

# **To the Rescue II: The Prequel**

By

DrT

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## **Chapter I**

Thursday, July 4, 1968

Hugh FitzWilliam smiled benignly as he walked into the Great Hall of the Ysgol, the oldest wizarding school in the Americas, dating back to 1524. He had turned 120 shortly before, and had finished presiding over his twenty-fifth year as headmaster just under two weeks before. He was happy with his life, the school, and life around him.

Soon after the Spanish Muggles started colonizing the Americas, the period of Muggle European history known as the Reformation broke out. Muggles across Europe fought each other over differing versions of religion. This also created an even greater climate of hatred towards the Magical community, and by the early 1600s the two communities were segregated more completely than ever before, which remains true at the turn of the Millennium.

There had been nine powerful magical communities in Britain in 1500. Now there are only Diagon Village in England, now fully part of London and called merely Diagon Alley, and Hogsmeade in Scotland. The other two English towns and one of the Scots were destroyed in the 1500s, the remaining Scots town was destroyed in 1748.

The three Welsh towns, with some emigration from others in the Welsh, English and Scots Magical population, moved themselves to America between 1500-1650 (its start slightly predating the Reformation), to what today is the 'backwoods' of Maine and Quebec, nearly a hundred years before Muggles started to settle in the nearby areas. Some of the people just wanted to get away from the growing climate of persecution. Some wanted to at least partially disassociate themselves from the general magical community as well. These groups brought many allies from the remaining Celtic enclaves, some which had been hidden away for centuries in Ireland, Wales, Scotland, Brittany, and Cornwall, or in some cases in the Pyrenees and Alps, hidden away in places for nearly 1500 years -- places some now abandoned, while a few very secret places kept just caretaker populations. These Old Believers and the general magical population set up a series of communities which no Muggle can now locate. Today there are nine thriving towns, numerous agricultural villages, many farms, and the Ysgol (the oldest and most prestigious school of witchcraft and wizardry in the Americas) in the general area of northern Maine and southern Quebec.

An even larger mass migration of many magical families from Europe followed between 1672 and 1815. A few took their place within the general framework of Muggle society, a few hid themselves away from Muggles and the Maine-Quebec groups throughout the Appalachians. A slightly larger group found their homes in the Original Settlement. Most of the latter joined the Religion and, along with many of the stricter Old Believers, settled in the Rockies, which some Old Believers had explored in the early 1600s. The magical population of the North American Magical Confederation is, percentage-wise, the highest against the surrounding Muggle population in the world (more than four times the European average), and most of the magical population is well-hidden even from outside magical observation. There are two communities in the Rockies that are nearly small magical cities, with dozens of fair-sized towns, including the magical capital in western Ontario.

A little more than a two-thirds of that Original wizarding area, and nearly half of the total American and Canadian Magical population, belong to the Old Believers, who base themselves in part on the Welsh Magical culture as it was when it led the migration and in part on the remaining true remnants of the Old Religion, Druidism. In the Confederation's 2000 census, there were 331,119 'Europeans' (although that term contains people of every ethnic group on Earth), 219,879 Old Believers (not including an estimated 102,600 'Hidden' who refuse to participate in most Governmental activities), and 9,783 Native Americans. If an Outsider were allowed to visit any of the stricter Old Believer settlements of any kind (which is almost impossible), it would be easy to believe that they were back in the late 1500s in many respects, and in pre-Roman Gaul or Britain in some others.

At the age of eleven, nearly all Old Believer children are still sent to the Ysgol or one of the three exclusive Old Believer schools (the largest of which, with an estimated 6,000 students, is said to be located in the Yukon, while the other two are in central Ontario and northern Montana), but after taking the WT's (the American version of O.W.L.s), they have to decide if they wish to stay and receive both advanced training and Muggle studies (American schools other than the exclusive Old Believer ones teach you how to blend into Muggle society at some point, if only with a one term or one year course). The children of Old Believers who stay the extra two years at other schools (including the Ysgol) must prove they genuinely wish to come back before being allowed to come and stay for good. After the age of 21, it's almost impossible for those who have left the strict settlements to come back, even to visit, other than to one special area, and then only by prior arrangement (even if they have not also left the religion).

Few outsiders have married into any of the stricter Old Believers sects, especially during the 20th century. The requirement of fluent Welsh, not just in everyday life but for magical use, and 16th century living conditions and sanitation facilities make it unattractive to most outsiders. The 'Open' Old Believers are the most liberal group, and the largest sect other than the Hidden, with 49,116 members in 2000, and they may be found everywhere from the oldest Old Believer families living in the private areas of the Old Believers to Muggle-borns living nearly Muggle lives.

There are now five even larger areas of Old Believer settlement in North America, but the Original area in Maine and Quebec remains the spiritual home. Nearly all Old Believers, other than about half of the somewhat secular and liberal Open Believers, are either farmers, crafts people, or raise livestock (especially guard griffins in Maine and Quebec, while many in the wilds of the Rockies raise dragons and wyverns for dragon hides and potion ingredients).

