



"....."

**Prologue**

20 March, 1345

**Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry**

"Now, students be careful! First to third years gather over here, fourth and fifth there, and remember, *only* sixth and seventh years are allowed near the parapet!"

*Dominus* Jacobus Prewett's voice, amplified by a mild *Sonorus*, boomed over the students assembled on top of the Astronomy Tower. They'd have to share, five or six to a compass or astrolabe, and he and the whole teaching staff would be kept more than busy trying to maintain order and to make sure that everyone would have their turn at the instruments. But it'd be worth the effort; to observe a triple planetary conjunction after an unprecedented several *days* of lunar eclipses earlier during the month was a once-in-a-lifetime experience for all of them, teachers and students alike. *Magister* Helios Sinistro, of course, was manning Hogwarts' main equatorium himself, as was his prerogative as the school's Astronomy professor though he had promised to make his memories and notes available to the interested later so that his colleagues might have a closer look; for now, most of the assembled staff would have to make do with watching the event unaided. It was simply too dangerous to leave this large a group of students unsupervised in such cramped quarters, regardless that the school's staff had worked hard for the past week to expand and safeguard the observation platform as much as possible.

The sun had set, and in the rapidly-falling darkness the children shuffled into their preassigned groups, vying for room to work their equipment. Already Jupiter was becoming visible if one knew where to look, and Saturn wouldn't be far behind for once. Most were quite understandably excited, but a fair few of them were frightened despite the professors' best efforts and all the proof the Astronomy teacher's records could provide that such conjunctions were recurring phenomena and *not* a portent of doom. Unfortunately, it was a sad fact that superstition often ran as rampant among witches and wizards as it did among the Muggles. Certainly they were about to witness an unusual event, but not a sign of bad things to come no matter what the centaurs or Muggles believed!

As if on cue, someone behind the Headmaster whispered anxiously, "But Magnus, what if it *is* an omen ..."

"Shush, Isobel. *Dominus* Prewett said it's not, and he has yet to lead us astray!"

Headmaster Prewett snorted to himself even as he cancelled his *Sonorus*. He'd recognized the voices, hushed though they were, of Slytherin students Magnus Gaunt and Isobel LeStrange. Dismissing them from his mind for now, Prewett turned his own eyes towards the planets rising in the southeast. Even to the naked eye, it was a magnificent sight in the clear springtime air. This far north, they were fortunate to be able to view any number of celestial events, like the last eclipse of the moon just two days ago.

This rare alignment of Saturn, Jupiter and Mars in the eleventh house, though ... Despite himself, the Headmaster shivered. He did *not* believe in Divination he just *didn't!*

*Well, and even in the unlikely event that I'm wrong after all, and it is a portent of some kind,* Prewett thought defiantly, *the country's already at war with France, and has been these past eight years. Surely, any omen will only presage another great battle, not something more sinister!* Determinedly, he banished the traitorous and unwelcome thought, silently invoked Merlin and Morgana's help and crossed himself for good measure before concentrating once more on his charges.

The first students were already muttering in awe over their instruments as the two biggest planets slowly climbed above the horizon, one after the other. And at long last, close to midnight, the much smaller reddish pinpoint of Mars rose into view from behind the looming silhouette of the Forbidden Forest.

"I see them, professors!" exclaimed Guillaume Abbott, the seventh-year Ravenclaw Prefect as he looked up from the second-biggest equatorium and pointed. "*Domine* Prewett, I can see all three planets!"

There was a chorus of delighted "ooohs" and "aaahs" as the students and teachers of Hogwarts observed the rare phenomenon with the help of a few vision-sharpening spells carefully cast by the school's Mediwizard and a couple of teachers; a few especially enthusiastic ones crouched down and lit their wands with low-powered *Lumos* spells to scribble notes on scraps of parchment and small slates. Above them, the sky formed a canopy of stars, twinkling like diamonds on velvet, with the majestic orbs of Saturn, Jupiter and Mars glowing as jewels in the celestial crown.

Crowding around their Astronomy teacher, the young witches and wizards were taking care not to jostle the dozen or so astrolabes or those students already working on a compass; after all, they might accidentally shove someone against or, all saints forbid, *over* the parapets! In due time, all the students were able to look and marvel, and could switch places so that each and every one might have their turn, while Helios Sinistro also measured and calculated, dictating his observations to his eagerly scribbling senior apprentice in a low voice.

It took a while, but eventually most of the students had looked their fill and were slowly herded down the stairs back to their sleeping chambers by the Prefects. Only those especially interested in Astronomy, namely most teachers and one last group of students, were left, and the youngsters stepped up eagerly to the great equatorium. Among them was a quiet, plain-looking witch from Cornwall Meliora Warne, fifth-year Hufflepuff and a gifted Arithmancer. Professor Sinistro kindly cast a temporary vision-sharpening spell on her and gestured for her to begin. The spell was unstable and would fade out soon, but in the absence of other means would do for now. With a timid smile, the girl bent over the instrument already adjusted towards the sign of Aquarius. She fumbled a little with the controls to fine-tune them to her requirements and scribbled down her observations, frequently shifting her attention from the device to her parchment and back. Once she was done taking notes, she straightened slowly and gazed wide-eyed at the firmament where Mars, Saturn and Jupiter formed a true triple conjunction of superior planets almost like pearls on a string. Suddenly, her whole body seized up as if someone had cast *Petrificus Totalis* at her. Someone gasped in shock; whether teacher or student, nobody could tell afterwards.

Then Meliora Warne started to speak in a deep, guttural voice not her own.

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**A/N:** "Magister" and "Dominus" are Latin words for "teacher/master"; "Domine" is the vocative, the way how you'd address someone with this title.

Helios Sinistro = female version of Aurora Sinistra

Astrolabe, compass and equatorium are medieval instruments used in Astronomy; while glasses and other lenses to enlarge things at close range already existed, far-seeing lenses (like in telescopes) hadn't been invented yet in the mid-fourteenth century.

There really were several eclipses and a conjunction of Saturn, Mars and Jupiter in the early 1340s. On 24 March, 1345, French physician Guy de Chauliac claimed the one on March 20 that year heralded the outbreak of the Black Death in Europe of 1346/7.

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# One

## Chapter 2 of 6

Where Harry retrieves an artefact

### Chapter 1

25 April, 2014

#### 1.1 - The Potters' house, Godric's Hollow

"Why do we have to do this again?"

There were only four more days until Beltane, and Harry sighed at the petulant tone in Ginny's voice as he came into the spacious kitchen from inspecting the back yard. He wasn't quite uncharitable enough to call it a whine, but ... did they really *have* to have the same argument over and over again?

"Because this is a time for family." As far as he was concerned, it was the only reason that counted or was needed. Ginny *knew* how much 'family' meant to him, and that he'd take any opportunity to gather those he'd chosen as such around him. And if Harry's family nowadays included more than just his wife and children, Hermione, Ron, and however many other Weasleys who could manage to come, so much the better. *Why can't Ginny accept that?* "Besides, it's our turn this year."

It wasn't as if she minded hosting large parties; he knew that, if anything, she was far more of a social animal than Harry. Only, Ginny preferred going out, attending glamorous social events whereas Harry detested those with a passion. Meeting with family and friends here, at the restored house in Godric's Hollow, was what *he* liked, and he was damned if he'd let his wife's grumbling spoil the occasion for him!

"It's also traditional," he added more quietly. "You should know."

Ginny *did* know; after all, she'd grown up in a Pureblood family, even if the Weasleys as a whole paid little more than lip service to the traditions. Sure, they'd have bannocks for Beltane, and roasted chestnuts at Samhain, but Christmas mince pies and Easter eggs always had been more special as treats ... and with seven boisterous children to look after, Molly had had little time to observe all the niceties and trappings.

She shrugged. "We were never observant, and I really don't see why you should be," she grouched. "After all, it's not as if you've grown up with it." As soon as the words left her mouth, Ginny winced and cast a guilty look at her husband. "Sorry, I "

Harry had paled at her careless remark. "Has it ever occurred to you that I might have, if my parents ... or even Sirius! ... had been around to raise me?" he finally said, the effort it cost him to keep his hurt and anger in check clearly noticeable in his stiff posture and overly-controlled voice. "It's not my fault I didn't know any of the traditions until Andromeda taught me."

Ginny turned away to hide her scowl. *Damn that woman anyway!* She knew very well that the erstwhile Andromeda Black was the reason Harry had become interested in the old ways initially. It hadn't been surprising that Mrs Tonks wanted to teach Harry's godson about 'good' wizarding traditions; what had raised more than one eyebrow within their circle of friends and family was how much Harry had involved himself with the concept and procedures.

*If it weren't for Andromeda, none of this would be happening!* 'This' did not only mean the upcoming Beltane celebration; truthfully, Ginny rather liked having a party at their home, even if it was only for family and required some specific preparations. She usually enjoyed setting up seasonal activities for the passel of children that would be attending these events. But Teddy was at Hogwarts, sitting his O.W.L.s and unable to come, and fine, as the boy's grandmother Andromeda was welcome at the Potters' house whenever, but did Harry *have* to include the rest of Andromeda's family?

The War may have been over for fifteen years, but it was only recently that Andromeda had fully reconciled with her one surviving sister. Ginny supposed having Narcissa Malfoy over wasn't all that bad, given that she *had* saved Harry that night in the Forbidden Forest, but must she really bring the Ferret and his family along, too? Worse, Albus and Rose were ecstatic at the idea of having the youngest Malfoy come along.

Never in a million years had Ginny expected *that* friendship to develop when the children met at preschool. She sighed. What was done, was done, and she'd just have to make the best of it. She'd survived one year at school under the Carrows; she could survive one day with the Malfoys in her home. Even if she would've preferred to attend the Ministry Spring Ball, wearing a new designer gown and sipping champagne. *Maybe I could even have persuaded Harry to dance with me ...*

"Tell me again why we can't just attend the bonfire up on the Common?"

Harry sighed. "Gin ...I told you why. Several times, if I recall. It's more than dancing around the fire; it's about the blessings and everything else."

She shot him a look. "Yes, but you have yet to convince me," she said crossly. "I just want to know why we can't just once have a small family gathering at home and then go out say, to the Ministry Spring Ball, maybe?"

"You know I hate these formal affairs. It's bad enough that I can't get out of the annual New Year's bash; I won't waste my time with more if I can help it."

"Has it ever occurred to you that I might like to attend more than one grand function a year?" she asked, trying to keep unnecessary sharpness out of her voice. "You barely accompany me to *my* job-related parties--"

"You cannot honestly believe that I'd ever enjoy being in the same room with a bunch of journalists!" Harry exclaimed.

"Not all of us are like Rita Skeeter," she replied, stung. While retiring from the Holyhead Harpies had been the right decision for the sake of her marriage, herself and the children, Ginny had to admit that *writing* about Quidditch wasn't half as grand or exciting as actually *playing* the sport had been ... and that sometimes, she missed the public attention.

