

## Family Values The Boy Who Arrived

FAMILY VALUES

Disclaimer: Oh, so not mine. If you see anything you recognize, it belongs to J.K. Rowling, the Estate of Charles Addams, or the media companies interpreting the work of the two creative types. Or the people who write snappy sayings for T-shirts.

### Chapter 1 – The Boy Who Arrived

#### October 31 – Midnight

A pale woman clad in a black gown, carrying an old-fashioned oil lamp, ascended a winding staircase. Her shadow flowed and leaped along the walls and danced among the cobwebs. The sound of laughter and merriment in the house below faded as she climbed. This was her place. This was her time.

At the top of the stairs was an octagonal room, which had been prepared for her use tonight. Taking a single black taper from a wall sconce, she lit it from her lamp and then used it, in turn to light the many other candles, from tapers to squat pillars, to votives in stained glass holders, which surrounded the room. The light gleamed on the dark brocaded fabric that covered the walls instead of paper.

The woman replaced the taper in its sconce and seated herself at a small table in the centre of the room, placing the lamp upon it. She ran her slim white fingers over the cold, smooth surface of a crystal globe, then gently touched a worn leather pouch that rested beside it. Not the crystal, not tonight, nor the carved wooden runes, smoothed by the touch of generations of hands. She picked up a silk-wrapped bundle and undid the black cord wrapped around it. The fabric fell away to reveal her treasured cards, their hand-painted images almost seeming to move in the candlelight.

Carefully, without rushing, she shuffled and cut the cards, spreading them out in a pattern known to no gypsy or boardwalk reader, before turning them over, one by one.

She caught her breath with the first cards revealed. The cards reflecting the present were dark. The Lightning Struck Tower. The Magus, reversed. The Five of Swords. The Ten of Swords.

In the future, The Hierophant crossed The Emperor, covered by the Seven of Cups. The Two of Swords. Death. But the future was not entirely bleak. The Page of Cups was supported by the Ace of Wands, flanked by the Two of Cups and the Ten of Cups.

She turned the last two cards, the ones to which all others led. The Wheel of Fortune and The Chariot.

She sat for a long time, staring at the cards, memorizing their pattern.

Finally, as the moon set, she gathered the card up and rewrapped them carefully. She extinguished the candles and took up the lamp, descending the stairs to rejoin her loved ones. At the bottom of the curving main staircase, her husband waited for her. As long as they were together, the future held no terrors, regardless of what the cards said. They were Family. And the Family would prevail.

#### 1 November – Midnight

*"I've come to bring Harry to his aunt and uncle," said Dumbledore. "They're the only family he has left now."*

*"You don't mean - you can't mean the people who live here?" cried Professor McGonagall, jumping to her feet and pointing at Number Four. "Dumbledore - you can't. I've been watching them all day. You couldn't find two people who are less like us. And they've got this son - I saw him kicking his mother all the way up the street, screaming for sweets. Harry Potter come and live here!"*

*"It's the best place for him," said Dumbledore firmly. "His aunt and uncle will be able to explain everything to him when he's older. I've written them a letter."*

*"A letter?" repeated Professor McGonagall faintly, sitting back down on the wall. "Really, Dumbledore, you think you can explain all this in a letter? These people will never understand him! He'll be famous - a legend - I wouldn't be surprised if today was known as Harry Potter day in the future - there will be books written about Harry - every child in our world will know his name!"*

*"Exactly," said Dumbledore, looking very seriously over the top of his half-moon glasses. "It would be enough to turn any boy's head. Famous before he can walk and talk! Famous for something he won't even remember! Can you see how much better off he'll be, growing up away from all that until he's ready to take it?"*

*Professor McGonagall opened her mouth, changed her mind, swallowed, and then said, "Yes - yes, you're right, of course."*

But she would wonder, in the years that followed, whether he really was right.

## 2 November - Morning

Mr and Mrs Dursley, of Number Four, Privet Drive, prided themselves on being quite normal, thank you very much, and the only attention they wanted was the kind you got from being even more aggressively, suburbanly normal than their typically suburban neighbours. Mr Vernon Dursley was climbing the executive ladder at a drill manufacturing company called Grunnings, and Mrs Petunia Dursley kept house and had produced the required child to complete the family, a boy named Dudley, a name the neighbours thought was perfectly appropriate for a boy who closely resembled a pudding, even as an infant. Petunia Dursley kept the house spotless, the garden neatly manicured, and paraded Dudley about the neighbourhood in his pram on nice days. In short, they were a completely boring family, and their neighbours didn't pay much attention to them at all, being much more interested in the sort of disasters that hit Mr and Mrs Number Eight, whose daughter had managed to become pregnant while she was away at University, and Mr and Mrs Number Fifteen, who were, it was rumoured, on the verge of getting a divorce.

All of this changed on 2 November, when Petunia Dursley stepped out of her front door to look for the morning newspaper so that her husband could read it over his breakfast. The newspaper had unaccountably not been delivered through the letterbox as usual, and Petunia hoped it would be outside. On her front step, however, she found a large wicker basket containing a small boy with fluffy black hair, who had at one point apparently been sleeping peacefully beneath a plaid blanket, but was now happily dismembering the paper and sending its individual sheets blowing across the garden and down the street. When Petunia stepped out, the child looked up at her with clear green eyes, and held his hands up trustingly, obviously hoping to be picked up.

Petunia did the first thing that came to mind under the circumstances. She screamed. Then she went back in the house, slamming the door behind her.

The little boy decided that if the lady was screaming, he should be, too, and let out a howl that showed he had very healthy lungs.

Petunia hastily jerked the door open again, and whisked the basket, boy and all, into the house, slamming the door behind her. She took the basket into the kitchen and dropped it on the kitchen table, then pulled down all the shades over the kitchen windows, and in the dining room and lounge for good measure.

Vernon Dursley, still in the process of tying his tie, came down the stairs to find his house in chaos: the rooms were dark, since Petunia had not turned on the lights when she pulled down the shades; Dudley was in his play pen in the lounge demanding to be let out; a horrid smell emanating from the kitchen meant that breakfast was burnt beyond salvaging; Petunia was sitting on a kitchen chair rocking back and forth and crying; and there was a basket on the table, with a black-haired toddler on the verge of tipping it over.

Vernon did something that was as obvious for him as screaming was for Petunia. He shouted. "WHAT THE BLOODY BLUE BLAZES IS GOING ON HERE?!" Because, of course, shouting always solves all problems.

Unaccountably, it didn't work this time. The boy in the basket looked up at Vernon, took a deep breath, and howled. Dudley, in the living room, joined the chorus. The bangers in the pan on the stove caught fire. And Petunia flung herself into Vernon's arms, sobbing uncontrollably. Vernon glared at the strange boy. This was obviously all his fault.

It took a while, but eventually matters were sorted out. Dudley was given some toast with jam and juice in his favourite blue sippy cup. This quieted him temporarily. The strange boy was also given toast (but without jam) and juice in a purple sippy cup which Vernon had decided was a totally unsuitable colour for his only son. The boy looked at it warily, but apparently had no prejudices against the colour purple and accepted the offered food and drink. The bangers were extinguished, removed from the burner and disposed of. Lights were turned on. Petunia was comforted, and once she had calmed a bit, she thrust a bundle of what appeared to be parchments at him to read.

Vernon, of course, knew all about Petunia's sister, Lily, and her freakish magic. He'd never seen her use it, of course, but Petunia believed in it wholeheartedly, so he did as well. After the unsettling events of the day before, he was even more willing to accept it. He had no choice. Between owls and map-reading cats and shooting stars, it was fairly obvious that magical things were happening. He'd always hoped it would leave him alone, that Lily and her husband and child would remain safely in their own world and never bother the safe, sane, *normal* people. But now the magical world had spilled into his own life with not so much as a by your leave. Did they expect him to accept the baby left on his doorstep without question or complaint?

"No, Petunia! I'll not have it! This ... this *freak* of a nephew of yours is not going to be staying in our house, eating our food, and contaminating *our son* with this magic of his! No! The boy goes!"

"But they'll be watching! They'll *know* if we don't keep him. You have no idea what these people can do, Vernon! They could turn us into frogs or newts, and do who knows what to our Dudley!"

Vernon paled. "Newts?"

"Newts."

"Then we'll keep him for a while. Just long enough for them to get bored and go away. And then we'll ... we'll put him up for adoption, how about that?"

"He has to stay with blood relations; it says that in the note. We'll just have to make do. Hopefully we can keep it quiet, at any rate. Heaven knows what the neighbours will think."

Unfortunately for Petunia, keeping it quiet was next to impossible. Her shrill screams that morning had been quite piercing and attracted quite a bit

of unwanted attention from the neighbours. That Vernon Dursley's car didn't leave the drive that morning attracted even more notice. It was quite unusual, even unheard of, that Mr Dursley did not go to work. And with all the window shades pulled down, no one could even guess at what was going on by peeking in through the windows.

It was apparent to the neighbours that in order to find out what was going on, someone was going to have to do a reconnaissance in person. Therefore, Mrs Number Six, being the closest to them, promptly made a casserole and took it over to the obviously troubled couple in hopes of getting some information in return.

When the doorbell rang, Petunia peeked out the window, only to see Mrs Number Six standing there with a covered dish in her hands. "Vernon, give me a moment to take the boy upstairs, then answer the door. It's Mrs Number Six, and it looks like she's going to settle in to stay."

"What shall I tell her?"

"Tell her the truth ... some of it, anyway. Tell her my sister died suddenly and I'm terribly distraught and – and we have to go pick up her son from the hospital since we're going to be stuck with him! There will be too many questions if they know he's here already!" She grabbed the basket containing her nephew from the table and struggled up the stairs with him as quickly as possible.

As soon as she was in the bedroom, with the door open only a crack, Vernon answered the second, more insistent ringing of the bell. "Yes, what can I do for – oh hello, Mrs. Reese. How nice to see you. No, no, nothing's – well actually something is wrong, yes – you see, my wife's sister, we only just heard ..."

Mrs. Reese was a good listener, and terribly sympathetic, and by dint of patient questioning gleaned every detail of the tragic car accident that had taken Lily and James Potter's lives that Vernon (and Petunia, when she descended the stairs to rescue her husband from his interrogator) could make up. They thanked her profusely for the casserole, and put it in the refrigerator "for later" while trying to get her out of the house as fast as possible, under the pretext that they had to go collect their poor orphaned nephew.

Vernon managed to smuggle the boy, still in his basket, into the back seat of the car while Petunia fussed with getting Dudley into his safety seat, and they drove away, aware that behind them all the phones on Privet Drive were ringing as Mrs. Reese spread the news of the Dursleys' unexpected misfortune.

They spent several hours driving around, and stopped at two or three second-hand shops to acquire things that presumably would have belonged to the boy, and which they would need. When they arrived home, with a second baby seat in the back now containing the boy, several boxes of clothing and a few toys in the boot, and a disassembled crib tied to the top of the car, all the neighbours rallied round to help them. They streamed in and out of the house, bringing food, offers to mind the child, spare clothing from their attics, and extra baby furniture. They chucked the green-eyed child under the chin and said what a good boy he was, and wasn't it nice that little Dudley would have someone to play with growing up, and wasn't it kind of Petunia and Vernon to open their home to poor little Harry, and then they went away and left the Dursleys to their own devices.

## 14 November

Petunia tried, she honestly did. She fully intended to treat her orphaned nephew well. But Dudley was a demanding child, and when the other boy suddenly appeared in his life, he didn't take it well, to say the least. He was clingy when he saw his mother paying any attention to Harry, and he screamed and threw a tantrum when she let Harry play with any of Dudley's toys. He claimed all Harry's toys as his own, and kept Petunia running all through the day.

Harry, for his part, was abnormally quiet during the day, content to sit and play quietly with whatever small toys Dudley overlooked. But at night he had nightmares and woke up screaming, keeping everyone in the house awake.

Vernon took to sleeping on the sofa downstairs, saying it was the only way he could get any peace. When they received another thick parchment envelope, this one thankfully delivered through the letter box like normal post, containing copies of papers granting Petunia legal guardianship of her nephew, he threatened that if Petunia didn't do something about the boy, he wouldn't be responsible for his actions.

Exhausted and in despair, one night Petunia stuffed the mattress from Harry's crib into the cupboard under the stairs and locked him in. That night, for the first time since the boy arrived, she got a full night's sleep, with her husband by her side, and decided she didn't care if the boy cried or not, as long as she couldn't hear him.

Far away, another woman made a phone call. It was the same call she'd placed every day for the past week, with the same result. The number she had dialled was not in service. Please hang up and dial again. She hung up, but she did not dial again. Instead, she sat at her writing desk and began a letter. *My dear cousin*, she wrote. *It has been several years since last I wrote...*

## 18 November - Morning

Petunia was feeding Dudley his breakfast, while Harry was fending for himself with a bowl of unsweetened porridge and some toast, when Vernon came into the kitchen with the morning post. "Here, who's this writing to you from the States?" he said, dropping an envelope on the table. "Someone named Addams? On monogrammed stationery, no less!"

Petunia took the envelope, frowning. "Oh, that's just Morticia. Her mother and my mother were cousins of some sort; I don't know the exact connection. She writes every so often, but I really wish she wouldn't. Her letters always have long stories about people I don't know and all the disastrous things that have happened to them." She opened the envelope and pulled out several sheets of stationery filled with elegantly sloping handwriting. "Yes, it's more of the same. Downright depressing."

Vernon snorted. "Morticia, eh? Name like that, I'm not surprised her letters are depressing. Well, now you can write her back and tell her all about the disaster that's happened to us. I'm sure she'll want to know all about it. Who knows, if she's a blood relation, you might even be able to foist the

freak off on her. *They* wouldn't be able to complain then, now would they?"

"No. No, they wouldn't," said Petunia. "I doubt she'd be willing, really – I mean, how would I even bring it up? But I suppose it wouldn't hurt to write back."

"Good. I'll leave you to it, then. Have a good day, dear." And he bustled off, off to his job at the drill company, where he could forget about magic and green-eyed boys for a little while, at least.

Petunia, who had no such refuge, thought for a long time before she began to write a long letter to her cousin.

A/N1: For those who read Tarot, the cards that Morticia turns up provide hints to what will be happening as the story unfolds. I originally put in the meanings, but decided that it would give away too much in the very beginning.

A/N2: The italicized text is, of course, from "Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone" (with a tiny modification or two). In general, I'm not going to include much detail from the stories, as everybody knows what happened, but I may show character reactions which were not included in the original novels since I'm not working from an exclusively Harry-centric POV.

## Family Values Welcome to the Family

Family Values

Disclaimer: Not mine. This market's been cornered.

A/N: I have received a few comments about my explanations, or lack thereof, of the Tarot card spread in Chapter 01. I may put an explanation at the end of the story, but I didn't want to make things too obvious. For those who are interested, there are pictures and explanations of all the cards at the following site: <http://www.learntarot.com/cards.htm>. While there are multiple possible meanings for each card, it should be fairly easy to figure out the general meaning of the spread. Don't worry about the positions of the cards. Morticia wasn't using any generally recognized pattern. She's an intuitive reader and puts the cards where she feels they need to be.

### Chapter 02 – Welcome to the Family

Letters led to phone calls; phone calls led to couriered packages; and couriered packages contained travel documents and first-class plane tickets. Although Petunia had still never met her cousin Morticia, she had tentatively come to think of her as a friend. More importantly, a friend with contacts, and a friend who was willing to pay for the privilege of taking a nuisance off Petunia's hands. If she'd been less anxious to get rid of Harry, she might have questioned it more, but as things were, she didn't want to ruin things. Accordingly, she eagerly awaited her first trip abroad by herself - not counting the baby as a companion – and the first time she'd had away from Vernon since they'd been married and from Dudley since he'd been born. It wasn't that she didn't love them, of course; she adored her husband and son, but sometimes ... if she was honest with herself, sometimes she wanted to do something for herself.

All through her childhood, Petunia Evans had been appalled and embarrassed by her parents and their freewheeling ways. Rosemary Evans (nee Addams) and Peregrine Evans had been loving parents, but a bit scatterbrained, and Petunia wouldn't have been surprised to discover that they'd simply misplaced another sibling or two somewhere. Her parents had been ever so pleased to discover Lily was a witch, of course, and though they tried to show equal affection to both their daughters, it had always been evident that it was the beautiful and talented Lily, who took after their mother, who was the favourite, instead of herself, who unfortunately took after her father in the looks department. Over the years, the more outrageous her parents were, the more straitlaced Petunia had become, embracing the role of suburban housewife enthusiastically after her marriage to Vernon Dursley. When her parents were killed while bucketing about Africa on some sort of volunteer work, Petunia convinced herself that she didn't care. That she was content with her life. That she could think of nothing better to do than keep Vernon's house, raise his child, and hostess the occasional dinner party.

Now it turned out that there was something, something Addams-ish, perhaps, in her after all, and for once in her life, she would meet adventure head on!

### 20 December – Somewhere over the Atlantic

It was, perhaps, inevitable that she would regret her decision at some point. She had expected to when she left home. She had offered to get someone in to do for Vernon and Dudley while she was away, but Vernon had insisted that he was perfectly capable of handling Dudley and the cooking for a few days; after all, she did it all the time without too much trouble, so how hard could it be, really? Though she wasn't looking forward to the condition of her kitchen when she returned, she thought Vernon was in for an enlightening few days. When Dudley began to whimper and whine as he saw Mummy leaving and taking the Other Boy and not taking *him*, she made a break for it, stuffing her baggage in the boot of the taxi and getting away as fast as she could.

Being trapped on an airplane with a cranky and irritable Harry, however, was far from being the adventure she sought. The flight attendants all fell in love with the boy at first sight and kept coming round to see if he or Petunia needed anything, but they all had their jobs to do. Harry was as agitated as any toddler would be in the strange setting, although perhaps less demanding. When Harry fell asleep, she thought she might have some peace, but he eventually woke up shrieking from a nightmare, and it took some time to get him calmed down again, even with the attendants' help.

### 20 December – New Jersey

By the time her flight landed, in the late afternoon local time, and she'd made her way through Baggage Claims and Customs, Petunia had had quite enough. Harry was fussy and miserable, her luggage on wheels kept tipping over as she made her way through the crowds, she was exhausted and overheated from having to wear her coat indoors, and she had a ladder in her tights. Fortunately Morticia had said she would send along a driver, so Petunia wouldn't have to worry about getting a rental car or remembering to drive on the wrong side of the road. Petunia sought out the exit from the terminal; Vernon had told her that drivers for business travellers often waited there for their passengers.

There they were. Six men in black suits, huddled together, all carrying signs – JONES, FERREIRO, WOLFORD ... and the reason why they were huddled – a giant of a man, easily seven feet tall and gaunt, in an old-fashioned chauffeur's uniform, with a greyish complexion and dark eyes under a heavy brow ridge. He was, of course, carrying a sign that said DURSLEY. Petunia gaped for a moment, thinking, *Be careful what you ask for*;

*you might get it. You wanted an adventure ...* Straightening up her suitcase, which had tipped over again, she approached the forbidding figure. "Excuse me ... sir ... I'm Mrs Dursley. I believe you're waiting for me?"

The giant looked her up and down, his eyes glittering, intense. Instead of speaking he uttered a groaning sound and stepped toward her. She swallowed nervously and stepped back hurriedly, almost tripping over her bag. He shook his head wordlessly and reached down to take her bag, lifting it almost effortlessly.

"Oh. Oh, of course," she said. "Will you take me to the car now, please?"

He shook his head again and turned toward the automatic doors and the parking lot, with Petunia, Harry in her arms, trailing along uncertainly behind him.

When they reached the car, Petunia gasped in surprise. While she didn't know what the make and model were, not being up on American cars generally, she did know a classic when she saw one. It was long and low to the ground, with running boards, spoked tires, and a seat for the driver outside the passenger compartment. That part was just sensible, she realized; the chauffeur was so tall he would bump his head in a normal car. He stowed her luggage in the boot and assisted her into the car, still never saying a word. He took his own seat and started the car, and its engine purred almost noiselessly as he pulled out of the parking lot. *Aside from the driver, thought Petunia, I could get used to this.*

The car left the city behind, passed through a band of suburbs not unlike home, and eventually came to a town filled with older buildings. With lights in the windows and wreaths on the doors in celebration of the season, it quite reminded her of a picture one would find on a Christmas card. They left the shopping district behind, and headed up into a neighbourhood of well kept older homes. The further they went up into the hills, the larger and more expensive the homes became. Finally, they came to a large wrought iron gate with the letter "A" worked into it. The gate swung open as they approached and closed again after them.

The long drive curved about, and a house came into view on the top of the hill. It was huge and imposing, silhouetted against the evening sky. It was at least three storeys tall, with a tower jutting up above the roof. As they came near, however, Petunia could see that the house had seen better days, as had the grounds. The garden beds boasted only leafless shrubs at this time of year, of course, and the grass lay lank and matted on the lawns. The house itself was sadly in need of painting, with most of its formerly white paint peeled off to reveal greying wood beneath.

The chauffeur stopped the car in front of the front steps of the house, which led up to an impressively tall set of double doors. He held the car door for Petunia, then took her luggage up the stairs and set it in front of the doors while she struggled up the stairs with a tired child in her arms. As soon as she reached the top step, he went back down and drove away, pulling the car around the house to the rear.

Petunia was left standing by the doors, being ogled by an impertinent raven that was perched over a nearby window. Hesitantly, she reached for the doorbell. It was an old-fashioned pull type instead of a push button. Shifting Harry slightly on her hip for balance, she pulled the knob and released it. Instantly, a shrill scream rang out from behind the door. Startled by the scream, she almost jumped out of her skin when the door opened. There was the tall man again – or his twin brother – wearing a butler's outfit this time.

For the first time, he spoke, in a deep, almost sepulchral voice. "You raaaang?"

"I... I..." It took Petunia a moment to pull herself together, and her frustration was what carried her through. "Of course I rang! My name is Petunia Dursley, I've travelled a long way to meet Morticia Addams, and I don't appreciate whatever game it is you're playing!"

The butler stepped aside to let her flounce past him, then brought her case into the foyer from the steps.

Once inside, Petunia stopped and looked about, apprehensively. The foyer rose three storeys to the ceiling, with a staircase twisting around it. The only furniture was an uncomfortable looking bench seat with a carved back, and a table that bore a three-branched candelabrum and a vase filled with black peacock feathers instead of flowers. Light came from ornate antique wall fixtures, but the room itself seemed to soak it up until all was shadows. Petunia felt someone was watching her from above, but she couldn't see whoever it was.

"Welcome, Petunia." The voice was low and rich, melodic and somehow cold. Petunia whirled, to see a tall, slim woman, clad in a form-fitting black gown, coming out of a door from an adjoining parlour.

"Morticia?"

"I'm glad to make your acquaintance at last, Petunia. And is this little Harry? Welcome to your new home, little one." Her tone of voice thawed considerably as she addressed the child.

"Thank you for inviting me to come," said Petunia.

"It's nothing. Our home is yours, my dear. You are an Addams, after all."

"I'm afraid I'm not ..."

"Your mother, Rosemary Evans, was an Addams by birth. And so, of course, are you. Blood means so much more than just the name, you know. You are an Addams, as was your sister and as is Harry, and you are both welcome here. If you will come with me, we'll get him settled in the nursery while Lurch takes your things up to your room."

"Lurch?" Petunia discovered the big man standing right in back of her, carrying her suitcase again.

"Yes, this is Lurch. He's an old family retainer. Between you and me, very old." Morticia picked up the candelabrum from the table, and the candles lit by themselves as she did so.

“Did you ... are you ...?” Petunia suddenly seemed to be unable to speak in complete sentences.

“All will be explained in time, my dear cousin. Let us see to Harry first.”

Petunia followed the flickering light of the candles up the stairs and through shadowy halls to a large room which she presumed was the nursery. The walls were painted with images of strange creatures Petunia couldn't identify, but which seemed vaguely unwholesome. In the flickering light, she thought she could see them moving. There were three ornate cots, each hung with curtains to keep out draughts. An elderly woman, clad in rags and her hair in rats, came to greet them.

“I just got the children to bed. Little Pugsley fought me for a whole hour this time, and I had to put the lid on the crib,” she said proudly.

“Did he? He'll be ready for a big boy's bed soon,” said Morticia. “Grandmama, I would like to introduce you to Petunia Dursley. She has been so very kind as to bring Harry to us. Petunia, this is Grandmama Addams, my husband's mother.”

“Pleased, I'm sure,” murmured Petunia weakly, as Grandmama smiled at her, exposing a number of gaps in her yellowed teeth.

“These are my children.” Morticia approached the first cot, which had an initial “P” carved on the headboard. “Pugsley. My first born. He was two last September.” The light revealed a stocky boy with short, fuzzy hair, wearing a sleeper with horizontal black and white stripes. In addition to the normal bars on the sides of the cot, a set of bars covered the top, making it resemble a cage containing the peacefully sleeping child.

Morticia passed on to the next cot, which had a carved “W” and no lid. A small girl lay motionless, snuggling a plush animal of some sort. The exact species was hard to tell, as it had no head. The child wore a black one-piece sleeper with a touch of white lace at the throat. Her hair was black and done up in two short braids. “My daughter, Wednesday. She's a few weeks younger than Harry.”

“Your children are very close in age,” Petunia noted.

“Oh, yes. Irish twins. We were so proud,” said Morticia. “And now Harry makes them triplets. It will be wonderful.”

She led the way to a third cot, its side down for easy access. It had an “H” proudly carved on the headboard. “This will be Harry's bed, and I have a nightshirt here for him. I guessed at his size to get things to last him a few days; of course I'll have him properly fitted for clothing now that he's here.”

Between two experienced mothers, one fussy boy didn't stand a chance at not being changed into his nightshirt. Harry's eyes closed almost as soon as his head touched the pillow, and Morticia tucked him in with what appeared to be a stuffed multi-tentacled creature of some sort.

“I should warn you,” said Petunia. “He does have nightmares. Sometimes. Wakes up crying. You know.”

“I shouldn't be surprised,” said Morticia. “He did see his parents killed before his eyes. I would be worried if he *didn't* have nightmares. But we can cope. Grandmama sleeps in an adjoining room, and if she can cope with Fester's nightmares, she can cope with Harry's.”

“And how old is Fester?”

“Forty-three.”

Morticia turned away from the sleeping child and looked intently at Petunia. “Come. You are exhausted yourself. There will be time enough tomorrow to talk and explain everything.” She led the way down the hall to what appeared to be a guest room, with a bed so high it needed steps to climb into it, an old-fashioned washstand, and an elaborately carved wardrobe. Petunia's clothing had already been put away, and a nightgown lay ready on the bed.

Morticia put the candelabrum on a nightstand near the bed. “This will be your room,” she said, turning toward the door. “If you need anything, just scream.”

A/N “A ladder in her tights”, by the way, is a run in her stockings or pantyhose.

## Family Values The Contract

### FAMILY VALUES

Disclaimer: Neither Harry Potter nor the Addams Family belong to me, alas. I'm merely playing with them, and promise to put them back in the same condition in which I found them. Mostly.

A/N Sorry for no chappie yesterday. The folks at work insisted that I actually work (imagine that!), and when I got home I spent several hours wrestling with it, writing a grand total of 350 words, until I realized that writing from Morticia's point of view just wasn't going to work here. So we're back with Petunia for a while, and hopefully this chapter is long enough to make up for it.

Thanks for your reviews and comments, everyone. I'm really happy with the reception this story has received so far, and I hope to keep up the momentum. Several of you pointed out an annoying misplaced pronoun in the previous chapter, and I also received a helpful Brit-pick tip on the delivery of newspapers. Corrections have been made; thank you, everyone.

### Chapter 03 – The Contract

If Petunia didn't scream during the night, it was only because she was too terrified to. She attempted to pick up the candelabrum, to get a better look at the room, but the candles went out as soon as she touched it. She fumbled around the walls, but could find no light switch – *what century were these people living in, anyway?* – and was forced to find her way back to the bed by touch. During this process, she barked her shins severely on several pieces of furniture that she swore had not been in the room before, but that were there now for the express purpose of tripping her up. She changed into her nightgown, draping her clothing over the footboard – this was not something she would ordinarily do, but she was not venturing into the darkness looking for the wardrobe, not with homicidal furniture out there – and then climbed awkwardly into the bed.

The mattress was soft – too soft. She sank into it and it billowed up on either side of her, hampering her movement. She managed to pull a quilt, which smelt of lavender and less wholesome things, up over her, and tried to sleep, but it was useless. In a big old house like this, night noises were inevitable, and she was so unsettled that every noise was magnified into a signal that some creeping horror that was out to get her.

She finally did manage to drop off, but woke up abruptly, convinced that there was something – some *thing* – in the bed with her. Groping blindly, she found a hand – a hand that was *not hers* and was connected to no arm – resting on the quilt. It was warm, and it *wiggled* in her grasp. With a shriek, she flung it away from her, hearing a satisfying thump as it hit the wall, and grabbed for the candelabrum, prepared to defend her life and virtue if necessary. There were a few scuffling noises, and then she heard a rapid patter moving out of her room and down the hall. Silence fell again, and Petunia huddled against the headboard and dared not move until morning came.

### 21 December – The Addams Residence, Somewhere in New Jersey

As soon as it was light enough to see, Petunia got out of bed and searched the room. There was no sign of a dismembered hand anywhere, and she decided with relief that she had dreamed it. The things she had left across the footboard had vanished over night, but nothing leaped out of the wardrobe at her when she opened it, and all her clothes were hanging there neatly. She dressed rapidly and then went in search of a bathroom, which was rapidly becoming a necessity. Fortunately, it was both close by and relatively normal, although the clawed feet on the tub were a little too realistically modelled for her taste.

She returned to her room and repacked her things, just in case she needed to make a quick getaway, but also recognizing that she might have to leave everything behind anyway. She only had a few jewellery items of any value, so she made sure she was wearing those. Then she went looking for the nursery again. She didn't particularly care for her nephew, that was true, but even he didn't belong in a house like this.

The house had looked large from the outside, but it was even bigger on the inside, and she soon became thoroughly lost. She peeked into some of the rooms, and found most of them to be unused, with dust covers draped over the furnishings. This section must be guest quarters, and she was sure there were rarely guests to be quartered. Eventually she found a flight of stairs leading down to the ground floor and the main foyer. She tried the front door, but it refused to open. Further investigation showed that the door Morticia had come from the previous night led to a parlour. The furniture was all antique and probably original to the house. She pushed open the drapes, and the grey morning light showed unmistakeable signs of heavy wear on the upholstery. The rugs were threadbare, the wallpaper faded where the sun would hit it, and the drapes themselves were brittle with age. This room contained the first sign she had seen of holiday decorations; a tall, thin tree with only a few crispy brown needles clinging to it was decorated with ornaments she would have considered appropriate for Halloween – little ghosts, black cats, broomsticks, even skeletons and a tiny Iron Maiden – and garlanded with funereal black and purple ribbons.

"Good morning, Petunia," came Morticia's voice from behind her. Petunia jumped and whirled to see her cousin in the doorway, arms casually crossed. Either she was wearing the same long dress as yesterday, or she had a closet full of the things. "I'm surprised to see you up this early. Did you sleep well?"

"Not at all! There was this ... this *thing* in my room and..."



“Thing was in your room? Oh dear, he knows he’s not supposed to bother the guests, but he’s always just so happy to see visitors. I’ll have a word with him later. Now, how would you like a cup of tea before breakfast to settle your nerves?” Morticia gracefully led Petunia to one of the chairs near the tree. “I see you noticed my little tree. I generally don’t decorate much for the holidays, but last week I was taken by a *dreadful* urge to be merry, so I indulged. The children seem to like it.”

Morticia crossed to the corner of the room, where there was a hangman’s noose hanging unobtrusively in the shadows. Morticia pulled it briskly, and a loud gong rang. To Petunia, it seemed to shake the entire house. The giant butler appeared instantly in the doorway. “You raaang?” he asked in his groaning voice.

“Please bring us some tea, Lurch. My personal blend, I think,” she said, glancing at Petunia, who was perched tensely on the very edge of her seat. “And let Grandmama know that we will be down for breakfast shortly.”

The butler groaned in acknowledgement and disappeared as quickly and as silently as he had come.

“I saw you looking out the window,” Morticia said. “I’m afraid the gardens aren’t much at this time of year. You should see them in the summer, when the wolfsbane and the hellebore and the nightshade are in bloom. I even have some bog asphodel, although it usually doesn’t grow well outside of the Pine Barrens. There’s a colony of the dearest little brown bats in the attic, and it’s so relaxing to watch them flit about in the evening while the tree frogs sing. But I do love a day like today, when it’s grey and damp and they’re promising sleet for the afternoon. It just makes you feel good to be alive.”

Petunia made politely noncommittal noises which Morticia apparently took for agreement, and they chatted about gardening, which was an interest they seemed to have in common. In a few moments the butler was back, carrying a silver tea tray that looked tiny in his huge hands. He set it on the table next to Morticia’s chair and vanished again. Morticia poured from the ornate silver teapot, and handed Petunia a delicate cup of steaming tea.

Petunia cradled the cup gratefully, since her hands were cold, and took a whiff, as she always did, before tasting the tea. She almost retched; the tea was vaguely greenish, and smelled of nasty, rancid sweat socks. “What *is* this?” she asked.

“Do you like it? It’s my own calming blend. Valerian, skullcap, a little hops for a hint of bitterness. I hope you don’t mind, but you do seem a little on edge this morning.”

“It’s certainly ... different.” Petunia bravely took a sip, forcing herself not to inhale any more of the scent. It didn’t taste as bad as it smelled, fortunately, although Morticia was correct about the bitterness.

“I’ll have some packed up for you to take home with you,” said Morticia. She picked up a little silver bell and rang it once. To Petunia’s everlasting horror, a disembodied hand skittered into the room, walking on its fingertips as if they were feet. The hand leaped up onto the table next to the tea tray. “Thing, dear, would you mind terribly getting a jar of my morning tea blend and putting it in Petunia’s bag? Thank you. Oh, and were you in her room last night?”

The hand flipped itself so it was standing on its wrist and signalled to Morticia in what Petunia thought was probably sign language.

“Oh, yes, I see. Quite. You did startle her, though, so please don’t do it again. Thank you.”

The hand flashed an ‘OK’ sign, jumped off the table, and scuttled out of the room again.

“Thing said he was in your room last night to put away your clothes. Then you grabbed him and flung him against the wall. Is this true?”

“Well, yes. I mean, what else was I supposed to do when I found a hand in bed with me?”

“I quite understand, and so does Thing. He really appreciated your taking the time to play with him. I do believe he likes you.”

Petunia shuddered at the thought.

“Now, if you’ve finished your tea, let’s go down to breakfast, and I’ll introduce you to the rest of the family.”

“There’s more?” said Petunia weakly, taking another token sip of tea and then putting the cup down gratefully.

“Oh, yes, you haven’t met my husband or his brother yet. That’s all the immediate family. The extended family will be coming for the party tonight.”

“Party?” asked Petunia weakly.

“To celebrate your bringing Harry to us, of course. Now come; we have a busy day ahead of us.” She led Petunia through a corridor to a large dining room, and then down a flight of stairs to a basement kitchen. “We generally breakfast *en famille* in the kitchen. It’s so cozy down here,” said Morticia.

Petunia wouldn’t exactly have called it cozy, exactly. The kitchen was cavernous, its ceiling was low and smoke-stained, and the walls were festooned with items that could have been antique cooking utensils or could have been torture implements. There was a fireplace big enough to roast a whole cow in, and a huge cast-iron stove that could make enough food to feed an army. Grandmama was making scrambled eggs, and the three children were seated in high chairs at the huge oak table, snacking on some sort of dry cereal and happily pelting each other with bits of it.

Harry was joining in, but he stopped as soon as he saw Petunia, shrinking into himself and clutching some of his cereal tightly in his hands.

Morticia acted as though she didn't notice, kissing all three children good morning before helping Grandmama serve the eggs. The two Addams women sat with the children, helping Wednesday and Harry eat some of the eggs, while Pugsley could mostly manage on his own.

Petunia was wondering exactly what was in the eggs and whether it was safe to eat them, because they smelled a trifle odd, when two men came into the kitchen. One was tall and swarthy, with black hair parted in the middle and slicked down, and a pencil-thin moustache. He wore a purple pin-striped suit with an extravagant black silk cravat. The other was just as tall and massively built, wearing a bulky black robe instead of a shirt and trousers. He was completely bald, and his skin was pasty white. Still, the family resemblance between the men was obvious in their sunken dark eyes and wide grins full of slightly pointed teeth. "Good morning, darling!" said the one in the suit. "How are the children today? Good heavens, we seem to have acquired an extra one! Where did that come from?" he asked in mock surprise.

"Now, dearest, you know perfectly well young Harry arrived yesterday. That's why you spent it hiding in your office. Look, he's already playing with Pugsley!" Pugsley had decided to use his spoon as a catapult, and was launching sticky gobs of egg at Harry. Harry looked at Petunia, and then covered his head with his hands. Spending six weeks with the Dursley family had already taught him that when a bigger boy wanted to hit him with something, he shouldn't fight back.

Morticia's lips tightened, and she pried Harry's fingers out of his hair. "See, Harry, Pugsley's playing! He likes you. So you just throw something back, and he'll know you like him, too." She gave Harry a spoon and some egg, and carefully showed him how to fling it. Little Wednesday insisting on joining in, and soon that entire side of the table was covered in yellow goo and the children's laughter rang to the rafters.

Once he had his wife's attention again, Gomez gestured to Petunia. "Morticia, my dear, you've been remiss. Won't you present us to the vision of loveliness gracing our table?"

"Of course. Petunia, may I present my husband, Gomez, and my brother in law, Fester?"

"*Enchante*, my dear," Gomez murmured, taking Petunia's offered hand and leaning over it to kiss it.

She was rather startled; no one had ever kissed her hand before, or told her she was a vision of loveliness as if they meant it. And Gomez did mean it; his sincerity was obvious. Even though he wasn't a very attractive man, she could sense passion burning in him, and couldn't help but respond. She blushed and stammered out a greeting.

Fester waved merrily at her from behind Gomez. Grandmama handed Gomez a plate, and Fester helped himself to the rest of the eggs, eating directly out of the pan. Fester, for one, did not stand on ceremony.

Breakfast with the Addamses reminded Petunia somewhat of meals with her own family, before Lily's freakishness – no, talent, these people *liked* Lily, so she had to be politic – had manifested. The atmosphere was relaxed and intimate, and she hadn't even realized that she missed it.

Once the meal was done, Gomez leapt energetically to his feet. "Shall we deal with business before the day's festivities? Grandmama, will you be all right with the children for the morning?"

"Go on," said the older woman, whose first name Petunia still did not know. Everyone just seemed to refer to her as "Grandmama," even her own sons. "I can handle the children – I assume there's a child under there," she said, looking dubiously at Pugsley, who was almost completely covered with egg, since Harry and Wednesday had ganged up on him. "You just do what has to be done."

Gomez offered Petunia his hand. "Shall we?"

Soon Gomez, Morticia and Petunia were closeted in Gomez's study, which proved to be a comfortable office space and adjoining library. It was easily the most welcoming room Petunia had seen in the house so far.

Gomez pulled a sheaf of papers and a rolled up scroll from out of a filing cabinet and settled down on a leather sofa, Morticia next to him. Petunia was comfortable in a wing-back chair. "Before we get started, Petunia, do you have any questions about anything?" he asked.

"No, well, I don't know. Yes, I guess. My parents always said Lily was the first, um, *witch* in the family. But Morticia, I mean, the candles last night, and Thing, and ... I'm doing this badly but, are you witches?"

The Addamses glanced at each other, and Petunia had the feeling that a whole conversation passed between them.

"I suppose that depends on who you ask," said Morticia, carefully. "To your sister and her husband and their folk, no, we're not. But there are just as many who would say yes. We can't do magic the way your sister could, though some of our ancestors could. But magic comes in many forms, and there are other ways that don't require the waving of wands. Even you may have magic of some kind."

"I – I don't think so. I'm not like..." She let the end of her sentence trail off, aware that there was no way to finish it without hopelessly alienating her 'hosts'.

"Well, if you don't look for it, you'll never find it," said Morticia, smoothly. "That's entirely up to you. But Harry..."

"Harry will be like them."

"Like his parents, yes. Strange things will be happening around him, to the people near him."

"I don't think I can cope with that. I know my husband can't. And my son demands so much of my time, well ..."

"You don't need to justify yourself to us, Petunia. I know exactly what you're thinking, what you're going through." And she did, Petunia knew suddenly. And she didn't approve. That was why she was so formal. She would be different when it was just the family.

“Harry has a very special destiny,” Morticia continued. “We’re willing to work with him, to help him achieve it. You know we can do it, and it will also protect your son and husband. So we ask you formally, Petunia, will you grant guardianship of Harry Potter to us?”

“Yes.”

Gomez leaned forward and spread out the papers on the coffee table between them. “These are the legal papers. State, federal immigration, everything. We’ll all sign them, I’ll have them filed with the proper authorities, all will be taken care of.” He placed the scroll next to the other papers. “And this is the Betrothal Contract. This will make him our son in all but name.”

“Betrothal? But he’s far too young…”

“It’s the safest way,” said Morticia. “The idea is to betroth our daughter, Wednesday, to him, after which we will raise him in fosterage to be a fit partner for her. We will ensure that he is properly schooled in the use of his magic and trained to meet his destiny.”

“But a marriage contract? That’s so medieval. What if he doesn’t want to marry Wednesday? Or she doesn’t want to marry him?”

“Who wouldn’t want to marry my daughter?” cried Gomez, springing to his feet and pacing around the room. “She’ll be beautiful and strong and intelligent, just like her mother! But in the remote possibility that Harry is completely insane and doesn’t want to marry her, he doesn’t have to. The contract will allow either of them to terminate it. But until then, this is the best way to protect him and his property. At the moment, you can’t protect him if he needs it, but we can. Do we have an agreement?”

Petunia bit her lip, then nodded. If nothing else, she didn’t want to face Vernon if she came back home with the boy.

“Good, then let’s get to it! You have his birth certificate, his guardianship papers, and the papers I sent you to be executed before you came? Oh, thank you, Thing.”

The hand popped up from somewhere behind the chair, offering Gomez the buff envelope Petunia had had in her luggage. She was outraged that Thing had been going through her baggage – again – but was beginning to learn that polite standards of behaviour didn’t apply to these people. She just wanted to sign the papers and go home. Then if someone poisoned Harry with their cooking or he fell into a bog, it wasn’t any of her responsibility.

They signed all the normal legal papers first, which took some time, and then Gomez unrolled the scroll, weighting down the corners with a car from a toy train and a monkey skull as paperweights. It was all handwritten, and Petunia found it rather hard to read. “Wait, what is this? ‘I transfer all family assets, properties, wards, bindings, and protections…’ What assets?”

“The boy has a share in the trust funds set up by your parents for Lily and yourself and your children.” Petunia nodded; she received a certain amount quarterly under her parents’ Wills; it wasn’t much, but it was something, and it was hers and would go to Dudley if something happened to her. It made sense they’d have left something similar for Lily, but she hadn’t thought of it before. “Of course there’s the Addams Family Trust, he’ll get a share of that if he chooses to claim it. Wednesday’s dowry, if they do marry. The Potters probably had something at Gringotts, the Wizarding bank, too, but I won’t be able to find that out until after the Contract is signed. The Goblins have very strict rules about account access. It will all remain in his name, of course; that’s another reason for the Contract. If Lily performed any protective spells, and it sounds like she may have, or else they wouldn’t have insisted Harry stay with blood relatives, then this will transfer those spells from you and your house to us and ours.”

“There might be spells on me?” Petunia practically squeaked.

“And your house,” said Morticia, calmly. “If the people who murdered your sister came for Harry, you might be forced to defend him.”

“Then let me sign this and get them off,” said Petunia, suddenly willing to disregard any hypothetical assets in favour of removing any spells on herself.

“This contract has to be signed in blood,” Gomez warned.

Petunia turned somewhat green, but nodded. Gomez took three small silver bowls, a knife, and an old fashioned quill pen from a desk drawer. Each of them made a small cut on their thumb, letting the blood flow into the bowls, then signed the Contract with the quill and sealed it with a bloody thumbprint. When it was done, Petunia sighed and morosely blotted the wound with a tissue, while Gomez and Morticia licked each others’ thumbs clean.

## **21 December – Hogwarts Castle, Scotland**

In a tower room belonging to Albus Dumbledore, a small silver device resembling a gyroscope standing on a polished granite base spun slowly clockwise. At the moment Petunia placed her thumbprint on the Contract to seal it, it stopped spinning, began to scream shrilly, and started spinning madly in the opposite direction. When Morticia Addams placed her thumbprint on the Contract, the screaming ceased, and the device changed direction again, resuming its slow clockwise rotation. Unfortunately, at that time Dumbledore was out of his office at a meeting with his teaching staff. By the time he returned to his office and cast a casual glance over the devices monitoring Harry Potter, there was nothing unusual to be seen.

## **21 December – The Addams Residence, Somewhere in New Jersey**

Shortly after lunch time, the first of a long stream of delivery vans arrived at the Addams house, with signs on their sides advertising florists, bakeries, and a surprising number of caterers. When Morticia Addams threw a party, she was serious about it. Petunia was thinking about going up to her room for a little lie-down, since her short night had left her fatigued, when Morticia brought a short, plump woman clad in a gown that

seemed to be all lace and ribbons up to her. "Petunia, my dear, I realize you probably didn't bring anything with you that would be suitable for a party. This is Madeleine, my personal dressmaker. I asked her to do me the favour of dressing you for the occasion. May I put you in her hands?"

"Oh, er, yes, of course," said Petunia, and she was forthwith whisked off to a dressing room, where Madeleine dismissed her entire wardrobe and all her accessories with a sniff that told Petunia exactly what Madeleine thought of them. An assistant passed Madeleine a measuring tape and took notes while every part of Petunia that could be measured was measured. Madeleine then spent close to an hour holding swatches of fabric and lace up against Petunia's face and arms, then went off without consulting Petunia about her preferred styles at all.

Before Petunia could escape, she was beset by two other women, one of whom supervised her bath and then did her hair, the other of whom did Petunia's makeup and gave her a manicure. Just before the party was to start, Madeleine returned, and proceeded to insert Petunia into a dark red, off the shoulder dress that flared from the hips to the low hem. She also had shoes to match. Finally, Morticia brought in a selection of jewellery ("Just a few baubles of my own, but I thought they'd look well on you," she murmured) from which Petunia could select. Only when she was completely done up did the women let her look at herself in the mirror.

She barely recognized herself. Petunia Dursley was a housewife, a nobody from Surrey. The woman in the mirror moved in the highest levels of society. Petunia knew well that her face and figure were flawed and had tried her best to hide those flaws with clothes and makeup; now she could see just how badly she had failed. Madeleine's custom design flattered her colouring and enhanced her figure while detracting from those features that were least attractive; makeup and a new hairstyle shaped her features, enhanced her skin, and brought attention to her eyes, which were her best feature. She looked twenty years younger.

"Is that ... no, it can't be ... is that ... me?" Morticia and Madeleine nodded.

"Come, Petunia. It is your moment to shine." Morticia took Petunia out into the hall, where Gomez and Fester awaited them. Gomez wore formal attire, while Fester was ... well, at least he wasn't wearing that robe. Gomez bowed and took Morticia's arm, and Petunia gingerly took Fester's, and they went down to the ballroom together.

Earlier that day, Petunia had peeked into the ballroom. It had stood empty and lifeless, filled with shadows. Now it was a riot of colour and music and movement. The caterers had been busy, and a buffet stood along one wall laden with silver chafing dishes. A small orchestra had set up at the other end of the room, playing spirited dance tunes. The room was already filled with guests who were laughing and chatting and spinning each other around the dance floor. As the Addamses entered, the music stopped, and all eyes turned toward them.

"Dear friends!" Gomez announced. "We have gathered here tonight to welcome the newest member of our family. Morticia and I have taken on the guardianship of none other than Harry Potter! Yes, that Harry Potter, the Boy-Who-Lived himself. His Aunt, Petunia Dursley, has kindly brought him to us and entered into a traditional Betrothal Contract between her nephew and our daughter, Wednesday Addams. Everyone please join us in thanking Mrs Dursley and in welcoming little Harry to the family!"

Applause rang out, and Petunia blushed before realizing that most of the guests were looking at something behind her. She stepped out of the way to let Lurch pass her, carrying Harry in one arm and Wednesday in the other. Harry was dressed in a tiny formal suit, a duplicate of Gomez's, and Wednesday was adorable in a black velvet dress with lace tights. Everyone wanted to see the two children, but it was already past their bedtime and they shortly grew cranky. Lurch took them off to bed, and the dancing resumed.

Fester introduced Petunia to various family members before going off to dance with a four-foot-tall woman introduced as "Cousin Glynis." Left to her own devices, Petunia watched the dancing for a bit, beginning to realize just how odd the family was. For all their peculiarities of dress and habit, Morticia and Gomez were, at least, physically normal. Many members of the Family were not exactly physically normal. Morticia was exchanging jokes with a teenage hunchbacked boy who was blushing at her attention, while Gomez was dancing with a fashionably dressed woman with a long, full beard. Two sets of conjoined twins were dancing, but not with each other. Petunia soon found herself dancing with a young man, introduced to her as Mr Ian Woon; at least the only thing odd about him was that he had two different coloured eyes, one blue and one green.

After the dance, Mr Woon escorted her to the buffet tables, where she was hard put to recognize anything recognizable as food. There were tiny hardboiled eggs smaller than any hen's egg, with orangish yolk mixture piped into the hollows of the halves, slippery, clear noodles with a green sauce on them, piles of what looked like seaweed, and vegetables in a noxious-looking brownish-yellow sauce. There was even a roast suckling pig – that had two heads. Bravely, she tried most of it, even the pig, though she drew the line at the crispy-fried insects wrapped in some sort of leaf. She almost cried with relief when she discovered a simple platter of cold cuts at the very end of the table.

The dancing continued for hours, and she soon learned not to flinch when a new partner cut in, no matter what he (or it, in the case of one cousin who seemed to be nothing but a pile of hair) looked like. The music became wilder and wilder, and while Gomez and Fester were engaged in some sort of showpiece folkdance that involved much leaping about and throwing knives at each other, she decided she couldn't take any more and slipped out of the ballroom through a side door.

She found herself in a conservatory of sorts, with a host of potted plants on iron racks. Dim light came through the windows, enough to enable her to avoid the thorny branches and vines that reached out to snag her skirts. She found a garden bench and sat down with a sigh.

"Aren't you enjoying the party?"

She turned to see Morticia emerging wraithlike from the shadows. "I suppose I am. It was good of you to put it on, though it was a bit much for me."

"For you? No. The party was for Harry. To welcome him into the Family. Every new member is a treasure. You haven't accepted that you're a member of it. If you ever do, there will be a party for you, just as grand as this."

"How can you live like this, Morticia? Everything in your house is so old, so run-down. Then you throw a party ... I can't begin to estimate what this cost. Why so much for one party? Why not put some of that into your home? Why not make the children's' room more cheerful?"

"We have everything we need, Petunia. We could buy anything we wanted, but then it wouldn't mean anything. The children will always have everything they need, and they will know this, but they must also learn that wanting is not the same as needing, and how to get what they want for themselves. We don't believe in spoiling our children, Petunia. They'll never learn to take care of themselves if we do."

Petunia thought of her son Dudley, and the resolution that she and Vernon had made when he was born to make sure he never lacked for anything. Already, at only a year and a half, he was a holy terror. Whenever they bought him something, he wanted something else. It was never enough. It would never be enough.

"Thank you. Whatever else comes of this visit, I've had a look into a different sort of world, and I have a lot to think about. I think I'll go to bed now. I have a plane to catch in the morning."

"Shall I send Thing up to help you out of your dress?"

The look of utter horror on Petunia's face was all the answer Morticia needed.

A/N I managed to get in references to four of the original Addams Family cartoons in this chapter. Can you pick them out? Also two of my NaNo dares. Go me!

## Family Values Dumbledore vs. Addams, Round 1

### FAMILY VALUES

**Disclaimer:** If these characters were mine, I'd be living in Ireland (no income tax for creative artists, go Ireland!) in a castle and posting in an entirely different time zone.

#### Chapter 04 – Dumbledore vs. Addams, Round 1

##### Little Whinging

At the beginning of January, a house came on the market on Wisteria Walk, Little Whinging, just two blocks away from Privet Drive. Remarkably, it sold that same day. Even more remarkably, the purchaser paid a premium to the owner for a rapid closing. The purchaser had the wherewithal to pay for it with a simple bank cheque, so there was no mortgage to slow things up. Two weeks later, the old owners said goodbye to Little Whinging. The next day, Mrs Arabella Figg and her four cats moved in.

The rapid turnover of the house had the neighbours gossiping a bit, but it was somewhat less than a nine days' wonder, and people soon moved on to other topics of conversation. Mrs Figg was a typical old lady, a bit dotty but obviously able to take care of herself.

After settling in a bit, Mrs Figg made the acquaintance of her neighbours, and then some of their neighbours, and then let it be known that she wouldn't mind doing a bit of child minding now and then, just to keep from becoming too bored. In a suburban area like this, there were plenty of young mothers with children, and word soon got round. After spending time with several families, Mrs Figg soon had a reputation for handling difficult children well. The first week in February, her persistent groundwork paid off. She received a call from a Mrs Petunia Dursley, of Number Four, Privet Drive, wishing to know if she was available to watch her little Dudley on Tuesday next. If Mrs Figg thought there was anything odd about her mention of only one child, she didn't say anything.

On Tuesday next, she showed up at the appointed time and eyed the family curiously. She had seen them on the street on occasion, but hadn't had the time or opportunity to make a close inspection. She had to admit, they weren't what she was expecting, having been told they were average people with average tastes and slightly better than average income. Mrs Dursley was wearing a red ball gown which had obviously cost a pretty penny. Mrs Figg occasionally followed the fashion periodicals, and knew that a dress like that was custom designed, probably in Paris. The jewellery that went with it was just as expensive, and her hair and makeup were done with care and taste. Mr Dursley's evening wear wasn't anywhere close to comparable. It looked as if it had been rented for the night and fit awkwardly on his heavy body, and he looked like his tie was strangling him.

The young couple were going out dancing, Mrs Dursley said, for the first time since Dudley was born. It was so exciting, almost like their first date again. Mr Dursley didn't look so excited, but was willing to go along with his wife.

Mrs Dursley introduced Mrs Figg to Dudley, warning that he was a bit strong-willed, and if he got into a tantrum, Mrs. Figg should just put him in his crib and let him cry it out. She gave Mrs Figg a list of emergency phone numbers and a tour of the house, and asked if there were any questions.

"Well, yes, I had been under the impression you had a second child, a little boy like Dudley, but dark haired. Mrs Simmons said you'd taken him in last fall."

"Oh, I see. That was my nephew. He stayed with us briefly, but he was adopted. Was there anything else?"

"No, I believe you covered everything. Have a good evening, dear. We'll be just fine."

Once the Dursleys were gone and Dudley had been bathed and put to bed, Mrs Figg searched the house thoroughly. The upstairs had four bedrooms, one of which belonged to Mr and Mrs Dursley, one was Dudley's, one was a guest room, and one had been fitted out as a playroom. In one corner of the latter room were a disassembled cot and a stack of boxes that contained lightly used boys' clothing in sizes too small for Dudley. Petunia had written "jumble sale" on the boxes.

There was nothing else to show that a second child had ever lived there.

##### Hogwarts Castle , Scotland

On a Wednesday morning in February, Albus Dumbledore returned to his office after breakfast, anticipating no more trouble than was usual for a school for several hundred magical teenagers, plus Peeves. Things had settled down remarkably rapidly after the events of the previous fall, when young Harry Potter had destroyed the Dark Lord. Most of the trials were over by Christmas, Dumbledore had managed to extricate his Potions Master from the Ministry's clutches, and all was right with the world.

At least all was right until the flame in his fireplace burned green and the face of Arabella Figg appeared to float above the bed of coals.

Headmaster Dumbledore, are you there? This is Arabella Figg!"

Dumbledore rose from his desk and hurried around to a position from which she could see him. "My dear Mrs Figg, this is an unexpected pleasure. What can I do for you this fine day?"

"Did you, or did you not, tell me that Harry Potter was staying with the Dursleys in Little Whinging?"

"Of course he is," said Dumbledore. "I took him there myself. Is there a problem?"

"I finally made contact with the Dursley woman," said Mrs Figg. "In order to obtain access to the home, I pretended to be looking for a little extra work doing some child minding."

"Yes, good thinking, that. With two children, they'd be needing some help sooner or later," said Dumbledore.

"Well, they don't have two children. They only have one, who goes by the name of Dudley, looks just like his father, and bears no resemblance to the Potters. I inquired about a second child, and Mrs Dursley told me they'd given her nephew up for adoption!"

"What?!" Dumbledore gasped. "That's impossible!"

"You heard me! He's not there. There's a second-hand cot and some other things, all marked for the next church jumble sale. There's no sign that Harry Potter lives in that house."

"Did you find out anything about who adopted him?"

"I couldn't inquire without raising suspicions. They don't really know me and just hired me for the night. If I got nosy, there would be no hope of being invited back."

"All right. See if you can find out any more from the neighbours, and try to further the acquaintance with the Dursleys. If necessary, you can invite Mrs Dursley to tea and slip her something to make sure she's talkative. Yes, I'm sure Severus can brew something that's safe for use on Muggles."

"There was something curious I noticed about them, Albus. You said they lived a normal middle-class lifestyle. However, last night Petunia Dursley was wearing an expensive designer gown and jewels to go with it. Is it possible that someone bribed her to turn Harry over to them?"

"It shouldn't be possible, no. Wait one moment while I check the monitoring spells I have on the boy." His letter had made it clear to Petunia Dursley that the child must stay with his mother's blood relatives, and he'd even laid a minor compulsion charm on it to be sure. Petunia Dursley should not have been able to turn her nephew over to anyone else without Dumbledore's knowledge and permission. However, even if that charm had been broken somehow, the boy's condition could be determined, and even his location if he were anywhere in Britain. Dumbledore hurried over to a shelf full of shiny silver items. Some of them were simply toys, like the rack of little silver balls that clicked against each other as they swung back and forth. Most of them, however, were connected to persons or places in which he had an interest. Nothing intrusive, mind you, he had no interest in violating anyone's privacy – but if a little modest surveillance saved a life, it was worth it, wasn't it?

First he checked the status of the charm he'd placed upon Harry, to extend the blood protection created by Lily Potter's sacrifice to be extended to the Dursley home. The little silver gyroscope spun contentedly on its base, indicating that the protection was still in place. That was a relief, anyway. He was afraid that his charms work might have failed quietly somewhere along the line; he had been a bit hasty when he cast the spell.

Next he looked at a small glass globe held in a silver frame. A curl of brilliant green smoke drifted idly inside the globe, and this reassured Dumbledore further. The movement of the smoke indicated Harry's emotional state. He was currently calm and happy, and seemed to have got over the agitation that had bothered him for weeks after his parents' deaths. Likewise, his health, which was indicated by the bright green colour of the smoke, had improved. The shade had been a bit off before, which was also understandable at the time, and nothing to be overly concerned about. Little children were remarkably resilient, and it was obvious that Harry had just needed some time to adjust to his new surroundings.

The final item was a compass with two arrows. One was the normal compass arrow; the other was a little silver arrow that had one fine black baby hair sealed in its shaft. Dumbledore picked up the compass and turned it until the compass arrow was correctly aligned; the other arrow was spinning randomly. Dumbledore frowned. It shouldn't be doing that. "Point me Harry Potter," Dumbledore commanded firmly, and the second arrow began to move. First it swung south, which he expected, but then it swung east, then south again, then started pointing randomly again, drifting back and forth as if at whim. Dumbledore muttered a word under his breath that he never used anywhere the students might hear. *Of all the spells to fail, it had to be that one!*

He returned to the fireplace where Arabella Figg was waiting, more or less patiently. "The boy is safe, healthy and in good spirits, but the tracking spell seems to have failed. We'll have to look for him the hard way, Arabella. In addition to investigating at the Dursleys', I'll have to ask you to check with the Muggle authorities. We had all the proper papers filed to make their bureaucracy happy. Surely if the Dursleys put him up for adoption, there would be a record somewhere."

