**Chapter 44**

**Home, Sweet Home**

*And lo and behold, another school year has ended.*

*The trunks are packed, and summer’s sun shines in the blue sky. The House Cup and the Quidditch Cup have been decided and the Hogwarts Express is waiting to bring you back home.*

*It remains to be seen if this will be a good thing or not for you.*

*You see, dear readers, while you were away for nine months from the world, the world has not forgotten you. Parents and relatives have thought long and hard about the academic performances they expected to hear from your teachers.*

*If your grades are good, you will in all likelihood have a good summer.*

*In the contrary case, I hope for your sake you have good excuses and promises which will placate your audience.*

*Some gentle advice: do not try to tell many falsehoods and push the blame on others. It doesn’t work, as your well-connected parents have without a doubt better sources than you to draw information from and the punishments are going to be heavier in the end...*

Extract from *The* *Fall of Slytherin’s Heir*, Epilogue, by Gilderoy Lockhart.

*And the Boy-Who-Lived looked with happiness at the red silhouette of the Hogwarts Express waiting for them at the Hogsmeade station.*

*The darkness had been vanquished, his friends were with him, and many students who could have died or fallen to the Dark had been saved. The weather had never been so blue, the time of exams was over, and they had won the House Cup without contestation. All was well.*

*Now summer beckoned, and with it months of adventures, Quidditch, and relaxation...*

Extract from *Neville Longbottom and the Chamber of Secrets*, Epilogue, by Notton Wizarding Editions.

**5 June 1993, 4 Private Drive, Little Whinging, England**

The Dudley Gang –save its leader of course - was in front of her. Two years ago, this was a scene Alexandra would have moved heaven and hell to avoid. A gathering like this would have happened for a single reason: to hunt her. The moment she saw all of them in a single place with her cousin leading the charge would have been the moment to run for her life.

Two years had changed that. After her first year and the Summon of Brise-Roc, it had become difficult to take them seriously. The main danger represented by someone like Dudley Dursley was how she could not use her wand without being punished by the Ministry of Magic. Last summer, her wandless magic had been erratic and imprecise, but the Morrigan had resolved this problem. In the last months, she had trained herself to use the basic Charms of first-year without the use of her hydra wand in preparation for a day like this. And she could now teleport several kilometres away given a second or two of notice.

Dudley and his friends had fallen to the bottom of her threat list. When compared to the Basilisks, the Summon, or the power Dark Wizards had at their disposal, a gang of bullies were small fry.

Returning to the Dudley Gang, everyone had indeed assembled in the Polkiss living room – apparently his parents were away for a reception or something like that. From left to right, the names of her cousin’s followers were: Dennis Roberts, Gordon Peters, Piers Polkiss, Malcolm Cox, Edgar Dalton, and Jimmy Raynor. The latter two were new additions; apparently Dudley had been recruiting at Smeltings Academy.

She would have been more impressed if they were not all built from the same model: fat, tall, threatening in appearance and of course, very stupid. The promise of violence and ruling the Academy over those unable to defend themselves must have been all it took to convince them to join.

Really, if someone wanted to find a residential area full of genius children, Alexandra could only advise them to stay far, far away from Privet Drive. Especially in light of the recent events which had unfolded while she was away.

“Let me sum-up the situation. At the end of April, the father of a girl you had attacked in the toilets came to Smeltings. He didn’t believe for a second she had fallen down the stairs or whatever excuse you had forced her to repeat, and this was far from the first incident of the sort.”

Alexandra threw a disdainful look at them and all the boys did their best to avoid looking directly into her eyes. They were very lucky the Statute of Secrecy prevented her from cursing them right now - there were too many witnesses. But they were going to pay, and the sooner, the better. They had traumatised the poor girl with seven against one and their victim was one year younger than them. Dudley and his gang had a lot to be proud of, didn’t they?

“The intelligent behaviour would have been to stay quiet and let the furious father leave before breaking the Academy’s rules once again. But that would have been too simple, wouldn’t it?”

Piers’ shoulders sagged in defeat and this was all the confirmation she needed to know where this ‘idea’ had originated.

“The father of the girl had come in an Aston Martin. It was an expensive car, easily worth tens of thousand pounds.”

Frankly, she had to trust them on this point, but it was easily believable. The only Aston Martins she had seen until now were the ones James Bond drove in his films.

“Yeah,” confirmed Jimmy. Of the entire group, the black-haired boy was the most presentable...but Alexandra didn’t like his eyes. There was something dark in them and his attempts at being roguish were not amusing. “I think that model is called the Virage and can be bought for two hundred and thirty-six thousand pounds.”

Alexandra whistled. She was rich in the magical world and a Galleon was around nineteen pounds, but this car had to cost more than ten thousand Galleons...enough to empty her trust vault in one go.

“So you six decided to demolish it with your baseball bats. Because you didn’t like the man and thought he wouldn’t urge the teachers to throw you in detention again.”

Nods and positive murmurs echoed in the greatest room of the Polkiss household.

“Seriously, what is wrong with you?” The Potter Heiress barked. Her tolerance towards bullies hadn’t improved since she had punished Chang at Hogwarts, and the acts of her cousin’s gang were worse. “You brutalise younger children unable to defend themselves, and then you decide it’s fair to vandalise a car because someone is annoying?”

It could have easily been her instead of this poor girl. In fact, now that she thought about it, she was worried the victim having black-hair and a slim figure were not coincidences at all.

“It was Dudley’s idea,” tried Dennis. His hair was black, his visage had many freckles and his expression was particularly stupid. It was a common expression on the faces of Dudley’s friends.

Alexandra snorted. “Yes, and I think it was also my cousin’s idea that no one kept watch while the rest of you smashed the car windows, burst the tires, and demolished the bodywork. I’m sure the owner must have had quite a surprise when he came back for his car and found you there with your baseball bats.”

Too bad the scene hadn’t been filmed by a camera; Alexandra would have paid a hefty sum to watch it. Maybe one day she would explain to them the first holy rule of pranksters, Slytherins, and rule-breakers at Hogwarts: don’t get caught.

And this was what happened to them, in the end. What was the correct expression again? They had been caught red-handed, with the weapons of the crime in their hands and about a hundred witnesses – including the car’s owner, a few teachers and the Headmaster of the school.

Expelling them had just been a formality after that. Vernon Dursley had rushed to the school, but there wasn’t anything left to save. Obviously, Smeltings wasn’t Hogwarts. You couldn’t half-destroy someone else’s property and wake up the next day with just a detention as sole punishment. Vernon Dursley may have been one of their respected alumni in the past, but it hadn’t protected Dudley.