Old Believer children only account for about a third of the 900 - 1000 students attending the Ysgol (most of them from Open families). The Ysgol had been founded by a group of scholars who had, for the most part, been educated at Hogwarts, and for many years the only contact the Old Believers maintained with Europe was with Hogwarts. Even in the twentieth century, the Ysgol maintained as close links with Hogwarts as it did with the smaller, less prestigious schools in North America. They therefore followed the same curriculum and had a similar House structure, named the Orange, Green, Blue (corresponding to Gryffindor), Red (Slytherin), White (Ravenclaw) and Brown (Hufflepuff) dragons.

Only three of the teaching staff were still present this summer, to supervise twelve students who were not going home -- something of a record. Usually there were three or four dozen students staying over all or part of the summer. "Good morning!" the Headmaster called out in greeting. "It's nice to see we're all here before our charges." He frowned. "Strange that we're all here this early."

Before anyone could say anything, Willie McCrae, the head groundskeeper came into the Great Hall, looking very worried. "Headmaster? We have a real problem. I think you should all come."

FitzWilliam and the three teachers looked at each other, and then followed McCrae out the main hall to the portico. There, on the top near the steps, lay what at first appeared to be a large bundle of blankets and three large trunks. "What is it? And how did it all get here?" FitzWilliam demanded.

McCrae pulled down three of the blankets. "It's a child!" FitzWilliam exclaimed.

Marcus Williams, both the junior of the School's three Charms instructors and the junior instructor present, took another edge of the blanket and lifted it, then dropped it in a hurry. "Actually, it's a girl."

"There was a note, sir," McCrae told the Headmaster, handing a large thick Muggle-manila envelope to him.

"Williams, go get Weiss." Rebecca Weis was the nurse/healer staying that July. FitzWilliam checked the envelope carefully for possible traps, and then opened it.

Amanda Keys, one of the Herbology instructors, demanded, "Well, what does it say? It can't demand total secrecy with the girl arriving like this!"

"Sorry."

*My Dear Headmaster:*

*You shall never know who I am if I have done my work correctly. This is my daughter; she is magical and comes from magical families. As far as I know, there are no Muggles in her background. She is more than sufficiently magical to start school in September.*

*I have provided her with more than enough money. All three trunks are twelve chamber trunks. The keys have been stuck to the inside of the envelope. The trunk marked with a '1' contains the money. Tuition, private room, and board for a full year, including summers, is 750 Galleons. Each chamber has 1200 Galleons, which should take care of clothes, supplies, books, etc. with some money left over each year to save for her future. Each chamber also contains 52 small sacks for an allowance, progressively increasing as she matures. I appoint the Headmaster and the Heads of the Blue, White, and Green Houses as my daughter's legal and financial guardians until June 21, 1979, which is when the last chamber is to be opened. And yes, her birthday is June 21.*

*Trunk #3 is empty. Since she will have no other home, I wanted her to have some place to store anything she wishes. Trunk #2 has ten empty chambers, the second has clothes and other items for her current use. The first chamber is empty except for her wand.*

*The wand is untraceable for all practical purposes. My daughter, who shall go under the name of Tabitha Stephanie Spellman, is also as untraceable as I have been able to make her. She does not appear in any magical registry. That I have been able to bring her here, in this condition and with these effects, should prove at least her partial magical heritage. The fact that I cannot provide a complete heritage, other than my word, makes me hope that she is not sorted to the Red Dragons.*

*My daughter will not be able to help you. I have replaced her personal memories with some rather large blocks of information, ie Muggle and Magical history, and a number of languages in addition to English. If I have done all the charms correctly, not even the Sorting Hat should be able to find a coherent personal memory. I hope no one is stupid or irresponsible enough to try and reverse these charms.*

*Tabitha should be awakened by 8:00 am July 5. Directions are on page 3.*

"There is of course no signature," FitzWilliam told the group, now augmented by Williams and Weiss. "The second page has an inventory of the items and monies in the trunks. The third has the awakening instructions." He turned to the Infirmarian and handed her the third page. "What do you think?"

"I think we should get her to the Infirmary."

At 3:00, a small group met in the Infirmary office. Besides FitzWilliam, the rest of the staff was present -- Williams, Keys, Weiss, George Stratis (one of the Muggle Studies teachers), Drew Loveland (one of the Transfiguration teachers), and one of the Librarians, Courtney Carey, plus three people from the North American Confederacy. These last three were not introduced by name, which meant they were from Intelligence.

"Miss Weiss, perhaps you should start."

"Assuming her birthday really is June Twenty-first, Miss Spellman is either a slightly undergrown eleven year old, or slightly taller and more mature than average ten year old. From her teeth I'm guessing the latter, but I won't swear to it. Although thin, she seems well-nourished if small-boned and in very good physical condition. She has naturally very fair skin, but has a heavy tan on her legs, arms, back, and face. I do not think she could get that tanned very quickly. She must have spent the last few months, or longer, in warm weather. Beyond that, there's little I can tell you until we wake her up, since her clothes are Muggle and the magical accessories common and untraceable."