Harry inclined his head in apology. "Granted, but way too many of your colleagues hang around me okay, us at these shindigs, just waiting for me to say or do something they can print the next day." He took a deep breath. "I know that I can't help being in the public eye due to my job, and I know you've earned your own celebrity, but let's please keep our private life just that private." He smiled a little at Ginny's rebellious expression and reached over to touch her cheek.

"Gin, if it's dressing up and a fine dinner you want, Seamus mentioned the other day that a new hotel opened last year in Connemara; apparently they have a very good restaurant." His smile deepened, became cajoling. "There may even be a bar with a dance floor. For afterwards."

Ginny huffed. "As if you'd ever make use of it."

"Well ... I just *might* be persuaded," Harry murmured, dropping a kiss on her hair. "Please, Ginny? Just the two of us, or maybe Ron and Hermione, or Neville and Hannah, if you'd rather have them ..."

"I'll think about it," Ginny conceded. It wasn't what she really wanted, not the big, glamorous affair that the star-struck little girl still lurking somewhere in her psyche craved, but she'd take what she could get. If that meant an out-of-the-way place in Ireland, no matter how exclusive, rather than an elegant establishment in London or one of the capitals on the Continent, so be it. Harry was such a homebody, and so leery of his barely-diminished fame, she knew it was a major concession for him to offer her even that much.

*This is his dream family and home. But what about mine?*

Reluctantly, Ginny left Harry to his preparations, declining his help in the kitchen and the offer of hiring a Free Elf for the day. They could have refreshments catered she was a working woman, after all and there'd be help available for the asking. Her mother's May wine was always delicious, and Molly would be glad to provide it. As for the rest ... she may not be a 'domestic goddess' like Molly, but Ginny was her mother's daughter. She had her pride. If Harry wanted a homemade party, that's what she'd give him to the best of her ability. *And if I say so myself, my best may not be perfect, but it's still pretty damn good!*

She started to gather ingredients from her cupboards. With close to thirty people expected on Beltane and an article on the new coach of the Wimbourne Wasps to finish before then, it'd be best to get her baking out of the way as soon as possible. Proper bannocks could be done the night before, but Ginny rightly suspected that no matter how many she made, a good portion would disappear in the hollow legs that were their children's stomachs. *Beltane bread it is.*

With a determined yet slightly rueful grimace, she flicked her wand at her kitchen mortar to set almonds to grind and started to measure and sift flour into a large bowl.

"...""...""..."

27 April, 2014

## 1.2 - Diagon Alley, Gringotts

Two days later, Harry was still brooding over Ginny's careless remark despite himself. Sure, she'd apologized properly later that night, and he'd told her it didn't matter and had already forgotten about it... but it did, and he hadn't, not really. He'd never expected to become so invested in rather ancient wizarding traditions that not many families still observed fully, but when Andromeda had told him she planned to teach Teddy as soon as he was old enough, he'd agreed readily. After all, it was part of the boy's heritage and a way for Harry himself to learn what he'd most likely would've been taught by his father and godfather.

With the ease of long practice, he suppressed the slight pang thinking of Sirius still caused him even after nearly two decades. He'd had his fill of Purebloods right after the War, and had embraced the rather casual approach the Weasleys took, but as the trauma slowly receded and he matured, Harry had become interested in the traditions Andromeda observed. He'd learned to value them over time and discovered that some of the spirituality actually enriched his own life.

It wasn't like joining a specific religion, not the way he understood it, but there was *something* about the special magic and being connected to the land that spoke to Harry. It went beyond his oaths to serve and protect the wizarding world he'd sworn as an Auror; it was also more than the civic duty he owed the state of Great Britain and the Crown as a whole. Harry couldn't define it, but despite the Dursleys' attempts to crush any kind of belief in the supernatural or spiritual out of him, he accepted that there just might be forces at work in the world and even the universe that could and should be honoured throughout one's life ... if only to give thanks for gifts one had received in life.

*Besides, the rituals and traditions are wholly benign. There's nothing to be afraid of, or unnatural about them. Not like the crimes against nature Riddle committed that were solely for his own benefit.*

Even Hermione, determined part-agnostic though she was, had come around to his point of view eventually, and was seriously considering starting a campaign to introduce a Wizarding Customs class at Hogwarts, to be made as compulsory as Muggle Studies were nowadays.

Of the four major feasts, Harry enjoyed Beltane the most, with its connotations of rebirth and renewal even more so, in a way, than Yule. How could he *not*, after seeing his family's spirits when he'd walked to his death in the Forbidden Forest, and afterwards having Dumbledore's ghost, or whatever it was, send him back from that eerily-white King's Cross station to live on ... and win? It was in no small part because of those encounters that he'd been able to do away with Voldemort for good fifteen years ago – only a day after the holiday!

He'd also realised that he liked Samhain the least. It was the time his parents had been killed, after all, and while he was all for honouring one's beloved dead, he'd seen enough funerals to last him several lifetimes. So, small wonder, really.

*Stop being maudlin*, he admonished himself. *It's only two days until Beltane, and you have ladies to meet.* He couldn't help smiling as he walked up the steps to Gringotts' front entrance. The goblin guards scowled at him, but he only inclined his head politely in passing. It had taken some effort to get back into the goblins' good graces after the War, but time and sharing the secret of *what* exactly he'd removed from the LeStrange vault with Ragnok, Chief of the Horde had eventually smoothed things over so that Auror Potter was once more a valued customer. *Not that owning two of the oldest, and well-filled, vaults in the bank has anything to do with it, nooo.*

Harry hid his cynicism behind a cheerful smile as he greeted both Andromeda and Narcissa in the marble entrance hall. The Sisters Black had become a formidable force in society in recent years, and Harry was well aware that one crossed them at one's own peril. In truth, he quite liked both of them if for different reasons. Andromeda surprisingly had become a second mother figure to him, always ready with well-reasoned advice if he asked for it. Harry honestly appreciated Molly's generosity and effusive affection, but sometimes couldn't shake the feeling that she still saw Ginny as her baby girl and him as the scrawny eleven-year-old she'd first met at King's Cross Station all those years ago. He wouldn't want to miss Molly's unstinting love for the world, but sometimes he couldn't help wishing she'd remember that Ginny and he were in their thirties, seasoned professionals and had three children of their own.

Andromeda, on the other hand, had met him when he was already of age, been heavily involved in fighting a war, and afterwards was sharing the upbringing of her grandson. To her, he was an adult, and got treated as such. Harry found it quite a refreshing contrast.

As for Narcissa ... well. He'd spoken out on her behalf at the Death Eater trials and achieved a suspended sentence for her. Furthermore, due to his testimony Draco had been sentenced to just a year's prison term and another three under house arrest. Only Lucius was still in Azkaban and would remain there for five more years. What had begun as a civil exchange of thank-you notes in the aftermath of the trials had slowly evolved into a surprisingly cordial association with the Malfoy family.

He and Draco might never exactly be friends, but their sons were ... and Narcissa was still helping him navigate safely through wizarding society. His smile widened as he noticed the unobtrusive once-over she gave him as they shook hands. It had taken a lot of effort and subtle guidance on her part, but it had finally penetrated his thick skull that proper manners and a neat, dapper appearance wasn't something to haul out just for official functions, weddings and funerals. Regardless of Lucius' politics, Narcissa *had* moved in the top circles, and the lessons she'd taught him since the War were still standing him in good stead now that he was yea-close to becoming the youngest Head Auror in living memory.

"Shall we go, ladies? I'm afraid my time is rather more limited than I'd hoped," he said after exchanging pleasantries with both women, politely ushering them towards the carts. They'd come to Gringotts to check the Potter and Black vaults for items to use in the Beltane ritual. Narcissa already had promised to bring flowers from the Manor's gardens. Andromeda was providing the athame she and Ted Tonks had bought when they'd first married, and Molly had volunteered to make the May wine. The Potters' was a young household, after all, and it was perfectly acceptable to supplement heirlooms they might find today with loans from friends and family. But Harry still hoped his

parents and Sirius might have left him things that would suit.

"..."

In the Potter vault, Harry went directly to a rosewood box he'd discovered on a preliminary foray. From it, he carefully unpacked a pale-green tablecloth made from finest Irish linen, edged all around by three inches of Chantilly lace and showing a simple cross-stitch pattern of yellow and white daffodils. "I found this among my parents' effects," he said, "and thought it would work for the altar. What do you think?"

Narcissa inspected the cloth. "This is rather lovely," she murmured. "Somewhat simplistic, but a fine fabric and very nice craftsmanship."

"My grandmother Evans made it," Harry explained quietly. "She used to keep a journal ... The fabric comes from *her* grandmother's trousseau, the lace edging is from her mother's wedding veil, and she herself did the embroidery when she was pregnant with my mum. She was sick a lot of the time and needed something to keep her busy. She wrote that she always put it out for family gatherings at Easter."

"So it has family history, the colours are right, and while the flower motif is a bit of a stretch, season-wise, it's still appropriate for spring. It'll do," Narcissa declared.

"So will this," Andromeda said, coming over with a large, heavy-looking vase she'd retrieved from a glass-fronted cabinet in one corner. It was made from a milky yellow material and was decorated with a relief of near-nude women. "Some good crystal here, and it's a wonderful colour."

"It's also somewhat risqué," Narcissa commented. "Really, Andi dancing nymphs in a state of near-undress? There'll be children present!"

"Oh, pish. They've likely seen their mothers wearing as little or less on the beach; technically, they're bacchantes, not nymphs, and what could be more fitting for a Beltane fertility symbol?"

"Maybe, but still ..." Narcissa frowned, turning the vase this way and that.

"You've turned into a prude, Cissy."

"Better than corrupt innocent minds!"

Harry decided to intervene before the sisters could seriously get into one of their frequent arguments where Andromeda's more liberal views clashed with Narcissa's Pureblood notions of propriety.

"The vase belonged to my mum's other grandmother," he said. "It was one of her wedding presents back in the 1930s and was handcrafted by a famous French designer. Hermione looked it up and told me it's quite valuable nowadays."

Narcissa paused in her tirade and lifted an eyebrow. "Really?"

"Uh huh," he nodded. "I gather that they're still being manufactured and are rather expensive even when new, but an original, and in this particular colour ... I think she mentioned the value's at least in the four figure-range. Galleons, too, not just pounds." Harry hid a smile when the polite look she'd given him so far turned calculating. He'd had a feeling that bit of information would impress Narcissa. Carefully avoiding Andromeda's dancing eyes, he added ingeniously, "Besides, I doubt the kids will look at the vase closely anyway. Well, Teddy might if he were coming, but he's fifteen already, so ..."

"I don't want to know what my grandson may or may not be familiar with in regards to semi-nude females," Andromeda said primly, blithely ignoring her sister's muttered "Hypocrite!". Her lips were twitching, though. "We'll take it."

And that was pretty much *that*.

Harry bit back a grin of his own. "Right. Shall we go on then?"

They packed up both items and stepped back out into the drafty tunnel. The goblin steering the cart quickly transported them even deeper until they reached the Black vault, number 711. Once inside, Harry stood back and let the two women search through the treasure trove of heirlooms.