Well, it hadn’t really protected Vernon either. The owner of the destroyed Aston Martin and Vernon had threatened each other. Unfortunately for Dudley’s father, the father of the beaten girl had far better connections than the director of a firm making drills. This was not surprising in Alexandra’s mind: the Dursleys were not exactly poor, but they had never showed they had the funds to buy an Aston Martin or a Jaguar.

As a result, Vernon Dursley had made the enemy of a very powerful man, at a moment it was evident Dudley was utterly in the wrong. The gang and their parents had no idea what sort of arrangements had happened behind the scenes, but roughly two weeks later, governmental investigators had arrived to investigate Grunnings and every financial deed Vernon had made in the last decade.

If they had discovered no law-breaking, Vernon Dursley would have already been in deep trouble: the money from the ruined Aston Martin had to be paid somehow and Dudley was penniless – his pocket money lasted less than twenty-four hours on average.

But her ‘Uncle’ was not a paragon of virtue and model citizenship in one fat body. In fact, Vernon Dursley, the self-proclaimed ‘champion of normality’, was very much a criminal when he was in his business clothes. Malcolm Cox had heard the charges but apart from ‘tax evasion’, ‘fraud’, and a few other words, he had not remembered the exact terms. Alexandra could hazard a few guesses, though. Needless to say, his employees had been quite content denouncing their boss. Vernon must have treated them with the same level of respect he gave her. Oh, and Petunia had been arrested too, because her signatures had been involved somewhere in the fraud and she had attacked the investigators putting the manacles on her husband.

Alexandra had laughed a good while at this series of events. Her ‘Uncle’ and her ‘Aunt’ had been so fearful of magic and had publicly tried to brand her as a troublemaker...and at the same time they were grabbing money and advantages the non-magical law considered unlawful. Ultimately, Vernon and Petunia were just hypocrites. Magic was not okay and respecting the laws and their non-magical peers was over their dim-witted brains too.

“Why didn’t Dudley go live with his ‘Aunt Marge’?” The woman was horrible - and was, thanks the Valar, not her relative – but she was Vernon’s sister and the person which would welcome Dudley should his parents be unable to care for him. It went without saying Alexandra loathed her. Every time ‘Aunt Marge’ was visiting, she fled before one of the bulldogs ripped her leg off.

This time it was Dennis Roberts who replied.

“Dudley’s aunt was arrested. The policemen went to give her the news and she went raving mad and ordered two of her dogs to attack them.”

The visage of Dudley’s friend was paler than usual when he finished the explanation.

“One policeman was injured and they had to call for reinforcements. Dudley’s aunt was arrested. She hadn’t correctly trained those dogs, so they were all killed. Our parents say she is going to stay in prison longer than Dudley’s parents.”

Alexandra breathed in relief. Too bad for the policeman, but this way Marge’s pet monsters were gone from this world.

One thought came to the young witch’s mind, though. Wasn’t it a bit too convenient? Yes, she had wanted the Dursleys out of her life. Yes, these events were a magnificent revenge for all the years she had lived in their home. But after nearly a decade where everyone in Privet Drive had ignored her when she wanted to eat to her heart’s content, the Ravenclaw witch was a bit suspicious. The Dursleys had deserved being in prison but they must have accumulated a heavy dose of bad luck for such a rapid collapse. Still, there were stranger things which had happened in history. Maybe.

It was probably paranoia, but she would have to do some investigating. In a few months. Once she stopped laughing at their predicament.

“That doesn’t explain why Dudley disappeared.”

Her cousin had somehow ended up with a foster family after this series of disasters.

“We’re...not sure.” And for the first time, Piers’ rat-face was not confused or ashamed. He was truly and honestly terrified.

“We were told to do a lot of general interest work because we broke this Aston Martin. We had to go to the police station every morning.”

“And?” demanded the twelve-year old girl, wondering what sort of nuisance her cousin had begun.

“And one morning these guys were there. They were...big and scary.”

Oh what a fine description. Alexandra was sure it would go well in a criminal investigation. ‘Yes Sir, we have seen the thieves and kidnappers. They were big and scary’. And people wondered why they were not considered reliable witnesses.

Alexandra opened her mouth to ask Dudley’s lieutenant if he wanted to be a bit less obvious, but the rat-face of Piers Polkiss was troubled and his ugly eyes were not looking at her. He looked...haunted.

“We could not move. It was like they could crush us with a single touch. There was something in their eyes...”

Okay, that was not natural. No, it was not natural at all. It screamed ‘magic’ because if they were that afraid, they should have run and escaped.

“And the policemen? You were in a police station, where were they?”

“They were counting the bank notes,” said Jimmy disgusted. “Those bastards were paid to sell Dudley!”

Given how many times Dudley and his gang must have caused problems in Little Whinging, Alexandra couldn’t find in her soul the strength to blame the policemen. By the Powers of Magic, if she had been offered a way to sell the Dursleys away when she was eleven, she would have probably done it. No, stop. She would have done it without asking questions and joyously gone to Hogwarts without remorse.

She posed a few more questions, but it was obvious neither Piers nor the others knew how they had been forced to stand immobile without moving a foot or a finger. But it left more questions. For example...

“Why did they take only Dudley? You were all involved in the destruction of the Aston Martin, after all...”

“This strange guy with a long nose sniffed us,” revealed Dennis.

“He sniffed you?” That wasn’t good, at all. There were a lot of creatures with a sense of smell better than a human’s, but those having the power to take a human appearance were in general werewolves or something similar.

She asked a few more questions, but the descriptions weren’t useful. Average hair, average clothes, black eyes...

What could they have recognised in Dudley? He wasn’t a wizard; he would have had a letter for a magical school otherwise...

“Yeah, and he pointed his hand at Dudley and said ‘this one’.” Gordon Peters affirmed. “Two of the biggest guys grabbed Dudley and they left. When we could move again, the policemen acted like nothing had happened and that Dudley was never there.”

“That’s all?” With these clues, Dudley could be anywhere right now...not that Alexandra was frankly eager to go running around saving a cousin she didn’t like.

“I saw the van they were using before,” added Jimmy. “They were saying to the people around they were people from Saint Brutus’s Secure Centre for Incurably Criminal Boys.” The latest addition to Dudley’s gang sent her a pleading look. “That centre doesn’t exist. We checked. And everyone behaved like Dudley never existed afterwards.”

Yes, but people in the streets would not believe them. Indeed, they would have believed the Dursleys over Alexandra if they had pretended the same thing. Policemen were always more reliable figures than young teenagers who loved terrorising kids and destroying cars.

