

A DIFFERENCE IN THE FAMILY
THE SNAPE CHRONICLES

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Based on the characters of

J. K. ROWLING

and her books:

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone

Year One at Hogwarts

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets

Year Two at Hogwarts

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban

Year Three at Hogwarts

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire

Year Four at Hogwarts

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix

Year Five at Hogwarts

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince

Year Six at Hogwarts

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows

Year Seven at Hogwarts

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C H A P T E R O N E

PROLOGUE

THURSDAY, APRIL 9, 1959 (THE DAY AFTER THE NEW MOON)

“Well, look who’s here!” Ted Heseltine looked over from the game of darts as the door to the local opened. “If ’t ain’t the bridegroom! Wha’ cha doin’ here, Toby? Run outta petrol?” General laughter greeted this comment.

“Shut yer gob, Ted, and watch yer language. Got the missus here.”

There was general movement as the men gathered in the local — in that sweet hour between leaving work and going home for supper — realized that the smaller figure behind Toby was the very new Mrs. Snape. They swept nut shells off the table, dabbed up a bit of spilt ale, and dusted off a chair, for everyone knew that Toby ’d up and married a girl from a country cottage, used to gentler ways than the ones found among the workers in a shabby east Lancashire mill town.

“Beggin’ your pardon, Missus,” Ted said, offering the now clean seat to the thin, sallow, long-faced woman that Toby’d taken to wife. She was no beauty, but then neither were any of them, and men in their walk of life didn’t marry for beauty, but for companionship, a home, and children.

“Thanks,” said Mrs. Snape quietly, and condescended to join them, making her instantly popular with the men.

“Lads!” Toby cried. “Drinks all ’round! This ’ere’s m’ new wife. Eileen, these are m’ mates at the mill, the lads what I spend m’ days with.” The pints came, and they toasted Toby’s wife.

“So Toby, wha’ cha doin’ back from Blackpool early?” asked Thurstan Garnett. “Y’ got another day comin’. Thought you might like to stretch it out . . . Beggin’ your pardon, Missus.”

“We come back early,” proclaimed Tobias Snape with some drama, “because we been informed we’ve a house. A dome-ee-sile. End o’ Spinner’s End, it is, and we’re settin’ up housekeeping. M’ grandad’s hired a couple o’ men to bring some things from ’is house and m’ dad’s, and me and ’Leen decided t’ take the three days and move in proper. So I ain’t back yet, not official. You’ll see me at the mill come Monday.”

Eileen Snape said nothing as the men exchanged gossip and chatted about the latest news of the job — “fired Fred just like that, and ’im with four kids t’ feed” — but she watched their faces as they talked, and her restless eyes took in every detail of the pub. Toby had two more pints and was getting boisterously chummy.

Then it was time to go home — the other men to their wives and to supper — and the little group broke up. Toby and Eileen walked together, hand in hand, through the maze of brick Victorian worker’s cottages, soot blackened, the few visible curtains dingy from the grime-filled air. Toby’s hobnailed shoes rang loud on the ancient cracked cobblestones as they approached the last little house at the very outskirts of the town, on a street under the shadow of the mill chimney that dominated the whole skyline. The last little house on Spinner’s End.

It was dark inside, dark and empty, and their footsteps echoed slightly in the empty rooms. Eileen went directly to the kitchen, where she’d already started preparing supper with one skillet on a coal grate because the gas and electricity hadn’t been turned on yet.

Tobias stomped around the little house. The ground floor had a sitting/dining room and the kitchen. The upper floor had a large bedroom and a smaller room that Toby planned to divide into a tiny second bedroom and a storage space. There was also a narrow room with a toilet and a sink wedged onto the upper floor sometime in the last fifty years, but no proper bathroom. It was all right. They weren’t any la-di-da Londoners. Hot water and soap in a basin was all you really needed. They’d make do.

They camped for supper, eating Eileen's simple meal on two cracked plates while sitting on the floor in the front room. "Could ya ever witch us up a coupla drinks and some posh dessert?" Toby joked, but Eileen frowned.

"You know it doesn't work with food," she said.

"Aye," said Toby. "Seems there's lots it don't work with."

In addition to the skillet and the plates, and two stools in the kitchen, there was one other thing in the house — an old lumpy mattress in the sitting room. The next day they would get some small pieces of furniture, but for tonight this was the bed.

"Come on, 'Leen," Toby coaxed and, even though it was early and the sun barely set, Eileen smiled and joined her very new husband. They were, after all, still on their honeymoon.

[Many miles away, more than an ocean away, on exactly the same day at almost exactly the same time, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration announced the names of the seven men, the Mercury Seven, who would be the first western pilots to become astronauts in their country's space program. One of them, John Herschel Glenn, Jr., would be the first American in outer space. Neither Tobias Snape nor his new bride, the former Eileen Prince, were ever aware that this had happened, but the coincidence is an interesting one.]

By the time Eileen woke the next morning, Toby'd left, but he was still with her as she moved around the house. She put on her dressing gown and found a note on a sheet from a tiny pad of paper — 'Ye'r the greatest.' Another note was in the tin of tea — 'I'm the luckiest man alive.'

Eileen smiled her tight, quiet smile. She wasn't one for talking and had never had many friends, certainly never a beau to go out walking with. Toby made her feel special, important, and he was always telling her sweet things. He did like to go out with his mates of a Friday night, and had a fondness for gin, and sometimes the fondness gave him a ready fist, but these were common traits among working-class men in both small town and big city, and Eileen thought nothing of it.

A knock on the door made her jump. It wasn't Toby — Toby'd walk right

in. Eileen didn't want to greet strangers on her doorstep still in her night clothes, so she walked quietly to the front door and, instead of opening it, said, "Who's there?"

"Your mother, 'Leen. Who else are you expecting at seven-thirty on a Friday morning?"

The door opened, and Eileen nodded to her mother and slipped quickly back inside, conscious she was wearing a dressing gown on a public road. "Come in, Mum, and have a cuppa. We got no furniture yet, but at least we got a house. How'd you get here? How'd you know?"

"Believe it or not, that old muggle scoundrel Wensley dropped by yesterday to tell me he'd found a place, and Sam and Emily Dyson are visiting their daughter in Colne, so they gave me a ride." Mrs. Prince stood in the sitting room looking around at the dingy walls. "It's rather old, isn't it? And small."

"I'll be doing a load of cleaning, that's for sure, and 't ain't big, but it'll be better when the furniture comes, enough for two at any rate."

"Two?" Mrs. Prince's gaze lingered a moment on Eileen's face. "Are you sure?"

Eileen blushed. It didn't suit her and made her face look blotchy. "Mum, please. We are married. And you can't never be sure."

"We can," Mrs. Prince replied. "show me the kitchen now, and we'll have that cuppa." She waited until they were sitting and sipping the hot tea before continuing. "There's going to be trouble, 'Leen. It's not just the money, though children are expensive. That man of yours won't stand being second, and babies have a way of grabbing all the attention."

"Toby'll be fine, Mum. He'll be proud t' have fathered a child."

"He'll be jealous. It's bad enough, both of you Moon in Aries, but to get married when it's swinging through Aquarius and now having it in Aries again for this . . . I never did see a couple so willing to have a fight, with both of you wanting to control everything and him wanting no rivals. You might at least have waited 'til you were settled in."

"We'll be fine, Mum. And you know Toby sets no store by all that . . ."

The front door opened, and Eileen jumped up to greet her husband.

Mrs. Prince followed more slowly and paused in the kitchen doorway when she saw there were two men in the sitting room. The older of the two, cap already in hand, gave her a nod that was almost a bow.

“Good morning, Constantina. Come to have a peek at the new digs?”

“Good morning, Wensley. I suppose it was good of you to be looking out for them like this.”

“Proud to do it, proud to do it. Well, ’Leen, you’re looking fit. Got a bit of a glow. Has my grandson been doing his duty? Am I going to be a great-grandfather before I die?”

Toby started to stammer something about waiting until everything was settled with the house and they were sure about the jobs continuing at the mill, then noticed that both Eileen and Mrs. Prince were very quiet. Wensley Snape had already noticed.

“You got news for us, Constantina?” Wensley asked. “Your people got ways of knowing?”

His mouth still open from an unfinished sentence, Toby turned to his wife of less than a week. “Is it true, ’Leen? D’ people like you . . . D’ ye know?”

Eileen nodded. Toby let out a whoop, and began dancing her around the empty sitting room. “A dad!” he bellowed. “A dad! And it’ll be a boy, I know it. You’ve made me the happiest man . . .”

Then the laborers arrived with furniture gleaned from the houses of several different relatives — sofa and chairs, lamps, table, bed, and all the important things — not many, but enough — to start a home with. As Toby and Eileen busied themselves with telling the workmen where to put these used but serviceable treasures, old Wensley Snape watched Eileen with a keen, almost hungry expression. Constantina Prince was one of the best-known witch healers and potion brewers of the Pendle countryside, and more than anyone else, Wensley had supported Toby in his courtship of her daughter. It was something he’d wanted most of his life.

There are dreams that are never fulfilled, and others that come true. Wensley Snape was lucky in that, of all those near to him, his was the dream

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CHAPTER ONE

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that was about to come true. If all went well, in nine months' time, he would have a wizard in the family.

C H A P T E R T W O

THE PERFECT BABY

SATURDAY, JANUARY 9, 1960 (HALFWAY BETWEEN FIRST QUARTER AND FULL MOON)

Exactly nine months later, at one forty-six in the afternoon on Saturday, the ninth of January, 1960, Eileen Snape gave birth to a tiny baby boy in that small mill town about fifteen minutes drive from Colne in the Pendle district of Lancashire. There was no doctor present, and no licensed midwife either, the birth being assisted by the new baby's two grandmothers. If the child had been born in a hospital, he would have been taken from the room and placed in a crib in an infant ward, swaddled and removed from real human contact except for the short time each day when he would be allowed to be held by his mother. At home, however, he was washed and placed immediately in Eileen's arms, so that the first thing he ever really noticed in his life, blurred and unfocused though they were, were his mother's eyes.

His father Toby was so overcome by the proxy pain he felt for his wife's travail, that he spent the whole morning in the local pub, together with his own father, Edward Snape, and only returned home, boisterous and joyful, after he was assured he was the father of a reasonably healthy son. Wensley spent the entire time in the sitting room or bringing water and towels to the women. He couldn't go into the upper room itself, for that was women's domain.

"Look a' that!" Toby chirped when he saw his son for the first time. "I told ye no son o' mine 'd be born bald! Chip off the ol' block, 'e is. Chip off the ol' block. Thought all babies 'ad blue eyes, though," for the newest

member of the family had wisps of dusky hair already, and his eyes were so dark as to look black.

"You can't ever tell a baby's eye color when he's born," admonished Nora Snape, Toby's mother. "Give him a couple of months and they'll change. Ned, don't breathe the smell of whiskey in the boy's face."

"Maybe," said Constantina, looking at the child thoughtfully and still talking about his eyes. "We'll have to wait and see."

Wensley reached out a tentative little finger and touched it to the baby's palm. The tiny fist clutched it with surprising firmness. Constantina sniffed at the expression on the older man's face. "All newborns hold on tightly," she said. "That grip 'll weaken soon."

"You think so?" said Wensley wistfully. "I was kind of hoping he might be a strong 'un."

"He may still be, but not because of the way he's hanging on right now. Everybody out, now. You've all seen him, and 'Leen needs some rest." The three men went downstairs to plan the boy's future and toast him, his mum, and everyone else they could think of, while upstairs the older women began to prepare mother and baby for the first feeding. There was some tension between them, since Constantina's ideas of what was necessary did not coincide with Nora's. In general, the witch's will prevailed.

The boy was not immediately named. Eileen, true to her education, wanted him to be Septimius Severus, but Tobias wasn't going to have any Septimius in his family, by God, and insisted the baby be named for his grandfathers, either Edward Richard, with Tobias's father first, or Richard Edward, giving pride of place to Eileen's. The eventual compromise was Richard Severus, Toby allowing the Richard since Richard Prince had died some years before, and Toby had never gotten along well with his own father anyway. Not unless they were in a pub.

With the logic inherent in all families who spend an inordinate time choosing names, the little boy was never called any variant of Richard, everybody for some reason settling on the nickname Russ. The neighbors, in fact, labored all his life under the misconception that his name was Russell.

Russ Snape was, from the day of his birth, a changeling child. His father put it down to superior intelligence.

"Ain't he the smart one, though, 'Leen. He knows when I come home from work I need it nice and quiet. He don't never bother, does he? Quiet as a parson. Look at him pushing his head up to look around. Won't nobody never put nothing over on him."

Eileen watched the development of her son with tigerish pride as he stretched and kicked and explored his little world and, when put on his stomach, pushed himself up to watch her. She didn't tell Toby that the child never cried. It made things easier if Toby felt that was a baby gift just for him. She also didn't tell Toby that the sharp, quick, black eyes lit up and sparkled more for her than for his father. There was no reason reminding her husband that children always have a closer relationship with their mothers.

Eileen's own mother had other things to say when Eileen and her son came visiting.

"What do you mean, he doesn't cry? All babies cry sometimes. When they're hungry, or tired, or they need their nappies changed. He must cry sometimes."

"No, Mum. He doesn't cry. He never has. He has other ways to tell me he needs something." She leaned over the infant. "Russ knows how to tell me things. See? Now he wants me to pick him up and hold him." She lifted the child from Constantina's sofa into her arms. "You want to walk around the room and look at things, don' cha, Russ?"

Constantina, however, had a new worried look on her face. "Eileen, are you reading that baby?" She stood behind her daughter and peered into the great black eyes in the tiny face. "He's closed to me. Not that I could ever read anyone anyway, but I didn't think you could either. No wonder he doesn't cry, if he can just look at you and you know what he wants."

Toby, meanwhile, rapidly became less enchanted, more ambivalent about the child.

"Didn't know as a baby'd cost so much money," he told Eileen. "Bottles and nappies. And can't you just leave 'm a bit to come sit by me? He don't

need all your attention. A woman's got to take care of her man."

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 1960 (ONE DAY BEFORE THE FULL MOON)

There was a little group of women that got together of an afternoon while their husbands worked in the mill. Kate Hanson was widowed by a fire in the cotton shed six years earlier and had no children, but the insurance settlement had allowed her to keep her house, and her skill at needlework — plus taking in boarders — kept her independent. Her younger sister was Polly Heseltine, whose third child, a daughter named Peggy, was two months older than Russ. Other women in the group — they were five altogether — also had small children of preschool age. When they got together, in whosoever house, the children played while the mothers gossiped over a cuppa in the kitchen.

"Peggy 'ad a new word this week," Polly told the group jammed into the Snape's tiny kitchen, clearly proud of her little girl. "Just a year old now, and she says 'water,' and 'bye-bye,' and just Tuesday she said 'pram' as clear as can be." (What Peggy had said was *pam*, but her meaning had been clear.)

"They're such fun t' watch at this age," chimed in Sarah Catlow. "My Bobby's askin' for biscuits and milk. He said 'mama' when he was eight months, y' know. How's Russy doing, 'Leen? He'd be getting close."

Eileen poured more tea for Polly. "He ain't started talking yet. Still too young. He'll be walking soon on his own, though." She glanced through the kitchen doorway to where little Russ teetered on his newfound legs, clinging to the sofa. He got around rather quickly now, moving from piece of furniture to piece of furniture, and she had to keep a constant eye on him.

Sarah smiled at the tiny boy, so much frailer than her own sturdy children. "You'll get something soon, 'Leen. His babbling' ll be words 'fore y' know it."

"He doesn't babble either," said Eileen. "He's a quiet one."

"My cousin Jane's girl never babbled," said Edith Phillips, whose son Neil was now using one of Russ's blocks to pound Russ's toes. "They kept a pacifier in 'er mouth t' keep her quiet, and she never said a word 'til she was

near three years old, then started talking like a bleeding solicitor. You never can tell."

"Neil," said Eileen from her chair in the kitchen, "don't hit Russ. Neil..."

Neil suddenly let out a howl of pain and rage and sat down plop in the middle of the sitting room. He continued to scream as his mother ran in from the kitchen to pick him up and cuddle him. "What did y' do, love?" Edith crooned to him. "Did you hit your fingers with the old block? That's what naughty little boys get when they hit other people with blocks, y' know. They hit their own fingers." To the other women's expressions of solicitude she replied matter-of-factly, "I don't think he's hurt. Just one of those things, y' know."

Little Russ swayed insecurely where he clung to the sofa, his black eyes intent on the squalling Neil. He hadn't reacted either to the attack with the block or to Neil's tantrum. Eileen kept an eye on him for the rest of the afternoon, but nothing else happened.

The next night was Bonfire Night. Toby loved Bonfire Night because it was his birthday, and he'd grown up with the idea that the fires and the fireworks were for him. He was thirty now, three years older than Eileen, but that put no damper on his enjoyment of the evening.

In fact, Toby spent a good part of the afternoon looking for serviceable pieces of combustible junk to put into the front area, then as dusk gathered he waited in the darkened sitting room, peering through the closed curtains. A group of teenagers came prowling with the first stars, spied the junk, and lifted it carefully and quietly over the low area wall. Toby let them get a ways down the street before he came out yelling at them for thieves. The boys jeered and threw a couple of small stones, and Toby chased them to the town center. It was all in good fun.

Then Toby returned home to collect Eileen and baby Russ, and together they went to watch the bonfire and the burning of the Guy. Eileen made the traditional black treacle cake called parkin, and Toby brought potatoes wrapped in foil to cook in the fire. They 'oh'ed and 'ah'ed at the fireworks

while little Russ watched everything with wide, intent eyes, then went home to feast on potatoes and parkin.

"You got a present for me, 'Leen?" Toby grinned across the lamplit sitting room as the clock ticked past nine.

"I gave you your present," said Eileen. It was a warm winter sweater she'd knitted.

"I 'ad a different present in mind," Toby leered, "seeing as it's m' birthday and all," but Eileen wasn't watching him.

"Shh. Look, Toby. Look at Russ."

Toby looked. Little Russ had clambered to his feet with the help of the sofa. Now, oblivious to the attention he was getting, he released his grip and, holding nothing, staggered toward the front door.

"...two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight..." Eileen stopped counting as Russ lost his balance and sat suddenly on the sitting room floor. He made no sound "There y' go, Toby! There's your present!" Eileen cried as Toby hugged first her and then the little boy who had him beaming with pride. "Your son's walking!"

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 24, 1960 (TEN HOURS BEFORE THE FIRST QUARTER)

For some reason passing human understanding, Toby decided to have the whole family over for his, Eileen's, and Russ's first Christmas as a family. Everyone would stay the night, and wake up together for Christmas breakfast and the opening of presents. Since the house was small, they had to split up Toby's parents, for Nora and Constantina had to share the second, smaller bedroom while Wensley and Edward bunked in the sitting room. Ordinarily Toby and Eileen might have given up their bedroom to his parents, but they had Russ's crib there and felt that with all the noise and disruption, the baby should at least be able to sleep in a place that was familiar.

All had arrived by four o'clock Christmas Eve, Wensley, Nora, and Edward in the latter's car with a Christmas tree tied to the top. Nora guarded boxes of fragile ornaments that had been in the family for ages and had graced

every one of Toby's Christmases. "Thought it was best for you to have these," she told her son, "now that you're the one with the child."

The men stayed in the sitting room putting up the tree while the women busied themselves in the kitchen preparing supper. Nora watched Constantina and Eileen with barely concealed curiosity. When Constantina raised her eyebrows, Nora admitted. "I was just thinking to see some . . . you know . . . I never saw you do any."

"What are you expecting," said Constantina a bit huffily, "an ice sculpture?"

"Plum pudding?" replied Nora.

"That's in the oven already," Eileen said. "I got it this afternoon."

"Oh," Nora sighed sadly. "Just like everyone else."

"That," Constantina said, "is a typical muggle attitude. We can't make anything permanent out of thin air. Magic fades, it dissolves. Magical food doesn't nourish. Magical money turns to dross. Magic is for temporary things, like this . . ." She set a knife to peeling a potato and a whisk to beating eggs for the eggnog. "Silly muggle idea, using magic to make food."

"Mum!" Eileen hissed. She looked nervous.

"We're inside a witch's house doing simple household tasks," Constantina replied. "Nobody cares. I swear, that school of yours . . ."

Nora was abashed, though also pleased by the display. "Wensley was always so sure," she said, "but he never could give me a concrete example. Do you think Russy . . ."

"We don't know," said Constantina. "It's too early to tell."

"Maybe not," Eileen whispered, and the two older women bent closer. "Beginning of November, I was hosting a little group — we all have young children — and one of the boys was hitting Russ with a block, not hard, but hitting and . . . well all of a sudden he acted like something hit him and pushed him back, but Russ didn't move. I don't know if that was anything, but I've been wondering ever since."

Nora went over to Russ, who was playing in the corner with a toy telephone made of cardboard, holding it to his ear but not imitating talking into it. "Are you gra-gra's little wizard, Russy?" she cooed. "Did you do magic on

that naughty boy?" She reached out an arm that had bruises on the wrist. Nora always had bruises on her wrists or arms. It was normal. Russ stared back at her with intent, guarded eyes.

"Leen," Constantina said suddenly, "you go talk to him. Ask the same question."

Unsure but willing, Eileen took Nora's place. "Russ," she said, "did you do magic on that naughty boy?" and she held the memory of that day in her mind.

Something behind the dark eyes opened then, like doors opening into a lighted hall, sparkling with comprehension and a trace of mischief. Eileen stepped back, puzzlement now on her face.

"He doesn't understand the question," she said, "but he thought 't was funny when Neil fell down."

"That's not just hunger and wet nappies, 'Leen. That's true reading." Constantina pulled a chair away from the table and sat down in it. "All these years," she said, shaking her head. "All these years you had the gift of reading and I never knew. Your own mother, and I never knew. It's because I didn't have the gift. No one in my family had it. There were some in your dad's family, though not him. I suppose that's why I never looked for it in you. My daughter is a reader."

"Does that mean she can read minds?" Nora asked.

"In a way," Constantina said after considering a few seconds whether or not to answer. "She can look in your eyes and know what you're thinking at that moment. Some have it stronger than others."

Nora turned to her daughter-in-law. "What am I thinking now?" she demanded.

Eileen looked. She kept looking. "I don't know," she said at last. "Maybe about a car."

