

Harry Potter & The Great Escape

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Harry Potter & The Great Escape

by [FaerieMyst](#)

Summary

After the third task, Harry realizes he cannot return to Hogwarts or the Dursley's. Reaching out for help leads to unexpected results, not just for Harry but for all of Wizarding Britain. A life filled with "No" becomes a life filled with "Yes" and suddenly everything is possible.

Reality Registers

Chapter Notes

Saturday, June 24, 1995 after third task to Monday, June 26

Harry stared at the ceiling as he lay in bed. He was still physically exhausted but the second potion to calm his damaged nerves had brought significant pain relief. He never thought he would feel grateful to Severus Snape but the man had taken charge after learning that Harry had suffered the cruciatus curse at Voldemort's hand.

After giving his account of what happened at the end of the fourth task, Harry had been escorted to the infirmary by his head of House, Professor McGonagall. To his surprise, Madam Pomfrey had given him an exam without using any magic. He was very banged up but fortunately had no broken bones. The cut on his arm from Pettigrew had finally stopped bleeding and his head was throbbing but those seemed to be the worst of his injuries.

Snape arrived with his usual sweep of robes carrying a small cloth tote of potions. Reaching in and pulling out a bright orange vial, he handed it to Harry with instructions to drink. Despite the adversarial relationship he shared with the potions professor, Harry had no reason to distrust Snape. Harry knew as well as any that you could do right by someone regardless of how you felt about them.

After Harry downed the surprisingly neutral tasting potion, he started feeling immediate relief. He didn't feel even close to good but better was still preferred. Taking back the phial, Snape motioned for the boy to follow. Led into a small chamber at the back of Pomfrey's office, Harry saw a tub of bubbling water and could smell the aroma of lavender.

"Until your nerves are completely calmed, it is inadvisable to use magic on you. This bath will not only get the irritants from your skin but will also further soothe both your body and your spirit," Snape explained. "Depending on how long you were held under the cruciatus curse, you will need at least three doses of the potion I gave you. In the meantime, I will endeavor to make you as comfortable as possible."

"Thank you, Sir," Harry said quietly.

Snape settled into a nearby chair while Harry undressed to get into the bath. The combination of muggle gym class and the shared dorm and bathroom at Hogwarts had erased what little modesty Harry had. The Dursley's had never taught Harry the concepts of body modesty so what little he possessed had been adopted from the behavior of others. It had no emotional connection therefore it never occurred to him to behave differently in the presence of others than he did when he was alone.

Snape watched in surprise as his enemy's child undressed to get in the tub. He could see the most recent damage to the boy's body and found himself attempting to determine which wounds resulted from the tournament and which were from his encounter with the Dark Lord. Snape could also see the residue of much older damage and could not help but wonder if perhaps his understanding of the boy's home life was not what everyone had been led to believe.

When Harry tried to wash his hair, he found his arms were trembling too much to wet it effectively. To his surprise, Snape moved over to the tub and conjured a jug that he dipped into the tub and used it to quickly wet the boy's head, being careful to tilt it back causing the water to run down Harry's back. Reaching for the soap on the edge of the tub, Snape gently washed Harry's hair while carefully feeling along his scalp for any hidden injuries. When the soap had been rinsed free, Snape soaped his hands and carefully cleaned the boy's shoulders and back, taking note of the tremors that shook his body.

Snape reached over to a nearby table and grabbed a large, soft towel and motioned for Harry to stand up. Helping Harry out of the tub, Snape wrapped him in the towel. "Don't rub. It will only irritate. Just gently press it to your skin."

Following Snape's instructions, Harry slowly dried himself and took the long nightshirt that he was handed. As it fell over his body, he noted its warmth and incredible softness. It felt like being encased in a cloud. As he followed Snape to a bed beside Pomfrey's large desk, he found the sheets and pillow to be the same soft cloud.

"I will bring you the potion every two hours. Try to sleep as much as you can in the meantime." Snape instructed.

Harry nodded in response and allowed his exhaustion to pull him under.

Harry never knew that it took five phials of potion to calm his nerve damage. After the second dose, it was a long stretch of interrupted sleep that flowed into his dreams. He didn't have nightmares but had he ever seen paintings by Picasso or Dali, Harry would have found them relatable. Disturbing is the word Harry would later use to describe the night's dreams. After the terror of the graveyard, disturbing was a significant step up.

Following the final dose of the potion, Harry slept while Madam Pomfrey healed the remaining damage to his body. The hours of uninterrupted sleep that followed were as restorative as the healing magic.

Harry woke to the smell of freshly baked bread. With his eyes still closed, he rolled his head, hearing his neck crack. Next was his shoulders twisting back and forth as the motion carried down his arms. An arch in his back preceded a stretch to his upper legs. Next came the flexing and pointing of his toes that worked his calves and ankles.

Harry was pleasantly surprised to find only soreness in his body. Thoroughly relaxing, he opened his eyes and looked around. He was now in the central part of the infirmary in his accustomed bed. He looked over to Madam Pomfrey's office when he heard a door opening and saw both the mediwitch and Snape coming toward his bed.

“Good evening, Mr. Potter. Ready for some dinner?” Despite her stern demeanor, Harry could sense the relief coming from the woman that had so often patched him together.

With a nod, Harry began to push himself up only to find himself being helped by Snape into a sitting position as Pomfrey arranged pillows behind his head and shoulders. Floating a tray over to the bed, a lap desk was conjured to hold a dinner of the bread with thick, aromatic soup and a cup of tea.

“Tuck in, Mr. Potter,” Pomfrey instructed. “Professor Snape will update you on everything while you eat.”

Snape conjured a straight, wooden chair and pulled it close to Harry’s bedside. Sitting down, Snape began speaking, “You’ve had quite a few visitors while you were sleeping. Most were turned away with assurances that they would see you before term ended.” Snape paused for a minute before continuing, “However, a few were most insistent.”

“Hermione,” Harry mumbled before putting another spoonful of soup in his mouth.

“Indeed,” Snape answered, “as well as the four Weasleys.”

It took Harry a moment to realize Snape meant Ginny, Ron and the twins. He felt a warmth in his chest at the thought of the two pranksters. For all their overt actions, they were surprisingly reticent about more personal things. Over the incredibly difficult year, Harry had come to rely on their quiet strength. He didn't think they could understand what it meant when they simply came and sat with him while he studied or ate.

Snape continued, “I did allow them in while you were sleeping so they could see that you were recovering. However, I promised the headmaster that I would not let anyone speak to you before he had a chance to interview you in more detail about the events of last evening.”

“So, he’ll be here tonight?” Harry asked with dread filling him.

“Much to the headmaster’s consternation, you will not be up to visitors before morning,” Snape answered. “It is quite unfortunate that the healing potions required do not allow you to stay awake for any significant amount of time.”

“Why, sir?”

“A lot has happened to you in the last day, on top of an already full school year. Madam Pomfrey and I felt that you could use a little time to yourself. There are fresh pajamas in the bathroom. Call us if you need anything. Otherwise, you will be undisturbed until after breakfast.”

Harry nodded as the dinner dishes and trays disappeared. As soon as Snape disappeared into Pomfrey’s office, Harry climbed out of bed and headed for the bathroom. A soothing, warm shower and fresh bed clothes made for a tired but content young man. He climbed back into the bed, noticing that the bed linens had been changed.

Harry was lying in a half doze when he felt as much as heard a small pop. He looked over and opened his eyes. To his surprise, Dobby was standing there with his usual wide eyes and wringing hands.

"Dobby?"

"Harry Potter, Sir. Dobby is so relieved. Dobby has been very worried for his Harry Potter. Harry Potter is a very great wizard but Harry Potter must not come back to Hogwarts. Hogwarts is too dangerous for Harry Potter."

Harry sighed, "I think you're right, Dobby."

"Harry Potter agrees with Dobby?"

It was with both sadness and relief that Harry realized that he did agree with Dobby. Every year he faced things that other students simply didn't. Once would have been extraordinary but every year Harry confronted death in some way or another. Growing up with the Dursleys, unwanted and unloved, had left Harry with few expectations. Discovering the magical world had kindled a sense of wonder that he still felt but it wasn't enough. Life had to be more than surviving.

Thinking of the Dursleys reminded Harry of the upcoming summer. He realized that his aunt and uncle's house was no safer than Hogwarts. Each summer was worse. There was more work. There was less food. There were more injuries. Each year the blows were more brutal and came more often. Hogwarts was no longer the sanctuary he needed but Harry still needed a safe place. He just didn't know where to find it.

Dobby had waited quietly while all this ran through Harry's mind. "Harry Potter, Sir, what can Dobby do to help?"

Harry started. He had forgotten about Dobby. Maybe the situation wasn't so bleak after all. "Are you still working for Hogwarts?" Harry asked.

"Yes," Dobby answered. "Headmaster Dumbles still pay Dobby."

"Would you be willing to work for me?" Harry asked hopefully.

"Oh no, Harry Potter, Sir," Dobby was fervent in his answer. "Dobby could never take pay from Harry Potter. Dobby would only work for Harry Potter if Harry Potter would take Dobby as his elf."

Harry's heart had plummeted at Dobby's exclamation but as Dobby continued, Harry felt his hopes rise again. "You would be willing to belong to me? I thought you liked being a free elf."

"Dobby loves being free of evil former master but now Dobby really believes he will never go back to bad Malfoys. Now Dobby wishes to serve a proper wizard and Harry Potter is a proper wizard."

Harry thought about that for a moment. He could understand Dobby's logic but maybe that was just all the potions he had been taking. "I'm not sure I'm a proper wizard, Dobby," Harry said, "but I'd be honored to have you as my elf. What do I need to do?"

Dobby stared at Harry and then a large tear rolled down Dobby's cheek. "Dobby wants nothing more than to be Harry Potter's elf but Dobby doesn't think Harry Potter will want Dobby when he learns what Dobby has done."

"What have you done?" Harry couldn't imagine anything so wrong but it was Dobby and he did seem to be a most unusual elf.

Dobby wrung his hands and took a step closer to Harry before speaking softly, "Dobby has promised Winky not to leave her. She is very sad she will never have a wizard family and must work at Hogwarts instead."

This was a situation Harry understood. He understood friendship and loyalty. "That isn't a problem, Dobby, if Winky is willing to also be my elf. I'm not sure exactly what she, or even you, would do but I'm willing if you both are."

"Oh!" Dobby softly exclaimed, "Harry Potter is both a great and powerful wizard. Harry Potter's magic could support many elves. Two will not be a problem."

"Huh," Harry had no idea how such things worked. "Dobby, what does a wizard need to do to have an elf?"

"Elves and wizards are happiest when there is a bond between their magics. Elf magic and wizard magic are very different but go together. An elf may only bond to one wizard but powerful wizards can bond to more than one elf. Old wizard families like the Potters have lots of magic to bond to many elves," Dobby explained.

"So, what do we need to do?" Harry asked. "What happens when we bond?"

"Harry Potter will see," Dobby said. "Dobby will fetch Winky."

Before Harry could even blink, Dobby was back, holding Winky's hand. Winky looked down and shuffled her feet before looking shyly up at Harry. Dobby pulled her forward.

"Winky, the great Harry Potter wants to bond with us," Dobby told her.

The smaller elf shook her head slowly, "Winky is bad elf. Winky doesn't deserve new family."

At those words, Harry sat up so quickly that his head swam. He reached out and took Winky's free hand, "Winky, everyone deserves a family. Everyone."

As Winky and Dobby looked up at him with wide eyes, Harry stopped and repeated what he had just said, "Everyone deserves a family."

Harry twisted around to sit on the edge of the bed facing both elves. He reached his free hand and took Dobby's other hand. "Everyone deserves a family. Since we don't have a

family, we will become one.”

Dobby and Winky looked at each other and then back at Harry. It was Dobby that spoke, in a softer voice than Harry had ever heard from the enthusiastic elf, “Harry Potter wants to be family with Winky and Dobby?”

Harry nodded, “Yes, I do. I’m not sure how it will work but we do deserve a family. We can learn together how it works. Now, what do I have to do to bond us together?”

Dobby stepped forward and took both of Harry’s hands into his. Looking at Harry, he asked, “Does Harry Potter take Dobby as his elf?”

Harry smiled, “Yes, I do.” Harry felt a small magic pulse and continued, “Does Dobby take Harry Potter as his wizard?”

Dobby’s eyes grew wide and filled with shimmering liquid, “Dobby is honored to take Harry Potter as his wizard.” The pulse that followed was much larger and a flash of soft light surrounded the joined hands.

Harry released Dobby’s hands and turned to Winky. With a trembling voice, Winky asked, “Does Harry Potter take Winky as his elf?”

“Yes, I do. Does Winky take Harry Potter as her wizard?”

Two large tears trailed down Winky’s face as she answered, “Oh yes, I do.” Once again, a large magical pulse as a flash of light surrounded their hands.

Harry released one of Winky’s hands and reached out to Dobby. A smile broke across his face and he declared, “We are family.” Both elves released his hand and suddenly Harry was tackled by two joyous elves as he fell back onto the bed.

Later, Harry wasn’t sure how he went from laughing hugs to being tucked in bed and admonished to sleep by two smiling elves. As he drifted into sleep, Harry felt a sense of peace he had never felt before. His problems hadn’t gone away. He still needed to figure a lot of things out. Voldemort was still out there despite the Minister’s denial. The big things in life hadn’t altered but that was okay. Harry had made a family for himself and that was bigger than his problems.

Harry woke early the following day and had several happy hours before the real world intruded. By the time Dumbledore, accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Diggory, arrived, Harry had enjoyed a long hot shower, a sumptuous breakfast and newly shrunk and repaired clothes. He had never considered the personal implications of having elves as family. It was eye-opening. Most surprising was the lecture from Winky on his need to get new things. She expected her wizard to look proper although she didn’t define what that meant. In return, Harry exacted a promise that when he got new garments, she and Dobby would use the family funds (as Harry referred to his trusts galleons) to get outfits with the Potter crest. Harry was very careful not to use the dreaded word “clothes”.

Harry insisted that both elves stay while he ate the breakfast they prepared, though they refused to share. Winky cooked the French toast and sausage while Dobby cut up the fruit and prepared the tea. Harry understood their reluctance to eat with him but told the elves that when they left Hogwarts, he expected them to eat together because they were now family. Harry still didn't know what to do when both elves teared up as they had already done several times that morning.

When the headmaster arrived, followed by the Diggorys, both elves popped out. Harry was dressed and sitting on the bed. Physically he felt much better but the sight of the Diggorys brought back all the horrible feelings that were in the back of his mind. There had been so much fear and on top of that was the horror of seeing Cedric lying lifeless on the ground. He couldn't even begin to think about what it had been like seeing the ghosts of his parents along with Voldemort's other victims.

The Diggorys were kind and insisted he take the tournament winnings. At that point, Harry couldn't stop the tears that flowed down his cheeks. He talked about Cedric's sense of fairness and recounted what had happened in the maze with Victor and the acromantula. He told them of the decision to reach for the trophy together and how the shock of the unexpected graveyard had led them both to hesitate. The hesitation had proven fatal for Cedric and led to Harry awakening tied to the gravestone statue.

After the Diggorys left, Dumbledore transfigured a comfy chair and sat down. "Now, Harry," he said in a kind and gentle voice, "tell me what happened after you woke up in the graveyard."

In as much detail as he could remember, Harry recounted everything. Fortunately, Dumbledore didn't rush him or exhibit any impatience as Harry stumbled through the account. Harry didn't try to be stoic or brave as he recounted everything. He couldn't pretend everything was alright because it wasn't.

By the time he told of grabbing Cedric's body and the portkey, Harry was exhausted. The retelling had reinforced the unexpected decision he had come to the night before. He couldn't return to Hogwarts. Every year a DADA teacher tried to kill him. He did acknowledge to himself that Remus had not done it purposefully. Still, you shouldn't be in mortal peril from a teacher, not to mention the swarm of dementors that tried to suck his soul out through his face. Add in the forced participation in the tournament and its horrifying aftermath and Harry had to call it quits at Hogwarts. That, however, was a problem for another day. He had four days until the term ended and he needed to figure out where he would go when the Express arrived in London.

After enduring one final exam from Madam Pomfrey, Harry arrived in his dorm to find it empty. He knew he would have to face everyone eventually but was grateful for some quiet. He had a lot to think about. He not only had to figure out a plan but he had to make sure whatever it was included his new family. He knew there were a lot of galleons in his trust vault but exactly how much was it? How long would it last? How long before he had to find some sort of job?

Harry realized that there were too many questions and he didn't have enough information to answer them. The money questions could be answered at Gringotts but there was too much

he didn't know about the wizarding world. He needed help.

In his time at Hogwarts, Harry had turned to his friends. That was no longer an option. Although he had "made up" with Ron, the friendship was not the same. The very fact that Ron had turned on him so resolutely had shattered something that couldn't be repaired with an apology. Getting away was too important to trust that Ron would be on his side.

Hermione was also out. Yes, she had helped him this year but when faced with a choice between Harry and any authority figure, Hermione was conditioned to heed the highest ranking person. She would not be able to accept that Harry wasn't going to simply do what Dumbledore said.

Still, Hermione was right about one thing. Sometimes you did need to listen to an adult. Harry needed someone with experience that could advise him. He needed someone that would be entirely on Harry's side. He needed someone who didn't automatically do what Dumbledore said. That last qualification significantly narrowed the options.

Whatever else happened, Harry had to stay away from Dumbledore. That much was obvious. Dumbledore ran the school where Harry continually found his life in danger. Dumbledore hired the teachers that had tried to kill Harry. Dumbledore had done nothing to stop Harry's participation in the tournament or to make it safer for a too young student. Dumbledore had not even noticed that his old friend Moody was an imposter or worse, the headmaster had noticed and not done anything about it. No, Dumbledore was not someone to be relied on.

The only adults Harry really knew were his teachers at Hogwarts. He had come in contact with many adults in the wizarding world but only superficially. He didn't think staying at the Leaky Cauldron or buying books at Flourish and Blotts made the people working there into someone he could turn to. Harry turned his considerations to his professors.

Professor McGonagall was out. Yes, she was an excellent teacher but as a head of house, she largely ignored what happened. Despite her talk of your house being your family, she had let everyone ostracize Harry in his second year when everyone thought he was the heir of Slytherin. With only a few exceptions, most Gryffindors had turned on him when his name came out of the goblet. Even after the first task, they refused to believe that he had not entered his name. On the occasions he had gone to her for help, McGonagall had essentially told him to leave it to the adults and return to the common room. McGonagall was not a source of support.

Snape was out. Yes, he had been unexpectedly kind in the infirmary and Harry would thank him for that but their history was not a smooth one. Harry felt in many ways Snape was trustworthy. Harry knew the churlish professor hated him, although he didn't understand why. He also knew that Snape would do what was needed to make sure Harry's life wasn't endangered. However, Harry couldn't trust that Snape would accept the danger the Dursleys and Hogwarts represented.

Harry thought through the remaining professors. Trelawney was out. She would believe he was in danger but would also think it was his destiny to die. Hagrid was kind and very fond of Harry but he would never believe that Dumbledore couldn't be counted on. There were

the professors he knew by sight like Sinistra and Vector but had no personal knowledge of them. He briefly considered Madam Pomfrey. He liked her but something told him she wasn't a good choice. That left Professors Sprout and Flitwick.

Harry liked Professor Sprout. She loved her plants the way Hagrid loved deadly creatures. Harry could respect that. She was a Hufflepuff so she was loyal but what was she loyal to? She would be loyal to Hogwarts and, by extension, the headmaster. She was also loyal to her students. She viewed each student in her house as a human plant that needed to be nurtured. It would be an advantage to have Professor Sprout on your side. Unfortunately, Harry wasn't sure he could convince her to be loyal to him over Hogwarts and Dumbledore.

That left Professor Flitwick. Harry smiled as he thought of the diminutive teacher. Flitwick was an outstanding teacher. He was always clear in his explanations of magical theory. He gave excellent demonstrations and was always helpful to everyone regardless of how quickly they could master a spell. He was a Ravenclaw which meant he valued reason. You didn't have to spend much time around Flitwick to see this trait. When asked a question, he always stopped to consider the best way to answer. Harry could tell he always considered the student before he answered and didn't just say the same thing to everyone. Flitwick seemed to understand that everyone was a bit different.

Yes, Flitwick seemed like the best choice. All Harry had to do was make a reasonable argument that his life was in danger both at his relatives and at Hogwarts and the Charm's professor would believe him. That was the big hurdle. Harry was sure that even if Flitwick couldn't directly help, he could point Harry at someone who could. The problem was what would happen if Flitwick didn't believe him or worse if Flitwick believed him but still thought Dumbledore was the solution. How could Harry ensure that Flitwick didn't tell his secrets?

Harry knew from listening to his uncle talk about his work at Grunnings that there were contracts that people in business signed to not talk about company secrets. Did the wizarding world have something like that? He knew there were contracts because some sort of magical contract forced him to participate in the tournament but where did the contracts come from? He also knew that secret keepers could keep a big secret like where a house was but could that also apply to personal secrets? Oh, Dobby would probably know. He had mentioned not being able to tell Malfoy's secrets. Was it only an elf thing or was there something similar for wizards?

Harry called Dobby who immediately popped in. Harry discussed the situation with Dobby. Dobby told Harry about the vows and oaths that wizards could make and eventually popped to the library and back to deliver a small volume titled **A Wizard's Word**. Harry tucked the volume into his bag and headed to the Great Hall for lunch.

Only about a third of the students were at lunch when Harry arrived. There was a noticeable hush when he walked in but Harry ignored everyone and took what had become his customary seat toward the back end of the hall. Gryffindor was the least populated table so Harry was able to begin reading his book while he ate. He had almost cleared his plate when Hermione and Ron sat across from him.

"What's that?" Hermione asked, indicating the book Harry held.

Harry held up the volume so she could read the title. "It's about the different types of oaths and vows that wizards can make for keeping secrets."

Hermione nodded and looked thoughtfully at Harry while Ron started a rambling story about a Weasley cousin who was obsessed with secrecy vows. Harry listened a moment before turning his attention back to his book. The story only lasted until more food arrived on the table which diverted Ron's attention. With Ron and Hermione's attention focused on their lunch, Harry was able to read far enough into the book to realize that it would probably be enough to ask Flitwick to simply keep his confidence.

As Harry started to get up from the table, Hermione exclaimed, "Harry, you can't leave. We haven't had a chance to talk since everything happened."

"Please, Hermione," pleaded Harry, "can we wait until the train home? I don't think I can talk about it yet."

"Of course, Harry. I wasn't thinking," Hermione answered. Although her eagerness to know sometimes overwhelmed her sense, it only took a reminder for Hermione's natural kindness to assert itself.

"I'm just going to run this back to the library," Harry held up the book. "I'll meet you both back in the common room."

Harry set off for the library at a brisk pace that discouraged interaction from his fellow students. After dropping the book off, Harry headed toward the Gryffindor common room via the Charms classroom, hoping the professor would be in his office. He found Flitwick just putting away a stack of papers and requested a meeting. Flitwick was curious but knowing what had recently happened didn't press for more information. He agreed to meet following dinner and to allow as much time as Harry needed.

After a quiet afternoon with his friends in the common room, Harry went down to dinner. As Ron and Hermione headed towards the Gryffindor table, Harry continued to the head table. Stopping in front of Professor Snape, he waited until he had the dour man's attention.

"Yes, Mr. Potter?" Snape said in his usual drawl.

"Thank you, Professor," Harry said. "I appreciate your assistance while I was in the infirmary."

"You are welcome," Snape responded. "Now go join your bothersome friends for dinner."

Harry smiled. The man's sour attitude was almost comforting. It was a steadiness that could be relied upon and after such a turbulent year anything that felt solid counted as a gain.

"What was that all about?" Ron asked as Harry sat down at the table.

"Professor Snape was very helpful when I was in the infirmary so I was thanking him," Harry answered.

"I guess the greasy git is good for something," Ron observed.

“Ronald Weasley,” Hermione huffed.

Harry just laughed. The bickering was typical and was another steady comfort. It wasn’t enough to change his mind about his course of action but it was a small balm in the moment.

Harry dithered over dinner. He still hadn’t figured out an excuse for not returning to the common room. He knew Hermione was concerned about him and would be watching him closely. Fortunately, Professor Flitwick seemed to anticipate his need.

“Mr. Potter,” Flitwick’s voice cut through his musings.

“Yes, Professor?”

“Please stop by my office after dinner. I am concerned that with all your extracurricular activities this year that you have missed some basics that will be essential as you begin preparation for your OWL year. I’d like to discuss some extra study options for your summer.” The Charm’s professor had barely finished his sentence before he was moving toward the doors of the Great Hall.

“That’s great, Harry,” Hermione enthused. “Maybe you should check in with your other professors to see if they have additional study for you.”

“Hermione,” Ron grumbled, “only you would think that extra summer homework is a good thing.”

Harry tuned them out as he enthusiastically dug into his pudding. Now that his immediate problems were solved, his mind turned to his upcoming meeting with Professor Flitwick. Suddenly it felt huge to even think about talking about things that had been kept secret but Harry knew he had no choice. He had tried to tell adults that things weren’t good at his relative’s house but it had always been brushed aside. If he wanted Flitwick’s help, he would have to tell everything. Harry thought of Dobby and Winky and suddenly felt filled with resolve. He had a family now. They would all take care of each other like family was supposed to, and his part started with an honest telling of the obstacles he faced. If he could face Voldemort, he could surely tell Flitwick about his life outside of Hogwarts.

Honesty Really Is The Best Policy

Chapter Notes

Monday, June 24 - Friday, June 30

After dinner, Harry went up to his dorm room and changed out of his school robes. He pulled out the hand-me-downs from Dudley including his holey, taped-together trainers. Harry needed his muggle reality to be seen for what it was. After getting dressed, he closed his eyes and reminded himself what was at stake. Opening his eyes and straightening his shoulders, Harry headed down the stairs to take the first step toward having a different life.

When he was finally standing in front of Professor Flitwick's desk, Harry realized he had no idea how to start. Recognizing how emotional the young man in front of him was, Flitwick motioned to a grouping of chairs nestled into the corner opposite his desk. "Let's sit comfortably over here to talk."

Harry nodded and moved over to an unoccupied chair. It looked squishy but was surprisingly firm. After a moment's consideration, Harry called Dobby and Winky. "Dobby and Winky agreed to be my elves and I agreed to be their wizard," Harry began, not noticing in his nervousness the widening of Flitwick's eyes. "I think they need to hear what I'm going to tell you because we are a family now."

Flitwick had always considered Harry Potter to be an exceptional young man despite his sometimes desultory performance in the classroom. To so firmly declare his loyalty to two house elves showed not just character but also heart and confirmed for him that whatever had brought the boy to his office, it deserved his full attention.

Conjuring two smaller armchairs for the elves, Flitwick motioned for them to be seated. "When you are ready, you can tell me what has brought you here tonight."

It took a few moments and when Harry began speaking it was halting and nearly mumbled. Gradually his voice gained strength as the professor accepted his words. He told of his earliest memories in the cupboard. He told of his constant hunger and his gratefulness every school year that he got at least one meal a day. He told about his typical day and the chores he routinely did. When he paused, Dobby popped out and came back with tea. Pouring a cup and preparing it like he already knew his wizard liked it, Dobby handed the cup to Harry who smiled his thanks and took a seat.

There was silence as the two wizards sipped their tea. Finally, Harry set his cup aside and began to talk again. He spoke of the punishments for any perceived infraction. He described the frying pan that Aunt Petunia hit him in the head with if he messed up preparing a meal. He told of the belt and cane his Uncle used whenever he did anything considered freakish. He

told of the increasing frequency of the punishments as each year progressed. He talked about the locks on the doors and the bars on the windows. He confessed that the reason his summer homework was never complete was because his uncle locked his trunk in the cupboard as soon as he got home every summer and it was not released until it was time to return to Hogwarts.

Amongst the recitation of facts, Harry also began to talk about the constant fear and uncertainty present every moment he lived outside of Hogwarts. He let himself feel the reality of the steady escalation of violence. Finally, he spoke of his realization that he might not survive another summer at the Dursley residence.

As he wound down, Flitwick asked quietly, "Have you told the headmaster any of this?"

"I've tried," Harry answered in frustration, "but every year he tells me that I must go back for my protection. He seems to think that Death Eaters are the worst threat I face."

Flitwick was stunned. To the average witch or wizard, a confrontation with a Death Eater was an unthinkable horror. That the young man in front of him spoke of the threat so dismissively told him as much as the recitation of horrors did about the untenable situation that The Boy Who Lived faced.

"Harry," Flitwick asked gently, "why did you come to me?"

Harry repeated the thoughts of that morning as he had considered and ultimately rejected the variety of people in his life. Finally, he concluded, "I guess it comes down to trusting that you would listen to me and then really consider things. I figure that you are my best choice to help me figure out what to do next."

Flitwick was silent for a moment and then he leaned forward, "I believe that your conclusions are correct, Mr. Potter," he began. "You would not be wise to return to your relative's house. I also accept your conclusion that the headmaster would reject your reasoning and is best left unaware of any changes that need to be made."

Flitwick carefully considered what to say next. After a moment, he continued, "Albus Dumbledore is a formidable wizard and shoulders many responsibilities. I suspect that in managing his responsibilities, he is unaware of how much danger a person can be in from the lesser evils that exist in the world. I think it is past time that someone looked after your interests."

Harry was wrung out emotionally from everything he had told Flitwick. It seemed like his professor was taking his side of things but didn't understand what that meant in practical terms. "So I'm not sure what to do now."

"I'm not either," Flitwick responded, "but I have a few ideas. I need to check a few things and then we can talk again tomorrow evening. We'll figure out a safe place for you that doesn't include your abusive relatives."

Flitwick looked at the elves and saw that both had tears streaming down their faces. Dobby stood up and turned to Harry, "Harry Potter is even greater than Dobby realized. I is honored

to be your elf.”

Winky stood and moved to face Harry, nodding fervently, “Winky also be honored. We keep you safe from bad muggles and bad wizards. No one be hurting our Harry Potter.”

Harry leaned forward and gathered both elves in a hug, “Thank you both. I’ll do everything I can to be a good wizard for you both.”

Harry fell asleep quickly that night with the knowledge that he had someone on his side. Unfortunately, his sleep gave way to nightmares about the graveyard. It was a melange of gravestones, fog and hooded figures with the constant sound of Cedric begging for his life in the distance. He woke in a sweat to find Dobby shaking his shoulder and Winky stroking his hair. After Harry sat up, Dobby popped out to get a cup of hot chocolate. As Harry sipped the comforting beverage, Winky told him a story. It was the elf equivalent of Jack and the Beanstalk. Had Harry not been so traumatized by the dream, he would have found it quite amusing. He fell asleep to Winky’s promise that she would tell him more elf stories whenever he wanted.

The next day was custom-made for adolescents that had spent a Scottish winter in a stone fortress. Sunny and warm, it encouraged long walks, skipping stones on the lake and general laziness. As lunchtime approached, Dobby popped to Harry with a basket of food and a blanket. To Harry’s relief, Ron and Hermione simply accepted it as part of Dobby’s crazy adoration of Harry. The afternoon continued much as the morning had until it was time to go to dinner.

Harry shouldn’t have been surprised after dinner when Hermione asked if she could join him and Professor Flitwick for extra charms tutoring. Harry looked down as if embarrassed and confessed, “Actually, Hermione, it isn’t all charms tutoring. Professor Flitwick is pretty easy to talk to and it’s helping.”

“Oh, that’s really good, Harry,” Hermione exclaimed. “It’s important that you talk about this. It will help.”

With this endorsement, Harry parted from his friends and went to Flitwick’s office. He found that the professor had already set up the seating area with the smaller armchairs for Dobby and Winky. Harry called them and they popped in with tea. After they were all settled with a cup, Flitwick began to explain the arrangements he was making.

“I went to Gringotts this morning and spoke to the Potter Account Manager.”

“I have an account manager?” Harry interrupted.

“The Potter family does,” Flitwick explained, “and as the last remaining Potter, that makes him your account manager.”

Flitwick let the surprised young man digest this information before continuing. “The Potter accounts are some of the oldest wizarding accounts in Gringotts. It is in their interest to assist you in any way possible.

“First thing tomorrow, I want you to send your relatives a note telling them you will spend the summer with your friends. From what you said last night, they won’t find this too unusual.”

Harry nodded and leaned forward to refill everyone’s tea. He had discovered that both elves liked undoctored tea in contrast to the sweet, milky cup he and the professor preferred.

Flitwick continued, “I will have a portkey for you when you leave Hogwarts. All you need to do is find an out-of-the-way spot and activate the portkey. It will take you directly to Gringotts. I have already notified the headmaster that I will be taking my vacation directly after the Express leaves and I will meet you at the bank.”

“Thank you, Sir,” Harry responded. He was relieved that Flitwick would continue to help him even after he left the school.

“Once you are at Gringotts, you can call your elves to join you there.” The professor paused for a moment and then looked at Harry, “I have a feeling there is more you need to tell me.”

“Yes, Sir,” Harry answered, “but you’re not going to like it.”

“Harry, I didn’t like hearing that you were hurt by the people that were supposed to take care of you,” Flitwick said. “Whatever else there is, we will figure it out.”

Harry’s eyes grew bright with unshed tears. He hadn’t expected to be so overwhelmed with emotion by Flitwick’s acceptance and help. It took him the remainder of his cup of tea to compose himself to speak.

“Sometimes things happen and at the time, you know it isn’t normal but there is an explanation so you just accept it. It’s when unusual things keep happening that you start to think that maybe there’s more to it.”

Flitwick nodded his understanding and encouraged Harry to continue. So Harry did, starting with the troll in his first year. By the time Harry concluded his tale of events that included booby traps, basilisks and Dementors, the professor was speechless. Harry was right, any single event was extraordinary but taken together, and especially considering Harry’s unwilling participation in the Tri-Wizard tournament, it painted an untenable picture for any student in any school. Add in the tale of Sirius Black and Flitwick was more than willing to consider that there was possibly something behind the string of events.

Flitwick set aside the possibility of a conspiracy. Even without it, he concluded that Harry was correct in his assertion that he was better off not returning to the school.

“You are right, Harry,” Flitwick told him. “I do not like what has happened to you here at Hogwarts. You are also correct that it would not be safe to return.”

Harry sat back in stunned relief. Yes, he had chosen the charms professor as the most likely to help him but a part of him had held back counting on actual acceptance and help.

Flitwick considered a moment and then suggested, “There is a lot that needs to be figured out. For now, let’s get settled for the summer and then we can figure out the next step in your education.”

At this pronouncement, Harry’s composure broke and tears streamed down his face. As his elves gathered around him, he fell apart for the first time since he was a small child hurt in a dark cupboard.

As Harry wept in the arms of his chosen family, Filius Flitwick breathed deeply to calm himself. Despite his cheerful demeanor, at his heart, Filius was a warrior. He longed to rush to the headmaster’s office to challenge the man both for his shameful and possibly deliberate neglect of Harry’s home life and for the continued hazards the boy had faced from almost the beginning of his Hogwarts education.

He breathed steadily, knowing that a rush to action would not help Harry. Right now it was important to help Harry find safety. As Filius considered everything that needed to be done, he realized that his priorities had shifted. Since retiring from the dueling circuit, Filius had enjoyed a gentler life passing on his knowledge to fledgling wizards and witches. He had considered it the perfect retirement from the constant travel and high-stress environment of the dueling pitch.

It was time for the next stage of his life and that would be at the side of Harry Potter. The young man needed more than two elves for his family. He needed more than a loving yet unstable godfather who was still a fugitive. Harry needed an adult at his side and Filius could be that adult. He considered waiting to tell Harry this but knew too much information had been withheld in the young man’s life. Right now he needed the certainty that knowledge could bring.

Once Harry was settled with a fresh cup of tea, the elves resumed their seats and waited. Filius refilled his tea then sat back to ask what felt like the most important question he had ever asked, “Harry, would you consider accepting me as part of your family?”

“Sir?” Harry wasn’t sure he had heard the professor correctly.

“You have created a family with Dobby and Winky. I would like to be a part of that family.”

Harry looked over at the two elves. They looked at the professor and then back at Harry. Both nodded and Harry smiled, “Yes, Sir, I would be very happy to have you in my family.”

A broad grin stole across Flitwick’s face, “Good. I think we will all benefit from such an arrangement.”

“So what’s next?” Harry asked.

“Enjoy the last two days with your friends. All you need to do is write to your aunt. I’d like you to spend your evenings here if possible.”

Harry nodded, “I can do that, Sir. I told my friends that you were giving me extra tutoring to make up for what I missed with the tournament. I also told Hermione that you were easy to

talk to about what happened so she is pretty happy about that.”

For the next two days, Harry’s only task was to enjoy his remaining time in Hogwarts. He spent the mornings roaming the castle and setting it in his memory since it was possible he would never return. His first stop the next day was the Hogwarts owlery to visit Hedwig. He had instructed Hedwig to make his way to the owlery at The Leaky Cauldron and wait there. Hedwig was still a bit miffed that Harry had used a school owl to send the note to the Dursleys.

“You know how they are, Hedwig,” Harry told the owl for what felt like the hundredth time. “I can’t take a risk that they would hurt you.”

After lunch on both days, Harry, Ron and Hermione would head out to the lake to enjoy the afternoon. Harry still had moments that caught at him as he remembered recent events but he had an underlying sense of peace about his decisions. At some point, he would have to write to his friends and Sirius but no one would be surprised if he didn’t write to them for the first week or so. He hoped he could keep in touch with both Ron and Hermione but that was a worry for later.

His final two evenings with Professor Flitwick were spent talking about the recent year. Harry had never talked about his feelings beyond the superficial. He felt like his life had always been moving from task to task doing what needed to be done. The fun times with Ron and Hermione were the exception and didn’t include a lot of introspection. The professor encouraged Harry to talk by first sharing his perspective as an observer and then asking how it compared to Harry’s experience as the main participant.

For the first time, Harry talked about how hurt he had been by Ron’s rejection but the attitudes of most students weren’t significant. He shared the combination of amusement, satisfaction and horror felt when Professor Moody turned Malfoy into a ferret.

When Harry talked about the graveyard, he related the shock and fear and the overwhelming physical pain. His feelings about Cedric’s death were about the trauma of seeing him killed. There was some sadness that Cedric was dead but it wasn’t a genuine loss to Harry. By the end of the second night, he was beginning to remember details that the haze of fear and pain had shrouded.

At the end of Harry’s final evening at Hogwarts, Flitwick gave him a folded-up piece of paper. “Keep this in your pocket. When you are in a private location at King’s Cross, tap it with your wand and it will take you to Gringotts.”

Harry nodded and slipped the paper into his pocket. “What about my trunk?”

“Get one of the upper years to first shrink Hedwig’s cage and put that in your trunk. Then have him shrink the trunk. You can carry it in your pocket. A tap of your wand with a small push of magic will resize it later.”

Harry nodded. He’d seen the older students shrinking their trunks but never thought to ask one to help him that way. Saying goodnight to the professor, Harry returned to his dorm for his last night at Hogwarts.

The next day was one that had become typical for Harry: leaving Hogwarts on the Express. For Filius Flitwick, it was as atypical a day as he had ever had. His first task after breakfast was to see the deputy headmistress, Minerva McGonagall.

“What do you mean you’re leaving Hogwarts?” she demanded.

“I am resigning my position immediately, Minerva,” Filius repeated.

“But why?” It was almost a wail.

“I’m ready for something different,” Filius answered. He learned early that most of the time he didn’t need to explain or justify his decisions.

“Surely you aren’t returning to the dueling circuit,” Minerva’s voice expressed her skepticism at this idea.

“No. I might dabble in the occasional tournament but those days are past.”

“What will you do?” she asked.

“I honestly don’t know. I’ll figure it out.” Filius knew this was blindsiding his friend and colleague but it had been nearly as surprising for himself. “Sometimes lightning strikes and you follow where it strikes.”

Minerva nodded, “That actually makes sense which is a little frightening. When do you intend to tell Albus?”

Filius chuckled, “As soon as I’m done here.”

“Will I see you again?” she asked.

“I’m only leaving a job, Minerva,” Filius admonished. “I’m not leaving my friends.”

“Good,” she sniffed. “I’m glad you’re at least being sensible about this.”

Filius wished that the subsequent conversation with the headmaster had been as easy. He had learned early that Albus was a master at emotional manipulation. He wielded his grandfatherly persona like an award-winning thespian. From delighted twinkle to sorrowful disappointment, Albus had an entire repertoire of expressions designed to produce specific emotional responses. Filius refused to yield. He was calm but adamant. He offered no explanation beyond what he had already told the deputy headmistress. He was unmoving in the face of the headmaster’s frustration. All in all, Filius found it very satisfying.

Once Harry had left for the Express, Dobby and Winky had shown up to pack Filius’ living area. He had already packed his personal items from his office and organized his syllabi and teaching notes for the next charms professor. As abrupt as his departure was, he would not be accused of handicapping the next teacher. Albus and Minerva had plenty of time to find a replacement that would find an office prepared for the next year of students.

Most of his colleagues took their annual vacation at the beginning of the summer break and had already departed when he was ready to leave the castle. He visited each office and left a personal letter to bid them farewell. The exceptions were Pomona and Severus. Both stayed in the castle over the holidays to work on personal projects using the resources that only Hogwarts would have available. They were the last he visited to say goodbye. As expected, Severus was as dour as Pomona was expressive. He assured her he would not be out of touch, merely out of sight.

With assurances from Dobby that his belongings were being stored, Filius flooded to the Leaky Cauldron from the Three Broomsticks. He had a few errands to run before it was time for Harry to arrive at Gringotts.

His first stop was the Leaky Cauldron owlery to see if Hedwig had arrived. Finding the distinctive owl, Filius approached her with a treat, "Good afternoon, Hedwig," he began as he reached out to stroke her head. "I need an owl that won't be identified with Harry. Would you accompany me to Eyelops and help me pick one out?"

Hedwig barked and turned to the side to nip lightly at Filius' fingers. The owl launched off the perch and flew to the high opening of the owlery. Turning her head, Hedwig barked again and threw herself out of the window.

"Well, I'll meet you there," laughed Filius to the departed bird.

When he arrived at Eyelops, Filius found Hedwig waiting on a perch outside the store. "Shall we find a companion?" Filius said to the bird. He held out his arm and the snowy owl delicately stepped over and then sidestepped to his shoulder. With a chuckle, Filius entered the store. There were many beautiful owls on both perches and in cages. As Filius looked around, Hedwig launched from his shoulder and in a few sweeps of her wings flew to the back right corner of the room, opposite the checkout counter. She landed on a large perch occupied by the smallest owl Filius had ever seen. Next to Hedwig, this owl looked like a toy.

As Filius stood there looking at the tiny owl, the owner walked up and commented, "That's a Northern Saw-Whet. Got him in a trade with a shopkeep in America."

"Is he big enough to actually carry mail?" Filius asked.

"I wouldn't burden him with anything large but he's fine with letters and small packages," answered the shop owner. "And he's fast. Don't know if it's natural or the magic but he can outfly anything in the shop."

As a practical matter, it seemed absurd to buy such a tiny owl but Filius felt drawn to the small avian. He looked at Hedwig and raised an eyebrow. The snowy owl clicked his beak and then stepped along the perch until he was nestled up against the tiny owl. The Northern Saw-Whet made a soft scritch-scratch sound that sounded like a knife being drawn over a whetstone.

"That explains the name," Filius commented. He extended his arm and the tiny owl hopped over. With a happy hoot, Hedwig took off and exited the store. "That's that then," he said with a smile and walked to the register to finalize the sale.

Walking out of the shop with the tiny owl on his shoulder, Filius found Hedwig once again perched in front of the shop.

Filius looked at the small owl and recalled his history, "There was once a human Hedwig and her partner was Henry. That seems like a good name for you. Does Henry suit?"

Hedwig barked as the newly christened Henry chirruped his acceptance.

"Come along then. Let's settle in for a few days.". Filius turned and headed towards Gringotts. Although most wizards and witches never went past the bank, the Alley split on either side of the lopsided white edifice. The right fork, known as Alley Way, led to a residential area that mostly catered to singles and couples. The left fork, known as Diagon Way, led to the more exclusive shops that catered to a more select clientele than the more well-known shops along the main alley attracted. Whether you wanted a custom broom or a custom wardrobe, if you had the galleons you could find a shop that would create it to your specifications.

Walking along Diagon Way, Filius walked to the smaller of the two inns. The larger inn, Manorly, catered to those of a more hedonistic bent both in accommodations and unlisted extras that could be purchased. In contrast, the Silver Sickle attracted families and individuals that wanted a more settled shopping or business experience. Both inns prided themselves on complete privacy and asked no questions. For any reason, if you could afford it, you had a place to stay.

Filius booked a small family suite at the Sickle Inn for a week. There was a lot to do and no reason to create added stress by rushing things. Entering the two-bedroom suite, Filius called Dobby and Winky.

"How's can Dobby be helping Harry Potter's professy?"

Filius chuckled, "Dobby, please call me Filius. We're going to be staying here for a week or so. Harry will be in the larger bedroom as I'm sure he'll want you and Winky with him at night." He handed his shrunken trunk to Winky then turned back to Dobby, "Hedwig and a very small owl named Henry will be in the owlery here. I'll call you once Harry arrives at Gringotts and you can get his things."

With that settled, Filius went into the sitting room and tucked into a comfy armchair that he had transfigured to the perfect size for his smaller body. For a while he just sat and enjoyed the stillness. Winky brought out his current book, a comprehensive comparison of European and Asian charms, and he settled in to read. He was surprised when Dobby brought him a tray with a sandwich, soup and butterbeer. When he eventually got up to head to Gringotts to meet Harry, he felt an ease that he had not experienced in many a year.

Practical Matters

Chapter Notes

Friday, June 30 - Sunday, July 2

Harry sat at a large round table beside Professor Flitwick and a goblin named Sharpnail. Despite being told to call the Professor by his given name, Harry couldn't quite bring himself to be so informal and stuck to the honorific of Sir. This seemed to amuse Flitwick but he understood that it took time to grow into new relationships.

They were waiting for the arrival of the solicitor that Sharpnail had contacted on Harry's behalf. Upon learning from Flitwick that Harry was largely unaware of his family heritage, Sharpnail had recommended hiring a firm that was experienced in both wizard and muggle law and regularly worked with Gringotts. At Flitwick's urging, Harry had accepted the recommendation. Harry didn't understand why he needed a solicitor but recognized that he had little experience with the wizarding world outside of Hogwarts.

The original Potter family solicitor had died soon after Harry had been born and, with the Potters in hiding, a replacement had not been hired. Sharpnail had written to Harry several times since he had started Hogwarts with a recommendation to hire someone. Having learned that Harry had never received any Gringotts correspondence, Sharpnail now understood why those queries had never been answered.

Harry had been looking at the desk on the other side of the room trying to identify various objects arrayed on it when the door opened and an armor-clad goblin led a man carrying a briefcase into the room. Seeing Sharpnail and Flitwick rise, Harry did the same and was introduced to his solicitor.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Potter. I'm Ted Tonks of Greengrass and Associates," the man introduced himself. He appeared tall but it was hard to know as he was the only fully human adult in the room. He shook Harry's hand and then turned to greet Sharpnail.

Upon being introduced to Flitwick, the solicitor turned to Harry and asked, "Do I have your permission to discuss your legal business with Professor Flitwick present?"

Harry blinked, "Oh yes, the professor is family."

"Very well, Mr. Potter," the solicitor answered easily as he moved to the seat on the other side of Harry. "If there is ever anything you want to discuss privately with me, you need only say so."

Harry nodded and, after a moment's thought, called, "Dobby, Winky."

The elves popped in and Harry introduced them to Ted Tonks then explained, "Mr. Tonks is a solicitor and will be helping me get everything sorted."

Dobby turned to Tonks and told him with his usual intense bouncy enthusiasm, "Harry Potter is a great wizard and must be kept safe. Tonks solicitor can help Professy take special care of Harry Potter. You tell Dobby and Winky how to help."

Ted Tonks blinked and just nodded, "Thank you, Dobby and, uh, Winky. I will do my best to help Mr. Potter."

The elves nodded and stepped forward to hug Harry then popped away.

"Mr. Tonks," Harry said gravely, "Dobby and Winky are family so I need to make sure I can take care of them."

"I understand," the solicitor responded, "I will keep that in mind as we move forward." Harry nodded, satisfied as he sat back in his seat.

Sharpnail cleared his throat and regained everyone's attention, "We have much to do so today is mostly planning but there are two items that need Mr. Potter's immediate attention. First is the issue of emancipation."

The goblin turned to Harry, "Mr. Potter, your unwilling participation in the Tri-Wizard Tournament has had a favorable result. As the tournament was limited to legal-age students, your inclusion made you a de facto adult. At this time, you can file a request for provisional emancipation."

Harry looked at Flitwick in confusion. He knew emancipation meant freedom but had no idea what that meant for him. It was Ted Tonks that explained, "Mr. Potter, the Ministry has two requirements that you must meet to be considered an adult in the wizarding world: You must be 17 years of age, and you must pass at least one OWL. Your inclusion in the tournament meets the age requirement but it does not excuse you from the OWL requirement."

"So this is good?" Harry asked.

"Yes, for many reasons," Sharpnail answered, "but at this moment what is most relevant is that you have full access to the Potter vaults so you can take care of your family like you want."

"Vaults?" Harry wondered, "How many are there?"

Sharpnail chuckled, "That brings up the next issue. When you turned eleven, you were legally eligible to claim your rights as heir to the House of Potter and to execute your parents' wills if that had not already been done."

Harry turned to Flitwick, "Why didn't anyone tell me?"

"I don't know, Harry," Flitwick reached out and laid his hand on Harry's. "Dumbledore had the Wizengamot seal the wills but that would not have taken precedence over your rights when you turned eleven." Flitwick didn't like the implications but was mindful of Harry's

need for openness, "I don't know if Albus simply forgot about it or if he intentionally neglected to tell you. Either way, you are here now."

Harry nodded and turned back to Sharpnail, "I guess we should do this then." Harry turned to Tonks, "Would you read everything and tell me what I need to know today?"

"Certainly," Tonks answered, reaching out to take the sheaf of papers from Sharpnail. The solicitor read through everything, making the occasional note on a pad he took out of his briefcase. Harry noticed that he was using paper and pen instead of parchment and quill.

"This is pretty straightforward. Your parents left individual bequests to friends and family, including some personal items in their joint personal vault. We can review those later and decide how you want to notify those individuals.

"There is also some," Tonks hesitated for a moment, "let's call it legal information that will require some research. After I've done the research, we can discuss what this means to you.

"Your mother invested in the muggle stock market and some individual businesses. We'll set an appointment with Sharpnail specifically to go over these investments.

"As to your father, with your emancipation there are no limitations on your inheritance."

"Limitations?" Harry asked.

"Yes," Tonks answered, "typically, you would not be able to take control of your family vaults and properties until you reached seventeen. You would also not be able to claim head of House status yet."

"But now I don't have to wait," Harry clarified.

"That's correct," Tonks confirmed. "May I make a copy of this?" he asked, referring to the two wills. At Harry's nod, he touched his wand to the papers and another stack appeared next to it. Handing the wills to Harry, the solicitor said, "You can read these when you are ready but there is no rush. You can wait until you feel comfortable to do so."

Harry took the papers, appreciating the consideration. "What happens next?"

The adults exchanged looks, and at a nod from Sharpnail, Flitwick spoke up, "The priority is a complete medical exam." Turning to Harry, Flitwick continued, "I would like you examined by both a wizard and goblin healer. Winky has requested that you also allow an elf healer as well."

"That is a rare honor, Mr. Potter," Sharpnail said, "Elf healers rarely share their skills with wizards."

Flitwick nodded and continued, "Winky has also given me an additional task. I am to make sure you obtain a complete wardrobe that is suitable for, and here I quote, "the greatness that is Harry Potter."

The adults chuckled while Harry leaned forward and covered his face with his hands. Flitwick reached over and placed a hand on Harry's shoulder, "You are their wizard, Harry. They take that as seriously as you take them being your elves."

"I know. It's just a little overwhelming."

Flitwick smiled in understanding and turned to Sharpnail, "How much time do you need to go over the financial matters?"

Sharpnail opened the top folder and perused the first piece of parchment, "A day each for the Potter and Evans-Potter investments, a day to review all the property issues. You will want at least a day to make an initial assessment of the Potter family vault, plus a day to look through the other vaults. I'm sure you will want the house elves with you for those days."

"Um," Harry hesitated momentarily, "How many vaults do I have?"

Sharpnail took out another parchment, "We will need to do an inheritance test for the final determination but currently there is your trust vault and the personal vault of James and Lily Potter. The Potter vaults include the hereditary family vault, a general storage vault, a high-security patents vault and three personal vaults from Dorea Black Potter, Henry Potter and Euphemia Potter. Additionally, a vault is set aside for legacies left to you as the boy-who-lived."

"What? Legacies? I don't understand." Harry was genuinely baffled by this unexpected turn.

Tonks took up the narrative, "It became quite fashionable following your victory over You-Know-Who for wizards and witches without heirs to leave their estates to you."

"That's nuts," Harry shook his head. "I didn't even do anything."

"You gave them hope after too long without," Tonks explained. "For many, a bequest or inheritance was a small price." The solicitor turned back to Sharpnail, "If I can have a copy of the legacies, I'll make recommendations for Mr. Potter so we can at least empty one vault. I'll also coordinate with the healers to schedule time for a complete physical examination."

Tonks looked at Flitwick and Harry, "Tomorrow would be a good day to take care of shopping and other personal errands. That gives us a day to coordinate the various appointments and to file the emancipation paperwork with the ministry."

"We have time for one last thing before we adjourn for the day," Sharpnail said. "Let's go ahead and do the inheritance test, and then we can plan if there are unexpected results."

"How can there be unexpected results?" Harry asked, "Wouldn't it be the same as my father?"

"It might well be," answered Sharpnail, "but many heirs to ancient houses don't bother to check inheritance rights. It has been several generations since a Potter has checked the bloodlines. There may be expired lines that will revert to you. It is also possible that your mother descended from a squib line and the resurgence of magic in the line makes you eligible for an unrealized inheritance."

"That's a lot more complicated than I expected," Harry said. "How do you figure it out?"

Sharpnail directed everyone to a side table holding a small bowl, parchment and a knife. "You will go to that table and prick your finger with the knife. Seven drops of blood will go into the bowl. Then you will pour the contents of the bowl onto the parchment. After a few minutes, you will see the results."

Harry looked to Flitwick who nodded so Harry got up and went to the table. The knife seemed very sharp and when he picked it up he felt heavy magic. Feeling directed, Harry put the knife to his middle right finger and barely pressed the sharp blade into his flesh. At the feel of a quick stab, blood welled up and Harry put his finger over the bowl. After seven drops, he pulled his hand back to see that the small cut was already closed. As he set the knife down, he looked in the bowl and saw the blood swirling in a clear shimmering liquid. Once again feeling directed, Harry picked up the bowl and poured the contents onto the center of the parchment. He watched in fascination as the liquid was absorbed.

"Come sit down, Mr. Potter," Sharpnail said. "I'll know when it is ready."

Everyone sat quietly until Sharpnail rose at some unspoken signal to fetch the charmed parchment. He sat and glanced down, his face noticeably paling. Without a word, he made a copy and handed it to Ted Tonks then looked at Harry, "Mr. Potter, there are some unexpected results. If you give me a moment, I need to request some documents."

With that pronouncement, Sharpnail went to his desk, scribbled on several sheets of parchment and placed them in a tray where they promptly disappeared. As he walked back to his chair, he handed Harry the parchment where the following was written:

House of Potter by right of paternal inheritance
House of Peverell by right of primogeniture
House of Stinchcombe by right of primogeniture
House of Gryffindor by right of primogeniture
House of Slytherin by right of conquest and primogeniture
House of Gaunt by right of conquest
House of Emrys by right of maternal inheritance
House of Black Heir by selection

Flitwick, reading alongside Harry, gasped in surprise, "This is astonishing."

Harry was confused. "I don't understand," he said softly.

"Ask your questions, Mr. Potter," Sharpnail said gently.

"I know what you said about lost houses and stuff but so many. And what is primo...primo..."

"Primogeniture," Tonks pronounced the word slowly. "It means that a House's inheritance passes to the oldest child. In some Houses, it is limited to the oldest male heir, but that is more common in the oldest Houses. When a line ends, we look at the next oldest child's line, and so on. Then there are cases when a House merges into another House through marriage."

Harry nodded in understanding.

Sharpnail took over the explanation. "In the case of the Gryffindor line, it merged into a non-inheriting Peverell line. So did the Slytherin line, though in a different branch of the Peverell family. The Potter line came about when a Stinchcomb male married a non-inheriting Peverell female. By the whim of fate, this Stinchcomb was nicknamed Potter and it stuck and thus was born the House of Potter that gained its own status over time."

"Okay," Harry said. "I think I understood that. So what's this about conquest?"

Flitwick explained, "It's a very ancient law that we brought into the wizarding world from the muggles. If you defeat the head of a House, you have the right to seize both the Lordship and assets of that House."

"Ooookay," Harry said dubiously.

A goblin walked into the room carrying a stack of folders and handed them to Sharpnail. Sharpnail looked through each folder, pulling one out to hand to Tonks. After Tonks read through the folder, he handed it back.

Sharpnail cleared his throat and said, "According to our records, you defeated Tom Marvolo Riddle, last descendant of both the Slytherin and Gaunt lines on October 31, 1981. At that time, you became entitled to claim both Houses once you came of age."

"But," Harry started.

"Mr. Potter," Tonks interrupted, "do you know who Tom Marvolo Riddle is?"

"Of course I do," snapped Harry in irritation, "It's Voldemort but doesn't his resurrection sort of cancel that?"

"You defeated Tom Marvolo Riddle, who styled himself as Lord Voldemort. The wraith that orchestrated the creation of a magical construct claiming to be Lord Voldemort is not recognized by Gringotts as the same being. Therefore the claim stands." Sharpnail was adamant, "Whether you choose to claim it or not, it is still yours to claim."

"You have a lot of decisions you will have to make, but none of them carry any urgency," Tonks told Harry. "Sharpnail and I will coordinate with the healers. Tomorrow evening I will stop by to update you on anything necessary."

Tonks looked at Flitwick, "Do you feel comfortable doing the Diagon Alley shopping with Harry tomorrow morning?"

"Quite"

"My assistant is muggle born. Not only is she fashion mad but she loves shopping. She can pick up Harry after lunch to take him into London." Looking at Harry, Tonks continued, "I'm sure you will want jeans and other casual clothes, but you will also need some more formal clothes to meet some of your muggle obligations created by your maternal inheritance."

Both Harry and Flitwick nodded in acceptance.

"Mr. Potter, in addition to Sharpnail's advice and assistance concerning your financial matters, you have the full resources of Greengrass and Associates at your disposal. If you have questions or concerns, you need only ask."

Ted Tonks was greeted by Dobby after knocking on the door to what he thought of as the Potter Suite. "Good evening, Dobby."

"Good evening, Sollicy Tonks. Harry Potter has bought many clothes and Winky be very happy."

"I'm glad to hear that, Dobby," Tonks said, following the elf into the sitting area. "Good evening, Mr. Potter and Professor Flitwick. How are you both?"

Harry made a noise of disgust. "He," Harry gestured at Flitwick, "got to spend the afternoon here while your assistant was torturing me. She called it shopping, but I'm pretty sure it could be classified as torture."

Tonks laughed, "She said it was a very productive afternoon. Plus, Dobby has already told me that Winky is pleased with the results."

"I like the results," Harry said. "I just wish it could have happened without me."

"Unfortunately, at your age, it will happen more often as you grow," chuckled Tonks.

"I can't wait," Harry said with the first sarcasm Tonks had heard from the boy.

Tonks laughed, "Well, with any luck, you won't have to do clothes shopping for at least several months."

Flitwick laughed and then his expression turned serious, "What's next on the schedule?"

"On Monday, you will floo to this address at 8 am," Tonks handed Flitwick a folded sheet of paper. "It's my wife's healing practice. Her name is Andromeda Tonks. She is both a medical doctor and a master healer. The other healers will be there."

"How long will it take?" Harry asked.

"She's booked the entire day," Tonks answered. "If you don't need it, she gets time off."

Looking between Flitwick and Tonks, Harry suspected they expected a full day with the healers.

Tonks reached into his briefcase and pulled out a notepad. Consulting it, he said to Harry, "I'd like to talk about OWLs with you."

Harry nodded, so Tonks continued, "I filed the emancipation paperwork with the ministry today. It is a routine filing and will automatically be recorded.

"As I mentioned, it is considered provisional until you get at least one OWL. Am I correct in assuming that you will not be returning to Hogwarts in September?"

"I don't think I can," said Harry softly.

"I think anyone looking at events objectively wouldn't be surprised at your decision," Tonks responded. "However, when the first of September arrives, questions will be asked. I suspect there will be pressure to return you to Hogwarts despite the emancipation. If you can take and receive an OWL before then, nothing can be done. Your assumption of adulthood will be secured."

"Can I just take a single OWL?" Harry wondered.

Tonks chuckled, "Contrary to practice at most magical schools, OWLs can be taken at any time in a wizard's life. It isn't unusual for older witches and wizards to learn new areas of magic later in their life. Likewise, you can also apply to take a NEWT in any subject once you are legally recognized as an adult.

"So, yes, Mr. Potter," Tonks reiterated, "you can take a single OWL. You simply fill out a form, pay the fee and show up at the Ministry Department of Education on the appointed day. Typically it takes about a week to get the results for a single OWL.

"The real question is if you can accomplish the preparation in less than two months," Tonks looked at Harry with a question on his face.

Harry, in turn, looked at Flitwick, "What do you think, Sir?"

"Once we get settled, I'm sure I can have you ready for your Charms OWL within a month," Flitwick answered confidently.

Harry nodded in acknowledgment. He was often an indifferent student but when motivated he accomplished what he set out to do. He had no doubt he could get his first OWL by summer's end.

Satisfied, Tonks continued, "Once you are legally unassailable, you will have more freedom. Talk with your family. You can achieve as much or as little as you desire, but the hardest part will be figuring out what you want."

"Thank you, Mr. Tonks. I appreciate everything you've done." Harry figured for a while he'd just be taking things one step at a time while he absorbed everything he needed to know.

"Just remember to use your resources and find the best people for what you need to accomplish. You never have to go it alone."

As he lay in bed that night, Harry thought about what Tonks had said. He realized that he had never really thought of the future. It was a bit overwhelming to know he had options he had

never considered. At the same time, it was comforting to know he didn't have to figure it out alone.

Sunday morning arrived with the realization that it had been a whole week since Voldemort's resurrection. Harry lay in bed thinking of everything that had changed in a week. The trip on the Express had been bittersweet. Harry had no regrets about his decision, but he knew it would radically change his relationship with Ron and Hermione. Of course, this past year had already done that, so maybe this was just the natural progression.

Arriving at Gringotts had been the first of many revelations that would forever alter Harry's perception of Albus Dumbledore. Filius had immediately checked him for tracking charms and discovered that both he and his robes had a tracking charm. Dobby, arriving to take his trunk to their lodgings, had found several amongst his possessions. As prearranged between Filius and the elves, Dobby had taken the charms to Privet Drive.

Harry woke, realizing he had dozed off while reviewing everything he had learned at Gringotts. He had been so tired after the meeting that he had almost fallen asleep during dinner. Yesterday's whirlwind of shopping had also left him exhausted at the end of the day, and he had fallen asleep soon after Tonks' visit.

Today was a day with no bankers or solicitors, just his newly chosen family. Harry dressed in his new casual muggle clothes and went to the sitting room. As he sat down, a bowl of porridge full of fresh fruit appeared on the table. Harry grabbed a spoon with an enthusiastic, "Thanks."

"Good morning, Harry," Filius looked up from the letter he was reading. "Would you like to learn some fun charms today?"

Harry grinned and nodded as he continued to eat his porridge. He had no idea what made a charm fun, but he had learned that the cheerful Charms professor enjoyed a good laugh and seemed to find humor all around himself.

Harry did indeed learn fun charms. His favorite was shooting string out of the end of his wand. With a bit of practice, he could change the color of the string. It took more practice but eventually, he learned to shoot multiple strings, first all of the same color and then different colors at the same time. After string came balls varying not just in color but also quantity and size. By lunch time, Harry could shoot string, balls, colored lights and birds out of his wand.

After lunch came the real fun: dueling using the charms he had learned that morning. By dinner, Harry was physically exhausted but mentally refreshed. He couldn't remember ever laughing so much and for so long.

Filius was pleased with the day. He had laid a foundation for intent-based spell casting, expanded Harry's understanding of charms and given him a break from his recent troubles.

Winky and Dobby also enjoyed the day. They delighted in Harry's laughter while marveling at Filius' dueling ability. Before dinner, the elves had engaged in their version of fun dueling that fascinated Harry and Filius.

Harry fell asleep that night before Winky could even begin an elf tale. Winky laid out Harry's clothes for the next day before cuddling up with Dobby in the comfortable pillow nest they had made for themselves. Tomorrow Winky would ensure her young wizard received healing for his old hurts. Her family was strong in healing magic. Winky's strength was in nurturing, but she could see much of the physical hurt her Harry had suffered. Tomorrow would start to fix things.

Medical Matters

Chapter Notes

Monday, July 3

Arriving at the healer's on Monday morning reminded Harry how much he hated magical travel. Filius chuckled as he helped Harry up and cleared the soot from him. Filius made a mental note to teach Harry the charm. With the emancipation registered, Harry could legally perform magic and the trace was automatically removed when the paperwork was filed.

Ted Tonks was waiting for them in the arrivals room and greeted both with a handshake. "I want to assure you that everything happening is completely confidential. As a precaution, Healer Tonks gave her assistant the day off."

"Thank you, Sir." As Harry responded, Dobby and Winky popped in. They knew their young wizard was nervous and wanted to give him as much support as possible.

After Tonks greeted the elves, he led them to the meeting room where he introduced them to his wife, Andromeda Tonks. With her were a goblin and an elf. Andromeda took over the introductions. "This is Healer Heartwise," Andromeda said, indicating the youngest-looking goblin Harry had ever seen. Gesturing to the elf, Andromeda continued, "This is Healer Gorin."

Harry stepped forward. The family had decided that, in general, Harry would speak for them since both elves and Filius considered themselves adopted into Harry's family. "I am honored that you would use your skills on my behalf. My family and I thank you."

Andromeda led them to a small conference table, "We'd like to start by ensuring we all have a clear understanding of expectations." After everyone was seated, she looked at Harry, "Would you prefer to be addressed as Lord Potter, Potter or Harry?"

"Harry, please," he answered.

"Very well, Harry. I know Ted has already assured you of our confidentiality. It is always your decision who has information about your body and health. You need to specifically tell us who can be given this information. Even after you've given permission, you can at any time revoke that permission. Do you understand?"

"Yes, ma'am," Harry responded.

Healer Tonks reached for a folder on the table and pulled it toward herself. Taking out a parchment she instructed, "Speak clearly those who have permission to view or be told about your medical reports."

Uncertain, Harry looked at Filius. Getting a nod of encouragement, Harry spoke, "Filius Flitwick, Dobby Potter, Winky Potter and Solicitor Ted Tonks."

Verifying that the names had been filled correctly, Healer Tonk's asked, "Is there anyone you want specifically excluded from access to your medical records?" This was not usually included but Ted had requested this clause.

Without hesitation, Harry spoke, "Albus Dumbledore."

Once again verifying the parchment, Tonk's passed it to Harry along with a quill, "Please look this over and sign."

Harry did as requested and returned the parchment to the healer.

Heartwise spoke in the gentlest voice Harry had ever heard, "The next step is to do a comprehensive diagnostic examination. We will each do this using the healing magic of our people. Then we will confer and discuss the results. This may lead to further diagnostics. Then we will discuss the results with you and any necessary or recommended procedures."

Gorin spoke next, "Do you have any specific concerns, Harry?"

Harry sat wide-eyed. He looked at Filius and then Dobby and then closed his eyes, feeling overwhelmed. After a moment, Filius reached over and laid his hand on Harry's arm and asked, "Would you like us to tell them?"

At Harry's nod, Filius looked at the healers, "Harry has been subject to physical abuse for as long as he can remember. It was the continuing escalation that first brought him to me."

Dobby spoke up, "Harry Potter is a great wizard and has done great deeds at Hogwarts. He has been much hurt rescuing his friends."

Harry opened his eyes to see the healers absorb the information in their various fashions. All three managed to look both sad and fierce at the same time. Harry couldn't help but wonder if it was a look taught to all healers. He returned to the moment realizing that the healers were waiting for his acknowledgment. Harry nodded and when they began to rise from their chairs he followed. At an indication from Tonks, he walked to the middle of the room and stood waiting.

Harry watched as the three healers moved around him. Tonks waved her wand in patterns he recognized from Madame Pomfrey. The others gestured with their hands as they moved. What Harry couldn't see was the renown with which each healer was regarded by their communities.

It was easy to assume that Andromeda Tonks had been chosen for her relationship with Harry's solicitor. In fact, were she not so highly regarded she would have been avoided for that exact reason. Greengrass and Associates were well known for only engaging the best professionals on behalf of their clients. While nepotism was the usual way of business in the wizarding world, many didn't seem to notice that companies regarded as the best employed the best regardless of relationship or blood status.

Andromeda Tonks was considered a blood traitor by many purebloods. Her marriage to a muggle that left her disowned by her Ancient and Noble family meant she would never hold a position above basic healer at St. Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies. That was a management decision that followed the Ministry's lead in hiring and advancement practices. However, no healer at St. Mungos would hesitate to recommend Healer Tonks to their patients. Her willingness to use both wizarding and muggle healing techniques may have been publicly disdained but privately healers appreciated her willingness to use any known method to help her patients.

Heartwise was the youngest healer in recorded dwarrow history. From her earliest memory she had felt drawn to those in need of healing. Her gentle manner and compassion had earned her true name while she was still an apprentice. Her mastery was taken with Gringotts' master healer, Stronggut, whose composure was legendary in the goblin halls. Heartwise had learned wizard healing from Stronggut, and while she had declined a position with Gringotts, she was often called in to consult with their wizard clients.

Heartwise had been approached by Filius Flitwick. Filius was a member of the dwarrow nation and was so well respected for his dueling skills that his decision to teach in a wizarding school was regarded as a quirk rather than an insult to his heritage. Filius spent his holidays teaching promising dwarrow children, never asking anything in return. When he approached several goblins about aid for Harry Potter it was notable. Heartwise had immediately volunteered when a healer was requested. Like many, Heartwise assumed there must be more to young Potter than simply his interactions with a dark wizard.

Gorin was as old as Heartwise was young. Winky, his great-great-great-granddaughter, had approached him. Every elf in his line had healing magic but only a few had enough to obtain mastery in it. Despite the troubles with Bartemus Crouch, Winky was well respected in her family. She was the only one that blamed herself for her dismissal. Her family knew that some wizards were, for lack of a better word, assholes. When Winky told of her two-way bond with Harry Potter, many in the family wept. It had been generations since a wizard had honored the ancient pact of mutual bonding, so long that most wizards no longer knew of the pact. That the young wizard had automatically reciprocated the bond would have been enough to garner Gorin's services. When Winky had told her many times grandfather that Harry needed special healing, Gorin was intrigued.

Gorin was considered ancient even by house elf standards. He had long satisfied his need to serve and spent most of his time learning the healing ways of other magical beings. Wizards and goblins were easy from his perspective. Even centaurs were no challenge but learning to follow the healing pathways of griffons and dragons was a challenge that made him feel almost young. His services were much sought after but he referred most to other healers in the family. This was the first time in two decades he had agreed to offer his services to a human.

Harry had gotten bored standing there while the healers had moved around him so he let his mind wander. He was mentally constructing the perfect quidditch game. Both teams were good, with one offensively stacked and the other emphasizing defense. He was considering ways for the seekers to duck into active play more often. He was so involved in his mental game that he didn't notice each healer pause and repeat their diagnostic exam. Filius and the

elves noticed and each was busy imagining the revenge they could get on the people that had hurt their Harry so badly.

Finally, the healers were done and Tonks got Harry's attention. He joined his family at the conference table and waited while the healers briefly conferred.

Gorin stepped forward, "Harry, I've heard that you have enjoyed Winky telling you elf stories."

Harry nodded, confused about the seemingly unrelated topic of conversation.

Gorin continued, "Instead of waiting here while we confer, go back to your room, be comfortable and let Winky tell you more stories. We can meet back here at 1 pm."

Winky reached over and took Harry's hand, "Stories are better than boring waiting." Winky had watched the healers. She knew her Harry would take lots of healing.

"An excellent idea," Filius joined in, "a light lunch and a good story are just what we all need." He nodded to the healers and led the rest back to the floo.

After the unusual family left, the healers took seats at the table while Tonks called the office elf for tea. They each began going over the individual diagnostic reports that their magics had produced. For a while the only sounds were the scratching of quill on parchment and the clink of porcelain as tea was sipped.

Heartwise spoke first, "I was under the impression that Harry has been attending Hogwarts. Why weren't at least some of these issues brought to light?"

"Let me see if I can find that out," Tonks said. Getting up, she went to her desk and took out a form. Filling it out, she called for Dobby. When the elf popped in, she handed him the form, "Could you ask Harry to sign this form? I'd like to discuss some of his school injuries with Madame Pomfrey." She went back and waited until Dobby returned with the signed form. She had slightly stretched the truth but some questions needed answers. When she had the signed form she got up and walked to the arrivals room and knelt at the fireplace. Throwing in a pinch of floo powder, she called out, "Hogwarts Infirmary." After a brief conversation, she stood up and waited while Poppy Pomfrey came through the floo.

When Pomfrey entered the room, she paused at the sight of an elf and a goblin sitting at the table. Taking the chair indicated by Tonks, Pomfrey sat and waited as Tonks introduced Gorin and Heartwise.

Tonks handed Pomfrey the original of the signed release form from Harry, "Before we go further, I need to know if, as an employee of Hogwarts, you are required to notify Albus Dumbledore of this consultation."

"As an employee of Hogwarts, no," Pomfrey responded, "but I must notify him as Mr. Potter's magical guardian."

Tonks pulled out a parchment from the folder, copied it and handed the copy to Pomfrey, "This is a copy of Harry Potter's ministry-certified emancipation declaration."

Pomfrey looked over the document and smirked, "Good for Mr. Potter. At least something good came out of the tournament mess."

"This is a diagnostic that I did this morning. I did it twice to confirm the results," Tonks said, handing the magically produced parchment to Pomfrey.

Pomfrey wasn't even a quarter way through the diagnostic when she looked up in outrage, "Why hasn't this been taken care of?"

"That's exactly what I want to know," answered Tonks vehemently.

"You're his healer," Pomfrey said with exasperated heat.

"I just met him this morning," Tonks responded with equal heat.

"Where is his regular healer?" Pomfrey asked.

"The only medical professional Harry Potter has ever seen before today is you," Tonks said. "Why did you never notice these issues when you examined him?"

Pomfrey slumped back in her chair and closed her eyes. After a moment, she sat up and handed the file she had brought to Tonks. Stuck to the front inside of the folder was the standard permission form that allowed the school mediwitch to perform a full magical diagnostic at the start of first year and routinely when the student was seen in the hospital wing for illness or injury. Permission had been refused and the stated reason for the refusal was that Harry Potter would see his private healer if necessary. Albus Dumbledore had signed the form.

After flooing back to her office, Poppy Pomfrey sat at her desk putting away Harry Potter's file. The last few hours left her heartbroken. She had unwittingly failed a child in her care. How did she prevent that from happening again?

She looked up when the hospital wards notified her that someone had entered. She recognized Ted Tonk's approaching her office. She had never treated him as a student but had seen him almost every year when his daughter, Nymphadora, had been a student.

"How can I help you, Mr. Tonks?" She greeted him as he entered her office.

"Good afternoon, Madame Pomfrey," Tonks answered and handed her his business card. "I represent Harry Potter and I need some information from you for today's consultation."

"Before I discuss Mr. Potter with you, I need a signed release," Pomfrey stated firmly.

Tonks chuckled, "I should have been clearer. I need your information to set up a standard consultation agreement and pay your fee."

"Oh," said Pomfrey, taken aback, "I wasn't expecting any payment."

"Aside from the value of your time and expertise as a mediwitch," Tonks explained, "by accepting a formal consulting agreement, you won't have acted in your capacity as a Hogwarts employee. It protects you as much as it does us."

Pomfrey nodded in acceptance and then her hand flew to cover her mouth as understanding dawned, "He's not coming back."

"Life has not been kind to Mr. Potter," Tonks responded as a non-answer. "He is old enough now to take a more active role in determining his circumstances."

Pomfrey nodded, "Please let him know that I wish him the very best."

"I will do so," Tonks said as he handed a sheaf of papers to Pomfrey and got to the business at hand.

Harry arrived back through the floo with his family and went directly to the healing room. He was surprised to see Solicitor Tonks sitting at the table with the healers. At a gesture from Healer Tonks, the family sat with Filius and the elves on either side of Harry.

"Is there a problem, Mr. Tonks?" Harry asked.

"If there weren't, Mr. Potter, I would not have a job," the solicitor answered with a wink to ease Harry's obvious concern. "It is law in both the muggle and magical worlds that any signs of child abuse must be reported. As you are now emancipated, that requirement is no longer applicable. However, your magical guardian was Albus Dumbledore, and he is also the magical guardian to many other children."

Harry swallowed as he considered the implications, but Filius responded, "If he was willing to overlook Harry's abuse, how many other situations might he be ignoring."

"Not only that, Harry," Healer Tonk's said, "but Dumbledore placed false information in your school file that directly affected any treatment you received at school."

Harry looked at Filius with a look of determination and for the first time Filius saw how this slight young man had faced the darkest wizard Britain had ever known. Harry turned to his solicitor, "Do what you need to do."

Ted Tonks saw that same determination in Harry's face and nodded, "I'll consult our family law solicitor and let you know the plan." As he got up, Tonk's turned to his wife, "Please let me know Harry's healing plan so I can schedule around it."

As the solicitor left, Harry turned his attention back to the healers, "How bad is it?"

Heartwise answered with his customary gentleness, "There is much to be done to bring you to full health. Much of it will be uncomfortable, but nothing is without remedy."

"Harry," Tonks said, "how much do you know about healing?"

"I know it uses your magic; the healer directs your magic," Harry answered.

"That's right. It means that a healer has to be careful with a patient's magic," Tonks responded. "I have to make sure there is enough magical power available for the healing that needs to be done."

"Do I have enough?" Harry asked.

"You have more than enough, but there are a few things to consider," Tonks answered.

"Harry," Heartwise said, "what do you know about your scar?"

"Besides the fact that everyone stares at it?" Harry asked with some bitterness. Harry considered, "I was told it happened when Voldemort tried to kill me, but I don't know how anyone knows that. I mean, I was the only one there when it happened."

"You are correct," said Gorin. "I suspect Albus Dumbledore figured out what transpired that night. For all his failings, he is brilliant so I would tend to believe he is correct."

"What does this have to do with Harry's health?" Filius asked.

"The immediate thing that comes to mind is to ask why no effort was made to reduce the scar," Gorin answered.

"But perhaps the second question gives us the answer to the first," Heartwise said.

"It also gives us a possible hint as to why Dumbledore prevented Madam Pomfrey from doing a full diagnostic scan," Tonks said.

Harry had to consciously refrain from rolling his eyes but he knew that as much as the healers were telling him, they were still working some things out for themselves.

"Harry," Heartwise began and then paused, "there is very dark magic emanating from your scar. It is so dark that Gorin and I feel certain it is a fragment of Voldemort's soul."

Harry paled and quickly put his head down on the table, breathing rapidly. Filius reached over and rubbed up and down Harry's back while Winky began petting his hair like she did when he had a nightmare. Dobby snapped and a blanket appeared around his back and shoulders. Filius gently pulled Harry upright after a few minutes and tucked the blanket around him while Winky continued to pet his hair.

Eventually, Harry looked up and in a hard voice said, "Get. Him. Out."

"That is the first thing we plan on doing," Tonks told him. "Although the dark fragment is contained and not directly affecting you, we believe you are expending significant magic to keep it contained. We suspect this may be why your magic has never corrected your eyesight, as happens with many magical beings."

"Rather than try to remove the soul fragment from your scar, we are going to remove the scar with the soul fragment still in it," Heartwise told Harry. "Then I will take it to one of our ritual rooms where we will be able to use it to detect any other soul fragments that may exist."

"Can we do it now?" Harry asked, still reeling from the information.

Tonks stood up, "Come with me and we'll get you ready."

Harry followed Tonks into the next room with a standard hospital bed. She handed him a set of pajamas similar to the ones that Madam Pomfrey always had, "Put these on and relax on the bed. Your clothes can go into that bin," she said, pointing to a low shelf near the door.

Harry had barely started getting undressed when Dobby popped in and started folding clothes while explaining in detail how Winky liked everything folded. Dobby deliberately misfolded the pants while explaining what was acceptable to Harry and Dobby was not acceptable to Winky. By the time the pants were folded correctly, Harry was considerably more relaxed.

While Harry was getting ready with Dobby's comic help, Tonks explained the planned healing schedule to Filius and Winky, "We will do healing in the afternoons. This leaves Harry free to take care of business in the morning. He'll be exhausted after most of the healing sessions so he will most likely go to bed right after supper."

Filius nodded, "Do you expect any complications from today's procedure?" A loremaster had raised Filius. He knew just what a soul fragment was and what it implied.

"We don't," answered Heartwise, "because we are not trying to remove the soul fragment but rather simply move it within the protective flesh enclosing it."

"Nevertheless," continued Gorin, "we will be setting up wards to protect young Harry if anything unexpected should happen."

"Thank you," Filius said. "Harry has become very dear to me in a short amount of time."

Heartwise reached over and took Filius' hand, "When another soul reaches out to us, we must answer."

The healers entered the small room where Harry waited and took places on either side of the bed. Harry absently noticed that Heartwise and Gorin had stepped up on something to bring them to the same height as Tonks. Tonks explained that she would be using a combination of muggle and wizard procedures to remove his scar while he was in a healing sleep. A special healing salve would be applied with a bandage that they would change daily. In about a week, his forehead would be healed with no sign the scar ever existed.

"It may ache a little," Gorin told Harry. "Winky will have a mild pain relief potion you can take if the discomfort keeps you awake."

Harry nodded and without conscious thought reached over and took Gorin's hand. Gorin raised her other hand and placed it on Harry's head. With a murmured, "Sleep," Harry was unconscious.

When Harry woke, Filius was sitting in a chair beside the bed. Harry took the offered glass of water and drank most of the liquid. He reached up to touch his forehead but Filius grabbed

his hand and placed a mirror in it. After seeing the small white bandage, Harry asked, "It's gone?"

"Completely," Filius answered firmly.

Harry let out a breath of relief and smiled, "Good. When it comes to dark dorks, they should be out there."

"Quite right, Harry," Filius agreed. "If you can sit and stand without a problem, you can get dressed."

With no more than a brief bout of dizziness, Harry was soon dressed and back in the main healing room. Sitting down, he looked at the healers and asked, "What's next?"

"We would like to schedule healing sessions for the afternoon. That leaves your mornings free and gives you the evening to rest and recover," Tonks answered.

"Are you going to tell me everything wrong with me?" Harry asked.

"Of course we are." Gorin's answer was brisk.

"The better question is when we will tell you," said Heartwise. "We can tell you everything right now, including how we will treat each issue but I believe you will find that rather overwhelming. Instead, we would rather tell you each day the issue that we will be addressing."

Tonks turned toward Harry, "As we told you earlier, every problem we found because of what happened to you can be corrected and we will do that but you are more than a body in need of healing. You are a young man dealing with a lot. Let us make it a little easier by not overloading you with more information than you need."

"But you won't hide anything from me?" Harry asked with almost a plea.

"Nothing will be hidden," Gorin answered. "Now enjoy time with your family, eat a good dinner and get a good night's sleep."

Looking Ahead

Chapter Notes

Tuesday, July 4

The following day at breakfast, Harry received two owls. The first was a note from Ted Tonks with his floo address requesting their morning meeting be at his law office. The second was a letter from the twins. Harry didn't notice that he had taken his glasses off to read the letters.

Dear Harrikins,

Greetings from the top secret location owned by Sirius Black, kept secret by Albus Dumbledore, and lived in by yours truly and family.

Firstly, do not expect any letters from Ron, Hermione, Sirius or Remus. Dumbledore told them not to write both because it is supposedly safer for you and because you need time to grieve Cedric. Naturally, Mom is enforcing all attempts made by Sirius to write to you. Hermione is being her ever-obedient self and taking Ron with her.

Secondly, we're not sure that Sirius is okay. He hates it here yet stays because Dumbledore tells him to. Sirius hates Mom telling him what to do but then gives in. Don't get us wrong - we know what she is like, but he is giving us a top-secret place to live because there are safety concerns with dark wankers rising from the dead. Maybe you could write to him. He needs someone in his corner. We think living here is messing him up as bad as Azkaban did (his mother's portrait is a special form of dementor)

Thirdly, we don't believe the Daily Prophet, but a lot of people probably will. Not sure you can do anything but don't let it get you down.

We've encouraged Ron and Hermione to ask Dumbledore when you can visit. He's here every couple of days for super secret adult meetings that we would never eavesdrop on. He keeps saying that you need to stay for your own safety. We have tried to tell him it isn't good there, but he just twinkles at us.

That leads us to this: are you okay? Say the word and we will figure out a way to rescue you because you are always our Harrikins.

You can write here and the super secret place will let your owl in. Please tell us how you are. We know this year was lousy, but we're also sure that forcing you to be alone with horrible relatives never makes anything better.

Your devoted pranksters,

Gred & Forge
(We are still pretending you can't tell us apart.)

Harry set aside the letter to read again later. Filius didn't read The Daily Prophet, but he'd bet that Tonks did since it was his job to know stuff. He would find out what the twins were talking about.

Filius and Harry took the floo to Greengrass & Associates, leaving the elves behind to their chosen tasks. Both elves had explained to Harry that being family didn't mean boring meetings every day. They expressed their trust in Harry to make good decisions for the family and if he needed their help all he had to do was call.

Tonks introduced Filius and Harry around the office. Harry had no idea that there were so many legal specialties. One witch did nothing but handle housing law. She was another muggleborn that straddled both legal worlds. The wizard that specialized in Wizengamot law reminded Harry of Percy Weasley, very young and very detail oriented. While Harry was glad that the law firm had so many specialties, he couldn't imagine ever wanting to do something like that. Harry also got to meet a lot of assistants. Each solicitor had at least two assistants, most of whom had areas of specialization.

Tonks led them to a small round table in his office and called an elf for tea. "Always have tea to offer at meetings, Mr. Potter. It gives people something to do if they have to wait."

Harry nodded and appreciated that along with the legal advice, Tonks sprinkled in many practical lessons. He had stopped at their suite last night to check on Harry and had advised him on what was customary for a young man to wear at the type of meeting they would have today. Harry had no idea that there were so many little things that made a difference. He wondered if Hogwarts would have been easier if he had known some of this information.

Tonks picked up a thin folder and handed it to Harry, "These are the properties you own in Great Britain that are currently vacant. There are six total, with two of them being muggle properties and the remainder being wizarding properties. Each sheet will give details of the property and what needs to be done to make them habitable."

"How many properties do I own, and why aren't they all available?" Harry asked.

"Mr. Potter, your family owns properties all over the world. They range from homes to wizard resorts. Your mother convinced your father to invest in muggle real estate, and you have residential and commercial properties in Great Britain, Spain, France and Italy. Most of the residential properties, both magic and muggle, are occupied. You make a substantial amount of income from your real estate holdings. You will spend time with Sharpnail at some point going over the finances for those assets."

Tonks took a sip of his tea and then indicated the folder he had given Harry, "I asked Sharpnail for a list of vacant properties in Great Britain because you will need a place for your family to live. If none of these suit you, there are properties in Ireland and continental Europe that are also available immediately. Again, there is no rush to choose, but I want the options to be available when you are ready."

“Thank you,” Harry responded with feeling. “I guess I’ve just been taking things as they come.”

“That’s all you need to do,” Tonks said. “It’s my job to keep things in order for you and help you decide what to do next. Eventually, you will have learned enough to take a more active role in planning, but while you may be legally an adult, you are still very much an adolescent. You can let the adults around you care for things while you learn.”

Harry nodded and let himself relax. It helped to think of all the legal and financial matters as part of his education. “What’s next?” he asked. Harry realized he would ask this question a lot as he was learning.

“Next is the Dursleys,” Tonks answered. “First, do you have any personal property that needs to be retrieved from your Aunt’s house?”

“No, once I started Hogwarts, I never left anything there when I went to Hogwarts.”

Tonks made a note and then looked up, “Mr. Potter, my job is to look after your best interests, even in areas that may be uncomfortable for you. However, anytime you need to take a break or hold off on a topic for a day or so while you get your bearings, just let me know.”

Harry nodded as Tonks continued, “You may not be aware, but your aunt and uncle received a monthly allowance for your upkeep. My guess is that very little of this was spent on you.”

Harry sat speechless, and as he felt his temper rise, he closed his eyes and breathed deeply. Whenever he had nightmares, Winky always told him to breathe and it did seem to help. “As far as I remember, my aunt and uncle never bought me anything. I wore my cousin’s oversized old clothes. My glasses came from the charity bin at a local church. They even filed for government aid to pay for my muggle school supplies. I can’t even say they paid for food because I usually ate their scraps, and once I started school even the lunches were paid for by the government.”

Tonks was busy scribbling notes and Filius reached over to put an arm around Harry. It was strange to receive physical comfort but Harry was learning to be comfortable with it.

“I’d like to put one of our investigators on this. I believe that we have a strong case of fraud against the Dursleys, both in the muggle and magical courts. We also have the option of filing a civil suit to force them to return the money they received for your care.” Tonks continued to make notes while he was saying this. “We could also pursue abuse charges, but that would require your participation, and I’m not sure it is worth the stress it would cause you. Seeking fraud charges and repayment would require minimal input from you because we can do most of it with an audit of bank records.”

“After all the times I listened to them complain about how much I cost them, I think it is only fair that I actually cost them something,” Harry said with a smile.

“No legal outcome is guaranteed,” Tonks advised, “but I feel certain we can cause them a great deal of financial pain and inconvenience, not to mention embarrassment.”

“Embarrassment is good,” Harry said. “My aunt is very concerned about appearances.” Harry thought, “Can you bring a civil suit against someone for lying about you?”

“What do you mean?” Tonks asked.

“My aunt and uncle told everybody, the neighbors and my teachers, that I was a juvenile delinquent and went to St. Brutus Secure Center for Incurably Criminal Boys,” Harry told Tonks.

“I want to do some research, but I feel reasonably confident that we can bring a successful suit for defamation of character,” Tonks said, taking more notes.

“Then I’d like to do that,” said Harry.

Tonks put down his pen, “I’d like to talk to you about what is being said about you in the Daily Prophet.”

“Oh, I was going to ask you about that,” responded Harry, “I got a letter today from the twins, that’s Fred and George Weasley, and they mentioned the Daily Prophet. What’s going on?”

“It looks as if the Ministry is engaging in a smear campaign against you,” Tonks answered.

Filius turned to Harry, “I think the minister doesn’t want to accept the reality that You-Know-Who has returned.”

“That’s just stupid,” Harry said hotly.

“And that’s exactly the sort of response that will make things worse,” Tonks pointed out.

“What should I say?” Harry asked.

“Absolutely nothing . . . “

“But,” Harry interrupted.

Tonks continued, “You are no longer a penniless student. You are Harry Potter, scion of an Ancient and Noble House. You have an account manager to increase your wealth. You have a legal firm to fight your battles. You have a publicist to manage your image.”

“Oh,” Harry sat back a bit speechless and looked over at Filius who was beaming. This was so far outside of Harry’s experience that he had not realized just what all those vaults meant in practical terms.

Finally, Harry asked the only question that made itself coherent in his overwhelmed brain, “When did I get a publicist?”

“In about an hour,” Tonks answered with a smile. “I took the liberty of signing a confidentiality agreement with him and making an appointment for you. If you don’t get along with him, we can try someone else.”

“Thank you,” Harry said with heartfelt sincerity. “How come the ministry gets to lie about me? Can we do something about that?”

“We can,” Tonks answered. “Another solicitor specializing in libel and defamation will handle the Dursleys and the ministry. I will introduce you to her before you leave so you will recognize her when she contacts you.”

Harry nodded and wished he had known all this during the tournament. “What about the Daily Prophet? How can they just print something that isn’t true?”

Tonks chuckled, “You will notice that you don’t see much about Lucius Malfoy or Cornelius Fudge. The Daily Prophet knows who it is safe to go after and who would cost them more money than they can earn.”

“So, in short, Harry is going to make it expensive for them just to print anything they want about him,” Filius noted.

“Exactly,” Tonks confirmed.

“I thought that newspapers could get in trouble for lying,” Harry said.

“One thing you will learn to look at as you take over managing your holdings is the cost-benefit ratio,” Tonks explained. “When you make decisions, you need to understand what it will cost you and what you will gain from it. The Daily Prophet looks at how many newspapers they will sell against what it might cost them to print the lie. Plus, they factor in the goodwill of the ministry. If the ministry is happy with them, it will feed them more news which in turn helps sell more newspapers.”

Harry scowled and crossed his arms, “If I owned The Daily Prophet, I wouldn’t let them print lies.”

“Would you like to?” Tonks asked.

“What?” The conversation had taken a turn that Harry wasn’t following.

“Would you like to own The Daily Prophet?” Tonks asked him.

“Can I do that?” Harry asked, looking at both Tonks and Filius.

“Once again, it is about cost-benefit,” Tonks explained. “Everything has a price. The question is if you are willing to pay the price. How about I look into it and put together a proposal for you to consider.”

Harry grinned, “Wicked.”

Tonks laughed, “Mr. Potter, it is an honor to work on your behalf. The Potter family has been a force in our world for centuries. To help you find your voice in our world is something I am enjoying very much.”

"I like that," Harry said, turning to Filius. "Finding my voice. I need to think about what I want that voice to say."

When Harry sat down to lunch with his family, he was afraid that all the information he had learned would start dripping out of his ears.

After meeting his publicist, an older wizard distantly related to the Bulstrodes, Harry and Filius had turned to one another and, in the same voice, said, "McGonagall."

It turned out that Gerard Borner had attended Hogwarts with Minerva McGonagall and considered it the highest form of compliment to be compared to her. He was a no-nonsense wizard who had been shaping the public opinion of prominent wizards and witches for many decades. He was sternly enthusiastic about working for Harry. Borner had proposed meeting in a week after he had done a bit of research and investigation on Harry's behalf.

Harry and Filius told the elves some of the highlights of the meeting, but the focus was on the six properties. Of the four, only Filius had thought about their future living situation, but even he hadn't given it much thought. With his considerable tournament winnings over the decades, Filius knew he had enough to purchase a nice property for them all even if Harry had been penniless.

They passed around the sheets describing the properties. Both muggle properties were in remote areas and would not be an issue for a magical family. There was a townhouse in Hogsmeade that would have been perfect if Harry were still at Hogwarts, but each of them automatically rejected it as too much of a risk. Harry sat back stunned when he got to the sheet about Potter Manor. Even though it had been the traditional home of Potters for several centuries, it felt a bit much for their small family. Harry simply couldn't imagine needing twenty-four bedrooms, a ballroom and a grand parlor.

Two properties stood out: Potter Lodge in Wales and Peverell Keep on the Isle of Man. Both were in wooded areas. Both had lots of privacy but were easily accessible for magic users. Filius put forth a plan, "Let's think about what each of us would consider ideal and what would make a place unacceptable. The elves can go check out both places during our morning meetings. If they think they will be acceptable, then Harry and I can check them out."

By the time they were sitting at the table with the healers, Harry was starting to feel nervous. All three healers smiled reassuringly and Harry once again wondered if healers practiced particular looks for their patients.

"I notice you are not wearing your glasses," Tonks stated.

Harry nodded, "Things are a bit blurry, but it's worse with my glasses on."

"That was quicker than we expected," Tonks glanced at the other healers before continuing. "How do you feel in general?"

Harry grinned, "Really great."

"Excellent," said Heartwise with enthusiasm before turning to Filius. "How would you rate Harry's relative magical strength?"

"Harry is quite powerful," Filius answered. "Not only did he successfully compete with students three years older than himself this past year, but he could form a large, extremely powerful Patronus when he was thirteen."

Three stunned healers sat looking at each other in dismay. "We need a coven," Tonks whispered.

"Better yet, a conclave," Gorin added.

Harry looked at Filius who then explained, "A coven is thirteen magical beings of the same type and gender that gather for ritual magic."

"So, thirteen female elves," Harry said as an example.

"Exactly," affirmed Filius. "A conclave is two or more different types of covens working together."

Filius turned back to the healers, "What does Harry need ritual healing for?"

"Harry, what do you know about the unforgivables?" Heartwise asked.

"The killing, cruciatus, and imperious curses cannot be shielded against though the killing and cruciatus curse can be blocked with another physical object," Harry answered.

"Voldemort has used all of them against me, but only one was successful," Harry added with a bit of smugness.

"You resisted an imperious from," Tonks trailed off in shock. Resisting a newly cast imperious was considered practically impossible. Theoretically, it could be done but it took tremendous power and will. It wasn't something an immature wizard should be able to do.

Tonks mentally shook herself, "Based on what you have told us, we will have to revise our schedule. Before we discuss any further medical issues, I'd like to check Harry's forehead and change the bandage." She stood up and motioned toward the smaller treatment room.

It wasn't long before Tonks and Harry emerged from the treatment room wearing broad smiles. "I'm very pleased," Tonks announced. "No trace of curse magic, and it is healing nicely."

As they took their seats, Gorin straightened and looked at Harry, "Let me tell you a bit of history to help you understand what needs to happen next."

Harry nodded and realized he was tense when Winky climbed into his lap. It had become common for her to simply cuddle Harry into calmness whenever he was stressed in any way.

Gorin smiled and continued, “Not long after Hogwarts was completed, a small magical family showed up at the gates in distress. The family's baby was having extreme bouts of accidental magic. Fearing both their muggle neighbors and the possibility of catastrophic damage, the family had come seeking a way to cope with the magical outbursts.

“While not common, it isn’t unheard of for infants to display accidental magic. However, it is usually quite benign, such as summoning a toy or a bottle.”

Tonks nodded and took up the tale, “The founders met with the family and witnessed an incident and agreed that something needed to be done. Eventually, Helga Hufflepuff devised a way to bind a magical core. The idea was that when the child was older, the binding would be removed and could learn some control over emotional and magical outbursts.”

“Is that what is wrong with me?” Harry asked.

“Yes,” Heartwise answered, “but there is more to the story.”

Gorin nodded and continued, “The family built a small farm near Hogsmeade. When the child, a girl, was seven, she had enough emotional control that she would be able to learn some magical control. There might still be accidental magic, but its power would be lessened.

“The family brought the girl to the healing wing of the school and Hufflepuff removed the binding. Unfortunately, magic had built up behind the binding and the backlash was quite destructive. Fortunately, no one came to any permanent harm, but as a result, Hufflepuff revised her spell and came up with a binding that, over time, would gradually dissolve, allowing more and more magic out. When the binding finally dissolved, there was no magical build-up behind it.”

“Over the centuries, permanent bindings have been tried in various circumstances,” Tonks told him. “They are still used, but it is rare and requires the agreement of at least three healers. It is never done on children as a remedy for accidental magic.”

Harry closed his eyes. There was a reason they had told him this and he didn’t like where it was leading. “Tell me, please,” he whispered.

“Based on our scans, it appears that a permanent binding was placed on your magic when you were about five years old,” Heartwise said. “We originally thought we would be able to create a ward to contain any backlash.”

“But now?” Filius asked sharply.

“Based on what you’ve told us,” Andromeda answered, “we will need much stronger containment. If Harry is as magically strong as he appears with most of his magic bound, it will require the strength of at least a coven to contain the backlash.”

“It was Dumbledore, wasn’t it?” Harry asked dully.

“Yes,” Tonks answered, “bindings always retain the magical signature of the caster and his signature is well known.”

“We would prefer to wait on healing any other medical issues until the binding is released,” Tonks said.

“How long will that take,” Filius asked, noting that Dobby had popped out and back with hot chocolate for Harry.

“Probably a week or two,” answered Heartwise. “We will need to contact at least two covens, get their agreement along with oaths of confidentiality, and then plan and set up for the ritual.”

“In the meantime, we can start you on some nutrient potions to build up your strength,” Tonks said. “You can go ahead with whatever else you need to do, and we will let you know when everything is ready.”

Harry remained silent, sipping his hot chocolate. Everything kept circling back to Dumbledore somehow, and he didn’t understand any of it.

After a moment, Filius spoke, “That sounds like a good plan. We certainly have plenty to do in the meantime. Winky can get the nutrient potions we need. Dobby can make us a nice tea, and we start figuring out where we want to live.”

That brought a smile to Harry’s face and he gently lifted Winky off his lap and stood up. Turning to the healers, he said, “Thank you for figuring all this out.”

Heartwise rose and walked to stand in front of Harry, “It is an honor to aid you. You have much life ahead of you, and it should be done in the best of health.”

It was much later in the afternoon that Harry’s mind circled back to everything the healers had said, “Filius, when the healers asked about unforgivable curses, were they saying that the permanent binding on my magic is considered unforgivable.”

“I think that is exactly what they were saying but realizing that you can resist an imperious curse derailed the topic a bit,” Filius answered.

“What will we do about Dumbledore?”

Filius was pleased that Harry had said ‘we.’ “We’ve already done the first part,” he answered.

“We’ve left so he can’t do anything else to me,” Harry responded.

“Exactly,” Filius said. “We will also ensure that your healers share what’s happening with your solicitor, and then we will discuss any possible plans to remedy what has already happened.”

Harry sat back bemused that he went from having only school friends to help him to having a family and a group of adults on his side. Not knowing he had an income, it had never occurred to Harry that he could hire people to make his life better. Being emancipated just kept looking better and better.

By the time they sat down to a dinner of roast chicken, jacketed potatoes and roasted vegetables, they had narrowed down their requirements for a home. To the elf's dismay, Harry insisted they have their own space, and they could do anything they wanted with it. They may be used to cabinets and closets for sleeping but Harry wanted them to know they were equal in the family.

Once that was settled, Winky and Dobby started planning the perfect kitchen. Dobby liked fixing meals while Winky loved to bake. Harry was happy to leave those tasks to the elves. He never wanted to cook again. Winky also wanted a proper store room for potions and healing supplies.

Filius brought up the need for space to learn and train. As a master dueler, Filius was looking forward to teaching Harry to duel. He knew that as Harry grew in his magic, he would be a challenge that Filius looked forward to dueling against. They also needed a library and study area for traditional schooling and for Harry to continue learning everything involved with his various lordships and holdings. Filius suspected that the Potter vaults would hold a substantial inventory of books.

Harry's wants were simple. He enjoyed the time he spent with his family and wanted a family room they could all gather in. He didn't care what his room was like. After a childhood in a cupboard, a comfortable bed was the primary requirement. However, the top of the list was simple - a place to fly. Quidditch was fun, but it was the flying that Harry loved.

After dinner, Harry sat down to write some letters. Harry had gotten a fountain pen from Solicitor Tonks. It provided the best of both muggle and magic. The writing closely resembled a quill but was much easier for most muggles to maneuver. Most muggle born went back to pens when they left Hogwarts. Muggleborns and half-bloods that needed to blend into the magical world compromised with fountain pens. It still took some practice, but Harry never wanted to use a quill again. His first letter was to the twins.

To my Devoted Pranksters,

Thank you for your letter. It means a lot that you wrote.

There is so much I want to tell you both, but I also have super secrets I have to keep. I've realized that even when adults mean well, they don't always make the best choices.

Yes, my relatives are not the best, but I have found a way to take care of myself. I am getting enough to eat and I can leave my room whenever I want. I have lots of plans and, hopefully, I will be able to share them with you before too long.

I am sad but not surprised to hear that Ron and Hermione are following Dumbledore's orders. It doesn't seem to occur to any of them that I might know what I need better than anyone else.

You are both true friends and your friendship and support, especially this last year, mean a lot to me.

I hope you will write more about secrets you aren't eavesdropping on.

Your very own,
Harrikins

It took Harry longer to write to Sirius. He realized that he wanted Sirius as part of his family, but it couldn't happen as long as Sirius was following Dumbledore's orders, even if it was reluctantly. The same was true of Professor Lupin. He would ask both Filius and Solicitor Tonks for advice. Still, he could let Sirius get to know him better and maybe Sirius would do the same.

Dear Sirius,

I hope you are doing well. I know how hard it is when everyone is telling you what to do instead of asking what you need. Over this last year, I've learned that I have to figure things out for myself before I can find the people around me that will listen.

We haven't been able to spend much time together so I thought I would tell you about myself. I know you spent a lot of time with me when I was a baby, but I'm pretty sure I've changed a lot since then.

I think you've already figured out that I love to fly. Quidditch is fun, both playing and watching, but it is the flying that matters. Do wizards race brooms like muggles race cars? I would love to see that, but even more, I would love to do that.

I love magic. It seems like people raised in the magical world don't appreciate it as much. Yeah, they all think they are better than muggles but they don't seem to have any sense of wonder about everything magic can do. I suppose it is the same with a lot of muggles and technology. The difference is that technology seems to be constantly changing so there are always discoveries.

Please let me know how you are doing. I know you are with the Weasleys, and they can be a bit overwhelming, but they are good people, especially the twins. Don't be fooled by how Fred and George act. Underneath the pranks, they are brilliant and very reliable.

I know you aren't supposed to owl me and that Mrs. Weasley will do her best to stop you. When you have a letter for me, call Dobby. He will come and bring back anything you have for me. You can trust Dobby. He is loyal and kind.

I hope to see you this summer,

Harry

After Harry finished his letters, he learned a charm from Filius that would make the letters invisible to all but to whom they were addressed. Harry thought that was the best prank ever considering how nosy all the Weasleys were and especially Hermione, who needed to know everything.

Tomorrow morning would be spent at Gringotts and Harry was sure it would leave his head filled with too much information. After taking the letters up to Hedwig, Harry returned to

their suite to find the sitting room cleared of furniture. Filius was standing to the side, holding his wand.

"Put your wand away. We're going to do some dodging drills," Filius told him.

After Harry had set his wand aside, Filius explained, "I will only use a mild stinging hex. The goal is not to get hit. The best duelers use multiple ways to avoid getting hit with a spell. The most basic way is simply not being where the spell is going."

Filius started slowly and coached Harry in watching where the spell was intended to land. Harry had a lifetime of practice avoiding blows from the Dursleys, but it was an adjustment to judge where the spell was headed. It took concentration not to go after the spell as he would a snitch but soon he dodged every hex. As he became more adept, the speed of the hexes increased. With the elves cheering both sides unreservedly, they continued until Harry was getting stung more than he was avoiding the hexes.

"Very good, Harry," Filius praised. "You did very well, especially considering it's the end of the day."

Harry grinned, "That was fun, plus it cleared my head out."

"That's good," Filius answered with a returning grin. "It will no doubt be filled again tomorrow."

Education All Around

Chapter Notes

Wednesday, July 5 - Thursday, July 6

The next morning was spent with Sharpnail. He planned to teach Harry the basics of asset management, and once Harry understood the Potter estate, they would look at any other assets from any of the dormant Houses that Harry claimed.

Harry was surprised that accounting and asset management came quickly to him. It made sense. There was no guessing. The numbers had to balance. There were clear objectives and you could follow a plan. There was flexibility and adjustments to be made but even that made sense. As much as Harry loved magic, the theory was woolly, but numbers were real.

Watching Harry learn from Sharpnail, Filius better understood why magical theory was difficult for Harry to grasp. While Harry was rolling in numbers, Filius was formulating a new way to teach Harry. Most children did better learning the theory first and then practicing the spell. Harry wanted a concrete basis and didn't understand the theory until he mastered the casting.

Filius understood why there was so much emphasis on theory. It created a foundation for a lifetime of spells. A greater foundational approach meant a greater spell repertoire as an adult. However, he realized that it didn't mean that theory had to be the first thing learned. Harry would undoubtedly do better learning spells and then applying the theory to what he had already learned.

While Filius was creating lesson plans, Harry was beginning to understand why the Potter estate had continued to grow despite over a decade of neglect. His grandfather, Fleamont Potter, had created a detailed investment and maintenance plan that was stipulated to continue in perpetuity until the Head of House changed it. Despite James Potter's lack of engagement with the family assets, the plan continued to be followed and continued during Harry's life. Sharpnail wished every account was attended with such care.

The one thing Harry had trouble comprehending was the sheer amount that he owned. It was more than galleons, knuts and sickles, although just the amount in the main Potter vault was staggering to a boy that had grown up deprived of physical comforts. There were stock portfolios, the largest inherited over many generations. His mother and father also started smaller portfolios based on their interests. Sharpnail had applied the general rules set up by Fleamont to the smaller portfolios.

James Potter had tended to invest in what personally interested him. Harry was stunned to learn he owned healthy interests in the Nimbus and Cleansweep broom companies. He also

had stock in the Mizuno Company which manufactured sports equipment. Lily Potter had invested in muggle technologies. Harry recognized most of the names like Apple, Microsoft, IBM, and Intel, but one name in particular, Oracle, struck Harry as funny. He wondered if his mother had chosen it because it sounded magical. His mother's stock portfolio had been more volatile, but it had also grown much more.

They called a halt to the meeting a bit after noon. Harry had hit his absorption limit and needed time to sort through everything. Sharpnail, while mainly responsible for the Potter assets, also had other matters to attend to. They set a meeting for the following day, and Sharpnail handed Harry a parchment with some books, magazines and newspapers listed. He wanted Harry to learn more about investments and create a stock portfolio based on his interests. Sharpnail called it educational play and assured Harry that there was little risk to the Potter estate if he made mistakes while learning.

As much as Filius wanted to jump into charms work, he recognized that Harry was mentally exhausted. After a hearty stew prepared by the inn's kitchen, Harry asked Dobby to obtain the magical books and magazines recommended by Sharpnail. Harry and Filius dressed in casual muggle clothes and ventured into London proper to find Hatchards Book Store. Located in Piccadilly, Filius could apparate them to a nearby alley.

It was a very productive afternoon. Harry found several biographies of business leaders and books on general asset management. He was also able, with Filius' help, to set up subscriptions to several periodicals that would help him in the world of muggle investments. The magazines would be mailed to the general owlery in Diagon Alley and, from there, sent by owl directly to Harry. Filius assured him it was routine and that mail, whether by post or owl, was considered confidential.

Once again after dinner, Filius cleared the sitting room for spell avoidance practice. Harry thought dodge-spell was a better name. Filius wanted Harry to build up his endurance and then they would add in casting while dodging. It was a good goal for Harry. The stopping point was the same as the previous night: when Harry was getting stung more than he was avoiding the hex. The stings were mild and left no lasting hurt and Harry considered it much better than a tickling charm or a jelly leg jinx.

While Harry's day had started at Gringotts, the day had started much differently at No. 12 Grimmauld Place. Breakfast was barely finished when a familiar snowy old glided across the kitchen.

"Hedwig," Ron exclaimed, happy to see Harry's beloved owl.

Molly Weasley shook her head, "Did Albus not tell Harry he wasn't to write?"

Of course, there was no answer to that but the twins grinned as Hedwig landed in front of them. Fred took both letters from Hedwig and handed her some sausage before giving Sirius' letter to George. Jumping up from the table, George left the kitchen to deliver the letter.

"Where is he going?" Hermione asked.

"Sirius," Fred answered.

Ron held out a hand, "Give it over."

"Give what over?" Fred asked, a picture of innocence.

"The letter, you prat," Ron answered impatiently.

"It isn't for you," George answered, returning.

"What do you mean it isn't for me? Is it for Hermione?" Ron was growing redder with each passing moment.

"It isn't for you," Fred started.

"And it isn't for Hermione." George finished, returning from his errand.

"Well, who's it for?" The redness continued to grow and began to edge into purple.

"Fred"

"and George"

"Weasley," they finished in unison.

Ron huffed and stormed out of the kitchen, convinced it was an elaborate prank.

Fred and George opened the letter and quickly read it. Folding it up, they shared a long look. They didn't know what, but something was up. They didn't think it was a bad something, but it was definitely something.

"Why would Harry write to you and not us?" Hermione asked, genuinely perplexed.

"Perhaps,"

"because,"

"We wrote him," they finished.

"What?" Molly nearly shrieked. "Dumbledore told you not to write him."

"How could you?" Hermione asked, feeling somehow betrayed but not understanding why.

"Dumbledore told you not to write him, not us," Fred said.

"Plus," George added, "we are of age and can choose who we write to."

"Although," Fred looked thoughtful, "I do wonder why you are so quick to obey your headmaster when you aren't in school."

"It's almost," George added, then paused, "almost, as if you can't think for yourself."

It was Hermione's turn to rush out of the kitchen, tears stinging her eyes.

"Boys," Molly remonstrated gently, "that wasn't very nice."

"No,"

"It wasn't"

“But it was true,” they answered.

“Dumbledore only wants what is best for Harry,” Molly explained.

“Mom,” said Fred, “we only want what’s best for Harry.”

“We just disagree with Dumbledore,” George added, “on what that is.”

Both boys got up and went to their room to reread the letter.

Lunch brought everyone together and Sirius stepped into the kitchen with a smile. Lunch was silent with tension in the air. Ron kept glaring at the twins and almost violently eating his sandwich. Finally, Hermione broke the tension, “How is Harry doing?”

“Said he’s getting enough to eat and isn’t locked in his room,” George answered, knowing Sirius probably hadn’t heard about Harry’s living conditions.

“What!” Sirius hollered, jumping up from his seat.

“Now, boys,” Molly started, but Fred talked over her.

“Two summers ago, we were worried because no one had heard from Harry,” explained Fred. “So we snuck out one night and went to his house. The muggles had him locked in his room with bars on the window.”

“There was a cat flap on the door that they slipped him food through,” George continued. “Harry said he got a can of soup every day that he shared with Hedwig. They let him out to the bathroom once a day.”

“They keep his school trunk locked in a cupboard,” Fred said. “It’s why he never has his summer homework done.”

Sirius continued to stand there, listening to the twins. He turned to Molly, “Did you know about this?”

“Well,” Molly hedged, “you know how teenagers exaggerate.”

Sirius sat down heavily. He knew Fred and George were telling the truth, or as much as they knew.

“Harry doesn’t like to talk about it,” Hermione said, “but it’s pretty obvious that they don’t treat him well. They don’t even buy him proper clothes.”

Sirius closed his eyes and listened to the internal voice of Moony in his head that told him not to rush into anything. Finally, he looked at the twins, “You really think Harry is okay?”

“Yeah, we do,” answered Fred.

“Harry talks to us, and he wouldn’t have said he was okay if he wasn’t,” explained George.

Sirius nodded and realized he would write to Harry sooner than he originally planned.

“Did he,” Ron asked hesitantly, “did he say anything about us?”

“Yeah, Ronniekins,” answered George.

Fred continued, “He is saddened but unsurprised that you and Hermione are doing what Dumbledore tells you.”

“Oh,” added George, “he wishes people would ask him what he needs instead of deciding for him.”

“That’s not fair,” Hermione protested.

Sirius got up and left. He didn’t think hysterical laughter would do any good. The twins just sighed and grabbed more sandwiches. They had planned to wait until after tonight’s order meeting to write Harry but realized that during the meeting was the best time to sneak up to the owlery at the top of the house. There was already plenty of news to share.

Thursday morning, Harry was again at Gringotts with Sharpnail. Harry had a lot of questions and Sharpnail was pleased with his interest. Interest was no guarantee for a good business head, but it was the starting point. Sharpnail went over Fleamont’s long-term investment plan in detail, and he discussed possible alterations for Harry to consider. Harry liked that Sharpnail took his questions and ideas seriously. There was a lot to learn but Harry was determined to build upon what he had inherited.

After lunch, the elves went to check Potter Manor. They had looked over the muggle properties the previous day, and while they deemed them acceptable, they didn’t stand out. Dobby and Winky felt that Harry Potter deserved the best place to live and were happy to be doing the first look at the various properties.

Filius apparated himself and Harry to the Penwith district in southwest Cornwall. They walked up the road from Penzance to Lands End to the stone circle known as Boscawen-Un. There was a central standing stone that was surrounded by a circle. Harry walked the circle, counting nineteen stones. He was fascinated by one stone made of bright quartz while the others were grey granite.

Filius told him some of the old lore of ritual circles. Harry had heard of Stonehenge but had no idea there were so many stone circles throughout Great Britain. Filius also shared a brief overview of ritual magic and how, over generations, it would rise and fall in favor, but through it all, some passed on the lore and kept the practices alive even when hidden.

When they returned, Dobby brought Harry two letters, “Harry Potter’s dogfather called and he had these for you.”

“Thank you, Dobby,” Harry smiled as he took the letters. He opened the one from the twins first.

Dear Harrikins,

There is so much to tell that we almost don't know where to start. There was much consternation this morning when Hedwig arrived. Ron was very unhappy that we received mail and he did not. We lacked sympathy.

The super secret meetings that Dumbledore holds are with an organization he started during the first war to fight the big ugly guy that hates you. He has started it back up, but it's kind of unclear what they are actually doing.

He has sent Professor Lupin to talk to the werewolf packs to convince them not to fight for the other side. Sirius is very unhappy about that, but since we don't actually know anything about it, he can't actually talk to us about it.

Sirius was in this organization before, along with your parents, Lupin and the rat. My parents are in it this time, along with a few aurors, some other ministry people, McGonagall and Snape.

There is also someone named Arabella. It sounds like she lives near you and watches you for Dumbledore. She told him she hasn't seen you outside as much this year but he assured her that you were fine.

They meet in the kitchen and Mom doesn't let us anywhere near when they have meetings. We're given sandwiches and sent upstairs.

Hermione is here for the summer. Dumbledore is concerned that your friends might be targeted, and Hermione, being muggleborn, is considered especially at risk. She and Ginny are sharing a room.

Most of the time Sirius was in Azkaban, this place was empty. There is an ancient house elf here that seems to hate Sirius. It looks like the feelings are mutual. We're not sure what he does besides skulk around muttering but he doesn't clean. Mom makes us do some cleaning every day, but we're not sure why. It doesn't seem like we're making any real progress. I think it gives her something to do. We all miss the Burrow but, once again, Dumbledore knows best. Maybe he does, but

Sirius seems happy to have heard from you. He had a real smile on his face at lunch today. We did tell him what happened two summers ago. He needed to know. We know you don't like to talk about your life away from school, but you deserve better.

There is another top-secret meeting tonight. We expect that both Mom and Sirius will question Dumbledore about you staying with your relatives. We'll let you know anything interesting that happens.

Dad took us to the ministry last week to get our Apparation License. Yes, we can apparate. We're making Mom crazy going back and forth between upstairs and downstairs. This means that we have a way to sneak out. Okay, apparating is loud so it's not so much sneaking, but we can get out. Is there a way for you to get to Diagon Alley? I'm not sure it would be a good

idea to apparate to your house since Arabella seems to be watching you. Hopefully, we can see you soon.

Your favorite pranksters,
Gred and Forge

Harry sat back on the couch with a sigh. Arabella could only be his old babysitter, Arabella Figg. And the strange-looking cats weren't cats but kneazles or half-kneazles.

Filius noticed Harry's sigh and asked, "Bad news?"

Harry read him the section about Arabella and told him about her.

"Figg," Filius said, "is an old wizarding family. Several squibs are in that line, so I'm guessing she is one."

"I don't even know what to think anymore," Harry confessed. "It feels like Dumbledore has done everything possible to make my life miserable, including a babysitter that spies."

"You've learned a lot of unpleasant things about someone you liked and trusted," Filius pointed out. "It will probably take a while to sort through all your feelings."

Harry nodded and picked up Sirius' letter.

