

Enslavement (Original version)

When he was a child, he remembered seeing a TV program about grief, and it had listed five stages. He felt now that he was on stage five. Only, in his case, there was one more stage to go.

Denial was the first stage. When he had heard Hermione say something sarcastic to Ron. “You probably think he was faking saving Ginny, as he’s a Parselmouth.” The sarcasm part had flown right over Ron’s head. And the rest of the Gryffindors.

And that had meant that he’d found himself kicked out of Gryffindor, with his trunk, and nowhere else to go. He’d gone to McGonagall, who’d proven once again that she was a beacon of hope and competence, by failing to do anything about it.

As he’d been exiled, he wasn’t allowed anywhere nice to stay, just given a small room in an abandoned corner. But, it had a bed, a desk, and a small bathing area, so was heaps better than where he had grown up.

The second stage was anger, and that hadn’t taken long. Hermione had fallen to the peer pressure to ignore him, and while she sent him apologetic looks, she didn’t do anything else. And that had kicked off his anger. He’d ignored the lot of them, and the other houses, kept his head down, and plotted elaborate revenge scenarios. None of which had been even slightly practical.

At the same time, he used his anger to remain silent. At the weighing of the wands, he’d said nothing to anyone, not even the sleazy reporter. She had responded by completely fabricating an interview, which made things even worse for him.

He’d sent out a few letters, to find that no one (Goblins, the Ministry et al) cared that he’d been slandered. Or that the reporter had completely lied.

Just before the first task, he’d abandoned his pride and tried to bargain with Dobby for help. The third stage. But the elf said that he couldn’t help. He’d been gagged by the other elves, and while he could go against a master, he couldn’t go against his people.

Harry then swallowed his dignity and went a step further, asking Dumbledore for help. In return, Dumbledore had offered meaningless platitudes and not much else.

So he’d been alone.

That had been enough for the fourth stage to kick in. Depression. He had been stunningly

unsurprised when he'd been told he'd be fighting a dragon. He'd gone out with only one idea, asking for the dragon to just give him the egg.

And to his surprise it had, when he'd explained. He'd ended up with six points from the non-human judge and one point from each of the human judges for doing nothing but talk, and more scorn from the humans he attended school with for using a "dark" skill.

Which had led to the supposed final stage – acceptance.

Harry Potter was not normal. Harry Potter would never be normal. Harry Potter had thought he'd finally met humans he could like. Harry Potter had not.

Everyone turned out to be the same. And as such, he abandoned his attempts to fit in with them. If people cursed him, he cursed back. Sadly, there was a lot more of them than there were of him. The only bright side was that his healing spells were a lot better than they were, and his reflexes had improved from necessity.

Apart from answering professors in as few words as possible, he hadn't said a single word to anyone else since he had tried with Dobby.

Food and laundry services were still provided for him, but the food always arrived in his room. He understood and followed through on the unspoken request.

And with nothing else to do, he studied. Everything and anything he could, looking for a way to escape. Christmas came and went, and he slid back on his progress a little when he got nothing from Sirius or Remus. But what had he expected? A human to be on his side? That wasn't how his life worked. And even Remus had made it clear that he hated his better non-human side.

The second task came; with a complete lack of subtlety he broke into Snape's potions supplies and got the Gillyweed he'd read about. During the task, he rescued the little Veela, simply because she wasn't human. If she had been, he would have left her there.

That had got him a few more points, but he'd lost a lot more for being over the time limit. He noticed that the most points once again came from the half-giant on the judging panel. The other judges, human, the lot of them, had again given him low points.

Ludo Bagman had been giving Krum tens, higher marks than anyone else, which made Harry realise that the competition wasn't about performance, it was about popularity. And he had none.

He walked back, ignoring the now familiar taunts of the boy who used to be his friend. The urge to curse him was high, but that would be acting like a human. And what the boy wanted. So he walked around him, again, and again, until the boy had thrown a punch. Harry simply moved out of the way and walked past the over-balancing boy.

The expected curse in the back hit his shield, and he continued. As expected, the human teachers did nothing. Flitwick, on the other hand, stopped Ron.

Yet again, the non-human acting better than the human – just about anyway. A full non-human would have done more.

Harry once more looked at the book before him.

He had an idea for his own final stage. Stage six, moving on. And all he needed to do it was drop the morals he'd tried so very hard to cultivate. He'd taken them from books, the few he'd managed to read, and from the TV. He'd hoped that by being the opposite of the Dursleys, and by having the text book version of morals he'd have fit in.

He hadn't. So, fine, those morals were gone. All that mattered now was leaving the humans.

He re-read the pages of the book again, checking once more he wasn't mistaken. He then took out another book, and re-read that again. It sounded as close to perfection as he could expect, exactly what he wanted, and so he was going to risk the little he had left to get it. He didn't worry about the cost to his soul, he wasn't sure that freaks even had souls.

He grabbed the books, his map, and his invisibility cloak. He then shrunk his fully packed trunk that contained his clothing, Hedwig's perch and cage, and all the books he was stealing, and put it in his pocket. He donned his cloak, and exited his little room for the last time.

His first stop was the Owlery, to the one being he could still count on. If he'd had a window in his room, he knew Hedwig would have stayed with him. Even without it, she'd tried. He hadn't let her though. He'd told her that he'd feel better knowing she had her freedom, and that he'd imagine that he was out flying with her.

His owl was not human, and yet she displayed more of the characteristics that humans liked to define themselves by than any human he'd ever met.

He looked around his small room, and nodded his head. He'd quite liked the place, but wasn't sad to say goodbye. One way or another, he was never coming back. He had a plan, and a backup plan. The backup plan sucked, but at least he'd be free.

Hedwig hadn't liked the backup plan either, but had understood. She always did.

Once in the Owlery, he removed his cloak, and moved to a perch. Hedwig drifted down and allowed him to attach the letter he'd written earlier. With a soft bark, she flew out of the Owlery, before she started to circle around Hogwarts with slow energy conserving strokes of her beautiful wings. After a few moments, she seemed to vanish into the darkness of the night, but he knew she was still there, waiting and watching.

Harry placed his cloak back on, and this time he cast some extra spells on himself. Silencing spells, smell denial spells, and ambient temperature spells.

They worked; he'd once stood next to Dumbledore without the wizard being any the wiser. He hadn't overheard anything interesting, which would have been a bonus.

He walked down, and out of the school. He didn't need to sneak, and headed to the Beauxbatons carriage, and with each step, he took his denial, his anger, his bargaining, his depression and his acceptance, and his desire for moving on, and used it to reinforce his will.

