

What if?

by dm1984

What if Minerva McGonagall and Albus Dumbledore had a son? What if he came to Hogwarts?

Homecoming

Chapter 1 of 2

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Chapter 01/??

Homecoming

The start-of-term banquet on Saturday night, celebrating the beginning of another year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry was coming to a close. Caught up as she was in quiet conversation with the diminutive Charms Master, Professor Flitwick, Minerva McGonagall didn't pay much attention when Hagrid came walking (surprisingly quiet and graceful afoot for his size) behind Headmaster Dumbledore and whispered in his ear. Albus Dumbledore nodded and smiled at the gentle half-giant.

"Thank you, Hagrid. I'll take it from here," he replied softly. "Enjoy your meal; you must be famished from your travels." The tall headmaster stood and cleared his throat, preparing to address the entire school. "Ladies and gentlemen? A few words before we dismiss." There was a momentary pause as several hundred students quieted. Those seated at the staff table were also politely attentive.

"Rest well and get yourselves prepared tomorrow for an exciting new journey! Classes will commence bright and early Monday morning," Dumbledore looked at each of the four house tables in turn, a slight smile on his face. "Prefects, you may escort your first years to their respective dormitories. Off you go then, chop chop!" He clapped his hands once, and the enchanted candles brightened as many dozens of dark-robed young witches and wizards pushed back from their benches at the four long wooden tables.

Organized chaos followed, accompanied by the excited chatter of students leaving the Great Hall. Dumbledore placed a light restraining hand on McGonagall's shoulder as she was preparing to stand and take one final sip of her warm herbal tea. "Minerva, would you come with me to the hospital wing? A late-arriving student requires our attention."

"Certainly, Headmaster. Nothing serious, I hope?" She noticed then that Madam Pomfrey, Hogwarts' Head Matron, had left the banquet early. It was not unheard of for a student to be taken ill on the train from Kings' Cross Station, London.

"Hagrid assured me that it was just minor injuries which the young man sustained outside Heathrow Airport. Poppy is tending to him as we speak."

They walked together through the halls of the castle, nodding greetings to faculty and students whom they passed. Dumbledore paused briefly and held her arm again as they reached the entry door to Madam Pomfrey's hospital ward. He looked around before he spoke, making sure that none could hear, a bit furtively she thought. As Headmaster and Deputy Headmistress, their relationship was strictly collegial. It was considered normal that they would spend a lot of time in each other's company; running a school of this size took a great deal of organization and management.

As husband and wife of fifty years, however, their relationship was strictly secret. Only a handful of their closest friends even knew... loyal keepers of their secret for five

decades.

His bright gaze held hers. "Minerva, it's time. Brian is here, at Hogwarts," he whispered. He watched as her expressively beautiful face went swiftly through confusion, remembrance and then maternal concern.

"Brian is here? Oh, Albus..." She gasped and staggered into him, tears coming suddenly to her deep emerald eyes. *My son? Our son?*, thought Minerva. At that very moment, thundering herds of dragons could not have stopped her from rushing directly to his bedside, her green tartan robes flapping behind her.

The ward was completely empty except for Madam Pomfrey leaning over one young patient, and he was already fast asleep. Minerva recognized the angelic face and tousled curly brown hair at once, even though she had last seen him as a tiny newborn infant, nearly forty-eight years before.

Poppy Pomfrey stood and nodded with satisfaction as she straightened a bandage and adjusted the corner of the bed sheet, smoothing out a miniscule wrinkle. She didn't startle when she noticed Dumbledore and McGonagall standing there; she'd heard them come in as her hearing was supernaturally acute.

"Headmaster. Professor," she said by way of greeting them, smiling slightly. "He'll be fine...just superficial cuts and bruises. The broken arm was from a fall, I'd imagine."

Dumbledore heaved a sigh. "Yes, the Muggles call it 'mugging' if I recall correctly. Ironic, really."

