it, it's just drifting now. No active portals apart from Colorado. Hermione, let's have the time-turner spell now, set the portal cycling into the past."

Hermione flicked her wand with an odd twisting motion and sparkling light streamed into the glass tank. The hum of the machinery seemed to change pitch slightly.
"That's got it... drifting back nicely. One month... two... three... keep going... that's around the right time... yes! Okay, we're picking up a portal, right general area, right general time. Trying to lock onto it... c'mon... c'mon, darn it... got you. It's a big one, must be at least two feet wide." On her display something that looked like a thin hair was nuzzling against a twisted strand of spaghetti, a symbolic representation of the original portal's path through eleven-dimensional space. "I'm going to have a hard job keeping our opening small here, it wants to be the same width as their portal. Charles, any sign of anything leaking into the tank?"

"Nothing."

"Okay. Dawn, we need an accurate time hack."

"On it." Dawn pushed a thin aerial through a small port in the side of the glass tank and into the portal. "Nothing for the NIST atomic clock in the States or the MSF one in Britain, must be out of range, let's see... yeah, getting a time signal from the DCF transmitter in Germany. You reading it, Fred?"

"Got it. That'd be one-fifteen AM in Hungary, a couple of hours before the attack. Switch to GPS frequencies... okay, I'm getting co-ordinates, so it must already be outside the Dragon Reserve. Cordy, sending the co-ordinates to your computer."

"Got it." Cordy looked at a map display on the screen, compared it to the paper maps beside the computer. "If I'm getting this right one end of the portal is travelling across Romania towards Hungary at about eighty miles an hour, the other is stationary in Romania."

"Can you narrow down the location of the stationary end?"

"Let's see... Yeah, it's shown as a factory on this map, about ten kilometres from the Dragon Reserve, it has rail and road links. Could be where the propane came from."

"Okay. Charles, I'm going to try to open the portal wide enough for the endoscope. When I do start feeding it in fairly slowly, stop as soon as you see something on your screen, or if the portal seems to be becoming unstable."

Gunn opened a larger hatch in the tank and carefully guided the tube into the portal. "Okay... dark, dark, white light, and... here we go. Looks like some sort of factory."
"Stop the tube there and take a look around."

"Way ahead of you." Sergeant Stok, Corporal Kuryakin and Dawn moved to watch the screen as Gunn carefully closed a clamp to hold the tube in place and panned the end through a circle. "Nothing, just lots of machinery inside a building, lots of valves and gauges, look kinda old and rusty.... okay, that looks like a body on the floor. Another next to it, both wearing robes. I think we have dead wizards here. Around some more and... hello, who are these guys?"

"Death Eaters," said Stok. "Or people pretending to be Death Eaters." On screen three men in silver masks dragged another body to one side then moved towards the portal. "Can they see us?"

"The portal's kinda bright and hard on the eyes," said Gunn, "We ought to be okay if they don't look too closely. There's only a couple of inches of this thing showing."

"Can you zoom in at all?" asked Dawn.

"Nope, fixed focus lens."

They moved another body, and Hermione gulped and said "I think... I think that might be Charlie Weasley they're moving."

"Me too," said Harry.

"Yes," said Krum, "I think you are right."

"Then we've been wrong from the start," said Angel. "It really was Death Eaters that attacked the school. They must have hijacked this operation, maybe changed the target."

"We don't know that," said Krum, "for all we know the school might have been the target from the start, the Death Eaters might be trying to stop it."

"Doesn't look that way," said Willow. "They could close that portal any time they wanted to, just
"Okay," said Fred, "Let's try some bugs. Harry, let's have a wasp for each of those guys, and one for each body. Viktor, send in a couple of spiders, set them to home in on the strongest source of magic that isn't the portal."

"Right," said Harry, tapping some of the wasps with his wand and murmuring to them. Viktor did the same to the spiders, then apparated them into the portal. "Wish I could do that," said Harry, as Krum repeated the process for the wasps.

"It's a knack," said Krum. "Comes in handy sometimes."

"There's still plenty of time," said Fred, "Charles, keep filming for a while, see if we can get anything to help identify them."

A few minutes later the Death Eaters came back into view, guiding a huge steel pipe which seemed to be growing towards the portal. As it reached the edge the rim began to bend down until the portal was completely covered. "Three guesses what they're planning to pump through there," said Kennedy.

"No takers," said Dawn. "Still think they're trying to stop it."

"No," said Krum.

"Let's take a look at the other end," said Fred. "Charles, pull out the camera, then I'll try to reverse the connection..."

* * * * *

"That's it," Angel said two hours later, as Fred closed the portal and powered down her equipment. "About what we thought. That carpet had some holes, looked like it had been through a firefight. My guess is that the Death Eaters knew what was going down and attacked by broom soon after they took off, one unit taking out the guys on the carpet while the others went for the propane refinery. They switched the raid from wherever it was originally headed to the school, bombed the place, then switched back to their brooms and dumped the carpet and the end of the portal into the fire once the school was burning. Do we have anything on their identities?"
"Not yet," said Fred, "We need to see what we get from the bugs."

"When will they get here?"

"If everything worked as planned they'll have already made their way back. I told them to go to room 530, the last time anyone was in there was when we had the wake for Faith."

"I'll go take a look," said Willow, heading for the stairs. She came back a few minutes later with a spider and two wasps. "They've been there a few months, I think. Guess the others didn't make it."

"Are you saying that we didn't need to do any of this?" asked Harry, "we could have just gone upstairs and got them?"

"Ummm... We'll have to try that some time. I'm not sure I want to think about it right now."

"Better not," said Fred, "I'm kinda dubious about creating unnecessary time paradoxes. Might destroy the universe or split it into two time lines."

"Dumbledore always warned me about that," said Hermione, "he was a little vague on what exactly might happen, but I don't think it was good."

"Okay, let's not then. Harry, Viktor, can you get these back to their original forms?"

"No problem," said Harry, gesturing with his wand, "Finite Incantatum". Krum echoed him. Three instrument packages, each about the size of a paperback book, appeared in place of the bugs. Fred removed DAT tape cartridges from all of them and tiny hypodermic syringes from the 'wasps'.

"Okay, looks like we have blood from both wasps. Let's see what we got on tape." She put the first cassette into a DAT video player and began to watch; it showed a wasp's-eye view as it flew from the portal towards one of the Death Eaters, landed on him, and inserted a fine needle to take a small blood sample. A huge hand slowly moved towards the bug, which easily flitted free to evade it. It flew off a few feet, circled its victim, then gently landed on his cloak. They all knew that it was programmed to take the colour of its surroundings, so within seconds it would be effectively invisible.
"What's on the data track?" asked Kennedy.

"Just the GPS co-ordinates for the factory so far."

"Can you fast forward this?" asked Dawn, "That's a four hour tape, gonna be a little boring if we watch every second."

"Okay, but watch out for any change." On screen they could see apparently random views of the factory as the Death Eater moved around, unfortunately it was looking backwards so they couldn't see precisely what was going on.

Fred set the playback to x5, then x10, then x20. After a few minutes she said "This would be when they released the gas, but all of the action is out of view, can't see a damn thing. I'll slow it to x5 now. About three minutes later the picture suddenly jumped to a bright swirl of colour then went dark. "Let's take that back and go through at quarter speed.... okay, just here they must have used a portkey, whoever it is was standing inside.. uh, what do you make of this, Harry?" She hit the 'Pause' key.

"Looks a bit of a dump, really. Typical sort of wizarding place... no, there's Dark Arts stuff going on there, that's a Hand of Glory... wait a second, I do know it, it's Borgin & Burkes shop in Knockturn Alley. I was there once, messed up the first time I used Floo powder."

"I know it too," said Willow, "Giles and I went there once looking for some books."

"Okay. No GPS, so inside another unmappable area, no surprise there. I'll take it forward frame by frame. Keep an eye open for people coming into view."

They watched as, with excruciating slowness, the cloak was taken off and thrown into a cupboard. All that they saw of its wearer was a large hand with hairy knuckles. "Could be Borgin," said Harry, "I think he had hands like that. He was killed in the final battle so it doesn't help us much."

"Never met the guy," said Willow, "Giles spoke to Burke."

Fred fast forwarded, but the rest of the tape showed only darkness. "Okay, the wasp would have got
out the next time the cupboard was opened, flown a random course until it started to pick up GPS signals, then headed back here."

"How about the blood?" asked Hermione.

"It's magically preserved," said Willow, "it could still be used for DNA matching but you'd need a lot more evidence to get a warrant. Unless the Aurors work a lot differently to the ordinary police."

"Not that different, there are so many ways to fake evidence with magic that you pretty much have to have a couple of dozen eye witnesses, even then they'd be checking that people's memories hadn't been tampered with."

"That's why it was so hard to get people to believe Voldemort was back," said Harry, "when I was the only witness it was easier to believe I was lying or out of my mind and faked the evidence myself."

"Okay, let's try wasp number two then," said Fred. "I think it's one of the ones we sent to the carpet. We should have numbered them." She put it in the player and it popped out again, a red light flashing on the controls. Fred took a closer look and swore. "There's nothing here, the tape's jammed right at the start. Looks like one of the rollers was defective. So we've got a blood sample but no idea who it comes from or when it was taken."

