

**Inspected by No. 13**  
**A Bureaucrat is Born**

Harry sat in the tent waiting his turn to face the dragon. He held the animated miniature in his hand and wondered if he was going to get away with what he had planned.

*The original plan had been to summon his broom and use the maneuverability that would offer to retrieve the egg and make his escape. Hermione was sure it was his best chance. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, Harry had happened upon a book of Dragon lore by the current lead handler of Charlie Weasley's Dragon Reserve the night before after Hermione had gone to bed. According to the book, flying a broom anywhere near a dragon was a recipe for suicide.*

*His plan in tatters Harry had spent the night trying to think of something, anything he could do that would not end in his death. It was not until 4 am he returned to the book of Dragon lore and found an odd passage.*

*Was this a joke? He wondered as he re-read the passage for the fifth time.*

*Joke or not, it appeared to be his best chance of survival. Harry extinguished his wand, rose from his bed and padded to his trunk; to search for the souvenirs the elder Weasleys had brought him after that trip to visit Charlie.*

*Finding what he was looking for, Harry returned to his bed and spend the next three hours trying to make sure his new plan couldn't come back to bite him.*

*A magical contract had gotten him into this mess, he reasoned. Maybe a magical contract could get him out. Or several.*

"Mr. Potter," the Ministry man at the entry to the tent said rousing Harry from his reflections. "It's your turn."

"Thank you," Harry said as he stood up and straightened his robes. Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out a large golden badge and placed it over his left breast. Picking up a clipboard, he nodded to the Ministry man and exited the tent to the arena, ignoring the man's protests that the only thing he was allowed to bring with him was his wand.

competitors had drawn the Horntail. He felt nothing but sympathy for the kid, that particular dragon could be a cast iron bitch when she set her mind to it.

Her mood wasn't the best, it had taken him... Charlie Weasley, the god of the Dragon Handlers, 15 minutes to get her into position.

When Harry entered the arena, Charlie's jaw dropped.

What the hell had possessed Harry Potter to have him do *that* ?

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The dragon bellowed her rage at the wizards cowering behind their magical barriers, she inspected her clutch, noting the extra addition, but disregarding it as inconsequential. She stomped around only to be interrupted by one of the small human's clearing its tiny throat.

"ahem,"

She swiveled her long neck to face the wizard, and when she saw him, her blood ran cold.

"Ministry inspection," the Wizard said in clipped tones, the light glinting off his badge that proclaimed him to be from the Department of Magical Inspections: Inspector 13. The Wizard raised his clipboard and clicked his retractable quill. "Let's get started, shall we?"

The dragon sat her hindquarters onto the ground with an earthshaking thud.

"Eyes please," the wizard said.

Instantly, the dragon lowered her head to easy viewing level for the tiny wizard.

"Very nice," he said reaching out to touch her horns. "Eyes clear, scales shiny, horns appropriately sharp. Tail please."

The dragon wheeled on the spot, presenting her tail and hindquarters for inspection.

"Again, very nice," the wizard continued. "Hindquarters clean and scale coverage proper, tail... hmm," the wizard made a note on his clipboard. "Foreign material ground into the horns of the tail. Down check."

The dragon whimpered, and her head drooped.

"That will be quite enough of that," the wizard snapped. "This sort of condition may be adequate at your reserve, but I think you'll find we have stricter standards in Britain. Continuing on, rear talons."

Rotating her hindquarters so that she was half lying on the floor of the arena, she presented her rear feet.

"Adequate," the wizard snapped. "Fore talons,"

Rising back into the traditional sitting position of inspection, she rotated her forelegs so that her razor sharp talons pointed upward.

"Really?" The wizard asked, pointing disgustedly at the cracked nail on her right second toe. "This is the way you present yourself when you are representing Britain? Do you *want* to a downgraded to large salamander? Alternatively, perhaps your goal is a reclassification all the way down to 'large fire breathing lizard'? The ministry will not stand for this. If a downgrade is your goal, I can take care of it right now. You can start work Monday as the heating element for the Ministry's boiler room."

The dragon whimpered miserably, pleading with the wizard for mercy with her eyes. The human's only response was to shake his head in a manner suggesting extreme fatigue, before moving to her clutch.

"Egg inspection," the tiny human announced as he began looking over the eggs, before his brow furrowed and he reached into the clutch, pulling out the golden egg. "And what do you call this? Does your reserve allow this sort of counter regulation, unnecessary frivolousness?"

Again, the dragon whimpered in misery, trying to think how to relay to the wizard that the golden egg was part of the Tournament and not her idea.

"This would be you third down check, and would automatically trigger your downgrade to salamander, is that what you want?"

Yet another whimper was the Dragon's only response.

"Fine, I'm in the mood for mercy today. This," the wizard said, holding up the egg, "is confiscated."

The small wizard spun on his heel and stalked away. The dragon collapsed to the ground in utter relief.

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Harry entered the medical tent for the required post task evaluation to find all three of the other champions staring at him in open-mouthed amazement.

"Witches and Wizards, Harry Potter completed his task... somehow..." Ludo Bagman's voice rang out throughout the arena "in two minute and forty nine seconds, beating his closest competitor by more than ten minutes." A short pause followed before Bagman continued. "There has been a challenge to his completion of the task. Please stand by for the official rulings of the Judges."

Fleur sat on one of the beds, her left side smeared in Madam Pomfrey's best burn salve. "What did you do?"

"What I had to do to survive," Harry explained without explaining.

"Harry," Cedric began before Professor McGonagall stuck her head into the medical tent interrupted him.

"Potter," she said, "you are to report to the Judges Stand, now."

Harry nodded. He had been expecting this.

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"Harry!" the Headmaster greeted the fourth year as he arrived at the reviewing stands.

"One moment, Headmaster. I have some Ministry business to get out of the way first." Harry turned to Barty Crouch Senior and presented his clipboard and retractable quill. "The report of my inspection of the Dragon, Mr. Crouch, as the senior Ministry Representative here, could you acknowledge my inspection report? If you would, sign here, here, and here, and initial here."

With the practiced ease of a senior bureaucrat, Crouch did as he was asked.

"Now then, Harry..." Dumbledore began again.

"One more moment, Headmaster, I need to deliver my reports to all of the heads of the participating schools, as I'm sure you're all aware, the job isn't done until the paperwork is finished."

Harry presented his clipboard with a new form on top to Karkaroff, "Headmaster, your copy of my report, would you sign for receipt? Right here sir."

Karkaroff eyed the boy suspiciously. The child may be a cheat, but he certainly understood the ways of governments. He scribbled his name in the appropriate place and taking his copy returned the clipboard to Potter.

"Thank you sir, Madame Maxime? Sign here please?"

The half giant followed the example of her colleague from Durmstrang. This was patently odd, but her dealings with bureaucracies had her signing the form on autopilot.

"Thank you, Headmistress," Harry said as he handed the huge woman a copy of his report and moved on to Dumbledore. "And you Headmaster?"

Dumbledore also signed without reading his acknowledgement, accepted the report and returned Harry's clipboard to him.

"Are we ready to proceed now, Harry?"

"Of course, Headmaster," the boy said respectfully.

"Unfortunately Harry, we are going to have to disqualify your method of retrieving the golden egg."

"But, why sir?" Harry asked innocence thick in his voice.

"The rules clearly say that you were only allowed to enter the arena with your wand, Mr. Potter," Madam Maxime explained.

Harry's brow furrowed. "We were supposed to be naked?"

"Of course not boy," Crouch snapped.

"Oh, that's a relief," Harry smiled. "I mean, sure, Fleur could have pulled it off, but I don't think I would have liked being compared to Cedric and Viktor."

Dumbledore choked at Harry's response, before recovering. "Your badge of office, Harry, and your clipboard, those are the prohibited items that are disqualifying you."

"But, I got dispensation to use them as part of a magical contract," Harry complained.

"And who granted this imagined dispensation, boy?" Karkaroff sneered.

"Well, you all did, just now," Harry explained. "Didn't you read what you were signing?"

As one, the four adults raised the forms they had signed and began to read. Not only had they retroactively agreed that Potter had blanket permission to use his badge, forms and clipboard, and any other tools he might choose to use now or in the future, but they had agreed to grade him fairly based solely upon his technique and times throughout the tournament.

In short, the four Judges had agreed to award the boy a perfect score for the first task, at very least.

"You little bastard," Karkaroff snarled.

"Potter," Crouch snarled. "You will release us from this contract, and you will do it now."

"Sure thing, Mr. Crouch," Harry agreed, "I'd love to. Just as soon as you release me from having to participate in this Tournament."

"Harry," Dumbledore said sadly, "we cannot do that."

"That's too bad," Harry agreed, "because I've entered into another magical contract, with parties that asked not to be named, not to release you from yours, until such time as you release me from mine."

The looks on the faces of the assembled adults gave Harry an almost uncontrollable urge to limbo. He was not sure what that was all about.

Harry arrived in the common room to find a party going on. That figured. Yesterday they were all saying he was a cheat, now he was a hero for some reason.

"HARRY!" a shout echoed throughout the common room, even drowning out the music. Harry found himself wrapped in a hug lifted off his feet and spun around the room. Who the hell?

"Oh, Harry," the hugger said as Harry was returned to his feet. His eyes widened in surprise. Percy?

"I was at your task as Mr. Crouch's assistant, and I have to tell you, I have never been so proud. You dealt with that Dragon in exactly the correct way," Percy babbled. "I never dreamed that any Gryffindor would ever show such a flare for the important things in life. You have to help me with my research on cauldron bottoms!"

"Uh, Percy," Ron said appearing at his older brother's side. "Harry's needed up in our dorm."

"Business," Fred explained when he appeared to Harry's left.

"Triwizard business," George emphasized from Harry's right.

Not waiting for Percy to answer, the twins picked Harry up by the arms and hurried up the stairs to the 4th year dorm, following Ron.

"What the hell?" Harry asked as the twins allowed his feet to touch the floor again, just inside his Dorm.

"Harry," George began.

"What have you done?" Fred finished.

"What?" Harry responded. "I did what I had to do."

"Harry," Hermione broke in, alerting him to her presence, "Why didn't you summon your broom?"

"After you went to bed, I was skimming through that book of Dragon Lore Mr. and Mrs. Weasley got me after they visited Charlie," Harry said, not understanding the concern everyone was showing. "It said that even thinking about flying around a dragon was suicide. Then I found a passage about how Dragons are trained to react to their inspections."

"Oh, Merlin," Fred said sitting on Ron's bed.

"Yeah," Harry continued, "So I dug out that souvenir inspector's badge and clipboard that your folks got me with the book and decided to bluff my way through. I figured why not? I never really thought it would work, but it was the best option I had."

"Harry," Fred said shaking his head. "That badge and clipboard aren't souvenirs..."

"Well, they were given to you as a souvenir," George interjected.

"Right," Fred agreed, "but the badge and clipboard are *real*. I thought Dad explained that."

"I don't understand."

"Ok, look," George said, "the badge and clipboard belonged to a real Ministry Inspector, who died when he downgraded a dragon to 'large fire-breathing lizard' and the dragon reacted badly. That's why the clipboard had the forms you needed. It's charmed to produce the required forms on demand. And the Badge is charmed to always allow you to spout the bureaucratic jibber-jabber needed to do the job."

