

# Constant Vigilance

*by severina*

~Complete~ Takes place during the early part of HBP. After Ollivander is captured (or is he?) by Death Eaters, his daughter returns to find answers, aided by paranoid ex-Auror, Mad-Eye Moody.

## Chapter 1

*Chapter 1 of 10*

~Complete~ Takes place during the early part of HBP. After Ollivander is captured (or is he?) by Death Eaters, his daughter returns to find answers, aided by paranoid ex-Auror, Mad-Eye Moody.

A/N: No, it's not Snape/Hermione or any other normal pairings, but give it a chance! It's a Jayne Ann Krentz-esque story, but with magic. At least leave a \*kind\* review. Thanks in advance! This is not mine; it's JKR's. Any and all passages from the books are copyright by her.

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"Not yet, we're still waiting for the storyboards," Polyxena Ollivander snapped impatiently at the fireplace. "How's the campaign for Morgana's Magical Megastore coming along? I've told them not to use the Malaclaw in the print ads; those animal setups are so eighties. Have the new pamphlets on my desk by the time I get in, but owl me the storyboards directly."

"Polyxena, get to the table! Your porridge is getting cold, and I'm not casting one more bloody Heating Charm on it."

Groaning, she turned away from the hearth and strode through the well-appointed apartment in downtown Kenishara, Canada's only all-Wizarding village. "Why in the name of Hecate am I still living with my Mum?" she mumbled gloomily, though she knew well the answer. At twenty-three, Polyxena had been out of Hogwarts for six years, (Ravenclaw, class of '90), had been of age for six years, and had lived all that time with her shrill, overly-ambitious mother. Hogwarts and Wizarding Britain had not adequately prepared her for a career in their new home, which was far more Muggle-ized and cutthroat. In school, she'd trained in Charms and Divination because what the hell else was there to do? That moldering old castle hadn't a single class on copywriting, marketing, or anything she did daily at the Bicorn Advertising Agency.

"So there you are, finally. You've been up working since half six this morning," accused Hecuba, pouring a cup of tea.

"The megastore is a big account for us," she said with exaggerated patience, picking up the day's copy of the *Kenishara Augury*. "It's meant to be the Wal-Mart of the Wizarding World. And I just got some British shop in Diagon Alley that's trying to go international. Weasley something or other."

"Gryffindor Weasleys. Didn't you graduate with one of them? Yes, you did Charlie the dragon tamer. I recall you had a bit of a fling with his older brother in your..."

"Mum, did you read this?" Polyxena cut into her mother's prattling. "Look at the 'World News' section of the paper today. The Death Eater conflict appears to have gotten worse. They've murdered two women and taken prisoner that ice cream shop fellow you fucked right before we left." No parent-child boundaries for Hecuba and her daughter.

"Fortescue? Why? Did they need peanut butter sundaes and five minute sex? What else?"

Polyxena took a long sip of tea before she added a name to her list of victims. "It seems they've captured Britain's most respected wandmaker." Raking a hand through her Sneezy-smooth espresso hair, she stated the obvious. "Papa."

The newspaper tore as Hecuba grabbed it from her daughter's manicured hands. "Bloody hell.*Bloody hell.* That's..."

"Awful," finished Polyxena firmly, swallowing the last of her porridge. "Far be it from us to wish being dragged off by Death Eaters upon anyone." She had the sneaking suspicion that her mother was actually pleased by the development. Hecuba had been Priamus Ollivander's youthful lover during her own last year at Hogwarts (Hufflepuff, Class of '73). Though she was still beautiful at forty, in those days, she had been traffic-stopping, arresting, and sultry (not necessarily in that order). When she discovered she was pregnant with Polyxena, the clandestine pair had, to their credit, tried to make a go at marriage, but it lasted only until the girl's third year. Hecuba had gotten a fair number of Galleons in a divorce settlement and gotten a sizeable flat in Hogsmeade for two of them to share until her daughter finished with school. Since Ollivander had not wanted to train a girl to take over the wandmaking business, Polyxena had gone to Canada with her mother, joined the ad agency as a junior copywriter, and been promoted several times to reach her current position of account executive. Not a very glamorously magical career, but honestly, do you think those billboards at the Quidditch World Cup wrote themselves?

"The Death Eaters," echoed Hecuba. "No sign of a struggle. Bless." She set down the paper with a strange expression on her face.

Polyxena's finely plucked brows arched skeptically. "You think he went to Voldemort willingly? He's odd, I'll admit that, and very abstruse, but certainly not in a 'going over to the Dark Side' sort of way. They probably stunned him. I'm sure the Ministry is looking into it."

Hecuba scoffed. "Doubt it. I wouldn't trust the Ministry of Magic for a second. The British Wizarding world is a bloody police state. Not only does the Minister control the press, but there's precious little to stop them arresting innocent people, torturing them, and the like. Trials are optional, you know that."

"Indeed." Thinking the conversation over, the younger woman stood and smoothed the lapel of her chocolate Chanel suit. "I'd best be getting to the office. Heads will roll if that fucking Malaclaw is still in the *Witch Weekly* advert section. I can't for the life of me get the art department to understand the meaning of the word 'sexy.' I'm honestly beginning to think that they fancy wild animals."

"You should go," cried Hecuba suddenly.

With a roll of her eyes, Polyxena sighed, "I *am* going. That's what I just said. I'll see you later; don't wait supper for me."

Hecuba shook her head vigorously. "No, no, I meant to England. Just for a while, to see what you can learn."

It was Polyxena's turn to scoff. "Are we out of Floo powder? All the owls' wings are broken?"

"Do a bit of your own work," urged her mother. "It can't hurt."

"I've work," she reminded her. "Speaking of which, I'm an ad exec not a private investigator. What do you care what's happened to the man anyhow? You're divorced, you've not seen him since a good eight years ago when I broke my wand. I'm sure they'll turn something up. The Death Eaters won't kill him; he's too useful."

"But that lot already has wands," persisted Hecuba. "Just go."

\* \* \*

*I'm nothing if not a bloody idiot*, thought a disgruntled Polyxena as she limped down Charing Cross Road in a pair of chafing Manolo Maryjanes. *This is the last time I listen to Mum. I mean it this time.* At last, the door to the Leaky Cauldron came into view, so she slowly pushed it open to reveal the dark, smoky bar full of oddly-dressed witches and wizards gossiping and drinking tiny glasses of sherry.

At least, they were gossiping before she walked in. Uncomfortably aware that she looked like a *Sex and the City* Muggle, Polyxena strode to the bar for an apple martini. Through some small miracle, old Tom actually knew what she meant, and so she took the drink over to an empty table in the corner and tried to ignore the twenty pairs of eyes that had fastened themselves to her power suit and gold Chanel logo earrings.

One of them was finally bold enough to approach her. The man, of average height with dark grey, grizzled hair limped over to her on a wooden leg and gave her a suspicious once-over with one brown eye and a whirling blue one that lingered a second too long on her bosom. He sat heavily in the rough-hewn seat across from hers and barked out an order for another Firewhisky before grunting, "Name?"

Polyxena's eyes narrowed. "You first." None of the bars she frequented after work featured half-nosed perverts who could see through clothing.

The stranger let out an appreciative guffaw. "Moody. Alastor Moody. Ex-Auror."

"Really? Well, that explains the missing body parts, so I suppose I'll believe you. I'm Polyxena Ollivander, here on business. Well, personal business."

"So you are a witch." Moody was incredulous.

"Yes, I live in Kenishara, Canada's Wizarding village. We're all magic, too, but we're not quite so 'Brothers Grimm Walking Stereotype' about it." She took another sip of her cocktail.

Moody chuckled again. "You're Ollivander's daughter." A statement, not a question.

"Hence the same last name. No wonder you were an Auror; can't put anything past you." She smirked.

"CONSTANT VIGILANCE!" shouted Moody abruptly, slamming his heavy fist onto the table.

"Indeed," Polyxena replied drolly, finishing up her martini. "So, anyway, I'm just here to..."

"That doesn't bother you?" Alastor seemed a bit hurt.

"What?"

"This." He sent another blow toward the table. "CONSTANT VIGILANCE!"

"No, a girl from my office has Tourette's. I don't judge you, but I thought most victims said things like 'Motherfucker, pig blowing, slut bitch whore' instead of 'Constant vigilance.' Where does *that* come from?"

"I don't have a bloody syndrome." A discomfited Moody drank deeply from his Firewhisky.

"Oh. Well then. I'm here to see what exactly has happened with my father's disappearance. I'd like to know what the Death Eaters want with him. Well actually, my mum wants to know, but she's sent me in her stead."

At that, Alastor's eyes became grave. "Nasty business, working around the Death Eaters."

"I suppose." Purposefully nonchalant, Polyxena hoped the attitude would annoy him enough to make him leave. "But I'm adequately prepared."

"You're trained in this sort of thing?" Moody was skeptical. "I never thought Canada had much call for Aurors."

"I'm in advertising," she informed him haughtily. "I worked on the Wizarding Wireless spot for Gladrags Wizardwear, among other things."

*What does she think she's going to do, knock them unconscious with a storyboard? Bore them to death with market research?* "I see." Alastor scratched what remained of the bridge of his nose. "*Crucio!*" He zapped a passing fly.

With a groan of exhausted irritation, she said tersely, "I'd love to stay and chat, Moody, Alastor Moody, ex-Auror, but I'm fighting jet lag, and your eye is starting to irritate me. Have a nice evening." She collected her leather valise and clattered toward the stairs to the guest rooms. *Let the vigilant man spread his dubious cheer to someone else*, she thought, *I have Death Eaters to catch single-handedly and torture for information. Damn Mum. This really is the last time I agree to one of her schemes.*

\* \* \*

Floreat Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlor had officially become a Dairy Witch, surprising Polyxena with the rapid commercial space turnover in Diagon Alley. She had done the PR for Dairy Witch back home, three years ago when she was still a lowly account assistant. Licking her tongue around the edge of a cone of vanilla soft serve, she reflected on her disappointing first morning. She'd questioned every shop owner within fifty feet of her father's shop and nothing. Whether they actually didn't know anything or had been put off by her crisp, tailored suit and heels, she was unsure.

"You've gone about it all wrong," growled a voice from behind her. "Disguise and concealment. And CONSTANT VIGILANCE!"

"You again!" Discreetly, she rubbed at her injured ear. "What now? I heard you the first time. Constant fucking vigilance. But I can't very well be vigilant if nothing is going on. No one saw anything. Makes logical sense. If there were witnesses, I wouldn't be here in the first place. It was a stupid way to start."

"Agreed," replied Moody in a way that nettled her. "But you won't be getting any work done dressed like that."

Polyxena hated to give in, but the straps of her Jimmy Choos were cutting into her swollen feet. "Then what do you suggest?"

"Gladrags Wizardwear, Twillfit and Tattings, Madame Malkin's. Go on, I've not met a woman yet who didn't enjoy a day's shopping," he added with a patronizing grin.

"Fuck off," she muttered into her ice cream. "Shouldn't you be in a science exhibit somewhere?"

"Up!" Moody dragged her to her feet in one swift movement. "You draw too much attention, and the Death Eaters will have you *Avada'd* before dusk."

"I'm sure," answered Polyxena sardonically, "that all these people around us are Death Eaters just waiting to hex me when my back is turned."

Moody's eye whirled to look through the back of his head. "Think this is a joke, do you? I once saw a bloke get Killing Cursed at a child's eighth birthday party! It was my birthday party! The bloke was my father! CONSTANT VIGILANCE!" He took her by the arms and shook her.

Polyxena yawned. "This all very 'Cat's in the Cradle,' but I really have some things I need to get done. I promised the office I'd sent them an outline for the Weasley's Wizard Wheezes campaign by next..."

"You'll be sending it from behind the veil if you don't do as I say. CON..."

"...stant vigilance, yes. If I go robe shopping with you, will you leave me alone? I need to get back to the Leaky Cauldron to..." The rest of her thought was cut off when Moody's large, weathered hand clamped over her mouth.

He growled and said, "Now all of Diagon Alley knows where you're staying. You'll have to move."

"Fine, I'll go to the Acanthus Hotel near my father's wand shop."

"Not now, you won't." He leaned in close and imbued her with the scent of dragon hide and musk. "Voldemort himself could be lurking right beside us under an Invisibility Cloak."

"I hardly think..."

"You'll come with me. Petrificus Charm or under your own power, now, that's up to you."

"All right!" The easiest way to get rid of him seemed to be to go along with his mad plans, and besides, all his talk of Death Eaters had her a bit worried. She hadn't realized just how serious the problems in Britain were. "I'll go buy a fucking robe, but if you think I'm actually going to stay *with you*, then you're madder than I thought."

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Two hours later, Polyxena, clad in a plain blue velvet robe and silver cape, was dragging her overstuffed valise and garment bag down a filthy Muggle street and clumsily avoiding shards of broken streetlights in her awkward new shoes.

"You live *here*?" she queried disgustedly, surveying a row of motley town homes. "Bloody hell. I'm better off with my mum. At least the flat is nice."

Alastor forced a slip of paper into her hand. "Read. Memorize. Think," he ground out, well tired of her sarcastic griping.

"The headquarters for the Order..." Moody's hand was back at her mouth.

"Read silently, you idiot girl. CONST..."

It was Polyxena's turn to clamp a hand over a mouth. "Shut up about it, will you? And stop drinking from a flask; it makes you look like a homeless person. All right, memorized." A small spark from the tip of her companion's wand ignited the paper, and Polyxena began to mull over the words, figuring them some sort of access key to a magical site and was only proven right when number twelve, Grimmauld Place appeared before them. "What've we here?"

With the handle of a broomstick, Moody shepherded her onto the porch and inside.

"Right. Now what the hell is going on? Who are you, exactly, and what in Merlin's name is the Order of the Phoenix?" she snapped, voice rising with agitation.

*"Filth! A scourge on the house of my fathers! Werewolves and half-breeds and blood traitors, oh, my..."*

"Charming," remarked Polyxena dryly as Alastor struggled to close the curtains on Mrs. Black's drooling portrait.

"Tonks, is that you? What have I said about the hallway?" A plump, redheaded woman hurried out into the foyer and wiped her floury hands on a striped apron. "Hello there, Mad-Eye. What have we here?" The three of them edged toward the kitchen. "I didn't know Mad-Eye was seeing anyone." She chuckled as though she had made a little joke.

"Perish the thought!" cried Polyxena in horror. "This 'Mad-Eye' bloke has been dragging me around Diagon Alley all day screaming in my jet-lagged ear about constant vigilance. It doesn't pay to talk to strangers in bars. He told me his name was Alastor Moody, the ex-Auror."

"It never pays to talk to strangers," reproved Mrs. Weasley. "He could have been a Death Eater, dear."

Polyxena shook her head. "You people think everyone is a Death Eater. Ridiculous, really, when you think that there are so few pureblood Slytherins about anymore, and besides, why would some diabolical minion of Voldemort's try to chat me up in a bar?"

Hissing, Molly covered her ears. "Don't say it," she hissed. "Not that awful name."

"What, Voldemort? Why? It's not like he has a surveillance on each and every magical person, just watching and waiting for them to say his name so he can Apparate to their house and kill their family. I hope not because we'd be doubly fucked."

"Such language," tsked Mrs. Weasley, unsure of what to make of the young woman. "Well, come on, we were just about to sit down for tea. I'm Molly Weasley, by the way, and," she said when they entered the dining room, "that's Remus Lupin, Severus Snape, my husband, Arthur, and my son, Bill."

"Why, Bill and I are already acquainted." *He stole my virginity back in fourth year*, she finished mentally, but held her tongue. "Nice to see you again." Polyxena fastened her hard gaze on each man in turn, the thin man in threadbare robes called Remus whom she figured *had* to be gay; the oily haired man, Severus, who sat in the corner exuding sex appeal; the thin, balding man who played Jack Sprat to Mrs. Weasley; and of course Bill, with his stupid earring and seventies ponytail that she'd just soaked her little knickers for back in Hogwarts.

"Polyxena Ollivander," she introduced herself, noting that they at once sat up with interest. "I was here on business when your paranoid friend accosted me at the Leaky Cauldron and dragged me here, spouting all sorts of Voldemort nonsense." Smoothing a dollop of clotted cream onto a scone she went on, "So what exactly is this Order about anyway? Fighting Voldemort, I presume."

"The very thing," said Remus kindly. "Are you trying to find Ollivander the wandmaker?"

"That would be the logical conclusion, wouldn't it?" she returned acidly. "I have no real interest in the case; my mum sent me over for some sort of closure. I'm really just looking to find out what happened to him. I don't even have to find him. After I know, I can go home, tell Mum, and get back to work by the time Morgana's Magical Megastore has its grand opening."

"I didn't know old Ollivander was married," remarked Arthur in surprise.

"He's not," said Polyxena crisply. "He seduced Mum when she was seventeen, married her because of me, but they divorced three years later. I never saw much of him; he's a trifle odd, to say the least."

"To say the least," echoed Bill. "But actually, we've some leads on him. The files are in my room. Come up later, and I'll let you see them."

"Fuck off." Polyxena glowered at him. "I'm going up now because I'm jet lagged as fuck and didn't sleep a wink last night because I had a mirror telling me my nightie was indecent. Doesn't anyone realize how out of vogue those talking mirrors are?" Rising to her feet, the girl said suddenly, "Where am I to be sleeping?"

"You can have Hermione and Ginny's room. They're off at school 'til winter holidays. Third door on the left down the hall."

Polyxena stormed from the room after a final glower at Bill and stomped past Moody on her way over the threshold. Funny how the Voldemort-crazed British Wizarding folk could turn a simple search for answers into a national security emergency.

## Chapter 2

### *Chapter 2 of 10*

Polyxena and Moody set off for their first round of sleuthing after a discussion at Grimmauld Place.

A/N: \*Note to self: do not invent original characters when in a vile, garum mood\* Thanks to my kindly reviewers of Chapter 1 and the helpful concrit about Polyxena's less than friendly attitude. I'd also like to thank Bottle\_Of\_Sherry and PrepackagedCheeseCrackerSnacks for helping me write late into the night. I love you two!

\* \* \*

Though she had professed jet lag, Polyxena's lethargy had long since worn off, and thus the sojourn in Hermione and Ginny's room (whoever *they* were) was merely a welcome reprieve from her cantankerous, self-proclaimed shadow and hipster ex-lover. Therefore, she clutched a stuffed hippogriff and lie facedown on the bed, playing with a piece of flesh colored string she had found on the floor. Pressing it to her ear, she suddenly heard the faint voices of the members of the Order filtering from the kitchen.

"Never heard such language from a lady," came the disapproving cluck of the woman called Molly.

"Aw, Mum, she's had a rough time of it," spoke up Bill compassionately. "Her father left them, and now he's gone missing."

"What surprises me is that Moody took the initiative to bring this girl all the way to headquarters. Forgive me, but do you not normally require a triple background check and complete set of references before you ask a person for the time of day?" the sexy, dark-haired man's voice accused Mad-Eye. It sounded as though he was making some heavy-handed attempt at levity, but was entirely unsure how to go about it.

There was a long pause. "I could tell she was out of place. Nothin' like instinct for that sort of thing." Moody's voice was especially gruff. "A Death Eater wouldn't have worn that ridiculous Muggle garb."

*Ridiculous?* Polyxena was outraged. If he'd known how much those bloody suits cost, not to mention the shoes...

"Does 'the best Auror the Ministry ever had' have a bit of a soft spot for someone?" teased Remus, convincing the eavesdropper beyond a doubt of his homosexuality.

Moody's reply was a barely discernable grunt.

"I must say, Alastor, you could have chosen a bit more wisely... ."

*Chosen?* Polyxena was a bit perturbed. She hadn't dated in an age, some crazed retiree comes up to her in a London bar, and now he's 'chosen' her like something in a meat market? *That'll be the bloody day*, she thought savagely.

"... she's a pretty enough girl," Molly's voice went on, then, after an embarrassed pause added in a whisper, "but she's a right bitch."

