

Інформація

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Книги

>

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Сохранять

Выживание сильнейших

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Когда на Гарри нападают дементоры перед пятым курсом и говорят, что представители Министерства приедут на Прайвет Драйв, чтобы уничтожить его палочку, он бежит. Он ни за что не позволит кому-либо сломать его палочку. Он должен уйти.

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1. Expelled (2020 Update)

Chapter 1: Expelled

Harry, with Dudley hanging limply over his shoulders, trudged up the garden path to the front door of number four Privet Drive.

Through the little window at the top of the door, Harry could see that the hall light was still on. Hopefully that meant his Aunt and Uncle hadn't gone to bed yet.

Sticking his wand inside the waistband of his jeans, Harry leant Dudley against the doorframe so he could ring the doorbell. He watched as Aunt Petunia's outline grew larger and larger, as she approached the door.

"Diddy! About time too; I was getting quite - quite - Diddy, what's the matter?"

Harry glanced over at Dudley's swaying form propped against the doorway and ducked out from under his arm just in time. Dudley swayed for a moment on the spot, his face ashen and clammy. Then he opened his mouth as if to answer Aunt Petunia and vomited all over the doormat.

"DIDDY! Diddy, what's the matter with you? Vernon? VERNON!"

Harry's uncle came galloping out of the parlour room, as fast as his rotund form could waddle. His walrus-like moustache twitched in agitation, and his face was truly flushed by the time he arrived in the entryway.

Uncle Vernon hurried forward to help Aunt Petunia maneuver a weak-kneed Dudley over the threshold while avoiding stepping in the pool of sick that was seeping into the entryway rug.

"He's ill, Vernon!" Aunt Petunia shrieked.

Uncle Vernon hoisted Dudley a little higher, "What is it, son? What's happened? Did Mrs. Polkiss give you something foreign for tea?"

Dudley's silence and ashen face was their only reply as Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon hauled their son down the hall towards the kitchen.

"Why are you all covered in dirt, darling? Have you been lying on the ground?"

"Hang on - you haven't been mugged, have you, son?"

Aunt Petunia screamed, "Phone the police, Vernon! Phone the police!

Diddy, darling, speak to mummy! What did they do to you?"

In all the kerfuffle, nobody seemed to have noticed Harry, which suited him perfectly as he managed to slip inside before his uncle could slam the front door. He watched as the Dursleys made their way noisily down the hall towards the kitchen, and carefully crept towards the stairs.

As his aunt and uncle sat Dudley gingerly in one of the chairs around the kitchen table, Uncle Vernon gave Dudley a little shake. "Who did it, son? Give us names. We'll get them, don't worry" Uncle Vernon promised as Aunt Petunia fussed.

"Shh! He's trying to say something, Vernon! What is it, Diddy? Tell Mummy!"

Harry was a quarter of the way up the stairs when Dudley finally found his voice.

"Him" he rasped.

Harry froze, foot on the stair, trying to make as little sound as possible. He knew what was coming next and braced for the explosion.

"BOY! COME HERE!"

With a feeling of dread and frustration, Harry slowly climbed back down the stairs and walked towards the kitchen. After years of this, Harry had learnt it was just better to let them yell at him. The punishment was always worse if he tried to run or hide; even if it wasn't his fault.

The scrupulously clean kitchen gleamed as Harry entered. Dudley was sitting at the kitchen table, quivering in his seat while Aunt Petunia ran her long bony fingers through his hair. Clutching Dudley to her chest, Aunt Petunia whispered calming words in his ear as she rocked him back and forth.

Dudley still looked rather clammy and nauseous, so Aunt Petunia's

rocking was only making him look even more ill as he struggled not to throw up the contents of his stomach over the sparkly kitchen tiles.

Uncle Vernon, meanwhile, glared at Harry from where he was standing by the sink with his meaty arms crossed over his chest.

"What have you done to my son, boy?" Uncle Vernon said in a menacing growl as he stormed towards where Harry was standing in the doorway, towering over him threateningly.

"Nothing," said Harry, knowing perfectly well that Uncle Vernon wouldn't believe him.

He was right.

Before Harry could do anything to defend himself, Uncle Vernon seized him by the throat and pinned him against the kitchen wall.

Harry gasped for breath and tried to pry Uncle Vernon's hands from his throat.

"Let me go," Harry wheezed as he struggled to break out of his uncle's grip.

Uncle Vernon's hands only closed tighter around his neck in retaliation, "Now, what have you done to my son, boy?" Vernon demanded as he shook Harry by the neck.

Harry was struggling to breathe, and black spots were starting to cover his vision. Gasping, Harry weakly tried to kick at his uncle. If only he could get Uncle Vernon to loosen his grip just a little so Harry could breathe.

Harry felt one of his kicks connect with his uncle's middle and Uncle Vernon roared in rage. Squeezing his hands even tighter around Harry's throat, Uncle Vernon gave Harry another shake, "I asked you, WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO MY SON, YOU FREAK?!"

The black spots were expanding in size and Harry knew he was seconds

from passing out due to lack of oxygen. In a last-ditch effort, Harry flung out his fists and began feebly beating at his uncle's arm; trying to do anything to loosen his uncle's grip on his throat. However, his Uncle only snarled and squeezed his hands even tighter about Harry's throat.

Harry could faintly hear Aunt Petunia screaming at his uncle to stop, but it seemed like Uncle Vernon was too furious to hear her.

Harry felt the black spots closing in, but just before he lost consciousness, he reached out his fingers towards his uncle and thought 'Reducto'.

From somewhere deep inside him a coil of magic erupted violently.

Suddenly, a sharp pulse filled the air as Uncle Vernon was flung across the kitchen and smashed into the opposite wall.

Harry could hear Aunt Petunia and Dudley's screams as he opened his eyes. The tile floor of what was once Aunt Petunia's pristine kitchen, was now broken up into chunks and scorch marks littered the walls.

"Vernon!" Aunt Petunia screamed in fear as she huddled Dudley tighter to her slight frame, "Vernon, are you alright?!"

Uncle Vernon groaned from his crumpled position on the shattered tile floor and began trying to stand.

Meanwhile, Harry was on the other side of the kitchen, slumped down on the floor, dragging in desperate gasps of air. Relief surged through him.

He was alive. His magic, or something that felt like his magic, had saved him from his uncle.

His uncle who had just tried to kill him...

Looking at his relatives, Harry saw all three of them staring at him in a mixture of fear and hatred, which filled him with a surge of resentment.

He had just saved Dudley's life from Dementors, and in thanks, his uncle had strangled him.

"Nothing," said Harry with a glare in his uncle's direction as he shakily

got to his feet.

"What was that?" Uncle Vernon asked as he too staggered to his feet.

"I said, nothing," Harry repeated. "I did nothing to Dudley other than save his miserable life."

"And you expect me to believe that do you, boy? After what you just did to me?!"

"To be honest? No," Harry snapped, "I knew perfectly well that none of you would believe me. You never have, and I gave up on the idea of you lot being my family a long time ago."

A tense silence settled in the kitchen of number four Privet Drive. Neither Harry nor his relatives seemed to know what to do.

The silence was broken with a resounding shriek as a screech owl swooped into the room through the open window above the sink, narrowly missing the top of Aunt Petunia's head as it soared across the kitchen to perch on the back of one of the dining chairs. Clutched in its beak was a letter addressed to Harry.

With a furious bellow of "OWLS!", Uncle Vernon stormed towards the now startled screech owl, his face turning a blotchy puce in his rage.

Harry dashed towards the owl and snatched the letter, hoping to stop the owl from being strangled by his enraged uncle.

Once Harry had grabbed the envelope, the screech owl quickly flapped its wings in a flutter of feathers and soared back towards the open kitchen window; its talons scratching the top of the fridge in its haste to escape the enclosed space and loud voices in the Dursley Family Kitchen.

With the owl flying off across the garden and out into the night, Harry breathed a sigh of relief only to be stopped by his uncle shouting, once again.

"OWLS! AGAIN! I WILL NOT HAVE ANY MORE OF YOUR

FREAKISHNESS CONTAMINATING THIS HOME! AND THERE WILL BE NO MORE OWLS IN MY HOUSE!" Vernon bellowed as he waddled towards the kitchen window to slam it shut with a resonating BANG.

Meanwhile, Harry was ripping open the parchment envelope and swiftly pulling out the letter inside, his pulse racing frantically as he read the contents of the letter.

Dear Mr. Potter,

We have received intelligence that you performed the Patronus Charm at twenty-three minutes past nine this evening in a Muggle-inhabited area and in the presence of a Muggle. The severity of this breach of the Decree for the Reasonable Restriction of Underage Sorcery has resulted in your expulsion from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Ministry representatives will be calling at your place of residence shortly to destroy your wand. As you have already received an official warning for a previous offence under section 13 of the International Confederation of Wizards' Statute of Secrecy, we regret to inform you that your presence is required at a disciplinary hearing at the Ministry of Magic at 9 A.M. on August 12th.

Hoping you are well,

Yours sincerely,

Mafalda Hophirk

Improper Use of Magic Office

Ministry of Magic

'This can't be happening' Harry thought as he began to read through the letter a second time. As he was reading, he was becoming steadily paler and paler until he reached the end of the letter for a second time.

'This is real. This is really happening', he thought as his brain and body began to become icy and numb. He could vaguely hear his aunt and uncle talking in harsh whispers in the background.

One fact seemed to penetrate Harry's self-induced shock like a bullet to the brain. He was expelled from Hogwarts. It was all over. He was never going to be allowed back. He'll never see his friends or professors again. He'll never get to play quidditch, or hell, argue with that prat Malfoy ever again.

'Maybe they will let me stay at Hogwarts and be Hagrid's assistant,' Harry thought as he remembered the time, back in his first year at Hogwarts when he thought that he would be expelled for saving Neville's Remembrall from Malfoy. His stomach once again twisted in discomfort at the idea of trailing behind Hagrid, carrying his bag. 'Oh, Merlin! What am I going to do?' he thought, 'How will I escape Voldemort if I can't use magic...'

That last thought caused an avalanche within his mind. Ministry representatives will be calling at your place of residence shortly to destroy your wand. That was what the letter had said. There was only one thing that he could do; he would have to run.

'Perhaps I can be on the run with Sirius...' his mind plotted as the severity of the situation slowly sunk in. 'It doesn't matter where I go, as long as I'm not here when they come to destroy my wand.' Because there was one thing that he knew for certain: there was no way in hell he was letting anyone snap his wand. He would die without it; and whether he was at Hogwarts or outside it, he needed his wand if he wanted any chance at surviving another fight against Voldemort.

With these thoughts rushing through his head, Harry sprinted out of the kitchen and into the hall to the sound of Uncle Vernon shouting, "Where do you think you're going, boy?!"

Leaping up the stairs, taking them two at a time, Harry reached his room as he heard his uncle bellow, "I haven't finished with you, boy! Get back

here and explain what you did to my son, you freak!"

Even an outsider could tell that this room either held many secrets or something dangerous by the numerous padlocks and deadbolts on the door and the small cat-flap located at it's base. The cat-flap had been put in by his Uncle in the beginning of the summer before Harry's second year at Hogwarts and it was usually used by his Aunt to push the leftover scraps, through the door for him to eat.

Bolting through the door to his room, Harry began to gather his meagre possessions and stuff them, unceremoniously, into the old backpack that Dudley had gotten for his thirteenth birthday and then had ripped a week later. The backpack had been left in Harry's room the summer before his third year, when Aunt Petunia graciously gave it to him to fix. However, a week later, the backpack had still not been asked for and Harry decided to keep it instead.

Harry first rummaged through the small cupboard in his room, pulling out the few clothes that fit him and stuffing them into the waiting backpack. Harry then rushed over to his broken and slightly crooked desk to retrieve his school books. 'At least this way I will have something to learn, even if I have been expelled,' Harry thought as he scooped up his school books and placed them next to the backpack.

"Bollox" said Harry when he realised that not all of his textbooks would fit inside the small backpack. Then it hit him; he was a wizard; he could use magic.

'I'm such an idiot.' Harry thought as he began shrinking his textbooks and clothes.

Hedwig meanwhile was beginning to buffet the sides of her cage with her wings as she flapped them in agitation, causing her cage to rock back and forth precariously on Harry's desk.

"Yes, I know girl. Just a second," Harry said as he finished packing his, now shrunken school books into the backpack.

"Alohomora," said Harry, unlocking the padlock on Hedwig's cage. "We have to go girl. I've been expelled from Hogwarts. Do you think you could go and stay with Hermione for a little bit?" Harry asked Hedwig as she hopped out from her cage and onto his extended arm.

Hedwig let out a soft coo as she climbed up his arm and proceeded to nibble affectionately on his earlobe.

"Thanks, girl," said Harry, smiling at the understanding Hedwig was showing.

"I really wish I could bring you with me but if I'm going to be hiding from the Ministry, I'll need to hide in the Muggle world. It would probably look a bit odd for an ordinary person to have a snowy owl in the middle of Muggle London." Harry said as he opened the window.

With one last affectionate nibble on the ear, Hedwig was shooting out the window and gliding away into the night. "Goodbye, girl," whispered Harry into the never-ending darkness.

Forcing himself to turn from the window, Harry returned to packing.

Moving over to his bed, Harry dropped to his knees and reached below his bed for the loose floorboards which held his treasures.

From beneath the floorboards, Harry pulled out his father's invisibility cloak, the photo album that Hagrid had given him and a pouch full of galleons. With these treasures in hand, Harry closed his hidey-hole and placed the photo album and galleons in the backpack before zipping it, and slinging it onto his shoulders. He then fastened the invisibility cloak around his neck, avoiding the bruises which were quickly forming there, and pulled the hood of the cloak up over his head, rendering him completely invisible.

Now invisible, Harry silenced his feet with a quick "Silencio" and walked back into the upstairs hallway. His uncle was at the foot of the stairs. He was trapped.

"BOY! GET BACK HERE, THIS INSTANT!" Vernon bellowed up the stairs, not knowing that Harry was only a few metres away, standing at the top of the stairs.

When there was no audible reply to his bellow, Uncle Vernon snarled and began to storm up the stairs, a look of murderous intent upon his face.

Harry knew that while his uncle couldn't see him, he could still run in to him, so as his uncle laboured up the stairs, Harry tucked himself inside the doorway of the bathroom and waited.

"BOY! IF I HAVE TO DRAG YOU DOWNSTAIRS, I WILL THROTTLE YOU TILL YOU SEE STARS!" Uncle Vernon shouted as he thundered past the bathroom door on the way to Harry's bedroom.

With the way free, Harry quietly slipped down the stairs and down the hall to the kitchen. From the hall, Harry could see Aunt Petunia was still fussing over Dudley but she had an anxious look on her face as she glanced upstairs when Uncle Vernon roared in rage.

"THE BOY'S GONE AND VANISHED! HE'S NOT IN HIS ROOM!"

Harry knew he only had a few seconds to get out of the house before his uncle returned downstairs, so with a flick of his wand and a quiet

"Alohomora" the lock on cupboard under the stairs popped open and Harry quickly grabbed his firebolt and threw a "Reducio" at his trunk before popping it in his pocket.

Aunt Petunia must have noticed movement out in the hall because she was soon screaming.

"Vernon! Vernon, the boy's in his cupboard grabbing his things! Hurry, Vernon!"

Harry could hear his uncle thundering back down the stairs behind him as he ran into the kitchen, past his aunt and threw open the back door.

"Mum!" Dudley shouted as he pointed at the sliding door, "The freak's escaping!"

The second he was outside; Harry threw himself onto his firebolt and quickly rose into the air. His heart and head were pounding and it took a while for the adrenaline, which had been pumping through his system, to wane.

For a while he just flew up towards the moon, watching as the lights of Little Whinging faded below him.

When he reached a high enough altitude, Harry began to follow the strip of lights which had to be the motorway. He sighed as the summer night air brushed past him, drying the sour-smelling sweat stuck to his skin.

The hood of his invisibility cloak had slipped back onto his shoulders during the climb into the air so he knew he would have to remain at this altitude so Muggles wouldn't see a floating head.

Harry had no idea where he was going or what he was supposed to do now. All he did know was that out of a choice between a life on the run with his wand, or a life without his wand only to die at Voldemort's hand because he couldn't defend himself... He knew he would choose the life on the run.

Continuing to follow the lights of the motorway, Harry decided to just see where it took him. He was honestly too exhausted and sore to think about where he was going.

Unfortunately, a tired old barn owl named Errol was a few kilometers behind Harry and struggling to keep up. Errol had been tasked with delivering a small roll of parchment to Harry Potter but after being buffeted about by a summer storm, Errol hadn't made it to the boy's

house in time. Now he was stuck frantically flying a behind the boy, trying in vain to deliver a letter which could have prevented all of this. Meanwhile in London, in the depths of the Ministry of Magic, Dumbledore was frantic. However, you wouldn't know it by looking at him. On the outside, Albus looked perfectly calm, his grandfatherly mask firmly in place as he tried to convince Cornelius Fudge, the Minister of Magic, not to snap Mr. Potter's wand, expel him from Hogwarts or send him to Azkaban as the Minister was currently ranting about at the moment.

On the inside however, Albus was fuming.

'You idiotic boy' Albus thought as he tried to calm the Minister. 'How on earth am I going to get you out of this mess?' Albus mentally snarled as he thought of the upcoming battle of wits against the Wizengamot that he would have to face, simply to prevent Harry from being sent to Azkaban.

'The things I sacrifice for the Greater Good.'

## 2. Deadly Dreams (2020 Update)

### Chapter 2: Deadly Dreams

With one hand still holding onto his broom, Harry pulled his wand out from the waistband of his jeans.

"Tempus."

The date and time appeared in front of his wand. It was almost midnight and he had been flying for over an hour now.

Harry had been following the motorway since he left Little Whinging and he could see a lot of light ahead. It must be a major town or city. Harry still wasn't quite sure where he was headed. All he knew was that he needed to fly away - anywhere that wasn't Privet Drive.

He couldn't stay with his relatives anymore; not after his uncle had almost... and well, he wasn't going to stick around and wait for his wand

to be snapped by some Ministry official who didn't care that he had just saved his cousin...

With another world-weary sigh, Harry continued towards the city he could see in the distance. It was getting really late. He would have to find a place to sleep tonight and then he could continue moving in the morning. As he got closer to the city, Harry was forced to squint as a blast of icy wind slammed into his small frame. It may be summer, but he had been flying at a high altitude for almost an hour now and the wind was beginning to make Harry's face hurt. It was beginning to feel like tiny needles were being jabbed into his face with each gust.

The last time Harry had been this cold and sore while flying had been during that horrible quidditch match against Hufflepuff in his third year which had taken place during a thunderstorm. Harry had been flying blind as the rain had pelted against his glasses and his quidditch uniform had been soaked to his skin. Harry had hardly been able to see his teammates let alone the elusive snitch until Wood had called for a time out and Hermione had run over and charmed his glasses with a quick "Impervius!" so that they would repel water. Actually, that was the game he had played against Cedric...

Harry shook his head in irritation. He didn't have time to think about Cedric now. He had to find a place to stay for the night that wasn't so bloody cold. Looking down towards the motorway, Harry's pulled the hood of his invisibility cloak up over his head, tucked his feet close to his body and dove towards the ground. He continued to drop until he was flying only a few meters above the few cars that were on the road.

Glancing at the signs on the motorway, he saw that he was quickly approaching London. Harry wasn't sure if going to London was a good idea or not but at this point, he was too tired. He would sleep on a park

bench if it meant getting some rest at this point. All he needed was a place to sleep that was far away from the Ministry workers that were probably swarming the Dursley's house at that very moment.

Little did he know that it was not employees of the Ministry of Magic that were swarming about the Dursley's house in Little Whinging, but members of the esteemed Order of the Phoenix.

Since entering number four Privet Drive, Alastor (Mad-Eye) Moody had been using his prosthetic eye to scan each of the walls looking for traces of magical residue.

The front door and entryway had looked fine as the harpy-woman shrieked at Albus and tried to stop the rest of the Order members from trailing inside, "You cannot just barge into our home!"

"Now Petunia, we're here to collect Harry and keep him safe," Albus placated. "These are dangerous times after all."

The woman only increased her efforts to shove the rest of the Order back outside, "The boy's not even here anymore! He left! He hurt my poor baby, Diddy-Dumpling and attacked Vernon before exploding my beautiful kitchen!"

Albus didn't look it, but Alastor could tell that this had shocked him.

Albus obviously hadn't expected the boy to have run off.

Ignoring the rest of the conversation between Albus and the Harpy-woman, Alastor walked down the hall towards what looked like the kitchen. As he was walking, Alastor noticed a cupboard tucked into the side of the staircase which seemed to have magical residue on the padlock.

Alastor slashed his wand through the air and the lock fell to the ground.

Opening the cupboard, Alastor saw a worn looking mattress on the floor, broken toy soldiers tucked into corners and drawings tacked to the walls

which claimed this space as 'Harry's Room'. The air smelled stale in the small cupboard, so Alastor reasoned that the 'room' hadn't been used as a bedroom for a while but it still wasn't a good sign.

With a glare, Alastor closed the cupboard. There hadn't been any magical residue inside so obviously the boy had grabbed something from his old room and then bolted.

Continuing down the hall, Alastor entered the kitchen and examined the damage. His prosthetic eye swirling around taking in the residue left behind from the magical explosion. From the cracks in the tiled floor to the angry green sludge-like residue which plastered the walls, it was clear that the epicenter of the explosion had been the wall next to the doorway.

The colour and pattern of the magical residue normally gave an indication of the type of spell that was used, but this green tar-like residue was not familiar to Alastor. The scorch marks and the residue splatter indicated that it had been an explosive spell, but the colour...

"Tonks, get in here," Alastor called into the hallway. "You need to see this."

A few moments later, a young witch with short spiky hair that was a violent shade of violet entered the kitchen, "Wha' did you find, Mad-Eye?" Alastor gestured around the room to the soot marks staining the walls and the cracked tile floor, "Looks like the boy did explode the kitchen but he used a spell I don't recognise."

With an impressed whistle, Tonks examined the room, "Wow. It makes you wonder where he picked up an offensive spell that even you don't recognise..."

"Hmmm," Alastor agreed and continued to look around the kitchen.

"Wait, wasn't his breach of the Decree for the Reasonable Restriction of

Underage Sorcery for the use of a Patronus Charm?" inquired Tonks as she glanced over at Mad-Eye with a baffled look on her face.

"That it was," Alastor confirmed as he examined the human-shaped indent in the wall opposite the epicenter.

Tonks gestured to the room, "I don't know what this was but it sure wasn't a Patronus Charm."

"Correct, not even a failed Patronus causes an explosion," Alastor explained. "This must have happened after the Potter boy cast the Patronus, which begs the question... Why would he go from using a Patronus Charm to then attack his relatives with an explosive spell?"

Tonk's hair turned orange and she glanced up at Mad-Eye in shock, "You don't think Harry did this, do you?"

Alastor turned towards the younger Auror, "His aunt seemed quite sure that it was the boy who attacked her family and exploded the kitchen."

"But is it Harry's magical signature?"

That caused Alastor to pause, because the magical signature in this room did not match the one he had found on the lock to the cupboard under the stairs.

"Mad-Eye? I said, is it Harry's magical signature?" Tonks asked again.

Letting out a frustrated sigh, Alastor responded, "No, it's not, but that only raises more questions like 'who was here?' and 'why did they look enough like the Potter boy to convince his own relatives that it was him?'"

Rocking back on her heels, Tonks looked around the room as if it would magically produce the answers they were looking for, before turning back to Mad-Eye. He was a much more experienced Auror than she was but he was also super paranoid, "Do you think it was someone under Polyjuice, Mad-Eye?"

"No clue, but keep an eye out. This whole place seems off..." Alastor

trailed off as he walked out of the kitchen and into the hall where Albus was still trying to get answers out of the boy's aunt.

"Where's the boy's bedroom?" Alastor interjected gruffly.

The boy's aunt turned to him with a glare, "Will you and your lot leave after you've checked the boy's room?"

"Sure," Alastor conceded. After all, there was no point in lingering. The boy wasn't here and it was clear Albus wasn't getting any answers so once he checked the boy's room, he should know enough to determine what happened.

The harpy-woman roughly gestured up the stairs. "His is the first door on the right. Hurry and check the room and then leave," she hissed like an angry goose.

Alastor brushed past her and her walrus-like husband who was now standing behind her, puffing up his chest to try to look intimidating. All he looked like was one of those giant balloons with baskets that Muggles liked to fly around in.

As he walked up the stairs, Alastor could hear a few Order members following along behind him. About time, in his opinion. Hiding behind Albus as he spoke to the Muggles wasn't helping locate the boy.

"Did you find any clue as to where Harry went, in the kitchen," Remus asked as he followed Alastor.

"Plenty of clues but a lot more questions too," Alastor replied before they reached the door.

A furious snarl came from Remus's throat as he saw the multitude of locks, bolts and the cat-flap installed on the door to Harry's room.

With another slash of his wand, the door seemed to fall off its hinges and topple inwards. Alastor walked forward, vanishing the offending door as he stepped into the room. Glancing around, Alastor saw that the furniture

all looked well-worn and the doors of the wardrobe were flung open with some oversize shirts still inside... but there were no personal items. There were no pictures or posters, books or scraps of parchment. The only thing that proved it was the Potter boy's room was the bird cage resting on the desk filled with foul-smelling owl droppings and a dry water bowl.

Even the tiny cupboard under the stairs had contained drawings and old toys but this room was barren. The boy had either stripped it of all of his personal belongings before he left, or the situation was worse than Alastor had originally thought.

"Are the boy's relatives abusive?" a tall black wizard named Kingsley Shacklebolt asked, only for Remus to let out a snarl which quickly turned into a smothered sob.

Alastor turned to the pair, "All evidence points to neglect and mistreatment."

Remus looked furious but Kingsley simply nodded, accepting Alastor's conclusions.

"There's only magical residue of Reducio, Silencio and Alohomora being used recently in the room and it's all the boy's signature," Alastor continued. "It looks like he packed in a hurry and took what little he had."

Kingsley shook his head, "Why was he living with these Muggles when they clearly don't like him?"

Remus snatched the bird cage from atop the boy's desk, and stormed past Kingsley and Mad-Eye with a defeated snap of, "because he has no one else!"

Following behind the angry werewolf, Alastor and Kingsley walked down the stairs to the entryway where the rest of the Order were waiting.

"So Albus, where do you reckon the boy ran off to?" Alastor asked as they

reached the bottom of the stairs.

"I'm afraid, I am still at a loss Alastor. His relatives do not seem to know where he went," a solemn Albus replied as he walked into the parlor of number four Privet Drive.

"How can you not know?" a furious-looking Remus snarled as he grabbed Albus' arm, preventing him leaving the entryway. "You placed him here. You said he was safe here. You said he was protected here not neglected and mistreated!"

Anyone could tell, just by looking at him, that Remus was taking Harry's disappearance badly. That fact combined with the approaching full moon was causing Remus' furry problem to rear its ugly head more than normal.

"Get a hold of yourself, Remus! For Merlin's sake, calm down," an obviously frustrated Minerva McGonagall snapped. "Albus is trying to find Harry. Once we find him, we can discuss where he will be living in the future," She continued. Minerva could tell that her old student was struggling, however she was even more worried about how Sirius would react when he found out his pup, James and Lilly's son, was missing.

"But where could he possibly have gone?" a curious Tonks asked as she walked into entryway from the kitchen. "The Weasley's said they hadn't heard back from him before we left - maybe he ended up going to the Burrow?"

"As I have just told dear Remus, I am not sure..." Albus replied. "However, I hope that by inquiring further about his whereabouts, his relatives might reveal some clues as to where dear Harry might have run off to," Albus said to the group before, once more entering the parlour of number four Privet Drive to see the Dursley family sitting, squished onto one couch in the corner of the room, looking as if they would rather be

anywhere else.

Seeing the freaks enter his living room, Vernon Dursley, attempted to gain control of the situation, "Now see here! This is completely unacceptable! You've seen the boy's room and now you must leave! You can't just barge into our home, unwelcome and unannounced and expect for there not to be ramifications! I demand that you leave at once or I will be forced to call the police!" Vernon shouted, slowly turning a horrible shade of puce with each passing second.

"Are Muggles normally that colour?" a shocked Dedalus Diggle, inquired to McGonagall in the doorway to the parlour.

"Of course not!" McGonagall snapped at her short and squat colleague, "What a ridiculous question!"

"Oi, no need to get snippy about it! 'Twas only askin' a question" Diggle snapped back. "Who stepped on your tail?" Dedalus mumbled under his breath, not knowing that Minerva had heard every word that he had just said.

"Well, I never!" an offended McGonagall said as she pulled out her wand and began waving it in a complex movement only to stop when her wrist was seized by Alastor.

"Stop it. We've got enough to deal with." Alastor growled under his breath before turning once more to face the living room to watch the tail end of Dumbledore's conversation with the Dursley family. From the looks of things, it wasn't going very well.

"WE DON'T KNOW, NOR DO WE CARE WHERE THAT FREAK OF A BOY HAS DISAPPEARED OFF TOO!" screeched an enraged Aunt Petunia, "AFTER WHAT HE DID TO MY POOR, BABY, DIDDY-DUMPLING, I'M GLAD THE FREAK IS GONE!" she shrilled; getting paler and paler, the more enraged she became.

"I AM GLAD THAT FREAK IS GONE! NEVER AGAIN WILL HE BE DROPPED ON OUR DOORSTOP! NEVER AGAIN WILL WE HAVE TO PUT UP WITH HIS FREAKISHNESS! NOW GET OUT!" Petunia screeched while pointing to the front door.

Members of the Order of the Phoenix, hearing her cruel words were shocked, but an infuriated growl rumbled from Remus's throat as he lunged forwards towards the Dursley's only to be seized by Albus.

The Dursley's looked terrified and silence filled the parlour of number four Privet Drive.

Petunia seemed to be the first to recover. "I suggest you leave now," she said in a cold voice, ignoring the stunned looks on the faces of her family and the members of the Order of the Phoenix. "I will not put up with any more of your kind's nonsense any longer, leave!" Petunia hissed, advancing on the shocked members of the Order. Seemingly, as one, the Order took one step back for the resemblance between Lily and Petunia was now undeniable as Petunia reached a new level of fury, one that the late Lily Potter was famous for.

Pushing through the crowd of shocked onlookers, Petunia barged into the entryway and pulled open the front door. Looking back at the astonished members of the Order, Petunia made eye contact with Albus and said, "I think you have overstayed your welcome. Leave. Now," Petunia hissed, as if daring Dumbledore to do anything but what she had just said.

"I do believe you are correct, my dear," a sombre Albus replied gravely; the ever-present twinkle gone from his eyes. Beckoning to the rest of the Order, and pulling Remus along with him, Albus walked out the door only to turn around once more.

"I do apologise for the inconvenience, but the boy must return again next year. Toodles!" and with that, Dumbledore spun around and strode down

the front path towards the road.

"Albus, the boy cannot return to these filthy Muggles!" McGonagall hissed, trying to catch up to Albus' long strides.

"But he must..." Dumbledore grimly replied and with a sharp "CRACK" he was gone; gone back to the Headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix.

Harry meanwhile had just found the perfect spot to stay for the night. It was three blocks away from Charing Cross Road, where the Leaky Cauldron was located so Harry would be able to sneak into Diagon Alley to get more money from Gringotts if he needed it and it was also far enough away from the Wizarding World that he wouldn't have to worry about being found by Ministry officials.

The place Harry had found was a shabby youth hostel that rented out rooms at cheap prices. According to the signs outside, it was cheap enough that Harry could afford a bed in a shared room with the twenty pound note he had in his money pouch. The only downside, from what he'd seen so far, was that the place was filled with noisy Muggles and a lot of them seemed drunk as they stumbled inside. Taking a risk, Harry followed a loud group into the building.

As the loud group filed into the building, Harry could see that it was around 3am thanks to the little clock above the reception desk.

Unfortunately, Harry didn't have a key to a room, so he was soon alone in the reception of the shabby youth hostel. According to a little sign taped to the front of the desk, reception didn't open until six, so Harry was stuck here for another three hours. He was tired, hungry and cold and at this point in time he wasn't really bothered by the prospect of Ministry officials finding him.

Sitting down in one of the uncomfortable looking chairs in the 'lounge' area, Harry pulled off his invisibility cloak, folded into a small square and

shoved it into the pocket of his jeans. To be completely honest, the hostel looked like a dump. The walls were cracked and the smell of sick was coming from a potted plant in the corner of the room.

Ignoring how rundown the hostel looked, it was actually the perfect place for him to hide for a night. Who would be looking for a runaway wizard in a Muggle hostel? He was sure he would blend in with all the other scruffy adults that stumbled in and out of those doors.

Pulling his backpack onto his lap and opening the first pocket, Harry pulled out a chocolate frog that he had stashed just in case he got hungry. Ripping open the packet and snatching up the jumping frog, mid-air, Harry popped it into his mouth. Chewing on the deliciously sweet chocolate, Harry pulled out the collectible card that came with the frog.

"No bloody way!" Harry smiled. His chocolate frog card was the one card that Ron had been hunting down for years; Agrippa. 'I wonder what his reaction will be when he finds out that I, of all people got it,' thought Harry as he pocketed the card and nodded off to sleep in the uncomfortable reception chair.

Opening his eyes, Harry saw the one thing that he wished with all his heart that he could forget; the Final Task in the Tri-Wizard Tournament. He had been having nightmares about this night since he had left Hogwarts, and no matter what he tried, nothing stopped them.

In front of him, the memory began to play out. A memory version of a younger Harry and Cedric were standing next to each other, looking between each other and the Triwizard Cup.

Harry shouted at his younger self; begging him to shut up and take the Cup for himself, to save Cedric but the scene played on. Harry knew his shouts would do nothing, but he could never just let the scene play out and not try to save Cedric.

As expected, the memory continued to play out the way it had happened and there was nothing Harry could do to stop it or change it. Harry was forced to watch one of his worst memories play out in his dreams.

"Both of us," The younger Harry said, looking from Cedric to the Triwizard Cup.

"What?" the memory Cedric replied.

Watching the memory from the sidelines, Harry sobbed, knowing what was about to happen.

"We'll take it at the same time. It's still a Hogwarts victory. We'll tie for it."

The younger, ignorant Harry egged Cedric on, encouraging him to share what he thought was a victory but turned out to be a bitter defeat for both of them.

"You—you sure?" the memory Cedric questioned.

Being forced to watch this memory over and over the last few weeks had made Harry realise that it was his fault that Cedric was dead. He may not have done the actual killing, but Harry was the reason that Cedric had taken the Cup. If only he hadn't suggested that they share. If only he had seized the Cup in a fit of greed... then Cedric would still be alive.

"Yeah... we've helped each other out, haven't we? We both got here. Let's just take it together."

Harry watched as his younger self and Cedric grinned at one another, happy to be sharing in their victory and ignorant of the pain to follow.

"You're on, come here!" memory Cedric replied with a happy grin on his face.

"Noooo," Harry moaned, as if in physical pain from Cedric's reply. Sobbing his eyes out, Harry wished he didn't have to relive this horrible moment of his life every night.

"On three, right?" memory Harry said and together, like some sick countdown to the moment you die, memory Harry and Cedric counted, in perfect harmony, "One—two - three-"

Harry watched as they were whisked away before he too was pulled into a new scene; the Graveyard where Tom Riddle Sr. Was buried and the place where Cedric would die.

"Where are we?" the memory version of Harry inquired.

Harry couldn't pull his eyes away from Cedric if he tried, so he watched as the boy shook his head, indicating that he didn't know and pulled memory Harry to his feet. "Did anyone tell you the cup was a Portkey?" memory Cedric asked.

"Nope" the memory version of Harry replied, "Is this supposed to be part of the task?"

"I dunno. Wands out, d'you reckon?" Cedric replied, both sounding and looking nervous at the unknown situation.

Harry could only watch as his friend and younger self walked unknowingly towards death.

"Yeah" Harry's younger self replied, "Wait, someone's coming"

At those words and the sight of the approaching figures, the real Harry's sobs grew in volume and shakes wracked his frame, "No, please no, not Cedric, not Cedric..." Harry chanted like a mantra as the robed figures got closer and closer. Then Harry heard the words that haunted him to the core and made his nights unbearable.

"Kill the spare" Harry heard Voldemort whisper in a rasping voice.

"AVADA KEDAVRA!"

Harry watched as Wormtail cast the spell that would change his life forever.

Harry was forced to watch as the blindingly green light sped toward the two younger males until it hit Cedric.

With a wail of agony, Harry watched as Cedric fell to the ground and lay, spread-eagled on the ground beside his younger self. Harry's mind shut down from the pain and nausea that the memory brought forth and watched with

detached, glassy eyes as memory Harry was tied to the gravestone and Voldemort was reborn. Then as Voldemort stepped out of the cauldron and turned to face his younger self, everything faded to black and Harry felt the strangest sensation of being shaken.

### 3. Settling In

Title: Survival of the Fittest

Summary: What if, during Harry's fifth year at Hogwarts, in the face of betrayal, torture and deceit, Harry embraced his Slytherin side? Would he have started Dumbledore's Army? Would he have let his rage and loneliness consume him? Or would he transform into something terrifying and beautiful...

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter because if I did, Ginny would have died in the Chamber of Secrets, Dumbledore would be either dead or in Azkaban Prison (preferably prison... I want to see him SUFFER!), Harry wouldn't be as naive and Ron would not be Harry's friend. Sorry folks if you do like these characters but I don't. However you need not worry, I won't kill them off... no I might make their lives miserable instead!

A/N: All right people, here is the deal. I have no problem with constructive criticism because it makes me a better writer. However, that doesn't mean that your reviews can be cruel. If you post a bad review, at least give the common courtesy of doing it under your own name so that I can explain why I wrote what I did. Otherwise, if you don't like reading it, just stop, no one is making you read this.

Ok, mini-rant over! Time to get back to Survival of the Fittest!

-Marcielle-

"Speaking" - Normal Conversation

Previously in Survival of the Fittest:

With a wail of agony the real Harry watched as Cedric fell to the ground and

lay, spread-eagled on the ground beside his younger self. Harry's mind shut down from the pain and nausea that the memory brought forth and watched with detached, glassy eyes as memory Harry was tied to the gravestone and Voldemort was reborn. Then as Voldemort stepped out of the cauldron and turned to face his younger self, everything faded to black and Harry felt the strangest sensation of being shaken.

#### Chapter 4: Settling In

"Hello... child, are you alright," a concerned motherly voice sounded through Harry's nightmare. The strange voice was followed, once more, by the sensation of being shaken.

Mrs. Hudson was a curious creature. She was the landlady of the youth hostel that Harry had found in the middle of the night. Normally she could sleep through any of the noises that the young, rambunctious teenagers and young adults made around her, but this particular night she woke with a start, earlier than usual. Turning her head to the side to look at the glowing numbers of her alarm clock, she sighed, it was four o'clock in the morning. She didn't need to wake until five so with another sigh of frustration at the lack of sleep she was destined to get, Mrs.

Hudson turned back around and snuggled up to her husband, Mr.

Hudson, to stare at the ceiling until it was time for her to get up.

Mrs. Hudson and Mr. Hudson had met just over fifty years ago during the London Blitz. Mrs. Hudson had been barely sixteen when she was employed, part-time, as a nurse; tending the wounded and making bandages. Meanwhile Mr. Hudson had been a young military man, barely eighteen when he had been hit with debris during one of the air raids.

While in hospital they had fallen madly in love and when World War II was over they returned to their families announcing that they were going to be married, much to their parent's delight.

A few weeks after the marriage, the newlywed Mr. And Mrs. Hudson had bought the building that was now the youth hostel, intending it to be a five-star hotel. Needless to say their dreams of grandeur never happened and with Mr. Hudson being sterile from his accident during the War, Mrs. Hudson never got any children. However, when they converted their bed and breakfast into a youth hostel, Mrs. Hudson got her wish; she was now completely surrounded by children.

But Mrs. Hudson was now, lying awake, staring at the ceiling when she heard a pained moan coming from outside the window closest to the street which she had left open to get the night breeze into the room to clear out the stifling humidity of the London summer that had accumulated over the course of the day. Sitting bolt-upright in bed Mrs. Hudson heard the noise again. It sounded like an animal in pain but then she heard the sobs. 'Animals don't sob,' Mrs. Hudson thought as she scrambled out of bed and threw on her bathrobe.

"Howard! Get up Howard! Someone's outside! They sound like they're in pain..." Mrs. Hudson whispered to her husband kneeling on the bed as she leaned over to his side of the bed and shook him awake.

"Huh? Waz goin' on?" Mr. Hudson mumbled groggily as he awoke.

"Come on Howard and grab the medicine kit!" Mrs. Howard frantically whispered as she opened the door to their bedroom and scrambled into the hallway that leads to the front door. Looking out the peep-hole in the door, Mrs. Hudson saw a young man sleeping on the doorstep, sobbing his eyes out while clutching his backpack to his chest like a lifeline.

"Oh, you poor thing!" said Mrs. Hudson as she unlocked the door and dashed outside to kneel beside the sleeping teenager. Gently, Mrs.

Hudson reached out and clutched the child's shoulder and shook it,

"Come on, darling wake up," She crooned, "Hello child, are you alright?"

Mrs. Hudson continued though when no response was given her worry increased tenfold. The child was unnaturally warm, as if he had a fever, even though, in the cool night air, the boy should have been frozen.

"Let me through, Margret," said Mr. Hudson as he lumbered through the front door. As Mrs. Hudson stepped back from the boy, Mr. Hudson stepped forward and kneeled down to pick up the boy that they had found on their doorstep. Little did they know that this was the second time in his short life that Harry had been found asleep on a doorstep.

"Let's get the kid into one of the spare rooms. Then we can see what's wrong with the lad," grunted Mr. Hudson as he lifted the sleeping Harry into his arms and began carrying him up the stairs to the front door and into the youth hostel. Once inside, Mr. Hudson whispered to his wife, "What rooms are empty, honey?" as he began to carry Harry down the hall and up the stairs with his wife trailing behind them carrying the medicine kit.

This was not the first time that one of the people staying at their hostel had shown up, bruised and battered or struck with fever. Each and every one of the 'children' that stayed with the Hudsons at their hostel was always well taken care of and doted upon by Mrs. Hudson.

"Room number seven is empty, but all the others are full, honey. It is the summer holidays, are you surprised," Mrs. Hudson remarked, fiddling with the latch on the medicine kit, as she reached the landing on the first floor. The youth hostel was equipped with living quarters for the Hudson family, a common room on the ground floor and upstairs there were seven rooms available. Rooms one through to three were on the second floor, four through six were on the third floor and Room number seven was the lonely room up in the attic next to the Hudson's storage room. All of the rooms, one through seven, were clearly labelled with a brass

numberplate on the door and were furnished with a bed, bedside table, wardrobe and a small bathroom and all of the rooms were lockable by key. In Mrs. Hudson's opinion it was perfect and homey.

Climbing up two more sets of stairs, huffing and puffing all the while, Mr. Hudson carried the sleeping teenager up to the attic to the door of room number seven. "You got the keys, love? 'Cause I've not got them," Mr. Hudson wheezed to his wife.

"Oh! Yes, yes, I've got them," said Mrs. Hudson as she bustled up to the door and swiftly unlocked it with a flourish. "Just set him down on the bed and then we'll see what's wrong with the poor darling," Margret Hudson whispered to her husband as she moved silently into the room to pull back the covers on the single bed.

Moving slowly into the room, Mr. Hudson carefully placed the young boy on the bed, cautious not to bump any unknown injuries that the boy might have. Over the years, the Hudsons had seen their fare share of runaway teenagers, thinking that they could blend in and not be noticed in a youth hostel. The Hudsons, over time, had learned to turn a blind eye to the fact that they were runaways and not question the children that passed through, because they all usually had good reasons to run, guessing from the bruises that generally covered them when they arrived.

"Do you think it's another one, Margret?" Harold whispered to his wife as he tucked in the child and placed his backpack next to the bedside table, not daring to look at the contents. Like some of the other abused children that Harold had seen, this one was short and looked malnourished and knowing Margret the way he did, he knew that she would fuss over this one as soon as he woke.

"God, I hope not..." she trailed off as she moved from her place beside the bed and went to stand with her husband, "did you see any injuries?"

she whispered, clutching her husband's hand like a lifeline. Mrs. Hudson had been hoping that the previous abused teenager that had passed through would be their last. Her name was Helen and she had been raped by her step-father and had run away. This was last year in October and Mrs. Hudson still received letters from the young girl. These poor abused children broke her heart and Mrs. Hudson, like always, was there to help them get back on their feet and enter a new life.

"Not any that I could see... other than the obvious growth problems caused from malnutrition..." mumbled Mr. Hudson as he wrapped his arm around his wife in an attempt to comfort her. "Why don't we just leave the medicine kit up here, so that when he wakes up he can use it if he needs it? And you can bring breakfast to him in the morning and try to get a story out of him, like you always do." Mr. Hudson said while guiding his wife out of the room but before he left he reached into the bedside table and pulled out a notepad and pen that were stashed inside the drawer.

Welcome to the Hudson's Youth Hostel,

We found you on the doorstep and brought you up here to room number seven. I hope it is to your liking. Mrs. Hudson, the landlady and my wife, will be up shortly with a breakfast for you. Feel free to make use of the bathroom and the medicine kit if you are in need of it.

-Mr. Hudson-

p.s. my wife will likely make a fuss over you because of where she found you and at what time she found you.

With the short note written, Mr. Hudson dropped the spare key to the room next to the note on the bedside table and followed his wife out of the room, closing the door behind him as quietly as possible.

"Do you think the poor boy will be alright? What if the poor boy is struck

by a fever during the night?" Mrs. Hudson worried as her husband led her down the stairs to entryway and into their rooms.

"I'm sure he will be fine, darling. Now get some rest, we have a big day ahead of us tomorrow." Mr. Hudson whispered to his wife as he climbed back into their bed and turned off the light.

"I suppose you're right..." Mrs. Hudson replied and soon, she too was fast asleep.

Meanwhile at the Headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix...

"I have called you all here in the wee hours of the morning for a very important meeting." Albus Dumbledore announced to the group of witches and wizards that sat at the enlarged kitchen table of number twelve, Grimmauld Place.

As he spoke, a wave of silence spread across the room as all chatter ceased and everyone gathered gave Albus their undivided attention; every single face staring up at him from their seats in anticipation. After all, it wasn't every morning that an emergency meeting of the entire Order of the Phoenix is called at five o'clock in the morning. In fact this was one of the first meetings where every single member was present.

"Unfortunately, this meeting, as some of you may have already guessed, has not been called for any happy occasion. No, regrettably, this meeting has been called to inform you of the loss of one Harry James Potter."

Albus continued, a solemn look upon his face and his trademark eye-twinkle gone from sight.

Whispers and bursts of conversation started at his statement but the most audible was the resounding "WHAT?" that was furiously barked out by the shadowy figure leaning against the doorway, "You mean to tell me that Harry, James' SON, is MISSING?" the figure roared as he pushed of the doorway and slammed his hand on the table with a reverberating,

"BANG!"

"Yes, I am truly sorry, but he has completely disappeared." Albus calmly replied from his place at the head of the table as he watched the enraged man with a contemplating and calculation gleam in his eye.

The members of the Order of the Phoenix who were sitting at the kitchen table stared between the two figures with wide eyes, shocked at both what Dumbledore had told them and the figure's response.

"Sorry? You're SORRY?" the figure roared, his long curly black hair whipping around his head in his rage, "Sorry doesn't bring my godson back, you old FOOL!" the figure continued to shout across the table at Albus, spittle flying across the room at an alarming speed and hitting the Order members that were in range.

"Calm down, Sirius. Screaming at me won't bring Harry back." And with that Dumbledore turned back to the sitting members of the Order of the Phoenix and proceeded to ignore the furious form of Sirius Black.

"However, what will bring him back will be the combined efforts of you, the valued members of this honourable organisation." Dumbledore continued, "I propose that teams of two or three search the most likely places that Harry will go; these places namely being, Diagon Alley, the Leaky Cauldron, the Burrow, Hogsmeade and Hogwarts."

While naming each of these places Dumbledore looked each and every Order member in the eye, except Sirius who was fuming in the doorway.

His pup was MISSING! And Dumbledore had let it happen!

"We need to find him... or the consequences could be dire..." Dumbledore concluded, sitting down at his seat at the head of the table once more, silence following his words.

One thing was for certain; it was going to be a long, tiresome search for the famous boy-who-lived...

A/N: I know that the last two chapters seemed like fillers but they were necessary fillers because without them Harry could not have gotten to where I plan for him to go. This transformation process is very necessary because I refuse for my Harry to be canon one second and some 'Super Sneaky Slytherin' the next. This is going to be a very long fanfiction and I ask for you to bear with me. I know that Harry didn't actually say anything this chapter but he will in the next, I assure you!

This chapter was fun to write. I enjoyed properly introducing the Hudson family and I hope you, my readers enjoyed this chapter of Survival of the Fittest. Remember, my lovely readers... Review... Review...Review! - The ghost of Chapters Past compels you...

-Marcielle-

#### 4. A New World

Title: Survival of the Fittest

Summary: What if, during Harry's fifth year at Hogwarts, in the face of betrayal, torture and deceit, Harry embraced his Slytherin side? Would he have started Dumbledore's Army? Would he have let his rage and loneliness consume him? Or would he transform into something terrifying and beautiful...

Disclaimer:

Harry: "She does not own us..."

Voldemort: "But she wishes she did..."

Marcielle: "Who is this SHE that you speak of? It better not be me..."

Harry: "Run!... Voldy, why aren't you running?"

Voldemort: "She is the overlord of evil... she will let me win if I'm a good slave..."

Harry: "You're hopeless..."

Marcielle: "I make no money from this fanfiction and unfortunately I am

not J.K. Rowling."

A/N: This will be my longest chapter yet! I am determined for this chapter to be the best one that I have written, also! Thank you, to all of my readers who added Survival of the Fittest to their favourites and to those who reviewed, you are oh so kind.

To the 'Cruel Reviewer' who said that it was summer... Why thank you, but I am not completely ignorant. I do know that it was summer but I also know that as altitude increases, temperature decreases... and in case that this hasn't convinced you, you might want to consider reading the fifth book again (chapter three to be specific). Now to the rest of you, my lovely yet impatient readers, here is Harry in Survival of the Fittest!

p.s. This will be a LONG fanfiction. Nothing will happen instantaneously which means that Survival of the Fittest will be similar to canon for a while. However it will change, you just have to be PATIENT!

I intend for Harry's transformation to be realistic and believable. This means that he won't suddenly go 'poof' and have super powers and be super cunning and smart... that just doesn't happen. These things take time, so I ask you to be patient.

-Marcielle-

"Speaking" - Normal Conversation

'Speaking' - Thoughts

\$Speaking\$ - Parseltongue

Previously in Survival of the Fittest:

"We need to find him... or the consequences could be dire..." Dumbledore concluded, sitting down at his seat at the head of the table once more, silence following his words.