"After the old Inspector 13 died," Fred explained, "no one wanted the badge; everyone thought it was cursed because he was the 12th Inspector 13 to die during an inspection. Since no one wanted it, and the bloody things are indestructible,"

"That one made its way through the digestive tract of a 'Large Fire-Breathing Lizard'," Ron supplied helpfully.

"Yeah," George nodded. "Indestructible, as soon as you put the badge on and used it in an inspection, you became Inspector 13."

"The 13th Inspector 13," Hermione pointed out.

"So, you may be cursed," Ron suggested, "and you may be doomed, not that being doomed is all that unusual for you, but, and this is important, you're being paid."

"Oh, bloody hell!" Harry said, looking to the ceiling.

"So, we need to know," George said.

"What was that form you got us to sign this morning?" Fred asked.

"Oh, nothing important," Harry sighed. "Just a magical contract between us that doesn't allow me to release any of the judges from any magical contracts we may at any point in the future enter into with each other, until such time as they release me from the magical contract that enforces my participation in the Triwizard Tournament."

He paged through the forms on his clipboard. "Evidently that's Ministry Form 792-B," he sighed. "You said I was getting paid?"

"Oh, yeah," Ron agreed. "A really good salary too, like twice what Dad gets as a department head."

"That doesn't make any sense," Hermione said. "If the pay is that high, why isn't Mr. Weasley an inspector?"

"Well, it's complicated," Ron said.

"No, it isn't," Fred disagreed.

"No one likes the Inspectors," George explained. "The whole Department of Magical Inspections is reviled by all right thinking people. The only department more hated is the Department of Magical Audits."

"Brr." Ron said, physically shaking at the mention of the name. "Auditors, the You Know Whos of the Ministry."

"Oh Bloody Hell!" Harry exclaimed as he fell back on his bed.

"Language Harry," Hermione admonished. "It's not that bad, at least you've got a career."

**Inspected by No. 13**  
**A Bureaucrat is Courted**

Reactions in the stands toward Harry Potter assuming the role of Inspector 13 were many and varied.

Draco Malfoy was at first gleeful to think that his hated adversary would be forced to face the most horrifying of dragons. Then, startled by the power the Potter scion had somehow assumed, Draco wondered what all of this meant. Even his father spoke in frightened tones of the power of the Ministry Inspectors. And now, Potter was one. What did that mean?

Ron Weasley watched in terror as he realized just how wrong he had been about his friend, and that fear only grew when he saw what desperation had driven Harry to do. In the time he had known Harry, Ron was always surprised at how little his friend actually knew of the magical world. It was entirely possible that this ignorance had led directly to... this.

Severus Snape experienced a disturbing realization that the child he had been purposefully tormenting since he arrived at Hogwarts might have acquired the power to strike back in a way against which the Potions Master had no defense.

Barty Crouch Senior recognized the birth of a new Bureaucrat, one that might need the guidance of an experienced hand. Once again, the man felt the pain of seeing another young man choosing the path his own son had rejected.

Barty Crouch Junior willed his stolen magical eye into magnification to allow closer examination of the Potter boy as the child cowed the massive she-dragon. Nothing in the boy's class work had suggested this sort of gambit. No, this was an out-of-character grab for power, and a vital power it was. In the deepest part of his mind, he found himself wondering if it was a power his Master could stand against.

Albus Dumbledore sat amidst the other judges and evaluated how this development might affect his plans for the future. Harry's entry into the tournament was obviously some sort of plot against the boy; Harry was, after all, far too interested in blending into his environment to have ever tried to stand out like this. The Potter heir was vital to his plans, and this unexpected development could easily derail those plans.

Meanwhile, in the Hufflepuff section of the stands, a young woman found her interest piqued. This development in the Potter heir was unexpected. Perhaps he was worth further investigation after

all.

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The stares had gotten to him, Harry admitted to himself as he tickled the pear on the painting. The door opened to reveal the Hogwarts kitchens. He just could not take another meal where everyone in the Great Hall stared at him, so he skipped dinner and hoped that the kitchen would offer a bit of refuge.

"Harry!" every elf in the kitchen chorused as he entered the room.

Potter blinked. That was odd; no elf had ever just used his given name before. It was always 'Harry Potter' or 'Young Master' whenever he could get an elf to calm down enough to actually speak with him.

Harry found himself mobbed by the tiny beings before one of the elves began shouting at his fellows.

"All right you lot," the elf, easily the most ancient Harry had ever seen, barked. "Clear off, give Harry some room."

The crowd of happy elves disbursed back to their jobs, smiling as they did so.

"Good to see you, Harry," the old elf said as he steered the boy to a table. "I'm Isaac, I run the elf side of the castle operations."

Harry noticed that he was gaping and made a concerted effort to stop. "Your speech..." he began.

"Noticed that did you?" Isaac laughed. "Isaac is sorry Harry Potter, Sir, Isaac will be cleaning now... That rot is for the bosses, because that's what they expect, Harry. Tippy noticed you weren't at dinner, are you hungry?"

"A bit, yeah," Harry agreed. Almost instantly, the table in front of him filled with food.

"Eat up, Harry," Isaac continued. "You won't be hearing that pidgin shite from us anymore, unless we're in public, as you've become one of us, the workers, one of those who keep everything running in the face of the insanity of the bosses. The Ministry Inspectors and the Elves have long worked together in pursuit of a better tomorrow."

Harry waited for three whole beats before his curiosity got the better of him. "It's an act? The whole happy slave routine is an *act*?"

The old elf just offered an evil smirk in way of answer.

If nothing else, Harry reflected as he began his meal, putting on that badge had given him plenty to contemplate.

**Mr. Potter:**

***First of all, welcome to the ranks of the Department of Magical Inspections. You have assumed a position that has been vacant for twenty-seven years, and as such, this notification is intended to bring you up to date with the latest processes of our venerable organization.***

Well, Harry thought, that cleared that up. After a few weeks of various flavors of fan and hate mail, Harry had not been sure what to make of the package that arrived bearing the mark of the Department of Magical Inspections.

The hate mail had stopped as if someone had turned off a spigot. He was not sure if his facing the dragon that had made it stop, or if it was the badge that he decided to put on that day. Either way, it had stopped.

The fan mail on the other hand had skyrocketed. He had asked Isaac to find a place to stash the stuff until he had time to deal with it. Isaac had just laughed and asked him, "Bosses, eh? No problem Harry, we'll deal with it."

Harry still was not sure just how he felt about the jovial, snarky, smart arsed, elves. Still, they were good people.

Back to the letter.

***In as much as your equipment has been dormant for twenty-seven years, you are due an update. Normally, this would be done during one of your visits to the Main Office in the fourth basement of the Ministry of Magic, but since such a visit is not something that you could easily do at this time, I have provided a remote upgrade for your use.***

***This is a one-time event, in the future; you will follow standard protocols.***

***To activate the process, load this letter onto your clipboard, lay your badge on top of the letter, press your wand into the number shield of your badge and wait until the page turns blue. Once the page is blue, then you have only to wait for the upgrade to process.***

***Our people in the Research and Development tell me the process will take approximately twenty minutes.***

***Once you have done this, this letter will have further information that you will need to continue in your duties.***

Harry turned the page over and found it to be blank. They were serious; he had to perform the update to get any more information.

Well, nothing else for it, he decided as he clipped the page to the clipboard, placed his badge on top of it, and touched his wand to the badge.

And waited.

And waited.

Just as Harry was wondering if he had done something wrong, the page went blue and a musical chime sounded in unused classroom.

Now all he had to do was wait.

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Another chime drew Harry's attention from his Charms homework to his clipboard..., which had changed.

Where before it had been a simple metal clip on a piece of wood was not a metal box with a clip on it, not terribly unlike the ones he had seen in the hands of various tradesmen that the Dursleys had employed from time to time. An obvious piano hinge was on the top, indicating how the box opened.

He retrieved his badge and the letter, which now had new text.

***If you are reading this, then you have completed the upgrade of your equipment and are again wearing your badge.***

***This is a security feature of all interoffice memorandums from this department; none of our memorandums are readable without the wearing of a badge.***

***This would be normally covered in your orientation, but believe me when I say that no one wants to witness what happens when an unauthorized person attempts to wear an active badge. You were quite lucky that Badge 13 was deactivated when you put it on.***

***Your clipboard has been upgraded to the current state of the art. Open it now.***

Harry reach for his newly modified clipboard. Finding a small latch at the bottom, he opened the box carefully, only slightly surprised to find that the quarter inch deep box held a full set of file folders. Someday he might get used to discovering magical expansion spaces in innocuous objects, but not today.

***You will now find access to your personal files. Whenever you fill out a modern form, it will be in quadruplicate. The original is filed with our Department in the first folder labeled 'Ministry'. The first copy goes to your files; the remaining two copies go to the inspected party.***

***In the event you are in receipt of Departmental Documentation, you will file the third copy in your personal files, and the fourth with the Department.***

***You will also find your personal stamp in the clipboard. This is a new innovation since your badge went inactive. You will use it to certify the documents you handle. Among other things, it***

*verifies your signature and certifies that the forms that bear them are valid.*

*Once you have the time, you will need to come into the Main Office for your real orientation. Among other things, the Audit Department wishes to meet with you about certain topics, and the Goblins of Gringotts wish to have a meeting with you as soon as possible.*

*Looking forward to actually meeting you Mr. Potter.*

*David Philpot*

*Section Manager*

*Department of Magical Inspections*

Harry shook his head and sighed. The more he was exposed to what passed for the government of the magical world, the less sense it made. What sane organization would allow a boy his age to just assume the kind of administrative power he found himself with?

Obviously, the same kind of organization that would force a boy his age to compete in a tournament against a dragon.

Still, he had to wonder, what did the Goblins want?

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"Excuse me, Harry?"

Harry looked up from his meal to find Ernie Macmillan standing in front of him.

"What can I do for you, Ernie?" He asked.

"Uh," the taller boy hesitated for a moment until he was elbowed by the tall brunette at his side, "Harry, I'd like to introduce you to my sister, Eddie."

Harry rose from his seat. There was something about this girl... Something that his newly found sense of bureaucracy seemed to recognize.

"Miss Macmillan," Harry said with a nod.

"Mr. Potter," she acknowledged with a nod of her own. "You may go Ernie."

Ernie seemed to disappear from the table, his relief evident to anyone who was paying attention.

"I was having breakfast, Miss Macmillan," Harry said, "Would you care to join me?"

"Yes, Mr. Potter," she nodded. "I believe I will."

The pair sat, still the only occupants of the Gryffindor table at this early hour. The young woman

filled her plate.

"I am Edwina Macmillan, 6th year Hufflepuff. You did not enter in the tournament of your own free will?"

"I did not," Harry acknowledged, wondering where this conversation was going.

"I see," Eddie nodded as she dug into her eggs. "Do you have questions for me?"

"You seem awfully familiar," Harry said. "I mean I know I've seen you in the halls during school, but suddenly..."