Polyxena could almost imagine the redhead's blushing cheeks as her motherly tongue stumbled over the unfamiliar curse word.

"Now, Molly," came Arthur's easygoing tone, "Bill's right. She's here to search for her father among Death Eaters. One of the very things we're trying to do, since the Ministry has turned yet another blind eye."

"The Ministry has more eyes than Argus, all of them blind," called Polyxena from her new position in the doorway. "Sadly, lo gets off scot-free every time."

The six of them jumped guiltily, and the first to regain his voice was Bill. "True. Poor Fleur was outraged by the power the Ministry seems to wield here."

"Fleur?" queried Polyxena with a sense of foreboding.

"My fiancée, Fleur Delacour. She attended Beauxbatons, and I daresay... "

Polyxena tuned out the rest of Bill's prattling. *So, he had hoodwinked some unlucky girl into marriage, had he? Well, more pity for her, then.* Bill, despite his purportedly 'glamorous' job at Gringotts', struck her as one of those unfortunate souls who peaked at sixteen and lived out the rest of his days trying to capture his youth with a string of veela and a flying motorbike or two. *Arrogant, Astronomy Tower bastard in his dragon skin boots.* She settled back down at her place near Remus with steely resolve not to be 'a right bitch.'

"So, the Order of the Phoenix. You hadn't finished telling me about it."

Moody exchanged a dark look with the others before reluctantly beginning, "We're an underground society, founded during the First War by Dumbledore to defeat Voldemort. We've a lot of secrets and prefer to keep them that way."

She nodded her understanding. "How very *Darkness at Noon* of you. I'm actually rather impressed. There are more of you, I take it?"

"Naturally," sneered the sexy man, whose name she had just remembered was Snape. "Though there were more of us in the old days. War does tend to take a toll."

Aghast, she cried out, almost involuntarily, "You don't mean that some of you have *died*?"

"What did you think I meant?" Snape glowered. "Do you have no memories of the First War?"

"Not really," she replied a tad too breezily for everyone's liking. "I was only born in '73, then my dad left us three years later, then Vold, er, the Dark Lord died when I was eight."

Alastor started at the use of the appellation 'Dark Lord,' and growled, "Well, they were miserable times. Damned miserable, just like these. Can't trust a soul... "

*Though it's doubtful you would anyhow*, thought Polyxena, though to her credit, did not say it aloud. "But yet you felt no qualms about bringing, no *dragging* me back to your secret headquarters and introducing me to your members." Bill hid a grin at her last comment, and she thought, *I was right, his mind did stop at sixteen.*

"You resisted my help every step of the way. No Death Eater would have been so unpleasant if it meant learning about the Order. Besides, I did a background check after you went up to your room in the Leaky Cauldron. Ravenclaw prefect, five NEWTs in Divination, Potions, History of Magic, Charms, and Muggle Studies, very impressive, account executive for the Bicorn Advertising Agency, only daughter of Hecuba Smethwyk and Priamus Ollivander, wand thirteen inches of birch with the heartstrings of a dragon, boggart the..."

"We get the picture," interrupted Polyxena, holding up an imperious hand. "Unpretentious Pureblood lines and a lot of schoolwork. Please. I'm really a bit fraught at the moment. I..." She was hesitant, but finally admitted, "I have no bloody clue what I'm doing." She looked so small when she said that, so wan and helpless that Moody proffered his hip flask, which his charge accepted gratefully. "Thank you. Sorry, I don't normally get so Bronte sisters about things. This is turning out to be the week from hell."

"Well, that's all going to end," Arthur assured her with a paternal twinkle in his eye. "We've narrowed it down to two possibilities: either he went with them willingly or he was Stunned and dragged off by force."

*They had to narrow it down to that*, wondered Polyxena. *What other choices could there be?* However, she held her tongue peaceably and said, "I see." Pursing her lips together in a thin, white line, she repeated, "I see. He's a trifle off his trolley, I'd be the first to agree, but a Death Eater? It hardly seems likely. He wouldn't even speak the Dark Lord's name as I recall."

"The Death Eaters," Severus informed her from his place in the corner, "also do not speak the Dark Lord's name."

"Are you sure?"

"Fairly certain," returned Snape with a hint of sarcasm that she didn't understand. "And the Dark Lord prefers it thus."

"What do the Death Eaters call him?" Polyxena's curiosity was piqued.

"The Dark Lord," said Moody with a heavy, quelling stare.

Passionately, Molly exclaimed, "Decent people call him You-Know-Who or He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named!"

"Or I-Think-We-All-Know-Who-I'm-Talking-About," added Bill with a sidelong smirk and a quick snigger at his own joke, in which Polyxena was tempted to join until Moody's disparate eyes narrowed at the eldest Weasley.

"There's nothing funny about an evil dark wizard, you plait-wearing pillock," growled Moody.

This time Polyxena did laugh, not her usual harsh, derisive scoff, but a rich, sincere chuckle, until her large, pale grey eyes shone.

Affronted, Alastor snatched his hip flask back from her and took a long swig before snapping the cap back on with one of his gnarled hands. "You-Know-Who likely kidnapped your father or put him under the Imperius," he snapped. "Find that amusing, do you?"

"Of course not!" she protested. "Plait-wearing pillock. It was funny, that's all." Bill glowered, but Moody seemed pleased. "I agree; Vold... person appears far more dangerous than I'd thought. What were you saying about the Imperius?"

"It seems a likely explanation," Remus explained. "His shop was empty, there was no sign of a struggle..."

*No sign of a struggle?*"What the film-noir detective channeling himself through Lupin means is that your father gave every impression of having packed up his shop, put it all in a Gringotts' vault, and gone away with no forwarding address. There's not even any definite indication that the Death Eaters took him," Snape offered.

At that, Mad-Eye gave a disbelieving snort through his partial nose and coughed an odd sort of cough that sounded to Polyxena very like 'Death Eaters... in the third person.'

Anyone could see that a derisive comeback rested on the tip of Snape's no doubt dexterous tongue, so Polyxena said quickly, "I'm not looking to find the bastard, you understand. Just tell me 'he was dragged off by Vold... character's minions' or 'he was Imperiused' or 'he joined the Dark Lord,' and I'll be off. No more intrusions on your secret Dumbledore Order; you can even Oblivate me if you like. It would only be fair."

"Well!" Moody seemed a bit disconcerted. "No one's being Oblivated, at least, not tonight." He ran a hand through his grizzled hair and discreetly fixed his magical eye on her.

The grandfather clock struck six then, and Snape rose, muttering something about getting back to Hogwarts. Lupin excused himself as well to go take his potion, but not before he shot a wolfish grin at their new houseguest, and Molly dragged poor, uxorious Arthur off to the kitchen to help with supper. Bill gave his former lover a final wink before heading to the fireplace so he could collect his fiancée from work. Rising then, Polyxena made her way out to the shadowy parlor and settled on the couch. She had not even noticed the sound of a wooden leg clomping behind her, and for that, the leg's owner repeated his mantra,

"CONSTANT VIGILANCE!"

"Oh, hello," she said gamely. "Didn't see you there. I thought the meeting was over?"

"It is." Moody handed her a glass of sherry. "Thought you could use this." Settling down next to her, he watched a bit gleefully as she gave the liquid a suspicious sniff.

"What's in this? Veritaserum?" she demanded, setting the glass aside and pulling a small phial from her handbag. "Because I have the antidote."

With a guffaw, Mad-Eye took a sip from the glass in question. "Satisfied?"

With a slight blush, Polyxena nodded. "You'll forgive me for being a bit paranoid?"

"Of course," replied Moody without a trace of irony. "Better paranoid than dead, I say. Vigilance is better than the veil."

"Without vigilance for Voldemort, the veil is viable," agreed Polyxena.

"Very viable." Alastor's lopsided mouth twisted into something that may have been a grin.

When her giggles had subsided, Polyxena looked at her companion seriously and touched a long, white finger to the remnants of his nose. "How... I mean, that is to say... if you don't mind my asking..."

"Rosier." Moody removed her hand from his face. It was soft and warm, like a recently used candle. "A duel to death back during the First War."

Polyxena shook herself free of his gnarled grasp. "Whose death? Oh, right," she amended stupidly at his raised eyebrow.

"Lestranger," he continued, gesturing at his magical eye, then thumping his wooden leg on the floor, finished, "Avery. The former survived to go to Azkaban, the other claimed Imperius."

"Imperius? Was he really? After all your hard work?"

Moody snorted and lit a grimy black pipe. "Not bloody likely since he went running back to You-Know-Who straightaway after his rebirth."

"Oh."

"Not much punishment went to the Death Eaters," he said with a puff of vaguely coriander smoke. "For all the Ministry's gunboat tactics. Are you going to drink that?"

Polyxena downed the glassful of sherry in one gulp. "Yes." The warm, buzzy feeling from the fortified wine spread through her limbs and settled in the pit of her empty stomach. Her tightly wound, workaholic face visibly relaxed. "May I have another?" Wordlessly, he handed her the flask. "Thanks. What is this, exactly?" She took a lasting sip without waiting for a reply. "It's quite strong."

"Scotch, vodka, maybe a hint of gin. Whatever's on hand." He took it from her proffering fingers. "You say you don't want to find Ollivander?"

"It doesn't matter," replied Polyxena tiredly. "We're not close, but my mother has it in her head that we need to know where he's gone. I don't know why; we've not heard from him in an age."

"You do realize he could be a Death Eater?" Moody pressed in a surprisingly gentle growl. "Or dead?"

"Of course," she said dismissively. "I'm not here for my benefit. I'd prefer to be at work."

"At work," Mad-Eye repeated neutrally, blowing the last of his pipe smoke across the room.

"It's not that I'm terribly bitter," she began, sherry putting her in as confessional a mood as would Veritaserum, "but he's nothing to do with us. He seduced my poor mother in the top floor of his wand shop where he lived and left her with me when the Dark Lord was still in power."

Moody smirked. "I wouldn't have thought old Ollivander had it in him."

With a scowl, Polyxena stood to leave, swaying slightly. "And you think *that's* funny?"

After he had leapt up to balance the slightly tipsy witch, Alastor assented, "Just the thought of that crackpot wandmaker getting off with teenagers."

"My mother was absolutely breathtaking back then," defended Polyxena hotly as she attempted to worm her way from the ex-Auror's steadying grasp.

"Of course she was," Moody shot back gruffly, tightening his grip on the girl's arms. "Come on, Molly should have supper ready by now."

"What if she's poisoned it?" was Polyxena's sarcastic query to hide the twinge of discomfort at Moody's frank statement. Had he known her mother then or did he mean 'of course she was; you take after her'? *The fucker.*

\* \* \*

Polyxena stumbled after Alastor in the bleary darkness of Grimmauld Place before dawn. "It's hard to be constantly vigilant when one hasn't even regained one's faculties from sleep," she mumbled in exhaustion. There had been wine with dinner, then more sherry, and another swallow or two from the flask, so the slight nausea of a minor hangover churned at her stomach as the pair made their way through the foyer and out into the parlor.

Alastor ignored her griping. "What do you know about disguise and concealment?" he asked instead.

"Obviously very little," admitted Polyxena. "I tried to question British wizards while wearing a Chanel suit. How are we getting there? Floo powder? Apparition?"

"Muggle taxicab," he said grimly, dragging a bowler hat down over his magical eye.

"Very Bada Bing Club," approved his companion with a worried glance at her own green velvet robe and heavy brown traveling cloak. "Can't I put my normal clothes on? I won't be very disguised or concealed like this."

"In Diagon Alley, you will be," he reproved. "Now what's your name?"

"Augusta Blackwood," she replied obediently.

"And I am?"

"Septimius Blackwood."

"And we're... ?"

"Taking a stroll through Diagon Alley," Polyxena said automatically. Moody had drilled their story into her brain all last evening. "Oh where, oh where is the wandmaker? Has he gone? Was this his little shop? Merciful heavens, my dear Septimius, what has become of old Ollivander?"

Moody glared at her as they climbed into the back of a black cab. *"Constant vigilance,"* he hissed before directing the driver to Charing Cross Road.

The warm cab and thick wool of Alastor's cloak were soothing to the woman, and before they reached the Leaky Cauldron, her head was nestled quite comfortably in the black fabric. She slept until somehow she was on the sidewalk before the pub, blinking herself awake in the face of rosy-fingered dawn, and Alastor shook her, chastising,

"Always on your guard. The first rule of CONSTANT VIGILANCE is: Never. Fall. Asleep. On. The. Job."

"Sorry," she yawned heartily. "Your cloak is nice."

"Get in." He pushed her through the inconspicuous door. "We'll find you an Energy Draught."

"We just got the first all-magic Starbucks in Kenishara," she complained, "and here I am in Diagon fucking Alley."

They took their breakfast in the Leaky Cauldron at a table well apart from the three or four other customers, and as Polyxena greedily poured a mug of thick coffee down her throat, she became far more personable.

"So, erm, Mad-Eye," she began awkwardly. "Is that what you want me to call you? 'Mad-Eye'? It seems a bit insensitive to point out your visual... uh... non congruence every time I address you."

He smiled his lopsided grin and said with a hint of amusement, "Alastor will be fine. But today," he said sharply, "you'll be calling me Septimius Blackwood."

"Yes, of course, although how are you going to pass yourself off as someone else? No one knows me, but you're quite a... distinctive... bloke."

Winking at her with his normal eye, Moody raised his hip flask and drank deeply, shuddering when he had finally finished. "Took a couple of hairs off an unwary Muggle," he informed her as he began to change to the form of a nondescript, sandy-haired forty something man.

"Brilliant!" gasped Polyxena. "Polyjuice Potion, what an idea."

"Come along, Augusta," he said, rising from his seat and stowing his leg and magical eye beneath his voluminous cloak. "We've wand shopping to do."

## Chapter 3

### *Chapter 3 of 10*

Moody and Polyxena search for answers in Diagon Alley and have a run-in with an angry Death Eater.

A/N: I hope people are enjoying this, despite the lack of SS/HG sexual interaction. What?*No*? Okay, okay, fine. Let me think here... umm... "Snape drove his throbbing hardness into her tight, wet sheath and listened with pleasure to her satisfied moans. 'Oh, gods, yes, Severus,' panted Hermione. 'You're so amazing.' Snape's answer was merely a grunt as he slammed himself into her, finally feeling her convulse around him, and finished with a groan of ecstasy." Hope that tides everyone over long enough to read a little OC fic and leave a stellar review! :)

\* \* \*

Augusta and Septimius strode into Diagon Alley after their long breakfast and moved easily among the clusters of nervous shoppers on the lookout for the next big Death Eater. Augusta tossed her wavy dark hair affably and took Septimius' arm. "Perhaps we ought to start in Flourish and Blott's, darling," she said sweetly. "I'd so like to read Aphrodite Cusan's latest."

Moody rolled his eyes. "A bit on the obvious side...*darling*," he said in the random Muggle's growl-free voice.

"This is just too odd," whispered Polyxena. "Melting clocks be damned, *this* is Daliesque surreal." She caught their reflections in a shop window. "Look at us! Look at you!"

The couple did enter the bookshop, as it would seem far more natural if they had a few shopping bags. "Don't tell me you read that Aphrodite Cusan tripe," grumbled Moody/Septimius, taking a discreet swig of his Polyjuice Potion.

Polyxena/Augusta gave an embarrassed shrug. "Occasionally, when I've time. What sort of books do you read, then?*The Complete Idiot's Guide to Constant Vigilance?*"

"You've read my book?" Alastor smiled widely.

"Er, I was joking," she replied uncomfortably. "Oh, look, they've revised*Handshake or Murder Plot? An Auror's Guide*."

"Finally." Looking around for the volume in question, Moody's eyes narrowed. "Another joke."

Polyxena nodded apologetically. "I can't turn it off. Can I just get my book without anymore snide comments?" Since Alastor waved her toward the 'Romance' section, she scurried off and pulled a paperback book from the shelf. After paying ten Sickles and five Knuts for it, she rejoined her companion and said, "Right. Now where?"

"I could use more lacewing flies," said Mad-Eye, indicating his flask. "We'll go to the Apothecary and then the wand shop. And in the wand shop, you don't say a word," he barked like a crusty old general in his bivouac.

"Such effrontery!" exclaimed Polyxena. "It's *my* father we're look..."

Alastor's random Muggle hand clamped over her mouth. "Not another word. CONSTANT VIGILANCE!" He gave a quick glance at their startled fellow customers. "... is what Mad-Eye Moody would no doubt say to do in dark times such as these. Come along, dear." The pair beat a hasty retreat to the Apothecary, and Polyxena remarked,

"Nice save. Glad you're thinking on your feet."

"It's quite a nice change to have feet," replied Moody. "It has a better ring to it than 'thinking on your foot and peg leg.'"

"Indeed," agreed Polyxena as her Polyjuiced pal paid a Galleon for a packet of stewed lacewing flies. "Do we really have to go to the wand shop?"

"Why else would we be here?" grunted Moody, sounding strangely like his old self. "Come on. Let me do the talking. Keep that tart tongue out of your pretty little cheek."

Self-consciously, Polyxena's long fingers darted to one of her smooth, slightly reddened cheeks. "Whatever you say," she sighed.

"Can I have that in writing?" asked Mad-Eye in the most jocular tone he could muster.

"Fuck off." Polyxena smiled as she said it. "We're almost there. Bloody hell," she added in a whisper. "Look at what's happened to it. My father's family..."

"Your family," interjected Moody dryly.

"... has had this business since 382 BCE, and now look. It's becoming a Stop 'n' Jinx." She observed the posters in the window with narrow, critical eyes. "But what a catchy advert."

"Poisoned candle, one Galleon," Alastor read, "vaguely menacing tribal mask, fifty Galleons; Hand of Glory, fifteen Galleons, twelve Sickles; coming up with the perfect jinx for Walpurgis Night, priceless. Stop 'n' Jinx: taking the Dark Arts out of Knockturn Alley, one opal at a time.' Let me guess: you designed this?"

"Of course." Polyxena preened proudly. "But that means my father must have sold his shop."

"He could be subletting it," Alastor soothed. "Come on, let's speak with this bloke."

"Oh, fuck it!" Cursing, Polyxena darted behind her companion. "That's Icarus Diggle, the marketing director. I've spoken to him only about a thousand times."

"Go on, then." Moody gave her a shove forward. "Pretend you're on business."

"I thought I was Augusta Blackwood?"

"Just do as I say."

"Hello there, Icarus," said Polyxena brightly. "How's our latest campaign working out for you?"

"Polyxena Ollivander! What a surprise. Here on business?"

"I am," she said nonchalantly. "We're working with Weasley's Wizard Wheezes now. I was just on my way there when I saw you!"

"These adverts are pure genius, Polyxena," said Icarus effusively.

"Thanks. I see you've got a new storefront. Did you just buy it?"

"Leased it, actually," confided Icarus, "from a fellow called Avery Harz up in Hogsmeade."

"Well, it's lovely. Good luck with things!" called Polyxena as she started off toward the Weasley's joke shop. "That was easy enough," she said to Moody. "But who the fuck is Avery Harz?"

"A Death Eater," returned Moody darkly.

"Oh, Alastor, you say that about everyone."

"My name's not Alastor; CONSTANT VIGILANCE," he roared to the astonishment of passersby and hastily amended: "... said Mad-Eye before he left the pub and went to his flat, where had sex with an irresistibly beautiful veela on every surface in the house."

Polyxena made a dismissive gesture. "You're going to run out of those excuse stories very quickly, Septimius. Beautiful veela, indeed. Stop drinking from that flask," she hissed. "This whole 'other body' thing is throwing my brain for a Snitch."

"Fair enough." Moody replaced the cap. "Give me another fifteen minutes." Checking his watch, he said casually, "We'll go behind these buildings until I transform, and you can explain why you think I couldn't sleep with a veela."

"I'm sure you could," began Polyxena in an apologetic tone. "I'm sure you could have sex with whomever you wish. Don't mind me. Why? Do you have a veela in mind? My father hated veela," she remembered suddenly. "He said their hair makes temperamental wands because they're so flighty."