"Close enough," Nora said. "I was thinking about going in the car to get the Christmas tree. There was a car in there. But why," this was addressed to Constantina, "can't she read me better?"

"Maybe it's the baby," Constantina admitted. "Maybe it's just between the mother and her child."

"What's between the mother and her child?" asked a new voice. Wensley Snape was standing in the kitchen doorway.

"Leen has the gift of reading Russ." Constantina explained. "That's how she always knows what he needs, and probably why he never has to cry to get it. He just lets her see it. It seems now she can read much more than that, though."

"Would he let me see it, too?" Wensley asked. He was an old man, eighty or more, and though he wanted to crouch down at the child's level, he couldn't. Instead he brought a chair and sat next to the boy, leaning forward so that they could make eye contact. "Nothing," he said. "I can't read anything in that little brain."

"That's because you're a muggle, and muggles can't read anyway," Constantina stated flatly, but she'd seen something else. She seen the baby's dark eyes lose the light, as if the door behind them had closed. It opened, apparently, only for Eileen.

"What're y' all doin' in th' kitchen?" Toby asked, now sticking his head in the doorway, his father right behind. Father and son had both been hitting the Christmas cheer rather heavily, and both had reached the 'jolly' stage.

"We're experimenting with 'Leen's ability to read your son's mind," said Wensley. "It seems to improve communication. Imagine just thinking what you want without having to say anything."

"Wait a mo,'" said Toby. "Is 'at why he's slow? 'Cause 'Leen's doin' somewhat to his mind?"

The three women and Wensley were taken aback. "Your son," said Constantina firmly, "is not slow."

"Ted Heseltine says Polly says Edith Philips says 'e might be slow 'cause 'e ain't talkin' yet."

"That's rubbish. No baby his age is talking yet."

Toby was beginning to get steamed, and made an effort to enunciate clearly. "You know wha' I mean. I mean he ain't talkin' baby talk. I ain't heard a wa-wa or a goo-goo out o' him in his entire life. He's nigh a year old. How come he ain't prattling? There's some beginning to think he's slow."

"He's not prattling, as you call it," Constantina retorted, "because he's

smart enough to know he doesn't have to. Why learn to talk when all you have to do is think about what you want and you get it?"

"Well then she's got t' stop doin' it. She's got t' make him 'ave t' talk so 's the neighbors don't get the idea he's slow. Once they start thinkin' y're slow, they've got y' pegged for the rest o' yer life."

"Now Toby, don't be so harsh!" Eileen cried.

"The lad may have a point," said Wensley.

"You'd better be awfully sure of yourselves before you go messing in my grandson's head..."

"Nobody's gonna call my son slow!"

As the exchange heated toward argument level, no one noticed that the child in the corner was watching and listening intently, the place behind his eyes sealed shut, guarded and wary. He didn't understand the words, or what the argument was about, but he knew that the people in the room were angry, and it had something to do with him.

Nora made them stop before it went too far. "For crying out loud, it's Christmas Eve! Toby, you take the chicken, Ned the potatoes, Dad Snape the peas. It's time for supper!"

"But we got to..."

"Toby! Not one more word. Tomorrow. We'll discuss it tomorrow when we're calmer." She thrust the platter with the roast chicken into his hands, turned him around, and pushed him into the sitting room where they'd set up card tables for their Christmas Eve feast. Wensley'd brought a bottle of wine for Toby to open. The plum pudding and eggnog were for later.

There was even a little plate with his special favorites for Russ, who could not yet eat everything they were eating. Eileen held out a hand to him and, since the adults were no longer arguing, he solemnly got to his feet, grasped her outstretched finger in a small fist, and let her lead him into the sitting room. That was when he saw the Christmas tree.

As the rest busied themselves setting the tables, Russ, his eyes wide and wonder-filled, crossed the room on his short little legs and reached out a hand to take one of the pretty, sparkling ornaments. "No, Russ. Don't touch,"

Eileen called to him, and he put the hand down. She turned back to the table, confident that he would obey.

He did obey. She said he must not touch. Russ again held out his right hand to within two inches of the ornament. Slowly, gently, the gaudy ball of blue and gold moved, arcing lazily outward on its hook as if drawn by a magnet, until it reached the waiting fingers. He had not touched the ornament, the ornament had touched him.

The only one in the room to notice was Wensley, who held his breath as he watched the little pointed face with the glittering dark eyes and soft black hair concentrate on the fulfillment of its desire. *Slow, Toby? I don't think so. There's a brain inside that head, whether he talks or not, and whatever else they may think, no one's ever going to think he's slow.*

The next morning, after a fine breakfast, the seven gathered around the Christmas tree to open presents. These were mostly small practical things — a warm pair of gloves, a new cap — because they were poor working-class people who had to take care of each penny, shilling, and half crown. (Not farthings, of course. Eileen was going through every pocket and drawer in the house to find all the farthings, which she would spend in her shopping during the coming week, for with the new year they would become worthless.)

The only one in the house who got frivolous presents in addition to the more practical clothing was Russ. He opened his own gifts, with a little help from Eileen, and was soon playing on the carpet with a toy car that his grandfather had given him. He was the subject of midmorning discussion.

"Much as I hate to admit it, 'Leen," said Constantina as she helped pour the tea, "Toby may be right. If the boy isn't making any attempt to communicate with other people because he can communicate so well with you, then maybe he needs a little push."

"But Mum, he's so young. He won't understand it's for his own good. There's never a day in his life when he ain't connected with me. Can I just take that away?"

"There, dear, it isn't really so bad as that," Nora soothed. "It's not like you don't talk t' him every day, too. Just keep talking t' him. He won't lose that. Talk t' him and cuddle him..."

“Not too much,” Toby butted in. “No son of mine’s gonna be a molly-coddle.”

“Be quiet, Toby,” said Wensley. “The child’s not a year old yet. This is women’s business.”

“And remember, ’Leen,” her mother added, “we only know that you can read Russ. We don’t know if Russ can read you. He listens when you talk and doesn’t need eye contact to follow your instructions. You’re not removing yourself from him, only the crutch.”

“Yes, but he’s so little . . .”

“Sometimes,” Wensley said, “you have to be cruel to be kind.”

They started that afternoon, after the older Snapes had left. Constantina insisted on staying a few days to help Eileen get through the worst of it, and for once Toby let her have her way because in this she was supporting him.

The battle started at three o’clock when Russ toddled into the kitchen and pulled at his mother’s apron. She looked down, smiling but avoiding his eyes, and said, “Wha’ cha want, dear?”

“Keep it simple,” Constantina warned. “Any way he can show you that doesn’t involve reading.”

Russ continued to tug at the apron, clearly puzzled that he couldn’t make his needs understood. Eileen decided to give him a choice. She patted his nappies. “D’ ya need changing?” A quick check showed he didn’t. She brought two little bottles, one of water and one of juice. “Are you thirsty, Russ? Show mum what you want.”

None of it worked. Eileen was bending down closer, trying to prompt, when Russ suddenly grabbed her hair and pulled. Hard.

“Ow! Hey! Lay off, now you . . .” Eileen cried.

“What’s he doing?” Toby was at the kitchen door watching.

“He’s trying to pull my head around so I’ll look at him.”

Toby grinned in spite of himself. “Knows what he wants and not afraid t’ try t’ get it, eh?” He turned to Constantina. “He ain’t really slow, is he?”

“Toby Snape, your son took his first steps when most babies are still crawling. I think he’s going to fight for what he wants right now because he doesn’t want to give up the easy life. My grandson isn’t slow.”

"That's all right then," said Toby, and went back into the sitting room.

Meanwhile, Eileen picked Russ up, but he kept reaching for her hair and eyes. For the first time, she and her son had a true difference of opinion, and for the first time it really struck her how odd it was to have a baby who made no noise except for grunts and coos without meaning. Right now, the most natural thing would be for him to be squalling, but he wasn't.

After a while Russ buried his face against Eileen's arm and lay in her lap, rigid and resentful, while Eileen rocked him, calling him a good boy and asking him to show her what he wanted because if he could do that, she would get it for him. Just show her what it was.

The battle went on for days. Russ clung to Eileen's skirts, reaching up to her, or let himself be carried around the house while he pulled at her hair and nose, and stuck his fingers in her eyes. Other times he lay on his stomach on the sitting room carpet, unmoving and unresponsive, a pathetic, lost little figure who couldn't understand what was happening to his once secure world.

MONDAY, JANUARY 9, 1961 (NINE HOURS BEFORE THE LAST QUARTER)

They didn't celebrate Russ's first birthday. It was too soon after Christmas for any extra expense, Russ did not understand birthdays in any case, and the boy was still being withdrawn and resentful.

"Is 'e bein' sullen?" Toby demanded when he arrived home from the mill by way of the local. He was later than usual, and gin was clearly the reason why. "A boy's s'posed to be a comfort n' support for 'is dad. Ain't s'posed to be sullen."

"Don't be hard on him, Toby. He doesn't understand."

"Some 'un should make 'im understand. Where's m' supper?"

Supper was a source of tension, too. "Why don't 'e eat? A man works 'ard for th' food on 's table and th' sullen witch brat don't eat."

"He hasn't eaten anything all day. I don't know if it's 'cause he's upset or he's sick."

"You don't go t' no bleeding doctor! Bloody National Health can't put a doctor in a man's town, 'e pays taxes and still 'as t' pay a bleeding doctor!"

"What if he's sick?"

"Ain't that wha' cher mum does? Wha' good's a witch, she can't physic 'er own kin?"

After supper, Toby pulled a partial bottle of gin from a cupboard, a bottle left over from Christmas, and after he'd poured a drink or two the problem became worse, but clearer. "That bleedin' horse's behind Evans come down from 'is la-di-da office t'day t' tell us we ain't com-pe-ti-tive. We got to ee-co-no-mize, or the mill's closin'. Askin' us t' do same work in shorter hours. 'T ain't right. A man works 'is whole life 'til he gets where 'e can afford a home 'n a wife 'n family, 'n they ups and takes it away from 'im." He poured another glass and downed it in a gulp.

Eileen froze. "You ain't redundant, are you, Toby?" She was trying to think of a way to take the bottle from him.

"What's th' difference? Less hours, less pay. Bleeding managers ain't takin' less pay, I'll wager!"

"We can still make do, Toby. I can clean and sew..."

"Man's s'posed t' provide for 'is wife! 'E can't do that, 'e ain't a man!" Another drink.

"You're a man, Toby, and a good one. 'T ain't your fault the mill's on hard times."

"Wha's a man t' do, 'Leen? Got a wife 'n kid t' take care of..." Toby looked across the room to where Russ was sitting on the floor, toys abandoned, quiet and resentful. "Com'ere son," Toby called to him. "Come t' yer dad."

Russ didn't move. Worse, he turned his head away. "It's all right," Eileen said quickly. "I can put him to bed in the small room. It'll be just you and me."

"No, I want m' son. Get over here, boy, 'n comfort yer dad." When Russ still didn't move, Toby rose, Eileen trying to restrain him, and stomped over to the boy. He bent down to take Russ's hand, saying, "Y' come to yer dad now," but Russ pulled the hand away and shrank from his father.

"Y' ungrateful little brat!" Toby roared. "I'll teach you what for!" He seized Russ and lifted him, holding him tightly while the toddler wriggled and squirmed and pushed with tiny fists.

"Toby! He's just a baby!" Eileen screamed, trying to break his grip and pull the child away. "Leave him be! Give him to me!"

"Shut yer gob, woman! E's gonna sit with 'is father like a proper son, and not a sullen witch's brat!" Toby yelled back. "'Ere I thought you was a wife, 'n you been teachin' 'im 'gainst me all this time!"

Russ was kicking now, twisting and squirming as his parents shouted at each other, his face reddening and his fists flailing. Suddenly he, too, was screaming—howling and wailing with infant rage and fear. The sound was so shocking to Toby that he staggered back against the little table next to the sofa, tipping over his glass, and released the child to Eileen.

"Wha's 'at?" Toby stammered.

"It's your son," Eileen replied. "He's crying."

"Thought 'e didn't cry."

"He does now." She looked deeply into the dark eyes, saw the need, and carried Russ up to his crib where she crooned to him and settled him down with his teddy bear and his favorite soft cloth, then went back down to comfort the stricken Toby, who had to face the cold outside world alone. Toby was staring at the floor by the cupboard where the shattered gin bottle lay. "Didn't know I knocked into it," he said by way of an apology as she cleaned up the mess.

After that, Russ had no trouble making his needs known. The next morning he clambered into Eileen's lap and patted her mouth with his hand, opening and closing his own mouth in a pantomime of speech. She started speaking baby-talk to him, and he watched her lips intently, mimicking their movements. Two days later he said, "Mama," and Toby was in transports of joy.

"You're going to regret wanting him to start talking," Eileen told Toby the following week, and it was true they could no longer get the boy to be quiet. He babbled and prattled and talked nonsense on his cardboard telephone the way he saw people talk on the public phone in the market, and

on the day he mastered the sound ‘g,’ he went around the house crowing, “Ga-ga-ga-ga,” all day long. He said ‘da-da’ and ‘wa-da’ and ‘tey’ (which meant teddy), and ‘pu’ when his nappies needed changing. Toby had to agree that he was not slow.

The neighborhood was changing. Most of the men at the mill had their hours cut, and it was hard to make do on less than eight pounds a week. Ted and Polly Heseltine had enough saved that they were able to move to Manchester where he could find work. Most of the other wives started walking long, dusty miles to other villages and towns looking for chores to supplement income.

Toby took up an old refrain. “Why can’t ya magic us up something, ‘Leen? What good’s it being married to a witch if she can’t help with a coupla pounds here and there? Y’ give me the expense of a baby and then don’t help out. ’T ain’t fair to a man.”

With Polly gone, Kate Hanson suddenly became available to watch Russ while Eileen went seeking day employ, and luckily she asked only a meal in return. They decided it would be better if Kate came to the Snape house so that Russ would still be in familiar surroundings. The first day she had to leave him, Eileen was edgy.

“You know Mrs. Hanson,” she told Russ as she crouched down at his level and straightened his smock. “You be a good boy and don’t give her any trouble. I’ll be back for supper.”

“Don’t you fret, Eileen,” Kate said. “I may not have had any of my own, but I’ve taken care of all three of Polly’s. We’ll get along fine.”

How fine, Eileen found out late that afternoon when she returned. Mrs. Hanson was sitting by herself in the front room knitting.

“Where’s Russ?” Eileen asked.

“He’s been hiding,” Kate said calmly. “Practically the moment you left, he crawled into one of the lower kitchen cabinets and hasn’t been out all day. He’s punishing you for leaving him. It’s normal, believe me. It took Georgy a week before he’d come out of the upstairs wardrobe, and I’m his aunt.”

“I got to let him know I’m home.”

“I’m sure he knows. He’d have heard the door open. Now, Eileen, he’s

not going t' come rushing into your arms. He's going t' punish you. He'll retreat, and push you away, and scream like a banshee, but that's because he's been saving up all day just t' let you know how unhappy he is. Let him get it all out, and stay calm."

Mrs. Hanson was right. Eileen couldn't let the boy stay in the cabinet with Toby due home in an hour, so she pulled him out, and he let out a wail that must have been heard clear down the street. He screamed, and kicked, and fought his way off her lap, and tried to get back into the cabinet, and it was all she could do to stay patient, for she was tired, too, so Kate came into the kitchen, and Russ went to her instead of his mother, and Eileen was finally able to fix supper.

Russ continued to punish Eileen after Toby came home. He did this by pushing away from her and snuggling up to his father on the sofa. "What's this?" Toby asked, clearly pleased. "You two 'ad a tiff or something?"

"He's sore at me for leaving him today," Eileen said. "We're not talking."

"Smart boy," Toby chuckled. "Women 're fickle. Y' got t' stick with your mates."

It was only a matter of time, of course, before Kate and Russ reached a *modus vivendi*, and he began to accept her arrival as normal, and to run to greet his mother when she got home. Kate did express some concerns, though.

"Did you ever notice how distant he is from everyone," she said one day. "Like he's outside watching, but never wants to get close?"

"No, I can't say as I have," Eileen replied. "Did something happen to-day?"

"No, not really. Maybe it's just because Polly's children were different, more outgoing. Never the same for two minutes. They'd be giggling, and then crying, and then so rapt in something they'd never hear you call, and then fighting, and then loving. Russ, except when he's hiding in cupboards, well he's always so . . . detached."

"He's always been a quiet child," said Eileen, putting on her apron and starting to prepare supper.

Several months later, Kate greeted Eileen at the door with an apologetic

air. "I don't know how it happened, 'Leen, but Russ got out the back door and out onto the moor before I noticed the door was open. I was sure that door was latched."

Since Russ was now sitting on the kitchen floor playing with his toy car, Eileen calmly removed her coat. "I see you caught him."

"When it comes t' it," Kate laughed, "I'm faster than he is."

After Kate had left, Eileen sat herself down next to Russ. "You went out by yourself today."

"I went for walk," Russ replied, not looking at her.

"How'd you open the door?"

Russ thought for a moment. "Didn't. Door just opened."

"Why'd it do that?"

The little boy grinned. "I said please."

Eileen sighed, thankful that childish magic set off no alarms. "Russ, you must never go out of the house alone. Always stay with Mrs. Hanson. If the door opens again, run and tell her. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Mum." And as always, having been given a direct order, Russ obeyed.

Things went on like this for another couple of years, and then in 1964 the mill finally closed. Men like Derrick Philips and Harry Evans got work in Colne and managed to stay in the town while they commuted. Others, like the Catlows and Garnetts, moved to Manchester and Birmingham. Toby got a job in the mine in the next town and came home drunk more often. Things, which had been bad, gradually got worse.

C H A P T E R T H R E E

SCHOOL DAYS

Nineteen-sixty-four was also the year Russ's family began talking about school.

"He'll be going to Hogwarts." Nana was saying. "Eileen was the first of the family to go, but her son should be admitted as well. He's shown he's magical. They can't refuse him." Eileen was Russ's mum, and Nana was her mum, and Nana almost always got her way because she was the most powerful witch around. Russ had not yet come to grips with the fact that Nana and Mum were the only witches around. He thought being the most powerful was pretty good.

"Right," said Dad, who almost never agreed with Nana. "Can y' see me telling m' mates that my son goes to some school called Hogwarts? Y' know what they'll all say."

"You would impress me more, Tobias, if you were worried more about your son's education and less about what your 'mates' would say."

"I don't see 's it makes much difference right now anyway," continued Dad. "He can't start that la-di-da school 'til he's eleven. We're talking about right next year, when he's five."

"He should," Nana said, "be home-schooled."

"She's right, Toby," said Wenny. "The boy needs to be prepared for Hogwarts. A primary school isn't going to give him that." Wenny was Dad's dad's dad. Dad didn't have a dad because he was dead — killed in a mine cave-in. Russ knew a mine was where his dad worked, a cave-in was a bad thing, killed meant making someone dead, and dead was when you had to go away and

you could never come back even though you wanted to. Mum's dad was dead before Russ was born. He had no memory of either of his grandfathers.

Mum spoke next, and she agreed with Dad. This made Russ happy because when Mum agreed with Dad, Dad was usually in a good mood about it. "No, Wensley," she said, "Toby's right. Who's going to home-school him? I can't. I have to look for jobs. We ain't got the money to pay for it. Are either of you going to pay for it? If you aren't I don't see as you've got any say in the matter."

They were always talking about money. Russ didn't understand a lot about money. He had a collection of five coins: a farthing that used to be able to buy things but couldn't anymore, a ha'penny, a penny, a tuppence, and a thruppence. The other coins were too important for him to have, they needed to be spent. He figured home-schooling must cost a lot of sixpences if none of the adults had the money for it.

The school talk ended. Wenny bent down where Russ was drawing with a piece of charcoal on a scrap of butcher's paper. "You want to come spend the afternoon with me, Severus? I think your mum and dad want to be alone." Wenny was leaning on a cane. He used a cane to walk with, which Russ thought was neat since Wenny's canes always had interesting figures on them. This cane had a dragon's head. It came from a place called Wales.

Russ nodded and got at once to his feet. Whenever he visited Wenny because his parents wanted to be alone, his Dad was always in a good mood when he got back. He also loved going to Wenny's house because it had so many interesting things. He scampered to get his jacket and cap, then ran out the door with a quick "Bye, Mum. Bye, Dad."

Walking down the street with Wenny was fun, too. Men Russ didn't know would tip their caps and say things like, 'Afternoon, Cap'n.' Sometimes they noticed Russ. 'Is this the young 'un?' they'd ask, and Wenny would say, 'Aye, m' great-grandson. Greet the gentleman, Severus.' Then Russ would hold out his hand and say solemnly, 'How do you do?' and the men would tip their caps to him, too.

Wenny lived a short ways outside the town, in an old, old cottage with an overgrown, rambling garden. Nana's garden was neat and orderly, and she

told him the names of everything and what it was good for, but Wenny's garden was wild and full of things with no names. Russ could pick and examine anything he wanted, as long as he didn't put it into his mouth. He loved both gardens, but Wenny's garden was more fun to play in.

Even more fun was the inside of Wenny's house. It was full of things that nobody else had. There were real human heads so small they'd fit in your hand, and dolls that if you stuck pins in them they could make people sick. There were pig knuckle bones and painted cards that told the future, and blowguns with poison darts that Russ couldn't touch because they could still kill you if you pricked yourself. There were statues with eight arms, and snake skins, and a dinosaur claw. There was the dried-out eye of a creature that lived on the highest mountain in the world, a vial of dirt from a vampire's grave, and the tooth of a man-eating shark. There were drawers and chests full of these things, and Russ loved them all.

The best were the books because they all had pictures. Russ couldn't read yet, but he knew which pictures were the vampires, and which the zombies. He could recognize werewolves and ghouls, harpies and gorgons, banshees and dragons, gremlins and basilisks, the Cyclops and the minotaur, centaurs and satyrs. He could lie for hours on his stomach poring over one of the musty old volumes that smelled of salt and mildew.

Russ was, in fact, not yet five years old, yet he already knew more about herbs and potions, dark arts and magical creatures, than any other student who at the age of eleven had crossed the lake to Hogwarts on his way to being sorted.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 1965 (DAY BEFORE THE FIRST QUARTER)

Russ stood in front of his mother and father on the first day of school dressed in his brand new school uniform. It was too big for him. This was partly because there were no premade uniforms his size, but partly also because his parents expected him to grow into it.