"That is an aspect of our callings," she explained as she casually pulled back her robes to reveal her own badge of office pinned to her blouse. "Until you assumed your duties as Inspector 13, I was the youngest of our department, having assumed my father's position when he passed last year. Inspector 84, at your service."

"Ah," Harry nodded, "so, we can all recognize each other?"

"Yes," Eddie agreed. "I was the eldest of father's heirs, so with his passing the post was mine for the taking. Fortunately Ernie never wanted the position, so my acceptance of the position brought about no familial ill will."

"I have to admit that I had wondered how others got their positions within the department."

"Most are passed from generation to generation, though those who assumed a vacant position, either willingly or from ignorance are hardly unknown."

"I see," Harry nodded. "Should I assume my predecessor had no children?"

"An only child, who never married or fathered children," Eddie explained. "He was before my time, of course, but I grew up listening to stories of the legendary Inspector 13."

"Stories I will strive to live up to," Harry said quietly.

Eddie seemed to stare at him for several moments, before seemingly making up her mind. "I find you acceptable."

Harry blinked at that, not being sure how to respond, he decided to go with politeness. "Thank you."

"In accordance with published policies, and in consideration of the upcoming Yule Ball, I am submitting this," Eddie said, producing her own clipboard and removing a form, before sliding it across the table to Harry."

Harry picked up the form and read the title: **Department of Magical Inspections form 2936-D; Intent to Instigate a Personal Relationship between Departmental Personnel.**

Harry read through the document and after determining that it was correct in detail and form, he retrieved his own upgraded clipboard from his pocket, and signed approval on each of the pages in quadruplicate. He then used his new stamp to emboss and verify each of his signatures.

Obtaining a copy of **Department of Magical Inspections form 2973-H; *Tentative Acceptance of a Personal Relationship between Departmental Personnel*** from his files, he filled it out with Eddie's name badge number and current rank. He then pushed his form across the table to her, along with the first two copies of her original form, keeping two copies for himself.

Harry accepted the original and first copy of his form 2973-H, and filed the original along with the third copy of the form 2936-D with the ministry, and placed the remaining pages into his own files.

"I believe," Harry said thoughtfully, "that, pending approval, we have a date."

"We do," Eddie agreed. "I believe our official robes would be the most appropriate attire for the event. Since it is unlikely that you have a set, I propose we remedy that during the December Hogsmeade weekend."

"Agreed."

"Very good," she said rising to her feet, her meal finished. "I look forward to our shopping expedition and the Ball then."

Harry watched as the older girl exited from the Great Hall.

"You're up early," Hermione noted as she slid onto the bench next to him. "What did Eddie Macmillan want?"

"Good morning Hermione," Harry said as he put away his clipboard and set about finishing his breakfast. "She asked me to the Yule Ball."

"She did?" Hermione asked a tone of surprise in her voice. "What did you say?"

"I acknowledged of the request with a positive endorsement," Harry noted absently, reaching for the pumpkin juice. "Now we're just waiting for Managerial approval."

For once in her life, Hermione Granger had no idea how to respond to something.

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The Ministry owl accepted the offered bacon and took wing, leaving Harry with his letter.

Opening the envelope, Harry scanned the page and smiled. Looking across the Great Hall to the Hufflepuff table, he caught Eddie Macmillan's eye as she looked up from her own letter and nodded, a gesture she returned with a small smile.

"Well," he said, "I've got a date."

"What?" Ron asked around a mouthful of eggs and toast.

"Disgusting is what it is," Hermione huffed. "Both Ron talking with his mouth full and the pair of you asking permission of the Ministry to go to the ball together."

"I keep telling you, Hermione," Harry sighed, "there are rules."

"Rules that you didn't agree to before becoming subject to them," she complained. "Honestly, Harry. What that Badge is doing to you is just as bad as what being forced into this contest is doing to you."

"How did you get a date?" Ron asked when he came up for air, before diving back into his breakfast.

"Eddie asked me," Harry explained. "Look Hermione, so far this badge and what it allows me to do has kept me from getting hurt or killed. That's a fair trade if you ask me."

"Eddie Macmillan?" Ron asked, shocked to his core. "She's hot! Why would a hot older woman be interested in you?"

"Common interests," Harry shrugged.

"Just because it allows you to go around the rules..."

"Hermione," Harry sighed again, "if not for my 'going around the rules', I would have been forced to face that dragon with nothing but my wand. If I'd have summoned my broom like we planned, I would have died."

Hermione blushed, "I know, I can't believe I missed that."

"We both missed it Hermione," Harry pointed out. "If I hadn't looked at the tourist book Mr. Weasley got me at the last minute, it wouldn't have ended well. But everything worked out."

"Common interests?" Ron asked. "What common interests?"

"We both like Quidditch, treacle tarts and the Beano," Harry explained.

"The Beano?" Ron and Hermione chorused one in confusion, the other in surprise.

"What's the Beano?" Ron asked.

"A Muggle Comic book," Harry explained.

"Oh," Ron nodded wisely. "Keep hold of her Harry, a bird who likes comics is a rare find."

"And how are you going to survive the next task Harry?" Hermione soldiered on, trying to ignore Ron's sexism as well as Harry's Beano comment. "Have you even tried to figure out the egg yet?"

"Well, not as such," Harry admitted. "I was concentrating on surviving the Ball first."

"Does she have a friend?" Ron asked.

"What?" Harry asked, wondering what Ron was talking about.

"Your hot sixth year who recognizes great literature," Ron said. "Does she have a friend that I could go with?"

"I don't know," Harry hesitated, "I guess I could ask."

"She needs to be hot," Ron insisted. "I have a reputation to think about."

"And you desperately want to change it," Hermione thundered in a rage over the sexism of Ron's request.

Harry just closed his eyes and listened while Hermione to smack Ron, somewhat harder than usual.

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"Sorry about stepping on your feet," Harry said as the pair made their way through the halls.

"I stepped on yours just as much, Harry," Eddie laughed. "When you add in that you didn't spill your drink on me like my last date, you're well into the 'I had a great time' category."

"I'll take that as a win then," Harry said laughing himself.

"You seemed surprised to see your little friend all dressed up," Eddie noted.

"Well, yeah," Harry admitted. "I mean, I'll be the first to admit that I don't know much about Wizarding fashions, but that thing Ron was wearing was horrible."

"It was the height of fashion about a hundred and fifty years ago," Eddie explained. "But I was referring to your other little friend."

"Hermione?" Harry asked, "Yeah, it was a bit surprising to see her all dressed up, I mean, she usually doesn't bother with that sort of thing." He paused for a moment before continuing, "You know, from everything I've ever heard about dating, I think that talking about another girl is a bad idea."

"Usually, but I brought her up, so you're ok," Eddie laughed.

The pair stopped in front of one of the many frosted windows to look out over the snow covered

grounds.

"Home tomorrow for Christmas with the family," Eddie said, breaking the silence. "What do you have planned for the holiday?"

"Same as usual, staying here. My relatives and I don't really get along, so it's just easier to stay. On the first, I've got an appointment with Gringotts, something to do with the Department, though I'm not sure what it's about."

"That's odd," Eddie offered, "I don't recall ever hearing about inspections of Gringotts."

Harry shrugged. "Well, I guess I'll find out on the first."

The two resumed their stroll through the darkened castle. Before long, they had reached the entrance to the Hufflepuff dorms.

"Are you sure you had a good time?" Harry asked.

"Well," Eddie teased, making a great show of thinking about her answer, "I really could have done without Weasley rushing up and hugging you and making such a fuss."

"Percy's been like that since I put the badge on," Harry sighed. "I'm not sure what it's all about, but from him, I guess that's a kind of support."

"I had a wonderful time Harry," Eddie admitted. "I suspected that I would so I had this ready," from a pocket, she produced a roll of parchment.

**Department of Magical Inspections form 9761-D; *Intent to Indicate a Successful First Date with a Good Night Kiss;***

Harry scanned the document and noted the qualifiers checked off in the body of the text:

***On the Lips.***

***Closed Mouth.***

***No Tongue.***

Harry looked into Eddie's eyes, as he fumbled for his clipboard. He signed in all the appropriate places, and stamped to verify his signatures, before returning the original and first copy to his date and filing his own copies.

Then she took his face in her hands, and kissed him.

During the kiss, Harry pondered if he should point out to Eddie that she had exceeded the parameters of her Notice of Intent.

"A Ministry Inspector?" a sibilant voice asked.

"That's what the Prophet says, My Lord," Peter Pettigrew simpered.

"How did Potter become a Ministry Inspector?" Voldemort demanded.

"The Paper doesn't say, My Lord," Peter explained, hoping to escape punishment for his ignorance. "He certainly wasn't one last year."

"Obviously, that has changed," Voldemort spat. "Go away, I must think about this!"

Pettigrew scampered away, leaving his master alone with his thoughts.

So long ago, the Department of Magical Inspections had been Voldemort's own goal, defaulting to becoming a Dark Lord only after he had fallen short. To hear that Potter has succeeded where Voldemort had failed was infuriating.

Against an opponent like a Ministry Inspector, he was going to have to be careful, so very careful.

Failure was not an option.

Harry entered the Bank and found himself greeted by a sudden hissing sound.

Looking around he noticed that every Goblin in the bank was starting at him.

There was no getting around it, Gringotts was weird.

"The Bank is closed," the Floor Walker called out as the tellers closed their windows in mid transaction and the guards began hustling banking customers from the building.

Just his luck, Harry reflected with a sigh, before turning to leave.

"Not you Potter," the Floor Walker said at his elbow. "This way to the Manager's office."

Harry followed the goblin through a maze of tunnels to a round wooden door set into the very stone of the tunnel. His escort knocked on the door in what Harry recognized as the 'Shave and a Haircut' rhythm and the door opened.

Where he found a single, apparently ancient goblin waiting for him. This goblin was covered in gold chains and jeweled rings on all of his fingers and toes, as well as an patch over his left eye that had a large emerald inlaid in the center.

Harry suddenly felt somewhat underdressed in his school robes.

"Potter," the goblin barked. "I'm Nagnok, Bank Manager."

"Of course you are," Harry agreed wondering what was going on.

The goblin blinked at the response, but carried on, "I'm a busy goblin Potter, how much?"

"How much for what?" Harry asked.

"Do you think we've forgotten?" the goblin demanded.

Harry recognized the feeling that coursed through him. It was the sudden realization that he did not have the slightest clue as to what was going on. This was a feeling that he was becoming quite used to. "Forgotten what?"

"We haven't forgotten that Inspector 13 is the official liaison between Gringotts and the Department of Magical Audits!" the goblin thundered.

"I am?" Harry asked.

It isn't going to work Potter," the goblin screamed, thrusting a handful of file folders into Harry's hands.

"What's this?" Harry asked.

"A complete listing of the Potter holdings," Nagnok said, calming himself. "You can see we're holding nothing back, and we're paying..." the goblin swallowed painfully, "interest to your accounts."

"Really?" Harry asked as he paged through the documents in his hands. "Cool."

"So, how much?"