"I don't like veela," he replied in a tone that was half reassuring, half something else she couldn't place. "But why resist a bit of, shall we say, advertising?"

"Right, of course, advertising. Anyhow, whatever your name is, why do you say this Harz character is a Death Eater? Any proof or is this just one of those 'the Dairy Witch cashier gave me back the wrong change; she must be working for Vold... bloke' things?"

"Avery, you may remember, is the reason for this." Withdrawing the wooden leg from the folds of his robes, Moody thumped it on the ground. "And the Death Eaters were once called the Knights of Walpurgis. On Walpurgis Night, the witches supposedly meet in the Harz Mountains." He snorted through his rapidly returning deformed nose. "Rather bloody obvious, if you ask me."

"Very *Asti Spumante Code*," agreed Polyxena. "Oh, that's better."

Moody had regained his original form and was currently reattaching his false limb. Pointing the tip of his wand at his magical eye, he said a quick *Scourgify* to cleanse it of any dust, then popped it back into his empty socket with a few taps to the side of his head.



"That's revolting, Alastor!" Watching him blink his eye into place, swiveling it this way and that, Polyxena wrinkled her nose.

"Not half as revolting as this." With his wand, he conjured a glass of water and reached back into his socket, withdrawing the eye with a long, slow sucking sound and swishing it in the water before he returned it once more to its proper place.

"Finished?" Polyxena arched a brow. "I must say, that's not at all sexy. No wonder the veela aren't lining up at the door."

"Cheeky wench," growled Moody. "Revolting is using half a bottle of Sleekeazy potion per day." Lifting her hair by the roots, he trailed his fingers down to the ends. "Like a head full of flobberworms, that," he lied. Polyxena's hair was like a thick, satin blanket and stopped just above her breasts.

Injured, she jerked away. "Keep your grimy, calloused hands off my hair!" she snapped, tossing her mane over her shoulder. "We'd better be getting to Hogsmeade, wouldn't you say?" She strode on ahead, until a now-familiar gnarled hand clamped itself over her mouth from behind.

"Any Death Eater could have been hiding under an Invisibility Cloak while you revealed our destination," he said in a low, dangerous voice. Well, a voice more low and dangerous than his usual growl. His eye spun wildly for a moment. "We were lucky this time. The next could mean death. Death!" He shook her for emphasis. "And," he added, moving closer to her ear, "there's also nothing sexy about a grown woman throwing a temper tantrum."

A sob broke free from Polyxena's throat. "You're mad and paranoid!" she wailed, sinking down to sit on a crate that had once contained canary creams. "What Death Eater would stand around an alley in an Invisibility Cloak waiting for an Auror to stop by and accidentally disclose his secret destination?"

Moody sank to the neighboring crate and wrapped an awkward arm around the girl's shoulders. "It's all right," he attempted gamely, never a fan of hysterical women. "But for Merlin's sake, use sense next time."

"Do you mean that we could actually die? And there's nothing wrong with my hair!" she continued wetly.

A non-sequitur indeed. Though he was not to be topped in catching Dark wizards, Alastor Moody had never professed to understand the female mind (perhaps that was why Bellatrix Lestrange had chosen to relieve him of his eye), but a giggling instinct told him to address the latter issue. "Of course not," he growled kindly, prying the tearstained folds of his traveling cloak from her balled-up fingers. "I was only joking. No, it's... fine."

"Fine?" That had only served to agitate her further. "Very creative, you are."

"Lovely?" he tried. Merlin's balls, what did she want him to say? "Why are you on about your bloody hair? You're lucky I don't fall to pieces when someone has a laugh about *my* looks."

Polyxena managed a small chuckle. "Sorry. I'm so fucking sorry. It wasn't that. It's just that I..."

A jet of red light brushed past her elbow, and Moody snapped to attention. "Get down. Shut up," he commanded before pushing her to the pavement behind the crates.

"I take it you've never been married," Polyxena couldn't resist hissing.

Jabbing his wand out before him, Moody glowered into the dark end of the alley, and his magical eye whirled until it hit the figure of a man crouched behind a dustbin. "Nott," he snarled. "Come on and fight a proper duel."

"Not a duel!" Polyxena's head popped up from behind the crate.

"STAY DOWN!" barked the former Auror as another jet of light, this time the ominous green, shot past him. Moody sent a silent spell at the dustbin, shattering it into a thousand pieces to reveal a surprised, but uninjured Nott.

"*Sectumsempra!*" bellowed Nott, slicing his wand through the air while an identical cut appeared on Alastor's wand arm. "Old Mad-Eye Moody," he sneered. "Reflexes starting to go? Then again..." He launched a spell at the wooden leg, which Moody nimbly dodged. "... they were never particularly good to begin with."

"*Stupefy!*"

"*Protego!*"

"*Crucio!*"

"Polyxena!"

"*Rictusempra!*"

"*Petrificus Totalus!*"

Nott's limbs finally snapped together, and Moody performed the Tickling Charm's countercurse on Polyxena.

"Gods above!" she cried when she had regained her breath. "Are you all right?" Taking his injured arm, she pushed back the sleeve and performed a quick Healing Spell. "I've never heard of the *Sectumsempra*."

"Come with me," ordered Moody. "Before the Full Body Bind wears off of that scum. I'll Floo Tonks, and she can get him to Azkaban."

Polyxena and Mad-Eye didn't speak while they waited the few minutes for the witch called Tonks to arrive. The former was surprised that the Auror turned out to be a young woman her own age, a girl she vaguely remembered from school, though Tonks had been a Hufflepuff. However, rather than her previous bright pink hair and mischievous eyes, her former classmate had mousy brown locks and a rather somber mien.

"Wotcher, Mad-Eye," she said wearily. "Wotcher, Person I Don't Know."

"Yes, you do," corrected Polyxena. "Polyxena Ollivander. We graduated from Hogwarts together."

"Right," answered Tonks distractedly, magicking Nott into the air. "Off to Azkaban I go. Nice one, Mad-Eye. Good seeing you again, Proserpina." Tonks Apparated from the alleyway, and so Moody and Polyxena hastened back into Diagon Alley.

He dragged her back to the Leaky Cauldron for lunch, sat them at a table in the corner, and cast a Muffliato Charm on the rest of the diners. "I've been patient, Polyxena Ollivander," he said in a deep growl, "but I ask you, *where did you learn the Unforgivable Curses?*"

"Erm, Defense Against the Dark Arts?" she said hopefully.

"Don't lie to me." He grabbed at her arm. "Where?"

"Why do you always find it necessary to manhandle me?" she sighed, then took a look at his dark expression. "Father," she finally admitted. "He was a great admirer of Voldemort's spell work. 'Terrible, but great,' he always said. I think it was some kind of aesthetic thing. He wanted to learn every spell there was, and though he didn't

believe that witches could ever be as great as wizards, he showed a great deal of his spells to me. I saw him occasionally when I was in school. I should have told you that, but no one likes to think that her father could be a Death Eater."

Mad-Eye ignored this. "Anything else you've been hiding?"

"I don't think so. He called the Dark Lord 'He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named.' Quite a mouthful, isn't it? He was very picky about his wands and quite arrogant."

"No more withholding information," snapped Moody, then he sighed, "I'm getting to old for this. I supposedly retired a good decade ago."

"You did brilliantly," Polyxena offered in a bracing voice. "I was impressed."

Moody shook the compliment off like a horse shaking off flies. "Should've checked the area for possible spies. I let my guard down."

"That was my fault," she argued. "Me and my pre-Parnassian fit."

"Didn't help," grunted the ex-Auror. "Well, never mind." He drank deeply from his flask, having replaced the Polyjuice Potion with brandy. "Tonight, we'll return you-know-where, and then the flock flies toward the motherland."

"The... what?" Polyxena was befuddled. "Did you steal that from *In the Army Now*?"

"Code, girl!" he said impatiently. "Never mind; I'll explain you-know-where."

"What is it with you people? You-Know-Who, you-know-where... do you know why?" She saw him draw in breath to bark his mantra and raise his fist above the table. "Never mind; don't answer that. Constant vigilance."

"The very thing," he agreed, pleased that she had finally caught on. "The very thing."

## Chapter 4

*Chapter 4 of 10*

A semi-passionate interlude (but not with whom you think), a grisly gift complete with card, and a whiff of Amortentia.  
Mundungus Fletcher also makes an appearance.

A/N: Leave reviews! I will gladly trade them for sexual favors and/or baked goods.

\* \* \*

Polyxena staggered into the kitchen behind Molly, who was carrying two brimming bags of shopping, and heaved her ten-pound watermelon onto the kitchen worktop with a resounding thump.

"Bloody hell," she gasped. "What exactly is your objection to mixing magic and groceries?"

"If you knew my twins, you'd understand," said Molly briskly, storing a loaf of bread and a bag of apples.

As Polyxena contemplated the sizeable, green spheroid dominating the tile, Moody stalked into the room and thundered, "Where were you?"

"Doing a shop," replied Molly calmly. "Nothing to lose another eye about, Mad-Eye. Leave your robe on."

He quirked an eyebrow at Polyxena, whose cheeks flamed. "I plan to. Why'd you take her with you?"

"I carried a watermelon," answered Polyxena with a cheeky grin.

Moody didn't get it, of course, but he did say casually, "You've got a bit of color. Did you get too much sun in Diagon Alley?"

"Fuck off," she snapped, turning away to put a pack of yellow onions in the cupboard.

"Don't torture the poor girl, Mad-Eye," scolded Molly. "She's had a long day. In fact, sit down, dear. I'll make you some onion soup."

Willingly, Polyxena obeyed. "I take it I'm not a 'right bitch' any longer?"

A pot of jam exploded when Molly started and dropped it onto the stone floor. "I beg your pardon?"

"How did you hear that?" Moody was as cheerful as she'd ever seen him.

"I hardly think I have to tell *you* that," she returned. "I found this string thing that amplifies conversations."

"Extendable Ears," sighed Molly wearily. "My sons sell them in their joke shop."

Moody was practically dancing on the table. "Perhaps I underestimated you."

"Perhaps?" Polyxena returned dryly. "Perhaps so. Excuse me." Rising from her seat, she started toward the loo to splash her face with water. Molly Weasley and Mad-Eye Moody were too much personality for one small room.

"Polyxena Ollivander." An arm snaked out to catch her by the elbow. "You have no idea how surprised I was to see you showing up here."

"I think I probably do," she answered, seeing Bill's face loom over her in the shadowy hallway. "It's hard to believe you're engaged." She imbued her statement with false cheer. Though the girl had absolutely no desire to pick up where they'd left off (one embarrassing and alarmingly short night on the Astronomy Tower of all uncreative places), the news of his imminent marriage didn't exactly fill her with joy and good wishes.

"You're telling me," he said with a shake of his head that made his fang earring jangle. "It seems like just yesterday I was chatting you up in the library and... " He leaned closer, until his lips were brushing her cheek. "... waiting for you in the Tower."

"Me and about a hundred others," she scoffed, but made no move to pull away. Her curiosity was piqued by the idea that Bill had gotten better in the nine ensuing years since their assignation. Merlin knew he couldn't have gotten any worse.

Lowering his lips to hers, Bill pressed a firm kiss on them, openmouthed, but no tongue. A blunt object that she didn't think was his wand pressed into her taut stomach and made her cry out:

"Gods above, your mind really *did* stop at sixteen! I pity this poor Fleur, whoever she is. Her fiancé can't even kiss his ex-girlfriend without getting a hard-on."

A chuckle bubbled up from Bill's throat. "You always were a pisser, Ollivander," he said with a nostalgic grin. "But believe me, I'm a lot better now. Your review didn't do much for me with the seventh-year girls. I didn't get laid for weeks after you told every bloody Ravenclaw that I was a two-minute man." With a heated look, he added, "And I'd be willing to bet you've acquired a few skills yourself. Well," he said, checking his watch, "I'd better go get Fleur from Gringotts. Don't like to leave her alone with the Death Eaters about." Bill turned and galloped down the stairs, so Polyxena was able to complete her errand.

She dabbed at her temples with a soaked facecloth, gave her hair an unnecessary brushing, and then turned to go. "Merlin!" she exclaimed into a face full of olive robe and black wool. "Alastor, you gave me a fright." With narrowed eyes, she added, "*Don't* say it. But does that really extend to your following me to the loo?"

"Wasn't thinking about you," he said, a bit condescendingly. "Molly sent me to find Bill."

"Oh. Well then." She pursed her lips and informed him in a frosty tone: "He just went downstairs."

"It took everything I learned in Stealth and Tracking, but I did see him go downstairs," grumbled Moody. "That's not all I saw," he added after a moment's hesitation. "I thought you were through hiding information."

Polyxena bristled. "Anything I did with Bill is nothing to do with finding my father," she said icily, repeating, "Finding my father. A task you seem to be doing little about. It feels like we're in the fourth chapter of the 'Constant Vigilance' story, and all we do is engage in witty banter during halfhearted searches."

"You nearly got *Avada'd* by one of You-Know-Who's inner circle," he snarled. "If there's something witty and halfhearted about Dark wizards, I'd like to know what it is."

"Nothing," she said succinctly. "But I spent an afternoon grocery shopping with that Weasley woman and getting hit on by her worthless tosser of an eldest son!"

"I didn't even think you wanted to find your father." Merlin, she was giving him a headache. "And I never saw anyone look so cozy with a bloke she thought was worthless."

"What do you care?" she demanded, ignoring the part about Ollivander. "Paranoid fucker, looking through walls with your namesake mad eye. But just for the record, Bill's a crap kisser and an even more crap lover. Not that I have anything to... " She trailed off. "Well, now you know."

"Now I know," said Moody equably. "Now I know that *should* have put Veritaserum into your sherry."

"Naff off," mumbled Polyxena as she turned to walk down the stairs, promptly crashed into a slovenly, ginger-haired man, and was nearly suffocated by a whiff of stale tobacco, Jack's, rum punch, and what she could only hope was fish. "Who the fuck are you?"

"Nice girl," the slovenly man called to Mad-Eye.

"Before this gets any worse... " Moody approached the pair on the stairs. "... Polyxena Ollivander, Mundungus Fletcher."

"Are you in the Order?" she queried. "Or did you escape from the homeless shelter?"

"Didn' escape," mumbled Mundungus. "Left of m' own free will."

Polyxena's eyebrows rose faster than a Firebolt. "Well, that makes it all better, then. I should get downstairs. I'm exhausted; your friend dragged me to Diagon Alley at the crack of dawn this morning."

"We're not friends," growled Moody, but no one seemed to listen.

"P'lyx'na Ollivander?" Dung scratched his unshorn head.

"Yes, but you really need to start using vowels."

"Then m' message is for you. See, I had a business transaction down in Knockturn Alley; these special Dark wands got 'lost in shipping' if y' know what I mean, wink, wink, nudge, nudge. So I go, an' there's this bloke says, 'Dung, that locket y' sold me last week's got a hex on it like a motherfucking Doxy in heat,' an' so I says... "

Befuddled, Polyxena shook her head and said, "I really don't see what this message has to do with me."

"I'm gettin' to that! So, I says, 'Go fuck a goat, Abe, it's what y' do best.' An' he gets all out of his cauldron an' starts casting the Engorgement Charm. M' healer says I'll have perm'n'ant damage if I get one more of them cast on me, know what I mean? So I get the hell outta there an' go t' the Leaky Cauldron, an' old Tom says he's got a package for P'lyx'na Ollivander, an' she was with old Mad-Eye Moody, an' I says 'Mad-Eye Moody, the cocksuckin' bastard! Heh, heh, just kiddin' Mad-Eye. So I gets a glass of Firewhisky, an' this hag sits down wantin' somethin' I could damage with the Engorgement Charm, know what I mean? So I says, 'Fuckin' hags is what I do best; how 'bout... "

"Can I just have the package?" cut in Polyxena, reaching out a spidery, white hand for the elegantly wrapped green and silver box in Dung's grasp. "I believe I'm superfluous to the conversation at this point."

Mundungus thrust it at her with a disaffected grunt. "Here y' go." Pulling a pipe from the pocket of his threadbare tweed overcoat, he lit it with the tip of his wand so that it belched out a cloud of acrid, green smoke. "What's in it?"

Deftly, Polyxena began to peel the Spellotape from the front. "Good question."

"PUT THE BLOODY THING DOWN!" shouted Moody, casting a Banishing Charm on the box. It flew forth from the girl's hands and crashed into the opposite wall. "This could have a curse on it the likes of which no wizard has ever known! I've just seen a girl in St. Mungo's who opened a cursed necklace and may not live to see Christmas!" Moody pointed his wand at the package and slowly peeled back the layers of paper with some sort of spell until it fell open to reveal a slender, white object on a bed of green velvet.

"S a joint!" cried Dung joyfully.

"No." Mad-Eye focused his specially-abled ocular prosthetic on the object and then magicked the box back across the room. "Although there are joints on it."

Nervously, Polyxena peered at the thing resting there and no sooner had she, when she let out a piercing scream that brought Molly, Arthur, and Remus running up the stairs, and set Mrs. Black shrieking,

*"Mudbloods! Vile, wretched thieves! Stealing from the house of my fathers!"*

For once, no one paid her any heed, for they were all too transfixed by the finger that had been wrapped up in pretty paper and sent to Polyxena. It was long, white, and tapered with a neatly trimmed nail, but an oozing, bloody stump where it had been cut off with a knife, and the resemblance it bore to Polyxena's finger was so uncanny, it went without saying.

"That's absofuckingly horrible," she moaned and stumbled to the loo for a good vomit. When she opened the door, Moody was waiting for her, and she said weakly, "They've sent me my father's finger. His fucking *finger*. How disgusting can you be?"

He handed her the flask. "There was a card."

"A *card*? I shouldn't have asked that last question." Tearing it open, she read,

*Bad idea to send Nott to Azkaban. Who knows what I'll cut off next?*

"I"? Doesn't he mean 'we'? This note can't possibly be from Vold... wizard himself, can it?"

"Not likely," growled Alastor thoughtfully. "Threatening notes and limbs in pretty boxes aren't You-Know-Who's style. If You-Know-Who doesn't like you, he just kills you. Besides, he wouldn't go to all this trouble for Nott. Nott denounced him after the First War."

"We should go to Hogsmeade tomorrow," said Polyxena suddenly. "Whoever this Avery Harz character is might still be there. Maybe Vold... iekins doesn't act like a character from a Janet Evanovich novel, but some dramatic Death Eater could."

"Fair enough," said Moody. "I have a few questions for Dumbledore, come to that."

\* \* \*

Mercifully, Polyxena was allowed to sleep off the shock of finding her father's finger in gift packaging, and she and Moody Apparated to Hogsmeade just before noon the next day.

"All right," he said in a low voice, keeping his cloak over his face. It didn't do much to disguise his appearance, but the idea was there. "First, we go to Gladrags Wizardwear."

"Gladrags Wizardwear. Distinctive looks for witches and wizards at prices that will make you glad," rattled off Polyxena under her breath.

"Right," muttered Mad-Eye, giving the area a quick three-sixty check. "Keep your cloak over your face. You can leave your hat on."

"Kinky, aren't you, Tom Jones?" she replied, making the necessary wardrobe adjustments.

The pair set off for the robe shop, and an hour and a few well placed Glamour Charms later, they emerged in new disguises: Polyxena as a younger, prettier version of Rita Skeeter and Moody in a long, trailing cloak that hid his wooden leg, an eye patch over his magical eye, and a capacious hat to hide his grizzled hair.

"You look... " Polyxena paused, trying to force herself to say 'nice'. "... fucked up. I think that will draw more attention than your original form. I never thought I'd say that, but, Merlin, look at you. Don't you have anymore of that Polyjuice Potion?"

"Come on," growled Moody. "We've got an appointment with Dumbledore."

Up the road they went toward Hogwarts Castle, Polyxena trailing anxiously behind her bizarrely attired companion. "Have you been back to school since your graduation?" she queried.

Snorting, Moody said, "In a manner of speaking. I signed on to teach Defense Against the Dark Arts for a year, but that all went to hell."