The carriage had numerous doors. He'd staked them out earlier, so he knew which one to go to. He took a deep breath, and knocked on the door with a sharp staccato beat. He removed his cloak, and placed it in his pocket. He'd copied the knock from the Beauxbatons' Headmistress.

The door opened, and Harry stunned Fleur Delacour with a Stupefy as she answered. He stepped inside, shut the door firmly behind him and cast a truth charm on her, before waking her up. "Is this true?" he demanded, shoving the book in her face. They were in a small entrance hall, with doors leading to either side. The decoration was classical French, with a grandfather clock against the far wall, the lights, if there were any, weren't on, leaving it quite dark.

Her face paled, and with a great reluctance, she said, "Oui."

"Then I, Harry James Potter, cla..."

"Wait," she hissed, keeping her voice down.

He looked at her. "I am owed a debt, I will collect it."

"You will enslave an eight year old?" she demanded. "What sort of monster are you?"

"Freak," he corrected. "Not a monster, a freak."

The answer seemed to throw her. "What sort of freak are you?"

He gave her the first smile since this had started. "The one I was born to be and the one I was moulded into," he replied.

"Claiming 'er, means you will 'ave to sleep with 'er. Fuck 'er. She is eight, a child."

Those words would have affected him before all of this, but not now. But it was time to play his second card. "That's a price I'm willing to pay."

"What?"

"A price I'm willing to pay," he repeated.

"For what?"

"Veela following the old traditions are automatically accepted in to the Veela Enclave of the continent of birth."

She looked absolutely horrified as his words sank in. "You'd rape my sister, and zen take 'er away for life?"

“It’s not rape,” he replied, “Its payment due to her owing me her life. Surely that’s better than death?”

She shook herself. “But once in, you can never leave,” she said, changing her angle of attack like he suspected she would.

“Yes, I’d forever be locked up in a city of marble, only able to leave with permission from the high council, my magic forever sworn to the defence of the city with my life. I’d never be able to see the rest of the world, see anybody I cared about, or even communicate with them. The magic that stops invaders and the oath to join is very clear.” The words were not for his benefit, but for hers.

“She will ‘ate you.”

“Does it matter?” he asked. “I’ll have a pretty little sex slave; a freak like me doesn’t need emotions, only release.”

Fleur reeled back, as if struck. Suddenly she smiled. It was a soft smile, a gentle one. “Come, ‘arry, you ‘ave not thought this through,” she whispered. Her arms went back, as she emphasised her chest from her position on the floor. Her face glowed softly in the darkness of the hallway, the only real light reflecting from the cracks in the doorways out of the hallway. He wanted to listen to her more, agree with what she said. He raised his wand and stunned her again. The feeling vanished. When he awoke her, she scowled.

“I saved her life, it’s now mine to do with as I see fit,” he continued their earlier conversation, allowing a small hint of cheerfulness to creep into his words. “I’m sure she’ll get used to it eventually,” he added with an uncaring shrug.

Fleur went for her wand, but his was already in his hand, held loosely, and then he was holding two wands as well. “Would you like to be awake for her screams?” he asked politely. “Because I can stun you again, so you won’t have to hear them.”

Her look was full of hate, and her hands started to glow. He took a step forward and kicked her in the stomach, stopping the transformation into her aviary form in its tracks. How she could think that he wouldn’t have found out everything he could about Veela beforehand? He guessed she had listened to the rumours about him, and believed them.

But then, the rumours also said he was evil, dark, and that helped here. He couldn’t blame her for listening to them; he’d seen how she’d wanted to give up her best side, to be more human.

“I, Harry James Potter, do hereby cla…”

“Wait,” Fleur begged.

He paused and looked at her.

“Take me, instead.”

“You are a bitch,” he said simply. “I have no interest in you.”

Her eyes widened in surprise, and she reeled back again.

“Please,” she said. She moved to her knees, the arrogance and superiority he had seen earlier was gone. Now it was just a girl desperate to protect her younger sister. Once, he would have moved the earth for her – for anyone in her position, but now he wouldn’t exhale in her favour. “Please,” she begged once more. “Do not force my seester into slavery, do not take away ‘er freedom. Take me instead, I am a ze bitch, I deserve it, she does not. Please!”

She shifted on to her knees and started to undo the buttons of her blue blouse, revealing the start of her white bra, when he stopped her. He shrugged. One Veela was as good as another. “You will swear the oath I was going to make Gabrielle swear, once she was under my control?”

“I will,” she said, her hands pausing, as she looked at him with something like hope. He felt she was a good actress.

He pulled out a piece of paper and floated it over to her. He wasn’t getting near her, not yet. She looked at him, and her act failed. The paper had Gabrielle’s name in it. She looked at him with loathing.

He rolled his eyes, and summoned it back. The clock struck eleven. The space between each chime seemed eternal.

With a hateful look, she started to speak. “I, Fleur Isabelle Delacour, do ‘ereby pledge my eternal servitude to ‘arry James Potter, for as long as ‘e so desires. I vow, under penalty of death, zat my words are true.” She paused, having read the full sentence printed on the paper, before she glared and added her own. “I do zis of my own free will, in payment for zee life debt incurred by my seester at ze Second Task.”

“I accept,” Harry said, and he could immediately feel Fleur’s magic bond to his, her Veela nature ensuring she followed through on her magical promise.

“Now what?” she asked, with another hate filled look. “Master?” The last word was said with such contempt that it was almost visible.

“Now, you will contact the Enclave, and arrange for us to leave tomorrow.”

“Ze third task, we are bound to compete,” she pointed out.

“You will explain that as well. You will write to the best of your ability, explain everything honestly, and cite the relevant laws pertaining to our access.” He placed the second of his books down, with the bookmark in place. “This is a command,” he added, for emphasis. “If you do not do so, I will consider your vow broken; the price refunded, and will claim your sister.”

She looked like she wanted to jump him and claw his eyes out, but her vow kept her from doing so.

“Be happy, little Veela,” he hissed, “I could take you now, but I will give you the rest of the night and the morning to say your goodbyes. I am not completely without mercy.”

He backed away slowly, and out of the door, before he threw her wand back to her. As she grabbed for it, he closed the door and pulled on his cloak. He refreshed his charms, and stood still.

Fleur opened the door, and scowled as she saw no sign of him, her wand in his hand. He watched her face, as anger gave way to despair, and she started to shake. He hoped it was the effect of her not following a command.

As she shut the door, he placed his hand out of the cloak, and waved it. There was a soft bark from the distance, and he smiled. He headed out, not back to the school, but into the Forbidden forest. He was too nervous to sleep, so he just walked. And as he did, he passed Acromantulas; he passed centaurs, and loads of other species.