Arabella looked dubious about the possibility. "I don't know about that, Albus, they seal the records on that sort of thing. I don't have any legal connection to the matter, and they wouldn't just give me the information. Do you have a Ministry connection that might help?"

"I've managed to keep the Ministry from getting involved so far, and would rather continue doing so. The whole point in keeping Harry with his Muggle family was to keep Minister Bagnold from putting him under Ministry control."

"I'll do my best, then, but I don't expect much success. I'll play social worker with the officials and dotty old cat lady with the neighbours and see I can turn up. I'll let you know if I need some help with Petunia Dursley."

"You have my thanks, Arabella. I'll work things from this end." Arabella withdrew her head from the flames, which resumed their usual colour.

Dumbledore sat behind his desk again, but the paperwork he'd been doing no longer seemed important. Arabella Figg was only a Squib, but she was one of his best people; indeed, she was one of the few people he had that could move effortlessly between the Wizarding world and Muggle society. She also had an excellent mind, and knew how to keep a secret. If anybody could find out what Petunia had done with Harry, Arabella could.

OoOoOoOoO

Unfortunately, Arabella's prediction was correct; the Muggle records dealing with guardianship and adoption were sealed to protect the privacy of both parents and children.

Dumbledore made discreet inquiries at the Ministry, but nothing turned up. He took to checking Harry's status daily, and his concern was somewhat relieved by the constant spin of the gyroscope and the slow eddy of the green smoke.

The Dursleys hired Arabella to watch Dudley several times over the next few months, and each time she searched the house discreetly, but didn't succeed in finding anything. She never got close enough to dose Petunia with the potion that Dumbledore provided.

It wasn't until the beginning of August that they got a break. The Dursleys had gone out to a dinner party, leaving Arabella with Dudley as usual. After putting the boy to bed, she began her usual search. She was beginning to think it was hopeless, but to her surprise, it paid off.

The Dursleys kept a large photo album filled with pictures of Dudley. While flipping through it, Arabella found an envelope with a return address in the United States. Inside the large envelope were several photographs. One was unmistakably Harry Potter, digging enthusiastically into the remains of a birthday cake. Another was of Harry sitting with two other children, a slightly older boy and a little girl, both of whom were helping Harry shred the wrappings on a package. A third showed all three children, outdoors this time, with a slim woman dressed in a long black dress. The day appeared to have been fairly bright, since the woman was wearing dark sunglasses and carrying a black parasol to shade her pale skin. She was sitting on a stone bench with Harry in her lap and both of the other children at her feet.

Enclosed with the pictures was a brief note in an elegant hand.

*"Dearest Petunia," it read. "I thought you would appreciate a few pictures to see how Harry has grown. I must thank you again for bringing him to us. He is quite the daredevil; I keep finding him in the most remarkable places, and where he goes, Pugsley and Wednesday will follow. Gomez is thinking about buying a large dog to keep watch over them. Between you and me, it had best be a **very** large dog. Yours, Morticia."*

Arabella didn't dare to just take the pictures, because Petunia might notice they were missing, but she did study them carefully, making note of all the details she could, and copied the note and the return address before slipping the envelope back into the album. Despite the late hour, she reported to Dumbledore immediately on returning home.

## **Westfield , New Jersey**

Two days later, wearing a red suit in the best Muggle style, Dumbledore took an international Portkey to the United States, arriving in the Wizarding capitol of Boston. He hoped to get some official assistance in collecting the missing child, and indeed received some initial encouragement from the local Aurors, but that assistance seemed to dry up after he mentioned the name 'Addams'. This perturbed him somewhat since he was used to the unconditional respect from law enforcement personnel and government officials that came with his title of Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederation of Wizards.

Undeterred, he acquired a Portkey to a location in New Jersey conveniently near the Addams residence, arriving in an upstairs broom closet in the rather interestingly named "Arcanum Hall" in downtown Westfield. From there, he took a Muggle taxi to the Addams' residence, or at least as close as the taxi driver would go, which was the outer gate.

Once the driver had betaken himself elsewhere (at high speed), Dumbledore tried the gate, dismissing as a joke a sign which read, "Warning: Trespassers Will be Eaten." The gate did not open, and there did not seem to be a way to summon attention. Looking about to make sure he was unobserved, he drew his wand and trained it on the large and obvious lock.

*"Alohomora!"*

It didn't budge.

*"Alohomora!"* he cast, with a bit more power to it. The gate creaked open a bit, but as soon as Dumbledore put his hand out to push it open the rest of the way, it slammed shut again. This obviously called for sterner measures.

*"ERUMPO FORIS!"* The gate swung wide as if burst open. Dumbledore tucked his wand away and strode through the gate, but his entrance was completely spoiled by the gate swinging shut abruptly and catching the tails of his suit jacket in the latch. After a brief struggle, Dumbledore resumed striding up the path minus some of the fabric from his jacket. A swatch of red hung from the lock, and if a gate could snicker, he swore that one was doing it.

He looked about cautiously as he approached the large, imposing house at the top of the hill. It was a beautiful summer afternoon, yet he heard no birds or even bees. The gardens were lush, perhaps even overgrown, with odd and exotic plants – there were no marigolds or daisies here, and the only roses were purple and black. Indeed, a surprising number of flowers were black.

He mounted the steps and examined the doorbell. It had a bell-pull of the type he remembered from his youth, and with confidence he gave it a brisk yank. A shrill scream rang out from somewhere inside the door. "Great Merlin!" he exclaimed.



Suddenly, the door opened. A tall, ghoulish figure in a formal butler's uniform filled the opening. "You raaaang?" it asked.

"Good afternoon. My name is Albus Dumbledore. May I speak to Mr or Mrs Addams?"

The butler groaned and stepped aside to let Dumbledore in, abandoning him in the foyer. Dumbledore strolled about, carefully examining everything, until a tall woman, probably the woman Arabella had seen in the picture, entered. "Good afternoon, sir. May I help you?"

"Good afternoon, Madame. Am I speaking to Mrs Addams?"

"You are. And your name would be ...?"

"Terribly sorry. I am Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore. I am the Headmaster of Hogwarts School in Scotland."

"I see." She stood still and silent, regarding Dumbledore with a dark intensity that made him want to squirm. It was quite unaccountable, really. He hadn't felt that way since his own school days, when Madame Manders had caught him transfiguring Horatio Gunnings' sweets into soap.

"Yes, well, I believe that you may be housing a young man here, a boy actually, by the name of Harry Potter. I don't know how he came to be in your custody, but he belongs with his relatives. In England."

"Did Petunia Dursley send you?"

"Er, no."

"Good. I would hate to think she reneged on our agreement. The results could have been ... unpleasant. Would you come with me, Mr Dumbledore?"

Without waiting for Dumbledore's assurance that he would follow, she turned and walked away.

They passed through several dreary rooms before she opened a tall double door and escorted him into a large, comfortably furnished office. A swarthy man sat behind a wide oak desk, with his chair tipped back and his feet comfortably resting on the desk top. He held a handful of throwing knives, with which he was apparently in the process of playing a game of darts.

"Gomez, dear, this is Mr. Dumbledore. He claims to be the Headmaster of Hogwarts, a school in Scotland."

"Looking for a donation, are you?" asked Mr Addams, leaping to his feet and showing Dumbledore to a chair. "What are you running, some kind of agricultural school? Animal husbandry, that sort of thing? I'll be happy to endow a chair for you, how about in Genetic Engineering? Wave of the future, you know. What do you want? Half a million? A million?" Dumbledore blinked in astonishment. "All right, two. You drive a hard bargain, sir!" He whisked a leather chequebook out of a desk drawer and started to write.

"Dearest, Mr. Dumbledore isn't here about a donation."

"He's not?"

"No, he's not. He's here about Harry."

"Ah, offering a scholarship! I see. Getting your bid in early, eh? You'd better take the donation, then, get your facilities up to snuff."

"Mr Addams, Harry's attendance at Hogwarts is not in question. He's already been accepted and his tuition paid for by his parents before their untimely deaths."

"Well, that's efficiency for you!" said Mr Addams with apparent delight. "Must save a lot of time, accepting them while they're still babies!"

"I'm not here to talk about school, Mr Addams. I'm here to take Harry back to his relatives."

"I don't understand. He's with his relatives. He's with *us*."

"Dearest, Mr Dumbledore seems to be under the impression that we have somehow unlawfully obtained custody of Harry, and are holding him in durance vile. Am I correct, sir?"

"I wouldn't put it that way, exactly."

"Then how *would* you put it, Mr Dumbledore?" Her voice was low and calm, but with a distinct air of menace to it. Gomez Addams' smile seemed to have become more of a feral grin, and the temperature in the room had dropped alarmingly.

"Harry Potter is a most important child," Dumbledore continued desperately. He is ... gifted, shall we say? Hogwarts is one of the few schools in the world capable of educating him. Since his future lies in Britain, it is important that he live there, with his family, as I arranged."

"As *you* arranged? Why did you have any say in Harry's placement?" asked Gomez, his eyes glittering. "Are you the executor of his parents' wills? Are you his trustee or guardian?"

"I told you, I am the Headmaster at Hogwarts School."

"A position with no official status, sir. At least none of which I am aware. Certainly not the authority to place an orphaned child." Gomez opened a

drawer and pulled out a folder. "This, sir, gives us all the authority we need to care for Harry. I'll think you'll find that you don't have a leg to stand on, legally speaking."

Dumbledore flipped through the papers, astonished to find a full set of guardianship papers granting custody of one Harry James Potter to Gomez and Morticia Addams.

"That's as may be, but I really must insist..."

Dumbledore was interrupted when the door burst open and three giggling children tumbled into the room, chased by an elderly woman, and all came to a sudden stop on seeing a stranger. The black-haired boy was indubitably Harry Potter; the rumpled hair, the green eyes and the jagged scar on his head were much as Dumbledore had seen them last October. A little girl of about the same age was clinging to his sleeve. A slightly older boy looked at Dumbledore, his eyes growing wider and wider, and then he screamed in terror and ran out of the room again. The two black-haired children screamed as well, although their shrieks were more of delight than fear, and followed him. The elderly woman shrugged and pursued the children.

"I'm terribly sorry, Mr Dumbledore. I expect it was the beard. There was an unfortunate incident last Christmas with a department store Santa. You know the sort of thing," said Morticia. "However, you can see that Harry is in perfect health and good spirits, and we have every legal right to raise him as we see fit. We will be perfectly willing to show you around the house and grounds, to reassure you that he is being well cared for, but we will not let you take him away."

To her credit, that's exactly what she did, showing him the nursery, the main rooms of the house, and the kitchen. All of the rooms were technically within the bounds of normality (for a man who had been born only a few years before this house was built, who now lived in a castle, and who knew nothing of advances in Muggle home building) but the décor was unsettling, and he felt a subtle pressure, almost like something really wanted him to leave. It felt like an old spell, very old, and not maintained properly, but still trying to do its job. He'd seen no sign of magical ability among the adults he'd seen, although their demeanour was certainly odd. The only thing that might have been active magic was the odd behaviour of the gate, but that could just as easily be explained by rusty springs in the hinges. Perhaps, he suddenly thought, perhaps the house had belonged to a magical family, probably a Dark family, when it was built, and the wards had not been removed when they left. Lingering effects of Dark magic on subsequent Muggle residents might very well explain their strangeness, as well as the unwillingness of people like the taxi drive to remain in the vicinity of the house. He should probably tell the Americans, so their 'Anti-Hoodoo and Voodoo Squad', as they called their Department of Magical Accidents and Catastrophes, could come remove the lingering wards and remove any trace of magic from the site.

Quite satisfied that he'd solved the puzzle, he chatted affably with the elderly woman he'd thought was a nanny, but who was actually somebody's grandmother, while she served dinner to the children. A tiny black kitten had climbed up onto the table and was sniffing the plates.

"Smells good," Dumbledore said, taking an appreciative whiff over the pot. "What is it?"

"Oh, it's just Son of a Bitch Stew."

"I beg your pardon?"

"You just throw some son of a bitch into the pot and cook him until you can't tell what he was." She reached over to the table and casually picked up the kitten. "You want me to throw something in the pot for you?"

"Oh, no, that won't be necessary, I shan't be staying. But thank you," he said hastily.

"Grandmama, I do believe Mr. Dumbledore thinks you might put that kitten in the stew," said Morticia.

"Oh, gracious, no," said Grandmama, to the great relief of Dumbledore, who had been thinking that very thing. Then, just as he was beginning to relax, she said, "He's way too small yet." She tucked the kitten into a basket near the pantry door.

Dumbledore decided that leaving would be a good idea. "Mrs Addams, you said you'd show me the grounds?"

The grounds were that same unsettling mix of the expected and the outré. There were formally planted beds at the front of the house and more cottage style plantings to the sides, where plants that were commonly used in magic grew side by side with ordinary, though oddly coloured, garden plants. Behind the house, the land sloped down to a small bog, which Morticia said contained a number of rare plants, and then the land rose into the forested slopes of the Watchung Mountain Reservation. And to the north, at the bottom of the hill on which the house was built, a family graveyard. The predominant name on the stones was Addams, though that was not exclusive. The family had owned the house for some time, then. That clashed with something else he'd been thinking earlier, but he was getting increasingly tired. He'd think about it later, when his mind was clearer.

The sun was setting behind the mountains as Morticia led him to a moss-covered, free-standing crypt in the centre of the graveyard. "This is the crypt of Charles Felonius Addams, the founder of our line. He devoted his life to the Family, as, of course, do we. Observe his motto, carved over the lintel of his tomb. *Sic gorgiamus allos subjectatus nunc*. Not just pretty words, Mr Dumbledore. Harry Potter is safe with us. The Family always protects its own." She turned to face him, and in the gathering dark her dark eyes seemed black and bottomless, like Snape's. "I must go help Grandmama put the children to bed. I trust you can see yourself out."

And then she disappeared into the shadows, leaving Dumbledore standing among the carved stones, contemplating the words of the motto that had disappeared in the darkness.

A/N1: I've taken some, er, "liberties" with the geography of Westfield, New Jersey. The house on which Charles Addams (whose middle name was *not* Felonius, but might have appreciated the joke) modelled the Family's home is located in the middle of a pleasant (and very expensive!) neighbourhood. I've moved it closer to the Watchung Mountain Reservation, which is one of the major sources of weirdness in New Jersey (the

other is the Pine Barrens, the home of the Jersey Devil). Arcanum Hall is located in the centre of Westfield, and I have no idea what anybody does in there, but it seemed a logical place to have a Portkey terminus. The Second Empire style of house dates back to the 1850's, and Albus Dumbledore was born ca. 1840. The Family still keeps much of the house in its historical state, so Dumbledore didn't see it as being as "unusual" as Petunia did.

A/N2: From the movie, the Addams Family motto is translated as "We gladly feast on those who would subdue us." Morticia presumes that Dumbledore, as an old-fashioned Headmaster, will be familiar with Latin.

A/N3: I know we haven't seen much of Harry yet, but come on, he's only two! Stay tuned for the next chapter, "Growing up Addams".

## Family Values Growing up Addams: Accidental Magic

### FAMILY VALUES

**Disclaimer** : Without being as verbose as my esteemed spousal unit, I would like to make it clear that I don't own Harry Potter or the Addams Family.

#### Chapter 05 – Growing up Addams: Accidental Magic

Every year at Halloween, Morticia would gather the whole family together and tell them all the story of how Harry came to live with them, and what he might have to do in the future, and how the Family would stand with him when it came time for him to do it. Every year the story got a little more complicated as the children could understand more. Harry had a Destiny, and when it came, he would be ready for it.

But in the meantime, he was allowed to be a child.

For any child, growing up is an adventure. For an Addams child, it was more so. Harry, Pugsley and Wednesday had a huge house, a large yard full of interesting things, a nearby cemetery and swamp to play in, and the Watchung Mountain Reservation looming over all. Where most suburban children went to the park and played on slides and swings, the Addams children played "hide and seek" among the gravestones and caught bugs to feed to the carnivorous plants in the swamp. When they got older, they held "tea parties" at the Stone Tables and cleaned up the mystery circles after the Satanists got done with them. They excavated abandoned towns and made rubbings of pictograms carved in the walls of ancient caves. In short, they had a grand old time.

It wasn't all fun and games, of course. They had to learn things. Morticia made sure of that. But the learning things part was often disguised by the fun and games. Science and mathematics and history and even the basics of physics and chemistry, which most parents would have considered well beyond the grasp of kindergarten-age children, were devoured eagerly, particularly when linked with something that exploded or made noise. Gomez, for example, let them play with his train set, rebuilding the trestles when they collapsed, and estimating which building in the village below would be hit by the crashing and burning train.

By the time Harry and Wednesday were five, they knew how to write in cursive (Morticia never having understood why you had to teach a child to write twice) and how to add and subtract anything. They were working on multiplication. Morticia or Grandmama read a chapter of something to them every night, and if they were very good, they got *two* chapters. They didn't limit their reading to "children's" stories, so instead of *The Cat in The Hat*, the children cut their teeth on the unexpurgated Brothers Grimm, Peter Pan, and all forty of the Wizard of Oz books. Harry was particularly fond of the giant spider sequence in *The Hobbit*, and insisted that Morticia read it to him over and over, until he eventually made the leap into reading it for himself. Once that happened, he was allowed to read anything that he wanted in Gomez's big library, and almost anything in Grandmama's collection, except for the books that were in cages because they would bite. If he had questions, he could come to one of the adults, and the questions would be answered – virtually nothing was off-limits.

In addition to regular play outdoors, they learned tumbling and wrestling, and eventually Gomez started teaching Harry and Wednesday the basics of acrobatics and fencing, although Pugsley was not physically suited to either activity.

Each of the children began to develop their own interests. Pugsley was fascinated with how things went together and how they came apart. His room, once the children were moved out of the joint nursery and into separate bedrooms, was full of bits and bobs and parts of things he'd taken apart and hadn't figured out how to put back together.

Wednesday liked plants best; Grandmama gave her her own little garden bed to take care of outdoors, and Morticia taught her how to grow rare species in the conservatory and what to do with bits of the plants once they were grown.

Harry's main interest was animals, especially once he discovered he could talk to the snakes that were common in the area. His room was filled with tanks containing interesting beetles, newts, frogs, snakes, snails, and a two-headed turtle.

The magic of the House kept the children safe from almost everything, but it gave even Morticia pause when Harry came out of the woods one day when he was four with a three foot long, thick bodied snake draped around his neck. The dark brown hourglass shaped markings were clear against the reddish brown background colour. While Morticia knew that a Northern Copperhead wasn't as venomous as certain other snakes, it could be exceedingly painful and dangerous to a small child. Harry seemed to be completely unaware of the danger, stroking the smooth, scaly hide fondly.

"Aunt 'Tisha, look what I found! She's a big snake, and she talks!"

"Harry," said Morticia in her usual calm voice, "do be careful with that. It could hurt you if it bites."

"It's okay. She won't bite."

"How do you know that?"

"She told me."

"For real, or pretend?"

"For real. I told you, she talks! Listen!" Harry held the snake up, presumably so Morticia could hear it. Its tongue flickered out, but she heard nothing.

She shook her head. "I don't hear anything, Harry."

Harry looked at the snake. "Well, I can. She's pleased to meet you, and she's asking if she could live out by the garden shed for a little while, please?"

"Only if she promises not to bite anyone in the family, or eat any of Grandmama's kittens." Grandmama's black cat had had yet another batch of kittens, and while the children knew the facts of life (and death) for pets by now, there was no reason to deliberately put the kittens in harm's way.

"Is it okay if she bites someone who isn't in the family?"

"Quite."

Harry held a "conversation" with the snake which consisted of him hissing at it and it flicking its tongue at him.

"Okay. I'll inter ... int ... she says if she can taste people she'll know who not to bite."

So all the family members were duly 'tasted' and the snake was shown a kitten which was also 'tasted' (much to the tiny feline's displeasure). And for a while, the snake lived under the garden shed and reduced the local population of mice and toads. Eventually, however, it asked to be taken back to the woods on the other side of the swamp, and Harry complied, but he went to visit her every so often for the rest of the summer.

Aunts, uncles, cousins, and adults with more distant family connections came by from time to time, stayed at the House for an hour or a week, and shared whatever knowledge they had with the children. Cousin Ian, for example (he of the different-coloured eyes), taught them the basics of anatomy through taxidermy, including how to trap the animals themselves. Squeamishness was *not* an Addams trait; not for very long, anyway. Grandmama taught them what to do with the rest of the animal after the skin and bones had been removed. "Waste not, want not!" she said.

And her demonstrations were always tasty.

Grandmama and Morticia made sure the children were exposed to a variety of foods, and they learned to eat anything put before them without complaint, from haute cuisine to crispy-fried earthworms. (After Harry discovered his special ability, he did draw one line – he wouldn't eat anything he could talk to, which ruled out rattlesnake stew.)

The most boring lessons were etiquette and deportment, in which they learned how to use the correct silverware at a formal dinner, dance with maiden aunts, and such. Although they didn't know it, this was the sort of training upper-class children had received a century before. Addams children were expected to be able to move in every level of society. *Both* societies, for they were well aware of the Wizarding world as well as the Muggle one. The Family lived in the grey space between them. Addamses knew they were different (how many people had a cousin who resembled a giant stack of hair?). They knew they could trust Family, no matter what they looked like. They knew they could not trust outsiders, who were often cruel to people who were different. Loyalty to Family was drilled into Addams children from day one, and Harry, Wednesday and Pugsley were no exception.

They learned to maintain different "faces" for outsiders and for Family. This was relatively easy for Harry and Wednesday, both of whom learned to keep their faces almost emotionless, but less so for Pugsley, whose natural disposition was quite sunny. He eventually decided on a different method, developing a good-naturedly stupid look that went well with his height and muscular build, and made other children and adults underestimate him.

Their first real test came when Harry and Wednesday started kindergarten. It was unthinkable, of course, that they would go to public school. They went to a prestigious private school not far from home, where Pugsley had started the year before. Unfortunately, children are children no matter where they are, and private school children can be just as cruel, or more so, than public school kids to children who are 'different'.

In this case, it didn't take long before the little boys started making fun of Harry because he liked to be with Wednesday, even to the point of holding her hand when they walked through the halls of the school together. It didn't help that Harry's tastes in clothing were somewhat eclectic, showing what Morticia considered a deplorable liking for bright colours. Gomez, who had a tendency to wear purple suits and lime-green shirts himself, saw nothing wrong with his fashion choices. While Wednesday usually dressed in neat black dresses, Harry's trousers, socks, shirts and jumpers were often from colour groups with nothing in common. Then there was his hair, which stubbornly refused to lie down, but always looked like he'd just rolled out of bed.

For a week, Harry practiced his expressionless 'face', mostly ignoring his tormentors, but occasionally getting in a zinger or two. Then came the day they started picking on Wednesday.

"Ha! Harry's a sissy! He's got girl cooties!" yelled Neil Buchman when he spotted Harry and Wednesday quietly sitting under a tree at recess, reading books.

Neil's gang of four other boys gathered around, chanting "Harry is a sissy!" over and over again.

"Go away, Neil," said Harry.

"Hey Harry, you're ugly, and your mother dresses you funny!" Neil obviously thought this was supposed to put Harry in his place.

Harry cocked his head and gave Neil his best expressionless stare, ignoring the other boys.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" Neil asked.

"I'm just trying to imagine you with a personality." Harry looked at him for a bit more, then shook his head. "Nah. Can't do it. Sorry."

"What did you just say?"

"Not the brightest crayon in the box, are we?" put in Wednesday.

"You shut up! I'm not talking to you!" Then Neil committed a grave error. He kicked dirt at Wednesday.

Harry and Wednesday glanced at each other. They slowly, deliberately closed their books and got to their feet.

"I wouldn't do that again," said Harry.

"Yeah, what are you gonna do about it, you weirdo? Twin weirdos, ha!"

Harry addressed Wednesday, while carefully keeping his eyes on Neil. "Okay, I forget. Am I the good twin or the evil one?"

"You won the coin flip this morning. You're the evil one," she said.

"Oh, good. Neil, go away. Don't make me kill you."

"You can't kill me. You can't do anything to me. But I can do this!" Neil made his second error. He pushed Wednesday.

Harry launched himself at Neil in a multi-coloured frenzy. Neil fell over, and the two boys rolled around on the ground trading punches. Fortunately, neither one of them was able to do much to hurt the other. The other boys started yelling and a couple of them jumped on Harry. Wednesday picked up a stick and started whacking the pile of boys with it. Her whacks weren't random, but were carefully placed to hit only Neil and not Harry. Pugsley, who had been over on the playground trying to launch a smaller child into space using a teeter-totter, gave a shout of glee, ran over and joined into the fray. The recess teacher blew her whistle, which everyone ignored, and ran over to stop the fight.

By this time, flashes of colour were coming from somewhere in the middle of the pile of boys. When the teacher managed to get the fight stopped, Neil had a bloody nose, Harry had a black eye, and all of the boys, including Pugsley, were wearing clothes in a garish mis-match of colours that made Harry's look normal. Wednesday's clothes were unchanged.

The teacher hustled all of the children into the administration office, the nurse gave Neil a wad of cotton and Harry an ice pack, and parents were summoned. Not all of the parents were easily reachable, of course, since most of them worked, and it was not surprising that Morticia and Gomez got their first. Harry, Pugsley and Wednesday were sitting on one side of the office, calmly reading their books. Five boys in varying states of disrepair sat on the other side of the room.

While the fight was easy enough to explain, the teachers were at a loss to explain the odd colouring of the other children's clothing.

"Oh, dear," said Morticia. "You mean they don't dress like that normally?"

"No, they do *not* dress like that normally. Your colour-blind nephew dresses like that, but they were all wearing perfectly normal jeans and t-shirts an hour ago!"

"Marvellous!" said Gomez. "This is wonderful! Tish, do you know what this means?"

"I certainly do, and we'll celebrate later. In the meantime, Ms Marlowe, would you mind if I used your phone for a moment? Thank you."

While Gomez was having the children go through a blow by blow description of the fight and the teachers were discouraging a re-enactment of the scuffle, Morticia made a quick call and less than five minutes later three official looking types marched in the office door, flashing badges proclaiming them to be from the Agency for the Management of Underage Magic. Five minutes after that, the boys' clothes were back to normal, despite Pugsley's request to keep his that way, and the Agency people were gone, leaving the students and teachers with no memory of their presence and having paused only long enough to tell Morticia that she should make an appointment for an interview at home later that evening.

Harry's first accidental magic was the cause for much rejoicing, and an impromptu party was held at the Addams home that night. The Agency representative showed up half way through and pulled Harry and his guardians out of the celebration to explain to Harry why he should be careful about doing magic where Muggles could see it. They also gave him a little red wand and a book with some basic cantrips in it, and told him to practice those at home, where no one else could see. Nothing was harmful, it would give him an idea of the basic practices of magic, and start building up his strength. "Magic is like a muscle, you know, the more you use it, the stronger it gets." Most importantly, it would make him less likely to do magic accidentally. When he had a little practice and was ready for formal magical education, he would be able to get a custom wand of his own, but in the meantime the training wand would do.

"Whoa, cool!" said Pugsley, as Harry did a colour-changing spell, on purpose this time. "I wish I could do that!"

"Maybe you can," said Harry. "Here, give it a try." He passed the wand over to Pugsley.

"Now don't be surprised if nothing..." the Agency man started to say, when Pugsley waved Harry's wand and a burst of red sparks shot out the end of it.

Morticia gasped, and Pugsley's eyes bulged. "I did it! I did magic too! Did you see that?!"

"Congratulations, my boy!" exclaimed Gomez. "You're first Addams wizard since, well, since him!" he said, pointing at Harry.

"May I try, too?" asked Wednesday.

"I think you'd better. If one child is magical, the siblings usually are, too." Pugsley passed the wand to Wednesday, who waved it several times to no effect before she managed to make a light shine at the end of the wand.

"That's what I thought. Congratulations. You're a witch." He gave Wednesday and Pugsley their own wands and spell books. "Ma'am. Sir. I don't envy you. Having one magical child is hard enough, but three at the same time?" He shook his head. "You're Squibs, right?"

"Most of the family are, yes."

"Do you have any fully trained witches or wizards available?"

"Not in the wanded specialties. Grandmama could have gone to Salem, but her parents sent her for a traditional Potions apprenticeship instead."

"Well, you might want to get a tutor for them, then. Somebody who can supervise them properly and reverse anything that needs to be reversed. In the meantime, here's my card; don't hesitate to call me during working hours, and the emergency service number is on the back. May I assume you'll be interested in sending them to one of the academies when they're a little older?"

"You assume correctly, sir!" said Gomez. "This is one of the best things to happen to this family in ages! Nothing but the best schools for our children! All three of them!" he said, pulling Harry into a hug. "You're our little good luck charm, Harry. Without you, we might never have found out about Pugsley and Wednesday!"

Harry beamed.

"Oh, I feel sure you'd have found out sooner or later," said the Agent dryly. "Magic will come out one way or another, after all. Let the children play with their wands for a year or two, get the hang of it. Make sure they're always supervised by an adult, and don't let them have their wands where Muggles might see them. If they stick with the spells in the books, they'll be quite safe, but sometimes little kids like to try to make up their own spells, and that can lead to trouble. Fortunately most children aren't strong enough to do much damage, even if they attempt a major curse. When they're about seven, you can have them tested for relative strength and any special abilities, you know the sort of thing. Most of the best academies start accepting students when they're about ten. That's when magic starts to stabilize and become reliable. I'll put you on the mailing list, you'll get applications at the right time." He wrote down the names and birthdates of all three children in his little notebook. "Now I'll leave you to your party. Congratulations again, all three of you." He solemnly shook hands with the children and left.

It was hours before the party wound down, and nothing in the ballroom was the colour it had started as by the time the children went to bed. All three of them slept clutching their new wands, happy and exhausted smiles on their faces.

There were no further incidents of accidental magic at school, although things were rather oddly coloured around the Addams home for some time, until the novelty wore off.

All in all, Harry's childhood was idyllic, even if it did have rather more explosions than most children's.

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In comparison to Harry's life, Dumbledore's was anything but idyllic. It seemed everyone wanted some of his time.

Although the Death Eater trials were over, the Wizengamot met repeatedly, mostly to discuss matters of estates and successions, since so much damage had been done to the Great Families on both sides. Dumbledore's constant attention was required, as he needed to keep track of the alliances between the Light, Dark and Neutral families, and steer attention away from the empty Black and Potter seats. Only the knowledge that Harry Potter still lived, somewhere, kept the Malfoys from moving to acquire both seats and the fortunes that went with them.

The International Confederation of Wizards was in almost continuous session, trying to work out ways to prevent future Dark Lords from gaining international backing. Privately, Dumbledore knew this was a hopeless effort, due mainly to the inability of that august body to even decide what was Dark and what wasn't. The rise of a Dark Lord in one country was a legitimate change of regime in another. As Supreme Mugwump, it was his responsibility to keep the debate civil, or at least make sure no blood was shed and everybody got changed back to their regular shape at the end of the day.

The Board of Governors of Hogwarts met frequently, too. It had a number of new members, and they all wanted to get a feel for the job. Every one of them had ideas that would "improve" the running of the school. Dumbledore much preferred it when the Board wasn't quite so proactive, as they required far too much of his time for tours, explanations and negotiations. He hoped the new members would get bored in a year or two, and things could go back to normal, with the Board only meeting quarterly to go over the financial statements instead of thinking they actually did something.

The school itself took the majority of his time. His Deputy, Minerva McGonagall, helped out with the paperwork, but since she also taught classes, there was only so much time available for her to help him, and it seemed there were a surprising number of things only he could decide, from approving the lists of new books to be bought for the library to negotiating a settlement to the feud between the Kitchen House Elves and the Laundry House Elves. Merlin only knew what they were actually fighting about, he'd never been able to get a straight answer from them, but it

popped up every few years and he wouldn't get any peace until it was settled.

This left remarkably little time for other things, especially since Madam Pomfrey, at his last physical, had informed him that a man his age shouldn't be using a Time Turner to double up days. She had actually attempted to take it away from him, but relented upon his promise to use it only for emergencies. Fortunately for him, she'd never actually defined what constituted an emergency, so he felt free to keep using it. So he was tired all the time; that was normal for a man his age, wasn't it? He was used to it by now. He'd catch up on his sleep when he retired ... in fifty years or so.

One of the things that he had to jam into his limited free time was trying to get Harry back from the Addamses. It probably wouldn't do him much harm to stay there for a little while, which was the main reason he'd been willing to leave without the boy, but trying to make the arrangements while keeping the Ministry unaware of the proceedings was time-consuming. It wasn't that he didn't *trust* the Ministry, exactly, but ... he didn't *trust* the Ministry. Minister Bagnold was a very capable woman, and understood that sometimes one had to do things that looked bad, but were for the greater good in the long run. Whoever followed her in the job, however, might not be as competent, nor as understanding.

The first thing he'd done was contact the American Anti-Hoodoo and Voodoo Squad to try to get the Addams property cleaned up. He assumed that once the Dark influence was removed, it would be easier to get them to release the child.

It took the Squad several months to get back to him, stating that it was impossible to do anything about the property since the Family had been there long enough that the situation was self-sustaining. The fact that the property was located on the edge of one of the oldest and strongest Wild Magic sinks in the United States didn't help matters. Any attempt to seal the excess magic at the Addams house could easily disrupt the tenuous balance between the Watchungs and the Pine Barrens, resulting in another spate of Jersey Devil sightings. The uproar still hadn't died down after the last batch.

Then he'd tried the Bureau of Magical Child Welfare in Boston. This was the agency charged with getting magical children out of potentially dangerous Muggle households and fostered with more appropriate families. Dumbledore thought that if the boy was removed from the Addams household, it would be easy enough at that point to introduce evidence about his relatives in England and have him sent home.

No such luck. The caseworkers, under Dumbledore's repeated urgings over the course of a year, made several inspection trips and found nothing dangerous or threatening about the child's home environment, except for the lack of smoke alarms in the home. This was rectified immediately by the boy's foster parents, and the case was closed, with a letter of thanks to Mr Dumbledore and a request that he not bother them any more.

His next step was to make appeals through the Muggle courts in the United States. While Mrs Figg had been quite correct that the records were sealed, a wizard could get into the files where a Squib couldn't. The problem was getting someone with the expertise to find the one set of files in all the massive rooms full of paper. Then the process had to be repeated in New Jersey. Then he had to get a Muggle solicitor to analyse everything and attempt to find a legitimate reason to break the guardianship and bring Harry back to the Dursleys.

Without the consent of Petunia Dursley, the solicitor said, it would be almost impossible to have the guardianship revoked. This led Dumbledore to contact Mrs Dursley and implore her to try to get Harry back. He even offered her considerable monetary inducement to do so, thinking that since she had been open to such influence before, she might be again. She proved remarkably stubborn, however, and refused to have any part in such a plan of action, even after some strong magical encouragement. In the end, he realised, it would take an Imperius to coerce her to do what he wanted, and he was not willing to risk Azkaban, even for this. He had to settle for Obliviating her to remove the memory of his visit, since she was quite agitated and threatening to report it, although she wasn't terribly clear on who she would report it to.

Therefore, although it ran against his personal standards, he instructed his solicitor to contact an attorney in New Jersey to try to crack the Addamses' guardianship of Harry Potter, forging Petunia Dursley's signature. He could always send in Arabella Figg under Polyjuice or a glamour if a personal appearance in court was needed.

He did not count on the resistance he received. Gomez Addams may not have won many of his cases, but when he was acting on behalf of his Family, he was a skilled and canny opponent. He strung the case out for months, even years, submitting briefs and affidavits so full of pettifoggery that it took Dumbledore's solicitors weeks to figure out what they said. Harry's fifth birthday had already passed when the case finally came to a hearing at which a personal appearance by "Petunia Dursley" could not be avoided. Carefully briefed, Arabella Figg, disguised as Petunia Dursley, and accompanied by a British solicitor, one 'Brian Albus', as well as the American lawyer, went to court, to be questioned by Gomez Addams himself.

"Mrs. Dursley, is this your signature on these documents granting custody of Harry Potter to us?"

"Yes," said Arabella, after carefully examining the documents.

"And is this also your signature on the petition submitted to nullify the transfer of guardianship and return Harry Potter to your custody?"

"Yes, it is."

"May I ask why you are attempting to regain custody of Harry Potter at this time?"

"Well, it's all there in the petition. When I originally gave him up, I was still grieving for my sister. Having Harry in my house all the time was just too hard – it reminded me of her too much – but I realized afterwards that it was a mistake. Never to see the sweet boy again – violating my sister's trust in me – I just had to try to get him back." She dabbed delicately at her eye with a kerchief.

"Your honour, I would like to call a witness at this time."

Dumbledore's lawyer tried to intervene. "Your honour, we agreed on the witness lists months ago! Mr. Addams can't introduce a new witness out of the blue!"



"I assure you, it's not a new witness. It's one who's been involved for a long time. I call Mrs. Petunia Dursley!"

A door opened at the back of the room to admit Petunia, dressed in her best lilac suit.

The judge looked at her over his glasses. "We seem to have an excess of Mrs. Dursleys. Can you prove this is her?"

"Absolutely, your honour. We have copies of her fingerprints and forensic analysis of her signature compared to the one in her passport and on the original custody documents, submitted here as Exhibits R and S. We're prepared to submit to polygraph testing and DNA analysis if necessary. I doubt my opponents are willing to do the same." He handed a bundle of papers to the judge and an identical set to Dumbledore's lawyer, who was beginning to sweat. "Your honour, I submit that someone in this case has been perpetrating a cruel deceit upon this court, submitting documents with fraudulent signatures and even hiring an actress to impersonate Mrs Dursley. I can only speculate as to their motivation, or what fate might have awaited an innocent boy if he fell into their hands!"

"Your honour, I believe I can explain everything to everyone's satisfaction," said 'Brian Albus', rising to his feet. He whisked his wand out of his sleeve. "*Obliviate! Obliviate! Obliviate!*" While the Muggles in the room were still reeling, he tapped the documents Gomez had handed him. "*Portus!*" He pressed them into Arabella Figg's hands and the two of them were gone, as if they had never been there.

There were repercussions, of course. All Dumbledore's Obliviation spells couldn't get rid of the multiple copies of the evidence, nor had he been aware that all the proceedings were being audio taped so transcripts could be made. The American AHVS, however, was notified of the use of massive amounts of magic in the Union County courthouse, and they were able to get rid of the pesky evidence and spent several hours working on perfecting the back stories to go with the memory charms. They were not pleased. It was fairly obvious to them what had happened, especially after they reversed the memory charm on Mr Addams and got the whole story about Harry's guardianship and Dumbledore's subsequent visit and attempts to meddle.

Shortly thereafter, Albus Dumbledore received an express owl from the head of the International Magical Relations Committee of the United States Magical Congress, informing him that the United States Magical Congress had now taken an interest in the matter as a result of his injudicious use of magic in a Muggle venue and his continuing interference in a custody matter in which he had no legal interest. If he did not wish the Congress to reveal all the evidence they had now collected and request an inquiry before the International Confederation of Wizards, which was likely to result in Dumbledore's removal from that august body, he was to cease meddling, immediately and forthwith, in any matters relating to Harry Potter and/or the Addams family. He was also to cease meddling with Petunia Dursley; for while the Congress had no direct jurisdiction in Britain, they were sure that a letter to the Ministry would result in a full Wizengamot investigation of the same.

It was blackmail, pure and simple, but there wasn't anything Dumbledore could do about it. If he didn't wish to lose two of his extremely influential positions and be subject to considerable personal embarrassment, not to mention admitting what he'd done with Harry, he had to back off and keep quiet.

The whole debacle had cost him several years, considerable cash outlay from his own pockets, and a valuable ally. Arabella Figg had given him a piece of her mind, would have resigned from the Order of the Phoenix if it had still existed to resign from, and stormed off to go back to her own house. The house on Wisteria Walk was put up for sale the next day, and no one in Little Whinging ever saw Mrs Figg again.

To top it all off, he received a letter, via the Muggle post drop set up for the parents of Muggle-born students, from Gomez Addams. It read, quite succinctly, "Strike two."

It was not a good year for Dumbledore. Not a good year at all.

## Family Values Growing up Addams: Abracadabra

### FAMILY VALUES

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However, if Snape should suddenly manifest in the flesh inside this wavering question mark we call reality, he shall be mine, oh yes, he shall be mine.... that's not just the vodka talking either!

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### Chapter 06 – Growing up Addams: Abracadabra

For Harry, Wednesday and Pugsley, knowing they were magical changed everything. When they were at home, they carried their wands with them everywhere, and practiced the spells in their little books relentlessly. The spells which the Agency man had said were "cantrips" turned out to be very basic Charms and Transfigurations, with a few harmless jinxes as well. The book said if they could learn those, it would give them the foundations for the three main categories of wanded magic. The author of the book assumed that it would take a child about a month or so to master each spell, but the author didn't know Harry Potter and the Addamses. With the three children egging each other on, they ripped through the books in nothing flat.

By the end of October, they'd mastered the two dozen spells in the books and were practically frothing at the mouth trying to figure out new ones on their own. It was Wednesday's idea that some of the "magic" words in their storybooks might actually *be* magic, so they started trying them out. And of course the words they tried first were the classics: "hocus pocus" and "abracadabra."

*Hocus pocus*, it turned out, was the incantation for a mild distraction spell. If it was cast on an object, people would tend not to notice that object for a short time. Grandmama showed the children a book that said that *Hocus pocus* was only part of a longer incantation. The first part was a distraction. The second part, *tontus talontus*, created a flash and a bang. The third part, *vade celeriter jubeo*, was a disappearing spell. Put together, the whole spell was very useful for a traveling magician, and each part could be used separately as well.

*Abracadabra*, however, was an entirely different kettle of fish.

The children had worked out, with some help from Uncle Fester, who was good at figuring things out, that different kinds of wand movements went with different spells. Charms, for example, usually involved a swish or wave of the wand. Transfigurations required that the item being Transfigured be tapped with the wand. And jinxes were cast with a slashing, jabbing or thrusting movement at the person or creature being jinxed. So they had to try all different kinds of movements with different kinds of targets in order to figure out what the incantation might do.

Harry thought it might be a charm, and kept trying to figure out what kind of swish it would require. Wednesday didn't think it was wanded at all, since they'd found a story about it being written on a piece of paper to cure a mysterious illness. Pugsley thought it was a jinx, and since jinxes needed to be performed on living objects, he had enlisted the other children's help in collecting an assortment of bugs and beetles to practice on. He had put a beetle in a mason jar, and was trying different ways to pronounce the word. He was getting frustrated at his lack of progress, and was waving his wand ever more forcefully.

"*Abra cadabra! Abba cedabba! Avva kedavva!*" A spark of sickly green light leapt from the end of his wand, impacting on the glass, which shattered, releasing the beetle, which crawled frantically over the floor of the conservatory, which they were using as their practice room under Morticia's supervision. He heard Harry gasp in surprise. "Hey, look, it worked! *Avva kedavva!*" There was another spark of light, a whooshing sound, and the beetle rolled over, quite dead. Simultaneously, Harry slapped his wand out of his hand.

"Don't. Do. That. Again," said Harry.

"What? Why?"

"Just don't." He turned away from Pugsley and looked down at the dead beetle. He toed it gently, almost as if hoping it would move again, but it didn't.

"It's just a bug."

Harry shrugged. “No, now it’s snake food.” He picked it up, hearing Grandmama’ adage in his head. *Waste not, want not*. His snakes would be going to sleep for the winter soon. One of them would like a little snack first, he was sure.

“Where did my wand go?” Pugsley got on his knees and looked under the plant racks, ignoring the tendrils of a climbing nightshade brushing against the back of his neck. “Here it is! Hey!” he said, outrage in his tone. He held his wand out. It was split right down the middle. “My wand broke! Mom! Can you fix this?”

Morticia took the pieces of the wand and looked at them closely. “I’m afraid not. And I don’t think it’s the sort of thing you can fix with tape, glue or a welder’s torch. I’ll have to contact Mr Blair from the Agency and see if we can get a new one. I’ll call him in the morning.”

But they didn’t have to wait for morning to speak to Mr Blair. Almost as soon as Morticia finished speaking, the doorbell’s scream rang out; Lurch escorted Mr Blair to the conservatory a moment later.

“All right, who did what?” he asked. “Is anyone hurt?”

Pugsley handed over the parts of his wand. “No, but my wand broke! Can you fix it?”

“No. I can’t. And whether you get another one depends on what you tell me about how this one broke.”

“May I ask why?” asked Morticia.

“Because these things are designed to break, and send an emergency alert to the Agency, if, and only if, they’re used to hurt a living creature. If you stick with the spells in the book, it isn’t supposed to happen at all.” He put the two pieces of the wand together and chanted, “*Priori incantatem!*” A bit of grey mist came from the tip and formed into a beetle. “Just a beetle?” Blair said with relief.

Harry held out the beetle for inspection. “I was going to feed it to one of my snakes. That’s okay, isn’t it?”

“Oh, yes, it’s just dead, not tainted.” Blair turned toward Pugsley again. “Now then, what were you doing, and where did you learn it?”

“We ran out of spells in the book, so we figured – well, Wednesday figured some of the things in storybooks might be real, and people only think they aren’t. Sort of like how the Jersey Devil is real but everybody thinks it isn’t. So we got some bugs to test things on, and we did *hocus pocus*, and then I wanted to do *abracadabra*, but ...”

“If you’d stuck with *abracadabra*, you’d have been all right,” said Blair. “That’s a pretty hefty conjuration spell, and I doubt you’d be able to do anything with it. But there’s a curse that’s pretty close in sound, and that’s the one you used, am I right?”

“I said *avva kedavva*. I think.”

“Close enough. And let me guess, you were using a jinx wand movement, and you were pretty annoyed at the bug, huh?”

“Not at the bug. Because I couldn’t make the spell work.”

“Okay. You didn’t intentionally hurt anything. And you wouldn’t have this time, if you were working on anything larger than a bug. I’ll bring a new wand around for you in the morning. But I want you to promise not to try that spell again. You could be in very serious trouble if you do.” He took a look at Pugsley’s mutinous face, and then glanced at the carefully expressionless faces of the other two children. “Okay. Let’s put it this way. Your new wand will be adjusted so that spell isn’t possible for you right now. And I’m going to ask your sister and your cousin to give me their wands too, so I can adjust those in case you decide to swap wands.”

“Mr Blair, don’t we have a say in the matter?” asked Morticia.

“Look, Mrs Addams, I know about you and your family, and we know about *him*,” he said, pointing at Harry. “You’re all kind of legend, and we’re under orders to let things slide because you’re not *exactly* members of our community. We don’t have jurisdiction over most of the things that go on here. But we do have jurisdiction over these three, and we need to make sure they learn things that are safe and don’t threaten others. At this age, they don’t have the discretion to handle more dangerous spells.”

Morticia raised her eyebrows in polite disbelief.

“Everybody thinks their kids are an exception. Look, you wouldn’t give a six-year-old a loaded gun, would you? Never mind, maybe you would. Be that as it may, we are required to keep the children from doing deliberately dangerous things. Pugsley didn’t intend to kill the beetle, just jinx it a little. Most children would never have discovered how to cast that spell. Most children wouldn’t have been able to force enough magic to kill a beetle through a training wand. That’s why there aren’t going to be any charges pressed. This time. If it happens again, there will be a hearing and his wand will be confiscated, probably for several years. I’m sure you don’t want to stunt the development of his magic because he accidentally cast a spell he shouldn’t.”

“I assure you, Mr Blair, my son will not be killing anything *accidentally*.”

“Good. I’ll be back in the morning, then. And I’ll suggest again that you get them a tutor.” He gave Morticia a half-bow and strode off officiously.

He quite forgot to take Harry and Wednesday’s wands with him.

“*Hocus pocus*,” Morticia whispered as he left.

That night, Harry had a nightmare. It started with him discovering a new door in the House, which opened into a whole different house he'd never seen before, although it had the same 'feel' of age and magic that the House did. Tiptoeing through the dark halls, he found a room whose door was open. It was a baby's room. Its walls were dark like the sky, with clouds floating around and obscuring the twinkling stars. From time to time, a small glowing gold thing with wings would fly past. The crib in the room held a dark-haired baby who was contentedly sucking his thumb in his sleep. Then there came crashing noises from downstairs; a man's voice yelled something and a woman screamed, and sickly green light flashed once, twice, filling up the hall and spilling into the baby's room. The baby in the crib woke up and started to cry. A man in a dark robe, with glowing red eyes, came into the room and pointed his wand at the baby, ignoring Harry's presence. That was a mistake.

Harry ran forward and kicked the man in the shins as hard as he could, causing the green spell that burst from the man's wand to hit the ceiling, blowing a hole in it. Then he went to the crib, whose bars dissolved magically, and grabbed the baby. Darting around the man, he ran out of the room and down the hall, trying to find his way back home. The man chased him, yelling "*AVADA KEDAVRA!*" and shooting green spells at him. The baby grew heavier and heavier in his arms. Finally, just as he thought he was cornered, he found another door that led back into the House. The baby was gone, but the man was still chasing him and firing spells at Family members who came into the hall. Uncle Gomez tried to cut the man with a saber, but there was green light and he fell. Pugsley tried to use his red wand, but it broke, and a green spell cut him down. Aunt Morticia and Wednesday came into the hall armed with axes, and a green spell hit Aunt Morticia and Harry grabbed Wednesday's hand and they kept running.

Then they were out in the graveyard somehow, and the House on the top of the hill was burning, wreathed with green flame. Hand in hand, Harry and Wednesday ran to the tomb of Charles Felonius Addams, trying to take shelter there, knowing somehow that if they could get inside it, they'd be safe, but the door wouldn't open and the man with the red eyes laughed, a high, cold laugh that sent chills through Harry's body.

"*AVADA KEDAVRA!*" A green spell came towards him and Wednesday, and there was no way to dodge it, and the great bronze doors of the tomb behind them opened and they fell through into the dark, falling, falling ...

He woke as he hit the floor of his own bedroom with a thump. Aunt Morticia was sitting on a chair next to his bed and Wednesday was sitting on the end of his bed, looking down at him.

"That looked like fun," said Wednesday.

"Wasn't," said Harry, rubbing his forehead. He hadn't hit it, but his head ached.

Pugsley came into the room, yawning, with Grandmama just behind him. "I went and got Grandmama," he said unnecessarily.

Uncle Gomez, Thing, and even Lurch crowded into Harry's little room and helped him back into bed. He was still shivering. Grandmama pulled the cork from a little brown bottle and handed it to him. He drank it without question, and felt heat rush through his body until steam burst out his ears. His headache disappeared instantly. "Whoa! That's great! What is that stuff?"

"It's a Pepper-Up Potion. Warms you right up, doesn't it?"

He nodded enthusiastically. He felt much better now, and the steam pouring out of his ears tickled.

"We're all here now, Harry. Why don't you tell us about your dream?"

So Harry did, in great detail, causing Pugsley to complain, "No fair! You have the most exciting dreams!" and Wednesday to squeeze his hand tightly when he came to the part when they were trapped at the tomb.

When he was finished, there was silence for a moment.

"What does it all mean, Aunt Morticia?" he whispered. He knew she was good at interpreting dreams and omens and things like that.

"I've told you all the story of how you came to stay with us, Harry," Aunt Morticia said. "When you first came here, you used to have nightmares like this, but you were too young to explain what they were about. Now we know. When your parents were killed by the Dark Wizard Voldemort, he probably used what is called the Killing Curse. Pugsley came close to discovering that curse today, which is why you were upset when he used it on the beetle. It brought back the memories from when you were just a baby. In your dream, as in your real life, you heard Voldemort kill your parents, and then he came to kill you. In your dream, you saved yourself as a baby. What really happened, of course, was that the Killing Curse bounced back and destroyed him. You were rescued from the ruins of the house and brought to your Aunt Petunia, who in turn brought you here to us."

"So this Dark guy is really dead, and I killed him?" asked Harry.

"Unfortunately, there is some doubt about that. While he might have died, according to the stories in the papers at the time, there was no body, and his wand was never found."

"Then how do they even know what happened?" asked Wednesday, ever the logical one.

"That's a very good question," said Uncle Gomez, "and it's one we've never been able to find an answer to. I have a whole scrapbook of newspaper stories of the time, and there have even been books written about it, but there are holes in the story big enough to ride a dragon through. Personally, I think there was at least one other person in the house that night, probably on Voldemort's side, who ran off with his wand. Possibly there were other people besides Harry's parents there, and some of them survived the fight and told other people what had happened, and the story spread from there. Even though he was only a year old when it happened, they think Harry's a hero for defeating Voldemort."

“But I didn’t do anything,” said Harry, puzzled.

“I know you didn’t. But people need heroes and you were there. When you go back to England, you’ll probably have lots of people telling you how great you were.”

“Do I have to go back? I want to stay here with the Family!”

“Yes, you have to go back some time, because the story isn’t finished yet. I have read it in the cards,” said Aunt Morticia. “Voldemort may be gone, but he’s not dead. What’s the first rule about enemies?”

“Make sure they’re dead before you turn your back on them,” chorused the three children.

“Right. Voldemort probably knows that, too. So if he does ever come back, he’ll come after Harry. And since we don’t want him to come here ....”

Harry shivered, thinking of his dream of the House burning down. No, he certainly didn’t want Voldemort to come here!

“...we’ll have to go there.”

“We? Not just me?”

Aunt Morticia reached forward and ruffled Harry’s already messy hair. “We. We’re Family, Harry. You know what that means. *Sic gorgiamus allos subjectatus nunc.* ”

“We gladly feast on those who would subdue us’,” replied Harry. A smile came to his face slowly. “Voldemort doesn’t stand a chance.”

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Minerva McGonagall was beginning to wonder about Albus Dumbledore. He seemed uncharacteristically subdued since the beginning of the school year, and she overheard him questioning the Muggle Studies professor what the phrase “strike two” meant. Unfortunately, she had no idea either.

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Harry, Pugsley and Wednesday continued growing up, as children do. Grandmama brought them some old spell books, and they started going through them, but rapidly ran into problems. As Mr Blair had suggested would happen, they just couldn’t make most of the higher level spells work. They would have to keep practicing with the easier cantrips and wait until their power increased to deal with the harder ones.

This didn’t mean they stopped learning magic, though. As Aunt Morticia pointed out to Harry, there were many magical studies which didn’t require wands. And some of those were things she and other members of the Family could teach. So even though they couldn’t find a tutor who wouldn’t flee screaming after two days, Harry, Pugsley and Wednesday still got lessons.

Grandmama, of course, taught them Potions, starting with teaching all of them how to cook. Once they’d all learned the basics of preparing ingredients properly, adding them in the right order, stirring widdershins and deosil, and keeping the pot from scorching, she was sure they could not only handle basic potions, but make a decent soup from scratch.

Aunt Morticia taught them Herbology, starting with herbal lore and how to grow plants in the greenhouse.

Both Grandmama and Aunt Morticia were experts at divination, and Wednesday seemed to have the gift for it, learning how to read cards and palms and tea leaves. Her mother promised to teach her astrology as well, when she could handle the mathematics involved.

Uncle Gomez kept up the fencing lessons, proclaiming that “no matter how powerful the wizard, a blade between the ribs would seriously cramp his style!” On any given weekend afternoon, the sound of steel against steel rang through the ballroom as Uncle Gomez fought Aunt Morticia and Harry fought against Wednesday. As inevitably happened, when one of the adults disarmed the other and they started kissing, Harry and Wednesday took their practice into another room and solemnly promised each other that they would never do anything so disgusting.

Uncle Gomez also worked with them on History of Magic. He had several books in his library that had been brought over from England in 1693 by Charles Felonius Addams, and others that had been added to the library since then. He showed Harry his scrapbook of stories that had appeared in the British, American, French and German Wizarding press at the time, translating the French and German since Harry had only the most rudimentary knowledge of those languages. He also let Harry read one of the biographies that had been published about him, and helped him compose a letter of outrage to the publisher.

Uncle Fester took over teaching Arithmancy and Runes, although he was usually just a chapter or two ahead of his students. These lessons were Pugsley’s favourites.

Cousin Woon and Cousin Itt both came over more often, showing Harry fascinating books on cryptozoology and mythical creatures. Cousin Itt particularly approved of Harry’s collection of snakes. Wednesday developed an interest in spiders, and Cousin Woon helped her start breeding tarantulas.

Christmas came round as it was wont to do. There were no carolers at the door this year, as word had gone round the previous year about the group that had penetrated the Addams House’s defenses and, for their pains, were drenched with a cauldron full of hot wassail, poured on them from the top of the tower. The assault case and the corresponding trespass case were still pending and popular opinion in town was against the carolers - everyone wanted to know what they could possibly have been thinking. The children remembered Pugsley’s early fear of the old man with

the white whiskers who came into people's houses on Christmas Eve, and made sure that the fireplace was kept ablaze all night. "The little dears!" murmured Aunt Morticia to Uncle Gomez. "They still believe in Santa Claus!" Wednesday received a beautiful doll in funeral attire; she promptly christened the doll 'Marie Antoinette' and cut its head off in the guillotine her father used on his cigars. The boys got a set of miniature siege engines, and happily spent the morning lobbing chocolates at each other with catapults and trebuchets, and trying to catch the missiles in their mouths.

With the coming of spring, both boys planted gardens alongside Wednesday's, and the tramps through the mountains resumed. The Satanists were starting to leave a lot of junk (mostly beer cans) at their circles and were being very sloppy about their practices, so the children arranged black candles and wrote runes on the stones and left a sacrifice at one of the spots they frequently used, just to show them how it should be done. They were rather disappointed when the Satanists didn't come back after that.

Playing "Colonists and Indians" in the woods became a favorite game, and all three of them learned how to move silently, sneaking up on and arranging traps for Uncle Fester, who usually volunteered to play Colonist for them.

Over the summer holidays, they went on vacation to New England. In Massachusetts, they saw the Magical Congress building in Boston, hunted for aliens (but didn't catch any) in the Bridgewater Triangle, toured the sites of the witch hangings in Salem and visited Lizzie Borden's house in Fall River; in New Hampshire, they visited Mystery Hill; and in Vermont, they visited Lake Champlain and tried to take pictures of Champ, the lake monster. It didn't show up, although they threw several chickens into the water to attract it, so Harry had to settle for getting a team jersey from the Vermont Lake Monsters minor league baseball team, which he rooted for ever after.

Out of courtesy, Morticia and Gomez sent Petunia Dursley pictures every year, along with a short note telling her about Harry's accomplishments. She very rarely responded, but they didn't expect her to.

They also decided to send some snapshots to Albus Dumbledore, both as a peace offering and as a warning. The old man hadn't bothered them at all for a year now. With any luck, he'd given up.

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"Giving up", unfortunately, was not in the Headmaster's vocabulary.

## Family Values They Stole My Werewolf!

FAMILY VALUES

**Disclaimer:** (*plural*: disclaimers)

1. One who disclaims, disowns, or renounces.
2. (*Law*): A denial, disavowal, or renunciation, as of a title, claim, interest, estate, or trust; relinquishment or waiver of an interest or estate.
3. A public disavowal, as of pretensions, claims, opinions, and the like.
4. A statement that I don't own anything related to Harry Potter or The Addams Family.

### Chapter 07: They Stole My Werewolf!

August was the slowest time in Albus Dumbledore's year. Both the Wizengamot and the International Confederation of Wizards were in recess except for dire emergencies, and the staff of Hogwarts had the business of summer maintenance well in hand. The professors rarely changed their lesson plans, so with the exception of whoever he'd convinced to take the Defence against the Dark Arts position this year, he didn't have to read and approve those. Argus Filch was directing an army of house elves in cleaning the castle top to bottom. Rubeus Hagrid had another army tending to the grounds and gardens. Irma Pince was working on her list of new volumes needed to restock the library, Severus Snape had already ordered the new potions supplies for the year and was now helping Poppy Pomfrey stock up the Hospital Wing, Miranda Butterworth was restocking the kitchens and Winnie Winkle had her house elf laundry staff washing, repairing or replacing all the linens in the castle, from towels to bed curtains. All he really needed to do was approve the requisitions for new books, potions supplies, food and linens. This, unfortunately, gave him time to plot.

