

The Inner Eye of Harry Potter The Gift of Sight

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Chapter 1 – The Gift of Sight

October 31st, 1988

Eight year old Harry Potter loved spending time with Auntie Sibyll the most. She had come when he was five, in the middle of a thunderstorm. Some bad words were exchanged between her and Uncle Vernon, but before he threw her out, she gave him the names of two horses that would win the next day at the racetrack.

She came back the next day and Uncle Vernon didn't mind having her around so much. Every so often she would give him the name of a horse or the winner of a football match and Harry's uncle would smile and thank her.

It's how she came to live in the smallest bedroom at Privet Drive. Vernon allowed Harry to move from his tiny cupboard and share that room with his Auntie.

His 'real' aunt and uncle told all the neighbors that she was a 'New Age' cousin of Petunia's and generally kept the neighbors from talking to Auntie Sibyll. Harry didn't care, he loved Auntie Sibyll.

She told him he was a Wizard.

Auntie Sibyll showed him her magic wand and made his castoff teddy bear into a brand new one. She even made it come to life and chase him around the room.

Harry's 'adopted' aunt claimed that she wasn't a very powerful witch, but she was a Seer. For a short time, she taught at the magical school where Harry would go in a few years. Harry wasn't sure why, but he got the feeling that she didn't like teaching there. She told him that people without the gift of sight, were jealous of those who had it and that they could believe in Magic, but they couldn't believe in Divination. Harry didn't know who Minerva was, but he already didn't like her and hoped that she wasn't still teaching there when he went to Hogwarts.

Auntie Sibyll kept a magic book that every day would record every single word she said and every night all the pages would go blank and it would start all over again. When Harry got better at reading she let him help her look through the book and look for any of her predictions.

She always gave him a piece of chocolate when he found one.

According to her, Harry was going to be a very special Wizard, so one day her book told her to go find the boy. She knew it was time to leave Hogwarts and come teach Harry, because if someone in his generation would have the gift of sight, it was probably going to be him!

There was a prophecy about him being the one to defeat an evil wizard and something about a power that the Dark Lord knows not. Auntie Sibyll was certain that it was Harry's psychic abilities, so she left that school to come and find him and personally teach him.

She taught him so many things – how to read the cards, palmistry, and how to throw the dice. Harry especially loved throwing the dice. He also learned to read tea leaves and the proper use of a crystal ball. Every Halloween his new auntie would give him a special gift. When he was five, she gave him his very own set of cards and dice. He'd thought today she would bring him a crystal ball, but instead she gave him his very own magical recording book. Harry hadn't made a prediction yet, that they knew of, but Auntie Sibyll said it was only a matter of time.

"What do you see in your cup tonight, Harry?"

"Two wiggly lines and an arrow."

"If you hold your cup in your proper hand which way does the arrow point?"

"That way towards the wall, so it points north!" Harry exclaimed.

"Omens pointing north are always a good sign. The wavy lines indicate change. So we can expect change, but in a good way. Last night you asked the cards how you were going to do on your Geography test today. How did you fare?"

"The card said I would do well and I did! I almost got full marks!"

"That's very good dear. What did you miss?"

"There was a question to identify a country and name an animal that lived there. I got Peru right, but the teacher had never heard of a Peruvian

Vipertooth is a dragon. Non-magical people don't think they exist and it's important that you don't talk about magical creatures to people who don't have magic. You must remember that in the future. How did your cousin do? I seem to recall that the cards said he wouldn't do well at all." Harry pouted.

"Harry, the Vipertooth is a dragon. Non-magical people don't think they exist and it's important that you don't talk about magical creatures to people who don't have magic. You must remember that in the future. How did your cousin do? I seem to recall that the cards said he wouldn't do well at all."

"He got caught cheating off of Piers' paper! They sent him to the office and everything! Aunt Petunia is really mad at him. I guess he shouldn't have made fun of my card readings, huh?"

The woman with large glasses looked back at him. "No Harry, mocking the powers is never a good thing."

Harry didn't bother to mention that he was pointing at Dudley when the teacher saw him cheating. In this case, the powers needed his help, but maybe that was the way it was meant to be, and Harry wasn't about to argue with the powers.

"Good day," Harry heard a woman's voice in the parlor. "I am here to take Mr. Potter shopping in Diagon Alley and introduce him to the Wizarding world."

Petunia walked up the stairs and opened the door to the room. "Sibyll, there's one of your kind down there. Will you please deal with her?"

Harry followed Sibyll into the hallway, but stayed at the top of the stairs as his aunt descended.

"I'm afraid that won't be necessary, Professor McGonagall. We have already purchased everything Harry will need two days ago."

"What are you doing here?" The Scotswoman barked in surprise.

Auntie Sibyll shrugged and answered plainly, "Where else would I be?"

"You live here?" Harry immediately doubted this woman's skills. She didn't seem very observant.

"Yes."

"Does Albus know?"

"I spend my time attempting to commune with the higher powers, not Albus Dumbledore."

"You're no blood relation to the Potters! Albus will most certainly hear about this! Do not think for one second that he will approve! I can only imagine what nonsense you have filled the boy's head with!"

"I think you should leave now, Minerva. Tell Albus Dumbledore whatever you wish, but if he is as powerful as you truly believe, he would already know that I live here."

Harry watched the angry woman disappear with a *crack*. Sibyll told him that it was called Apparition, but she wasn't very good at it.

That evening, Harry met Albus Dumbledore. Harry feared that this old wizard would make Auntie Sibyll leave. Instead, he changed his robes into regular clothes and invited everyone out to go bowling.

After notching a score of one hundred and fifty in the first game and losing to Uncle Vernon's two thirteen, the old man sighed and handed a ten pound note to Vernon, "Sadly, my many endeavors prevent me from working on my game as much as I'd like."

While they waited to bowl, Dumbledore asked Harry all sorts of questions. Harry did his best to answer. Most questions that dealt with Arithmancy, Numerology, Divination, Herbology, and Magical Creatures, Harry was certain he got right. He struggled with Charms, Potions, and Transfiguration.

After losing two more ten pound notes, the Headmaster sat down with Harry and his Auntie Sibyll at a table while Vernon, Petunia and Dudley ate pizza at another one.

"Would you like to learn magic at Hogwarts, Harry?"

"I've learned a lot from my Auntie. Can I have her teach me?"

The old man scratched his beard, "She's done a good job teaching you many subjects, but you do need a good foundation in all the disciplines taught to really make your mark on the world, Harry."

Harry knew that the powers said he would go to Hogwarts, but just because they said it didn't mean he had to like it.

"Alright sir, I'll go."

As Harry waited for the Patil sisters to be sorted, he rolled his four-sided dice once more. The answer was another two, but did it mean he was going to the second table which would be Ravenclaw or to where the second sister was sorted, to Gryffindor. Harry wasn't certain he wanted to go

to a place where Minerva McGonagall was in charge.

He should have consulted the cards. Dice have a tendency to be ambiguous.

The people murmured as the McGonagall woman said his name. She urged him forward towards the Hat on the stool.

"Go ahead and put me on, so that we can get through this." The talking hat said rather bored.

"How much exactly do you see when you're on someone's head, Mr. Hat?"

"I see anything I wish to see, for I am a thinking cap." It answered with a flourish.

"In that case, I can't put you on my head. There are prophecies and probably many other things in my head. It would be an offense to the powers that be if you were allowed to view them."

"Mr. Potter. Put the Sorting Hat on your head this instant!" McGonagall's tone left no room for an eleven year old to argue.

Of course, Harry was not the usual eleven-year old. He shook his head no. "Auntie Sibyll says offending the powers is wrong and I'm certain this will offend them."

The old woman leaned in very close, so that only Harry could hear her. "I do not care what that crazy bat has told you. You put that hat on right now, or so help me..."

"Is there a problem, Minerva?" Dumbledore glided up next to them.

"Potter doesn't want to put the Hat on. Apparently, Sibyll's influence."

"Ah yes, fear that any hidden prophecies might be disclosed."

Harry sighed in relief. At least the Headmaster understood.

"Well Hat, ask Mr. Potter three questions and make your decision based on his answers. Harry, please answer to the best of your abilities."

The artifact seemed lost in thought for a moment. "Fancy yourself a Seer, eh? Very well. Brave or foolish enough to stand your ground against McGonagall seems rather Gryffindor. Who will win the next Quidditch World Cup?"

Harry searched his mind for what Auntie had predicted. "I haven't made a prediction on that event yet, but my Auntie says the winner will have green in its colors."

"That narrows the field down to at least a dozen of the contenders." The artifact scoffed. "Question two, will Professor Quirrell last the entire year?"

"I'll have to ask my cards."

Chuckling, the Hat answered, "By all means."

The Headmaster was kind enough to point out the man in the turban. Harry felt a twinge of pain when the two locked eyes. He looked away, but he could still sense the feeling. Quickly he shuffled the cards and drew. Harry looked at the card – The Devil.

"I don't believe so. The Devil indicates lack of control over one's life."

"Interesting, but a fairly easy prediction to make, Potter, since no one has been able to hold the post since Merrythought. Question three – you have a galleon, a sickle, and a knut. In front of you are four students, one from each of the four houses and you need to hire them for a task. Who do you give the coins to and why?"

"What task am I hiring them for?"

"They're going to help you wrestle a Troll."

Harry stopped to think for a moment, "I'd give the galleon to the Slytherin, but only after we're done. The sickle to the Hufflepuff, and the knut to the Gryffindor."

"Why?"

"Based on house traits, the Slytherin would need the most convincing. The Hufflepuff would work the hardest and deserve something substantial for their effort, and the Gryffindor would charge right in anyway, so a knut is about right."

McGonagall snorted at the slight to her house and Harry knew exactly where the Hat was going to put him. The answer was obvious.

"Why nothing for the Ravenclaw?"

Harry smiled. "They'd help me because I'd be in their house already."

The Sorting Hat laughed, "You're an odd bird, Potter. Fortunately, I have a place for odd birds and those who know the answers before they are asked - Ravenclaw!"

"Class, you will be Transfiguring a matchstick into a needle. Yes, Mr. Potter?"

"Why?"

"Because that is today's lesson," she replied in a terse manner.

"No, I mean why would I need either a needle or a matchstick? It seems rather odd. I mean, I have a wand and if I wanted to light a fire, I'd conjure a flame. If my shirt needed sewing I could use a seamstress invocation. So why would I need a needle?" It amazed Harry that this woman was so mean to Auntie Sibyll, when apparently all Transfiguration consisted of was turning things he didn't need into other things that he didn't need. He sincerely doubted that he'd run into a situation where he'd need to turn a desk into a pig.

"Mr. Potter! That is not the point. This is an introductory lesson into the art of Transfiguration."

"Can we turn it into something different? Maybe a quill? We always seem to need those. I keep losing mine." Harry said casting a glance at Terry Boot. When Harry did a card reading for him, the Avatar he drew out of the deck was 'The Thief.' Harry was getting suspicious.

"Matchsticks into *needles*! You will need to replicate the pattern exactly as I have instructed." The woman's lips pursed and her next words looked almost painful coming from her mouth, "Yes, Mr. Potter?"

"If we need to exactly replicate the pattern wouldn't Transfiguration be more of a science rather than an art? Art is open to interpretation, whereas science is not."

"Two points from Ravenclaw for your cheek! Now begin!"

Angered Harry tried the spell and his matchstick gained a sort of silvery hue. He reminded himself that this was supposedly 'real' magic. Somehow, it was a bit lacking. Reaching into his book bag, he opened one of Mr. Lockhart's household charms books. Auntie had always told him what a great wizard Mr. Lockhart was. That's where the spell was. He quickly reread the passage and looked at his matchstick. The incantation was the Latin word for 'to write' and the wand movements were simple enough.

It cost Ravenclaw three more points, but Harry really needed a replacement quill.

"I challenge you to a duel! Tonight at midnight in the trophy room." Draco Malfoy hissed.

Eleven year old Harry Potter looked up at Slytherin boy and at his fellow Ravenclaws seated around him. He had been engrossed in a card reading when the boy approached with two others that rivaled Cousin Dudley in size. They were the same ones trio interrupted his meditation on the train with nonsense about blood superiority. The powers above do not care about blood when it comes to the pure art of Divination! "I'm sorry were you talking to me."

"You heard me Potter. Choose your second or be known as a coward."

"You should try meditating. It helps to clear the mind of anger. I would suggest counseling. You don't seem to be adjusting to school life well. Do you miss your family?"

"Don't mock me, Potter! We will duel tonight."

Harry quickly gathered his cards and shuffled them with practiced ease. Auntie Sibyll had given these to him for his fifth birthday. As a seeker of true knowledge, it was important for him to develop a relationship with his cards and dice. The more he was in tune with them, the clearer his answers would be.

"If that is what you truly wish, Draco. We can find out who wins right now. Sit and let the cards tell of the results, or continue standing, it matters not."

Several people around Harry groaned. It wasn't his fault that both the cards and his crystal ball had predicted that none of his housemates would finish as the top student in their year; they doubted his skills. Auntie had warned him how cruel the environment of Hogwarts could be to one gifted as he. "Our first card is the Trickster. That's never a good sign. Obviously, you do not come to me in good faith."

"Are you calling me a liar?" The young man sputtered.

"No. I am merely making an observation based on the card that fate has provided." Harry dealt the next four cards "A false battle? You obviously are not to be taken at your word. The tamed hound? That is certainly an odd card to turn up here. It doesn't make much sense. This next card symbolizes triumph and the final card is my Avatar in the deck. Well you can't get more certain than that! The cards indicate that you do not duel in good faith, but I will triumph regardless."

"I'll make you eat those cards after I beat you tonight."

"Why should I bother even coming?"

"What?" It was surprising that a boy with such a fair complexion could get so red. Surely that couldn't be healthy.

Harry was mystified at the Slytherin's misdirected anger. "I've already won. There is little point in showing up if the outcome is this certain. If you insist, I could roll the dice to verify the results, but the powers that be can become offended if you continue to ask the same question after they have provided such a clear answer. They may visit vengeance upon both you and me."

"Speak like a normal person, you git! You're just scared of me and trying to get out of being humiliated. I'll show everyone the fraud you really are!"

Harry shook his head and rolled the dice hoping that the spirits would not punish him for this disbeliever's arrogance. "Four of the five runes are aligned with me. I win again. Do you require further proof?" Even Dudley had a better grasp on these things!

"This is what I'll do to you!" Draco's hand swept the table knocking dice from the bowl and cards into the air. He snatched Harry's Avatar card into the air and held it in his hand beginning to crinkle it.

"What is going on here?" a tiny voice inquired.

"Professor Flitwick, Potter threatened me." Several of the voices protested Malfoy's obvious lie.

Harry breathed deeply trying to ignore his anger at the damage being done to his Avatar. "He's lying. He wanted to fight me in a duel tonight at midnight in the trophy room."

Flitwick's eyes narrowed looking intently at Draco. "Is that so?"

"Of course not, sir. I would never suggest dueling and certainly not after curfew."

With a blank expression, Harry reached into his bag and pulled out his magical ledger and handed it to his head of house, who recognized it and reread the last page. The charms master looked up at the boy already a head above him. "Mr. Malfoy. You will put that card back on the table now. Ten points from Slytherin for challenging a student to a duel. Ten points from Slytherin for conspiring to be out after curfew. Five points from Slytherin for damaging another student's possession and five more points for lying to a teacher. You will serve one detention with Mr. Filch for every ten points I have taken. Mr. Potter, five points to Ravenclaw for being prepared with this book and for being truthful."

Malfoy sputtered at Flitwick's rebuke until the Professor locked eyes with him again. "Are you waiting for more detentions, Mr. Malfoy? Should I Firecall your father and describe your behavior to him?"

The Slytherin student fled as Harry frantically tried to smooth the crinkled card. A few of the others sheepishly helped him recover the rest of his goods. Still even a few more smiled at him and congratulated him. It was much better than the usual odd looks he received, though Harry couldn't understand why? He guessed it was because he had won a duel.

"Excuse me. We need to leave."

Hermione Granger turned to see that bizarre Ravenclaw boy, Harry Potter inches away from her tear streaked face.

"This is a Girl's Water Closet!"

"Yes. But it is also an ominous place. According to the cards, it might be the tomb, the prison, or the battleground, and none of those places sound very good. The two faced man is plotting tonight. We should go. You can cry elsewhere if you'd like?" he offered helpfully.

"Leave me alone!" she protested as he dragged her out of the bathroom. For a smallish boy, he was quite strong and determined. He pulled her into dark area by the staircase and told her forcefully to be quiet. She'd never seen such intensity from anyone before and was stunned into silence.

Two minutes later, a troll lumbered into the hallway and Hermione sucked in a breath and fought the urge to scream. It stepped into the bathroom and Harry cast a Locking charm on the door and walked out to sit on the steps. She was so confused! Sniffing loudly, she walked out next to him. "You know the Locking charm already! We're not supposed to learn that until third year. I know the Unlocking charm."

"It seemed like a good spell to know. Every night, I go into the library and roll the dice. That tells me what row shelf and book to select. I then roll again and turn to that page. This spell was the one I found last night. It seems destiny knew I would need it today."

Hermione watched as the odd boy pulled his runic dice out of their pouch and pressed each one to his lips before returning them to the pouch. She supposed surviving a deadly curse could leave lasting brain damage. She wondered if Muggle medicine could do anything for him. Skeptically, she said, "I don't know if I believe in dice throwing."

"Did you believe in magic before you got your letter?"

"That's different!"

"No, it's not."

"Yes, it is!"

Albus Dumbledore was a worried man. It was two in the morning and many teachers were assembled in the staff room. He regretted returning James Potter's invisibility cloak to the lad. "Has anyone been able to locate Mr. Potter?"

Professor Flitwick looked awful. "The only thing I could find by his bedside was a piece of parchment next to his magical ledger. It had '*Save the Unicorn. Save the World.*' written on it. The ledger had already blanked itself for the day. Surely, he wouldn't have gone into the forest?"

Those in the room paled. The idea of a barely trained first year out alone hunting for something that was supposedly killing unicorns shocked them.

Snape snorted, "Here I was just beginning to believe that he wasn't like his worthless father."

This drew several angry glares from the rest of those assembled. Dumbledore acted. "Quickly, we must divide into search parties!"

"I reckon there's no need for that, Professor," Hagrid said butchering his words as always.

The others crowded around the window looking out onto the grounds. There in the moonlight was a centaur being followed by almost a dozen Unicorns.

Harry shifted feeling the strong arms carrying him. "Welcome back, youngling."

Harry blearily opened an eye. A bare-chested man was carrying him. "Hi, I'm Harry."

"I am Firenze. You've done a great thing tonight. The unicorn you saved brought me to you. Mars is no longer bright."

Harry realized the "man" carrying him was actually a centaur. He looked into the sky. "Mars still looks bright to me."

This caused Firenze to stop and scan the sky. "Mars seems obscured at the moment. Are you certain?"

Harry looked again before sheepishly taking his glasses off and cleaning them on his cloak. "Sorry, there was a smear on my glasses. You're right Mars does seem dark. I can't see Uranus, can you?"

"No, but I can smell it." Both laughed at a timeless Astronomy joke and the centaur continued, "You possess a great gift Harry. Use it well." Firenze said setting him on the ground and handing him the two wands and Harry's invisibility cloak.

Harry looked up at the centaur towering over him and back at the herd of unicorns escorting them. "I was thinking the owl I use really belongs to my Aunt Sibyll. Do you think one of the unicorns would be my familiar?"

"No, I do believe under most circumstances they only allow young maidens to approach them."

"Oh, darn. How about you? I bet no one's ever had a centaur for a familiar before. I'd rather tell jokes and talk about Astronomy and Astrology with you than pet a cat or a rat's hair."

The centaur guffawed. "It's a tempting offer and I would almost accept just to see the look on Bane's face, but I'm afraid I will have to decline. Something tells me that this will not be the last time our paths cross. Ah, good evening Albus, I believe this one has strayed from your herd?"

Harry moved slightly closer to the centaur, somewhat afraid of the Headmaster's wrath.

"Indeed, he has. Mr. Potter, what have you to say for yourself?"

Firenze interceded gesturing to a unicorn with a poultice wrapped around it, "Be lenient on him, Albus. He destroyed the monster that was killing the unicorns. That one there is only alive because of Harry's actions."

"What was it?"

Harry spoke up. "It was Professor Quirrell, sir. He was trying to drink the unicorn's blood. I used the disarming charm and got his wand from him, but he grabbed me while I was trying to cancel the spell on the unicorn. When he did, his hands started burning. He pulled his turban off and there was another face on the back of his head. It started screaming at me, I grabbed on again and he fell backwards onto the unicorn's horn. I'm real sorry. I didn't mean to hurt him."

The Headmaster's brow furrowed as several of the teachers murmured. "Harry what happened next?"

"His body just kind of dissolved into a mist and the mist had the face of the other man. He spoke to me and said that he would kill me like he did my parents and he flew right through me. I must have passed out then, because the next thing I know, Mr. Firenze is carrying me out of the woods."

Harry felt momentarily dizzy under his headmaster's gaze. It was a very strange feeling. He sometimes had that feeling around Professor Snape. Finally, Dumbledore spoke.

"Professor Flitwick, will you escort Mr. Potter to the Infirmary?"

Snape and McGonagall both said, "He should be expelled." It caused an awkward moment of silence where both looked at each other.

"No, I think not. It appears that young Harry has once again faced Lord Voldemort and prevailed. No doubt he was intending to take the stone. Severus, please go and verify that it is still safe."

Harry was about to say he was sorry to Professor Snape for thinking that he was the two faced man, but it occurred to Harry that even if he wasn't,

he was still an arse. He turned back to Firenze. "Thanks for bringing me back. Are you sure you don't want to stay and be my familiar?"

"No, perhaps another day." Firenze answered turning and leading the herd of unicorns back towards the forest.

Sighing, Harry watched his future familiar head back into the woods. It would take time to convince the centaur, but he would be here for several years. Professor Flitwick gently tugged his hand. Harry stopped when they got next to Dumbledore, "Sir, I'm awfully hungry. Could you spare a lemon drop?"

Harry really liked lemon drops.

