

The Weight of History

by DrPolliwog

Wizard Historian Pinkerton Thatchdale and his young assistant spend the summer interviewing Severus Snape about his part in the events of the Final Battle. His young university-student assistant re-examines her ideals concerning the writing of history and its fallibility.

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CHAPTER ONE

The overcast afternoon brought on the streetlights lining the narrow roads of the small, dingy northwestern British town nearly two hours earlier than usual. Most of the identical brick houses were in varying states of advanced decay with overgrown lawns before the houses and thin, scrubby-looking heath behind; however, it was the spindly house of greyish brick atop the town's furthest outlying hill that was the most overgrown and scrubby-looking of the lot.

The girl and the older man hurried through the narrow streets of the overgrown, scrubby-looking town. The girl tripped over one of the many shallow pits that helped the town's faded roads resemble nothing so much as a good Swiss cheese. She snatched at a fold of the man's long maroon robe to prevent herself falling further. Looking mildly surprised, the man helped to right her. The two proceeded to speed up the narrow road while trying to appear as though they did not actually mean to walk quickly.

The girl's name was Lux Lecant, and it was the result of a drunken joke between her academic father and the man in the maroon robes. There were no passersby, but had there been, she would have been the more normal-looking of the two. Her companion, whose name was Dr. Pinkerton Thatchdale, had decided upon the worn, maroon robes despite Lux's firm recommendation that he, like her, ought to don a nondescript jumper and a pair of trousers. He had insisted that "a reasonable amount of humidity kept little Pinky feeling chipper." Lux offered no further advice.

As they approached the greyish, brick house at the top of the hill, Dr. Thatchdale began patting his robes with increasing urgency.

"Lux, do you have--?"

She nodded. "In my bag."

Dr. Pinkerton Thatchdale gave his pockets a few extra pats. He nodded a few times nervously, his head bobbing up and down in a jerky staccato.

At the top of the hill, the girl paused for a moment to catch her breath. Dr. Pinkerton Thatchdale used the pause to pat down his robes once more before glancing at her.

"All right?"

"Yeah. Let's, er, let's knock."

As they recommenced walking, the same nonexistent passerby would have noticed Dr. Thatchdale and Lux's pace slowed to about half its previous speed.

When they finally reached the plain, wooden front door, Dr. Pinkerton Thatchdale looked momentarily blank. After several seconds, Lux raised a clenched fist to knock.

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Ruffin Lecant was in the second year of his undergraduate studies at Essex when the idea that would eventually become his daughter's name was first conceived. Over an imported bottle of Maker's Mark purchased for the occasion of his twentieth birthday, Ruffin confided to his history-major roommate and best mate, Pinkerton Thatchdale, that he'd always cherished a secret desire to name his possible future child after a linguistic term.

Pinky had sprawled his gangling self across the shabby couch, one of the few pieces of furniture in their off-campus flat. He considered for several long minutes before finally declaring that his best mate, Rufe, was a genius, and wasn't university marvelous, and wasn't bourbon even more so? Rufe responded with a twelve-minute tirade on the marvelous, marvelous properties of language in shaping thought and finally resurfaced to discover Pinky had opted out of listening for a good kip on the sofa.

It would be two years before twenty-two-year-old Rufe's extracurricular reading would lead him to Jeffrey Eugenides' novel "The Virgin Suicides" and ultimately to the realization that the name "Lux Lecant" would sound very much like "lexicon."

Constance Lecant needed considerably more convincing than her cousin. Dr. Ruffin Lecant had earned his doctorate in English the previous spring, and he and his wife celebrated by finally deciding to begin a family. Constance was two months away from the delivery of their daughter, and Ruffin found his considerable brain powers fully devoted to convincing his wife that little Lux would not be teased through grammar school.

"And it's possible she'll take after your side and won't need to worry about it at all," Rufe wheedled hopefully. Constance (whose own parents were called Gideon and Melisande) couldn't much argue against his point.

Young Lux spent her first ten years of evenings burrowed snugly into the curve of her father's lap and chest as he read to her books, wonderful books: the Chronicles of Narnia, Brian Jacques' Redwall books, the Hobbit and the Lord of the Rings. As she grew, Lux's predilection for fictitious historical accounts became apparent. Rufe realized with some chagrin that his daughter's academic passion would not be for the language that he loved, but for the stories it put into semi-permanent recorded form. Regardless, Lux's father persisted in calling her his "little dictionary" in hopes that Lux's preferences might prove to take after his own.

As it happened, Lux did take after her mother's family, and she spent her secondary school years at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Lux was a Ravenclaw to the surprise of her mother whose family had all been Hufflepuffs and the great delight of her father, who knew very little about Hogwarts prior to his daughter's acceptance and had supposed Ravenclaw to be the best house of the lot.

On leaving Hogwarts, Lux opted to attend the University of Essex to study history. Her father was proud that she'd chosen his alma mater for her "*undergraduate* degree," as she said, but did not envy her the long afternoons and late nights of research and paper-writing his best friend had agonized over in their three years at Essex.

Her first two years at Essex were just as the stories told by her father and uncle had prompted Lux to expect. As she had in Hogwarts, Lux kept mostly to herself. She spent most of her time attending classes, working in the campus library, and occasionally taking trips to the campus gymnasium in a fruitless attempt to keep healthy and focused. She flourished, reading volumes and writing papers and, upon their return, taking pride in the "A" scribbled at the close of each. And if she had no other work to complete and the time was after 9am and before 5pm, she frequently opted to take a kettle of hot water and several tea packets to her father's small, book-crowded office. He was working long hours towards tenure as an associate professor in the furthest part of the English department wing.