Since he had lost his agent in the Muggle world, he had to find a new one. It needed to be someone who was capable of moving in the Muggle world without attracting notice. It needed to be someone who would not be missed in the larger Wizarding community. It needed to be someone who trusted Dumbledore and would follow his instructions unhesitatingly. What's more, it had to be someone with a strong enough interest in Harry Potter to be willing to do something possibly immoral and illegal (but not, he thought, fattening) in order to reclaim the boy and bring him back to Britain, where he belonged. And it had to be someone who was plausibly deniable, so that in case something went wrong, nothing could be traced back to him – Dumbledore had learned what "strike two" meant by now, and did not wish to find out what "strike three" would mean.

There was really only one person it could be. The Headmaster re-sealed the envelope the photographs had arrived in, and then asked Remus Lupin to come visit him for tea.

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"Remus, my boy! Come in, come in. Thank you for indulging an old man."

"Old? Never. You're only what, a hundred fifty or so? Griselda Marchbanks is older than that."

"Yes, and she keeps reminding me of it every time she comes to administer the O.W.L. and N.E.W.T. tests, too. Makes me feel like I'm taking them all over again," said Dumbledore ruefully. "Dreadful old harridan."

Remus laughed, and Dumbledore served the tea while looking critically at the younger man. Remus had only just passed the age of thirty, and his face, as most wizards', did not show his true age, but bits of grey were appearing in his brown hair. His robes were shabby and out of style. "I wanted to find out how you were doing, Remus. We really haven't had a chance to sit down and talk for years now. I regret that."

"It has been a long time, hasn't it, Headmaster? I don't think we've had a real conversation since ... since James and Lily ..."

"No, we haven't. Things have been so busy since then, I really haven't had a chance to catch up with anyone. So tell me, how are you doing? I always had great hopes for you, my boy. Great hopes."

"Well, I've been doing a little of this, a little of that. I haven't been able to hold a position very well, unfortunately. I get by."

"What have you been doing for the full moons?" asked Dumbledore curiously.

"My mother remarried; a squib farmer who's willing to put up with my – infirmity – in exchange for the prestige of having a witch for a wife. They have an old stone barn on their property. A few silencing charms, and hey presto – a perfect place for a werewolf to hide."

As they chatted, an owl flew in through Dumbledore's open window and landed on the arm of his chair. It was a bit awkward in landing, since it had

a flat Muggle envelope attached to its leg instead of a rolled up parchment. Dumbledore relieved it of its burden and sent it on its way.

Lupin tactfully concentrated on sipping his tea while Dumbledore opened the envelope and pulled out its contents. After reading the enclosed note and looking briefly at the pictures, the Headmaster let out a long sigh, visibly distraught.

"Headmaster? Are you all right?"

"Thank you, Remus, yes, I'm fine. It's just ..." He shrugged and slid the envelope's contents back into it.

Remus had never seen the Headmaster at a loss for words before. "Is it bad news? Surely not ... not You-Know-Who?" It was perhaps typical of a young wizard who had come to maturity during the last war that the possibility of the Dark Lord returning was the first thing that came to mind.

"Oh, no, nothing like that," Dumbledore hastened to reassure him. "It's something I've ... well, perhaps you should know. You do have an interest in it, after all." He held out the envelope to the younger man.

"An interest?" Remus took the envelope gingerly and pulled a letter and three Muggle photographs out of it. The first two pictures were of a little girl and two boys. In the first, the little girl had her head and hands through a pillory, with the two boys standing on either side of her. The little girl had to stand on her tiptoes to get her head through the pillory. The stockier of the two boys was holding a fake cat o' nine tails, while the slimmer, dark-haired one was pretending to declaim something from a scroll. The words "Salem Witchcraft Museum" were visible on a sign on the wall behind them. In the second, a dark haired, sunken-eyed man held one of the two boys in his arms, while the boy waved at the camera. The two were posed, most unsettlingly, in front of a moss-covered tomb; Remus could see the edges of gravestones behind the tomb, so supposed they were in the middle of a substantial graveyard. The third picture was a close-up of the boy alone, with a large snake draped around his neck; the boy had a gap-toothed smile, showing that he had recently lost a couple of teeth, as he held the snake's head up for the camera. The final shot showed clearly the boy's green eyes, ruffled black hair, and a distinctive lightning-bolt scar on his forehead. "That's not ... is that *Harry*?"

Dumbledore watched the expression of shock spread across Remus's face. *Really*, he thought, *the Addamses couldn't have picked a better selection of pictures to unsettle a British Wizard*. "Read the note," he said, quietly.

Remus's fingers shook slightly as he unfolded the sheet of creamy paper. It was black-bordered, the sort of thing one usually used to notify someone of a death.

*Dear Mr. Dumbledore,*

*I hope this letter finds you well.*

*As you can see, Harry is healthy and doing well. We will send you pictures and updates so that you may be assured of his well-being. His school grades are excellent, and heretofore hidden talents are surfacing. We are very pleased, and have already begun to make plans for a proper education for him.*

*We appreciate your forbearance this year, and would like to assure you that we will still consider sending Harry to your School when the time comes, although that will change if there is any further custodial interference.*

*I remind you of the adage you read on our ancestor's tomb, Mr. Dumbledore. Do not start with us. You will not win.*

*Very truly yours,*

*Morticia A. Addams*

"What is this all about?" asked Remus in a hoarse whisper. "Who are these people? Why do they have Harry? I thought he was being raised somewhere safe!"

"I made a terrible mistake, Remus. I sent Harry to live with Lily's family, her sister in fact, who was his closest living kin. Since Lily was Muggle-born, I felt it would be better for him to have a normal childhood in the Muggle world than one living in the limelight of the Wizarding world."

"But Lily's sister *hates* magic!" Remus exclaimed. "She used to tell us stories about how awful Petunia was to her. And it only got worse after her sister got married. Didn't you know?"

"Kin is kin, Remus. I know that Lily and Petunia didn't like each other very much, but it was the safest place for him to stay, where he could be protected from Voldemort."

"But who was going to protect him from *them*?" asked Remus. Maybe You Know Who was gone, but they could have done anything to him. What happened? Did they beat him? Did he have to be taken away by child welfare? And how did he wind up with these ... these people?" he asked, waving the pictures.

"As far as I know, he was not beaten or mistreated. But Petunia, with a son of her own about the same age, was overworked and unable to take on a second child. Harry needed more care than she was willing to give. However it happened, she made a connection with this Morticia Addams in the United States. I believe there is some familial relation there, although it is distant."

"So this ... Morticia adopted Harry?"

"No, there has been no adoption. She and her husband assumed guardianship, however. I went to visit them, in an attempt to regain custody, and found them most uncooperative. I even brought a case against them in the Muggle courts, which did not end well. This," he said, gesturing at the



letter and pictures, “is an attempt to remind me that they have the upper hand, and that Harry’s welfare is completely in their hands.”

“Welfare? Look at these pictures! You call that welfare?”

“True, true. The family is disturbingly Dark.”

“You mean they’re magical?”

“I don’t believe the family is magical – although by now they certainly know that Harry is – just look at the comment in their letter about ‘special talents’. The area they live in is a Wild Magic sink, and it’s affected them, over the years. They’re odd, even for Muggles. They’re fascinated with all that is strange and bizarre. You can see for yourself. They let Harry play with dangerous snakes – the one he has there is a Copperhead, I believe. Quite deadly. They take him, and their own children, to places that celebrate the destruction of witches and let them play at being pilloried. They have a cemetery in their garden, and an iron maiden in the kitchen. They eat cats. I fear for Harry, I really do. I’m afraid that these people will turn him as Dark as Voldemort was – perhaps worse, if he grows up knowing nothing else. I wish there was a way to get Harry out of there, but my hands are tied.”

“What about the Ministry?”

“The Ministry knows nothing about this. I placed Harry with Petunia Dursley of my own accord, because I was afraid that if the Ministry got involved, Harry might be placed with a family that was more interested in the influence they could have over him than his well-being. It was borderline illegal, but I believed it was the right thing to do. But if I admit it now, Harry will become a pawn, as I feared. So here I am, hoist on my own petard,” Dumbledore said glumly.

“Surely there’s something someone can do,” said Remus. “What about James and Lily’s Wills? Wasn’t there some direction there?”

“Alas, I never submitted it to be probated,” admitted Dumbledore. “They named four possible Guardians for Harry: Sirius Black. Peter Pettigrew, Alice Longbottom, and yourself. At the time, I believed Petunia to be the better choice. It could be submitted now, but I’m not sure what good it would do. Of those four, you’re the only one who could possibly serve.”

“And I’m not a fit Guardian for a child,” said Remus morosely. “What in the world would I do with him on the full moons? I might hurt him. Or worse. And I haven’t nearly the wherewithal to support a child.”

“What about your mother? Do you think she might be willing to mind him those nights? I do think you’d be an excellent Guardian otherwise. Never mind the costs, he has a trust that would support both of you easily, as well as paying his Hogwarts fees.” Dumbledore sighed again. “But that’s neither here nor there at this point. If we could get Harry here, we could submit the Will for processing and you could get custody. But the Americans have already told me they will not intervene, and the people who have Harry are not likely to let him go.”

“That’s because they’ve never faced a Marauder in defence of his cub,” said Remus, decisively.

“Now, Remus, don’t do anything foolish,” said Dumbledore.

“Foolish? No, I don’t believe it will be foolish at all,” said Remus. “I won’t say more, that way if anyone asks if you told me to do something, both you and I can honestly say ‘no’. Thank you for the tea, Headmaster. I’ll be in touch.” He left the Headmaster’s office with a new determination evident in his stride.

“Good luck, my boy,” said the Headmaster. “Good luck.”

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Harry, Wednesday and Pugsley headed out into the woods. It was the last weekend of the summer vacation, and the heat and humidity were oppressive. The children had talked Uncle Fester into playing Indians with them again, and had chased him into the trees, giving him a good head start. Both boys had taken their shirts off and put war paint on their faces and chests, while Wednesday had settled for wearing a headband with a feather in it along with her normal black jeans and t-shirt. All three children carried their wands along with knives in sheaths, hatchets, bows and arrows, and beaded shoulder bags that contained their lunches.

They had been sneaking about for some time, when Harry stooped to look at the ground. “Huh. Look at this.” The other two bent to look, as well. “That’s not Uncle Fester’s footprint, is it, Pugsley?”

“Harry, you’re supposed to use our Indian names!” Wednesday scolded.

“Sorry, Little Blackbird. That’s not the white man’s footprint, is it, Flying Buffalo?”

“No, it isn’t, Wild Moose,” said Pugsley. “Uncle Fester’s feet are bigger than that.”

A little green snake wiggled through the weeds and leaf litter at their feet. Harry hissed at it quietly, and it hissed back.

“There’s somebody watching us,” he said, keeping his voice quiet, so only Wednesday and Pugsley could hear. “He’s behind that tree,” he said, pointing while pretending to scratch his nose. “He’s invisible. The snake could taste him but not see him.”

“That means he’s a wizard. This isn’t a game any more, is it?” asked Wednesday, quietly.

“Nope. We’re too far from home, he’d catch up with us if we tried to run. But if he wanted to hurt us, he would have done it already. Let’s pretend we don’t know he’s there and keep trying to find Uncle Fester.” All the children had been told about Albus Dumbledore and the mad old wizard’s

attempt to take Harry away, but they were all very careful, because Harry didn't want to be taken away. How could he marry Wednesday someday if he was taken away? So they had all practiced how to yell and scream if anyone suspicious approached them on the street. But they hadn't planned on someone sneaking up on them in the woods.

"Aren't we near where we set that trap yesterday?" asked Pugsley.

"Yes," said Harry, a smile coming to his face. "The snare over by the Snake Den. Let's angle over that way and see if it's caught anything. If not, we can make sure it does." He was still worried, but he had the beginnings of a plan now.

They headed off, changing their course slightly up hill of the direction they had been heading. All three children, listening carefully, could now hear the sounds of someone who was trying to be stealthy following a short distance behind them. When they came to the clearing where they had set their trap the previous day, they were happy to see that it hadn't been set off by wandering deer or Uncle Fester. They crossed the clearing cautious, being very careful not to set it off themselves, and passed between two bushes on the opposite side, so that they were temporarily hidden from the stalker.

"Now let's try to catch him!" whispered Harry. "Wednesday, get ready to scream."

He threw himself to the ground with a loud thump, crying, "Ow!"

"Harry!" Wednesday screamed, maybe a little louder than was necessary. "Are you all right?"

Someone across the clearing swore and ran forward towards them. With a swoosh and a flurry of leaves, the noose of the snare trap they had set tightened around an unwary foot and the bent and pegged branch came loose, jerking the trap's victim upside down. There was another curse, presumably as his head hit the ground.

Harry rolled to his feet and the three children returned to the clearing, being careful not to step into the reach of their 'prey'. Their trap had sprung, and there was a large invisible something dangling from the taut rope. It wasn't completely invisible, looking like the shimmer of heat haze one could see in a parking lot on a hot day, but they could only barely tell that it was human by the outline. It was struggling quite a bit, judging from the way the rope was jerking about. Harry glanced at the ground. Sure enough, there was a wand, where it had been dropped when its owner parted company with the ground. It might still be in reach of its owner, when and if he stopped flailing about. Harry took a deep breath to steady himself, then tumbled forward and over the wand, righting himself with it clutched in his hand.

The other children nocked arrows in their bows and drew, trying to aim at where they thought the body would be.

"All right, whoever you are," Harry commanded. "Let us see you!"

"Give me my wand!" said an adult voice with a distinct British accent. "That stick you have in your hand!"

Harry rolled his eyes. "We're young, not stupid! I'm not giving it back!" He pulled his red wand out of his bag and flicked it in the direction of the invisible person. "*Finite incantatem!*"

Nothing happened. He tried it again, with the stranger's wand this time. Still nothing.

"I have to tap myself with the wand!" said the voice, obviously trying to sound reasonable.

"Oh. You can stay invisible, then. Wednesday –"

"Little Blackbird!" she said, stamping her foot.

"Okay, okay. Little Blackbird. You go find Uncle Fester. Take his wand," Harry said, passing her the stranger's wand. "We'll stay and make sure *he* doesn't escape."

"How come I have to go find Uncle Fester? Is it because I'm a girl?"

"No, it's because you find him best."

"Okay, then. Don't scalp him till I come back," she instructed them.

"Not even a little?" asked Pugsley, fingering his sheathed knife.

"Not even a little," she said, and trotted off between the trees.

"Now boys, this has gone far enough," said the voice, somewhat shakily. The talk of 'scalping' had apparently got to him. "Get me down this instant!"

Harry grinned at Pugsley. "He must think we're little kids. He doesn't know who he's messing with!"

"All right, who am I, er, 'messing with'?"

"He's Flying Buffalo, and I'm Wild Moose. She's Little Blackbird," Harry said, waving in the direction Wednesday had gone. "We're the Tribe of the Snake. Who are you?"

There was a sigh of resignation. "My name is Remus Lupin, Harry. Your parents were friends of mine."

"Yeah, right. Tell me another one," said Harry. "How come I've never heard of you before?"

"I only just found out where you were, Harry. I've come a long way to see you."

"Then how come you're sneaking around in the woods? How come you didn't knock on the door like a regular person?" There was silence. "Right. No good answer."

"Maybe he's just passed out," suggested Pugsley. "No, wait ... the rope's moving too much. He's trying to get at the knot."

"Try that jinx we were practicing the other day. Then even if he gets down, he still won't be able to go anywhere."

Pugsley drew his wand and fired off a perfect Jelly-Legs Jinx, which their prisoner apparently recognized, judging from his cry of frustration, and the two boys settled down calmly to eat their lunches while they waited for Wednesday and Uncle Fester.

They were finishing off their apples when Uncle Fester stepped out of the bushes, with Wednesday right behind him. "So, where's this invisible man you caught?"

"Right there," Harry said, pointing at the rope, which was now jerking frantically. "We thought he might try to get loose, so Pugsley jinxed him."

"How about getting him visible again?" asked their Uncle. "It'll be a little difficult getting him back to the house if we can't see him."

"He says he has to be tapped on the head with his wand to break the spell. We figured we'd wait until you could sit on him or something to make sure he didn't get away."

"That will work," said Uncle Fester. Suiting action to words, he borrowed Harry's knife and cut the rope. The invisible prisoner tumbled to the ground. Uncle Fester tossed the knife a safe distance away and then jumped on their captive, landing directly on top of him.

The children giggled as they watched him struggle with the unseen man. It looked very silly.

"Okay, got him ... here's his head, somebody give him a whack."

Wednesday followed instructions exactly.

"Ow!" The heat haze underneath Uncle Fester faded, revealing a brown-haired man of medium height. He was wearing a tweedy brown suit and dress shoes which were completely unsuitable for roaming around in the woods. "Get off me, you great oaf!"

"Now is that any way to talk to the man who just got you down? I can hang you upside down in the tree again if you want." The man on the ground didn't reply, but continued struggling futilely. He managed to tear himself free from Fester's grip, which impressed the boys, because *nobody* was stronger than Uncle Fester, and made a desperate lunge at Wednesday, who still had his wand. She jumped backwards, just out of his reach.

Uncle Fester did not have an unlimited store of patience. As a matter of fact, it was pretty severely limited, and the stranger's attack on Wednesday exhausted it completely. With a roar of anger, Fester slammed his massive fist into the stranger's jaw. The man fell to the ground and didn't move again.

"That's more like it. Help me get him up, kids, we have to take him home." He got the stranger up in a fireman's carry while the children picked up all their belongings, and they headed down slope to the house.

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Remus Lupin had awakened to find himself in a bit of a tight spot, and cursed himself for having fallen for a trick like the one Harry had pulled. A Marauder, especially, should not have fallen for that. Unfortunately, Harry's trick had awakened an old memory, and that had him rushing in without being cautious. That led to him being yanked upside down by one ankle, jinxed, and assaulted by that bald bruiser they called an uncle. Returning to consciousness, he discovered that he was stretched out and bound on a hard flat surface, perhaps a table or bench. He was shirtless and shoeless, but still had his trousers and socks on, so that was a plus. Once he was able to focus, he looked around.

The room was something out of a nightmare. The walls were windowless, but gaslights provided enough light for him to see a variety of whips, chains and torture implements dangling from hooks on the walls. There was even a hangman's noose in the corner. He lifted his head and was able to see enough of the device to which he was bound to determine that it was actually a rack. It looked functional, too. This was not good, not good at all. Straining, he lifted his head more and saw a thick oaken door at the far end of the room. It was open a few inches, and next to it was a straight-backed chair with a dismembered hand lying on it. Was this a not so subtle warning of what lay in store for him? His captors seemed to have left him alone for the moment, so he hoped he might be able to escape. He was stronger, much stronger, than he looked, so maybe he could break the ropes on the rack.

As he strained at his bindings, he heard a scrabbling noise from the door. He looked over and gasped in horror. The hand had risen up on its fingers. It flipped over to stand on its wrist, and wagged its index finger at him in a gesture Remus understood to mean "no", then leaped off the chair and scuttled out the door on its fingertips, almost like some kind of large spider.

Remus sighed and tried to relax in his bonds. He was going to have company in just a few moments, he was sure.

The door swung open, and three people entered. One was a tall, slim woman in a tight-fitting black dress. She was extremely pale, and if he hadn't known better, he'd have thought she was a vampire. As a matter of fact, it occurred to him belatedly, he didn't know better. She might actually be a

vampire at that. He was accompanied by two men, one the pasty eyed fellow who had brought him down in the woods, who still had bits of leaves stuck to a knobby knit black turtle neck jumper that made him appear to have no neck, and one the swarthy man who had been holding Harry in the picture taken in the graveyard. His clothing appeared to be skirting the line between elegance and decadence, and wouldn't have been out of place in Diagon Alley or Hogsmeade.

Behind the three adults came three children, Harry and the other two from the woods, all properly dressed now, although there was still a smudge of war paint on Harry's cheek. A hag wearing a green robe that fit more like a sack hovered over them. The children lined up against the wall, a safe distance away from him. All three of the children wore unemotional, blank expressions, and his heart sank. This was nothing for children to see.

Finally, the hand was back, jumping up on the chair as if to see better – although what it saw with, Remus had no idea.

Mentally, Remus raged at the distant Headmaster, although he knew he himself had more responsibility for his current situation. *Dumbledore, you old coot, how could you possibly think these people were Muggles?*

The slim woman took up a position on Remus's left, the bulky man on his right. The slimmer man stood at Remus's feet, resting one foot casually on the roller to which Remus's ankles were chained. He reached into his trouser pocket and pulled out a wallet. Remus's wallet.

"Remus J. Lupin, age such, address such, identification number so and so. Resident of Market Harborough? Such interesting names your towns have. One wonders, Mr. Lupin, just what business you had traipsing through the woods and attacking our children?"

"I wasn't attacking them."

"Could have fooled me," muttered the young girl.

"Now, Wednesday, no talking when we're interrogating the prisoner," said the woman. "You'll get your turn later."

"She had my wand," Remus said, as if that explained everything.

"This wand?" said his questioner, holding up the familiar long, slim shaft of blackthorn. "It will be a while before we can buy wands for the children. I wonder if they could use this to practice with in the meantime."

"No!" said Remus, in a bit of panic. It was always disturbing to have one's wand in the hands of someone else, and to think of his being used by those children ... "It won't work for someone else. It's personalised to me." That was true enough – the core was a whisker from his own wolf form. That wand would never work for anyone else. Not as long as he lived. Of course, he wasn't about to tell them that. "I wouldn't have hurt her. But I had to get it back."

"You wouldn't have hurt her intentionally, maybe. But you're a lot stronger than you look if you were able to best Fester. You could have hurt her accidentally. That's why we have you tied down, to keep the children safe. I would kill for them – any of them, including Harry. I would die for them. But I don't plan on doing either today." He handed the wand to the hag. "Grandmama, put that in the vault. Thing will stay with the children."

Grandmama took the wand in one wizened hand, and gave it an experimental swish. Nothing happened, but she grinned like a little child and shuffled out through the door, still swishing as she went. The hand leaped up onto the shoulder of the little girl in what was obviously meant to be a comforting manner as the hag left.

"Now then," said the swarthy man, "Let's get down to business, shall we?"

"Gomez, you're forgetting something," said the woman, speaking for the first time. "We've not properly introduced ourselves to our guest."

"Oh, of course. Forgive me, my dear. Mr Lupin, allow me to introduce myself. I am Gomez Addams, the Addams of Addams, the father of two of those lovely children over there, and your host. The lovely lady to your left is my wife, Morticia, the heart and soul of our little Family. The not-so-lovely gentleman on your right is my brother, Fester, my right hand and the guardian of my back. The children are my daughter, Wednesday, my son and heir, Pugsley, and my ward, Harry Potter. The Thing is ... Thing. Our butler has already gone to pick up your things from your motel; one way or another, you won't be going back. Welcome to our humble abode."

"I'd say I'm pleased to meet you all, but the circumstances are rather difficult," said Remus, attempting to match Addams' bantering tone.

"About all we know of you, Mr Lupin, is that you were following our children about in the woods and attempted to attack my daughter. Oh, and you're a wizard. You can understand that we have a few questions. So we're going to put them to you, and you can answer. Or not, if you choose. But we really do advise that you answer. You wouldn't like what happens if you don't."

"I can imagine," muttered Remus.

"No, I don't think you do," said Gomez, jovially. "You see, if you don't tell us what's going on, we're just going to call the police and hand you over to them. Without that lovely little stick of yours, you might find it a bit difficult to extricate yourself. You'd find that the authorities hereabouts are not very fond of grown men who chase little children through the woods. Neither are some of the other people they have in their custody. I think I can guarantee that you'd have a very unpleasant time of it."

"Very," said Remus dryly. Whoever was sharing his cell would have a very unpleasant time of it too, come the next full moon. And then doubtless the American Aurors would get involved, and he had no idea what their policies on werewolves were, and didn't want to find out. Honestly, he decided, was probably the best policy here.

"Why exactly were you following our children today?"

"I just wanted to see Harry."

"Just see him?"

"I wanted to know that he was all right. That he was happy."

"And if he wasn't?"

"Then I'd ... see what I could do about it."

"What did you think you could possibly do?"

"His parents – James and Lily – they were my best friends. I found out they left a Will, but it was never probated. It named me as one of the guardians for Harry. It would give me the right to raise him."

"And how did you find out about this Will?"

"Albus Dumbledore told me about it."

Gomez's face went still and cold. "Did he tell you to come here and take Harry away from us?"

"No, no! I swear, he didn't tell me to do anything!"

"Then how did the subject of the Will come up? It's not something one just inserts into a conversation, after all."

"We were having tea when your owl arrived."

"Owl? We didn't send an owl."

"It had an envelope with a letter and some photographs. Harry with a snake. You and Harry in a graveyard ..."

"I sent that Express Mail, not with an owl," said Morticia. "Dumbledore might have arranged for it to be re-delivered while you were there."

"Perhaps. He seemed rather distressed when he received it. When I asked him what was wrong, he showed me the pictures. He told me how you'd taken Harry from the Dursleys. He told me you were Dark – that you'd turn Harry Dark."

"Is there necessarily anything wrong with being Dark, Mr Lupin? Are you under the impression that Dark is the same thing as Evil?"

Remus couldn't answer that at first, but his captors were patient and let him think it through. Every bit of his childhood training screamed that yes, Dark was Evil. The wars against Voldemort and Grindelwald were proof of that. And yet ... and yet, there was the Darkness he himself was cursed with. The wolf inside him was Dark, but not Evil. He wasn't an evil person although he carried it inside him.

"No. It isn't."

"Very good. Is Light necessarily Good?"

That one was easier to answer. James Potter was from one of the foremost Light families, and yet he had done things – they all had – that they knew were not Good, both in school and later, during the war. Even Dumbledore, the premier Light wizard of his age, had violated the spirit and the letter of the law to place Harry with a family against his parents' wishes – and, Remus was coming to realize, had manipulated him into coming here to try to kidnap Harry and bring him back to England.

"No."

"If you had to choose between Dumbledore's orders and Harry's well being, which would you choose?"

The answer was immediate. "Harry. It would have to be Harry."

Gomez smiled, showing a disturbing number of pointed teeth. "Then I have a proposition for you, Mr Lupin. Stay here as our guest for two weeks – a month – as long as you'd like. Get to know the boy. Get to know us. Then go back and tell Dumbledore what you've seen. And tell him Harry Potter will return to England on our terms or not at all. In exchange, while you're here, you'll tutor all three children in wand magic. Yes, they're all magical, and no, none of us can teach them what they need to know."

"You're willing to trust me?"

"I don't trust you, Mr Lupin, because you haven't earned my trust yet. But I'm willing to give you a chance, and what you make of it is up to you. We have your wand. I don't think you'd be willing to leave without that. I also don't think you'd be foolish enough to kidnap Harry. Because if you did, that would make enemies of us. There wouldn't be a place in the world we couldn't follow you to, Mr Lupin, and when we did ... well, we do have a very convenient graveyard." The threat was clear, and Remus believed every bit of it.

Gomez reached down and unlocked the cuffs on Remus's ankles, and Morticia and Fester did the same for his wrists. He sat up slowly, working the stiffness out of his joints. "Your shoes and the rest of your clothes are under the rack," said Gomez. "Dinner is in fifteen minutes. Thing will show you the way." Almost as if Remus really was a friend and a guest, he nodded affably and turned to escort his wife out of the room, and their children followed. Thing jumped off Wednesday's shoulder and onto the chair again, clearly prepared to wait as long as it took for Remus to get dressed.

Fester and Harry remained, as well.

The big man looked down impassively at Remus. "I don't trust you either. Gomez says to give you a chance, so you'll have your chance. But I'm warning you – if you do anything to hurt any of the kids, there won't be pieces of you large enough to bury." He stalked out of the room, leaving Remus alone with the boy. Harry was still standing against the wall, silent and impassive as he'd been the whole time.

"Harry. This isn't how I'd pictured meeting you. Nothing's gone the way I expected it to. Can we start again?" Remus held out his hand. "I'm Remus Lupin. I was a friend of your parents. It's nice to meet you."

Harry stepped forward and took Remus's hand. For a moment, he was as carefully controlled as Fester had been. "I'm Harry Potter. It's nice to meet you, too. If you try to hurt Wednesday again, I'll kill you myself." Remus found himself believing it. Then the boy's mood shifted mercurially, and he was a normal child. He sat down on the rack, for all the world as if it were a park bench, swinging his feet while the older man dressed.

"Can you tell me all about my parents?"

## Family Values Dumbledore vs. Addams, Round 2

### FAMILY VALUES

**Disclaimer:** Boy, do I wish I'd thought of that Ultimate Disclaimer thing first. Kinsfire doesn't need the word count, dammit! Anyway. I don't own anything. No werewolves, golems, or kumquats were harmed in the writing of this chapter.

#### Chapter 08: Dumbledore vs. Addams, Round 2

Remus enjoyed taking his morning tea in a little gazebo in the back gardens of the House. Nobody else used it much, although there were a couple of crossbow bolts sticking into the wood, which meant somebody had been using it for target practice recently. It offered a good view of both the cemetery to the north and the bog and the hills beyond to the west. At this time of day, just after dawn, there was a little mist hanging over the bog. It was quite picturesque, and he could almost believe he was the only person around for miles.

From the first moment he set foot in those hills they called mountains, he had felt the Wild Magic surging around him, rich and dark and potent. It spoke to the wolf inside him, which was just as Wild and dark. In England, he had always felt constrained to keep the wolf under tight control, which only served to make it more painful when it inevitably broke free on nights of the full moon. During the years he had spent here, he had learned not to hold it back, and even to make use of it. The Wild Magic of the Watchungs gave him strength. He wondered, a little morosely, what it would be like to go back to Britain and its tightly constrained magic. There was the Forbidden Forest near Hogwarts, that was true, but that was the only large Wild Magic area left. The rest were little patches of strangeness that bore the same resemblance to Wild Magic that a hedgerow did to the Forest.

But go back to Britain he must. Harry was on the verge of turning eleven, and would start at Hogwarts in September. Plans had been laid, and today they would start putting them into effect, for today was the day Minerva McGonagall was scheduled to bring Harry his Hogwarts letter.

He finished his tea, pouring the dregs out onto the planting of wormwood around the base of the gazebo, and returned the cup to the kitchen, where he met Lurch, who was to be doing chauffeur duty for him today. He could very well have Apparated to town and brought Professor McGonagall back with him, but the effect of the House and Family was best achieved by the slower, more theatrical presentation of the drive up the hill. "Good morning, Lurch. How are you this fine day? Are you ready to go pick up our guest?" he asked.

Lurch looked at him and groaned in response. Over the years Remus had learned to interpret the nuances of Lurch's groans, almost as well as the rest of the Family. The big golem only knew a few words, and liked to use them at any opportunity, but the other sounds he made were quite expressive.

"I agree," said Remus. "It's going to be far too hot for this suit today. But there's nothing for it; have to do the Family proud, after all. Shall we?" He accompanied Lurch out to the converted stable which served to garage the classic Fleetwood, and they drove the reasonably short distance to Arcanum Hall. There were, of course, the necessary two parking spaces for the car – he really didn't know how Lurch did it, but there were always two spaces anywhere he needed to park, and Remus suspected it was some small magic only Lurch knew. Remus went to the upstairs hall and loitered about for a few moments. At exactly nine o'clock, there was a muffled 'thump' from inside the janitor's closet, and a moment later, a dignified looking woman emerged from it as if the janitor's closet were someplace she could normally be found emerging from.

"Professor McGonagall, how good to see you again!" said Remus.

"Excuse me, I don't believe we've – why, good heavens, Remus Lupin! I've wondered where you'd gone!"

"I'm surprised the Headmaster didn't tell you – I've been doing a little tutoring for the children."

"Well, yes, he did say he had someone he trusted watching over the Potter boy. I just never dreamed it was you! No wonder he wasn't worried. Now let me look at you a moment, you've changed so!" Remus smiled as she gave him a thorough once-over. Professor McGonagall was scrupulously fair and tried not to play favourites among her students, but she had confessed after he had left school that she had always been concerned about him. He had dressed particularly well this morning, at least partially to show his Head of House that he had, indeed, landed on his feet. "You seem very relaxed. I don't think I've ever seen you smile like that. And that's a very handsome suit. Is that ... Remus Lupin, are you wearing an *earring*?"

"Observant as ever, Professor," he said, fingering the platinum stud in his right ear. "It's my Portkey to the Werewolf Reserve. As long as I wear this, I need never fear hurting anyone by accident, and American witches and wizards know I'm no danger. Of course, I sometimes do get some other kinds of attention, but that can't be helped."

"Werewolf Reserve? You must tell me all about that. I've never heard of any such thing."

"No, you wouldn't have, more's the pity. But please, the car is waiting, and blocking up traffic, I'm sure." He offered Professor McGonagall his arm

gallantly, and the two descended to street level.

The car was indeed blocking up traffic. Even though it was properly parked, as always, cars driving by slowed as the drivers gawked at either Lurch, the car, or both. The pavement, however, was quite clear, as pedestrians didn't seem to care to walk too close to Lurch, who was standing next to the car trying to look casual, but couldn't do 'casual' if his life depended on it. Most people chose to cross the street to the other side, which delayed the traffic even more. As Remus and Professor McGonagall emerged onto the street, Lurch calmly opened the car door for them, and then, when they were seated, went round to the driver's compartment. Traffic became even more snarled as he pulled out of the parking spot and three other cars vied for the two spots vacated, but Lurch didn't care, directing the elderly limousine slowly and majestically through the streets.

"Well! I must say you've come up in the world," said McGonagall to Remus. "A car and a chauffeur! And that suit!"

"I must confess that I'm little more than an employee, no matter what Mr Addams says. Possibly I've achieved the status of 'family retainer,' like Lurch there. The Addamses seem to find my skills useful, and I'm paid well enough, plus room and board, so I really can't complain."

"And do they know about ...?" she asked, gesturing at the earring.

"Oh, of course. I really couldn't hide the fact that I have four legs and fur two nights a month. At first, of course, I simply planned to leave well before the full moon, but when it became evident that I was going to stay, other arrangements had to be made. Hence the Werewolf Reserve. It really has made things much easier."

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In the first days of his stay with the Family, Remus was filled with terror that grew with the waxing moon becoming more and more agitated. He had no idea how the Americans, and most importantly the Addamses, looked at lycanthropes. Would they look at him in disgust and turf him out? Would they simply put him down like a mad beast? Was interment in the cemetery the best that he could hope for? How long could he hide his condition? He had the run of the House, and discovered, in the labyrinthine cellars of the House, a small, empty, almost cell-like room, with stone walls and an oak door that was lined with metal on the inside and could be locked from either side. Into this room he brought a metal box with a combination lock of a type which he knew was impossible for him to open while he was transformed. As the first full moon approached, he locked himself in the room, casting silencing charms and an additional locking spell on the door. He stripped, since he did not have so many clothes that he could afford to lose any, folding his clothing and putting it in the box, then placed his wand and a supply of potions that he knew from experience he would need inside the box as well. Finally, he locked it and wrapped himself in an old blanket, waiting for moonrise and the first pangs of transformation.

The next morning, when he woke among the remains of the shredded blanket, he opened the battered box, took his potions and dressed. It was still early enough that he might be able to make it back to his room without anyone being the wiser. However, as he emerged from the cellars, he found Morticia and Gomez waiting for him, with a cup of hot tea – fortunately not the abomination that Morticia called tea, but something drinkable by anyone else.

"Lupin, old man, how long were you going to wait before telling us that you were a werewolf?" asked Gomez with what Remus was beginning to learn was his customary geniality.

"I, er, was hoping it wouldn't be necessary," said Remus, wincing as a muscle twinged when he sat down at the heavy oaken table. "It's not something I generally advertise to strangers."

"You're hardly a stranger here. You've been with us, what – three weeks now? The children love you."

*Well*, Remus thought, *they might love me now, but I haven't forgot that all three of them threatened my life when I first came here – and meant it, too.* After dinner that first night, Pugsley had let Remus know that he knew lots of ways to blow someone up that didn't depend on magic at all, and that he wouldn't hesitate to use them if Remus hurt either Harry or Wednesday. Then Wednesday had cornered him to inform him, quite seriously, that as Harry's betrothed – and hadn't *that* come as a shock – she would have no trouble whatsoever destroying him if he even looked like he was going to cause harm to Harry. Apparently she thought Pugsley could take care of himself. Then all three of them simply dropped the matter, as if they knew that making the threat once was enough, and settled into relatively normal childlike behaviour patterns.

"I'm their tutor," Remus answered wryly. "They won't love me when I give them their next pop quiz, I'll tell you that."

"They care enough. Last night all three of them were trying to get into that room, convinced something horrible was happening to you."

"Something was," said Remus, horrified that the children were trying to get *in* to where he was. If he hadn't spelled the door shut, they might have managed it. He didn't want to know how they'd found him or how they got through the silencing spells. "I can't stay, then. I've put the children – everyone – in danger by even being here. I'll pack my things and leave immediately."

"You'll do no such thing!" said Morticia sharply. "You're in no condition to be going anywhere, and tomorrow morning will be even worse, will it not?"

Remus nodded, keeping his eyes cast down at his tea. He didn't want to meet their gaze.

"Then it's settled. I'll call Dr Machtyger in ... an hour," Gomez said, checking his watch. "She owes me a favour or two. She can get someone over here right away to check you out, and we can have you enrolled at the Reserve by nightfall. I guarantee you, it will be much more comfortable than the cellar."

"What? Dr ... who? Reserve? I'm sorry, I'm totally lost," said Remus.

"No, no. Different doctor," said Gomez. "Lycanthrope specialist. One of the best. You do see a specialist in England, don't you?"



“Can’t say as I do. Kind of thin on the ground there, you know.”

“Well, with six different kinds of weres in the United States, we need specialists. And reserves so they can’t hurt anyone.”

“You pen your werewolves up in reserves?” Remus asked, horrified.

“Pen them up? Of course not,” said Morticia, reaching out to rest her cool, slim fingers on the back of Remus’s hand. “Think of it as more like a camping area in the middle of a very large forest, with an infirmary attached. Anyone who needs to can go there, run through the woods at night, get medical attention and sleep the day after, then return to their homes.”

“And who pays for all this?”

“Why, we will, of course, since you’re doing us the favour of tutoring the children,” said Gomez. “We wouldn’t be treating you very well if we locked you in the cellar every month, now would we? Unless you like that sort of thing.”

“No, not particularly.”

“Good. Then Lurch will help you up to your room. I’ll have one of the children bring up a breakfast tray, and we’ll let you know when the doctor gets here.”

Morticia rose and pulled one of the hangman’s nooses that seemed to be in every room in the house, and Lurch appeared with his customary rapidity. “You raaang?”

“Lurch, please take Remus up to his room and make sure he goes straight to bed. Then send Grandmama to him. She may have some potions for you to take,” she said to Remus. “Don’t worry. Everything will be taken care of.”

One can’t resist a seven foot tall, three hundred pound nursemaid, even if one is a werewolf, so Remus soon found himself tucked in his own bed, and all three of the children showed up with his breakfast tray. They climbed up on the foot of the bed and watched intently to make sure he ate everything, all the while questioning him about changing into a werewolf, and did it hurt a lot, and could they see the scar where he was bitten please?

By the time he’d managed to shoo the children out, the enigmatic Dr Macntyger was there to give him a thorough physical and fuss at him for not taking adequate care of himself, given his condition. She prescribed a course of nutrient potions and a high-protein diet to build up his strength, muscle relaxants for before and after transformations, and a calming potion to be taken immediately before the change so that the wolf wouldn’t be maddened by the pain and bite itself. The last was very strong, as it had to be in order to keep from being burned off completely during the change itself. Finally, she said she didn’t see any reason why he wouldn’t be able to come to the Reserve, starting that very night, gave him a reusable Portkey and a handful of pamphlets that described the Reserve and recent advances in lycanthropic medicine, and showed herself out.

That night, for the first time, he had transformed surrounded by others of his kind, and run with a pack under the light of the full moon. It reminded him of his school days and the Marauders, and the next morning he had wept, for them and for himself, and let himself begin to heal.

Since then, he had gone to the Reserve every month, learning to treat it as a mini-holiday the way the other werewolves did. He learned that American werewolves could look forward almost to the life expectancy of normal wizards, instead of burning themselves out the way they usually did in Europe, and the Reserve system was the main reason why. There was rumour that a new treatment would be available soon, one that would allow the werewolf to keep his or her human mind, and everyone was very excited about that, since self-inflicted wounds were still the major cause of health problems for lycanthropes. He had obtained a permanent Portkey to the Reserve in the form of an ear stud that was charmed not to come out unless he took it out. He could trigger it to bring him to the Reserve at any time prior to moonrise. If he was asleep or unconscious, it would take him to the Reserve automatically. And if he couldn’t make it back to the infirmary on his own after a night’s run, it would allow the Reserve Healers (and *only* them) to track him.

The Reserve, he reflected, had probably saved his life. He didn’t know how much longer he could have gone on as he was.

He hadn’t found out until years later that The Addams Foundation was the sponsor of it all.

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Minerva McGonagall was impressed, against her will, with the circumstances in which one of her favourite students had found himself. She had always worried that the young werewolf, even though he was skilled and knowledgeable and had passed his N.E.W.T.s with flying colours, would not be able to get or hold a job. Her fears had been justified in the years after he left school. While his friends, even the far less talented Peter Pettigrew, had gone on to promising careers, Lupin had languished in a limbo of unskilled labourer’s jobs. He could work only two weeks a month, since most employers wouldn’t risk having him on a work site the week before or the week after the full moon. If he didn’t tell an employer about his curse, they generally found out anyway, since the symptoms couldn’t be hidden very well, and then they fired Lupin for lying to them. Eventually he’d taken to supplementing his income with Muggle day labour jobs, and McGonagall had feared he would eventually be driven to a life of petty crime to supplement his meagre wages, as so many were forced to. To see him now, relaxed and happy, without that aura of haunted misery that had used to follow him everywhere, spoke volumes for his employers.

Her concerns about the upbringing of Harry Potter, too, were somewhat relieved. She had doubted, all those years ago, that leaving the young child with Petunia Dursley was the right thing to do. It was bad enough that Muggle-born children came to Hogwarts with no knowledge of the Wizarding world, but for a child born to a Wizard family to be deprived of that heritage was unthinkable. It was even more unthinkable if that child was a scion of a powerful family like the Potters. How would he ever learn what he needed to in order to take his place in society as an adult? Albus had insisted that he would make up for it later, but she wasn’t so sure.

Yet it all seemed to have worked out somehow, even if she wasn't sure exactly how Albus had arranged it, for she was sure he had. With Remus as a tutor, she knew that Potter would know everything he needed to about the basics of magic, and now she realized that he would not be lacking in the social graces either, if the people he was staying with had a car like this and clothed their servants the way they did the chauffeur and Remus. She laughed when Remus told her stories about Harry's childhood, like the year he and Pugsley had spent in the Cub Scouts. They had been asked to leave after their first major camp out, when they had decided that a neighbouring pack had better snacks and organised their pack to build siege engines and take the other pack's campsite by storm. The plot had failed only when they discovered that nobody had brought a stone suitable for use in their trebuchet.

Her laughter, and her confidence, ebbed somewhat when the car passed through the gates and the house came into sight. The years had not been kind to it, and the contrast between the classic car and the battered building puzzled her.

Remus escorted her from the car and in through the front door, where she was temporarily blinded by the contrast between the brilliant morning sun outdoors and the shadows of the interior. From there, he escorted her into a dimly lit parlour, where a slim, dark-haired woman was engaged in placing stitches into a piece of fine blackwork. Remus made the introductions and then rang for tea, the loud gonging of the bell startling Minerva almost as badly as the instant appearance of the butler. She expected that of house elves but this was not what she expected in a Muggle home.

"Professor McGonagall, it's a pleasure to meet you at last. Remus has told me much about you. I'm glad that the children will get a chance to learn from such a renowned witch."

It almost got past her. "I hope I can live up to his ... excuse me, did you say 'children'?"

"My son and daughter have grown up with Harry, and they'll be accompanying him, of course."

"You do understand that Hogwarts is a school for witches and wizards, Mrs Addams. Your children simply will-

"My children have been earning excellent grades at the Salem Witches' Institute. They went co-ed some years ago, but kept the name for historical reasons. Harry has been going there, too, of course."

"Oh. Oh, dear." Minerva was seriously off balance. Albus hadn't mentioned that there might be other magical children in the family, or that Harry had started at a magical school other than Hogwarts. It was possible, of course, that he hadn't known ... then she glanced at Remus, and knew from the regretful look on his face that he had reported it all, and that Albus simply hadn't told her.

"Perhaps now would be a good time for you to meet the children," Mrs Addams suggested, and Minerva agreed. Again Remus pulled the disturbing bell-pull, and again the butler appeared with astonishing speed. "Lurch, would you bring the children here, please? They should be in the library with Gomez. Thank you. My husband," she told Minerva by way of explanation. "The children have been working on Wizarding History with him, to get a jump on next year's classes."

"What exactly have they been learning at Salem?" inquired Minerva. She couldn't imagine that children younger than eleven would be ready for any serious work, but perhaps they were getting a good foundation in theory. That could only benefit them.

"Oh, the usual," Mrs Addams said, counting on her fingers. "Enchantments, Transmogrification, Jinxes and Hexes. Brews. History. Herbalism. Then they've each taken electives, of course. Harry has Cryptozoology and Numerology. Pugsley has Numerology and Symbology. And Wednesday has Cryptozoology and Divination."

Minerva blinked. She would have to communicate with Salem to find out exactly what those courses entailed. Only two of them seemed to be the same as at Hogwarts. And they seemed to have already started things that weren't given at Hogwarts until third year. And ... "What about Astronomy?"

"That's offered as an elective. Wednesday will have to take it eventually in order to complete her Astrology unit, but there's time for that."

The talk was interrupted by the entry of three children, accompanied by Lurch, who merely delivered them and then left again. "Children, this is Professor McGonagall, who has come from Scotland to talk to us."

"Good morning, Professor McGonagall," they chorused.

Minerva looked at all three children, but most intently at Harry. He was tall and slim, and looked very much like his father, although his eyes were green and almond shaped, like Lily's, behind the stylish silver frames of his glasses. However, his face was schooled to be still and inexpressive, the green eyes watchful and wary. Well. She cleared her throat and began. "As you may know, Harry, your parents attended Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. I am the Deputy Headmistress and Professor Transfiguration. It is my great pleasure to inform you that you have been accepted to study at Hogwarts, which is a very great honour. It's the premiere school in all of Europe." She reached into her Muggle-style handbag and pulled out a yellowish parchment envelope, which was addressed with green ink and had a green wax seal on the back. She held it out to Harry.

He didn't take it.

"If you would pardon me, Professor," said Remus.

He rose and ran his wand across the letter, which glowed green for a moment. He nodded to Mrs Addams, and she murmured softly to Harry, "Go ahead and take it, Harry. It's safe."

"How could it not be safe?" Minerva huffed.

There was a case of a child kidnapped by Portkey last year,” said Mrs Addams. “The children have been instructed not to accept anything from any magical person they don’t know. Remus is teaching them how to do the spell to check things for themselves, but they haven’t mastered it yet.”

“Very wise,” said Minerva. “I can assure you there’s nothing wrong with this letter.”

Harry took it, rather tentatively, from her hand. “Thank you very much,” he said, then looked to his mother. She nodded slightly, and he flipped it over and broke the green seal. The other two children crowded around him to look as he pulled the letter out of its envelope.

“Go ahead and read it, Harry. I’d like to hear what it says,” said Mrs. Addams.

In a confident voice, Harry read out loud: “Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Headmaster: Albus Dumbledore. (Order of Merlin, First Class, Grand Sorcerer, Chief Warlock, Supreme Mugwump, International Confed. of Wizards).”

“My, such a busy man. I’m surprised he has enough time to breathe, much less run a school,” said Mrs Addams admiringly. “He did seem to be quite stressed when he was here before. I do hope he’s relaxed some.”

“He was here before?”

“Oh, yes, on several occasions. He tried to have our custody of Harry revoked. He was quite put out about it when it didn’t work. Finish reading the letter, Harry.”

“Dear Mr. Potter,

“We are pleased to inform you that you have been accepted at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Please find enclosed a list of all necessary books and equipment.

“Term begins on September 1. We await your owl by no later than July 31.

“Yours sincerely, Minerva McGonagall, Deputy Headmistress.”

“That’s all?” asked Mrs Addams as Harry handed the letter to her. “That’s rather abrupt. The letter from Salem went on for several pages. Of course, they were competing with several other schools at the time, and had to sell themselves.”

“Yes, well, there’s only the one school in Britain. It’s quite a prestigious thing to have your child accepted there. This is the letter we normally send to families of children who already know about the magical world. The Muggle-born, of course, usually get a more extensive explanation and a personal visit from a Professor. We’re happy to say that virtually all of the students we write to attend Hogwarts and do very well.”

“Of course, if it’s the only game in town. What happens to all of the other children, Professor?”

“Well, most of them are taught by their parents, or are schooled through a traditional apprenticeship program.”

“And there are no other formal schools?”

“Well, there are a few day schools. Honeychurch. Callanish. Silbury. But they’re much smaller and have neither the faculty nor the facilities that Hogwarts offers. The only schools on the level of Hogwarts are Beauxbatons and Durmstrang, but of course those require knowledge of different languages.”

“The children are already more than competent in French and German, and familiar with Russian,” said Mrs Addams. “I imagine an immersion program would improve their knowledge tremendously. I shall have to look into these other schools,” she concluded thoughtfully.

Minerva was quite nervous now. Not only was she having to justify pulling three children out of a school at which they were apparently doing quite well, but she was suddenly facing competition from Beauxbatons and Durmstrang as well. “Well, they have their points, I suppose,” she said. “Beauxbatons turns out socially polished students, but they have a reputation of being lightweights academically. And Durmstrang – well, Remus can tell you about Durmstrang. Many of its alumni are, quite frankly, worrisomely Dark.”

“I see,” said Mrs Addams. “We have no difficulty with Harry attending Hogwarts. In theory. The question is, what does he think about it? Harry?”

“Well, it sounds interesting, from what Remus has told us. But it’s awfully far away. What about Wednesday and Pugsley?”

“There’s no reason they couldn’t continue at Salem,” said McGonagall. “You see, your attendance at Hogwarts has already been paid for by your parents, and ...”

“Money is not an issue,” murmured Mrs Addams, at the same moment as Harry snapped out, “Then I’m not going.”

“What?”

“If Wednesday and Pugsley aren’t going, I’m not going.”

“But they’re not on the attendance list ... there’s no evaluation of them ...”

“Wouldn’t their successful completion of a year at Salem count as an evaluation? Or Remus’s documentation?”

“I suppose ... but I don’t have the authority ...”

“Who does? Headmaster Dumbledore?”

“Of course he would, but ...”

“Then I would advise you, Professor McGonagall, to ask Headmaster Dumbledore if he would care to meet with us to discuss Harry’s attendance. You may take it as a given that if Wednesday and Pugsley do not attend, then Harry will not attend either. There are other contingencies we should talk about, as well.”

“Other ...” said Minerva, faintly.

“Well, of course,” said Mrs Addams. “The choice of a school means so much to a child’s entire life. We can’t make a decision based on *this*,” she said, holding up the letter. “Now, I’ll assume you will wish to speak to Remus about the children’s evaluation before you return to Scotland. Remus, you may wish to give the Professor a tour of the house and grounds as well. You are, of course, invited to stay for luncheon.”

“I ... thank you for your hospitality,” said Minerva. As Remus escorted her away, she wondered what had just happened and how everything had turned upside down so rapidly.

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Harry watched his tutor take the flustered older witch off for her tour.

“Aunt Morticia, I thought we had agreed I would be going to Hogwarts after all.”

“Of course, dear. But *they* don’t know that. And as long as they’re not sure of it, they’ll give us almost anything we want to entice you to go. Once you’re there, we’ll have less influence, since there will probably be a contract which won’t allow us to pull you out.”

“That’s beautiful,” said Harry admiringly.

“Watch and learn, Harry. Watch and learn.”

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After an enlightening morning reviewing Remus’s class records and a delightful luncheon at which she had no idea what she was eating, Minerva Portkeyed directly from the Addams house to her office at Hogwarts. Albus and the rest of the reduced summer staff would be at dinner in the staff room off the Great Hall now. The portraits in the corridors were treated to a sight they had never seen before, as the reserved, prim and proper Deputy Headmistress picked up her skirts and ran through the hall as if a Grim was after her.

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“Now see here, madam. You can’t simply expect me to turn my entire institution head over tail just for one student! There are traditions to be maintained ...”

“I assure you, Headmaster, we have no interest in upsetting your traditions. But I’m not going to be sending my two children, and one that I love as my own, into a strange country without a few assurances that there will be contact with their family and support from those they trust. If you’re not even willing to discuss the matter, then I shall contact Salem and confirm their class schedules for next year.”

“Very well, let’s see this list,” said Dumbledore, irritably. He mumbled out loud as he ran his finger down the list.

“Wednesday and Pugsley Addams to enter classes along with Harry Potter ... how old are they, then?”

“Pugsley will turn twelve in September; Harry’s birthday is next week and Wednesday’s two weeks after that.”

“They’ll all be in the same class, then. That will be a handful, but we can cope ... Wednesday and Pugsley Addams not to be asked to leave school except for academic cause, subject to review of class records by neutral party, Harry Potter to be allowed to be withdrawn from school if Wednesday and Pugsley Addams are not in attendance ... Do you honestly think your children would be failed out just to separate them from Harry?”

“Yes.”

“Well, they wouldn’t.”

“If you say so. You should know, Headmaster, that all three children, as well as myself, have been trained in the art of Occlumency so as to resist Memory Charms and other ... tampering. Since certain individuals have already demonstrated their facility with those spells. There will be no possibility of failure due to outside tampering.”

Dumbledore gave her a dirty look over the top edge of the paper. “Continuing ... Regular parent conferences ... open house night ... Parent Teacher Association? ... what is all this?”

“Surely the parents of your students would be interested in seeing what their children are learning, talk to their teachers, and have a input into their programs? The Parent Teacher Association is an excellent way of raising funds in addition to tuition and whatever your Ministry provides as a subsidy – if your Ministry is like our Department of Magical Education, I’m sure there’s never enough funding for things the children really need. The parents can also help supervise children on field trips and outings, taking some of the stress off your teachers.”

Grumbling at the idea of any more parental involvement at the school than there already was, Dumbledore continued perusing the list. “Immediate notification of parents and/or guardians in the case of emergencies involving any of the three children, or any incident involving medical care, permission to visit the school when children are in the infirmary ... I don’t see a problem with that, as long as the school mediwitch is allowed to initiate necessary treatment prior to your arrival.”

“Of course. If immediate treatment is necessary, it should be provided. But we would like to be notified as soon as possible after that.”

“Fine, then, let Poppy throw you out of the Medical Wing ... Consultation with parents before special training or tutoring ... What is this? Change of personnel? New History of Magic teacher?”

“Remus Lupin has told us all about the deficiencies of your current Professor – Binns, I believe his name is? Professor McGonagall confirmed much of it when she was here yesterday. Professor Binns may have been a specialist in non-human relations – although he seems to have a fixation on Goblin Wars for some reason – but since he died in the 1930’s, he has neither learned nor taught anything about current events, particularly the last two Dark Lords you’ve had to deal with. I’m sure you know, Headmaster, that those who do not learn from history tend to repeat it – and if they do not learn history at all, how can they learn from it? Mr Lupin is an excellent teacher; the children like and trust him, and I must confess my mind would rest easier knowing that he is there. If it’s a matter of salary, my husband and I would be more than happy to donate –”

“I assure you, madam, that I am capable of paying the salaries of my own staff!” This was one recommendation that Dumbledore didn’t mind going along with. Binns’s performance over the past few years had been going steadily down hill, to the point where the only students passing their O.W.L.s in History of Magic were Ravenclaws who ignored the ghostly Professor and organised their own study groups. He was sure he could depend on Remus to keep an eye on the children and provide him inside information – he had admitted Remus to school and bent the rules – and the law – to ensure that the boy could stay in school. Remus owed him, and he would make sure Remus wouldn’t forget it.

“Of course you are, Headmaster. Forgive me.”

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The Headmaster left late that evening in a terrible snit, but the contract had been signed. Most of what Morticia and Gomez had wanted had been won through negotiations; the few points on which they had given up weren’t worth much to them.

Morticia filed their copy of the contract away in Gomez’s office, while Remus relaxed in one of the green leather wing chairs. “So, you think it worked?”

“I believe so. Between one thing and another, your Headmaster was so off balance that he didn’t even ask why I was signing on behalf of Gomez.”

“Didn’t matter. You’re the one with legal custody of Harry, and the other two are only useful to the Headmaster as long as they keep Harry happy.”

“Still, I’m glad to have avoided the question. Gomez should be back from London tomorrow, and I’m sure his business with the Goblins was successful. All we have to do now is pack. This house you found is suitable?”

“Very. The estate agent specialises in the larger, harder to let properties. She said this one has been empty for years. Prior tenants thought it was haunted. The current owner is an absentee landlord, and doesn’t care whether it’s haunted or not. There’s a caretaker for the grounds, and Thing and Lurch can handle the interior. It’s pretty much furnished. Place even comes with its own graveyard. It’ll be just like home.”

“Nothing will be just like home,” she said. “But it will do. For good or ill, the children of Charles Adams are returning to England.”

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A/N: The stage is set, the players all arranged. Next chapter, Harry, Wednesday and Pugsley take centre stage as we journey to Hogwarts (and then I can stop using British spellings for things in America, which feels pretty damn silly!).

## Family Values Riddle Me This

### FAMILY VALUES

**Disclaimer:** My driver's license doesn't say Joanne Rowling, and this isn't Scotland, so I don't own Harry Potter. It also doesn't say Charles Addams (for which my husband, I am sure, is grateful), so I don't own the Addams Family either. Darn.

No Goblins, mad aunts or vaporous snakes were harmed in the writing of this chapter.

A/N: Congratulations to all the readers who realized that the Addams Family's new house in England will be the Riddle Manor in Little Hangleton. You all get a cookie.

For everybody who guessed the Shrieking Shack or Twelve Grimmauld Place: close but no cigar. Thanks for playing, try again later.

I have stolen Marjin Alley from Copperbadge and Origin Alley from someone whose name I can't remember now. Parti Alley is my own. I think.

### Chapter 09: Riddle Me This

The Addams Family, plus two, arrived in London by private jet on Wednesday's birthday, August 14. They spent some time arguing with the Customs and Quarantine people as to whether Thing was a "possession" (in which case a dismembered hand would certainly be confiscated) or a "pet" (in which case he would be subject to six months' quarantine). In the end, of course, Uncle Gomez argued them into a decision to forget about Thing entirely and have a drink (or six) on him after their shift was over. They accepted gladly. Uncle Gomez had that effect on people.

Lurch they just ignored.

Before they headed off to their new home, the Family briefly took up residence at Claridge's. At most hotels, the staff was seriously bothered by the Family's weirdness. At Claridge's, they may very well have been bothered, but had the good training not to show it. Uncle Gomez appreciated that in a staff. He also appreciated that the concierge was capable of obtaining just about anything the Family might need (in Muggle London, anyway) even if it was borderline illegal. Large tips further ensured good service.

For the first day, they played tourist. There were many interesting places in London that appealed to the Family's sensibilities, and primary among them was the Tower of London. Harry led Pugsley and Wednesday in an attempt to sneak out of the hotel after dark to return to the Tower and try to see if the Ghost of Ann Boleyn really kept her head tucked underneath her arm, or, failing that, to take one of the Tower ravens home for a souvenir. They failed on both counts, and were returned to the hotel by the Ravenmaster, but it was an interesting adventure.

The next day, they went to Diagon Alley. With Remus acting as Trusty Native Guide, and Lurch to carry things, they headed off to Charing Cross Road and the Leaky Cauldron.