FitzWilliam turned to one of the Ministry men. "Well?"

The man shrugged. He hadn't given his name, and while FitzWilliam knew it, he wasn't about to use it. "There are no registered witches this could be. Even all the possible Muggle-born are accounted for, although she might be registered someplace else. We double-checked for glamours and the like of course, but there don't seem to be any."

"She **MUST** be registered **SOME** where," Keys protested.

"No," the Man from the Ministry mused, "there are always semi-deserted Pacific islands and such places where you can be born and NOT get registered, even today. I can tell you this, though. Her mother was not a North American Confederation witch. If she's a native of the Confederation on both sides, her mother was a Muggle or a Squib."

"My guess is a Squib," Williams said. "The writing looked very masculine, suggesting it was written by at least a powerful and wealthy wizard, rather than witch. His emphasis on her non-Muggle roots might have been mere distraction, but I rather think it points to a Squib mother and an old-line, maybe even Old Believer, father who can't acknowledge a child with a Squib."

"Most sects do have rather strict guidelines about that," one of the Ministry men agreed unnecessarily.

"The large amount of gold suggests an old family of some kind, and if the memory spells really were done well, that suggests an old family as well. I've noticed that many raised in even partial Muggle environments, not to mention Muggle-borns, are very uncomfortable using memory spells," Loveland pointed out.

"True," FitzWilliam had to agree.

The third Ministry man spoke up, addressing the eldest Ministry man. "I know it's illegal to use as an investigatory tool, but why not try the Sorting Hat now? It can at least tell us if she's a real witch and talented enough, and has developed adequate power, to attend the school. And, if you and the Headmaster agree, it might be able to tell us something about her."

"She would also have to be sorted, if she's admitted," Keys pointed out.

"Very well." The Headmaster clapped, and an elf appeared.

"Headmaster desires something?"

"Please fetch us the Sorting Hat from my office." The elf bowed, and in less than ten seconds had returned with the Hat. He handed the Hat to the Headmaster, bowed again, and disappeared.

Less than half the age of the Hogwarts Hat it had been basically copied from, the Hat spoke in a slightly friendlier voice. "A little early, are we not?"

"Yes, we are," the Headmaster agreed. "We have a situation. To be precise, we have a foundling, with a written claim that her personal memories have been replaced. We need to know, at the least, if she is magical and of current development to come to school -- there is some question as to her exact age. If she is ready for school, then of course she must be sorted. Any additional information would be most welcome."

"H'mmm, very well."

The head of the hospital bed was raised and the Hat placed on the girl's head. "Difficult . . . very difficult, considering her magical coma. Let me study this problem for a while. Come back in an hour."

The group reassembled in a little under an hour, but the Hat ignored them until the full hour was up. "Well, this is a pretty mess. Who ever did this was very powerful, very thorough, and very very lucky. I could find no real coherent useful personal memories. Plenty of memories of things like Muggle television shows, reading Muggle and magical children's books and school books, and a few what might be called personalized impersonal memories: Christmas trees; lots of memories of beaches. There is no hint of any memory of any personal name for her or her parents."

"From the construction of the memory fragments, I would say she lived in the Muggle world with her mother, although with a good knowledge of the magical world. From the fragments of her early life that remain, I would guess her mother was a Squib or something near it. The only memories that weren't affected were very fuzzy ones from infancy. She grew up near a tropical or semi-tropical beach or beaches. She went to a Muggle school, but again all the personal names have been erased. I can say that all the children looked like they were of European descent, but that people in the town included some Hispanics and Negroes."

"Florida, or southern California," one Ministry man murmured.

"There was also an earlier memory, from when she was around three I would guess, of a ride, or perhaps two, in an aeroplane. I can tell you no more about her ancestry." 'Because I'm not allowed to tell you how I can tell who people are,' the Hat thought. 'If you knew the two families involved, you would know the scandal would rock the North American Hidden Old Believer communities.'

The Hat went on. "The new memories are fairly well assimilated -- this child will not have to study very hard, as she already has a greater knowledge of the Muggle and magical world than all of you together. While I do think she has just turned ten, she will turn out to be very powerful. She is currently at the average power level for new students. I think it best that she start now. Her standing as an average-powered witch will keep her ego in check. She is very brilliant. Even without these knowledge blocks, she would have likely stood near the top of her class academically. She is brave, but that is not her primary characteristic. She is ambitious, but that is not her primary characteristic either, and considering her ambiguous ancestry, she should no more be a Red dragon than a Blue. I would like to wait and judge her in a day or two, to decide between White, Green, and Orange."

"Very well," FitzWilliam agreed.

"I recommend you wake her up, and be prepared to have some one here to talk with her at all times for a few days. She will be very frightened at first. She was either uncertain what was happening to her while the charms were applied, or she understood and was terrified by the prospect. The memories are gone, but the fear remains."