“Great,” she put a lot of good humour in the word and stood from the armchair where she had been seated. “All of this was extremely fascinating, but if you’ll excuse me, I have a train for Ireland to catch.” It was better to teleport to MacDougal Manor before Dumbledore’s spy realised she was back – she was ready to bet it was Mrs Figg, as several of her cats had Kneazle ancestry. Although why Dumbledore had not deigned to inform her of this change in the Dursleys’ status, she had no idea. Perhaps it was vengeance, or it was incompetence.

She had not made three steps towards the door before Malcolm was blocking her way with a supplicating expression.

“Please, Alexandra, we need your help finding our boss.”

The five other boys nodded vigorously with the dumb expressions she was so familiar with. She had to give them credit, Alexandra had not thought they would be that loyal to Dudley. The question was if her cousin had indeed done something to create this kind of loyalty or if they were too dumb to betray him.

“I don’t do charity work and I’m not the shining hero you’re asking for.” Besides, it would be a disastrous picture. Dudley was bigger than an obese pig and no fair princess; Alexandra was not the white knight running to the defence of the innocents. “Should I help you, what will you give me?”

“Everything,” whispered Piers.

Alexandra took a moment to consider it. On the one hand, Dudley’s gang were dumb brutes. On the other hand, if she accepted, they would be *her* dumb brutes. The Exiled were cruelly lacking support in the non-magical world. Malcolm, Dennis, and the rest of their group were not exactly the kind of allies a General would dream of...but she had to start somewhere, no?

“Good,” the Basilisk-Slayer told them. “You are all officially hired as minions in the Army of the Exiled...and if you betray me, the authorities will never find your corpses. This I swear, on the name of House Potter.”

**5 June 1993, Longbottom Manor, England**

Neville was bored. When he had imagined his plans for the first evening of the summer, the leader of the Gryffindor second-years had had in mind a lot of fun. There was an exhibition game between the Falmouth Falcons and a German Quidditch team tonight, and Leo’s father had gotten them good seats. When it would be over they would meet the players, obtain a few autographs and party for hours with good food and Butterbeer.

His grandmother had decided otherwise.

The moment he had returned to Longbottom Manor, his grandmother had shut down his dreams of absconding to a Quidditch match. Until then, he had not realised how disappointed she had been with his Hogwarts second-year grades.

He had a better idea now. For two good hours, she had point by point compared his marks with his father and belittled him every time he came short of his father’s grades.

It was completely unfair.

Neville had taken the top spots in DADA and Herbology, beating the records in the last five years in these classes. He was eighth in Charms and ninth in Transfiguration. He had thought it could count for something!

His grandmother’s retort had been that Herbology was just a second-rate class and in no way the path a true respectable wizard would choose for a career. The sole class he had largely beaten the marks of his father in, put aside just like that. In DADA, Charms and Transfiguration, he was below Frank Longbottom’s achievements. The gap was smaller in Defence, because he had achieved an ‘O’ there. But in Flitwick’s and McGonagall’s classes, he knew he hadn’t had a minor chance to equal these successes. Neville was getting ‘E+’ in these classes, but his father had ‘O+’ there too...the students in his year regularly getting an ‘O’ were Padma Patil, Alexandra Potter and Hermione Granger. Leo had managed to get fourth place in Charms but with an ‘E+’ like him. In third place, Padma had received an ‘O’.

Those had been the main classes, the one that mattered. But after this it was Potions, Astronomy, and History’s turn. Neville couldn’t honestly understand what the big deal was. The two teachers of the History class were a complete joke and everyone knew this was a course that was not recognised internationally by the education department of the ICW. What was the problem? Yes, he was not proud of his twenty-second place and the ‘P+’ he had received, but he wasn’t going to lose sleep over it.

His Astronomy essays weren’t that bad. He was fourteenth in the class despite the exhaustion staying awake so late always gave him. Yes, he was also far behind his father. The acid remarks of his grandmother had hurt, really. But seriously, what duellist worth his wand cared about what celestial alignment existed between Titan and Mars when you had a Dark Wizard in front of you ready to throw a Dark Curse? According to ‘Perfect Prefect Percy’, there were some applications of Astronomy in the development of new spells, Arithmancy, and the intricacies of many old theories. But once again, who cared about that save a few bookworms and teacher’s pets? Neville was happy to leave the rings of Saturn and the mysteries of Pluto to those who were interested in it. For himself, he preferred elaborate pranks against those who deserved it and playing Quidditch.

That left Potions...his personal bane and worst class in one box. Of course, his grandmother had questioned his dedication and his skills after learning he was forty-third, but that was not something he could change with a charm! Honestly, as long as the teacher making the schedules didn’t understand that putting him and Snape in the same room was an explosive recipe for disaster, his Potions grades were doomed. He hated the greasy bat and Snivellus was returning the favour. Plus they always had the class with the Slytherins. Malfoy, Crabbe, Goyle, Nott and the Carrows always sabotaged his cauldron when he had his back turned. Neville had made his peace with the fact that he would never be graded fairly in the dungeons. He was ready to bet his father had never had this kind of problem with his Potions Professor.

His arguments had not moved his grandmother. And grades had just been the first in a litany of complaints she had in her heart. The pranks he had played against the Slytherins, the students he had refused to ally himself with, the rumours he had spread around the castle, and his actions in the Chamber of Secrets: every action he had taken during his second-year was somehow wrong.

As a result, Neville was not going to see Quidditch this night or every other day of the week. He was forbidden from leaving the grounds of Longbottom Manor for the next three weeks and had to play waiter for the circle of old Ladies his grandmother was receiving this evening.

It was boring, and he had the classes of Binns to compare it with.

He had to refill the tea cups at regular intervals, prevent their grumpy old cats from escaping, and listen to their laments about how dumb the younger generations were. If a wizard in Britain thought this was interesting, Neville was ready to volunteer to be a living target in duelling practises.

And there would be three more of these ‘tea meetings’ before the end of the month.

Summer holidays had just started...and Neville prayed they would soon be over.

**5 June 1993, Malfoy Manor, England**

This was not how Draco had imagined his return to the ancestral manor. First, father had been absent at King’s Cross. Granted, it was not as much of a surprise as it should have been, the last letter he had received before the End-of-Term Feast had informed him there was an ICW conference the same day as his return.

But it still was a disappointment. Today was his birthday, the day he turned thirteen. Birthdays were always special, and not just because received tons of presents or the authorisation to invite every boy and girl he was allied with over. Whether it had been Winter or Summer, until now every time he had come back to London, his parents were here to welcome him back. His cousin Lyre had arrived shortly before the beginning of his second year, but it had not changed this fact. Departures and arrivals from Hogwarts were done together. It was the way it had always been.

 The problem...it was no longer the case.