They paused just in front of the tiny, grubby-looking pub jammed in between a large book shop and a record shop. "All right, can everyone see the place? Gomez, I know you can, but how about Morticia? Grandmama? Lurch?" Everyone said they could see it, the children nodded enthusiastically, and Lurch groaned assent. "Good. I was worried. Some Squibs seem to be able to see the place but others can't. And I wasn't at all sure about you, Lurch. But it's nice to know we can all get here if we need to. Shall we, then?" He offered his arm in gentlemanly fashion to Grandmama, and they entered through the narrow door.

Inside, it was very dark and shabby. Tables seemed to be set up to impede passage through the pub and divert people toward the bar, and the progress of the rather large family group, especially accompanied by Lurch, attracted a fair amount of attention. The elderly bartender looked up at Remus, looked away and did a double take. "Remus Lupin, as I live and breathe! It's been a long time. Looks like yer doin' well for yerself. Yeh've come quite a way from waitin' tables, eh?"

"Quite a way, Tom, but I'll always remember this place with fondness. Is Tilly still making that good Shepherd's Pie?"

"That she is, boy, that she is. Shall I have her dish ye up some?"

"I'm afraid not now. I'm on escort duty at the moment, but perhaps later."

Tom nodded, appearing to notice Remus's party for the first time. "I'll not keep yeh, then, I ... Good Lord," said the bartender, peering at Harry, "is this -- can this be -- ? Bless my soul, it is. Harry Potter...what an honour." He hurried out from behind the bar, rushed toward Harry and seized his hand, tears in his eyes. "Welcome back, Mr Potter, welcome back."

Harry was taken aback only for a moment before he returned the handshake. "It's good to be back, sir."

There was a great scraping of chairs, and suddenly everyone in the pub seemed to be pressing forward, wanting to shake Harry's hand. He did get

In a couple of handshakes, but suddenly Lurch was interposing himself between the mob and Harry. “Baack ... off,” he groaned threateningly.

The crowd obeyed rapidly.

“I’m sorry, everybody, but we’re just passing through,” said Remus, smoothly. “School shopping, you know. Harry does appreciate knowing how much you care, though. Thank you all very much.” He led the rest of the family toward the back exit from the pub, and Harry waved at everybody as they left. Lurch very effectively kept the crowd at bay.

The Family crowded into a small, walled courtyard where a few weeds grew around the rubbish tip.

“I think we can expect that to happen whenever we’re out in public,” said Remus, grimly. “Harry, we did warn you about this. You’re a celebrity here, remember. We’ll run interference for you, but everyone’s going to think they’re entitled to a piece of you.”

“I know what to do,” said Harry, confidently. “Smile, say hello, keep moving, don’t let myself get boxed into a corner.” In truth, he was a little shaken by his first experience with celebrity. Surely that wouldn’t happen all the time!

“Good boy. Lurch, that was very impressive in there. Two new words, too.”

Lurch beamed with pride. Anybody who didn’t know his expressions would have been terrified.

“Okay. Harry in the middle, Lurch, Wednesday, Pugsley, you stay with him no matter what.” Remus pointed out a particular brick in the wall, which did look a little the worse for wear, and gave it three taps with the tip of his wand. The bricks quivered and wiggled out of the way, and soon a wide archway, tall enough even for Lurch, opened out into a cobblestone marketplace. Across the market, a street twisted and turned out of sight. Several smaller alleys ran off from the courtyard and from the main street. Crowds filled the marketplace, ranging from housewives buying fresh vegetables from vendors’ carts to students thronging stores stocked with cauldrons, brooms, and potions supplies. Some of the shoppers were in Muggle dress, some in full, brightly coloured robes or gowns with bodices, and some in some odd combination of clothing. The Addams party would have no difficulty fitting in. “Welcome,” said Remus, “to Diagon Alley.”

“Whoa!” said Pugsley, his eyes popping out. Harry managed to control his reaction, but would have loved to say “whoa!” as well. They had been to the major shopping areas in Salem (where wizarding shops were often the back rooms of tourist traps) and New York (where there were several appearing and disappearing streets), but the communities there had largely given up on wearing robes, except for special occasions. This looked like they had stepped back in time a century or more.

They made their way across the market and down the street, pausing from time to time so that someone could look at something, but mostly moving steadily until they reached Gringotts. Although the children had all been given little bags of golden Galleons for spending money, there was apparently other work that needed to be attended to at the bank. The children had seen Goblins before at the Gringotts branch in New York, so they weren’t surprised, but instead of queuing up for a teller, they were escorted into a set of opulent offices. Harry was then escorted alone into a private inner office while the rest of the group was offered tea and biscuits in a lavishly appointed reception area.

A Goblin wearing a red velvet suit heavily encrusted with golden embroidery sat behind a wide walnut desk. As soon as Harry was seated in a comfortable chair, he began to speak without preamble. “Mr Potter, allow me to introduce myself. I am Roquat, and I have been the manager of the assorted Potter funds, trusts and properties since your grandfather’s day. I asked Mr Addams to bring you here today to give him your proxies to direct me in investments on your behalf, and to sit on the board of those various funds, trusts and properties. Is this clear?”

“I thought he already was directing things as my guardian,” said Harry. As soon as he was old enough to understand, the legal and financial facts of life had been explained to him, and he was quite happy that he wouldn’t have to bother with the details until he was older.

“Yes, well, there are problems with that. You see, Mr Addams is a Squib, and there are rules about properties being held by a Squib in trust for Wizard heirs. His actions have been severely limited. There are proxies that he will not be able to wield until you confirm them. You are, I believe, eleven years old now, Mr Potter?”

“I turned eleven a few weeks ago.”

“And you have been accepted to Hogwarts?”

“Yes.”

“Very well, then. As an acknowledged Wizard and heir to the Potter family, you will need to provide a specific magical proxy to Mr Addams so that he can act in your stead. This will enable him to sign transactions for you and seal them using your magical signature, since he obviously does not have one of his own. If you do not wish him to do this, then you may name any Wizarding adult to act for you. Three other individuals, in fact, have asked that their names be brought to your attention.”

“And those three are...?”

“The first is Augusta Longbottom. She is currently acting on behalf of the Longbottom family in regards to the Diagon Alley Trust, in which you also own shares, and there is a long-term alliance between your two families. She has no history, however, of dealing with any of the other Potter assets. The second is Lucius Malfoy, who is the current director of the Diagon Alley Trust, being the sole shareholder free to act directly. Mr Malfoy also has no history of dealing with any of the other Potter assets, and he wishes to create an alliance between your families at this time. The third is Albus Dumbledore, who is the Headmaster at Hogwarts. He holds proxies for a number of students whose parents were lost in the late war, and offers to do so for you as well, as a courtesy while you are attending school.”

“I think I would prefer Uncle Gomez – sorry, Mr Addams – to act for me. I know him, you see. I don’t know any of these others.”

"Very well, Mr Potter," said the Goblin. He opened a small drawer in his desk and pulled out a parchment, a gold ring and a silver knife. "In order to give your Uncle your magical proxy, I will ask you to write your name and Mr Addams' name on this proxy parchment, then prick your thumb and place a drop of your blood on the parchment and another on this ring." He pushed all three of the items, along with a jewelled pen set, over to Harry. Harry dipped the quill in the ink bottle and neatly filled in the form as requested. Then he carefully pricked his thumb and placed drops of blood where they were needed. The ring glowed briefly, and the blood formed itself into a ruby held tightly in the gold setting. Roquat eased himself out of his chair. "I will ask your Uncle to join us now," he said.

Soon Uncle Gomez was seated next to Harry. "Mr Potter has given you his proxy to act for him," said Roquat, handing the ring to Gomez. "At any time you sign a document on his behalf which must be sealed, merely touch the stone of this ring to the parchment, and your signature will be imbued with his magical signature."

Uncle Gomez inspected the ring and put it on his little finger, where it sized itself to fit as if made for him.

"Now," said Roquat, "we have only to discuss the alliances in the Diagon Alley Trust."

"You mean like in the street out there?" asked Harry, curiously.

"Exactly. The land on which the whole of Diagon Alley – and by that I mean not only the main alley but also its subsidiary Alleys, such as Knockturn Alley, Marjin Alley, Origin Alley and Parti Alley, is built was a gift from Queen Elizabeth I, the last Muggle ruler who had any connection to the magical world, to her Royal Wizard, John Dee, to be used specifically as a residential and mercantile area for magical persons and businesses. Dee took the land in trust, did not take any personal property from it, and died penniless. An honourable man, Mr Dee. He passed the land, still in trust, to his son Arthur, the only one of his eight children who was a Wizard. Arthur held it under the same conditions. Arthur had twelve children, but the Dee line was failing, and only one of his children was so much as a Squib. In 1693, the rules of inheritance were changed so that Squibs could not inherit magical fortunes, so Rowland Dee, John's grandson, was forced to sell the land. He sold it to the Goblins, who paid him a fair price for it. Am I clear so far?"

"Of course you are, old man!" said Uncle Gomez in his most jovial tone. "As a matter of fact, you've run into my family history! Rowland Dee took the money from the sale and went to the New World, where he partnered up with my ancestor, Charles Adams, a Squib who'd emptied out his family vault and left England one step ahead of that same inheritance law. The extra 'D' in our name is in honour of Rowland Dee."

"And his middle name is Felonius because he stole all that money?" guessed Harry.

"Well, he didn't steal it, because it was his already, but the Ministry certainly thought he did," said Uncle Gomez. "The Dee fortune eventually became part of the Addams holdings when Rowland Dee's daughter married Charles Addams' son."

"Yes, well, the loss of those two major fortunes – and several smaller ones that went 'missing' about the same time," the Goblin continued, "forced the Ministry to look for another source of revenue. They looked to the rents from Diagon Alley, which was now in Goblin hands, and promptly created a law to make it illegal for Goblins to own land in Britain."

"I imagine that wasn't taken well," said Uncle Gomez.

"Indeed not. For a time, it appeared that we were on the brink of war, until four wizards joined their fortunes and formed the Diagon Alley Trust to buy the land back from the Goblins. These four wizards were the heads of the Potter, Longbottom, Black, and Malfoy families. Over the years, they recovered their investment and reaped handsome profits as well. In time, alliances between the Potter and Longbottom families and the Black and Malfoy families developed, but there was always balance on the Board of Directors. In recent years, however, that has changed. Currently, the Longbottom shareholder is under a permanent disability, and Augusta Longbottom is voting his shares, but she cannot vote the Potter shares in alliance since her son is not able to give her that proxy. As for the Malfoy-Black alliance ..." The Goblin looked shrewdly at Harry. "Your father, young Mr Potter, made a personal alliance with Sirius Black, a friend of his at school. Mr Black, when he came into ownership of the shares, repudiated the traditional alliance with the Malfoy shares in favour of the alliance with Potter. They agreed that if anything happened to either of them, the other would vote their shares, and that the alliance would continue unless specifically repudiated by them or their heirs. Mr Black is currently alive but unable to vote his shares, and despite all that has happened, that alliance still stands. Mr Addams, as your proxy, now has the right to vote Mr Black's shares until Mr Black either repudiates the alliance or dies leaving his shares to an heir who repudiates it. What this meant, however, was that for some years neither the Black nor the Potter shares could be effectively voted, and Mr Malfoy has been running things as he wished." The Goblin steepled his fingers and looked solemnly at Harry and Uncle Gomez. "But all that has just changed."

"Because Uncle Gomez can vote my shares?" Harry was actually finding this financial stuff interesting. He'd never guessed it could be so exciting. There was a Queen and a Royal Wizard and absconding with fortunes in the middle of the night! He envisioned Charles Adams and Rowland Dee slinging huge bags of galleons into a rowboat, and rowing with muffled oars to meet a ship to the mysterious New World.

"And he can vote the Black shares, and call on the Longbottom shares in the alliance. What this means, Mr Potter, is that you now control or influence three-quarters of the shares in the Diagon Alley Trust, and Mr Addams – a Squib, and an American – as holder of your proxy, is now effectively the Director of the Trust, and the most influential person, second only to the Minister himself, in Wizarding Britain."

"Whoa!" said Harry.

"Whoa, indeed. Mr Addams, you may wish to take precautions to ensure your own safety. There are those who will not take kindly to a Squib controlling the Alley. I also strongly suggest that matters be undertaken as soon as possible to secure a succession. The Black matter is bad enough, but if the Potter line were to be broken without a clear successor, there could be financial chaos." His tone implied that the financial type was the only sort of chaos worth bothering about.

"There's a Betrothal Contract in place between Harry here and my daughter. Will that help?"



"I'd have to look at it to be sure, but if it's the old form, yes, unless the contract is broken, an affianced spouse is an heir. Is she of age?"

"No, she's the same age as Harry."

"That's unfortunate. Well, you secure the line of inheritance from her. Are there other children?"

"Yes, I have a son as well."

"Good, good. I know humans look at things differently than Goblins do – if they were Goblins, Mr Potter and your daughter would already be in the ritual room – but I would advise that Mr Potter and Miss Addams wed and produce an heir as soon as possible. Your son should do the same, to secure a possible cadet succession."

"My children will marry where and when they will, Mr Roquat. As will Harry. But I'll make sure they all know how important it is. Is there anything else?"

"I will send you copies of the statements by owl next week, and when you have reviewed them, we should speak again. Do you have any questions, young Mr Potter?"

"What happened to Sirius Black? You said he was my father's friend, and that he's alive but can't vote his shares. Remus – that's our tutor – has mentioned him, too, but he always looks sad when he does. So what happened to him?"

"Mr Black has been imprisoned by the Ministry – without a trial or record of a conviction – since two days after your father died. Some say that he was responsible for your parents' deaths."

Harry caught his breath. "But doesn't anybody know for sure? Don't you know?"

"Goblins deal with facts, Mr Potter, not speculation. If there isn't the requisite paperwork filled out, it never happened. All we know is that Black never repudiated the alliance, which is curious if he indeed turned against your father. Until someone asks him, we cannot know."

"Why doesn't someone ask him, then?"

"Mr Black is currently held in the depths of the Prison of Azkaban, Mr Potter. It is a terrible place, and prisoners frequently go mad there. After almost ten years, I am afraid there will be no asking Mr Black anything."

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Harry and Uncle Gomez left Roquat's office in quite a solemn mood. It was a lot to take in at once. Harry paused at the top of the steps outside Gringotts and looked both ways up and down Diagon Alley. All of this was his to take care of, and all these people, one way or another, depended on him. It was a heavy burden, and he was glad Uncle Gomez and Roquat were there to help him. He remembered reading something in a comic book once: "With great power comes great responsibility." He shivered. Even Spiderman didn't have this much responsibility! First Voldemort, and now this? He'd almost rather have to do the crime-fighting thing. Then he envisioned himself swinging down Diagon Alley on web lines, and laughed, and the mood passed. He was still only eleven, after all. Uncle Gomez was being disturbed enough for both of them, glowering and muttering odd words like "Bastille" and "habeas corpus" to himself.

Wednesday stood beside Harry and took his hand. She was smiling and her eyes sparkled. "Come on, Harry! Let's go shopping!" Harry laughed. They had most of the day ahead of them, and a lot of things to buy. Time to get busy. He wondered how the staff at Claridge's would react when they came back with an owl.

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Two days of travel and tourism brought them to their new home. It was in the middle of nowhere in northern England, just short of the border with Scotland. Little Hangleton was a tiny farming community not far from Greater Hangleton, which wasn't much bigger. Little Hangleton boasted two churches and a pub. Greater Hangleton had two churches and two pubs.

One thing Little Hangleton had that the other town didn't was its very own haunted house. Two of them, as a matter of fact. One of them had just acquired new tenants.

"Oh, Remus, it's wonderful!" said Aunt Morticia as the Rolls they'd leased pulled around a bend and the great house on top of the hill came into view. The three children immediately piled onto that side of the car and stuck their heads out the window to get a good look at their new home. It was a huge pile of brick, vaguely reminiscent of a cross between a castle and a factory, with multiple chimneys and an elaborate topiary garden and no charm whatsoever. Ivy crawled unchecked up its face, and its many stone framed windows were dark and cheerless.

"I thought you'd like it," said Remus. "It's called the Riddle House. Partly because the family that used to own it were named Riddle, and partly because there was some mystery about them ... how the last of them died. All I got in the pub were hints and whispers; I suppose I'll be able to find out more now that we're living here and they don't have to worry about scaring me off."

At the base of the hill, between the house and the village, there was a disused chapel and a small cemetery, whose tombs and monuments, or what could be seen of them in the gathering gloom, were large, pretentious, and wrought by sculptors with evident tastes for the gothic. The caretaker's cottage huddled by the side of the long, winding drive as if trying to get further away from the cemetery.

"Pull up here for a moment," said Remus. Lurch stopped the car just in front of the cottage and Remus got out and knocked on its door, talking briefly with the elderly man who answered. He returned to the car with a large ring of keys. "Here we go. Keys to everything from attic to cellars. Frank – that's the caretaker – was in and did a bit of cleaning to get it ready for us, and he said he'd be up in the morning to help us unpack. I think

we should have most of it done by then. Shall we go have a look at the old heap?" He jumped on the running board of the car and rode the outside as Lurch drove slowly up the drive.

The boot of the car was filled with boxes in which the miniaturized belongings of the Family had been shipped via an international Portkey courier. It was mostly clothes and personal belongings, since the house came with furnishings that had remained untouched for almost fifty years.

"Hmm," said Aunt Morticia, looking at a perfectly ghastly chintz sofa in the drawing room. "I can't say much for their taste. Typical *nouveau riche*."

"Tish," said Uncle Gomez, sweeping her into his arms, "you spoke French!"

"*Oui, mon cher*," she replied, running her hands up his arms.

"*Cara mia*," he responded, pulling her closer into a passionate dip.

"Oy vey," said Harry, putting his hands over his eyes.

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Thanks to the fact that the children weren't going to completely unpack, since they'd only have to pack again a week later, and that four people in the household were using magic to unshrink everything and put it away, things were well on their way to being settled by midnight. The next morning, the adults were working on arranging the knickknacks they'd brought to give the house the personal touch, and the children were free to explore the place. They decided to start at the top and work their way down, and spent a delightful morning pawing through old trunks and boxes in the attic before moving on to what they assumed were the servants' quarters or rooms for the poor relations. The caretaker had only done a cursory job of cleaning on this floor over the years, and dust lay thick all over everything.

At the end of one long hallway, Pugsley came upon a door that wouldn't open. All of the other doors were standing open, so this was a bit odd. He didn't feel like going down to get the keys to see if one of them worked, so he just pulled his lock picks out of his pocket and went to work, while Harry held up the flashlight – or torch, he had to remember that things went by different names here – so he could see properly and Wednesday speculated on why only this one door was locked.

"Maybe this is where they locked up their mad aunt to keep her from bothering the family with her moans and screams. And maybe when they moved away, they didn't want to send her to the asylum, so they just left her here. And then she died, clawing at the door with her fingernails and trying all the while to get out, and her spirit is still trying to get out ..."

"Damn it!" said Pugsley as one of his picks snapped, interrupting her musings. "This lock is just too old and stiff. Rusted solid, too, probably. Maybe this will help." He drew his wand – his real one, they had long since left the red children's wands behind – and pointed it at the lock. "*Alohomora!*" he said briskly.

Nothing happened.

"That's weird. *Alohomora!*" he said, trying again.

Still nothing.

"Huh. Let me try," said Harry, reaching out to give the door a tentative push.

As soon as his fingertips touched the wood, there was a loud click, and the door swung open with a groan. Harry stepped in through the open door, shining the torch around, and then stopped, suddenly. Pugsley ran right into him.

"What is it?" asked Wednesday, who couldn't see at all around the boys and was dancing on her toes in impatience. "Is it the mad aunt? Is she dead?"

"It's not a mad aunt," said Harry, quietly. "Remember those fake Satanist circles at home?"

"Yeah."

"This is the real thing. Take a look. Don't come past the door. Just look." He stepped aside just enough that she would be able to see. The light of the torch played over the floor. There were no furnishings in the room. Thanks to the locked door and closed window, there was also very little dust. There was a double circle drawn with chalk on the bare floor boards, and strange symbols drawn around the edge. Seven dark, mottled pillar candles were spaced roughly equidistantly around the edge. In the middle of the circle was a purple pillow with gold tassels on each corner, and on the pillow rested an ornate dagger; its sheath and hilt were silver, and there was a large ruby in the pommel. Next to the pillow, resting on the floor, was a small black book.

"Okay. I'm going to stay right here," said Harry. "I'm not going to go in any further. Pugsley, you watch my back, and if the door tries to close, you block it. Wednesday, run down and get Remus and your parents. *Now*."

"Why am I always the one who has to go get the grown-ups?" she complained, but she was already moving.

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Remus prowled around the room, carefully looking at everything before he touched anything. His magic-revealing spell had shown traces lingering around the candles, and strong magic remaining on the book, the dagger, and the door to the room. Now Harry, Pugsley and Wednesday held their

wands aloft with their tips lit to provide extra light; the little bit that came through the single narrow window in the north wall did little good. All of the Addams adults were standing at the edges of the room to stay out of the way.

"Blood candles," he muttered. Harry strained to hear every word he said. "Never lit ... pretty much no magic left in them ... Egyptian hieroglyphs, not runes. Need to look these up to be sure, looks like some kind of seal. To keep something out? Or keep something in?" He crouched over the book and pillow. "The knife is silver – not touching that, thanks much." He cast a series of analytical spells which flashed varying colours over the knife and the book. "Well, everything I can do says this is all clean. It was obviously set up to do something Dark, but aside from the candles themselves there's nothing here that's a problem."

"You're sure?" asked Uncle Gomez. Magic he was comfortable with, Darkness he was comfortable with, but it was obvious that Dark Magic of unknown origin in the house with his children he was *not* comfortable with.

"Well, as sure as I can be without having a professional curse-breaker on hand. You could probably get Gringotts to send one up if you really needed it, but they don't come cheap. Or you could call for the Aurors. But that would bring you more attention than you want. They'd take a look at the rest of the house, and Lurch, and Thing, and even me, and then they'd realise who Harry is and have a fit. The Ministry would have him out of here in nothing flat."

"They'd try," Uncle Fester growled.

"They'd do it, if they thought it would benefit them. And they'd see all of you in Azkaban if necessary. No, I think it's best if we clean this up ourselves. The candles have got some blood of the caster in them, so they could be saved and used against him, her, or it. Or you could just burn them. Outside of a ritual setting, they're just candles. They're likely to smell quite noxious, though."

He stood and scuffed the chalked ring with the toe of his boot. "This is just chalk. I'm going to copy down all the symbols, but after that it can be scrubbed off. The knife is clean. It's probably got an ever sharp charm on the blade or some such. I can't touch it, but the rest of you can. As for the book ..." He picked it up and flipped through page after page of gibberish. "Some kind of spell to keep it from being read by anyone except the owner, would be my guess. I can try to crack that, but it's not harmful." He tucked the book into his pocket.

"Then there's the door. It's got a mild Muggle-repellent spell on it. Muggles wouldn't even want to come down this end of the hall. And it's got a locking spell on it that only the touch of certain individuals can undo. That's not what I'd call major security, though, just some basic precautions. The puzzle there is why it unlocked at Harry's touch but not Pugsley's or Wednesday's. He didn't even cast a spell. Harry, did you feel anything odd when you touched the door?"

"Now that you mention it ... there was a little tickle on my forehead. Around my scar. I thought it was just cobwebs in my hair."

"Your scar, eh? That's just a little bit unsettling. Have you ever felt anything like that before?"

"No." Harry stepped over to the door and touched it again. "I don't feel anything now, either. It was just that once."

"Mm. All right, plan of action. We clean this up, burn the candles. Gomez, I think the knife should be put in your vault at Gringotts – or maybe in Harry's family vault, it's got marginally better security. And we should go over every room in this house just to make sure there are no more surprises. I never got up this far when I was checking the place out this spring. I should have been more thorough."

Somehow Harry and his cousins found themselves shunted outside, instructed to stay out of the way until dinner. Disgruntled, they wandered down the hill to the graveyard, and sat on one of the tombs that stood like stone tables on its outskirts. "Send us out to play like little kids!" grumbled Harry.

"Harry, we are little kids," said Pugsley, pragmatically.

"We are not either. You're almost twelve. That's practically a teenager."

"Let's go exploring out here, then," said Wednesday. "The Tribe of the Snake, come to a new homeland. We need to search out its secrets and find hiding places in case our enemies come to find us." Of the three of them, Wednesday had always been the most into their Indian games, but all of them still enjoyed them. At least on some level, they realised that what looked like innocent play was helping them learn skills that could save their lives some day. Uncle Fester had always known this, and Remus, once he'd got over his own rather traumatic introduction to the game, understood also. The children and the adults took turns hunting each other all over the hills near home, until the children could tell exactly where they were by the shape of each tree. Here, they were in unfamiliar territory. In one direction was the hill and Riddle House and the moors rising up beyond it, stark and treeless. In the other was the valley where the town of Little Hangleton nestled, and a belt of forest on the other side before the land rose to hills again.

"You're right, Little Blackbird," said Harry. "We should start out here as long as the weather is good. Leave the house for rainy days. We've only got a few weeks, so let's make 'em count." He cocked his head at her with a wry grin. "You know, we ought to make you chief instead of me."

She shook her head solemnly. "Squaws are in charge anyway. We just let the chiefs think they're running things."

"You know, that makes sense. Okay, Wild Moose says let's go see what that old guy who lives down by the road is up to."

The summer weather continued fair, although it was cooler for August than the Tribe of the Snake were used to. Over the next few days, they explored all of the territory near the house, and Frank Bryce ran them out of the cemetery twice, before he realised that they weren't desecrating the graves. They took rubbings of the gravestones and spent the evenings trying to figure out who was related to whom, and made up elaborate stories about how these strangers had lived and died. Wednesday found a grave all alone on the other side of the road, the carving on the stone so worn it was illegible, and immediately decided that it was the "mad aunt", who had died by her own hand, desperate and alone. She trimmed the lank

grass and weeds around the stone, and sometimes went there without the boys to talk to the nameless woman. The boys rolled their eyes and chalked it up as one of the crazy things girls did.

After they'd been living in the Riddle House for a week, the Tribe of the Snake made contact with the native inhabitants of the area, and it was anything but friendly. Somehow, Harry was never exactly sure how, he and Pugsley were challenged by a small gang of local boys to prove their bravery in order to be accepted. This wasn't surprising, since boys had been challenging each other to such tests for centuries; nor was the fact that Wednesday was left out of it, since girls were generally considered to be 'beyond the pale' as far as friendship went for boys of that age. It was precisely Harry and Pugsley's willingness to be seen in public with Wednesday that led to the challenge. While they could have fought with the other boys, they were seriously outnumbered, and they couldn't use magic to even up the odds because the others were all Muggles, and it had been drilled into them that one shouldn't use magic where Muggles could see it (much less using it *on* said Muggles).

The challenge was classic. Harry and Pugsley were to sneak out of the house after everyone thought they were asleep, and go down to the forest on the other side of the village. There they would find an old tumbledown shack that used to belong to a family of tramps, but that had been standing alone and untenanted for years. The shack was supposed to be haunted, the boys said with ghoulish relish, by the ghost of the tramp's daughter, who had got herself 'in a family way' and been cast out and died, but supposedly her spirit had returned and dragged her brother down to Hell, since he had disappeared mysteriously. She was said to still walk the night, seeking vengeance on her family. Harry and Pugsley expected that the boys would talk somebody's teenaged sister into dressing up in a bed sheet and trying to scare them, and smirked at the notion of anything that silly frightening them.

Accordingly, just after moonrise that night, all three members of the Tribe of the Snake crept out of the back door of Riddle House and down the road to the village. Wednesday wasn't about to be left behind on an adventure like this, even if the village boys hadn't invited her. They all had their wands in forearm sheaths covered by their shirtsleeves, as they had been taught to do when in Muggle territory. They also had their flashlights and knives, and had raided the kitchen for some snacks and a bottle of water.

They met the village boys at the crossroads; they scowled at Wednesday, but didn't tell her to go home. The boys led them into the woods beyond the village, up an overgrown track to what had probably once been a clearing but was now thickly overgrown. A tumbledown shack nestled between the trees. Its door stood agape, the interior thick with darkness.

"Now remember, yeh've ta stay till dawn, righ'? We'll be back ta get yeh ... or ta carry out yer remains," the oldest boy of the gang said, leering at Wednesday in what was probably supposed to be a frightening manner.

"What's that on the door?" asked Pugsley, shining his torch at it. There was a vaguely sinuous shape of something attached to the old wooden panel.

"Dead snake," said one of the other boys. "'S always been there. Lots of snakes 'round here, did we forget to mention that?"

"Cool!" said Harry, discomfiting them a bit. "Let's go look at the rest of it!" The other boys didn't seem to want to get any closer to the house than they already were, so the Tribe shrugged and walked up onto the narrow porch. Harry reached out to touch the poor dead snake, surprised it was still there all those years; in this damp climate, it should have rotted away. Somebody had gone to some effort to preserve it, though, as its skin and flesh had been dried to a tough leathery consistency. The skull peeped through breaks in the skin on its head, and rusty nails poked through its neck and tail.

The hinges of the door creaked loudly as Harry pushed it open. Wild Moose, the leader of the Tribe, crept silently into the room, checking out what could possibly make an excellent new Den for them. Or a Lair. Yes, this place looked much more like a Lair.

The main room appeared to have been the main living space of the house. There was an ancient cast-iron stove against the north wall, and shelves that had most likely served to hold pots or dishes, but anything portable had long since been removed, probably by souvenir-hunting boys as proof that they had actually gone into the house. There was a rickety table and three chairs, and one larger rocking chair in the corner. Two doors led to two tiny bedrooms, most of the space in each being taken up by a crudely built wooden bed frame. It looked like the mattresses had been simple bags filled with straw, suspended on a mesh of ropes which had long since rotted out, and the bedclothes were little more than shreds of grey rags. Wednesday poked at the mattresses with a stick and made a face as she heard something scurrying away from her.

"Yuck," she said. "We should have brought blankets or something." She had nothing against mice and other small scurrying things, but she didn't want to sleep with them if she didn't have to.

"We'll clean it up if we decide to come back," said Harry. "I think we can sleep sitting up in the chairs if we have to."

Back in the outer room, Pugsley set out their snacks on the table while Harry poked about in the shadowy corners.

Wednesday said she was chilly, and decided to see if the rusty old stove would still work. They certainly had enough kindling, and there was a stack of wood, covered with cobwebs, nearby. She scraped a layer of ashes and charcoal out of the stove's firebox and expertly arranged some fresh tinder so that it would catch, then crossed to the stack of wood. There was a ripping sound as floorboards weakened by years of dry rot gave way under her weight and she disappeared into a hole underneath. The stack of wood tilted and fell in after her. The boys heard her cursing in Russian, so they knew she was all right. If she was actually hurt, she'd be using Chinese.

With a creak, the rest of the floorboards shifted and tilted, rusted bolts sheered, and the massive stove threatened to tear loose from its moorings and fall in after her. If that happened, witch or no, there would be Wednesday pancakes down there.

Harry whipped out his wand. "*Levinare!*" he shouted, with a brisk flick of his wand. The stove lifted about six inches off the ground, and Harry carefully floated it away from the hole, setting it down safely on the other side of the room. The floor creaked in protest, but held.

Pugsley stuck his head down the hole. "Are you all right?"

"I twisted my ankle a little bit, but I'm okay. You guys should get down here, though! There's a whole secret room down here!"

The boys didn't have to be asked twice, and both of them slipped carefully through the hole, hanging by their hands from the edge and dropping the rest of the way to the floor, which wasn't far. Wednesday already had her torch shining on things around the room. "Are you going to make me go get the grownups again?"

"Hell no! They took our adventure away the last time! This one's ours!"

They were in what looked like a basic potions workroom, with several worktables and a rack of shelves filled with bottles and jars. One wall had a fireplace, where a large cauldron dangled from an iron crane. A bed of coal lay underneath it, as if ready for someone to start a brew.

In the centre of the main worktable was the skull of a huge snake, with a candle mounted on it.

Pugsley reached out to pick it up. "Hey, Harry, this would look great in your room!"

"Pugsley, don't—" But it was too late. With a roar, the coals in the fireplace burst into flame, something in the cauldron started boiling instantly, and threads of green smoke in the shape of serpents curled up out of it. The vaporous serpents slithered rapidly through the air towards them. Harry could hear the serpents hissing. "*Bite the intruders! Kill them! Protect the secret!*"

Harry looked at Pugsley with a look of utter disgust on his face. "Did you just forget everything we've been learning about unknown objects?"

Pugsley looked sheepish, and Harry yanked the skull out of his hands. The snakes stopped immediately, looking as puzzled as snakes can. "*Massster?*"

"*Umm. Yes?*"

"*Shall we bite? Kill? Poison?*"

"*Err. No. I shall deal with the intruders.*"

The snakes looked vaguely disappointed, and then dissipated into clouds of malodorous mist. The flames kept going, though, and the cauldron kept boiling.

"What was that about, Harry?" asked Wednesday.

"I'm ... not sure. This whole thing is just weird." He put the skull down and went to take a closer look at the fireplace, rubbing his forehead as he went. He was feeling that weird tickle again, and he didn't like it.

By rights, the fireplace should have been blazing hot, but it seemed only warm. He swung the crane with the cauldron out and looked into the cauldron. It was full of something blue, which continued boiling enthusiastically, and he could see glimmers of something golden at the bottom. He touched the liquid tentatively. It was luke warm, and nothing seemed to happen, so he reached in to pick up whatever it was. His scar was tickling like mad now.

Wednesday shrieked. "Harry James Potter, did you take a stupid pill today *too*?"

"What?" he said as his hand closed around the unknown object.

She pointed at the floor, where spattered drops were eating holes in the flagstones. "That's *acid*!"

Harry removed his hand from the cauldron with all due haste, to find that it was completely uninjured, although his shirt sleeve had dissolved completely. "Oops."

"Oops! All you can is 'Oops'?! What was so important you'd risk your *hand*?"

Harry opened his hand, revealing a gold ring with a dull black stone. There was a coat of arms of some sort carved on the stone.

"Well. That's ugly," she said.

"I'll say," Harry agreed. "But it was the strangest thing. It was almost like the ring wanted me to find it. And it wants me to put it on."

"Well, don't," she cautioned.

"I'm not completely thick," he said, annoyed. "I read the Lord of the Rings too, you know. And even if it isn't anything in the same league as that, it could be dangerous. The next time I get a chance to go to Gringotts, this is going right in my vault next to that knife." He wrapped the ring in some fabric he tore off his already ruined shirt sleeve, and stuffed it in his pocket.

Pugsley looked into the cauldron. "It's empty. How come it's empty? And how come there was anything in it when it's been sitting here all these years? Shouldn't it have evaporated?"

Wednesday sighed. "You're thinking with the wrong half of your brain again. What part of 'it's magic' do you not understand?"

"Oh," said Pugsley.

"Honestly. They're going to eat you alive at Hogwarts."

"Can I watch?" asked Harry. "Seriously, you slip more than either of us. You're going to have to do better."

"I'm sorry, but when I'm in the Muggle world, it's easy to think like a Muggle. It's hard to stop. Maybe once there's nothing around *but* magic, it'll help."

"Maybe. Now let's get ourselves out of here," said Harry. "I think it should be about time for those idiots to come back and try to scare us, and I have a plan ..."

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The boys of Little Hangleton never bothered them again.

Harry had new room decorations, and the Addamses (being what they were) never asked him where he got the snake skull with candle or the leathery dried serpent, only if they would be missed.

Two days later, the tramp's shack in the woods quietly burned down, with the ruins falling into the pit of the basement that no one had ever suspected was there. If anyone thought it odd that the trees nearby weren't even scorched, they didn't say anything.

The ring was carefully stashed in Harry's vault. It had stopped insisting that he wear it after he had threatened to throw it into an active volcano.

And soon, the summer was over, and it was time to go to London and catch the Hogwarts Express for the first time.

## Family Values Hogwarts at Last!

FAMILY VALUES

Disclaimer: So very not mine.

A/N: I'm assuming here that the Hogwarts uniforms are like those in the movies and Mary Grand Pre illustrations: black slacks/skirts, white shirt/blouse, grey cardigan optional, striped house tie, black open robe with House crest and hood matching House colour. These last don't change to reflect House affiliation until after Sorting. This may not be what JKR had in mind (I assume she was thinking about the closed-front, one-piece traditional "wizard's robe" Such as Dumbledore wears), but it's easiest to visualize.

I've added a baggage car to the Express, since I can't see there being room for the trunks in the compartments. And I stole a few bits of dialogue from PS/SS; you'll probably recognize which ones.

### Chapter 10: Hogwarts At Last!

Platform Nine and Three Quarters was as crowded as Newark Penn Station at rush hour, Harry thought. Maybe more so, because most commuters weren't dealing with humongous trunks and owl cages. The Addams contingent had a full trolley, with three gleaming new trunks, and an owl cage, in addition to the carry-on bags each child had. Persephone had been a joint birthday present for Harry and Wednesday; she was a very rare breed, a South American Stygian Owl, and she seemed to know it, too. Her sooty black plumage, marked with a herringbone pattern on the front, was quite striking, as were her brilliant gold eyes, and she had little tufts of feathers that stuck up like horns whenever she got excited. She was awake late in the day and was letting everyone know she resented it, raising her horn tufts and emitting sharp "wak-wak-wak" calls whenever another owl cage got too close to hers, or when a cat looked like it might be getting ideas.

Where most of the students had one or at most two parents with them, the entire Addams family, except for Remus, who had gone ahead a few days before to get settled at Hogwarts, were there to see them off. The crowds parted almost magically for them, and they ignored the stares, whispers and occasional snickers. It was all part of being an Addams.

They checked their trunks onto the baggage car and went on to find an unoccupied compartment. There they found a rack designed for owl cages, and Persephone promptly tucked her head under a wing and went to sleep now that the excitement was over. Harry, Pugsley and Wednesday hung out of the windows to say their last goodbyes to the family and waved madly as the train started moving.

"Well, we're on our own, I guess," said Harry, plopping himself into a seat. "No family until Christmas."

"Unless Mom gets that Parents' Night thing organized," said Pugsley. "She said that Professor McGonagall was being really helpful about that."

"Yeah, but that's only for one night. Even at Salem, we got to see the family on weekends," said Harry. "Now it's just us."

The door of the compartment slid open and a girl with bushy hair and rather large front teeth stuck her head in. "Mind if I join you?" she asked, pointing at one of the empty seats. "Everywhere else is full."

"Please, go right ahead," said Harry.

"Thank you. I'm ever so glad we're finally moving, aren't you? It seems like forever since I got my letter, and nobody in my family's magic at all, so it was ever such a surprise, and I've just been waiting for the time to come and I'm so excited, I mean, it's the very best school of witchcraft there is, I've heard – I've learned all our course books by heart, of course, I just hope it will be enough – I'm Hermione Granger, by the way, who are you?"

Harry smiled wryly. They had met Muggle-borns at Salem who had the same super-excited attitude at first. It had worn off on all but one of them eventually, and then they realised Jordan was always like that.

"I'm Harry Potter," he said, extending his hand to her. "Pleased to meet you. These are my cousins, Wednesday and Pugsley Addams."

"Are you really?" said Hermione. "I know all about you, of course – I got a few extra books, for background reading, and you're in Modern Magical History and The Rise and Fall of the Dark Arts and Great Wizarding Events of the Twentieth Century. Oh, and hello," she said belatedly to Wednesday and Pugsley.

"Well, yes," said Harry. "They hardly got anything right, though."

"What?" she squeaked. "What do you mean they're not right? They're *books*," she said.

"Books get things wrong all the time. Look, if you get a chance, get all three of those books out at the same time and try to make sense of them all at once. You can't do it, because they all say different things. And not one of them gives credit to my parents – I mean, I was just a baby, what could

"do? I think it was something my mother did, because she was just brilliant, but nobody even mentions her because she was Muggle-born."

"Why would that make a difference?" asked Hermione, cocking her head.

"There's a lot of people who think Muggle-borns aren't as good as people from Wizarding families," said Harry. "It's not as important in the United States, where I grew up, but I've found out since I got here that some people take it really seriously. Some kid in the book store on Diagon Alley didn't even want to talk to Pugsley when he said his parents were Squibs."

"Really?" she said. "That would explain why the girls I met at the robe shop didn't want to talk to me! I thought it was just because, you know, I talk a lot when I get nervous."

"I'd sort of noticed that," said Harry. "You probably told them right off that nobody in your family was magic, just like you did to us, didn't you?"

"Probably," she said, blushing.

"The more people know about you, the more ammunition they have to use against you," said Wednesday, unexpectedly joining the conversation. "It's always better to say too little than too much. That way people underestimate you. Until it's too late."

"Why would you want someone to underestimate you? Do you want people to think you're stupid?"

"I don't care what people think, except for the teachers. And even they don't need to know all of it. I don't hide what I know. But I don't wave it in people's faces, either. Pure-bloods will think less of you because you're Muggle-born. They think less of me because my parents are Squibs. Boys in general will think less of both of us because we're girls. People think more of Harry because of something he doesn't remember doing and probably couldn't do again. Does any of that make any sense?"

"No, it doesn't."

"But you know it's going to happen anyway. So you might as well use it for your benefit."

"That's a particularly ..."

"Slytherin?"

"I was going to say 'cold-blooded' way of looking at it."

Wednesday shrugged. "Nobody's just going to give me what I want. I have to earn it. Same as Pugsley and Harry. Our family has money. We'll have everything we need. But money isn't everything, and if we want something, it's up to us to get it, do you see?"

"Y-yes."

"So you have to think about what's important to you, and how to get it."

"Okay." She was thoughtful for a moment. "You know, I did want to be in Gryffindor House, because everybody said it was the best because Dumbledore was a Gryffindor. But what's important to me is knowledge and understanding. So maybe I ought to try for Ravenclaw instead."

"You can do that anywhere. But you'd probably find more kindred souls in Ravenclaw," agreed Pugsley. "I was thinking about Ravenclaw myself, but I'll be Sorted where I'm Sorted, I guess."

"What's most important to you?" asked Hermione, curiously.

"Well, I'll be the head of the family some day, so I have to be ready for that," said the stocky boy.

"But first we have to help Harry achieve his Destiny," said Wednesday. Hermione could somehow hear the capital letter in her speech.

"Harry has a Destiny?" she asked, looking at him.

Harry nodded.

"But ... you already destroyed You Know Who. Isn't that enough of a Destiny?"

"All I know is what Aunt Morticia has seen in the cards," said Harry. "There's something I still have to do. It might involve Voldemort – and I wouldn't be surprised, just blowing him up as a baby would be too easy – or it might be something else. Whatever it is, I want to be prepared for it."

"Divination seems like sort of a woolly discipline to me," said Hermione. "It's all gypsies and crystal balls."

"There might be some gypsy in the Family," said Harry. "There's some of just about everything else, why not that? But don't let Aunt Morticia hear you saying Divination is 'woolly'. She can give a cold reading that will knock your socks off."

"So, you think You Know Who might come back?"

"Might. If he does, I'll face him again. And again, if necessary. Third time's usually the charm on these things."

"You're talking like we live in a story book," she scoffed. "This is the real world."



He smiled sadly. "Where do you think the stories come from, Hermione?"

The moment was broken by a loud clatter from outside, and a smiling, round-faced woman opened the compartment door. "Anything from the trolley, dears?"

No matter how serious the conversation might have been, they were still eleven years old, and sweets took precedence. Even Hermione, whose parents were dentists and who had been sent off with a bag of sugar-free treats and healthy snacks, happily abandoned them in favour of the joys of Chocolate Frogs and Bertie Bott's Every Flavour Beans.

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Mid-afternoon found them sitting in a companionable silence. Harry had moved over to sit next to Hermione and they were looking at her copy of *Hogwarts: A History* together. Wednesday was working on a letter to send home, fuming because a girl she'd met in the loo had told her that some boy named Lee had brought a giant tarantula on the train, and she wanted to know why nobody had told her that spiders were acceptable pets at Hogwarts. She wanted hers sent to her immediately, if not sooner. Pugsley was doing rune puzzles from a book he'd picked up at Diagon Alley. Suddenly the compartment door slid open yet again, and three boys pushed their way inside.

The one in the middle was thin and pale, with hair so blond it was almost white slicked back with gel, and pointy features. The two behind him were much taller, thickset, and attempting to look mean. Harry exchanged quick glances with Pugsley and Wednesday.

The pale boy glanced at Wednesday and Pugsley, dismissing them, and then fixed his gaze on Harry. "Is it true?" he said. "They're saying all down the train that Harry Potter's in this compartment. So it's you, is it?"

"Yes," said Harry, keeping his expression blank.

"I heard you'd been in America," said the pale boy. "You'll soon find out that things are different here. You'll need to know the right people to do well. I can help you there." He held out his hand. "My name's Malfoy. Draco Malfoy."

Harry tried to keep a straight face, and probably would have, if Pugsley hadn't coughed. And then Wednesday snickered. Hermione looked puzzled. And that was it, he just burst out laughing. "And do you," he choked out, "prefer your p-pumpkin juice shaken or stirred?"

Then Hermione got it, and started giggling too, and Pugsley broke out into an open guffaw.

Two points of red started over Malfoy's cheekbones, and a muscle in his jaw twitched. He withdrew his hand. "I fail to see what is so funny."

"It's ... it's a Muggle thing. You wouldn't understand," said Harry, pulling himself together. "But thanks for the laugh anyway."

"You compare me to a Muggle?" said Malfoy, outraged. "How *dare* you insult me that way?" With a flourish, he whipped his wand out of its belt sheath.

Harry beat him to the draw, mainly because he didn't waste time on theatrics or flourishes. "*Expelliarmus!*" he snapped, and Malfoy staggered back against one of the bigger boys while his wand flew out of his hand. Harry snatched it out of the air and tossed it to Hermione, who caught it awkwardly. "Hold that a second, will you?"

"*Give me that!*" Malfoy made a grab for it, and Harry stepped between him and Hermione.

"You know, I don't think so. Why don't you and your friends go back to wherever it was you came from, and then if you're very good, I'll give you your wand back when we reach Hogwarts."

Malfoy looked around frantically, only then, apparently, realizing that Pugsley and Wednesday had their wands drawn and pointing at the bookends, neither of whom had managed to get their wands out. Pugsley had a manic grin on his face that resembled Uncle Gomez at his best, and Wednesday's face was so blank it was terrifying. "You wait, Potter! You'll get what's coming to you! Just like your parents!"

Harry's blood froze, and he leaned forward until he was practically nose to nose with Malfoy. "You will never. Mention. My parents. Again. Is that clear?"

"Guh," said Malfoy, eloquently.

"Now get out."

Malfoy squeezed between his thugs and stormed out. The thugs, who Harry decided he would call Thing One and Thing Two, gave Harry looks which he supposed was meant to be menacing, but only made them look like they had indigestion, and followed.

Harry slammed the door shut. "Can you believe that guy? Like he thought he was actually dangerous. *Neil* was scarier than that."

"Neil?" asked Hermione.

"Kid back in kindergarten. He insulted Wednesday. She hit him with a stick and I turned his hair purple," Harry explained.

"What should I do with this?" Hermione held Malfoy's wand out, delicately dangling it from two fingertips as if she didn't want to touch it any more than necessary.

"Give it to me. I'll hang on to it for now, but I'll have to give it back to him later, I suppose. Too bad we don't know how to booby-trap it."

Hermione gasped. “You shouldn’t mess with somebody’s wand! It says in Magical Manners for the Muggle-born that tampering with another wizard’s wand can start a blood feud! You don’t want to make an enemy on the first day.”

“Think I’ve already done that,” said Harry. “Although if Malfoy has the sense God gave a goldfish, he’ll leave me alone.”

Hermione didn’t say anything, but her expression said she had doubts about how much sense Malfoy had. So did Harry, but there wasn’t anything he could do about it.

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The sun was setting when the Hogwarts Express pulled into the station. A voice echoed through the train, instructing them to leave their baggage on the cars, so they made sure all their things were tucked into their carry-on bags and left them in the compartment along with Persephone. Harry made sure he had Malfoy’s wand tucked into his sleeve with his own. Out in the corridor, they were caught up in a small mob of students all trying to get off the train at the same time. Harry and Wednesday were briefly separated from Pugsley and Hermione in the crush, and Harry took the opportunity to pull Wednesday into a vacant compartment.

“What was that about with Hermione? You got awfully talkative with her all of a sudden.”

“And you didn’t?”

“I was mostly talking about her. I didn’t start spilling about desires and my Destiny. That was you. So spill.”

“We’ll need her,” said Wednesday, looking up at Harry. Her pupils were wide, as he’d only seen a few times before, and he knew that whatever she was Seeing wasn’t exactly the here and now. “We need her, but she has to choose whether to join us of her own free will. She has to know.”

“And you’re never wrong.”

“Not about people. Not about this.”

“Okay, then. It looks like things have cleared up out there. Let’s go.”

They reunited with Pugsley and Hermione on the platform when all the first years gathered under a lantern held by a man who was absolutely huge. “He’s even taller than *Lurch*!” said Pugsley, his eyes round.

“Firs’ years, firs’ years over here! We got everybody now?” Harry looked about. The older students had all disappeared off the platform, leaving the youngest students alone with the huge bearded man. The Express now sat dark and motionless, the engine making odd pinging and creaking noises as it cooled down in the night air. The entire scene had a vague creepiness that might have bothered him if he hadn’t been an Addams. He grinned and trotted off to follow the bobbing lantern.

The big man led them down a steep, narrow path between rows of dark trees, and Harry heard several girls eeking when they heard something moving in the shadows. “Yeh’ll get yer firs’ sight o’ Hogwarts in a sec,” the big man called over his shoulder, “jus’ round this bend here.”

There were oohs and aahs as they turned a corner and the narrow path opened suddenly onto the edge of a great black lake. Perched atop a high mountain on the other side, its windows sparkling in the starry sky, was a vast castle with many turrets and towers.

“No more’n four to a boat!” the man called, pointing to a fleet of little boats sitting in the water by the shore. Harry helped Wednesday into one of the boats, and Pugsley did the same for Hermione. When everyone was in boats, the big man yelled, “*Forward!*” and the boats started off by themselves, moving gently forward across the smooth surface of the lake. On the other side, the boats slid one by one into a tunnel which let them off onto a pebbly beach in an underground harbour.

Harry saw a flash of white blond hair in the lantern light. Malfoy was standing in one of the little boats, waiting for Thing Two to get out of his way.

“Hey, Malfoy!” Harry called. “I think you’ll need this! Catch!” He tossed Malfoy’s wand at him.

If the boy had waited for it to come to him, he’d have caught it with no problem. Instead, he lunged for it, the boat shifted suddenly, and he tumbled into the water with a splash! It wasn’t all that deep, only a foot or two, but he was totally soaked.

A red-headed boy fished the wand out of the water before it floated away, and held it out to Malfoy. “Here, I think you missed this. You might want to think twice before trying for the Quidditch team, yeah?”

Malfoy waded out of the water, snarled and snatched the wand from the boy’s hand. He brushed his hair, now hanging lank and limp, out of his eyes and squelched his way up the beach.

Their guide acted like nothing was wrong as he led them up a tunnel to the doors of the castle itself, where Professor McGonagall directed them into a small stone waiting room.

“Welcome to Hogwarts,” said the Professor. “The start-of-term banquet will begin shortly, but before you take your seats in the Great Hall, you will be sorted into your houses. The Sorting is a very important ceremony because, while you are here, your house will be something like your family within Hogwarts. You will have classes with the rest of your house, sleep in your house dormitory, and spend free time in your house common room.

“The four houses are called Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Slytherin. Each house has its own noble history and each has produced outstanding witches and wizards. While you are at Hogwarts, your triumphs will earn your house points, while any rule breaking will lose house

points. At the end of the year, the house with the most points is awarded the house cup, a great honour. I hope each of you will be a credit to whichever house becomes yours.

“The Sorting Ceremony will take place in a few minutes in front of the rest of the school. I suggest you all smarten yourselves up – as much as you can – while you are waiting.” Her eyes fell on Malfoy as she said this, and her expression said she doubted he’d be able to do anything that might help.

Then she left them for a bit. There was muttering about how the Sorting might be accomplished, with someone saying there might be some kind of test. Hermione started whispering to herself as she ran through a list of all the spells she knew, but Pugsley leaned over and murmured to her, “Come on, they haven’t even taught us anything yet. How can there be a test?”

“What are they going to do then?”

“I don’t know. Remus – Professor Lupin – didn’t tell us. Probably it’s alphabetical, or we draw lots.”

“You *know* one of the professors?”

“Tutor,” said Pugsley.

“You must know all sorts of things in advance, then. That’s so *unfair!*”

“Life’s like that. You’ll catch up.”

Their low-voiced conversation was interrupted by a flight of ghosts through the room. Some of the girls screamed, and Wednesday clasped her hands in rapture as she watched them pass. “Oh, aren’t they *beautiful!*” she whispered.

“Come along now!” said Professor McGonagall. “The Sorting Ceremony is about to begin. Form a line and follow me!”

In his most gallant fashion, Harry bowed to Wednesday and offered her his arm. “My dear?”

She dropped him an elegant curtsy. “Thank you, good sir!” She took his arm and they followed after McGonagall.

Pugsley, not to be outdone, bowed to Hermione and offered his arm. She was a bit clumsy about the curtsy, never having done it before, and they followed Harry and Wednesday.

A sandy haired boy shrugged, bowed to the girl with blond pigtails next to him, and they joined the line. All through the room, boys bowed, girls curtsied, and a slightly ragged double line formed. Malfoy brought up the rear by himself, since he was still sodden and none of the girls would even admit he existed, much less take his arm.

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The start of term feast was possibly Severus Snape’s least favourite occasion of the year, just as the end of term feast was his favourite. Two months of blessed peace and quiet, ruined by the arrival of hundreds of noisy, incompetent brats. This year was possibly the worst yet. For two weeks, he’d been plagued by a persistent itch on his hands. Specifically his thumbs. He knew the signs as well as anyone. *Something wicked this way comes*, he murmured to himself. And now the teachers had gathered at the head table, he was sandwiched in between Hagrid and Quirrell, the older children were in their seats, the firsties were out in the waiting room, and his thumbs had abruptly stopped itching. *Something wicked is here already.*

The door swung open, and McGonagall entered, followed by ... a neat double line of boys gallantly escorting girls to the front of the room like young gentlemen and ladies, instead of the hellions he knew they were. At the front of the line ... *of course, it would be him*, thought Snape sourly. There was no mistaking the dishevelled black hair and the glasses, even if they were in a different style from those of the hated father. Aping the manners of a bygone era, the boy swaggered arrogantly along, for all the world as if he thought he owned the school. The girl on his arm was a fit match for him, tilting her nose in the air like Narcissa Malfoy on those occasions when she was forced to associate with the rabble. *And speaking of Malfoy, where is ... Merlin, what happened to him?* Snape wondered. The Prince of Slytherin was straggling in at the end of the line looking like a drowned cat, his robes hanging shapeless and dripping from the hem. *Filch will have a fit when he sees those puddles.*

He tuned out the Sorting Hat’s inane little ditty, wondering morosely how long it was going to be before he got an owl with an outraged letter from Lucius Malfoy, or worse yet, from Narcissa, wondering how her little Drakie-poo came to be so damp, and what he was going to do about it. Somehow he knew the boy’s condition was going to turn out to be his problem. At least McGonagall would have to deal with Potter. The brat wasn’t his concern.

The Sorting started, and he kept a jaundiced eye on the proceedings, making mental notes as the students went to their seats. *Abbott, Hannah ... Hufflepuff, no surprise. Addams, Pugsley*. He didn’t recognize the name, probably Muggle-born. *Cruel parents, to give a child a name like that. Slytherin!?* It wasn’t impossible that a Muggle-born could be sorted into Slytherin, but it was going to be a problem. Worse, the boy looked stupid enough that he didn’t realise he was in trouble as he took a seat at the Slytherin table. *Addams, Wednesday. Potter’s little tart. A twin? Had to be, with a name like that. And also Slytherin. Of course. Just to completely ruin my day. Bulstrode. Good heavens, what have they been feeding that girl? Crabbe. Whatever it was, they were feeding it to him, too. Davis. Tiny little thing, well, she makes up for Bulstrode. Goyle. Another one. Wonderful. Greengrass. Good family, shouldn’t be a problem. Malfoy. No surprise there. Nott. Nor there, either. Parkinson. Hope she doesn’t take after her mother. Perks. Who are the Perks? Have to look them up, they’re not one of the Great Families. Potter. POTTER!?*

The room was silent. Potter stood up from the stool, put the Hat down with great precision and economy of movement, and walked easily toward the Slytherin table. Someone started clapping. *The Addams girl, of course.* Then her brother. Then Perks. Then some of the other students from farther up the table. Then all of the Slytherins except Malfoy. Even Crabbe and Goyle were clapping half-heartedly. The teachers at the Head Table were clapping also, most with varying degrees of shock and bewilderment evident on their faces, and Severus joined in belatedly, with a smile that looked more like his teeth hurt. *In for a penny, in for a pound. Up Slytherin!* he thought as he clapped. Finally McGonagall called the next student, and Severus stopped clapping immediately.

Throughout the rest of the Sorting, he was preoccupied with one question. *How the hell did this happen?*

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A/N: For pictures of Persephone the Stygian Owl, check out <http://www.owlpages.com/owls.php?genus=Asio&species=stygius> . The first and fourth pictures show the “horn” tufts clearly.

## Family Values This Means War

FAMILY VALUES

Disclaimer:

A/N: At one point, for another story, I tried to figure out class schedules. I discovered it can't be done to be completely consistent with the books. Primarily the problem is with Snape's class; since he does a lot of doubles he doesn't have time to teach more than one session per week for any given student group (such as Gryffindor/Slytherin firsties). First year seems to confirm this, since their first class with him is on a Friday. Yet second year has potions classes for Harry on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday afternoon, with Thursday, at least, being a double session. In third, fourth and fifth years, he has potions at least twice a week. It is not possible for Snape to be running this kind of schedule. He would have to be using a Time Turner. (Which would explain his mood most of the time.) I could be realistic, and work out which classes are when and ignore canon when it conflicts. Or I could go with canon and sprinkle other classes higglety pigglety where I feel like having them and completely ignore realism. Can't have both. HmMMM....

### Chapter 11: This Means War

The Slytherin Common Room proved to be located down in the very bowels of the castle. It was a long, low room with rough stone walls and round green glass lamps hanging from chains on the ceiling so that the tallest of the Slytherins had to walk around them lest they bash themselves in the forehead. There was a large fireplace with an elaborately carved mantel and a cheerful blaze going within it, and green leather wing-back chairs that wouldn't have looked out of place in Uncle Gomez's study grouped around it. One wall seemed to be made of smooth glass, and Harry wondered what would be beyond it, since they were quite a distance underground, by his calculation. Whatever it was out there was completely black.

It had been a long day and Harry just wanted to go to bed since he still had a lingering headache from dinner, but the Prefect, a fifth year named Titus Artibee, kept them gathered in the Common Room. The firsties were beginning to get a little antsy when dark shadows in one corner resolved themselves into an even darker blot, and the blot stepped out into the room to reveal itself as a tall man wearing robes of unrelieved black. His hair was black and hung down to his shoulders, and his eyes were cold and hard, like chunks of coal. His skin was sallow, his nose was hooked, and his lips were pressed together in a thin line. He was altogether unattractive.

"Welcome to Slytherin House," he said. As unattractive as he was, his voice was compelling, drawing the students' attention like a magnet. "I am Severus Snape, your head of house. Each of you is in this house for one reason, and one reason only. Deep down, you think you're the best, and you want a chance to prove it. And prove it you will. Slytherin has held the House cup for the last seven years, and the Quidditch cup for the last three. If you do your best, we'll continue to hold them until you leave school. I know that you will have rivalries. After all, you can't all be the best of the best. You'll be working out your own pecking order in the coming weeks. I want it made perfectly clear, though, that whatever happens in our house, *stays* in our house. Once you're beyond those doors, you're Slytherin first and foremost, and Slytherins stick together and back each other up, because no one else will. Prefects, take your charges off to bed."

Harry turned to follow Artibee, when Professor Snape snapped, "Potter! One moment."

Harry obediently returned to the middle of the Common Room, where Snape stood glaring down at him. He immediately schooled his face and mind to total blankness.