"Spitwads?" asked Polyxena lightly.

"No, Imperius Curse, locked in a trunk, used in a plot to bring back You-Know-Who."

"Really? By whom?"

"Barty Crouch the Younger. It wasn't a pleasant time. When You-Know-Who came back to life, they finally foiled the plot after what felt like a 734 page novel. Dumbledore had me shipped off to the hospital wing, of course, but I heard something about Potter's wand foiling Voldemort's wand. When I heard that old Ollivander had gone missing, I wondered, but Dumbledore never said a word to me. But I figure he'll talk to Ollivander's own daughter."

Polyxena was silent as they passed through the great stone doorway and found their way to the stairs. The school had never seemed so vast when she'd attended, aside from the night of her Sorting. "Horace Slughorn still works here?" she asked incredulously. "He must be as old as Dumbledore by now."

"Last I heard, Snape was teaching Potions," growled Moody.

*The sexy man*, remembered Polyxena with a wry grin, though she didn't mention it. He and Moody had gotten on poorly enough as it was. "Well, that was Slughorn with a cauldron of... something." She watched him go, carrying a pewter cauldron that gave off a gentle, spiraling steam. "Something that smells good, though. Baking cake, rain, and some other thing. Like a brandy and coriander musk." She inhaled again. "I like it."

Disfigured nose twitching, Alastor took a swig from his hip flask. "All I can smell is Sleekeazy's Hair Potion. Come on; it's this way."

Potion long forgotten, they arrived at Dumbledore's office, gave the password (Blood-flavored lollipops), and soon were seated in front of his desk.

"Afternoon, Dumbledore," said Moody easily.

"Hello, Alastor," said the older wizard, blue eyes a-twinkle. "Sherbet Lemon? One for your companion?"

"Yes, please." Polyxena took one politely, which seemed to please Albus to no end.

"Not for me." Moody lit his black pipe and puffed out a ring of smoke toward Polyxena.

"Motherfucker!" she exclaimed, stomping her high-heeled shoe on the floor.

Not a flicker of curiosity crossed Dumbledore's serene face. "Polyxena Ollivander of Ravenclaw. I was so sorry to hear about your father."

"I got a NEWT in fucking Potions," was her reply.

Mad-Eye glanced around suspiciously. "What happened to the Secrecy Sensor and the Sneakoscope I gave you last year?"

"Capslock! Harry saw fit to break them," sighed Dumbledore. "So, what brings you and your charming lady friend here today, Alastor?"

"It's about Potter's wand," he began. "I heard you mention that it reacted with You-Know-Who's and kept off the Killing Curse. Now that Polyxena here is looking for her father, the wandmaker who made both wands, I thought you might tell us why."

Dumbledore regarded Polyxena's face, disguised though it was, and said, "I see. I wasn't aware you and Ollivander were close."

Polyxena fixed him with a glare. "What exactly is that supposed to..."

"They were extremely close," grunted Moody. "And she wants to know what the Death Eaters have in store for him. One of them sent her his finger wrapped in Slytherin wrapping paper last night."

Dumbledore's silver brows knitted together. "Indeed?"

"Along with this note." Moody shoved the card across the headmaster's desk. "Doesn't look like You-Know-Who's doing."

"If it was the Dark Lord himself, he'd have killed my father and set the Mark over his shop, but if he was using him for something, I doubt he'd taunt us with notes and severed limbs. He seems a bit too prosaic for that."

"*Priori Incantatem*," said Dumbledore heavily. "Harry's and Voldemort's wands both have a phoenix feather core. That phoenix gave two feathers only. Fawkes. The effect is rather rare; even Voldemort himself didn't plan for it. My guess would be that whoever kidnapped your father is looking for a way to sever that connection."

"Isn't that quite a lot of trouble?" asked Polyxena. "Couldn't Vold... ieboy just sneak up behind Potter and hit him with the Killing Curse? Or, er, you know, the other way around," she amended at the outraged looks from both men. "Just brainstorming here."

"She's got a point," Moody allowed. "When it comes to constant vigilance, Potter's not exactly the Triwizard Champion. He keeps his wand in the back pocket of his trousers, for Merlin's sake."

"He'll lose a buttock like that," added Polyxena. "The cheekless Chosen One."

"I do not think that either Harry or Voldemort will have the opportunity for a surprise attack," put in Dumbledore, however graciously.

Moody set down his pipe. "There's always the opportunity for a surprise attack," he said darkly.

"It's true," said his companion. "Nott tried to kill us when we were sitting in an alley. Fortunately, Alastor put him in a Full Body Bind and had him carted straight to Azkaban, but did we expect to be Unforgivably at? Not in the slightest."

Taking a deep breath, Dumbledore exhaled it in a regretful sigh. "He's out of jail."

## Chapter 5

### *Chapter 5 of 10*

Dumbledore finishes his meeting with his guests and offers them a room at Hormonal Hogwarts. A sentimental reminiscence leads to a certain deed named after a sour citrus fruit. A somewhat realistically described scene, no ?core of her womanhood? or ?sleekly muscled form.?

A/N: Thanks for reading! Reviews are always welcome.

\* \* \*

"Out of jail?" cried Polyxena. "But he went in yesterday! I thought the Ministry was desperate to put Death Eaters away, especially with that Scrimgeour fellow in charge. Some bloke from Hufflepuff who was a year or two behind me in school just went to Azkaban, and I'd give one of my own fingers that he wasn't following the Dark Lord." She paused, biting her lower lip. "And I wouldn't bet a limb that my father isn't doing thus, finger or no finger."

Dumbledore's eyes twinkled at her. "Nor would I," he said kindly, holding up his withered, blackened right hand. "But I will tell you that your father wrote me straightaway to inform me of the wand that chose Harry Potter."

"The wand that chose Harry Potter.' I'll bet he phrased it just like that, too. He knows perfectly well that if I wanted to use Alastor's wand or your wand, I could. It might not work quite as well, but there is such a thing as a hand-me-down wand." Polyxena was firm, but allowed, "Perhaps that's why he never wanted to leave his wand shop to my care. Do you think that the Voldster is keeping my father prisoner to make a new wand that will choose him? Is that possible to do? It must be; I broke my wand when I was in fifth year, and Papa replaced it for me. No two wands are the same," she finished, uncomfortably aware that she had babbled on like an encyclopedia of wandmaking.

Moody's brows shot up, widening his beady eye. "Interesting. Very Ravenclaw. It's worth looking into, at least."

"I agree." Nodding, Dumbledore stood. "Sorry to dismiss you, but I have another appointment. You're welcome to stay in the castle rather than Hogsmeade. I believe there's a spare room in the staff quarters yet."

With an appreciative nod, Moody said, "We will, Albus. Be safer, at least." As though he had reminded himself, he did a quick scan of the room.

"Thank you very much," added Polyxena as they made their way from the office. "Do you still remember where the staff quarters are?" she asked of Moody when they were once again standing before the stone gargoyle.

Moody glowered and growled, "I was dragged there in a locked trunk, barley alive and under the Imperius Curse. Somehow I forgot about cartography."

Blushing, Polyxena nodded and glanced around the wide, tapestried hallway. "Someone's bound to happen along. Oh, look! There's the sexy man."

"The which?"

"Oh, um, your colleague, Severus, but look. He's busy." Hiding a grin, Polyxena watched surreptitiously as Snape snogged the face off a head of bushy hair in Gryffindor

robes. *Lucky girl*, she thought wryly. *Hogwarts must have some sort of Hormone Heightening Spell cast over it*

Moody merely snorted. "Severus Snape, a two-faced traitor if there ever was one. I wouldn't be surprised if he up and killed Dumbledore someday."

"That's ridiculous!" exclaimed his companion, edging away from the passionate couple. "Kill Dumbledore? That man will outlive us all, I'm sure of it."

"Authority figures make the best targets," admonished Moody. "And there's no blocking the Killing Curse."

"You're a regular old Hugo Whittier, aren't you?" she laughed delightedly.

"No use sidestepping the truth. It's hard to be vigilant wearing rose colored glasses."

Shaking her head, Polyxena said with a sigh, "Let's just go to the Great Hall. It's about time for supper."

Moody shook his head. "I brought a few rations with me. I don't trust that house-elf in the kitchens. Winky. Her master was the one who stole my identity."

"You're afraid that on the off chance you may have possibly stopped by, there's a plot to poison you in full view of the students and staff? And this death vendetta is held by someone called *Winky*? Come on; we're going to eat." Polyxena strode ahead, leaving him no choice but to follow her.

The throng of students filling the Great Hall nearly overwhelmed the ex-Auror and his self-appointed charge. Ravensclaws, Gryffindors, Hufflepuffs, and Slytherins poured through the great, arched doorway in a sea of black that reminded Polyxena of an ant colony. Never before had she seen the dining area from the vantage point of the staff table: the talking, laughing masses trying to set one another on fire and, she noted with a sickened grimace at a red-headed boy, stuff as many sausages into their mouths as humanly possible.

"Weasley's brother," grunted Moody when he saw her staring. "He'll choke to death long before he gets hexed. There's his friend, Potter."

Polyxena narrowed her eyes at a rather unremarkable boy with messy black hair and glasses. "So that's the 'Chosen One', is it? You know him? Is he a good wizard?"

"He's a Gryffindor," said Moody with a slight shrug, as though this explained everything. "Doesn't think about consequences, just acts."

Smiling, she replied, "I'm terrified to hear your description for Ravenclaw." Taking a final sip of pumpkin juice fortified by whatever had been in the flask, she asked coyly, "And what house were you in, Alastor? You never said."

A pause stretched on so long that she thought he wasn't going to answer, but he finally muttered, "Slytherin."

Polyxena let out a shriek of laughter. "The Dark house! Bloody hell, that's the funniest thing I've heard all year. No wonder you can think like a Dark wizard."

Lowering his head to inspect his treacle tart for poisons, Moody said uncomfortably, "According to the Sorting Hat, I'm 'cunning' and 'quick to save my own neck.'"

"It probably didn't know what to make of you."

Moody let out a rare laugh. "I was up there a full six minutes. Longest six minutes of my life, aside from all that time in Crouch's steamer trunk."

At that point, the plates began to disappear, and the students shuffled off to start their essays. Out of the corner of her eye, Polyxena glimpsed her old Head of House and cried joyfully,

"Professor Flitwick!"

"Polyxena Ollivander!" he squeaked. (Polyxena and Moody had long dispensed with their disguises.) "One of my best Charms students! What brings you back to Hogwarts?"

"We had an interview with Dumbledore this afternoon," she explained, gesturing to include Mad-Eye. "About my father, you know."

"Dreadful business!" chirped Flitwick.

"Yes," agreed Polyxena with the proper show of sadness. "Would you be so kind as to show us the staff quarters? Dumbledore has offered us rooms here for the night."

"Of course!" He stood quickly, knocking over a few of the cushions he sat on. "This way!"

Polyxena leaned toward Alastor. "Unless of course, you'd like to sleep down in your old dungeon common room."

Moody exhaled a breath of air and growled, "That's enough out of you."

Flitwick led them out the door, into the entrance hall, and up six flights of marble stairs. Before they, and in particular Moody, could regain their ability to breathe, the Charms professor turned down a long, narrow corridor that ended in yet more stairs, a tiny, dark, twisting staircase that led to a portrait of three water nymphs and a couple of satyrs at a river.

"Bitterwort!" squeaked Flitwick, and the picture swung forward. "Fifth door on the right!" He motioned Moody and Polyxena inside and set off once again, presumably for his office.

Moody grabbed Polyxena's arm before she could set off down the hallway. "Wait. Could be Death Eaters."

"Inside Hogwarts? That's as ridiculous as your 'Dumbledore's Death' prophecy."

Pulling a Sneakoscope, a Foe-Glass, and a Dark Detector from his satchel, Moody went straight to work. When his instruments registered no evil activity, he inspected each and every door with his magical eye and cast some spell over the room that Polyxena assumed he'd learned as an Auror. When Mad-Eye finally pronounced the room free of Dark wizards, he led Polyxena to the door Flitwick had indicated and opened it cautiously, wand at the ready, brandishing his Secrecy Sensor like a weapon, and using the eye to look under the bed, in the bathtub, and in the wardrobe.

"I'd hate to see you in someplace we didn't already know was perfectly safe," remarked Polyxena.

"There's no such thing as perfectly safe," he replied, as she'd known he would. "CONSTANT VIGILANCE!"

"Right. So I can take this room, and you can have... What other room did he say?" Her voice rose nervously as she glanced at the single four-poster against the far wall.

"He didn't. And as I recall, Dumbledore said 'room' singular, not 'rooms' plural."

"I... but... I'm a... and you're a... Unless you can transfigure an armoire into a fold out sofa, this is bloody well not going to work."

"Safety in numbers," growled Moody. "But there wasn't much call for transfiguring beds at the Auror Office."

Polyxena's eyes darted as fast as her companion's magical one. "Well, one of us is going to have to sleep on the floor." She looked down. The floor was hard stone

covered by a single Oriental rug. "Take the bed," she urged. "You're missing limbs."

"We're both sleeping in the damn bed," he ground out. "Do you think I had time for this kind of nonsense out in the field, not knowing whether I was going to live or die?"

"Something tells me you slept underneath a cloak propped up by a stick, keeping your wand at the ready in case a squirrel, who was really an unregistered Animagus Death Eater in disguise happened by to eat an acorn, which was really a Horcrux made by Voldemort, and by 'eat,' I mean 'specially enchant to make indestructible.' Gods above, no wonder you were a Slytherin."

Alastor narrowed both his eyes at her. "How do you know about Horcruxes?"

"Father, of course. He'd been a Ravenclaw like me, so he read a great deal. I think the Dark Lord is bound to have one. He got *Avada*'d, and he didn't die."

With a thoughtful nod, Moody said appreciatively, "Interesting suggestion."

"Thank you." She glanced toward the spacious bathroom. "I'll just change then."

When Polyxena returned, Moody was already in the bed, puffing away at his pipe and staring at a piece of paper that she'd seen him pull from his pocket. He wore a nondescript flannel nightshirt, and she noticed that his wooden leg was propped up beside the nightstand.

"It's dangerous to smoke in bed," she said haughtily, tossing her hair as she stole timidly around to the other side of the four-poster. "Actually, you know what? I forgot, I've got some work I have to do yet for... for... work." Her feet edged back, tripping over the hem of her white nightgown until Moody grunted,

"Enough, girl."

Polyxena resignedly pulled back the edge of the blanket and lowered herself so close to the edge of the mattress, she promptly fell on the floor. Hastily and with blushing cheeks, she scrambled up and sat gingerly beside Moody. "Who are they?" The paper in his hands had turned out to be a very old, tattered photograph. In spite of herself, she edged over, across the imaginary line she had drawn to bisect the bed, and squinted at the smiling witches and wizards. "Your family?"

"Yeah, you might say that. Original Order," he growled, "from back during the First War. Me." He pointed. "And the Weasleys. Dumbledore." When Moody had finished naming everyone in the photograph, he said, "Most all of them are dead. About half, I'd say. Or insane from the Cruciatus, like the Longbottoms. Poor bastards."

"Bloody hell." Polyxena traced a scar on Moody's left cheek with her slender finger. "No wonder you're so fucking paranoid. I didn't realize... You carry this around with you?"

He gave a half shrug. "Yeah, well. I found it last year with my old Invisibility Cloak."

"Look how happy they are here," she remarked sadly. "And for most of them to end up dead... You were lucky."

Moody arched the brow over his magical eye. "Depends on your definition of 'lucky,' I suppose."

With a laugh, Polyxena amended, "You may be right about that. But, you know, I think it's very admirable that you didn't go about turning Unforgivables on the Death Eaters after that, even though you were allowed." Her lips twisted into a wry grin. "Molly told me all about you."

Uncomfortably, Moody mumbled, "Don't... I wouldn't say... If I'd gotten a chance at Barty Crouch's son, things might have been different." He shook his head, as though coming out of a daze and set the photograph aside. "No spell can reawaken the dead."

Ever pragmatic (aside from her Diagon Alley sobbing fit), Polyxena nodded sagely. "That's certainly true." Looking up into his eyes, real and magical, she said gently, "But it's sweet of you to remember them."

Mad-Eye gave a snort of laughter. "I don't think I've ever been called 'sweet' before."

"Well, I've never slept in a bed with a bloke before," replied Polyxena tensely, "so I guess we're even." She felt him staring at her. "No, not even Bill, so don't ask. We had two awful minutes on the Astronomy Tower, and that was it for me at Hogwarts. After school, I got too busy with work, and anyhow, I live with my mum, so I never..." Her cheeks pinkened. "Rowena's rack! Did you put Veritaserum in my pumpkin juice? Why am I telling you this?"

"You know why," he growled. "The Amortentia."

"The Amortentia," she sighed.

"If it's any consolation, I smelled sherry, watermelon, and hair potion."

Polyxena felt a flicker of something curling in her stomach and spiraling upward like the Amortentia's steam. "I... I see." She licked her lips with a dry tongue. "That's... something." She inched forward, moving back across her invisible line, and touched a hand to his cheek. The musky scent she had recognized in the potion invaded her nostrils and cut off any remaining non-primal brain function. In that spirit, she closed the gap between them and pressed her lips cautiously against his. She felt his fingers thread through her hair as the kiss deepened to a dizzying heat that she couldn't have really imagined at their first meeting.

She broke away first and panted, "You're much better at this than Weasley." After a pause, she continued in a timid whisper, "Alastor, I think... I want... something else. More." Crossing her arms over her chest, she drew the thin, cotton nightgown over her head and leaned slowly back into the feather pillows.

It wasn't that he was worried about outperforming Bill Weasley (Hell, he could fall asleep at the wheel and still be a better lay than Weasley), but he started at the sight of Polyxena's pale white flesh against the crimson sheets (Dumbledore's house pride seemed to extend to interior decorating), her small breasts thrust in the air, and her passion glazed eyes gazing up at him as if to say, "What are you waiting for?"

"Nothing," he said aloud and lowered himself to kiss her again.

"Ow!"

"I haven't done anything yet."

"My hair." Sheepishly, she wriggled away and swept her ebony mane to one side. "Take off that ridiculous thing." Polyxena seized two fistfuls of flannel and dragged the nightshirt over his head. Well, she tried. One of the buttons got stuck, but they managed eventually.

He ran his palms over her bare breasts, teasing the firm, pink nipples with his thumb, and watched the mix of desire and curiosity on her face. If her mother looked anything like her at all, he couldn't blame old Ollivander for seducing a teenager.

Polyxena's hands traveled over his back, exploring every scar and contour and probably deciding whether she really wanted to sleep with him after all. "Oh, Alastor," she sighed. Apparently, she did, but, then again, he had moved his mouth over her breasts, biting them and teasing her with his tongue. Brushing his hair out of the way, she pulled him back up to kiss her mouth and felt what she'd decided to call his 'Throbbing Manhood' jutting against her damp, sticky thigh. At least she hoped it was his TM. With Alastor, it could very well be a Secrecy Sensor.

She figured she'd better check, so she moved her hand down beneath the blankets and closed her long fingers around it. Nope, definitely not a Secrecy Sensor, not unless he groaned with pleasure every time someone touched his Dark detection devices. She ran her fingers experimentally down the shaft, stroking him with her thumb until he

took her by the wrist and growled,

"Too much. Keep doing that, and I'll pull a Weasley." Moving his fingers away from her hand, he moved one over her swollen clit in a steady rhythm and slid another into her wetness.

"Oh, gods," she gasped. "Keep doing *that*, and I'll pull a Weasley."

Grinning (more) wickedly (than usual), he replied, "You will, will you?" He increased the pressure and ran his tongue over the sensitive spot on her neck until he felt her muscles clench around his finger and heard her breathy little moans.

"That... was... interesting," she said a moment or two later. "Very nice, but I thought you wanted to sleep with me for real."

"I do." He looked down at her eager face. "'Interesting.' Ungrateful wench." Taking care not to pull her hair again, he positioned himself on top of her and nudged her thighs apart with his knee. "Damn. Where's my wand?"