Pomfrey tutted softly, gathering her treatment tray and bottles. "Well, the poor dear didn't even need the Sleeping Draught I prepared, he was that exhausted when Hagrid brought him in from the city. There's the extent of his belongings as well," she said, pointing to a wallet, jacket and pile of neatly folded Muggle clothing. "He had no trunk or school things that I could tell."

"That won't be a problem," Dumbledore told her. "I'll send Hagrid to Diagon Alley tomorrow. Three more late-arriving students are expected in the afternoon, but they'll have already been to the shops."

McGonagall still had not spoken, but drew up a chair to the side of the hospital bed and was holding the boy's uninjured hand, gently stroking his knuckles with her thumb. The Head nurse's eyes went wide as she finally understood who the youngster really was. She quickly drew the privacy curtains, and Minerva placed her pointed hat on the floor beside her chair.

"Minerva, is it really he? How long has it been?" Pomfrey touched her old schoolmate's arm, silently offering her support and understanding.

The distraught mother nodded. "Brian was born on the 29th of February, 1960," she said huskily, her voice breaking with emotion. "A 'Leap Day of a Leap Year'." As a first year student-to-be at Hogwarts, Brian appeared as any other eleven year old youngster would. None of them questioned yet how this was even possible.

"He'll be right as rain by tomorrow, I personally guarantee it," said Poppy. Her eyes grew moist with unshed tears as she recognized the rare and special privilege that she had been granted by this particular family scene.

Albus Dumbledore gave her shoulder a fond squeeze. "Thank you, Poppy."

McGonagall tore her eyes away from her sleeping son and looked with gratitude at her dearest friend. "I'll stay here tonight."

Nurse Pomfrey beamed as she stepped around the curtain. "Gi'us a shout if you need owt." The sound of her blowing her nose into a handkerchief drifted faintly back to them.

Dumbledore chuckled and leaned down to kiss his wife's cheek. "What are you thinking, my love?" He stroked her upper back, both giving and drawing comfort from the warm closeness.

She wiped her eyes and smiled tearfully up at her husband. "He's gloriously handsome, Albus." He knew at once that she didn't trust herself to speak much more.

Dumbledore chuckled again and then winced as he gingerly pushed the boy's hair back from his forehead, revealing an angry bruise over one eyebrow. "That he is, thanks to his mother." Albus leaned closer to Brian's ear, whispering an obscure Healing Charm. The bruise cleared almost immediately; the boy smiled, wrinkling his nose at an imagined tickle and mumbled in his sleep, but did not awaken.

"There's a good lad," his father told him tenderly. He kissed his son, and then he kissed his wife, giving her fingers a squeeze. "I'll see you two in the morning."

Next morning, Dumbledore arrived back at the hospital wing to find Brian sitting up in bed, attentively watching Madam Pomfrey removing the bandages from his right arm. He nodded affirmatively at something she told him and flexed the fingers of his right hand. A tired but happy-looking Minerva McGonagall was coming in from the opposite direction, carrying a laden breakfast tray.

"Good morning, Mr. Rollins," called Dumbledore. "You are looking well."

Pomfrey smiled broadly at them both. "Good as new, Professor."

"Excellent! We haven't met; I am Professor Albus Dumbledore," he continued, holding out his right hand to Brian. The boy's handshake was, indeed, good as new. "I see you've already met Madam Pomfrey, our school nurse, and Professor McGonagall, our Deputy Headmistress."

"Thank you, yes sir, I have," Brian replied in a distinctive American tone. Dumbledore's eyes sparkled with amusement at this, even though he knew that his son had been adopted from an orphanage in Salem, Massachusetts. The boy seemed pleasant enough, curious and positively bursting with bonhomie; his accent certainly wasn't from any of the British Isles.

McGonagall placed the tray of porridge, tea and toast on the nightstand beside him, and Brian quietly thanked her. Minerva returned to her seat, interested to see how her husband would handle this first meeting. To her proud surprise, it was her son who took the initiative.