"I seem to remember something ..." Andromeda mused after a while, closing a domed iron-banded trunk with a loud 'snap' after a cursory glance-through. "Cissy, help me look for a small oak chest with brass fittings. You should remember which one I'm thinking of - grandfather Arcturus always kept it on the mantelpiece in his study."

Narcissa looked up from her own inventorying. "Hmm - about the size of a lap desk, with ebony inlays?"

"That's the one." The two started to rummage through the items in the vault's far-right corner.

"I think I've found it," Narcissa said at last. "Is this the chest you mean?"

"It looks to be the right size and age, anyway. Harry, some help lifting, please?"

"Sure."

As the retrieval of Hufflepuff's Cup had taught Harry, they couldn't use their wands to Summon things in a high-security Pureblood vault, so he had to shift chests and books by hand until he could physically pick up the small box and carried it to an old trunk close to a sputtering torch. The wood was old and weathered, the metal bindings dull with age, but it was not terribly heavy, and the sliding lock opened with very little effort. Inside, on a bed of faded velvet, lay a chunky golden chalice.

The three of them bent over the open chest to take a closer look. The cup was maybe ten inches high altogether and stood on a short, stocky base. The bowl was roughly tulip-shaped, had uncommonly thick walls compared to its overall weight, and the only adornment were some vaguely floral etchings on the inside and a narrow band of faded script around the rim that seemed to have been inlaid with now-tarnished silver.

"I don't know," Narcissa said dubiously. "It's certainly an antique, but looks rather crude; I find it not very attractive, to be honest."

Privately, Harry had to agree

"Fourteenth-century work, if I'm not mistaken. Aunt Walburga locked it up here as soon as she could," Andromeda murmured. "I don't know what it is about this chalice, but ..." She held her wand hand above it, careful not to touch, and let out a little surprised gasp. "Oh!"

"Careful, Andi!" Narcissa exclaimed, but when she saw that her sister wasn't being hexed or worse, she, too, let her hand hover over the chalice. "Merlin," she whispered. "There's some very powerful magic in this!"

Curious, Harry stretched out his own hand. As far as he was concerned, anything that Walburga Black had rejected almost *had* to be something positive, but he'd learned the hard way to be wary of magical artefacts. Memories of wearing Slytherin's locket still had the power to make him break out in a cold sweat. He let his senses and magic flow towards the vessel and almost immediately felt a wash of ... Well, *goodness* was the only way he could describe it ... seep into his body.

"Yeah," he breathed. "But I'd bet my Invisibility Cloak that whatever magic's in here won't harm us."

"Oh, definitely not," Andromeda said. "Cissy?"

"Indeed," Narcissa agreed after a few seconds before she reluctantly stepped back. "Shall we take it, then?"

"By all means!"

"Please."

Harry gently closed the wooden box again and tucked it under his arm. The vase had been wrapped into the tablecloth and put into a padded satchel for safe transport, and he held all three items carefully on his lap as they rode the cart back to the surface.

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**A/N:** A picture of the 'Bacchantes' vase Harry found in the Potter vault can be seen [here](#). It's vintage Art Déco, was made by René Lalique, and the median value of a signed 1932 original is \$15,000/£10,000 ... which, estimating a rough conversion of £5 to a Galleon, equals 2,000 Galleons. Expensive, indeed!

*Bacchantes are priestesses of the God Bacchus*

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## Two

### Chapter 3 of 6

#### Deciphering the Prophecy

### Chapter 2

6 January, 1347

#### Windsor Castle

King Edward III of England and his Court were merrily celebrating the Feast of Epiphany. With the help of some subtly-applied spells, Bartholomew Selwyn and Aurelius Flint had contrived that one of Queen Philippa's chambermaids and the senior groom of the King's stables were named Lord and Lady of Misrule on this day. Thus it was ensured that the royal couple would stay in the castle's Great Hall for quite some time. Word had been passed to the King that the wizards of the realm desired a meeting with him and as many of the Court's knights that could be spared from the revelries. They'd all be at Windsor until Twelfth Night, but tonight had turned out to be convenient for most, so ... Here they were, gathered in one of the castle's smaller libraries, well away from the festivities.

This meeting was, by necessity, quite clandestine; while witches and wizards often mingled with the Muggle world, the ever-growing influence of the Church made it increasingly problematic for the King to openly associate with his magical subjects. Only his heir and most trusted courtiers even knew about the ties some of the most prominent families had to wizards - hence, Edward of Woodstock, the Prince of Wales, was acting in the monarch's stead. Accompanying him were the Baron of Stafford, two Squib Knights of the Garter - and a Dominican priest who'd tagged along uninvited to guard His Highness the Prince's immortal soul!

"What's afoot, Sire?" John de Grey, Baron of Rotherfield, asked jovially as soon as some footmen had finished providing flagons of ale and wine as well as platters of sweetmeats, nuts and fruit. They then closed the heavy doors and left the small group of nobles and wizards amongst themselves. "What's so important we had to leave before the mummeries and dances were done with?"

"I know not, John," Prince Edward replied, with a half-playful scowl at the four richly-robed wizards standing in one corner of the room. He was barely grown into manhood, but still had a presence about him that easily dominated all eight men in the room. "My father's seneschal informed me that *Dominus* Prewett and his deputy, *Magister* Wulfric, have asked for this assembly."

"Wulfric?" De Grey asked curiously, turning towards the wizards. "I don't think we've met?"

"Not until today, my lord," a tall man with long greying hair and beard introduced himself, blue eyes twinkling. "Wulfric Dumbledore, at your service. I have the honour of teaching the art of Transfiguration at Hogwarts."

"That school for your kind?" Walter Paveley, one of the Garter Knights, inquired. Like de Grey, he was not magical himself, but as both a Squib and kin by marriage to the Peverel family he was better acquainted with wizards than most. "Isn't that up in Scotland?"

"It is indeed, my lord. Wizards and witches from all over the realm are being educated there. It has been so since the days of King Alfred."

"How, by all the saints, do you manage that, I'd like to know," the cleric wearing the cassock of the Black Friars muttered. "Those woad-stained savages won't even give their neighbours the time of day half the time, and yet your folk can send *children* up there each year without bloodshed? How?"

"We teach everybody who is magical in Albion, my lord," *Dominus* Prewett said softly, yet firmly. "English, Scottish, Welsh - even Irish, it matters not to us. We're all the same in the eyes of Magic."

*Magister* Dumbledore smiled, and the twinkle in his eyes intensified. "Although we must admit, ever since hostilities ceased these ten years hence it has become vastly more easy to travel back and forth."

The priest sneered and seemed about to make a scathing remark, but a look and headshake from Prince Edward made him back down. Instead, he turned towards the refreshments, filling a goblet and gulping the wine down with a scowl.

"Who is that fellow, and what's he doing here?" murmured Paveley to his fellow Garter knight. De Grey grimaced.

"He's one of the Dominicans from Oxford," he replied *sotto voce*. "Name's Gaston de Nogaret and he accidentally overheard LeStrange passing our message to the King, so he invited himself along. Unfortunately he's just high-ranking enough that we can't kick him out without reason."

Paveley frowned. "De Nogaret? Any relation to ...?"

"Guillaume? Yes. Don't know the degree, but I've heard him brag more than once how his relative was instrumental in bringing down the Knights Templar in '14. Nasty business, that. What's worse, he seems to feel a need to follow in Guillaume's footsteps, seeing heresy in every corner."

"Heresy? It's been a century since the crusade against the Cathars, and after the Templars, even the Beguines were disbanded by the Church decades ago. What other heretics except the occasional malcontent are left?"

John de Grey didn't answer, but sent a telling glance towards the group of wizards in the room. He knew, as did Paveley and the rest of the Prince's trusted men, that Prewett, Dumbledore and their fellows were as law-abiding and as trustworthy as any non-magical, but to people like this Friar Gaston ... if men like him got their way, they'd probably even accuse *him* of heresy, despite the fact that his magic-less family routinely swapped any magical children to the magical branch, the House of Mavros, merchant princes of Candia.

Walter Paveley saw the look and interpreted it correctly. He rolled his own eyes. "What a cretin," he muttered. "I trust my Peverel connexions as much as, if not more than, members of my own family. An upstart like that should never be allowed to –"

"Gentlemen, may I remind you that we're not here to discuss politics?" Prince Edward interrupted firmly. "I believe it's because *Dominus* Prewett has important information for *all* of us." The two knights bowed in silent apology, and the Prince turned once more towards the elderly scholar. "To business, then Jacobus, *why* have you called this assembly?"

The Headmaster of Hogwarts squared his shoulders and stepped forward, easily drawing all eyes towards him. "As you rightly assume, Sire, it's a matter of portent for all people of this blessed isle," he said, his voice lowering unhappily. "You see, a prophecy has been made."

"A prophecy? Surely you don't mean the gibberish that chit from Hufflepuff House spewed forth three years ago?" All eyes turned towards the new speaker, one Nicholas Malfoy. He was a relative newcomer to the Court, having risen fast among the King's advisors. The Malfoys had come to Britain with the Conqueror in 1066, but retained a closer connection with their French roots than most. Malicious tongues claimed that the current head of the family openly supported King Edward's claim to the French throne only because their holdings on the river Loire had been ravaged in the war the House of Plantagenet was waging with the House of Valois. There certainly was some truth to that, but Malfoy was a wizard, a rich merchant and consummate politician. He had also lost both his sons in the King's service but recently and therefore was allowed some latitude.

"Indeed I do, Nicholas," Prewett said. "It has taken us until now to decipher it, but there can be no doubt it *is* a genuine prophecy."

"What was so complicated about it, I wonder?" De Grey asked. "Apart from the customary cryptic-ness, so to speak?"

Dumbledore coughed. "'Twould've been easier if the lass had at least spoken plain English or French, but no whatever spirit possessed her felt it necessary to impart the message in Cornish. If it hadn't been for Weasley, here, we'd still be in the dark."

The redheaded man in question smiled. "It was a stroke of luck that one of my retainers recognized it at all. His wife is Cornish, you see, one of the few who still speaks the language. Even so, if it hadn't been for one of the good brethren at Glastonbury Abbey ..." Perceval Weasley stopped short as he noticed the Black Prince raising a regal hand to halt his words.

"Forgive me, Sire. It's a fascinating piece of scholarly endeavor, and I'm afraid I tend to get carried away by the mystery of it all." He shrugged deprecatingly, then drew a deep breath. "In short, the lass spoke the prophecy in her native Cornish, but complicated the matter by applying the grammatical rules of Arabic."

"What? Why?" one of the knights wondered.

"That, we know not. It is only due to Friar Lucas' knowledge of both languages that we managed to unlock the message at all."

"Well, let's hear it, then," commanded the Prince impatiently.

*Dominus* Prewett sighed and withdrew a small roll of parchment from his sleeve. Knights and wizards gathered closely around him to listen as he read out the formal record.