One thing was for certain; it was going to be a long, tiresome search for the famous boy-who-lived...

## Chapter 6: A New World

Waking up from his nightly horror, Harry opened his eyes to the unfamiliar site of a strange room, "Huh?" Harry groggily mumbled as he opened his eyes ever wider in alarm, "How did I get here?" said Harry in his shock as he stared around the attic room, "The last thing I remember is falling asleep on the doorstep of the youth hostel..." Harry trailed off as he noticed the note and the key lying innocently on the bedside table. Sitting up in the bed and propping up the pillows against the wrought iron bed-head Harry picked up the letter from the bedside table and began to read:

Welcome to the Hudson's Youth Hostel,

We found you on the doorstep and brought you up here to room number seven. I hope it is to your liking. Mrs. Hudson, the landlady and my wife, will be up shortly with a breakfast for you. Feel free to make use of the bathroom and the medicine kit if you are in need of it.

-Mr. Hudson-

p.s. my wife will likely make a fuss over you because of where she found you and at what time she found you.

Harry was alarmed that they had brought him inside, carried him to the room and given him a place to stay... He thought that most people would have called the police.

Placing the letter down on the bedspread, Harry resumed his inspection of his surroundings. The room was sparsely furnished and the room had a tired feeling to it but the old looking furniture that was in the room looked well used and homely and gave the room a welcoming feeling.

Inside the room there was a comfortable wrought iron bed with a colourful patchwork quilt that was currently wrapped around Harry as he inspected his new surroundings like a fox peeking out of its den. At the

end of the bed was a fluffy throw-blanket that Harry supposed was there in case he got cold during the night. Next to the cosy and warm single bed that was tucked against the slanted attic wall was a modest bedside table which, in Harry's opinion, looked to be made of oak and at the foot of the bed was another piece of oak furniture, a chest that was covered in simple yet ornate carvings.

Across the room, in between the door to the hallway and another door which Harry assumed led to a bathroom, was a large, highly polished oak wardrobe that featured two mirrors on the doors and polished brass handles. In the room, there was only one window that was next to the small bedside table and Harry guessed it was the cause of the small rays of light that filtered through its grimy panes that had woken Harry from his nightmare. This dormer window jutted out from the main walls looked just as dirty as the other windows that Harry had spotted from the street last night but surprisingly the window featured a comfortable looking window seat that was covered in strategically placed cushions in bright patchwork covers which Harry thought was to make it look inviting, it did.

However, other than the window next to the bedside table, there were no other windows in the room and the only other source of light was the lamp on the bedside table. Strangely, other than the missing fireplace, this room reminded Harry of his room at the Leaky Cauldron that he had stayed in before his third year at Hogwarts when he had run away from the Dursleys after blowing up his Aunt Marge.

The similar surroundings brought a smile to Harry's face, 'I guess I found a place to stay then...' he thought happily.

Taking a final glance at the note, Harry wondered when the landlady, Mrs. Hudson, would be coming up with a breakfast for him, as had been

mentioned in the note. As he placed the letter back on the bedside table beside the old-looking iron key, Harry peeked at his watch. The glowing numbers informed him that it was still early, only five minutes to six, 'I wonder if I have time for a shower before Mrs. Hudson arrives,' thought Harry as he contemplated the time.

Climbing out of the warm bed, Harry shivered. The wooden floorboards were icy on his bare feet and Harry was forced to battle the urge to scramble back into the lovely warm bed. Once he had resisted the urge, Harry reached down to pick up his backpack that was leaning against the legs of the bedside table and pulled the zipper for the main pocket where he had placed his shrunken clothing. Rummaging through the contents of his backpack, Harry pulled out a set of clothes that, in his opinion, matched; a pair of faded, washed-out jeans, a pair of boxer shorts and an emerald-green t-shirt that Hermione had gotten for him last summer for his birthday.

With the clothes in hand, Harry walked calmly into the tiled bathroom through the door to the right of the wardrobe. Hissing from the chill of the tiles, Harry swiftly walked to the shower, reached inside and turned the hot tap. As the hot water sprayed from the showerhead, steam wafted up and surrounded Harry who, while closing the door to the bathroom, had found a fresh towel hanging from the hook on the back of the door. Now with the door closed Harry proceeded to undress and stepped into the spray.

"Mmmmm" he sighed as the warm water beat against his muscles, relaxing them until Harry felt like he wouldn't mind sitting in the shower forever.

The last time that Harry had experienced such a hot shower was when he was back at Hogwarts during the last few weeks of his fourth year. The

Dursleys never allowed Harry to have a long shower with icy cold water, let alone a hot one.

The hot water was heavenly as it ran through his hair and down his back. Harry stood under the hot spray for another minute before he began his search for some soap to wash himself with. However, his search did not take long, for Harry found the soap in the dish next to the sink and with an extension of his arm and a reach over the toilet; the elusive soap was in his grasp. As Harry began to lather himself with soap he heard a knocking from outside the bathroom.

"Just a minute," he shouted as he rinsed off the suds and reluctantly stepped out of the shower onto the bathmat and wrapped the dark blue towel, hanging from the door, around his waist. With the towel secured Harry opened the bathroom door and walked across the room, picking up his wand along the way that he had left innocently on the bed and tucked it into the folds of the towel at the small of his back.

'You can never be too cautious' he thought while opening the main door to reveal an elderly woman, dressed in a blue dress and skin coloured stockings that seemed to be from another age with her gray hair tightly braided. The woman, who was holding a tray with a plate of toast, eggs and sausages, smiled brightly at him as he opened the door her wrinkles disappearing from her face as she smiled.

"Hello darling, it is good to see you up and about" the woman said as she bustled into the room, brushing past Harry and deposited the tray onto the wooden chest at the end of the bed on the far side of the room, not even blinking at the state of undress her new charge was in.

It was only then that Harry realised that he was almost completely naked in front of the elderly woman, who he assumed was Mrs. Hudson, the landlady. Realising this, Harry blushed a bright red and scrambled to

retrieve the t-shirt that he had placed at the end of the bed. "I'm sorry for not being dressed properly," Harry mumbled as he frantically pulled the shirt over his head, his face still as red as the Weasley family's hair.

"Not to worry, darling. It would not be the first time I've seen a man, naked, wandering these halls," Mrs. Hudson chortled as she scuttled over to the window and wrenched it open letting in the warm, summer morning air. "I hope you slept well," she continued as she walked into the bathroom and brought out the medicine kit that Harry had caught a glimpse of while he had been searching for the soap.

Placing the kit on the bed she finally stopped moving and turned to face the bemused Harry who was standing, still, at the door watching her as she flew into the room like a cyclone, picking up things and dropping off others as she moved about.

"Now, darling would you like to tell me what you were doing on the front doorstep at three in the morning?" she questioned, a stern look on her motherly face.

Harry's thoughts were a blur. What could he possibly tell this kind Muggle woman that didn't involve magic in the explanation?

'Why don't I just tell a partial truth? After all, they always say that the best lie is based on a partial truth,' Harry thought frantically, wondering about what he was going to tell the kind woman who had taken him in for the night when she needn't have.

"My Aunt and Uncle kicked me out of the house and I really didn't have anywhere else to go..." Harry said, angling his head down so that he appeared ashamed and depressed by having to tell her this but at the pitying sounds that Mrs. Hudson was making Harry was overjoyed on the inside.

'It's working! Thank Merlin I'm such a good actor,' Harry happily thought,

smirking at his success on the inside.

"Oh, you poor thing! Well, you are welcome to stay here until you get back on your feet," said Mrs. Hudson with a sympathising look on her face.

However at her words Harry began to feel guilty, 'I'm not so low that I would take advantage of this woman's kindness... am I?' thought Harry, his mood darkening with guilt.

"Wait!" Harry said suddenly, "I have money! I can pay for my lodgings and the food too" Harry continued glancing back at the freshly prepared breakfast that she had kindly prepared for him. He may be lying to her about his circumstances but he wouldn't let her and her kind husband be disadvantaged financially because of him.

"Are you sure darling? Rooms here are quite expensive for someone your age; 35 pounds a night. Are you sure you can afford it?" She said with a concerned look on her face while wringing her hands on the edges of her dress as if worried that he might not be able to afford it.

In response to her concern Harry's mind was jumbled because it would be so easy just to accept her kindness, and not pay for his lodgings, 'She is too kind... I can't take advantage of such kindness, even though it would immensely benefit me... It's not fair to her or her husband when all they have done is take care of me' thought Harry, making up his mind.

"No, I assure you, I can pay for my room," Harry said quickly, trying to reassure her, "Here, let me pay you for last night and this wonderful breakfast this morning," Harry said with a smile while reaching into his backpack that he had placed on the bed after retrieving his clothes and pulled out the small amount of money he had on him.

However, while extracting the twenty pound note from the pouch of wizarding money, Harry's expression fell, he couldn't give her Galleons to

pay for the rest. "I'm sorry, but I only have twenty pounds on me now but I will have more once I can go to the bank..." Harry confessed, looking bashful.

If there was one thing that he had learnt from his time in the Wizarding World, it was that; knowing just how to act in a situation could easily manipulate anyone into believing you and in this situation he desperately needed the landlady to believe him.

Guiltily, Harry remembered the many times that he had used his acting skills on Mrs. Weasley. He did love her for her kindness but Mrs. Weasley was one of the easiest people he had ever met to convince of almost anything. All it took was a well placed smile or a bashful and pathetic look and most women, Harry had found over the years, could not resist babying him because of his green eyes and short stature.

'I guess the Dursleys were good for something over the years then,' Harry sardonically thought before he was brought back to his conversation with the kind landlady by her reply.

"That's alright darling," Mrs. Hudson replied, once more with a smile on her face, "The room and food is free for you today darling. If you wish to stay longer you can pay us once you get back from the bank. Is that alright?" she asked; the concerned, motherly look back on her face.

"Yes, that's perfect," Harry said with an easy-going smile plastered on his face. 'This is just too easy' he thought as Mrs. Hudson turned to leave.

And with a final "feel free to ask my husband and I for anything, sweetie." Mrs. Hudson said, popping her head through the door and just as she was about to close the door, she opened it again with a flourish, "Oh, and before I forget, the rent is collected on Tuesdays. That gives you three days," and with that final comment she was gone, the door closed silently behind her in her bustle down the stairs.

Silence filled the room...

Harry was struck, both by Mrs. Hudson's sudden appearance and her sudden departure. 'Does she ever slow down?' Harry wondered silently to himself and he flopped onto the bed. 'It's far too early to be doing this...' he thought as he lay back down against the bedspread, ignoring the wet patch that his hair was making as it was slowly absorbed into the quilt. Harry's emotions were all over the place. He felt guilty for deceiving Mrs. Hudson when she had only been kind to him, but really he didn't have a choice... It's not like he could tell her what really happened and if his acting abilities helped him to get this amazing place to live and hide from the Ministry officials that were after him; well, he wasn't going to feel guilty. With these thoughts Harry allowed himself to relax on the bed, "I'm free..." he whispered with joy.

Harry basked in the feeling for a few more minutes, just staring at the ceiling until he forced himself to get up and continue getting dressed. He had a big day ahead of him. As he dressed he thought about all the things that he had to get done today, 'First I have to somehow sneak into Diagon Alley, get to Gringotts unnoticed and convert some Galleons to pounds for food and rent in the Muggle world,' Harry thought as he pulled on his jeans and pushed his feet back into his sneakers that were lying next to the bed.

'I also need to get a second wand that isn't registered with the Ministry' thought Harry as he sat down on the bed and crawled down to the end of the bed to pick up the breakfast tray from on top of the chest and pull it into his lap.

As he stared at the food hungrily all Harry could think was 'yummm' and he dug into the food with gusto. Picking up a piece of toast he shovelled it into his mouth, relishing the taste. Soon the soft boiled egg was peeled

and swiftly devoured along with the other piece of toast. Finishing the meal, Harry gulped down the orange juice and licked his lips.

"I could get used to this," Harry said in satisfaction as he patted his comfortably full stomach with a pleased sigh.

As he placed the tray back on the chest at the end of the bed Harry said to himself, "I should really write this down so I don't forget anything." So, reaching into his backpack Harry pulled out a spare piece of parchment that he had packed so he could send letters. Once a scrap of parchment was torn off Harry began to make his list, using the bedside table to write against.

To Do List

Sneak into Diagon Alley

Get to Gringotts and take out enough Galleons to go shopping (wand, books, other stuff that interests me) and enough Muggle money for food, rent, clothing ect.

Find out What's Happening in the Wizarding World (Knowledge is Power - Sientia est Potentia)

Go shopping for said items.

Avoid the Ministry

Figure out what I'm going to do about my education (expelled, now what?)

Re-evaluate my life...

Seven things... "Well, they always say that seven is a magic number...

maybe this will make me lucky," said Harry to himself as he completed the list and looked it over for a second time to make sure that he hadn't missed anything, he hadn't.

With the list completed Harry popped it and the key from the bedside table in his pocket, shrugged on his backpack containing all of his worldly possessions onto his back, stuck his wand in the waistband of his

jeans, placed his folded up invisibility cloak in his back pocket and stepped out into the world.

Meanwhile in Dumbledore's office at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry another meeting was taking place just hours after the Order of the Phoenix meeting that had taken place in the early hours of the morning. However, this meeting was far more secretive in nature than the Order meetings could ever possibly hope to be and was between two very likeminded individuals; Severus Snape the sly and cunning potions master for Hogwarts and Albus Wulfric Brian Dumbledore the manipulative and sly Headmaster of Hogwarts, Grand Sorcerer, Chief Warlock, Supreme Mugwump and a holder of a whole lot of other positions that he had abused over the years for the 'Greater Good'.

You see, these two men were very alike though they would never admit it and currently they were talking about a poor orphan boy of barely fifteen years, who had run away from his home... his name was Harry Potter.

"What are we going to do Albus?" Severus snarled as he paced across the room in front of Dumbledore's desk, of which he was currently sitting at, "The boy has run away and you barely just stopped the Minister from sentencing the boy to a one way ticket to Azkaban. Why couldn't he have just stayed put like he was told? No, he had to go act the idiotic Gryffindor and run away!" Severus continued to rant, while wearing a hole into the carpet as he strode back and forth in his agitation.

"Calm yourself, Severus" Albus chided, "Now is not the time to be angry. We need to be thinking of ways to find him and return him to Headquarters safe and sound," said Albus as he placed his hands, calmly on his desk, one hand on top of the other.

"I thought that you already stationed people in the most likely places that the boy would go? Do you suddenly believe that he won't show up?"

Severus questioned; a puzzled look on his face as he finally stopped his pacing.

"You know full well that I have." Stated Albus, his serene mask slipping slightly to reveal a hint of irritation, "What I am worried about is that he may have gone into hiding in the Muggle world." Albus continued, his calm mask, once more in place, "For, no matter how much we search it would be extremely unlikely that the Order would have any chance of finding him if that is what he has decided."

"So the brat actually may have some intelligence after all then..." Snape pondered sarcastically, "unlike his miserable oaf of a father, I suppose..." Severus trailed off, sinking into his thoughts.

"Really, all we can do is wait, and hope for the best," said Albus as he leaned back in his chair and continued his contemplation of the current situation.

A/N: Are you happy, my lovely readers. You got Harry, Snape and Dumble-whore in this chapter!

This chapter was long and took me quite a while to write due to family issues, so I apologise for the lateness of the update. Nonetheless, I hope you enjoyed reading this chapter of Survival of the Fittest! I am so looking forward to the next chapter! I get to write about Diagon Alley, my favourite place in the entire wizarding world!

I know majority of you don't like the short chapters but they are much easier for me to write on a nightly basis. So really it is your choice:

Short chapters but updated more frequently

OR

Longer chapters but updated less frequently

The content will be the same but it really depends on how you, my readers, want it because I don't really mind. Tell me what you think in a

review and the choice with the most votes will be what I will end up doing. Thanks for reading!

-Marcielle-

## 5. Gringotts Wizarding Bank

Title: Survival of the Fittest

Summary: What if, in the summer before Harry's fifth year at Hogwarts, he decided to run away after the Dementor Attack... and in order to escape capture by both the Ministry and the Order he embraced his Slytherin side? After all, Sytherins are not only known for their sly and cunning nature but also their strong sense of self preservation.

This is a story of a Harry who made a few different choices than the original canon Harry and the impact that these choices on his mindset and his overall outlook on his life in the wizarding world. So then, how will this new Harry react when faced with slander, hate and oppression as the Ministry of Magic slowly takes over Hogwarts?

Disclaimer: If by know you haven't realised that I am NOT J.K. Rowling (even after constant disclaimers stating otherwise...) then you probably should just stop reading now.

A/N: I know it has been a while since I last updated this fanfiction but once again life, final exams, graduation and work intervened and it is only now that I have had a moment to compile my random scribbling from my notebook and fashion it into a 'Thank You' chapter of sorts. So to all those who stood by patiently waiting for me to update Survival of the Fittest without flooding my mailbox with demands as to why I haven't updated yet... Thank You. And, without further adieu, I give you, Chapter Seven of Survival of the Fittest!

Previously in Survival of the Fittest

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Seven things... "Well, they always say that seven is a magic number...

maybe this will make me lucky," said Harry to himself as he completed the list and looked it over for a second time to make sure that he hadn't missed anything, he hadn't.

With the list completed Harry popped it and the key from the bedside table in his pocket, shrugged on his backpack containing all of his worldly possessions onto his back, stuck his wand in the waistband of his jeans, placed his folded up invisibility cloak in his back pocket and stepped out into the world.

Chapter 7: Gringotts Wizarding Bank

In the early hours of the morning, Harry clambered down the front steps of the Hudson's and headed out into the bustling centre of London in the direction of the Leaky Cauldron. Really, he wasn't surprised at how much the room at the Hudson's cost. He was around three to five streets away from Charing Cross Rd, so anything in this district was bound to be expensive.

Harry was a mixture between excited and nervous. He was excited because he was finally free from the Dursleys and now he could pretty

much do anything he wanted as long as he didn't draw attention to himself but he was also exceedingly nervous because one false move and the Ministry would arrest him and sentence him to a lifetime in Azkaban, something he was not really looking forward to. So, Harry began trying to distract himself by simply observing the Muggles as they made their way to work. However, Harry was pulled out of his observation when he realised that he had, in fact, walked past Charing Cross Road and was now in front of an antique store. The antique store wasn't open but a few shops down, next to a reasonably small cafe, was an alley that appeared to cut through to Charing Cross Road. So without a second thought Harry slipped inside the mouth of the alley. It wasn't the most appealing place due to the dumpster full of scraps and trash from the cafe but that didn't really bother Harry so making sure no Muggles were in sight he quickly clambered behind the dumpster, pulled out his invisibility cloak and wrapped it around him. Contrary to what most people thought, Harry wasn't stupid. He did think about his actions and the repercussions of his actions and he also knew that he couldn't just waltz right into the Leaky Cauldron like he owned the place otherwise he would get arrested. He had to get into the wizarding world a more subtle way... 'And there is nothing more subtle than being invisible' thought Harry with a grin as he continued down the alley, his confidence growing with each step. Except for the fact that Hagrid wasn't with him, Harry's walk down Charing Cross Road reminded him of his first time entering the wizarding world and the confusion and excitement that the trip had caused him. Harry still remembered what Hagrid has said when Harry had asked if he really could get all of his wizarding school supplies in London: "If yeh know where to go". Well Harry certainly knew where to go, but this time he wasn't buying his school supplies, he was on the run

from the Ministry and the Order of the Phoenix.

While being invisible was a huge advantage sometimes it was also bloody annoying other times. For example, Harry couldn't simply walk down the street when he was invisible. No, instead he had to play some demented game of dodgems just so that he wouldn't get bowled over by Muggles in business suits as they made their way to work in swarms of gray.

Finally Harry came to a halt in front of the very building he was looking for, The Leaky Cauldron and just like in his first year the place still looked like a tiny, grubby-looking pub. 'Don't wizards get offended when they see the state of the place?' thought Harry as he tried to catch a glimpse of the patrons inside through the grimy dirt covered windows that looked as if they hadn't been washed in the past century. Behind him, Muggles hurried past without even looking in the direction of the pub. Their eyes slid from the book shop on one side to the record shop on the other as if they couldn't see the Leaky Cauldron at all. "Silly Muggles" giggled Harry quietly, "Magic is for wizards" as he was reminded of the Trix commercial that had been on the television a few weeks ago while Dudley was watching some show of his. Now, Harry just had to wait until someone either tried to walk in or walk out of the pub because even though it was the entrance to the wizarding world, doors that opened by themselves were still looked on as slightly suspicious. So Harry leaned against the wall next to the door, committing himself to a long wait.

It was seventeen minutes before a stumbling wizard that smelled strongly of sherry pushed open the door next to Harry's invisible form. So once the drunken man had cleared the doorway Harry quietly slipped inside. The Leaky Cauldron really hadn't changed since the last time he saw it. It was still very dark and shabby and witches and wizards in all shapes and sizes were sitting around tables either drinking or catching a quick bite to eat

before heading off to work.

Trying to be as silent as possible, Harry weaved in between the tables, making his way through the bar and out into the small walled courtyard that opened up to Diagon Alley. Trash littered the ground closest to the secret archway that had likely blown in the last time someone has crossed through and wedged between the wall and a crate was an old copy of the Daily Prophet. Figuring he would have to wait, once more, for someone else to open the archway for him, Harry sat down on the crate Indian style with his legs tucked up under the folds of the cloak and picked up the newspaper, making sure that all of it was hidden from prying eyes.

This summer, instead of reading the Prophet cover to cover simply because he was bored, he had generally only glanced at the front page because he figured that if they were going to report anything about Voldemort it would be splashed all over the front page and would make headline news. But with nothing else to do and plenty of time, Harry opened the prophet. On the second page there was an article about promotions within the ministry and on page three there was about some old witch's 'heroic' Kneazle that had stopped a burglar in his tracks. Harry was beginning to think that he would rather just sit and wait than read this drivel when his eyes caught sight of the article at the bottom of page three: Xeno Lovegood Accuses Minister of Hiding Evidence of Squib Uprising. Thinking it looked interesting Harry began to skim-read the article. Half-way through, he stopped. 'Had he really just read what he thought he had just read?' thought Harry as he went back to the beginning of the sentence to check.

It is clear to the wizarding population that Mr. Lovegood is deranged and is in sever need of some help if he truly believes that our esteemed Minister,

Cornelius Fudge, would even consider hiding anything from us. It is advised that he seek immediate medical help or at least be institutionalised for his own good if he is willing to spin further tall tales worthy of Harry Potter.

... He really didn't know what to think. In fact, he wasn't thinking much of anything at the moment as he fumed silently under his invisibility cloak. "How dare they," he growled quietly to himself as he processed the slander. But without much more time to think about this new development, the bricks around the secret entrance into Diagon Alley began to shift and move. As quietly as possible, Harry quickly folded the Daily Prophet up into his backpack and hopped of the crate. He could look at the Prophet later once he was safe back at the Hudson's. For now, he had to put it to the back of his mind because he had more important things to do.

Invisible to passersby and preoccupied shoppers, Harry dodged past the wizarding family that had opened the secret entrance and entered Diagon Alley. The Alley was full of bustling witches and wizards as they meandered from shop to shop, enjoying the summer sunlight and the morning breeze. However, unbeknownst to Harry, members of the Order of the Phoenix were prowling around Diagon Alley, Hogsmeade and The Burrow in search of him and at least three Order members were in the crowded press of witches and wizards between Harry and Gringotts at the other end of the Alley.

As he observed the crowds from his quiet spot against the wall of Pottage's Cauldron Shop, underneath the folds of his invisibility cloak, Harry resolved himself to creeping along the edges of the alley, closest to the shops so that he wouldn't accidentally bump into any of the shoppers.

"Have you been reading the prophet lately, Margret?" a plump witch in marron robes nearby enquired to one of the stall tenders, another middle-

aged witch in green robes who appeared to be selling 'Beautifying Potions and Lotions'.

"Oh, I certainly have, Abigail. You should hear some of the things my daughter tells me about that mad Potter boy. You remember Mandy, don't you? She was sorted into Ravenclaw, my smart little girl. She has been telling me over the years the sort of mischief that the Potter boy gets up to. She told me just a few years ago that the deranged boy can even talk to snakes! It's not right, allowing those sorts of people to attend Hogwarts. I think the Ministry should just lock the boy up and be done with it," said the stall tender as she passed over a small bottle labelled 'Margret's Magical Pimple Purification Potion' to the witch in maroon. Harry didn't want to hear any more. He just wanted to get his money from Gringotts so he could finish his shopping and go back to the Hudson's. He couldn't deal with this. 'This is why I hate being famous!' Harry angrily thought to himself as he slipped past Madame Malkin's Robes for all Occasions. 'The Wizarding World is made up of sheep. None of them can think for themselves and every single one of them believes that rag of a newspaper.'

At the rate that it was taking Harry to dodge shoppers and slink past shops and stalls undetected, he would not reach Gringotts for quite some time. In fact, it took Harry at least twenty-three minutes of to finally reach the marble steps of Gringotts and by that time he was well and truly ready to strangle the next unfortunate witch or wizard that bumped into him or said 'how mad is Potter?' or 'I can't believe the Ministry would let a deranged child go to Hogwarts! I mean, think of the danger to the other children!' At this point in time Harry did not care one iota about the 'precious children!'

Standing either side of the giant bronze doors at the top of the marble

steps were two goblin guards dressed in the traditional scarlet and gold uniform of Gringotts and in the hand farthest from the door, was a highly polished, very sharp looking spear...

It was because of the spears and the fear that Goblins, while unable to see him, might still be able to smell or hear him if he was to walk up the marble steps by himself, that Harry waited until a pompous looking wizard with a simpering witch's on his arm strode confidently towards Gringotts. As they began to climb the steps Harry quietly slipped in behind them and trailed them until he had passed the Goblin guards and was through the bronze doors.

On the other side of the bronze doors was yet another set of doors, these were twice the size and were made of, what looked like, pressed silver with words engraved upon them:

Enter, stranger, but take heed

Of what awaits the sin of greed.

For those who take but do not earn,

Must pay most dearly in their turn.

So if you seek beneath our floors

A treasure that was never yours,

Thief, you have been warned, beware

Of finding more than treasure there.

The words reminded Harry of his first time in Diagon Alley when Hagrid had been leading him to his vault and the other vault to collect Mr.

Flamel's Stone. How innocent and impressionable had he been then? To

believe that by simply entering this magical world that it would take

away all his problems. If anything, entering the magical world only

tripled his problems and put him in even more danger.

The two goblin guards either side of the silver doors bowed to the

wizarding couple in front of him as all three of them walked through into the main hall of Gringotts where imposing marble columns stretched up to the ceiling like trees and over a hundred more goblins were sitting on high stools behind two long counters on either side of the room. Some were scribbling in large ledgers while others were examining precious stones like rubies, diamonds, emeralds and sapphires through magnifying eyeglasses. Further goblins could be seen weighing piles of Galleons, Sickles, and Knuts on brass scales as they stared down ominously at the wizarding patrons in front of them.

By the time that Harry had finished his observations the wizarding couple had already walked off and was in the process of arguing with one of the tellers who was scowling down at them from his high perch.

As amusing as watching the sheep of the wizarding world make fools of themselves was, Harry still was faced with the problem that yes, he needed money but he didn't know if the Gringotts goblins would turn him into the Ministry or not and with the added fact that Harry did not want to be noticed, he was hesitant to take any form of action lest it negatively affect him in some way.

'What am I doing?' thought Harry to himself. 'I'm not a Slytherin! What happened to my so called Gryffindor courage?' and with that final thought Harry crept behind the counter and approached one of the free tellers that appeared to be sitting farther away from the other goblins. Without removing his cloak, Harry stepped closer to the oblivious goblin so that the other nearby goblins would not hear him. "Excuse me, Sir Goblin, but could I please have your assistance?" whispered Harry into the goblin's ear.

The only sign that the goblin was surprised was the slight flinch that wracked his frame before the goblin once more regained his previous

aloof and surly demeanour. Without turning his head to face the source of the voice the goblin whispered without barely moving his lips, "And how can I help you, whoever you are?"

So far their exchange hadn't attracted any attention but that was not going to last for long so Harry whispered "Well, I need to withdraw some money from my vault but if people see me it could cause quite an uproar. So is there any way we could have a private room to further discuss this so that we don't attract any attention?"

The goblin's face became slightly more pinched and his eyes flicked back to where he thought Harry was standing, "You still have not told me your name..." the goblin whispered expectantly in reply.

"And that is why I requested a private room," Harry stubbornly replied.

With a slightly pained look on the somewhat elderly goblin's face he hopped down from his high perch, "Very well," said the goblin in a slightly exacerbated tone, "If you will just follow me?" said the goblin before walking off into one of the many side archways with Harry trailing invisibly behind him.

Harry followed the Goblin past the carts that led down to the vaults and down a side passage that led to a hallway lined with doors. "These are the meeting rooms," said the goblin before striding towards the last door on the left. "The rooms are warded so that no one can listen in to any conversations held within these rooms," said the goblin as he unlocked the door with a brass key from his belt and then held the door open expectantly. Without waiting, Harry strode inside and the goblin closed the door.

"You will remove that infernal cloak now," Growled the goblin with a scowl on his face as he pushed past the chair where Harry was seated and sat himself down in the ornate chair on the other side of the raised desk.

"Yes, yes, sorry," said Harry quickly as he pulled the cloaks hood down so that only his face showed.

"Mithros' teeth," exclaimed the goblin in surprise before he started to mumble to himself, "I never expected this... Harry Potter..." before he realised that Harry could hear him and switched to gobble-gook, the goblin tongue.

Finally after a few minutes of the goblin talking to himself he opened one of the drawers and pulled out a shallow silver bowl and a gold dagger.

"Before we go any further, you will verify that you are actually who you claim you are," said the elderly goblin as he placed the silver bowl and gold knife side-by-side on the desk.

"Uh -," said Harry as he fidgeted in his seat. The wrinkled goblin continued to stare down the length of his nose at him with a rather condescending look. "And how would I do that?" Harry nervously continued under the scrutiny of the goblin across from him.

The goblin raised a large hairy eyebrow in response and then proceeded to drawl, "By performing a blood test, of course."

The look that the goblin was giving him was doing absolutely nothing to calm his nerves as Harry swallowed apprehensively at the mention of a blood test. He really didn't feel like having anyone poke him with sharp, pointy objects let alone a vicious looking goblin.

Seeing the boy's apprehension the goblin continued to describe the blood testing process. "Worry not young wizard," said the goblin with a smirk, "all you will have to do is cut your hand with that dagger and place a few drops of blood in the bowl."

"Oh, alright then," said Harry. The tension slipping away as he moved, without hesitation to pick up the dagger. Once in his hand he pulled the bowl towards him and pricked his pointer finger with the dagger.

Both Harry and the goblin watched with anticipation as three drops of blood slowly dropped into the bowl from Harry's bleeding finger. As the third drop made contact with the bowl there was a flash of golden light and then a silver fire burst out of the bowl on the desk, burning merrily. The gobbling then reached into the desk drawer and pulled out, what appeared to be a roll of silk fabric. Picking up the golden dagger, the gobbling sliced the silk to the size of a piece of parchment and with a flick of his gnarled hand flung the silk into the silver flame.

Seeing the shocked yet still curious expression on Harry's face the goblin began to describe the process of the blood testing ritual to him. "The silver bowl is a feminine symbol and represents the Goddess and her lunar powers and the gold dagger is a phallic symbol which represents the Sun God Mithros. These two instruments call on the ambient magic in the name of these two Gods to perform the blood testing ritual."

However, before the goblin could continue his explanation he was interrupted by Harry's question, "But who are the 'Goddess' and 'Mithros'? I thought that the wizarding world didn't have a definite religion."

"That is because all of the Muggle-born children that are brought into our world each year are not taught about our customs, traditions and beliefs so they therefore believe that there is no religion. There are very few books on the subject because for the practitioners of old magic it is simply an integral part of their lives and is not so much a religion to be actively practiced," grumbled the goblin in agitation at being interrupted.

"But that doesn't answer my question..." Harry protested.

"I am not your tutor! If you wish to know more about the traditions and beliefs of the wizarding world then go and find a practitioner of old magic! I should not have to suffer through your incessant questions simply because you are too ignorant of the world that you live in, now

you will be silent," the goblin finished by slamming his hand on the top of the desk and as he did so, the silver fire ceased and all that was left in the bowl was the silk parchment.

As the goblin reached into the bowl and extracted the parchment Harry could see what had once been a piece of undyed silk was now ebony in colour with words scrawled in silver ink across its surface. The goblin looked over the black parchment for a few seconds, scowling as he went, before he laid it on the surface of the desk and began packing up the bowl and the dagger. Even though he was practically bursting with questions Harry remained silent after the goblin's outburst in fear of further angering the impatient goblin.

Once the bowl and the dagger were once more packed away in their drawer of the goblin's desk the goblin finally turned towards Harry and addressed him, "Well it seems that everything is in order, Mr. Potter. My name is Geldreth Snarklaw, How may Gringotts be of assistance to you, today," said the elderly goblin with a greedy smile upon his face.

"Well, I was hoping to access my vault..." Harry nervously said as he fidgeted in his chair.

Seeing the movement, Geldreth raised an eyebrow and said "Is there anything else, child?" which only served to make Harry fidget even more.

"I... well... could I please look at that sheet?" said Harry at a fast pace reminiscent of Hermione when Harry first met her on the Hogwarts Express.

Geldreth smirked and replied, "Certainly," as he passed the parchment across the desk to Harry.

Looking over the parchment Harry's eyes widened with each line.

HPHPHPHPHP

Name: Harry James Potter

Title: Potter Heir, Slytherin Heir (via Horcrux), Gryffindor Heir (via Proven Worth Ritual)

Parents: James Potter, Lilly Potter (nee Evans), Tom Riddle (via Horcrux)

Godparents: Sirius Black, Alice Longbottom

Magical Aptitude: Medium Aptitude for Charms (Lilly Potter), Medium Aptitude for Transfiguration (James Potter), Medium Aptitude for Old Magic (Tom Riddle), High Aptitude for Defensive and Offensive Magic (Lilly Potter, Tom Riddle).

Magical Gifts: Low Level Metamorphmagus Capability (Dorea Potter nee Black), Medium Level Wandless Magic Capability (James Potter, Tom Riddle via Horcrux), Medium Level Parseltongue Capability (Tom Riddle via Horcrux).

HPHPHPHPHP

"Wha- but... how?" Harry stuttered out once he had finished reading.

"How is this possible?" Harry whispered in shock while staring at Geldreth imploringly as if begging him to explain.

"How is what possible Mr. Potter?" Geldreth enquired in a slightly smirking tone as if this whole situation greatly amused him; which it most likely did.

"How can Voldemort be one of my parents?" Harry shouted in reply as he leant forward in his seat.

"Who?" replied Geldreth with a frown on his face, "The only people listed as your parents are James and Lilly Potter and one Tom Riddle. There is no mention of Voldemort upon this sheet."

"Yes, yes there is," groaned Harry as he slumped in his seat, "Tom Marvolo Riddle. That is the true name of Lord Voldemort. It's an anagram. When you rearrange his name you get 'I am Lord Voldemort'."

"Well, in that case, yes you are related to the Dark Lord," said Geldreth

with a twisted smile on his face.

"I can see that perfectly well for myself, thanks. But what you have yet to inform me is HOW Voldemort is listed as one of my parents," Harry mockingly responded while he sat up straight in his chair once more as if silently daring Geldreth to lie to him.

"You saw the sheet with your very own eyes Mr. Potter. It says that through Tom Riddle's Horcrux, which I am assuming is within you, you are listed as his son by soul and magic if not blood," drawled Geldreth, "However, I presume that what you really wish to know is what a Horcrux is. Am I correct?"

"Yes, now if you would please explain I would be most grateful," said Harry in reply, utilising his inner Slytherin in this game of words. From his observations, the more he uses formal language with slightly sarcastic and biting undertones the more information that Geldreth gives away.

"A Horcrux is a very powerful object, or in this case, a person in which a Dark witch or wizard has hidden a fragment of his or her soul for the purpose of attaining immortality. Essentially a portion of Mr. Riddle's soul resides within you, blessing you with tremendous gifts. But do not be fooled, a Horcrux is one of the foulest, most evil pieces of magic which requires a living sacrifice in order to split the soul," explained Geldreth, losing his sarcastic tone as he went. By the end of his description of a Horcrux his voice resembled that of Ollivander when he first handed Harry his wand.

"So, what you're telling me is that part of Voldemort is LIVING inside me?" shouted Harry with budding horror creeping into his voice.

"Essentially, yes. But as I said before, it appears you have only benefitted from its presence," replied Geldreth in an attempt to placate Harry's fears.

"I don't care if I've only 'benefitted from its presence'! I don't want to be

anything like Voldemort," Harry shouted in response before he was interrupted by Geldreth.

"I do not care Mr. Potter, about what you want, or not. To my knowledge a Horcrux has never been placed in a living vessel before. That you are even alive is a miracle. And even if you were to remove it, of which I have absolutely no idea how to achieve, it would most likely kill you in the process. So your choices, Mr. Potter are thus. Risk the possibility of dying in the hope that whatever method you choose will destroy the Horcrux OR, you accept that it is a part of you and make the most of the abilities that it has presented you with," finished Geldreth.

Silence filled the room as Harry contemplated what Geldreth had said for a few minutes before deciding to take Geldreth's advice. He would accept that Voldemort's Horcrux was a part of him and he would strive to make the most of the abilities that it has given him. For example, the ability to speak to snakes, gifted to him by Voldemort allowed him to hear the Basilisk during his second year and in the process saved his and Ginny's lives. But since he had heard from Dumbledore that it was possible that he had received his gift from Tom, he had wanted nothing to do with it.

"You're right, thank you. I needed to be told that," said Harry with a small smile as he calmed down.

"You are quite welcome, Mr. Potter," Geldreth replied with a small bow of his head.

"Um..." said Harry with a hint of nervousness creeping into his tone once more, "I trust that this information will be kept between us?"

"Yes, yes of course. The client confidentiality is required of all Gringotts staff," answered Geldreth. "Do you have any further questions or do you wish to proceed to your vault?" Geldreth enquired with yet another raise of his left eyebrow.

"Well, I do have quite a few more questions but as long as I can find books about Metamorphmagi, Wandless Magic and Parseltongue then it doesn't need to be you who answers them," replied Harry. "So, if you don't mind I would like to go to my vault," said Harry as he began to rise from his seat.

"You are correct, that you can find books on those three subjects. However they are rare and hard to find. You will not find them in Flourish and Blotts but you might have more luck down Knockturn Alley where there are quite a few rare book shops that aren't exactly 'Ministry Approved'," said Geldreth as he too rose from his seat and gestured for Harry to follow him back out into the passageway to the carts.

Harry pulled the hood of his invisibility cloak up, once again and followed after Geldreth through the narrow marble hallways of Gringotts until they reached the carts that would take them both down to Harry's vault. Climbing on board one of the carts Geldreth sent them speeding down into the depths of Gringotts at lightning speeds were they finally stopped in front of Harry's vault.

Geldreth and Harry both climbed out of the cart and pulled out a jar with a silly putty looking substance within it.

Seeing Harry's inquisitive look Geldreth began to explain, "This is what we at Gringotts call Goblin Wax. It is actually a clever mix of molten gold and silver preserved in a diamond jar. It is what is used to make the keys to the vaults within Gringotts. This will make you a new key while destroying the old one, wherever it may be."

And without giving Harry any time to question Geldreth, the sly old goblin opened the jar and pressed it up against the lock of the door while mumbling in gobblie-gook. The molten gold and silver flowed out of the jar and into the lock, as if it was alive. Moments later a loud 'Ca-Clunk'

could be heard as the locking mechanism disengaged and the door swung inwards.

Geldreth then strode forward and collected the freshly made key from the door, "You would do well not to lose this one," said Geldreth as he passed it to Harry.

Not wishing to lose his key a second time Harry pulled out the chain that hung loosely around his neck that Sirius had gotten for him as a 'going to school present' before his fourth year. Currently the only thing on the necklace was a set of dog tags; one said Prongs and the other said Prongslet. Now he would add his Gringotts key to the chain which would guarantee that he would not lose it since he had never taken it off once since he had received it.

After retrieving some money from his vault and having over half of it converted into pounds, Harry and Geldreth once more, climbed inside the Gringotts cart and began their speedy journey up to the entrance.

As they climbed back out of the carts Harry whispered to Geldreth from beneath his invisibility cloak, "Is the Ministry after me?"

"No," was Geldreth's only reply as he walked back to his place behind the counter, leaving Harry to escort himself out of Gringotts by himself.

'So the Ministry does not want to arrest me...' thought Harry as he walked out the doors of Gringotts behind a short wizard with salt-and-pepper hair to muffle the sound of his footsteps. And with that revelation Harry stepped out into Diagon Alley unafraid of being apprehended and ready to find out more about his new abilities.

A/N: Well there it is! I hope you enjoyed it and I would be overjoyed to hear what you thought of this chapter!

-Marcielle-

6. Old Magic

Title: Survival of the Fittest

Author: Marcielle's Musings

Previously In Survival of the Fittest:

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Chapter 8: Old Magic

Harry was eager to begin his shopping but the excitement of finding out about his inherited abilities was dampened by the other unpleasant information that the blood test had revealed.

'Voldemort is my father...' thought Harry in shock as he stumbled down the steps of Gringotts, hidden from view within the folds of his invisibility cloak.

'By soul and by magic through his Horcrux...' Harry reflected while bringing a hand up to his scar to trace its lightning bolt pattern.

When he had first heard the news of exactly what he was; a piece of Voldemort's soul, he had quickly put on an indifferent mask so that his true inner turmoil wouldn't show through. He hadn't wanted Geldreth to think him weak and in his opinion he had succeeded. In fact, his sarcastic and witty 'Slytherin Side' as he was prone to calling it, had convinced Geldreth to tell him exactly what a Horcrux actually is and even though he didn't like the fact that Voldemort's Horcrux was inside him it had

given him the ability to speak Parseltongue and even some abilities that he didn't even know that he had: the ability to perform Old Magic and Wandless Magic.

"For a snarky old goblin, Geldreth sure knows a lot..." said Harry with a small smirk.

Unlike any other member of the goblin nation, Geldreth had certainly made a positive impression upon Harry with his 'no nonsense' attitude and the fact that he got straight to the point and told Harry what he wanted to know instead of making him run around in circles like a loon trying to figure it out for himself like Dumbledore usually did. In a way, Geldreth reminded Harry a little of the greasy potions Professor, but at least a Snape that didn't blatantly hate his very existence...

But now Harry was faced with a decision. Should he walk around Diagon Alley proudly with his Slytherin mask firmly in place or should he get a disguise and hide from the public eye for as long as possible. If he decided not to hide he would no doubt be faced with scornful looks on all sides due to his new title, The-Boy-Who-Lies.

"Bloody sheep," mumbled Harry disdainfully, "Can't even think for themselves..." said Harry with a glare at a group of wizards who were discussing how Dumbledore should be admitted to an asylum for believing the ranting of a deranged attention-seeking teenager.

With his decision made Harry made his way to the small Second Hand Robes store, dodging shoppers left and right. Pushing the door of the second hand robes store open as quietly as possible so as to not gain the attention of the old man behind the counter Harry walked into the quaint establishment only to trip over the leg of a coat rack. Luckily the man behind the counter was currently absorbed in the latest issue of Quidditch Monthly and had not noticed the incident.

And that is how Harry found himself, a few minutes later rummaging through the bins of musty old robes in search of something that was actually wearable. The shop was crammed full of piles and stacks of old robes, some even appeared to be even older than Dumbledore. Robes hung from the ceiling and coat racks by the dozens. There were bins full to the brim of robes and every one that Harry had tried on over his clothes thus far was either too big, too small or was covered in stains. That was not even beginning to cover the amount of moth-eaten robes he had found. In fact, in one bin instead of finding more moth-eaten clothing he had found a very nasty doxie nest. Needless to say Harry had left that bin alone and had gone rummaging through another with a little bit more care than previously, not wanting to disturb any other creatures that had found homes in amongst the musty clothing.

Eventually Harry decided on one full length black robe with a cowl and one sleeveless, blue robe with a silver trim that buttoned down the front until it hit his hips and then it flared out either side, leaving his jeans showing underneath. Even though the blue one seemed a little bit... extravagant for a second hand robes shop Harry was pleased with his findings.

Slipping the black robes over his head and placing his invisibility cloak in the main pocket of his backpack, Harry approached the teller with his head angled downwards so that the man wouldn't see his face. However these precautions turned out to be rather unnecessary since the man behind the counter didn't even glance at him as he paid for both sets of robes.

Geldreth had mentioned that books about Metamorphmagi, Parseltongue and Wandless Magic existed but that they were rare and hard to find and that the only place he was likely to find these books in England was

Knockturn Alley or in the private libraries of old pureblood families, dark pureblood families. Harry also wanted to see if he could find books on Old Magic or at least someone who would be willing to tutor him in it because Harry knew that if he asked Geldreth to teach him the old goblin would probably have an aneurism. So with that last thought, Harry, with the cowl of his new robes pulled up to shadow his face, began to walk towards the entrance of Knockturn Alley ignoring the masses that passed him by without a second glance.

Even though Geldreth said he wouldn't find any of the books he was looking for in Diagon Alley, Harry was hesitant to go into Knockturn Alley after his previous experience down there before his second year at Hogwarts. And with Voldemort and his Death Eaters roaming around Harry wasn't sure if venturing down there alone would possibly be the brightest idea. He may have been sorted into Gryffindor but he wasn't as stupid and as impulsive as most people thought him to be. He did have a brain no matter how many times people pointed out the contrary.

It was then that Harry noticed the sign for Obscurus Books; the second-hand bookstore next to the entrance to Knockturn Alley. Figuring it was worth a shot, Harry made his way towards the small bookshop.

A bell rang with a soft chime as Harry opened the door to Obscurus Books and walked inside. Like the robes shop, Obscurus Books was filled to the brim with books of all shapes and sizes. Bookshelves lined the walls and ran down the length of the store in isles and at the end of each isle was a stack of books that was piled all the way up to the ceiling. It was so similar to Flourish and Blotts in the fact that there appeared to be books on almost any subject imaginable but it was also much cleaner, quieter and more organised than the popular Flourish and Blotts. It reminded Harry of a smaller version of the Hogwarts library and that fact

comforted him as he meandered through the stacks taking in the titles of the tomes.

Harry didn't know it but since the moment he had entered the store he had been watched.

Baird Opusculus was the owner of Obscurus Books. His family had been selling knowledge in any form since before the time of Merlin. You see Baird was descended from a long line of witches and wizards who practiced the Ancient Arté or as it was now called 'Old Magic'. In the days before the time of Merlin when witches and wizards lived together with muggles without fear of prosecution, his family were members of the Druidic class within the Celtic Nation.

Muggles believe that in the days of old only males could be Druids. That was not the case. A Druid was simply another way of saying the wizarding class within the region. What muggles believe to be 'true druids' was actually the leaders of the wizarding group at those times which included a high priest, high priestess, knowledge keepers, and the leader of the clan and their family.

And since those days of old, the now named Opusculus family had continued to pass on the accumulated Ancient knowledge of the past to their descendents until now.

Baird Opusculus was an old man, a very old man indeed, nearly as old as Ollivander the wand maker. But this was where the problem now occurred. You see, Baird, while married had never been able conceive a child due to a battle wound from when he was younger and much more foolish, fighting alongside Gellert Grindelwald's forces so that the practice of the Ancient Arts could be legalised across Europe. And due to this predicament Baird had yet to pass on his family knowledge which would die with him unless he found himself an heir. This was why on a

rather quiet afternoon Baird caught himself watching as a young wizard entered his store and began to browse in amongst the isles. The reason that this particular young wizard had caught his attention was because the ambient magic that had collected in the air of the shop seemed to be drawn to him and twirl and spin around him like it was happy that he was here. For most witches and wizards who entered his shop the magic that resides in everything alive and inanimate didn't even react to their presence unless they used their wand for something but this boy, this very peculiar boy received the same reaction from Magic as he himself did. That could only mean one thing; the boy was a being of the Ancient Ways, a true Childe of Magic. This opportunity was too perfect for Baird to pass up. This young boy would become his heir.

Meanwhile at the Headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix...

"Where could he possibly be?" ranted Hermione as she passed the length of Ron's bedroom that he was meant to be sharing with Harry but Harry had disappeared sometime last night and the Order had yet to be able to locate him.

Needless to say, she was feeling a little bit frazzled. I mean, first she had found out, late last night that Harry had used the Patronus charm and that the Ministry of Magic had expelled Harry from Hogwarts and that they were going to snap his wand. From then on the rest of the night was a blur. All the adults seemed to be jittery and were constantly in and out of the floo system. Then the 'children' were sent to bed while the Order had a meeting in the kitchen but with all that was happening, Hermione had not slept a wink. All she could think about was Harry and how he was doing. She could imagine just how lost he would be feeling because that was how she would feel if she was expelled from Hogwarts.

But then in the early hours of the morning when she had convinced

herself that it wasn't too early to go down to breakfast, Mrs. Weasley had told her that Harry was missing and couldn't be located before she had burst into tears and then excused herself from the room.

The news had hit Hermione like a slap to the face, leaving her shocked and unknowing of how to respond.

'Harry is missing...' was all that ran through her mind like some pathetically broken record. It was all like a sick joke. 'Harry couldn't be missing... He's Harry! He doesn't just go missing like any other person...He has fought against Voldemort so many times... He can't just go missing!' her mind screamed but to the outside world Hermione looked as if she had been petrified by the Basilisk again, all pale and clammy yet completely still. But by now, in the mid afternoon, Hermione was no longer in shock. In fact, she was currently rampaging along the length of Ron's room as Fred, George, Ron and Ginny watched on in awe from their seats on the two beds in the room as Hermione paced back and forth like a caged lioness her bushy hair flying around her like a lion's mane.

"How do you expect us to know, Mione?" Ron replied in a frustrated tone as he pulled on his hair.

"I don't," sighed Hermione in a defeated tone as her shoulders slumped and she took a seat next to Ron so that she could lean against him for comfort.

"It's going to be ok, Hermione" said Ginny comfortingly as she scooted closer to Hermione's other side and wrapped her arm around the brainy girl in a one-armed hug.

"Yeah," said Ron as he too wrapped a comforting arm around her,

"Harry's gonna be just fine, you'll see. I mean, they've got the whole Order out lookin' for him don't they? They'll find him."

Completely unnoticed by the younger three in the room, Fred and George

shared a silent look. They didn't think that the Order would find Harry, at least, not unless he actually wanted to be found.

Ever since the summer before their fourth year at Hogwarts Fred and George had been watching Harry and what they saw was not the loud Gryffindor that everyone seemed to think he was. The Harry they saw was small, quiet, and was very good and hiding his presence.