"Professor Dumbledore, sir? Where am I?" It was a valid question.

Dumbledore took off his hat and rubbed his forehead and thinning hairline, chuckling. "Quite right, I do apologize. We are presently at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry," he said. "It's in Great Britain."

Brian nodded, still puzzled. "I see. And what do you teach here?" he asked politely, fearlessly. Apart from the half-moon spectacles and flowing white beard, Rollins had the same sparkling blue eyes as Dumbledore, and his eyes creased the same way when he smiled. Minerva McGonagall could only watch and wonder, hoping that she wouldn't start to cry. She knew then that her heart was lost forever to the boy, again, and that it would be very, very difficult to keep the secret of the three of them.

But she would do it gladly; their survival against Voldemort and his Death Eaters depended on it. Brian could never know who she and Dumbledore really were.

"What do we teach?" echoed Albus, sounding faintly surprised. "Why, magic, of course."

Brian Rollins considered this seriously for several heartbeats, his brow furrowed in concentration. They certainly didn't expect him to throw his head back, laughing with great abandon. He shook his head. "Magical? Me? Not possible, Professor. Not possible."

Poppy Pomfrey stifled a giggle at his completely unintentional reference to a Gilderoy Lockhart book title. "I'll check back on you a little later, Mr. Rollins," she said with a smile. She patted his leg and moved off down the ward. So far, Brian was her one and only patient.

McGonagall was also trying hard not to laugh. "Why ever not? Haven't you ever done anything, er... magical?" With considerable effort, she forced a serious expression onto her face and looked at him over the rims of her specs. Out of the corner of her eye, she noticed Dumbledore smiling mysteriously and looking rather pleased with himself.

The boy shook his head, chewing delicately on a fingernail as he began. "No, ma'am. I grew up on a farm in Maine helping my father with the animals and my mother with the gardens." Brian shrugged. "Sorry, my foster Mom and Dad. They adopted five of us when they lived in Salem; we moved up to Maine when I was about, erm, four years old, I guess."

Dumbledore nodded sagely. "Frank and Juliette Rollins." He cast a sideways glance to Minerva, who immediately understood.

The Rollinses were Protectors: they had volunteered to raise the children of other witches and wizards, protecting them from Voldemort. They reared their adopted children as Muggles, but could contact any Ministry of Magic should the child start to show tendencies of wizardry. From that point, the biological parents, if known (some were, after all, truly orphans), could be contacted to further his or her education. Given that Brian's birth-parents were both extremely powerful in the magical world, and both respected educators of wizardry, it wasn't any surprise that he should end up at Hogwarts.

And here he was.

"But nothing ever happened that you couldn't explain, Brian?" pressed McGonagall. "Anything special with the plants or animals perhaps?"

When he didn't answer right away, they could literally see the wheels turning in his head as he thought about how best to answer the question. "Well," he began slowly, blushing all the way out to his ears. "For as long as I can remember, I liked to talk to the plants and animals. Mama would tell you that I pretty much did it all the time... cats, dogs, birds, flowers, and trees, whatever."

"And did any of them ever speak to you?" Dumbledore wanted to know.

"Speak? Not exactly, but communicate, yes. I guess maybe responded to me is a better way to put it," Brian said modestly. "My folks called it my 'green fingers' since I could grow anything in the garden, no problem." He held up both hands and waggled all ten of his digits by way of illustration, grinning sheepishly.

"Hmpff, of course they responded to you, young man. They are living things, after all," came a kindly voice from down the ward. The trio looked up to see Professor Sprout hurrying along the central pathway, carrying a tray of healing herb plants. Her robes were covered with a dingy brown smock, and her well-used pointed hat was, as always, worn at a jaunty angle. "It absolutely amazes me how many people forget that."

"Pomona. Meet one of our new first year students: Mr. Brian Rollins, just arrived from America," said Dumbledore, introducing them. "Brian, this is Professor Sprout, our resident Herbology Mistress."