"Well," Harry said, wanting nothing more than to go somewhere and find out what his family owned and see if there was anything remaining from his parents. Maybe it would be best if he just paid the goblins what they wanted. After all, the department was paying him to do pretty much what he wanted, he could afford it. "I haven't really thought about it... Why don't we start off at the old rates and we can see how that goes?"

Again Nagnok blinked. "The rates from 27 years ago?"

"Sure," Harry agreed. "Why not?"

A leather bag was thrust into Harry hands and he was hustled from the room, to the waiting Floor Walker who in turn escorted him from the bank.

It was only when Harry was standing in middle of the cobblestone street in front of the bank that he had a chance to look into the leather bag, to find it full of galleon coins.

"Wait," he said aloud to no one in particular, "they're paying *me* ?"

- 13 -

As soon as Potter was out of the office and the door sealed with the dreaded Inspector 13 on the other side, the goblin who called himself Nagnok threw himself to the floor in a position of supplication.

The stone wall in the rear of the office slid to the side and the true Nagnok stepped into his office flanked by his advisors and guards.

"He knew," the One True Bank Manager rumbled. "He knew you were a fake as soon as you identified yourself."

"I know, Bank Manager, I know," kneeling goblin said piteously. "I have no idea how he saw through my disguise, but he did."

"Our monitors observed from every angle," the advisor to Nagnok's left noted. "If there was a mistake on Kleplep's part, none of us could see it."

"There is obviously a reason the Ministry has placed the Potter heir as Inspector 13," Nagnok said thoughtfully.

"He actually accepted the tribute at the rates of 27 years ago?" the advisor to Nagnok's right asked.

"He did," Kleplep answered.

"We aren't falling for that," Nagnok pronounced. "Double... No, triple the tribute next week. Bagman has been betting that the Potter heir will win their interschool competition has he not?"

"He has Bank Manager," Kleplep agreed from his place on the stone floor.

"Find a reason to cancel his bets, pay a penalty if you have to, but I don't want any Gringotts carrying any markers going against Inspector 13."

"It shall be done," the assembled goblins chorused.

- 13 -

Harry settled down onto the floor, his back against the wall. Everyone was due back the next day, and classes began the day after. He had put off figuring out the clue in the Golden Egg long enough. It was time to get serious with the stupid thing.

At some level, he knew he needed a large dose of luck, so where better to puzzle out this problem than the classroom where he had received one of his first hints in his first adventure in Hogwarts? He sat precisely where the Mirror of Erised had been that first time, holding the Egg in his lap.

Being here might not help, Harry realized, but it certainly would not hurt.

He took a deep breath and steeled his resolve. The egg was going to be loud enough to hurt in this enclosed space.

He opened the Golden Egg and despite all his preparation, he was still startled by the garbled shrieks that issued from the magical artifact. His left arm jerked away from the Egg, the sleeve of his jumper catching on his badge, pulling it from his chest.

Harry cursed under his breath as he groped for his badge in the semidarkness of the unused classroom, his hand closing around it, and oddly he felt the Departmental symbol in the center of the face depress with a click.

Coinciding with that more felt than heard click, the shrieking was stopped and a song filled the air;

*An hour long you'll have to look,*

*And to recover ...*

In his surprise, his hand tightened on the badge and he felt the click yet again, and the shrieking returned.

Harry sat in amazement, looking between the badge in his hand and the Egg in his lap. The badge had a translator built into it? He clicked it again.

*It won't come back.*

Well, that wasn't ominous at all was it? He waited for the song to recycle, as it seemed to be on a loop. After a short pause, his wait was rewarded.

*Come seek us where our voices sound,*

*We cannot sing above the ground,*

*And while you're searching ponder this;*

*We've taken what you'll sorely miss,*

*An hour long you'll have to look,*

*And to recover what we took,*

*But past an hour, the prospect's black,*

*Too late, it's gone, it won't come back.*

Harry listened to the entire song three more times until he was satisfied that he understood what it was saying.

Something was going to be taken from him, and hidden, he would then have an hour to find it, and if he didn't it was gone for good.

Fair enough.

Voices that could not be heard above the ground... Tunnels like the Goblins used?

No, that was stupid. Goblins likely spoke their own language among themselves, but they could clearly be heard 'above the ground'.

What could be 'below the ground', but not under the ground?

Under... under... Under water?

Harry snapped the Golden Egg closed, and slowly began hitting his head against the stone way behind him. Under water. Of course it would be under water. He could fly, he could run, the dark never bothered him, neither had enclosed spaces.

It had to be under water, which just went to show that the old Potter luck running on full power.

He couldn't swim... and there was nowhere and no time to learn before the 2nd task. Of course the 2nd task would be underwater. In Scotland. In February.

- 13 -

Harry arrived at the lake to find the crowds already forming.

He waved to Ron and Neville as he passed the stands, responding to the thumbs up each of them offered. It was good to see the pair of them, though it was odd that Hermione was not with them.

That is when it occurred to him that he had not seen his bushy haired friend since dinner the night before. That was very odd... Then he realized he had not seen Eddie since dinner either.

What was going on?

He climbed the stairs to the dock, unsurprised to find Cedric waiting clad in a robe.

"Morning Harry," the affable Hufflepuff called. "Ready for the task? You don't seem to be dressed for the event."

"Morning Cedric," Harry responded. "Well, considering I can't swim, I didn't see the point in dressing for it. I'm just hoping whatever they took isn't something I can't live without."

"Solved the Egg puzzle did you?" Cedric laughed. "I've been wondering what they took as well. I

didn't find anything missing... Well, other than Cho."

"Cho is missing?" Harry asked, suddenly alarmed for some reason he could not quite put his finger on.

"Well, not missing," Cedric amended. "She just missed breakfast, we usually eat together, and it's not like her not to come by before a task and wish me luck."

Pieces started to fall together in Harry's mind. Cedric had gone to the Yule Ball with Cho, she wasn't to be found... He had gone with Eddie, and she was missing, Hermione had gone with Krum, and she was missing... his eyes sought out the stands and relief flooded through him. There in the front row of the Ravenclaw section was Roger Davies, Fleur's date.

Viktor Krum appeared in a robe, "Good morning," he called as he approached the Hogwarts pair. "We are ready for a swim, yes?"

"Well, I am," Cedric laughed. "Poor Harry here doesn't swim. I guess that means he's out of luck this time."

"You cannot swim?" Viktor asked incredulously.

"Never learned," Harry shrugged. "Cedric and I were just talking, his girlfriend Cho hasn't come by this morning, and I haven't seen my friend Eddie..." Harry was still trying to decide if there was something going on there. "By any chance have you seen Hermione today?"

Realization spread across the faces of the other two competitors.

"Do you think the egg meant 'who' we'd sorely miss?" Cedric asked as his eyes scanned the audience.

"They would not dare," Viktor rumbled as he stared daggers at the Judge's in the reviewing stand.

"Maybe they didn't," Harry suggested. "I mean, our dates for the Yule Ball may not be here, but Roger Davies is right there in the stands."

An obviously distraught Fleur Delacour joined the trio of males, her eyes red from crying.

"What is wrong?" Viktor asked his anger from a moment before forgotten.

"My sister," Fleur whispered, "Gabrielle, is missing. We searched the carriage, and even the castle, but we cannot find her."

"Those bastards," Cedric said, duplicating Viktor's glare at the Judges.

"What is it?" Fleur asked.

"They have not taken *something* from us," Viktor growled. "They have taken *someone* from each

of us."

Harry's mind raced. This had to be illegal. Risking the competitors, even one forced to compete, like he was, would one thing. Bringing innocents into this stupid game was beyond the pale. He reached into his pocket and obtained his clipboard. Opening it, Harry began to page through the files.

There. He pulled three copies of one form and one of another form and began to fill them out.

- 13 -

"This cannot stand," Viktor said, "we will protest, we will have this contest canceled."

"Yes," Cedric agreed. "I don't care what happens to me, they can't..."

"I've got an idea," Harry said as he handed each of the competitors a knut. "Ok, I want you to give those to me."

Puzzled the three older students did what he asked.

"Oh, dear," Harry said more for effect than anything else. "You all appear to be bribing an Inspector of the Department of Magical Inspections. Fortunately, we have the proper documentation for such an unlikely event. If each of you would please sign in the appropriate places?"

Cedric looked over the form and a smile crossed his lips. He had seen enough Ministry paperwork to recognize an official scam when he saw one. The Hufflepuff signed the offered form and encouraged his fellows to do the same.

This should be good.

- 13 -

Ludo Bagman approached the four competitors, utterly oblivious to the anger rolling off the quartet. He carefully positioned each of the students along the dock, spacing them at intervals of ten feet. Harry was on the very end of the line, next to Viktor, who was now holding his wand at the ready.

"All right, Harry?" Bagman whispered as he moved Harry to his position. "Know what you're going to do?"

"Oh, Yeah," Harry nodded. "I know exactly what I'm going to do."

Bagman returned Harry's nod and returned to the judges' table; he pointed his wand at his throat and said, "Sonus!" and his voice boomed out across the dark water toward the stands.

"Well, all our champions are ready for the second task, which will start on my whistle. They have

precisely one hour to recover the treasure that has been taken from them. On the count of three, then. One... two... three!"

Fleur, Viktor and Cedric all stepped back from the dock and waited, while Harry removed his badge from his shirt and knelt down to touch it to the water.

An ear shattering " **BAWAAA!** " sounded from the lake.

"Bloody hell," Cedric muttered, "and I thought that the egg was loud."

Harry stood up, fastened his badge back on his shirt, and waited.

But not for long, the scaled head of a Merman appeared.

"Good morning," Harry said tapping his badge to activate the translation charm. "Ministry spot inspection. I have been informed that you are holding prisoners in your village."

The Merman responded with sounds familiar to anyone who had heard one of the Golden Eggs opened.

"I see," Harry nodded. "You're claiming that they aren't prisoners, but hostages. Fine, I suppose the real question is, are you zoned for keeping 'hostages'? My records show your zoning allows residential structures, a school, and a municipal building and nothing more."

The Mercreature responded with a mournful sound.

"Well," Harry said, checking the forms on his clipboard, "I show the fine to be five hundred Galleons for each zoning violation."

A throaty squawk came in response.

"I'm not sure about the exact conversion, but I believe it's roughly two hundred mackerel per Galleon."

The air was pierced by a horrific screech.

"Well, don't forget, that's per violation. You have four violations down there; let's call it four hundred thousand mackerel."

The merman let forth with a strangled screech, which muted after a few seconds before taking on a beseeching tone.

"Well, I'll tell you what, I don't want the bother of going all the way into London to file my report. Since this is a first offense, if you were to bring the hostages up to us now, I might see my way to forgetting this ever happened."

The Mercreature's head disappeared beneath the water.

Harry turned to his fellow Champions, "well, negotiations appear to be going well."

"Did it work?" Fleur gasped.

Before Harry could answer, three young women and one small girl washed up onto the dock at their feet.

Viktor knelt down with Hermione, and Cedric with Cho.

"Yeah," Harry nodded as he helped Eddie to her feet, while casting warming charms on everyone in the area. "I think it worked out pretty well."

He turned to Ludo Bagman, "Well, would you look at that, a four way draw."