The uniform was short gray pants and white shirt, a dark blue tie and blazer, a gray cap and socks, and black shoes. All these garments hung loosely

on Russ, giving him a scarecrowish appearance. He didn't realize this. His mum and dad were proud.

"There he is," said Dad, almost teary. "M' son's going off to school."

"Now," Mum asked, "What are you supposed to remember? What's your name?"

"Richard Severus Snape."

"Where do you live?"

"End of Spinner's End, down by the mill."

"Parents?"

"Tobias and Eileen Snape."

"Dad's work?"

"Collier."

"Your numbers."

"One, two, three . . ." he rattled them off all the way to a hundred.

"Alphabet."

"A, B, C . . ." that one was easy.

"All right, Russ, let's go."

Dad went off to the mine while Mum took Russ's hand and went with him to the school building at the center of the town, a half mile away. Just as they got to the bridge over the river, Mum bent down to adjust Russ's tie.

"And what's the most important to remember?" she asked quietly.

"Don't make nothing happen," Russ replied. It was a rule he'd learned to follow so long ago he couldn't remember. Never make things happen where people could see.

They crossed the bridge and went up the hill toward the school. Other students were going, too, some of them with their mums. Russ was excited and a little bit scared.

Mum left Russ in a big room with desks and tables and chairs. The teacher, a tired young woman with curly blonde hair who introduced herself as Miss Donnelly, showed him where to sit, and soon the room was full with nervous five-year-olds. Russ hunched down in his seat because he didn't want them to look at him. Most of them had uniforms that fit.

The teacher began to call names and to ask the children questions. Some of the questions were easy, like 'What do you call the big light in the sky?' or 'Count from eleven to twenty.' Some were harder, like 'Tell me the names of three animals with four legs.' Russ knew lots of names of plants, but his acquaintance with nonmagical animals was almost nonexistent. Then the teacher called the name of a student who didn't answer.

"Richard?"

The children looked around. Russ looked around. Richard wasn't there.

"Richard?" the teacher said again, then she stood up and walked over to Russ. "Richard Snape? That's you, right?" The class giggled.

Russ looked down at his hands, mortified. "Y's 'm," he muttered, hating himself for not remembering his full name.

"Good, Richard. Now tell me, what country do you live in?"

Russ thought. His parents hadn't given him the answer to this one. "Pendle," he said after a moment. The class giggled again.

"It's England, Richard," the teacher said. "Do you know what the capital of England is? Capital means a large, important city."

Russ thought hard about cities, trying to remember a name. One came. "Blackpool," he answered. More giggles.

"Don't worry, Richard," the teacher said. "We'll have time to learn about London."

It was a terrible day. Russ was confronted time after time with things he did not know. He didn't blame or resent the teacher, he blamed himself. He blamed himself for being too stupid to know these things that everybody else knew. There was something wrong with him. Nana and Wenny were right. He should have been kept at home because he was not good enough to go to school.

When Mum came to pick him up, Russ was silent and miserable.

Russ remained silent after they got home and Eileen got him a glass of water and a piece of bread for tea. "How did it go today?" she asked him finally, sitting beside him at the kitchen table with her own cuppa.

"Okay," Russ answered glumly. He didn't know the name yet for the

feeling of shame inside him, but it was new and unpleasant. He didn't want his mother to know about it. She'd been so sure he would do well.

"It doesn't sound so good," said Eileen. "Let's have a look-see." She leaned forward to bring her eyes closer to his.

Russ panicked. For the first time in his life, he did not want to show his mum what he was remembering, what he was thinking. He wanted her to be proud of him, and if she saw, she wouldn't be. Suddenly, not by his own effort, but by a kind of reflex, like pulling your hand away from something hot, he was remembering a half hour in the late morning when he was drawing a picture. That had been nice.

"Oh, drawing," Eileen said. "What did you draw?"

"Nana's garden with the flowers," Russ replied. He'd wanted to draw Wenny's shrunk heads and voodoo dolls, but he didn't know how. The teacher'd liked the flowers.

"Show me something else."

Russ found that if he left out the bad parts, there were things he could let his mum see. The teacher reading a story, for example, and the song she wanted them to learn. Children running around the play yard. He pushed his own failure down into a place where she would never look for it and... he didn't really understand, but it was like the kitchen door out to the area yard that if you didn't latch it, the wind could blow it open. Russ latched it.

By the time his dad got home, Russ had the story ready. He told all about the drawing, and the music, and the class learning ABC together, and Toby was satisfied.

"Mum, what's a country? Is it like Nana's house?" Russ asked later while Eileen did the washing up.

"What? No, Russ. That's a different word. When we say Nana lives in the country, we mean the countryside. Out of town where there's no other house but Nana's, and all's moor and open land. A country is a big place with lots of villages, towns, farms, and cities inside it."

"Is England a country?"

"That's right. We live inside England. Remember last month when we

went to Blackpool with Gra? All the time we were driving, and in Blackpool, we were still in England. We could drive for hours, and we'd still be in England."

The next day in school, the teacher didn't ask about England or London, even though Russ now had the right answers to give her.

As the days and weeks passed, school became at least predictable, even though it continued to be a torment. Russ soon discovered that almost anything he did made the other children giggle, and he hated being called on for any thing. Even if he knew the answer, he couldn't get it to come out of his mouth properly, and he would say things like 'L... London,' or 'I don't... know.' That was really funny for the others.

Play time was good because the other children ran off to play games, and he could find a quiet place to sit and think. Wild flowers poked their way up through the cracks and around the edges of the play yard, and Russ found old friends — pimpernel, heart's ease, and toadflax.

Books were another good thing, and Russ learned to form the letters into words, and to add and subtract, and more about England and Lancashire. He learned to look at a globe and find his own country, and how the sun made day and night while the globe turned, and about temperature, and that plants make their own food.

On the bad side, he learned that he was poor, and that the part of the town he lived in wasn't a nice place for the other children to go. Most of the families with small children had left his neighborhood when the mill closed, so there weren't too many others from his area, and everyone could tell where he came from just by looking at him.

And he knew that the one thing he must never, never talk about to anybody was about witches, wizards, magic, or Hogwarts. They were all muggles, and they wouldn't understand.

After the first week, Eileen stopped taking Russ to school or bringing him home. He knew the way, and she needed to work or they wouldn't have enough money for food on the table. Russ understood that money was important, so this didn't bother him. Besides, this was when Russ started exploring.

The most important thing about exploring was not to stay on the same side of the river as the school. If you stayed there, people stared at you and warned you off because they could tell you were from the other side. On the school side there were flowers in the yards, and the mothers didn't have to work, so they had time to keep their curtains clean from the dirty air. On the mill side, it was different.

The river had a stone bridge wide enough for a car to cross on it. The river went past the old, closed mill, and the water smelled bad. Russ wasn't supposed to go in it, or drink from it, or even touch it. People threw things there like it was a long, wet rubbish bin.

There were places along the bank, though — mostly on the school side — where scraggly trees grew. It was nice to sit under a tree on a quiet afternoon as long as no one saw you. There were a few children at school who lived on the mill side of the river, all older than Russ. Russ didn't like them to see him because they laughed at his badly-fitting clothes, and they all knew his dad spent too much time at the local. Besides, Russ had learned that you didn't want people talking and looking at you too much because if they looked in your eyes, they could steal your thoughts. Russ's mum could, and Russ now assumed other people could, too. It was okay if it was your mum.

At first it was easy to get lost on the mill side because all the streets were the same. All the houses were grayish brown brick covered with black soot. All the cobblestones were cracked and broken. All the streets and sidewalks were narrow, with gutters running down the center, and there were no trees or flowers anywhere. When Russ started noticing which houses had boarded up windows, it got easier to remember which street he was on.

Soon Russ knew all the important places. There was a shop where his mum bought tea and sugar, and a bakery for bread, and the butcher's shop. They were all small and didn't sell many things. Russ knew from walking through the school side that the shops there were bigger and had more things for sale. This didn't bother Russ because he knew they were different, and he didn't question that this was the natural order. It might have been otherwise if he'd suffered real want, but for all his dad's complaint about putting food on the table, Russ had never been truly hungry. He was small, and didn't eat

much. There were even rare occasions when his dad would bring home fish and chips wrapped in newspaper on an Friday evening. Life had its pleasures.

Russ also knew where the pub was. He had to be careful his dad never saw him there because Russ wasn't supposed to be mucking around in the street after school, so if his dad stepped out of the pub, Russ had to run home like the dickens to get there before his dad did. His mum would look up from cooking, tired after a day charring or laundering, and say as he raced into the house, "He's on his way, is he? Good thing supper's nigh ready."

After a month of exploring, Russ discovered the old mill. He had a vague memory that a long time before, maybe a year ago, his dad 'd worked at a place called the mill. That was before the mill closed and everyone had to work at another place called the mine. The mill was all boarded up and surrounded by a fence, but Russ found a place in the fence where it was broken and he could squeeze through. He started prowling around every day after school trying to find a way into the building. He didn't find it because something else happened.

Suddenly, in the third week in October, all the mothers were shepherding the children more closely than usual. Children who'd walked to school on their own now came with a parent. Women talked to Russ's mum in the evening, and she walked him to school as well. The teachers patrolled the play yard at play time, and when Russ wanted to go off in a corner by himself, he was told to stay close to the others. Gossip among the second and third year students was frightening.

"They did bad things to her, and then they killed her and buried her on the moor," was the general story, and some of the boys demonstrated how you could be strangled. On Thursday the body of a boy was found on the moor, too, and Eileen lectured Russ about not talking to or taking rides from strangers. The deaths were in Manchester, not in Pendle, but one never knew. The world was a dangerous place.

One aspect of having to stay closer to the other children during play time was that several of the older ones had little battery-run radios, and Russ could overhear some of the songs and listen to the students talk about the singers.

He never did it in school, but at home he started singing some of the words. Those he knew, at any rate.

He wasn't a good singer, so the first time Russ did "Help! I need somebody! Help! Not just anybody!" Eileen came running thinking he really wanted assistance. "Hey! You've got to hide your love away!" was another favorite. Over and over again.

Russ wanted his hair longer, too. "No son o' mine is going t' have hair like a girl!" Toby insisted, but eventually he had to give in because so many of the young people had been growing their hair long for more than a year now, and he wanted his son to be 'normal.'

Shortly after Christmas, in spite of frantic hand waving and stop signals from Toby, Eileen asked if Russ wanted to invite some friends over for a birthday party. "Nah," Russ answered, "bunch o' stuffed shirts," a remark that made Toby tousle his hair and say, "That's m' boy!"

In fact, no one was much concerned that Russ didn't make friends at school. He was the son of a poor miner who had to travel to another town for work, and he came from the side of town where boarded up windows and lifeless streets were signs of the decay that had set in after the closing of the mill. It would have been more surprising if the boy had shown signs of wanting to form friendships outside his social class.

The summer of 1966, Russ went to spend several weeks with Nana. He was six and a half now, and his fingers were much more controllable than they'd been when he was five, so Nana set him to weeding and pinching off flowers in her herb garden. At first he tried witching them out of the ground, but Nana told him not to use magic around her potions herbs, so he stopped. Then he also had to pick off caterpillars and aphids, and anything else that liked to eat leaves or suck juices. The pollinators he was supposed to leave alone. Nana didn't believe in using nasty sprays.

"Don't be afraid of that bee, child!" Nana would call to him across the garden. "It won't sting you unless you force it to. A sting 'll just hurt you for fifteen minutes, but it'll kill the bee. Move slowly and give it time to clear out."

That was the time of Russ's first encounter with stinging nettles, too. At

first he thought it was a bee, until Nana checked, found no sting, then saw the plant he'd touched. "We can have nettle soup tonight," she said, and laughed at Russ's expression. "Don't worry. Nettle soup is good and healthy, and cooking takes away the sting. In fact, if you grab it instead of just brushing against it, it hurts but not as much. Sometimes if you want something, you have to be willing to let it hurt you for a bit. It depends on how bad it hurts, and how much you want it. You'd better wear gloves, though, if you're going to be pulling nettles." The nettle soup was delicious.

Nana had an tawny owl named Nelson. Nelson was older than Russ by a year, and Nana warned Russ that if he wasn't careful Nelson would live longer than Russ would. Russ thought this was funny until Nana explained that a tawny owl residing with a wizard family could easily live to be twenty or thirty years old. "I know of wizards dead before thirty because they weren't careful with their spells."

It was Nana who now started teaching Russ about magic in earnest. Russ's mum couldn't do it because first his dad was uncomfortable about magic, and second because they lived in a place where there were too many muggles. You weren't supposed to do magic where muggles could see, unless like Gra they were members of the family, and so Mum just never used it. She told Russ she'd never been that good at it anyway.

Nana was good at it. She got out her husband's old wand and showed Russ how to hold it. "Mum says I'm not supposed to use wand magic," Russ told her. "I'm too young."

"Your mother picked up some strange ideas in that school of hers," Nana retorted. "And the Ministry's a bunch of officious busybodies. You're in my house, and nobody can tell if it's you or me doing it. A wizard should start his magic young. How else is he going to be good at it? Now you hold this like I showed you, and you're going to learn how to fix something that's broken. It only puts pieces together, so if you don't have all the pieces, it won't be properly fixed, but if you use it the moment you break something, then it's fine. Just move the wand downward 'til it points at the thing and say the name of the thing you want fixed and *Reparo!*"

That was Russ's first introduction to magical language because you

couldn't just speak English. If you wanted to fix a bottle (he practiced on a bottle that he could break and repair over and over again), you had to say *Ampullam reparo!* because magic for bottle was *ampulla*. And you had to know that you couldn't use it on living things because they didn't 'fix' the same way.

"You're better at this than your mother was," Nana said thoughtfully after he managed to fix the bottle several times in a row. "I'm not surprised. I never knew a Rossendale or a Prince who wasn't good at magic until your mother came along. Maybe it just skipped a generation."

"What's a Rossendale?" Russ asked.

"I am. My name was Constantina Rossendale before I married Richard Prince, and then I became a Prince by marriage."

"Am I a Rossendale, too?" It was an interesting concept.

"You certainly are. A Rossendale and a Prince, just like your mother." Nana fingered the wand. "This works pretty well for you. Maybe when you're older, you can have it."

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 1966 (ONE DAY AFTER THE FULL MOON)

Life became more tense that fall. The most important factor was Russ's dad. Toby suddenly hated Americans. It wasn't really about the war in that country south of China that Russ had trouble finding on the globe, even though his dad was always saying how the Americans shouldn't be there. No, the real problem was coal. Russ had the idea that if it weren't for the coal, his dad wouldn't care about the war.

The Americans were selling their coal cheaper than the English were selling their coal. That meant everybody wanted to buy American coal instead of English coal. If nobody bought English coal, then Dad would lose his job. If the English sold their coal cheaper, then the mines wouldn't have as much money, and Dad would still lose his job. To make matters worse, somebody in London was talking about joining Europe. If England did that, then the Germans would sell their coal in England, and Dad would lose his job.

Toby Snape was getting drunk more often now, and it wasn't the jolly kind of drunk. He was coming home roaring with rage against the world, furious and frightened, and striking out at fate. The first time he hit Eileen was the night after the first day of school. He staggered late into the house calling for Russ. "Where's m' boy! The whol' worl's 'gainst a man, but 'e's go' 'is son t' comfort 'im. Bleedin' 'ope f'r th' future! Russ! Come sit wit' yer dad!"

Eileen tried to stop him from going up the stairs, where Russ had already gone to bed in his room. "Get yer 'ands off me, woman!" Toby yelled, and punched her in the shoulder, sending her back against the wall. He advanced up the stairs bellowing "Russ! Get out 'ere!"

Russ had been startled awake, and came out of the room, his father's drunkenness by now a matter of common occurrence. One look at Toby's wrathful face, however, and he shrieked in terror and darted back in, grabbing the door and trying to shut it. This only infuriated Toby more, and he lunged for the door, thrusting it open and seizing the boy by the upper arm. "Shut me out, will ya, ya witch's brat! Where's th' magic when a man needs it? Laughing at me, both o' ya, but y'd never lift a finger t' do a bit t' help! You don't run from me!"

He'd loosened and removed the belt from his waist and now brought the strap down on Russ. The boy didn't wear pajamas — they couldn't afford unnecessary things — and was dressed in underpants and undershirt. The strap caught the flesh at the back of his thighs, and he screamed, more in fear than in pain for Toby was too drunk to do a proper job of it. The strap went up and came down again as Russ shrieked bloody murder, and then Eileen was behind them yelling "*Expelliarmus!*" and the belt flew out of Toby's hand. Toby's grip relaxed in the surprise of finding himself beltless, and Russ was out of the room and down the stairs as fast as he could run.

The wand disappeared, and Eileen was soothing the astounded Toby. "Nothing happened, Toby. Y're dreamin' or something. It's all right, come to bed. Y're tired." Russ didn't hear any more. He ran through the kitchen and crouched in the area yard, shivering in the cold.

Twenty minutes later, Eileen came looking for Russ. "It's okay, dear, you

can come inside. He's asleep. Russ padded into the kitchen, his face wet with tears. "Let's look at you," his mum said, examining the still red skin on the backs of his legs. "Does it sting?"

Russ shook his head, but she put cold compresses on the marks anyway and then held him until he stopped whimpering and relaxed in her arms. "It's a cold world for a working man, Russ," Eileen tried to explain. "You work hard for every little thing and then the world takes it away. Sometimes a man just explodes from all the pressure."

Beginning to remember, Russ asked, "Did you use magic on him?"

Eileen stiffened. "No. I did not use magic on him. I used magic on the belt and made it go away. I did not use magic on your father." She sat him up in her lap to lock eyes. "Russ, a witch must never, never use magic on a muggle. It isn't fair. It isn't right. We have all the weapons muggles have. We have words, and fists, and everything else. There's no reason why we can't fight them fairly. Magic in the nonmagical world isn't fair."

"But you used magic upstairs."

"On the belt, not on the person. And only because I didn't want to punch him in the nose."

Russ giggled. Eileen put him to bed then, down in the sitting room on the sofa. She lay down in the boy's bed upstairs while Toby sprawled in their bed in the large bedroom. By the time Toby woke up the next morning, Russ was already in school.

School was no better. They had drawing just before lunch, and Russ took the last full packet of crayons. "Hey," said Neil Philips behind him. "I wanted those."

"Well, I . . . got them . . . first," said Russ, and took the crayons to his desk.

At lunch time, Russ found a bench off to one side where he sat to eat the sandwich his mum made for him. Three older boys, about nine years old, came up to him, Neil right behind.

"Hey, funny-looking," the first boy said, "I want to talk to you."

Russ got up and tried to leave, but they blocked his path.

"I said I wanted to talk to you. Is it true you didn't know your own

name 'til you were six?" The boys all laughed. "I'm Brian. Neil's my brother. I want you to stay out of his way."

Russ didn't answer. He tried to move sideways, but there wasn't enough space to get away.

"Do you understand me, funny-looking?" Brian looked around at the others. "Not too bright, is he? What's your name?"

"R...ru... Richard," Russ said quietly.

"Well, Ra-Ra-Richard, people like you are supposed to wait and let people like us go first. That's why we live in nice houses and you live in pig sties. Got it?"

"Y...es," Russ answered. There was nothing else he could do. They were bigger, and there were more of them. Probably no one even saw he was in the middle of them since he was so much shorter.

"Good," said Brian. He reached out and fingered Russ's blazer lapel. "And tell your parents to get you some clothes that fit. You're an eyesore." The boys left, laughing.

Russ sat back down to finish his sandwich. He was seething. *Wait*, he thought, *just wait 'til I'm old enough to do magic. I'll show you. I'm better than you are, and you'll have to wait for me.* A new thought came. *Muggles. That's all you are — muggles. Just muggles. I'm a wizard! And I don't have to care what you think because when I'm eleven, I'm going to a different school that wouldn't even look at people like you. And I'll learn to do great magic, and I'll be just like everybody else, and we'll all laugh at you. Who needs muggle friends? When I'm eleven, I'll have wizard friends.*

The thought carried Russ through the rest of the day and gave him an inner dignity that he could see, even if no one else could. He paid no attention to Neil making faces at him behind the teacher's back. He did his exercises and turned in his papers, and when school was over he walked calmly out of the building. He was once again allowed to go home by himself, and now he noticed even more how the houses changed, got older, more uncared for as he crossed the stone bridge over the river. And when he saw his mother wave from the front area yard, she really was dressed more shabbily than the other mothers. It didn't matter. She was a witch, and that made her better.

His dad was shamed-faced and apologetic. Toby didn't remember what he'd done the night before, but he'd been sick enough to know that he was likely out of control. Eileen told him he'd tried to beat his son, and got a couple of good licks in before she could stop him, so Toby was all over trying to make it up to Russ in any way he could.

After dinner, Toby said, "They teach you figuring in that school, right?"

"Yeah," Russ answered.

"What's eight and seven?"

"Fifteen."

"What's six and nine?"

"Fifteen."

"You want me to show you that game your great-granddad and I play all the time?"

"Isn't he a bit young?" Eileen asked.

"That'll just give him more time to get good at it. How about it, son?"

"Okay," Russ said, and watched carefully as his father showed him how to deal the cards, count the hands, and peg. It was a complicated game, and Russ couldn't learn it all in one night. Toby didn't go to the local all weekend, but stayed sober and taught his boy cribbage. By Bonfire Night, Russ was good enough that from time to time he could even skunk his father. They didn't go to the bonfire that night because there was nothing in the way of junk to put in the yard for the lads to scavenge. Even junk was worth too much. Without that, there was no point. Toby stayed home with his family and played cribbage with his son.

Wenny died on Christmas Eve. He was in a shop buying a gift for Gra when he had a massive stroke and was dead in minutes. The funeral was well-attended by older men with a nautical air who'd shipped out on one of Wensley Snape's voyages when they were young, for he really had been a sea captain. Two men even came from as far away as Liverpool.

It turned out, though, that Wenny had lived somewhat above his pension, and that when all was settled, there wasn't much to leave to his daughter-in-law, grandson and great-grandson. Toby got a bit of money, much of which he spent celebrating the fact that he'd gotten it. Russ got a few boxes.