"Wonderful," said Angel.

"We didn't even get a picture of anything useful through the portal," said Gunn, "seeing as the portal was under the carpet, and the riders were on top."

"What about the spider?" asked Dawn.

"It's from the carpet. We told it to climb round to the top of the carpet and hitch a ride on someone, let's see what we got."

They watched the screen as the spider did exactly that, coming over the edge of the carpet to reveal two riders and a bundle of supplies. Fred froze the tape. "Recognise anyone?"
"The bloke nearer the camera," said Harry. "White hair, Death Eater mask, looks like he's laughing his head off. Bet you a galleon to a sickle it's Lucius Malfoy."

"I think you're right," said Hermione, "but I don't know the other one at all."

"Me neither."

The spider patiently crawled towards Malfoy, or whoever it was, climbed onto his cloak, then as programmed began to scan its surroundings with its camera. Unlike the wasps it had a mobile head and covered a much wider field of view.

"Okay," said Fred, freezing the playback again, "We've got a good look at this guy on the broom. Ring any bells with anyone?"

"The broom's a Firebolt Enduro 02," said Harry, "got a touring saddle and panniers so it's definitely not for Quidditch."

"Why not?" asked Angel.

"It'd be like using a big touring motorbike on a rough dirt road," said Hermione. "You could do it, but it'd skid all over the place. A small light trail bike is better."

"What about the rider?"

"I'm not sure," said Harry, "I've an idea I've seen him on a broom somewhere, there's something about the way he's riding it. Maybe someone I've played against."

"Someone else from Hogwarts?" asked Willow.

"Maybe. Why?"

"You said your school's team went to Durmstrang. Could it be someone else from the team?"
"I suppose," said Harry, not liking the idea, then thought for a second. "Wait a minute. Can you work out how big he is?"

"Big?" asked Dawn, raising her eyebrows suggestively.

"I mean his height."

"If you can tell me the size of something in the picture," said Willow.

"The handle of an Enduro 02 is a hundred and forty centimetres long," said Krum, "The bristles would be another fifty to sixty centimetres depending on how it was tuned."

"Let's see," said Willow, capturing the picture to one of the computers and opening a photographic analysis program. "Hmm... based on the length of the stick he's six feet five or six. That's about one point nine five metres, Viktor."

"Could be Marcus Flint," said Harry. "He was a Slytherin, there were rumours he was a Death Eater, but nothing was ever proved. He left school three years ago."

"Could he have played in an inter-school match in a previous year?" asked Angel.

"No, ours was the first in nearly thirty years."

"Damn. Okay, unknown but might be Flint."

"I have seen Flint play," said Krum, "the riding position is right, but many others ride like that. I would hesitate to accept this as evidence."

"Okay, let's see if there's anything else on the tape," said Fred, fast forwarding again. After a few seconds the broom flew out of view. The tape continued with an hour and a half of flight, then an aerial view of the destruction of Durmstrang, a confused view of flames and violent motion as the carpet was rocked by the explosion. Then the Death Eater the spider was riding climbed onto a
broom, leaving the carpet suspended in mid-air and ablaze, falling towards the ruins of Durmstrang. The broom flew on for several miles, then landed in woods. The screen showed confusing glimpses of three other Death Eaters, then as before switched abruptly to an interior view.

"Portkey again," said Harry. This time the camera showed a palatial-looking hall. "I've seen that place before.... Bloody hell." The wearer of the cloak turned, and a blonde woman with a haughty expression reached for it. "That's Narcissa Malfoy, and the place is Malfoy Hall. I've seen pictures in the Daily Prophet." She hung it on a coat rack, and the spider still had a view of its surroundings. A few feet away a white-haired man removed a silver mask to reveal a pale pointed face. "Lucius Malfoy" whispered Hermione.

"It was him the spider was riding," said Willow. "He's definitely one of the ones that attacked the school."

"He was acquitted of Death Eater activities," said Harry, "Wolfram and Hart defended him."

"Well, whatever he was tried for," said Kennedy, "He was as guilty as hell at Durmstrang. All we have to do now is prove it, and work out what the Ministry of Magic was trying to hide and why."
"Let's take a break," said Willow, "it's about time we ate, and I think we all need a little time to think over what we've seen. Meet in the conference room afterwards, talk things over?"

"Sounds like a plan," said Angel.

Nearly everyone went back to the lobby to eat; Fred remained, working at one of the computers until Gunn came back carrying Alonna, a plate of tacos and salad, and a feeding bottle.

"You got something?" asked Gunn, giving her the tacos and a kiss.

"Maybe. Let me have Alonna. Can you pop upstairs and get a couple of books from our room?"

"Sure, which ones?"

"The Journal of Theoretical Physics for November last year and Arthmancy Today for the first quarter this year."

"Those issues sound familiar. Your paper?"

"That's right. Need to check something."

"Back in a few minutes." Fred began to feed Alonna and nibble a taco while Gunn went upstairs.

"You know," said Harry, "we're still missing a lot here. We're pretty sure that Death Eaters hijacked our raid, what we don't know is what the original plan was, or why they chose to attack Durmstrang. Why the heck would Voldemort want to wipe out Europe's leading source of dark Wizards?"

"Taking out the competition?" suggested Angel. The others stared at him. "Think about it. At that point in the war he was running out of allies and some of those he had must have been thinking about taking his place. Maybe he knew something about one of the people at Durmstrung, a prophecy or something. Or maybe he needed a death sacrifice to boost his power."

"Or maybe their plan was to blame the raid on the Ministry of Magic and get the Baba Yaga to take out Britain's magical leadership," suggested Kennedy.

"Maybe," said Harry. "The other thing I can't understand is why we have two non-magical attacks going on. The Durmstrung attack makes sense, if you assume it was originally targeted at somewhere important to Voldemort, the raid on Dracula's castle makes no sense at all."

"I would have thought that was obvious," said Kennedy. "The Durmstrung raid must have originally been targeted on Dracula's castle, maybe Voldemort really was there at the time."

"He was, but he left a few days earlier," said Krum.

"Proves my point. Voldemort must have had a spy keeping tabs on the operation, had his guys take out the raiding party at the last minute. When everything went wrong someone decided to cover it up by pretending that there had been an entirely separate operation that failed. The first bodies in the Dragon Reserve were the team originally intended to fly the raid, killed by Death Eaters before they took off. The ones that were added later came from the gas refinery."

"That makes sense," said Krum, "but there is no proof, it is all supposition."
"And it still doesn't tell us who planned things," said Harry, "how we came to be using a muggle weapon. Against Voldemort, for Merlin's sake."

"It has to be someone senior," said Hermione. "Someone who could take a muggle idea and put it to use in the magical world. Arthur Weasley?"

"Not a chance. He's interested in muggle artifacts, but he hardly ever goes into the muggle world and he knows less about how they're used than any bright kid with muggle parents."

"I think you're on the wrong track," said Fred. "As Viktor said, anyone outside the wizarding community, and some in it, might know about propane and fuel-air explosions. What we need to find is something that pins it down to a smaller number of people."

"And you've got something, haven't you?" Gunn said fondly.

"I think so. The symbols on the frame of the portal looked familiar, so I ran an enhancement program. They're the ones I developed for my second thesis on dimensional portals, the one that went to the Journal of Theoretical Physics and to Practical Arithmancy."

"But that wasn't published until well after Durmstrung was destroyed. You think that someone read an early draft?"

"It seems a possibility."

"How many people would have seen it?" asked Angel.

"The editors of the magazines and whoever they sent it to for peer review. Eventually the printers, I suppose, but that would have been much later."

"Peer review sounds most likely. Can you find out who did it? Do you still have copies of the journals?"

"Here, I've already checked them. The Journal sent it to Hawking in Britain and Otsuka in Japan. No links to the wizarding world there, as far as I know. Arithmancy Today had it checked by Doctor Abcissa at the Salem Witches Institute and Professor Vector at Hogwarts. Don't know much about either of them, what about the rest of you?"

"Not Abcissa," Willow said immediately, "she's a pure theoretician, can't see her doing anything practical with it in a hurry. Don't think she's got much imagination anyway, when I met her she asked me why I didn't take notes when we were closing the Hellmouth. Hello, fighting vampires here. Well, kinda trying to avoid getting killed, but you know what I mean."

"I concur," said Professor Gödel, "she is undoubtedly brilliant, but her brilliance is all in theory. It would never cross her mind to try to use your work practically."

"What about Professor Vector?" asked Angel.

"I've never met her," said Willow, "Fred's theory girl, I'm more interested in results."

"And I really don't know her work at all," Fred said apologetically.

Gödel shrugged and said "Past her best work. Twenty or so years ago she was one of the leaders in the field, but the quality of her papers declined. There was a tragedy..."

"Tragedy?" asked Willow.
"Her husband was a muggle, a mathematician who was killed by Voldemort shortly before his first defeat."

"What was she like when she was at her best?"

"Remarkable. She was one of the first to realise the significance of transfinite numbers in transfiguration and the first to apply set theory to apportation."

"I never realised," said Hermione, "she was a really good teacher, but she never talked about her own work."