"It's sort of poking into my..."

"I meant my actual wand," he grumbled drolly. "There's a certain charm that needs cast."

"It's all right," she assured him. "I'm on The Potion. You know, just in case." Polyxena sensed that her vigilance about birth control had turned him on because he thrust deeply into her, moving with deliberate strokes until she came, dragging a groan from her throat and arching her back against his now feverish pace. He followed her a few minutes later, and they collapsed in a boneless heap.

After a few minutes, she raised her head groggily and said, "Alastor, I should probably tell you that I'm a Death Eater."

"What?" He stiffened and not at all in a good way.

"Only joking. But thanks for not transfiguring the armoire."

"My pleasure." Moody smirked. "Now go to sleep. We have a wandmaker to search for tomorrow."

## Chapter 6

*Chapter 6 of 10*

Dung gives the duo information on Avery Harz, which comes in handy after a surprise attack puts an abrupt end to a little tryst.

Undisguised, Polyxena followed her cohort along the path to Hogsmeade, kicking at the gravel with her slightly scuffed, secondhand boots. Her cloak was dusty, but she didn't care. It had been an awkward morning to be sure, full of eye-avoiding (not an easy thing with that magical eye) and little conversation, and there had been no repeat performance in the early hours, just a quick scramble for her nightgown before she scuttled off to the bath.

*Aren't you brilliant, Polyxena Ollivander, she upbraided herself. Some creepy bloke acts all sentimental for about five minutes, and you jump his bones. Not only that, but you still have a mystery to solve together. Perhaps this is why Nancy Drew and Ned Nickerson never went all the way.* She couldn't deny, of course, how fucking good it had felt and that it had been she who'd started it in the first place, talking about her crap sex life and kissing him and whipping off her damn nightie.

"All right?" he growled, glancing back at her with his magical eye.

"Fine," she replied faintly with a prickle of dread that their witty banter had been replaced by scintillating conversation such as this. "You?"

Moody's answer was merely a grunt as he led them past the Three Broomsticks and into the heart of the Wizarding village. They were off to the Hog's Head at the other end of town to meet Mundungus Fletcher, that loathsome Lothario of hags. Dung, Moody had informed her while they were still speaking, was not technically allowed to enter the pub on account of his having been thrown out for good about twenty years before, but that didn't stop him from frequenting the place dressed in drag. Though he was a member of the Order, Dung was a notorious small-time thief, con artist, and Merlin only knew what else, and therefore, he was in a prime position to pass on information about Avery Harz, assuming the man even existed.

*Good for him.* The only thing Polyxena could focus on was the fact that she had inherited two things from her mother: glossy dark hair and very unusual taste in men. Her grandmother had married Asclepius Smethwyk, a Healer with a secret passion for Augureys; her mother had, however briefly, married the crazy, old wandmaker, Ollivander; and now Polyxena was busily fucking the life out of Mad-Eye Moody. *Well, perhaps not 'fucking the life out of' him* she amended hastily. Alastor, she duly noted as he ushered her into the Hog's Head, appeared to be very much alive.

"Hello, Sugar Quill," she managed wearily as she sat heavily in a seat across from Mundungus, taking care to use the man's 'drag name.'

"'lo there, P'lyx'na," he mumbled, squinting into his glass of Ogden's. "Heard y' were at 'Ogwarts last night."

"No! I mean, yes, we were." She blushed furiously. "But it's not like we were 'at Hogwarts,' were just... staying at Hogwarts."

"S what I said." For the first time, he raised his stubbly face and bloodshot eyes to hers.

"Concealment and Disguise," Moody hissed into her ear.

Polyxena brought her foot down onto his toes with a satisfying amount of savagery. Unfortunately, they turned out to be the wooden, clawlike toes at the end of his prosthesis, and so she winced.

Smirking, Mad-Eye turned to Sugar Quill. "Avery Harz," he began gravely. "We'd like some information on Avery Harz, and by 'some information,' I mean everything about him you can possibly recall."

"Why's that?" inquired Dung suspiciously, taking a long drink of his Firewhisky. "Can't see a pretty girl like her an' an acclaimed Dark wizard catcher like yourself gettin' "



mixed up with the likes of Avery Harz."

Moody's magical eye fixed on him appraisingly. "It's to do with you-know-who."

"You-Know-Who?" gasped Mundungus.

"No, lower case," growled Moody with impatience and leaned forward to mutter, "Ollivander's was leased to one of Polyxena here's clients by Harz. What do you mean, 'the likes of Avery Harz'?"

Dung laughed a wheezy sort of laugh that ended in a coughing fit. Lighting his smelly pipe, he croaked, "Avery Harz is a motherfuckin' cocksucker's what I mean. I never done no business transactions with that lot. Sure, I've got a living to earn m' self, an' so some cauldrons fall off the back of a broom, no one asks questions, know what I mean? But Harz an' them, that's diff'nt, what with the killin' and the embezzlin' at the Ministry like."

"I beg your pardon?" Polyxena gave him a measured stare. "So this Avery Harz bloke is like the Keyser Söze of the Wizarding world? Do you think my father was mixed up with *him*? That seems a tad far-fetched, and besides, where do Nott and the Death Eaters figure into all this? Embezzling at the Ministry?"

"S all a rich tapestry," grunted Sugar Quill with the pipe still between his teeth. "But Harz is no friend t' You-Know-Who on account of You-Know-Who's in his way. Harz is no friend t' anyone, come to that. 'S like You-Know-Who, kill y' as soon as look at y', but Harz's in it for the Galleons."

"Still, that's a bit cheerier than being in it for the complete world domination," remarked Polyxena. "So, let me get this straight: the Dark Lord is out to take over the Wizarding world and kill Harry Potter, but the Order of the Phoenix is trying to stop him. Avery Harz is out to steal a good number of Galleons and control the biggest crime ring in the Wizarding world, but the Dark Lord wants to be the head of the criminal industry. Ergo, this creates a problem because... because this plot got really complicated all of a sudden? And what has any of this to do with my father? The whole 'severing the wand connection' thing made much more sense than the 'criminal underworld' thing."

Moody nodded, but he had to concede: "The severed finger makes a bit more sense coming from Harz, though. You were right at the beginning; it's just not You-Know-Who's style."

"But my father did a respectable trade in wands. Our family has done it for centuries." Polyxena's head was beginning to throb. "I need a Firewhisky."

Passing her the flask, Moody assented, "I agree, it doesn't add up. One thing I have to say though is that he's probably in with one of the two. My best guess is the Death Eaters."

"The greater of two evils," grumbled Polyxena, swallowing a hearty sip of brandy. "Though," she continued grudgingly, "it does make the most sense. 'Terrible, but great' this and '*Magick Moste Evile*' that. Bloody hell."

Dung nodded his shaggy, ginger head. "I 'gree with P'lyx'na. Harz isn' one to go 'round puttin' the Imperius on everyone. He'd just drag him off and run 'im through with a knife like a Muggle."

\* \* \*

"He could be under the Imperius Curse, you know," said Polyxena haughtily. "Some Death Eater, Nott perhaps, could have come up behind him and been like *Imperio!* and then said, 'Okay, Ollivander, close up your shop and come with us to Death Eater Headquarters.'"

"I'm aware of how the Imperius works," growled Moody as gave the Dark detectors a final check and removed his wooden leg. "What the bloody hell are you doing?"

Polyxena had slung her legs over the arm of an upright wooden chair and taken one of the pillows from the bed in the room Madam Rosmerta had rented to them. "Reading my book before I go to sleep. Why? Did you want to sleep in the chair? Because you should really have the bed with your poor leg."

"*Mobilicorpus!*"

Polyxena squealed as she, the book, and the pillow drifted across the room and crash landed on the bed. Her hand darted to her wand, but she found herself in the Full Body Bind before she had gotten two inches.

Moody reached across her and took the wand, placing it on his bedside table before he performed the countercurse. "We make love, and you're still on about this bed nonsense?"

"It's not nonsense," she replied huffily, turning back to her book. "And 'make love'? What are you, a girl? We fucked, we did it, we... we got the friction on. We didn't 'make love.'"

"Right," grumbled Mad-Eye, a slight pink tinge coloring his scarred features. With one deft movement, he had plucked the book from her long fingers and scanned the text with his normal eye. He fixed the magical eye on her. "*His Muggle Bride?* Looks very edifying, but of course, Aphrodite Cusan usually is."

"How would you know?"

Ignoring her, he flipped the book over and read, "'When beautiful Muggle Becca Robertson walks into the Leaky Cauldron, Tiberius Wentworth is immediately suspicious. How did a Muggle find a magical site on her own? And why does she seem so keen to find out about the murder of wealthy, pureblood, Sebastian Fortunata by the Death Eaters years ere? Tiberius is in for a shock when the Muggle he desires turns out to be Fortunata's daughter, Celestina...'"

"Give me the bloody book!" Polyxena's cheeks were aflame as she grabbed for the tome, held just out of reach by Moody. "Alastor, you're insufferable!"

"Just like Tiberius." He gave her a lopsided grin.

"What?"

"'You're insufferable, Tiberius!' cried Celestina, as he trapped her against the stone wall'," read Moody in an amused growl. "'Yes,' he assented rakishly, 'but you can't get enough of it.' With that, Tiberius lowered his mouth to explore her petal-soft, rosy lips while his strong hands roved over her alabaster mounds...' Merlin's beard, Polyxena, get another hobby! '... she wrapped her long legs tightly around his sleekly muscled form, feeling his wand of desire throb against the secrets of her womanhood.'" Moody chuckled heartily. "Nice. Very comprehensive. Let's see what happens next. 'He felt the barrier of her innocence straining against his throbbing manhood, taunting him with the exquisite delights within her...'"

"I want my book back!" Desperately, she reached for the novel that Moody was now holding aloft, stretching across him until she nearly toppled off the bed.

He caught her with one arm and thrust the book back into her hands. "Here. Only having a laugh."

"You really shouldn't have magicked me over here," she began severely. "Now you're reading erotica out loud, and I'm sitting in your lap, and this whole situation is just... bad. It's like we're sitting around waiting to be jinxed."

Grabbing for his wand, Moody checked the Foe Glass. "Jinxed?" His magical eye began to whirl. "Why, what have you seen?"

"It's just an expression," she bit off in exasperation. "I just meant the whole 'bed sharing' thing isn't doing us any favors because neither of us is willing to exercise any self-

control."

"Self-control," muttered Alastor. "What's this about, girl? Granted, I'm not Tiberius Wentworth, Muggle seducer extraordinaire, but I thought we..."

"It was brilliant," she assured him softly, brushing a lock of his hair aside. "But I think we've gone a bit fast. We're trying to solve this bizarre kidnapping thing, and all the sexual tension makes me lose my focus. I know that if we both stay in this damn bed, we're going to have sex. Again. And I'm really going to like it. Again."

His mouth twisted into a smile. "Agreed. But the tension will be there whether we, er..." He glanced at the still open book. "... 'surrender to desire's fiery lash' or not. In fact," he said, closing a hand over her cotton-covered breast, "it might even be worse if we ignore it."

Polyxena gave a small sigh of pleasure. "Well, when you put it like that, this is probably safer." She met his lips, hungry and demanding, and greedily arched against his hand. As he impatiently tore at the buttons on her nightdress, she moved her mouth lower, scraping the edges of her teeth along his earlobe, nipping at it before she inched down to his neck. Vaguely, she realized that she'd been stripped nude, so she grabbed her wand from the table and gave Alastor's robe a tap. "*Despolia!*"

He watched his clothes fall in a crumpled heap on the floor. "I'll have to remember that one." Her hand pushed him firmly back onto the bed, and before he knew it, she was astride him, gliding her clit against the slick tip of his erection while she leaned over him. "Gods, Polyxena." Her hair tickled his face as she bent to kiss him before sliding back up to sheathe him slowly inside her. His hips bucked wildly as he clutched tightly at her thighs and whimpered incoherently.

When she came she felt him slam into her with his final thrust and explode with the warm, thick seed of an orgasm that left him shuddering. "Merlin," she gasped, keeping their bodies locked together. "I think that time, we might have made love. That definitely wasn't just 'fucking.'" Reluctantly and with a hazy, far from vigilant mind, she bent her head to kiss him again.

Moody jerked, sitting bolt upright so fast that she fell to the floor. "The Foe Glass!" he cried suddenly and reached for his wand. He fixed his magical eye on the door. "Get under the bed."

She tried to reach for her nightie. "I don't want the Death Eaters to see me naked!"

"It's not a Death Eater, and GET UNDER THE BED!" he roared just as the door burst into splinters. Moody leapt from bed with Polyxena's nightgown tied around his waist.

"*Stupefy!*" A bolt of red light narrowly missed Mad-Eye and shattered the lamp behind him.

"*Crucio!*" Wearing a bedsheet as a toga, Polyxena sprang up in front of Moody and jabbed her wand at the intruder.

He went down, writhing in pain, screaming with the unbearable agony.

"*Expelliarmus!*" she added almost as an afterthought, grabbing the wand as it sailed through the air. "See, Alastor, Unforgivables aren't so bad if you're the one using them."

"Unforgivables are a one-way ticket to Azkaban."

"Going to turn me in, are you?" She smirked, giving him a haughty look that reminded him uncomfortably of Bellatrix Lestrange as she bent to bind the intruder's hands and feet with cords from her wand. "He was attacking us, and I stopped him."

"He tried to Stun me. You used the most painful Torturing Curse known to wizardkind on him."

"Because he tried to Stun you," repeated Polyxena patiently, as though it made perfect sense. "Well, anyway, here he is, all tied up and submissive. Damn. I didn't mean to make that sound so sexual."

Alastor grunted and busied himself by dragging the captive wizard into the only chair in the room.

Polyxena jabbed her wand at the intruder's throat. "Who the fuck are you?" His reply was a beady-eyed glower, so she sank the wand a few more inches into his flesh. "Don't make me do this the hard way," she sneered. "There's plenty more Cruciatus where that came from. Did you know people have gone insane from the Cruciatus?"

"Polyxena!" Moody jostled her impatiently aside and turned to their erstwhile attacker. "Who sent you?" he growled, holding his own wand inches from the other wizard's nose. "Ever seen what a well-placed Curse of the Bogies can do to a nice nose like yours?"

"Alastor!" Polyxena summoned his wand before he had a chance to react. "I thought you used to be an Auror."

"I was. Caught more Dark wizards than any..."

"Then why are you so crap at interrogations?" she demanded.

"What?"

"I'm supposed to be the bad cop! The good cop has to say things like 'Don't listen to her, Captive Bloke' and 'Easy, Polyxena, you just got your badge back!'"

Moody gave her a wary, befuddled stare. "Badge? Aurors don't do interrogations. We find scum, catch scum, and deliver said scum to Azkaban."

"So you've never heard of good cop/bad cop? Like on *Aurors*?"

Moody shook his head.

"*CSI: Diagon Alley?*" When he responded with a confused look, she pressed, "Do you even own a Wizarding wireless? I thought not. Well, last week on *Aurors*, Stubby Boardman's character finds this bloke who he thinks might be Death Eater, so he takes him to Auror Headquarters, and he and that witch who was on *Sex and Hogsmeade* have to question him, and Boardman is like 'Fuck you,' and so that witch tells him off."

"I see," replied Moody dubiously. "Well, clearly that won't work because he's been listening to you all this time."

"Good point. I say we torture him a bit!" She raised her wand threateningly.

"Wait, why do you get to be the bad cop?" he growled.

"Because I started out as the bad one until you went on your 'Curse of the Bogies' tangent. Look, we're getting nowhere with this. I have some Veritaserum in my handbag."

"Why didn't you just say so?" grumbled Moody, taking the crystal phial from her outstretched hand and pouring the liquid into the wizard's throat. He waved three gnarled fingers before his face. "How many fingers am I holding up?"

"Five," he replied truculently.

"Oh, sorry, that was just water," Polyxena apologized and held out an Evian bottle. "This is the Veritaserum." At Moody's quizzical glance, she replied sheepishly, "Constant

vigilance." Unceremoniously, she dumped the bottle's contents into their victim's sneering mouth. "What's your name?"

"Tiberius Wentworth," he said in a dull, flat monotone.

Polyxena started. "Really?"

"Yes."

"Why did you attack us?" growled Moody.

"I had orders. Orders from the boss."

"Harz? Why did he order the attack?" Moody asked shrewdly.

"Yes, Harz. He wanted to stop the girl interfering. He told me to kill the girl and the old Auror. He promised me sixty Galleons."

Snorting, Polyxena murmured, "I like to think our lives are worth more than thirty Galleons apiece. Why did he tell you to kill us?"

"I don't know."

"Yes you do!" she exclaimed, drawing her wand.

"He doesn't," growled Mad-Eye. "Harz and You-Know-Who have that in common. They never tell their followers all their plans in case of situations like this. Does Harz have Ollivander, the wandmaker?"

"I don't know."

"Motherfucker," swore Polyxena so viciously that a few red sparks shot out of her wand. "So what are we going to do with him? Take him to Azkaban?"

"I'll Floo Headquarters." Moody strode toward the fireplace. "Hopefully Tonks or Kingsley will be on the night shift."

"That sounds like dialogue from *Aurors*," laughed Polyxena. "By the way, Alastor, you might want to change first. You're still wearing my nightie as a skirt." Handing him his thick traveling cloak, she said, "That could lead to all sorts of questions."

Moody took a pinch of Floo powder and summoned the mopey witch called Tonks while Polyxena, still in her bedsheet toga, glowered menacingly at their captive.

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I borrowed the following phrase from the *Friends* episode, 'The One Where Rachel is Late.'

"And 'make love'? What are you, a girl?"

## Chapter 7

### *Chapter 7 of 10*

Dung gives the duo vital information on Harz, Ollivander, and the Death Eaters. The three of them travel to Great Hangleton to find the ?rat-faced? man from whom Dung nicked the ?special Dark? wands.

A/N: Thanks to the admins for making this a featured story!

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Fortunately for Polyxena and Moody, Tonks had been so gloomy and dejected that when she arrived in their room, knocking over a table and chair and tripping over the rug, she didn't even notice their collective state of dishabille. After she had gone away to deliver said scum to Azkaban, the pair remaining in the room found that being attacked, fighting a duel, interrogating their attacker, and having an Auror come in to arrest him had spoiled their lazy, post-coital mood. Alastor had merely cast a strong Intruder Charm on the building, checked his Sneakoscope, and righted the Foe Glass before they both went straight to bed.

The next morning, again without any wake-up sex ploys, they had Apparated once more to Diagon Alley to continue their investigation.

"Ah, Septimius, I've missed you," laughed Polyxena, eyes sweeping over Moody's Polyjuice-altered form. "How have you been since the duel?"

"Take this." Mad-Eye thrust a flask full of the potion into her hands, which were waiting beneath his Invisibility Cloak. "You can't stay under that cloak all day, and both the Death Eaters and Harz's lot know who you are."

"Septimius, you swinging dog," laughed Polyxena after taking a shuddering sip of Polyjuice. "What about poor Augusta? Though I must admit, these breasts are spectacular. Any way I can keep them?"

When she shrugged off the Invisibility Cloak, Moody's eyes roved over her new body, also borrowed from an unwary Muggle. "No," he said shortly.

Polyxena's Muggle features lit up. "Aww, you like my original form, don't you, Septimius? The tough Dark wizard catcher is just an old softie."

"I'm not a Dark wizard catcher," he reminded her, hovering close to her ear. "I'm in the cauldron business."

"Right you are," assented Polyxena cheerfully, strode on ahead singing 'A Cauldron Full of Hot, Strong Love,' and did an admirable job of ignoring Moody's murderous looks.

"You're a bit young to know Celestina Warbeck," observed Septimius when he had finally caught up to her.

Arching an eyebrow, she replied, "My mum likes her. And you're not that much older than me, are you *Septimius*?" she added pointedly. "Constant vigilance, my friend,

constant vigilance. Even though this is undoubtedly the point in the story where we would start dancing to Cole Porter while wearing clothes from the Peterman catalog, I never thought Alastor Moody would be so slack in his Aurorly duties."