The Inner Eye of Harry Potter The Trapped Boy

Chapter 2 – Year Two: The Trapped Boy

“Harry Potter must not return to Hogwarts!” Dobby didn’t understand why the witch and the boy wizard wouldn’t listen to him. It made him want to bludgeon himself with a croquet mallet.

“I’m afraid the powers have already spoken, little elf. All we know to this point is that there is a Trapped Boy who must be freed. If Harry does not go, it is unlikely the boy can be saved.” The woman said calmly.

Dobby had tried to block his mail and isolate him from his friends, but no one had written him. All he had to show for it was eight issues of The Quibbler, a Hogwarts Letter, and five catalogs. They rolled dice and turned over cards. Dobby tried using his magic to interfere, but he had no idea what to change the dice rolls to. This only resulted in predictions that Harry would be made Minister of Magic this year and that the Giant Squid would lead an insurgency against the Merfolk Intercontinental Liberation Front.

“Hogwarts will be very dangerous for you,” Dobby warned.

The great and wonderful Harry Potter looked at him. Dobby couldn’t let his master’s plot harm Harry Potter. “Trust me, Dobby. I don’t really want to go back either, but the choice is already made. Plus, I’m looking forward to finally meeting Gilderoy Lockhart. We heard over the wireless that he’s going to be teaching there this year. If Hogwarts is going to be a dangerous place, then we have the perfect defense teacher for the job. Are you okay? Do you need to sit down?”

The elf felt a twinge in his left eye. Others said that he didn’t eat right and that he was too eager to punish himself. They didn’t understand how hard it was to please his master and his family. Harry Potter was asking him to sit down and relax! He truly was a great wizard. His choice was obvious. He would have to stop Harry Potter from going to Hogwarts by any means necessary.

“Is anyone else here?” A young blonde asked. Several older students had stopped at his compartment and went elsewhere. He didn’t worry. If his trip was to be spent in meditative silence or trading stories with other students, it was out of his hands.

“No, make your self at home. First year at Hogwarts?”

“Yes, I miss daddy already. I hope he remembers to feed the moles.” She sat down and removed a paper from her handbag.

“Is that The Quibbler?”

“Yes,” she answered in a distant voice. She was doing the crossword puzzle upside down.

“Odd, I thought they’d gone out of business. They must have cancelled my subscription.”

“No, father hasn’t gone out of business in the last five months. We periodically do that to make the Rotfangs believe they’ve won to make them come out into the open.”

“Do you think the Rotfangs are behind my cancelled subscription?” Perhaps this was the danger the elf spoke of. Harry pondered the ramifications of a world cut off from vital news. They’d likely strike the wireless next.

“I’ll have to warn father. May I have your name so that we can get all your back issues delivered promptly by our Secret Owl Delivery Overnight Fast Flyers? The Rotfangs can’t possibly have gotten to those. They’re specially trained in avoidance techniques by daddy.”

“Harry Potter. Overnight you say?”

She leaned forward as recognition dawned on her. “Most of the time, but sometimes it’s up to a week. I’m Luna Lovegood. If the Rotfangs are trying to keep information from you it means they must be moving forward with the Periopocalypse!”

The train started rolling out of the station and the compartment door opened. Harry recognized Hermione Granger. She entered looking very frazzled. “Do you mind if I join you? The other compartments are filling up fast.”

He watched her stow her carry on bag and pull out her Transfiguration text book. Harry looked out at the quickly receding city of London and opted not to give his opinion of that subject. Next year would be Divination and Harry was confident that he could convince his auntie to come back to the school.

“Did you two get caught up in the delay? I do hope they can make up the time.”

“There was a delay? I hadn’t noticed,” Luna commented

“Yes, the portal to platform nine and three quarters stopped functioning. It was a terrible mess. People were lined up and it was attracting all kinds of attention from the Muggles. They had to send for a team of Oblivators. One of them almost bewitched my dad by mistake!”

“All signs pointed towards a bad day for travel,” Harry repeated. “That’s why my auntie brought me four hours early. We caught the Knight Bus, because my uncle was on the phone with the auto club and the police. Someone stole all four of his tires last night. Can you believe that?”

“How awful!” Hermione said.

“Like I said, a bad day for travel. Luna, when you’re done with your newspaper, may I borrow it? I want to see what replaced Auntie Sibyll’s column with.”

“Which one did she pen?”

“*Omens and Portents* under the name Mistress Cleo. She stopped sending them in when the papers stopped coming.”

“Oh, we’d assumed the worst and replaced her with a series about how to spot compulsion charms on your household plants. Maybe it wasn’t you the Rotfangs were trying to stop. I should owl daddy as soon as we get to Hogwarts.”

“Excuse me, but what exactly are Rotfangs?”

Harry listened as Luna explained the elements of the Rotfang conspiracy to the second year Gryffindor witch. He didn’t need a dice roll to know that this wouldn’t end well at all. After it was done, the girl shook her head and stood. She pulled down her carryon.

“I just remembered that I promised to sit with some friends. The two of you have a splendid trip.” With that Hermione Granger left their compartment. It was then that Harry recalled an important series of facts.

Hermione didn’t really have any friends and someone said her parents were Muggle dentists. He explained this to Luna and she immediately understood.

“The Rotfangs are active in the Muggle world. I’ll ask daddy if we should use her to spread misinformation.”

A few minutes later, the Patil twins entered.

“Easiest two galleons I’ve ever made.” The one in Ravenclaw robes said.

Her sister snatched one out of Padma’s hand, “You should give me one.”

“Why?”

“Because, I have to sleep in the same room with her all year. That’s why I came with you. Oh, hello, Harry. Do you mind if we join you?”

He smiled at the twins. Padma was a bit on the stern and bookish side. He probably wouldn’t have passed Transfiguration if it weren’t for her help. As if turning an animal into a pincushion or a mouse into a teacup had any use in the world. Who in their right mind would drink tea from a cup that used to be a mouse? How utterly disgusting! Parvati, he didn’t know very well, but she and her the other female Gryffindor second year, Lavender had been nice to him.

“So, have you made any predictions for the coming year?” Padma asked. She’d been skeptical right up until finals when Hermione Granger’s test scores put her ahead of both Padma and Terry Boot, validating his prediction that someone other than a Ravenclaw would finish as last year’s top student.

“I think the top student will be a Ravenclaw this year, if that’s what you’re interested in. There’s a ‘Trapped Boy’ that I need to be on the look out for and the numbers nineteen and eighty-one are occurring in my dice rolls far too often to be a coincidence.”

“You really know Divination?” Parvati asked with excitement in her voice. “I thought Padma was just pulling my leg.”

Harry smiled and repeated his auntie’s sage-like words, “Everyone knows Divination. Those moments when you feel like someone is watching you or the feeling when we know something bad is going to happen. The secret is to recognize what our feelings are trying to tell us and open our mind to the possibilities all around us.”

“Wow! I’m planning on taking it next year. Do you think you could give me some pointers?”

Harry was pleasantly surprised that someone was showing an interest spent much of the trip showing her the basics of tarot card reading. All three girls let him read their palms, though Padma was a bit reluctant. Things were looking up.

Dearest Harry,

Tonight, I threw the Fool, the Hierophant, Judgment, the Devil, and the Queen of Swords. Based on this, I believe there is the following. You

should be careful who you trust, even the teachers. There is at least one person you should trust more. Since we've identified who the Devil is already from last year, I recommend caution. Evil once again stalks the halls of Hogwarts, but my faith in you remains true. Tell Albus Dumbledore that I will come back to teach next year. Even with Gilderoy Lockhart there, I fear you will need all the help you can get.

Love,

Auntie S.

"Harry Potter, it's good to see you." Professor Lockhart gave him an award winning smile. He had a first year boy in Gryffindor robes with a camera next to him.

"Hello Professor." Harry said. This was a good omen. Auntie had just been writing about him and he turns up. He was definitely one to trust more.

"I was just about to have young Mr. Creevey here take a few photos of me up in the third floor trophy room, but you know what might make it even more amazing? If it's is Gilderoy Lockhart and Harry Potter in the same photograph. Now that would truly be a collector's item! Come along."

"Can you sign one for my Auntie? She's a big fan."

Lockhart's smile grew in intensity. "Sign them? Oh yes, I think we should sign lots of them."

From his perch on top of the Quidditch stands, Dobby guided the Bludger looking for the Great Harry Potter in the stands as the students ran for cover. Where was the most magnanimous and kindest wizard he had ever met? Had he used his powers and known that Dobby would try to force him from the school? Had he failed again?

Dobby ignored the shrieks of the crowd and yanked on his ears as hard as he could. How could he outsmart the wonderful Harry Potter? With a sad and defeated look on his tiny face, he summoned the Bludger up from the crowds and watched it grow from a small speck to something that filled his field of vision. He welcomed the pain.

"Bet you didn't predict what happened at the Quidditch match, Potter?" Draco Malfoy said looking very self important. "Did you scatter like the rest of the Cravenclaws?"

"Something happened at the match? I told them not to go, but they never listen." Harry said, hoping no one was injured. Later, he was relieved to find out that Madame Pomfrey and Hagrid were treating a brave house elf that stopped the rogue Bludger. Now, if he could only find information about the trapped boy.

"Trapped boy, you say. Surely, I'd know if there were any problems in this castle, Harry." Gilderoy Lockhart answered the students question while handing the lad another stack of photos to sign. He was right; they were the hottest thing on the shelves this year. His agent said they need many more for the Christmas season. They were literally flying off the shelves faster than they could be reprinted.

His hand itched after signing his next book contract. He did so hate Blood Quills. "Harry, do you like Roaming with Red Caps, or Venturing with Veelas for the title?"

"Well sir, when you solve the mystery of The Trapped Boy, you could call it Castles and Conundrums."

"Oh, I like that one, Harry. Keep me up to date on what you discover. Are you looking forward to the Halloween festivities next week?"

"No, I've been invited to a Deathday celebration for Sir Nicholas. It seems much more interesting. Besides, I think something bad is going to happen again."

Gilderoy got a gleam in his eye and picked out another quill, "What exactly happened last year, Harry."

"Well, I guess it started with a Troll." Harry said, but they were interrupted by Professor Sinastra entering.

"Hello, Professor Lockhart. Thank you for that lovely wine. I just haven't been able to get you out of my mind all evening and I've been trying to come up with a way to properly thank you," She said in a breathy voice while running her fingers through her hair and licking her lips. All Gilderoy could do was smile.

"Harry, that will be all for today. The professor and I are going to have a staff meeting. Do run along."

"Yes sir." Harry said leaving the room.

Halfway down the hallway Harry remembered that he'd left his new quill in the room. He didn't want to interfere with Professor Lockhart and Sinastra's staff meeting, so he pulled his invisibility cloak out of his bag and sneaked back into the room.

After a few seconds of watching, he decided he didn't need that quill so much anyway.

"Harry, you seem a bit off tonight. Are you okay?" Professor Sinastra asked rubbing her sore jaw. Normally, the boy was fascinated with the stars.

Tonight, he just kept staring in the corner.

"Are you sick?" She asked.

"No." He refused to look at her.

She knew the boy was a bit off, but this was bizarre, even by his standards. "Class, let's call it an early night. Stack your star charts up in a pile and back to your dorms. Mr. Potter, I'd like a word with you."

Several of the students snickered as they left. She knew that Harry wasn't well liked, but normally it didn't bother him. "Harry, I've noticed that you've been having some problems focusing all class. If there's something you'd like to talk about, I'm always willing to listen."

The Ravenclaw shuffled nervously. "I didn't mean to go back into the room. I'm sorry."

"Sorry about what? I'm afraid I don't understand."

"I went back into Professor Lockhart's room. I just wanted my quill back! I didn't see anything, honest!"

Professor Sinastra was a bit lost. "What are you talking about, Harry?"

"I saw your staff meeting with Professor Lockhart just after dinner. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to see. I won't tell anyone."

Now, she was really confused. "Harry, I haven't been anywhere near Professor Lockhart this evening."

"Okay." He nodded furiously, wanting to agree with her.

The Astronomy professor wracked her brain. She had dinner went back to her room to catch up on her grading before tonight's class. There was nothing out of the ordinary. Wait, there was a gift basket, wasn't there? And there was a bottle of wine. It was odd that she hadn't recalled that until just now.

"Harry, what was I doing with Professor Lockhart?" The boy's eyes went wide open. "It's okay, you can tell me. I promise I won't be mad at you."

"You were kissing his thing." He said flushed, embarrassed, and looking anywhere but at her.

"I was what!" She exclaimed, as the short boy recoiled like he'd been slapped. She didn't want to believe him, but the soreness in her jaw, the bruising on her knees, and her somewhat vague recollection of this evening all seemed to back up Harry's story. It was a story that she did not like one bit.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Harry. I'm not mad at you. In fact, you just earned Ravenclaw ten points for telling me something very, very important. Just don't ever tell anyone why I gave them to you, okay?"

"Okay."

"Good. Now, I'll walk you back to Ravenclaw tower and then I have to go take care of something."

Harry sat at the breakfast table next to Luna as the Headmaster stood up and cleared his throat. "Good morning students. It is with great regret that I must inform you that Professor Lockhart was involved in a magical mishap last night. Let us wish him a speedy recovery and all the best hopes that certain parts of his body can be reattached. Of course that means that we are again without a Defense Against the Dark Arts instructor. While I search for a replacement, the rest of the staff will be filling in on a rotating basis ... beginning with Professor Sinastra. She has recently demonstrated amazing proficiency with hexes and curses. I am positive that your education will not suffer. We will be having new textbooks delivered within the next two days."

With that, Dumbledore sat down while everyone began murmuring about the cursed position. Luna whispered in his ear, "I bet it was the Rotfangs. He is a junior member of the Defense Against the Dark Arts League. They'd want him out of the way."

Harry gulped and said, "I think you're right – definitely the Rotfangs." An owl dropped off a package in front of him. It wasn't Auntie Sibyll's writing. It did look very familiar.

Inside was his quill and five more, including Professor Lockhart's special contract quill. There was also a note.

Wasn't sure which one was yours, so here, have them all.

"I'm afraid you don't have a very long life line," Harry said looking at Sir Nicholas's palm. But you did have four kids right?"

"No, only three."

"That you know of!" The Fat Friar roared and most all the other ghosts assembled began laughing.

Harry found the ghosts very entertaining. He tried to make predictions about their past lives. Some, he got right. Others he wasn't even close. After all, Moaning Myrtle wasn't killed by a Dark Lord. Something happened to her while she was in the WC. Not many Dark Lords creeping

around a loo and unless Dudley's old stories about the toilet shark were spot on, it hardly seemed like an accurate prediction.

Stepping up to the Ravenclaw House Ghost, Harry asked, "Would you like for me to try and make some predictions?"

"No. I don't like speaking about my life."

"Oh, okay then." Harry said somewhat disappointed. He was about to move on to the Slytherin Ghost when Peeves entered through a wall and shouted "Mrs. Norris is a stiffy! Mrs. Norris is a stiffy!"

"Hey! Someone finally killed that thing off!" Someone shouted. They all floated through the walls and floors to see the commotion. Harry followed as best he could, only to discover that the cat was actually petrified and there was a cryptic message about the Chamber being opened – whatever that was.

"I don't think we're getting any closer to figuring out who The Trapped Boy is." Harry said as they hung their piece of paper on the student announcement board. "It could be either Colin or Justin and we are no closer to figuring out what twelve, nineteen, and eighty-one mean. The powers are trying to tell me something. I just don't know what it is!"

Luna shared his frustration. "With Hermione Granger paralyzed, we can rule out the Rotfangs, they'd never hurt one of their own, unless, of course, they became aware of our misinformation campaign. Either way I'm glad we made a new friend. It was interesting learning what he knew about the Chamber of Secrets. I'm not sure I believe Hagrid opened it up"

Harry nodded and said, "My card readings and the tea leaves don't point in Hagrid's direction and I'm beginning to think my dice are jinxed to only roll the same three numbers. I wished we could have talked to him before the Ministry took him away. With Dumbledore suspended, things look rather serious."

Harry stepped back from the announcement board to look at their notice.

Found – One small black book. Answers to the name Tom. Contact Harry Potter in Ravenclaw Tower.

"Well, at least we can look after the animals for Hagrid, except the chickens of course."

"Don't you like the chickens, Luna?"

"No, silly the Nargles killed them already. Hagrid believes a student killed them, but that's the way Nargles operate."

Something about chickens made Harry think. "Luna, have you ever eaten at a Chinese restaurant?"

"You're late. I expected you here twenty minutes ago."

The essence of Tom Riddle looked at the boy sitting at the base of Salazar's statue. He was in a meditative position with seven candles burning and a complicated pattern of cards and runic dice arranged around him. How had he gotten into the Chamber? Commanding the Weasley girl to lay down, Tom held her wand. It wouldn't be long now and soon he'd be able to slaughter the enigmatic Ravenclaw in front of him, who continued talking to him as if he was lecturing.

"The readings were all over the place this year - a darkness clouded my inner eye. The patterns were littered in false leads. I thought the 'Trapped Boy' was the Colin Creevy, but discarded that as soon as Justin was paralyzed as well. The red haired maiden, I was certain it was Susan Bones and now she thinks I like her. That doesn't bode well for the future."

"Foolish boy, you have no future. I command the Basilisk!" Tom hissed in Parseltounge for the serpent to come. Any second now Potter would be dead.

A full minute passed with no signs of the creature. Tom was confused, where was it?

"All along, the 'Trapped Boy' was you. I trusted you when I shouldn't have. There was a pattern to my dice rolls. More often than chance would allow the numbers Twelve, Nineteen, and Eighty-One would turn up. 1981, I originally connected with my defeat of Voldemort which was incorrect, but the longest time the Twelve vexed me."

"I am Lord Voldemort!" The boy should know the truth before he dies.

"Really, you look better than when you were the Two Faced Man. That's another correlation I hadn't made. In hindsight, it does make sense. The pattern of chaos becomes more certain."

"Your feeble powers and reliance on useless magic is no match for me." Tom Riddle grimaced. How could this absurd excuse for a wizard have ever defeated him at the height of his power? He tried summoning the great serpent again. This time the boy continued his lecture in Parseltongue.

"I guess that's why I can speak to snakes, too. Finally, I was speaking to Luna, the one who gave your book back to Ginevra. She mentioned something that reminded me of Chinese food. A little help from Padma and Moaning Myrtle and I put it all together. Twelve confirmed it was a

year, but I was looking at the wrong calendar. I should have been looking at the Chinese one.”

Tom blinked not wanting to listen to the boy. He still wasn't corporeal enough to cast a spell. Slowly, he asked, “What have you done?”

“1981 - The Year of the Cock. Come on out, Colonel Sanders.” Tom watched as a seven foot tall rooster stepped out from behind the massive statue. The quick head movements found Tom as the beady eyes regarded him. Tom realized that there was a compulsion on Potter's monster - rather advanced for a second year. For the first time Tom Riddle was afraid.

“Hagrid taught me how to control animals last year. I had to purchase the growth potion from a seventh year and I paid Ginevra's brothers to sneak down into Hogsmeade and get me a rooster. Looking back I think it was probably overkill, but the good Colonel is a rather impressive sight in combat. Your Basilisk never stood a chance. There is balance in the idea that a mighty serpent could be destroyed by a common farm animal, or in this case an uncommon one. When Luna told me who claimed the diary from me, I realized the red haired maiden wasn't Susan, but Ginevra Weasley and you had been lying to me all along.”

“Die! *Avada Kedavra!*” It was still too soon – only a feeble green sputtering emerged.

“You seem to like tormenting people with large animals. Let us see how you deal with mine, Tom Riddle.”

The giant chicken forced Tom back as the boy walked forward to dying girl and removed the diary from her robes and the keepsake blood quill from his pocket.

“My blood is bane to you, Lord Voldemort. I also learned that last year. Fortunately for me, Mr. Lockhart saves the day once more! I hope when he gets my letter, that he'll be proud. I'm going to write a message to you with this quill. You lived a life of lies and deceit. That is wrong. It reminds me that I must always be true to myself and my gifts. So, in your tome I shall write, 'I must not tell lies.' I'm certain this will hurt you more than it hurts me. Goodbye, Tom Riddle.”

The book erupted in flames as Harry finished the sentence and the young Ravenclaw watched as the screaming apparition in front of him faded against the power of his mother's sacrifice. The girl at his feet stirred.

“Harry? Harry Potter?” Ginny started to wake up and prayed that it was all a bad dream. When she saw that Harry and Luna had the book, she had to get it back before it started doing bad things to them too, but the moment she took hold of it, Tom took hold of her.

“Hello Ginevra. I brought you a chocolate bar. My visions did not tell me whether you liked them with or without nuts and it would offend the spirits to ask their advice on such a trivial matter, so I brought both kinds. Here, it will make you feel better.”

“I couldn't fight him. He was too strong.” Ginny stammered apologetically as she selected the one without nuts. Her illusions about the boy in front of her were shattered. He was even barmier than Luna! It was nothing like the stories, she was devastated.

Unaware of her plight, she watched Harry collect his equipment, the burnt remains of the diary, and then, he smiled at her. “There was no lasting harm. The others will recover. We should go. I don't need to throw the dice to know everyone is worried, but then again, I could never resist a good roll. This should tell me if it's truly over.”

She heard the tiny clatter of the hand carved runic dice in a bowl. “Twelve, Nineteen, and ... wait ... Eighty-Four this time! That is odd? Why would the Year of the Cock be followed by the Year of the Rat? This is a new pattern that warrants contemplation, but we should go. Would you like to walk or we can ride on the back of Colonel Sanders?”

Ginny didn't know what to think as Harry helped her onto the saddle on back of the chicken's back. She was certain that Hogwarts had probably seen many bizarre things, but two students emerging from a girl's bathroom riding a giant chicken probably ranks up there amongst the strangest.

She had dreamed of her knight in shining armor sweeping up in victory and riding off on a noble steed – an Abraxan or a Hippogriff. Not once had a monstrous chicken crossed her mind. Maybe she should stick to normal boys?

The Inner Eye of Harry Potter The Year of the Rat

Chapter 3 – The Year of the Rat

Harry looked down into the teacup. Suddenly, he didn't like tea anymore. "Auntie Sybil, I've got the Grim again. Are you sure you aren't charming the cup?"