Dear Harry,

It is good to hear from you. You are right, we can get to know each other better while I figure out a way for us to be together.

I also love to fly, and yes, there are broom races. We'll need to see one sometime. There is an Amateur league and a Professional League though you can't always tell the difference watching them compete.

I used to own a flying motorcycle. I modified it myself. It would ride on the street like a regular motorcycle, or you could take it to the sky. It had silencing and stealth features so the muggles wouldn't see it. I'm not sure what happened to it. When Hagrid came to fetch you for Dumbledore as a baby, I insisted he take it so you would be safe. I had forgotten about it until your letter. I'll write to him and see if he still has it.

The twins told me about what you've experienced with your muggle relatives. I am so sorry that I wasn't there to spare you that. You are right that even when people mean well, they still make bad decisions. I'm convinced that Dumbledore may have meant well placing you there, but he was obviously wrong.

Part of me wants to promise you that I'll fix everything, but I'm trying not to rush into anything. That is what landed me in Azkaban in the first place and I lost you in my life. I also

realize that what you want matters. Before any decisions are made that affect your life, you need to tell me what you want.

I do know that I need to clear my name. At first, I thought the only way to do that was to capture Peter, but I can't count on being able to find him again. I don't remember my trial, but I must have had one.

I realize that there are many things you don't know because you weren't raised in the wizarding world - things your father would have taught you. One of those things is meditation and occlumency. Occlumency helps you organize your mind so that wizards skilled in the mind arts can't read your surface thoughts. Meditation is the first step. I will start doing the exercises I learned when I was young to get my thoughts in order. Hopefully, it will help me remember more, but at least it will help me stay calm and not react. I survived Azkaban by being Padfoot as much as possible, but I have to learn to deal with things as a man if I want to be part of your life.

I'm glad I have a way to contact you without fighting Molly. I know she means well, but I'm just not up to fighting everything. I was so focused on finding Peter and getting to you that I didn't realize how badly I was affected by the dementors. Getting away last year helped some, but I need to learn to deal with people again. I need more practice before I tangle with someone like Molly Weasley.

So I will keep writing while I figure things out. I thought I was disinherited, but as the family house let me in, I obviously wasn't. I guess the first order of business is figuring out the best way to get to Gringotts and talk to the family account manager.

Let me know what you are doing with yourself this summer.

Your Loving Godfather

Harry had an overwhelming urge to cry. The elves, sensing his distress, rushed over and snuggled on either side of them. "What be wrong?" Winky asked.

"I don't know," Harry answered. "I'm not sure anything is, but I just want to cry."

Filius put his book down and scooted forward on his chair to address Harry, "Sometimes, when we are filled with emotion, it just needs to come out. Crying helps us do that. It doesn't mean anything is wrong. Sometimes it just means there is too much feeling."

Harry nodded. "That makes sense, and it helps."

At dinner, the elves told Harry about Potter Manor. With the same forethought he had applied to the family finances, Fleamont Potter had set up the manor to be a working enterprise. Harry discovered he owned a lot of house elves and they were all at the manor. Like Hogwarts, the property was situated at an intersection of ley lines, and the ambient magic of the estate had kept the elves healthy. There were extensive gardens with magically controlled climates growing herbs and spices that supplied much of magical Britain.

The manor was in pristine condition and Dobby described the interior in dizzying detail. Winky was more enthusiastic about the gardens and the drying sheds where row upon row of herbs were hung to dry. Both elves had explored the library and had a catalogue of everything it contained. Filius was very excited about the rare manuscripts housed at the manor.

Harry was both intimidated and inspired by his grandfather's forethought. He expressed his hope that one day he could do as well for future generations.

"I have no doubt," Filius responded. "I can't imagine you doing less than your best for the people around you. I am sure the House of Potter will thrive under your leadership."

"You really think so?" Harry asked, the doubt evident in his voice.

"Yes, Harry," Filius answered with gentleness, "I do."

Harry relaxed and reached for the delicious-looking pudding that Winky had prepared. It amazed him how much his life had changed in a very short time. Looking around the small table, he realized he felt more content than he ever had in his life. Part of it was the bond with the elves, the mutual belonging. Part of it was the unexpected entry of Filius Flitwick into his life. Filius was so comfortable with himself that he was easy to be around.

Harry was both pleased and exhausted at the end of the evening's dodge spell. He had lasted a little longer and enjoyed the physical challenge. Filius had explained the long-term plan of adding additional skill layers as Harry improved.

After his evening shower, Harry climbed into bed and grabbed one of the biographies he had bought the previous afternoon. He fell asleep reading about an American billionaire who had controlled most of the world's oil refineries in the first part of the century. He dreamt of flying over vast farmlands with a gas-powered broom.

Change Is In The Air

Chapter Notes

Friday, July 7

Harry woke early the following day and thought immediately of Sirius. As much as he liked the Weasleys, he couldn't imagine that it would be easy for Sirius to be surrounded by them after the isolation of Azkaban. He also felt it was essential to get Sirius away from Dumbledore. There wasn't a specific reason, but something felt off.

He was dressed and reading when Filius emerged from his room. "Do we have plans this afternoon?" Harry asked.

"I thought we might go see Potter Manor unless you prefer to wait," Filius answered.

Harry laughed, "You want to see the library."

"Guilty," Filius answered with a smile. "Did you have something in mind?"

"I'd like to talk to Mr. Tonks about Sirius," Harry answered. "He needs help to clear his name."

"I'll floo his office before we head to Gringotts and see if he is available," Filius said.

Harry nodded and moved to the table when plates of food appeared. After a few bites of the fluffy pancakes, he asked Filius, "Is there anything I should be doing?"

Filius could hear the uncertainty in Harry's voice. The boy, no, the young man, had his life turned upside down by a choice that had resulted in a cascade of revelations. Filius judged him to be handling it well. Despite Harry's lackadaisical approach to his school work, he demonstrated sound reasoning skills and could apply himself when he so desired. The question Filius found himself asking was why Harry had not wanted to apply himself at Hogwarts.

Filius turned his attention to the question Harry had asked, "Not that I'm aware of. We have a plan that we are adapting as we need. The elves take care of our day-to-day needs. I'm taking charge of your educational needs. You are listening to professional recommendations concerning your financial situation and learning to use that to your advantage. Considering how much your life has changed in a very short period, you are doing remarkably well."

Harry beamed. After a few bites of sausage dipped in the syrup left from the pancakes, he took a drink of orange juice and relaxed back in his chair. "I'm really enjoying all the money stuff Sharpnail is teaching me. It's kind of like quidditch, only instead of different balls, you

have different investments, and you have to make them all work together to get the goals you want and to make a big score.”

Filius laughed, “That’s not a bad analogy. Like quidditch, you have a team supporting you as you go after the big score, however you define that. While you are looking for the snitch, they are keeping the other balls in play. You can duck in to assist them or leave them to it. You are also the team captain, so you can direct them to specific plays or let them do what they are trained to do.”

Harry nodded, “Exactly. That’s kind of the easy part. The hard part is all the feelings I keep having.”

“Do you feel ready to share those feelings?” Filius asked. Harry had never had an adult he felt safe opening up to. Filius was touched that Harry was willing to trust him in that way.

“I’m angry. It’s like my life has been orchestrated for maximum misery. I want to ask why but then I realize it doesn’t matter. I’m still left with the results of it.” Harry scrunched his face as he considered, “I know there are other things I’m feeling, but they’re kind of getting lost in all the anger.”

“Not surprising,” replied Filius. He thought for a moment, “Do you know what a mind healer is?”

“Is that like a shrink?” Harry asked and then realized Filius probably wasn’t familiar with muggle slang. “That’s what we call a doctor that talks to you about how you feel and stuff.”

“It sounds very similar,” Filius responded. “Remember last night when we talked about being so filled with emotion that sometimes you need to let it out?”

Harry nodded.

“Think of your life as a teacup that you are inside of,” Filius explained, “it fills up with your emotions and you are surrounded by them. A mind healer is someone that helps you look at all the emotions, but they are looking from outside of your teacup. It lets them see it differently than you do.”

“So a mind healer is with emotions kind of like Sharpnail is with money or Mr. Tonks is with legal stuff,” Harry said. “They know more about that stuff in general, so they can help me figure out my specific stuff.”

“Exactly,” responded Filius with pride. “You’ve had a lot of things in your life that created big feelings. And now, it’s like you’re in a whole new teacup. You’re still the same, Harry, but everything around you is different. All of that affects the big feelings you already had and, on top of that, creates even bigger feelings.”

“So it would be good if I went to an expert to help me learn about all the feelings, so I don’t drown in them as my teacup fills up,” Harry summarized.

“Yes,” Filius replied. “You’ve learned how helpful it is to have experts teach you what you need to know. I think a mind healer would be another good expert on your team.”

“So, do you think Mr. Tonks would know someone that can help?” Harry asked.

“I’m sure he either knows or will know who to ask for a recommendation,” Filius said.

“We’ll make that one of the things we ask him about today.”

“See,” Harry said with a small amount of smugness, “there is something I’m supposed to do.”

Filius smiled and reached over and ruffled Harry’s already messy hair.

“Hey,” Harry pulled back, “you’re supposed to be on my side, not my hair’s.” He laughed as he said that.

Filius shook his head and got up to move to his favorite armchair. Picking up his book, he smirked at Harry, “I think your hair is on the winning side.”

Harry got up and summoned his own book, and sat down to read for a bit. He had read a few pages when Winky popped in and sat beside him. He found that sometimes Winky just liked to sit by him. He wasn’t sure if Winky found it reassuring or if she was reassuring him. Either way, it was nice.

When Harry finished the chapter he was reading, he set the book aside, "Where's Dobby?"

"Dobby be shopping. You need lots of food to grow.". Winky peeked around Harry at Filius and then, in a pseudo whisper, said, "Maybe if Professy eats more, he gets taller, too."

By the time Harry's laughter died, Filius was sitting on the floor leaning against the chair from laughing so hard.

Harry sat at the familiar table in Sharpnail's office, still chuffed that Winky had made a joke about Filius. Filius and Tonks were discussing the various magical districts they had visited. They both agreed that Tirana, Albania had the busiest shopping area and attracted merchants from all over the world.

Sharpnail entered and went directly to his desk where he grabbed a stack of folders and brought them over to the conference table. "Before we go any further, we need to sort out your Head of House status."

'Being Head of House carries responsibilities and privileges," Tonks explained. "As the last Potter, you have an obligation to lead your House. However, you can choose if you want to assume leadership of any dormant lines."

So my dad didn't really have time to do anything," Harry said, "What about my granddad?"

"Fleamont Potter assumed leadership of the Stinchcombe line," Sharpnail answered. "By right of primogeniture, he was able to claim it despite the Potter line having diverged from

the line."

Harry and Filius looked at each other and, in unison, said, "Stinchcombe Herbs." Harry smiled, thinking about the packages of fresh herbs that were sold in apothecaries and wizarding grocery stores.

"Yes, your grandfather is an example of claiming a line for the financial benefits," Sharpnail said.

"What other benefits are there?" Harry asked.

"Each of these lines is an Ancient House that has a seat in the Wizengamot," Tonks explained. "If you want to make legal changes in the wizarding world, being your own voting block would give you a tremendous advantage in creating alliances."

Harry considered and asked, "If I wanted laws that made it illegal to abuse an elf..."

Tonks nodded, "Exactly. Being able to write and introduce laws and then build support for your agenda is a good reason to claim those Houses."

"It's not a one-time opportunity, Harry," Filius said, "but there is one thing you need to know: when you claim Headship of a House, you take control of the family magic. Family magic differs from House to House, but all of it carries protection."

"What kind of protection?" Harry wanted to know.

"Every family's magic is different, but they tend to follow patterns. The Black family is strong in mind magic, so I would guess that claiming the Heir ring would bring some protection against those that can read surface thoughts."

"What about the Potters?" Harry eagerly asked.

"Potters are famous for potions," Tonks answered. "Fleamont created Sleekeazy. Linfred Potter invented Skele-gro and Pepper Up potions. I would guess that the Potter magic is protective against poisons or other potions."

"How do you find out what a family's magic does?" Harry wondered.

"The family grimoire," Sharpnail answered. "It's a book kept by the head of the family and added to by each subsequent head. It's a combination of spellbook, history and diary. Once you take the headship, you can access the family grimoire."

"I can take the headship to access the family magic, but I won't know what the magic is until I do," Harry clarified.

"Yes, because becoming head of a family is not about what you get," Filius clarified. "It's about accepting an important responsibility."

"So any benefits are like a bonus," Harry concluded.

“That’s a good way to look at it,” Tonks said. “You also need to know that when you claim a headship, there is an automatic filing with the ministry. It states that there is a new Head of the House, but it doesn’t say who has claimed it. The Daily Prophet has a reporter that checks those notices every day.”

Harry thought about it and grinned, “So they would know there is a Lord Slytherin but not who it is.”

Tonks grinned back, “Yes, Harry. You might consider that a benefit.”

“What happens when a House isn’t dormant?” Harry asked.

“Then you would become responsible for the members of your House,” Tonks answered. “Who can marry and divorce, for example.”

Harry looked at the folders in front of Sharpnail, “I need to look at the list.” He took the parchment that Sharpnail handed to him.

Harry considered. Potter was a given, as was Stinchcombe, since there was an ongoing business. Gryffindor and Slytherin could be useful. Gaunt could be used to mess with Riddle. Being the Black heir was the least he could do for Sirius. Harry didn’t know anything about Peverell or Emrys. He asked about those.

The three adults looked at each other. Unexpectedly, Tonks called Dobby, who immediately popped in, “What does Mr. Sollicy need for my Harry Potter?”

Tonks smiled, “I need you to go to Flourish & Blotts and get Tales of Beedle the Bard.”

Dobby looked at Harry, who nodded. The elf popped out and was back a few minutes later with a slim black volume. Tonks took it and paged through it. When he found what he wanted, he handed the book to Harry, “Read this.”

Harry took the book and read The Tale of Three Brothers, then looked up, “Are the three brothers Peverells?”

“There are some that think so,” Filius answered.

“And the gifts from Death, is that part real?” Harry asked, fascinated with the possibility.

Filius chuckled, “That’s the question. Most think they are just children’s tales. Others? There is some debate. Some believe it is literal, and the personification of Death really did appear. Some scholars believe the brothers made the wand, stone and cloak, but because they are so powerful, it is as if they are made by Death itself.”

“Which Peverell am I descended from?” Harry asked.

Sharpnail pulled out a folder and opened it, “You are descended from Ignottus Peverell, the youngest of three brothers.”

Harry sat in thought for a moment, "I will claim Peverell. I think I own the actual invisibility cloak. If that's real, I think the others are, too."

"Will you try to find them?" Tonks asked.

"Maybe. I am curious now," Harry answered. "What about Emrys?"

"Emrys is the line of Merlin," Filius answered. "I'm guessing that Lily didn't know."

"My mom was descended from Merlin?" Harry said in wonder.

"As are you," Sharpnail responded.

Harry looked at Filius in wonder, "I have to. It's my mom."

Filius nodded slowly, "I can understand that."

"And the others?" Sharpnail asked.

"All of them," Harry said resolutely. "I think it is something I have to do."

Tonks chuckled, "It will create quite a stir. I'm kind of looking forward to it."

"Should I wait?" Harry asked.

"Legally, there is no reason to wait, and it will give you some advantage," Tonks answered.

"The Potter Headship is your right. The rest are your legacy."

Harry considered. Dumbledore might see it if it was published, but the tracking charms still showed Harry at Privet Drive. Plus, the headmaster didn't know about the emancipation. With luck, Dumbledore would waste time and effort trying to figure it out.

"Let's do it. It's time the wizarding world was disturbed a bit on my behalf," Harry said.

Filius clapped him on the back, "I think you are correct, Harry. I think you've earned a little mischief."

"For each House, you will take an oath. After the oaths are taken, you will visit the primary family vaults to claim the family token. After the magic has accepted you, you can claim the grimoire," Sharpnail explained.

"What is a family token?" Harry asked.

"Usually, it is a ring, but it could be something else, particularly if it is from a time when the Head of House went to battle with something other than a wand," Sharpnail answered.

Harry nodded and sat forward on the edge of his chair, "Potter, Black, then oldest family forward."

Sharpnail opened the top folder and pulled out a parchment and handed it to Harry. He took the parchment, read it over, then stood up. Holding the parchment with his left hand, he

raised his right hand, with his wand in his fist, and placed it over his heart.

"I, Harry James Potter, accept responsibility for House Potter and swear, by blood, by magic and by spirit, to live my life observing the Potter legacy of honour, service and respect for all creatures. I will learn from my ancestors, work with my kin and instruct future generations to the best of my abilities."

Harry felt a pulse of magic pass over him and something seemed to settle inside him. He closed his eyes, took a deep breath and stood up a bit straighter. The Potter magic was weighty, like the roots of a plant. It felt deep and brown.

He exchanged parchments with Sharpnail and read through the next oath.

"I, Harry James Potter, do accept, by blood, by magic and by spirit, the position of Heir to the House of Black. I promise to follow my Head of House in all matters concerning House Black. I will act in the best interests of House Black, including acting on behalf of the Head of House Black when needed."

Once again, Harry felt a pulse of magic, but this one felt different. It was bright silver and felt like a fierce wind. After it passed, Harry felt the need to shake himself, much like Padfoot would do.

There was another exchange of parchment and Harry read the oath for House Emrys. Harry took a breath. Then he took another one. This was a serious oath. Still, he had no doubts. He knew with absolute certainty that if given a chance, his mother would have taken this oath. He reread the parchment and felt it sear into his mind. He handed it back to Sharpnail and then stepped back and raised his wand.

"I, Harry James Evans Potter, accept responsibility for House Emrys and swear on my life, my magic and my soul to always uphold the highest principles of magic. I will use my magic to serve and protect all magic. I will honor and teach the Primary Laws of Magic. I will hold all Magical Beings accountable to these laws and will judge on behalf of Magic as required."

As soon as Harry finished speaking, a wind swept through the office as a deep bell-like sound was felt by each person. Harry was engulfed in bright light and felt judged in the deepest parts of his soul. Emrys magic was like the bright sun. It was overwhelming, yet it felt like the source of all life. When the light disappeared, Harry swayed as Tonks jumped forward to steady him and Filius placed a chair directly behind Harry. As Tonks helped him to sit, there was a knock on the door.

Sharpnail went to the door and spoke with someone for a few moments then returned to the table, "It appears that the wind and sound swept through all of Gringotts. We have employees checking the Alley and Ministry to see if it also happened there."

As Sharpnail finished speaking, Dobby and Winky popped in and immediately rushed to Harry. They climbed to his lap and threw their arms around his neck. Harry hugged them both and waited, more than a little alarmed at their behavior.

When the elves started to relax, Harry asked, "What's the matter?"

"Your magic get big," Winky explained.

"Still big," Dobby added, "but not so big now."

Harry looked around to see if anyone had an explanation.

"I've never seen anything like this happen before," Sharpnail said.

"I'm not sure anyone has," Tonks said, "but this is far from something I know about."

Suddenly, Harry felt something. He didn't know what it was, but it was something. He closed his eyes and focused on the something. It felt crinkly. And odd. Plus, it seemed to be growing. Harry's eyes popped open. He looked at the elves still on his lap. Their eyes were wide.

"Can you feel it?" Harry asked them. Both elves nodded. Then Harry realized what was happening. The bindings on his magic were unraveling in the combined presence of Potter, Black and Emrys family magic. Three powerful houses claimed Harry as much as he claimed them.

"Dobby," Harry said urgently, "you must take me far away from people and buildings. As far as you can."

Suddenly Harry and Dobby were gone with Winky tumbling to the floor. Filius leaped forward to help her up. Then Dobby was back, wringing his hands as he looked at Filius.

"Where is Harry?" Filius demanded.

"Harry Potter says magic coming loose. Dobby must wait one hour to get him," Dobby stated forcefully.

"Take me to him, Dobby," Filius implored. "Please."

"Dobby cannot." With that pronouncement, Dobby reached out to Winky and popped out.

It was approximately twelve minutes later that a wave of magic raced across the room.

To the south, in a sun-drenched field of flattened grass, a very tired Harry Potter rolled over onto his side and fell asleep with a smile.

When it was time for Dobby to get Harry, the elf popped in to get Filius who was pacing the office. When they arrived at the distant field, both ran over to a slumbering Harry. Harry opened his eyes and held up his wand, now a charred stick, "I tried a lumos. It was really bright until my entire wand got hot and caught fire."

Filius dropped and gathered Harry in his arms, "You scared me."

"I scared myself," Harry responded wryly, "but I felt like my magic was about to explode." Harry looked around, "I think it did."

"Quite," Filius said. "Now, let's get you back."

When Dobby popped them back into Sharpnail's office, the three healers were waiting. Harry turned to Winky, "You didn't need to call the healers."

Winky ran up and threw herself around Harry's legs, "Harry Potter scared Winky."

Before Harry could say anything, Tonks said, "I called the healers."

"I'm sorry I scared everyone, but it felt urgent to leave," Harry admitted.

"Perhaps that same urgency can be applied to your hand," Gorin nearly snarled.

The men and elves stared at Harry in horror while the healers gathered around him. Healer Tonks handed him a pain potion. Gorin conjured a bowl of bright orange liquid and thrust Harry's hand in it, still holding the wand.

Heartwise gently guided Harry into a chair that had been placed behind him. "Please tell us what happened that led to this," she said, gesturing at Harry's hand.

Harry started by telling them about claiming the Potter House and Black Heirship and how the family magics felt different. Then he described the judgment of the Emrys magic, "It didn't just flow through me. It's like it filled me up so it could look at every part of me."

It was hard for Harry to talk about the wrongness of the binding beside the Emrys magic. He didn't know the words to use. He just knew that his magic needed to be big in a way it had never been. Then there was the urgency that the magic was too big to contain.

When Harry was alone in the field, the swelling felt as if he were a taut string waiting to be plucked. When it was finally released, there was so much relief and an enormous sense of rightness. Afterward, he had just rolled over to rest in the profound peace he felt.

For a while, Harry had lain there, lost in an awareness of his magic he had never felt before. When his brain seemed to come awake, he wondered what it would feel like to cast a spell with the new awareness. He cast a lumos. It was a brilliant light that seemed to get brighter and brighter. The brighter the light, the warmer his arm felt until the heat focused in his hand. It became unbearably hot and suddenly, his wand burst into flame. He tried to open his hand, but he couldn't release the wand. Finally, the flame died down, leaving his wand a burnt stick and his hand throbbing with pain.

As Harry told the story, Gorin gently separated the wand from his skin. The pain potion and orange numbing solution left Harry with a weird tingly feeling in his hand but no more pain. Harry looked at his burnt wand and felt curiously ambivalent. He remembered the wonderful feeling when he first picked it up. It had been his partner in magic. It had saved his life in the graveyard, but for that same reason, he was almost relieved to be rid of it. His scar and his wand had been connected to Voldemort. With his scar gone and the wand burnt beyond use, a new feeling of freedom crept in.

After gently drying Harry's hand, Gorin stepped back so Healer Tonks could bandage it. She gently wrapped soft cloth around each finger, then wrapped the whole hand, leaving Harry with a big white mitten. Winky crept up to Tonks and whispered loudly, "Do other hand so he has matching set."

Harry laughed as Tonks looked wide-eyed at the elf. Winky grinned, happy to have cheered her wizard.

Heartwise stepped to Harry's side, "We're going to check your magical health now. Just sit here and rest."

As the healers moved around Harry, the rest stepped back to watch. Harry closed his eyes and breathed steadily and considered magic. He'd never really thought about what magic was, just that it was there. Now he considered the different ways the Potter, Black and Emrys magic felt. Did he use magic, or did magic use him?

Harry felt a touch on his shoulder and opened his eyes to see Dobby peering at him. He looked around and saw the healers conferring. Healer Tonks stepped forward and addressed Harry, "Your core is irritated where it was bound. It should settle in a few days. No wanded spells this weekend. We'll see you Monday afternoon and go from there."

"Can I claim the rest of my Houses?" Harry asked. "The magic doesn't want me to wait."

Heartwise stepped forward, "I will stay with Harry this afternoon."

With medical matters settled, Healer Tonks and Gorin made their farewells. Harry stood and stepped up to Sharpnail to accept the next oath.

"I, Harry James Potter, accept responsibility for House Gryffindor and do swear, by blood, by magic and by spirit, to live my life protecting those in need. I will teach the arts of protection and defense to those seeking knowledge. I will be a fortress to those in need of shelter."

Harry felt a swell in his magic and the Gryffindor magic seemed to nestle comfortably, swirling a deep burgundy around his other family magics. Once he felt settled, he reached for the next parchment.

"I, Harry James Potter, accept responsibility for House Slytherin and swear, by blood, by magic and by spirit, to defend the sanctity of the magical world. I promise to encourage the ambitions of all magical children that seek guidance and knowledge."

The Slytherin magic felt silver, but while the Black magic felt like a broad cloth of sheer silver, the Slytherin magic was a sharp focus that moved in and around his other magics.

Harry was beginning to understand why Houses went dormant. Claiming one House was significant to your magic. Extra Houses added magical weight. For Harry, there was no choice. The magic of Emrys demanded the restoration. Fortunately, Gryffindor magic made boldness more than an aspiration. It was infusing his magical core. Slytherin cunning wound through showing him a way forward.

"Mr. Tonks," Harry turned to his solicitor, "can you see if Mr. Borner is available today? I think we need to manage how my Houses are presented to the magical world."

Tonks nodded and went to send the message as Harry reached for the next parchment.

"I, Harry James Potter, accept responsibility for House Peverell and swear, by blood, by magic and by spirit, to pursue innovation in all things. I promise to seek knowledge and creativity and to encourage the pursuit of excellence."

The Peverell magic was airy and colorful. It bounced and swirled, and Harry felt the urge to dance. Instead, he laughed. "It's so alive," he exclaimed. "It wants.....well, I'm not sure, but it is reaching."

Harry shook himself and considered the magic he felt. It was probably good he couldn't do spells for a few days. It would take at least that long to adjust. After a deep breath, he reached for the next parchment.

"I, Harry James Potter, accept responsibility for House Stinchcombe and do swear, by blood, by magic and by spirit, to nurture and protect the magical world. I will share my knowledge with all who seek to understand. I will record newly gained knowledge to be shared with future generations."

Stinchcombe magic was deep green and seemed to nestle into the Potter magic. They both felt steady as if he could grow roots in them. Steadying himself in the feeling, Harry reached for the last parchment, read it and handed it back to Sharpnail, "I need a minute."

Harry stepped back to the chair and sat down. He closed his eyes and let the magic in him move. The Gaunt oath was ugly. Regardless of the push to reclaim a lost House, Harry could not take that oath.

"I think I need to take a break. Then I can claim the family tokens and grimoires," Harry said. "After that, I can figure out the Gaunt mess."

"An excellent plan, Harry," Heartwise said. "A few hours rest will make the rest of the day easier."

After settling on a return time, Harry and Filius flooded to their temporary home.

Consolidating the Magic

Chapter Notes

Friday, July 7

As the elves plied Harry with food, he began to suspect that perhaps that was not what Heartwise intended with the suggestion of rest. Salad, stew, roasted vegetables, fruits, sweet, nut-filled rolls and treacle tart were placed in front of Harry, one after the other. Surprisingly, he consumed all of it, plus the nutrient potion that accompanied every meal.

After, Harry sat between Dobby and Winky as they told him of the deal made with the Potter elves. The manor farms would supply Harry with fruits, vegetables, herbs and spices grown at the manor. In that way, the Potter elves would be serving the Head of House without disruption to the thriving Stinchcombe Herbs business. Dobby also agreed, on Harry's behalf, that Harry would formally bond with each of them.

"How many Potter elves are there?" Harry asked with some trepidation.

"Many elves. As many as Hoggywarts," Dobby answered.

Filius laughed at Harry's expression, "It's okay, lad. You have more than enough magic to support them."

"How many elves can a wizard support?" Harry asked.

"Most can support at least one, often two. The average Head of House can easily support three to five," Filius answered. "If they maintained the old ways of a mutual bond, even a squib could support an elf."

"Why did it change?"

"Wizards be greedy," Winky said with a scowl.

Filius nodded, "Winky is correct. Once one started, it spread until the old way of bonding was forgotten."

Harry thought about that, considering how he could change things back around. "How come I can support so many elves?" Even with the mutual bond, it seemed like a lot.

"Part of it is the mutual bond," Filius confirmed, "but a larger part is your power, and now you have your House magics."

Harry nodded in acknowledgment. He knew he had been more powerful than his classmates. With the binding gone and the House magics in his core, Harry was aware of his magic in a way he had never been before. He sat between the elves, just breathing and feeling the flow of his magic.

When it was time to return to Gringotts, Harry felt renewed. The time with his family filled a deep place in Harry that had always ached in the back of his awareness. He felt ready for whatever came next.

Before sitting again at the small conference table, Harry was subject to a quick examination by Heartwise. After receiving the young goblin's nod, Harry sat by Filius. The elves were spending the afternoon at Potter Lodge. While the family elves had popped in regularly to maintain the lodge, the grounds were overgrown. Winky was determined to make the immediate area around the lodge presentable for her wizard.

Sharpnail sat with his ever-present stack of folders plus a rectangular leather wallet. "These contain your vault keys," Sharpnail said, indicating the wallet. "Concentrate on which vault you want and the key will come to you. To return it, concentrate on returning it. You do not need the wallet physically with you to use it. The keys are joined to your House magic."

Harry grinned. He loved the practical parts of magic the best.

Sharpnail continued, "We will go to each main House vault in the same order you took your oaths. As you enter each vault, you will see a pedestal. On each is a box with your House emblem. Houses Potter and Black use rings. Other Houses may be different. While you are not required to wear the House emblems, each has enchantments to protect the wearer. You will also find the House seal for affixing to letters and documents.

"Also on the pedestal will be the Grimoire. Only the Head or Heir may open the Grimoire. Some are also spelled so that only they may read them. You may take it or leave it in the vault as you choose."

Harry nodded his understanding.

Filius reached over and placed his hand on Harry's arm, "Trust the magic, Harry."

It wasn't often that Sharpnail accompanied a client to the vaults but he had never seen so many Houses claimed at once and wanted to witness the fulfillment. Ted Tonks came along for the same reason, plus he never quite knew what his client would do next and he enjoyed the anticipation.

Sharpnail drove the cart with Filius and Harry following Heartwise and Tonks in a cart driven by a junior staff goblin. The first stop was the Potter vault. Harry stepped out and looked at the others, realizing that this was something he had to do alone.

Sharpnail stepped out of the cart and presented his open hand, "Your key please, Mr. Potter."

Harry concentrated briefly and passed him the key that appeared in his hand. He wondered if he could make it appear and disappear directly to the goblin opening the vault.

"Place your hand there," Sharpnail said, indicating an iridescent square beside the vault door. "Only the Head and Heir are accepted in the House vault without a direct invitation. To authorize any elves, call them when you are in the vault."

Harry nodded and placed his hand palm down on the shiny square. It felt as if his magic was being tasted. Sharpnail inserted the key and Harry saw the door disappear. After a nod from the goblin, Harry entered the vault.

A vitreous onyx pedestal stood about six feet in from the doorway. It was about chest height to Harry. On the broad top sat a pale wooden box and a thick dark brown leather book. Stepping up, Harry raised the front of the lid until it was fully open. Inside were three rings and the House seal on a dark wooden handle. Harry knew, without understanding how he knew, that the center ring was his. He picked it up with his bandaged right hand and placed it on his left index finger. It adjusted to fit his finger and Harry felt a thrum in his magic. He picked up the House seal and closed the lid. Taking the book, he stepped back through the open doorway. When Sharpnail removed the key, stone filled the opening. Harry took the key and mentally returned it to the wallet.

Harry stepped close to Sharpnail and, in a quiet voice, asked, "What are all the boxes in the vault?"

Sharpnail chuckled, "Those boxes, Mr. Potter, hold ten thousand galleons each."

Harry thought about the ceiling-high stacks of boxes going row upon row into the dark of the vault. He was pretty sure that muggle banks didn't work that way.

As Sharpnail got back into the cart, he asked Harry, "Did you decide not to call the elves?"

"We plan to come back another day to review at least the Potter vaults," Harry answered.

The Black vault was next. It was near identical to the Potter vault. The only difference on the pedestal was a black leather-bound book. Harry once again instinctively recognized the Heir ring and placed it on the thumb of his left hand. As with the Potter ring, he couldn't articulate the reason for the ring location, just that it felt right. After closing the lid to the dark wood box, he left the book for the Head of House Black. He barely glanced at the stacks of galleon boxes that also filled the Black vault.

The Emrys vault was at the deepest level of Gringotts. It was smaller than the Potter and Black vaults with fewer boxes, but it also contained many wooden and hard leather chests and casks. Opening the large, flat box on the pedestal, Harry found three braided circlets. His circlet was twisted strands of yellow, white and rose gold braided loosely. It fit across his forehead and slipped through his hair to fit snugly along the sides of his head. Once on, it felt weightless, but the Emrys magic resonated through him.

The book on top of the pedestal was a small, slim volume bound in tan leather. Harry hesitated but then felt almost compelled to take the volume. Reaching out, he placed his left hand on the book and closed his eyes. He knew that despite the small size, the words contained would have immeasurable meaning for him. He may have felt obligated by the Potter magic but the Emrys magic commanded him. Taking the volume, he left the vault.

The Peverell vault was small. Creativity and invention may have been the Peverell heritage but it was jealously guarded. It was not sold for fame or fortune. What small fame that was garnered was surrounded by whispers and rumours.

Opening the lacquered box, Harry found three bracelets. Unlike other trios meant for Head, Heir and Spouse, the Peverell set had been made for three identical brothers. Birth order may have determined inheritance but they always considered themselves equals.

Urged by magic, Harry took the rightmost bracelet and slipped it on his right wrist. As he did, the volume alongside suddenly opened some pages from the beginning. Harry began reading at the top of the page:

If you are reading from the beginning, the remainder of this page will be illegible. Move past for you will have no success attempting to discern the text. If this volume suddenly opened to this page, then Magic itself has chosen you. Do not turn aside.

My brothers, Antioch and Cadmus, and I created three magical artifacts of tremendous power. Antioch created and enchanted a wand that when wielded by the chosen Wizard or Witch will be unbeatable. Powerful wielders may mistakenly attribute their own prowess to the wand but only a chosen Peverell will access its full power. Many have coveted this wand but the whispers of it passing in combat are exaggerations.

Cadmus enchanted a stone with his necromantic power to call forth those that have passed. With discernment, this artifact will greatly aid any it submits to. Beware of using it with sentimentality that will ensnare the weak. Already rumour abounds that my brother was so snared to the cost of his life. This is not so. A wasting illness took both Cadmus and his beloved Leanna and no power of this world could save them.

I wove a cloak of finest acromantula silk and placed enchantments of illusion within the warp and weft of the fabric. This cloak of true invisibility will not fade or decay over time. It cannot be tracked or bespelled. It will pass down my line and always find its way back to my descendants.

Together, Antioch, Cadmus and I experienced a Seeing. Prophecy is not a gift given to us but Magic granted True Sight for the sake of Magic itself.

One will come from our line at a time when Magic hangs in the balance. There are but two paths before it: vibrant rejuvenation or total annihilation. The artifacts we three created can tip the balance by One daring enough to call them, courageous enough to wield them and wise enough to exercise restraint.

No matter where these artifacts reside, when called by the true Peverell Head, wand, stone and cloak will return to the House vault and may only be removed by the Head of House Peverell chosen by Magic. When called by the chosen Head any artifact will immediately come.

Do not hesitate to claim your Inheritance. Call forth the Treasures. Learn them. Use them as Magic demands for all Wizardkind.

Ignotus Peverell

On a hunch, Harry reopened the box and removed the remaining bracelets. Placing them both on his right wrist alongside the first, he watched as the three bracelets blended together as one. Holding his arm across his body so the melded bracelet lay across his heart, Harry called upon all three artifacts to appear. His cloak appeared first. Then a long, knobby wand that looked familiar was laying atop the folded cloak. Lastly a box appeared that set off loud alarms within the vault.

At the first sound of the alarm Sharpnail called, "Mr. Potter, please step back without touching anything."

Harry backed up and exited the vault, "What's going on?"

Sharpnail immediately removed the key, sealing the vault. "That was a dark object alarm. What did you do, Mr. Potter?"

By this time, everyone had left the carts and gathered round. Harry explained that following instructions in the Grimoire, he had summoned three artifacts belong to House Peverell. When the final artifact arrived in a wooden box, the alarm sounded.

Sharpnail spoke briefly to the cart driver who took off down the track. "I've sent for a curse breaker. I think it is safe to say that the artifact was not originally dark or the alarm would not have been set on the vault."

After several minutes the cart returned and Bill Weasley stepped out and stopped in surprise. Sharpnail stepped forward, "Mr. Weasley, Lord Peverell recalled House heirlooms to his vault and one set the alarm off."

Sharpnail then turned to Harry, "Lord Peverell, please invite Mr. Weasley into your vault and, without touching it, show him the item that set off the alarm."

Harry stepped up to the vault door and placed his hand on the identification plate. As the door shimmered away, he went inside and invited Bill into the vault.

Bill looked at Harry, "Lord Peverell."

"Mr. Weasley."

Bill chuckled, "I guess today has brought surprises to both of us."

"You have no idea," Harry responded with feeling.

"So," Bill said, "which one? The cloth, Dumbledore's wand or the box?"

Harry started and his eyes grew big, "D-Dumbledore's wand?"

"You didn't recognize it," Bill observed. "I wonder if he knew?"

"Nothing would surprise me," Harry stated honestly. "It's the box or whatever's in it?"

Bill walked closer to the pedestal and began casting a variety of detection spells. Finally he levitated the lid off the box and looked inside, "Harry, please step back. There are powerful compulsion spells at work."

Harry stepped back as Bill continued to cast spells. Finally, Bill reached into a pouch attached to his belt and removed a pair of heavy, dark gloves. Putting them on, he reached in the box and removed a ring. He put the ring in the pouch, removed the gloves and without touching the outside of them, returned them to the pouch with the ring.

"The box is harmless," Bill said. "It had a simple locking spell. The ring had a very ugly curse that would attack anyone that put it on along with compulsion spells so you would want to wear it."

"Is the ring safe now?" Harry asked.

"The curse and compulsions are gone but there is something very dark inhabiting the ring," Bill answered. "We have a specialist that exams this type of thing."

As Harry turned to leave, Bill stopped him with a touch on his arm, "What will you do with Dumbledore's wand?"

Harry thought of what Ignotus had written. "Dumbledore thinks the wand is special but for him it is only a wand wielded by a powerful wizard. In truth, it is my wand and, apparently, always has been."

"Are you leaving it here?" Bill asked.

Harry held up his bandaged hand, "For the moment."

After stepping out of the vault, Harry walked over to Heartwise and Filius and said softly, "The ring Bill has feels kind of like my scar did." Heartwise nodded while Filius set a comforting hand on Harry's arm.

After Bill finished his brief report to Sharpnail, he turned to the cart. Heartwise stepped forward, "Since Harry is doing so well, I will return with Mr. Weasley to further investigate the dark object."

The Gryffindor and Slytherin vaults we're near identical in size. Both Houses were symbolized by enameled arm bands. The only difference in the small, thick volumes was the color: Deep Gryffindor red vs vibrant Slytherin green.

In the Gryffindor vault, Harry followed his instincts and called forth any Gryffindor heirlooms. He immediately recognized the Sword of Gryffindor but was surprised by the matching dagger and scabbard. Several equally ornate daggers arrived along with numerous

bowls, cups and platters in gold, silver and bronze. More surprising was the quantity of scrolls and books that showed up.

Calling for heirlooms in the Slytherin vault called weapons, scrolls, books, cups, platters and bowls. There was also a locket that set off the vault alarms. While waiting for Bill's arrival Harry learned that most older vaults had alarms for curses and dark magic. Unlike the arbitrary definitions for light and dark magic that the ministry used, Gringotts was constant in its consideration that dark magic was that which intentionally harmed.

Harry was sure that Bill visibly twitched when Harry was introduced as Lord Slytherin. Harry grinned and invited Bill into the vault.

"Just how many Houses have you claimed?" Bill asked, not really expecting an answer

"Only six," Harry answered, "so far."

Bill's mouth snapped shut as he decided he was better off not knowing anything else.

The Stinchcombe ring was surprisingly simple and Harry chose to put it on his left pinkie. He hoped that most of the time he wouldn't need to wear all the various House symbols. The Stinchcombe Grimoire was very large and bound with green leather so dark it was nearly black.

Instead of boxes of galleons or chests of heirlooms, there were shelves filled with small boxes. Looking closely, Harry saw that there were hundreds of seeds kept under some sort of stasis charm. He wished he could invite Neville to see them all, then he realized he could. Maybe not right away but once he had an OWL, he could reach out to people.

When he returned to the cart, he looked at Filius and Tonks, "Hasn't this been boring for you?"

"Not at all, Harry," Filius beamed, "we've had some delightful conversation." Filius took the grimoire and put it into a leather case with the other grimoires.

"Plus," added Tonks, "there is always the anticipation of what will happen next around you."

Harry sat in the back with Tonks while Filius rode at the front of the cart with Sharpnail. When they got back to the office, Heartwise was waiting to do a quick check of Harry. By the time Heartwise was satisfied with Harry's magical health, Mr. Borner had arrived.

"Mr. Potter, I didn't expect to see you so soon. I hope all is well," Mr. Borner greeted Harry.

"Mostly, yes," Harry said, holding up his bandaged hand with a rueful grin. "I have an idea but I'm not sure it will work."

"Then let's explore it together," Borner responded.

"As I understand," Harry said, nodding at Tonks, "when a House or Heir is claimed, the ministry automatically receives notice."

"That is correct," Borner confirmed.

"And The Daily Prophet watches for these notices to print them," Harry continued.

"Yes, they do," Borner said. "Have you claimed your House?"

"Actually," Harry began and then hesitated.

"Yes?" Borner leaned forward.

"I claimed six," Harry rushed out, "plus Heir to another."

Borner sat back, stunned at the news. "That's quite a few," he finally responded. "What was your idea?"

"I was hoping you could convince the Prophet to string out reporting the House claims in exchange for a statement or maybe a written interview for each House," Harry explained.

Borner thought for a moment, "No guarantees, of course, but I believe there is a good chance of convincing them."

"Good," Harry said, "I'll probably start with Slytherin."

Borner went pale, "Slytherin?"

"Yes," Harry confirmed, "we can figure out the order for the rest later."

"Very well," Borner said, "I shall get to work on that immediately. I'll owl you after I talk to them."

After the publicist left, Sharpnail handed Harry a thick leather portfolio, "This contains the inventory for all your Potter vaults. It also contains a summary of any portfolios the House maintains. After you've met with your healers and set a schedule with them, we will make an appointment to review everything. We will also do an audit of you other House vaults."

"Thank you, Sharpnail," Harry said.

"You requested an appointment with me today," Tonks said to Harry. "Do you want to conduct it here or move to my office?"

"Here," Harry answered. "It concerns House Black."

"What is your concern, Heir Black?" Sharpnail asked.

"Sirius Black is Head of House Black. I do not know if he has formally taken the oath but that is a technicality. The wards of his manor have recognized him," Harry said. "His name needs to be cleared so he can properly lead the House."

"You believe Sirius Black is innocent?" Tonks asked.

"I know he is innocent," Harry asserted, "as does Albus Dumbledore."

Tonks nodded, "I believe so as well. This is a matter I have been looking into after reading your parent's will. From what I have had quietly researched, Sirius Black was neither charged nor tried for any crimes."

"So what do we do?" Harry asked.

"He can come at anytime to visit the House vault," Sharpnail said.

"The sooner, the better as far as I'm concerned," Tonks added.

Harry thought for a moment then reached in his bag for paper and pen. He scribbled something down and called for Dobby.

Harry hugged the elf then showed him the paper, "Take this to Sirius and bring him back here if he agrees."

"Dobby will take care of the dogfather. Don't you worry," and Dobby popped away.

It was barely a minute later that Dobby popped back with Sirius Black. Harry jumped up and quickly found himself spun around in a hug.

"Pup, what are you doing here?" Sirius asked as he looked over Harry.

Harry stepped back and pulled Sirius toward the table, "I'd like to introduce you to Sharpnail, my account manager; Ted Tonks, my solicitor and you know Professor Flitwick."

Sirius shook hands all around and at a gesture from Sharpnail took a seat at the table between Filius and Harry. "This is unexpected," he observed.

"Much of this day has been," Filius said, "but I'm finding that is actually to be expected around Harry."

"It's not like I plan it," Harry protested.

Tonks looked at Sirius, "There's something you need to know. Harry is emancipated and today he became Head of six Houses."

Sirius was stunned but before he could say anything Sharpnail added, "Plus he became Heir of House Black as designated by the previous Head, Arcturus Black."

"I had no idea Grandfather had done that," Sirius whispered.

"You should know, Mr. Black, that Mr. Potter's first act as Heir was to advocate your innocence," Sharpnail pointed out.

Sirius turned to Harry with tears in his eyes, "Thank you, Pup."

"Based on what Harry has told me, powerful forces are arrayed against you," said Filius. "We must change the balance of power."

"You need the power of an active House behind you," Sharpnail said. "House Black has been effectively dormant since your grandfather's passing. It is time to claim your House."

In a seemingly unrelated matter, Sirius turned to Filius and asked, "Tell me, Professor, what is your interest in my godson."

Filius looked at Harry with a smile. While still looking at him, Filius said, "Harry has allowed me to become family with him."

Sirius nodded and then was silent for a moment. "I never wanted to head House Black. I was brought up to do it. I was trained for it. After my father was passed over and my mother disowned me, I assumed Regulus would inherit the House. It was a surprise when the wards of the London Manor welcomed me.

"My grandfather may have never disinherited me but he also never named me Heir. Harry may not have known it but it is apparent that my grandfather intended for him to be the next head of House Black."

Harry sat up straight and blinked. Everyone else at the table was nodding as if they agreed with Sirius.

"Fine," Harry said. "I'll do it but I have a few conditions."

Now Sirius was wary. "Name your terms," he said with no small amount of dread.

"You will be Heir," Harry stated firmly and held up a hand. "That is not an option."

"What else?"

"You will no longer live in the London Manor, however, you will return there for your secret meetings," Harry said.

"How. . ." Sirius started and Harry just smiled.

"You will teach me what you were taught as the future Head of House Black," Harry finished.

Sirius grinned, "It's a deal."

"Harry," Filius said, "why are you agreeing to this?"

"Magic," Harry answered. "Magic is everything. I've known that since I first learned of it but today, today I finally understand."

Filius nodded in understanding, "Are you up to doing this today?"

"Yeah," Harry sighed, "and I know what to do with the Gaunt oath."

Harry stood up and walked over to Sharpnail, holding out his hand. He took the parchment with the oath and read it over.

“I, Harry James Potter, accept responsibility for House Black and do swear, by blood, by magic and by spirit, to honor the purity of magic. I promise to protect the pursuit and practice of magical knowledge. I will hold all members of House Black to be magically faithful to these principles.”

He felt the bright silver of Black magic swell larger within his magic. He briefly wondered if there was a limit on how much his magic could grow. He handed back the parchment to Sharpnail and then looked at Sirius, “Your turn.”

Sirius stood and reached across the table to take the parchment from Sharpnail.

"I, Sirius Orion Black, do accept, by blood, by magic and by spirit, the position of Heir to the House of Black. I promise to follow my Head of House in all matters concerning House Black. I will act in the best interests of House Black including acting on behalf of the Head of House Black when needed."

Harry had remained standing and when Sirius took the oath a line of bright silver magic stretched between them. Harry felt a pull on his magic and even after the oath was finished and the line had dissipated, he still felt a slight tug connecting him to Sirius.

“The Gaunt oath is pretty repulsive,” Harry said, “but I’m going to follow the magic and see what happens.”

Sharpnail held out the parchment, “Are you sure, Mr. Potter?”

“Would it be as much fun if I was?” Harry asked with a grin as he took the parchment.

“I, Harry James Potter, accept responsibility for House Gaunt and do reject, by blood, by magic and by spirit, the traditional oath of House Gaunt.”

The parchment suddenly burst into a bright flash of fire as it was almost instantly consumed. Harry, with widened eyes, looked around but the only response he got was from Sharpnail who motioned for Harry to continue.

“House Gaunt will now and forever become a House of magical expansion, always seeking ways to strengthen and broaden the reach of magic within the magical community. I will seek ways to educate other Houses of the dangers of narrowing the reach of magic, letting the history of House Gaunt serve as an example.”

While Harry spoke the oath and felt the pale blue House magic, the others saw more than a teenager taking on another responsibility. They saw a young man growing into an unexpected future. Filius and Sharpnail exchanged a look with an unspoken promise to speak sooner rather than later.

While Sharpnail took Harry and Filius to the Black and Gaunt vaults, Tonks took the opportunity to speak to Sirius.

“Your godson is quite the young man,” Tonks said.

“Yes, and I don’t think he even realizes the impact he has on everyone around him.”

“It’s quite a commitment to accept him as your Head of House,” Tonks noted.

Sirius thought a moment, “It seems that way but it feels right. I think this is what House Black needs, though I’m not sure it is what it wants.”

Tonks chuckled, “I’m sure it will make an impact. Now let’s talk about you.”

When Sirius acknowledged him, Tonks continued, “We have a specialist in criminal law in our firm. I’d like to set up an appointment with him for you. We have a secure floo connection and if that doesn’t work for you, I’m sure that Dobby will be willing to transport you.”

“Is there anything I should be doing?” Sirius asked.

“I’d like to see you as healthy as possible. The ministry never likes to admit mistakes, even when it would be to their advantage to do so. They will be looking for any excuse to dismiss you and, by extension, your case. The sounder you are in body and mind, the better your advantage.”

“You want me to see a mind healer,” Sirius stated.

“Do you have any objections to that?” Tonks asked.

Sirius considered, “Even a week ago I would have fought it but I’ve come to realize that Azkaban had a bigger impact on me than I was willing to acknowledge. Otherwise I would never have agreed to live in my mother’s house again.”

“I’d like permission to set up appointments with both a healer and a mind healer. All interactions will be completely confidential. Your safety and well being is of utmost importance,” Tonks said.

“Is that for my sake or Harry’s?” Sirius wondered.

“Both,” Tonks answered frankly. “Mr. Potter is a very important client. I have also become very fond of him in a short amount of time. As you are important to him, you become important to both me and my firm.”

“Makes sense,” Sirius responded. “Anything else?”

“Harry is a fast learner when it comes to the practical and already understands the need for positive publicity. I am sure that he will arrange a meeting with his publicist.”

“Harry has a publicist?” Sirius asked with some incredulity.

“Yes,” Tonks answered, “and has already met with him today about press for his Houses.”

Harry’s foray into the Black vault was straightforward. He had already given the Heir ring to Sirius so now he took the Head of House ring and seal. The Grimoire was, as expected, a thick black leather bound book with Silver inlay that read ‘House of Black’.

The Gaunt vault was more complicated. He opened the box for the family emblem and found it empty. Following a similar urge that he had used in the Peverell, Gryffindor and Slytherin vaults, Harry called forth the Gaunt legacy. To his surprise, it was the Peverell ring that showed up, however, this time no alarm was triggered.

“Sharpnail,” Harry was a bit embarrassed as he stepped out of the vault, “I think you better call Bill Weasley.”

Sharpnail actually rolled his eyes to Harry’s surprise, “Is nothing ever simple with you, young man?”

“I’d like it to be?” Harry asked as much as said.

Filius chuckled, “At least it is not dull.”

When Bill showed up, he looked at Harry and asked, “How can I help you, Lord . . .”

“Gaunt,” answered Harry then he leaned into Bill and whispered, “I’m up to eight.”

Harry laughed at Bill’s reaction, “It’s actually the same ring that showed up in the Peverell vault.”

Then Harry stepped into the vault and spread his arms, “Be welcome into this vault, Bill Weasley and share in the spoils.”

Bill chuckled and stepped into a small, empty vault and saw the strange Peverell ring on the pedestal beside a grubby dark leather bound volume. Taking out his dragon hide gloves, he once again put the ring into a transport pouch.

“I’d rather not retrieve this a third time,” Bill said with a wink.

“I’ll do my best,” Harry promised.

When Harry, Sharpnail and Filius returned, Tonks was explaining Little League Baseball to Sirius who was quite taken with the idea. Harry joined them at the table and immediately called Dobby and Winky.

“What can Dobby be doing for his wizard?” Dobby asked as Winky climbed into Harry’s lap for a hug.

“Sirius, this is Dobby and Winky. They are my elves and I am their wizard,” Harry said.

Sirius swallowed as he absorbed the implications of Harry’s introduction then he politely greeted both elves.

“Sirius needs a new home. Do you have any suggestions?” Harry asked both elves.

“Tonight he should stay at Potter Manor. The elves there remember him,” Winky explained. “Tomorrow Winky will make the lodge ready for Dogfather and his wolf.”

Harry looked at Sirius, "Is that alright with you?"

Sirius looked sad, "It will be good to see Potter Manor again. Is the lodge the Potter Hunting Lodge?"

"Yes, the elves have been reviewing my vacant properties," Harry answered. "Let Dobby know anything you need from the London House and he can get it for you."

Sirius nodded and stood up, "Thanks for the kick in the butt, Pup. I needed it."

Harry got up and gave Sirius a long hug. When he pulled back, he looked at his godfather with tears in his eyes, "It took too long but I have a family now and you are part of it."

Filius got up and walked up to Sirius, extending a hand, "After we get everything settled, Harry will begin studying for his Charms OWL. You were quite adept at Charms, as I remember, and I will expect your assistance."

Sirius smiled broadly as he shook Filius' hand, "It will be my honor to assist in any way I can."

Dobby walked over to Sirius and grabbed the sleeve of his coat, "We go, Dogfather. You see our wizard tomorrow."

With that pronouncement, Dobby popped away, taking Sirius with him.

"Please tell me we are done for today," Harry pleaded as he turned back to the table.

"We are indeed, Mr. Potter," Sharpnail answered. "You have the list of the Potter vaults you own along with complete inventory for each vault. It was updated this week. I would prefer you look over your holdings before we discuss them. What House would you like us to inventory next?"

"Black. I think along with Potter, it will be a lot more work than the dormant Houses," Harry answered.

Sharpnail nodded and made a note on a piece of parchment, "Please let me know when you have reviewed the Potter inventory."

"Thanks, Sharpnail," Harry grinned. "It's always fun working with you."

"Go home, youngster," Sharpnail grumbled but Harry recognized the affection in his tone.

Harry was enthusiastically eating dinner. He didn't know what he was eating but it was delicious. There was some kind of thin, flat bread, strips of grilled beef, onions and peppers with some sort of green stuff to put on top of it. Dobby showed him how to put everything on the bread and roll it up like a strange sandwich.

"What exactly is this, Dobby?" Filius asked as he assembled a second strange sandwich.

“Dobby not know. Dobby sneaks in and watches muggles cook at eating places,” Dobby answered.

“It’s amazing,” Harry enthused, barely stopping to swallow his last bite.

“Dobby sees muggles make it with different meats. Will make again different,” Dobby explained. Dobby liked cooking new things and was happy that his wizard liked so many different foods.

“How are you feeling about everything that happened today, Harry?” Filius asked.

Harry considered while he ate a few more bites. Finally he said, “I’m not sure. It was a lot and it feels really big.”

“I suspect that it will hit you in stages,” Filius responded. “You have a lot of people willing to help. Even if you aren’t sure what you need, ask someone.”

“I will,” Harry assured him and then focused back on his dinner.

After dinner, Harry applied himself enthusiastically to the nightly dodging exercises. It was fun and had the added benefits of exercising his body, honing his reflexes and clearing his mind. When they were finished and he was laying in the middle of the floor panting, he asked about the next day’s plan.

“No appointments. You have a lot of things to go over so you might want to start on some of that,” Filius suggested. “The elves have arranged for us to have lunch at Potter Manor with Sirius, then we can go to the Hunting Lodge. I thought you might want to bring your broom and get some flying in.”

Harry’s answering smile was huge, “That sounds excellent.”

Winky marched in and stood over Harry, hands on her small hips, “Up. Bath time for wizards.”

Harry laughed as he got up off the floor, “Yes, ma’am.”

Winky scowled but everyone knew she was always pleased when Harry took care of himself. She watched her wizard hug Filius on his way to his bedroom. Dobby was right. Harry Potter was a great wizard and she was proud to be his elf.

A Very Full Weekend

Chapter Notes

Saturday, July 8 - Sunday, July 9

Harry woke Monday morning with a smile on his face. The weekend had been fantastic. Harry and Filius slept an extra hour on Saturday and then ate a sumptuous breakfast overseen by a doting Winky.

After breakfast, Harry had looked longingly at the Potter Grimoire but agreed with Filius that they needed a few lighter days. It had been an intense week and while Harry felt better than he could ever remember feeling, he knew he needed a bit of a break. He pulled out the folder with the Potter vaults inventory.

Harry had thought he understood how much he owned. He was wrong. Filius had immediately made a copy of the list of books stored in the general storage vault so he could make notes. Also in the storage vault was enough furniture, lamps, tableware and paintings to furnish at least ten houses. Harry didn't understand most of the styles listed and knew he would need to see them.

The patent vault was literally where the record of Potter family patents was held. In addition to the commercially successful potions like Sleakezy, there were quite a few healing potions, including the easily recognized Skelegro. Up until his father, every Potter generation had at least one patent for a potion. Harry had to take more than a few calming breaths when he thought of his botched potions education. He determined at that moment to get a Potions NEWT.

His parent's vault was much smaller. The list of his mother's books wasn't extensive but covered a wide range of subjects. Filius was very excited when Harry passed over the list. He noted quite a few brooms and guessed that his father must have gotten a new one every year. When he saw a cradle listed, everything crashed down and soon Winky was in his lap hugging him. Harry really liked Winky hugs.

After that, Winky declared enough had been done and it was time to head to Potter Manor.

Dobby and Winky popped Harry and Filius to Potter Manor. Like many magical estates, the manor had an arrival salon. This was where all guests arrived via portkey, floo, apparition or through the front door. To go further, you had to be invited by someone with Potter blood or be allowed directly by the wards. Despite the years, the wards were still set to recognize Sirius. Those that arrived unexpectedly had their choice of sofas and chairs upon which to wait.

Harry invited Filius in and was greeted by Sirius with a hug. Already, Sirius looked better. His London house may have been an improvement on Azkaban and living rough, but it still hadn't been good for him.

"Will you give us a tour?" Harry asked Sirius.

"Of course, Pup," Sirius answered with a grin.

Harry greatly enjoyed the tour of Potter Manor. The ground floor was for entertaining. Multiple salons, a ballroom, several different-sized dining rooms and a magnificent orangery made it apparent that at least at one time the Potter family had been highly social.

The first floor was the private family floor with a master suite with a private sitting room, nursery suite, family dining room, salon, library and study. Harry lost count of all the bedrooms but was amazed at the library's cozy reading nooks. The study was unexpectedly large. A large blackwood desk dominated the room. Harry imagined his grandfather sitting there as he set up Stinchcombe Herbs or planned investments.

The second floor was what Sirius referred to as semi-private. It contained six guest suites that each had a sitting room, bedroom and private bathing suits. There was also a dining room and a large salon where guests could gather.

The third floor had more bedrooms but without sitting rooms or private baths. Harry wondered how you decided who stayed where when you had lots of guests.

Harry followed Sirius back downstairs and noticed all the portraits were asleep. Sirius turned down a smaller hallway between a salon and a dining room and walked to a door at the other end. He crossed a corridor and opened the door to lead them into the manor's kitchen.

Harry had no desire ever to cook again but he recognized that this was a kitchen built for serious food preparation. From the massive sinks to the three eight-burner stoves, this was the final proof that Potter Manor had been designed as a social hub. He looked at the four large ovens and thought of all the bread, pastries, cakes and pies that could be baked.

As Sirius was pointing out the door to the cold room, Harry had a glimpse of a future that used Potter Manor as a place to entertain and dazzle but not to live. Harry didn't like his Aunt and Uncle but he had learned the value that entertaining brought to business deals and negotiations. He could see hosting parties as a way to bring people together. It was something he needed to learn about.

As he came out of his musings, Harry realized that the three elves in the kitchen had stopped working and were looking at him with longing.

"You is Lord Potter?" an elf asked.

Harry nodded, "I am. What's your name?"

"I be Susu," she answered with a tiny bob, "We be your elves?"

“Anyone who wants can be my elf,” Harry answered. “Would you tell all the elves that want a bond to come to the ...” Harry looked at Sirius.

“The Grand Ballroom,” Sirius answered smoothly.

Susu looked at Harry, and when he gave a nod, she popped out, the other elves quickly following.

By the time Harry arrived at the ballroom, there were a lot of elves. “Are all these Potter elves?” he asked Sirius. Harry guessed there were at least a hundred elves in the large ballroom.

“I don’t remember there being near that many,” Sirius answered with a slight frown.

Susu stepped over to Harry and began to speak. “Lord Potter, Sir, many elves lose master or mistress in war. They come here to work. Only two places unbonded elf can go and Hogwarts not have work for every elf.”

Harry understood. This was why Stinchcombe Herbs continued to grow even without direct leadership. It wasn’t dramatic growth but nearly every year showed a slow, steady increase.

“So all these elves work here?” Harry confirmed.

“Not all,” Susu responded. “Some come this week when they hear of the greatness that is Lord Potter.”

Harry groaned, “Dobby.” He wasn’t exactly calling the elf but was unsurprised when Dobby immediately popped by his side.

“Harry needs his Dobby?” the elf asked. Gradually both elves were getting more comfortable with more casual address. They were also clearly possessive.

“Always,” Harry answered with a flash of a smile. “Can I actually bond with this many elves?”

Dobby nodded his head rapidly, “Bonding old way let you bond with many more elves.”

“Great,” Harry grumbled to himself, “I’ll have my own elf army.”

Sirius and Filius both heard him and chuckled.

Dobby popped a chair beside Harry who took the hint and sat down, “Is there any particular way to do this?”

“This is Bibi,” Susu said as she led a very old elf forward.

Harry reached out a hand to Bibi and asked, “Are you related to Susu?”

“She be of my line,” Bibi answered.

"Are you a Potter elf?"

"I take care of Dorea Black and come with her when married. After they go, Flea Potter bonded Bibi. Take care of Baby James and Baby Harry," Bibi answered.

Harry sat stunned, still holding the elf's hand. "I'm sorry I can't remember," Harry said. "Would you like to bond with me?"

Bibi nodded, "Does Harry Potter take Bibi as his elf?"

"Yes, I do," Harry said with a smile. As he felt the familiar pulse, he said to the elf, "Does Bibi take Harry Potter as her wizard?"

Bibi curtsied, "Bibi agrees." The larger magical pulse was expected but Harry had forgotten the soft flash of light that surrounded the joined hands of wizard and elf.

There was a collective gasp from the assembled elves. Despite Dobby's words, most had not believed that the new Lord Potter would honor the old ways. They watched as the exchange of magic with Lord Potter rejuvenated the ancient elf. Bibi stood taller as her stooped shoulders straightened. Her skin plumped and many of the wrinkles smoothed.

Sirius was amazed as he watched the exchange. His mother, a truly vile witch, had used her personal elf to torture her oldest son. She called it discipline but no sane person would see it as such. Sirius had despised the elf and that had infected his view of all elves. Observing his godson interact with different elves surprised him. Seeing the elves responding to Harry had been even more revealing.

Since escaping Azkaban, Sirius' time with Harry had been in short snippets. He had assumed because Harry looked so much like James that he was like James in personality. Watching Harry today, not just with the elves but in his reactions as they toured the manor, Sirius realized that Harry was just as much Lily's son. There was a sweetness to Harry that was matched by a fierce instinct to do what was right. It was Lily Evans that would have stepped up to take on the dormant Houses.

As Sirius looked on, Harry greeted each elf and asked a few questions about how long they had been at Potter Manor and what work they did and if they liked it. Sometimes he would glance at Dobby who would nod in response. Sirius had no idea what was being communicated but it was interesting to watch.

Sirius glanced at Flitwick occasionally. The former charms professor always watched Harry intently. He often reached out to lay a hand on Harry's arm or shoulder in encouragement. From the little Sirius had seen, Flitwick provided guidance and seemed to set the general schedule while always checking with Harry.

Sirius had only known Flitwick as a professor. It felt odd to call him by his given name though, Sirius realized, Harry had adjusted to a changed relationship. Sirius also noted that Harry and Flitwick had not created an artificial family honorific. They referred to themselves as family but didn't need to label it further. That was another lesson for Sirius. He needed to

let his relationship with Harry evolve naturally. Harry had made it clear that he wanted Sirius in his life. That was enough for the present.

Eventually, Harry had bonded with every elf at Potter Manor except Susu. When he beckoned her over, she shook her head and moved closer to Sirius, taking his hand.

“Susu, do you want to stay with Sirius?” Harry asked.

“Susu stay with Black Paddy,” the elf adamantly declared.

Sirius looked lost, his eyes wide. Susu let go of Sirius' hand and moved to face him. She held out her hands expectantly. Sirius knew what the elf before him wanted. It went against everything he had been taught about the relationship between elves and wizards. He drew in a deep breath and looked around. Harry didn't even seem tired after his reciprocal bonding with all the Potter elves. It obviously wouldn't harm him in any way. Sirius just needed to get over himself. He held out his hands to Susu.

Susu took his hands and said the ritual words, “Does Sirius Black take Susu as his elf?”

“I do.” Sirius gulped, “Does Susu take Sirius Black as her wizard?”

“Susu does,” she said with a huge grin, gently bouncing in place.

Sirius had seen the glow that happened when Harry bonded with the elves but he was unprepared for the intensity of it. He looked at Susu in wonder.

“We be family now,” Susu announced.

“I suppose we are,” Sirius agreed with a sense of wonder.

After a sumptuous lunch, Harry, Filius, Sirius and Susu flooded to Potter Lodge. Harry was expecting some sort of log cabin like he'd seen in history books of America. Instead it was a very large three-story house. It fit into the surrounding forest with rich hardwood wall panels and flooring. The furniture was simpler than at the manor but was no less luxurious.

Winky and Dobby were waiting at the lodge and gave them all a tour. Sirius had been with James a few times and told about a few of their exploits as they looked over the house. The lodge practically sparkled and Harry complimented the elves for getting it ready.

The lodge had several brooms that had been top-of-the-line when Harry was born. Filius and Sirius each grabbed a broom. Harry had his Firebolt and was eager to fly amongst the trees. Soon they were off. Sirius was quite rusty and stayed low and slow while he got used to flying again.

Flying with Filius was a revelation. He was as nimble and precise on a broom as he was casting charms. It wasn't long before Harry and Filius were playing high-speed tag dodging around trees. It was exhilarating and soon everything else was forgotten. When Filius finally called a halt after getting tagged, both were sore and tired from all the fast-flying and tight turns.

Sirius had long since landed his broom and walked out of the lodge with Susu floating a tray of drinks behind him. "This is perfect, Harry," he enthused. "I'd like to invite Moony here if you don't mind."

"This is your home now," Sirius," Harry said. "I was hoping Moony would join you."

As Harry and Filius were quenching their thirst, Filius turned to Sirius and asked, "Does Dumbledore know about this place?"

"I don't think so," Sirius answered. "And it is heavily warded. He won't know I'm here."

"We're probably in the Alley for another week," Filius said. "I'll send Winky over in the morning with Harry's schedule."

Sirius nodded and then stilled as Filius started walking around him. "Have you seen a healer since you left Azkaban?" Filius asked.

Sirius took a sudden step back, "Harry's solicitor is arranging one but I really don't want to see anyone." Harry immediately stepped into his space and threw his arms around his godfather. Sirius responded instinctively, embracing his godson in return.

"It's okay," Harry said. "Tonks knows a great healer and she won't tell anyone about you."

"How can you be so sure?" Sirius asked.

Harry responded with confidence, "Because she keeps my secrets."

Sirius let himself relax. "For you, pup," he murmured. Harry's smile as he stepped back from Sirius was worth seeing a dozen healers.

The rest of the day and evening was spent at the lodge with Sirius. After dinner, Filius shrunk the furniture in the main downstairs room so Sirius could watch Harry's dodging practice. Harry had continued to improve. He lasted progressively longer and no longer got stung until he started tiring. Filius no longer stood in place while hexing. He was constantly moving so Harry was no longer dodging spells from a fixed target.

As Harry was lying in the middle of the floor recovering from his exertions and Filius was restoring to the room, Sirius was enthusing about both Harry and Filius and their agility. Harry smiled. He now had another person who cared for him and wanted the best for him.

Harry was wide awake early Sunday morning, excited to see Peverell Keep. They had all seen pictures and read the description and agreed that the Keep seemed perfect for their needs. Currently, the Keep was an empty shell. Tonks had recommended an architect and Harry had authorized a portkey to the property for 11 am to discuss what they needed. He wanted to grab the folder and review the property details again but knew if he did the elves would rush to get everything ready for the day and it was too early to disturb anyone.

Harry settled back and took a deep breath. Since taking on the House magics, he had been more aware of the magic flowing through his body. Of course, having most of his magic

finally free could also contribute to that. He closed his eyes and just let himself feel. Since the soul fragment was removed, he felt lighter somehow. It had also made him realize how much physical discomfort the scar had caused him since coming into Voldemort's presence in first year.

Taking another deep breath, Harry just let himself feel. One by one, he noted the sensations he was feeling in his body. He remembered the sense of different colors associated with each House magic as it had settled into his own magic. He imagined that his own magic had an eye that could see the different colors of the magic within him. Slowly he began to sense the different sensations that went with each House. It was more than color. Each different house had a different resonance that was almost like sound. His other senses jumped into the game. Each house not only had a different color and resonance but it also seemed to have a different taste and smell and, definitely, a different feel.

Slowly he began to identify the different House magics and as he did so he started to recognize his own core that lay both underneath and around everything. Moving through the different magics in his body, he began to get his first sense of his own magic. His magic looked to his inner eye like a swirl of greens and blues with the occasional hint of deep purple. The resonance was high and clear, almost like the tinkling wind chimes he had heard around the neighborhoods of Little Whinging, but much fuller. His magic had the taste and smell of a rich buttery caramel with a hint of deeper, almost burnt, flavor at the edges.

The combination was mesmerizing and he stayed in it until something shook him and called his name. He opened his eyes to see Winky looking at him with concern, "Harry be sitting in trance for very long time. Time to get up."

Harry looked at the time and with shock realized that it had been over two hours since he started examining his magic. He pulled completely out of his magic and got up to get dressed for the day. Over breakfast, he shared with Filius what he had experienced. As Harry spoke, the former charms professor nodded in encouragement. Filius's acceptance of the information reassured Harry more than words could have.

After breakfast, Harry and Filius portkeyed to the Keep. They found themselves in front of a squat square brick building with a circular tower at one corner next to a bridge that crossed the water at the edge of a lake.

The square part of the Keep appeared to have four stories with dormer windows coming out from the roof. The bridge ended at a door at the first story with the main level even with the water of the lake. The topmost floor was larger than the lower floors and, along with the roof, made Harry think of it as a hat on the top of the Keep.

The round tower appeared to have five floors topped by a steep pointed roof with a chimney at the edge of it. As they stood there looking at the outside of the Keep the door opened and Dobby and Winky ran out to greet them.

Harry pulled out his tiny broom and unshrunk it. With a nod at Filius and the elves, Harry hopped on his broom and began to examine the keep from all sides. Before even stepping inside, Harry was enchanted. The Keep called to him in a way he had never experienced

before. There was a weight to the atmosphere soothing a place deep in his magic. As he flew around the Keep at every floor level, Harry felt the magic of House Peverell swell.

Finally landing, Harry crossed the bridge and opened the door to see Filius, Dobby and Winky standing in the middle of a cavernous room. There were no walls and no ceiling. As expected, the Keep was completely empty. Turning around, Harry grinned, "This is brilliant."

Filius watched as Harry walked slowly around the outside of the room. After teaching for several decades, Filius had learned that different children had different motivations for learning. Some did it because it was expected and that was simply what you did when you went to school. Others genuinely loved learning and soaked up any knowledge made available to them. Then, there were students like Harry who were bright and more than willing to learn but not willing to be uninterested. Filius had expected that when Harry found something that interested him he would apply himself enthusiastically. The actual practice of magic fascinated Harry but the theory left him cold. Most young wixen needed at least a base level of theory to cast a spell successfully. Harry was not one of these. He simply needed to want to cast the spell and he worked on it until he got it, usually quite quickly.

No one, least of all Harry, had expected that the financial dealings of ancient Houses would capture his interest. Both muggle and magical finance fascinated Harry and he not only learned what Sharpnail and Tonks set before him but asked questions at every turn. Now it seemed that Harry found Peverell Keep equally fascinating. It would be interesting to see the interaction between Harry and the architect that was arriving in a half hour. In the meantime, Harry was examining every nook and cranny and was moving steadily toward the one interior door that led into the corner Tower by the front door.

Harry looked into the tower, both up and down. It was obvious that the stairs weren't safe and Harry was tempted to fly his broom down and see what remained intact in the lower level. Instead, with a wave to his family he took his broom back outside to fly around the lowest level, peeking inside each window. Like the floor above, it was one open room, though with a more normal ceiling height. Harry wondered if the water from the lake ever rose to flood the room but figured there was probably a magical way to prevent that from happening. Flying back up, Harry went back inside to wait.

At 11:00, Filius stepped outside to greet the arriving portkey. A wizard of medium height with sandy brown hair looked around until he spotted Filius near the front door. As the middle-aged man walked forward, he recognized his Hogwarts professor.

"Professor Flitwick, this is unexpected," he exclaimed cheerfully. "Are you no longer teaching at Hogwarts?"

"I retired this summer to pursue other interests, Mr. Jameson."

Jameson was gratified that his former professor recognized him. He had worked hard to achieve Outstandings in both his OWL and NEWT exams. After getting a degree in muggle architectural studies, Jameson received Charms and Transfiguration masteries that he used to create innovative solutions in the wizarding world.

"Are you my client?" Jameson asked, "or are you representing someone else?"

"Neither," Filius answered with his usual cheerfulness. "I'm here with the owner, and I need to remind you of the confidential agreement you signed."

"Of course," Jameson assure him. "That is standard in every contract."

"Did you also sign a separate agreement of confidentiality?" Filius inquired, polite but firm.

"I did," Jameson nodded, "but I really don't understand why it was necessary."

"When you meet the young owner of Peverell Keep you will understand," Filius responded. "If you want to start at an advantage, treat him like any other client and make no special note of his identity." With that pronouncement, Filius turned and rapped sharply on the door and then gestured to Jameson to step back.

First out the door was Dobby and Winky followed by Harry who peeked out first and then stepped fully onto the bridge. Straightening his shoulders, Harry walked forward, extending his hand and greeting the newcomer.

"Welcome to Peverell Keep. I'm Harry Potter and I know that you are acquainted with Professor Flitwick," Harry said as he shook the architect's hand. Harry motioned Dobby and Winky forward, "This is Dobby and Winky, also members of our family."

Harry's greeting gave Jameson the time he needed to compose himself, "I'm Samuel Jameson and I'm looking forward to seeing what our firm can design for you."

"Do you want to talk first about what we're looking for or would you rather look inside of the physical structure? Harry asked. Harry had no idea how architects designed but he knew that it formed the basis for everything else that followed. Jameson and Associates had been Tonks' first recommendation. The firm had an outstanding reputation for work that was both innovative and meticulous.

"Let me look inside and get an idea of what's possible," Jameson answered, "and then we can explore what would best suit you and your family." Harry was pleased with the answer and led Jameson inside the keep.

By the time Jameson had looked around the keep, a small sitting area had been conjured and afternoon tea was set out. Jameson joined them and they relaxed with tea. As usual, Winky and Dobby provided a veritable feast with all of Harry's favorite sandwiches and cakes. When they were all pleasantly full, Jameson started asking questions. They had already decided as a family that Peverell Keep would be strictly their home. They could floo easily to Potter Manor for business or entertainment. Peverell Keep was their haven.

Most of the discussion was simply about what they wanted. Winky and Dobby had very detailed directions for a kitchen along with storage and potion rooms. Filius was quite detailed about his requirements for what he called a playroom but what Harry considered to be a dueling room. None of them were particularly picky about what they wanted the bedrooms to look like so long as they were comfortable. They would have some bookshelves, but most of the books would stay in the library at Potter Manor. It just didn't make sense to

have two libraries. They spent the most time talking about the living area or, as Harry very happily thought of it, the family room.

Jameson explained the process he used when designing for a family. He would send them a design in about two weeks. They could accept the design, reject it, or modify it to suit them. Once they had a design, construction was quick. With magical construction, it usually only took about a week to complete. Most families took another week or two to fully furnish the dwelling. Jameson had recommendations for the construction for them to consider. He could also recommend interior design firms if they needed assistance. Harry asked him to send all of his recommendations to Tonks knowing that his solicitor would thoroughly investigate all of them.

By the time the discussion was finished, everyone was satisfied with their plans. The sitting area was vanished and then Harry and Filius grabbed their brooms. They spent some time simply exploring the area. They also spent time playing tag with one another. Harry loved flying with Filius. Few could keep up with Harry on a broom so it was a special joy to have one in his new family.

The family returned to the Alley and made plans over an early supper. It would be at least a week before they had finalized plans from the architect. Since it would be several weeks before they could move into Peverell Keep, they discussed their living options. Although the alley was convenient, there was always the risk that Harry would be recognized even without his well-known scar. They decided that Potter Manor was the best place for their temporary stay until the Keep was ready.

Deciding there was no reason to wait, the elves packed up their belongings while Filius went down and closed out their account at the Inn. Harry went to the owlery to tell Hedwig and Henry to meet them at Potter Manor. It wasn't long before they arrived at the Manor to the absolute delight of the many elves.

At first, Harry refused to take the master suite but Filius and the elves insisted. This was the public face of the Potter House and Harry needed to become comfortable with everything that went with heading the House. It would take time but he needed to make a start. With a long-suffering and only slightly exaggerated sigh Harry acquiesced. The elves settled into a small room that was attached to Harry's new bedroom that the elves took for themselves. With Dobby and Winky so close, Harry felt more at ease about the suite of rooms that was larger than most muggle houses that he had been in.

With the assistance of the elves, Harry decorated the suite to match his magical core. Soft shades of blue and green with deep purple accents helped to ease his misgivings and when he finally settled in the large canopied bed that night, he fell into a dreamless slumber.

Consequences

Chapter Notes

Monday, July 3 - Saturday, July 8

Albus Dumbledore did not have a good weekend. He was sitting at his desk Friday afternoon approving routine disbursements for the coming school year. When a school elf popped in to remind him of dinner, Dumbledore instinctively reached for his wand that he always kept in the same spot at his desk when he worked. To his surprise, his wand was not there.

At first, Dumbledore wasn't concerned. Sometimes the wand got pushed aside as he shuffled papers. On a few occasions he had even unknowingly pushed it over the edge of the desk. He looked around and still didn't see it. He started neatening the papers and clearing his desk. Still no wand. He looked over the side of his desk and then under his desk. He looked in his chair. He felt the sleeves of his robes where he often tucked his wand to give the impression that he had mastered wandless magic.

Next, he summoned his wand. There was no response. Beginning to worry just a little, Dumbledore called for the elf that looked after his office and quarters. "I can't seem to find my wand. Have you, by chance, moved it?" Dumbledore asked with forced calm.

"Oh no," the elf responded. "Karn would never touch great wizard's wand."

Dumbledore dismissed the elf and sat down heavily in his chair. He refused to panic. There had to be an explanation. In the meantime, he knew that the remaining staff would expect him at dinner. Even in the confines of Hogwarts, Albus Dumbledore would not let himself be wandless. Opening a rarely used drawer in his desk, he pulled out the wand purchased from Ollivander's father when he was eleven years old. Eleven inches long, made of birch with a dragon heartstring, the old wand still sang with his magic. He had forgotten how natural it felt in his hand.

Shaking off the nostalgic thoughts, Dumbledore hurried through the castle to the Great Hall and the smaller, round table the staff sat at during holidays. He was distracted all through dinner, and when asked, he smiled and said he was distracted by the work he had done that day. Although most of the staff respected Dumbledore as a great wizard, it was the general opinion that most of the day-to-day work of running Hogwarts was left to the deputy headmistress, Minerva McGonagall. There would later be talk wondering what was really wrong with the headmaster, but sitting at the dinner table, they accepted his explanation.

It was a long night for Albus Dumbledore. He tore his office apart looking for his beloved wand. Finally, toward morning, he slumped exhausted in his chair. The wand was not in his

office. With resignation, he heaved his tired body out of his chair and up the stairs into his private quarters. He didn't know how but it had to be there.

He searched both his sitting room and his bedroom, his actions becoming increasingly desperate. Known throughout history as the Elder Wand, Dumbledore had acquired the wand in the same way its previous owner had acquired it: he stole it.

Despite the appearance he intentionally portrayed, Albus Dumbledore had only truly loved two people in his entire life: his sister, Ariana, and his lover, Gellert Grindelwald. His relatively brief and intense love affair with Grindelwald ended in losing both the love of his life and his sister. The resulting estrangement with his brother Aberforth was inconsequential. The loss of his two loves left him angry and bitter and determined never to feel such loss again.

He had watched in bemusement as Grindelwald began to take control in Europe. It was only the growing threat to the Statute of Secrecy that prompted Dumbledore to act. Under the guise of a truce, Dumbledore approached his former lover with a face of love and remorse. The passionate kindling of their romance was as genuine on Grindelwald's part as it was false on Dumbledore's.

In the wee hours of the morning, Dumbledore unknowingly repeated the same actions with which Grindelwald had initially acquired the wand. He stunned his sleeping lover and stole the wand in much the same way Grindelwald had stunned Gregorovitch and stolen the wand over twenty years previous.

Owners of the Elder Wand throughout history believed the wand was originally a gift from Death to Antioch Peverell and recounted as a fable in The Tale of the Three Brothers. They believed the rumor that the wand could only be acquired through an act of conquest. It did not occur to either Grindelwald or Dumbledore that stunning a man and stealing the wand was not an act of conquest but rather deceit.

Both men believed themselves to be the most powerful of their generation in part due to the presence of the Elder Wand. They were wrong on both counts. Grindelwald dominated both with raw power and his lack of hesitancy in using it to achieve his goals. Dumbledore, while powerful, excelled in the depth and breadth of his spell knowledge. Grindelwald was a sledgehammer. Dumbledore was a sculptor's tool. Both achieved tremendous feats of magic through differing means.

The power bestowed by the Elder Wand was an illusion. Any actual increase in power was purely through the wielder's belief. Antioch Peverell had been more than a wand maker. He, like his brothers, possessed the rare ability to imbue his creations with woven magics. While many could layer and chain magic, it was the rare magic user that could weave it. All three Peverell brothers possessed the gift and had used it to create what would be, for each of them, the pinnacle of their endeavors.

Working together, the brothers had created magical weavings that included the Peverell House magic, which would recognize a bearer of that same House magic. The three artifacts, wand, stone and cloak, were excellent magical constructs but were merely that unless the House magic recognized the wielder. It was only at that point that the true power of the

artifacts was unlocked. The Elder Wand was unique in that very few magic users would find themselves incompatible with it. It was only in the hand of a recognized Peverell that the wand became practically unbeatable and inseparable from its wielder.

Dumbledore had owned the wand for fifty years, and he privately credited his defeat of Grindelwald to it. The truth was that his confidence from the possession of the Elder Wand, combined with Grindelwald's perceived loss, was what tipped the scales in Dumbledore's favor. Dumbledore still believed himself the most powerful of wizards, but he keenly felt the absence of his cherished wand. His inability to find it was unbearable. As he completed the search of his bedroom, he had worked himself into a frenzy. Where was his wand?

At breakfast, Albus Dumbledore was a shadow of his usual self. Poppy Pomfrey, who stayed at the school through mid-July restocking supplies and preparing for the next school year, was alarmed at his appearance. Knowing the headmaster would resist any attempt at an examination, Pomfrey wandered behind the seated man and discretely cast a diagnostic charm. Although she was heartbroken about the situation with Harry Potter, she was, first and foremost, a healer, and Dumbledore was clearly in physical distress.

"Headmaster, you are showing every sign of exhaustion. I really must insist that you rest after breakfast. Do you need a potion?" the mediwitch asked as she moved to take a seat.

The headmaster snarled, "No, I don't need a potion. I need my...."
As his voice trailed off, the remaining staff watched in alarm.

"Albus Dumbledore," McGonagall scolded, "there is no need for such temper."

Dumbledore closed his eyes and drew upon his usual mask of benevolence, "My apologies to everyone, especially you, Poppy. I'm feeling quite stressed about staffing issues."

"Quite understandable," McGonagall conceded. "I still don't understand what prompted Filius to quit so abruptly."

The turn in conversation diverted the staff as Dumbledore had intended. While everyone else speculated on their former colleague, Dumbledore's thoughts were furiously churning. How did his wand disappear?

Back in his office, Dumbledore realized that Poppy was correct. He was exhausted and attempting to search his office again while so tired would likely be fruitless. He went upstairs, pleased that the elves had tidied his room, and collapsed on his bed into a fitful sleep.

Dumbledore slept through lunch and woke to find a tray waiting for him. He quickly ate the sandwich and soup and then went down to his office to search once again. Yesterday's search had been frantic. Today's was deliberate. Systematically Dumbledore went through his office. The Elder Wand was not there.

In frustration, Dumbledore called the head Hogwarts elf, "Limney."

The ancient elf popped into the headmaster's office, "What can Limney do for Headmaster?"

Dumbledore forced himself to be patient with the elf reminding himself that lesser creatures often needed careful handling. "Limney, one of my wands is missing," Dumbledore started when the elf interrupted.

"Peverell wand not missing," Limney said firmly. "Peverell wand gone."

"Yes, yes," Dumbledore said impatiently, "It's gone. I need to find it."

"Not missing, gone," Limney insisted.

Dumbledore sighed. This would be much easier with intelligent creatures. "Missing, gone, it makes no difference," Dumbledore explained. "It must be found."

"Is not missing so cannot be found," Limney stated slowly as if to a child. "Peverell wand be gone."

"Then where is it?" Dumbledore nearly ground his teeth in frustration.

Limney straightened and looked Dumbledore in the eye, "Lord Peverell call all specials."

Dumbledore was puzzled. What were specials? Surely the old elf couldn't be talking about....."Do you mean the Deathly Hallows?"

The elf scoffed, "Silly wizard name. Peverell specials need no name."

"How do you know this?" Dumbledore demanded.

"Elves know," Limney said, "Lord Peverell bring back old ways."

With that, the elf popped away, leaving Dumbledore bewildered and infuriated.

Dumbledore sat at his desk, going over what the elf had said. Who was Lord Peverell? Had Voldemort started approaching creatures already? No, it couldn't be Voldemort. For one, it was much too early in the game, plus Voldemort had never shown any interest in the elves. This Lord Peverell must be a new player, but who was he?

The elves seemed to know of this Lord Peverell, so Dumbledore began calling them, one at a time. Unfortunately, for Dumbledore, at least, it only led to more frustration.

Dumbledore started calling various elves. He only asked two questions with the same frustrating answers. Lord Peverell was Lord Peverell, and he was with family. Neither answer told him anything, even when asked in multiple ways who and where Lord Peverell was.

Dumbledore was neither an ancient nor a noble House. The first Dumbledore in the magical world was only four generations back. There was no Dumbledore House magic. Had either he or Aberforth had children, it most likely would have started to develop. House magic took generations to build. While it added power, it did not come from power. It came from Magic itself, and Magic took a very long view.

He thought maybe the Potter line was related to the Peverells, but that was unhelpful. The only Potter left was Harry, and he was safely ensconced in Little Whinging, a fact Dumbledore verified daily with several silver instruments about his office. Attuned to various charms placed on Harry and his possessions, the instruments identified the general area where they resided. Dumbledore always knew where Harry Potter was. The watchers Dumbledore sent to Surrey were an added layer of certainty. The boy barely left his room.

Dumbledore's frustration only increased. Not only had he lost his wand, but there appeared to be a new player in the game. For now, all he could do was search for more information.

Dumbledore was so focused on the missing wand that he overlooked other missing items. A variety of books and heirlooms from the Potter vault were no longer in the hidden cabinet where they had resided for over a decade. He also did not look up to see that the Sword of Gryffindor was no longer on the wall of his office.

While Albus Dumbledore's weekend was unusually frantic, Bill Weasley's was unusually quiet. Bill was both personable and popular, and his return to England had been greeted with numerous invitations to gatherings of all sizes. After the years in Egypt, where he was more often than not either consumed with his work or recovering from it, a full social calendar was a welcome change.

Bill had returned to England a month ago. Initially, it had just been to do some training after finishing the excavation of a particularly complex gravesite. After the third tournament task, he requested a full transfer. When prompted by his supervisor, Bill had candidly confessed that it was a hunch prompting him to request the transfer. The goblins respected hunches and intuition, believing magic often drove needed actions.

This past week had brought a change. Late Monday, Bill was called into his supervisor's office. Arriving promptly, Bill had discovered numerous additional goblins, including the chief curse breaker, Hardfinger, and the leader of the British goblin clans, Ragnok. Hardfinger stepped forward and motioned everyone to sit at the large oval table that dominated the room. Bill was in the middle of one side between two goblins he had seen before but didn't know.

While Ragnok sat at the head of the table, it was Hardfinger that began, "A short while ago, we received a section of flesh that had been removed from a young wizard. The flesh is a scar that contains a soul fragment. We know this as a horcrux."

The goblins erupted in furor while Bill sat in shocked silence. Hardfinger continued, "You have been chosen to deal with this problem. As you know, we can use the existing horcrux to construct a ritual to call other horcruxes to it. It is not easy. Each soul shard interacts with its container to create a unique magical signature. The calling ritual must call forth something close to that signature to find that particular horcrux. It will take all of you working together to craft each ritual."

It wasn't until the next day that Bill saw and recognized the scar that was attached to the horcrux, and he wasn't the only one.

"Harry Potter," Fastsnap said the obvious conclusion while the rest of the team just gaped. As the team leader, Fastsnap had the most liberty to speak freely. It would take a few days, but eventually, a hierarchy within the team would be established. Until then, most wouldn't risk much.

Bill was the only human on the team of four, and the goblins accepted that he was there. Each member of the group had an area of specialization. Bill was included for his curse-breaking skills. Bill had been surprised at the words of praise accompanying his introduction. The three goblins stood out to Bill. Fastsnap, the leader, was the oldest and had worked at sites all over the world. Grapplelock was also quite old and was said to be able to get into any vault or through any locked door without a key. Introduced as a specialist in soul magic and healing, Heartwise was noticeably young. Typically, younger goblins weren't seen in public spaces as they completed their education and apprenticeships. That Heartwise was on the team and respected told Bill that her skills were formidable. Bill soon noticed that Heartwise was sometimes absent with other commitments. That no one commented on this also told Bill of the esteem with which the young goblin was held.

Horcruxes were rare, so the first step was to review the historical records. The vile nature of a horcrux prompted an openness among the goblin nations that was rarely seen. Any horcrux found, researched and destroyed was rigorously documented and a copy was sent to every goblin leader. Learning everything possible about previous occurrences was crucial.

After spending several days reviewing records, the team began a detailed examination of the existing horcrux and the soul shard it contained. It was evident that the soul shard belonged to the creature known as Voldemort. However, that did not stop the team from seeking as much confirmation as possible. A second investigating team was promptly dispatched to learn as much about Voldemort as possible. This included both his life and reported demise.

Finding out that Harry Potter's famous lightning bolt scar was a horcrux stunned them. Bill had questions that he didn't dare voice. How did it happen? Did Harry know? How did he find out? Did Dumbledore know? Did the ministry know? How had Harry survived nearly thirteen years as a horcrux? How had it been removed, a feat Bill would have thought impossible.

It was Thursday morning when Heartwise brought up the subject of Harry Potter. "It is apparent that you all have questions about this horcrux," she began. "After much consideration, I have decided to tell you how it came into our possession, knowing that each of you is bound by your oaths of confidentiality.

"I was requested to be part of a healing team examining the wizard Harry Potter. The group consisted of a well-respected human healer, an elven healer renowned for working with various magical species and myself. After a thorough diagnostic done by each of us, it was apparent that young Mr. Potter had suffered grievous harm at the hands of both magical and muggle. We were so surprised by the results that we immediately repeated the diagnostics.

"The most shocking result was the presence of the soul shard we have been examining this week. As surprising as the presence of the soul shard was, it was even more shocking that the rather infamous scar completely encapsulated it. It was evident that the soul shard was impacting Mr. Potter's health; however, the extent of that impact was unknown.

"As the soul shard appeared to be completely encapsulated, we determined that the best solution was to remove both the soul shard and the surrounding scar tissue. Before attempting the removal of the flesh, we created a highly warded containment area. Mr. Potter was spelled asleep, and we cut the affecting tissue away. There were no complications, and I took possession of the horcrux for further examination."

Bill had so many questions that he had to set aside to concentrate on the issue of the horcrux. The one question that wouldn't go away was how this had happened. There were records of living creatures being used as a horcrux but never a sentient being. Had this been deliberate, or was it an accident? In either case, the issue of the soul shard surrounded by the scar tissue was the most significant part of the mystery.

"We need to talk to Harry," Bill said when he realized it.

Grapplelock snorted, "What can a juvenile wizard tell us?"

"We won't know until we talk to him," Bill answered, resisting the urge to roll his eyes, "but Harry was present at the ritual that brought You-Know-Who back. Plus...." Bill trailed off.

"What is it?" Heartwise asked with a quelling look at Grapplelock.

"Something happened to my sister in her first year that involved Harry and a diary," Bill answered. "There was also a mention of You-Know-Who. I'll talk to my family when I see them this weekend and see if I can get more information about it."

"Mr. Weasley is correct," Heartwise said. "I'll invite Mr. Potter to come talk to us next week,"

The rest of the day was mainly spent speculating about the origin of the horcrux in their possession. By evening, the group had compiled a list of possibilities to research.

Friday was more research. Despite the vile nature of horcruxes and the fact that there was no record of anyone extending their life through one, a surprising number of witches and wizards had attempted to create them. Only about a third of the attempts were successful. A combination of incredible power, a complex ritual and the will to commit cold-blooded murder was required to create a horcrux. Of the third that succeeded, only a few attempted it more than once. Most simply couldn't live with part of their soul torn away.

The relative few who could create more than one horcrux followed the same pattern. The first piece of the soul torn away was roughly half of the soul. Each subsequent piece was approximately half the remaining soul. This was a constant that soul specialists such as Heartwise had learned to measure. The piece of soul in Harry Potter's scar was aptly called a shard. For it to be that small meant the soul had already been split many times.

Bill and Grapplelock were learning the details of horcruxes for the first time. Fastsnap had previously worked on similar teams throughout Europe and Asia. Heartwise had never been fully part of a research team before, but her deep understanding of soul magics had her regularly consulting with other goblin nations. Despite the disparity of experience, they were stunned at the ramifications of the sliver of soul in Harry Potter's scar.

With so little soul left, was You-Know-Who even remotely sane? By lunch, the team had asked many questions but that one question terrified each of them. Could the magical world even survive?

When Bill was called to retrieve a dark object from an ancient vault, he wasn't sure what surprised him more: learning that Harry Potter was Lord Peverell or that the dark object felt very similar to the horcrux currently being studied.

Bill had only just turned over the horcrux to the team when he was called again. This time Harry was introduced as Lord Slytherin, and there was another horcrux. Bill was beginning to wonder why they had a team when Harry Potter delivered horcruxes to him.

Fastsnap was examining the strange Peverell ring when it disappeared. A moment later, Bill was again requested.

"Bloody Harry Potter," Grapplelock grouched. It seemed the most reasonable explanation.

This time Bill was introduced to Lord Gaunt as Harry invited him into the vault to retrieve the disappearing ring. If only that were the most shocking event that day. In the Gaunt vault, empty except for the House pedestal, Harry admitted he had claimed eight Houses. Eight! How was that even possible?

Bill was heir to House Weasley and knew his brothers, Fred and George, were heirs to House Prewitt. Bill felt the responsibility keenly, particularly in the face of the neglect both Houses had experienced in the last few decades. House Weasley was neglected by the inattention of Arthur Weasley. House Prewitt had been neglected since the deaths of Bill's uncles, Fabian and Gideon. To take on so many dormant Houses told Bill that Harry Potter was remarkable, although Bill honestly wasn't sure if it was in a positive or negative sense.

The entire team was exhausted by the intensity of the work. As the day ended, Bill was craving the comfort of his mother's cooking and his father's calm presence. He flooded to Sirius' London Manor as his mother set dinner on the table.

After hugs all around, Molly Weasley grabbed another plate setting. "This is a surprise," she said, sitting beside her husband.

Bill recognized the code. His mother wanted to know why he was there. "I had an exhausting week at work and suddenly having my mom's cooking seemed like the perfect remedy," he answered.

"What's going on?" his father asked.

"I've been assigned to a team tasked with finding some dark objects that went missing from an estate," Bill had quickly learned how to talk about his work without actually saying anything confidential.

"Does that happen often?" Percy asked with a frown. Like his brother, Percy showed up occasionally for the comfort of his mum's cooking.

"It isn't unusual for someone to try to hide assets," Bill answered. "Fortunately, most of the time, they aren't successful."

Everyone seemed satisfied with his answer, and the conversation moved on. As Molly was serving dessert, Bill asked, "Where's Sirius?"

Molly tsked, "That man. Pouting like a child because he can't leave."

"Now Molly, it can't be easy to be stuck in the childhood home you were miserable in," Arthur gently chided.

"Nobody minds that Harry is," one of the twins mumbled.

"Oh, not that again," Molly huffed. "Harry is perfectly fine."

"What's going on with Harry?" Bill asked innocently.

"As the twins started to speak, Molly interrupted, "No, whatever you think you know, Professor Dumbledore would not leave Harry with his family if he wasn't treated well."

Bill noticed Hermione whispering furiously at Ron. Finally, Ron pulled away and spoke up, "They're right, Mom. Harry's relatives aren't very good."

"What makes you say that?" Bill asked quickly before his mom could say anything.

"Little things, you know," answered Ron. "Like how he's so skinny at the start of every year. And his clothes are huge on him and raggedy. He wears his school robes over them even on weekends."

"Anything else?" Bill prompted.

"He never gets any letters from home or Christmas gifts," Ron added. "Plus, he never goes home for holidays. I think he'd stay at the school in the summer if he could."

Bill nodded in understanding, "If that's true, I'd think he'd want to spend his summer here with everyone."

Molly couldn't stay silent any longer, "That's enough. If the Headmaster thinks he needs to stay with his family, that's where he needs to be."

On cue, Arthur began sharing harmless ministry gossip while Bill let his mind wander. Apparently, Harry had taken matters into his own hands. Bill hadn't gotten a close view, but he would have sworn he saw Professor Flitwick waiting in a goblin cart with Ted Tonks. You didn't work long at Gringotts without knowing the few wizards and witches that the goblins genuinely respected. Ted Tonks was one and worked with many higher-level account managers. Whatever was going on, if Ted Tonks were involved, the plan would be solid.

Arthur noticed his oldest son's distraction and, after the table was clear, suggested in a gentle voice that Molly take everyone upstairs. "Is the work difficult, Son?"

It was easy to overlook Arthur Weasley as he stood in the shadow of the louder, more flamboyant Molly. Combined with his innocent enthusiasm for all things muggle, Arthur was frequently dismissed as irrelevant. It was a mistake only those who didn't know Arthur made. His children knew him. They may have grown up in the overwhelming shadow of their mother, but their father was the solid rock supporting and surrounding them. It was this rock that Bill turned to after all the revelations he had experienced.

"Not so much difficult as intense," Bill answered, "very intense but also fascinating. The team I'm on is amazing. I was very surprised I was chosen for it."

"Why's that?"

"I'm still the youngest curse breaker at Gringotts," Bill said. "At first I thought....."

"That maybe you were there because you know the right person?" Arthur was innocent, but he wasn't naive. He understood power dynamics. He simply refused to participate.

Bill nodded, "Yeah, but after this week, I know better. Dwarrow may play power games like every other species, but the team would never have accepted me so openly if that was the case."

"So, what's bothering you?"

Bill took a moment to find the right words, "You know me. I like to understand things. It's part of why I love curse-breaking. It's like a magic puzzle that needs to be taken apart and understood, and then you can solve it."

His father nodded. That was very much his oldest son's personality. Then he understood, "Something's not fitting together right."

"No," Bill responded, "and that happens sometimes but this, whatever it is, seems to be undermining bigger things that I thought I understood."

"I imagine that's pretty unsettling," his father said.

"Yeah," Bill sighed. "I don't even fully understand what it is that has me so unsettled. I'd say it's a gut feeling right now."

"Then that's okay," his father said, putting a hand on his son's shoulder. "I trust your instincts. Whatever this is, you'll figure it out, and you'll know what you need to do."

Bill hesitated a moment, "I wish I could talk about this in more detail. It feels enormous. In fact," and here Bill paused to consider what he could ethically say, "if what I suspect is true, you will know about it soon enough."

"Will it affect the Order?" Arthur asked, referring to the organization centered around Dumbledore to fight Voldemort.

"Dad, if I'm right, it will affect the entire wizarding world."

Back to Business

Chapter Notes

Monday, July 10

Breakfast Monday morning brought an unexpected conversation. As he finished his breakfast, Harry looked up to see Filius watching him, an intense expression on his face.

"Is something wrong?" Harry asked.

"Not at all," Filius answered. "In fact, I think things are incredibly right for both of us. I know there have been some unexpected difficulties, but how do you feel about everything that's happened since you left school?"

Harry took a moment to think about the question. "Good about a lot of things," Harry answered. "Sad and kind of weird about other things."

"Tell me about the good things," Filius said.

"You, Winky and Dobby, Sirius," Harry answered immediately, "Mr. Tonks, Sharpnail and all the others helping me. I mean, I know I'm paying them but these are people I'm going to work with for a really long time and it all feels positive."

Harry thought a bit more, then he grinned, "I'm rich. I didn't expect that. I just wanted enough to last until I figured out what sort of work I could do. Then I find out that I don't ever have to worry about money, and it looks like work will be taking care of all of that, and, strangely, I seem to like it."

Harry paused again, a bit surprised by everything that had tumbled out of his mouth. He thought about Fred and George. They had been a source of solid support ever since the wild rescue following his first year at Hogwarts. That support had not wavered, either during the whole Heir of Slytherin debacle in second year or throughout the Triwizard tournament. Still, it felt like something was changing with the letters this summer, but it wasn't something he was ready to talk about.

"And the sad?" Filius prompted.

"Ron and Hermione," Harry answered without hesitation. "Not just what I've told you about but realizing that most of my life I have had to take care of myself. Add in everything with Voldemort and it just seems like I can't go back to what I had with them before last year. Now I head all my Houses and I'm moving in a totally different direction."

Filius nodded, "Each unique experience has taken you another step away. As much as you are starting to thrive with the most recent changes, there is a loss. What's the weird?"

"Dumbledore," Harry said. "It was one thing to realize I wasn't safe at Hogwarts, but then there were all the tracking charms, everything he hid from me, my physical issues and binding my magic. Is there more? And why?"

"I wish I could answer that, Harry," Filius answered with some sadness, "beyond the obvious that Dumbledore has some agenda where you are concerned."

Harry had noticed that since the first day with the healers, Filius no longer referred to the headmaster by his given name. It wasn't quite as apparent as the elves referring to Dumbledore as 'the bad headmaster,' but it was equally appreciated.

"Now that we've taken care of the most urgent business, it's time to start preparing for your OWL," Filius stated. "You still will have to meet regularly with your various advisers but I feel certain that one day a week will give you time for those meetings, at least at present."

Harry nodded as Filius continued, "As you have shown an aptitude for your House business, these are meetings you can do on your own." At Harry's surprise, he added, "If there is a particular meeting you would like me to attend in an advisory capacity, just let me know."

Harry beamed, "Thank you." Both understood that the appreciation was both for the confidence Filius was showing in Harry and the offer of support.

"The charms work will be intense, but the tutoring sessions with Sirius, the interviews I expect you will have every week, plus your own personal study will give you enough breaks. We'll continue our after-dinner drills, and we will definitely take flying breaks."

Harry grinned, "Can we learn to do the drills while flying?"

"I think that is an excellent suggestion," Filius agreed. "We can use the quidditch pitch here."

"How cool is it to have a pitch," Harry said. "We need to make sure the equipment is in good shape."

"Good plan," Filius said. "I'm sure once everything sorts out you'll have people you will want to invite here to play."

"Definitely," Harry smiled, looking forward to a future that was still forming in his imagination.

"I would like to continue to attend your medical appointments if you are agreeable," Filius said.

"It helps," Harry said quietly. As if summoned, Winky popped in and climbed into Harry's lap for a cuddle. That, as much as anything, told Filius how bothered Harry still was by the medical issues that had been discovered.

"Does Monday work as your day to take care of your regular House business meetings and personal matters?" Filius asked.

Harry shrugged, "I think so."

Filius held out a hand and two small volumes appeared, "These are linked appointment journals. The next month or so will be intense, getting you ready to take an OWL and get it scored by start of term. Even so, I don't want you overloaded. This will help me schedule your studies and will make sure you know where I am if you need me."

Harry took the journal and looked slyly at Filius, "This won't possess me, will it?"

Filius barked out a laugh, "No, and we won't keep any basilisks."

Harry laughed and then looked at Filius, "I don't have an appointment until 10:00. Can I talk to you about something?"

"Of course, Harry," Filius answered.

"What I did with trying to feel my magic, is that something I should practice?"

Filius had been rapt as Harry had described his perception of his core and House magics with his senses. Thinking about it more, Filius said, "Despite the evidence around them, most wizards and witches think of magic as a singular thing. Already you have learned that there is nothing simple about magic. Most never experience House magic, and even those that do rarely distinguish it from their innate core. To be able to sort through the various magics that reside in you is rare and I encourage you to continue to learn the feeling of your magics."

"So this is a good thing?" Harry asked with some nervousness.

"I think it is a very good thing," Filius answered. "I also think that Healer Gorin would be helpful in this matter. If you send him an owl now, he may be able to talk with you about this after your healers appointment this afternoon."

"I'll head to the office now," Harry said. "Thank you for everything, Filius. I couldn't do this without you."

"You are most welcome, Harry. This is a grand adventure for all of us."

Like with the master suite, it had taken Filius and the elves to convince Harry to use the Potter Manor office as his private work area, once again helped by a change in decor. When Harry first saw the office, he was intimidated, which was exactly what had been intended by Dorea Black when she had designed the space for her brother-in-law, Fleamont Potter. Black with gold accents and a large, blackwood desk, the room was grandiose and, to Harry's eyes, excessively adult.

To Harry's delight, the elves and Filius had struck a balance between youthfulness and maturity. Leaving Hogwarts behind, Harry had found unexpected responsibilities and he had answered magic's call. At the same time, he was still in mid-adolescence and shouldn't be battling dark lords or deadly creatures. The redecorated office reflected that dichotomy. Soft

grey walls with a slightly darker grey carpet created a soothing background. The large blackwood desk had been replaced with a smaller cherry writing desk. The heavy visitor chairs had been removed and a comfortable sofa and a pair of armchairs created a cozy sitting area. It was simple and uncluttered and provided a quiet place for Harry to write letters and study.

When Harry sat down at his desk, he found several letters. The first was from Sharpnail recommending that he acquire stationary for his various Houses and including the names of several suppliers. He also provided advice for getting the best price. Harry responded with thanks and a request for a meeting the following Monday concerning Peverell House.

The next letter was from Sirius, addressed to him as Lord Black. It concerned the use of the London Manor by Albus Dumbledore and the Weasley family. He included his recommendations and reasons for and against allowing the arrangements to continue. Harry set that one aside to discuss with his solicitor.

The final letter was from the twins:

Dearest Harrikins,

Here in the super secret house is a super secret mystery: Sirius Black is gone. It goes like this - Friday, Sirius didn't come down to dinner. No one worried because Sirius tends to skip a lot of meals and comes down later to get food.

Saturday, still no Sirius. Sunday morning, Mum finally gets worried. Bangs on Sirius' door but no answer. Calls Kreacher but no answer which was not surprising.

Harrikins, you would not believe how hard it was not to laugh at the show that followed. Mum fretted. Mum paced. Mum ranted. Dad was calm and tried to soothe Mum but she was having none of that. Of course, it was entirely the fault of Sirius Black. That was the one thing Mum was absolutely sure of. Finally after lunch, she floo called Dumbledore.

Dumbledore came and took charge. We were all assigned rooms to search. Still no Sirius. Finally, Dumbledore waves his wand in a complicated pattern that we're not actually sure did anything and then announces that, yes, Sirius Black is not in the house.

Side note and probably unrelated, Dumbledore has a different wand.

Dumbledore has called a super secret meeting tonight and seems sure that Sirius will show up for the meeting. Now we are all waiting.

That's really all the interesting news here. Ron and Hermione are still fighting about whether or not to write you. Hermione is upset but won't go against Dumbledore. Ron thinks they should write but is too lazy to actually do it, or maybe he's just too lazy to go against Hermione.

Bill has permanently transferred back to England. He's been assigned to a special project at Gringotts but all he will say is that it is really interesting. Mum is unhappy that he has his

own place but Bill just kisses her on the cheek and tells her he's too old to live with his parents.

We are trusting that if you need anything you will find a way to let us know. We miss our Harrikins and just want him safe and happy.

Your favorite Weasleys,

Gred & Forge

Harry laughed as he read the letter and pictured Molly Weasley pacing around the kitchen and ranting about Sirius. Harry took out parchment to reply.

Dear Fred and George,

I can promise you that Sirius Black is alive and very well. I'm sure he will show up at the super secret meeting.

Yes, I am both safe and happy. It is a very good feeling.

I've been very unsure what to do about Ron and Hermione. Part of me, a big part, wants to just leave it be. After everything with the tournament, I'm not as willing to fight for friends who won't stand up for me. I know Hermione felt torn when Ron was being a prat but Ron was wrong and it hurt that Hermione was unwilling to stand up to him for my sake. As for Ron, I can understand his jealousy, but it doesn't excuse his actions. When you're best friends with someone, shouldn't you believe them?

However, I'm trying to do more than react to my feelings. I doubt I will ever consider either of them as best friends again but there is a lot of history between us. I will be writing to both of them. I'm not sure what I'm going to say but what they choose to do shouldn't determine what I choose to do.

I hope you are both creating lots of new and exciting products. I can't wait to see them. You are both so talented and one day I'll be able to tell people that I knew you back when it started.

Have fun watching the show,

Your favorite Harrikins

PS - Who is Kreacher?

After some debate, Harry decided to write Ron and Hermione together.

Dear Ron and Hermione,

I heard from the twins that you were both staying in the same place this summer so I thought I would save the parchment and just write both of you together.

I know that Dumbledore told you not to write, both for my safety and to let me grieve in peace. Here's the truth that Dumbledore has either ignored or chosen not to believe - the Dursleys have caused me more harm and pain than Voldemort and all his death eaters. As to my grief, that's trickier. I liked Cedric and watching him so casually murdered while standing beside me was horrifying. It was so casually done and life should never be treated with so little regard.

If I had gone from that graveyard to being locked alone in my horrible room with my relatives sliding me food through a cat flap or, alternatively, being worked from sunrise to sunset without food or rest, I would not be grieving. I would be enraged at the complete lack of regard for what I endured. Fortunately, there was a week at Hogwarts where I was allowed my shock and grief and given help to deal with things. It's painful that the help didn't come from any of the adults that profess to care so much for me but still, I had help even if it came from an unexpected source.

So, summer at the Dursleys will always suck, but I'm doing okay. I'm actually studying and learning some very interesting things.

Hopefully, I will get to spend some time with you this summer. At the very least, I will meet you in Diagon Alley before school starts back.

Your friend,
Harry

Harry carefully rolled the parchments and tied them shut. He had done his best not to lie to his friends while still keeping his secrets. Calling for Dobby, he handed the elf the parchments. "Please take this to the twins," he said, handing the first letter to Dobby. "This goes to Ron and Hermione."

After the elf had popped away, Harry pulled out his notebook and pen and wrote down some notes for his morning appointments. While using a fountain pen was a definite improvement over a quill, it was always a relief to use a normal pen with paper for his personal notes. Most of today's business concerned House Black but Harry had an idea that was better suited to House Peverell. He reminded himself that with the exception of exonerating Sirius, there was very little urgency to most of the House business he wanted to do. Most of the Houses had been dormant for a very long time and would wait as long as necessary.

Harry had another hour before he needed to get ready for his morning appointments. He opened the grimoire for House Black and started reading. The first page was the oath that he had taken for House Black. It had not been what he had expected. He read it out loud, "I, Harry James Potter, accept responsibility for House Black and do swear, by blood, by magic and by spirit, to honor the purity of magic. I promise to protect the pursuit and practice of magical knowledge. I will hold all members of House Black to be magically faithful to these principles."

Harry read it several times, committing it to memory. Being the Head of a House was a big responsibility. He knew many people would only see the benefits. They would see the money, the possessions and the power without ever recognizing that those things only existed to help fulfill the necessary duties.

Harry continued reading. Each head of House had added to the grimoire. Some had added very little while others had written many pages. It was the history of House Black, but it was so much more. This was a House dedicated to magic. As he read, he realized that the founders of House Black had what could almost be described as a love affair with magic. It was passionate, but it was also reasoned. House Black was an ancient house and it was a very thick grimoire. Harry set it aside thinking that it would be fascinating to see when House Black had embraced both the dark arts and the ideal of blood purity.

Dobby popped in with the tray and set it on the desk in front of Harry. "Yous eat this and go get clothes from Winky," the elf told him.

Harry sighed and picked up the fork, stabbing it into a small chunk of melon. Harry knew that with the increase in his magic he needed to eat both more food and more often but some days it felt like he was constantly eating. On the plus side, he never really had to think about it. Dobby had taken it as his personal task to keep Harry well-fed.

After he finished his snack, Harry went upstairs to find clothes for his morning appointments laid out for him. Like he had accepted Dobby's need to feed him, Harry had accepted Winky's insistence on taking care of his wardrobe. After a lifetime of wearing oversized hand-me-downs, Harry had learned to ignore what he was wearing. The shapeless, black robes of the Hogwarts uniform had only reinforced that mindset. The earlier shopping trip for wizard and muggle clothing had been overwhelming so Harry was more than happy to accept Winky's recommendations. He appreciated the care she took to help him once again find a balance between his actual age and the maturity that his new responsibilities demanded.

Dressed in gray slacks and a pale blue shirt with a darker blue open-front robe, Harry went down to the floo in what he privately thought of as the to-and-from room. Dobby was waiting with his messenger bag packed and ready to go. Grabbing a handful of floo powder, Harry made his way to Greengrass & Associates. He was led directly to Tonk's office where he accepted a cup of tea prepared exactly as he liked it.

"Good morning, Mr. Potter," Tonks greeted him. "I hope you had a relaxing weekend."

Harry grinned, "I did. I hope you and Healer Tonks had an enjoyable time as well."

"We certainly did," answered Tonks, "but now it's back to work."

Harry reached into his bag for his notebook, opening it to the list of items for today. When Tonks nodded at him to begin, Harry asked, "Who would handle business contracts? Would that be you or Sharpnail?"

"It is generally a collaborative effort," Tonks answered. "Sharpnail, of course, would take care of the financial details while our firm would handle the non-financial contractual issues. Do you have something specific in mind?"

"I would like House Peverell to offer funding and assistance to people that want to start new businesses in the wizarding world," Harry said. "I know a couple of seventh years already in business but could use the help."

"What sort of timing are you looking at?" Tonks asked.

"They are already doing business at Hogwarts. I think with some assistance they could open a shop in Hogsmeade specifically for the student weekends," Harry answered. "I know their longer-term goal is to have a shop in Diagon Alley."

"Did you have any specifics in mind?" Tonks inquired further.

"They would need funding for supplies and a place to set up shop," Harry answered. "With a couple of elves to help with production while in class, they could have plenty of product ready to sell on the Hogsmeade weekends."

"The only problem," Tonks responded, "is that elves are expensive. That would significantly increase the amount of funding needed."

Harry looked down, feeling a little embarrassed, "I have over a hundred elves. I think it wouldn't be hard to find a couple of younger ones that would like to do something different."

As a solicitor, Tonks rarely found himself without a word except, apparently, where Harry Potter was concerned. Finally, he asked, "How is that possible?"

"Dobby says it's because I have a lot of magic and I do a two-way bond like they used to do hundreds of years ago," Harry answered.

"What's a two-way bond?" Tonks asked.

"After you accept an elf, you ask them to accept you," Harry explained. "Now the bond forms both ways, and the magic goes back and forth, so it takes less from the wizard."

Tonks had never heard of that. Once again, Harry Potter had surprised him. He shook his head and continued the previous conversation, "I'll put something together and send it to Sharpnail."

"Thank you," Harry responded. "I have some other ideas, but I need some information. I need to know any buildings for sale in Hogsmeade, any land available and who owns the Shrieking Shack."

Tonks was taking notes as Harry spoke. When he was done, he tapped the paper with his wand and it folded into an airplane and flew out of the room. "I'll have our real estate division look into these issues for you. While we're discussing Hogsmeade, is there anything in particular you want to do with your property there?"

"I'd like to keep it. Once I've passed my OWL, I can stay there on school weekends to visit with my friends," Harry answered. "Does the Head of House Gryffindor and House Slytherin have any special privileges or responsibilities when it comes to Hogwarts?"

Tonks shuffled the file folders on his desk and opened one of them to read. Then he opened another one and read that one. "I'll find a copy of the Hogwarts Charter for you. Both Houses have seats on the Board of Governors. You can assign a proxy to sit those seats for you."

"Good," Harry said with a particularly predatory smile. "I'd like to assign Remus Lupin as my proxy for Gryffindor and Severus Snape as my proxy for Slytherin." Harry still didn't particularly like Snape but he had a gut feeling about this and it wouldn't hurt to follow it.

"I'll have the paperwork drawn up for the proxies. You will also need proxies for your Wizengamot seats. Think about who you would like for that. Currently, Albus Dumbledore is holding a proxy for the Potter seats and Lucius Malfoy votes the Black seat. The rest remain empty. You can have one person holding a proxy for all of the seats or assign them individually or in groups as you prefer," Tonks explained. "When would you like to enact your proxies for the board of governors?"

"After the article comes out for each House in the Daily Prophet, please send the notification of proxy to the appropriate person," instructed Harry.

"You are assuming Mr. Borner will be able to arrange the separate interviews as you requested," Tonks stated.

Harry smirked, "I have a feeling Mr. Borner can do anything he sets his mind to do for a client."

Tonks chuckled, "I wouldn't bet against him." Tonks pulled out a folder and handed it to Harry, "These are the various options you have regarding the Daily Prophet. Let me know if you want to proceed with any of them."

Harry nodded and took the folder, slipping it into his messenger bag.

While he was doing that, Tonks had refilled and prepared tea. Handing Harry the cup, he said, "You did a tremendous thing on Friday by claiming so many dormant Houses. You will need to consider staff."

"Staff?" Harry asked, puzzled.

"Yes, employees who will assist you in your various duties," Tonks answered. "For example, with as many Wizengamot seats as you will have, you will probably want a dedicated researcher to look into the various issues you will be voting on."

"Why can't I look into them myself?" Harry asked.

"You could," Tonks responded, "but your time would be better spent using your considerable influence to convince other people to vote with you. The first person you will probably want to hire will be somebody to take care of your correspondence," Tonks said. "As your interviews are published, a lot of people are going to want the attention of the various Lords."

Tonks then explained the various tasks that a good correspondence secretary would do. Already Harry had almost daily letters from Sharpnail and Tonks. Part of that was for Harry's

benefit as he learned everything involved in managing an active House. The other part was both Sharpnail and Tonks learning about Harry and his developing sense of how he wanted to shape his financial empire. Harry's real estate holdings were a considerable fortune, with only passive growth for over a decade. Stinchcombe Herbs, while of a much smaller magnitude, was rock steady but capable of more. Add in Harry's growing ideas for House Peverell and Harry saw himself soon drowning in parchment. That was before he thought about how Gryffindor and Slytherin would get involved.