"Was?" asked Cordelia. "Did she die?"

"No, but she retired this summer."

"Transfinite numbers and set theory are both pretty important in my portal work," said Fred. "It's why they sent the paper to her, of course. Wait a minute, was she using a different name when she published?"

"Yes, her married name, Cooper. Until his death her husband co-authored most of the papers."

"'Cooper and Cooper on Set Theory in Apportation'. Okay, yes, that rings a lot of bells. You're right, she was brilliant in her time."

"It sounds like she was well up on maths theory, not just arithmancy," said Willow. "She must have been reading our journals as well as the ones published in the wizarding world."

"It sounds like she's the person we need to talk to," said Angel. "She's intelligent, has the background we're looking for including links to the muggle world, and a good reason to want to hurt Voldemort. The trouble is that she's in Britain and I have a feeling that Percy Weasley will lock us up and throw away the key if we go back there."

"She isn't, you know," said Harry, "She's at the conference. Or was before all this started, anyway."

"Is the conference still on?" asked Gunn.

"Until the end of the week."

"Okay," said Angel, "If all of us go there we'll start a riot. Who has a pass?"

"Dawn," said Harry, "Hermione, me, Willow, Kennedy and Fred."

"It's still daylight so I can't go, but maybe Cordy, Viktor and Gunn could tag along, it should be easy enough for you to take them in as guests. Find her and invite her back here. If she doesn't want to come don't push it, but find out where she's staying and see if she'll talk about this. Above all, stay with her and watch her back."

"Why the sudden urgency?" asked Cordelia.

"Just a feeling. We've been turning over a lot of rocks, making a lot of waves, by now people may be worrying about what we're going to find out, and they've probably guessed we're back in LA. If anyone's watching the Hyperion they'll know. It's just possible that someone will decide that they don't want us talking to her."

"Okay," Gunn said as they crossed one of UCLA's car parks towards the convention site, "let's split into smaller groups. Me with Fred and Willow, Harry with Dawn and Kennedy, Hermione with
Viktor and Cordy. That gives us at some muscle and at least one wizard or witch per group. Everyone happy with that?" There were nods of agreement from the others. "Let's try to keep things casual. We'll meet at the cars at five, if anyone has to go earlier leave voicemail, we can pick it up outside the convention. Everyone wearing clockwork or magic watches, and got your PDAs and phones switched off or screened against magical damage?" More nods of agreement. "Okay, let's check in."

"Swords!" Cordelia said enthusiastically as she, Hermione, and Viktor walked through the market section and stopped at the stall where Dawn had bought Angel's present. "I could do with a new rapier."

"Is everyone in Los Angeles in love with weapons?" Hermione asked, exasperated, as Cordelia and Viktor began to discuss the merits of the blades on display.

"It's kinda an acquired taste," said Cordelia, reluctantly turning from the display, "but maybe you've got a point. We're supposed to be looking for the professor. Where would someone with her interests be right now?"

"There's nothing in her field listed in the programme at the moment," said Hermione, "but her name is glowing on the membership list so she's here somewhere."

"Is there any way to contact her?" asked Cordelia.

"Maybe the voodoo board, but it's really only supposed to be for emergencies."

"Why?"

"Well, you stick a pin in her name to get her attention of course, obviously it's going to hurt her a little."

"I think we had better find her quickly," Viktor said quietly. "We're not the only ones looking for her."

"What do you mean?" asked Hermione.

"Do you see those two wizards in grey robes, about twenty metres ahead of us? When they passed us I noticed that one of them was looking at a photograph of her."

"Then we'd better follow them," said Cordelia. "With luck they'll lead us right to her."

"You realise that none of us actually know what the professor looks like?" asked Fred.

"Damn," said Gunn, "knew I'd forgotten something. I should have set the groups up differently."

"Don't worry," said Willow, "everyone's wearing name badges. We just need to keep looking for women in their sixties, then check the badge."

"Couldn't we use some sort of spell to find her?"

"There's so much magic around here it'd be difficult, since I don't even know her."

"I hope we can find her soon," said Fred, "I'm worried that Angel will forget Alonna's evening feed if we're late."

"Don't worry," said Willow, "I set up an alarm clock spell. He'll remember."
"That ought to do it," said Fred. "If we can't find the professor, could we find her badge instead?"

"Maybe. Yeah, that might work. Give me a couple of minutes..." She began to rummage around in her bag, pulled out some modelling clay, and deftly moulded it into a replica of a blank badge, then began to talk to it. The name "Prof. Hilda Vector" appeared on the badge. She said "Lepidoptera" and it glowed gold for a second then transformed into a golden butterfly, poised on Willow's finger. She said a few more words then gently blew on it. It flapped its wings and flitted off over the crowd. "Okay," said Willow, "follow that butterfly!"

"You just had to say that, didn't you," said Gunn, and they set off in pursuit.

"It's that bastard Malfoy's fault," panted Dawn, "he started the rumours, as far as I could make out half of them think I'm a disguised Veela, the others think I'm carrying your love-child."

Kennedy appeared in a narrow alley between two tents ahead and stood to one side to let them pass, saying "Keep going." Behind them they heard a series of loud thumps and crashes, and looked back to see the two tents collapse into the alley, a heaving mass of canvas burying the reporters. Kennedy slid out from under the wreck on the far side, pushed two stakes into the edge of the canvas with Slayer strength, jumped more than twenty feet to land on their side and repeated the process, then strolled back to them. "That ought to keep them pinned down for a few minutes."

"That big lump's Rita Skeeter," said Harry, briefly thinking of throwing something large and heavy at her then deciding that a hasty retreat might be a better idea.

"Okay," said Dawn, "let's get out of sight and see if we can disguise ourselves somehow."

"In there," said Harry, gesturing at a tent with a sign reading

**Zonko's Joke Shop**

*a division of*  
Weasley's Wizarding Wheezes Ltd.

"Any idea who they are?" asked Hermione, gesturing towards the wizards Victor had spotted.

"They could be aurors," said Viktor, "they have that look about them. And don't point, they might notice."

"Sorry, I'm not used to this sort of thing."

"There's something about them," said Cordelia, "I'm getting an odd feeling... whoever they are, they're up to no good."

"You're a seer?" asked Viktor.

"Used to be, but I lost that part of my power."

"What's left? Nobody really explained what you do."

"Occasional levitation episodes which would be more useful if I got more than six inches off the ground and could actually control it, I can sometimes heal and purify things, and more often than not my instincts turn out to be right."
"I think they are," said Viktor, "One of them is carrying two wands, one in his belt and one in a sleeve. I can see the end when he moves his hand."

"So?" asked Hermione.

"It is possible that he's simply carrying a spare, but assassins have been known to carry an untraceable second wand, use it once, then discard it."

"Any sign of Vector?" asked Cordelia.

"No," said Hermione, "but those wizards are heading towards the American Arithmancy Association tent. Maybe they think she's there."

"It went between those tents," said Gunn.

"I think it went more to the right," said Fred.

"Are you looking for this?" asked an attractive dark-haired witch in her twenties wearing a cabaret magician's outfit with top hat, tails, fishnet tights and stiletto heels. The butterfly was poised on her finger, inert, its wings drooping.

"Yeah," said Gunn, "and somehow I doubt that you're the person it was trying to find."

"Down boy," muttered Fred.

"I'm sorry, it flew into my hair," said the witch. "Who were you after?"

"Professor Vector," said Willow, trying hard not to stare at her legs.

"Don't know her, but... rotcev rossefop dnf." As she spoke she tapped the butterfly with a shiny black wand. It came back to life, lifted from her fingers, circled her head, and flew down one of the aisles of tents.

"Thanks," said Gunn, turning to follow.

"My pleasure."

"Haven't I seen her on TV?" Fred asked as they walked on.

"She's been on Letterman a few times," said Willow. "Wow, I've got to get one of those outfits."

"I can't see you wearing that in public," teased Fred.

"Who said anything about public? I was thinking more, well, bedroomy. To.. um.. amuse Kennedy. She really liked the pointy hat I got for Fairest of them All."

"If Charles' reaction is anything to go by you might be on to a winner there."

"This way," Gunn said hastily, "or we'll lose it again."

"Your friends have an odd sense of humour," said Dawn, adjusting the caricature Harry Potter mask and giant spectacles Fred and George had given her. "I look like Elton John."

"I don't think it's that bad," said Harry, disguised as Dumbledore, "but this beard tickles."

"Between the mask, the day-glo robes and the balloons no-one will look at you twice."
"Ha bloody ha." The balloons were bright orange, about a foot across, played a tune Dawn didn't recognise in a slightly flat key, and were labelled 'ZONKO' in large animated letters. Occasionally one exploded, turned into a pigeon, rained confetti on Harry and Dawn, or otherwise misbehaved. Somehow the bunch never got smaller.

"Any idea where we should go?" Kennedy asked, unrecognisable behind a troll mask, "I'm beginning to get a bad feeling about this, I think Angel may have been right."

"Slayer instinct?" asked Dawn.

"That and I think I recognised someone just now, one of the wizards that was following you two in Diagon Alley."

"Do you think he knows where Professor Vector is?"