"Alastor? Oh, you mean Mad-Eye Moody," said Septimius with a note of steel in his voice. "Yeah, I never thought that either. He's a good bloke, that Mad-Eye, but he's neither here nor there. He's certainly not here."

"Er, right. No, he's not here." Polyxena twisted one of her fluffy blonde ringlets around her stubby finger. "I wish he was, though. He's a very... "

"P'lyx'na!" Mundungus hurried over to them as fast as his bandy legs could carry him. "Mad-Eye! Polyjuice Potion, very clever, indeed," he called from the pavement before the Apothecary. I been askin' 'round t' Harz's blokes... well, blokes who know Harz's blokes, an' they were sayin' that Harz's got that old wandmaker."

"Harz has my father?" Polyxena said skeptically, while Moody seized Dung's tweed overcoat and shouted,

"CONSTANT VIGILANCE! You've ruined our cover, you... "

"Alastor! Dung's just told us what we wanted to know in the first place; now we needn't waste time walking about Diagon Alley in these stupid Muggles' bodies. So... " She turned to the nervous thief. "... Harz has him? Did anyone say why? And the Death Eaters, what's their role in all of this?"

"Do I look like a bleedin' library?" Dung replied in a croaking voice laced with irritation. "Harz's got 'im in... in... well, I dunno where."

"But he's being held against his will, then? I wonder why he locked up his shop so nicely and cleared out everything like that. You said before that Harz never uses the Imperius Curse."

"He doesn'," mumbled Mundungus, taking a swing from a bottle concealed in a paper bag that read 'Hog's Head Take-Away.' "An' stop askin' so much. I'm a simple bloke, P'lyx'na. I got hags t' fuck, couple of misplaced items t' sell, plenty of Ogden's, then I'm happy enough t' conjure a fuckin' Patronus." Hoisting a dirty, green sack over his shoulder, he turned to go. "I've gotta get these special Darks down t' Knockturn Alley 'fore old Wagstaff gets a jump on things."

Scrutinizing the bag with his magical eye, Moody growled, "Special Darks?"

"Wands," grunted Dung. "Nicked 'em from some little, rat-faced bloke in Great Hangleton. Nice ones, too. Made outta walnut an' black cat whisker cores. Don't know what that means exactly, but..."

Polyxena seized a wand and held it up to her squinting gaze. "It means that these wands perform Dark curses especially well. This combination in particular can raise extremely powerful Inferi, not to mention easily seal a Horcrux. Why would a member of the Order want such a thing to be sold to the public? Watch." She aimed one of the wands at a spider making its way along the cobblestones. "*Crucio!*"

The spider pulled its legs in against the agony until it was torn apart, legs flying in all directions and fat little body ending in a gooey heap on the street.

Moody and Dung stared at it, aghast. One of Moody's eyes remained fixed on the spider and one on Polyxena until he flicked his wand at the filthy sack and said firmly, "*Incendio!*"

Mundungus gave a yelp and dropped the bag, which burned out on the pavement. "Fuckin' Flobberworms, Mad-Eye, that was m' whole month's rent, that."

"That spider could have been you," he growled. "And Polyxena could have been Nott or Crabbe or Lestrangle."

"Oh, that's flattering," she interjected crossly. "But Alastor's right, Dung." Surveying the remaining special Dark wand more closely, she muttered, almost to herself, "Smooth as chocolate, thirteen inches, somewhat elastic... but definitely not a Gregorovitch, although he's known to use this combination... though the styling around the handle is quite... no, it couldn't be." Face drawn, she turned to Moody. "My father made these wands."

"Are you certain?"

"Quite. The craftsmanship is undeniable, and it seems just the sort of intellectual challenge he wouldn't want to pass up. He'd never sell them in his shop, mind. Though he's not exactly a 'family man,' as they say, I hardly think he's a Dark wizard."

"Anyone could be a Dark wizard," returned Moody darkly. "Dark magic lurks at every turn, and the only way to be safe from it?"

"Oh, I could hazard a guess."

"CONSTANT VIGILANCE!" he roared. "Now, we'd better get up to Great Hangleton and fast. All three of us." He fixed his magical eye sternly upon Mundungus, who had begun to slink away. "You can help us find the bloke you nicked these from. 'Little' and 'rat-faced' isn't the most helpful description."

"He was wearin' a cloak," grumbled Dung uncomfortably.

"WE'RE WIZARDS, DAMN IT! WE ALL WEAR CLOAKS!"

Taking another swig from his hidden bottle, the other man said in a strained voice, "We can't all see through clothes, Mad-Eye. Though it'd be a hell of a fine thing," he added with a leer at Polyxena, who had, along with Moody, regained her original form.

"Naff off," she snapped, drawing her arms protectively across her chest.

At Moody's scowl, a spark of understanding lit in Mundungus' bloodshot eyes, and so he leaned in to whisper discreetly, "'S you two... y' know... fuckin'?"

"Like Abe and a pen full of goats," Polyxena stated crisply. "But that's completely irrelevant to the evil wands and the Death Eaters and Harz and, you know, all those other things we're trying to accomplish."

"Does he leave th' wooden leg on?" queried Dung eagerly. "I'd have thought with splinters an' all... "

Polyxena didn't seem offended in the least. "No, he takes it off."

"'S it true he's got a Sneakoscope tattooed on his... "

"Enough!" interrupted Moody with a glower at both of them.

"Incidentally, it is true," Polyxena hissed at Dung just before they Apparated. "He's bewitched it so that it'll... " She was interrupted by the sharp cracks of Apparition, so she calmly focused on Great Hangleton and reappeared beside Moody on the outskirts of the town.

"He was on th' road up here," grunted Mundungus. "Walkin' towards Little Hangleton, an' I sneaked out of th' bushes an' nicked th' special Darks right outta his silver hand."

"Silver hand?" said Polyxena in confusion. "You stole wands from Michael Jackson?"

"'He had one silver hand' would've been a helpful description to add to 'rat-faced,' 'little,' and 'wearing a cloak,'" growled Moody as the trio set off down the road to the next

village. "A wizard can't afford to be uninformed about his enemies." Flipping open his pocket Foe-Glass, he did a quick check of the area. "We're close. Very close. In fact..." He tossed his Invisibility Cloak back to Polyxena and Dung. "Put this on."

Wrinkling her nose, Polyxena spread the cloak over both of them, trapping the acrid smell of pipe and the noxious fumes of stale spirits in the airless tent of fabric. "Ugh, Dung. Haven't you got a Toothflossing Stringmint?" she hissed, sorely tempted to perform the Bubble Head Charm.

He drew his grimy old pipe from the pocket of his coat. "Never had one. Prefer m' pipe." Lighting it with the tip of his wand, he immediately filled the interior of the cloak with a poisonous green cloud.

With a violent cough, Polyxena leapt out from beneath Moody's cloak. "I ought to cast the Engorgement Charm on you! Didn't your Healer say that one more would finish you off? I kept the special Dark, mind you."

"M' privates!" yelped Dung, tripping over the hem of the Invisibility Cloak in his haste to shield his family jewels. "What'll I do without 'em? Every hag in Hogsmeade's countin' on these!"

Mad-Eye, whose magical eye had been watching them through the back of his head, whirled around. "Back under the cloak!" he barked. "What did I say about the Foe-Glass?"

"That the enemy was close. Very close," came the cold, drawing voice of Rodolphus Lestrage. "It seems that the paranoid, old Auror was correct for once. The enemy is close. Very close."

Fighting the absurd urge to laugh, Polyxena gazed at the three masked and hooded men who had just appeared from the forest. "That sounded like appallingly bad 'evil villain' dialogue from *CSI: Diagon Alley*. It's bad enough that the Dark Lord refers to himself in the third person, with all the 'Lord Voldemort is angry' and the 'Lord Voldemort needs another cup of Ribena,' but this is a new low. Can you think of nothing better to say to potential victims?"

"Now that you mention it," allowed Rodolphus with a slight shrug. "*Crucio!*"

"*Protego!*" Moody dived in front of her and blocked Lestrage's spell.

"Don't worry about me, Alastor," Polyxena said briskly. "I still have the special Dark wand." Taking aim at one of the hooded figures, she cried *Sectumsempra!*

The unfortunate Death Eater's wand arm, far from being gashed by the curse, fell heavily to the ground in a bloody heap, followed quickly by the Death Eater himself.

"Rabastan!" Rodolphus started slightly. "My brother."

"*Crucio!*" She pointed the special Dark at the next figure, who screamed so loudly that Rodolphus had to put a Silencing Charm on him, lest the Muggles from the village come running.

Finally, the tortured Death Eater collapsed beside Rabastan, eyes glazed, jaw slack, and a hint of drool running down his chin.

At the sight of him, Rodolphus cried, "Not Nott!"

"I love this wand," commented Polyxena with an admiring glance toward the smooth walnut handle.

"*ACCIO SPECIAL D--*" began Lestrage in fury, jabbing his own wand at Polyxena's hand.

"*Incendio.*" She had taken her real wand from the folds of her robe and neatly reduced the special Dark to ash. "That's the last of the special Darks, I'm afraid. Though I'm sure you could just Imperius my father into making more of them."

Lestrage glared wrathfully at her and then, without warning, dashed forward, seized her by the wrist, and Apparated the both of them.

"*Engorgio!*"

"*Petrificus Totalus!*" cried Moody, but it was too late. Rodolphus and Polyxena had vanished. "Mundungus," he growled, "the Engorgement Charm isn't dangerous to everyone."

Dung raised his bloodshot eyes to Moody's disparate ones. "'S my 'chilles heel," he muttered. "Got carried away, 'cause of P'lyx'na."

"Polyxena." Alastor felt his limbs grow loose with chilly fear. "Come on, we've got to get the Dark Detectors out and... and..."

"We'll find 'em," said Mundungus awkwardly. "They're not gonna kill her right off, if she's useful. They can't've got far."

"They *Apparated*," snapped Moody in exasperation. "They could bloody well be in London by now. Or in Hogsmeade. Or in fucking Albania."

Shaking his ginger head emphatically, Dung replied, "No, I got th' feeling that rat-faced bloke was stayin' somewhere near here. An' th' Dark wands were for th' Death Eaters. C'mon, we'll try Little Hangleton. 'S only another couple miles down."

\* \* \*

Lestrage and Polyxena had appeared in the back garden of the large manor house that dominated the hill above the village. Using his wand to tap an access code into the stones beside the kitchen door, Rodolphus led her into a cold, dark room with slimy walls and the sound of dripping water.

"Guests and prisoners have to sign in," he grunted, gesturing to a quill and a black, leather-bound guest book. "Name, date, time, wand type."

With a bemused expression, Polyxena took the quill and signed her name below 'Podmore, Sturgis' and 'Malfoy, Narcissa.' A quick scan of the pages told her that no 'Ollivander, Priamus' had ever visited Death Eater Headquarters. *Then again, Death Eaters themselves don't have to sign the book.*

Pressing yet another series of stones with his wand, Lestrage led her into a much warmer room that was sleek, well-appointed, and bustling with the activity of perhaps twenty-five or thirty Death Eaters.

"Lestrage!" one of them greeted the newcomer enthusiastically. "What happened to the others?"

"This one took them out with one of those special Darks." He jerked his thumb toward Polyxena, slid his mask over his face, and hung it up, along with his robe, on a peg underneath a plaque labeled 'Ro. Lestrage.'

It was then that Polyxena noticed that each and every Death Eater was attired in the same black, rather Muggle-esque uniform: black cargo pants, black trainers, and a black t-shirt with the words 'Death Eaters' stitched beneath an embroidered Dark Mark.

"So, what have we got?" Rodolphus leaned over one of the men, who was sitting before a large panel of Foe-Glasses.

"Haven't seen much from Dumbledore in a few days," he replied easily, "but we had a bit of a scare earlier; these Muggles on a historical tour. Avery took care of it, though. Standard 'Torture/Memory Wipe' procedure. The Dark Lord was well pleased."

"So..." Rodolphus leaned forward conspiratorially "... he's in a good mood, then?"

The Death Eater shrugged. "As good as can be expected. He's been on edge ever since he took the Malfoy boy out of coffee runs and Muggle baiting and put him on The Project."

"I should think. Well, have a nice evening, then, Dolohov." His eyes cut back to Polyxena. "Come along then, you. The Dark Lord is most anxious for your visit."

## Chapter 8

*Chapter 8 of 10*

Polyxena talks with Lord Voldemort while Dung, Moody, and Dumbledore formulate a plan to rescue her.

A/N: Review, review, review! Thanks.

\* \* \*

"The Dark Lord is most anxious for my visit?" repeated Polyxena, voice rising in horror. "I never thought I'd be dealing with him directly. I'm hardly the Potters or Dorcas Meadowes, am I?"

Rodolphus shrugged. "Just following orders. I was to bring you back and use as much clichéd 'evil villain' talk as possible. That's what we Death Eaters are known for." He opened a heavily carved, ebony door to reveal a large room predictably decorated in dark green and silver with a single chair placed before a crackling fire. "My lord," intoned Rodolphus, head bowed, "the prisoner has arrived."

"Excellent work, Lestrangle," came the high, cold voice of the Dark Lord. "Lord Voldemort rewards his followers." Pausing, he turned in his chair to face his visitors. "So feel free to pick up a fresh box of Bartlett pears on your way out."

"You are good and merciful, my lord," murmured Rodolphus, prostrating himself at his master's feet.

Polyxena scoffed, drawing herself up. "What is it you want with me exactly, Lord Voldemort?"

"*Do not speak the Dark Lord's name!*" hissed Rodolphus, leaping to his feet. "How dare you besmirch it with your filthy half-blood's tongue?"

"I'm not a half-blood," replied Polyxena. "And what else am I going to call him? Not being a Death Eater, I can't really say 'master' or 'my lord.'" She turned back to Voldemort and spoke quickly. "It seems a bit odd to call you You-Know-Who because you clearly know who because you is who and you is you. He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named is just plain stupid, unless I change it to You-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, which is idiotic in the extreme, and I doubt you'd be willing to go in for things like 'Voldie,' so nicknames are out of the picture. I can't really see myself saying 'Oh, hello, The Dark Lord' either."

Voldemort's red, snakelike eyes narrowed in confusion. "Lord Voldemort hasn't been this perplexed since Lord Voldemort read *Ulysses*. But Lord Voldemort grows impatient. Lord Voldemort will not bore you with the details of the Harry Potter drama in a pitiful attempt to up the word count and seriousness of this particular scene, so suffice it to say that Lord Voldemort is angry. Lord Voldemort could have killed Harry Potter in what Lord Voldemort likes to call 'Book Four' of Lord Voldemort's 'series' of encounters with the boy, but..."

"The wands, yes, we know, we know," snapped Polyxena impatiently. "So you want my father to make you a special Dark with which you can kill Potter?"

"That is Lord Voldemort's eventual objective, yes," admitted the Dark Lord. "But there is haberdashery afoot."

"Do you even know what haberdashery means?" queried Polyxena in outrage. "It's nothing to do with my father or his wands. I think you mean skullduggery."

"Lord Voldemort has overindulged in Gilbert and Sullivan of late," admitted You-Know-Who. "But, at any rate, that wretched Mundungus Fletcher absconded with the entire stock of prototypes for Lord Voldemort's new wand. Therefore, Lord Voldemort has come to the most obvious and trite conclusion possible: Mundungus, the Order member, has intercepted them to keep Lord Voldemort from having the most destructive wand ever created!"

Polyxena's brow furrowed. "You don't think very highly of She-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, do you? Aren't you forgetting that Dung is affiliated with all sorts of criminal gangs, save for Harz's lot. (Harz, your 'not-quite-arch' enemy) Perhaps he merely stole them to sell them in Knockturn Alley before Stop 'n' Jinx takes the Dark Arts mainstream. What I don't understand is how my father could be making wands for you, but you have no idea where he is, and are in fact so scrapped for ideas that you kidnap his daughter, who is obviously searching for him, too."

At that, Rodolphus pulled her aside. "I should warn you, the Dark Lord has a tendency to overlook crucial facts. He's a brilliant wizard and a noble master, but things like life debts, powerful ancient magic that could potentially destroy him, *Priori Incantatem*, hearing the entire prophecy before acting, noticing that someone is reading his mind, the existence of love, and feeling pieces of his soul die tend to escape him. Just so you're aware."

"Lord Voldemort heard that. *Crucio!*"

Writhing in agony, Lestrangle fell to the green carpet. "I adore you, oh, master."

Sighing, Polyxena glanced from the Dark Lord to the fallen Death Eater and back again. *This moment could have pivotal and dramatic, but it's become nothing more than a farce.* "Lord Voldemort, please. I know your followers put the Imperius on my father, but somehow Harz's lot got hold of him. We need to speak rationally. All this 'She-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named' and 'word count' talk is so Pirandello it's not even funny."

"Lord Voldemort's followers did not put the Imperius on the wandmaker. The wandmaker sent word to Lord Voldemort that he wished to indulge in that particular intellectual challenge. He never arrived. Those guilty of great treachery to Lord Voldemort must pay the ultimate price." The Dark Lord drummed his skeletal fingers on the mantelpiece.

"How can you Avada him if you don't know where he is?" queried Polyxena.

"Avada Kedavra," repeated Voldemort with relish. "What a wonderful phrase." He eyed Polyxena shrewdly. "You claim not to know where the wandmaker is. Lord Voldemort does not believe you." His cold, red gaze met Polyxena's furious grey one. "But I see he is with Harz, as you said before." Turning to Rodolphus, the Dark Lord sighed, "She is useless to Lord Voldemort. *Crucio!*" He flicked his wand lazily at Polyxena.

She screamed, falling to the hard, stone floor as thousands of hot nails drove themselves into her flesh. The pain came in waves, searing into her bones and finally leaving her motionless and aching with the curse's aftereffects. Through the haze of pain, she saw Lord Voldemort's cold smirk and heard him tell Lestrage to take her to one of their 'guest suites.' Just before she lost consciousness, Polyxena felt Rodolphus magic her up from the floor and float her back through Death Eater Headquarters.

\* \* \*

"It just doesn't add up," growled Moody, swigging deeply from his flask as he and Dung sat in a dark, smoky corner of the Hanged Man, Little Hangleton's village pub. "If the scum who sent that finger was part of Harz's lot, then why did he write that it was a bad idea to send Nott to Azkaban? The bastard didn't even have a chance to unpack his bags before they let him go, so how would Harz have even known that Nott was arrested?"

"An' why would 'e care?" muttered Dung, letting out a great cloud of pipe smoke. "Harz's lot'd be 'appy if one of You-Know-Who's lot wasn' workin'. An' what'd 'e think P'lyx'na was gonna tell 'im? She an' the wandmaker don't talk much."

"Dunno." Moody replaced the cap on his gin. "You-Know-Who's the best Legilimens in the world. He'll realize that Polyxena can't tell him much of anything." Pausing, Mad-Eye said gruffly, "And kill her then, no doubt."

Blinking at him mournfully, Dung had to agree. "Wager you're right, Mad-Eye, 'less we find 'er first. Maybe Dumbledore'll know somethin' 'bout that rat-faced bloke."

Moody's magical eye twitched. "Well, we'd better not waste any time, then." Dragging Mundungus' tweed arm through the door of the pub, he led him to a quiet spot near the edge of the forest to Apparate.

With a few sharp cracks, the two men appeared in Hogsmeade and hastened up the path to the school, Moody limping so heavily that he conjured a staff and Dung simultaneously gasping for breath and taking drags on his pipe. They tore past a number of startled students and staff, ignored a brooding, angry Snape and tearful Hermione, and skidded to a halt at the stone gargoye.

"Blood... flavored... lollipops," panted Moody and dragged Dung up the spiraling stone steps to Dumbledore's apartments. "Dumbledore! Albus!"

"Th' Death Eater's've got P'lyx'na!" cried Mundungus. "Reckon they're torturin' her right now. Th' Cruciatius or maybe th' Curse of..."