When they opened the boxes, they found the voodoo dolls and the poison dart blowers, and all the other wonderful, dark things that Russ loved so much. Another box had the books with the fascinating pictures, books that Russ still couldn't read because they had words in a language he wasn't learning in school. There were some books in English, though, and Russ was particularly charmed by one on different things witches could do to curse someone. He sat up several nights going over the hexes and the jinxes, wishing he was at Nana's with his grandfather's wand so he could try them.

It wasn't until after Russ's seventh birthday that the full impact of Wenny's death hit. Russ's effective routine human contact had narrowed by a third. He saw Nana and Gra only rarely, but Wenny had lived in the same town, and while Russ hadn't visited every week, he'd generally seen Wenny two or three times a month at least. Now, that was impossible, and the only people Russ talked to outside of school were his parents in the evenings, if his father was sober.

Wensley's death affected Toby, too, in subtle ways. Of the three, Toby had the largest circle of acquaintance, for he had his mates at the mine, and the lads at the local pub. Some of the men were in both circles, for several of them made the same trip each day from home to mine and back, stopping to unwind over a couple of pints at the pub on the way home. But Wensley had been something more. He was Toby's port in a storm. Toby had always known that if worst came to worst and he had to strike out into parts unknown looking for work, Eileen and Russ could stay the while with old Wensley. Now that security was gone, and Toby had no one to look to for help but himself.

Even more subtle, and something Russ was far too young to understand, was that with Wensley gone Toby and Eileen had far less chance to be alone together. Toby's temper became shorter and shorter, and he tended more and more to take it out on Russ, who was now a serious, if subliminal, rival for Eileen's attention. Toby was far more apt now to lash out with palm or fist or belt when drunk, and Russ was far more apt to be the target. Russ was beginning to sport bruises on his wrists, arms, back, and legs, and it was a good thing his sleeves were long.

Then there was the whole battle over baths.

The house was an old one, and while a toilet had been put in, a bathroom had not. Toby did most of his ablutions at the mine, where there was a big washroom for the men to clean off the dust and grime at the end of the day after they came up out of the ‘hole.’

Eileen washed at the sink, and had the daily privacy of an empty house when she got home to take care of her needs. Russ washed his face, hands, and neck daily, but a couple of times a week he stood naked in a washtub on the kitchen floor, water halfway to his knees, while his mum soaped him down and poured water over his head to rinse him. At the age of seven, this ritual became deeply humiliating to him, repugnant, shameful.

“Mum, please,” he begged as she unbuttoned his shirt and began to undo his pants. “Let me do it myself. I’m not a baby!” He didn’t know how to tell her that he couldn’t bear the thought of undressing in front of her, even though he’d been doing it all his life.

“You’re not old enough yet to do it proper. You’d give a lick and a promise and be off.”

“Please, Mum, don’t. I can do it,” She whisked off the clothes despite his efforts to impede her, and he tried to cover himself with his hands. Eileen shook her head and tsked with her tongue, but she did the washing as quickly as possible so he could wrap the towel around him and be decent again. This sudden newfound modesty puzzled her; she could understand neither its origins nor the suddenness of her son’s intense embarrassment.

TUESDAY, APRIL 4, 1967 (THREE DAYS AFTER THE LAST QUARTER)

On the first Tuesday in April, when Russ arrived home from school, his dressing gown mum met him at the door with a bag that had his play clothes and a change of underwear. “Go over to Mrs. Hanson’s, Russ. You’re going to spend the night there. She’s expecting you. She’ll explain.” Russ could see past her that his dad was already home, something very unusual as it was at least four hours earlier than normal. Russ didn’t argue. He took the bag and left.

Mrs. Hanson was, indeed, expecting him. "We're going t' have so much fun, Russy," she gushed. "It's been so long since I could take care of you. My, you're quite the little man now. Come on in and have some milk and a scone."

"What's wrong with mum and dad?" Russ demanded as soon as he was inside. "She said you knew."

"La, child, there's nothing wrong and everything right. Did you know that on this day eight years ago your mum and dad got married? So it's like a birthday for them. Except on your birthday you want your friends over for a party, but on the anniversary of your wedding, you want t' be alone."

Russ let pass the whole reference to birthday parties. "You mean they're not angry with me? Or with each other?"

"Heaven's no, boy. They're happy as clams, and the more we leave them alone, the happier they'll be. Your dad even went t' the foreman this morning and begged the afternoon off without pay so 's he could be alone with his missus, and Eileen thought t' make it the whole night. She come running over here so excited, and I'll guess Toby's pleased as punch. He was hoping for just the afternoon."

Russ still didn't understand, except that he already knew being alone was good. Mrs. Hanson at least was a vaguely remembered familiarity from his babyhood, so he decided to make the best of it. "Where can I put these?" he asked, showing her the bag.

Mrs. Hanson was, as she described it, a double-pensioned widow. Her first husband was a sergeant who married just before D-Day and died fighting in France. Her second husband was killed in a mill fire less than a year after they were married. She lived in her late parents' house and got both pensions. The house was quite nice.

To begin with, it had more rooms than Russ's house had — though two of them had paying boarders living in them — and Russ found himself in an honest-to-goodness spare bedroom on the ground floor. Second, it had a real bathroom with a claw-footed tub. Third, it had a television. Supper was early, and Russ kept very quiet because the two boarders were eating at the same table. He kept his eyes down on his plate because he was afraid they would

want to look inside him. The door behind his eyes was latched. After supper, thankfully, the two men went to their rooms.

That evening, Russ did two new things. First, he took a bath in a real bathtub in a real bathroom where he shut the door and was all by himself behind a curtain. Second, he watched the first two television shows of his life, both from America. Mrs. Hanson turned on the television five minutes ahead of time because it had to warm up first, and then the shows came on. The first show was about a married couple. The wife was a little crazy, and she had a job in a factory where she was supposed to put chocolates into boxes, except the belt kept going faster and faster, so she was eating the chocolates to keep up. Russ laughed at that one.

The second show was harder to understand because of the strange accents, but in a way it was better because it was about poor people who suddenly got rich. They left their poor house and moved into a big mansion, but they still acted the same, not stuck up. They were smarter than the rich people, too. It was something nice to dream about — getting rich suddenly.

The next morning Russ left for school from Mrs. Hanson's house, and when he got home, his mum had made a cake. Dad got home at a good time after only two pints at the local, and he and Russ played cribbage. Everybody was happy. Russ thought about the television a lot, and went around the house occasionally singing, "Oil, that is. Black gold. Texas tea." He thought that was funny, too.

After that Russ started spending occasional Saturday nights at Mrs. Hanson's whenever his parents got a bit of money saved up. Saturday night was a good night because after his bath he could watch television shows like 'Dixon of Dock Green,' and Russ finally saw what London looked like. He also watched the Avengers, and thought Mrs. Peel was a great fighter. His favorite, though, was Doctor Who and the TARDIS time travel ship. He wanted to travel in time, too, but Mrs. Hanson explained that it wasn't possible.

The last weekend in June, when summer break was starting, Russ went to spend two nights with Mrs. Hanson. The first was the normal Saturday night, but Sunday night was really special. On Sunday night, Russ was going

to watch ‘history in the making,’ for it was the first time in the whole world when there would be a live television broadcast from every country to every country at the same time, and Russ was going to watch it. So were the two boarders.

“It’s because of those satellites they have up in space,” Mrs. Hanson explained. She didn’t understand them completely, but one of the boarders knew that they floated up there in space so far away that you couldn’t see them, and they could now beam radio and television shows to each other and then back down to earth so that everybody could watch the same show at once, and Russ got to watch the very first one.

All Sunday afternoon, while he played in Mrs. Hanson’s little area yard, Russ kept looking up at the sky, hoping he could see the satellites, and wondering how they could stay up there and not fall down.

That night, with everybody helping him understand what he was looking at, Russ watched the rest of the world. There was a shopping district in north Africa and the traffic speeding by in Paris. They got to see the house where the Presidents of the United States and Russia were meeting, and there were a bunch of people talking that Russ didn’t understand. Then he watched a real cowboy in Canada.

It was tomorrow in Japan and Australia, nearly five o’clock in the morning, and men were working on the Tokyo subway, and the trams were taking people to work in Melbourne.

Then they showed the great outdoor disc of the telescope, and Russ was entranced. He couldn’t believe that he was not only watching tomorrow morning, but that he was also looking at something that could see millions of miles away. Satellites and telescopes, and he was in love.

The last thing on the broadcast was the Beatles. Russ had heard their songs, but not seen them. Their names appeared on the screen, so Russ knew which was Paul, and which was Ringo. They were recording a new song with a lot of people and an orchestra. Russ especially noticed that John’s nose looked just like his dad’s nose, and when it was all over went to bed humming “All you need is love . . .”

The next day, Russ didn’t describe the whole show to his parents because

there was a lot he didn't understand, especially when the serious men were talking about serious things—that had been boring—but he managed to give them an idea of Paris streets, and the beach in Canada, and he even tried to draw what the great Australian telescope looked like. Toby wasn't sure all this exposure to the outside world was good for a working class boy; it made you discontented with life. Eileen was better pleased.

That summer, while Toby was at work and Russ wasn't in school, Eileen started to talk to Russ about Hogwarts.

"It's a great castle on a hill, with a big lake—there's a squid in the lake, so nobody swims there—and the students can fly on broomsticks and play a game called Quidditch. Everybody lives in four different parts of the castle called houses. You'll probably be in the same one I was in—Hufflepuff. You'll like it there. There's all different kinds of people there, and they all work together."

"Did you play Quidditch, Mum?"

"La, no, child. I was never good on a broomstick. I was captain of the gobstones team, though."

Then, in August, Eileen and Russ went to visit Nana for three days, and everything changed.

Eileen and Russ worked together in Nana's garden, weeding, picking off bugs, and pinching back some of the flowers to prevent plants from going to seed. Eileen was talking about Hogwarts.

"The head of Hufflepuff house is Professor Mullein. He's the Herbology teacher, too, so you should get on well with him. He even knows about Nana by reputation, though she never went to Hogwarts. Hufflepuff house is in the lower levels, and you enter through a wall near the kitchens. That's where the house elves work. I never saw or heard of house elves before I went to Hogwarts..."

"Leen," Nana called from the edge of the garden. "Can I talk to you for a moment." The two women stood near the kitchen door, but Russ could still hear them in the quiet summer air.

"You'd best not get the boy too excited about Hufflepuff," Nana said in a warning tone of voice. "He might not be sorted there."

"Of course he will," Eileen said. "Children 're always sorted into the same house as their parents. Since I was in Hufflepuff..."

"I went to see Tabitha Pollard yesterday. She did a chart for 1971."

"I checked that already, Mum," Eileen said. "Mercury's in his fourth house and it's in Virgo from July twenty-seventh to October first. He'll be fine."

"No, 'Leen. Mercury is retrograde beginning August thirteenth. It goes back into Leo on August thirtieth, and doesn't reenter Virgo until September eleventh. It will be in Leo on the day he's sorted."

There was silence, and Russ could tell from the quality of the silence that his mum was trying to cope with sudden, bitter disappointment. "They can't put him into Slytherin," she said. "A little half-blood boy like him... They'd eat him alive."

"Don't tell him that. There must be other half-bloods in Slytherin. I don't think we have that many pureblood families left. If he's at least prepared to accept Slytherin, he may be fine there. Just don't get his heart too set on Hufflepuff, and make sure he's ready for Slytherin."

From that day, things changed. Eileen began talking to Russ about the other three houses at least as much as about Hufflepuff, and about Slytherin most of all. She said that in Slytherin everybody was ambitious and eager to get ahead in life. Slytherin students stuck together more than the other houses, and if Slytherins were your friends, they'd watch your back and stick up for you. The Head of Slytherin house was Professor Slughorn, who taught potions, so Russ should do well there since he would go to Hogwarts already knowing so much about potions.

It was also from that day that Eileen began to teach Russ how to defend himself. They brought grandfather Prince's wand back home with them, and she and Russ would go out onto the moors to practice, out where the magic they did wouldn't register with the place Russ's mum called 'The Ministry.' She began to show him how to read other people.

"Look in their eyes," she told him. "You'll see the attack in their eyes before they move, before they say anything." She also told him he had to

close his mind to the person he was fighting. "Don't let them read you," she said, "or they'll know what you're going to do."

That part turned out to be easy. Russ'd always known how to close his mind. It was what he did to everyone but his mother, and sometimes he even hid things from her. Nobody knew it, of course, because they didn't know how to read him. Now, on her orders, he closed his mother out completely when they practiced dueling.

"Great!" she told him. "You catch on fast. Let's work on reflexes."

That fall, Russ started getting into fights at school. The first time, the school couldn't call his mum because she didn't have a telephone. Instead, they gave him a note to take home to her.

"What happened to you?" Eileen exclaimed when Russ walked in with a bruised jaw and a cut on the side of his mouth.

"Neil Philips wanted to fight with me," Russ replied, and handed her the note.

The note said that Russ had started the fight, that he'd attacked the Philips boy without provocation, and that naturally the Philips boy had been forced to defend himself. The note asked Eileen to come to school the next day with Russ to discuss the matter.

The meeting was highly unsatisfactory. Mrs. Philips was there and not only said that boys like Russ shouldn't be allowed in school, she insinuated that Russ's mum was a slovenly housewife, which as she used to come over when Russ and Neil were babies, she knew to be untrue, so Eileen called her a liar and the mother of a bully. Russ insisted that Neil had been about to attack him, Neil denied it, and several of Neil's friends came forward to testify that Neil was the victim. Since Russ had no friends to testify for him, the case was decided then and there. Russ was to stay home for three days. Neil was triumphant.

When Toby learned what had happened, he took off his belt and gave Russ six sharp licks with it for starting a fight and giving the family a bad name. Then he began teaching Russ how to box.

"Nella Tarleton," Toby told Russ gravely. "Y' got to think like him. Featherweight champion of Britain, and th' whole world. I saw him once,

his last fight as it turned out, in Manchester when I was fourteen. M' dad borrowed and begged for th' tickets so I could see a master just once. Nel was thirty-nine, and Al Philips was twenty-five. Nel, he'd lead with his left, get several jabs in, and be back out of range 'fore Philips knew what hit him. So quick he was, no one ever could lay a glove on him. Didn't have a mark on him from a gross of fights except from th' ropes. He could sure use th' ropes! A right scientist he was. Always thinking, always planning. After he retired, come t' find he only had one good lung! Imagine going th' distance in all them fights with only one lung. M' own dad used t' tell me the only way they could get Al Foreman t' fight him was t' limit th' fight t' twelve rounds, 'cause if Nella beat Foreman in fifteen, he'd be lightweight and featherweight champion at th' same time!"

Russ was learning how to punch — jabs and hooks — but he wasn't very good at it. What he was good at was dodging and feinting. If you could dodge and feint enough, then land one or two good jabs, you had a chance of winning. It was fun sparring with his dad, and it gave him more confidence about facing larger boys in the play yard.

"Now you remember," his dad cautioned, "don't never start a fight, but if they mess with you, you give 'em what for!"

It was to his mum that Russ expressed most of his animosity. "They're always pushing me around and calling me names. I could see in Neil's eyes that Geoff was behind me and he was going t' push me so Geoff could grab me. But I got him first! And I'm ready. He comes for me again and I'm going t' tie his legs together. I'm going t' glue his tongue t' the roof of his mouth."

Eileen looked at her son with concern. "How are you going t' do that?" she asked.

"*Locomotor Mortis!*" Russ told her. "And there's a tongue-tying curse..."

Eileen seized his wrist in a painful grip. "Where did you learn those curses?" she demanded. "Where! I told you, you don't ever use magic against a muggle! I catch you using magic against a muggle, and I'll skin you alive! Where did you learn those? You tell me now!"

"There's a book that Wenny had. It's in the book." Russ was scared now. His mother seldom got this angry.

"I'm going to lock those up. Imagine you learning things like that! You promise me you'll never use magic on a muggle."

"Promise," Russ said, but his heart was with the curses that could prove to people like Neil and Geoff that he was stronger than they were. He concentrated on the boxing.

Russ was now exploring farther and farther afield. Instead of sticking to the mill side of the river where everything was familiar, he started going out onto the moors. He circumnavigated the town and found there were other ways to get to different areas besides walking openly down the street. He discovered where Neil Philips lived, but he didn't do anything about it because Neil was just a dirty old muggle and not worth the effort.

Sometimes, when his mum was busy putting his dad to bed after a bad night at the local, Russ would go out onto the moors for the half hour she needed instead of staying in the kitchen or area yard. If the night was clear, you could see for a billion miles. He started to read books about stars in the little school library and was captivated by the pictures taken by the Russians the year before he was born of the 'other' side of the moon. Both the Americans and the Russians were trying to get there, and Russ tried to find out as much as he could about their space programs. Given who he was and where he was living, that wasn't much. Russ longed for a telescope, and treasured with something close to hunger the thought that at Hogwarts he'd be able to study astronomy.

Over the next couple of years things continued on a downward spiral. Britain devalued the pound, which helped coal, but also made things harder in other ways. Petrol became more expensive, and Mum could no longer afford anything that wasn't made or grown in England, and not much of that. Toby worked just as hard for less reward, and drank even more. His belt became more active because Russ was getting into more fights, though now he made sure he never threw the first punch. Mrs. Hanson's house was a refuge, and Russ looked forward to those rare Saturdays he was able to spend with her, but it didn't quite make up for everything else.

To make matters worse, Russ was finally growing. At nearly nine, he finally looked like he was six or seven. If he tried hard to act grown up,

people believed he was eight. That was the good part. The bad part was that his clothes went overnight from being too big to being too small. It wasn't that he was fatter, it was that he was taller. He was now more than three and a half feet tall, still the smallest in his class by far, and nearly the smallest in the whole school, but bigger than his worn old uniform. His knees stuck out, his ankles stuck out, his wrists and neck stuck out. His play clothes were better, but even his jeans and jacket were rapidly getting too small.

By this time, Russ actively hated the other children at school and had long realized that he was strange because nobody would be his friend. The others were always talking about things he couldn't share, like 'best friends,' and birthday parties, and even little things like passing notes when the teacher was writing on the blackboard. Things Russ wasn't permitted to join in on. He resented their friendships and hated the air of superiority they used whenever they couldn't avoid contact with him, and he told himself again and again that it didn't matter. He wasn't like them. He was a wizard, and they were just muggles. And one day he'd show them all.

On his ninth birthday, Russ's mum gave him a special present. She let him have the books she'd used at Hogwarts. There were books on the History of Magic, and on Charms, books on Transfiguration and Arithmancy and Muggle Studies. But the books that Russ loved most were the books on Potions, Defense against the Dark Arts, and most especially, Astronomy. Russ remembered that although half of him was a Snape, the other half of him was a Prince — a half-blood wizard. On the back of each volume he carefully inscribed in his tight, cramped handwriting: *This Book is the Property of the Half-Blood Prince.*

Russ also had a passion now, the first true passion in his life, and the passion was named Apollo. The satellites and telescopes of his seventh year of life, the stars of his eighth, were making way for a love of Saturn rockets and the capsules they carried into space. One good thing about school was that he now understood why the satellites didn't fall down, and what an orbit was, and he knew not only that the Americans were going to the moon, but when. Russ scavenged used newspapers out of rubbish bins looking for articles on the American space program. He treasured in his heart the possibility that

he himself might go to the moon one day.

And then, in May of Russ's fourth year in school, a miracle happened. It was such a miraculous miracle that at first Russ didn't believe it, even though he'd seen it happen. The miracle happened at school.

Russ was doing his maths work when a small click caught his attention, and he looked up to see that three rows ahead of him a girl had dropped her pen on the floor. She bent down to retrieve the pen, and the miracle occurred. Her hand still inches away from it, the pen suddenly leapt upwards and into her grasp. Russ couldn't believe his eyes. A muggle had just performed a wandless summoning spell. A red-haired muggle girl of no account whose name, as Russ knew, was Lily Evans.

C H A P T E R F O U R

A F R I E N D

The shock of Russ's discovery was so powerful that his reaction was physical. His heart was beating hard, not fast but hard, so that he could feel it. He had trouble breathing. He felt lightheaded and his hands began to tremble. It was all he could do to concentrate on the maths work and write something, even if it was wrong.

At lunch Russ watched Lily in the play yard. He watched stealthily, his face turned away, his eyes darting restlessly, so that no one could accuse him of watching. Lily Evans was one of the muggles he hated, hated because she had a best friend and birthday parties, because everyone talked to her and she passed notes in class. At lunch she was part of a group of four girls that always ate together and played little games that Russ didn't know the rules to.

The walk home seemed endless, and Russ was so impatient that as soon as he got to the part of the town where the gardens got lost and boards appeared over the windows, he ran.

"Hold on, young man!" Eileen exclaimed as Russ came careening through the door and burst into the kitchen. "Is there a fire?"

"Mum," Russ said breathlessly, "how many kinds of wizards are there?"

Eileen frowned. "As many different kinds as there are people. All wizards are different from all other wizards."

"No, I mean like how I'm half and half, muggle and wizard."

“Oh, that,” said Eileen, and she didn’t seem any happier. “Well first, there are purebloods. They have a wizard father and a witch mother. Some purebloods like to think they’re one hundred percent magic, but I don’t think anyone really is. Generally if all four grandparents are magic, then the grandchild is pureblood. They don’t really look back further than that. Then there are part-bloods. That would be both magical parents, but maybe one of them is a half-blood. True half-bloods like you have one magical parent and one muggle parent, so magic on only one side of the family. And then there are muggle-borns.”

“What are muggle-borns?” Russ tried to conceal the urgency he felt about the answer to this question.

“For some reason, occasionally a magical child is born to a nonmagical family. Everybody is a muggle, and ‘bang’ there’s a wizard in the mix. We don’t know why that happens. The opposite can happen, too. Sometimes a nonmagical child is born into a magical family. They’re called squibs.”

“So you could have someone you thought was a muggle, and it turns out she’s a witch?” Russ asked to confirm what he hoped was true.

“Why are you asking about this?” said Eileen, turning to catch her son’s eyes.

“Nothing,” Russ answered, meeting her gaze calmly, all thought of the girl and the pen latched away where she couldn’t see it. “I was just thinking about it this afternoon.”

“Have a piece of bread and a glass of water then, and do your homework.”