Once the effects of the Portkey started to dissipate and they walked through the gates of Malfoy Manor, it became evident to his eyes it was far from the only change in the air. It was still early summer, so the large grounds on the right and the left of the alley should be covered in flowers. Mother loved flowers. Once winter died and spring replaced it, House Elves were instructed to seed roses, orchids, lilies, and many other flowers. Every time there was a ball in one of their homes, the tables and the walls were covered in flowers. There were animals too. It was a rare day you couldn’t see a squirrel or a peacock on the grass.

It had changed. There were still flowers and plants cultivated, but these weren’t the kind of things one exhibited at a ball or a reception. Potions was his best class and Draco had no difficulty recognising the names of the plants passing under his eyes. Asphodel, Mistletoe berry, Foxglove, Knotgrass, and Dittany were growing under the sun...it looked like the marketplace of a Potions Master.

Draco opened the mouth to know why abandoning the scenery had been necessary, but his mother was continuing in long strides towards the manor and he had to run in order to keep up, the trunks Lyre and he used being levitated over their heads.

The imposing doors opened without a whisper before two cracks made their luggage disappear. Half-walking, half-running, Lyre and he arrived in the entrance hall where sleepy commentaries from the past generations of Malfoys greeted them. They took several seconds to remove their robes and Draco prepared to walk to his room and wonder where his plans for the year had utterly failed when his mother’s voice stopped him cold.

“Lyre, dear, would you mind going to your room for a couple of hours? My son and I have a few important points to discuss.”

The intonation was soft and cultured, and an invitee to Malfoy Manor could have been fooled. But he was not an outsider here and underneath the pleasant facade Draco saw the truth. His mother was really furious. The twelve-year old boy did his best not to gulp in worry.

“Of course, Lady Narcissa. By your leave,” and his French cousin disappeared up the ancient wooden stair with a grace and elegance Draco knew he didn’t have.

Without turning back, his mother entered a room on the right she used as a tearoom for the meetings with other Ladies and influential witches. To his relief, there was no one else here. Every word said inside these walls would not leave. On the other side, the furniture was rather minimal. He saw no sign of any birthday presents, sweets, or pies. No, there were just a small dark table and two great couches, one green and one silver.

SLAP!

Before he realised what was about to happen, his mother had just turned around and given him a huge slap on the cheek.

“Mother?” It was a mistake. Mother had never slapped or struck him. Never. But the eyes of his mother were dark, terribly dark and had no affection in them.

“Draco Malfoy, you and I had a conversation last year about what was expected from the Heir of a Most Noble House and an alumni of House Slytherin.”

He had never heard his mother snarl either, but this was the closest to it he had ever heard.

“Yes, mother.” He didn’t know which conversation she referred to; there had been a lot of them, but he assumed pointing out this issue would not get him many compliments.

“Your academic results were below the standards I expected from you.”

Ah yes, *that* conversation.

 “Twentieth place may satisfy a half-blood of a low and impoverished Ancient House, but for a scion descending from the Noble and Most Ancient House of Black, it is completely unacceptable. And as if this was not disappointing enough, you didn’t rise as the leader of your year among the four Houses of Hogwarts. According to Severus, you did not even have all the first-year Slytherins in your circle.”

A twirl of her wand and an official-looking parchment appeared from nowhere.

“Explain to me, Draco,” his name was really articulated in this icy statement, “how being twenty-fourth this year can be considered an improvement of your grades.”

“I took the top post in Potions, mother.” It was a feeble excuse and he knew it. He had brewed with cauldrons since he was nine years old while most witches and wizards didn’t touch one before their eleventh birthday. Plus he had Severus as a godfather.

Narcissa Malfoy snorted.

“You were taught the knowledge of elixirs and philtres long before your peers knew how to pronounce the word cauldron, my son. If you weren’t able to take first place in this class, I would start to be very worried.” A click of her fingers and a House Elf appeared, carrying a tray with one glass and a bottle of wine before disappearing as fast as it had appeared. “But in the year’s end ranking, dominating the Potions’ rankings is not sufficient. You are thirteenth in DADA, nineteen in History, twenty-first in Charms, twenty-seventh in Herbology, twenty-eighth in Transfiguration and thirty-fifth in Astronomy.”

The last grade brought a minor grimace to Draco’s lips. Thankfully, his mother was pouring wine into her glass at that moment, so she hadn’t seen him. He had never been good at calculating and drawing the dance of the planets, and in the final exam he had inverted Jupiter and Saturn, which had made his star chart completely useless. It was the blood-traitors MacDougal and Weasley’s fault, of course. If the former had not decided to beat the latter with her telescope, he would have been able to notice his mistake.

 “Your grades are catastrophic and your peers aren’t respecting you anymore,” concluded brutally his mother. “I had to convince your father that sending you to Durmstrang was not the remedial course you needed.”

Draco could not help but feel a brief moment of disappointment.

“Durmstrang doesn’t tolerate mudbloods.” The thirteen-year old Slytherin argued.

“Durmstrang elite students eat ten boys like you before breakfast, Draco.” His mother corrected. “The law of the Institute is the law of the strongest witches and wizards. And you would begin with a severe drawback as the DADA courses of Hogwarts are a pleasantry while Durmstrang teaches the Dark Arts to all children.”

The implication was clear: his mother didn’t think he would survive a semester in Scandinavia –or wherever the school was located. And something in his stomach told him his mother was right. Father had taught him some low-level curses of course, but real Dark spells were not in his repertoire as they trained.

“Your father and I had to remind our Vassal Houses of their obligations, Draco.” There was cold fury in these words. “I had to listen to the prattle of Lady Crabbe and Goyle and explain to them why we support them financially and socially. Your father had to summon Lord Parkinson to remind him of the support he received when he signed his daughter’s betrothal.”

“Do not think we are going to tolerate this kind of academic disaster for one more year, my son.” The parchment levitating caught fire and the glass in his mother’s hands froze completely. “You will improve your grades and begin to behave like a Slytherin worthy of the name.”

There was no ‘or else’ uttered but Draco heard it nonetheless.

**8 June 1993, the Burrow, England**

Their parents, on the rare occasions they had visited the twins’ rooms in the last years, had described it as ‘utter chaos’. This was a grave insult. Yes, it looked like someone had thrown a Bombarda or two in a sea of sweets and candy, painted it in twenty colours, and perfumed it with chocolate-lemon-vanilla. Yes, their bed was levitating permanently since their eleventh birthday, the result of a joke they had never managed to reverse. Yes, their old school books had been buried somewhere under a pile of orders and potion supplies for the better part of nine months.

But Fred and George knew exactly what was in their room from their first fake wand to the last firework, so it was ‘organised chaos’, right? And if their mother didn’t agree, she shouldn’t have given birth to them on April 1st.