Harry considered all this and asked, "How soon should I get someone?"

"Sooner rather than later. Definitely within a few weeks," Tonks answered. "We always have more applicants than we can hire. We also sometimes hire people who realize this isn't the right fit. I'll review the files and give you some recommendations."

"Thank you," Harry responded with relief. Agreeing to hire someone was one thing. Finding that person felt like a mountain too high to climb. "There are some letters I need to send today and need advice on."

Tonks picked up his pen, "We can take care of that."

"Sirius agreed to allow the Black Manor in London to be used by," Harry hesitated for a moment, "friends. I suspect he was bullied into it, knowing the personalities involved."

"You would like to alter those arrangements?" Tonks inquired.

"Yes. I think it's important to establish Lord Black's authority, both regarding Sirius and concerning that specific property," Harry answered.

"Tell me what you want, and I'll have it ready for you this afternoon," Tonks responded.

Harry told Tonks what he wanted and incorporated some of Tonks' suggestions. Writing it all down, Tonks told Harry, "I should have a rough draft of both letters by the time your meeting with Mr. Borner is finished."

Next, he opened another folder and quickly reviewed his notes, "As per our discussion last week, we have opened an investigation into the Dursleys. We have enough evidence to go to the muggle authorities on fraud charges. Doing so may tip your hand that you are no longer living there. Do you want to proceed or wait?"

"Do it," Harry responded harshly. A week ago, Harry would have been afraid of being found. While he still preferred to keep his independence a private matter, he was no longer afraid. Although he still had trouble comprehending the power he could bring to bear as the Head of eight Houses, the magical power flowing through him gave its own form of confidence. He knew he still had a lot to learn but what he did know could be executed with more than enough power to protect himself.

"There is one other matter concerning the Dursleys that has turned up," Tonks said after giving Harry a few moments to compose himself. "The house on Privet Drive does not belong to the Dursleys. It belongs to you."

"What?"

"Your mother owned the house and let her sister live there," Tonks explained. "Your mother's will clearly states that it was temporary to allow Petunia and Vernon Dursleys the opportunity to save a down payment for their own house. At the end of five years, possession would revert to Lily Potter. After your mother's death, the house was part of what she left to you."

"Did my aunt know it was temporary?" Harry asked.

"There was a copy of the agreement between the sisters with your mother's financial documents," Tonks replied. "I received it from Sharpnail this morning."

"What are my options?"

"You can do nothing," Tonks said. "In that event, Petunia would eventually become the owner of the house by common law since you had knowledge of the claim and allowed her to remain."

"Not happening," Harry said.

"You can offer the Dursleys the option of either purchasing the property or paying rent," Tonks continued.

"I don't think so," replied Harry. "They have lived on my property long enough."

"You can take them to court for illegal possession," Tonk said. "Combined with the fraud charges, it should be a relatively quick legal proceeding."

"Sounds like a good plan," Harry replied with a smile.

Additionally," Tonks added, "with any of these options, you can sue for payment of back rent based on illegal possession."

"We definitely want to do that," Harry said.

"I'll inform the litigation department to move forward with this," Tonks said as he gathered up the folder and stood. "I've reserved a small conference room for your meeting with Mr. Borner."

"Thank you, Mr. Tonks," Harry said.

"Lord Potter," Borner greeted Harry in the conference room, "the Daily Prophet is very interested in interviewing the new Heads of the claimed Houses with one condition. They are willing to take a confidentiality oath but want an in-person interview."

"I can do that," Harry replied, "but only if the interviewer is not Rita Skeeter."

"That is not a problem," answered Borner. "Do you still want to start with House Slytherin?"

"No, I need to start with House Black," Harry said firmly.

"Very well," Borner replied. "The Prophet would like to do the interviews on consecutive Thursday afternoons so they can print it in the Sunday edition. Will this week be too soon?"

Harry thought about the schedule Filius had planned for OWL prep and other activities. He'd have to adjust a few things this week to finish reading the Black Grimoire, but he'd prefer to do it sooner rather than later. He indicated his consent for the interview this week and took out the shared journal. He wrote down the interview time Borner suggested and blocked out some office time to prepare. He noted that Filius had already blocked out some time with Sirius. It was a full schedule but it would ease up after the first OWL.

After Harry closed his journal, Borner continued, "I have started seeding the ministry with support for you. Giving people who know you a chance to say positive things when reporters happen to be near."

"Does that work?" Harry wanted to know.

"Remarkably well," Borner answered. "It takes time, but that makes it even more authentic. If you can support a more positive view of yourself in the interviews, it will shift the reporters' blind acceptance of ministry propaganda."

Harry nodded, a little overwhelmed at how easily Borner talked of manipulating the press.

"I know you have had bad experiences with the press," Borner continued, "but you are going to change that."

"I am?" Harry's doubt was palpable.

"You have resources you didn't have before," Borner tells Harry. "You don't just head a House. You are the House. That is both power and resources that anybody would think twice before crossing."

"Plus, I have you," Harry says with a bit of cheek.

"Indeed you do," Borner replied, "and I shall correspond regularly to help you find how you present yourself to the public."

Lunch with Filius and the elves was a welcome respite. Harry showed the letter that Tonks had crafted for Dumbledore to Filius and his laughter filled the small dining room. Harry approved the letters and sent them back to Tonks to be formally written then took some time to breathe into his magic. It had been a good morning.

Getting Better Every Day

Chapter Notes

Monday, July 10

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Despite the newness of Harry's participation in the adult wizarding world, he felt comfortable discussing business with Sharpnail and Tonks. The information was new but he absorbed it like a sponge. It wasn't quite as natural as flying, but it was as close as any non-physical activity came. However, he was not so sanguine about his upcoming medical appointment. Harry liked his healers, and he felt better physically than he could ever remember feeling. He knew part was his magic bursting out of its bindings, but an even more significant part was the absence of Voldemort's soul shard. His eyesight was now normal. He had more energy. Most of his nightmares had disappeared and the throbbing, painful headaches were gone. That was better than good, but Harry dreaded what else he would learn. He was sure the healers found the many injuries he had suffered as a child. Would they find injuries Harry hadn't been aware of? Had Dumbledore done more that affected him?

Feeling himself getting upset, Harry closed his eyes and breathed. He felt for his magic and just let himself feel the swirling whole of it. The swirling colors were mesmerizing, and while they mingled, they never entirely merged. He felt a light touch and opened his eyes to Winky.

"Time to go with Fili," she told him. "You call Winky if too much."

Harry hugged the small elf, "Thank you, Winky. I will."

Arriving at Healer Tonks' office, Harry felt a stirring in the Black family magic. His steps faltered as he entered the meeting room and he looked up to see that Tonks was standing and staring at him.

"Lord Black?" she stammered, looking confused.

Unconsciously, Harry straightened, letting the flow of magic guide him. "Well met," he said, the ritual words coming naturally. "The blood of House Black flows in you, but I cannot feel the relationship."

If Andromeda Tonks had any doubts that Harry Potter was Head of House Black, his question dispelled them. "I am daughter to Cygnus and cousin to Sirius," she answered. "I was disowned for refusing the marriage arranged for me."

Harry grinned, "Good for you. We'll have to fix that."

Andromeda blinked and in that moment her professionalism asserted itself, "I look forward to it. Have a seat and let's concentrate on you for a bit."

Just like that, Harry was back to being her fourteen-year-old patient. The healers asked a variety of questions about both his weekend and the feeling of his magic, then had him stand for a diagnostic.

"With all that has happened with your magic and the family magics, we need to reassess," Gorin explained.

After what felt like forever but was less than a few minutes, the scans were complete. Sitting back down, Harry fidgeted while the healers conferred with one another.

When they returned to the table, Heartwise began, "In our first examination, you were suffering the effects of long-term malnutrition. This showed in your smaller than normal size and lower bone density and damage to your internal organs."

"The good news is that access to your full magical core seems to be healing much of the internal damage," Gorin continued. "Keep taking the nutrient potions and we will check you each week. There is also a good chance that a growth spurt will restore you to a more normal height and weight."

"Unfortunately, some damage still has to be corrected," Tonks added. "You have a number of bones that did not heal correctly. This could cause you future problems. All of these bones can be vanished and regrown with Skele Gro."

"Our recommendation is to do this in three stages, every other night, starting tonight," explained Heartwise. "Tonks will come over about 10 pm on those nights, vanish the bones and give you both Skelegro and Dreamless Sleep. I'll come over the next morning to ensure everything has grown back correctly."

"How often does something grow back wrong?" Harry asked nervously.

The healers chuckled. "Never, as far as we know," Tonks answered, "but it is theoretically possible."

Filius reached over and laid a comforting hand on Harry's arm, "It will be fine. Healer Tonks is being cautious."

"That seems reasonable," Harry responded.

"So I want to see you back here at the same time next week for a general check-up to make sure that things are still healing as they are now," Tonks reiterated.

"After that," said Heartwise, "you and I will spend some time together. You have been through a tremendous amount of distress in your life. It's highly commendable that after everything you've gone through, you have still chosen to take on tremendous responsibility for magic's sake. I want to help you adjust to everything, so you feel better as you grow into the roles that you've chosen for yourself."

Harry thought for a moment, "Filius talked to me about a mind healer. Is that what this is?"

"It's very similar," answered Heartwise. "You may decide at some point that you want to see a wizarding mind healer, but I think that right now, you'll be more comfortable with people you are already familiar with."

"Okay," Harry said, nodding, "that makes sense, and you're right; a lot has happened. I think I probably do need some help figuring it all out."

"Good," said Gorin, more brusquely. "Now that's settled, let's talk about your magic."

Harry nodded in agreement.

"You've just experienced a huge influx of magic," Gorin continued. "Not only has your core significantly expanded with the absence of any bindings, but you've added a lot of different magics from the Houses you've taken on. Understanding and separating the different sources of your magic will not only give you more control over it, but it will also make your use of it more powerful."

Harry listened attentively. He was so aware of all the magic that flowed through him and it was both exhilarating and terrifying.

"Every night, before you go to bed, I want you to let yourself sink into your magic and feel it. Don't try to do anything with it. Don't try to manipulate it. You don't even need to understand it right now. You just need to know it. Does this make sense?" Gorin continued.

"Yes, it does," answered Harry. "How long should I do this? When I did it the other day, two hours passed, and I didn't even realize it."

"Have one of your elves alert you when an hour has passed. That's enough time," answered Gorin. "As you do this, it will gradually take you less and less time to reach in and feel the various magics within you until, eventually, it will be as easy as that," she said as she snapped her fingers.

"I'll pop in next week and check in with you and we'll figure out the next step together," Gorin continued. "Now, let's talk about a wand. It's difficult to know whether you burnt out your wand because the unbound magic was uncontrolled or if you are genuinely too powerful for a typical wand. Either is possible."

Harry hadn't thought about what had happened to his wand. When it happened, there had been too much pain from both his magic unleashing and the burn in his hand. He had kept himself busy all weekend and avoided thinking that he would never be able to use his beloved wand again. Now he felt overwhelmed with a feeling of sadness. Seeing this, Filius came over and placed a gentle arm around Harry's shoulders.

Harry took a deep breath and let himself lean into the comfort that was being offered. Finally, he looked at Gorin and said, "I think I have a wand that will work." Remembering the words in the Peverell grimoire, Harry called for the wand and it appeared in his hand.

Filius gasped as he recognized the wand that had been used by Albus Dumbledore, "How did you get that?"

"It is one of three artifacts that came when I became Head of House Peverell," Harry answered. "It's a little more complicated than that, but the wand has never truly belonged to anyone that isn't a Peverell."

Filius nodded, knowing that Harry could not have acquired the wand by any means other than Magic's hand.

Harry was nervous. The wand was warm in his hand and felt like it belonged there. He cleared his throat and looked first at Gorin and then at Filius, "What should I do?"

"I don't want you to cast a spell. Rather I want you to think about what you want," Gorin advised. "Think about creating a mild white light at the end of your wand."

Harry thought about the indirect sunlight that lit his room that morning at Potter Manor. Holding that idea firmly in his mind, he thought about that same light appearing at the end of his wand.

"Hold it," Gorin said, "now make it a very dim light."

Harry thought about the light that Winky conjured when he had a bad dream appearing at the end of his wand. He imagined that light at the end of his wand and it appeared, replacing the brighter light.

"Good, now tell me what you were thinking," Gorin demanded.

Harry explained his thoughts, keeping the light at the end of his wand.

"Now I want you to start changing the light into whatever color I say," Gorin instructed. "Don't think about it. I want you to react as quickly as you can."

Harry nodded and waited for the next instruction.

Gorin started naming colors, starting slowly and gradually getting faster, "Pink, blue, red, yellow, purple, green, orange, white, pink, yellow, blue, pink, green, yellow, orange, stop."

At the final word, Harry let the magic flowing into the wand stop, extinguishing the light.

"Very good, Harry," Gorin said. "Now, I understand from your school files that many of your injuries came from playing quidditch. What position did you play?"

Harry's face lit up with remembered pleasure, "Seeker."

"Were you any good?"

"The best," answered Harry with confidence.

The healer thought for a moment, "What was the best part of being a seeker?"

"The flying," Harry answered immediately. "I mean, quidditch is fun and all that, but for me, it's all about the flying. Flying is everything."

Flitwick nodded in affirmation, "He is quite an amazing flier."

Gorin thought for a moment. She had a hunch, but she knew she had to approach it the right way. Finally, she asked, "If you could fly without a broom would you do it?"

"Absolutely," Harry answered. "Is that possible?"

"There are spells that simulate flying," answered Flitwick, "but true flight has not been done outside of an animagus form."

Harry added that to his long-term personal to-do list: getting a NEWT in potions to spite Snape and learning to fly without a broom.

"Put your wand away, Harry," Gorin instructed and watched as the wand vanished to wherever it had come from. "Now, tell me how it feels when you fly. What are you thinking as you zoom through the air?"

"I'm not sure I can describe it. I mean, I can tell you how it feels, but I'm not thinking when I get on the broom. I start flying, and it's like instinct takes over." Harry did not have words for what it was like when he was in the air. It was so incredibly natural.

Gorin nodded, "That's exactly how you, Harry Potter, should do magic. Being an excellent seeker tells me that you have the required focus. You certainly have the power, and your actions, not only in the last few weeks but over your entire life, tell me that you have the determination. You have everything you need to do magic as easily and as instinctually as you fly."

Was magic really that easy, wondered Harry. He tried to sort it in his mind, but it didn't quite add up. If it was really like that, then why all the theory and the spells and the precise wand movements?

In unguarded moments like this, Harry's thoughts were written all over his face. Flitwick and Gorin exchanged a look, but it was Tonks that knew how to explain it to an extraordinary young man who still saw himself as ordinary and just doing what needed to be done.

"Let's all sit down," said Tonks. As they moved to the table, Tonks positioned herself beside Harry, summoning parchment and a fountain pen.

"Have you ever heard of a bell curve?" Tonks asked as she drew one on the parchment.

Harry shook his head and watched as she drew vertical lines at parallel intervals from the center of the curve.

"Let's talk quidditch," Tonks said, drawing a picture of a snitch. "People in the center might catch the snitch," she said as she shaded in the first space on either side of the middle, "or they might not. It could go either way." Then she started making little dots in the next section to the right which was smaller than the center sections.

"These people will probably catch the snitch." She moved to the next section on the left and started filling it with dots, "These people probably won't." Moving to the next smaller sections on either side of the dots, Tonks indicated first the right and then the left. "These people will catch the snitch most of the time and these will miss most of the time."

Finally," and this time, she colored a dark dot at each end, "these people will either always catch the snitch or always miss."

Harry understood this. It was very similar to some of the financial stuff he was learning. He had no idea what this had to do with magic.

Filius stood and put his arm around Harry's shoulders, "Now imagine that this bell curve represents magical power. People in the middle have an average or medium amount of power."

"Harry," Tonks asked gently, "where do you think you would be on the curve if people on the right side have more power and people on the left side have less power?"

Harry thought about it, "I know I'm more powerful than my classmates, but we're all students. I mean, when compared to people like Dumbledore or most of my professors, I don't know how to compare, but if I had to guess, I would say probably in this section that's a bit more powerful than average."

Harry saw the reaction of the adults to what he had said and immediately began to backpedal, "I could be wrong. I mean, I really don't know how to judge these things. Maybe I'm just average."

Tonks put the nib of her fountain pen at the right outermost edge of the bell curve, "There's no 100% accurate way to measure these things, but if there were, I would be willing to bet everything I own that you sit out here at the edge."

Harry looked around and the others were nodding in agreement. "I don't understand," he said. "I'm just, I mean, a teenager. I can't be that powerful."

"When you said that you were more powerful than your classmates, that was with your magic bound. You only had a fraction of your power. Unbinding your magic made you extremely powerful. That doesn't even include the eight Houses that accepted you as head and gave you their House magic," Filius explained.

Harry understood the words but still didn't quite understand. This felt like so much more than vaults full of gold and artifacts. He didn't even realize that he was on the verge of panic until Winky popped in and, with a scowl at everyone else, hopped onto Harry's lap and hugged him tightly.

When Harry was calm and Winky had popped away, Heartwise spoke, "Harry Potter, the magic you bear, that you carry through our world, is a gift from Lady Magic herself. She has chosen you. Would you deny that choice?"

Harry could only shake his head mutely.

"Then you must not doubt. You don't have to understand the depth and breadth of the power you bear but you must accept it. Until you do, you will be unable to truly wield it. That is the reason you have been given such a great gift. You have that power so that you can wield that power in our world." Heartwise spoke gently but the words were implacable.

Harry took a ragged breath and closed his eyes. He took another breath and then another. With each breath he sat a little straighter. He opened his eyes and turned to Gorin, "What must I do?"

"Each night," Gorin said, "you will let your magic flow and you will learn it and you will grow comfortable with it. Each day this week, you will work with Filius and revise the charms you learned in your first year of schooling. You will learn to cast those charms as easily as you feel your magic. You will learn to fly without a broom."

Filius Flitwick escorted a thoughtful and slightly dazed young man back to Potter Manor. "You've had a full day. Let's grab our brooms and floo to the Lodge for some flying."

The dazed look disappeared from Harry's face, replaced by an infectious grin, "Perfect." He raced up the stairs to change into less formal clothing.

Harry stepped out of the fireplace at the lodge holding his broom. Seeing Sirius, Harry rushed over to hug his godfather; then, with a glance at Filius, he rushed out of the room.

"What's going on?" Sirius asked Filius.

"Harry had a very adult morning and then a very disconcerting afternoon," Filius answered. "Right now, he just needs to be a teenager for a while."

"Anything I can help with?"

"Possibly. Harry was made aware today just how truly powerful he is," Filius said. "While his modest nature speaks well of him, it sometimes hinders him. Both the elves and the goblins believe that Harry has a destiny."

"I think Albus believes that Harry's destiny is to kill You-Know-Who," said Sirius.

Filius was shocked. "Has he said as much?"

"No, but unlike the first war where we went out and fought death eaters, this time is different," Sirius explained. "Dumbledore doesn't say so, but it still manages to somehow be all about Harry."

Filius thought about this and nodded, "Looking back at everything Harry has been through at Hogwarts, I think I agree with you. I also think Dumbledore is wrong."

Sirius raised an eyebrow and waited for his former professor to say more.

"Ridding the world, once again, of a dark wizard may be part of Harry's destiny, but it is only a part," Filius stated. "In fact, I think it would only be a small part."

Sirius nodded and switched topics, "So, what will you be doing while Harry is flying?"

Filius took out his broom from a pouch and resized it. "I'm also going to fly. Today made me realize that I have to find an entirely new way to prepare Harry for his charms OWL."

Dobby and Winky loved being bonded with Harry Potter but even more important than that was being part of Harry Potter's family. Harry Potter was a very special wizard and Dobby prided himself on being the first to recognize his greatness. Both elves enjoyed their work. They did various tasks to take care of the family, but what they enjoyed most were the special things they did for Harry Potter. Dobby quickly realized that Harry Potter did not get enough food. For reasons Dobby did not understand, Harry Potter had never been fed enough, and Harry told himself he didn't need to eat much. As much as Dobby loved Harry Potter, Dobby knew that, in this case, Harry Potter was wrong. So Dobby made it his personal task to make sure that Harry Potter always had enough to eat. Equally important was making sure that Harry Potter really liked the food that Dobby prepared for him.

In his quest to keep Harry Potter fed, Dobby became what muggles called a stalker. Dobby didn't really stalk people so much as he did kitchens. It had started innocently enough. A few days into his stay in Diagon Alley, Dobby ventured beyond the Alley to explore the Muggle world. Making himself invisible, Dobby entered a big room where many people were eating. Dobby knew that muggles didn't have elves, and he was curious about how this was happening. He entered the big room and went from table to table, looking at what the muggles were eating. They ate many different things. Most of the time, the people at a table weren't even eating the same food.

Dobby noticed that muggles were coming through a door carrying trays filled with plates of food. The muggles would put food on the tables for people to eat and pick up any empty plates and go back through the same door. Curious, Dobby followed one of them. Dobby had never seen a muggle kitchen before and found it very interesting. In some ways, it was like a magical kitchen. There were stoves and ovens to cook the food. There were big sinks for washing dishes. There were tables and counters and all sorts of utensils for preparing food and putting it on plates. In other ways, muggle and magical kitchens were very different. There was no fire. While the stoves and oven cooked food, Dobby couldn't figure out how it happened because muggles couldn't use magic. There was a big cold box for storing food, but once again, Dobby couldn't figure out how it worked without magic.

After puzzling over the differences, Dobby realized it didn't matter. Cooking food, preparing ingredients, and putting it together on a plate, these were things that had to be done in both the muggle and the magical world. What seemed important to Dobby was that the muggles were eating foods he had never seen before. Harry Potter had been raised by muggles, so Dobby figured he would enjoy these different muggle foods. From that day, Dobby gave himself a new task. Dobby was determined to learn to cook as many different foods from the muggles as he could.

Dobby was very conscientious about the tasks he did for the family. He was always happy to deliver letters and messages for Harry Potter and the people that were important to Harry Potter. Now he gave himself another task: learn muggle cooking. Whenever Dobby had time,

he ventured into the Muggle world to find the big eating rooms and the kitchens behind them. Sometimes he was able to learn the name of a food being prepared. Other times, he wasn't, but that was okay. What was important was to be able to fix the food for his Harry Potter.

Today, Dobby was fixing something called bangers and mash. He understood mash. It was mashed potatoes. What puzzled him was the word bangers. Did the bangers refer to the fried sausages, or was it referring to the rich gravy and onions spooned on top of everything? Either way, it seemed like the perfect food for tonight's dinner. Winky had popped out mid-afternoon to comfort Harry Potter at the healers. Dobby wasn't as good at comforting, but he could serve his Harry Potter food that made him feel better. Harry Potter liked rich foods and gravy when he was upset. Dobby had come up with numerous variations of shepherd's pie that would be great for the upset days, but he also thought this new dish would be equally good.

Dobby was right. Harry Potter loved bangers and mash. Harry had never had it before. He had never even cooked it for the Dursleys. Harry didn't know that growing up, his mom and Aunt Petunia had often had this delicious meal. For the socially conscious Petunia, bangers and mash were too close to her working-class roots for her to be comfortable with it. Vernon and Dudley would have loved it but that made it all the more important to avoid it and make sure they only ate upstanding foods.

Such ridiculous thoughts were far from Harry's mind as he dug into his dinner. "This is delicious, Dobby," he enthused. "Thank you."

After a relaxing cup of tea to allow their dinner to settle, Filius and Harry engaged in their regular dodging game. For the first time, Filius called a halt before Harry was tired out.

"Your increase in magic seems to have also increased your stamina," Filius pointed out. "That's a tremendous advantage for you."

Harry smiled happily. Seeing Dobby and Winky at the side of the room watching, he rushed over and scooped them both in a celebratory hug. When the laughter stopped, the family went to one of the small salons on the second floor and settled comfortably. It somewhat scandalized the elves at Potter Manor that Dobby and Winky behaved so casually with Harry. Harry knew it would take time for Dobby and Winky to truly be comfortable being part of a family with a wizard. He also knew that the reactions of the Potter elves were hard for them. However, Harry was adamant that while all the elves should be treated well, Dobby and Winky were family, and that went beyond the mutual bond.

As was becoming routine, the mixed family spent some time just relaxing and speaking of their day. While the elves would not go into detail, insisting it was a surprise, they had spent their day at the Keep working on the area surrounding the ancient fortress.

The elves watched with interest as Harry went over the first-year charms. First, he would do it with his Peverell wand and then see if he could do it without. Harry was surprised that he could do about half the charms without his wand, but it took a bit longer.

All too soon, it was time for Harry to go to his room to practice finding and feeling his magic. It seemed like he had barely closed his eyes when Winky gently shook him. Healer

Tonks had arrived. He quickly got ready for bed.

He settled in bed and Tonks cast a spell to immobilize Harry's shoulder. Next were Skele-Gro and Dreamless Sleep. Once taken, the healer vanished Harry's left shoulder and collarbone. By the time his bones were vanished, Harry could barely keep his eyes open. It had been a very good day, and it had also been a very full one. As he fell asleep, Harry thought it wouldn't be bad if every day were both good and full.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the kudos and comments. I am very happy that so many people are enjoying this story.

Magic Reimagined

Chapter Notes

Tuesday, July 11 - Wednesday, July 12

At breakfast the next morning, Susu popped in with a note from Sirius. The previous evening, Harry sent letters to Dumbledore and Arthur Weasley from Lord Black. The letter to Dumbledore had withdrawn permission to use any Black properties for his personal use. Lord Black had also insisted that Dumbledore remove the fidelius charm placed on the property. According to Sirius' note, Dumbledore had not removed the charm, believing Lord Black would relent.

Harry set the note down and considered it for a moment. Most mornings were free so that Harry could take care of any House business and correspondence that popped up. It looked like at least part of his morning would be spent at the London Manor removing a fidelius charm. As much as Filius wanted to watch Harry work his magic, it was better for both of them to remain unseen together for as long as possible. After sending a message to Sirius, Harry went upstairs to dress.

Despite Harry's desire for casual dress, Winky insisted that he dress as befitting Lord Black on House business. Sirius arrived to find Harry waiting in the arrivals salon wearing a black business robe over dark green slacks with a pale green dress shirt open at the collar. Although not obvious, Harry also wore the various House tokens.

Arriving in front of where the manor would be via side along apparition, Harry examined the row of large townhouses. It seemed evident that a number was missing between #11 and #13. Reading the street sign at the end of the block, Harry said, "Number 12 Grimmauld Place?"

"Yes," Sirius answered, "but even knowing it won't allow you to see it without the information written by Dumbledore."

Harry could feel something pushing at him. It wanted him to ignore the missing number, to not even notice it. Harry started walking toward the townhouses. The closer he got to what appeared to be a shared wall between #11 and #13, the more he felt pushed against his magic, urging him away. He pushed back and soon stood close to the townhouses.

Reaching forward with his right hand, Harry touched what appeared to be the shared wall. He closed his eyes and just felt. He stepped back and considered. He knew he had the power to overcome the fidelius charm. It was just a matter of how. Brute force would work but would probably take down all the other wards that protected the manor. He couldn't do this as Harry Potter. It had to be done by Lord Black.

With a thought, Harry conjured a small sharp knife. Making a small cut in his palm, he waited until there was enough blood to let it trickle to the Black ring on his right index finger, where the ring had been moved after his bandages had come off. Once again, he placed his hand on the wall. Harry closed his eyes and reached for the Black magic. Pushing it to the front of his magic, Harry commanded the manor to reveal itself. There was resistance, but Harry held firm. With another push of his magic, Harry felt the fidelius charm break, and suddenly, he was standing not at the join between neighboring townhouses but in front of #12 with his hand on the front door.

With a grin, Harry turned back to Sirius and indicated the door, "Shall we?"

In the manor kitchen, the Weasley family was enjoying breakfast. While still somewhat confused by Lord Black's refusal to allow Dumbledore to use the manor, the adult Weasleys were nonetheless grateful for the gracious permission to live in the protected property. Oblivious to all this, the younger Weasleys were enjoying breakfast when a powerful pulse of magic swept through the room. While they all felt the magic, the five youngest in the room recognized it. Almost at the same time, they said, "Harry."

Three things happened at once: four Weasleys and a Granger pushed through the kitchen door, Harry Potter and Sirius Black stepped through the front door and the portrait of Walburga Black started screeching obscenities.

George was in the lead and immediately stopped and flung out an arm to stop the stampede, "Be quiet." It was the only way to shut up the portrait.

At the sound of the screeching portrait, Harry stopped and looked up. Reaching with his still bloody palm, Harry placed it firmly on the grungy painting. Abruptly there was silence. Harry straightened and let a touch of Black magic flow into the now silent woman, "As Lord Black, I declare you dead to House Black. No more will your memory poison this Ancient and Noble House."

While Sirius was registering the implications of Harry's declaration, an old elf flung itself down the stairs wailing, "What has filthy half-blood done to Mistress?"

With a thought, Harry cleaned his hand and knelt in front of the elf. Letting a tendril of the Black magic reach out, Harry held out a hand and asked, "What is your name?"

"Kreacher," the elf answered, feeling magic purer than any he had ever felt when he took the offered hand.

"Who holds your bond?"

"Kreacher be bonded to House Black. No more since Mistress died," the old elf said with a tear tracking down his cheek.

By now, the entire Weasley family stood silent and mesmerized in the doorway and watched as Harry stood and turned to Sirius who was now beside him in the hallway, "You let a partially bonded elf remain in a house full of dark objects with an insane portrait?"

Sirius flinched at the anger in Harry's voice but still defended his lack of action, "This elf made my childhood miserable. He doesn't deserve any better."

Harry closed his eyes and struggled with his flaring magic. "I don't care," he bit out. He opened his eyes and looked hard at Sirius, "You are Heir to House Black. You do not get the luxury of acting out your feelings like a fourteen-year-old boy."

Sirius heard and felt the underlying meaning in the rebuke. Harry was a fourteen-year-old boy and knew to behave better than Sirius had.

Harry turned back and knelt again in front of the elf, "Kreacher, would you like to bond?"

"Kreacher burst into tears, "Kreacher not deserve kind master."

Sirius looked up at that moment and saw the crowd in the doorway. With wide eyes, he motioned them back into the kitchen. When they were once more behind a closed door, Sirius watched as Harry bonded with Kreacher. Whatever the issue, it had been resolved. As he had seen with the Potter elves, the bonding seemed to take decades of age off the elf.

Harry looked up in time to see the kitchen door swinging shut. He exchanged a glance with Sirius and decided, "Let's take care of the wards, and then we'll deal with the rest of it."

Sirius led the way upstairs and into a study. As he passed through the doorway, Harry could feel the family magic that would limit who could enter. Behind the large blackwood desk that dominated the study was a darkened doorway. Harry followed Sirius through the door and down the spiral staircase. At the bottom of the stairs, another doorway beckoned. In the center of a small, circular room was a round plinth that held a large, irregularly shaped piece of obsidian. The combination of smooth curves and sharp, ragged edges was unlike anything Harry could have expected or imagined.

Stepping forward, Harry placed both hands against the stone. He felt the dagger-sharp edges cutting into the skin of his fingers and palms. As his blood flowed, he felt as if the very core of his magic was connecting with the magic of the stone. For a moment, the connection was uncomfortable, and then Harry pushed the Black magic forward, and the discomfort eased. As the connection between Harry and the wardstone deepened, he began to sense something profound about the very nature of magic itself. Like the exchange of bonds with the elves, the fullest magic was also an exchange. The Lord and Lady of Magic gave, often generously, but they also took with greed that matched the generosity.

Harry let the exchange of magic settle, and, pulling the mantle of House Black around himself, he began to communicate with the stone. He thought again of the vow he had taken as head of House Black. He let his desire to uphold that vow fill him. He thought of the people who had done right by Sirius and himself. These people would always be welcome within the bounds of this manor. He also considered those who had brought him harm or had done damage to Sirius. These individuals would find no safe harbor. There was no need for a fidelius charm. The magic of House Black would hide itself from any who were not welcome.

Removing his hands from the stone, Harry stepped back. He let the House magic heal the many cuts and gashes and then thought them clean. Turning to Sirius, Harry was surprised to see a wide-eyed look of shock on his godfather's face.

"That isn't how you do it," Sirius gasped.

Harry didn't have an answer for that, so he smiled and walked around his godfather, and headed back upstairs.

As he followed Harry, Sirius felt the restructured wards. They were there, but they weren't like any wards Sirius had ever felt before. Finally, he caught up to Harry at the door to the hall. Laying a hand on his shoulder, Sirius asked, "How did you do that?"

"Do what?"

"Change the wards," Sirius answered in frustration.

"I.... I'm not really sure," Harry answered, "but come back with me to the manor and we can talk it over with Filius."

When Harry eventually arrived back in the manor, Winky was waiting for him, "you need go change and have snack," the tiny elf informed him.

Despite having only been gone for a short time, Harry felt as if he was at the end of a very long day. He had intended to slip in and out, but somehow his magic had notified his friends of his presence. The exhilaration of new magic had quickly been overwhelmed by his conversation with Arthur Weasley and trying to avoid a confrontation with his friends. The one bright spot had been the greeting from the twins.

"Go now," Winky said sternly as Sirius stepped out of the floo. She could see that her Harry was overwrought and needed a break.

Heeding her words, Harry quickly left the room and headed upstairs. When Sirius started to follow, Winky stepped in front of him. "Professy Fili is in his library," the elf announced pointedly. "You go there now and wait."

With the recent bond with his own personal elf, Sirius knew better than to argue. When an elf knew what was good for you, they found a way to make you do it, whether you agreed or not. Unfortunately, the elf was usually right.

Arriving at the small library that Filius had taken for his use, Sirius Black began pacing. Back and forth, he walked, mentally gnawing on the magical mystery that his godson presented. Filius watched for less than a minute before returning to his book. Ted Tonks had found a book written on a set of studies done over the span of 20 years in London schools that addressed the special education needs of intellectually gifted muggles. Filius was finding it surprisingly helpful in forming a plan to continue Harry's education.

Sirius continued to pace back and forth, occasionally grumbling about the slowness of teenage boys. After several decades of teaching in a boarding school, Filius had learned to

ignore extraneous noises. Twenty minutes had passed before Harry entered the small library dressed in jeans and a t-shirt.

"How long does it take to change clothes?" Sirius asked with biting sarcasm.

"A couple of minutes," Harry answered. "Why?"

"You were gone considerably longer than a couple of minutes," Sirius bit out.

"It was snack time," Harry answered, taking quiet delight in Sirius' agitation.

"Snack time," Sirius practically roared.

Harry laughed, "Yes, Dobby is quite insistent about the amount of food I eat."

"And rightly so," interjected Filius. "Now, what has your panties in a twist, Sirius?"

In answer, Sirius suddenly went mute and pointed at Harry.

Filius looked back and forth between Sirius and Harry and raised an eyebrow in question. "Perhaps someone should tell me what's been happening this morning," he suggested.

Harry took compassion on Sirius' confused mental state and gave a narrative of the events at Black Manor.

Filius was quiet for a moment considering all that Harry had said. "When you say you removed the fidelius charm, how exactly did you do that?" Filius asked.

"I cut my palm with my wand and then placed it on the place where the manor should have been. Then I claimed it," Harry explained.

"Then I claimed it," Sirius mimicked back. "What exactly does that mean?"

Harry decided it would be simpler to ignore Sirius's attitude and answer the questions as straightforwardly as possible. "I put my palm on it, gave the manor time to recognize my magic, and then I said 'Mine.'"

"What made you decide to cut your hand?". Filius asked.

Harry shrugged, "Just seemed the thing to do."

Now both Sirius and Filius were speechless. These were magically accomplished men. Filius Flitwick was a champion duelist with a mastery in charms. He had taught for many decades and had seen the brightest in many generations of wizarding Britain. Working with Minerva McGonagall, Pomona Sprout, Severus Snape and Albus Dumbledore, Filius had seen some of the finest magical talent in the world.

Sirius Black was a powerful wizard. He was a gifted duelist who had fought and defeated many opponents in the last war. Along with James Potter, Sirius had planned to get a mastery in transfiguration. He had seen the incredible talent of Lily Evans in both charms and potions.

Although he still despised Severus Snape, he could not deny the man's brilliance both as a potions master and a spellcrafter.

For the first time, Filius Flitwick and Sirius Black witnessed magic wielded in an entirely unexpected fashion. Nothing in their collective experience prepared them for the almost casual way Harry used magical power.

Harry sat in silence, watching the two men who had become very important in a very short time. He was unsure about their reactions. He knew the magic he had done earlier was different, but it couldn't have been that different. After all, he wasn't even fifteen. He assumed that while he might be advanced for his age, he wasn't doing anything other adults couldn't do.

When Filius realized that Harry was still sitting there, he cleared his throat, "Harry, why don't you take the rest of the morning to finish what you were pulled away from, and at lunchtime, we'll discuss this further."

After Harry left the room, Filius is turned to Sirius, "This changes things. I can't prepare Harry for a Charms OWL. That would be a step backward for his magic."

"He has to get an OWL," Sirius pointed out.

"Yes, but it would be best if it were not in a wandless subject," Filius responded.

"So Potions, History of Magic, Herbology, Care of Magical Creatures or Divination," Sirius concluded.

"Exactly. We'll let Harry decide which one he would prefer."

Upstairs in his office, Harry had just finished a letter to Bill Weasley requesting a replica of the Slytherin locket. The Black elf, Kreacher, had been ordered to destroy the locket by Sirius' younger brother. The inability to do so had sunk the elf into despair. Combined with the lack of a bond, the prevalence of dark magic throughout the house, and the screeching insanity of Walburga Black's portrait, the elf had little chance of retaining his own mind. It distressed Harry to see any living creature in such a state.

The rest of the time before lunch was spent preparing for the upcoming interview. He had received the expected letter from his publicist and went over it carefully, taking notes and thinking of possible questions he might be asked. Harry also spent more time in the Black grimoire. What surprised Harry the most was the unevenness of the entries. Some writers had been prolific, while others wrote very little. Some of the entries were of the minutiae of everyday life. Other entries dealt more with that person's exploration of the family magic. All of it was educational, but Harry was unsure about how much of it would be relevant to his experience as Lord Black. Perhaps he should go back into the grimoire to make notes about what proved useful and what did not as he figured out his various responsibilities to House Black.

By the time Winky called him for lunch, Harry had completely forgotten the reactions that Sirius and Filius had to his morning activity at the London Black Manor. Sitting down to a

stacked sandwich and a handful of crisps, Harry dug in. Even with the earlier snack, he was ravenous. It wasn't until a fruit plate had popped in front of him that he realized how silent the table had been. Although Dobby and Winky were always present at breakfast and dinner, it wasn't unusual for them to be busy at lunchtime. While lunch was usually a quieter affair, it was rarely silent as it was now.

Looking between the two men, Harry asked, "What's going on?"

"I think, Harry," said Filius, "that we need a different approach to your OWL examination."

"You don't think I'll be ready," Harry said, the uncertainty evident in his voice.

"Readiness isn't the issue," Filius assured him. "With the advances in your magical ability, Sirius and I agree that preparation for an OWL in one of the wanded subjects would hinder your development in that area."

"Is there something wrong with me?" Harry asked quietly.

"Far from it," Sirius assured him. "You command the magic of eight Houses. That's on top of your magical power, which is formidable. You have already demonstrated an ability to do magic never seen before, and you've just started."

"I don't understand why that would keep me from getting an OWL in charms," Harry responded.

"Let me put this another way," Filius said gently. "You are friends with the Weasley twins. You have seen their ability to use magic in ways that most people don't think of. Now consider Percy Weasley. Percy is a very strong wizard, and he's very intelligent. Despite his slavish devotion to the ministry, he is as equally talented as the twins. However, just like you wouldn't ask either of the twins to get a job at the ministry, you wouldn't ask Percy to create a prank for you. It simply goes against the nature of who they are."

Filius continued, "You are very capable of getting an OWL in any subject you want. You have the magical talent, and you have the intelligence to do it. However, like the Weasley twins, you are beginning to look at magic differently and use it in different ways. OWLs are about understanding the core traditions of a subject, while NEWTs are about how you use the magic. I think you'll be happier if you let your skills in the wanded areas of magic develop without the constriction of OWL requirements. You don't need an OWL to get a NEWT. It's just how it's usually done."

Harry thought about it and nodded, "Okay, that makes sense, but I still need at least one OWL."

"That still leaves you Potions, Care of Magical Creatures, Herbology, History or Divination," Sirius pointed out.

Understanding dawned as Harry considered his options, "I definitely want a NEWT in Potions, but first, I need to find a really good tutor to understand the basics better."

"Divination is a joke, and for that reason alone, I don't want my first OWL in that subject even though I do believe that Trelawny is a legitimate seer," Harry said as he considered the available subjects.

"What makes you say that?" Filius asked curiously. He found Sybil Trelawny an entertaining witch to be around but often wondered why Dumbledore had hired her.

"In my third year, I had stayed after class for a moment when she went into some sort of odd trance and started speaking in a different voice," Harry explained. "At the time, I just thought it was weird, and I didn't understand what she was saying, but I'm pretty sure now it was a prophecy that has come true."

"A prophecy," Sirius asked. "What kind of prophecy?" There was something niggling at the back of his mind, but he couldn't quite grab hold of it.

Harry thought back and then recited as he remembered:

It will happen tonight. The Dark Lord lies alone and friendless, abandoned by his followers. His servant has been chained these twelve years. Tonight, before midnight, the servant will break free and set out to rejoin his master. The Dark Lord will rise again with his servant's aid, greater and more terrible than ever before. Tonight ... before midnight ... the servant ... will set out ... to rejoin ... his master ..."

"You think this was about Pettigrew," Filius said.

"Yes," Harry responded. He looked over at Sirius and noticed how pale he was, "Sirius, what's wrong?"

"It was a prophecy," Sirius said.

"Yes, I know," said Harry with a touch of impatience.

"No," said Sirius in a tone of urgency. "It was a prophecy that sent your parents into hiding." He looked at Harry, "I had forgotten all about it. I never knew what the prophecy said, but your father told me it was the reason they had to hide."

"So, how did The Potters learn about the prophecy?" Filius asked.

Sirius thought back for a moment. There were still memory gaps from his time in Azkaban. After a moment he sat up straighter, "Dumbledore. Dumbledore told them to go into hiding."

"So Dumbledore knew of the prophecy," Filius said. "While it might be nice to know where he heard it, we don't need that information."

Harry had been silent as he digested this new information. "So unless Dumbledore tells us, we have no way of knowing what the prophecy is." Harry screwed up his face, "I think it's safe to say Dumbledore won't tell me. I've asked before about things, and he's never told me anything that I needed to know."

Sirius looked over at Filius, "Does the Ministry keep track of these things? Seers and prophecies are not something the Blacks usually concerned themselves with."

Thoughtful, Filius said, "It's not something I know a lot about either, but I'll make some inquiries. In the meantime, let's get back to the issue of Harry's OWL."

"What about Care of Magical Creatures?" Sirius asked. "You seem to enjoy that."

"I do," Harry said, "but I didn't exactly take it because it was useful. It was more that it was both interesting and easy."

"So, History or Herbology," Filius said.

Harry considered both. With what he had been learning in the last few weeks, Harry could see how History would be helpful. Unfortunately, the continued droning from Binns about Goblin Wars had left him somewhat ambivalent about the subject. Herbology, in Harry's mind, was the equivalent of gardening. It was the one chore at the Dursleys that he actually enjoyed. He liked being outside, and he always liked the feel of the earth in his hands. Since he was now the owner of Stinchcomb Herbs, it seemed like a good choice.

"Herbology," he announced.

Filius and Sirius realized the connection immediately. They both exclaimed in the affirmative and Harry enjoyed their approval.

"Spend the rest of this week revising what you've learned, and then next week, we'll decide if you need more revision or if you're ready to move on to the 5th Year curriculum," Filius said. "We'll still practice charms in the evening to help you get more comfortable with how your magic interacts with what you already know."

Harry was in his study the following day reading more of the Black grimoire when Dobby popped in looking agitated, "Master Harry Potter Sir must go to Hogwarts," the elf blurted.

Harry put the grimoire down and looked at Dobby. It had taken a while to convince both elves that family could use less formal address, so Dobby's reverting to his old habits told Harry how distressed the elf was. He turned in his chair and took both of Dobby's hands, "Dobby, tell me what's going on."

"Hogwarts elves need bond," Dobby said.

"I thought the elves at Hogwarts were bonded to the castle," Harry responded.

"Elves were bonded," Dobby responded, starting to calm down now that the issue was being addressed, "but with Head of Griffey and Snake, the castle no longer hold bond."

Harry thought over what Dobby had just said, "So because I'm now head of Gryffindor and Slytherin, the elves need to bond directly with me rather than the castle?"

Dobby nodded enthusiastically, "Yes, Harry Potter must go now."

Harry realized that this was similar to what had happened to Kreacher. Harry got up and went to find Filius. Explaining the situation, Harry pointed out the obstacle to completing the task immediately, "I need to figure out a way to meet with the elves without anyone in the castle knowing."

Dobby," Filius asked, "can the head elf come here? We need to make some arrangements."

Before he could even blink, Dobby was gone. Two blinks later, Dobby had returned with another elf.

"This be Limney," Dobby introduced an older elf dressed in a neat white towel embroidered with the Hogwarts crest.

"Good morning, Limney," Harry said. "I'm sorry I didn't know to come bond with you."

"Dobby 'splain to me that Lord Gryffy has many Houses," Manny said. "Elves pick House to bond."

Harry wasn't sure what the elf meant so Harry just nodded, "Is there a way for me to come to Hogwarts without anyone finding out?"

"Lord Gryffy owns castle. Can come and go anytime."

Harry's eyes went wide and he turned to Filius, "I didn't know that."

Filius chuckled, "Your friend, Miss Granger, would tell you it's in Hogwarts, A History."

"Yes, she would," Harry laughed. "Right now, it's all I can manage to learn about House Black."

Filius thought about it for a moment, "You can probably go through the floo in my old office. I doubt anyone has thought to close it off, and I'm sure they haven't hired anyone new yet. The address is Hogwarts, Charms office, and the password is leviosa. Give it a try and see if that works."

Accompanied by Filius to the arrivals room, Harry took a pinch of floo powder and threw it in the fireplace, saying the address clearly and stepping into the green flames. When he came to a sudden stop, he said the password and found himself easily stepping into Filius' old office.

Immediately an elf arrived, squealed and then promptly cleaned the soot off of Harry. The elf led Harry through the castle down to the kitchens going through several passages that Harry had not known existed. As Harry looked around in the passages, the elf said to him, "Elfs know many ways through Hoggywarts that wizards never see."

"Should you have shown them to me?" Harry asked.

"You be Lord Griffey," the elf answered. "No secrets from Castle Lord."

Harry just nodded as he continued to follow the elf. One of the passages ended at a plain wooden door that opened into the huge Hogwarts kitchen. Today the tables that normally sat in a copy of the Great Hall were missing. The huge space was filled with elves that seem to be congregated in a variety of different sized groups.

Limney stepped forward, "I bond first to Lord Griffey."

With the usual ritual words, Limney asked Lord Gryffindor to accept him. Harry gave his assent and in return requested to be Limney's wizard. With the completion of the bond, all of the elves in the room were still for a moment and then it seemed as if suddenly every elf let out a shout of joy as they witnessed the first mutual bond any had ever seen.

Limney let the noise continue for a moment and then stomped his foot. There was sudden quiet and Limney instructed, "All Griffy elves together." About half of the elves gathered about Harry and Limney. "These be wishing to bond to Lord Griffey and stay at Hoggywarts."

Harry knelt and one at a time met the elves, confirmed they wanted to stay at Hogwarts and bonded with them. Harry kept losing count but was pretty sure it was more than fifty elves.

After the Gryffindor elves came those wanting a bond with Lord Slytherin. Like the previous group, these elves wanted to remain at Hogwarts. Repeating the process, Harry bonded with over forty elves.

Harry had been surprised that the elves divided themselves between Gryffindor and Slytherin but he realized there was still a sizable group of elves left. Many unbonded elves went to Hogwarts. While not as fulfilling as a bond with a wizard, the high level of ambient magic was still better. This meant a surfeit of elves.

The bigger surprise was that Dobby had told the Hogwarts elves about all of his Houses. Many elves saw this as an opportunity.

Sixteen elves wanted to bond with Lord Stinchcomb. These elves had a love of growing things and there simply wasn't enough work at Hogwarts with the Herbology students tending to the greenhouses and gardens much of the year.

Eleven elves wanted to bond with Lord Peverell. The chance to do something different was appealing. Harry was excited to have elves specifically interested in new things.

Three elves had previously belonged to the Black family and wanted to return. Harry sent them to help clean the London Black Manor with specific instructions concerning Kreacher and the Weasleys but most importantly to call Dobby if there were any problems.

The Houses of Emrys and Gaunt were each claimed by an adult couple. Both pairs wanted to be part of reestablishing an Ancient House. Harry had no idea what the elves would do but in a moment of mischief sent them both to Solicitor Tonks.

The general feeling was that House Potter had plenty of elves which it did. Harry knew that the Potter elves had been discussing the other Houses. It had been a very long time since

elves were given that choice.

By the time Harry returned to Potter Manor, he was more than ready for the waiting lunch. He was devouring a second sandwich when a Gringotts owl flew into the room. Taking the parchment, Harry watched as the owl flew to the back of a vacant chair and settled into wait.

"A curse breaking team wants to meet with me on Friday morning to discuss my scar. Heartwise is part of the team," Harry said as he wandlessly summoned parchment and pen.

As Harry wrote his acceptance, Filius wondered if Harry even realized how much magic he did both silently and wandlessly when he wasn't thinking about it.

After Harry had sent the owl back with a response, he turned to Filius, "More reading this afternoon?"

"Unfortunately not," Filius sighed. He had spent the previous afternoon exploring the library and looked forward to many hours of reading. "I'm headed to Gringotts to see if I can find out how to listen to that prophecy that Sirius remembers."

"More Herbology revision for me," Harry sighed dramatically.

"You can't fool me," Filius responded. "I saw your reaction to the greenhouse study space the elves made for you."

"I never expected that," Harry admitted. "It really is a great study space for the subject." It was in the closest greenhouse and included a study area and a practical area with planting table, tools, apron and dragonhide gloves that fit perfectly, all surrounded by beautiful flowering plants interspersed with fragrant herbs. There were enough elves with a passion for flowers that they had their own greenhouse. They were thrilled to have more properties open that they could supply. Harry opened his notebook and made a note to see if there was a market for selling flowers. He hadn't seen any wizarding florists but that didn't mean they didn't exist.

"It makes the elves happy to do things for you but I know it is an adjustment for you," Filius noted.

Harry nodded and got up, "I'm going to go see the kitchen elves before I head to the greenhouse." Harry made sure to express his appreciation to the elves frequently. He knew what it was like to cook, clean and garden without any acknowledgement and never wanted to take his privileges for granted.

Harry arrived at the greenhouse at 1:30 ready to finish revising the first year coursework. A lot of it was learning terminology for stuff he had been doing since before primary school. An older elf was waiting by the desk, "Lord Stinchcomb, I be Bob and I know everything Plant Lady taught at Hoggwarts."

"Why did you leave?" Harry asked, "and please, call me Harry."

"Bob is tired of listening. Here I be teacher."

Harry grinned, "Cool."

Bob combined Hermione's bossiness with Professor Sprout's love of plants. As strange as that was, Harry enjoyed the afternoon. After only a couple of hours, Bob pronounced Harry ready for second year revision and handed him a slim volume to read before the next day's lesson.

Climbing the stairs to the owlery, Harry got comfortable in a seat by an open window. Hedwig and Henry flew over, each taking a shoulder. "Hey girl," he said, nuzzling his dearest companion, "are you enjoying the owlery? It's big and clean but we will need more owls soon."

Hedwig prekked and gave Harry a nip on his finger. Harry turned to stroke Henry. The tiny owl and Hedwig were inseparable when they weren't delivering letters. "I have to do some reading for tomorrow so I thought it would be nice to do it with the both of you," Harry told the owls. He settled back with the slim volume while the owls groomed his hair. The book was a discussion of how planting and harvest times impacted the potency of ingredients. It brought together astronomy, potions and herbology that had Harry understanding for the first time why all three were included as core subjects. Why had he not learned this at Hogwarts?

Portents and Prophecies

Chapter Notes

July 12, 1995

Filius walked into Sharpnail's office to see Gorin and Heartwise sitting at the conference table. He took a seat next to Heartwise and greeted both healers. While they waited for Sharpnail, Filius enthused about the Potter library.

"How does it compare to Hogwarts' library?" Sharpnail asked as he entered and sat down at the conference table.

"A lot more variety," Filius answered. "It also goes far beyond NEWT level in most areas. Large sections of fiction and scientific study, both magical and muggle, so it surpasses the school in range of content. I suspect by the time Harry gets through the vaults and the collections from his other Houses, he will find he owns the most comprehensive selection of magical books in the world."

There was a moment of stunned silence as everyone digested this information. Harry was so easygoing and down to earth that it was easy to overlook his vast wealth.

Gorin finally spoke into the silence, "We are here to talk about prophecies. There are both Elven and Dwarrow prophecies that point to a time when Magic is at a precipice. Although only spoken of obliquely, I suspect there are also Mermish and Centaur portents."

"I learned yesterday there may be a Wixen prophecy concerning Harry," Filius said. "I don't know where it fits into all this, but I believe Harry will bring about momentous events."

Heartwise nodded, "It is ironic that there are those who strive to deliberately shape events and place themselves at the center of our world, but the one person that seems to be the focal point of these omens has no ambition to control others."

"He is Magic's Chosen," Gorin pronounced. "Others may choose to assert themselves, but one chosen by Magic does not need glory."

"Magic is everything," Filius stated. "Harry says that several times a day, and that explains everything you need to know about the young man."

"How does Lord Potter feel about a possible prophecy?" Sharpnail asked.

"His biggest concern is passing an OWL," Filius answered. "Harry sees that as necessary to care for himself and his family."

"We shall go see Croaker," Gorin said, gesturing at himself and Heartwise. "If there is anything relevant to young Harry, we will contact you, Filius. Otherwise, we will see you both next week."

With a smile, Heartwise followed Gorin to visit the Department of Mysteries and the Head Unspeakable.

"You have certainly found yourself uniquely positioned among our races," Sharpnail observed to Filius.

"The elven clan of my great-grandparents is one of the more scattered, so for most of my life, I have had only superficial contact with elves," Filius observed. "Most wixen of mixed heritage are sidelined, the exception being the Delacoeurs and the Malfoys. Both families depend upon sheer arrogance to render their Veela heritage irrelevant. I've always been closest to my dwarrow kin."

"And now you've found yourself accepted as kin to two young elves and a powerful wizard who seems to give no regard to race," Sharpnail observed.

"He does not," Filius agreed. "I suspect that when he learns that it was wixen that first called us goblins, he will have strong opinions."

"No doubt," agreed Sharpnail, "and he will make those opinions known."

The Department of Mysteries was located in the lowest levels of the Ministry of Magic but was not actually part of the Ministry. It was both self-governing and self-funded. It answered only to Magic and while occasional corruption happened, once discovered, it was dealt with swiftly and ruthlessly.

Every sentient race studied magic in some way. Some had a very narrow focus, while others took a broader view. The centaurs focused exclusively on celestial divination. Merpeople only studied beyond water magic where it occasionally interacted with air or earth magic. Elves were the most inclusive race in their pursuit of magical understanding. While most human magicals saw elves as beings of limited intelligence, elves had the same spectrum of intellectual capacity as any other race.

Not only did the variety of magical studies differ among the races, but the number of individuals interested in those studies also differed. All centaurs studied the stars to some degree. About a third of merpeople studied water magic, while the rest used that same magic to connect the waterways and keep them safe and hidden. It was rare for a younger elf to study magic. It simply wasn't enough to use the nearly boundless energy that magic had gifted them. As elves reached their later years, they were more settled with their magic and began to move to more intellectual explorations. The oldest elves eventually turned their attention to magic itself. Dwarrow typically followed the occupational leanings of their clan. It was rare for a banking clan to produce a jewelfsmith. Likewise, clans drawn to intellectual pursuits were more likely to raise a youngling drawn to the study of magic. Heartwise was a

rare individual that followed her clan's inclination toward healing and combined it with the study and rare understanding of soul magic.

For wixen, the study of magic seemed to be more of a calling, not unlike what those who followed spiritual traditions experienced. The number ebbed and flowed, and currently, the number working in the British Department of Mysteries was at a historic low. The Unspeakables, as those that studied magic were known as, attributed this low to two events. The first, publicly bemoaned, was the rise of Voldemort, which had significantly reduced the British magical population. The second reason was never mentioned to anyone outside of the Department besides the leaders of other races: Albus Dumbledore.

Dumbledore had been headmaster at Britain's leading magical school for thirty-nine years. Most British wixen were unaware of the smaller schools scattered throughout the realm that gained their students directly through the recommendations of previous graduates. This meant one man exercised unprecedented influence over the magical population. Every decade of Dumbledore's educational leadership had seen a reduction in both the depth and breadth of learning opportunities. Fewer subjects were taught. Fewer students qualified for apprenticeships, and, over time, there were fewer Masters to offer in-depth instruction. Unlike many countries that had embraced a magical equivalent to muggle university, the only way to move beyond NEWT level education was either self-study or seeking further education outside of Britain. The wixen of Britain were unaware that they were one of the least educated magical populations in the world.

This influence was further compounded by Dumbledore's many years as Chief Warlock which allowed him to act as a gatekeeper to both the judicial and legislative workings within the Ministry of Magic. As educational standards dropped, the population became less capable of good self-governance, and, ironically, they repeatedly turned to the Wizard that created the situation. The most significant disagreement among the Unspeakables was how much of this was of deliberate intent on Dumbledore's part.

Croaker, as the Head Unspeakable was always named, was the youngest Unspeakable to ever rise to the leadership position. Each Croaker held the esteem of every Unspeakable, but the current Croaker was practically revered. All Unspeakables were bound by magic to absolute secrecy. Even those willing to betray their colleagues or the secrets they held were unable to. In practice, this meant that the hooded cloaks worn by every Unspeakable were set aside within the depths of the Department. Croaker, in a cloak so deeply red as to be almost black, had an intimidating presence when walking the halls of the Ministry. Few dared approach and most fled in the other direction when Croaker was sighted.

In the depths of the Department, instead of a figure in deepest blood red, there was a willowy young woman in pastel shades with a floral over-robe. Although still addressed as Croaker, she would have been recognized as Sidra Evergreen. While her older sister, Pandora, had excelled at spell crafting, Sidra's first love had been magical theory. It was at Pandora's urging that Sidra followed her older sister's footsteps into the Department of Mysteries. When Pandora foolishly attempted a newly crafted spell in her home rather than in the protected spaces of the Department, the emotional fallout from Pandora's death was profound. Pandora's husband, Xenophilius Lovegood, had escaped his grief by creating alternate realities within his mind. Pandora's young daughter, Luna, had no one to guide her growing

Magesight and was forced to come up with her own explanations using a child's logic. Sidra, much younger but more ambitious, had used grief to fuel her drive to understand the forces that magic created within the world. Although none truly thrived, all three survivors occupied unique spaces within the magical world.

Sidra was enjoying a quiet afternoon in her office, reviewing the progress of the current projects within the Department. As the Unspeakables answered only to Magic, there was very little of the paperwork that accompanied most bureaucracies. There were, however, reports that kept track of ongoing studies and allowed necessary oversight. When Gorin and Heartwise arrived in her office, Sidra was of mixed mind. She enjoyed catching up on her colleagues' work, but she also knew these two coming together had significant implications.

An elf, a dwarrow and a witch sat silently, drinking tea. It was a comfortable silence made so by both their respect for each other and by the level of comfort each felt with themselves. When the last sip was swallowed and the tea service removed, Gorin reached into a pocket and pulled out a clouded orb, placing it on the table. Following suit, Heartwise placed a similar orb beside the first.

Sidra quirked an eyebrow and grinned, "I seem to have misplaced my contribution to this party."

Gorin snorted and answered the unspoken question, "A young wizard has come into our lives. He is already beginning to shake the foundations. These orbs have foretold such an occasion."

"We learned today that you may have a specific prophecy concerning this wizard," Heartwise added. "Harry James Potter."

Sidra nodded, "There is such a prophecy. Although it shows as unfulfilled, there is debate as to whether part of it has come to pass." Sidra held out her hand and an orb appeared. She placed the orb beside the others and tapped it with her wand.

The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches... Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies... and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not... and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives... The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies...

As the voice faded, Heartwise reached forward to tap the orb she had brought.

When magic wanes and the dark encroaches, He will return
When the Champion for Light has lost his way, He will return
When Houses fade and the Old Ways are forgotten, He will return
When the Races are divided and Blood covers the land,
He will return

Unlike the almost monotone voice of the Wixen prophecy, the harsh voice of the dwarrow prophecy grew in volume until the final phrase was a shout of triumph. With a shake of his head, Gorin tapped the last orb.

The races, torn asunder by malice and apathy,
will once again find harmony.
Counseled by Elven, Dwarrow and Wixen, a man-child will show the way.
Led by Magic and powered by Belief, a new understanding will grow.
All magical races will rejoice when those that lead with lies are Judged.

The light elven voice was lyrical and contrasted sharply with the seriousness of the words. Finally, Sidra spoke, "Very different types of prophecies. Do you believe they all involve Harry Potter?"

"Yes," Heartwise answered decisively, "but it doesn't matter. Whatever comes to pass, Lord Potter is already changing destinies."

Gorin nodded and then called, "Dobby."

Dobby popped in and made a small bow to Gorin, "How can Dobby assist today?"

"Please ask Lord Potter if I can join him for dinner along with Heartwise and a trusted friend," Gorin requested.

In answer, Dobby disappeared and reappeared about fifteen seconds later, "Harry Potter says that healers and friend are welcome anytime to Potter Manor. Come for tea at four then lots of talk time before dinner." With that announcement, Dobby disappeared again.

Sidra Evergreen sat in stunned silence. The Department of Mysteries was sealed against random apparation even from other magical races. How had an uninvited elf managed to get in? That question held the answer. Gorin had called the elf. "I did not realize that elves called each other like that," she stated in what was clearly a question.

"We don't," Gorin answered. "I called a member of Harry Potter's family who is willing to relay messages for those Lord Potter is close to."

Sidra nodded, appreciating the nuances of the answer.

At 3:55 pm, Sidra arrived in the Gringotts floo room to join an unusual group heading to Potter Manor. Sidra had a tendency to work well into the evening as she became absorbed in her work. Leaving early for tea felt like a holiday. She was expecting only Gorin and Heartwise and was surprised to see her old Charms professor who introduced her to Sharpnail and Ted Tonks.

It was apparent that most of the diverse group had never visited the manor before. The head elf, Bibi, promised a tour after tea. They were settling around a large octagonal table in the sunlit orangery when a young, excited voice captured everyone's attention, "This changes everything, Sirius. Why isn't it taught this way at Hogwarts? It makes so much more sense."

Sirius let out a clear, unfettered laugh that suddenly cut off as he rounded the corner from the kitchen gardens and saw a table full of people through the transparent walls. Few had seen Harry transition from teenager to Lord but with a shift in posture, Harry took Sirius by the hand and led him inside and to the empty seat beside Ted Tonks. Harry reached out a hand to clasp Filius' shoulder in greeting, met Sidra, and welcomed everyone to Potter Manor.

Winky popped into Harry's lap after he sat down between Filius and Sharpnail, "Dobby be watching food now."

Harry smiled and let Winky prepare his tea and load up his plate with a snap of her fingers. He was glad Dobby had found a hobby. It was especially nice that it resulted in new foods for the family. Harry listened to the chit-chat as everyone busied themselves with choosing and doctoring their tea, picking sandwiches and cakes and settling in. Sirius had calmed down next to Tonks' matter-of-fact presence.

"What has you so excited this afternoon, Harry?" Filius asked.

"Herbology," Harry answered with a grin. "I've been revising to get ready for fifth year studies. Bob gave me a book that showed how herbology connected with astronomy, divination and potions. We looked at a bunch of plants in the greenhouses and Bob showed me all the ways that things work together and how you can sometimes tell just by looking at the shape of the leaves or the thickness of a stem if a plant is good for potions work."

Harry paused to breathe and took a bite of a cucumber sandwich. He loved everything Dobby fixed him and all the delicious breads Winky baked every morning, but Harry was growing especially fond of the little sandwiches served for tea at the manor. "Herbology always seemed like it was just gardening with magical plants. Of course, since I had done a lot of gardening, maybe that was just me, but I never realized how it connected to things other than using things like mandrakes for special potions."

"I've been reading about different teaching styles and was rather shocked to learn how much disagreement there is about the best way to teach different subjects," Filius responded. "A lot seems to depend upon the number of students. When there are a lot of students for fewer teachers, subjects tend to be segregated more. Smaller class sizes allow a more integrated approach, but only if you have teachers that can teach that way."

Harry blinked and looked at Filius. A slight blush was dusting the small man's cheeks and Harry nearly dislodged Winky as he twisted to hug Filius. "You did that for me," Harry crowed.

At the small commotion, the rest of the table curiously watched the interplay between Harry and Filius. Harry looked around and said with a beaming smile, "Filius was studying the best way to teach me."

"Of course, he was," said Heartwise. "The importance of family is something that all magical races have in common. At this table sit wixen, dwarrow and elves. We have much common ground but the first and most important after magic itself is the value that we all place on family."

Harry was puzzled over the new words, “Wixen and dwarrow. I’m guessing that is wizards and goblins, but I haven’t heard those words before.”

“And you most likely wouldn’t,” responded Gorin, “as both a human and a male, you would hear terms that apply to you as a male human. As a wizard, it is natural for you to think of other magical humans as wizards, but in fact, female human magicals are witches. It gets cumbersome to always say wizards and witches, so it gets shortened. The term wixen is a reference to a human magical regardless of gender.”

Harry nodded, “That makes sense, but what is a dwarrow?”

“I am a dwarrow,” Sharpnail answered. “The word goblin was first used by French wixen in the 1300s. The influence of muggle religion had already seeped into the magical world and we were viewed as evil creatures by the humans.”

“That’s horrible,” Harry gasped looking around the table and seeing the understanding nods.

“Yes and no,” Filius said. “It is horrible when you are only judged by what is immediately seen. On the other hand, dwarrow appreciate being underestimated. By answering to the term goblin, dwarrow have turned it from a term of derision to an advantage. “

“We use it to feed our ego,” Sharpnail said. “Answering to a term that is considered derogatory, we tell ourselves that we are superior to ignorant wixen.”

“So both dwarrow and wixen think they are better than the other,” Harry noted, “but neither really gets to know the other.”

“In many ways, Albus Dumbledore did you a great disservice by allowing you to enter the magical world with so little knowledge,” Tonks said. “You were not even given the basic pre-Hogwarts information that muggleborn are given.”

“Magic has used these circumstances,” Gorin said. “Many that come into the magical world simply absorb the opinions of those around them. The isolation forced upon you in childhood set you on a different path.”

“It is our fortune, Harry Potter, that, despite many obstacles, you have an open heart that sees past form or race,” Heartwise said.

“Why doesn’t Hogwarts teach these things?” Harry asked.

“A question I’m sure you will consider when you embrace your Gryffindor and Slytherin inheritances,” Tonks answered, having already seen how seriously Harry took the oaths taken as Head of Houses.

“I was promised a tour of your beautiful manor,” Gorin announced. “After, I’d like to meet to teach Lord Potter a bit about how magical races view divination and prophecy.”

Sirius saw Harry’s confusion and his protective instincts took over, “Come on, Cub. I’m told that you have some wicked quidditch moves. Time to show me what you’ve got.”

It was nearly an hour later when everyone was gathered in a small sitting room. The room selection was something Harry would never think about, but the elves did. Beyond the usual ties of affection that grew within a healthy wixen-elf bond, the elves of Potter Manor were quickly growing to view their young Lord as someone both needing and deserving of special considerations. It was the end of a busy day for their young Lord, so they chose a room decorated in deepest blue with burgundy accents. Winky had made the connection that the colors of Harry's core magic were calming to the young wizard. Winky had decorated the master suite of the manor accordingly and had altered the color of his more formal wizarding robes to match. The Potter elves had followed her lead and had modified the decorating around the manor accordingly. The preponderance of red and gold had been replaced with deep blues and greens and splashes of dark purples and plums. Had Sirius Black been in a more stable frame of mind, he would have remembered that the manor had always been an endorsement of the Gryffindor colors that generations of Potters had embraced. Now it reflected one specific Potter who was finding himself for the first time in a difficult life.

Potter Manor was impressive but not overly intimidating. Despite the size, a warmth permeated it during the few days since the newest Lord Potter had claimed the title. Magical buildings absorbed not only the magical ambiance of the physical surroundings but also the magical energy of living beings. The manor responded not only to Harry's strong core of magic but also to the layers of House magic he carried with him. The Potter magic was amplified by the Gryffindor, Peverell, and Stinchcomb magics. To most magical beings, Potter Manor felt good. Those more sensitive to magic, like Sidra and Gorin, felt the many layers that contributed to that feeling.

Harry sat on a loveseat between Filius and Winky and watched everyone settle in. As more proof that the manor was suited for hosting, the various sofas and chairs automatically resized themselves for the best comfort of their occupants.

Sidra Evergreen sat forward and, when the room was focused on her, began to speak, "Harry, I am an Unspeakable. That means that I work in the Department of Mysteries studying magic. One fascinating thing I have discovered is that every magical race has core subjects that it teaches to its young regardless of whether it is the more formal schooling that wixen, dwarrow and centaurs attend or the more casual environment that elves and mermish utilize. Those races, and others, all have basics that are taught to young magicals.

"Of particular interest is that while every magical race practices divination, it is the most unevenly taught subject. Even where it is a formal subject, such as at Hogwarts, the importance of the subject and the competence of the teaching varies wildly not only from generation to generation but even amongst a group learning together."

"You shared a prophecy you heard from Sybil Trelawney that sounds genuine," Filius said, "but most of the students and teachers consider her something of a fraud. It is most likely that she is a seer who also happens to be a bad teacher."

"Kind of like Snape," Harry said. At Sirius' snort, Harry continued, "Everyone talks about how amazing Snape is with potions, but nearly every student considers him a nightmare in class."

Filius chuckled, "That is a good example."

"My family magic is centered around mind gifts. It includes mage sight and divination," Sidra said. "Truth is, we live in our heads. I grew up learning the many ways to read past, present and future events from the ordinary things that surround us."

"Like tea leaves," Harry said.

"Yes," Sidra answered, "but it is both simpler and more complex than what is taught in third year Divination."

"Harry," Gorin said, "I'm going to ask you some questions and I want you to answer with the first thing that comes to mind. Don't think about it or wonder if it is right. Just say it."

Harry nodded.

"What is magic?"

"It's everything," Harry answered confidently.

"Where is magic?"

"Everywhere," another confident answer.

"When is magic?"

Harry didn't even hesitate, "Always."

"Who is magic?"

"Everyone," Harry answered with a frown, "or more that it's everything living."

"Why is magic?"

Harry shook his head, "It doesn't matter."

"Why not?" Sidra asked.

"Because magic just is," Harry answered, "and it might be interesting to know, but it won't change anything."

"Are you sure of that?" Hearwise asked.

Harry nodded, "Pretty sure." He looked around the room. Gorin, Heartwise and Sidra looked pleased. Filius had a look of interest on his face, like he was reading a new book. The rest seemed confused.

"Why don't they teach you that at Hogwarts?" Sidra asked.

"It's too big," Harry responded instinctively. "I don't know how to explain it any better than that, but I don't think people want really big things." Harry thought about Ron and Hermione. Hermione wanted more, but it had to fit where she understood it. Always wanting more and

bigger had left her without many friends. Ron wanted simple things like dinner and quidditch. More people were more like Ron than Hermione.

“Most people want a simple life. Even those that can see bigger things don’t necessarily want them. Then there are those that want bigger but don’t understand what they want,” Heartwise said.

“Voldemort. He wants everyone to recognize him as really big,” Harry realized.

“Exactly,” Gorin said. “Each of us has a different impact on the world. Disruption comes when we deny where magic has placed us.”

Harry thought about this. It seemed unfair, but he was pretty sure that didn't matter.

“Just let everything sit,” Heartwise said. “Those of us studying magic spend our whole lives trying to understand just a piece of it.”

“So why are you telling me this?” Harry asked.

Winky climbed onto Harry’s lap and looked at him eye to eye, “Harry Potter is great wizard. Harry Potter is big wizard.”

“But I’m just a kid,” Harry argued.

Winky nodded and placed her hands on either side of Harry’s face, “You is young but you is a great wizard. You is many Lords. You make things different.”

Flitwick explained, “Throughout history, prophecies have been made. Sirius thinks there is a prophecy that might be about you.”

Harry nodded. He had figured this somehow tied into the prophecy that had sent his parents into hiding.

“That alone makes it important that you understand how things like prophecy and divination work,” Filius said.

“But something about me makes it more,” Harry concluded. “What do I need to know?”

Filius chuckled. He was coming to appreciate Harry’s ability to focus on the immediate need when things got complicated. “There have been lots of prophecies, and some have come to pass, and others have not. Whenever someone starts changing things in their world, people will look through the prophecies and start to guess.”

“It won’t matter if the prophecy is really about you. People want simple explanations,” Gorin said. “No matter the race, most people want a simple life with simple solutions.”

“It is what you wanted when you came to me,” Filius said, “but when magic asked for more, you gave it. That is what makes you different.”

“Do you want to know the prophecy that affected your life?” Sidra asked.

Harry shook his head, “Not yet. I’m still figuring a lot of stuff out, and if it won’t get me my OWL or help my family, then it needs to wait.”

“Now,” Sidra said, turning to Sirius, “Tell me why Harry Potter, a high-level Gringotts account manager, a well-respected solicitor and a former Charms professor are so comfortable with a wanted man.”

By the time Sidra had learned of the situation with Sirius, it was time for dinner. The elves took advantage of the extra guests to open one of the small, formal dining rooms. It was also an excuse for a more formal meal. Dobby and Winky were hesitant at first to join, but Harry insisted, and Gorin’s presence helped ease their discomfort.

Harry had watched from a distance as his relatives entertained neighbors and business associates. It had always looked stiff and awkward. Seeing a group of adults that were comfortable with each other was educational. Harry sat at the head of the table, and initially, it felt uncomfortable, but the easy acceptance from everyone soon had him relaxing. The adults seemed to communicate with each other, and Ted Tonks and Sidra Evergreen were seated on either side of Harry. Sidra took her cue from Ted and shared with Harry anecdotes from her own experiences at similar dinners. Ted explained the various courses and gave him practical tips on navigating unknown dining situations. Both wixen assured him that everyone had to learn to comfortably fake it until it became second nature to follow the ebb and flow of more formal dining situations.

After everyone was gone, Filius and Harry went outside to a shielded patio for their evening dueling practice. After the seriousness of the evening, Filius suggested they have fun. Harry called his wand and practiced the various charms. The first time he shot streams of colorful string from his wand, the strings hit the shield so hard that it created a loud reverberation. Harry looked sheepishly at Filius only to find the man laughing with tears streaming down his cheeks.

"I just had an image of you taking down an opponent with string," Filius gasped. "Can you imagine what that would do to the reputation of someone like Lucius Malfoy?"

“Maybe that’s the real answer to defeating Voldemort and the death eaters,” Harry suggested, “don’t kill them, just embarrass them so much they quit showing up.”

As if it were a real possibility, Filius introduced Harry to spell chains and helped Harry develop chains of the silly charms they played with. Filius taught Harry to experiment with different spell combinations and repetitions and how to tell which were more effective in different situations.

There was still plenty of dodging, but by the time they were finished, Filius and Harry looked like color bombs had exploded on them. Harry favored blues, greens and purples with occasional streaks of red and deep pink. Filius liked the other end of the color spectrum and mainly used shades of yellow and orange with the occasional deep red. Both had clumps of sticky string though Harry was more covered in the string while what landed on Filius tended

to cling more tenaciously. Harry was also learning that while he had a definite advantage in terms of power, Filius' agility and speed canceled a lot of it out.

When the elves reminded them of the time, both wizards were tired and ready for a much-needed cleanup. Harry took a quick shower while Dobby filled the deep bathtub with hot water that smelled soothingly of lavender and mint. Harry relaxed in his bath and let himself sink into his magic, knowing that the elves would not let him stay too long.

By the time Healer Tonks arrived for the next Skelegro treatment, Harry was relaxed and reflecting on everything he had learned. Before he got into the bed, he stood in front of Tonks and pulled the Black magic to the front of his awareness. "I would like you to join me Friday evening for dinner. It is House business and you may come alone, or you are welcome to bring your husband. Your daughter is also welcome."

"Thank you, Lord Black," Andromeda Tonks said formally. "I will let you know if anyone will accompany me." As she watched, Harry relaxed and went from being the Head of her former House to the young patient she was treating. "Okay, Harry," she said with an easy smile, "into the bed with you."

With a grin, Harry hopped onto the bed and snuggled in. He had just swallowed the needed potions when Winky popped beside him and started telling a new story. As Harry fell asleep to Winky's words, he knew she'd tell it again when he could stay awake to hear the complete tale.

The Turning of Days

Chapter Notes

July 13-15

That week set a pattern that would follow as Harry learned about his various Houses. Monday morning was for meetings with Sharpnail, Borner and Solicitor Tonks. Monday afternoon was spent with his healing team. Healer Tonks concentrated on the physical. Heartwise concerned herself with his emotional health. Gorin monitored his magical health and taught him how to exercise and care for it.

Tuesday and Wednesday morning were spent studying the Grimoire for that week's House after he had read and answered letters from his friends and advisors. Afternoons were spent in Herbology. Bob was a stern taskmaster but Harry barely noticed as he realized that Herbology was so much more than plants with magic. As the weeks passed, Harry often returned to his greenhouse study area after tea to continue the lessons.

Thursday was the most stressful day of the week though as the weeks progressed, Harry was able to relax more. The morning was a review of that week's House. Every day he recited the oath and by Thursday morning, it was memorized. He decided where he wanted the focus of that week's interview to be and practiced ways to direct attention to it. His near-daily correspondence with Borner was an education in effective communication. Harry learned that it was more than what he said. It was also how he said it and how some words worked better than others.

Harry could barely eat lunch before the afternoon interview. The elves adapted and had all of Harry's favorite fruits cut up with ice-cold juice. They knew that after the interview, he would be ready for a substantial tea.

Despite the high-stress levels, Harry managed the interviews well. It helped that it was a group effort. Dobby made sure Harry was never alone from the time he woke up on Thursday until after the interview. Anytime Harry started to panic, Dobby was at his side chattering away until Harry was calm. Winky made sure that Harry was dressed like a prosperous young lord in fashionable, high-quality wizard wear in the appropriate colors for that week's House. Harry found it easier to focus on that House's magic when he could look down and see the House colors.

Filius was simply there. The only time he left Harry's side on Thursday was during the actual interview. The rest of the day, before and after, he was always quietly around. He often sat to the side reading but he found numerous ways to reach out with affectionate gestures. As a concession to Harry's stress, Filius restrained from ruffling Harry's hair until after the interview.

While Harry was never totally comfortable during the interviews, the professionalism of the Daily Prophet reporter helped. Terrance Threadmore was almost the complete opposite of Rita Skeeter. Instead of a quick quotes quill, Threadmore used a dictaquill that took down every word. At the beginning of each interview, he reiterated the confidentiality oath he had taken. At the end of the interview, he showed Harry everything recorded by the dictaquill with the promise that Harry would have the completed article Saturday morning to review before Sunday's publication.

Borner and Solicitor Tonks were there at the beginning of each interview. After the Black interview, Threadmore quickly caught on that he would be interviewing Harry Potter each week as the Head of a different House and recognized the opportunity this presented. By respecting the boundaries outlined and being as accurate as possible to what Harry said, Threadmore was building the foundation of a lifelong relationship between a major figure in the magical world and the magical press. While readers devoured the scandals and speculations presented by Rita Skeeter, those stories made it harder to get the facts of what was really happening. This created a vicious cycle that let the editor of the Daily Prophet justify both Skeeter's gossip-mongering and accepting the ministry's propaganda. The real newsmakers avoided the press which created a news vacuum. Skeeter and the ministry filled the vacuum with stories that further alienated those that had the information the public needed. Threadmore had a passion for journalism and saw a glimmer of what could be.

After the interview and a hearty tea, Harry slept until dinner. Thursday's dinner was always quiet and limited to just Harry, Filius, Dobby and Winky. Filius and Harry quickly designated Thursday evening for broom dueling. It was the perfect end to the day and left Harry ready for a good night's sleep.

Friday and Saturday were much like Tuesday and Wednesday with the addition of lunch and dinner guests. This was when Harry reached out as Head of House and started consolidating alliances and conducting House business. Harry, of course, did not think of it with such formality. He thought of it as getting set up for Sunday's publication of the interview. He was learning from all his mentors that preparation made everything else easier.

Each day, from after dinner until after breakfast the next morning, was family time. Sometimes Sirius was there and later Moony would join them occasionally but no one else. Sunday was kept strictly to the four of them. Even before they moved into the Keep, Winky and Dobby prepared the meals that day. Sometimes it was a quiet day. Sometimes it was getting out to explore something new. It wasn't so much about what they did but that they insulated themselves from the rest of the world. Harry needed this day of restoration and all of them valued and guarded it.

The morning of the first interview was notable not just for Harry's almost overwhelming nerves but for the packet that arrived via owl from Gringotts that contained a list of all House Black properties and vaults along with a page for each vault listing the contents and who had permission to access the vaults. With these lists was an explanation from Sharpnail about how House Vaults worked.

Outside of the treaties between the Dwarrow Nation and the Ministry of Magic, relationships between dwarrow and wixen were governed by contracts. When you opened a Gringotts vault, you signed a contract. Most wixen just signed the basic contract provided by Gringotts not realizing that it was negotiable. Muggleborn, in particular, accepted the contract assuming it was like the contract provided by a bank that was largely regulated by muggle banking laws and had built-in legal protections.

In addition to individual contracts for individual vaults, Gringotts had contracts with Heads of Houses. These contracts stipulated not only who owned the vaults (usually the Head of House) but who had access and whether or not ownership and access were transferable. Each Head of House could renegotiate the contract but few did and often House contracts went unchanged for centuries.

House Black had always been a controlling House. The Head traditionally exerted enormous influence over its members. The most common means of control was financial, whether through disinheritance and subsequent loss of access to family assets or removal of access to vaults. This control was part of being a Black and accepted as inevitable.

Black House magic was ancient and strong. It was one reason that Black wixen had such a formidable reputation. With the emphasis on the possible loss of wealth, most members of House Black never considered what it would mean to lose access to the House magic. Reading the numerous grimoire entries, Harry had been shocked at this imbalance. Yes, being poor sucked but how could that possibly compare to losing access to part of the magic you used?

The strength of the Black House magic was one reason why Sirius had managed to survive Azkaban. His innocence and animagus form had helped but the core of his survival and sanity was in the House magic. It was why Bellatrix remained a formidable witch despite her years in prison. Yes, there was a rumor that she had succumbed to a hereditary madness but Bellatrix had always played that up for effect.

The actual interview was both more and less stressful than Harry expected. When it was done, he would describe it as being like a really important exam without the nuisance of a quill.

In his correspondence with Borner, Harry had settled on three things he wanted to communicate in the first interview. Most important was the innocence of his godfather. In the actual interview, Borner suggested that it be treated almost like an afterthought. Harry also wanted to undermine both the ministry's smear campaign and the blood purists that benefited from the ministry's denial.

There was an unexpected consequence to the interview. The oath of House Black became more than a general guideline. It settled in him as a goad. It wasn't just about freeing Sirius and accepting Andromeda back into the House. It was about examining every living member of House Black and holding them to the oath's standard. During his morning meditation, Harry focused on the Black magic. He could both feel and see the tendrils of silvery magic that stretched out to everyone that had access to the House magic. His magical connection with Sirius was the strongest. It was a thick, solid thread made strong both by the magical

connection of Head and Heir and by the emotional connection between godfather and godson.

The interview was barely over when Harry asked Dobby to ask Heir Black to join Lord Black for tea. It was weird but Harry was learning to think of himself differently depending on what he was doing. Lord and Heir Black were very different from Harry and his godfather, Sirius. Before Harry started eating the almost alarming amount of food the elves had set out for tea, he shared his thoughts with Filius and Sirius and asked for their advice on dealing with the various house members. Then Harry started eating while Sirius began talking about the members of House Black.

Harry listened as Filius and Sirius concluded that dealing with Narcissa Black was best done before the article was published. Narcissa would already know there was a new Lord but not giving her or Lucius more time to manipulate public perception was in Harry's best interest. Sirius also impressed on Harry that as Head of House Black, there was no such thing as short notice. Just as Sirius had immediately answered a summons, Narcissa Black Malfoy would show equal responsiveness.

While Harry rested, Sirius sent letters to his cousins, Andy and Cissy. He kept the tone friendly and casual but knew they would read the subtext. He was speaking as Heir for Lord Black. By the time Harry woke up for dinner, there was a plan. Step one was the planned dinner with Healer Tonks. Andromeda and her daughter, Nymphadora, would join Harry for a casual dinner on Friday evening. After dinner, Harry would offer to formally rejoin Andromeda Tonks to House Black.

Harry woke Friday morning feeling refreshed. An evening of fun and a good night's sleep had let him release the stress of the interview. Before his Gringotts meeting, Harry sent letters to Sharpnail, Solicitor Tonks and Borner requesting advice concerning House dealings. Were there laws or customs for what he wanted to do?

At 8:30, Harry was met in the Gringotts lobby by Bill Weasley. "You are creating quite a stir, Lord Potter," the young curse breaker grinned.

"Yeah," answered Harry with his own grin, "but this time only some of it is my fault."

Bill laughed and directed Harry to follow him deeper into the bank, "How are you feeling without your scar?"

"Amazing," Harry answered. "I was so used to the pain it caused that I didn't even know what it would be like without it."

Bill's only response was a sudden blink which Harry interpreted as surprise. Bill led Harry into a room that was mostly taken up by a large round table. Heartwise was there along with three other dwarrow, all standing around the table. Bill guided Harry to the empty seat beside Heartwise and pulled out the chair for Harry. As Harry sat, so did Bill, Heartwise and two of the remaining dwarrow. Bill introduced the standing dwarrow as Ragnok.

“Good morning, Lord Potter,” Ragnok said. “Seated with you is a team that was assembled to examine the soul shard that was contained in your scar. They would like to ask you some questions as well as share with you what they have learned. I only ask that you limit any discussion of this matter with those that are already aware of the soul shard that was in your scar.”

Harry nodded, feeling nervous. He didn’t know who Ragnok was but from the behavior of Bill and the dwarrow, Harry concluded that Ragnok was very important. At Harry’s nod, Ragnok looked around the table, making eye contact with each person at the table. With a decisive nod, Ragnok turned and left the room.

“Harry, this is Fastsnap,” Bill indicated the goblin directly across from Harry. “Fastsnap is our team leader. He has more experience than all of us here plus ten other curse breakers. Grapplelock,” Bill indicated the dwarrow beside Fastsnap, “is renowned throughout the Dwarrow nation for his ability to get in or out of any locked door.”

Harry grinned. No matter what else happened, he was still a fourteen-year-old boy and this was cool. He was in what was an underground room with people who had actual adventures.

Harry’s smile soon faltered as Heartwise explained that his soul shard was a horcrux and everything that meant. Bill explained that the dark objects called to Harry’s vaults also contained horcruxes. Heartwise retold the tale and gave Harry a simplified explanation of how they determined how many horcruxes there were.

“So before Voldemort tried to kill me, he had already made five horcruxes,” Harry stated. “Was he trying to make another horcrux using me or was that an accident?”

“We don’t know, Harry,” Bill answered. “That’s part of what we are trying to figure out, although we may not be able to.”

“But if Voldemort was planning to use my death to make a horcrux, wouldn’t he have needed something there to put it in?” Harry asked.

“He would,” Fastsnap answered gruffly, “but we have no way of knowing what happened that night. The only public account was given by Albus Dumbledore and he wasn’t even there. The ministry quickly took over the site and sealed it.”

“Oh,” Harry said suddenly. “I never even thought about all that. Did my parents own the house they were living in?”

“You’ll have to ask your account manager that,” Grapplelock answered. “And it isn’t relevant.”

“But it is,” Harry pushed back. “If my parents owned the house, then that property would have become mine and I have a right to know what the ministry took from me. I mean, it wasn’t just a house. My parents had furniture and clothes and all the stuff you live with. What happened to all that? If we can find out what was in the house, there might be a clue about what happened.”

Harry pulled a piece of parchment and his fountain pen out of his bag. He quickly wrote out a note and called Dobby, "Please take this to Sharpnail." As Dobby popped away, Harry explained. "I've given Sharpnail permission to discuss anything concerning that property with you. Maybe that will help."

"Thank you, Lord Potter," Fastsnap said. "Do you have any other questions about what we have discussed so far?"

Harry thought and turned to Bill, "The Slytherin locket and the Peverell ring both contained horcruxes. What about the diary? That had to be a horcrux"

"That is what we think. From what Dumbledore told my father, it does sound like a horcrux tried to take life using my sister," Bill said. "Unfortunately, we don't have the diary to test it. My father never knew what happened to it."

Harry thought over the sequence of events, "I got the diary from Dumbledore and put one of my socks in it. I gave the diary to Malfoy who handed it to Dobby. Dobby found the sock and was free. Malfoy tried to curse me but Dobby protected me. So Dobby probably knows." Harry called for Dobby again and asked him about the diary.

"Dobby gives bad diary to Dumbly," Dobby answered, "Dobby sees diary in Dumbly office when Dobby work at Hoggywarts."

"So we need to ask Dumbledore for it," Bill concluded. "We need to decide how much of all this to reveal."

The dwarrow immediately started debating what they would reveal while Harry and Dobby just looked at each other. Suddenly, Harry's laughter rang out. The dwarrow stopped and looked at Harry with varying levels of irritation at the interruption.

"Dobby, please go ask Limney to retrieve the diary as soon as possible without alerting Dumbledore," Harry said. Dobby popped out and Harry explained to the others, "I own Hogwarts and all the elves there are bonded to me."

By the time Dobby turned up with the diary, the team was questioning Harry about his scar. Looking back, it was obvious that the level of pain was directly related to how close Harry was to Voldemort. Harry started with the opening feast in his first year. By the time Harry told of the encounter in the graveyard, no one was doubting the importance of talking to Harry about the horcrux he had unknowingly housed.

When Harry returned to the manor, he found several letters waiting at his desk along with a large plate of fruit. He opened up a large envelope from Samuel Jameson and then started eating the fruit as he read through the letter and looked at the plans Jameson had drawn up for Peverell Keep. From what Harry could see, it looked good but he set it aside to show to Filius and the elves.

Next, Harry opened a letter from Greengrass & Associates. In the letter from Ted Tonks was the reminder to look over the options for taking control of the Daily Prophet. Harry found that folder and read through the options. Each option had a summation that estimated both the

probable success and the amount of time it would take to fully execute the option. The plan with the greatest chance of working was to gradually buy up shares of the paper as they came up for sale. It was estimated that within a year, Harry would have enough shares to influence the editorial policies of the papers. Within three years, it was estimated that Harry would have enough of a controlling interest to dictate the day-to-day operations if he desired. This plan was judged the best option for success because most of the transactions would happen out of sight and by the time it was noticed, it would be too late to counter. Harry put the subject on his list of things to discuss in Monday's meeting with Tonks.

Next, Harry opened a letter from Arthur Weasley requesting a meeting with Lord Black. Harry grinned and quickly penned a response suggesting lunch on Saturday with the floo address. He gave the response to a Black elf to deliver to Arthur. Harry hoped that his words with Arthur earlier in the week would at least make the man question a few things.

Finally, Harry opened the letter from the twins.

Dearest Harrikins or
Greetings Lord Black or
Salutations Lord Potter,

From our observations, Bill and Dad definitely know. The others are in various forms of denial by focusing on things that while interesting are not the point. Ginny keeps going on about how posh you looked and how obviously expensive your robes were. Naturally, this leads to dreamy sighs as she imagines herself as Lady Potter and able to wear equally nice clothes. She doesn't actually come out and say that but we have been her brothers for a long time.

Ron can't get over the fact that you silenced Sirius' mom and she hasn't spoken since. Hermione bemoans not only that you bonded with Kreacher (without even wondering how that is possible) but that you have been brainwashed into thinking that is what elves really want.

It's mom that is really different. We don't think she has figured out that you are Lord Black but something changed. She is no longer getting hopeful looks when Ginny gets dreamy about you. Instead, she just points out how young Ginny is and not to count gnomes before they hatch. She clucks over Ron and Hermione without really saying anything at all.

The biggest change, though, is how she has treated us in the last few days. Harrikins, she apologized to us for doubting our dreams and told us how proud she was of our creativity and determination. Last night, she asked us to stay after dinner and started talking about her brothers, Fabian and Gideon, and what they were like. She has also insisted that we go to Gringotts on Monday for an inheritance test but won't say more.

We do adore you but we have to ask: Did you hex our mother? If so, please don't undo it. If not, help us understand if you can, otherwise, we will have to ask Dad at some point and right now we are not ready for more parent/child talks.

Since we will be going to Gringotts on Monday morning, we think this is the perfect opportunity to have lunch with you and catch up on all the news because there obviously is

some. Whatever has happened, it only matters that you are safe and happy.

Oh, yeah, we almost forgot. Dumbledore keeps trying to get into the house. We don't know what is actually happening but Snape has been by a couple of times. He has flooed, apparated and entered the front door with no problem. Every time Dumbledore can't get in (and has tried many times), he sends Snape. Snape seems pretty chuffed that he can get into the house and Dumbledore can't. Yes, we definitely want to know more about that.

Let us know about Monday,

Your favorite pranksters

Harry immediately responded.

To my favorite pranksters,

Yes, there is lots of news and while I'm not being public about it, I'm not going to act as if it isn't happening. I'll answer all your questions on Monday.

One thing I am learning is that people often see what they want or expect to see rather than what is actually there. I am discovering how much bigger the world is when you look beyond your expectations.

I think it is really interesting that the Black magic is letting Snape in and that tells me more about Snape's character than anything else could.

For the record, I am very fond of Ginny but it isn't the I want to date her kind of fond. I'm not exactly sure but I think it is how I might feel about a cousin.

Your biggest pranking fan,
Harry

Harry spent the rest of the morning studying in the Black grimoire and reading accounts of how previous Heads had dealt with both accepting and rejecting someone into or out of the House. In addition to the emphasis on respecting the purity of magic, House Black strongly believed in the power of intent. Thinking about how he had changed the wards on the London Manor, Harry realized that the Black magic had led him to do what was necessary. Harry knew that the only way he could properly deal with Black family business was to stay connected to the House magic and simply trust it. With that realization, Harry set the grimoire aside and went to enjoy lunch and an afternoon of Herbology.

Harry enjoyed Friday evening with the Tonks witches. Andromeda insisted that when she wasn't acting as Healer Tonks, she was Andy. Nymphadora, call me Tonks, was smart and funny. She was a junior auror and shared a flat with two other young women that worked at the ministry. It was during dessert that Tonks brought up a potential conflict.

“I was at Grimmauld Place Monday evening when Headmaster Dumbledore told us that Lord Black would not let us meet there anymore,” Tonks said. “I need to know if acceptance back into House Black creates a conflict with that group.”

“What would you consider a conflict?” Harry asked.

Tonks answered immediately, “If you wanted me to spy on them and tell you what happens at the meetings.”

Harry laughed, “I don’t care beyond where it impacts people I care about. Lord Black’s disagreement is with Dumbledore.”

“What happened with him?” Tonks asked, ignoring her mother's signals to not ask.

Harry let the Black magic come to the front of his awareness, “Albus Dumbledore knew that Sirius Black was unjustly imprisoned. Dumbledore, as Head of the Wizengamot, had not only the ability but also the obligation to immediately take steps to clear Sirius. By ignoring his obligation, Albus Dumbledore did harm to a member of House Black.”

“I know Sirius is innocent and that Dumbledore knows that but it didn’t occur to me what that meant,” Tonks said.

“People that trust Dumbledore don’t seem to question him,” Harry said, “but no one always makes the right choices. In this case, Dumbledore has acted against House Black whether or not that was his intention. I hope that answers any questions you have.

“Now,” Harry said, “I have a question for you, Andy. You chose Ted Tonks over the obligations imposed on you by your House. Do you regret that?”

“Not at all,” answered Andromeda. “It was hard to lose the Black magic. Even more, it hurt to lose my sisters but I could not choose either of those over my love for Ted.”

“Do you wish to be restored to House Black?” Harry asked.

“Yes but not at the cost of my family,” Andromeda answered resolutely.

Harry reached out and took Andromeda’s hands in his, “Andromeda Irma Black Tonks, you are restored to House Black.”

A bright silver light surrounded their clasped hands and expanded to surround Andromeda. As Andromeda gasped, the silver light settled into her. Beside Andromeda, Nymphadora started to glow with the same light. As the light settled, Nymphadora was left trembling.

Harry smiled as he felt the Black magic dance amongst them, “Stop by Gringotts in the next week and see Sharpnail. He will have information for both of you on the Black vaults set aside for your use.”

By the time Andromeda accompanied Harry to his room for the last dose of skelegro, Harry barely needed the dreamless sleep. It seemed like every time he had finished one thing, Sirius had been there to teach him more about being a Lord. His head felt crammed full.

Harry let himself have a bit of a lie-in on Saturday. He was looking forward to lunch with Arthur Weasley but tried not to think about that night's dinner with the Malfoys. After breakfast, Harry, Filius, Winky and Dobby spread out the plans for Peverell Keep. As they went over the plans for each floor, tears rolled down Harry's cheeks. This would be his home. Hogwarts had been more of a home to him than Privet Drive ever had but the castle was still his school, even if he did technically own the castle now. Potter Manor was amazing and everything Harry might have imagined for a rich, titled Lord but Harry still felt out of place amid all the luxury. Peverell Keep just felt right. If pushed, Harry could have explained but it was enough that the Keep felt like home even before the first room was planned.

Saturday evening was Harry's first time hosting a formal dinner. The guests included Lord and Lady Malfoy, along with their son, Draco, Ted and Andromeda Tonks and Sirius Black. After talking it over with Bibi, it was decided to use a smaller dining room with a round table so there were no issues of precedence.

Just as Harry started to get nervous in anticipation of a formal dinner, Sirius reminded Harry of a very important fact, "You are the Black of House Black. When Lord Black hosts anything, he sets the rules. You literally can't do anything wrong."

Dinner went better than Harry expected. As planned, Harry entered the small salon where everyone had gathered. Ted Tonks and Lucius Malfoy were standing to the side, drinks in hand. Lucius looked stiff and uncomfortable while Ted looked amused.

As Harry walked into the room, he let his Black magic rise to the front. The four Blacks in the room noticed. Sirius and Andromeda immediately loosely fisted their right hands and placed them over their hearts and dipped their heads in respect. Narcissa had a moment of confusion upon seeing them but with little hesitation imitated her sister and cousin in showing respect to Harry. Draco just looked confused.

Harry stopped in front of Sirius, "Good evening, Heir Black, and welcome."

Sirius grinned and immediately engulfed Harry in a hug, "Good evening, Lord Black." He released Harry and made a wide gesture, "Are you going to keep this room in Black colors?"

"I'm thinking of it," Harry answered. I like the idea of decorating the salons to represent my different Houses." Harry then turned to Andromeda, "Andy, welcome back."

"Thank you, Lord Black," Andromeda answered and then reached out to embrace him. "I'd like to introduce my sister, Narcissa Black Malfoy."

"Lady Malfoy," Harry said, taking her hand and placing a kiss just above the back of her hand as Sirius had taught him, "It is a pleasure to meet you."

"Thank you, Lord Black," Narcissa responded smoothly and motioned Draco to move next to her, "and, of course, you already know Draco."

Harry nodded his head, "Welcome to Potter Manor, Draco."

“What are you playing at, Potter?” Draco snarled.

Harry ignored Draco and turned back to Narcissa, “Sirius has been passing on the lessons he learned growing up as I did not have that same opportunity. As I’m sure you passed those lessons on to your son, perhaps it is time for a refresher.”

With that, Harry turned to Lucius Malfoy, “Welcome, Lord Malfoy.”

“Lord Black,” Malfoy responded with forced politeness. “I suppose it is understandable that Sirius passed the Headship to you in light of his current legal difficulties.”

“Actually,” Sirius answered, coming up beside Harry with an arm thrown casually around his shoulders, “I was never meant to be Lord Black except in my parents' early imagination. Grandfather Arcturus named Harry the heir shortly after he was born.”

That news was a surprise to the Malfoys and Tonks. Although Ted Tonks had known Harry was Head of House Black, he had no idea it had been determined so early.

“I am surprised that Grandfather chose someone so distant in the bloodline,” Narcissa commented.

“According to the House grimoire, Arcturus believed that a prophecy made by Elladora Black referred to me,” Harry answered.

That surprised everyone in the room and Sirius spoke up, “You didn’t tell me that, pup.”

“I have to keep some secrets from you,” Harry responded with a smile, “or you might think you are something special.” Harry’s tone was teasing and Sirius’ guffawed response reflected the closeness between Head and Heir. Although genuine, it was also deliberately planned to dash any hopes Lucius Malfoy might have about his role in the Black family.

While waiting for the arrival of Lord Black, elves had served the appetizer which consisted of muggle martinis along with toast rounds topped with a hardboiled egg slice, thinly sliced smoked salmon and a dollop of caviar. An elf stood beside Harry holding a plate with a few toast rounds and Harry smiled in anticipation. Dobby had introduced him to caviar earlier in the week and Harry loved it. Harry never thought to ask about the cost of the savory treat but Sirius and Filius already had a bet on Harry's reaction.

Another elf stood holding a crystal highball glass with ginger ale. Andy had suggested it as a suitable alternative to the adults' martinis. Later, Sirius would show Harry a memory of everyone's reaction to the muggle drinks. Sirius had also passed on another lesson learned from his grandfather: the Head of an Ancient and Noble House did not juggle plates and cups. Harry had practiced taking food and drink from waiting elves while making conversation.

Harry happily watched the two sisters standing, heads together, while he ate another toast round and drank some ginger ale. When he was done, Harry stepped up to Narcissa, "Lady Malfoy, may I escort you to the dining room?"

Like the salon, the small dining room was decorated in Black House colors. Against the pale gray tablecloth, matte black plates were trimmed in silver and glossy black and were surrounded by sparkling silver trimmed crystal and black trimmed silver flatware. It was dramatic without being gaudy.

"This is stunning," Andy said. The previous night's dinner had been kept casual but tonight's dinner had a different purpose.

"Several of my elves have an interest in art and design," Harry responded. "I am happy to accept their expertise in these matters."

There was no mistaking Harry's message. Harry, or more importantly Lord Black, accepted the expertise of his elves. Harry reinforced the message as they sat where the place cards indicated, "My grandfather, Fleamont Potter, set up Potter Manor and lands to be both self-sustaining and able to help supply the local villages. Tonight's menu features what is grown and raised here. The Head Potter elf will describe each course as it is served."

"Head Potter elf," Lucius said with disdain. "Are there no Black elves?"

"Of course, there are," Harry answered easily, "and a few are serving tonight but since I am hosting here, I wanted the menu to reflect what the manor produces."

Harry didn't notice the looks exchanged amongst the Malfoys as the placeholders were exchanged for the hors d'oeuvre course.

"This course is a wild garlic crêpe with roasted portobello mushrooms and herbed creme fraîche with a beet and red cabbage slaw," Bibi announced, "with a Linaria Valley chardonnay."

As Bibi popped away, first bites were taken to the accompaniment of appreciative murmurs.

Toward the end of the course, Narcissa leaned into Harry and asked, "The wine for you and Draco,"

"Is diluted," Harry assured her. "I received stern warnings about alcohol and an immature core."

Narcissa nodded, "It is an excellent wine."

"Everyone keeps telling me I will grow to appreciate it more," Harry said quietly for her ears.

As plates disappeared, Bibi announced the next course, "Tonight's fish course is a seafood scialatielli."

New plates appeared with thick, short pasta tossed with fresh fish and seafood in a creamy tomato sauce.

After a palate cleanser of cucumber mint sorbet, Bibi announced the main course, "The main course tonight is honeyed lamb chops with a side of leek and potato risotto. Lord Black has chosen a Bordeaux from Chateau Margaux."

“Did you actually choose the wine, Potter?” Draco asked with his usual sneer.

“Yes,” Harry answered. “It was part of an herbology lesson understanding how different herbs go with different foods and drinks. It was really interesting.”

“Why would you study herbology during break?” Draco asked in disbelief.

“The elves here know so much about growing things,” Harry answered. “It would be foolish not to learn from them.”

Andromeda took the momentary silence to change the conversation, “I love risotto, Harry, but I’ve never had it made with potato instead of rice.”

Harry caught Lucius Malfoy’s eye before answering, “Dobby likes to visit muggle restaurants and watch them cook. He told the kitchen elves about it.”

The varying reactions of the Malfoy family were the best entertainment of the night. The Tonks didn’t know the backstory and looked on as Narcissa’s legendary glares kept her husband and son silent. Sirius and Harry became very interested in their lamb chops to keep from laughing.

Things might have calmed down with the salad course had Draco not been foolish enough to ask what other foods Harry had been introduced to by a house elf. While Draco’s tone of voice implied it was meant as an insult, Harry enthusiastically told Draco some of the foods that Dobby had introduced from the muggle world.

By the time Bibi announced a selection of Welsh cheeses, the Malfoys were completely silent while Ted and Sirius looked like this was the most fun dinner could be. Thankfully Andromeda and Harry kept up an easy conversation about how Harry was enjoying learning about the manor his father had grown up in.

When Harry announced that dessert would be served in the salon, there were several sighs of relief.

Two side tables were set up. One held a selection of tea, coffee and dessert wines while the other held small plates of dark chocolate cake with a scoop of blood orange sorbet.

Harry chose to sit near Draco while he ate his dessert. Harry knew that the evening was going well but it was exhausting and the hardest part was still ahead. Thankfully Draco decided that not talking to Harry would be some sort of insult so Harry enjoyed a quiet dessert while the adults made small talk.

To Harry’s surprise, it was Winky that vanished his dessert plate and handed him a cup of tea prepared just the way he preferred. The encouraging smile and hidden pat on his back was just what he needed. When Harry handed the empty cup to Winky, he rose and approached Narcissa, “Lady Malfoy, please join me for a private word.”

Harry offered his arm to Narcissa and saw out of the corner of his eye when Sirius intercepted Lucius’ attempt to follow.

Harry escorted Narcissa to the smallest salon in the manor. Harry had deliberately had the elves decorate this salon in what he considered his personal colors. The trappings of House Black were a message to his guests but this room reminded Harry that ultimately his authority was granted to him by Magic itself.

"Lady Malfoy," Harry began, "thank you for the many ways you have promoted House Black in the years it lacked a Head."

Narcissa inclined her head. Until asked a direct question or invited to speak, she would remain silent as House protocol dictated.

"I was raised without any knowledge of magic," Harry said. "I started Hogwarts knowing less than the average muggleborn. Hagrid was my first introduction to the magical world."

Harry paused and let the full import of that sink in before continuing, "I have chosen to focus my first efforts on House Black because Sirius never deserved what happened to him. My first surprise was the oath I took to lead House Black. Are you familiar with the oath?"

"No, my lord," Narcissa answered. "Grandfather believed it was a private matter."

Harry snorted, "Perhaps if he had kept that oath, it would have remained so."

"I, Harry James Potter, accept responsibility for House Black and do swear, by blood, by magic and by spirit, to honor the purity of magic. I promise to protect the pursuit and practice of magical knowledge. I will hold all members of House Black to be magically faithful to these principles."

Harry looked at Narcissa, "Toujours Pur was never about blood politics until Arcturus Black folded before the power of Voldemort and allowed House Black to violate everything it stood for."

Harry stood and walked to stand in front of Narcissa, "House Black was on the edge of ruin because of that cowardice."

Narcissa paled and the effort of not reacting left her trembling.

"Since taking that oath, I have repeated it many times," Harry said. "I have studied the Black grimoire. I have learned what it means to be a Black. Do you know what I've learned, Lady Malfoy?"

Narcissa shook her head, shocked at the hardness that had entered Harry's voice.

"A Black bows to no one."

Harry returned to his seat, "By tonight's end, you will be a Black or a Malfoy. There is no compromise."

Lucius Malfoy burst into the salon, "This is unacceptable"

‘I allowed Lady Malfoy the courtesy of discussing this with you,’ Harry responded, ‘but your opinion does not matter.’

“You do not want to make an enemy of me, Potter,” Malfoy spat.

Harry responded the only way he could. He laughed.

“You think this is a laughing matter?” Malfoy asked with a sneer.

There was no hesitancy or uncertainty in Harry’s response. “Lucius Malfoy, you became my enemy when you put Tom Riddle’s diary in Ginevra Weasley’s cauldron. You were my enemy when you threatened and attempted to hex me at the end of that same school year. You were my enemy when you answered Voldemort’s summons and knelt before him in the graveyard. You were my enemy when you laughed as Voldemort tortured me.”

Harry stood and turned to fully face Malfoy, “I have faced your chosen lord four times. Three of those times, I defeated him. The fourth time, I may not have defeated him but he did not defeat me no matter what you tell yourself. Can you really convince yourself that I care if you are my enemy?

“I am going to conclude my business with Lady Malfoy. When that is done, I will be happy to face you on my dueling pitch.” Harry walked past Malfoy and left the room.

“Have you made your decision?” Harry asked Narcissa.

“It is not a choice I can make, my Lord,” Narcissa responded, looking at Harry directly.

Harry understood and asked bluntly, “Do you love your husband?”

“I beg your pardon.”

“Do you love your husband?” Harry repeated.

“Ours was an arranged marriage,” Narcissa answered.

“I am aware,” Harry responded. “Do you love your husband?”

Narcissa shook her head, “No. I cannot.”

Harry accepted the answer and then nodded, “Do you wish to decide for Draco or will you let him decide?”

“Draco is a Black,” Narcissa answered firmly, “but I wish to speak to him before.”

Harry called Bibi, “Please send an elf to bring Draco Malfoy here.”

By the end of the evening, Narcissa and Draco Black were guests at Potter Manor. Lucius Malfoy had been magically ejected from the manor. Andromeda, Ted and Sirius had joined Filius in the library to share tales of the evening. Harry Potter relaxed and let himself soak in a bath overfilled with brightly colored bubbles. Tomorrow was Sunday and they would have breakfast individually then go to the Keep and spend the day there. No House business, no studying, just Harry, Filius, Dobby and Winky.

It had been three weeks since Harry Potter decided to change his life. Wizarding Britain was already changing in response.

Lord Black

Chapter Summary

July 10-16

Becoming Head of House Black was more than just taking an oath and putting on a ring. While House Black had been without a Head for nearly a decade, it had not been inactive. Politically, House Black had been represented by proxy. The proxy was easy to undo with a Ministry filing. At his usual Monday morning meeting with Solicitor Tonks, Harry had signed the appropriate paperwork and affixed the Black seal. Upon filing, a notice was sent to Lucius Malfoy informing him that Lord Black was revoking the proxy. Six days before the general public was informed of a new Lord Black, rumors would start.

Narcissa Black was a proud daughter of her House but her generation had not fared well. One cousin was dead. One cousin was currently a fugitive. Her older sister, Andromeda, was disinherited while her younger sister, Bellatrix, would spend the rest of her life in Azkaban. Narcissa hoped that eventually her son, Draco, would inherit the title and one of his children would take the Black name.

The first indication of change came in the form of a roar emitting from Lucius Malfoy's study late Monday. Narcissa was in her personal salon answering invitations to various social and charity events and dropped her quill at the sudden sound. She had just stood when an elf popped into the room, "Master is calling for his Cissy."

Narcissa entered her husband's study to see him standing behind his desk, face contorted in anger with a crumpled parchment in his fist. "Did you know about this?" Lucius demanded.

Narcissa tilted her head in question and waited.

"Lord Black has just rescinded the proxy I hold for House Black," Lucius ground out. "Lord Black."

"That's ridiculous," Narcissa snapped. "There is no Lord Black."

"Apparently, your information is out of date," Lucius responded coldly.

Several hours later, Sirius Black stepped out of the floo into the front parlor of his childhood home. He hated this place but tonight he was glad to be there. He had two letters to deliver, one to Albus Dumbledore and another to Arthur Weasley. Sirius had no idea what the letters said so it would be a very interesting evening.

Walking into the kitchen, he was unsurprised by the sudden barrage of questions. Ignoring them, he handed the letters prepared earlier in the day by Solicitor Tonks and signed appropriately by Harry to the recipients and then stood back while Albus and Arthur read their respective letters.

Albus Dumbledore
Headmaster, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry
Order of Merlin, First Class
Grand Sorcerer
Chief Warlock
International Confederation of Wizards

Dear Mr. Dumbledore:

It has come to my attention that you are currently using the Black London Manor for private meetings. Although you received permission from my heir, Sirius Black, he was not legally empowered to grant you access to the property.

As there is no evidence that your private interests and the interests of House Black align, you will no longer be allowed access to any House Black properties. I am confident that with your many resources you will have no difficulty finding another location for your meetings.

Please remove the fidelius charm you have placed on the property at the close of your meeting this evening.

Sincerely,

Lord Black

While Dumbledore was opening his missive, Arthur Weasley was opening his.

Arthur Weasley
Head of House Weasley

Dear Lord Weasley,

Please allow me to confirm the invitation conveyed to you by my heir, Sirius Black, to reside at the Black London Manor during this time of danger and uncertainty. This invitation includes your wife, children and Miss Hermione Granger.

Due to the recent dark turn of House Black, there are many dangerous objects throughout the residence. Please do not attempt to clean or remove them. I have contracted Gringotts to send a curse breaker to deal with these items.

Additionally, I have hired professionals to clean and renovate the property. I apologize for the state of disrepair you and your family have had to endure.

Tomorrow an elf, Rumi, will be arriving to take charge of the roof garden. Once it is restored, you and your family are welcome to enjoy that space. Additional elves may assist in restoring the property as needed.

If you have any issues, please do not hesitate to contact me via Sirius or Rumi.

Sincerely,

Lord Black

Sirius watched two very different men read two very different letters and have two very different reactions. Albus Dumbledore's normally happy visage now wore an expression of almost pure fury. By contrast, Arthur Weasley's face held an expression of wonder. Fortunately for Dumbledore, most of the attention was on Arthur.

"What does it say?" Molly demanded.

In answer, Arthur simply handed her the letter. Arthur sat back and picked up his cup of tea and sipped while watching his wife read the letter.

"I don't understand," Molly said. She looked at Sirius, "Aren't you Lord Black?"

At this question, Dumbledore looked up sharply, "That is an excellent question, Molly dear." The twinkle was back and Dumbledore's normally benign and placid demeanor had returned.

"Obviously, I'm not," Sirius answered easily.

"But why not?" Molly asked insistently.

"My late grandfather chose to name someone else as heir," Sirius said, remaining polite to a woman that had treated him quite poorly overall.

It was at that moment that others started to arrive and the issue was diverted.

"I see the dog has returned," Severus Snape said with his usual snideness. Sirius ignored his teenage nemesis and sat down beside Bill Weasley.

Bill had read the letter over his father's shoulder and had watched everyone with interest. As Sirius sat down, Bill gave him a traditional greeting, "Well met, Heir Black."

Sirius returned both his infectious grin and greeting, "Well met, Heir Weasley."

"How fares Lord Black?" Bill was positively gleeful as his question brought conversation around the table to a halt.

"I last saw him Saturday evening, lying on the floor recovering from a practice duel with an enormous grin on his face," Sirius answered, remembering Harry's gleeful reactions during his dodging exercise. "He tends to keep a pretty full calendar."

"I imagine so," Bill said. "Taking on a neglected House is a big responsibility."

Dumbledore stood and the room quieted. "Originally I called this meeting because I believed Sirius Black was missing," he said. "As you can see, that is no longer true. However, we have another issue before us."

Dumbledore was silent as various opinions regarding the non-missing Sirius were expressed. After a moment, he continued, "While I, too, would like to know where Sirius has been, we have a more pressing issue at hand. There is a new Head of House Black and he has denied the Order permission to use this house as headquarters."

There was a general clamor but Sirius stood up and the room quickly quieted, "Excuse me, Albus, but since Lord Black does not know about the Order, he could not have denied it permission."

"Quite right, Sirius," Albus agreed, retaining his genial demeanor. Technically Lord Black has denied me the right to use any Black properties for private meetings."

Sirius remained silent as conversation and questions broke out. Finally, one question broke through, "Why would Lord Black do that?"

All eyes turned to Sirius and he was glad for the advice that had accompanied the letters he delivered. Sirius threw out his own question, "Why would Lord Black grant permission to any outside of House Black to use his properties?"

"A very good question, Sirius," Dumbledore responded genially, "but one that cannot be answered tonight. Let us turn our attention to other matters."

As various people gave reports on suspected Death eater activity, Sirius let his mind wander. It was clear that Harry's opinion of Albus Dumbledore had taken a downturn. Equally apparent was that this opinion was supported by those Harry turned to for advice and support. In a contest between Dumbledore and Harry, there was none. In addition to Sirius' love for his godson, a more calculating part pointed out that in less than a week, Harry had done more for Sirius' than Dumbledore had done in over a year.

Sirius was startled out of his reverie by people stopping by to hug him and say they were glad he was alright. As he rose, Sirius heard Albus call him, "A moment of your time, Sirius."

Sirius waited silently until finally, Albus made his first salvo, "We were worried about you, my boy. What possessed you to leave the safety of your home?"

It was amazing how much more clearly Sirius was thinking after just a few days away. Being supported rather than criticized by those surrounding you made a significant difference. "This hasn't been my home since I was sixteen, Albus. What is more surprising is that I even came here at all. I will simply blame the damage of Azkaban for the fact that I forgot how many options I had."

Albus nodded and moved on, "Please let Lord Black know that I look forward to discussing the fidelius charm with him. I believe all those here are much safer with it remaining."

Sirius had no response to that. As the scion of a noble house, infringing on another's property without their permission was beyond the pale. With nothing more to say, Sirius nodded and left via the kitchen floor.

The next morning, a silent Arthur Weasley was assembling the pieces of a puzzle. First, there was the powerful pulse of magic which his children immediately identified as Harry Potter. Then there were the comments that followed the return of the adolescents to the kitchen.

Ron: "Blimey, he made Mrs. Black shut up."

George: "Did you see him yell at Sirius?"

Hermione: "Harry bonded with Kreacher. How could he?"

Ginny: "He was dressed all posh."

Fred: "Little Lord Harrikins is all grown up."

While the children engaged in speculation, Arthur added their comments to the puzzle. There was only one conclusion he could arrive at: Harry Potter was Lord Black. He didn't fully understand but he could verify it soon enough.

If Harry was Lord Black, it created another puzzle: How did the boy that his younger sons had rescued and who accidentally blew up his aunt become a young man willing to take on the responsibility of a House? Arthur knew he treated many of his House responsibilities with casual disregard but, even so, it was a burden. How could Harry, not even fifteen years old, shoulder that weight? Had the Tournament changed Harry that much? If so, where did that leave his friendship with Ron?

Arthur had let Molly take the lead in parenting. She was so passionate about being a mother and he loved that about her. Unfortunately, he could see where that passion had evolved into obsession. Even more unfortunate was that he only saw it in hindsight and now he wondered if anything could be salvaged.