Over the years they had added to these observations and had realised that Harry was only acting the way people thought he should act. But underneath all the layers the true Harry was more like a Snake adapting to make the best of a really bad situation. And even though they usually despised all things Slytherin they couldn't bring themselves to hate their Snake in Lion's clothing simply because Harry was just too nice a person to hate.

That was why they were perfectly happy to sit back and watch the Order run around like headless chickens looking for Harry while they inwardly applauded Harry for his escape act.

Harry was browsing through the aisles of books looking at the many types of books for sale when suddenly a hand was clamped on his shoulder in a firm but not rough grip. Harry's insides froze and all of his muscles tensed, ready to fight if necessary.

Turning to face his assailant as he gripped his wand in the pocket of his robes, Harry was faced with a bald old man with a long pointed nose which made him look quite bird-like. The man was looking at him with an inquisitive eyebrow raised as he took in Harry's reaction before he released his shoulder and began to speak.

"Are you looking for something in particular?" asked the man with a small smirk at the corner of his lips.

"Well... Yes, yes I am," replied Harry, "but some of the books that I am

looking for aren't exactly... 'Ministry Approved' if you get my meaning..."

continued Harry warily.

"Now what would a young boy like yourself be wanting with books on Dark Magic?" asked the man with a scowl, "I should report you to the Ministry..." he continued as he began to back away from Harry as if he carried the plague.

"NO!" shouted Harry, causing the man to stop his movement backwards. Quickly rushing to explain Harry blurted out "I'm not after books on Dark Magic. I'm looking for books to help me learn and practice some abilities that I were passed down from my ancestors..." finished Harry quietly.

"And let me guess, these abilities of yours are frowned on by the Ministry, correct?" asked the man.

"Yes, but I'm not evil or anything I just... I want to be the best that I can be..." replied Harry.

"Good answer, boy," said the man as he turned around, "The name's Baird Opusculus by the way. Now come with me and we'll go get your books," said Baird as he walked behind the counter and through the doorway with Harry following warily behind him.

"Where are we going, if you don't mind my asking?" questioned Harry as he followed Baird down the old wooden steps down to the basement.

"The Vault," replied Baird when he reached the bottom of the stairs to a box filled basement, "It is where all knowledge, no matter what kind, is kept, whether it is approved by our idiotic Ministry or not."

Silently agreeing with the man, Harry continued to follow him as Baird walked behind the staircase and approached the back wall.

"It is protected so that no one but members of the Opusculus family may open the door," said Baird with a smile as he locked back a Harry before he turned back to the stone wall, pulled out a small knife, pricked his

finger and placed his now bloody finger against the stone wall. The blood was quickly absorbed into the wall, not even leaving a trace that it had been there in the first place.

Next something happened which Harry could not explain. Baird placed both hands on the wall and whispered, "Please Open."

Harry could feel a shift in the air and suddenly the wall was folding back to reveal an archway which led to a long spiral staircase leading down.

"Let me just close up the shop," said Baird as he pulled out his wand and gave it a flick, "This way please," he continued as he began to lead Harry down the winding staircase.

It seemed like they had been walking for ages but in reality it had only been three minutes when they reached the bottom of the staircase and Harry was faced with the most amazing room that Harry had ever laid eyes on. Standing up on the balcony that went around the room Harry looked down at the Opusculus Vault. It was like a larger version of his Gringotts vault but instead of filled with gold it was filled with shelves upon shelves of books. It appeared to be at least five times larger than the Hogwarts library and every wall was covered in books of all shapes and sizes. The far wall, which was almost a football field away, if Harry was seeing it correctly, was covered in rolls upon rolls of scrolls protected by sliding glass doors.

"Wow..." said Harry in shock. When faced with a sight such as this any hope of being articulate flew out the window.

With a flourish, Baird gestured to the room and said, "Welcome to the Opusculus Vault" with a large smile on his face.

Harry could easily see that the man, Baird, truly loved this place from the expression upon his face when he looked out into The Vault. He didn't blame the man, even he loved this place and he wasn't even a book

fanatic like Hermione.

"It's... it's truly... Amazing..." said Harry, his wonder portrayed easily through his voice.

"Yes, it is," said Baird proudly, a lazy smirk adorning his face, "Now, exactly what topics did these so called 'Ministry Denounced' books cover?"

"Um... well... let me just check," said Harry as he pulled his backpack out from underneath the black robes and opened the main pocket where he had put the silk parchment with the results of the blood test on it. Pulling it out, he scanned the parchment again.

Name: Harry James Potter

Title: Potter Heir, Slytherin Heir (via Horcrux), Gryffindor Heir (via Proven Worth Ritual)

Parents: James Potter, Lilly Potter (nee Evans), Tom Riddle (via Horcrux)

Godparents: Sirius Black, Alice Longbottom

Magical Aptitude: Medium Aptitude for Charms (Lilly Potter), Medium Aptitude for Transfiguration (James Potter), Medium Aptitude for Old Magic (Tom Riddle), High Aptitude for Defensive and Offensive Magic (Lilly Potter, Tom Riddle).

Magical Gifts: Low Level Metamorphmagus Capability (Dorea Potter nee Black), Medium Level Wandless Magic Capability (James Potter, Tom Riddle via Horcrux), Medium Level Parseltongue Capability (Tom Riddle via Horcrux).

"Oh, just let me see that," said Baird as he impatiently snatched the parchment out of Harry's hand.

"NO!" shouted Harry as he reached for the parchment but it was already too late.

"Oh, my word... You're Harry Potter," said Baird, his eyes widening as he

read the first damning line on the parchment before he reached out and grabbed the cowl of Harry's robes and pulled it down, revealing his lightning bolt scar to the world.

A/N: I know this chapter is long overdue but fear not! The next few chapters have been written and it is now only a matter of editing them and re-reading them a million times to check for any mistakes. I hope you like the new development. ;)

-Marcielle-

## 7. Friends and Advisors Pt 1

Title: Survival of the Fittest

Author: Marcielle's Musings

Q&A: Through both reviews and via emails quite a few of my readers have questioned why the results for Harry's blood test were the way they were. So here I am to explain the methodology of my madness. ;)

So far none of you, my lovely readers have had comments about the first few lines (Name, Title, Parents and Godparents) which surprised me a little because I was sure that Tom being considered his parent might not be liked... But I'm not going to complain because I had plans for those first few lines.

Now for the more controversial lines...

First of all Harry's blood test was formed using really simple genetics. For example, Lily Potter was exceedingly good at charms and James is claimed to have been amazing at transfiguration. This means that if it was a natural gift, Harry, would at least gain a medium aptitude for those abilities. However, with Harry being, essentially, another piece of Tom Riddle, he gained a medium aptitude for Old Magic which Tom himself had. This will be further explained in later chapters so bare with me. For some odd reason it was Harry's high aptitude for defensive and

offensive magic which has caused the most controversy. Some questioned why James wasn't listed and some questioned why Lily was and some even questioned how Harry could have a high aptitude in defensive and offensive magic and not have a high aptitude for charms and transfiguration. To answer all these questions I am going to say this; it is DEFENSIVE and OFFENSIVE magic not just Defence Against the Dark Arts. It encompasses any form of magic which could be used to defend one's self or to attack another (including charms and transfiguration if the need arise). And finally, James Potter wasn't listed because (and before you say it, yes, I know he was an auror) James was only really good at DADA and Transfiguration not the overall Defensive or Offensive Magic. Thus far, no one has had questions about Harry's Magical Gifts which surprised me but I'm glad that you have all accepted them.

I will leave you with this final message: My Harry will never suddenly go poof and be all badass. He is a regular guy (with a few extra abilities thanks to his connection to Tom) that is thrown into extreme circumstances and these circumstances cause him to work hard to become the best that he can be because even though a person may be amazing at (lest just say Maths) but can't be bothered to study doesn't mean that they will beat the person who studied for the exam for weeks.

I guess what I'm trying to say is this: I will never write an unrealistic Harry.

Previously In Survival of the Fittest:

"Oh, just let me see that," said Baird as he impatiently snatched the parchment out of Harry's hand.

"NO!" shouted Harry as he reached for the parchment but it was already too late.

"Oh, my word... You're Harry Potter," said Baird, his eyes widening as he read the first damning line on the parchment before he reached out and grabbed the

cowl of Harry's robes and pulled it down, revealing his lightning bolt scar to the world.

## Chapter 9: Friends and Advisors

Pulling up his famous Gryffindor courage Harry began to speak, "Yes, I am Harry Potter," he said confidently lifting up his chin so that he looked squarely into the taller man's eyes in challenge.

"Will that be a problem?" Harry continued to ask with a raised eyebrow that looked eerily similar to Geldreth's favourite expression.

Baird's eyes widened in response to Harry's question before returning once more to his normally calm expression with that ever present sly smirk directed, once more, in Harry's direction.

"Not, at all," replied Baird, "I apologise for my impatience before but now let's get to business shall we?" he continued as he looked once more down at the results of the blood test.

"Hmmm... Uh-hmmm..." mumbled Baird as he looked over the contents of the parchment.

"What is it?" asked Harry.

"Oh! It's nothing, nothing," said Baird before he shook his head and then continued.

"Well, no that's not true... It's not nothing, it is indeed something, a very peculiar and very interesting something..." trailed off Baird, completely oblivious to the confusion his non-answer had induced upon poor young Harry.

Baird continued to look at the parchment with a rather distant look on his face and then he looked at Harry as if trying to look through him.

"Well there are certainly many very interesting items on this parchment," said Baird suddenly.

Harry didn't know how to respond to the abrupt statement so instead he

just decided on nodding his head in assent to which Baird nodded in reply.

"How about you and I make a deal, hmm?" asked Baird with an inquisitively raised eyebrow which only succeeded in making him appear more bird-like.

Harry tensed involuntarily at that question because even if this so called deal benefitted him in any way, he would still be trapped by its constraints. For example, The Blood Wards that protected number 4 Privet Drive. Yes, they supposedly protected him from Death Eaters but they no longer protected him from Voldemort because of the events during the Triwizard Tournament when Voldemort had used Harry's own blood to resurrect himself. The Blood Wards also forced him to spend time with his hateful relatives who he would rather never see again in his lifetime.

It was because of this reminder that Harry hesitated and asked, "How about you specify the outlines of this deal and then we will talk about whether I accept or not, hmmm?"

"Now, now, no need to get all defensive... Well at least you're not completely idiotic like a majority of the wizarding world in Britain. I was just about to explain the parameters of our agreement anyway." Baird quickly replied to Harry's rather tense response to his offer.

"Well?" encouraged Harry suspiciously.

"In exchange for working for me on weekdays this summer, I will allow you to copy any manuscript in The Vault for free," said Baird with an encouraging smile.

"Wha- really?" said Harry in shock at the offer. Because it really was an amazing offer; the opportunity to copy all these books and scrolls in exchange for working for the old man... but wait.

"If, say, I did take up your offer, what exactly would I be doing for you?"

Harry asked suspiciously.

"Well first off you would probably be in charge of checking and organising stock, making orders and watching the store while I work down in The Vault," Baird replied.

"Oh, and I would also provide you with a room to stay in since I'm not paying you," Baird quickly added as if trying to sweeten the deal.

Harry's awe at the offer urged him to quickly reply, "Yes! Um, I mean yes, you have a deal," said Harry as he regained his composure and stuck out his hand to shake.

"You, really were raised by muggles weren't you? It wasn't just a rumor?" asked Baird with a smirk.

Reeling back in shock, Harry slowly said, "Yes..." in a slightly offended tone.

"No, no, don't be offended," said Baird quickly, "I meant that in the wizarding world there is a different way to show the finalisation of a deal or to greet someone."

"Oh?" replied Harry hesitantly.

It was like he was beginning to see a completely different side to the wizarding world that he had just never known about. Harry first began to realise that there was a very large gap in his knowledge about the wizarding world when Geldreth began describing the magic used within the ritual and how the snarky old goblin hadn't used a wand and had said something about the magic of some God and Goddess. Until that moment Harry hadn't even know that the wizarding world had a religion. He had come into this completely new culture, like all other muggle-born and muggle-raised students, and had expected it to be exactly like the one he had left. Harry was beginning to realise just how ignorant he had been. It

was time to change all that.

"Um, well... would you mind showing me?" asked Harry hesitantly. Not wanting to offend the other man further, he met Baird's eyes evenly as he asked the question.

"No, I wouldn't mind, at all," Baird answered with a kind smile, realising that this must all be quite strange for Harry.

"In the wizarding world, it is common to bow one's head in both greeting, recognition and at the finalisation of a deal. However, there are other rules which dictate this custom. For example, a bow from the waist would signify that you have great respect for the person that you are bowing to; it would also subliminally say to others that you are beneath that person in both social standing and power. There are all types of bows used within the wizarding world... too many for me to describe to you at this particular moment in time, in fact. So how about I show you a book on wizarding etiquette at a later date, hmm?" said Baird.

Harry was shocked that there was simply so much on the wizarding world that he just didn't know about and silently vowed to rectify that situation as soon as possible.

"So," said Harry with a little bit more confidence, "in the case of a student bowing to a mentor and advisor, what bow would be used?"

Hearing Harry's question, Baird smiled a small little smile and replied,

"Well, in that case you would bow first. It would only be a bow of the head but it would be at a slight angle until your chin is approximately a centimetre from your chest and in reply you should receive a slight nod."

Hearing what he was supposed to do; Harry quickly slipped his left foot backwards slightly and bowed his head as advised. To which Baird responded with the replying bow.

'The boy already thought of him as a mentor and advisor!' Baird thought

happily as he began to show the boy around The Vault, pointing out where each topic could be found and the magical printing press on the lower level where he could copy whatever books he chose.

At first glance The Vault looked enormous and it really was. There were so many books in the Vault that it would have been impossible to count them all and they were in every language imaginable and even in some that Harry couldn't even recognise. Harry was amazed at the amount of knowledge contained within The Vault. It was like every library in the world, both magical and muggle was contained all within one room and it was all available to Harry.

Once the five hour long tour of The Vault was done Harry couldn't wait to get started at his new job. This thought surprised him at first because he wouldn't normally consider himself to be a book fanatic like Hermione. But after a final look at The Vault from the upper balcony before following Baird back up the winding stone staircase Harry was convinced that he wasn't going crazy; any sane person would be amazed at the sight of The Vault and would want even a glimpse of the knowledge contained within.

Once the pair reached the top of the spiral staircase, Baird closed the door with another whispered word and a drop of blood. Then Harry continued to follow his new employer up the wooden stairs from the basement back up to the ground level where the shop was located. It was then that Baird began to speak:

"Oh my, it's almost evening! Young Mr. Potter, you should probably be heading back home, lest your relatives worry," said Baird as he led Harry to the front door.

"I'm not living with my relatives anymore," said Harry as he planted his feet firmly on the floor in front of the front door to the shop.

"Why, ever not?" asked Baird in a rather alarmed tone as he spun around to face Harry's still form.

"Because they were never the nicest of people, they hated all things magical; including me and that is added to the fact that they kicked me out," replied Harry evenly.

"Oh," said Baird in shock. He could never imagine why any family would turn out a member onto the streets let alone because the child could do magic. It was wrong, so wrong. It was unforgivable.

"Well then you can move in tonight!" Baird exclaimed happily as he put his hands on both of Harry's shoulders and gave him a large smile.

Baird's excitement was contagious and Harry found himself smiling as well. But then Harry's smile fell because even though Harry had all of his belongings with him in his backpack he had to go back to the youth hostel to pay the Hudsons for letting him stay with them last night and to tell them that he had found someone to stay with. Judging from Mrs. Hudson's personality, Harry thought that they would worry if he just simply disappeared. He had to go back.

"Thank you for the offer but I have to go back and tell the people that I stayed with last night goodbye otherwise they would worry," said Harry apologetically.

"All right," said Baird with a nod of acceptance, "Feel free to come back here afterwards. I would be happy to show you your room when you get back so that you can get settled in."

"Ok," said Harry with a happy grin.

Mr. Opusculus was such an easy person for Harry to talk to. He didn't know why but it was probably the man's kindness and light hearted approach to life even though the man was a little eccentric and impatient at times. But no one can be perfect.

"I'll do that," said Harry with a nod as he opened the front door to the shop.

"Ok... Oh! WAIT!" Baird shouted as Harry was about to step over the doorframe.

"Yes?" Harry asked hesitantly with trepidation while not moving a muscle just in case.

"Oh, stop that stupid pose. It's fine to move. I just have to key you into the wards so that you will be able to get back inside once you return," said Baird calmly as if he hadn't just shouted.

Relaxing Harry waited in the doorway while Baird pulled out his small knife from his robes.

"I'm sorry but this will require a little blood," said Baird as he reached for Harry's hand which Harry handed over readily.

Next, like when opening the doorway to The Vault, Baird made a small incision in Harry's palm and held it over the doorway where a few drops of blood fell onto the doorstep. Then Baird pulled out his wand and made a few complex movements while mumbling under his breath before he put his wand away and put out his hands, face up and said, "Magic, please accept one, Harry James Potter as a member of this Household. So Mote It Be..."

Harry just watched on in confusion as all of this was happening but he, like before, could feel the shift in the air like a sudden weight was pushing down on him before suddenly it disappeared and it felt like the air itself was caressing him and holding him. He felt safe and like he didn't have a care in the world and then, just as suddenly as the sensations had started, they stopped.

"What on earth was that?" Harry asked Baird.

"That was a very simple yet very useful ritual which would allow you

within the wards on this shop, the apartment upstairs, and would also allow you access to the vault once the wards are activated at night," replied Baird calmly, seemingly completely oblivious to the shock that he had caused Harry.

"You can go now," said Baird with a smirk.

Harry just continued to look at Baird as if he was crazy.

"You wouldn't happen to be related to Ollivander would you?" asked Harry.

"Probably, now off you pop," said Baird with a cheerful smile and wave before he slammed the door in Harry's face.

Harry's eyes widened before he shook his head in fond exasperation, pulled up the cowl on his robes and began to walk towards the Leaky Cauldron.

"Crazy old man," Harry muttered under his breath, "Why is it that every old wizarding person I've met is either crazy, eccentric or just plain batty?"

In the end Harry figured he really didn't want to know the answer as he passed through the Leaky Cauldron and made his way back to the Hudson's.

Harry had been right to go back to the Hudson's because as soon as he told Mr. and Mrs. Hudson that he had found another place to stay they had immediately begun cautioning him about staying with strangers.

After he had reassured them that their concerns were unnecessary he had then been faced with the challenge of trying to get them to accept payment for allowing him to stay last night.

"You already paid us more than enough this morning," said Mrs. Hudson as she hustled him back towards the front door, "You best be off, darling. It's getting quite dark now and we wouldn't want anything to happen to

you."

And so, with one last grateful goodbye Harry began walking back along the now dark London streets to his new lodgings at Obscurus Books.

Meanwhile, back at the headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix a meeting was occurring down in the kitchen. A meeting which was already not going as originally planned.

"HOW COULD YOU NOT HAVE FOUND HIM?" Sirius roared in outrage as he stood up from his chair sending it clattering to the floor.

"Calm down, Sirius!" said Molly Weasley sharply from her seat on the opposite side of the long kitchen table.

"You be quiet, woman!" Sirius snapped back.

Molly gasped with wide eyes, rocking back in her chair as if physically struck by his hurtful words.

It also seemed as if what he had said just occurred to him.

"Molly, I'm sorry. I didn't mean-" said Sirius apologetically before he was interrupted by Mrs. Weasley's rise from her chair.

"NO, I will not be quiet, Sirius! We all know you care for the boy but shouting at all of us who are trying to help find him WILL NOT HELP THE MATTER!" Molly screeched, the colour rising swiftly in her cheeks.

There was complete silence in the kitchen until Mad Eye Moody gruffly rose from his seat, "Well, if that's all, I'll see you all on lookout tomorrow. You all know your positions."

A series of "Goodbye"s and "Have a good evening"s followed him as he stomped out the door.

Tomorrow would be a new day and hopefully it would be the day that they would find Harry Potter.

A/N: I hope you all enjoyed the new chapter. I know it is shorter than the previous but I'm already spoiling you guys by posting two chapters in

one week.

Now remember to hit that little review button below and tell me what you think!

-Marcielle-

8. Friends and Advisors Pt 2

Title: Survival of the Fittest

Author: Marcielle's Musings

Previously In Survival of the Fittest:

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Tomorrow would be a new day and hopefully it would be the day that they would find Harry Potter.

Chapter 10: Friends and Advisors, Part 2

Harry had never been a book lover like Hermione but as a kid he had really enjoyed reading story books simply because it was something that he could do if he was locked up in his cupboard for any length of time.

His favourite books had been Peter Pan, Robin Hood, Arabian Nights, and The Swiss Family Robinson which he had borrowed from the library at his primary school. These books had been his favourites simply because they were all about people who went on grand adventures or did something heroic and as a kid, locked in a small cupboard it allowed him to imagine that someday, he too would go on a grand adventure or do

something heroic.

Now that he thinks about it, it was probably all that reading in his dark cupboard which screwed up his eyesight.

But when he learnt about the wizarding world and about Voldemort any thought of reading during his free time vanished. He was free of the Dursleys for the first time and he wanted to enjoy the world that he now lived in. That ideology must have stuck with him because when he wasn't swamped with schoolwork or attempting to discover what Voldemort was up to that year, Harry usually found himself relaxing with Ron or playing Quidditch.

But by working and living at Obscurus Books with Baird, Harry was beginning to develop a love for books. Don't worry, he wasn't fanatical about them like Baird was but he was slowly developing a strong appreciation for the knowledge that they contained. Harry was now beginning to understand Hermione's love for books and that thought didn't scare him as much as he thought it should.

Harry had been working and living with Baird at Obscurus books for three days now and already he had learnt, what he felt was more than he had learnt in the first three years at Hogwarts. This was because majority of the stuff he was learning now was actually useful in comparison to learning how to turn a mouse into a matchbox.

I mean, how often did Professor McGonagall honestly think that they would need to turn a mouse into a matchbox?

Most importantly, Harry had learnt that if he was in a place with wizards and witches that were of age or in an area with high levels of magic such as Diagon Alley, Knockturn Alley and Hogsmeade his magic would go undetected.

Baird had told him this on his first day working in the shop when he had

told Harry that before they opened the shop to customers he would have to unlock the wards and then begin layering charms to regulate the temperature and to increase airflow so that the shop wouldn't feel stuffy. Harry had been amazed. He had thought that he wasn't allowed to do magic outside of Hogwarts when in reality, he wasn't supposed to but he could if he was careful or had a wizarding parent, guardian or employer approve his use of magic.

Baird had asked, "How do you expect wizarding teenagers to get summer jobs, hmmm? Do you expect them to just blunder around like Muggles doing manual labour? How will they exercise their control over the summer if they do not practice?"

To which Harry had gaped silently in response.

"No wonder teenagers these days are practically useless" muttered Baird as he shook his head with disdain and then proceeded to explain the many charms and spells that needed to be layered and bonded to the walls of the shop before they could actually open.

As well as spells and charms Harry was also learning boat loads about the history and culture of the wizarding world, stuff that, according to Baird, he should be learning in History of Magic at Hogwarts.

Needless to say, when Harry had told Baird after his first day working in the shop while they were sitting down for dinner up in the apartment above the shop that his history teacher, Binns' ghost, had taught them nothing about wizarding culture and barely anything about wizarding history Baird had been shocked and then he had stormed off to the attic for a while.

When he finally returned he proceeded to give Harry a very basic, as he called it, outline of wizarding history, starting with the evolution of man till the modern day.

It turns out that the wizarding race has been around for approximately 400,000 years, since the evolution of the Archaic Homo Sapiens, the forerunners of the modern human race. But unknown to Muggle scientists this race once again evolved and split into two specific gene pools; one that could interact with the energies of the earth and one that couldn't. The reason that this evolution has gone unnoticed by Muggle scientists and historians is because both species were identical except for that one fact.

Baird then explained how the wizarding race, all around the world, became integrated with the ordinary human race and lived harmoniously during what Muggles call the Paleolithic Era. During this time, both groups generally lived as nomadic hunter-gatherers with the humans who could interact with the earth's energies and manipulate them with very basic wandless magic becoming the leaders, medicine men and women or shamans. This was also when the beginnings of the modern day European wizarding religion began.

This tradition of the early wizarding population being the leaders of the early nomadic tribes continued well into the Neolithic period when living in small farming and herding villages began to be the more common form of living. Also, during the Neolithic age the early wizarding population began crafting items out of different types of stones and crystals, woods, and bones, feathers and claws from animals which could be used to create larger feats of rather primitive magic.

Hearing this, Harry had said, "So basically, what you're saying is that before wands were created wizards and witches used the components of wands and other natural items to produce magic?"

"Essentially yes," replied Baird with a nod at Harry from his place across the table from him. "However, this primitive use of magic had very small

results because majority of the magic or natural energies that were imbued into the object dispersed quite quickly instead of going to the intended target."

This discussion and explanation on the origins of magic and wizarding kind lasted well until one in the morning when Baird had finally realised the time and had sent Harry off to his room to get some sleep because he had a big day tomorrow. A new shipment of books was being delivered tomorrow and Harry would be in charge of stocking the shelves and organising the basement...

'Joy' Harry had thought as he had nodded off to sleep.

Baird hadn't been lying when he had said that Harry would have a big day tomorrow. After being woken by Baird at five in the morning to receive the new shipment of books he had spent the next half of the day levitating boxes of books down to the basement where he had then organised them by category and then by the author's last name.

That evening at dinner Baird had said that until he learnt to control his Metamorphic ability he wouldn't allow Harry in the shop while customers were there.

"Bad for business," he had said, "what with your name and reputation being mud now-a-days. That is not even beginning to cover your so called questionable sanity..." mumbled Baird.

Harry had been about to protest when he had realised that perhaps Baird was right. With the Prophet scorning his name and the wizarding population believing the Prophet's lies, Harry really would be bad for business.

Taking Harry's silence as acceptance Baird thumped five heavy tomes down in front of Harry.

"This," said Baird while pointing to the first book, "is a copy of

Persephone Penfrost's original 'Metamorphmagus Me' which was written in 1894 and details how Metamorphmagi came to be and a series of exercises that you can do to become more proficient with the ability. It also lists the famous Metamorphs throughout history."

"Now this one," said Baird while pointing to the second book, "is a copy of 'A History of Parseltongue' by Salazar Slytherin. I hope you don't need me to explain what it's about because if for some odd reason that you did I might have to join the foolish public of the wizarding world in their opinion of your sanity or lack thereof," said Baird while completely ignoring the scowl that Harry shot his way

"And this one," said Baird as he pointed to the third book in the pile, "is a copy of 'Ancient Ways' by Morgane de la Firenze and is possibly the best book on the subject of Old Magic or Ancient Magic as it used to be called."

The last two books in the pile turned out to be about Wandless Magic and Ritual Magic.

Harry was amazed at the pile of books in front of him. 'When had Baird had the time to copy these for him?' thought Harry in gratitude but then something else dawned on him: 'When on earth did Baird expect him to read all of these?' thought Harry in alarm.

As if sensing his thoughts Baird said, "You have the weekends off but I expect you to spend at least four hours each day reading these books.

You want to master your gifts and talents don't you? Well then you have to put in the effort!" said Baird passionately before continuing in a more subdued tone, "That is what the wizarding world seems to forget nowadays. With a flick of a wand you can do almost anything so the wizarding world has forgotten the one simple saying; anything worth doing is worth the effort."

After that Baird had stood up and levitated the dishes to the sink and had cast the charm that makes them clean themselves. Then he had turned to Harry and said, "You have so much potential, child. I just don't want to see you waste it," before he walked out of the kitchen to his room.

Harry sat at the kitchen table in silence processing what had just been said. That had been the first time someone had told him that he had the potential to be something. At the Dursleys he was a freak and was going to end up like his drunk bum of a father and his good for nothing mother and at Hogwarts no one told him things like that because, like Professor Snape, they probably thought that he was spoiled and heard those sort of things all the time.

Harry didn't want people to fawn over him like he was the new messiah but he would like it if once in a while someone would tell him that they were proud of him or that he had the potential to be something great, like Baird had just done.

And with that final thought Harry picked up 'Metamorphmagus Me' and began to read.

Yesterday had been a long exhausting day after only a few hours sleep but today was now Harry's third day of living with Baird, and blessedly it was a Saturday which meant that he had the day off so Harry was currently enjoying a nice, long, relaxing lie in to catch up on some much needed sleep before heading out into the kitchen / lounge area for breakfast.

Realising that it was probably quite late in the morning judging from the blinding sunlight that had streamed through the shutters on the window across from his bed and had woken him, Harry groggily woke up and reached for his wand and glasses on his bedside table.

While slipping his glasses onto his nose Harry sleepily muttered out

"tempus," with a yawn and a flick of his wand. The charm revealed the time to be 10:23am so Harry clambered out of bed with a reluctant groan and sleepily shuffled off to the bathroom to go to the toilet and to have a shower before he came back to his room to get dressed.

Opening the nearly empty wardrobe Harry realised that he really needed to go clothes shopping because other than the beige trousers and white t-shirt that he was pulling on now he only had one more clean outfit, the rest were dirty in a pile in the corner of his room. Sliding the blue, button-up robes that he had bought second-hand a few days ago Harry vowed to go shopping today after he finished the third chapter of *Metamorphmagus Me*.

Like Baird had said the first chapter had been about the history of the metamorphic ability and how it developed over time. Chapter two had been entirely about famous Metamorphmagi in history. Majority of them turned out to have impersonated some famous Muggle and essentially taken their place. What wasn't mentioned was what happened to the famous Muggles after the Metamorphmagus took their place. Harry decided that this was why the ability was looked down upon by the Ministry of Magic. While the metamorphic ability wasn't technically classified as a 'Dark Ability' like Parseltongue was, it was still frowned upon by the 'Light' wizarding society because of its 'dark past'.

It had taken Harry until midnight just to read those two chapters, which was almost half of the book, before he had plodded off to bed. But Harry was really looking forward to read chapter three because that was when he finally got to begin using his ability. So after a quick breakfast Harry plopped himself down on the lounge and began to read chapter three.

### Chapter Three

#### First Transformation

As children, most Metamorphs will go through a phase of shifting, as I like to call it. The shifting phase is generally in the early stages of childhood, from ages five to seven, and during this phase the Metamorphmagus gene is activated for the first time. When the gene is activated the child will become prone to transforming or morphing during times of high stress. This usually occurs if a child doesn't like how they look or if other children tease them about how they look. In response to these high levels of emotional strain the Metamorphmagus gene will activate and the child will morph into what they think they should look like. Sometimes these changes are small like a small growth spurt or a change in hair length but sometimes the changes are drastic like a change in hair colour or a full facial reconstruction. Whatever the child's first morph was, that will become the easiest transformation for them to achieve once they are older. Not only will it be the easiest it will also be the first that they will learn to control.

#### Exercise One

First, close your eyes and try and remember your first morph.

Place yourself within the memory and try to remember how your first morph felt.

Remember exactly how the morph felt and now open your eyes.

Focus on how your very first transformation felt to you and try to replicate that feeling with your eyes open.

Allow your magic to flow freely and interact with the world around you.

Now guide your magic to the place where your first transformation took place and visualise in your mind how you want it to change.

You have to really want that part of your body to change. Like wandless and ritual magic the magic interacts with how you feel and what you want to occur.

Now Morph.

Harry was astounded that that was all there was to chapter three.

Chapters one and two had been over fifty percent of the book but chapter three was only a page... He could understand why, though.

Metamorphing appeared to be a type of magic that you have to feel, to accomplish. That was why there was very little description; because every Metamorphmagus would have felt something different.

Putting the book down on the coffee table, Harry leaned back against the couch, closed his eyes and pulled his legs up to sit Indian Style. Then he read over the first line in his head:

First, close your eyes and try and remember your first morph.

His eyes were already closed and it was easy to remember when his first morph had been. Ever since he was five the same thing had happened.

About once a week, Uncle Vernon would look at Harry over the top of his newspaper as he ate breakfast, which Harry had usually prepared, and shout that Harry needed a haircut. Every week it had been the same thing and by the time he was six Harry must have had more haircuts than the rest of the boys in his class at primary school put together but it made no difference, his hair simply grew that way - all over the place.

But Harry remembered, one time when he was five, Aunt Petunia had finally become fed up with Harry coming back from the barber looking as if he had never been at all so she had taken a pair of kitchen scissors and cut his hair so short that Harry almost looked bald except for a small patch of hair near his forehead which she had left "to hide that horrible scar".

Harry had looked horrible and Dudley had laughed himself silly until Harry made a strategic escape to his cupboard where he had laid down on his mattress imagining what school would be like the next day. Harry was already teased and bullied by Dudley and his friends but his haircut

would have given his classmates, who already teased him for his baggy clothes and taped glasses, just another thing to laugh at. He had spent the night imagining what a horrible day he would have and how much they would all tease and laugh at him.

Then, the next morning, Harry had woken up to find his hair had grown back to exactly the way it had been before Aunt Petunia had sheared it off. He had been punished with a week in his cupboard for this. The only times he had been allowed out was to go to school, use the bathroom and to cook meals for his family.

It was a horrible memory that Harry really didn't want to relive but this was the first time that Harry could remember an exact moment that a drastic physical change occurred to him.

The second line had said: Place yourself within the memory and try to remember how your first morph felt.

Well, Harry knew exactly how it felt every time he remembered this moment he relived the extreme embarrassment the haircut caused him to feel and the sobs that had eventually lulled him to sleep as he imagined how awful the next day would have been. Harry began to focus on that feeling until he realised that the embarrassment and shame that he had felt wasn't how the actual morph had felt. Those were the feelings he had felt as he was falling asleep but just before he fell asleep Harry could vaguely remember a slight tingling feeling in his scalp, which at the time he had thought was a spider crawling into his hair. With a swat at his head Harry had drifted off to sleep.

'Maybe...' thought Harry and he focused on that tingling feeling in his scalp that he had felt those many years ago and remembering the third line, he opened his eyes.

The fourth step had said to 'try to replicate that feeling with your eyes open.'

So that's what Harry found himself doing, five minutes later. Trying, unsuccessfully, to make his scalp tingle the way he had remembered in the memory.

'How on earth does one make their scalp tingle on command?' Harry thought furiously, 'It's not as if I can just think "I command you scalp to tingle" and then poof my scalp tingles.'

"Having any luck?" said a curious voice from behind Harry.

"Ahhhh," shouted Harry as he bolted out of his seat on the lounge and whipped his head around. His eyes had been open and he had been facing the doorway to the staircase but he still hadn't noticed Baird come up the stairs and begin to cook dinner in the kitchen behind him.

'He must be able to become invisible' thought Harry in suspicion because there was no way that the old man could have snuck past him without him even noticing. Not to mention the fact that the stairs down to the shop squeaked with every step. 'A silencing charm and a disillusionment charm then' thought Harry with a nod but before he could say anything Baird began to speak.

"Correct! I didn't want to disturb you and interrupt your concentration," said Baird with a crooked smile, "But then I noticed that you didn't seem to be getting anywhere so I decided that you needed a break. Why don't you come help me make some lunch and then we can talk while we eat, hmmm?"

"Wha- how?" said Harry in shock, "How on earth did you do that?"

Then it dawned on him, "Did you just read my mind?" Harry shouted across the room.

"Yes, I did," said Baird with an absentminded wave of his hand as if his reading of Harry's mind was nothing important.

Harry just stared at Baird, slack jawed, before he shook his head in

exacerbation and said, "Why? I mean, what could have possibly possessed you?"

To which Baird replied with his back facing Harry as he continued preparing the grilled chicken salad, "Why did I 'read' your mind? Why, simply because I could! Your mind is wide open. Oh, that reminds me, I must teach you to shield it," Baird mumbled.

"Shield it?" asked Harry with a sigh. Baird was a genius. He could remember the most obscure details with perfect clarity but he was completely batty when he wasn't telling you stuff that he read in books.

"Yes, Shield it and thank you for the lovely compliment," said Baird as he turned around to look at Harry with a sly look, "Now come set the table and let's eat."

After setting the table Baird brought over their lunch; a Moroccan seasoned, grilled chicken salad with cashews, pine nuts and dried cranberries. It looked and smelled delicious and they both quickly dug in with gusto.

That was probably one of the first lessons that Baird had taught him. If you ate healthy balanced meals your personal magic levels filled up faster but if you ate unhealthy food then they would fill up sluggishly after use because there was not enough nutrition in the foods. On his first night, Baird had clearly laid out what he shouldn't be eating: caffeine, alcohol, sugar, simple carbohydrates, fast food and junk food (pretty much anything fried or yummy), processed meats, added salt, and any dairy products.

Since then he had never felt better. It seemed like he had more energy and like he could do anything. Baird had said that it was because he had more energy, so to speak. Now that he was eating regularly and healthily his energy levels had replenished themselves and had become more

regulated. Baird had also said that if he continued to maintain a healthy lifestyle he will be able to tap into other energy sources, if his are ever too low. To Harry it seemed like he was recharging a battery but to Baird it was the key to living a long healthy life.

As they were finishing their meal, Baird finally asked, "Now what seems to be the problem?" as he laid his hands on the table while looking at Harry as if imploring him to answer truthfully.

"It's just..." started Harry before he changed his mind, "Do you know how I could make my scalp tingle on command?" Harry asked warily.

Baird just looked at him as if he was the one who was completely batty and then said with a raised eyebrow, "Let me guess... your hair was the first morph you ever performed?"

"Yeah, but I just can't... you know... force myself to feel it," Harry answered with a sigh.

"That is because you are not meant to replicate the feeling you are simply meant to visualise the feeling," said Baird as he stood up from the table and made his way to the sink with the dishes and cutlery floating merrily behind him.

Sensing that their conversation Harry walked back to the couch and looked at the open book on the table his eyes were immediately drawn to the line: Allow your magic to flow freely and interact with the world around you.

That was easy. Closing his eyes, Harry could easily remember the feeling he got the first time he picked up his wand at Ollivander's shop. It was like pure bliss rushing through his veins and as Harry remembered he began to feel his magic. Pumping through his veins and seeping through his skin. His body breathed in energy and life with every breath. And now he focused on the tingling feeling in his scalp while still holding

onto the euphoria of his magic.

He wanted it.

He needed it.

His hair was going to grow.

It was going to grow until no one would ever see his stupid scar unless he showed them.

And then his scalp began to tingle like ants were crawling there and suddenly it stopped.

Harry opened his eyes.

Had he done it?

He had.

Hanging around his head like a veil was a curtain of pitch black wavy hair. He had done it. He had made his hair grow! He really was a Metamorphmagus! He had had doubts, even after the results of the blood test but those were now flying out the window as Harry let out a whoop of joy.

Harry leaped off the couch and ran to the bathroom so he could see what he looked like. His hair had grown until it reached his shoulder blades. It was long and wavy but Harry thought it made him look a little bit girlish so he would either have to learn how to revert the morph or get a haircut.

"Don't cut it," said Baird from the doorway to the bathroom.

"Why not?" asked Harry in surprise, "It makes me look too much like a girl."

"No it doesn't. It makes you look how a powerful young wizard, like yourself, should look." said Baird before he turned to leave, "If you are going to revert it back at least keep it shoulder length so that it doesn't look like a birds nest."

Harry did like his hair when it wasn't flying all over the place so he decided that shoulder length would work for him and then began the long process of reverting it back.

In the end it took him three tries to get the length right and one time he had even ended up bald but now Harry was staring at his reflection in the mirror of the small bathroom.

I did it, was all he could think.

A/N: I hope you all enjoyed this new installment of Survival of the Fittest. I tried to add more information about wizarding history and their culture to this chapter so that it would seem a little bit more well rounded. The only thing I missed during this chapter was a lot of dialog... Oh well, there will just have to be a lot more in the next one.

-Marcielle-

## 9. New Me or Shopping Spree?

Title: Survival of the Fittest

Author: Marcielle's Musings

Previously In Survival of the Fittest:

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## Chapter 11: New Me or Shopping Spree?

As a child, Harry had never gone clothes shopping. He had always been given Dudley's castoffs or if he was lucky something that Aunt Petunia had bought for him out of the bargain bin. So when Harry walked into the largest shopping centre in London he couldn't help but gape.

There were so many things to buy.

Anything a person might need was for sale.

There was also three times the number of people than there ever was in Diagon Alley.

Harry didn't like crowds, even on a good day, so he quickly dodged in the heavy press of holiday shoppers until he reached one of the glass windows for a shop that sold woman's clothing. Putting his back to the glass Harry caught his breath and watched the shoppers for a few minutes as they pushed and shoved their way through.

"Are you ok?" said a voice coming from inside the shop that Harry was currently leaning against.

Harry's head whipped around and his hand went to the waistband at the back of his jeans where his wand was currently hidden until he stopped himself.

"I said are you ok?" asked the woman standing on the other side of the glass in concern.

"Um... yeah. I'm fine... you just shocked me that's all..." Harry answered back through the glass while trying to sound as convincing as possible. He failed.

"Well you sure don't look it. You look like my boyfriend, Kyle. He hates crowds - claustrophobic you see. Why don't you come in here? It's a lot less crowded," continued the woman as she waved her hand in a 'come on

in' motion.

Figuring that the woman was probably right, even if it was a woman's clothing store, Harry went inside.

"Come this way," said the woman he had been speaking to, "I'll get you a bottle of water from out the back."

Meanwhile as, who Harry assumed was one of the sales women, popped out to the back room, the female shoppers were all staring at Harry as if he was another life form from a distant planet.

Harry had a strong urge to hide himself in a clothes rack and understandably too; he had never been very good with talking to the opposite sex. It was like they spoke a completely different language and every time he tried to talk to them he would just clam up.

Harry was jolted out of his inner rambblings when the sales woman reappeared and passed him a chilled bottle of water.

"Thanks," mumbled Harry in appreciation as he cracked open the lid and swallowed a few hearty gulps.

"Oh, it's no problem," said the woman with a smile, "So what were you trying to shop for before the crowds became too much?"

"Clothes, I need a complete new wardrobe. I've grown out of everything I have..." Harry answered as he rubbed the back of his neck in an awkward manner.

It was if those had been the magic words because as soon as he said them half the women in the shop perked up as if they had just heard something exciting.

"Well then," continued the woman as if nothing was out of the ordinary, "my break is in seventeen minutes," she said with a glance at her watch, "how about I come help you? Give you a professional opinion and all that?"

Harry really didn't know what to think let alone what to say so in the end he just blurted out a nervous "sure".

"Ok then!" said the woman happily, "let me just finish up here and then we will go, ok?" and with that she went running off into the back room, leaving Harry in the store not knowing what to do.

In the end, he ended up leaning against the front counter fidgeting with his hands as he waited for the young sales woman.

As the twenty minute mark approached, Harry began to fidget more and more, wondering if the sales woman was going to come back or if she had just left him. But as he began to consider just leaving the shop and going clothes shopping by himself the woman burst through the door to the back room with her hair now up in a high pony-tail and her very large handbag swinging from her shoulder.

"Oh good, you're still here," said the sales woman with a relieved smile, "I was a little bit worried that you would have left without your fashion consultant," she said with a wink as she grabbed Harry's arm and looped it through hers.

The last thing she said before they were out the front doors to the shop was, "Oh, this is going to be so much fun!"

And it was...

At least for her it was...

The woman, whose name which Harry later learned was Lisa, was thoroughly enjoying herself at the expense of Harry's eternal suffering.

By four in the afternoon Harry and Lisa had been through six different stores and Lisa had made him try on everything that they had for sale until she found items that were 'suitable', 'OMG that looks amazing!' or 'hmmm, it's ok... but it's not great. Just put aside and we'll see in the end'.

Harry was about ready to go find Voldemort and beg at his feet,

"PLEASE! I CAN'T TAKE IT ANY LONGER! JUST KILL ME NOW AND SPARE ME THE AGONY!"

Harry was not quite at that level of desperation yet, but he was getting there.

His one saving grace was the fact that Lisa had said that this was the last store and after this he wouldn't have to go clothes shopping again until he grew some more.

That was almost enough to cause him to start weeping for joy at her feet.

Almost, but not quite.

He still had some dignity left. He wasn't sure where it was hiding right now after all of her poking and prodding but he was almost positive that it was still alive.

Maybe.

But anyway, back to the task at hand. Harry was currently in the dressing room of a very expensive looking men's clothing store trying on suit jackets. He thought he looked ridiculous in all of them and for once Lisa was agreeing with him.

"Ok, well that's the end of the slate grey ones... We'll just move on to the blacks now," said a frustrated Lisa when Harry finally emerged from the change room for her perusal.

So with that dismissal Harry was banished back to the dressing room to begin trying on the pile of black suit jackets that Lisa and the sceptical salesman had left for him.

Thus far, with Lisa's help he had bought twelve t-shirts, ten button up shirts with long sleeves and six with short sleeves, three pairs of beige trousers, four pairs of black trousers, three pairs of jeans in various cuts and washes, two brown belts, two black belts, a new pair of prescription glasses, two pairs of sunglasses and contacts, various undergarments -

that had been mortifying!, three new pairs of shoes, and last but not least a black suit jacket.

Stepping out of the change room for what felt like the millionth time, Harry stood in front of Lisa waiting for either her approval or disapproval.

"Wow," was all she said before she turned to the salesman and asked, "Do you think you could tailor it around the waist?"

"Certainly," the salesman replied as he walked up to Harry and gestured for him to take off the jacket.

Rushing to do so, Harry slipped the jacket off of his shoulders and passed it to the man.

"Is that it?" Harry tiredly asked Lisa.

"That's it, Harry. All done now," she said with a smirk.

The evil, sadistic woman knew exactly how much pain this 'shopping spree' had caused him and he was pretty sure that she was revelling in it.

Harry couldn't decide who was more evil; Voldemort or Lisa.

In the end, Harry just ended up praying that they would never team up.

He didn't think the world would survive it.

Meanwhile at the Headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix...

Ron, Hermione and Ginny were relaxing upstairs in what was supposed to be Ron and Harry's room after a long day of trying to clean the living room when Hedwig landed on the windowsill and began pecking at the window.

"Look, it's Hedwig!" shouted Hermione as she scrambled up from her seat beside Ron on his bed and flew to the window.

After fumbling with the latch, Hermione finally got the window open and Hedwig soared inside and landed on the dresser.

"Is there a letter," Ron asked eagerly, "Is Harry ok?"

"She doesn't know yet Ron," said Ginny as she sat on Harry's bed, "For once in your life be patient."

As Hermione cautiously approached Hedwig, Ron and Ginny waited eagerly in anticipation to hear any possible news from Harry.

"Hello, Hedwig" Hermione cooed.

In response Hedwig fixed her beady golden eyes on Hermione and just stared down at the girl from her perch on the dresser.

Ignoring the stare, Hermione asked Hedwig, "Did Harry send us a letter?"

Hedwig just ruffled her snowy feathers and tucked her head under her wing to nap.

"So, is there a letter?" Ron asked.

"No," an aggravated Hermione answered, "There's no letter. There's nothing."

"Where could he possibly be?" shouted Ron

"What I'm more worried about is the fact that he didn't send a letter," said Hermione quietly as she slumped down on the bed and buried her head in her hands.

"I mean why did he have to run off? Was he attacked? Has Voldemort kidnapped him?" Hermione ranted.

"I'm sure he's fine," said Ginny reassuringly.

"But we don't KNOW THAT!" shouted Hermione, "No one tells us anything! He could be dead and we wouldn't even know it!" she shouted before she burst out in tears.

"There, there Herm. I'm sure he's fine, like Ginny said," said a nervous Ron as he tried to comfort Hermione with reassuring pats on the back. He wasn't doing very well.

"Hey, Hermione," said Ginny

"Hmmm?" Hermione replied

"Why don't we try and send a message too Harry using Hedwig? She should be able to find him anywhere. Then we would know that he is at least safe,"

At this suggestion Hermione's mood visibly brightened.

"Good idea, Ginny. Let me just go get some parchment and a quill," said Hermione quickly and she rushed out of the room with tear streaks still on her face.

When Harry finally reached the Leaky Cauldron he was so relieved.

He could finally shrink all those bags of clothes!

It seemed like they weighed a ton... each, and there were at least twenty bags. And every single Muggle he had passed had just looked at him like he was insane.

One man had even come up to him and asked, "Why didn't you drive? Or even just catch a taxi?"

Harry was wondering that very same fact. Why the hell hadn't he caught a taxi or if he was feeling a little masochistic, the Knight Bus? But no...

He felt the need to walk all the way back to the Leaky Cauldron without casting feather light charms on the bags or even shrinking charms.

It was moments like this that made Harry feel that Baird was justified in his opinion that Harry was particularly forgetful to the fact that he actually had magic unless he was attacked or he was specifically told to use magic.

Baird's exact words had been, "Why on earth do I keep you around when you can't even seem to remember that you are a wizard?" before he had stormed off down to the shop to take care of a customer.

Since then Harry had been trying to make himself use magic for everything, even the tiniest of things like tying his shoelaces.

Once inside the Leaky Cauldron Harry plonked his bags down on one of

the spare tables and shrunk them until they were the size of matchboxes and slipped them in the pocket of his jeans.

Now that his hair was long enough to cover his scar, no one had recognised him, yet. But Harry knew that it would only be a matter of time. Long hair is a crappy disguise even by Harry's low standards. Harry was going to see if he could work on changing his eye colour and height next but this evening he planned on pulling out Slytherin's 'A History of Parseltongue' and beginning to read that.

After a good long nap on the couch first though.

So with those thoughts in mind, Harry passed through the barrier into Diagon Alley and began making his way to Obscurus Books.

As Harry walked through the front door to the shop a small bell went off and the customers who were still milling about in the shop turned to look at him before dismissing him and returning to their browsing.

"Ah, there you are boy!" said a voice from behind one of the bookshelves, a voice that sounded exactly like Baird.

Harry just groaned. He didn't have time for this! He just wanted to go upstairs to their apartment and become one with the couch and he rested his poor feet.

"Are you ignoring me?" asked Baird as he emerged from the book stacks with a raised eyebrow.

"No, Baird. I was just catching my breath," Harry sighed.

"Good," said Baird with a grin.

'Crap' thought Harry. He knew, he just knew that he wasn't going to get to sit down and rest his feet because every time Baird got that god-forsaken grin on his face Harry ended up having to do something for the old coot.

"Because I need you to watch the shop for me, for a second while I go

fetch something for a customer," continued Baird with a smirk.

'Why do I even bother?' Harry thought sarcastically before answering,

"Sure, let me just put my bags up in my room?"

"No, you can do that afterward. It will only take a moment," said Baird and then he was gone, out the door to the back staircase.

Harry just sighed and walked behind the counter, hoping that none of the customers would have questions about any of the books in the store because Harry didn't know that much about any of them.

"Hi, I would like to purchase this book," said a petite witch who appeared to be in her mid twenties. Although, knowing how wizards and witches age she could be fifty for all Harry knew.

'Crap,' thought Harry, 'Where's Baird when you need him?'