"I don't know what you're doing in this house, Potter. But I warn you, you put even one toe out of line and I'll have you on the Express back to your family so fast it will make your head swim! You will keep your arrogance and pride to yourself and there will be *absolutely no pranks!* Is that clear?"

Harry nodded. He had no idea what the man was going on about, but it was safer to agree at this point and find out later.

"Good. I have no idea why the Hat put you here, but here you are, and if you keep your head down and your nose clean, you just might survive this little nest of vipers."

"Sir?"

"Yes?"

"You said yourself why the Hat put me here. I don't know if I'm the best now, but I know I have to be in the future. And this is the best place for me to achieve that."

"Cheek, Potter."

"Truth, Professor."

There was silence for a moment, broken only by the sound of the logs hissing in the fireplace.

“Go to bed, Potter.”

“Good night, sir.”

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Snape stalked through the halls after getting his little serpents settled. The talk with Potter had disturbed him deeply, and he would have given him detention for his cheek except that he didn't want the dubious distinction of being the first head to give detention to a member of his own house. He'd wait until the Weasley twins blew something up and got a detention from Minerva (which he knew was likely to happen within the next week) and then he would be free to descend on Potter like an avenging Fury. He found himself at the gargoyle that guarded the stairs to the Headmaster's sanctum almost without willing his feet to carry him there. Light shone out of the crack around the Headmaster's door, which meant that he was not the only one disturbed at this hour of the night. “Sherbet lemon,” he snapped. The gargoyle stepped aside, and Snape rode the spiral staircase upward. The door opened before he could knock, and he wondered sourly why the griffin shaped knocker was even there. It never got any use.

“Ah, Severus, I thought you'd be up before long.” The Headmaster sat behind his wide desk, with the Sorting Hat on its stool in front of it, almost as if the Hat were being called on the carpet.

“Headmaster, that Hat has finally gone insane. Potter can't belong in my house. He can't!”

“I thought you might be concerned. I was, as well. Therefore I thought we might ask the Hat for an explanation, together.”

“What's there to explain?” asked the Hat. “The boy had to be Sorted, I Sorted him. That's my job.”

“But into Slytherin? The boy's parents were Gryffindor through and through,” said Dumbledore.

“But *he* is not. You should know, you're responsible for making him what he is,” said the Hat. “If you wanted him to be a Gryffindor, you should have left him with Sirius Black. Or those Weasleys, they're an excellent lot!”

“Black was a traitor and a murderer,” snapped Snape.

“Impossible. I know what was in that boy's head when he was Sorted. He wasn't capable of it. You, on the other hand ...”

“If I may,” interrupted Dumbledore. “We're here to discuss Mr. Potter.”

“Yes, yes. A delightful boy. We had a wonderful chat. You really must invite him up here some time, Headmaster. I'd love to talk with him again.”

“Hat, you will re-Sort that boy or ... or I'll turn you into a propeller beanie!” said Snape.

“Don't make threats you can't keep,” said the Hat. “I think I know my job better than you, I've been doing it for over a millennium! There will be no re-Sorting. The boy is a Slytherin to the core, no other place would serve him as well. Don't you remember what I sang?” The Hat broke into song again.

*“Or perhaps in Slytherin*

*You'll make your real friends,*

*Those cunning folk use any means*

*To achieve their ends.*

“Perhaps it's not great poetry, but it's clear enough. The Potter boy knows he has a Destiny.”

Dumbledore gave a start, and actually paled slightly.

“Don't worry, Headmaster, he knows nothing of the details, but he knows it exists. Over and above that, he has a dream, and he is determined to do whatever it takes to meet his Destiny *and* achieve his dream. *Whatever* it takes. Little things like conventional morality and social standards are not going to stand in his way. You tell me where I should put him. Bravery he has in plenty, intelligence and loyalty as well, but it is his drive to succeed that is his strongest trait.” The Hat sighed. “Professor, your house has become a haven for those unwilling or unable to face change. It was never intended to be a retreat for pure-bloods, and it must not continue to be so. There's more to ambition than being power-hungry, and there's more to cunning than cheating on your exams! You yourself are proof of that.”

“But it's you that's been Sorting them that way.”

“It's their parents who've been teaching them that ambition without bravery, loyalty, or talent is enough to get by. What am I to do when I am presented with such paltry material? The Malfoy boy, for example, is lazy, craven, and woefully ignorant, and he is unwilling to change. Yet he is filled with a blinding ambition to rule over all others, convinced that his heritage and his pure blood – as if any of them are pure! – entitle him to such a lofty status without effort on his part, and blissfully unaware of the responsibilities that go with such an exalted state. Where else am I to put him? I would say that less than half of your house embodies the ideals of the Founder, Professor. And the more it strays from those ideals, the further it will sink into the mire. If Slytherin wishes to regain its greatness, it needs what the Potter boy has to offer. And if he wants to survive, he needs what

Slytherin can teach. So be it. The Great and Powerful Hat has spoken!”

“You can’t possibly expect me to have Potter in my house!” Snape ranted. “What of the danger? He has enemies there already!”

“Severus,” Dumbledore said, “there have always been student rivalries and feuds. Perhaps in this case it is extreme, but you must remember these are only students. It is the job of the head of house to keep house squabbles at a safe level. If you don’t wish to take this responsibility, perhaps it is time that you ceased being its head. Professor Sinistra was in Slytherin in her day, perhaps she’d be willing to serve. Or Quirrell. He’s young, but no younger than you were when you became head.”

That hit Snape like a dash of cold water in the face. Lose his house? Unthinkable! “Sinistra would never come down out of her tower to watch over them, Headmaster. And my snakes would eat Quirrell alive! He’s afraid of his shadow as it is.”

“Then you must come to terms with having Harry Potter in your house, Severus. I know you have an old grudge against his father, but it really is quite childish, and it is time to put away childish things. Time and long past time.”

“Very well, Headmaster. Potter may stay. But what of his cousins? Perhaps they could be re-Sorted elsewhere? I dislike having the little knot of the three of them together where they can make mischief.”

“Perhaps. It would at the least encourage him to have a relationship with someone in another house. Hat, what have you to say about that?”

“Absolutely not. The boy is brave enough for Gryffindor, true, but the only thing he really has in common with any of them is a deep and abiding love for explosions. I shudder to think what would happen if you put him in a tower with the Weasley twins. The girl is brilliant, but far too ruthless for Ravenclaw.”

“Hufflepuff?”

“Headmaster, if you *want* the Hufflepuffs to take over the world, just say so. I’ll re-Sort everyone into Hufflepuff and save them the trouble.”

Dumbledore blinked, and even Snape was taken aback. “Who are these people? *What* are they? Headmaster, if the Potter boy and these two are amoral, then—”

“I did not say ‘amoral’,” snapped the Hat. “I said he will not let *conventional* morality stand in his way. He has his own standards, as do the Addams children, and they will live and die by those standards, no matter how odd they may appear to others.”

“Hat, I must demand a clear answer,” said the Headmaster, firmly. “Are we looking at another Dark Lord in the making?”

The Hat made a tsk-ing sound. “Headmaster, you must know by now there *are* no clear answers, especially when you do not ask clear questions. The boy is Dark, yes, it is his birthright. He was marked by Darkness and brought up in it. He may well become a true Lord; he has the innate nobility that so many who claim that title lack, and is aware, as Malfoy is not, of the responsibilities that go with power. I will say this: having a Dark Lord might not be a bad thing, if it is Harry Potter.”

That was not at all reassuring to Snape. “But ...”

“No buts! I’m tired and will say no more! If you want to learn more of the boy, talk to Lupin.” The Hat slumped down and began to snore.

“Lupin? Why should we ask Lupin?” Snape asked in frustration.

“Because Remus Lupin has been my agent inside the Addams family for the past five years,” said the Headmaster, tiredly. “He has been tutoring all three children in our history, the ways of our culture, some basic theory, and sending me regular reports.”

“*That’s* why you gave him the History position,” said Snape. He had been wondering for weeks, ever since the unexpected announcement that Lupin would be taking over the teaching of History of Magic, why the Headmaster would bring that ... that *beast* into a school full of helpless children.

“Yes, and that is why I have asked you to learn how to make the Wolfsbane Potion,” said Dumbledore. “They trust him, and he can give us insights into the way they think. If they feel the need to confide in anyone, they will approach him. If there is anyone who can influence them, bring them to the Light, it will be him. I know you don’t like him, Severus, but trust me ... we *need* Remus Lupin.”

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For Harry, Pugsley and Wednesday, the first week of classes was an exciting adventure. Maybe not the classes themselves; they were mostly old hat, though there were a few nuggets of new information here and there. But the castle was amazing, and they were having a marvellous time exploring it.

Pugsley said he doubted that there was enough time even in seven years to see all of it, but he was going to try.

Wednesday had decided she was going to find all the secret passages, since there just *had* to be secret passages in a place like this, and was trying to figure out where she would be if she was a secret passage, which was her usual method of finding things.

Harry was wondering where exactly that third floor passage Dumbledore had been going on about during the opening feast was; he was pretty sure he’d located that corridor. but didn’t see anything particularly scary.

Hermione, once they’d connected up with her during a shared Transfiguration class with the Ravenclaws, told them she had acquired a deep and

abiding desire to read every book in the school library, and had started a check list to make sure she didn't miss any.

Astronomy was the most fun class, because it was the only one that was completely new to all of them. At Salem, it had been an elective. Unfortunately, they shared the early session with the Hufflepuffs, and only saw Hermione in passing on the stairs as she headed up to the late session when they were leaving.

History of Magic was interesting, but Remus's classes had always been interesting. He had a way of lecturing that was more like telling a story, and then he would ask questions to make sure you had been listening. Harry gathered, from hearing gossip from the older students in the Common Room, that the old History teacher was much less interesting, and the change in teachers was very highly approved of. Remus winked at them when they all sat down together in the front row, and asked them to stop by his office some time during the week after classes.

Transfiguration and Charms were their least favourite classes, mainly because they'd already covered most of the material at Salem. During the first Transfiguration class, Professor McGonagall called on Harry to explain why he wasn't even trying to turn his matchstick into a needle, but was passing Rune puzzles back and forth with Pugsley instead. Harry explained that he was giving someone else a chance first, and promptly turned all five of the matchsticks on his desk into needles. Then for good measure, he turned a quill into a crochet hook. Hermione shot him a look that was part outrage, part envy, and part "I am so going to study with you!" The look on Professor McGonagall's face was worth the detention he and Pugsley received for passing the puzzles in class.

On Thursday evening they reported to Mr. Filch, the castle caretaker, for their detention. Finding his office was, as always, the hardest part; it was down in an unfamiliar section of the dungeons and they made three wrong turns before they got there, fifteen minutes late.

"Yer late!" the man growled when he opened the door.

"We got lost, sir. It won't happen again," said Pugsley.

"See that it doesn't," said Filch. "I'll hold you half an hour extra this time; next time it gets some serious time." He ushered the boys into his office, which was grimy, crowded with file cabinets, and stank of cleaning supplies and cat. He gave them each a pail containing steel wool, rags, and metal polish, then fished a ring of huge, old-fashioned keys out of his desk drawer. "Follow me." He led them through ever more twisted passages and finally used the keys to unlock an oak door with a small barred window. Inside was a room that looked like a torture chamber, with chains, manacles, masks, whips and similar devices hanging on hooks around the walls. Light came from torches mounted on the walls, and a sturdy rack stood in the centre of the room. "Get inside there," he said, giving Pugsley a light shove.

"This is where we used to do detentions, back in the old days," he said with a tone of fondness in his voice. "Headmaster said we can't do it nowadays. But just in case the old ways come back, I like to keep my old equipment in good shape." He pointed to the wall nearest the door. "That wall. I want every piece of metal shining. No magic."

He stepped outside the room and slammed the door. "I'll come let you out when your time's up," he said through the barred window.

"Whoa," said Pugsley, looking around with wide eyes. "This is so *cool*!" The boys placed their cleaning supplies on the rack, which was just the right height to be a workbench, and helped themselves to an armful of chains from the wall.

When Filch came back, he found Harry diligently re-hanging the chains, which he had organized by length and thickness of the links, while Pugsley sat on the rack, scrubbing a mask to get a bit of rust off the inside.

"Oh, hi, Mr. Filch! I'll be done with this in a second," said Pugsley.

"This stuff is great!" said Harry, with a smile. "Reminds me of home! You forgot to give us any oil, though, so it's all just going to rust again. This thumbscrew is already rusted solid. You want us to come down some time and take care of that?"

Filch blinked. "You ... you want to come down here?"

"Well, yeah, it would be a shame to put all this work to waste. And things like this deserve to be kept in good shape, right, Pugs?"

"Oh, yeah, these are classic," said Pugsley, holding the mask up to the light to make sure he'd gotten the last bit of rust off it. "What do you think?" he asked, putting it over his face. "Is it me?"

"It's you, it's definitely you," said Harry. "But you've got fingerprints all over it now. Polish it up before you hang it."

"I know how to take care of things," said Pugsley, annoyed. He gave the mask a quick polish and replaced it on the wall. He and Harry then cleaned up their supplies and wiped down the rack to make sure it hadn't got any polish spilled on it accidentally.

"This is really nice too," said Harry, patting the rack. "But the ropes are getting rotten. I doubt it would take more than one good turn to break them. You really should replace them."

"I suppose you're volunteering to do that, too?" asked Filch.

"We could, yeah. Pugsley's Dad helped us build our own at home – he said it was a lot more fun when you make things yourself, and it is!"

"Did you try it out to see if it worked, then?"

"It did," said Pugsley. "We tried it ourselves, and then we watched Grandmama use it on Remus – Professor Lupin, I mean."

"Your grandmother had Professor Lupin on a rack?" Filch asked. He was more astounded with the answer to each question.



“Mm-hm. He said it helped his back a lot. Are we done now?”

“Yes,” Filch said faintly, then with more confidence, “I suppose you are. The rest will wait for some other little miscreant. Give me the buckets, then, and back to your Common Room with you. Make it fast, it’s almost curfew, and you don’t want to be visiting me again too soon!”

“We wouldn’t mind, really, Mr. Filch! Bye!” said Harry, and they ran off.

“The other way!” barked Filch.

“Oh. Sorry! Got turned around again!” Pugsley said, and they trotted off in the other direction.

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Wednesday sat doing her homework in a wing back chair which she had claimed as her own, over near the great window. During the day, the window let a suffused bluish light fill the Common Room, as it opened onto the lake just below the water line. In just a few days, she had seen grindylows and merfolk swim by, and once had caught a glimpse of something large, with tentacles, moving off in the distance. At night the window was pitch black, and she could sometimes see something phosphorescent darting about in the darkness.

From the right angle, the black glass became a mirror, and she could see not only the lights in the water, but also what was going on in back of her in the Common Room, which was one reason she liked to sit here. She hadn’t had problems with any of the other Slytherins so far – they were mostly just ignoring her – but there was no point to letting anyone sneak up and catch her unaware.

Some of the older students had been having a discussion by the fire just a few minutes ago. Now, when she looked up again, she saw that Professor Snape and Malfoy had joined them, and Malfoy was pouting about something. The Professor was speaking in a determined manner. She should have been able to hear what he was saying, but couldn’t make it out over the crackling of the fire. Some spell to prevent eavesdropping, obviously. *Note to self: learn howto read lips!* she thought. Well, there was no time like the present, and fortunately Professor Snape was facing the window.

Some words were easy enough to make out. He seemed to be saying “Potter” a lot. Every time he said it, he got angrier. She thought she could make out “murder” and also “revenge”. There was “no” in there a lot, too. Malfoy was angry now, too, and Professor Snape jabbed his finger in Malfoy’s chest and then gestured at himself. Malfoy finally acquiesced to whatever it was Professor Snape wanted, and the other students, who ranged through all the different years, agreed as well. Professor Snape nodded, then cancelled the spell and stalked off.

Malfoy, in a total snit, stormed off toward the dorms. The other students talked quietly among themselves, and finally drifted off to do homework or chat with friends.

Wednesday considered the ramifications of what she had just seen.

Just before curfew, Harry and Pugsley, reeking of metal polish, returned from detention.

“Wednesday, you wouldn’t *believe* all the neat stuff Mr. Filch asked us to polish! He had chains, and manacles, and thumbscrews, and a rack, and...”

“That’s it, next time I get detention too,” she said. “Why shouldn’t I get to play with all the fun stuff?”

“We’re going to go down again this weekend,” said Harry. “You could come with us.”

“I’ll do that,” she said. “But listen, you need to hear about what I saw tonight.” She recounted what she had seen in just a few minutes.

“So what do you think it was all about?” Harry asked when she was through.

“It was obvious, I think. He was telling them not to take revenge on you. Maybe because he was going to take revenge himself.”

“Wonderful. Not only do I have to worry about passing classes, I have to worry about the professors trying to kill me. Why did I even decide to come to this school, anyway?” complained Harry. “Why would Professor Snape want revenge on me? I haven’t even had a single class with him yet!”

“Maybe he was on the wrong side in the war with Voldemort,” said Pugsley. “I’d be kind of pissed off if I was going to rule the world and had to settle for being a school teacher instead.”

“You have a point, there. You guys got my back?”

“Always,” said Wednesday.

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Friday morning brought the first Potions class for the Slytherins, and everyone was wildly excited about it. The older students raved about what a great teacher Professor Snape was, and how it was the one class where pure-bloods got the attention they deserved, since they were held back by the Muggle-born (who they sometimes called “mudbloods”) and half-bloods in other classes. Harry took this with a grain of salt, since he hadn’t noticed that the self-proclaimed pure-bloods, such as Malfoy and Thug One and Thug Two, whose real names, he had found out, were Crabbe and Goyle, were any better than anyone else.

The Slytherins all made sure they left the breakfast table early, so as to be at the classroom in plenty of time to get settled. The door to the

classroom was locked, and Professor Snape swept down the corridor to open it precisely five minutes before class was scheduled to begin. The Slytherins rushed in to get the best seats, and most of the Gryffindors, straggling in at the last minute, had to settle for seats to the side or to the rear of the room.

Wednesday and Harry set out their pens, notebooks (since they saw no need to take notes on sloppy loose parchment; it was bad enough they'd have to turn in homework on the stuff) and textbooks and sat calmly and expectantly at the worktable they had claimed in the front of the centre row. Pugsley claimed the seat directly in back of Harry, sliding in just seconds ahead of Malfoy, who settled for the seat in back of Wednesday. In keeping with his 'goofball' persona, he spent several minutes getting his things set out and then openly ogled the jars of misshapen, preserved creatures on shelves along the walls. Malfoy was trying to get his attention, probably to ask to switch seats, and didn't take kindly to being ignored.

Professor Snape closed the door at exactly the correct moment, and then called the roll, pausing suggestively at Harry's name, but not saying anything untoward. Then he looked up at the class, looking for all the world like he'd rather be facing a firing squad than all those pre-adolescent faces.

"You are here to learn the subtle science and exact art of Potionmaking," he began. He spoke in barely more than a whisper, but they caught every word – like Professor McGonagall, Snape had the gift of keeping a class silent without effort. "As there is little foolish wand-waving here, many of you will hardly believe this is magic. I don't expect you will really understand the beauty of the softly simmering cauldron with its shimmering fumes, the delicate power of liquids that creep through human veins, bewitching the mind, ensnaring the senses ... I can teach you how to bottle fame, brew glory, even stopper death – if you aren't as big a bunch of dunderheads as I usually have to teach."

Harry and Wednesday scribbled madly, trying to get as much as possible in their notes. They didn't manage to get it all, but thought they had most of it, thanks to Muggle pens, which made writing much faster than with a quill.

"Mr. Potter!" Professor Snape snapped.

"Yes, sir?" Harry replied calmly.

"What would you get if you added powdered root of asphodel to an infusion of wormwood?"

"That's the basis for Draught of the Living Death, sir, a sleeping potion so powerful it mimics death," Harry answered. He'd powdered bog asphodel at home, and made the wormwood infusion, although Grandmama wouldn't let him stay in the work room when she combined them.

"Where would where would you look if I told you to find me a bezoar?"

"Bezoars form in the stomachs of ruminants such as goats, sheep, and ibexes – and teenage girls who chew on the ends of their hair," Harry said with a sideways look at a blonde Gryffindor girl who was, indeed, chewing on her hair. Caught, the girl spit it out hastily. "They're counters to most poisons – although why you'd want to ruin a perfectly good poison is beyond me."

Snape narrowed his eyes at the answer. "What is the difference, Potter, between monkshood and wolfsbane?"

"Oh, there's no difference at all, sir. They're the same plant. The proper name is aconite. There's a planting of them in our garden back home."

"I don't care what you have in your garden back home," Snape sneered. He became aware that the students were staring at him oddly, and snapped, "Well? Why aren't you writing this down?" A flurry of mad scribbling ensued.

"What is that you're writing with, Mr. Potter?" Snape asked abruptly.

"It's a ballpoint pen," said Harry, looking up.

"And just why are you using that and that ... that book, instead of a proper quill on parchment?"

"It's faster to write with, sir. I can get more of what you're saying since I don't have to keep dipping it or worrying about it splattering. And the notebook keeps my note pages better organized."

"Next class, Mr. Potter, I want you – and Mr. and Miss Addams, also – to be properly equipped with quill, ink and parchment. I also want two feet of parchment from each of you as to why exactly it's a bad idea to bring substances with unknown properties into the Potions work room."

"But these are perfectly safe, they've been tested –"

"Make that three feet, Mr. Potter."

Harry quit while he was ahead.

Snape then set them to make a simple potion to cure boils, or at least Harry and Wednesday found it simple. While they hadn't done this exact potion before, the directions were clear enough, and they set to work with confidence. Snape swept around the room in his long black cloak, watching the students weigh dried nettles and crush snake fangs, criticizing almost everyone except Malfoy, whom he seemed to like. He was just telling everyone to look at the perfect way Malfoy had stewed his horned slugs when clouds of acid green smoke and a loud hissing filled the dungeon. One of the Gryffindor boys, Neville Longbottom, had somehow managed to melt his cauldron into a twisted blob, and the potion he and his partner had been working on was seeping across the stone floor, burning holes in people's shoes. Within seconds, the whole class was

standing on their stools while Longbottom, who had been drenched in the potion when the cauldron collapsed, moaned in pain as angry red boils sprang up all over his arms and legs.

"Idiot boy!" snarled Snape, clearing the spilled potion away from the table and floor with one wave of his wand. "I suppose you added the porcupine quills before taking the cauldron off the fire?"

The boy whimpered as boils started to pop up all over his nose.

"Take him up to the hospital wing," Snape spat at Longbottom's partner. "And make sure he doesn't drip on the way there." Then he rounded on Harry and Wednesday, who had been working nearby.

"You – Potter – why didn't you tell him not to add the quills? Thought he'd make you look good if he got it wrong, did you? That's a point from ..." and then he suddenly stopped, his attention caught by the Slytherin badge on Harry's robe as if he were seeing it for the first time. Apparently he drew the line at taking points from his own house.

Harry looked over at the destroyed workstation, which was covered with dripping goo. Really, it wasn't fair to blame him for somebody else's stupid mistake, but perhaps he could turn this to his own advantage. "Professor, I'd be glad to act as class monitor. Thank you. By the way, Malfoy's got his flame too high, and Crabbe and Goyle's cauldron is going to catch fire in three seconds ... two ... one ... now!"

There was a muffled "fwoomp!" noise from behind Snape, followed by a round of "ooohs" and "aahs" from random students, and applause from Pugsley.

Snape pinched the bridge of his nose. "Malfoy, turn down that flame, do you want your cauldron to go up, too? Crabbe, Goyle, put the lid on your cauldron; it will smother the fire. For the love of Merlin, DON'T put water in ... oh, no." Crabbe had poured some water in to extinguish the flames and now the cauldron was shooting globs of greyish sludge at the ceiling. "NOW put the lid on."

There were no further explosions, and soon a row of bottled potions of varying degrees of correctness was lined up on Snape's desk. He assigned reading and an essay topic, then dismissed the class. Harry lingered a bit, taking his self-appointed duties as class monitor seriously and making sure everything was cleaned up satisfactorily, while Wednesday waited for him.

Malfoy, not to be outdone, cleared away the mess of the melted cauldron, for which he received a point for Slytherin from the Professor. Harry received nothing, but by this point, he wasn't expecting anything.

Pugsley approached Snape's desk. "Professor Snape, this was the best class I have ever attended!" he said with relish. "Next class, may I sit next to Longbottom? He's going to make the best explosions!"

Snape gaped at the boy for a moment, then snapped "Get out! All of you! Out!"

Without waiting to see if they obeyed, he hurried through the door to the connecting storeroom, slamming it behind him.

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Pugsley woke up Saturday morning to the sound of laughter. Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle were in high spirits about something. He pulled his bed curtains open on the side facing Harry's bed, only to find Harry's curtains open and the bed clothes stained with greenish goo and dragged half off the bed. "Harry? Harry!"

"Aw, does Addams miss his little cousin?" asked Malfoy.

"I heard him crying last night, maybe he got homesick," said Goyle. "Maybe he's gone home like the cry-baby he is."

"The day Harry is a cry-baby is the day you ace your NEWTS," said Pugsley. In less than a week, it had become obvious to everyone that brains was not Goyle's strong suit. Nor Crabbe's, for that matter. Wednesday was of the opinion that they were sharing a single brain cell between them. Today must be Goyle's day to have custody. It being a weekend, it wasn't necessary to wear the uniform robes, so Pugsley dressed quickly in Muggle casuals and hurried out of the dorm to look for Harry.

He didn't have to look far.

Harry was sprawled on one of the sofas, wearing only his pyjama bottoms. His back was broken out in horrid, huge boils, and he was moaning softly. Several of the older students were standing around looking at him, but nobody was trying to do anything.

Pugsley dropped to his knees beside Harry. "Harry! Talk to me, Harry!"

"Ngh."

"C'mon, Harry. Say something."

"Ow." It was a clearly pronounced syllable, not a sound of pain, and it said everything Harry needed to say about how he was feeling.

Pugsley sat back on his heels. It was fairly obvious what had happened. Somebody had put some of Longbottom's boil-creating goo in Harry's bed and covered it up so he'd lie down in it. And Harry had then come out here and collapsed on the sofa. But how long had he been out here? Pugsley looked up. Millicent Bulstrode was part of the increasing crowd. She hadn't been overly friendly, but she hadn't exactly been unfriendly either. Her eyes were huge with shock, and there was no trace of a smirk on her face.

Millicent ... can you run into your room and get Wednesday out here? Tell her to bring her first aid kit. Will you? Please?"

The tall girl pushed her way through the onlookers and ran to the hallway that led to the girls' rooms. A moment later, Wednesday ran out, carrying a black case with her. She knelt next to Harry. "What happened?"

"That green stuff of Longbottom's, I think. Someone put some in his bed. He must have come out here once he realised what was happening."

"And he didn't wake you because he's a stubborn idiot," said Wednesday. "This stuff has been on his skin too long. He's got burns all in between the boils. Help me swab it off," she said, handing Pugsley a handful of gauze cotton pads and a bottle of a pale blue potion, "Then we can put some of the potion we were really making yesterday on the boils, and then get him down to the infirmary."

"Miss Addams, may I ask what you're doing to your cousin in the middle of the Common Room?" Professor Snape's voice was cold.

"First aid, sir. Then we're going to take him down to the Hospital Wing," said Pugsley.

"I was *asking* your sister, Mr. Addams."

"What he said," snapped Wednesday as she swabbed Harry's back.

Snape snatched the gauze out of her hand. "What makes you think you're qualified to do first aid, Miss Addams? You have no idea what kind of interactions—"

"Actually I do, sir. That's a neutral swab, it'll dilute that goo Longbottom made without interacting harmfully with any of the ingredients in it, and it'll cool the burned skin in between the boils. And the stuff you taught us yesterday will take down the boils."

Snape sniffed the swab suspiciously, then handed it back to her. "And what, pray tell, is your cousin doing out here in this condition in the first place?"

"Someone booby-trapped his bed," said Pugsley, swabbing gently between Harry's shoulders.

Snape stalked into the boys' dorms and was back a moment later, carrying Harry's dressing gown. "I see no sign of any 'booby-trapping'. When you've finished with your first aid, take your cousin off to the Hospital Wing. Presumably the next time he tries to seek attention, he'll find a way that's a little less painful." He turned and clapped his hands sharply. "The rest of you, off to breakfast. There's nothing to see here, we don't want to encourage him by gawking at him." He shooed the other Slytherins away.

"Somebody probably cleaned it up already," said Pugsley. "Malfoy and his cronies were still in there when I came out."

"Great. So there's no way to prove anything. This was probably Malfoy, but we can't prove anything."

"And if we retaliate without proof ..."

"We're in detention until Christmas."

They worked in silence until they were ready to put the boil curing potion on. Harry hadn't made a sound through the entire ordeal, despite the fact that several boils had broken open and the whole thing must have been agonising.

"Some job of watching his back I did," said Pugsley, morosely.

"S'ok," mumbled Harry. "I didn' check las' nigh' either."

"It's not ok," said Pugsley. "Uncle Fester wouldn't let anybody get at Dad's back."

"Don' worry. We'll geddem."

"Right," said Wednesday, with a determined expression on her face. "We'll find out who did this. And when we do ..."

Pugsley nodded grimly. "This means war."

## Family Values The Art of War - Gathering Allies

**Disclaimer** : It seems I completely forgot to put a disclaimer in the last chapter. Oh, well. I didn't own Harry Potter or The Addams Family or The Wizard of Oz then, and I don't now. Maybe if I ask Santa really nicely this year.

**A/N** : This chapter is a bit late because a reviewer reminded me of something that I should have remembered on my own and caused me to rewrite the whole darn thing. Thanks, RedPat! Also I had to finish a very long beta job which I had let hang through most of November. Thanks for your forbearance, Jeconais!

### Chapter 12: The Art of War – Gathering Allies

Harry spent Saturday lying face down in the Hospital Wing, with Wednesday and Madam Pomfrey periodically dabbing his back with potion where it hurt the worst. Neville Longbottom had been kept overnight, and was being released just as Harry came in. He looked stricken when Wednesday explained to Madam Pomfrey what had happened, and apologized profusely despite Harry's muttered assurances that it wasn't his fault.

As soon as Madam Pomfrey had established Harry in a bed and put another coat of the boil-removing potion on him, she picked up a green folder with his name on it and noted the circumstances of his visit, the diagnosis, and prognosis. As soon as she closed the folder, a quill in a distant tower of the castle sprang into action, writing out a terse note on a piece of parchment. An owl, slightly grumpy at being needed early in the morning, swooped down to pick it up and winged off.

By noon, the Addams family had arrived at Hogwarts.

Professor Dumbledore was rather annoyed at receiving a Floo call from Morticia Addams just before luncheon on a Saturday, and even more annoyed when he realized why she was calling. How on earth had the blasted boy managed to get himself sent to the Hospital Wing on his first weekend at school? According to that damned contract the Addams woman had made him sign, he had to allow a visit. What he hadn't expected was that the woman, her husband, his brother, and the butler would come spinning through the Floo into his office. The only saving grace was that the cat-eating old woman wasn't there.

"A pleasure to see you again, Mrs Addams," he said as she stepped, quite unruffled and unsmirched, from his fireplace. "I regret that it must happen under these...."

"We regret it as well," she said coolly. "The circumstances will tell us whether anyone else will regret it. Please take us to the Hospital Wing, Headmaster."

Dumbledore led them by the fastest route to the Hospital Wing rather than the least travelled, with the result that quite a few people, students, portraits and staff included, saw him leading the odd procession through Hogwarts' halls, and wild rumours began to spread immediately.

Madam Pomfrey was duly introduced to the family; somewhat flustered, she led them into the day ward, where Harry was still lying in bed with a sheet floating in the air over him for modesty. Wednesday was sitting in a chair next to his bed, reading to him, and she saw them enter the room first. "Mom! Harry, Mom and Dad are here! And Uncle Fester! And even Lurch!"

"Oh, great," he groaned. "I really always wanted them to see me naked and all covered in boils."

"But they're such *interesting* boils," she said as her parents reached the bed.

"Boils? Someone mention boils?" said her Uncle, with an almost unseemly relish.

"Look!" said Wednesday, pulling back the sheet.

Harry pulled a pillow over his head. "C'mon, Wednesday, what part of *naked* did you not understand?"

"Wow!" said the bald man, inspecting Harry's back carefully. "Those are classic!"

The boils were truly spectacular. Many of them had burst and were suppurating, and the skin in between them was raw and inflamed. A layer of boil-curing potion lay over everything. The inflamed area ran from the nape of Harry's neck, down over his shoulders, back and buttocks, to the tops of his thighs.

Dumbledore blanched. He had been hoping to discover that Harry had been injured in some schoolboy scuffle or an understandable accident. Those things happened. But this – *this* was far beyond anything he had expected. "What happened, Poppy? Some kind of Potions accident?"

"Oh, the first one was an accident, Headmaster," she said as she drew the sheet back up to cover the boy.

*First one?* This was getting worse and worse.

“But this was no accident. This was intentional.”

“A boy named Longbottom made a potion wrong in class and gave himself boils with it,” said Wednesday. “Then last night someone put the potion in Harry’s bed. Pugsley found him on the sofa in the Common Room this morning.”

“So someone saved a bit of the potion to prank Harry?” asked Dumbledore, putting the pieces together.

Madam Pomfrey huffed in annoyance. “This was no *prank*, Headmaster. This was an assault. It would have taken far more than *a bit* of the potion to do this. Miss Addams tells me Professor Snape announced to the whole class the error that Mr Longbottom made to produce this result. Anyone could have reproduced it. And there are several relatively simple charms that could have hidden it until Mr Potter lay down in his bed.”

“How long will it take to heal this?” asked Mrs Addams. “And will there be any long-term effects?”

“He’ll be out of here by tomorrow morning,” said Madam Pomfrey. “The boils themselves will be gone by dinnertime. It wouldn’t have taken this long to heal them if getting help hadn’t been delayed. Once the boils are gone, another potion will heal the burns overnight. He won’t even have a scar to remind him of this unfortunate experience.”

“Not even one?” asked Fester Addams. “Pity.”

“One scar’s enough, Uncle Fester,” said Harry, finally emerging from under his pillow.

“And he’ll be back in the dorms with the very students who did this? I want to talk to their head of house,” said Gomez Addams. “And we’re going to leave a little guard for the boys.”

“Really, I’m sure there’s no need –” said Dumbledore.

“You may be sure, but I’m far from it. It’s either that or we take them back to Salem,” said Mrs Addams.

“I will remind you, Madam, of the contract we signed....”

“... Which requires that you take reasonable steps to ensure the children’s safety while they’re in your care,” she said in an icy tone. “You’ve had them for less than a week, and this happens. We will leave a guard until and unless we are assured that this won’t happen again, or else hold you in breach of the contract and remove the children. All three of them.”

They had him there. “Who did you have in mind?” Dumbledore said uneasily, imagining the difficulties of having an adult Addams – or worse, the butler – in his castle day in and day out.

“Let’s get his Head of House up here, and all will be revealed,” said Mr Addams.

There was nothing for it; Snape was duly summoned, and Dumbledore wondered just when he had lost control of the entire situation.

Snape arrived shortly, accompanied, to his apparent annoyance, by Professor Lupin, who he had encountered on the way up.

“Gomez! Morticia! How nice to see you again,” said Lupin, as if it had been far longer than two weeks since he had seen them. “I heard a rumour that some vampires were chasing the Headmaster through the school, and I knew it could only be you.”

“We came as soon as we had notice that Harry was in the infirmary,” said Morticia. “I was surprised that you hadn’t heard.”

“I’m not completely plugged into the gossip network yet,” said Lupin, shrugging. “So what happened?”

Introductions were performed, explanations were made, and Harry’s back was displayed again, although this time the sheet was only pulled down to his waist. Lupin was horrified, Snape maintained a dispassionate demeanour.

“Mr Snape, do you have any idea who might have done this?” asked Mr Addams.

“I haven’t inquired,” said Snape coolly.

“Why on earth not?” asked Lupin.

“As you are well aware, Lupin, any pranks done to any Slytherin routinely go uninvestigated and unpunished. It was so twenty years ago, it is so now. Why should I bother when nothing will be done?” He looked down at Harry’s inflamed shoulders again. “He is Slytherin. He must learn, as all of us have, what it is to be Slytherin.”

“This was not a prank, Snape. This was an attack,” Lupin said, inadvertently echoing Madam Pomfrey’s earlier comment.

“I could list a series of personal attacks over the course of seven years that went unanswered, Lupin. Culminating with attempted murder on my own person. I fail to see the difference.”

Snape and Lupin were now glaring at each other, ignoring everyone else in the room.

“Gentlemen!” said Dumbledore, sharply clapping his hands together to attract their attention. “May I remind you that we are not here to discuss you. Either of you. Severus, regardless of what happened or did not happen twenty years ago, we must deal with this now.”

“Of course. He is a Potter, therefore something must be done.”

“Professor Snape,” said Mrs Addams in an ice cold tone, “there is one thing you forget. Harry’s name may be Potter. But he is, and has been raised as, an Addams. You don’t know what that means now, but I assure you, you will shortly. He will not take this lightly.”

“Damn straight I won’t!”

“Language, Mr Potter,” said Madam Pomfrey absently.

“Snape,” put in Mr Addams again, “you still haven’t answered my question. I didn’t ask if you had inquired, I asked if you had any idea who did this.”

“Idea? Oh, yes, I have ideas. Potter has enemies, you know. There were many who felt themselves hard done by when their Lord and Master disappeared, apparently at Potter’s hand, ten years ago. Some of those people have children in school now, who have grown up hearing stories about the power that could have been theirs if it wasn’t for Potter. And many of those children are in Slytherin. If we go along with the Sorting Hat’s recommendation of Slytherin for Potter, we must accept the consequences.”

“Very well,” said Mrs Addams. “As long as that means you accept *all* the consequences. One consequence is protection. Harry must be able to study and sleep without fear of being attacked. Like it or not, those most likely to have perpetrated this attack are those who will be sharing a room with him for the next seven years. Therefore, we will be providing protection of our own. Someone to watch over both of the boys and their belongings to prevent tampering, to defend them, and to summon help if it is necessary.”

She snapped her fingers sharply, and a hand – an *extra* hand – popped out of the big butler’s jacket pocket. It waved its fingers in greeting and leaped – Dumbledore wasn’t sure how, but it did – onto Harry’s bedside table. Madam Pomfrey screamed and fainted. Lupin caught her and laid her down in the next bed over. Both Dumbledore and Snape were aghast.

Harry and Wednesday appeared delighted. “Thing!” the boy said happily. “How ya doin’?” The hand flipped up on its wrist and waved again, then rapidly made a series of complex signs with its fingers. “Yeah, isn’t it great? Wait till you see our Common Room! It’s got a window into the lake!”

“What? What on Earth is that ... that thing?” asked Dumbledore, pointing at the hand.

“Ah. I forgot you hadn’t met before. Headmaster, this is Thing. Thing, Headmaster Dumbledore.”

The hand leapt off the table and firmly grasped Dumbledore’s hand in a parody of a handshake. Dumbledore shook it off frantically and sent it flying. It hit the screen on the far side of Harry’s bed and tumbled to the ground. A moment later it crawled out from underneath the bed, walking on its finger tips, none the worse for wear. It turned towards Snape, almost as if it were looking hopefully at him.

“Don’t even think it,” the dour man snapped.

The hand flipped and snapped its fingers in a disappointed fashion.

Wednesday picked it up, cuddling it in her arms. “Don’t worry, Thing. We’ll play with you when we’re alone, okay?”

Thing flashed an ‘okay’ hand gesture at her.

“Thing is one of our most trusted family members,” said Mrs Addams. “As for what he is, exactly, we’re not sure. We found him on our doorstep one winter morning, shivering and holding a business card that said ‘Will Work for Gloves.’ We took him in, of course, and he’s been with us ever since.”

Dumbledore was still shaking. “I will not allow that ... that ... whatever it is ... in my school! It could be a necromantic construct! A Dark creature!”

“I assure you, Professor, Thing is completely harmless – to anyone who means no harm. He is incredibly hard to damage, by either physical or magical means. He does not eat nor sleep. You won’t need to provide him with a room; as you can see, he takes up very little space. All he’ll need is a place to keep his gloves.”

“Gloves?”

“If he goes outdoors in the winter, he will need to wear a glove. This is Scotland, is it not?”

“He can use a corner of my sock drawer,” volunteered Harry.

“There, see? It’s all taken care of. If you want, you claim that Thing is a valet or something of the sort – he’ll help the boys out with things, anyway,” said Mr Addams. He put his arm around Snape’s shoulders and drew him aside in a confidential fashion, but completely neglected to lower his voice, so that all in the room could hear him. “Now, then, Snape, I know you may not be able to prove anything about who did this. You did say you had ideas. I’m sure you could, perhaps, pass the word along to some of those people you have ideas about that it would be an excellent idea for them to admit it and apologize. The word will get around to the correct individuals, I’m sure.”

“You don’t know much about Slytherins if you think anyone will ever apologize, Mr Addams.”

“Oh, I sort of figured that. But you don’t know much about Addamses if you think this will go unanswered, one way or another. I’m just trying to save you a little trouble, but if you’re not interested ...” He shrugged and turned briskly from Snape to Dumbledore, leaving Snape to fume at the abrupt dismissal. “Now then, Headmaster, while my wife is visiting with Harry, I’d like to talk to you about a little legal matter that’s come to my attention. You are involved with the Wizengamot, I believe ...”

The first week set the pattern for the weeks that followed. Except for the ‘spending the weekend in the Hospital Wing’ part, anyway. The majority of classes were ridiculously easy for the American-raised trio. Potions was the only one in which they did not get good grades, no matter how much work they put in. All three of the trio took to filling extra vials of their potions and sending them off to Grandmama for verification of their quality, since Snape kept marking points off for them. Persephone was very happy to stretch her wings and make multiple trips.

The three feet of parchment on why unknown substances shouldn’t be brought into the potions class room were duly produced, accompanied by five or six feet of supplementary explanations that the substances in question weren’t unknown, analyses of the inks and paper, and citations of scholarly journals in which said analyses had previously appeared, just in case the learned Professor had missed them in his reading. The three of them received another detention for ‘cheek’, and were informed that they were to use quills, parchment, and traditionally approved inks in the future. (In contrast, Professor Lupin encouraged them to use whatever pens and notebooks they liked, and the Muggle Studies teacher asked them to demonstrate for the upper-year classes.)

The presence of Thing in the first years’ dorm was disquieting at first, and all of the other boys stayed well away from the hand when he was going about his duties: making Harry and Pugsley’s beds, laying out clothes and pyjamas, and organizing their books and school supplies for them in the morning. Soon, however, the Slytherins got used to Thing and accepted him as an odd sort of a personal servant; Malfoy even wrote home to request that his own house elf be sent to him at Hogwarts, because if a Potter could have a servant, surely a Malfoy could have one as well. Whatever response he received from home, it was not to his liking, and he spent the next several days glaring at Thing or at Harry, whichever was available.

Any real discomfort with Thing among the Slytherins was dispelled when Harry accidentally knocked a glass vial off the edge of his worktable in Potions class. Thing, who had taken to riding quietly in Harry’s book bag, leapt out and caught it in midair, then jumped up onto Harry’s chair to present him with the vial. Dean Thomas, one of the Gryffindor boys, on seeing Thing, gave a positively girlish shriek and fled the classroom, bumping into several other people and knocking over a cauldron (fortunately holding nothing but water) in the process. Snape took ten points from Gryffindor, and Thing (and by extension Harry) became an instant favourite with the Slytherins. Snape then gave Harry a detention and informed him that he was not to bring Thing to Potions class any more. Harry agreed, and from then on, Thing rode in Pugsley’s school bag.

Whether Professor Snape ever extended a warning to the other Slytherins or not was unknown; certainly no one ever admitted to putting the boil-causing agent in Harry’s bed, at least not in Harry or Pugsley’s hearing, but Malfoy did take an unholy glee in the whole incident, which Harry considered good circumstantial evidence. There were several more ‘pranking’ attempts on both Harry and Pugsley, but both boys were far too wary now to let anyone get in back of them. Professor Lupin taught them some simple alarm charms to put on their beds, and both boys finally mastered the spell to detect magical traps. “Nothing like having some incentive,” Harry grumbled.

Harry took to layering simple hexes with his alarms, and one morning woke to find that Crabbe was utterly bald. Crabbe blamed Harry, because the hex had gone off when he tried to open Harry’s bed curtains. Harry claimed, quite logically, that nobody would ever have known the hex was there unless they were trying to do something they shouldn’t. Professor Snape decreed that Crabbe was punished enough by the hex, which meant his hair would have to grow back in normally, and that Harry would have detention because he used a hex which would expose a member of his own house to ridicule outside the house.

Two nights later, everyone in the dorm was awakened by Goyle rolling on the floor, laughing hysterically, until Malfoy rather grumpily broke the spell. Though no lasting damage was done, Goyle reported the occurrence to Professor Snape, who gave Harry a detention. Pugsley came forward to say that it was a hex on his bed curtains that Goyle had triggered. Snape gave him a detention and let Harry’s stand for giving him the idea.

“Do you detect a pattern here?” asked Pugsley as they polished awards in the trophy room.

“I’ll say. We might as well make a standing appointment with Mr Filch,” said Harry. “I figure by the end of seven years, we’ll have polished everything in the castle.”

“Either that, or we’ll have polished these enough that the words don’t show any more,” said Pugsley, starting on a silver plaque. “Hey, look at this. ‘Awarded for special services to the school to Tom Marvolo Riddle, May 1943’. Think that’s the same Riddle that built our house?”

“Maybe. Same family, anyway. Remember that big tombstone in the middle of the graveyard? The one Wednesday took the rubbing from, where everybody died the same day? That was a Thomas Sr. and his wife and a Thomas Junior, but I don’t remember the middle initial. Pretty sure it wasn’t M, though. That was in 1944. The year after he got this award. If this Tom was related, it might explain the ritual thing we found. Maybe he was Muggle-born, and using that room for practice.”

“He set up something that backfired and killed everybody?” Pugsley was excited; this was better than Wednesday’s ‘mad aunt’.

“Remus said that ritual was never actually started. So it must have been something else – something he was going to do, but never got the chance. That was at the end of World War II – and they were dealing with Grindelwald in Europe, weren’t they? Perhaps it was connected with that. I can look it up in *Hogwarts: A History* when we get back to our room.”

But although *Hogwarts: A History* had a footnote duly recording the special award to Tom Riddle at the end of his fifth year, and also noted that he was a Slytherin Prefect in fifth and sixth years and Head Boy in his seventh, it completely failed to indicate what the special award was for. Harry, Pugsley and Wednesday speculated what it all might mean, dreaming up a complex plot in which agents of the mad Austrian wizard Grindelwald attempted to assassinate Albus Dumbledore and were foiled by the efforts of a single wily and heroic Slytherin, and the boy’s parents were later killed in revenge and the boy himself hidden away in safety. They also considered the role, if any, of the wizards who lived in the little shack in the woods, and what connection the ring might have had to it all, but in the end, it was all guesswork. It was an excellent way of passing the time while polishing things, though.



Malfoy talked a lot, but never did anything that could be traced to him directly. After listening to Malfoy describe, at length, how he was going to run Harry out of the school, Harry wrote home to request that something be sent to him. The next day, Persephone flew in at the morning mail call with a small package. “Oh good, it’s here,” he said, stripping off the wrapping. “Hey, Malfoy, catch!” he said, tossing a paperback book several places down.

Malfoy caught it clumsily. “Machiavelli? What’s this, Potter?”

“I thought it might be helpful if you read it. I’m afraid it’s the Italian version, but you’ve had a proper education, right?”

“Er, right. Of course. Why are you giving it to me, though?”

Harry let off with a carefully rehearsed stream of Italian. He was really only beginning to study the language, but had learned one sentence by heart for just this occasion.

Malfoy was obviously clueless, but Blaise Zabini laughed so hard he almost fell off his seat.

“What? What did he say?”

“He said ... he said ‘I don’t want to have a battle of wits with an unarmed person.’”

Malfoy flushed an angry red and threw the book back at Harry before storming out of the room, followed by Crabbe and Goyle.

Several of the upper-year Slytherins watched him go, and looked thoughtfully at Harry, who picked up the book and began reading it with every evidence of enjoyment.

The by-play also attracted the attention of Hermione, who was sitting at the Ravenclaw table next to the Slytherins. “Harry, can you really read that?”

“Well, I read it in English first, but yeah, I can follow the Italian. I’m working on it to improve my vocabulary. Why?”

“We have a language club,” she said, gesturing at the Ravenclaw table. I was thinking that you could join us for practice. I’m sure somebody speaks Italian.”

“Would that be okay with the rest of your house? You know, me being an evil Slytherin and all?”

“As long as you promise not to hex anybody.”

“Only if someone hexes me first,” he promised solemnly. “What languages does this club of yours cover?”

“Anything anybody knows. We share. I’ve only been to one meeting so far, of course, but I think we’ve got most of the European ones covered. Padma’s going to teach us some Hindi, and between Cho Chang and Su Li, we’ve got three different dialects of Chinese.”

“Cool. Can Pugsley and Wednesday join, too? We all read and write Latin and Greek, and we speak French and German and some Russian. I’m doing Italian and Swahili. Wednesday knows Spanish and some Chinese – Cantonese, I think – and Pugsley learned Portuguese and a little bit of Cherokee.”

“Cherokee? Really?” Her eyes went round.

“Yeah. It’s great for casting spells if you don’t want the other person to know what you’re saying,” said Pugsley.

“Can anybody join this club of yours?” asked Blaise.

“I don’t see why not. So far the club is Ravenclaws and a few Hufflepuffs. The Gryffindors and Slytherins don’t seem to join things much. But I’m sure you’d be welcome. We meet on Saturday afternoons in the lecture room by the library. May I tell the others who to expect?”

“Beg pardon. Blaise Zabini,” he said, holding out his hand. “Italian, French, German, Rumanian and Arabic. Plus Latin and Greek.”

“Hermione Granger,” she said, shaking his hand. “That’s an impressive list. I only speak French ... and English, of course.”

“We moved around a lot,” the black boy said. “English was actually my third language. Italian was my first. Your pronunciation on that was very good, Potter.”

“Thanks. Call me Harry, please. ‘Potter’ makes me think Professor Snape is talking to me. I practiced that a lot, just in case Malfoy could speak Italian after all. But he didn’t look the type to be a polyglot.”

“He isn’t. You’ll find that a lot here. Either people know a bunch of languages or they only know one. Except for Latin, of course. All the pure-blooded types know Latin.”

“Great for spells, not so good for ordering a hamburger,” said Harry, and in their laughter, the walls between the houses started to weaken.

Flying lessons were held with the Gryffindors towards the end of September. For once, Harry didn’t have to worry about Malfoy. The blond boy had

made one smart comment about the Americans' presumed lack of experience on brooms, only to find out that both Harry and Pugsley had played Junior Quodpot, which differed only from regular Quodpot in that the ball made a loud ringing noise instead of exploding, and Wednesday had taken third place in their year for the Steeplechase (with real steeples). They also weren't impressed with Malfoy's stories about being chased by helicopters, pointing out that helicopters were so noisy any idiot could hear them from a mile off, and even Grandmama on a broom could get away from one.

Malfoy picked Neville Longbottom, Pugsley's Potions partner, as his target of the week. The boy was obviously nervous about flying lessons, and had made the mistake of telling Pugsley, in Malfoy's hearing, that his grandmother had never let him ride one of the family brooms, being afraid that he would fall off. Malfoy homed in on the weakness, making sure that Longbottom overheard him telling Crabbe and/or Goyle about horrible broom accidents that had happened to people of his acquaintance, then loudly 'reassuring' Longbottom that he didn't have to worry at all, because of course he would never get off the ground. Pugsley tried to give the other boy some tips, but by the time the first lesson came around, Longbottom was frankly terrified.

The result was predictable, and the class ended early as Longbottom was taken off to the Hospital Wing to nurse a broken arm, while Malfoy cackled maliciously. Abruptly, he ran to the spot where Longbottom had fallen, and picked up something shiny from the grass. "Look, it's that thing of Longbottom's. Wonder what he'll give to get it back?"

Harry sighed. He hated bullies, and Malfoy seemed cut from the same cloth as Neil back in grade school. "Give that to me, Malfoy. Pugsley will give it back to Longbottom."

"Why should I give it to you? Why don't I just leave it somewhere so he can find it ... say, on the roof!" He jumped onto his broom and took off.

"Great," muttered Harry under his breath as he kicked his own broom into the air. Pugsley and Wednesday followed right behind him. The three of them rapidly surrounded Malfoy. "Give me that, Malfoy! It doesn't belong to you!"

"You want it? Here, you can have it – if you can catch it!" Malfoy said, throwing the sparkling bauble as hard as he could.

Without thinking about it, Harry veered up and after it, catching it just before it smashed against the side of the castle, and barely managing to avoid smashing into the castle himself. Malfoy had been forced to the ground by Pugsley and Wednesday, with the result that Harry, returning to the group, was the only one in the air when an irate Professor McGonagall came charging out of the castle.

"Mister Potter! Just what do you think you were doing, making such an unseemly display?"

"Oh, Professor, just the person I wanted to see!" Harry said brightly, interrupting her rant before she got properly warmed up. "Here, give this to Longbottom, would you?" He passed the small shining sphere over to her. "It fell out of his pocket and, er, someone was playing with it, but I didn't think he'd want it to be smashed."

"That's ... very admirable, Mr. Potter. Thank you. Three points to Slytherin. Now get back to your class and stay on the ground until Madam Hooch comes back!" She turned and stormed back into the castle.

Harry ran back to the others. The Gryffindors were grumbling that Harry hadn't been punished for flying, and tried to fink on him when Madam Hooch came back, but once the explanation had been made, he got off with a single detention, to be spent doing maintenance on the school's fleet of elderly brooms. Malfoy tried to laugh at him, only to be turned on by the rest of the Slytherins, who felt that the points Harry had earned for the House outweighed Malfoy's attempted (but failed) put-down of a Gryffindor on some unspoken social scale.

The rest of the class was uneventful. Madam Hooch got everyone in the air and led them on several test flights around the Great Lawn (with Harry quacking quietly to himself on seeing the string of students following her like baby ducklings). Then she put them through harder and harder aerobatics and speed tests, grounding the students one by one as they reached their level of incompetence, until only Harry and Wednesday were in the air.

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Professor McGonagall, on seeing Professor Snape at the dinner table, snapped, "You have no idea what you've lucked into, Severus. But I want you to know Gryffindor won't be letting you walk away with the Cup. We're going to fight you every inch of the way."

Snape blinked, caught totally off guard by the unexpected comment. "Cup? Which Cup? What *are* you talking about, Minerva?"

"She's probably talking about the little display Potter put on during flying class," said Madam Hooch, leaning around Professor Quirrell to speak to Snape. "While I was gone, taking a student to the Hospital Wing, there was a little altercation of some sort among your snakes, which resulted in several of them taking to the air. One of them threw something that Potter decided to catch – which he did after performing a steep climb, steeper dive and rapid pullout, with a turn and roll to avoid being flattened against the side of the castle. The Weasley boy knows his Quidditch moves; I overheard him saying it was an almost perfect Wronski Feint, except for the castle being in the way."

"A Gryffindor saying something good about a Slytherin? I fear the world is coming to an end."

"Quidditch comes before Houses sometimes, Severus, especially with boys that age. Although I think if you asked him, he'd deny it. I tested all of the students to find out what they needed to learn. Both Potter and that cousin of his passed everything I threw at them. Get them up to speed on Quidditch rules this year, and next year they'll be unstoppable."

"Which cousin?" asked Snape.

"The girl. Wednesday. Boy's not bad either, he'll be right up there with them by next year."

McGonagall snorted. “Maybe then you’ll have a team that won’t have to cheat to win,” she said.

Snape ignored the calumny, mainly because he knew it was true. Gryffindor had talented players who took insane chances, Ravenclaw a fancy playbook and precision timing, Hufflepuff sheer dogged determination and unparalleled teamwork. That left aggression and dirty tricks for the Slytherins, and they had served the team well for the past several years. But he had to admit, it would be nice to know they’d won – just once – because they were really better than the other team. He supposed he shouldn’t have been surprised about Potter; he took after his blasted father in most other things, why not this? He drummed his fingers on the table. He hated to do anything that might further expand the boy’s already over-large ego, but there was House loyalty to consider. And the Quidditch team was mostly composed of older students; they’d be leaving school in a year or two and he’d need replacements anyway. The thought of James Potter rolling in his grave from having his son be on the Slytherin Quidditch team decided him. The boy’s next detention (and he was sure there would be one, since he had Potter for Potions the next day) would be very different indeed from the last.

“Thank you, Rolanda,” he said to Hooch. “I’ll have Flint take a look at them on Saturday.”

“If you’ve q-q-quite finished your conversation, I’d l-like to eat n-now,” stuttered Quirrell, who had pushed back from his place to allow Snape and Hooch to talk across him.

“Sorry, Quirinius,” said Hooch.

Snape muttered something that might have been an apology, but then snapped, “For Merlin’s sake, man, wash that turban. It reeks of garlic. I can’t smell my own food!”

“K-keeps vampires aw-way,” said Quirrell.

“There aren’t any vampires within miles of Hogwarts!”

“W-works, d-doesn’t it?”

Snape groaned at having been caught by that old chestnut, and turned to his dinner, with dreams of the Quidditch Cup dancing in his head.

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The next day, during free study time in the Great Hall, Harry overheard Pugsley trying to reassure a despondent Longbottom.

“I’ll never be a proper wizard,” the pudgy Gryffindor moaned to Pugsley. “Even with you helping in Potions, I’m only just passing, and I’m sure that’s only because Snape’s too busy trying to catch your cousin out at something to really pay attention to me. I’m no good at spells, and now I can’t stay on a broom. The other Gryffindors won’t even talk to me because I’m an embarrassment. Maybe Malfoy’s right, and I won’t even last till Christmas, and Gran will make me go live with the Muggles.”

“Malfoy hasn’t been right about anything so far,” said Harry, moving over to sit next to them. “I bet he’s not right about you, either.” The Gryffindor’s eyes flickered upwards toward Harry’s scar, something Harry was beginning to find quite annoying. “Look down here, Longbottom, that doesn’t talk.” The other boy at least had the grace to look abashed as he met Harry’s gaze. “You’ve got Pugsley working with you on Potions, so you’re bound to get better there. Give it a little time. We don’t share any other classes, but you’re probably covering the same things we are, so we could practice together. And I could help you with the flying.”

“Really?” There was a trace of hope in Longbottom’s voice.

“Really,” said Pugsley. “Harry’s a good coach. I had a horrible list to port when I started flying, and he helped me fly straight. He’s going to coach our friend Hermione from Ravenclaw, too. She’s having the same trouble as you.”

Harry nodded in confirmation, although this was the first he’d heard of it.

“Why would you want to do that for me, though?”

Harry shrugged. “Our families have been allied for a long time, so I hear. Allies do things for each other.”

Neville looked blank.

“Diagon Alley? The Trust?” Harry asked.

Still no recognition.

“Never mind for now, then, but ask your grandmother some time. I think my uncle’s already met with her about stuff. You should know about it too. Anyway, regardless of being in separate houses, we’re both on the same side.” He stuck out his hand. “And maybe someday you can do me a favour, and we’ll be even. Okay?”

The pudgy boy grinned and took his extended hand. “Okay.”

“Great. Now the first thing is that you have to do is convince the broom that you’re the boss ...”

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Early Saturday morning, Harry, Wednesday and Pugsley went out to the Quidditch pitch to serve their “detention” – for the crime of breathing too

loudly in class – with Marcus Flint, the Slytherin Quidditch captain, and Terence Higgs, the Seeker. It was barely past dawn, and mist still lay across the pitch. Harry stood quite still and tried not to look intimidated as the two older boys walked around him, looking him up and down from every angle. “He’s got a good build,” commented Flint. “Light, speedy. Just right for a Seeker. Chaser, maybe.”

“Couple years, anyway. We’ll have to see if he gets all tall and weedy,” said Higgs, who was on the short and slim side himself, despite being a seventh year. “The girl looks good, too,” he said, looking appraisingly at Wednesday.