Bill and Charlie were fine young men and easygoing in temperament but Arthur knew that their choice of employers had been heavily influenced by Molly's overbearing style. Percy was the most like his mother: hardworking, driven, dedicated and once set on a course, stubborn as hell. The twins sometimes seemed like the living incarnations of Molly's older brothers. Appropriately born on April 1st, both boys were full of mischief and laughter. They weren't serious about school but when something interested them they would turn the world upside down to figure it out. Fred and George would never have the ministry career their mother wanted but Arthur knew that both boys would succeed at whatever they put their minds to.

Ron and Ginny were the two that worried him. Ron resented being the youngest son and never hid his unhappiness at their economic situation. The other boys took second-hand robes and books in stride but Ron treated it as a personal affront. His realization of Harry's wealth

and fame had fanned a seed of jealousy that had grown into an invasive vine. Arthur had learned of Ron's reaction to Harry's participation in the tournament from several of his children. It was a disappointment that Ron had refused to support his best friend. Even after the initial estrangement was over, Arthur could see the cracks in the friendship, most of which originated with his youngest son. If Harry was Lord Black, he had probably also taken on the mantle of Lord Potter. Arthur had trouble seeing the boys' friendship survive. Harry seemed to have stepped firmly on the road to adulthood while Ron remained seeped in childhood disarray.

His youngest, his baby girl, Ginevra, was at a crossroads. Her childhood fantasies of the boy who lived combined with the terrifying events of her first year did not leave his daughter able to relate to Harry in a healthy way. There were still too many stars in his daughter's eyes when it came to Harry Potter and Arthur honestly couldn't see a positive outcome to that. He continued to hope that his daughter would outgrow her fantasies but Molly's encouragement did not help the situation. Arthur feared that a young Lord would prove an even greater attraction and feed more unrealistic fantasies. He had no objection to Harry as a future partner to his daughter but the situation would have to change before that was even possible.

Arthur was finishing his breakfast when Sirius entered the kitchen, followed by Harry. Everyone started to jump up already exclaiming greetings when Arthur very deliberately cleared his throat. His family understood the signal and Ron and Ginny both pulled Hermione back and hushed her.

Wiping his hands and setting his napkin on the table as he rose, Arthur walked over to Harry and extended his right hand in greeting, "Thank you, Lord Black. I am indebted to you on behalf of my family."

"There is no debt," Harry replied while shaking Arthur's hand, "you welcomed me into your family. It is a pleasure to help keep your family safe in any way I can, Lord Weasley."

"I've never been comfortable with the Lord Weasley stuff," Arthur said uncomfortably.

"Maybe not," said Harry, "but it is your title. Being Head of House is a responsibility but it does come with some privilege that is well deserved.

"I don't get that," Arthur answered. "I don't understand why there should be privilege."

Harry stood and bent his head back a little to look at Arthur Weasley. Harry had always seen him as a good man but a tad out of touch. Harry wondered how much of that was the defense against the chaos he was surrounded with by his over-exuberant wife and family.

"When was the last time you read or wrote in your House grimoire?"

"I read the oath when I became Head of House but I never read further," Arthur replied, "and I've never written in it."

Harry briefly closed his eyes and tried to keep his features free of any other reaction. This was still very new to Harry but, as was becoming more common, he felt magic pushing at him to respond. He took a moment and identified it as House Emrys magic. From the little

he had read in the Emrys grimoire, Harry knew that Merlin had spent much time in the study of House magic.

Harry wasn't aware that every eye was on him as he straightened and seemed to draw a mantle of authority around himself, "Lord Weasley, can you feel your House magic?"

"When I concentrate," Arthur answered.

"Have any of your children been gifted with the Weasley house magic?"

"No," Arthur said, shaking his head.

Harry sighed, "House magic is a gift from Magic itself. The loss of any House magic is a loss to both magic and to our magical community. There is a reason magic chose House Weasley and gifted it with its special magic. As you said, there is both responsibility and privilege. You have a responsibility to understand your House magic and how it contributes to our world. You also have a responsibility to live your House values and teach them to the next generation. The privilege that balances the responsibility is your House magic."

Arthur was silent. He had been taught that growing up, as had Molly in House Prewitt. The death of her older brothers had devastated her. Arthur realized now that it was this hurt that caused her to focus so much attention on her family. Additionally, Molly seemed to reject any responsibilities that she deemed unnecessary for the safety of her family. Arthur realized that he had allowed Molly's fear to pull him away from his duties as Head of House.

Arthur looked at Harry, "I will go to Gringotts today and retrieve the House grimoire. I hope I may call upon you to discuss this further, Lord Black."

Harry grinned, "I look forward to it, Lord Weasley."

As Arthur stepped back there was a moment of silence before pandemonium broke loose. In a rush it was Molly that got to Harry first with a huge hug, "Dumbledore didn't tell us you would be coming today. Will you be here the rest of the summer?"

Harry reached up and rubbed the back of his neck looking down, suddenly transformed once again into the teenager he was, "I, uh, won't be staying. I just came to take care of a few things but I have to go back home now."

Suddenly he was bombarded with questions. Straightening up, he turned to his friends, "I really do need to get back."

"But Harry," Hermione began,

Harry held up a hand and said firmly, "I have to go but if you write I'll answer any questions I can."

Hermione looked sheepish then her sense of rightness reasserted itself but Harry was already turning to the twins. Once again Harry was caught in the vacillation between adolescence and adulthood. Smiling shyly, he stepped closer, and then, in a move he would have never made a month earlier, he stepped forward again and opened his arms.

With matching grins, Fred and George step forward and opened their arms to engulf Harry in a three-way hug. Speaking quietly but still in twin speak, they quietly said, "We want to know everything. You can tell us but we won't push. As long as you are okay, that's all that matters."

Harry nodded, feeling relief at their acceptance, "Let me know if you can get away and I'll send Dobby for you."

The twins stepped back with a whoop of joy, "We'll do our best, mate."

Stepping back, Harry turned to look at Sirius. Harry nodded and then walked over to the fireplace. Reaching up he took a pinch of floo powder from the box on the mantle and tossed it in the fire. "Potter Manor," he said clearly, stepping into the flame and disappearing.

Turning to follow, Sirius heard Molly say, "I think you owe us some answers, Sirius Black."

"No Molly," Sirius said, "I don't owe you anything." With that Sirius turned and followed Harry.

Despite often giving the appearance of all bluster and no brains, Molly Weasley was a woman of both intelligence and self-awareness. The deaths of Fabian and Gideon Prewitt had deprived Molly of not only her beloved brothers but also the heads of her magical House. The dual blow had left her wheeling and unbalanced. In an instance of supreme irony, Arthur's attempt to shield her emotionally by acquiescing to the grief-filled denial of her House ended up magnifying her loss.

As often happened, loss increased Molly's need to hold tightly to what was left. The relaxed, carefree mother that had already given birth to six sons suddenly became terrified of loss. The birth of her only daughter had further entrenched her fear. Each child had responded as the individual they were but they were all affected by it.

In grasping on to what she was afraid of losing, Molly gradually lost awareness of what she did have: soul-sight. The Prewitt line was known for producing seers and mind mages. Molly had the gift of seeing the essence of someone. It was not an easy gift to have but she had studied the journals left by previous Prewitts and had learned to use her gift wisely.

It was her gift that led Molly to Arthur Weasley. Arthur was smart and handsome and from one of the Sacred Twenty-Eight families but that is not what attracted her to him. Molly Prewitt saw the goodness that radiated off of Arthur Weasley. His lack of material prospects had caused division with her family but Molly would have no other.

In an over-embrace of motherhood, Molly Weasley had trouble seeing Harry Potter as more than the orphan boy she considered one of her own. The evidence that he was more was staring her in the face and still, she couldn't see it. What she could see was his interaction with her children.

It wasn't a conscious thought that led Molly to encourage Ron's friendship with Harry. Nor was it conscious when she encouraged her daughter's crush on the Boy-Who-Lived. It was fear and pragmatism.

Molly would never be able to say what shifted her view. Maybe it was the strangeness of the encounter. Maybe it was the re-emergence of her soul-sight. Even as Molly demanded answers from Sirius, the interaction that Harry had with her children registered and she suddenly saw more. Whatever had been in Harry's friendship with Ron, Molly now saw their paths diverging. There was no break. It was a natural drawing away that happened in some relationships. At the same time, she saw how unsuitable for each other Ginny and Harry were. They were both good children but as it stood now, they were not moving toward a future together.

It was obvious to even the most casual observer that Molly had problems with her twin sons. What wasn't obvious was the reason. Fred and George were the living embodiment of her brothers, Fabian and Gideon. Seeing her twins brought the searing pain of loss into Molly's everyday reality. It was that she rejected, not her twin boys. Unfortunately, it was damaging to both mother and children.

Seeing Harry open his arms to the twins caused an equally wide opening in Molly's heart. The pain was still there but suddenly she saw her boys for who they were and not who they represented. She saw cleverness and a level of industry that she had ignored because it was not headed in the direction she thought was safe. She saw joy and light-heartedness. She saw resolve and self-honesty. She saw how they fit with Harry Potter.

For the hours after breakfast, Molly was lost in her thoughts. She barely noticed Arthur bussing her cheek as he left for the ministry. It was only in passing that she saw the twins leave, followed by Ron, Ginny and Hermione badgering them with questions. She cleaned up the kitchen and started a hearty stew for lunch. She chopped vegetables for a green salad. Before she realized it, the kids were gathering for lunch. Still, her thoughts were elsewhere.

It was not until her eldest son kissed her on the cheek that Molly became aware once more. "Bill," she exclaimed, "what are you doing here? Why aren't you at work."

Bill grinned, "I am at work. I'm here to assess the house for cursed and dark objects."

Further conversation was delayed as five teenagers invaded the kitchen to greet Bill. After the initial greetings, Bill repeated what he had said to his mother, "I'm here to look over the house and see what needs to be done. Lord Black wants this place cleansed as quickly as possible."

"Why the hurry?" Hermione asked.

"As Head of House Black, Lord Black is responsible for the safety and well-being of any who live in a Black property. He takes that responsibility very seriously," Bill answered.

"But Dumbledore. . ." Hermione started to protest.

“It doesn’t matter what Dumbledore thought,” Bill interrupted. “Once Lord Black became aware of the state of this manor, he insisted it be thoroughly cleaned, both physically and magically.”

As per the agreement between Lord Black and Gringotts, Bill marked all the rooms that were clear of dark objects and curses. Bill was surprised to find that over half the rooms could be immediately cleaned and used. Once he had identified the rooms that needed more intense scrutiny, Bill got out his notebook and started a detailed assessment.

An hour after Bill began to assess the manor, Dobby popped into the kitchen with three elves. Hermione, who was working on her transfiguration homework, immediately jumped up, “Dobby, what are you doing here?”

Dobby ignored Hermione and turned to Molly, “Lord Black ask Dobby to introduce elves to Lady Weezy. This be Rumi who will make roof garden beautiful again.” Rumi curtsied and then quickly popped away. Dobby motioned the remaining two elves forward, “This be Sam and Daisy. They choose Lord Black and here to help Kreacher.”

As the two elves popped away to find Kreacher, Hermione tried again, “Dobby, are you working for Lord Black?”

Dobby turned to Hermione, “Dobby be family to Harry Potter. Dogfather be very important to Harry Potter.” With that mix of truth and obfuscation, Dobby popped away.

The rest of the week was very busy at the Black London Manor or Grimmauld Place as it had been known by older generations. Wednesday brought a team of curse breakers but after Bill introduced the team, he returned to Gringotts.

Wednesday also saw the return of Sirius with Winky and two other elves that were not introduced. Sirius explained that they would be cleaning and decorating the manor. The elves had been given access to the Black vault that contained furniture and art. Winky was there to make sure that the public rooms would be suitable for Lord Black and that the private rooms were comfortable for her Harry. As Lord Black, he would conduct business there in the future.

The Weasley family, guests and visitors watched as the manor went from a dark, cursed monstrosity to a beautiful and elegant home. The biggest surprise for those living there was that even the bedrooms were transformed. Arthur and Molly discovered on Thursday that they had been moved into the newly refurbished master suite.

The roof garden was cleared and brought back to life with the help of plants and cuttings from Potter Manor. Molly began spending her afternoons there. She missed her gardens and tending the small kitchen garden on the roof eased something she hadn’t realized was bothering her.

Thursday's Daily Prophet brought the first news of Lord Black to the wider wizarding world.

Who is Lord Black?

An inside look by Rita Skeeter

Recent ministry filings show not only a new Head of House Black but that the new Lord Black has rescinded its Wizengamot voting proxy, held by none other than Lord Lucius Malfoy.

An angry Lord Malfoy has confirmed this news. He reluctantly admitted to not knowing who the recently confirmed Head of House Black is.

Another source, well trusted by yours truly, suggests that Lord Black is not a supporter of Headmaster Albus Dumbledore. We have to wonder what could cause such a rift. Is this merely a continuation of the longstanding animosity between House Black and the Leader of the Light or is there more to the story?

Your intrepid reporter has since learned that another Daily Prophet reporter is interviewing Lord Black this very afternoon and the exclusive interview will be published in our Sunday edition.

Although this reporter confesses to disappointment that she is not the one conducting the interview, she is nevertheless excited to bring awareness of the wizarding world to a powerful new player.

What will Lord Black do next? If he doesn't support the Light, is he behind darker factions that some are claiming have reemerged?

Stay tuned as your ever-questioning reporter searches for more information on the mysterious Lord Black.

On Friday, Sirius showed up carrying a large basket filled with produce and meats, "Lord Black has estates that are self-sufficient and then some," he told Molly. "He says it would be wasteful not to share it with you." It had been Sirius that had realized that Molly and Arthur had stretched themselves thin providing meals for the Order.

When Molly would have protested, Arthur reached out and took the basket, "Please thank Lord Black for us. I'm sure we will enjoy it."

Sirius also took the opportunity to pass letters from Harry to Arthur and the twins while Molly fussed over the contents of the basket. Hermione was fascinated by the expansion charms that let the basket hold so much food. She watched avidly as Molly began to cast preservation charms on much of it. Ron just watched the food.

The Weasley household was a busy, noisy household. It was only on Arthur Weasley's return via the kitchen floor Saturday afternoon that his absence was noticed.

"Arthur?" Molly questioned.

"Good afternoon, Molly, children," Arthur said as he brushed soot off his robes. "I just had lunch with Lord Black." As he spoke, Arthur watched the reactions of his family. Molly and the two girls had looks of curiosity and interest. Ron had his usual look of boredom where it didn't concern quidditch or chess. The twin both grinned and exchanged glances. One of them looked Arthur in the eye and winked.

"Oh?" Molly responded, trying not to appear too eager.

"Yes, at his suggestion, I started reading the Weasley grimoire," Arthur said. "I'm realizing that I've done a grave disservice to our family by ignoring my duties."

"What duties?" Hermione asked.

"Beyond the Sacred Twenty-eight Families, even beyond Ancient or Noble Families, there are families that have been given House Magic," Arthur explained to her, knowing that it was a refresher for his children. "Talking with Lord Black, I don't think many today understand House Magic."

Molly gestured to Arthur to sit down and poured him a cup of tea, "I was taught that House Magic is a gift to the oldest families."

"Lord Black has been studying his House grimoire," Arthur said. "He believes that House Magic is less a gift and more a bargain with Magic itself."

Naturally, it was the twins that asked the next question, "What's the bargain?"

Arthur drank some tea as he thought of his talk with Harry. This was all new to Harry and Harry's perspective had not been colored by family history or pure-blood culture. "Lord Black believes that Houses that practice and teach important magical values are given extra magic that reflects those values. In return, Magic wants those values taught, not just to the rest of the House but to others as well."

Molly reared back in surprise, "He thinks we should share House secrets?"

"Not secrets, Mollywobbles," Arthur responded, "values."

In the early Sunday hours, two things happened. The first was the destruction of a silver thread of Black magic connecting the Head of House Black to a member of the House currently residing at a remote prison in the North Sea. The second was the distribution of the Daily Prophet's Sunday edition.

Lord Black Returns

Two Gringotts records were recently filed at the ministry indicating a new head and a new heir for House Black. Shortly after, the Daily Prophet was contacted by a representative for the Head of House Black offering an exclusive interview. After taking an oath of confidentiality, I sat down with the new Head.

Before being allowed to speak to you, I took an oath that I would keep your identity confidential. Can you share with our readers why you are unwilling to publicly identify yourself?

It was never my intention to claim the headship of House Black. I was in Gringotts on other business and my account manager suggested an inheritance test. When it was revealed that I was the named Heir I simply assumed that the Head of House Black had chosen me as his heir. Further investigation showed that the former Head, Lord Arcturus Black, chose me, making me the actual Head of House Black should I accept it.

So, you had a choice. Why did you accept it?

I had already taken the oath as Heir and the Black House magic had accepted me. That very same magic pushed me to accept the elevation to head the House.

I understand you didn't expect this but it still does not explain why you are now unwilling to reveal yourself.

House Black has always been a driving force within magical Britain. Right now House Black is at a precipice due to a number of recent events. I believe that my identity would detract from more important matters that House Black needs to deal with.

Would you share with our readers more about these issues?

The motto of House Black has always been *Toujours Pur* or Always Pure. Unfortunately, the last few decades have seen a contamination in understanding what exactly that motto means.

It appears that the most recent generation of House Black has interpreted this to refer to blood status. Are you saying this isn't true?

Not only is it not true but it is an affront against the very magic of House Black.

Before you elaborate further, could you talk a little bit about what House magic is? Many do not understand it.

Certainly. Sometimes a witch or wizard practices strict adherence to a particular principle of magic. Now suppose that that individual marries and has a family and teaches that principle to the family members. The children of that family grow up and form their own families. They may or may not choose to pass on what they were taught growing up. When the same magical principle is taught through multiple generations, when that magical principle is honored and practiced within the family and subsequent generations, Magic notices. Over the generations, the practice of that particular principle strengthens the magic around it. Eventually Magic itself recognizes those within a bloodline that practice the magic. This is

the beginning of a House Magic that becomes an entity on its own within that particular House.

Can you talk about the magic of House Black and how it relates to the motto of Always Pure?

Every head of a House takes an oath to that House. As head of House Black, I took an oath to honor the purity of magic. Specifically, I promised to protect the pursuit and practice of magical knowledge. I also took an oath to hold all members of House Black to be magically faithful to those principles.

Notice that my oath had nothing to do with blood status. There is no mention of divisions prompted by prejudice or politics. It is about magical knowledge. It's not about limiting who may pursue or practice knowledge. Quite the opposite. The fact that magic itself chose to form this principle as a core of magic for House Black implies that the pursuit and practice of knowledge should be as unlimited as possible.

How does your oath affect House Black as it stands today?

House Magic is not guaranteed to every member of a House. We don't completely understand why some members of a House are excluded and why others are included. That aside, in the generation following the elevation of Arcturus Black as Head of House, there has been unprecedented corruption. I think nothing demonstrates this more than those members of House Black that have affiliated themselves with a terrorist in the pursuit of artificial blood purity.

Terrorist?

It is a word first used by both magicals and muggles in 18th-century France to describe a government that sought to control the people with fear. It was a Rule by Terror.

By Terrorist, do you mean You Know Who?

Yes, this jumped-up terrorist uses fear to both lead and conquer. He creates fear in his followers by suggesting that anyone with a different background is trying to destroy their way of life. directs his followers to commit senseless atrocities against anyone that opposes him.

What do you mean by jumped up?

He calls himself Lord Voldemort. There is no House Voldemort and he is certainly not a Lord. Making up a name and giving yourself a title does not impart legitimacy.

What do you mean about making up a name?

Voldemort is French. Vol-de-mort means flight-from-death. It's a name an adolescent would choose. While he may be powerful, he lacks emotional maturity.

What does this have to do with House Black?

Any member of House Black that chooses allegiance to an upstart terrorist over the principles of House Black will no longer be a part of our House.

That seems harsh. How will you know who has chosen this?

For some it is easy. If they have chosen to bear the Dark Mark then they have chosen their allegiance. For those married or allied with someone bearing that Mark, they will be asked to make a choice. They can be part of House Black and be faithful to the principles that it holds or they can choose a different allegiance. It is entirely up to them.

Does this include the criminal, Sirius Black?

It would if his loyalty was in question. However, not only does Sirius Black not bear the Dark Mark but I am so certain of his loyalty to House Black that I have named him my heir.

How can you be so certain?

A Head of House has a magical connection to every member of their house. The magical connection I share with Sirius Black is untainted by evil. He does not bear the Dark Mark. He has never allied himself in any way with Mr. French-Fake-Name.

If he has never allied himself with You-Know-Who, can you explain his actions regarding James and Lily Potter and the murder of Peter Pettigrew?

I can but so can Cornelius Fudge and Albus Dumbledore. Both of them, and others, know that Sirius Black was not the Secret Keeper for The Potters. They also know that Peter Pettigrew was the true Secret Keeper and is still alive and in the service of the Terrorist-with-a-made-up-name.

You say that Minister Fudge and Headmaster Dumbledore both know that Sirius Black is innocent. Why has nothing been done?

I can only speculate as to their reasoning. You would think that the Minister for Magic and the Head of the Wizengamot would want to see justice done, justice that was miscarried in the previous administration following the last war.

I do know that Sirius Black was neither charged nor tried for any crimes. He was arrested and immediately sent to Azkaban. Escaping illegal imprisonment is not a crime yet Minister Fudge, despite knowing the truth, still has a Kiss on Sight order on Sirius Black.

Headmaster Dumbledore has known since witnessing the will of James and Lily Potter that Sirius Black was not the Secret Keeper yet has never spoken in his defense.

You will have to ask both men why they refuse to come forth with the truth.

Don't you think this makes it even more important to come forward and reveal your identity?

The public knowing who I am does not change the truth in any way. Eventually, I will step forward and publicly claim my Wizengamot seat for House Black. I hope that by that time

there has been a more thorough investigation into the miscarriage of justice surrounding Sirius Black.

As I am working to correct the issues within House Black, others are working, on my behalf, to correct the injustice that was done to my heir, Sirius Black. When that work is done I will take the steps necessary to publicly lead my house. Until that time my focus cannot be divided by unnecessary publicity.

What prompted you to agree to an interview with the Daily Prophet?

As the Daily Prophet's coverage of Sirius Black demonstrates, much of what is printed is based on speculation and hearsay. Some truths needed to be made public.

Will you grant me a follow-up interview when you are ready to reveal your identity?

Given your willingness to speak with me agreeing to my conditions, I think it would only be fair to do so.

One last question, Lord Black. Do you know where Sirius Black is?

As my heir, Sirius Black has access to all my properties. I think it reasonable that he would take advantage of that. As to where he is at any given moment, only he knows for sure.

end of interview

Following the interview with Lord Black, I attempted to question Minister Fudge and Headmaster Dumbledore. Both refused to answer any questions. I also questioned Amelia Bones, Head of the DMLE, who stated that an investigation was already underway and she therefore could not comment upon it.

Although I cannot reveal the identity of Lord Black, I can attest to his forthrightness and sincerity during the interview. I wish him well as he takes leadership of one of our Ancient and Noble Houses.

Sirius Matters

Chapter Notes

July 7-16

Headmaster Dumbledore has known since witnessing the will of James and Lily Potter that Sirius Black was not the Secret Keeper yet has never spoken in his defense.

Sirius put down the newspaper. He picked it up again and started rereading the interview.

Headmaster Dumbledore has known since witnessing the will of James and Lily Potter that Sirius Black was not the Secret Keeper yet has never spoken in his defense.

Sirius couldn't read past that sentence. He knew the rest of the article was important, but the shock of that statement paralyzed him. Dumbledore had known the entire time Sirius was in Azkaban and never said a word to anyone.

Sirius knew he wasn't right. Twelve years in Azkaban had seriously messed with him, and that was on top of every way he had been messed up before even setting foot in the prison. Sirius also knew he was getting better. He had been reluctant to see a Mind Healer, but it was helping. The potions regimen that Andy had him on was making a difference and he had already started to gain the weight that had been elusive since his escape. Having a clean, safe place to sleep definitely helped. Still, Sirius admitted to himself, the biggest help was SuSu.

As if summoned, the tiny elf popped in front of Sirius. "Siri go think calm," she announced.

Think calm was Susu's name for meditation. House Black was strong in the mind arts and Sirius had started learning meditation techniques when his first tutor arrived at age five.

As heir to House Black, Sirius had access to the Black grimoire and, at Harry's insistence, had started reading it. The biggest surprise to Sirius had been that the mind arts his House was so famous for had developed as a way to aid in the study of magic. Without the ability to organize your thoughts, you lacked the mental capacity to learn and retain all that magic had to offer. All Sirius had known was that for almost as long as he could remember, he had been meditating. In Azkaban, his meditative state had mainly been replaced by the constant use of his animagus form. However, even without consciously doing so, Sirius continued to use the

techniques taught over a lifetime. When a child in House Black went to Hogwarts, they were learning the basics of occlumency.

The mind healer, an older squib, had been born to House Black. Marius Black had been brother to Dorea Black who had married Charlus Potter. Marius freely shared with Sirius that his meditation training had made a significant difference when he had been cast from the family. Unlike many families that disowned squibs, House Black did not cut off the financial support needed. Instead, they hired the necessary nannies and tutors to help the child learn a new culture. It didn't lessen the hurt of losing your family and life, but it was better than most squibs got. Meditation eventually led Marius to learn mind healing in the burgeoning muggle field of psychotherapy.

Like most squibs, Marius had some magic, but it wasn't enough to allow a wand education. It was, however, enough to grant him a significantly longer lifespan than muggles had. His experience, both as a Black and as a mind healer, made him well-suited to help Sirius.

Still, Sirius acknowledged, the mind healing would not have been possible had he followed Dumbledore's plan and avoided contact with Harry and anyone else outside the Order, remaining in the horror that was his childhood home. Even after escaping Azkaban, Dumbledore still wanted Sirius in prison.

Sirius was agitated almost beyond his ability to meditate when he went outside to the sitting area Susu had created for him. He spent mornings and evenings here. The possessive elf that had claimed him (and really, Sirius couldn't think of it any other way) had created a space that somehow felt both open and sheltered. Elven charms kept the area pleasant regardless of the ambient air temperature or weather conditions.

Although Sirius had been taught to meditate in an upright position, he preferred to stretch out on his back, arms at his sides. Being physically open reinforced his awareness of freedom and calmed him. He kept his eyes open and focused on the sky above.

Sirius breathed. In and Out. Slowly. Deliberately. As a child, his mind would wander. It took months of daily practice but eventually, Sirius learned to let go of his thoughts and refocus on the steady rise and fall of his breath. Since escaping Azkaban, wandering thoughts were less of an issue than physical distractions. A shadow or a whisper of sound brought him to full alertness.

Susu helped. She sat near Sirius in the space she had created and would reach out with a hand when he startled. All it took was a gentle touch to remind him that he was safe. There were no dementors at Potter Lodge.

Practicing morning and night to clear his mind was helping, but today was not a good day for calm thinking. Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, Supreme Mugwump, Chief Warlock and Leader of the Light, had let Sirius rot in Azkaban prison. Had it been merely words in the Daily Prophet, Sirius might have doubted the truthfulness of the statement. A quote from Lord Black, from Harry, checked by both solicitor and publicist, was unassailable.

A younger, more impetuous Sirius Black would not have responded with meditation. At the very least, a howler would have been sent. More likely, he would have sought out

Dumbledore and issued a challenge of some sort. There definitely would have been alcohol involved regardless of the time of day.

Azkaban may not have driven all the impulsiveness out of him, but it did temper his reaction. Since meditation seemed impossible, Sirius continued his steady breathing and thought back to the letter he had received from Harry ten days ago. It had been different from the short, frantic scrawls that had been usual during that horrid tournament. It had been calmer and more thoughtful.

Sirius now realized that the change in Harry's tone was due to a total change in Harry's circumstances. When Dobby showed up two days later with a note from Harry that said, "Please take Dobby's hand and go with him," Sirius' circumstances would also change.

That night in Potter Manor had been a revelation. The welcome from the manor's wards had been a pleasant surprise, but the welcome from so many of the old Potter elves had broken open the wounds from too many rejections in a battered life.

Sirius had been surprised to discover that Harry wasn't living at the manor and had not, in fact, even been to the manor yet. Still, he was in a place that had been a refuge when he had needed it most. The memories of this place, while tinged with loss, contained a lot of laughter and joy. There was no portrait of a dead mother to harangue him over perceived failures. There was no Molly Weasley to lecture him. Best of all, no one told him to be miserable for the greater good.

Saturday had brought many surprises. The first was waking up in a clean, well-lit space. More importantly, it was the suite of rooms that had been set aside for his use the first time he had visited the manor with James. After running away from home, it had become his exclusively. Sirius didn't know whether to weep or laugh at the memories.

A table and chair sat in a window nook and a full English was waiting for him along with a pot of coffee. Sirius took his time enjoying the food and silence. After breakfast, he enjoyed a long bath in the oversized tub that was part of every bathing suite. Sirius found clothes he had long left at the manor waiting on the bed, cleaned and pressed. He couldn't tell if the clothes still fit from his younger years or if they had been resized.

Sirius wandered the manor, his head filling with questions. Through the transparent walls of the orangery was the formal back garden. Beyond that, as far as he could see, were greenhouses interspersed with smaller garden plots. Sirius realized that Stinchcombe Herbs was still in operation. Fleamont Potter had considered it a great prank to create a thriving business under the noses of the Sacred Twenty-eight. Many believed any direct involvement with business to be distasteful. Business was either what you paid goblins to do on your behalf or it was trade that lower classes engaged in.

Fleamont had proposed a partnership with Hargrave Longbottom as the family was well known for their horticultural gifts. The overture had been rejected, but Hargrave's son, Frank Longbottom, had heard the proposal and gone to James Potter with a counter-proposal. Frank would never defy his father, but in decades to come, after the budding war was over, Frank and James would help their heirs set up a joint business venture.

Sirius had not realized how much time had passed until an elf had come with news of Harry's arrival. Sirius had delighted in showing Harry his ancestral home. Harry's presence in the manor kitchen had been another surprise. Every elf in the large room had looked at Harry with such longing until one worked up the courage to speak. Next thing Sirius knew, he was in the grand ballroom filled with elves.

When did the Potters get so many elves? Potter Manor had always had more than its fair share. The combination of ley lines and the growing herb business meant there was enough magic and enough work to sustain several dozen elves. This? There must be at least a hundred elves here.

Watching Harry bond with all the elves was a revelation. It completely overturned everything Sirius thought he knew about wizard-elf relationships. Then there was Susu. She stood before Sirius, expecting him to bond the way Harry had bonded with his elves. Sirius Black became the second wizard in over 200 years to form a reciprocal bond with an elf. It was unlike anything in his experience or imagination.

Lunch had been a daze. Harry seemed almost manic after bonding with all the elves. He chattered about working and studying at Potter Manor which confused Sirius. Of course, Harry would work and study at the manor. It was his home. Despite talk of Potter Lodge, Sirius assumed that he and Harry would live together in the manor.

Sirius had only visited Potter Lodge a few times with James. He remembered it as large and rustic and surrounded by woods. All that was true, but it was more. There was a lawn spreading out from the lodge that was pristine. Both front and back doors have a stone path leading toward the forest that branched into multiple tracks. At the branching of the paths, there were beds filled with low leafy green plants. It was beautiful and serene.

Sirius quickly realized that he would not be flying through the forest with his godson. The realization that he was physically incapable of more than a very short and very low flight on a broom was devastating. He knew that over a decade in Azkaban had destroyed his body, but to realize that nearly two years after escaping, he could not do what many considered an ordinary wizarding activity was a shock.

He felt a small hand take his and looked down at Susu, "Siri not worry. We make safe, quiet home here."

Sirius looked at the elf in shock, "Here?"

"Siri live here," the elf said, "learn to be person again. Is important."

Sirius nodded without understanding. He had never really thought past escaping the prison, capturing the rat and getting to Harry. Since that first plunge into the icy North Atlantic waters, Sirius had rarely thought beyond the next step. Even in his awful childhood home, Sirius had not thought much beyond wanting to be with Harry. Everything else had seemed superfluous.

Susu took him by the hand and led him to a comfortable sitting area beside the back door. With a snap of her fingers, he had a butterbeer and he was relishing the taste of his favorite

beverage. Such a simple thing, sitting and enjoying a butterbeer. It was something he had not done in close to fifteen years. Maybe the elf was right. Perhaps he did need to learn how to be a person again before anything else could happen.

Sunday had been a day equal in bitterness and balm. After dinner with his godson the night before, Sirius enjoyed watching Harry and Filius have what Sirius knew to be beginner dueling practice. He had been impressed with his godson's stamina and agility. It had seemed a natural ending to the evening to bid them good night and watch them floo away. To his surprise, Susu had led him to the master suite and had patiently let him through the process of getting ready for bed.

Sirius didn't seem to sleep much these days. Closing his eyes brought back too many memories of what had been lost. Instead of simply turning out the lights, Susu dimmed them and climbed up on the bed. She started talking about, of all things, Harry's crazy little elf named Dobby. Sirius had known Dobby for a while. Dobby had often brought food and other supplies to the cave where Sirius hid while Harry competed in that awful tournament. It wasn't a surprise to have Dobby show up to deliver letters back and forth.

What was surprising was to learn that Dobby had become something of an ambassador for his godson. In the few short weeks since bonding with Harry, Dobby never missed an opportunity to extol the greatness of Harry Potter. Harry Potter was not only a great wizard who defeated evil, Harry Potter was a kind wizard. Harry Potter was restoring the old ways. Harry Potter treated all beings equally. Harry Potter would change the magical world.

Susu told of the scores of elves that arrived at Potter Manor hoping to bond with Harry. The elves came hoping for a different relationship. They didn't believe it was possible, but still, they hoped. Even Susu, who had lived her entire life at Potter Manor and had known only good treatment, didn't believe Dobby.

Dobby talked not only of reciprocal bonds but of being family with the great Harry Potter. Even the longest-lived elves were skeptical. For hundreds of years, elders had seen the ebb and flow of wixen-elvin relationships. Family, even chosen, was only possible between like beings. Still, Dobby insisted that Harry Potter was family.

Sirius fell asleep to the tales of Dobby and Harry Potter. Waking Sunday morning, he realized that Harry had not indicated in any way when he would next see Sirius. Before he could think about this, Susu was there, encouraging him to get dressed and eat breakfast.

After breakfast, Sirius went to the floo, but before he could do anything, Susu was there, "What Siri doing?"

"I'm going to Potter Manor to find my godson," Sirius answered.

"Lord Potter not be at manor today," Susu said, taking Sirius by the hand. "Susu make Siri calm space. Come."

Sirius managed to hold his questions until Susu had led him outside, "Where is he?" Why isn't he living at the manor? When will I see him?"

“Siri need calm. Siri breathe,” Susu instructed.

Sirius flopped down onto the covered and cushioned ground and sighed at the comfort. After Azkaban and living rough, softness was appreciated. He looked at the canopy of trees above and tried to relax, but his mind would not slow.

Susu sat beside him, "I have one more thing to tell you about Dobby."

Sirius focused on Susu and waited.

"Dobby tell every elf how important Siri is to Harry Potter," Susu announced.

Sirius just stared. He didn't know what to say to that.

Susu continued, "Dobby tell every elf that Harry Potter love Dogfather. Taking care of Dogfather is taking care of Harry Potter."

"Is that why you...." Siri wasn't sure how to continue.

"Is part," Siri answered, "then Susu see Siri needs her. Susu want wizard that needs her."

Sirius looked at Susu, “What happens when I no longer need you?”

Susu laughed, “Silly Siri. Wizards always need elves. Elves always need wizards.”

Sirius accepted that but then asked, “So what do I do today?”

“Today you rest. You eat. You walk. You breathe calm,” Susu answered.

“And tomorrow?” Sirius asked.

“Tomorrow healers,” Susu answered. “Soliccy send portkey tonight.”

“When. . .” Sirius started.

“No worry,” Susu said, placing a finger across Sirius’ lips. “Just do today. Siri safe now.”

Sirius accepted that and started breathing like he had been taught as a child. He would focus on breathing and looking up at the sky.

Monday morning found Sirius with more energy than he could remember having since graduating from Hogwarts. It had felt strange but Sirius had focused on whatever Susu told him to do. At moments he had felt embarrassed at following directions like a child. Most of the time, he felt safe and warm, and that was an unbelievable feeling.

Dressed in clothes that he had found laid out, Sirius looked in the mirror. He was still too thin, but he no longer looked exhausted and haunted. He had remembered all the grooming charms and his hair and beard were neatly trimmed. The clothes were a bit more conservative than what he preferred but acceptable.

Susu popped in behind him and held out the portkey, “It be time. If need Susu, call.”

Sirius took the portkey and said the activation phrase. After the familiar hook feeling behind his naval, Sirius found himself in a small, professional-looking arrivals room. A young woman stepped forward and greeted him, “Mr. Black, I’m Amanda from Greengrass & Associates. This folder contains a list of your appointments this week and additional information you might need.”

Sirius took that folder from the young woman and opened it to see that he had appointments scheduled every morning this week. After thanking her, he watched her step into the floo then he went through the only door in the room to find a woman about his age waiting for him.

“Hello, cousin,” the woman greeted.

“Andy?” Sirius gasped.

Andromeda Tonks stepped forward and embraced her cousin, “Officially, I’m Healer Tonks.”

Sirius just gaped, and finally, Andromeda laughed, took him by the hand and led him further into the office.

“Let’s take care of the medical issues and then we can have some tea and catch up a bit,” Andromeda said, gesturing for Sirius to stand in the middle of a small room.

Sirius set the folder on a side table and stepped into the designated spot. He watched as Andromeda stepped around him, waving her wand and lightly chanting. He was aware of a scroll with a self-writing quill scribbling away. Finally, Andromeda motioned him to a seat at a small table.

“Nothing surprising in these results,” Andromeda announced. “Do you have a house elf that can help with things?”

“Yes, one of the Potter elves decided to bond with me,” Sirius answered.

“Good,” Andromeda answered. “It will be easier to discuss this with both of you.”

Once Susu arrived, Andromeda began, “The first issue is systemic exhaustion. You went from being in a war to Azkaban to being on the run. I’m guessing you haven’t had good, consistent sleep in nearly two decades. That takes a serious toll on your body.”

Andromeda paused to ensure she had Sirius’ full attention, “Sirius, you can get healthy again, but you have to take this seriously, and no puns.”

“What do I need to do?” Sirius asked, taken aback by the solemnity of Andromeda’s tone.

“It is expected that you will have nightmares. So I want you to keep calming draught on hand. Eventually, you want to be able to calm yourself down after a nightmare but expecting that anytime soon isn’t realistic. Twice a week, and twice a week only, you are to take a dreamless sleep potion. This isn’t optional. You need those two nights of stress-free rest. The other nights, you can take a mild sleeping potion if you need it.”

Andromeda turned to Susu, “Do you have a source for potions?”

“Winky make potions for family,” Susu answered.

“Good,” Andromeda responded. “Now, let's talk about the malnutrition.”

Sirius nodded, relieved that Andromeda and Susu were so calm about everything.

“I’m guessing you didn’t always eat the best before Azkaban, and then it worsened. I also imagine it isn’t always easy to eat now, so twice a day I want you to take a nutritional potion. Three meals a day plus snacks will feel like an enormous amount of food but I want you to get into the habit of eating that often. Even if you can only eat a few bites, I still want you to try. Don’t make yourself sick, but you need a steady intake of food.”

Now Sirius had doubts. It was one thing to try to sleep, but all the eating seemed unnatural after so many years of constant hunger. Susu reached over and took his hand, “Susu help Siri.”

“How long do I have to do this?” Sirius asked.

It will take at least a year for you to experience significant recovery. You can’t undo years of abuse and neglect with a few potions, a good night’s sleep and a hearty meal,” Andromeda answered. “The good news is that your magical core is strong and that will make things easier.”

“What’s the bad news?” Sirius asked, knowing that there was bad news.

“I’m sure you are already aware of the effects of constant Dementor exposure on fertility,” Andromeda answered, deliberately not thinking about any broader implications.

“That isn’t an issue,” Sirius said easily. “I already have an heir, and I can wait for him to provide more rugrats to love.”

Susu stood up, “Susu go get potions and lunch ready for Siri.” She hugged Sirius and then popped away.

“I think you are in good hands,” Andromeda said.

“Whether I want to be or not,” Sirius answered wryly.

“Oh,” said Andromeda, as if it were an afterthought, “nothing stronger than a small glass of wine with dinner. That’s a hard limit.”

After tea with Andromeda and hearing about her life with Ted and her daughter, Nymphadora, Sirius went to his next appointment.

“Good morning, Mr. Black,” The familiar-looking man greeted him. “I’m Marius Black, and I’m your uncle.”

At Sirius’ frown, Marius continued as he led Sirius from the floo into a cozy room with comfortable-looking armchairs.

“Have a seat. There is tea, coffee and water always available so you can help yourself at any time.”

Sirius poured himself a glass of water and sat in the chair closest to the door. Marius sat in a chair nearby at a ninety-degree angle that let them see each other without feeling confrontational.

“I did not have enough magic to attend Hogwarts, so the family set me up with caretakers and a significant trust fund to help me create a life outside of the magical world. I was never officially disowned, so I still can feel the family magic and its affinity to mind magics. With that advantage, I studied the muggle science of psychology and became what magicals refer to as a mind healer. I have clients in both the magical and muggle world.”

“So what happens here?” Sirius asked, having no idea what mind healing involved.

“We talk,” Marius answered. “There aren’t any rules other than I expect you to treat yourself and me with respect. That means showing up when you say you will, communicating if something prevents you from being here, and being as honest as you can be.”

“How often do I need to show up?” Sirius asked.

“For a few weeks, I would recommend every day. A lot has happened and just having a neutral sounding board will help,” Marius answered. “After that, we’ll reduce it to three times a week and go from there.”

“What do we talk about?” Sirius was still on the fence about how necessary this was.

“Anything you want,” Marius answered. “This is your time. My job is to listen and be a neutral observer. I will share my observations with you and then you can decide how you want to respond to my observations.”

“And this will really help?” The skepticism was evident in Sirius’ voice.

“It will,” Marius said with certainty. “It isn’t a quick fix. You have over a decade of trauma from an illegal incarceration, which is on top of being in a war and having a less-than-healthy home life as a child. That doesn’t even include the stress of dealing with everything happening now.”

Sirius nodded, “That’s reasonable. I’m guessing this will take a while.”

“A fair bit,” Marius answered calmly, “but I promise that if you keep showing up and being as honest as possible, things will get easier. Maybe not right away, but slowly and steadily.”

“I can do that,” Sirius agreed. “Where do we start?”

When Sirius returned to the lodge for lunch, he was exhausted. He downed the requisite potion and then managed half a sandwich and some soup before stumbling to his room. The last he remembered before falling asleep was Susu removing his boots. By the time he woke up, Susu had tea ready on the back patio. He had not even sat down when the floo chimed.

Harry rushed in, followed by a more sedate Filius. With a quick hug, Harry was off to fly through the trees.

Later, a calmer Harry sat down with him. Harry told him how much of his magic had been bound and he was having to learn how to handle the increased power. With the added House magic from his Lordships, Harry was feeling out of sorts.

As Sirius held Harry in a gentle embrace, Sirius realized that both of them were in a similar situation. Both had to learn new ways to live. Harry was surrounding himself with people he didn't need to look after, and, much as it pained him to admit it, Sirius needed looking after. Harry had to be separate to take care of himself, but he loved Sirius enough to make sure Sirius could look after his own self.

Godson and godfather were enjoying the mutual comfort when Dobby popped in with a packet from Ted Tonks. Opening it, Harry quickly read the letter and pulled the Black seal from a small pouch at his waist. He magically pulled a small table close and then opened up two other letters and affixed his seal to both.

"Do you have one of your secret meetings soon?" Harry asked.

"Dumbledore called one for this evening," Sirius answered. "Apparently, I'm missing."

"Time to be found," Harry said with a grin. "I need these delivered to Dumbledore and Arthur Weasley."

"What did you decide?" Sirius asked.

"Wait and see," Harry answered. "I don't want to spoil the surprise."

"Does anyone else know the identity of Lord Black?" Sirius asked so he could be prepared.

"I don't know if he'll be there, but Bill Weasley probably knows," Harry answered. "I had some business with him at Gringotts for Houses Peverell, Slytherin and Gaunt."

The order meeting had been fun. Watching everyone flutter around, trying to answer questions that didn't need answering. Did the identity of Lord Black matter? Did it matter where Sirius had been?

Sirius had recognized a kindred soul in Bill Weasley. The man might not have the reputation for pranks that his twin brothers had, but it was clear that Bill enjoyed a good joke. Knowing that Harry Potter was Lord Black was the best joke of all. Or so Sirius had thought.

It had seemed like a lark, a great prank against his birth family, to encourage Harry to become Head of House Black. Then Sirius truly met Lord Black. It was terrifying.

Sirius expected Harry would be unhappy with Dumbledore's refusal to remove the fidelius charm. Sirius didn't expect Harry to promptly go to the London manor and remove the charm. First, there was the fact that Harry could sense the property despite the powerful charm hiding it. Then Harry removed the charm without taking any of the old wards down. That was a level of power that Sirius had never imagined.

The hits kept coming. The horrid painting was finally silenced. The rebuke over Kreacher. A total rework of the wards without even opening the wardbook or changing the runes. The mixed reactions from the Weasleys. Why would some recognize immediately that Harry was Lord Black while others remained oblivious?

Listening to Harry's explanation had not helped in any way. When Susu had shown up to remind Sirius of his appointment with Marius, Sirius had grudgingly gone. Sirius had surprised Marius with a veritable deluge of bewildered ramblings about Harry. Marius' responses had been measured and just what Sirius needed. Sirius had trouble seeing Harry without the filter of his past relationship with James and Lily. Despite the similarities in appearance, Harry was very much his own person. He barely remembered his parents. Marius reminded Sirius that Harry's lack of connection to James and Lily wasn't personal.

Sirius was in a more even frame of mind when he returned to the manor for lunch. Marius had given him phrases to remind himself to separate the past from the present. Watching as Harry processed the information about changing his OWL subject reminded Sirius of just how young Harry was. Harry was both adult and child and juggling between them. Sirius realized that Filius and the elves formed an anchor for Harry. They were steady, so Harry didn't always have to be. At the same time, they stepped back and let Harry be fully adult for the situations that required it.

Sirius didn't know it, but that day set a pattern for the coming months. Mornings were for mind healing and other scheduled appointments. Lunch at Potter Manor was followed by a nap in his old suite, then tea with Filius and Harry. Most evenings, he went back to the lodge for a quiet dinner, but sometimes he joined Harry at the manor.

A meeting with Ted Tonks introduced him to Cyrus Greengrass and Elador Bulstrode. Greengrass was the head of the firm and committed to seeing justice for Sirius. Any old family pureblood would be outraged that one of their own had been treated as Sirius had. Elador Bulstrode was his legal advocate. The Ministry often hired her for particularly complex prosecutions. She not only knew wizarding law, but she understood the ins and outs of the court system. She was the perfect advocate for Sirius.

Sirius also had a meeting during the week with a publicist named Borner. Sirius could not remember his first name due to the uncanny personality resemblance the publicist had to Minerva McGonagall. Mentally, Sirius referred to the publicist as Minnie Borner. Borner had explained the interviews Harry would be doing in the coming weeks and that one of his goals was to keep the injustices done to Sirius at the forefront of the public's mind. Borner had also explained how he would be working behind the scenes to sway public opinion.

Wednesday's impromptu meeting and dinner to explain to Harry the import of prophecy had been eye-opening. First was the unpleasant surprise of so many people waiting in the orangery. Then there was the diversity of the company. Sirius' friendship with Lily had been an exception. Most of his life had been spent in the company of pure bloods. Even after leaving his childhood family, Sirius still kept to his peers. Harry had no such limitations. Harry was as easily friends with a goblin as he was a pureblood, as comfortable with a muggleborn as he was with an elf. It was yet another thing to gain Marius' perspective on.

While Harry was being interviewed as Lord Black on Thursday afternoon, Sirius took his regular nap in his suite at the manor. As usual, Sirius joined Harry for tea only to find himself being called upon as Heir Black. This began what Sirius would characterize as the most surreal three days of his life.

It began when Sirius mentioned that Narcissa Black was most likely the brains in the Malfoy marriage. Harry had already realized that Narcissa's marriage to Lucius was incompatible with her place in House Black. Harry recognized that resolving that issue needed to happen before the Prophet article was published. What followed was a flurry of owls sent back and forth from Heir Black to his cousins, Andromeda and Narcissa. Plans were made. Dinners were arranged. Harry was given the most essential etiquette lesson of all: Lord Black sets the standard.

Sirius had always hated official family functions. They were boring. The food was usually bland. The liquor was mediocre. That was in the past. The Lord Black that Harry Potter embodied threw a marvelous dinner party. The level of drama from Lucius Malfoy alone ensured it would not be boring. Add in the petulant Malfoy heir, and it went to a whole new level. The food was inspired. When given the freedom to use their creativity, elves were capable of gastronomic feats. The martinis, wines and after-dinner drinks were top shelf.

The perfection of the evening, however, did not make up for the horror that Sirius felt upon reading Sunday's Daily Prophet. While his distrust of Dumbledore had been steadily growing, Sirius still wanted to believe that his wrongdoings were simple misjudgments. Discovering that Dumbledore had known of Sirius' innocence and let him rot in Azkaban broke something in Sirius. It was a level of betrayal that exceeded everything Sirius had ever experienced.

Sirius grew up with a mother that practiced casual cruelty. He knew from a young age that a corrupt ministry governed his world. He had watched both his birth family and his adopted family wither under the effects of a dark lord. It was natural that Sirius would gravitate to a larger-than-life leader of the Light. A man who had defeated Grindelwald and stood at the forefront of the battle against Voldemort was worth following.

So many believed in Sirius' guilt following the extreme shock of Voldemort's demise combined with Harry's survival. Sirius wasn't surprised that people believed his guilt as he, himself, had put out that he was the Potter's secret keeper. Of course, Dumbledore would believe that same falsehood. Lily had insisted on casting the fidelius, and only the four of them, James, Lily, Sirius and Peter, had known the secret.

Ted Tonks had told Sirius earlier in the week that the truth was in the Potter wills. Tonks had not mentioned that Dumbledore had stood witness to those wills. If the man who put himself at the forefront of the fight against the Darkness was willing to betray his followers, what was left to believe in?

Despite being Sunday, Sirius still had his regular morning appointment with Marius Black. With his level of near hysteria, Sirius didn't see the point, but Susu insistently pushed him through the floo.

The tea Marius served was laced with calming draught. Sirius appreciated it even as he resented the need for it. He drank the tea in silence. When Marius poured a second cup, Sirius didn't refuse.

Finally, Sirius spoke, "What were we even fighting for?"

Marius chuckled, "I've witnessed many wars, muggle and magical. That is a question many ask both during and after such conflicts."

"So, how do you even know you are on the right side?" Sirius wondered.

"Sometimes you don't," Marius answered. "Sometimes you do your best and hope you've made the right decision. In the muggle world, young men don't often have a choice when they fight in a war."

"Does that make it easier or harder?" Sirius asked.

"Both," Marius responded. "Perspective really is everything."

Sirius poured the next cup of tea for himself and drank it before asking, "What do I do now?"

"You're already doing it," Marius said. "You take care of yourself. You keep your appointments with all the professionals that are there to help you. You spend time with Harry."

"What do I do about Dumbledore?" Sirius asked.

"Dumbledore is part of a system that has already cost you a third of your life," Marius said. "Systems are hard to fight. You can't personally fight that. Instead, you use your own system."

"I have a system?" Sirius questioned.

"You are certainly part of one," Marius answered. "You have a godson that has amassed considerable power. He has surrounded himself with people that understand the system you are up against. Let his power and the skills of his people work on your behalf."

"So I just wait," Sirius concluded with resignation.

"Only for a little while," Marius responded. "This article is going to shake things up. You take care of yourself and let the people that care for you, the godson that loves you, take care of fighting the system that wronged you."

After returning to the lodge, Susu handed Sirius a lunch invitation from Narcissa. Changing into muggle jeans and a t-shirt to annoy his cousin, Sirius flooed to the manor.

Lunch with Cissy and Andy was a hoot. The only mention of Dumbledore was made obliquely at the meal's start.

Narcissa raised a glass, “Here’s to the ruination of our enemies.”

Narcissa Black said it perfectly.

Perspectives

Chapter Summary

July 15-16

Harry Potter woke up Monday morning, stretched and grinned. He felt great. After a long and very difficult Saturday, he had lain awake long into the night. Bringing Andromeda, and consequently, Tonks, back into the family had made the Black magic sing. Drawing the line for Narcissa and Draco was the easy part. Standing before a very poised Lady Malfoy and issuing an ultimatum was the hard part. As he lay in bed hours later, Lord Black had one more task. He could feel the attenuated strand of magic that connected him to Bellatrix Black Lestrange. From grimoire entries, Harry knew he could follow the strand into her magic but even while instructing, the grimoire had cautioned about such a step. Only the direst of circumstances gave anyone the right to delve into someone else's magical core. Harry sunk into the magic of House Black, grabbed hold of the feeble strand and willed it out of existence. Bellatrix was no longer part of House Black.

His exhaustion had not allowed him a good night's sleep and he woke groggy on Sunday morning. He staggered to his favorite window seat to find a small table beside it with an ice-cold glass of juice. He took a long drink and enjoyed the lightly spiced pear juice. He slowly sipped the rest of the juice as he watched the sky lighten. When he finished the juice, he set down the glass and found a bowl of buttery porridge on the table. It was full of dried fruits and nuts and sweetened with honey. He forced himself to eat slowly. There was no schedule today. No meetings with anyone. No correspondence to read or write. Nothing to study. It was something Harry had never had before this summer - a day to enjoy with family.

When he was finished with his porridge, Harry went and climbed into the center of his bed. Sitting in a lotus position, he closed his eyes and sank into his magic. After a week of diving into the Black magic, it was easy to find. Harry moved past that strong layer of silvery magic to explore his other family magics. He carefully identified each distinct house magic, spending time to appreciate the unique sensations that belonged to each. After identifying the various house magics, Harry sank into his core.

When Harry rose out of his magic, he found clothes laid at the end of the bed. To his delight, there were jeans and a t-shirt. No wizarding robes and no fancy shirts or trousers would interrupt his day off. With a whoop, Harry jumped up and got dressed for the day.

Harry, Filius, Dobby and Winky spent all day Sunday at the keep. Even the bright sunshine of a July day was not enough to dispel the cool weather. With Harry eagerly watching, Filius set up a containment area where warming charms created a pleasant sitting area. The elves provided blankets and pillows and hampers full of food and drink. There was flying and exploration of the land surrounding the keep. When Harry and Filius dug out books to read,

Dobby and Winky planned the kitchen garden. While the family would get most of their produce from the manor, Winky wanted to grow her own herbs and a selection of potion ingredients. Both elves delighted in spoiling Harry and Filius. All four of them found it difficult to spend a day only doing what pleased them without regard for necessity or duty. While this first day, this first Sunday, of dedicated family enjoyment was a new experience, they would eventually learn how important a lifetime of Sundays would become.

Harry was not the only person that needed Sunday to assimilate the changes an eventful week brought.

Draco Malfoy did not like change. The routines of his life were considered a right and when those rights were violated, Draco was angry. Anger, while not a pleasant emotion, was at least familiar. If that was all Draco was feeling, he would have been fine. Unfortunately, Draco was also confused. Draco's Saturday evening had started with semi-formal dress for a dinner party. It had ended with the dissolution of his parents' marriage and a name change.

It was an evening of surprises. The first surprise was the other dinner guests, his blood traitor aunt, Andromeda Tonks, and her mudblood husband along with known mass murderer, Sirius Black. He had side along apparated with his mother to coordinates provided in the dinner invitation, a dinner invitation from none other than Lord Black. The Malfoy family landed in the arrivals room of a stately manor and were ushered in by a house elf that wore the Black crest.

It was Sirius Black that had broken the frozen tableau, "Cissy, cousin, it is a delight to see you again."

Draco watched as the Azkaban escapee embraced his mother and then led her over to the blood traitor. Draco couldn't hear what was said but he saw his mother embracing her sister and saw tears on both women's faces.

In a social situation, Draco always looked first to his mother but right now she was providing no guidance. Draco looked at his father. Others would have accurately described the look on Lucius Malfoy's face as a haughty sneer. To Draco, it was his father's public face and one Draco emulated, not knowing how ridiculous it looked with his adolescent features. House elves circulated with small plates and drinks. Draco was given a bubbly, pale golden beverage and told it was called ginger ale. The first sip was different but as he drank, Draco grew accustomed and began to like the strange drink. He recognized and ate the small toasts with smoked fish and caviar. He had tasted it before and while it wasn't a favorite, he didn't actively dislike it. Eventually, his mother turned and gestured. They were introductions amongst people who while having never met still knew who everyone was.

Draco felt something. He didn't know what it was. It felt sort of like his magic but different. Movement caught his eye and he looked over in time to see Sirius Black and Andromeda Tonks placing their right hands over their hearts and making a half bow. With shock, Draco realized they were making obeisance to none other than Harry Potter. Hearing his mother greet Potter as Lord Black was too much. From there, the evening only got worse.

When Draco was summoned to a private meeting with Lord Black and his mother, Draco was curious. He had seen the confrontation between his father and Potter and couldn't understand why his father seemed to put up with Potter's disdain. Lucius Malfoy was a great man and a half-blood should cower before him. Instead, Potter seemed to mock him and offered to meet him on the dueling pitch.

Draco entered the small salon where his mother and Potter were sitting across from each other. Potter gestured for him to take a seat before speaking, "I have dissolved your parents' marriage. Your mother believes that you are old enough to choose whether you will be part of House Malfoy or House Black."

It took Draco a moment to understand the full implications of what was said, "So I have to choose between my mother or my father."

"No," Harry said, "as Lord Black I will never prevent you in any way from having a relationship with either of your parents. However, you are a minor and the final decision rests in their hands."

Draco didn't understand. His world had largely been black or white. You were pure blood or not. You were rich or not. You were acceptable or not. There was never any parlay between two opposing sides.

Harry leaned forward, "Let me make things as clear as I can. Your father has given his allegiance to Voldemort. If you remain a Malfoy, you will be expected to give your allegiance to Voldemort as well. Like your father, you will be marked and at that point, you will be Voldemort's slave.

"If you choose to join your mother and become part of House Black, you will be free to choose your own future. You will never kneel before anyone unless you choose to. You will never be required to crawl in Voldemort's presence and kiss the hem of his robe. You will not live every moment in fear of his punishments."

"So instead of Voldemort, I'll be bowing to you," Draco said with a sneer.

Harry sighed, "No, Draco, you won't. As an underage member of House Black, you will have very few dealings with Lord Black. Most of the time I'm just Harry."

Draco snorted, "Right." Draco considered and finally spoke, "Make me heir and I'll join House Black."

"No," Harry answered with a shake of his head. "I already have an heir but one of your children might eventually be Lord Black."

"That's the best you can offer?"

"Draco," his mother gasped. "Please forgive my son, Lord Black," she said turning to Harry. "He doesn't understand."

"He doesn't," Harry agreed, "and as House Black outranks House Malfoy, the decision is mine. As his mother, I leave it in your hands."

Narcissa bowed her head in acknowledgment, "I wish to keep my son."

Before Draco could even absorb what was happening, a house elf was leading them upstairs to a suite of rooms.

After breakfast with his mother on Sunday, Draco was surprised by the appearance of Andromeda Tonks. That was simply too much. A name change was one thing but he was not spending his day with a blood traitor.

Draco started exploring the manor. Functionally speaking, it wasn't all that different from Malfoy Manor. Stylistically, it was very different. Malfoy Manor was cool elegance with all but the most private of rooms being very formal. Potter Manor was warmer and more welcoming. It was as if every room was inviting you to make yourself at home. That difference left Draco feeling uneasy, a feeling that was in no way dispelled when he stepped into the kitchen.

The kitchen at Potter Manor was easily 3 to 4 times the size of the kitchen at Malfoy Manor. That difference was jarring but the biggest shock came from the number of house elves. There were dozens of them. This was simply not possible.

In Draco's world, possessions were a way to keep score and house elves were simply another possession. They were a very expensive possession thus making their ownership particularly important. Until Harry Potter had stolen Dobby, Draco had never known anyone to own as many house elves as the Malfoys. Even with the loss of Dobby, there was still only one family that owned as many, the Zabini's. Most wealthy families only owned one. The Parkinsons and the Greengrasses each owned two. Owning three put the Malfoys and the Zabini's in their own class. So how were there so many elves in the Potter Manor kitchen?

A young elf bustled forward and escorted Draco through a hallway to the orangery. Draco loved the orangery at Malfoy Manor and this one was equally magnificent. There were gardens as far as the eye could see and greenhouses in the distance. He could see movement amongst the garden beds. After watching for a bit, Draco realized there were elves, more than he could count. How many elves could Harry Potter possibly own?

Draco was only vaguely aware of consuming the small tea that an elf served. He remained in the orangery for the rest of the morning trying to understand how his world had turned upside down.

When he was called to lunch, he walked into the dining room to find his mother and aunt had been joined by Sirius Black. Draco turned and walked out. It seemed the safest option was to simply stay in his room for the rest of the day.

Narcissa Isla Black woke up Sunday morning feeling something she had never previously felt: free. Even for the few years at Hogwarts when she thought she would have a choice, she

recognized the constraints that governed her choices. She had been subject to her parent's rules and while they would allow her to train as a healer, it was with the understanding that she would only practice the craft in a way suitable to her station. She would be allowed to choose a husband but only within the criteria that suited her House and birth status.

Even those limited choices were removed when her younger sister, Andromeda, married a muggle named Ted Tonks. As expected, Narcissa stepped into the marriage contract with Lucius Malfoy which Andromeda had run away from. Narcissa had not been angry with her sister. She had been envious.

Despite stepping in to meet family obligations, Narcissa had kept a few things for herself. She had insisted she be allowed to complete her basic medi-witch training before marriage. She also demanded to complete her Healer apprenticeship after the marriage, even if during that time she bore the required Malfoy heir. Narcissa knew she would never work as a Healer but she wanted the accomplishment nonetheless.

On the surface, Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy were the perfect couple. They were as smoothly polished as the finest marble. They were physically beautiful. They had exquisite manners and practiced all the social niceties. They moved in all the right circles and socialized with only the best people. They had power, prestige, beauty and grace. Plus, they were rich.

The Malfoy fortune was significant. Despite the drain that devotion to a dark lord caused, the annual interest on their accounts was more than most families could earn in a decade. The substantial dowry that Narcissa brought to the marriage was gravy that never left her vault. It was simply there as one more sign of the perfection of their union.

Underneath the perfect surface was a different picture altogether. While Narcissa Black subsumed her personality underneath the image of a perfect, pureblood lady, Lucius Malfoy had no personality to subsume. Narcissa acted perfectly and it was very much an act. Lucius was exactly what he appeared: shallow, vain and arrogant.

Had there been anything to grasp, Narcissa would have found it and held on. She was a passionate woman and thrived in interactions with her family and friends. Narcissa had naively assumed that she and Lucius had found nothing in common because they didn't know each other. She honestly thought that following the marriage, she would find things in common that would let her form a partnership with Lucius. It was not long into the marriage before Narcissa realized how little chance there was of any form of rapport developing.

First, there was the disillusionment of her wedding night. No one expected anyone, male or female, to arrive at their marriage night chaste. In fact, it was considered rather rude to not bring some level of skill as a gift to their mate. The only expectation was that proper precautions, against both disease and unwanted pregnancy, would be taken.

This was an arranged marriage. Narcissa didn't expect romance. She didn't even expect tenderness. She did, however, expect competence. She would have liked attention to detail. A good helping of thoroughness would also have been appreciated. Instead, she got barely perfunctory.

After Lucius had left for his bed, Narcissa tried to be reasonable. Perhaps there was someone else. It was an arranged marriage and nothing said he hadn't fallen in love with someone else. Maybe he preferred wizards over witches. Whatever the reason, at least he could have tried. Narcissa was more than a little annoyed.

In the year between the ceremony and conception, each well-timed encounter had been the same. A hastily cast lubrication charm, the minimum required thrusting and then a nod of acknowledgment. Breakfast the next morning was the same as always. Lucius did not indicate that he realized his performance was lacking. Eventually, Narcissa realized that his sexual performance was exactly in line with the rest of his personality: severely and ignorantly bereft of anything approaching character or personality.

Narcissa decided early on that there would be no extramarital sexual activity. It wasn't that she lacked desire. Rather, it was that she lacked the patience to take all the necessary steps to screen any potential lovers to ensure they were not a threat to the life she was creating. In the early years of her marriage, Narcissa devoted herself to her apprenticeship. Her family and wealth had allowed her to find a situation with a well-known healer that would make allowances for her marriage and subsequent pregnancy.

Once she had achieved her healing mastery, Narcissa found ways to use it. Her social standing let her gain a position on the board of St. Mungos. The changes she shepherded over the years might seem small but when taken together increased the overall quality of care to the average wixen that did not have access to a private healer.

She went from attending social events to hosting them. She donated generously and eventually became known for her ability to raise money for underfunded causes. Her Yule and Solstice Balls were the most well-attended events of the year.

She loved her son fiercely. She did her best to mitigate the effect of Lucius' hit-or-miss attention on a young, impressionable boy. Draco loved his mother but he idolized his father who seemed to embody all that was important in their world. Narcissa knew that Draco was intelligent. She knew that underneath the arrogance he emulated, he had compassion. Unfortunately, in times of stress, Draco became a copy of his father.

On the morning following the dissolution of her marriage, Narcissa felt free: free to hope, free to openly support her own values, free to parent without interference and just possibly, free to find love.

Lucius Abraxas Malfoy was confused. He clearly remembered that awful dinner party, except he wasn't sure why he thought it was awful. The food was spectacular. He found it a bit odd that his host had used a house elf to announce the courses but he had to admit that it was an interesting theme of using all locally sourced ingredients. The company was tolerable. He would never have invited a muggle but Ted Tonks was a well-spoken man who seemed knowledgeable of wizarding customs. Andromeda had been as cultured and witty as Narcissa. Sirius Black was also an entertaining dinner companion despite his fugitive status.

As to his host, that was the confusing part. Lucius knew he had met Lord Black, whose identity had been a shock. Lucius had spent an evening in Lord Black's company. Lucius had been livid at the dissolution of his marriage and had threatened the higher-ranked lord. Lucius could remember Lord Black's requirements for future interactions with Draco. Lucius still wasn't sure how he got from that conversation to Diagon Alley but he had easily apparated home. Now, on Sunday morning, Lucius could not remember the identity of Lord Black.

There was also the issue of his dissolved marriage. It was inconvenient. Narcissa had always been a superb hostess. Her dinner parties, teas and balls were always the most sought-after events. She collected gossip and could sort out what was advantageous and what was drivel. She kept track of his social calendar, even events she did not attend. She made sure Malfoy Manor was always decorated as per the latest continental style. Yes, it would be very inconvenient to live without her.

Fortunately, Lucius could keep Draco as his heir and even continue his education in the future duties Draco would assume when he came of age. At least, there didn't need to be another marriage. Getting used to Narcissa had been tiresome. Lucius had no desire to go through that again.

Albus Dumbledore walked through Hogwarts with a smile on his face and a spring in his step. It had been a ghastly week but Albus had determined to take this day and enjoy it. He would set aside the distress over his missing wand. He would not think about the mystery that Lord Black presented. He wouldn't even try to figure out why some order members had easily visited the Weasleys at Grimmauld Place while others could not get through the wards.

Albus had arranged for all the order members to attempt to visit the Black home on Saturday. Some he sent by floo. Others attempted apparation. A few approached from the street. The results had been puzzling. While Severus Snape had gotten in by every possible means, Alastor Moody was denied entry. Arabella Figg, Dedalus Diggle, Elphias Doge and Mundungus Fletcher could not pass the wards. Minerva McGonagall and Hestia Jones had both arrived and stayed for tea with Molly. Hagrid and Aberforth had knocked on the front door and spent a pleasant hour in the newly redecorated front parlor with Arthur. Those denied that tried to enter a second time found themselves high on a windy cliff somewhere in southern England. No one was willing to try a third time, not even Albus.

That was yesterday. Today he would enjoy breakfast with his teaching colleagues. He would take a walk by the Black Lake and watch the giant squid play. He would set aside any worries until tomorrow. It was a good plan. It was an excellent plan. Unfortunately, the plan did not last past breakfast.

After greeting everyone at the table, Albus tucked into a hearty breakfast. Everyone was nearly finished when the mail owls arrived. As usual, personal correspondence was read first with the periodicals set aside to peruse with the after-breakfast tea.

"Oh" exclaimed Pomona Sprout, holding up a letter, "Fortuna is coming to Glasgow in August." Fortuna Sprout was Pomona's older sister. Both shared a love and mastery of herbology. While Pomona had settled happily into a life of teaching and growing at

Hogwarts, Fortuna enjoyed a life of travel. She often took commissions to source rare plant ingredients and also consulted with private growers.

Minerva held up a letter, "It's from Filius." There were various reactions as Minerva looked over the letter and then she began to read out loud.

Dear Minerva,

I clearly remember the moment I decided to leave the dueling circuit. It wasn't momentous. I was tired and more than a little bored. I traveled for a while, visiting those cities that previously I had competed in but never really seen. It was on a visit to London that I saw the advertisement for a charms professor. I had my mastery and, while on the circuit, had kept up with the latest developments in the field. I had never even considered teaching before but suddenly, it felt right. You know the rest.

I can honestly say that I was unprepared for the first time I saw a first year successfully perform wingardium leviosa. The look of astonishment and joy was unmatched. It never got old, student after student, year after year, seeing the pleasure that successful casting can bring to a student. Watching the brightest and the best of magical Britain move through the years to successfully complete OWLs and then NEWTs brought unexpected satisfaction into my life. The camaraderie of my fellow teachers only added to the experience.

I know you wonder why I left. I can only say that, in time, you will understand. Beyond the facts is a truth: Magic moved me. I stand witness to events that will soon become widely known. I don't know what will happen, but there is one thing that I do know. Magical beings are at a crossroads. Each of us has a choice. It isn't Light vs Dark. It isn't even right vs wrong. It's about Magic. Do we follow where it leads or do we stay trapped in what is comfortable?

Momentous events have happened. Regardless of the name you attach, the return of an evil wizard will change many things. Trust that even away from Hogwarts, I am at your side.

Faithful in Friendship,

Filius

The table was silent before everyone started talking at once. It was the distinctive drawl of Severus Snape that cut through the chatter, "It is apparently a day of news. I have received a most unusual letter from Sirius Black. Severus then read his letter to the table.

Dear Severus,

There is no good way to say this so I'll be blunt. I was an arse. Regardless of how we loathed each other, I took it too far. Repeatedly. I was wrong but never more so than when a

thoughtless prank endangered your life. By rights, I should have been expelled. Instead, you were coerced into silence to protect another that I had also wronged.

I apologize. You deserved none of the harm I and my friends dealt you.

You may wonder what has brought about this change of attitude as it has not been so long since we shared our dislike of each other. I blame Lord Black. Recently, he rebuked me, "You are Heir to House Black. You do not get the luxury of acting out your feelings like a fourteen-year-old boy."

That statement led me to consider my recent behavior which, in turn, led me to consider how I actually behaved as a fourteen-year-old boy. It is not something I am proud of. I do not expect your forgiveness but I wanted you to know that if we should meet in the future, I will behave better.

Sincerely,

Sirius Orion Black
Heir to House Black

The silence in response to this letter lasted even longer. Finally, Minerva spoke, "How do you feel about this, Severus?"

"I don't know," Severus answered. "I think I will need some time to consider this."

Albus Dumbledore was genuinely puzzled. Who was this Lord Black that he was having such a profound effect on Sirius? Setting aside the mystery of Lord Black, Albus picked up the Daily Prophet, signaling the rest of the table to pick up their newspapers and magazines.

There, across the top of the front page in large letters, the headline proclaimed Lord Black Returns. With a frown, Albus started reading the interview. As Albus read, he saw many of his plans disintegrate. He depended on Sirius Black's fugitive status to keep Harry Potter with his relatives. Such a potentially powerful young man could not be allowed to disrupt their world. The unpleasantness of his family situation combined with the bindings that Albus had placed on the infant's magical core meant that Harry Potter could be managed to do what was necessary for the greater good.

Albus continued reading with growing horror. His day of rest was rapidly disappearing as the need to control the response to the interview became evident. It was the scraping of a chair that drew his attention away from the paper.

"Albus Dumbledore," Minerva said, the anger evident in her voice, "I have never been so disappointed. How could you?" She stormed out of the Great Hall, followed by most of the teachers. Only Severus remained.

"I always assumed that your lack of regard for my distress was because I was in Slytherin," Severus said evenly. "I didn't realize your disregard for the individual was so unlimited."

The first howler arrived, cutting off further conversation.

Sitting around a kitchen table in London, three witches were weeping while the wizards sat in silence. Molly Weasley wept for Sirius Black. She could admit that she had never trusted him but that distrust had been based on the belief that he had been convicted of a crime, even if Sirius hadn't betrayed James and Lily. Now that she realized he was not only innocent but had been wrongly imprisoned, she grieved for what Sirius had lost.

Hermione Granger wept for her loss of faith. She knew that those in authority weren't always right. She knew that there were corrupt individuals in positions of power. The knowledge of wrongdoing had been balanced by shining examples of public service, individuals of apparent goodness that worked on behalf of the people. Albus Dumbledore was one such person, or so Hermione had believed. Even the obvious miscarriage of justice against Sirius had not shaken her belief in the headmaster. She told herself that these things would take time. Now, she saw that her belief was misplaced. If Dumbledore could do this to Sirius Black, one of his followers, what else was he willing to do?

Ginny Weasley wept for Harry Potter. Aside from her romantic fantasies, Ginny considered Harry a friend. She knew his life before Hogwarts had not been good. She knew he hated returning to his relatives each summer. To realize that Harry could have grown up loved by his godfather but hadn't been was heartbreaking to the idealistic young woman. The needless suffering of someone she cared about woke up something in Ginny that wasn't linked to her adolescent notions of love. It was fierce and when the weeping ended, it left behind a powerful compassion that would continue to shape her as she grew into a young woman.

In the presence of so much emotion, it was almost anticlimactic when Ron exclaimed, "Blimey, someone needs to tell Harry."

Ron didn't understand why his father and brothers burst into laughter.

Manic Monday

Chapter Notes

July 17

Harry was practically skipping as he entered the dining room. Reaching around Filius, he grabbed a slice of bacon and munched on it as he settled into his usual seat.

"I thought you had a breakfast meeting this morning," Filius said. Harry now had a weekly breakfast meeting with his publicist, Borner, to review that week's published interview.

"It was more like a pastry and tea meeting," Harry responded, "but it was a good meeting."

"Was he happy with the interview?" Filius asked

"Yeah, and he promises they'll get easier." A bacon sarnie and a bowl of fruit appeared in front of Harry, "thanks."

"Why do you bother to thank house elves?" Draco asked.

"Because I appreciate them," Harry answered. "Plus, it's polite." Harry turned to Filius, "What are your plans for the morning?"

"The elves and I are heading to Gringotts to check out furniture for the keep," Filius answered.

"Oh yeah," Harry said with a grin, "I guess we need that."

Harry continued eating as he listened to Narcissa and Filius discuss their favorite books. When there was a pause in the conversation, Draco spoke up, "How long will you keep us prisoner here?"

Without looking at Draco, Harry called, "Timon."

A young elf popped beside Harry, "what can Timon do for Lord Harry?"

"Please show Mr. Black to the floo so that he can leave whenever he has his mother's permission," Harry requested. "Lady Black, when you are finished, could you join me in my study?"

"Of course, Lord Black," Narcissa answered.

When Narcissa entered the Lord's study, she found Harry sorting through a large pile of letters. Harry smiled and indicated for her to wait in the small sitting area. "Dobby," the young lord called. The elf popped in and took a stack of folders from Harry. "Those go to Solicitor Tonks, Sharpnail and Sirius. "

Picking up another folder, Harry walked over and sat down on the loveseat across from Narcissa. "As a member of House Black, you are welcome in any of the Black properties. As of today, only one has been cleaned and made ready for use. It is the London Manor, and currently, a family is using it as a safe haven. While you are still welcome there, I wanted you to be aware.

"House Black currently has six elves, but quite a few elves from other Houses have volunteered to help them clean and decorate the remaining Black properties after a curse-breaking team has cleared them.

"In the meantime, you are welcome here as long as you wish to stay."

"Thank you, My Lord," Narcissa responded, surprised at the generosity.

"There is a Potter property that you might find suitable," Harry handed Narcissa the folder he was holding. "It is in Hogsmead. As you have both Potter Manor and other Black properties to use for social events, I thought you might like a smaller property just for yourself."

Narcissa blinked, suddenly unable to respond. She had not expected that level of consideration.

Harry continued, "There's no rush. Stay here as long as you wish. After this week, I will be moving to my Keep. I will be here during most days for work and tutoring."

Your Keep?" Narcissa wondered.

"Peverell Keep," Harry answered. Most days, I'll have breakfast and dinner there."

"I'm surprised you won't be living in your ancestral home," Narcissa said, trying to limit her curiosity.

"Oh, I am," Harry grinned, "just a different ancestor. Sometime this week, please see Sharpnail at Gringotts. He is the account manager for my Houses and will give you the key to your personal vault and explain what's available for House-related expenses from the main vault."

"Is there anything in particular you need from me, My Lord," Narcissa asked?

"Right now, I need you to train your son to behave like a Black," Harry responded. "I understand that he is out of sorts and I'm an easy target, but there is a limit to what I will put up with both in my own home and in public."

"I will see to his education," Narcissa answered.

When Harry arrived at Greengrass and Associates a short while later, he was looking forward to a break from House Black business. It had been the right decision to deal with the complicated House first, but it had been very challenging, even with good advisors. Harry was hoping House Peverell would be a bit more fun as there were no urgent issues to address.

“Good morning, Lord Potter,” Tonks greeted him.

“Good morning, Mr. Tonks,” Harry responded. “Did you have a pleasant Sunday?”

“I did,” Tonks answered, leading Harry into the firm. “I spent the day golfing with my uncle.”

“I didn’t know that wizards played golf,” Harry said.

“They don’t,” Tonks responded with a grin. “It means there was no chance of encountering wizarding gossip or work.”

Harry laughed and followed Tonks into a large office with an older wizard seated behind a very large desk. The older wizard stood and came around the desk, extending his hand to shake, “Good morning, Lord Potter. I’m Everard Greengrass.”

“Good morning, Sir,” Harry responded and followed him to a small seating area. As directed, Harry sat in an armchair across from Greengrass and watched as Tonks sat on a small settee.

“Lord Potter, Greengrass and Associates find itself in a position that has occurred three times previously. One client is not only utilizing 100% of a solicitor’s time but appears to need to do so indefinitely,” Greengrass stated.

“Is that a problem?” Harry asked.

“Only if we let it become one,” Greengrass answered. “Fortunately, we have a precedent for dealing with this situation.”

Harry was nervous. He took a deep breath, briefly felt for his magic and then slowly released the breath. “What needs to happen?” he asked, feeling slightly calmer.

“As we’ve observed with other firms, both muggle and magical, in this situation, the client often finds it more economical to hire their own personal solicitor. Not only does the firm lose the business, but the client loses the resources that a complete law firm can provide. Additionally, it causes a minor setback in the ongoing work as the new solicitor settles in.

“Our solution, which has successfully worked three previous times, is to allow the client to hire the Greengrass and Associates solicitor they are already working with. This will have an immediate effect of reducing your costs.”

“What is the benefit to you?” Harry asked, immediately appreciating how convenient it would be to have Tonks as an employee.

“We have a contract, which can be modified as needed, that outlines a future relationship with Greengrass and Associates. You would be responsible for hiring any assistants you need

for Solicitor Tonks. When you have specialized legal needs, you will continue to use the solicitors we have on staff.”

“What do you mean by specialized legal needs?” Harry asked.

“Real estate contracts, criminal proceedings, matters of family law in the event you wanted to adopt into your family. Any area where Tonks would normally reach out to another solicitor who has specific and limited legal knowledge,” Greengrass answered.

Harry nodded, “That makes sense. When would this happen?”

“If you sign the contract this week, Tonks can start for you next Monday.”

“Sounds reasonable,” Harry responded.

Greengrass stood, “I’ll let you get on with your usual business.”

Harry and Tonks both stood, and Harry followed Tonks to his office where they sat down and each prepared the cup of tea that was waiting for them. “What do you think of this?” Harry asked.

“I was quite surprised when Mr. Greengrass approached me this morning, but as he explained it to you, I finally had a chance to think about it,” Tonks answered. “You have made it clear that you want to actively build and manage your Houses. I think it would be very fulfilling to work with you and help you realize all of your dreams and ambitions.”

“Would you look over the contract, make any suggested changes and then pass it to Sharpnail to review?” Harry requested. “Does it say how much I should pay you?”

“I will review it, and yes,” Tonks answered, “it does specify pay equal to what I am currently being paid here with a specified review period.”

“Sounds reasonable,” Harry said, “and I think it would be great to work directly with you. How much staff will we need?”

Tonks smiled at Harry’s use of the word, we, “Most Lords that actively manage a House have an assistant of some sort. Usually, that assistant manages their schedule and handles basic correspondence and research, plus whatever the Lord needs. You have eight Houses, and rather than have a person for each House, I would suggest assistants based on specific activities.

“You want a personal secretary who will keep track of everything. That person will be tasked with not only keeping track of your appointments but coordinating the work of the other assistants. That way, you would communicate directly with your secretary and me but wouldn’t have to deal with the others regularly. That simplifies your life.”

“Makes sense,” Harry said. “What other assistants do you recommend?”

“You want a correspondence secretary. I’m sure the pile you sent me today matches what you sent Sharpnail and Sirius,” Tonks answered.

Harry chuckled, "Yeah, it was a little intimidating. I'm just glad I could pass it on."

"Once a correspondence secretary knows your preferences, you will only get your personal mail. Along with the staff, I will handle official responses, and all you will have to do is review anything non-standard and attach your seal. You will be provided a daily summary of the correspondence received and sent on your behalf."

"I would recommend two other assistants to start with," Tonks suggested. "A research assistant for both business and Wizengamot matters as well as a general assistant to take care of whatever needs done and provide additional help to the other assistants and me."

Harry finished his tea and poured another cup, "It scares me a little that it sounds reasonable to have a personal solicitor and four assistants to start with."

Tonks laughed, "I do understand. A month ago, you were still at Hogwarts. You are handling everything remarkably well."

"Sometimes yes and sometimes no," Harry said. "It helps that I have so many people around me that help."

"That's what everyone needs," Tonks answered. "Do you have anyone in particular in mind to hire?"

"Only one, and I don't know if he will do it, but I'd like Percy Weasley to be my secretary. He currently works at the ministry," Harry answered. "He's a prat, but he is very smart and works hard. I think that once I had his loyalty, he wouldn't waver."

Tonks made some notes and then asked, "How important is it that I hire him specifically?"

"Pretty important," Harry responded. "His family has always been there for me and his work at the ministry is tearing them all apart. I think that Percy has let his ambition get in the way of his sense. I really don't think the ministry is a good place for him to work."

"I'll put together a salary package for your review, along with suggestions for the other positions," Tonks replied. "Before we get into today's business, I have another suggestion."

"What's that?"

"It was important in the beginning for you to get used to being addressed as Lord Potter and using formal address," Tonks said. "Now that we will be working together directly, I suggest that in private we use our given names."

Harry grinned, "I'd like that." He stuck out a hand, "I'm Harry. It's a pleasure to meet you."

Tonks shook his hand, "I'm Ted. I'm looking forward to a great future with you, Harry."

"There is one other person I want to hire," Harry said, "Remus Lupin."

Tonks made a note, "What would he be doing?"

“First, he will hold my proxy for Griffyndor, both on the Hogwarts Board and in the Wizengamot,” Harry answered. “I also want him to help create and manage a foundation that will aid werewolves.”

Tonks stopped writing, “Are you aware of how difficult that will be?”

“I have an idea,” Harry said, “but it needs to be done. Remus Lupin is family, but if I just take care of him, I’m not really solving any problems. So if I hire him for this, I can take care of him and work on the problem.”

“You are a remarkable young man,” Tonks said as he resumed taking notes.

“I’m lucky I have the chance to be,” Harry answered. “Now, where are we with the Dursleys?”

Sharpnail was starting to review the contract to transfer Ted Tonks from the employment of Greengrass & Associates to Harry James Potter when the notification chime sounded. Setting aside the contract, Sharpnail had just rounded the desk when Harry was ushered into his office.

“Good morning, Lord Potter,” Sharpnail said with genuine pleasure. “What brings you to Gringott’s today?”

“I have some business to take care of in the Potter and Emrys vaults and just stopped in to greet you,” Harry answered. “We do so much business in our letters, and sometimes it is just nice to meet face to face.”

Sharpnail ushered Harry to the round conference table in his office. Harry Potter was the first client that Sharpnail had ever considered worthy of meeting without a desk between them.

“I’m reviewing the Tonks contract and will forward any suggested changes to you this afternoon,” Sharpnail said.

“Thank you, Sharpnail,” Harry responded. “Anything I need to know that wasn’t covered in this morning’s letter?”

“No. I ensured the ministry recorded the dissolution of the LeStrange marriage and reclaiming the dowry vault on Saturday. Although it is unnecessary, you should also file a record of disinheriting Bellatrix Black after the marriage was dissolved,” Sharpnail said.

“Tonks can do that?” Harry verified.

“Yes, it’s just a form. Doesn’t even require a House seal,” Sharpnail explained.

“Wow,” Harry said. “Has anyone ever tried to fake that?”

“Not that I’ve heard of,” Sharpnail answered. “The ministry filing is just a formality, but I like to have everything in order.”

“Me, too,” Harry grinned. “I have a few ideas I want to run by you.”

Harry was jittery as he stepped into the cart that would take him to the main Potter vault. He had so many things he wanted to do and had to keep reminding himself that there was no rush. What he had read in the Black grimoire and the little he had read in the Peverell grimoire fit Harry’s impression that the wizarding world was churning in place. He had been reading biographies of both current business leaders and those that had shepherded the Industrial Revolution. He had read a great book about how the steam engine had changed the 19th-century muggle world. He had also started reading a fascinating book about intellectual property and how the growth of ideas that profited the individual drove innovation forward. These ideas bounced around his head and he could see no corresponding innovation in wizarding Britain. It seemed like most innovation was coming from the rest of the world and the conservatives in the Wizengamot worked hard to keep such things away from British magicals.

At this stage, it was primarily ideas, but he was starting to get some confirmation from the various questions he asked his advisors. Tonks was right that he needed a staff. If he wanted to advance his different ideas, he had to have help.

As the cart hurtled along the tracks, Harry breathed steadily to calm his mind. He had a task. He had not learned he could call House treasures to a vault until he had read the section in the Peverell grimoire. Harry had done that in all subsequent House vaults, including the Black vault when he went to claim the Lordship ring. He had not done that for the Potter or Emrys vaults. There might not be any artifacts to recall, but he wouldn’t know that until he tried.

Standing in the Leaky Cauldron less than an hour later, Harry wanted nothing more but to sit in his office with a pot of tea and a plate of treats to nibble on. There had been some rare books that came to the Potter vault when he called, but most everything had been stored away before his parents went into hiding. The shock had happened in the Emrys vault. The Emrys vault wasn’t a large one, but it was deep in the earth below Gringotts.

Harry stopped. He never even considered he might be recognized though with his change in dress, removal of the famous scar and a recent growth, it was unlikely. He stood in the open space before the bar and just froze.

Oh My God.

He couldn’t even swear on Merlin. Not for this.

Sitting in one of his vaults was a sword. Not that sword. Godric Gryffindor’s sword had been a surprise, but when he thought about it, it made sense. No, this was a different sword.

Maybe he was wrong. Maybe the sword wasn’t what he thought it was.

It was. He knew it, no matter how much he might like to deny it.

Sitting in one of his many vaults was Excalibur.

Yes, the Excalibur.

Legendary sword of Arther.

The Sword in the Stone.

Held by the Lady of the Lake.

Except it wasn't. Obviously, since it was sitting on its own pedestal in the Emrys vault.

"Can I help you, Sir," Tom asked.

Harry blinked and focused on the proprietor of the Leaky Cauldron.

"Tom, it's me, Harry Potter," Harry said, not having the sense to say anything else.

"By Merlin, it is you," Tom said. "I barely recognize the young lad I met two years ago."

That snapped Harry out of it, "Yeah, I've changed a bit. I'm here to meet some friends, a little older than me, red hair."

"Ah yes, the Weasley twins," Tom answered. "Up one flight, to the right, second room on the left. Just ring the bell when you are ready for lunch."

"Thanks," Harry said and turned to the stairs. He took the flight up to set aside the reality that was sitting in his vault. House Emrys was six weeks away. He had other things to deal with first. Right now, he had friends to see.

Harry looked at the twins and forgot about the contents of his vault. He rushed over and pushed between them on the loveseat they occupied, "Talk to me."

"We're rich," Fred mumbled.

"We're heirs," George said at almost the same time.

"Let's take the heir thing first," Harry suggested.

"We are heirs to House Prewitt," Fred answered. "It can only go to twins, and we are the only Prewitt twins."

"We have to get at least four NEWTs," George added.

"Because, apparently, Prewitts are pranksters, and it ensures the Heads of House have a good magical education," Fred clarified.

"That actually makes sense," Harry responded. "So you will both be Lord Prewitt after you get your NEWTs. That's quite a surprise."

“Yeah, and there’s a vault,” Fred added. “I don’t know if Mom knew about the Lord thing, but she had to know there was a vault.”

“Which is frustrating,” George added. “All those years of scrimping and at least from age 11, we had a trust vault.”

“Did you meet with your account manager?” Harry asked.

Both twins just looked at him blankly.

“I’ll take that as a ‘no’,” Harry said as he maneuvered himself off the couch and went to the table on the other side of the room. Summoning parchment and pen, Harry started to write, “I’m asking my account manager, Sharpnail, to find out who the Prewitt account manager is. That’s the first step.”

Harry called Dobby and sent the note off and then turned to the twins, “Let’s call for food and I’ll catch you up on me. Then we can figure out what to do next for you.”

Fred and George nodded numbly and went over to sit by Harry. Harry summoned the bell and rang it. A few minutes later, a large bowl of stew, a basket of bread and a stack of bowls and spoons appeared at the table.

Shortly after that, three butterbeers appeared.

Harry started dishing up the stews and passing the filled bowls to the brothers, “You figured out that I’m Lord Black and Lord Potter.”

Twin snorts sounded from either side of him. Calmer now, the twins resumed their usual twin-speak, “Yeah, even though half our family seems willfully blind to it.”

“Despite all the evidence,”

“So we figure you never went back to your relatives,”

“But we don’t know how you did it,”

“Or where you are staying at,”

“But Sirius is obviously in on it, somehow,”

“And Dumbledore doesn’t know,”

“Because you don’t seem to trust the headmaster now.”

Harry had been happily dipping chunks of bread into his bowl and eating broth-soaked bites. He scooped a bite of meat and vegetables and chewed happily. Finally, he swallowed and set down his spoon, “That’s pretty accurate. What happened is complicated, but basically, I made a family with Dobby, Winky and Professor Flitwick. We started out in Diagon Alley but moved to Potter Manor. Next week, we will move to Peverell Keep, which will be our home.”

“Wow,” the twins said together and then waited for Harry to continue.

“Your brother, Bill, knows a lot of this because of stuff happening with Gringotts. There are things I can’t tell you, but I can tell you that I’ve claimed other Houses. Every week there will be a new interview in the Prophet. All of those are me.”

“The Tournament,” Fred said.

“Only those of legal age could compete,” George completed the thought.

“Exactly. I went to Gringotts to figure out how much I had in my trust vault and met the Potter Account Manager. From there, it just grew,”

“It just grew,” George commented.

Harry laughed, “Okay, it sounds lame, but it’s true.”

“As long as you are okay, that’s all that matters,” Fred responded.

“I’m better than I’ve ever been,” Harry assured them.

The lunch with Fred and George had given Harry some much-needed perspective. The twins left for a meeting with Sharpnail and a promise to Harry that outside of buying school supplies for themselves, Ron and Ginny, they would not touch the money in the Prewitt Trust Vault.

Harry was happy for the twins but recognized that it would cause upheaval in the Weasley family. Ron, in particular, would not react well. It would also take some time for Fred and George to come to terms with the choices that their mother had made regarding their inheritance. After making arrangements for a regular Monday lunch, the twins were calmer.

Flooding to the Healer’s office, Harry was surprised to see only Andromeda waiting for him. “Where is everyone?” he asked as Filius walked into the room.

“Sorry for being a bit late,” Filius said, “Sirius is not having a good day, but his elf is with him and I think having tea with you will help.”

Harry nodded and turned to Andromeda, “What’s happening today?”

Andromeda smiled and ushered them back to the examining room, “I will be monitoring your physical health. Unless something unusual happens, I’d like you to keep coming in every week. I’ll do a brief exam and we’ll work on the best ways for you to achieve optimum health. Heartwise will be here in an hour to talk with you. An hour after that, Gorin will be here to work on your magical education.”

“Sounds good,” Harry responded.

“Stand up, and I’ll do a basic diagnostic scan,” Tonks said.

Harry stood, and while Tonks was scanning, Filius started chatting about his recent finds in the Potter library and the catalog system that kept track of everything. Harry appreciated the distraction.

After the scan was completed, they sat at the table and Tonks began, “Your level of healing is remarkable. The damage to your internal organs from malnutrition is steadily healing. You’ve grown an inch in the last week. All your new bones are healthy and the remainder are mostly healed. Let’s continue the nutrient potions, but it is a precaution.”

“That’s excellent news, Harry,” Filius said with a broad smile.

“I was worried you might find more wrong with me,” Harry admitted.

“We were quite alarmed at your state of physical health the first time we saw you, but you have responded very well,” Tonks said. “The combination of removing the soul shard and freeing your magical core has had a remarkable impact on the speed of healing.”

“How much more will I grow?” Harry asked. “I’ve really felt clumsy this week.”

“You are still smaller than average for your age, but I suspect you will catch up in the next few months,” Andromeda answered. “Then you will most likely experience a normal growth spurt in a couple of years. Now I’d like to talk about your diet and activity levels.”

Harry was feeling optimistic about his physical health by the time Heartwise arrived. Flitwick left to shop in the Alley while Harry met with the dwarrow mind healer.

After settling into a private room, Heartwise said, “You had a hectic week. Tell me the best thing about it.”

Harry took some time to think about the previous week before responding, “The best thing was bringing Andromeda and her daughter back into the family. Feeling the magic connect and seeing them respond to it was kind of amazing.”

“What was the hardest thing you had to do?” Heartwise asked.

“Hardest? Cutting off Bellatrix,” Harry answered. “Magically it wasn’t hard. Her connection to the family magic was already so thin and weak. I can’t say that I feel guilty for doing it, but it is not something a Head of House should ever have to do. It felt like this really big loss.”

Heartwise waited, letting Harry work through his feelings.

“I know that Bellatrix LeStrange did horrible things. She chose to follow an evil person and did evil things in his name,” Harry said. “What I have trouble with is why someone would do those things. How can someone hate so much that they just want to hurt people?”

Heartwise looked at Harry and leaned forward, “Harry, that is a bigger question than most of us can ever answer. The sad truth is that there are people who choose to harm others. The question you have to be able to answer is how you will respond to it.”

“It is not acceptable and will not be allowed in any House I lead,” Harry declared.

“As the Head of a House, you will have to make hard decisions. Knowing your boundaries is important,” Heartwise said. “It doesn’t mean it will be easy or without pain, but it will help you determine your actions.”

“That makes sense,” Harry acknowledged. “I know I had to remove her from the family. There was never any question about that. I didn’t expect to feel sad about it.”

“As you become closer to your magic, you will feel the things that impact Magic itself,” Heartwise explained.

“Is that normal?” Harry asked.

“Yes and no,” Heartwise answered. “It is normal that those strong in magic and highly attuned to it will feel it more. However, there are very few individuals truly capable of that.”

Heartwise waited while Harry thought about that. When he nodded, she continued, “How are you feeling overall about everything?”

“Last week, I stayed so busy moving from one thing to the next that I didn’t really let myself feel,” Harry answered. “Sunday was such a relief, and I shoved everything away to enjoy the day.”

“What happened today?”

“Everything,” Harry exclaimed. “It’s like one moment I feel good, and it all makes sense, and the next it feels like too much.”

“Tell me about the things that felt good and made sense,” Heartwise said.

“I had meetings with Solicitor Tonks and Sharpnail,” Harry responded. “It’s a lot of details and figuring things out, but it makes sense. It’s practical. It’s not about how I feel. It’s just stuff to deal with. I like that. I can see what we decided and feel like I made progress.”

“Understandable,” Heartwise confirmed. “So what didn’t make sense?”

“Excalibur!”

“Excalibur?” Heartwise was confused at this sudden change in direction.

“Exactly,” Harry said. “Excalibur. That made no sense. I’m standing in the Emrys vault calling for lost House objects, and suddenly this huge sword appears back in the vault. It was in the back and stuck in this big, black stone.”

Heartwise started laughing. It probably wasn’t the best response, but she couldn’t help it.

“I’m glad you find it funny,” Harry said with no small amount of asperity.

“It’s just so unexpected,” Heartwise explained. “Everything going on, and in the middle of it all, Excalibur shows up.”

“Okay,” Harry conceded, “it is a little funny.”

“It’s a lot funny,” Heartwise insisted.

By the end of their time, Harry had learned some things to help him handle everything better. Heartwise suggested that Harry take time at the end of every day to review his day and how things had made him feel. She also reassured him that it was okay to feel both good and bad at the same time. Emotions happened and part of growing up was learning how to deal with them.

The hour with Gorin was more practical. Gorin transported Harry and Filius to a large plain. Harry had no idea where they were except that it was warm and sunny. Gorin conjured rows of boulders, and for an hour, Harry blasted them. What varied were the strength of the blast and the presence of his wand. It was both fun and frustrating.

Harry discovered that he could blow a row of at least six boulders away with a sweep of his arm and enough concentration. Blasting a corner of a boulder off required the wand and a lot of practice. Gorin suggested that Harry repeat this exercise three more times before they met again. Filius nodded and opened his calendar to make a note.

Arriving at Potter Manor, Harry ran upstairs to take a quick shower and change into jeans and a t-shirt. The official part of his day was done and while he had more to do, he could do it comfortably. Entering the orangery, he found Filius, Sirius and Narcissa waiting for him.

“Thanks for waiting,” Harry said. “Where’s Draco?”

“In his room, most likely,” Narcissa answered. “Would you like him here?”

“I think it would be nice to have everyone together,” Harry answered and called for an elf to request Draco’s presence.

Draco was silent and surly when he arrived. Sitting next to his mother, he asked, “Why did I have to be here?”

“You don’t have to be here,” Harry answered, “but I thought you might enjoy it.”

Draco was confused by Harry’s answer but didn’t respond so Harry turned to Narcissa and Sirius to ask about their day.

Sirius admitted to his struggle to reconcile his image of his former headmaster with a man who had willingly let him spend twelve years in Azkaban and remain on the run for nearly two more. It was Narcissa who had the background and experience to reassure her cousin. Listening to her, Harry was struck by how graceful she was. He had upended her world, yet she was continually polite and kind. He had not heard a single complaint. He had not thought about her reaction when he had made his decision regarding her marriage, but he would not have expected the result that happened.

With those thoughts, Harry turned to Narcissa, "How was your day?"

"It was very interesting," Narcissa answered, "but it raised a lot of questions. I was hoping I could meet with you tomorrow morning. Filius tells me that you take care of House business most mornings."

"Yes, I do," Harry responded. "You are welcome to drop in anytime."

"What do you usually do between tea and dinner?" she asked.

"Depends on the day. On Mondays, flying is the best remedy to all my meetings," Harry answered. "I was thinking that Draco might enjoy joining me on the pitch for some seeker drills."

Draco had not expected the invitation and just stared at Harry. Before either young man could say anything, Filius exclaimed, "An excellent notion, Harry. It'll be good for both of you to forget the cares of the day."

Draco stood beside Harry, eyeing the pitch. His broom had been delivered to him by an eager elf. "Potter, why are you doing this?"

"Doing what?" Harry asked.

"Being nice to me. To my mom," Draco answered.

"Draco," Harry said, "This isn't school. It isn't Gryffindor vs. Slytherin. Being polite, being kind, it's the right thing to do. Besides, you're family now, and this is the kind of family I want to have."

"With elves and half-breeds?" Draco couldn't keep the scorn from his voice.

Harry closed his eyes and took several deep breaths, "I know you don't understand yet. Magic is everything. Everything. Race, family history, bloodlines, none of that matters."

"Of course, it matters," Draco contested.

"No," Harry responded firmly, "it doesn't. You've been taught it does, but it doesn't. Magic is everything, and that is what matters. Now let's fly. Everything else can wait."

Conversations

Chapter Notes

July 18-19

"Mum, we need to talk."

Molly Weasley looked up to see the twins looking at her with a seriousness she had never seen on their faces.

"Of course," she answered. "Here or in one of the parlors?"

"One of the parlors," answered the other twin, "and maybe you could ask Dad to join us."

When Molly entered the blue parlor behind her husband, she found the twins sitting on a loveseat, leaving two wingback chairs available. She sat down and a tea service popped onto the table between them. Two of the Black elves had stayed after the cleaning and decorating were complete. They didn't try to cook meals, but they made it clear that providing snacks and tea was theirs to do. It only took two days for Molly to give in.

After everyone had a cuppa, one of the twins leaned forward, "We went to Gringotts today."

"We are Heirs Prewitt," the other twin said and they both held up their right hands to show the rings adorning each index finger. "After we complete our NEWTs, we can claim the Lordship."

"That's wonderful, boys," Arthur was genuinely happy for his sons. "What prompted this?"

"Mum suggested it."

Molly suddenly felt nervous. It had been a moment of nostalgia for her brothers that had prompted her to suggest the twins visit Gringotts. "I wasn't sure," she said, "but you were the only twins."

"I don't understand," Arthur said, looking back and forth between his wife and sons. "If you were eligible, why couldn't you claim it when you turned eleven?"

"That's the question. We didn't know, and no one told us." Both twins leaned forward and focused on their mother and began speaking,

"This is what we don't understand."

"We have a trust vault."

“A generous one.”

“This trust vault would have made life so much easier,”

“For everyone.”

“But especially,”

“Ron and Ginny.”

“Do you have any idea how much it has hurt Ron to be poor?”

“Not just poor,”

“But always the last to get anything.”

“He not only had to start school with a wand that didn’t work properly,”

“But then had to use it broken for nearly half a year.”

“The dress robes,”

“Were the worst.”

“Kids are mean,”

“And poor Ronny had to wear those awful frilly robes last year,”

“While everyone was in their best.”

“That didn’t have to happen.”

Molly started to speak, to defend her decision but the twins kept going,

“And Ginny,”

“It isn’t just the secondhand stuff,”

“Which made it harder to fit in.”

“But Ginny is tough,”

“That wouldn’t have really mattered.”

“What matters is that after that first year,”

“When Ginny was so hurt,”

“And broken,”

“She could have seen a mind healer,”

“That you said we couldn’t afford.”

“So we want to know why.”

“You love us.”

“We know that.”

“So why didn’t you tell us about something that would have helped everyone?”

There was silence as the twins sat back and waited.

Arthur was the first to speak, “I don’t understand,” He turned to Molly, “Did you know?”

Molly remained stubbornly silent, head down. Finally, she looked up, “I knew it was a possibility. Twins always head House Prewitt. I never even considered there might be a trust vault.”

“Why didn’t you tell the boys, Molly?” Arthur asked. “Why didn’t you take them to Gringotts when they turned eleven?”

Molly was again silent and then burst out, “They were always so irresponsible.”

The twins looked at each other, communicating and quickly agreeing,

“Mom, Dad, we love you both,”

“But this wasn’t okay.”

“So we are going to go stay with friends while we figure things out.”

“Please let us know when you take Ron and Gin-gin shopping for school supplies.”

“We’ll meet them in the Alley.”

Arthur looked away from his wife and frowned slightly at the boys. They nodded, and he understood where they were going. After the boys had left the room, Arthur stood, took Molly by the hand and led her to the loveseat. Sitting down, he pulled his wife into his arms and waited for the emotional storm to start.

Narcissa sat in the comfortable chair facing Harry’s desk watching as he finished sorting through a stack of letters. As she had seen Harry do the day before, he sent some to his solicitor, some to his account manager and some to his publicist. Whoever had advised the young lord to get a publicist had done him a great service. The ministry was still publishing articles casting doubt on Harry Potter, but for every source at the ministry questioning his character, there was at least one source that countered it.

After he finished sorting, Harry looked at Narcissa, “Is everything okay?”

“Yes, Harry,” Narcissa answered. “I just had a few questions.”

Harry got up and asked Narcissa to join him in the seating area.

"I talked to the elves about the state of the other Black properties. No upkeep has been done since Arcturus passed," Narcissa stated. "You have a lot of responsibilities, and I imagine that restoring Black Castle and the other manors is not high on your list of priorities."

"Honestly," Harry responded, "I haven't even thought of them."

Narcissa smiled, “And you don’t need to. With your permission, I’d like to take the lead on restoring the Black properties so they can be used to further House Black goals.”

“Is that something you would enjoy?” Harry asked.

“Very much,” Narcissa answered honestly. “Not only would I enjoy the process, but I would also enjoy knowing I am contributing to the future of House Black. I know by the way you are using Potter Manor that you understand the importance of appearances when doing business.”

“Yes, I do,” Harry responded. “In part, from observing my muggle relatives but also from conversations with Sirius, Ted and Sharpnail.”

“May I go to the London Manor and see the work done there?” Narcissa asked.

“Of course,” Harry answered. “You are welcome at any Black property. A family is taking refuge there, so please respect their privacy. I would also advise you not to take Draco.”

Narcissa nodded while she gathered her thoughts. “There is something else I need to ask you about.”

Harry motioned for her to continue.

“It’s your house elves,” Narcissa ventured. “They behave differently than any elves I’ve ever seen before. Some of them told me about decorating the London manor for you. Then there was the active role they played in the family dinner.”

Harry leaned forward, “Wizards assume they are the center of the magical world. They are wrong.”

Narcissa paled. What Harry, Lord Black, said was against everything she had been raised to believe. Then she considered some of the things he had said to her previously and tried to listen to what he had to say.

Harry continued, “Elves, Dwarrow, Merpeople, Centaurs, Wixen, all are sentient magical beings. They are not less. They are different. We are, all of us, gifted with magic. Other magical races practice different magics, but it is still magic.

“Elves and wixen discovered thousands of years ago that both benefit from a mutual relationship. They learned to bond with each other magically. I don’t fully understand

everything about elves or the bonds I share with them, but I know that I am a better wizard because of it. The elves are happy.”

“Bonding with each other,” Narcissa echoed.

“Yes,” Harry responded, “It was always meant to be a mutual bond. A couple hundred years ago, a wizard did not return the bond, and it started spreading. Wixen started to believe they were better than elves and had the right to own them. The mutual bond was never about ownership but was a partnership.”

Narcissa sat there, stunned. She had never heard of such a thing.

Harry continued, “Sirius has bonded with an elf and has found it very different. Filius has spent time talking to some of the elves about it and can probably explain better.”

“You’ve referred to Dobby and Winky as family,” Narcissa said.

“Yes, I didn’t have a family, so I made my own: Dobby, Winky, and Filius. Sirius is also part of it, but right now he needs to concentrate on himself,” Harry responded.

Molly was in the kitchen starting a stew for dinner when she heard the chime announcing an arrival. A few moments later, an elf popped in, “Lady Black here to see House. Asks permission to look.”

Molly frowned and headed to the arrivals room. Seeing her visitor, she stopped in surprise, “Lady Malfoy.”

Narcissa smiled, “It’s Lady Black now, Lady Weasley, but I’d prefer if you call me Narcissa.”

“Of course,” Molly answered automatically, “And please call me Molly.”

“Thank you,” Narcissa answered. “I’ve been talking to the Black house elves, and they told me about their work here. I’m familiar with the state it was in before and was curious. Lord Black gave permission for me to look at the public rooms.”

“That’s fine,” Molly responded. “We are only using a few of the bedrooms, and there are no guests, so there are plenty of rooms to look at. The elves did a marvelous job. I can hardly believe it is the same house and I’ve been here. When you are done, please join me in the kitchen for tea.”

“I’d be delighted,” Narcissa said, and with that, the women exited the room and went in different directions.

It was nearly an hour later when Narcissa stepped into the kitchen, “It’s amazing. I was here often before my marriage, and it was always so gloomy. Now it feels so open and light. Plus, the decor distinguishes between the public and private rooms.”

“I noticed that,” Molly responded as she indicated for Narcissa to sit at the table, “but I didn’t understand.”

“It has to do with where you work,” Narcissa explained, sitting down. “Your husband and sons work away from home, so home is always home. When the house serves as both home and workplace, there is often at least one room set aside for business while the rest of the house is reserved for family. In a House as influential as the Blacks were, there are also rooms for entertaining.”

Molly nodded, “I never thought of that, but it makes sense. I wondered why some of the rooms had been done in the Black colors while others were so clearly different.”

A tea service and plates of sandwiches and cakes popped onto the table, and both women busied themselves with their tea and selected delicacies to enjoy.

“So you’ve met Lord Black?” Molly asked hesitantly. It had been a melancholy morning, and the appearance of the former Lady Malfoy had left her off balance. This was not a social situation Molly had ever imagined.

“Yes,” Narcissa answered. “He’s a fascinating young man.”

“Arthur’s met him,” Molly said. “Says he has a unique perspective on things.”

“I’m surprised you haven’t met him,” Narcissa commented, finding it a curious situation.

“Bill met him at Gringotts. He says it is a lot of work to take over and manage a House that’s been dormant.” Molly said.

“Bill is your eldest?” Narcissa inquired.

“Yes, works as a curse-breaker,” Molly answered. “He did the initial evaluation here before a team came in to remove curses and dark objects.” Molly hesitated a moment before asking, “What’s he like? Lord Black, that is.”

“Younger than expected,” Narcissa answered immediately, “but while I think there will be those that judge him by his age, he is a formidable wizard.”

“He is powerful, then?” Molly asked.

“Yes, that much is apparent, but it is more than that,” Narcissa responded. “He has an implacableness about him, a resolve to do what is necessary for the sake of his House.”

“That’s good,” Molly said. “I think you have to be determined to lead a House.”

“He definitely has determination.”

“Good morning, Lord Potter,” Ted Tonks said, walking into the small dining room Wednesday morning where the residents of Potter Manor were eating breakfast.

“Good morning, Solicitor Tonks,” Harry answered with a grin as he rose to shake hands with the man. “Would you like to join us?”

“I would enjoy a cup of tea,” Ted answered, taking a seat in a chair that appeared next to Filius.

“What brings you around this morning, Ted?” Narcissa asked.

“Just some updates for Harry,” Ted answered easily. Ted looked around the table, noting the new faces.

“Ted,” Harry said, gesturing toward the twins, “This is Fred Weasley and George Weasley.”

“Nice to finally put faces to the names,” Ted responded. “Perhaps when I’m done with Harry, we could sit down and talk. Save me an owl.”

Small talk continued while Harry finished his breakfast. Ted noted that Draco was quiet and not talking to anyone.

When they arrived in Harry’s office, Harry sat down on the loveseat and Ted took one of the armchairs. Pulling a shrunken portfolio out of his pocket, Ted resized it and opened his notes.

“What’s up?” Harry asked.

“I wanted to update you on the employee search,” Ted responded. “I’ve already made an offer to Percy Weasley and expect an answer from him tomorrow.

“How did he take it?”

“He was quite stunned,” Ted answered, “but I think the Black interview went far toward tempering the Ministry’s propaganda against you. Plus, the salary offer quelled a lot of doubts.”

Harry laughed, “What about the other positions?”

“My assistant, Amanda, has applied for the general assistant position,” Ted stated.

“Is that she who tortures with shopping?” Harry asked.

“The very same,” Ted answered. “Right now, she assists me and several other solicitors in the office. She would like to come work for you.”

“Why?” Harry wondered.

“Apart from just liking you as a person, she was impressed with the Black interview,” Tonks responded. “I think I have found the right person for your correspondence. She graduated from Hogwarts several years ago and has been working at the Ministry. She has become disheartened with her prospects.”

“Muggleborn?” Harry guessed.

“Yes,” Tonks conferred, “and not appreciated. Magically she is average, but she always excelled in her classes. She listed Minerva McGonagall and Septima Vector as references, and they both praised her ability to write on a subject. Her supervisor in the Ministry also gave her a glowing recommendation, appreciating the difficulty that blood prejudice creates regardless of ability.”

“Sounds good,” Harry said. “Any luck finding a researcher?”

“I have two interviews scheduled this afternoon,” Ted answered. “Both Ravenclaws, which isn’t surprising. One is older and has attended a muggle university. The other is only a few years out of Hogwarts and currently working at Flourish and Blotts.”

“What do I need to do?” Harry asked.

It was such a typical Harry question that Ted chuckled, “You will need to figure out the office layout for everyone. I would suggest having Amanda come over. She is used to working in a multi-staff office and can give you practical input.”

Harry opened his calendar and considered his options, “Could you see if she is available for tea this afternoon? It would be good to get to know her a bit more, and then she can look over the available space.”

“I don’t think that will be a problem, but if it is, I’ll let you know,” Ted answered.

“So what else?” Harry asked. “You could have included all this in our usual correspondence.”

Ted laughed, “You are right. There is something else I want to talk to you about, and it is best done in person.”

“That doesn’t sound alarming in any way,” Harry noted.

“Not alarming,” Ted assured Harry, “but important.”

“What’s one more thing to challenge my view of the world?” Harry asked with no small amount of snark.

Ted took a deep breath. It wasn’t a subject he ever expected to discuss with a client, but it was important and he didn’t think it would occur to anyone else. “As a muggleborn who has straddled both worlds, there are some things that I only learned by stumbling across them. To those raised in the magical world, it is just something you know. Most muggle raised don’t realize there is anything different to know and that is often a source of a lot of the friction that occurs.”

“That makes sense,” Harry acknowledged. “You don’t know what you don’t know until you run into it.”

“You have first-hand experience with that,” Ted grinned. “One area that is very different is how muggles and magicals consider sexual orientation.”

Whatever Harry had been expecting, that was not it.

“In the muggle world, there is a lot of division about how sexual orientation is viewed. It is a bit simpler in the magical world,” Ted said.

“Simpler how?” Harry wondered.

“Most magicals don’t care who you have sex with,” Ted responded matter of factly. “They don’t even care about the gender of whom you marry.”

“So what do they care about besides those that care about blood status?” Harry asked.

“Line continuation,” Ted answered.

“I don’t even know what that means,” Harry said.

“Carrying on your House or family name,” Ted explained. “You need children that will continue your line.”

“Okay,” said Harry, still not understanding.

“You need children, Harry,” Ted said bluntly. “With eight houses, you will eventually need eight heirs.”

Harry paled and his eyes got bigger as he considered this, “I have to have eight children?”

“Not exactly,” Tonks answered. “You need eight heirs and, ideally, with different ancestry. You might physically father children, but there are other options.”

“Such as?” Harry asked, still on the edge of panic.

“Surrogacy, where you father children with different mothers,” Ted explained. “It can happen through a physical relationship, or it can be done by magically inseminating a willing woman.”

Harry gulped, still not entirely comfortable with the subject.

“There is also the option of adoption,” Ted told him. “There is traditional adoption done through legal channels. There is also the option of a magical blood adoption that would merge your genetic contribution with what already exists in the person you are adopting.”

“Do all of the heirs have to be boys?” Harry asked.

“It depends on the House,” Ted answered. “Some stipulate a male heir, but even that can be changed by the declaration of a Head of House before the Wizengamot. The important thing is that they carry forward the House name.”

Harry just nodded with a dazed look on his face.

“Harry,” Ted said, getting the young lord’s attention, “this isn’t something you have to worry about in the immediate future. We do need to consider the future of each House, but there is

plenty of time. I just wanted you to know that your romantic interests don't need to be limited by the need to have heirs."

"Thank you," Harry said almost automatically. "I appreciate knowing. I had no idea it was both so simple and so complicated at the same time."

Bill looked up and waved his father over to the booth he occupied. He had arrived early to secure the quiet corner booth. Bill had been surprised to receive an owl that morning requesting a lunch meeting. Arthur's preference to meet at the Leaky Cauldron instead of the ministry cafeteria conveyed a sense of importance to the request.

When Arthur sat down to the waiting bowls of stew and bottles of butterbeer, Bill quickly set up privacy wards. Arthur nodded to his eldest son and dug into his lunch.

"Interesting morning," Bill noted between bites. "I got two letters this morning from family members requesting meetings, you for lunch and Percy after dinner at the manor." It didn't matter that his parents and siblings were living at the Black manor, it wasn't home. No, home was a lopsided house in Ottery-St-Catchpole.

"Percy sent me a memo this morning," Arthur acknowledged. "If nothing else, your mother will be happy to see you both."

"The twins stopped by the bank yesterday and told me what was happening," Bill said. "Does mom know where they are living?"

"No," Arthur answered, "and since they haven't told me, I haven't said anything beyond assuring her that they are both adults and have lots of friends."

Bill grinned, "How many years did it take you to develop your mom-wrangling skills?"

"I prefer to think of it as a mature diplomacy that serves me well in everything I do," Arthur responded with a sly smile.

They continued to catch up with each other's lives while they finished lunch, and then Bill stacked the bowls and set them aside. Arthur got up and fetched two more butterbeers from the bar and then sat nursing his while he gathered his thoughts.

"Lord Black," Arthur finally said, knowing that Bill would catch the meaning behind the use of Harry's title, "suggested that I read the family grimoire. I had never had any desire to do so before. In fact, even after I accepted the suggestion, I still felt a reluctance to do so."

"Turns out," Arthur said after taking a few sips of his butterbeer, "my great-grandfather placed a compulsion on the grimoire to discourage anyone from reading it."

Bill blinked in surprise. "By anyone," he finally noted, "you mean, Heads of House Weasley."

"And heirs," Arthur confirmed.

“Do you need me to remove the compulsion?” Bill asked.

“Eventually,” Arthur answered, “but more importantly, I need to tell you why the compulsion was set.”

Bill waited. His father was visibly disturbed, and Bill wondered if that resulted from defying the compulsion or because the compulsion existed in the first place. Probably a bit of both.

“As you know, the Weasleys and the Malfoys have been enemies for nearly four hundred years,” Arthur stated.

“Yes,” Bill responded, “I always assumed the Malfoys did something Intolerable.” To refer to something as Intolerable was the social equivalent of a spell being labeled Unforgivable.

“It wasn’t the Malfoys,” Arthur said softly. “It was the Weasleys. We, or rather, our ancestor, did something Intolerable, and I fear we have paid the price for it.”

Bill set down his bottle. He had no response as there was none that could make sense of what his father had just said.

Arthur reached into his pocket and pulled out an old leather volume. He handed it to Bill.

“Heir Weasley, take wisdom from the words of our fathers,” Arthur said the ritual words for the patriarchal house.

Bill took the grimoire and could feel the compulsion. He quickly canceled the privacy wards and rose, “Let’s go to a room at Gringotts.”

Bill put some coins on the table to cover lunch and led the way to the bank.

Dinner was weird, delicious, but weird. Mom looked on the verge of tears. The twins were absent and unmentioned. Ron and Ginny were unusually quiet. Even Hermione was subdued. Most disturbing were his father and Bill. They were grim as if an enormous weight had been set upon their shoulders.

Several times, Percy considered just excusing himself and going back home, but then he would remember his mother’s hug when he had arrived and would settle back down to dinner.