For the first time, he was truly invisible. And it was glorious.

As dawn broke, he headed back to the French camp, and watched patiently. At nine thirty, Fleur and Olympe Maxime met with an older couple who arrived from the gates of Hogwarts. The man looked ready to spit fire, while the woman was crying and hugging her daughter.

Fleur had a family, a family that had never gone through the things he had. Maybe that was why she wanted to betray the good thing about her and be human.

Gabrielle appeared, dressed in jeans, trainers and a coat. She clung to her sister, and was crying and begging.

It was a heart breaking scene. Only, Harry no longer had a heart.

Other students appeared, and he listened as they were told the truth, it was exaggerated, but all the salient facts where there.

The students looked angry and dispersed. Half an hour later the small group of five headed into Hogwarts. He followed them, to find chaos inside. It seemed like half the student body where there, and from the noise, they were all looking for him. The names they called him as they reported failure were amazing. He hadn't known that so many of them had such verbosity.

He cursed to himself, as the crowd closed after the group of five. He spotted Hermione, who looked incensed, he guessed at the idea of slavery. She arranged the students so he couldn't get through. It seemed the students wanted to persuade him to release Fleur.

And as expected, the authority figures were doing nothing at all. He spotted Malfoy and Weasley talking to that reporter, and shook his head. He vaguely remembered a quote about politics making strange bed fellows. Clearly hate worked too.

Instead of risking it, he went outside and waited.

Two hours later, a large wooden gate appeared outside the wards of Hogwarts, and a column of Veela guards marched forwards. They were two wide, and twenty deep, and moved in absolutely perfect unison. They were wearing the same, vaguely Roman – or maybe Greek, looking clothing. Leather sandals with the straps going wrapping around awesome calves up to their knees. A leather apron acted a bit like a skirt, although the ends appeared weighted down, as they did not float in the spring breeze. On their left hips, a scabbard made of gold glinted, a golden handle on top. The cuirass they wore on their chests were sculpted to be feminine, and generously so, and their helmets appeared to have their own hair coming out of the top.

In their left hands they each had a rectangular shield. Their faces were as beautiful as the Veela he'd seen at the start of the year, but each had a fierce expression.

He moved in front of them, aware of students exiting Hogwarts behind him, and removed his cloak as they were ten foot away. They continued to march, stopping two foot from him. "You are the one who has enslaved a part-Veela?" the lead Veela demanded. Up close, he could see that her armour was more ornate, and that she had an emblem embossed on her shoulder.

"I am."

"You are not inside?"

"Many people disagree with my actions."

"Understandably," the Veela murmured. "As the law dictates, so we will follow." She took a deep breath, and looked at him directly.

It felt like someone had taken a pickaxe to his skull, she was the most perfect creature he had ever seen; she was fabulous, amazing, and so utterly inhuman.

"You want to stop all this, don't you?" she asked, with a hint of a foreign accent he couldn't place; it almost sounded like she had sung the question, and his mind flickered to TV performances of girls singing solo in front of large choirs in churches.

"Just say the word," she continued, "and we'll forget all about it, no harm done."

"No," he suddenly blurted, and metaphorically forced the pickaxe out of his head. He panted from effort, and glared at the Veela. Grudging respect flashed in her eyes for a second.

"Move," she ordered her companions. They moved, and he found himself surrounded by them, almost swallowed up. This close, they gave off an air of otherness, of not being human, and the first time in months, he allowed himself a tiny bit of hope.

They marched into Hogwarts, and everything and everyone went silent. "There he is," one of students shouted, raising his wand. The boy, Anthony Goldstein was stunned before he could go any further.

"Acts of aggression will not be tolerated," the lead Veela intoned, the lyrical accent gone, replaced

only with a dull monotone. “Any further attempts of aggression at Enclave soldiers will be returned with extreme prejudice.”

The gathered students swayed backwards at the monotone delivery, and the certainty of the words.

“We just want a chat with Potter,” the youngest male Weasley cried.

“This is now an Enclave mission,” The Veela replied evenly. “We do not have the time or the desire for your input, human.”

That last word resonated with Harry, more than anything. It was the biggest insult he could dream of, aimed directly at his former friend – even if the boy didn’t recognise it as such.

They were left to march up to Dumbledore’s office. Looking over his shoulder, he could see the trailing Veela take guard positions on the stairs.

They entered Dumbledore’s office. McGonagall and Snape were to the left of Dumbledore’s desk, the man himself was sat behind his desk. To the right, where Fawkes’ perch was usually, the Delacour family stood in front of the half-giant headmistress.

“I am Colonel Sophia Adler, charged by the European Enclave to accept Harry James Potter and Fleur Isabelle Delacour into said Enclave,” she said in the same monotone she’d used so far.

“I’m afraid,” Dumbledore replied, “That will not be possible.”

“Magical Britain is retreating from its treaties with the International Confederation of Wizards and European Law,” Sophia said. “I will let the Enclave Council know.” She turned on her heel, and started to march away.

“No,” Dumbledore yelped. Harry kept his face emotionless. Clearly, Dumbledore hadn’t expected Sophia to immediately simply accept his words for what they were – an attempt to subvert a treaty.

She paused, and turned. “What did you mean then?”

“The champions need to fulfil the third task.” Harry could see the frustration on Dumbledore’s face. He knew Dumbledore liked to talk, but he could see that Sophia didn’t, and he himself had hidden away until this moment, to avoid anything the headmaster might say to him.

“We are aware of this,” Sophia returned. “Special permission has already been granted for that day.”

He could feel Snape stare at him, but Harry avoided meeting his eyes. Harry knew he had scant skill in the mind arts, so he took the simple way out.

Before anyone else could say anything, Sophia continued, still in her monotone voice. “Under the law of the International Confederation of Wizards, a Veela, regardless of purity may apply to join

the Enclave. A class two bond is the minimum required. A class one bond was originally available in this instance, but the slavery bond formed in payment is still a class two bond. As such, the application has been granted.

Fleur started to cry, sobbing silently, while Gabrielle looked at Harry and spat what was probably a vile imprecation. Harry didn't speak French, a fact he was pleased with for once.

There were looks of futile fury on the faces of Fleur's parents. And a matching one of the face of Olympe Maxime. He could see the disappointment on the faces of Dumbledore, McGonagall, and the contempt and anger on Snape's face.

"I told you he was arrogant, just like his father," Snape sneered.

Harry ignored him.

Sophia turned. "Harry James Potter, do you swear your life to the Enclave, do you swear your magic to her defence, to uphold her laws. Do you acknowledge that the magic that protects you also binds you? Do you swear to follow the Council's guidance? Do you abandon your English heritage, your citizenship, and all claims to this country? Do you pledge any and all wealth to the Enclave?"