His auntie took the cup from him, "I'm sure you're just imagining it. No one turns up the same tea reading three times in ..." Her voice trailed off looking into the cup. Harry could tell that she wanted to reassure him, but the image looked even more distinct than the previous two. The Grim was coming and from the looks of things it was getting closer.

"You don't have to sugarcoat it for me. I know the Grim means death." He did his best not to sound frightened. Of course, hitting puberty caused his voice to get a little unsteady at times - such as now. Still, Harry knew that he must not show fear. The powers above would not appreciate that.

Auntie Sybil smiled at him and offered him a biscuit. She said, "Harry, you and I know that the omen of death is not necessarily directed at you. It could be someone you know, barely know, or have not even met before now. Sometimes Death is change or the death of thoughts or ideals and not connected to an actual person - much the way that one of the pureblood families would look at Arthur Weasley's Muggle protection act as negatively impacting on their lifestyle. Why don't you go down to the park, or take a walk and clear your mind. When you come back, I'll break out my copy of Ominous Portents and we'll do some reading."

"I'm glad you're coming back to teach this year. I think things will be a lot safer." Harry asked eager to have a friendly face in that somewhat harsh environment.

"It's been several years and the months here with just Vernon and Petunia do make me a tad restless. Plus with a Grim stalking my protégé and Sirius Black on the loose, I don't think anything could keep me away from that castle this year."

Knowing that made Harry feel better. He'd considered not going this year after finding the second Grim. Smiling, he started out the bedroom before turning and saying, "Professor Sinistra will have to get used to being my second favorite teacher."

"I was getting worried about you! Where have you been?" Auntie Sybil was looking down at him rather sternly.

Harry reexamined his actions and felt ashamed. "I'm sorry, I should have come back, but I found out that the Grim was just a big black dog! I met one in the park today. We played a little fetch. I didn't see any tags on him. Do you think Aunt Petunia would let me keep him?"

"Well, you can't take a dog to Hogwarts. If I recall correctly, Hagrid is already watching that giant chicken of yours."

"Well...yeah, everyone was surprised when the growth potion never wore off. I know, the rules say that you can't have two familiars, but you could...if the powers sent him to me three times in one day, surely it's a sign!"

"Where is he now?"

"I've got him in the garage."

"Very well, Harry. Let's go out and see what your new friend looks like."

Harry led her out to the garage after making a quick stop at the refrigerator. Poor Blackie didn't look so hot, so he grabbed a package of luncheon meat for the dog to snack on.

"My word, isn't he a larger one. Definitely not a puppy...bit on the mangy side if you ask me."

Harry listened to his Auntie's assessment while opening the package and setting it on the ground. The dog pounced on the food like it hadn't eaten in a week!

"I've never been much of a dog owner, Harry, but for you, I'll take him to Hogwarts with me, but first let me get my wand and neuter him. I don't want to be blamed for every litter of puppies in Hogsmeade. Plus, it will make him more docile and easier to handle."

No sooner had the words left her mouth than the large black dog sprinted past the two of them and down the driveway like the fires of hell were chasing it.

Harry tried to put on his best face to mask his disappointment and said, "Okay, maybe he wasn't that important after all."

Remus Lupin hurried into the next train car with all the screaming. He couldn't believe the Dementors had boarded the train! The tattered length of cloak on the ground, shaking like a violent storm commanded his attention as he sprinted forward the words of the Patronus charm on his lips.

He stopped at the opening and was greeted by a most peculiar sight. The Dementor was trapped beneath a large steamer trunk, flailing helplessly, with its head encased in a block of ice. There was a boy sitting on top of the trunk shivering. Finally, a young blonde witch blanketed the creature in Patronus mist. A woman, who was clearly a member of the staff, clutched her purse and an empty bottle. Everyone looked a trifle pale.

"I'm Remus Lupin. What happened here?" He asked.

"Sibyll Trelawney. Would you be so kind as to get that creature off the train?" The witch answered with a question of her own. If this was the new Divination teacher that meant the boy was ... the spitting image of James Potter.

"That's very advanced magic, young lady," he said to the Ravenclaw.

"Really? It's taught to everyone in South America as soon as they get their wands to ward off Lethifolds. Daddy made sure I could do it when we went there."

He hadn't expected that. The Dementor continued to whack its head against the ground, trying to crack the icy helmet with little effect. Part of him was supposed to be afraid, but at the same time the scene was quite ludicrous. "Err, good show then. Remind me to give you some house points. So what exactly happened? How did the Dementor's head get a block of ice around it?"

"The awful thing came into our compartment and headed straight for Harry. The reduction charm on my trunk was negated by its presence and the trunk fell on the creature. I panicked and threw my drink on it and it started freezing. Fortunately for us, Miss Lovegood here knows the charm that affects them and I happened to have a supply of liquid on hand."

"Oh, I see." Remus was perplexed. Water should have frozen long before it got into the room. One of the few benefits to his condition was acute senses. He took a deep breath and got his answer. A quick look at the professor and the necks of the two empty bottles sticking out of her purse confirmed his suspicion. "Is that..."

"It calms my nerves. Never did like travel by rail. Now, if you please, the creature?"

"Quite right. Harry, you can get up now." Lupin removed the trunk and unceremoniously helped the unbalanced Dementor to its "feet." True, they were despicable, loathsome monsters, but Remus found this all rather comical. It wobbled like some child's toy as he pushed it out into the passageway and opened the door between this and the next car.

"Out you go. Nothing to see here. Let's move along." It seemed reluctant to take to the gliding-like flight these things were capable of, so he gave it a little push.

For a moment, like those old cartoons on the telly, it just floated there in the air. Then it plummeted, weighed down by the block of frozen alcohol around the head. His keen eyesight spotted the Dementor crashing through the suddenly frozen water. Seconds later, it bobbed to the surface, now encased bodily in a block of ice. Several others swooped down and made things worse in the river below. The icy prison was now much larger – a most unfortunate turn of events.

Remus often scratched his chin during awkward moments. James used to say, it was why he never could grow a beard. He saw the Dementors looking up at him and felt uncomfortable.

To no one in particular he said, "I should definitely go now."

Back inside, he addressed the trio, "I don't believe that Dementor will be giving you any more problems. I'll let the conductor know that we can be on our way – the sooner, the better."

Absently, he fished out some chocolate bars from his robes and dispensed them.

The young girl looked at it skeptically before asking, "You didn't get these from the Rotfangs did you?"

"Um no, if the wrapper is to be believed, they're from Hershey, Pennsylvania."

The young witch smiled and replied, "Oh good, Daddy says the colonies have the Rots firmly under control! Thank you very much, sir."

Remus nodded, feigning understanding. It was slightly disturbing to see that Harry waited until the witch deemed her chocolate good to eat. It reminded him of Minerva's comments a few days ago that the new Divination professor had an undo influence on James and Lily's child and he should try and find time to be a positive role model to the young wizard.

He owed his deceased friends that much.

"I can't teach the boy! Even with the Patil girl's help, he's going to fail this year. He excels at multiple choice exams, but since I've switched to essay and short answers, his grades have plummeted. It means he's been guessing all along!" Minerva McGonagall barked at the staff meeting. Her comments were directed at Albus Dumbledore, but her glare was firmly locked with the Divination Professor's eyes.

"Actually, it means that when faced with multiple answers to a possible question that he's been able to utilize his abilities to select the correct answer. It's rather odd that you switched your testing style. Was it just because of Harry? Especially strange when you proclaim my specialty is so much rubbish," the Divination Professor answered, barely looking up from her knitting.

Several in the staffroom chuckled. A few offered their own comments about Potter's ability to defy probability on multiple choice quizzes. Either way, the two instructors were on a collision course. Over the years, McGonagall proved that she wasn't above calling someone out. "You've ruined the boy! Ruined him, I say!"

"If the powers had not wanted me in Harry's life, I would not have sought him out. Please don't continue to blame a thirteen year old for your own shortcomings as an educator."

"While young Mr. Potter's academics are a fascinating subject for discussion, it has little bearing on the budget proposals for next year." Dumbledore interjected, hoping to head off a confrontation.

"I've always thought that magic is what surrounds us and that each and every witch and wizard must realize the potential within themselves to be a conduit for it. Do we guide the children on the path to enlightenment or are we frog marching them in lockstep to your desired destination?" Sibyll answered with accusations with her own.

Albus swallowed. That wasn't going to go over well. Minerva was already getting her hackles up. "You were a miserable student, Sibyll! You have the gall to say that Potter's development as a wizard is my fault! How dare you?"

Trelawney sat straight up. "From my perspective things here haven't changed since I left. If anything, they've become more stagnant. Do this! Say that! Mix this together! Don't you dare do that! Where's the freedom to learn, Professor McGonagall? Where's the joy of learning?"

"I don't believe providing the students 'joy' was in the job description," Snape interjected.

"Ah yes, Professor Snape. I remember you bragging that your experiments as a student were what led you to being selected as the youngest Potion Master in the last two centuries. Now, I hear that you accept no deviations from your instructions. Would you have been able to pass your own class under these circumstances?"

Dumbledore twinkling eye twitched slightly. He knew Severus Snape wanted to be drawn in to the verbal sparring. The man had a weakness when it came to young Harry. Albus hoped that wouldn't be a problem in the future.

With a trademark sneer, the Potions Master replied, "I seldom encounter a student with any real potential. Most of them are accidents waiting to happen. As for Potter, he's on a path to mediocrity. If you harbor any dreams of him sitting for NEWTs in my class, then I do believe you need to have your crystal ball checked for cracks."

"Mediocrity?" Sibyll sputtered, "Perhaps you spend too much time sniffing your cauldron scrapings. I only agreed to come back to try and help Harry and protect him when it is clear the lot of you cannot! I suppose you'll be as useful as all of you were against the Basilisk last year. Do I even need to mention his first year?"

Both McGonagall and Snape were red faced and leaning forward. This did not bode well at all. Dumbledore cleared his throat and said, "Ah yes, wonderfully spirited debate is the foundation of any good school, but I'm afraid we should move on."

Dumbledore faked a smile and desperately twinkled his eyes. "Discovering new and better ways of helping the students, including young Harry, is an admirable goal, but once again not part of the business at hand. To avoid a descent into chaos, let's let Harry's head of house have the final word. Filius, what do you have to say about Harry's progress?"

"He does well enough in Charms. Not surprisingly, he has top marks in Divination. Good marks in Astronomy, History, and Magical Creatures. His Defense, Transfigurations, and Potions could use some work. Overall, he's scoring lower than all the students in my house, but still in the top half of the year."

Remus Lupin spoke up, "I've been spending some time with the lad. I tested him in private with the boggart."

"What was his fear?" Snape asked, perhaps with a bit too much sudden interest.

"A broken crystal ball, blank cards, and shattered dice. I was concerned that a life-sized version of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named would pop out."

Sibyll frowned and said, "He's worried that when he needs them the most, his powers will fail him. Probably the influence of the very people in this room."

The accusation hung in the air for a moment before Remus said, "We're trying to learn the Patronus Charm, but honestly, he wants to hear about his parents and I have a hard time saying no to him."

"Which reinforces how useless you really are. Several of my students could also use extra defense tutoring. Shall I send them to you as well, or is this a special program just for the Potter boy?"

"Severus, "Dumbledore warned. "Very well, I can see this is going nowhere. Remus, please continue to work with Harry. If he is performing acceptably in Potions, I will leave that to your judgment, Severus. As for Transfiguration, send him to me, Minerva. Perhaps a different approach might work for Mister Potter. Now, if we can get back to next year's budgets."

"You wanted to see me, sir."

"Yes, Harry. Come sit down."

Harry did as he was instructed. He'd drawn The Sage when Auntie told him that he was to see the Headmaster. The smiling old man offered Harry a lemon drop, which he gladly accepted.

"I'm told you're having a spot of trouble with Transfiguration. Would you like to talk about it?"

Quite honestly, Harry would rather have a fungal infection. "I'll work harder, sir."

"Always good to hear, but I was thinking that we might try a different approach. You're going to spend a few hours a week with me and, though I haven't taught in several years, let's see if I still have that old magic – pardon the pun."

Despite himself, Harry chuckled, as the Headmaster continued, "According to the syllabus, you're studying Rollins' theories on small object Transfiguration. How about we recap and I'll try to help you gain a better understanding?"

Thirty minutes later, Harry had learned more about Transfiguration than he had in perhaps the entire year. It just furthered his opinion that Professor McGonagall wasn't all that good. Instead of boring lecture and repetition with wand movements, the Headmaster constantly spoke while his wand was in motion demonstrating, telling stories of when he found himself in a situation that he had to apply the theory.

Dumbledore was telling a particularly interesting story about a friend from his childhood named "Gelly" and an unusual situation where they found themselves swimming in a lake and someone stole their clothes from the shore. They were forced to make whatever clothes they could out of the shrubbery.

"And that, Harry, is why you must always be careful about your selection of base material – or as I like to say, poison ivy does not make good underwear."

Before Harry could reply, the Head Boy burst into Dumbledore's office. "Headmaster! Headmaster! The Fat Ladies painting! It's been damaged!"

"I'm afraid we're done for the night Harry. I must go sort this out. See you again next week."

Harry made it back to Ravenclaw tower just in time to find out that there was some impromptu sleeping party in the Great Hall. One thing was certain; things were never dull around the castle.

"Professor Snape?"

Snape looked up from the mind numbing tedium of grading essays to find the Potter boy looking at him. "What do you want?"

"I've made a prediction and I believe it involves you." The boy was wary.

"I don't have time for this foolishness."

"The snake, the wolf, and the dog circle each other. When the three intersect, the fate of the fourth shall be decided. They will suffer, pain, humiliation, and guilt."

He smacked his hands on the table. "I'm supposed to make something out of your gibberish."

Potter's face darkened and for a moment it reminded Snape of an older and decidedly less harmless Potter. "Make of it what you will, I'm simply delivering a warning and assuming you are the snake. I'm going to warn Mr. Lupin next."

"So, your Aunt told you about him being a werewolf against Dumbledore's wishes?"

"He's a werewolf? I just assumed he's the wolf because of his name being Remus Lupin. Wow! What horrible karma to have that name and end up being turned into a werewolf. Talk about bad luck!"

Snape suddenly felt a nasty itch on his backside, and it was spreading. The oath! Dumbledore made him swear not to directly tell any student about Lupin's condition unless they were in immediate danger. He shifted uncomfortably in his chair at the sudden pain.

"Get out of my office!"

The brat stood there for a moment before turning and leaving, giving Snape one last pitying look. When the door closed, Snape rummaged through his cabinets for some healing balm and began slathering it on the red welts to no avail. He'd have to have Dumbledore release him from the oath before it would stop irritating him. It was at that moment Severus Snape remembered that Dumbledore had been called to the Ministry for the evening and wouldn't be back until morning.

The whelp would suffer for this! Snape would make certain of that. Furious, he cursed aloud, "Why do Dumbledore's oaths always involve my arse!"

A few of the paintings in the room guffawed.

Harry wasn't allowed out of the castle much. Auntie Sibyll had confiscated his invisibility cloak after the first time he'd been caught using it to take a turn around the school grounds. It was one of the reasons he liked the newly-promoted Professor Hagrid's Care of Magical Creatures class. It was the only time he could get out and see Colonel Sanders.

"You look troubled, sir." Harry said tossing an engorged kernel of corn to his familiar.

"Ya don't have ta call me sir, Harry. I'm still just plain old Hagrid. But yeah, I'm worried about what they're going ta do ta poor Buckbeak."

"Buckbeak? What's that all about?"

"Unless I can stop it, they're gonna have him killed on account of him injuring Draco Malfoy. Little Miss Granger is trying to come up with a defense for it, but I reckon they'll do it anyway just to save his pride."

Harry vaguely recalled something about Draco posturing in front of the Gryffindors after Dean Thomas had successfully ridden a hippogriff, and the blond Slytherin got hurt. Harry didn't particularly like Malfoy, especially after that incident in their first year. Lucius Malfoy had been behind the diary plot of the second year.

Looking over at the shackled creature, Harry figured he ought to do something about it.

"Why exactly did you drag me down here?" Hermione Granger asked. Out of boredom and mostly since Parvati was in detention, Lavender followed along when Harry asked Hermione to meet him outside of the entrance to the kitchens.

"You've never been down to the kitchens before?" Harry didn't even bother with waiting for the answer. Instead, he led the two girls down the narrow steps and past the silencing charm that kept all the noise confined to this area.

Harry found the chaotic actions of the House Elves to be an enjoyable way to relax sometimes. It was the very definition of organized chaos.

"They have House Elves in Hogwarts!" Granger exclaimed.

He almost commented that for someone at the top of the class for academics, she was a little sparse in the cupboard when it came to common sense.

"Of course the do, Hermione," Lavender Brown said. "How do you think our food gets made and our rooms cleaned?"

"But it's slavery? They're thinking beings, not animals!"

"Let's not wander off topic," Harry replied. "You want to save Buckbeak, right?"

"What on Earth does this have to do with Buckbeak?"

"Dobby!"

The elf dropped his pan, containing someone's dinner and ran over to them. "The great and powerful Harry Potter is calling on poor little Dobby!"

Harry made a note not to have any fish tonight. "Yes. Hermione and Lavender, this is Dobby. Dobby was the elf that stopped that rogue bludger last year. He used to work for the Malfoys, but there was a bit of a dust up between Mr. Malfoy and the Headmaster at the end of the year and now Dobby is a castle elf." Harry gave them as few details as possible before turning to the elf. "Dobby, your old master is up to no good. He's going to make the Ministry kill a hippogriff. I'm betting there are a lot of things you can tell us about Mr. Malfoy and what he keeps at his house."

The elf's eyes grew impossibly large, "Oh no! Dobby cannot betray old master. It is not allowed."

The wheels in Harry's head turned. "Were there any things you weren't allowed to touch?"

"Dobby was burnt with hot pokers after he used Master's hair potions. Dobby's hair is the envy of all the castle elves."

Lavender tilted her head sideways. "You don't have any hair."

Dobby started to pull the Hogwarts towel he wore like a robe open. Harry's quick action stopped the elf.

"Never mind! Dobby! We don't need to see that ... ever! I'm probably asking the wrong question. Were there any places in the house that you weren't allowed to clean?"

"Oh yes! There was the chamber under the trapdoor in the drawing room. Dobby was never to go down there and the little room behind the bookshelf in the master bedroom. Dobby was punished for cleaning it once..."

Harry smiled and nodded to the pair of Gryffindor witches. "Thank you, Dobby. I think that's everything we need."

"Dobby is always happy to help the wonderfully magnanimous Harry Potter!"

Climbing the steps, Harry said to Lavender, "I'm sorry about your rabbit."

The blonde witch replied, "I'm amazed Professor Trelawney predicted it! She said my aura indicated loss and the next day, Binky's gone."

Hermione Granger spoke up, "Maybe you can use your powers of Divination to find Ron Weasley's rat. He keeps saying that my cat ate it."

It was the first time this year Harry had heard someone mention a rat. He filed it away and wondered if it was significant. "Now, let's use a school owl to send Draco's father a little warning."

"We're going to blackmail him?" Granger said folding her arms.

Harry shrugged and replied. "Normally, I wouldn't do this, but I happen to know he was behind the diary incident last year."

"He was?" Hermione had spent weeks paralyzed by the Basilisk, nearly died, and, much to her horror, had lost her top student ranking as a result.

"Yes, so I'm a firm believer in what goes around comes around. Sometimes things just need some extra help going around."

"I'll write the letter," she said with a slightly scary smile on her face. It made Harry wonder if there was really anything to that theory Luna had about Hermione being connected to a Rotfang conspiracy.

Dear Lucius Malfoy,

Bad things will happen to you if the hippogriff known as Buckbeak is executed. There's a good chance that the Aurors will discover what is in that little room behind the bookshelf in the master bedroom amongst other things.

A friend

"My brother and I have been talking ..."

"Actually, I do believe I was doing the talking ..."

"Are you certain? I thought I was the one talking."

"Quite possibly, but I'm fairly certain I was talking as well."

Harry did his best to follow the banter of Fred and George Weasley. Their antics were well known throughout the castle. They circled him so he had a hard time following which one was speaking.

"A right sly one, this one is, wouldn't you say, Fred?"

"Indeed brother. Didn't you hear a rumor that he was behind that hippogriff getting freed? Rather resourceful if you asked me."

"What can I do for you two?"

"Well, we heard you were confined to the castle and thought that was a poor show on their part. We might happen to know the locations of a few secret passageways and would be willing to part with them, in return for the occasional use of a certain invisibility cloak you're rumored to possess."

"My auntie confiscated it."

"Yes, we'd heard that and it does sound bad. Well look at it this way Harry. When something is confiscated, it really means that it's being borrowed for a period of time. Obviously, your aunt intends to return it at a later date and you know what they say about time ... that there's no time like the present."

"They also say time's a wasting, dear brother."

"All too true my not-so better half. There's a good chance something can become un-borrowed and perhaps even returned before it is noticed. When she confiscated it, she meant for you not to be using it. Since we would be using it, and not you, I don't see where the harm is in that, do you?"

Harry frowned. "If you can get it, you can borrow it. The powers that be will either allow your success, or conspire against you."

The twins looked at each other like Harry had challenged them. "Ah, but young Mr. Potter, we have something of an edge over even a seer."

They unfurled a map and whispered something to it. Harry was very surprised when names began appearing on the map and moving around. It showed Auntie Sibyll was in the faculty lounge.

"As you can see, it will be a simple matter for us to retrieve your cloak and the powers that be are nowhere to be found. So you see, oh gifted one, even such powers as yours can be overcome."

Harry fought back a smile. Perhaps they should have checked the surrounding area first. "If you say so. But I wouldn't be so certain. The powers work in mysterious ways."

"Surely, you jest."

Professor Lupin's voice interrupted, "I believe his given name is Harry and not Shirley."

The Weasley brothers tried in vain to hide the parchment, again whispering to it, but the Defense instructor held his hand out for it.

By the time they gave it to him, the image of the castle had faded.