- 13 -

Deep within the subbasements of the Ministry of Magic, David Philpot wove his way through the maze of corridors that made up his departmental spaces in a manner only made possible by decades of experience. Reaching his Supervisor's open door, he tapped his knuckles on the doorframe as he passed through it.

"What do you have for me today David?" Michael Millbanks asked.

"I've come to apologize for all the whinging I did when you assigned me to the new 13 as his case officer," David said as he sank uninvited into Millbanks' guest chair. "I thought hand-holding the rookie for a decade or two would be boring, but this lad is nothing but entertaining."

"What's he done now?" Millbanks asked.

"That stupid Triwizard nonsense he ended up in had a second task where they stuck hostages underneath the Black Lake in the Mercreature village."

"How could the badge help him with that?"

"That's the second best part, he threatened the Mercreature village with zoning violations for holding prisoners," Philpot laughed. "But he waived the fine when they produced the hostages, all four of them."

"So he won the task on zoning violations?" Millbanks asked, joining in on the laughter.

"Oh, no," Philpot shook his head, "he was the only one of the competitors not in swimwear, so he loaned each of them a knut, and then had them bribe him to intervene. He forwarded the traditional 33 percent of his bribe to the office for the Christmas Party." The laughing man held up the single bronze coin. "We're swimming in it now. With the four way draw for the Second Task, he remains solidly in first place."

"We'll have to have a word with him about the minimum bribe amount he should agree to,"

Millbanks laughed. "We have standards to uphold, after all. A knut doesn't go as far as it used to."

"Oh, he more than made up for it in fines," Philpot disagreed.

"Fines?"

"Oh, yes. 100 Galleons for each of the hostages charged to the Triwizard organizing committee for 'Conscription of Non-Participants without filing form 1692-K' with the Ministry," the man smirked.

1692-K? Don't know that one," Millbanks said as he thumbed through his files to find the correct form. "**Department of Magical Inspections form 1692-K; Application to Hold Passerbys, Onlookers, Spectators and Witnesses Incommunicado for purposes other than Ransom**"

Millbanks looked up blinking. "Oh, my. This kid is good."

"You don't know the half of it," Philpot gasped, his laughter even harder at the sight of his boss' reaction. "He also fined the Organizing committee 20 Galleons for falsely advertising the second task as a 'spectator event'."

"Well, 20 Galleons is 20 Galleons, but that's not all that impressive next to the 400 Galleons his first fine," Millbanks noticed.

"That was 20 Galleons per spectator," Philpot laughed. "Between students, staff, press and dignitaries, the attendance was listed as 1011. He said that even if the task had gone as planned and all four of the Champions had gone into the lake after their hostages, the spectators would have been stuck watching the surface of the lake for an hour, in February, in freezing temperatures, and that attendance of the school students was mandatory."

Bloody hell," Millbanks breathed. "20,000 Galleons?"

"Yep," Philpot nodded. "And that was before Inspector 84 got involved."

"There's more?!" Millbanks exclaimed in shock. "You did say they had started dating. What did she do?"

"Indeed there is." Philpot confirmed while he grinned like the proverbial cat that ate the canary. "She fined them 5 Galleons per spectator for public safety violations- The available facilities were too far away and insufficient for a crowd that size. There was an additional fine of 7 Galleons per spectator for insufficient climate control; 3 people had to be treated for hypothermia and another 2 for frostbite."

"Blood hell." Millbanks snapped. "There's no way those stands were up to code if that happened!"

Philpot nodded. "Which brings me to the next bit, Inspectors 13 and 84 then filed a joint inspection fining the Organizing Committee 15 Galleons per spectator plus an additional flat 2,000 galleon fine for failing to file the proper building permits for a temporary structure."

Millbanks raised a speculative eyebrow. "And that's in addition to the previous 20,000 Galleons?"

Phillpot laughed. "Their total fine came to 49,517 Galleons and 5 knuts."

"What were the 5 knuts for?" Millbanks wondered aloud.

Phillpot snickered. "Inspector 84 charged them for the ink, quills and parchment used to write the citations. Yep, you'd best be careful boss, if these kids keep this up, we'll end up working for them."

**Inspected by No. 13**  
**A Bureaucrat is Freed**

The first indication that things had changed was the plain black robes the Headmaster wore to breakfast the first day of classes after the 2nd task.

Harry only noticed when Hermione commented on it, but thought that perhaps the old man had, for some reason, decided to tone down his wardrobe.

The next indication of change came later that day when Harry escorted Eddie to lunch having arranged to meet with her to keep their fledgling relationship as active as possible. Outside the entrance of the Great Hall was a small table staffed by several of the teachers, selling baked goods.

Eddie and Harry exchanged a look before approaching the table to inspect the wares.

"What would you like, Potter?" Professor McGonagall asked.

"That tablet looks good, Professor," Harry said as he fished in his pockets for cash.

"It should," the Professor said, offering the Scottish confectionary. "It's my mother's recipe, after all."

"They had tablet back then?" Ron Weasley asked before turning to his friend, "spot me a few knuts, Harry?"

Harry paid for his own purchase and tossed his change to Ron. He looked questioningly to Hermione who shook her head.

"This is nice," Eddie observed as she munched on a biscuit, "I don't recall anything like this happening before."

"We're trying to support the Headmaster," Professor Sprout explained as she brought out another tray of her 'special' brownies. "He finds himself in financial straits after the paying the fines levied by *some people* ."

Eddie stiffened, "are you suggesting the fines were wrong, Professor?"

"The pair of you have nearly bankrupted a good man," Pomona Sprout responded.

"Three young women and one small girl were taken in the night without as much as a by your leave and hidden at the bottom of the lake," Harry pointed out, his appetite gone in an instant, "for the crime of having been somewhat close to the 'Champions'. Surely you don't support that do you Professor?"

"They came to no harm," the head of House Hufflepuff pointed out.

"We didn't know that," Harry explained. "The clue from the Golden Egg told us we had an hour to retrieve what, or rather who, was taken from us, and that if we failed we lost it forever."

"Besides, is harm your standard for crime?" Eddie asked. "If someone was to take you in the night, savagely beat you nearly to death, and then heal you and oblivate the experience from your mind, would you then call 'no harm, no foul'?"

"That's hardly the same thing," Sprout protested.

"It's exactly the same thing," Hermione Granger responded. "I couldn't sleep last night out of the fear that they would come for me again."

"It was kidnapping, plain and simple," Harry pointed out. "And the Triwizard Tournament Committee forced attendance of all the students of all three schools in an environment that was unsafe. Some of the Beauxbatons girls got frostbite. The entire event was ill thought out and poorly executed. Besides, while the Aurors refused to treat the kidnappings as the crime it was, the fines were challenged and adjudicated yesterday. The challenge failed. Our rulings were held to be quite legitimate."

Harry and Eddie left the bake sale for lunch, each silently reflecting on how no one outside the department ever truly understood the burden of keeping the world safe from itself.

- 13 -

"And that," Barty Crouch Senior said with a sigh, "is the status of our current funding."

"Well," Albus said, clearly distressed by his drab garb, "this is disheartening news. Are you sure?"

"Quite sure," Barty confirmed. "We are no longer in a position to carry through with our original plans for the third task."

"Surely, it could not cost that much," Madame Olympe Maxime suggested, her usual jewelry noticeable in its absence. "It is only a maze."

"I hadn't thought so either, and then I checked Ludo's books," Crouch sighed. "The sphinx alone was going to cost us more than a thousand Galleons, she is evidently highly sought after. Getting the Ministry of Magic's Landscaping Herbologist Union involved was more than 5000 Galleons just to grow the hedgerows, and don't get me started on what the Acromantula's time is worth."

"Hagrid intended to donate some of his creatures pro bono, but without the maze..." Albus left his

thought incomplete.

"None of this would have happened if the Tournament was held at Durmstrang," Karkaroff sneered.

"We wanted to hold it at Durmstrang Igor," Albus pointed out, "but you refused to tell any of us where your school is located."

"Security," the man smirked, his trademark furs exchanged for a blue and white cardigan. "Plus it guaranteed a Drumstrang victory, so also strategy."

"Yes, as diabolically clever as that plot may have been," Barty Crouch interjected, "we still need to determine what will make up the new, vastly less expensive, third task."

"How about a double elimination, one on one Quidditch Tournament?" Ludo Bagman asked.

"You're proposing a Quidditch tournament between three seekers and someone who plays keeper in the odd pickup game?" Olympe sniffed, not failing to notice that Bagman was the only member of the Committee now showing signs of impending poverty. "I think not."

"Besides," Albus said shaking his head, "That could take weeks, and we don't have that kind of time left to us."

"Well," Bagman temporized, "what about a broom race?"

"Then the race is between Krum and Potter," Albus pointed out. "As they are the only ones with professional level brooms."

"We could supply brooms selected randomly from the Hogwarts flying class, so everyone is on the same level," the Ministry man suggested.

"I have seen those so called brooms in use," Karkaroff snarled. "I will not risk my student on such trash. If we are to do this we will need top of the line racing brooms."

"Which returns us to the original issue," Barty sighed. "We don't have the funds."

"The third task is traditionally a kind of race," Albus noted.

"Usually, but not always," Barty agreed.

"Given the unfortunate attention of the Department of Magical Inspections, we have to make the third task spectator friendly. What if we were to build an obstacle course," the Hogwarts Headmaster stroked his beard in thought, "one over large pools of water..."

"Or mud," Karkaroff agreed.

"Or mud," Albus nodded. "The obstacle course would have features that rotated, and went up and

down, and sprayed slippery liquids to make footing unsure. The Champions would have to scramble to make it through, and then we could, from a safe distance, ridicule their efforts to the audience."

"That would be popular with the audience," Bagman agreed.

"We still fall back onto to the whole how do we pay for it question," Barty pointed out. "Much of your 'obstacle course' could be conjured, of course, but much of it could not, and our budget is nonexistent."

"True," Albus conceded, deflating a bit.

"I have heard good things about Full Contact Tiddlywinks," Karkaroff suggested.

"No, just no," Olympe said, pinching the bridge of her nose. "We hosted one of those tournaments two years ago. Dozens died, and they're still scrubbing the blood off the ceiling of my dining hall. What about Gobstones?"

"The International Gobstones Federation would never allow it," Bagman objected. "Those IGF lads play rough."

"Well," Barty said, "I am hesitant to suggest it, but it seems to me that a similar situation came up in the 1591 Tournament hosted at Beauxbatons."

"They were fined into insolvency as well?" Olympe asked, annoyed that she was unaware of the instance that took place at her own school.

"Well, no," Barty admitted as his fellow committee members paged through their documentation to find the event. "The second task ended in 1591 with an enraged herd of Erumpents stampeded into the viewing stands and killed hundred. The committee's funds were depleted caring for the injured and paying reparations to the families of the killed. Their final solution for the 3rd task is detailed on page 1093."

The Committee members read the passage looked up at each other and smiled as one.

"And once again," Albus laughed. "The Triwizard Tournament is saved."

- 13 -

Six hundred meters beneath the streets of London, torchlight flickered in the Council Chamber of the Goblin nation. Five ancient goblins sat on an ornate dais shaped in a half circle, each with an aide standing directly behind them on guard. A single goblin stood before the assembled Council awaiting his fate.