"On Sunday, the twentieth day of March in the year of Our Lord 1345, the maiden Meliora Warne of Trewortha, near Bodmin Moor in Cornwall, made the following prophecy in the hours between midnight and dawn at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry:

'A great evil will rise in the east. It will not pass until the moon darkens after the summer solstice four turns hence, and it will kill wizard and Muggle alike with no distinction. Four times four moons before that, two knights shall quest to the place where four waters become one to seek out the stern master who is lost to Albion, he who dwells in a threefold house. One knight will be a leader of armies, the other bear the sign of the dragon, and they must leave once the spring equinox has passed. They must first seek the warrior knights' treasure where eleven-score of innocents were slain, then carry it to the master. When truce of fast prevails, star and messenger will join them at the master's house and help with ancient lore. Dragon and warrior must then bring the treasure to Ynis Afallach where they shall bear it through the maze to the Tor's peak on Beltane night, to anoint the land with what was made by master's craft, messenger's skill and star's guidance.'

There were a few minutes of silence as the assembled men tried to parse what they'd heard. At last, Paveley blurted out what the others were clearly thinking. "What in Saint George's name does that mean?"

*Magister* Dumbledore spread his hands in an 'I-don't-know' gesture and shrugged apologetically. "We cannot be sure. Some of it we've been able to decipher this great evil may well be a plague of sorts. Reports we've received just a few days ago from our, erm, associates in Bulgaria and Constantinople seem to point in that direction, and a plague *would* strike indiscriminately." There were grim nods all around. "The time is also rather clear; the prophecy was made three turns that is, years ago, so this quest for a preventative, or at best a cure, must start right after the equinox in late March and be finished by Beltane next year."

Prince Edward steepled his fingers against his lips, thinking it over. "That seems ... logical," he mused. "Very well. What else?"

John de Grey had picked up the prophecy transcript and was reading through it again. "A 'quest' ... two knights must go *somewhere*. 'Where four waters become one' ... what place might that be? A lake, or the sea?"

Headmaster Prewett casually summoned a large map showing the European mainland from one of the cabinets and unrolled it on a table, adding a light Sticking Charm to keep it open. He didn't notice, or else chose to ignore, the priest's grimace at the minor display of magic. "We've looked at dozens of maps, and the consensus among us is that the prophecy most likely refers to the city of Granada," he explained, pointing at the relevant area of the Iberian peninsula. "Four rivers conjoin there before they reach the sea."

"Which might fit our purpose," Weasley exclaimed. "Doesn't it?"

After perusing Prewett's map, most present nodded.

*Magister* Dumbledore's blue eyes began to twinkle. "Now that I think of it, there's something else that speaks for Granada," he said. "One of my correspondents, Omar Shafiq, mentioned a few months ago that one Abbas al-Bedali is teaching Alchemy and Healing at the city's *madrassa*. That is a kind of religious university," he explained for his less-scholarly company's benefit.

"And that concerns us how?" Paveley asked.

"Well ... if my suspicions are correct, some of us might know him under a different name. Or names, rather."

"Stop being cryptic, Wulfric," the Headmaster said with a rare show of irritability. "If you know the man's identity, just tell us!"

Dumbledore gave a slight bow and smiled. "As you wish. However, I need to be rather specific about his background – if I may?" He received an impatient signal to proceed. "The surname al-Bedali in Arabic means 'from Bedale'," he began.

"Bedale? As in *our* Bedale, up in Yorkshire?" Prince Edward interrupted incredulously.

"I believe so, Sire," Dumbledore said.

"Lost to Albion! That's what this part means," John de Grey exclaimed.

Dumbledore inclined his head in assent. "Indeed. Also, Abbas is an Arabic name meaning 'austere', 'stern' ... or even 'severe'," he continued with a sly wink at Weasley, who began to sputter almost immediately.

"Severe? Wulfric, are you telling us that this ... this Abbas al-Bedali might be Severus apElain? That Potions prodigy from ... Yorkshire ..." His voice shifted from incredulity into awed realization. "Oh my."

"He certainly seems to fit the bill, no?"

"Why would a Welshman first move to Yorkshire, then to Andalucia, though?" de Grey wondered.

"He wasn't born Welsh, *nor* was his name always apElain," Paveley grumbled. "On the contrary, his father was one Tobias Sneap, a shipwright from Rye. He was caught poaching deer on our lands several times, and was ultimately hanged as a repeat offender. If I remember correctly, the mother, Eliana, then packed up and moved back north to stay with her remaining family."

"Eliana Ha-Nasi, as she called herself before her marriage, was an accomplished witch," Prewett recalled. "She must've passed on her talent to her son."

"He certainly didn't get it from his father; Sneap was as ordinary as they come," Paveley commented.

"The mother's name seems to indicate she was a Jewess," the Prince of Wales said with a frown. As if being a witch wasn't suspect enough these days!

"Not quite; the family had converted during the unpleasantness at York fifty years ago," Dumbledore reassured him. "While I know not how he came to live in Andalucia, I surmise that it is a certain familiarity with this background which allows Severus, as Abbas, to teach at a Moorish institution. The Emirs of Granada are surprisingly tolerant towards both Christians and Jews because they're all what they call 'Children of the Book'. Strangely, though, only Jews are allowed to attend their schools; I do not know why that is. Thus it might be easy for Abbas/Severus to pass as Jewish due to his family history, even if he did not presume to adopt the name his mother chose. Ha-Nasi means 'the prince', after all."

"It also makes sense out of the 'threefold house' part," Prince Edward said slowly. "A Christian living among Moors, pretending to be a Jew ..."

"By Saint George, it's all coming together," Paveley breathed.

"Yes. And Ynis Afallach is, of course, Avalon which is reputed to be near Glastonbury Tor," Headmaster Prewett concluded.

More nods of assent from everybody. "Fine. That's when and where sorted. Which leaves us with ... who and what?" asked the Prince.

The third courtier, who'd remained silent until now, spoke up. "Finding two knights should be easy enough we just have to determine whose arms depict a dragon and for the second, select a likely officer in His Majesty's service."

"My dear Stafford, I could name at least a dozen men offhand who'd fit either of those criteria, if not both," Paveley said dryly. "Somehow, I don't think it'll be easy at all."

Baron Stafford glared at the rather mild rebuke, but chose to take a drink rather than reply.

"I've been thinking about that," Weasley murmured at length. "What if ... what if this part doesn't refer to the knights' arms, but to their names?"

"Names? Hmmm ..." De Grey's face slowly brightened. "Tell me doesn't 'Harold' mean 'leader of armies' in the Saxon tongue?"

"Yes," Paveley said, nodding in agreement. "And there aren't many knights with that name. In fact, I can think of only one."

"You can?"

The Garter Knight gave a brief bow to the Prince. "My cousin Lionel's grandson, Sire. If you'll recall, His Majesty gave him the accolade two years ago at Yule court." Actually, his relation to Lionel Peverel was more distant and complicated and spanned more than one generation, but Paveley was opting for simplicity over accuracy.

"What, Lionel le Potier?" scoffed Ralph de Stafford. His expression showed that he didn't think much of this man.

"I wish you wouldn't call him that, my lord," Paveley retorted stiffly. "Lionel is hardly a potter."

"He trades in pottery, doesn't he? And even tries to make some? So he may as well claim the name," the baron sneered.

"He's just jealous that the Peverels' trade relations with the Moors, the Venetians and China is creating Lionel a fortune," Malfoy murmured snidely in an aside to Weasley. "The good Baron is trying to duplicate his success with the cobblers on his estates, but they just can't compete. 'Tis nothing but sour grapes, I tell you."

Weasley manfully swallowed a comment that Malfoy was only so dismissive of the Muggle nobleman because he hadn't been awarded a title himself yet and gave only a noncommittal grunt in reply. Whose grapes were the sourest, he couldn't tell.

Meanwhile, the discussion had gone on. "Sir Harold is well-named," Dumbledore explained. "I've taught him at Hogwarts. He is brave, intelligent and resourceful, yet can be quite cunning if need be. If he weren't hampered by weak eyesight, he'd be a formidable asset to any man King or wizard. As he has so ably demonstrated on the campaign that earned him the accolade."

"Yes, I remember now. Let us assume he's one of the two, then," Prince Edward decided. "We do not have the time to search far and wide. March, and the spring equinox, will come sooner than we wish, and he seems capable enough. Does anyone know who might be the other?"

"If your assumption is correct, it'd be somebody named 'dragon'?" Stafford sneered, his expression openly disdainful. "Of all the ridiculous things! Surely that can't be a proper name only a fool would saddle his son with such!"

"Mayhap my younger brother was foolish, then," Malfoy said coldly. "His only son now my heir was indeed given the name Draco, after the constellation. It has long been a custom in his wife's family and he was pleased to do her the favour." He gave a small bow to John de Grey, who nodded back. Ever since a de Grey ancestor had found Maia Mavros on the island of Candia and made her his bride despite her being a witch, all magical children born to the family were adopted into the Mavros clan and followed the same tradition. In return, the rare Mavros Squib became a de Grey. The younger Malfoy was thus distantly related to them by marriage.



Before Stafford could retaliate, Headmaster Prewett intervened in the brewing argument.

"Splendid. I had the pleasure of teaching young Draco as well, and know that in his own way he's as accomplished as Harold Peverel; let's hope they'll do well together on this quest."

"But the Malfoys are merchants! He's not a knight," Stafford protested.

"That's easily remedied with a word to my father, the King," Prince Edward said quellingly, settling the argument there and then lest Nicholas Malfoy take even bigger umbrage at the deliberate snub.

The baron bowed and subsided, grumbling to himself about unwarranted privileges for the sake of expediency. He contented himself with a sideways glance at the cleric who just shrugged minutely. Each, for his own reasons, mightily disliked the favours shown to the wizards tonight and in general, but they could do nothing against the will of their Prince and liege. For now.

Prewett smiled, seemingly oblivious to the brewing undercurrents. "So, we now must instruct the lads on what they have to do, determine how they shall get to Granada safely, and decide how to convince Master Abbas to help us!"

With everybody in at least nominal agreement, wizards and courtiers put their heads together and discussed stratagems late into the night.