For the first time in a very long time, he smiled. He held out his hand, his wand in it. "On my magic, I so swear."

He closed his eyes as he felt a new bond form, not a weak one, influenced by humanity, like with Fleur, but a pure one, with a city he had no idea of the location of, but would be his home for the rest of his life.

Sophia turned. "Fleur Isabelle Delacour."

Harry moved slightly, and put his hand on Sophia's shoulder. She didn't jump, but she did turn to him. "Oh, yes, a class two bond," she spat softly, her eyes hard. "Go ahead, order her participation."

He saw the traces of hope vanish from the eyes of the beautiful family of four facing him. He allowed his hand to drop from Sophia's shoulder. "Fleur Isabelle Delacour," he said, his voice emotionless. "I release you from your vow, and I accept your actions as full payment for the debt of your sister's life."

His words hung in the air, as if they had been transfigured into stone.

"Well played. Extremely well played." Sophia was the first to respond, she swivelled to look at him, and her eyes turned warm. She reached out and put her hand on his shoulder, squeezing lightly. "Our business here is concluded."

"Wait," Dumbledore called desperately.

“What is it?”

“Harry, he stays, now?”

“Harry is a member of the Enclave,” Sophia replied dismissively.

“But he has no bond.”

“He does not need one, for he is a member.”

“But, why?” Fleur demanded.

Harry looked at her, over his shoulder. “It was never about you,” he said, “or your sister. You are a bitch, and she is eight. I would not want to spend time with you, nor force a child to do anything.”

Fleur again rocked backwards, as if he had slapped her.

The mother met his eyes, and she smiled and nodded. “Thank you, and good luck.”

He nodded at her. She wasn't human, more so than her daughter. So he respected her more for that.

He didn't look at anyone else, he simply turned, and followed the two guards who were behind him and were now in front of him.

There was a rustle, and a spell cast. He looked, to see the guard to the left of Sophia had blocked it with her shield, allowing Sophia to cast her sword at the person who had thrown the spell. Snape staggered back, the sword through his chest. Sophia snapped her fingers, and the sword returned to her hand.

“Attacking a member of the Enclave is against the agreed treaty with the International Confederation of Wizards,” she said evenly. “Punishment has been dispensed.”

Harry shot a look at Dumbledore, who was now looking at Snape in horror, and turned. Once again, they moved, down the stairs, the other Veela falling in with them. A command, in a language Harry didn't understand, had them move, so that as they cleared a space at the bottom of the stairs, they took a formation four abreast, with him in the centre. Sophia said a few more words in the same lyrical language, and the body language of the Veela around him changed. It was inclusive, not exclusive.

In absolute silence, they marched out, and Harry was aware that he still had a smile on his face. The murmurs started, as no one could see Fleur, and he could see the confusion on some of their faces, but he didn't care.

They stepped out of Hogwarts, and his smile grew. They continued to march down toward the magical gate.

Up ahead, he could see some Aurors, five or six, accompanying the Minister for Magic. They stopped, directly in the way, the Minister's chest swelling as he prepared himself. The Veela didn't pause, they didn't slow down; they just kept their steady march. At the last second, Fudge squeaked and threw himself to the ground, rolling out of the way. The Aurors followed him.

Harry felt his smile grow. His guards hadn't acted like humans.

The first of the guards entered the gate, and vanished. He felt a hand take his, and he looked at the grinning face of Sophia, and held on to her. They entered, and it felt like he was thrown through space and time, tumbling each way, before with a suddenness that almost made him sick, they arrived in a small clearing in a forest.

The Veela, almost as one, removed their helms. They were still inhumanly perfect, and he loved it. None of them suffered from helmet hair, their bright blonde reflected the sun, causing them to glow.

"Come on, Harry," Sophia said brightly. "Let's go see your new home!"

Harry felt his smile grow even bigger.

"You are the first person to enter as a single male, ever," she continued, "and we're all really impressed now that we understand what you've done."

"Thanks," he said shyly.

"I've got a niece you'll love to meet," Sophia added.

"Oi, don't boggart Green Eyes," another one said, "I've got a younger sister!"

Harry allowed himself a giggle, as quite a few of the guards started to bicker and squabble. They guided him up a path, and he had his first sight of the humongous gates of the Veela enclave. It made the security he'd seen at Gringotts look provincial and immature. But then, it was designed to protect a race of physically perfect females. Something far more important than gold.

The gates were made of stone, with wooden lattices. Above the gates two marble guard towers stood, each lined with guards, all with weapons. And while only some looked made for the task, having seen Sophia deal with Snape, he wasn't counting anything back.

"Halt," a guard called in a magically enhanced voice. Harry was surprised they were talking English.

"Colonel Sophia Adler, returning from Mission eight-zero-zero-five-three at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry."

"Colonel Adler, your mission appears incomplete," the guard called down.

"Target A swore the oath, then released target B."

There was a hush from the top of the gate. Then the guard, in a much warmer voice, called, “Welcome home, Colonel Adler. Welcome home, Harry James Potter.”

Harry felt a tear run down his cheek, as he offered the most honoured bow of his life.

“The English was for you,” Sophia whispered, as the huge gates slowly opened. They were completely silent, and Harry was able to see that they were at least six foot thick.

Next to him, opposite Sophia, another of the guards was humming. He looked at her, “Hotel California?” he asked.

“You can check out any time you like, but you can never leave.”

“Who wants to leave home?” Harry asked.

The guard reached out and hugged him, to his surprise.

As he stepped through the gate, he stumbled. The bond he’d thought was strong before increased in intensity a thousand percent, more, maybe. It felt like everything he had was now bonded with the city, and with the walls. And he knew. He knew if they were attacked, he would defend with everything he had. It was his home, it was bright, it was everything he wanted.

Sophia took his arm, and helped him along. “When I swore the oath as an adult, I felt exactly the same way. It’s amazing, isn’t it?”

“It’s the most non-human thing I’ve ever felt, and I love it,” he replied.

Through the gates, and inside the enclave, he saw that the interior was in a huge bowl, so he had a great view of as much as he could see. It wasn’t just a city, he could see farms in the distance, some growing crops, others herding cattle. He could not see the wall on the far side. To the right of centre, he smiled in delight. He could see a beach and the ocean. He’d never seen the ocean before!

The city itself gleamed in the sunlight, and for a second, he thought it was made of gold. “Eldorado,” he whispered.

His eyes cleared, and he realised it was just the reflection of the sun on the marble.