Russ’s desk in his small upstairs bedroom was really an equipment crate turned on its side so he could stick his feet in the crate while he wrote. Now he sat at this makeshift desk while his mother baked downstairs, kicking his feet against the wood and pretending to do schoolwork. He had a lot of thinking to do.

All his life he’d known that he was the only magical child around, and that he must never talk about it or show it to anyone. This made him different, isolated and friendless, the only child in town doomed to have no friends until he was eleven and could leave. But that was more than two years away,

and Russ didn't want to wait two years. He wanted a friend now. Even if she was a girl.

Russ held his feelings down, pushed them into the latched part of his brain where they couldn't bother him because he had to think carefully about this. What if he was wrong? What if there'd been no magic, just a trick of the light? After all, Lily Evans had been in the same class as him for four years, and he'd never caught a glimpse of magic before. Nor had anyone else, or they'd have talked about it. There was no reason to get excited over something that might not be true.

But he so desperately wanted it to be true. Up until that morning he'd been fine, he accepted his fate and set all his hopes on Hogwarts. Now, suddenly, the desire for a friend, for someone to share things with, welled up in him like a hunger, twisting his stomach and making him sick with longing.

He had to be sure. He couldn't afford to act on information that might not be true. Instead of doing his homework, Russ was forming a plan — a plan for watching Lily to see if she ever did any other magic. If she did, if she truly was a muggle-born witch, then Russ could find a way to talk to her, to explain to her, maybe to show her some more magic as proof — and then they could be friends.

He went to bed that night planning how the future was going to be.

Russ became a spy. He was secret agent Drake, he was John Steed and Emma Peel. He found ways to move within earshot of Lily Evans and her friends while making it look perfectly casual. He started having to kneel down and tie his shoes a lot. He began dropping pens. He started walking around with his nose ostensibly in a book, and pausing when he got to 'interesting' bits.

He found out that Lily had an older sister named Petunia who was about to take her Eleven Plus examination. He found out that Lily had a sweet temper and a gentle way about her. He found out that Lily was born in January, just like he was, except he was Capricorn and she was Aquarius.

He asked his mother about this, and she told him, along with the other signs that Russ asked about to mask his real interest, that Capricorn and Aquarius did not go well together. Capricorn was organized and Aquarius

was not. Capricorn would be jealous of free-spirited Aquarius. Better be friends than look for a life together.

That suited Russ fine. He wasn't looking for a life together anyway, just a friend.

Russ discovered that Lily and Petunia lived on the eastern side of the little town, far from the area where his house was, a place of nice gardens and newer automobiles. He couldn't follow them there because he would be noticed and most likely chased away. He had to, as his mum put it in her training sessions, get his bearings and learn the lay of the land.

It was June, and the school term was nearing its close. The summer days were long. This was good news for Russ, since it meant he didn't have to be coming and going in the streets at the same time as everyone else. He could go early and wait, and then come home later. He wanted to see Lily away from school anyway. His spying was becoming frustrating. He had still not seen her perform any more magic.

The last week of school, Russ left home early every day. On Monday he waited behind a gate at the last house where he saw Lily disappear every afternoon, and from this vantage point he was able to see the direction she came from. The next morning he hid further on, and discovered more of her route. By Thursday he'd located the house. He had to wait until all the other children had gone by before he could follow them to the school building, so all that week he was late to class, but he didn't mind.

On the evening after the last day of school, Russ lay in bed planning. He had it all worked out. He would wait until he saw more magic, then he would show himself and reveal to Lily that she was a witch. She would be excited at the news and want to know more, and he would be able to teach her and tell her all about Hogwarts. Hogwarts! Maybe Lily could go there, too.

The next morning, Russ was out of the house before seven o'clock. He hid amongst some rubbish bins a ways down the street from Lily's house and waited. He would do a lot of waiting over the next few days, but the hunger inside him was ravenous now. He no longer even considered the possibility

that Lily was not a witch. The bitter disappointment that would entail would, by this point, have destroyed him.

Lily and Petunia frequented a playground near their house. Sometimes there were other children there, and sometimes there were not. Russ began going to the playground instead of nearer to their house so that no one would see him in the street. There were bushes and hedges he could hide behind and under, and no one ever noticed him.

A week and a half into the break, Lily and Petunia were alone, Petunia revolving lazily on a carousel, and Lily in a swing. Lily kept going higher and higher, and Petunia stopped to watch. "You're going too high, Lily. It can be dangerous," cautioned the older sister.

"No, it's fun," Lily crowed. "It's like flying through the air. I bet if I try hard enough, I can really fly!"

"Lily!" Petunia cried. "Don't you dare!"

Lily dared. She reached the top of her arc and launched herself into space. Instead of falling, as Petunia clearly feared, she hovered for a moment, then glided lightly to the ground. "See," she said to Petunia, "I can fly."

It was Russ's moment. It was what he had been waiting for, planning for since May. He tried to get to his feet to go to the two girls, but his courage failed him. Instead, he remained, hidden and miserable behind his bushes.

Petunia started for home. "I'm going to tell Mummy you've been doing wicked things again," she called behind her. "You're going to be in so much trouble!"

Lily ran after her. "I wasn't doing anything bad. Look, I'm not hurt. There's nothing wrong with it. Tuney, come back."

Russ dragged himself home, crushed and defeated by his own timidity. His opportunity had been there, within his grasp, and he had failed to seize it. He might never have another chance.

Back at home he found that another opportunity had slipped like water through his fingers.

"You won't be going over to Mrs. Hanson's this weekend or next," his mum told him as she fixed supper. "She's taking two weeks to visit her sister in Manchester."

Russ nearly spilled his glass of water. "She can't!" he cried. "Not now! The Americans are going to the moon next week. How can I watch it if she's in Manchester?"

The following week the whole world watched the Apollo 11 moon landing except Russ. The whole world got to hear, "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind" except Russ. The bitterness of his disappointment was capped by the news that Mrs. Hanson would be staying in Manchester with her sister for several months, and the boarders were taking care of her house. No moon landing, no further television, no baths . . . The pleasures in Russ's life were narrowing to nothing.

FRIDAY, JULY 25, 1969 (FOUR DAYS BEFORE THE FULL MOON)

"He can't wear that jacket any more," Eileen told Toby the day after the Apollo 11 splashdown that Russ didn't see on television. He was already withdrawn and miserable about missing 'history in the making,' and at first didn't register that his mum was talking about him. "It's gotten far too short for him and there's holes in the elbows. He needs new shirts, too."

"A boy needs t' take better care of his togs, and not go wasting a man's hard-earned money," Toby complained. "You was just telling me yesterday as he needed a school uniform, too. You know we ain't got the money."

"He can't go 'round naked."

"He don't have to dress like the Marquess o' Queensbury neither. Can't help the uniform, but ain't we got togs in the house he can wear?"

Russ woke up then to the fact that they were discussing his clothes. The uniform was good news. It'd be big so he could grow into it over the next two years, but that would be better than what he was wearing now. The part about his play clothes was less important.

Mum went upstairs and started hauling things out of the makeshift store-room. There weren't many of them — they generally used things until they were worn so bad they weren't good for anything but rags — but there were some. Some of them had belonged to Wenny. Most of them were still far too big.

“What about this?” Mum held up a strange kind of blouse or smock with a high collar and wide sleeves. The collar and sleeves had embroidery on them. Toby and Russ protested at the same time:

“No son of mine’s gonna dress like a girl!”

“I can’t wear that, Mum, they’d laugh at me!”

“Don’t be silly,” said Mum. “Wensley wouldn’t have any woman’s clothes. He musta picked it up in one of those countries he sailed to. Maybe China or Russia. And we ain’t got anything else. It’s this, or buy, or go without. What if I take the embroidery off for you, Russ? It wouldn’t look so girlie then.”

There were a couple of the strange smocks, one white and one blue, so Russ had one to wear and one to wash. They couldn’t do anything about the pants, so he had to keep wearing his too-short jeans, but Mum did find him a jacket — sort of.

It was an old sailor’s jacket, a navy-blue pea coat in worn, shabby wool. It was meant to go part way down a grown man’s thigh, but on Russ it reached below his knees. The shoulders were too wide, and the sleeves far too long. Mum rolled up the cuffs to make it fit better. “I might be able to sew that,” she said.

“Don’t go cutting it,” Toby insisted. “If he grows more, he’ll need the sleeves long. That’s a nice coat, that is. It’ll do.”

At least it was obviously a man’s coat, Russ reasoned, and it would hide the funny smock.

Russ continued for the rest of July into August observing the children at the playground near Lily Evans’s house. More than four weeks after his first failed attempt, Lily and Petunia were once again alone, both today on the swings. The other children had gone home.

Lily was again swinging as high as she could, and Russ held his breath, knowing she was planning to fly again.

“Lily, don’t do it!” Petunia cried, but Lily just laughed and launched herself into the air, just as she had the first time, landing lightly and easily after her flight, not far from the bush where Russ was hiding.

“Mummy told you not to!” Petunia yelled at her. “Mummy said you

weren't allowed, Lily!" She stopped swinging and was now trying to assert older-sister authority.

Lily was laughing at her. "But I'm fine," she said, as if that was the only problem with flying. She picked up a flower from the ground. "Tuney, look at this. Watch what I can do." In her hands the dead flower began to open and close its petals like some cartoon space creature. This didn't calm Petunia in the least.

"Stop it!" she screamed.

Lily threw the flower down, and there was a hint of resentment in her voice as she said, "It's not hurting you."

"It's not right," Petunia said. Then, unable to completely hide her fascination, she added, "How do you do it?"

There it was. The moment Russ had waited for, planned for, anticipated for nearly three months. If he didn't have the courage to act now, he would never have it. He steeled himself and forced himself to rise, stepping out from behind his bush and addressing Petunia's question.

"It's obvious, isn't it?" he said, and regretted it immediately because Petunia acted as if he was some kind of wild dog and ran toward the swings. Lily didn't run, but her expression was probably the same one she wore when she took medicine. Russ could feel the color mount in his face and wished he were anywhere else. *Idiot! Fool! This was never a good idea.*

After a moment Lily asked, "What's obvious?"

Russ's heart was pounding again — she wanted to talk. He didn't want Petunia to hear, so his voice, when it came out, was nearly a whisper. "I know . . . what you are."

"What do you mean?"

"You're . . . you're a witch."

"That's not a very nice thing to say to somebody!"

She huffed away, just as snooty as the rest of them. Russ hurried after her, Wenny's coat hot and heavy as it hung past his wrists in the sunny August afternoon, but Russ wasn't thinking about how he looked. "No!" he insisted, and they let him get near enough to the swings to listen to what he had to say. "You . . . are. You are a . . . witch. I've been . . . watching you for a . . . while.

But there's nothing... wrong with that. My mum's... one, and I'm a... wizard."

Lily said nothing, but Petunia howled with laughter. "Wizard! I know who you are. You're that Snape boy!" and the way she said 'Snape' made it sound evil, obscene. She turned to Lily. "They live down Spinner's End by the river." Then she wheeled on Russ, who was suddenly aware how much taller she was than he. "Why have you been spying on us?"

Russ looked down, away from her accusing eyes. "Haven't been... spying. Wouldn't... spy on you anyway. You're a... muggle." That was when he realized how he must look — Wenny's pea coat loose around his shoulders and swinging past his knees, the silly foreign smock, his outgrown jeans, his hair damp and sweaty on his forehead. Like a clown.

"Lily, come on, we're leaving," Petunia announced, and it was some small revenge to note how shrill and ugly her voice sounded. The two girls stalked out, leaving Russ standing alone and defeated in the playground.

He slunk out away from the houses and onto the moor to go home along the periphery of the town. He didn't want anyone to see him. He wanted to crawl into the earth and never have anyone see him ever again.

Russ was trying to figure out what had gone wrong. Lily knew she could do unusual things. She should have been pleased to learn she was magical. She should have wanted to know more.

It was Petunia's fault. Petunia had acted as if he was dangerous, Petunia'd made fun of his poverty and his family with her sneers and smirks. She was probably laughing about him even now with Lily. Petunia had called his honest desire for a friend 'spying,' and made it seem criminal. Now she'd probably tell all the other students at school, and they'd all laugh at him even more. Neil would have a great time with that. Instead of better, life had gotten worse, and Russ wished he was dead.

That evening he picked at his food at supper, then went straight to bed, to lie on his side facing the wall. He didn't want to see anyone or talk to anyone or go anywhere... He just wanted to lie there forever.

And the worst thing was that all he had to look forward to were two long,

cold, barren, empty years. Years of enforced loneliness and silence, and he didn't think he could bear it.

"You sick?" his dad asked from the doorway.

"No, just tired. 'S hot outside. Made m' head hurt."

"That's all right then. Don't you go gettin' sick. Can't afford no doctor."

His dad left. Russ thought bitterly that there was no doctor who could help him anyway. The hunger that had nothing to do with food twisted his insides, and there wasn't any medicine for it. What he needed was someone to talk to, someone to listen, someone who'd talk to him that he could listen to...

The pain inside him was so great that Russ thought he'd burst from it, and then a strange thing happened. The painful things started to go away. Not the pain, but the things that caused the pain. One by one, the loneliness, the bitterness, the humiliation and shame all retreated from him, as if his mind suddenly said, 'I don't want you any more.' They went — he had no other way to explain it — down into the cellar of his mind and found a door Russ didn't even know was there, and they latched the door behind them.

Russ just lay in bed and let it happen, and when all the bad things were latched down, he felt curiously calm and detached from everything, like it was all just a television show, but nothing to really get upset about. He didn't feel anything — and that was a lot better than feeling pain.

The sense of calm and detachment didn't go away. The next morning Russ got up and ate breakfast — tea and toast was all — then went out exploring while his dad went to the mine and his mum went off looking for day jobs. He went out onto the moor. He had no desire to go over to the playground to watch for the two sisters. It was as if that was another person, that boy who'd been so disappointed the day before.

Instead Russ wandered for miles. The moor area wasn't large, and gave way from time to time to farms, pastures, and sparse woodland with here a tiny village and there another decaying mill town. Colne and Barrowford had many mills, mostly closed. A few other towns had mines or quarries, though Russ usually gave them a wide berth. By now he was old enough and had explored enough to have his bearings and know the lay of the land. He

knew the bulk of Pendle Hill was to the west, and Yorkshire but a stone's throw to the east and north.

As he wandered Russ got to thinking that he probably ought to be of use to somebody in his life, and began to figure how he might be useful. He was too young for a real job, and the shopkeepers on the mill side couldn't afford to hire a boy. The shopkeepers on the school side would never even look at him except maybe to keep an eye out that he didn't steal anything. Odd how people expected your clothes to show how honest you were.

Around midmorning Russ found an outcrop of rock and just sat, not really thinking of anything in particular, when he noticed that as long as he kept still, there was a lot of movement around him. There were mostly birds, but some other animals as well, such as a very surprised fox that rose from the ground where it had been resting and slunk off, and a coney, its nose wiggling to pick up odors in the breeze and . . . a grouse.

What day is it? was the first thing in Russ's mind, for he did know about the 'glorious twelfth,' the day the men went out to drive the grouse in the open moors, the beginning of hunting season. He thought about it all the way home.

A glass of water, a slice of bread, and Russ sat in the kitchen watching his mother as if she was a total stranger and he was a scientist observing her behavior. It was a curious feeling. He knew all about her, remembered everything he should remember, but there was no emotion attached. It made things more interesting because he found he noticed more detail, like the way she held her fingers around the handle of the knife she was chopping with, or the limp, straggling locks of hair that strayed on the collar of her dress.

When his dad came home, Russ waited patiently until he was settled, then went into the sitting room.

"Dad, d' you know how t' throw."

"Throw what, son?"

"Rocks."

Toby regarded his son carefully. "Wha' cha want t' be throwin' rocks for?"

"Huntin' season starts Tuesday. Saw a grouse out on the moor."

Toby chuckled. “Leen! This boy thinks he can put down a grouse with a rock. Ain’t that a kick?”

“Y’ always did want him t’ be ambitious, Toby,” Mum called from the kitchen.

They started that day, in the lingering August evening, Toby showing Russ how to select stones and how to throw them, not overhand or underhand, but sharp and quick from the side. Russ found his new sense of cool apartness helped. He noticed every detail of his father’s stance and movement, and copied each one with care and accuracy. Before they went in to bed, he was hitting fence posts more times than not, and Toby was beaming with pride.

Eileen took him out training on the weekend, and was impressed. “You been practicing, ain’t cha?” she said. “Couldn’t get past your eyes not once the whole time. Come ’ere. Let’s have a look-see.”

She peered into his eyes, and Russ gave her the moors and his satisfied tiredness after the hard work, and the fact that he was hungry for supper . . . but the other things, the fears, the failures, stayed latched away and she never even looked for them.

“Good,” Eileen said at last. “You’re learning right fast. We’ll start with some real spells tomorrow.”

On Sunday, Russ learned Expelliarmus and Protego. There was some trick to the way you held and pointed the wand for each one, so it took some concentration, but now he had three wand spells that he could actually do, because he remembered how to do Reparo. It was a shame he could only do them on the moors, and not in the town because of the muggles. Russ was always thinking of the neighbors as muggles now.

Just before school started, Russ brought down his one and only grouse. It was the first thing larger than a spider that he’d ever killed. He studied it for a while, clinically, dispassionately, then put it in the bag he now carried everywhere and took it home for his mum to cook. That was, after all, why he’d learned to throw.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 1969 (TWO DAYS BEFORE THE LAST QUARTER)

By September first, Russ was willing to acknowledge that the first day of his fifth year at school was likely to be different from previous first days. It wasn't just that he was older. It wasn't just that for the first time he was wearing a new uniform that was neither clownishly big nor embarrassingly worn and small. No, it was more that there had been two important changes. The first was his expectation that Petunia Evans had spread through the entire school his claim to being a wizard, which the other students would find ridiculous and would tease him for. The second was his mastery of two fighting spells that gave him more self-confidence, combined with a continued total separation from any emotional connection to the school at all.

It wasn't until he was crossing the bridge over the river that Russ remembered something — something that altered his whole perception of the coming day, and that he could have kicked himself for not remembering earlier. Petunia Evans was no longer going to his school! She'd taken her Eleven Plus exams the previous spring and, depending on how well she'd done, was even now on her way to a grammar school or a technical school in Colne or, if she'd done poorly, to a secondary modern. She wouldn't even be at his school to tell stories about him.

That left Lily, of course, but Russ hoped she would be less interested in ridiculing him about the witch idea, and more interested in talking about it.

At first that didn't seem likely. Lily started and stared at him when she saw him in the play yard before school, but she didn't approach. On the good side, nobody teased or laughed at him. Neil tried to get at him by holding his nose and talking about 'river stench,' but Brian was gone to secondary school, too, and Neil had no backup. Russ ignored him.

The breakthrough came at lunch time.

"Is this taken?" Lily asked Russ, indicating the far end of the bench where he was sitting.

"Nah," Russ replied. "Go ahead." They ate their sandwiches in silence for several minutes. When they started talking, they allowed long pauses between sentences so that no one else would notice.

“What you said in the playground, about me, was it true?” Lily asked.

“Sure. You know most people don’t do stuff like that.” Russ was calm and cool. The hunger was latched down.

“Do you do ‘stuff like that?’”

“Fly off swings? Nah. Don’t got no swings on th’ other side o’ th’ river. I do other things.”

“What kind of things?”

“You got something broken you want fixed? I can fix it. Don’t have to touch it.”

“Now you’re fooling me!”

“Okay, if that’s what ’cha wanta believe.”

There was an extended silence, then Lily said. “Can you prove it? Fix something now.”

“It’s not allowed in front of muggles.”

“What you really mean is you can’t.”

Russ paused, but the latched down feelings didn’t hinder his evaluation of the situation. “No. I mean I’m not allowed. If you want, I can show you. Just not here and now.”

“When and where then?”

“Can you go after school t’ the trees just north of the bridge? Wait for me there? Then I can show you.”

“I’m not supposed to go near the river.”

“Well, if you can’t, you can’t.”

“Okay, I’ll try.”

“Give me a few minutes. I’ll have to get m’ wand.”

The whole rest of the afternoon was tinged by a magic spell. If all went well, Russ was going to meet Lily by the trees just north of the bridge on the school side shortly after school. There he would show her what being a wizard meant. And yet, there was still that curious detachment, as if this was happening to another person.

Right after school, Russ ran home. He took the stairs to his bedroom two at a time and extracted his grandfather’s wand from under his pillow. Tucking it carefully into his sleeve to preserve it from unworthy eyes, he

ran back to the bridge and, hopefully, to Lily, the greater part of him still detached and cool.

It took a moment to see where Lily was, but she'd gotten there before he did. From the way she was crouched down by the tree, it was clear she didn't want to be seen any more than he did. Russ coughed before joining her on the grass, not wanting to startle her suddenly.

"This is my wand," he said, holding it up for her to see. "It was my grandfather's, but he's dead, so my grandmother gave it to me."

"Fix something, then." Lily was prepared to be skeptical.

Taking a small bottle from his huge pocket — a bottle he'd rescued from the rubbish and kept to practice on — Russ handed it to her and said, "Break this."

Lily examined it carefully. It looked like a normal, unbroken bottle. "How?" she asked.

"Hit it on something. Hit it on the tree."

It took several hits before Lily used enough force to break the glass. It would have been more dramatic if the bottle was shattered, but Russ was willing to take what he could get. "Now you check it and be sure you think it's really broken."

"You sound like one of those trick magicians on television."

It registered that Lily's family had a television, but Russ didn't dwell on the thought. "I just don't want you to think this isn't real," he said, and for good measure turned out his pockets and then took off the pea coat, patting the full sleeves of the smock to prove there was no second bottle hidden there. Then he brought his wand down to point at the bottle and said, "*Ampullam Reparo.*"

The glass sprang together and the bottle was fixed. Lily didn't want to touch it. Instead, she stared at it and examined it from a short distance as it lay on the grass. "That was pretty good," she said. "How did you do it?"

"The same way you make flowers open and close. Magic. That's why I said you were a witch. It wasn't anything bad, just a name for a girl who's magical."

"Are your parents magical, too?"

"Just my mum. My dad's a muggle — an ordinary person."

"So why are you poor? If you can do all this, why not make yourself rich?"

Russ thought about this. It was something he asked himself sometimes, even though he knew the answer. "Magic doesn't create stuff," he said. "If I make money or food, it isn't like real money or food. It doesn't last. If I have real stuff to work with, I can break it, or fix it, or make it move — once I learn how — but I can't make things that aren't there."