She nodded and smiled, trying not to get potting soil on Madam Pomfrey's spotless floors. "How do? I'm of the 'green fingers' lot as well, you could say," said Professor Sprout. "Which house are you?" Pomona Sprout was not only the Professor of Herbology; she was also the Head of Hufflepuff House.

Rollins shrugged. "I honestly don't know, ma'am." He looked to the Headmaster for an explanation.

"Mr. Rollins and our other late-arrivals will be Sorted at dinner this evening," Dumbledore commented helpfully. "Coincidentally, there are three more that will soon need to learn of their House assignments."

"Very good. You'd make an excellent Hufflepuff student, Mr. Rollins," she said, giving him a friendly wink. "Well, cheerio!" She continued down the corridor on her way to deliver the plants to Madam Pomfrey. Some of the flowers were laying their heads lovingly upon her chest.

"You need to eat, or the matron here will have my head," McGonagall said as sternly as she could manage, placing the breakfast tray in his lap and giving Dumbledore a subtle nod toward the exit. Minerva reached down and replaced her hat upon her head, straightening it without looking out of many years habit.

"Yes, yes, we shouldn't keep you," added Dumbledore. "Madam Pomfrey is quite protective of her patients, as you will find out." He leaned to lightly take McGonagall's arm, helping her from around the bedside.

Brian took a sip of the tea and picked up a piece of buttered toast. He obviously had many questions left unanswered, but one more popped suddenly into his head. "Professors, before you go, please...?"

They turned as one back to him. "Yes, Brian?" asked the elder wizard.

"In which houses are you?"

"Before I became Headmaster of our school, I was Head of Gryffindor House for many, many years," Dumbledore answered, his eyes glittering with pride at this boy's sharp mind.

McGonagall smiled kindly. "And I am the present Head of Gryffindor, Mr. Rollins." She snaked her hand through the arm which Dumbledore offered.

Brian grinned, quickly swallowing the bite of toast he had been chewing. "Then I hope I am chosen for Gryffindor House, Professor McGonagall."

She winked at him and turned with Dumbledore to leave the hospital ward. Before they reached the main door, and out of Brian's earshot, she whispered to her husband: "So do I, Brian. So do I."

Albus Dumbledore squeezed her fingers discretely before disengaging her hand from his arm as they went out into a more public hallway. "We cannot bias the Sorting Hat, my dear. It is a trusted and revered magical object," he whispered back, nearly laughing out loud at the delightfully stubborn set to her jaw. It had attracted him to the gifted and beautiful witch more than fifty years before, and it still did to this day.

She didn't answer but gave him a knowing smirk as they parted, each heading to their own office to attend to school business before the start of the term on the following day.

Yes, I can, thought McGonagall. Oh, yes, I can if I have to

TBC

Gryffindor Golf

What if Minerva McGonagall and Albus Dumbledore had a son? What if he came to Hogwarts?

A/N: This story disregards all of HBP and DH (years 6 and 7 of canon). What if someone born on the 29th of February only aged a year on that exact date? "Brian" celebrated his 12th birthday on 29 February 2008.

Chapter 02??

Gryffindor Golf

Professor Minerva McGonagall needn't have worried over the Sorting Hat's placement of her son in Gryffindor House. On the rare second Sorting Ceremony that Sunday evening, he and three other late-arriving students learned of their House assignments. In fact, each House at Hogwarts gained a far more international flair that night: an American, a Nigerian, an Albanian and an Argentine rounded out the foursome of newly Sorted students.

There was not a moment's hesitation when she placed the shabby-looking magical hat upon his head; it shouted "GRYFFINDOR!" with unmistakable enthusiasm. McGonagall chanced a look up to the head table and saw Dumbledore joining in the applause as the rowdy young people welcomed Brian to their table; Minerva could tell that the elder wizard was pleased when he gave her a tiny salute with his wine goblet.