“Not quite,” Sophia said with a soft laugh.

There was something off about the city, maybe in the angles of the corners, or the height of the buildings. He almost bounced in happiness, it wasn’t human! It was almost freakish! It was amazing.

Harry removed his robes, as he realised just how hot it was here. He presumed they were in the Mediterranean somewhere, but he found he really didn’t care where. He didn’t need to know where it was to help defend it.

And defend it he would, he would study, push himself, train his magic like never before, because this ... this Enclave, this place that was home, it deserved everything he could offer, and so much more.

He focused down on the city, trying to make out the population, and found that the people tended to be wearing white linen, in simple fashion, with sandals.

“We do dress up for balls,” Sophia said, “but for every day, it’s too hot to dress in anything else.”

Harry took his trunk, broom, and other possessions out of the pockets of his Hogwarts robes, before he threw the robes in the air. “Incendio.” They burnt, quickly, and he grinned as he heard the chuckles of his guards. He went to jam his stuff in his pockets, when he was stopped by another of his guards. She held out a small bag for him, then he put everything in. “Thank you.”

The words she said in reply in what he hoped was their language, because it was identical to how Sophia had spoken earlier.

“Come on,” Sophia said, “we’ll go meet the council, and then we can show you your home.”

“My home?”

“Of course,” the guard who had hummed earlier said, “Where else are you going to live?”

“I’ve spent a lot of time living in a cupboard, and then this year, a tiny room, I’d be happy with anything with a window.”

“Well, you’re just going to have to live with a nice house,” Sophia said. There was a bark, and Harry smiled, “Hedwig,” he called, lifting his hand. His owl swooped down, landed on his arm, and she immediately head butted him gently. “Do you like it here?”

She barked again, softly. “I’m so pleased,” he told her. She was looking at him, and he could feel her pride and happiness.

“No more Dursleys, no more Hogwarts, just endless fields of mice, and the occasional slice of bacon as a treat.”

Hedwig hopped up his arm, and sat firmly on his shoulder. One of her wings wrapped around his head for a second, in an avian hug, before she settled down.

“I have never seen anything even close to that before,” the humming guard said.

“Hed’s my greatest friend, by such a huge way,” Harry said enthusiastically. “She’s always been there, always been on my side, even when no one else was. She’s the best.”

Hedwig barked in agreement, and Harry laughed. He reached up and scratched her chest. Her feathers were always so soft and he always liked that he could feel her heart beat, far faster than any human’s could be.

“Come on, the council is waiting,” Sophia ordered gently.

“We’ll see you later, Harry,” one of the other guards called. Harry turned to them. “Thank you, so much,” he said, and bowed in respect. He felt Hedwig move, expanding her wings, as she did a little curtsy, thanking them as well.

There were various calls of them being welcome, before he was carefully tugged away. The road was made of a yellow stone that looked golden in the sunlight. And although it was a mile, he enjoyed the warmth and the clear air.

They arrived in front of the first building, a Roman style villa, complete with four columns in front. They entered into the cool interior and walked on top of an amazing mosaic. He paused, to look at it closely.

“You can examine it later,” Sophia promised.

He nodded and hurried after her.

They were allowed through a guarded doorway, one of the guards giving him a wink as he went through. Harry grinned back at her.

Inside, to his surprise, was a pretty modern room, with a long table stretching along the far wall. He could see some computers with green displays on the monitors on desk around the edges of the room.

At the table sat eight people, seven of which were female. They were all older than Sophia, but he couldn’t take a guess to their real age. They were all inhumanly perfect, and he felt right at home.

“Take a seat, you two,” they were told. He did, and sat with his hands on his lap, as he looked along the line, not afraid to meet their eyes. They were sat in the middle, looking directly across at two councillors.

One of the rolled out a piece of paper. Harry glanced at it, and saw that it was the letter he had written to them yesterday. “I take it your plan worked?”

“Yes, ma’am,” he replied politely.

There were some soft chuckles.

“Wait,” Sophia said, “Plan?”

“Sorry, Soph,” the male, who was the other councillor in the middle, said, “but we wanted this by the book.”

“So Harry planned this all in advance?”

“Yes, we were pretty shocked when his owl breached our defences.”

“Hedwig’s awesome,” Harry interrupted, “she knew she held our future in her talons, and she wasn’t going to let either of us down.”

Hedwig barked her agreement.

“Quite,” the male continued. “So when we received the Delacour petition to join this morning, we decided to go along with Harry’s plan.”

“I nearly gutted him on sight,” Sophia pointed him out.

“But you didn’t, and we know you are professional enough to do the mission first, and take personal actions later.”

Harry smiled. “Of which I’m grateful. I did half expect to be gutted on sight.”

“And,” Sophia added, sounding a little guilty this time, “I might have hit him with a level zero Allure blast, not the level four required for joining.”

“A zero?” the man gasped. “And he passed?”

“He did.”

There was a round of awed silence. “Right, welcome to the Enclave, Mr Potter. Three thousand generations have built our little place, and the magic that protects us also binds us.”

Harry nodded. “It’s great.”

“I don’t know if you know, but you were quite a wealthy young man in the foreign world.”

Harry shook his head. “I’m glad I won’t be a drain on the Enclave.”

More smiles were aimed at him. “Your first jobs will be to improve your physical ability, and to learn our language.”

“I really appreciate the honour you have shown me by using my language,” he said.

“I’ve got a niece who would be perfect to help teach him,” Sophia added eagerly.

“We’ve all got nieces, daughters, cousins,” the man said dryly. “No hogging the first independent male, ever.”

The female council member in front of him spoke. “When our children reach majority, they are given the choice to swear the oath to become full citizens, to leave, and find a partner and return, or to leave and never come back. That is how we increase the population and ensure we suffer no ill effect from inbreeding.”

“The purebloods have that problem, they are rigid in their beliefs, human,” he spat the last word,

“so I’m delighted to hear that logic and practicality is treated sensibly here!”

“Welcome, indeed, Harry Potter, to the last home of your life.”

“People keep saying that like it’s a bad thing,” Harry pointed out.

There was another round of chuckles.

“Soph will show you to your house, we’ll have a timetable dropped off. When you can speak our language, we’ll introduce you and ourselves properly.”

Harry nodded, and swore to himself that he’d learn it as fast as possible. Apart from Sophia, not one single person had introduced themselves, and it was with another little burst of pleasure that he realised that it wasn’t polite, well, polite as defined by humans. He couldn’t wait for real introductions, when he had earned the privilege.

They were dismissed, and soon back in the sunlight. They started to walk, down a street, the buildings were all detached, on each side, and the amount of people on the street increased as they walked.