"That's reasonable," Weiss agreed. "If we ever do find out who did this, I hope you throw him over to Europe for prison. He would deserve some time with those dementors."

"Please leave me here to observe," the Hat concluded. "You might consider having some students spend time with her, if the ones here this summer are suitable." The Hat went back to looking like an old hat.



"A few are," FitzWilliam stated. He moved the Hat to a nearby stand.

When they woke the girl up, she woke up screaming in terror.

## **Chapter II**

Friday, July 5, 1968

"Rough night?" Marcus Williams asked Becky Weiss when she sat down for a late breakfast that seemed to consist of mostly coffee.

"Very. That poor little girl." Becky shook her head.

"Heck of a holiday yesterday, huh?"

"Holiday? Oh, that's right, you're a dualist." These were wizards who maintained they were citizens of both the Confederation and either the United States or Canada.

"I am. Don't sound like one of the OBs."

Becky glanced around, nervously.

"Oh, come on! There's no need to be paranoid!"

"This is still your first year here."

"I was a student for seven years. I never saw some big OB conspiracy running things."

"Remember, one third of all the teaching faculty have to Old Believers, active ones at that, and in actuality nearly half are. Some are even druids of some type!"

"Well, they're going to have to live with what one of their own did to that girl."

"We can't be certain it was an OB!" Becky nearly hissed.

"We'll see. If they come up with a name and can prove it, it won't be an OB, but I doubt if they'll come up with a name. Why? Because there aren't many who could do those spells that well. Anyone in North America who can do those spells and who isn't an OB can be traced in about five days. If it's an OB, especially one of the Hiddens, that girl's father will NEVER be found." The Hidden Old Believers were the strictest sect. Few sent their children to the Ysgol, unless they were from one of the enclaves in Maine or Quebec, and even 99% of them went to the secret Old Believer school in the Yukon or one of the other two small Old Believer schools in preference to going to a school with 'Outsiders'. "The Old Believers will probably figure out who did it, but won't do anything to him."

"There you are partially wrong," the Headmaster said, surprising them since they hadn't heard him approach. "If the father was a Hidden, he would have needed some very sound reasons to be in Muggle territory, let alone consorting with a Squib. If this was a Hidden, he will likely be punished, even if we never hear of how, let alone who. No, I doubt if this was a Hidden. Could the father be a member of one of the other sects, even the Strict ones? That I can easily believe, because you were correct. Unless the father holds a position in some of the secret parts of the Confederation, he is most likely an Old Believer of some sort. And I doubt if he would be publically identified, or privately punished."

"And, of course, many of those highly placed people are Old Believers," Marcus pointed out.

FitzWilliam smiled. "So we are." The Headmaster changed the subject. "Would you be willing to spend two hours a day with Miss Spellman for a while?"

"I guess, since there are so few of us, I had better."

"Well, she is one of our students now. The poor girl is very confused and still a bit scared, but she certainly knows how to handle a wand like a Second year. If there is no long-term damage to her emotionally, I believe she will be an excellent addition to our student population."

"Is that likely?"

"We have no data," Becky said. "If we give her support, she might come out of this without too much damage."

"I'll take my turn in the rotation," Marcus said.

A few minutes before 3:00, Marcus made his way to the Infirmary. "Where's our new student?" he asked Becky.

"In the bathroom. She's been there quite a while, actually."

"Is something wrong?" He received a glare for that. "You know what I mean!"

Becky relented. "She just didn't know what she looked like. She's getting to know herself and her body."

Suddenly the girl was with them. She was rather short to be a starting student and very thin, although not quite unhealthily, and very light, as her arms and legs were very long in comparison to her body. Her hair, normally more a bright red than blonde, was heavily streaked gold and white from the sun and cut into a short pageboy. She was also totally naked.

Marcus blushed, but the girl was unconcerned. "Hello," the girl said politely. "I'm told I'm Tabitha Spellman." She held out her hand.

Marcus, very red in the face, shook her hand. "I'm Marcus Williams, one of the Charms teachers," he managed to say. "Thank God she's ten or eleven instead of sixteen!"

"Tabitha, dear," Becky said kindly, "remember what I told you about modesty?"

Tabitha's face scrunched in thought. "I do, but it still doesn't make sense. It's very warm in here, and the floor and cross-breeze feel nice and cool."

"But. . . ."

"Anyway, I was wondering if you could explain exactly what else this does," she said, putting one foot on a chair to open her legs.

"I'll be back in half an hour," Marcus said, and fled the room.

35 minutes later, Marcus cautiously stuck his head through the Infirmary door. "It's safe," Becky said with a laugh. "Come on in."

"What was that all about, anyway?"

"Obviously, her modesty was destroyed in the overlays. It could have been worse; it could have been something as simple as chewing, or her toilet training or almost anything."

"I guess. That was a bit unnerving."

"Never seen a girl naked?"

"Women, yes; little girls, no." He grinned. "She talks like a twenty year-old. I'm glad she's not built like one!"