"No, he was looking around like we were. He went off that way, lost him in the crowd."

"That way?" asked Dawn, looking at the map in her programme. "The American Arithmancy Association has a tent over there, next to the big refreshment tent. Got to be where he's headed."

"Show me," said Kennedy, took a quick look at the map, then ran off towards the tent.

Harry and Dawn began to follow, then Harry did a double-take and said "Wait a minute, it's five past four. Come on, this way..."

Alice Abcissa was signing copies of her new book "Arithmancy And You" when the trouble began. The interior of the AAA tent was set up as a replica of Escher's Relativity, and the queue stretched across the floor, up the stairs and onto one of the walls, and half-way across the ceiling.

"...and this one's for my nephew Hocus," said the grey-haired old witch who had presented her with seven copies of the slim volume, and Alice groaned inwardly as she tried to think of something new to write for each book.

Two wizards came in through one of the floor level doors and started to look round, ignoring the books and instruments on display and staring rudely at the staff and visitors. Both of them seemed to glance at Alice at the same time, and she was sure that there was something malignant in the way that they were looking at her. They began to push past the customers towards her, and one of them produced a wand from his sleeve, the other threw a black glass sphere to the floor. It burst, and the tent began to fill with dense grey smoke.

A wizard, a young witch, and a woman in muggle clothes ran in at the door in the ceiling and sprinted across the wall towards the stairs, the witch shouting "Stop them! Assassins!" Someone screamed "Death Eaters!" and the crowd began to mill around in a panic. Alice ducked under the table, trying to remember what she'd done with her wand. There was a blinding white light and the smoke vanished; as the light faded a little she saw the muggle, or whatever she was, floating in mid-air, her eyes and mouth glowing brilliant white. A man and two women ran in across the ceiling and looked around. One of the women floated down (or up) into the air, her hair changing from red to white, and threw a bolt of purple lightning at one of the assassins. She missed but he dived for cover under another table, the other grabbed the old witch and began to bring his wand towards her head. The other two newcomers dashed towards another flight of stairs. Alice belatedly recognised the second airborne woman as Professor Rosenberg and desperately scrambled under the most solid cover she could find, a display cabinet containing a model of the proposed new Arithmancy wing at the Massechussets Institute of Thaumaturgy on Nantucket. Another woman in muggle clothes dashed across the rear wall and leaped an impossible distance into the air, her trajectory curving as
she left the gravity of the wall and fell towards the floor. She landed in a crouch just behind the standing assassin and Alice saw she was wearing a troll mask. She chopped the wand from the assassins hand, and he fell back, dropping another ball. More smoke erupted; after that things became a little confused.

Somewhere in the smoke at least a dozen people were firing off spells, although what they thought they were doing was beyond Alice's comprehension. There was pandemonium, and she could only distinguish occasional voices:
"Stupefy!"
"Help!"
"Aveda Ka..urgh!"
"Accio Kalashnikov!"
"Oblivi..yaargh!"
"Ouch!"
"Sorry, thought it was one of them."

Gradually the noise ended and the smoke cleared. Both of the assassins were lying on the floor in full body binds, one of the wizards who had run to help was mopping a bleeding nose with one hand and holding an odd metal thing in the other - could that really be Viktor Krum? - and Professor Rosenberg was comforting the old witch and saying "I hope you're all right, Professor Vector."

The old lady looked at her dazedly and said "Professor Vector? I'm not Professor Vector!"

"You're not?" said Professor Rosenberg, doubt evident in her voice.

"Certainly I'm not. What do you think, I don't know who I am?" and pointed at her name badge, which read "Mimsy Cottlethorpe - Curse Research Organisation of Nebraska (CRONE)."

"Then where the heck is Professor Vector?"

"Here," said a young wizard with a British accent wearing an improbable-looking false beard, accompanied by a girl in muggle clothing and another elderly witch who looked vaguely like Mimsy Cottlethorpe. "I suddenly realised it was tea time, we found her in the refreshment tent."

"Okay," said the other floating woman, landing on the tent floor, her glow slowly disappearing. "We'll go and get the aurors, everyone else stay here and stop these two assassins from escaping."

There was a stunned silence as they hustled Professor Vector out of the tent. It took several minutes for anyone else to think of going for help.
"This really is very irregular, Granger," Professor Vector said as she was hustled to the car park.

"It's for your own safety," said Harry.

"Is that you, Potter?" Harry remembered that he was still wearing the Dumbledore mask the Weasleys had given him and discarded it.

"Yeah. Sorry, Professor, but it really is important. We think someone might try to hurt you."

"But why?"

"We're not sure," said Viktor Krum, catching up with them, "but it has something to do with the destruction of Durmstrung."

"Oh. I see." She swayed slightly, and Hermione was afraid that she was about to faint.

"Professor? Are you all right?" asked Harry.

"What?"

"Are you all right, Professor?"

"I'm sorry," said Professor Vector, "It's a bit of a shock."

"What is?" asked Hermione.

"All this." They reached Cordelia's SUV, she opened the doors and started the engine.
"Professor, this is our car. Could you get in, please, I think we're a bit conspicuous out here."

"Where are you taking me?"

"Somewhere safe."

"That might be a good idea."

* * * * *

"You have to understand that we were losing the war," said Professor Vector, looking around the conference room at the Hyperion.

"Losing?" asked Angel. "I thought that by that time you had Voldemort on the run."

"It may have looked that way, but appearances can be deceptive. He was retreating, but still had most of his strength and was still gaining allies."

"How do you know that?" asked Krum.

"I was a consultant for the Ministry of Magic."

"Merlin!" said Harry, "You kept that one quiet."

"Voldemort was ready to kill anyone prepared to stand against him. The Ministry, the parts of it that were actually effective against him, was one of his main targets. There were a dozen very carefully planned assassinations in your last two years at Hogwarts."

"I never realised."

"Why should you? They were lost in the general mayhem caused by the Death Eaters. Voldemort
didn't mind people knowing that they killed people, but he worked hard to make it look like they were just random targets. In fact he was destroying the most able minds of the wizarding community, leaving his allies and nonentities like Fudge to run things. Arthur Weasly survived because until late in the war Muggle Artifacts seemed the least significant part of the Ministry, so Voldemort was slow to turn his attention that way. I think he'd genuinely forgotten how destructive muggles can be. We used his neglect as cover for our plans."

"Cover for what?" asked Angel. "My guess is a weapons programme, something like the Manhattan project."

"Good heavens no, nothing so... well, so expensive. We were trying to destroy Voldemort on a shoestring, adapt anything we could think of to do it, entirely unofficially. Professor Berkle's paper was a godsend."

"What went wrong?" asked Harry.

"We were betrayed."

"Who by?"

"By whom, Harry," Professor Vector said reprovingly.

"By whom then."

"I wish I could tell you, but you'll have to ask elsewhere."

"Professor," said Cordelia, "your life may be in danger, don't you think you should tell us?"

"I would if I could, my dear, but I think you misunderstand. I can't tell you because I never knew. It was someone senior, that I'm sure of, the Death Eaters knew exactly when and where to strike. There can't have been more than a handful of people who knew enough."

"If you don't know," said Angel, "why was someone trying to keep you from talking?"
"I really have absolutely no idea."

"Damn."

Gunn came in with a mobile phone in his hand and said "I think we have other problems. I've just been speaking with Wesley, he says he can keep the Department of Magic off our backs for maybe another day, but only if Professor Vector speaks to them and they make sure she isn't being held against her will. Harry needs to talk to them too."

"What about the assassins, if that's what they were?" asked Angel.

"The Department of Magic has them in custody, but both of them seem to have taken some sort of amnesia potion. They think they can identify it and give them an antidote but it'll take at least a couple of days."

"Why is Wes being so helpful?" asked Fred. "Why did he even call us?"

"The deal we cut with Wolfram and Hart still has a few advantages for us. One of them is that they're our attorneys of record, so anyone wanting to bust us legally has to get past the evil lawyers first, and they have to keep us posted. And like it or not, they're goddamned good at what they do."

"I'd better get on to Giles," said Dawn, "These days the Watchers have a lot of pull with the magical side of the government, here and in Britain. I'm pretty sure we can make a case for this being Council business."

"That's good," said Angel, "but sooner or later we're going to have to face the music. Or were you forgetting Soprano? The guy we kidnapped and killed?"

"That was self-defense," said Willow, "and you've got five witnesses to say so."

"Wouldn't have happened if we hadn't snatched him."
"Actually I doubt that the Department of Magic will be too worried about that," said Hermione. "I've been reading up on American wizarding law, if I'm interpreting it correctly we're okay. Your intention was to question him about an attempt to kill a wizard and a breach in the secrecy of the wizarding world then release him, right?"

"That's right, I guess. He volunteered to come to Britain with us."

"Then I think it's all right. Your lawyers will have to handle the paperwork, but I think you can justify it as the equivalent of a citizen's arrest under the terms of the Uniform Code of Wizarding Justice. When he attacked us he was acting as a free agent, so killing him was self-defence. There are at least a dozen cases that support that interpretation."