"And what have you found?" Nagnok demanded from his place at the center of the dais.

The young goblin standing before the Council of Elders tried very hard not to squirm.

"Very little," he admitted. "By all reports, Potter is a lack luster student with no real talents beyond their Defense against the Dark Arts class and flying."

"Then why was he made Inspector 13?" one of the elders thundered.

"We don't know," the investigator responded plaintively, "the wizards claim the boy unknowingly assumed the role himself when he decided to wear the badge and tried to bluff the dragon."

"Absurd," the elder snarled. "No one would allow such an insane manner of assuming such an important position."

"Never question the absurdity of the wizards," one of his fellows responded. "After all, they left the position of Inspector 13, the most important of the Inspectors vacant for most of three decades."

"Wizards," Nagnok spat from his place at the head of the Council. "What was Potter's reaction to the increase of the tribute?"

"He said nothing when the February tribute was delivered," the investigator answered. "He didn't even count it."

"He didn't count it?" Nagnok echoed incredulously.

"He didn't even open the bag to look inside," the investigator responded. "I didn't know how to react to that at all, so I didn't. When I delivered the tribute for March, he asked why the tribute had increased. Again, I didn't know how to react, so I just told him that it was the culmination of the traditional annual increases, factored for twenty seven years. He thanks me and told me it really wasn't necessary, and then... He didn't even open the bag again. Nor did he check upon the delivery of the April or May tributes."

"What does that mean?" the first Elder demanded.

"It either means he trusts us," Nagnok responded, hesitantly, "which would be ridiculous on its face, or it means that it doesn't matter because we don't concern him."

"He knows?" the elder asked, his complexion paling to an unhealthy pink.

"He knows," Nagnok confirmed. "Cancel the plans, cancel them now!"

"But..."

"If Potter knows, then the Ministry knows. Cancel everything. This is my word, this is my command."

Silence filled the Council Chambers of the Goblin nation and the reality of their situation sank in. Thusly, through the total lack of effort on the part of Harry Potter, the Goblin Rebellion of 1995 was averted.

"This... espionage of our plans cannot go unchallenged," Nagnok thundered. "Potter is tested by the wizards' latest Dark Lord is he not?"

"Yes," the elder responsible for external security responded. "Riddle is even now working toward regaining a body. The presence of Inspector 13 has forced him to file all the applicable documentation."

"It seems we have a mutual enemy," Nagnok noted. "Send a delegation to Riddle upon his rebirth, offer our assistance in the consolidation of his power."

"And the tribute to Potter?" the Investigator before the Council asked. "Should it be stopped?"

"No," Nagnok ordered. "That would draw his suspicion. Continue the deliveries... In fact, double the tribute. If Riddle fails, there will be no harm in playing both sides."

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"Well, here we are," Harry said as he paused at the entry to the Quidditch pitch. "Hopefully this one isn't as dangerous as the first two."

"You don't believe that for a second," Eddie laughed and leaned in to kiss him on the cheek. "Good luck."

"Thanks," Harry said as he squared his shoulders and made his way onto the pitch.

Being the first to arrive, Harry had the chance to take in his surroundings. The pitch was immaculate. He made a mental note to congratulate the elves responsible for maintaining the pitch. They did not need his thanks, but always seemed to appreciate it.

"You have beautiful stadium."

Harry turned to face Viktor Krum as the older man approached. "Thanks, but I'm guessing it's pretty shabby compared to what you're used to."

"Professional stadium have more..." the Bulgarian paused to think of the proper word, "amenities. For a school stadium, this is first class. Much better than Durmstrang."

"I find that hard to believe," Fleur Delacour said as she approached the pair. This stadium is on par with the one we have at Beauxbatons, Viktor. You will never convince me that the school that taught you and the rest of your national team your skills is lacking in their facilities."

"I'm late," Cedric announced as he jogged up the his fellow champions. "What did I miss?"

"Viktor was being modest about his school's Quidditch Stadium," Fleur laughed. She nodded toward the stands, "All of our friends and family are here and safe."

"Good," the Hufflepuff nodded. "I think our friend Harry almost bankrupted the Committee over

the shite they pulled last time. I doubt they even have the prize money any longer."

"They do," Harry said. "The Prize money is in escrow, and it couldn't be touched by the fines."

"Well, we have that to look forward to," Viktor laughed, clearly showing he saw the prize money as a trivial sum.

In all honesty, given the piles of Galleons the goblins insisted on giving him month after month, Harry was not particularly impressed with a 1000 Galleon prize either.

Ludo Bagman approached the quartet in the middle of the pitch and immediately pointed his wand at his throat and said, "Sonus!" Immediately his voice echoed throughout the stands.

"Well, all our champions are ready for the third task, which will start on my command. Due to certain... unexpected difficulties, the original third task had to be reconsidered. At one point it was going to be a race through a magical maze, but instead, to decide our ultimate Triwizard champion we are going to conduct that most challenging of tasks... A round of Parchment, Stone, Wand, Dragon, Merlin."

Harry blinked. Seriously? In his time at Hogwarts he had witnessed dozens of games of Parchment, Stone, Wand, Dragon, Merlin, which always took hours because the Purebloods always picked the same thing for several rounds until it occurred them that it wasn't working.

"For the benefit of the Muggle raised in the audience," Bagman continued, "Playing the game is perfectly simple. Wand cuts Parchment," he explained pantomiming the actions. "Parchment covers stone. Stone crushes dragon. Dragon eats Merlin. Merlin snaps Wand. Wand stuns dragon. Dragon burns Parchment. Parchment confuses Merlin. Merlin vanishes stone. And, of course, stone breaks Wand."

"What was that again?" Harry asked, wondering if he could get the fraud to repeat himself.

"Of course, It's very simple. Wand cuts Parchment," he explained, again pantomiming the actions. "Parchment covers stone. Stone crushes dragon. Dragon eats Merlin. Merlin snaps Wand. Wand stuns dragon. Dragon burns Parchment. Parchment confuses Merlin. Merlin vanishes stone. And, of course, stone breaks Wand."

"Ok," Harry nodded. "Got it."

Bagman raised his wand and a white square appeared in the middle of the pitch. Harry took his assigned place as the others took there.

"The Winner of this Third Task wins the Tournament over all. Are all the Champions ready?" Bagman announced.

All four of the champions signaled their readiness. Harry looked at the other three players who had become his friends over the last few months. They were all purebloods, even Fleur after a fashion.

Would they all be as predictable as the purebloods at Hogwarts?

"This is it," Bagman continued. "This is what we've been waiting for, this is the big one. This is the one that..."

"Would you just get on with it?" Barty Crouch demanded from the judges stands.

"Oh, of course. Certainly," Bagman said. "Champions ready? One... Two... Three... Cast!"

As one, four hands shot forward and Harry made his decision.

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"Soon, Wormtail, Soon," the baby sized homunculus wheezed.

"Yes Master," Peter agreed absently while going over his paperwork for the tenth time.

"My most faithful follower is springing the trap as we speak," the tiny Dark Lord cackled. "Soon I will have my body and Potter will die!"

"Only if I've got this filled out right," Peter mumbled as he started working on page 42.

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"And Viktor Krum of Durmstrang has cast Merlin, Fleur Delacour of Beauxbatons has also cast Merlin, Cedric Diggory of Hogwarts has Cast Merlin," Bagman announced for the crowd. "And Harry Potter of Hogwarts has cast..."

Silence filled the air as Bagman and everyone else gaped at Harry's offering.

"Parchment!" Bagman gasped. "In a totally unorthodox play, Potter did not cast Merlin, rather casting Parchment, which as everyone knows confuses Merlin. Potter wins the Triwizard Tournament!"

Harry looked to the other champions.

"You didn't cast Merlin," Fleur said, obviously stunned.

"No," Harry agreed. "I didn't."

"But... but..." Viktor stuttered. "You didn't cast Merlin."

"Everyone casts Merlin," Cedric insisted.

"I didn't," Harry pointed out.

"But everyone cast Merlin," the trio chorused.

"Congratulations Potter," Professor Moody said as he stepped past the crowd that was surrounding the champions. "Here's your trophy, the Minister will be here in a minute to award you your cash prize."

"Thank you," Harry said as he took the cup from the old man's hands, wondering why Moody was wearing gloves.

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Albus Dumbledore rushed forward when he saw Harry Potter disappear. The only explanation for the boy seemingly evaporating from the scene would be a portkey.

Albus held his wand out aiming squarely between the eyes of Alastor Moody, one of his oldest friends.

His shock only grew as Moody began to laugh.

"You've lost Dumbledore!" the man said through his laughter. "The Dark Lord is reborn! He needed Potter for the ritual to bring him back, and now the boy has been delivered to my Lord."

"Who are you?" the Headmaster demanded.

As if on cue, the man's features rippled and his hands ripped the magical eye from his face while kicking the famous peg leg free. "My resources were limited," he said as a new man looked up from where Alastor Moody had stood before. "I barely had enough polyjuice to last this long. I was worried that the final task would take too long."

"Junior?" Barty Crouch asked having just arrived at Dumbledore's side.

"Hello Father," Barty Jr. responded.

"Ahem."

The crowd parted as Edwina Macmillan made her way forward, her badge of office on open display and her clipboard in her hand. She clicked her retractable quill. "I'm sure the explanation for this will be quite entertaining."

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"B-blood of the enemy... forcibly taken... you will... resurrect your foe."

Those words woke Harry, his attention caught by a sudden pain in his left forearm, preventing him from returning to oblivion.

That was when the realization hit him. The Triwizard Cup had been a portkey.

He forced his eyes open and saw Peter Pettigrew slicing into his inner arm and gathering the blood

that issued from the wound in a crystal vial, before shambling away toward a boiling cauldron and adding the blood to the roiling mass.

Pettigrew, dropped to his knees beside the cauldron, slumping sideways and laying on the ground, cradling his arm, a bleeding stump, gasped and began sobbing.

The cauldron was boiling wildly, sending crystalline sparks in all directions, so bright that it turned all else to velvety blackness. What happened? How did he get here? Harry wondered before deciding that just hanging where he was tied was probably not the best idea.

He struggled against the ropes that tied him to what appeared to be a tombstone when, suddenly, the sparks emanating from the cauldron were extinguished. A surge of white steam billowed thickly from the cauldron instead, obliterating everything in front of Harry, so that he could not see Pettigrew or anything other than the vapor hanging in the air.

This was probably not good.

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The mist in front of him thinned. Harry watched, with a growing feeling of terror, as the dark outline of a man, tall and skeletally thin, rose slowly from the cauldron.

"Robe me," a high, cold voice said, and Pettigrew, still sobbing and moaning, cradling his mutilated arm, scrambled to pick up some black robes from the ground, got to his feet, reached up, and pulled them one handed over his master's head.

The man stepped out of the cauldron, staring at Harry... and Harry stared back into the face that had haunted his nightmares for three years. His exposed skin, whiter a skull, with wide, red eyes and a nose that was flat as a snake's with slits for nostrils.

Lord Voldemort had risen again.