When Arthur suggested that Bill and Percy join him in one of the salons, Percy felt physically relieved to escape the tension of the kitchen. Unfortunately, some of it followed them into the salon.

“What’s going on?” Percy asked.

“Quite a bit,” Arthur admitted. “Fred and George have moved out, and your mother is upset.”

Percy nodded but then looked at his father sharply, “That’s not everything.”

“No,” Arthur answered. “Bill and I have discovered some uncomfortable truths in the family grimoire that we have to deal with. As soon as we’ve come to a decision, we’ll call a family meeting.”

Percy accepted that. The Weasleys might not be big on tradition, but they still understood that some things were Head of House issues.

“What brings you round?” Bill asked as a tray of after-dinner tea and biscuits popped onto the small table beside them. Percy busied himself, pouring tea for everyone.

“I got a job offer this week,” Percy said. “A really good one.”

“That’s excellent, son,” Arthur exclaimed.

Percy was silent. He wasn’t sure how to explain his misgivings. Finally, he blurted, “It’s with Harry Potter.”

“Ahhhh,” Bill and Arthur responded simultaneously before Percy continued.

“I had to take an oath not to talk about it, but the solicitor said I could talk to both of you.”

“We are aware of the situation, Bill more so than me,” Arthur responded.

“You’ve said it’s a good offer. What has you hesitating?” Bill asked.

“It’s Harry Potter,” Percy answered as if that explained everything.

Arthur saw Bill’s confused look and took pity on him. “The official ministry position is that Harry Potter lied about what happened after the last task. The Minister has devoted considerable resources to deny everything Harry said.”

“Yes,” Bill answered, “I saw the coverage in the Prophet, but that seems to have died down a bit.”

“Only outside of the ministry,” Arthur responded. “The Minister is still adamant that Harry is only making certain claims to get attention.”

“That’s ridiculous,” Bill scoffed. “Harry isn’t like that.”

“But how do you know?” Percy asked. “Are you saying the Minister is lying?”

“Percy, most things aren’t black and white,” Arthur stated. “I don’t know if the Minister truly believes that Harry is lying or if he doesn’t want to deal with the information. What I do know is that Harry Potter is a fine young man. He is not a liar, and he does not seek attention.”

“But,” Percy stuttered, “everyone says. . .”

“Percy,” Bill interrupted, “everyone doesn’t say anything. A few loud voices are saying negative things. A lot of quieter voices are saying other things, but those voices are largely

being drowned out. Everyone in your family, a family you used to trust, disagrees with the minister. Why have you chosen to believe a politician over your parents and siblings?"

"But he wouldn't be minister . . ." Percy trailed off in bewilderment.

"I know that Binns mostly covered goblin wars, but surely you know that becoming Minister of Magic doesn't suddenly make a person right about everything," Bill said with no small amount of exasperation. "Even the best Ministers have made mistakes."

Percy nodded, a miserable look on his face. He turned to his father, "I just don't know what to do."

"So tell me all the reasons you should turn down the offer," Arthur suggested, "reasons other than the fact that Harry and the Minister are in disagreement about some things."

"It would mean the end of my ministry career," Percy said. "That's what I've always wanted."

"Why did you want a ministry career?" Arthur asked.

"I want to make a difference," Percy answered as if that were obvious. "We're Weasleys. We do what's right." He was looking down and missed the look that Arthur and Bill exchanged.

"So are there any reasons to accept Lord Potter's offer," Arthur asked, "other than the fact that he will most likely pay you more."

Percy looked at Bill, "Is it true what the solicitor said? Does Harry really Head eight Houses?"

"Yep," Bill grinned. "I was at Gringotts the day Harry accepted the Lordships and had to assist him with objects in some of his new vaults."

Percy shook his head, "I think the work would be interesting. As I understand it, I would coordinate the work of other assistants so I would have more say in what gets done."

"I also think Harry would listen to my opinions," Percy continued. "The solicitor, Tonks, said that Harry is very open-minded and seeks counsel from those around him. It would make me part of a team rather than an overworked file clerk."

"Percy, do you like what you do at the ministry?" Bill asked.

Percy sat back suddenly. Did he? He liked the thought of working in the ministry. He had liked how important he had felt working for Mr. Crouch but had that even been real? After Crouch died and it turned out that he had been imperiused, Percy was heavily questioned. At the time, Percy thought he would lose his job and was surprised to be transferred to work directly under the Minister. Suddenly a very unpleasant thought occurred to Percy.

"Dad, I shouldn't have been filling in for Mr. Crouch."

“No, Percy,” Arthur said gently, “You shouldn’t have. You were a junior clerk with less than a year on the job. Acting directly for Mr. Crouch should have been done by his undersecretary.”

“But I was so busy gloating about my assignment that I didn’t ask any questions or look at things objectively,” Percy noted with growing dread. “Did you know I was being used?”

“I suspected,” Arthur admitted, “But I had no proof. The ministry is not always a nice place to work, even when you love what you do. There is a lot of corruption, and often the wrong people are promoted for the wrong reasons.”

“You tried to warn me,” Percy observed.

“As much as any father can warn a grown son,” Arthur acknowledged. “Percy, you are smart, ambitious and hard-working. You are fearless in the pursuit of what you want. You wanted a career in the ministry. Nothing I said was going to change that.”

Percy nodded. The three men were silent, each lost in their own thoughts. Finally, Percy spoke, “You’ve given me a lot to think about. Thank you.”

“Lady Black is here to see you.”

Cornelius Fudge looked up to see Narcissa Malfoy walk into his office. “Narcissa,” he said with a smile, “What brings you here today?”

“Good morning, Cornelius,” Narcissa responded, and she walked up to him and allowed him to kiss her cheek.

“I’m afraid my assistant misspoke,” Cornelius said as he motioned her into the chair facing his desk. “She announced you as Lady Black.”

“Oh, I am,” Narcissa said. “Lord Black dissolved my marriage to Lucius.”

Cornelius just stared for a moment, “He can do that?”

“Yes,” Narcissa answered, “Any Black marriage always exists at the pleasure of Lord Black.”

“And he just ended your marriage?” Cornelius was flabbergasted by this news.

“Lucius made choices that conflicted with the values of House Black,” Narcissa explained.

“So you want me to intervene on your behalf,” Cornelius concluded.

Narcissa laughed, “Not at all. I’m quite satisfied with Lord Black’s decision. I would never go against my Head of House.”

Cornelius Fudge, while not the most powerful nor the most intelligent Minister of Magic, was, nonetheless, politically shrewd. If Narcissa had chosen House Black over her marriage

and House Malfoy, there was a shift in the balance of power. Still, that didn't tell him why Narcissa was sitting in his office.

"Cornelius," Narcissa said, shifting forward slightly, "I'd like to think that we are friends apart from whatever political relationship you have with Lucius."

Cornelius nodded. No matter what name she took, Narcissa had a lot of influence among the upper levels of Wixen society.

"I'm sure you've gotten a lot of reaction from Sunday's interview with Lord Black," Narcissa said. "You need to quit reacting and start leading."

"What exactly are you suggesting?"

"First, you must rescind the Kiss on Sight order for Sirius," Narcissa stated firmly. "If he should be kissed while this is unsettled, you will be finished."

Before the minister could respond, Narcissa continued, "You must make it clear that you stand behind the results of any investigations ongoing with the DMLE. You will not survive if you are in public disagreement with Amelia Bones."

"Finally, it is good you have distanced yourself from Albus Dumbledore, but you must cease the public attacks on Harry Potter. It makes you look petty when you attack a fourteen-year-old boy, one who has not said anything against your ministry. You've stated your position; now let it go."

"The boy lied," Cornelius started to explain.

"So what?" Narcissa interrupted. "He is a child that had just finished a difficult tournament and witnessed the death of a friend. Whatever happened, whatever he said, you are only keeping it in the public's mind with your attacks."

"But how do we know he didn't kill the boy?" Cornelius asked smugly as if that was a legitimate argument.

Narcissa scoffed, "Really, Cornelius, I had thought better of you. Surely the young man's body was examined for cause of death."

"Well, yes," Cornelius admitted, "but that doesn't absolve the boy of wrongdoing."

Narcissa rolled her eyes, something she only ever did for the effect it had on her audience, "That's ridiculous, and it does not reflect well on you."

Narcissa stood up and looked Cornelius squarely in the eye, "I've given you my advice. I only hope you are wise enough to give it the proper consideration. Just don't dally when it comes to Cousin Sirius."

Beauracracric Bungles

Chapter Notes

July 2-15

*You might belong in Gryffindor,
Where dwell the brave at heart,
Their daring, nerve and chivalry,
Set Gryffindors apart;*

*You might belong in Hufflepuff
Where they are just and loyal,
Those patient Hufflepuffs are true,
And unafraid of toil;*

*Or yet in wise old Ravenclaw,
If you've a ready mind,
Where those of wit and learning,
Will always find their kind;*

*Or perhaps in Slytherin,
You'll make your real friends,
Those cunning folk use any means,
To achieve their ends.*

It had been decades since Amelia Bones had first heard the sorting song, but she still remembered it. She also never forgot that in addition to the publicly acclaimed virtues of each house, there were traits that were not seen outside of that house.

As a Hufflepuff, Amelia was everything the Sorting Hat proclaimed: just, loyal, patient and hard-working. What the Sorting Hat never said was the Hufflepuffs played as hard as they worked. Amelia Bones, also known as Lady Bones, Director Bones and Madame Bones, did her best to live up to the values of her Hogwarts house. She was diligent and worked steadily no matter how much she liked or disliked the task before her. As a balance, she played equally hard. She went to dance clubs, both muggle and magical. She attended parties that served no political or social purpose. She took lovers freely and equally from both genders. She indulged in spa days at least twice a month. The only deviations occurred in the presence of her niece, Susan. As an acting parent, Amelia's activities with her niece were a softer, gentler version of her usual behaviors, whether it was work or play.

In anticipation of Susan's summer holiday, Amelia usually scheduled extra time for herself in early June. This year, the end of term included attending the last task of the Tri-Wizard Tournament. From Amelia's perspective, the entire tournament had been a disaster. First, there was the mess that the Quidditch World Cup had turned into. Even had the World Cup gone off without a hitch, no one in their right mind would schedule both the Cup and Tournament within the same year. Of course, no one ever accused most of the Ministry of being in their right mind.

To add insult to injury, Magical Law Enforcement had only been brought in for both events as an afterthought, an "oh yeah, we need security." Amelia had spent a lot of political capital getting her department involved as much as it had been. After both events had ended in disaster, she was too exhausted to say, "I told you so." She had looked forward to at least a week away with Susan at the end of term.

As had become habit, Amelia picked up Susan from the Express and took her directly to Bones Manor. Aunt and niece would enjoy a dinner of their favorites prepared by the house elves that had served the Bones family for generations. They would spend Saturday getting ready for a short holiday. On Sunday, Amelia would go into the office for a few hours to ensure all was prepared for her absence. It would be. Her department was run smoothly, and the only time it was disrupted was when the Minister or other Wizengamot members interfered.

Unfortunately, the best-laid plans can go awry.

Amelia was enjoying tea with Susan when a Gringotts owl arrived with a letter.

Dear Madame Bones,

I apologize for such late notice, but a matter has come to my attention that needs to be dealt with promptly.

Please let me know when you are available for a meeting on Monday, July 3.

Sincerely,
Ted Tonks, Solicitor
Greengrass & Associates

The brief letter contained far more information than its short contents would indicate.

First was the source. Ted Tonks was well respected despite his blood status. The Goblins accepted him. He had experience in both magical and muggle legal systems. The premiere law firm of Wizarding Britain employed him.

The fact that a Gringotts owl had carried the letter told Amelia that the matter was important to the Goblins. The lack of a definitive subject told Amelia it was a sensitive matter. The timing of its arrival told of the importance it had to the sender or, more importantly, the sender's client.

Amelia requested parchment and quill and quickly wrote a reply for the waiting owl (another indication of the importance of the missive.) She was not available on Monday, but she could meet with him the day before, on Sunday.

“Harry Potter,” Amelia concluded. There was no response, but Amelia hadn’t expected any.

She held the wills of James and Lily Potter in her hands. The Wizengamot had not unsealed the wills; therefore, this was the Gringotts' copy. Gringotts would only release the will to a legal beneficiary. Gringotts would not tolerate wixen coming in to request a will reading unless they were sure they were a beneficiary. In fact, Gringotts was allowed to enact a penalty fee if a non-beneficiary requested a will reading. It had been over a decade since the Potter’s death; therefore, it was most likely someone newly able to request a reading of the will. Harry Potter participated in the Triwizard Tournament, which was restricted to those of age, making Harry Potter legally adult; thus, the Goblins could tell him of his rights. The question was, as heir, why hadn’t Harry Potter requested the right to do so when he turned eleven.

Having concluded the origin of the wills, Amelia began to read.

“Are you here representing Harry Potter or Sirius Black?” Amelia asked.

“I was hired to represent Harry Potter,” Tonks answered. “In the course of providing counsel, I was provided a copy of the wills. Mr. Potter has chosen, at this time, to only act on the financial matters presented by his parents’ wills. He has authorized me to look into other matters as I see fit.”

Amelia thought for a moment. Both Potters asserted in their wills that Sirius Black had not been their secret keeper. Peter Pettigrew had been named. Harry Potter had also claimed that Peter Pettigrew was the person that killed Cedric Diggory, an assertion that most wrote off as a child’s hysteria. If Pettigrew had been the secret keeper for the Potters, it made sense that Black would go after him. The question remained, why had this information not come to light?

“This is what is going to happen,” Amelia said in her usual no-nonsense way. “I am going to authorize a confidential investigation into all matters concerning Sirius Black starting with the death of the Potters. Only my investigator, the Head Auror, I and you will know about this. How I move forward will depend entirely upon the results of that investigation. As a courtesy, I will inform you of the conclusions that are reached and what further steps will be taken. “

“That’s fair,” Tonks responded. “In the meantime, as there are doubts now as to the guilt of Sirius Black, will you have the Kiss on Sight order rescinded?”

“Mr. Tonks,” Amelia said, “I have attempted numerous times to have that order rescinded. Unfortunately, as it was placed by the Minister, only the Minister or an overriding Wizengamot vote can do so.”

Tonks nodded, "That's reasonable. I should warn you, Madame Bones. Although I only met Harry Potter a few days ago, it is evident that he will do whatever is necessary to take care of the people he feels responsible for."

"I have no personal stake in this," Amelia responded. "Wherever the investigation leads, I will follow and act accordingly."

As soon as Tonks had left, Amelia sent messages to Head Auror Rufus Scrimgeour and Auror Daniel Avery. Avery was from a distant family branch that had not participated in the previous war. He had been homeschooled and took his OWLs and NEWTs directly through the ministry. He was as close to neutral as Amelia could find. He was also her best investigator.

By the time both men arrived, Amelia had read through the wills several more times and had more questions than answers. She suspected that once the Sirius Black matter was concluded, Ted Tonks would be bringing other matters to the attention of the Ministry. Fortunately, most of those matters were not the purview of the DMLE.

Once both men were seated, Amelia addressed her Head Auror, "Rufus, I am authorizing a confidential investigation. You are being informed because you will need to take Auror Avery out of the regular duty roster. You are not to discuss this investigation with Auror Avery. You are not to mention to anyone, inside or outside the Ministry, that a confidential investigation is being conducted. If asked, you will refer any questions directly to me. Do you understand?"

"May I know the subject of this investigation?" Scrimgeour asked with some asperity.

"No," Amelia answered promptly. "Once the investigation is concluded, you will be read into the results."

"Will you tell me why I am being shut out?"

"Primarily for your political well-being," Amelia answered. "I do not in any way want to prejudice the outcome of this investigation, but it may create waves within the Ministry. It is even possible that reputations and careers will be affected. Until there is factual evidence to act on, I want you to be protected from any potential fallout."

"Will that fallout affect my Auror?" Rufus asked.

"I don't believe so," Amelia responded. "He will be out of the picture before the investigation results become public knowledge."

"Very well," Scrimgeour rose and turned to Avery. "If there is any assistance I can render that does not violate the confidential nature of your inquiry, please do not hesitate to come to me."

Amelia knew that Rufus wasn't happy with her at the moment. Still, she also knew that he was enough of a political animal to appreciate the protection he was being offered. She

turned her attention to Daniel Avery.

“You are going to do a complete investigation of Sirius Orion Black III,” she instructed. “You are to assume nothing. I want to know as much as possible about his childhood, his years at Hogwarts and his actions during the war. This will include everything you can learn about his relationship with the Potters and any role he might have had in their deaths. You will find out what charges were brought forward in his trial and the outcome of that trial. I want to know about his years in Azkaban, his escape, the search for him and anything else you can find. Do you understand?”

“No,” Avery blurted, “I mean, yes, I mean, I understand what you want me to investigate, but why?”

“If anyone questions what you are doing, you can tell them that you are building a criminal profile,” Amelia responded, not answering the question. “It is a muggle investigative technique that helps law enforcement identify difficult-to-apprehend criminals.”

“Is that true?” Avery asked.

Amelia smiled at the young man, “Only peripherally. There are claims that all is not as it seems with Sirius Black. I want you to start from scratch and see where it leads you. Whatever the outcome, it will be a good experience for you as an investigator.”

“How long do I have?” Avery asked.

“As long as it takes,” Amelia answered. “Consider this a review of our justice system. It is important to know when we condemn a man that the right thing has been done.”

Daniel Avery did not understand the investigation he had been assigned. Was it a training exercise or a test? Why was it confidential? Why did he get the assignment directly from the Head of the DMLE?

Avery quickly concluded that none of the answers mattered because in any investigation you eventually found the answers you needed. So he made a plan. First would be collecting all official documentation on Sirius Black. Once that was in progress, he would create a timeline of Black’s life. From the timeline, he would make a list of the relationships that Black had with others. He would find all published articles from British Wizarding publications that concerned Black. Lastly, he would interview the people on the list who were deemed relevant to the events of Sirius Black’s life.

Being an auror did not give you automatic permission to access records. You needed authorization. Usually, you had to make a case to your superior for accessing any Ministry records. If your supervisor approved, you had to present that approval to the Head Auror, who would give you an authorization slip. Most authorization slips were very narrow in scope. They authorized access to a specific record or set of documents. It was a sound system. You couldn’t just make guesses and try to justify them. You had to have evidence and

solid theories. The records were the final steps in creating the body of proof that went to the Ministry Judicial Office.

To Avery's surprise, he found a blanket authorization signed by Amelia Bones and Rufus Scrimgeour for all Ministry-designated records needed on his desk Monday morning. No names were on it. It wasn't limited to Sirius Black. It was the closest thing to a blank check Avery had ever seen. If he didn't understand anything, that authorization level told him this investigation was important. Ministry-designated records covered not only the departments in the Ministry of Magic but also St. Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. As the scope of the investigation was unlimited, he would need to request records from every department in the Ministry.

Avery knew that just requesting the Ministry records would create a stir. Sirius Black was a well-known and controversial figure in the British Wizarding world. After a morning spent planning, Avery spent an afternoon in research. He needed a legend, a backstory that people would believe because the minute a record was requested for Sirius Black, curiosity would create questions. Brushing off or ignoring the questions wouldn't make them go away. Avery believed it would have the opposite effect. So having a plausible reason for his investigation would make everything easier.

Avery spent the afternoon at the Barbican Library in London. He learned about the field of behavioral analysis that was part of muggle psychology or mind healing. He learned about Howard Tetan, an early pioneer in applying the growing body of behavioral analysis to criminal offenders that brought it into the mainstream of criminal investigation. It was now a technique used in law enforcement throughout the muggle world. As far as Avery knew, there was no magical equivalent in practice.

By dinnertime, Avery was excited. Regardless of where his investigation led, he was confident that criminal profiling could make a difference to the DMLE. It would be easy to use that enthusiasm as he gathered records. Every time someone would ask why Avery wanted records on Sirius Black, Avery would let his excitement about behavioral analysis gush out. By the time he left with copies of documents, the name, Sirius Black, was incidental to what Avery was doing. What most remembered was the deluge of information that seemed to make sense but at the same time was almost nonsense. No one gave the actual records request any more thought.

It took Avery two full days to gather copies of the Ministry records. The third morning was spent at St. Mungo's and that afternoon was spent in the office of the Deputy Headmistress of Hogwarts. When the last record was locked in his office safe, Avery went home for a well-deserved evening of relaxation.

Friday was a day of sorting records - mostly putting them in date order. Avery resisted the urge to read beyond the record dates. The most comprehensive view of Sirius Black was going to be found by learning about his life from the earliest record until the present. Avery had instructed the Ministry elves to keep him supplied with tea and sandwiches so he could work without interruption. By early afternoon the records were in date order and Avery was ready to read through them.

Like most career paths in the wizarding world, becoming an auror was done through an apprenticeship system. It had evolved into a less formal system than in decades past, but it was still based on learning from experienced practitioners. Rather than learning from one person for years, auror trainees switched mentors every three months. At the end of three months, the trainee, mentor and training supervisor would meet for an evaluation. The evaluation was not just of the trainee but also of the mentor. The goal was to make sure that trainees and mentors were well-matched. While there were general training goals, the DMLE did not want to produce matching aurors. While there was a core of knowledge that everyone needed, a small population of professionals required specialists. Part of the evaluation process each quarter was determining the education path for the trainee based on their skills and aptitudes.

Successful trainees spent at least three years learning from a variety of mentors. It wasn't unusual for trainees to repeat training with the same mentor several times. Avery was a true investigator. He had trained three times, one quarter each year, with Amelia Bones. He had barely survived his quarter with Alastor Moody. It was a toss-up over which of them was less happy with that pairing. Avery was not a fighter. Sure, he could survive a confrontation long enough to either escape or call in help, but he would never be a front-line auror. His skill was in sifting data, seeing patterns and interpreting a larger picture.

Most of the documentation from Sirius Black's early life came from St. Mungo's. Typical to purebloods, there was no official record of Black's birth. At two weeks of age, there was a record of a visit to the hospital for an infant examination. This was a baseline examination typically done in the first month of an infant's life. The first ministry record was at age three months, another typical milestone for a pureblood. This was a filing recording the birth date, birth location and child and parent names. There were the usual early child vaccination records. There was also a record of healer visits at the hospital that showed a pattern Avery had seen before. Sirius Black had suffered spell abuse at home. It wasn't common, but it did happen, particularly in more traditional families. Avery made a note to request other Black family records to see if this was a family pattern or particular to Sirius.

By the time Avery had sorted and read through all the records leading up to Sirius Black's admission to Hogwarts, it was time to call it an evening. Tomorrow, Avery expected to complete his read-through of the records so he could move to the next step of his investigation come Monday morning. Except for a brief meeting with Amelia Bones to give her a progress report, Avery would take Sunday off as was his habit.

"What?" Amelia Bones nearly screeched. All the relaxation from her week in Switzerland with Susan evaporated as she stared at Daniel Avery.

"According to DMLE and Ministry Judicial records, Sirius Black has never been arrested, charged, tried or convicted for any crimes," Avery repeated, understanding Bones' reaction.

Bones' mind was working overtime. She had deliberately not thought about this matter over the last week. She needed to be open to whatever outcome the investigation produced. She had certainly not expected to hear about a complete lack of any official records concerning the judicial process.

“Tell me your process and where you are in your investigation,” Bones ordered.

From a procedural standpoint, Avery was on the right track. His planned process was sound. Technically, he was still in the initial stages of the investigation. She ordered tea from the elf that regularly took care of the DMLE and reviewed everything she knew.

A lack of records was not proof of anything. It was unusual, but in any bureaucratic organization, records occasionally got mislaid. To have a sequence of records particular to one individual disappear was almost an impossibility. Had someone gathered all the documents? For what purpose? It didn't even occur to Bones that the records had never existed. There was a system. A lack of records didn't necessarily mean the system hadn't functioned. It only meant there wasn't a record of that functionality.

“I want you to continue,” Bones said. “We will have to determine why the records are missing, but that is incidental to the outcome of the investigation.”

Avery nodded, “In light of the missing records, I'm going to Azkaban to request Black's prison record. I had considered it incidental, but now I think it is vital.”

“I agree,” Bones responded. “Hopefully, you will turn up the missing records. That would be the simplest solution.

The misery of Azkaban prison could not be entirely blamed on the presence of dementors. In fact, an administrative visit was entirely dementor free. Dementors stayed in the areas that housed high-level prisoners. Medium-level prisoners were at the edge of the dementor effects. Dementors had some impact but weren't debilitating. Low-level prisoners, those there with short sentences and guilty of misdemeanors, were housed away from the dementors entirely.

The misery for most at Azkaban was a direct result of being a small island in the North Sea. There was constantly blowing wind. Even on the most moderate days, the temperature was uncomfortable for prolonged exposure. None of the buildings were fully finished. Prisoners didn't even have windows. Administrative staff had windows, but there was no insulation, so the benefit was minimal. The warmest water temperature was still too cold to be even pleasant to dip your toes in. The constant crash of waves against the rocks that lined the edge of the island was a salty punishment on its own.

Assignment to Azkaban was almost nearly some form of ministry punishment. There were no prison guards, as you would find in a muggle prison. They weren't necessary. Prisoners never left their cells until their release. Food was delivered magically. On the rare occasion that a healer was required, someone on rotation from St. Mungo's came with the daily supply run and returned the following day.

Daniel Avery apparated to the designated coordinates in the tiny village that existed purely to ferry supplies and people to Azkaban. He walked to the end of the dock and boarded the small boat, showing his authorization papers. His papers also required that the supply boat

wait until he finished his errand so he did not have to stay overnight. With any luck, he would take less than five minutes to copy the existing records.

Avery was both correct and incorrect. Finding and copying the records was a matter of minutes. What took time was waiting while everyone there examined his records request and hounded him with questions. He gave his well-rehearsed talk about criminal profiling but refrained from providing any ministry gossip. The real snag occurred as he was ready to head back to the boat.

“Hey, Avery,” an older woman called, “do you want Sirius Black’s stuff?”

That stopped Avery. Prisoners typically arrived at Azkaban with only the prison garments they were wearing. Any possessions were removed at the ministry and either returned to the family or stored. Avery looked in the box and found clothing, various odds and ends, and, most importantly, a wand. Avery took the box with him when he returned to the ministry.

The trip to and from Azkaban was enough for one day. After locking everything in his office safe, Avery called it a day. He would continue tomorrow after a good night’s sleep. Avery had learned early that good food and proper rest were essential to a good investigative outcome.

Tuesday started with a review of the Azkaban records. As was typical, Black arrived at the dock wearing magic-suppressing cuffs. Atypically, Black was not accompanied by a ministry clerk but by two senior aurors. Intake notes indicated that Black had no paperwork. He was fully dressed and had his wand and assorted personal items. The prison staff had to scramble to find him the prison garb that was typically provided at the ministry holding cells. He was taken to his cell, where he changed clothes and turned over his possessions to the staff. Behavioral notes indicated he was despondent and non-talkative.

It was tempting to go directly to interviewing the aurors who delivered Black to Azkaban. Avery resisted the temptation. He had a process planned, and there was no reason not to follow it. His instructions had been clear: he was to create a comprehensive review of Sirius Black’s life. So Avery spent the remainder of the day sending owl requests to individuals requesting interviews.

Wednesday was spent in the archive room of the Daily Prophet reading every article that mentioned Sirius Black. Nearly all of it was gossip and speculation. The headlines following the Potters’ death had screamed of his guilt, but there was no reporting on any trial. Sirius Black was regularly mentioned in articles about other death eaters. Still, Avery noted that there was also no record of Black being mentioned at any of the trials that happened following the death of You-Know-Who. There was over a decade of silence about Black until his prison escape. The coverage following his escape was once again sensational and speculative. Beyond the fact that Black escaped Azkaban, there was nothing of substance.

Thursday was spent in Hogsmeade. Avery rented a room at the Three Broomsticks and interviewed as many people from Black’s Hogwarts days as agreed. He could not force cooperation, but most people had enough natural curiosity to agree. He discovered that many who knew Black at Hogwarts also knew him in the fight against You-Know-Who. It was clear that until the moment of the Potters’ betrayal, Sirius Black had been considered a staunch fighter on the side of the light.

Black was a polarizing figure. His former classmates and teachers seemed divided between love and hate. No one had felt ambivalent about the young man. However, there was one thing they all had in common. Whether they had loved him or hated him, all were surprised that he would ever betray the Potters. Sirius Black had loved James Potter. Not a single person would have ever predicted that Sirius Black would betray the one person he held above all others.

Friday morning, Avery met with the two aurors that had arrested Sirius Black and delivered him to Azkaban. The arresting aurors had not been in the front line fight against death eaters. They were not top-notch investigators. They were like most that made up the majority of the auror corps: hard-working men that believed in law and order. They had shown up at the report of a magical explosion. There they had found Sirius Black, dazed and hysterical.

One auror, Simon Wilson, had immediately apparated to the ministry to summon obliviators and report to the head of the DMLE, Bartemius Crouch, Sr. The remaining auror, Windegard Shafiq, had done little more than keep a semblance of order while waiting. Shafiq had attempted to question Black but had little success. The only thing Black had said was a repeated murmur of "It's my fault."

Wilson had returned shortly after the ministry obliviators had begun their work. The instructions from Crouch were clear. They were to transfer Black to Azkaban immediately. Wilson had a portkey and the boat had been waiting when they arrived at the dock. After delivering Black, both aurors returned to the ministry cubicles and wrote up a standard report of the incident which they delivered to Crouch, per previous instructions. Neither man ever considered the matter again.

Although Avery interviewed the men separately, both stories agreed. The accounts weren't carbon copies, but it was clear that they were giving a truthful account of the events as they experienced them. During the chaos following the demise of the Potters, it wasn't unusual for procedures to vary from the norm. Both aurors assumed that the normal process would be followed after things quieted down.

The lack of records continued even after Sirius Black escaped from Azkaban. There was no official notice of escape. There were no formal instructions recorded. Even the Kiss-On-Sight order to the Dementors was verbal with no written record. There were numerous newspaper accounts of Sirius Black's sightings in the first year following his escape, but it was clear that they were designed to sell papers, not relay factual news. By the end of the first year following Black's escape, information was scarce. Anytime anything negative happened, the ministry attributed it to Black, but there was no identifiable evidence to support the suppositions.

Saturday found Avery once again at his desk with a continual supply of tea and sandwiches. He correlated all his interview notes with the official records and began his review. It was late afternoon when Avery started his official report. One conclusion stood out: there was no record of either the guilt or innocence of Sirius Black regarding the death of the Potters or the explosion that killed over a dozen muggles plus Peter Pettigrew.

When the interview with Lord Black asserted Sirius Black's innocence, neither Amelia Bones nor Daniel Avery was surprised. After conferring with Director Bones, Avery sent an owl to Lord Black requesting interviews with Lord and Heir Black.

Lord Peverell

Chapter Summary

July 18-20

July 23-24

By the time Harry crawled into bed Monday night, he was giving serious consideration to postponing the Peverell interview that was scheduled for Thursday. Aside from the extraordinary information in the Peverell grimoire, there was a request from an investigator with the DMLE concerning Sirius. Add in Harry's continuing Herbology studies and the week felt about to overflow.

Harry had invited the DMLE investigator to join him for a private lunch on Tuesday. With Filius' help, he had prepared pensieve memories of the confrontation in the Shrieking Shack with Sirius and Pettigrew. He also had copied the memories of Fudge's reaction. Dobby had taken a letter to Ron and Hermione letting them know that they might be contacted by the DMLE. Reviewing his actions helped calm Harry. Yes, it was one extra meeting in a full week but it didn't impede his other activities.

The ad had appeared in Tuesday's Daily Prophet.

Are you looking for more? Bored with your ministry job? Want a mastery in your favorite subject? Have an idea you want to explore?

Let Lord Peverell help you explore your dreams. Send a detailed letter including your current level of education, special skills and what you want to accomplish to apply. All applicants will be considered regardless of age, blood status, gender or magical power. Pure-blood, half-blood, muggle-born, squib - your passion is what matters.

Harry knew there would be interest. He had listened to Fred and George talk about a joke shop. Padma and Parvati Patil had talked about their idea for a boutique that offered affordable beauty options for both witches and wizards. Lavender Brown had gushed about the spas she had visited in Continental Europe and had read about day spas in America and wished for similar services in Great Britain. Colin Creevy's love of photography deserved better than the occasional publication in the Daily Prophet. Harry was sure there were students in other Houses that wanted more than a traditional ministry job or apprenticeship.

Harry was unprepared for the summaries he received from Amanda starting Wednesday morning. There were dozens of letters from hopeful wixen. By the time Harry sat down for

Thursday's interview, he felt a surprising optimism about Britain's future. It translated into a level of enthusiasm that hadn't been apparent in Lord Black's interview.

When Harry took his inheritance test, he only expected confirmation that he was a Potter. Seeing House Black was a welcome opportunity to help Sirius. Seeing Slytherin and Gryffindor was just cool. Emrys, once Harry understood the connection to Merlin, was beyond comprehension but pinged Harry's emotional radar because it came from his mom. The rest of the houses were interesting but certainly didn't stir any emotional connection.

House Peverell quickly rose to the forefront after reading the grimoire entry connected to the artifacts that Harry had learned were considered the legendary Deathly Hallows. It also stood out because the oath was about innovation and creativity which naturally made Harry think of Fred and George. The muggle biographies that Harry was reading to help his education in the larger world of business were about people who made fortunes with their inventions. This made House Peverell feel personal in a way most of the other houses weren't.

Reading the Black grimoire had been a duty. Reading the Peverell grimoire was a delight.

After a short meeting with Narcissa Tuesday morning, Harry opened the Peverell grimoire. As he had done the previous week, Harry started with the oath he took as Head of House.

I, Harry James Potter, accept responsibility for House Peverell and do swear, by blood, by magic and by spirit, to pursue innovation in all things. I promise to seek knowledge and creativity and to encourage the pursuit of excellence.

Harry read the oath several times and committed it to memory, then he felt for the Peverell magic. House Black magic was sharp. In contrast, House Peverell magic was light and airy. While the Black magic sat and demanded, the Peverell magic was always dancing and it enticed Harry to join the dance.

The token that signified House Peverell had changed with the three brothers. Originally, it had been a gauntlet. The three brothers committed to always work together despite only Antioch being the Head. To honor this commitment, Antioch had the gauntlet melted and forged into three bracelets that would magically weave together for future heads.

As Harry read the grimoire, he jotted down notes. He paid attention to certain words so he could make sure he understood them. What was the difference between invention and innovation? Did the pursuit of knowledge mean that formal education was a necessity? What was creativity and how did a wixen express it?

Harry had made it about halfway through the grimoire when an elf announced a visitor. Harry arrived at the small dining room at the same time that another elf led a man dressed in auror robes into the room.

"Good afternoon. Welcome to Potter Manor," Harry said and stepped forward with his hand extended.

Despite his obvious surprise, the man took Harry's hand, "I'm Auror Daniel Avery and I'm here to see Lord Black."

Harry led Avery to the already set table, "I'm Harry Potter-Black. I hope you understand my caution but I felt it best to meet with you before introducing you to my heir."

While Harry was speaking, goblets of sparkling water and two plates of salad appeared. Finally recovering from his surprise, Avery spoke, "Thank you for agreeing to see me. I understand your reluctance to expose Heir Black to anyone from the ministry."

"Well," Harry said with a grin, "it's probably more of a risk to expose the ministry to Sirius. He is, understandably, very angry."

"May I ask why he has not come forward to try to clear his name?" Avery asked.

"If you had a Kiss-on-Sight order on you, would you come forward?"

"Fair point," Avery noted. "Were you the one that instigated the new investigation?"

"I assume it was my solicitor," Harry answered. "When did you start this investigation?"

"Two weeks ago," Avery answered. "This salad is very good."

"The elves grow or raise nearly everything we eat here. Add in some amazing cooks and the results are delicious," Harry responded. He always tried to give public credit to the elves that produced the results.

As they finished the salad, the plates were replaced with clean ones. A large shepherd's pie appeared between Harry and his guest.

Harry let out a laugh, "The elves must consider this to be a stressful meeting. Shepherd's pie is a favorite of mine."

"Do you consider it stressful?" Avery asked.

"Only in that it adds one more thing to my day," Harry answered. "I'm actually quite happy to be able to talk about Sirius' innocence."

"And you are positive of his innocence?"

"As you will see from the memories I am providing, I met Sirius Black at the same time I first met Peter Pettigrew, at the end of my third year at Hogwarts," Harry answered.

"First met?"

"I met Pettigrew again at the end of my fourth year," Harry said in a heavier voice. "I provided that memory as well."

They ate in silence for a while and then Avery asked, "I understand why Black did not come forward, but why didn't you come forward with this information?"

“I did,” Harry said. “Fudge dismissed the word of three students. It was only quick thinking and a lot of luck that saved Sirius from getting kissed that day. That memory is also included.”

Avery nodded as he continued eating, “Who were the other students?”

“Ronald Weasley and Hermione Granger,” Harry said. “I have included their address in the notes I provided.

After they finished eating, Harry called Dobby and requested the box that contained the memories and the notes. As Harry handed the box to Avery he said, “When I took the oath as Head of House Black, my only concern was for my godfather. I will do whatever is necessary to see that he gets justice for the wrongs done against him.”

“I would do the same, Lord Black,” Avery assured the young man.

“I’m sure that your investigation has already shown that Sirius is at least not guilty,” Harry said. “If there is anything else I can do, please let me know.”

At that moment another elf popped in, “Bob say time for lessons.”

Harry chuckled, “Thank you, Winky. I’ll be right out.” Harry turned to Avery, “I have my afternoon herbology lesson. Feel free to look around and enjoy the manor. The gardens here are spectacular.”

Harry felt like his brain was about to burst. The Peverell grimoire had given him so many ideas and he didn't know what to do with them. Even with the reminder that there was no urgency to any of it, his mind still raced. He had sent a quick letter to Solicitor Tonks requesting any statistics that were available about muggle-born, squibs and other wizarding cultures. Harry knew he couldn't personally fulfill the Peverell oath but he could certainly use his resources to further the intent of the oath within the magical world.

Lunch with Avery had been more enjoyable than he expected. Harry deliberately didn't focus on the outcome of any ongoing investigation. There was a plan and Harry would do his part and trust Tonks to oversee the rest. Harry didn't have the knowledge or experience to directly involve himself in the politics that surrounded Sirius' case. Both Tonks and Narcissa would handle that part of things. Harry's main role was to lurk in the background as Lord Black.

As he walked into his herbology area, Harry removed his outer robe and replaced it with his gardening smock. Today was the final revision before moving into the fifth-year curriculum. Harry sat on his stool, closed his eyes and inhaled deeply. He let the smells of the earth and various plants fill his senses and he quickly sank into his magic. Surrounded by living plants, it was easy to connect to the Stinchcomb and Potter magics. He let them swirl around him before sinking deeper into his core. A touch to his arm told him that Bob was ready and Harry opened his eyes, his mind quiet and ready for the afternoon.

"Harry, my dear boy," George said in an almost perfect imitation of Dumbledore. At least, Harry was pretty sure it was George. Yes, there was that freckle. So far, Harry had only found one physical difference between the twins. George had one additional freckle just at the edge of his jaw near his ear.

"Hey George," Harry responded. "What's up?"

The slight widening of his eyes was the only indication of surprise as George looked over to Fred. "It's just that we never see you."

There was a deep chuckle as Filius walked into the dining room where they were gathering for Wednesday's lunch, "As you both seem to stay as busy as Harry does, it's not surprising that you aren't crossing paths."

Both twins sighed but it was Fred that spoke, "Sadly, it is true. Our Harrikins has provided such perfect accommodations that we have been seduced away from his side."

"What perfect accommodations?" Draco asked suspiciously.

"I think he's referring to the potions lab they've been using," Harry answered. "Did you get a chance to talk to Tonks this morning?"

"Indeed, we did," George answered.

"It seems a certain Lord Peverell is interested in doing business with us," Fred said with a wink at Harry.

"I heard that rumor," Harry responded with a grin. "Lord Peverell is interested in doing business with a lot of people. Unfortunately, some of it involves the Wizengamot."

"Stuffy old men," Sirius groused as he walked into the dining room with Narcissa.

"They may be stuffy old men," Narcissa chided her cousin, "but if you want to get anything done, they are necessary."

They sat down at the table and plates of food popped in front of each of them. "Uh, Harry," Fred said, "What are you feeding us?"

"It's quiche," Narcissa answered. "It's a savory egg base tart, popular in France."

"When did you start eating French food," George asked.

"Today," Harry answered easily. "I usually eat what they make for me and it's always delicious."

The quiche was accompanied by a hearty green salad, followed by fresh fruit. Harry always enjoyed lunch. It wasn't just the delicious selection but also the company. As usual, Filius, Narcissa, and Sirius were soon involved in conversation. Today, unsurprisingly, it was about the upcoming Wizengamot session. The full Wizengamot met on the second Tuesday of every month plus any special sessions that were called. For trials and tribunals, only a small

selection of the membership was called. This was rotated so that no one was overtaxed with their duties to the wizarding court system. Most of the gossip concerning the upcoming session was about Sirius Black. Although normally the Wizengamot, as a body that made laws and conducted trials, would not concern themselves with such an issue, the fact that it involved the heir to a major house made it of interest to nearly everyone. Harry, while staying out of the conversation, was nevertheless hopeful that the issue would be resolved before it was time for the next session.

As the now empty plates disappeared, Harry spoke, "I have a request to make."

When everyone's attention was focused on him, Harry continued. "I have no desire to be involved with the Wizengamot. However, by necessity, I have to participate in some manner. So I will be using proxies to represent my Houses."

"Did you have anyone in particular in mind," Narcissa asked.

"I'd hoped it would be at least several more months before this was necessary but I need to start sooner rather than later because of some of the things I've learned," Harry explained. "I hope Sirius is cleared before the next session and can sit as proxy for House Black."

"No," Sirius said.

"Yes, Harry responded. " Even if it isn't the next session, as soon as you are able to represent our House, you will. I need you. You'll keep them on their toes."

Sirius frowned. This was something he had never wanted to do but he recognized his duty. He also recognized that this was something very important he could do for his godson.

Harry continued, "As I understand, each seated Lord or proxy can have an advisor. Lady Black, will you serve as advisor for House Black?"

"I'd be honored," Narcissa responded.

"Filius," Harry said, "would you stand proxy for House Peverell?"

"Are you sure?" Filius asked in surprise.

"Certain," answered Harry. "You have the right energy for it."

"Is there anything we can do to help?" asked Fred.

"As heirs," Harry responded, "you are allowed to sit and observe regular Wizengamot sessions. I would like it if you would start doing that."

"We had never planned to claim our seats," George said. "Are you sure this is what you want us to do?"

"Stuffy old men," Harry answered, "are the ones making the rules. We need to change that."

"Are you calling my father a stuffy old man?" Draco demanded.

"Yes," Harry responded, "because he acts like one in his attitudes. The stuffy old men look out for themselves. They are not thinking about the future of the magical world, only of how something impacts their fortune and their power base."

"Why would they care about anything else?" Draco asked.

"Because our world is dying," Harry answered. "Slowly and steadily our current course is leading to the end of Wizarding Britain."

"Even if it's true," Draco sneered, "do you think you can change that?"

Harry thought of the sword sitting deep in the Emrys vault, "Not alone, but I can make a start."

Thursday morning, Harry received a thick packet of parchment from Tonks. A few years previously, an angry muggle-born wizard had attempted to sue the ministry and Hogwarts. Although the suit was unsuccessful, the research that had been done in support of his case was still part of his file. As the research had been part of the public trial record, Tonks was able to copy it and send it to Harry. It confirmed Harry's suspicions about the true state of Wizarding Britain.

With the packet was a note. Lucius Malfoy had filed with both Gringotts and the Ministry the official notice that Draco Malfoy-Black was his heir. Harry was glad for Draco's sake. Lucius Malfoy was a total jerk but he was still Draco's father and that mattered. Hopefully, living away from the man's influence, Draco could start to open his mind. Already, the boy was behaving better, at least in Harry's presence. Harry invited Draco out to the pitch to fly every afternoon following tea. Harry enjoyed having someone to fly against and Draco was a good flyer.

When Harry sat down for Thursday's interview, he was almost bursting with emotion. What he had learned from the Peverell grimoire combined with the research provided by Tonks painted a picture that was both dire and hopeful. Harry only hoped that he could communicate clearly what he had learned.

Lord Peverell Emerges

I spent time this week with the recently elevated Lord Peverell. The portkey I was provided brought me to Peverell Keep, The five-story brick keep located at the edge of a lake was undergoing a complete renovation. Naturally, the Keep itself was the first subject addressed in the interview.

There hasn't been a Lord Peverell in over 500 years. What shape was the Keep in the first time you saw it?

Like you, I first saw the Keep after arriving by portkey. It immediately felt like home. I can't explain it. It was an empty shell inside. There was the main floor and the stairs that led to the lower level. Nothing else. No upper floors, and no walls, it was completely empty. Yet, it was perfect. I knew this was going to be my home.

When do you expect to move in?

I am planning on moving in this weekend.

Our readers will want to know, will you be living here alone?

I do have a family but I would prefer to keep the details of my private life just that, private.

One more question about the Keep, if you don't mind. I notice that the kitchen is quite large. Is there a reason for that?

Yes, two of my family love to cook. One of them loves to experiment with different cuisines while the other is passionate about baking. Since I get to enjoy their efforts, it seemed only fair to provide them with the best kitchen possible.

House Peverell has been dormant for many centuries. What prompted you to renew this ancient House?

I was at Gringotts on routine business when an acquaintance suggested an Inheritance test. It was a complete surprise to discover that I was eligible to claim the House. It just felt right to accept the claim.

Since accepting that claim, what have you learned about House Peverell?

The oath of House Peverell is to pursue innovation in all things through knowledge, creativity and the pursuit of excellence. When this oath was first written, the word innovation was used as we would use the word invention today. After studying the Peverell grimoire, I would say that both invention and innovation were equally valued.

What is the difference between innovation and invention?

We use the word invention when we talk about the creation of something new. Innovation usually refers to taking something we already have and improving on it. For example, Damocles Belby invented the Wolfsbane potion. Although the potion is revolutionary, it is still very expensive. If another potions master found a way to modify the formula with less expensive ingredients, that would be an innovation.

What do you see House Peverell contributing to the modern wizarding world?

Potentially, quite a bit. The sad truth is the British wizarding world has fallen behind the rest of the wizarding world. That doesn't even consider how behind magicals are from the muggle world.

That's quite a lot to unpack, let's start with your assertion that the British wizarding world has fallen behind the rest of the magical world.

If you look at products and services available to British wixen and compare that to what you would find as close as France you would see there's a lot less available. Only in our businesses that compete internationally do you see innovation happening. Even then, what is brought to British wixen is less than is offered to the rest of the world.

Can you give me some examples?

Yes, take brooms for example. You see near-constant innovation in flying brooms because these brooms are not just sold in Britain but they're sold throughout Europe where they have to compete with other broomstick companies. What the average British wixen is unaware of is other products those very same companies make and sell throughout the world. Not only do they make and sell flying carpets but they also make different size brooms that accommodate more than one person. In most of Europe, you can buy a double broom that lets you and a friend quite literally fly together. You can also buy a family broom that seats up to four people. These products are unavailable in magical Britain.

The same laws that prevent flying carpets from being sold here also prevent multi-person brooms from being sold. What hurts Wizarding Britain is the reason these items are illegal. It isn't because they are unsafe. It isn't because it puts the Statute of Secrecy at risk. If that were the case, these items wouldn't be sold and used worldwide. The truth is that several hundred years ago one family, heavily invested in making brooms, was able to push through laws banning multi-person flying devices. This wasn't done for the sake of the wizarding public. This was done purely to protect the business interest of one family. Since most British wixen never go abroad, they aren't aware of what they're missing.

Why is this of interest to you as Lord Peverell?

That's just one example. As Head of a House committed to invention and innovation, I think it's important to look beyond the act of creating something new to how this impacts the larger magical world. What is the use of creating something new if there isn't an opportunity to use or sell that product because of ill-conceived laws? We lose too much magical talent because of the self-interest of older Houses that are only looking after their own interests. Too many wixen either go to live in other countries where there are more opportunities or they leave the magical world altogether to live in the muggle world which embraces innovation.

That's the second time you have mentioned the muggle world. Many readers will find it offensive that you think the magical world is inferior to the muggle world. Can you talk more about this?

This isn't about which world is better. It isn't magical versus muggle. The two worlds are vastly different and there is a reason we have the Statute of Secrecy. That doesn't mean we can't learn from the muggle world. Human nature is just that. It's human nature. We don't call it magical nature. We don't call it muggle nature. There are a lot of things we have in common.

What would you say we have in common with muggles?

I think that most would agree that we want things that make our life easier. We have spells for things like washing our dishes or our clothes. We have spells that help us clean up and get rid

of dust. We have spells that heat water. We don't need spells to do that. A thousand years ago, our magical ancestors walked to the closest source of water and hauled water to a fire to heat it. They used that heated water to bathe, to wash their dishes and to clean their clothes. We figured out easier ways to do that. We found spells that would do that. We learned how to make runic arrays that could do a sequence of spells to accomplish a task. So today, we don't have to haul water from the lake or the river. We simply turn on a tap in our house. We don't have to heat water over the fire. We have another tap that is magically set to heat the water that we've already magically brought into our house.

Muggles no longer go out to the river to haul in their water and heat it over a fire either. That's a lot of work. Just like us, they looked for easier ways to do things. They didn't have magic to make things easier. So muggles have to find non-magical ways to do things. Where we use magic, muggles use science and technology. Those are words that a lot of the wizarding world won't understand because we don't have science and technology. However, if you talk to anyone magical that was raised in the muggle world, they will tell you about devices that muggles have that we don't.

Can you give me an example?

I could give you a lot of examples but the terminology is something that a lot of magicals simply won't understand. There is one thing that I can tell you about. Thirty years ago, muggles walked on the moon. They created devices that could fly through space to the surface of the moon. They created special clothing that let them walk, talk and even breathe on the moon.

That's impossible.

And yet, muggles did it.

Most magicals consider themselves superior to muggles. They resent muggle-borns that come into our world and complain about things we don't have. They don't understand why muggle-borns often return to the muggle world after they graduate Hogwarts. This becomes an excuse for restricting opportunities for the muggle-born. This creates a cycle of loss. The restrictions mean that most muggle-borns never fully learn the richness of the magical world and our wizarding heritage. All that a muggle-born can see is that they don't have the same job opportunities that a pure-blood or a half-blood has.

Naturally, the muggleborn resent this. They left their world, the only world they knew, with promises of the wonders of magic only to discover that most can never rise above the level of a clerk. So, many go back to the muggle world, even though they often have to work very hard to make up for the schooling they missed. The fact is that many of them can still make a better life for themselves in the muggle world because hard work and talent are what matter, not blood status. Then pureblood magicals that have the power to make the laws use this as an excuse to further restrict muggle opportunities. This creates a vicious cycle. The result is that Great Britain has a lower magical population as a percentage of the total population than anywhere else in the world. We are losing magical talent because instead of rewarding innovation and hard work and talent, we fear and reject change.

Do you honestly believe that you can change this?

Not easily and not quickly but unless something changes Wizarding Britain will not survive. Every year, the population is smaller. Every year, fewer students are attending Hogwarts. The bigotry against anyone not pureblood and the laws that grow from that are slowly but surely destroying our world. I will do everything I can to prevent that from happening.

Is that the reason for the ad you placed in this week's paper? (See page 7 to read the ad)

Yes. House Peverell is committed to innovation. Unfortunately, that is not my area of expertise. However, what I can do is help magicals in our world that want to create, that want to invent, that want to innovate. I can help them find resources, funding, and education to further their dreams. I can help provide low-cost places for them to live and work. I will also work to change the laws that limit opportunities in our world. There is so much that we can do with magic. We can not only do more but give more opportunities.

I am certain that this interview will ruffle quite a few feathers. Do you have anything to say about that?

Change is always uncomfortable. Whether it is a personal change or cultural change, it disrupts and it disturbs. No one likes change but without change, we die.

That seems rather harsh.

It is but it is also true. British magical society is shrinking. I challenge you to investigate the records. Look at birth records. Compare graduation records to the number of people working and then compare that to historical records. Look at the size of our magical villages and compare it to the size of magical villages twenty or fifty years ago. Then go further and compare them to what is happening in the rest of the wizarding world. Look at those same statistics in Europe, Asia, and North and South America. See for yourself what is happening.

Is there anything else you'd like to share with the public?

Yes but I don't think they'll like this either. One of my ancestors created an extremely powerful wand. The wand is legendary and there are stories both told and written about it. What isn't talked about is the reason my ancestor created the wand. Perhaps the reason it isn't talked about is that aside from being an extremely powerful wand that will work with anyone that wields it, my ancestor considered his creation to be a failure.

How was it a failure?

The original purpose of the wand, the reason my ancestor created it was that he wanted a wand that would work with squibs.

How can a wand work with a squib? They don't have magic.

That is not true. Squibs don't have enough magic to work with a wand. However, they do have enough magic for non-wanded endeavors.

That's quite a claim. Can you elaborate on that?

Something that you can verify is that squibs have enough magic to considerably extend their lifespan. They also have enough magic to create and brew potions. They have enough magic to power most runic arrays. They have enough magic to cultivate magical plants. They have enough magic to work with magical creatures. What they can't do is magic most of us require a wand for. They do not have enough magic to do transfiguration or charms. For a lot of magical history, squibs were educated and had a place in the magical world. I don't know what happened and I'm still researching this but something started happening three to four hundred years ago. Gradually we started to treat magicals with lower power levels differently. They were labeled as squibs. It got so bad that many families began to kill these children. Even those that didn't kill them, rejected them from the family and forced them into the muggle world. Many of those we consider muggle-born may be actual descendants of those outcast magicals that we labeled as squibs.

Are you certain of this?

As I said, I am still doing research into this but I think it's very important to our understanding of magic. Based on what I found out so far, we have been not only squandering some of our magical resources but we have done a great disservice to some of our magical children. That has to stop.

What would you change?

We have to change the way we think about magic. Magic is more than what you can do with a wand. Most magical races don't use wands yet still have their own magic. Wixen consider these magical races inferior just like they consider magical people who cannot use a wand as inferior. This isn't right. Magic is magic no matter where it comes from or how it is wielded. By refusing to acknowledge that we lessen our magical world.

You've introduced quite a few revolutionary thoughts. How do you think people will react to that?

As I said earlier, nobody likes change. Nobody likes to be told that the way they view the world is wrong. I know what I've said is controversial. I know that a lot of people will deny it. Regardless of how they feel, wizarding Britain can grow or it can die. Those are the only options. As Lord Peverell, I will do everything I can to help it grow.

The World Turned Upside Down

Chapter Summary

July 23-28

Sidra Evergreen read Lord Peverell's interview for a third time. The first reading of the article had been to get a general overview. The second reading focused on the implied corruption within the Wizengamot. Anyone who worked in or with the ministry knew there was widespread corruption. As Croaker, Sidra didn't have to deal with it directly. The oath taken by all Unspeakables was strict. While the oath did not prevent a person from working against the Ministry, it did prevent any direct perversion of the work done in the Department of Mysteries. After Augustus Rookwood was revealed as a Death Eater over a decade earlier, the previous department head had considered revising the oath taken by all Unspeakables but ultimately had decided against it. It wasn't the Head Unspeakable's job to be the moral police. It was hard enough guarding the integrity of the department itself.

As Sidra read the article again, she focused on the information concerning squibs. This fell within her purview because it dealt with magic itself. She resisted the urge to cancel her lunch plans and immediately rush to her office. Instead, she pulled parchment and quill and sent out a few missives. First, was a letter to Ted Tonks requesting copies of the statistical data that Lord Peverell had referenced in the interview. The second letter was to her assistant. Tomorrow, Sidra would form a new working group within the department. If squibs did indeed have an active magical core, there would be far-reaching implications.

Cornelius Fudge was a lazy man. Ambitious but lazy. Fortunately, so were many that worked or dealt with the ministry. Taking advantage of this early in his tenure as minister, Fudge had carved out Sunday as a day of isolation. Only the direst of emergencies could disturb this isolation. Fudge depended on his staff to hold the line against possible intrusions.

To further hold the line against reality, Fudge refused to read the Sunday Daily Prophet. Any news could wait until he arrived at the office on Monday. A direct floor connection between his home and personal office meant he didn't have to immediately deal with the fallout of whatever headlines the Prophet was peddling. Copies of any relevant articles published in Sunday's paper would be waiting on his desk when he arrived Monday morning.

Wixen that worked with the Minister, whether as Ministry employees, Wizengamot members, or just individuals powerful enough to gain the Minister's ear, knew the ebb and flow of the Minister's routine. If you wanted Fudge's attention on Monday, you made an appointment the previous week. On the rare occasion it was necessary, the Minister's staff was in the office on Sunday afternoons and, with enough persuasion, would find you a time to see the Minister on

Monday afternoon. The earliest appointment available on Monday was at 1:00 p.m. This allowed the Minister to review the previous week and plan the upcoming week in a relaxed manner.

Fudge knew there would be unpleasantness to deal with. That irritating Bones woman was still hounding him about Sirius Black. It was ridiculous. Everyone knew the Black was guilty and it would only make the Ministry look weak to suddenly change course. Unfortunately, she was extremely competent at running her department and had an impeccable reputation. He had to at least appear to consider her recommendations.

To complicate matters, the former Lady Malfoy, Narcissa Black, was pressuring him, not only about her wayward cousin but also about the Potter boy. It didn't help that Lucius Malfoy had been all but invisible the previous week. With no clear reason to change his stance, Fudge followed his usual path of least resistance. He could always adjust later.

Fudge stepped out of the floo into chaos. While empty, his office was not the quiet oasis that it should have been first thing Monday morning. There was shouting outside his door. His reaction was automatic. He backed up against his desk and simply stared at the closed door, mouth gaping. He could hear the Under-Secretary, Dolores Umbridge, arguing with someone. He heard other voices that he recognized but, surprisingly, he didn't hear his assistant, young Mr. Weasley.

Finally, shaking off his shock, Fudge straightened and took his usual place behind his desk. He looked over his list of afternoon appointments and noticed it was fuller than he was accustomed to. Then he started reading the articles that had been selected for his attention. Fudge started reading the interview with Lord Peverell. His first thought was that it could not possibly be as troublesome as the interview with Lord Black had been. That article had been full of nonsense that riled everyone up.

As Fudge read the interview, he began to sweat. The allegations made by Lord Peverell were problematic. Looking at his list of afternoon appointments, Fudge knew which ones were a direct result of the article. He wasn't wrong. By the time the day ended, Fudge had completely forgotten Sirius Black and the warnings from both Amelia Bones and Narcissa Black.

Amelia Bones was cranky. She had spent the better part of the previous week attempting to convince Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge, to rescind the Kiss-on-Sight order for Sirius Black. After reviewing the results of Daniel Avery's investigation, Amelia knew that Sirius Black was legally entitled to his freedom. He had never been charged with any crime. Neither had he ever been convicted. His imprisonment in Azkaban was illegal. Therefore, Sirius Black could not be charged with breaking out of prison. This made the Kiss-on-Sight order not only illegal but a mockery of their justice system, a system that had failed repeatedly where Sirius Black was concerned.

Finally, and in frustration, Amelia had leveled an ultimatum, "Next week, I will hold a press conference announcing the results of the investigation. How you respond is up to you."

Amelia had learned that in dealing with the press, it was best to hold things close. She had planned to call the Daily Prophet and Quibbler Monday right before lunch. She would set up and announce in the atrium of the ministry at 4:00 p.m. on Monday. This would give print publications time to write their articles and get ready for the Tuesday morning edition. It would also be in time for the evening Wizinging wireless news and announcements.

That had been the plan. Then she read the interview with Lord Peverell and realized that Monday would be a madhouse. Between the thinly veiled accusations of corruption within the Wizengamot and the assertion that squibs were magical, the ministry would be abuzz with activity. She was right. While most of the hubbub bypassed her department, the Ministry was a beehive of activity.

In addition to the steady stream of wixen going to and from the Minister's office, the normally quiet offices of the Wizengamot members were awash with activity. It seemed to Amelia that the older the Wix, the greater the outrage expressed. They seemed equally divided between feeling insulted at the implication that a member of the Wizengamot would be swayed by monetary concerns and being defensive about past actions toward squibs. It only took one foray away from the DMLE for Amelia to retreat to her office with firm instructions that she was not to be disturbed.

By Tuesday, the Ministry was mostly back to normal. There was still a steady stream of visitors to the Minister's office and a higher-than-normal number of Wizengamot members spending time in their small offices but the worst seemed to have passed. Amanda sent word to the press representatives before she left for lunch.

At 4 pm, Amelia stepped up to the raised podium that had been set up in the atrium. Standing to the side and slightly behind her were Rufus Scrimgeour, Head Auror, Ted Tonks as legal counsel for Lord Black and Narcissa Black, representing House Black. As a courtesy, Amelia had sent word to the Minister but had not received any response.

"Good afternoon. As most of you know, I am Amelia Bones, Director of Magical Law Enforcement for the British Ministry of Magic. I have a statement to make and I ask that you hold all your questions until I am done.

"Approximately three weeks ago, I was shown a copy of the wills for James and Lily Potter. Both wills named Peter Pettigrew as their secret keeper. I immediately authorized an investigation into Sirius Black. We concluded the investigation last week and today I stand before you to announce the result of that investigation."

Amelia waited as questions were immediately shouted at her. It was several minutes before she continued.

"I will start with an outline of known and proven events. On October 31st, 1981, James and Lily Potter were found dead in their home in Godric's Hollow. They were living in a cottage with their infant son, Harry, protected by a Fidelis charm. This information was known to their close friends and associates. It was generally believed that Sirius Black was the secret keeper.

"By the time law enforcement was called, several people had already been to the Potter cottage, including Severus Snape, Sirius Black and Rubeus Hagrid. The infant, Harry Potter, had already been removed. In addition to the bodies of James and Lily Potter, empty robes were found beside Harry Potter's crib. Although no body and no wand were found at the site, the near disappearance of the dark mark on those known as Death Eaters led to the conclusion that the wizard known as Lord Voldemort was dead at the hands of Harry Potter.

"On November 1, 1981, a magical explosion was reported in the Exmoor area. Aurors responding to the event found Sirius Black who was reported to be hysterical but otherwise unresponsive. Upon direct instructions by then Director of Magical Law Enforcement, Bartemius Crouch, the aurors took Sirius Black directly to Azkaban prison. It was announced that he was responsible for the deaths of James and Lily Potter, Peter Pettigrew and twelve muggles.

"On July 30, 1993, Sirius Black left Azkaban prison. In the interest of public safety, Minister for Magic, Cornelius Fudge, issued a Kiss-on-Sight order and authorized an extensive search for Sirius Black, including the use of Dementors.

"On June 6, 1994, four individuals witnessed Sirius Black confront Peter Pettigrew in a building known as the Shrieking Shack located just outside of Hogsmeade Village. Although Peter Pettigrew escaped, three of the witnesses reported this to Minister Cornelius Fudge. Unfortunately, the three of the witnesses were underage and, therefore, judged to be unreliable. The fourth witness was unavailable.

"During this investigation, these witnesses were interviewed and pensieve memories were provided as confirmation. It is the opinion of the investigator and myself that the testimony and the memories provided are reliable and accurate.

"At no time immediately following the death of James and Lily Potter was any official investigation conducted into the guilt or innocence of Sirius Black. Although the magical explosion that resulted in the death of twelve muggles and the disappearance of Peter Pettigrew was attributed to Sirius Black, no evidence was found. Sirius Black was not arrested for any crime. Sirius Black was not charged with any crime. Sirius Black was not tried for any crime.

"Based on our investigation, there is no evidence that Sirius Black was responsible for the betrayal of James and Lily Potter and the events that followed in Exmoor. I have presented this evidence to minister Cornelius Fudge and requested that the Kiss-on-Sight order be lifted."

As Amelia stepped back from the podium, an explosion of sound rose as questions were shouted. Amelia waited for the noise to die down before stepping back up to the podium and raising one hand for silence, "If you will raise your hands, I will call on you for questions and answer as best I can. Please identify yourself and the organization you represent before asking your question."

Rita Skeeter, Daily Prophet. When will you issue the arrest warrant for Sirius Black?

Amelia had never been more tempted to roll her eyes. "As previously stated, there is no evidence that Sirius Black committed any crime though we would appreciate the opportunity to interview Mr. Black as soon as he's available."

Aaron Reed, Salem Gazette. What compensation will the ministry be offering Sirius Black for his illegal incarceration?

Amelia motioned to Tonks who stepped forward, "I'm Ted Tonks, legal representative for Lord Black. As I am currently in negotiations with the Ministry concerning this matter, I am unwilling to get into specifics. However, one of Lord Black's demands is that the ministry forms a Judicial Review Board with procedures that ensure that there is an appeals procedure in place for anyone remanded to Azkaban."

Ellen Jones, The Wizard's Voice. Has the Kiss-on-Sight order been rescinded?

"The Kiss-on-Sight order can only be rescinded by the minister. At this time it has not been rescinded," Amelia answered.

Timothy Rosen, The Wizarding World News. Who is responsible for Sirius Black's illegal imprisonment?

"Former head of the DMLE, Bartemius Crouch, gave the initial order to take Sirius Black directly to Azkaban. Following this order, there was no further action taken to follow the regular procedures. Our investigation has also confirmed that the wills of James and Lily Potter named Peter Pettigrew as the Secret Keeper. Although the ministry copy of these wills is still sealed under Wizengamot order, a copy of the wills on file with Gringotts Bank has been provided to us. These copies show that both wills were witnessed by Albus Dumbledore. Our investigation also shows that Albus Dumbledore was also made aware after Sirius Black escaped from Azkaban that Peter Pettigrew was still alive. There is no record of any action taken by Albus Dumbledore on Sirius Black's behalf."

Xenophilius Lovegood, The Quibbler. Will any charges be brought against Albus Dumbledore?

"No decisions have been made regarding additional charges to any individuals."

Candice Wilson, Witch Weekly. Is it true that Minister Fudge knew of Sirius Black's innocence and did nothing?

"As I stated, there were witnesses that came forward claiming to have seen Peter Pettigrew. These witnesses were underage or considered unreliable and Minister Fudge discounted their testimony because of it. As part of our investigation, we were able to view pensieve memories of the event to confirm the eyewitness statements."

Rita Skeeter, Daily Prophet. Will you call for a vote of no-confidence against Minister Fudge?

"My focus has been on the investigation of Sirius Black. I have not given further consideration as to what actions need to be taken as a Wizengamot member."

As the audience considered Bones' answer, Narcissa stepped forward. She stood silently, waiting until she had everyone's attention, "I am Narcissa Black and today I stand before you on behalf of House Black. Correcting the injustice done to Heir Black does not exonerate those who committed grievous harm to House Black. Those who perpetrated these deceits will be held accountable. House Black calls for Cornelius Fudge and Albus Dumbledore to be fully investigated for their part in the illegal incarceration of Sirius Black."

As an explosion of sound erupted, Amelia Bones felt the blossoming of a headache begin.

Percival Ignatius Weasley had led a sheltered life. Percy was extremely intelligent and, like many of a similar intellectual persuasion, believed himself to be far more worldly than he was. He was convinced that he saw the world more accurately than those with lesser intellectual gifts. The year at the ministry had done little to dispel this naivety.

The first blow to Percy's worldview came in the form of a job offer delivered by Ted Tonks. The job offer was eye-opening. Percy immediately recognized that he was being offered a step up in the world. As the third son of a minor House, he had no inherent advantage beyond his abilities and hard work. His goal had been to eventually head a ministry department, ideally the Department of International Magical Cooperation. Percy was smart enough to know it would take several decades of hard work to achieve such a position.

The opportunity to act as Secretary to the Lord of an Ancient and Noble House was unexpected, first due to his age and second due to his relative lack of experience. Then the identity of the Lord was revealed. It soon became apparent that whatever opinions Percy held concerning Harry Potter had to be ruthlessly set aside. Listening to the job description and salary offer, Percy recognized the rare opportunity he was being given but he was still hesitant. The evening spent with his family gave him the needed push to adopt a more objective view of Harry Potter. The following day, he met with Tonks and after further discussion, Percy accepted Lord Potter's offer.

The second blow came when Percy signed the employment contract. The original salary offer was stated in the contract along with a list of job benefits. The job benefits included the option of renting any property owned by Lord Potter at a fifty percent reduction in the going rental rate. Additionally, Percy would receive a custom working wardrobe from Hubler & Stevens, well-known for clothing the wealthier members of Britain's magical society. He was required to take Sunday plus one-half day per week off. He was also required to take one week off after every three months. Additional time off could be requested as needed.

Percy was stunned. There had to be a catch. No one would be that generous.

Tonks assured him that it was genuine. "Look, the truth is that Harry Potter has to be experienced. You will find yourself working harder than you ever have before, not because Lord Potter requires it but because you will want to help him accomplish what he imagines is possible."

Percy signed the contract and then quietly resigned from the Ministry.

On Monday, while much of the wizarding world was in a furor, Percy Weasley was rearranging his life. He started his day being fitted for his working wardrobe. Percy was pleased to discover that the Potter colors were a deep chocolate brown and rich dark red. A selection of trousers, waistcoats and robes in both colors was made with the tailor helping to select the most flattering styles. Percy went with cream-colored shirts, also at the tailor's recommendation. The next stop was with the cordwainer where Percy was measured for two pairs of dragonhide boots.

After lunch, Percy looked at several different apartments from a list Tonks had provided. With the discounted rate, Percy could move into a nicer place without a roommate. Percy was quite happy to find a spacious studio on Alley Way that suited him. He made arrangements to move in and gave notice to his roommate. With a final stop back at Hubler & Stevens to pick up his clothes, Percy was ready to step into a very different life.

It wasn't until Percy had been at his job for several days that he appreciated his new wardrobe. He had been puzzled to learn that all employees were provided with either a working wardrobe or a special clothing allowance. He had never heard of such a thing and he was familiar with many of the assistants that worked for Ancient and Noble Houses.

His first clue concerning the wardrobe came from Draco Malfoy. On his first day of work, Percy had joined Amanda and Ted for lunch as he was told was the custom. The first person he encountered entering the dining room with Draco Malfoy who looked him up and down with the start of a sneer on his face but then simply said "huh" and went and took his seat. Percy would realize later that his greatly improved wardrobe had taken away any immediate cause for criticism. Everyone was dressed equally fine and it eliminated obvious discrimination based on appearance.

Harry Potter, Percy learned, did not care how a person looked. Harry did not care about their species. He did not care how they dressed. He did not care how they talked. Harry had learned, early on, that in both the muggle and Wizarding World, appearance did matter to most people. So Harry listened to the advice given to him by Ted Tonks, Narcissa Black and Winky, his elf and dressed and behaved as advised. Then Harry, as only he could do, took it a step further. Harry realized that if it was true for him then it was also true for the people that represented him.

The Sorting Hat had been right. Harry truly did embody the traits of all four houses. His Slytherin ambition showed him the opportunities he was surrounded by. His Ravenclaw intelligence made connections from the advice he was given. His Hufflepuff loyalty prompted him to look out for the people he called family and friends. His bravery gave him the push to do it. Harry not only wanted to succeed in his new life but he wanted everyone around him to succeed with him.

It didn't happen quickly but gradually, day by day, Percy Weasley got to know Harry Potter.

Draco was beginning to like living at Potter Manor and that made him uncomfortable. He had always viewed life at Malfoy Manor as the ideal. There were two spheres of activity there, private and social. The private life of a Malfoy was small and quiet. At most, it was three

people behaving with decorum. It was always calm. The social life of Malfoy Manor was bustling and filled with acquaintances and strangers. While busier, it was still governed by strict manners.

The private life at Potter Manor seemed to bustle. Even with Potter and his weird family moving out, there was still a constant hum of activity. The orangery housed breakfast and afternoon tea. Breakfast, with the absence of Potter and Flitwick, had become an intimate affair with his mother and the Weasley twins. Surprisingly, Draco discovered that the Weasley twins were incredibly smart. They were thoughtful. They had a broad variety of interests. Most importantly, they could hold a decent conversation. Although their ambition was to open a joke shop, the Weasley twins did not think small. Their planned product lines went beyond schoolboy pranks. They talked about opening their first shop. The clue was there, their first shop. They wanted more. Draco was beginning to realize that almost the entirety of the wizarding world had seriously underestimated Fred and George Weasley.

Tea time was a much larger affair. Even with Harry no longer living at Potter Manor, he took tea every day in the orangery. Potter was joined by Flitwick and his abnormal elves along with cousin Sirius. On Monday, their group had grown by two more. Ted Tonks and a young witch named Amanda were now part of Potter's staff. At Potter's insistence, both wixen join them for tea before returning to their work in their ground floor office suite. On Tuesday, Percy Weasley joined the staff and became part of the tea-time menagerie. Apparently, there were more to follow next week.

That was another thing that baffled Draco. Harry Potter, his school nemesis, had hired a staff. Sure, Draco had heard mention of Potter working in his office in the mornings but Draco had dismissed that as pretentiousness on Potter's part. What could Harry Potter possibly need staff for? Draco's father had a part-time assistant. That was typical of most Wizengamot Lords. To have a solicitor, an assistant and a full secretary, not counting the researchers that had not yet started, seemed excessive. Granted, Potter was both Lord of Potter and Black but still, was all that really necessary?

Potter continued to confuse Draco. Lunch, like tea, hosted everyone that was around the manor, including the oddly large staff. Most days that included Sirius Black who always sat next to Draco's mother. The house elves that Potter called family were usually absent and sometimes Potter himself was at a separate lunch appointment. Lunch was usually in the same dining room every day but the decor seemed to vary. Potter allowed the house elves to change the decorations. Such initiative from a servant was unheard of. Draco's mother seemed to find the house elves fascinating and had started asking them questions.

That was another thing. Draco began to suspect that his mother was not his mother. That is not to say that the woman he was living with at Potter Manor was not the woman that gave birth to him. Rather, Narcissa Malfoy was not the same as Narcissa Black. She still had the same impeccable manners. She's still dressed at the height of fashion. She was still reserved in public. The change was in private. Narcissa was more open with each passing day. She laughed more. She physically relaxed in the company of others that shared the spaces of Potter Manor. She began to demonstrate a sly humor that she had been known for at Hogwarts but had never been seen by her son.

Draco had spent time with his father on the weekend. Draco had flooed to Malfoy Manor at lunchtime. It had been like every other meal Draco could remember sharing with his father. There was polite inquiry. There was good food. That was it. Draco had never before considered it lacking but he found himself missing the easy laughter that was every meal consumed at Potter Manor, regardless of who was present. Draco left Malfoy Manor feeling uncomfortably aware that his childhood had not been as idyllic as he had always assumed.

At 9:00 a.m. Friday, Sirius Black arrived via floo at the Ministry of Magic. At his side were Ted Tonks and Narcissa Black. It had been three weeks since Sirius had left the toxic environment of his childhood home. The changes in his appearance and demeanor were significant. The gaunt, haunted appearance was gone as was the resized clothing from his adolescence. In its place stood the heir to the Ancient and Noble House of Black. Collusion between Susu, Winky and Narcissa had resulted in fine silver-trimmed black robes worn over an all-black ensemble. Fine wool trousers, an open-neck silk shirt and a jacquard print waistcoat completed the look of both confidence, privilege and wealth.

It did not take long for news to spread throughout the ministry. By the time Ted and Narcissa had completed their wand registration, a crowd was gathered in the atrium. The crowd included ministry workers, visitors and reporters that regularly waited at the ministry for the chance to report on breaking news.

Both Ted Tonks and Narcissa Malfoy resisted the urge to close in on Sirius and protect him from the crowd. This was a moment for Sirius to show his strength.

A reporter called out, "Mr. Black, are you on your way to see Amelia Bones?"

Sirius stopped and looked the reporter in the eye, "I am here to take care of several pieces of business but my first stop is indeed the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. I am going to pick up the wand that was illegally confiscated fourteen years ago."

With that pronouncement, Sirius turned and continued to the elevators. He had a wand to retrieve, an animagus to register and a proxy to file. Sirius Black had never thought beyond fighting a war and spending time with his friends. It was time to step into adulthood. Even if he didn't want to do it for himself, he would do it for Harry.

Lord Stinchcombe

Chapter Notes

July 23-30

Monday brought a change to the Potter family. Sunday was moving day. Winky, Dobby and Filius had furnished the Keep. Winky and a few Potter elves had moved all their clothes and personal possessions first thing Sunday morning. When Harry and Filius arrived at their new home, most of their stuff was already in place. The biggest decision Harry had to make was where to keep his beloved Firebolt. Eventually, Filius took it from him, shrunk it to a twig and conjured a small case for it.

"The case should last at least a week," Filius said, "You'll want to buy one so the broom doesn't get damaged in your pocket."

It wasn't just Sunday with his family. It was Sunday with his family at home.

Harry's Monday morning breakfast with Borner had been entertaining. The publicist was delighted with the interview. The man had spent the day in the various pubs, tea houses, and restaurants of Wizarding Britain, watching the reactions and listening to the comments as people read Lord Peverell's interview. No one was surprised to hear that laws were manipulated for the benefit of those in power. The only difference was that now people were publicly talking about the corruption that existed. The real surprise had been the revelation about squibs.

There were few, if any, that had not at least heard stories about children banished from their homes when they did not exhibit any obvious magic. The final straw was not receiving the coveted letter from Hogwarts. To learn that these losses were not only needless but constituted a loss to the magical community was heartbreaking for many. There was outrage and questioning. Some questioned whether or not Lord Peverell's assertions were true. Others wondered if this was actually known and had been deliberately kept hidden. There was talk of both letters and howlers sent to both Hogwarts and the Ministry demanding answers.

Borner relayed all of this to Harry and then concluded, "You have done very well, young Lord. I am pleased that you have listened so well and learned so much."

Although surrounded by people who supported him every day, Harry was still pleasantly surprised every time he was praised. He returned to the manor still needing more breakfast.

Since he didn't need to go to Greengrass & Associates to meet with Ted, Harry dove straight into the Stinchcombe grimoire. As he had done at the start of the previous two weeks, Harry started by reading and learning the Stinchcombe oath.

I, Harry James Potter, accept responsibility for House Stinchcombe and do swear, by blood, by magic and by spirit, to nurture and protect the magical world. I will share the knowledge I have gained with all who seek to understand. I will record newly gained knowledge to be shared with future generations.

Once Harry had the oath committed to memory, he let himself sink into the Stinchcombe magic. It was both easy and hard to identify that magic. It fit comfortably with the Potter magic but at times Harry had trouble separating them. The Stinchcombe magic was deep green and steady.

Although the oath was about the magical world, the focus of House Stinchcombe was on the magical plant world. Generation after generation of Stinchcombes literally rooted their life in the earth. They took joy in working with the earth and they celebrated that joy on the Sabbats.

Growing up with his relatives, Harry had been aware that religion existed. The Dursleys, like many in their neighborhood, went to church for Christmas and Easter. The rest of the time they made reference to being God-fearing or Christian but practiced no other activity to support those beliefs. Harry, of course, was never welcomed to the twice-yearly religious outings. Each time the family went, at least one Dursley would tell Harry how unwelcome his freakishness would be in any church.

Harry had learned in both Muggle and magical history that the witch burnings were motivated by religious belief. That, combined with a lack of evidence, convinced Harry that wixen simply didn't believe in any God or practice any sort of religion. The closest to a religious experience he had witnessed in the magical world was Trelawny when she would get a faraway look and speak about the inner eye. Her fervor seemed to approximate what Harry always imagined spirituality would be.

The Stinchcombe grimoire was not a cohesive discussion of the Sabbats. Rather, it was a series of accounts through time of how the different Lords celebrated the different Sabbats. Harry realized from these accounts that the Sabbats were all celebrations of both magic and the land but the accounts were too disparate and he couldn't get a cohesive picture. Finally, he got out one of his notebooks and started making notes. Eventually, he was able to see that there were eight Sabbats, one at each change of seasons and one midway through each season. What he didn't know was if these Sabbats were still celebrated. The last Stinchcombe entry that mentioned the Sabbats had been several hundred years ago.

Shortly before lunch, Ted and Amanda stepped into Harry's office. After Harry had welcomed them upon his arrival at the manor, both new employees had promised to stop by after they did a bit of organizing.

"Get everything set up like you wanted it?" Harry asked.

"The elves did a great job arranging the rooms and furniture," Ted answered. "It was mostly arranging the various supplies and getting our personal areas set up."

Amanda stepped forward, "Thank you for this opportunity, Lord Potter."

"I'm still Harry. I prefer to keep things here at the manor a little more informal."

Amanda nodded and stepped out of the room, leaving Ted to talk to Harry in privacy.

"Mr. Weasley will be starting tomorrow. Phoebe Wilson, your correspondence secretary, we'll be starting on Friday morning," Ted announced.

"What about the researcher? Which one did you hire?" Harry inquired.

"That's the problem," Ted answered. "I'm having trouble deciding between the two of them and would like your input."

Harry nodded so Ted continued, "The older, muggle-born and raised is very comfortable accessing non-wizarding information. Although you have not started working with them yet, you do have quite a few ties to the muggle financial community. Having someone comfortable with their systems and in their world would give you a big advantage."

"That seems reasonable," Harry responded. "What about the other one?"

"The other one is from an old purebred family," Ted answered. "It's a distaff line and he has only the remotest chance of ever inheriting anything in his House but he was still trained to take up those duties in the event it should ever become necessary. He is comfortable not just in the wizarding world but amongst the old Wizarding families. He would be an excellent resource for you and able to navigate the ministry to find information that you need."

"Do we have enough work to hire them both?" Harry asked.

"Maybe not right away," Ted answered, "but I believe that we soon will."

"Will they be able to work together if necessary?" Harry asked.

Ted thought for a moment, "I believe so. Both have a love of knowledge and don't just accept what's told to them at face value. I suspect that will draw them together and facilitate a smooth working relationship."

"Is there any reason not to have two researchers if we can use them both?"

"Not at all," Ted said, "and I was hoping that would be your response."

"Then I guess we'll have two researchers," Harry said with a grin.

Harry was quiet during lunch. This was not unusual. He frequently still had his mind on whatever he had been working on during the morning. By the end of lunch, he was starting to

join in conversation more but was already starting to think ahead to his upcoming appointments. With a wave to everyone, Harry went to the arrivals room with Filius.

The official part of his checkup with Healer Tonks went quickly. Harry was continuing to grow and the long-term damage from the malnutrition of his childhood was continuing to heal. Tonks felt confident enough in his continued healing to discontinue the nutrient potions. Once physical matters had been addressed, Harry, Filius and Andromeda enjoyed a relaxed visit together.

The meeting with Heartwise took a different turn. After a brief review of how Harry was feeling about the previous week, Heartwise asked about the friends Harry had at Hogwarts. Naturally, it centered around Ron and Hermione. It was painfully difficult for Harry to publicly acknowledge that he had never had friends before those fateful meetings on the Hogwarts Express. With gentle prodding, Harry looked back and considered how his previous isolation had guided his interactions with his first two friends. Harry was able to see that his fear of losing those friendships had led him to decisions that were not always in his best interest. This was painfully evident in his approach to his studies. Torn between Ron's laziness and Hermione's almost pathological need to achieve, Harry had chosen a middle ground that was familiar but uncomfortable.

Harry had learned early in his childhood that excellence in any endeavor was at best unappreciated and at worst a cause for punishment. His adult relatives demanded perfection in regard to any chores performed. Imperfections were punished but the accomplishment of the goal was merely a prompt to assign more work. At primary school, Harry had learned he was safest when he was average. Any academic achievement was interpreted as an effort on Harry's part to overshadow his cousin, Dudley.

It had never occurred to Harry but talking about school work both before and during Hogwarts made him realize that Dudley and Ron had a lot in common. While Ron was not a physical bully, he was every bit as intolerant as Dudley had been. What wasn't understood was scorned. Those who were different were mocked. It was ironic that this very behavior was what led to Hermione's encounter with the troll that ultimately forged the friendship that the three had shared.

Hermione's aggressive demands for scholastic achievement mirrored Aunt Petunia's demands for household perfection. With both, the efforts Harry put forth were rarely good enough. When they did rise to the level of excellence both were fearful of being outshone and highlighted every flaw. This behavior reinforced Harry's belief that he needed to be good but not too good.

Harry spent long minutes sobbing in Heartwise's embrace. When he was once again calm, Harry was reassured to learn that first friendships typically mirrored relationships learned from family. Heartwise also helped the young man see that forming healthier family relationships was also helping him form healthier friendships.

By the time Harry met with Gorin and Filius, he felt emotionally exhausted. Harry knew that the realizations about his first friends were necessary and important but they were incredibly painful. Fortunately, magical tutoring didn't require feelings. It did, however, require a lot of concentration. Once again going to a remote field filled with boulders, Gorin instructed Harry

in a series of both wanded and wandless exercises designed to improve his magical control. Filius took many notes and Harry knew that some form of these exercises would be part of his nightly dueling practice.

While Harry paid careful attention to Gorin's instructions, he was less aware of how effortlessly he was using magic. When Gorin told him to do something, Harry didn't think about what spell to use or what wand movement was necessary. He simply did it. After weeks of consciously seeking out his magic, it was almost instinctive to call it into action. After over an hour of magical activity, Gorin called to stop and ran a diagnostic spell over Harry.

"Excellent," Gorin said. Your core is stable. Your endurance is excellent. Your control is steadily improving."

Filius put a hand on Harry's shoulder, "Good work. Let's go relax in the manor library for a bit before tea."

Harry chuckled, "You always want to relax in the library."

Tuesday morning, Harry dove back into the grimoire. He was fascinated by the entry that discussed the beginning of what was referred to as the seed vault. It started as simply a cabinet used to store seeds but over generations grew until eventually, one forward-thinking Lord realized the importance of what was being saved. This led to acquiring a much larger Gringotts vault and saving not only seeds from what was grown but also the acquisition of rare magical seeds from all over the world.

When Ted led Percy Weasley into Harry's study, Harry had an idea. "Ted, did you have any specific task for Percy this morning?"

"Nothing in particular," Ted answered. "Just showing him around and letting him get settled into his office."

"Percy, would you like to accompany me to visit one of my vaults at Gringotts?" Harry asked.

Percy looked at Ted, confusion evident on his face.

Ted chuckled, "Yes, Harry takes a little to get used to but when he asks you a question he wants an honest response."

Percy turned back to Harry, "Yes, I would. I'm quite curious about what you have in mind."

Percy was surprised when they floored directly to Gringotts. He also noted that Harry had much improved over that first disastrous trip through the floo before Harry's second year.

A goblin stepped into the room, "Greetings, Lord Potter. What brings you to Gringotts today?"

"Sharpnail," Harry exclaimed. "It's good to see you. This is my new secretary, Mr. Percy Weasley. We've come to look at the Stinchcombe vault."

"Certainly," Sharpnail responded. "I'll call someone to escort you. If you would stop by my office when you're done, I have a few documents for you to sign."

When they stepped out of the cart in the depths of Gringotts, Harry turned to Percy with a grin, "Brooms and carts are the only forms of magical travel I enjoy."

Percy looked at Harry, the horror evident on his face. Harry just laughed and called forth his vault key and presented it to the attending goblin.

"Growing up, I only knew that my parents were dead. I didn't even know their names. It is an unspeakable gift to discover a heritage that not only spans over millennia but over multiple Houses," Harry said. "This week I'm learning about my Stinchcombe heritage and this vault is an important part of it."

As Harry led Percy into the vault, Percy considered what he had just learned about his new employer. He couldn't imagine a life where he didn't know his family both past and present.

Harry led him to a tall cabinet of drawers, "This is the true wealth of the Stinchcombes."

Percy walked among the cabinets marveling at the vast quantity of them and wondering what they contained. He looked back and noticed that Harry stood by the first cabinet paging through a green leather-bound book.

At Percy's curious look, Harry responded, "I was reading in the House grimoire about seeds collected from all over the world and I was curious. This is a catalog of all the seeds contained in this vault."

Percy turned back to look at the cabinets. He didn't know what he had expected but the idea of a vault full of seeds had never entered his mind.

After a return cart ride that Harry found as exhilarating as Percy found horrifying, Harry stepped into Sharpnail's office carrying the seed catalog.

"Lord Potter," Sharpnail said, "I hope you found everything you needed."

"I did, thank you," Harry responded. "What do you need for me today?"

Sharpnail opened a folder and pulled out a sheet of paper, "This is the inventory of the Lestrage vault that you reclaimed. You will find, at the bottom, an item of special interest. I would like your permission to remove it from the vault for examination by a select group."

Harry looked up at the goblin with shock evident on his face, "Of course."

Sharpnail pulled out another document and walked over to the small conference table. Percy watched as Harry sat down at the table and seemed to wandlessly summon a writing instrument. Signing the document, Harry asked, "Do you need my seal?"

"A signature is sufficient," the goblin answered. "As always, your assistance in this matter is appreciated."

"Have you made any progress on the other artifacts?" Harry asked. He understood how fortunate it was to find another of Tom Riddle's horcruxes.

"I understand that the additional information from this artifact will help them further refine the magical signature that will lead to the remaining artifacts," Sharpnail answered.

"That is really good news," Harry responded. "Please let everyone know that I am available anytime if I can be of further assistance."

After they returned to the manor, Harry turned to Percy, "Thank you for accompanying me. I figured that the better you get to know me and what's important to me, the better you'll be able to do your job."

"Thank you for the opportunity, Lord Potter," Percy said with all gravity.

Harry smiled and responded, "Once we're back here I'm just Harry."

At lunch, Harry watched as Percy was greeted by his twin brothers. Harry had spoken with Fred and George before tea yesterday and reminded both that Percy was joining as an important part of his staff. Behavior that was tolerated at Hogwarts was unacceptable at the manor. Harry was pleased to see both twins treating their brother with respect.

By the time lunch was finished, Harry was ready to start this week's herbology lessons. After removing his robe and replacing it with an apron, Harry sat down at the work table in his greenhouse and felt for his magic. He was starting to do this anytime his daily activities transitioned. It was a quick moment and it helped center him.

When Bob entered, he took one look at his young charge and asked, "What fills your mind?"

"Do elves do the Sabbats?" Harry asked.

"Most do," Bob answered, "some don't if owners or families don't."

"What about my elves?" Harry wondered.

"All elves here at Manor celebrate Sabbats. Very important," Bob responded.

"Why?"

Bob walked up to Harry, took his hands and looked into Harry's eyes "Feel."

Harry did as instructed. He could feel not only his own magic but also Bob's. Harry's magic was a deep well. There was movement in the well and Harry could move his magic in and out of the well but mostly it stayed there until ready to be used. Bob's magic was everywhere in the small body. There was constant movement. Harry looked at Bob with wonder.

"Elf magic different. Elf magic move. Elf magic change. Happiest elf has wizard to move and change magic with. Without wizard, elf must find another way or hurt."

Harry nodded and understood, "What other ways are there?"

"Earth magic help," Bob said. "At Hoggywarts and Potterland, magic be strong. Sabbats help elf connect to magic in land. Sabbats help elf not hurt. Sabbats also help land."

"How does it help the land?"

"Active magic is happy magic," Bob explained. "Even in land, magic wants to dance."

Harry didn't completely understand but nodded. "Are there books about this?"

Bob smirked, "There be books on everything. Look in library. Ask old families."

With that said, they moved into the day's herbology lesson.

At tea, Harry brought up the Sabbats. There was an uncomfortable silence but it was Narcissa that eventually spoke "There are many that still practice the Sabbats in some form or another but it is rarely acknowledged publicly."

"Why not, Harry asked."

"To understand you need to know some of what happened during the war with you know who," Ted answered.

"Okay," Harry said, "we are not going to do that."

"Do what?" Sirius asked.

"We are not using made-up names for Voldemort," Harry said with authority. "I don't think we should even call him Voldemort. It is a silly made-up name. His name is Tom Riddle. We can call him Tom. We can call him Riddle. We can even call him Mr. Riddle but we will not tiptoe about who and what he is."

"Just what do you think he is?" asked Draco.

"As I said in my interview as Lord Black, Tom Riddle is a terrorist. He is a thug and he is a criminal. Whatever goals he may have had, however noble a cause that might have attracted people to his side, he chose to do it with fear and murder."

Everyone was silent for a moment and then Ted spoke again, "All right. When Mr. Riddle started, he became a champion for pure blood rights. There has always been a small faction who fear muggle-born. They fear the possible changes that they bring. They fear their numbers. Mr. Riddle used a message of pure blood superiority to attract those people and eventually attract a significant portion of the old pureblood families."

Ted paused and took a sip of his tea, "On the opposite side was Dumbledore who preached love and acceptance. After everything I've learned, I don't know if he believes that or if it was

just the opposite of what Mr. Riddle was doing. Regardless, Dumbledore used his position at Hogwarts to promote his agenda and make small changes. With the growing fear of Mr. Riddle, the relief when he disappeared was enormous. Most people just wanted peace. Dumbledore took advantage of this and started making more sweeping changes at Hogwarts.”

It was Sirius that took up the tale, “When I started school, all the old holidays were observed. I was a third year when we had the first Halloween feast. There was still a Samhain ritual for those that wanted to celebrate and some students or groups of students had their own private celebrations. It was the next year that the castle was decorated for Christmas. To be honest, most of us didn't mind if the muggles got to celebrate their holidays. After all, we got to celebrate ours.”

“I think things would be a lot different now if the conflict hadn't become so violent,” Narcissa said. “Our parents may have grumbled about the muggle nonsense but no one really cared. It was when our rituals and celebrations were pushed aside and ignored that the lines suddenly seemed sharper.”

“Harry,” Narcissa continued, turning to him, “there's something you need to understand. Most that took up Riddle's cause did so because they didn't see any other way. If you weren't a marked death eater, and most of us weren't, you were not exposed to the darker, uglier side.”

“Cissy's right,” Sirius said. “The actual period that we refer to as the war was only the last few years at the end. That's when the killing started. That's when families were destroyed. That's when open warfare broke out between the Death Eaters and the Order.”

“Order?” Harry noticed the twins and Percy exchanging glances.

“Order of the Phoenix,” Ted explained. “A lot of people act like it's a secret organization but it's not. The truth is, the ministry is ill-equipped to deal with open conflict. We don't have a military. We have aurors. When we need more than that, we put in a request to the ICW and Hit Wizards come in to take care of the bigger problems.”

“Of course,” Sirius said, “the ministry didn't want to admit the problem was that big and refused to call the ICW to deal with Tommy boy. When Dumbledore formed the Order, it was an open secret. Mostly the Order was a defensive organization. When Death Eaters attacked, the Order would respond and try to save as many lives as possible.”

For the young people in the room, this was new information. It was Amanda that asked the next question, “So how did muggle-born learn about wizarding holidays?”

“Mostly by seeing what was going on and asking questions. It's not like it's secret information,” Ted answered.

Harry's first impulse after tea was to rush up to the library to continue learning about the Sabbats. As he was learning to do, when he felt an urgent need for something, he paused for a moment and checked in with his magic.

With a calmer mind, Harry turned to Draco, “Up for a spot of flying?”

The next morning, Harry went straight to the kitchens after arriving at Potter Manor. Seeing Bibi, Harry invited the head elf to join him for a cup of tea, "How do you celebrate the Sabbats here at the Manor?"

"Sabbats always happen. Lord leads, elves follow," Bibi explained. "Without Lord, elves still follow but listen in head for Lord's part."

It took Harry a moment to wrap his head around what Bibi was saying, then he asked, "How do I learn the Lord's part?"

Bibi beamed at him, "There be book. Bibi bring to Lord. You learn for Lughnasadh."

"Thank you," Harry replied. "I'll be ready."

Before returning to the keep the previous evening, Harry had found several books in the Potter library about the Sabbats. Most he sent to his study but one, **The Decline of Pagan Magic** by Bathilda Bagshot, he took with them. After dueling practice with Filius, Harry curled up on the sofa in front of the fireplace and read until Winky sent him off to bed.

It was fascinating reading. Harry learned that for much of wizarding history, the Sabbats were public celebrations held at ritual circles. With so many circles scattered across Britain, it was always easy for friends and families to gather in celebration.

As the muggle population grew, it became increasingly difficult to hold public gatherings for the Sabbat. With increasing frequency, the Sabbats evolved into private celebrations. Wealthier families were able to dedicate spaces for Sabbat gatherings. A lucky few, such as the Potters, owned magic-saturated lands and were able to create private ritual circles.

The most significant consequence of this evolution was the gradual segregation between muggle and wizard born. Muggleborn wixen were able to celebrate the Sabbats that occurred during the Hogwarts school terms. Outside of those times, they were excluded unless invited to participate with wizard-born wixen. With the gradual elimination of Sabbat celebrations at Hogwarts, most new muggle-born wixen never learned of the Sabbats.

When Harry arrived at his study, there was a brown leather-bound journal on his desk. He opened to the first page and read, *A Potter Celebration*. Starting with Beltaine, the book detailed the year-long progression of Sabbats. Nearly every holiday was celebrated with a bonfire. Each Sabbat had a distinct purpose.

Lughnasa was the next Sabbat to be celebrated on August 1. It was a harvest celebration and a celebration of the first fruits. Traditionally, it was accompanied with markets and fairs. In more modern times, families recognized this aspect with the trip to either Hogsmeade or Diagon Alley. It was also considered an auspicious day for handfasting. It was traditional for Lord Potter to recognize the new unions of the bonded elves.

Harry opened his calendar and marked the date. As he did so, he noted that Filius had made note of his birthday. With everything Harry had on his mind, he had completely forgotten

about it. Setting aside the calendar, Harry picked up another book he had found in the library titled **Understanding the Sabbats** . There was no author listed but the margins of the pages were filled with notes.

There was a lot covered and Harry realized that he would not understand it all in one sitting. As the year progressed and he learned about and practiced the individual Sabbaths, Harry would come to understand more and more. As he read select sections, Harry learned that magical celebrations are based on balance, between seasons, between night and day, between light and dark, between life and death. It was the reason why magical calendars depicted the year as a circle or a wheel.

It was at tea that Harry's birthday was mentioned. Realizing that Harry would not be comfortable with a large celebration but also recognizing how very many people cared about the young man, Narcissa, Ted, Sirius, Filius and Winky had come up with a plan. Now they only needed to convince Harry. Harry listened to their suggestions and was surprised at how much thought they had put into the matter. He found it more than a little overwhelming and didn't know how to respond. Finally, Winky crawled in his lap, cradled his face in her hands and nodded. That was all the reassurance Harry needed to accept the plans that were suggested.

As tea was winding down, Harry invited everyone present to join the House Potter Lughnasa Sabbats. There would be a traditional celebration at a ritual circle located deep in the woods of Potter Manor. It was customary for the household to walk to the circle together. Harry had consulted with Ted earlier and after the celebration, the participants would floo to Diagon Alley and enjoy a private luncheon together before enjoying an afternoon of shopping.

Harry was careful to make it clear that while everyone that spent their days in the manor was welcome, none were required to participate.

Thursday morning started with the usual pre-interview nerves. Fortunately, Harry stayed so busy once he arrived at Potter Manor that his anxiety quickly faded. It started with a letter from Borner reminding him to focus on two things he wanted to communicate in the interview. Harry centered his Stinchcombe magic and thought about everything he had learned this week. Once again, he was surprised at how much he had learned. Now it was time to share that knowledge.

Meeting Lord Stinchcombe

As a reporter for the Daily Prophet, I've done many interviews. Typically, it involves meeting with someone and sitting down to get to know them. I usually come prepared with a list of questions to ask and usually ask additional questions based on their answers.

I've recently interviewed the newly elevated Lords Black and Peverell. When I arranged to meet with the new Head of House Stinchcombe, I was surprised to discover we would be meeting at Gringotts. Although it is not unusual to hold confidential meetings at the bank, it

is not a typical place to conduct interviews. However, instead of being escorted to a meeting room, I was brought to one of the carts that transport visitors to their vault. There I met a smiling Lord Stinchcombe who invited me to join him in the cart to visit the Stinchcomb vault.

What followed was not a traditional interview. Although I did get to ask some questions, it was mainly Lord Stinchcombe introducing me to his world. (I've noted Lord Stinchcombe's in italics)

I know this isn't what you expected but it's the best place to start to understand House Stinchcomb.

Lord Stinchcombe asked if I had ever visited a family vault before and invited me into the Stinchcombe vault. As I entered I saw a stone stand holding several items. House vaults all have this feature which holds the family grimoire, any House tokens such as a Lordship ring and any artifacts that are important to the family.

Instead of piles or chests of galleons that you usually see in a Gringotts vault, they were rows of cabinets. Each cabinet contained dozens of drawers. Lord Stinchcombe invited me to look inside one of the drawers.

This is the true wealth of House Stinchcombe.

Inside the drawer were stasis balls of seeds. Each drawer contained different seeds. Lord Stinchcombe explained a bit of the organization and showed me a large catalog that magically updated.

We regularly grow these seeds and replace them as they flower. We also add new cultivars as they are developed. The first seed cabinet was added to this vault over 800 years ago.

The next stop was a visit to Stinchcombe Herbs. Yes, the company that supplies popular culinary herbs and potion ingredients is owned and operated by House Stinchcombe.

As I stepped into the gardens, there were growing beds, greenhouses and fields as far as the eye could see.

The Stinchcombe line had gone dormant when my grandfather claimed it. Growing up, he had heard stories and wanted to know more. After taking the House oath and reading the family grimoire, he decided to start Stinchcombe Herbs to honor the family heritage. Very few knew that he was the man behind the company. After my Grandfather died, my father didn't get a chance to claim the House before he was killed during the war. Despite this, Stinchcombe herbs continued.

I asked Lord Stinchcombe what it meant to him, personally, to be a Stinchcombe.

When I told you that the seed vault is the true wealth of House Stinchcombe, I wasn't talking about its monetary value. Those seeds represent both past and future. They are a heritage that encapsulates the values of House Stinchcombe. We, as magical beings, have a connection to the larger magical world. House Stinchcombe, and by extension Stinchcombe

Herbs, pursues, studies and shares knowledge of our magical world and our connection to it. That's especially true as we approach the Sabbat of Lughnasa.

Lord Stinchcombe led me on a tour of the extensive growing beds. He introduced me to the many house elves that maintain the day-to-day operations of Stinchcombe Herbs. Finally, he led me through the woods to a ritual circle. I was surprised to see that the circle was well-maintained.

For over a decade the elves and other magical beings have gathered here at each Sabbat to celebrate. The heritage of House Stinchcombe is more than a seed vault. It is what those seeds represent. It is a heritage. It is a passing on of knowledge. It is a sharing.

Next week, I will gather my household and invite the magical beings on my land to share in the celebration of Lughnasa. The celebration of the Sabbath will not only be a sharing of our magic with the magic of the land but it's a greater sharing. It's a sharing with all other magical beings that will be celebrating on that day. It is recognizing that we all share a long and rich history together.

It is unusual to hear someone speak openly about the Sabbats. It is recognized that many still celebrate these traditional days but they are no longer talked about. To my surprise, Lord Stinchcombe invited me to share the Sabbat with his household. His only stipulation was that I respect the privacy of those involved.

In my years at Hogwarts, I learned a lot of spells. I learned magical theory. I learned how to make potions. I even managed to learn a little history. What I never learned were the rich traditions of magic. I am fortunate to have inherited a grimoire that taught me the heritage of my House. It taught me that magic is so much more than what you can do with a wand. It taught me that magic is everywhere and it flows between all magical beings and between the land that nurtures us.

When I expressed surprise that Lord Stinchcombe was being so open about private House celebrations, he explained his reasoning.

For over a thousand years, the Sabbats were celebrated openly. Most celebrations were large gatherings of not just families but also villages. Necessity forced us away from large public ritual circles. The Sabbats were never a secret and were never meant to be. Magical Houses are not meant to be private clubs. They are how we acquire and pass on our knowledge and traditions. The Sabbats are how we celebrate. Celebrations should always be shared.

Celebrations - part 1

Chapter Notes

July 31

"Happy birthday, Harry," Borner said with a smile as Harry walked into the publicist's office.

"Thank you," Harry responded as he took a seat at the small table already covered in pastries.

"You did an excellent job on this week's interview," Borner said. You have good instincts. It certainly makes my job a lot easier."

"How has the response been?" Harry asked as he watched the enchanted teapot pour two cups.

"Very favorable," Borner answered. "Many were already familiar with Stinchcombe Herbs and see it in a positive light. As to the Sabbats, a lot of wixen would like more openness about the holidays."

Harry nodded as he chewed happily on a cherry-filled pastry.

"I am curious," Borner said, "if you will make any changes at Hogwarts in your capacity as a founder's heir."

Harry swallowed and smiled, "I guess you'll just have to wait and see."

"You are not always the nice young man you appear to be," Borner scolded.

"You should never trust appearances," Harry responded, "but I'm really glad that people do."

Borner laughed and pulled out two books bound together with a bright silver ribbon, "I hope you find your birthday present helpful."

When Harry arrived at Potter Manor, he found a bacon sarnie waiting at his desk. He sat down, untied the ribbon and looked through the books Borner had given him. Both were on nonverbal communication, one on interpreting it in others and one on understanding what your personal body language says to other people. Both sounded very interesting.

Harry reluctantly pulled out the Gaunt grimoire. He was quite ambivalent about this House. The first oath he had seen had been ugly. It was hateful and bigoted. He hoped that like House Black, House Gaunt had started more positively and had, through an unfortunate turn, evolved into something unhealthy. He would only find out by opening the grimoire and reading.

As always, Harry started with the oath he had taken.

I, Harry James Potter, accept responsibility for House Gaunt and do reject, by blood, by magic and by spirit, the traditional oath of House Gaunt.”

House Gaunt will now and forever become a House of magical expansion, always seeking ways to strengthen and broaden the reach of magic within the magical community. I will seek ways to educate other Houses of the dangers of narrowing the reach of magic, letting the history of House Gaunt serve as an example.”

Harry started reading and was surprised to see that originally House Gaunt was all about the understanding and preservation of House traits. House Gaunt, as a direct descendant of Salazar Slytherin, carried the gift of parseltongue and studied the development of parselmagic.

Harry was reading about the first parselspells when there was a knock on the door. Harry looked up to see Ted with the rest of his staff crowded behind him. Harry motioned them in. Ted entered with a smile and beside him, Amanda carried a wrapped package.

"Happy birthday," they all said in chorus.

Harry put down the grimoire and smiled, "Thank you."

It was Percy that stepped forward to speak, "We will all be at your birthday tea this afternoon but our present is for your office."

Harry reached out and accepted the package and then opened it. Inside was a large brightly colored peacock quill but instead of the usual tip, it was somehow connected to the nib of a fountain pen. It was accompanied by a stand to hold it.

"We know how hard you work," Amanda said, "so hopefully when you use this it will brighten your day."

"It is beautiful and yes," Harry said, "I will definitely enjoy using this. Thank you."

After they left Harry went back to reading the grimoire, as usual, jotting down questions as he went.

Harry had just finished his mid-morning snack when Winky popped into his office, "Time to change for lunch."

Harry checked the time, "It's 10:30."

"Still time," said Winky. "Dogfather guests come at 11: 00."

"I thought it was a lunch party," Harry whinged.

"You still has meetings. Moved around but still there" Winky explained. "Must go to have time with friends."

Harry nodded, finally understanding. Andromeda would be at his birthday tea and had agreed to do a quick checkup after but he still had his regular meetings with Heartwise and Gorin. His emotional and magical health couldn't be ignored just because it was his birthday.

Harry went up and dressed in the clothes Winky had laid out. Dark Potter brown trousers, a pale blue shirt, and a deeper blue robe. He recognized the pale blue as the color for House Gaunt and the deeper blue was one of the colors of his personal magic. It always amazed him how much thought Winky put into what he wore.

He flooded over to Potter Lodge. Sirius was hosting a birthday luncheon for Harry's younger friends at the lodge. This allowed Harry to see all of his friends in a more neutral setting as most had no idea what his summer entailed. Harry walked into the backyard to see two pavilions had been set up for the occasion, one for Harry and his friends and the other for any adult chaperones. Winky, Dobby, and Susu had worked together to set up everything. Harry was extremely grateful that the three elves got along so well. It could have been disaster otherwise.

Fred and George arrived first, coming, as it were, from Potter Manor. They immediately began rapid twin speak,

“Why look,
it's Harry Potter.
I heard
it's his birthday.
Happy birthday,
Harry.”

"Hey guys," Harry walked over and gave each twin a brief hug. "I'm so glad you're here. It's so rare that I see you at lunchtime."

There was laughter all around and then Sirius was leading Neville and his grandmother out to join them. Harry thanked them both for attending before Sirius led Augusta Longbottom over to the grownup side.

"Hey, Neville, Harry said. "I'm glad you could make it."

"Thanks, Harry," Neville responded as he handed Harry a letter, "and thanks for the birthday present. Also thanks for the warning."

"Oooo," said George, "What naughty thing did our Harrykins get for you?"

"Nothing naughty," Neville answered, "but it wasn't appropriate to open it at the breakfast table when it arrived."

"I sent Neville some thestral and hippogriff dung for his greenhouse," Harry said.

"You sent him poo," Fred said, deadpan.

"Dung," Neville corrected, "and it's great. Magical dung is the best fertilizer you can get for your plants. If you have a source for it, you can make a lot of money."

"Huh," Harry responded. He'd had the Hogwarts elves gather it for him but had no idea what usually happened to it. It was something to look into.

"What made you think of dung?" George asked.

"Someone suggested that it was a great gift for someone really into herbology," Harry answered. In fact, it was Bob's suggestion when Harry asked what would be the perfect gift for a gifted herbology student.

"Seems it was a good suggestion," Fred noted with a grin.

Next to arrive were Arthur and Bill Weasley.

"Arthur, Bill, it's good to see you both," Harry said, shaking their hands.

"Happy birthday, Harry," Arthur said warmly.

"Fifteen now?" Bill asked.

"Yes," Harry answered, "and it's weird."

"You'll get used to it," Arthur said, "and then it'll be time for another birthday."

With a wave to the other boys, Arthur and Bill went to join Sirius.

Finally, Molly arrived with Ron, Hermione, and Ginny with exuberant birthday greetings and hugs all around. Molly was practically weeping at the sight of Fred and George, ignoring the fact they had visited the day before.

Despite having seen Harry a few weeks earlier, the new arrivals were shocked at his appearance.

"You've grown, Harry," Molly gushed. There wasn't much Harry could say to that.

"When did you get rid of your glasses?" Hermione asked. "Do you have contacts or is there some magical way of correcting vision?"

It was Fred and George to the rescue as they immediately swooped in and led everyone over to the table, effectively distracting Hermione.

"Happy birthday, Harry," Ginny quietly said.

"Thanks, Ginny," Harry responded. "I'm really glad everyone could make it."

"Sirius said not to bring any presents," Ron interjected. "I hope that's okay."

"It's exactly what I wanted," said Harry sincerely. "I just wanted to spend some time with my friends."

"A little early for lunch, isn't it mate," Ron commented, "not that I'm complaining."

"It fits best with everyone's schedule," Harry responded.

Lunch was what had become one of Harry's favorite combinations of quiche, salad and berries. Hermione explained quiche to Ron, Ginny and Neville in far more detail than anyone wanted.

When Hermione asked about summer homework, Harry was able to honestly answer that he didn't have any left to do.

Eventually, the adults wandered over and a large cake popped into the center of the table, covered in candles which Harry dutifully blew out. The cake was strawberry and vanilla with a whipped cream icing. It was perfect.

Harry had some time before his appointment so he returned to Potter Manor. Taking out the letter that Neville had given him, Harry sat down at his desk and read it.

Dear Harry,

Grandmum was very distressed that you did not want a birthday present, especially after you sent me one. I hope you don't mind but eventually, I was able to convince her it was a muggle thing. In reality, I think I understand. Your gift was the only truly useful one I received. I appreciate the gifts everyone else gave me but sometimes gifts just remind you that most people, no matter how much they like you, don't really know you.

I hope in the coming year that you and I can get to know each other better. The end of this past school year made me realize that you never really know what can happen. You can't assume that you have time with the people around you. It has really made me think.

You probably don't know this, because it isn't something most people talk about, but when You-Know-Who died, it didn't end the war. There were still Deatheaters and they were still attacking. Five days after your parents died, Deatheaters attacked Longbottom Manor. They did not believe that You-Know-Who was dead and were trying to find more information. Since my parents were both aurors, they assumed my parents would know. When the wards were breached, my grandmother hid with me in a closet.

Three of the Deatheaters tortured my parents for information using the pain curse. Although I was very young, I still remember their screams. I also remember when the screams stopped and there was silence. When my grandmother finally let us out of the closet, my parents were still alive but that was all. Since then they have lived in a special ward of St Mungos. They can walk and follow simple instructions but nothing more. The screams were the last time I heard my parents' voices.

You are probably wondering why I'm telling you this. As I said earlier, I realize that we never know what's going to happen. I also realize that if I want people to know me I have to use my Gryffindor courage and show them who I am. An important part of who I am is a result of that horrible day.

I hope that by our next birthday, we will know each other as we would have done had circumstances been otherwise.

Sincerely,

Neville Longbottom

Harry put down the letter and took a deep breath. It was unexpected and he was feeling too many things at once. Not knowing what else to do, Harry closed his eyes and sank into his magic until Winky called him for his appointment.

Usually, Harry met with Heartwise in Healer Tonks' office. Since the goblin healer had been invited to Harry's birthday tea, they were meeting at Potter Manor. When Harry joined her in a small salon, Heartwise could see that something was bothering the young man.

"What is it, Harry?"

In response, Harry handed Heartwise the letter that was still clutched in his hand. The healer read the letter and then asked, "What are you feeling?"

"Too much," Harry answered.

"Then let's take it one thing at a time. When I ask you, tell me the first thing that pops into your mind," Heartwise said.

Harry nodded.

"What are you feeling?"

"Guilty."

"What do you feel guilty for?"

"I've known Neville for four years," Harry answered, "and I never knew any of this."

"Okay," Heartwise responded, "I want you to read the letter again."

Harry read through the letter and looked up.

"Now tell me why you didn't know about Neville's parents," Heartwise instructed.

"Neville didn't tell me," Harry answered.

“So who was responsible for you not knowing about Neville’s situation?”

"I guess Neville is," Harry responded, "but maybe if I'd been a better friend..."

“I need you to listen carefully to what I'm about to say,” Heartwise said, looking directly at Harry. “Until recently, you had very little control in your life. You had no control over how the Dursleys treated you. You had no control over where you lived. You had no control over how much you got to eat,

“Some of that is just part of being a child,” Heartwise explained. “Children don't get to choose where they live, where their bedroom is, or what they're fed for supper. A good parent gives their children choices when it's appropriate. As the child matures, they get more and more choices. Unfortunately, you never experienced that. It's normal for you to find control wherever you can and sometimes, in this type of situation, a person tries to claim control for something that is not their control. Do you understand?”

Harry sat for a minute considering it, “Yeah, I think so.”

“An important part of maturing is learning what you are responsible for and what you are not responsible for,” Heartwise explained. “You are never responsible for the choices other people make. Yes, you can always look back and see what you might have done differently. That does not make you responsible for what another person chooses to do or not do.”

Harry nodded but didn't say anything.

“Harry, I'd like you to repeat that back to me so that I know you understand,” Heartwise said. “You are not responsible for what another person chooses.”

Harry swallowed, “I am not responsible for what another person chooses.”

“This is a lot bigger than Neville's letter,” Heartwise continued. “Just like you are not responsible for Neville's choice, you were also not responsible for the decisions other people made, even when they affected you.”

Harry looked up in panic.

“Let's talk about some other choices you are not responsible for,” Heartwise said gently.

“I don't want to,” responded Harry.

“I understand, but it's important.

“Last week,” Heartwise continued, “we talked about your friendships with Ron and Hermione. You did very well understanding how their behaviors mirrored the behavior of the Dursleys. I'd like to make sure you understand that how Ron and Hermione behaved and how the Dursleys behaved was not your responsibility. It was not your fault. Why not?”

“Because I am not responsible for the choices other people make,” Harry answered

“Do you believe that?”

“Sort of,” Harry answered.

“How does it make you feel to say that, to say that you are not responsible?”

“Really scary,” Harry admitted.

“Do you know why it feels so scary?”

“It means I can't make it change,” Harry said after a moment's thought. “No matter how much I wanted the Dursleys to be a real family, I couldn't make it happen.”

“That's correct,” Heartwise said. “At some level, you realize this. It was part of what led you to reach out to Filius, Dobby and Winky. It helped you step away from the life you were living to try to make a new life.”

“Now let's talk about how this applies to your friendship with Ron and Hermione,” Heartwise said.

“I'd really rather not,” Harry said looking at her.

“Let's do it anyway,” Heartwise persisted. At Harry's nod, she continued, “You recognized that your relationships with Ron and Hermione were not good for you. Do you understand that although you chose to accept their behaviors, you were not responsible for how they behaved?”

Harry nodded, “Yeah I get that.”

“Good,” Heartwise responded. “Now let's talk about the part you are responsible for. In both the past, present and future, you are not responsible for the choices Ron and Hermione make in their relationships with you. So what are you responsible for?”

Harry thought about this. He went through his memories of both good and bad times with his friends. He remembered the times when he was so grateful they were there. He remembered the times when they acted in ways that caused him pain. He remembered the times when they were loyal to him and stood up for him. He remembered the times when they didn't believe him or weren't willing to speak up for him.

Finally, he looked at Heartwise, “I'm responsible for how I reacted to them. I'm responsible for choosing to let the good balance the bad. I'm responsible that I chose to forgive them when they hurt me.”

“Do you regret those choices?”

“No,” Harry answered immediately. “I don't think I could have done any differently.”

“So that's the past,” Heartwise noted. “What about now? What's going on now with Ron and Hermione? What's been happening and how are you feeling about it?”

“They came to my birthday lunch today and that felt nice,” Harry said. “I know they both had questions about things they're seeing and not understanding but except for a brief moment in

the beginning, they let it go to just be with me. I appreciate that.”

“I sense a but,” Heartwise noted.

“But,” Harry said with a small grin, “they still think it's okay that they did what Dumbledore told them to in regards to communicating with me this summer. They still haven't sent me a single letter since school ended asking how I am despite believing that I'm still at the Dursley's and knowing how hard this year was for me.”

“How does that make you feel?”

“Really angry,” Harry admitted. “I sort of understand. I mean, until recently I thought Dumbledore was the good guy looking out for everyone's best interest. So, yeah, I can see why they think they have to listen to him but on the other side of that is the fact that we were supposed to be best friends. Is it really okay to abandon your best friend because your headmaster tells you to?”

“Is it?”

“No,” Harry said forcefully. “I don't think it is. I think our years of friendship are worth more than that or it should have been because obviously it wasn't.”

“And besides angry, how does that make you feel?”

“It really hurts,” Harry admitted. “Part of that is that not everyone made that same choice. I know they're older but Fred and George and Sirius still reached out to me despite being told not to.”

Heartwise was silent, letting Harry just sit with his feelings for a bit and finally she asked, “And what about the future?”

“I've been thinking about that,” Harry said. “We have a history together and some of it was good. I can't just set that aside. On the other hand, these past weeks have shown me a different way to interact with people. They've shown me what it means to be respected for who I am. I don't want to cut them out of my life but I don't think they'll ever have the same importance again.”

“So how are you feeling about that decision?”

“Overall good,” Harry responded. “There's still some anger and sadness. I wish it was different.”

“So what is Harry Potter responsible for?”

“I'm responsible for the choices I make,” Harry said.

By the end of the hour with Heartwise, Harry was emotionally exhausted. He didn't know what Gorin had planned but it had to be better than what he just went through. He knew the time with Heartwise was important and it was helping him but it felt like the hardest thing he did every week.

Gorin and Harry walked out into the woods, “You are leading the Lughnasa celebration tomorrow. I know that you have learned the expected parts so today I want to make sure you are prepared magically.”

Gorin stopped when they were still some distance from the ritual circle, “I want you to connect to your personal magic and just feel for a moment.”

Harry did as instructed.