The population appeared to be extremely female dominated, and so inhumanly perfect. Everything was clean and bright, and he could see people scrubbing walls and cleaning windows. They seemed to take great pride, a little like humans, but willing to put in the work themselves to keep it that way, unlike humans.

Sophia was greeted many times by name and small phrases, and she often replied in their musical language. It intensified his desire to learn it.

They moved through a bustling market place. He could see the indications of charms to keep meat cold, and vegetable fresh on the stalls. The produce looked brilliant, varied, and he started to imagine some of the meals he could cook for himself. After so many years cooking for others or not being allowed to cook at all, the prospect of cooking for himself was uplifting.

He realised he was hungry as his stomach growled. Sophia giggled, and approached a vendor. She handed over some money and received two sandwiches. They were simply a crusty baguette filled with some ham, and plenty of salad, cut in half. Without hesitation, he bit into it, and was delighted at the taste of the ham.

“JamonIberico,” Sophia said, “imported from Barcelona.”

“It’s incredible.”

She smiled, and they continue to walk, before they stopped. In front of them was a small townhouse, although small was only in relation to the earlier houses he’d seen. Sophia unlocked the door, before giving him the key.

They entered a high ceilinged living room, that was nice and cool after the warmth of outside. A

fan spun lazily and silently on the ceiling, creating a cooling breeze and where there would normally be a fireplace was a water feature that filled the air with a gentle tinkling sound.

The furniture was minimal, just a couple of chairs in the large room, and several mis-matched bookshelves. The floor was polished marble with a rug in front of the chairs.

Sophia took him around a fully featured kitchen, and showed him that the fridge was stocked with food and drink. Up marble stairs were two large bedrooms, again with marble flooring. One bedroom was empty; the other just had a bed and a wooden wardrobe. To the right of the room, was a good sized bathroom, complete with roll top bath, a mirror on top of a marble counter, and a separate shower unit.

A shelf in the shower was stocked with products for him to clean himself, and white fluffy towels were piled on the counter.

To the left, back in the bedroom, was a large window looking out at the bustling street.

“This is brilliant,” he said, awed. “It’s for me?”

“Yes,” Sophia said with a sad little smile. “It’s empty though, you shouldn’t be so happy.”

“Why not?” he demanded. He pulled out Hedwig’s perch and placed it by his bed. Hedwig drifted over from his shoulder, and immediately went to sleep. “It’s brilliant.”

“Because you’ve yet to choose the furniture you want, this is just temporary stuff.”

“Oh, this will do, honest; I don’t want to be a burden.”

“My niece, and probably a lot of people who are curious about someone who managed to get in on their own, will be around later to take you shopping. For now, I suggest you get clean, eat a bit more, and then sleep. You looked like you’ve not slept in days.”

Harry lurched forward and hugged her. “Thank you!” He tried to avoid bashing his head on her armour.

“You’re very welcome, Harry,” Sophia said, giving him a hug back, before she walked out, and left him alone.

Harry smiled. He looked around happily. He couldn’t wait to meet people; no one here had stared at his forehead, or referred to what he did as a child, and more, they seemed impressed by what he had done on his own, not something his parents had done, or with a skill that he’d inherited from his family.

He laughed as he looked around the bedroom.

It was *his* bedroom.

He was free.

He had moved on.

Epilogue

The atmosphere at Hogwarts was tense. The third and final task was due to start in fifteen minutes, and the final champion had yet to arrive.

The Minister for Magic was in attendance, surrounded by fifty Aurors, and a series of high ranking Ministry officials, including Amelia Bones.

People were very nervous about the fact that Harry Potter had simply renounced everything about the British Isles, and left. To the one place that not only didn't believe in extradition, they had a magically binding vow not to leave.

Without very specific permission from the Enclave council, Harry simply could not leave without dying.

And that wasn't to mention the sheer futility of anyone trying to remove him by force. There were tens of thousands of Veela, humans, and other creatures in the Enclave, all dedicated with everything they had to protect themselves, and that was if someone actually knew where the Enclave was!

And despite all this, despite all the trouble caused, Albus Dumbledore was thrilled that Harry was safe, and getting the childhood he deserved.

He was also confident with the defeat of Voldemort, now. Voldemort would never have the ability to let Harry live, but attacking him would be suicide. He was sure that Voldemort would spend far more time worrying about Harry than anything else.

He did admit to himself that he might be being optimistic. And if not, well, they reaped what they had sown.

The last few months had forced through some incredibly deep introspection, touched off by something the elder Miss Delacour had said – that Harry hadn't referred to himself as a monster, but as a freak.

When Albus combined that, with the fact that Harry had rejected humanity completely, it had not left him any place to hide from his thoughts.

Although it was far too late, he'd investigated the Dursleys, and felt guilt. He'd investigated the Goblet himself, and felt far, far more guilt.

How he could have believed that Harry had entered himself was something he castigated himself over at practically every waking moment. That simple assumption, that Harry had done it because it was something James would have done, was the downright stupidest thought he'd ever had.

And because he had believed, he hadn't interfered when Harry had been exiled from the Gryffindors. He had thought it would help Harry grow up, and that, in a small way, the boy did deserve that action. He'd also ordered the other teachers not to interfere, and let Harry grow.

And from there, he'd simply not paid attention. And with that understanding of the depth of his own blindness, of his own foolishness, of his own incompetence and appalling lack of judgement, he had forced himself to retire from the International Confederation of Wizards and had set about doing what he could to repair Harry's reputation.

He had done it for himself, he knew that, but it had made him feel better.

He'd dealt with the imposter; his investigation of the Goblet had shown the magical signature of the person who'd confounded it. The real Alastor Moody had recovered from his confinement, and had agreed to continue teaching. Barty Crouch Junior had been brought before the Wizengamot and questioned before Fudge could get near him.

The answers they had given that night had backfired slightly. Fudge was now determined, international treaties be damned, that Harry help them deal with Voldemort once more.

For the first time in his long life, Albus had actually questioned just why he was fighting for some of these people. And he hadn't liked the answer.

Twelve minutes to go, he noted to himself, before allowing his mind to wander once more.

His attempts to restore Harry's reputation had significant impact in Hogwarts. For the Slytherins, he'd made sure they realised just how sneaky he had been, managing to be the first human ever to enter a Veela enclave unbonded. And how he'd tricked young Miss Delacour and played on her fears to get what he wanted.

With Severus' unfortunate demise, Horace Slughorn had taken over Slytherin House. It had been less than a week later when Horace had informed Albus about Draco Malfoy. The headmaster had followed the boy around for a morning and at the end of it, had called Lucius Malfoy to his office, and had promptly expelled the little shit, snapping his wand with pleasure.