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*A/N: The wizarding surnames were taken from JKR's list of the "Sacred Twenty-Eight Families" (see HP wikia). Nicholas Malfoy, who (according to Pottermore) profited during the Black Death in Britain, conveniently fits my time period. All the courtiers' names are real and come from the founding Knights of the Order of the Garter obviously, any wizarding relations are my invention, as is the connection between Peverel(l) and Paveley.*

*Dominican monks, known as Black Friars because of the colour of their habits, were the main driving force of the Inquisition.*

*Guillaume de Nogaret was real, and instrumental in building the heresy case that led to the downfall of the Knights Templar.*

*Meliora Warne is in fact a (made-up) Cornish name (A hint: JKR once stated a fondness for them.)*

*Maia is a star in the Pleiades constellation, and Mavros is a real Greek word the meaning of which should become obvious later.*

*Candia is the old name for the Greek island of Crete.*

*Eliana is a female Hebrew name; the Welsh version Elian means "fawn" and apElian is thus "Son of (the) Fawn". 'Ha-Nasi' is also Hebrew used as both a (self-styled) title, meaning 'the prince', and as a surname. (See what I did there?) It was created with the help of the good folks at the LJ community Linguaphiles. Thanks, guys!*

*As for Sneap ... According to Merriam-Webster.com, the word means "to blast; blight with cold" (archaic), or alternatively, is English dialect for "to chide". Sound familiar, anyone?*

*The "unpleasantness in York" refers to the final expulsion of all Jews from that city in 1290; it was preceded by wholesale massacres and forced conversions to Christianity a century before.*

*Oh, and King Edward III was actually born at Windsor Castle, and it was one of his favourite residences; he usually held Christmas Court there.*

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## Three

Chapter 4 of 6

At the Potters' Beltane Celebration

### Chapter 3

1 May, 2014

#### *The Potters' house, Godric's Hollow*

Beltane morning dawned bright and clear, and soon after mid-morning, the guests started to arrive. Despite her reluctance, Ginny had cleverly utilized a few Muggle shortcuts and thus quite outdone herself with preparing everything. There was a buffet table set up on the paved terrace at the back of the house, convenient to the kitchen and easily accessed from the area Harry had prepared for the celebration. The caterers had thankfully been on time and everything looked as close to perfect as could be expected, with white linen on the conjured tables, and dishes and cutlery laid out close to the platters, serving bowls and chafing dishes. Housewife and cook *extraordinaire* Molly Weasley might scoff at the store-bought nibbles, but she had to admit that as a working mother Ginny simply didn't have the time to cook for such a large group of people from scratch – not even with magic to help her.

Arthur's delight at getting to sample Muggle delicacies was infectious.

"Have you tried these stuffed pastries, Mollywobblers? They're delicious!" He bit with relish into his third crispy triangle and nearly choked when he started to chew. "Spicy, though," he wheezed.

"They're called samosas, Arthur." Hermione handed him a glass of water and winked at her sister-in-law. "It's a type of snack from India, often eaten as appetizers. Here, try dipping them into the minted yogurt, or one of the chutneys it'll take some of the heat away." She fondly directed her father-in-law to an array of bowls.

"Mmm." He spooned some condiments onto his plate, dipped and took another, more careful bite. "Oh, that's wonderful!"

Looking skeptical, Molly chose a skewered bright-red prawn and swirled it through a dollop of yogurt. Her eyes widened as the spices exploded on her tongue. "Why, that ... that's ..."

"Great, yeah?" Ron grinned as he refilled his own plate with deep-fried curried cauliflower florets and a generous helping of mango chutney. "I even like the veg!"

Harry turned away from the ensuing good-natured debate when he heard the soft 'pops' of Apparition near the fence and the exuberant yells from Albus and Rose, already rushing forward to greet their best buddy, Scorpius Malfoy, who had arrived with his grandmother and the rest of the Malfoy family.

*Well, at least most of them.* Somewhat to his surprise, Draco's wife was missing. He accepted their polite excuses and ushered the three adults towards the refreshments while the children dragged their blond friend off towards the other kids.

"...""...""..."

Some time later, Al and Rose managed to spirit Scorpius into a corner of the garden, away from the group. They huddled behind some raspberry bushes, just hidden enough to be unobserved but not so much to make an adult suspicious. There, they finally got to ask their friend what they'd been dying to know ever since Aunt Andi and the Malfoys had arrived.

"Where's your Mum, Scorp?" Albus asked point-blank.

"Al! Don't be rude!" Rose gasped.

He ignored his cousin's indignant exclamation. "As if you don't want to know," he muttered, looking down to hide the blush he couldn't help. Rose was right, of course, but he also knew his best friend. Left to his own devices, Scorp would take ages to spill the beans, and with so many people close by, they simply didn't have the time to beat around the bush. "Scorp? Can you tell?"

Scorpius grimaced a little usually, Al wasn't quite that blunt, at least not with him but he really needed to speak to *someone*. Who better than his best friends? Sooner or later, he'd tell them anyway. He sighed.

"She stayed at home," he said quietly. "To pack."

"Pack?" Rosie wondered. "Why? Is she going somewhere?"

"Uh huh," Scorpius nodded, fighting down his reluctance.

"But where?" Al asked. "And why couldn't she wait until tomorrow?"

"I don't know," Scorpius murmured. "Father just said she's going away." He paused. "I ... I don't think she's coming back, though." Despite his best efforts to appear calm, like a proper Malfoy, his expression shifted into misery.

"What? Why?"

The blond boy shrugged. "Father didn't say. He often looks sad, though. Or angry. Sometimes both." He sounded as if a big lump had lodged in his throat.

"Have ... have they been yelling at each other a lot?" Rose asked hesitantly, with a growing suspicion where this might be going. Just after Christmas, one of the girls down in Ottery St Catchpole had told her and Hugo that something just like that had happened with *her* parents, too only it had been Natalie's dad who'd packed up the car and left. He hadn't yet come back, either.

"No." Scorpius swallowed hard. "Actually, they haven't said much to each other at all lately."

"Sometimes, that's worse." Al's voice sounded very small, and the glance he cast across the garden towards Ginny and Harry appeared rather unhappy. His cousin and friend saw and exchanged worried looks, but were unsure of what to say. "I think maybe the yelling's better."

*Wait, both of them? Oh, this is bad.*

Turning pale under her freckles, Rose hugged Al with one arm and slid her free hand into Scorpius', trying to comfort both as best she could. Unusually, neither boy objected to her touch. "It doesn't *have* to mean anything, though right?" she whispered, for once at a loss for words. She definitely was Hermione's daughter too intelligent not to draw the obvious conclusions, but that didn't mean she *wanted* to be right. Not now and not about something like this.

If Scorpius' parents were really splitting up like Natalie's, that'd be bad enough, but ... Uncle Harry and Aunt Ginny, too? Impossible! If only she could run to her mum and ask for an explanation! But she knew the boys would hate her if she did, so she resolved to wait and give what comfort she could in the strained silence settling between them. Luckily for her, it was at that moment that Al's younger sister Lily burst into their hideout.

"Al, Al Aunt Luna brought chocolate muffins! With buttercream icing and sprinkles! If you want some, come now, before Jamie and the cousins eat them all," the little girl cried excitedly.

When one is only eight years old, sweet treats can ease a lot of worries. Even ones about mothers who pack bags, fathers who are sad when nobody's looking, and parents who either yell or don't speak.

"Yes, let's," Al said, glad for an excuse to escape his thoughts. "Coming, Scorp?"

"Sure."

"Then come on," Rose said simply. Hand in hand, the children ran off.

"...""...""..."

The day passed; while the weather had turned drizzly around midafternoon, a few discreet charms over the part of the garden that couldn't be seen into by casual passersby ensured that the party remained pleasant and comfortable.

Most of the food had been consumed, drinks had been had by all, and now it was time for the 'real' Beltane celebration to begin. Ginny organized the general tidying-up and storing of leftovers, Harry oversaw the rearranging of seating, and the three matriarchs turned their attention towards the needed paraphernalia. The tablecloth embroidered by Harry's grandmother Evans was draped onto a large, solid-oak table under some early-blooming apple trees, Narcissa deftly arranged a bouquet of spring flowers from the Manor gardens into the yellow-crystal vase, Molly carried over a basket of the bread Ginny had baked and filled an elegant silver-lidded crystal jug with her May wine. Lastly, Andromeda unwrapped the freshly-polished chalice they'd retrieved from the Black vault and placed it in the center of the table-turned-altar, right next to her own silver athame. Together, they lit a few lampions hanging in the trees' branches and then consecrated the area.

All preparations complete, adults and children gathered and sat in a half-circle of conjured seats while Molly and Arthur stepped forward. As the oldest present, they invoked the traditional blessings. Next the Sisters Black distributed sunflower seeds and pieces of bread to everyone and poured each person a glass of the wine, substituting peach nectar for the children. Ginny and Harry as hosts then recited the ritual words they'd chosen beforehand and filled the ancient chalice with clear water, half from their wands and half collected at dawn from a small spring at the edge of Godric's Hollow. As the sun began to set slowly behind the trees, Harry hesitated briefly,



Sir Harold Peverel and Sir Draco Malfoy as the Prince of Wales had promised, Nicholas' nephew had been given the accolade as reward for his participation as well as to fulfill the parameters of the Prophecy to the letter, just in case it should matter met at the Sleeping Dragon Inn in Plymouth shortly after St Andrews Church had tolled Sext at midday. Within an hour, they were having their first fight.

"I refuse to travel in squalor," shouted Malfoy, slamming his tankard of ale so hard on the table that half the contents slopped over. He impatiently Vanished the spillage with a wave of his wand. "It is beneath my status I brought my escort for a reason!"

Peverel huffed and sat back down on the chair he'd abandoned earlier in his agitation. "I'd hardly call it squalor," he said, his clipped tones conveying his annoyance as well, if not better, than sheer volume ever would. "I'm just trying to tell you that a small group of travelers would be much less conspicuous than over a dozen men, armed to the teeth and going about with banners flying!"

"They would give us protection!"

"Why would we need that? For all that you're not a soldier, you are no slouch at defending yourself," Peverel countered. "Remember, I've seen what you can do at Hogwarts." He gave the other young man a *look*. "We're not a merchant caravan transporting valuable wares."

"No, just a tiny band of riders, if you have your way, venturing into strange and potentially hostile areas," Sir Draco muttered, refusing to be mollified by the earlier mild compliment on his prowess at Defense.

Peverel rolled his eyes. "In case you have forgotten, there's a war going on in many of the lands we have to travel, and while King Edward may also be Duke of Aquitaine and related to the House of Castile through his grandmother, this is not a guarantee that we, as Englishmen, won't be considered hostiles by large parts of the populace."

"I'm actually French," Malfoy grumbled sullenly, taking back his own seat.

"By ancestry maybe, but as your uncle swore fealty to the King and your father has been declared Heir ..."

Malfoy gave him a disgusted look since he couldn't very well refute the point. "Trust you to be *logical* about it," he grumped. "Like some bloody Ravenclaw!"

It took an enormous amount of self-control for Peverel not to burst out laughing. He just stared until the other looked away first.

"Oh, very well," Malfoy conceded grudgingly. "I'll send them back."

Harold knew when to be gracious. "I'm not saying you must be completely without company," he said, much calmer now. "I'll be taking my squire and a groom myself how about you choose two of your men for an escort as well? That'd bring our number to six a group small enough not to draw undue attention, yet safe enough to prevent random attacks."

Malfoy clearly didn't like it, but knew that between the two of them, the soldierly Peverel had more experience than him, a merchant if a very successful one. He was quite aware that what was suitable for a commercial endeavor didn't necessarily mean it'd be the same on the kind of journey they were about to undertake.

"Oh, do what you will; much as it pains me to admit, you're the expert here," he gave in at last, if with ill grace.

Peverel grinned and refilled both their tankards without prompting. "That must've hurt," he said with a wink. "Just because I beat you a few times at *Creaothceann* and *Shuntbumps* while we were at school ..."