Lily nodded. Apparently it made sense. She looked straight at Russ. "What else can you do," she asked. "Could you fix my watch?"

Her eyes were green. Russ had never noticed that before. Green, and though round in the middle, they were pointy at the sides . . . A breeze inside his head was blowing the unlatched doors open, and the things that were supposed to stay down there were floating back up, and Russ was suddenly confused . . . He turned his head quickly away, letting the doors close again.

"I don't know," Russ answered. "I don't know the magic word for watch yet." He saw a figure move by the houses on the other side of the bridge. Panic rose — it was his mum! "Get down!" he whispered to Lily. "We shouldn't be seen together."

"Russ!" his mum was calling, and she sounded angry. "Richard Severus Snape, you come out right now!"

Russ stood up and ran for the bridge, hoping Lily kept her head down. "I'm here, Mum!" he cried out to her.

"Who're you with?" Eileen demanded. "Did you take something from the house you're not supposed to have?"

"No, Mum, I . . ." but she grabbed his pea coat and found the wand in the pocket.

"You did! Do you know I just got an owl from the Ministry? You used this where muggles could see! Muggles! You march home right now, young man, because this time I'm going to give you what for!"

Eileen took Russ's wrist and pulled him away from the bridge. A quick glance behind told him that Lily'd either left or was hiding. Russ knew he was in serious trouble, but with all his doors once again latched, it didn't

really bother him. It was like Nana said. Sometimes you had to take a little pain to get something you really wanted. It just depended how much pain and how much you wanted it.

That afternoon, for the first time, Eileen whupped her son and whupped him good. And she was a lot better at it than Toby was.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 1969 (ONE DAY BEFORE THE LAST QUARTER)

The next day, Lily's behavior toward Russ remained unchanged. She sat in her seat in class and never looked at him. She stayed with her friends during play time and lunch. She giggled with the others when Russ was called on to recite and stammered his answer. And she also managed to drop a tiny scrap of paper near him that contained the one, indecipherable word 'tree.'

Russ didn't wait by the tree, he waited in the shelter of the underside of the bridge. When Lily came and sat down under the tree they'd sat under the day before, Russ came out from his hiding place and joined her.

"Were you in trouble yesterday?" Lily asked.

"Yeah. I'm not . . . supposed to do wand magic 'cause I'm . . . too young, and doing it . . . with a wand where muggles can see is . . . worse. The Ministry sent an . . . owl."

"An owl? The Ministry?"

"We use owls as . . . messengers. There's this Ministry of . . . Magic that has laws and . . . rules, and they get after you if you . . . break them. I broke a . . . rule, and 'cause I'm nine it's my . . . parents who get in trouble . . . for it. Mum was pretty . . . angry."

"Did she spank you?"

"She used a . . . hairbrush. Dad uses a . . . belt."

"That's terrible!"

"Not . . . really. There's worse they could . . . do."

Lily didn't reply to that. Instead she changed the subject. "She called you by a different name. Is that why you didn't know your name in our first year?"

"I didn't . . . think people . . . remembered that."

"Neil joked about it for the longest time. It was like he had something personal against you."

"My mum says we used to . . . play together when we were . . . babies. That's before the mill . . . closed."

"Neil's from the other side of the bridge?" Lily giggled. "Maybe that's why. He doesn't want people to know."

"Are you going to . . . tell?"

"Why cause trouble? So what's your real name? The one you use?"

"Severus. My parents . . . call me Russ."

"Severus . . ." Lily repeated, rolling the name in her mouth in a way that made it sound important. "What do wizards do when they grow up?"

"Don't know. When I'm . . . eleven I'm going to the wizard . . . school. It's called . . . Hogwarts. That's where I'll learn the important . . . magic. Mum says in sixth year they . . . start talking about careers. By then I'll . . . know what I'm good at."

"That'd be fun, going to a magic school."

"But you're . . . magic, too. That means you could . . . go. Heck, they probably already . . . know about you from the time you . . . did your first magic trick."

"You think so?" Lily sounded pleased at the idea of going to a magical school. "I don't think my parents would let me, though."

"Just wait 'til they . . . find out. They've gotta be . . . pleased." Russ thought about Petunia. "Don't know about your . . . sister, though."

"Tuney? She'll be fine. She just doesn't like me doing things Mummy and Daddy said not to. She's bossy. She likes to boss me around."

"Good job she's going to a . . . different school then."

"True. If she was still here—I wouldn't be here." Lily looked over at Russ. "Could you tell me all about what it's like to be a witch?"

"Sure. Right now?"

Lily looked down at her watch. "It's late," she said. "I have to go or they'll get worried and Tuney'll get suspicious. We'd better not meet every day either." She got up and brushed herself off. "See you tomorrow, Severus," she said, and was gone.

Russ went home practically floating on top of the world.

Right after finishing his homework that evening, Russ went up to his room and took his Hogwarts textbooks out from under his bed. That was also where he'd put Wenny's books on dark creatures and hexes, and he brought them out as well. There was a new importance to these things because not only did he have to be ready for Hogwarts, Lily had to be ready as well. They had only two years, and there was no time to waste.

All of his mum's books had been bought second hand. Some, like *The Standard Book of Spells (Grade 1)* had the name of the previous owner written on one of the front pages, and Russ wondered who people like Atticus Fringillida and Cassius Varve were. Mostly, though, he was interested in the subject matter.

For the next several days, Russ pored over *A History of Magic* and *Astronomical Charts for Beginners*, over *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* and *The Dark Forces: A guide to Self-Protection*. On Friday Lily slipped him a note — 'tomorrow, 2.'

Russ took this to mean two o'clock, and arrived at the bridge at one forty-five.

"I don't think this is a good place," was almost the first thing Lily said when she showed up at two-ten. "At least not on the weekend. Too many people pass by here."

Russ agreed, and suggested a place just outside the town, on the river above the old mill, where there was a sheltered thicket of trees and brush that was more shielded from passing view. They split up immediately, Russ following the west bank of the river upstream, and Lily following the east. Where the thicket was, Russ waded across because the river here was shallower.

"You didn't tell them about me, did you?" Lily asked when they were settled.

"No. My mum wouldn't want me ... meeting someone she wasn't ... sure about ... magic, you know." Russ answered. "She doesn't ... want another owl from the ... Ministry."

"I can't tell my family about you either. My daddy was a supervisor at

the mill. He doesn't trust the laborers on the other side of the bridge. They didn't get along."

"Who's your . . . father?"

"Harry Evans. I guess yours is Tobias Snape."

"Your dad . . . talks about my dad? Mine doesn't talk . . . about yours."

"No, it's just that Tuney asked if Daddy knew the families of any of the students at school. I guess she was really asking about you, but she didn't make it too obvious. She named a whole bunch of people, and Daddy told us." Lily paused, clearly embarrassed. Then she took a deep breath. "Is it true your dad's all the time in the boozier?"

"Your dad said . . . that?"

"Yeah. Tuney loved it. She gave me this see-I-told-you look that made me so angry. Is it true?"

Russ wanted to change the subject, but somehow asking 'Do you want to learn the history of magic' would've sounded hollow at this point. "Yeah," he said. "Him and Mum are always . . . arguing. On bad . . . days, that's when he . . . hits me."

"Phew, that's all right then," said Lily. "Tuney bet you'd lie about it and said if you did it'd prove I couldn't trust you. Now I can tell her how silly she is."

"D' rather you didn't . . . talk to her 'bout . . . me. She doesn't like me."

"It's all right. She's okay once you know her."

"She thinks I'm . . . rubbish 'cause I'm on the wrong side . . . of the river."

Lily's silence confirmed the truth of this statement. She changed the subject and asked about Hogwarts, and Russ began to tell her all about the courses they'd be taking — Herbology, and Transfiguration . . . It seemed like only a short time before Lily had to leave. They agreed to meet in the same place the following Saturday. During the week it would be as if they didn't know each other.

On arriving home, Russ thought to try Petunia's trick on his dad. He asked about the different families of his classmates.

"What 'cha wanta know that for?" his dad asked.

"Got to know who's decent and who ain't," Russ replied. "Don't wanta mix with no stuffed shirts or college puddings."

"That's m' boy," Dad said, and that was how Russ found out that 'that rat, Harry Evans' was one of his dad's least favorite people. There was no doubt now that his friendship with Lily had to be kept secret.

A secret friendship wasn't as good as a best friendship, but it was so many steps higher than anything Russ 'd had before that he wasn't going to quibble. He didn't see Lily every Saturday (though he was at the tree every Saturday), but the chances he had to talk to her quickly became the most important thing in his life.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 1969 (THE DAY BEFORE THE FIRST QUARTER)

Russ paced impatiently by their tree. He was fairly sure two o'clock had come and gone, but he didn't want to pass up this particular meeting and was willing to wait until dark if necessary. He glanced at the sun in the southwest. Two-thirty maybe? Two-forty-five? The he saw her, and sat down so that no chance observer would see two young figures by the river.

"Hi," Lily said as she sat down next to him. She was bundled up more warmly than he, with scarf and hat as well as her winter coat.

"Did you see it?" Russ asked, ignoring the formalities.

"No, but it was on the news. It got hit by lightning."

"What! They're not . . . It didn't . . ." he couldn't even say the words.

"No, they're all right. Just after takeoff a bolt of lightning hit, and I think it damaged something because they were taking about how the information was garbled or something, but everything else seems to be okay."

Russ sighed deeply. He knew Lily wasn't as interested in this as he was, and it was kind of her to relay reports. Certainly better than the Apollo 11 landing when he had to scrounge newspapers for any kind of information. He was still going to scrounge newspapers, but there was more a sense of immediacy with Lily watching her television.

"What about the lunar landing?" he asked. "That's . . . Wednesday morning about seven. Are you going to be able to . . . watch that?"

"I'll try," Lily promised, and the conversation switched to school and Lily's most recent tiff with Petunia. Russ wished he had a brother or sister to have a tiff with. It seemed to make life more interesting.

Wednesday morning, Russ was at school early. Lily gave him a surreptitious thumb's up when she came in, then left a note wedged between her books for him to retrieve on the way to recess. The note said, 'TV not working. Nobody can see it.'

It was a grim sort of satisfaction to learn that the well-off with their televisions were in exactly the same position as he was without. His poverty — he knew the word now and accepted the reality it represented — was not a disadvantage at this moment. Nobody was watching the Apollo 12 moon walk.

There was one more important moment, maybe the most important of all, and Russ and Lily had to arrange that the following Saturday.

"It'll be about nine o'clock at night. Will you be able to . . . watch?"

"I think so. I don't know if they'll show it, though. I can have a radio on, too. They'd announce something. How do I let you know?"

Russ had that already planned. "I'll sneak out and go around and be . . . waiting out in the dark. Do you have a flashlight?"

"You mean shine it out the window? Like a signal?"

"Yeah. One flash if something went . . . wrong, two if they're okay."

"Okay. Are you going to have trouble getting out?"

"I don't think so. I've been practicing."

Monday evening, Russ said goodnight to his parents and started up to his room at eight o'clock.

"You got more homework tonight?" his dad asked. "That school ain't turnin' you into no pudding, is it?"

"Nah, Dad. Just showing 'em I ain't no dummy. I'm going to bed right when I finish, though. See ya in the morning."

From there it was easy to arrange his bed to look like he was in it, then to sneak into the small store room at the back and out the narrow window. He had a length of rope there that he could tie and lower to help him down and back up. No one would notice it hanging there in the dark.

Russ also had a flashlight, since he couldn't be sure how long it would

take him to get to where he could see Lily's house and the window to her bedroom. If she didn't see his answering gleam of light, she was supposed to repeat the message in fifteen minutes. By the stars, it was around nine o'clock when he took up his position on the cold moors.

He didn't have long to wait. About ten minutes later, there was a flash of light, followed by a second flash. He let his own light shine for a few seconds, then carefully picked his way back home across the moors and let himself in through the window. His parents were none the wiser.

As he got into bed, Russ considered that life was pretty good. Apollo 12 was back with a safe splashdown, and he had a friend who could tell him about it. Life didn't get much better than that.

C H A P T E R F I V E

WAITING FOR HOGWARTS

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2, 1969 (THE LAST QUARTER)

At the beginning of December, Toby's hours at the mine were cut. He came home that night roaring drunk.

"Ge' yer 'ands off me woman!" he bellowed at Eileen as she tried to get him upstairs to bed. "Where's m' son? Russ! Ge' out here n' keep yer father company. Where's m' boy!"

Russ was outside in the cold area yard where a steady rain had already drenched him to the skin. The door was ajar, and he could hear everything.

"Come to bed, Toby. You're tired. You got to get some sleep..."

"Wha's a man to sleep for if he don't got a job t' go to in th' morning? Russ! Ge' out here!"

The silence mirrored Russ's own shock. His dad didn't have a job? There was nothing worse that could happen. He waited, scarcely breathing.

"Toby," Eileen whispered, "you're not redundant? Not now with winter coming on?"

"Good as... Take a man's hours away, take 'is pay. Where's m' boy?" There was another silence, then... "Whyn't y' witch 'em? 'Ere I'm saddled wi' a witch 'n a witch's brat, 'n she can't witch me up a decent job 'r decent pay. What good are ya, woman! Take a man's money 'n give 'im nothing!"

"Toby, come upstairs. It'll be better in the morning. It'll..."

"Ge' yer 'ands off me!" There was the sound of a fist hitting flesh, and a thump as someone fell against the wall.

Russ was through the kitchen and into the sitting room at once. Eileen was on the floor, but already starting to rise. Toby swayed near the foot of the stairs. "Mum!" Russ screamed and made to cross over to his mother, but Toby grabbed his arm.

"You b'n keepin' away from me, y' ungrateful brat! You 'n yer useless mam! I'll give you what for!"

His belt came down, buckle end this time, and Russ kicked and shrieked as it struck, his arm held in a viselike grip. Eileen moved in, and Toby swung at her; the buckle caught her ear and drew blood. Russ kicked and connected with a knee cap, making his dad turn and strike him backhand across the mouth. Eileen grabbed Toby's left arm, and the grip on Russ eased. He wriggled out of his dad's grasp, Toby lunged for him, stumbled on the threadbare carpet, and fell. He struggled for a moment to rise, but he was too drunk, and then he was asleep.

Eileen looked down at her husband sprawled on the floor. "Bloody mine," she hissed. "Bet the managers aren't going hungry. Here, Russ, help me get him on the sofa." Together they hauled Toby over and dragged him onto the sofa, then Eileen took Russ into the kitchen to check his mouth, back and legs. "He gave you a couple of good ones, then, didn't he?" she said as she dabbed at the spots where the buckle 'd broken the skin a little. "Stopped bleeding, though."

"Mum, your left ear's bleeding." Russ helped his mum wash off her ear and neck where there was a small trickle. A bruise was just starting on her jaw.

"I've half a mind to send you to Nana," Eileen said, "even if it means missing school. We're in for a rough stretch."

"Why don't we both go to Nana?" Russ asked. "She'd make him stay away."

Eileen shook her head. "Who'd take care of him?" she said quietly, glancing toward the sitting room. "Your dad ain't one that can live alone. He wouldn't last a week." She reached out a hand and touched a welt on Russ's shoulder. "He's not a bad man, Russ, just one that muddles through the best he can, but sometimes he can't even do that. It ain't easy working in a mine,

the dark, the dust, the hard work, and then they take even that away. And he lies in bed of a night fretting and worrying and sick just thinking about the future. At least with a bit of gin in him he can sleep . . .“

”Can’t you just use your wand? It’d be . . .“

”You don’t. Use. Magic. Against. Muggles. Not ever. And if we go around breaking the rules about magic in a muggle community, they can keep you out of . . .“ Eileen looked at Russ, then grasped his face between her hands, her own face fierce and determined. ”You listen to me,“ she said. ”You don’t ever get in the middle of that ever again. I can handle your dad, but you got to stay out of it. We got a year and a half to make through, and then you’re going to Hogwarts. You’ll be safe in Hogwarts. And I’m not doing anything to give them a reason to keep you out. We can do magic out on the moors where no one can see us or identify us, but not in town. Promise?“

”Yes, Mum.“

The following day, Russ went to school as tightly locked down as he had ever been in his life. His dark eyes were cold and empty, and no spark of feeling bubbled up through the latched doors. His teacher asked him how he came by the cut and bruise on the side of his mouth, and he looked her straight in the eyes, knowing she would never be able to read him, and answered, ”Accident,“ in a cool, collected voice. The fact that her knowing smirk implied that she suspected a drunken, working-class father bothered him not at all. He cared nothing for her or for any of the other students. Today he didn’t even care for Lily. That, too, was locked away.

That night, Russ sat up with his mum waiting for his dad to get home. When they heard his hobnailed working shoes staggering along the cobblestones, Eileen ordered Russ out of the house, not to come back until Toby was in bed. Still locked down, still cold and detached, Russ obeyed. He obeyed night after night for two weeks.

He couldn’t bear to stay in the area yard in the back listening to the same scene played over and over again. When his dad came home, Russ went out onto the moors. He no longer got undressed for bed, but wore his clothes at all times, so that outside at night, with the collar of the pea coat turned up to protect his ears, he could still be warm in the winter cold. Sometimes it

rained. Sometimes there was a light dusting of snow. Once the sky was clear and glittering with a million stars.

Term ended, and school let out for the Christmas break; Lily's family went to Hampshire for three weeks. Then, two days before Christmas, there was a cave-in in an old section of the mine they'd decided to reopen and try to work again. Toby came home that night crazed with grief and anger. Russ heard the lamp smash just as he was closing the kitchen door, and stayed, afraid now to leave his mother alone, trying to decipher from the sounds what was happening in the next room

"Toby, no! Put that down, we can't afford more if you..." The sound of a plate breaking against the wall. "Ge' off me, woman! Bloody murd'rin' swine e'ry one o' 'em!" A chair thrown across the room. Russ cowered by the door, trembling as his mum's pleas, his dad's roars, the crash of objects to the floor told of violence spiraling out of control.

Russ couldn't stand it any more. He eased the door open. His parents were yelling at each other, Eileen trying to restrain the furious Toby, whose back was turned to Russ. Russ took a deep breath and slipped past his dad up the stairs.

Toby saw the movement. "Get back here, you brat!" he yelled, and made a grab that missed. He started up the stairs after the boy.

"Toby!" Eileen shrieked. "Russ, get out of here! Toby!"

Russ rushed into his room and out again, wand now in hand. In the face of his father's ferocious charge and his mother's cries to stop, he pointed the wand and said, loudly and clearly, "*Stupefy!*" Red light spurted from the wand, Eileen screamed, and Toby crumpled there on the stairs and fell backwards, crashing down the steps to the floor and lying motionless.

"You've killed him!" Eileen screamed, dropping to her husband's side. "My wand! Get my wand now!"

Russ, horrified at what had happened, raced for the kitchen drawer where Eileen kept the wand and brought it to her, then crouched miserably in a corner as she began the low healing chants to repair the damage he had caused. Even as she worked, there was a bump and flutter against the window. Not wanting his mum interrupted, Russ rose and crossed to the window to open

it and take the heavy official envelope from the owl. All around him the world was crumbling, and it was his fault. And still Eileen chanted, and still Russ waited.

When Toby was finally sleeping safely, Eileen rose and walked over to Russ, her face pale and furious. She held out her hand, and Russ gave her the letter. She opened it, glanced at the contents then, white with rage, handed it to Russ.

It was short and to the point. Two spells, one an attack spell and one a healing spell, had been performed with two different wands in a home with only one adult witch in an area where they might have been seen by muggles. They were reminded that wizards under the age of eleven were not allowed to use wands, and that continued violation of the Magical Secrecy Act and the Restriction on Underage Magic might result in the confiscation of the wands and the revocation of the privilege of attending Hogwarts School.

“Why didn’t you leave like I told you?” Eileen said coldly. “A mate of his was killed today. He needed to blow off steam. He didn’t touch me, just furniture. You used magic against a muggle. You dropped him on a staircase and near killed him. You brought the Ministry down on us and now they’re talking about Hogwarts. Nothing is going to keep you out of Hogwarts. Especially not your own stupidity.”

She seized his wrist and dragged him after her out onto the dark moor. There she stripped off the coat, pulled up the smock and with a murmured “*Flagello*,” wielded her wand like a whip. When she was done, she wrapped her son in the coat and carried him back into the house.

Russ spent the next three days in bed while his mum tended the lash marks on his back. They stung like fury, but Eileen couldn’t risk using magic with two counts already against them at the Ministry, so Russ had no recourse but to endure. It was then, with the constant prodding of pain, that he began to exploit, without even willing himself to do so, the inner recesses of his own mind.

The first thing he realized was that a total emotional lockdown made the pain easier to endure. The pain didn’t go away, and it didn’t lessen, but he didn’t care about it as much. He could accept the pain as simply there, and

was able to concentrate on other things in spite of it. Then he realized that, separated from any emotional reaction to what had happened, he was able to understand both the necessity for and the justice of what his mum had done. Russ had broken the rules.

One of the rules was that you never broke the rules of people who controlled what you wanted or needed. You had to figure out first what you needed, then what you wanted, and then you had to learn who, if anyone, controlled it. Their rules were the important rules. Russ had to get into Hogwarts. The Ministry controlled that. The Ministry's rules couldn't be broken, not by him and not by his mum. The Ministry controlled nothing that Nana needed or wanted. Their rules didn't affect her.

Another rule was that there were different levels for the concept of unfair. A lightweight fighting a featherweight was basically unfair because of the weight difference, but as Nel Tarleton proved, the odds could be evened out by applying other physical talents that reduced the advantage. Magic, on the other hand, was an irreducible advantage. A nonmagical person had no chance against a magical person, and there was no nonmagical talent that could even the odds. To use magic against a muggle was more intrinsically unfair than to use magic against a weaker wizard. The weaker wizard could compensate. The muggle couldn't.

Still another rule was that you never interfered with someone who'd decided that the goal was worth the pain. His mum had decided that protecting him and giving his dad a way to 'blow off steam' was worth the pain of an occasional black eye or bruised jaw. He'd tried to take that decision away from her, and thereby negated the freedom she needed to control her own life.