“Have to see how she develops, though. Not gonna be good if she gets all busty,” said Flint.

“Haven’t been any girls on the team in ages. Maybe time to try one again. Seeker?”

“Or Chaser. We’ll try them out for both.”

Harry and Wednesday exchanged glances and Harry smiled ruefully, wondering if the older boys were going to look at their teeth next. Their assessments were impersonal and frank, making Harry feel as if he were a piece of Quidditch equipment they were evaluating.

Flint reached out and squeezed Pugsley’s bicep, to which Pugsley responded by slapping his hand away. “Ooh, this one’s got a temper on him,” said Flint, grinning at Higgs. “A little muscle, too. Might make a good Beater. We won’t really need one for a couple of years, but that’ll give him some time to build himself up.”

“Let’s get ‘em on brooms and see if Hooch was right,” said Flint. Both of the older boys had brought their own brooms, and Flint had borrowed a third one from somebody else. All were vast improvements over the beaten-up Shooting Stars the school provided. Harry leapt into the air on Higgs’s broom, and Wednesday and Pugsley were right behind him on the others. “Okay, we want three laps around the pitch, slalom between the goalposts at each end on each lap, then touchdown back here. Go!”

The three cousins were off like a shot. Harry finished the course first, but he wasn’t sure if that was because of the broom he was riding, a brand-new Comet, which might have been a little faster than the other two.

“Not bad,” said Flint. “Any of you ever play Quidditch before?”

“Nope. Pugs and I played Quodpot, which is kind of like it. Except the ball explodes,” explained Harry.

“Okay, we’ll explain it, then,” said Flint, and he launched into an exhaustive explanation of the rules – “because you can’t break the rules until you know what they are,” he said. “Let’s try you two for Chaser first.” He tossed a Quaffle at the cousins and had Harry and Wednesday pass it between them while flying around the pitch, then take a few shots at the goal hoops with himself acting as Keeper. “Not bad,” he said when they grounded. “You’ll both need a little more muscle for Chaser, but we’ll put that on you. Terry, try that Seeker practice you do.”

Higgs had a small bucket with him, which proved to contain about a dozen old golf balls. “If we let the Snitch go for real, it could take an hour or more to catch. These will do as well, and we can get more tries in. I’ll throw, you catch. Be careful you get these, now, I don’t want to lose ‘em. I nicked ‘em from the Gryffies – don’t know where they got ‘em, but they’re good for practice.”

Harry laughed. “You want some new ones? We can get some sent from home by owl. Uncle Gomez is a golfing fiend – loses a couple dozen balls a day. I’m sure he wouldn’t mind sending us some.”

“That’d be great!” said Higgs. “But don’t think you can bribe your way onto the team with just some practice balls.”

“Oh, no, I’m sure it’s much more expensive than that,” said Harry, seriously.

Higgs looked at him askance, not quite sure if he was being made fun of or not. “Up in the air, babbies,” he said, roughly. He started throwing the golf balls in every direction, instructing Harry and Wednesday to catch as many of them as possible. After a few minutes, he called Wednesday down. “Okay, I’ve seen enough from you. You’ve missed more than you’ve caught, but you did better with the Quaffle. Maybe with enough practice, you could make a decent Chaser. Potter, let’s try some more of these,” he said, chucking another series of golf balls into the air.

Now that he didn’t have to worry about dodging Wednesday, Harry zipped about and caught all of them. Flint whistled. “Hooch was right. You’re a natural. Okay, I’m going to talk to the Professor about getting you on the team as reserve. We’ll have to see about getting you a broom, though.”

“Oh, I’ve got one at home. I just couldn’t bring it because of that rule.”

“What model?”

“It’s a Blue Streak. An American model,” he added helpfully.

Flint nodded. “Okay, we’ll get permission for you to use it. Addams, tough luck. Better next year, maybe. Get some practice in and you might have a shot. While we’re out here, let’s check both of you boys as Beaters. Addams, up!” Wednesday switched with Pugsley, and Flint tossed bats to both boys before freeing one of the Bludgers, which were almost quivering with their eagerness to be free of the Quidditch chest.

As soon as Flint released the Bludger, it shot into the air and came rocketing back, making a bee-line for Pugsley, who bashed it with his bat. “Not a bad arm,” Flint murmured.

Then the ball came back again, aiming at Harry this time. He gave it a bash and it swooped out, in a much shorter arc than Pugsley had managed, then came barrelling back at him. “Whoa!” Another bash, another arc, and it was back at him again.

Flint was laughing uproariously. “I think it likes you, Potter!”

“Dodge it!” yelled Pugsley.

Harry took off at high speed, and the Bludger followed him. It zipped around and made a try for his head, and he swung the bat but the Bludger swerved at the last minute and hit his hand. The bat fell from his nerveless fingers and landed on the grass of the pitch, while Harry and the Bludger commenced a wild flight around the pitch. Higher and higher Harry climbed; he looped and swooped, spiralled, zigzagged, and rolled.

Pugsley hefted his bat and took off after Harry. He intercepted the boy and the attacking ball in midfield, and bashed the Bludger toward the stands. It swerved around and came back at them, trying to get at Harry from the other side.

Wednesday was hopping up and down frantically. “Flint! Go after them!”

“Huh? Oh!” Flint belatedly realized there was a real problem. He swooped down and grabbed the other bat where Harry had dropped it, and went after the two younger boys. Between the two of them, and with a lot of fancy flying on Harry’s part, they kept him from being any further damaged, but they would eventually tire and the Bludger wouldn’t. Worse, it was beginning to learn how to dodge around Flint and Pugsley. Only the fact that Harry could change direction faster than it could, and could roll and manage to fly hanging upside down from his broom for brief periods, kept it away from him. “Higgs!” Flint yelled. “Go up to the castle! Get help!”

Before Higgs even reached the exit from the pitch, a sizzling curse shot through the air and impacted on the Bludger. All three of the boys ducked instinctively as the wood and iron ball disintegrated in a shower of splinters and rust. A tall, dark figure emerged from the shadows under the stands as the boys slowly descended to the grass and Wednesday ran out to meet them.

“Professor!” Flint gasped in relief. “The Bludger ... it just went mad ...”

“I know. I saw,” said Professor Snape. “How’s the hand?” He bent and picked up a splinter and inspected it closely.

Harry wiggled his fingers. “Nothing broken. It just grazed me.”

“Good. I’d hate to have to explain to your relatives why you were in the Hospital Wing again,” Snape said. He tossed the splinter away. “A simple enough Tracking Charm, but on a Bludger the effects can be lethal. You have worse enemies than I thought, Potter.”

“Not my roommates again?” asked Harry.

“Not this time. The Quidditch equipment is professionally charmed to prevent people from putting unauthorised spells on the balls. No student would have the strength to break it, and few adults would have the skill. Whoever did this meant business.”

“Are you going to tell my Aunt and Uncle?”

“I’ll tell the Headmaster. It’s his job to tell them.”

“Oh. He’s not going to tell them, then. I’d like you to, please.”

“Why don’t you think he’d tell?”

“He won’t tell because he wants me here for some reason. He won’t want me to be pulled out of the school, which he thinks might happen if Aunt Morticia is displeased with him. I think they should know. We’ll have to work out what to do about it, after all.”

“You sound like a Gryffindor now. Charging in to face who knows what?”

“I have a very good idea of what,” said Harry darkly, keeping his public face on despite his desire to scream in frustration and grind the splinters of the Bludger into dust. “And I’m not charging in to anything. I knew this was going to be coming. I just didn’t know it was going to be so soon.”

Higgs had rejoined them, so Harry handed him back his broom. “Thanks for lending this to me. It’s a good broom; it probably saved my life. I owe you.” He turned to Flint, who was standing next to Snape. “And thanks for your bat work. You and Pugsley were great. I owe you, too.” He turned to Snape. “And you, sir. That was a cool spell. What was it again?”

“*Frango.*”

“Thanks. I hope I’m strong enough to use it someday. I owe you most of all.”

Snape stared down at him, his eyes blank for a moment. “No, call it even. I ... owed your father one, from many years ago.”

Harry nodded. “Even. Thank you.”

The two older boys escorted the three first-years back to the castle, leaving Snape out on the pitch, staring at the remains of the shattered ball. It was several hours before he came back in again.

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**A/N** : Thanks to Jeremy DuCharme for the idea about Machiavelli, which got me thinking about Sun Tzu.

## Family Values A House Divided

Disclaimer: No windmills were tilted in this chapter.

A/N: Sorry it's been so long. The dialogue in part of this was giving me fits.

For the children, October flew by in a whirl of classes, clubs, practices, and detentions.

Harry wrote home about the Bludger incident, and also told Professor Lupin about it. Two days later all three children received necklaces with tiny broom charms on them. Lupin showed them how to expand them into their own, personal, full-sized brooms when needed and shrink them down again after, and if anyone noticed that the first-years had their own brooms, nobody complained. Harry's broom was upgraded from a Blue Streak to a professional-level Silver Streak. Higgs was green with envy once he saw how it handled. He took this out on Harry by making him his personal "assistant" for Quidditch, having him prep his gear and fetch water for him during practice and so on. Harry didn't complain, did everything that he was asked to do, ignored rude comments from Malfoy and some of the older boys, and soaked up everything Higgs knew about Quidditch like a sponge. He considered it a fair trade.

Harry's flying lessons for Neville and Hermione expanded to include several other students from all three Houses who needed practice and found Madam Hooch to be too focused on the acrobatics needed to play Quidditch to give the attention and patient instruction needed by Muggle-borns who were still trying to overcome their fear of heights.

Wednesday was recruited for the Slytherin broom racing team, and Pugsley teamed up with Millicent Bulstrode for Beater practice. Ungainly on the ground, the girl proved to be as elegant as a swan in the air, even if she was flying a school broom. She was also a Quidditch fanatic, with the burning ambition to play for the Holyhead Harpies some day. She had despaired of getting on the Slytherin team because she was both a girl and a half-blood, although really, her Muggle ancestry was so far back on her family tree it wouldn't matter to anyone who wasn't totally obsessed with blood purity. With Pugsley on her side, and willing to practice with her, she now had hopes of making the team when the position she wanted opened up.

As for other extracurricular activities, the language club was just the tip of the iceberg. Through Hermione, who had jumped into the social whirl in Ravenclaw with both feet, they discovered a whole network of Clubs, Associations, and Societies, covering everything from the formal class subjects to specialty areas to artistic activities to sports and games. Officially, each club had a staff member supervising it, but in practice the clubs were run by sixth and seventh year students mostly, with the supervising staff member popping in occasionally to see that everything was going smoothly, or sitting quietly in the back of the room grading parchments. As Hermione had noted, the club memberships were composed mostly of Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs; the Gryffindors and Slytherins were both rather standoffish from the other Houses. With Harry and Blaise taking the lead, though, many of the lower year Slytherins joined first the Language Society and then some of the other clubs. Hermione told Padma Patil who told her sister Parvati in Gryffindor who told Lavender Brown who told *everybody* that Harry Potter was joining clubs, and it suddenly became fashionable for Gryffindors – at least the girls – to join clubs also.

Unaware that he was becoming a trend-setter, Harry joined as many clubs as he could cram into his schedule. The subject-specific ones were his favourites, because there he could learn more advanced spell work from the older students. Combined with the tutoring they were getting from Professor Lupin, he thought, it should keep them well ahead of the curriculum. It wasn't lost on the Ravenclaws that he and his cousins were working on a second and sometimes third-year level in the practical aspects of several subjects, and higher than that on the theoretical level, and they promptly "adopted" the three as honorary Ravenclaws, inviting them to sit at the Ravenclaw table for meals if they wanted, and bemoaning the whimsy of the Sorting Hat.

Not to be outdone, Neville invited them, and Hermione, to sit at the Gryffindor table when they wanted to. There were a few complaints, mainly from one of the Prefects, who thought the mixing of houses to be highly improper, and Ron Weasley, the red-headed boy who now regretted giving Malfoy back his wand when he fell in the lake. Weasley apparently felt that everything about Slytherin House was evil, and he ostentatiously sat at the other end of the table from Harry and the Addamses whenever they joined the Gryffindors.

The Hufflepuffs were trying to get one of their House members into Harry's circle so that they would sit at the Badgers' table as well.

Within Slytherin, things were much less pleasant. The first-years seemed to have divided into three groups. Draco Malfoy, his shadows Crabbe and Goyle, Pansy Parkinson and Daphne Greengrass formed one group; Harry, Pugsley, Wednesday, Blaise Zabini, and the mismatched pair of Millicent Bulstrode and Tracey Davis formed another. Theo Nott and Sally-Ann Perks held themselves aloof from either group. Gradually, some of the second-years started aligning themselves with Harry's friends, while others gravitated to Malfoy and a few, like Nott and Perks, stayed out of the affair altogether. It was no coincidence that all of the half-bloods were on Harry's side. As long as things remained at the level of sarcastic comments and name-calling, and the discordance was never shown outside the Dungeons, however, Snape made no effort to stop it.

completely obscured by the stack of ledgers and minutes books he was carrying. He carefully organized the books on a side table, then scurried out and returned with an easel, a stack of parchment, a large bottle of ink, and a dictation quill. While he was setting that up, a second goblin brought in a tray bearing a teapot, a coffee decanter, a platter with a variety of small cakes and pastries, and all the other necessary accoutrements; this goblin left once things were arranged to his liking.

The next to arrive were Morticia and Gomez Addams. Morticia was darkly elegant, as always, in her close-fitting gown and a black lace shawl. Gomez had opted for a scarlet double-breasted suit with green pinstripes, and carried a large leather artist's portfolio. While they helped themselves to coffee and pastries, they were joined by an elderly witch in sombrely coloured robes, who had a small stuffed vulture perched on her hat.

Gomez introduced Morticia to Augusta Longbottom, who was currently voting the Longbottom shares due to her son's incapacity.

"Our children are attending school together with your grandson, are they not, Mrs. Longbottom? Both our Pugsley and Harry speak well of him in their letters."

"They do? But they're in separate Houses. How—?"

"What are Houses to the likes of us?" said Morticia dismissively. "A purely artificial division. Harry and Neville will have to work together as adults. They'd best start now, and Harry knows this. I believe Harry is coaching Neville on his flying, and Pugsley speaks well of his Potions ability."

Augusta was politely disbelieving.

"You see, Augusta, the best foundation for a working alliance as adults is laid now," Gomez cut in. "Both Harry and Pugsley will have sizeable fortunes to manage when they grow up. It wouldn't be a favour to either one of them to let them grow up ignorant of it and then just drop it in their laps when they turn eighteen."

"Seventeen, dear," said Morticia. "Remember the age of majority is different here."

"Right, seventeen. We had assumed that one of the boys would be The Addams in the next generation and the other his second – it didn't much matter which was which. But now it looks like things may work out differently. If our son will be The Addams at home and Harry becomes The Potter here, it's our responsibility to make sure both of them know what they're doing. It's the same for your Neville, I assume. With his father indisposed, he'll be expected to pick up the reins as The Longbottom right away."

"Yes, you're right. I suppose I hadn't thought much about it," said Augusta. "I suppose now that it's established he's not a Squib – no offence, but we were worried about it – I should start having him tutored during the summers."

"Perhaps he can spend part of the holidays with us," suggested Gomez. "Some lessons, some summer fun. We have more than enough space. What do you say?"

"I'll consider it. We'll see how the boys are getting on at the end of the spring term, shall we? I'm still dubious about a Gryffindor being friends with Slytherins. I just don't see how it's possible."

"I believe that the House system is too firmly entrenched in the school," said Morticia. "The children in the various Houses hardly know each other. What possible sense can it make to have your children cut off from three quarters of the people they will be working with when they grow up?"

Augusta uttered an unladylike sound. "The House system has done very well by us for generations, Mrs. Addams! You're an outsider, you couldn't possibly know."

"Sometimes it takes an outsider to see something differently. I've organized a group of other concerned parents – perhaps you would like to come to the next meeting of the Hogwarts Parents Association, where we've been discussing this very matter? We have many parents of Muggle-born and half-blood students who would be interested in what you have to say about it. We have a few pure-blood parents, but none from families as prominent as yours."

"I'll consider it," the older woman said stiffly.

"Thank you."

At a quarter past the hour, there was no sign of Lucius Malfoy.

"Is he often this late?" Gomez asked Augusta Longbottom.

"Unfortunately, yes," the older woman replied. "Mr Malfoy is of the opinion that the party doesn't start until he arrives. It takes two votes for a quorum."

"But now I hold proxies for two votes and you hold one vote."

"So we could start the meeting, yes," she said, her eyes widening as she realized that there was a sea change in the offing.

"Very well, then, I don't see any reason to continue waiting. As senior member of the Trust, Mrs Longbottom, would you care to call the meeting to order?"

"I would indeed, Mr Addams. I would indeed."

At half past the hour, the door opened and a tall, aristocratic blond man swaggered in. He carried a black walking stick with a silver serpent's head, although he showed no signs of actually needing it. On seeing Gomez and Mrs Longbottom, who were working over a set of maps spread across the conference table while Morticia took notes, he stopped abruptly.

"So nice to see you, Lucius," said Mrs Longbottom. "You were running a bit late, so we decided to start without you."

"You can't do that!" exclaimed Malfoy.

"Sorry, old chap, but we can and did," said Gomez cheerfully. "Guph, read back the minutes, if you please."

The goblin at the side desk stilled the quill which was busily writing away, and read back from the top of the scroll. "Minutes of Quarterly Meeting of Diagon Alley Trust. Meeting was originally scheduled for morning of 15 September, rescheduled for morning of 15 October at request of Lucius Malfoy. Meeting called to order at fifteen past eleven by Augusta Longbottom with a quorum of two votes. First item of agenda: Presentation of a ratified copy of an alliance agreement between the Houses of Potter and Black. Gomez Addams called on alliance between the Houses of Potter and Longbottom. Augusta Longbottom agreed to act in accordance with alliance. Second item of agenda: Gomez Addams called for election of new Director of Diagon Alley Trust. Potter, Black, and Longbottom votes were cast for Gomez Addams, Malfoy vote was not cast due to absence of shareholder. Augusta Longbottom handed over direction of the meeting to Director Addams. Third item of agenda: Discussion of inequities in rent schedules, certain rents not paid, and maintenance and repairs. Lucius Malfoy arrived at 11:31. Director Addams requested minutes be read."

Lucius Malfoy's face turned purple, a colour which clashed badly with his silver-white hair. "You ... you ... how *dare* you, you Squib? Augusta, I demand that you cease this foolishness immediately!"

"You're in no position to demand anything, Lucius," snapped the old woman. "I've been watching you play with the Trust like it's your own personal domain for ten years now. It's about time someone else had a chance."

"Frankly, old man, you've been running the Trust into the ground," said Gomez. "You've been pulling funds out of the capital account without replenishing it, there's been no maintenance done for the last ten years on the parts of the property that need it most, the highest rents are charged to those least able to pay, there are vacant storefronts you've made no effort to rent out, and there are at least a dozen occupied townhouses for which no rents have been collected at all. I'm sorry to say one of them is yours, Malfoy."

"Wha – what?" Malfoy turned from purple to paler than was normal for him.

"Out of courtesy for a Trust Member, of course, we'll refrain from starting eviction proceedings or changing the locks, but it really doesn't look good. You will have to make good the deficiency. That's ten years, interest compounded monthly ..."

"I have no intention of ..." Malfoy was reduced to sputtering.

"...or else you'll be reading about it in the financial pages of the Daily Prophet."

"There are no financial pages in the Prophet!"

"There are now. I made a substantial investment, with a little proviso as to what the money would be used for. This community needs a little financial accountability."

"//I show you accountable, you...!" Malfoy twisted the head of his cane, and it came loose, revealing the shaft of an ebony wand.

It was less than half drawn, however, when Guph, the goblin, snapped, "*Mis* ter Malfoy! May I remind you that the fine for any wizard drawing his wand in anger in Gringotts premises is equal to no less than half the contents of his vault? I don't think you want to be doing that." His grin was wide, feral, and full of many sharp teeth.

Malfoy pushed his wand back into the body of the walking stick abruptly.

"Do have a seat, Lucius," said Mrs Longbottom. "After we've finished with this, we're going to move on to the issue of tax liabilities. Do you know, the goblins seem to be under the impression that you told them to pay the taxes out of the Longbottom and Potter shares of income, but not the Black or Malfoy shares? That's another little matter that will need to be rectified. And back taxes paid, of course."

Malfoy uttered a noise that sounded like "Gk!" He turned and stormed out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

"Somehow I don't think he's going to take this lying down," said Gomez.

"I don't think so either. Let's finish this up and see if we can at least get to the taxes before he tries to have us arrested." Augusta sighed. "Azkaban is such a dreary place this time of year."

Somewhat less than an hour later, the door slammed open again and Malfoy stormed back in, this time accompanied by a rotund individual in eye-searing green robes, topped with a matching bowler hat, and two rather unhappy looking Aurors.

"Back so soon, Malfoy?" Gomez asked. "I really had hoped you'd stay away. We've been getting so much accomplished."

"You'll accomplish nothing, Squib!" said Malfoy, coldly.

Gomez looked at him with an expression of polite puzzlement, followed after a moment with a look of dawning enlightenment. "Ah! You intended to insult me! I hope you won't mind if I don't take offence, Malfoy. Being a Squib is of no relevance to me. First, last, and in between, I am an



Addams. Now, what was it you wanted?"

"I want you to give up this charade. You have no authority here. The Minister here will confirm it, and then the Aurors will put you where you belong. In Azkaban!"

"Minister? Minister Fudge!" Gomez said in apparent delight. "Malfoy, I take back anything I've said about you. Mr. Fudge is just the man I want to see!"

"Yes, and he'll put you ... what?" said Malfoy.

Gomez hurried around the table and was shaking Cornelius Fudge's hand vigorously. "Minister Fudge! I can't tell you how glad I am to meet you! I've been trying to get an appointment with you for weeks now. My name's Addams, Gomez Addams. And let me introduce you to my wife, Morticia, and this is Mrs. Augusta Longbottom – oh, of course, you must have met already – and this is Guph, who's been helping me out with the books for the Trust."

Propelled by the human dynamo that was Gomez Addams, Fudge shook hands all around, even kissing Morticia's hand and somehow winding up shaking the hand of the goblin. Judging from the speed with which he let go of the clawed appendage, he had no idea how that had happened and wasn't particularly happy with it.

"Now then, Addams," Fudge said, clearly meaning to take charge of the situation, "my good friend Lucius tells me you've used forgery and chicanery to take over the Trust. The Ministry will not stand for this!"

"Forgery? Chicanery? You wound me. I didn't even need any chicanery – your friend Malfoy made it so easy!"

"So you admit to the forgery?"

"On the contrary. Guph, the papers, if you will?" The goblin handed over a folio of documents to Gomez, which he then passed one by one to the Minister. "Here is a copy of my proxy from Harry Potter, complete with his magical signature confirming it. Here are copies of the alliance documents between the Houses of Potter and Black and the Houses of Potter and Longbottom. And a copy of the resolution approving my election as Director of the Trust. Take your time to look them over, Minister. I believe you'll find everything's in order." Gomez drew a cigar from his suit pocket and stuck it in the corner of his mouth.

"I wasn't present to vote on the resolution! It doesn't count!" said Malfoy.

"You knew when the meeting was due to start. It's not my fault you were late," said Gomez, removing the unlit cheroot so he could speak clearly. "But if you insist, I'll let you cast your vote now." He nodded to the goblin.

"On the matter of the election of Gomez Addams as Director of the Diagon Alley Trust, how does the House of Malfoy vote?" asked Guph, formally.

"Malfoy votes NAY!"

The goblin nodded, recording the vote. "That makes the vote three for, one against. Gomez Addams is confirmed as Director."

"You can't do that!"

"Malfoy, I thought we'd already been over this," said Gomez, wearily. "If you want to hold another election, put it on the agenda for next quarter. In the meantime, we have some very important matters to discuss with the Minister. You can stay and add your input, or you can leave – but don't blame me for how things work out later."

"I'll stay," Malfoy said, flinging himself into a chair.

Gomez seated Fudge in the chair next to his own at the head of the table. "Minister, Augusta and I have been discussing ways to undo some of the damage that's been done to the Alleys in the past few years, and ..."

"What damage?" asked Fudge.

"For almost three hundred years," Gomez said soberly, "the rents from the Alley properties have been used to maintain the properties, rebuilding or adding new buildings where necessary, applying fireproofing charms, paying taxes to the Ministry and then paying a small, but steady, income stream to the Trust Members. Only the tribute from Gringotts is more than the taxes paid by the Trust to the Ministry. The more valuable properties, of course, had the highest rents, and the least valuable – the carts in Marjion and Knockturn Alleys – paid the least. The Trust was run by competent people who were trained for years by their parents before taking the wheel themselves.

"Ten years ago, however, there was a massive change in the membership of the Trust. The deaths of the heads of the Black, Potter, Malfoy and Longbottom families all within a span of five years left four very young and inexperienced men at the helm of the Trust. Lucius Malfoy was the oldest, although James Potter inherited first, causing disputes as to which of them had seniority and should be the Director. In the course of one month, Potter was killed, Black arrested and imprisoned, and Longbottom rendered permanently incompetent. The Potter and Longbottom heirs were both infants, and the control of the Black family was never passed on since Black was incarcerated but not dead and never stripped of his rights as Head of the family. Lucius Malfoy claimed Directorship by right, since he was the only one holding his family's interest directly.

"Almost immediately, he made some major changes in how things were done, as well as some large withdrawals from the capital fund. First, large amounts were paid directly to your predecessor in office, Minister, as well as to several other individuals in the Ministry. This was, coincidentally, just about the time Mr Malfoy was exonerated from charges of being a Death Eater."

It wasn't my fault! I was under the Imperius!" snapped Malfoy.

"Yes, and I'm sure you had dozens of witnesses who could say that you were acting spaced out and dreamy during the entire period," said Gomez. "Although it's strange that I couldn't find anything about it in the public record. In any event," he said, returning his attention to the Minister, "in subsequent months, Mr Malfoy changed the rental system, charging the lowest rents to pure-bloods and the highest rents to Muggle-borns or half-bloods. He failed to collect any rents for townhouses occupied to himself and his friends, but spent considerable capital on maintaining them. He has allowed storefronts to become vacant and not found new businesses to occupy them. And he's cut back on the amount of taxes paid to the Ministry, instead making personal contributions of considerably lower amounts directly to, I regret to say, someone highly placed in your own office. This began under Minister Bagshot and has continued under your regime."

Fudge merely gaped. Malfoy jumped up from his seat. "What! How can you possibly know any of this?"

"Mr Malfoy, it's obvious that while you know quite a bit about magic, you know nothing of financial management or double-entry bookkeeping. Every transaction has been carefully recorded by the goblins, and the cumulative impact is clear. Income from the high-end areas of the Alleys has dropped. Income from the low-end areas has risen, but it's a higher percentage of overhead for the businesses. Some have closed, unable to turn a profit. New ones require higher investment costs. The only people that can afford to start businesses now are pure-bloods, and they're the ones least likely to, since innovation at every level comes from the Muggle-born and half-bloods. Storefronts now stand empty and deteriorating. Some of them have been taken over by squatters – homeless people who do what they can to eke out a bare living and pay 'protection' to Malfoy's goons in order to be allowed to stay in filthy, crumbling firetraps of buildings."

"Baseless accusations!" roared Malfoy, at the same moment as the Minister snapped, "The Wizarding World has no homeless!"

"The books don't lie, Malfoy," said Gomez, tapping the leather-bound ledger sharply. "And you do have homeless, Minister. In Marjin and Knockturn it's mostly Muggle-born and half-bloods who can't get jobs in either world. Up by Hogsmeade, you have a small werewolf colony living in shacks in the Forbidden Forest. There are probably more in the Muggle world."

"They're naught but shiftless layabouts," said Fudge. "The Wizarding World isn't going to support anyone who's not willing to work for a living."

"Most of them are," Gomez said, "but most Wizarding businesses won't hire Muggle-born or werewolves, and they don't have the skills or the documentation to get jobs in the Muggle world. I'm arranging jobs for some of them, and harder workers I've yet to meet." He shrugged. "But that's only part of the problem. Finances can be worked out. But the current management has turned Diagon Alley into a death trap."

"WHAT?!" cried Malfoy and Fudge in unison.

"The building standards of Diagon Alley haven't changed since before the Great Fire in 1666. Where the Muggles have gone on to use stone, brick, and concrete, here you still use wood for building and roofing. Origin Alley and Parti Alley use gas for heat and light, but Diagon, Knockturn, and Marjin Alleys still use open fireplaces, wood and coal stoves, candles, and oil lamps. Fireproofing runes have been used for years to keep the buildings safe. But such spells have to be maintained, and most people don't know how to do it. You have to hire specialist Rune Masters. That's not cheap. The rents from the lower Alleys go to pay fireproofing for the upper Alleys, and the owners of businesses in Knockturn and Marjin are expected to provide their own fireproofing. Most of them don't, because they can't afford it or because Pure-blood Runes Masters – the only kind the Trust licenses to do the work – won't lower themselves to work in there."

Gomez turned a map of the Alleys so that the Minister could see it. "I had a survey done on my own dime. The buildings marked in green are protected with fireproofing, flood proofing, insect proofing, you name it. Buildings marked in yellow have basic fireproofing, but not high-grade. Buildings marked in red have no protections at all." The map was clear enough: Knockturn and Marjin Alleys were almost entirely red, with a few flecks of yellow and green; Diagon was a mixture of red and yellow, except for Gringotts, which was green; Parti Alley was part yellow and part green; and Origin Alley was solidly green.

"To make it worse, there used to be entrances at the ends of each Alley to allow for easy access and easy escape. Over the years, these have been closed to keep Muggles from stumbling in. The only ways in now, other than designated Apparation Zones, are through the Leaky Cauldron, and a remaining gate at the end of Origin Alley. There's a locked gate connecting Origin to Diagon, so that exit isn't accessible by the general public. If a fire starts in Knockturn or Marjin – which it will, sooner or later – it will spread from building to building rapidly. By the time it bursts out of Knockturn onto Diagon, it will be magically fuelled by burning artefacts, brooms, potions ingredients, and whatever illegal things are being sold in there. It will overwhelm the low-end fireproofing charms in Diagon. If it spreads to the Leaky, whoever is in Diagon will be trapped. If it doesn't spread to the Leaky, hundreds of people will be trying to get through it and spilling out onto the streets of Muggle London. At the other end of Diagon, people will be cut off by the fire. The gates will prevent them from getting into Origin Alley and London from that end. Meanwhile, the fire will be spreading to Muggle areas. They won't be able to extinguish it for hours, if at all, because they'll have no idea where it's coming from."

"Think of it," he said, waving his cigar in emphasis. "Knockturn Alley in flames! Roofs along Diagon catching fire! People splinching themselves trying to Apparate out in a panic. Hundreds of people being trampled at the Leaky and crushing themselves against the gate at Origin. Sparks flying into London and igniting fires all around! Magically charged smoke poisoning everything from here to the Thames! And at the end ... Nothing standing but Gringotts and maybe some of the townhouses on Origin Alley ... Secrecy destroyed, hundreds dead, the Muggles up in arms ..." His eyes glowed with an almost manic light. "It would be glorious!" He stuck his cigar back in his mouth and took a puff. "Glorious!"

"It would be a disaster!" cried Fudge, who was almost as green as his robe.

"That too," said Gomez cheerfully. "Fortunately it can be avoided. It will take a little work, but it can be done." He reached into his large artists' portfolio and removed a poster, which he set up on the easel. It showed a large, idealized portrait of Minister Fudge, and announced the inception of a new Public Safety Project, funded by the Ministry under the leadership of Cornelius Fudge and (in much smaller letters) the Directors of the Diagon Alley Trust.

The first thing is to get the fireproofing back on every building in all of the Alleys. Then we need to reverse the rental schemes, so rents are affordable, and back rents have to be collected at the correct rates. We need to tear down dilapidated buildings, replace them with new ones using modern building techniques, then work through all the other buildings in turn. The Trust can do it by itself in five years. With the Ministry's assistance, two. There will be almost no profits for the first few years since all revenues will be ploughed back into the project, but in ten years, everyone can get back to the business of getting rich again. And by that time, I'll have taught Harry Potter and Neville Longbottom how to manage the Trust – something Malfoy's father apparently never taught him. I'll be willing to give lessons to your son, too, Malfoy, if you're interested."

"Nonsense! We can't entrust the wellbeing of the wizarding public to a Squib!" exclaimed Malfoy.

"A wizard almost destroyed it," said Gomez. "A Squib can save it. My father made sure I knew how to manage a property before I came of age. One of my majors at Yale was finance. And I also know a few useful things like carpentry and plumbing. Now, I could just buy the Alleys from the current Trust and deal with it myself," he said, casually dismissing the stunning cost of such a venture, "but I doubt you'd want to sell to an outsider. I can just sit back and watch it happen. Minister, it's your country and your constituents. It's your name that will be attached to the disaster. Or to its solution." He took another puff on his cigar, sending up a cloud of noxious smoke. "Well?"

The answer was obvious, although it was several hours before Malfoy and Fudge agreed on the details.

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If asked, Draco Malfoy would have said, with complete honesty, that he had nothing against mudbloods, half-bloods, or Squibs – as long as they stayed in their places. And those places were far away from Hogwarts in general and Slytherin House in particular.

Muggle-borns didn't belong in the school at all, he thought. They had no sense of etiquette or tradition or respect for history; in fact, they came into the wizarding world and demanded that changes be made to suit their own plebeian standards. They had far too much influence. Why, even the school "robes" worn at Hogwarts were just Muggle-style trousers, shirts, ties, and jumpers, with an open hooded robe, too heavy to be comfortable indoors and too light to be much good outdoors, taking the place of a proper cloak. Draco's parents had been absolutely livid when they found out – in their day, of course, student wear had been proper black robes. Madam Malkin had made some excuse about a fad a few years ago for turning people upside down and dangling them by their ankles, necessitating the switch to trousers in the name of decency. Draco's father called that a likely story; it was clearly an excuse to justify the Headmaster's Muggle-loving ways. Draco agreed. He didn't like the feeling of the cloth covering his legs, and he was convinced his tie hated him. Thankfully it was charmed to tie itself, because he didn't think he'd ever figure out that knot. It was all the mudbloods' fault, and they were just lucky there were none in Slytherin. That know-it-all, bushy-haired, bucktoothed Ravenclaw that Potter and the Addamses hung out with was the worst of the lot, and if she knew what was good for her, she'd stay out of his way.

As for the half-bloods, he was well aware that the great majority of wizards and witches were the half-blood tradesmen who worked in the workshops that produced all the goods consumed by pure-bloods, and in the shops that sold them. Most of them were home-schooled, apprenticed, or attended one of several magical day schools, all of them with far less prestige than Hogwarts. Some of them became wealthy and influential enough to send their children to Hogwarts, but in Draco's opinion, which he knew was correct because he'd heard it from his father, they all belonged in Hufflepuff and shouldn't rub shoulders with their betters in Slytherin. Accordingly, he ignored Millicent Bulstrode and Tracey Davis, both daughters of merchants, who no doubt were only attending Hogwarts in the hope of snagging a pure-blood husband.

Squibs, of course, couldn't be educated at Hogwarts at all, but they were technically pure-bloods. Some of them had influential relatives, and even though they couldn't inherit family fortunes, they could amass their own private fortunes and receive gifts and personal bequests. Many of them, and the weak wizards and witches occasionally born to them, found work in the wizarding world that didn't require magic; they were solicitors, barristers, financial advisors, estate managers and household managers. The women, if they were pretty enough, could become mistresses to rich pure-bloods. Draco wasn't quite sure what a mistress did – it was apparently some kind of personal servant, and it was very important to a pure-blood man to have one, but it wasn't discussed around women and children. Draco had only heard about them when eavesdropping on his father and some of his friends.

Although Potter was technically a half-blood, he actually fell in a category all his own, and Draco didn't know how to handle him.

If Potter had been brought up with his parents, his father would have made sure he knew everything about history and tradition and so forth, and his family prestige would have made up for his mother's unfortunate ancestry. In a generation or six, nobody would have remembered it, particularly if he married well.

If he had been brought up by Muggles, he could have been harassed or ignored, like any Muggle-born, or possibly seduced with the offer of acceptance into proper society.

But he'd been brought up by Squibs in an unknown country. He had the usual knowledge of magic that a pure-blood student had before starting school (or maybe more – his Blocking spell had considerable kick, Draco acknowledged), but who knew what else he knew or how he'd been trained? He certainly knew how to fly. He carried himself like a pure-blood, and his Squib family apparently didn't lack for money – everything they owned was of the best quality – well, except for his bed decorations. Although he'd been somehow Sorted into Slytherin, Potter didn't seem to appreciate the honour done him. On the night table was a large snake skull with a candle mounted on it; on the curtain at the head of his bed hung a ratty old dead serpent twisted into a letter "S". Its bones peeked through its scaly hide in some places. In Draco's mind, these artefacts showed a distinct lack of appreciation for the symbol of their House.

But if Potter's knowledge of wizarding niceties sometimes had gaps, he also knew the Muggle customs, like how to tie his tie without almost strangling himself, and without a charm to do it for him. And he knew languages – Draco was still smarting from the humiliation of the Italian Incident, although his mother had assured him in her most recent note that anybody could learn languages, and Potter was probably making up for his shortcomings as a wizard by showing off with something else. But Potter didn't seem to have shortcomings, really. He was tops in his classes, except for Potions, where Professor Snape kept him in his place despite his insistence that he was something called a "class monitor" – which really seemed to be Potter's excuse to poke his nose into other people's business.

His clothing sense, however, was execrable, and Draco felt himself justly superior in that regard.

When Draco had come to London to spend the last few weeks of summer in the family town home on Origin Alley and allow himself to be seen by the plebs on Diagon Alley, he had found to his dismay that everyone was talking about Harry Potter – whether he would or would not attend Hogwarts, and then going on about the rather odd family he’d turned up with. Nobody was interested in Draco at all, which made him no end of miffed. Worse, Draco’s father had told him to make a connection of some sort with Potter as fast as possible – befriend him if possible, dominate him if not. Draco had tried the former, on the train to school, and been thoroughly rebuffed and humiliated. Subsequent efforts at domination were inconclusive. He’d put some of the boil potion he’d stolen from Longbottom’s cauldron in Potter’s bed on a whim, only to find that the stuff wasn’t as effective as he’d hoped. It put Potter in the Hospital Wing, true, but he hadn’t seemed in as much pain as Draco had expected. He suspected Potter knew who was responsible, but there had as yet been no retaliation. Crabbe and Goyle, at Draco’s orders, had attempted to jinx Potter and his cousin, but both of them were now on the alert. He’d made a new batch of the boil potion and put it in the bed, this time in a capsule which would keep it fresh, then dissolve from body heat and release its contents, but nothing had happened at all.

Draco had expected Potter to try to get back at him. What he didn’t expect was being ignored. The whole thing was very disappointing.

He decided that the combination of Harry, Pugsley and Thing was too hard a nut to crack, and went after “easier” prey. Wednesday.

He’d decided to spend some time watching his targets, and noticed that while Potter seemed to be good at everything, and Pugsley Addams was strong and fast if not skilful, Wednesday was struggling in Charms and Transfiguration. It took her a long time and many tries to achieve her desired result, and often her Transfigurations were flawed, just good enough to pass. She spent a lot of time studying and writing, but Daphne had managed to get a look at some of the grades on her essays and saw that she was only pulling A’s. Clearly, she was not going to be a very powerful witch. And that made her a possible weak link.

Draco’s opportunity came on the last Saturday morning in October. Potter and Pugsley Addams left to go to their pathetic little flying class, accompanied by Bulstrode. They’d be gone for the rest of the day, since Potter had Quidditch practice afterward, in preparation for the first match next weekend. Zabini and Davis were working on something in the Library. That left Wednesday alone in the Common Room, in her customary seat by the lake window, reading a rather large book and seemingly unaware that she had none of Potter’s little gang to hand.

Draco gave it long enough to be sure that the girl’s brother and cousin would be safely on the other side of the castle, then sauntered casually over toward where she sat. He leaned over the back of her chair to see what she was reading, and was surprised to find it was a book he knew well. “*The 500* ? Since when are you interested in the history of the Pure-blood families? Trying to fit in?”

She ignored him and kept reading.

“You’d be better off with a more current book,” he said, walking around her chair to stand in front of her with his back to the window. “That family you’re reading about now, the Dees, well, they were great in their day but they’re long gone. Not that they were quite respectable in the first place,” he said with a sniff.

She glared at him; well that was good, at least she wasn’t ignoring him. Nobody ignored a Malfoy!

“My family’s been here since the Conquest. As a matter of fact, it’s safe to say that there wouldn’t have *been* a Conquest without Guillaume de Malfoy. And we’ve been leaders in Society ever since. Attending Hogwarts is only a start. If you want to stay here after finishing school, you’re going to need sponsorship. Otherwise you’re just going to go back to that log cabin or whatever it is you live in back in the Colonies.” He waved his hand dismissively, in a gesture he’d learned from his father. “Your brother and cousin will learn that. They’ll need help, if they want to get anywhere with their careers. I offered them my help once, and was treated most rudely in return. But I might be willing to overlook that,” he said magnanimously. “If you asked nicely.”

“Nicely,” said Wednesday in a flat tone.

“Nicely. I think we can come to a mutually beneficial arrangement. Your brother and cousin seem to have abandoned you already. I’m willing to introduce you around to all the people you should know. They’ll accept you if I say so. I know you’ve been having difficulty in some classes. I can help you out – maybe even tutor you myself. Then later, when we’re done with school and they realise they’re having difficulties, then they’ll come to you and you can come to me and I can help. Or not, if you feel like it. The choice will be entirely yours.”

“And what do you want from me?”

“At first, nothing – you have to agree you have a long way to go before you can begin to move in the correct circles. When we’re older, well, you’re not a bad looking girl, you know. But your hair and clothes are dreadful,” he said disdainfully, looking at her plain braids and boring black Muggle clothes. “If you’re trying to compensate for Potter’s lack of colour sense, it doesn’t work. Daphne and Pansy will work on that with you. And when you’re fit to be seen with me, we’ll work something out. You could be my secretary. Or my mistress,” he said, trying to sound both casual and sophisticated at the same time. “Something like that.”

“You’re offering to let me be your mistress?” she said, slowly.

“Yes,” Draco said, wondering if she was always this slow to grasp the obvious. “Well, maybe, anyway.”

Wednesday slowly got up from her chair. “I am Wednesday Friday Addams, the daughter of Gomez and Morticia Addams. My ancestors built castles in Wales and Spain while yours were still peasants in France! I am the heiress to the Dee fortune, and when I marry, my husband will be the richest wizard in England. And you *graciously* offer to *let* me be your mistress! *MAYBE!?*” Her fists were clenched, her cheeks flushed, her eyes wide and dark.

Everyone else in the Common Room was staring at them, mouths agape.

It occurred to Draco that perhaps making that offer in public hadn't been the best idea he'd ever had. The next thing that occurred to him was that making that offer at all hadn't been the best idea he'd ever had.

She stalked towards him slowly, deliberately.

Draco felt his hair standing on end, and a strange buzzing sound filled the air. He could scarcely breathe, held transfixed by a vision of outraged, malevolent femininity.

Suddenly the tension was shattered, as Pugsley appeared behind Wednesday, pulling her away, and Potter seemed to materialize between the girl and himself. He wasn't sure this was an improvement, however, since the other boy's green eyes were burning with anger.

"How *dare* you?" Potter hissed. "How *dare* you approach *my* betrothed and offer to make her your mistress? I demand satisfaction for this insult!" He struck Draco across the face with the Quidditch gauntlets he held in his hand.

"Satisfaction?" replied Draco in what he had hoped would be a sneer, but was closer to a squeak.

"Satisfaction. I challenge you to a duel!"

"Fine! I'll meet you in the Trophy Room at midnight!"

"So I can get caught by Filch? Not hardly," scoffed Potter. "We'll settle this here and now. Wednesday, go get your sword. Pugsley, get mine."

"S-sword?" Draco gulped as the Addams siblings ran off immediately to do Potter's bidding.

"Of course, Malfoy. The weapon of the gentleman. Even a wizard. Surely you've been taught?"

"Of course," said Draco, and this time it was the truth. He'd been learning the basics of swordplay, but had thought it would be a few more years before he would get a chance to show off. "But I'm afraid I didn't bring my blade to school."

"I figured as much. That's why I had Wednesday go get hers."

Wednesday had already returned, carrying a rapier in a belted scabbard cradled in her arms like a baby. "Harry! You can't let him use Dulcinea!"

"Of course not. I will. Malfoy will use Rocinante." Pugsley returned from the boys' dorm with a similar weapon.

Potter gestured, and Pugsley presented the sword, with some reluctance, to Draco, who took it awkwardly. "You give me a piece of junk and expect me to use it?"

"That's my own sword," said Potter coldly. "It's over a hundred years old, it's Toledo steel, not junk, and its name is Rocinante. Treat it with honour, Malfoy."

Wednesday knelt at Potter's side and carefully buckled her sword to Potter's waist. Draco looked toward Pansy to do the honours for him, but for some inexplicable reason she was disinclined to cooperate, so he buckled Rocinante on himself, although it was a somewhat tight fit.

"Now, then, Malfoy," said Potter. "Draw. Your. Sword." Somehow, he'd acquired a British accent.

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Severus Snape both enjoyed and dreaded weekends. He enjoyed them because he didn't have to have classes with any of the little dunderheads, and could spend his time either quietly reading or grading papers, or, preferably, working on advanced projects in his own workroom. He dreaded them because, invariably, his reading, grading, or brewing would be interrupted by one of the students banging on his door and demanding that he settle some bit of childish nonsense.

It was the weekend after the full moon, so he was taking the opportunity to closely question Lupin about the efficacy of the latest batch of Wolfsbane Potion, making notes so that he might be able to improve it for next month. He didn't particularly like Lupin and had no altruistic interest in improving the potion, but as long as he had to live in the same castle with the man he was going to make sure the potion was as effective as possible. If he could, he would have included a sedative to render the wolf completely unconscious for the entire night of the full moon, but unfortunately he hadn't found one yet that was safe in combination with the Wolfsbane.

In the middle of the session, he heard a frantic banging on the door of his office. "Excuse me a moment. Duty calls," he said, and strode to the door, yanking it open abruptly. "All right, Miss Abercrombie, what is so important that you couldn't wait for my regular office hours?"

The girl was panting with excitement. "Potter ... and Malfoy ... duelling ... in the Common Room!"

"Well, at least they can't use any dangerous spells in the Common Room. Have one of the Prefects pull them apart and I'll be there momentarily to assign detentions."

Miss Abercrombie managed to collect herself a bit. "They're not using spells, sir. They're using swords!"

Snape bit back an expletive; he refused to swear in front of the students. Glancing over at Lupin, he found the man exhibiting a marked lack of astonishment. "Why am I not surprised that *you're* not surprised?" he snarled. "All right, Miss Abercrombie, I'm coming!"

The girl turned and ran back down the corridor toward the Common Room door, with Snape just behind her and Lupin following in a more leisurely fashion behind them.

Snape found a crowd of students blocking the entrance to the Common Room, some inside trying to get out, and some outside trying to see what was going on within. The ring of steel against steel, and occasional crashing noises, came from inside the room.

The Head of House's authority won out even against curiosity, however, and Snape soon pushed his way inside.

The Common Room was in a shambles. Furniture was tipped over or pushed out of the middle of the room, the throw rugs had been thrown, and one of the green glass lamps hanging from the ceiling was swaying wildly on its chain as if someone had recently been swinging from it. Potter and Malfoy were indeed duelling, if by "duelling" one meant that Potter, with a huge grin on his face, was slicing Malfoy's robes to ribbons with a rapier while chasing him around the room backwards. Malfoy was ineffectually waving a sword of his own in Potter's general direction while attempting to defend what was left of his dignity. Neither sword, Snape noted absently, had buttons on the tip.

Pugsley and Wednesday Addams were cheering on their cousin, and other students had pressed themselves into the corners of the room or were hiding behind chairs while attempting to simultaneously get a good view. Some of them had also taken sides, and there were cries of "Potter!" and "Malfoy!" from various quarters.

"POTTER! Stop this foolishness immediately!" roared Snape, reaching out to grab the boy and just missing as he dashed past. Potter showed no inclination to stop, and Snape wasn't fool enough to step into the middle of a confrontation with live, and probably edged, steel. The fight ended a few moments later when Malfoy got wedged beneath an end table and Potter cut an initial "H" in the previously unsullied cloth covering his rear. Malfoy's sword was lying on the floor a short distance away, having been abandoned in Malfoy's search for sanctuary.

"Do you yield, Malfoy?" he asked. "Will you apologise to my lady?"

"Yes, yes!" came a muffled voice from under the table. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry!"

"Come out here and do it properly!" Potter commanded, just before Snape snatched the sword from his hand.

"Potter, what do you think you're doing?" Snape asked, glaring down at him.

"Working out the pecking order, sir," said the boy, seemingly unaffected by either the glare or by the trouble he was in. "I was just finishing, so if I could have my sword back ..."

"I think we've had quite enough of you waving this thing about, Potter. I think even the Headmaster won't tolerate you attempting to murder another student."

"There isn't a scratch on him," Potter protested. "If I wanted him dead, he'd be dead. And I was entirely within my rights to issue a challenge."

"You have no right to endanger other students!"

"No one was in danger," the arrogant boy insisted. "And I have every right to defend my lady's honour!"

"Oh, is that what you were doing? That's no excuse—"

"No, actually I was saving *his* life," said Potter, jerking his thumb at Malfoy. "Not to mention everyone else in the Common Room."

That was so unexpected that it brought Snape up short. "What on earth could humiliating someone have to do with saving his life?"

"Well, I was on my way to flying practice when I realized I'd forgotten my Quidditch gloves and I was going to need them later. So Pugs and I doubled back and came in just in time to hear Malfoy lay a whole series of insults on Wednesday."

"I did not either! I was just trying to be friendly!" yelped Malfoy.

"You have a funny way of showing it," said Wednesday. "You started off by insulting my family, my ancestry and my home, then went on to specifically insult my brother and my cousin, insulted me, and finally went on to offering to make me your ... your mistress. And then you implied I wouldn't even be good enough for that!"

Snape glanced around at the assembled witnesses, surprised to note that many of the students were nodding their agreement with Wednesday's summary of what had happened. Even Pansy Parkinson agreed, and the thunderous look on her face made it clear what she thought of Malfoy's apparent intention.

"And that," said Potter, interrupting the girl before she could get wound up again, "is when I saved his life. There's a Betrothal Contract in force between her parents and my guardians. It is my right, privilege and obligation to defend her honour from such an insult. So I got in the middle of it and challenged him to a duel before she could do anything really dangerous."

"And how dangerous can a half-powered witch be?" sneered Malfoy.

"Careful, or I'll have to challenge you again," said Potter. "When Wednesday gets mad, she breaks things. You were standing in front of a plate glass window with an entire lake on the other side of it. And it was buzzing. I don't *know* that Wednesday could have broken it, but I don't know that she couldn't – and I don't think that flooding the Common Room would improve the décor any."

"And how often does your little cousin go mad?" asked Malfoy.

“*Get* mad, not *go* mad,” said Pugsley. “And I’m getting a little mad myself, so you’d better quit while you’re ahead.”

“When Pugsley gets mad, he explodes things,” said Potter helpfully. “That gets kinda messy.”

“And just what do you do when *you* go mad, Potter?”

Potter stalked over to stand face to face with Malfoy. “I don’t get mad,” he said in a low, dangerous voice. “I get even.”

Snape turned to Lupin. “Is there really a Betrothal Contract in effect?”

Lupin nodded. “I’ve seen it; it’s in the Old Form. Harry was obligated to act, or the Contract could be declared broken. He was perfectly within his rights to demand whatever satisfaction he could get from Malfoy. The boy is lucky Harry decided to take it out on his robes instead of drawing blood.”

Snape had heard enough. “Malfoy, take that ridiculous sword belt off and go get changed. I’m going to be speaking to your father later in the day about your appalling lack of manners.”

“But—”

“Go!”

Malfoy went.

“As for you, Potter, Contract or no Contract, you handled this with an appalling lack of discretion! The Headmaster will be most displeased—”

Potter had the nerve to interrupt. “I thought what happens in Slytherin stays in Slytherin? Or does that not apply to me?”

“I think we can arrange things satisfactorily in-house,” said Lupin before Snape could respond. “There are all sorts of ways this story could turn embarrassing if it gets out, and I don’t think anyone wants that to happen. Although it wouldn’t be Harry and Wednesday’s reputations that would suffer if it did.”

The point was not lost on Snape. It was clearly Malfoy, as the offending party, who would suffer here, and his own authority as Head of House might be called into question. It was bad enough that the students would be talking about this for years inside the House; he didn’t want anyone outside of it finding out about Malfoy’s indiscretion if they could help it. “Very well. But there will be no more swordplay in this Common Room,” said Snape. “As a matter of fact, I’m going to confiscate and destroy—”

“Two heirlooms that are probably worth more than your pension?” asked Lupin. “Why don’t I just take those? That way nobody inexperienced can get hurt using them, and I can oversee Harry and Wednesday’s practices in my classroom. I can tell you’ve been slacking, Harry, you weren’t keeping your wrist straight.”

Snape would probably have made a fuss about the swords, except that a piercing shriek rang out from the boys’ dorms at that moment. Both teachers dashed in, to find Draco Malfoy rolling on the floor of the room in pain. He was still clad in rags, and his back was covered with boils. A stain of the now familiar green colour of the potion was smeared across his bedclothes, along with the gooey remains of a Zonko’s Patented Dissolving Pouch.

“It hurts!” he wailed. “Make it stop! Please, it hurts!”

“Calm down, Mister Malfoy. We’ll take care of it. Addams, does your sister have any more of that potion?”

“I used it all on Harry, sir, and you wouldn’t let me use the potions room to make more. Sorry,” said Wednesday as she eeled through the crowd of gawkers. She didn’t sound sorry at all.

Snape cast a numbing charm on Malfoy’s back and prepared to levitate him. “I’ll be taking him to the Hospital Wing. Lupin, see if you can find out who’s responsible.”

“What, he doesn’t have to learn what it is to be Slytherin?” Harry grumbled as Snape carefully floated Malfoy out of the room. He clearly remembered how much every step had hurt as he had walked to the Hospital Wing, even with Pugsley and Wednesday supporting him. Harry was an Addams and no stranger to pain, but that didn’t mean he liked it.

Lupin shooed the rest of the students out before turning to Harry, Pugsley and Wednesday. “Well, do we know who’s responsible?”

Harry shrugged. “Draco himself would be my best guess. Thing’s been finding things lying around and I always tell him to return them to the person that lost them. My guess would be Malfoy put that in my bed, and Thing ‘returned’ it this morning. Then Malfoy probably sort of flopped on the bed to feel sorry for himself instead of getting changed right away, and, well,” he shrugged again. “That stuff’s nasty on bare skin.”

“But you didn’t see Malfoy put anything in your bed, or Thing put anything in his?”

“No.”

“Well, I think we’ll just have to chalk this up to a person or persons unknown, like the last one. Now then, don’t you have people waiting for you down at the Quidditch pitch?”

Wednesday never did get her apology, but everyone in Slytherin knew the result of the trial by combat. Despite the code of silence protecting Slytherin interests, hints and rumours spread, and it was widely understood that you didn't mess with Wednesday Addams unless you wanted to get on the bad side of Harry Potter – and you did *not* want to be on the bad side of Harry Potter. Even Crabbe and Goyle gave him a wide berth.

Malfoy stayed in the Hospital Wing until Tuesday night, and Professor Snape tasked Harry to take notes for him in all their classes. Even when Malfoy returned to the Common Room, he displayed signs of lingering pain and tenderness, and Professor Snape told Harry to carry the other boy's books to classes and sit with him to help him if need be. In most classes, this wasn't a problem, but in Defence Against the Dark Arts, Malfoy liked to sit right up front. Whatever it was that Professor Quirrell had wrapped in his turban, the odour gave Harry blinding headaches every time the man came close to him. He would be very glad when he could abandon Malfoy and retreat to his usual desk at the back of the classroom, as far away from the Professor as possible.

Outside of classes, the early part of the week was very busy, as the first Parents' Weekend was to be held the weekend after Halloween. Mr. Filch had more work to do to ready the castle than he had elves to do it, and any student unfortunate enough to cross his path ran the risk of being drafted into one of his cleaning squads. All students had to help clean their own dorms and Common Rooms as well. Most of the teachers assigned their best students – and that included Harry in almost all cases – to do special presentations for the parents during the weekend, and those required research and spell practice in advance.

On Halloween morning they woke to the delicious smell of baking pumpkin wafting through the corridors. Harry wasn't quite sure why the British wizards were so hooked on the stuff. He liked pumpkin juice well enough, but it seemed like everybody else couldn't get enough of it.

Class went well that day, especially Transfiguration, where he successfully transformed a ball into a bell. The formation of the moving clapper was particularly tricky, and he was rather proud of himself. At lunch a story spread about the Gryffindor Charms class, at which someone had managed to make a feather explode instead of levitating it. For a wonder, it wasn't Neville who'd done it.

The afternoon seemed to pass excruciatingly slowly, but eventually it was time for dinner and the Halloween feast. The decorations were truly spectacular. The usual floating candles had been replaced with jack-o-lanterns that cast eerie shadows across the tables. A thousand live bats fluttered from the walls and ceiling while a thousand more swooped over the tables in low black clouds, making the candles in the pumpkins stutter. Hogwarts' many ghosts circulated through the Hall, singing spooky ballads, and a thick layer of mist covered the floor.

Harry was just helping himself to a baked potato when Professor Quirrell came sprinting into the Great Hall, his turban askew and terror on his face. Everyone stared as he reached Professor Dumbledore's chair, slumped against the table, and gasped, "Troll – in the dungeons – thought you ought to know."

He then sank to the floor in a dead faint, as panic broke out in the Hall.



## Family Values The Forbidden Corridor

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The Hall exploded into pandemonium. It was obvious to Harry, as he sat calmly at the end of the Slytherin table with Pugsley and Wednesday, that the Hogwarts students had never heard of a "fire drill." Many younger students, and even some older ones, jumped up from their seats and started to dash about as if afraid the troll would find them. The teachers weren't much better. Professor Sprout was all a-flutter, and Professor Snape slipped away from the Head Table into the shadows at the end of the Hall. Finally, several purple fireworks exploded from the end of Professor Dumbledore's wand and brought silence. Harry's eyes narrowed as Snape quietly exited through a side door at the moment Dumbledore drew everyone's attention.

"Prefects," Dumbledore ordered, "lead your Houses back to the dormitories immediately! Teachers, come with me!"

In the disarray while the various prefects gathered their scattered House members together, Harry caught Wednesday and Pugsley's attention. He shook his head quickly and gestured to them.

In order to understand Thing, the children had learned to read the hand alphabet and Morse code. Using Morse and the hand alphabet themselves was a natural extension of that. From the hand alphabet, they had progressed to full sign language, which Thing couldn't emulate due to the lack of a second hand or a body. When they had begun the Indian game, they had started making up their own signal codes. When Remus had joined the Family, he had taught them the Marauders' private hand code as well. By now, they could hold a nuanced conversation, shifting effortlessly between modes, in complete silence and perfect security – nobody else could understand a thing they were 'saying'.

*"Down,"* Harry said. *"Wait until everyone's gone."* All three children slid under the table, hidden from sight by the festive tablecloths and the mist. *"Watch Quirrell,"* Harry signalled, and Wednesday wormed up to the end of the table next to him.

Pugsley reached out to tug at the hem of Hermione's robe as she passed them. She looked down at him, and he signalled to her to get under the table with them. She looked uncertainly at the chaotic mob of first years around the Prefects, then bit her lip and slipped under the table with the other three.

"What are we—?"

"Sh!" whispered Pugsley softly, breathing the words barely audibly into her ear. "Harry's spotted something. Wait and see."

In a short time, the various groups of students were being hustled out of the Great Hall by the prefects, and the teachers followed Dumbledore, who strode in a determined fashion to the front doors of the Great Hall and out to the main staircase that led down to the dungeons.