"Wow," said Dawn. "Hermione, if you ever want to think about a research career with the Watcher's Council look me up, I'll give you contact details. You're exactly the kind of person we're looking for." Hermione blushed. "Just to be on the safe side I'll phone Giles, can't hurt to have the Council ready to help us." She went out to the lobby to make the call.

"Getting back to business," said Angel, "are you sure that you have no idea who betrayed you, Professor?"

"None at all. Very few people knew all the details."

"Could you give us a list? If we're right there's still a Death Eater spy in the Ministry of Magic. I think it needs to be investigated."

"You still don't understand," said Vector. "It wasn't like that. I really don't know who was involved. It was better that way. Percy insisted on it, he said that..."

"Percy?" interrupted Harry. "Percy Weasley?"

"Yes, of course. He was my liason with the Ministry."

"Bloody hell..."
Out in the hotel garden a plump beetle with eye markings a little like ornate spectacles landed on the rim of an old ornamental fountain, full of green-scummed water. Rita Skeeter still had contacts in the Ministry of Magic, and the diplomatic section was in an uproar about the kidnapping of Professor Vector. Finding where she was being held had cost a small fortune, but in the post-war boom the Daily Prophet wasn't short of Galleons. If her informant was right Vector wasn't alone here; Harry Potter and Viktor Krum were also present, along with their muggle abductors. If she could only get inside without being spotted, and ahead of the aurors who couldn't be far behind, it would be the story of the century. She watched from the rim, studying the back of the hotel and looking for a way in.

Behind her, concealed by the surface layer of scum, the newt that had once been Furio Giunta hungrily eyed her and slowly drifted into striking range.

* * * * *

"It looks like the Department of Magic is going to stay out of our hair for now," Angel said that evening. "Wes even got them to retroactively okay Viktor's entry into the country, and the rest of his team." He sounded tired.

"What is the problem," asked Viktor. "Surely it is good that we are no longer illegal."

"It's not that, it's just discouraging to see them manipulate the system so easily. I know that this time it's in a good cause, but they'd do the same thing for pond scum if it paid their fees."

"Are you sure that this is a good cause?" asked Cordelia.

"I don't understand."

"What happens if we solve this, and it turns out that someone in the Ministry of Magic was responsible for the destruction of Durmstrung?"

"I guess the Ministry arrests them. Why?"
"That's not the end of it though. Not with the Baba Yaga on the warpath."

"I know."

"Oh crap," said Willow. "I'd forgotten her."

"About that," said Angel, then hesitated. "Wesley told me something else."

"What?"

"Around the time you were busy at the wizard's conference this afternoon there was an incident in Britain. Someone killed Lucius Malfoy and burned his manor half to the ground. Eight other casualties with serious injuries including his wife, the attacker was described as a crone riding inside a giant flying bowl and waving a huge club. Ring any bells?"

"If the bowl was a mortar and the club was a pestle it's the Baba Yaga," Viktor said calmly.

"You don't sound very surprised."

"She has her ways of learning things."

"Yes," Angel said flatly. "Especially if she has someone on the inside taking notes for her."

"Taking notes?" asked Dawn.

"While you were all out this afternoon I heard a popping noise from upstairs, the noise you hear when someone apports. So I got curious and took a look around. Sergeant Stok and Professor Gödel were playing pool in the bar, but I couldn't find Corporal Kuryakin. Couldn't hear her either, not anywhere in the hotel. So I went up to the rooms your people are using and sniffed around, and realised that I knew her scent."

"You know Corporal Kuryakin's scent?" asked Viktor.
"That's right. Where is she, anyway?"

"She and Professor Gödel are making some potions, I think. Why?"

"How much do you know about her?"

"What?"

"What is she? Another grand-daughter? A grand-niece?"

"I don't understand."

"She's blood kin to the Baba Yaga. Mostly human, I think, but there's some demon in there too. She's related."

"You're sure of this?"

"Positive."

"Then I won't try to deny it."

"And you were planning to tell me about this when, exactly?"

Viktor shrugged, and said "If it became necessary. Perhaps we should talk to her."

* * * * *

They found Kuryakin and Stok in one of the unfurnished bedrooms, now fitted out as an improvised laboratory. She was pouring a bubbling liquid through a coffee filter into some small ceramic bottles,
Kuryakin finished pouring the potion and said "I presume you refer to my grandmother."

"Grandmother?" asked Willow.

"The Baba Yaga."

"If she's your grand-mother..." began Harry.

"We are a long-lived family."

"What the hell is grand-daughter of the Baba Yaga doing playing soldier?" asked Angel. "That's a big-time wizarding family, I'd expect you to be running the... what is it called these days, the People's Bureau of Magic?"

"If you mean the People's Revolutionary Bureau of Magic, that name hasn't been used since the end of the Cold War. It's the Eastern Wizarding Bureau. And I don't wish to run it, I prefer a more practical way of life."

"As a corporal?" Angel asked skeptically.

"It has been my experience that attention is usually concentrated on officers, leaving the other ranks a certain amount of freedom to act unobserved. It was often useful when dealing with the old regime."

"Which one, the communists or the Tsar?"

"Both, of course. I'm surprised it took you so long to notice me, we have met before."

"We have?" Angel couldn't conceal his surprise.
"Vienna 1875. You tried to drink my blood, I flayed you and left for the ravens. How did you escape?"

"Darla had me cut down. About ten minutes before dawn, I think, took me a month to recover." There was a reminiscent half-smile on his face. "I remember now, you used to hang with the vengeance demons. Should have known drinking your blood would be a bad idea."

"Anyanka or Halfrek?" asked Dawn.

"You know them?" asked Kuryakin.

"Knew," said Willow. "They're both dead. D'Hoffryn killed Halfrek, Anya gave up her powers and was killed in the fight when we closed the Hellmouth."

"I knew Halfrek was dead, I hadn't heard about Anyanka." She looked a little sad.

"Getting back to the point," said Angel, "did you tell your grandmother about Malfoy?"

"Of course. Do you doubt that he was involved? He killed my cousin and everyone else at that school."

"But we didn't have proof!"

"And now you won't need it. When we have more names I'm sure that she will kill them too. My grandmother lacks faith in the English wizarding courts. Malfoy had already escaped them twice."

"Did it occur to you or your grand-mother that we might need to question him?"

"I'm sure it occurred to her. I doubt that she cared."

"Well, if she keeps on doing this we'll never find all of the killers."
"Very well, I'll ask her to wait." She turned back to her potion-making.

"And that's it?" asked Harry.

"Any solution that doesn't involve the Baba Yaga destroying Britain works for me," said Willow. "If she gives us time to investigate this properly maybe we can talk her into giving the courts another chance."

"But.."

"Do you want to argue with her?" asked Angel, heading for the door, followed by Willow, leaving Viktor behind.

"Leave it," said Dawn. "We'll talk downstairs." She took his arm and pulled him outside, still spluttering his protest. As soon as they were out of the room she gestured for silence and led him downstairs.

"What the hell was that about?" asked Harry, as soon as they were back in the lobby.

"You don't argue with the Baba Yaga, Harry, she makes Voldemort look like Little Mary Sunshine."

"What?"

"Kuryakin," said Willow. "Did you really think that the Baba Yaga would send a granddaughter for this? It's a matter of her honour, she sees to it personally. If she isn't a metamorphmagus she's got some kind of potion that's a hell of a lot better than polyjuice. First time I've really looked at her properly."

Harry asked Dawn "But how did you know?"

"Willow signalled it," said Dawn. "Watcher's code, kinda sign language but less obvious, doesn't set off magical alarms the way telepathy does."
"Does she know you know?"

"Probably. But she doesn't know that we know she knows..."

There was a scream of "Demon", and they looked round to see Hermione holding her wand on someone who had just walked in.

"Clem?" said Willow and Dawn.

"Dawnie?" said Clem, with surprise in his voice. "Howa ya doing, kid, how's Spike and the Slayer?" The floppy-eared demon waved at them, and Dawn rushed over and hugged him, saying "It's okay, Hermione, he's a friend."

"Hermione Granger?" asked Clem. Hermione nodded. "Then I guess that's Harry Potter over there. Got a message for you, kids."

"A message?" Harry asked warily.

"Yeah, my cousin owled me and asked me to bring it over, thought that something sent directly to you might be intercepted."

"Your cousin?"

"Sure. Works at Hogwarts."

"I don't think..." began Harry, Hermione just goggled.

"C'mon, can't you see the family resemblance? Sure, I know I'm only house elf on my second mother's side, but even so..."

"You're part house-elf?" asked Harry.
"One fifth house-elf, three-fifths demon, and one fifth human, but we don't talk about that side of the family. I'm surprised cousin Dobby hasn't shown you a picture."

"You're Dobby's... cousin?"

"Bingo. Give the kid a coconut."

"What's the message?"

Clem reached into his pocket and pulled out a small scroll. "Here. Dobby says it's from Dumbledore."

Harry examined Dumbledore's distinctive seal and touched it with a finger, feeling the magical wards around it, then broke the seal and unrolled it. Inside was a small green-striped sweet wrapped in cellophane.

"What does it say?" asked Dawn.

"Dumbledore says that he needs to see us urgently. All of us."

"All of us?" asked Willow.