"I should take you to a Muggle nudist camp I know of," Becky teased.

Marcus blushed again. "I didn't think you mixed much with Muggles."

"Our clan land is nearby. They're about the only Muggles I know."

"Hello, Mister Williams."

Marcus mentally steeled himself and greeted the girl. This time she was at least wearing a thin sun dress. Her feet were still bare.

"Yes," she said seeing where he was looking, "the floor still feels nice." She looked around the room. "The room IS still warm and very bright, isn't it?" Sun was pouring in from a large set of windows. Tabitha squinted, and plucked the Sorting Hat up and plopped it on her head so she wouldn't have to squint.

"Oh! My, this is interesting!"

"Marcus, go get the Headmaster."

"No need," the Hat said. "Yes, my dear, your mind has cleared to a great degree. You're still confused and a bit frightened, but your true personality is still here after all."

"You mean. . . ."

"Yes, dear child. If someone who knew you before met you, they would not just recognize your face, but your personality. The inner you, if you will."

"Thanks," the little girl said sincerely.

"You're very welcome, my dear. Here, this is about the only real personal memory I've been able to find."

The girl smiled.

"What is it, Tabitha?" Becky asked.

"It's a teddy bear. I don't remember its name, but it's warm and friendly and as big as me, as big as I was then, anyway."

"Yes. Now, you are brave and have both a brilliant mind and encyclopedic knowledge that a senior wizard would envy, but are a bit too sly to be happy with the White Dragons. Yet I don't think you have quite the right sort of bravery yet to be a Blue. All in all, yes, a Green Dragon would suit you best."

Sunday, July 7, 1968

"Come on, kid, we're the only two people in the Green Tower." The girl's body language changed. "What's wrong with that?"

"Do you like being alone?"

Tudor Myrddin stopped and looked down at the little girl. At seventeen and over six foot three, he was almost at his full adult height, and already weighed 225 muscular pounds. He was a popular, powerful, brilliant student, a descendent of Merlin himself and a member of the third-largest and second-most liberal of the Old Believer sects. He was a very self-satisfied and secure young man, almost to the point of arrogance. He was spending the summer taking a crash correspondence course in Government -- his family expected great things from him, and he was determined to exceed those expectations.

And now he thought of this tiny, adult-talking little girl and all she'd been through. She still didn't know who she was and would never recover who she had been. Yet somehow, she kept going.

He knelt and hugged the little girl. "You're not alone. Never think that," he said softly. "Now, let me explain the Tower."

Several years before, the physical structure of the original Green Dragon Tower became unstable. While it could have been secured magically, the Governors decided to stabilize it by removing the upper half of the Tower. The remaining portion was converted into office space. A new tower was built for the Greens.

The new Green Tower complex was built along Muggle lines. Muggles could enter the ten storey block (eight floors of student rooms) and never know they weren't in a Muggle building. The students could reach the common floor and the eight residential floors via two stairwells or two elevators. The lighting looked like standard fluorescent overhead panels. The central core had showers and bathrooms. Yet it was all powered by magic. A magical construction company had built it at cost, to show how magical and Muggle construction could blend. While the wards prevented radio or television reception or the use of most electronic equipment, in buildings with lesser wards than the school the electricity would blend perfectly with the magic.

The basement led off into the old dungeons, and had some of the magical devices needed to power the building and small meeting rooms for the students. The ground floor had the Head of House's apartment and office, the next had two common rooms large enough for the entire House. The upper floors (numbered 1 through 8) alternated between girls and boys floors. First, Second, Fifth, and Seventh years always stayed together. Third, Fourth, and Sixth years were mixed across the floors. Each House had approximately 140 students, although there was always room for more. Each floor had four internal study rooms and ten external rooms which could be for double or single occupancy, while the corners had two bedrooms and a study each, the bedrooms always doubles. There was also a floor prefect with a private room and bath across from the elevators. Each floor could therefore hold 37 students, but usually had between 18 to 24. The Ysgol hosted a number of conferences over the year, and many of the attendees were housed in the Houses, especially the Green Tower, which had the most spare room.

"Normally boys can't go on girls' floors and vice versa," Tudor went on as they entered the elevator. He pushed '5'. "If you try and get off on the wrong floor or go through a stairwell door someone else opened for you, it feels like you've hit a soft wall that you can't push through. Prefects are the exception, and I'm the head prefect next year, for the entire student body."

They got off the elevator. "Take your wand out, and when I tell you to, touch it to your door and then state your full name." Tudor touched the handle with his wand. "Prefect Tudor Albus Myrddin authorizes the sole occupant Tabitha Stephanie Spellman." He nodded to Tabitha.

She touched her wand to the door. "Tabitha Stephanie Spellman."

In the center of the door, just above a brass plate, was a small brass dragon door knocker. It opened its green eyes and asked, "What name shall I use?"

"Pardon?"

"What variation of your name would you like on your door plate, and how would you like it to look."