That left the four students crouched in the mist – and the fallen form of Professor Quirrell.

"Why did they just leave him?" whispered Hermione to Pugsley.

"Sh!" he whispered again.

*"He's faking,"* signed Harry. *"I saw him flinch when someone stepped on him. I want to know what he's up to."*

In a few moments, Quirrell stirred and sat up. He looked around the room quickly, then rose and hurried out through a side door.

"Quick," whispered Harry. "I don't want to lose him!"

The four children scrambled out from under the table, and the three Americans rapidly slipped their shoes off, stuffing them in the capacious pockets of their robes. Harry looked at Hermione.

"You're all going to get in trouble!" she whispered urgently. "You're supposed to be going to your Common Room."

"Hermione," said Harry, "our Common Room is down where the troll is. It's not safe. You don't have to come if you don't want to. You'll be safe here."

Hermione hesitated only a second before slipping her shoes off as well and scooping them up. "All right, but if we get in trouble, I'll ..."

"Tell them it's all my fault," said Harry with a smile. "Now come on!"

Quirrell had a bit of a lead on them by now, but the mist had left moisture on his shoes and cloak, and Harry tracked him by the damp marks on the stone floors. He wasn't heading toward the dungeons, but to a side flight of stairs that was rarely used. They tiptoed up the stairs and peered around the corner into the corridor, ducking back hastily as a black shadow emerged from a doorway and swept off after Quirrell.

"It's Snape! He's following Quirrell, too!" said Wednesday.

"Now what do we do?" asked Hermione, peering anxiously over Pugsley's shoulder.

"Now we follow him instead!"

Darting from doorway to doorway and peeking around corners, they followed Snape who followed Quirrell. Harry found himself wondering if anyone was following them.

Snape and Quirrell took several shortcuts, and for several nerve-wracking minutes Snape waited in an alcove while waiting for Quirrell to ascend one of the flights of stairs that stretched across the great gallery that extended from the roof of the castle to the floor at least twelve storeys beneath. Only when Quirrell had reached the other side and disappeared down a side corridor did Snape hurry up the stairs himself.

The four students waited anxiously until Snape was out of sight, and dashed for the stairs themselves. The stairs, however, had remained in place for some time already, and moved on their own indefinable schedule when they were about half-way up. The four students clung to the railing while the top end of the staircase moved from the short side of the gallery to a balcony on the long side. As soon as the top end locked into place, the bottom end parted company with the lower landing and swung around until its end butted up against a blank wall.

"Now what?" asked Pugsley. "Up, or trust that there's a secret door down there?"

"Up," said Hermione, who had a death grip on the banister. "We're closer to the top than the bottom, and at least we'll be on the same floor as them. Besides, I really don't like heights."

"Sounds like a plan. Let's move," said Harry. The quartet climbed to the top of the staircase and found themselves in a portrait gallery. They bore to the right to try to find a corridor that would intercept Snape and Quirrell, and soon found themselves in known territory: the Charms corridor.

They tiptoed past the classroom, Professor Flitwick's office which adjoined it, and the spare rooms full of random objects to practice charming. They'd almost made it out of the corridor when there was a sudden shout from behind them and they were pelted with an assortment of rubber balls stuffed animals and marbles. "HA! STUDENTS OUT OF BED! STUDENTS IN THE CHARMS CORRIDOR!"

"Great," grumbled Harry. "We can't deal with him now. Run!" He led the way at a full run. The last thing they needed was for Peeves to attract attention from either of the teachers they were trying to follow. He made a sharp right at the first cross corridor, and slammed into a closed door. He tried the handle, but it was locked. He looked back in time to see Peeves careening on down the main corridor. Apparently the poltergeist had missed seeing them turn, but he'd be back before they could get away.

Harry pulled his wand and tapped the lock sharply. "*Abierto!*" he snapped, and the lock clicked open.

The four children piled through the door and stopped abruptly. The door slammed shut behind them and the lock clicked shut again.

"Oh, shit," breathed Pugsley.

It was, indeed, an 'oh shit' sort of a moment, thought Harry. They weren't in a room. They were in a corridor. The forbidden corridor. And now they knew why it was forbidden. They were looking straight into the eyes of a monstrous dog, a dog that filled the whole space between ceiling and floor. It had three heads. Three pairs of rolling, mad eyes; three noses, twitching and quivering; three drooling mouths, saliva hanging in slippery ropes from yellowish fangs. The only reason it wasn't immediately threatening them was because the left-most head had a firm grip on Professor Snape's leg and was shaking him like a rag doll. Snape himself seemed to be unconscious. Just out of range of the dog's right-most head stood Professor Quirrell. He whirled to bring his wand to bear on the four students. So much for not attracting attention.

"Well, isn't this interesting?" said Quirrell in a cold, hard voice that betrayed no trace of his customary stammer. "More company. I think you're quite enough for the night." He flicked his wand at the door. "*Colloportus!*" It emitted a squelching sound as it was sealed shut. Quirrell looked at them consideringly. "I suppose it's too much to assume you four found this room by coincidence, tonight of all nights. Severus must have let you follow him, the fool."

"We were actually following you," said Harry, almost unwillingly coming to Snape's defence. "So who's the fool then?"

Quirrell sneered. "We'll see who's the fool when I've achieved my Master's goal. I was going to use Snape to face the traps in Dumbledore's gauntlet, but it will be easier to use you instead. My Master may have a use for Severus later, but I doubt he'll have much use for any of you. The Mudblood will serve admirably to distract the beast."

Hermione gasped and pressed herself flat against the door as if trying to squeeze out through the wood.

Quirrell ignored her and continued, "As for you boys, I'll use Miss Addams' continued well-being to keep you in line. Do my bidding, and she may survive." He raised his hand and made a grasping and yanking motion, and Wednesday was dragged across the flagged floor towards him, her arms pinned to her side by some invisible force.

"Oh, no you don't!" said Harry, lunging after her.

Quirrell grasped Wednesday's robe at the shoulder, and Harry grabbed the professor's wrist to pull his hand away from her. At once, needle-sharp pain seared across Harry's head from his scar. Harry gritted his teeth to prevent a scream from breaking free – the pain was unexpected and he hadn't had a chance to set himself to accept it – and tightened his grip on Quirrell.

Quirrell, however, was unable to hold back his own cry of pain; he released Wednesday, who, still bound and off balance, fell to the floor. Pulling his hand out of Harry's grip, he staggered backward, cradling his hand against his chest. There were red, blistered marks across the back of his wrist showing clearly where Harry's fingers had gripped.

The pain in Harry's head lessened, and he moved to stand between Wednesday and Quirrell, assuming a duelling stance. With his free hand, he made a quick series of gestures to Pugsley.

Quirrell laughed. "You dare, Potter? You have no idea who you're facing!"

"An incompetent Defence teacher, looks like," said Harry.

"Incompetent? Why, you little—"

"Face it, Professor, I haven't seen you defend against so much as a dust bunny in two months, and the upper years say the same. You can't even bear my touch. Whereas I destroyed a Dark Lord when I was less than two years old. So which of us is outmatched, hm?" Behind him, Harry heard noises, but he didn't turn around. He knew it was just Pugsley, pulling Wednesday to safety while Quirrell was focusing on him. "Or maybe he was just a piss-poor excuse for a Dark Lord..."

"Enough!" A high-pitched voice interrupted him. It sounded like it was coming from behind Quirrell, but Harry could see no one there. "You've the nerve of a Gryffindor ... boy ... without the good sense to be frightened when you should be."

"I haven't seen anything to be frightened of," scoffed Harry, sidling slowly to his right.

"Then perhaps I should show you," said the voice.

"Master, no!" said Quirrell. "You are not strong enough!"

"I have strength enough ... for this."

As if compelled against his will, Quirrell slowly reached up with his injured hand and unwrapped his turban. The length of purple cloth fell to the floor in a puddle at his feet, and he turned slowly in place.

Where there should have been a back to Quirrell's head, there was a face, a warped, distorted face. It was chalk white with glaring red eyes and slits for nostrils, like a snake. "Harry Potter..." it whispered.

Harry took another step to his right, and Quirrell turned so the face stayed facing toward him. "Voldemort," Harry breathed.

"So you know me," replied the face. "After ten years, you still remember me."

"I saw you in a dream once," said Harry.

"See what I have become?" the face said. "Mere shadow and vapour ... I have form only when I can share another's body ... But there have always been those willing to let me into their hearts and minds ... such as my faithful Quirrell..."

The young teacher's body shuddered.

"Soon I shall return to my proper form," the face continued. "And with a body of my own ... I shall rally my followers ... we shall defeat our opposition ... the Mudbloods shall fall beneath our feet ..." The face's red eyes seemed to brighten as they looked down at Harry. "You're going to be a powerful wizard someday, Potter ... I can feel it. Join me, and there is nothing that could stop us. Join me ..."

"And we can rule the galaxy as father and son?" asked Harry. "Sorry, I've heard that line before, and I know how it ends up. Besides, I'm not really into evil."

"Evil? There is no good and evil ... there is only power, and those too weak to seek it. Your parents were weak ... They died begging me for mercy ..."

"Liar!" Harry snapped. "They wouldn't have begged you for anything!"

"How touching, your faith in your parents ... Your father did put up a courageous fight, that's true ... and your mother needn't have died at all ... but they did die. And so will you, and your little cousins ... unless you swear fealty to me."

"NEVER!"

"Then ... die!" snarled Voldemort.

Quirrell started to spin to bring his wand to bear on Harry again, when a spell flashed and his legs became like rubber and twisted together, unable to support his weight. With a cry, he crashed to the floor, landing face-first.

Harry flung himself onto Quirrell's back. "Nobody's dying today," he said. "Except maybe you." He took his wand between his teeth and pressed his hands to the moist white skin of Voldemort's face.

The double howl emitted by Quirrell and Voldemort was quite satisfying, perhaps even worth the blazing pain in his forehead. Quirrell thrashed, trying to throw Harry off. He shifted his weight to straddle Quirrell's back and keep him pinned, sliding his hands down to get a firm hold around his neck. Pugsley landed on Quirrell's legs, and Hermione kicked Quirrell's wand out of his hand, sending it skittering across the floor.

Harry closed his eyes, gritted his teeth and forced himself to concentrate on Voldemort, think of Quidditch, think of Wednesday ... anything but the pain ... Voldemort and Quirrell screamed even louder as Quirrell's skin began to blister and char, and then crumbled away into charcoal beneath Harry's hands. Harry felt Quirrell stop moving underneath him, but the pain still burned through his head and he could still hear that hideous howling.

Someone was tugging at Harry's robes, and he opened his eyes cautiously to find Hermione trying to pull him away from Quirrell. The professor's body was crumbling away to ash, and a hideous plume of grey vapour issued from the place where Voldemort's face had been. The vapour coalesced until it looked like a smoky comet with vaguely human features at the head end, circling around them.

"You cannot win, Potter!" it whispered. "I shall take another host ... Quirrell was a weakling ... I need a stronger host ... one who cannot deny me ..."

The smoke swooped down towards the unconscious Snape.

Taking his wand properly in hand, Harry lunged at the Potions Master as well, laying one hand against his face and pointing his wand at the vaporous spirit. "Not again, Voldemort! I can drive you out of him, too! Go back to wherever you've been hiding. *Separatur a plasmate tuo!*" he cried, jabbing his wand at Voldemort. A shower of gold sparks shot out the end of it

The miasmal entity uttered a whispery cry of pain as some of the sparks passed through it. It turned, swooped down the length of the corridor, and vanished through a transom window.

Harry allowed himself to relax, sitting on the floor next to Snape. "What do you know? It worked!"

"What was that spell?" Hermione said, bouncing up and down. "You have to teach me that!"

"It's part of an old exorcism rite I found when we were studying Latin. I thought it just sounded cool, but maybe there is something to it after all. It certainly sounded like it hurt him." He got slowly to his feet, feeling very tired. "Thanks for that jinx, Pugs. It was at exactly the right time."

"That wasn't me," said Pugsley. "That was Hermione. I was still trying to get Wednesday unbound."

"See, I told you we'd need her," said Wednesday, who was still lying on the floor with her arms pinned to her sides. "Now get me out of this!"

Harry flicked his wand at her. "*Finite incantatem.*"

"I already tried ... hey, it worked!" said Pugsley as Wednesday was released from the binding spell. "How come it worked for you?"

"The Force is with me," Harry said wearily. "Hermione, what's wrong?"

The young Ravenclaw was horror-stricken, her clenched fists pressed to her mouth as realization hit. "I ... I *jinxed a teacher!* They'll *expel* me for that!"

"I just disintegrated the same teacher," said Harry, wryly. "I don't think they'll be worried about you jinxing him." He looked around. "Snape's still out cold. He never saw us. And I doubt that dog is going to tell anyone what happened either."

The three-headed dog, in fact, was cowering at the far end of the corridor.

"Let's clean this mess up and get back to our Common Rooms. If we don't leave any evidence, nobody will be able to figure out what happened."

"What about the troll?" asked Hermione.

Harry pointed at the pile of ash. "He's the one who said it was in the school. What do you want to bet he made it all up?"

Working quickly, the four students bundled up the ash in Quirrell's clothing and wiped up the remaining traces with his turban. His wand went into the bundle as well.

While cleaning up, they realized the giant dog had been sitting on a heavy trap door set into the floor. "He must have been guarding that," said Pugsley. "Wonder what's down there?"

"Something *he* wanted," said Harry. "Whatever it is, it should probably stay there for the time being. I don't think he's going to make another try for it any time soon."

"But shouldn't we find out?" asked Hermione, her reservations at being out after curfew and jinxing a professor forgotten in the face of a puzzle. "It could be important!"

"No," said Harry firmly. "He said there were more traps and things down there. I don't know about the rest of you, but I'm wiped. Look, I'll put an alarm charm on the trapdoor," he said, casting it rapidly. "If anyone tries to open it, we'll know and can figure out what to do then. For now, I just

want to get out of here.”

Harry and Wednesday together managed to calm the giant dog and led it back to their end of the corridor. Harry pointed at the trapdoor. “Sit!” he commanded. The dog sat on it. “Stay! Good dog. I’ll bring you a steak or something when I can, all right?”

“Woof!” said the dog’s middle head.

Quirrell’s sealing spell was still in effect on the door, but like the binding, it was easy for Harry to break it. He didn’t like the implications of that, but decided to think about it later. Just before he closed the door, he stuck his wand through the crack and cast an *Ennervate* on Professor Snape. As the man stirred slightly, Harry let the door close silently and they tiptoed away.

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“There’s one thing about all this that I don’t understand,” said Harry as they descended the stairs, having finally found a flight that looked like they were going the right way.

“Just one?” said Wednesday. “I’ve got lots. Like, why did your touch burn Quirrell? Why could you undo his spells when no one else could? What’s down that trapdoor? What’s your question?”

“That must have been the corridor Dumbledore warned us about at the Sorting Feast, right?”

“Right.”

“So what was it doing on the fourth floor? I’ve been all over the third floor and couldn’t find anything!”

“That was the third floor,” said Hermione.

“No it wasn’t. It’s the fourth! The Great Hall’s on the first, that big portrait gallery’s on the second, the ...”

“Harry, that’s not how we count the floors here,” Hermione interrupted. “The Great Hall’s on the ground floor, the portrait gallery is on the first, the Defence classroom is on the second ...”

“You mean all this time I’ve been looking on the *wrong floor* ?!”

Hermione nodded, biting her lip to avoid laughing at him.

“I will never understand this country. Never.”

They dropped Hermione off in the Great Hall, hid the bundle of Professor Quirrell’s remains in an unused dungeon, and then tried to sneak back into their Common Room. Everybody else had gone to bed, except for the fifth-year prefect, Titus Artibee, who was waiting for them and gave them a thorough dressing down. Prefects couldn’t take points, but he was going to assign a detention with Professor Snape until Harry pointed out that Titus would likely get a worse one for letting them get away from him in the first place. He might even have his prefect status revoked. On reflection, Titus agreed that his lecture was punishment enough, as long as they promised not to do it again. Harry swore that next time a troll was loose in the school they would go straight to the Common Room, and that settled that.

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The next morning, the news was all over the Great Hall that three Gryffindors, Seamus Finnegan, Dean Thomas, and Ron Weasley, had gone after the troll and cornered it in the boys’ bathroom, where Weasley had knocked it out while it was attacking Finnegan. The points they received for defeating the troll were almost, but not quite, negated by the points taken for the damage done to the bathroom and for not going to their Common Room in the first place. As long as they were in the positive, the Gryffindors didn’t seem to care, and there was much celebrating going on.

Harry wandered over to the Gryffindor table.

“Hey, Nev. Here comes Potter again. How come he keeps coming over here, anyway?” said Weasley. “Slytherins should stay over on their own side.”

“Usually I come to talk to Neville, but this time I came over to congratulate you,” said Harry. “But if you don’t want me to ...”

“No, I, wait, what?” said Weasley.

“Ah, Gryffindor eloquence,” said Harry. “Good thing you didn’t have to talk the troll to death. What did you do to it, anyway?”

Thus encouraged, Weasley launched into a description (somewhat exaggerated, Harry suspected) of the epic battle in the boys’ room, ending with his levitating the troll’s club up near the troll’s head, where it exploded, knocking the beast out. In his enthusiasm, he demonstrated by levitating a cream pitcher. Neville foresaw the inevitable result and ducked under the table at just the right moment before the pitcher exploded, showering Weasley, Finnegan and Thomas with cream.

“Sounds like a great fight,” said Harry. “You need to work on that charm a little, though. You don’t want things exploding unless you intend them to.”

“Yeah, you’re right about that,” said Weasley, as napkins were passed down the table so the three could mop themselves up. “But it was wicked, anyway. Bet you wish you’d been there, huh?”

No, I'd just have gotten in your way," said Harry. "Sounds like you had it all handled. But if I need a good man in a fight, I know who to call." He slapped Weasley in a comradely way on the shoulder, and the red-headed boy beamed. "Good going, Weasley."

"It's Ron," the other boy said, impulsively sticking out his hand.

"Harry," said Harry, shaking it. "See you in Potions later?"

"Yeah. See you then," said Ron. Harry waved at Neville, who had resumed his seat now that there was not likely to be any more exploding crockery, and left, trying to listen to what was going on at the Gryffindor table as long as he was in earshot.

"Ron ... did I just see you shaking hands with a Slytherin?" asked Finnegan. "I thought I'd never see it."

"Hey," said Ron. "It's Potter, okay? The Boy-Who-Lived. They can't all be bad."

Harry returned to his seat by Wednesday, smiling. Weasley was the most outspokenly anti-Slytherin of this year's Gryffindors, and if Harry could win him over ... it was a start, anyway.

More importantly, his circuit of the room told him that nobody had noticed yet that Professor Quirrell was missing. Everyone was more concerned with the troll and the upcoming Quidditch game and the first-ever Hogwarts Parents Weekend.

With luck, they might just get away with it.

## Family Values Quidditch

Potions class was different than it usually was. When they reached the dungeon, Professor Snape was settled behind his desk in the chair he rarely sat in, and he stayed there the whole class. He didn't pay any more attention to Harry and his cousins than he usually did, and Harry began to breathe more easily. Most of the class was spent cleaning the tabletops and every bit of glassware in the room until they were spotless. Even Malfoy, who was still milking his alleged lingering discomfort from the boils, was set to organising the ingredients in the supply cabinet.

"You know," said Weasley as he scrubbed at a particularly annoying stain on his worktable, "I've always wondered why we can't use magic to do this. Why vinegar and salt scrubs? We'll all smell like pickles by the end of the class."

Harry looked up from his table, which he and Wednesday were scrubbing industriously. "Think about it, Ron. Do *you* know half of the things that have been spilled on that table?"

"No," said Weasley, frowning at the stain. "We're not the only classes using them."

"And do you know what happens when you mix unknown ingredients and then run a scrubbing charm over them?"

"No."

"Neither do Potions Masters. That's why they have students or apprentices," Harry said, waving his scrub brush at the rest of the class, "to do this for them. It's safer without magic. It could be worse, you know. The Ravens and Puffs are going to get the cauldrons and the floors."

Weasley glanced down at the flagstones at his feet and the crud in the cracks between them, and nodded in understanding before attacking his stain with renewed vigour, as if suddenly scrubbing tables didn't seem so bad any more.

Professor Snape, from behind his desk, glared mightily at Harry. Harry gave him a small smile in return and resumed scrubbing his table.

OoOoOoOoO

By lunch, a new bit of news was circulating in the Great Hall. Professor Quirrell had not showed up for his morning classes, and substitutes had been arranged for all of his classes in case he didn't show up in the afternoon. Rumour had it that he'd been so terrified by the troll that he'd run away in the night. Or that it ate him. Opinion was divided on the issue.

The Slytherins had double Defence in the afternoon with the Ravenclaws and were supervised by Madam Hooch, who had a free period at that time. She told the class to "do something to decorate the classroom" and then settled down to read the latest issue of Quidditch Monthly. Given such nebulous instructions, it was inevitable that the class would divide itself into two groups: most of the Ravenclaws and Harry's half of the Slytherins, who started investigating the unknown depths of the Defence storeroom, and Malfoy's half of the Slytherins, who goofed off.

Professor Quirrell had done the least of any of the teachers when it came to classroom preparation, and Harry thought that he understood why now – he'd never planned to be still at the school by then in the first place. As a consequence, the room was a trifle bare. The morning classes had put up a display of posters showing various duelling moves, but Harry wanted something a little more exciting.

The storeroom produced a seemingly endless supply of stuffed and mounted creatures, thoroughly covered with dust and cobwebs. Harry divided his team between those who went "ew ew ew!" on seeing the creatures and those who went "whoa, cool!". The division was mostly along gender lines, but there were a few exceptions, such as Wednesday, who was in the "cool!" camp. The "whoa, cool!" team set about cleaning the specimens and posing them in gruesome tableaux around the room, while the "ew ew ew!" team researched exactly what they were and put up signs with explanations.

When they were through, Madam Hooch walked about and looked approvingly at the displays. She gave points to everyone who worked on them, awarded Harry an extra five points for organising everything, and told Malfoy and his group that they would have three detentions the next week, to be spent cleaning and organising everything else that was in the storeroom. She didn't take points because that wouldn't have been fair to those Slytherins who actually did the work.

"What?!" exclaimed Malfoy. "You didn't say anything about detentions!"

"I shouldn't have to," said Madam Hooch. "I told you to do something, but didn't say what. You're old enough to start working out your own projects. When you're grown up, you will frequently have to work without direction, and you should start learning how now. The rest of your classmates did an excellent job. You sat around and drew caricatures of them. It was entirely your choice, and you get what you deserve."

"But my back ... the pain ..." Malfoy began.

"If you couldn't work moving things, you could have researched and made signs with the girls. This is not open to discussion, Mr. Malfoy. One more

word and I add a fourth detention.”

Malfoy subsided with ill grace, and the class was dismissed to go clean themselves up before all the parents arrived for dinner.

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Albus Dumbledore looked down upon the eight tables in the Great Hall. Things had got very much out of hand, and he wasn't exactly sure when or how. It was true that Morticia Addams had insisted on the creation of the Hogwarts Parents' Association, but he'd left its actual formation up to her, believing that an American Squib would never be able to organize such a thing, particularly given the disparities between pure-blooded and Muggle parents and her own unfamiliarity with the British Wizarding World. He had told Minerva McGonagall to act for him as Hogwarts' contact with the nascent Parents Association and left it at that, assuming that she would squash it, or at least keep their activities minimally disruptive.

It had therefore been a complete surprise to him when Minerva had called a staff meeting and presented complete plans for not just one night, but a whole weekend of activities, which would keep him quite busy from the time the Express arrived before dinner on Friday night until it took them all away again after Sunday luncheon. All except the blasted Addamses and the officers of the Parents Association, who wanted to have a meeting with him and the senior staff on Saturday afternoon.

Guest quarters that hadn't been used in two hundred years had been cleaned and prepared for occupancy, extra tables squeezed into the Great Hall, and all of the classes thoroughly upset for the last week.

Now there were Muggles – not Muggle-born witches and wizards, which he was quite used to and even approved of, but actual Muggles! – in the stately halls of Hogwarts for the first time ever, sitting at its tables and walking its halls, side by side with some of the worst pure-blood purists the Wizarding World had ever produced, for the next two days. The Addamses, true to form, had brought the whole family, including the butler and the hag. At least their arrival had Harry Potter smiling again, instead of displaying that blank mask he and his female cousin had been wearing all week, but now the whole family was giving the cut direct to the Malfoys. Admittedly, he wouldn't mind giving the cut to Lucius Malfoy himself, but starting a feud with one of the most influential families in Britain was not a Good Idea.

The whole thing was quite enough to give him a migraine.

On top of all that, his Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher had inexplicably gone missing, on the same evening that three students had almost been squashed by a troll. Severus had reported that he had suspicions about Quirrell, and had followed him to the entrance to the gauntlet Albus had set up to guard Nicholas' treasure, but he remembered nothing after opening the door, until he regained consciousness in a room that was empty but for himself and Fluffy. Albus had visited the room but discovered that some sort of powerful raw magic had wiped out all the magical traces of whatever had passed there, except for a single new Alarm Charm on the trap door. This he had left in place, along with one of his own, rather than alert the caster that it had been discovered and removed. It was clear that something had happened there, but he had no idea what. The trap door, however, had not been opened and the Cerberus was still on duty. Severus suggested that perhaps the timorous Professor Quirrell had just been so frightened by it that he ran off. Albus was dubious about this theory, but did not have a better one at the moment.

The loss of Quirrell did, however, leave him with an embarrassing gap in his staff that he needed to fill at the first opportunity. He would begin his search for a new Defence instructor as soon as this Parents' Weekend idiocy was over.

The last of the parents had taken their seats, many of the younger – and some of the older – children were waving happily to their families, and the head Kitchen Elf had notified him that dinner was ready to be served when the signal was given. Time to get this show on the road, as his gypsy grandmother was wont to say.

He rose from his seat and smiled benignly down upon his audience as they turned as one to face him.

“Ladies and gentlemen, mothers and fathers, I bid you welcome to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Some of you are strangers here, visiting for the first time. To you I say, Welcome! Some of you know these halls well, from the days you attended classes here. To you I say, Welcome back! We have many events planned over the next two days, including demonstrations of what your children have been learning so well in their classes, and I would like to invite all of you to attend a Quidditch game tomorrow morning between what promise to be two of our best House teams in years, Gryffindor and Slytherin!” He paused to allow the predictable cheers from the students to die down. “But for now, the Hogwarts kitchen staff have been working all day on a delicious feast for us all, so without further ado I say, let us eat!”

Tureens of soup appeared on the tables in the usual way, causing a murmur of surprise and appreciation to arise from the parents' tables, and Albus sat down and began his first course.

“Quite a turnout, isn't it?” asked Minerva happily.

“Quite,” Albus said, sourly. “I must say you outdid yourself.”

“Why, Albus,” she said chidingly, “anyone would think you didn't approve.”

“Hogwarts has done quite well for a thousand years, and we would have continued to do so without these American innovations.”

“Don't be so negative, Albus. A little innovation now and then is a good thing.” She beamed down at the students and parents at their tables. “For example, Remus came up with the most charming little maps. They show a dot labelled ‘You are here’ and the rooms and halls in the immediate area, and if you tell the map where you want to go, it shows little footprints taking you in the right direction. I've no idea where he got the idea, but it means we won't have people getting lost all weekend. I'm seriously considering giving them to all the first-years next year.”

Albus looked down at the same congregation and was less than happy. The neat, orderly table groupings were dissolving. Less than five minutes into dinner, students were leaving their tables to sit with their parents, and parents were sitting at the student tables, and soon enough ... yes, one of



the Ravenclaw students and her parents were talking to the Addamses on the Slytherin table, and was that Madam Longbottom heading over in that direction as well? At least she didn't stay there long, returning to the Gryffindor table to sit with her grandson, but the very fact that she'd been there was worrying.

He would definitely have to take a headache potion when this was over.

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Harry, Pugsley and Wednesday welcomed their family warmly as they entered the Great Hall, promptly moving over to the parents' table after the Headmaster's speech, filling in the gap left between the Addamses and the other Slytherin parents. After a short time, Hermione brought her parents – both obviously Muggle – over to join them. The Malfoy parents, along with the Goyles, made an ostentatious display of moving from the parents' to the students' table, sniffing disdainfully when the Granger parents thanked them for moving and took their places.

Harry and Hermione made introductions, though it seemed that Aunt Morticia and Mrs Granger had already met through the Parents' Association, and soon Mr Granger was chatting affably with Uncle Gomez, although his wife was a little more reserved.

"Pleased to meet you, Addams," said Mr Granger. "I've heard quite a lot about your boy, and your nephew, was it? Our Hermione's been writing us every week, and it's all about Pugsley this and Harry that. I wasn't sure until we got here that there were actually any other boys in the school!" He chuckled as Hermione buried her face in her hands, then had mercy on his mortified daughter. "So, I understand you're from America? May I ask what you do there?"

"I'm a lawyer. And I handle a few family investments. What do you do?" Gomez asked politely.

"My wife and I are both dentists," said Mr Granger proudly.

"Oh, really?" asked Gomez, with a wide and interested smile. "That must be fascinating."

Mrs Granger blinked and then leaned forward. "Mr Addams, do you ... I don't believe I've ever seen a human being with that many canine teeth before. Would you mind coming down to our clinic some time? I'd like to take some x-rays ... and perhaps some of your family might come too? Maybe there's a paper in this ..." All the while, her gaze was fixed on Gomez's teeth.

"Please forgive my wife, she gets a little ... intense when something grabs her interest," said Mr Granger. "Our daughter is the same way sometimes..."

"No, I couldn't have guessed," Harry murmured *sotto voce* to Pugsley. Hermione blushed heavily and concentrated her attention on her soup.

The soup plates and tureens vanished, to be replaced by the salad, and then the main course. The kitchens had outdone themselves, and there were many selections, served family-style so everyone could choose whatever they wished. Aunt Morticia helped herself to several items, tasted each one, and looked blankly down at her plate. "Is this what you normally eat?"

"Nope. This is feast food," said Harry. "It's better than usual. Normally it's meat, potatoes, choice of veggies. We do get a nice curry on alternate Tuesdays." He shrugged philosophically. "It keeps us going, but I'm really looking forward to Grandmama's cooking when we get home for Christmas."

When the pudding came, it was the Grangers' turn to be horrified by the vast array of tarts, trifles, cakes and sweets that appeared. "Not a fresh fruit to be seen. Hermione, you have been brushing, haven't you?"

"Da-ad!" moaned Hermione, who was beginning to wish she'd never brought her parents over.

The meal finished with coffee, tea and petit-fours. Many adults and their older children lingered in the Great Hall, while the younger students dragged their families off to see the Common Rooms and their dormitories. To an interested viewer, such as Albus Dumbledore, Harry and his cousins were just like all the others, tugging their relatives out of the room. Remus Lupin left the Head Table and tagged along with them.

The children, however, did not take the Family to the Slytherin Common Room immediately. Instead, they led them to the smallish dungeon where they'd hidden Quirrell's remains.

Lupin immediately recognised the filthy purple fabric that had been Quirrell's turban. "How did you get this, Harry? Dumbledore's had us all looking everywhere for Professor Quirrell."

"Quirrell's dead. I killed him," said Harry flatly.

"I assume you had reason," said Uncle Gomez. "You can't go killing teachers just because you don't like their class, you know."

"He was holding Wednesday hostage," said Harry.

"And he was going to feed Hermione to a huge dog, and use us to trip booby-traps," said Pugsley.

"He had Voldemort on the back of his head," said Wednesday.

"Two-faced, eh? In that case, he needed killing. Congratulations, Harry!" said Uncle Gomez, handing Harry a cigar.

"I'm not upset that it happened," said Harry, tucking the cigar in his shirt pocket. "I guess it's just my Destiny and all – I guess that makes the score me 2, Voldemort 0. I didn't expect it this soon, but ..." He shrugged. "The problem is how I did it. I don't know what happened or why, and I don't

know if it will happen again accidentally.”

The children explained what happened, in great detail and with occasional backtracking to fill in points that weren't clear the first time.

“That’s all clear as mud,” said Uncle Gomez when they were done. “I think the first thing to do is find out if Harry can do that to anyone else, on command.” He reached out and grasped Harry’s hand firmly. Harry gasped and tried to pull his hand away, but his uncle’s grip was unyielding. “Nothing. So it’s not going to just happen anytime you touch someone. Now try to hurt me. Try to burn me.”

“But I don’t want to!”

“There are lots of things you’ll have to do that you don’t want to,” said Uncle Fester. “Do it!”

“But what if I kill you?”

“You didn’t kill Quirrell right away. It took time. I think I can get away from you if necessary,” said Uncle Gomez. “And if I don’t, at least we’ll know.”

Reluctantly, Harry closed his eyes and concentrated on making Uncle Gomez burn. Then he tried to pretend it was Quirrell who was holding his hand, and he was trying to burn Voldemort again. *Burn*, he thought. *Burn burn burn burn* ... Suddenly he smelled smoke, and let go of his uncle’s hand with a yelp.

“Why did you stop? I didn’t feel anything.”

“Well, something’s burning!”

“Harry, look!” exclaimed Wednesday.

The tip of the cigar sticking out of Harry’s pocket had ignited and was sending up a plume of fragrant smoke.

“Not bad,” said Uncle Gomez, as Harry plucked the cigar out of his pocket before it could burn his shirt. “I didn’t master that trick until I was fifteen.”

“Okay, so at least I won’t burn random people,” said Harry. “That’s really what I was worried about most.”

“Right. If you’re going to incinerate people, it should always be on purpose,” said Uncle Fester. “Trust me, I know.”

Uncle Gomez nodded agreement. “Smoke your cigar as long as you’ve got it lit. It’s good for you.”

“So what do I do now?” asked Harry, taking a tentative puff. “It’s nice to know I won’t burn anybody else up, but I still don’t know why it happened in the first place.”

“I have an idea,” said Remus. “But I want to check something before I go trotting it out for everyone to laugh at. Think you could come round to my office sometime this weekend? Maybe Sunday afternoon? Then we’ll have a chance to work things out before the family leaves.”

“I suppose so, yeah. But in the meantime I’ve got a box full of dead Professor here and that dog is still up there sitting on God-knows-what, and ...” He looked at Remus, who had a guilty expression on his face. “You know what’s under there, don’t you?”

“Yes. Yes, I do. It’s something that belongs to an associate of Professor Dumbledore’s – something that could be dangerous if certain parties got their hands on it. I believe there was some threat against it where it was, and Dumbledore agreed to keep it here for protection. Most of the teachers were asked to contribute sort of a booby trap against anyone getting at it. He thinks I’m his man, and I want to keep him thinking that, so of course I kicked in my bit.” He looked uncomfortable. “I really didn’t anticipate your getting involved with it, which is why I didn’t say anything before.”

“I suppose Quirrell kicked in his bit, too?” asked Harry.

Remus nodded. “The idea was that none of us would be likely to be able to get through the whole gauntlet of traps, and if we couldn’t, then nobody else could, either.”

“Then how is anybody going to get through it when they need to give it back to whoever owns it?”

“Oh, Dumbledore can get through it. But probably no other wizard in the world can.”

“So it’s perfectly safe, then?”

“Perfectly.”

Harry paused to blow a cloud of smoke, then said, “Fine, then that’s something I don’t have to worry about. I doubt Voldemort’s going to try to get into the school riding on the back of someone’s head again, and all we have to do to be sure is start a fad for knocking off people’s hats. Then if we see someone suspicious, whammo!” He grinned. “So all I have to do is deal with Quirrellmort, here.”

“That’s easy enough,” said Uncle Gomez. “Finish the job you started. This looks like it will burn well,” he said, fingering the dirty turban. “Then flush the ashes down the john. Or dump them in the lake.”

“Not going to tell me to report it to the police?”

“That’s the Aurors, here, and no. I’ve seen enough of the Ministry to know they’d have you convicted of murdering him and whisked off to Azkaban

before you could say ‘turban’. And Azkaban, while it has a rather bracing climate, is no place for a growing boy. Dumbledore wouldn’t be any help either. He’d just take it as an invitation to get involved with your life again, and any man stupid enough to hire a teacher wearing his worst enemy on the back of his head can’t be trusted. Rumour says Quirrell ran off. Let’s leave it at that.”

So Harry tucked Quirrell’s wand into the bundle of clothing, and was just about to stuff it into the fireplace in the dungeon, which had apparently not been used in some years, judging from the cobwebs that festooned it, when Remus stopped him. “Learn from a pro, Harry. *Evanesco*.” The cobwebs vanished. “Now put the clothes in.”

Harry put them in the fireplace and set them on fire with a quick “*Incendio!*” The cloth didn’t burn up as fast as Quirrell himself had, although his wand went up with a flash. Soon enough there was only a second pile of ash, together with the buttons from Quirrell’s clothing. They scooped the ash into an empty coal scuttle that stood next to the fireplace.

“*Scourgify*,” Remus muttered, cleaning the last of the ash and traces of smoke from the fireplace. “Now here’s the beauty part ... *Exorior!*” With a swish of his wand, the cobwebs reappeared in the fireplace, making it look as if nothing had ever disturbed them. “Now let’s deal with those ashes.”

During their previous explorations in the area, the children had found an ancient toilet, consisting of a shaft with a wooden seat over it. When they tossed a button in, they heard a splash far below. “Probably leads down into the lake. Or an old cesspit. Either way, it’ll do,” said Harry, and he promptly poured the contents of the coal scuttle down the shaft. There were a few more quiet plops as buttons hit the water. Harry threw the stub of his cigar in for good measure.

“Now then,” said Aunt Morticia, “why don’t you show us your Common Room, and then take yourselves off to bed? You do have a Quidditch game tomorrow, you know.”

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Harry sat on the edge of his bed, pensively turning his wand end over end with a one-handed finger twiddle. The rest of the boys had just gone to bed, and the only light in the room was from the candle on Harry’s snake skull. Pugsley lay in his own bed next to Harry’s, lying on his side so no one else could see his signals.

*“What are you thinking about? Quirrell?”*

Harry put his wand aside and signaled back. *“It’s perfectly safe.”*

*“What?”*

*“What Remus said. It’s perfectly safe.”*

*“So?”*

*“It’s down a hole with a dog sitting on it and a bunch of boobytraps protecting it. Do you call that perfectly safe?”*

*“Not really, no.”*

*“Whatever it is, Voldemort wants it. So it must be important.”*

*“Yeah.”*

*“Think he’s going to let what happened stop him?”*

*“Probably not.”*

*“We need to get it first.”*

*“Yeah.”*

“Would you put that bloody candle out? Some of us are trying to sleep here!” came Malfoy’s voice from the other end of the room.

*“We’ll get the girls in on it first chance we get.”*

*“Yeah.”*

Harry blew the candle out and lay down, but sleep was a long time coming.

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Saturday morning found Harry almost too excited to eat, although he didn’t show it, of course. He managed to get a few bites of toast down, and then pushed food around on his plate for a bit. Finally Marcus Flint signalled to the team that it was time to go, and they marched briskly out of the Great Hall. Most of the team were older students, and Harry looked very small and young tagging along behind Higgs.

In the locker room on the west side of the pitch, the team changed into their green Quidditch robes. Madam Hooch, the referee, made a quick visit to check the equipment and then left again. While she had the door open, Harry could hear the sounds of the students and their families chattering while they filled the stands outside, and he fancied they sounded like a flock of exotic birds.

All right, men," growled Flint. "You all know what's at stake here – the honour of our House ... and the chance to give those Gryffindor pansies what for. Word is all three of their Chasers are girls this year. They're young and won't be able to take a good Bludger hit, so they'll have to dodge a lot." He turned to the two Beaters, both fifth-years. "Bole, Derrick, keep 'em on their toes. If you can take any of their Beaters or Chasers out, do it. They're probably playing without reserves again this year, and if they're a man down, we'll roll right over them."

The Beaters nodded. They knew the drill.

Flint addressed the Keeper next. "Bletchley, most of their shots on goal will be fast and short-range. Those girls don't have the upper body strength for long shots, so watch for them coming in and stay centred. Be ready to jink in any direction, but don't let them lure you away from the goals."

Bletchley just grunted in reply.

There were two Chasers other than Flint. "Pucey, you remember the Weasley twins from last year. Warrington, this is your first time facing them. Deadly accurate they are, especially with that doppelbeater attack. Keep your eye on 'em, don't let them take you by surprise. Keep 'em separated if you can, they'll do less damage that way."

It was Higgs' turn next. "Higgs. I don't know who they're flying at Seeker this year, but they haven't had anybody decent in years. Test their new man, and if you can outfly him, try to distract their Chasers as much as possible. Let us get the score up a bit, then catch the bloody Snitch."

Finally, he turned to the three Reserve players, one Beater, one Chaser, and Harry. "I don't anticipate any of you getting in the air this match, but anything can happen once the whistle blows. You're all new to the team – I want you to study the first-string players and see how they work. It's different in a real game than in practice."

"All right. They'll be ready to start any second now. You all know what to do, and you're going to go out and do it or answer to me. And if you survive that, you'll have to answer to Professor Snape." A bell rang, to signal that they were wanted on the field. "Now let's get out there, and kick some Gryffindor arse!"

They picked up their brooms and moved out to the launch gate, Harry pausing only to grab a golf pencil and a piece of paper out of the supply section of his broom case.

"Wossat for?" asked Montague, the Reserve Chaser.

Harry shrugged. "Notes. Keeping score. Whatever I feel like."

"You sure you're not a Ravenclaw?" Montague asked, laughing.

They trooped out to the gate, where the seven first-string players got into formation and flew out onto the pitch, to the cheers of the students in the stands. The three Reserve players settled down to watch, with Harry paying rather more attention than the other two, simply because it was the first time he'd seen a game being played.

"And Madam Hooch gives the signal, and ... *they're off!* And the Quaffle is taken immediately by Angelina Johnson of Gryffindor – what an excellent Chaser that girl is, and rather attractive, too –"

"*Jordan !*"

"Sorry, Professor." Professor McGonagall, Gryffindor's Head of House, attempted to keep the rather exuberant student announcer in check.

"And she's really belting along up there, a neat pass to Alicia Spinnet, a good find of Oliver Wood's, last year only a reserve – back to Johnson and – no, the Slytherins have taken the Quaffle, Slytherin Captain Marcus Flint gains the Quaffle and off he goes – Flint flying like an eagle up there – he's going to sc – no, stopped by an excellent move by Gryffindor Keeper Wood and the Gryffindors take the Quaffle – that's Chaser Katie Bell of Gryffindor there, nice dive around Flint, off up the field and – OUCH – that must have hurt, hit in the back of the head by a Bludger – Quaffle taken by the Slytherins – that's Adrian Pucey speeding off toward the goal posts, but he's blocked by a second Bludger – sent his way by Fred or George Weasley, can't tell which – nice play by the Gryffindor Beater, anyway, and Johnson back in possession of the Quaffle, a clear field ahead and off she goes – she's really flying – dodges a speeding Bludger – the goal posts are ahead – come on, now, Angelina – Keeper Bletchley dives – misses – GRYFFINDORS SCORE!"

Gryffindor cheers filled the cold air, with howls and moans from the Slytherins. Most of the Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs seemed to be rooting for Slytherin too.

Slytherin gained the Quaffle after the Gryffindor goal, and play continued until both Seekers spotted the Snitch and raced after it. Harry held his breath, willing Higgs to catch it, but it looked like the Gryffindor Seeker was slightly in the lead, until Flint blocked him and knocked him away. The Gryffindor team screamed foul, Madam Hooch awarded a penalty shot to Gryffindor, and the Snitch got away again in the confusion.

Flint didn't seem to be terribly upset that Gryffindor was up by twenty points after one of their Chasers scored on the penalty shot.

Harry frowned, and started taking notes.

An hour in, the game was getting even rougher, the fans were hoarse from shouting, and Professor McGonagall had threatened to remove the announcer a dozen more times. The Gryffindor Seeker, a third-year who was new to the team, was pale and shaking from the number of close calls he'd had from the Bludgers. Harry had the impression he'd stopped looking for the Snitch and was mostly trying to keep from getting killed. Higgs wasn't particularly looking for the Snitch either; he was spending most of his time interrupting passes between the Gryffindor Chasers.

Finally, as Higgs dove between the Chasers and clipped the twigs on Katie Bell's broomstick, the Gryffindor Beaters decided they'd had enough. One of them sent a Bludger straight at Higgs, who jinked to the right to avoid it – and the second Bludger slammed directly into his head. The crowd gasped as Higgs parted company with his broom and plummeted to the ground, which fortunately was only twenty feet away. Unfortunately, the November frost had rendered it as unforgiving as cement, and the sound of his arm breaking as he hit could be clearly heard in the sudden silence.

Madam Hooch blew her whistle frantically, and play came to a stop as she checked Higgs' condition. Shortly he had been placed on a stretcher which was floated back up to the castle by a squad of Hufflepuff volunteers.

"Uh-oh," said Montague. "Bad luck for Higgs. They'll be calling you in a minute, Potter. Think you can avoid getting killed?"

Harry nodded, and rapidly began folding his notes into a paper airplane.

"Whatcha doin' that for?"

"You'll see," he said, as he drew his wand just long enough to place a quick charm on the paper.

Out on the pitch, Madam Hooch turned to Flint. "Captain Flint, you're down your Seeker. Do you want to forfeit the match, or switch one of your Chasers to play Seeker?"

"We have a Reserve Seeker," he said, signalling to the entry gate.

Harry mounted his broom and launched himself into the air, as the announcer started speaking again.

"Slytherin have opted to bring in a Reserve Seeker ... I'm being handed the details by the Slytherin scorekeeper now ... Holy cats! Is this true? Ladies and gentlemen, the new Slytherin Seeker is none other than *Harry Potter!* Still in his first year, he's easily the youngest player in a school match in over a century! I've heard rumours about how this boy flies, it's going to be something to see. He's riding an American model broom – we'll see if it can keep up ..."

Harry smirked and patted the shaft of his Silver Streak. They were in for a surprise. He made a quick circuit of the stadium, and as he passed the stands where Wednesday sat in the first row with the rest of the family, he launched his paper airplane. The charmed paper sailed directly into her hands and unfolded itself. She read it and then looked up and nodded. He gave her a quick salute in reply, then turned his attention to the game.

Flint was arguing with Madam Hooch that the Bludger attack against Higgs had been a foul, but she said it was a fair play, and blew her whistle to resume play with Gryffindor in possession of the Quaffle.

Harry stayed above the skirmishing teams, circling while looking for the Snitch and dodging the occasional Bludger and listening to the commentary with half an ear.

"Potter's staying high – can't say I blame him, one good Bludger shot would break him in half – Flint intercepts the Quaffle, there he goes up the pitch – he takes his shot – he *scores!* And it's fifty to ninety Gryffindor. The Quaffle is back in play and *there goes Potter!*" the announcer practically screamed into the microphone. "Gryffindor Seeker Towson is after him, but Potter's in the lead, heading for the Slytherin end of the pitch, and *Great Merlin* he's made a hairpin turn in one broom length and he's headed the other way – Towson floundering, can't make the turn, he's way behind – Potter corkscrewing between the Slytherin Chasers – the rumours were right, that boy can fly – and he *has the Snitch!* Potter catches the Snitch in less than five minutes in his first game, and the game ends with Slytherin scoring two hundred points to Gryffindor's ninety!"

The Slytherin stands broke out into cheers. A number of Ravensclaws, a few Hufflepuffs, and one Gryffindor – Neville Longbottom – were cheering as well, and Harry waved to his friends and family as the team took a victory lap around the pitch. The paper airplane sailed up to him as they passed the Slytherin section of the stands, and he pocketed it unnoticed among the silver confetti and green streamers that were pouring down upon them.

When they were back in the locker room, the first thing everybody did was check their brooms and make sure no damage had been done, then put them away. Flint came over to Harry's bench and slapped him on the back. "Good job, Potter! We've got a hundred ten points to the Cup! Higgs is going to have to work to get his spot back – if he gets it back. But next time, just let us get the score up a little first, eh?"

Harry turned to face Flint. "Higgs can have his spot back any time he wants it. If you're going to play the game that way – I quit!"

"What?"

"You heard me. I quit. I'm not going to bail you out when you're practically *giving* the game away!"

"What the hell are you talking about, shrimp?!" Flint roared.

Harry dropped his broom to the floor and stood on it, willing it to lift him up so he could see Flint eye to eye. He waved the unfolded airplane in his face. "I'm talking about *this*, Flint! I kept score all the time I was watching. And I had Wednesday do it while I was playing."

"So what? We got a scorekeeper."

"And I bet you're not paying enough attention to his tally, either. You guys were *fifty* points down when I came on."

"We'd have got it back. I scored just after you started, remember?"

"You'd never have caught up. Look, in regular shots on goal, you guys are about the same as the Gryffies," said Harry, waving the paper. "You both

take about the same number of shots and make about the same number of goals. But when you foul them and they get a penalty shot, they make almost all of them. I bet those girls've been practicing penalty shots more than anything else. Those are free points you're giving them. And they were provoking you. The madder you get, the more fouls you make. They don't foul you on purpose, so you don't get anywhere near as many penalty points. The way you were playing, if I hadn't caught the Snitch early, they'd have won sooner or later anyway." He slapped the paper into Flint's hand. "If the Gryffies can figure out a strategy to take advantage of you, you can bet the Claws and the Puffs have figured it out too. And we can't count on them having lousy Seekers."

He let the broom lower him to the ground again and sat down on the bench.

"If they all play to it, we're not going to have anywhere near a big enough margin to take the Cup."

"One game and you're an expert?"

"He's right," said Bletchley. "Those girls are deadly accurate on penalty throws. They got six penalty shots by me. If you guys hadn't fouled them, we'd have won by one seventy instead of one ten."

"And if you'd *blocked* those shots like you're *supposed to* , we'd ..."

Harry sighed, put his broom on its chain, and closed up the case that he toted around as a decoy. The argument rolled around him. He'd had his say, and Flint would learn that he meant it when he didn't show up for the next practice.

In the meantime, his family was waiting for him, and luncheon would soon be served.

## Family Values Balance of Power

Snape glared across his desk at the woman who sat opposite him, but she seemed remarkably unfazed. He wasn't quite sure what to do in these circumstances; most of his previous conferences with parents had been with the fathers of his students, who mostly tried to use intimidation (unsuccessfully) or bribery (sometimes successful, he admitted to himself – his salary as Potions Master was adequate, but no more than that) to get better grades for their darling little dunderheads. Some few conferences had been with the mothers of students, who used different ploys – shrieking, crying, or a different kind of bribery – to seek advancement for their children. This was the first time he'd had to cope with a grandmother.

The woman who'd been introduced to him only as "Grandmama Addams" at the open house on Saturday afternoon, and who'd sat quietly knitting a shapeless sweater designed for someone with three arms and two heads throughout his presentations on basic Potions, now sat in his most uncomfortable chair, looking around his office with beady black eyes whose sharp gaze didn't miss a thing. She wore a pea-green robe covered by a flowered shawl, none of whose colours even remotely matched the green. A weedy-looking corsage held the shawl together. Bone-white fingertips protruded from fingerless gloves of black lace, clutching a worn carpetbag that overflowed her lap.

"Madam," he finally said, "if all you want is to look at my office, that can be arranged another time. There are other parents who have things they actually wish to talk about."

"Of course," said the old woman in a high, creaky voice. "I was just taking the opportunity to get to know you. You can learn a lot about people from their bookshelves."

Snape glanced at his shelves, with their familiar clutter of books, parchments, and random bottles of herbs and odd souvenirs, and wondered uneasily what exactly she had learned.

"I'm a bit surprised to see you," he confessed. "I was expecting the other Mrs Addams."

"My daughter-in-law? She went to see the Divination teacher - that's her specialty. I've been known to fiddle with a potion or two, so I got to see you," she said, with a snaggle-toothed grin.

"Lucky me," drawled Snape. "What in particular did you wish to speak to me about? Your grandchildren—"

She waved her hand dismissively. "They're both doing well enough. Pugsley isn't interested in anything that can't be made to explode, catch fire, or emit poisonous vapours, and Wednesday, well, let's just say she'll test better than her homework would make you suspect."

Snape nodded. He'd already realised that about Pugsley Addams – just last week he'd caught the boy showing Longbottom how to make a perfectly innocuous cleaning potion emit a vile green fume by the simple addition of saltpetre, but at least he had the sense to put small samples of potions into a tester cauldron before he did anything to them, rather than blow up an entire batch. It did tend to keep the class lively, and Snape would have liked to have the concession on tester cauldrons at Diagon Alley – it was clear the Longbottom/Addams team was going to go through a lot of them. And Wednesday had done better on her last quiz than her homework would suggest. Perhaps she was one of those who performed best under pressure. He would have to keep an eye on her.

"No, I'm here to talk about Harry. He's not my blood kin, you know, the connection is through my husband's family, but I couldn't love him any more if he was."

"I'm sure," said Snape sourly. This was exactly what he'd been afraid of – the boy was pampered to a faretheewell. The Addamses were undoubtedly more concerned with his welfare than with their own children's – probably in an attempt to get their hands on the Potter and Black fortunes, he thought. From the report he'd received of Wednesday's comments to Malfoy, the Addams Family weren't exactly penniless, but it was typical of families that had money to want more. "And exactly what is your concern about Mr Potter?"

"I believe that his homework assignments and finished potions work may not have been ... correctly evaluated," she said.

"Mr Potter's written work is inadequately documented, his technique sloppy, and his finished potions barely acceptable. He is easily distracted in class, and I suspect his quiz grades rely more on guesswork than on proper revision," said Snape witheringly.

"Well, I disagree. I taught all three of those children all their basic technique, and while I've occasionally seen Pugsley distracted by a good explosion, Harry never loses his focus."

"Madam, while you may - how did you put it? - 'fiddle around with a potion or two', I am a fully accredited Potions Master. I think I am capable of assessing a student's work accurately."

"Well, that's as may be," the old bat said, opening the carpetbag. "After the first week, the children weren't too sure of that, so all three of them have been sending me copies of their homework and samples of their potions since September. They've been evaluated and certified by one of the

best American Potions Mistresses in the business. Perhaps you know the name?" She set out several scrolls of parchment, all written in Potter's sloppy handwriting – the boy didn't like using quill pens and let his dislike show. At the bottom of each scroll was an evaluation written in spidery handwriting with purple ink, and a purple wax seal was attached. Next was a set of potions vials, all labelled in Harry's handwriting and also sealed with a purple seal.

Snape's hand shook slightly as he picked up the parchments. The seal was genuine, he could see that at a glance. He had one of his own, to use with his own unique colour of wax and ink (a rather bilious green, unfortunately – all the good colours were already taken by the time he achieved his Mastery). No one would dare fake the seal of the International Potion Master's Guild, not without risking becoming potions ingredients themselves. He glanced over the first parchment – he remembered this one, right down to the quill spatters for which he'd deducted points. The grading was fair and accurate, with extra credit given for footnotes and citations for which he had deducted points, claiming they were 'unnecessary frippery'. It was the last time footnotes had appeared on any of the Addams Trio's papers; they had merely included the citations within the text after that.

His gaze skittered down to the signature next to the seal.

"Eu ... Eudora ... you got *Eudora Frump* to grade children's papers?"

"I *am* Eudora Frump, Mr Snape. Got my seal well before I married the late Mr Addams, and I've kept working all these years. Two of my books are on your shelves," she said, nodding to the shelf where *Frump's Formulas for Fermentation* and its companion volume, *Perilously Potent Potables*, held pride of place. "I retired when the grandchildren started coming, but a Master's first duty is to teach. Given three captive students, well ..."

"How did a *Squib* get to be a Potions Mistress?"

"Now, now, Mr Snape," said Mrs Addams. "Think logically. I wasn't born an Addams. I'm as full-blooded a witch as they come in America. It was my husband who was the Squib."

"But ... if you don't do magic ...?"

"Whoever said I don't? Or what kind? There's more to being a witch than all this silly wand-waving, you know. Or would, if you ever set foot off this island. The Great Suppression wasn't as thorough elsewhere as it was here."

"What Great Suppression? I've never heard of..."

"I believe you call it the Great Purification – you can look it up. Or ask Lupin, he knows. It's not my place to teach you your own history. But that's neither here nor there. The question is what to do about Harry's grades."

"What do you expect me to do, madam?" Snape said coldly.

"I expect you to grade his work fairly," she snapped back. "Both you and I know he's capable of working at this level and better. Most of the potions you've been assigning are ones I taught the children years ago. They could brew them in their sleep. More than that, I expect you to treat the other students fairly as well. You did sign the Paracelsus Pledge when you achieved your Mastery, did you not?"

"Of course."

"What is the third clause?" she asked.

He found himself responding automatically, as he would have to the Master who had trained him. "As the Master is known by his Student, it is the responsibility of the Master to train his Apprentices well and treat them with respect.' But this isn't an Apprentice situation."

"Pish and tosh!" she said, waving her hand again. "That's mere legalistic quibbling, and you know it! It doesn't matter that Harry isn't an Apprentice, nor is he ever likely to be. He's an excellent brewer, but he doesn't have the interest or the inner vision it takes to seek a Mastery. Pugsley's a different case and may enter a specialized Apprenticeship when he's older. The point is that at eleven, it isn't always obvious which students are Apprentice material and which aren't. Even that Longbottom boy could surprise you. So you have to treat them all as potential Apprentices. But if you reward or penalize them based on their political value, their family connections, or what House they are – stupid concept if you ask me – they'll never have a chance to find out if they could be Apprentices. Or Aurors or Mediwitches or any of the other things that require Potions skills. You, *Mister* Snape," she said, emphasizing the dismissive 'Mister', "are the first person representing the Art of potion-making to the children of Britain. If *you* turn the talented away and sponsor the incompetent, then *you* will be responsible for disrepute falling on our Art – damage which may take a generation or more to undo."

She reached out and tapped one bony finger on one of the sealed parchments. "*This*, Mr Snape, is evidence – evidence of either incompetence or deliberate maliciousness as a teacher, neither of which is acceptable in a member of the Guild. And as a senior Guild member myself, I have no choice but to make you answer for it. I would be completely within my rights to haul you up before the Guild Council tomorrow. If you can convince them that it was just a youthful indiscretion – you are far younger than most of the Guild members, after all – then you might keep your Mastery credentials, under the supervision of a senior member who could remedy your deficiencies. If they believe it's been done out of malice, then they might drum you out of the Guild entirely. How long do you think your cushy little job would last then?"

"Albus would ..." He stopped abruptly.

"Albus Dumbledore is an Alchemist – a classically trained one, at that," said Mrs Addams – no, Mistress Frump. "You know about the rivalry between the Alchemists' League and the Guild as well as I do. Are you sure he wouldn't welcome the opportunity to give the Guild a bloody nose – and save the difference in salaries between a Potions *Master* and a simple Potions *instructor* into the bargain? That's if he decided to keep you at all."



But ... but ...” Snape spluttered. The very idea of leaving Hogwarts was abhorrent. He’d spent more of his life here than any other place, and he had nowhere else to go. True, he owned his father’s house, but he didn’t actually *live* there, and retreating there as a defrocked Potions Master with no prospects would validate every cutting remark his father had ever made. The associates of his youth were mostly, like him, trying to live down their earlier political affiliation, and while they were willing to associate with him when their children’s school careers were at stake, they would have no use for him were he to lose his situation.

“Of course, there might be a way to avoid the necessity,” she said slyly.

*Of course*, he thought. *Blackmail. I should have expected it.* “What are your conditions, Mistress Frump?” he asked, managing a sneer.

“First of all, you’re going to regrade all of Harry’s work, fairly. And all the other students in your classes. Yes, I know it’s a lot of work, but you haven’t posted grades for this term yet, so no harm done. And you’re going to keep grading them fairly from here on out. I’ll take you on for some additional mentoring for a period of, shall we say, seven years?” The fact that this was the period that Harry Potter would be attending Hogwarts went unmentioned. “That should be enough time to whip you into shape, and it’s no more than the Guild would require. It’s obvious no one taught you how to teach, did they? We’ll rectify that, never fear. You’ll find it easier once you’re not trying to make it up as you go along. And if it’s research you really want to do, which I see it is,” she said, shooting a glance at his bookshelves, “we’ll get you some time for that. And as for that ... that *Alchemist*,” she almost spat, “here’s how we’ll get it all past him ...”