Russ was, in fact, beginning to learn that pain and disappointment are two of the most profound teachers in a person's life. If you never have to learn to deal with pain and disappointment, then you don't have the tools or the defenses to survive. Russ was a survivor. He would learn from his disappointment, and he would learn from his pain, and locking himself down was a way to do both.

In this fashion, Christmas came and went with no one in the Snape household even noticing. There was, in any case, no money for a tree, presents, or special foods. Just having enough food was a gift.

With the new year, Russ returned to school, his being locked down now the most natural of states for him. The first Friday of the new term was his tenth birthday, an event notable for its lack of celebration. The following day he went to the tree by the river to see Lily privately for the first time in a month.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 10, 1970 (HALFWAY BETWEEN THE NEW MOON AND THE FIRST QUARTER)

"What happened?" was the first thing Lily said when she arrived at the tree Saturday afternoon, all bundled up against the cold. There wasn't any snow, but the shallow places on the river had a thin crusting of ice.

"Nothing, why?" Russ replied.

"Severus Snape, you're lying to me. You've changed, gotten all . . . distant and turned off."

"I'm always distant and turned . . . off. There's no one at school for me to . . . turn on for. Except you, of course."

"How's your mum?"

"Okay, I guess."

"And your dad?"

Russ didn't answer. Instead he looked across to his side of the river, the side with no trees. "I suppose he's okay, too," he said after a moment.

"Do they fight?"

"They argue a lot." It wasn't really a lie, because he hadn't said no about the fighting, and they did argue.

"Don't take it to heart," said Lily and reached into her pocket. "I brought you something." It was a little square of gingerbread with icing on it. Lily also fished out a tiny, partially burnt candle. "I can't light it because I can't use matches, but you can pretend to blow it out. I know it's late." She stuck the

candle into the icing and handed the gingerbread to Russ. "Happy birthday," she said.

Russ stared down at the little square that he knew would be sharp and sweet at the same time because he'd had gingerbread at his grandmother Gra's house, and occasional other sweets at home when times were good. He thought of them as something special, to be treasured, and wondered if Lily felt the same way. "Thanks," he said, and looked into her eyes.

This time he was expecting it, and it didn't frighten him as much. As he looked into the green eyes, the locks began to unlock and the latches to unlatch. The part of his brain that had been detached and clinical for so many weeks analyzed the phenomenon and wondered if this always happened between friends or if it was something about Lily in particular, and then he realized that the surfacing feelings were too many to cope with at once, and he glanced away. The latches clicked back into place.

He had, however, learned something else. It wasn't as clear and definite as seeing an attack spell in his mum's eyes when they practiced out on the moor — more of a vague, partly defined impression — but he knew, with certainty, that Lily would never willingly hurt him. "How did you . . . know?"

Lily giggled. "I'm not telling," she said. "My secret."

"I know yours is at the end of . . . January. What day is it?"

"Not telling that either. How do you know?"

"Miss Wade last year had a list of months and . . . birthdays, and our names in order, but I couldn't see the . . . dates. How can I say 'Happy Birthday' to you if I don't . . . know?" Russ looked at her again, and the fresh breeze of her gaze blew through the unlatched doors. He realized he could control this by looking up and down, maintaining a balance.

"You just wait 'til you know it's past, then you say 'Sorry I'm late, but happy birthday.' Just like I did. There. That's my secret." Lily was laughing now.

"You mean you really didn't know . . . yesterday was my birthday?" Russ wasn't laughing exactly, but his smile had a liberating feeling.

"Wow. I got really close, didn't I?"

The ground was too cold to sit on, so they stood next to the tree and

shared the gingerbread. Lily told Russ all about Hampshire and her visit to the Isle of Wight and Portsmouth, and the two days she'd been in London. Russ couldn't tell her about his Christmas break, so he just said, "I was sick for a few days," and "Nothing much. The usual. Kind of boring, really."

Then Lily told Russ some silly jokes her cousin in Hampshire told her. Things like 'What does a five hundred pound mouse say?— Here kitty, kitty,' and 'Why aren't you ever hungry on the beach?— Because of the sand which is there.' Then she had to explain to him about 'sand which is' and 'sandwiches' because Russ wasn't too good at jokes, but he got the last one all by himself. 'Where does a five hundred pound gorilla sleep?— Anywhere he wants to.' By then both of them had reached a point where they'd giggle at anything.

After that, Lily had to go home. They said, 'see you in school' knowing they couldn't talk there, and they arranged to meet the following week, knowing it might not be possible, and then Russ went home, and as he crossed the river and made his way past the derelict mill, the doors began to close and latch again, and the locks made everything secure. He didn't make it happen, it just happened.

The feeling of openness and lightness of being was gone, and would not return until Russ was able to look again into the green eyes, but he didn't really mind. What he felt — or rather didn't feel — at that moment was quite normal to him. He was under no illusions about life. Most of it was muddling through, or dealing with hardship, or surviving storms. Every now and then, if you were lucky, there were some happy moments. Russ was lucky. Sometime in the next few weeks, maybe as soon as the very next Saturday, he'd have another happy moment. It was something to look forward to.

Winter melted into spring, and Toby got his hours back at the mine where a new shaft held some promise of steady work. Life at home calmed down, and once again father and son played cribbage of an evening after Russ was done with his homework. Eileen found a place in a town seven miles away that gave her needlework, piecework that she could bring home and embroider and return when she was done for decent pay, the little label 'hand embroidered' being something the company used to charge more from the

tourists who bought the table linen they manufactured. Sometimes Eileen would take the things to Nana's house and embroider with magic. It went faster that way, and brought in more shillings.

As April opened with its new leaves and first shoots that would be flowers by May, and the world began to look fresh and green again, Russ once more turned his eyes to the heavens. April eleventh was the day he was waiting for. April eleventh would bring the reenactment of another important part of his life. The Americans were planning their third lunar expedition, and this time Russ and Lily were conspiring to see if they could find a way for him to finally watch it on television.

Russ hadn't seen the first moon walk, and no one had seen the second, but he had high hopes for the astronauts and lunar excursion module of Apollo 13.

The Saturday before, on the fourth of April, Russ went over the terminology with Lily: launch, splashdown, lunar orbit, liftoff, command module, reentry, and all the other useful facts she'd need to follow what was happening. Launch was from Cape Kennedy just after eight o'clock at night, and Russ planned to be out on the moors waiting for Lily's signal that all had gone well, that the rocket hadn't blown up. "Although," Russ assured her, "the Saturn rocket's never failed. It has a perfect record."

"I think it's great you like this space business so much."

"You're interested in it, too."

"Not as much as you," Lily said, "but when you talk about it, you forget to stammer."

"That sounds like you think I . . . stammer on purpose."

"You know I don't mean that!"

"Okay," said Russ, the stammering immediately forgotten again, "liftoff is on the eleventh. The lunar excursion starts the sixteenth and goes into the seventeenth, reentry and splashdown are on the twentieth. Now we have to find out when the BBC is broadcasting because they won't do it for the whole thirty-three hours they're on the moon."

The launch went as planned the evening of the eleventh, and Lily's flashlight beam told Russ that all was well. All continued well for the next two

days, but Tuesday morning the rumors began to fly.

"There was this big explosion, and the whole spaceship was torn apart!"

"I heard the ship's like a big coffin and they're going to stay up there forever."

"A meteor hit it and all the air escaped into space!"

"It's going to fall into the sun!"

"Don't be an idiot! It isn't anywhere near the sun!"

That afternoon, the teachers dedicated themselves to rumor control and science lessons. Russ's teacher was loaded with details. She referred constantly to a piece of paper as she drew a diagram of the different parts of the 'spaceship,' the modules Russ already knew as the Odyssey and the Aquarius, and explained.

"There's been an explosion, but they don't know what caused it since they can't go back there to look. They've lost a lot of electrical power on board, and now they have to save the batteries to get back to earth. So they turned everything off in this big part of the ship, and moved into the little part where they use less electricity. When they get back close to earth, they'll turn everything on again."

That was all right, but then over the next two days the teacher was talking about carbon dioxide and temperature, and something called 'trajectory.' It was very clear that these brave men, these astronauts, could die at any time.

It was a living nightmare, and Russ found his heart and soul linked with the flight crew of Apollo 13. They were young. Only Lovell was older than Russ's dad, and Haise was younger than his mum. That was old in one sense, but still far too young to die. They had children Russ's age. Luckily the whole rest of the world was caught up in the drama, too, and for once Russ didn't have to scavenge for information. It was all around him.

As he learned of all the different ways to die, Russ died with the astronauts. First was losing the air, being suffocated in carbon dioxide, struggling just to breathe. Then there was cold, as your fingers lost their feeling and you kept on trying to work instruments with hands too numb to manipulate the controls. Then there was the fear of ricocheting off the atmosphere, to careen into empty space and slowly die of cold, thirst, and hunger. And

all the while knowing that no one, no one could ever come help you. That in the end, you were alone.

Russ longed for the chance to go into space, to heroically save the astronauts of Apollo 13, and knew that he was as helpless, as impotent as everyone else. There was nothing he could do.

The Odyssey and Aquarius went around the moon, and then they sped back towards earth, and suddenly reentry wasn't April twentieth, it was April seventeenth. Right around seven o'clock in the evening. Russ left an emergency note in one of Lily's books, and they met by the tree Wednesday afternoon after school.

"It's tomorrow. It's tomorrow around seven o'clock. I have to know if they get back all right. The heat shield, you know. It might've been damaged."

Lily frowned. "Dad's got an interview with a company in Birmingham. I don't know if it's tomorrow or Friday. If he goes tomorrow, Mum'll go with him. Don't know about Tuney. Maybe you could sneak in. They may not be showing it, though."

"How could anybody not be showing the splashdown? How could people not care?"

"Okay. Be outside hiding in the garden at six thirty. If Mum and Dad are gone, I'll try to keep Tuney upstairs. She's not so interested in this 'space' stuff. She'll stay there if she's got school work to do. I'll see you tomorrow night."

It wasn't easy getting to Lily's house on the seventeenth. It was right around supper time, and if Russ was seen in that part of town in his poor clothes he'd be taken for a prowler or a thief. He started early and made his way cautiously from street to street in order to be hiding under a bush in Lily's yard ten minutes ahead of schedule.

At six thirty, Lily opened the kitchen door, and Russ slipped into the house.

"Shh," Lily said. "Mum and Dad are in Birmingham, but Tuney's listening to records upstairs." And indeed, Russ could hear "Gimme Shelter" from

the upper part of the house as Lily led him into their sitting room where the television was already on and tuned to BBC1.

The Evans house was an intimidating place to be. Larger and filled with newer and more expensive things than Mrs. Hanson's home, it made Russ feel very dirty and uncouth. He was afraid to touch anything for fear of leaving finger marks, and when Lily invited him to sit down, he shook his head. He pretended that he preferred standing. In reality, he didn't want to touch the sofa.

"They're not broadcasting it," Russ said, for the normal Friday night show was on.

"They'll switch over soon," Lily replied. "They've already alerted us that as soon as the capsule is close enough, they'll pick up the transmission of the splashdown."

Sure enough, at about a quarter to seven, they started getting a picture from a big American ship in the Pacific Ocean. The BBC announcer was explaining that the spacecraft was about to begin its descent, and that there would be a radio blackout due to ionization of the hull. Normal blackout was about three minutes; this one would be longer because of the shallow angle of entry.

Blackout began, and Russ and Lily waited. Three minutes seemed an eternity, and while they were waiting the announcer explained that there was the possibility that the spacecraft would just burn up in the atmosphere because a heat shield may have been damaged, or the parachutes might not open and the capsule would be destroyed in its freefall crash into the ocean. It was terrible to listen to.

Three minutes was up, and nothing happened. The announcer explained again about the shallow angle. Thirty more seconds... still probably okay... thirty more... they were obviously worried now, and Russ began to shut down... another thirty seconds... and suddenly there was a crackle on the radio, and the astronauts were talking to Houston, and they were safely through the blackout... And Lily let out a whoop, and hugged Russ right there in front of the television.

"What are you doing down there?" Petunia called. "Why are you making so much noise?"

"It's just the television Tuney," Lily called back. "I'm watching that moon thing, and everybody's happy because it looks like they're going to make it home."

"Oh, that thing. Don't yell like that, please. I'm listening to something."

Lily put her finger to her lips, and she and Russ turned back to the television because it wasn't over yet. The spacecraft was still falling, and Russ wouldn't be satisfied until it was in the water and the astronauts climbing out.

It took nine minutes for the rest of the long plunge to earth. Russ and Lily heard that the parachutes had opened long before they could see the capsule, and then it came into view and hit the water, and they knew the worst was over. They couldn't see any more after that, because the ship was too far away from the capsule. A helicopter was on its way to them, and then the BBC interrupted its coverage to return to normal programming. It would be a while before the ship reached the astronauts, but they would keep their viewers informed.

That was it. Russ knew he couldn't stay until the recovery of the capsule. He had to leave Lily's house and go home. Lily had other ideas.

"Would you like a glass of milk and some gingerbread before you go?" she asked. "I ought to have asked you earlier, but we were too interested in the splashdown."

Russ was going to say no, then remembered how good Mrs. Hanson's milk tasted. "I don't want to be any trouble for you," he said.

"No trouble. We can eat in the kitchen."

"Who are you talking to?" Petunia shouted from upstairs.

"It's the television," Lily shouted back. She and Russ scurried into the kitchen, where Russ felt more comfortable about sitting on the chairs, and Lily got him some milk and a little plate of gingerbread. "That was scary," she said as she settled into her chair. "I thought for a few minutes they weren't going to make it. It seemed like such a long time."

"In a way, it probably wasn't as hard for the astronauts," Russ replied.

"They knew they were still alive. It's us who didn't know what was happening that felt it was long."

"I don't think I could ever do what they did," Lily said. "I mean asking for a job where I knew I might die like that, all alone up in space with no one to help me."

"There are worse ways to die," said Russ. "At least they were able to keep working on it, keep trying to solve their problem, right up until the last possible moment. Even if they did die, they'd have been thinking of something else when it happened. It'd be a lot worse to be in some kind of accident, like a mine cave-in, where you're trapped for hours or days in the dark, and there's nothing you can do to keep your mind off dying. Or do you remember our first year in school when they found those bodies in Manchester?"

"Yes, I remember that."

"My dad says if that'd been a year or two earlier, they'd have been hanged. Imagine walking out to die and you have to stand there while everyone's watching you, and nobody's going to help you because they all want you dead. That'd be worse, too."

"Do you think about dying a lot? It's like when you talk about the astronauts. You're not stammering."

Russ shook his head. "Not a lot, but sometimes. My dad works in a mine, and there was a cave-in last December and one of his mates died. It messed him up for a while, and when I thought about it I could see..." Russ paused because of the look on Lily's face.

"Your dad works in a mine?" she said.

Russ looked down at his hands, at the dirt under the fingernails and around the cuticles, and thought of his dad's hands, grimy and calloused from working with the tools and the slate. He'd bet anything Lily's dad didn't work half as hard. "Yeah," was all he said.

"But if your mum's a witch, can't she do something?"

"Nah. I... told you. We can't make... anything that doesn't already... exist. And we can't do... magic where... muggles can see."

"What would they do to you if you did?" Lily picked up a piece of gingerbread and nibbled the edge, her head cocked to one side.

"They could keep me out of . . . Hogwarts, and there's other . . . things they could do."

"Like what?"

Petunia unwittingly came to the rescue. "Lily, you're talking to somebody down there. You're not supposed to have people in the house when Mum and Dad are away." They could hear her footsteps on the stairs.

Russ was up immediately and out the back door. He didn't run, though. He needed to be cautious getting back out to the moors, and besides, he wanted to hear what Lily and Petunia would say.

Petunia's voice got louder with the kitchen door no longer muffling it. "Who was here with you?"

"No one," Lily answered. "I was playing a game."

"How come there's two glasses of milk?"

"I poured one, then forgot I had it. Then I poured another. Don't worry, I'll finish both of them."

"I don't believe you!"

"I don't care if you believe me or not. You're not my mother."

"It's that boy, isn't it? You had that strange Snape boy over didn't you?"

Lily laughed. "That's silly. How would he get here? Everybody'd chase him off. I'm going to tell Mum and Dad you're imagining stuff. Besides, you're just trying to scare me so you can bring your boyfriend over."

Twelve-year-old Petunia was incensed. "I don't have any stupid boyfriend!"

"Sue Hodges said her sister Mary said you were sweet on Brian Philips."

"That stupid git? I'd rather be sweet on a ferret!"

"Tuney lo-oves Brian . . . Tuney lo-oves Brian . . ."

Satisfied that Lily had the situation well under control, Russ ducked away from the bushes around the house and made his way stealthily to the moors and thence back home. It was still early enough that his parents hadn't been the slightest bit concerned as to his whereabouts.

"Mum," Russ asked later that evening, "what do they do to wizards who break the rules?"

"They have a prison, Mr. Nosey Parker, just for rule-breakers. It's called Azkaban."

"Is that a bad place?" Russ asked.

"Oh, very bad. It's guarded by dementors who'll steal all your happy thoughts and leave you miserable for the rest of your life." Eileen was putting away the dishes and cleaning up the kitchen, ready for the next morning.

"What do they look like?"

"Like nasty corpses in rotten grave cloths and when they kiss you, they suck out your soul." Eileen made a sudden lunge at Russ, who squealed in mock terror and dove out of her grasp.

"If I did something bad, would they send me to Azkaban?" Russ continued from a more defensive position.

"Why? What did you do?" Eileen regarded her son shrewdly.

"Nothing."

"Then they won't send you there."

"But if I did something bad?"

"They don't send children to Azkaban. If you did something really bad, they'd send me to Azkaban, and you and your father'd have to muddle through. Come to think of it, I could use a holiday. What're you planning?"

"Mum!"

"I mean it. I'd get there, and when they tried to suck out my soul I'd tell them all about my demon of a son who'd drive a saint to perdition and get them all feeling so sorry for me..."

"Mum!"

Eileen stopped, and she seemed to see something in Russ's face because she crouched down to talk to him. "Don't you ever forget," she said, "you're a good boy. There's nothing you could do that'd make anyone want to put you into Azkaban. You're a good boy."

"I've done wand magic."

"They don't put you into Azkaban for that."

The next time Russ saw Lily was in May under the tree by the river.

That was when he told her about the owl from the Ministry and the warning message, though he didn't go into detail about why he'd cast a spell, or what his dad'd been like, or how his mum'd reacted. Just that he'd done magic and gotten a warning. And he told her about Azkaban and the dementors.

"They sound really scary," Lily said.

"They're supposed to be scary. It wouldn't do any good to have a prison people weren't scared of."

"I guess not."

"Magic's serious business," Russ said solemnly. "It's not a game. You've got to follow the rules."

Of course, there are more serious things in the world than just magic.

MONDAY, JUNE 1, 1970 (THREE DAYS BEFORE THE NEW MOON)

School was winding down toward the summer break. On the first of June, Toby came home early from the pub, more sober than usual. Even more surprising, he brought a copy of the *Manchester Guardian*. It was a rare thing for him to buy a newspaper, but one glance at the front page told Russ and Eileen why.

"Forty thousand people," Toby told them, awe mixed with sorrow in his voice. "Forty thousand. That's a whole town buried under the earth. Makes a mine cave-in look like nothing. A miner—he knows what might happen every time he goes down a shaft, but them? Who'd think the earth could move so 's t' make a whole mountain come down on ya? Where's Peru, boy?"

Russ hesitated a moment, then blurted out, "South America." Geography was something Miss Wade had stressed.

"Smart kid. They do well by ya in that school. They speak English there?"

"No, Spanish."

"Don't matter none. People's people. Ain't nothing worse 'n being buried before y're dead."

The *Guardian* was left to Russ, who pored over every word in every paragraph. The next day he uncharacteristically slipped a note into Lily's hand. *Ask about the Peru earthquake* it said. Lily obliged, and the class got a nice lesson about plate tectonics and fault lines.

On June 18, general elections were held and Labor was voted out. Toby hadn't been completely happy with a Labor Government that tried to limit workers' rights, but he was less than happy with a Conservative government that didn't bother about those rights at all. Workers in far off places like Wales were talking of strikes, and late nights at the pub became common again. Russ mastered sleeping with one ear tuned to the cobblestones, ready to slip out of the house at a moment's notice.

Ten days later, the school year ended. Lily went with her family to the Lake District and Scotland, and wasn't due back until August. For the first time in his life, Russ found himself with nothing new to do and no one to do it with. He was frustrated and bored, and old enough for the boredom and frustration to find expression in mischievous and potentially destructive activities. He prowled through his house, his neighborhood, and the town looking for an outlet for his nervous energy. He found the outlet in his great-grandfather's books.

The study of spells, charms, hexes, jinxes, and curses was no longer a matter of childish curiosity. That summer it became serious business. Russ 'borrowed' his mother's wand, went far out on the moors where the rules didn't apply, and practiced gestures and incantations and a new language. Wensley's ships had put into Piraeus often enough for him to invest in a tiny Greek dictionary and phrase book, and once Russ figured out the strange letters, it was a treasure trove of words, though he was aware that it wasn't the 'magic language' that Nana used. He had to experiment with pronunciation, but he was patient and determined.

The first spell Russ invented was one that made a pebble jump a few inches into the air. He'd been concentrating on it all afternoon, and was so surprised when it happened that he jumped backward himself and fell down. He practiced saying "*Pido!*" to a number of small things and returned home with a sense of great accomplishment. This was no vague, childish play, but

a deliberate, focused spell. He assumed all wizards invented such things. He had yet to learn what a rare talent it was.

Later in the month, having more or less mastered the Pido spell and remembering the events of early June, Russ checked his Greek dictionary for the word for earthquake. It was *Seismos*. He tried making a spell with the word, but with little success. Not daunted, he continued trying.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 8, 1970 (TWO DAYS BEFORE THE FIRST QUARTER)

Lily returned in August, and it was sunny and hot the second Saturday, when Russ and Lily were able to meet under their tree. The bright sun made the river sparkle, and you could almost forget how dirty it was. Russ even removed the ever present pea coat, now comfortable enough with Lily that he was confident she wouldn't laugh at his clothes. There was, however, a new barrier between them.