Tabitha shrugged. "Tabitha S. Spellman, plain lettering."

"That's probably best," Tudor agreed. "Some of the boys get silly, and some of the girls get rather . . . cute and whimsical."

Tabitha watched as *Tabitha S. Spellman -- First Year* appeared on the name plate.

"The door will now respond to your voice -- say 'lock' or 'unlock'."

"Unlock." The door clicked, and Tabitha opened the door. It was a small room, perhaps eighteen feet deep by twelve feet wide, although three feet on either side of the door was taken up as closet space. There was a cot, a dresser, and a deck and desk chair, which Tabitha later learned was standard furniture in every room, as was the wicker basket where she was to put her laundry. There was also an over-stuffed chair and two night stands from her trunk, with a wizarding wireless on one of the stands and a magical lamp on the other. One trunk was in one of the closets while the other was at the foot of the bed (the trunk with the

money was in the Headmaster's treasury). Her clothes and robes were already hung in the closets or otherwise put away.

"House elves?"

"Mostly, plus some free elves."

Tabitha's eyes went wide. "Telephones?"

"Just installed two summers ago, as an experiment. They only work in the Tower. You just dial the room number. The prefects are all room twenty-four. So just dial seven twenty-four, and it's me."

"Thank you," she said, sounding a bit forlorn.

Tudor looked at the little girl. He had never been alone, let alone lonely, in his life. He had a large extended family and had many friends in all the Houses. He had also had a lot of work to do. He smiled and held out his hand. "Shall I show you around the school?"

Tabitha smiled and took his hand. "Thank you."

The three nameless intelligence agents had been joined by three more agents and an expert in the Headmaster's Office, along with Hilda Swank, the new head of the Green dragons, who had been recalled from her vacation. "Ffowc?" the Headmaster asked.

Ffowc Pwy, head of the best family of wand-wrights in the Americas, sighed. "I've never seen anything like it. The wand is an old Pwy wand, cherry and griffin hair, made around 1720. It was sold to a Muggle-born wizard in 1723. He was killed in the battle of Diahoga in 1777." This had been the great confrontation between the wizards of European descent based in the 13 American colonies and the Native shamans. The Old Believers, who were mostly separate from both groups at the time, had then stepped in and made peace between the two factions, laying the start of the North American Magical Confederation. The Colonials were then admitted to the Ysgol, while the Natives could attend either the Ysgol itself if they wanted or a new associated school called the Eagle Camp, which taught Native shamanic magic and offered optional instruction at the Ysgol. "The wand was lost. It matches the girl as perfectly as any I could have matched her with."

"Any ideas of where it might have been these last hundred and ninety years?" Swank asked, "Or is it self-evident?"

The intelligence men, all from Old Believer or Old Colonial families, looked abashed.

"Many of the old clans have collections of wands," the Headmaster admitted.

"So that family could identify the wand?"

"A few of the senior members might be able to, but almost certainly won't," the Headmaster said.

"So, we run into the stone wall of the OB's and the Old Colonial families, right?" Swank stated in a disgusted voice, knowing she was likely the only non-OB non-Colonial in the room. "Which means you will go through the motions for a while, but in reality, we have an abandoned and abused little girl to raise by ourselves. Right?"

The men, looked ashamed but said nothing. "Fine," Swank said in a resigned voice, standing, "good day to you all." She slammed the door on her way out.

"I really hate it when she's right," FitzWilliam said.

"She is partially right, though," the senior Intelligence man said. "The question now is, do we publicize all this? It may cause the father tremendous problems, but I doubt if we would be told about it. So it really wouldn't give the girl her father."

"And we can't reverse the memory replacements," a young specialist stated. "That would just damage her mind further. She seems like an intelligent girl, and if the school gives her enough emotional support she has a good chance of making it."

"Would publicity hurt or help her?" a third man mused. "She needs sympathy, but not hoards of curious people. They'll be coming out of the woodwork, claiming her as somebody's child."

"Their worst enemies', no doubt," the senior man said.

"We have a few weeks to figure this out. I've ready told Myrddin the story and to keep quiet for now. . . ."

"Myrddin? Myrddin who?" the senior man demanded, now a bit worried.

"Tudor Myrddin, and yes, THAT Myrddin family. He's the only Green dragon here this summer, and he'll be the House and Head Prefect next year."

"A Myrddin. . . ."

"Exactly. And Tudor is perhaps the most capable Myrddin I've seen in years." The most prestigious of all the Old Believer clans, heirs of Merlin, wealthy -- if Tudor Myrddin extended his protection around the girl, there would be few students in the school, outside some of the European and Old Colonial Pure-Bloods in the Reds, who would bother her on general principles.

"We will of course run down any leads we come up with, but right now, we don't have anything other than a girl of between ten and eleven, possibly born on June twenty-first of 1957 or 58, and we have a description. The father is most likely an OB, and the mother a Squib daughter of an OB family, but those are merely the likelihood, not even probabilities. Unless the mother was a fairly marginal Squib, we wouldn't have any real record of her."