"Sure," said Harry as he forced down his inner panic and pulled on his Slytherin mask with what he hoped was a convincing smile. Glancing down at the book, Harry suddenly changed his mind because lying innocently on the counter in front of him was Gilderoy Lockhart's 'Voyages with Vampires'.

"Ms?" asked Harry hesitantly.

"Yes?" the witch replied with an inquisitive look, "Is there a problem?"

"No, no problem at all," said Harry reassuringly.

Harry knew that if he just blurted out that Lockhart was a fraud and that he didn't think the woman should buy his books, then the witch would probably just leave the shop in disgust and then Baird would be angry at him for scaring away a customer so Harry decided to be sly about it.

"It's just that if you are looking for a good Defence Against the Dark Arts book, I know a much better one," Harry continued while trying to be as convincing as possible.

"You must be mistaken," said the witch, "There are no better books on

Defence Against the Dark Arts than Gilderoy Lockhart's!"

"You are completely correct," said Harry with a smile, "But the book that I am talking about is just as useful as Lockhart's books but is almost half the price. You see, Lockhart was a genius of a writer but because of his fame, his books are now a little bit too pricy."

"That is why I'm telling you this little secret," Harry continued with a wink at the witch, "To help a beautiful witch like you, get the information she needs but at an affordable price."

The woman was blushing at the attention, "Um... well. Ok, if you insist." She responded with a nervous smile.

"Alright then, just this way," said Harry as he walked back around the counter and began leading the witch to the Defence Against the Dark Arts aisle.

"Just so you know," said the witch who was still blushing a little bit.

"The book is for my fiancé. It's his birthday next week and he works in the Department of Magical Law Enforcement so I wanted to get him something useful," said the witch as she puffed up in pride when she began speaking about her fiancé.

"Well he must be a very lucky man to have such a beautiful witch as his fiancé," said Harry with a smile at the once again blushing witch before going back to his search.

"Aha, here it is!" Harry said triumphantly as he reached up to the top shelf and grabbed the defence book that had been assigned during Harry's third year at Hogwarts.

"And you're sure it's just as good as Gilderoy Lockhart's?" the witch asked dubiously.

"Positive," said Harry with a grin, "I guarantee your fiancé will love it."

"If you're sure, then I'll have it," said the woman with a smile in return.

"Then I'll go ring it up for you," said Harry.

When the woman was gone, happily walking out of the shop with a wave at Harry, Baird mysteriously appeared as if he had sensed that Harry no longer needed him.

"Thanks for all the help back there, Harry muttered sarcastically to Baird as he walked past him to give a book to one of the wizards in the Transfiguration aisle.

"You're welcome, my young apprentice," said Baird with a smirk when he returned, "it's good to see you demonstrating that you have some potential after all."

"What is that supposed to mean?" Harry asked, slightly offended.

He thought that he had handled the situation perfectly. He had convinced the woman to believe that not buying Lockhart's book was the right decision. Wasn't that a good thing?

"It was excellent," said Baird with a pat on Harry's back. "I just wish you would act that confident and suave all the time. When you put on what you call your 'Slytherin Mask' I see you transform into a young man with the world at his fingertips and who is ready to take it."

"Oh," said Harry.

He was confused. Baird had just called his manipulative Slytherin mask a good thing?

"But isn't it wrong to manipulate people like that?" Harry asked.

"Let me ask you something," said Baird as he began closing up the shop and setting up the night wards.

"Did you convince that woman not to buy Lockhart's trash of a book?" asked Baird.

"Yes," replied Harry hesitantly from his seat on the counter with his legs swinging back and forth.

"Was that woman flattered by your compliments?" asked Baird with a smirk.

"Yes"

"Now was she pleased when she was leaving?" Baird asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Yes" replied Harry resignedly. He could see where Baird was going with this.

"Now do you see? This is any salesperson's job. This is what I do and this is what you will do," said Baird with finality.

"But it's wrong!" yelled Harry.

"No it is NOT, boy!" Baird yelled back.

Harry just sat stunned on the counter. Baird had never raised his voice in the time that he had known him. He had never yelled at Harry but something he had said must have set the man off.

"Everyone manipulates," Baird continued, "Some just do it better than others. In the Wizarding world that makes you a Slytherin and in the Muggle world that makes you a Conman. You need to learn to embrace who you are and make the most of it."

Then Baird started to walk towards Harry with a scowl on his face.

"I've said this before, kid. You have so much potential in there," Baird solemnly said as he pointed to Harry's forehead, "I just don't want to see you waste it."

"I understand," said Harry with a serious nod.

"Good!" said Baird cheerfully.

Harry's eyes widened at Baird's sudden mood swing and then it dawned on him. The old coot had just manipulated him! Harry couldn't force himself to be mad with Baird because he had just been demonstrating exactly what he had been trying to say...

"Why you old manipulative coot!" Harry yelled as he leaped off the checkout counter to follow Baird to the back staircase.

"Guilty as charged!" said Baird with a grin as they climbed the stairs to the apartment they shared, "Now let's have some dinner."

Harry just sighed. He was never going to get to sit down let alone put his shopping bags away at this rate. Baird would never let him have a moment's peace... but for some reason that was ok with him because for once in his life he felt like he was on the right path.

A/N: Yay, the good bit is slowly coming closer and closer! I hoped you all liked this chapter of Survival of the Fittest. So click the review button and tell me what you thought!

-Marcielle-

## 10. Slytherin Secrets

Title: Survival of the Fittest

Author: Marcielle's Musings

Previously In Survival of the Fittest:

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## Chapter 12: Slytherin Secrets

It turned out that Harry did get his wish to kick back and relax but it was much later in the evening than he had initially hoped for. He also wasn't on the couch with his feet propped up on the coffee table. Nope, he was tucked up in his bed, reading, with only the lamp on his bedside table for light.

A few hours earlier, after dinner, Harry had gone to his room to empty all of his shopping bags into a pile on his bed which he then went and placed in the correct drawers in his dresser.

Once he had finished putting away all of his new belongings he had grabbed 'Metamorphmagus Me' and a mirror so that he could practice how to change the colour of his eyes and his hair. As the book had mentioned, changing his hair was much easier than changing his eye colour. It had taken him three hours but in the end he had gotten it.

He now had Weasley red hair, and bright blue eyes. That was, before he had changed his hair back. He really, really didn't look good as a red head. He had, however, kept the blue eyes because they made him look mysterious and also nothing like the old be-speckled Harry which had first entered the wizarding world.

One other miracle of the evening was the discovery that Harry could completely fix his eyesight using his Metamorphmagus ability.

He couldn't believe it when it had first happened.

He could see!

Nothing was blurry or out of focus!

He had perfect 20/20 vision!

After that huge success of the evening, Harry decided to give

'Metamorphmagus Me' a rest and had picked up another book. The book was titled 'A History of Parseltongue' by Salazar Slytherin and its contents, if known by the wizarding public, would change the way that they viewed Parseltongue... forever.

## A History of Parseltongue

By Salazar Slytherin

### Introduction

Parseltongue, a language now viewed as a mark, a mark of Darkness and evil. But this now hated language was once viewed as a mark of a healer, prophet and high priest/priestess. How has the truth of this ancient and noble gift been corrupted so completely that its past has been entirely forgotten?

Parseltongue is the language of serpents and other magical serpentine creatures such as the Runespore, Naga, Basilisk, Ashwinder, Sea Serpents and even Wyverns. Any human being who can speak Parseltongue is known as a Parselmouth or 'Snake-Speaker'. While the commonly hereditary gift of Parseltongue is now viewed as a rare skill, this was not always the case. There was once a time when there were many Parselmouths roaming this planet but now these numbers have dwindled to a short few due to interbreeding with non-Parselmouths. This interbreeding has caused this once revered gift to become a whisper. There are many historical legends which inadvertently speak of the creation of Parselmouths and all will be touched on in this book. But let me finish this introduction with a final message: forget what you think you know about Parselmouths and the gift of Parseltongue because the truth is like nothing you could ever imagine.

### Chapter One: The Origins of Parseltongue and Parselmouths

All around the world there have been snake deities; Gods and Goddesses

who could speak to snakes and serpents. And there were also serpentine creatures themselves which were revered as deities. From the Feathered Serpent of the Americas to the Naga of Eastern Asia Serpent deities have been around since the dawn of time. So are Parselmouths the mortal children of these great beings? Or are we something else entirely?

The Feathered Serpent is a prominent deity found in multiple religions in the Americas. To the Aztecs it was called Quetzalcoatl, to the Mayans this deity was called Kukulcan, Q'ug'umatz and Tohil. Instead of being some mystical single deity as the Muggles during believed, these species of serpent are actually distant relatives of the Chinese wind dragons and Wyverns which are believed to have flown over from Asia and evolved as a separate species, complete with their own identifiable characteristics. These feathered serpents are now under the classification of serpentine dragon like their featherless cousin the Wyvern.

A Wyvern is a magical winged serpent with a barbed tail which is as sharp as the blade of a freshly polished sword and unlike their cousins, dragons; Wyverns have no legs and are incapable of breathing fire. Instead these flying serpents with leathery bat-like wings are capable of creating one of the most deadly venoms on the planet. This species also is capable of biting their prey and not injecting their venom as is quite common during hatching season since baby Wyverns are unable to eat poisoned meat. Like the Feathered Serpents, Wyverns are under the classification of serpentine dragons.

Now, the Naga were deities found in Hinduism and Buddhism throughout Asia who took the form of a large snake - specifically the King Cobra. These 'deities' had the upper body of a mortal human being but the lower body of a serpent. A male Naga is called a Nag while a female Naga is called a Nagi or Nagini. In India, Nagas are considered to be spirits of

nature and the protectors of springs, wells and rivers. They bring rain, and thus fertility, but are also thought to bring disasters such as floods and drought. According to traditions Nagas are only malevolent to humans when they have been mistreated. In many countries throughout Asia, the Naga concept has been merged with local traditions of great and wise serpents or dragons. In Tibet, the Naga were equated with the klu, which dwell in lakes or underground streams and supposedly guard great treasures. In China, the Naga were equated with the lóng or the Chinese dragon.

However, in a Cambodian creation myth, the Naga were a reptilian race which ruled over a large empire on a group of islands in the Pacific Ocean. Now here is where the first myth about the creation of Parselmouths begins. In the legend the Naga King of this vast empire had a very beautiful daughter named Nagini. And it is said that, on the day of her betrothal to a Nag of much wealth and power, she fled the Naga Empire and made her way to India. There, while hiding in a river Nagini saw a man get thrown from his horse, which had spooked at the sight of a snake in the reeds beside the river. Seeing that the man couldn't swim and was sure to drown, beautiful Nagini saved the man's life by swimming him to the banks of the river.

"I am indebted to you, fair maiden," said the man, "as a reward I will make you my wife"

But the man had not yet seen that Nagini was half serpent since the murky river hid her lower half. It was then that Nagini revealed her true form to the man. He was shocked and asked her if she was a Goddess to which she replied; "I am no Goddess but I am a Princess to a vast empire in the stars and I would be honoured to be your wife"

In reply the man said, "Well I am no mere peasant either. I am the

Brahman, Kaundiya. I own vast lands and you will be my Queen."

From the eventual union of Nagini and Kaundiya sprung the beginnings of the Cambodian people and possibly the first Parselmouths in existence.

Even today there are still Cambodians, both Muggle and Magical, who say that they are 'Born from the Naga'.

So, are Parselmouths the children of a Naga princess and an Indian Brahman? Or are we the descendents of an entirely different magical race.

With a yawn, Harry glanced up from the book and looked out the window. It was pitch black outside and the only light was from the moon which was half hidden by clouds at the moment.

'What time is it?' Harry thought to himself as he put a scrap of parchment into the book to save his place and grabbed his wand from his bedside table.

"Tempus," whispered Harry.

Now hovering before Harry's face in glowing neon numbers and letters was the date and time before they faded into nothing after a seven second interval.

"Crap," cursed Harry as he saw the time.

It was 11:45 at night and knowing Baird he would be banging on the door to Harry's room at five o'clock in the morning telling him to "Get up and get studying!"

So Harry put the Parseltongue book on the nightstand, turned off the lamp and lay down to sleep.

Just as Harry predicted, when five o'clock in the morning arrived, so too did Baird's annoying wake-up call.

"Get up and get studying! No lazing around for you this morning. Up!"

Baird yelled from the other side of Harry's bedroom door as he banged on

the door with his fist.

After jack-knifing up in his bed at the sudden noise, Harry sighed and ran his hand over his face.

"Are you up yet?" Baird yelled.

"I'm up! For the Gods sake, would it be impossible to wake me up in a different way?" Harry yelled back as he stormed to his door and thrust it open.

Baird stood on the other side of the door frame, grinning like a loon, which only succeeded in infuriating Harry even more before his anger just drained out of him. There was no point in trying to stay mad at Baird, he would just find Harry's anger funny and would keep antagonising him until he either forcibly calmed down or he cracked.

"See, I'm up," said Harry with a sarcastic grin in Baird's direction, "Are you happy now, you old loon?"

"Ecstatic," Baird grinned, "Now go have a shower and get dressed then join me for breakfast. I have something important to tell you."

"Yeah, yeah, I'm going," said Harry's retreating figure with an absentminded wave in Baird's direction.

After finishing his morning ablutions and dressing in a pair of beige slacks and a light blue button up, Harry made his way to the kitchen. On the table was a plate of fresh assorted fruits.

"Set the table will you?" Baird asked while he ladled porridge into two bowls.

"Sure" Harry agreed as he moved to grab the place mats and the cutlery.

Once they were both seated and happily munching on the fruit and eating their porridge Harry finally spoke up with the question that had been bugging him since Baird had woken him.

"You said that you had something important to tell me?" asked Harry

curiously.

"Oh, yes. I really need to begin your Occlumency training. I can't just have you walking around with your thoughts going everywhere. We need to organise that mess up there that way you will find learning new things easier because information will become more accessible." Baird said once he swallowed his mouthful of porridge.

"But you still haven't told me what Occlumency really is. You've just told me that I have to learn it. How about a little explanation first," Harry replied.

Baird smiled and then began to speak, "It's good that you are finally asking questions. You should really learn to question everything that you are told because most of the time it will not be the complete truth.

People are naturally biased due to how they were raised, what culture they were raised in and what their personal experiences have been."

"Now, Occlumency is the art of magically organising one's mind and protecting it against Legilimency. Legilimency is the opposite of Occlumency and is the art of penetrating a person's mind and navigating through this person's mind and correctly interpreting one's findings. A person who practices the art of Occlumency is called an Occlumens and a person who practices the art of Legilimency is known as a Legilimens. As an Occlumens you would be able to prevent a Legilimens from accessing your thoughts and feelings, or even influencing them. It would also give you much better focus because your mind will be organised and your emotions calm. Essentially it is a permanent, magical version of Muggle meditation," Baird explained.

"I'm not sure that I will be very good at this," Harry mumbled bashfully,

"My thoughts are all over the place at the best of times and I really don't have time for meditation."

"Well then you will just have to make time," Baird replied, "I went ahead and bought you a Muggle book on guided meditations for you to listen to every evening before you go to sleep. This will succeed in calming both your mind and your body and will help you get a better night's sleep."

"Wait, but you said it was a Muggle book. How will I listen to it?" Harry asked.

"By using the Libroquar charm, of course," Baird replied.

"And what on earth is that?" asked Harry in frustration. Baird always did this. He would tell him something but he would never elaborate unless Harry specifically asked him to.

"It is abbreviated Latin for 'book speak'. When saying this spell you are essentially commanding the book to speak," Baird answered.

"Ok, and let me guess you want me to meditate now?" Harry asked sarcastically, already knowing what the answer would be; 'Yes'

"No, like I just told you; practice your meditation before you go to bed. It will give you a head start on your Occlumency training, later," said Baird.

"Oh, now that reminds me. How is your Metamorphmagus training progressing? Will you be able to work in the shop this upcoming Monday?" Baird then asked.

"Really, really well. Here watch!" said Harry as he excitedly started morphing his hair into short, chestnut coloured spikes and his eyes morphed into the same icy-blue colour that they had been last night.

"Very impressive," said Baird with a smirk, "I will, of course, expect you to be working down in the shop all of next week while I work down in The Vault."

"Fine," Harry sighed.

"Oh, one more thing!" said Harry as he gestured to his eyes, "No more glasses! I'll never need those pesky liabilities ever again!"

"Congratulations!" Baird exclaimed with a clap, "And how are you doing with all of the other books?"

"Um... well I've started the book by Salazar Slytherin on the history of Parseltongue..." Harry replied.

"Good, good. And what do you think of it so far?" asked Baird as he reached for a cube of honeydew melon.

"It's really interesting. I always thought that Parselmouths were descended from Salazar Slytherin but if the information in the book is accurate Parselmouths are supposedly descended from the Naga! How cool is that? One thing I don't understand is why the Wizarding World thinks that all Parselmouths are descended from Salazar Slytherin..." said Harry.

"As you probably already know, snakes and serpents, both magical and non-magical, tend to prefer warmer climates. Therefore, it is quite possible that Salazar Slytherin was the first Parseltongue in Europe, that is, and that other Parselmouths remained in the tropics." Baird answered.

"Hmm, yeah that would make sense..." said Harry with a nod before he began to stand and clear up his breakfast from the kitchen table.

As Harry cleaned up Baird asked, "So, what do you plan on doing today now that you are far more inconspicuous?"

"Unfortunately I have to go shopping again, but this time in Diagon Alley. I need some more robes and a new trunk since I left my old banged up one at my relatives," replied Harry as he cast Scourgify on the dishes and then levitated them to their place in the cupboard.

Watching Harry cast those spells Baird remarked, "You have gotten much better at casting those spells."

"Thanks," said Harry with a happy grin, "Alright then, I'll probably be back for lunch but if I'm not I'll just eat in the Alley," Harry continued to

say as he walked towards the front door to the apartment.

"Wait," Baird said, "You should probably get a wand holster as well, while you're shopping and perhaps you should get a multi compartment trunk so that you will have space for everything to be organised instead of just throwing them inside like you do with that backpack of yours. I won't have you damaging any of the books that I've given you, understood?"

"Understood," said Harry with a wave and then he was out the door.

He really didn't want another shopping trip like yesterday. One was more than enough in a lifetime. He really didn't need another. He just wanted to get some new robes that actually fit him, a trunk and a wand holster and then he would be done. Since Madam Malkin's was the closest Harry decided to go there first and get his robes shopping over and done with.

Walking outside of Obscurus Books, the Alley wasn't nearly as crowded as it had been yesterday since it was so early in the morning. The shops were only just beginning to open for the day. Across the street, Mr. and Mrs. Scribbulus were opening the front door to their shop, Scribbulus Writing Instruments. Baird had mentioned them to him two days ago when the old man had been telling him where the inks used in copying the books down in The Vault came from.

Slightly apprehensive Harry opened the front door to Madam Malkin's Robes for all occasions. Because it was so early Harry was the shop's only customer and he was immediately approached by one of the shops assistants. Thankfully this assistant was a twenty-something looking male so Harry wouldn't need to go through another 'Lisa Attack' simply because he said he needed clothes.

"How can I help you today?" the sales assistant asked.

"Well," Harry said as he looked around at the many racks of robes that lined the walls of the store. "I was hoping that I could get a few pairs of

tailored robes."

"Sure we can do that," the man replied with a smile that looked effortless.

"Well, nothing over the top... but maybe two sets of black robes and one royal blue and the other emerald green," Harry continued to say.

"Yeah, we can do that too. Seriously, don't sweat it. Any sort of robes in any colour - we do them all," the wizard reassured, "Here, just step this way, up on the block"

In less than two minutes, Harry was standing on a wooden block in the centre of the shop as one of those magical measuring tapes flew around him taking his measurements from how tall he was to how wide his shoulders were. It was a lot less annoying than the one in Ollivander's shop which measured how far apart his eyes are and how big his nostrils. Meanwhile the assistant was in the back room fetching the fabric. When he returned he began layering the bolts of fabric over Harry's arms.

"Good choices on the colours," he said before he looked at Harry inquisitively, "You wouldn't happen to know what style of cut you want for your robes, would you?"

"Um... well yeah," Harry nervously answered, "I have this really old pair of blue robes back at Obscurus Books that I really like which have a high neck and buttons down the front until it reaches my hips and then it flows loosely around my ankles. Oh, and it's sleeveless too and has a silver trim. Do you think you could make these like that?"

"Wow, are you the store owner of Obscurus Books' apprentice?" the sales assistant asked in apparent shock.

"Something like that, yeah," answered Harry because really, what else could he be but Baird's apprentice?

"What's it like?" the young man asked as he began pinning the fabric until it somewhat resembled the robes that Harry had described.

"It's a lot of hard work and a lot of studying but it's worth it. I've learnt more stuff with Baird that is actually useful than I have in all of my years at Hogwarts so far," Harry replied as he watched the man work.

"Wow, that's good. So you are still going to Hogwarts and what - working and doing your apprenticeship over the summer? That's a really good arrangement. Madam Malkin wouldn't start my apprenticeship until I had completely finished my schooling at Hogwarts. What's your name by the way?" the shop assistant asked as he began pinning the next set of robes. 'Shit,' thought Harry. He hadn't thought up a name that he would be using when he was in this disguise! What would his name be? How about James, like his father? No that was too similar. How about Evan like his mother's maiden name, then? Yeah, that would work but what about a last name...

"Evan Thomas," Harry said with a smile as he did a slight bow of the head down to the assistant. It was enough of a bow to be considered a greeting but not too much to signify that Harry thought himself beneath the shop assistant, "and you are?" newly crowned, Evan asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Oh, sorry. My name is Daemarcus Desbrowe," Daemarcus replied with a similar bow, "There all done!"

"Really? That was quick," said Harry. He had expected the fitting to take much longer.

"Yeah, well you're only getting four sets of robes and a little bit of magic helps to speed up the process. Do you want to watch as I stitch them?" Daemarcus asked.

"Sure. Is there a special spell that does the stitching?" asked Harry as he saw Daemarcus pull out his wand.

"Yeah, there are but they are all part of the apprenticeship," Daemarcus

replied with a wink.

Before his eyes, the robes started stitching themselves together. Not a seam was out of place. Out of the back room a pair of scissors and a box of buttons flew out and began attacking the robes.

"Stop that!" Daemarcus commanded with a flick of his wand.

The scissors and buttons ceased their attack and began floating around the robes appearing to look, if it was possible, chastised. Five minutes later the robes were completely finished.

"What do you think? Let's try them on you to make sure they fit,"

Daemarcus said as he held up the finished products.

"They look really good," Harry replied enthusiastically as he tried on one of the black ones and then the blue one, "And they are all really comfortable."

"You should keep that one on," said Daemarcus from his place behind Harry as he admired his new robes in the mirror, "It goes really well with your eyes."

"Ok, I'll do that. So how much, in total, for the robes?" Harry asked as he stepped down from the block.

Daemarcus, with the other three pairs of robes in his arms, walked to the counter and began to figure out the price, "Well that is four custom made apprentice robes. Two black, one blue and one green, all with silver embroidery at the hem and on the left lapel and with anti-staining, anti-wrinkling and anti-stretching charms put in place. That will come to a total of eleven galleons and six sickles."

"Here you go," said Harry as he passed over the appropriate amount of money from his money pouch that he had grabbed from his backpack earlier that morning.

With Harry's new robes folded up carefully and placed in a bag, Harry

walked happily back out into Diagon Alley, glad to get his robe shopping over and done with. It was much busier now than it had been earlier when he had started shopping but it still wasn't as bad as the 'Hogwarts Rush' when all the Hogwarts students are out in mass buying their supplies, the first weekend after the letters arrive.

Next Harry began making his way to Wiseacre's Wizarding Equipment where he figured he could buy a new trunk. Wiseacre's Wizarding Equipment sold a wide variety of magical instruments like telescopes and hourglasses but they also sold wizarding tents, magical clocks like the one at the Burrow and multi-compartment trunks. There was also a local branch in Hogsmeade that Harry had visited once or twice, just to have a look around.

The shop was crammed full of wizarding items. There was a pile of brass scales to the left of the door and on the far right wall hung what looked like twenty cuckoo clocks. There was a sign in the centre of the shop that advertised 'Witchy Prices on Wiseacre's Wizarding Tents' and next to it was a pile of what looked like telescopes in their leather cases. There were only four or five customers in the shop, all browsing the many magical wares the shop had to offer. There was so much stuff that Harry thought he could have walked in without a disguise and he still wouldn't have been noticed.

Clambering through the piles of merchandise Harry finally made his way to the counter at the back of the store.

"Hello and how can I help you today?" asked the middle age looking wizard behind the counter.

"I'm looking for a multi-compartment trunk. I need one split compartment for my Muggle clothes, another for my robes, one compartment that folds out into a bookcase, and another fold out compartment full of drawers to

store any other items," said Harry, "Oh, and also if you have them, I need a wand holster."

"You're in luck!" said the wizard behind the counter, "We do have a trunk that meets your specifications but it also has one other compartment used to store potions ingredients. Is the trunk and the wand holster for your apprenticeship?" the man asked as he glanced at Harry's new robes.

"Yeah, something like that," replied Harry, "Can I see the trunk and then decide if I want it?"

"Of course! Just follow me and I'll show you the trunk I was talking about." Said the man as he darted out from behind the counter and began weaving his way through the piles and stacks of equipment. Eventually they reached a pile of trunks that were piled in a fashion so that they made a pyramid shape.

"Hmmm, now which one was it..." the store clerk mumbled under his breath before he yelled, "Aha, that one," he said as he pointed to one of the trunks near the top of the pile.

Pulling out his wand, the store clerk waved it in a circle and then he waved it in a figure eight shape before he pulled the wand closer to his body. As he did so, the trunk that he had just pointed to came shooting out of the pile and landed at Harry's feet. Somehow the precarious pile hadn't toppled over and appeared to be held up by pure magic until the trunks began to rearrange themselves until they formed a, once more, stable pyramid shape.

"Here are the keys," said the clerk as he passed Harry a ring that had five brass keys on it.

All of the keys were numbered one through to five and each corresponded with a lock on the trunk. Grabbing the first key, Harry opened the first compartment which opened like the trunk he had bought

before his first year. However this compartment was broken up into three sections.

"One for shirts, one for pants, and one for undergarments and the like," said the sales assistant.

Next, Harry opened the second compartment but this one folded out to a small long-hang wardrobe for Harry to hang his robes. The third compartment was similar to the first but was broken up into fifty small sections each with a glass potion vial inside.

"The whole trunk is covered in unmovable, waterproof, fireproof and unbreakable charms," the clerk added helpfully as he watched Harry inspect the trunk.

The fourth compartment was similar to the second and folded out but instead of a long-hang wardrobe it was made up of ten squared drawers.

The last compartment, compartment number five, was the same size as the long-hand wardrobe but it was a fold out bookshelf. It was perfect.

"I'll take it," said Harry as he stood up from where he had been crouched beside the trunk.

"Excellent. Oh, and for an extra two galleons I can tie the trunk to your magical signature so that only you can open it" the shop clerk mentioned enticingly.

"I'll do that too," said Harry with a nod. Having the trunk tied to his magical signature would prevent anyone from breaking into his trunk. It would also prevent his classmates from seeing his book choices which, at the moment, weren't exactly legal or 'light' in the eyes of the Ministry.

"Wonderful! I'll just take this up to the counter while you go pick a wand holster from that pile over there," the clerk said as he pointed to a pile of wand holsters to Harry's right.

The sign hanging from the ceiling advertised 'Quick Draw Wand Holsters:

Just flick your wrist and into your hand they pop. Extra anti-summoning charm for a galleon'

Picking up one of the black leather holsters Harry attached it to his wrist with the leather straps that hung from the holster. It felt a little weird having something that large attached to his forearm but for some reason it didn't feel like it weighed a thing.

'Must be an added feather-light charm' thought Harry as he made his way back to the counter.

"Ah, there you are. Did you find a wand holster?" asked the middle-aged shop clerk.

In response Harry just held up his forearm where the wand holster was safely secured.

"Good, good. Now, did you want that anti-summoning charm put on the wand holster?" the clerk asked Harry.

"Yeah, and could you also tie it to my magical signature like you will for the trunk?" Harry asked.

"Hmmm, not many people have asked for that but I'm sure it's possible. That would prevent anyone from trying to take the holster from you...

That is a very good idea. I'll try to see if I can do it," said the clerk as he levitated the trunk onto the counter, "Now just place your forearm with the holster on the counter as well."

Doing so the clerk began a series of complicated wand movements and Harry began to feel a small tugging in the pit of his stomach. It was a little bit similar to the feeling he got when he morphed. And then, suddenly the tugging feeling stopped.

"There we go, All done!" the shop assistant exclaimed with a clap, "Both the wand holster and the trunk are tied to your magical signature and the wand has that extra anti-summoning charm that you asked for. That will

be twenty four galleons in total."

Harry passed the shop assistant the money and then levitated the trunk behind him as he made his way out of the shop and back to Obscurus Books. One of the things he loved about Diagon Alley is the fact that no one blinked an eye at the levitated trunk that was trailing behind Harry as he walked. It was considered normal in Diagon Alley for things to be floating, glowing, or even bubbling. It was insane but Harry loved it.

When Harry walked into Obscurus Books the bell chimed merrily and Baird who was helping a customer glanced over. When his eyes landed on what Harry was wearing his eyes widened.

"Just a moment," Baird said to the customer that he was currently helping before he began making his way to where Harry was walking to the back door to the shop.

Harry stopped suddenly when a hand grasped his forearm. Spinning around to face the person who stopped him, Harry was met with Baird's scowling face.

"Baird? What is it? Have I done something wrong?" Harry asked warily.

"Follow me, boy," Was the only reply Harry got as he was dragged by his forearm up to the apartment that Baird and Harry shared with Harry's new trunk bobbing merrily behind them.

"Do you have any idea about the significance of the robes you are wearing?" growled Baird.

"Umm, no. I just asked for robes similar to that blue pair that I have," answered Harry nervously. He couldn't understand what had made Baird so worked up but he was beginning to think that it had something to do with his robes.

Baird sighed, "You are wearing apprentice robes. Second level apprentice robes at that."

"What's wrong with that? I pretty much am your apprentice anyway."

Harry replied.

"Yes, you are but all apprenticeships must be registered with the Ministry Guild Sector before they begin and you are not even a bronze level apprentice let alone a silver one," answered Baird with another sigh as he ran his hand down his face.

"I don't understand what you're talking about!" said Harry in frustration.

"Sit down child and I will explain," said Baird as he began pacing on the opposite side of the coffee table.

Doing as he had been told, Harry sat on the couch and waited for Baird to explain because Harry was so confused right now.

"There are three levels to an apprenticeship; bronze, silver and gold.

Bronze level apprentices are just beginning their apprenticeship and it is a full year of study and training before they become a silver level apprentice. Once you become a silver level apprentice it is two years of study until you become a gold level apprentice and then it is only three years after that you can test to become a master. These guidelines were set out by The Guild Masters hundreds of years ago. You can't just impersonate a silver level apprentice!" said Baird in frustration equal to Harry's own.

"I'm sorry, I didn't know!" Harry yelled, "Just change the robes then so that they aren't silver level!"

"It's no longer that simple, child. You have been traipsing all around Diagon Alley in that getup. People would be more suspicious if you suddenly stopped." Sighed Baird as he slumped down in one of the kitchen table chairs.

Getting up to follow Baird, Harry planted himself in the seat opposite and then asked, "Well then what can we do?"

"We will have to register you with the Guild Sector. You are in luck, boy because I know the perfect cover for you as the apprentice of a friend of mine from the Republic of Chile who recently died. It's perfect. Do you have a name yet for this brown haired, blue eyed disguise of yours?"

Baird asked.

"Um, yeah, Evan Thomas," answered Harry with a nervous rub to the back of his neck.

"Oh? And why that name?" asked Baird with a raised eyebrow.

"Well my mother's maiden name was Evans so I chose that as my first name but... Thomas was because of... well, the Horcrux. I don't know why I chose that but it just felt right, I guess. Voldemort has always shaped who I am so I guess it felt necessary, you know?" answered Harry.

"I understand child," replied Baird reassuringly with a pat on Harry's wrist, "Voldemort has always had a large impact on your life. It is completely understandable that you would choose his birth name to become part of your new identity."

"So, I'm your apprentice now?" asked Harry hesitantly not wanting to irritate that man further.

"By the looks of it," Baird replied, "I will file the necessary paperwork tomorrow if you can watch the shop for me."

"Deal," said Harry, "and by the way, I am sorry for causing this inconvenience."

"It's no problem, child. I was going to ask you to become my apprentice anyway. This just sped up the process," said Baird as he got up from the table.

"Really?" asked Harry in shock. He knew that he was sort of like Baird's apprentice already but for Baird to offer to make it official...

"Really but don't make me regret this decision," answered Baird, "You will

study and work until you really are at a silver apprentice level and I will have no complaints. Do you understand me?"

"Completely. Thank You, I won't make you regret this," said Harry as he got out of his seat and performed a medium level bow from the waist. He now owed Baird more than he could possibly imagine and this was the perfect way to show how thankful he was.

Baird smiled at the display. Contrary to what he had said, the boy would do wonderfully at his apprenticeship and in Baird's eyes he was already well on his way to becoming a silver level, in reality. The boy may not love books as Baird himself did but he enjoyed learning and he always strived to do his best. In this apprenticeship, the boy would thrive. The only problem they might have would be trying to fit his apprenticeship in between his Hogwarts education.

## 11. Apprenticeship Week One

Title: Survival of the Fittest

Author: Marcielle's Musings

Previously In Survival of the Fittest:

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his way to becoming a silver level, in reality. The boy may not love books as Baird himself did but he enjoyed learning and he always strived to do his best. In this apprenticeship, the boy would thrive. The only problem they might have would be trying to fit his apprenticeship in between his Hogwarts education.

### Chapter 13: Apprenticeship Week One

After the discussion about Harry's new apprenticeship Baird had gone to his bedroom and had returned with a blue leather bound journal.

"This," Baird explained as he passed the book to Harry "will essentially be your notebook as you complete your apprenticeship. In the days of old these books were once called Grimoires. This book will contain notes on what you are currently studying for your apprenticeship and your impressions, thoughts and comments on what you are studying."

"On the first page I have written for you, 'Bard Apprenticeship: Bronze' since this is your first year as my Apprentice," continued Baird.

"Wait! You still haven't explained what type of apprentice I'll be. I know that I will be your apprentice but what does that entail? What will I be studying and why do I need an apprenticeship to become a bookstore owner?" Harry asked, overwhelmed by the reality of the situation.

'What have I gotten myself into?' Harry thought to himself.

"A lot of hard work, that's what," Baird replied to Harry's mental question. "You really do need to start on those meditations."

"I'll get to it but it seems like I have a million other things to learn at the same time!" yelled Harry in frustration.

"Calm down Harry, and to answer your other questions, you will be beginning your first year as an apprentice Bard," said Baird calmly, "Now before you ask, a Bard is essentially a collector and keeper of knowledge. In the days of old a Bard was a trader of knowledge of any type. To the masses, Bards were known as minstrels, poets and scholars. But our true

purpose is to collect and sell knowledge."

"As my apprentice," Baird continued with his explanation, "You will begin by mastering your own talents like your Parseltongue, Wandless Magic and Metamorphmagus abilities. Also you will learn about both Wizarding and Muggle History and how they intersect, Magical and Non-Magical Creatures and their habitats and Wizarding and Muggle laws. I will also teach you Old Magic, Spells, Enchantments and Rituals along the way to increase your learning capabilities and memory retention. And last but not least, you will slowly begin to create your own Vault."

"That sounds amazing..." said Harry in awe. "But please tell me you don't expect me to learn all of that in my first year," Harry begged.

"No, no, no," replied Baird with a chuckle at Harry's expense, "However, you must learn, at least the basics of all of these subjects in your first three years and then in your last three years, when you reach your gold level apprenticeship, you will be allowed to pick your own areas of study in which to focus on as well as continuing to study the topics that I set out."

"Ok then, that doesn't sound that bad," said Harry as he could almost physically feel the workload lessening.

"Don't forget that you also have your Hogwarts education, as well, to complete," mentioned Baird.

Harry's eyes widened to an almost impossible size as he imagined his next year at Hogwarts. He would have all the work set out for the first year of his Bard apprenticeship to complete as well as doing well in his Hogwarts studies.

"I'm not going to make it..." Harry groaned into his hands as he put his head down on the table.

He would never have time to relax. He would never have time to play

Quidditch... What had he gotten himself into?

"Oh, you will," Baird chuckled, "Don't worry so much. You stressing will not help the situation. It will only make the situation seem worse. You will have time to relax and play Quidditch if you stay organised on top of your work."

"Got it," said Harry as he began to stand up from his place at the kitchen table.

"Wait, sit back down. Before you go I have two spells to teach you," said Baird, "The first spell is the personalisation charm. This charm attaches your magical signature to an object so that only you can touch it or in this case read it. Once I teach you this charm I want you to apply it to your Grimoire so that both your secrets and mine will remain safe. The incantation is Soluméhi which is abbreviated Latin for 'only mine' while moving your wand in a circle over the object and then drawing a line through the circle to you."

"Try it now," said Baird encouragingly.

"Ok," said Harry nervously as he flicked his wand out of its new holster and began trying to focus on what he had to accomplish.

"Soluméhi" whispered Harry as he moved his wand in the directed movements.

'Please work,' Harry thought desperately, 'Don't let me fail...'

Before Harry's eyes, his new Grimoire began to glow and then stopped suddenly.

"Did it work?" asked Harry.

"Yes, it worked," said Baird with a nod, "Now, the second spell allows you to copy large amounts of text and also allows you to put down your thoughts without actively having to write them down. The spell will write down everything that you say in your Grimoire, for you. The

incantation is Cuenné while moving your wand in a circle around your mouth and then flicking your wand at your Grimoire and thinking about the spell copying your words. Then, if you need to erase words because you have made a mistake, say Avek while thinking about the words you want to erase."

"Should I try it now?" Harry asked.

"Yes, that would probably be a good idea so that you don't mess up your Grimoire on your first try. Accio Spare Parchment," said Baird with a flick of his wand.

A spare scrap of parchment flew out of Baird's room and landed in front of him on the table.

"Here," he intoned as he passed the scrap of parchment across the table to Harry, "Use this instead."

"Alright," answered Harry as he grabbed the parchment and began the wand movements for the copy charm, "Cuenné... Is something supposed to be happening?"

There, on the piece of spare parchment were the words 'Is something supposed to be happening?' in an elegantly slanted script.

"Now try to erase it," said Baird.

"Avek," said Harry as he focused on erasing the words on the scrap of parchment.

Seconds later the words began to fade until they eventually vanished all together as if they had never been there in the first place.

"These spells are brilliant!" said Harry with a grin as what felt like a rush of power went through him when he said the incantations of the copy and erase charms. "Why on earth aren't these spells taught at Hogwarts? It would make writing those stupid essays ten times easier. If I made a mistake I wouldn't have to write the whole thing over again."

"The reason that these spells aren't taught at Hogwarts is because they are classified as Dark spells by the Ministry of Magic. These spells, instead of using only the magic residing in yourself, you are asking the ambient magic that is all around us to help you with the task," answered Baird.

"But why are they banned and classified as Dark magic?" asked Harry with a confused look on his face. He couldn't understand why seemingly innocent spells would be classified as dark and banned. It wasn't like they hurt anybody.

"They are classified as Dark and banned for the reason that you just felt. Dark spells feel different from Light spells. When casting Light spells it will feel as if the magic is coming from within you but when casting Dark spells the magic doesn't come from inside of your magical core as it does for Light magic. Instead, majority of the magic used in Dark spells comes from the air around you and is channelled through you into the spell," explained Baird.

"But that doesn't answer my question," blurted out Harry impatiently.

"Patience, I am not finished explaining" chastised Baird, "Now, before you rudely interrupted I was going to say that while the spells that I just taught you may seem innocent enough they can be used for a more sinister purpose. For example, using Cuenné I could just as easily copy how you look and impersonate you because that is what the spell does; it copies anything as long as you put enough power into the spell and think about what you want to copy. In an area heavily populated with magical people, such as Diagon Alley and Knockturn Alley, the ambient magic available is more than enough to copy Harry Potter's features."

Then, without any warning, Baird cast Cuenné while pointing his wand at his own face. Like when casting the wards Harry could feel a shift in the air like all the magic in the room was being drawn to Baird. Slowly

Baird's face began to shimmer until the magic finally settled. Sitting in front of Harry was a perfect copy of what he had looked like as 'Harry Potter'.

"Do you see now why this spell is classified as Dark? While it can be used for innocent reasons like copying your words onto a piece of parchment it can also be used to steal another person's identity, the same way Polyjuice Potion does but this spell doesn't need to be reapplied. Unless I specifically cancel the spell I will remain looking like 'Harry Potter' forever. Another reason that these spell are classed as Dark, is because they are permanent due to the fact that they are supported by the ambient magic," explained Baird.

"I understand," said Harry.

"No, you don't. Not really. You are only beginning to learn about Dark magic, Old magic, Ritual magic and wizarding history. There are so many gaps in what I have told you and what you have learnt. You can't learn thousands of years worth of magic and traditions in only a week. It will take time but hopefully by the end of your apprenticeship you won't be as ignorant as the masses. You'll probably only be a little bit more knowledgeable but what can you expect?" asked Baird sarcastically.

"Now, you have the rest of the day off so I suggest that you use it wisely by studying and copying the books I have given you into your Grimoire," Then Baird was standing up from the kitchen table and walking out of the apartment, down to the shop below to take care of customers leaving Harry sitting contemplatively at the table.

Harry had only been living with Baird for four days. It may have felt like an eternity but it hadn't even been a week yet. Harry had three more years of Hogwarts education and six more years of being Baird's apprentice in which he could learn all he could ever possibly need to

thrive in the wizarding world. He would also have a future career available to him as a master Bard.

Harry didn't know what he was going to do about Voldemort but for now he was going to put it to the back of his mind because, in reality, there was no point in fighting against Voldemort if a part of him resided in Harry. It would be like fighting against himself. There was no doubt that if Voldemort tried to kill Harry he would do his best to defend himself but Harry wasn't going to go out into the world to try and hunt Voldemort down.

Walking to his room, Harry placed his new multi-compartment trunk in the corner at the end of his bed and dumped the bag carrying his new robes onto his bed before he flopped down on his bed face first. Sure, Baird had told him that he should probably be studying but Harry felt like he hadn't stopped learning and studying since he came to live with Baird. He needed a break. So Harry decided a quick afternoon nap was in order.

Baird said to meditate before sleep...

With a groan Harry realised that the niggling thought at the back of his brain was right; Baird had told him to meditate.

Sliding off the bed lethargically, Harry opened his wardrobe and rummaged through the books laying at the bottom until he found the Muggle book on guided meditation. Laying back down on the bed Harry flicked his wand out of his wand holster and cast Libroquar on the book, closed his eyes and began to listen to the soothing voice that emanated from the Muggle book.

Now, be sure to practice this when you have a few moments to yourself and you will not be bothered...

So now, let's begin by just relaxing in a comfortable position with your hands

and arms hanging at your sides...

Now, let's take a deep breath in through your nose, wait a moment, now breathe back out; exhaling through your mouth...

Laying down on the bed Harry followed the directions calmly as the melodic soothing voice calmed his nerves and allowed him to relax for what felt like the first time in weeks. The last time that he had truly relaxed without feeling as if he should be worrying about something was before the Triwizard Tournament had begun.

As your body begins to relax and your mind begins to clear continue to breathe deeply in through your nose, hold it, and then exhale...

Letting go of any tension in your body, your mind begins to focus solely on the words I am saying while letting go of any errant thoughts about things that may be troubling you or bothering you...

You will find that you do not need to try to relax but that relaxation sets in naturally...

And now, just allow each and every breath you exhale to carry away any tension and stress while making you more and more relaxed with each passing breath as if each breath you exhale doubles your relaxation...

And now, if you have not already done so, just close your eyes...

There you go...

Harry was calm, this relaxation meditation was allowing both his tired muscles and his mind to relax. Harry knew that if he fell asleep right now he probably wouldn't have nightmares like he usually does. He would sleep calmly and deeply until morning. This was why Baird had told him to do it before he fell asleep.

Now, you may find that your thoughts wander from time to time. This is ok.

Just bring your attention back to the sound of my voice... As the sound of my voice takes you deeper relaxed.

Harry was sound asleep in minutes, having his first dreamless sleep without the help of a potion since the Tri-Wizard Tournament.

A/N: Ok, I know it has been a while since I updated this story... (like months) but I have been really busy with University, Work, Family ect. I know that you all have been waiting for this chapter for quite some time and I am sorry for the wait. The next chapter should be up by Easter but if it is not then it means I have become, once more, swamped with prior commitments. Now, to dispel some myths: No, I am not quitting this story. Yes, I plan on updating as soon as I possibly can.

I hope you liked this chapter and thank you for sticking with Survival of the Fittest.

## 12. Learning the Law

Title: Survival of the Fittest

Author: Marcielle's Musings

A/N: I would like to personally thank NoturHeroNeMore for your inspiring review which kicked my ass into gear and encouraged me to write this chapter. Thank You.

Previously In Survival of the Fittest:

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Now, you may find that your thoughts wander from time to time. This is ok. Just bring your attention back to the sound of my voice... As the sound of my voice takes you deeper relaxed.

Harry was sound asleep in minutes, having his first dreamless sleep without the help of a potion since the Tri-Wizard Tournament.

## Chapter 14: Learning the Law

Harry woke from his afternoon nap to the sight of the sun setting over London. A hazy, murky glow gave evidence to simply how much pollution was in the air.

Glancing around his room, Harry realised that he still needed to put away and organise his belongings into his new multi-compartment trunk. He had left them strewn about his room after dropping them off. Majority of them were still in the bags he had bought them in. Resigned, Harry clambered out of his warm, lovely bed... and sat down on the floor next to his raggedy backpack that he had dropped on the floor at the end of his bed when he had first moved in with Baird. Next to it was His new trunk and the bag of robes he had bought earlier in the day.

All of his second-hand muggle clothes that he had brought from the Dursley's would still be in his backpack along with some of his other things. Unzipping the backpack Harry first pulled out his father's invisibility cloak and placed it beside him. He should probably start carrying it around with him, just in case of emergencies. Next was the photo album Hagrid had given him that was full of photos of his parents and some of his friends that Colin Creevey or the Weasley's had taken. Placing it on his other side Harry reached into the backpack again and pulled out his shrunken textbooks. Those and the photo album could go in the fifth compartment of his trunk which folded out into a bookshelf. Crawling over to his trunk Harry pulled the brass ring of keys out of his pocket and unlocked the fifth lock while channelling his magic into the key.

'Click' went the lock as the fifth compartment unlocked and folded out to create a large bookcase.

"I love magic," said Harry with a grin before he rushed to his wardrobe to

grab Persephone Penfrost's 'Metamorphmagus Me', 'A History of Parseltongue' by Salazar Slytherin, 'Ancient Ways' by Morgane de la Firenze, the Wandless Magic and Ritual Magic books and his apprenticeship Grimoire. Flicking out his wand he levitated the books to the fold-out bookshelf and began arranging. Personal or free reading books could go on the top shelf, then school books on the next shelf down and then the copied books from the Vault and ones for his apprenticeship on the rest of the shelves.

With that done Harry flopped back down on the floor next to his backpack and began rummaging around inside it. Out came a raggedy pair of jeans and a T-shirt that were two sizes too big for him.

"Those can be burnt!" said Harry with an evil looking grin.

"Incendio!" thought Harry vindictively. He was going to try to do most of his spell casting non-verbally from now on since Baird had said that it would help him exercise his magic more and would therefore make him more powerful when he was forced to duel someone. It would also give him the advantage of his opponents not knowing what spell he cast until it would be too late.

Harry wasn't going to lie, watching those clothes burn made him feel excellent. They would be the last reminder of his hateful relatives and he was happy to see them gone.

Silently, Harry vanished the remaining ashes and Scorgified the floor where the fire had made a mark before flicking his wand towards the wardrobe and levitating the robes within to the second compartment of the trunk which folded out to create a long-hang wardrobe. Next Harry did the same with the robes he had bought earlier in Diagon Alley from Madam Malkin's.

With his robes hanging neatly in the second compartment, Harry closed it

and then clicked open the first compartment so he could put his muggle clothes away. With another flick of his wand and a thought 'Wingardium Leviosa' muggle slacks, button-up shirts, ties, jackets, suits, undergarments, jeans, t-shirts and even shoes went flying across the room and organised themselves neatly within the first compartment of the trunk.

"Yep, I really do love magic..." said Harry with a grin. It made troublesome, tedious tasks easy to perform and it cut the time the task would take (if he had done it the muggle way) in half.

With all of that done, Harry looked around his now clean room with a smile. Other than the wand holster on his forearm and the wand in his hand everything was packed away neatly into his trunk. Everything... except the backpack at the foot of the bed.

For some reason Harry was hesitant to burn it. While it did represent a part of his time at the Dursley's... it also represented his escape from the Dursley's, his time at the Hudson's and meeting Geldreth and Baird. It represented all the amazing things that had happened over the past week which had put him on a completely different path than the one he had been on.

Before, when he was 'just Harry', he was the boy-who-lived, the Gryffindor Golden Boy and the leader of the Golden Trio, out to save the world from Voldemort and trying to survive while doing it. He was the puppet of Dumbledore and a Hogwarts student, Seeker for the Gryffindor Quidditch team and best friend to Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger. Now that he was Evan Thomas he was the son of Lilly Potter nee Evans, James Potter and Tom Riddle, heir to the former and a Horcrux to the previous. He was also the Gryffindor and Slytherin Heir, godson of Sirius Black and Alice Longbottom and the Apprentice to Baird Opusculus. He

was a Metamorphmagus, Parseltongue and he finally had a future that looked welcoming and exciting instead of terrifying.

'Reparo' thought Harry as he closed his eyes and focused on all of the wonderful things that had happened to him in the past week and then on the backpack. The only problem; he wasn't holding his wand.

However, the previously old and ragged looking backpack quickly began repairing itself until it looked brand new.

Opening his eyes, Harry was shocked. The backpack was fixed and he had done it without a wand!

"Accio" said Harry with an outstretched hand toward the backpack.

The newly repaired black backpack zoomed across the room and slapped into Harry's outstretched hand.

"That... that shouldn't be possible!" shouted Harry.

Then it occurred to him. 'The blood test results...'

Quickly unzipping the backpack and sitting down on his bed, cross-legged, Harry looked inside the backpack and pulled out the three pieces of parchment within. Unfolding the first one, Harry found his original 'To Do List'.

To Do List

Sneak into Diagon Alley

Get to Gringotts and take out enough Galleons to go shopping (wand, books, other stuff that interests me) and enough Muggle money for food, rent, clothing ect.

Find out What's Happening in the Wizarding World (Knowledge is Power – Sientia est Potentia)

Go shopping for said items.