But for the present time, the pranks and the chaos generated by them had been toned down. The Weasley Twins had a crucial conversation and if there were mini-explosions near the door, it was to prevent their other siblings or their mother – especially their mother - from listening to the doors.

“Mother was not happy with our grades.”

“Mother will never be happy with our grades, Fred.” George was counting the Galleons they had managed to earn this year. There was far more than they would have believed possible two years ago, but ten Galleons and six Sickles were pocket change for the average Hogwarts student. Only the Muggle-borns who managed to get their tuition paid by some ‘anonymous benefactors’ had less money in their pockets. “She wants us to work in the Ministry.”

“Strange, George. I’m pretty sure we told her, oh, four or five times every day that we weren’t interested.”

“You know, if it was a well-paid job like a Quidditch player or Curse-Breaker, I could understand our mother. But the Ministry? No matter our grades, we would be lucky to begin cleaning the toilets or organising the archives of the fifteenth century.”

The grades you got at Hogwarts really didn’t matter for most of the jobs the Ministry had. It was the blood-status, the influence and the wealth of your family, which mattered. And the House Weasley, while it was impeccably pure-blood, was viewed with some truth as the biggest gathering of poor blood-traitors in the British Isles. To counter this sort of reputation, you needed the sort of grades Percy had received during his five years to even have a chance of being noticed. The twins had neither the patience nor the discipline to endure these torments.

“No, it will be the joke shop or a Quidditch player,” concluded Fred. Two jobs which could bring huge rewards if they succeeded, but if they failed, well they would be lucky to clean the streets of Diagon Alley. “Even if we decided to raise our grades to the OWL standards next September, all the professors would think we cheated somehow.”

“And pranking those pure-blood idiots of House Slytherin must have closed every Ministry door to us. I’m betting those bigots and dim-witted Heirs and Heiresses have started to moan and complain to their parents the moment they left the Hogwarts Express.”

 They had no source of information to confirm it, but they had seen the glares from the adults and their ‘betters’ every September. A few had been for their father, but the rest were for them. So no, they didn’t want to work with these arrogant and humourless politicians. Before a week was over, the Ministry would be painted in orange and red if they were hired.

“We did better than Ron, at least.”

“Thirty-eighth out of forty-four students,” Fred said admiringly. The year of their youngest brother was the smallest which had been seen in decades due to the Blood War. “We didn’t manage to do that bad and I personally ticked every possible answer in the Charms quiz.”

“Don’t forget the volcano of slime we made in Whitehead’s class.”

“And the runic trap we caught Filch in next to the Great Hall, immobilising him for half of the Astronomy theory exam.”

Ah yes, this had been honestly one of their best contributions to the noble discipline of Ancient Runes. Who knew combining Sumerian and Nordic inscriptions could have such impressive effects?

“I wonder what sort of career Ron has in mind,” mused George after a couple of seconds of silence. “I mean, his grades are catastrophic and I think Malfoy’s spawn is better than him on a broom. He’s good at chess when his opponents are inexperienced. Unlike us, he is not deliberately lowering his grades and spending hours on the elaboration of new products to challenge Zonko’s monopoly. What is he after?”

“Don’t forget, my not-handsome brother,” George guffawed at Fred’s remark, “that Ron has powerful patrons in Neville Longbottom and Leo Black. Those two will become Lords of their Houses, one day.”

And a Noble and Most Ancient House and a Most Noble and Ancient House to support your activities...it was nothing to sneeze at. But there was a hint of doubt in his mind. And George opened his mouth to his twin to share it.

“Will they?” He asked thoughtfully. Fred understood in ten seconds the implications of his question.

“You don’t think they will survive long enough to claim their seats,” Fred said as he threw a new firework to make more noise in case someone got suspicious downstairs.

“I don’t think they have excellent judgement. They told us to get these glasses to stop the Basilisk glare, but the Aurors told us afterwards these things would have been useless to counter the King of the Snakes.” The glasses had not been cheap to buy, so excuse them if they hadn’t taken the news calmly afterwards.

“We trusted them to correctly do their research,” agreed Fred. “In reality, they just opened the first book they found and trusted it like Merlin’s first sock. Fortunately for our reputation, we didn’t buy a rooster to get more ridiculous.”

“When you say it like that...it’s really a miracle of magic no one on our side died in the Chamber of Secrets.”

The twins smiled in a similar in question. The ‘miracle’ in question had manifested in the form of a black-haired Ravenclaw with...original ideas about what was the correct method to slay a Basilisk and deal with junior Death-Eaters. A shadow passed over the Burrow, taking the shape of an enormous bat.

“I also don’t like how our brother and the Boy-Who-Lived are so eager to escalate against those they view as their enemies.” George added. “I could understand teaching a lesson to the Slytherins about how the time of You-Know-Who is over...but they are not focusing their efforts on the worst seventh and sixth-years. They are attacking Slytherins because they are Slytherins.”

“I may not like them very much, George, but the ‘Golden Trio’ is still one of our main gold sources if we want to open the joke shop of our dreams someday.”

This was a very good point, unfortunately. For all the applause they earned when something spectacular happened inside the castle walls, the research and development of their pranks was not cheap. They bought materials from Zonko from time to time, yes. But their own inventions had to be financed somehow, and House Gryffindor was their main source of income. The Slytherins would never pay them, not when bright pink paint was landing on their arrogant heads during breakfast. The Hufflepuffs were in the ‘all for one and one for all’ mentality and didn’t support pranks except to punish a few bad eggs in their ranks. The Ravenclaws were normally the one who developed their own pranks and esoteric spells; they had no need to go somewhere else. When it came to the truth, Hogwarts was both an advantage and a drawback compared to the minor schools existing in Britain. There were students who had a lot of Galleons, but there were also brilliant students who had no need for their pranks. The Weasley Twins were the masters of prank supply, but there had to be some demand for them.

“How much gold do we need for Plan Wizard Wheeze to begin after our OWLS now that contingency Circus is over?”

Fred drew a roll of parchment from under the whoopee cushion they used as a pillow.

“Approximately two thousand and five hundred Galleons,” both grimaced in perfect synchronicity. “Somehow, I don’t think someone will have a crisis of generosity next September and throw a bag of Galleons our way.”

 No kidding, this was an impressive mountain of gold. Maybe Longbottom and Black had that much in their trust vaults, but they had to be the only ones in Gryffindor Tower.

“We will contact Lee tomorrow, see if he can send a letter to Bill in Egypt.” Yes, that was good suggestion. Maybe their big brother would have interesting ideas on how to get an initial investment. “We should also ask him for help with Ginny...”