The youngest of the Intelligence men looked confused, but wisely didn't say anything. His senior decided to enlighten him, as he was from a very unimportant recently-converted Open Believer family that lived in one of the magical towns. The young man was the first to move into the Deeper Sects. "Every fully-magical child born in North America is recorded in at least one of the three Books of Record. A child with powers that turned out to be not quite strong enough to train could be recorded when she was born. If not, then we wouldn't have



records, and in a large enough clan or isolated enough family, no outsider would know of a Squib."

"And they do happen in every family," another acknowledged. "What?" I'm not saying this girl's mother was in my family. I do have two Squib first cousins and some more distant ones, all male. Most leave to go into the Muggle world, rather than staying unmarried in ours."

"That's true, and it's also true that most Squibs, especially, well, the furthest away from magical, are males," the Headmaster stated. "There were probably only at most sixty female Squibs of the ages capable of bearing this child in North America, if only we could trace them."

"We can, and will, try to trace them," the Senior man said. "With the resources we have, however, if we don't trace the parents by early September, we might not be able to do so for years."

The Headmaster sighed. "I can understand that."

"There are a lot of missing Muggle children out there, any one of which could be this girl, assuming the Muggles even know she's missing. We'll look in the most obvious place for her birth and her last ten years." Seeing the confused face on two of his subordinates, the Senior man explained. "There are now four books that cover the Confederation, the newest is one that covers Hawaii and some of the surrounding Pacific, and it only came into being in 1959 - it took decades of negotiations with the Pacific Island Shamans to get permission to create one, since it records their births as well as ours, and they didn't want us knowing their information."

"What did we do?"

The man shrugged. "We let them be in charge of it. Hawaii would be the perfect place for this child to have been born, although there is a fair chance she was moved afterwards. We have the resources to do a good search in Hawaii, then if we have to continue it, we'll proceed slower into southern California and Florida." He stood, and the other Intelligence people stood with him. "We'll let you know if we find out anything."

After they left, the Headmaster muttered, "Assuming he's not the father, he might just find out who Tabitha is."

## **Chapter III**

Tabitha was only really alone at night those first two months. The entire staff had been notified of the strange circumstances, and a number of teachers had cut their vacations short to come back. Ten of the twelve students who were staying there that summer also rallied around. The elves happily kept her under close scrutiny, as did most of the ground keepers, who were quickly used to seeing the thin red-head wandering the grounds throughout the day and evenings before her curfew.

Tabitha also quickly found her way along a trail and over a low rise that took her deeper into the woods. That was where the Eagle Camp was located. While the Ysgol students were always allowed to go to the camp, and many friendships were made by those Eagles that attended classes at the Ysgol, relatively few from the Ysgol made the trip to the camp. She did not come to sight-see, but merely sat and listened to the open lessons.

It was clear that Tabitha was thirsty for knowledge, but not ready to seek out self-knowledge. Considering her age, that was hardly surprising. It was understandable that she wanted to gain some personal experiences, to fill her mind with something other than the impersonal knowledge which was all she had been left with.

The four girls who were staying over the summer pampered Tabitha. Unlike Hogwarts, where students of one House never (legitimately) entered another House area, the Ysgol allowed visits between the same genders in their rooms (although each House had at least one private common room that the other students were not allowed in). The girls visited Tabitha and encouraged her to visit them in return. A 16 year old Muggle-born Brown dragon showed Tabitha how to do her nails, and the girls did each others' hair every Saturday.

Mrs. Swank and the Headmaster were surprised that Tabitha was so socially well-adjusted. It wasn't that she was 'normal,' let alone typical for her age, but none of the worst-case scenarios they could have imagined seemed to be more than hinted at in her behavior.

"We still need to keep a close watch," Becky reminded the staff in a meeting held on August 2. "Starting off as she is as an almost blank slate, these problems might just take time to manifest."

"Did those Muggle case studies on amnesia help at all?" George Stratis, one of the Muggle Studies teachers asked.

"Some, although amnesia as complete as this is much rarer in fact than in Muggle fiction. It's much more common for people to lose or repress part of their memories rather than all of it," the Infirmarian answered.

"The Sorting Hat did well by putting her in Green," Drew Loveland, a Transfiguration teacher and Red dragon mused. "My House does not care much for ambiguous ancestry, and the Blues and Browns really dislike mysteries on principle. I just wish there were more Greens here this summer."

Becky shrugged. "Perhaps, or perhaps she might have felt smothered by the attention. This way she can retreat if she feels over-whelmed. I haven't seen any evidence of it, but we must make just as certain we give her just enough room to discover who she now is as we do that she doesn't fall."

"We shall," Hilda stated. "I'm glad she was sorted into my House for another reason: it will be easier for the faculty to look after her."

"Why is that?" Galen Hardy, one of the astronomers and the Head of the Blue dragons asked.