"It was nearly all the bloody time, and you know it," Malfoy replied with much less heat than before. They'd attended Hogwarts together half a decade ago, but had never been part of each other's circle of friends: One Saxon, half-blood, good at practical magic like Charms and Transfiguration, Gryffindor and from a family long entrenched in Christianity; the other of Norman descent, pure-blood, excelling at Potions and Arithmancy, Slytherin, his family still not-so-secretly following the Old Religion ... they hadn't *hated* each other, just didn't have a lot in common. Well, except for their mutual love of broomstick sports, which had led to a fierce rivalry on the playing field. "How you ever managed to walk, much less sit after the hours you spent on a besom ..."

"Practice and good extra-strength padding, sewn into my breeches," Sir Harold confessed cheerfully. "But you realise that's also the reason why we have to travel the Muggle way to pass undisturbed through Andalucia?"

"Merlin, yes," Malfoy agreed fervently. "I love to fly, but the thought of covering nearly three hundred leagues on a broomstick my poor arse!"

Even when they'd been at Hogwarts together, Harold had often noticed just how fine an arse Malfoy had in his tight breeches and well-cut robes, but kept his observation to himself. Maybe there would be an opportunity to find out more on this quest they were about to begin ...

He was brought out of his musings when Malfoy cleared his throat. "Tell me, though, why we can't use other ways to travel? I see why we have to sail into France, but surely there's a faster way? I mean, there's the Wildsmith woman's invention everybody's been raving about for ages ... It lets one travel through fireplaces, or some such?"

"I wish there was," Sir Harold sighed and drained his tankard. "I'm not looking forward to several weeks on the road, either. But to use Floo powder, the fireplaces must be connected to each other somehow, and nobody has attempted it yet over great distances. As for Apparition, not even *Dominus* Prewett could find maps accurate enough to provide us with destinations, and besides, even short hops would only exhaust us over that kind of distance."

"Which also holds true for Portkeys, I presume?"

"Unfortunately. For one, it'd be difficult to transport our luggage with a Portkey, and for another, we can't risk appearing apparently out of thin air within sight of Muggles. Not only would it frighten them and draw undue attention to us, it's also that the Pope and the Church are getting progressively intolerant of magic. I'd rather not call the Inquisition upon us, and our quest, just to save time and avoid some discomfort."

Malfoy grimaced. "Nobody's expecting the Inquisition," he said. "What do they have against magic, anyway?"

"They consider it heresy, or maybe apostasy," Peverel replied. "I never bothered to learn the difference between either, but whatever they are, it's supposedly against God and the natural order of things, or some such rot." The two shared an eye-roll. Every witch and wizard knew that magic always worked *in accord* with the Gods and Nature and hadn't even the Christ performed acts recorded in the Bible that were indistinguishable from magic? Healing, Transfiguring water into wine, Conjuring enough food to feed a crowd from just a few pieces of bread and two fishes, even calming down a storm or walking on water all things a wizard might do if he was sufficiently trained.

"That's ridiculous," Malfoy scoffed. "Don't they know that there are laws to magic that are perfectly natural?"

"If they do and some must, or the King would never have sanctioned our quest they don't care," Harold said. "Let's just be thankful that we can shrink most of our luggage and supplies, and hide our valuables from prying eyes by Disillusioning them."

"Can we at least use Muggle-Repelling Charms, do you think?"

"Certainly sometimes and Notice-Me-Not Charms, too, I believe," Harold replied ... and just like that, they sank into a discussion on how to proceed that took up most of the day and went well past the evening meal.

"...""...""..."

Two days later, Malfoy had sent most of his men-at-arms back home; the remaining two, Vincent and Gregory, would serve them well on the journey. They were big, strong and taciturn; neither stupid nor especially bright, but good with horses, capable hunters and knew how to handle themselves in a tight spot with crossbow and knives if need be. Peverel brought his squire Ronald, a tall, lanky redhead with a fiery temper who was skilled at the longbow, and another groom who'd served him well on the last campaign he'd fought in the King's service – a quick-witted Irishman named Seamus whose life's ambition seemed to be to drown himself in as many casks of strong spirit as he could find, but he had healing experience and was utterly devoted to Sir Harold. They'd do tolerably well together, everybody agreed.

They sailed from Plymouth with the morning tide on the twenty-second of March; the sky was overcast and chilly, as it often tended to be in spring, but luck was with them and the sea remained mostly calm as the ship took them to La Rochelle, a well-defended harbour on the western coast of France guarded by two mighty stone towers.

The time of their passage was spent profitably, both in renewing their acquaintance as well as pooling what information they'd been given. Because of the deadlines the prophecy had set them, they hadn't been able to have long planning meetings with everybody involved in one place. Instead, *Magister* Dumbledore and Perceval Weasley had briefed Peverel, whereas Headmaster Prewett had accompanied Nicholas Malfoy to instruct the man's nephew on what he needed to know.

It was a reasonably sunny day in the Bay of Biscay when the captain informed both young men they'd be making landfall within a few hours – and indeed, the faint outline of shore was already becoming visible on the horizon. Vincent and Gregory immediately began to pack their belongings into sturdy trunks, surreptitiously applying Shrinking and Lightening Charms. Seamus readied their mounts and Squire Ronald stood watch, dividing his attention between his fellows and the two knights, ready to lend a hand wherever one might be needed. Peverel and Malfoy stood at the ship's bow, watching it pass the Île de Ré, the small island just a short distance offshore from La Rochelle. Their cloaks were billowing around their legs, the appliquéd arms nearly obscured by the folds.

"So what's the plan?" Malfoy wanted to know at last, his quiet voice almost drowned out by the snap of wind in the sails overhead and the shouts of the sailors as the captain eased into the harbour.

"Find an inn to stay the night to regain our land legs, buy provisions, pack up and leave as soon as possible," Peverel replied succinctly. He squinted in the sunlight, trying to make out what was going on at the wharf. He wished he could ask Ronald for a detailed description as was his wont, but decided not to draw unnecessary attention to his weak eyes.

He received a sardonic look in return. "As if I couldn't have thought of that by myself," Malfoy said. "Don't take me for an idiot just because you have more campaign experience than I; organising a trade caravan isn't *that* different, I'll have you know."

"I haven't thought you an idiot for quite some time now, Malfoy," Peverel said with a slight bow and a barely-hidden grin. The magical-versus-Muggle method of doing things had been a bone of contention between them since they'd set out on their journey, but the shouting matches had gradually given way to more teasing exchanges on both sides – a state of affairs that looked likely to continue. "Why, I believe it's been four days now – ever since you realised that just because we won't be able to use magic openly doesn't mean that we have to be totally uncomfortable. So, my apologies."

"If you go on insulting me – which you're doing quite badly, I might add – you may as well use my given name," Malfoy grumbled, making a rather unexpected offer.

"I'm sure I'll have ample opportunity to get better at it on this quest of ours." Peverel grinned. "But very well ... Draco." He held out his hand, which Malfoy shook. "Call me Harold – or better yet, Harry."

"What, not Hereweald?" Malfoy – no, Draco – smirked. "I seem to remember that's what you were named at the Sorting."

Harry groaned. "I'll never live that down, will I?"

"Not soon," Draco confirmed, chuckling. "What *were* your parents thinking, to use the Saxon version of Harold?"

"Probably a similar thing as yours when they named you dragon in Latin," Harry retorted. "But to answer your question – we'll head south, into Languedoc. Our first stop will be the Château de Montségur."

"..."

## 4.2 Château de Montségur

They made good progress, but a bout of bad weather and the need to go around a skirmish near Toulouse turned the nine days it should've taken them into nearly two weeks of hard riding before they reached the remnants of what had once been a proud castle high in the foothills rising up into the Pyrenée mountains. The château had been half in ruins for a hundred years now, ever since the Pope's forces had laid siege to the ancient fortress. This siege had lasted over a year and only ended when two hundred and twenty Cathars were burned to death, choosing to walk into the flames rather than being put to the stake. The locals stayed away, fearing the ghosts of the slain, but one person still lived in the ruins – and it was him Peverel had been told to seek out by *Magister* Dumbledore.

He alighted from his weary horse in the centre of the former courtyard. One hand stayed wrapped firmly around the hilt of his sword as he looked around.

"Someone's moving in the far corner on the left, Sir Harold," murmured Ronald the squire as he came up to take the horse's reins. Harold sent him a quick, grateful smile sometimes, due to his not-very-sharp sight, he missed things that could be dangerous. Thus Ronald had been acting as his 'eyes' since he'd left Hogwarts.

"My thanks, Ron." He turned towards the deep shadow. "Hello there! We mean no harm; Wulfric Dumbledore sent us," he called in French, his voice ringing clear among the crumbling walls.

"Pretty words fer a stranger carryin' a big knife." And out of an archway stepped a man that had Malfoy and his grooms reach for their wands. He was almost as tall as they were astride on their horses, with an enormous beard, wild long hair and was clad in rough homespun breeches and tunic. He was also holding onto the collar of a vicious-looking boar hound that well matched his master's size. His beetle-black eyes beneath bushy brows were watchful, but not hostile. "Maître Wulfric sent yeh, yeh said?"

"He did," Harry confirmed and quickly performed introductions. "And you would be ...?"

The huge man relaxed and signaled the dog to sit. "Good man, Dumbledore. Me name's Hagrid," he said, his French uncultured and accented, yet understandable. "If yeh'll follow me, I'll show yeh yer quarters fer the night."

"Right. Ronald, Vincent, if you'll see to the horses?"

"Oh, leave 'em here. I'll look after 'em right proper myself," Hagrid said and led them deeper into the half-ruined keep. "Be careful now that yeh don' stumble."

The six men followed, carefully taking note of their surroundings. "Merlin, he's *big*," Malfoy murmured in English, watching in half-horrified fascination how Hagrid pushed aside large, broken beams and chunks of rubble as if they were nothing but twigs and pebbles.

"Dumbledore suspects he's half-giant," Harry answered in the same language, keeping his voice low. "But he also said he's not dangerous ... if we treat him right."

Draco blushed slightly; he knew he tended to be arrogant, especially when dealing with those of lesser status. "Don't worry; I'm always on my best behaviour towards people who look as if they can crush me like vermin between their fingers."

"Oh, so size matters to you?" Harry said with a tiny leer even as he climbed nimbly over a half-crumbled wall. He'd been delighted to see that a bit of innuendo wasn't rejected by his new friend; in fact, Draco was beginning to tease him right back, and the possibilities inherent in *that* were ... promising.

Before the other could reply, Harry's wayward thoughts were interrupted as Hagrid stopped and pointed towards a battered wooden door in what might once have been the castle's kitchen. "Here yeh go. Sorry it's jes' two rooms; I canna keep up more or I'd be found out by folks we don' want pokin' around."

The chambers were low-ceilinged and the only light came from the doorways, but each had a decent fireplace, the floors were clean, and there was room enough to spread out their bedding.

"It'll do fine for a couple of days," Peverel decided, choosing the room to the right and motioning their escort of four into the other. "We need to rest the horses, after all."

"And to pick up a certain item," Malfoy started to say when he caught a slight shake of the head and warning glance from the other man. He subsided and waited until Hagrid had left to feed and stable their mounts, boar hound in tow, with a promise to come back later with food.