"Well, it seems to be a gag gift of some kind. How does it activate?"

"We don't know, sir," they answered in unison.

"Well, perhaps I'll try this. Oh my! That was a rude comment from someone called Mr. Prongs. Okay, how about this? A Mr. Padfoot that time and a Mr. Wormtail that time."

"There's another one called Mr. Moony," one of the brothers said. "We show it to people and let it insult them. It's just a prank paper, sir. That's all."

"Oh, okay. But it seems to me that it would be smaller if it was simply that. Perhaps you should try reading it now." He said handing it back to the nearest twin.

"Mr. Moony says that he's on to you and that you should return his map. That doesn't make any sense."

Lupin smiled, "Unless of course you knew that my nickname in school happened to be Mr. Moony."

Harry enjoyed watching the expressions on their face. It was never good to taunt the powers. They should have known better.

The Defense instructor tapped the map in the boy's hands and said, "I solemnly swear that I am up to no good. Normally, I'd be inclined to let you two keep this, but in the light of current events, I think it's best that the map goes with me. Harry, I was just coming to get you. Professor Trelawney says that she has made a prediction and wants your assistance interpreting it. It was something about a servant returning to the master. So, if you'll follow me."

A Weasley spoke up, "One second sir, if you are Mr. Moony, who are the others?"

"Mr. Prongs was none other than James Potter, Mr. Padfoot was Sirius Black, and Mr. Wormtail was the late Peter Pettigrew." He paused and his expression darkened as he said, "With Black an escaped prisoner and a threat to the people in this castle, it is only fitting that something he made will have a hand in his undoing."

Harry noticed Fred and George nudging each other. Lupin did as well, "Do you two have something to say?"

"I thought Peter Pettigrew was that kid in Ron's year – kind of pudgy and barmy about plants."

"I think that's Neville Longbottom," Harry answered.

"Well we used to see Peter Pettigrew on the map all the time in the third year Gryffindor dorms."

"Impossible!" Lupin said. "Peter died. If his ghost was haunting the castle he surely would have come see me."

Lupin knelt down and spread the map, scanning it very intently. Harry also looked. His eyes were drawn to the gamekeeper's hut.

Three names were there. Rubeus Hagrid, Sirius Black, and Peter Pettigrew.

Lupin bolted upright and started running for the exit.

Harry and the twins regarded each other as one of them snatched the map back up and stuffed it inside his vest. "What do you think we should do?" The other asked.

His face was devoid of humor, "Sirius Black helped kill my parents. I'm going down there to make sure he gets his!"

"What's all this about?" Snape said coming around the corner.

"Sirius Black is in Hagrid's hut right now! Mr. Lupin's gone off to capture him."

"More like help him!" Snape said moving faster than they had ever seen him.

The three boys waited just long enough for him to round the corner before following.

Peter Pettigrew was having a bad week and was in fear for his life. He'd been caught by Hagrid in the vegetable garden and put into a cage to be given back to Ron Weasley. The cage didn't worry Peter, except that he couldn't transform.

But it wasn't his inability to transform that had him so frightened. Hagrid had also found another animal and brought it in to his hut to feed the creature.

It was a dog – a very big, black dog and it was staring at him and showing teeth.

The only thing keeping Black from transforming was that he had no wand and Rubeus Hagrid was in the room, but that could change any minute.

Hagrid swilled whiskey from a jug, "You're looking a little lean there, doggy! Here, let me getcha something." Peter cringed at the sound of bloody meat slapping on a plate. When the plate was set down in front of Sirius, the animagus made a point of picking the morsel up and holding it in his mouth and staring at Peter before violently ripping into it.

No, it can't end like this!

"I was plannin' to go down to Hogsmeade today," Hagrid said to no one in particular, "but I reckon there'll be plenty of time for that after the school year ends. I think I'll have me a little snack and a nap instead." He collapsed into a large, battered recliner that looked like it was scavenged from a muggle landfill with his jug of alcohol and a plate with four turkey drumsticks on it.

Peter considered his options and started using his tiny paws to work on the cage's latch. Black growled at him, which in turn caused Hagrid's boarhound, Fang, to growl at the animagus. There was a light thud on the windowsill and Peter looked on in horror at that bloody Granger girl's cat. It meowed at Black who gave a curt bark back in reply. The presence of Crookshanks sent Fang into further hysterics.

Bloody hell! Black and the cat are working together.

"Aw, give it a rest, Fang! Can't a bloke get a little peace and quiet?" Hagrid chucked a half-eaten drumstick at the barking animal as Crookshanks edged closer to Peter's cage.

In answer to that question, the door burst open and there was Remus Lupin brandishing his wand. He immediately sent a stunner at the grim, who dived behind an end table for cover.

"Lupin! 'Ave you lost your bloomin' mind!"

Remus was too busy casting a variety of spells at the dog and his banisher actually struck Hagrid's leg spinning his massive frame around like the least graceful ballerina in history.

That knocked Hagrid into the table and Peter's cage teetered before crashing to the floor. The rat animagus tried to clear his head. The cage was broken in several places. His first instinct was to run, but the sudden appearance of a furry orange claw swiping at him. He dodged to the backside oblivious to the mayhem occurring in the rest of the room.

Then, it was Crookshank's turn to dodge as Fang leapt after it. His tiny ears winced at the screams of the cat, the growls from the dogs, Hagrid's curses, and Lupin's spells! Knowing it was foolish to stay, Peter scurried out of the broken cage. Fang was intercepted by Sirius Black, and the two canines rolled onto the ground.

But that means...

Peter sprinted for the cover of the destroyed recliner as a claw struck him hard, knocking him sideways. Pain shot up his back leg and he knew he was bleeding, but didn't have time to worry about that at the moment. He burrowed into the cushions, desperately trying to escape the feline. The cat was right after him with its claws digging through the whiskey soaked foam.

"Quit destroying my things!" Peter heard Hagrid below and the floor shook with heavy steps.

"The dog! The dog is Black!" Lupin screams were muffled by Peter's getting under what used to be the bottom of the chair and was now a twisted mass of wood, fabric, and metal.

Peter risked a quick peek. Hagrid had Lupin pinned to the wall. Fang and Black were nipping at each other, but Black's frame shuddered and the angry dog became enraged man, kicking his way through the hound and lunging at Peter.

"I'm going to kill you Wormtail!"

Peter was already moving when Black upended the remains of the chair. He sprinted through a broken lampshade and glanced back at the maniac chasing him.

I just need a way out! One stinking break!

“Die, Black!”

Peter was shocked that his salvation came at the wand of none other than Severus Snape. The cutting curse opened up a nasty wound on Black’s back. The escapee ducked the blasting curse which opened a gaping hole in the wall. Several screams from the animals in the pens behind that wall could be heard.

That way’s too high off the ground. I’ll get out the window!

Peter started that way, leaping from bookshelf to chair and from chair to the table next to the windowsill, but was cut off by a haggard looking cat with a few blood spatters on its fur. He turned and ran off the table, but it was too fast. It pounced on him. He’d run out of options and shifted back into his human form.

The injured Black was screaming at him, so Peter did the first thing he could think of. He threw the wretched cat at the man’s face. Hagrid was wrestling with both Lupin and Snape. The Slytherin was still firing off spells and now the room was on fire and filling with smoke. The huge man tossed both men aside like rag dolls and turned towards Sirius and him.

Three other forms appeared at the doorframe. Peter recognized Fred and George Weasley. It was the third that for some reason made Peter pause. Ron hadn’t brought him to too many classes with Harry Potter. He’d snuck into the Ravenclaw tower to see him a few times. It was shocking how much the boy looked like James. It was just plain eerie.

It was almost like the boy was looking right through him with Lily’s eyes.

What am I doing? I have to get out of here!

Hagrid grabbed Sirius and was already moving his way much more quickly than Peter ever believed possible. Snape’s wand was coming up, but the two twins and Lupin cursed the man. The spell Snape was casting misfired and the entire hut started to collapse.

Peter pushed his way through the collapsing boards around the hole and transformed.

That’ll stop them! I’m safe! All I need to do is get to the woods and I can Apparate.

“Colonel Sanders! Stop him!” Potter yelled from the other side of the chaos.

For a second he savored the freedom sprinting across the dirt strewn with the chunks of corn and half-eaten melons. It was only then that Peter looked for the inhabitant of the cage. It was a hulking monstrous chicken; nearly the size of Hagrid and its beak was coming right for

Uninjured, Harry sat on the edge of the bed in the infirmary watching his headmaster unravel the events at Hagrid’s destroyed hut. Madame Pomfrey moved like a hummingbird amongst a floral bed, flitting from one patient to the next.

“You two boys are lucky to have such thick heads.”

“Not quite ...”

“Thick enough ...”

“If you ...”

“Ask me ...” The twins answered. Both had concussions and bruises. One was nursing a broken collarbone.

Harry had remained in the doorframe because he’d kept thinking about earthquakes and one of the best places to be during an earthquake was a doorframe ... or a tub, but there had been too much going on to get to Hagrid’s bathtub and, more importantly, Harry wasn’t sure what he’d find in Hagrid’s bathtub, or for that matter if the man actually bathed.

Clearly the doorframe was where he was supposed to be.

Sirius Black was both magically and physically restrained. The curse he’d been hit with was still oozing blood. There was talk of sending someone to St. Mungo’s to find out what the correct counter-curse was from Professor Snape. Snape was in horrible condition. One of the twins had hit him with a slug spitter and the other a bowel loosener. Those spells had combined with whatever he’d been trying to cast and Harry was having a hard time not smiling at the disgusting aftermath. The twins were already joking about how to reverse engineer the “slug pooper” and all the possible applications of such a spell, especially when Madame Pomfrey and Dumbledore’s efforts could not reverse it.

“But Dumbledore, Sirius Black is an escaped criminal. He should be kissed. Immediately!”

“Cornelius, under any other circumstance, I would agree with you, but the fact that we recovered this body by forcing young Harry’s giant chicken to regurgitate it. The deceased bears a striking resemblance to Peter Pettigrew and also possesses a Dark Mark on his arm. We always assumed that Sirius Black was never marked because he was Lord Voldemort’s secret agent, but I now have cause to doubt this.”

“I agree with the Headmaster,” Remus Lupin said limping badly passed Hagrid’s bandaged and snoring form. “I acted too rashly and should have questioned Pettigrew’s presence, but it was clear that Sirius was trying to kill him.”

“That’s one thing that is definite, Mr. Lupin. You did act rashly. One of my conditions for allowing Dumbledore and the Board of Governors to hire

you was that you kept your nose clean. This flies in the face of that.”

“If my resignation is asked for, I will gladly give it.” The man answered leaning on a cane. “Either way, there should be an inquiry before any action is taken. I’d never dreamed that Peter was still alive all this time, but he was. The man was clearly a rat animagus, as was Peter. He is missing the same finger that belonged to Peter and most importantly, unless Peter was guilty, he had no reason to stay in hiding all these years. He was thought of as a hero. Minister Bagnold posthumously awarded him an Order of Merlin.”

Fudge scratched his chin and said, “Fine, fine. We’ll question Black under Veritaserum and find out if he and this one were co-conspirators. I’ll have a trio of Aurors watching him until we can question him.”

Dumbledore nodded. “Do what you think is necessary, Minister. Neither myself or Sirius Black will be leaving this room until I’ve had a chance to question him.”

The Minister of Magic left, motioning for the pair of disappointed Dementors waiting at the entrance to the infirmary to follow him.

“Harry, I do believe we need to make your chicken the official mascot of Hogwarts,” Dumbledore said with a slight smile on his face. “It is a remarkable and unlikely force for good.”

“How is Colonel Sanders?”

“Your chicken’s wounds are minor. I sent Percy Weasley to gather some of the NEWT Care of Magical Creatures students to tend to it and the other injured animals. Do not fear. They are in good hands, although Miss Granger’s cat has most assuredly spent at least one of its nine lives.”

Harry started to reply, but another voice interrupted. “*You killed me! You bastards killed me!*”

They turned and looked at the ethereal twin of the corpse on the bed.

“Ah, Mr. Pettigrew I presume.”

“*You’ll all pay for this! I’ll find The Master. I’ll tell him everything I know about this place!*”

“You got exactly what you deserved, Peter!” Lupin fumed. “How could you betray James and Lily like that? You sold out to the Death Eaters!”

“*Go to hell, Lupin. I did it for the money, a whole lot of money in fact. I was going to live like a prince! Then the little brat here destroys the master and suddenly there wasn’t anyone willing to pay up. They were all too busy trying to buy their way out of prison. So, I hid. I listened and now I’ll go tell the Dark Lord everything I know about this place. I’ve been in this castle for years, Dumbledore. I know things about it that even you can’t possibly know. The Master will reward me. He’ll make me a newbody. You’ll see!*”

Harry spoke up, “Good luck finding your master. Last I heard he was in Canada.”

“*Nice try whelp, just like your father, but I heard Albania is the place to be. Isn’t that what you said to the boy last year, Dumbledore? Your office has quite a few little holes in the walls.*”

With a wave of his wand, Dumbledore banished Pettigrew’s ghost through the wall. “I’ll alert the ghosts in the castle. Should Mr. Pettigrew attempt to return to the grounds, he will be dealt with. How are you holding up, Harry?”

“I could use a lemon drop.”

The man reached into the pocket of his robes and fished out a pair. Harry barely noticed the privacy spell going up from the man’s wand. “I was just thinking the same thing. Assuming Sirius Black is innocent, he is your godfather. He will doubtless want to be involved in your life, but for the sake of the blood protections you must continue to live at your aunt’s house.”

“I understand sir.”

“Good. You have a remarkable ability, Harry. The fact that you came through that entire fight unscathed is most impressive. Continue to hone and refine it.”

“What do we do now, sir?”

“We persevere. I will ponder what damage Peter can possibly cause and you, young man, will continue to be the most fascinating student to walk these halls in centuries.”

The Inner Eye of Harry Potter The Reluctant Champion

The Inner Eye of Harry Potter

Chapter 4: The Reluctant Champion

"What do you make of, 'Three will be expected, but four will arrive.?'?" Harry asked his Auntie Sibyll gesturing to the line in his book of predictions.

His mentor's brow furrowed and her eyes winked behind her overly large glasses. "I'm not certain, Harry. A strict interpretation of it means there will be an unexpected result."

"An unexpected result? That never happens at school," Harry answered as dryly as possible.

She smiled at him and said, "If you look at from a numerological standpoint, three is a prime number and is seen as powerful. Four is the first non-prime number, but is symbolic of balance. On the surface, three becoming four sounds like a good thing. I suspect the powers are being intentionally vague with you, Harry. Be patient and allow the answer to come to you in good time."

Admittedly, Harry had tried to force several things since the events of last year. The ghost of Peter Pettigrew had vowed revenge and was actively seeking Voldemort. His lack of discipline had likely angered the powers and they were only giving him vague responses. The most ominous one being, "Beware the man that walks as a woman." The powers also cautioned him that he'd need the "Moon's gifts."

"You ever think about playing Quidditch? Your dad was rather good." Sirius said as they prepared to go to the World Cup.

"Not really sir," Harry didn't really care for the game. "There'd be too much temptation to use my abilities and that would be an affront to the greater powers."

"James would really be impressed at how you stay in character. You're pranking the whole wizarding world, Harry. Don't ever stop!"

Harry wondered how those long years surrounded by Dementors had affected his newly acquired godfather. The man seemed to believe that Harry was acting and nothing Harry said or did would convince the man otherwise. It made him wary of going with Sirius unless they were accompanied by someone else.

Fortunately, Remus Lupin would be meeting them at the World Cup. The man was kind and respectful of Harry's talents. Thanks to him, Harry could make the Patronus mist and he had plenty of stories about Harry's mum and dad. Even with the werewolf's presence, Harry was certain this whole trip was going to end badly. All the signs pointed toward it.

Dumbledore had just finished his welcoming speech, trying to ease everyone's concern about the Death Eaters at the Quidditch World Cup. Everyone was excited about The Triwizard Tournament and the chance to be a champion to represent the school.

"What's wrong, Harry?" Padma Patil asked. They had an odd friendship. She liked her logic and puzzles, but listened to what he said and accepted him on his word. It was far more than most of his house offered. Often, Harry had the sneaking suspicion that she was using him as a test subject and planning to do a research paper on him. He pictured himself chained up and Padma running test on him in a secret laboratory she had stashed away in the castle.

Lately, that idea had begun to intrigue Harry. This, his Auntie explained, was the result of Harry entering puberty. She said he would begin to be attracted to young witches and talked to Harry at length. He politely refused her offer to provide diagrams and other paraphernalia. It was the most awkward conversation they'd ever had.

He'd accidentally walked in on Cousin Dudley's "demonstration." Sadly, the owl he sent to Gilderoy Lockhart, requesting if he could possibly remove that particular memory was answered by his publicist. She informed Harry that Mr. Lockhart had left England to travel extensively and would be unavailable for the foreseeable future.

"Harry, you're doing it again." Padma sounded slightly irritated at his drifting off in thought.

"Sorry, I'm just trying to figure out if it ties in to a prediction I made this summer. If so, there's going to be four champions. I wonder why?" He finished by repeating the prediction to her.

Padma answered, "Well, I guess anything is possible. We'll just have to see how it turns out."

He gently tapped the blonde girl next to him, so Luna would know that Dumbledore was finished speaking.

“What did I miss?” Luna asked removing the enchanted butterbeer corks from her ears. She’d told Harry about Dumbledore’s alleged ties to the Heliopaths and vowed not to listen to anything the man said all year.

“There’s going to be a contest. We’ll be hosting visitors from two other schools.” Padma summarized.

Luna smiled, “How nice. I’ll have to let Daddy know. Harry, don’t forget to get extra hard boiled eggs tomorrow at breakfast.”

Harry saw Padma rolling her eyes. “Luna, you’re not going to try that chicken egg ritual in the common room again this year? It’s not going to work.”

“No, we still have to wait a few more months before I can try that again. Venus is completely in the wrong position. Harry and I are going out to feed the Giant Squid after breakfast. It likes breaking the shells with its suction cups after we engorge them.” The third year student paused and giggled. “It’s cracking good fun, right Harry?”

Harry nodded, “Rather friendly creature. The lake was one of the few places I was allowed to go last year with the Dementors and the ruckus over my godfather. Would you like to come with us, Padma?”

“Perhaps another time. I like sleeping in.”

Harry knew there was an ongoing debate inside Ravenclaw tower concerning which one of them was more “barmy.” Luna was oblivious and thanks to Padma running interference for the young third year, she was left in her own private world. He often wondered how much “interference” Padma was running for him. The powers had seen fit to put her in his life and he was grateful for her assistance.

All said and done, they were a most odd trio.

“When Professor Moody sleeps at night, do you think his eye sees through his eyelid?”

Padma blinked several times. She did that a lot when Harry or Luna said something completely off the wall. “I don’t know, Harry. Maybe it comes out? Perhaps you should ask him.” Quickly, she added, “Just make sure you stay after class to do that. It doesn’t have anything to do with the course, after all.”

“Too right you are,” he replied and she could see that he was already moving on to the next random thought in his mind. Both he and Luna Lovegood were oddly insightful – nothing like her dingbat of a sister and her vapid circle of friends. Being around the two was a true mental exercise. Their thought processes were so vastly different when compared to the rest of the student body. Luna’s approach to solving a problem was so very random and Padma could actually picture the thousand monkeys inside the girl’s head scribbling away in their notebooks. Harry was different. He would start on a logical path and sometimes even complete the journey. More often than not, he would suddenly diverge, inspired by the powers he believed in and arrive at a solution no one, except for he, could predict.

It was fascinating to watch, but sometimes a bit of a gamble to be his partner during Transfiguration classes. Having seen many of his visions come true, Padma seriously wondered whether he manifested accidental magic that would fulfill his soothsaying almost like a magical “lucky streak.” Perhaps during their sixth year, he’d allow her to privately examine him. She stopped that line of thought and hid a blush with a cough while scolding herself to not think such thoughts.

For the most part, she studied them, looking for patterns of behavior and enjoyed the increased cerebral acuteness that came to her from being around her two friends.

The only troubling thing was over the summer, when Vati had her friends over, Padma would be listening to their conversation and found herself thinking and almost saying things that either Harry or Luna might say.

It made her wonder if they were “contagious” and if she should closely control how much time she spent around the duo this year.

These thoughts circled her mind as she watched Dumbledore gesture for Cedric Diggory to follow the other two selected champions into the staff room behind the Great Hall. When the Goblet of Fire relit for a fourth time, she heard Harry’s sharp intake of breath and saw him grab his knee and lean forward.

He has very soft looking hands. Funny, I’ve never thought about that before.

She halted that line of thought and focused on the fact that he said there would be four champions instead of three. If the “improbability field,” as she liked to call it, around him was powerful enough to affect magical items, he must be an extremely powerful wizard.

“Harry Potter!?!” The Headmaster sputtered in near disbelief.

She looked at Harry and he was paler than usual. People all around him were turning and glaring at him.

“Bugger! I didn’t ...” he started.

Padma took that opportunity to take his hand and give it a gentle squeeze. “I know you didn’t.” Privately, she added, “*on purpose* .”

Harry responded with a grateful smile and let go of her hand. He looked a frightful, despondent mess as he walked slowly toward Albus

Dumbledore. People were already whispering and Padma felt her protective hackles coming up. She knew he'd put up a good show and act like it didn't bother him, but she suspected that he'd be spending a lot of time hiding from the rest of the students this year, either with his aunt or all the other places he goes with that invisibility cloak of his.

She looked at her hand and recalled that she was correct. His hands were very soft.

There's room for two under that cloak as I recall. No, he's not boyfriend material just yet. Maybe next year.

"Where did Harry go?" Luna asked, once again removing her makeshift ear plugs.

"It's a long story." She replied with a sigh.

"Do you have a plan for your dragon?" The disguised Barty Crouch, Junior asked.

"What dragon, sir?"

"Don't play dumb with me, boy. I'm in no mood. The one you're going to face tomorrow, lad. You don't have to pretend with me, Potter. I'd be surprised if there weren't ten people in this entire castle that don't know about the four dragons in the forest."