Russ found himself unable to look Lily in the eyes. It wasn't that he was afraid she could read him — he knew by now she couldn't — but that the feeling of being so open when he now had so much to conceal made him nervous. What if he couldn't close down again before he went home to his mum? What if his mum found out he was using her wand and doing illegal magic, even if it was in a place where the rules were different? Russ couldn't risk it. He spent a lot of the conversation looking at the river. They were talking about Hogwarts.

“...then after you get the school letter, you can get a wand.”

“I thought you already had a wand.”

“Mum took it away from me. Besides, it wasn't really mine. It was my grandfather's.” Russ thought about the feel of the wand in his fingers. His mother's borrowed wand didn't feel the same, and he knew he could do better magic with his grandfather's old one. That wand really was his — he could tell. He didn't say this to Lily, though. “They'll start teaching us real magic at Hogwarts. Then the rules get stricter, like I told you, and the Ministry can punish you if you do magic outside school — you get letters.”

Lily looked disbelieving. “But I have done magic outside school!” she insisted.

“We’re all right. We haven’t technically got wands yet. They let you off when you’re a kid and you can’t help it.” Russ wasn’t as sure what happened when you were a kid and knew enough magic so that you could help it, but not going to Hogwarts was involved. “But once you’re eleven,” he continued, “and they start training you, then you’ve got to go careful.”

A random stick became a play wand in Lily’s hand. “It is real, isn’t?” The note of disbelief was softer now. This was something she wanted to be real. “It’s not a joke? Petunia says you’re lying to me. Petunia says there isn’t a Hogwarts. It is real, isn’t it?”

“It’s real for us. Not for her. But we’ll get the letter, you and me.”

“Really?”

“Definitely.”

“And will it really come by owl?”

“Normally. But you’re muggle-born, so someone from the school will have to come and explain to your parents.”

“Does it make a difference, being muggle-born?”

Russ found himself remembering the whispered conversations between his mum and Nana, the ones he wasn’t supposed to have heard — A little half-blood boy like him . . . They’d eat him alive — and he knew not everything was perfect at Hogwarts. He looked at Lily then, her burnished red hair, the eager expression he knew so well, and couldn’t bear the thought that his only friend might be afraid to go to Hogwarts, might refuse to go to Hogwarts. “No,” he said. “It doesn’t make any difference.”

Their eyes met, the doors blew open and, as Lily rolled onto her back to stare up at the leaves, Russ watched inside his head where the selfish truth about himself was bubbling up through the open doors.

I’m afraid of Hogwarts. The stars say I’m to be sorted into Slytherin where they eat half-blood boys like me alive, and Mum’s so worried she’s teaching me how to fight. I don’t know if I’ll ever have a friend there. I’ve never met any other wizards, and the only witches I know are Mum, Nana, and Lily. What if they don’t like me? But if Lily’s there, I’ll have a friend, and it’ll be all right. She

has to go. She has to be there. I need her to be there... Then the doors slowly closed again for the green eyes were looking elsewhere.

"How are things at your house?" Lily asked, and Russ lied his little lie, downplaying the strife because he was ashamed of his dad, picking and pulling at the grass around him to keep from looking back at Lily's eyes, not wanting to see more of the truth.

"But it won't be that long and I'll be gone," he finished, hoping his mother was right, and it would be better at Hogwarts.

For some reason Lily wanted to talk more than usual, maybe because they hadn't seen each other in six weeks, and she changed the subject to Azkaban and the dementors. It was better than talking about his family, so Russ would have liked the conversation to continue, but at that moment he heard a rustle of leaves and grass much louder than any lizard or mouse could make, and Lily was scrambling to her feet crying, "Tuney!"

Their secret meeting place was no longer a secret.

Russ was on his feet at once, angry that Petunia would consider acceptable for her an action she'd condemned in him only a year earlier. "Who's spying now? What d' you want?" he demanded.

Instead of responding to the challenge, Petunia attacked on a personal level. She leveled a finger at Russ. "What is that you're wearing, anyway? Your mum's blouse?"

It was a low blow and, as fury blazed in him, Russ heard the snap of a breaking tree branch, Lily's warning cry, and then Petunia was pushed backwards when the falling branch struck her shoulder. She turned and ran from them, sobbing.

Lily's call of "Tuney!" had no effect. She spun to confront Russ, anger mounting in her as well. "Did you make that happen?"

He hadn't. He couldn't have. He hadn't noticed the branch until it fell. "No," Russ answered, and was distressed that Lily'd even asked the question.

Lily was already starting after Petunia. "You did! You did! You hurt her!" she flung at him, as she moved away.

"No — no I didn't!" but the protest was useless. Lily glared at him and

was gone, leaving Russ staring forlornly at the branch on the ground where Petunia had been standing.

Did I do that? I didn't think about doing it. It just happened... Yet Russ understood that somehow he had done it, had used the branch as a weapon against Petunia because Petunia was attacking something that lay at the core of his being, something that he couldn't give up. Now, because of it, he was losing Lily's friendship anyway, because of something bad that he'd done.

I lost control. I did childish, wandless magic because I lost control. Why did I lose control? I lost control because I wasn't shut down tightly enough. When you don't shut down, you lose control, and then people don't want to be around you. Like Lily doesn't want to be around me now. If I don't shut down tight enough, I'll lose control, and then Lily won't be my friend any more.

Quietly, consciously, deliberately, Russ examined the latches and locks of his mind. They were dangerously loose and open. He closed them. And having closed them, he resolved to monitor them closely to ensure they remained closed. He couldn't afford more mistakes like the one he'd just made.

Russ walked home firm in his new resolve. The following weekend he went to the thicket of trees by the river, but Lily didn't come. He didn't see her again until school started in September — their last year of school before Hogwarts. By then, Russ had been practicing being shut down so well that he no longer had to think about it all the time. He'd also spent more time working on magic and, in his loneliness and isolation, had created spells that would make flowers droop and wilt, little patches of ground dry up and become hard, and small insects like ants grow confused and lose their way.

The first Saturday in September was the fifth, and Lily came to the river. Russ watched the path behind her, but saw no sign of Petunia. "Don't worry," Lily said. "She won't be coming any more. You were very mean to her."

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to do it. I didn't even know it was me doing it."

"Well, you shouldn't do it any more. I couldn't be friends with someone I thought was mean."

"I won't do it any more. I've been practicing not getting angry."

"That's good. Because you did hurt Petunia, you know. She had a bruise on her shoulder."

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to do it. It won't happen again."

"That's all right, then," said Lily, and they sat under the tree and talked. Russ was very careful not to look into her eyes so that he wouldn't lose control. It was good to have everything in his world back to normal.

Things were better with Toby as well. With full time work, and the extra Eileen brought in, he managed to save a little money, and on October 17, instead of staying home to rest after a hard week at the mine, Toby left for the morning and returned in the early afternoon at the wheel of a battered old black car that chugged and backfired as he drove it along the cobblestones to the house. Since theirs was the last home in Spinner's End, Toby parked the car beside the house.

There was a dog-eared, torn manual with missing pages, some tools, and a kit for patching the inner tubes of the tires. Together, with Eileen watching, Toby and Russ pored over the manual. Toby had considerable experience with the trucks and other machines at the mine, and soon father and son had the hood up and were tinkering with the engine, trying to improve the car's performance. They succeeded well enough that that evening they went for a short drive, and Russ got to feel the wind whipping at his hair through the open windows and the thrill of speeding along at thirty miles per hour.

Fall dissolved into winter, and then into a new year, and soon it was Russ's eleventh birthday.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 9, 1971 (TWO DAYS BEFORE THE FULL MOON)

For his eleventh birthday, Russ had an actual party. Both his grandmothers came, and he had not only cake, but three presents. The table in the sitting room was covered in a lace cloth supplied by Gra, and flowers from Nana's garden added color and a festival feeling.

The reason for the party was, of course, that if all went well, this was the last time he'd be home on his birthday for the next seven years. Toby wasn't entirely comfortable with the idea of his son attending a wizards' school, but

the women dealt with it by reminding him of the major advantages — more time alone with Eileen, one less mouth to feed, and a son who, at the age of seventeen, would be able to keep the car properly tuned with a wave of his wand.

Gra, a lover of all kinds of puzzles, gave Russ a book of logic problems and a book of Sherlock Holmes stories. Nana's witching fees were mostly in kind, but she'd saved coin and bought him his first little cauldron and starting potions kit from a wizarding shop in Liverpool that carried school supplies.

Russ's mum and dad gave him a wonderful gift — trousers, shirt, shoes and a sweater that were only a little bit large, and actually came close to reasonably fitting. He tried them on to show how they looked and was quite the proper, respectable, working class boy. Then he changed back into his normal clothes so that the new ones wouldn't get dirty. They were for his trip to London at the end of August.

"Have you heard there's a new headmaster?" Nana asked after Russ blew out his candles, the cake was sliced, and Mum'd handed out the cups of tea.

"No. You mean old Dippet finally retired? It's about time. When I was there, the deputy headmaster already did most of the work anyway. We thought Dippet spent most of his time asleep." Eileen smiled to herself at the memory.

"Who was the deputy headmaster?"

"One of the Transfiguration teachers — Dumbledore." Eileen handed a slice of cake to Gra, who knew nothing of Hogwarts and wisely kept silent.

"He's the one who's just been made headmaster. Is he any good?" Nana asked.

"He's a shrewd one, that's for certain. Who'd take over as head of Gryffindor if Dumbledore's the headmaster?"

"Did you know a professor named Minerva McGonagall?"

Eileen shook her head. "She must have come after I left in June of fifty-two. I don't recall anyone named McGonagall."

"She's the new deputy as well, so Gryffindor remains firmly in charge. You said they always got the plums, didn't you?"

"It seems like my whole time there, the Head Boy and Head Girl were from Gryffindor house." Eileen turned to Russ, who was playing cribbage with his dad. "The discipline and order in the houses is maintained by the prefects of each house. You have to obey them." She turned back to the other women. "They all, regardless of their houses, are supervised by the Head Boy and Girl, who report to the deputy headmaster. So being Head Boy is a pretty powerful job. They always gave it to someone from Gryffindor because that was Dippet's old house and Dumbledore's, too."

"Sounds like Gryffindor has a lock on the power," said Nana, pouring herself another cup of tea.

"It didn't bother us too much, but the students in Slytherin were ambitious, and they resented being shut out." Eileen smiled across the table at her son. "Slytherin students are clever, and they all think Gryffindor students are strong, but brainless."

"My boy's clever," said Toby, not really paying much attention to the conversation. "He'll go with the clever ones. Y' don't need brawn to get along in the world, you need brains."

Late in the afternoon, they all got into Toby's car, Russ sandwiched in the back between his two grandmothers. First they took Nana to her neat little cottage in the country, then they drove to Gra's village where Toby helped his mother into the house, Gra having a little trouble walking. Then Toby gave Russ a treat by driving around for a while. Since they were on summer time all year, the sun didn't set until a quarter past five, so they got home just as it was getting dark.

It'd been a really nice birthday.

The next day was Sunday, and Russ wandered up to the little thicket of trees where he sometimes met Lily. There he found a piece of paper wedged between two branches. He unfolded it and read: *I came at 2:00 and you weren't here. It was cold but I waited for an hour. What happened? I thought you'd always come Sat. afternoon. Where were you?*

The idea of Lily waiting in the cold for him was terrible. Russ wasn't sure what to do. He'd have to find some way to apologize because he didn't want to lose Lily's friendship due to his own thoughtlessness.

The end of January brought both Lily's birthday on the last Saturday of the month, and the launch of Apollo 14 the following evening. Russ didn't have any money for a present, so he walked the eight miles to Nana's cottage after school on the twenty-ninth and returned long after dark with a little bottle of potion that could revive any drooping flower, plus the instructions for making more. It was fairly simple, and the beauty of potions was that they required no wand magic, so he could brew them without fear of the Ministry.

Apollo 14 returned safely from its mission and splashed down late in the evening of the second Tuesday in February. Lily's parents, amused by her interest in the American space program, let her stay up long enough to get the news that the capsule and astronauts were safe. She beamed her flashlight out towards the moors, so that Russ could sneak back home to his warm bed and a peaceful night.

The very next day, every bank in Britain closed at three-thirty, not to reopen until the following Monday. The era of tuppences and sixpences was over. England had gone decimal, and suddenly everyone was talking about 'pee,' so what used to cost half a crown was now twelve and a half 'pee.' It didn't affect Russ much since he never had any money, but everyone else was confused for a while.

Then in April, Russ became interested in the Russians. The Americans were going to the moon, but the Russians had a space station orbiting the earth, the Salyut 1. The first crew sent up to enter the station had to return to earth because the docking mechanism wouldn't work, but the second crew made it and spent almost all of June working on experiments in space. Russ and Lily sat for their eleven-plus exams, but Russ's thoughts were more with the cosmonauts than on the test. The test didn't mean anything anyway. He wasn't going to one of those schools.

June 30 brought the first tragedy. The three-man crew of the Soyuz 11 died during their return to earth. A faulty valve allowed their air to escape, and the cosmonauts were asphyxiated within minutes. Russ had nightmares for a week, waking up struggling for breath as if something heavy was sitting on his chest.

And then, in the last week of July, the Hogwarts letters came.

Russ got his letter by owl, a majestic brown bird, and treasured the stiff parchment message with its green ink that told him what to bring. Eileen immediately pulled out her old robes and books, and began altering the first to fit Russ and sorting through the second for the ones he would need. The books were old, secondhand even when Eileen had them, but she and Russ agreed he could make notes in the margins of any material that was new since they were published.

Nana sent Nelson with a letter asking if she could pick up anything at the shop in Liverpool, and soon, with his birthday cauldron and his grandfather's wand, Russ had everything he needed. On Saturday the thirty-first, he met Lily under their trees on the river.

"It's so exciting!" Lily squealed, hugging Russ when she saw him. "It was just like you said, everything the way you said it. This woman came to the door, the deputy headmistress, and talked for the longest time with Mum and Dad, and did magic for them right there in the house! You should have seen Petunia's face. She's been teasing me about this for the longest time, and now she has to eat her words because it's all true!"

"What did your mum and dad say?"

"I think they were really shocked, but also relieved. I mean, they've been worried about me and the things I can do, and I think they were happy to find out I wasn't crazy. Petunia's gone all sour. I think she's jealous."

"Let her be jealous. It serves her right for being nasty."

"Don't be mean. Anyway, we're going to London next week because there's this secret place just for witches where we can buy all the things I need for school. Are you going there?"

"Don't have to. I've had all my school things for ages." Russ didn't think it was necessary to tell Lily that they'd been his mother's things.

"Have you ever been to London?"

Russ shook his head. The whole business about going to London to take the Hogwarts train was causing problems in his family. There was no train from Colne that would get them to King's Cross station in time to catch the express, so he and his mother would have to go the day before, but there was

no money for lodgings. His mum and dad had been arguing about it since the letter came.

There was something else important to ask Lily. "Are you going to be back from London by next Saturday?"

"Sure. I even have the house to myself all evening. Mum and Dad are taking Petunia out to dinner and a movie in Colne. Sort of to give her some attention since I'm getting so much. Why?"

"There's another splashdown..."

"Again?"

"Apollo 15. Coming back from the moon. Please Lily. What if they die like the Russians? I have to know."

The landing was scheduled for just before ten o'clock in the evening on August seventh. Lily suggested that Russ come for supper so that she could play hostess, but he didn't want his parents to wonder where he was. She settled for dessert and tea. He agreed to arrive around nine, and would leave well before her parents and Petunia got back.

Russ's arrival went according to plan, and he got to Lily's house just as the sun was setting, not having been seen by anyone. In honor of the occasion, he was wearing the new clothes he would take with him to Hogwarts. He felt very proper and dressed up. She let him into the kitchen where she had cake and tea ready, and for fifteen minutes they ate and talked about Hogwarts.

"Would you like to see my house?" Lily asked suddenly. "You hardly got to see anything the last time you were here."

"Sure," Russ replied, having not only the vague impression that refusing would be impolite, but also curiosity about the place where Lily lived. He wasn't as intimidated as he'd been the first time, since this time he had an idea what to expect.

The downstairs had a dining room as well as a living room. The upstairs had a bath and three bedrooms. Russ was immensely impressed that Lily didn't have to share her bedroom with Petunia, though Lily admitted that if they had overnight guests, she did.

Lily's room was robin's egg blue and white. "I wanted paisley," she told Russ proudly, "but Mum wouldn't hear of it." Petunia preferred yellow. It

surprised Russ that Petunia's room was more frilly than Lily's. If he'd had to guess, he would have thought the other way around. Each girl had a bed, a desk and chair, a small bookcase and . . .

"What's that?" Russ asked, pointing to Petunia's desk where a yellow envelope with green writing lay.

"I don't know," said Lily.

"It's a letter from Hogwarts."

"Really? Petunia didn't mention it."

"That's not possible," Russ said, walking to the desk and staring at the envelope. "Muggles don't get Hogwarts letters."

"Maybe it isn't really from Hogwarts," Lily said, and picked the envelope up. It was the same parchment and the same green ink. "I wonder what it says. You don't think Petunia's been accepted to Hogwarts, too, do you?"

"Has she ever shown any magic ability?"

"I never saw any."

"Then she can't go."

Curiosity got the better of Lily, and she opened the envelope. After looking at the letter for a moment, she handed it to Russ. It was from Headmaster Dumbledore, gently explaining that unfortunately only persons with magical talent could attend Hogwarts. He understood Petunia's desire to learn magic with her sister, but it was not possible.

"She wrote to the school," Russ said in surprise. "How could she do that? I always thought muggles couldn't write to them, like there's someone in the postal service that stops the letters."

"Maybe it happened during the postal strike. That lasted forever."

Russ shook his head. "That ended in March. She must've writ to him after you got your letter last week."

"Poor Petunia," Lily sighed. "I guess she is jealous after all. She was on about you and me being freaks, but that could have been after she got the answer to her letter."

"Well let her be jealous. I don't care. I don't want her at Hogwarts. She's never been nice to me."

"Don't be mean, Severus."

“Mean is as mean does. I’m glad she won’t be going.”

At that moment, they both remembered the Apollo 15 capsule hurtling toward earth, and ran to warm up the television. Because of the recent Russian tragedy, the BBC picked up the image just before a quarter to the hour. Russ saw what was wrong at the same time the announcer did.

“There’s only two parachutes open! What happened to the third one?”

All thought of Petunia’s letter vanished as, heart in his throat, Russ watched the Endeavour plunge to earth. As it turned out, the third parachute was there just as a precaution, and the capsule was perfectly capable of landing in the ocean with two. Less than a minute after being terrified half out of his mind for the astronauts, Russ was hugging Lily madly in the knowledge that they were safe. Then he slipped out of her house and made his way home.

On August 30, both Nana and Gra came to stay the night in order to see Russ off at the train station in Colne. He was taking a footlocker with his books and a few extra things like changes of underwear, and Gra brought an old, somewhat battered Gladstone bag that had belonged to Wensley Snape in the days when he went to sea. The bag was for carrying Russ’s robes and hat so he could change on the train.

It was a Monday night. Toby’d taken the following morning off to drive all of them, Eileen and Russ to the station at Colne, and then Nana and Gra to their homes. He’d be by himself one night, but there was a train Eileen could catch from Euston Station after leaving Russ on the platform at King’s Cross that would get her home the evening of the second day, September first. Russ had the feeling his dad was looking forward to that night.

Lily had already left. She, her parents, and Petunia had spent the weekend in London. Russ wouldn’t see her until they got to King’s Cross Station, and he wouldn’t be able to talk to her until the train was on its way to Scotland. After that, though, they no longer had to worry about their parents or Petunia.

That evening, Russ had a thorough wash at the sink upstairs. It was years now since he’d stood in the wash tub in the kitchen, but he still hated the whole process. Nonetheless, tonight he wanted to be especially clean for the

trip to London in his new clothes. The worst part was his hair, which he couldn't wash upstairs so as not to get hairs in the drain. No, washing his hair had to be done outside in the area yard, stripped to the waist, while his mother poured water over his head in full view of the neighbors. It was humiliating, but Russ endured it. It was the last time for ten months. For Hogwarts, he'd endure anything.

"What say y' give us a game, eh boy?" Toby said after dinner, and they pulled out the cribbage board and the cards.

"You might let the child visit with us," said Nana primly. "We're the ones who don't see him every day."

"That's why you won't miss him so much as I will," Toby retorted. "Sides, he can talk while he plays. He ain't no dummy, my son."

Despite the barbs, the evening was good humored and pleasant, and Russ even got the feeling his father and his grandmother enjoyed a bit of sparring. The grandmothers were sharing his room, and Russ spent the night on the old sofa downstairs.

They were up early the next morning to a hearty breakfast and the double checking of all Russ's things. The women fussed over how neat he looked in his new togs, while Toby went out for the twentieth time to run a cloth over the car to be sure it looked nice. The footlocker was loaded into the trunk of the car, then, at last, they were off to Colne.

"Now you remember," Toby said at the train station for the fifth time since he parked the car, "you don't let no one put nothing over. They try, and you give 'em what for."

"Sure, Dad."

They stood in an embarrassed little group on the platform until the train pulled up, and then there were hugs from the grandmothers while Toby watched. Last of them all, he faced his son and solemnly shook hands. "You remember who you are, Russ. Them college puddings can't never put nothing over on a lanky. You don't never forget that."

Eileen and Russ boarded the train and found seats in the nearly empty second class car. Russ had been on trains three times before in his life, once to Blackpool and twice to Manchester, and he knew the whole routine. They

had sandwiches for the trip, which would be a long one since the train made every stop on the route. Longer from Lancashire to London than from London to northern Scotland, since the Hogwarts train was an express, Eileen explained.

The train was moving, and they were waving goodbye, and the adventure was truly started.

Eileen spent the trip reviewing with Russ all the things he needed to remember, about guarding his thoughts, about dueling and defending himself, about keeping his things secure, and about hiding from the authorities the fact that he'd been practicing magic, real magic, for some time, in defiance of the law. Keeping secrets wasn't a problem for Russ. He'd been keeping secrets for years.

From Euston station, they went to King's Cross where they checked almost everything they were carrying. Eileen had a special hotel in mind, one she'd stayed in as a student, and they shouldn't have luggage when they showed up there. "There," she said as they left the station. "Across the road." She was pointing to a church, a white church with a classic Georgian portico. "We should be in time for evensong. Then we have to be careful, but if we are it'll be a peaceful night."

Together mother and son crossed Euston Road and entered St. Pancras church.

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