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On Sunday afternoon, following another sumptuous luncheon, the Hogwarts carriages arrived to take the parents back down to Hogsmeade Station, and most of the students thronged outside to see them off. Only thirteen parents remained, the officers and core members of the Parents’ Association, and Dumbledore sincerely wished they were on the carriages as well. Fairy tales notwithstanding, wishing didn’t work, and he soon found himself conjuring suitable seats for all of them in his office. In a fit of pique, he conjured the stiffest, hardest, most uncomfortable chairs he could think of for Gomez and Morticia Addams, only to find to his disgust that they seemed to like them very much.

“Ladies ... Gentlemen,” he said, nodding cordially to the mixed group of parents. “May I offer you some tea? Biscuits? Lemon drops?” As various parents accepted his offers or demurred, he contemplated the group that filled his office to bursting, despite his having expanded the room twice.

Mrs Addams couldn’t have come up with a more varied group if she’d tried. Dumbledore prided himself on knowing the names, House and Family affiliations of all his students, and he realized that besides herself and her husband, Mrs Addams had managed to arrange things so that the members of the Executive Committee, as she called it, included parents of students in every House and every year; they included pure-bloods, full-bloods, half-bloods, Muggle-born and Muggles. He wondered who’d helped her with it; it was masterfully done and couldn’t have been accidental.

Backing up Dumbledore himself were all four Heads of House, plus Argus Filch, representing the maintenance and housekeeping staff, Madam Pomfrey, and Lucius Malfoy, representing the Board of Governors of the school. He would never have thought he and Malfoy would be on the same side of anything, but the circumstances were anything but usual.

“Shall we begin, then?” Dumbledore asked. The sooner this started, the sooner it would be over and everything would return to normal. Mrs Addams had a long list of topics, however, so he wasn’t hopeful.

“Thank you, Headmaster,” said Mrs Addams. “Your courtesy in permitting this visit is most appreciated, and we look forward to our next gathering.”

“What next -?”

“We’re planning a similar visit just before the spring break. We think two visits per year will be sufficient to allow the parents insight to their children’s education.”

“Two visits? Every year?”

“Yes, unless you think more would be better? One per term, perhaps?”

“No, no, two visits should be more than adequate,” said Dumbledore hastily.

“Two it is, then. Professor McGonagall has been most helpful with the organisation of this visit, and I hope we may continue to rely on her assistance.” Mrs Addams nodded almost regally at Minerva, who returned the nod graciously. “We would also like to thank Mr Filch, who has done a remarkable job of preparing the castle for our visit.”

There was a small round of applause, and Argus Filch preened. It wasn’t often that he got any thanks for anything.

Mrs Addams then asked a Josiah Poundstone – pure-blood, Dumbledore recalled, two children, a daughter who was a Ravenclaw fifth year and a Slytherin son who’d left school the year before, no trouble out of either of them, family not politically active though traditionally sort of Darkish – who reported on his committee’s impression of the castle and the grounds. While there was no complaint – Dumbledore snorted at the very idea of there being a complaint – about the castle itself, Mr Poundstone’s committee felt that the greenhouses should be expanded, that the housing provided for the gamekeeper was inadequate (being much too small for a man his size, and primitive to boot), and that some sort of fencing should be erected to keep the children out of the Forbidden Forest.

This was followed by Mrs Granger’s report – she was entirely dissatisfied with the food provided for the students. There was not enough variety, the meats were fatty, the vegetables overcooked, and the desserts too rich and sugary. Salads, raw vegetables, fresh fruits, whole-grain breads, ethnic foods (aside from the bi-weekly curry), and seasonings other than salt and pepper were all noticeable by their absence. She was also perturbed that she had not been able to see the kitchens, and hence had no idea whether the facilities for food storage and cooking were sanitary.

Mrs Granger was concerned for the children's health.

Madam Pomfrey rose to meet the challenge. "Mrs Granger, I resent the implication that we here at Hogwarts do not take adequate care for our charges. We are well aware that, left to their own devices, children would subsist on a diet consisting entirely of toast, bacon, sausages and sweets. We provide a traditional menu and make sure that the food is liberally enriched with nutrient potions. No Hogwarts student has ever suffered from a nutritional deficiency."

"Perhaps not, Madam Pomfrey, but what of their diet when they leave school? If they do not learn to eat properly during their formative years, they are more than likely to continue their bad habits, but without the benefit of your potions they will rapidly find their health declining. Additionally, those of the students who are used to healthy fare before they come here find the selections quite lacking."

"Indeed," murmured Mrs Addams. "My children find the selections offered to be quite boring. They grew up being exposed to the cuisines of many cultures and an extremely varied diet."

Dumbledore shuddered; he remembered just how varied the Addams diet was.

"I believe that if the children are offered a selection of side dishes, in addition to the basic fare provided, and you encourage them to try them, you would find they would vary their meals on their own, and you would not need to dose them with potions surreptitiously. I have noticed that the meals at the Head Table are different from those served the children, so obviously your kitchen staff can handle a more sophisticated menu."

"Madam," said Dumbledore, "our staff receive meals individually prepared their personal tastes, it is true. Asking the kitchen staff to extend that practice to the entire student body—"

"Would make them deliriously happy, sir," Lucius Malfoy put in unexpectedly. "Your kitchen is staffed by house-elves, is it not?"

"Why, yes, but—"

"Your elves, sir, are most likely as bored with the food as the children are. They like nothing so much as a challenge, and learning an entire new menu is just what they like. A busy elf is a happy elf, as my mother used to say – and a happy elf stays out of trouble."

"I shall take the matter under advisement," said Dumbledore through gritted teeth. Being lectured on the proper management of house-elves – by Lucius Malfoy, of all people – was almost intolerable.

"If you wouldn't mind, Headmaster, perhaps we could take this up in a smaller meeting with Madame Pomfrey and, er, the head of your kitchen staff, and perhaps Mr Malfoy might be willing to participate, since he knows how to handle house elves? I assure you, we'll work out the best possible compromise to avoid any disruption."

*Then go away entirely*, thought Dumbledore, but he didn't let any trace of his opinion show on his face, and murmured that that would be satisfactory. If he could just break the "issues" these people were coming up with into small chunks, they'd be easier to handle than trying to deal with them all at once.

"Very well, then," said Mrs Addams, making a tiny tick mark on her list. "Let us get on to matters of the curriculum and the staff, shall we? I should proceed alphabetically, but there is one situation that was rather glaring – the total lack of a Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher."

"Professor Quirrell was forced to leave us rather suddenly. A personal emergency, quite unexpected."

"Emergencies usually are," she said gently. "May I inquire as to how soon he may be returning to his post?"

"I am afraid I don't have an answer for that question," Dumbledore replied. "If he does not return shortly, I shall be searching for a new teacher."

"May I suggest that you already have a qualified teacher on your staff? Remus Lupin would, I believe, make an excellent choice. He qualified for his Defence Mastery at the Miskatonic Institute in Massachusetts a few years ago."

"Why is a qualified Defence Master teaching History of Magic?" asked Simon Greenstock. He had two sons, fifth and seventh-year Hufflepuffs, and was well aware of the problems with staffing the Defence position.

"Because of the curse, of course," said Morticia. "He wished to stay at Hogwarts for more than one year."

"The rumour of a curse is quite unsubstantiated," said Dumbledore through gritted teeth. "There's been a string of bad luck, that's all."

"Thirty-four years of bad luck?" asked Morticia, raising an eyebrow.

"This was Professor Quirrell's second year in the position," Dumbledore pointed out.

"He started in the spring of last year when Professor Drumthwacket left," Greenstock reminded him. "So Quirrell hasn't really been in the position a year yet."

"And if Professor Lupin takes the position with the understanding that he'll return to his original position at the end of the year, the curse will be satisfied. Not all of your Defence professors have left under dire circumstances, after all – only about a third."

The blasted woman had done her research, Dumbledore noted. If Quirrell hadn't gone missing only a few days ago, he thought she might have had something to do with it. If he didn't know absolutely that Lupin was his man, he still might think she had something to do with it.

"That would leave us without a History of Magic teacher, though," Dumbledore pointed out. "Although I suppose we could impose on Professor Binns again."

"Binns is still haunting his old classroom and hasn't noticed that no students come any more," a parent in the back row pointed out. "My Jeremy says he's learned more in two months with Professor Lupin than in three years with Binns."

"It'll be easier to find a History teacher than Defence," said Mr Addams, speaking up for the first time. "Could do it myself, if the schedule is rearranged a little. Just till the end of the school year, of course."

"A Squib teach at Hogwarts?" Lucius Malfoy interjected.

"Why not? Of the twelve subjects taught here, only two, Charms and Transfiguration, absolutely require the use of wands. Six of the others could be taught by a Squib as well as anyone else," said Gomez, slapping his knee. "I believe I'll do it! Problem solved! Next issue!"

And that was the way it went. Under the Addamses' guidance, the meeting went from bad to worse, and within an hour Dumbledore found that they were installing Morticia as an assistant in both Herbology and Divination, and Fester was nominated to supplement the science portion of the Muggle Studies curriculum. The only up side to it was that the Family members did not wish to have quarters at Hogwarts; they would commute from their own home by Floo. In non-Addams related upheavals, the Muggle parents raised the perennial request for a Wizard Cultural Study course to parallel Muggle Studies (and a request that the Muggle Studies teacher have some practical experience with her subject, which the current one did not). Dumbledore found it rather harder to refuse them face to face than in correspondence, and chose to defer the matter. Another committee was nominated to deal with it.

"Now, as to your Potions Master," Morticia said, ticking off another point on her list.

"I suppose you'll find him hopelessly inadequate as well?" snapped Dumbledore.

"Why no, exactly the opposite! The man is a genius!" Dumbledore saw Snape start slightly at the approval. He had apparently been expecting a bad report as well. "He is, however, totally unsuited to teaching the younger children. He'd be much better suited to teaching older students – fifth through seventh, perhaps – along with a specialty course for those intending to go into Potions-oriented careers and a series of research workshops."

"And just who will teach the younger students? And who is going to develop the specialty curriculum and fund the research?"

"If I may, Headmaster," Snape put in smoothly, startling Dumbledore slightly. "It so happens that I have been in contact with a noted Potions Mistress from America, Mistress Eudora Frump. She retired several years ago, but is thinking of returning to teaching – on a part time basis, of course. I believe that I could lure her out of retirement to take on the younger students while I, as Mrs Addams has suggested, concentrate my efforts on the upper years. For a stipend appropriate to one of her stature, of course. And room and board."

Gomez Addams spoke up again. "I'm sure the Potions Masters Guild has some curriculum material to provide. And we could apply for research grants. If we get one, the program could be put in place for next year."

Dumbledore could only nod numbly.

"That's settled, then," said Mrs Addams. "Now then, I believe Mrs Fawcett wished to speak about a matter of serious concern to some of the parents. Mrs Fawcett?"

Mrs Fawcett – pureblood, Dumbledore recalled, with two daughters, one in Hufflepuff and one in Ravenclaw – the Fawcetts had never been one of the families consistently sorted into one house or another – was a tiny woman whose twittering, almost birdlike demeanour concealed a mind like a steel trap.

"Before I begin, I'd just like to say how much I appreciate Headmaster Dumbledore's idea of starting this Parent-Teacher Association. I remember my own days at Hogwarts with great fondness, and it is a distinct pleasure to be able to give something back to the school after all this time."

Dumbledore blinked and managed to mumble a gracious acknowledgement to Mrs.. Fawcett. *She thinks I started this insanity? But of course, that's what Mrs Addams told the pure-bloods to get them involved. They'd never have gone along with a Muggle idea. Clever of her, quite clever.*

"What my committee would like to address, Headmaster, is the problems that result from having children in classes below their level of functioning. At the moment, all children are grouped together according to their age, without provision for individual ability and, ah, differences in preparation." She glanced, a bit furtively, Dumbledore thought, at the Grangers, who were seated in front of her and so couldn't see it. He rather suspected he knew what was going to come next. "You see, Headmaster, some children come into the school with the advantage of having had advanced reading, tutoring, that sort of thing. The classes are all geared to deal with the needs of students who come in with very little knowledge. As a result, some students who already know the material are bored – and I don't think we need reminding of the mischief that bored students can perpetrate, do we?"

Dumbledore thought of the Marauders and shuddered. They hadn't been the first batch of pure-blood pranksters, and they probably wouldn't be the last. "Mrs Fawcett, I am more than aware of the inequities involved in schooling children of differing levels of ability together. However, it does more damage to separate the children–"

"Oh, no, we're not suggesting separating anybody," Mrs Fawcett protested. "It's just, well, there's a concept that some of the Muggle schools have been using. It's called 'Advance Placement'. Are you familiar with it?"

"I'm not sure that I -"

"It's quite simple, Headmaster, I really don't know why it hasn't been tried before," the little woman said enthusiastically. "Before the beginning of the school year, tests are made to see what level the children are already functioning at. How much they already know. So if a student already knows about Charms, say, they could be placed in a Charms class that is teaching new material for that student. The rest of his classes could be with his year. And it means he'll be meeting and getting to know students in years other than his own, as well. Wouldn't that be wonderful?"

"But you are aware, madam, that a child's knowledge could easily outstrip his developing power? The spells are generally taught in a certain order so that a child won't get depressed by attempting spells he isn't capable of casting yet."

"But power development varies among children too, doesn't it? So we simply test them for casting ability as well as theory and place them where the lower of the two tests says they should be. Additionally, the testing will prepare them for O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s later on. It's a ... what did you call it, Morticia? A win-win situation!"

"But what about the other children? Won't they resent their peers being advanced over them?"

"If I may, Headmaster," Mr Granger raised his hand to attract attention. "We've recently been through this with our daughter, Hermione, who was an advanced student in the, er, Muggle schools. It has been our experience that the other children don't resent a student being advanced so much as they resent the more advanced child being in their own classes, showing them up. Out of sight, out of mind, you know. And if the child still participates in other classes, activities and meals with their own age group, there won't be the social problems that happen when a younger child is forced to interact entirely with an older age cohort."

"And if your daughter proves not to be as ... advanced ... in the magical milieu as in the Muggle?"

"Oh, it would probably do Hermione some good to fail a test for a change. And we're aware that many of your students are born to magical families and soaked it up as they grew up. Even in the Muggle world, that happens. But I think you underestimate how motivated some of your Muggle-born students are to learn, and I don't think they'd do as poorly as some might think." This last was with a sidelong glance at Mrs Fawcett which showed that the two of them had already had this discussion, probably several times. "Pass or fail, it can only do the students – and their parents – good to have some objective measure of how they're doing. And it will give the ambitious students a goal to shoot for. After all, there's no point in doing better if there's no reward for it. This also works the other way as well – if a student just isn't ready for a certain level of work, they can repeat a year until their power level catches up."

"It would take some time to make up these tests," said Dumbledore.

"Not really, Albus," said Minerva, and Dumbledore turned to her, feeling slightly betrayed. "We all have a library of old examinations. We each just take some questions from those, starting with first-year material and going up to seventh. Then when the student gets to the point where a student can't answer the questions or perform the spells, we know where their levels of proficiency are, and go from there."

"And what if a third-year student tests at sixth year? What about the O.W.L.s?"

"Why, we place them in a fifth-year class and let them take the O.W.L.s. There's nothing that says a student has to be fifteen to take them, you know, only that they be capable of doing the work. Really, Albus, I think we should at least try this. We could hold testing over the Christmas holidays this year, then, say, each summer in August before the class schedules are made up."

"You realize how difficult it will be to schedule?" asked Dumbledore. "We've been using carefully worked out class schedules for years. What if a student is in classes that overlap, like first-year History and third-year Charms?"

"I don't know about that. I'll admit it's a bit of a problem."

"I'm sure it would be easier, Headmaster, if there were more than one teacher per subject," put in Mrs Addams. "The existing schedule provides no leeway, that's true. But we've already agreed on the hiring of an additional Potions instructor for the lower years, as well as assistant teachers in several other classes. Wouldn't it be easiest to hire additional teachers for the other classes as well, so there would be enough flexibility for scheduling? There are plenty of unused classrooms, after all, so there wouldn't be any need for additional construction. Just some outlay for books and supplies, and salary, of course. Yes, that would be best," she said, ticking off the last item on her list. "This has been a most productive meeting, don't you think, Headmaster?"

Dumbledore had had enough. "Mrs Addams! It's all very well for you to talk about adding teachers to my staff, rearranging the schedule, and ordering improvements to the castle, but we cannot make such changes willy-nilly. There's the little matter of paying for it all. The Board of Governors holds the purse strings, and there's simply no space in the budget for new greenhouses and adjunct professors!"

"You see, I told you you should have taken my two million," put in Mr Addams cheerfully. "It'll take a lot more now to deal with things on an expedited basis." He whipped out a book of Gringotts drafts and quickly scribbled one out. "Here you go, Headmaster. Six hundred sixty two thousand, seven hundred twenty-one galleons, fifteen sickles and twelve knuts. That should cover everything, from salaries to improvement of the physical plant – I can have a construction team in here tomorrow if you want – and quite a bit left over for things like updating of the medical facilities and acquisition of new books for the library. And that's for this just for this year. There will be additional donations for next year."

"Mr Addams, I'm aware that as guardian of Harry Potter you have access to his family funds, but I don't believe it is appropriate for you to use them to—" Dumbledore was sweating slightly; he could see the impressive number of digits on the draft Addams was holding out to him, and he had to admit he was tempted.

"Oh, don't worry, Headmaster. This isn't Harry's money. I wouldn't dream of touching that – he'll need it when he becomes the head of his own Family. This is mine. As the parent of two children in your fine school, I don't think there's any problem with my making a donation out of my own

Family's discretionary funds, do you?"

Dumbledore took the draft, his hands shaking slightly. "I... thank you for your generosity, Mr. Addams. It is still up to the Board of Governors to ..."

"Oh, silly me. Did I mention that this donation, which you've just accepted, makes me the major donor to the Hogwarts Trust Fund? And that makes me the Chairman of the Board of Governors. Does it not, Mr Malfoy?" Addams asked with a glint of steel in his eye. Dumbledore glanced from Malfoy to Addams and his heart sank. He knew very well that Malfoy's Chairmanship of the Board of Governors was based on his largesse, and with that precedent, the balance of power had just shifted, unless Malfoy was capable of matching or exceeding the donation. From rumours Dumbledore had heard at the Ministry, however, he probably wasn't going to be able to. "And since I'm the Chairman, I believe I should have your seat ..."

The next thing Dumbledore knew, Addams was sitting next to him, and Malfoy had taken the uncomfortable seat next to Mrs Addams. The entire programme of staff hires, proposed construction and student testing, as suggested by Mrs Addams and her Committee, was approved by Mr Addams as Chairman of the Board of Governors, who shook Dumbledore's hand enthusiastically and offered him a cigar.

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Harry took Remus up on his suggestion, and showed up at Remus's office door with Pugsley, Wednesday, and Hermione in tow.

"Well, I didn't expect the whole crowd! Harry, if what I think is happening is happening, it could be pretty intense. Are you sure you want them all..."

"We were all together on Halloween, Professor Lupin," Harry said. "Hermione saved us all with her Jelly Legs Jinx, so I think she deserves to know what's going on as much as Wednesday and Pugsley do. Then if anyone wants to bail out afterwards, it's their call."

The stubborn looks on the faces of the other three said that bailing out was a very remote possibility.

"All right, then. Come on in. I was just about to pour myself some tea. Would you like some?"

They made themselves comfortable and Remus poured cups of tea all around.

"All right, then. Here's what we know so far: Professor Quirrell was taken over by You Know Who, possibly some time ago. He's certainly been wearing that turban since the beginning of the year, so at least that long. We know he was trying to get at the item Dumbledore hid under the trapdoor. We also know that you, Harry, were capable of undoing his spells easily, whereas Pugsley couldn't undo the binding spell. Did anybody try the locking charm or enervating Snape?"

"I tried unlocking the door," said Hermione. "It didn't work."

"I don't think anyone else tried Snape," said Harry. "Having him awake was the last thing we wanted."

Remus nodded. "All right. You also managed to undo whatever was binding Himself into Quirrell, though again without intending to. Harry, I'm sure you recall another instance where you could undo a spell that Pugsley couldn't?"

"The ritual room at home! It unlocked to my touch, but not anyone else's. You think maybe that had something to do with Voldemort?"

"Maybe. We found a book there, remember? I've been trying to translate it ever since then, but with no luck. Every time I think I'm getting close to identifying the symbols, they all change and I'm back where I started." He got up and unlocked the top drawer of his desk, pulling the leather-bound book from it. "Why don't you take a look at it?"

Harry took the book gingerly. This was the first time he'd been allowed to handle the book, though he'd seen Remus trying to work on it several times. It had a plain black cover of buttery soft leather, and pages made of parchment, not paper – it was obviously a Wizard-made book, not Muggle. He opened the cover and blinked as a mess of nonsensical scrawls started squirming over the page. In a moment, they resolved into something legible, although still scrawled – the person who wrote this did not have good handwriting. "Hey! I can read it!"

Hermione looked over his shoulder curiously. "Looks like squiggles to me, Harry. What's it say?"

*"This is the immortality journal of Lord Voldemort. WHEREAS, I am (or soon will be) the greatest Wizard of all time, and WHEREAS, it is inconceivable that my power should perish at the end of a human lifespan, and WHEREAS, myth and legend tell of magicians who have achieved the ultimate goal of immortality, and WHEREAS, these have evidently failed in their goals due to the interference of others, BE IT RESOLVED that I shall fully investigate all means of achieving my goal of Immortality, and BE IT RESOLVED that when I have determined the most efficacious methods, I shall use them, no matter what costs are involved, and BE IT RESOLVED, that I shall not let the errors made by lesser minds foil my plans, and BE IT RESOLVED ..."* Harry stopped reading and looked up at Remus. "Thinks a lot of himself, doesn't he? He goes on like that for a while. There's at least another page of BE IT RESOLVEDs. Can I skip some?"

"Well, we always knew that You Know Who had an ego. Now we know it was bigger than everyone else's. Wonder what he was compensating for?" The children started giggling. "Go ahead and skip a few pages."

Harry skipped forward to the end of the bombast and into a more casually penned section. "Okay, this is mostly notes. Lots of stories from mythology – Gilgamesh, Osiris, somebody named Kosh ... Koschei the Deathless? Tithonus – there's a note in the margin here – '*do not try this except as last resort – immortality as a grasshopper does not appeal*'. Looks like he's going back through all the old stories and trying to find out if there's an actual magical basis for some of them. '*Nectar and ambrosia – find recipes.*' '*Phoenix-Firebird-Feng Huang-Garuda-Thunderbird – same creature? Hindoo Elixir of Immortality – based on phoenix tears? Try to acquire phoenix. Not Fawkes – he bites.*'" Harry looked up at Remus. "Would that actually work, do you think?"

“Phoenix tears as the basis for a potion? Maybe. It’s known that wizards who bond to phoenixes live longer than others – look at the Headmaster, he’s rumoured to be over 150 years old – but there isn’t a phoenix in the world that would willingly associate with a Dark Wizard. Possibly he might keep one captive, the way Kaschei did. But it would eventually escape and break the Wizard’s power.”

“Kaschei? Is that the same as this ‘Koschei the Deathless’?”

“Probably,” said Remus, settling in to lecture mode. “Names change slightly over time, you know. Kaschei, Koschei, Kashchei, they’re all variations on the name of a Wizard who controlled a fertile valley – almost a small country, really – in Russia over a thousand years ago. This was centuries before the separation of the Wizard and Muggle worlds, of course. He had trapped a Firebird and was said to use its power to become immortal. Eventually, however, a Muggle prince came questing, freed the Firebird, and the Wizard and his palace disappeared from the mortal world. It was a very popular story among the Muggles, and remains so to this day. Of course, there are also variations – Koschei was also said to be immortal because he kept his soul inside a needle, inside an egg, inside a duck, inside a hare, inside an iron chest, buried under an oak tree, on an island in the middle of the ocean. So you can take your pick of the stories.”

“None of it seems to be very practical,” said Harry.

Remus smiled. “The Old Magic generally wasn’t. It was very complicated and took a long time to cast, and sometimes had flaws that would turn around and bite you on the arse – look up the story of Tithonus yourself if you’re curious about what could go wrong. I dare say as you go farther in that journal, Harry, you’ll come across things more solid than myth – and probably very nasty. Obviously You Know Who tried something, and it seems to have worked, otherwise he would have died ten years ago. That book will probably tell us what it was.”

Harry flipped through several of the back pages at random. “Well, I’m going to have to work on my Ancient Runes if we’re going to find out. I see hieroglyphics here, and Norse runes, and some things I can’t recognize.”

“Can you copy some for me?” Remus said. “If I can read what you copy, it will help tremendously.”

Harry took a quill and a piece of parchment and made scratchy lines for a bit, then handed it to Remus. “That’s what it looks like.”

Remus sighed. “Cuneiform. That’s one of the oldest scripts known. We’ll need help translating that. And Ogham. I recognize the word ‘fish’ in there, but that’s about it. This project is going to take a while, and I’m afraid you’re going to have to copy out the book so other people can see it.” He took the book away from Harry and opened it at random, looking at the encrypted pages. “But you’ve already told us more than we knew before about You Know Who. We knew he was trying to take over the Wizarding World in Britain, and we know he had sympathizers in Europe. But immortality? Power everlasting? That’s new, and it changes so much. And it opens up all new questions.”

He sighed. “And now we’re getting to the ugly part, where we have a mass of questions and no answers, not yet. Why exactly can you, Harry, negate You Know Who’s magic when no one else can? Why did your touch destroy him? Why can you read the book he enchanted so only he could see it and open the door only he could open? He claimed he was a Parseltongue because he was descended from Salazar Slytherin, but is that true? And if it is, is your Parseltongue something you got from him, or is it a talent you would have had anyway? Are you, perhaps, also descended from Slytherin somehow, or are you – maybe both of you - rogue talents? Are there two phenomena here, or only one? Or three?”

Hermione timidly raised her hand. “Excuse me ... Parseltongue?”

“I can talk to snakes,” Harry said. “It’s kind of cool, but it creeps some people out, so I don’t talk about it much.”

Hermione shuddered. “I don’t like snakes. They’re all slimy.”

“No they’re not!” Harry answered hotly. “They’re all smooth and dry. I’ll bet you never touched one in your life, did you?”

“Well, no.”

“Then don’t go saying they’re slimy. I’ll introduce you to one of my snakes, okay? You can see for yourself.”

“All right,” she said, abashed. “But the idea of talking to snakes is a little creepy.”

“Try the idea of being related to Voldemort somehow. *That’s* creepy.”

“How’s this for creepy?” put in Wednesday. “Maybe part of Voldemort got *stuck in your head* when he tried to kill you. And all his old magic stuff thinks *you’re him!* And maybe that’s why he didn’t die, because part of him was still here!”

“Er, Wednesday, I wouldn’t go that far,” said Remus, who was well-used to Wednesday’s flights of fancy.

“I would,” breathed Harry. “Look at her eyes, Remus, look at her *eyes!*”

And indeed, Wednesday’s pupils were dilated as she stared into Darkness.

## Family Values Albus Dumbledore and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Week

The first sign of change was minor: on Monday morning, bowls of fresh fruit appeared in each Common Room, the Staff Room, and spaced at intervals on the tables in the Great Hall. They were mounded with apples, pears, and clementines, with a single crimson pomegranate perched precariously atop each one. Even before the regular breakfast foods appeared on the long tables, students and teachers alike were snagging the fruits. Most students avoided the pomegranates, either not knowing how to eat them or thinking of them as potions ingredients rather than food, but a few, such as the Patil twins, Blaise Zabini, and Wednesday, happily appropriated them, cut them open, and started scooping the ruby seeds out onto their plates with their spoons. A few other adventurous students followed their lead.

Up at the Head Table, Dumbledore glared at the bowl in front of him, treating it as a symbol of all the changes that had been forced on him. The pomegranate in particular was offensive. It was alien to him. It didn't belong here, any more than the three extra places that had been set at the table belonged here.

"Headmaster, if you've finished interrogating the pomegranate, may I put it out of its misery?" Morticia Addams' cool, rich voice interrupted his ruminations.

"Of course, Madam." He passed the fruit down the table and watched with a sort of morbid fascination as she dismembered it expertly with her long, sharp nails, its red juice shining like blood on the white china of her plate.

And that was the second sign of change. For this first morning, the three Addams adults had taken places at the Head Table. They had already told him that in future they would commute in through the Floo in Remus Lupin's office and would only be taking luncheon on the days they taught, but today he had to introduce them. He could already hear the buzzing of interest among the students as they speculated at the presence of the three extra people. Well, best to get that done immediately, before the suppositions became too outrageous.

Using the mild spell that he cast whenever he wished attention to be drawn to him, he rose majestically from his chair. The students quieted as he smiled benignly down upon them. "May I have your attention, please? I have a few announcements to make. I know you are all anxious to get to your breakfasts, so I will keep this as short as possible. First of all, Professor Quirrell has been unavoidably called away by a personal emergency, and will remain absent for an indefinite period. While he is away, Professor Lupin will take on his responsibilities teaching Defense Against the Dark Arts. I hope you will all do your best for Professor Lupin."

He paused to shoot a quick glance down at the Slytherin table while there was a round of applause and Lupin waved briefly at the students. The Potter boy was rapidly becoming influential among the students, and was important to Dumbledore in his own right, so it had become second-nature for the old wizard to check the boy's reactions. He didn't seem to be even paying attention to the announcements, in comparison to his cousins' enthusiastic approval. This was odd.

"This, of course, leaves us short a Professor of Magical History – a position which will be admirably filled, on an interim basis, by Professor Gomez Addams. Professor Addams comes to us from the United States and has much to share with us about the history of magic in foreign countries. Please give him a hearty welcome!" The children gave another round of applause, a bit more uncertainly this time, while Gomez Addams rose and gave a cheery wave. The Addams children sat stunned. Apparently they hadn't been told about what their parents were going to be doing for the next few months.

"Furthermore," said Dumbledore, waving his hands for attention again, "we are also starting a program to add Assistant Professors in each subject, who will assist the regular Professors, provide tutoring where needed, and eventually teach a few classes in their fields of expertise. Today we welcome the first of these new Assistant Professors: Professor Morticia Addams, who will be assisting in both Divination and Herbology, and Professor Fester Addams, who will be assisting in Muggle Studies. Again, a hearty welcome to our new instructors!" This time Dumbledore himself clapped politely as Morticia and Fester Addams rose briefly. The Addams boy was banging his head on the table, while Wednesday applauded excitedly. Potter's reaction was odder yet: he sat methodically shredding the peel of a clementine, while the fruit itself sat ignored on his plate.

After breakfast, Dumbledore spent the morning dealing with the paperwork involved with all the new changes, including drafting guidelines for the advanced placement testing – the announcements would have to be worded very carefully – and also drafting an offer to the Potions Mistress Severus had recommended – he was sure that would require a bit of negotiation. Then he had a quick lunch in his office and Time Turned himself back to just after breakfast, Flooed to the Ministry, and spent the morning again focused on Wizengamot matters. Someone was mounting legal challenges to the seals on Death Eater trials from just after the end of the war with Voldemort, and it was becoming increasingly difficult to keep the records secure. There were any number of reasons why someone might want access to those files, and he couldn't think of any good that would come from releasing them. He wasn't sure yet who was behind it – the solicitors refused to say who their principal was, and there were precedents to protect the anonymous plaintiff. Dumbledore sometimes regretted that Wizarding Law had different rules from Muggle law, but that couldn't be changed now.

Returning to the school, he had a second, proper luncheon in the Great Hall, listening carefully to the gossip among the students and the teachers. The students, understandably, were most concerned with the new teachers. He heard a buzz of approval about Remus Lupin, who had started off

with a bang – literally – by having all of his classes do target practice, shooting sparks at conjured bubbles, and giving House points to the highest scorers. Apparently Quirrell hadn't had his classes use their wands at all, and the students had greatly enjoyed the chance to show off.

He did notice something odd about the luncheon, however – the long tables, normally bare wood, were covered with shining white tablecloths. Perhaps this was a detail he'd missed from that interminable meeting? He made a mental note to follow up on it.

He spent the afternoon with the Minister for Magic, who had his usual Monday cluster of questions and demands – Dumbledore swore the man spent his weekends thinking of ways to ruin his Mondays – then doubled back to handle a staff meeting before dinner. The fruit bowl in the staff room had been supplemented by a plate of biscuits, which was quite welcome during the meeting.

Gomez Addams cornered him about getting some guest lecturers in. Dumbledore wasn't surprised that the American Squib had found himself out of his depth already and was calling in some experts, so he gave his approval.

Professor Sprout bubbled happily about Morticia Addams' offer to bring in some specimens of rare carnivorous plants from her own collection. Dumbledore shuddered to think about it, but decided they couldn't be any more dangerous than the Devil's Snare and Mandrakes that were already in the greenhouses.

Fester Addams had spent the morning sitting quietly in the back of the Muggle Studies classroom, and the students and Professor Burbage were too intimidated to approach him. He said, though, that he could already see some things in the program that could be updated, and he was thinking about some practical exercises.

All in all, things seemed to be going well.

Dinner itself was blessedly normal and Addams-free. Dumbledore spent the evening catching up on his reading and chatting with the portraits in his office, which were a major source of information on what was really going on in the school. When he retired, long after midnight, he found his bedclothes turned down invitingly, and a mint on his pillow.

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Tuesday morning found a small bowl of fruit (without pomegranates) on his nightstand next to his customary cup of tea. He wondered briefly what the small brown fuzzy thing in the bowl was, but everything else seemed quite in order. He partook of an orange to refresh himself before dressing and going down to breakfast.

There, he found that the snowy white tablecloths from the previous day remained, and the ordinary white napkins had been replaced by napkins in House colours on the student tables; the napkins on the Head table remained white but sported embroidered Hogwarts crests.

Around ten o'clock, the quiet, orderly progression of the day was disrupted by the arrival of a work gang of dwarves who said they were here to build the greenhouse, the new housing for Hagrid, a fence at the edge of the Forbidden Forest, and new stables and paddock fencing for the Magical Creatures class. This made Professor Kettleburn very happy, as he'd been grouching about missing out on the weekend's goodies. The dwarves, however, kept stomping up and down the stairs to Dumbledore's office with questions about every little detail, until he finally told Professor Sprout to deal with everything. She drafted Rubeus Hagrid, Morticia Addams, and Professor Kettleburn to oversee matters, and the dwarves stopped bothering him – although the sounds of construction drifting through his tower windows were quite distracting. Not quite as distracting, though, as the dwarven work song the younger students adopted, marching to and from their classes singing "Heigh-ho! Heigh-ho!" with considerable gusto.

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Wednesday morning brought warm pastries with his tea before breakfast, and it proved to be a good thing that he'd eaten something before he went down to the Great Hall. The Head Table had a temporary extension, and there was Gomez Addams sitting with three goblins! All of them had plates full of what Dumbledore assumed was goblin breakfast food – but it was squirming and wriggling most alarmingly. Dumbledore pulled Addams aside.

"May I ask what *they* are doing here?"

"They're my guest lecturers, of course! It seems Binns was teaching an extremely one-sided version of the history of the Goblin Wars, and I thought it might be a good idea to get some goblins in to explain their side of it to the older students. It'll help them understand there are always two sides, at least, to any situation. And the truth is probably somewhere in between."

"I had no idea this was the sort of guest lecturer you had in mind," said Dumbledore, looking at the goblins. Professor Flitwick had just joined them and was happily chatting in the throat-rending Goblin language and eating the unsettling wriggly things on toast. "Perhaps you should have run this past Professor Lupin, since it's really his class."

"Oh, he was all for it!" said Addams cheerfully. "He thinks it's such a good idea, he wants to get some vampires in next term. And maybe centaurs, or some werewolves in the spring. Excuse me, though, I have to go attend to my guests."

Dumbledore nodded dumbly. He'd known Flitwick was one-quarter goblin, of course, but the only way it showed was in his height – he'd never spoken Gobbledegook or eaten things that squirmed. Now he was doing both in public. Hopefully things would go back to normal once the goblins were gone.

He glanced once more at the goblin end of the table, to see Addams drenching a bowl of wiggly things in some sort of green sauce and spooning them up enthusiastically. He shuddered and resolutely looked away.

Lunch was just as bad, and he found himself unable to eat a bite. Fortunately he was able to sustain himself from a tray of sweets and cakes in the



staff room, and found himself reluctantly agreeing with Lucius Malfoy that perhaps allowing the house elves to learn some new recipes was a good thing – there were some round cakes with an interesting sweet red filling that he found quite tasty.

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Thursday was a meeting of the International Confederation of Wizards, where he found himself, as Supreme Mugwump of that august body, overseeing a vote to make a resolution to force himself, as Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot of Britain, to bring British Wizarding Law in line with that of the Americas and Europe by ordering public trials and questioning of both defendants and witnesses under Veritaserum in capital cases. Which wasn't a bad thing, necessarily, but combined with the movement in the Wizengamot itself, it was quite suspicious. Paperwork kept him at the Confederation offices in Luxembourg until well after dinner, so he Time-Turned himself to catch dinner at Hogwarts; it would not do for him not to be there.

The napkins were neatly folded into origami animals, which was cute but distracting, as one had to catch them before one could unfold them onto the lap. Fortunately they stayed still after that.

Hagrid buttonholed him after dinner. It seemed the dwarves had been as efficient as ever about their work, and had already finished the new house for the gamekeeper. The huge man had moved his possessions over and couldn't wait to show it off, so Dumbledore found himself nodding and smiling at various architectural details ("Look, there's room for me head now. An' a real bedroom! An' a run out back fer Fang...") and attempting to find gracious ways of turning down rock cakes while drinking a gallon or so of strong tea. He got to bed far later than he'd planned, and slept poorly, with several trips to the loo.

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On Friday morning, Dumbledore found his desk buried under a mound of parchment. Each of the teachers had delivered a draft of the placement test for their subject; additionally, the advert for Assistant Professor positions had run in Wednesday's *Daily Prophet*, so responses had begun to come in for that.

On top of it all was a note from Severus, who he had put in charge of recruiting for the Potions position, informing him that Mistress Frump had agreed to join the Hogwarts faculty at a salary that was quite reasonable, given her reputation and years of experience, on the condition that she have staff quarters, workshop facilities, and library access, as well as quarters for a servant who would prepare her meals, as she was quite particular in her diet. It was quite a relief to be able to sign off on this matter so rapidly; Dumbledore agreed to her terms and sent a note of approval to Severus, asking him to arrange the details with Mistress Frump, and he also advised housekeeping to prepare appropriate quarters for her and housing for her house elf.

While he was sorting out the Assistant Professor applications into three piles ("must hire", "possible", and "not in a million years"), there was a thunderous "BOOM!" from outside. The entire castle seemed to shake, and the piles of parchment cascaded into Dumbledore's lap.

He was half-way to the front entrance when there was another "BOOM!".

He arrived in the Entrance Hall to find Argus Filch barring the massive oak door against attack, while students and teachers were trying to find ways to see out the high windows and find out what was going on.

Dumbledore had Filch unbar the door and ventured outside. The entire north side of the castle was shrouded in clouds of smoke that reeked of brimstone. As he made his way cautiously through it, a familiar voice cut through the mist. "All right, I think you have the range now. Let's try to get the next one right down the chimney!"

Of course, it was an Addams – Fester, this time. That whole family was becoming the bane of his existence. Coughing, he followed the sound of voices and metal on metal. The smoke cleared and he discovered a group of seventh-year students grouped around a full-sized cannon, much larger than the little toy one Filch had. One of the boys was cleaning the barrel with a Scourgify spell while others prepared a powder charge, wadding, and a cannon ball.

With Fester here, that meant this was the N.E.W.T. Muggle Studies class, but where was the regular teacher? Ah, there she was, fluttering her hands ineffectively. "Professor Addams, I really don't think ... I mean, blowing it up isn't really ... what if you ..."

"Don't worry, I've blown up hundreds of things. Most of 'em on purpose. I've even got permission for this one. Spoils it a little, but you can't have everything. Twitchell, you done with the barrel yet?"

"All clear," said the boy. Several other students started to load the cannon; the short, plump girl in charge of the cannon ball had to levitate it up to the muzzle.

Dumbledore finally found his voice. "Addams, what is going on here?"

"Demonstration. Seems your kids had no idea that a Muggle weapon could do as much damage as a Blasting Curse. So I'm showing them."

"What are you shooting at?"

"Hagrid's old house. The dwarves were going to just tear it down, but I asked him if I could use it for target practice." He nodded over at the audience he had acquired; most of the Muggle Studies students, all of the dwarves, and Hagrid waited eagerly to see what would happen. "Ready, kids?" The students had finished loading the cannon. "Okay, *silencio!*" he yelled, clapping his own hands over his ears. Dumbledore wondered for a second why Addams, a Squib to the core, was casting a spell, then realised it was an instruction to the class, who were casting Silencing Charms on themselves. Dumbledore hastily did the same, as Addams gestured to a seventh-year who cast a small, wordless *incendio* at the touchhole of the cannon.

A gout of fire and smoke erupted from its bore, and although he could not hear its roar, Dumbledore could feel the concussion as the artillery piece rocked backwards on its spoked wheels.

A moment later, as the smoke started to clear, the students manning the cannon started jumping up and down, cheering and pointing at Hagrid's house. The cannon ball had not gone down the chimney after all, but had blasted through the front wall, shattered the back wall, and smashed the privy before plowing into one of the giant pumpkins in Hagrid's garden and covering everything with orange pulp. Apparently the cannon ball had taken out the central support of the hut in its passage. With a groan, the roof of the hut collapsed majestically, taking what was left of the walls with it, leaving only a pile of splintered wood; indeed, the only part of the house still standing was the chimney. The rest of the class, who had been observing from a safe distance, peered through the smoke and gaped at the wreckage. The dwarves murmured appreciatively and Hagrid applauded. Professor Burbage fainted. Fester pounded the boy who'd touched the cannon off on the back, nearly knocking him off his feet. His lips moved soundlessly. After a moment, Dumbledore remembered to cancel his spell.

"... go down and take a look at the damage! And remember that Muggles don't just use one cannon at a time! Try to imagine a whole row of them along this ridge here, firing down on forces below. Betsy here is an old-fashioned cannon, too – the balls don't even explode when they hit. Modern artillery does lots more damage. Next week we'll see what grapeshot and chain can do to a body ..."

"You most certainly will not!" Dumbledore barked. "There will be no shooting at people at this school!"

"I was going to use a pig, Headmaster."

"That's good to know, but still ..."

"Humans are too hard to come by."

"Assistant Professor Addams," sighed Dumbledore, "while I normally don't interfere with how my teachers teach their classes, I must request that you refrain from demonstrations involving cannons or explosions in the future. Is that clear?"

"No artillery?"

"None."

"No dynamite?"

"No. Look, what's the next chapter in the Muggle Studies book? Just go with that."

"Plagues it is, then." Fester grinned at Dumbledore, a truly horrifying experience that sent the older wizard back to the castle as rapidly as he could go lest his stomach betray him.

All the rest of the day, Dumbledore kept jumping every time he heard an odd sound, and every sound was beginning to seem odd. He was only halfway through with the paperwork when dinnertime rolled around, and had to put in three hours with the Time Turner to get it done before taking to his bed.

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That night it snowed. Saturday morning dawned bright and clear, with six inches of snow on the ground. Virtually none of the students showed up for breakfast, and Dumbledore looked forward to quiet enjoyment of his breakfast. Unfortunately for him, Professor McGonagall stormed into the Great Hall as Dumbledore was finishing his porridge.

"Dumbledore, you have to do something about this!"

"You know the first snowfall of the season distracts the students, my dear Professor. Undoubtedly they are all out pelting each other with snowballs. It's Saturday. There's no harm in it."

"Not that. It's just ... Come see for yourself."

She practically dragged Dumbledore to the front entrance, which stood open, letting in the frosty air and the sounds of the students' merriment. He looked out upon the front courtyard, and gaped in amazement.

The snow which had fallen overnight was shaped into a profusion of exotic snow sculptures, forts, and castles. A veritable zoo of creatures carved from blocks of ice lined the galleries of the courtyard. One snow fort was shaped like Hogwarts itself and another resembled the village of Hogsmeade; there was a "town-and-gown" snowball fight of epic proportions going on.

"All the courtyards are like this," said McGonagall. "And there's a gallery of statues of famous wizards along the main road to the gate. This whole thing is getting out of hand. They must be stopped now."

"They, who?" asked Dumbledore.

"The house elves, of course! Who else could have done this? Who else would have?"

The heads of the house-elf clans were duly summoned and interrogated. It turned out that there had been a raging war going on between the Kitchen Elves and the Housekeeping Elves for a week, precipitated by the intrusion of the Kitchen Elves into the common rooms to provide fruit for the students. The Housekeeping Elves had retaliated with fancy linens at table, which led to even more elaborate snack plates, which led to origami napkins, and so forth. The Housekeeping Elves were planning to escalate to centerpieces next. The Groundskeeping Elves had finally

been given a chance to enter the fray when the snow came; nobody had noticed how clean the courtyards had been, but everyone noticed the snow sculptures.

After hours of intense negotiation during which Dumbledore was sometimes tempted to slam his own head on the desk, the Kitchen clan was relegated to simple fruit bowls in the common rooms, the Housekeeping Elves were allowed to put plain white linens on the table at dinner only, and the Groundskeeping Elves were told that they could maintain a pair of simple snow forts on the Great Lawn, but that was it. Their current artwork would be allowed to melt naturally.

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On Sunday, Dumbledore made an announcement to the school. “This morning we expect the arrival of Potions Mistress Eudora Frump, who will be taking over some of Professor Snape’s classes.”

He was interrupted by cheers, whistles, and table-banging from the students.

“Ahem! If I may ... after an appropriate period of observation, Mistress Frump will teach First through Fourth Years, with Professor Snape retaining Fifth through Seventh.”

There was more cheering from the younger students, accompanied now by groans from the older ones.

“I trust that you will welcome Professor Frump and give her all the respect due her position.”

He was looking directly at the Weasley Twins as he said it; they responded with exaggerated expressions of innocence.

“I suppose now would be a good time to announce a new program – on an experimental basis, students will be allowed to test for placement in advanced classes. Details and schedules are being posted this morning in your Common Rooms. Permission forms will be sent to your parents this week, so if you’re interested in testing, be sure to owl them and let them know. Examinations will be held over the Christmas break, so you have time to brush up on the material in advance. New class assignments will be made at the beginning of next term.”

He smiled to himself as he sat down and watched the Ravenclaws gobble their breakfasts prior to stampeding *en masse* up to their Common Room to check out the testing schedules. The other houses were less obvious about their interest, but even so, breakfast was finished in record time, and the owlery was empty by ten.

Just after noon, Hagrid took one of the thestral-drawn carriages down to Hogsmeade, and picked up Professor Frump, who had made her own way to the Three Broomsticks.

Feeling quite pleased that something was going right, Albus made his way down to the Entry Hall to meet her, and got there just as Hagrid was bringing in the last of a large number of trunks. There, in all her baggy-robed, frizzy-haired glory, stood Grandmama Addams, wearing a battered pointy hat and a tattered shawl as her only protection from the November cold, and carrying a wicker basket from which came mewling sounds. Assisting Hagrid in bringing in the luggage was the Addams’ giant butler.

“What ... what ... where’s Professor Frump?” he sputtered.

“Right here,” said Grandmama, cackling. “Eudora Frump Addams, at your service. Thanks for the invitation; I’m looking forward to working with young Snape here.”

“Madam, are you sure you can handle ...? I mean, our lower year students are quite ...”

She waved her hand dismissively. “Don’t worry. It’s been a few years since I handled a classroom, but it’s like falling off a broom – you never forget how.”

“Well, then,” said Dumbledore, gritting his teeth, “welcome to Hogwarts. I’m sure it will be pleasant to work with you.”

“I’m looking forward to it. Give me a few years and you won’t recognize your old dungeons.”

*That’s what I’m afraid of*, Dumbledore thought. He did not let it show on his face, though, instead smiling and bending to kiss Grandmama’s hand in a courtly fashion. He was very much aware of the audience of students that lined the stairs and the balcony overlooking the hall. “Professor Snape will show you to your quarters and to the dungeons, madam. I trust you’ll find all the arrangements satisfactory. We’ll have to arrange new quarters for your servant. I must admit we were expecting a house elf, not ...” He gestured helplessly at Lurch.

“An honest mistake. I’ve always said Lurch is part house elf. Maybe part of several house elves. Anyway, he won’t be staying for the evenings. Seems my son will be needing him at home soon for some project or other, so Lurch will just be teaching your elves how to do some Addams-style home cooking and popping by during the day from time to time.”

“I’m sure that will be fine,” said Dumbledore weakly. “Let me have a word with Professor Snape, and then I’ll leave you to get settled.”

He drew Snape aside. “You knew about this!” he hissed.

“About what?”

“Her! Being an Addams!”

“Well, of course I did. Everyone in the Guild knows about Eudora Frump. I thought you knew, too, before you approved it. You do have several of her books on your shelves, after all. All you had to do was open one and see the picture on the flyleaf.”

“I haven’t had much time to keep up with the literature, Severus. Well, I suppose I’m stuck with her. Try to keep the damage down to a minimum, will you?”

“I shall do my best, Headmaster.”

If Dumbledore didn’t know better, he’d have sworn Snape was smirking as he escorted Grandmama, followed by a bobbing line of floating trunks, down toward the dungeons.

Afterwards, Dumbledore retreated to his own quarters, where he took an infusion of feverfew, butterbur and willow bark and lay down in the dark for an hour or two to make a last attempt at fending off the migraine that had been threatening all week.

It had easily been the worst week of his life, and that was saying something.

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Dumbledore was not the only one having a bad week, though. Harry Potter drifted listlessly through Monday and Tuesday’s classes, taking minimal notes and putting little effort into his Transfigurations and Charms.

On Wednesday morning before breakfast, Wednesday Addams waylaid her father as he came out of the Floo in his office. “Dad, you have to do something about Harry!”

“There’s a problem?”

“Yes! He thinks that the fragment of Voldemort’s soul stuck in his head will make him all evil and we’ll have to kill him to get it out. So he’s depressed. He’s not eating, he’s not studying, he spends a lot of time staring out the window into the lake.”

“Hmm. That’s not good.”

“Can you help him?”

Gomez checked his watch. “I have guest lecturers coming in today, so I’ll have to talk to him after class. I think Remus might have a few thoughts on the matter, too. Send Harry down here when you’re done with your last class, all right?”

Wednesday nodded and headed off to breakfast.

Four o’clock saw Gomez saying his goodbyes to the Goblins, and Harry showed up just in time to say hello to Roquat and Guph before they returned to Gringotts. He bowed and attempted a greeting in Gobbledegook to the goblins, eliciting a delighted response which he understood as, “May you have as much gold as you can eat.” He obviously needed to study more. The goblins then took the Floo out, and Harry flopped down on the ancient sofa that graced the office. A puff of dust rose from its threadbare upholstery, reminding Harry of the comforts of home.

Gomez threw himself into the leather chair behind the desk, which had seen more use in the last three days than in the past thirty years. “Now then, Harry, perhaps you can tell me what’s wrong?”

“Who’s asking? Uncle Gomez, or Professor Addams?”

“Let’s start with Uncle Gomez, shall we?”

Harry grunted. “Nothing’s wrong. ‘M fine.”

“You’re four years ahead of schedule on grunting and three on ‘I’m fine,’” said Gomez. “Skip the sullen teenager routine and talk.”

“Didn’t Remus tell you already?”

“About Voldemort’s soul? Yes, he told me. So?”

“So!? So I’ve got a huge chunk of a Dark Lord stuck in my head! Don’t you think that’s worth being upset about?”

“Stranger things have happened.”

“Yeah, right. I bet nobody in our family’s ever had someone else’s soul stuck in their head.”

Gomez stroked his mustache contemplatively. “You’re right there, I think. There was Cousin Bosworth, who was occasionally possessed by the spirit of a hedgehog – he was great fun at parties – but that’s not at all the same thing.”

“Right. So I think I’m entitled to be depressed.”

“Absolutely!” said Gomez, slapping his knee heartily. “Most understandable thing in the world!”

“I didn’t think you’d under – wait, what?” asked Harry, his train of thought derailed by his uncle’s cheerful acceptance.

“Depression, angst, wallowing in self-pity ... all perfectly natural. But you’re going about it all wrong!”

“I am?”

You're an Addams, boy! And Addamses do things big! With *passion*! Good or ill, pleasure or pain, we embrace it! Now ... do you want to face this like a child or a man?"

"Um... a man?"

"Good, good! Now, when a man gets into a bad spot, what does he do?" Gomez jerked open a desk drawer and pulled a bottle of amber-colored liquid and several tumblers out. "He gets good and drunk, that's what he does! You can't look at the problem from all angles if you're sober!"

He poured out a generous portion for himself, and a slightly less generous portion for Harry. Tiny flames danced across the surface of the liquid as Harry picked up the glass.

Gomez raised his glass. "To passion!" he toasted, and knocked his drink back with panache.

Harry attempted to follow suit. It wasn't the first time he'd had alcohol, of course. Along with the cuisines of many nations, the Addams children had sampled their drinks, from absinthe to zinfandel. It was, however, the first time Harry had had firewhisky. He felt the magical liquor burn its way down his gullet and set fire to his stomach. Then it seared its way back up his throat and shot from his mouth in a jet of flame that would have done credit to a small dragon.

"Whoa! Smooth!" he croaked.

Gomez smiled and poured again. Carefully judging the amount the boy drank, the older man soon had Harry at the garrulous but not incoherent stage.

"Ready for the next step?"

"Sure," said Harry, blinking owlishly at him and raising his glass again.

"You've had enough for the moment. Next step is the depression."

"I was doing that, wasn't I?"

"Not bad for a beginner, I suppose. But you're not taking it far enough. Do it *big*! Don't just mope around. Take to your bed! Don't just pick at your food. Go on a hunger strike! Don't just sigh. SING!"

"Sing?"

"Like this: *Nobody knows, the trouble I've seen. Nobody knows my sorrow,*" Gomez intoned in a soulful baritone. "Now you try."

"Do I have to do that song?"

"No, you can find something else just as depressing, I'm sure."

"Okay, how about ... *You gotta put down the duckie, Put down the duckie, Put down the duckie, If you wanna play the saxophone!*" Harry warbled.

Gomez looked at him. "'Put down the duckie'?"

Harry sighed deeply. "That song saw me through so many bad times."

"I'm sure it did. I think singing is going to have to wait until your voice changes, though."

"Probably. I can really take to my bed?" he asked hopefully.

"As your uncle, I'd recommend it. As your professor, I'd say wait until Saturday."

"And this hunger strike ... is that everything, or just stuff I don't like?"

Gomez was saved from answering by a rap at the door; it was Remus, who had by now finished his own last class of the day.

"Starting a little early, aren't you?" asked Remus as Gomez greeted him and handed him a glass of flaming liquid.

"Lunch was hours ago."

Harry, meanwhile, had been considering his uncle's lesson. "You know, Uncle Gomez, all this taking to my bed stuff sounds good, but it doesn't really help. What's it good for?"

"It makes sure you're good and rested when the next stage comes."

"What's that?"

"Why, leaping out of bed and heroically dashing off to solve the problem, with as much collateral damage as possible. Preferably while saving the beautiful maiden in the process." Gomez whispered confidentially, "Take it from me, they really love collateral damage."

"But I already heroically saved Wednesday. And I burned Voldemort all up. But he's still in my head! You know, I don't think you've ever really been depressed at all," said Harry skeptically.

"I'm wounded! Of course I've been depressed! You should have seen me just before I got married to your Aunt Morticia! I was a wreck!"

"You were depressed about marrying her? I thought you loved her?"

"I do, but I wasn't supposed to be marrying her. I was supposed to be marrying your Aunt Ophelia." Gomez shuddered, and Harry shuddered as well; he couldn't imagine anyone less suited for Uncle Gomez than Aunt Ophelia, whose cheerful, sunny demeanor and golden hair masked her nature as a Black Widow. She'd had nine husbands that Harry knew of; none had lived more than six months, but they'd all died happy, or so Aunt Ophelia claimed.

"I was contracted to marry one of Cousin Repelli's two daughters, and Ophelia was the elder, so there it was. Morticia, as the younger sister, was just her bridesmaid. Anyway, I didn't really want to marry Ophelia – don't get me wrong, I'd have done my family duty – but I indulged myself in a good long bout of depression first. Hunger strikes, nightmares, chills and fevers, coughing up blood, the works! But then I saw Morticia coming down the aisle, in that long black dress with the tentacles around the hem and carrying a bouquet of spider lilies, and, well, that was it for me. I've never looked back. Come to think of it, that's more the beautiful maiden saving me. But we're getting off track here. Solving the problem, that's what we were talking about."

"Well, then, there's another Addams way to deal with it," said Remus, judging that Gomez had done an excellent job of jarring Harry out of his funk, and it was a good time for a professional Voice of Reason to step in. "Use it. Learn all you can about it. Learn how to control it and make it work for you. And learn how to get rid of it, so when you don't need it anymore ... poof!" he said, flicking his fingers in a dismissive gesture.

"But what if I can't?"

"Then we deal with that when the time comes. There's no point in fretting about it now. In the meantime, we start working on it."

"But I can feel it now. It's in my head, poking at me to do stuff."

"You don't have to listen to it," said Remus, sensibly.

"Yeah, you try not listening to something like ... oh."

"Right. I've got a lifetime of experience with that," said Remus, sitting down next to Harry. "I was younger than you are now when I was bitten. Since then, the wolf has been part of me. It's always there, prowling around, wanting to get out. I spent years – most of my life, in fact – trying not to let the wolf out at all. I didn't let myself get angry or get in fights. And you know what happened?"

Harry shook his head.

"It got worse. It got stronger. Every month I tried to hold it back and every month it hurt me more and did more damage when it finally did get free. I'm pretty sure it would have killed me – or someone else – eventually."

"What did you do?"

"Well, I got lucky and met your family, and they sent me to the Reserve. And there I learned that if I let the wolf out, and used it for my own purposes, it was less likely to go out of control. It took me a couple of years, but eventually I learned not to be a person trying not to be a werewolf, but to accept the fact that I was a werewolf and let it be part of me. It isn't really all bad, either – I'm stronger, faster, have more acute senses, and actually a bit of extra magical power, too. The new Wolfsbane potion Professor Snape makes for me helps tremendously."

"If there was a cure, would you give that up?"

"In a heartbeat. It's still a curse, you know. But as long as I'm stuck with it, I'll make it work for me."

"So you think I can do that, too?"

"You already know Occlumency – that will help you tell your ideas and emotions from your unwelcome guest's. I don't think it's likely to make you turn evil now that you're aware of it. If it was going to, it would have done it already. In the meantime, it's probably what's giving you your Parseltongue ability, as well as the ability to cancel the spells cast by a certain Dark Lord, which could turn out to be crucial. You can translate his journal, which nobody else can do. You can tell when he or things connected to him are around – sort of a Voldemort detector, if you will. And it's probably giving you some extra magical power. You may or may not be able to keep any of this when you get rid of the soul fragment. I'd say probably not, but I can't be sure at this point."

"I'd kinda miss being a Parseltongue," said Harry sadly. "But getting rid of this," he said, poking the scar, "would be worth it."

"Then we'll get right on it. If I know Gomez –"

"– and you do," put in Gomez.

"– he'll be lining up every witch doctor, exorcist and spiritualist in Europe and the United States to see what they can do for you."

Gomez nodded in agreement.

"Bet they'll make me drink lots of yucky potions," said Harry, making a face.

"Probably," said Gomez, "and speaking of yucky potions, you'll probably want to take these," he said as he plopped two vials down on the end table

next to Harry, "or I'm going to have my head handed to me when we go down to dinner."

Sobered and de-hangovered, Harry went off to drop his books in the Common Room before dinner. With any luck, there was still some Goblin food left over.

"Think we can pull it off?" asked Remus quietly.

"We'd better. I don't want to think of what might happen if we don't."