Avoid the Ministry

Figure out what I'm going to do about my education (expelled, now what?)

Re-evaluate my life...

Smirking at the contents Harry internally checked off all of the items on the list 'done, done, done, done, done, done and done'.

The second piece of parchment that Harry unrolled was the blood test results that he had initially been looking for.

Name: Harry James Potter

Title: Potter Heir, Slytherin Heir (via Horcrux), Gryffindor Heir (via Proven Worth Ritual)

Parents: James Potter, Lily Potter (nee Evans), Tom Riddle (via Horcrux)

Godparents: Sirius Black, Alice Longbottom

Magical Aptitude: Medium Aptitude for Charms (Lily Potter), Medium Aptitude for Transfiguration (James Potter), Medium Aptitude for Old Magic (Tom Riddle), High Aptitude for Defensive and Offensive Magic (Lily Potter, Tom Riddle).

Magical Gifts: Low Level Metamorphmagus Capability (Dorea Potter nee Black), Medium Level Wandless Magic Capability (James Potter, Tom Riddle via Horcrux), Medium Level Parseltongue Capability (Tom Riddle via Horcrux).

"Well, that explains it," said Harry as he looked over the contents of the parchment again, "one of my magical gifts is a medium level wandless magic capability..." he trailed off. And then he remembered the third piece of parchment. Unfolding it, Harry paled and his icy-blue eyes widened.

"Shit," cursed Harry before he read the contents of the innocent looking letter a second time just to make sure he had read it correctly. Because if he had... he had some serious problems ahead of him in the coming week.

Dear Mr. Potter,

We have received intelligence that you performed the Patronus Charm at twenty-three minutes past nine this evening in a Muggle-inhabited area and in the presence of a Muggle. The severity of this breach of the Decree for the Reasonable Restriction of Underage Sorcery has resulted in your expulsion from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Ministry representatives will be calling at your place of residence shortly to destroy your wand. As you have already received an official warning for a previous offence under section 13 of the International Confederation of Wizards' Statute of Secrecy, we regret to inform you that your presence is required at a disciplinary hearing at the Ministry of Magic at 9 A.M. on August 12th.

Hoping you are well,

Yours sincerely,

Mafalda Hophirk

Improper Use of Magic Office

Ministry of Magic

Yes, he had read this letter a week ago but what was causing him alarm now was the last line of the letter: 'we regret to inform you that your presence is required at a disciplinary hearing at the Ministry of Magic at 9 A.M. on August 12th.' Harry was pretty sure that 'shit' summarised this situation quite nicely and buried his head in his hands with a groan.

"What am I going to do?" said Harry despairingly "I don't know anything about the wizarding legal system!"

But then it occurred to him... Baird and Geldreth would know what to do. Leaping off his bed with the thrice-cursed letter in hand, Harry threw on a sleeveless over-robe and wrenched open his door. With that obstacle out of the way, Harry sprinted into the living area of the apartment and jumped over the back of the couch to land on the other side in front of the door to the stairs. Racing down the stairs, Harry was tempted to

shout for Baird but then he realised it would probably be a horrible idea because there might still be customers in the shop. When he reached the ground level of the staircase, Harry paused in the doorway to the shop. It looked empty and Harry could see Baird ringing up what looked like the last customer; a wizard with short honey coloured hair and brown eyes.

"Will that be all?" asked Baird politely to the customer.

"Yes, thank you. I know that normally you would be closed by now so I appreciate you staying open just a little bit later so I could find the book."

Replied the wizard as he passed his chosen book across the counter.

"Not a problem, not a problem. Now, let me just ring this up..." said Baird with a smile.

It always annoyed Harry how Baird was so polite and kind to customers but to him the man was a batty old man who was sly, sarcastic and a little bit of a bastard. For some strange reason... Harry liked the guy. It was probably the fact that Baird had taught him so much and from what he could tell, hadn't purposefully hidden something from him. It could also be the fact that he had taken him in, given him a job and a place to stay, not to mention a future.

"There you go," said Baird to the wizard as he passed him the book in a feather-light bag, "Thank you for shopping at Obscurus Books. I hope to see you again someday." He continued as the man walked out of the shop with a wave.

"Now, Evan. What is it you wanted so urgently that you had to race down those stairs like a herd of thestrals?" asked Baird as he went to close the wards.

Ignoring the fact that Baird had called him Evan, which he didn't normally do unless there were people around, Harry began to speak while he nervously pushed his hand through his brown shoulder-length

hair. "We have a big problem," said Harry as he watched Baird set the wards for the night and close shop, "And when I say 'big problem' I mean the shit has literally hit the fan!"

"Language!" barked Baird as he turned to face the distraught boy. "Now why don't you tell me what has you so worked up and I'll see what I can do to help. There is no point stressing at this time in the evening, you'll just get yourself more worked up. We will figure out whatever the problem is tonight and then tomorrow we will do what we can to fix it." Placing his hand on Harry's shoulder comfortingly, Baird began to guide Harry back up the stairs.

"How was your nap?" Baird asked casually as they walked, obviously trying to temporarily take Harry's mind off of whatever was bothering him.

"Good, really good, in fact," said Harry with a small smile "It was the first time I haven't had nightmares about my past."

"I'm assuming that the guided meditations helped then?" asked Baird as he climbed the last stair to the apartment, while guiding Harry beside him.

"Yeah, they did. Thanks for those books again. In fact, thank you... for everything you've done for me in the past week. I don't know where I would be if you hadn't taken me in and given me a job. You've taught me so much in only a week and I haven't thanked you nearly enough. I have learnt more in my time with you than I have in all my years at Hogwarts." finished Harry as Baird sat him down on the couch and passed him a hot cup of tea.

"You are very welcome, my young apprentice," said Baird as he sat down on the lounge across from the one that Harry was seated, and claimed a cup of tea for himself. "Now, what had you so distraught, not moments

ago? It must be something of great importance if it got you that worked up," said Baird gently.

"Here," said Harry as he passed Baird the letter which he had accidentally crushed into a ball in his hand.

"What's this?" asked Baird before he even looked at the contents of the letter.

"Just read it and you'll see," replied Harry.

Taking a sip from his cup of tea Harry relaxed into the couch while he watched Baird read the letter.

"Hmm, yes I can see why this would be a problem," said Baird calmly as he looked up from the letter to glance at Harry.

"That's it?" asked Harry, dumbfounded as to why it seemed Baird thought that the trial was no big deal. "You can see why this would be a problem? Well that's great because it is!" shouted Harry.

"Now, now. Hush for a moment, child. How about you explain why you got this letter from the Improper Use of Magic Office, calmly, and then we can talk about how we will handle it. How does that sound? You seem to be forgetting that I don't know why you came to me originally. All I know is that you came into my shop a week ago looking for books and a place to learn about your inherent talents and I gave you that opportunity. I know nothing of why or how you came to be at my shop that day. All I know is that you were there and you needed my help." said Baird calmly while he sipped his tea.

"Ok," said Harry embarrassedly, ashamed of his previous outburst. "Well it all started with my cousin, Dudley, and I getting attacked by a Dementor in our muggle neighbourhood..." trailed off Harry.

"A Dementor?" asked Baird with double raised-eyebrows. Harry's statement had shocked the man. "You're not lying?"

"No, I'm not." Harry shook his head. "I wouldn't lie about something like this, especially not if I'm trying to get your help."

"What on earth were you and your cousin doing to attract the attention of a Dementor?" asked Baird incredulously.

"Nothing!" said Harry. "One minute we were arguing and the next, two Dementors come at us like we're a gourmet brunch!"

Baird shook his head, exasperatedly. "Well, I'm assuming you know how to cast a pretty good Patronus then, since you're sitting before me now.

That would also explain the letter from the Improper Use of Magic Office," said Baird. "Well, I don't see why you are so worried. This is an open and closed self-defence case. You have nothing to be worried about. Even if you are in disfavour with the public and the Ministry at the moment, there is no reason why any lawyer worth his salt would not win this case."

"That's it? Get a good lawyer. That's your advice?" gaped Harry. "The trial is this upcoming Thursday! It's Sunday in case you haven't forgotten. We have less than a week to prepare!"

"Yep," replied Baird with a crooked smile in Harry's direction, "I know we only have a short amount of time to prepare but you needn't needlessly worry. I will call in on my barrister and lawyers tomorrow but for tonight, we will relax and I will tell you more about the wizarding world's history. Think about it this way; this is perfect opportunity to begin your training in wizarding law."

True to Baird's word, the first thing he did the next morning was fire-call his barrister and lawyers to arrange a meeting for that afternoon.

Soon after that he left for the Ministry to file the necessary paperwork for Evan Thomas' apprenticeship. That meant that Harry was left taking care of the shop.

When Baird got back from the Ministry around lunch time, he was forced to rescue 'Evan' from shop duty, chuckling all the while at his plight.

Harry had spent the entire morning, since he had opened the shop, being harassed by elderly witches who wanted to know where Baird was and insisted on telling him just how 'adorable' he was every few minutes. He was this close to snapping and cursing the next witch that thought it was a good idea to pinch his cheeks and call him cute.

However, once Baird had finished ringing up all of the customers still in the shop they closed the shop up early and went upstairs to the apartment where Baird fire-called his legal team (Harry had no idea why the old man had a team of lawyers, but he was eternally grateful whatever the reason was, now) and invited them to come through the floo-system to the apartment.

The first through the floo was a large middle-aged looking wizard with sandy shoulder-length hair that slightly resembled a lion's mane that was tied back and soft-looking blue eyes. After he stepped out of the floo and 'Scorgified' his blue robes he looked up and saw Baird.

"Baird! How are you doing my old friend? Not in too much trouble, I hope?" the tall, lion-looking wizard said in a jolly booming voice.

"Charles," replied Baird with a welcoming bow, "Thank you for coming so swiftly and for bringing your legal team with you, too."

"No problem. Anything for an old friend like you," the wizard replied with a slightly deeper bow. Then the wizard turned to Harry, "Now who is this?" the lion-like wizard asked Baird.

"This is my apprentice," said Baird with a gesture in Harry's direction. "I will explain further once your team is here. I would rather not have to explain numerous times when one would suffice."

"Alright then," Charles replied, slightly warier this time as he cast a

glance in Harry's direction.

"Crackle-crackle whoosh!" went the floo as the next member of Baird's legal team came through the floo. This one was a young looking witch with brown hair and eyes on a heart-shaped face. In contrast to the first wizard she was very petite and appeared slightly mouse-ish in appearance.

'The Lion and the Mouse' thought Harry with a smile. The pair reminded him of a fable he had read as a child. Often, when he was young and in a muggle primary school, he would avoid going outside during lunchtime because he would usually end up getting chased and possibly beat up by Dudley. So instead he would try to spend as many lunch times in the small library at the school, reading whatever took his fancy.

"Abigail Merryweather, at your service," said the mousy witch with a bow in Baird and Harry's direction. "Lord Charles has told me so much about you, Mr. Opusculus. I am looking forward to working with you."

"A pleasure," said Baird with a smile at the witch. "I assume Miss Merryweather is new to the team, then?" Baird asked Charles.

"Yes, but she has an excellent eye for detail and is the perfect addition to my team now that Dickinson is gone," replied Lord Charles as he swung an arm around the mousy witch's shoulders with a roguish grin in Baird's direction.

"whoosh!"

The group standing in the apartment's living room turned to the fireplace as the next member of the legal team came out through the emerald flames. This member of the legal team was another middle-aged wizard but with dark chocolate-brown hair and a short facial hair.

"Baird, you remember Henry Anderson, don't you?" Charles asked as he clasped the shorter wizard around the shoulders with his other free arm.

"Get off me, you over-exuberant buffoon!" the shorter wizard grumbled as he extracted himself from Lord Charles' hold. "Sorry about him, Baird. You know how he gets." The shorter wizard said with a smile at Baird.

"Oh, and who's this?"

"That's Baird's apprentice. He said that he would wait until all of the team was here and then he would explain who the boy is and why we were called here," Charles explained.

"whoosh!" went the floo as another member of Baird's legal team was ejected into the living room from the emerald flames of the fireplace only to trip over the hearth rug.

"Whoa!" the wizard yelled as he went toppling forward.

Everyone watched with wide eyes as the man began to fall. Ignoring everyone's shock, Harry flicked his hand out quickly, palm out, and thought 'Wingardium Leviosa'. The man who had been about to fall face-first into the floor was now levitating horizontally at waist height.

"Um, thanks..." said the wizard as he looked up and saw who had saved him. His eyes widened, "You can do wandless magic?" he yelled.

When everyone turned to stare at Harry with wide eyes, Harry's concentration faltered and the man fell to the ground in a heap.

"Ummm," said Harry with similarly wide eyes as he backed away from the group defensively.

"Now, stop that, you lot!" berated Baird to the legal team. "Now if you will all sit down at the table I will explain exactly who my apprentice is," he said as he flicked his wand at the kitchen table and transfigured it into a long mahogany conference table with matching chairs.

When everyone was seated - the legal team on one side of the table and Baird and Harry on the other- Baird began to speak to the legal team,

"While I know you are all bound by client confidentiality charms I will

need an unbreakable vow from all of you before I disclose who my apprentice is and why you were called here today."

"Alright, I agree. How about the rest of you?" Lord Charles said to the rest of his team. "It's completely up to you, but if you don't take the vow, you will be forced to leave the meeting."

"I agree," said the wizard Harry had saved. "My name's Alexander Gregorovich, by the way. Thank you for catching me." The wizard said to Harry.

"I agree, too," said Abigail with a smile. She seemed very eager to start working.

"I agree, but I don't like walking into unbreakable vows without knowing what they cover. However, I understand why you have asked for one and I do trust your judgement, Baird," said Anderson grudgingly.

"I'm glad to hear that," said Baird to the group, "My apprentice will be our bonder," as he gestured to Harry, at his side and then placed his hand on the table near the centre. "You all know what to do."

The all nodded to Baird and placed their hands on top of his in the centre of the table.

"You will need your wand for this, my apprentice," said Baird calmly over his shoulder to Harry.

Harry flicked his wrist and his wand flew into his hand. He was slightly astonished that Baird had chosen him to be the bonder for the 'unbreakable vow'. He didn't even know what that was. I mean, sure, he could guess but he didn't really know what it entailed and what the consequences were if one broke an unbreakable vow.

"You will also need to move closer and place your wand on our linked hands," continued Baird.

Harry stood from his seat and moved to stand slightly to the side, behind

Baird and placed his wand tip on their linked hands.

Baird began to speak to the legal team, "Do you, Charles, Abigail, Henry and Alexander agree never to disclose the identity of my apprentice unless he specifically allows you to do so?"

"I do." They all intoned simultaneously.

A thin trail of brilliant spell fire issued from the end of the wand and wound its way around the linked hands of the group like a red-hot wire.

"And do you all agree to keep any and all information, disclosed this evening, confidential unless I personally allow you to disclose the information and only if it is pertinent to my apprentice's upcoming case?"

"I do," said the group.

A second and final tongue of magical fire shot out from the wand and began to interweave itself with the first, making a fine, glowing chain.

The spell chain then glowed a bright florescent red and bound itself tightly around their clasped hands before it sunk into their skin, leaving a faint white scar where the chain had touched.

"Well, now that that's out of the way, I would like to introduce you all to my apprentice, Harry Potter," said Baird with a clap of his hands at the legal team's dumb-struck expressions.

Abigail squeaked.

"Wha - you're... how?" said Alexander.

"Well that certainly is worth an unbreakable vow," a shocked Henry Anderson muttered under his breath and Lord Charles just raised one of his eyebrows in Harry's direction in a very Baird-like way.

"Well," Harry said nervously while rubbing the back of her neck, "ummm, Baird?"

"Stop staring at the boy and let's get down to business," said Baird.

Once the meeting ended at around eight o'clock, the legal team left for

their respective homes and promised to have Harry's defence ready for Thursday. Harry was still quite nervous about the trial but he was also reassured by the fact that Lord Charles and his team seemed to know what they were doing. Plus, Baird wouldn't have called them if he didn't know that they could help him.

The rest of the week, from the time the legal team left to the night before the trial, Harry was buried in legal manuscripts that Baird had dumped on him and told him to read. It was obvious that Baird wanted Harry to know all the little quirks about the wizarding legal system which seemed to literally be all over the place.

Baird had said "The wizarding legal system is more complicated than Italian taxation law and Russian business law combined and has twice as many loopholes that only work for pure-bloods."

It seemed like Harry only understood every third word of the legal texts. He was tempted to fire-call Alexander, to see if the man could translate the text for him to normal human speech. Or hell, even parseltongue would have been preferable to this legal mumbo-jumbo. In the end Baird had been forced to tutor him in wizarding law in the evenings, after he closed the shop, just so Harry could have a faint understanding of wizarding law and the legal system.

As long as Harry was busy learning as much as he could about law within the wizarding world, he could forget about the trial but the second he stopped studying or even when he was lying exhausted in his bed at the end of the day, the thought of the looming Ministry hearing returned to him and plagued his thoughts. Harry wasn't that worried about being expelled. He had used magic in self-defence and between him and Lord Charles they had plenty of proof to use to prove his innocence. He was confident that the legal team wouldn't let him get expelled or allow the

Ministry to snap his wand but it was the anticipation of the trial that was gnawing at his insides, making him feel nauseous.

Even though he was confident about his upcoming hearing he still had nightmares about a faceless Ministry official expelling him from Hogwarts as his friends looked on and shook their heads in his direction. Next the official would snap his wand and then order him back to the Dursleys' where he was locked in the cupboard under the stairs and forgotten.

The feeling only got worse on Wednesday night when Baird had said during dinner, "You should wear your emerald robes tomorrow for the trial and one of those muggle dress suits that you bought a few days ago, underneath. You should use a pressing charm and a cooling charm on your clothes and a shining charm on your shoes before you put them on in the morning. Oh, and make sure you scrub every inch of skin when you shower, too. I want you looking impeccable, like the Heir of Slytherin and Gryffindor should look for your trial tomorrow."

Harry had gulped and almost choked on the food he had in his mouth. Sure he knew the hearing was on Thursday, but it had come so quickly. He suddenly didn't feel prepared anymore.

Seeing that his apprentice had turned nervous and fidgety again Baird spoke up, "I think it would help if you let your so-called 'Slytherin side' take over tomorrow. You need to show the Ministry that you are confident that you are innocent and I won't have any apprentice of mine, stuttering in public because they are nervous. Tonight I will let you look nervous and skittish but Tomorrow morning I want you standing tall with your shoulders back and head held high."

Baird was right, of course. He always was. He couldn't show the Ministry he was afraid otherwise they would crush him and there was no way that

was going to happen...

Looking up from his dinner plate, Harry looked Baird in the eye and smirked, "You shouldn't worry so much old man. The Ministry won't know what hit them when they see the 'new-and-improved boy-who-lived'."

Baird scoffed and shook his head reproachfully as he began to clear the table, "I shouldn't have said anything. You're a menace, boy. I pity the Ministry official who tries to snap your wand."

Harry grinned. "Aww, don't be like that! You know you love me" he said with a wink.

"I've unleashed a monster," Baird said with a chuckle, "Now, off to bed with you. I want you having a good night's sleep. You'll be up bright an early tomorrow morning, so don't forget to meditate before you sleep."

"I won't," replied Harry, "It makes falling asleep easier. Oh, I almost forgot! How am I getting there? I know the trial is at nine but..." Harry asked.

"Lord Charles will pick you up at six and will take you to the Ministry through the floo," answered Baird. "Now, go to bed. You have a big day tomorrow."

Harry was woken by Baird's banging on his door at quarter-to-five in the morning. For a few moments he just laid in his bed, mentally preparing himself for the day ahead. 'I'm innocent. I'm going to win. I'm not expelled from Hogwarts. Lord Charles won't let the Ministry expel me or snap my wand. This is going to be a piece of cake, another Quidditch match against Hufflepuff with Oliver as captain. I can do this. Calm, cool and confident.'

"Today's the day..." said Harry before he pulled back the covers and climbed out of bed.

Wandlessly summoning his towel, toiletries and clothes for the day to his hand Harry opened his door, shouted a "Good Morning" to Baird before heading to the bathroom to shower. Half an hour later, a clean-shaven and impeccably dressed Harry James Potter stepped out of the bathroom and out into the living area of the apartment.

"Do you plan on keeping some of your morphs in place or will you be putting your hair back to its old mop-like appearance and your eyesight back to its half blind state?" asked Baird as he passed Harry a bowl of oatmeal, a small plate of fruit and a cup of tea and gestured for the boy to sit down and eat.

"No, I think I'll keep my hair this length," gesturing to his wavy shoulder-length hair, "It's more manageable and I never liked being half-blind," said Harry in between mouthfuls of his breakfast.

"Good," said Baird as he sat down across from Harry with his own breakfast, "You look much better that way."

Suddenly the fireplace on the other side of the room burst into glowing green flames and Lord Charles stepped out of the fireplace.

"We have a problem, gentlemen," Lord Charles said with a grim expression as he strode across the room to stand at the edge of the breakfast table. "It seems like the Ministry is trying to pull one over us. We're lucky that I have a friend in the Department of Magical Law Enforcement who was kind enough to inform us, otherwise things could have been a whole lot worse."

"What is it?" Harry asked, filled with trepidation about what could have happened to make the normally calm and happy man this gruff.

"They changed the time and venue of your hearing without seeing fit to inform us. That in itself is illegal and is enough to call for a re-trial but, from the look of things, the Ministry already dislikes you, I don't think

we should give them any more reasons to. Your hearing has been moved forward to eight o'clock and is now going to be held in Courtroom Ten," answered Lord Charles with a heavy scowl.

"What?" barked an enraged looking Baird as he looked at Lord Charles in shock, "Why on earth is his hearing being held in the old Trial Room?" then, seeing Harry's confused look he began to explain. "Courtroom Ten was used by the Council of Magical Law during the first war against Voldemort and was used to try several of his Death Eaters and sentence them to lifetimes in Azkaban. It's also used by the Wizengamot, which you've read about."

Harry paled. "Why are they having me tried like a criminal? All I did was defend myself."

"Probably because the Ministry and the Minister in particular dislike you and think you're an attention seeking child with too much power," answered Lord Charles.

Harry growled. "Once we're done clearing my name and preventing me from being expelled and having my wand snapped, I'm going to charge the Daily Prophet with defamation and sue them for a lot of money..." said Harry with a snarl.

Lord Charles and Baird grinned very similar grins to those Harry had seen Geldreth wear. "About time" they said in unison.

"Care for a cup of tea before you go?" Baird asked Lord Charles.

"No, but thank you for the offer. I had one before I left this morning," answered Lord Charles before he turned to Harry. "Finish getting ready and meet me back here in fifteen minutes. The team will meet us at the Ministry with our witnesses."

"Alright," said Harry as he slid out of his chair, flicked his wand out of its wand holster and fixed his robes with a 'swish'. He then walked back to

the bathroom to brush his teeth and left Baird and Lord Charles in the kitchen.

"Do you think he is prepared enough?" Baird asked Lord Charles.

"He is as prepared as we could make him. Look at it this way. Even if, for some odd reason he is expelled from Hogwarts and his wand is snapped, nothing is stopping him from buying a new wand and transferring to Beauxbatons. Plus, the boy is proficient with wandless magic and is your apprentice. He would honestly be better off if he remained with you and quit school all together!" answered Lord Charles with a grin. "The boy will be fine. We will be celebrating tonight, just you wait."

The two men stopped their conversation when Harry walked back in the room. "All ready to go," he said as he walked over to Lord Charles.

"Good, then let's go."

A/N: How did you like the chapter? I would love it if you reviewed and told me your thoughts. Thanks for your commitment to Survival of the Fittest. I hope you enjoyed this latest instalment.

-Marcielle-

### 13. The Hearing Part 1

Title: Survival of the Fittest

Author: Marcielle's Musings

Previously In Survival of the Fittest:

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#### Chapter 14: The Hearing Part 1

Harry and Lord Charles flooded into the Ministry in a swirl of green flames. If Harry hadn't been consciously guarding his facial expressions his jaw would have dropped. Stepping out of the fireplace, Lord Charles and Harry were standing on one side at the end of a very long and splendid black marble hall with a highly polished, dark wood floor. The peacock-blue ceiling was inlaid with glowing golden symbols that were constantly moving and changing like the stars in and constellations visible in the night sky. The bottoms of the black marble walls were covered in gilded fireplaces made of similar black marble. Every few seconds a witch or wizard would emerge from one of the fireplaces on Harry's side with a soft "whoosh" and on the other side of the hall, short queues of waiting witches and wizards were forming in front of each fireplace, obviously waiting to depart.

Halfway down the hall was a huge golden fountain with larger than life-size figures standing in the middle of a circular pool on a marble platform. The tallest of the figures was a noble-looking wizard with his wand pointed straight up in the air. The reason the statue of the wizard was the tallest was because it was standing on a higher platform than the rest. Grouped around the wizard on a lower tier were a beautiful witch, a centaur, a goblin, and a house-elf. The last three were all looking adoringly up at the witch and wizard. Glittering jets of water were flying from the ends of the two wands, the point of the centaur's arrow, the tip of the goblin's hat, and from each of the house-elf's ears.

'Could they be any more blatantly racist and sexist,' Harry thought with a growl 'No wonder muggle-borns like Hermione think the wizarding world is backwards.'

The pops and cracks of Apparators and the clatter of footsteps of hundreds of witches and wizards could easily be heard over the sounds of the fountain. Most of the witches and wizards arriving were wearing glum, early-morning looks as they strode towards a set of gleaming golden gates at the end of the hall. Some of the Ministry workers were carrying tottering piles of parchment so tall that the only thing keeping the parchment from falling everywhere had to be magic and others carrying battered leather briefcases which Harry assumed were like his trunk and could hold more on the inside than they appeared to be able to. Other wizards and witches were weaving their way through the crowds expertly while still reading the Daily Prophet and drinking their morning tea as they walked.

"This way, Harry" said Lord Charles as he placed his hand on Harry's shoulder and began leading him into the throng of wizarding folk arriving for work. As they passed the fountain Harry saw silver Sickles and bronze Knuts glinting up at him from the bottom of the pool. A small smudged golden plaque at the base of the fountain read:

All proceeds from the Fountain of Magical Brethren will be given to  
St. Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries

'If all goes well and I'm not expelled from Hogwarts and my wand isn't snapped, I'll put in ten Galleons' thought Harry.

Lord Charles continued to lead Harry through the stream of Ministry employees heading for the golden gates towards a desk on the left side of the hall, over which hung a sign saying SECURITY. A scruffy looking wizard in bright blue robes looked up as they approached and put down

his Daily Prophet.

"I'm escorting a visitor," said Lord Charles, gesturing toward Harry.

"Step over here," said the wizard in a bored monotone voice as he walked out from behind the desk.

When Harry walked over to the wizard, the man held up a long golden rod and passed it up and down Harry's front and back like one of the muggle metal detectors that Harry had seen.

'But, this rod must be searching for something else,' thought Harry as he continued to watch the wizard cautiously.

When the wizard was done inspecting Harry with the metal rod he placed the golden instrument on the desk and asked for Harry's wand.

Flicking his wrist, Harry's wand shot into his hand before he grudgingly passed it over to the wizard when he heard Lord Charles soft chuckle behind him. The scruffy-looking wizard dropped Harry's wand onto a strange looking brass instrument that somewhat resembled a set of scales but with only one dish. Soon, the brass instrument began to vibrate and make a small beeping noise. A narrow slip of parchment came speeding out of a slit in the base of the instrument. The wizard tore off the parchment and read off its contents.

"Holly, eleven inches with a phoenix feather core. Been in use four years.

That correct?" the man asked.

"Yes," replied Harry evenly as he continued to watch the man.

"I keep this," said the wizard as he impaled the piece of parchment on a small brass spike on his desk. "You get this back," he added, thrusting Harry's wand back into the young man's hand.

"Thank you," said Harry as he took the wand and turned around to look at Lord Charles with a scowl. Unknowingly, his hair shifted during the movement and revealed a flash of his famous scar.

"Hang on..." said the wizard slowly, "Do you have a visitor's badge Mr...?"

"Potter," answered Harry in a clipped tone; knowing what sort of responses his name usually caused within the wizarding population.

The wizard's eyes widened as he took another glance at Harry's forehead and then at his robes. "Well, then I'll just make one up for you..." the wizard nervously trailed off.

The wizard pointed his wand and gave it a wave in Harry's direction. If it hadn't been for the hand that clamped down on his shoulder, Harry would have pulled out his wand too and used it to curse the idiotic wizard in front of him. A visitor badge with Harry's name on it appeared on his chest, attached to the breast of his robes. Harry would have to thank Lord Charles once they were done here for stopping him from scaring the wizard.

With the visitor badge secured to his chest, Lord Charles steered him away from the desk and back into the throng of witches and wizards walking through the golden arches into the smaller hall beyond, where at least twenty elevators lined the walls behind wrought golden grilles.

Harry and Lord Charles joined the queue in front of one of them. Soon, but with a great amount of jangling and clattering a lift descended in front of them. The golden grille slid to the side and a crowd of bustling witches and wizards clambered out of the elevator before the waiting witches and wizards around Harry and Lord Charles surged in. Lord Charles held Harry back until the last minute before nudging him forward.

"I wouldn't want you crushed at the back of the elevator now would I?"

Lord Charles whispered in his ear with a grin as the golden grilles closed behind them with a crash. They had been the last two to get onto the lift. Several witches and wizards were looking at Harry curiously but quickly

looked away when they noticed the glare Lord Charles was sending their way. While in person, Lord Charles was a nice enough bloke but to the wizarding public he had a reputation for being one of the best and most ruthless barristers in the wizarding world.

The elevator began to slowly ascend, chains rattling all the while, while a calm female voice rang out "Level seven, Department of Magical Games and Sports, incorporating the British and Irish Quidditch League Headquarters, Official Gobstones Club, and Ludicrous Patents Office."

The elevator doors opened and Harry glimpsed an untidy-looking corridor with various posters of Quidditch teams tacked lopsidedly to the walls. One of the wizards in the lift who was standing behind Harry and Lord Charles, was carrying an awkward-looking armful of purple broomsticks slowly extracted himself from the elevator, trying not to bump into anyone (an impossible feat) and disappeared down the corridor.

The doors of the elevator closed once more and the lift juddered upward again. Harry didn't know what floor they were getting off on but he hoped it was coming up soon. The elevator was filled with a tense atmosphere thanks to Lord Charles protective glare. You could tell he took his job very seriously, which was probably why he was good at his job. Most wizards that Harry had met were at least slightly eccentric and got distracted easily. Lord Charles seemed the exact opposite which filled Harry with a renewed confidence about his upcoming trial.

"Level six, Department of Magical Transport, incorporating the Floo Network Authority, Broom Regulatory Control, Portkey Office, and Apparation Test Centre," the woman's droning voice said.

Once again the elevator doors opened and five witches and wizards pushed past Harry and Lord Charles to get out of the lift. At the same

time, several origami birds like the ones he had seen Malfoy make swooped into the elevator. Harry subtly glanced up at them from the corner of his eye as they flapped idly around above his head. They were a pale violet colour and he could see MINISTRY OF MAGIC stamped in gold along the edges of their wings. Harry assumed that they were messages of some sort.

The lift doors closed and the elevator clattered upward again and the woman's voice said, "Level five, Department of International Magical Cooperation, incorporating the International Magical Trading Standards Body, the International Magical Office of Law, and the International Confederation of Wizards, British Seats."

This level interested Harry. He assumed this was maybe where Baird had come to get his apprenticeship 'transferred' to him from his 'friend in South America'. How they had gotten away with that blatant lie, Harry would never know.

'Maybe that sort of thing was common? Or, more likely, Baird is more influential than he gives himself credit for' Harry thought contemplatively as the elevator doors opened and Lord Charles pulled Harry away from the door so that he wouldn't get shoved by the witches and wizards making their way out of the elevator. At the same time two of the origami birds zoomed out of the lift and several more zoomed in, so that the light from the lamp in the ceiling flickered and flashed as they darted around it.

"Level four, Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures, incorporating Beast, Being and Spirit Divisions, Goblin Liaison Office, and Pest Advisory Bureau."

"S'cuse me," said another scruffy looking wizard carrying a fire-breathing chicken in what looked like a heat-proof cage as he shuffled out of the

elevator, followed by a flock of origami birds. The doors of the lift clanged shut again and Harry sighed with relief. He had been nervously eyeing the fire-breathing chicken the entire ride. It looked perfectly harmless but then again so did most of the magical creatures that Hagrid showed them in Care of Magical Creatures Class.

"Level three, Department of Magical Accidents and Catastrophes, including the Accidental Magic Reversal Squad, Obliviator Headquarters, and Muggle-Worthy Excuse Committee."

'Ah,' thought Harry with an evil grin, 'So you're the people who popped Aunt Marge when I blew her up in my third year.' Then he inwardly pouted 'Shame, you should have left her that way until she floated up into space and died from lack of oxygen. The bitch would deserve it for all the times she tried to kill me with her dogs.'

Everyone else in the elevator got out on this level except Lord Charles, Harry and a witch at the back of the elevator who was reading an extremely long piece of parchment that was trailing on the ground behind her. The remaining origami birds that hadn't vacated the lift on this level continued to soar around the lamp as the lift juddered upward again and then the voice said, "Level two, Department of Magical Law Enforcement, including the Improper Use of Magic Office, Auror Headquarters, and Wizengamot Administration Services."

If Harry remembered correctly, this was where Mr. Weasley worked. Harry turned away from the door to stare at the back wall of the lift just in case the man was there. It wouldn't do to be noticed by one of the people probably looking for him since his departure from the Dursley's house. Sure, he felt guilty for probably making the Weasley's worry, but he was enjoying living with Baird and the freedom that came with it. He didn't plan on leaving Baird's until September first when he will board

the Hogwarts Express and go back to Hogwarts.

When no one made to exit or enter the elevator the doors closed swiftly and they continued their ascent to the top of the Ministry. "Level one, Department of the Minister of Magic..." The witch from the back of the elevator rolled up her extremely long parchment and exited the elevator. She obviously worked directly for the Minister. But that was level one and unless they had a level zero which Harry didn't think the Ministry did then this was the last stop.

"Lord Charles?" asked Harry.

"hmm?"

"Why haven't we gotten off the elevator?" Harry continued.

Lord Charles smirked down at Harry and winked at him. "You'll see."

As soon as he said it the lift doors slammed shut and the woman's voice called out "Level nine, Department of Mysteries" before the elevator dropped like a stone into the bowels of the Ministry of Magic. Just as suddenly the elevator stopped and Harry would have fallen to the floor if it hadn't been for Lord Charles grabbing his shoulder and keeping him upright. The tall wizard had been smart enough to grab the handrail that ran along the edge of the elevator which had prevented him from falling like Harry had.

"Warn me next time," growled Harry at Lord Charles as the doors of the lift rattled open.

The lion-like wizard just laughed and walked out into the corridor. The walls were made of a similar black marble to the Atrium but were bare of any furnishings. There were fake windows and no doors except for a plain black one at the end of the corridor. Stepping to the side of the corridor, Lord Charles flicked his wand at Harry and himself, renewing the cooling charms on their robes and returning their clothes to their

unruffled state. Behind them, Harry could hear the golden gate of the elevator, closing and the lift speeding back up to the Atrium.

Seeing Harry's look Lord Charles began to explain with a grin, "The lift goes all the way to the top before plummeting down. I've heard some Unspeakables say that it is more terrifyingly fun than some muggle amusement-park rides." Then his face smoothed and he leaned against the wall in a relaxed manner, "The rest of the legal team should be here soon. They just had to collect our witnesses a little earlier than planned." Harry's head was full of questions that he wanted to ask the man but he refrained himself. 'I want him thinking only about the hearing. We can discuss my questions later, once we've won.'

The nervous bubbly feeling was slowly filling Harry's stomach. He didn't like waiting for something to happen, especially if he couldn't do anything about it. He would much rather be doing something. 'Think like a Slytherin; calm, cool and confident' Harry repeated like a mantra in his head until the elevator 'ting-ed' indicating that the legal team was here with the witnesses. Time for the hearing.

With everyone here, Lord Charles began leading the group down a flight of stairs on the left side of the corridor. At the bottom of the stairs was another corridor, which Harry thought bore a great resemblance to the dungeon corridor that led to the potion's classroom in Hogwarts, with rough stone walls with torches in sconces on the walls for lighting. The doors the group passed in this passage were great heavy wooden ones with iron bolts and keyholes.

Lord Charles came to a halt outside a grimy dark door with an immense iron lock. "Courtroom Ten," he announced with a smile which didn't seem to fit the atmosphere of the morose corridor. "Are you ready?" he asked Harry.

Harry was nervous, too nervous to speak at the moment so he simply nodded. He wanted this over and done with, whatever the outcome. The anticipation was slowly killing him. 'And wouldn't that make Tommy-boy depressed if I died because of the Ministry' Harry sardonically thought. "All right then. Here we go," said Lord Charles as he turned the large iron door handle and led the group inside the courtroom.

Entering the courtroom, Harry's eyes widened; he couldn't help it. The large dungeon-like room that was the courtroom was eerily familiar.

Harry had never stepped foot in Courtroom ten in person, but he had been here in a memory, viewed through Dumbledore's Pensieve. This was the place where Harry had watched the Lestranges sentenced to life imprisonment in Azkaban and a niggling thought in the back of his head told him "and that is what the Ministry wants to do to you..."

Harry's nerves were beginning to come back to him. Before, Lord Charles' calm confidence had reassured Harry but now the snitches were back in his stomach fluttering away and making him feel like throwing up.

'I knew I shouldn't have eaten breakfast this morning' Harry thought to himself as he followed Lord Charles into centre of the dimly lit courtroom.

Similar to the atrium, the courtroom's walls were made of a dark marble-like stone lit by torches in alcoves along the wall which only served to make the room feel even more oppressive.

'It obviously wasn't bad enough that the Ministry used this room to sentence murderers and rapists to life long sentences in Azkaban. No, they had to use a room which makes a person feel guilty a well,' thought Harry.

Empty benches on either side of the doorway, sloped down from the walls like seats in the Colosseum in Rome, but ahead, on the other side of

the room, in the highest benches of all, were many shadowy figures dressed in black and blood red. The figures had been talking in low voices amongst themselves but at the sound of the large door swinging behind the last member of the legal team, an ominous silence fell as they all turned to look down upon Harry and the legal team. It was obvious that the room was especially designed to make the person on trial feel as if they were insignificant.

"They obviously don't follow the 'innocent until proven guilty' policy," Harry mumbled under his breath.

A cold male voice rang across the courtroom and echoed as it bounced off the walls.

"You were almost late."

Harry was about to apologise but then Lord Charles comfortingly placed his hand down on Harry's shoulder and began to speak for the group.

"Ah, but we weren't late. We got here perfectly on time considering the late arrival of the 'twenty-four hour in advance notification'. I'm sure that due notice was given and something seriously untoward must have happened with the owl post employed by the Ministry for the notification to have been delivered as late as it was. However I'm sure that the matter will be looked into with utmost haste considering how inconvenient it would be for the Wizengamot to have to retry numerous witches and wizards due to such a small error."

"Ah, yes. Of course," replied the voice, "but who are all of you? This is the Disciplinary hearing for one Harry James Potter. Friends and acquaintances will have to wait outside, I'm afraid."

Again Lord Charles spoke for the group, "Mr. Potter is entitled by both wizarding law and the sovereign law of our great nation to legal representation. What you see before you is Mr. Potter's legal team and

witnesses for his defence."

"Of course, I apologise for the insult Mr..." began the voice

"Lord Charles," drawled Harry's lion-like barrister. Pulling out his wand he gave it a flick and conjured a mahogany table and a row of chairs for the legal team and a bench behind the table for the witnesses.

"Ah... please," continued the voice; a man in red on the high bench on the Harry's left, "take a seat."

The seat that the red-robed man had gestured Harry to was in the centre of the room, in front of the legal team's table. The arms of the chair were covered in chains and Harry had seen those chains spring to life in Dumbledore's Pensieve and bind whoever sat between them. Harry wasn't going to sit there. He may be on trial but he wasn't guilty and he refused to be treated as if he was.

Flicking his eyes to Lord Charles to get his attention, Harry gestured to the shackle and chain covered chair.

"Now that won't be necessary. As a minor, will sit with his legal representation" Lord Charles said as he gestured for Harry to sit in the free chair behind the legal team's table. With another flick of his wand the ominous looking chair was transfigured into a comfortable mahogany high-backed chair.

Seated with the legal team, Harry began to feel more comfortable about the following proceedings. It was obvious that Lord Charles wasn't going to let the Ministry push him around and deny him his rights as a minor. Gingerly, Harry looked up at the people seated on the high benches on either side of the podium. From the way that they were dressed, Harry recognised them as the Wizengamot. There were about fifty of them, all staring down their noses at him, some with very austere expressions, others looked on with evident curiosity. In the middle of the front row on

a raised tie, behind the podium was Cornelius Fudge, the Minister of Magic.

Harry wasn't stupid. The Minister of Magic was the reason for the slander campaign against Harry in the Daily Prophet. Ever since the end of the Triwizard Tournament, the man had been steadfast in his position that Voldemort wasn't back and that Harry was merely being an attention seeking brat for proclaiming otherwise. Since Harry no longer wanted anything to do with the upcoming war he wasn't going to bother trying to tell people that the murdering megalomaniac was back. It would be a waste of his time and breath. They would all figure it out eventually when the Ministry gets Avada Kadavra'ed in the back by the very Death Eaters in their employment.

'they deserve it' thought Harry darkly as he stared at the Wizengamot members.

"Very well," said Fudge. "The accused and his legal representation now being present, let us begin."

Harry could tell that Fudge was slightly nervous. He obviously wasn't expecting that Harry would have legal representation to defend him.

'Bastard!' Harry internally snarled. He was a minor yet they were trying him as an adult. Last time he checked, fifteen was still considered to be a minor.

"Are you ready?" Fudge called down the row.

"Yes, sir," replied a younger red-head.

And wait... Harry knew that voice! Taking a quick glance at the end of the bench, Harry saw Percy, Ron's older brother, sitting with a long piece of parchment and a quill in front of him. Obviously Percy would be writing the transcript of the trial.

"Disciplinary hearing of the twelfth of August," Minister Fudge said in a

ringing voice.

Harry could see Percy immediately begin scribbling down every word. If Fred and George could see their esteemed brother now... Harry thought with a mental scoff.

"into the offences committed under the Decree for the Reasonable Restriction of Underage Sorcery and the International Statute of Secrecy by one Harry James Potter, resident at number four, Privet Drive, Little Whinging, Surrey," continued Fudge, "Interrogators: Cornelius Oswald Fudge, Minister of Magic; Amelia Susan Bones, Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement; Dolores Jane Umbridge, Senior Undersecretary to the Minister, Court Scribe, Percy Ignatius Weasley and The Wizengamot of the Wizarding World of Great Britain."

Fudge then looked down at the paper in front of him, "Barristers for the Defense: Lord Charles Andrew Johnson, Chief Barrister and Leader of the Defence Team, Henry Martin Anderson, Support Barrister, Abigail Elizabeth Merryweather, Research for the Defence, Alexander Gregorovich, Support Research for the Defence and Witness Organisation. Witnesses for the Defence, one Mrs. Arabella Doreen Figg -"

"And Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore," said a voice from behind the legal team.

Harry's head whipped around. What on earth was Dumbledore doing here? He wasn't on Harry's legal team and he wasn't a witness to the event so what on earth was he doing here?

"Oh? And who might you be?" Professor Dumbledore asked as he approached Harry and the seated legal counsel.

Standing up, Lord Charles stood toe to toe against Dumbledore, "We are Harry James Potter's legal counsel. We are supposed to be here and have filed the appropriate paperwork regarding our presence at Harry's

hearing whereas you have not. I would ask that you leave these proceedings at once. You have already caused enough trouble with your rude interruption Mr. Dumbledore."

"Ah, but my boy, Harry needs someone he trusts to be here in order to ensure that his best interests are at heart. I know you mean well..."

"Lord Charles Andrew Johnson, Chief Barrister for Harry James Potter and I will not say it again, Mr. Dumbledore, leave."

"I'm afraid that isn't your decision to make, Charles, it's Harry's,"

Dumbledore said to Lord Charles in a rather condescendingly grandfather tone before turning to look imploringly at Harry, "You want my here to ensure your best interests are maintained, don't you Harry?"

Everyone was staring at Harry. This was not how Harry had expected his hearing to go.

"Actually, I would prefer it if you left, Professor. I assure you my legal team is more that competent enough and do have my best interests at heart. Thank you for your concern. It's very touching but I would ask you to wait outside so the hearing that you interrupted can proceed," Harry finished with one last look at Dumbledore before averting his eyes from his old mentor to face front again. Essentially ignoring, Dumbledore as he adverted all attention from him.

Harry felt a hand on his leg and glanced over at Anderson.

"You handled that well," said Anderson with a small nod.

Harry smiled briefly at Anderson before glancing out the corner of his eye to see Professor Dumbledore glare at Charles and storm out the door of the courtroom.

"Well," said Charles with a smirk up at Fudge and the Wizengamot as he moved to sit back down, "I apologise for that rude interruption. Perhaps, we can now continue listing the witnesses and proceed with the hearing?"

"Yes," Fudge replied before nervously shuffling his notes, "Well then, where was I? Yes, the witnesses; one Arabella Doreen Figg and Petunia Emily Dursley, Aunt of the accused and a written account by one Dudley Harold Dursley, cousin of the accused, has been submitted to evidence with a drop of blood to prove its validity."

Fudge extracted another piece of parchment from the pile in front of him, took a deep breath and read, "The charges against the accused are as follows: That he did knowingly, deliberately, and in full awareness of the illegality of his actions, having received a previous written warning from the Ministry of Magic on a similar charge, produce a Patronus Charm in a Muggle-inhabited area, in the presence of a Muggle, on August the second at twenty-three minutes past nine, which constitutes an offence under paragraph C of the Decree for the Reasonable Restriction of Underage Sorcery, 1875, and also under section thirteen of the International Confederation of Wizards' Statute of Secrecy."

"Please state for the record your name, title and place of residence. You are Harry James Potter of number four, Privet Drive, Little Whinging, Surrey?" Fudge asked as he glared down at Harry over the top of the parchment in his hand.

Harry looked over at Charles for guidance and Charles motioned that he should stand.

"Yes, my name is Harry James Potter..." Harry glanced down at Charles for confirmation. Was he really supposed to state his titles? They hadn't discussed this during the preliminary meetings with the legal team!

"Harry," Anderson whispered, "Just state your title and place of residence so we can continue with the hearing!"

With a nervous gulp, Harry turned to face front again and lifted his head to make eye-contact with Fudge, "My name is Harry James Potter Heir to

the House of Potter, Slytherin and Gryffindor and my legal place of residence is number four, Privet Drive, little Whinging, Surrey."

The members of the Wizengamot were all muttering furiously amongst themselves and Fudge, Percy and a witch who looked like a vat of pink die had exploded all over her were all gaping down at him. Meanwhile, Madam Bones was looking at him with an intrigued expression on her face.

"This would have been a great thing to mention during the preliminary meetings, Harry," Anderson whispered frantically at him as he began furiously shuffling through papers.

"Well I'm so sorry but it's not as if it would come up in normal conversation now is it?" Harry whispered back.

Amongst the Wizengamot's muttering a female voice asked, "What right do you have to claim such titles child? You are a halfblood. There is no way you are the heir of Gryffindor or Slytherin. Do you have proof to verify your claim?"

Harry rose from his seat and faced the member of the Wizengamot who had posed the question, "Yes, yes I do. I had a Hereditary Test performed by the Goblin Geldreth Snarklaw a while ago. This test verifies my claim as the Heir of the Houses of Potter, Slytherin and Griffindor. However, the other information on the results of the Hereditary Test are confidential. I propose that Geldreth be brought forward as a witness to testify under oath the validity of my claim. I will also testify under Veritaserum as to the validity of my claim. Is this agreeable?"

There was muttering amongst the Wizengamot again before the woman who asked the question spoke up, "Yes, the Goblin will be fetched by one of your retainers and the hearing will commence upon their return."

"No!" Fudge shouted, "This boy has already caused enough trouble

making such erroneous claims. I will not have this hearing postponed for one of his attention-seeking games!"

"And if it is not a game?" posed Madam Bones, "What then? You would prevent Mr. Potter from claiming titles that are rightfully his simply because you do not wish to postpone a mere Disciplinary Hearing? No, the Hearing will be postponed until nine o'clock by which time the Goblin, Geldreth Snarklaw, will be fetched by one of Mr. Potter's retainers. Mr. Potter will remain. Hearing Adjourned."

A/N: I know it's been a long time since I updated Survival of the Fittest and I'm sorry for that. I have been overwhelmed with work full time and Uni at night so I haven't had much time to write, nor the inclination really other than to write short stuff. I hope this chapter makes up for the long wait.

-Marcielle-

p.s. The next chapter is already underway and should be finished by New Years. Feel free to comment or review. I love to hear your thoughts :D

#### 14. The Hearing Part 2

Title: Survival of the Fittest

Author: Marcielle's Musings

A/N: Hi everyone, Marci here! I'm so glad you all enjoyed chapter fourteen so I've decided to upload chapter fifteen, The Hearing Part 2, early! So you will all be getting it a few days before New Years.

Happy Holidays to everyone who has followed this story from the beginning and also to those who have just recently joined us. You can check out my tumblr at [/marciellesmusings.tumblr.com](http://marciellesmusings.tumblr.com)

I hope you all enjoy Part 2 of the Hearing. I would love to hear what you think in a review.

-Marci-

Previously In Survival of the Fittest:

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Chapter 15: The Hearing Part 2

"Are you really the Heir of Slytherin and Griffindor?"

Harry turned to face Lord Charles. Their time to fetch Geldreth was almost up and Alexander wasn't back yet with the snarky goblin. What if Geldreth refused to come? Would the Ministry listen if only he testified under Veritaserum? Harry didn't know.

"Yeah, I am. Hopefully, Alexander and Abigail are on their way back with Geldreth and the Veritaserum, we're almost out of time," Harry replied.

"Don't worry. If my team is anything, it's reliable. They'll get here on time. Hopefully that letter you sent with Alexander will help convince the goblin to come," Charles said as he glanced up at the Wizengamot who were still whispering amongst themselves. Harry had created quite a juicy piece of information by claiming two of the most renowned titles in the United Kingdom.

"Yeah, let's hope so."

Meanwhile at the Order of the Phoenix...

Hermione had been trying to send letters to Harry for over a week now.

But every time she tried to pass a letter that was addressed to Harry

Potter to Hedwig, she would fly off. Obviously, Harry had told Hedwig not to come find him. It was frustrating her that she couldn't get an owl, even a ridiculously intelligent owl as Hedwig, to do as she was bid. Fred and George had thought it was a right old laugh that she was being outsmarted by a bird.

"Wha'cha thinkin' bout Hermione?" Ron asked from across the room.

"Nothing, Ron."