It was the source of more guilt of his that he had always let Severus deal with things, and had simply not realised how bad things were.

Lucius had tried to kick up a fuss, but the headmaster had been playing politics long before Lucius was born, and all he'd done was simply report the threats made to the relevant authorities. And the press. And the combination of the two, along with a quiet word here and there, soon had Lucius in jail for being part of the group that had attacked at the Quidditch World Cup.

With Malfoy and Snape gone, some of the more moderate members of the house had seized their chance. And they had been quietly vocal in their admiration of Harry.

For the Ravenclaws, he'd actually listened to Filius, and not turned the other cheek. Three students were placed on final warnings for bullying and all but one of the Ravenclaw prefects had their badges removed.

For Harry's reputation, he allowed them to know of the research he'd done to escape. And especially about the spells Albus had found to help with his cloak. They were ingenious, and fixed the flaws that he himself had exploited to be able to track Harry.

He hadn't done anything for the Hufflepuffs. He hadn't needed to. Pomona had taken the news that their fundamental first point, that Harry had somehow stolen their glory, was a complete fabrication with shocked dismay.

Everything the Hufflepuffs stood for was suddenly in doubt, and she had simply passed this along, without putting any judgement in it, just the cold hard fact that they had helped in the sanctioned bullying of an innocent boy. One who had left their world because of it.

Diggory had asked if he could forfeit the competition, as he felt he didn't deserve to represent ideals he'd failed at. It was with a small amount of regret that Albus had told him he couldn't, the Goblet wouldn't allow it.

Six minutes were left before the competition started.

For the Gryffindors, the house that had expelled him, he hadn't known what to do. They were within their rights to expel someone, if they thought he was going against their ideals, and Harry had appeared to have been doing so.

In the end, he'd decided to just go with the truth. He had stood with Minerva, and told them to their faces that Harry had not entered himself. Unlike the other houses, the Gryffindors had argued with him.

The Gryffindors had pointed out that the judges had given him low scores. They had in the first task, simply because all Harry had done was ask nicely. That wasn't a bad thing, it was a very clever thing, but in a magical competition, they could not award decent points for something so simple.

For the second task, the rules of the competition were strict. You lost a point for every minute over the time, and Harry had been nine minutes later. Olympe had given him extra points for rescuing the younger Miss Delacour.

It was with the clarity of hindsight that Albus realised that no one had told Harry this. And that was his fault, as the organiser, he should have talked to the boy, especially when Harry had come to him.

It was another of his failings.

He explained that to the Gryffindors, and mentioned that with Harry gone for good, they would need a new Seeker, and then to really hit them where it hurt, he told them that with the exile, they had lost all the points Harry had accumulated, meaning that they were no longer entitled to call themselves the winners of the House Cup for the three previous years.

It was a petty form of revenge, and that had at least caused divisions in their hitherto unified front.

Ronald Weasley had tried to make out that Harry was a coward, for leaving them with Voldemort around.

Albus had looked at the youngest male Weasley, and saw the desperate attempt to avoid the guilt that was building around him. And so, he had simply informed the boy that Harry had not known when he had left, and so could not be called a coward for it. He also pointed out that the boy, who was no longer a Gryffindor, who came from a very long line of Gryffindors, would be the last Potter to be a Gryffindor, and all because he had used a skill to rescue the youngest Weasley from a Basilisk, and then been exiled because of the same skill. But at least they could be happy; Harry would no longer be there to cause problems. He'd paused, before adding his final words, "Or fix them."

After dealing with the students, he'd checked the elves. Under his broad orders not to assist any of the champions – given by him to the head elf – they had been sending his food to his room, because that was what they thought he wanted it.

Dobby, the elf Harry had rescued from the Malfoys, had been utterly devastated by what had happened, and was perhaps the worst off of everyone. He'd been hitting the Butterbeer hard, and every time anyone talked to him, all he could say was that he was a bad elf who had let down the Great Harry Potter sir.

Albus still had not been able to help the elf, but he remained hopeful.

With hindsight, he could see how Harry was completely isolated, and why he'd chosen to throw everything he had into a wonderful escape.

For restoring the rest of the population, Albus had finally stepped on Skeeter, hard, and she'd been forced to admit that she had totally fabricated the article. At the time, in his stupidity, Albus had thought Harry had been lashing out through the paper.

Three minutes to go.

And so, everyone now knew that Harry Potter was innocent and that Harry Potter was gone, for good. And that this event would be the very last time they would see him.

He looked up, as he felt a massive spike of energy that announced one of the portals. He cast a spell, and watched as the first of the Veela squad emerged. He recognised Commander Adler and

his mind flickered back to the almost insolently easy way she had killed Severus. To his regret, it had also been completely legal.

Just why Severus had chosen to attack them, he would never know. All he did know was that it was incredibly stupid and the man had paid for it with his life.

To his surprise, the Veela kept coming, spreading out behind Commander Adler, until he realised that they had sent a phalanx, 120 warriors, with Mr Potter.

He smiled as he caught a glimpse of the boy hidden in the centre. The Veela marched directly to a spot close to the start, and stood, at parade rest; they had left a path for Harry to make his way to the front, which he did.

Albus looked at him closely, and felt some of his guilt ebb away. Harry had gained a few inches in height, and his hair was longer, and sun bleached so it wasn't so dark. It was spiked up, leaving his scar-free forehead clear. He was wearing thin silver framed glasses, and had a small smile of confidence on his face. He was dressed in white trousers and a white shirt, with a dark belt. His shoes were deep blue, and he looked like he'd just stepped off of a boat.

He watched, as Ludo Bagman approached them nervously. The phalanx shifted slightly, and somehow, were suddenly a lot more intimidating. "W-welcome back, Harry," his voice broke as he said it.

Harry said something in the true language of the Veela; none of the Veela responded, but Harry didn't seem bothered in the slightest.

"The object is to get to the centre of the maze," Bagman explained nervously. "The first person to touch the cup wins."

"Rules, are there any? Penalised, I do not want to be, knowledge not knowing the required." It wasn't only the verbal grammar that was wrong with Harry's speech, his inflections were in the wrong place. Albus had the distinct feeling that Harry hadn't spoken any English, at all, since he had left. And more, that he didn't want to.

Albus was amused by the stubbornness of the teenager. He hoped that, when he was older, he'd be able to at least appreciate his heritage.

"N-n, there are no rules. Krum will be first, Diggory one minute later, and Delacour thirty seconds after that. You will be another minutes later. There was a plot to do with the trophy, so we will warn you that the trophy is in no way enchanted."