Lux was less and less comfortable in the face of the imminent summer term. She had completed most of the required courses for her degree, and the university did not offer enough of the courses she did need to make enrolling for summer term practical. Her resultant mild discomfort was a source of perplexity and anxiety for her father. Rufe always appreciated the summer hols and had difficulty understanding why his daughter viewed her extra-long summer with evident apprehension. He mentioned this in passing to Pinky one afternoon during a shared luncheon.

Pinky chewed his ham on rye slowly, then swallowed. "I've been looking for a temporary assistant for my project, but due to the unusual nature of the research, it's been difficult to find someone with both the clearance and the knowledge of the field required by the position. D'you think Luxie would be interested? I've wanted to ask her, but I thought she might be taking summer classes again this year."

"She isn't, and I'm sure she would. Why don't you ask her after dinner tomorrow?" Pinky traditionally ate their Friday evening meal at the Lecant family home.

Lux, of course, was only too pleased to be asked to apply for the position. Pinkerton immediately began laying forth plans and reviewing available information to ascertain where he believed they ought to focus their summer's efforts.

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In the years following Voldemort's defeat by twenty-six-year-old Harry Potter, the Ministry's Aurors and the remaining members of the Order of the Phoenix hunted down the remaining known Death Eaters. All those who had stood with the Dark Lord were detained, awaiting trial in the now wizard-guarded Azkaban.

The British Wizarding community was dissatisfied with the actions of Rufus Scrimgeour's Ministry. In the calm immediately following Voldemort's defeat, voters called for Scrimgeour's impeachment. Arthur Weasley had since been elected Minister of Magic. The magical community recognized his efforts in the war against Voldemort, and though Minister Weasley had first been reluctant to take the post, his wife's prodding and his awareness of the barely quelled chaos in the Isles forced his eventual acceptance of the position. Under his administration, the Ministry was taking unprecedented steps to ensure all pertinent information was collected before taking any accused Death Eaters to trial.

Any, that was, excepting one.

Severus Snape had been taken to trial within a year of Voldemort's defeat. It was rumored that his early trial had been pushed forward by the Ministry to avoid outraging the Wizarding public. Albus Dumbledore had been a great favorite among the majority of the populace. His reputation as one of the great warriors of the Light had become near-impenetrable after his death.

The Wizarding public was astonished. The *Daily Prophet* was gobsmacked. Report after report ran of secret documents and a wealthy patron's bribery of Wizengamot officials. Too much oil and friction set the great propaganda machine aflame. Instead of leaning on the *Prophet*, Arthur Weasley's Ministry allowed the paper to burn itself to the ground. Two months after Snape's acquittal, the *Daily Prophet's* London offices closed.

Without the *Prophet*, the British Wizarding community had no reliable news sources. The *Quibbler* was apt to drop the Ministry's latest body count for a story about the world's smallest Acromantula.

Four years after the close of the *Daily Prophet*, Dr. Pinkerton Thatchdale took a sabbatical from his job in the history department of the University of Leeds. Dr. Thatchdale committed himself to fulfilling the role he saw the *Daily Prophet* vacate.

He and Lux began their partnership with a weekly meeting on Thursdays, her afternoon off from exam study, at the university café.

"I've collected every periodical I could that addressed any aspect of the war on Voldemort, but the initial denial of Cornelius Fudge's Ministry and the covert nature of the Light's strategies made for very little and not terribly accurate news," he admitted, stirring milk into his teacup.

Lux took another swallow of her tea. "Are there no other reliable recorded sources?"

"There is one. Barnabas Cuffe, final editor of the *Daily Prophet*, kept detailed records on all information gathered by his reporters. The *Prophet's* archives contain information notes taken by *Prophet* field reporters, articles written for and never included in the paper."

"Where is the archive?"

"In the basement of the *Prophet's* old London offices."

Lux sipped her tea. "I suppose you've already written Mr. Cuffe?"

"I have."

"And?"

"Minister Weasley's strict policy of noninterference at the *Prophet* does not extend to the paper's archives. Cuffe says he can't allow anyone access to the archives until the conclusion of the Death Eater trials."

Lux's eyes widened. "Five years could easily pass before every suspected Death Eater has been tried!"

"Five years will *certainly* pass before the files are available for perusal by the public eye. I've an appointment Tuesday afternoon to speak with a Ministry review board."

"Come off it, Pinky. They've approved your research grant. They must allow you to access the archives, or the grant is useless. No two ways about it." She shrugged and dripped a bit of tea on her jumper.

Pinkerton stared at his tea. "If they refuse access to the archives, we very may well need to ferret out that theoretical second way."

A paler Pinky returned to the university café the next Thursday. Arthur Weasley had proved to be as unbending as his predecessor in his refusal to release sensitive information. Lux listened with disbelief as Pinkerton reluctantly described the reasoning behind the Ministry committee's decision.

"We'll have to nip into the *Prophet* offices and nick the files we want, then."

Pinkerton swallowed, his Adam's apple bobbing up and down nervously.

"D'you " Lux set her half-empty teacup down heavily on the painted café table. "D'you think you could let me *finish* my tea before breaking it off with me? Honestly, Humbert! I *do* hope you're paying."

A couple who had been pulling out chairs to sit in the nearest table glanced at her sharply and moved off.

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The door swung open suddenly. Dr. Pinkerton Thatchdale startled backwards.

The man behind the door was equal in height to the imposingly tall doctor. Where Pinky was lanky, he was merely thin. Between them, Lux felt quite small and dumpy. The man's face was oily and sallow. He had a long, hooked nose, down which he stared at the doctor and the girl peevishly.

"We're, er we're looking for Severus Snape," Pinkerton finally managed.

The man stared at them for a long moment. "I am he."

Dr. Thatchdale fidgeted.

Finally, Lux blurted, "Well well, aren't you going to ask us inside?"