A new batch of doxies had been found in the drawing room and Hermione, Ron, Ginny, Fred and George had been battling them with Mrs. Weasley for two days now. The nest of dead puffskeins that Fred had found under the sofa had been cleared out yesterday but the room wasn't looking much better than when they started.

The drawing room was a long, high ceilinged room on the first floor with olive green walls covered in dirty tapestries. The carpet, which now exhaled little clouds of dust every time someone put their foot down, probably had been a soft cream once but now it had faded and become a dull dirty gray. The curtains that covered the windows that faced the street were a mossy green coloured velvet. However, that could also be the mould and mildew that covered them and currently they were buzzing with the sound of agitated doxies.

Everyone was decked out in cleaning masks over their noses and mouths and they all had a large bottle of Doxycide with a nozzle at the end which they had been using to kill the doxies for the past two days.

Hermione wished that the adults would tell them what was going on. She knew they were all frantically searching for Harry and that so far they hadn't found him and she was worried. Where could Harry have gone that not even Dumbledore could find him? What if he's been captured by Voldemort and his Death Eaters? How could that just be standing here

cleaning when they should be out searching for Harry with the rest of the Order.

Hermione hadn't been paying attention while she was spraying the curtains and suddenly a fully grown doxy came soaring out of a fold in the curtains towards her face. It's shiny beetle-like wings were whirling as its tiny needle-sharp teeth attempted to chomp down on her nose.

"Ahhh," Hermione shrieked as she dodged the doxy's attack and sprayed it in the face with a blast of Doxycide. The doxy, that had only moments ago been attempting to munch on her nose with its poisonous teeth, froze in midair and then fell to the ground with a thunk as a dust cloud from the carpet formed around its body. Gingerly, Hermione picked up the dead doxy and chucked it in the bucket.

They shouldn't be cleaning. They should be out looking for Harry but little did she know that Harry had been found by one Albus Dumbledore who had informed the Order of Harry's current whereabouts and was now waiting for the hearing to be finished so he could intercept Harry and bring him to number twelve Grimmauld Place where he would be safe...

Abigail had returned with the Veritaserum first and there was only five minutes until their time was up when Alexander walked through the courtroom doors with Geldreth trotting along behind him, a prominent scowl on the golbin's face.

"Ah, excellent, you made it. Now, Master Geldreth could you please step forward?" Madam Bones said as she gestured for Geldreth to sit with a wave of her hand in the direction of the chair Lord Charles had conjured they had arrived.

Once Geldreth was seated the questioning began, "Master Geldreth, please state your name and title for the record."

"My name is Geldreth Snarklaw son of Gaelen Snarklaw and Master Goldsmith for Gringotts Wizarding Bank," replied Geldreth.

"Please describe, for the record, the day Mr. Potter came to you to perform a Heritage Test."

"He came into Gringotts on the third of August, but he was disguised. So in order for him to gain access to his vault it is required by Gringotts policy to perform a blood test to confirm that the identity of the customer is what they claim it to be."

"Please continue," said Madam Bones with a gesture.

Harry could tell that Madam Bones appeared to be running this section of the hearing. It was obvious that Fudge wanted nothing to do with this and was hesitant to even allow Geldreth to speak by the prominent glower on his face.

"I let the man claiming to be Harry Potter into one of the secure meeting rooms within Gringotts which are warded so that no one can listen in on any conversations held within. There, the boy, removed his disguise and I performed the blood test to verify his identity," Geldreth continued.

"And what was the nature of this blood test?" asked the plump witch in pink with a pinched look, "Surely, you are not suggesting that a goblin took blood from a wizard and performed magic using that blood. Blood Magic has been illegal in Great Britain since 1634. Are you suggesting that you performed Dark Magic?! And now expect us to believe the results of such a dark test?!"

"Goblins are not subject to wizarding law and it was not dark magic that I performed. Just a simple blood test which revealed the identity of my customer to be one Harry James Potter Heir to the House of Potter, Slytherin and Griffindor," Geldreth snapped.

Harry could tell that Geldreth was getting frustrated with the

proceedings. He could only hope that the goblin's part was over soon.

"Did that blood test reveal how, Mr. Potter came to be the Heir of the House of Slytherin and Griffindor?" another member of the Wizengamot asked.

"Yes, it did. However that is confidential client information and is not pertinent to this hearing."

"Alright," Madam Bones replied with a nod and pulled out her wand, "Do you Geldreth Snarklaw, son of Gaelen Snarklaw and Master Goldsmith for Gringotts Wizarding Bank so swear that the man behind you, Mr. Potter is the Heir of the Houses of Potter, Slytherin and Griffindor?"

"Yes, I do swear," replied Geldreth.

"Then you are bound by magic, so mote it be," Madam Bones finished. As the last word left her lips a gold thread of magic slipped out of her wand and wound its way around Geldreth's throat before dissipating.

"The goblin speaks the truth," said a member of the Wizengamot with a frown.

"Mr. Potter is the Heir of the House of Potter, Slytherin and Griffindor," said another with a grin, "Welcome, Lordling."

"NO!" shouted Fudge, "I will not have this little attention seeking brat gain the title of Heir to two of the greatest Houses in Great Britain simply because of what a goblin says!"

"The goblin did not lie," Madam Bones placated, "My spell worked perfectly. If he had lied he would have died and yet here he stands."

"The goblin could have found a way around the spell," the plump witch in pink simpered, "perhaps the boy should also swear under oath."

"No," Lord Charles interjected as he stood, "It was agreed before Geldreth was fetched that my client would agree to verify his claim under Veritaserum. You will see it in the transcript. He will only verify his

claim under Veritaserum."

Percy passed the transcript that he had been writing over to the toad-like woman as Madam Bones looked on with a hawk-like expression.

"So it does..." the witch stated before she passed the transcript over to Fudge.

"Fine then," snapped Fudge, "But Veritaserum is very expensive... Is the Wizengamot willing to adjourn this hearing yet again so that the defence may fetch some?"

There was muttering amongst the Wizengamot and most looked to be shaking their heads.

"Pardon," Lord Charles said, once more grabbing the Wizengamot's attention, "But my legal team already has purchased a vial of Veritaserum, sealed and unopened with the maker's seal still intact in preparation."

All muttering stopped, "Then proceed with administering the Veritaserum,"

With a nod from Anderson, Harry rose from his seat and moved into the seat Geldreth had just occupied. Lord Charles pulled the vial out of a pocket on his robes and held it up for the Wizengamot to see.

"Two drops of this and you will tell nothing but the truth for a minute," Charles whispered in Harry's ear, "Don't worry, I will stop them from asking questions about classified information. They will only verify your claim - nothing more."

Harry nodded nervously and opened his mouth. Two drops of Veritaserum were placed on his tongue. If Harry hadn't known that it was a truth serum, he would have said only water had been placed in his mouth for the potion had not taste or texture to differentiate it.

Lord Charles watched as Harry's pupils dilated, a sure sign that the potion

was working, and nodded at Fudge to indicate that the questioning could begin.

"Now, Mr. Potter," said Fudge, "What Houses are you the Heir to?"

"I am the Heir to the House of Potter, Slytherin and Griffindor," Harry replied in a monotone voice.

"And how did you come to be the Heir of the Houses of Griffindor and Slytherin?" Fudge asked.

Lord Charles shot a silencing spell at Harry, "Now see here! We have stated previously that that is confidential information. You are now taking advantage of Mr. Potter's current state. That line of questioning has nothing to do with his hearing. He has confirmed for you that he is the Heir of the House of Griffindor and Slytherin as well as the House of Potter. Now can we please continue with the original purpose of this hearing?"

"Lord Charles is correct, Cornelius. You go too far," said Madam Bones from her seat as she glanced over at Fudge.

"Very well," said Fudge with a sigh, "Let the record show that Harry James Potter has proven his right to claim the title of Heir to the House of Potter, Griffindor and Slytherin."

"Now, the charges against the accused, once more, are as follows: That he did knowingly, deliberately, and in full awareness of the illegality of his actions, having received a previous written warning from the Ministry of Magic on a similar charge, produce a Patronus Charm in a Muggle-inhabited area, in the presence of a Muggle, on August the second at twenty-three minutes past nine, which constitutes an offence under paragraph C of the Decree for the Reasonable Restriction of Underage Sorcery, 1875, and also under section thirteen of the International Confederation of Wizards' Statute of Secrecy," drawled Fudge.

Harry was no longer under the effects of the Veritaserum and was now waiting for his hearing to be over. He would hate it if he was expelled from Hogwarts but so far the Hearing had run on too long and it was only technically starting. He knew that he was going to have a massive headache by the end of the day. When he got back to Baird's he was going to take a long nap.

"You are Harry James Potter, Heir of the House of Potter, Gryffindor and Slytherin, of number four, Privet Drive, Little Whinging, Surrey?" Fudge said while glaring down at Harry.

"Yes," Harry answered.

"You received an official warning from the Ministry of Magic for using magic illegally, while still underage, three years ago, did you not?"

"Yes, I did. However -"

"And yet you conjured a Patronus on the night of the second of August?"

Fudge interrupted.

"Cornelius!" Lord Charles loud voice boomed as he interjected. "The boy has the right to defend his actions in the case of a trial or hearing under subsection F, paragraph 2.7 of the Reasonable Restriction of Underage Sorcery, 1875 but also under the laws of the realm. He is allowed to defend his actions without you harping on his every word," Lord Charles finished with a growl up at Fudge that made him sound like the lion he looked like.

"Fine," snapped Fudge as he realised he was losing control of this hearing,

"speak, Mr. Potter."

"As I was saying, I did receive an official warning from the Ministry of Magic for using magic illegally, while still underage, three years ago.

However, it was not I who actually performed the magic. It was a house elf," said Harry.

"Preposterous!" Fudge scoffed, "A house elf?! In a Muggle house?! You expect us to believe this nonsense?!"

"Yes, I do," Harry replied calmly.

"No. No more of your stories, boy."

"Cornelius!" Lord Charles roared, "I will not have you speak to my client in such a manner. Compose yourself. You are the Minister of Magic. Act like it."

Fudge spluttered at the reprimand and Harry could see Madam Bones lift her hand up to cover her mouth where a small smile was slipping out. It appeared that not everyone appreciated Fudge's manner of conducting this hearing.

"The house elf in question is willing to testify as to his actions that day," said Lord Charles, "It is not a commonly known fact, but house elves can copy a person's magical signature. So that when a house elf does perform magic it will register as the signature that was copied, not their own personal signature. This is also part of the magic that binds house elves to families. Would you like me to bring the house elf forward?"

"I - not - I haven't got time to listen to house elves!" shouted Fudge.

"Now, Cornelius, if they have proof that it wasn't Mr. Potter who performed the magic then it must be taken into account," Madam Bones said calmly to Fudge who was slowly turning red before asking Lord Charles, "Can you please bring the house elf in question forward?"

"Certainly," Lord Charles replied with a short bow. "Dobby, please come here."

There was a sudden \*Pop\* and then Dobby was standing in the middle of the courtroom looking very confused.

"Youse called, Harry's Lionsy?" Dobby squeaked as he nervously began fiddling with his Hogwarts House Elf uniform.

Harry could hear a few snickers and giggles from amongst the Wizengamot. He had found it funny the first time Dobby had been introduced to the legal team, too. Dobby had taken one look at the large man with the lion's mane like hair and had immediately called him 'Harry's Lionsy'. Everyone around the table had gotten a good laugh out of that. But then Dobby had turned to the rest of the table and the names hadn't gotten any better. Baird's was possibly the most funny but also the most accurate. Not that Harry would ever say that to the man.

"Yes I did, Dobby, thank you for coming so promptly," Lord Charles said kindly.

Harry was glad that Lord Charles and the rest of the legal team didn't seem to look down on Dobby simply because he was a house elf. Or if they did, they didn't show it.

"Now, Dobby, three years ago, before Harry's second year at Hogwarts, did you go to his house?" Lord Charles asked.

"Yes, Sirs. I visit Mister Harry Potter, sirs," replied Dobby as he began rocking back and forth on his feet.

"And while you were there, did you perform magic while making your magic imitate Mr. Potter's magical signature?"

"Yes sirs," Dobby's ears began to droop and his eyes began to tear up and he turned away from Charles to face Harry, "I is sorry Mister Harry Potter. I does it to prevent you from returning to Hogwarts. You was in great danger. I hope you is not in more trouble because of Dobby."

"It's all right Dobby," placated Harry when Dobby started to tear up,

"Thank you for coming here and telling the truth."

"Harry Potter is thanking Dobby," said Dobby with wide eyes before running forward and hugging Harry's legs, "Harry Potter is truly a kind and forgiving wizard."

"There, there Dobby," Harry said while patting Dobby on the head and looking over at Charles pleadingly. He could feel the bottom of his robes becoming wet from Dobby's tears.

"That is all Dobby," Lord Charles said, drawing Dobby's attention away from Harry, "You may return to Hogwarts."

"Yes, Harry's Lionsy, sir," said Dobby and with a snap of his fingers he was gone, presumably to the Hogwarts kitchens.

"Could you?" Harry asked Lord Charles with a gesture down at his robes. Lord Charles smirked at Harry and flicked his wand in his direction, the robes now spotless once more.

"As you can now see, it was not Harry who was responsible for the hover charm three years ago, which he was given a formal warning for," Charles stated for the Wizengamot.

"But how do we know that the house elf wasn't Mr. Potter's at the time of the incident and directed the elf to perform the charm, not knowing that it would register under his magical signature," a rather dumpy wizard with a large black moustache in the second row asked.

"At the time of the incident, Dobby the house elf was in the employment of one Lucius Malfoy," Charles replied, "Are you accusing Lucius Malfoy of purposefully sabotaging my client?"

Heh, Lord Charles was brilliant. Lucius Malfoy had Fudge in his back pocket. While this normally wouldn't be a good thing, Charles had obviously found a way to use this to their advantage. Fudge would never do anything to implicate Lucius in a crime.

"Nonsense!" Fudge shouted, "Obviously the elf was working alone."

"Then it's settled. The incident three years ago that caused Harry to receive an official warning for the Reasonable Restriction of Underage Sorcery, 1875 was in fact caused by the actions of the House Elf Dobby

who is now in the employment of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry."

"Agreed. In the light of this new evidence, Mr. Potter's previous warning for the Misuse of Magic will be removed from his record," said Amelia Bones, "Now, let us continue with the rest of the Hearing."

Harry could tell that Fudge was slowly losing his patience with this hearing. It obviously wasn't going the way he wanted it to and the fact that Harry's legal team was trouncing him at every turn was becoming embarrassing for the Minister.

Fudge ran a hand down his face with a frustrated sigh, "Did you, Mr. Harry James Potter cast the Patronus charm on the night of the second of August?"

"Yes," said Harry "but -"

"Knowing full well that you are not permitted to use magic outside school while you are under the age of seventeen?"

"Yes, I do know that I am not permitted to use magic outside school while still under the age of seventeen. However, there were extenuating circumstances that -"

"Knowing that you were in an area completely inhabited by Muggles?"

Fudge interrupted again.

"Yes, but as I am trying to tell you if you would stop interrupting me,"

growled Harry, "there were extenuating circumstances that dictated that I use the Patronus charm in order to -"

"And fully aware that you were in close proximity to a Muggle at the time?" interrupted Fudge.

"THAT IS ENOUGH, CORNELIUS!" Lord Charles roared as he stood from his seat. The high backed chair fell to the ground with a clatter as Lord Charles pushed it back and moved onto the floor of the Courtroom, "AS I

HAVE WARNED YOU BEFORE, the boy has the right to defend his actions without you harping on his every word. If you continue to dictate his hearing in this childish manner I will demand a re-trial under a less biased administrator. Thus far you have changed the time of the hearing without due notice, belittled my client and his witnesses, and prevented my client from defending himself as is his right by law, not once, but over ten times. This is more than enough evidence to demand a re-trial and have you disbarred for misconduct!"

"So Minister," Lord Charles growled threateningly, "unless you would like to have an audit put in to have all trials, hearings and legal proceedings that you have overseen in your tenure as Minister looked over for misconduct, I would learn to hold your tongue and let my client speak."

By the end of Lord Charles speech, Fudge was gaping like a fish and so were a few members of the Wizengamot. Obviously he wasn't used to people not bending to his every whim. Honestly, the way the Minister behaved, Harry sometimes thought the Wizarding World of Great Britain had employed an overgrown toddler prone to temper tantrums as Minister of Magic.

"HOW DARE YOU!" the witch to the right of Fudge, who looked like a rather pale toad with large bulging eyes and a broad flabby face, shrieked, "THIS IS THE MINISTER OF MAGIC! YOU ARE NOT PERMITTED TO SPEAK TO HIM IN SUCH A WAY!"

"When the Minister starts behaving the way he is supposed to as the Minister of Magic and stops breaking his own laws over a simple Disciplinary Hearing I will cease reprimanding him, Senior Undersecretary, Umbridge," Lord Charles calmly responded, face blank as he stared down the toad-like woman.

"Hmmf," the toad woman huffed as she broke eye-contact with Lord

Charles.

"Cornelius, Lord Charles is correct. A little professionalism, please and then we can all get on with our day," Madam Bones said, "Now, you were trying to clarify something for us Mr. Potter?"

"Yes, I was. Thank you, Madam Bones," Harry said with a slight bow of the head to the woman who had inadvertently defended him. Not too much of a bow to demonstrate subservience but enough to demonstrate that he was grateful for her sense of justice and equality.

"As I was saying," began Harry, "There were extenuating circumstances that dictated that I use the Patronus charm in order to protect both myself and my cousin from Dementors. The Muggle that I have been accused of performing magic in front of was my cousin, who I have lived with since my parents death and who has known about my magic and the Wizarding World since I was eleven and received my acceptance letter to Hogwarts."

Harry could tell from the muttering amongst the Wizengamot and the angry red flush on Fudge's face that they all wished to speak but Lord Charles began to alliterate on what Harry had said before any of them could speak.

"Under the Reasonable Restriction of Underage Sorcery, 1875 an underage wizard is permitted to use magic in self-defence if their life is in danger or a member of their family is unable to lend assistance or a family member's life is threatened. This addition to the Charter of the Restriction of Underage Sorcery was added after the McCallum Family Massacre of 1865 when it was revealed that the McCallum Family children had been physically unable to help protect or save their family while they were under attack from the Dark Lord Mallificarus' forces due to the fact that their wands had been taken from them for their summer

break from Hogwarts as was customary at the time," Lord Charles explained, "It was thanks to my client, Mr. Potter's quick thinking and preparedness that not only his life but that of his cousin, Dudley Dursley, was spared from a fate worse than death; the Dementor's Kiss."

"Additionally, Dudley Dursley, Harry Potter's Muggle cousin and the Muggle that Mr. Potter has been accused of performing magic in front of already knew of Mr. Potter's magic and of the Wizarding World.

Therefore, my client, Mr. Potter did not break or in any way endanger section thirteen of the International Confederation of Wizards' Statute of Secrecy," continued Lord Charles.

"As you can see, ladies and gentleman, Mr. Potter's only offence is that he used magic to defend both himself and his cousin from Dementors in a Muggle populated area over the summer when magic is not permitted to be performed by an underage witch or wizard. My client, Mr. Potter, should not be being punished for his actions. He should be being thanked for preserving not only his life and the life of his cousin but from preventing Dementors from harming the innocent Muggles of Little Whinging, Surrey!" Charles elaborated with a flourish of his arms.

The Wizengamot was completely captivated by Lord Charles' performance. Because that was what it was. The lion-like wizard could probably convince them the sky was actually pink if he wanted to, Harry thought. He was truly lucky to have Lord Charles as his Chief Barrister. Without him, Harry was sure that the Hearing would not have gone even half as well.

There was silence after Lord Charles speech. It was obvious that they were all thinking about what had been said but not a minute later a voice spoke up. It was Minister Fudge.

"That is a very good story," drawled Fudge, "I'm not sure how Mr. Potter

convinced you of that little cover story, Lord Charles. How convenient that Muggles can't see Dementors, can they, boy? Highly convenient, highly convenient... so it's just your word and no witnesses. Because by your own admission, Lord Charles, Mr. Potter is the only wizard in residence within Little Whinging is he not?" Fudge finished with a smirk.

"Ah, but that is where you are wrong, Minister," Lord Charles replied with a smirk of his own, "We have quite a few witnesses. Of those Mr. Potter's cousin, Dudley Dursley and Harry Potter's Aunt and the Late Lilly Potter nee Evans' sister, Petunia Dursley nee Evans, have both submitted a written account and a memory of the evening along with a drop of blood for identity verification. Mrs. Arabella Doreen Figg, Squib and Harry Potter's next door neighbour who witnessed the event has agreed to testify under Veritaserum. As well as Mr. Potter himself, who has submitted a memory of that evening of August the second, which has already been cleared by Unspeakables as being authentic with no modifications."

Fudge's eyes widened and so did the toad-lady's. They obviously hadn't expected Harry to have so many witnesses willing to testify even though they had provided notification of their witnesses to the Ministry as required so really, it shouldn't have been a surprise if Fudge had bothered to come to the hearing prepared.

"Bring forth Mr. Potter's memory," said Madam Bones after a moment, with a gesture to Lord Charles who immediately levitated the sealed bottle with the memory within up to her waiting hand. "You said that this memory has been cleared with the Unspeakables as un-tampered-with and true?"

"Yes, Madam Bones," Lord Charles replied with a nod.

"Alright. Bring forth the Projection Pensieve," Bones barked down at

Percy.

With wide eyes, Percy quickly scrambled out of his chair, abandoning his parchment with a flutter, and exited the courtroom through a side door.

A few moments later he returned, out of breath with a large black granite bowl with runes inscribed in gold around the rim.

When the bowl was passed to Madam Bones by the flustered Percy, she uncorked the bottle containing Harry's memory of the Dementor attack and poured the contents into the bowl. As the memory swirled around in the Pensieve it began to emit a faint blue glow.

"Watch closely," Anderson whispered in Harry's ear, "This is the good bit."

Suddenly the gold runes around the rim of the Pensieve began to pulse and glow while the swirling memory within, emitted an even brighter blue light which was cast onto the ceiling of the chamber. The ceiling was now bathed in a swirling blue light and around the edges of the room a matching set of glowing gold runes appeared to etch themselves into the stone. Once the last gold rune was completed, black lines began to swirl and twine their way through the blue light. Then with a flash of blue light the memory began, projected on the ceiling like a movie.

Harry and Dudley were standing in the narrow alleyway which formed a shortcut between Magnolia Crescent and Wisteria Walk. The Alley was empty except for a few wheelie bins and was much darker than the street they had just left because there were no street lamps. The shadow of the Jones' garage and the Miller's high wooden fence making the alley seem only that much darker as Dudley gave a harsh bark of laughter and then adopted a high pitched whimpering voice. "Don't kill Cedric! Don't kill Cedric! Who's Cedric - your boyfriend?"

Harry's face went a pasty white colour as the shock of what Dudley had said registered with him, "I - you're lying -"

"Dad! Help me, Dad! He's going to kill me, Dad! Boo-hoo!" Dudley mocked as he moved forward into Harry's personal space.

Harry's wand was in his hand shaking with the effort to not point it at Dudley, "Shut up," Harry whispered, "Shut up, Dudley, I'm warning you!"

"Come and help me, Dad! Mum, come and help me! He's killed Cedric! Dad, help me! He's going to -"

Harry's wand was suddenly shoved threateningly in the direction of Dudley's heart, the expression on his face both pained and beyond livid.

"Don't you point that thing at me!" shrieked Dudley as he backed into the wall of the alleyway Harry's wand pointed steadily at Dudley's heart.

"Don't ever talk about that again," Harry snarled, the expression on his face slowly shifting to murderous, "D'you understand me?"

Dudley obviously wasn't listening to a word Harry was saying as he focused his beady little eyes only on Harry's wand which hadn't moved an inch from where it was pointed at his heart.

"Point that thing somewhere else!" said Dudley frantically as his eyes flicked between Harry's wand and the end of the alley like a cornered rabbit trapped by a hungry fox.

"I said, do you understand me?"

"Point it somewhere else!"

"DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME?!" Harry yelled in Dudley's face.

"GET THAT THING AWAY FROM-" shrieked Dudley before he suddenly stopped and gave an odd, shuddering gasp, as though he had been doused in cold icy water.

There was a shift in the night. A chilly night breeze rushed through the alley and the warm summer night was suddenly a lot less inviting. The star-strewn sky was suddenly pitch black and lightless - the stars, the moon, the misty street lamps at either end of the alley had vanished. The distant grumble of

cars and the whisper of trees had gone. It was as if the small alleyway had become completely separate from the world around it, as if it had shifted into a separate dimension. The muggy evening was also suddenly piercingly, biting cold and frost was beginning to grow on the telephone wires above the two boys' heads. Harry and Dudley were now surrounded by total, impenetrable, silent darkness.

Harry turned his head this way and that in confusion, obviously confused by the sudden shift in the evening.

"W-what are you d-doing? St-stop it!" Dudley fearfully stuttered as he tried to inch away from his cousin.

"Harry's head whipped around to face Dudley, "I'm not doing anything! Shut up and don't move!" Harry said as he moved in front of Dudley protectively.

There was no way. No way they could be here. Dementors in Little Whinging – There was no way and yet Harry's senses were telling him that they were already here... in the alleyway.

"I c-can't see! I've g-gone blind! I –"

"I said shut up!" Harry frantically whispered to his cousin with a hushing motion before standing stock-still, trying to see anything using his peripherals. The cold was now so intense that both boys were now shivering all over; goose bumps covering their arms and the hairs on the back of Harry's neck were standing up in instinctive warning of danger.

Harry turned his head this way and that obviously trying to hear something while Dudley quivered in fear behind him.

"I'll t-tell Dad!" Dudley whimpered. "W-where are you? What are you d-do-?"

"Will you shut up?" Harry hissed back at Dudley, "I'm trying to lis-"

Harry's eyes widened and he paled as the sound of a rasping rattling breath echoed in the alley. Harry could hear long, hoarse, rattling breaths as he backed up, tremblingly, closer to Dudley.

"C-cut it out! Stop doing it! I'll h-hit you, I swear I will!" Dudley stuttered out.

"Dudley, shut-"

But then Harry was cut off as Dudley's fist connected with the side of his head, lifting Harry off his feet. Harry landed hard on the concrete and his wand flew out of his hand and rolled out of reach.

"You moron, Dudley!" Harry yelled as he scrambled to his hands and knees, his eyes watering as he searched frantically in the blackness for his wand.

Dudley launched himself off the wall and blundered across the alleyway until he connected with the wooden fence on the other side.

"DUDLEY, COME BACK! YOU'RE RUNNING RIGHT AT IT!" Harry yelled after Dudley.

Dudley let out a horrible squealing yell, and his footsteps stopped. Harry couldn't see him but at the same moment the hairs on the back of his neck...

There was more than one dementor.

"DUDLEY, KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT! WHATEVER YOU DO, KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT!" Harry yelled frantically as his hands flew over the concrete in search for his wand, "Wand! Where's - wand - come on - Lumos!"

Harry's wand wasn't in his hand but he had said the spell automatically, desperate for the light to help him in his search and to his obvious disbelief, a soft blue light flared to life inches from his right hand. The tip of his wand had ignited.

Snatching up his wand, Harry scrambled to his feet and turned around.

A towering, hooded figure was gliding smoothly towards Harry, hovering over the ground, its face and feet hidden beneath its robes.

Harry's eyes widened but he still raised his wand in a defensive position in front of him, "Expecto Patronum!" he yelled as he pointed his wand at the dementor in front of him.

A silvery wisp of smoky white vapour shot out from the tip of Harry's wand

and the dementor slowed its progress but for some reason the spell hadn't worked properly and the dementor did not stop moving towards Harry.

Scrambling backwards, Harry retreated farther down the alley away from the dementor as it bore down upon him.

Harry couldn't see Dudley. Hopefully he was ok, but Harry couldn't know for sure.

A pair of gray, slimy scabbed hands slid out from inside the dementor's robes, reaching for Harry.

"Expecto Patronum!" Harry shouted weakly, his voice sounding dim and distant even to his own ears as terror clenched his heart.

Another faint silvery mist shot out of Harry's wand, even more feeble than his last attempt. He didn't know why it wasn't working anymore. If he couldn't do a Patronus he was going to die.

Both he and Dudley were going to die if Harry couldn't get his bloody Patronus to work.

The dementor now had Harry by the throat, its putrid breath that was as cold as death bathing his face and being sucked into his own lungs as Harry was forced to breath. He was drowning in cold, darkness and the smell of death.

Harry took a gasping breath, his eyes closed shut, as the dementor drew closer and closer to his mouth before his eyes snapped open as he shouted,

"EXPECTO PATRONUM!"

Unbeknownst to Harry, his eyes were glowing the eerie green of the killing curse as the power of his magic surged through his wand and erupted in the form of an enormous silver stag from the tip of his wand which was pointed at the dementor's face.

The Patronus' antlers caught the dementor that had almost been on top of Harry in the place where the heart should have been and the dementor was catapulted down the alley with a ghostly shriek.

Harry was quick to his feet as happiness surged through him. He should have known better than to doubt his magic. It had never let him down so far.

"Prongs! This way! We have to find Dudley!" Harry shouted to his Patronus which tossed its head, its sharp looking antlers flying, and charged down the alleyway in front of Harry.

Holding his wand aloft, Harry followed Prongs down the alley, "DUDLEY? DUDLEY, WHERE ARE YOU?! DUDLEY!"

Harry's eyes immediately zeroed in on his cousin's frame. Dudley was curled up on the ground, his arms clamped protectively over his face as a second dementor crouched over him, gripping his wrists in its slimy hands.

The dementor was slowly prying Dudley's arm away from his face. A bruise was beginning to form on Dudley's wrist in the shape of the dementor's hand. Dudley's arm was almost completely out of the way now and the dementor was lowering its hooded head towards Dudley's face as if it were about to kiss him.

"Prongs! GET IT!" Harry bellowed, and with a rushing roaring sound the silver stag galloped towards the dementor and let out a bellow.

The dementor's eyeless face was barely an inch from Dudley's when the glowing silver antlers of Harry's Patronus caught it in the ribs. The dementor was thrown up into the air as Prongs' antlers gouged through its outer robe and with a hiss was absorbed back into the darkness.

The moon, stars and street lamps burst back to life and a warm summer breeze swept down the alley. Trees rustled in the Miller's garden past the wooden fence that made up one side of the alley and the mundane rumble of cars driving down Magnolia Crescent filled the air again. The dementors were gone. It was as if they had never been there in the first place.

Harry was standing still, tense and ready to move at a moment's notice just in case the dementors hadn't entirely left the area. Harry's t-shirt was sticking to

his chest and back; he was completely drenched in sweat and his senses were going haywire.

Across the alleyway from Harry was Dudley; curled up on the ground, whimpering and shaking from the effects of almost having his soul sucked out by a dementor. Walking over, Harry crouched down next to next to Dudley and placed a hand gently on his wrist to check his pulse. It fluttered under his fingertips like a snitch's wings. Good. At least that meant his cousin was alive.

"Dudley? Dudley, are you ok?" Harry asked as he gently shook his cousin's shoulder. Giving Dudley a rougher shake, Harry frantically called, "Dudley! Dudley, answer me! Oh shit! Please still have a soul! Dudley, WAKE UP!"

"Mmmhnhhhnnnggg," Dudley groaned loudly before rolling over and falling back into unconsciousness.

Looking hopefully over his shoulder at Prongs who was standing protectively over Harry and had still yet to dissipate, Harry asked, "Is he ok? Yeah, he may be a right arse of a cousin but...No one deserves to have their soul sucked out by a dementor, not even Voldemort."

Prongs looked down at Harry blank faced before giving what sounded like a derisive snort and walked gracefully over to Dudley. Now standing over Dudley, Prongs leaned down and gave Dudley a sniff before he turned back to Harry and gave him a small nod.

"So he still has a soul?"

Another nod and then Prongs walked back to stand protectively behind Harry. The clip-clop of shoes running on cement caused Harry's head to shoot up and Prongs to lower his antlers threateningly in the direction the sound had come from. Harry raised his wand only to see Mrs. Figg, his batty old cat-lady of a neighbour, come panting into sight.

Mrs. Figg's frazzled gray hair was escaping from her hairnet and a clanking shopping bag was swinging back and forth from her wrist, near her ankles.

Her feet were halfway out of her tartan carpet slippers.

Harry's eyes moved quickly between his wand, Prongs standing protectively in front of him and Mrs. Figg. Prongs dissipated and Harry made to stow his wand but the damage was already done. Mrs. Figg had seen...

"Don't put it away, idiot boy! Best keep your wand out too" Mrs. Figg shrieked "What if there are more around? You'll need that Patronus! And always keep your wand at hand! Oh, I am going to kill Mundungus Fletcher!"

The memory was over and the black lines that had flowed through the swirling blue light were dissipating. The magic that made the runes glow gold was also fading until nothing but black marble remained on the ceiling.

"Dementors in Little Whinging," Madam Bones said breathlessly as if she couldn't believe it even though she had seen Harry's memory with her own eyes.

The Wizengamot was aflutter with chatter; disbelief a prominent theme amongst them.

"As you have just seen, my client, Mr. Potter was yet again telling the truth," said Lord Charles as he stood from his seat. "We have further witnesses if you require them..."

"I DON'T BELIEVE THIS!" Fudge roared as he too rose from his seat amongst the Wizengamot, "THE MEMORY IS OBVIOUSLY A FABRICATION!"

"Cornelius!" Madam Bones reproached, "I have the authentication sheet from the Unspeakables in front of me! The memory is an accurate and valid portrayal of the events of August the second. Mr. Potter used his magic in self defence and in the defence of his Muggle cousin. Clause seven of the Decree for the Reasonable Restriction of Underage Sorcery states that magic may be used before Muggles in exceptional

circumstances. Those circumstances include situations that threaten the life of the witch or wizard himself, or witches, wizards or Muggles present at the time of the event. Do your other witnesses corroborate with the memory shown?"

"Yes, Madam Bones; they do. However, this poses the question," Lord Charles said, prompting the stilling of each of the Wizengamot members, "What were Dementors doing in Little Whinging, Surrey? According to the Ministry of Magic of Great Britain, all Dementors in Great Britain are under the control of the Ministry and are restricted to the Island of Azkaban. There are also no reports of wild Dementors and the Dementors of Azkaban Prison are not permitted to leave the Island without Ministry Approval. So who authorised two Dementors to leave Azkaban Prison and go to Little Whinging where the only wizard in residence is Mr. Potter?"

This caused the Wizengamot to begin their mutterings once more.

"Hehm," spoke the toad-like witch from earlier in a fluttery girlish manner causing the Wizengamot to pause in their mutterings.

"The Chair recognises Dolores Jane Umbridge, Senior Undersecretary to the Minister," said Fudge.

Standing up the simpering toad of a witch began to speak down her nose at Lord Charles, "I'm sure I heard you incorrectly, Lord Charles. So silly of me... But for a teensy tiny moment it sounded as if you were suggesting that the Ministry of Magic had ordered the attack on this boy!"

"That is exactly what I am suggesting, Madam Umbridge," Lord Charles replied, "Undoubtedly, the Ministry will be making a full inquiry into why two dementors, as you have just seen in Mr. Potter's memory, were so far from Azkaban Prison and why they attacked without authorisation. Or perhaps, who did authorise the attack on my client..."

"Rest assured, Lord Charles and Mr. Potter; I will look into the matter

personally," Madam Bones said, "I will not let this matter go unattended.

Now, I do believe that this hearing has gone on long enough. Lord Charles, have the other witnesses submit their testimonies."

"Already done, Madam Bones," Lord Charles quickly replied, "I had Abigail submit them to your office three days ago, personally. They should be sitting on your desk."

"Good, good. I believe this hearing is well over time. Mr. Potter was accused of knowingly, deliberately, and in full awareness of the illegality of his actions, having received a previous written warning from the Ministry of Magic on a similar charge, producing a Patronus Charm in a Muggle-inhabited area, in the presence of a Muggle, on August the second at twenty-three minutes past nine, which constitutes an offence under paragraph C of the Decree for the Reasonable Restriction of Underage Sorcery, 1875, and also under section thirteen of the International Confederation of Wizards' Statute of Secrecy," said Madam Bones.

Harry sucked in a nervous breath. The hearing was almost over.

"It has thus been demonstrated through both questioning and the use of a memory, authenticated by Ministry Unspeakables, that Mr. Potter was in fact attacked by two Dementors of the evening of August the second at twenty-three minutes past nine and in the defence of both himself and his cousin, one Dudley Dursley used his magic to produce a corporeal Patronus Charm. Clause seven of the Decree for the Reasonable Restriction of Underage Sorcery states that magic may be used before Muggles in exceptional circumstances. Those circumstances include situations that threaten the life of the witch or wizard himself, or witches, wizards or Muggles present at the time of the event. Therefore, Mr. Potter did not break the Decree for the Reasonable Restriction of

Underage Sorcery." Madam Bones continued

"Additionally, the Muggle that Mr. Potter has been accused of performing magic in front of, one Dudley Dursley; the cousin of the accused, already knew of Mr. Potter's magic and of the Wizarding World. Therefore, Mr. Potter did not break or in any way endanger section thirteen of the International Confederation of Wizards' Statute of Secrecy. All those in favour of conviction?" asked Madam Bones with a glance at the Wizengamot.

Fudge raised his hand and so did the toad-like woman but they were the only ones.

Harry's eyes widened and Anderson squeezed his knee, "Almost over now."

"All those in favour of clearing Mr. Potter of all charges and of all previous charges of which evidence has been given to prove his innocence?" said Madam Bones' booming voice.

Every single member of the Wizengamot's hands were raised. Harry eyes widened and he tried to count them all. They believed him.

Fudge dejectedly glanced around at them all, looking as though there was something decidedly unpleasant stuck in his throat. But to be honest Harry didn't care that much because...

"Very well, very well... cleared of all charges," growled Fudge.

Harry sat blank-faced in a strong mixture of shock and relief. He had been cleared of all charges!

"Congratulations, Harry" Lord Charles said with a grin and a slap on the back, "Couldn't have hoped for a better result, eh?"

"Yeah," Harry croaked as he choked down a sob of relief.

Seeing Harry struggling to maintain his composure, Charles shuffled forward and took hold of his client's shoulders. "Alright, it's been a long

morning for everyone," Charles said with a nod to the rest of the legal team and Harry. "Abigail, if you could take Master Snarklaw back to Gringotts? And Henry, if you could accompany Mrs. Dursley back to her home?"

"Certainly," they both replied.

"Now, let's get you home to Baird," Charles said down to Harry with a smile.

"Just a moment?" Harry asked with a hand on Lord Charles' arm.

"Whatever you want, Harry."

"Geldreth?" Harry asked as he moved away from Lord Charles and towards the grouchy goblin, who was standing next to Abigail waiting to leave.

"Thank you for testifying on my behalf," Harry said with a bow, "You didn't have to even come, but you did and for that I am eternally grateful. If ever you require my help in a similar matter, I will be there."

Everyone's eyes widened at Harry's admission. It wasn't often that a wizard lowered themselves to thank a goblin as an equal.

"May your days be prosperous and your gold forever grow," added Harry. Geldreth's eyes widened, "And you, Mr. Potter. It seems as if you aren't as dense as you first made yourself to appear. I see you found yourself a good teacher?"

"Yes," Harry replied with a grin down at Geldreth, "I have and thank you for remaining silent about the other sensitive matters regarding my blood test."

Geldreth's eyes shot up to Harry's forehead where his ever-present scar lay, "You are quite welcome Mr. Potter but as I said before; company policy dictates complete client confidentiality. You had nothing to fear."

"None the less, thank you."

Geldreth bowed to Harry. "If you would show me the way out, Miss? Not all of us have all day to flounce away with legal matters. Some of us have real work to do; with money," Geldreth snarked at Abigail as he began walking towards the Courtroom doors.

"I like him," Anderson remarked with a smirk over at Harry.

"Ha! Of course you do, Henry. Your personalities are so alike!" Lord Charles boomed with a laugh.

While Lord Charles and Anderson began to banter back and forth as the two lawyers were known to do, Harry approached his Aunt who was standing off to the side with a pinched look on her face.

"I didn't think you would come..." whispered Harry.

This was very awkward for him. The last time he saw his Aunt they were in the kitchen of number four Privet Drive and Harry had just saved Dudley from Dementors and thrown Uncle Vernon across the kitchen with wandless magic... He hadn't expected her to want to see him let alone come to his trial. He was amazed that Anderson and Alexander had managed to convince her to come.

Aunt Petunia sniffed and tilted her head away from Harry, "Mr. Anderson and Mr. Gregorovich convinced me to come and give my testimony of the evening. They also assured me that you would not be returning as you have found a new place to live with a Mr. Opus-kull-us."

"Yeah, I'm living with Baird now... Thank you for coming anyway. Even though you didn't end up having to speak... It means a lot" Harry said awkwardly to Aunt Petunia.

"As long as you don't ever grace my doorstep again, I'm willing to come to some silly hearing," Aunt Petunia sniffed.

"Well then," Harry said uncomfortably as he rubbed the back of his neck nervously, "Thank you anyway, you best be getting back home. I think

Anderson was taking you?"

"Yes, I am," Anderson butted in, "Mrs. Dursley?" Anderson asked as he offered an arm to Harry's Aunt. Aunt Petunia stuck up her nose at the offered appendage and began walking away from the wizards to the Courtroom doors.

Harry looked over at Anderson and shrugged at the other man's scowl. That was just how his Aunt was.

He had told the legal team a little bit of what living with the Dursley's was like and Anderson, Alexander and Abigail had been very much for filing charges of abuse against his Muggle family but Harry had convinced the other wizards and witch that it wasn't worth it. After all, he wouldn't be going back there anyway, now that he was living comfortably with Baird during the summers and at Hogwarts for the rest of the year.

As Anderson trotted after his Aunt, Lord Charles and Alexander came up behind Harry.

"Ready to go, Harry?" Lord Charles asked as he placed a comforting hand on Harry's shoulder.

"Yeah, let's go home."

A/N: This chapter was really fun to write. I was quite lucky to get this much done in a week. But the fates were with me and delayed the flight to my relative's house by five hours so I had plenty of time to write. I hope you all had a wonderful Christmas and a fabulous New Year!

-Marcielle-

p.s. I would love to get reviews from you all so you can tell me what you think of the Hearing (both Part one and Part two). I'm not going to lie, I struggled through both chapters. They were a challenge to

write but fun none the less.

## 15. Home Again, Home Again

Title: Survival of the Fittest

Author: Marcielle's Musings

A/N: In a recent review by XxLockexX it was pointed out that I may not have explained things in Slytherin's book as well as I should have.

He/She said: There is a glaring inconsistency in this chapter (chapter 11) that I'm not sure you have realized. Hogwarts and its founders have been dead centuries before the discovery of the Americas. Unless Slytherin is, y'know, immortal, he could have never have know of the Aztecs (a civilization founded three centuries after his birth).

As for your comment about the inconsistency - While the muggles may not have 'discovered' the Americas until the late 14 hundreds I am going along the line that there were European wizards who went across with the early Norse colonisation of the Americas (Leif Eriksson, who landed in North America (Newfoundland, Canada) around the year 900 c.e. - 1000 c.e.). Also there were wizards and witches amongst the Native people of the Americas.

Through wizarding means of travel Slytherin could easily either have gone with these Norse travellers or known someone who had. I personally like the idea of he, himself, going and meeting the Native cultures of the Americas and learning some of their traditions after he left Hogwarts. At this time the Muggle Aztec culture would have been in its very early stages however I believe that the Wizarding side would have been more advanced and more established.

"You all know, of course, that Hogwarts was founded over a thousand years ago - the precise date is uncertain - by the four

greatest witches and wizards of the age. They built this castle together, far from prying Muggle eyes, for it was an age when magic was feared by common people, and witches and wizards suffered much persecution."

- Professor Binns

I loved Miranda Flairgold's A Second Chance at Life (the first in the trilogy) which inspired this mix of history and magic. If you haven't read this trilogy - GO DO IT! It is beyond amazing. The start is a little rough and slightly cliché but it gets SO much better.

I hope this answers any questions and inconsistencies you may have noticed. Message me if you have any more.

~Marci~

Previously In Survival of the Fittest:

"Very well, very well... cleared of all charges," growled Fudge.

Harry sat blank-faced in a strong mixture of shock and relief. He had been cleared of all charges!

"Congratulations, Harry" Lord Charles said with a grin and a slap on the back,

"Couldn't have hoped for a better result, eh?"

"Yeah," Harry croaked as he choked down a sob of relief.

Seeing Harry struggling to maintain his composure, Charles shuffled forward and took hold of his client's shoulders. "Alright, it's been a long morning for everyone," Charles said with a nod to the rest of the legal team and Harry.

"Abigail, if you could take Master Snarklaw back to Gringotts? And Henry, if you could accompany Mrs. Dursley back to her home?"

"Certainly," they both replied.

"Now, let's get you home to Baird," Charles said down to Harry with a smile.

Chapter 16: Home Again, Home Again

"Crap," Alexander cursed as they stepped through the Courtroom doors.

Harry and Lord Charles looked over at Alexander with confusion.

"What is it, Alex?" Harry asked.

"Dumbledore," Alexander answered with a nod over at a nearby shadowed alcove which Professor Dumbledore was emerging from.

Another witch and wizard walked down the hall to stand on either side of Dumbledore, blocking their exit. 'Crap' was an understatement. Harry just wanted to get home to Baird's place and take a nap... Was that too much to ask? He didn't want to have to deal with Dumbledore's incessant need to stick his big nose into every single bit of Harry's business.

"Alexander, get Harry back to Baird's. I'll deal with Dumbledore and his minions," Lord Charles whispered to both Harry and Alex.

"Got it. Come on Harry," said Alex as he grabbed Harry's wrist and began guiding him around Charles and past Dumbledore, the witch and the wizard who had moved to flank the headmaster on either side.

However, the wizard on Dumbledore's right moved to intercept them and prevent their exit but Lord Charles quickly sidestepped and prevented the tall wizard from reaching out and grabbing Harry's other arm.

"I must insist you move out of the way, Lord Charles," said Dumbledore in a congenial manner; his eyes twinkling away, "It is not safe for Harry to be out and about in such unpleasant times. I must insist that he comes with me and my associates to a safe house where he can be protected."

"I assure you, Harry will be perfectly safe with Alexander and I, Headmaster Dumbledore, and you need not worry about Harry's living arrangements," Lord Charles replied with a small smirk, "Harry's guardianship has been removed from those horrible abusive and neglectful Muggles that you placed him with and has been transferred to a much more suitable guardian,"

The two wizards and the witch's eyes widened.

"What? Abuse? What is he talking about?" the witch with bright  
bubblegum pink hair asked Dumbledore.

Dumbledore ignored the witch's question and instead continued speaking  
with Charles, "I had not heard of the Dursley's guardianship of Harry  
being removed... And surly you are mistaken, Lord Charles. Harry's  
relatives never abused him. I'm sure Harry has merely exaggerated his  
living conditions and his relative's dislike of the magical world. Dislike  
does not constitute abuse."

"No, but neglect and mistreatment does," Lord Charles growled back at  
Dumbledore, "Additionally, there was a reason you were not informed of  
Harry's change of guardianship. You are neither my client's guardian nor  
his magical guardian; only his headmaster. You are therefore not  
required to be informed of such a change. It does not matter anyway. Mr  
and Mrs. Dursley happily signed over their guardianship of my client  
when threatened with charges of abuse and Mrs. Dursley was happy to  
attend Harry's trial and act as a witness as long as they 'never had to see  
the freak or any of his kind ever again'. Now, does that sound like loving  
and caring relatives to you, Headmaster Dumbledore?"

Lord Charles didn't give Dumbledore a chance to respond, "I didn't think  
so. Now if you would kindly get out of our way, I must be returning  
Harry to his new guardian. I'm sure he's very concerned with how the  
hearing went. Good Day, Professor Dumbledore, Auror Kingsley, and  
Auror Tonks."

Lord Charles shot the three slight nods of the head, indicating his  
acknowledgement but nothing more, and guided Harry and Alexander  
past the three. They turned the corner, heading towards the elevators,  
when Harry bumped into someone.

"So sorry, I didn't see you there..." Harry said as he dusted himself off

before he got a good look at the person who had bumped into.

It was Lucius Malfoy.

Lucius' cold gray eyes narrowed and fixed upon Harry's face, "Well, well, well... If it isn't Patronus Potter. I heard that your hearing was today."

Harry felt slightly out of breath. The last time he had seen those cold grey eyes they were peaking out through the slit's in a Death Eater's hood as Lucius and his fellow Death Eaters jeered while Voldemort tortured him in the graveyard where Tom Riddle Senior was buried and his son was resurrected.

He could not believe that Lucius Malfoy dared to look him in the eye, let alone come to the Ministry of Magic, when Harry had warned Fudge only a few weeks ago that Malfoy Sr. was a Death Eater. It just goes to show just how much gold the Malfoy Family had lined Fudge's pockets with but also how adamant Fudge was in disregarding every word that came out of Harry's mouth; warning or not.

Well, Harry was done warning people who wouldn't listen. They would just have to find out for themselves when they are stabbed in the back by the very Death Eaters Harry had warned them about in the first place.

"I was just speaking to the Minister, not a moment ago, and he told me about your lucky escape, Potter," Mr. Malfoy drawled, "Quite astonishing, the way you continue to wriggle out of tight spots... Very snakelike, in fact... Well I suppose we shouldn't be surprised what with you claiming to be the Slytherin heir..."

Harry smirked up at Lucius and then shrugged. "What can I sssay? It runsss in the family," Harry hissed in Lucius' face, causing the man to jump back, startled.

Harry grinned at Lucius' wide eyed stare, "Well, if that's all, Mr. Malfoy? We best get going. I apologise for running into you like that; very rude of

me. Oh, and say hello to Tom for me would you?"

With that, Harry brushed past a rather star-struck looking Mr. Malfoy and continued down the hallway towards the elevators, Lord Charles and Alex following behind him.

When the elevator doors closed Lord Charles pulled out his wand and cast a privacy ward around the three of them before turning and giving Harry a rather narrow look, "You never told us you were on such friendly terms with Lucius Malfoy. And what was that you hissed in his face? Was that Parseltongue?"

"Yes it was," Harry replied, his face blank. They may be his lawyers and are therefore required by both magic itself and the law to hold his secrets in confidence, but he is still entitled to keep some secrets. And it wasn't as if him being a Parselmouth was much of a secret anyway... Harry had thought everyone would know, what with his gift being exposed in his second year at Hogwarts.

"And you never told me that my change of guardianship had been approved," Harry continued with a raised eyebrow over at Lord Charles at the elevator began to ascend.

"It was going to be a surprise for tonight," Alex said as he leaned back against the railing that ran around the edge of the elevators, "A sort of congratulations present from the four of us."

"Level eight: Atrium" the same, calm female voice unknowing interrupted as the chains that pulled the elevator rattled to a stop and the elevator doors slid open.