**9 June 1993, New York, United States of America**

In terms of decoration, it was the complete opposite of the quarters he had lived in at Hogwarts. Of course, he had been forced to maintain his false persona of a famous author and a narcissist fraud at the time. When he decorated something for his real self, Gilderoy swore they weren’t portraits of himself hanging every two metres in colours, including purple and gold, looking like he was advertising new shampoo products. The house he owned in New Hampshire, in which he had been resting for the last three weeks, was a modest affair with a single floor and grey walls. It was not a location which attracted undue attention.

The office of Hendryk Jones was still extremely Spartan in comparison. The chief of the secret operations for the Magical Intelligence Bureau had a desk in his office, a small library on the back wall....and that was all. There were no paintings to lighten the ambiance or break the monotony of the boring white walls. There were no family pictures, no trinket offered by a friend or a wife – now that he thought about it, Gilderoy was reminded he hadn’t the slightest clue if his superior was married or not. There weren’t any chairs either. It was a classic tactic among certain senior agents of the Bureau to keep the pleasantries and political boot-licking to a minimum. Everyone was standing, and there was an informal rule not to conjure a seat for your noble backside. A delegate from Magical Japan who had once had the audacity to use his wand for this had found himself on his back, jaw dropped, before experiencing a terrible tongue-lashing.

“Ah, Gilderoy. I trust you are well-recovered from your Scottish adventure?”

“The Healers told me I am,” the British-born wizard replied carefully. “Though they also told me no Scottish weather, food, or students wanting to kill me will do wonders for my life-expectancy.”

Jones chucked lightly; Gilderoy noticed the smile didn’t reach his eyes.

“You can be reassured, agent. Our schools here have no killers in them and all our extremely dangerous Dark creatures are accounted for.”

The words ‘Britain’, ‘Hogwarts’, and ‘Basilisk’ were not uttered, but according to the whispers he had heard from his contacts, they had created a lot of debates in the corridors of the UMAS Ministry. And the fact Jones was able to certify this only increased the major issue that Magical Britain couldn’t.

“I’m reassured of course.” His right leg was a bit dolorous but he ignored the pain with the habit of long practise. Like the itches on his visage, these were cursed wounds which would never heal completely. Dark Magic always left traces, and the spell Carrow had used had never been published anywhere. Gilderoy knew he looked fine on the outside, but it was inside the real damage had been done and he had probably shortened his life expectancy by half a decade. “But I don’t think you have made this appointment just to reassure me.”

“I haven’t,” said Hendryk Jones. For the first time in years of service, the MIB wizard looked like he was apologising. “I know your last mission at Hogwarts was extremely taxing and ended in bloodshed, but I have a new mission which requires your unique talents.”

Lockhart winced. When compared to the best agents the MIB had, his two main talents were writing and his knowledge of Britain’s magical culture. Both had been exploited during his latest assignment to spy on Dumbledore and the state of affairs at Hogwarts. Since the former were generally considered fictional and just a pleasant distraction for wherever the wizards and witches had something in their skull, it was far more likely it was the latter which was primordial in this case.

“You remember our previous conversation when I informed you we had captured a cell of our wizard-first supremacists.”

“I remember,” Gilderoy acknowledged. “You told me the situation was well in hand, though. The ‘Lords’ Nott and Avery lost several of their subordinates and the MIB stopped their plans.”

There was no smile anymore in Hendryk Jones’ visage and Lockhart had a feeling he wasn’t going to like the news at all.

“We believed we had the situation well in hand. We dosed each of our own traitors and the British prisoners with enough Veritaserum to break the mental defences of a Dark Lord and asked them very politely to tell us everything they knew.” The fifth most graded agent of the Magical Intelligence Bureau shrugged. “At the time, we got everything - or so we believed. Gold, second-hand wands, cheap magical devices, sub-par Potions...I think we discovered between twenty and twenty-five safe houses they intended to use against us.”

The blonde-haired wizard nodded in approval, though he still didn’t know where it could have gone wrong. In Britain, these bigots would have been released without a trial and while the prisons of the UMAS were not flawless, there hadn’t been an evasion in the last seventy years. The more he thought about it, the less he could see where the Bureau had failed.

“Unfortunately, we realised too late that two of the idiots we interrogated had done worse than arming our insurgents.” Hendryk paused for a second before theatrically revealing the truth. “I think – and our boss agrees with me – these inbred morons have used the opportunity to sell the loot they amassed during the last British Civil War.”

 Gilderoy repressed the urge to puke. He suddenly felt very, very sick. These monsters had killed thousands for their stupid blood-purity and now were making profits from the possessions of those they had murdered in cold blood? Voldemort and his supporters had really taken the lessons of the Grindelwald War to heart...

“Many objects they stole were from British non-magical homes.” The voice of Jones was bristling with fury. And Lockhart suddenly felt the urge to kill one or two ‘Imperiused Death Eaters’.

“Please tell me they weren’t that stupid.”

Marrying between cousins had not boosted the average intelligence levels of the Wizengamot pure-bloods, but it was hard to believe someone could be that stupid.

“I’m afraid you overestimate their common sense,” there was no admission of defeat on his face, but Hendryk Jones suddenly looked very old and tired. “These idiots saw the opportunity to get US currency for their future plans. And since they did it for several months without handing receipts or bothering with the consequences, we underestimated the scale of the problem. It didn’t help many of the stolen objects were not magical in nature.”

“What changed?”

His superior didn’t answer directly however and instead barked an “Enter!” when someone knocked at the door.

Two assistants entered, one brown-haired and the other black-haired, pushing what happened to be a container of yellowish and half-transparent glass. Gilderoy recognised it as one of the new magical materials which were used by the MIB to store dangerous heirlooms and hazardous creations.

It wasn’t remarkable. You saw many of them in the archives and the secret stores the UMAS wasn’t supposed to have. What was inside, on the other hand...the alchemical-glass wasn’t perfectly transparent, but Lockhart could recognise just fine a painting of Hogwarts. From the cadre of the painting, small red steams were flowing. The bottom of the container was full of it and he didn’t need a clue from Jones to tell him that yes, this was blood.

“What is this horror?”

Hendryk Jones didn’t answer the question directly. Instead, another question was asked.

“Are you familiar with the term ‘Portrait of Ruin’?”

“No, I’m not.” In fact, he could say with certainty he had never heard it in his life and in his missions he had discovered a lot of magic specialties the wizards and witches of this world refused to admit existed.

“Not surprising I suppose, this is an advanced and rare form of magic.” Jones’ speech had been lowered to a murmur. “The principle is simple: first, a wizard conjures an object into existence and permanently anchors it into reality with a combination of Runes.”