Harry realized that he was not likely to escape from the ropes that bound him, and he struggled to rein in his panic. Listening to the instincts that had come to him from the first instant he pinned the badge to his chest had kept him alive so far. Why not go with what worked before?

He quit fighting the ropes and instead pulled inward, forcing his right hand into his pocket. His hand closed upon his clipboard. As he did so, the ropes fell away from him, and he fell soundlessly to the ground. Harry carefully straightened his robes and cleared his throat.

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Voldemort laughed, he was reborn! The sensation of once again having a fully functional body was a heady one. He knew that he needed to complete his victory by destroying the boy who lived and his newfound power.

First, he wanted, no he needed, to rejoice in being alive after so long.

"Ahem"

Voldemort spun to face the source of the voice. Where, only moments before, had been Harry Potter, his prisoner, stood Harry Potter, Inspector 13, his clipboard at the ready, a retractable quill in his hand.

"Good evening, Mr. Pettigrew," the boy said clicking his quill, "Ministry inspection. This appears to be a standard Necromantic reanimation ritual, class 2. Shall we begin? Your documentation, please?"

"You're doomed, Potter," Voldemort snarled. "We have countered your power, we've taken every precaution, we've done everything by the book, and you don't stand a..."

Potter held up his right hand, his index finger extended upward in the universal signal for quiet.

"If you please," the boy said, "I was addressing Mr. Pettigrew, not his necromantic abomination. This is human talk, Sir."

Necromantic abomination? Voldemort blinked. That was surprisingly hurtful.

Peter rushed forward to offer his permits to the Inspector.

"These seem to be in order," the boy mused as he looked over the documentation, "The standard **Department of Magical Inspections Form 7198-H; Necromantic Ritual, Class 2 Human Reanimation**, this shouldn't be too involved. Could I see your ingredient prep area?"

"Uh... well, you see..." Pettigrew said, clearly stalling.

"You did prepare the ingredients didn't you?" Inspector 13 asked suspiciously.

"I was never all that good at potions, so I bought the kit," Peter explained. "There wasn't really much to prepare."

"A kit?" Potter asked incredulously as he made several notes. "You performed a class 2 ritual with a kit?"

"Ikea Potions are very reputable," Peter responded defensively, offering up the instruction sheet for the kit he had used.

"Fine," Inspector 13 said, accepting the kit instructions with a sigh, while noting the official Motto of the Ikea Potions division at the top of each page: '**Only the very smart, or the very lucky, get it right the first time**'. "I do find it disturbing that the bulk of these instructions consist of cartoonish drawings rather than words. This indicates that several of the ingredients required a bit of preparation. The Chinese Chomping Cabbage for example required dicing with a silver knife. May I see the knife?"

"I didn't actually use a knife, I couldn't find one," Peter admitted. "I used a cutting charm."

"Of course you did," Potter said, "You're aware, of course, that the use of cutting charms in the preparation of ingredients for necromantic rituals is prohibited unless you have been issued an Exemption under the **Uniform Procedures Act of 1870** . Have you submitted a Form 16257-A to get approval? And, if so where is the Permit of Variation signed by the Commissioner of Resurrections?"

"Umm..." Peter hedged, "I didn't know about any of that..." Pettigrew looked down at the ground. He just knew this was going to look bad on his permanent record.

"I'm going to have to give you a down-check on that one," Harry said as he wrote some notes, "and don't be surprised if you get a full Audit as a follow up to this inspection."

Voldemort cringed. Even Dark Lords feared the Auditors.

Potter completed his notes before consulting the kit's illustrated instructions again. "And the Fluxweed? Did you grind it into a powder?"

"Well, yeah," Peter affirmed.

"Excellent, could I see the mortar and pestle, please?" Potter asked hopefully.

"Mortar and pestle?" Peter asked confusedly, "you mean that you can't just stomp on it and grind it under your heel?"

The boy held his parents' betrayer with a stare for several seconds before making some more notes while Voldemort resisted face palming with all of his might.

"And the knotgrass?" the Inspector asked, "The instructions called for it to be charred before being added to the brew. Dare I ask how you charred it?"

Peter proudly produced a Zippo lighter.

Voldemort gave in to his overwhelming urge to face palm.

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"Reviewing the ingredients not part of the... kit," Potter said, contempt for the shortcut evident in his voice, let's go over them, shall we? Your source for 'bone of the father'?

Pettigrew pointed to the grave marked 'Tom Riddle'.

"I see," Potter nodded. "And this Tom Riddle was both the... Abomination's original birth father and unaware that his bone would be used in a resurrection ritual?"

"Utterly," Voldemort interjected while Peter nodded energetically.

Potter nodded again "That checks out, and I know about the 'blood of the enemy, forcibly taken',

well done on that by the way."

"Thank you," Peter said.

"Now then, flesh of the Servant willingly offered, can I assume you were willing?"

"Oh, yes," Peter agreed, holding up his bloody stump.

"Good, good," Potter said, examining the directions. "Did you notice that the 'flesh of the servant' didn't need to be anything more than nail clippings?"

"What?" Peter asked in a strangled voice.

"Oh, yes, or hair clipping would have worked as well. Your whole hand wasn't required. I applaud your dedication. Now then, as for this cauldron," Potter said with a tone of distaste as he examined the brewing vessel, "You're very, very, lucky."

"What do you mean?" Voldemort asked while Peter was still focused on his bloody stump.

"There is a move afoot to standardize cauldron bottoms, as yet, there has been no standard approved, if there was one, using this pitted and warped monstrosity would have meant an automatic failure."

Peter hung his head in shame as Voldemort delivered a dope slap to the back of his minion's head. Everyone knew of the dangers of faulty cauldron bottoms.

"Well, it is apparent that despite your flagrant disregard for proper procedure, ingredient preparation, and general safety, you have somehow finished the ritual; even though you should have waited for an inspection of your preparation prior to proceeding with the actual procedure," Harry intoned as Pettigrew cringed again, "so let's have a look at what you achieved."

"I hardly think that..." Voldemort said, before he was silenced by Pettigrew's panicked whisper.

"My Lord, please, you're going to get me into *trouble* !"

The Dark Lord bit his tongue and waited.

Potter walked around Voldemort slowly, inspecting the Dark Lord from all angles, taking measurements and making notes. Finally, he raised his wand and cast a low level Lumos that he directed into Voldemort's eyes, one at a time.

Finally, the boy lowered his wand and made some more notes. He then lowered the clipboard and looked up.

"It is reasonably obvious that you've botched this entire ritual, as the end result falls far below acceptable standards," Potter said in the manner of long suffering Inspectors everywhere. "For a necromantic raising ritual, type 2, to be deemed acceptable the raised person must meet several

criteria."

Potter consulted his documentation and started through the listing, "First of all, the Risen must be fully human, have an appearance that does not pose a risk to the Statute of Secrecy, and finally be of reasonable health."

The boy pointed his wand at several parts of the Dark Lord's body.

"This specimen is questionable on all three requirements. The inexplicable inclusion of snake ingredients has left you with a snake-human hybrid, the appearance alone would constitute a breach of the Statute of Secrecy should a Muggle see this... abomination and the poor ingredient preparation standards and resultant contamination has resulted in a body that will certainly have a major organ failure within the next three years. Most likely, a heart attack from what I can see here."

"So, I failed my Master?" Pettigrew whined pitifully.

"I have yet to tally your score, Mr. Pettigrew," Potter chastised the animagus. "I shall do so now."

The Dark Lord and his minion spent several terror filled minutes as Potter calculated the scoring of their ritual.

"Well, by my calculations, based upon the standard 100 point scale, this ritual, guaranteed as it is by the deposit of several 'soul fragments', currently held in escrow, scores a rather disappointing 71," Potter said.

"71?" Pettigrew asked in disappointment. "It's 4th year Potions all over again. Another score of Troll."

"Wait," Voldemort interjected. "71 points is passing isn't it? I've won!"

"You would think so, yes," Potter agreed. "Unfortunately, Mr. Pettigrew submitted a **Form 7198-H; Necromantic Ritual, Class 2 Human Reanimation**. I'm sure you would agree that you, his end result, are hardly human, are you? The form he should have submitted is the **Form 7199-Hy; Necromantic Ritual, Class 2 Human Hybrid Reanimation**. As such, for failure to follow proper procedures I'm afraid that the 'soul fragments' currently in escrow and any others you may have secreted around are subject to forfeit, and that I'm going to have to issue you a **Form 3019-C Order to Condemn**."

With that, Potter flipped through the parchment on his clipboard and pulled out a pre-printed form. He quickly filled it out, signed it, stamped it five times to verify his signature and then initialed each stamp to verify the stamp's authenticity. He then slapped the completed form onto a horrified Voldemort's chest.

"There. I hope you've learned your lesson from this to not take short-cuts next time." Harry said to Pettigrew as the Dark Lord dissolved into a puddle of grey goo.

Potter then gulped and his hand went to the scar on his forehead as the boy fell to his knees, leaving him gasping for several seconds.

"Well, that was unpleasant," the boy rasped as he regained his feet and secured his clipboard in his pocket. "I believe that concludes our business for today, Mr. Pettigrew, but the two of us must return to Hogwarts, as your violation of the Uniform Procedures Act of 1870 is far too egregious to ignore."

With that, Harry placed his hand on the downcast Peter Pettigrew's arm. "I suppose we're going to have to find and punish those who would have offered you aid," Potter said as he summoned the Triwizard Cup.

Hidden in the forest that surround the graveyard a trio of goblin stood in stark terror at what they had observed. Inspector 13 had dealt with a reborn Dark Lord so very casually, and then threatened the Goblin Nation in such an offhand manner.

The Bank Manager had to be informed.

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"Well," Sirius said, "this is the old dump."

"Nice," Harry lied as he looked about the old seat of the Black family. It had taken three weeks, but Sirius had been cleared of the crimes he had been accused of, courtesy of a living breathing Peter Pettigrew. A consequence of this meant that Harry was free of the Dursleys.

"Your room is up here," Sirius said as he guided Harry up the stairs. "This was my brother's room, we'll need to fix it up for you, but..."

"This is great Sirius, really."

"Kreacher!" Sirius called.

"Bad Master called?" responded a surly elf at Sirius's side.

"Kreacher, this is Harry, my Godson," Sirius said.

"Bad master bringing filthy halfbloods into Kreacher's Mistress' home," the elf muttered.

"You will obey him as you obey me," Sirius said, ignoring Kreacher's complaints. "He'll be taking Regulus' room, so get it cleaned up, fresh linens, like that."

"Kreacher will despoil good Master's room for filthy halfblood as bad Master commands," the elf snarled.

"Good. Harry... I need to get out of here, this was Regulus' room and..."

"I understand, Sirius, really I do," Harry said as his godfather left the room. Harry returned his attention to the elf.

Kreacher winked at him, and stood tall instead of slouching. "Morning Harry," he said, his surliness gone, "I've been looking forward to your getting here since Sirius told me you were coming."

Harry did not even show surprise. Elves had been dropping their slave personae's around him for months now, and he had gotten rather used to it.

"So," Harry asked, "what's with the 'bad master' stuff?"