The Atrium was almost completely deserted. Eric the idiotic security man from earlier was hidden behind his Daily Prophet again. Lord Charles and Alex were just walking past the golden fountain when Harry remembered.

"Wait," Harry said, causing his companions to pause and turn to look back at him, "Does the money in the fountain really go to St. Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries?"

"I believe so," answered Lord Charles.

"If it doesn't get pinched first," Alex scoffed under his breath.

"True," Lord Charles said with sad smile, "There aren't any thieving and anti-burglary charms placed on the fountain to prevent any witch or wizard from just reaching in and taking the money for themselves. If you would like to make a donation to St. Mungo's I would suggest you take the normal route. Donations are usually done through Gringotts. If you donate above a certain amount, I believe it's 50 Galleons this year, your family name goes on a plaque in St. Mungo's. I'm sure Geldreth would be happy to help you."

"Alright, I'll do that then."

"We're back!" Harry shouted as he stepped out of the fireplace, "Baird? Hmm... must be down in the shop."

Harry moved out of the way so Lord Charles and Alex could come through safely, and flopped down on the couch. He knew the action that would normally get him chastised by Baird, wouldn't rumple his robes thanks to the nifty charm put on his robes by... Oh, what was his name?... Daemarcus, that's it! The charm Daemarcus had used on his apprentice robes.

A piece of Harry's now long hair, fell from behind his ear and dangled down in front of his nose. Harry blew on the piece of hair absentmindedly as it tickled his nose.

Focusing on changing his hair back to the chestnut coloured spikes he had adopted for his disguise as Evan Thomas, Harry's scalp began to tingle and the piece of hair that had been hanging in front of his nose

began to rapidly shrink and change into what he hoped were short, light brown spikes.

"Accio mirror," Harry said as he held his hand out in front of him and visualised the small hand-held mirror he had transfigured to help him with his morphs. Once, when he had been practicing and hadn't used a mirror he had ended up with rainbow streaked hair like the tails on those Muggle unicorn plushies. Baird had gotten a right old laugh out of that and from then on Harry had always used a mirror to check his morph. The small mirror zoomed out of his bedroom and into his hand with a small 'thwack' and Harry checked that his hair had actually morphed the way he wanted it to this time. Sometimes he felt as if his magic just liked screwing with him sometimes. It always worked perfectly if he was in danger or worried about something but if he was relaxed his magic was much more likely to play up.

With a blink, Harry stared into his reflection's eyes and his emerald green eyes began morphing into Evan's soft blue before focusing on moving his scar.

Harry had tried numerous times to try and remove his infernal scar but it had never worked. In the end Baird had suggested just moving it slightly upwards so that it was on his scalp. He now had a lightning bolt part where the scar was and no one had noticed. It was brilliant not to have people stare at his stupid scar anymore.

Just as Harry sent the small handheld mirror zooming back to his room, the flames in the grate whooshed green and Lord Charles stepped out of the fireplace.

"Where's Baird?" Lord Charles asked as he stepped through the Floo, "I would have expected him to be here to at least congratulate you on your victory at the hearing."

When he finally glanced over at Harry, his eyes widened minutely at the change in appearance, "Well that was a quick change," he said as he gestured to Harry's head "I was only a few seconds behind you to give you time to clear the Floo."

"Thanks," Harry grinned up at Lord Charles, "I've been practicing. Still need a mirror to check the morphs worked properly though," Harry shrugged. "And Baird's probably still down in the shop. The wards will have notified him of our arrival, though. So he should be up soon," Harry replied as Alex stepped through the Floo, this time stepping completely over the hearth rug.

Harry smirked at Alex and looked between him and the hearth rug with a grin, "Learnt your lesson last time, did you? Not afraid of a poor little rug are you?"

With a laugh, Alex replied "Yes," he said with a fake solemnity, "I have learned my lesson. The furniture within this apartment has been charmed by Baird to kill intruders and for some reason the apartment sees me as an intruder. Last time I was here I swear my chair bit me!"

"Awww poor wittle Awex," Harry mocked the only slightly older man with an expression of over-exaggerated concern, "Did the big mean chair bite your little bottom?"

Lord Charles let out a booming laugh, "You two are as bad as Baird and I used to be!"

"Why thank you," Harry bowed with an exaggerated flourish from his lounged position on the couch.

This only caused more laughter from both of his companions.

"Here, both of you sit down and I'll fetch us some tea while we wait for Baird to be done down in the shop," said Harry as he got up from the couch and walked over to the kitchen / dining side of the living room.

With a flick of his wrist the teapot, teacups, and tea tray came floating out of the cupboard above and to the right of the stove, and floated gracefully down to the kitchen table where they arranged themselves neatly upon the tea tray.

"Wow," said Alex as he walked over to lean against the kitchen table and gestured to the tea set, "You must be bloody powerful. I mean we knew you could do wandless magic, what with you catching me when we first met, but this level of control is amazing. You're the heir of the houses of Gryffindor, Slytherin and Potter, a Parselmouth who is also a partial Metamorphmagus and who can do Wandless Magic. What other secrets have you got hidden up your sleeves?"

Harry only shrugged in reply. Sure he was grateful to the legal team for all of their help the past week with both the Hearing and having the Dursley's removed as his guardians, but he didn't like that they knew almost all of his secrets. He knew they were under both a client confidentiality oath and an unbreakable vow not to reveal any of his personal information but he had only known them for a little under a week. He liked them all well enough but he wasn't comfortable sharing even more information. What few secrets he had left would be held close to his chest.

When the water from the kettle was boiled, Harry used wandless magic to lift it from the stove and pour the boiling hot water into the teapot. He ignored the stares from both Lord Charles and Alex. It wasn't as if he wasn't used to people staring at him. They would either get used to him using wandless magic or they wouldn't.

"Ah," said Baird as he came to the top of the staircase and looked around the room, "Where are Henry and Abigail?"

"Abigail was taking Geldreth back to Gringotts and Henry was taking

Mrs. Dursley back to Privet Drive," Lord Charles answered as he looked up at Baird from the couch.

"Well from the fact that Evan isn't moping himself into a puddle of teenage angst all over the floor, I'm assuming the hearing went well," Baird said to Lord Charles with a brief smirk over at Harry or was it Evan now? It got a bit confusing sometimes but he supposed that both were his names...

While in this morph he would be Evan and while looking like Harry Potter he would be Harry.

"Hey," Evan protested, "I do not mope!"

"Yes you do," the other three replied almost perfectly in sync.

Evan scowled and then pouted.

The room burst out in laughter.

In the end, Abigail ended up suggesting a nice muggle cafe down near the river, once she and Anderson returned from escorting Geldreth and Aunt Petunia from the Ministry. However, it wasn't until the celebratory lunch was over and Baird had apparated them both back to Diagon Alley that Baird sprung his surprise gift on him.

Baird had apparated Evan back to Diagon Alley from the alleyway a few blocks from the cafe where they had had lunch with the legal team but instead of going back inside Obscurus Books, Baird pulled out his wand and silently transfigured the muggle suit he had worn to the restaurant back into his customary dark blue robes and walked past the shop and into the alleyway next to it; Knockturn Alley.

Evan's eyes widened slightly before looking hesitantly between Baird's disappearing form and the front door of the shop before he too transfigured his suit jacket back into the emerald green apprenticeship robes he had worn to the hearing and quickly followed after Baird. He

wasn't eager to have a repeat performance of his previous adventure into the infamous Alley. The hag that tried to sell him human fingernails last time he was here gave him the heebie-jeebies. Thankfully she was nowhere in sight this time.

"Why are we coming down here?" Evan whispered once he caught up to Baird.

"Two reasons," Baird replied without even glancing at Evan, "One; to get you a congratulations present and two; to pick up the book I ordered."

"You don't have to get me anything!" Evan exclaimed as they passed a shop called Zoe's Poisonous Candles which had a glowing display of brightly coloured candles glittering in the window and playfully ominous multi-coloured smoke that furled out from underneath the front door.

"You already refused to let me pay for the legal team, agreed to let me become your apprentice and took over my guardianship from the Dursleys. You have already done so much for me. Really, you don't need to get me anything."

"Don't think I'm getting nothing out of our arrangement," Baird scoffed "I get to be the benefit of a competent apprentice who is willing to learn, is blessed with phenomenal magical gifts and talents and who powerful to boot. I also get a permanent slave for the summer holidays-

Evan barked out a laugh

"I mean shop assistant," Baird amended "and all I have to do is pay a few measly legal fees, and provide you with a room in my apartment and food. Additionally, this will not be some useless present. I plan on buying you something that will help you continue with your training for your apprenticeship while you are at Hogwarts."

"Oh," Evan mumbled as he silently followed behind Baird. He didn't know how to respond to that. When Baird worded it that way it seemed like

they were both getting a lot out of this agreement. However, Evan couldn't help but feel like he was getting a lot more out of it than Baird. Perhaps Baird had other reasons for doing all this for him.

Evan looked over at Baird contemplatively as they strolled down the dimly lit alley. Most of the shops were closed what with it being late afternoon still. There was a reason that it was called Knockturn Alley after all.

Evan had been shocked when Baird had first told him about what Knockturn Alley was really like. To be honest it reminded Evan a lot of what a muggle Red-Light District was like. Most of the shops opened at night and catered to a... different sort of clientele than Diagon Alley. Unfortunately most darks arts shops had been forced to move down into Knockturn after the fall of Grindelwald when there was extreme prejudice and bigotry towards witches and wizards who studied what was classified by the Ministry of Magic as 'dark magic'.

Baird and Evan walked past a small pub called The Poisoned Apple where Evan could see the owner beginning to set out the chairs for the Twilight rush.

"Ah, here we are."

Evan looked up. Baird had led him to a small unassuming shop on the corner of one of the even smaller lanes that branched off Knockturn Alley. The windows were a gloomy frosted glass that would barely let in any light even if the deep purple curtains that covered them were drawn back. Not that it would have made much of a difference to a business in Knockturn Alley which only opened shop at dusk and closed at dawn. The small sign next to the door read 'Morpheus' nothing else. There was no indication as to what the small gloomy shop sold.

"And what is 'here' exactly?" Evan asked.

"You'll see soon enough," Baird replied before knocking on the front door of the shop. There was a rustle in the purple curtains that covered the shop-front windows and then the door was opened by a middle-aged blonde witch in deep purple robes with a gold trim.

"You're early," the witch huffed as she pulled the door further open and ushered them through. "I haven't even started opening up the shop."

Baird ignored the witch's scowl "I knew you would be awake and most likely in the shop tending to your 'beauties'"

The woman's scowl became even more pronounced, before she glanced over at Evan. "This your new apprentice, then?" the witch asked with a raised eyebrow over at Baird. "I thought you'd never get one. You've turned down every person who asked to date - even me."

"And are you not better off because of it? If I had taken you on as my apprentice, you never would have apprenticed under Morpheus and discovered your talent with magical creatures."

"True enough. Alright, come with me..."

"Evan," supplied Evan as the witch glanced over at him.

"Alright then, Evan. Follow me and I'll show you the beauty that Baird had me order for him from a trader in the Amazon," the witch said as Evan and Baird followed her behind the counter into a room lined with different size cages, tanks and what looked like portable eco-systems.

"She cost a pretty penny but she's damn worth it if you know how to handle her. You do know how to handle magical snakes don't you?" the witch continued.

Evan could only nod as he took in all the different kinds of magical creatures that lined the walls. Evan could only recognise a few of them but all of the creatures looked as if they had complete habitats magically encased in each tank or cage.

The witch smirked at Evan's silence, "Gorgeous isn't it? Much better than that hole - the Magical Menagerie in Diagon Alley. Just stuff the animals in cages, in there. No respect for the creatures themselves or whatever environments they need. All the cages or tanks here are spelled to replicate the particular species natural habitat. The flora and water is also imported from the natural habitats of the creatures and the tanks are temperature regulated."

Evan nodded along with the witch's explanation. He could feel the magical wards around each of the tanks and cages as the group weaved their way through them. Eventually they stopped near the back of the room in front of a glass tank. The tank was a similar size to the one the boa constrictor Evan had seen at the zoo when he was ten. The sides of the tank were covered in a light mist but through the mist Evan could see bright green leaves and foliage.

"I know you nodded earlier," the witch said, "but I really do need to know if you know how to take care of magical snakes. I won't sell her to you if you don't, even if you may be Baird's apprentice."

"Evan is a parselmouth, Cassandra," Baird quipped. "Learning how to take care of magical snakes is going to be part of his apprenticeship. Although, I would appreciate you tutoring him in the temperature regulating wards and habitat imitation wards you use."

Cassandra's eyes widened and her head whipped over to stare at Evan before glancing back at Baird, "A parselmouth, you say? Hmmm, not many parselmouths in England. I can only think of four in the past 100 years. Parselmouths usually stay out of Europe. There's just too much prejudice against them due to Slytherin's reputation. Plus, the climate's not exactly ideal for snakes."

Before Evan could ask who the other parselmouths were, Baird spoke

up, "Well Evan was apprenticed to a friend of mine over in the Republic of Chile who died recently."

"And you took over his apprenticeship? Just like that?!"

"I had already met Evan on a previous occasion and he was doing amazingly well in his apprenticeship to my friend and when I heard of his death I immediately asked Evan if he would like to continue his apprenticeship with me. He said yes. Evan's family already lived in Surrey so it has given him more opportunity to see them as well as complete his apprenticeship."

"And your previous master never trained you in Parselmagic? That's strange. The Republic of Chile is the perfect climate for a variety of magical serpents," Cassandra said. "Oh, well at least Baird will make sure you know what you need to. He's not one to conform to any type of prejudice."

Evan smiled, "Baird has been very good to me. He's a right git in the mornings but I've learnt a lot, living with him."

Cassandra laughed as Baird swatted at the back of Evan's head. Evan ducked under the playful swing and grinned, "What? It's true! Every morning at the crack of dawn, without fail, he's banging on my bedroom door telling me 'Get up and get studying! No lazing around for you this morning! Up! Now!'"

Cassandra continued to laugh and Baird gave a reluctant grin.

"You've got your hands full with this imp, Baird" Cassandra grinned.

Pulling out her wand, Cassandra muttered a spell and the mist that covered the glass of the tank disappeared. "Now, Evan, let's see some parseltongue. Try and call the snake within this tank forward so we can see her."

"Ok," Evan stepped forward and eyed the tank. He couldn't see any snake

but that didn't mean one wasn't there. The only problem; Harry had never spoken parseltongue without actually looking at a snake. Hopefully he wouldn't make a fool of himself.

"Hello? Um... the witch sssays that there is a sssnake in thisss tank." Evan said to the tank. He wasn't sure but he thought he had spoken in parseltongue.

"There iss a ssspeaker here?" a rather effeminate voice said from inside the tank.

Evan glanced at the tank but he still couldn't see the snake. It must be hidden amongst the foliage, "Yesss, I am a ssspeaker. My name iss Harry but I go by Evan while I look like thisss. Could you pleasse come forward sso we can sssee you?"

"Cssertainly, Ssspeaker." The voice said before a rustling of the leaves in front of Harry's face could be seen. Then Evan gasped. In front of him was a serpent that resembled one mentioned in Salazar Slytherin's book; a feathered serpent.

Evan whipped his head around to look at Cassandra. "Is this a Quetzalcoatl?" Evan asked excitedly.

"I'm impressed you know the breed but considering where you did the first year of your apprenticeship it is not that surprising. This breed is quite a popular breed among Parselmouths in South America," Cassandra replied.

"She's beautiful," Evan whispered in awe as more of the feathered serpent was revealed. The female Quetzalcoatl looked similar to a banana snake in shape but was covered in a variety of different coloured green feathers.

"I thought Quetzalcoatl were a lot bigger though and had predominantly red, blue and gold coloured feathers not green." Evan said as he tore his gaze away from the tank to look at Cassandra.

"You would be right, Evan. However it is the male Quetzalcoatl who have the traditional red, blue and gold plumage while the females have a green plumage which, as you can tell, blends in with their natural habitat. Quetzalcoatl typically grow up to 60 feet in length this little girl is only a hatchling, hence her size. Six feet long is normal for a Quetzalcoatl hatchling of two days old. She will grow quite quickly, but for her first year she will remain six feet long before going through a rapid growth period where she will shed five times and grow to twenty feet long."

"Wow, ok. She only hatched two days ago?" Evan asked.

"Yes, I had her egg shipped to me a week ago from a Parselmouth acquaintance of mine when Baird placed the order. She hatched here two days ago," Cassandra said with a fond smile at the young serpent.

Evan turned back to the tank, "Hello young one, do you have a name?"

The young Quetzalcoatl focused on Evan, "What iss a name, Ssspeaker?"

"A name iss a word to disscern onessself from otherssss. For example, my name iss Harry Jamesss Potter but I go by Evan Thomasss while I have brown hair and blue eyesss." Evan explained as he pointed to his hair and eyes for clarification.

"I'm confussed. What is a Hairy Jamsss Potter and an Ovan Tomasss? And what do you mean by your appearancsse changing?" the snake asked as her head tilted to the side.

Evan burst out laughing, "No, hatchling, my names are Harry James Potter and Evan Thomas. My outward appearancsse changesss just like your feathers change colour in different light. Like you, it helps me blend into my environment without drawing attention to myself."

"Ssspeaker iss sssmart. Ssspeaker is sssafe from preditorsss when he blendsss in essspecially because Ssspeaker iss sso sssmall," the hatchling nodded

looking proud of herself.

"Thank you," Evan said, taking the complement for what it was, "But I'm not that sssshort. I'm almosst normal height for sssomeone my age."

"You are sssmaller than me and I am only a hatchling."

"True," Evan hissed back before grinning back at Cassandra and Baird,

"She's perfect."

Cassandra smiled, "I'm assuming you get along well?"

"Yeah,"

"I'm glad," Baird spoke up, "because she's going to be your companion for the rest of your life. Quetzalcoatl can live up to 350 years. Now, Cassandra, would it be alright for Evan to stay here this evening so you can teach him the charms and wards for the hatchling's tank and her dietary requirements?"

"Sure, but I also have a shop to run, Baird," Cassandra scowled at Baird.

"I don't want to be any trouble," Evan interjected.

"Oh, you're not," Cassandra waved. "We just might be interrupted a few times by customers. Depending on how long it takes you to learn the wards, charms and etcetera, you should probably be out of here by eleven."

"Ok then, I'll leave the imp in your very capable hands, Cassandra." Baird said as he turned and began to walk towards the front of the store room.

"Oh, and don't forget to feed him!"

With that Baird was gone, walking through the door into the main part of the shop. The sound of a tinkling bell signalled his exit from the shop.

"I think I'm lucky,"

Evan looked over at Cassandra inquiringly.

"If Baird had taken me on as his apprentice I probably would have murdered the old bat in his sleep. He's worse than Ollivander and that's

saying something." Cassandra smirked.

"I think they might be related," Evan chuckled.

"You're probably right," Cassandra wilyly considered with a smirk. "Ok, enough chatter. Let's see how fast you learn new spells and such."

The evening went reasonably well. Cassandra was almost impossible to please when it came to the temperature regulating charms and habitat wards. If he didn't cast them absolutely perfect she would make him remove the charm and try again. At least by the end of the evening Evan was perfect at them. Cassandra expected nothing less.

They had been interrupted a few times by customers entering the shop to purchase supplies for their pets and familiars but when seven had finally rolled around, Cassandra had closed up the shop temporarily so they could go out for dinner.

They ended up eating at the pub Evan had seen on the way down to Cassandra's shop, The Poisoned Apple which made Evan laugh at the reference to the Muggle fairy tale.

Cassandra had asked during dinner what had caused Evan to laugh so he had told her which resulted in Evan learning that Snow White wasn't just a Muggle tale, it was a wizarding tale as well. Snow White was actually a half fey witch born into a light family and when her father had remarried after Snow White's mother died, he married a dark witch. From there the traditional story that Harry knew was much the same except for the fact that it was Goblins that Snow White found not dwarfs.

Once their meal was finished, Evan and Cassandra headed back to her shop where Evan practiced the charms until Cassandra was finally satisfied.

"I'm impressed," Cassandra said once Evan finally mastered the environment ward.

"Thanks," Evan replied as he gave a sweaty grin. The environment ward he had created in a circle around him mimicked the environment that Quetzalcoatl favoured. It was hot sticky and humid inside the ward which was making Evan sweat like crazy.

Dispelling the ward, Evan cast Scorgify on himself and grinned at Cassandra. He was really pleased that he had managed to get the charms down.

"I can see why Baird took you on as his apprentice. It took me months to finally get those charms down while I was apprenticed to Morpheus and it only took you a few hours of hard study," Cassandra said as she passed Evan a bag she had prepared earlier with all the supplies he would need for taking care of his new familiar.

Evan was gob-smacked. He thought he was taking too long learning the charms. If it had taken Cassandra, who was a brilliant witch, months to learn those charms why did Baird say that he could learn them in one evening?!

"I was joking when I said you would be done by eleven," Cassandra admitted at the star-struck look on Evan's face, "but it looks like Baird knows you better than you think he does."

Evan nodded bemusedly.

"You could probably take the hatchling now. All the supplies you will need are in the bag," Cassandra continued with a gesture to the bag she had passed Evan as they walked down the aisles of cages and tanks in Morpheus' back room until they stopped in front of the tank which currently contained Evan's baby Quetzalcoatl.

Evan stepped forward and cast the spells which unsealed the glass on one side of the tank and dispel the environment sustaining wards.

"Ssspeaker?" Evan heard once the glass tank was opened.

"Hello again darling. Would you like to come live with me and be my companion?" Evan asked as the hatchling's head peaked out of the leaves nearest Evan's face.

A light pink tongue flicked out of the Quetzalcoatl's mouth and tested the air. She was scenting Evan.

"Yesss, I think I would like that. Will there be birdiesss, reptilesss and mousssiesss for me to sssnack on?" the baby Quetzalcoatl asked with an adorable tilt of her head.

Evan laughed, "Yesss, my darling. However, there will be a sssnowy owl named Hedwig who will join usss sssometime in the future. You are not allowed to eat her."

"I will not if that isss what you assk, Ssspeaker,"

"What have I sssaid about calling me Harry or Evan?" Evan replied.

"I will not call you Hairy even if that isss what you are. I will call you Evan if that isss what you wisssh." The hatchling responded as she climbed up the arm Evan had lifted up for her until she was resting comfortably on Evan's shoulders like a living green feather boa.

Exactly like a living green feather boa, Evan thought with a grin.

"Evan is fine with me. Now it is you who need a name, my darling. How does Cihuacoatl sound?"

The hatchling's tongue flicked out again as if she was tasting the name,

"Cihuacoatl? I like it what does it mean?"

Evan smiled and scratched her gently under her jaw, "I thought you would like it. I read it in a book written by Sssalazar Ssslytherin called 'A History of Parssseltongue'. It means 'sssnake woman'. Cihuacoatl was an Aztec goddesss of motherhood and fertility who, with the help of Quetzalcoatl, the sun god, created the human race by grinding up the bonesss of the previousss agesss in her coilsss."

"Ooo, I like it even more now. You are a good companion to name me after a goddess. I will keep it." The newly named Cihuacoatl hissed in pleasure.

"I'm glad you like it. A magical ssserpent ass beautiful ass you should have a name jusst ass fitting. Cihuacoatl sssuits you, my dear." Evan hissed back.

Evan, with Cihuacoatl wrapped gently around his shoulders and neck, turned to face Cassandra.

"You two look wonderful together," Cassandra commented "If you had green eyes you would look even more fetching against her feathers, Evan.

Did you decide on a name?"

"Yeah, Cihuacoatl, after the Aztec goddess" Evan said while inwardly smirking at the irony of that statement - He does have green eyes.

Cihuacoatl's tongue flicked against Evan's cheek, "What iss sso amussing, Evan?"

"Cassssandra, the woman in front of usss, sssaid that we look wonderful together and that if I had green eyesss like your featherssss we would look even more sstunning. What I found amussing is that I do have green eyesss that match your featherssss, coincidently." Evan hissed quickly to his companion as Cassandra watched on with a smile.

Cihuacoatl's head moved from her place against his neck to hover in front of his face.

"What are you doing, Cihuacoatl?" Evan asked bemusedly.

"You lied. Your eyesss do not match my featherssss. Why did you lie?"

Cihuacoatl hissed agitatedly in his face.

Evan smiled and gently bumped his nose against Cihuacoatl's "I did not lie, my sweet. I do have green eyesss that match your featherssss. They are jusst hidden at the moment sso that I do not draw attention to myssself. Do you remember what I sssaid about camouflage and blending in?"

"Yesss... You are blending in now?" Cihuacoatl asked, "Why? Do you not

trusst the woman? Ssshould I crusssh her in my coilsss? Isss she a danger to usss?"

"Husssh, Cihuacoatl," Evan placated, "Ssshe is not a danger to usss. I jussst do not wisssh to alert her to who I truly am. It is like how you will remain hidden while hunting until it is time to ssstrike."

"Ssso ssshe isss pray?"

Evan laughed, "No, I sssimply do not wisssh to alert her to what I really look like."

"Alright," Cihuacoatl acquiesced, "but you will have to ssshow me your true eyess when we reach your nessesst."

"Asss you wisssh," Evan readily agreed before finally speaking to

Cassandra who had watched the conversation with avid interest. Evan could tell she enjoyed watching them converse. It was obvious, as well, that Cassandra wished she too had the ability to speak parseltongue.

Then she would be able to speak to her other serpents. "Thank you for all of your help this evening."

"You are quite welcome. I was happy to be able to teach you something.

You are a good student. You learn quickly and take criticism well. I think you will do really well as Baird's apprentice."

"Thank you," Evan replied to the compliments with a traditional student to mentor bow, "I would be honored to learn more from you another time if you are willing to teach me. There is still much I still have to learn about Magical and Non-Magical Creatures for my apprenticeship to Baird."

Cassandra gave a short bow in acknowledgement before looking Evan in the eye, "As I said, you're a good student. If Baird says it's ok, I am happy to teach you all I know about Magical and Non-Magical Creatures."

"Really?" Evan asked. He was shocked that Cassandra would be willing to

teach him for nothing. She wasn't getting paid to teach him all of those spells, charms and wards this evening either... But to be willing to do it again... "If you really mean that, I will see if it is possible to teach you some parseltongue, in exchange. It should make conversing with the serpents you have in here much easier."

Cassandra gaped at him, "You think it's possible for parseltongue to be taught?"

"Why not," Evan shrugged, "It's really just another language. You wouldn't have instinctive knowledge of it like a parselmouth does but I'm sure it can be taught. You would just have to learn the differences between words."

"If you truly think it can be taught and Baird agrees then I will be happy to teach you," Cassandra grinned.

"I'll ask him tonight then," Evan grinned back before opening the front door of the shop, "It was nice meeting you, Cassandra, no matter what Baird decides."

"Off with you, imp," Cassandra smirked as Evan walked out the door,

"And you best take good care of Cihuacoatl, you hear me!"

"I will," Evan shouted back with a wave before heading back down Knockturn Alley.

Today had been a good day.

A/N: I hope you all liked that chapter!

Evan/Harry had had a very busy day what with waking up early to go to his hearing, having to face down Fudge, Umbridge, Dumbledore and Lucius. But he also had his guardianship removed from the Dursleys and moved to Baird, had lunch with the legal team and then went down to Knockturn Alley with Baird and met Cassandra and Cihuacoatl!

All in one day. Evan/Harry must be very tired. I would be.

I have some big plans for Evan coming up. I would love to hear what you all think of this newest chapter.

~Marcielle~

## 16. Don't Shoot the Messenger

Survival of the Fittest by Marcielle's Musings

A/N: So far I have been overwhelmed with the positive response for my AU characters. I would like to give a great big thank you to all who have stayed with Survival of the Fittest from the very first few chapters and also a big welcome to those who have only just joined our little family. I would also like to give out a big thank you to all those who took the time to review. I really enjoy reading what you all think about the plot, characters and places. So thank you.

~Marci~

In a recent review, it was stated that Parseltongue could not be taught because it is a magical language. I was so glad that the reviewer brought this up! I'm happy to explain:

The answer is yes, parseltongue can be taught even though it is a magical language as demonstrated by Ron in 'Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows' who had heard Harry hissing in his sleep over the years and learned to mimic the sounds which were actually words in parseltongue. It is what allowed Ron to open the Chamber of Secrets.

Also Albus Dumbledore demonstrated that it is possible to learn a magical language by knowing how to speak Mermish. As I stated in the previous chapter of SotF, Parseltongue is just another language. Harry, as a Parselmouth, has instinctive knowledge and understanding of the language. However, it is possible to both teach and learn Parseltongue just like any other language.

Hope this clears up some misunderstandings,

~Marci~

Previously in Survival of the Fittest...

"Really?" Evan asked. He was shocked that Cassandra would be willing to teach him for nothing. She wasn't getting paid to teach him all of those spells, charms and wards this evening either... But to be willing to do it again... "If you really mean that, I will see if it is possible to teach you some parseltongue, in exchange. It should make conversing with the serpents you have in here much easier."

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Today had been a good day.

Chapter 17: Don't Shoot the Messenger

Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore was having a no good, very bad day.

Today was the day of Harry's trial and was supposed to be the day that he brought Harry back to the Headquarters of the Order of the Pheonix,

where he would be safe from Voldemort and away from any possible influences. But thus far all of his perfectly sculpted plans to bring Harry back had been foiled and now he had to deal with inquisitive Aurors and Harry's pesky godfather, Sirius Black. If only Black had remained in prison the way he was supposed to, instead of breaking out and giving Harry hope of a place to stay other than with the Dursleys. None of this nonsense would have happened if Harry had continued to think that he had nowhere to run away to other than the Weasleys.

For that matter, he really needed to find out who Harry's new guardian was and if they could be swayed to his side. It would be problematic if Harry became even more independent and starting thinking outside of his perfectly crafted pathways. However, at the moment he was prevented from following up on those plans because he had to placate his Order members. Sometimes they were more trouble than they were worth.

"Albus, do you mind explaining what Lord Charles meant by saying that Mr. Potter's relatives were abusive and neglectful?" Kingsley asked as soon as the group that had accompanied Albus to the Ministry to collect Harry, walked down the front hallway of Number 12 Grimmauld Place. Feigning ignorance, Albus replied, "I'm not sure. It is quite worrying that Harry would lie about such things, though. I'm also quite worried that Harry will not be safe with this new guardian of his. What if they are a supporter of the Dark Lord?"

Tonks watched the conversation silently as she followed behind the two older wizards to the kitchen, which had become the regular meeting place of the Order of the Phoenix during the recent months.

"Now, Albus, I've known Lord Charles for years. He's not one to exaggerate. That's what makes him so good at his job. If he believed Harry's claim enough to help him remove guardianship from his relatives,

then I am inclined to believe Harry's claim as well," Kingsley replied as the group entered the kitchen where Molly was waiting, obviously to collect a non-existent Harry from them to stuff him full of her cooking.

"What's this about Harry?" Molly asked as she bustled around the large table that sat in the middle of the kitchen, "Where is the poor boy? I thought you were going to collect him after his hearing?"

"Something came up, Molly. Harry's lawyers and barristers prevented us from speaking to him," Albus genially answered Molly before turning back to Kingsley, "We don't know what Harry said to Lord Charles and we therefore do not know why the Dursley's guardianship of Harry was removed. We can investigate that later. However, what greatly concerns me is who Harry's new guardian is."

"NEW GUARDIAN?!" two voices shouted almost simultaneously. One from Molly in front of them and another from behind the group.

Oh, great. This was just what he needed; one Sirius Orion Black shouting at him because Harry went and got himself a new guardian, forgetting all about his godfather. Honestly, sometimes, Albus wondered if young mister Potter was worth all of the effort he had put in thus far.

"What's this about a new guardian for Harry?" Sirius demanded as he shoved past Tonks to stand directly in front of Albus, a fierce scowl on his face.

"According to Lord Charles, Harry's new barrister, the Dursley's were removed as Mr. Potter's guardians due to evidence of abuse and neglect," Kingsley interjected.

"WHAT?!" both Molly and Sirius shouted.

"Oh, that poor boy. How did we not notice? I always said he was too thin," Molly mumbled.

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN ABUSE AND NEGLECT?!" Sirius shouted before

rounding on Dumbledore, "You promised me that he was safe with them! You said it was the safest place for him and that he wouldn't be safe with me! YOU GUARANTEED TO ME THAT HARRY'S RELATIVES TOOK CARE OF HIM!"

"Sirius, it's hardly my fault tha-" Dumbledore tried to protest.

"I HAVE HAD ENOUGH OF YOUR EXCUSES, ALBUS!" Sirius interrupted with a shout, "Obviously your word means nothing."

"Now, Sirius. Don't be so hasty to judge me. Everyone makes mistakes. It is a shame that Harry did not feel that he could tell of his plight but -"

"This is not just a simple mistake, Albus. This is my godson we're talking about and if he's been abused on your watch. There is nothing you could do to redeem yourself in my eyes," Sirius hissed in Dumbledore's face before turning and blatantly ignoring Dumbledore's existence. "Kingsley, Tonks, I need you to tell me everything about this 'Lord Charles' and how Harry looked when you saw him. Did he have bruises? Was he limping? Did he look alright?"

Needless to say, Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore was having no good, very bad day.

Sirius stormed into out of the kitchen and went up the stairs to the front parlour. His cousin, Tonks, and her partner, Kingsley following behind.

When he entered the parlour he immediately spun back around, "Ok, so what can you tell me about this 'Lord Charles'? Is Harry safe with him?"

Sirius asked.

"Calm down, Siri," Tonks huffed as she stalked past Sirius and flopped down on the worn couch.

Sirius spun to face his cousin incredulously, "How can I possibly be calm when Harry, my godson, is out there somewhere with strangers who could be Death Eaters in disguise for all we know?!"

"Tonks, is right, Sirius. You panicking will not help anyone, let alone Harry. So, get a hold of yourself and we'll tell you what we know," Kingsley said while leaning against the doorframe.

"Fine,"

However, before either Kingsley or Tonks could begin their explanation of what happened earlier at the Ministry to Sirius there was a thundering on the staircase and Hermione, closely followed by Ginny and Ron flew into the room. "Is Harry here? I thought you two were going with Professor Dumbledore to get Harry after his trial. Where is he?" Hermione asked.

"He's not here," Sirius grumbled, "He left the Hearing with his Barrister, 'Lord Charles', and is supposedly living with a new guardian because the Dursley's abused him."

"What?!" five voices shouted simultaneously. The twins had just entered the room to hear the end of that sentence.

A deep scowl was shared between the twins before nodding at one another and moving to sit on the couch. Meanwhile, Hermione and Ginny blew up with questions at Sirius. Fred and George wondered if Hermione was secretly a Weasley with the way she matched their little sister question for question. Both were vicious whenever Harry's wellbeing was mentioned. It was evident that both witches would begin smothering Harry the second they saw him. Which was exactly the opposite of what Harry would want. So the twins sat back and waited for an explanation. They would find out if there was anything they could do before they acted. But if their little Snake in Lion's clothing needed help, they would do whatever they could.

Fred and George watched as Sirius tried to speak over Hermione and Ginny who were ranting at him about 'How could he have let Harry be

abused?!' and 'How could no one have possibly known about it until now?!' and 'What if his new guardians are just as bad?!'. Meanwhile, Tonks was trying to get Sirius to calm down.

George glanced over at Kingsley and nudged Fred in the side. Fred glanced at his twin with an inquisitive look, "What is it? These guys look like they're about to explode in each other's faces,"

"Look at Kingsley," George replied with a nod in Kingsley's direction.

Kingsley was leaning against the wall and looked like he had had just about enough with Sirius, Hermione and Ginny ranting at each other.

Quietly, both Fred and George got up from the couch and made their way over to the all auror.

"Hey Kingsley," Fred started.

"We were just wondering," George continued.

"If you could tell us about how Harry looked after the hearing?" Fred and George finished together.

Kingsley looked back and forth between the twins as if he was watching that muggle game where they hit a ball back and forth with bats with netting on them - teni they think it's called. Muggles are weird. "I can't say if Mr. Potter looked better or worse than before since this is the first time I've met him, but to me he looked quite healthy and put together. To be honest he looked nothing like you lot have described him as. His hair was shoulder length for starters and he looked taller than you described him as. He held himself tall - confident, nothing like any of the abuse victims that I've seen. His new guardian must be taking care of him quite well."

George grinned, "Sounds like we've got nothing to worry about."

"Yeah, Harry would never let himself be taken anywhere he didn't want to go," Fred continued.

"Especially after what happened during the TriWizard Tournament, the twins finished solemnly together.

With a grin at Kingsley, the twins crept soundlessly out of the room.

Hermione, Ginny, Tonks and Sirius never noticed their escape over their shouting.

Walking down Knockturn Alley with Cihuacoatl at eleven o'clock at night had been an interesting experience. You would have thought that Evan would have been gutted by one of the Hags selling their wares or by one of the Vampires that wandered the alley, browsing amongst the shops and stalls. But no, he had been fine. Knockturn Alley at night was much like Diagon Alley during the day except it was more of a hodge-podge group of people and there were no children running around laughing.

There was what looked like a Werewolf Pack hanging outside of one of the smaller pubs. There were a few people that, if Evan didn't know any better would say they were part magical creature. Knowing the type of clientele that Knockturn catered to, that was quite possible.

Most of the night time shoppers, however, gave Evan a wide berth and watched Cihuacoatl warily. Ci, on the other hand was enjoying herself immensely, commenting on every new smell or sight she encountered as he head swayed back and forth from Evan's shoulder.

"Enjoying yourself, Cihuacoatl?" Evan hissed to his companion teasingly. The werewolf pack that were seated out the front of the pub all whipped their heads around to look at him in varying states of shock. They must have heard him. Oops.

Oh well, everyone would find out sooner or later when customers saw Evan with Ci in Obscurus Books. There wasn't much of a point in hiding it. Plus, now that he knew Parselmouths were more common than he had originally thought, he could easily use the cover story Baird had come up

with to ward off any questions. The only problem might be if Voldemort got wind of Evan Thomas and put the pieces together that he was actually Harry Potter.

"Yesss, I am. Not many of the people in thisss placsse are witches or wizards like you and the woman in the shop. It isss quite fun to tell them apart." Cihuacoatl hissed back happily before flicking her tongue out at a new scent.

Evan was glad that Ci was enjoying her first time outside of Morpheus'.

"Wait, you can tell them apart by scent?"

"Yesss, can't you?"

"No. Do you know the namesss for all the different kindsss you are sssmelling?" Evan asked as they continued to walk down the alley, ignoring the stares they got from the other shoppers in the alley.

"No, I do not." Cihuacoatl muttered.

Evan burst out laughing causing the vendor of one of the nearer stalls to eye him funnily. Evan brushed off the stares. He was used to them even if normally they were for a different reason. His little familiar was frustrated because she didn't know what all the different species in the alley were called, only that they smelled different.

Cihuacoatl hissed indignantly and squeezed his shoulders threateningly in her coils. "Do not make fun of me or I will crusssh you in my coilsss and grind your bonesss up like my namesssake. Excsept you will not be reborn into a new age."

"I'm sorry, Cihuacoatl," Evan placated Cihuacoatl with small scratches under her jaw, careful not to displace or ruffle the agitated serpent's feathers too much, lest she get mad at him again. "I'm sssorry for teassing you. I ssshouldn't have done that. I know that you are sstill a hatchling so I ssshould be teaching you about the world you live in insstead of teassing you

for your lack of knowledge. Ssso for that I appologisse. Would you like me to tell you the namesss of the ssspeciesss that I can identify?"

"Yesss, that will sssufficse."

"Asss you wisssh, Your Majessty," Evan teased before quickly moving into an explanation of all the species he could identify as they walked the rest of the way back to Obscurus Books. After all, he wouldn't want Ci to crush him into a pulp. Maybe he should have given her a different name... Perhaps one with less violent connotations...

Earlier, that day at Malfoy Manor...

Lucius had just returned from a rather interesting and informative morning at the Ministry of Magic. It was not every day, after all, that a person is acknowledged as an Heir of two of the greatest founders of Hogwarts by the entire Wizengamot. His Lord would not be pleased but none the less, needed to be informed of the drastic changes to the Potter boy's status.

Knocking faintly on the doors to his Lord's personal study, Lucius prepared himself for what would most likely be a very uncomfortable conversation.

"Come in..." his Lord hissed from within.

Lucius opened the door and immediately swept into a deep bow. His Lord would expect nothing less.

"Rise, Lucius," his Lord drawled from his seat behind the desk, "I'm sure you have a very good reason for interrupting me. I was in the middle of something."

The silent threat hung in the air. Lucius swallowed. Hopefully his Lord would be merciful and not take out his anger on him for bringing him the news of Potter's Hearing.

There was a muggle saying that Lucius had heard once... Oh, what was

it? Ah, yes; 'Don't shoot the messenger'. He assumed that the saying would very much apply to this situation. But he was never one to conform to muggle customs so the thought was irrelevant.

"My Lord, I have just come from the Ministry. I have urgent news regarding the Potter boy's Hearing," Lucius said as he before his Lord. His Lord's eyes widened slightly and he sat up in his seat behind the mahogany desk, placing the parchment he had been writing down on its surface. "Report."

"Yes, my Lord," Lucius replied with another bow, "While I was at the Ministry. I intercepted Cornelius on his way back to his office from the Potter boy's trial. He was quite happy to rant about how the boy walked all over the legal proceedings of the Hearing as if he was a king and his barrister, the infamous Lord Charles, had the audacity to reprimand him in front of the entire Wizengamot. However, during the proceedings the Potter boy claimed the titles of Heir to the House of Potter, Gryffindor and Slytherin. Apparently he provided proof of his right to the titles as well, My Lord."

Lucius glanced quickly at his Lord's expression. His Lord looked to be a mixture between furious and intrigued. Lucius only hoped that His Lord wouldn't take out his fury on him.

"Was there anything else of interest?" the Dark Lord asked.

"The Potter boy and his muggle cousin were, in fact, attacked by two Dementors, My Lord, and on my way down to the Department of Mysteries I had the misfortune to bump into Mr. Potter himself," Lucius said.

"I do not like to be kept waiting, Lucius. What did the Potter boy say?" the Dark Lord glared.

"I apologise, My Lord. The Potter boy was accompanied by Lord Charles

and another member of his legal team. They all appeared rather harried and when Mr. Potter spoke to me it was in Parseltongue, My Lord," Lucius said nervously, "After that he apologised for bumping into me and then instructed me to 'say hello to Tom for me'. I do not know of who he was referring to, My Lord. I do not know of any 'Tom' other than the bar-keep at the Leaky Cauldron."

Lucius kept his gaze down as His Lord thought silently on what he just told him.

Tom was inwardly scoffing at the gal of the brat. Poor Lucius, had no idea of the games the Potter boy had played on him by the sounds of it.

"You will show me you're conversation with the Potter brat, Lucius," Tom instructed as he gestured for Lucius to come forward.

"Yes, My Lord," Lucius said before manoeuvring his way around the desk and kneeling at his Lord's feet.

"Look at me, Lucius," Tom instructed as he placed his hands on either side of Lucius' face. Lucius did as instructed and Tom entered his mind as soon as they made eye contact.

The memory of Lucius' interaction with Potter started with the two of them colliding. Tom watched on avidly.

"So sorry, I didn't see you there..." Potter said as he dusted himself off before looking up to make eye contact with Lucius. It was obvious from the way the boy's eyes widened that he had not been expecting it to be Lucius. Tom chuckled to himself. The last time the Potter boy would have seen Lucius would have been at his resurrection.

Tom watched on as Lucius's eyes narrowed and fixed upon Potter's face, "Well, well, well... If it isn't Patronus Potter. I heard that your hearing was today."

Tom watched curiously as Potter didn't respond to the bait. Instead he just

stood there, his face blank until Lucius began speaking again. It was obvious that Lucius' arrival had shocked the boy.

"I was just speaking to the Minister, not a moment ago, and he told me about your lucky escape, Potter," Lucius drawled, "Quite astonishing, the way you continue to wriggle out of tight spots... Very snakelike, in fact... Well I suppose we shouldn't be surprised what with you claiming to be the Slytherin heir..."

That was when Tom saw the Potter do something completely uncharacteristic. Instead of getting angry and snapping back at Lucius as he had seen the Potter boy do before... he smirked at Lucius and then shrugged nonchalantly, "What can I say? It runs in the family," the boy hissed in Lucius' face, causing the man to jump back, startled.

Tom's eyes widened. Lucius wouldn't have understood what Harry had hissed but Tom could. What did the boy mean by 'It runs in the family'? Did it have something to do with how the boy could claim the title of Slytherin Heir? Tom didn't have much time to contemplate that thought before he was distracted by the memory.

The Potter boy grinned at Lucius' wide eyed stare, "Well, if that's all, Mr. Malfoy? We best get going." The boy gestured to his companions, his barrister and lawyers by the look of it. "I apologise for running into you like that; very rude of me. Oh, and say hello to Tom for me would you?" the boy finished with a smirk at Lucius.

With that, Harry brushed past a rather star-struck looking Lucius and continued down the hallway towards the elevators, his barrister and lawyer following behind him.

Interesting...

Tom withdrew from the memory and removed his hands from Lucius' temples, a contemplative look on his face.

"My Lord?" inquired Lucius, still kneeling on the floor at Tom's feet.

"Rise," Tom said dismissively. He had a lot to think about. How had the Potter child gained the title of the Heir of Slytherin? Were the boy and he possibly related? That would explain the parseltongue but then why would the prophesy...

"My Lord?" Lucius tentatively asked.

"Leave me, Lucius, and be sure to find out what you can about the details of Potter's trial. I need to know how Potter of all people was able to claim the title of Slytherin Heir," Tom said dismissively with a wave before turning back to his book. He had a lot to think about...

'BANG! BANG! BANG!'

Harry shot up from his bed and whipped his head in the direction the sound had come from.

"Get up! No lazing around for you this morning! Up! Now! You're helping me in the shop today" Baird shouted through the door.

Harry rolled his eyes and flopped back down onto his warm, soft, comfy bed "You've got to be kidding me!" Harry groaned into his pillow.

"I heard that!" Baird shouted from the other side of the door.

"You were supposed to you barmy old git!" Harry shouted back with a grin. Honestly, for the life of him, he couldn't understand why he even liked living with Baird. But he did.

"What iss that horrible ssshouting for?"

Harry glanced over at the tank that he had set up the night before for his rather temperamental familiar. "Good morning to you too, Ci."

"How on earth do you classify thissss ass a good morning with all thissss ssshouting going on?" Ci grumbled back at him. She obviously wasn't very happy to have been woken up at the ass-crack of dawn.

"I'm sssorry that Baird's ssshouting woke you." Harry hissed as he rolled out of bed. "Thissss is how he normally wakesss me. I can put a sssilencing charm

on your overnight if you like?"

"No, then I will not be able to hear if sssomething triesss to enter our nessesst during the night. No, I will jussst bite the old man and crusssh him in my coilsss. He ssshould know better than to wake usss in sssuch a manner," Ci hissed back.

Harry couldn't stop the laugh that escaped, "I don't think Baird would appreciate you biting him or crussshing him, Ci. I'm going in the ssshower and then getting breakfast, do you want to come with me or go back to sssleep?"

"I'm already awake. I might ass well accompany you," Ci hissed before slithering her way through the habitat wards, down the side of her tank and over to Harry.

"Asss you wisssh, Your Majessty," Harry hissed back teasingly with a chuckle while leaning down so that Ci could climb up onto his shoulders.

Once on his shoulders Ci swayed in front of Harry's face, "Your eyesss are sstill different, Evan. They match my featherssss."

Evan sighed and summoned his toiletries to him before heading to the bathroom with Ci around his shoulders "I know Ci, I'll change back into my disguissse after I ssshower."

"You ssshould ssstay in thiss form, I like it better." Ci hissed petulantly back when Harry placed his towel on the closed toilet seat and her on top of it.

"Why? Because of my eyes?"

"Yes. They are much better this way."

Harry chuckled and reached over to turn on the shower faucet, "My mother's eyesss were this colour... but I have to disguissse myself so that I can blend into my environment without drawing attention to myssself. You know thiss." Harry hissed before quickly undressing and stepping under the hot spray of the shower head.

Steam was beginning to fill the room, making it warm and humid; the

perfect environment for Cihuacoatl. When Harry was finally done bathing, he stepped out from under the spray and flicked off the water. With a little bit of wandless magic he levitated Ci off of his towel and around his shoulders. That gained him an aggravated hiss from his companion.

"Do not do that again or I will bite you!" Ci angrily hissed in his face.

"Well I'm sssso sssorry but you were sssitting on my towel." Harry hissed back while he wrapped the aforementioned towel around his waist.

"Ssstill. How would you like being levitated without any warning?"

"I wouldn't," Harry hissed back at Ci while wandlessly unfogging the bathroom mirror. He loved magic. "I apologissse. I won't levitate you unless it isss to get you out of harmssss way."

"Fine."

"Fine"

"Are you lot done flouncing about in the bathroom? Or do you need a couple more minutes to pretty yourself up?" Baird drawled from the other side of the bathroom door.

Harry just rolled his eyes. How had this become his life?

Once morphed into his 'Evan Thomas' persona and dressed, he plonked down at the kitchen table with Ci around his shoulders. "Seriously, Baird? What's with the extravagant wake-up call?"

"You needed to get up," Baird said as he placed a bowl of oatmeal and another bowl of fruit in front of him. "You're working in the shop this morning and then, in the afternoon I'm going to help you work on your Occlumency. You have been meditating every night before bed, haven't you?"

"Yes, though I don't see how meditating is going to help me learn to 'shield my mind'."

"Have I led you astray before?" Baird asked with a raised eyebrow.

"No but-

"Trust me," Baird continued while eating his own breakfast, "meditating will help you get into the frame of mind to build an astral temple which will shield your mind from outside influences."

"What is the old man saying?" Ci suddenly asked.

Both Baird and Harry stopped talking to look over at Ci "He's telling me how the meditating that I do every night will help me to build an astral temple which will help supposedly shield my mind from outside influences."

Ci tilted her head and ruffled her feathers, "What is an astral temple?"

Harry looked between Baird and Ci. "That's a good question, I'll ask him," Harry hissed back to Ci before looking back at Baird, "She wants to know what an astral temple is."

Baird looked at them both curiously, "I'm sure Cassandra knows a charm which will help Cihuacoatl understand English, that way you will only have to translate one way. You could ask her to teach it to you when you go back down to her shop this weekend for your lessons. And as for an astral temple, it is a home base of sorts within your mind. An astral temple is not literally a temple or building. It can be but it's not always. While some choose a place that they have actually been to and where they feel safe, it can also be a place that you imagine. For example, my astral temple is an exact copy of the vault. Within your astral temple you will store all of your memories both good and bad and add protections to them so that a Legimens will not be able to find them."