Said like this, it sounded so simple. First phase, and it was a project of Runes and Transfiguration of NEWT Level. There was a reason why wizards and witches created an object from real resources and gave it magical properties afterwards: it was incredibly difficult to make sure something purely magical stayed real. Otherwise, the moment your magic was not enough, the object vanished and it could lead to...amusing situations.

 “Secondly, the wizard wards the object in order for it to be as unbreakable as possible.”

This was logical...and it would involve talents in Enchanting, Charms and certainly a vast knowledge of Offensive and Defensive magic.

“Thirdly, the wizard creates a pocket dimension and magically locks the entrance within the object.”

Wait, what? This was...this was completely insane. It would involve...Time and Space Magic for sure, a well of magical power on the Dumbledore-level and Arithmancy and Runes skills on Mastery levels.

No wonder he had never heard of these creations before. The efforts which had gone into these things must have been at the very least phenomenal and the work of decades. It was beyond the talent of Death Eaters and their pet monsters. If they had been able to do things like this, Britain would have fallen long ago.

“It doesn’t explain why it is dripping blood.”

This time Jones made an ugly grimace.

“The painting escaped our teams on the first surveys. It was, and still is, completely passive when not activated. The runes are engraved in the wood under the paint, and thus are invisible. But on the early morning of April 11, 1993, this changed.”

Gilderoy Lockhart went absolutely still. It was the very day the final battle of the Chamber of Secrets had happened. In fact, given the time lag between the Americas and Britain, it was quite likely it had been the moment when Alexandra Potter had vanquished the Basilisks.

In the life of a spy, coincidences were a rarity. His instinct was telling him this was not one of them.

“What happened?”

“The first person, a No-Maj, touched the blood and started to kill his entire family like a rabid beast. But when the local authorities killed him, he was transformed into a pool of blood. Unavoidably someone touched it after he held his last breath and the cycle of horror continued. They touched the blood and the effect propagated further and further. It was only the intervention of our forces which stopped the carnage – for a reason we haven’t elucidated, this blood has no effect on magical beings.”

Well it was absolutely repugnant, no mistake about it.

“How many people died in this incident?”

“Twenty-one.”

Twenty-one innocent people murdered because these Death Eaters were greedy and incompetent arses. Somehow, he already felt better about at the idea that some of their children had been massacred at Hogwarts this year.

“What sort of magic could do...this?”

“At the moment, our researchers think this is a time-delayed Thaumaturgy curse.” Gilderoy’s ignorance must have showed, because Hendryk explained seconds later. “This is a particularly nasty variant of Blood Magic, one principally used by the Vampires.”

Vampires on top of a Death Eater problem, this day was getting better and better.

“So the Death Eaters stole this painting from a vampire home and sold it, unaware there was a curse on it?

Had it been any other thief, Gilderoy wouldn’t have believed it, but these were Death Eaters and their arrogance had no limit.

“It is one of the theories which have been voiced.” The way the MIB secret agent told it, there were sure of nothing.” But we lack proof to confirm or deny it.”

“You want me to find this evidence.” And here he had enjoyed his rest and the idea of not being on the wrong side of the Atlantic.

His superior nodded in approval.

“You must go back to the British Isles and discover who owned the painting.” The two wizards watched the Hogwarts representation. The blood was continuously flowing. It was sinister and put his nerves on edge. “We have no idea what is in the pocket dimension protected by this painting or how to open it, but I’m sure we can agree what is inside is certainly something unpleasant.”

Lockhart tried to remember what he had learned about the British Vampires. It was not a lot. There were two covens left when he had studied a book during his tenure as DADA Professor. Both had become quite reclusive after the Ministry voted a new series of anti-creature laws post-war.

“I suppose we can’t wait for Lucius Malfoy and his friends to illegally sell new ‘Portraits of Ruin’ and begin new massacres. I’m afraid I have no contact in the British vampire community though.”

Consequently, having an appointment with them would not be a short process. Okay it was not true: if you wanted to become the coven’s next meal, the delay would decrease from months to days.

“No, we can’t.” Hendryk Jones gravely said. “And contact the Basilisk-slayer while you’re at it. A Claim of Conquest is a magical deed of High Arcane, and I want to know what else has been unleashed by her actions.”

**10 June 1993, Godric’s Hollow, England**

The grave was grey and not really pretty. Some graves nearby had been built in white or black marble, but not this one. Maybe the authorities had thought the person wasn’t worth the effort. The emplacement of the tomb tended to support this view, sadly. The cemetery was not exactly in an advertising position, hidden behind the church, but this grave was in a dark alley far away from the prime spots. Despite the presence of a warm sun and a blue sky over their heads, the presence of dark woods in the vicinity put a large shadow over the grey stone. There were no sculptures, no gold letters, and no flowers.

The words engraved were short and badly written, but Alexandra had no need to come closer to know what they meant.

**LILIAN MARIE POTTER**

**30 JANUARY 1960 - 5 NOVEMBER 1981**

**LOVING MOTHER**

Underneath were three words in Latin. The hand which had written the initial inscriptions was evidently not the same as this one. It was more elegant, nobler.

**POST LUX TENEBRAS**

The meaning of this sentence...she had no idea. If ‘after the light, the darkness’ had more meaning than what was seen at first look, Alexandra wasn’t aware of it. But then the Potter Heiress was hardly aware of every moment of her mother’s life.

In fact, what did she really know about Lily Potter? She was the sister of Petunia Evans, a detestable woman who married the obese walrus known as Vernon Dursley. Her mother was a witch. At some point before she was eleven, she had received a Hogwarts letter and attended the famous – or infamous depending on the perspective – British school for wizards and witches. Lily Evans had been sorted into Gryffindor, got excellent grades, established new academic records and was the most brilliant witch of her generation. She had achieved twelve OWLS and seven NEWTS, all with perfect Outstandings – the kind of scores which had only been bested by a few select geniuses, like Albus Dumbledore or a certain Tom Marvolo Riddle. In 1979, she had married James Potter and completed her Mastery in Enchanting somewhere on the continent. Around that date too, she became a member of the Light-aligned militia named the Order of the Phoenix. And two years later, she died in this very village.

When it came down to it, it was not a lot. Alexandra had asked Grimjaw to look around in the Potter vault if there were diaries or something like this during her first year but the majority of the files Lily Potter had left behind were some papers related to her school projects and post-school experiments. The raven-haired teenage witch admitted those were way over her understanding of magic and left them there. They would maybe be useful in a few years, but for now they shed no light on the mystery of her mother. The relevant parts had probably been in the house at Godric’s Hollow or Potter Manor. As the two places had been more or less razed to the ground, they would not give her more information.

Maybe this was why the tears didn’t come. Was she sad her mother was dead? Absolutely. But she didn’t know her and whatever bits Flitwick had told her were not enough to have a reliable view.