Gabriel Unegbu, a tall, handsome Nigerian boy, was placed in Ravenclaw; Tandi Hysaj, a delicately-featured Albanian girl, in Hufflepuff; and, though there was more of an indecisive delay from the Sorting Hat, Argentine Leilia Barberis was sorted to Slytherin House. She practically dwarfed her classmates when she joined Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle at the end table.

Dumbledore was leaning over to congratulate Professor Sprout on her new student when Minerva returned to the staff table. He turned to McGonagall and whispered: "Happy now, dearest?" He couldn't help teasing her at every opportunity, but he knew she was overjoyed at the homecoming of their son. If the truth be told, so was he.

She took a sip of her tea. "Very. And I had absolutely nothing to do with it," she whispered back. Dumbledore knew beyond all doubt that she was to be believed; he felt, and heard, her sigh of happiness at his right shoulder. "Brian is so handsome in his school robes, Albus."

His eyes twinkled at her with affection. "Thank you, my love," he said quietly, knowing that he was going to get a smack later for that one. Even at their ages, they could still flirt with one another, and had actually gotten quite good at being subtle about it with decades of practice. Though she turned from him to speak to Professor Flitwick seated at her right, Minerva snuck a hand under the tablecloth and squeezed Dumbledore's upper thigh. To her immense pleasure, Albus jumped guiltily and covered it by shifting his chair. She heard him groan softly and knew she had excited him; it sounded like he was clearing his throat, but she knew him well enough to know what it really meant.

Much later that evening, after the second Sorting dinner, he returned the favor in their private quarters and reminded her just how much he appreciated that Minerva McGonagall had agreed to be his wife. Not that they needed it, but seeing Brian again reminded them of how much, and for how long, they had truly loved each other.

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The month of September at Hogwarts shone crisp and cool, and Brian joined his first-year classmates in having the time of their lives. Busy times they were: with no less than seven courses, and an introduction to broomstick flying, there were numerous lessons and assignments to work through.

Monday through Thursday mornings were scheduled for Gryffindor first-year students in Transfiguration with Professor McGonagall (first period), followed by Charms with Professor Flitwick (second period). Friday mornings were a bit of a challenge since they had Double Potions with Professor Snape and were scheduled with Slytherin first years at the same time. Not many of the young Gryffindor lions would claim this course as their favorite: the Potions master was also head of Slytherin House and favored his own pupils above all others.

By the time the noonday bell sounded, all of the students were ready for a break; there was only so much information that you could cram into your brain before your body started complaining. It took Brian and his classmates a few days to become accustomed to the manner with which their food arrived to the long table, but after that, no one startled the way they had on the first dinner night. They even grew accustomed to the company of the castle's ghosts: Sir Nicholas de Mimsy-Porpington was the Gryffindor ghost, and he often joined them at mealtimes and in study hall. Following the older students' lead, Brian made sure that he addressed him as "Sir Nicholas" and not "Nearly Headless Nick." Ghosts had feelings too.

Monday through Thursday afternoons saw the Gryffindor first years concentrating on Defense Against the Dark Arts with Professor Quirrell, a nervous sort of wizard who always wore an odd purple turban wrapped around his head. As a Defense Against the Dark Arts instructor of some renown, he also smelled strongly of garlic; it was said that vampires all over Europe would love to chance a meeting with him to, well, "repay" what he'd done to some of their brethren in the past.

Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, they finished their classes for the day with Professor Sprout in greenhouse one and Herbology. Monday and Wednesday, their last class of the day was History of Magic with Professor Binns, the only ghost instructor at Hogwarts. Fortunately or not, this period was ideal for a bit of a nap as he droned on and on (and on) about this or that Goblin war. It was a good thing too, since Gryffindors were scheduled for Wednesday Astronomy at midnight with Professor Sinistra, a pale witch who rarely came down from her tower in the daytime. She was stern but fair, and most students liked her courses.