“Now,” Gorin said, holding out a hand, “take my hand and feel my magic.”

As he had done with Bob, Harry reached out with his magic and felt the deep, lively thrum of Gorin’s magic.

“When we get to the circle, I want you to ground yourself in your magic and then let yourself feel the magic inside the circle,” Gorin instructed.

Arriving at the circle, Harry looked around. He thought it was pretty amazing to have a ritual circle on his land. In the center of the circle was a large stone that was called a menhir. It was about five feet tall and about three feet across. Etched around the bottom were runes that were weathered but still distinct.

At a distance of about 10 feet from the menhir was the circle. There were four larger stones about three feet high and a foot across. These were at each of the cardinal directions. Between the four cardinal stones were six stones spanning the distance, creating four sets of seven.

Gorin directed Harry to a spot between the menhir and the outer circle, “Feel the magic, Harry.”

Harry reached out and felt. “The magic feels heavy and still. It almost feels asleep.”

“Although the elves and other beings that celebrate the Sabbats here feed the magic, they do not have the strength to move it,” Gorin explained. “The magic of the land is thick and strong and the constant stream from the ley lines only increases it. You need to waken the magic.”

“I can do that?” Harry asked in wonder.

“Lord Potter can do that,” Gorin answered. “The Sabbat will be more complete if the magic is awake. It will be able to interact with all the participants. Right now, it would only be able to interact with you.”

“How do I do it?”

“I don’t know,” Gorin answered, stepping outside the circle. “You need to follow your instincts.”

Harry walked in a slow circle between the menhir and the outer stones. The magic felt heaviest around the center stone. He continued walking, mapping the density of the magic. He couldn’t put it into words but he could feel differences. After the third time around, he

could mentally map where the magic was heaviest. Heavy swaths going from the menhir to the cardinal stones were distinctly denser.

To confirm an idea, he stepped outside of the circle and walked around it. Then he understood. The magic gathered in the circle but it didn't want to be stuck there. The sabbats helped move the gathered magic out into the rest of the world.

Harry walked over to Gorin, "The magic is stuck in the circle and wants out, but there is so much magic gathered that it has become too heavy."

"What do you think needs to happen?" Gorin asked.

"I think I need to help move some of it out now. To properly celebrate, the magic needs to be lighter and able to move freely," Harry said. "It can't do that now."

Gorin nodded, "What do you need?"

"I'm not sure," Harry answered. "I need to connect to the magic in the circle. I can feel it but I need to connect it to my magic."

"As Lord Potter, on the Potter lands, in the Potter circle, this is part of your birthright," Gorin said.

"The grimoire," Harry realized.

Harry called Dobby and requested the Potter grimoire. When Harry had it in hand, he started to browse through it.

"I've avoided reading it," Harry said. "The other grimoires are not personal but this one is."

"I understand," replied Gorin, "but sometimes necessity forces our hand."

Harry flipped the pages until he found one that talked about renewing the circle. It wasn't exactly the same as what Harry needed to do. For a decade, dozens of elves had poured their magic into the circle without the wixen magic to balance it. It had accumulated and needed to be dispersed. Harry closed the book and thought for a bit.

"I think I know what to do," Harry said and handed the book to Gorin.

Harry stepped into the circle and magically cut his palm. Then he placed it on the menhir. His Potter blood combined with House Potter magic allowed a connection to form between his personal magic and the magic of the circle. After a moment, he stepped back from the menhir.

Harry turned to the West and with a deliberate pace, walked to the cardinal stone. He placed his blooded hand on the stone and reached for the magic of the circle, then he pulled. Harry pulled the magic through the circle to the western cardinal stone. He could feel the magic hesitate at the edge of the circle so once the magic was flowing to the edge, Harry stepped outside the circle, continuing to pull the magic. As it left the circle, Harry could feel it start to rush out faster.

Harry had no sense of time as he pulled the accumulated magic out of the circle. It felt like it both took forever and took no time at all. When he felt the magic of the circle start to slow, he released his hold of it. With a nod to Gorin, Harry started walking back to the manor.

They walked back in silence. Harry was surprised to find that he felt energized. He could hear voices as he approached the orangery. Tea time was becoming increasingly social at the manor. With the addition of his staff, there were usually at least a dozen people at tea. Today there were even more.

As he stepped into the orangery from the gardens, there was a sudden silence. Harry realized everyone was staring at him. It was Sirius that finally approached.

“Happy Birthday, Harry,” Sirius said. “Is it safe to hug you?”

“Why wouldn’t it be,” Harry asked, perplexed.

“Well, you’re sort of, um, glowing,” Sirius answered.

“It’s very pretty,” Narcissa chimed in from behind Sirius.

Gorin stepped forward, “Lord Potter has been preparing the ritual circle for tomorrow. He is rather steeped in magic at the moment.”

Everyone was silent, absorbing this information. Finally, Sirius stepped forward and hugged Harry.

“Maybe we should adopt it as a trend,” Narcissa said lightly as she stepped forward to hug Harry. “Everyone glows on their birthday.”

With that, the atmosphere lightened and Harry sat in his usual spot. A plate of his favorite sandwiches and prepared tea was already waiting on the small table beside him. He looked around at everyone and felt a sense of wonder at how full his life had become.

Harry didn’t consider that everyone would want to personally wish him a happy birthday. He felt a bit like he was some sort of royalty holding court, not realizing that he was. His Lordships alone would have created the situation but it was more because he was Harry and the more he opened himself to others, the more people grew to esteem him. For some, like his employees, it was respect. For those that had worked with him the most this past month, the respect had grown into fondness. For a few, Filius, Winky, Dobby, Narcissa, Sirius and the twins, the feeling had grown into love. Mostly familial love but the twins knew themselves well enough to recognize that what they felt for Harry was not brotherly. They weren’t quite ready to label it yet but, if pressed, would have admitted it was some type of love.

There was a parade of elves that came to give Harry birthday wishes. Some hugged. Others bowed or curtsied. Bibi and Bob came first, then Susu. Then Harry realized that the elven groups were aligned with his different Houses. To his surprise, Limney and some of the Hogwarts elves had come. The wixen present watched in amazement.

Finally, Draco quietly said something to the twins, "I don't understand. This breaks all the rules about how house elves behave."

"It's Harry Potter,
I don't think
the rules matter.
Do you?"

Draco looked at the twins with a frown, "Do you have to do that?"

"Yes," the twins answered in unison with matching grins.

By the time the busier-than-usual tea ended, Harry was exhausted. With more hugs, Harry bid everyone farewell and went up to his bedroom for a brief exam by Healer Tonks.

After a quick diagnostic exam, Tonks smiled, "I am very pleased. The long-term damage is still healing. You've grown a little more. Gorin tells me your magical core is healthy."

With a clean bill of health, Harry went to the arrivals room where he flooed back to the keep with his family.

Harry woke and looked around. He had fallen asleep in his favorite loveseat in front of the fire. Even during summer, the keep was always chilled and there was always a blazing fire warming the family room. Potter Manor had salons and sitting rooms but Peverell Keep had a family room surrounded by balconies that led to the individual suites. The family room was decorated for comfort. Squishy chairs and loveseats surrounded the large fireplace with plenty of small tables to hold books and snacks. Large colorful braided rugs covered the stone floor and warm woven blankets were scattered amongst the seating.

Suddenly, Dobby was standing in front of him, "Time for special dinner."

Harry figured he must be getting used to the elf because he didn't even ask before following Dobby downstairs into the large open kitchen. The enormous trestle table that normally took up half the kitchen had been replaced with a slightly smaller but different table. About 2/3 of the table was made of iron. Surrounding the iron on three sides was a wooden apron. Filius and Winky were already seated at each end of the table. Dobby led Harry to the solitary seat along the long wooden side. Dobby walked to the other side which was all iron. Then Dobby stepped up onto something that put him waist-high to the table.

Harry looked around, "What's going on?"

"Dobby and Winky have planned a very special birthday dinner for you," Filius answered.

"Dobby find very strange muggle restaurant," Dobby said. "Benihana."

"Dobby bring Winky to see," Winky continued the tale. "Strange place. Like cooking play. We go many times."

"Dobby learns and practices," Dobby smiled at Harry. "Dobby give his Harry best birthday meal. Winky help."

What followed was the most interesting dinner Harry had ever experienced. As Dobby both prepared and cooked the meal at the table, the elf performed amazing feats of artistry. Dobby flipped and juggled and made an onion volcano. Large slabs of beef, scallops and shrimp were seared. Rice was fried with onions and eggs cooked in. Vegetables were grilled. Sauces were presented alongside the food.

Finally, Dobby's cooking presentation was finished and the elf enjoyed his portion as he sat next to Winky.

"Thank you," Harry said. "Dinner was amazing. Plus, I know you all helped with the rest of the day. I've never had a birthday like this."

That was all it took to instigate a family hug. When they finally made it upstairs, Winky had a treacle tart waiting for Harry.

Filius looked over at Harry as he snuggled with both elves. Filius knew from his first conversations with the young man that birthdays had been largely ignored until Harry had friends in the wizarding world. Filius had joined his life to Harry Potter's and it had led in unexpected directions. From teacher and student to family, the difference had never been more clear than seeing Harry at dinner as he smiled and laughed at Dobby's dinner performance.

"Harry," Filius said, "Ready for a night flight?"

Harry's dash to grab his broom was all the answer Filius needed. It was the perfect end to Harry's fifteenth birthday.

Celebrations - part 2

Chapter Notes

August 1-2

Harry dove back into the Gaunt grimoire Tuesday morning. Gradually the writers in the grimoire went from studying House traits to focusing on the Gaunt House trait, parseltongue, to trying to strengthen the trait by strengthening the bloodline. Unfortunately, their understanding of inheritance was flawed. While the parseltongue trait did get stronger in the Gaunt line, to the point that every member carried the trait, the general effect on the Gaunt line was negative. Their magic got progressively weaker until the youngest Gaunt, while never called a squib, never received an invitation to Hogwarts.

It wasn't until Harry had finished reading the Grimoire that he realized the last few generations had written entirely in parseltongue. Harry sat back in shock. He had never questioned Dumbledore's theory that his parseltongue ability came from the connection with Voldemort in his curse scar. Apparently, he could still read the language. Could he still speak it?

Harry was making some notes of future research to do when Winky popped in.

"Work stop," Winky said in her usual imperial manner. "Go change."

Harry looked at the time, surprised it was as late as it was, "Thanks, Winky."

Harry went to his suite. Winky had split his wardrobe between the keep and the manor. Most of his casual clothes went to the keep while his business and formal wizarding wear was kept at the manor. Once again, Harry was thankful that Winky took care of that for him. While he knew that what you wore was important to the impression you made, Harry would have been happy in jeans and t-shirts all the time. He didn't object to the more formal styles, he just didn't care enough to make the effort. Though, he thought to himself, if he didn't have Winky taking care of it, he would have eventually realized the importance of his wardrobe. It just would have taken longer.

Harry was surprised to see what Winky had chosen for him. Harry preferred a mono or dichromatic palette. Winky typically chose clothing that was in the shades of one of his Houses. Today, she had chosen the colors of his personal magic, not one or two of the colors but all three. Dark blue trousers, a green shirt, a dark blue waistcoat that matched the trousers and a royal purple robe.

Harry blinked and called, "Winky."

Winky was there in an instant, “What Winky do for her Harry?”

“Shouldn’t I be wearing Potter colors today?” Harry asked, knowing he was leading the Lughnasa celebration as Lord Potter.

“Potter for Sabbat,” Winky explained.

“Okay,” Harry said, trying to understand. “Another House for this afternoon?”

“Today, all follow Harry Potter,” Winky explained. “Not House but Harry.”

“I don’t understand,” Harry confessed.

“You is powerful wizard,” Winky said. “You has big magic. Magic call to magic on sacred days. Today you be you for everyone.”

Harry closed his eyes. This was the part he wasn’t comfortable with. The work, whether learning his Houses, doing business, or learning Herbology, was what engaged Harry. He knew as Head of many Houses that he had power and influence. He thought of that power in terms of what it allowed him to do, the differences he could make. The power that came from the strength of his personal magic was something that he simply didn’t think about. Even in his work with Gorin or the nightly practice with Filius, Harry didn’t consider what the magic he wielded meant in a larger context.

Winky could see the anxiety in her Harry. She took his hand and when he opened his eyes, told him gently, “Breathe. Feel magic.”

Harry sank into a sitting position on the floor. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. He sank into his magic. Remembering Winky’s words, he focused on his magical core. The swirling greens, blues and purples were familiar and comforting. After a few minutes, he felt Winky crawl into his lap. He opened his eyes.

Winky placed her hands on his face as she often did when soothing him, “You is you. Afternoon for fun. Not think of anything else. Just fun.”

Harry smiled. He had been looking forward to the afternoon. Today he would participate in a part of wizarding culture that he had never experienced before. Tonight’s Sabbat was for all magical beings but each race had their own traditions they followed for the day.

Lughnasa was the celebration of the first harvest. Over time, it had evolved into enjoying the markets that those harvests went to. In centuries past, wixen would go to local markets to purchase the first fruits of the summer. With the changes brought about both by the Statute of Secrecy and the consolidation of magical districts, wixen went to magical shopping enclaves such as Diagon Alley or Hogsmeade instead of a local market. Although not openly advertised, there would be stalls and carts out today in addition to the more permanent stores.

To celebrate the bounty that Lughnasa represented, Harry was hosting a private luncheon at a restaurant on Diagon Way. It would include Filius, members of the Black family, his staff, any residing in Potter manor and additional invited guests. The afternoon would be spent

perusing the shops of both Diagon Alley and Way. Winky and Dobby would enjoy an afternoon of elven tradition at the manor.

After he dressed, Harry went to the arrivals room. Harry and Ted would floo directly to the restaurant. Others would floo to the Leaky Cauldron and some would apparate to one of the apparation points in the Alley.

Amanda had arranged for a large private dining room. Rather than ordering from the menu, Narcissa and Bibi had chosen what would be served. Lamb and corn were both traditional foods served on Lughnasa as well as a variety of other early-harvest fruits and vegetables.

Harry waited at the door to the dining room to greet his guests as they arrived. Although a traditional holiday celebrated by many, it was not celebrated by all. Harry had been surprised to learn that Andromeda had not celebrated the Sabbats since her expulsion from the Black family. It had held too many painful reminders and, being married to a muggle-born, it was easier to just ignore those days. Today would be the first time Ted and Nymphadora celebrated the holiday and the following Sabbat.

Another first-timer sharing the day with them was Bill Weasley. Although it was never discussed, Harry got the impression that many of the Light families had rejected the holidays and Sabbat celebrations. As he had learned earlier, much of this is because of the changes Dumbledore had brought to Hogwarts. Bill had been delighted at the chance to celebrate the holiday and experience his first Sabbat.

Harry had been generous in his invitations. He keenly felt the responsibility of sharing the traditions of his Houses. His publicist, Borner, would be joining them for lunch and traditional shopping but preferred to celebrate the Sabbat privately.

Another invitee, Sidra Evergreen was attending accompanied by her former brother-in-law and niece. No one in the family had celebrated since the death of Sidra's sister, Pandora Lovegood. Sidra always worked on the holidays and then held a private Sabbat with her remaining family. Harry's invitation was the prompt she needed to rejoin the larger magical community.

As Sidra arrived, she brought her family over to meet the host, "Harry, this is my niece, Luna Lovegood, and her father, Xenophilius. Luna is about to start her fourth year at Hogwarts."

Harry welcomed them, shaking Xenophilius' hand and then turning to Luna. To Harry's surprise, Luna leaned forward and kissed him on the cheek.

"You will be missed at Hogwarts, Harry Potter," Luna said in a slightly sing-song voice, "but magic has called you and you have answered."

Harry had no idea how to respond to that and just nodded. Sidra let her family into the room and Harry continued to greet his guests.

Eventually, everyone arrived and, per Narcissa's instructions, Harry went to the head of the table and stood behind his chair, signaling that it was time for everyone to come to the table. Narcissa stood behind the chair at the opposite end of the table. For the foreseeable future,

Narcissa would act as the official hostess for the Houses that Harry led. Once everyone had found their place at the table, Harry took his seat with Narcissa a bare second behind. Soon everyone was seated.

The luncheon courses were served by wixen staff which was typical of most wizarding restaurants. It was a lavish meal and would be balanced by a light supper before the Sabbath would be celebrated. Harry, with the help of Sirius and Narcissa, set the tone. Work was set aside. Politics were ignored. It was a day of laughter and joy.

After the luncheon, everyone was given a token, "For any purchases made this afternoon, simply present the token to the merchant. They will make an impression and return it to you. My Houses have benefited from all of you. Today I gladly return some of that bounty to you." They were ritual words that Harry had found in the Potter grimoire and they had resonated with his generous nature. It was with almost unspeakable joy that he said them to his guests.

Some of his guests had trouble with his generosity but this had been foreseen. Filius, Ted, Narcissa and Sirius had quiet words where necessary overcoming any reluctance.

As they were moving into Diagon Alley, Sirius pulled Percy Weasley aside, "I heard you were very serious about a young lady in your life. This would be a good opportunity to buy her a special piece of jewelry."

"I couldn't do that," stammered Percy.

"Not only can you do that," Sirius said, "but Harry expects you to."

"I don't understand, at all," responded Percy.

"Right now, you still think of this as a job," Sirius said. "Your employment contract is the modern equivalent to a vassal's oath. Both sides can walk away at any time but while it holds, you act in service to House Potter."

"I understand that," said Percy, "but I don't see what that has to do with this." Percy held up the token as he spoke.

"As House Potter prospers, it is both Harry's privilege and duty to provide for the needs of His people," Sirius explained. "Your happiness is one of those needs."

With that, Sirius stepped away to join Harry for some shopping. Bill had heard the entire exchange and sped up to walk beside his brother.

"I had to learn," Bill said conversationally, "that whatever I thought I knew about Harry Potter had to be thrown out the window. You can't overthink this. Just accept with gratitude and humility."

Percy nodded, a bit overwhelmed and stayed by his brother's side as they started to peruse the shops.

Borner used his token for a few sweets and baubles but the real benefit of the afternoon came from the rumors swirling through Diagon Alley. The use of the token was a very old custom and had not been employed for a very long time. Its revival set the merchants talking. First, it was about the custom itself. Then, it was noted how many tokens had been given. Then came the speculation of who among the many present had been so generous.

The sight of Sirius and Narcissa prompted many to speculate that it was Lord Black hosting the event. Others speculated that it was the strange Lord Peverell. Lord Stinchcombe was immediately dismissed as a candidate. He was seen as too down to earth for such frivolous nonsense.

Many speculated on the identity of the young man dressed in such fine, colorful robes. There was no mistaking the power that radiated from him and it was clear that many deferred to him, but no one knew who he was. It made Borner giddy with delight. Their image of Harry Potter was not only skewed but it was based on information that had quickly become obsolete. Borner couldn't wait until people eventually made the correct connections.

Harry spent the afternoon with Fred and George. The best part of the afternoon was when Harry convinced the twins to use their tokens to buy new brooms. They were initially reluctant but Harry gave his best pleading face and the capitulation was near instantaneous. After much debate, they decided on the newly released Comet 290.

Harry used his token for upgrades to his work accessories. He was still using his leather messenger bag from school so he upgraded to a Hungarian Horntail dragon skin satchel dyed a rich, dark blue. It had featherlight and extension charms. He also purchased a lap desk and stationer case for use at the Keep.

His final stop was Magical Menagerie. It was time to visit the snakes. He walked in and went directly to the reptiles. There were three large cages housing multiple snakes each. Then there were enclosures holding single snakes.

Harry walked up and stood in front of the cages. Very hesitantly, he said, "Hello."

Nearly all the snakes snapped their heads toward Harry. Suddenly there was a cacophony of greetings, mostly cries of "Speaker."

A huge grin spread across Harry's face as he turned to the twins, "I can still do it."

Fred and George looked at each other and then back at Harry. Fred asked, "Did you think you couldn't?"

"I wasn't sure," Harry answered. He didn't know what to say so he turned back to the snakes and started talking to them.

Fred and George weren't sure what was going on but today was not the day to figure it out. Instead, they moved until they stood back to back with Harry, blocking him from the rest of the store.

Unaware of his protective barrier, Harry was chatting with various snakes. Most of the snakes in the pens were mundane varieties. Those in cages tended to be magical though there were a couple of mundane ones. All of them wanted to live with a Speaker.

Harry remembered his absolute delight the first time he had conversed with a snake. He also remembered the school's reaction when he revealed the talent in his second year. It was the second memory that mattered. The various lessons from Narcissa, Sirius, Ted, Borner and Sharpfang coalesced. He outranked nearly everyone, politically, financially and magically. He might not dwell on it but it was there and it was his. If he wanted snakes, he could have snakes.

He turned and walked up to the counter, pulling out his token. He handed it to the shop clerk and said, "I'd like to buy your snakes."

Hearing Harry's words, Fred slipped out of the store, leaving George to look after Harry. He returned a short time later with Percy who quickly took stock of the situation.

Percy walked up to Harry and asked, "You want all the snakes?"

Harry grinned, unrepentantly, "I do."

"Then I'll take care of it," Percy said, turning to the shop clerk, "If you will write up the bill of sale, I will contact you tomorrow. It will take several days to arrange the enclosures for them."

Percy looked at Harry and considered. Finally, he leaned over and quietly said, "There is no keeping this quiet. I recommend House Slytherin."

Percy was right and it wasn't something that he had considered. Well, in for a knut, in for a galleon. He looked at Percy and nodded his acceptance of the recommendation.

Stepping up, Harry looked at the clerk and said, "This is Percy Weasley, my secretary. He handles all matters for House Slytherin. However, today is a holiday so except for approving the Bill of Sale, the rest of the arrangements will wait."

Having set the kneazle amongst the owls, Harry walked out of the shop, flanked by Fred and George. The best moment for the twins was still to come and happened at tea when Harry looked at Borner and said, "By the way, Lord Slytherin bought all the snakes in Magical Menagerie today."

After tea, Harry went to his personal greenhouse and worked with some of the plants he was studying. It had already been a full day and there was still a lot more to come. He needed some time alone to recharge.

About an hour later, Bibi popped into the greenhouse, "It be time."

Harry went upstairs to wash up and change clothes for the rest of the day. Coming out from a quick shower, Harry found dark brown trousers and waistcoat with a cream-colored shirt and a deep red robe. This evening he was Lord Potter.

In the formal gardens outside of the orangery, the elves of Potter Manor were gathered. Lughnasa was traditionally considered an auspicious day to be hand-fasted. While most of the wizarding world chose other days, most elves still followed the practice. Harry went to stand where he had been shown earlier. He had learned from Bibi the words and actions expected of him as Head of House.

He smiled nervously, "On this day of celebration, we come together to celebrate not only our first fruits but also the bonds of love. I invite any elves who wish to be handfasted to step forward."

That was shifting in the crowd and Harry could not tell how many couples were arrayed in front of him. He would later learn that twenty-six couples from his various Houses were handfasted. There were many couples that had waited quite a few years for this day.

One couple at a time, Harry knelt and exchanged ritual words with each pair. Finally, there were only two elves left. Dobby and Winky stood before him. Winky looked very pretty in a yellow dress with matching hat and shoes. Dobby in his inimical fashion looked smart in short pants and a crisp shirt. He also wore three hats and his usual unmatched socks. Although dressed more distinctly, Dobby and Winky wore the Potter crest on their left shoulder.

Harry knelt, holding out one hand to conjure the handfasting ribbons. For the previous couples, Harry had conjured ribbons in the colors of the house they had bonded to. For Winky and Dobby, family, the ribbons were in his personal colors.

Harry closed his eyes and called, once more, upon the ancient magic. As he intoned the ceremonial words, the ribbons rose from his hand, braiding together and then wrapping around the joined hands of Dobby and Winky.

"May you know nothing but happiness from this day forward.
May your mornings bring joy and your evenings bring peace.
May your troubles grow few as your blessings increase.
May your hearts be joined forever in love.
May the blessings of magic rest upon you
And fill all your coming days."

With each word, the magic built until it was a swirl surrounding the couple. At the last words, the magic surrounding Dobby and Winky settled into them. Rather than moving to the side, as previous couples had done, the two elves threw themselves into Harry's arms.

All of the elves, with Harry among them, celebrated until it was time for a light dinner. This was the first handfasting celebrated at Potter Manor in over a decade. For the elves of Hogwarts, it had been much longer. There was music and dancing and elven magic filled the air.

It was a very relaxed and happy young man that joined most of his household for supper. The members of House Black were celebrating the Sabbat at Castle Black with Sirius as heir leading the celebration. Although there was no ritual circle at the castle, there was a garden

used exclusively for Sabbat celebrations. The castle was not yet fit for habitation but Narcissa had made sure the garden would be ready.

An hour before sunset, Harry led wixen and elves through the gardens and woods to the circle. While everyone else moved around the outside of the circle, Harry stepped inside. He sat down beside the menhir and sank into his magic. This was not a time for nerves. He had learned the words of the celebration and knew what he had to do. He waited until near sunset and then stood.

Slowly Harry walked around the inside of the circle, looking at the participants who waited to be invited in. Standing beside Filius was Sharpnail who had come to not only honor his trusted relationship with Harry but to represent Gringotts in hopes of a better future relationship between wixen and dwarrow.

Sidra Evergreen and the Lovegoods had returned to Potter Manor to celebrate the Sabbat with them. Fred, George, Percy and Bill stood together, attending their first Sabbat, all with different hopes. Amanda and his other staff members stood together. Harry acknowledged each one.

In addition to the wixen and elves, several griffins were standing separate. There was a herd of Abraxan, two centaurs and several thestral. The elves of Hogwarts would celebrate in the forest with most of the thestral herd and centaurs. A few had traveled to Potter Manor to celebrate with the new Lord and report back. The Griffin were part of a larger flock that lived on Manor lands. Like hippogriffs, they were proud beings and did not usually mix with humans. The Abraxans had a large stable and land set aside for them on the other side of Potter Manor. Only on Sabbats did the griffins and Abraxans come into proximity with one another.

After walking the circle, Harry stepped up to the menhir. With a thought, he opened a cut on his palm and pressed it to the stone. He let his blood and magic seep into the stone. Harry began the ritual words, amplifying his voice so all could hear,

“The Wheel turns.”

He walked to the western cardinal stone and pressed his hand to it, once more offering blood and magic,

“Today we find balance between what we use from the land and what we give to the land.”

Harry walked along each stone, making an offering of blood and magic. Most of his ancestors only made an offering at the menhir. A few were strong enough to make an offering at the cardinal stones. Not since Merlin had there been a Lord strong enough to make the offering at all twenty-eight stones.

At the southern stone, Harry continued,

“The harvest of our lands has begun.”

At the eastern stone,

“We have enjoyed the first fruits and the bounty it brings us.”

At the northern stone,

“The magic of our bodies is offered in thanks for the bounty of the land.”

Harry completed the circle and returned to the menhir, closing the cut on his hand. He extended his arms, palms up, to invite everyone into the circle.

With arms still extended, Harry said the final words of the ritual, pausing after each phrase to allow the participants that to repeat the phrase, either vocally or silently.

“Blessed is the land.”

“Blessed is the harvest.”

“May magic accept our offerings.”

“May magic bless our Houses.”

“May magic bless our Peoples.”

Harry turned so his palms were down and let his magic flow down toward the land. The participants in the ritual also offered a tiny portion of their magic. The air became thick with the magic that flowed between the magical people.

Harry closed his hands into fists, stopping the flow of magic and signaling the end of the ritual,

“So mote it be,”

“So mote it be.”

Harry woke the next morning in his suite at Potter Manor. The wixen participants had spent the night at the manor. By the time everyone had returned to the manor, it was late and the emotional and magical intensity of the Sabbat had left everyone joyous but exhausted.

Harry barely remembered the walk to the manor. He remembered Fred and George linking arms with him and walking him up to his suite. He didn’t even remember getting in bed so assumed they, or someone, had assisted him into his pajamas.

After a long shower, Harry dressed in dark blue trousers with a light blue shirt. Personal and House Gaunt colors, Harry noted absently. It was going to be a fairly low-key day so there was no waistcoat or robe.

It was a lively breakfast. Narcissa and Draco had returned to the manor the night before. Ted came in for breakfast to make the rest of the staff more comfortable. Harry had made it clear

that all of them were welcome at any meal served at the manor but usually, they were only there for lunch and tea.

It was a happy crowd gathered in one of the mid-sized dining rooms. Harry noted that the decor and tableware represented House Potter. Lots of cream color with dark brown and red accents. Harry enjoyed the fluid decorative aesthetic the manor elves employed.

Before leaving, Sidra Evergreen, Xenophilius and Luna Lovegood came to thank Harry once more for the previous day. After shaking the adult's hands, Harry was surprised at the enthusiastic hug given by Luna.

"You have a generous heart, Harry Potter," Luna said. "I would like to write to you. May I?"

"Of course," Harry answered, "and you are always welcome to visit now that you know the floo address. We didn't get a chance to know each other at Hogwarts but perhaps we can be friends now."

Luna beamed, "I would like that very much."

As much as Harry enjoyed the social atmosphere of mealtimes, he was always relieved when it was over. He happily returned to the Gaunt grimoire in his office. He had read it through and now was writing down notes and questions as he read it a second time.

Shortly after his mid-morning snack arrived, Percy knocked on the office door. Harry picked up his plate of sandwiches and fruit and moved to the seating area, motioning for Percy to join him. A tea service popped onto the table and Percy leaned forward to pour. Percy was gradually becoming more comfortable with Harry's casual yet serious nature. Ted set a similar tone in the office area and Percy was learning that an easy-going manner could go along with a serious approach to the work.

Percy made his report as Harry ate, "I have contacted Magical Menagerie and confirmed the purchase and reminded them it would be at least several days until we take possession of the snakes. Sally has an appointment this afternoon at the London Zoo to talk to specialists about creating a private herpetarium."

Sally Wilson was one of the new researchers that started the previous Friday. She had a degree in economics and her specialty was financial research. Her familiarity and comfort in the muggle world made her the most suitable for this task.

Harry nodded as he grabbed another sandwich. He had spent a lot of magical energy during last night's celebration. While his magic felt fine, his body felt famished. Filius had assured him this morning that it was a normal response to such magical expenditure. Having the capacity and using the capacity were two different things and it would take time for his body to adjust.

Percy continued, "We are still getting applications for Lord Peverell. Do you want to continue the ad?"

"Continue to run the ad for the rest of this week," Harry answered. "Then run it for a week in the Quibbler. After that, alternate between the two and we'll see how the responses run."

Harry thought for a moment, "Talk to Filius. Get his thoughts on approaching the Deputy Headmistress to work it into the career talks that happen in fifth year. Also, make a note that eventually Hogwarts will need to add career counseling as part of third year. There needs to be something before students pick their electives. I know I went into it totally blind. Muggle born and raised are at a particular disadvantage."

Percy made a note and then pulled out a sheet of parchment, "Lady Black has provided this update on the renovations to the various Black properties."

Percy handed the parchment to Harry. It contained a list of properties, the status of renovations and a summary of costs.

"Lady Black has provided more detailed expense information to Sharpnail," Percy added. "Lady Black also asked me to remind you that she will be moving to Hogsmeade in mid-August."

"Please arrange a weekly appointment with Lady Black," Harry responded. "I'd prefer late morning so that she can join us for lunch. Also, remind her she is always welcome for tea."

Percy made a note. He had been quite surprised by the closeness between Harry and the former Lady Malfoy.

"Thank you, Percy," Harry said. "Leave any correspondence I need to sign on my desk and you can pick it up after lunch."

Percy gathered his things, recognizing the dismissal. He placed a folder on Harry's desk and left.

Harry poured himself another cup of tea and took it over to his desk. He opened the folder and started reviewing, signing and sealing the various letters that would be sent out. This part was tedious but it was a huge improvement on having to write out everything himself.

After two very active and social days, Harry enjoyed a routine Wednesday. The solitude of his office and the afternoon of Herbology with Bob was the perfect balance. Tomorrow would be the Gaunt interview. Harry still had no idea what he wanted to communicate but he trusted that magic would guide him. So far, magic had not steered him wrong.

Harry Potter

Chapter Summary

Thursday, August 3

Harry came to a realization as the summer progressed. He liked order. Just as Harry had discovered that he liked order, he liked having plans. A plan was more than a schedule. A plan was more like a schedule that had a purpose. Most of Harry's life had been jumping from one problem to another and trying to keep ahead of them. Even when there was a plan, no one told him about it. Now there was a plan the adults in his life had helped him make. When there was a task, he understood how it fit into the plan.

At least, that's how it was on August 2nd.

The morning of August 3rd started with Sirius calling Dobby to take the Daily Prophet to Harry before breakfast. There, in large headlines, it said BOY-WHO-LIVED MISSING.

Harry had several immediate thoughts.

1. This definitely affected the plan.
2. Kill Sirius for an unpleasant wake-up.
3. Set aside the news and restart the day.

Harry settled in the middle of the bed and sank into his magic. With the disruptive start to his day, Harry focused on his core magic. Whatever the day brought, this was his center. By the time Harry sat down to breakfast, Dobby had shown the newspaper to Winky and Filius. As usual, they followed Harry's lead. Breakfast was relaxed, and no one mentioned that Harry ate slower than normal. Once the day got started at the manor, it would most likely be hectic.

Harry and Filius arrived at the manor to a pacing Sirius. Weeks of mind healing had tempered some of the adolescent impatience that Sirius had never had a chance to outgrow. It said a lot that Sirius had waited at the manor and had limited himself to sending the news with Dobby.

Harry immediately headed off an outburst by embracing his godfather, "Thank you for the warning. I guess this means a busy morning."

While Filius went to send a message to Sharpnail, Harry read the article. The day before, Dementors had descended on Little Whinging. Arabella Figg had been kissed rescuing his cousin, Dudley. When Figg missed an appointment later that day, an auror was asked to check on her. That's when the tragedy was discovered. Further investigation turned up Harry's relationship to Dudley and that Harry had never gone home from Hogwarts.

With a huff of aggravation, Harry sent a note to Borner requesting an immediate meeting.

Reactions appeared to be mixed. The ministry tried to spin his disappearance as further proof of his instability. In response, Borner carefully disseminated doubt about the quality of Harry's home life. What kind of guardian lets their ward do whatever he wants during holidays? How could they not know where he was?

Borner also asked Tonks, along with Greengrass & Associates, to loudly question their contacts in the ministry as to why Wizard Family Services hadn't caught that level of carelessness with any child, much less Harry Potter.

Harry was in his office discussing possible interview options when one of the twins knocked on the door.

“What’s up?” Harry asked.

“I think George and I better go round and see Mum. She’s probably gone spare with the headline and all.”

Harry leaned his head against the back of the loveseat. “No, I’ll go,” he said wearily. “She’ll drive you nuts with questions, and I sort of owe it to Ron and Hermione.”

“Are you sure?” Fred asked. “We don’t mind.”

“I know,” Harry answered, “but it’s best if I pop over. Let me finish up here.”

Kreacher greeted Harry when he flooded into the arrivals room, “Master be here. How can Kreacher serve?”

Harry smiled at the old elf, “Where is everyone?”

Kreacher rolled his eyes, “Kitchen. Always kitchen.”

Harry chuckled. It did seem that Weasley life centered around the kitchen.

Harry had barely stepped foot in the kitchen when a plump, red-headed missile attacked him.

“Oh, Harry,” Mrs. Weasley sobbed as she nearly smothered him. “We were so worried.”

She had barely let go when Hermione took her place, talking non-stop as she hugged, “Where were you? Why weren’t you with your relatives? How long have you been gone? Why didn’t you tell us?”

Harry gently pushed her back, “Guys, you just saw me on Monday.”

“Yeah, mate, but we didn’t know you didn’t go back,” Ron said.

“And where were you before that?” Hermione asked. “The Prophet said you hadn’t been there all summer.”

“Children,” Mrs. Weasley intervened, “let’s sit down and have some tea and give Harry a chance to answer.”

As Mrs. Weasley passed out tea and put a plate of biscuits on the table, she said, “Now, Harry, you really need to tell us where you’ve been.”

Until that moment, Harry had fully intended to tell them where he had been this summer but something about how she said it put Harry on edge.

“You know,” Harry said, “if you wanted to know, you could’ve written and asked.”

“Harry,” Hermione answered with exasperation, “we’ve explained why we couldn’t write.”

“No,” Harry responded, “you’ve explained why you didn’t write. I explained why that was unsatisfactory. You chose to put the false authority of your headmaster over our friendship. Ron chose to be his usual lazy self and follow your lead.”

The protests started immediately. Harry ignored them and drank his tea. When the questions and demands died, Harry said, “I came here as a courtesy to let you know I am okay. I did not come to be interrogated. If you are that interested in what’s been happening this summer, you can read about it in tomorrow’s Prophet.”

“Harry,” Mrs. Weasley said gently, “Is someone taking care of you?”

Harry relaxed and a smile lit up his entire face, “There are lots of people taking care of me and it’s wonderful.”

Harry got back to the manor with a bit of time to stop in his office before lunch. The interview schedule was waiting for him. Harry looked it over. It was a nightmare, but it was the best of a bad situation. Harry had learned enough from Borner to know he had to use the situation to his best advantage.

Instead of the Gaunt interview, Harry would use his regular interview time for a personal interview. Ted was making a list of approved interview questions for Harry to review after lunch. Harry was going to be honest and bare a lot of personal secrets. It would be hell, but he wouldn’t be the only one to suffer from it.

Terrance Threadmore, the reporter who conducted the interviews, would stay at the manor to finalize the interview so it could be approved for Friday morning publication. Threadmore would return Friday afternoon for the Gaunt interview for Sunday publication. While Rita Skeeter was busy writing speculative articles, Threadmore got the real deal.

Harry had his usual Thursday lunch of fruit and juice in the library with Filius and Dobby. As typical, Filius was a quiet presence while Dobby chattered away. Harry didn’t quite relax, but it was the calm he needed.

As the dishes popped away, Filius asked, “How are you holding up?”

"I don't know," answered Harry. "Just taking one thing at a time."

Filius nodded, "Sometimes, there is no other way. Do you need us in the interview?"

"I don't think so," Harry responded, "but I'd like to know you're close."

"Always."

"Since we arranged this lunch several days ago," Bill Weasley said as he joined his father in the ministry cafeteria, "this isn't about tonight's Order meeting."

Arthur chuckled, "No. I think we both know what the order meeting will be about."

"It will certainly be interesting," Bill said.

Father and son ate for a bit, digging into sandwiches and salads. Finally, Arthur asks, "Have you given any more thought to what we learned from the grimoire?"

Bill looked at him, "Have I given any more thought? How could I not?"

"We need to make it right," Arthur said quietly.

"That's the problem," Bill responded. "How do we do that? Even with my savings, it isn't enough to make full restitution."

"I think we should ask Harry," Arthur said. "He might have an idea, and even if he doesn't, someone around him might."

"I trust Harry, but are you sure about the others?"

"It comes down to trusting Harry," Arthur answered.

"I suppose it does," Bill responded.

The family had barely arrived at the Keep when Harry was falling asleep in front of the fire. Neville and Luna had come for tea. With the twins sitting on either side and Draco on the periphery, the six teenagers had kept everything light with lots of laughter.

When Harry began to fade, Filius suggested returning to the Keep.

As Harry stood, Luna stepped over and kissed his cheek, "Do not fear that the time has come." Luna stepped back, then suddenly she reached out and grabbed his hand, "Save him. His light cannot die."

Harry nodded, not having a clue what she meant. The twins escorted Harry to the arrivals room. As he was about to step into the floo, Fred grinned, "We're joining the Order of the Phoenix tonight."

"Jokes on them," George added.

As he slept, Harry dreamt. He was in a room full of people, both familiar and unfamiliar. Overhead, a Phoenix circled, crying mournfully.

Harry woke up with a gasp, "Fawkes."

Severus Snape liked to arrive early to Order meetings whenever possible. He had never planned nor wanted to be a spy. Nevertheless, Severus Snape became an exceptional spy. Most of the drive to exceptionalism was necessity. Poor spies were dead spies. Some of it was because he enjoyed spying. He liked knowledge. He enjoyed watching people. He delighted in discovering secrets. It was a poor second to his love of potions, but if you are going to be forced into a secondary occupation, at least he got to enjoy it most of the time.

He watched from a front corner as people began to arrive. The headmaster had chosen the largest visitors' parlor on Hogwarts' ground floor. There was a scattering of small tables already holding tea and biscuits with chairs around and amongst them. Front and center, naturally, was the overstuffed throne-like monstrosity from which Albus would lead the meeting.

As Snape watched the arrivals, the divide became apparent. Most were clearly concerned for the missing Potter brat. Some clearly weren't. None of the attending Weasleys showed any concern. Bill and the twins were the most relaxed, but even Molly and Arthur showed no worry. Was the answer that simple? Had the Weasleys been hosting the errant child? No, the timing didn't quite work, but they knew something.

The dog, the wolf and the metamorph were also unconcerned. The dog he expected. The wolf naturally followed, but the metamorph puzzled him. Snape wasn't aware that the junior auror even knew Potter.

Dadelus Diggle and Mundungus Fletcher arrived in a gossiping flurry. Obviously, they had been charged with obtaining whatever information was available. Equally apparent was their failure in doing so.

When Albus Dumbledore arrived in a swirl of brightly colored robes, anticipation fell over the room. Sitting down, Albus said gravely, "With Harry Potter missing, our priorities have changed. Dadelus, would you tell us what you have discovered?"

Before Diggle could open his mouth, Severus interrupted, "Perhaps, Headmaster, we should ask if anyone has seen Potter this week."

Recovering his surprise, Dumbledore responded, "Ah yes, Severus. An excellent suggestion. Has anyone here actually seen Harry Potter recently?"

Severus could see looks being exchanged when a voice said, "Yes, I've seen Harry Potter this week."

There were gasps, and heads swiveled as Harry Potter walked in through the open door. At least, it sounded like Harry Potter. The young man winding his way through the tables did not look at all like the boy that had left on the Hogwarts Express. He wore extremely fine robes in shades of blue. The defining glasses no longer sat on his face. His unruly hair was now shoulder length and while still untamed, was well groomed. No longer short and scrawny, he was several inches taller and at least a stone heavier. Most telling was the lack of the infamous lightning bolt scar.

Any doubt was dispelled when twin voices cried out, "Harrikins."

"As you can see, I am not missing," Harry said as he sat between the Weasley twins. "You can continue the rest of your meeting."

"Perhaps you could tell us where you've been, Mr. Potter," Minerva McGonagall said sternly.

Harry nodded, "I could, but that would spoil the surprise."

Still taking the lead, McGonagall asked, "And what surprise would that be?"

"My interview for The Daily Prophet," Harry answered, "where I explain exactly where I've been and, more importantly, why."

"Harry," Dumbledore said with weariness in his voice, "why did you give an interview to the Prophet?"

"It was easier," Harry explained. "I didn't want to answer the same questions over and over."

"I see," Dumbledore said. "Since you won't explain yourself, I must ask you to leave. This meeting is for adults only."

Harry beamed, "Excellent. We can get started then."

"He said adults, Potter," Snape sneered.

"Oh," Harry responded, sounding surprised. He looked at Dumbledore, "Didn't you realize that forcing me to participate in a tournament limited to adults would lead to my emancipation?"

There was a general murmur as people processed this information. Once again, Snape could see who knew and who did not. Interestingly, Molly was the only Weasley that didn't know.

"Perhaps, we can move on and sort Potter later," Snape suggested.

"Another excellent suggestion, Severus," Dumbledore said. "Remus, how did it go with the Irish packs?"

"At this time," Remus answered, "none of the packs are willing to commit to either side of the potential conflict."

"I was afraid that might be the case," Dumbledore replied. "Still, it doesn't hurt to put the offer out there. I think we should approach the packs in France next. How soon can you leave?"

"I'm sorry, Albus," Remus responded. "I won't be able to act as liaison any longer. I've accepted a job offer that will keep me occupied."

It was clear that Dumbledore did not expect that answer, "May I ask what sort of work you have taken on that is more important than our struggle against the dark."

Lupin answered easily, "I've accepted an offer from Lord Black."

"I see," Dumbledore replied, attempting to turn the situation to his favor. "That is unfortunate. Lord Black has refused all overtures from me. I fear his allegiance may be to the dark. Perhaps the job offer is an attempt to undermine our work to secure cooperation with the packs."

"That's enough," Harry said firmly, standing up. "Are you seriously saying Remus has to choose between earning a living and opposing Voldemort? Are you asking that of everyone here?"

Dumbledore could see by the reactions that Harry's questions had struck a nerve, "Very well. We can discuss this later, Remus. Now to the next issue. This week, a gentleman claiming to be Lord Slytherin made a significant purchase at the Magical Menagerie."

This announcement caused a significant reaction. Dumbledore raised a hand, and when the room quieted, he continued, "Even more disturbing is that the description of the young man is remarkably like that of a young Voldemort."

"What did he look like?" one of the twins asked. Snape never could tell them apart.

"According to the shop clerk, The young man was well dressed in bold-colored robes. He was good-looking with dark, medium-length hair."

"Merlin," exclaimed the other twin. "That sounds just like our Harry."

Harry glared at the speaker, "Now you've gone and spoiled it. I wanted to tell them."

There was absolute silence in the room.

Harry stood up, "It's true. I am Lord Slytherin."

"Mr. Potter," McGonagall stood to face the young man, "This is nothing to joke about."

"I'm not joking," Harry said. "Besides, I thought you already knew."

Dumbledore motioned McGonagall to sit down and asked, "Knew what, Harry?"

"That I'm Lord Slytherin," Harry stated.

"If you are the Lord Slytherin," Dumbledore said with a twinkle in his eye that clearly said he didn't believe Harry, "why would you think we would know that?"

It was as if the entire room held its breath, waiting for the answer.

"Second year," Harry exclaimed. "Everyone was saying that I was the Heir of Slytherin. If it weren't true, you would have stopped them."

"What are you talking about, lad?" Moody asked.

"Everyone thought I was the Heir of Slytherin and that I was evil," Harry exclaimed.

Two throats cleared behind him, and Harry glanced back, "Sorry, almost everyone. I was getting hexed in the halls between every class. People would run away from me. Even in my own House," at this he looked directly at McGonagall, "I was shunned. If I wasn't the Heir of Slytherin, then why didn't you stop it?"

The silence was absolute until Albus cleared his throat, "My dear boy, even if that were true, even if you had been the Heir of Slytherin, you can't simply announce yourself as Lord Slytherin."

"I can't?" Harry said in a bewildered voice.

"Of course not, you foolish boy," Snape said.

Harry suddenly smiled, "I can't suddenly make myself Lord Slytherin, but if I am Lord Slytherin, I can certainly tell anyone I want."

Everything had suddenly gone off the rails, but he felt he had to educate the boy, "Harry, what makes you believe you're Lord Slytherin?"

"Because I am," Harry answered. "Lord Slytherin, by Right of Conquest. I can also claim it as an extremely distant relation, but Right of Conquest sounds so much cooler."

"Do you even know what Right of Conquest means?" Snape was back to sneering.

"It means I beat the bugger," Harry answered, ignoring the gasps of shock at his language and looking directly at Snape. "Voldemort was Lord Slytherin. I beat him. I am now Lord Slytherin."

Harry turned back to Dumbledore, "As fun as this all is, it is not the reason I came here tonight."

Harry went to the front of the room and stood beside Dumbledore's chair, facing the room, "I've learned a lot this summer, but one thing that genuinely puzzles me is this division between Light and Dark. I think it would be clearer if, instead, we divided it between Helping and Harming.

"You see, I was thinking about the phoenix. This bird is supposed to represent the Light, the side that is helping. Yet, someone clearly doing harm has a phoenix, and I can't help but

wonder why."

Harry stood straighter and called out, "Fawkes."

As the bird flashed into the room, Dumbledore started to rise. Harry immediately turned to him and said, "Be quiet and don't move, Old Man."

To everyone's shock, Dumbledore was silenced and unable to rise.

The Phoenix circled overhead, cried mournfully, and landed on the closest table where Alastor Moody and Hestia Jones were seated.

Harry walked over and reached out of hand to pet the bird, "Hello, Fawkes. Will you let me feel your magic?"

Fawkes trilled and stepped closer to the young man. Harry closed his eyes and reached down into his magic. Instinctually, he reached for the Emrys magic. He could feel the binds cutting into the phoenix's magical core. He could feel the pain it was causing, and tears ran down his cheeks.

Harry stepped back and addressed specific individuals within the room, "Lord Weasley, Heir Weasley, Heir Black, Heirs Prewett, Heir Prince."

As Harry called the names, the individuals stood up. Severus Snape didn't know what was happening, but when he was called by his House name, he felt the urgings of magic and stood with the others.

"I call upon the representatives of Magical Houses to bear witness to my actions and to stand guard while I answer Magic's call," Harry said and then walked out of the room.

"So mote it be," came the magically induced response

As the phoenix flashed away, those named followed along with most of the room's occupants.

Harry walked out of the castle and continued until he stood about halfway between the front doors and the gates. He held out an arm, and Fawkes gently landed.

Turning to face those that followed, Harry said, "Fawkes' magic has been bound. There is no gentle way to do this, and I need to focus on my task."

Harry looked at Fawkes, "When you feel your magic free, flash up. I will not leave you unprotected."

Harry reached with his magic into the phoenix. One strand at a time, he released the bindings that trapped Fawkes' core. He could feel Fawkes' magic straining against the remaining bonds. Suddenly, Fawkes flashed and reappeared about thirty feet above the group. With barely a thought, Harry threw out his arms, creating a shield as an explosion of light filled the sky, pressing down on everyone.

As quickly as it began, it was over, and a baby bird plummeted from the sky. Harry reached up and surrounded the chick in a ball of bright golden light and slowed his descent. Catching Fawkes, Harry drew the phoenix to his chest and turned to the onlookers, a look of triumph on his face.

Harry walked back into the castle, and everyone followed him into the visitor's parlor. Dumbledore was still silently stuck to his chair while McGonagall, Diggle and someone Harry didn't know frantically and repeatedly cast *finite*.

Harry stood before Dumbledore, "When I first left the school, I just wanted to avoid you until everything was settled. As I learned what you had done to me, I wanted to make sure you could never do that to anyone else. Realizing that you bound the magic of a phoenix to make yourself look better tells me there is no limit to the harm you will do."

Harry stepped back and called, "Winky."

When the elf popped in, Harry handed her the phoenix, "Take him to the Keep and make him comfortable in my room."

Winky took the bird and then popped away.

Harry called forth his wand and turned back to Dumbledore, "Albus Percival Brian Wulfric Dumbledore, you defile magic with your actions. I call upon the judgment of Lady Magic. Should magic rule against you, the harm you have visited upon others will be visited upon yourself. So mote it be.

"So mote it be," echoed throughout the room.

Harry turned to leave when McGonagall's voice stopped him, "Mr. Potter, you can't leave him like this?"

"Why not?"

"It isn't right," the witch protested.

Harry smiled, "it isn't right to leave someone stuck without a voice?"

"It most certainly is not," McGonagall staunchly declared.

"No," Harry responded, "but it is just."

Harry Potter Lives

Yesterday, this paper proclaimed that the boy who lived, Harry Potter, was missing. Several hours later, I was contacted and offered a chance to interview that same missing person. What follows is a very frank and often disturbing interview.

You have been reported as missing. Can we address this first?

Of course. As you can see, I am obviously not missing. While I have not spent any time this summer in the home of the people who raised me, I have been very open in my activities. I could easily introduce you to at least twenty people aware of my situation this summer.

Where have you been this summer?

For the first two weeks after the Hogwarts term ended, I stayed at an inn in Alley Way. Since then, I have lived in a private residence that I own.

What about your guardians?

Former guardians. As a result of my forced entry into the Triwizard tournament, I was able to declare my emancipation with the ministry. As a legal adult, I'm able to live wherever I want.

How did you decide on your course of action?

To fully understand, I need to give you some background.

It starts with the death of my parents. Late that night, or in the wee hours of the following morning, I was left in a basket on the doorstep of my mother's sister, Petunia. In the basket, besides myself, was a note. The note informed Petunia that her sister was dead, killed by a dark lord. The note also told Petunia that she needed to take me in and that by raising me, she would be protected by the followers of this dark lord that were still around. The letter also promised she would not be bothered by other magical people. When Petunia went outside early the next morning to get the milk delivery, she found the basket.

I want to clarify. No one told your aunt that her sister had died.

No, it was done with a note, a note that left her with custody of an infant she didn't want - a note signed by Albus Dumbledore.

How do you know your aunt didn't want you?

Aside from the fact that she regularly told me, there was the fact that Petunia and my mother were estranged. They had not spoken in quite some time. Add in the fact that my parents' wills specifically excluded Petunia and her husband from having custody of me, and you can begin to understand that it was not a happy situation.

If your parents' wills excluded your aunt from custody, why were you left with her?

As to why, I don't know. I can only speculate. What I do know is that the next day, Albus Dumbledore had my parents' wills sealed, claiming it was for my safety.

Is it possible that Albus Dumbledore didn't know your parents had expressly excluded your aunt from the chain of custody?

One of the first things I did this summer was to read a copy of my parents' wills on file with Gringotts. As has been reported earlier this summer, Albus Dumbledore was witness to both wills.

So you were saying that Albus Dumbledore knew that neither of your parents wanted you raised by your aunt and left you there anyway?

That's what happened.

So how is this relevant to your decision to declare your emancipation?

Because that was the beginning. It was the beginning of my life being raised by a family that hated and feared magic and everything magical.

How did that affect the way they raised you?

I was four when Petunia started teaching me how to cook. By age five, I was cooking breakfast every morning for the family. By age six, I was cooking breakfast and dinner. I was cooking it. I rarely ate it. On a good day, I was allowed to eat any scraps left over. If for any reason, Petunia or her husband Vernon were unhappy with me, the standard punishment was not to be allowed to eat at all. I survived by sneaking food out of the trash can when I could.

In addition to cooking, once again, starting at age four, I was taught and then required to maintain the yard. That included planting the spring flowers, weeding the flower beds, and mowing the yard. Keep in mind that without magic, everything has to be done by hand.

I was also taught to clean the house, to dust, to clean the floors, to wash the clothes.

My days started at 6:00 a.m. I didn't have a bedtime. Once I was locked in my cupboard for the night, they didn't care when I fell asleep.

Your cupboard?

Oh, did I not mention that small detail? Petunia and Vernon own a four-bedroom house. No, that's not true. I found out this summer that I own the house. Despite that, until I got my Hogwarts letter, I was not allowed to sleep in any of the bedrooms. I was told that freaks don't deserve a bedroom. Instead, I slept on my cousin's old crib mattress in the cupboard under the stairs, a cupboard that was locked from the outside.

A cupboard?

You can see for yourself.

At this point, Harry Potter handed me an easily recognizable letter addressed to Mr. H. Potter, The Cupboard under the Stairs, 4. Privet Drive, Little Whinging, SURREY.

What else can you tell us about your childhood?

In addition to the overwhelming amount of physical tasks I was given that were not in any way age-appropriate, I was regularly told that I was a burden on the family and had to earn my keep.

Naturally, there were consequences if I could not do the work properly.

What kind of consequences?

When I was four and overcooked the bacon, Petunia hit me in the head with a frying pan. She was rarely physical. Most punishments involved loss of food and being locked in my cupboard. My uncle preferred physical punishments before locking me in the cupboard. I don't even know how old I was when the first bone was broken. The irony is, between the broken bones and the damage to my body from the malnutrition, I would not be alive if I didn't have magic, the very same magic that they were trying to beat out of me. Any imagined infractions were just an excuse.

Aside from the excessive work and the punishments, what else was your childhood like?

The only clothes I had were when my cousin outgrew or wore out his clothing. My cousin is at least four sizes bigger than me, so my clothes were always too big and usually held on with scraps of rope that I found.

Until I went to primary school, I thought my name was Freak. I learned on the first day of school that my name was Harry Potter. It was also during that school year that I learned when my birthday was and how old I was. I was told that my father was worthless and a deadbeat and that my mother was a whore. I was also told that my parents died in a car accident because my father was drunk.

Until Rubeus Hagrid came to hand deliver a letter and take me to do my school shopping in Diagon Alley, I didn't know I was magical. I didn't know anything about the magical world.

Rubeus Hagrid was your introduction to magic?

Yes. At the time, I didn't question it. I didn't know any better. I was so overwhelmed by everything. I was shocked when Hagrid took me to Gringotts and pulled out a key to a vault that was supposed to be mine.

Hagrid had your key?

On that day. It had been held by, of course, Albus Dumbledore.

I can certainly understand why you didn't want to go back to that environment. When you decided not to return after this school year, were you aware of the emancipation?

No, that was a fortunate discovery.

So, in effect, you thought you were running away?

Yes, I did. Fortunately, I had a few people in my corner that helped me.

Can you tell us who these people were?

I can. The first is an elf named Dobby. I befriended Dobby during my second year at Hogwarts. Dobby came to check on me while I was in the infirmary recovering from multiple bouts of the cruciatus curse. He expressed his opinion that Hogwarts was too dangerous, and

I realized that he was right, but at the same time, I realized I couldn't return to where I had been raised.

Why did you feel you could not return?

Every year it was worse. Each summer, there was less food and more violence. I realized that if I returned to where I was raised, I might not survive the summer.

What did you do after you had this realization?

I knew immediately I couldn't do this alone. So I asked Dobby to bond with me. He immediately mentioned another unbonded elf, Winky, and I bonded with both of them. Then I started thinking about the adults in my life and decided to ask for advice from Professor Flitwick. He was my Charms teacher.

Why did you choose Professor Flitwick?

It was the way he taught. He was always very methodical. If you didn't understand something, he would go step by step until you understood. He was always willing to explain things in different ways. If you disagreed with something, he would listen to you. I never saw him dismiss a student's questions or concerns.

Was Professor Flitwick willing to help you?

Yes. It was Filius, Professor Flitwick, that suggested I write Petunia to tell her I wouldn't be returning. Then he contacted Gringotts and arranged for a portkey to take me to the bank when I got to London on the Express. Most importantly, Filius asked if he could join me along with Dobby and Winky. The four of us decided to become a family. That was something I always wanted.

So much has happened since then, and there is no way I could tell you it all today. As you can see, I'm not missing. I'm legally an adult, and I have a family and many other people helping me as I figure everything out.

end interview

I had a lot more questions for Mr. Potter and was promised another interview at a later date.

Immediately at the close of the interview, two house elves popped into the room and immediately embraced Harry Potter. I assumed that these were the house elves that Mr. Potter had spoken about. A moment later, former Charms professor Filius Flitwick entered and joined them, and invited me to tea.

I was about to decline when Flitwick told me, "If you want to get to know the real Harry Potter, this is where you'll see him."

I was led into a large sunny room with several people waiting. As tea progressed, people continued to arrive. There were five schoolmates from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The oldest house elf I have ever seen arrived accompanied by a young goblin dressed in the lavender healer robes of their race. Another goblin arrived, dressed in a

business suit typical of a Gringotts manager. There were another twelve adults eventually present.

Lastly, a gentleman arrived to exclamations from several people. I watched Harry Potter rush over and embrace him. As I watched what was a reunion, Sirius Black approached me. Mr. Black was the only person present who permitted me to identify him by name.

Indicating the gentleman who had just arrived, Mr. Black said, "He's been out of town, but everyone else has been before and has a standing invitation."

Watching this large, diverse group, I realized that Harry Potter was correct. He had never been missing. He is not only alive but healthy and happy.

Aftermath

Chapter Notes

Friday, August 4

Arthur and Molly sat beside each other at the end of the large table that dominated the kitchen. They had finished breakfast and were enjoying a cup of tea while warily eyeing the unopened Daily Prophet. They had come to enjoy this time of day when no one else was awake. Neither had spoken of the events that happened the previous evening. There would be time for that later, but for now, they enjoyed the quiet.

The arrival bell rang, and a moment later, Sam popped in to announce the arrival of Severus Snape. After receiving a nod, the elf popped out and led the potions master into the kitchen.

"Good morning, Severus," Arthur said cheerfully. "What brings you here this morning?"

"I'm looking for Potter," Severus answered. "Albus is still stuck to the damn chair, and even without being able to make a sound, he is managing to be noisy."

Arthur thought for a moment, "Have you had breakfast yet?"

"No," Severus replied, "but I need to find the boy."

"I don't know where Harry is right now, but I know where he'll be in about an hour," Arthur said. "I can take you there, and you can have breakfast while you wait."

Arthur kissed Molly on the cheek, "Be back in five, love."

Arthur led Severus to the arrival room and held out an arm to side apparate him. After the usual discomfort of side along, Severus found himself in another arrival room.

Arthur told the waiting house elf, "Severus Snape is here to see Harry. Could you escort him to the breakfast room?"

Severus thanked Arthur for his help and turned to follow the house elf. Severus was obviously in some sort of manor but saw nothing to identify the owner.

The house elf led Severus into a small dining room where Narcissa Malfoy, of all people, sat at the head of the table.

"Severus," Narcissa exclaimed with a smile. "What brings you here this morning?"

"I'm looking for Harry Potter," Severus replied. "Is this where you live now?"

"Only for a few more days," Narcissa answered. "I'll be moving into my own home next week. Join me, please, and help yourself."

Severus sat down and prepared the tea that had appeared before him while Narcissa called, "Bibi." When the house elf appeared, Narcissa continued, "When Harry arrives, please let him know that Severus Snape is here to see him."

Severus had just started eating when a cup of tea appeared on the table across from him. A half-asleep Draco arrived, still in his pajamas, and sat down, grabbing the waiting cup and taking a deep drink.

Draco had not even noticed Severus when twin voices cried out, Professor Snape."

Draco jerked his head up and stared wide-eyed at his Potions professor. The Weasley twins came into the room and sat in the seats next to Draco. One of the twins reached out and ruffled Draco's unstyled hair. To Severus' surprise, Draco didn't even complain but returned his attention to his morning beverage.

"Here to see Harry?" one of the twins asked.

At Severus' nod, The other twin said, "I bet the headmaster is still stuck. Isn't he?"

"What's this?" Narcissa asked.

Before Severus could answer, Luna Lovegood walked into the room and sat beside him.

"Good morning, Professor," Luna said. "Harry's not happy this morning, so he'll be a little late."

Severus could only stare.

"Luna, dear, are you here to see Harry?" Narcissa had always wanted a daughter and seemed to have adopted Harry's newest friend.

"No, ma'am," Luna answered. "I'm here to visit the Griffins."

"Do they know you're coming?" Narcissa asked, trying not to panic at the thought of the small girl with the very large and very deadly animals.

"They invited me," Luna replied and turned her attention to spreading jam on a piece of toast.

Narcissa nodded, trying to accept that the child seemed to have a special relationship with all the creatures that called Potter Manor home. "Now, what is going on with the headmaster?"

The twins exchanged glances, and one said, "We should wait for the staff. They need to know, and Harry has other things to worry about."

Narcissa nodded, and before anything else could be said, copies of the Daily Prophet arrived, one for each person at the table.

Indicating the paper, Narcissa asked, "Is it about this or something else?"

Another glance was exchanged, "Mostly something else."

Almost as one, everyone picked up the papers and started reading.

When Narcissa rose from the table, she told Severus, "An elf will take you to Lord Black when he's available."

Severus watched in confusion as Narcissa left. Potter was Lord Black?

Harry usually looked forward to his day at Potter Manor. Reading the grimoires and learning about his Houses was always interesting. The afternoon Herbology lessons had turned out to be unexpectedly enjoyable. Seeing everyone that worked or lived at the manor was always a pleasure. Except today.

Harry had decided to speak the truth about his former life. It was a good decision, but he dreaded the aftermath. There was also the matter of the headmaster. Harry knew no one else would be able to release the old coot, but Harry felt no rush to do so, plus he had a really busy day. There was no time for manipulative frauds.

However, sometimes it was on the busiest days that you needed to fly. Harry took to the skies over the Keep and just let go. After returning home the previous night, Harry had given in to his emotions. Holding Fawkes with Winky in his lap, Dobby and Filius on either side, Harry had cried. He cried for Fawkes. He cried for the necessity of exposing a corrupted figurehead. Most of all, he cried for the innocence he lost too early. So this morning Harry flew.

The staff had only been together a short time. Each had their personal reasons, but all had committed to the work. By 8 am most mornings, the staff had settled in and was working on individual projects. Today, the staff arrived thirty minutes early to read the published interview.

Only Ted Tonks knew what Harry's childhood had been like. Amanda and Percy had spent enough time around Harry to have suspicions. The others had no idea. That soon changed.

Terence Trembley knew that children were abused. Regardless of the type of abuse, it existed, and it took a toll. In many old pure-blood families, the abuse was often delivered magically and was something of an open secret. The situation often seemed hopeless, but whether Dark or Light, there was hope. The many stories of Harry Potter's idyllic childhood became that hope. If the boy who lost everything to the Dark Lord could find happiness, so could another child. Terence Trembley had been one of those hopeful children.

When Terence met Harry, it was apparent that his new employer embodied magic. Watching Lord Potter wake every single ritual stone on Lughnasa evoked an awe never before

experienced in the young man. Learning that Harry Potter's childhood had been truly hopeless stoked a fire in Terence. Whatever Harry Potter needed, Terence would provide it.

Emily Stevens had entered the wizarding world eagerly. Like other muggleborn girls both before and after, she was hailed as the brightest witch of her generation. She believed she would have a life in the magical world where she could use her talents meaningfully. Then she graduated from Hogwarts, and her dreams crashed into reality.

Emily was not looking to change the world. She didn't want to revolutionize anything. She just wanted to work to the best of her ability. Watching less capable pure-bloods receive undeserved promotions led Emily to conclude that even working as a shop clerk in the muggle world would be less frustrating.

Answering the ad in the Daily Prophet for a correspondence secretary had been Emily's final effort. She had applied to many jobs in and out of the ministry to no avail. No matter how pretty the words of refusal, it came down to one simple fact, her blood was not pure enough. She was surprised when she was offered the job. The generous employment contract gave her the first spark of hope that she might still have a future in the wizarding world. The first time Lord Potter had asked her advice on phrasing a reply, Emily knew this job would be different. Learning about the pain of Harry's childhood solidified her loyalty.

Sally Wilson never entirely left the muggle world. In between fifth-year OWLs and seventh-year NEWTs, she took her A-levels. Her first general economics class in college determined her choice of degree. She loved the intricacies of financial systems. Nothing engaged her more than following money trails to solve a puzzle.

While Harry was being interviewed, Sally interviewed the herpetologist at the London zoo. It had been interesting, but fundamental understanding came when Sally was able to look through a folder of purchase orders. Financial information told her the real priorities for the feeding and housing of snakes.

Reading the Daily Prophet, Sally realized something crucial. The safeguards in both the muggle and wizarding worlds to protect children had failed Harry Potter. Odds were, there had been exchanges of money or favors, probably both. Harry Potter generously paid her to do something she would have done anyway, research. She would research the hell out of every teacher, school nurse, counselor, or principal that failed to see what happened to Harry Potter. She would find the information, and then she would give it to Ted so he could lawyer the guilty parties into submission.

Amanda Kingsford had led a fortunate life. A half-blood, she had thrived in Hufflepuff. She had stumbled into her job at Greengrass & Associates and found that being a general assistant suited her perfectly. She had definable tasks and a lot of freedom to accomplish them. Within an hour of meeting Harry Potter, she had fallen in love, in a strictly sisterly way. From then on, Amanda ensured she was always available on days that Ted Tonks was meeting with Harry Potter. When she learned that Ted be working directly for Harry, Amanda immediately requested a job. She knew Harry would have other employees, but Ted would still need an assistant, and, in all probability, she would be very useful to any other staff as well.

Had she seen nothing else, Amanda would have known of the neglect Harry experienced from his wardrobe. No child deserves less than to be loved and cherished. Amanda couldn't change Harry Potter's past, but she could make sure he had a better future.

When the twins, followed by Narcissa and Filius, arrived at the staff offices, the bristle of magic was thick in the air.

"What's going on?" asked Percy.

One of the twins stepped forward, "There was an Order of the Phoenix meeting last night. It's an organization Dumbledore started when they were fighting Tom Riddle the first time."

"Who's Tom Riddle?" Amanda asked.

"Voldemort," Ted answered. "His birth name is Tom Riddle, and Harry prefers that we call him that rather than euphemisms. Did something happen at this meeting?"

"A lot happened at this meeting, and it will be easier if we only have to tell it once or preferably show you. Does Harry own a pensieve?"

"Several, I believe," answered Ted. "Dobby."

"What can Dobby do for Mr. Sollicy?" the elf asked.

Ted handed Dobby a list and pointed to an item, "I need you to go retrieve this from the vault."

Dobby popped away, and then Ted said, "Let's go into the sitting room."

Once seated, Ted turned to Narcissa, "Can you tell everyone what a pensieve is and the three different types?"

"Certainly," Narcissa answered. A pensieve is an especially enchanted device that lets you view memories. There are three types. A personal pensieve is designed for use by a single person. Family pensieves are for small groups. Most of the ancient families have one, and they were developed to use in educating the children. The personal and the family pensieves let you step inside the memory as if you were there.

"The third type of pensieve is a judicial pensieve. These are extremely rare. A judicial pensieve projects the memories so larger groups can view them. This is what's used in trials in front of the Wizengamot.

Dobby popped in with a large stone bowl and sat on one of the small tables.

"This is the Black family pensieve. Instead of sticking your face in it like you would with a personal pensieve. You only need to stick a finger." Ted turned to the twins, "Which of you will provide the memory?"

One of the twins stepped forward and held a wand to his head. He closed his eyes and breathed deeply and then pulled down a long silvery strand. The other twin caught it in a vial and handed it to Ted.

Ted poured the memory into the bowl and motioned to everyone forward, "On my signal, stick one finger into the bowl. We will be there until the memory ends."

The memory started when the twins entered the room and made their way to a table and sat down. It continued until Harry left with the twins following behind and watching him apparate away.

There was silence when the memory was finished, and they were again seated around the room. Narcissa broke the silence, "When did Harry learn to apparate?"

Filius chuckled, "When does Harry learn to do anything? The last few weeks, it seems like all Harry has to do is think about it, and it happens."

"So," Percy said, "to sum up, Harry stuck and silenced Professor Dumbledore. Harry unbound a phoenix's magic, and then he called upon the judgment of Lady Magic."

"Severus Snape is waiting to meet with Harry," Narcissa said. "The headmaster is still stuck."

There was only a beat of silence before the snicker started, and soon most of the room was laughing. Between the interview with Lord Black and Harry's interview, there was a little sympathy for Albus Dumbledore.

"This is what we're going to do," Ted announced. "Fred and George, I'd like for you to contact as many of your classmates as you can and find out the general reactions to what's been happening the last few weeks with Sirius Black and now Harry."

"Filius and Narcissa, interview days are rough for Harry, and this week he has two. Just be there for him."

"Terence, the Wizengamot meets next week. Is there enough support to call for Dumbledore's removal as Chief Warlock? Find out what you can. Plan to spend tomorrow and Monday mornings in a crash course on the Wizengamot for Harry and any of his proxies that need it."

"Amanda, coordinate with the investigators already working on the Dursley case. Share the information with Sally. Continue to liaise with Borner."

"Sally, the Dursleys are the people that raised Harry. There is an ongoing investigation into their financial affairs. Go over the information we have and see if there's any more you can do. I know you're still working on the herpetarium, and that's the priority for the moment."

"Emily, you'll have a full day with the letters."

"Percy, start working on the plan to get Dumbledore ousted from the ICW."

"What about Hogwarts?" Narcissa asked.

"If Dumbledore is still headmaster in a few weeks," Ted replied, "I think Lords Gryffindor and Slytherin can handle that."

While the staff returned to their offices, Narcissa called Winky, "How's Harry?"

"Harry be fine," Winky answered. "Harry read house book."

"Ah, the grimoire," Narcissa interpreted. "Where is Professor Snape?"

"Mean professy be in library," Winky answered and then popped away.

"I'll keep an eye on Severus," Filius said. The library was his usual morning haunt.

Severus Snape looked inside the room he had been directed to. Several people were standing before a desk, including one with Weasley red hair. A closer look told Severus that it was Percy Weasley. Standing on either side of him were two young women. He couldn't see Potter, but he heard his voice.

"Borner is right," Potter said. "It is a better choice for this week considering what's happened. It just bugs me not to have the preparation time."

One of the women spoke, "We'll take delivery of the snakes tomorrow afternoon."

"Everything will be ready?" Potter asked.

"The elves have cleared an area by your personal greenhouse," Percy said. "Bob has already selected the plants and they'll be transferred into the space after tea. He said you are to join him so you don't miss today's lesson."

Potter laughed, "Of course he did. Anything else?"

The other woman spoke, "Gorin will be here after lunch to check on both you and the phoenix."

"That's probably good," Potter responded. "After I meet with Professor Snape, I need to be undisturbed until lunch."

"Of course," Percy responded. "I've already instructed BiBi that you will have your usual pre-interview lunch."

"Thank you all," Potter said. "I know this has been a hectic week and I appreciate everything you've done to make it easier."

With the clear dismissal, Percy and the two women left the office, passing Snape on their way out.

"Come in, Professor Snape," Harry said.

As Severus entered the room, Harry emerged from behind the desk and moved toward a small sitting area. Harry sat down on the loveseat and motioned toward the armchairs.

"What can I help you with, Professor?"

"Headmaster Dumbledore is still stuck to the chair and unable to speak," Snape responded.

Harry nodded, "If you had to choose between serving Albus Dumbledore or Voldemort, who would you choose?" Harry asked conversationally.

Snape stood up with a scowl and moved toward the door. He was not going to play games with the boy.

"Sit down, Professor Snape," Harry said, hardness in his voice. "We are not finished here."

Snape turned from where he stood, "What are you playing at, Potter?"

"Nothing," Harry answered with easy assurance, "but I do need you to sit down and answer my questions. It's important."

After a moment, Snape returned to the chair and sat down, and Harry continued. "If you had to choose between serving Albus Dumbledore or Voldemort, who would you choose?" Harry asked again.

This time Snape answered, "Albus Dumbledore."

"If you had to choose between serving the light and serving the dark, which would you choose?"

Snape delivered one of his trademark sneers, "The light."

Harry leaned forward and rested his forearms on his thighs, and looked directly at Snape, "And if you were asked to serve magic itself?"

Harry watched as Snape stiffened and then collapsed almost bonelessly into the armchair. For Severus Snape, life had seemed like a series of choices: His kind magical mother or his abusive muggle father, Lily or Petunia, Slytherin or Gryffindor, Dumbledore or Voldemort.

With one question, Harry Potter had broken open the dualism of his life. He looked up and asked, "Is it really that simple?"

"It really is," Harry answered.

Snape had a look of wonder on his face, "Magic is everything."

"Yes," Harry exclaimed with a fist pump. Harry stood and walked over to Snape. Harry knelt in front of the teacher and reached forward and took Snape's hand. When Harry reached to push Snape's sleeve up, Snape tried to jerk his hand back, but Harry held firmly.

Gently pushing up the sleeve, Harry asked, "Is this what you want?"

Snape looked down at the Dark Mark marring his skin and pushed back the reaction that sprang to his lips. Instead, he answered, "No."

Harry stood up and went to his seat. A cup of tea and a plate of fruit had appeared. "Tom Riddle, Lord Voldemort, Dark Lord, You Know Who, He Who Must Not Be Named. It doesn't matter what you call him, the driving force of his life is fear."

Harry picked up a piece of fruit and took a bite, watching Snape think about that statement. Harry continued, "When you know the circumstances of Tom Riddle's childhood, you can understand the fear. It is when you use your fear to justify the abuse of others that it becomes unacceptable."

Snape blanched. He understood that Potter was not only referring to the Dark Lord, "How do you know of the Dark Lord's childhood?"

"The goblins are interested in his continued existence," Harry answered. "They have compiled a lot of information."

"Anyone," Potter continued, "in a position of power that uses that power to cause harm is unacceptable. There is no justification for it. Do you understand?"

Snape nodded, his mouth suddenly dry, "Who are you?" he croaked.

"I am Harry James Potter. Lord of House Potter, House Black, House Peverell, House Stinchcombe, House Gaunt, House Gryffindor, House Slytherin and House Emrys."

Severus felt the blood drain from his face. Whatever had happened to Potter this summer, it was no schoolboy lark.

Harry was silent for a moment, and Severus didn't say a word. Finally, Harry looked at him, "After the fourth task, after returning with Cedric's body, after discovering that Moody wasn't Moody, do you know what Albus Dumbledore did? He took me to his office so I could tell him what happened."

Harry shook his head in recollection, "There was no urgency. Nothing was time sensitive at that point. Wait, there was something time-sensitive. I was still bleeding, and I was shaking from both the shock and the torture."

"For a long time, I saw the headmaster as a grandfather figure. In all of our conversations, he appeared gentle and kind. There were times every year when his behavior contradicted that appearance, but it wasn't until that night that I realized something: Dumbledore isn't my grandfather, and he certainly doesn't love me like I would want one to."

"Do you know the only teacher that showed me real kindness that night? It was you, Professor Snape. I had always believed that you hated me despite the number of times you saved my life. It may have been at Dumbledore's instructions that you escorted me to the infirmary, but you went far beyond that. You cared for me. You not only stayed with me all through the night giving me the necessary potions, but you offered comfort."

"What do you want from me?" Snape asked.

"Only what you want to give," Potter answered. "I'd like it if you let me remove the mark of slavery, a mark that keeps you enslaved to two men."

Severus could only nod.

Harry finished a cup of tea and then stood up and once more went to kneel beside Snape. Pushing Snape's sleeve up to expose the mark, Harry said, "I know I can remove the mark. It will most likely cause you pain."

"Do it," Snape said. "Please."

Harry held Snape's arm in one hand, and the other he placed over the mark. Harry closed his eyes and sank into his magic. He called up the magic of House Slytherin. He called forth the parselmagic of House Gaunt. He sent his magic along the paths of darkness and began to hiss.

Later, neither Severus nor Harry could tell you how long they remained in that position. In truth, it was both an eternity and barely a moment. The taint of possessive magic was entwined with Snape's core. Following thread by individual thread, Harry focused the silvery brightness of Slytherin magic on the perversion that was the Dark Mark, burning every last tendril away. When Harry removed his hand from where the Dark Mark had been, only unblemished skin remained.

Harry looked up at Snape and immediately called for Winky and requested a pain potion.

"Drink," Harry said. "Winky is an excellent brewer."

Trusting that Potter wouldn't remove the Dark Mark only to poison him, Severus drank the potion, immediately feeling better.

"You are welcome to take refuge here in Potter Manor," Harry said. "The library is a Ravenclaw's dream, or so Filius tells me. My favorite room is the orangery, but you might prefer the potions lab."

"Is this where you've been living?" Snape asked.

Harry laughed, "I'd be happy to answer your questions, except I have a lot to get done today. Filius is most likely in the library and can tell you what we've been up to."

Filius found Severus Snape sitting in his favorite nook, "Severus," Filius called, "May I join you?"

Snape nodded and, as the former Charms professor sat down, asked, "What happened to Harry Potter?"

"You're going to have to be more specific," Filius answered.

"The young man I just met with is not the boy that left Hogwarts five weeks ago," Snape said.

"No, he isn't," Filius responded. "Quite a lot has happened, but the most succinct answer is that magic called, and Harry Potter said 'yes'."

Snape rolled up his sleeve and laid his arm on the table, "It was one of my biggest regrets. It couldn't be hidden or camouflaged. In minutes, Potter removed it as if it were nothing."

Filius beamed, "I'm not surprised he could do it."

"Do you know what happened last night?" Severus asked.

"I just viewed a memory of the meeting," Filius answered. "I understand the headmaster is still stuck."

"You don't appear bothered by that," Snape noted.

"After what that man put Harry through," Filius paused and considered. "You read today's interview?"

When Snape gave a nod of assent, Filius continued, "Before we even left Hogwarts, Harry told me about his childhood in even greater detail than what the Prophet reported. I've been with Harry during every medical appointment he's had since then. I thought knowing what had happened prepared me.

"For over a decade, Albus Dumbledore lied. He told us that Harry Potter was a loved and pampered child. When we noticed something wasn't quite right with the boy, Dumbledore always had an explanation. We were fools to believe him. All of us, every Head of House trained to notice distress in our students, share some culpability for dismissing what was in front of our eyes. I'm still coming to terms with my part in that. Nevertheless, Albus Dumbledore was responsible for putting an innocent child into a situation where he would grow up unloved, uncared for, and abused."

"Is that why you're with Potter now?"

Filius smiled, "No, it was the elves."

"Elves?"

"When Harry reached out to me," Filius explained, "he had already bonded with Dobby and Winky. This neglected and abused child who had just endured torture by an evil megalomaniac bonded with elves. It was a mutual bond, the kind that hadn't existed for centuries. No one told him to do that. The elves didn't expect it. It was a natural response. When the elves offered themselves to Harry, he offered himself back. Then, he insisted they be present when he spoke with me, and Harry claimed them as family. I realized, after being without family for decades, that I wanted that for myself, so I asked if Harry would include me in his family."

Snape was silent. Whatever he had expected, it certainly wasn't this. Everything he thought he knew about Harry Potter had been upended in less than a day.

"I asked Potter if he had been living here all along, and he suggested I ask you," Snape said. "Apparently, he's very busy today."

Filius laughed, "Harry keeps a full schedule. Most of the time, he thrives. This week has been exceptionally busy. Monday was his birthday. He had three different parties so everyone who wanted to spend it with him would have a chance, plus his regular Monday appointments. Tuesday was Lughnasa. He hosted a market day and then led the Sabbat.

"Wednesday was a regular day for him. He worked in the morning and had tutoring in the afternoon. Thursday, he woke up and discovered he was missing."

It was a lot of information, and Snape had more than a bit of trouble putting it all together in his head. He focused on one thing that didn't make sense, "You said he worked Wednesday morning. What sort of work?"

"Harry is emancipated and has adult responsibilities," Filius answered. "He takes those responsibilities seriously. He's learning the financial management of his assets, and he's learning what it means to Head a House."

"Is that what the tutoring is for?"

"The tutoring is for his OWLs," Filius explained.

Snape didn't ask any more questions or make any more comments as he processed the new information. After a minute, Filius summoned a book and began to read.

Snape lost track of time as he considered everything Filius told him. He was surprised out of his reverie when two house elves popped in.

The female, dressed in a bright yellow ruffled pinafore dress, spoke to Filius, "Lunch be in greenhouse."

The male, dressed in a uniform with the Potter crest, directed his comment to Snape, "Lady Black host lunch. Please join."

Snape got up and followed the elf noting that Filius was headed in a different direction. He entered a different, larger dining room where, once again, Narcissa sat at the head of the table.

"Does Potter not eat in his own home?" Snape asked as he was directed to sit beside Narcissa and across from Ted Tonks.

Ted answered, "Harry doesn't live here, but he usually eats lunch with us, just not today."

Snape looked up as a group of young people walked in. He recognized the three Weasleys and Draco, but there were three young ladies and a gentleman beside that looked familiar.

A few minutes later, Luna Lovegood came in and sat down next to Snape, "Hello, Professor."

"Miss Lovegood," Snape answered. "Did you enjoy your time with the griffins?"

"Very much, plus I got to visit Buckbeak for a little while."

Two seats down and across the table, Draco choked on his drink, "Buckbeak is here?"

"Where else would he be? Harry always takes care of his friends," Luna answered as she dished herself up some salad.

Sirius arrived at that moment and sat across from Luna, "Buckbeak loves it here. Plenty of room to roam. He gets along with both the abraxans and the griffins. Good afternoon, Snape. How's the headmaster?"

"Black," Snape acknowledged. "As of this morning, the headmaster is still seated in the visitor's parlor."

"Serves the bastard right," Sirius responded. There were agreeing nods up and down the table.

Snape noticed Lupin coming in and sitting down beside Percy Weasley. "I'm curious about what everyone does around here."

"Most of us work here," Ted answered. Ted had been several years ahead of Snape at Hogwarts and mostly knew him through Andromeda's recollections and Nymphadora's experience in his classes.

The answer didn't give Snape any significant understanding. It was Sirius that relented. He jabbed his fork toward various people, "These guys work for Harry, or rather Lord Potter, Black, etc. I come everyday to spend time with Harry and family."

"We're staying here until term starts," one of the twins said. "Had a bit of a disagreement with Mum."

The other twin nodded in agreement, "Plus, Harry is here."

"I'm taking over for a Potter employee that wants to retire," Lupin said. "He's been working in a muggle office, but since Harry is beginning to expand, it will be better for me to work here with everyone else."

"What about you?" Black asked. "I know what brought you here, but why are you still here?"

The question was asked gently and surprised Severus. Finally, he answered, "I came at Minerva's request but now find myself unsure how to proceed."

There were chuckles around the table. "Harry seems to have that effect on people," Narcissa noted.

"Stop by my office after lunch," Ted said. "Perhaps I can help with that."

Snape stopped in the doorway of Ted's office. It was laid out similarly to Harry's office. Ted motioned him to a chair on the other side of the desk and handed him a folder.

"That's the standard employment contract," Ted explained. "Specifics are added depending on the job, but that is the basic package for everyone Lord Potter employs. The salary listed is the minimum for a clerical position."

"Am I being offered a job?" Snape asked as he took the folder.

"It's a possibility," Ted answered, "but it is more for you to understand how Lord Potter approaches his responsibilities."

"I notice that sometimes you refer to him as Harry and sometimes as Lord Potter," Snape observed.

"He is both. This distinction becomes apparent when you spend time with him," Tonks explained. "Read, and then we'll talk."

Snape read the contract. He was surprised to see that the lowest salary offered was more than what he received as a professor. It wasn't entirely a fair comparison as Severus lived at the castle, but then he noticed that all employees were offered discount accommodations at any Potter rental property.

"It's extremely generous," Snape noted.

Ted nodded, "Before this summer, Harry lived a life of privation. He was never told of his wealth. He mistakenly believed that his school trust vault was all he had from his parents. He didn't even realize it was replenished annually."

"So the clothes weren't a muggle fashion trend," Snape said.

"Is that what Dumbledore said?"

"Yes, and that Potter was a picky eater," Snape answered.

"To explain the thinness," Ted extrapolated. "Fortunately, that is in the past. We are here to talk about the future."

"Several weeks ago, Harry indicated that he wanted you to hold the proxy for Lord Slytherin in both the Wizengamot and the Hogwarts Board of Governors. He also mentioned a project that he wanted your involvement in. This week's events have moved the timeline forward a bit."

"How did Potter know about the mark?" Snape asked.

Ted understood the seemingly unrelated question. "It is possible that someone mentioned your role in the last war, and he figured it out. More likely, he felt it today when you met with him. He has become very sensitive to magic."

“What is this project?”

“I need to give you a little background,” Ted said. “When I met Harry at Gringotts, he had no idea the amount of information that had been withheld from him. Filius had told him there was a Potter account manager, and that manager, Sharpnail, called me in for a consultation.

“Harry had no idea he was emancipated. He had never known his parents had a will. When Sharpnail recommended an inheritance test, none of us, but most of all Harry had any idea what would be uncovered.”

“Eight Houses,” Snape said, remembering Harry’s claims.

“Yes, eight houses, all ancient, some noble,” Ted confirmed. “His father never held any of them. His grandfather, only three of the five he was eligible to hold.”

“Five?” Snape noted the discrepancy.

“Slytherin and Gaunt are by right of conquest though there is some claim to the Slytherin line via the Peverells,” Ted explained. “House Emrys is from his mother.”

“Lily?” Snape was stunned. “Did she even know?”

“There is no indication if she did,” Ted responded. “Lily had made some very lucrative muggle investments that she left to Harry, but there was no mention of anything magical in origin.”

“He claimed them all,” Snape said.

“He did,” Ted confirmed. “I watched as he made the decision. It wasn’t done lightly, but it also wasn’t done reluctantly. It was deliberate. Then I watched him take each House oath. Harry can share what he wants about that experience, but I can tell you that he takes those oaths seriously.”

“What does this have to do with me?” Snape asked, not making the connection.

“The proxies are because Harry believes you embody Slytherin values. The special project concerns the Potter oath,” Ted answered. “Although the Potters have a very public history regarding potions, House Potter has a commitment of service to magical creatures.”

Snape thought about what Filius had told him about the elves. Then he considered what else he knew about Potter, “Werewolves.”

“Yes,” Ted confirmed. “His first goal is to undo the harmful creature legislation that has passed in recent years, but he has a larger goal of offering care and sanctuary to any magical that needs it.”

“He could hire anyone to brew wolfsbane,” Snape noted.

“Yes, he could,” Ted agreed, “but he wants more. In regards to the wolfsbane, he would like to refine the potion to be both gentler and more cost-effective. He also believes that potions

are part of a possible cure. He knows from some of his mother's notes that you are also adept at spell creation. He would like you to lead that project and whatever other magical disorders you want to address."

Snape was stunned. He had once dreamt of using his ability in both potions and spell crafting to develop new ways of treating curses and illnesses. That dream had died with an impulsive decision made in anger and self-loathing.

"There is no rush," Ted noted. "You are welcome to stay at the manor. A guest room has been set aside for you. If you would like, the Hogwarts elves can pack up your rooms and transfer your belongings here or elsewhere."

Snape looked at him in puzzlement, and Ted laughed, "Lords Gryffindor and Slytherin. Harry has bonded with the Hogwarts elves.

"All of them?"

"And more," Ted's amusement was evident. "Last I heard, Harry had bonded with several hundred elves. They adore him."

Ted watched as Snape processed that last piece of information, "Whatever you thought you knew about Harry Potter needs to be set aside. Whatever Harry Potter was or he was perceived to be, it is not what he is becoming."

Lord Potter

Chapter Summary

August 5-6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Harry woke with a smile. It had been a brutal week but today was Sunday and all was right with the world, at least for one day. Despite the emotional exhaustion, Harry felt good physically. It still amazed him that he could feel this good. Regular meals and snacks, a full night's sleep every night and being surrounded by family and friends were definitely something everyone should have. Add in the unbinding of his magic and the removal of the vile soul shard and Harry lived in a different body than he had a few months ago.

He looked over and saw that Winky had set out jeans and a long-sleeved t-shirt for him. He had suggested, once, that he could dress himself on his days off. He had never suggested it again. He also learned not to offer to help in her personal garden.

Despite unexpected events, Harry was very happy with what had been accomplished during the week. He was also more than a little nervous. As the week progressed, Harry had felt the growing push of magic that had culminated Saturday after tea. Throughout the week, the number of people showing up had steadily grown until Saturday when the orangery was nearly overflowing.

After the interview as Lord Potter on Thursday, Harry popped over to Hogwarts to release Dumbledore. He had done so in silence and without answering the barrage of questions leveled at him by Minerva McGonagall. Harry had released the headmaster and then had turned on the spot to apparate away. It wasn't until later that day that Harry realized he had never learned to apparate. It also occurred to him that Hermione had once told him that apparation didn't work within the Hogwarts wards. It was one more thing to put in his ever-expanding notebook.

As usual post-interview, Harry had consumed an enormous amount of food at tea and then, before he could join Bob in the new herpetarium, Ted had approached requesting a meeting with Arthur and Bill Weasley. With a message to Bob, Harry had gone to his office to find both Weasleys looking embarrassed.

Naturally, it came down to money. Unfortunately, it wasn't a problem where Harry could simply authorize funds. Harry was very new to working as an equal with other adults. He wanted to simply give the Weasleys the money they needed to make things right with the Malfoys. He knew the easy solution would be the absolute worst thing he could offer so

Harry did what he had learned to do in situations where he felt totally out of his depth: he called for backup.

After the arrival of Narcissa and Ted, Arthur reluctantly told what he had learned from the Weasley grimoire. As Harry anticipated, Narcissa knew a way forward that let Harry handle the financial side of things while preserving the famous Weasley pride. Ted, Arthur and Bill spent the evening negotiating a contract that satisfied all parties. At least, Harry assumed it would. This was one area where he had absolute trust in his solicitor. Ted knew what Harry found important and whatever was agreed on would reflect that knowledge.

Saturday morning found Arthur, Bill, George and Fred Weasley in a sitting room with Sirius and Narcissa Black, Severus Snape, Ted Tonks and Filius Flitwick. They were there with Harry to learn as much as possible about the workings of the Wizengamott. Percy Weasley, who had often acted as Scribe at both trials and the monthly meetings, worked alongside Terrance Trembley. They started the morning with a basic overview of the procedures that were followed at each meeting. It had not been a fun morning for anyone but it was necessary.

When they finally broke for lunch, Harry held back for a brief word with Ted. Ted had worked for several more hours Thursday evening after his meeting with the Weasleys. He prepared the paperwork that he filed Friday morning at the ministry. There were proxies to rescind and new proxies to declare and Friday had been the last day any of it could be done. With that done, all the legal requirements had been met.

Harry was the last to arrive for Saturday lunch. It had been a long morning and he was hungry. He spotted Ron and Hermione seated on either side of his usual place. Fred was beside Ron with George beside Hermione. Harry recognized that the twins were giving him a buffer to have a bit of privacy with his friends.

"Hey guys," Harry greeted as he took a seat and a plate of salad popped in front of him.

"This place is beautiful," Hermione gushed.

Ron mumbled something and Harry looked at him, "What was that?"

"It's not fair," Ron said in a low voice.

"What's not?" Harry asked, unsure what Ron was complaining about this time.

"You get all this," Ron bit out. "It's not fair."

Before Harry could answer or Hermione could scold, one of the twins spoke up, "Little Ronnie is absolutely right, Harrikins. You should swap with him."

Harry looked up in confusion and saw it was Fred who had spoken. A wink from Fred gave Harry a hint.

"Not a bad idea," Harry mused and looked at Ron. "You want to swap lives for a week?"

Ron was flummoxed. He looked around the room. This was the kind of life he always dreamed of with nice things and elves waiting on him. "Yeah, mate. That'd be great."

With a wink of his own, George stood up and said, "Let me get Percy. You'll need his help to figure out the best way to do this."

In a matter of seconds, Percy was approaching. Harry summoned a chair adjacent to the table between him and Ron.

As Percy took a seat, Fred spoke up, "Ron and Harry are going to switch places for a week. Ron's going to come here and do everything Harry does and Harry will live in London and do everything Ron does."

"I see," said Percy looking at Harry for affirmation. At Harry's nod, Percy continued, "May I suggest that you postpone the swap for a week. Next week is the Wizengamot meeting and I don't think there's enough time to get Ron fully up to speed on everything you have planned."

Harry nodded, "That's a good point. Does that sound okay to you Ron?"

"Uhh, yeah, I guess," Ron answered, not entirely understanding what was going on.

"Okay then," said Harry. He summoned parchment and a quill and handed them to Ron, "You'll want to take notes. Percy can fill in if I miss something."

"So, first question," Harry said. "Will you be living here during that week or will you stay in London and just floo here every day?"

"Of course, I'll live here," Ron said, surprised it wasn't obvious.

"It will probably be easier if you come Sunday night. You want to be down to breakfast by about 7:30 so you have time to eat before getting into the office at 8:00."

"Office?" Ron genuinely didn't understand.

"Yes," Harry answered. Harry then gave Ron an outline of his week. The confusion never left Ron's face and when he did ask a question, the answer didn't seem to help.

Harry could see that it was taking everything Hermione had not to blurt out a thousand questions but George would periodically whisper in her ear and grab hold of her arm and that seemed to be what she needed to remain quiet.

Finally, Harry stopped talking and Ron asked, "I really need to do all that stuff?"

"Yes," Harry answered. "If we are swapping lives, you need to take over my responsibilities."

"Okay, no," Ron said firmly.

"No?"

"I don't get it," Ron said. "Why are you doing all this?"

"Doing all what?"

"The meetings and the studying and the tutor and the dueling lessons," Ron answered. "I don't understand why you're doing all these things."

"It's part of being Lord Potter," Harry answered.

"But I'm not Lord Potter," Ron explained as if Harry were daft.

"If you want all the stuff that goes with being Lord Potter, the house, the elves that fix you great meals, the clothes, the quidditch pitch, then you have to meet the responsibilities that come with it. You don't get the benefits of being Lord Potter without doing the work of Lord Potter."

"But I don't want to be Lord Potter," Ron said.

"So you just want all the stuff?"

"Of course, I want it," Ron answered.

"So how did you earn it? What did you do to get the stuff?"

"You didn't earn it," Ron said defensively.

"No," Harry responded with a sigh, "I didn't, but my ancestors did. They earned it. They worked hard for it and now it's my responsibility to continue that hard work. Every day, I have to be Lord Potter. I have to continue the work that they started. This isn't just a freebie, Ron. Life doesn't work like that. You don't just have stuff because you want them. You have to do the work."

"I don't get it," said Ron again. "You got all this stuff for being a Potter. You don't have to keep working."

"No, you're right," Harry paused as he considered how to explain. "I don't have to keep doing it. It's just . . . it would be irresponsible of me not to continue making the best use of everything I have," Harry responded. "Now, I'm afraid I need to go and spend some time in my greenhouse. There have been a lot of interruptions this week and I need to get in the studying when I can so I will see you guys in a few hours."

With that, Harry got up and left. Harry would later learn that it was Ginny, listening from the other side of George, that dragged Ron into a small salon and gave Ron a much-needed reality check. Accompanied by Hermione and the twins, Ginny had laid out how hard Bill, Charlie and Percy had worked to get the jobs they had. The twins told Ron how much extra work they did learning Potions, Charms and Arithmancy to create their joke products. The twins also convinced Ginny to confess to years of getting up every morning at 4 am to practice quidditch moves in the chill pre-dawn air. Ginny wanted to play professionally and knew it would take more than a few years of Hogwarts quidditch to achieve her goal.

Harry entered his greenhouse to find Severus Snape talking with Bob. Harry went to his workstation and replaced his robe with the large apron he wore during Herbology.

"Good afternoon, Professor," Harry said.

"It is no longer Professor, Lord Potter," Snape responded. "I sent my resignation to Minerva this morning."

Harry grinned, "That is excellent news, for both you and the students."

To Harry's surprise, Snape only nodded in acknowledgment of the statement, "I have a concern, Lord Potter."

Snape started pacing and Harry waited. This was something important to the man.

"I certainly don't know everything that has happened to you in recent weeks but it is obvious that you wield considerable magical power," Snape said as he came to stop in front of Harry. "How do I know you won't try to become the next Dark Lord?"

Harry burst out laughing. He knew it wasn't the best response but he couldn't help it. Getting himself under control, he apologized, "I'm sorry but that is the last thing I expected you to say."

Snape was silent and Harry realized how serious the question was, "Okay, if Voldemort made a mistake, did you ever call him an idiot or tell him he was a dunderhead?"

Snape's eyes got so big that Harry thought they might pop out of his head. After a moment, he stammered, "Of course, not."

"Why not?" It's not like you to hold back," Harry said.

"He's the Dark Lord. You don't just go around telling him he's wrong about something," Snape replied as if that were the most obvious thing in the world.

"That's how you know I won't become a Dark Lord," Harry responded. "I don't think there will ever be a time that you won't feel free to tell me I'm being stupid if you believe that I am."

Snape considered that and slowly nodded as Harry continued, "I am surrounded by people that care enough about me to tell me when I get things wrong. They are pretty nice about it but they still tell me. How many people does Voldemort have that do that?"

Snape was silent a moment and then said, "You make an excellent point, Lord Potter. I will let you get on with your Herbology lesson."

Harry watched Snape walk toward the door and then said, "You can call me, Harry."

Snape turned back, "Thank you, Harry. Please call me, Severus."

As Harry approached his office, he could hear voices from inside. He listened as Percy try to explain to his mother why she was not invited to the meeting between Lord Potter, his father and his eldest brother.

Molly was having none of it.

Harry stepped into his office to see Molly Weasley standing beside Percy in front of Arthur and Bill with Ron, Ginny, and Hermione standing a few feet away.

Molly whirled, "Harry James Potter, what is the meaning of this?"

Harry sighed. He did not need this. Unfortunately, Molly was part of the Weasley family and it was a package deal. He looked at Arthur, "How much have you told her?"

Arthur step forward, "In your interview, you mentioned that you hadn't been hiding this summer. I noticed when you were at the house a few weeks ago, some of us immediately recognized you as Lord Black while the rest did not. After our conversation, I realized that magic must have a hand in that. For some reason, your identity is obvious to some people while others don't see anything different. For that reason, I chose not to say anything."

Harry nodded. He hadn't considered magic's hand and why some immediately recognized him as a Lord while others did not. He would have to consider it further but it did confirm that his plans with Arthur Weasley were well chosen.

"Lord Weasley," Harry addressed Arthur, "if you would like your family to bear witness, I can create a shield that will allow them to see and hear everything but will not allow any interference. The choice is yours."

"I would like that," Arthur responded. "Thank you, Harry."

Harry turned to Molly, "If you and everyone else would have a seat, I will create the necessary shield."

When Molly started to object, Harry simply spoke over her, "It's either that or you can leave."

Harry could tell by the looks on both Molly's and Ron's faces that they did not like either option, but they all complied and went to the seating area. When everyone was seated, Harry closed his eyes for a minute and felt for the Potter magic that was connected to the manor. With a push of his will, a softly glowing shield surrounded the seating area.

Harry turned back to Arthur, "I understand that Percy will serve as witness and binder while your heir stands with you."

"That is correct," Arthur responded.

Harry stepped behind his desk and sat down indicating for Arthur and Bill to take the chairs in front of the desk. Harry accepted a folder from Percy and read the documents inside. This was his first time seeing the finalized agreement but it included everything he expected. Harry signed the agreement and then passed it back to Percy who then handed it to his father. After Arthur had signed the agreement and Percy had witnessed it, Harry stepped back

around the desk. As Arthur and Bill stood up, Harry vanished the chairs so that the area in front of his desk was empty.

Harry stepped forward and extended both hands to Arthur who took them. Percy conjured a golden ribbon that tied itself around their joined hands.

“I, Harry James Potter, Head of House Potter, extend my patronage to you, Arthur Septimus Weasley, Head of House Weasley. Your fortunes will become my fortunes. Your burdens will become my burdens. This agreement will be recognized by magic as binding for three generations.”

A glow surrounded Harry and extended to cover Arthur. While the magic was still active, Arthur responded,

“I, Arthur Septimus Weasley, Head of House Weasley, agree to be vassal to you, Harry James Potter, Head of House Potter. My fortunes will become your fortunes. My burdens will become your burdens. This agreement will be recognized by magic as binding for three generations.”

The magic brightened in intensity and pulsed and then contracted into the joined hands. When the light disappeared, the ribbon was gone. Harry stepped forward and embraced Arthur.

When Harry released the shield, Molly rushed forward, “Arthur, what happened? Are you all right?”

“Never better, Mollywobbles,” Arthur answered.

Before any more questions could be asked, Percy stepped forward, “Lord Potter, Lady Black is waiting in the Black Salon to continue the discussion you were having earlier.”

Harry recognized a rescue when he saw it and at that moment was thankful beyond words that he had hired Percy, “Thank you. She has been very patient and I don’t want to keep her waiting. I’ll see you all at tea.”

Harry went to the Black Salon, so named because the elves had decorated it in both the colors and style of House Black and found that Narcissa was waiting for him.

“Harry darling,” Narcissa stood and greeted him with a kiss on the cheek. “Percy asked me to wait here so you would have an excuse to escape if you needed it.”

“Thank you,” Harry said with sincerity. “Would you wait here with me until tea?”

Narcissa took his hand and led him to a loveseat and sat down with him, “I’d be delighted to. This week has been ghastly for you and I’m happy to be able to help in this small way.”

When Harry eventually escorted Narcissa to tea in the orangery, Harry was surprised at how many were there. He sat in his usual spot, a square of love seats with chairs in the corners. Winky immediately popped in with a plate of his favorite little sandwiches. She climbed up beside him and cuddled close while his friends gradually took up seats around him. He noted

that Draco and Ron were on opposite corner chairs and that while Draco was being polite, Ron was surly. Hermione and Ginny were across from Harry with Fred and George between. The twins seemed to have accepted the duty of answering questions. Neville and Luna were seated together on the remaining loveseat. As usual, Luna kissed Harry on the cheek before sitting beside Neville.

A table in the middle of the grouping was filled with plates of sandwiches and cakes. There was a pitcher of pumpkin juice and a pot of tea. Two of the potter elves prepared plates for everyone. Harry could see Hermione barely staying quiet at Fred's urging. He heard Fred say, "Have some faith in your friend."

"This is the largest crowd yet," Neville observed. "I have no idea why but just as I was about to step into the floo, Gran joined me."

"It is time," Luna said.

"Time for what?" Hermione asked. There was an edge to her voice that told Harry that she was running out of patience.

"For magic to speak," Luna answered with a serenity that Harry had come to expect of the young woman.

Before more could be said, Harry felt it. It was the same thing he felt when he decided to accept the Lordships of eight magical Houses. Now he felt it pushing him. He handed Winky his plate and stood. As conversation began to die down, Harry stepped to the front of the room by the large windows overlooking the gardens.

Harry waited until the room was silent and then he reached into his magic and let it flow outward. As it encompassed the room, he released a hold he didn't realize he held on the House magics that resided within him.

With words of ritual provided by magic itself, Harry spoke, "Let those moved by magic, speak."

There was silence and then Gorin stood.

"I am Gorin, an elder of the elven people. For thousands of years, wixen and elves lived side by side as partners. They shared their magics and their work. They made each other's burdens lighter. Several hundred years ago, while I was still young, a wizard, in fear, refused to reciprocate the bond between Wix and elf. The fear spread and the bonds were no longer shared. A relationship of equals became a relationship of master and servant.

"Six weeks ago, a young man, battered and weak, was offered the bond of an elf. Without thought for himself, this young man, Harry James Potter, offered the first reciprocal bond offered to an elf in nearly 300 years.

"Word has spread, first among the elves and now among wixen. Already, reciprocal bonds are being formed."

Gorin sat down. There was silence and then Narcissa Black stood.

“I am Narcissa Black of House Black. For as long as I can remember, I was taught two things distinguished House Black from the rest of wixenkind, our special knowledge of arcane magic and our refusal to bow before anyone.

“Today, House Black has a reputation, not for its knowledge of arcane magics but for the practice of the darkest, most pernicious arts. The focus of study has gradually narrowed to the most undesirable of subjects. From a proud House that refused to bend knee to anyone, we became a House that served as lackey to a madman. While my grandfather, Arcturus, refused to bow, his siblings did not hold true. My older sister, Andromeda, and my cousin, Sirius, refused to give way and were rejected by the family while the rest conceded.

“Today I stand free. Lord Black, Harry James Potter, has restored the honor of House Black. He has reaffirmed our commitment to magical knowledge and to standing tall within the magical community. Know this, a Black bows to no one, no matter how many promises he makes or how much power he holds. We reclaim our ancient values and will hold strong.”

Harry watched, tears in his eyes, as Sirius, Andromeda, Tonks and Draco stood and rushed to embrace Narcissa.

Sharpnail stood and those that had not previously noticed the goblins in their midst were too shocked to remark on it.

“I am Sharpnail and am considered a Lord within the Dwarrow nation. Like the elves, for thousands of years, the Dwarrow lived as equals with Wixen. Our affinity for precious metals and jewels eventually evolved and we became the keepers of magic's monetary system.

“About 250 years ago, a wizard stood in the Wizengamot and proposed the first law limiting the rights of the Dwarrow people. He was convinced that my people intended harm and subjugation to the physically weaker wixen and, therefore, sought to limit our magical power.

“Previous disagreements which happen among all thoughtful people became characterized as rebellions. These so-called goblin rebellions were used as justification for the further restriction of Dwarrow rights.

“A dwarrow with the gift of prophecy told of dark times to come. Yet, there was hope. At a time when darkness would threaten all that is dear to magic, one would rise to show us a new way.

"I stand before you today as a representative of the Dwarrow nation to commit to a partnership with Harry James Potter, Head of House Potter, Black, Emrys, Gryffindor, Slytherin, Peverell, Stinchcombe and Gaunt."

There were gasps throughout the room. The weight of the magic blanketing the room was the only thing maintaining a watchful silence.

Another elf stood and stepped forward to speak.

“I am Bob and I share a bond with Lord Slytherin. Today I take the time for formal speech. For 150 years, I have served at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. My love of all things growing led me to assist numerous Herbology professors that have taught at the school. Over the years, I have witnessed many changes.

“From the time of the founding to about a hundred years ago, Hogwarts was self-sustaining. We raised and grew everything we needed for food, potions and healing. We formed alliances with the peoples of the forest. We traded for silk from the acromantulas. We shared our prophecies with the centaurs. We learned the ways of water from the merpeople.

“Students were taught respect for other races. Older students often learned with the young from these races. All magical beings knew that while we had different forms and different gifts, we were, all of us, part of magic.

“I have watched over the years as fewer and fewer wixen attend Hogwarts. I have seen attitudes shift and more young come to the school believing themselves superior to other races.

“After bonding with Lord Slytherin, I came here to act as his tutor in Herbology. I have watched Harry James Potter discover his affinity to the earth through his magical heritage. I have watched him realize the interconnectedness between Herbology and other magical disciplines. I have witnessed his interactions with elves, dwarrow, centaurs, griffins, thestrals, and abraxan. He treats all with respect and courtesy. I have seen that what was once can be again.

“The elves of House Slytherin that serve at Hogwarts stand ready for their Lord’s will.”

Before Bob had sat, Limney stood.

“I am Limney and I share a bond with Lord Gryffindor. Today is a time for formal speech. I was born at Hogwarts and have served there for over a hundred years. I have been Head Elf for thirty of those years. I, too, have witnessed a decline.

“Not only are there fewer wixen at Hogwarts but they are taught fewer subjects. Muggleborn are no longer taught the noble history of the magical world. They are not taught the language and customs of Wixen. Their ignorance pulls them apart. Instead, they are taught by a ghost who teaches a myth of goblin rebellions.

“Students were once nurtured by House Parents that had rooms within the dorms. They served as tutors and advisors. They ensured that all students had the physical care they needed. They counseled when needed. They taught respect for all wixen, not just those that were like-minded.

“Sabbats are no longer honored by the faculty or students. At the great celebrations, the forest races are no longer joined by wixen. The forest once called Great is now called Forbidden.

“I have never known a Hogwarts that allowed students with passive magic to attend, those you refer to as squibs. I did hear stories growing up of students who came to study the non-

wanded arts. Today, I hear stories from students of the shame that less magically powerful children bring to a family. This is not right. All magic is good and should be honored.

“When elves felt the bonds to Hogwarts fade and the presence of a Founder’s heir, we were uncertain. Then Dobby came and told us of Harry James Potter who would share a bond and treat us as equals. We did not believe but we hoped.

“Today the elves at Hogwarts thrive. No longer do we feed off the magic of the land and hope it is enough. We are strengthened by the bonds exchanged with us.

“The elves of House Gryffindor that serve at Hogwarts stand ready for their Lord’s will.”

Arthur Weasley stood next.

“I am Arthur Septimus Weasley, Head of House Weasley. I have known Harry James Potter for several years and have witnessed his friendship with my children. A little over three weeks ago, I met Lord Black.

“That meeting changed me. I had always disregarded my role as Head of House Weasley. I had minimized the role it could play in my life. Lord Black reminded me of my responsibility to magic. Thankfully, I listened.

“To my shame, I have discovered that the Weasleys are indeed blood traitors. Over 250 years ago, a Weasley patriarch committed an intolerable offense against the House Malfoy. To our further shame, another patriarch attempted to hide the transgression from future generations.

“It falls on me to make restitution to House Malfoy. Lady Narcissa Black has agreed to act as an intermediary in the negotiations to make right the wrong that was done by my ancestor.

“To further restore the honor and dignity of House Weasley, I have entered into a three-generation vassal agreement with Lord Potter. House Weasley is committed to serving House Potter in its commitment to restore equality to the magical world.”

Like the Blacks, the Weasleys immediately gathered around Arthur. As if the day couldn’t get any more astonishing, Severus Snape stood.

“I am Severus Tobias Snape-Prince, Head of House Prince. My list of offenses is great but none as great as the offenses I have committed against Harry James Potter.

“In my youth, I allowed myself to be seduced by the promises of a powerful wizard. I quickly learned how empty those promises were but by then I was trapped. The mark of slavery that I bore prevented genuine repentance.

“Words I foolishly repeated were used as justification to attack my dearest childhood friend, Lily Potter. In desperation, I turned to another powerful wizard who also made promises but those promises required a vow on my part. Unfortunately, those promises were in vain and I mourned the death of Lily Potter but the vow to protect the life of her son remained.

“In the furtherance of that vow and at threat to my freedom, I was coerced into teaching at Hogwarts. Most of you here know how that has been. Teaching is a noble calling and it is not

one I share.

“Today, I stand before you free. The mark of my slavery has been removed. With that removal, the threat to my freedom is no longer valid and I have resigned my teaching position.

“The reluctant vow I took to protect the life of Harry Potter still stands but today I give a willing vow. From this day forth, I will not listen to the promises of wixen, no matter how much power they wield or what they promise. I will follow Magic’s call and let it be my guide.”

It was in a super-charged atmosphere that Harry stepped forward.

“Four weeks ago, magic called me to accept the Lordship of eight dormant Houses. Some of those houses had been dormant for less than twenty years. Others had been dormant for many centuries. When I started learning about these Houses, my focus was on the neglected businesses. As I began to read some of the House grimoires, I discovered something much more important.

“As you have heard today, several hundred years ago things started changing in the magical world. Values held for thousands of years shifted in the space of decades. Even my grandfather fell prey to this. When he revived House Stinchcombe, it was not to restore the values of that House but rather for financial reasons.

“Of the Houses that remained active after the shift in magic, one house stood out, House Gaunt. I don't know if it is a coincidence but House Gaunt is the House that gave birth to Tom Riddle whom many of you know as Lord Voldemort. When I read the oath of House Gaunt, I was so appalled that my first reaction was to not accept the House. Eventually, I accepted the House but rejected the oath and made a different one.

“The oath I rejected was not the original oath of House Gaunt. Originally, House Gaunt served magic by studying inherited magical gifts such as mind magic or, in the case of House Gaunt, parseltongue and its associated magic. Somehow along the way, that study got perverted by a need to strengthen the Gaunt magic. In their misguided efforts, they began to systematically refuse any marriages from outside of the House. By the time Merope Gaunt gave birth to Tom Marvolo Riddle, the magical strength of the House was almost non-existent and they could barely speak English. Parseltongue was the language they were fluent in.

“Ironically, one of the strongest wizards of the last century is the son of a squib and a muggle. This is the wizard that is polluting our world with claims of pure-blood supremacy.

“It was in the Potter grimoire, I got the first hint of what may have started the shifts. First was the implementation of the Statute of Secrecy. While necessary, this drove many expressions of our magic away from public view and into secrecy. About twenty years later, in 1714, another event occurred. The last Stuart monarch, Anne, died. She was also the last monarch with magical blood. Hardwin Potter felt her death because it resonated in the earth and he was an earth-mage.

“I don’t have answers and I am still finding questions. What I do know is that things need to change. It started with the interviews I have given and will continue to give. It will continue as we bring these issues before the Wizengamot.

“Let me be clear on one thing, Tom Riddle isn’t the problem. Yes, he is a problem but he is not the source of what is wrong in our world.

“Just as one man is not the problem, no one person will be the solution. It will take all of us to create the world we want to live in, a world where all magical races are equally respected and listened to.”

As Harry stepped back, Neville Longbottom stood and began to clap. Soon everyone in the room had joined him.

Thoughts from Lord Potter

After interviewing Harry Potter earlier this week, I was invited back to talk about what he has been doing since declaring his emancipation. After arriving, I was led to a greenhouse where Harry Potter was repotting plants. He immediately started talking and I decided to just listen and record what he said and not worry about a formal interview. What follows are excerpts from what Harry Potter shared.

About the Potter family:

I mentioned before that I didn’t know I was magical until I got my Hogwarts letter. I didn’t even know my parents’ names. It was Rubeus Hagrid that first mentioned James and Lily Potter. Even then I didn’t know very much. They were killed by Voldemort. I look like my father but have my mother’s eyes. My father was brave and my mother was kind. That was it.

So I walked into Gringotts this summer knowing little more than that I was the son of James and Lily Potter. Obviously, people knew more. Filius (Flitwick) knew enough to know I would have an account manager. He, like others, assumed I knew the larger story of my family.

I can’t describe what it was like to learn that I was Head of the Ancient and Noble House of Potter. I didn’t even understand what that meant. Over 900 years of Potters and a magical line that goes back many centuries beyond that - to before the founders. I had been raised in total ignorance.

I was also raised in poverty. Oh, the people that kept me had more than enough but it was never shared. I never had regular meals until I was at Hogwarts. My first new clothing was from Madam Malkin’s. In fact, I didn’t own anything until that first trip to Diagon Alley.

When I first saw my vault, I was stunned. I was rich, at least in comparison to what I had believed. Even that had a catch. I believed the galleons in that vault had to pay for my years at Hogwarts and all my supplies. I figured it was enough but that it was all I had from my parents.

I go into Gringotts hoping I have enough galleons to finish my education and afford a place to live for my new family. To my surprise, not only do I own the house where I endured my childhood but I own houses all over the world. I always had enough money for food and clothes. I just never knew.

Then I discovered something even more valuable than galleons and properties. I found the Potter family grimoire. I found the words of my ancestors. For the first time, I started to learn what it meant to be a Potter.

I learned about Linfred, the first to be called a Potter. He was a potioneer, the first of many Potters that embraced potion-making.

I learned about Hardwin Potter. He had earth magic. I didn't even know there was such a thing as earth magic. Maybe they teach it in the upper years or maybe it is something that magical people just know and don't think to teach, but I had no idea.

Do you know what it means in potions and herbology when you have earth magic? I'm beginning to learn.

About being a young Head of House

I've learned that there are two sides to being Head of House. The first is the magical side. This is both the easiest and the most demanding part. When you accept the call to be Head of House, and I don't know how else to describe it, you take an oath. The oath is your contract with magic. It goes both ways. You accept the House magic and the House magic accepts you.

It's easy because you live by that oath in everything you do on behalf of your House. The oath sets your priorities and values. No, it actually demands that you follow that oath. That's what I meant by saying it was the most demanding. It pushes me. It sets the magical path that I'm following.

The other side is the practical side. This is taking care of your House and the members of your House. By blood, I am the last Potter, but this summer is teaching me that family is more than blood. It's also understanding my responsibility and continuing the Potter legacy.

I am certain that had I grown up knowing these responsibilities, I would have made different choices. I don't regret the choices I've made so far because I've done the best that I can. I recognize that my choices weren't fully informed and while it wasn't my fault, I have a lot of catching up to do.

My father, James Potter, never led House Potter. He went into hiding and was killed before he had that chance. Fortunately, my grandfather, Fleamont Potter, set up safeguards in the event there wasn't a Head of House. He left an active business plan that covered not only his investments but the investments my parents made. While I was growing up in ignorance, House Potter continued to thrive financially.

On the Ministry reaction to recent events

It is horrifying to realize we have a Minister of Magic and the supporting Ministry that will attack a child because they don't like something he said. It would be one thing if those in power had chosen to simply not believe me. It would be understandable. At the end of the TriWizard tournament, I was traumatized and in shock. Anything I said at that time could reasonably be painted as suspect. However, that isn't what happened.

Instead, the Ministry engaged in a systematic campaign of slander against me. They never came out and said, "We don't believe Harry Potter because the facts are unsupported." Instead, they called me names and questioned my character. These are not the actions of honorable people. I have to wonder if the average wix of Great Britain realizes the level of shameful behavior engaged in by our leaders.

There was never any attempt to find proof that my words were either truthful or untruthful. I would have willingly sworn an oath. I would have taken veritaserum. I would have provided memories that could be viewed. Instead, the man chosen to lead us, Cornelius Fudge, instantly denied even the possibility that my words might be true and began a campaign to discredit me.

Cornelius Fudge is a stain on the honor of wixen everywhere. It is a stain that needs to be removed.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for your patience on this update. Harry behaved unexpectedly in the previous chapter and I had to rethink a few things.