In the end, the dead told no tales, and most of her family was dead.

Alexandra turned around and departed the cemetery’s alley, gravel crunching under her new pair of boots. This was the only source of noise in the area with the light breeze in the air. It was early afternoon and a pleasant day, but Godric’s Hollow was entirely deserted. She had met three people and one cat before arriving at the church, and there was no sign there was a crowd hidden somewhere waiting to ambush her.

As a result, her red-haired friend was really standing out near the church doors. With the sun shining, Morag’s hair was like a torrent of flames and the best part was that no magic was involved. Like Alexandra, she carried a sword on her back for protection. Second year had proven the times were dangerous and when you didn’t have the right to use magic outside the powerful wards of ancient manors, it was best to be protected. Alexandra had *Fragarach* in her scabbard. Morag had ‘borrowed’ from the ancestral armoury of her family a one-handed runic sword answering to the name *Claiomh Solais*. No, it wasn’t one of the Four Treasures of the Tuatha Dé Danann, just a legacy name.

“For the birthplace of Godric Gryffindor, I expected something...more,” Alexandra remarked.

“One century ago, things were different,” replied the Irish Heiress, leaving her improvised observation post to walk alongside Alexandra. “There were over two dozen Wizengamot Houses living here, including the main line of House Abbot and important families of Frobisher, McQueen, Fleet, Hamilton, William and Cadwallader.”

“Things have changed a lot.”

“Yes, now they’re all gone or extinct.” And just like that, a Wizarding community had ended. Although to tell the truth, the disappearance of House Potter had probably been the last nail in the magical coffin. A lot of the names buried in the cemetery were of Houses having migrated elsewhere decades ago. The Dumbledore, Abbot, and many of the aforementioned families still had living descendents today; they just didn’t live in Godric’s Hollow.

But Alexandra couldn’t help but think that the civil war fought against Voldemort and his band of dangerous fanatics had ended this village just like it had ended countless lives and the future of Magical Britain. When Houses were reduced to one or two members or annihilated, villages were abandoned and magical lore kicked into the long grass.

“Have you found something on what happened twelve years ago?”

“Nothing, and that is worrying.” The MacDougal Heiress grimaced. “I’m beginning to think the explanation of a ‘local riot by a crowd of furious wizards and witches’ has been told to avoid very unpleasant inquiries. Every person living here has been Obliviated four or five times. The surroundings of your family’s cottage and nine more houses were completely demolished.”

“And yet the land still reeks of Dark Magic.” This was a very nasty revelation. Whatever had happened on November 5, 1981, the land and the air remembered it over a decade later.

Morag shrugged.

“We have no witnesses...or should I say we have no reliable witnesses, Alex.”

 Alexandra threw a last look at the church before they turned another crossroads and it disappeared from their view.

“It was just our luck that the last living witch in Godric’s Hollow is utterly crazy,” the twelve-year old witch sighed. “I knew it was just a bit too much to hope someone writing our history books would be reasonable, but Mrs. Bagshot should be definitely at Saint Mungo’s.”

“Yeah,” agreed Morag. “I think Luna Lovegood’s theories are really well-thought out compared to the crazy things she told us. Unspeakables plotting against the Ministry and breeding Dementors in secret, I could swallow at first. But Fudge and Amelia Bones being in a secret and torrid love affair?” The Ravenclaw red-headed nodded negatively. “The woman is just an old bat saying anything to attract attention. Veritaserum or not, I would not trust anything from her mouth.”

Alexandra smirked.

“Yes, I am a bit prejudiced against Dumbledore, but even I find difficult to believe that he and the freaking Dark Lord Grindelwald were in a love relationship. Or that Dumbledore was the mastermind of the entire affair all along and forced Grindelwald onto ‘the dark path’.”

Both young witches chuckled. The idea of the most terrible Dark Lord of the twentieth century being forced to do something he didn’t like was ridiculous in the extreme. Grindelwald had killed millions directly or indirectly and during his lengthy trial had never manifested any remorse for the uncountable massacres he had caused. It was like expecting Draco Malfoy to suddenly sprout that Hermione Granger was his natural superior. Yes, it was technically possible...but Alexandra would not spend hours of prayer waiting for it.

“There were some good ones, you must admit.”

Alexandra smiled widely.

“Well, Bathilda Bagshot has imagination if nothing else. The Head of House Crouch forbidding some sabbat practises because he found his wife practising some forbidden ritual with other men was definitely funny.” The Potter Heiress had seen the Head of International Cooperation from afar after the Basilisk Incident. He was not a likeable man. “But there are other things...more difficult to believe.”

The green-eyed witch had tried to not to formulate it out loud, but Morag had not her reluctance.

“The one where your mother was in a very hot threesome with an elder of a Vampire Coven and his female partner?”

Alexandra deeply blushed. This was obviously false information, but the image...no, best to banish it from her head immediately.

“Several Lords and Ladies engaging in treasonous activities purely because they thought the goblins were mistreated creatures, my father and his friends were all secretly were-animals, the Order of the Phoenix and the Death Eaters were both funded by extremist French secret societies, and Dumbledore was about to become King of Britain once he had vanquished the Dark Lord.” She listed with her fingers, trying to stir the subject away from less ‘interesting’ waters. “I think it is best for the woman to stay far, far away from any journalist of the *Daily Prophet*.”

By the Founders of Hogwarts, the ‘journalists’ of the Ministry-approved newspaper already took large liberties with the truth; they really didn’t need to have this source of incredibly wild rumours.

“No, the woman is old and mad. We will leave it at that.” The Potter heiress watched the deserted streets of Godric’s Hollow. They were sunny and carefully maintained, but she didn’t feel any envy or happiness at seeing the place which could have been her home village if events had turned out differently.

Godric Gryffindor or not, it was a foreign place and an old reminder of how the magical world had completely failed in the last decades.

“Our lovely minions are waiting near the yellow house,” told cheerfully Morag.

“Lovely,” commented Alexandra. “Let’s begin the hunt for Dudley Dursley. I want to see how badly my wayward cousin has fared...”

**Author’s note**: This is the first chapter of the third arc, which promises to be a long one if the first drafts I’ve made are any indication. A lot of magic, adventures, politics, friendship and battles await Alexandra and the Exiled...

Links for the story:

On P a treon: ww w. p a treon.c om/ Antony444

On TV Tropes: ww w. **tvtropes.o rg/ pmwiki / pmwiki .php/ Fanfic/ TheOddsWereNeverInMyFavour**

**Not a lot of action in this chapter, but I wanted to close several arcs and begin others. Chapter 45 will have far more fights and plots. The Exchequer and the rest of the Bad Guys are coming back...**