"Why did you stop me from speaking earlier?" he wanted to know as they lounged in front of a cheery fire, goblets of wine in hand. Ronald and the others had quickly unpacked and unshrunk a couple of stools along with their bedding and were now helping Hagrid prepare their evening meal. "Am I not to assume that it's here we're to collect that treasure the prophecy mentioned?"

"Yes," Harold said quietly. "But while I generally trust Dumbledore's judgement about Hagrid, I don't think we can be too careful about whom we tell about our purpose here. Others have been searching for the treasure in the past, and might still be doing so."

"Merlin, you soldier types are suspicious," Draco muttered. "But in this case, you may be right."

"Thank you."

"Don't be so effusive. One might almost think we're friends."

"Merlin, Morgana and all the saints forbid," Harry replied, sharing a grin with Draco.

They were interrupted by the others' return and stopped to partake of a simple yet tasty stew, accompanied by fresh crusty bread. Finished, they were left alone once more to share a last drink before retiring for the night.

"So, back to my earlier question?" Malfoy began.

"Ah, yes." Peverel unexpectedly drew his wand and quickly erected both Silencing and Privacy Wards around them. "First, I need your word that what I'm about to tell you doesn't leave this room."

Malfoy slowly sat up from his comfortable slouch. There was a note in the other man's voice that sounded deadly serious, and he knew better than to counter it with their usual banter, especially given the spells just cast. He also reached for his wand and held it across his heart. "On my magic, I swear to hold your secret as mine," he vowed solemnly.

Harold inclined his head in silent thanks, then took a few moments to gather his thoughts. "You've heard the prophecy; we had to come here to search for Montségur's treasure."

"You know what it is?"

"Not precisely, but I have an idea."

"Mmmn. Those warrior knights ..." Malfoy drawled, sipping his wine. "Might they have worn white mantles, with a red *crosse pattée*, perhaps?" He kept his expression purposely bland, but there was a keen shrewdness in his gaze that told Harry he'd correctly deduced a significant part of why they'd come here.

"Well reasoned, *mon ami*." Peverel inhaled deeply and met the grey eyes of the man who was quickly becoming a close friend. "There's a connection with my mother's family," he murmured at last. "You know that she was Muggleborn, yes?"

"Everybody does," Malfoy waved it away with a casual gesture. "Uncle Nicholas cares about this kind of thing more than I do. Admittedly, it's not something I'd choose for my own family, but from all accounts she was a competent witch, devoted to your father, and her ... um ... unfortunate background doesn't seem to have impaired *your* talent. Well, what there is of it, of course."

Harold smiled fleetingly. The disparities in their backgrounds had led to quite a number of debates so far, mostly good-natured if with a hefty dose of mockery from Malfoy which Peverel usually countered in a similar vein. Instead of causing more fights like at their first meeting in Plymouth, these arguments strangely served to draw them closer. "Thanks – I think. What *not* everybody knows, however, is her family history."

"Oh? Something more scandalous than Muggle origins?"

Peverel made a rude gesture which Malfoy returned by giving a small, slightly mocking salute with his goblet.

"My mother's father was a Templar Knight born not far from here at Angoulême, to be exact," Harold divulged at last. "His ancestors had come from Britain with Richard Lionheart and stayed after the Third Crusade to serve as mercenaries to the Sieur of Mirepoix, the patron of this area."

"Forty years ago, grandpère had gone to Paris on an errand when the Templars were disbanded overnight by Philipp of France and Pope Clement; he managed to leave just in time to escape being burned at the stake as a heretic. He was injured, though, and fled north to Lille where he ended up at a béguinage. It was there he met my grandmother; she nursed his wounds until he was hale once more, and when he left for his ancestral Britain, she followed him as his bride. Of course he had to set aside his vows, but ..." He shrugged eloquently.

"Can't have been an easy decision," Malfoy said. Vows of *any* kind were a serious matter, whether magical or Muggle.

"From what I hear, it wasn't, but anything else just wasn't safe, so ... anyway, they settled near Clwyd in Wales, where St Mungo had lived for a time, and when my mother was born and turned out magical, applied for protection to Rhydyon Evans, their head of family. Rhydyon agreed and even offered them the use of his name, which my grandfather gladly accepted to better hide his Templar past from the Church's persecution. In time, mother gained a place at Hogwarts; it was there she met my father, and, well, the rest is history, as they say."

Malfoy wasn't well-versed in Muggle affairs, but even purebloods knew of the Knights Templar; quite a few wizards had actually joined the Order's ranks in the past. And many a mediwitch went to hone her craft in a Béguine establishment; the women choosing to live there often were competent teachers and Healers, dedicated to good works and supporting themselves by hard, honest work – a reason why the Inquisition seemed inclined to take them under scrutiny as well. An independent woman was all but anathema to the Church, who preferred them to stay in the house and be subservient to their menfolk's rule. From all he'd heard about Lilia Evans Peverel, she hadn't been that kind of woman until the day she and her husband were killed by Scotsmen's hands during a border raid while Harold had still been in his first year at Hogwarts.

"Right. Now, are you finally going to tell me what this treasure the prophecy mentioned is?"

"So impatient," Harold teased, but gave up on levity when he saw his companion's frown. "It's something the Knights Templar hid here at Montségur on their way back from the Holy Land after the very first crusade, and it fell to my family line to protect it. People think it's lost to all, but ... there's a legend."

Draco groaned in mock horror. "What, you're dragging me halfway across Aquitaine *without* letting me use magic, either! just because there's a bedtime fable about a

Templar treasure?"

Harry smiled slightly, thinking of one specific story he'd grown up hearing. "What's mere legend to one can be family history to another." And he wouldn't say more on the matter for the rest of the night, and all of the next day.

"..."

Their second night at Montségur, Harry woke Draco only a few hours past midnight, ignoring the grumbling behind him as Draco sleepily stumbled out into the castle's courtyard in the chill pre-dawn air.

"Will you keep quiet?" Harry hissed. "We don't want the world to know that we're up and about, much less what we're going to look for!"

That woke Draco up better than an *Aguamenti* in the face. "We're searching for the treasure? Now?"

"Yes but quietly, if you please!"

"I'll be as quiet as a mouse," Draco promised, shrugging deeper into his gambeson as he followed.

Harry couldn't help himself, he had to chuckle. "Don't you have the wrong rodent there?" he asked, referring to the time when a stray misfired hex during dueling practice had turned the other into a ferret.

"Shut up, knave!" Draco sent Harold a poisonous glare. "I'm still not convinced it wasn't you who did that to me!"

"In fourth year? Hardly. Today would be another matter, though, if you'd like me to try?" Green eyes sparkled under black, messy hair cut short to facilitate wearing a helmet.

With a sniff, Draco finished fussing with the fastenings of his padded jacket and quickly tied his own long, blond hair back with a piece of ribbon. "You wish." He waved a dismissive hand. "Never mind; where are we going?"

"Just beyond the west wall," Harry pointed.

As stealthily as possible, they picked their way through the ruins until they stood outside the old keep. The hollowed-out and partially-broken windows stood in sharp contrast to the slowly-brightening sky as the stars winked out one by one.

"Any minute now," Harry murmured. He reached into a pouch tied to his belt and fastened a silver torc around his neck, blinking furiously as he activated the runes engraved on it with a tap of his wand and a whispered spell. "*Videō meliora!*"

"I thought you hated that thing. Doesn't it give you a headache?" Draco asked softly.

"Yes. Can't be helped, though I need to see what I'm doing." Harry sighed, wishing not for the first time that there was a device or whatever that could enhance vision permanently. He could use magnifying glasses to read and for close-quarters work that only needed one hand, but it was a cumbersome way of doing things. Certain spells helped, but they were often unstable or tended to wear off fairly quickly, and the 'eyeglasses' some Italian Muggle had invented some fifty-odd years ago that could be worn on one's face were useless for far-seeing. So until and unless someone found a better solution, he was stuck with his torc and the runes ... and unfortunately a blinding headache after each use. Still, he supposed it was better than nothing.

The two young men waited, watching the sun rise from behind the distant peaks of the mountains. "See that wheel window in the top right corner?"

"Ye-es," Malfoy said after a few moments, identifying the half-broken spokes at last. "What about it?"

"The legend says that if the right command is given at the right instant by someone of the Guardian's blood, a beam of light will fall through the central *oculus* and reveal where Montségur's treasure is hidden."

"Right ..."

They both watched with bated breaths as the sun rose inexorably, bathing the jagged walls in golden light. Harry moved a few careful steps now and then to adjust his position, telling Draco with sparse gestures to keep closely by his side. As dawn gradually gave way to true sunrise and the circle in the middle of the broken wheel window began to blaze bright with sunlight, it seemed to Draco that the legend might be just that, a tale told to children at bedtime, or around the fire on a winter's night. Strangely disappointed, he was about to say so when Harry suddenly gripped his arm, hard, and lifted his wand.

"*Lucem Revelo!*" he whisper-shouted, pointing his wand at the stone frame silhouetted in stark black against the cloudless sky. His aim was perfect and true. Struck mute with awe, Draco watched as sunlight mingled with spell, both turning crimson edged with gold, and against all laws of Nature veered off at an angle towards a hill not too far away.

"Quick, memorize the point of impact," Harry instructed, his hand as steady as his voice was shaking. "It'll be over in a second!" As he spoke, so it happened. The red beam died as quickly as it had appeared, and the last of the morning's mist shrouding the walls of Montségur was burned away by glorious light.

"..."

The sun was high in the sky once they'd first scrambled down the rocky cliff and then back up the moss-slippery hillside where the red beam had guided them, but it took them the better part of an hour to find what they were looking for. It was Draco's sharp eye that discovered the carved shape of a Templar's Seal underneath the grayish lichen on a flat stone shaped into a crude shield, and Harry's strong yet sensitive hands that pried it loose with very little fuss. The stone covered a deep crevice, and behind it sat a large lidded clay pot, of the type used to store perishable goods since the days of the Roman legions. It was rather heavy, but a cautious shake as they lifted it out of the crevice produced neither sound nor movement from within.

"Well, it's obviously not empty," Draco commented, stretching his back. "Heavy enough to hold gold or jewels, too."

"Somehow, I don't think so," Harry said, letting his fingertips glide lightly around the rim of the lid. When he got to the edge, he startled, paused and then bent to take a closer look. Soon, though, he straightened again and yanked the torc from his neck with a muttered oath.

"Damn this thing! My eyeballs feel as if they're filled with shards of glass, and I *still* can't see well enough to ..." He sighed, motioning for Draco to take over. "I think there's some kind of carving here; it might be runes, or something. Will you take a look?"

"Of course." The blond head bowed low over the pot as he, too, traced the lid's edge with sensitive fingers. "Not runes," Draco determined after a few moments. "But definitely a type of script."

"We'll examine it tonight," Harry said. "I'd rather not do it out here, where anyone can hide behind a rock without us noticing."

"Agreed. Also, food? It's nearing midday, and I'm starving!"