Harry nodded and quickly repeated the explanation to Cihuacoatl and told her of their plan to ask Cassandra for a charm to help Ci understand English when they went to see her for lessons on Saturday night. It

looked like he had another long week ahead of him... Joy.

A/N: Hello everyone! I hope you enjoyed this chapter of Survival of the Fittest. I would love to hear what you thought of it. Thanks so much,

-Marci-

## 17. Lord Slytherin

Survival of the Fittest by Marcielle's Musings

Previously in Survival of the Fittest

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## Chapter 18 - Lord Slytherin

As promised, Harry's morning was completely occupied with organizing and restocking shelves down in the shop. It wasn't until around noon that Baird let him go so he could grab some lunch. So with Cihuacoatl draped comfortably over his shoulders, Harry, disguised as Evan made his way out into the Alley to grab a quick bite to eat before he had to head back.

It was a Friday, so the Alley was moderately busy. There were a few middle aged witches and wizards but most of the clientele today were students from Hogwarts enjoying the last few weeks of the summer holidays.

Harry was quite happy he was walking around in his Evan persona.

Shoppers were staring enough as it is, because of Ci. I mean it's not every day that you see a boy walking down the street with a six foot long snake draped across their shoulders. The prejudice within the British Wizarding World against snakes as a symbol of evil didn't help much either. Some of the looks he was receiving as he walked towards Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlour reflected that fear and prejudice.

"Evan!" Harry heard a voice shout from behind him, "Hey, Evan!"

Harry turned around to search for the person who was calling his name. Quite a few other shoppers also turned to look for who had shouted. Out from amongst the crowd of shoppers emerged the boy Harry had met at Madam Malkin's Robes for all Occasions.

"Daemarcus!" Harry grinned as the other boy approached, "How've you been mate?"

Daemarcus and Harry clasped arms, "Great. I've been practically a House Elf to Madam Malkin though, what with the Hogwarts rush starting to come through but you know what that's like. It will be over soon though and then I can get back to doing up dresses for doddering old witches and wizards. How 'bout yourself? You must be busy too, working at Obscurus?"

"Yeah, Baird's been having me do inventory and stock shelves. He doesn't really let me mind the shop by myself unless it's an emergency. I don't think he trusts me with the poor innocent customers yet. He's afraid I might scare them off," Harry grinned.

Daemarcus' eyebrow raised and he leaned closer to Harry and gestured at Ci, "Speaking of frightening away customers, who is this gorgeous creature? I'm surprised Baird would let you keep a snake - he doesn't seem like the lenient type."

"This gorgeous girl is Cihuacoatl and she was actually a gift from Baird so I don't think he has any problems with snakes." Cihuacoatl's head lifted from Harry's shoulders at the mention of her name.

Daemarcus, raised his arm as if to pet Cihuacoatl's feathers. Harry nodded.

"Yeah, well there's a bit of a prejudice against snakes in the UK because of Slytherin and his descendents. The whole lot of them were as Dark as you come and Parselmouths to boot," cautioned Daemarcus as he ran his fingers carefully through Ci's feathers. "She's excellently trained."

Harry smirked, "She's not trained, I just asked her if you could pet her and she agreed. I'm a Parselmouth."

Daemarcus' eyes widened and then flicked between Harry and Ci, "Well that explains a lot, but mate, you might want to keep that fact a little more close to your chest in the future, I wasn't kidding when I said that there was some serious prejudice against Parselmouths in the UK. I don't really have a problem with it. After all, you seem like a nice enough bloke and not at all like a dark lord. You're not a Dark Lord are you?"

Harry playfully shoved Daemarcus who chuckled in response. It was good to know that there were some people who didn't care that he was a Parselmouth.

Harry glanced over at Daemarcus who was still grinning, "I was just going to grab some lunch at the Leaky, want to join me?"

"Don't mind if I do,"

Instead of eating at the Leaky Cauldron, Harry and Daemarcus decided to

eat a quick lunch at Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlour, since they both had to get back to work soon. They ended up sitting at one of the tables with floating candles outside and watched as shoppers bustled past with armfuls of bags. There were children screaming and shouting as they ran amongst their parent's legs and packs of Hogwarts students meandered from shop to shop.

Cihuacoatl had even migrated from around Harry's shoulders to coil up in the arms of the underside of the large umbrella that covered their table.

"So... Evan, have you done your Hogwarts shopping yet?" Daemarcus asked before taking a sip of his swirling pumpkin spice milkshake. "It's kind of hard to see you as a Hogwarts student. You don't really look that young."

Harry raised an eyebrow and took a sip of his own milkshake, "Oh? And how old do I look, Daemarcus? And no I haven't. It's weird, normally we would have received our letters by now but I still haven't gotten mine."

Daemarcus took another sip of his milkshake, "Yeah. That is weird. Huh, in fact I haven't seen any Firsties yet this year. Normally the Hogwarts letters would be out by now... Maybe the letters are late this year? That could be why you don't have yours. Or maybe Baird has anti-owl wards? I know a few places do nowadays so they don't get any mail from unapproved owls."

"Yeah, maybe that's just it. I'll ask Baird when I get back," Harry mused while glancing out at the shoppers.

Just as Harry was about to ask Daemarcus a question, Mr. Fortescue walked over with their lunches, "Here ya' go lads." said Mr. Fortescue as he levitated their lunches in front of them.

Daemarcus grinned up at Mr. Fortescue and immediately dug into his sandwich.

"Thank you," Harry said with a polite nod at Mr. Fortescue.

"No problem. I've seen both you lads workin' hard in the Alley this summer and I try to help out a fellow shopkeeper if I can. Now, both you, enjoy your meals and if ya' need anything jus' shoot me a spell," said Mr. Fortescue before walking back to the Parlour.

Daemarcus paused in his eating to take a sip of his milkshake, "He's a nice guy, Fortescue,"

"Yeah," Harry agreed and then proceeded to dig into his own lunch.

"Oh hey, you might find this interesting; what with you being a Parselmouth and all," Daemarcus interjected said right as Harry was about to take his second bite.

Harry looked up from his sandwich and indicated that Daemarcus should continue.

"Ok, so did you see that article this morning in the Prophet about Harry Potter?"

Harry's eyes widened, "No... Why? Was it something bad again?" he asked hesitantly, somewhat afraid of what Daemarcus' answer might be. He was sick of hearing about how 'insane Potter has done this,' or 'that's a tale worthy of Harry Potter - the Boy-Who-Lies'

Daemarcus, obviously seeing Harry's hesitance, swallowed and then continued, "Well, it wasn't bad per say... but it was portrayed in a horrible light."

Inwardly, Harry groaned. What could the Prophet possibly be saying about him now?

"What did it say?" Harry sighed and leaned back in his chair, bracing himself for the news.

"Just that he claimed the title of the Heir to the House of Slytherin! I remember in my fourth year there was this huge scandal because the

Chamber of Secrets was opened and a few people got petrified and then during Duelling Club, Potter supposedly talked to a snake. After that everyone started saying he was the Heir of Slytherin but when he never ended up getting blamed for the stuff that happened... everyone just sort of forgot that he could talk to snakes" Daemarcus answered with a shrug, "I guess now that he's older he's decided to claim the title..."

Harry ran his hand down his face, his appetite forgotten, "And let me guess he's been painted as the ultimate evil by the Daily Prophet and the public just gobbled that up like the sheep they are?"

Daemarcus nodded, "The-Boy-Who-Lived-To-Be-The-Future-Dark-Lord, to be exact. That's why I said you shouldn't be as open about your ability here in the UK. I don't know what it was like in the Republic of Chile... but here..."

Harry looked up sharply, "How do you know about the Republic of Chile?"

Daemarcus grinned, "You'll learn soon enough, but the shopkeepers here in Diagon, are the biggest gossips this side of the UK. There are no secrets that they don't already know about. Plus you work here now, or at least in the summers you do, and you're Baird's apprentice - so of course they're going to take notice of you. Everyone thought that Baird would never take an apprentice but, here you are!"

Harry laughed. It looks like he was worried for nothing but this slander in the Prophet about him had to stop. Maybe he could talk to Lord Charles about it.

After finishing their lunch the two boys parted ways with a cordial goodbye; Daemarcus back to Madam Malkin's and Harry to the Daily Prophet with Cihuacoatl to pick up a copy of today's paper before heading back to Obscurus Books with a mighty scowl on his face. Weren't

there Libel Laws in the UK that prevented slander such as this?

It wasn't until supper that Harry got the chance to speak to Baird about both the fact that his Hogwarts letter hadn't come and what could be done about the Daily Prophet's slander.

As they were sitting down for dinner, Baird had agreed to Floo call Lord Charles in the morning regarding the Daily Prophet's slander.

"And the reason why your mail probably hasn't been coming is because of the wards around the premises. The wards around the apartment prevent any unauthorised owls from entering the premises. And any owl being sent to either you or I is being redirected to the London Owl Office. Once at the Owl Office the mail is scanned for any malicious spells or tracking spells and is then sorted into a bin titled 'Obscurus Books'," Baird explained. "I usually send, Bartholomew, my owl, to the Owl Office to collect the cleared mail once a week."

"Do you think you could send Bartholomew tomorrow, then?" Harry asked, "It's just that I need my Hogwarts letter as well as any other mail that has been sent to me. Oh, and do you think I could set up one of these bins under the name Evan Thomas?"

Baird got a contemplative look on his face, "I'm not sure, but considering your status, I think that you already have a bin at Owl Office."

"What do you mean?"

Baird lay his cutlery back on the table, "Well, whoever was your magical guardian would have set up the bin for you. So that as a child, you were not swarmed with mail from 'adoring fans' or 'thank you' presents from people grateful that you thwarted the Dark Lord."

"But it couldn't have been my godfather... He would have been in Azkaban. But then who... ?" Harry mused. Then it hit him. "Dumbledore. It must have been Dumbledore. He's the only one with the power and the

means- You mean to tell me, I've probably got ten years worth of mail just sitting there at the Owl Office, waiting for me because I never sent Hedwig to pick up the approved mail?"

Baird nodded and then moved to stand, "Most likely. It's also possible, that your magical guardian had been having this mail sent to them, in which case they would have breached their contract as a magical guardian and should be removed from that position for failure to adequately perform their duty as magical proxy for a minor."

Harry cursed under his breath. He wasn't even sure that Dumbledore was his magical guardian. He was just assuming that it was Dumbledore because Hagrid had been the one to give him his vault key on Dumbledore's orders.

"So how do I go about fixing all this then? Is Dumbledore still my magical guardian now that you are my official guardian or has that changed?"

Harry asked as he helped to clear the table.

"I am both your magical guardian and official guardian. However, before I became your official guardian, Albus Dumbledore was your magical guardian," Baird explained, "So, when I send Bartholomew to the Owl Office tomorrow I can make a request to that you be allowed to see all 'cleared' mail and be notified of any mail that does not meet 'cleared' standards."

"Thanks," Harry breathed out. It was a load off of his shoulders for Baird to be helping him understand all of this. He hadn't even known about the Owl Office for gods sake!

Baird snorted, "Don't thank me just yet boy. If Dumbledore hasn't been taking your mail over the years then it's quite likely that you will probably have almost ten years worth of mail to go through."

"Crap," Harry sighed and sunk down in one of the chairs that surrounded

the kitchen table, "Why is nothing ever easy?"

Baird barked out a laugh, "That's life sonny, get used to it."

Harry stuck his tongue out at the git. Why did he put up with this?

"The key to defending your mind against intrusion from outside forces whether they be a wizard using Legilimency or even to ignore the compulsion induced with a Siren's song, is the construction of an Astral Temple. Now, an Astral Temple is does have to be a temple or building within your mind. For many witches and wizards, an astral temple could be a place in nature such as a clearing in a forest, an open meadow, a beach or a cave. While some choose a place that they have actually been to and where they feel safe. It can also be a place that you imagine,"

Baird explained from his seat on the couch across from Harry.

Harry ran a hand through his hair "Ok, so basically it can be anything? I could make it the Gryffindor Common Room or my room here?"

Baird nodded "As I said, it doesn't have to be a real place. However, it's easier to recreate an actual place in your mind as you are less likely to leave out bits. It does not particularly matter where your astral temple is or what it looks like, as long as you feel at 'home' there."

Harry nodded "Ok, but that doesn't tell me how to make one and how is this even going to prevent people from reading my mind?"

Baird rolled his eyes and sighed, "The mind is not like a book that can be read. Think of it like a bowl full of smoke. The smoke makes images that are linked by emotions and there is music and voices to go along with the smoke. Making an astral temple is like making a safe haven within your mind where you can 'venture out' to organise your memories and then, at a later date we will work on creating fortifications so that your memories and thoughts will be protected."

Harry yanked on his hair in frustration, "Yeah but you still haven't said

how to actually do it!"

One of Baird's eyebrows lifted in a rather condescending expression, "You have not yet given me the chance to explain. The key to building an astral temple is to be completely relaxed which is why I had you practice meditation. Just close your eyes and listen to my voice. I will guide you through the process."

Harry obediently closed his eyes and began taking deep breaths. Breathe in... 1... 2... breathe out. The sound of the fire crackling merrily in the hearth and the warmth it gave out only further relaxed Harry as it reminded Harry of the many nights he had spent with his friends in the Gryffindor Common Room.

Baird's voice was becoming merely background noise as Harry's heart slowed and his muscles relaxed, "Just breathe naturally and try to visualise a place where you feel safe. If it's a real place, pull up all of your memories of that place and layer them to create a copy of that place in your mind's eye. Now focus on putting yourself in the middle of that space."

Thoughts, feelings and memories of the Gryffindor Common Room came together but one memory stood out in particular. It was a memory from his second year at Hogwarts.

At the time, pretty much the entire school had turned against him because of the Chamber of Secrets fiasco and, only a week ago, Justin Finch-Fletchley and Nearly Headless Nick had been taken down in a double attack. After the school had found out about their petrification by the Basilisk there had almost been a stampede of students trying to book seats on the Hogwarts Express so they could go home for the Christmas Holidays.

Fred and George had jokingly started calling him the heir of Slytherin,

not knowing just how true that statement had been, at the time.

Once the Christmas Holidays had started and the students had fled the Castle, a tranquil silence as deep as the snow on that had blanketed the grounds surrounded the castle. Harry had found the silence peaceful rather than gloomy and one morning Harry had woken well before the sun had fully risen.

Choosing not to wake Ron who had been snoring up a storm over on his own bed, limbs thrown about as if he had been tumbled through a drier in his sleep, Harry had slipped out of bed, quickly dressed and crept down to the Common Room. There, he had dragged one of the plush red armchairs over to the bay windows that looked over the grounds and out to the Forbidden Forrest and sat down to watch the sunrise as it crept over the horizon.

There wasn't anything overly special about the memory but it had stuck with him because of its simplicity. He had felt safe and cocooned in warmth as he watched the early morning sun catch the snow covered tops of the trees from the safety of Gryffindor Tower with the fireplace crackling merrily behind him.

Focusing, Harry tried to do as Baird had instructed and layer the memory. A feeling of weightlessness surrounded him and the hairs on his arms stood on end and then - it stopped.

Opening his eyes, slowly at first and then wide, Harry's head whipped back and forth as he tried to figure out what the hell had just happened. He was in the Gryffindor Common Room but not just the Common Room as it would have been in the middle of the summer. No, it was the exact same Common Room from his memory. It even had the small table and chair in the corner closest to the fireplace, which had died a rather unfortunate death in his fourth year.

Outside there was even a thick layer of snow covering the ground and the sun was just beginning to peak over the treetops.

Harry continued to gape "What the hell...? How...?"

He was at Hogwarts but obviously not at Hogwarts. After all, he didn't think that there would be a foot of snow on the ground even if the start of term was only just over a week away.

Walking over to the entrance to the Common Room, Harry pushed open the portrait to see... nothing there was just this silvery-gray smoke swirling around. Taking a quick step back, Harry closed the portrait and sat down on the floor.

Intelligently, he knew he was in his head and not at Hogwarts but...

"How the hell do I get back out?"

"Just close your eyes and relax. In your mind, visualise your astral temple as though you are sitting or standing in the middle of it. Don't worry if you feel like you are pretending, ignore the feeling and continue to visualise. Now Harry, can you still hear me?"

Baird looked down at his charge and sighed. If the boy had fallen asleep instead of building his astral temple then he was going to give him dusting duty down in the vault for the rest of the week.

"Harry? Harry! Wake up!"

The boy continued to lie silently on the couch, his chest barely moving with each breath.

Baird's eyebrows rose into his hairline. There was no way the boy had managed to complete an astral temple on his first try. It just doesn't happen. There's normally a process to building an astral temple brick by brick...

And yet... this child had always forced him to re-adjust his perceptions of what is possible.

But now there was a very high chance the boy was trapped in his own Astral Temple.

"This boy," Baird grumbled and pulled out his wand, "Legilimens."

Harry was sitting on the ground when the headache started. At first it was a dull throb and then a sharp stabbing pain glanced across his brain.

Harry dug his fingers into his scalp, trying to stop the pain from getting any worse when suddenly it stopped and there was a knocking sound.

Harry glanced up at the Portrait door. There was another knock.

Hesitantly, Harry climbed to his feet and staggered to the portrait, "Who's there?"

"Who do you think, child?" came a very familiar drawl. Opening the portrait, Harry was shocked to see Baird floating just outside the entrance.

Paying no mind to the smoke, Baird walked through the doorway past a gaping Harry, "I don't know how you managed it but somehow you created an almost impenetrable fortress in your mind. It must have been quite some memory with very strong feelings attached to it for it to do this on your first try."

Baird glanced around at his surroundings, "I assume this is the Gryffindor common room?"

"Yeah, the Christmas my second year at Hogwarts," said Harry as he closed the portrait and joined Baird in front of the fire.

Baird nodded, "It's quite beautiful. I can see why you chose this.

Hopefully I will be able to teach you to manipulate it so that you can add more bookshelves to store your memories in."

Harry frowned, "What do you mean-"

"I mean you will store your memories in the shape of books and organise them in accordance with key words. Say for example you had a memory

about learning something new in Transfiguration. You would store that in a book titled Transfiguration," Baird explained. "You can also use this method to discard superfluous memories that are just taking up unnecessary space."

"Oh, okay, that's cool," said Harry as he contemplated what Baird had just said, "But how does this protect me from other people reading my mind if I have to physically be in here?"

Baird sat down in one of the chairs in front of the fireplace, "You might as well sit down. It is somewhat of a lengthy explanation."

Harry curled himself into the armchair closest to the fire.

"This," Baird gestured to the room around them, "is essentially a physical representation of your mind. This is also where you will retreat to if your mind is under a heavy attack or if you wish to retreat from your physical body."

"What do you mean retreat from your physical body?"

Baird glanced at Harry and then stared into the fire, "I mean that if you wish to meditate or organise your memories or even if you just need a quiet place to think. This is where you would retreat to. Meanwhile your body falls into a coma-like state. Some people who are being tortured or raped or are being forced to watch as those they love are being tortured or raped, retreat to their mind temples unconsciously to escape the horror of the situation. I have always believed that the Longbottoms are in such a state, however I have never been granted the opportunity to check. The Medi-wizards believed that if I attempted to enter their minds then I would be trapped within their madness with them."

"The Longbottoms - Neville's parents... They're still alive? I thought... I thought they were dead like mine," Harry whispered.

"Well I don't know if the state they are currently in would be considered

living but-

"I want to go see them... If I can... Neville's Mum, Alice was- I mean is my godmother and I think I should go visit her at least once..." said Harry.

Baird reached forward and clasped his hand over Harry's in comfort, "I will see if we can visit them, okay?"

Harry smiled, "Okay... sorry, we got side-tracked. So how does this-

Harry gestured to the room, "protect my mind without people knowing about it. I mean I don't want to have to go into a coma every time I have to protect my mind against intrusion."

Baird nodded, "And you will not have to. This Astral temple and the shields around it will protect someone from searching through your memories. It will always be here. It won't just suddenly disappear. Now the key to protecting your surface thoughts is to clear your mind, like you do with meditation, and direct your thoughts elsewhere. This will make the person using Legilimency against you think that you are thinking of something else."

"Okay but-

"I think that's enough for one night," Baird interrupted. "It will be getting quite late by now. I think it's best I teach you how to get back."

Harry sighed and rolled his eyes, "Fine."

Now, Tom Marvolo Riddle was not commonly the sort of person that walked into Gringotts. However, on this day, he was making an exception. After all, it's not often that you discover that you have an heir. As usual, on either side of the giant bronze doors that guarded the bank, were two goblin guards dressed in their traditional scarlet and gold uniform of Gringotts and in the hand farthest from the door, was a highly polished, very sharp looking spear.

These goblins at the front doors of the bank were only the first out of

many safety precautions the bank had in place to keep intruders or thieves in the bank so that the goblin nation could deal with them as they pleased. He should know, after all he is one of the few people to steal from the goblin nation and survive.

A smirk graced Tom's lips as he climbed the marble steps of the bank, making sure to think innocent thoughts of 'finding out who is my Heir' as he stepped through the large silver doors behind the bronze ones.

The reason for this was that the pressed silver doors were engraved with a magical contract with a built in compulsion charm, so that every person who walks through the doors is compelled to read and thereby accept the terms of entry into the premises:

Enter, stranger, but take heed

Of what awaits the sin of greed.

For those who take but do not earn,

Must pay most dearly in their turn.

So if you seek beneath our floors

A treasure that was never yours,

Thief, you have been warned, beware

Of finding more than treasure there.

The doors also had a light intention ward placed on them so that if a person either wished harm upon someone within the bank, or wished to steal something within the bank, then the Chief Goblins would be notified and higher security precautions would be put into action.

The Great Hall of Mithros (the main hall within Gringotts) was not overly busy this late in the evening. By now, most of the shops in Diagon Alley would have been closed for quite some time and the Knockturn Markets were in full swing. For this, Tom was grateful. He was not overly fond of crowds and the chance of someone recognising him, though slim, was

diminished a thousand fold by the lack of people.

Wasting no more time, Tom immediately approached the closest teller; a rather old and pinched looking goblin, and requested, in fluent gobbledygook "I wish to speak to the Manager of the Slytherin Account about a matter of great importance."

The elder goblin glanced at Tom as if assessing him, "Of course, Lord Slytherin. Please, follow me," said the goblin as he climbed down from his high chair and beckoned Tom to follow.

Through the twisted stone passages of Gringotts they went until the goblin stopped in front of a door marked with an emerald serpent that hissed at their approach.

"Hush, sweet guardian. It is only I," Tom hissed to the door guardian.

"Lord Slytherin, welcome back. I will inform Ragnok Ironclaw of your arrival," the serpent guardian hissed before disappearing into the wood of the door.

A moment later the serpent reappeared, "He says you are welcome to enter."

"Thank you," Tom replied to the serpent before turning to the goblin

"Thank you for escorting me. You are free to leave."

Even though it was phrased as a request, it really wasn't.

"Of course, Lord Slytherin," the goblin bowed.

He didn't want this lowly teller goblin telling others of his comings and goings, so just as the goblin was walking away he called out "I'm sure no one will hear of my being at Gringotts, will they, goblin?"

The goblin halted immediately, his aura reading anxiousness and a tremor of fear, "Of course not, Lord Slytherin."

Tom smiled, "Excellent," and pushed open the door to Ragnok Ironclaw's office.

"Ah, well if it isn't Lord Slytherin," Ragnok smirked from behind his desk, "It certainly has been a while since you graced my doorstep."

Tom smirked in return as he sauntered into the room and elegantly seated himself in the carved ebony chair across from Ragnok, "Be mindful, Ragnok, of the fact that the only reason you have a doorstep for me to grace with my presence is because I wish it. Do not forget that it was I who chose you to be the new Slytherin Account Manager, not the other way round."

Ragnok's bushy white eyebrow rose challengingly, "As I remember it, you offered the position to the first goblin to chop off the head of the previous Slytherin Account Manager."

A shadow passed over Tom's face as he crossed his arms and leant back in the high-backed chair, "Yes well that buffoon had swindled away my family's fortune until they were nothing more than pretentious beggars and I needed someone ruthless and sharp witted to take the position." A glint flashed in Tom's eyes as he glanced back up at Ragnok with a smirk, "As I remember it, you didn't even waste a second before lopping off his head and handing it to me by its ears while the other goblins just stood around gaping like imbecilic children."

Ragnok guffawed loudly, "Oh, how I have missed your pleasant company, Lord Slytherin. It has been far too long a time since I have laughed like that."

Tom relaxed into his chair and smiled at Ragnok.

There were very few people in the world that Tom actually trusted.

People like Dumbledore would say that he was incapable of trusting another person at all, but that was not the case. He did not trust very many people, but the few that he did trust, were in that position because they had yet to let him down.

Ragnok, in particular, had proved to be just as ruthless, cunning, sly and vindictive as he had hoped and the Slytherin fortune was now back to its former glory. Tom honestly could not have hoped for a better Account Manager.

Ragnok leaned forward and clasped his hands on top of the desk, "Now, as pleasant as this little catch-up has been, why are you here, Lord Slytherin? The last time you physically visited Gringotts was just over thirty years ago. So I have a strong suspicion you are not here to ruminate over the good ol' days."

"You would be correct. I'm here because it has come to my attention that I have an Heir, validated by a Gringotts Goblin; one Geldreth Snarklaw, I believe. I find this quite curious as I have yet to take a wife or consort and have any form of progeny," Tom drawled.

Ragnok shifted in his seat, "I was not aware that you had named an Heir..."

Tom glared, "That's because I have not. I would like to know just how Harry Potter was able to claim the title of the Heir of Slytherin without my naming him as such."

Ragnok reached down into one of the drawers in the large desk and pulled out a shallow silver bowl and a gold dagger and placed them side-by-side on the desk, "Unless you officially named him as your heir, the only way he could have claimed the title of Heir of the House of Slytherin without your knowledge is if he was already technically your Heir before he formally claimed the title... Which means the Potter boy is either an illegitimate son or a very close relative of yours, Lord Slytherin."

Tom glanced at the silver bowl and a gold dagger on the desk, "So you're suggesting that I perform a blood test to see how the Potter boy is related

to me?"

Ragnok nodded his head and Tom sighed before picking up the gold dagger and slicing his palm; letting three drops of blood drip into the shallow silver bowl. As the third drop made contact with the bowl there was a flash of golden light and then a silver fire burst to life within the bowl on the desk, burning merrily.

Ragnok then reached into the top desk drawer and pulled out, a role of silk fabric. Picking up the golden dagger, Ragnok sliced the silk to the size of a piece of parchment and with a flick of his gnarled hand flung the silk into the silver flame. The silk parchment within the bowl began to char and slowly turn a dark ebony before words began to appear in silver lettering.

Once the last word was written on the parchment the silver flame went out and Tom reached forward to pull it out of the bowl. As Tom read the results of the blood test, Ragnok began packing away the bowl and dagger.

However it wasn't until the fourth line that Tom found what he was looking for;

Name: Tom Marvolo Riddle (Vol de la Mort)

Title: Lord Slytherin, Servant of Hecate ~ Lord of Magick (via Proven Worth Ritual)

Parents: Tom Riddle Sr., Merope Gaunt

Children: Harry Potter ~ Heir (via Horcrux)

Tom's eyes widened. It wasn't possible. There was no way that- but perhaps, that Halloween night, all those years ago when the killing curse backfired and his body was disintegrated into dust... but that would mean... Harry Potter, the boy he had been trying to kill since he was an infant, was actually the key to his survival and his Heir... Hecate

considered the Potter boy to be his child by soul and magic if not by blood... He had a child.

Not bothering to read the rest of the parchment, Tom set it alight with a well controlled Fiendfire.

"Lord Slytherin?" Ragnok hesitantly asked.

Tom remained silent, thinking about all of the repercussions of this revelation. No one must find out that the Potter boy is a Horcrux, especially his Horcrux. Most importantly Dumbledore must not even hear of or think of the possibility of Potter being one of his Horcruxes.

Otherwise the old man will have the boy killed and Tom will have lost not only his Horcrux but also the next Heir to the Slytherin line. The real question that Tom wanted answered is, 'Does the Potter child know that he's his Horcrux?'

The answer; probably, considering that the only way he could have known to claim the title of Heir to the Slytherin line was if he performed this same blood test.

"Ragnok, the Potter boy is truly my Heir. I wish to send a message to him; however I presume that Dumbledore will have warded the boy against unwanted communication. Do you think a Gringotts letter would get through?" Tom asked the rather startled goblin.

Ragnok shifted in his seat with a thoughtful look on his face, "I assume that with this revelation you no longer wish to kill the child?"

Tom sneered, "Of course I no longer wish to kill him. What benefit would disposing of my Heir, recognised by Hecate, give me?" Tom paused to look at Ragnok incredulously before continuing, "Now, again, is it possible that a Gringotts letter would get through to the Potter boy?"

"Yes, I do believe that it is possible..."

"Good. I wish to set up a meeting with the boy, preferably here at

Gringotts so that I can discuss with him some of the matters regarding his new status and perhaps apologise for attacking him in the past..." Tom replied.

Ragnok leaned back in his high-backed chair and sighed, "Knowing your past together, do you think the boy will even come to the meeting if he knows you will be there?"

Tom ran a hand down his face and sighed, "Possibly he might, just in a show of Gryffindor bravery. However, I think it would be best if the letter was worded as if the meeting was merely about his status as the Heir of the Slytherin line."

"I believe that would be a much wiser course of action," Ragnock nodded.

"I will prepare the letter immediately and organise for this room to be empty of whichever day you choose to have this meeting."

"The boy will be going back to Hogwarts soon, so perhaps the meeting could be held three days from now?" Tom mused.

Ragnock nodded, pulled out a piece of parchment and began writing, "was there anything else you wished to discuss, Lord Slytherin?"

Tom rose from his seat, "No, that is all. Inform me as soon as you get a reply from my Heir."

And with that, Tom walked out of the room.

A/N: Hello everyone! I hope you enjoyed this chapter of Survival of the Fittest. The next chapter is already in the works but it will be finished when it's finished. I'm not very good with working to a deadline when it comes to writing. I have to be in the right mood and if I'm swamped with Uni Assignments or Work then I don't really feel like writing. Anyway, I hope you enjoyed this chapter (more Tom, which is fun and exploring some of my old OCs).

Till next time

Marcielle

## 18. Mail, Meetings and Libel Laws

Survival of the Fittest by Marcielle's Musings

by Marcielle's Musings

Previously in Survival of the Fittest

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## Chapter 19 - Mail, Meetings and Libel Laws

Harry yawned and blearily blinked open his eyes. Glancing around from underneath the covers of his warm comfy bed, he tried to find what had

woken him. When nothing immediately jumped out at him Harry groaned and buried his face into his pillow. Maybe if he just rolled over he would be able to fall back asleep. The horizon was just beginning to lighten into a smoggy orange so he probably had like an hour before Baird would come and bang on his bedroom door. But then he heard a strange flapping sound coming from the living room.

With a groan, Harry pulled himself up to sit against the headboard and snapped his fingers, "Tempus,"

A glowing '5:30am' appeared hovering above Harry's hand, "So much for more sleep," Harry sighed. He might as well get up now and find out what the sound was because there was no way he was falling back asleep.

Harry glanced over at Cihuacoatl's tank where she was still fast asleep before running his hand down his face and then scratching his stomach.

Clad in nothing but his red tartan sleep pants, Harry opened his bedroom door and plodded out to the living room.

In the middle of the living room, balanced precariously on top of the coffee table, was a huge wooden crate.

"The hell is going on?" said Harry as he plopped himself down on the couch in front of the crate, "Ah, forget it. It's too early for this." Harry grumbled while throwing an arm over his face and burrowing down into the cushions of the couch.

"Well, if you don't want your mail, then I'll be happy to burn it for you," a voice sounded from right above Harry's head.

Harry jolted upright, his arms and legs pin-wheeling as he lost his balance and fell off the couch with a 'thump'.

"Well that was graceful," Baird smirked down at his ward who was now flopped down on the rug like a pancake.

Harry rolled over and glared up at Baird. "Shut up," Harry grumbled as he

climbed back onto the couch, "and would you please stop doing that to me?"

Baird continued to smirk, "And why would I do that when your reactions to being startled are so entertaining?"

"I'm so glad you find enjoyment in my pain and suffering," Harry muttered under his breath.

Baird ruffled Harry's hair, making it into even more of a bird's nest than it normally was in the mornings, "You're welcome."

Harry swatted at Baird's hand but the man was already walking over to the kitchen to probably make their breakfast, "Wait? Did you just say that this crate was full of mail? For me?!" Harry asked aghast as he shot a look at the wooden crate on the coffee table. "That's- how?!"

Baird didn't even bother to look at Harry over his shoulder, "I sent Bartholomew to the UK Owl Office as soon as I woke up. The mail sent to either Obscurus Books or myself was a much smaller pile. And also, I was right; Dumbledore had been blocking your mail except for letters from a few select people that he personally approved. This is all of the mail that you've been sent since Dumbledore took over as your magical guardian."

Harry looked back at the crate, "You mean people may have been sending me mail for years and been expecting a reply... Holy crap."

"Yes, well that's why I'm giving you the day off to read all of that mail and to write replies to those you wish to," Baird conceded as he sat down at the kitchen table to eat.

"Thanks," Harry mumbled while shuffling over to the kitchen table to eat his own breakfast.

"Oh and before I forget, I set up a meeting for you and Lord Charles at 10am to discuss your issue with the Prophet."

Harry nodded and dug into his breakfast.

By the time ten rolled around, Harry was well and truly sick of reading letters. Thankfully, a wonderful person at the Owl Office had separated the letters by the year in which they were sent.

The most letters addressed to him had actually been sent just after the fateful Halloween when Voldemort had murdered his parents and he had been proclaimed The-Boy-Who-Lived. It must not have occurred to the people sending the letters that he had only been a year old when these letters would have been sent and therefore unable to read the letters let alone write a reply. But now, he had spent the past few hours reading thank you letters for vanquishing 'He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named' and mixed in amongst the thank you letters had been presents, birthday invitations, betrothal offers and even letters of inheritance.

It turns out that quite a few people who had been the last of their line had bequeathed him their estates upon their death as yet another 'thank you' to 'The-Boy-Who-Lived' for giving them the opportunity to see peace before their deaths. Along with the bequests were a summary of the contents of each estate, which he would have to take to Gringotts in order to formally claim them.

Most of the letters of inheritance had contained only galleons. However, one had included a townhouse just outside London and another, a small cottage in the Scottish Highlands. The one with the cottage also included all of the effects within the house, while the items within the townhouse had been sold off.

Various other wizarding schools around the globe had sent him letters, prior his attendance to Hogwarts, offering him a place in their schools. There had been invitations from the Salem Institute, Avalon Academy, Beauxbatons Academy, Durmstrang Institute, New Zealand Wizarding College, and even the Egyptian Academy of Magick. Harry had never

even known these schools existed.

Were they like Hogwarts? Were they better? Worse? Did they teach the same things that Hogwarts did? Every year at Hogwarts something happened. Every year someone tried to kill him. Maybe attending one of these other schools would be a good idea. After all Hogwarts wasn't exactly living up to its reputation as the safest place on earth. Even though he's decided not to interfere with the war... all of his friends are at Hogwarts. So he can't just leave... and at least now he has Baird to teach him and help him.

As he sifted through letter after letter, Harry began to think that perhaps this might be the reason why people in the wizarding world were so quick to think the worst of him, even though they've never met him; all of these people had sent him letters... and had never received a reply. They must think him a snobbish, standoffish, spoiled little brat, like Professor Snape does; too good to send a simple reply.

Despite not replying to the letters, people had also sent him a surprising amount of presents over the years. Thus far, there was a small pile of wizarding children's toys in front of him that had been sent to him either as birthday presents or as thank you gifts. One wizard had even sent him a children's broom that hovered only a foot above the ground and could go as fast as a children's bicycle. Another witch had sent him a book of wizarding children's tales and a stuffed lion. Within the book of tales from the witch had been a letter inscribed on the first page:

Happy Second Birthday Harry!

Today you will be turning two! I hope that as your relatives read this to you, you are enjoying playing with the animated stuffed lion and perhaps later your relatives will read these tales to you.

When you are older you will wonder why a stranger has been sending you

presents. Well it's because I was in your parent's year at Hogwarts. Your mother, Lily, was even my dorm-mate! So I know that even though she is gone and that you are happy and safe with your relatives in the Muggle world, she would have wanted you to have these.

When your mother first came to Hogwarts we would always find her sitting on her bed in the evenings reading old children's stories. When asked why she was reading children's books instead of theory textbooks as she was known to do during the day, she replied that 'True magic is within these books'.

It wasn't until years later, when trying to decide what to get you for your birthday that I understood what little eleven year old Lily had meant. These children's tales teach morals and magic to young wizards and witches - which most of our society has forgotten. Enclosed within these old books are hints at Fey Magick and Old Magick as well as guiding morals to make us all great witches and wizards.

I hope that as you read these books and learn this Little Magick, you experience the same wonder that your mother felt when reading them.

Annette Brown

By the time Harry had finished reading the inscription his eyes were wet.

People always told him how he looked just like his Father but the only thing from his mother was her eyes. No one had really told him much about his mother. I mean, Ollivander had told him that his mother's wand had been particularly good for charm work and Remus had told him that his Mum had the habit of seeing the best in others, even though they might not see it themselves. But most people told him about his father and his adventures at Hogwarts.

He practically knew nothing about his mother, even though he had lived with her sister for fourteen years. The only memory he had of her was of just before her death. But just months ago, in that cursed graveyard,

when the Priori Incantatem had happened, his mother's spirit had come out of Voldemort's wand and he had been able to speak to her - if only for a moment.

So to have this - a copy of a book that his mother had cherished as a child, from one of her year-mates was a huge thing.

Quickly, Harry summoned a piece of parchment and a self-inking quill from his room and began to write a letter to Annette Brown.

Dear Ms. Brown,

You may not remember me, but for my second birthday you sent me a copy of a book of tales that my mother had loved reading as a child and an animated stuffed lion. I know it is quite late, but I would like to thank you for this amazing gift. The reason I am only now sending this letter is that I just received your gift.

You see, up until recently Albus Dumbledore was my magical guardian and had been blocking any mail intended to come to me. Now that my Guardianship has been removed from my relatives and Dumbledore, I have finally been able to access all that has been kept from me.

So, even though I am much older than intended, I still cherish the gifts you have sent because they are a link to my mother.

With all my thanks,

Harry James Potter

"Hedwig?" Harry called, out of habit, before he remembered that Hedwig was with Hermione somewhere. With a sigh Harry called out for Baird's temperamental owl, "Bartholomew?"

With a loud hoot, Bartholomew flew out of Baird's room and landed on the back of one of the kitchen chairs.

"Um, do you think you could take this to Annette Brown and then bring Hedwig, my owl, back here?"

Bartholomew continued to stare at Harry balefully until Harry began to start thinking that the owl was mocking him. Then, without any warning, Bartholomew swooped off the back of the chair, swiped the letter from Harry's hand and flew out the open window above the kitchen sink.

Harry stared, open-mouthed after the owl before his attention was drawn to the fireplace which had flared to life with emerald green flames. Out of the flames stepped Lord Charles who stopped still at the piles of letters and gifts scattered across the living room and then stared at Harry, "Did something explode?"

"Something like that," Harry muttered as he walked forward to clasp Lord Charles' hand in greeting. "This," Harry gestured to the piles of letters and gifts, "is all of the mail that has been kept from me since my parents died."

Lord Charles eyebrows rose, "Really?... However, I assume that this," Lord Charles gestured to the piles of mail, "is not why I'm here."

"Yeah, no, it's not," Harry rubbed the back of his neck, "You know how the Daily Prophet has been writing about me... Well I wanted to know if there was anything I could do... to you know, stop it?"

Lord Charles pulled out his wand and gestured to the piles of letters, "Do you mind if I move these?"

"Uh, yeah. It's just- they're sort of sorted into piles; unread, read with gifts, read without gifts, and hate mail." Harry indicated each of the piles as he listed them.

"Colour coding might be the best option then," Lord Charles nodded and flicked his wand at the piles, changing their colour and then levitating them into piles next to Harry's bedroom door.

Harry summoned the copy of the Daily Prophet that he had been saving from his bedroom and sat down on one of the couches, leaving the other

free for Lord Charles to sit down.

"Here," Harry passed across the old copy of the Prophet, "This is just one example of many. I just-"

Lord Charles didn't even stop to read the article, he didn't need to "You want to stop the Prophet's slander of your name. Quite understandable, really. Now, as I anticipated that this would come up sooner or later, either by your hand or Baird's, I have already set in motion a variety of options."

Harry nodded, "Okay."

Lord Charles pulled a billfold from his inner robe pocket and enlarged it with a flick of his wand. The billfold grew to the size of a standard piece of parchment and when opened contained three manila folders; one blue, red and yellow "Good, well option one is to sue the Daily Prophet for libel," Lord Charles gestured to the blue folder. "This would be a long and lengthy process, however it would demonstrate that you are willing to stand up for yourself and your family names in the face of the public. It would also be a case that could effortlessly be won, as it is quite easy to prove that the Daily Prophet has no proof for majority of their claims."

Harry nodded following along easily, "And the other options?"

Lord Charles lifted up the red folder, "Option two is more of a long term project than an immediate solution. With your family's wealth at your disposal, the option to buy up shares within the Daily Prophet either under your name or shell corporation becomes a viable long term option. You see, if we take the option to sue the Daily Prophet for libel and defamation of character, there is always the possibility that they will do it again, and again and each time we would have to counter them until they are pressed with so many law suits that it becomes unviable for them to continue to slander your name. As I said earlier, if the Prophet

chooses to continue even after being sued for defamation then it may become a lengthy process. Which is why, option two, though it may not provide an immediate solution, will eventually provide you with controlling shares in the most influential paper within the Magical United Kingdom. This would allow you to change the manner in which the Wizarding press is conducted, because let's be honest - at the moment the Prophet is more of a sensationalist rag than a paper."

Harry was grinning at the thought of slowly taking over the Daily Prophet, "I like that option a lot actually. I mean Rita Skeeter brings shame to the journalism profession but, like you said, this option doesn't really solve my problem..."

Lord Charles held up the third folder, "This third option could be combined with the first option and, if we succeed will be a great asset to you in the future. However, it would require more work than any of the other options but also more reward. Our final option is to start up a rival newspaper to the Daily Prophet and invite journalists worldwide to submit articles from their countries. As I said, this could be combined with the first option to stop the Daily Prophet from slandering your name while using the funding to start up the rival company."

Harry leaned forward and clasped his hands under his chin, "I- every single one of these options is great but I don't know the first thing about running a company or journalism for that matter. So how-"

"You could always hire someone to manage the company in your name," Lord Charles interjected. "As you are still in school, I expected that to be the case. Since, with either option two or three, you would be the owner of the business you would have the final say in hiring, firing, and the content covered in the articles."

Harry was a little bit dumbstruck. He had no idea- He hadn't even

thought that any of this had been an option and both options two and three would give him an edge in the Wizarding business world but "These all sound amazing but I don't really want to manage a company... Not at my age - I don't even think I can. I don't know the first thing about business... I just want to be a normal Hogwarts student without having to worry about Dark Lords or the sheep of Wizarding Society deciding that I'm public enemy number one."

Lord Charles nodded slowly, "I can understand your hesitance. I mean you are only fifteen. However, this is a great opportunity to not only stop the slander against innocent people such as yourself but also to change how journalism within the English Wizarding World is conducted. You would also not be alone in your endeavour. You would have continual legal and business advice from a member of the legal team whenever you meet with the manager that you hire. I'm sure Alexander would appreciate the opportunity to work with you while I cover the defamation cases against the Daily Prophet."

Harry dropped his head into his hands, "Thank you, I mean all of these options are great but... I don't want to run a newspaper. I'm just fifteen! Maybe when I'm older but... I'm just starting to learn about the Wizarding World - and not just the stuff they force down our throats at Hogwarts. I'm learning the actual history of magic and how wizards started using it. I'm learning about various types of magic, cultures and religions and it's great. I'm apprenticed to Baird and I'm learning all about my magical gifts... I'm sorry but even if I did want to own a newspaper, it would not be for a very long time."

Lord Charles studied Harry's face for a moment before sighing and proceeding to put away the red and yellow folders, "I'm sorry if it seemed like I was pressuring you, Harry. I was not intending to do anything of

the sort. It's just that sometimes, I find it hard to remember that you are in fact still a child and are entitled to a childhood - of which you have been robbed of until recently. It's the way you act - if I may say so. You act like a confident, powerful young man ready to seize the world and all of its opportunities and thus I have begun to see you as such."

Lord Charles picked up the blue folder and rose from his seat, "Like Baird, I have begun to strive to ensure you achieve all you set out to do."

Harry stared rather dumb-struck at Lord Charles who smiled at him and then moved forward to ruffle his hair, "You're a good kid, Harry, and you deserve to be free to make your own choices. I will assume then that we will be going ahead with option 1: sue the Daily Prophet for libel and defamation of the Potter name?"

Harry nodded, "Um yeah, that would be good- I mean yes, thank you.

When do you think it will be done by?"

Lord Charles smirked at Harry's change in manner, "At a guess, I would say by mid October the proceedings will be in place. However, I'll be sending you a letter every week with our progress on the case. Will that be all?"

"Yes, and thank you once again for your help, Lord Charles," Harry bowed to Lord Charles who returned with a similar bow.

"Happy to help, Harry," said Lord Charles before he strode towards the fireplace, grabbed a handful of floo-powder and disappeared in a flash of emerald flames.

By the time Baird finally came up from locking up the shop, Harry was only half-way through sorting through the crate of letters. And so, when Baird walked up the stairs to their apartment it was to find his young apprentice surrounded by colour-coded stacks of letters and presents.

"Having fun?"

Harry wearily looked up at Baird, and then looked out the window where dusk was now falling, "Oh... I didn't know that it was already... Have I really just spent a whole day opening mail?"

Baird gave the room another glance, "By the looks of it. Did you at least remember to have lunch?"

Harry climbed out of his cocoon of letters and flopped face-first on the couch, "Can' 'emember," came Harry's muffled reply.

Baird rolled his eyes, "It astounds me how you can go from acting like a mature young adult one minute to a typical teenager the next."

Harry lifted his head from the couch cushion and shot Baird a baleful look, "And it astounds me just how often you forget that I am a teenager. And I guess you could say I am extremely good at acting under pressure."

"That's an understatement," Baird scoffed as he moved about the kitchen, "Now do you plan on introducing the lovely Snowy Owl that's staring at you from her perch on my couch or am I to assume you have no idea what she's doing here?"

Harry rolled over and stared at the top of the couch, a grin spreading across his face, "Hedwig!"

That seemed to be a signal to Hedwig, for as soon as he called out her name she hopped down from the back of the couch and landed on Harry's stomach.

"Oof, watch were you land, girl," Harry smiled at his faithful companion, "It's good to see you girl."

Hedwig walked up his chest and nipped his chin with her beak.

Harry laughed, "I'll take that as an 'I missed you too'."

Baird walked over to the two and stroked Hedwig's head, "So I'm assuming that the lovely Miss Hedwig is the one responsible for keeping you out of trouble all these years."

Hedwig preened under the attention and Harry laughed, "Yep, Hedwig's taken good care of me. Haven't you Hed?"

Hedwig's gold eyes fixed on him before she leaned down and nipped his nose - none too gently either.

"Ow, gee thanks Hed. I can really feel the love," Harry muttered while rubbing his now sore nose. "I'm sorry I sent you away but it was for the best," Harry apologised while petting his friend's soft downy feathers.

All the while Baird was chuckling at the pair's antics, "I can see just who rules this roost."

Harry laughed and moved to stand, "Oh, I know my place." Meanwhile, Hedwig quickly flapped her wings to land on Harry's head. Harry glanced up at his feathered friend, "Comfy?"

Hedwig just nestled down further down into Harry's hair.

Baird shot a glance at the pair and laughed, "At least now I know why you used to have a perpetual bird's nest for hair. You'll have to pick up an owl perch when you visit Cassandra this weekend."

Harry carefully walked into the kitchen, transfigured a chair into a temporary owl perch, carefully placed Hedwig upon it, and moved to help Baird with dinner.

Dear Mr. Potter,

Heir to the Houses of Potter, Slytherin and Gryffindor,

Your presence is requested at Gringotts Wizarding Bank on the 23rd of August at 10am in order to discuss your new status as Heir to the House of Slytherin and the obligations of this position.

Regards,

Ragnok Ironclaw,

Slytherin Account Manager

Gringotts Wizarding Bank

Harry re-folded the letter and glanced between at the coffee-table and then back at the envelope the letter had come in, "Hey Baird?"

Baird looked up from the book he was reading on the other lounge, "Yes...?"

Harry lifted up the letter, "What's tomorrow's date?"

Baird returned to his book, "The 23rd I believe... Now why do you ask?"

"It's nothing - I just have a meeting tomorrow at Gringotts to talk about the obligations for me as the Slytherin Heir," Harry groaned and buried his face in the couch cushions. His life was just one bloody thing after another. Between working for Baird, training, dealing with his mail and the Prophet he hadn't had a moment to just relax. Now he had a meeting with some goblin called Ragnok Ironclaw about his new status as Heir to the House of Slytherin - as if he didn't have enough on his plate!

"Well be sure not to act like this when you're there," Baird scoffed. "Oh, and make sure you don't look like Evan when you go there."

Harry rolled over and stuck out his tongue at his mentor.

"Yes, very mature. I can see you're going to be an excellent Lord one day.

Bravo, well done," Baird guffawed.

"So glad you approve," Harry drawled before laughing silently to himself.

"Well I'm off to bed before I have to look at one more bloody letter -

Night Baird," Harry yawned.

"Goodnight," Baird replied. "And remember, you're working down in the shop tomorrow morning before you meeting."

Harry waved his hand dismissively. He had known Baird wouldn't give him the morning off. Sleepily he shuffled over to the owl perch he had transfigured earlier for Hedwig.

Upon his approach, Hedwig lifted her head from under her wing and cooed.

"Hey girl," Harry sleepily smiled. "Wanna sleep in my room or do you want to go hunting?"

Hedwig vigorously flapped her wings so she could land on Harry's shoulder.

Harry smiled and began walking towards the door to his room, "Looks like you're coming with me then."

A/N: First let me just say thank you to all of my loyal readers who have stuck by this humble story even though I have been sporadic at best with my updating. Second of all I want to thank my sister for pushing me to update this chapter (I wasn't quite happy with it and I felt it should be longer but I wanted Harry's meeting with Tom to be a chapter all on its own). Nonetheless, another chapter down with probably forty or so still to go. I hope you enjoyed reading this new instalment. I know I enjoyed writing it.

I know after all this time you deserve so much more but between work, uni and my placements in schools (I'm training to be a teacher!) I've barely had any time to watch my favourite TV shows let alone sit down and write. So thank you once again for your patience and if you want to message me either send me a message on my tumblr, AO3 or fanfiction account :D

-Marci-

Внимание! Этот перевод, возможно, ещё не готов.

Его статус: идёт перевод

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