"Sirius expects it," the elf said with a shrug. "You know how it is; always give the bosses what they expect."

"This house," Harry gestured around in confusion, "Is an utter disaster, how did it get this way?"

"When old Walburga died, the only aspect of the Blacks still in the house was Walburga's portrait, and that horrible thing's only concern was the state of its frame and canvas. It forbade me to clean or maintain anything else in the house," the elf shrugged again. "When Sirius came back, all he wanted was to argue with me and rail against his mother in her portrait. The only thing he's asked me to clean is this room just now."

"And now?" Harry asked.

"Well, now you're here, so Sirius doesn't have to ask, does he? Until you tell me otherwise, I'll be assuming you'd like the house in a fit state to live in," the elf smirked before looking about the room and becoming a bit somber. "All of these things that belonged to Regulus, do you mind if I keep some of them? I know that we're not supposed to play favorites, but he was always mine."

Harry looked around at the Quidditch posters and photos of semi-clad women he did not recognize and shrugged. "If you want them, they're yours."

"Thanks Harry," the elf said. "You're the best."

There was a knock on Harry's door, giving Kreacher a chance to resume his stoop, Harry opened the door to find Eddie.

"Well, this is a surprise," Harry said, his smile widening.

"You said you were moving here once school was out, so I thought I might drop by," she responded, returning his smile.

"I've not really moved in yet," Harry explained. "I was just discussing how to get the place organized with Kreacher. Would you like to help?"

"Of course I would," Eddie nodded as she entered the room.

Harry was closing the door when the sound of a man clearing his throat stopped him.

Pulled from his new room and into the hallway, Harry found himself confronted by his Godfather. "As your guardian," Sirius said sternly, "I expect you to conduct yourself properly."

"Sirius, we're just trying to get the room cleaned up," Harry protested.

"I know what you're trying to do, Harry. Don't forget I was a 14 year old once upon a time."

"A long, long, time ago," Harry snarked. "When dinosaurs roamed the Earth."

"Watch it, my lad, don't make me break out the baby pictures to show your friend," Sirius scolded.

"Okay, okay," Harry grinned.

"As I said, as your guardian, I expect you to be on your best behavior," Sirius repeated. "However, as your Godfather, I have to say, go for it, stud."

"What?"

"I never had the balls to talk a girl into visiting me here," the man said offering Harry thumbs up with both hands. "My mother would have shat herself. Go for it."

Harry watched as a laughing Sirius descended the stairs, before reentering his room and closing the door behind him.

"All of the adults in my life," he said, leaning against the door, "are so very weird."

"What now?" Eddie asked from the window, where she and Kreacher appeared to have been discussing drapes.

"Sirius thinks you're here to have your way with me," Harry admitted. "And he told me to 'go for it'."

"That was somewhat presumptive of him," Eddie said quietly. "By my estimation, assuming our relationship continues, we shouldn't be at that point for another 13 months."

"13 months?" Harry asked. "That's rather specific. What happens in 13 months?"

"Your 16th birthday," she laughed, "I'm not a child molester, Harry."

"Oh, I see," Harry sighed. "Save the Wizarding world from a Dark Lord twice before I'm 15, and I'm still a kid."

"Your inspection of Riddle's resurrection has been slated for an audit next week, Harry," Eddie pointed out. "Hold on to being a kid as long as you can. It might help."

"Has it ever helped before?" Harry wondered. Since becoming Inspector 13, he had heard multiple horror stories of the Auditors from various classmates, so he was understandably nervous.

"No, not in the slightest."

"Great," Harry sighed.

"Of course," Kreacher interjected, "the Head Auditor might just want to welcome you to the department and tell you what a good job you've done. He probably also wants to talk about the fines the two of you have been doling out..."

The elf then noticed that the two inspectors were staring at him. "What? Elves talk to each other you know."

Eddie laughed and Harry pulled her into a hug.

"13 months huh?" He asked.

"Yes," she agreed.

Harry sighed. It was going to be a long year. Still, it could be worse. "I'm busy today with cleaning and organizing and all that, but would you like to go out and do something tomorrow?"

"That might be fun, what did you have in mind?" Eddie asked.

"Something I've only done once, and you've likely never done at all."

"Ohh, secretive, I like that," Eddie's eyes lit up with anticipation. "It's a date."

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"I'd read about these places, Eddie said as they strolled arm in arm, "but I never thought I'd actually see one."

"I've only been once," Harry admitted. "It was for my cousin's 11th birthday."

"From the way you talk about them, I wouldn't have thought that your relatives would have taken you to a zoo," Eddie noted.

"Normally, they wouldn't have," Harry agreed. "But my normal minder was ill, and they didn't trust me in the house alone... I might have eaten a full meal or something, so I got to come along and carry things."

"Oh my goodness," Eddie said as she stopped dead in her tracks. "That fellow is huge!"

Harry looked into the enclosure and could not help but agree. A huge polar bear heaved himself from his pool and thumped down into a sitting position, and began waving at the onlookers.

True to form, many in the crowd ignored the DO NOT FEED THE ANIMALS signs and began throwing treats to the huge bear.

"Can you imagine turning around and finding that looking at you without a moat and a bloody huge wall between you?" Eddie asked.

Harry was trying to ignore the lunatic in the overcoat and fedora standing just a little too close in the summer heat. "No thank you," he said. "I've had enough of animals trying to eat me to last a lifetime. Speaking of eating, ready for lunch?"

Eddie took one last look at the bear before nodding. Harry took her hand and turned to leave, accidentally bumping into the trench coat man.

"Excuse me," He said as the pair walked toward the concessions.

A young couple out on their first real date could be excused for only paying attention on each other and not noticing the commotion that sprang up behind them.

- 13 -

"I thought you were supposed to be able to fly," Sirius teased. "You're just like you father, all show and no go."

Harry pulled his broom up into a hover next to his godfather high above the deserted craggy ravine below. "You know, I could have gone all day without hearing you imitate Snape."

"The difference is, I'm observing the time honored tradition of trash talk, while Snivulous is nothing but a vindictive little bitch," Sirius explained. "That and I'm going to beat your arse in a race."

"Big talk from a man whose best days are far behind him," Harry snarked.

"Behind?" Sirius sputtered. "I'll have you know I'm in my prime you mouthy little punk. Ok, it's go time. From here to the far end of the island. We go on three. Ready? One, Two," Sirius accelerated away at high speed. For all of Harry's razing the man could fly. "Three!" the man called from a distance away. He could also cheat.

Harry leaned into his broom and gave it its head. There was a series of five pops behind him in rapid succession, but whatever cheat Sirius had rigged to distract him was not going to work. He poured on the speed and began to overtake his favorite godfather.

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"He said that?" The Councilor demanded.

"He did," the younger goblin confirmed. "His exact words were 'we're going to have to find and punish those who would have offered you aid'. Somehow, Inspector 13 knew what we were

planning. I have no explanation for this failure of our security."

Silence filled the Council Chamber of the Goblin nation. The five ancient goblins on the dais shared a feeling of dread. Who was this human boy? How was he penetrating their security so easily?

"Is assassination an option?" The elder to Nagnok's left asked.

"We've tried," the bank manager sighed. "Twice."

"Twice?" the elder gasped. While a goblin hit team occasionally missed their targets, the professional pride of the assassination unit had never allowed them to fail twice.

"The first attempt had a single assassin make the attempt while Potter was at a Muggle zoo attempting a human mating ritual with Inspector 84," Nagnok explained. "From what we were able to determine from his remains and his spotter's report, the assassin, disguised as a human, Potter 'accidentally' bumped into him and the assassin fell into the enclosure of a Great Northern White Bear. It was horrible. The Spotter is still in counseling."

"No," the elder breathed in disbelief.

Nagnok was not finished. "Just yesterday a follow up five goblin team was sent to deal with Potter after the failure of the first. They portkeyed to his location, keyed to Potter's blood so as to ensure that they would appear close enough to kill before the boy knew they were there. There were no survivors. We ultimately found their bodies, but they were so mangled together, it was impossible to tell where one started and another began."

"And Potter's reaction?" another of the Elders asked.

"None," Nagnok admitted. "He hasn't even acknowledged that the attempts happened."

"That is terrifying," the Elder to Nagnok's right, noted.

"Agreed," the Bank Manager said. "Our spies in the Ministry report that Potter is to meet with his department head in the morning. When dealing with a being such as Potter, who destroys Dark Lords, and who turns aside our assassins with no apparent effort there is but one answer."

Around him, the Council agreed.

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Harry stopped in front of the desk and waited. The young witch behind the desk looked up and smiled.

"You must be Harry Potter."

"I have to be," Harry grinned. "No one else is willing to do it. I have an appointment to see Head

Auditor Peasgood."

"And he's waiting for you," she said. "End of the hall, turn left, third door on your right."

"Thank you," Harry said as he set off to follow the directions. Like most parts of the Ministry of Magic, the hallway was expanded to an absurd degree, so the trip was longer than it should be. Finally reaching the door, he knocked.

"Get your sorry self in here Potter." Was the answer his knocking inspired.

Opening the door, Harry looked inside hesitantly.

"Potter," a quite harried man sitting behind a large ornate desk said, "what the hell have you been up to?"

"What?" Harry asked intelligently.

"This morning," the man Harry assumed to be Arnold Peasgood, the Head Auditor said, "We received an unscheduled deliver from Gringotts. A pallet of gold. Not Galleons, mind you, gold bars. So much that we haven't managed to weigh it to determine its value yet. Accompanying the gold was an unconditional surrender, not to the Ministry, but to you, specifically. What have you done to the Goblins?"

"I have no idea," Harry confessed. "The goblins just keep giving me money, more all the time. I've been careful to keep records of how much and I've sent the Department of Inspections their third, but I don't know what a 'surrender' would be about."

"This was supposed to be my standard introductions and frightening the new Inspector meeting, but this..." Peasgood said in an exasperated tone while waving a sheaf of ornate engraved parchment, "I don't know what to say about this. I've never had the Goblin Nation surrender to a rookie Inspector before."

Harry shrugged. "Sorry," he said. "This sort of thing just kind of happens around me."

"Well, the Department of Inspections is a sub-department under the Department of Audits, so I'm guessing we'll have a hell of a Christmas Party this year. Maybe in Bali," Peasgood grumbled good naturedly. "Your immediate supervisor, David Philpot would have been here for your interview, but he's still dealing with the fallout from the Barty Crouch Junior affair. Your friend 84 was rather vicious in her fines."

"I think she was upset that I'd been kidnapped," Harry suggested.

"I'm not saying she did anything wrong, Potter," Peasgood said with a shake of his head. "Crouch helped his son escape Azkaban, and Dumbledore allowed an unrepentant escaped convicted murderer to teach at Hogwarts. Between that, and what Crouch Junior managed to do to you, well, those fines and charges were well justified. I'm just saying that dealing with it is a pain."

Peasgood rose from his desk, walked around it to where Harry was standing, and shook the young man's hand. "Welcome to the Department Potter. As long as you're in school, we'll keep your work load light. Just keep an eye on Hogwarts and keep up your dealings with the goblins. Find out why they surrendered to you if you can. Now, get out of here, some of us have real work to do."

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