The rumble of Harry's stomach was answer enough, as was his rueful laugh. They re-covered the crevice, hiding its place as best they could, bundled up the pot in Draco's jerkin for protection and carried it back to the castle and their room.





and religious devotion. (from Wikipedia)

Clwyd/St Mungo: another real place. Scottish missionary Kentigern settled briefly on a ridge between the rivers Elwy and Clwyd. Kentigern eventually returned to Scotland (where he is known as St Mungo); found at [BritainExpress](#)

Hagrid's accent is courtesy of [the Hagridizer](#)

"oculus" = Latin for "eye". The round central opening in a wheel window.

"Video Meliora!" = Latin for "I see better!"

"Lucem Revelo" = Latin for "show the light"

The Old Testament quote is from Prophets; Jeremiah 17:14.

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## Five

Chapter 6 of 6

In which family and friends try to figure out what went wrong

### Chapter 5

1 May, 2014

#### **The Potters' House, Godric's Hollow**

"Harry!"

"Dad!"

"Draco!"

"Father!"

Voices shouted, screamed and yelled in a cacophony of sound, from Lily Luna's childish treble to Charlie Weasley's hoarse bellow, but none was as horrified as Ginny's, more anguished than Scorpius' and Narcissa's, or rang with such a sick sense of déjà vu as Ron and Hermione's. At least the latter two had at one time been rather inured to the various scrapes and calamities fate seemed to throw at Harry on a regular basis, and trusted him to take care of himself. Still, to have it happen today, after years of relative peace and quiet, and amongst family and friends like this, was disconcerting in the extreme. The rest of the assembled guests reacted according to temperament, or to the degree of understanding they were capable of.

Ginny was standing closest to Harry and Malfoy and instinctively reached out to her husband. But as soon as she came into contact with the dome surrounding the two men, it flared with a brilliant light, making her cry out with shock and stagger back a few steps. Wands were being drawn all around; Hermione and Ron rushed forward, preparing to do whatever they could, but a harsh command from Bill froze them in their tracks.

"Stop! Don't interfere!"

Bill moved to within a couple of feet to the translucent bubble, wand at the ready. "Let me scan this first."

"We can't just stand here and do nothing," Ron protested, his face blanched nearly white underneath his freckles. "That's Harry in there!"

"Thanks for stating the obvious, Ron." Ignoring his brother, Bill began to cast.

"Your brother is the expert in a situation like this, Mr. Weasley," Narcissa Malfoy said, a barely-suppressed tremor in her cultured voice. "Out of all of us, he would be the most qualified to deal with whatever is holding Harry and my son." Despite being visibly upset, her wand was steady and held in readiness even as she clutched Scorpius to her side.

Ron looked mutinous, but Arthur stepped up and laid a restraining hand on his arm. "They're right, son," he murmured. "We don't know what this shield is, or what it might do if we disturb it."

Bill was moving around the bubble, a frown on his scarred face as every diagnostic spell he could think of was either deflected or showed no useful result. "I can't make heads or tails of this," he muttered. "It's old magic, very old, and doesn't seem hostile, but more than that I can't tell."

Hermione had started her own investigation from farther away after making sure that Molly, Andromeda and the other adults were looking after the children. The youngest had begun to cry, the oldest were pale with fright, and Scorpius seemed nearly petrified as he stared at his motionless father:

"It almost looks like *Priori Incantatem*," she said, "but I don't think it is."

"Definitely not." Bill shook his head. "For one, it's emanating from the chalice, not a wand and for another, the signature has some characteristics that don't match up." Frustrated, he dispelled his diagnostics and returned his wand to its holster. "Where does that cup come from, anyway?"

"The Black family vault," Narcissa said after a moment's pause. "Harry, Andi and I retrieved it the other day."

"It's an heirloom," Andromeda added. "I'm no expert on antiques, but to me the workmanship looked as if it was fourteenth century; how long it's been in the family's possession, I couldn't say."

"The Blacks were always a Dark family," Hermione murmured, sending an apologetic glance at the sisters. "We found so many cursed objects at Grimmauld Place ... Could the cup be another one?"

"Absolutely not." Andromeda's reply was adamant, and echoed simultaneously by Narcissa.

"How can you be sure?" Ron spat, his ears already beginning to turn red with anger as he whirled around to stare at Mrs Malfoy. "I'll grant that you probably didn't *mean* to hurt Harry, but how could you have let him use that ... that *thing* if you didn't know it was safe?"

"Because we all believed that it was," Andromeda snapped. "Do you honestly think that *Harry*, of all people, would have brought a dangerous artefact into his house where people he loved – his *children!* – might get hurt?"

"No. No, he wouldn't have," Ginny said with conviction.

"Okay, but why has it trapped Harry and Malfoy, though?" Neville asked. "I mean, I've never heard or seen anything like this, and you must admit, it doesn't *look* good."

"I wish I knew," Mrs Malfoy sighed, casting a quick glance at her grandson who now stood anxiously poised at the edge of the group of children Molly had herded some distance away. Scorpius had been taught to stay well away from manifestations of unknown magic and was too well-mannered to disobey an adult, anyway, but his small, pointy face was even paler than usual, and tension radiated from every line of his body.

Momentarily reassured that the boy was safe, Narcissa wearily pressed a hand against her temple. "Our grandfather kept the chest with the chalice in his office as long as I can remember and no matter what beliefs my family may or may not have espoused in the past, they wouldn't have willingly endangered the children of the House," she said shakily. "Not that we were ever allowed to touch the heirlooms except under supervision, but it definitely wasn't warded or locked away."

"For what it's worth, Sirius' mother hated the chalice and banned it to the vault as soon as Arcturus had died," Andromeda added. "As I told Harry when we picked it up. Also, all three of us agreed that whatever magic the cup is imbued with – and it positively *oozed* with it, I'll say that much – is definitely benevolent."

"Did any of you touch it before you took it from the vault?" Bill wanted to know. "Because the old high-security vaults may have protections on them that fizzle out once certain items are removed from Gringotts ..."

"No. No, we didn't," Andromeda stated firmly.

"We just took the chest the cup was stored in," Narcissa said. "And *that* felt perfectly ordinary I should know, because it was I who found it."

Hermione made a frustrated sound. "So nobody touched the artefact itself before today?"

"I did."

Ginny's quiet statement had the same effect as a well-cast *Silencio*. Everybody shut up immediately and turned towards her.

"You did? When, and why?" several people asked at once, their voices once more overlapping and tinged with a mixture of incredulity, shock and curiosity. Not surprisingly, it was Molly Weasley who gained the upper hand and rushed towards her daughter to gather her in a protective embrace.

"Merlin, Ginny, how could you? Haven't you learned not to handle unknown artefacts, especially ones from " she scolded, but broke off when she caught sight of Narcissa's involuntary grimace and blushed despite herself. "Yes, well, I'm sorry, Narcissa; maybe it wasn't your fault, and I don't believe you'd harm your son, not after you lied to V-Voldemort for him and saved Harry, but ... can you blame me for thinking ..." she rallied.

"Calm down, Mum," Ginny sighed, disengaging herself from Molly's arms. She slowly walked towards the abandoned chairs and sank into one that offered her an unhindered view of Harry and Draco. They still stood frozen in the same position they'd been in when the dome had sprung up facing each other, left hands joined, the chalice held above them and the athame's blade half-plunged into the water swirling in the cup.

"Harry showed it to me when he brought it home, and it looked so grubby ... all I did was clean it last night. And Andi and Mrs Malfoy are right, it *did* have a palpable magical aura about it, but it felt absolutely non-threatening."

"If you say so," Bill grumbled, scowling that he couldn't have examined the cup himself *before* it'd been used in the ritual. He *hated* having to rely on someone else's perceptions of ancient artefacts. "What kind of spells did you use?" he wanted to know next. "Maybe they interfered with the cup's magic?"

"It could have been something in the cleaning solution," Molly, ever practical, put forth, interrupting her oldest son's ruminations. "When I was still a newlywed, I nearly managed to ruin a couple of silver candlesticks myself because they reacted badly to the Bundimun secretion in Mrs Scower's Magical Mess Remover."

"Or maybe whatever you used contained dragon's blood," Charlie spoke up unexpectedly. "I know it's sometimes used as a cleaning agent, but even a drop or two too many can cause significant damage. Ruddy Dumbledore should never have listed that among the twelve uses," he added in a disgruntled mumble.

Ginny produced a rather weak chuckle, surprising everyone. "Actually, I didn't use *any* magic on the chalice."

"How did you get it so shiny, then?" Andromeda asked. "Down in the vault, the metal seemed quite dull, even if we only saw it by the light of one torch."

"That's why I decided to give it a good rubdown." Ginny's eyes flicked briefly towards her sister-in-law. "I used an old Muggle remedy," she admitted. "Hermione mentioned it once; I was out of Mrs Scower's, so I thought why not give it a try and it worked!"

"*Muggle?!?* Impossible, that's..." Bill started, only to be interrupted again, this time by his father.

"Ginny, Muggles often use comicles to clean," Arthur said with a frown. "Maybe those did something to the chalice?"

"*Chemicals* is just another word for ingredients or components, Arthur," Hermione corrected gently. "Or rather, their properties the way they react with each other and to certain conditions. Chemistry, as the Muggle science dealing with that kind of thing is properly called, is a bit like a mixture of Alchemy and Potions." She shook her head when Mr Weasley's eyes lit up. "Please, Arthur, not now; I'll gladly explain at another time. Now, Ginny what exactly *did* you use to polish the cup?" There lurked a twinkle in her eyes that indicated she already knew, and it was answered by a slight, if strained smile from Ginny.

"Toothpaste, of course."

If the situation hadn't been so serious, the reactions and expressions on the assembled witches' and wizards' faces would've been priceless and equally exasperating and amusing to Hermione. As it was, she quickly explained why toothpaste something even wizards were familiar with could be and frequently was used by Muggles to polish delicate metal items, like jewellery ... and that it was highly unlikely that such a mundane thing would have influenced a magical artefact in any way.

"Well, in that case, I'm at my wits' end," Bill sighed as he slumped his shoulders. "There's no curse I can detect, nothing and nobody has apparently done anything to the chalice that could've caused it to act like this... so I guess all we can do is wait."

Decidedly not happy, Ron pursed his lips. "For how long, though?"

"However long it takes." Bill grimaced ruefully. "For what it's worth, in my experience even the most powerful heirlooms can't sustain energies like that dome indefinitely. I know it's not what any of you want to hear," he added, letting his eyes sweep across the assembled family and friends, "but it's the only way. We'll give it some time, and see what happens."

"I'm afraid Mr Weasley is correct," Narcissa concurred after exchanging looks with Andromeda, Molly and Arthur as the oldest Purebloods present. Even if neither the Weasleys nor the Prewetts put as much stock in the old teachings as the Blacks and Malfoys, they still *knew* about most of them – and when to step back and let events run their course.

"Meanwhile, may I suggest we complete the ritual as best we can without Draco and Harry? We don't want any stray energies that may still be lingering about to interfere with the magic of the chalice when it dissipates."

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