Brian fit in well with his classmates; some were from Muggle families, some were from so-called "pure-blood" wizarding families, and some were from families that fell in between. As both McGonagall and Dumbledore quietly noted, he seemed to be making friends and struggling along just as the other students did in trying to acquaint themselves with the magical world. Within the first two weeks, he was just as swamped as they were in homework: rolls and rolls of parchment needed to complete essays, research papers and worksheets which were assigned to them. And who was it that seemed to give out the most homework? It was neck and neck between Professors Snape and McGonagall, but at least he included his own Slytherin students in the suffering.

Rollins labored under enormous books checked out from the library, often helping Hermione or Neville or one of the others in his year to carry some of them back to the Gryffindor common room. Other than his distinctly American way of speaking, there was nothing extraordinary that really set him apart from the pack; his homework and his handwriting were nothing special. His parents worried illogically about this, Minerva more than Albus, but Dumbledore explained this to himself as her "mother-hen" tendency. Of course, he never actually said this aloud; she'd probably not like the joke.

That is, until Harry Potter started training as the youngest Quidditch Seeker in centuries. While some students were practicing their broomstick flying under the supervision of Madam Hooch (she offered extra sessions after each group of first years had met in the first week of school), Brian was swimming the lake that lay adjacent to the school grounds. While other students were practicing their wand skills or reading volumes upon volumes of wizarding history, Brian was befriendng the giant squid which lived in the lake. In short, if it was daylight and free time, he was in the lake, as much at home in the water as he was on land. He reckoned he could write essays when it was too dark to swim.

A few of the other students (even some who were not in the first year) tried to go for a dip when he did, but they soon discovered two very important things. One, that they were nowhere near as strong a swimmer as he; and two that the water was really, really cold. Whenever someone asked Brian about this, he just shrugged and laughed in his self-deprecating way, saying that he was used to cold water from back home in Maine. All he ever wore on these excursions was an old pair of blue swim trunks, borrowed from one of his dorm-mates.

He seemed to have no reason to fear the merpeople or the grindylows either. Once, when a pack of grindylows got too close and nearly had his swim trunks off, half of them were soundly thrashed by the giant squid. Just remember: grindylows aren't too bright.

It was customary for Hogwarts faculty to gather together on a late Friday afternoon, once a month, for cocktails, camaraderie and gossip. The staff conference room had a nice balcony overlooking the lake, and Dumbledore arranged for light snacks and drinks to be served while they enjoyed the sunset before dinner in the Great Hall. There was no theme for the gathering, and neither was attendance required, but nearly the entire faculty made it a point to show up and at least speak to the Headmaster for five minutes. Some of them genuinely liked each other and had worked together since their own student days. A few of them had to work on their social skills and temporarily declare no hostilities during the "second Friday truces."

On this particular Friday, the second one in September, Hagrid joined the party and found himself on the balcony with Professor Sprout discussing bird life of Great Britain. Both armed, so to speak, with Omnioculars, they were scanning the near shore for any new species to add to their respective life lists.

"Oh, look!" exclaimed Hagrid to his birding partner. "Go, laddie! Go!"

She misunderstood his enthusiasm and tried to find the bird in the direction he was searching. "A new one, Hagrid?"

He chuckled. "Nope, not exactly, Perfessor. The Yank has just about reached the other side of the lake this time." The Keeper of Keys and Grounds at Hogwarts fell easily into using the student-given nickname for Brian. Not original, sure, but descriptive enough to suffice; and he was the only American at Hogwarts.

"My stars," said Professor Sprout. "I've heard some of the students talking about this. Apparently Brian set himself a high goal right from the start of term. A few of my Hufflepuffs are hoping to work up to just getting in and getting wet." She giggled at the thought.

McGonagall just heard "Brian" and "lake," and was out on the balcony in a flash, rushing from the hors d'oeuvres table inside. She hid the worried look in her eyes by asking to borrow a set of Omnioculars. Sure enough, there he was; her son's arms angling out of the water in a powerful crawl stroke followed by a graceful glide. It seemed effortless. Moments later, as she and several others (who had by now conjured up their own viewers) watched with bated breath, he waded out and sat on the far bank of the lake. Minerva zoomed in as much as she could across the mile or so distance and froze the view frame on his smile of triumph. Professor Flitwick and one or two of the others burst out into spontaneous applause.