The boy continued playing innocent. "I know that I have to retrieve something, but that's all my crystal ball would tell me. I'm afraid I don't know anything about a dragon."

This kid killed the Dark Lord? It's hard to believe.

"Yes, you've got to get a fake egg from the dragon's nest. You've got to find something that you're good at and have an edge. So tell me, what are you good at, lad?"

Potter began listing off all sorts of useless things, but finished, "I didn't want to do too much scrying, because it would be cheating."

"Listen up," he said, trying to picture what the real Alastor Moody would do when faced with such abject stupidity. "It's a given that everyone cheats in this contest. Do you think Diggory's knack for Transfiguration is a cheat? The French girl is as much a fairy princess as I am a football player. Don't even get me started on Krum! They're playing to their strengths. If throwing dice and reading tea leaves gives you an advantage, then you'd be daft not to use it!"

It was beginning to make his head hurt. There was a knock on the door to his office and he used his wand to open it. An older woman stood there looking perturbed. She looked down at the boy, frowned, and asked, "Not giving any coaching, Moody, are you?"

"Not a bit, *Bertha*. Potter was just leaving."

They waited for the boy to leave and he cast a privacy ward and spelled the door shut.

"What news do you have, Crouch?" The pseudo witch asked.

"That boy doesn't stand a chance tomorrow, Pettigrew. I told him to trust in his *skills*. Even if he does have a gift, that'd hardly help him against a dragon." Crouch wondered exactly what the Dark Lord had done or taught to Peter Pettigrew that allowed him to claim Bertha Jorkins' body. It was probably best that he never knew.

"Good," the possessed witch answered. "I'd like nothing better to see him burnt to a crisp."

"The Master won't be pleased. He still wants the boy for his ritual."

"That bastard killed me, Crouch! He deserves to die!"

"Don't get your knickers in a twist," Barty said enjoying the irony. "He doesn't have a clue about what to do with a dragon. Potter's a mediocre spellcaster at best. He spends too much time staring into tea leaves."

The ghost possessing his father's assistant fought and regained control of the body he was possessing. After a moment he shrugged and said, "I'm stuck in this bint's body! If I just up and kill the little shit, the Dark Lord would leave me as a ghost me in retribution, but if he dies all on his own, well that's just a shame now isn't it?"

"I agree in principle, Pettigrew. The Master is too fixated on Potter. Virtually anyone would be suitable for the ritual, but he insists on the boy. When the boy's gone, our lord will come to his senses and rise again. We will be able to get out of this forsaken place and be first in his new inner circle."

"The sooner we leave the better, Crouch."

Albus Dumbledore worried for young Harry Potter and curious at the same time. The young wizard didn't seem too concerned with the prospect of stealing something from a Dragon's nest and he was facing a particularly foul-tempered Horntail.

The fourth year Ravenclaw stood at the entrance to the pen. He was taking a moment to stare at the enormous beast. Privately, he wondered

whether Harry's seer talents would aid him here. After looking at the creature for a full minute, he turned and walked to the exit and out of the enclosure.

While Dumbledore blinked his eyes, Bagman and the crowd were in a full uproar. Reluctantly, he stood and headed for the tent. Upon his arrival, things were out of control.

"The boy weasels his way into the tournament and then does this! It is an outrage!"

"Calm down, Igor," Albus barked. "I'm certain answers will be forthcoming. Harry, would you come here. Facing a dragon is understandably frightening, but I'm wondering why you did not attempt a single spell."

"I didn't have to sir," the young wizard answered.

"Do tell. Why not?"

"I took the egg from Professor McGonagall's office last night. I already have my clue for the next challenge."

If Albus thought the shouts in the room were loud before, they were nothing compared to the next minute.

"He's a cheater!"

"Potter should be disqualified!"

"Unbelievable!"

"Enough! Why would you do such a thing, Harry?"

The boy shrugged, "Professor Moody convinced me that using my talents wasn't cheating, so I did. After divining the locations of the eggs, I checked both my cards and my runic dice and received a favorable outcome. So, I went ahead and retrieved the egg from Professor McGonagall's office."

"How did you know that you had to retrieve an egg or where they were located?"

"Afraid I let that slip when I was speaking to the lad, Albus. Please accept my apologies." Alastor hobbled in and joined the conversation.

"I see. Alastor, you and I will have words on this matter later. Now Harry, how did you discern where the eggs were being held?"

"I did a card reading and the avatar of the 'faithless servant' came up. So I went to the kitchen and asked Dobby the house elf. He didn't know, but the female elf he's good friends with cleans Professor McGonagall's office."

"So, you broke in to a teacher's office?" Snape growled. "Here I thought you weren't like your arrogant father."

"No sir," Harry said hastily. "Professor McGonagall always says that she has an open door policy if we need help. Since she doesn't actually have a door, I assumed that meant her office was always open to students."

"Then why were there four eggs there this morning?" The Headmaster asked.

"I figured out the clue inside it after a few minutes and took it back."

"What?" Several voices asked in unison.

"It wasn't that hard," Harry replied.

Albus could tell the child was nervous being at the center of all this attention. "Harry, if you would whisper how you know this into my ear, I'd like to confirm that you've broken the riddle."

He bent down to let the boy whisper. Harry said, "I've been learning to speak some Mermish. The Giant Squid understands that and Swahili, but we don't have any books on Swahili here."

With the eyes of the crowd on him, Albus nodded and patted Harry on the head. "Harry has indeed broken the riddle of the egg."

"Well, I'm giving him a zero!" Karkaroff growled. Madame Maxime also seemed irate.

"Ludo, Barty" Dumbledore said to the other officials, "you know the rules of the tournament better than anyone else. What do they say about this? Does this constitute cheating?"

He hoped whatever penalty levied wouldn't be too harsh on the lad. The men consulted the tome. After ten minutes of flipping through pages, both looked up with incredulous looks on their face. "Nothing," Bagman said. "If he was caught cheating before his challenge, we could penalize him, fine him, even flog him publically. But we had to have caught him in the act. Instead, he admitted it after he left the field. We did not catch him; therefore Mr. Potter has successfully completed the challenge in the fastest recorded time."

Albus jumped in before the shouts could start again. "Harry, I will also have to award you zero points, but as you are not suffering any ill effects, the contract you have entered into with the Goblet of Fire does not appear to be breached. Additionally, I will speak to the elves to ensure that they cannot be used to provide that kind of assistance again."

Harry shrugged, "I never entered this contest to start with and I don't particularly care where I am in the standings."

Barty Crouch also joined in with the rest of the zeroes. Strangely enough, Ludo Bagman gave Harry the full ten points. Of course, given Ludo's own dubious history, it wasn't a complete surprise.

"Sir?"

"Yes, Harry."

"Could I still have the egg? Luna said she really wanted to see it."

"I don't see any harm in that."

Harry smiled and added it to the bag with the tiny model of the Hungarian Horntail in it.

"Hello."

Lavender turned and was startled to see Harry Potter standing inches away from her. The Ravenclaw wizard had a way of just turning up and scaring the woolies out of people.

"I have meditated, consulted the cards, dice and my crystal ball. Will you be my date for the Yule Ball? Hmmm, I hadn't intended for that to sound like a rhyme."

Lavender was almost speechless. "Why me?"

"You appreciate the subtleties of the Inner Eye. Unlike many, you know that magic is not all about wand movements, precise chanting, and which potions ingredients to mix together. That is how the mundane access the power that surrounds us. You are one of the few that can rise above those limitations. There is an aura of greatness about you."

No one had ever said something like that to her before. They usually just told her how pretty she was. Flattered, Lavender blushed and stammered a thank you before saying, "Excuse me for a moment."

Harry watched the girl walk over to Seamus and tell him that he would have to find another date to the ball. He'd have to watch out for Finnegan for a time. His aura was most unstable.

The choices for a dater to the Yule Ball were narrowed down to three; Luna, Parvati, and Lavender.

With his housemate Luna, the cards predicted hand holding and a kiss goodnight. It sounded like a good deal of fun. Luna didn't really want to go to the dance after she learned that the third years and below couldn't go. She had her heart set on taking Colonel Sanders and doing the "Chicken Dance." Padma and Harry both tried to explain that it wasn't quite what Luna thought it was.

Although, the costume she had started to make for the giant rooster did look impressive.

Parvati, the tea leaves boldly predicted that there would be heavy petting, but an underlying resentment from Padma, which was odd because she was going with someone else already. Still, she was one of the few people friendly to him and Harry didn't want to risk her companionship. His choice was made much easier with the crystal ball's prediction of naked frolicking with Lavender. Harry had to admit, Lavender certainly had a lovely ... aura.

He knew that he was considered odd by the other students, the staff, the elves and perhaps even the castle itself - only the squid and the centaurs really seemed to understand, but he was also a 14 year old boy and naked frolicking sure looked like a lot of fun.

Harry listened to the rules of this challenge. Lavender was his hostage. That explained the bad omens he'd been seeing all day.

The others leapt into the water and Harry paced nervously on the platform. He was just about to get started when a breathless Parvati Patil ran up to him.

"Harry! Lavender's down there!"

"Um, they did just tell us that. Don't worry. I'm going to get her in a minute," he answered wondering if Granger was using her roommates to practice the Confundus charm.

The judges were walking over to them as Parvati said, "Yes, I know, but what will happen when you get back here with her."

Even the with the ability to commune with the powers above and below, Harry was still somewhat mystified at the workings of the female mind. "What are you getting at Parvati?"

"Is there a problem, Harry?" Dumbledore asked.

"I'm not certain, sir. Parvati seems to believe there's a problem with Lavender."

"Miss Brown? She was quite enthusiastic about being the thing you would miss the most for this task."

"Harry," Parvati said in a tone that clearly meant that he should know this already, "when you come back up here, everyone's going to take pictures of her."

"Lavender likes getting her picture taken." Harry was clearly confused.

"Her hair is going to be drenched and she's going to look a frightful mess! Mark my words - she's not going to be happy!"

"Mr. Potter," Dumbledore interrupted, "Shouldn't you be a bit more concerned about the task? The clock is ticking, after all."

Harry just realized that his task had suddenly become much harder. An unhappy Lavender Brown didn't fit into Harry's plans. The Headmaster didn't understand - he'd never dated Lavender Brown. If there was going to be any naked frolicking for the next month, Harry needed to solve this problem before he returned to the surface with her. "How are your glamours, Vati? Are they good enough to take care of this?"

The Gryffindor looked slightly panicked. "I don't know. I'm not sure."

"I know the disillusionment charm. I'll put it on her when I break the surface of the water. How fast can you go and get my broom?"

"Fifteen minutes. What are you going to do?"

"I'll get her out of here before the charm wears off. We'll be back at the tower and she can get cleaned up."

"Mr. Potter, We have to actually see your hostage. I'm afraid that your plan won't be allowed."

Karkaroff sneered, making Harry wonder if he and Snape were related. "Dumbledore, your champion is making excuses. He should be disqualified."

The judges started arguing, but Harry scratched his chin and looked inside for inspiration. "I'm ready to start."

With a sigh, he walked to the edge of the platform. Using his wand, he summoned a piece of driftwood and transfigured it into a small boat. He placed the boat into the water and cast a strong engorging charm on it, making the toy boat about fifteen feet in length. At the same time, he made a net out of a length of rope and conjured a bucket. With the using his wand, he cast the net out and summoned it back and removed the fish that were squirming in them. Dropping the three fish inside into a nearby bucket, he cast again and again until he had a dozen fish sloshing around in the container.

The crowd, no stranger to the bizarre behavior of the fourth champion watched the spectacle and murmured. Finally, Harry climbed into the water and held his wand to his lips. He whistled and used a charm to amplify the sound of it to a piercing shriek forcing many to cover their ears.

Thirty seconds passed before the surface of the water broke and the head of the Giant Squid rose. The massive eye and its pool of darkness looked down at Harry as a pair of tentacles snaked around the boat Harry made. The rubbery extremities lifted it out of the water and crushed it in a display of raw power. It then waved the rest of the tentacles in the air in amusement.

"Hi!" Harry said screaming in Mermish. "I thought you'd like that. I know it's not the Durmstrang ship, but it's the best I could come up with it. We can do a bigger one later. Listen, I need to go down to the Merfolk's village, pick up someone and bring them right back. Will twelve fish cover it?"

A giant tentacle slapped the water once and then flicked in the air conveying a sense of annoyance.

"Okay, I'll catch another twelve when we get back, or we can work on your egg juggling later. It's up to you. That's my best offer. If it's all the same to you, I'll just hold my breath and we can do this in under a minute."

A tentacle slithered around the bucket and pulled it off the platform. A second one wrapped around Harry and deposited him on top of the squid's head. Several people in the crowd were already complaining, chief among them being Igor Karkaroff. Harry wasn't sure why. The other champions could have taken the time to befriend the Giant Squid, but they didn't. How was that his problem?

This is just like the egg thing all over again! This really is a stupid contest.

Harry whispered his final instructions while tapping the rubbery flesh of the Giant Squid to tell it that he was ready. His friend accelerated across the surface, forcing Harry to hold on for dear life and creating a massive wake behind it. It stopped above the Merfolk village and hesitated.

His talents weren't needed to know what was going to happen next. The Squid enjoyed a good fast dive. He let go halfway down and let the pull of the mammoth creature drag him the rest of the way. It was every bit as fun as that first drop at an amusement park and one of Harry's favorite ways to pass a free afternoon. Within a minute, they were in the village and the swarm of singing Merfolk were screaming and fleeing the scene.

Lavender floated motionless along with a young French girl, his housemate, Cho Chang, and surprisingly enough, Hermione Granger. He picked up a discarded spear and swam to her. It took longer than Harry hoped for the blade to cut through the rope as Harry started to feel the burning in his lungs.

He swam back to the Squid and held on to it along with Lavender. It was kind of an awkward arrangement, which made him rather glad that his girlfriend was in a magical sleep. The Squid made a few noises to indicate that the Merfolk were returning in force and that they should leave before the task became life threatening. The Merfolk didn't exactly like his friend, but his friend really enjoyed "pranking" them. That included the giant cloud of sticky ink the creature was releasing at that moment. Harry cringed realizing that all the other hostages and about twenty Merfolk were going to be ink stained.

Surfacing just before Harry's lungs burst, the Giant Squid propelled them back toward the spectators. As they approached the platforms, the squid smacked four of its tentacles in the water sending a wave of bitterly cold water into all the people.

"Why did the Giant Squid do that, Harry?" Lavender asked having come out of the spell placed on her. "I'd ask why we're on the Giant Squid, but I'm not sure I want to know the answer to that one." She knew he had an odd way of making entrances. There was one story about him and Ginny Weasley riding through the second floor hallways on Harry's pet chicken. Though, she supposed the Squid was a step up from a chicken, so she wasn't that terribly upset.

"Well, I could've used a drying charm on your hair, but I'm not very good at those, and I know you'll want to style it before we take pictures. The only other solution was to make sure everyone else had wet hair too. This should buy us a couple of minutes. Here use my wand."

The Gryffindor girl felt her hair and realized the embarrassment he'd just saved her from.

"You're the best boyfriend ever, Harry! I mean it!"

After taking a few pictures with Lavender, she'd run off to talk with Parvati and her other friends leaving him to finish up catching the fish he owed the Giant Squid. He elected to go back to the docks and get away from the angry crowd. A voice interrupted his work. "You've done well thus far, Harry. I am impressed."

Harry looked at the familiar face towering over him, "Hello, Firenze. How have you been?"

The centaur nodded. "I am well. The unicorns send their greetings and gather in your name. They have long memories and will not soon forget your heroism."

"Well, send them my greetings when you next speak to them. Did you come out to watch the task? I don't seem to be doing so well. Still, I guess twenty-three points is a step up from ten."

Firenze guffawed, "Most humans think in linear terms, young one. They see this contest in terms of the power you manifest not the actual power you choose not to use. It is clearly their loss, not yours."

"I keep telling them that I didn't enter and they don't believe me," Harry said reeling in the net and levitating the fish into the bucket.

"I'm worried for you, Harry. I sense powerful forces are aligned against you. One of our wisest mares, had a vision when observing Mars, Phobus, and Deimos. Your enemy is symbolized by Mars. He has two followers circling him and they will strike at you first."

"I suppose it's a good thing my enemy isn't Jupiter. It's up to sixty-three moons. That would be a serious problem."

"Indeed, even the smallest of satellites have an effect on the greater planets as a whole. Jupiter, to our herds is symbolic of your Ministry and the recent impacts caused by the comet over the summer give us pause to consider that a great upheaval is coming in your government. It remains to see what will happen when the patterns of chaos conclude."

"Your observations confirm things I have predicted and my Auntie as well. She had one a few weeks ago that said, 'Enemies flee from the claws and the screams.' I was half-expecting an attack today."

"I'm afraid I have to leave, Harry. May your sight serve you well."

"Sure you're not interested in the familiar position?" Harry asked.

"I would never stand between a boy and his chicken. It just wouldn't be right."

"Then I'll have to settle for being your friend. May the clouds never obscure your skies."

"What do you think we should do?" Barty Crouch, Junior asked his partner in crime.

Still possessing the body of Bertha Jorkins, Peter answered, "The Master wants us to turn the cup into a Portkey and make certain that Potter is the one to win."

"It's too risky. We'd have to put an imperius curse on one or more contestants and still hope that Potter doesn't get bogged down in the maze, or caught by the creatures. Plus the others have a huge head start because of Potter's poor performance. Plus, he's too unpredictable. He may not even try to get the blasted cup."

"You're right," Peter said. "How about we snatch the little bugger and put a polyjuiced imposter under the imperius curse in as his substitute? They'll never know he's gone until it's too late!"

Barty smiled and evil grin and said, "I like that plan much better."

Harry struggled to open his eyes and remember what had happened. He wasn't at Hogwarts, unless someone had hidden a graveyard at the castle. The last thing he recalled was walking with Luna. She said she had to go to the water closet and handed him her bag of stuff to hold. Professor Moody and that woman who was Mr. Crouch's assistant came toward him and said they were going to escort him to the site of the third task immediately.

They were on the path to Hogsmeade when he realized they were heading the wrong way. He probably could have dodged the stunner from Professor Moody, but the woman held him firmly in place and pulled a necklace out of her robes. It must have been a Portkey.

Here I thought the woman who walks like a man was Millicent!

The stone arms of a statue were wrapped tightly around him. A man he didn't recognize jabbed him in the arm with a knife and cackled, "Blood of the enemy forcibly taken!"

"Let me see him," a voice, tiny, but menacing at the same time said. The Jorkins woman held something and turned it to face Harry. It was a hideous creature.

"See what you have reduced me to, boy? You will suffer before you die."

"I'm not scared of you," Harry replied. It was mostly true. His wand and Luna's bag were sitting on a nearby tomb.

"We have his blood, Master. Let me kill the boy for you."

"No Peter, I want him to bear witness. Young Mister Crouch. I believe it is time for flesh of the servant willingly given."

Harry cringed. The woman was Peter Pettigrew. The other Death Eater walked to the cauldron and held his hand over the boiling edge as the woman/thing used a wand to slice his hand off and then lowered the abomination she carried into the pot while the man whimpered and staunched the bleeding stump with a charm from his wand.

Please let it die! Please let it die!

It didn't. The gurgling, churning mass took on a man shape and the cauldron toppled. Out of the steaming liquid pooling on the ground, that figure stood.

"Robe me, Wormtail."

Casting a glance skyward, Harry saw that Mars was bright in the sky, but there was a cloud drifting into its path. Things looked bad, but not completely hopeless.

Lord Voldemort was savoring every second of his rebirth, from regrowing Crouch's hand, to humiliating Lucius and the others begging for his forgiveness, to simply breathing and standing as a man once again.

A gesture from his wand released the boy. "Though I hear you haven't been properly instructed in the art of dueling, I will give you a chance to face me boy. Go ahead and take your wand. Killing you without it doesn't seem sporting and it is time to correct history's mistake!"

The pathetic boy picked up the wand and grabbed the tiny leather pouch next to it. The Dark Lord gestured to a clear area where he intended to finish the boy.

Instead, the insipid child broke into a sprint and dived behind a mausoleum!

Harry didn't have much time. He realized that the contents of Luna's bag were the "Moon's gifts."

Dumping everything out of the magical moleskin pouch on the ground, he saw his horntail model from the first task, the egg from the second, her butterbeer cork earplugs, a block of cheese, six gobstones, two issues of the Quibbler, five socks that were all different colors, his pen knife she'd borrowed the first week of school and said she'd returned, and several pieces of macaroni art.

There was one spell Harry truly excelled at. A masked Death Eater apparated a few feet away from Harry as he cast the engorgement charm on that tiny dragon model. It swelled up to the size of his godfather's Animagus form and leaped on the man slashing with its claws and biting him.

Harry wasted no time inserting the corks into his ear canals. He felt the earth tremble as a portion of the tomb he was using for shelter was obliterated. A second Death Eater appeared and "discovered" his toy dragon. The rest of the tomb simply vanished and Harry was looking at an angry Lord Voldemort and the rest of his Death Eaters.

His enemy was saying something, but Harry cracked open the egg and cast the Sonorous charm. Even with Luna's enchanted hearing protection some of the noise got through. It was painful, but nowhere near what the others were experiencing. They collapsed to the ground. A few had the sense of mind to apparate away. Pettigrew's ghost was dislodged from the witch. Harry struggled to his own feet and moved away from the painful wail.

Voldemort reappeared as Harry ran to the fallen witch. Harry thought he was going to die before he could find the Portkey, but it was Voldemort collapsing in agony. Harry looked around and saw his toy dragon badly injuring a massive snake. It occurred to Harry that Tom Riddle might have a connection to the monster.

Finding the necklace, he wrapped his arms around the witch and felt the pull on the middle of his body.

Harry faithfully relayed his story to Dumbledore and several others in the infirmary finishing with a feeble attempt at humor, "I guess, technically, they're Deaf Eaters now."

"Preposterous!" Minister Fudge exclaimed. "The boy is known for telling fanciful tales."

"How do you explain finding Alastor Moody locked in his magical trunk, all the used vials of polyjuice in his office, and the mental state of poor Bertha Jorkins? How do you account for those inconvenient facts, Cornelius?"