"There's a list. You and Kennedy, Hermione, Dawn, Angel, Cordelia, Gunn and Fred, Professor Vector, and Viktor and his people. And me. The sweet's a port-key, he says it's to the private bar of the Three Broomsticks in Hogsmeade."

"Does he say why?" asked Angel.

"No."

"Do you think it's some sort of trap?" asked Dawn.
"Dumbledore?" asked Harry, "No way."

"Then let's go," said Angel. "We're off to see the wizard."

"You had to say that..." said Dawn.
"That's three butterbeers, a vodka and tonic, two sparkling mineral waters, four beers, three glasses of red wine, a pig's blood with a dash of otter and burba weed, and an.. um.. a tequila. Anything else?" asked Madame Rosmerta, landlady of the Three Broomsticks.

"That's it. How much will it be?" asked Angel.

"That's all right, dear, Professor Dumbledore said to put it on his scroll when he booked the private bar."

"Nice of him. Where is he, anyway?"

"He waited for an hour then had to go back to Hogwarts, said I should floo him when you got here."

"Sorry about the delay, we had to make a couple of calls and arrange for a baby-sitter. Could you get him?"

"I'll just get your drinks then go and put my head in the fireplace."

Angel went back to the table, carefully avoiding patches of sunlight around the windows, as a procession of mugs and glasses flew from the bar and landed on the tables.

"I think this is yours," said Willow, handing him a covered china mug and taking a glass of wine. Angel peered inside, took out a small paper umbrella, sniffed, and tried a sip of blood. "That's not bad."

"This place is usually pretty good," said Harry, "didn't know they kept weird drinks like tequila though."

"I think she had to think about it," said Fred. "Maybe she conjured it for me."

"Madame Rosmerta keeps all known magical and muggle drinks," said Hermione, "apart from some of the demonic ones like yak's urine. You'd known that if you'd ever read 'Hogsmeade, A Guide'" Harry made a rude gesture as he sank some of his beer.

"Does it say what time the sun sets here?" asked Angel.

"Twilight in an hour or so," said Dawn, checking her magically-shielded PDA, "but it won't be really dark until eleven, then sunrise is at four. The nights are really short in Scotland."

"I'm surprised you don't carry one of those machines yourself," said Professor Vector.

"He keeps breaking them," said Cordelia. "Same with his cell phone."

"Is that a problem with vampiric strength?" asked Hermione.

"Nope, he's a klutz when it comes to high tech," said Dawn, "guess it comes with being born in the eighteenth century."

"Hey," said Angel, "I'm better than I used to be."

"You'd have to be," said Gunn.
"Fine," muttered Angel, "let's all gang up on the vampire."

"Now that I'm retired I really must get a computer for myself," said Professor Vector. "you'd need a ridiculously powerful shielding spell to get one to work at Hogwarts, the magic there is just too strong, but it ought to work in my cottage."

"If you need any help on that let me know," said Willow. "Magic and computers kind of a specialty here. And if you think your successor could use a computer, I'm pretty sure I can get set up in Hogwarts. Times I've been there I had to beef up the shields on my laptop a little, and it crashed once when Peeves was being a nuisance, but apart from that things worked okay. Not sure what you'd do about power though, maybe a solar panel or something. I was never there long enough for that to be an issue. Now networking could be tricky..."

Dawn, Harry and Hermione moved to one of the tables, and Dawn said "So... Dumbledore. Never met the guy, what's he like?"

"Mad as a hatter and cunning as Merlin," said Harry. Hermione shrugged and said "He's a little eccentric, but he usually seems to know what he's doing."

"Willow said he was pretty old."

"About a hundred and sixty-seven."

"He's immortal?"

"No, he's a pure-blood wizard," said Hermione, "some of them live to two hundred."

"And he looks it," said Harry. "I met Nicholas Flamel before he died, he was nearly seven hundred but he was using a potion for it, he looked about fifty."

"Is that sort of thing easy to do?" asked Dawn.

"No. He was using the Philosopher's Stone to make it, when that was destroyed he started aging pretty fast. And there was only one Philosopher's Stone."

"Okay.. scratch that then."

"Scratch it?" asked Hermione.

"One of these years I might want a boyfriend for the long haul. That would have been useful."

"Why on earth would your boyfriend need a longevity potion?"

Dawn lowered her voice and said "Because I don't."

"What? oh..." Dawn could almost see Hermione connecting ideas. "Is that why you carry a sword? For the challenges?"

"I told you she was bright," said Harry.

"Keep it to yourself," said Dawn. "It's not something I tell everyone, but I'd like us to be friends, and it's only fair that I warn you what to expect. If we stay friends I'll still look eighteen when you're old and grey."

"Well, I'll just have to pretend you're my niece or something." Hermione looked a little shocked, but reached into a pocket and pulled out a scroll and an Ever-Inked quill. "I've got hundreds of
"Oh Merlin," said Harry.

"We only did a few hours on immortality in Magical Creatures," said Hermione, "and most of that was vampires and potions and...her," she gestured towards Kuryakin, "and the Wandering Jew. But you're natural, aren't you, not... cursed or undead or anything?"

"Yes, that's me, little miss natural."

"You said you were older than you looked; how old are you really?"

"I really am twenty-two," said Dawn, "It's only been four years since my first death."

"So you were thinking you might want to spend some time with me," said Harry, finally catching up with the conversation and looking a little uncomfortable. Hermione guessed that the first bloom of romance might be starting to wear off, and while Dawn seemed a nice enough person, she and Harry really didn't have a huge amount in common.

"Not necessarily you," said Dawn, "but maybe some day I'll meet someone I really want to commit to."

"But I thought you two..." began Hermione, guessing the answer.

"We kinda fell into bed together after I was shot," said Dawn, "it was fun, but adrenalin's no basis for a long-term relationship. I don't think either of us is ready for that." Harry somehow managed to look relieved and hurt simultaneously.

"Well," Hermione said mischievously, "You could do worse than Harry. His parents were both wizards, so there's a good chance he'll have some of the longevity."

"I wonder how long Dumbledore will be," Harry said, and Hermione was sure that he was worried by the way the conversation was going. Good, served him right for sleeping around. Maybe it served both of them right.

There was an uncomfortable silence at the table, and Hermione listened to the other conversations in the room for a moment. Fred and Professor Vector were talking about something called superstring theory, which she vaguely remembered from magazines in her father's surgery, Gunn and Kennedy were discussing weapons with Viktor and his squad, and Angel, Cordelia and Willow were talking about Hollywood. She had a feeling that nobody was paying complete attention to the conversations. Everyone was waiting for Dumbledore. And as if by magic (if you could call a door opening magical) Dumbledore appeared from the main bar.

"Holy crap," whispered Dawn, "that him?"

"Yep," said Harry. Dumbledore was wearing a rainbow-striped robe and trousers that more or less matched, and a bright orange shirt that was almost concealed by his beard. He was carrying a bundle of scrolls under his left arm, a mug of something that smelled like cocoa in his left hand, and his wand in his right. There were pink bunny slippers on his feet. He looked around the bar and bowed deeply to Kuryakin and Willow, said "good evening, everyone," then gently waved the wand. The tables and chairs (with their occupants) began to slide across the floor, until they were arranged in a square with the seats on the outside. Neat triangular blocks labelled with their names appeared on the tables in front of each seat. Only Willow and Kuryakin stayed where they were; once the tables had stopped moving Kuryakin's chair rose into the air, flew across the room, and landed to the left of Dumbledore. Willow grinned, picked up her chair, and carried it to the space to his right. Harry and
Hermione looked as baffled as Dawn felt, but from the looks on the older wizards' faces, and a scowl from Kuryakin, Dawn guessed that Willow had just scored major points in some bizarre status game.

"Baba Yaga, Professor Rosenberg, ladies and gentlemen," said Dumbledore. Nobody pretended to be surprised by his use of Kuryakin's true name. "My apologies for keeping you waiting."

There was a pause, as everyone seemed to look for someone else to reply, then Harry said "Do you have some news for us, Professor?"

"Not exactly," said Dumbledore. "Gringrott's Bank, the Wizengamot and the International Confederation of Wizards have all asked me to look into recent events. It appears that they are less than happy with the progress made by the Ministry and the other government agencies involved in these cases."

"The ICW?" asked Willow, "how did they get involved? I thought that they were mostly a standards organisation. Wand strength, newt eye quality, that sort of thing."

"They are, but they are also organise international wizarding events. It's my understanding that their facilities, or rather their badge, was used to lure Harry to the attack that led to your involvement. And of course you did fight a pitched battle at the conference."

"You're very well informed," said Angel. "I'm not sure we mentioned the badge to anyone official."

"Umm..." said Harry, turning a little red. "I think that might have been me. I owled the Professor the evening after the attack, when you were working out how to capture Soprano, thought he might have some ideas."

"You did indeed," said Dumbledore. "I should explain that this is not as yet an official enquiry. If it were then someone with fewer ties to the case would be conducting it. Someone who isn't Harry's teacher, Professor Vector's colleague, and so forth."

"That makes sense," said Gunn. "You do a lot of this kinda work?"

"Enough to know when things are going badly wrong. Which I think is happening here."

"Okay," said Angel, "you know something we don't, obviously."