Harry nodded sharply. "Leave, you may."

Bagman scuttled off, and sounded the bang that had Krum enter in a hurry. He immediately turned left, and headed toward his first challenge. Upon entry, Diggory went straight on, and Delacour took the left.

Albus didn't bother watching their progress, because he truly didn't care.

There was another bang, and Harry stepped forward five steps. None of the Veela offered him support; and he did not look at them for it either.

Harry stood in front of the entrance. "Honour, I reclaim from First Task performance," he stated loudly. Suddenly, a wind whipped up around him, his wand appeared in his hand, and Albus could feel the amount of magic the boy was storing inside him.

There was no leakage, no pyrotechnic display, only the wind gave clue to the amount of power he was gathering. The Aurors near Fudge changed their positions, bracing themselves. The Veela didn't move a single iota.

Albus strained to hear what Harry was saying, the swirling wind making it difficult.

"By the light of the stars powered above,
By the earth of my ancestors, honoured by love.
From the place I live, the home I desire;
In the name of my ancestors, humanity lost in the mire.
Using the power I possess,
This spell I bless.
Reducto!"

The last word was roared out. The blue flash that poured from his wand was not the expected bolt of magic, but a veritable typhoon of magic. The beam hit the start of the maze and blasted through the heavily enchanted branches as if it was tissue paper. The hedge the spell touched simply disintegrated, and every other hedge the spell came in to contact with.

There was complete and utter silence. Albus could see that there was now a direct path straight through the maze, and remarkably, impossibly, almost, the trophy was untouched. Behind it, there was another straight line of nothing leading to a newly formed cave in the hill.

Harry jogged forward, at a reasonably fast pace, and reached the cup in less than fifteen seconds. He cast a spell at it, before he nodded, and grabbed it.

Fireworks were supposed to have been let off by Bagman when the first champion touched it.

Harry jogged back, and as he crossed the entrance line, Albus could see the three heads of the other champions peer carefully around the edges of the new path way.

Harry tossed the cup carelessly at Bagman, and re-entered the Veela phalanx. As one, they turned, and started to march away.

"W-wait," Fudge yelled. "I am the British Minister for Magic!"

The Veela phalanx stopped, and Sophia looked at him. "Well, Minister?" she asked in her monotone voice. "Why are you interrupting an Enclave Mission?"

“The boy, we need him back.”

“There is no boy here.”

Fudge blinked at the immediate response, and Albus allowed himself a chuckle under his breath. Watching the commander was a lot more fun when you were not the target.

“Harry Potter,” Fudge clarified.

“Requests for Enclave citizens must be submitted to the Enclave Council.”

Fudge glowered. “Look, we need him, he’s ours, you don’t want to start something here.”

Albus suddenly felt like he’d been hit in the head with a pickaxe.

And it was only due to the fact that the commander was female that Albus did nothing when she asked nicely if people would stun the Aurors.

The Aurors themselves appeared most eager to stun each other, and less than fifteen seconds later, the pickaxe was removed, and Albus had to suppress a giggle at every single Auror being unconscious, and that Fudge himself had helped stun them.

The Veela phalanx turned as one, and with Harry safely in the middle, they marched away, ignoring the Minister, the Ministry officials, and absolutely everyone else.

And then they were gone.

And all that was left were three scared looking champions, an obliterated path through a maze, fifty unconscious Aurors, and a shocked and fuming Minister.

Albus allowed himself a small chuckle as he looked once more at the devastation. He moved forward, and started to examine the edges of the maze. They were perfectly smooth.

“ProfezzorDumblydoor?” Fleur called. “What ‘appened? What spell could do zis?” The three champions moved over to him.

Shaking his head in awe, Albus replied, “Reducto, my dear.”

“One spell?” Cedric asked. “A blasting curse?”

“Indeed.”

“But ze power, how?”

“I have no idea,” Albus admitted freely. “It was quite marvellous to watch. A feeling of tightly controlled magic, a cantrip, and then the spell.”

“I didn’t think cantrips were used anymore?” Cedric asked. Albus noted that Krum was listening, but not participating.

“Indeed, I shall put a request in to the Enclave Council to find out more.”

“Albus?” Ludo called. “What now?”

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“Well, the champion has left, what about the money? The awarding of the trophy.”

“I believe that the award is meaningless to Harry. And as for the money, it should be sent to the enclave.”

“Oh, yes. I guess.”

“Zis ‘as been a fucked up tournament,” Fleur sighed.

“Yes, it rather has,” Albus agreed. “I don’t think it shall be repeated. Now while I am at Hogwarts, it really rather brought out the worse in us.”

“Professor, as we’re being honest,” Cedric said, “On a scale of one to fucked, how screwed are we, with He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named back, and Harry Potter completely gone?”

Albus allowed himself a small laugh. “We have a Minister that tries to order around a phalanx of Veela Enclave soldiers to force a child to fight for us. I think that anything that happens to a society that elects him as their representative doesn’t need Voldemort to be in trouble.”

“I’m really quite scared now,” Cedric said in a small voice.

“So am I,” Albus agreed.

“What are we going to do, Albus?” Fudge called. Albus turned to face him, they’d managed to get the Aurors awake, although they were looking sheepish.

“Surely your advisors could advise you?” Albus replied. “That is what they draw a ministerial salary for.”

Fudge shook. “That’s not important right now.”

“No,” he agreed sadly, “Your corruption and incompetence rarely is important. It doesn’t really matter what I say to you Cornelius, you’ll simply go back to your office, and take the advice of whatever pure blood has the biggest purse. I’m certainly not going to waste my time.”

“But... But, Albus, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named is out there, trying to get a body back, and Potter is the only one who can stop him!”

“Indeed, he is,” Albus replied, as the answer applied to both statements. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, I shall accompany the champions back, and ensure that everyone leaves the school grounds safely.”

“Blast it, Albus, you’re still Chief Warlock.”

“Not for much longer, I’m resigning that post as well. I will be dedicating my energies to ensuring my legacy at Hogwarts has something to offset the bad decisions I have made this year. While I cannot make up for my actions, I can at least ensure it can never happen again.”

“Albus?” Madame Bones said, speaking for the first time. “For old time’s sake, what would your plan be?”

“Why, I’d round up every Death Eater, pour a truth serum down their throat, find out where Voldemort is, capture him alive, and then very politely request to the Enclave that they allow Harry out to finish him.”

Amelia nodded. “A logical plan. We will discuss it at the next meeting of the Wizengamot.”

“Good luck with that,” Albus replied. He doubted she’d be able to get the plan through. Dark times were coming, and he wanted to help batten down Hogwarts’ hatches.