Many, many thanks for all the kind comments. They are so encouraging.

Judgement

Chapter Notes

August 7-8

Sixty-seven seats in the Wizengamot belong to magical Houses. It doesn't matter if they call themselves Ancient or Noble or any other descriptive title. All that matters is that the House has been recognized by magic itself. Many of these Houses are considered dormant and are unoccupied during legislative sessions.

Six seats in the Wizengamot belong to Order of Merlin recipients. Most of these seatholders never show up. However, the seats remain, waiting to be claimed. All things considered, it is not a surprise to learn that Order of Merlin, Second Class, winner Gilderoy Lockhart still retains both his Order of Merlin and the corresponding Wizengamot seat. Orders of Merlin are also held by Cornelius Fudge and Peter Pettigrew.

Three seats in the Wizengamot belong to designated department heads in the Ministry of Magic. These include the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, the Department of International Cooperation and the Department of Mysteries. The Minister of Magic attends Wizengamot meetings in an advisory capacity but does not have a vote.

The Wizengamot is presided over by the Chief Warlock. This title holds regardless of the gender of the office holder. The role of Chief Warlock is largely ceremonial and has no vote. Nevertheless, the Chief Warlock still holds tremendous influence over the Wizengamot whether in its legislative or judicial capacity.

A person can only hold one Wizengamot seat or position. Therefore, House Bones is voted by a proxy since Amelia Bones votes the Seat for the DMLE. The Dumbledore seat is also voted by a proxy, as is Cornelius Fudge's Order of Merlin seat while he attends as Minister of Magic.

Both legislative and judicial Wizengamot meetings follow established procedures. These procedures have been in place for thousands of years and have not changed during that time. Attempting any action outside of the normal procedural order results in immediate expulsion from the chamber for that particular session.

The Wizengamot has met in quite a few different locations throughout the long centuries of its existence. Regardless of where it meets, the one constant is the Wizengamot ward stone that controls the magic and therefore behavior within the chamber.

One important thing controlled by the ward stone is the amount of magic that is allowed within the Wizengamot chamber. No magic is allowed in the Wizengamot chamber. More

importantly, no magic will work in the Wizengamot chamber. A wix may wave a wand and speak incantations but nothing will happen. This one fact is the subject of most conversations when the subject of the ward stone comes up. It has long been rumored that Merlin could cast magic successfully in the Wizengamot chamber. Therefore, if Merlin could do it, another wix of sufficient power could do it. Many have asked Albus Dumbledore if he has ever tried but he has never given a definitive yes or no.

These are some of the facts Harry Potter learned over the hours of Saturday and Monday mornings. He did not consider the learning experience to be an enjoyable one. Harry learned best by doing. Facts and figures might be important but they were also tedious. Although he would not say this out loud, Harry considered these hours as lost ones he would never get back.

Albus Dumbledore was a very powerful wizard. Albus Dumbledore was a very lazy wizard. Those two facts were very much related. His magical accomplishments took so little effort and actually learning magic came easily so Albus expected everything to come with equal ease.

Albus held three important and influential jobs in the wizarding world. The average wix in Great Britain took that as proof that Albus Dumbledore was not only a great man but also a very hard-working man. In truth, Albus Dumbledore was neither.

All three positions generated enormous amounts of paperwork. Most of this paperwork could be passed to subordinates to complete. Albus bestowed profuse thanks and excessive eye twinkles to these subordinates and they felt honored. Albus felt contempt.

In addition to the forms and reports necessary, all three positions generated excessive mail. Albus ignored most of this mail. Much of the mail was magically generated notices. It generally fell into two categories. If it was legitimately important then Albus already knew about it and did not need to be notified. If it was merely administrative notices, it would be revealed when it became relevant and therefore did not require any action.

This explained why many of the events of the August 1995 Wizengamot session surprised Albus Dumbledore.

During Wizengamot trials, all seated members dressed in identical plum-colored robes. They were the same cut. They were made from the same material. They fell to the same point on the body of everyone wearing the robe. They were accompanied by identical and overly large, some would even say ridiculous, hats. The sameness of the garb represented the equality that everyone was entitled to under the law. It was an excellent theory.

During legislative sessions of the Wizengamot, seated members could wear whatever they chose. Most dressed in the colors of the House they represented. Ministry of Magic representatives had a standard formal robe that was identical and cut and color but could be custom made in a choice of materials. They always chose acromantula silk. Order of Merlin

recipients were dependent upon their own tastes. On the rare occasion that one attended, it was an unfortunate freedom.

On the morning of August 8, 1995, the arrivals room at Potter Manor was full. Some would be taking up Wizengamot seats. Some were accompanying the future seatholders. Some were attending as spectators. All of them came under the critical eyes of Narcissa Black and Winky.

After consulting each other, Narcissa and Winky spent Monday escorting various groups to Diagon Alley to purchase robes suitable for Wizengamot attendance. It didn't matter whether or not those being garbed agreed with Narcissa and Winky. Eventually, every individual escorted into a clothing shop gave way to their sartorial will.

The most difficult group taking the combined efforts of Narcissa and Winky were the Weasley spectators. This included Molly, Ron and Ginny Weasley along with Hermione Granger. The Weasleys never fully accepted the new garb but, as Narcissa pointed out, they had to represent not only House Weasley but House Potter. Arthur had made it abundantly clear to his family that it was time to put aside the Weasley pride.

Hermione attempted to insist that she had the right to wear anything she wanted, anywhere she wanted. Narcissa agreed and then asked the young woman if what she wanted to wear was more important than what she wanted to accomplish in her magical future. Hermione accepted the new robes provided by House Potter.

Spectator seats were on a first come/first serve basis. The arrivals room was considerably calmer once most of the Weasleys along with Hermione Granger and Ted Tonks had flooded to the ministry. The remaining wixen quickly divided up. Some would go by floo. A few were able to apparate directly to the ministry. Others would apparate to the visitor's entrance. Most Wizengamot members didn't prepare in advance for the sessions. If they were sponsoring legislation, they would prepare for that but as a whole, there was a lackadaisical approach to being a seated lawmaker in the wizarding world.

Albus Dumbledore was always the first to arrive. As the seated members and spectators arrived they would see him sitting there as a benevolent overlord. He quickly browsed through the packet of information for the day's session. There were several issues to be voted upon but that should go quickly as the arguments had already been made.

Next to arrive were the court clerk and scribe. Both were rotating positions among select junior ministry employees. Each group of employees was given job-specific training and put on rotation. A specific clerk could be requested and this was sometimes done to see how someone operated under pressure. Most clerical jobs in the ministry were routine but a few required the ability to think on your feet. It was not unknown for Amelia Bones to request specific clerks for trial cases. Those that performed well often went on to assignment in the DMLE. Albus noted absently that today's packet for the court scribe seemed unusually large. The position of court scribe was a rotating group and was strictly a matter of chance.

The issues being voted on today were regulatory in nature and, therefore, not of much interest to the average wixen. As the time for the session approached, Albus glanced up and was surprised to see the spectator gallery nearly full. On closer examination, he noted the presence of Molly Weasley and her two youngest children along with Hermione Granger. Albus wasn't particularly surprised at Miss Granger's interest in the governing body of the wizarding world. She appeared to have developed an interest in creature rights and working in the ministry would seem a logical step. It was unfortunate, Albus thought, that the young lady's ambitions would most likely be thwarted by the pure-blood bigotry that dominated the hiring and advancement practices. Perhaps Molly had brought her youngest along hoping to somehow interest them in future ministry careers. As purebloods from a well-known family, they would start with some advantages. With hard work, they had the chance to catch the eye of the right person and set themselves up for a successful ministry career.

Fifteen minutes before the start of the session, the doors were opened. More sociable members arrived with time to spare. Those less inclined to idle chit-chat would wait to enter until the last minute. As the hour chimed, members quickly found their seats and the doors to the chamber were closed. With the appropriate amount of solemnity, Albus banged the gavel and declared the session open.

As everyone got comfortable in their seats, the clerk called for the presentation of new seat holders. The doors that had just closed now reopened. Most of the time, nothing happened at this point. Occasionally, a new Lord would take his seat with the passing of the old. Sometimes an heir would accept the proxy to relieve the current Lord of the tedium of attending. There were also times when a proxy changed hands. Even the oldest member of the Wizengamot could not remember a time when a stream of people entered the chamber for the presentation of new members. Leading the line with Sirius Black.

Sirius waited until the chamber was quiet and then stepped forward, "Sirius Orion Black, proxy for Lord Black."

The clerk verified the paperwork and then responded, "Please take your seat."

This was usually the only moment of any real interest or suspense in the presentation of a new seat holder. When the member's name was announced, in this case, Lord Black, the seat for House Black lit with a soft glow. Sirius walked to the glowing seat and sat down. A soft bell-like tone resonated throughout the chamber indicating the acceptance of the new seat holder. In the event the seat holder was not accepted, the person attempting to take the seat would have been forcibly apparated out of the chamber to a sealed room where they would wait until the close of the session. On the few occasions when this had happened, it had always been a case of someone attempting to fraudulently represent the legitimate seat holder.

The physical seat was closer to a couch and comfortably seated four people. Typically, a seat holder was accompanied by at least one other person. Some brought an assistant or secretary to take notes for them. Some brought advisors. More typically, an heir would attend to learn this part of House business.

After Sirius had taken his seat, he was joined by Narcissa in her role of advisor and Percy Weasley as a clerical assistant. While only a few knew that Percy had left the ministry's

employ, none outside of those he was directly working with knew his new employer. There was a gasp from the spectator seating when it became apparent that Percy was employed by Lord Black. Many in the chamber remembered Sirius Black as a young, enthusiastic auror who loved a good prank. Others considered that he had spent over a decade in Azkaban. Both groups were inclined to dismiss Sirius as any sort of power within the Wizengamot. The presence of Lady Narcissa Black, formerly Malfoy, changed the calculations. It might be easy to dismiss Sirius Black. No one would ever dismiss Narcissa Black.

Next in line was Arthur Weasley. This caused a bit of a stir as Dedalus Diggle was currently sitting in the Weasley seat as proxy. Having prepared for this eventuality, Arthur stepped forward to make his claim, “Arthur Septimus Weasley, House Weasley.”

“I’m afraid, Arthur, that you must first rescind your proxy before you can take the seat yourself, Albus intoned in a grandfatherly voice that managed to be both benign and condescending at the same time.

“Actually, Chief Warlock,” the clerk interjected, “the paperwork to rescind Dedalus Diggle as proxy was properly filed. I have the Ministry copy.”

Diggle was flustered and unsure. He had held the Weasley seat for well over a decade, voting as instructed by Dumbledore. When Dumbledore remained silent, Arthur Weasley went to his House seat and stood patiently waiting for Diggle to remove himself.

Finally, Arthur spoke, “Dedalus, you need to leave.”

With a last look at Dumbledore, Diggle got up and went to sit in the spectator gallery, staying close in case something changed. Arthur took a seat where he was joined by Emily Stevens. The two had stuck up a congenial relationship based on Arthur's fascination with all things muggle and Emily's nearly endless patience.

The next person in line created a stir for an entirely different reason. Filius Flitwick was known to almost every person in the chamber. He had either taught them or their children or grandchildren. Although not spoken of, it was generally assumed he had some goblin ancestry. No one had ever guessed that he also had elven ancestry. The purebloods present were horrified but there was no rule forbidding those of mixed ancestry from occupying a seat.

“Filius Flitwick, proxy for Lord Peverell.”

When the clerk instructed, Filius went and took the seat for House Peverell where he was joined by Amanda Kingsford, former student and current ally in protecting Harry Potter.

Sirius Black had characterized the Wizengamot as a bunch of stuffy old men. Already the day’s session had ruffled many sensibilities. The shocks continued.

“Frederick Gideon Weasley, proxy for House Stinchcombe.”

Albus Dumbledore felt the need to once more interrupt “Mr. Weasley, I must insist that you abandon any plans to disrupt these proceedings.”

“Point of Order,” Sirius Black stood. A point of order could be made at any time that procedure was not being properly followed. “The Chief Warlock has no call to question those presenting themselves for a seat. So long as the appropriate paperwork has been filed in a timely manner with the Ministry, there is no excuse for these interruptions.”

“The esteemed proxy for House Black is correct,” the clerk stated for the record. “Only the clerk can find cause to question the presentation of a new seat holder.”

With this pronouncement, a deep ringing echoed through the chamber and suddenly Albus Dumbledore was no longer seated in the position of Chief Warlock. The wardstone of the Wizengamot chamber had made its judgment.

It was Harry that had suggested that Dumbledore might get himself ejected from the chamber. His exact words were, “Wouldn’t it be funny if that happened to Dumbledore?”

Bill Weasley worked primarily as a curse breaker for Gringotts but he was also skilled in warding. That skill, combined with a love of history that had not been dulled by Binn’s teaching, resulted in a fascination with the Wizengamot ward stone. On Saturday morning, he had explained the ward stone’s importance in maintaining order. Some rules, such as no magic in the chamber, were absolute. Other rules, such as following established procedures, were more flexible. That flexibility hinged on an allowed interruption known as the Point of Order.

Human nature practically demanded that individuals push boundaries. The orderly flow of business within the Wizengamot was no exception. Most of the time, small deviations to procedure were ignored. Occasionally, a Wizengamot member was unable to ignore the deviation and called for a Point of Order. A Point of Order was a request for clarification of the standing rules of the chamber. The clerk determined whether or not procedure was being followed. What happened next was up to the ward stone.

Although uncommon, it was not unusual for an object that was both ancient and constantly surrounded by high amounts of magical power to attain a kind of sentience. The most widely known example in Britain was Hogwarts. This was also true at many of the sacred circles that were placed on ley lines.

Many had forgotten that the Ministry of Magic had been placed at a powerful magical nexus. Throughout the centuries, the location of the Wizengamot had always been located at places of magical power. Over many years, the ward stone had developed its own intelligence. The many runes carved into its surface may have established the parameters that the ward stone followed but the stone itself had evolved its own criteria.

The clerk determined if someone was in adherence to the rules governing the Wizengamot. The ward stone determined the consequences of that determination. Most of the time the deviations were minor and were simply ignored. Occasionally, the stone determined that stronger consequences were necessary. On such occasions, the person in violation was magically removed from the chamber and placed in a sealed room. At the end of that day's

proceedings, the room would unseal itself. No one had ever been able to break through the seal either from inside or outside of the room.

The reaction to Dumbledore's ejection was immediate. From the spectators, there was questioning. From the seated members, there was immediate debate. The source of the debate was whether the presentation of new seat holders would continue or should be paused to select an acting Chief Warlock.

After a few moments, the clerk raised her wand and caused a loud boom to echo through the chamber immediately resulting in silence, "The presentation of new seat holders will continue followed by the Department reports. Then as new business we will make the selection of an acting Chief Warlock. Mr. Weasley, please take the Stinchcombe seat."

Fred sat in the appropriate seat and he was joined by George as his advisor. Ted Tonks had suggested that one of the twins act as proxy for House Stinchcombe. It not only temporarily solved the problem of who would wield the vote but would also give the twins experience in the legislative process while they were becoming eligible to claim the Prewitt seats.

The presentation continued with William Arthur Weasley for House Prewitt, Severus Tobias Snape-Prince for House Prince, and finally, Harry James Potter for House Potter. Bill was joined by Sally Wilson while Terence Trembley joined Snape. Harry sat alone.

Any questioning of Harry's right to sit his Wizengamot seat at such a young age was stifled. After what happened to Dumbledore, no one was taking any chances.

The clerk called for the departmental reports. All departments provided written summaries for the monthly Wizengamot sessions but the seated departments gave an oral report as well.

Next was new business and the first new business was selecting an acting Chief Warlock. The choice of Augusta Longbottom was nearly unanimous. She was considered part of the so-called light faction but had no particular allegiance to Dumbledore. Although others might not like her, her no-nonsense approach and strict adherence to protocol were appreciated.

When the clerk called for any additional new business, Sirius stood, "I motion for the permanent removal of Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore from his position as Chief Warlock."

On later reflection, it made perfect sense but at the moment everyone was surprised when Amelia Bones immediately seconded the motion.

As the person that made the motion, Sirius was given the opportunity to open the discussion. As rehearsed, Sirius Black stood and made a point-by-point argument for Dumbledore's removal. He started with the deliberate suppression of the Potter wills. Sirius pointed out that Dumbledore, as a witness to both wills, used his influence to get the wills sealed and then deliberately acted in contradiction to the Potter's stated desires. He covered Harry's undocumented placement with the Dursleys. He only made brief mention of his incarceration as if that wasn't even the greatest crime Dumbledore has committed.

As Sirius finished, Amelia Bones immediately rose and waited for recognition. "After the investigation into the illegal incarceration of Sirius Black, I authorized an investigation into the activities of Albus Dumbledore in the immediate aftermath of the war. I can confidently confirm everything that Sirius Black has said," Bones stated calmly. "As this is a deliberative body charged with the creation and maintenance of our body of laws, it is inappropriate that it be led by someone so willing to break those laws for his convenience."

As she sat down, Elphias Doge, proxy for House Dumbledore, stood. He rambled on about the long and dedicated service that Dumbledore had given to the wizarding world. He spoke about Dumbledore's benevolence and compassion. He went on longer than anyone actually paid attention to and finally wound down.

When Doge sat, there was a loud snort that anyone that attended Hogwarts in the past fifteen years recognized. The clerk looked at Snape to see if he wanted to make his own argument but Snape merely stared back.

The vote was a foregone conclusion. Those that considered themselves neutral or dark had no love for Dumbledore. Most of the light faction was embarrassed to realize they had supported someone who would behave so carelessly. The ultimate blow was when Arthur Weasley, a known Dumbledore supporter, raised his wand in favor of the motion.

After the vote, the clerk announced that a special session would be called at a later date for the selection of a new Chief Warlock.

When the clerk called for additional new business, Fred Weasley stood, "I motion for the removal of Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore from the position of Headmaster at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry."

The reaction from both the spectators and the seated members was such that the Chief Warlock had to call for order several times before the chamber was quiet. The clerk asked, "Does anyone second the motion?"

Filius Flitwick stood, "I second the motion."

This caused another round of consternation. It was well known that Flitwick was a genial man with rarely a cross word for anyone. For him to second the motion meant that it was something of substance.

When Fred was given the opportunity to open the discussion, he stood, "As many here know, my brother," and here he motioned to George, "and I are pranksters. It is our goal to bring more laughter to the wizarding world. Therefore, I'm sure that many are surprised to hear me speak on such a serious issue. However, it is a very serious issue that concerns not only the education of our children but their safety as well.

"First, I would like to address the issue of education. It is easy enough to discover that the quality of education at Hogwarts is not what it once was. Over the years that Dumbledore has been headmaster, the number and the quality of classes have decreased. Many electives that were once offered are no longer available. These include alchemy, ritual magic and advanced magical theory. Core classes have also been reduced. Where once magical theory was its own

class, today professors are forced to teach both theory and practical magic without any additional class time allocated to this change. It is known and often joked about that History is taught by a ghost. What isn't well known and certainly no joke is that the scores for History OWLs have steadily declined over recent decades. Additionally, there are never more than five students per year taking history NEWTS.

“Outside of the classroom, there are problems that create a negative learning environment. It is my understanding that the House system at Hogwarts was developed to help students find like-minded people to live and study with. The goal of the founders was to make it easier for students to learn. There was no point system and there was minimal rivalry between the houses.

“It was Headmaster Armando Dippet, at the suggestion of Albus Dumbledore, that introduced the point system and started the Houses down a road that would lead to detrimental conditions. I think we will all agree that competition can be healthy and can foster growth. Unfortunately, the rivalries between Houses at Hogwarts, particularly Gryffindor and Slytherin, are poisonous and have a negative effect on the ability of all students to learn.

“One of the first lessons that older students teach firsties is to never walk alone in the hallways. Always have at least one person with you, preferably someone older. At the start of each term, students are reminded that casting magic in the hallways is forbidden. Not only is the rule frequently violated but the consequences for breaking the rule are unevenly enforced.

“I have spoken with many people of all ages about this issue. It isn't a new problem. When a Gryffindor is caught jinxing or hexing another student, they will be scolded and most probably points will be deducted. Rarely are detentions assigned. If a Slytherin is caught in the same activity, not only will the point loss be higher but there will almost always be detentions assigned. Students quickly learn, Gryffindors can get away with almost anything. Slytherins are almost always suspect. The discipline directed toward Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff is more mixed depending on the teacher.

“No one really knows but it is assumed among the students that the leniency given to Gryffindors is because Headmaster Dumbledore was once Gryffindor. It is also assumed that the reason Slytherins are treated more harshly is that, unfortunately, the last war was led by someone sorted into Slytherin. I believe that eleven-year-olds should be considered innocent no matter what House they are sorted into. The automatic suspicion attributed to anyone sorted into Slytherin affects everyone. This atmosphere of bias has to stop. Unfortunately, I do not believe Headmaster Dumbledore is capable of being fair in this regard.”

Fred paused for a moment and looked around, “Now that I've addressed some of my educational concerns, I would like to share with you my concerns for the safety of the children at Hogwarts.

“At the opening feast during my third year at Hogwarts, Headmaster Dumbledore announced that the third-floor corridor was off limits to all who did not wish to die a horrible death. Pardon my language but what the hell? Why would you even need to make such a warning in a school? Not only that but ask any parent and they will tell you the quickest way to make a child want to do something is to forbid them to do it. I can name at least a dozen students

from Gryffindor alone that investigated the third-floor corridor during that first week of school.

“Headmaster Dumbledore was right. The third-floor corridor was a danger and could have led to a horrible death. Behind a door with a lock that a simple *alohamora* would open was a cerberus, a giant, vicious three-headed dog.

“For most, one glimpse behind that door was enough. Some of us are made of sterner stuff and, despite the risk, we continued to open the door. Eventually, it was discovered that the cerberus guarded a trap door. Through that trapdoor was a series of obstacles that ultimately led to a room that held a dark object, the Mirror of Erised. I'm sure that the representative for the Department of Mysteries can tell you more about why this is considered a dark object.

“I cannot tell you absolutely what the purpose of the obstacles was but by the end of the year, it was rumored that the school had been protecting the Philosopher's Stone, created by Nicholas Flamel.

“Once again, what the hell? Why would anyone store a priceless object in a school full of children? Either Headmaster Dumbledore knew and approved of what was happening or dangerous events were happening without his knowledge. I'm not sure which poses a greater danger to magical children.

“Oh, I forgot to mention the troll. One of the obstacles on the way to the Mirror of Erised was a troll. At Halloween of that same year, Professor Quirrell ran into the Great Hall during the feast to announce there was a troll in the dungeons. I don't think I need to explain to you what is wrong with this picture but to make it worse the Headmaster promptly stood up and sent all of the students to their House dormitories, ignoring the fact that two House dormitories were in the dungeons. In the chaos that followed, three first-year students ended up trapped in a bathroom with the troll. Fortunately, no one was injured.

“During my fourth year, a cat, a ghost and quite a few students were found petrified in the halls. Written on the walls were ominous warnings. All of the students were muggleborn. In not one case did Professor Dumbledore authorize the notification of those parents. Regardless of how you feel about muggles and muggleborns, imagine if your child was incapacitated for months of the school year and you were not notified. It is a breach of the trust that parents place in the school to take care of their children.

“Eventually it was discovered that an ancient basilisk that had been living under the school had been able to find its way with the pipes to wreak havoc. Fortunately, no student died. Unfortunately, students spent a year terrified of what might happen to them. This should never be the atmosphere of any school.

“You might almost say that my fifth year was quiet. There were no trolls or cerberus or basilisks roaming the school. Instead, dementors were searching for an accused mass murderer.” At this, Fred turned and bowed to Sirius Black who grinned in response. “The only people that benefited from this were the owners of Honeyduke's Chocolate. Sirius Black was never found by the dementors but the effect on the students was devastating. It can be argued that this decision was made by the Minister but at no time did Headmaster Dumbledore in any capacity, whether as Headmaster, Chief Warlock, or even through his

House seat in this body bring the issue forward. A situation that created not only a negative learning environment but harmful physical effects to the students under his care was met only with hand wringing.

“This past year, my sixth year, was the year that saw Hogwarts hosting the Triwizard Tournament. Now, I am all for international cooperation but should we really be depending upon students for such an important endeavor? Aside from that, there was a very good reason that the Triwizard Tournament was discontinued. It was dangerous. No, not dangerous. It was deadly. Yet Dumbledore approved the participation of his school in this tournament.

“Admittedly, not all of this can be laid at Headmaster Dumbledore's feet. This was a cooperative endeavor between three magical schools and their governments. As a student, it did not seem as if anybody put the needs of the students first and that rested squarely on Headmaster Dumbledore's shoulders. It is his job as Headmaster to look out for the students' welfare. That is his first responsibility. By allowing Hogwarts to take part in the tournament, Headmaster Dumbledore failed in his responsibility.

“I don't know what will happen in the coming school year, my final year. What I do know is that if Headmaster Dumbledore is allowed to continue, odds are it will not be a safe year and I will not be getting the best education I could be.”

By the time Fred sat down, Elphias Doge was nearly spitting in anger. He promptly stood. Recognition by the clerk was barely given before he turned to Fred, “How dare you?” Albus Dumbledore is the greatest headmaster Hogwarts has ever had. And you, Harry Potter,” Doge spit out the name venomously as he turned and stared at Harry, “how dare you bring your personal grievances into this chamber to discredit a great man.”

Doge stood there heaving and finally, the Chief Warlock banged the gavel and requested that he sit. The clerk addressed Harry, “Would you like to respond to the proxy for House Dumbledore?”

When Harry Potter had called on Lady Magic to judge Albus Dumbledore, Harry had no idea that Ted Tonks would become the instrument of that judgment.

When Ted finished watching the memories of the Order of Phoenix meeting, he knew one thing: the original plan was fucked. The gradual and orderly takedown of Albus Dumbledore that had been meticulously planned was no longer an option. They needed to move fast.

Severus Snape's arrival at the manor had been unexpected but fortuitous, another thing happening earlier than expected. He had already prepared an offer for Snape. It had only required the removal of the Dark Mark which Harry had been confident he could do.

Another piece falling into place was the request by Arthur Weasley for a meeting with Lord Potter. The establishment of a formal relationship with a known supporter of Dumbledore was an unexpected boon.

While two mornings were spent making sure everyone understood the history and protocols of the Wizengamot, those afternoons were strategy sessions. With input from Narcissa Black, Severus Snape and Filius Flitwick, Ted outlined a plan to strip Albus Dumbledore of all his official positions. The takedown would come from multiple fronts. The goal was to appear objective and dispassionate. This would not be a personal takedown. This would be based on established facts and principles.

It made sense for Sirius Black to call for Dumbledore's removal as Chief Warlock. The wizarding world was still reeling from the revelation of Sirius' illegal imprisonment. Every Lord that sat in the chamber would be mindful that if it could happen to the heir of an Ancient and Noble House, it could happen to anyone.

The decision for the twins to lead the call for Dumbledore's removal as Headmaster had been controversial. Ted was able to convince the others that the twins' normal light-hearted nature would make the seriousness of their argument all the more powerful. To everyone's surprise, Severus Snape volunteered to work with Fred Weasley on his presentation.

Calling for Dumbledore's removal as Britain's representative to the International Confederation of Wizards would be a call back to his removal as Chief Warlock. It would be presented as an afterthought.

While there was a lot of debate about how successful they would be, it was, nonetheless, agreed that a full frontal assault was the best option. One thing was also agreed upon. At no point would Harry Potter lead the assault. He would be there as an observer, most likely dismissed as unimportant.

Harry knew the plan and wholeheartedly agreed with it. Unfortunately, the direct challenge from Elphias Doge changed everything. If Harry did not respond, he would appear weak. While it could be useful to be underestimated, any appearance of weakness needed to be avoided. Men like Lucius Malfoy and Antonius Nott would be eager to take advantage at the first opportunity.

Harry stood and straightened. It wasn't even conscious. Over the previous weeks, he had learned to move in and out of his power effortlessly. He had developed an instinct for when to be 15-year-old Harry Potter and when to be the Head of a Magical House. The entire chamber watched as Harry Potter went from lackadaisical teenage boy watching adult proceedings to Lord Potter.

"I can speak to the relevance and accuracy of everything that the representative of House Stinchcombe has brought to this Chamber's attention. The facts brought forward speak for themselves. However, Mr. Doge insists that this is a personal vendetta on my part. Therefore, I will give you a personal response.

"In the interviews published recently in the Daily Prophet, I spoke of my upbringing and the deficiencies in my pre-Hogwarts education. Everything reported in those interviews was presented accurately. My childhood was miserable and I endured unnecessary hardship and cruelty. I never sought to blame anyone for that. It was simply what it was.

"Earlier this summer, I learned that Albus Dumbledore had sealed my parents' wills and declared himself my magical guardian. How did he handle that responsibility? Poorly. While he may justify his choice of physical guardians, it was in direct contradiction to what my parents wanted for me. There is no indication that in the ten years between my parents' death and my attendance at Hogwarts that Albus Dumbledore ever checked on my welfare.

"One would assume that a magical guardian would, at the very least, look to a child's magical education, yet I was totally ignorant of the magical world when I received my Hogwarts letter. At no time did Albus Dumbledore attend to my magical well-being.

"In regards to the motion for Albus Dumbledore to be removed as Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, I ask you this: is a man who has so shamefully neglected the well-being and education of the one child he claimed guardianship of through deceit and the misuse of power really who you want responsible for the education and safety of your children?"

Whatever Doge had hoped to accomplish in his confrontation with Harry, it did not work. Even the most ardent supporters of Albus Dumbledore could not justify allowing him to remain headmaster.

The final implementation of Ted Tonks' plan was almost a footnote. Bill Weasley, as proxy for House Prewitt, called for Dumbledore's replacement as the representative for the British magical government to the ICW. It was seconded by Arthur Weasley. The argument was short and simple. His removal as Chief Warlock and Headmaster was based on his deliberate disregard for both the law and the well-being of British magical citizens. For those very same reasons, Dumbledore was unsuitable as a delegate to the ICW. It went unsaid that if Dumbledore was not the representative to the ICW then he could not act as Supreme Mugwump to that organization.

Before lunchtime, Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore had been stripped of his public positions.

Paradigm Shift

Chapter Summary

August 5-8

Hermione Granger was reeling. She sat on her bed in the London townhouse trying to process everything that had happened. Since the house had been cleaned and decorated, Hermione had her own room. Mrs. Weasley had tried to insist that she share a room with Ginny but one of the Black house elves had been insistent that all guests of Lord Black would have their own room. Everyone watched in wonder while the house elf won the argument.

That was another thing! Harry owned house elves. Lots of them, but it seemed like every time she tried to talk to him about it, something interfered.

She set the thought aside and looked around the room. It was decorated in shades of soft rose with deep burgundy accents. Hermione found it very soothing. Unfortunately, it wasn't enough to calm her whirling thoughts.

Ever since the interview with Lord Black had been published, Hermione had struggled with her feelings about Professor Dumbledore. She had seen the headmaster as a figure of benevolent authority. Previous doubts had been reasoned away. The article had overcome that reason. Still, as she didn't come into contact with Professor Dumbledore, she was able to set aside most of her doubts.

The rift with Harry had further complicated things. When the headmaster instructed Hermione and Ron to refrain from sending any owls to Harry, she questioned it. If Harry were really in shock and grieving, he would need his friends. Professor Dumbledore had explained that keeping her friend safe was the most important thing. He also assured her that Harry would welcome the peace and quiet to resolve his emotional conflict.

Harry's reaction to the lack of correspondence had shocked her. As a defense, she had retreated to her natural deference to authority. Even with the Sirius Black situation, she still clung to her excuses. She was genuinely puzzled that Harry had not been more understanding.

Hermione had known that the return of Voldemort would result in great change. She thought she understood the nature of that change. Voldemort's return would be the start of war. Because of Harry, she would be involved in that war. Whatever that meant, she, Harry and Ron would face it together. They would always be together. Except now it seemed that they weren't.

She had made other assumptions as well. Obviously, Dumbledore would lead the Light. The Ministry would arrest those Death Eaters Harry had identified at the graveyard. They would hunt down Voldemort and the remaining Death Eaters and arrest them. Of course, she knew that Voldemort would resist. There would be fighting. There would be attacks on innocents. It would not be neat and tidy no matter how much she wanted it, but whatever else happened, Harry would be at the front of the fight. No matter how much Voldemort may have feared Dumbledore, Harry Potter was Voldemort's true enemy.

Hermione was shocked when she realized that the Minister was denying the return of Voldemort. It was beyond belief when the Daily Prophet started printing articles declaring Dumbledore and Harry delusional liars. She found it hard to believe that anyone would believe that. To her shock, many did believe what was printed.

All of these thoughts were in the back of her mind as Hermione prepared to watch her first Wizengamot session. She had been surprised that she had been invited along on the shopping trip with the Weasleys. She was even more surprised by the presence of Lady Black and Winky. Lady Black had been unexpectedly nice.

The bigger surprise was Winky. Winky was sober. Winky was bossy. Hermione's previous experience with Winky was with a drunk and emotionally devastated house elf. This Winky was confident. This Winky had opinions. This Winky was a protector of Harry's reputation. As a friend of Harry Potter, Hermione should not only want to look her best, but she should also realize that her appearance would reflect on Harry, except Winky never referred to him as Harry. It was always Lord Potter.

That was another thing that left her feeling wrong-footed. Hermione, as a British citizen, could certainly understand hereditary titles. She knew that those that held them took them seriously. She never expected Harry to be one of those people. In fairness, it didn't look like Harry took it all that seriously, but the people around him certainly did.

She had also been very confused by everything that happened on Saturday. Mr. Weasley had announced the evening before that they would have lunch and spend the afternoon at Potter Manor. When everyone erupted into questions, Mr. Weasley smiled and told them that all their questions would be answered the next day. They weren't.

Hermione had assumed that Potter Manor was somehow connected to Harry. She had expected to see him when everyone arrived via floo. Instead, she had been greeted by Lady Black and taken to a large dining room. She had greeted Sirius and Professor Flitwick, who had exclaimed happily at her presence. She had met Mr. Tonks and a bunch of people referred to as staff that included Percy Weasley. Percy was still on the stuffy side but seemed much more relaxed than he had been earlier in the year.

Hermione watched as Lady Black sat at the head of the table. The twins were there and took her, Ron and Ginny to the other end of the table. She had noticed Malfoy there, and that was when the twins told her that Draco was now Draco Black and that Lady Black was formerly Lady Malfoy. She still saw no sign of Harry when food started popping onto the table.

Then Harry arrived and sat down at the other end of the table. That surprised her. Adults were the ones to sit at the ends, not students.

The surprises kept coming. She had so many questions as Harry related how he spent his days. The twin sitting beside her kept shushing her, so Hermione did her best to focus on everything happening and not get lost in her mind.

After lunch, she followed everyone to a small salon decorated in dark brown with red accents. A house elf mentioned that those were the Potter colors. To Hermione's astonishment, Ginny started lecturing Ron about how hard all the Weasley siblings worked for what they had. Hermione had always known Ron was lazy but had not realized how much that differed from the rest of the family. Even Ginny worked every day toward her future career goals.

Watching Mr. Weasley, who was Lord Weasley, take an oath to become Harry's vassal was a shock. How could Harry do that? It was almost like making Mr. Weasley a slave. Hermione couldn't imagine how this was possible. It was bad enough that Harry was willing to do it, but why did Mr. Weasley agree? The questions continued to pile up.

Tea had been a surprise in many ways, but it led to even more questions. Back in the London Manor, dinner had been a quiet affair, and afterward, Hermione had retired to her room to think. She remembered Mr. Weasley saying something to Harry about how some people saw and others did not. Hermione had no idea what that meant, except she wasn't getting it, whatever it was.

After a restless night, Hermione went down to breakfast and sat down at the table just as a familiar snowy owl arrived. To her surprise, Hedwig had a letter for Mr. Weasley which he read to the family.

Dear Arthur,

I wanted to remind you that Potter Manor is available for the entire Weasley household, including Hermione, to enjoy.

Please let Ron and Ginny know there is a full-size quidditch pitch. The broom shed is stocked with a variety of different models. Yes, there is a Firebolt, but unless you are practicing to be a seeker, it is probably not the best choice. I recommend the Nimbus as a chaser's broom, and the Clean Sweeps are better for keeping.

Two elves, Amy and Rory, are interested in exchanging recipes with Molly. They have heard from the Black elves of her skill in the kitchens and invite her to join them any afternoon. I was also asked to remind her that Potter Manor has separate kitchen gardens. She is welcome to anything growing there.

I don't know if Hermione got a chance to see it, but she will enjoy the Potter library. Filius is there most afternoons and would love to discuss charms with an enthusiastic pupil.

I will see you Monday at another exciting Wizengamot education class. I have promised Percy I will try to pay better attention, but I can't make any promises. Maybe it is better if you grew up learning this stuff in bits, but so far, this is the most tedious part of being Head of House Potter.

Sincerely,
Harry

It had never occurred to Hermione that she could go to Potter Manor and talk to Harry. She would finally know what was going on.

It was nearly lunchtime before Hermione, Ron and Ginny flooded to Potter Manor. To her surprise, it was Malfoy, no, Black, that came to greet them.

“What are you doing here?” Ron demanded.

Ignoring the question, Black said, “Welcome to Potter Manor. If you would like to join us for lunch, follow me. Otherwise, you are welcome to any of the manor’s hospitality. Please do not enter rooms with closed doors.”

Draco turned to leave the room and then turned back, “Since my,” here he hesitated, “change in circumstances, I have been reflecting on my previous behaviors. I cannot change what happened in the past, but I hope you will keep an open mind in our future interactions. Although technically we are in different households, both are connected to Harry, and I suspect that will draw us together more.”

Draco led them to a small dining room.

“Blimey,” Ron exclaimed, “how many dining rooms does this place have?”

“Only one,” Draco answered, “but the elves can turn any room into a dining room, and it's no fun to eat at a table that seats a hundred people.”

Fred, George, and a woman with bright pink hair were seated at the table.

“Wotcher, I’m Tonks,” The young woman introduced herself. “Sirius is my cousin.”

“Where is Sirius?” Hermione asked.

“He's having lunch with my mom and Aunt Cissa,” Tonks answered. “They get together every Sunday.”

They all sat around the table, which immediately filled with food. As they started serving themselves, Hermione asked, “Um, Malfoy, I mean Black, can you explain what you meant earlier when you mentioned different households that were both connected to Harry?”

Draco looked surprised at the question. “Harry is Lord Potter and the Weasleys are now under the aegis of Lord Potter. Harry is Lord Black and I am part of the Black family now.”

“What happened to your dad?” Hermione asked as everyone tried to shush her.

“Nothing happened to my father,” Draco answered with a bit of a sneer. “Lord Black dissolved my parents' marriage. My mother wished me to remain with her as a Black.”

“How could Harry dissolve your parents' marriage?” Hermione asked incredulously.

“Harry didn't,” Draco responded. “Lord Black did.”

“But Harry is Lord Black,” Hermione argued.

Draco looked at Tonks who took pity on her cousin and responded, “From what I've heard about you, you'll probably be the Gryffindor fifth-year prefect next year. In a sense, you'll be two people. You'll be Hermione Granger, prefect, and you'll also be Hermione Granger, student. When you go home for holidays, you'll be Hermione Granger, daughter. It's kind of like that.”

“Ooookay,” Hermione responded, trying to sort out the distinctions in her head. “So Harry, as Lord Black, dissolved your parents' marriage. How is that possible?”

“Pure blood marriage contracts usually have clauses to terminate the marriage,” Draco explained. “Often, it has to do with children. For example, if a marriage contract requires at least two children and only one is born, the marriage can be dissolved. Usually, that's done after enough time has passed to reasonably expect another child, but while people are still young enough to bear more children with someone else.”

“Is that what happened to your mom?” Hermione would not quit. Even the twins look scandalized at Hermione's question.

Draco rolled his eyes, “No. The Black family has much more power than the Malfoy family. It was part of the original contract that the Head of House Black could dissolve the marriage at any time for any reason.”

“That's barbaric,” Hermione exclaimed. “I can't believe Harry would do something like that.”

“Harry wouldn't,” Fred responded, “but Lord Black has responsibilities, and as part of fulfilling those responsibilities, he made that choice.”

Draco turned to Hermione and looked almost as if he wanted to reach out and take her hand, “Look, I know that Harry is your friend, but Harry is also the Head of Ancient and Noble Houses. He has sworn oaths to uphold the responsibilities of those Houses. His decision to dissolve my parents' marriage was part of those responsibilities.”

Hermione was devastated. She certainly didn't have any love for the Malfoy family, but this was just wrong. How could Harry do it?

“Speaking of Harry,” Ginny said into the growing silence, “where is he?”

“He's probably at the Keep,” George answered. “At least, that's where he usually spends Sundays.”

“What's the Keep?” Ron asked.

“Peverell Keep,” Fred answered. “That's where Harry lives.”

“He lives there alone?” Hermione asked. If Harry spent the summer mostly alone, it was no wonder he was doing strange things.

“Didn't you read the article in The Prophet, Granger?” Draco asked, this time his sneer was more pronounced. “Harry lives with Filius, Dobby and Winky. He chose them as his family.”

“Are you okay with that?” Ginny asked. She couldn't imagine that any pureblood would accept someone choosing to be family with a half-goblin and two house elves.

“It's what Harry chose,” Draco answered. “It's not my place to have any opinion on the matter.”

“Impressive,” Tonks responded. “That's an excellent answer, cousin.”

“Wait,” Hermione said. “I thought you were Sirius' cousin.”

“My mom and Draco's mom are sisters,” Tonks replied. “Sirius is their cousin. Technically it's more like second cousin something something removed, but it's not worth it to worry about those small details. Cousin is fine.”

“Granger, there are a lot of things about Wizarding society that you don't know,” Draco said, his voice surprisingly gentle. “Maybe you should research and learn a bit more before you start judging Harry. He's had a lot of responsibilities dumped on his shoulders, and frankly, he's doing a damn fine job with them.”

It was the sincerity of Draco's tone that seemed to reach Hermione. “Where would I learn those things?”

“The first thing you have to do,” Tonks answered, “is to set aside judgment. The magical world and the muggle world have a lot of things in common, but some things are so different that unless you've been raised with it, it's tough to understand.”

At Hermione's puzzle look, Tonks continued, “My mother is a pureblood Black raised in a pureblood household. My father is a muggle. I've grown up with both. My mother educated me as any daughter of the House of Black would be educated, despite being banished from the family. My father educated me as a muggle parent would. Neither parent told me one way was better than the other, just that they were different. Just like you wouldn't judge a French person for not being English, you can't judge a magical person for not being muggle. Whether you agree with it or not, Harry has embraced his magical heritage.”

There was not a lot of conversation for the rest of the meal, but before the pudding was served, Draco leaned over and said to Hermione, “I know it seems like Harry has changed a lot, but there is one thing you should know.”

“What's that?” Hermione asked suspiciously.

“Harry saved me,” Draco responded. “My father had every intention of taking me to *him* to be marked after I turned sixteen. That won't happen now.”

“I thought you wanted to be marked,” Ron said.

Draco looked horrified, "Why would you think that?"

"Why wouldn't we?" Ginny asked.

"She does have a point," George pointed out.

Draco was silent as he considered how to respond, "That's fair. Harry isn't the only one that has changed this summer. I do not want to be a slave to anyone, and being part of House Black will make sure that never happens."

"Because of Harry?" Hermione probed.

"Because of Lord Black," Draco responded. "He reminded us that a Black bows to no one."

"Bellatrix LeStrange did," Ron pointed out.

"And she is no longer a Black," Draco answered firmly.

Hermione never made it to the library. Instead, she sat in the orangery with parchment and quill trying to make sense of everything she knew. She started by listing what she considered to be verifiable facts. After she finished the list, she started making a list of questions.

Hermione continued to work on her lists of what she did and did not know. When people started arriving for tea, she set the lists aside.

Sirius sat beside her, "Hey Kiddo, what's up?"

"I'm so confused," Hermione answered. "It seems like everything has changed, but I don't understand why. I wish I could talk to Harry about it."

"Maybe you can," Sirius responded, "but it will be a few days. Harry is in the middle of something really important right now."

"I don't understand why he hasn't told us before now that all this has been happening."

"Hermione," Sirius said in a very gentle voice, "you know why Harry hasn't told you."

"No, I don't," Hermione insisted.

"I was there when the Headmaster told us not to contact Harry," Sirius said. "I heard you arguing with him that it was the wrong thing to do. Despite that, you chose to obey your headmaster instead of listening to your heart and doing what was best for your friend."

"I had to," Hermione said.

"No, you didn't," Sirius responded. "Outside of Hogwarts, Albus Dumbledore has no authority over you. He isn't your parent. He isn't even your magical guardian. He's just another adult."

"Oh," Hermione said. "I never considered it that way. I mean, he has all these positions of authority, so I figured I had to do what he said."

"And he took advantage of that," Sirius answered. "That was a problem, but even when you saw that others made a different choice, you still insisted that your choice to do what Dumbledore wanted was the correct choice."

"So what do I do now?" Hermione asked.

"I'm probably not the best person to ask," Sirius responded. "I need to see a mind healer three times a week just to stay reasonably sane."

"Is it helping?"

"To my surprise, it is," Sirius said. "It's been challenging, but I realized that if I wanted a place in Harry's life, I had to deal with all the crap I've been through."

Hermione reached over and took Sirius' hand, "I'm glad things are better for you."

"They are, but I want you to consider that if I had listened to Dumbledore, I would still be a fugitive hiding in a house I never wanted to be in."

"What made you leave?"

"Harry," Sirius answered. "He sent me a note. It said, 'Please trust me and go with Dobby.' I did and found myself at Gringotts."

"Why Gringotts?"

"Harry was there. He had only been out of school for a week and was working on getting me exonerated. His advisors wanted me to become Lord Black. They felt that would make things easier."

"Why didn't you? Why did Harry become Lord Black, and you became the Heir?"

"I never wanted to be Lord Black. I ran away from that when I was sixteen. After twelve years in Azkaban, I could not become Head of House. Plus, I realized that while I made Harry my heir, it was my grandfather, the previous Lord Black, that named Harry as Heir to House Black. Harry was the one intended to be the next Lord Black."

"Why would he choose Harry?"

"Apparently, he had some sort of vision, and before he died, my grandfather declared Harry as Heir."

"Whatever the reason," Narcissa interjected, "it was the best choice the old bastard could have made."

Hermione started. She had been so caught up in Sirius' story that she hadn't noticed everyone else gathered around.

"So you're not upset that Harry is Lord Black?"

"I was," Narcissa admitted, "but after that first Black family dinner it was clear that Harry was exactly what House Black needed."

Hermione pulled her finger out of the pensieve. She had watched the memory of Saturday's tea twice. Fred had suggested that she spend the night at the manor and watch the memories in the Black pensieve. She had been so stunned by all the revelations on Saturday that she hadn't absorbed all the details. As she did the first time she had reviewed the memories, Hermione immediately began writing down notes. So much had been said, and she still struggled to reconcile it with the Harry she thought she knew. Could someone really change so much in so little time?

She read through all the notes she had made throughout the day and evening at the manor and began sorting them chronologically. As she reviewed them, she began to see a pattern. There were two things she knew about Harry. He was a great wizard, and he was a good person. She had always considered Harry a bit lazy, but if she thought about it, she realized it was more a case of motivation. When Harry wanted something, he worked for it. When it wasn't important to him, Harry did what he needed to do and moved on.

A house elf popped into the room, "Miss Hermy need sleep."

Hermione looked at the small being in front of her, "What is your name?"

"I be June," the elf answered.

"Hello, June," Hermione said. "How long have you known Harry?"

"June meet Lord Potter when he come to Manor. He bond with all elves."

"All the elves at the manor?" Hermione clarified.

"Yes, miss. Best day ever," June answered.

"What made it the best day?"

"Finally have bond," June responded. "Old master died and June come to Manor to work. Lots of magic here, almost enough."

"I don't understand," Hermione admitted.

"Miss Hermy talk to Bibi tomorrow. Now Miss Hermy sleep," the elf insisted.

Hermione sighed. She was beginning to realize that no one could out stubborn a house elf. She set aside her notes and went into the adjoining bedroom to get ready for bed.

Hermione woke the following day determined to talk to Harry. Unfortunately, her determination was thwarted. She learned at breakfast that Harry usually ate breakfast with his

chosen family at the Keep. She also learned that Monday was when Harry had meetings outside of the manor. This Monday morning was an exception as he continued to learn about the wiz. She would probably see him at lunch.

To her surprise, Hermione's morning was occupied with clothes shopping. While she thought she had agreed to a nice robe to wear to the Wizengamot meeting, Hermione found herself with quite a few new garments. As she watched a bewildered Mrs. Weasley submit to the whirlwind that was Narcissa Black in a clothing shop, Hermione's sense of humor asserted itself. Sitting back with Ginny, both girls enjoyed watching as first Mrs. Weasley and then Ron was subjected to sartorial revision. By the time it was Ginny's turn, the youngest Weasley was quite eager to have her wardrobe updated.

It wasn't until she was sitting in a restaurant with Lady Black, Mrs. Weasley and the youngest Weasleys that Hermione realized Winky was no longer with them. No matter how radically Harry was changing the relationships between elves and wizards, most of the Wizarding world barely tolerated the non-human members of the magical world.

After lunch, Hermione sought out Bibi. The old elf sat with Hermione and patiently answered all her questions. When Hermione had written her notes to the last question, she looked at Bibi and asked, "Why couldn't I find any books about house elves?"

"Bibi not know but maybe young Miss will write one."

Hermione was revising the notes that she had taken during her conversation with BiBi when Draco Black walked into the room, "Come on, Granger. Harry is doing his weekly magical training here and we're allowed to watch. Let's go see what he's learned."

Hermione was surprised, both at the news that Harry had weekly training and Drago's eagerness to watch. "How come he has magical training?"

"You've learned about House magic?" At Hermione's nod, Draco continued, "Harry took on the magic of eight Houses. That's a lot of extra magic. He had to learn how to integrate it with his own magic."

"Do you know what he's been learning?"

"No idea," Draco answered, "but I know he also practices with Flitwick every night."

Hermione followed Draco through the gardens back to the quidditch pitch. It looked like the entire household had gathered outside a blue translucent dome. Inside was the very old elf, Gorin, who had spoken on Saturday. Beside him were Harry and Professor Snape.

Before Hermione could ask any questions, Gorin stepped up to the dome's edge where the largest gathering of people was. His voice was amplified when he began to talk, "Harry has been studying with me and Filius Flitwick. Today he will duel with Severus Snape to see if he can apply his lessons to a new opponent."

"The rules are as follows: The use of wands is permitted but not required. No spells are allowed that will require more than 12 hours of healing time. The duel will end when either opponent yields or is unconscious."

Hermione looked around. As far as she could tell, everyone that had been at Saturday's tea was there to watch. She also noticed a centaur, house elves wearing the Potter, Black, Gryffindor and Slytherin crests, plus several guests she didn't recognize. Professor Flitwick was standing with Winky and Dobby and Dobby was bouncing from excitement. Hermione moved with Draco to stand with the twins, Luna and Neville.

What followed was like nothing Hermione had ever seen before. She had watched older students dueling. During the Triwizard Tournament, Durmstrang students often practiced dueling on the grounds regardless of the weather. Those duels have been orderly exchanges of spells. There was nothing orderly about what transpired in the dome. Offensively, Professor Snape had the advantage. He was faster at casting spells and had a more extensive repertoire. Defensively, Harry had an advantage. He both dodged and swatted away spells. He tended to cast with his wand while swatting away spells with his hand.

Both participants started with simple spells. As they took each other's measure, the spells became increasingly complicated. There were a lot of spells that she did not recognize, but Draco and the twins seemed to follow most of what was going on and gave a running commentary.

Eventually, Harry simply outlasted his former professor. He cast an overpowered Lumos that left everyone both inside and outside the dome virtually blind. In the aftermath, he apparated behind Snape and stunned him.

Once Gorin had acknowledged his victory, Harry pointed his wand at Snape and revived him. To everyone's surprise, Snape sat up and grinned at Harry. Harry returned the grin and reached out of hand to pull Snape up. They were enthusiastically talking to one another when Gorin dropped the dome.

As everyone started to rush forward, Gorin said loudly, "Harry, Severus, go get cleaned up. We'll see you both at tea."

All anyone at tea could talk about was the duel while Snape and Harry sat in adjacent chairs and consumed copious amounts of food. Eventually, Harry sat down his plate and stood. The room quieted almost immediately.

"So many of you have been working so hard and I cannot thank you enough for everything you've done. With magic's blessing, we will take our first steps to bring balance to our world. There are no guaranteed outcomes. We can each of us only do what we have been called to do.

"Whether you are remaining here or returning to your homes for the evening, relax. Enjoy a good dinner and get a good night's rest. I will see many of you in the morning."

When the Wizengamot broke for lunch, Hermione followed and found herself in what appeared to be a conference room with a large table taking up most of the space. Suddenly the table was set and platters of food appeared. Harry stepped into the room with the twins on either side. Hermione was about to go to Harry when a hand grabbed her elbow.

“Remember, you are here today as a spectator,” Ted Tonks said in a low voice.

Hermione nodded and allowed Ted to escort her to the table. He took the seat next to her and started filling his plate. As he ate, he explained that there was a whole floor of rooms set aside for Wizengamot members to use. There was a ministry cafeteria, but most preferred to let their house elves take care of things. Since Harry was here today as Lord Potter and the room had been reserved in his name, the Potter elves were taking care of lunch.

“Does it really matter that much?” Hermione asked. “I mean, which elves do what.”

“It matters to the elves,” Ted answered. “Elves take their bonds very seriously, especially when it is an opportunity to serve Harry directly.”

Hermione nodded. She had learned a great deal from Bibi and understood better why elves prefer to be bonded, even if the bond was not reciprocated.

“You planned all this,” Hermione said. “You came here planning to get rid of Dumbledore.”

“We came here planning to try,” Ted corrected. “There was no guarantee, but the actions of Dumbledore and his proxy certainly helped.”

“I know Dumbledore has made some mistakes, but does that justify removing him from all his positions?” Hermione questioned.

“You know Harry very well,” Ted responded. “Do you think he would act against someone for a mistake?”

“No,” Hermione answered. “Harry is very forgiving, but I don't understand what Dumbledore did that was so bad.”

Ted lowered his fork and turned toward Hermione, “Miss Granger, you are a very bright young woman. Understandably, you want to know what's going on around you. However, you are still young, and this is adult business.”

Hermione bristled, “I'm older than Harry.”

“Sometimes,” Ted responded, “it isn't about chronological age. Harry has accepted adult responsibilities. If you want to remain part of his world, you must do the same.”

“I don't even know how to do that,” Hermione said. “Do I need to also be emancipated?”

“No, it's more about how you view the world. Are you ready to look at the world and judge it for what it is, not what you want to be? Are you prepared to question people in authority, not simply to challenge but to genuinely understand so that you can make your own decisions?”

"Most of us grow up gradually. There's not a set moment when we go from being a child to being an adult. At some point, we look back, and we realize that we've become an adult and we've accepted adult responsibilities.

"Harry didn't have that luxury. He realized that if his life continued as it was, he might not survive. He realized that he had to do something deliberately different. In the course of doing that, he was presented with opportunities. Those opportunities would give him what he wanted but required him to accept adult responsibilities far earlier than anticipated."

"Do you believe that?" Hermione asked. "Do you really believe that Harry might not have survived if things hadn't changed?"

"Based on what I learned of Harry's history both before and at Hogwarts, I think he was likely correct."

Hermione sat there, stunned. Surely, it hadn't been that bad, but what if it was? Hermione finished her lunch in silence, contemplating what Ted had said. She'd never felt so uncertain and she didn't like that feeling.

Shortly before they were to return to the chamber, Winky popped in holding a very young Fawkes.

"I'm sorry, Harry, but firebird be very anxious," Winky said, holding the bird out toward Harry.

Harry took Fawkes gently in his hands and bent his head to look the phoenix directly in his eyes. After a moment, Harry looked at Winky and said, "Thank you."

After Winky left, Harry stood, "Many believed that this phoenix was bound to Albus Dumbledore. In truth, Fawkes chose, for many hundreds of years, to live at Hogwarts. In his arrogance, Dumbledore forced a bond and artificially bound Fawkes. Since removing that bond that forced a burning, Fawkes has been healing from the magical damage. A phoenix bond is easiest while the bird is young. Fawkes doesn't want to wait for another burning day to claim his wizard.

Harry walked to where Severus Snape was still seated and held out his hands, "He's chosen you," Harry said gently. "Will you accept?"

Hermione watched as Snape stood and took the young phoenix in his arms. A soft golden glow surrounded them for a minute, and then Fawkes chirped and began to sing.

Hermione realized she had witnessed a miracle. Two damaged individuals had started healing and found one another, and Harry had been an essential part of that.

As she looked around the room, Hermione realized that in a few short months, Harry Potter had been changing lives. She didn't know everything that had happened, and she didn't fully understand what she did know. What she knew was that she could set that aside and accept Harry for who he was becoming, or she would lose him from her life.

Hermione didn't know if she would ever have the friendship with Harry she had previously had. It made her sad to think it might be lost, but what was happening around Harry was bigger than one friendship.

Hermione turned to Ted Tonks, "I want in."

Next Steps

Chapter Notes

August 8-10

August 13

DUMBLEDORE OUT

Rita Skeeter fumed as she read the headline. The story should have been hers but two weeks ago she had been called into the editor's office. He had told her that she was restricted to society gossip. If she wanted to report on actual events or people, she had to be able to prove that what she wrote was true. Rita didn't know if someone had her editor by the balls or if it went higher. Every article she submitted was gone over and most were not approved for publication. She had approached Witch Weekly and several European publications. All of them refuse to work with her. No matter how juicy the gossip, no one would print her work. While she received a base salary from the Daily Prophet, the majority of her income came from the bonuses she received for each published story. It was more than a hit to her ego. It was beginning to impact her standard of living.

Leadership positions in the magical world often carried magical burdens. The Headmaster of Hogwarts carried the weight of the school's ancient wards. The Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot carried the weight of ancient magic that regulated the august body. Chief Mugwump of the International Confederation of Wizards also carried magic specific to the tasks demanded by an organization that spanned the world. Accepting any of these positions meant accepting the magic that accompanied them. Likewise, leaving the position, or, in Dumbledore's case, being fired from the position, resulted in the magic being stripped away.

As Dumbledore sat in the shielded and isolated room he had been banished to, he was unaware of these losses. When the door unsealed itself indicating the end of the Wizengamot session, the magic inherent to his previously held positions responded. The sudden loss left Albus Dumbledore unconscious. When he was found by an elf several hours later, he was immediately removed to Saint Mungo's. It would be two days before he regained consciousness and realized the loss of both magic and influence that he had become accustomed to.

At the moment Albus Dumbledore had the magic of Hogwarts wards stripped from him, Harry was standing from his seat in the chamber. The sudden weight of the Hogwarts wards settled upon him and was immediately welcomed by his Gryffindor and Slytherin magic. Filius had warned Harry that this might happen. Equally likely was the possibility that the wards would settle on the Deputy Headmistress. Even knowing of the possibility, Harry was

still caught off guard by the addition to his magic. He knew that he would hold his connection to the wards until he actively transferred it to the new Headmaster.

The day caught up to him in the middle of tea. One moment he was setting down his plate and the next he was slumped against George. George had barely registered the extra weight against his shoulder when Winky popped in. She popped him upstairs expecting him to wake in a few hours. Instead, Harry slept through dinner and most of the night. After a pre-dawn flight over the estate, Harry sat down at his desk and enjoyed a hearty breakfast while pulling out a copy of the Hogwarts charter.

Lucius Malfoy read the morning paper feeling very satisfied. For years he had worked to marginalize Albus Dumbledore but in one morning, the wizard had been deprived of his power nexus. While Lucius may not have dealt the killing blows, he was confident that his years of undermining Dumbledore's authority had contributed to the overwhelming majority that had carried all three votes. After breakfast, he would start contacting members of the Hogwarts Board. While Minerva McGonagall was a competent witch and educator, she had been Dumbledore's lackey. Far better to leave her as Deputy than promote her to Headmistress. Perhaps he could persuade Severus to take the job as Headmaster. Despite the setbacks a few years ago, Lucius still had enough sway to get a majority on his side.

Hermione stepped through the floo at Potter Manor and was met by June. At Ted Tonks' suggestion, she was moving into Potter Manor for the remainder of the summer holiday.

"Good morning, Miss Hermy. June show you to rooms." With that pronouncement, the house elf turned and walked out, depending on Hermione to follow.

Hermione had assumed she would be in the same room she had stayed in a few days ago. She was surprised to be led to a small suite on the first floor. There was a sitting room that opened onto a balcony overlooking the back gardens. The bedroom was spacious with a cozy reading area in front of a fireplace. The bathroom was large with both a shower and a large tub. Everything was in shades of soft yellow with bright red and orange accents. It was like being surrounded by a sunrise.

"This is perfect," Hermione exclaimed.

June beamed, "I is glad you like. June decorate a happy place for you to live."

"Live?" Hermione echoed, a little confused.

"You is Lord Potter's friend," June explained. "This always be yours when you want."

"Oh." Hermione hadn't expected that and was a little overwhelmed.

"June be your elf always. I unpack. Lady Black in breakfast room waiting for you."

Hermione blinked at the dismissal and finally turned to leave. Back on the ground floor, she quickly found the breakfast room. Hermione took a seat beside Lady Black and across from Draco.

“Good morning, dear,” Narcissa said. “I’m moving into Rose Cottage this afternoon. I would like it if you could join me for lunch a couple of times a week.”

A cup of tea popped in front of Hermione and she fixed it to her liking while she considered the request. Prior to the recent week, her experience of adult witches had been with her teachers and Mrs. Weasley. Lady Black was something entirely different. It was a good opportunity.

“Did someone ask you to do this?”

“Oh no,” Narcissa answered, “though it is understandable that you might wonder.”

“Then why?”

“I like you,” Narcissa answered simply.

“You like me?”

“Yes,” Narcissa responded. “I also love being a mother and while I wouldn't trade Draco for the world, I have always wanted a daughter. Consider this a bit of self-indulgence on my part.”

Hermione nodded, “Thank you for your honesty. I would love to have lunch with you regularly.”

“Excellent,” Narcissa said with enthusiasm. “Let's start tomorrow. The floo address is Rose Cottage. It's a lovely townhouse in Hogsmeade. As you might guess, it is well known for the beautiful roses that surround it.”

“I'm looking forward to it,” Hermione said with a smile.

Percy entered the orangery after lunch. It was the easiest and most comfortable place for a meeting this size. He noted that the elves had changed the color scheme to Potter colors since the meeting was on behalf of Lord Potter. Of all the adjustments Percy had to make in his new job, the constantly changing decor was the one that still caught him by surprise.

Percy reviewed his notes as people started trickling in. The first to arrive were Hermione and Draco, followed by the twins. Filius, Remus and Sirius arrived together, debating whether conjurations should be considered charms or a form of transfiguration. Luna Lovegood arrived with her father and both sat next to the twins.

Percy knew that the temperature in the orangery was kept at a constant level but he would have sworn that it got noticeably cooler when an imposing Augusta Longbottom arrived with Neville. Next to arrive was his mother with Ron and Ginny.

The last to arrive was Severus. The former potions professor no longer dressed in head-to-toe black unless he was in the potions lab. Two elves had cornered him one day and insisted that he ask Harry to transfer their bond. Severus learned that day that no amount of stubbornness or will could stand up to the desires of an elf. Those desires included a complete wardrobe overhaul. In a matter of hours, Severus had trousers in varying shades of gray and shirts in pale shades of lavender and blue. As a compromise, as much as anything with an elf was a compromise, his open robes were either black or dark blue. The twins had a betting pool on when Severus would have a new hairstyle.

Percy stood, "Thank you for coming. I'd like to start"

"Where is Mr. Tonks?" Augusta Longbottom interrupted. "For that matter, where is Lord Potter? I understood this meeting was at his request.

"Mr. Tonks asked me to handle this meeting," Percy answered. "Lord Potter will be here later to answer any questions."

"And what exactly do you do around here?"

Several people stared between Percy and Augusta while occasionally glancing at Molly to see her reaction to the confrontation.

"I am Lord Potter's assistant," Percy answered, trying to stay calm. "If you will allow me to continue, this will be quicker for everyone."

Augusta gave a regal nod and sat back.

Percy continued, "I am going to start by sharing some general information about OWLs and NEWTs. Some of you may know this already but please be patient.

"There are two primary reasons that you take OWL exams. The first is a ministry requirement. To be considered an adult, you need to be of legal age and pass at least one OWL in a core subject. The core subjects are Transfiguration, Charms, Defense, Herbology and Potions. If you can pass an OWL in any of those subjects, you are considered to have enough self-control to have adult wand rights.

"The second reason to take OWLs is to demonstrate that you are qualified for NEWT studies. At Hogwarts, most teachers require at least Exceeds Expectations to continue into NEWT-level classes. A few will not accept you in a NEWT class unless you get an Outstanding. While receiving an Acceptable is enough for wand rights, it is not enough for NEWT studies.

"NEWT exams only serve one purpose outside of continuing education. They can help you get your first job. If you are interested in a job at the Ministry, you will need at least four NEWTs with Exceeds Expectations or better. Some employers look at NEWTs as a way to distinguish between candidates. If everything else is equal, they will generally hire the person who has superior NEWT scores.

"Once you have experience with a job, that is what matters. Once you've been working for a while, no one cares about your OWL or NEWT scores. Your teachers at Hogwarts will

emphasize how important these scores are but it is important to keep it in perspective.

“There is one other thing about OWLs and NEWTs that you need to know. You do not need to go to a Wizarding school to take these exams. Anyone over the age of 13 can schedule an OWL exam with the Ministry. You can schedule a NEWT exam anytime over the age of 15. There is no age limit on when you can take exams. Unlike at Hogwarts or other schools, you do not have to take all your exams at the same time. While your Hogwarts tuition covers the cost of taking OWLs and NEWTs, there is a fee for taking the exam directly from the ministry.

“Lord Potter and several members of his household will not be returning to Hogwarts. They will receive private tutoring and will take exams directly from the Ministry. Lord Potter is inviting any that wish to withdraw from Hogwarts and take advantage of the tutors available.

“To help you make the most informed decision possible, Remus Lupin will explain how the tutoring will be structured.”

“Thank you, Percy,” Remus said as he stood. “We are not attempting to replicate the Hogwarts experience. That isn't possible and if that is what you want then you should continue at Hogwarts. This is an opportunity for those who do not thrive in a boarding school environment to have a better educational experience.

“There will be one class a week in each subject offered. Between classes, you will work independently to complete assignments and move forward with your educational objectives. Because of the individualized nature of the tutoring, you can move as fast as you are capable. After the first lesson, if you show up unprepared, you will no longer be welcome. Any who take advantage of this opportunity must be willing to do the work.

“Filius Flitwick will be tutoring charms. I don't think I need to tell you about his qualifications. Sirius Black will be tutoring transfiguration. He received Outstandings in both OWLs and NEWTs and when he is not tutoring or fulfilling his responsibilities to House Black, Sirius will be working on his mastery in transfiguration.

“Severus Snape will be offering tutoring in potions. His only requirement is that you have a sincere desire to learn potions.

“I will be in charge of defense tutoring. Sometimes I will be teaching it but other times the lessons may be taught by Filius, Sirius or Severus, depending on the subject area.

“Herbology will be taught by Bob. Some of you have already met him. He worked in the Hogwarts greenhouses for quite a few decades and assisted three different herbology professors.

“We are still interviewing tutors for Care of Magical Creatures, Arithmancy and Runes.”

“Are you telling me that Herbology will be taught by a house elf?” Augusta asked in a scathing tone.

Immediately Bob popped into the orangery, “This elf teaches Herbology to Lord Potter. Do you imply Lord Potter has inferior teacher?”

Before Augusta could reply, Harry was there. With a wave of his hand, his gardening smock and gloves were exchanged for a deep green robe. “Is there a problem?”

“Why is the Head of House Potter being taught by a house elf?”

“He offered,” Harry answered, “I thought it would be foolish not to take advantage of his experience and knowledge.”

“You think that experience and knowledge is greater than what you would receive at Hogwarts?”

“Definitely,” Harry responded. “Bob has worked with three Herbology professors and watched and learned as they taught hundreds of students. He not only has that knowledge but his own experience and magic. I would challenge you to find a better Herbology tutor.”

Everyone waited while Augusta considered Harry's words. Finally, she nodded, “Very well.”

Harry nodded to Percy, “Do you need me?”

“I was just about to open it up to questions,” Percy answered. “I would appreciate it if you would stay.”

Harry went and sat beside Sirius. There was silence and finally, Xenophilus Lovegood spoke, “What will this tutoring cost?”

“Sorry about that,” Percy said. “I forgot that part. Tuition at Hogwarts has to be paid by August 20th. If you have already paid next year's tuition, withdrawing before that date will allow you a full refund. As to the cost of tutoring, there is none.”

Once again, Augusta Longbottom was at the fore, “I'm afraid I couldn't accept that.”

“Why not?” Harry asked.

“House Longbottom does not accept charity,” was the abruptly delivered answer.

“First of all, it is not charity,” Harry said, drawing the full mantle of House Potter to himself. “It is not being offered to House Longbottom. It is being offered to my friend Neville and my other friends that are gathered here. It is not about Houses or politics.”

“Everything is about Houses and politics,” Augusta rebutted.

“For you, perhaps,” Harry said. “Magic has demanded that I participate in the business of Houses and politics and I have accepted that mandate. How I participate is guided by the bonds of family, friendship and love.”

Filius interrupted the stand-off, “Perhaps it would be better if we took a break. Take some time and consider. If you have questions about logistics, you can ask any of us. There are lots

of options but you each need to do what is best for you.”

“There is one question, I’d like to ask,” Hermione said. At Percy’s nod, she continued, “Is there a particular reason all of us are being offered this? Is it simply everyone that has been around this summer or is there some other reason?”

Percy turned a helpless look at Harry. Harry looked at Draco and at Draco’s nod stood up, “As Lord Black, I consider it inadvisable for Draco Black to return to Hogwarts. He was given the option of private tutoring or transferring to another school. He chose the tutoring.”

Harry looked over to the twins and at a look from them continued, “As Lord Peverell, I have signed an agreement with Heirs Prewitt to develop and distribute a line of joke products. One of the requirements is that they receive NEWTs in the subjects relevant to their business. In their case, that means Potions, Charms, Transfiguration and Herbology. After discussing their options with three of their former teachers, they decided private tutoring would give them the best way to meet both their educational requirements and business interests.”

Harry continued despite Molly’s exclamations, “I decided before I even left Hogwarts that I would not be returning. I have worked with Filius, Sirius, Ted and Gorin to create the best plan for my needs.”

“So since you were already going to have tutors available, you decided to offer it to your friends,” Hermione concluded when Harry paused to take a drink of water.

“Something like that,” Harry agreed. “I know that some of you have had challenges at Hogwarts that you wouldn’t have if you were tutored. With Draco, Fred, George and I here every day, you would have opportunities for social interaction. The Potter and Black libraries rival the Hogwarts library.”

“What about quidditch?” Ginny asked in a small voice.

Molly turned to her, scandalized, “Ginny, is that really important?”

“It is to me,” Ginny answered defiantly.

“Ginny,” Harry said to get her attention, “Bring your parents here tomorrow morning and I’ll tell you what options you have in regards to quidditch.”

When Ginny nodded in acknowledgment, Harry stood, “Tea is at the usual time. Hermione, why don’t you join me? I have some work to do in the herpetarium.”

After an enjoyable hour in the herpetarium, Harry and Hermione joined their friends for tea. As he sat in his usual spot, a plate of miniature sandwiches and a goblet appeared on the low table in front of him. He enjoyed a cucumber sandwich and then took a sip of his beverage.

“Here,” he thrust his goblet at Ron, “try this.”

“Blimey,” Ron exclaimed after taking a sip, “this is good.” He handed the goblet to Hermione, “Try it.”

Hermione took a sip and nodded then wrinkled her nose, "Is this tea?"

Harry laughed and explained, "Dobby decided that I didn't eat enough so he started not only making sure I had plenty to eat every meal but snacks as well." Harry paused as his plate automatically filled with food, "Dobby also loves to cook."

Harry took a few bites and watched Ron start to shovel food into his mouth. Looking away, Harry met Hermione's eyes and continued, "So one day, Dobby is exploring the area around the Leaky Cauldron and discovers a muggle restaurant. So now once or twice a week, Dobby goes into a muggle restaurant and watches them cook, then comes home and makes what he saw." Harry had thoroughly captured Hermione's interest as he showed a side of elves she had not witnessed. "A few weeks ago, he heard someone ask for "iced tea". Turns out the restaurant owner's wife is American and she brewed some for the customer. I like it. Sometimes he makes it with lemon or mint."

On Thursday morning, Harry stepped into his office to find his solicitor and his publicist waiting for him. Without a word, Borner handed Harry that morning's Daily Prophet. The front page featured a picture of Cornelius Fudge and the subsequent interview. If it had been the typical self-promotion, Harry would have brushed it aside. Instead, Fudge was claiming that Dumbledore's fall from grace was proof that both Albus Dumbledore and Harry Potter were lying about the return of Voldemort.

Harry closed his eyes and leaned back in his chair. This was not what he wanted to deal with. His best hope was that the goblins would find all the soul pieces and then the ministry would deal with Dark Lords and Death Eaters. Gringotts was doing its part but hoping for a competent ministry wasn't accomplishing anything.

"What do you want me to do?" Harry asked as he sat up and looked at both men.

"We can continue to undermine Fudge and boost your credibility," Borner responded.

"However, this is a direct attack on you, and Lord Potter would be better served with a direct response."

"How direct?"

"Cornelius Fudge has called the Head of an Ancient and Noble House a liar," Ted answered.

"You need to hit back hard. Legally, financially, politically and magically."

Harry motioned for Ted to continue.

"I would like to file a lawsuit against both Fudge and the Ministry for defamation of character. I would ask for reparations of at least 500,000 galleons. You could then offer to dismiss the Ministry from the lawsuit on the condition that Fudge is removed as minister."

That covers legal, financial and political," Harry said. "How do I hit back magically?"

"Challenge him to a duel," Ted responded.

“He won’t fight. He’ll use a representative,” Harry said.

“Probably, but I’m confident you could hold your own,” Ted rejoined.

“I’m fifteen.”

“Yes and that means a lack of experience,” Ted said, “but you make up for it in sheer power. We all watched you with Snape this week. Granted, you both weren’t trying to do any harm but you got the best of him. Outside of Dumbledore and Tom Riddle, I don’t think you could find anyone magically stronger than Severus Snape.”

“I understand that your claim to House Gaunt and House Slytherin is by Right of Conquest,” Borner said.

Harry blinked and then his brain caught up, “You want me to goad a Dark Lord.”

“If the ministry wants proof, an angry Dark Lord would certainly provide that,” Borner pointed out as if it was the most reasonable thing in the world.

“I barely survived my last confrontation with him,” Harry pointed out.

“But you did survive,” Borner answered back, “and from what I understand, that was with a fraction of the magic you now command.”

Harry stood and started pacing around the room. Periodically, he would stop, look at the two men, and then resume walking. After several circuits of the room, he threw himself back behind his desk, “Fine.”

There was a moment of silence and then Tonks asked, “What does that mean?”

Harry sat up and looked at his solicitor, “File the lawsuit as soon as you have it ready. Borner, make sure it is well publicized.

“I have a meeting with the Weasleys this morning. Other than that, I don’t want to be disturbed. I need to figure out this afternoon’s interview.”

After both men had left, Harry pulled out a piece of parchment and started writing. He signed and sealed the document and called for Dobby.

“What my Harry need?”

Harry looked at Dobby and smiled. Dobby always wore the Potter crest but the rest of his outfit was in his usual eclectic style.

“Please take this to Bill Weasley and wait for an answer,” Harry said, handing Dobby the parchment.

Arthur, Molly and Ginny Weasley stepped through the floo into the arrivals room at Potter Manor and were immediately met by two elves.

“Miss Ginny, please follow me,” the younger elf said. “Lord Potter has surprise.”

Ginny looked to her father for permission and then followed the elf. She was led to the quidditch pitch where the air was filled with flyers wearing the dark green and gold of the Holyhead Harpies. A woman veered out of formation and landed beside Ginny.

“Ginny Weasley?” At Ginny’s nod, the woman continued, “I’m Gwennog Jones of the Holyhead Harpies. Lord Potter tells me that you have been working hard with the goal of a professional quidditch career.”

Ginny had recognized Jones immediately and found herself able to do little more than nod in acknowledgment.

Jones laughed, “Easy, lass. I put my robe on one arm at a time like everyone else. Grab a broom and join us. Let’s see what you’ve got.”

The next two hours were the best hours of Ginny’s life. She started with some seeker drills and then moved to chaser exercises. She also did a turn with the beaters and spent some time in front of the goalposts acting as keeper. At the end of the time, Ginny was both exhausted and exhilarated.

After putting away the borrowed broom, Ginny followed Jones to a small salon where her parents were talking quietly. Ginny quickly introduced her parents to the quidditch captain and they all sat down.

“Lord Potter asked me here to evaluate Ginny’s potential as a quidditch player,” Jones began.

“I don’t understand,” Molly responded, “why would you do that? How do you know Harry?”

Jones smiled, “I know of Harry Potter through his participation on the Gryffindor quidditch team. There isn’t a team in Britain that hasn’t been hoping that he would play professionally. I know Lord Potter because he is a part owner of the Harpies. He asked me to come and give an assessment of a student who had dreams of going pro.”

"It's just a silly schoolgirl dream," Molly began.

Jones interrupted her, “Dreams are where we all start. Ginny not only has talent but it is obvious that she has worked hard to build her skills as a quidditch player. I can’t promise a career. What I can offer is a chance.”

Jones turned to Ginny, “Keep practicing and once you have your OWL, I’ll give you a tryout for the team. Starting players usually begin with the reserves but you have real promise.”

Lunch was a raucous affair with the Holyhead Harpies in attendance. Harry stopped by at the beginning of the meal to greet everyone but then went to have a private lunch with Bill.

Every interview was difficult but usually Harry had a plan. He sat down knowing at least two things he wanted to focus on. Today was different. His head was full. Originally, he had planned to focus on House Gaunt and the consequences of intermarriage between close family members. The interview with Fudge had changed things. While Harry agreed with the necessity of speaking out, he didn't have a plan. After an information-filled lunch with Bill where he learned everything the goblins had uncovered about Tom Riddle and his evolution into Lord Voldemort, Harry meditated. He sunk into his magic and just let himself feel. When Winky crawled into his lap to start bringing him out of his trance-like state, Harry was relaxed. He still didn't know what he would say but he trusted magic.

Harry reviewed what Borner had taught him about effective communication. He had learned about using short, powerful phrases and then repeating them to drive the point home. He had two goals: counter Fudge's propaganda and make Voldemort angry enough to do something rash. He hoped to do that without looking as nervous as he felt.

Lord Potter Tells All

In an interview on Thursday, August 10th, Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge declared Boy-Who-Lived, Harry Potter, an attention-seeking liar for the claim that the Dark Lord known as You-Know-Who had been resurrected. The following day both the Minister and the Ministry of Magic were served with lawsuits on behalf of Lord Potter for libel and defamation of character. In addition, Harry Potter challenged Cornelius Fudge to an honor duel.

I began my interview with Lord Potter by discussing these events:

Some feel that your response to the Minister of Magic is an overreaction. What were your reasons for taking the actions that you did?

This is not the first time that Cornelius Fudge has called my character into question. If I were Harry Potter, a teenage student, such a character assassination would be both despicable and pathetic. However, I am not Harry Potter, a teenage student. I am Lord Harry James Potter, head of an Ancient and Noble House. Fudge has attacked not only my person but also my House. That is unacceptable and I challenge you to find any Head of House that would not respond to their utmost ability.

Why include the Ministry in your lawsuit against Cornelius Fudge?

The article identified the speaker as Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge. He was not speaking as a private citizen but as a representative of the government that serves all of magical Britain. As such, the Ministry is responsible for the words and actions of its minister.

While many agree with you, others would rightly point out that holding the Ministry responsible will cost innocent wixen. How would you answer that charge?

It's simple. If the Ministry of Magic does not want to be held responsible for the words and actions of Cornelius Fudge as its minister then it needs to find a new Minister of Magic.

Are you saying that you would withdraw your lawsuit against the Ministry of Magic if Fudge is no longer minister?

Absolutely. I would consider that action as an apology for the misbegotten words of an incompetent leader.

Would you also withdraw the challenge for an honor duel?

No. While the lawsuit is on behalf of House Potter, the challenge comes from me personally. Cornelius Fudge in his cowardice and unwillingness to accept the difficult responsibilities that come with being Minister has wronged me on numerous occasions.

Can you give details about these occasions?

The first occurred when he attempted to have my innocent godfather Kissed despite the testimony of witnesses that questioned the suitability of that course of action. Anyone with a minimum of competence would have called for an investigation. Instead, Cornelius Fudge took the easy way out.

When it was discovered that a presumed dead Death Eater had masqueraded as a Hogwarts professor, Fudge immediately had the criminal Kissed. Once again, instead of calling for an investigation and learning all of the facts, Cornelius Fudge took the easy way out.

That pattern has continued. When I was kidnapped from the Triwizard Tournament and used in a dark ritual to resurrect Voldemort, Fudge's immediate response was denial. Again, the responsible action would have been to call for an investigation. Instead, Cornelius Fudge took the easy way out.

In the weeks following that event, Cornelius Fudge has been confronted with the innocence of my godfather, Sirius Black, and further evidence of Voldemort's resurrection. Again, the responsible and competent response would have been to investigate. Instead, Cornelius Fudge took the easy way out.

Discovering that I am the Head of an Ancient and Noble House has been a lesson in the necessity for responsible leadership. As a young adult, I should be able to look to older leaders to set an example, not only of competence but also of honor. Cornelius Fudge has demonstrated that not only is he incompetent as a minister but he is a wizard without honor. For that lack of honor, I have challenged him.

As you have pointed out, you are a young man. Do you believe you can challenge a fully qualified Wix?

I think I've already demonstrated my ability to issue a challenge. The real question is if I can survive the challenge. Ironically, no one questioned if a 15-month-old baby could survive an extremely powerful Dark Lord.

Do you believe you could survive that same Dark Lord today?

I already have. At the time of the last encounter, when I was forced to participate in a dark ritual that created a body for the spirit of Voldemort, I was injured and exhausted. I had just witnessed the murder of a classmate. Even in those dire circumstances, I survived.

If You-Know-Who is alive, why hasn't anyone seen him?

Many people have seen him. I've seen him. The circle of Death Eaters that showed up at his summons have seen him. The real question is why they are all hiding now. After all, Voldemort has not been convicted of any crime. He could legally walk into the Ministry or down the street of any wizarding village. So why doesn't he? What is he afraid of?

Of course, considering that he isn't exactly a person, maybe it's understandable that he hasn't been seen in public.

What do you mean?

I just realized that it is incorrect to refer to what happened in that graveyard as a resurrection. A resurrection is what would happen if you were to bring a dead body back to life. Voldemort was a spirit contained in what my advisors tell me is known as a homunculus. The ritual resulted in some sort of human-shaped construct. Yes, it had arms and legs and a head but it in no way looked human. It didn't even have a nose. It was kind of gross looking.

Now that I think about it, I get why it doesn't want to be seen by anyone. If I looked like that, I wouldn't let anyone see me either. It's also understandable why his followers aren't making a big deal of it. Who wants to admit to following that?

You seem to have very strong opinions about the issue of You-Know-Who.

I do, starting with how ridiculous it is to call him You-Know-Who. I've been told that during the earlier years of his terrorism, Voldemort placed a taboo upon his name. However, that taboo was broken the first time I defeated him. Of course, Voldemort is a made-up name. Understandably, people might substitute other made-up names for him. I just think there are better substitutions than You-Know-Who.

Do you have any suggestions?

We could go with something short and sweet like Voldy. That leads to the rhyming Moldy. You could expand that to Moldyshorts. Moldy Voldy also works.

His followers call him the Dark Lord. Considering how ridiculous he looks now, I think it would be more appropriate to call him the Dork Lord, but I'm not sure that dork is slang that the average Wix knows.

Of course, the simplest thing would be to simply call him by his actual name.

Do you know his name?

Tom Marvolo Riddle. Marvolo after his grandfather, Marvolo Gaunt. Tom and Riddle after his muggle father, Tom Riddle of Little Hangleton.

Are you saying that You-Know-Who is a half-blood?

The half-blood son of a squib mother. Considering how powerful Voldemort was, it's a total contradiction of the pure-blood claims of magical superiority.

You-Know-Who claimed to be the heir of Salazar Slytherin. Do you believe that?

He was. Had Tom Riddle claimed it, he would have been the Head of House Slytherin and House Gaunt.

Could he claim that now?

No, he lost that opportunity when I defeated him. By Right of Conquest, I am now Lord Slytherin and Lord Gaunt.

Can he reclaim those titles?

Only if he shows up and defeats me.

Does that worry you?

I would rather not fight Tom Riddle. He is a powerful wizard even in his artificial body. However, Tom Riddle has defiled magic with his despicable actions. I trust in the judgment of Lady Magic.

An Educational Look

Chapter Notes

Friday, August 11 - Friday, August 18

Harry put down his pen and called for Dobby.

"Yous has a note for Dobby to deliver?"

"Sort of," answered Harry. "I want to try something. I'm going to try to send this note to Ted. If it disappears, I want you to go see if Ted received it."

Dobby watched his Harry close his eyes. There were a few moments of silence, and then the note disappeared from the top of Harry's desk. Before Harry could open his eyes, Dobby popped away and reappeared.

"Mr. Soliccy has note."

"Thanks, Dobby," said Harry. "I'll have to practice that."

Ted Tonks read the note that had appeared on his desk. He called for Percy Weasley, and when the young man appeared requested, "Please ask Filius, Severus, and Remus to join me for a meeting after lunch. I'd also like you to be there."

While Percy was contacting the relevant wixen, Ted made copies of the Hogwarts charter and the list of questions that had appeared on his desk.

When the five men met in a small conference room after lunch, Ted passed out the charter and the list of questions.

"Harry has chosen our next project," Ted announced.

Glancing down, Severus sighed, "Hogwarts. I should have expected this."

"I have already notified the Board of Governors of the proxies for Lords Gryffindor and Slytherin." As he said this, Ted nodded to Remus and Severus. "You will probably receive a notice sometime next week for a meeting to appoint the next headmaster."

"Do you think they'll choose Minerva?" Filius asked.

The more conservative board members will want her for continuity," Severus answered. "There will be others who prefer someone not under the influence of the previous headmaster."

Percy picked up the list of questions, "How will we deal with this?"

"Harry has already ordered an audit of all the Hogwarts accounts," Ted responded. "He will meet with Sharpnail Monday morning."

"Between ourselves, the staff and Harry's friends, we already have a group of former and current students we can interview. I'll tackle the questions related to the curriculum," Remus announced.

"I know quite a few teachers at Ilvermorny, Salem Institute and Beauxbatons. I'll contact them," said Filius.

"I'll talk to Griselda Marchbanks about OWL and NEWT standards," Severus announced. "She should be able to put me in contact with her counterpart at the ICW."

"Percy will coordinate everything and keep track of our progress," Ted said. "My experience with Harry tells me this list will only grow."

"Good morning, Sharpnail," Harry greeted. Harry enjoyed the Monday morning meetings with his account manager.

"Good morning, Lord Potter," Sharpnail returned. "I greatly enjoyed reading this week's interview."

"Nothing like deliberately setting out to piss off a dark lord," Harry replied. Beside him, his companion made a choking noise. At Sharpnail's glance, Harry said, "Allow me to introduce Sally Wilson. She is part of my staff and has specialized education in financial matters. Given the nature of today's meeting, she will understand more than I will."

Sharpnail chuckled as he led them to the small conference table, "Don't sell yourself short. You have shown an aptitude for financial management."

"Thanks," Harry said, taking a seat. "I wish I had more time to focus on it. I don't enjoy all the politics."

Three large books appeared on the table and a stack of folders appeared on the table. Sharpnail gestured to them, "Hogwarts has three vaults. The first is for operations. The second one is endowments. The third vault is property, mainly artifacts and books. A preliminary audit shows no legal malfeasance."

"Legal malfeasance? As opposed to another type of malfeasance?" Harry asked as he pushed the books over to Sally.

Sharpnail chuckled, “Albus Dumbledore has not embezzled or improperly used any Hogwarts funds. However, he has also not used the funds to the best advantage they could be used.”

“Are you referring to investments?” Harry asked.

“He has followed the same investment strategy that most headmasters have followed, low risk, low return,” Sharpnail answered.

“Excuse me,” Sally interrupted, not looking up from the ledger she was paging through, “why is the balance for the operations vault so high? Even with incoming tuition, it shouldn’t be this much.”

“That is the question,” Sharpnail responded. “I suggest you spend some time in that ledger while Lord Potter and I discuss the endowments vault.”

Sally returned her attention to the operations ledger while Sharpnail pushed the investments ledger toward Harry. As Harry opened the ledger, Sharpnail returned to his desk to continue his regular work. Managing Harry Potter’s vaults had become his full-time job.

Sally was still taking notes when Harry closed the ledger and walked over to Sharpnail. Taking a seat in front of the desk, Harry waited while Sharpnail got to a stopping point.

“What would you like to change?” Sharpnail asked.

“Let’s start with re-balancing the investments. With the amount in this vault, a little risk is not unreasonable. I want to mirror the risk profile we use for the Potter accounts.”

“That’s reasonable,” Sharpnail responded. “Anything else?”

“If I’m reading this correctly, none of the investment profits have been moved to the operations vault in nearly a century,” Harry noted. “Do you know why?”

“From what I’ve been able to ascertain, it wasn’t needed,” Sharpnail replied. “Grindewald’s war and Riddle’s war both reduced the student enrollment.”

“Yes,” Harry responded, “but that would have also reduced the income.”

Sharpnail remained silent until Harry nodded.

“So in response, the headmasters started cutting expenses and hoarded the endowments against the future.”

Sally walked over and sat beside Harry, “From what I’ve seen, expenses were cut by eliminating courses and increasing class sizes. This reduced teacher salaries. There was also a near total elimination of non-teaching staff.”

“The wars that decreased the number of students also increased the number of endowments,” Harry noted, “so it balanced financially. There was never a real reason to cut back to such an extreme. Once one headmaster did it, the others followed.

“Sally, I want you to join the Hogwarts meetings. I’ll tell you what I want. You’ll tell me how we afford it.”

“Can I get a copy of the operations ledger?” Sally requested.

“I’ll send an updating copy to you this afternoon,” Sharpnail answered.

“I’ll be back tomorrow morning to look over the property vault,” Harry said. “I have a friend that will want to join me.”

Sally was nervous as she sat in the conference room next to the staff offices. She loved her job and enjoyed the variety of subjects she researched. The Hogwarts operations ledger had been a treasure trove of information. She needed more time with the details, but a picture was already beginning to form.

Ted walked in, followed by Severus, Filius, Percy and Remus. Greetings were quickly made as everyone sat down.

“I know it’s only been a few days,” Ted began, “but I wanted to check in with everyone. Any word on the next Governor’s meeting?”

“There is a meeting Thursday afternoon,” Severus answered.

“I’ve already sent proxy notices for Lords Gryffindor and Slytherin to the other members and the deputy headmistress,” Percy said. “We’ll meet Thursday morning to go over the agenda for that meeting.”

“I’ve been talking with former and current students,” Remus said. “For current students, the biggest complaints deal with issues outside the classroom. With former students, the reaction varies by blood status.

“If you are pure blood, you are practically guaranteed a job and advancement. NEWT scores will impact what ministry job you get or, more importantly, what department you are in. Advancement is guaranteed. The only difference is the speed of advancement.

“Half-bloods depend on the status of their pure-blood parent. Muggleborn have to fight for even the lowest positions, and there is no hope of advancement.”

“That's not surprising,” said Severus.

“It's worse,” replied Remus. “Those muggleborn that give up on the magical world discover that they are ill-prepared to return to the muggle world. They do not have the education that their muggle peers have.”

Sally spoke up, “I can confirm that. I'm the only one in my year that kept up with my muggle education. It was a lot of extra work, but after Hogwarts, I could attend university and get a degree. Most of the muggleborn I know can only get the lowest paying jobs whether they're magical or muggle.”

“We can't do anything about blood status inequality, at least in the short term,” Ted stated. “The question is what we can do about the educational opportunities for muggle-born. It is clear that a Hogwarts education does it disservice to a significant portion of its students.”

“How does Hogwarts compare to a comparable muggle education?” Filius asked. “Is there anyone around that would know that?”

“Wooster,” Severus called.

An elf popped in wearing the Prince crest, “How can Wooster help Master Sevvy?”

“Would you see if Hermione Granger is available to join us?” Severus requested.

The elf popped away and a moment later returned, “Miss Grangy come.”

In the waiting silence, everyone took the opportunity to grab tea or juice. A few minutes later, Hermione stepped into the room and looked around.

“Miss Granger,” Filius said to the nervous young woman, “would you join us, please?”

Hermione sat beside Sally, “How can I help you?”

“Have you maintained any relationships with muggle friends or family your age?” asked Severus.

“I see my cousins every holiday,” Hermione answered.

“Do you ever talk about your school experiences with them?” Severus asked.

“Of course,” Hermione said. “There's not a lot else to talk about.”

“Can you tell us how you talk about Hogwarts without talking about magic?” Remus asked.

“My family, outside of my parents, believe that I go to a school for gifted students,” Hermione answered.

“Are you able to talk about any of your classes with them?” Filius asked.

“Some,” Hermione admitted. “Obviously, I can't talk about things like Charms or Transfiguration or Defense against the Dark Arts. I can tell them about History and how horribly boring the teacher is. It always gets a good laugh when I tell them that most students sleep through the class.

“I describe Potions as a chemistry class. Of course, most people only take one year of chemistry, so at this point, I talk about taking advanced pre-university courses.

“Arithmancy is primarily about math. I can talk about analytical geometry and trigonometry. When I get to NEWT level, it will be comparable to calculus. Most muggle students don't get that advanced in math, but a few of my cousins do, so we can talk about that.

“Astronomy is similar enough in the muggle and magical worlds. Both look at things like the movement of the stars and planetary alignment. Not many muggle secondary schools offer Astronomy, but it isn't unusual for someone interested to study it at a local science center. The biggest difference is that muggles don't study it at night.”

“How can they study Astronomy and not study it at night?” Snape asked.

“Muggles have something called a planetarium. It's an enclosed room where they project pictures of stars and planets along the ceiling. You sit in reclining seats and look up at the ceiling. They can make it so that astronomical bodies move at an accelerated pace. You can watch weeks or months worth of movements in hours.”

Hermione looked around. Percy was furiously taking notes. Filius, Remus and Severus had stunned looks on their faces.

Hermione continued, “I can talk about Ancient Runes as studying an ancient written language that is no longer spoken. I have a cousin in university studying to be an archaeologist. She studies several languages that are no longer spoken, including some that are covered in Ancient Runes.”

“Are there muggle equivalents to OWLs and NEWTs? Remus asked.

“Sort of,” Hermione answered. “Every year, you take standardized tests in addition to regular exams. You don't really study for them, and they're really more about evaluating how good a job the school is doing teaching students. If you want to go to a university, you need to take A-levels. That would be the equivalent of NEWTs. Depending on how good your A-levels are can go a long way in determining which university you can attend and what subjects you can study.”

“Would any of your Hogwarts classes prepare you for these A-levels?” Filius asked.

Hermione thought for a moment, “I could probably do decently well in maths because numbers are numbers. I doubt anything else would translate.”

“So if you wanted to continue your muggle education, you would have to do what?” Remus asked.

“I'd have to do a lot of studying to learn the material,” Hermione responded. “I'm pretty smart, so I could do it independently. Most people would probably need to attend more classes or, if they could afford them, hire tutors.”

Hermione watched as Ted, Remus, Filius and Severus looked at each other. She saw them making discreet nods, and then Ted turned to her, “This group is attempting to make an objective evaluation of Hogwarts. As you've no doubt realized, Harry takes his Head of House responsibilities very seriously. As Lords Gryffindor and Slytherin, Harry has taken oaths to protect and educate the students of Hogwarts. The oaths of Lords Black Stinchcombe and Peverell also have educational components.”

Hermione sat back and started laughing.

“This is not a laughing matter,” Percy scolded her.

“No,” Hermione responded, controlling her laughter, “but it is funny. Hogwarts is so screwed.”

“What makes you say that?” Severus asked.

“I love magic,” Hermione responded, “and there is so much about Hogwarts to love, but there are so many things wrong with it.”

“We are becoming aware,” replied Severus sourly. “To that end, would you join us in this task?”

Hermione's eyes grew big, “I would be honored to. There is one area other than subject matter where Hogwarts differs from muggle schools.”

“What would that be?” Filius asked curiously.

“Extracurricular activities,” Hermione answered. “Hogwarts has quidditch. Muggle schools have football, rugby, field hockey, netball, rounders, boxing, and gymnastics. Those are the ones I can think of. Plus, there are a lot more clubs.”

Ted and Sally nodded in agreement

“When do they have time for all that?” Severus asked.

Hermione snorted, “Fred and George Weasley.”

“What?” several of them echoed.

“What grades did Fred and George get in classes?” Hermione asked.

Filius, Remus and Severus answered almost in unison, “Outstanding.”

“Exactly,” responded Hermione, “and I know they got mostly Outstandings in their OWLs. Granted, they are brilliant, but even getting grades that good, they still had time to develop a line of joke products and regularly prank students and staff alike.”

“Are you saying that students have too much free time,” Remus asked for clarification.

“Yes and no,” Hermione replied. “Some do, and others need that time. One big difference between magical and muggle education is the difference in classwork and homework time. From the descriptions my cousins give me, muggle education has about twice as much classroom time and a lot less homework.”

“How is that possible?” Filius asked.

“More teachers,” Sally answered. “We have one potions professor for the whole school. A muggle school would have at least two chemistry teachers but probably more depending on the size of the school.”

“It sounds like we need to learn more about the muggle education system,” Ted observed. “There are significant differences, but it could only help us to understand it better and see what we can learn from a different approach. Severus, have you had time to speak to Griselda Marchbanks?”

“We met this morning,” Severus answered. “She was expecting Lord Slytherin or a representative to approach her. She is unaware of Lord Gryffindor.”

“What was she willing to share?” Remus asked.

Severus opened a folder, “She not only gave me summary results for the last fifty years, but she also had comparative data from Beauxbatons and Durmstrang.” Severus made copies of the folder and passed one to everyone at the table.

Sally and Hermione shared a glance, surprised to be included. Hermione was very aware of her status as a minor, while Sally had believed her only contribution would be to a financial discussion.

Seeing the looks the young women exchanged, Severus explained, “Hermione and Sally, you bring a different perspective to this group. From the little I’ve worked with Harry, we will need a broad range of thinking.”

“I think we should take some time to review this for later discussion,” Severus continued, “but please turn to the final page. While the rest of the information in the folder is available to any who requests, the data on the final page is not for public consumption.”

The final page contained a graphical representation of power levels demonstrated during OWL and NEWT practical examinations over the last forty years.

“Griselda has data going back to the institution of the tests,” Severus said. “Mostly, it remained steady until a couple of hundred years ago. Since then, there has been a slow downward trend. The last forty years have shown a steadily increasing decline.”

“More support for Harry’s theory,” Filius noted. “Every House grimoire he’s read shows evidence of shifting attitudes and decline in magical abilities.”

“It appears that Magic has a hand in Harry taking control of so many Houses,” Remus observed.

“Harry will tell you that the only reason he did so was at Magic’s behest,” Ted responded. “Thank Magic that he did so willingly.”

“This comes at an opportune time,” Filius said. “Recent events postponed Harry’s interview as Lord Gaunt. He is giving that interview this week. This corroborates his conclusion from reading the Gaunt and Black grimoires.”

“I’ll give him a copy of this and discuss the best way to present it without revealing the source,” Severus said. “I’ve no doubt Griselda wants this information to get out, or she wouldn’t have given it to me. It is still important not to reveal her role in this.”

"I agree," responded Ted. "If we can get this information out without risking her position, she will most likely let others know there is a safe way to reveal things the ministry has kept hidden."

There were a lot of grins around the table.

"I've written to quite a few teachers at other schools, but it will be at least a few more days before I get any replies," Filius said.

"Then let's look at the school's financial health," Ted said. "Sally, what have you discovered so far?"

"Hogwarts has three vaults," answered Sally. "The first contains real property, including books and artifacts. Harry will be looking at that tomorrow."

"I'll be joining him," Hermione interjected. "I'll let you know if anything looks immediately useful."

Sally nodded, "The second vault is for endowments to the school. It has been invested conservatively with an average return of 2% annually. While money has continued to be added to the fund, none has been taken out in nearly a hundred years. I don't know the details, but Harry has already implemented a more aggressive investment strategy. The bottom line is that a sizable amount is available for improvements to the school if necessary.

"The third vault is for operations. The primary source of income for this vault is tuition. All school expenses are paid out of this vault. The real surprise is the substantial balance. Outgoing costs have not exceeded income for decades. Even without the interest earned on the endowments vault, you could double the teaching staff.

"I suspect that part of the problem comes from the fact that a headmaster was never intended to be a financial officer. I have no idea what a headmaster does daily, but Hogwarts is the equivalent of a major corporation. In the muggle world, day-to-day and financial management are separate but coordinated."

"Does Hogwarts have an account manager at Gringotts?" Filius asked.

"No," Sally responded. "The previous account manager died about thirty years ago, and Dumbledore never approved a replacement."

"Harry enjoys financial management," said Filius. "I suspect in the short-term he will manage the financial side of things with input from the Potter account manager."

"That brings us to our next item," Ted said as he copied a folder and passed around the contracts. "These are the current and recent contracts for Hogwarts employees. Percy, please focus on the administrative contracts. Filius, Remus and Severus concentrate on the teacher contracts. Sally and Hermione, I want you both to research muggle teaching contracts. I don't know what you might learn, but additional knowledge is always helpful."

Ted looked around the table, "We'll meet again Friday morning."

Severus left the table Tuesday morning and realized he was walking in the same direction as Remus, “Meeting with Harry?”

“Yes,” Remus answered, catching up to Severus, “I’m guessing this is about the Governor’s meeting.”

“Most likely,” agreed Severus.

The two men arrived to see Dobby popping away with a folder. “Good morning,” Harry cheerfully said.

Harry looked at each man and said, “Whatever the circumstances of your teaching, I know that both of you genuinely cared for your students. That is why I chose you as my proxy.”

Harry stood and grabbed a leather-bound book from his desk. Walking up to Remus, Harry reached out and took Remus by the hand, “I, Harry James Potter Gryffindor, give you, Remus Lyle Lupin, permission to read the grimoire entries of Godric Gryffindor.”

Harry handed the grimoire to Remus and then returned to the desk to pick up the second volume. Walking around the other side to Severus, Harry repeated his actions, “I, Harry James Potter Slytherin, give you, Severus Tobias Snape, permission to read the grimoire entries of Salazar Slytherin.”

As Harry returned to his chair, he noticed that both men had similar expressions of amazement. “The Hogwarts charter and the grimoires will give each of you all the information you need for the governor's meeting.

“Remus, I would remind you of two things. First, you are there as the voice of Lord Gryffindor. That is the source of your authority. Second, remember that Godric Gryffindor was the first Marauder.

“Severus, the most important thing to remember is that before Salazar Slytherin helped found a magical school, before his friendships with Godric, Helga and Rowena, before everything else, Salazar Slytherin was a scholar.”

There were several moments of silence, and finally, Remus spoke, “Do you have any thoughts on who should be the next Headmaster or mistress?”

“The best person for the job,” Harry answered instantly. “My only preference is that we not rush. I suspect that Dumbledore did very little in the day-to-day running of the school. “

“Do you have any objection to Minerva being Headmistress?” Severus asked.

“No,” Harry responded, “but I object to her holding multiple jobs. Right now, she is the only professor of a core subject, Head of Gryffindor House and Deputy Headmistress. Each of those should be a full-time job. If you think she is best qualified to be the next Headmistress, she is, but that will be her only job.”

Harry thought for a moment, “A bunch of you held multiple jobs, but I suspect you only got paid for one.”

Harry wrote something down on parchment and then closed his eyes. To the amazement of Severus and Remus, the parchment disappeared. “I’ve asked Sally to look into that discrepancy.”

“Did you just apparate that parchment?” Remus asked in a strangled voice.

“Maybe,” Harry answered. “I’ve been practicing, and it seems to work.”

“It seems to work,” Severus repeated.

“Yep,” Harry said with a broad smile. He loved magic.

As both men stood to leave, Harry had one more comment, “I’ve authorized the goblins to examine and strengthen Hogwarts’ wards. No one with a Dark Mark will be allowed onto the grounds. Make sure each governor is aware.”

There were seven members of the Hogwarts Board of Governors. Lucius Malfoy had been removed from the board several years earlier but had taken less than a year to replace his replacement. Like Malfoy, the remaining governors had children currently attending Hogwarts. It was tradition that when a child graduated, the governor resigned.

Any interested party could attend and observe a board meeting. This never happened. Any interested party could petition the board for specific actions. This never happened. Any student could bring a complaint to the board. This never happened. At least, these things had not happened in anyone’s memory.

The Headmaster and Deputy attended all board meetings in an advisory capacity. The Headmaster presented recommendations, including an annual budget. There was discussion. There was sometimes disagreement. These recommendations were always accepted.

For decades, the power and influence of Albus Dumbledore had been near absolute. His sudden absence created a vacuum that some hoped to fill. In the days leading to the Governor’s meeting, there were many luncheons and teas to discuss the possibilities.

The Governors had settled into their usual seats around the oblong table. Minerva McGonagall sat in her usual spot. The seat previously occupied by Albus Dumbledore was empty.

“Shall we get started,” Augusta Longbottom suggested.

She had just finished speaking when the door room opened and Remus Lupin, followed by Severus Snape, entered the room. As Harry had predicted, Hogwarts immediately provided chairs at each end of the table for the newcomers. Severus and Remus sat and observed the room.

After several minutes of silence, Eloise Bulstrode cleared her throat, “I assume you are here representing Lords Gryffindor and Slytherin.”

At both men’s assent, Silas Vane said, “This is most irregular.”

“What is irregular is this meeting,” Severus asserted. “Have any of you read the Hogwarts Charter?”

Once again, silence filled the room.

“Am I to understand that none of you have bothered to read the Charter?” Remus asked incredulously. “Deputy Headmistress, are you familiar with the Charter?”

“Albus told me that there were no copies of the Charter still in existence,” McGonagall replied.

“Albus Dumbledore lied,” Severus said bluntly. He pulled out a small folder, restored it to full size and made copies to pass out. “In addition to the copy held in the Slytherin Vault,”

“And the Gryffindor vault,” Remus interjected.

“The original Charter and copies were held in the Hogwarts property vault,” Severus continued. “According to the Charter, there should have been at least one copy in the Hogwarts library and another copy in the archives of the Ministry.

“Since no one here has read the Charter, I recommend that we conclude this meeting and reconvene in a week.”

“We need to choose the next Headmaster,” Malfoy stated, trying to take control of the meeting.

“How can you select a Headmaster when you don’t even know what the Charter requires?” Remus asked reasonably.

“This is unconscionable,” objected Eloise Hopkins.

“Be that as it may,” Severus stood, “this meeting is adjourned. We will meet next week at the same time. Meanwhile, as permitted by the Hogwarts Charter, the school wards will be renewed. No one with a Dark Mark will be permitted on school grounds. I suggest you make plans accordingly.”

Remus stood, “Lord Gryffindor, as is his right as a founder’s heir, will be examining the credentials of all teaching staff in the coming week. Minerva, please prepare for this.”

Both men left, unconcerned with the angry wixen that remained.

Minerva McGonagall stood on shaky legs. She had expected to be confirmed as Headmistress of her beloved school. In a very short time, all her expectations were upended. She was not surprised to learn that Albus had lied about the charter. To her sorrow, she had trusted a man she had considered a friend and colleague. Over the summer, that trust had eroded. By the

time Albus had been removed from the school, Minerva had become numb. She decided to focus on the school. Now it seemed even that bedrock was crumbling. What would happen next?

“Ted is at Gringotts this morning,” Percy announced to the group sitting around the table. “Let’s start with what happened at yesterday’s Board of Governors meeting.”

At that moment, Narcissa Black entered the room and sat beside Severus.

“Lady Black,” Percy exclaimed. He had come to admire the former Lady Malfoy but recognized that she never did anything without reason.

“You wouldn’t believe the number of owls and floo calls I’ve gotten,” Narcissa drawled as she lifted the cup of tea that had appeared before her. “I even got invited to dinner with my former husband.”

Hermione sat forward, “Did you accept?”

“Of course not,” Narcissa answered. “That would be most improper. I did, however, let him rant in my fireplace.”

The thought of Lucius Malfoy kneeling at the floo for an extended amount of time brought smiles to several faces.

“After the bother he’s caused Harry this week, I find myself lacking sympathy,” Filius responded.

“I did have dinner with Augusta Longbottom,” Narcissa announced.

“And what did that venerable lady have to say?” Severus asked.

“Many things,” Narcissa responded. “She is torn between admiration and irritation at Harry’s course of action. However, she eventually admitted that she will not raise a fuss unless he explicitly goes against the school charter or takes an action she considers detrimental to the students.

“The other board members that contacted me were full of outrage and indignation,” Narcissa stated.

“About anything specific?” Remus asked.

“Not really,” Narcissa replied. “More about the fact that anyone would dare to do something different. The light-minded still believe that Albus Dumbledore knows best despite evidence to the contrary.”

Narcissa turned to Severus with a smile, “How dare you act contrary to the wishes of the man that employed you for so many years.”

“How indeed,” Severus responded.

“And you,” Narcissa said, turning to Remus, “how could you be so disloyal after he hired you to teach for a whole year.”

“It boggles the mind,” Remus said with a wink at Severus.

“What about those that are not light-minded?” Hermione wondered.

“Ah,” said Narcissa, “they had plans now that Dumbledore is out of the way. They want Hogwarts restored to its full glory,”

Everyone present understood the code for giving an advantage to pure-blood students.

Narcissa stood, “I’d love to stay, but there is so much gossip to discover. Ta for now.”

With that pronouncement, Narcissa swept from the room.

Hermione sat back with a loud sigh, “I want to be her when I grow up.”

“So do we all,” Filius responded, and everyone chuckled.

“Anything else of note from the meeting?” Percy asked.

“According to Minerva,” Remus said, “Dumbledore claimed there were no surviving copies of the Charter. Severus corrected that and made sure everyone had a copy.”

“I also sent a copy to Irma Pince to ensure the library has its required copy,” Snape added.

Percy made a note, “A team from Gringotts will be at the school Monday to begin examining the wards. I will be going to greet them on behalf of Harry. Hermione, would you like to join me? Harry thought you might enjoy watching them work.”

Hermione nearly squealed, “Yes, I’d love to. Will you have a copy of the map?”

“Map?” Percy questioned as Remus chuckled.

“It’s a map of the castle that shows every room,” Hermione answered. “I’ll get it from Harry.”

“Except it doesn’t show every room,” Filius said. “Harry will have to show them the Chamber of Secrets.”

Severus choked on his tea while Remus thumped the former potions professor on the back, “What? Dumbledore said there was no actual Chamber, just a previously undiscovered room in the lower levels.”

“Not only is there a Chamber, but there is also the remains of a very large basilisk,” Filius responded. “According to Harry, the access is through the second-floor bathroom that always floods.”

Hermione nodded, "I've never seen it, but both Ron and Harry told me about it at the end of second year."

"There's another room not on the map," Remus contributed. "On the seventh floor. The elves call it the Come and Go room. It's a giant room that contains anything left and unclaimed."

"I'll talk to Harry. He can show the team the Chamber and talk to the Head Elf about any other rooms that might not be on his map," Percy made another note.

"He'll have to do it another day," Filius said. "Harry has his Herbology OWL on Monday."

Hermione looked around the room. This group, this mixed group, was going to change Hogwarts, and that would change the wizarding world. She let their words wash over her. Filius was talking about what he had learned from teachers and distant schools. She started to realize what was happening. It wasn't so much what Harry was doing but what Harry was giving them all a reason to do. Harry was being Harry.

She gasped and suddenly became aware of the silence that resulted.

"Is something on your mind, Miss Granger?" Severus asked.

Hermione blushed. She hadn't meant to lose track of the meeting or to interrupt what was happening, "It's something that a famous muggle said."

"What's that?" Remus asked gently.

"Her name was Margaret Mead. She said, 'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.' That's what we're doing. We're changing the world."

Silence filled the room again, but this time it was not a silence brought about by interruption. It was a silence of contemplation. It was a silence of recognized accomplishment. They had only just started, and there was still a lot to do. Looking at each other, there was resolve as they dove back into their task.

Escalation

Chapter Summary

August 14-16

Harry sat at his desk sorting through personal correspondence. He had enjoyed his usual Monday morning pastries with Borner to go over Sunday's interview. Borner was delighted that Fudge had responded publicly to Harry's challenge. The blustering article had been petty and vindictive and did not show the Minister in a positive light.

There was a very cheery note from Narcissa. She loved Rose Cottage and discovered that freedom from Lucius Malfoy more than compensated for a smaller home. She was working part-time with Andromeda to learn the latest healing techniques that had been developed since she had received her healing mastery. She was working with the Black elves to rejuvenate Castle Black and was very happy with the vault Harry had established for the work.

Narcissa had another project that she couldn't openly call a project. She had taken Hermione Granger under her tutelage. Narcissa delighted in Hermione's intelligence and relished the challenge of helping a muggle-born witch achieve the necessary veneer of polish for traditional wizarding society.

This led to Luna Lovegood. The quirky, motherless girl was a different sort of challenge. Narcissa recognized her different sort of intelligence and found herself easily interpreting the unique emotional language the girl used. She had scheduled a luncheon for later in the week with Xeno Lovegood to convince him to take up Harry's offer of private tutoring.

Talks with Hermione and Luna led Narcissa to Ginevra Weasley. Upon learning from Hermione what Lucius had done to the youngest Weasley, Narcissa had been in turn angry and devastated. Narcissa knew from her part in crafting the Potter/Weasley vassal agreement that each member of the family would be evaluated by a mind healer. The broad requirement had been a way to open the door for longer-term healing for the young lady. Harry knew firsthand how interaction with a horcrux could affect a person's magic and worried it had somehow damaged Ginny.

Narcissa confessed in her letter that Ginevra reminded Narcissa of a young Bellatrix. Three daughters were born to a dark family and two had found their way to becoming healers. The third had succumbed to darkness. Narcissa blamed much of it on the twisted marriage contract that subjected a young, idealistic Bella to the LeStrange brothers. Narcissa didn't know details but firmly believed that Bella's descent into darkness started there. It broke Narcissa's heart when she remembered how bright and happy Bella had been as a young

child. She would do everything in her power to make sure Ginny Weasley never veered in that direction.

Narcissa saw a brightness in Ginny that had nearly been snuffed out by the careless and selfish actions of Lucius. However, bringing Ginny into her orbit meant that Narcissa had to deal with Molly Weasley. Molly was very protective of all her children but none more so than her youngest. The incident with the diary had only tightened that grip. This led Narcissa to the conclusion that she needed to befriend Molly.

Harry looked down at the letter in his hand from Narcissa.

I am equally part grateful and furious for how you have opened up my life. You have systematically challenged much of what I was taught. I was taught that house elves are to be used and otherwise despised. Now I find myself on equal footing with a group of elves passionate about decorating as a form of artistic expression. I have always considered myself the height of fashionable taste and now realize that what I considered elegant was merely fearfully conservative.

Now I find myself drawn to three extraordinary young women, all three from circumstances I was raised to believe inferior in some fashion. I look at them and realize there is no lack in them but rather limitations in my worldview that led me to such conclusions. Seeing yourself clearly is painful and I both thank you and blame you for that pain.

Harry set aside the letter with a chuckle. So much had happened that he had never imagined possible but a potential friendship between Narcissa and Molly had to be one of the strangest.

Harry once more glanced at the Daily Prophet. Fudge made headlines with his acceptance of Harry's challenge. Lucius Malfoy would act as his second and would contact Sirius Black who was acting as Harry's second. Fudge and Malfoy spewed vitriol at Harry, apparently not learning from Harry's response to Fudge's earlier slanders.

Harry looked over his schedule. He had his regular Monday appointments starting at Gringotts. As usual, Harry kept a list of questions that occurred to him as he studied the family grimoires. He passed the lists to Ted who assigned the various questions to the appropriate staff member. Somehow, last week's questions, mostly about magical education, had prompted Ted to form a group to investigate Hogwarts.

Harry sighed at the timing. His original plan had put off many issues until after his first OWL was taken. Being outed by dementors a few weeks earlier had accelerated everything. So today's meeting with Sharpnail would be about the Hogwarts accounts that were Harry's responsibility as a double founder's heir.

He picked up the next letter. It was a request from Amelia Bones for a meeting to discuss a personal matter. Harry was curious but not enough to look into it further. He penned a response inviting Amelia Bones to tea any afternoon with a promise of a private meeting afterward.

Harry picked up the Gaunt grimoire. Later entries were all in parseltongue and mostly ramblings about blood purity. It was the earlier entries that held interest. About 400 years

previous, Venerable Gaunt had made a study of inherited magic. He had started a separate journal tracking magical traits. Venerable's son and grandson continued tracking until the Gaunt family had identified every major magical house and the magical traits associated with it.

Harry called for Dobby and sent him to the Gaunt vault to find that journal. Harry grabbed the dark blue robe that Winky had set aside for him and headed for the arrivals room. It was time for his meeting with Sharpnail.

His afternoon healing appointment with Andromeda confirmed that Harry was continuing to heal from a lifetime of abuse and neglect. He had grown another inch and put on more weight. For the first time that he could remember, Harry was the size of his age group. The exam itself didn't take long and Harry enjoyed a lovely break with Andromeda.

As usual, Harry's visit with Heartwise was both difficult and satisfying. The change in his relationship with Draco Black was challenging. As Lord Black, Harry appreciated and commended the growing maturity of the young man. As Harry Potter, it had not been all that long ago that Draco had led the campaign to belittle and marginalize Harry. It was an uncomfortable dichotomy and it was a relief when Heartwise assured Harry that ambivalent feelings were normal.

To a lesser degree, Harry was also struggling with his feelings for Hermione. He had always considered Hermione to be one of his best friends but her blind obedience to Dumbledore earlier in the summer had hurt him. Yes, Harry had the twins and Sirius and a whole network of people supporting him but they weren't his best friends. Harry clung to the belief that Ron and Hermione should have been the ones most staunchly on his side. They should have been who he relied on. Once again, reassurances from Heartwise helped Harry come to terms with his feelings. He was realizing that he would never regain the relationship he once had with his former best friends; however, evolving relationships were part of growing up. Part of Harry's growing maturity was accepting that evolution.

Once again, Harry's magical training with Gorin was witnessed by everyone at the Manor. The time Harry spent in touch with his magical core and the exercises he undertook daily connecting with the various House magics was giving Harry an awareness of magic that he had never previously experienced. Several times in recent weeks, Harry's practice time with Filius was spent in blind dueling. With Dobby and Winky watching, Filius and Harry would don blindfolds and duel using silly spells. Afterward, the visible result of flinging colored strings and paintballs at each other showed success or failure. The first time, Harry had barely landed a spell on his former charms professor while being covered in paint and string. Filius had helped him reach out to feel the magic that permeated all things and to learn to identify it.