"Fortunately young Percy still has a little respect for his old headmaster. I... ah... persuaded him to explain a few things."

"For example?"

"I'm afraid that the fracas at the convention was caused by undercover aurors from the Ministry of Magic. They thought that they were rescuing Professor Vector."

"But I wasn't in any danger!" said the professor. "I wasn't even in the Arithmancy tent when the fight started."

"Apparently they mistook an American witch for you, and thought that they were rescuing you from certain death. No doubt we'll learn more when they recover their memories."

"Certain death?" asked Angel

Dumbledore gestured towards the Baba Yaga, who nodded courteously, then continued "After the death of Lucius Malfoy it was felt that anyone involved in the attack on Durmstrang might be in
danger, even those who developed the original plan to attack Castle Dracula. Weasley had apparently sent several agents to Los Angeles after you disappeared from Diagon Alley, guessing that you'd surface there, as soon as he heard about Malfoy he told them to bring her back to the Ministry for protection. Unfortunately he said to do it 'whether she wanted to come or not', and warned them that there might be an attempt to kill her, and that seems to have caused the trouble."

"That doesn't explain the smoke bombs and the rest of it," objected Dawn, "let alone why they wiped their memories."

"It does seem a little over-dramatic," said Cordelia. "You put something like that on TV and nobody would believe it."

"The smoke was intended to confuse anyone casting spells at Professor Vector, and the potion was apparently a standard precaution to avoid interrogation if agents are captured."

"Okay," said Angel, "that explains that, but there are still a hell of a lot of unanswered questions."

"Things do seem to have become ridiculously complicated," said Dumbledore, "so let's get back to the beginning. Perhaps Harry could start by explaining exactly what happened on the night that he was shot..."

"So in effect," said Dumbledore and hour or so later, "there is no evidence whatever that the plot to defraud the late mister Soprano and assassinate Harry had anything to do with the attack on Durmstrang."

"What?" said Harry, Dawn, and Angel, more or less simultaneously.

"We know that the attempt to murder you began no earlier than the end of May," Dumbledore said patiently, "because that's when you decided to visit the conference. Even if someone had cast a spell to make you want to go there, it can only have happened after the conference arrangements were confirmed in February."

"February?" asked Gunn, "Isn't that kinda thing planned years in advance?"

"Normally, but in this instance the arrangements were somewhat... fluid... until Voldemort was killed. Nobody wanted to risk a large gathering of wizards that might be attacked. Once he was out of the way several institutions competed for the honour of hosting the conference, Los Angeles was the compromise choice."

"You're right," said Angel, "Soprano said as much. He was told that Harry would be in California when he first met the fake Charlie Weasley."

"That fits with the timing of the meeting at Gringrotts," said Gunn, "It'd be two or three weeks later. Was there some sort of public announcement?"

"Yes," said Hermione, after a moment's thought, "Rita Skeeter mentioned it in her column about a week after the list of participants was posted at Hogwarts. Someone must have told the Daily Prophet."

"Could have been anyone," said Harry, "with Voldemort out of the way we weren't trying to keep it secret."

"Okay," said Angel, "so the attack on Harry was arranged months after Durmstrang was destroyed. Doesn't meant that they aren't connected."
"Oh, I agree that it's possible," said Dumbledore, "but is it likely? What would be gained by it?"

"Well," said Fred, "We know now how Durmstrang was destroyed, and we're pretty sure we know who led the attack. Of course we'd know for sure if someone hadn't.. well, you know.. killed him."

"Don't you think it's more likely that they aren't connected?" asked Dumbledore.

"There are too many coincidences," said Angel. "What I keep seeing here is a wizard who thinks that he's smart enough to use magical tools to manipulate the muggle world. You think about it; the attack on Durmstrang was basically non-magical, although the way it was delivered used magic. The attack on Harry was entirely non-magical, and the way that Soprano was recruited led to us investigating Durmstrang. The end result is that Malfoy is dead and a huge can of worms has been opened. What if that was the plan all along?"

"But who could possibly do that?" asked Harry. "You're talking about someone who knows everything about the raid on Durmstrang, with contacts in the wizarding world, gangsters in America, some way to foresee the future accurately enough to ensure that I wouldn't be killed by Soprano..."

"Not necessarily," Professor Vector said thoughtfully, "your death might serve the same purposes equally well. You can imagine how thoroughly it would be investigated."

"Great," said Harry.

"So who are we looking for?" asked Hermione. "Who knew enough?"

"Percy Weasley seems a likely candidate," said Dawn. "Malfoy and his friends killed his brother, maybe it was the only way he could think of exposing them."

"Or he was a Death Eater all along," said Angel. "Someone must have tipped them off about the attack, given them the opportunity to hijack the portal."

"Percy?" said Harry, "He's no Death Eater, and he couldn't put something like that together. He's... um..." Harry trailed off into silence as he thought about it.

"Percy was a double agent capable of living a lie for months on end," said Angel, "He organised the attack, although I doubt he expected Durmstrang to be the target, and he must have organised the cover-up afterwards."

"To ensure that I turned on Voldemort," said the Baba Yaga.

"Exactly. If the Ministry had claimed that Death Eaters had taken over their attack, would you have believed them?"

"I don't like to be manipulated..."

"He knew where his brother lived, I guess," said Angel. "Did he know enough about the world outside the magical community?"

"Arthur Weasley was in charge of the Muggle Artifacts department until nearly the end of the war," said Hermione, "Percy always looked down on his father's interest in muggles, but he would have had plenty of opportunities to learn about us."

"And he went on diplomatic missions to America after the war," said Professor Vector, "I remember seeing it in the Prophet. He was the Ministry's liaison to the Department of Magic when they were
hunting down the last of Voldemort's followers."

"But why impersonate his own brother?" asked Harry.

"Who better?" Dumbledore said unexpectedly. He looked saddened. "Bill was in Egypt, and if there was ever any suspicion of the transaction with Soprano it would be easy to prove that he couldn't have been involved. And if it became apparent that there had been an attempt to implicate Bill, who would suspect that Percy had impersonated him? A stranger, someone outside the family, would surely seem more likely. When he took the polyjuice and realised he was disguised as Charlie, not Bill, it must have shaken him considerably."

"But why try to get Harry assassinated?" asked Dawn, "sure, it makes a big stink, stirs things up, but he could do that without involving Harry."

"Because I hate him, of course," said a voice from the doorway. Percy was standing there, wand in hand. "Don't get up."

Harry flicked his wand at Percy and said "Stupefy." Nothing happened.

"Don't be childish. Did you think I haven't taken precautions? You've all been drinking Madame Rosmerta's excellent beverages, and a simple muggle chemical... Stupefy!" He swung his wand towards Kennedy and stunned her as she was drawing a throwing knife. "As I was saying, none of your magic will work for the moment, and I'm quite ready for your muggle attacks."

"Think you can take us all?" asked Gunn, and Fred blew a raspberry. As Percy glanced at them Angel leaped across the table with vampiric speed. Somehow Percy saw him coming and swung his wand back, saying "Avada Kedavra!"

There was a green flash and Angel's body fell to the floor.
Hermione screamed, and Cordelia jumped to her feet. "Petrificus totalis" said Percy. She fell back into her chair, immobile. "Anyone else? Oh, don't bother to scream again, nobody can hear you. I've taken care of that."

There was a pause, then Harry said "I suppose this is the part where you explain your fiendish plan."

"What?" said Percy.

"Well, it's all a bit... you know... melodramatic," said Dawn.

"You can't kill us all," said Hermione, "Even Voldemort could only cast the Killing Curse a couple of times a day. So what are you going to do?"

"Why do you want to know?" asked Percy

"I'd imagine you're going to kill me," said Harry, "and I'd really like to know why, and be sure that nobody else will be hurt. If you can convince me of that I won't try to fight it too hard."

"Fight me? Without your magic?"

"Never heard of dodging?"

"Avada Kedav..." Dawn pushed Harry out of the way and took the blast of green energy, collapsing forward onto the table. "What in Merlin's name..." said Percy. Professor Vector felt her wrist then sorrowfully shook her head.

"You bastard!" said Gunn.

"I'm very disappointed," said Dumbledore. "To think that you should come to this... this vicious sloppiness."

"It's your own fault," said Percy, "Harry should have been the only one hurt. But you had to go poking into things, digging up the past."

"So you were Voldemort's agent all along?" asked Professor Vector.

"Of course not!" Percy actually looked insulted. Behind him, unnoticed, Angel silently rose to his feet. "Voldemort was mad. The Death Eaters were vicious sadistic thugs. But anyone can see that we've the right to rule. The muggles are obviously incapable of doing it for themselves."

"So you're... what, a magic Nazi?" asked Fred.

"Sounds like it to me," said Gunn. "But what did you have against Harry."

"What chance would I have in politics with him around?"

"You're putting me on."

"They're already talking about asking him to join the Ministry. Five years and he'll be junior Minister, ten and the bastard'll be Minister for Magic."

"And you wanted my money for... for buying your way into office?" Harry asked incredulously.
"Exactly."

"And you weren't trying to bring out the truth about Durmstrang?"

"Why would I want to do that? It's the one thing that could ruin my chances."