Moody leaned painfully on his walking stick. "Enough! We all know what Dark wizards are capable of. If you hadn't lit your pipe under the cloak, the Death Eaters would never have known she was there. CONSTANT VIGILANCE!"

"I've got an addiction, me," he grumbled under his breath. "An' you couldn't've hexed Lestrage while P'lyx'na was torturin' the others?"

Alastor's magical eye and normal eye both narrowed dangerously. "There was nothing stopping you from hexing the lot. I had to protect her."

Snorting derisively, Dung wheezed, "P'lyx'na don't need no protectin'. Didja see what she did t' them with th' special Dark?"

"Special Dark?" queried Dumbledore.

"Wands," growled Mad-Eye. "Ollivander made 'em, least, that's what Polyxena says. Dung here nicked them off a 'rat-faced bloke' with a 'silver hand' who was 'wearing a cloak.' Not a very apt description if you ask me; it's all part of Stealth and Tracking, knowing what..."

"Alastor," Dumbledore interrupted gently, "Dung stole those wands from Peter Pettigrew."

"Wormtail?" exclaimed Mundungus. "Th' bloke who betrayed th' Potters? Bloody hell, I'm movin' up in th' world, nickin' shit from Death Eaters an' all. Reckon ol' Elfrida'd let me have a go now."

"Wormtail." Wisely ignoring the rest of Dung's statement, Dumbledore continued, "He was indeed the man who betrayed the Potters, a double agent for Voldemort and the Order."

"Filthy scum," snarled Moody. "He got the Potters killed, not to mention Dorcas and the McKinnons. I could see him double-dipping with Harz's lot and the Death Eaters, the lousy traitor. Cutting off a finger, that's Pettigrew's trademark, and of course he'd be worried if one of You-Know-Who's inner circle was sent to Azkaban. But if Harz's lot has Ollivander, the only way Wormtail could have got to his finger is by being one of them. But why the special Darks? Harz's lot doesn't use Dark magic, and those are walnut with black cat whisker cores."

"The special Darks, then, are very powerful wands," replied Dumbledore thoughtfully. "And really, what vicious criminal overlord wouldn't want a very powerful wand? My guess would be that the Death Eaters put Ollivander under the Imperius to force him to create Voldemort's new wand, but Harz's followers seized him to prevent him making Voldemort more powerful."

"Harz's lot don't like You-Know-Who," interjected Mundungus eagerly. "An' them special Darks would've sold for a pretty Knut if Mad-Eye here hadn't burned 'em up. 'S like th' time ol' Warty Harris an' I went up t' th' top of Stoatshead Hill t'..."

"But You-Know-Who has Polyxena," interrupted Moody agitatedly, clunking back and forth across the room. "Finding her is more important than finding that wandmaker."

Dumbledore's eyes twinkled. "Is it now?"

"Stop trying to be cute, Albus," Moody growled. "Where's the Death Eater Headquarters?"

With a repressive look, the older wizard countered, "You of all people, Alastor, should know how many security measures the Death Eaters will have taken with their stronghold. One cannot simply barge in on Lord Voldemort."

"Yeah? Watch us."

"Us'?" Dung edged nervously toward the door. "'M not th' one who's trained for this, Mad-Eye. Followin' th' fuckin' Potter boy 'round Hogsmeade, that's one thing, innit? But sneakin' into th' Death Eater's house, that's just askin' t' get m' privates hexed off or get Avada'd an' Crucio'd 'til we're both madder 'n a coupla fuckin' Quintupeds."

Desperately, Mad-Eye grabbed a fistful of Dumbledore's purple velvet robes and leaned forward so that they were partially obliterated nose to crooked nose. "I was an Auror for twenty-five goddamn years, Albus, the best the Ministry ever had. I'm the reason most of those motherfuckers were in Azkaban..."

"So they'll be especially glad to see you sweeping onto the lawn of Riddle Manor to seize their hostage."

"Riddle Manor, is it?" Moody quirked the brow over his normal eye. "Back in Little Hangleton?"

"I..." Dumbledore's face was disgruntled. "Er... can I interest you in a Sherbet Lemon?"

Seizing a fistful of Dung's tweed overcoat, Moody dragged him back to the stairs. "Come on."

"Dunno... rescuin'... P'lyx'na... privates," muttered Dung incoherently as Alastor dragged him out of the castle. "Er, y' see, Mad-Eye, I just r'membered, I've got a business opportunity down in London, these thin-bottomed cauldrons..."

"Shut up, Dung," Moody snarled, tightening his grip on the other man's arm so that he could Apparate them both.

\* \* \*

When Polyxena came to, she was lying across an enormous, carved, ebony bed covered by a moth eaten, velvet coverlet. Her limbs were stiff and throbbing with a dull, continuous pain that felt as though she was being repeatedly bludgeoned with the business end of a Firebolt. Moaning slightly, she struggled to sit up and saw through narrowed eyes the ink-black sky pressing against the diamond-paned windows. The windows were, she noted at once, unlocked, though with heavy heart, she realized that the Death Eaters would have plenty of wards around the manor to stop her and the other guests escaping. At the sound of sharp raps upon her door, she started.

"Who's there?" she said weakly. "Al-Alastor?"

Dolohov of the twisted beard and evil leer entered the room and gave a harsh, mocking laugh. "You think the old Auror could limp past the Dark Lord and the entire night shift of Death Eaters?" He began to chuckle in earnest. "Yeah, yeah, I can see it now. He and that tramp looking bloke burst into the Dark Lord's very chambers and take him into Azkaban!"

"Fuck you," snapped Polyxena, finding some of her old ire. "Who do you think put you in with the Dementors last time? Who's to say it couldn't happen again?"

"I'm not here to discuss politics," interrupted the Death Eater smoothly. "Here at Death Eater Headquarters, we pride ourselves on providing the utmost in torture experiences. We, the Dark Lord's followers, believe in two things: the supremacy of purebloods and the brutal torment of our opponents. Every four hours, each prisoner receives a complimentary Cruciatus session with one of our certified Torture Infliction Associates. Your last torture session was at six, so *Crucio!*"

Polyxena had opened her mouth to retort, but instead the sound of her screams punctuated the silence. It was pain beyond pain beyond pain that made her think that Dolohov was actually better with the curse than Voldemort himself.

"Yes, I'd like to see that paranoid old nutter take that on," he said, licking his lips. Dolohov then tapped his Dark Mark thrice and spoke into the end of his wand. "Ground control to Major Tom. Can you hear me, Major Tom?"

"Speak to Lord Voldemort, Dolohov. Have you completed the rounds?" The Dark Lord's cruel voice erupted from the tip of Dolohov's wand.

"I have, my lord."

"You have done good work, Dolohov," praised the Dark Lord, "and Lord Voldemort rewards those faithful to the cause. You may pick up your free Death Eater's insignia tote bag at the end of your shift."

"You are great and merciful, my lord," simpered Dolohov and touched his wand to the Dark Mark once more. "See you at two," he sneered at Polyxena before slamming the heavy door behind him.

Sinking once more into the guest suite's uncomfortable bed, Polyxena felt consciousness leave her again.

## Chapter 9

*Chapter 9 of 10*

Polyxena meets another prisoner, who helps her hatch a scheme to escape. She and Moody heat things up.

A/N: I love reviews. They make me all warm and fuzzy.

\* \* \*

A soft knock at the door woke Polyxena. Whether it had been minutes or the dreaded four hours, she didn't know, for she couldn't even find the strength to tell the Death Eater to go fuck himself. Through half-closed eyes, she saw a square-jawed wizard about her mum's age with thick, straw-like hair stealing across the room to where she lay.

"Whofuckreyou?" she managed in a sleepy groan.

"Podmore," he returned quickly, "Sturgis Podmore. I'm not a Death Eater. I see you've had your Cruciatus session; did you get Dolohov? He's the worst. Here." Sturgis touched the end of his wand to Polyxena, and a comforting warmth seeped through her.

"Thanks for that." Blinking, she rose cautiously and continued, "Podmore. I saw your name in the guestbook. You've been here a long time."

"Over six months," he sighed. "But they forget to do their rounds half the time. They only torture me once every day or so. You're new though; I heard you talking with Dolohov. You know Mad-Eye Moody?"

A slight pink tinge stole over Polyxena's cheeks. "Yes, I'm his... we're... I'm in love with him." With an apologetic shrug when Sturgis raised a straw-colored eyebrow, she whispered, "Are you... in the Order?"

"I am. I was sent to Azkaban for six months last year, but when I got out, the Death Eaters brought me here. I was under the Imperius, you see, so that I would steal from the Department of Mysteries for You-Know-Who. After I was released, they wanted to keep me nice and quiet. You're not in the Order, are you?"

"No, but I've been to your headquarters. I'm Polyxena Ollivander, and..."

"Not Hecuba Smethwyck's daughter!" cried Sturgis in surprise. "She was a year ahead of me at Hogwarts, was Hecuba. She was..." He chuckled. "... well, she was something. I take it you're looking for the wandmaker?"

"Yes, Alastor and Dung are helping me, but Lestrangle kidnapped me after I tortured Nott and the other Lestrangle." She paused. "I had one of the special Dark wands my father had made. Dung says he nicked them off a rat-faced bloke..."



"Wormtail, yeah," Sturgis assented. "You wouldn't have seen him. He's mostly at Snape's..."

Polyxena's brow knitted. "Severus Snape? Isn't he...?"

"He's a double agent working for Dumbledore, though Mad-Eye doesn't trust him a bit. He even has some wild theory going that Snape's going to kill Dumbledore and bring Death Eaters into Hogwarts."

Hiding a smile, she said, "I know; I've heard that one. Well, that's Alastor for you. Speaking of whom..." She pulled two crystal phials from the pockets of her robes. "He gave me this. We were going to question people in Diagon Alley, but Mundungus blew our cover. Polyjuice Potion."

Sturgis took one of the phials in his large, square hand and stared at it in awe. "Brilliant. Bloody hell, Polyxena, not even the Dark Lord will be able to... There's enough for about fifteen minutes each here."

"Exactly. So here's what we'll do: when Dolohov or whoever comes back at two, you Stun him from behind, preferably *before* he gets the chance to torture me. Take a hair and his uniform, stash him in a closet, and call for backup. When the supervisor gets here, Stun him, and I'll take a hair. Then we go get robes and masks, and we're free."

"Polyjuice Potion. I could kiss you!" burst out Sturgis. "But I won't," he added hastily with a glance at her shocked expression. "Don't wager old Mad-Eye would appreciate... well, anyhow, we've got ten minutes. I'd best get behind the curtain."

\* \* \*

As Moody and Dung hastened up the path toward Riddle House, Dung tottering on his bandy legs and Moody stumping as fast as he could, Mad-Eye glimpsed two frantic Death Eaters tearing down the hill toward them.

"Alastor!" cried one. "Wait! Don't..."

"*Stupefy!*"

A bolt of red light hurtled toward the first Death Eater, who blocked it and threw aside her mask. "It's me, you mad, paranoid, old... It's me. And Sturgis."

Moody's eyes narrowed suspiciously. "How do I know? It looks mighty suspect, what with the both of you in Death Eater's robes. Unless Mundungus has some Veritaserum..."

"I was on top the last time," countered Polyxena unabashedly, ignoring Dung's eager glance, and flung herself at Moody. "Gods, Alastor, I thought I was..." she continued in a whisper. "If you hadn't given me that Polyjuice Potion..." Raising her head, she kissed him full on the mouth. "I thought I'd never see you again. And you!" Turning, she pressed her lips into Dung's unshaven cheek.

"Aww, P'lyx'na," he mumbled, blushing to the roots of his straggly ginger hair. "It was nothin', really... Jus' doin' m' part for the Order." His bloodshot eyes had landed on the man behind Polyxena. "Sturgis, y' old bastard!"

"Wotcher, Dung," replied Sturgis wearily. "Nick anything good lately?"

"Th' special Darks..." began Mundungus, but Moody cut in,

"No. Too dangerous. We have to get back to headquarters." Moody's eye swiveled toward Riddle House. "The Death Eaters should be realizing any time now that two of their prisoners escaped with their clothing."

"And the Death Eaters insignia tote," added Sturgis. "Dolohov had filled his torture quota for three consecutive months."

"Lestrage is Death Eater of the Week!" Polyxena piped up. "I got this before we had to dash." Extracting a large basket from beneath her robes, she said, "Royal Riviera pears and Jonagold apples. Almost makes me want to join up. I do rather like these uniforms."

Mad-Eye glowered at her. "You want to be in with the Darkest of wizards there ever was? You want You-Know-Who to torture you every time you slip up? Think you can murder Muggles with a clean conscience? Then go on, up the hill you get."

"She was joking, Moody. They're comfortable t-shirts, is all." Noting Polyxena's wounded look, Sturgis made a repressive gesture at the ex-Auror. "Now are we going to Apparate or are we going to Apparate?"

\* \* \*

With four separate cracks, the quartet appeared before 12 Grimmauld Place and hastened to the dank foyer within, where Dung immediately tripped over an end table.

"*Children of filth! Disgusting, villainous... Oh, hell!*" screeched Mrs. Black's portrait, eyeing Sturgis and Polyxena's borrowed clothing. "*At last, they have returned to avenge the house of my fathers! My Regulus shall be...*"

Moody quietly slid the curtains over the bad-tempered painting. "Take off those vile things," he snarled at the two faux-Death Eaters. His magical eye traveled slowly over Polyxena's robe. "Bloody hell, they've even got black trainers to match."

Hanging up his robe and mask, Sturgis agreed, "Yeah, You-Know-Who is rather strict on dress code and protocol. He hexed Rookwood last week because he tore his Dark Mark shirt chasing after a Muggle-born. I'll go fetch something from the closet; back in a mo'."

Polyxena squinted at Moody partly in confusion and partly in anguish *Perhaps I shouldn't have thrown myself at him like that when he had just asked whether I was a Death Eater. And to say to Sturgis that I'm in love with... Well, more fool me.* "I'd better go change, too," she spat acidly. "Wouldn't want you thinking I joined up with the Dark side and have a plot to kill you, now would I?" Tossing her thick, shiny hair, she stomped down the hall to the bedroom where her things were still stored, irritation simmering so that she did not notice that Moody had come stumping after her. After she had slammed the door with a satisfying crash, she pooled Lestrage's robe on the floor by her ankles, quickly followed by the cargo trousers and the logo tee she had joked about keeping.

"*Constant vigilance,*" came a low hiss from just beyond the threshold.

"Alastor!" she yelped, groping for the robe she had just discarded. "What the fuck do you want?" Furiously, she glared into his mismatched eyes. "Going to berate me about Dark wizards again? You're right, you know. In between Cruciatus sessions and being toyed with by Voldemort, I really considered a career in Dark wizarding. If I hadn't been unconscious between torture..."

"Enough," growled Moody, clapping a gnarled hand over her mouth. "That's enough. Do you think I want to hear about you being tortured? That I want to see anyone walking around in Death Eater's robes after what they've done to half the Order?"

"Oh," Polyxena managed, feeling rather stupid. "I just thought..."

"I know what you thought." Clasping her bare shoulders, he continued gruffly, "I watched Sirius Black die last summer, I answered the call after the Longbottoms were tortured, I saw Marlene McKinnon taken by You-Know-Who's followers. I took all this in stride; came with the job, didn't it? But when Nott kidnapped you..." He trailed off,

shaking his head. "I was more than worried about you, lass."

"Oh, Alastor." Polyxena reached up to run her fingers through his hair and crushed her mouth against his in a heavy, bruising kiss. The rise and fall of her chest was ragged against his worn traveling cloak, and her fingers worked frantically at the fastenings. At last, with great tearing of fabric, his robes fell behind him on the stone floor, and she hungrily roved over his bare flesh, tasting and touching and kissing every inch of skin she could find.

"Polyxena," he groaned thickly, half-dragging her over to the bed and cupping her arse as they collapsed there in a tangle of limbs. He knelt over her, taking her mouth in a searing kiss and teasing her nipples with his thumb. "Gods, Polyxena, I..." Parting her knees slowly, he tasted the hot flesh of her inner thigh, biting his way up to her sex and running his tongue along her cleft, until he finally nipped at her clit and glided over it with short, feathery strokes.

Polyxena gave a strangled shriek and clutched the balled up blankets tightly in her fists. "Please," she panted, "please. I want it with you inside me, Alastor." She felt him nod, and then he moved back up her body and kissed her, leaving her own taste on her lips. "Now," she moaned. "I have to have you now." Wantonly, she opened her legs, taking him into her and wrapping them tightly around him as he sheathed himself completely, thrusting deeply and frantically. Polyxena's hips rose, meeting each stroke eagerly until the gasping, dizzying heat overwhelmed her, and she came on an inarticulate cry of satisfaction.

He followed almost immediately after and fell limply on top of her, dimly realizing that she had been kissing him all the while. When he made a move to roll over onto his back, her hand held him.

"Stay," she whispered, threading her fingers through his grizzled hair. "I like having you here."

Alastor smiled his lopsided grin and pressed his lips softly to her forehead. "Fair enough."

A moment or two later, they heard a great shuffling from the corridor, and Sturgis' exasperated voice sighing, "Dung, come away from that door!"

\* \* \*

An hour later, Polyxena awoke nestled in the hollow of his shoulder and enjoyed the heavy sleepiness of his arms. Throwing a leg over him, she drew herself up to straddle him and slowly ground her hips against his already semi-tumescent length as he blinked drowsily. His erection unfurled before he was even fully awake, and Polyxena sank down to take him into her wetness. She'd only meant to please him, but soon felt herself grow just as aroused when she felt his strong hands grasp at her thighs as he thrust deep inside her, so far that she gave a whimper of pain just before she felt him come, convulsing underneath her in a fierce orgasm that brought her own.

"Are you awake now?" she queried innocently, bending to kiss the tip of his remaining bit of nose.

"One would hope," he growled, sitting up slowly. "We'd better get back to the kitchen. Dung and Sturgis will be wondering what became of us."

Polyxena quirked an eyebrow. "They're not that thick, Alastor. And Dung was listening at the door. Didn't you see him?" she teased lightly. "Constant vigilance?"

At once, Moody sobered. "You're right. I let my guard down." He ran an irritated hand through his grey hair. "Check the area for possible spies. That's the first thing they tell us in Surveillance and Espionage."

"It was only Dung," she countered, pulling on a clean robe. "Can you really blame him? I mean, the man has sex with hags."

"It could just as easily have been a Death Eater," he reminded her severely.

"Oh, Alastor." Polyxena sighed and tapped her wand against his torn robe. *'Reparo!'* Here, put this on; we've got work to do."

When the pair finally ambled out to the kitchen, Sturgis was nursing a cup of tea and Mundungus had collapsed into a ragged heap that smelled very strongly of Ogden's. Polyxena busied herself with the teapot, taking a cup to the table while Moody drank deeply from his trusty flask.

"Right then," said Sturgis calmly, without a flicker of discomfort at what the couple had been up to moments before. "Polyxena only started to tell me about your search for the wandmaker. Clearly you've struck a nerve with the Death Eaters if they went to the trouble of taking her as a hostage."

Moody regarded him through narrowed eyes. "Dumbledore told us that the bloke Mundungus there nicked the wands from is..."

"Wormtail," finished Polyxena. "I described him for Sturgis. He doesn't stay at headquarters, though; he's assigned to help Snape."

"Snape." Moody's heavily scarred face seemed more menacing than usual. "You think he might have mentioned that he's got that filthy traitor in his own house."

"Snape never said...?" Podmore trailed off in surprise. "Bloody hell. You'd think that sort of thing would benefit the Order. Yes, he's had Wormtail for months, cleaning his house, making him drinks, cooking his meals..."

"That sounds a bit dangerous, doesn't it?" remarked Polyxena. "Having all your food prepared by a known enemy."

Moody grinned at her before he said darkly, "There's no real proof that Wormtail is Snape's enemy."

"Dumbledore trusts him," began Podmore earnestly, and Mad-Eye gave a soft snort of disbelief. "And Dumbledore is a far better Legilimens than he lets on."