"Moody's claiming that Barty's son, dead and buried at Azkaban, was the one impersonating him! I'm not certain what to think, Dumbledore, but I'd advise you not to take this rubbish to the papers. I'd be forced to discredit you and it wouldn't be pretty."

"Perhaps if we were to contact St. Mungo's and inquire if there has been an unusual number of people seeking treatment for hearing loss or other noise related injuries, we might have some corroboration of young Harry's story. At the very least, there should be an inquest. Do you not agree?"

Fudge shrugged his shoulders, "Fine Dumbledore. If you don't go running out and scaring the public with this nonsense, you can conduct an inquest. My business here is concluded."

Harry watched the Minister leave. "We should try and warn people."

The Headmaster gave him a sad smile and said, "People believe what they want to believe – much like those that continue to doubt your talents and resourcefulness, despite all the evidence to the contrary. Minister Fudge only agreed to the inquest because he is certain that he can control the outcome or how the facts are released to the public. He seeks to bury me in bureaucracy, but that is my battle to fight, Harry. You'll probably have to make an official statement at the board of inquiry, but I will do my best to shield you from the backlash. Later, when you are rested, perhaps you would share with me the memory of your encounter with Tom and his followers."

Dumbledore paused for a moment and said, "Unfortunately, we will also have to explain how your name has been magically inscribed on the Triwizard Cup as this year's champion. I believe the Cup has judged that your performance in that graveyard to be superior to Mr. Krum's performance in the maze. I'm inclined to agree."

The Headmaster left and the nurse asked Harry if he wanted something to help him sleep. In his absence, a polyjuiced Lavender Brown had been compelled to compete in his place. She hadn't lasted very long and had a broken arm and three cracked ribs to show for her efforts. Harry opted to sit next to her for awhile.

"I'm sorry you got hurt," he said.

She forced a smile, "Me too, Harry. Being your girlfriend was fun, but I think I have to break it off now."

Harry understood. It meant no more naked frolicking ... at least with Lavender Brown.

"So, will I still be able to see her?" Luna asked in the deserted classroom. "Is she only invisible to you or to everyone in the castle? What a strange curse."

"No," Harry clarified while Padma shook her head. "When I said that I can't see Lavender anymore, I meant that we're no longer dating. In fact, I wanted to warn you two that you might be in danger."

"I'm not too worried, Harry," Padma said. "My family is going to India for the entire summer."

"I'm not worried either. If it was the Rotfangs or the Heliopaths, I would be, but it's just a bunch of Dark Wizards. That's what Daddy says we have the Aurors for. Besides, Daddy is taking me to the continent to search for the Snorkack breeding grounds. If we're searching for something no one has ever found, by extension, we can't be found either."

It was hard to argue with Luna's "logic," so Harry didn't even bother trying.

"I'm sorry I lost your pouch and everything inside it. It did save my life. If there's a way that I can make it up to you, let me know."

The young blonde smiled and soon he was sending an owl to his Aunt Petunia with a request that she go to the record store and purchase an album with the "Chicken Dance" on it. He didn't relish the idea of getting Colonel Sanders into the outfit Luna had made for the rooster, but he was interested in seeing if the giant bird could indeed dance.

The Inner Eye of Harry Potter Flowers for Padma

Harry was dreaming again. It was okay – he knew this one. It was a “reoccurring” dream and he didn’t mind it one bit. In it, he was laying back, resting on his bed, but he wasn’t alone. There was a distinctively female presence on top of him. The swaying breasts were his first clue. During the first few times, he thought it was just memories of his experiences with Lavender Brown from last year, but the blurry-faced female was differently shaped from his former Gryffindor girlfriend.

Still, the prospect of naked frolicking was even better than before to the now fifteen year old Harry Potter and he began to wonder if this dream was actually a vision of something in his future. He concentrated, trying to bring the image into focus. The skin was dusky; the hair was dark with something silver colored sweeping it off her face. Her eyes were a piercing hazel and darted from him to the book she casually held in one hand as a mischievous smile played on her lips. She was saying something to him, mouthing her thanks for giving her something ... diamonds?

Fairly certain who the mystery girl in his dream was, Harry looked hard at the title of the book to be sure.

Terrifying Transfigurations – Don’t Just Defeat Your Opponent.

That cinched it! Parvati would be holding a Teen Witch Weekly. The girl in this fantasy was definitely Padma Patil.

“Hello Harry!”

Harry started to answer the tantalizing witch, but his eyes betrayed him and opened. He bolted upright staring into the thick glasses of his Auntie Sibyll!

“What? Huh?” He asked startled. Instinctively, Harry shifted not wanting her to see something embarrassing.

“You sounded like you were having a bad dream, dear. Is it something you want to talk about?”

“I really have to go to the loo, first,” Harry stammered bolting out of the room faster than a pack of wild hippogriffs.

He gagged on the noxious odor in the bathroom. Cousin Dudley must have been in there recently. Within seconds, Harry was cured of his visible “problem”. At age eight sleeping in the same bedroom as his Auntie was the “best thing in the world.” Seven years later, it was still a far cry from the cupboard under the stairs, but there were growing problems.

Relieving himself, Harry washed up and gave himself the once over in the mirror while thinking about his housemate Padma and trying to sort through his thoughts with mixed results. She was certainly attractive and her mind was as sharp as a whip. Harry could do far worse than Padma Patil.

Of course, if his dream was a vision and not just the result of teenage male hormones running amuck, he’d have to buy her some diamonds at some point.

That seemed a trifle expensive.

“Hurry up, Harry. The Headmaster said he’d be by to collect us and give us some orders.”

“I think you misunderstood. He’s giving us to something called The Order. They’re his helpers. Sirius Black is supposed to be with them.”

He could hear Auntie Sibyll’s snort through the door. She said, “Yes, that does make more sense. Now, what was I saying, ah yes, don’t go taking all day in there young man. These bags won’t pack themselves, you know.”

“The incantation is ‘Pack,’ Auntie,” Harry said reminding her that they actually could.

Wondering why his godfather chose willingly to live in such an awful looking place, was beyond Harry. He followed Headmaster Dumbledore and his Auntie into the kitchen and found a group of wizards and witches waiting for him. Sirius stood and embraced him while Remus nodded a polite greeting. Arthur and Molly Weasley, Harry recalled from the brief meeting in Dumbledore’s office after that incident with the basilisk.

Mrs. Weasley handed him a plate of sandwiches and ushered him into the parlor. Inside, he found his classmate, Ron, and the rest of the underage Weasley children. They pounced on the platter in his hand like niffers striking a gold vein. Harry was lucky to come out with half of one with some additional crust dangling off of it. It rather reminded him of mealtime with Cousin Dudley.

“Did you hear what they were talking about?” Ron asked lips smacking together and pieces of moist bread rocketing out of his gaping maw.

"Not really," Harry answered. "I'd just barely walked through the door and now I'm here. Perhaps I'll go find my room."

"They're having a meeting," Ginny said, in her mouse-like way, nibbling away at her food. "They won't let us listen in, but we know they're talking about the war and you-know-who."

"That's good news I suppose." Harry reasoned adults should be stepping up and taking responsibility for this war. Heaven knows that he could use all the help the powers would provide and he definitely didn't want to fight a war with a bunch of schoolchildren – only a fool would do that! Setting down the now empty platter, he continued, "Which way to the stairs then?"

"Aren't you the least bit curious?" One of the twins said. Both of them were observing Harry much like he was an oddity and gulping the remnants of their sandwiches. They continued speaking – mostly nonsense – for the next minute. One would speak a sentence, bite and chew, while the other continued the thought.

Harry shrugged, saying, "If it's important, Auntie Sibyll or Mr. Black will tell me. If it's really important, I'm sure the powers that be will find a way to pass a message to me."

The other twin was struggling with a piece of string and said, "Even for a 'Claw, you're a nutter, Potter. Stairs are that way."

Harry replied, "Thanks," before heading out the other door and up the staircase. A decrepit looking house elf was there eyeing Harry's baggage.

"Another defiler enters the once noble house of Black," the surly elf hissed at him.

"I'm Harry," he said offering a greeting. Most house elves at Hogwarts liked it when Harry spoke directly to them.

Kicking Harry's trunk and sending it careening into the wall, the elf said, "Kreacher doesn't care. Kreacher knows you all for what you truly are – filth!"

The elf's tirade reminded him of something. "What did you say your name was?"

"Kreacher! Is stupid human deaf as well as stupid?"

Harry pushed the elf aside and opened his trunk. He pulled out the book where he recorded any predictions he had previously made and flipped through the pages. There it was – right below the one about the sensitivities of the moonlight. (Anything concerning the moon, Harry tended to associate with Luna and this made him worry that he would say or do something that upset her this year.)

Unto the Creature provide the Rod.

There was every possibility that this elf was the "Creature." Now, all he needed was to find the "Rod."

"Or maybe not!" Harry said aloud causing the elf to further glare at him. He opened the trunk once more and rummaged through it. Early in the summer, Cousin Dudley had taken to rapping on the doors, the steps, or virtually anything with his Smelting's Stick. After the stick had cracked one of Auntie Sibyll's prized crystal balls; it went "missing" and was still where Harry had left it.

"I believe that I need to give this to you." Harry said presenting it to Kreacher.

"What would Kreacher need a piece of wood for? Is it a magical stick?"

"No, it is a muggle stick. They use it to discipline their children when they misbehave and the students at my cousin's school use it to hit each other when the teachers aren't looking."

A tiny elf hand reached out and took the gnarled piece of wood from his hand. Kreacher turned it over, inspecting it. "Muggles beat other muggles with sticks?"

Harry wasn't quite sure he liked the expression on Kreacher's face. "Yes, but only when they're misbehaving," he quickly added.

"Kreacher thanks you for this gift. Maybe all of Bad Master's guests not worthless vermin after all. Kreacher take gift-giver's baggage to room now."

Sometimes, Harry worried about the consequences of heeding his predictions. He feared this one would come back to haunt him. Shrugging, he climbed the stairs and found the room with his belongings in it. The elf had opened a window and was using the Smelting's stick to pummel a nest of hapless doxies. What frightened Harry the most is how Kreacher was humming while he did it.

It was there, in his room, that Dumbledore found him.

"Hello Harry, how are you this day? I had thought you were to be rooming with young Ronald?"

"This is where the elf put me. I'm pretty good, I guess. I don't suppose you have a safe house that doesn't feel like a cursed tomb?"

The old man chuckled for a moment before sighing, "No, I'm afraid not at this time. The Ancient and Noble House of Black is all we have at our disposal. Chin up, lad, you haven't even had the pleasure of meeting Sirius's mother yet. Do tell her I said hello when you make her acquaintance."

The twinkle in his eye made Harry realize that he was being facetious.

"I will, sir. I suppose there is something that you'd like to talk about?"

"Yes, one of the things I'm concerned with is your scar. Has it been hurting you?"

Instinctively, Harry rubbed it, "A little," he admitted.

"I fear Lord Voldemort will try to use that connection the two of you share to his advantage to spy on us or even make an attempt at direct possession. You need to prepare yourself. I'd like you to begin studying from this textbook. It covers a little known branch of magic called Occlumency. It will help you erect barriers to protect your mind from Tom's Legilimency. Is something wrong, Harry?"

"Yes," Harry said taking a moment to pause. "As I understand this, it is a way to close off the mind. Won't it interfere with my abilities?"

"Alas, I cannot be certain because I am not a seer. It is a possibility."

Harry didn't like disagreeing with a veritable legend in the magical world. Shaking his head, he pushed the small tome back to the Headmaster and said, "I'm sorry sir. I need to have an open mind to be ready to use my talents. Closing even a portion of it might deprive me of a critical vision or interfere with my card draws and dice rolls. I can't risk that. It would be an affront to the powers and I would surely incur their wrath."

Dumbledore smiled and pulled on his long beard. "Yes, I feared that would be your answer. You will have to be extra skeptical of your visions this season, Harry. They may be illusions created by a master of lies. That said, I think it should be Tom that is worried, if and when he tries to access your fascinating mind. We will have frequent contact this year, Harry. Not just for your Remedial Transfiguration lessons, but I will continuously be assessing your state of mind."

"Do you really think that's necessary, sir? I'm opposed to letting a Legilimens poke around in my brain. There are things you may not be meant to see in there."

"I will gladly swear an unbreakable vow not to divulge any information I find in there, but even a Master Legilimens leaves signs. I'll be looking for those and not predictions of the future."

Harry was nervous, but it was preferable to closing off his mind and the Headmaster was very respectful of his abilities, otherwise they wouldn't be having this conversation to begin with. Part of him recoiled at the thought of being left in the dark for an entire year and not knowing what was going on.

"Okay, sir. I'll do it. You don't suppose while you're up there you could straighten me out when it comes to Charms and Defense?"

Dumbledore laughed and patted him on the shoulders. "I'm a Master Legilimens, Harry, not a miracle worker. Remember – hard work is its own reward and this is your OWL year. It is a truly exciting and challenging time in your life. Rise to that challenge m'boy. Rise to it!"

"I'll do my best, sir."

"Of course you will. Now, I'm afraid that our friend Cornelius has been active. He has placed a person on my staff for the coming year. Her name is Delores ..." They were interrupted by one of the Weasley twins apparating into the room and clutching his arm.

"Bloody elf just whacked me with a stick and said I was misbehaving!"

To his credit, Dumbledore showed no surprise. Instead, he asked, "And were you 'misbehaving,' Mr. Weasley?"

"Of course not, sir. Wouldn't dream of it." The seventh year wizard answered with practiced ease despite the pain.

"Then you may wish to speak to Mr. Black. Your mother is quite handy when it comes to healing charms. Or, if you do not feel like facing her, you could try to catch Ms. Vance or Mrs. Jones before they depart."

"Thank you." The twin said and disappeared again just as the door creaked open. The elf's head peeked into the room. It looked at Harry and then to Dumbledore. With a smile, it backed out and closed the door.

"Look, I've told Kreacher to stop hitting people with his stick," Sirius Black said smearing some ointment on the back of his hand. Most everyone around the table sported a bruise or three from the maniacal elf. The only ones who were unscathed, thus far, were Mrs. Weasley, Auntie Sibyll, and Harry.

"I heard it followed Fletcher into the street and was doing some kind of a war cry," Tonks said. She was apparently very clumsy and Harry learned that the majority of the bruises she sported were of her own making. "I wouldn't look for him to show up at any meetings in the near future."

Ron started to reach for the platter of breakfast pastries, but his purplish hand stopped short and he looked around nervously. Slowly he said, "Uh, Mr. Black, might I have another one of these?"

"Go ahead, Ron," Harry's godfather answered before loudly continuing. "In fact, everyone in the room is welcome to eat and drink as much as they like without fear of retribution."

"Does that include the Firewhiskey?" One of the twins brazenly asked.

Sirius shook his head. "It's a trifle early for that, boys! Besides, isn't that what got all this started? One of you down in the cellar sifting through the alcohol?"

The oldest Weasley, a cursebreaker named Bill, entered and was carrying a box containing several bottles of Doxy Spray.

"You kids are in for a real treat today ... Yow!" The man said nearly dropping the box when Kreacher appeared behind him and whacked him in the right calf muscle with the stick. "What the bloody hell was that for?"

"Maybe wizard learn to wipe feet on doormat when he enters Ancient and Noble House of Black!"

Bill went for his wand, but the elf was long gone. He settled for hopping over to the table and nearly falling into Tonks' lap. Laughing, the metamorph affected a remarkably accurate version of Fleur Delacour's face and said a few things that made Bill blush profusely.

"Misbehavior!" The stick slammed into Harry's wand hand knocking the locket he was holding to the ground. Harry knew his luck couldn't last.

"Ow, ow, ow!" Harry said. "We were told to clean this room, Kreacher." He was glad the Weasley children had left to get something to eat, though it made him wonder about their metabolisms.

"Clean yes, but no handling dark artifacts!"

Harry clutched his hand and pulled the wooden splinter lodged in the back of it out. He shook his hand to get the stinging sensation out of it and watched in horror as the blood splattered onto the carpet. In fear, Harry turned toward Kreacher, reflexively preparing for additional pain. The elf was cocked back for another swing, but he was frozen with his eyes looking at the floor.

Following the stare, Harry looked at the locket. Where the small trail of blood was, the locket was making a sizzling noise. The blood boiled off, but there was a discoloration left behind right on the large "S" emblazoned on the front.

Bugger! Now I'm really going to get it!

Instead, the elf looked up at him, wide-eyed in disbelief. "What does gift giving boy know about Dark Lord?"

"He's my enemy," Harry answered looking at the locket and wondering what he'd just stumbled on.

"Kreacher was ordered by Best Master Ever, Regulus to destroy the locket and has tried everything he knows."

"Why did your former master order you to destroy it?"

"Is important to Dark Lord. Kreacher doesn't know what it does, but Best Master told Kreacher to take it and destroy it."

"Go get a small bowl, Kreacher. I think my blood will do the job," Harry said and watched the suddenly gleeful elf disappear. He wondered if it was just like the diary, but didn't dare hold it again. If it was, it might try and possess him.

Kreacher returned and Harry used the tip of his wand to lift the artifact by its chain and deposited it into the bowl. Next, Harry sent the elf to get the knife from his potions kit. Harry sliced his palm and let the blood drip down into the bowl. The locket sparked and hissed back at them as the blood evaporated against it. The smell was so awful that Harry knew it must be doing something, but all it did was mar the surface.

"Not working! Not working!" Kreacher howled.

"Maybe if we tried opening it?"

"Can't open it. Kreacher tried."

"You can't speak Parseltongue. I can." Harry said and hissed for the locket to open. Sure enough, there was a tiny click and he was able to use the knife to separate the halves.

The dripping blood was causing more smoke and greater surface damage, but it was still intact. Kreacher began stamping his foot impatiently.

After two more minutes, Harry was starting to feel a little lightheaded. "Maybe we should stop and try again after I've had a few blood replenishers."

Kreacher's answer was to grab the knife and stab Harry's arm. "No!" The elf screamed. "We need more blood! It must be destroyed."

Harry could only appreciate the strength of an insane house elf as they wrestled for control of the knife.

"I kind of need most of what's in me, thank you very much!"

The knife popped out of Harry's arm. Kreacher's hand was on the handle, but Harry's hand was wrapped around the elf's. They continued struggling for a second more until they both noticed the sheen of blood coating the blade.

"Do you think we should ..." Harry started to ask.

Kreacher nodded. "Yes."

Fine. I'll let go, but no more stabbing me!"

Harry let go and backpedaled away from the insane house servant. The elf took the knife in a two-handed grip, like some pagan priest of old, and brought it down. There was a cracking noise. Kreacher looked up and smiled for a second. Then he snapped his fingers and sent Harry flying the length of the room, just ahead of the explosion.

After a minute, or perhaps five, Harry struggled to his feet. Actually, it was his godfather that was helping him. Several people were milling about the room. His glasses were nowhere in sight. His left shoulder hurt from where he impacted the wall. Since he was on that topic, it hurt to think, or to breathe for that matter.

Two days later, Harry was let out of bed. He still felt the aftereffects, but at least there were no more "cleaning details" in his foreseeable future. There was a lengthy conversation with Dumbledore and Sirius Black. The Headmaster took the remains of the locket back to Hogwarts to study.

He was busy, attempting to stay out of the way of another meeting of the Order of the Phoenix when a voice from nowhere spoke, "Trying to destroy my house, you vile, insipid little boy?" The witch in the painting accused.

Kreacher appeared, sporting an arm in a sling, three medicinal poultices and the top third of the Smelting's stick. At first, Harry thought he was going to be hit, but the elf leaped onto the frame and perched there with his little toes balancing him. He thwapped the canvas three times with the end of the stick making the woman in the painting yowl and cower.

"Harry Potter made it possible to avenge Greatest Master Ever, Regulus Black! No one, not even you, says bad things about Great Wizard Harry Potter ... or else."

The witch in the painting removed her hands from her face. The area around her eye was blackening already. "You avenged my son?"

"Yes. Both me and Kreacher." Harry wanted to make certain the elf got credit. He also dearly wanted for the first of September to get here and leave the Ancient and Noble (albeit insane) House of Black.

"Thank you. You'll hear nothing further from me, lad."

"It's all just theory ... and not even very good theory at that," Padma complained to Harry about the Defense Against the Dark Arts textbook as they headed toward the classroom to meet their new instructor. "I'd be willing to bet that the author is a family member."

"Can't be worse than last year, or first year for that matter," Harry replied. "They tried to kill me. The good teachers were in years two and three. Since two plus three equals five, and we're in our fifth year a case could be made for Madame Umbridge being good. Then again, one plus four also equals five, so there might be a problem with that line of reasoning."

"Is that a straight line or are we going off in circles again? My head is starting to hurt from trying to follow you, Harry. Can you sum it up for me?" Padma asked, flashing a smile. She didn't necessarily agree that Gilderoy Lockhart lived up to his billing, but Harry wasn't one to quibble over the details.

On the topic of straight lines, Harry couldn't help but notice that Padma's school uniform contained very few of them. There were far more curves than three months ago. He squelched those thoughts before they led him back to that vision he'd had over the summer.

"I guess either she's decent or going to try and kill me, perhaps both. I can try to narrow it down after I meet her." Harry left out the fact that Dumbledore had told him that their new teacher was the eyes and ears of Minister Fudge inside the school.

They took their seats and Madame Umbridge introduced herself and went into extraordinary detail of how her work in the Ministry on Dark Creatures was relevant to teaching a course on them.

One of the Hufflepuffs, a twitchy little fellow named Wayne Hopkins, asked when they would be using their wands.

"Hopkins? I don't believe I know that family name. You must be a Muggleborn, therefore, you do not have a full understanding of how hard the Ministry works to protect you. To answer your question, we're going to be working on the theories of defense, children, and not the practical applications. I've looked through the recent instructors and found their methods, not to mention their qualifications, somewhat lacking. I have decided to return to the basics and rebuild your foundation from the bottom up. After all, we must learn to stand and walk before we run."

As others, including Padma voiced their concerns about the upcoming OWL examinations; Harry remembered her tone from the years in school with Cousin Dudley. He felt somewhat insulted that she was addressing the class like they were preteens. He raised his hand after listening to her reassure Terry Boot that by studying these techniques it will fully prepare you for the testing at the end of the year.