Today, Harry would not be casting any spells. Sirius, Severus, Filius and Remus would be casting silently and sometimes wandlessly at Harry. The challenge was for Harry to avoid getting hit. None of the spells were injurious but whether it was a leg lock or a tickling charm, Harry's job was to avoid it. The hardest part for Harry was not focusing on Filius' magic. After a couple of months of working daily with Filius, Harry knew the feel of that magic. Now Harry had to set aside that knowledge because his task was to avoid any magic

directed his way. It was a difficult hour and Harry felt less than successful. Gorin, however, praised Harry's adaptability. He steadily improved throughout the hour and by the end was starting to identify not only magic heading his way but who was casting it by the feel of it.

Harry headed to the manor early on Tuesday. He was eager to dig into the journal on magical traits but there was something niggling in the back of his mind. He felt like he was missing something and decided to look at the Slytherin grimoire. The Gaunts were directly descended from Slytherin and perhaps there was a connection there. It was at that point that Harry's thoughts were derailed. Opening the grimoire to the writings of Salazar Slytherin was a journey into a different world. Salazar was a compelling writer and he painted a vivid picture of his relationships and the magical world he lived in.

Harry was just starting to read about the Chamber of Secrets when there was a knock at his door. Looking up, Harry saw Sirius and Borner and invited them in. Harry stood and walked over to the seating area, gesturing for both men to join him. As Harry sat down, a tray with tea and snacks appeared on the low table in front of the love seat that Harry preferred. Harry fixed himself tea and a plate of nibbles.

"I've just negotiated your duel with Cornelius Fudge," Sirius announced.

"And?" Harry finally asked when Sirius did no more than sit looking smug.

"The duel will take place at 10:00 a.m. tomorrow on a special dueling platform set up in the ministry atrium."

Harry stared at Sirius, "Tomorrow morning? In the ministry atrium?"

"Yes," answered Sirius. "The duel will last until one person is either incapacitated or concedes."

"Will Fudge be fighting me or will Malfoy stand in?"

"Part of what was negotiated was that you and Fudge will personally duel each other," Sirius answered. "In the event one of you is ill or injured before the duel, the duel will be postponed rather than fought by seconds."

"Is that usual?"

"Eh," responded Sirius. "It isn't unusual."

Harry turned to Borner, "What brings you here?"

"While Mr. Black was at the ministry negotiating the terms of your dual, I was at the ministry listening," Borner responded.

Harry grinned, "What did you hear?"

“Cornelius Fudge has never been a popular minister. For the most part, he's been considered a bit inept but harmless. Most people prefer a weaker minister that doesn't interfere with the day-to-day work of the ministry.

“Your recent comments and your lawsuit have people concluding that Fudge’s tenure is about to end. However, most people are skeptical about your ability to best him in a duel.”

“I wasn't aware that Fudge was magically powerful,” Harry commented.

“Oh, he's not,” responded Borner. “However, Cornelius Fudge is an adult wizard and you are considered a child. Whatever political power you have and whatever influence you wield, magically you are considered inferior. That's just the way adults think about underage students.”

Harry sat back and a large grin spread across his face, “That's brilliant.”

“A lot of people are rooting for you,” Borner said, “but most feel that, at best, you'll last five minutes with a mature wizard.”

Once Harry started laughing, he couldn't stop. Sirius and Borner sat drinking their tea and watching. When Winky popped in to remind Harry of his trip to the Hogwarts property vault, Harry was still chuckling to himself.

When Harry entered the arrivals room, he suddenly found himself with an armful of crying witch and a face full of fluffy hair.

“I’m so sorry, Harry,” Hermione sobbed. “I should have written you and then, when you were angry, I got stubborn about it. I know things have changed but please don’t stop being my friend.”

Despite all the changes in Harry’s life, he still didn’t know how to handle strong expressions of emotion. Before he could sink into a full-blown panic, Hermione pulled back and looked at him.

“Oh, Harry,” she chuckled while still somehow crying, “I didn’t mean to fall apart on you. It just suddenly hit me that even after realizing how wrong I was, I hadn’t apologized.”

Harry nodded, having no idea what to say. Fortunately, Hermione had years of experience with Harry’s emotional constipation. She grabbed his hand and pulled him to the floo and before he even processed everything, they were in the private arrivals room at Gringotts.

As Harry explored the shelves of magical artifacts in the Hogwarts property vault, Hermione stared at the stacks of books. There were hundreds of books in stacks starting at the back wall of the vault. The ledger for the vault showed a list of artifacts and about a dozen rare books. The remainder of the vault’s contents was unrecorded.

Harry walked over to Hermione, "Any thoughts?"

"Too many," Hermione mumbled, clearly overwhelmed by the sheer volume of books.

Harry stepped back and thought. He needed an expert. "Limney."

"Lord Hoggywarts call," Limney answered as she popped in.

"Is Madam Pince at the castle?"

"Book Lady there," Limney answered.

"Please ask if she can join Lord Gryffindor at Gringotts," Harry requested.

Limney immediately popped away and was back a minute later, "Book Lady come."

Harry went to the vault door to tell the waiting goblin that he was expecting the Hogwarts Librarian. He returned and said to Limney, "Please make available any elves needed to assist Madam Pince."

"There be elves for Book Room," Limney responded. "Tell Book Lady to call."

Hermione was both excited and angry at the range of books in the vault, excited that the books existed but angry that they had been kept away from students.

"Miss Granger?"

Hermione turned toward the voice of the school librarian, "Madam Pince, thank you for coming. We had no idea there would be so many books here."

"I was told I was meeting Lord Gryffindor," Irma Pince said, a bit stiffly. She wasn't used to being summoned by children.

"Harry," Hermione called to the back of the vault, "Madam Pince is here."

As Harry walked from the back of the vault, Hermione once again witnessed the transition from Harry Potter, teenager, to the Lord of an Ancient and Noble House.

"Madam Pince," Harry said, stepping forward, "thank you for coming."

"Mr. Potter," Pince said briskly, "I was told I was meeting Lord Gryffindor. It was my understanding that you are Lord Slytherin."

"Actually," Harry said a bit sheepishly, "I am both."

"Hmmp," was the entirety of Madam Pince's reaction.

Realizing that was all the reaction he would receive, Harry dove into the explanation. When he was done, Irma Pince started walking amongst the stacks, examining the books.

"What is it you expect of me?" she asked with a touch of asperity.

Harry took a deep breath and pushed back his impatience, "I'd like you to inventory the books here and determine which you will integrate into the Hogwarts library."

"And what makes you think I have time for this?"

Harry had grown accustomed to being treated as an adult. He was the head of eight magical Houses and even those that didn't respect him as Harry Potter respected him as a Lord. It was Hermione that realized what was happening and acted to head off any possible confrontation.

"June," Hermione called. When the elf popped in, Hermione continued, "Would you see if Mr. Tonks is available to join Lord Gryffindor at Gringotts?"

June returned in less than a minute, "Mr. Sollicy comes."

Harry turned to the librarian and in a polite but stiff voice said, "If you will give me a moment, I will turn things over to my solicitor and get out of your way." Harry turned to Hermione, "You are welcome to stay here as long as you wish."

There was tense silence until Ted Tonks arrived.

"Lord Gryffindor," Ted greeted Harry, "how can I assist?"

"I assumed," Harry said with a glance at Madam Pince, "that the Hogwarts librarian would be the best person to determine the disposition of these books. Madam Pince seems to disagree. As I have other obligations this morning, would you please sort this out for me?"

Ted understood immediately. 'Other obligations' was a code he had taught Harry to refer to things that Harry would rather not deal with. Ted had discovered early on that Harry Potter had an overdeveloped sense of responsibility. Gradually, and not always easily, Harry had learned that he didn't have to deal with every task even if it was within his ability to do so. Not only did Harry pay a staff to deal with things but he paid them generously and had complete confidence in their skills. As a result, there were more than enough people to deal with those things Harry was not inclined to handle personally. It was obvious from the tension in the vault that there was a conflict brewing. It was Ted's job to sort conflicts and he was happy to do so.

"Madam Pince," Ted said, "let's go up to Sharpnail's office and we'll review both the school charter and your employment contract to determine your level of responsibility in this issue." Ted turned back to Harry, "Lord Gryffindor, do you have any other concerns regarding this vault?"

Harry held out the ledger to Ted, "It appears that books and artifacts added in recent decades were not recorded."

"I'll take care of that," Ted said, reaching for the ledger. "I have a feeling there are several former teachers that would enjoy the task." With the sound of a clearing throat, Ted smiled, "I'm also sure that Miss Granger would be more than willing to assist them in the task."

Harry smiled and with a wave to Hermione left the vault.

Harry looked around the table. Lunch was always a busy table. The staff was usually there but over time had spread out a bit more and kept less to themselves to socialize. Hermione, Fred and George, Severus and Remus were there as residents of the manor. Sirius usually came for lunch and stayed through tea. He and Filius often had their heads together. Harry hadn't watched them but had heard that they regularly spent time on the dueling pitch. Filius had decades of experience but it was balanced both by Sirius' upbringing as a Black and his natural viciousness which hid under an exuberant personality. Narcissa and Draco came a couple times a week and Harry knew that Narcissa still spent Sundays at the manor with Andromeda and Sirius. Luna came several times a week and spent her afternoons with various animals that populated the estate. Ginny was coming over more often to spend afternoons practicing quidditch moves and taking advantage of the manor's better-quality brooms.

Harry waved to everyone as he left to change for his afternoon in the greenhouse. This was his last week of study before he took his Herbology OWL. Before this summer, Harry had a love/hate relationship with yard work. Those feelings had carried over to Hogwarts where he had viewed Herbology as a magical form of gardening. Bob's more integrated approach had shown Harry all the ways Herbology interacted with other disciplines. The stress-free environment of the greenhouse and Harry's growing skill in manipulating earth magic made the afternoon a favorite time for Harry.

Harry stepped into the arrivals room Wednesday morning a bit self-conscious in the dragonhide armor, although he appreciated that it was Hungarian Horntail. Ted, Sirius, Severus, Remus, Filius, and Narcissa were waiting for him. Harry recognized that these six individuals, each of them accomplished in their own right, stood beside him as his support and counsel.

Narcissa stepped forward and curtsied deeply. Upon rising she said, "My Lord Black. Today when you face Cornelius Fudge, your task is not to incapacitate him nor is it to force a concession. Your task, nay, your duty is to so thoroughly humiliate him that it is inconceivable for him to continue as minister. His humiliation must be so thorough that those who have supported him and propped him up will slink away in shame. After today, everyone will think twice before they cast aspersions upon your person."

As she stepped back, Sirius whistled, "Damn. I don't think there's anything left for the rest of us to say."

"Indeed," agreed Severus, "Shall we to the ministry?"

Formal duels fought in a public forum followed strict rules of engagement. Once accepted, these rules were sacrosanct. All communication, both between parties and to the public, was undertaken by the seconds.

At the stroke of ten, both parties stepped up onto the dueling platform. The challenger and the challenged could be accompanied by their second, a healer, and an advisor. Harry, accompanied by Sirius, Andromeda and Filius, only recognized Lucius Malfoy among those accompanying Fudge.

It was Andromeda that leaned forward, "The healer is Horatio Nott, younger brother to Lord Cassius Nott. His advisor is Lord Cephas Avery. The implication is that pure blood noble houses side with the minister."

Harry nodded his understanding.

Lucius Malfoy stepped to the center front of the dueling platform. As second to the challenged it was his right to speak first.

"We come today to answer a challenge issued to Cornelius Fudge, Minister of Magic. This challenge is issued by Harry Potter, student."

It was all said in a sneer that was typical of Lucius Malfoy. The disdain spoke clearly to all that Harry Potter was simply unworthy of the actions taken.

It was now Sirius' turn and Harry didn't know what to expect. Sirius, on behalf of all of those advising Harry, had asked for his trust. That was quite easy because it meant one less thing for Harry to worry about. Any nervousness he felt for the duel was overcome by curiosity at how Sirius would respond to Lucius Malfoy. Harry knew one thing. It would be pure Marauder, crafted for maximum mischief.

With a flourish, Sirius bowed to the audience, "Yes, it is true that Harry Potter has challenged the Minister of Magic. It is also true that Harry Potter is a student. Yet Harry Potter, as you all know, is more. You may know him as the Boy-Who-Lived but he is more than even that. Today, I stand proudly before you to introduce Harry James, Lord of House Potter, House Black, House Peverell, House Gryffindor, House Slytherin, House Stenchcome, House Gaunt, and last, but certainly not least, House Emrys."

As expected, there was quite a reaction from the audience. Sirius waited until there was once more quiet before executing another extravagant bow and moving back to Harry's side of the platform.

The trickiest part of the duel negotiations had not been the time or place. It had not even been the terms of the duel. The sticking point had been the selection of a referee. Sirius, naturally, rejected any known death eaters or their supporters. Lucius, for his part, rejected anyone known for their alignment with the light. That left those who declared themselves neutral or gray. In truth, Sirius would have accepted anyone from that faction. Lucius was the picky one. Eventually, they settled on Countess Eleanora Zabini. She was pure blood, staunchly neutral and most importantly, removed from most of the British wizarding world.

The Countess stepped forward, "At my signal, the duel between Cornelius Fudge and Harry Potter will commence. It will continue until one party is either incapacitated or concedes to the other. No unforgivable curses will be cast. Everything else is fair game."

The Countess nodded to both sides indicating that all support players should leave the dueling platform. She held up her wand, a signal for both the dualists to step forward and bow. She looked to each side and made eye contact with both Harry and Cornelius. Then she nodded, raised her wand and let out a loud bang. As she stepped off the dueling platform, a shield was raised covering not only the sides but also the top and bottom of the dueling area.

From the moment he stepped onto the platform, Cornelius Fudge had his wand in hand. Nine-inch oak with a dragon heartstring, the wand was gripped tightly in a sweating hand. Harry had not yet called forth his wand and remained empty-handed at the start of the duel.

Fudge scoffed, "Come boy, have you not been told how this works? You need a wand."

Harry smiled. It was a gentle smile, a friendly smile, "As Lord of my Houses, I feel obligated to give you a sporting chance."

There were titters from the audience. Most were not sure if he was joking or if he was naively overconfident. Fudge and his cronies assumed the latter.

"I've given you a chance," Fudge said almost as an announcement. "It is on your head now."

Harry waited. Fudge was now genuinely concerned. Did the boy really not understand what he had agreed to? He glanced over at Lucius who made a shooing motion with his hands. Finally, after a long moment, Fudge cast a stunner.

Over the previous day, each of Harry's advisors and many of his friends had sought him out to offer advice. The advice from his friends was mixed but the advice from the adults he had come to rely on was sound. One particular piece of advice was repeated by each of them, "Do not get overconfident. You don't need to be nervous but you still have to take it seriously."

The stunner was the first spell cast. Slowly, but with growing confidence, Fudge cast more spells, the intensity of them increasing. Harry's eyes never left the center of Fudge's body. The wand may be what cast the spell but the intent of the caster, the speed and the accuracy were all telegraphed by the body. Harry had been stung many times learning that lesson.

Slowly at first, matching the speed of the spells cast but with increasing agility, Harry avoided the spells. It was much like those early days of practice with Filius. The best way to beat a spell is to avoid the spell. Harry was no longer the weak, malnourished child that had stood before Filius that first night in the inn. He was young. He was healthy. He had stamina. Most importantly, he had a well of magic deeper than most could imagine.

Cornelius Fudge had stood in one place casting spell after spell. Harry was the one doing all the moving. At some points, he was practically a blur. Still, he did not even have a wand.

It was a confusing show for the audience. It was also highly entertaining. They watched as this young man nimbly avoided every spell cast by the Minister of Magic.

Finally, in frustration, Fudge stopped casting and stamped his foot. "This is unacceptable," he nearly screamed. "I demand you cast a spell."

Harry smiled, "Sure if that's what you want."

With a flick of Harry's hand, Cornelius Fudge was suddenly bright pink. At first, Fudge had no clue why the audience was laughing but a glance at his hand told him the tale and his anger overcame his good sense.

Fudge started stepping closer to Harry as he demanded, "How dare you?"

"How dare I?" Harry asked conversationally. With another flick of Harry's hand and Fudge's hair was neon green, brighter than the bowlers he normally wore.

In anger, Fudge cast a bone-breaking curse. Harry batted it aside.

"You, as Minister of Magic, refuse to face hard truths and you ask how I dare?" Harry accompanied this with a hand flick that removed the right sleeve of Fudge's robe and any undergarments he might have been wearing.

Fudge took another step forward and flung a curse at Harry. Harry didn't even bother to identify it as he brushed it aside.

"You hurl insults at a teenager, bringing shame to your office and you ask how I dare." This time Harry removed the garments from Fudge's left arm.

Another curse batted away.

"This is your last chance, Minister," Harry said. "Admit Voldemort has returned and you will keep what little dignity you have left."

"You lie," Fudge shouted but that was all the sound that came out of his mouth as Harry silenced him.

Fudge started casting more curses, each with a step in Harry's direction. For each curse Harry either avoided or battered aside, Harry removed another section of Fudge's clothing. First, it was the shoes, then socks followed by the pants. Fudge's robe only came to mid-thigh but soon even that was removed. Cornelius Fudge, Minister of Magic, was bright pink and naked.

Fudge's anger was such that he didn't even seem to notice. Curse after curse was cast but none touched Harry. When Fudge had advanced to six feet away from Harry, the minister bounced off of a barrier with such force that he landed on his back.

Harry had kept it relatively simple up until this point. One color for the body, one color for the hair, remove the clothing. As Fudge floundered, attempting to gain his feet, Harry summoned the elder wand. His first act was a very strong sticking charm between Fudge's ass and the floor. Then, directing his wand as if it were a paintbrush, Harry proceeded to create a special brand of art.

His right arm became red with green stripes while his left arm was lavender with silver swirls. His torso became an ever-changing canvas for blotches of pastel blue, pink and yellow. The legs were Harry's favorite part. Each leg cycled between variations of the Hogwarts house colors. Blue and bronze, green and silver, red and gold, yellow and black.

They never matched and the pattern changed. From stripes to polka dots, swirls to checks, it was pure entertainment for the audience. It was also pure humiliation for Fudge and his supporters.

At first, the Countess had been so entertained that one crucial fact did not register. Cornelius Fudge could not concede if he was silent. She cast a spell that caused all magic within the shield of the dueling platform to cease and cleared her throat.

"Excuse me, Lord Potter, but I will need you to unsilence Minister Fudge. Otherwise, you rob him of any opportunity should he wish to concede."

Harry grinned, "How foolish of me to overlook that. I apologize, Countess."

With a flick of the hand not holding a wand, Fudge's voice filled the air

"Stop. Stop it this instant. I insist. I am the Minister of Magic. How dare you. Stop."

This litany in various forms repeated. At this point, no magic was being cast. No spells were exchanged. The minister was unhinged. He was shouting himself hoarse. Some were amused. Some were horrified. All were enthralled. This was a show that had never been seen before.

It took quite a while but eventually, Fudge's voice failed him. He had not conceded and at this point, he could not. Harry wasn't even sure Fudge had enough concentration left to cast a spell.

Let it not be said that Harry Potter was not without a sense of humor as he ended the duel. Harry levitated the minister upright and cast an incarcerous that wrapped the minister up in a white feather boa. To complete the outfit, Harry placed a large, red velvet bow atop the minister's head.

Finally, the audience watched as Harry Potter stunned the minister and then, compassionately, cushioned this fall. Of course, it did not escape anyone's notice that the cushion led to the minister bouncing several times before he finally settled on the ground.

The audience was wild. The Countess didn't even try to get their attention. She simply waited. Eventually, there was quiet and she stepped forward, "I declare Harry Potter the winner of this contest. Let all here bear witness to the judgment of magic."

Harry sat in his favorite place in the orangery, Fred and George on either side of him. He watched as Fred prepared a plate of his favorite nibbles and George poured him a cup of juice. Since the end of the duel, neither twin had left his side. The duel had barely ended when they both jumped up, grabbed his arms and apparated to the arrivals room at Potter Manor. Once Harry was firmly on his feet, the twins proceeded to snog him senseless.

The afternoon that followed was surreal. When others started to arrive, the twins hustled Harry to his office. The snogging continued. Harry, still high on adrenaline, had not even tried to think. He simply accepted the attention and enjoyed it.

When Winky called the young men to lunch, the twins sat and either side of Harry. Once physically untouched by either twin, Harry was able to recognize his hunger and proceeded to eat an astonishing amount of food. When it was time for the afternoon herbology lesson, the twins followed. Although they set apart and never interrupted the lesson, they also never let Harry out of their sight.

Now, sitting at tea, Harry looked around. As at lunch, much of the conversation was about the duel but some had moved on to the consequences of the confrontation. Sitting somewhat apart beside Augusta Longbottom was Amelia Bones. Harry knew that she was expecting to meet with him as promised. Therefore, he needed to mentally prepare.

Harry was once again feeling quite ravenous and consumed the very full plate that had been prepared and drank several goblets of juice. He leaned back, comfortable between the twins. He closed his eyes and let himself feel his magic. He started pulling up the Potter magic and felt the connection to the manor. He reached out to the wards and let himself drift among the tendrils of magic that touched everything magical within its bounds. Too soon, Harry pulled himself back to full awareness.

"I have a private meeting coming up," Harry said quietly. "I need to do this alone."

Both twins were aware that they would eventually have to let Harry move from their side. That did not mean they liked it. The inner prankster, which was a considerable part of their personality, had delighted in this morning's duel. It was the ultimate prank against a pompous ass. However, the tender feelings toward their younger friend that had been steadily growing over recent months demanded expression. Although Harry had been amazingly victorious, there had still been a risk. Their hearts deemed that risk unacceptable.

When there was no response from either twin, Harry continued, "You may walk me to my meeting and if you need to, you may wait outside but I assure you I will be perfectly safe."

"Who are you meeting with?" George asked.

"Amelia Bones," Harry answered.

Both twins considered. Finally, Fred spoke, "If it was DMLE business, you would be meeting in her office. If it was really sensitive business, she might come here but it would be during your office hours, scheduled through Percy."

"That means it's personal," noted George.

"There is only one type of personal business that Amelia Bones, Head Head of House Bones, could have with Lord Potter," Fred observed.

"Betrothal," George concluded.

"What!" Harry's exclamation was loud enough to draw attention.

"She has a niece," Fred said with no inflection in his voice.

"A very attractive niece," added George with an equal lack of inflection.

"I am not at all interested in Susan Bones," Harry said with a low voice.

"It doesn't matter if you're interested, Harrikins," Fred said gently. "You will need heirs and there are good reasons to choose her for one of your Houses."

"That may be true," Harry responded, "but it doesn't change anything. I am not interested in Susan Bones in any capacity. I know that I will need heirs but when that time comes the first discussion will not be with someone's guardian."

"Who will it be with?" George asked.

"I'm hoping," Harry replied, "that it will be something the three of us will discuss together."

Stunned into silence, the twins sat. Harry filled another plate of food and continued eating, hoping that his words were not premature.

Eventually, both twins stood, whooped loudly and moved to a clear part of the room and began dancing a jig together. Harry laughed assuming that he was the only one that knew the reason for their antics. Those adults that had spent most of the summer at the manor made fairly accurate guesses as to the cause of the expressed jubilation. There were winks and quiet chuckles throughout the room.

When Harry was finished with tea, he called Dobby and asked him to lead Amelia Bones to a meeting room. Harry, followed by the twins, ducked into a sitting room and called Winky.

"What my Harry want?"

"Winky," Harry said nervously, "I have a meeting with Amelia Bones and it's about a personal matter. How should I be dressed?"

Winky looked over her wizard. He was wearing the deep red shirt and black trousers that she had laid out for him after his time in the greenhouse. With a snap of her fingers, she added a gold brocade waistcoat and a rich brown overrobe.

"There," she said with satisfaction, "now you be Lord Potter."

Harry walked down the hall with Fred and George on either side of him. He stopped just before he got to the small salon where Amelia Bones was waiting. He closed his eyes and felt for the Potter magic and brought it fully into focus. Feeling it settle around him he opened his eyes, grinned at each twin and then stepped into the room.

Amelia Bones automatically stood when Harry entered the room. Looking him over, she almost gasped at the power that surrounded him.

"Lord Potter," she said, "thank you for agreeing to meet with me."

Harry walked over and sat down in the chair and gestured for Amelia to retake her seat. "You are most welcome," he said. "I hope you enjoyed tea."

"It was lovely," Amelia responded. "Do you usually host so many?"

"It varies," Harry answered. "Today was a bit full with everyone wanting to talk about the duel."

"May I ask why you decided on that particular course of action?"

"The duel itself," Harry asked, "or the way I conducted the duel?"

"Both," Amelia replied, "if you don't mind."

"I was advised by my solicitor that a challenge was the appropriate response to a personal insult," Harry said. "What Cornelius Fudge was doing was definitely an insult to my person."

"As to my choice of spells," Harry continued, "that is a method of dueling that I employ in my daily training when I've had a particularly stressful day. It occurred to me that defeating an opponent with such benign and entertaining spells would be particularly disheartening. I'm fifteen years old. I don't want to go around injuring people but at the same time, it needs to be clear that I will not tolerate disrespect."

"You certainly got your message across," Amelia said. "I've come to speak to you about a personal matter."

At Harry's nod, Amelia continued, "As you are head of numerous Houses, you have a responsibility to provide heirs to those Houses."

"I am aware," said Harry.

"My niece, Susan, is a classmate of yours. She is also the heir of House Bones."

"Yes," Harry responded, "I am acquainted with your niece."

"She, too, needs to provide an heir. However, she needs to make sure that her heir carries the Bones name. As such, she is not pursuing any marriage contracts but would prefer a consort agreement."

"What would such an agreement entail?" Harry asked, curious.

"I would like to negotiate a consort agreement with one of your Houses," Amelia said, "that Susan would bear you at least two children, one to take the name of your House and the other to bear the name Bones. This would ensure an heir for both House Bones and one of your Houses."

"Is Susan aware of your proposal?"

"Yes," answered Amelia. "I suggested this and she is agreeable."

"How much has Susan told you about what happened during our second year?"

Amelia frowned, most of Susan's letters home concerned her school work and her intermediate friends. "Are you referring to anything in particular?"

"Did she tell you about the students that were petrified?"

"She mentioned that there had been a few attacks on students but that no one was seriously injured," Amelia answered. "Is that what you are referring to?"

"It started with the caretaker's cat," Harry answered. "I was with two of my friends when we found the petrified cat and writing on the wall referencing the Heir of Slytherin.

"There were more attacks after that against muggleborns," Harry continued. "It was revealed during a disastrous dueling club meeting that I am a parselmouth. Nearly the entirety of the school began to blame me for the attacks, including most of my yearmates. I was shunned and bullied. I was regularly attacked between classes."

"What does this have to do with Susan?" Amelia asked with a sense of dread.

"Hufflepuff, the house of the loyal and hard-working," Harry answered. "Apparently that loyalty is pretty easily overcome by fear and peer pressure."

Before Amelia could respond, Harry continued, "Now granted, Susan was twelve and I'm sure she felt pressure from the older students to fall in line. If it had ended there then I would have probably dismissed it as a mistake."

"Did something else happen?"

"You know about my entry into the Triwizard tournament," Harry replied. "Although I publicly stated that I had not entered myself into the tournament or asked anyone to enter me, very few believed me. I can understand that. What I don't understand is why once again it was an excuse to bully me.

"It's understandable that Susan supported Cedric Diggory. He was, after all, a fellow Puff. What isn't understandable is why she wore a button that both supported Diggory while also declaring 'Potter stinks.'"

"Lord Potter," Amelia began,

Harry interrupted her, "It could have been more peer pressure. It could have been what Susan genuinely believed. Either way, she chose, once again, to participate in school-wide cruelty directed at me.

"It is possible that in a few years, some of the hurt will fade. At this time, I am unwilling to consider any such cooperative partnership with your niece."

"I understand," Amelia said. "I believe myself to be a fair-minded person and I've always told myself that I raised Susan to be equally fair-minded. I have not done that as well as I intended. On behalf of House Bones, I offer formal apology for the hurt you were dealt by my heir."

"House Potter accepts the apology of House Bones," Harry responded. "Perhaps in the future, there will be opportunities to get to know one another better."

Amelia Bones stood and with a respectful nod to Harry, walked out of the room.

Suddenly the day caught up to Harry. He looked up to see the twins in the doorway. The twins exchanged a look and then George turned and left. Fred went over and reached out a hand to pull Harry up.

"Come on," said Fred, "let's get you to the floo."

Still holding Harry's hand, Fred led him to the arrivals room. "Go home and relax. George is letting Filius know."

With a nod and a quick kiss, Harry stepped into the floo and called the address for the keep. The rest of the day would take care of itself.

The Gaunt Legacy

Chapter Notes

Covers Thursday, August 17 - Sunday, August 20. Some overlap with chapter 33

Harry woke with a groan. Opening his eyes, he recognized his bedroom in Potter Manor. Memories flooded from the night before. He learned a valuable lesson. When you are in the midst of a flying duel, in and out of trees, don't think about snogging.

The sound of a hushed giggle had him turning his head. Sitting at the bottom of his bed were Winky and Dobby.

"Goes back sleep, My Harry," Winky said. "Bones still growing."

When Harry woke again, he found he had slept through his normal breakfast time. Following Winky's instructions, Harry had a long soak in his tub before sitting down to a large breakfast. He had just finished when there was a knock on the door followed by Filius and Andromeda entering.

Filius sat across from Harry and poured himself a cup of tea while Andromeda immediately paced around Harry's chair, casting a diagnostic charm. When it was complete, Andromeda sat at the table and poured herself a cup while plates of flaky pastries popped onto the table.

"You certainly did a number on yourself, Harry," Andromeda noted.

"It's not like I planned it," Harry protested.

"I should hope not," the healer answered.

Filius couldn't hold it in any longer as laughter bubbled out of him. Harry gave him a sour look that was somewhat diminished by the blush that dusted his cheeks. The look only served to increase Filius' amusement.

Andromeda watched Harry from a mother's perspective. It was good to see him having a problem related only to a normal adolescent life. Finally, she put down her tea, "Take it easy this morning. No physical activity for the rest of the day. That means no dueling practice and no flying."

Harry accepted the limitations knowing that without magic his injuries would have taken many weeks to heal.

Harry stayed in his room for the remainder of the morning. Percy had popped in and confirmed that there were no pressing issues that needed Harry's direct attention or input.

Harry spent the time before lunch reviewing the information Severus had received from Griselda Marchbanks. The statistics of OWL and NEWT scores combined with the historical record of student power levels told a grim tale. It was another confirmation that magic was deteriorating, at least among wixen. Were other magical races seeing a similar decline? Would it be possible to discuss this with representatives from other magical races? Was this limited to Great Britain or was it happening in other countries?

Harry had finally set aside his notebook when Winky popped in to announce lunch. Harry looked up in surprise. As usual, Thursday mornings were spent quietly with Filius' steady presence in the background and Dobby popping in from time to time to check on him. Harry sent his latest list of questions to Ted and then joined his family for lunch.

Harry continued to have a love-hate relationship with the weekly interviews. He knew they were very important. After the helplessness he felt in the previous year by the constant misrepresentation in the press, it felt good to have his actual views expressed accurately. However, these articles weren't about the frivolities of adolescence. These were issues that were vitally important to the magical health of Great Britain.

Harry's focus for this week's interview was the deterioration of magic. As this was well represented by the recent history of the Gaunt family, Harry focused on that House. It had the added benefit of once again emphasizing Voldemort's true history.

The complication was that the public was more interested in the previous day's duel with Cornelius Fudge. After a brief discussion, it was decided that the Prophet would print two interviews. The first interview, published on Friday, would focus on the current events. Sunday's interview would be with Lord Gaunt.

At tea, Harry found himself with Fred and George on either side of him. They had greeted him with a kiss on each cheek before settling in.

"All better now, Harrikins?" Fred asked. Everyone living at the manor had been aware of Harry's arrival the night before with some sort of injury requiring Andromeda Tonks.

"Pretty much," Harry answered. "Not allowed to fly today."

"What happened?" Hermione asked from the other side of George.

Before Harry could ask, Filius answered from behind, "It isn't unusual to experience injury during intense training. Unfortunately, this one happened while Harry was flying amongst the trees. Fortunately, broken bones are easily mended."

There were nods all around as Filius continued to his usual seat next to Sirius. The remainder of tea passed with Harry answering more questions about the previous day's duel.

While Harry was conducting his interviews, others were busy at Gringotts. When Ted had left Hermione alone in the Hogwarts property vault, he had sent a message to Amanda. Amanda and Hermione spent several hours in the vault formulating a plan. Although it would be

simple enough to magically inventory the contents, that would only list what was there. It would give no further details. Both young women felt that the books in particular needed individual examination. Some seemed well-preserved and in pristine condition. Others looked on the verge of falling apart. Then there was the issue of possible curses which neither girl was qualified to test for.

After returning to the manor, Amanda arranged a return to the vault on Thursday afternoon. She would be joined by Filius, Severus, Remus and Hermione. Once Harry had started his interview under the watchful eyes of Winky and Dobby, everyone had met in the arrivals room to floo to the bank.

Amanda and Hermione watched with amusement as the three teachers reacted to the wealth of knowledge contained in the vault. Once they had overcome their shock, Amanda outlined the plan she and Hermione had devised. The teachers suggested a few changes that were easily incorporated and then the work began. They divided into two groups. Filius, Remus and Hermione would evaluate the collection of books. Severus and Amanda would work on the artifacts. Both groups were equipped with dictaquills to record observations.

When Dobby popped in to announce tea, both groups barely made a dent in their assigned collections. Without Dobby there to herd them back to the manor, the groups would have happily stayed. However, Dobby's insistence and Amanda's good sense won. The group decided that anyone available would return each day between lunch and tea to continue the work knowing it would take several weeks.

The Boy Who Dueled - And Won

Lord Potter, you've had a very busy week.

I've had a very busy summer but I have no regrets about it.

Of everything that has happened since you were emancipated, what would you say is the most significant?

Discovering the full power of magic.

What do you mean by that?

At Hogwarts, I wasn't really taught what magic is. I was taught how to do things with magic. Specifically, I was taught how to cast spells. None of that prepared me for coming face to face with the force that magic is.

Do you think what you've learned this summer about magic is something that should be taught if it even can be taught?

You can certainly teach the principles of it. You can also teach people how to reach in to connect to their own magic. From there they can learn to feel the magic surrounding them, the magic of the world around them, and the magic of other magical beings.

And you believe that should be taught to children?

I believe it should be taught to everyone. I believe that every magical being should grow up knowing that magic is more than a tool. Magic is in every fiber of every natural thing in this world. Even muggles contain threads of magic. No, they don't have enough magic to use that magic but there is still some there.

Can you elaborate a bit more on what you mean by every natural thing?

I mean that magic is more than Wixen. It is more than magical beings or magical creatures. It is more than magical plants. It is in the very ground we walk on. It is in the air we breathe. It is in the water that we drink. It is in the fire that warms us. Those of us with affinities to a natural element have that affinity because the magic already exists in those elements. It is that magic that elemental magic connects to.

Is understanding that magic the reason you so handily defeated Minister Fudge in Wednesday's duel?

It certainly played a role but understanding magic isn't enough to win a duel. The majority of the credit has to go to Filius Flitwick who has spent time with me every day teaching me.

Did he teach you the spells you used in the duel?

Some of them. Mainly he has taught me the importance of not being hit when dueling with someone. There is also a lot of focus on accuracy and precision when casting a spell.

Why did you choose to use the spells you did?

As I mentioned in an earlier interview, Cornelius Fudge has repeatedly chosen to do what was easy rather than what was right. In doing so, Fudge has made a mockery of his position as Minister of Magic. I felt it was only appropriate to demonstrate the folly of his actions.

Some feel your spell choices showed a lack of maturity. Could you respond to that?

Choosing to mock an opponent is a valid choice in any confrontation. It was Fudge who created the conflict with his refusal to face reality and his continued attacks on my character. I hardly see that as a mature course of action for a government leader.

Will you call for a vote of No Confidence at the next Wizengamot meeting?

I hope that the outcome of the duel has been a wake-up call for Cornelius Fudge and he will realize how unsuited he is to leadership. The responsible thing on his part would be to tender his resignation.

And if the Minister doesn't resign?

Then I think that my voice will be one of many demanding his resignation.

Do you have someone in mind as the next Minister of Magic?

No, I'd just like a Minister who puts the needs of all Wixen above the special interests of the wealthy and influential few.

Friday morning, Harry arrived at Potter Manor a little past 7:30. The first interview was published this morning and Harry wouldn't be surprised if Borner dropped in to discuss the public reaction. He also had appointments with Bill and Narcissa. He knew Bill's appointment was to update him on the progress of finding the soul shards but he had no idea what Narcissa wanted to discuss. Either way, they would be enjoyable meetings. After that, Harry hoped to spend the rest of the day revising for his OWL.

"Morning, Percy," Harry greeted. It wasn't unusual to find Percy waiting when Harry arrived in his office. Most of the time, Percy simply handed off the day's schedule and any correspondence that needed Harry's input. Occasionally, there was research that Harry had requested or questions that had arisen as a result of the requested research. Harry was very happy that the day-to-day business of his Houses was handled by his staff.

"Good morning, Lord Potter," Percy responded. Percy's first greeting of every day was formal and after that he relaxed. It was a compromise that met Percy's need for acknowledgment of authority and Harry's preference for a relaxed atmosphere.

Percy handed the day's schedule to Harry, "The only addition is Borner stopping by during your morning tea."

Harry glanced at the schedule and then took the stack of parchment that Percy held out. These were letters and documents that needed either Harry's signature or a House seal.

Harry had just finished affixing his seal to the final document when Amanda led Bill into the office and leaned down to whisper into Percy's ear. Percy quickly gathered all the completed parchments and rushed out of the office. Harry watched him leave and then turned to greet Bill.

"Morning, Bill. Did you come early enough to enjoy breakfast with your brothers?"

"I did and Ginny also joined us," Bill answered. "You feed a lot of people here at Potter Manor."

"Yeah," Harry answered with a big grin. "I never had enough to eat growing up so it feels really good to be able to feed all the people I care about. Plus, the elves really enjoy it."

"I just have to know one thing," Bill said.

"What's that?"

"Hermione is extremely polite," Bill stated. "You are also very polite, even if you are quite snarky. What happened to Ron?"

"Hey man," Harry answered, "you guys raised him."

"We did," Bill responded. "Unfortunately, I think Ron often got overlooked in the shuffle. Between the chaos of the twins and Ginny being both the baby and the only girl, Ron just slipped in there."

"Ron often complained that there was nothing left for him. Everyone else had already accomplished everything."

"Are you serious?". Bill was shocked.

"Yeah," Harry answered. "Ron's pretty smart and he picks up spells quick enough. He just doesn't seem motivated to try. I don't think he sees the point of it."

"I'll mention that to Dad," Bill responded. "Maybe the mind healers that we're all seeing will be able to help." It was a requirement of the vassal agreement that each member of the Weasley family have at least five sessions with a mind healer. Andromeda had provided a list of mind healers that she worked with. Sirius had given a hearty endorsement to Marius Black.

"At least you're wrangling the twins now," Bill noted with a smirk.

Harry blushed, "I'm pretty sure it's the other way around."

Bill laughed, "As long as everyone is happy. I'm here to update you on the progress with the soul shards. We've been able to calculate that Tom Riddle split off seven pieces of his soul."

Harry blanched, "That's awful."

"It is," Bill agreed. "Based on the specialized spells we developed, we believe that the first five were made before the attack on Godric's Hollow. We don't think Riddle intended to break off the soul piece that was trapped in your scar. We guess that he intended to preserve six pieces of his soul."

Harry nodded and considered the corrupted items already found. "So we have four items. My scar was unintended so that leaves two others. Did he make them before, you know?"

"Figuring out stuff like this involves a lot of arithmancy," Bill answered. "In our search for the fifth item, we uncovered traces of another with a similar magical signature."

"What does that mean?"

"It means that sometime after he lost a piece of his soul to you, he created the sixth intentional horcrux."

"And we have no idea what that is," Harry observed. "So, two missing pieces."

"Not entirely missing, Bill responded. "It's kind of complicated to explain but basically we were able to create a ritual that gave us the approximate location of the horcruxes."

"Shouldn't you look a little happier about that?"

Bill laughed, "It's a good news, bad news sort of situation."

"So what's the good news?"

"It looks like the older horcrux is probably in Hogwarts. It's also possible it's in Hogsmeade or the Forbidden Forest but it is somewhere in that area."

"I'm guessing that your team will be looking for it next week when they are examining the wards at Hogwarts," Harry said.

"Yes," Bill responded. "My whole team will be there. We have created crystals that will sense a horcrux if it is nearby."

"So that's hopeful," Harry said. "What's the bad news?"

"We've been able to identify a large general area where the last horcrux is. Unfortunately, it appears to move around a lot within that area."

"So someone is carrying it around?"

"That's one possibility," Bill noted. "The other is that Riddle managed to envelop his soul shard into something living."

"A person?" Harry asked in horror. "Like he did with me?"

"Harry, you were never a horcrux," Bill stated emphatically. "A horcrux is an intentional, ritually prepared vessel. The shard of Riddle's soul that latched onto your wound was an anomaly. We don't know how but somehow that shard was wrapped in your magic and prevented from doing anything else. From some of your descriptions, it sounds like it tried to both get away from your body or get into you. Fortunately, it was stuck in place."

Harry sat for a moment, absorbing what Bill said. Finally, he asked, "So what do you think is going on?"

"There are records of horcruxes being created in a living being. It happened in Egypt when worshippers believed they were housing a piece of their god," Bill explained. "There are also records from several places around the world of people using familiars to create a horcrux."

"Last summer I had some sort of dream vision," Harry said hesitantly. "It involved Riddle in his weird baby form, Peter Pettigrew and a snake. He called it Nagini. It felt like I was watching everything from the snake's perspective."

Bill grinned, "Harry James Many-Names Potter, you have made this one of the easiest horcrux hunts in history."

"So you think the snake is the horcrux," Harry stated.

"I think it the most likely possibility," Bill responded. "I'll run it past the rest of the team but I think they'll agree."

“Good,” Harry said. “The sooner we find them all the sooner we can end the nightmare of Tom Riddle.”

Narcissa Black flooded into Potter Manor from Rose Cottage. She felt the magic of the manor embrace her. This had become a home to her even if she no longer resided there.

An elf popped in, “Welcome, Miss Cissa. I be Mike and I be your elf today”

“Good morning, Mike,” Narcissa said warmly.

Mike leaned in and said softly, “Staff is unhappy. Lady Cissa can help.”

“I will do my best,” Narcissa assured the elf. She had about forty minutes until her appointment with Harry.

Over the summer, Narcissa had gotten to know the staff. In her efforts on behalf of both Lord Black and Lord Potter, they had been an invaluable resource. When Narcissa walked into the common area of the staff offices, she could feel the tension. She went directly to Percy’s office.

“Good morning, Mr. Weasley,” Narcissa greeted.

“Lady Black,” Percy said with relief.

Narcissa was surprised. Usually, Potter Manor was a place of calm. Harry’s easygoing manner and the respect he treated everyone with had set a tone that permeated the entire estate. “Has something happened to Harry?”

Percy blanched, “No, but he won’t be happy.”

Narcissa raised an eyebrow and waited.

“Undersecretary Umbridge and Professor Dumbledore both arrived this morning demanding to speak to Harry,” Percy rushed to explain. “I’ve put them in separate rooms to wait. They refused to make an appointment.”

“Have they said what they wanted?”

“No,” Percy answered, literally wringing his hands, “they are just demanding to speak to Harry. I tried to explain but they insisted that Harry see them.”

“I will speak to both of them and explain the situation to Harry,” Narcissa said, her calm and even manner already affecting Percy’s anxiety.

“Thank you, Lady Black.”

“I want you to take a small break, maybe a walk in the gardens,” Narcissa continued. “Did Ted get a chance to look over the agreement I sent yesterday?”

“Yes, I have it here,” Percy answered, holding up a folder.

“I’ll come pick it up after I’ve spoken to our unexpected guests,” Narcissa replied. “You did the right thing this morning. Any upset Harry has about this situation will not be about your actions.”

Narcissa left the staff offices and called for Mike. After a brief discussion, she went to the small salon that hosted the Undersecretary. Dolores Umbridge made much of her title but she was the Percy Weasley to the minister. After working with both, Narcissa had concluded that Percy Weasley, while a bit stiff, was a far better administrative coordinator. There was a time to act on the authority of the position held but Dolores Umbridge attempted to be a living embodiment of that authority. It was grating.

“Undersecretary Umbridge,” Narcissa greeted as she entered the small salon. She noted with amusement that the room was a riot of Harry’s personal colors. The elves’ loyalty to Harry was unfailing and today it was obvious to those familiar with the manor.

“Lady Black,” Umbridge rose and gave a respectful nod. Dolores Umbridge recognized that Lady Black was coming to have more influence than Lady Malfoy had enjoyed.

“I understand you are here to see Lord Potter.”

“That boy,” Umbridge said with loathing.

“That young man,” Narcissa corrected, “controls eight Wizengamot seats and bested Cornelius in a duel.”

“And he needs to apologize for it,” Umbridge snapped.

Narcissa laughed. It was the only suitable response.

“Undersecretary,” Narcissa said when she finally calmed down, “you need to leave. If you want the Lord Potter to even consider anything you have to say, you need to make an appointment.”

Having dispensed her advice, Narcissa left the room and went down the hall to see Albus Dumbledore.

Albus Dumbledore was fuming. When he arrived shortly before 8:00 a.m., he did not expect to see Harry immediately. Quite honestly, Dumbledore didn't even expect the boy to be awake yet. He imagined that he would wait and be served tea while someone went to frantically awaken the young man. Dumbledore further imagined that Harry would arrive with apologies tumbling from his lips to make amends for his previous actions.

Unfortunately, at least for Dumbledore, reality was a bit different. When Dumbledore arrived at Potter Manor, he was greeted by a house elf who immediately went to fetch someone. To Dumbledore's surprise, that someone was Percy Weasley.

Embracing his usual grandfatherly mein, Dumbledore expressed a need to talk to Harry. Although nervous, Percy was firm in his actions. Percy escorted Dumbledore to a small salon and left after summoning an elf.

Dumbledore looked around the room. It was decorated in harmonious shades of brown with deep red accents. If he was remembering correctly, they were Potter colors. It wasn't to Dumbledore's taste but it was soothing. Dumbledore promptly conjured a large, soft armchair in a riotous floral pattern and sat down. An elf popped in and gave Dumbledore a furious look. A finger snap and Dumbledore found himself sitting on a small sofa and his conjured chair gone. Undeterred, Dumbledore once again conjured his preferred seating. He had barely sat when the elf returned. Dumbledore found himself back on the sofa. The third time Dumbledore attempted to alter the room's furnishings, he found himself not only back on the sofa but bound. When he protested, the elf pointed at him and Dumbledore found himself silenced. Despite his considerable power, Dumbledore was unable to overcome the elven magic.

Dumbledore was so angry that he didn't notice anyone entering the room until a voice said, "Oh my." Dumbledore looked up to see Narcissa Black standing in the doorway with a broad smile on her face.

Narcissa walked over to the bound man, "You must have upset the elves. Mike?"

A different elf popped in, "Lady Cissa calls?"

"Please bring me some tea," Narcissa requested as she took a seat across from Dumbledore.

When the tea service appeared on a small table beside Narcissa, she poured herself a cup, took a delicate sniff to determine the blend and added a splash of milk. As Narcissa sipped her tea, she began to speak, "The Potter elves are the epitome of gracious hospitality. I find it curious that you have been treated differently."

Narcissa finished her tea and set down the cup, "Of course, the elves are extremely loyal to Harry. I imagine they would be quite upset if they perceived any insult to him."

Narcissa was considering another cup when Mike popped in, "Bibi asked Lady Cissa to morning tea after meeting with Lord Potter."

Narcissa smiled, "I would be delighted."

Mike nodded, "Lord Harry be ready."

Narcissa stood, "It's been lovely seeing you, Albus. I hope we can do this again sometime."

Narcissa stood and left a furious Dumbledore.

Harry stood as Narcissa entered the office. He led her to the seating area and took his usual spot on the loveseat.

Across from him, Narcissa placed a folder on the small table, “After your duel with Cornelius, I suggested to Lucius that it would be good to negotiate the settlement between House Weasley and House Malfoy before you turned your attention to those who had supported the minister.” Narcissa looked at the folder and then looked back to Harry, “I think you will be pleased with the agreement.”

Harry picked up the folder and perused the contents. There was a note from Ted indicating his approval of the terms. Narcissa had negotiated a one-time settlement to be deposited directly into the main Malfoy vault. At the Wizengamot meeting following notification of the deposit, Malfoy would announce the end of the blood feud between House Weasley and House Potter. Harry looked at the settlement amount, looked at Narcissa and looked again at the amount.

Narcissa merely smiled.

“This is remarkable,” Harry noted. The amount was a fraction of what he had been expecting. It was still well beyond what the Weasleys could have afforded on their own but it was far less than Harry had anticipated when he signed the vassal agreement.

“It is possible that your thorough humiliation of Cornelius had some impact on the terms,” Narcissa noted.

“I was only doing as advised,” Harry said with a smirk.

“You did very well,” Narcissa said. “This is the first ripple. Now you must build on it.”

“What do you suggest?”

“I know you have your OWL in a few days,” Narcissa answered, “but every day you need to go out and be seen. It shouldn’t take you more than a half hour at a time but go somewhere public. Vary who is with you. One day, take friends, another, take a seat holder on the Wizengamot, another, a respected teacher. You get the idea.”

“What would you suggest I do when I go out?”

“It doesn’t matter,” Narcissa responded. “Just be seen and heard. Maybe after lunch pop out to Quality Quidditch Supplies with your former teammates. Tomorrow, take Remus and his overdeveloped sweet tooth to Honeydukes. You will be at the Ministry for your OWL on Monday so I’ll have someone there to meet you after to take you to lunch.”

“Fine,” Harry grumbled. “You know more about this sort of thing than I ever will.”

“Don’t underestimate yourself,” Narcissa scolded. “You’ve managed an incredible amount in a short time but it will take time to catch up on the education you missed growing up.”

Harry nodded and returned his attention to the settlement, “What will you be doing while I am out and about?”

“I thought a trip to Paris would be delightful,” Narcissa said.

“Paris?”

“Paris. Once things settle down a bit for you, you should take some time to visit various magical districts. I prefer Paris when I need to update my wardrobe,” Narcissa answered.

“Your wardrobe?”

Narcissa laughed, “Really, Harry? I’m not stuttering.”

“Will you be going alone?”

“I thought I might take a few young women to join me,” Narcissa said. “It is an important part of a young woman’s education to experience a Parisien shopping spree.”

“I’ll leave that part to you,” Harry said drily. “I’ll authorize a transfer to your personal Black vault to help cover expenses. Consider it part of my thanks for your efforts on behalf of House Potter.”

Narcissa nodded, “Thank you, Lord Potter.”

“Perhaps you can tell me about the unexpected visitors to the manor,” Harry suggested.

Narcissa raised an eyebrow in question.

“I can feel the change in the magic of the manor,” Harry explained.

“Dolores Umbridge is here. She is the Undersecretary to the Minister,” Narcissa said. “She is demanding that you apologize to the Minister.”

Harry laughed, “People are funny.”

“Dumbledore is here, tied and silenced.”

At Harry’s look, Narcissa continued, “I have no idea but your elves are very proprietary.”

“Any suggestions?”

“Don’t see either of them,” Narcissa answered. “Percy can tell them you are unavailable today and offer a future appointment. Then have an elf escort them to the arrivals room. Once there, the elf can change the wards on the room.”

“I will ask the elves to add a sitting room to the arrivals area for unexpected guests,” Harry said.

“That’s an excellent idea,” Narcissa noted. “Hospitality can be offered without allowing them further into the manor. It threw poor Percy into quite a state.”

“I can imagine,” Harry said. “He would never imagine not offering a place for either of them to wait. This takes the burden off of him. Thank you for everything, Narcissa.”

Narcissa stood, recognizing the dismissal, “You are always welcome, Harry.”

When Percy escorted Borner into the room, Harry gave him instructions concerning the unwanted visitors and the addition of a sitting room to the arrivals area. Magic made such things easy.

After Borner took the seat most recently occupied by Narcissa, an elf popped in with tea and an assortment of sandwiches and biscuits.

“In my decades of work, I have never had a more interesting client,” Borner said while fixing his tea.

“Is that a good thing?”

“It is very good, young man,” Borner answered. “There is nothing worse than tedium in one’s chosen work.”

Harry decided to keep his disagreement to himself. He was glad that the people around him had less life-threatening problems.

After plating up a few biscuits, Borner continued, “Your interview about the duel was perfect. Short and to the point. I know you don’t enjoy the public exposure but I would like to encourage some of the Prophet reporters to reach out to you for comments on various issues.”

Harry thought about the suggestion while munching on a cucumber sandwich. Why didn’t they serve these at Hogwarts? Finally, he spoke, “How would you suggest I do that?”

“I would suggest your correspondence secretary as your point of contact,” Borner answered. They can owl or even come here to make requests. How much or how little you say is up to you. You can give your comments directly or through Emily. She is a very personable and well-spoken young woman.”

“I’ll consider it,” Harry answered. “Right now the only thing I want to think about is Herbology.”

“An understandable priority,” Borner responded.

After that, Harry enjoyed his morning tea while Borner regaled him with gossip learned from the ministry and various wizarding restaurants and pubs.

Before spending the remainder of his morning revising his Herbology notes, Harry sent an elf to invite Ron to lunch. If he needed to be seen in public, at least some of it would be spent with friends. At lunch, Harry asked Ron to join him for a quick trip to Diagon Alley. Ron accepted but when they got to the arrivals room, Ron asked what they were doing.

“I thought a trip to Quality Quidditch Supplies would be fun for both of us,” Harry answered.

It was nice just being with Ron. They might not ever be like they were but they could still be friends and enjoy time together. It was easier than Harry expected to get Ron to accept a new

broom. Although Ron eyed the Firebolt, eventually he chose a Cleansweep model that was considered the top choice for Keepers.

Walking back through Diagon Alley toward the Leaky Cauldron, Ron asked, “You’re really not going back to Hogwarts?”

“Nope,” Harry answered, pulling Ron over to Fortescue's for an ice cream.

After they sat down with their selection, Ron looked at Harry, “What am I going to do without you?”

“You’re going to be Ron,” Harry responded. “You’re going to hang out with Dean and Seamus. You’re going to play Quidditch. You’re going to do your homework. You’ll miss us but I’ll be there for your quidditch games and Hogsmeade weekends.”

Ron nodded, “Yeah, it’ll be different but I guess that happens.”

“Different doesn’t mean bad,” Harry observed. “It just means different.”

Harry spent the rest of the day in his personal greenhouse. The elves had brought in a variety of plants. Bob asked questions while Harry pruned and potted. Saturday was spent in a similar fashion with an after-lunch trip with Remus to Honeyduke's. No one loved chocolate more than Remus Lupin.

A relaxed Sunday was a welcome respite. After being cleared by Andromeda, Harry spent much of the day in the air.

The Gaunt Legacy

We learned this week that Harry James Potter is Head of a number of magical houses. Lord Potter has previously given us interviews on behalf of those Houses. Today I am speaking to him about House Gaunt.

Some of your Houses are well-known: Potter, Black, Gryffindor. What can you tell us about House Gaunt?

House Gaunt is descended from House Slytherin. Like Salazar Slytherin, many members of the Gaunt family had the gift of parseltongue. That gift led to their interest in magical gifts. Generations of Gaunts studied inherited magical gifts.

Yet House Gaunt was a dormant House. How did that happen?

In reading various House grimoires, I’ve discovered that several hundred years ago a shift started. The focus of magic became somehow narrower. Wixen became less open to new ideas. Houses became super focused on themselves. As a whole, wixen became less tolerant

of other magical races. In House Gaunt, the focus on inherited magical gifts shifted solely to a focus on the magical gift of House Gaunt: parseltongue and the associated parselmagic.

I know that parseltongue is the ability to understand and speak to snakes. What is parselmagic?

Parseltongue is more than the ability to understand snakes. It is a complete language. Not only does each magical race have its own way of doing magic but each magical culture has its own language that it uses to call on magic. In Great Britain, we mostly use variations of Latin or Old English for our spells. In North America, many spells are based on Native languages. In Asia, spells are based in the ancient languages of that area. Same in Africa or South America. Any language can be used to create spells. Parselmagic is magic that uses the parsel language for spell work and rituals.

How did the study of parseltongue and parselmagic lead to the downfall of House Gaunt?

In a misguided effort to make the magical traits stronger, House Gaunt began intermarrying. It started with marrying second and third cousins. Then first cousins started marrying. There are records of aunts and uncles marrying nieces and nephews. Fortunately, the only time that siblings were married, there were no offspring. The result of these closely related pairings did result in strengthening the parseltongue ability. Unfortunately, it led to a weakening of nearly everything else, not only weaker physical health but also weaker magic. By the time the last generation of Gaunts was born, they didn't even have enough magic to wield a wand. They were considered squibs. Ironically, one of the most powerful wizards of the last century was born to one of these squibs.

How did that happen?

The young woman, Merope Gaunt, fell in love with a local man. This local man was a muggle.

So you're saying that the marriage of a squib and a muggle produced a powerful wizard. Do you know who this wizard is?

The marriage of Merope Gaunt and Tom Riddle resulted in the birth of Tom Marvolo Riddle, known today as Lord Voldemort.

You-Know-Who is the son of a squib and muggle?

Yes. I believe I've mentioned it before but people don't want to believe it. The wizard who styles himself as a Lord and a champion of pure-blood supremacy is barely a half-blood. I think Tom Riddle proves that blood status does not affect power. It also proves that people believe what they want and not what is true.

So if Tom Marvolo Riddle was the last Gaunt, how did you become Head of House Gaunt?

By Right of Conquest. Tom Riddle was the last of both House Gaunt and House Slytherin. As I defeated him over a decade ago, I had the right to claim both Houses. I did so earlier this summer. I don't know if Riddle is still claiming to be the Heir of Slytherin but he isn't.

So all the claims of You-Know-Who are false? He isn't the Heir of Slytherin and he isn't a pureblood.

Correct. He is still a very powerful . . . I'm not sure what to call him. He has the remaining soul of Tom Riddle but he isn't human. That soul is housed in a constructed body created by a ritual.

But you say he is still powerful?

I assume so but honestly, I'm not sure. I mean, when I fought him after the third Triwizard task, I was an exhausted and severely wounded child. It was hardly a fair fight and I still managed to survive and escape. Maybe he isn't as powerful as everyone thinks.

Would you be willing to face him now?

I'd prefer not. I'd rather just live my life but I have a feeling that won't be an option. If Tom Riddle ever dares to show his face in public, I will certainly answer any challenge he makes.

Testing Time

Chapter Summary

Monday, August 21 - Tuesday, August 22

“Lord Potter.”

Harry turned and saw an older gentleman approach across the ministry atrium.

“Lord Potter, I’m Frederick Greengrass,” the man said.

“Lord Greengrass,” Harry responded. “How can I help you?” Now Narcissa’s last words before he left for his OWL testing made sense. She had told him that Frederick Greengrass was Head of House Greengrass and was considered the leader of the neutral faction in the Wizengamot.

“I was hoping you had time to join me for lunch today,” Greengrass answered.

“Certainly,” Harry answered amiably while internally cursing Narcissa Black who was unquestionably the instigator of this encounter. “Can you suggest a suitable restaurant?”

“The Upper Level dining room here puts together a nice spread,” Greengrass suggested.

Once both men were seated, Harry looked around. It was a large room decorated in neutral colors. There was quite a bit of space between tables as well as screens and planters that created islands of privacy. On the way, Greengrass explained that the Upper Level dining room was reserved for Heads of Ministry departments and Wizengamot seat holders. Generally, it was less used early in the week.

“What brought you to the ministry this morning, Lord Potter?”

“Herbology OWL,” Harry answered while glancing at the menu. He looked up, “And please, call me Harry.”

Greengrass nodded and reciprocated, “It’s Frederick. I’m told the Herbology OWL is a bit different when taken at the ministry.”

“That’s what I was told,” Harry replied, “at least the practical part. I quite enjoyed it, although the written part was not fun.”

“It never is, regardless of the subject,” Frederick said. “I understand you stole Ted Tonks from my brother’s legal firm.”

Harry laughed, "That's one way to look at it. The offer to hire Ted directly was surprising, but it has worked out very well."

"My brother learned at a young age from the goblins that the best deals are the ones where everyone makes a profit."

"Muggles refer to it as a win/win situation," Harry noted.

"A good way to put it," Frederick observed. "It was suggested to me by Narcissa Black that I take the time to get to know you."

"As much as I'd like to complain, I can't," Harry said. "She has proven herself an excellent adviser."

"It was quite unexpected when you dissolved her marriage," Frederick noted. He had only his observations from the last Wizengamot session and a few comments from his daughter to go by. He had been surprised to see the young Lord take a clear stand against Dumbledore.

Harry sighed. He recognized this as a fact-finding mission on both their parts. "Once I took the oath of House Black and read the grimoire, the path was clear. There is no room in House Black for another Lord, no matter what name he gives himself."

"Well said. I wish more Houses had that attitude."

"Magic only allows for Lords within Magical Houses," Harry said firmly. "Anything else, regardless of whether you consider it light or dark, is an affront to Magic."

"That's a hard line to take," Frederick observed.

"It's a necessary line," Harry responded. "I believe that part of the reason magic is failing in our society is that too many magical houses have lost their way."

"Do you believe that magic is failing?"

Harry started ticking off on his fingers, "Relations between magical species are at an all-time low. Most Houses have a single heir. More and more squibs are being born and cast aside, which is lost magic both now and in the future."

"Squibs don't have magic," Frederick objected.

"They don't have enough to wield a wand," Harry countered. "Wanded magic is not the limit of magic. Potions, runes, arithmancy, divination, history, and astronomy are all subjects that don't require a wand. Squibs have enough magic for most potions and runic arrays. I'm sure you could find a dozen squibs that could teach History of Magic better than Binns does."

"I never thought of it like that," Frederick admitted.

"Most don't," Harry agreed. "They only see the absence of a Hogwarts letter. That is also something that needs to change. When Hogwarts was founded, they admitted those with non-wanded magic. Squibs were usually referred to as hedge-wixen. They were trained in the

non-wanded subjects. No one notices that the wanded subjects are far outnumbered by the non-wanded ones.”

“There are many who won’t like what you are saying.”

“It doesn’t make it any less true,” Harry rejoined.

“You’ve confused a lot of people.”

“How so?”

“Mainly because you haven’t met people’s expectations,” Frederick answered.

“How could I? Most of those expectations aren’t about me but about a mythical Boy-Who-Lived. Add in the outright lies printed by the Daily Prophet and then the decade of fiction presented as truth about my early life, no real person could live up to any of that, much less all of that.”

Frederick nodded, “I can see your point. Still, some of it is true. You did defeat You-Know-Who as a baby. You won the Triwizard tournament. I wonder how much I’ve heard from my daughters is true.”

“I don’t know what you’ve been told,” Harry responded, “but I will tell you a few things. My first-year DADA professor, Quirrel, was possessed by Tom Riddle, and I drove him out, killing Quirrel in the process. In my second year, a student was possessed by a piece of Tom Riddle’s spirit. It resulted in a basilisk petrifying numerous students. I killed the basilisk and destroyed that piece of Riddle’s spirit. If you’ve heard about my third year, you know much of the story about Sirius Black trying to kill me is untrue. However, I did cast a patronus that repelled over a hundred dementors. By the way, those dementors were on school grounds at the order of Cornelius Fudge, who had already refused to acknowledge the truth about Sirius Black.”

Harry paused and took a few bites of his meal. He looked at the shock on Frederick’s face with amusement. After a few moments, Harry continued, “Last year, I was illegally entered into a tournament and then forced to participate. I don’t know if it could have been undone, but the Ministry and the Headmaster insisted I would lose my magic if I didn’t participate. After being kidnapped from the final task, I watched a classmate get killed. I was used as part of a ritual to give what was left of Tom Riddle a body. Then, there were all of our leading citizens that showed up when summoned and watched as I was tortured and forced to once again fight for my life.”

Harry paused, “Huh,”

“What?” Frederick finally found his voice.

“All those leading citizens that Tom Riddle summoned using the Dark Mark,” Harry responded. “I think that should be the subject of my next interview.”

“Is that wise?”

“No,” Harry grinned, “but I’m young. I’m expected to do foolish things.”

Frederick laughed, “Yes, you are.”

From there, the conversation moved to lighter things. It was a pleasant meal, and Harry realized that Narcissa was right. Being seen and, more importantly, being heard was important. He needed people to see him acting on magic’s behalf.

The rest of the day followed its usual Monday pattern. A quick check-in with Andromeda accompanied by tea and gossip was a welcome respite after the OWL exam and a public lunch. The hour with Heartwise was more intense. Harry had taken on a lot of responsibility in a short amount of time. Sometimes, he needed to vent, which took up most of the hour.

Heartwise listened with compassion, but finally she asked, “If you could go back to the beginning of summer and do things differently, would you?”

“Not a bit,” Harry answered. “Yeah, it’s a lot, but I have so much now, and it is totally worth it.”

His time with Gorin lasted longer than usual. Gorin popped them to a large field they had previously used. Filius met them there.

“Are you finished with the property vault?” Harry asked, surprised to see Filius.

“Not even close,” Filius answered, “but you are more important than piles of old books.”

Harry rushed to the small man and hugged him, “Thank you.”

“Harry, we’re family,” Filius responded, “that will always come first. Now let’s see what challenge Gorin has for you today.”

Gorin snapped, and the field was filled with a variety of boulders. Harry practiced hitting the boulders, varying the spells and the intensity. When Gorin was satisfied with Harry’s progress, Gorin refilled the field with more boulders. Harry’s next task was to rearrange the boulders by size without using a wand. It was both an exercise and a test of Harry’s magical control. It also measured his power level after expending a significant amount of magic. By the end, Harry’s control was not as fine and he was exhausted but Gorin expressed satisfaction at the results.

While Harry was taking his OWL, Hermione was at Hogwarts. She was very excited about the coming week. She would spend her mornings observing one of the warding or curse-breaking teams. Afternoons would be spent in the property vault. It was an extravaganza of knowledge that Hermione accepted with both greed and gratitude. She was allowed to follow a team around and take notes. At lunch, Hermione could ask all the questions accumulated during the morning.

There were six teams assigned to Hogwarts. Two teams would work on the wards. The first step was examining the wards inside and outside of Hogwarts. The Hogwarts charter stipulated that the wards should be checked annually with an in-depth examination every five years. Any changes to the ward structures were to be recorded and reviewed as part of the annual examination. Unfortunately, Dumbledore had gotten increasingly lax over his decades as Headmaster. In recent years, Dumbledore had made numerous changes to the wards that had deteriorated the overall ward scheme. It would take the warding teams three days to fully document not only the current state of the wards but also the progression of changes that had occurred.

One team was assigned to assess the condition of the Forbidden Forest. Although considered separate, the forest was part of Hogwarts. A long-standing treaty with the centaurs allowed them complete access to the forest. Unfortunately, the relationship between wixen and centaurs had deteriorated to the point that the current centaur herd believed the forest was entirely their domain. Before the forest could be examined, the centaurs would need to be reminded of the original treaty terms. Balgor, an ancient dwarrow warrior, entered the forest alone with a copy of the treaty and the Hogwarts charter. He presented the documents to the centaur leader and then retreated with a promise to return the following day.

Another team was assigned to the Black Lake. Like the Forbidden Forest, the Black Lake was part of Hogwarts. Unlike the centaurs, who no longer observed the terms of the original treaty, the Merpeople were scrupulous in keeping their longstanding word. Wixen may have forgotten, but the Merpeople considered it a point of honor to uphold the agreement. After conferring with the leader of the Mer, the lake team was charged with examining every part of the lake and surrounding area to ensure it was safe for students to enjoy.

The final two teams consisted entirely of curse-breakers. Their remit was to examine every inch of the castle and grounds to ensure it was curse-free. While there were rumors of a curse on the DADA teaching position, nothing had ever been documented. If there was a curse, it would not be allowed to remain, nor would any other curses or dark objects.

At lunch, the Gringotts teams set apart from the staff in the Great Hall and discussed their initial findings.

“The centaurs are most likely to be uncooperative. We may need Lord Griffindor-Slytherin’s presence to enforce the treaty,” Balrog stated.

“Will they respect his authority? He is considered a youth,” Snorlan, a junior warding specialist, asked.

Bill, attached to one of the curse-breaking teams, answered, “Harry Potter is young, but when he wears the authority of his Lordship, his power is undeniable.” Several of the dwarrow who had encountered the young lord nodded in agreement.

Fallmont, the dwarrow leading the Black Lake team, spoke next, “Thanks to the continued adherence of the Mer to the treaty, we should be finished with the lake by Wednesday. The surrounding banks will most likely need modification when our survey is complete. The interior of the lake is clean and well-maintained, even outside the Mer village.”

“The wards are a mess,” Huro said. Huro was an ancient dwarrow warding master. “They’ve been manipulated so much that even the basic safety wards have deteriorated. Right now, even the lass here could punch through.”

Hermione blinked, surprised at the reference. “Punch through?”

“Although the usual way to break down wards is to undo the weaving, a sufficiently powerful spell can sometimes punch through a ward,” Bill explained. “That Huro thinks you have enough power to do it says a lot about both your power and the weakness of the wards.”

Hermione nodded, “So Harry could pull down the wards easily,” As many of the goblins at the table nodded, Hermione continued, “That’s not good. It’s lucky that no one thought to try.”

“Considering the times, it’s a very good thing,” Huro responded.

Gnurm from one of the curse-breaking teams spoke next, “We found the curse on the defense position. It’s overly complicated but shouldn’t be hard to break down. That will be done by the end of today.”

“We are still in the outer dungeons,” Proc said. “We aren’t finding curses, but we’ve encountered quite a few hidden dark objects.”

“Recommendations?” Shelk, the dwarrow in charge of the overall project. She had worked as both a curse breaker and a warding specialist.

“Another team to examine the wards,” Huro said. “I think we might be best served to take down the wards and start over completely.”

There was silence as everyone considered the recommendation. To recommend replacing ancient wards was damning. For most at the table, there could be no greater condemnation of Albus Dumbledore’s stewardship of Hogwarts.

Finally, Huro spoke, “When your examination is complete, I want that included as a consideration. Tomorrow, we will bring in two additional warding teams to re-examine the wards and make their recommendation. Both sets of warding teams will examine the health of the wardstones.”

The remainder of the lunch passed in amiable conversation, with Hermione peppering those around her with questions. Hermione was still considered a youngling by the dwarrow, and her questions were viewed with indulgence.

Afternoon tea at Potter Manor was the usual lively crowd. Harry enjoyed just watching everyone and listening to the easygoing banter of his friends.

“How did the OWL go?” Draco asked.

“I knew the answers, but the written part was tedious,” Harry answered. “I’m so glad that Bob doesn’t require essays.”

“What about the practical? I’ve heard it’s a bit different at the ministry.”

“Yeah,” Harry responded, “at Hogwarts they set up these stations to test your ability to work with different plants. The ministry has a greenhouse that they use. They sent me in and watched me for an hour.”

“What did you have to do?” Ginny asked. She spent nearly every afternoon on the quidditch pitch and frequently joined her friends for tea.

“The instructions were, ‘Go in and do what needs to be done’”

There were many explanations of surprise. Finally, George asked, “So what did you do?”

“First, I found a separate section with all the maintenance supplies. I put on gloves and an apron. I added the basic herbology tools to the pockets, and then I walked around. I found a couple of plants that needed the roots aerated. I removed dead foliage and did a bit of pruning. Several plants needed to be repotted. It was actually pretty interesting.”

“Were you nervous?”

“At the beginning of the written part,” Harry answered, “but once I started, I realized I knew the answers. I was a little hesitant when I started in the greenhouse, but by the time I was outfitted, it felt natural.”

Hermione joined the conversation, “Will you continue to study for NEWTs?”

Several people chuckled as if the question was absurd, but Harry surprised everyone, “Definitely.”

“Why?” The question came from several people.

“I enjoy it,” Harry answered. “Plus, it helps my magic. Both the Potter and Stinchcombe magics are rooted in the earth. Add in the Stinchcombe commitment to the land, and it is the right thing for me to do.”

“I never thought you really liked Herbology,” Hermione said.

“I didn’t,” Harry replied. “I saw Herbology as gardening with magic, and since gardening was a chore forced on me, I couldn’t see past that. Bob helped me see how it’s more than that. He taught me how to connect my magic to the magic in the earth and the magic in the plants and get it all working together.”

“I bet that’s what it is to Longbottom,” Draco noted. “He seems to have a real talent for it.”

Harry nodded, “His grandmother had a long talk out in the greenhouse with Bob and finally agreed to let Neville study with us this year. I can’t imagine what Bob said, but he’s very passionate about the subject.”

“My mother always loved the gardens at Malfoy Manor,” Draco said. “I’m sure she chose the house in Hogsmeade for the gardens there.”

“Did you enjoy your morning?” Harry asked Hermione.

“Oh, Harry, it was amazing,” Hermione answered, her face alight with happiness. “I watched one of the curse-breaking teams. It was fascinating.”

“I’m glad you enjoyed it,” Harry responded. “I’ll be there in the morning to open the Chamber of Secrets.”

“Are you nervous about going back?”

“No, I’ve been reading the Slytherin grimoire, so I haven’t been thinking about what happened to me down there. I’m looking forward to seeing the place where Salazar Slytherin spent so much time. There is so much more to it than the little bit I saw.”

The next morning. Harry went to the manor early to go through his correspondence and grab the Slytherin grimoire. He was surprised to see Severus waiting with Hermione.

Severus saw Harry’s surprised look and said, “I have long wanted to see Salazar’s chamber. Unfortunately, Dumbledore forbade the staff from asking you about it.”

Harry frowned, “Any idea why?”

“Dumbledore always had what the staff felt was an excessive interest in you,” Snape answered. “After a while, we just accepted it as another Dumbledore oddity.”

Harry could only nod in response. He still hadn’t come to terms with the harm Dumbledore had done in his life.

The three flooded to the Three Broomsticks and walked to the school gates. Both curse-breaking teams would be going into the chamber. Harry had provided memories of his time in the chamber, and it was believed that the chamber was much more extensive than the main room Harry had been in.

There was another team of dwarrow going to examine the remains of the basilisk. Because of the strength of the venom, the carcass would remain well-preserved for at least a decade. After sending the memory to Sharpnail, Harry received a letter informing him of rights to the basilisk remains. Harry was surprised that Dumbledore hadn’t taken advantage and harvested the remains. Based on the memory, the remains would be worth millions of galleons if distributed internationally.

Hagrid met the Gringotts' teams at the gate and didn’t even notice the addition of Harry and Severus. The teams dispersed to their assigned tasks. Today, Hermione was joining Harry.

Myrtle was not in her bathroom, and Harry breathed a sigh of relief. He quickly made his way to the sink and hissed. After the sink lowered, Harry silently cleaned the pipe and cast a

large cushioning charm at the base. Harry hissed again and a stairway formed. Then he turned to the waiting group.

“When Ron and I discovered the opening, we went down the pipe. It was fun but very messy. I found out from Slytherin’s grimoire how to call the stairs. I’m still going down the pipe. It’s a lot faster and a lot more fun. You are welcome to use whatever method you prefer.”

“Why is the pipe there if stairs can be called?” one of the team asked.

“It was for the basilisk,” Harry answered. “Salazar created the basilisk as a protector for the school. For a couple of centuries, it roamed freely. I don’t know when that changed, but I hope to discover that information eventually.”

With that, Harry turned and jumped into the pipe. His laughter could be heard as he descended. Two of the dwarrow and a witch followed into the pipe. The remainder used the stairs. By the time everyone was down, Harry had lit the torches that lined the walls. As planned, several dwarrow went to the cave-in and began working on expanding the opening. Once the chamber was cleared, an excavation and building team would be down to do any necessary restorations.

The other three curse-breaking team members cast spells to reveal traps or wards. Hermione watched them with her usual intensity when presented with something new.

“Severus,” Harry said, “do you have a use for any of the animal remains?”

“There are quite a few household potions that call for ground-up bones,” Severus answered. “The species doesn’t matter. They were originally developed to help households use every part of any animals they raised. It isn’t something I have a use for, but if they are gathered and cleaned, they can be sold to apothecaries and potioners.”

“Is there any specific cleaning method that has to be used?”

“No, they just need to be free of any meat, skin or sinew,” Severus responded.

Harry considered a moment and then got out his wand. With a wave, all of the bones were gathered into a pile. Another wave saw the bones scoured clean.

“Dobby,” Harry called.

When the elf arrived, Harry requested a single-space expanded trunk.

“Is there any specific way the bones need to be ground?” Harry asked Severus.

“Finely and consistently.”

Harry opened the trunk and waved the wand. The bones started moving to the trunk, turning to dust as they dropped into the open space.

Once Severus saw the process, he started gathering more bones from farther away into new piles. Severus and Harry followed behind the detection team gathering up bones. Hermione

noticed what they were doing and watched in fascination, jotting down questions to ask Harry later. She had seen him practice at the manor and had seen him call things like parchment with just a gesture. This was another way Harry's magical ability had grown over the summer.

When the opening was enlarged and sufficiently stable, everyone gathered to move through. As they walked to the set of large doors, Severus and Harry continued to pile up the bones but didn't do more. At the large doors, Harry hissed and the doors ground open.

The air that wafted out the open door was stale but otherwise fine. Harry stepped back to wait with Severus and Hermione while the team moved forward. Despite Harry having already been in this part, the team was following protocol when entering an unknown area that had been previously sealed.

"Can I clear the water from the floor?" Harry asked.

A few more spells were cast before the team agreed that basic clean-up could occur. Harry used his wand to move the water into the canals that lined the walls on either side of the large hallway. Severus followed behind with cleaning spells on the floor.

All forward momentum stopped when the team saw the basilisk. Despite being told there would be no noticeable decay, Harry was surprised it still looked the same, if a bit smaller than he remembered.

Suddenly, Harry had an armful of crying Hermione, "Oh, Harry, you could have died."

Harry chuckled, "I almost did."

"What!" Hermione shrieked.

"Yeah," Harry admitted, "the basilisk bit me."

"Harry," Severus said with some of his old aspersion, "if the basilisk bit you, you would be dead."

"Nope," Harry responded with some snark, "Fawkes healed me."

As if called, the phoenix flamed in and flew to the top of the basilisk's head where it trilled with what could only be called smugness.

"Harry," Hermione asked, "why didn't you ever tell me?"

"I guess in getting everyone unpetrified, I forgot," Harry responded sheepishly.

"Dumbledore knew," Severus asked. "Did Madam Pomfrey?"

"No," Harry answered, "I never went to the infirmary. Fawkes took us to Dumbledore's office, and when everything was over, I went back to the tower."

“I am sorry, Harry,” Severus said. “I never realized how careless that man was with your life.”

“I didn't either until I was able to step away and look back,” Harry said, “but it's done with, so let's do what we came here to do.”

Hermione continued to shadow the curse-breaking team, taking copious notes. Severus and Harry followed behind cleaning and gathering bones. Harry found himself enjoying a routine task that took little thought.

By the time they stopped for lunch, they had identified six hidden doorways. The tunnels leading away from the main chamber had been cleared and cleaned but had not yet been examined for additional passageways. A message was sent to Gringotts within an hour of their arrival. An additional rendering team was sent to help harvest the basilisk remains.

During lunch, the team gave updates on their progress. As expected, the centaur herd refused to acknowledge the validity of the ancient treaty. There were expectant looks in Harry's direction, and the young man sighed and called for Winky.

“What my Harry need?”

“I need to go meet with the centaurs,” Harry responded. “I will need appropriate dress.” Harry had been enjoying wearing jeans and a t-shirt.

“What House?”

“Gryffindor and Slytherin,” Harry answered.

“Winky talk with Filly and Lady Cissa. Eat now then Winky return.”

“Harry,” Hermione said, “do you always let Winky pick out your clothes?”

Harry nodded, “it's her thing. She has very definite ideas and it just doesn't matter to me. So everyone is happy. I'm dressed appropriately, and I don't have to think about it.”

They were nearly finished with lunch when it occurred to Severus that none of his former colleagues seemed to realize he was there. “Harry,” he asked, “does it seem strange to you that none of the staff has noticed me, you or Hermione?”

“Oh, that,” said Harry.

“What, exactly, is that?” Severus wondered.

“I sort of encouraged them not to pay attention to us,” Harry answered. “They know there's a whole bunch of people here from Gringotts, but they're not noticing us as individuals.”

“What spell is that? Where did you learn it? Can you teach it to me?”

“Breathe, Hermione,” Harry instructed with a laugh. “It's not exactly a spell.”

“If it’s not a spell, how did you do it?”

“I, um, sort of told Magic what I wanted, and it happened,” Harry answered sheepishly.

“You sort of told Magic, and it happened?” Severus responded incredulously.

Bill laughed, “Didn’t you know, Severus? Harry is Magic’s bitch.”

Hermione gasped, “Bill.”

Harry chuckled, “More like Fate’s bitch. Magic, at least, gives me a choice, no matter how insistent She is in asking.”

Harry, you speak of Magic like it is a person. Do you really think that?” Hermione asked.

Harry noticed his friend’s phrasing. In the past, Hermione was a lot more demanding of explanations and often insisted that her view was the only one. “I don’t think Magic is a person,” Harry answered after some thought, “at least not how we think of it. Magic is more like a presence. There is definitely”

“Awareness,” Severus suggested.

Harry nodded, “Definitely awareness. It also has presence and intent.”

“How do you know?” Hermione asked.

“I can feel it,” Harry answered.

“Could you always feel it?”

“No,” Harry said, thinking about it. “I think removing my curse scar made it easier for me to feel the magic around me.”

“That makes sense,” Bill agreed. “Your body expended a lot of magical energy keeping it contained, even with the containment provided by your mother’s efforts.”

“After my bindings broke, it was easier,” Harry continued. “The training with Gorin has helped.”

“Do you meditate?” Bill wanted to know.

“Oh,” Harry said, “I guess I do.”

“You guess you do,” Severus repeated. He seemed to be repeating a lot of what Harry said.

“Yeah,” Harry responded. “I wasn’t thinking of it like that. Every morning and night, I sink into my magic. Sometimes I concentrate on my core magic, other times on a specific House or a combination of compatible Houses.”

Bill could see all the questions people wanted to ask and raised his hand, “I think a lot of people would like to learn about this from you, but we have the afternoon ahead of us.

Perhaps we can continue this discussion at tomorrow's lunch."

With nods of agreement, everyone split into their various assignments. Harry returned to the bathroom to open the sink. Winky was waiting with a change of clothes. The rendering and curse-breaking teams went back down into the chamber. After a quick word with Severus, Hermione left to go to Gringotts to continue cataloging the Hogwarts property vault. When everyone but Severus was gone from the bathroom, Harry raised an eyebrow.

"I realize that the Headmaster heavily influenced my early perceptions of you," Severus said. "Add in your recent emotional and magical growth, and I am most curious to witness your interactions with the centaurs."

Harry nodded and went down to the entrance with Severus at his side. Harry wasn't exactly nervous. He was confident in his position as Head of Gryffindor and Slytherin, but he was still an adolescent, and the presence of a powerful, competent adult was comforting.

Percy was waiting in the entrance hall with a folder that he handed to Harry, "This is a copy of the original treaty. It was found in a folio of agreements the Founders made with various races and governing bodies."

Harry took the folder and read over the agreement. It was unexpectedly short and simple. In return for the use of the Forest and its considerable resources, the centaurs would act as stewards of the forest and the inhabiting creatures. They also agreed to render aid and assistance to anyone who came into the forest. It was clear that while they had use of the forest, they did not own or control it.

Harry handed the folder to Severus and said to Percy, "Please accompany us and record the meeting."

As they walked to the edge of the Forest, Harry asked, "Do either of you know when the centaurs started acting as if the Forest was their exclusive territory?"

"As far as I know, it was that way when I went to school," Severus answered.

"Perhaps Hagrid knows," Percy suggested.

Harry considered and rejected the idea, "If we ask Hagrid, it will be hard to keep him from accompanying us. I'd prefer to keep him out of this. He has his own relationship with the centaurs, and I don't want to interfere with that."

They continued to the edge of the Forest. Harry, with Percy and Severus several feet behind him, sent a pulse of magic into the Forest. A single centaur came out and looked at the humans standing just inside the boundaries of the Forest. The centaur saw a young lord wearing deep silvery grey shirt and slacks with a deep red overrobe standing in front of another man and the Potions Master, Severus Snape. All the centaurs recognized Snape and grudgingly accepted his foraging the edges of the forest for potion ingredients.

"What brings you to our forest, Human?" the centaur asked with a sneer.

Harry was suddenly annoyed. Yesterday was his OWL. Tomorrow and Thursday would most likely be spent dealing with the Hogwarts staff. His weekly interview with the Daily Prophet had been moved to Friday to accommodate the needs of Hogwarts. Today was supposed to be a day of exploration in the Chamber and the stubbornness of centaurs was interfering.

Harry let a small amount of Gryffindor and Slytherin magic out and replied, "I have come to meet with the leader of your herd."

The centaur scoffed, "You have no right to make any demands. Be gone from our forest."

Harry lost all patience and let the Gryffindor and Slytherin magic pulse in a wave of power that saturated the forest. At the feel of that power, the centaur turned and ran into the depths of the Forest.

"Subtle," Severus commented.

Harry looked back and grinned, "Early lesson from Ted and Sirius: never argue with someone who lacks the power to make a decision."

Percy nodded, "That is something Ted reminds us frequently."

A noise had Harry turning to face the Forest as a group of centaurs emerged. Harry recognized Firenze, Bane and Ronan. There were two others that Harry had not met. Both groups stood in silence.

Eventually, Bane broke the silence. "Harry Potter. How dare you send your magic into our forest."

Harry ignored Bane and spoke, "Who speaks for the centaurs that reside in my forest?"

There was instant outrage and one of the unknown centaurs stepped forward, "I am Magorian, leader of this herd. What right have you to claim our forest as your own?"

Suddenly, Harry was done. "As Lord of Gryffindor and Slytherin I order you to leave this forest. You have 48 hours from this moment to depart. This is my will and my right by Magic to demand."

With that announcement, Harry turned to leave, pulling a layer of magic around himself in protection. He was barely even with Severus and Percy when an arrow hit behind him. Harry ignored it and continued to the castle, trusting his companions to follow.

At the castle doors, Percy asked, "What will you do if they don't leave?"

"They will leave," Harry answered. "The question is if they leave by their will or mine."

After returning to the Chamber and changing back into casual wear, it didn't take long for Harry and Severus to finish cleaning up the detritus and collecting the bones that were left from centuries of feeding a basilisk. By the time the main chamber and the numerous tunnels

were clear, the curse breakers had disabled the wards on the six adjoining chambers. One chamber was clearly a potions lab. It appeared functional and only in need of potion ingredients. The real treasure in that room were the scrolls detailing Slytherin's various potion experiments. Three of the chambers were libraries and the fourth was simply a room furnished with sofas, chairs and low tables.

It was decided that Severus would coordinate with the group cataloging the school property vault at Gringotts and after that was complete, they would move to cataloging the chamber. The rendering teams would take the rest of the week to break down the basilisk while the curse-breaking team explored the adjoining tunnels. Following more instructions from the Slytherin grimoire, Harry changed the passphrases to Latin so the Chamber could more easily be accessed. Eventually, he would have to decide on a long-term resolution to accessing and using the Chamber, but that could wait.

While the teams and Severus trudged back up the steps at the end of the day, Harry concentrated for a moment and popped into the bathroom to find Dobby waiting. The elf was quivering with excitement.

"My Harry," Dobby exclaimed, "I finds it." With those words, Dobby held out a pouch. Cautiously, Harry opened the pouch and saw a tiara steeped in vile magic.

Quickly closing the pouch, Harry returned it to Dobby with a grin, "Please take this to Bill Weasley. Tell him that Harry Potter is always happy to assist."

Dobby popped away as the two Gringotts teams and Severus arrived at the top of the stairs. Setting the opening to remain open, Harry happily returned to the manor for a shower before joining his chosen family and friends for tea. Tomorrow would start a long couple of days and Harry wanted to relax for the rest of this one.

Qualified Education

Chapter Summary

Wednesday, August 23

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It was only Wednesday and already it had been a trying week for Minerva McGonagall. A large team from Gringotts had shown up on Monday to start examining the castle wards. To Minerva's surprise, they had been met by Percy Weasley and Hermione Granger. Mr. Weasley had made introductions and left. Miss Granger had followed one of the teams around all morning. Minerva had watched with a wary eye as the teams ate lunch in the Great Hall.

Tuesday had been similar, teams of goblins and humans roaming the castle, poking into every crack and crevice. She had been in Diagon Alley with a small group of muggleborns, assisting them with the school shopping. Between interviewing candidates for three teaching positions and her usual preparations for the upcoming school term, Minerva was exhausted and more than a little cranky. At dinner that night, Hagrid had unhappily reported that the centaurs were enraged that Harry Potter had demanded they leave the Forbidden Forest.

Wednesday morning, Ted Tonks entered the Great Hall wearing a robe of Ravenclaw blue trimmed in bronze. He was accompanied by Percy Weasley, dressed better than Minerva had ever seen. Tonks walked up the aisle toward her as conversation at the table gradually quieted. Moving to the center of the head table, Tonks greeted the acting headmistress with a nod of his head, noting the other staff members present.

"Good morning, Mr. Tonks," McGonagall greeted. "What brings you to Hogwarts this morning?"

"I am here on behalf of Lord Gryffindor," Tonks answered. "Per the Hogwarts charter, as an heir to one of the founders, Lord Gryffindor has requested that I verify the qualifications of all instructors at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry."

A brief frown crossed McGonagall's features. She had heard from Irma Prince that Harry Potter was both Lord Gryffindor and Lord Slytherin. McGonagall was still very conflicted about recent events. She sat forward with a smile, "You are correct, Mr. Tonks, that the head of any Founders' House may request to see the qualifications of any instructor here at the school. However, the charter makes no mention of requests made by solicitors. Therefore, if Lord Gryffindor wishes to review the qualifications of my teachers, he will have to request

that in person." McGonagall sat back. She didn't know everything going on but she was tired of all the obscuration.

"Very well," Tonks answered. Although they had prepared for this possibility, Harry would not be pleased with the turn of events. "Dobby," Tonks called.

The elf popped in next to Tonks, "Mr. Soliccy call Dobby?"

"Please inform Lord Gryffindor that he is needed at Hogwarts," Tonks instructed the elf who promptly popped away.

Without a sound, Harry Potter appeared in the Great Hall of Hogwarts in front of the head table directly across from Minerva McGonagall. Turning to Tonks, Harry instructed, "Thank you, Mr. Tonks. Percy, please coordinate with Gringotts and make sure they have everything they need."

Ted and Percy turned and began the walk back through the Great Hall as McGonagall brightly exclaimed, "Mr. Potter, please explain what is going on."

Harry answered, "I have come to exercise my right per the charter to examine the qualifications of all Hogwarts instructors."

Before anything else could be said, the ghosts of Hogwarts came through the walls of the Great Hall to congregate around Harry and he turned to face the spirits. Moving into a position of prominence, the Bloody Baron took to a knee in midair, "Welcome to Hogwarts, Lord Slytherin."

Not to be outdone, Nearly Headless Nick moved forward and took to a knee beside the Baron. "Lord Gryffindor," Nick said with emphasis on the name, "welcome home."

All eyes were focused on the gathering of ghosts. A furor started to rise in response to the greetings that was quickly silenced as every elf in Hogwarts suddenly appeared in the Great Hall while the ghosts faded to the edges of the hall.

Limney greeted Harry with a hug and then stepped back, "Welcome back, Lord Hoggywarts."

"Thank you Limney," Harry answered with a smile. "Is there anything you need from me before I get on to business here?" You could now hear a pin drop in the Great Hall as the teachers watched the unfolding drama. With only a few weeks of the holiday left, all returning staff plus the new hires were present.

"We have four new elves that be needing homes," the head elf answered. "They arrived last night."

"Then let's go ahead and take care of them," Harry said. A young elf stepped forward and Harry knelt and held a quiet conversation. Standing up Harry took a step back and gestured to the elf.

The elf stepped forward and took both of Harry's hands into his. Looking at Harry, he asked, "Does Lord Peverell take Kenny as his elf?"

Harry smiled, "Yes, I do." Harry felt a small magic pulse and then continued, "Does Kenny take Harry Potter, Lord Peverell, as his wizard?"

Kenny nodded enthusiastically, "Kenny is honored to take Harry Potter, Lord Peverell as his wizard." The usual pulse followed by the flash of soft light surrounding the joined hands.

Harry released Kenny's hands and turned to the next elf. Realizing that the growing noise in the Great Hall prevented further communication with the elves, Harry raised a hand. As the hall gradually quieted, Harry, with a thought, increased his volume, "Please allow me to finish this so all of us can get on with our day."

Turning back to the elf, Harry knelt down and then, repeating the same process, bonded with the remaining three elves. Two were bonded to Lord Peverell and two to Lord Stinchcomb. Harry told all four elves to go to Potter Manor and report to Bibi who would get them sorted.

As the four newly bonded elves popped away, the remaining Hogwarts elves lost all their shyness as they remembered their own bonding. Surging forward they all reached out and Harry greeted as many as he could reaching out to touch heads, hands and shoulders.

After a minute of the hubbub, Limney stomped a foot, "Back to work. Lord Hoggywarts be busy." As all the elves popped away, Limney turned back to Harry, "How may Limney assist Lord Hoggywarts?"

"Please prepare the main visitor's parlor," Harry answered, realizing that it wouldn't be wise to choose either Slytherin's or Gryffindor's office. "And please thank everyone for letting me have yesterday."

"Lord Hoggywarts deserve fun days," Limney said before popping away.

Turning back to the Head table, Harry nodded to McGonagall, "Thank you for your patience. I don't like to make the elves wait to bond. Some of them get very distressed."

Harry shifted slightly, allowing both the Gryffindor and Slytherin Magic to come forward and the change in his demeanor was apparent, "In a half hour I will begin meeting with each of the instructors. An elf will notify you when it is time to meet. Please be prepared and have any documentation of your qualifications with you. Also be prepared to talk about your classes and how you are preparing your students for upcoming OWLs, NEWTs and their life beyond Hogwarts."

"Is this necessary, Mr. Potter?" McGonagall asked with a touch of disappointment in her voice. "There's no need for this level of inconvenience when we can simply discuss this in my office."

"If you wanted to avoid inconvenience, you could have cooperated with my solicitor instead of disrupting my day," Harry pointed out. "As I am now here, I will take the opportunity to meet with each instructor individually."

"Madame Hooch," Harry said, turning to address the flying instructor, "I will begin with you."

Harry turned and began walking toward the doors of the Great Hall, preventing any further interactions. It was another lesson he had learned from Tonks: state your business and then simply walk away.

Harry made arrangements with Limney for the elves to deliver a prewritten note to any staff not at breakfast. He also met Kamir who prided himself on knowing every staff member's tea preferences.

When Yolanda Hooch arrived in the visitor's parlor, Harry rose to greet her, "Good morning, Madam Hooch. It's good to see you again."

"It's nice to see you as well Mr. Potter or should I call you Lord Gryffindor?" Hooch answered.

"Whatever you are comfortable with," Harry answered amiably, gesturing toward the armchair across from him. As they sat down, Kamir popped in beside Madame Hooch, setting a coffee prepared the way she preferred it and a plate of her favorite shortbread on the table beside her chair.

While the flying instructor was getting settled, Harry picked up his tea and took a sip. Setting it back down, he began, "I'm surprised to see you at the castle,"

"I heard there would be a Board meeting later this week," Hooch responded. "I am hoping we can finally upgrade the school brooms."

Harry nodded, "It is already on the list of improvements for this year. I'm aware of your flying experience as well as the time you worked with other flying instructors learning the best way to teach students. I have something else to talk with you about."

At Hooch's nod, Harry continued, "Part of my oath as Head of House Gryffindor is to ensure that students at Hogwarts are taught how to protect themselves. I would like to see every student at Hogwarts able to simply fly away from any danger they may be confronted with."

"That's a very good thought," Hooch replied, "except that I only work at the school part-time."

Harry smiled, "Which brings me to my question. Would you be interested in full-time employment here at Hogwarts?"

Hooch sat back and sipped at the coffee the elf had brought her. It was the combination of slightly bitter and creamy just as she preferred. She enjoyed teaching the students and she always regretted that she didn't have more time with those who had less aptitude, knowing that those students would probably never sit on a broom again and never know the joys that came with flying. Plus, her part-time income was enough to live on but didn't allow for many other pleasures.

"Would I have to live at the Castle?" she asked.

"No reason to," Harry replied. "You can come from your house in Hogsmeade just as easily as you do now."

"When would this start?" she asked, thinking about practical matters.

"After the winter break," Harry answered. "It will take some time both to rearrange the schedule and for you to formulate your lesson plans. I'd like you to also consider ways we can do flying instruction during more inclement weather."

"That sounds about right," she answered. "In my early years here I tried to convince both the Headmaster and the Board to expand the flying instruction but was unsuccessful. Both considered it unnecessary beyond the bare minimum."

"I think that a school should do more than the bare minimum for its students. Since making my decision to leave Hogwarts, I have become aware of just how much I didn't know about the wizarding world. While I admit that I've had some unique things to learn as the Head of an Ancient and Noble House, there are other more everyday things that I think too many students don't know and it will hold them back when they leave the school."

"Are you sure," Hooch hesitated, "that they aren't things you would have learned in your later years had you continued?"

Harry smiled, "I employ several recent graduates of the school and spent quite a bit of time reviewing what was taught during their final years."

Hooch nodded in acknowledgment, certainly not expecting that answer.

"I know that this was sprung rather suddenly on you," Harry said, "and you will, no doubt, have questions as you are preparing for the winter term. You can send an owl to me at Potter Manor or you can call the head elf and she can always get a message to me."

"I appreciate that," Hooch responded.

When Minerva McGonagall arrived, Harry stood up to greet her, "Professor."

"I am not happy with you, Mr. Potter," McGonagall said with her typical severeness.

On impulse, Harry stepped forward quickly and leaned up to give his former head of house a quick kiss on the cheek.

Eyes wide, Minerva McGonagall was speechless for a moment. Recovering, she asked, "What was that for?"

"Does a young man need an excuse to kiss a charming woman?" Harry asked with a grin.

In response, Harry received a stern look. Gesturing to the armchair, Harry indicated for McGonagall to take a seat.

After accepting a cup of tea spiked with her favorite McClallen, McGonagall asked, "What do you need from me, Mr. Potter?" She relaxed back and took a sip of her tea, eyebrows raising in surprise at the added tipple.

"Quite a bit, actually," Harry answered. "Although none of it concerns your credentials."

"I should think not," McGonagall replied.

Harry could hear the hostility and could see the stiffness in the way she sat. He didn't need anyone's permission to make changes at Hogwarts but McGonagall's cooperation would make it much easier. He discarded his planned approach and did the Gryffindor thing: he followed his gut.

"Not quite a year ago," he began softly, "I was a fourth-year student here at Hogwarts. I had what I thought was a reasonable expectation for a normal year. I wasn't entirely sure what that was but I was looking forward to learning. A little less than three months ago I was the unwilling witness to Voldemort's return.

"Cedric and I arrived at the center of the maze at almost the same time. As we were about to sprint to the trophy, an acromantula crept up behind him. It never occurred to me not to help Cedric defeat it. We were both already pretty beat up but my leg was injured during the fight and at that point, Cedric could have easily won. He tried to insist that I take the trophy but I suggested a compromise. We would take it together."

Harry chuckled, "From maze to graveyard, it almost didn't seem to matter where we were. We were both exhausted and we just wanted it to be over. When we saw someone in the distance, neither of us suspected anything bad. It seemed like only a moment and Cedric was dead.

"Neither of us had even registered what was happening. Just a voice saying, 'Kill the spare.'" Harry took a sip of tea. He could see that he had at least gotten McGonagall's attention so he continued.

"Cedric was dead and the next thing I knew I was held up over a grave. Turns out it was the gravestone of Tom Riddle, Sr. I'm sure Voldemort appreciated the irony more than I did."

Harry set his cup down and raised the sleeve of his right arm showing a long thin scar running the length of his forearm. "Pettigrew wanted my blood for the ritual. It wasn't enough that I was already bleeding from the fight with the acromantula. He only needed a few drops but somehow that required a cut down half my arm.

"When Voldemort rose from the cauldron, the only thing holding me up was the gravestone. While he summoned his followers, took the time to lecture and torture them and healed Pettigrew's hand, I was there bleeding.

"I'm pretty sure I was in shock by that point but that could have been from seeing Voldemort naked as much as from the blood loss. It was not a pretty sight," Harry shook his head in remembrance. "I was still bound to the headstone the first time he tortured me, pouring pain into the scar he left me," Harry indicated his forehead, now blemish-free.

"That wasn't enough. When Voldemort released me from the gravestone, I fell straight to the ground. He took the time to stand over me and let me know that he would kill me after I begged him for death. And then the bloody wanker wanted to duel."

At McGonagall's gasp, Harry smiled sheepishly, "Sorry for the language but that's really how I think of him in my head. On the one hand, it was absolutely terrifying. On the other, it kind of shows how ridiculous he is."

Harry took a long drink of his tea before continuing, "Think about it. I was a 14-year-old kid, battered, bleeding and exhausted. With every action, he demonstrated the enormity of his magical power. Gloating wasn't enough. Then he had to add in a crucio. Apparently in Voldemort's twisted mind, after you bow at the start of a duel, torture is the next step. I started to run away and made it behind a crypt. I guess I realized that there was no escaping and I really am descended from Godric Gryffindor. I was at least going to face him."

"Professor," Harry said, looking her in the eye, "that night changed me."

McGonagall could only nod, grateful for the refill of her special tea.

"When I decided to not return to either Hogwarts or my relatives' house, I had no idea where it would lead. I honestly thought I'd go to another school, finish my education, and then find a job to support the small family that was gathering around me."

Harry shook his head and smiled, "It didn't quite turn out that way."

"You aren't transferring to another school," McGonagall observed.

"No," Harry answered, "I study with private tutors."

"So you are working toward your OWLs?"

NEWTs, actually," Harry answered. "I took an OWL in Herbology to meet the ministry requirements for full emancipation. For the wanded subjects I'm skipping the OWLs and working on my NEWTs."

"That's quite an unusual step," McGonagall noted.

"I've experienced some unusual changes in my magic recently and my tutors felt that this was the best course," Harry responded.

"What sort of changes?" McGonagall inquired curiously.

"In addition to learning to work with all the different House magics, it turns out that a significant portion of my magical core was bound," Harry responded without inflection.

McGonagall gasped, "That's monstrous."

"My healing team was unhappy about it," Harry responded, "but by the time I claimed a few of my Houses, the problem took care of itself."

While she was digesting that piece of unexpected information, McGonagall looked at Harry. For the first time, he was dressed in very fine wizarding wear. Always before she had seen him in shabby muggle clothes but Albus had assured her it was a youthful fashion choice. Now he looked like a wealthy young lord. She also noticed that he was calm and relaxed. He certainly didn't look like he was at odds with one of the most powerful wizards in Britain.

"Things have changed a great deal for you," she observed.

"Yes, and that brings me to the reason for my visit today," Harry said, turning the subject back to Hogwarts business. "House Peverell is sponsoring some older Hogwarts students who have indicated a desire to go into business for themselves after graduation. As part of that agreement, the students are required to maintain their grades and obtain NEWTs in their core subjects."

Harry paused to refill his tea before continuing, "In corresponding with these students, it came to my attention that one particular class did not appear to be preparing them adequately for OWLs or NEWTs."

McGonagall nodded, silently cursing the ongoing problem of Defense teachers.

Harry continued, "As Head of both Gryffindor and Slytherin Houses, my oaths would have had me looking deeper into the educational standards of the school. However, the concerns of these students meant doing it sooner rather than later."

"I can understand that," McGonagall acknowledged, "but how did this come to encompass the entire teaching staff?"

"The situation led me to study the Hogwarts Charter," Harry answered. "Have you read the Charter?"

"I have not," McGonagall replied. "I wasn't even aware it did more than establish the school until Severus provided me with a copy last week."

"It is a remarkable document," Harry said. "It establishes the school and sets forth guidelines and requirements. It is very detailed but at the same time, it allows the headmaster and advisory board a lot of freedom as long as the basic guidelines are being followed. It also recognizes that standards change and makes allowances for that."

"What happens if the guidelines are not followed?" McGonagall asked, recognizing the underlying message.

"Then any Founder, Founder's Heir or Designated Founders Representative may intercede to correct that situation," Harry replied.

"And you are a Founder's Heir," McGonagall observed.

"Two, in fact," Harry pointed out, "Three of the Founders have heirs. I am currently in the process of designating a Founders Representative for the fourth Founder."

"Ravenclaw," McGonagall said.

Harry nodded. "At first reading, it was apparent that the Charter was not being followed. I know my experiences here were not typical so my staff started researching. First, they interviewed current and former students. Then they started researching other magical schools in Europe, Asia, Australia, and North and South America. At the same time, I asked the Hogwarts account manager at Gringotts for a thorough audit."

Minerva McGonagall knew that some of the previous Defense teachers were substandard but she was confident that even with that handicap, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry was still the finest magical school in the world. So it was with confidence that she concluded, "So you are here to deal with the DADA issue?"

"Professor," Harry said gently, "For Hogwarts to be considered on par with other magical schools throughout the world, serious changes need to be made, not only to the teaching staff but also to the non-teaching staff, the curriculum and the facilities."

"Surely it can't be that serious," McGonagall exclaimed, shocked by Harry's statement.

"I haven't even addressed the problems with the former Headmaster and the financial management of the school. Add in that the Ministry has attempted to intervene and the Board of Governors has consistently acted outside of its authorized purpose and it is a mess."

McGonagall was stunned. "Surely, Mr. Potter," she said intently, "the situation is not that dire."

"For the last two weeks, my staff has set aside most of their other work to address this issue. They have worked long days and I've even sent my tutors to schools around the world to better assess the situation." Harry didn't even mention the enormous help that the elves had provided in expediting correspondence.

"Today and tomorrow I am interviewing the teaching staff. When it is done, one of my assistants will bring you a report with my findings," Harry told her.

"This is necessary?" McGonagall asked quietly.

Harry could hear the tears in her voice, "It is. I will present summary findings but I will also have a detailed analysis available for you when it is complete."

"I see," and she did. If what Harry was saying was true and Hogwarts had fallen so low then changes were necessary. She suddenly wondered if she also would be facing dismissal.

Harry watched as she processed the information and saw the minute she feared for her job, "Professor, there will be changes, some of them quite significant, but I hope we will be able to work together to make Hogwarts the best it can be for the sake of both the students and the staff."

McGonagall nodded, feeling a lessening of her tension.

Harry continued, "One certain change is that every staff member will only have one job. It can be teaching. It can be administrative. It can be in a student support role such as head of

house. Those that currently have multiple roles will need to decide but I hope that you will opt to teach. In any event, I will be authorizing retroactive compensation for those of you who have done multiple jobs on a single paycheck.”

Hagrid was a problem. Harry genuinely liked the gentle giant but Hagrid was in no way qualified to teach. To complicate matters further, Hagrid's original job as Keeper of Keys and Grounds was not being done by anyone else which meant that Hagrid, like several others, was holding two positions. Was he doing both jobs? Add in that Hagrid had never been fully cleared by the ministry and could not legally carry a wand and the problems were multiplied.

While waiting for the half-giant to arrive, Harry opened the file that had been compiled. Unlike every other position in the school, there was no employment contract for Rubeus Hagrid. There was a job description for Keeper of the Keys and Grounds and from all appearances, Hagrid has fulfilled the role well.

There was no set of specific qualifications for the position. It did not require any OWLs or NEWTs. There were no educational requirements at all. It was a position originally established by the founders. For most of the school's history, it had been staffed by hedge-wixen but the bias against non-wand-wielding wixen had changed that practice in the late 19th century. The position required a general aptitude for plants and animals and a certain amount of stamina as it was a physically demanding job. Despite the lack of a contract, the deputies during the time of Hagrid's employment had done an annual review. Hagrid had always been well-regarded.

No, the problems had started with Hagrid's elevation to teacher two years prior. He had none of the qualifications for the position. Yes, Hagrid genuinely loved magical creatures. He had a natural aptitude for their care. The main problem was that Hagrid did not seem to realize that as a half-giant, he was capable of handling creatures that the average wixen could not hope to manage. Add in that the wixen in question were students and it was fortunate that the incident with Buckbeak had been the only one resulting in student injury.

With less than two weeks until the start of term, Harry was faced with a dilemma. He could not in good conscience continue to let Hagrid teach but as of yet, there was not a replacement teacher. He did, fortunately, have syllabi that had been filed by previous teachers in the position. He also had enough excess funds in the school vaults to afford a series of temporary teachers from the various magical creature preserves around the world until a permanent teacher could be found.

Earlier that morning, Dobby had taken a letter to Charlie Weasley that outlined the situation. Harry didn't expect that Charlie could teach but with luck, the young dragon tamer could provide possible candidates interested in the position, even if only on a temporary basis. He had given a copy of the letter to Percy to follow up on.

Harry had greeted Hagrid with a hug and while the following discussion had some uncomfortable moments, overall, both were satisfied with the outcome. Hagrid would continue to act as Keeper of the Keys and Grounds. He would receive additional pay for the

work he had done as a teacher over the last two years. He would also assist, with additional pay, any CoMC teachers at the school.

At the end of the meeting, Harry sent Hagrid to another room to meet with Ted Tonks and Remus Lupin. Hagrid had never been convicted of any crime and his expulsion from Hogwarts was of dubious legality. Tonks had brokered a settlement on Hagrid's behalf with the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. With Harry's memories providing proof that Hagrid had been guilty of no more than poor judgment regarding the suitability of a pet, Hagrid had been cleared of suspicion. The ministry would pay Ollivanders for a new wand and Hagrid would have two years to achieve the required OWL.

Additionally, Remus Lupin, at Harry's request, had volunteered three hours a week to tutor Hagrid in charms and transfiguration. Lupin would also arrange for Hagrid to sit in on any Hogwarts classes at the appropriate levels that he desired. Headmaster Dippet had taken the easy solution and wronged Rubeus Hagrid. Dumbledore had taken advantage of the situation and used the kind man egregiously.

Harry's final morning meeting was with Pomona Sprout. He was still very conflicted about the Herbology teacher. He knew the professor was qualified for her job. Not only did she have a mastery in herbology but she was well-respected in her field. By all reports, she was an excellent head of house. However, Harry couldn't forget how he had been treated by the teacher during the last school year. House pride was all well and good but it should never extend to the mistreatment of a student out of misplaced loyalty. Harry knew that in order to keep the professor at the school, he would have to address how she had treated him both in and out of class.

Harry stood when Professor Sprout entered the parlor. He accepted the packet of parchment from her and then sat. Harry noticed that the teacher did not touch the offered tea or biscuits.

Harry looked through the provided parchment. There was a copy of Sprout's mastery as well as a list of her work experience. She had been teaching at Hogwarts for a little more than a decade. Before that, she had taught in small, local magical schools and done private consulting. There was also a list of her published articles. There was no doubt that the woman knew her chosen field.

Harry tucked the parchment into a folder that also contained the complete syllabi for all seven years and leaned forward. "Before we address your future employment with Hogwarts, I need to discuss a personal issue with you," Harry said.

Sprout remained silent so Harry continued, "I am aware that Albus Dumbledore had a very large impact on teacher conduct in the school. I know, for example, that during both my second and fourth years, the teachers were instructed to ignore the bullying I endured from my classmates."

Harry paused and took a sip of his tea. Still, the Herbology professor remained silent and stoic.

“However,” Harry said, “you went beyond that. As my professor, you were rude to me in class. That was behavior that I had neither witnessed nor experienced before from you. Additionally, you took house points for me for no valid reason. I'd like to know why.”

“You cheated,” said the professor. “Against the rules, you put your name in the goblet of fire and then you lied about it.”

Harry stared. Finally, he found his voice, “So you believe that I did something wrong. In return, you, a teacher, treated me, a student, poorly.”

There was a long moment of silence while neither spoke.

“I have two problems with your actions,” Harry eventually said. “The first is that you believe how I behave justifies how you behave. It means that you aren't taking responsibility for your actions. The second problem I have is that even if I did cheat and lie, I did not do so in your classroom. It was not your place to punish me. That tells me that as a teacher you don't have appropriate boundaries.

“Regardless of my personal feelings, I do not believe that your actions, however inappropriate, justify breaking your teaching contract. However, some changes are happening this year.”

Harry stopped to refill his tea and take a drink before continuing, “The first change is that every employee of Hogwarts will have one job. If you are a teacher, you are only a teacher. If you are part of the student support staff, what a head of house would be considered, that is your only job. If you are part of the administrative staff, that is your only position. Recognizing that quite a few people have held multiple positions while only being paid for one, back pay for the additional responsibilities will be dispersed.

“Your current contract is to teach Herbology. There are two more years left in your contract. During those two years, you will be on probation and every point you award or take will be reviewed. Additionally, while additional staff will be hired in all of the core subjects, the Herbology department will be expanded beyond that. Originally, Hogwarts grew enough fruits and vegetables to provide for both itself and Hogsmeade. We will be returning to that practice and it will include student participation.”

“I'm being demoted,” Sprout said. “That is unacceptable.”

“You are not being demoted,” Harry responded. “You have a contract for teaching Herbology. You will continue to do so at your current rate of pay. Additionally, you will receive pay for the additional duties you carried out as Head of Hufflepuff.”

“And if I don't want to continue under those terms?” Sprout inquired.

“You, or your solicitor, can contact Ted Tonks,” Harry answered.

Harry got up and left the parlor. His openness with McGonagall had been draining. Hagrid's emotional storm, while happy, was exhausting. Dealing with a hostile herbology professor made Harry want to go to the Keep and crawl into bed. Unfortunately, the day was less than

half done. To give himself a much-needed break, Harry walked down to the lake. Sitting down, he immersed himself in his magic and let the calm surround him.

Harry had just settled in his seat at the Head table when a unique gold place setting appeared in front of Harry. It was obvious that the pieces were all associated with Gryffindor but Harry had never seen this place setting before. Along with the place setting was an ornate pitcher. Harry had learned that a young elf, Barley, had claimed the right to personally serve Harry whenever he visited Hogwarts. Harry wasn't quite sure how Kamir had maintained serving rights in the visitor's parlor but had kept expecting Barley to pop in.

Barley appeared beside Harry and directed the pitcher to fill the equally ornate goblet. "Thank you, Barley," Harry said as he raised the goblet to take a long drink. Steady sips of tea were not as satisfying as a good, cool drink.

Harry sat between McGonagall and Vector, the arithmancy professor. It was a pleasant lunch with Harry listening to the two professors discussing the most recent Hogsmeade gossip. Before the pudding was served, Harry moved down to sit with the Gringotts teams. He enjoyed an interesting discussion with Bill and several of the dwarrow about meditation and how it could be used. When they broke to return to their afternoon work, one of the dwarrow approached Harry.

"Lord Potter, my name is Huro and I am overseeing the warding teams. After an initial assessment of the wards, I brought in two additional teams to make their own assessment. We met this morning and put together our recommendations. If you have a moment, I'd like to review those with you."

"Should I ask the deputy headmistress to join us?"

"It's not necessary," Huro answered, "but it would make one less set of explanations."

Harry asked Barley to find McGonagall and then led Huro to the visitors parlor. After making introductions, Huro handed Harry a folder, "This is a detailed analysis of the wards. All of the teams agree that there is no way to restore the current wards to their full strength. Our recommendation is to completely remove the wards, renew the ward stone and place new wards."

McGonagall gasped, "That would leave Hogwarts completely vulnerable."

"Hogwarts is already vulnerable," Huro said bluntly. "Right now the only thing protecting Hogwarts is the belief in the wards. The wards themselves are doing very little."

"So we need to do this quickly and quietly," Harry concluded.

"That would be best," Huro agreed. "As added protection, it would be best if you stayed in the castle."

"I don't understand," McGonagall said.

“If word were to get out,” Huro responded, “Lord Potter is your best protection.”

“Surely not,” McGonagall protested.

“When do you want to do this?” Harry interrupted, not wanting to get into a back-and-forth over the issue.

“It will take us the rest of the week to design the new ward scheme and review it,” Huro answered. “It will take two days to safely remove the current wards. The fewer people used to charge the ward stone, the better. We believe that with the proper ritual, you have the power to recharge the ward stone without adding additional magical signatures. After that, we are looking at five days to weave the new wards. Most wixen find it uncomfortable to be inside ward weavings so it would be best if the castle were as empty as possible.”

“What about the elves?”

“Elves won’t be bothered. Wixen with larger magical cores also don’t seem to mind,” Huro answered.

“Winky,” Harry called as he pulled out his calendar.

“What my Harry need,” Winkyb asked as she popped in.

“Would you see if Gorin is available for a meeting as soon as possible?” Harry knew his power was unusual but he was skeptical of his ability to recharge a wardstone without assistance.

After Winky popped away, Harry said to Huro, “Gorin is my magical tutor. She’d be cranky if I agreed to this without consulting her.”

“Indeed, I would,” Gorin said, popping into the room.

Harry made introductions and then waited while Huro explained the situation to the ancient elf.

“When did you want to start?” Gorin asked Harry.

“Tuesday,” Harry answered. “Do I need to be here the entire time?”

“No,” Huro answered, “just most of the time.”

“Good,” Harry responded, “I will plan on the usual tea at the manor. I can do any meetings I need here.”

“I’m going to talk to Filius,” Gorin said. “You should do your evening instruction here for the rest of the week. Let the ambient magic of the castle interact with your active magic. We’ll have Monday’s lesson here and I’ll work with you on Tuesday and Wednesday while they remove the old wards.”

Harry nodded. He trusted Gorin with the health of his magic.

Shortly after Huro and Gorin left, McGonagall began peppering Harry with questions. Harry recognized that his former professor was doing her best to cope with a very difficult situation but he was fast losing his remaining patience. Fortunately, Harry was interrupted when he felt his calendar buzz. Signaling McGonagall for a break, Harry pulled out the journal to see that Filius had scheduled dueling practice at Hogwarts following tea. Harry smiled, recognizing that the change in their routine would allow them an uninterrupted evening at the Keep.

"I have a few more teachers to speak with and then I will be returning to Potter Manor for tea," Harry said. "After, Filius and I will be returning here for our regular dueling practice. We will use the quidditch pitch."

Harry met with three more teachers that afternoon. The meetings with Septima Vector who taught arithmancy and Bathsheba Babbling who taught runes were relatively short. Both teachers held masteries in their field and had published numerous papers. Both desired more class time and also expressed a desire to start teaching the subject to younger years. Harry took notes and promised that their requests would be given serious consideration.

The meeting with Aurora Sinistra, who taught astronomy, was a bit longer. She had many years of frustrations to express. As Harry had learned in his summer herbology studies, astronomy was more than just looking at stars in the sky. Unfortunately, midnight classes in a cold and drafty tower did not lend itself to either good teaching or receptive learning. Many younger students could barely stay awake, much less take adequate notes. Older students rarely maintained an interest in the subject. It was highly frustrating for someone so passionate about the subject to not have a suitable environment to pass along her knowledge. The professor left the meeting satisfied that someone was finally listening.

By the time Harry returned to the manor, he was exhausted. It wasn't so much physical as it was emotional. He briefly wondered if it was possible to delegate tomorrow's interviews but quickly dismissed the thought. The day had brought up a lot of questions that he had dropped off with Percy. A relaxing tea snuggled between the twins was the perfect remedy. Dobby had promised tacos for dinner and Harry was looking forward to the rest of his day.

Chapter End Notes

I wish I could write faster and update more frequently. Unfortunately, my writing is dependent upon my physical condition. With fibro, arthritis and sleep issues, I don't get to write nearly as often as I want. I appreciate everyone's patience. The story will eventually be finished.

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