"And Snape is one hell of an Occlumens," thundered Moody. "When we start to trust these shady characters..."

At that, Mundungus stirred slightly. "Some'n say m' name?" he groaned, forcing his bloodshot, baggy eyes open. "'S th' meeting over?"

"No one mentioned you." Polyxena peered over at his dissipated form. "Go on back to sleep."

"P'lyx'na," he said with a bit of a leer. "An' Mad-Eye, y' old dog. I knew y' had it in y'. I was just sayin' t' Sturgis b'fore I had m' drink that th' Extendable Ears could turn a decent profit in th' secondary market, know what I mean? If th' Weasleys had some fall off th' back of a broom, who'd be th' wiser?"

"The Weasleys are members of the Order," growled Moody sternly. "And using those things to listen outside of other people's bedroom doors..."

"Stealth an' Tracking, innit, Mad-Eye?" joked Dung uneasily. "Don' get all outta your cauldron an' turn me into a ferret."

A vein appeared in Moody's forehead. "That. Wasn't. Me," he snarled. "That was the impostor who..."

"We're getting nowhere with this," interrupted Polyxena loudly. "Suffice it to say, Sturgis, that we've been able to determine that my father is in fact with Harz."

Raising his head slightly, Dung added, "An' Dumbledore said th' Death Eaters Imperiused ol' Ollivander so he'd go with them, an' Wormtail's workin' for both, an' Harz kidnapped th' wandmaker. We've gotta find Wormtail an' have him lead us t' Harz." Dung shuddered slightly. "Dealin' with th' Death Eaters an' Harz's lot all in one day, dunno... th' Engorgement Charm," he muttered apprehensively, reaching down as though to check that his family jewels were still intact.

"Precisely," agreed Polyxena, disregarding the bit about the dreaded charm. "Except for one thing. Voldemort told me that my father owed him asking to help with the wand situation. No Death Eaters put the Imperius Curse on him; he just closed up his shop and left. When Harz got hold of him, he probably took over the property and leased it to Stop 'n' Jinx." With a bleak expression, she wordlessly accepted the flask from Moody. "To stop my father joining Voldemort."

# Chapter 10

Chapter 10 of 10

The quartet finds Wormtail and forces him to lead them to Harz's lair. Harz has a surprise revelation for the group.

A/N: Thanks to everyone who reviewed/followed this story!

\* \* \*

The night was a chilly one, especially for autumn, and the gloomy scene did not help matters one bit. Nearly every single lamp on the filthy street was burned out, the windows on the derelict brick rowhouses were for the most part boarded up, and the night sky was black with a new moon.

A Disillusioned Moody led the group, wand out and magical eye spinning faster than Polyxena had ever seen it do. Polyxena and Sturgis, beneath the Invisibility Cloak, followed closely behind him, and Dung, invisible under Moody's spare cloak, brought up the rear, though he rather ruined the effect by muttering incoherently about his Healer and whether the Weasleys made Shield Jocks.

"Another left," hissed Sturgis. "Yes, that's it right there. Number twenty-two, Spinner's Avenue. Snape and Wormtail should both be there."

"Are you sure about this, Alastor?" Knowing that he could see her, Polyxena gazed at Moody with a drawn, anxious face. "There's a damn good chance that Snape will just murder us on his doorstep."

"Four people, including three members of the Order?" scoffed Mad-Eye. "I hardly think Dumbledore would allow him to remain at Hogwarts after that. No, if he wants to stay on as a spy for You-Know-Who, he'll have to keep his cover with us."

Sturgis exhaled a puff of air through his nose. "There's also a 'damn good chance' that Snape's on our side. Would Dumbledore have let him into the meetings if there was any doubt? Not bloody likely. Come on, let's just get it over with." He raised his fist and banged heavily on the door.

A small, sniveling man answered; Polyxena presumed that this was Peter Pettigrew. "W-who's there?" he quavered. "Show yourselves!"

Almost at once, Moody sent out a Stunner that hit Wormtail right in the chest, knocking him clear into the sitting room. After he had bound the Death Eater's feet and hands with thick cords from his wand, the ex-Auror set about searching the small building for signs of Snape. His magical eye revolved slowly, taking in every single room, until its owner finally gave a soft snort of disbelief. "Snape's here, all right," he said with a touch of amusement. "But he's not alone. Come on upstairs, Sturgis. Dung, Polyxena, you make sure that rat bastard doesn't transform."

Polyxena's eyes narrowed. "Oughtn't I to go...?" she began, affronted.

"You'll stay here," grunted Moody. "Could be any sort of hexes and jinxes flying about once we interrupt Snape and his caller."

"But I know the Cruciatus!" countered Polyxena, pointing her wand at Wormtail. "Watch!"

"You'll stay here if I say you'll stay here," Alastor growled, once again the bivouacking general. "Come on, Sturgis." He and Podmore disappeared from view, leaving the others to stand guard over Pettigrew.

Mundungus was chuckling his wheezy chuckle, and for that, Polyxena scowled at him. "What are you laughing at, you dissipated sneak thief *Engorgio!*"

Dung yelped loudly, springing over the couch and landing hard atop Wormtail, who moaned piteously. "No, P'lyx'na, no! Just do th' Cruciatus!"

"Dung, that wasn't my wand, that was a stick."

However, Dung had already forgotten his near miss and was curiously examining one of the many books that lined Snape's shelves. "Bound in dragon hide, th' whole lot," he murmured to himself. "Fuckin' flobberworms, this'd fetch a fair bit down Knockturn..." As he was slipping volume after volume into the many hidden pockets of his overcoat, there came a great scuffle and the sound of incantations.

"Narcissa, stop! Just go; I'll finish them off!" came Snape's agitated voice from upstairs. Within seconds, a half-dressed blonde woman clambered down the staircase and out the door, where she Apparated with a faint pop. "I realize this looks a tad, shall we say, *incriminating*, but I can assure you, Moody, that my loyalties lie strictly with Dumbledore," Snape continued as he himself descended the stairs, tightening the sash on a shabby green night robe. "Now what is the meaning of this interruption? And in my own home as well." He very calmly took a seat beside Polyxena.

"*Avery Harz*," thundered Moody, looking appropriately frightening. "It's really Wormtail we're after. Unless of course, you happen to have a hand in it?" His magical eye rested momentarily on Snape's left sleeve, just long enough for him to make his point.

"Auror Moody," Snape replied as sarcastically as he could manage, "my *dear* fellow, it escapes me why you think you know better than Dumbledore on the question of my allegiance. However, I suppose I must humor you in your paranoid old age and say this: I am not faithful to the Dark Lord any longer. Aside from that, I don't even know who this Harz character is. Not a Death Eater, certainly."

"Yeah, we'd figured that much out, believe it or not," replied Moody just as sardonically. "But I think your associate has a pretty good idea, don't you, Wormtail?"

Wormtail whimpered.

"That's what I thought." He raised his wand. "Would you like to tell us where the wandmaker is or should I hex it out of you? Unless, of course, anyone brought any Veritaserum?"

"I used mine up on Harz's bloke. Snape seems to have some, though. *Accio!*" Polyxena flicked her wand at a crystal phial that rested on the table of a small, makeshift Potions laboratory. "You're being a really good bad cop, Alastor!" she praised. "Have you tuned in to *Aurors* lately?"

Ignoring her, Moody turned to administer the potion to their captive. "Where is Avery Harz?"

"In the caves outside Hogsmeade," replied Wormtail tonelessly.

"What's his real name?"

"Lucretius Thurkell."

"Does he have the wandmaker, Ollivander? Where is he?" demanded Polyxena.

"Yes, he does. The wandmaker is with Harz in the caves, making the special Darks for the Dark Lord." Wormtail looked as though he was imparting this news with particular loathing. "Harz does not know that."

"What do you mean?" Sturgis furrowed his brow. "Then how the hell do you know?"

"I work for Harz. He gives me Galleons. I also work for the Dark Lord. I came upon the wandmaker imprisoned in one of Harz's rooms. I put the Imperius on him. I forced him to make wands."

Polyxena arched a brow. "Why was Ollivander going to the Death Eaters in the first place?"

"The Dark Lord didn't know it, but Nott put the Imperius on Ollivander. He forced him to write a letter to the Dark Lord offering his help. The letter was a binding magical contract. Ollivander had no choice."

"Take us to Harz," growled Moody, seeing that the Veritaserum was losing its effect. "Now."

Mundungus was just as wary as Wormtail, if not more so. "Harz's lot," he muttered apprehensively. "Near killed ol' Will las' year. Nickin' silver from th' wrong bloke, know what I mean? An' they know 'bout th'... th'... " he swallowed convulsively.

"Get a grip on yourself, Dung... I didn't mean that literally," amended Sturgis when Dung clasped his hands over the zip of his trousers. "We have five good wizards... and witches," he added with a nod to Polyxena.

"But th' special Darks." Dung crept back beneath the Invisibility Cloak. "I saw what P'lyx'na did with them. Harz's lot could... " Unwilling to finish, he shook his head grimly.

"We're wasting time," snapped Moody impatiently. "Snape, come here, I'll Disillusion you."

Snape sneered haughtily. "This is your affair, Mad-Eye. I'm of half a mind to just stay here and read one of my... " With a glance at his shelf, he whirled around to face Mundungus. "Kindly return my books, you smelly, light-fingered... "

"Do you want the special Darks to fall into Death Eater hands?" snarled Polyxena. "Perhaps you'd like the Dark Lord to have a wand like that. Or Harz and his merry band."

Reluctantly and with a very pronounced grimace on his sallow face, Snape went to change into his robes. Upon his return, Wormtail burst out,

"Severus, the Dark Lord will know that you've been working against him! I'll tell him you've been consorting with the Order and that you've stopped him having the special Darks. Bellatrix was right; you can't be trusted!"

"Bellatrix was mistaken." Snape's eyes glittered dangerously. "By working with Harz, *you* are guilty of treachery to the Dark Lord, and he'll not have any qualms about my throwing you to Azkaban. As for the Order, by eliminating Harz, they are doing the Dark Lord a favor, are they not?"

Polyxena had to admire Snape's logic. Though he had not quite convinced her or for that matter Alastor on his allegiance to Dumbledore, she realized just how good a double agent he was. Clearly, Severus Snape could justify himself to either side with equal ease, and that impressed her, though she was still not quite sure what to make of him. And the fleeing blonde Death Eater had borne no resemblance to Snape's bushy-haired snogging partner of before. "Right, well," she said. "I'm in no hurry to do the Dark Lord any favors, but I would rather like to stop my father supplying legions of criminals with dangerous Dark wands. Lead on then, *Wormtail*." She spat the last word contemptibly. "We haven't got all night."

\* \* \*

The six of them had Apparated from Spinner's End to Hogsmeade (though Moody had Side-Alonged Wormtail just to be sure) as soon as they were beyond Snape's ward, a Stealth Sensing Spell that even Moody grudgingly approved. With the tip of Mad-Eye's wand shoved into his back, Wormtail led the party away from the village and toward the rocky ledges beyond, where Sirius Black had hidden years before. From inside the cloak, Polyxena looped her arms around one of Moody's and felt Dung clutching the back of her robes in fright. Both Disillusioned, Sturgis and Snape flanked them, wands out, but otherwise perfectly calm.

"Harz's lair is just up ahead," grumbled Pettigrew reluctantly.

*His* lair, thought Polyxena in disgust, *that's a new low. Even Voldemort just calls Riddle House his 'headquarters'.* "What is it exactly?" she hissed. "A cave or a house inside a cave with Michael Crawford playing the pipe organ and the whole bit?"

"The largest cave has several rooms," replied Wormtail. "The wandmaker is in an anteroom, but Harz doesn't know about the special Darks. That's our little secret."

Polyxena snorted. To her mind, Pettigrew looked and sounded just like the creepy pedophiles on the Muggle news, right down to the watery smirk of a smile.

"This is it," he said in his high-pitched voice. "Harz's lair."

"Go on in," growled Moody, "and distract Harz. We'll search the antechambers for Ollivander." Pettigrew gulped fearfully at the thought of speaking with Harz, but nonetheless did as Mad-Eye bade him, evidently more afraid of the ex-Auror than of the criminal overlord.

"I have stolen the gold you asked me to from Snape's safe," they heard Wormtail say to an unseen figure.

The knuckles gripping Snape's wand became whiter, and he muttered dangerously, "That useless traitor... "

"This way," growled Moody, magical eye whirling. "I've checked the doors; we need the third one on the left. That'd be the wandmaker."

Polyxena let out a hastily stifled gasp, and the entire cluster of wizards moved across the cavern to the makeshift door of the chamber.

"This is almost too easy," whispered Sturgis hoarsely. "And I can't say much for this headquarters. No totes and fruit baskets here, I'd wager."

"A place like this ought to have a fair number of Intruder Charms or at least a good Foe-Glass," put in Moody as they edged through the rough-hewn wooden door. "If I were Harz, I'd have put up a solid wall of wards around this entire cave."

"Curious, very curious. Ten and a quarter inches, inflexible... birch and unicorn hair... Gregorovitch creation, unless I'm much mistaken," was the muttering that came from deep within the pitch-black room.

"*Lumos*," hissed Moody, illuminating the space so that the wandmaker was clearly visible, huddled on a thin pallet, clad in a ragged robe, and minus a ring finger.

Polyxena shrugged aside Moody's Invisibility Cloak. "Papa?" Squinting in the weak beam of light, she eyed the aged wandmaker with a cool sort of interest.

"When its brother... why, its brother gave you that scar," continued Ollivander in hushed tones.

"Poorly performed Imperius Curse," Alastor growled. "He'll go to St. Mungo's, then."

"Ah, how well I remember... Dear me, the hair from the head of a veela."

"Fair plan," agreed Polyxena. "*Silencio!*" She jabbed her wand at the muttering old wizard and dragged him beneath the cloak with her. "Shall we?" Hastening back across the room, they joined Snape and Sturgis, who had been keeping guard at the door.

"What of Wormtail?" queried Snape. "I won't have him taking the story of this escapade to the Dark Lord. And, Moody, I'm surprised at you. A known Death Eater in your midst, and you're ready to leave him here with Harz?"

"I have a known Death Eater in my midst at every meeting of the Order," growled Moody. "And of course we're taking Wormtail... "

"... to Azkaban!" interjected Polyxena. "But I don't fancy being hexed in the process. Or Killing Cursed."

"Harz doesn't use Dark magic," grunted Dung. "He kills with knives like a Muggle. Cuttin' off fingers and the like."

"Exactly," agreed a low, harsh voice from the corridor. "Ah, Mundungus Fletcher. It's been ages. I don't think I've seen you since Dumbledore saved your worthless skin from a few of my business associates."

Dung yelped and jumped beneath his Invisibility Cloak, but Moody's hand twitched instinctively, sending out a beam of light from his wand that trapped Harz against the cave wall.

"You had your lot kidnap the wandmaker. Why?" he snarled. "You didn't even make use of the special Darks. In fact, you didn't even know that Ollivander was creating them."

"I didn't make use of the special Darks." A self-deprecating smile appeared on Harz's weasel-like face. "I tried to stop the special Darks being made ages ago. What use have I for a special Dark?"

"What use?" cried Polyxena in outrage. "What use? Have you seen what one of those wands is capable of? You could torture someone into insanity in half the time it takes with a normal wand."

"*Could I?*" replied Harz mildly. "Somehow I doubt that. I've collected, shall we say, 'fees' from the wandmaker's shop for years. Protection from the Death Eaters, in fact, but one of them managed to slip by and Imperius old Ollivander into helping He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named with his wand troubles. Naturally, I couldn't have that, Death Eaters running 'round with Dark wands, so when Ollivander was leaving his shop, two of my men intervened and brought him here. I didn't permit him to make wands, of course," he spat, a look of fury coming into his beady eyes. "Nothing I hate more than a bloody wand."

Sturgis raised an eyebrow. "A wizard who hates wands?"

"A wizard?" replied Harz. "No, I don't think so."

"A *Squib*?" exclaimed Polyxena. "But you have wizards working for you. Very poor wizards, though, I must say."

"Half my associates are Squibs," he jeered. "Surely Wormtail has told you my true name?"

"Thurkell." Snape's dark eyes were shrewd. "Of course. A relation of Thaddeus Thurkell, no doubt, a family famous for producing Squibs. But for a load of Squibs to cause such trouble for the Dark Lord..."

Even Dung slipped out from beneath his cloak. "Harz's lot's a bunch of Squibs?" His bloodshot eyes lit up. "I'll be a son of a Bludger. But why th' name 'Avery Harz'? Sounds like th' Death Eaters t' me."

"Of course it sounds like a Death Eater's name. Who do you think gets credit for most of my schemes? Florean Fortescue, Octavius Pepper, all my work. Gives You-Know-Who a bit more publicity than he'd like at times, and helps my lot avoid detection."

Moody's eyes narrowed. "We should take you straight to Azkaban," he said in a low voice. "But, as Snape said, that'd be doing You-Know-Who a favor. We'll just be taking Wormtail, then, but if I hear you've started consorting with Dark wizards, I know where to find you."

"I'm as eager to see You-Know-Who gone as anyone else, Auror Moody," replied Harz sincerely. "But I have a business to conduct." He gestured to the main entrance of the cave, and the group of wizards hastened outside and back into Hogsmeade.

\* \* \*

The tiny St. Mungo's tearoom was filled with members of the Order. Shackbolt and Tonks had joined Moody, Polyxena, Dung, Sturgis, and Snape after carting Wormtail off to Azkaban, and now sipped tea and Firewhisky with the five wizards who had rescued the wandmaker.

"I can't believe Mad-Eye here let Harz off with a warning," said Tonks with a flash of her old humor.

"Maybe you really are getting soft in your old age," Polyxena teased gently. "Though I found Harz rather personable for a dangerous criminal overlord. As long as my father doesn't attempt to do anymore work for the Dark Lord, I think we're well shut of Lucretius Thurkell."

Dung chuckled, still overcome with delight that Harz and most of his minions were Squibs. "An' worryin' about Harz's lot doing th' Engorgement Charm? That lot can't even do a bloody Levitating Spell." As though to reassure himself, he took out his own wand and made his teacup soar high into the air.

"Why would you worry about someone performing an Engorgement Charm?" began Snape, until Polyxena murmured,

"Don't ask."

Focusing his magical eye on Tonks, Moody muttered sheepishly, "Well, Harz isn't a Dark wizard, and if he's helping to keep You-Know-Who in check, then I wouldn't be the one who chucks him into Azkaban."

"Well put," agreed Sturgis. "So, Polyxena, I suppose this means you'll be leaving us? You and Hecuba have been living in Kenishara, haven't you?"

Polyxena's face clouded. "We have. I work for... well, I'm not sure now; I've taken so much time off... but I supposedly still work at Bicorn Advertising Agency. It's not such a brilliant job, though; I was always in a foul mood working there. The Canadian wizards are a lot like Muggles. Work is at such a hectic pace, and they wear the most hideously uncomfortable things, besides."

"You staying then, P'lyx'na?" Dung seemed hopeful. "You could join th' Order!"

Moody's normal eye narrowed. "She'll do no such thing. The Order's work is too dangerous for..."

"Someone who was in the lairs of both Harz and the Dark Lord and lived to tell the tale?" snapped Polyxena.

"What's it t' you, anyway, Mad-Eye?" queried Dung slyly.

Polyxena beat him to it. "Because we're in love."

"Really?"

"Yes, really," growled Moody, looking shiftily at Polyxena, who gave him a skittish glance in return. The flesh beneath the ex-Auror's scars was tinged pink. "Now enough with the questions."

\* \* \*

A/N: I really had fun writing this, more so than other fics I've done. I've already written pieces of stories that aren't exactly sequels, but feature these two characters (though other pairings will be the main focus.) Next up: Snape and Hermione! I'm tempted to put the summary for it, but that sort of self-pimperiness would be going a little too far. Anyway, I hope everyone enjoyed reading this fic! Thanks again to those who did.