"Yes, Mr. Potter?"

"I was just wondering how many Dark Creatures you've captured."

"In the last year alone, sixteen of the vile monsters were rounded up – a thirty-three percent increase over last year."

"By you, ma'am?"

A crack appeared Madame Umbridge's otherwise pleasant mask, but it disappeared just as quickly as she replied, "No, dear boy. By the Aurors and various other departments of the Ministry of Magic. No one expects you to combat a dragon, a troll, or anything like that. The purpose of this class is to give you the tools to protect yourself until trained and qualified assistance can be called upon. My role was in drafting the legislation which restricts the activities of these beasts and limits the threat these monsters and sub-humans present to our magical society. Trust me, you'll find no better authority in all of the United Kingdom on the actions of Dark Creatures."

The way she presented things left a foul taste in Harry's mouth. The instructor quickly fended off other questions by ordering them to read chapter one. Padma managed a roll of her hazel eyes and a quiet sigh. It was like class with Professor Binns ... only less interesting.

Though Harry did notice an acknowledgement to a sister named Delores in the front matters of the tome.

"So is she a Rotfang supporter or not?" Luna asked Harry while trying to balance a spoon on her nose and attempting to juggle three apples.

Lunchtime with Luna was seldom dull.

"You can make your own decision, when you have your first class with her, but if I have to say, better pencil her in on the side of the supporters."

Padma made a growling noise and offered her own opinion. "She certainly doesn't support anyone learning anything new or useful. My parents think she's just here to keep the Headmaster from causing a panic."

"Daddy thinks she's here recruiting for the Rotfangs. She wears a good deal of pink and it's rumored to be a mating color for them."

Michael Corner made a rather disagreeable noise, "That's something I didn't need to think about during mealtime, Lovegood. Can't you just be quiet and let us eat."

Luna deftly snapped her head and flipped the spoon into her juggling rotation. She replaced the spoon with one of the apples in her mouth. Harry had to admit that the girl had talent. She abruptly stopped and put the two apples and spoon down, but she held onto the fruit in her mouth.

Standing, she took a few bites before saying, "Are you coming, Harry?"

"Where are we going?" He asked.

"I found this wonderful room filled with all sorts of interesting things. I wanted to show it to you. Would you like to come as well, Padma?"

"No thanks, I'm going to finish my lunch and practice on my harp before the next class. Have fun you two."

With Padma's "blessing," Harry followed Luna out of the Great Hall and onto the moving staircases. While they waited for the pathways to realign, Luna held a decidedly one-sided conversation with the staircase. A couple of Gryffindor's nearby were pointing at her and laughing.

"She's mental. Talking to a stupid piece of stonework!"

Luna patted the banister and said, "Don't let it get to you, Toby. I know you're not stupid."

As if in response, the stairwell began to move and Luna started to hum in tune with the grinding noises of the slabs of moving rock.

She led him all the way to the seventh floor. Harry had heard that the Gryffindor tower entrance was around here somewhere. After roaming around for a few minutes, he was about to ask her if she had forgotten where they were going, but a door appeared in the wall in front of them.

Still humming, she opened the door. The room was enormous and filled with all sorts of things. Even Harry was impressed.

"How did you find this place?" Harry asked.

"Toby mentioned it when I told him that I was looking for hidden secrets in the castle."

"The staircase told you?" Even Harry was a bit skeptical.

"Well not at first. He was mostly complaining about his relationship with Frieda and how they might be heading for a permanent separation. Plus, he generally feels taken for granted and that everyone walks all over him."

"Who's Frieda?" Harry asked, more than a little lost. He wanted to forage through all the items in the room, but Luna's words mesmerized him.

"She's the landing on the second floor and Toby's girlfriend. They have two broom closets together."

"Oh, that does make sense," Harry answered, even though it didn't. Then again, Hogwarts is a magical castle, who was he to judge. "Let's hope they can patch things up."

Luna nodded and said, "I was thinking of having some words with Frieda. Oh, look at this!"

Harry peered over her shoulder. There was a skeleton of some exotic bird in a cage. When Luna tapped the cage, the thing stretched its neck out and snapped at her. Someone must have reanimated it and hidden it in this room.

"You might want to be a bit more careful in here," Harry warned.

"Oh, he's probably just hungry. After all, it's all bones," Luna answered pulling out a piece of butcher's paper and removing the piece of raw meat wrapped inside. "I normally save this for my visits with the Thestrals, but here you go, eat up."

The skeleton tried to take a piece of her hand along with the sliver of steak, but Luna was too quick for it. She swatted the cage and reprimanded it.

"That's interesting," Harry observed. The meat dissolved into mist and some flesh reappeared on the creature's clawed feet.

"I wonder if Hagrid will know what it is. Shall we take it to him? I should think this would make a splendid familiar."

Harry knew she'd been holding out for an elusive Snorkack, but this did seem a trifle baffling. He wondered what the other witches in her room would think about whatever this was. Glancing about the room, he quickly realized that it would take days, perhaps even weeks to sift through the debris in this room.

"Why don't we come back here tomorrow evening? We can start cataloguing the artifacts! Perhaps we can talk Padma into coming as well."

Harry scowled a bit before answering. "I have lessons with Dumbledore tomorrow night. With the amount of work she and I have this year, we might not be able to spend as much time with you this year, but I'll do my best."

He wasn't sure if he imagined it, but some of the twinkle in Luna's eyes went away. After a moment, she replied, "You always do."

They wandered around for a few more minutes, seeing various items, some of which might or might not be on the list of things banned from Hogwarts and were about to leave when Harry spied something that caught his attention. It was a headpiece and he'd seen it before somewhere.

It took him a minute, but he realized that it was part of his dream where he and Padma had been Without a second thought, he snatched it up and put it into his satchel.

"What are you going to do with a diadem, Harry? I don't think it's your color."

"Is that's what it's called?" Harry asked. It looked like he didn't have to buy Padma "diamonds" after all. On all fronts, things were definitely looking up. "I saw this in a dream over the summer. Padma was wearing it."

"Harry! Do you know what this is?"

"Luna said it was a diadem. I'm pretty sure that you're supposed to have it."

Padma looked around the dorm room. Her roommates were already gone and she and Harry were going to have to practically run to make their afternoon class, but suddenly that didn't matter to her. "No, Harry! Think about the bust of Rowena Ravenclaw down in the common room!"

"What about it? Oh wait, she's got one just like it." He casually remarked in a manner that made Padma want to throttle him.

"Not like it! This is hers! Ravenclaw's Diadem. Harry, this is huge! It's been missing since after her death. Look here's the inscription. It's supposed to make anyone who wears it several magnitudes smarter."

"Well, I had a vision of you wearing it over the summer, and when I spotted it in Luna's room full of hidden stuff ... well, you know, I just figured I should give it to you. Do you want to try it on?"

If it were anyone else, she'd swear it was just a sick joke, but Harry wasn't a prankster. He did seem a bit eager for her to put it on. Still, it could be a fake, left in that room to prank some future student. Her initial enthusiasm waned. People don't just walk into a room and hand someone an object belonging to one of the founders of Hogwarts. It simply isn't done!

"Alright," she said, "but pull it off of me if it starts doing something weird to me, or be ready to summon an elf and send it to Professor Flitwick, if it is cursed."

Harry agreed and she summoned her courage and closed her eyes. There was a tingle the moment the diadem touched her head. A split second of panic was replaced with a surge, as she felt her breathing and the rhythms of her body, so very clearly.

"Are you okay, Padma, do I need to pull it off, or get the Professor?"

She opened her eyes. It was like opening them for the first time. The colors were so vivid. Everything was so sharp. It was overwhelming. She started to swoon, but Harry caught her and helped her to her bed. When he reached to take it off, Padma stopped him.

"No, I'm okay. It's just strange, like seeing everything in a new light. Help me get over to my harp, I want to try something."

Harry did as she asked and Padma looked up at the piece of sheet music floating in the air. She'd been having difficulties with the transition in this piece. No matter what she'd done, her fingers never seemed to move fast enough. Focusing on the sheet and the notes, she started to play. The difference from before was like night and day. This fairly advanced piece was suddenly as easy to play as doing practice scales!

"That was very pretty, Padma," Harry remarked when she finished, she was staring at her hands, looking for differences.

Harry! This is really *her* diadem. It's incredible!" The windows in her mind hadn't just been opened, they were shattered.

"Like I said, I'm pretty sure it's supposed to be yours."

Padma couldn't believe her ears. Supreme knowledge was in his hands, yet he was giving it to her without a second thought. She inspected him, even noticing the slight aura around him. *I can see auras! Amazing. Mine is barely visible, but his lights up the room.*

Her theories of how his power affected his predictions came to mind and she processed numerous variables while scanning him from head to toe. She definitely wanted to study him. His aura was positively enthralling.

Reaching out, she touched his cheek with a finger. "You're so powerful, Harry and so very gifted."

"Thanks," he said blushing. The idea that he was crushing on her was so obvious. *How had I missed it before?*

"No, it's me who needs to thank you, Harry." She leaned closer and kissed him.

They never did make it to Herbology that day.

For Harry, the year was shaping up to be his best ever. At Padma's suggestion, they kept the rediscovery of Ravenclaw's Diadem a secret. She wanted to fully explore the item's potential and she had a really great way of convincing him.

"What are you doing, Mr. Potter?" The "sickly-sweet" voice of Madame Umbridge asked.

"Reading, as you instructed," Harry answered while realizing that he'd neglected to place a glamour over his Arithmancy text before class. He'd certainly meant to, but Padma had distracted him by pulling him into a broom closet on the way. Inside, she took out a sixth year Charms tome and the diadem out of her bag.

The "new" Padma was beginning to make Lavender Brown look like a Puritan in comparison. Her explanation was that she absorbed knowledge faster when she was stimulated. Harry had responded that she didn't need to explain anything to him.

"Five points from Ravenclaw for not following directions," Umbridge said.

"Actually, your directions were to, 'open your textbook and begin reading chapter six.' I assure you that this is my textbook and it is open to chapter six."

"Very well, I'll give those five points back, but now I'll take ten points for your cheek! What do you think about that, Mr. Potter?"

"About you giving the points back or you taking additional points? I suppose I'm pleased about the former, but not-so-much about the latter."

"Doesn't Ravenclaw's standing in the house cup matter to you?"

"Well the points system seems rather antiquated, if you ask me. Was it more important when you were in school?"

"Would you like a detention as well, Mr. Potter?"

"No, ma'am." Harry had heard rumors about Madame Umbridge's detentions. Hermione Granger in Gryffindor had been wearing a bandage on her hand after a string of detentions where the Muggleborn witch had challenged the "Professor's" qualifications.

"Too late! I'll see you here this evening."

"Ma'am, I have a remedial Transfiguration lesson with the Headmaster this evening."

"How are your studies progressing, Harry," Headmaster Dumbledore asked.

"It's going well, sir. Any news on Tom Riddle?"

"Not very much, I'm afraid. He appears to be consolidating his position and licking his wounds from the battle in the graveyard. You did a wonderful job spoiling his coming out party. The last time I was at the ministry, I did notice that Lucius Malfoy had difficulties hearing. He explained it away as a conjuration accident and is said to be seeking specialized treatment at a hospital in Lisbon. My sources tell me that Tom is also out of the country, rallying supporters to his cause."

Dumbledore paused, offering Harry a second lemon drop. "Nevertheless, I do believe that Tom will attempt to steal the copy of the prophecy that exists in the Department of Mysteries. Failing that, he will attempt to gain access to you or your Aunt Sibyll."

"Sir, should you be telling me this? You've said he may try and access my mind at some point."

"Yes, I did. That said, he will most likely see this very memory and he will have to decide whether I am simply telling you this or laying a trap for him. The copy of the prophecy in the Department of Mysteries, could be a real, a fake, or a trap. Tom prides himself on being a great thinker, and so I'll play to his paranoia and make him commit to a plan. Now, before we can get down to the business of Transfiguration, Madame Umbridge has

complained, quite vocally in fact, about your performance in her class. I delayed your detention with her until tomorrow, but do expect you to put forth more effort in the future.”

Harry nodded.

“I also received a request from the centaur herd. Firenze has asked that you be his guest for the meteor shower, next week. Assuming there are no further detentions, or other issues, and Professor Trewlany agrees as well, I have no problems with you attending.”

“Thank you, sir!” Harry was surprised by the invitation. He’d check with his Auntie in the morning.

“Good, now that we’ve dealt with the administrative issues, let’s move on. Your Godfather has asked if I would be willing to teach you the preliminary stages of becoming an Animagus. I am willing if you are as well.”

“He gave me some books on the subject for my birthday. I’ve been working my way through them during my free time,” Harry answered. Sirius seemed rather fixated on Harry becoming one.

“Very good. I’d like to start with some basic self-transfiguration.” The Headmaster got that twinkle in his eyes and Harry knew just to go along with what was about to happen next.

“What did you do to my quill?” Delores Umbridge exclaimed.

Harry cringed. “Nothing, ma’am. It just snapped in half when I started writing.”

“Give me that! What happened to the back of your hand?”

“I was practicing transfiguration with the Headmaster last night and I managed to turn this section to stone. He said if it doesn’t wear off by my next lesson, he’ll teach me how to reverse it.”

“Do you have any idea how expensive that quill was?”

Harry didn’t. It looked like Mr. Lockhart’s special contracts quill that Harry still had. He wasn’t about to offer it up as a replacement either. It was somewhat painful when writing with it and Harry didn’t care for the idea of doing lines with it. There was no doubt why Hermione Granger smelled like ointment and looked pale the other day.

Madame Umbridge raged, “Willfully destroying a Professor’s property! Ten more points from Ravenclaw and two detentions!”

The door creaked open and Dumbledore walked in. “My apologies Delores, I was wandering the halls and heard the commotion. Is something the matter?”

“No, of course not Headmaster,” Madame Umbridge immediately shifted her tone. “Potter broke a quill I had given him ... nothing more.”

“Well, my specialty is Alchemy, but I am a serviceable enchanter. Perhaps I could repair it for you?”

“No, no, no. That’s quite alright, Headmaster.” Umbridge’s wand came out and vanished the broken quill.

“But you seemed rather distraught at the loss of that expensive quill,” Dumbledore said. “If Harry did indeed break it – willfully I might add – I can authorize a punitive draft from his vault to pay for a replacement. Just tell me what type of quill it was and I’ll make the arrangements this evening.”

Taken aback, Umbridge answered, “It really was just an heirloom, given to me by a good friend, that’s why I overreacted.”

“Indeed,” Dumbledore said, while stroking his long beard. “In that case, Delores, I would recommend that, in the future, you not entrust a precious heirloom to the only partially-trained hands of a student. I’d hate to see a repeat of this unfortunate incident again. As Headmaster, I’ll allow the point deduction to stand, but I cannot go along with awarding two detentions for the breaking of a quill. It seems a tad excessive. In fact, since Harry’s overweighted hand is my fault; I feel the need to correct this.”

From his robes, he produced a phoenix feather and presented it to Madame Umbridge. “I can only hope that one of Fawkes’ feathers can replace that which you have lost. All I ask is that you never mention this to Fawkes. My familiar tends to get peeved when I give pieces of its body away without prior consultation. It sings a pleasant little tune when the words are written with good intentions behind them. I trust it will serve you well.”

Turning, Dumbledore winked at Harry and confidently walked from the room.

“Are you sure that you don’t want to go with me to see the meteor shower?” Harry asked Padma.

His girlfriend shook her head no as she undid the transfigured bed created in the broom cupboard while her clothes snaked around her body and returned to their proper place. “No, I’ll have to sit this one out. Why don’t you take Luna? Tonight, I’ve got a date with the Restricted Section. Professor Binns was kind enough to give me a pass. You go and have fun, Harry. Hopefully, you’ll make a prediction. Let me know if you do.”

Harry’s spell wasn’t nearly as impressive as his enchanted shirt smacked him in the face several times before he could get his arm into the sleeve, but it did save a bunch of time when it came to one of these “between class” rendezvous. Ever since he revealed the exact wording of the

prophecy, Padma had been on a mission to gain access to the Restricted Section of the library. It looked like her hard work had paid off.

He watched the enchanted headscarf Padma had made cover the diadem and hide the outline. Initially, Padma was only wearing it during their study sessions, but soon explained that she could make greater progress wearing it for longer periods of time.

“Did you have a good time?” He asked shyly.

She patted his head. “Yes, of course I did. The book, on the other hand, was something of a disappointment. The title is misleading and the content a tad pedestrian. Most of the spells inside weren’t really innovative charms. They were just variations on a theme ... clever perhaps, but hardly groundbreaking.”

“Maybe you should read up on Defense and start teaching the students on the side?” Harry offered.

“A secret defense club? Oh, I don’t think so. The more people involved in a secret, the greater the likelihood of the secret being exposed. I’ll be happy to tutor you, but I don’t want to reveal the existence of this to anyone else ... even Luna.”

“Why not Luna?” Luna already knew that Harry had given it to Padma. She just didn’t know it was Ravenclaw’s Diadem.

“She doesn’t really think before she blurts things out. That won’t do at all. Let’s not worry about that, Harry.” Padma slid up next to him and started kissing his neck. “I don’t think Luna’s that interested in Defense anyway. She’s better at Charms and Runes, in my opinion.”

Punctuating every few words with a kiss on his neck, she said, “Why don’t I ... show you a couple ... of the better charms I’ve picked up ... and you can show them to her?”

The hairs on the back of his neck were standing up, when he said, “Okay. Ow! Padma, I thought you said no more biting!”

She backed away and smiled at him. “I just like marking what is mine, Harry. That would be you. Besides, it was just a little nibble. You know I’ll make it up to you. In fact, drop off your cloak before you go see the Centaurs and just maybe, I’ll sneak up to your dorm room tonight.”

“Can’t,” he replied. “I lent it to Luna last week. She’s been using it while moving about the castle and looking hoping to catch one of her creatures.”

Harry noticed the perturbed look cross Padma’s face.

“The streaks are passing in front of Mars tonight, Harry. I’m not certain that’s a good thing.”

Harry stood next to Firenze and adjusted his telescope. The other centaurs were giving him and his friend a wide berth. *Apparently, I’m only welcome here by a few. It’s probably a good thing I couldn’t find Luna. We’d likely both feel unwanted and she would probably try to strike up a conversation with that angry Bane chap over there.*

There was a cluster of unicorns nearby. When he waved to them, they snorted and neighed at him. He was happy that they remembered him. One even pranced around and Harry guessed it was the male from the lake all those years ago. That alone was worth following Firenze out here on that ridiculously expensive broomstick Sirius bought last year. Harry enjoyed riding, but rarely had a chance to do so. Most of the time, he let Cho Chang borrow it for the Ravenclaw Quidditch team. Sadly, it was that, probably more than anything else that smoothed out the relations between him and the rest of Ravenclaw.

Pondering the centaur’s assessment, Harry answered, “I agree. Mars could still be very bright, but it is diminished by something that is closer.”

“Perhaps this means the Dark Lord is not the only threat you face, young wizard.”

“Well, that’s certainly one way to look at it. If I want to look on the bright side, it could also mean that something will be interfering with his plots to get at me.”

“True,” Firenze answered in his distant manner. “There is no harm in hoping for the best, so long as you plan for the worst.”

Harry was preparing to answer when a commotion at the edge of the clearing drew everyone’s attention and sent the unicorns retreating into the forest.

“Bad enough that we must endure one interloper at our gathering! Now, there’s another. Did you invite this one as well, Firenze?” Bane yelled.

“We found her near the giant. The witch drew her wand on us and cast spells. We subdued her.” The leader of the scout party said.

Firenze and Harry walked over. Bound and gagged was Delores Umbridge. Firenze studied the woman and replied, “She is no friend of mine. Let us hear what she has to say.”

“She’s one of the teacher’s at school, and employed by the Ministry of Magic,” Harry said while he removed the rags stuffed in her mouth.

“I am no mere employee. I am Delores Umbridge, Undersecretary to the Minister of Magic! You have no right to detain me, much less assault me! Release me at once!”

“You are the Umbridge? The one who voided the Treaty of the Woods with the Ironshod Herd? We’ve heard of you. Now, you dare trespass on lands belonging to the Brightcloud Herd – lands that were, so graciously carved out of what used to be our territory by your Ministry?” Bane said.

"I was following the boy! The forest is off limits to the students of Hogwarts. He is to be turned over to me for punishment."

"I was invited by the Centaurs and the visit was approved by the Headmaster and my Aunt," Harry answered, starting to grow weary of this woman. She wasn't a very good teacher, and furthermore, he didn't think she was a good representative of the Ministry.

"You are in no position to make demands, human," Bane said to the witch in a threatening manner. He leaned down and got near her face. "Perhaps, you would do well to think about your own punishment."

"Dumbledore didn't mention it to me! This is all a misunderstanding. Surely, we can just let bygones be bygones." Umbridge protested, her imperious tone disappeared and was replaced by a sugary-sweet plea.

Firenze spoke, "Correct my memory female, but last I heard, Albus Dumbledore is the holder of numerous of your human titles, in addition to being Headmaster of the nearby school. Is he required to receive your permission before he makes all his decisions?"

"No," she stammered. "I assumed the boy was sneaking into the Forbidden Forest."

"We have a treaty with your Ministry, witch," Bane said. "You have been caught trespassing on our lands and are now subject to centaur justice. I call for a council to convene and decide upon a punishment for The Umbridge!"

As the cheers became louder, Firenze motioned for Harry to come back to where his telescope was. "I'm afraid, you should probably go now. You may want to alert your Headmaster about this situation. I will try to keep this from going too far, but it may be beyond my abilities."

"What's going to happen to her?" Harry asked.

"Were I to guess, the most likely scenario is that she'll be bound to a tree. The females of the herd will circle her and spit on her. The males will urinate and kick droppings onto her. You don't want to see that. To be honest, I'm not even sure I want to see that. Impress upon Dumbledore that is the best case scenario. The others ... I'd rather not describe."