"I've heard of dirty politics..." began Willow, as Angel finally closed in on Percy. Almost too fast to see, he grabbed Percy by the head and twisted. There was a sickening snap and he dropped to the floor, dead.

"It would have helped if you'd taken him alive," said Dumbledore.

"Maybe I'm not feeling helpful," said Angel. "In fact, right now what I'm feeling is hungry." He looked around the room, and Willow slowly said "Angelus."

"That's right. Angel has left the building. Looks like I'm finally rid of that damned idiot."

"Temporarily," said Dumbledore, "I doubt that it's permanent. Even the Killing Curse can't destroy a soul."

"Then I'd better make the most of it while I can." His face morphed to his vampire form.

As he spoke Gunn pulled a crossbow from under the table and began to cock it, and the Baba Yaga threw a silver throwing knife at him. Angelus dodged the knife and leapt towards Gunn, hurdling a chair thrown in his path by Viktor. Dawn groaned and sat up, saw what was going on, and threw a bottle at Victor's head. He fended it off with one hand, drawing a knife with the other. By now everyone who wasn't petrified or stupefied was on their feet, with a weapon of some sort in their hands.

"Dawn," shouted Willow, "He's Angelus!" Dawn drew her sword and turned towards him.

"Do you really think you can stop me?" said Angel, snarling as they moved to encircle him.

There was a soft "beep" from Fred's PDA. "Actually," she said, "I think I have." Angel turned towards her, confused, as a swirling whirlpool of energy formed under his feet. He started to scream something, then fell through it and vanished. The disc of energy vanished with him.

"Where did he go?" asked the Baba Yaga.

"Back to the Hyperion. He'll come out in the cage in the basement, I made sure it was locked before we left. Once whatever Percy did to you wears off Willow can catch his soul and bring it back for him. I've got the orb and the herbs in my bag."

"How did you do that?" asked Dumbledore. "You didn't even touch that machine."

"Easy. When we get back to LA and I'm sure everything's okay I'll send myself a message telling me exactly when and where to open the portal, and everything else I need to know."

"Which you've already received?" asked Professor Vector.

"That's right. It came in when we were probing the original portal, with a warning not to discuss it with anyone else. I guess we can forget about causality, though I'm kinda wondering what'll happen if I don't send it."

"I'd prefer not to risk it," said Willow.
"Yeah. Maybe I'll try it another time when the stakes aren't quite so high."

"But Miss Summers..." began Professor Vector.

"I've got kinda a high natural resistance to magic," lied Dawn, "after all my sister's a Slayer. I think most of the blast missed me anyway."

"Your pulse..." protested Professor Vector.

"Well, my heart's thumping, but I think I'm okay."

"Your heart wasn't beating!"

"Maybe you didn't feel my pulse right. Things must have been kinda tense."

"My scar might have helped," said Harry, "it protected me from Voldemort, and Percy wasn't nearly as powerful. It hurt when he cast the spell, maybe it reduced the effect."

"But..." began Hermione, then realised that Harry was lying to protect Dawn. "...but of course. Honestly, Dawn, you should have known better, you're not even a proper witch."

"But..."

"Does it really matter, Professor?" asked Dumbledore. "After all, Miss Summers could hardly spring back to life." Dawn thought he winked slightly. "High natural magical resistance seems a perfectly acceptable explanation to me. It would be interesting to see how you handle a wand, Miss Summers, I particularly recommend those made by Ollivander. If you do indeed have a gift for magic I would strongly suggest that you obtain some training."

"What about Percy?" asked Harry.

"What would you suggest?" asked Dumbledore.

"If we tell anyone what he was up to it'll kill his parents. Could we... umm... make it look like some sort of accident?"

"Harry, Harry, it was lies that got us into this mess. I would have thought you would know better."

"You're right, I suppose. They'll have to be told. And the truth about what really happened to Durmstrang needs to come out."

"Definitely," said Willow. "How about you?" she gestured towards the Baba Yaga. "Are you content to leave things as they are?"

"If I'm not?"

Willow concentrated, and one of the bottles on the table rose into the air. "That might be unfortunate. I may not be as powerful as you, but I know what Percy zapped us with, I've run into it before. I've already got a little magic back, I'll be okay in about ten minutes. Will you?"

The Baba Yaga strained, but nothing happened. Eventually she said "What do you propose?"

"You let the Ministry of Magic do their job. We'll make sure that they do. I'm willing to bet that Percy had a pretty good idea who'd hijacked his operation, without him there to obstruct things the truth will probably come out. And I'll tell you about the drug Percy used, and how to work around it."
"And the other Death Eaters?"

"They go to Azkaban when we're certain of their guilt. Isn't that enough revenge for you?"

"Very well."

"Your word?"

"Very well. I give you my word."

Dumbledore said a few words in Russian. The Baba Yaga hissed, then replied in the same language. They seemed to be haggling.

"That's better," Viktor said eventually. "I think we are having a deal. She has sworn her blood oath, which is unbreakable."

"What about Angel?" asked Gunn. "He's not gonna be very popular in the wizarding world."

"Once the truth comes out," said Dumbledore, "I doubt that anyone will blame mister Angel. Percy should have known that the Killing Curse is useless against vampires, and guessed what might happen."

"One thing," said Harry. "Is there any way you can keep me out of the Ministry? I really don't want to be a politician."

"Of course you don't," said Dumbledore, "nobody in his right mind does. Circumstances sometimes force us into that role, but only a fool seeks power for the sake of power."

"I think you just explained the US electoral system," said Dawn.

"And the British, from what I've seen of it," said Harry. "But seriously, Professor, can you keep me out?"

"Harry, you're a brave boy. no, a brave man. but you could barely organise your homework, let alone a country. You were never seriously considered for office, I fear that was one of Percy's delusions. A post as an auror, perhaps, but not political office. Someone from your generation will eventually assume the role, I suppose, but you have never been on the list of possible candidates. Longbottom or Zabini, perhaps, or even young Malfoy now the influence of his father is removed."

"Bloody hell."

"Any of them would be better than our former minister, Harry."

"Can't argue with that."

"Hilda," said Dumbledore, "I think you'd better go outside and get Madame Rosmerta to summon the Aurors. And find out how Percy persuaded her to adulterate the drinks, and get us some that don't contain his ingredient. Miss Rosenberg, your help in preventing another occurrence would be appreciated."

"Let me get that soul back first. This time I'm gonna make that spell so binding..."

"So that's it." Harry said quietly as the first aurors and mediwitches arrived and tended to Kennedy and Cordelia. "Seems a bit anti-climactic. I suppose we should be grateful that Percy was the only one killed."
"Apart from Dawn, of course," said Hermione. "It's a good thing you knew you'd recover from the Killing Curse."

"Knew?" Dawn said absently. "How would I know?" She started to turn towards Willow, but Harry grabbed her arm, turned her back, and kissed her.

"Hermione," said Viktor, "This is the happy ending, yes?"

"Maybe. For some definitions of happy, I suppose." **Epilogue**

In the months that followed the last remnants of Malfoy's Death Eater cell were rounded up and imprisoned. True to her word, the Baba Yaga did nothing to interfere; when they were released it would be another story... The Weasleys took the news of Percy's guilt badly, but eventually learned to live with their sorrow.

Tony Soprano's decapitated corpse was 'ported to the New Jersey marshes, and eventually found by hunters, precipitating a gang war that claimed a dozen lives. Furio Giunta's humanity was restored, and all memories of his involvement in the wizarding world erased. With Tony dead he had no reason to stay in America, and returned to Italy.

Rita Skeeter's mysterious disappearance remains one of the enduring puzzles of the wizarding world. The Quibbler has run several articles about it, but nobody takes them seriously. The Daily Prophet offers a standing reward of five thousand galleons for news of her fate.

Professor Vector became the first wizard in Hogsmeade with internet access, and collaborates with Fred at long range. They're working on extending a portal over interplanetary and interstellar distances, but keep running into problems caused by interference from whatever it is that the US government has hidden under a Colorado mountain. Fred and Gunn are expecting another child.

Hermione eventually married George Weasley and became the business manager of Weasley's Wizarding Wheezes. Fred Weasley is engaged to Blaise Zabini, the Deputy Minister of Magic. Ron Weasley remains single, and recently became Wizarding Chess World Grand Master.

The Cordy Show is now in its eighth year, and the running joke about Cordy's mysterious boyfriend has become an integral part of the plot. Between seasons she helps the Watchers Council train new recruits. She and Angel are happy together, but take care to ensure that he never quite achieves **perfect** happiness.

Willow and Kennedy continue to live in Cleveland. They now have eleven cats, four of them part kneazle and sired by Hermione's cat Crookshanks.

Dawn and Harry continued an intermittent affair for several years, neither of them willing to commit to a long-term relationship, slowly drifting apart as the difference in their apparent ages became more obvious. Eventually he married Ginny Weasley and became a respected auror and father of three. Dawn now works full-time for Angel Investigations, with a side line as stunt double and stand-in for rock star Celeste.

The Baba Yaga is believed to be somewhere in Russia. It's rumoured that she is currently in a relationship with Viktor Krum, but nobody feels brave enough to ask.

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