Dumbledore laughed, delighted. "Well done, boy! Well done." He had moved quietly to McGonagall's side and elbowed her gently in the ribs. She ignored him, but he heard her sudden gasp as Brian dove back in and started across again. Below them on the near shore, a dozen or more student spectators were still cheering and cat-calling to him across the lake. Fred and George Weasley had somehow conjured up small brass air horns apiece and were blowing them raucously.

"Huh, not much rest for the trip back," commented Hagrid, taking a sip from his huge tankard of ale.

"I hope, Headmaster, that you are not considering a special award for this feat," said Snape waspishly. "Provided that he survives, of course."

Albus turned to look at his Potions master, still smiling benignly. "Not at all, Severus. I certainly couldn't do it. In fact, I don't think it's ever been done without magic." He fervently hoped that Minerva wouldn't give herself away by clawing the man's eyes out for speaking so ill of her child.

Flitwick sniggered from the deckchair he was standing on, contentedly tasting his cocktail. "Without magic? No, thank you." Several around him chuckled and raised their glasses, including Professor Binns (his ghostly goblet had nothing in it, but a toast is a toast).

Snape inclined his head slightly, a tight non-smile upon his lips. "I meant no harm to Mr. Rollins, clearly. What I should have said is that his time might be better spent on his studies. His spectators might consider the same."

McGonagall forced a sardonic chuckle. "The lake is not out of bounds, Professor Snape, and the students of my House seem to make the most of their recreation." Professors Sprout and Hooch shared a glance of raised eyebrows at this concession by their old schoolmate. She'd justifiably earned a reputation as a very studious witch, both as a student and as a teacher.

"Besides," added Dumbledore lightly, "Mr. Rollins was raised by Muggles and does not yet know of our... amusements." He laughed again and returned to his Omnioculars as Snape quietly went back inside.

"It is as you say," Snape finished, *sotto voce*.

For the faculty spectators who remained on the balcony, the next quarter hour was spent watching Brian and making quiet comments to each other, remarking on his swimming style or on his persistence (or both). Some of them even found themselves muttering encouragements to him, not that he could hear.

Hagrid, taking up the role of commentator, spoke more loudly as Brian got closer to the near shore. "Here we are, Yankee. Nearly home." He paused dramatically as the water behind the swimmer began to churn, tiny waves splashing here and there. "Uh oh. Grindylows."

"Come on," muttered McGonagall, urging him to the finish. Most of those who heard mistakenly thought she was concerned as his Head of House. Albus knew better.

As they watched, Brian kicked harder once or twice and nearly faltered. Someone on the shore screamed as they probably saw the grindylows trying to distract him from his goal by tugging on his feet or legs. And then, just as suddenly, a giant tentacle swept from below the water and not fewer than five grindylows flew through the air and landed high in a tree. The students cheered, turning in surprise when they heard the faculty above them doing the same. Brian reached the bank and waded out of the water, breathing hard but grinning, gratefully taking a wool blanket from one of his comrades. They could see him give Fred a surprised look before he courteously waved up to the faculty who were viewing from the balcony.

"Well played, Squid. Well played," said Dumbledore, admiration in his voice. "That nickname sounds much better than *Yank*, don't you think?" He caught his wife watching him and he winked. All she could do was wink back, shaking her head in fond exasperation. As they looked on, Brian leaned down and patted the giant animal's tentacles, obviously having one more conversation before he left the lake for the day.

Above them all, the tower bell sounded, echoing across the water and bouncing off the mountain peaks on the other side. Albus held out his arm in a gallant gesture; Minerva on one side and Pomona Sprout on the other. "Ah," he said brightly to the two witches. "Dinner and a show."

TBC

A/N: rather weird, I know, but I needed a set-up for later! Honest.