Harry cringed and wondered if Professor Umbridge had one of those "safe words" that he and Padma agreed on. He quickly disassembled his telescope and mounted his broom. Bane brought Umbridge's wand and tossed it on the ground in front of him.

"Give that to Dumbledore, boy! Tell him to not come before dawn. This trespasser is ours for the night."

"Potter! Help me, you miserable brat!" The witch bleated like a lost goat.

Remembering how she had humiliated his Auntie in class, just last week, Harry shook his head and flew off toward the castle. Harry wondered how he was going to break the news to the Headmaster that they would, in all likelihood, need another Defense Instructor.

"It is my sad duty to inform you that High Inquisitor Umbridge has urgent Ministry business to attend to and, regrettably, can no longer fulfill her instructional duties here at Hogwarts ..."

Dumbledore had to wait a full minute for the cheers to die down. Even some of the staff was applauding. When there was finally a modicum of silence, he continued, "Until I find a full time replacement, Professor Sinistra has graciously decided to take over Defense Against the Dark Arts and we'll be getting new textbooks by the weekend. I'd also like to welcome to the staff Professor Firenze, who will now be teaching Astronomy starting next week, after some much needed alterations are made to the Astronomy tower. Unfortunately, for many of you out there, the tower will be off limits until the additions have been made."

"Glad she's gone," Michael Corner said. "Now maybe we'll get someone competent."

Harry shrugged. "Hopefully, that will be the case. Unfortunately, the track record isn't so good with that class."

"Why don't you ask your cards, Harry?"

Corner wasn't a bad bloke, but with Luna skipping breakfast for a Nargle search and Padma sleeping off her romp through the Restricted Section last night, Harry was decidedly lacking in company. Michael had been reasonably friendly, especially after Harry predicted good things for him and Ginny Weasley.

Harry spread out the cards and surveyed the results. "It's a person at a crossroads. He or she has a great choice to make. There is the potential for betrayal, solidarity, and even redemption."

"Okay, that's all well and good, but is the next teacher worth his salt?"

"Sorry, that's what's being revealed. Maybe I'll try again before ..."

There was a sense of dizziness. "Potter, are you okay?"

Harry shook off the feeling. "Yeah, I think so."

"What exactly did '*One that you care for will suffer greatly*' mean?"

"Uh, did I just say that?" Harry asked fishing for his charmed book.

"Yeah, you're voice got all strange. Are you just pranking me?"

"No," Harry said looking at the words. "Was I looking directly at you when I said it?"

"Um, maybe. I'm not sure. Should I be worried?"

"I don't know. The prediction could just as easily apply to me. Did I point at you or grab you?"

"No." Corner was defensive. "Quit fooling around, Harry."

"I'm not. If I didn't directly indicate you in some manner, it's probably not you. Still, it wouldn't be a bad idea to keep it in mind."

Harry didn't like this one bit.

In the two weeks since his prediction, Harry had warned Luna, Auntie Sibyll, Professor Sinistra, and the Headmaster. Excluding Firenze, whom he also discussed the prediction with, those were about the only people he "cared" for in the castle. Firenze said that he "suffered" because of his expulsion from the herd. Firenze had prevented Bane from "more aggressively punishing" Madame Umbridge and had paid a price for his interference. Although, he wasn't sure that he had suffered greatly.

Padma was skeptical that anyone could make her suffer. Harry wasn't so certain.

"You haven't been to Herbology or History of Magic all week. You shouldn't keep ditching classes."

"Harry, those classes are beneath me. Virtually all of them are. There's hardly anything they can teach me here anymore. Watch this." Padma gestured with her hand and levitated his book bag. "They don't teach wandless magic here. I was able to come up with my own theorems by piecing together knowledge from three different tomes. Depending on whether my power increases on par with my knowledge, this time next year, I might not even need a wand anymore, and I owe it all to you."

Harry glanced at the title of her current book – *Magic Most Evil*. "Maybe you should take off the diadem for awhile?"

"What?" He could see the anger in his eyes.

"Think of your brain as a muscle. You can't exercise all the time. You have to have periods of rest in between."

Padma rolled her eyes, "I take it off when I sleep. It allows me all the rest my brain needs."

"You do?"

"Of course, don't fret sweetheart, I've got it all under control."

"Can I ask why you're reading that?"

"Well, to help you fight your reincarnated Dark Lord, I'm breaking down some of the rituals he might have used to see if we can turn them against him. It's really fascinating stuff, Harry."

"Its dark magic and I don't think you should be digging too deeply into it."

"Oh Harry," she said moving closer and pulling him into a hug. "I'm doing all of this for you. Once we've rid the world of him, our future is wide open."

Harry knew she was doing this to distract him. The reason it was working was that he was a teenaged boy. When she started tugging at his trousers, he said, "Padma! It's the middle of the day in your dorm room."

"That's never stopped us before, dear. Oh, if you insist..."

She grabbed her wand and cast a spell. She sat back on her bed and disappeared from sight. Her naked legs reappeared followed by the rest of her.

"What's nicer, Harry? The illusion or what's behind it? It's soundproof as well. Now be a good boy and come to Padma."

When Harry woke up, he was still in Padma's bed, naked. Looking out, he gulped upon seeing Mandy Brockelhurst and Lisa Turpin studying on their beds. Fortunately, they were oblivious to his presence. Harry noted that Mandy was already in her nightwear and could see why Terry Boot playfully referred to his girlfriend as Brockelchest.

That was the good news. The bad news was he was tied up. He shook the cobwebs out of his head. The last things he remembered before passing out were Padma, a knife, and him screaming out their safe word.

There was healing salve smeared on his shoulder and he felt a sting on his chest and back where her nails had clawed him. His jaw was sore and he distinctly remembered her punching him.

Okay, there's getting rough and then there's getting ridiculous. I think it's time I took Ravenclaws Diadem back.

Above him words floated on the canopy of Padma's bed.

When you wake up, get dressed and come find me in Luna's hidden room. Don't keep me waiting.

It took a few minutes of using his teeth to get his left hand untied. The fact that Lisa Turpin decided to use this time to change for bed also hindered his progress. Once free, he quickly unknotted the fabric holding the other hand hostage and fumbled around for his wand and his clothes. He was glad that Padma's illusion was soundproof as he dressed in silence.

He took the time to plan his escape. First he applied a disillusionment charm on himself and then used a spell to open the door. A third spell knocked Mandy's makeup case off of her dresser and spilled the contents on the ground. When Lisa offered to give Mandy a hand picking the items up, he slipped out and made for the door.

Almost bowling over Su Li descending the steps, he made his way down into the common room. It was already after curfew, but something told him that things were at a critical juncture and he needed to get to Padma.

Harry moved quickly and as quietly as he could through the castle. He had to stop twice and reapply the disillusionment charm. He fretted that it would be so much easier if Luna didn't still have his cloak.

Finally, he reached the place where the door was. Harry concentrated and summoned the secret door. He canceled his charm and pulled on the latch. The door opened and he stepped in.

Padma was waiting for him. The room looked much different. There was a large circular bed in the middle of a runic circle. All the clutter was pushed away to the sides. She wasn't in school robes, just a black cape covered with runes that left her naked body exposed except for a sash across her waist. On that sash was a crystal dagger and Harry's worries intensified.

"Tonight's going to be a great night, Harry. Wait until I tell you what I have planned. Don't just stand there catching flies come on in, there might be a draft."

When Harry paused and pulled up his wand, she sidestepped his stunner and disarmed him. A second wave and he felt his legs moving without his control. Once he was inside the circle, she made him crawl onto the bed and vanished his clothing. With her non wand hand, she performed a casual sweeping motion and the door to the hidden room closed.

"Every time I do that, it's such a rush," she said, not really looking at Harry.

"Padma, what's going on?"

"Tonight, you're going to help me kill a Dark Lord. It'll be fun."

"You've been acting strange lately, Padma. Let's just slow down a bit," Harry said.

"Don't worry, sweetheart. The theory is sound. Really, it's just a rather ingenious piece of voodoo."

"Voodoo?"

"Oh yes," she answered. "We both know that scar is a connection between you two. I briefly forced that connection open a little wider during our session earlier today and he possessed you for a moment and I was forced to get a little rough with him. Did you realize, Harry, that with a little bit of ritual, you could become a human voodoo doll right to him?"

Harry didn't like this idea so much. "Padma, take off the diadem. You're not doing this. It is."

"You don't understand, Harry. The Diadem is a Horcrux. It contains a piece of Tom Riddle's soul, just like the Diary. I've made a pact with it. Tonight, that piece of Tom is going to join with me after we destroy the sad, mockery of what he has become. There's an old saying, never send a man to do a woman's job. It's time to rid the world of a Dark Lord and pave the way for a Dark Lady."

Harry felt a bit nauseous. He'd been shagging part of Tom Riddle for months.

"The prophecy will be fulfilled; you will die by his hand, but will be the instrument of his destruction. Should he survive the dagger thrust into your scar; it will leave him lobotomized and even more useless than he is now. Even if his other Horcruxes are still intact, they won't be able to restore him."

His body was still paralyzed. Harry tried to talk her down. The only thing that came to mind was, "Padma, you said you loved me."

"I did. Honestly, I did so much. But after a month or so, I started to see how limited you were. The fact that you were willingly limiting yourself angered me. You could be so powerful, if you chose to, but you don't. Instead, you play the role of a tool of destiny and the higher powers. You squander your power, waiting to be called upon. I await no one's call. My path is to make my own destiny, through choice."

Harry glared at her while she straddled him. Even terrified, she knew how to get him aroused. "What, Harry? Not going to plead for your life? Not going to say I shouldn't mock the powers? Or are you just going to try and enjoy our last time together. I promise, I'll remember you fondly."

He'd been focusing on the look of madness in her face so much that he was just as surprised when the broken chair leg, hanging in the air smacked Padma upside the head.

Padma collapsed onto the bed next to him. Harry looked up as the invisibility cloak pulled back and revealed an expressionless Luna Lovegood.

"I wonder how fondly she'll recall that," the blonde witch said. Pausing for a second, she continued, "Luna Lovegood, in the secret room, with a club."

Harry didn't get the reference, but he sprang into action, pulling the Diadem off Padma's head. The crystal knife was filled with his blood and should be up to the task. Rolling off the bed, he put the diadem on the cold stone floor and brought the knife down on the centerpiece. It shattered and the naked Ravenclaw witch bolted upright and screamed. The unearthly howl lasted for fifteen seconds before Padma again fell onto the bed.

With the remains of one of the most powerful magical items in the world in his hands, he turned back and looked at Luna. "When did you know?"

"I knew it was Ravenclaw's Diadem as soon as I saw it, but wanted to see what Padma was going to do with it after you gave it to her. I was hoping you'd let me show it to Daddy at some point. He'll be sad that it's been found and destroyed. Where was I? Oh yes, when she tried to oblivate the knowledge of the diadem from me, I figured she was up to no good. As for tonight, I was out looking for Nargles in the halls, when I saw you appear and apply your charm. So, I followed you. Honestly, I never liked her much anyway."

"She oblivated you?" Harry tossed the shattered diadem on the bed and used Padma's sash to bind her hands, knowing how adept his girlfriend had become at wandless magic.

"She tried weeks ago, but if you haven't noticed, Harry, people call me things like insane or barking mental all the time. In truth, they say that about you as well, which is why we get along so famously. My mind doesn't work like most people's do. Oblivations just won't work on me."

Harry pondered this and said, "Well, I guess that must be a fringe benefit."

Luna shook her head. Her expression was the most serious, he'd ever seen. "You were too young to remember your mother dying, Harry. I wasn't."

"Oh... sorry. I didn't think of it that way. Forgive me."

"Consider yourself forgiven. I suppose I could give you a whack across the head if you'd like."

"No, we'd better move Padma to the infirmary and let the Headmaster know what happened. I suspect he will be cross with me."

Luna eyed him, her normal "dreamy" face returning with an appreciative smile on it. She said, "Shouldn't you consider finding some clothes first?"

Dumbledore was slightly cross with him. He told Harry that there had been ample opportunities for him to tell the Headmaster about the diadem during their private lessons through the year and that Harry had allowed himself to be controlled by his youth and his hormones. He was assigned multiple detentions and was not allowed to visit Hogsmeade for the remainder of the school year.

On the other hand, Padma's parents and sister more than made up for it by being downright hostile. Parvati started spreading the nastiest rumors about him out of spite, while his former girlfriend was restrained in a section of the infirmary. One time, Padma managed to get loose and proceeded to assault Madame Pomfrey with wandless magic. Dumbledore subdued her.

If it wasn't for the friendship of Luna, Firenze, his Auntie, and Professor Sinistra, Harry would have been virtually alone. His housemates only knew that Padma was hurt and Harry was to the blame. The general consensus was that it served her right for consorting with the "crazies" in the house. Even the affable Michael Corner had stopped speaking to Harry.

Padma also refused to see him, the three times he tried to visit her. Being thrice denied stung the most.

The weeks dragged on and Harry sat for his OWL examinations. He was doing rather well when he noticed Padma being escorted into the room by Dumbledore. She was seated away from the other students. The Headmaster was also on hand when Padma performed the practicals. Afterward, her wand was taken back from her.

Just a few days before the end of the term, Harry was scrubbing the second floor lavatory under the watchful eye of Myrtle, when a house elf popped in. Harry looked over his shoulder and saw his friend Dobby.

"Dobby was cleaning Astronomy Tower. Professor Horsey sent Dobby to fetch Harry Potter. He says Harry Potter's Padma is there and wants to speak with him."

Harry left the washroom in a hurry, but his pace slowed as he walked the elongated stairwell up to the Astronomy Tower. He was probably more nervous than he'd ever been in his life. After nearly two months, what would she say to him? What could he possibly say to her?

Firenze patted him on the shoulder when he entered and left. Padma was sitting on a bench out on the observation deck. She looked healthier when compared to the few times Harry had gotten a glimpse. Next to her, there was a book. An enchanted quill was writing her words. Upon seeing him, she touched the top of the quill with her finger and it stopped moving.

"Hello Harry," she said.

Harry was comforted by the fact that she looked equally nervous. "Hi Padma. How are you?"

Better is the word they've been using, so I'll go with it. The Grey Lady was very helpful. Did you know she's Rowena's daughter?"

"No, I didn't," Harry said. There was an awkward pause. He broke it by saying, "I'm sorry about what happened to you."

She smiled. It was a sad smile. "I suppose it was the powers that guide you, punishing me for my arrogance and for not being a true friend."

"I thought you were a good friend."

Her smile waned and she shook her head, "No, I wasn't. But I'm glad you thought so. I was given the kind of power others only dream of. I was on par with Dumbledore, Riddle, and even you Harry. But along the way, I turned into this twisted image of myself and I became something horrible. The worst part of all was how easily I accepted it. Now, since the diadem was destroyed, I am reverting to 'plain old Padma.' All the knowledge is slipping away from me."

She stopped and pointed at the book. "I'm writing things down, so that hopefully I can relearn them at some point, but I already look at the first few pages and it's barely comprehensible. By the beginning of the next school term, I might as well be looking at it for the first time."

"I don't know what to say," Harry answered honestly. His eyes were tearing up.

Gesturing to a flowerpot, Padma used wandless magic to raise it. The effort showed on her face. "I keep practicing this. If I can hold onto this one thing, it won't be so bad."

"I'll be here for you, Padma. I promise I won't turn my back on you."

"That's the problem, Harry. I won't be here for you. I'm not coming back to Hogwarts. I'll be transferring ... maybe Beauxbatons or a school in India, but most likely I'll go across the pond to New Salem. I don't have a firm choice at the moment."

Harry was thunderstruck. "Why?"

"Too many reminders. A few months ago, I knew every line from every book worth reading in the Hogwarts Library and even all those forbidden tomes that were stashed in Luna's hidden room. Every time I step in there, I'll feel ashamed about how much I've forgotten and about how I misused that knowledge. I did horrible things and was prepared to do even worse before Luna stopped me. That's one thing I'll never be able to forget. Also, I made myself a threat to Tom Riddle and even if I no longer have that power, I doubt he is going to forget, or forgive. Trust me, when I say, it's best that I go somewhere else."

She stood and walked to the ledge. Harry was worried that she might jump. "Why don't you come back over here Padma?"

Wiping some tears from her eyes, she said, "Don't worry, there are two paintings watching us and ready to report anything to the Headmaster. Plus, in all my years here, I've never once seen Professor Flitwick riding a broom, but he's right over there circling with Professor Sinistra. I'm certain they're here for your protection more than my safety."

Harry did what he thought was best and came up behind her and wrapped her in a hug. He rested his head on her shoulder and let her cry.

Between sobs, she said, "The worst part is not only did I try and kill you, but when Riddle possessed you I told him the prophecy and boasted how I was going to kill him and there was nothing he could do about it. Because of me, you could still die. I've betrayed you, Harry!"

He tried to reassure her by saying, "He was going to find out at some point. You weren't in control. I'm just as much to blame for giving the diadem to you."

"I wish I forgive so easily, but I can't, Harry. I just can't. I almost left without seeing you. I wasn't sure if the urge to kill you was finally gone. The piece of Riddle's soul wanted you dead in a bad way and I took it out on you when we were together. You'll need to find Hufflepuff's cup and Slytherin's ring. That should be the last of his Horcruxes, though you'll want to make certain that his snake is dead. The way you described his reactions when it was hurt makes me wonder. I've told Dumbledore all this. He'll know what to do."

"It'll be okay, Padma. Just give it some time."

"No. No it won't. It's just like when you take off your glasses and look around. Everything is a blur. My entire life has lost that clarity and nothing will ever bring it back!"

She broke his embrace and gently pushed him away. "It's time for me to go. I can't do this anymore. I'll write you at some point, but it'll be awhile. Don't try to get in touch with me. You're the last thing I need in my life right now. Besides, you've got more important things to deal with."

Padma gave him a tearful kiss goodbye and gathered the book and quill. At the stairs, she met his gaze one final time and fled down the steps.

Harry was tempted to go after her, but knew it was the wrong thing to do. He looked up into the sky and shouted, "Why?"

For the first time in his life, Harry Potter was angry at the powers.

The train ride home was lonely. Auntie Sibyll asked him to sit in her car, but he said that he needed to be alone. She said they would talk when he was ready.

He sat in the last compartment before the baggage car. The few students who looked in shook their heads and went elsewhere. The Hogwart's

Express had moved for two hours before the door opened. No one was there and Harry looked for the distortion patterns of a disillusionment spell. Not seeing them, he relaxed when Luna's head appeared.

"Hello, Harry. I was beginning to wonder if you were going to let me keep your cloak for the summer."

He managed a weak smile and replied, "Hi Luna, if you really want to borrow it, you can. I doubt I'll need it this summer."

She beamed at him. "The snorkacks won't stand a chance. Are you well, Harry? You've been distant."

"Padma got close to me and she got hurt ... really bad. I don't want the same thing to happen to you."

Luna's floating head moved closer. "I think you've been dating the wrong girls, Harry. Lavender was more than willing, so long as it elevated her status. When the first sign of danger came along, she bolted. Padma spoke with me before she left. She told me to be a true friend to you and support you as she never did. She initially was with you out of gratitude for the item you brought her. That gratitude became an obsession."

Harry didn't like his love life being dissected like a frog, but there was a lot of truth to what Luna was saying. "So do you think there's a girl out there for me?"

"No."

"No?"

"Yes. Or no, depending on whether that was a question. Harry, no girl in her right mind is going to date you. Not after what Lavender and Parvati are saying about you now."

"Wonderful. I guess I need to get used to be alone."

"Nonsense silly, the girl for you isn't out there. She's right here," Luna said, opening the cloak and hopping onto his lap. The unexpected move caused Harry to "woof" loudly as all the air was forced out of him. Luna wasn't wearing much, and most of the buttons on her blouse were undone. "I said 'no girl in her right mind.' It's well established that I'm batshit insane. I've got no problems dating you."

"Not even Voldemort? You're not afraid of him."

"Oh please. Padma Patil came this close to destroying him a few months ago and she was just a tart with a magical headpiece and delusions of grandeur. I beat her. He doesn't want to mess with a Lovegood. It wouldn't end well for him." Her eyes narrowed and the smile on her face spread. "But this Lovegood wants to mess with you. I liked seeing you naked and wanted to return a portion of the favor. Besides, Toby said the trip home would be the best time to grind your stones."

"Grind my stones?" He was having a hard time not laughing. Luna was so mercurial.

"He's a staircase. It makes sense to him. He didn't understand 'make a move' or other terms. When I brought up the topic of 'shagging,' Toby thought I was talking about having a relationship with a carpet."

"Did he and Frieda ever make up?" Harry had to ask. Part of him needed to know.

"Oh yes, he said that there'd likely be a new pantry in the kitchen by the time we returned to school. I'm looking forward to seeing that wee one. Now mind you, I'm not like either of your past few floosies, Harry. This," she pointed at her accessible chest area, "is for the sole purpose of cheering you up and giving your hands something to do while I kiss you. You won't always get *this* and you'll have to impress me before you get more than *this*. Can you accept those terms?"

"Sure, but what exactly impresses you?" Harry was wondering what her answer would be.

"Obviously when you were naked, you impressed me. But, that won't work again. I've already seen it. You'll have to come up with something better than that, but you're good with making predictions, so I'm sure you'll come up with something interesting." She giggled before leaning forward and kissing him warmly. Her fingers began working on the buttons on her shirt.

Her body was less developed than Padma's or Lavender's, but he was definitely seeing a new side of her. The fact that she was eager and didn't care that he was supposed to be the next Merlin or being controlled by someone meant a lot to him. He let his hands wander as she turned and clouded the compartment door's window and followed that up with a locking charm.

"Ow. Not so hard, Harry. Tweedledee and Tweedledelight are very sensitive. There that's better, much better in fact."

"They have names?" *So that's what the prediction meant!*

"Of course, and they'll be upset if you favor one over the other. I'd suggest equal treatment if I were you."

"Whatever you say, Luna."

She smiled and licked her lip before saying, "Whatever I say? That's an odd choice of words. Suppose I said, 'Oslo Norway.' What would that mean to you?"

He pulled her down and kissed her. Breaking away, he said, "It means I don't care if I'm crazy as long as I'm crazy about you."