"Three of the nine female staff members are Greens," she answered. "It will give her more chances of finding a mentor. She already knows Courtney and myself, and Mary will be here on Monday." Courtney Carey was one of the librarians, Mary Tyler one of the teachers of Magical Languages and Symbols.

"Miss Buddig, Miss Keyes, and of course Miss Weiss have already agreed to help out as well. Miss Hardy and Miss Sior have also written to say they will be returning early," the Headmaster said simply. "Miss Pyrs, of course, do as she thinks best."

"Where does the old lady go every summer, anyway?" Rhys Sadwrn, another Potions teacher asked, somewhat rhetorically.

"No one knows, but she's apparently been going since graduating back in 1821, so I don't think she's likely to change habits now," Lowri Buddug, junior Divination teacher to Elan Pyrs, commented drily.

"Going on, Mister Stratis, you mentioned you had something for us?"

"Something to consider, anyway. The immediate evidence suggests that the father is a powerful wizard, most likely an Old Believer, perhaps a Hidden, while the mother was an Old Believer Squib, possibly now deceased. This scenario would have them meeting before the Squib was sent off to live in the Muggle world."

"It IS a likely scenario, although there are many others," the Headmaster said.

"Well, if that IS the scenario, then the mother is likely still alive, unless she died from a illness that lasted some time and knew what would happen to her daughter. If she died in an accident, then the father knows current Muggle culture fairly well, which certainly rules out the Hidden."

"Why would you say either parent would have to know much about current Muggle culture?"

"The girl's name, Tabitha Stephanie Spellman. Spellman is not an unknown name in the Muggle world, but it has also been the name of a blonde character in a group of Muggle comic books called 'Sabrina, the Teenage Witch' for the last six years. Second, Tabitha is NOT a very common name. There is a Muggle television show called Bewitched, where a witch is married to a Muggle. They had a daughter two years ago named Tabitha Stevens."

"Stevens, Stephanie, yes, we understand," Loveland drawled. "Your conclusions?"

"Who ever planned this out, assuming it was just one person, knows popular Muggle culture." He shrugged. "That's all I can say."

"I shall pass that information on to the Intelligence people. Very few in that sector of the Agency know much of Muggle culture, current or otherwise."

Sunday, September 1, 1968

As August passed by, Tabitha didn't really notice that she was still under close observation, if only because she had no memories to compare her situation with. She did very little reading or studying, but much time meditating and discussing Ysgol social customs and the First year in general with Tudor and the four girls. She was clearly preparing for the start of the academic year, which soothed many worries amongst the faculty. The time she spent with the Eagles was mostly spent in nature walks, the rest merely listening.

Because of the students for the Ysgol came from all over the United States and Canada, gathering the students had to be different than the unifying British custom of the Hogwarts Express. Instead, the students were mostly gathered by the house elves, essentially by class, First years first, although if a household had more than one student they would all appear with the youngest student in the family. The Prefects also appeared with the First years. Since the students came from so many time zones, the few students from Hawaii and other Pacific islands came in with the Seventh years. The process was spread over seven hours, starting at 11:30 Eastern time.

Tudor escorted Tabitha to the great entrance hall, where she could watch the other First years arrive. As they flashed in with their elf escorts, Tudor felt the small hand in his squeeze harder and harder. "What's wrong?"

"There's so many. . . . And my life will be bound up with theirs for seven years."

'I swear she's thirty, not eleven,' Tudor thought. "Yes, that's how it works."

"First years! First years, through this door! The elves will take care of your luggage!" Miss Keys called out from one of the corridors. "Upper years! Report to your common rooms."

"Run along," Tudor said kindly. "Prefects! Prefects over here!" Tabitha took a deep breath, and followed the other First years out of the hall.

Unlike many of the First years, Tabitha found the lectures after the First Years' Lunch rather boring. She already knew the majority of the faculty and staff. She probably knew the school and its grounds better than most Second years. Still, she supposed, it was better for her to undergo a bit of boredom rather than stand out from the rest of her classmates. At least 80% of them were taller than her, but most seemed either nervous or friendly. A few seemed snooty, unfriendly, hostile, or just plain mean. She hoped they were sorted into other Houses.

It was a pleasant enough day that the First years were allowed to play in one of the courtyards under the eyes of some of the Prefects for an hour, although it was emphasized that this was to be a one-time occurrence.

"Hi!"

Tabitha turned around and saw two girls looking back at her. They looked similar enough to be sisters, or to be Tabitha's -- thin, long-legged, cute, strawberry blondes. "Hello."

"I'm Margaret Banks, and this is my cousin, Megan Poppins. Are you a cousin, too?"

"I don't think so. My name is Tabitha Spellman." 'Say something friendly!' Tabitha told herself. "I can see why you'd ask. Are you both from magical families?"

"Oh, yes," Margaret said. She was obviously a lot more outgoing than her cousin. "We're from the Old Settlements in upper Michigan."

"Oh? From the forges or the fisheries?" There were a number of mines and smelters run in cooperation between the wizarding world and the goblins, and also a few villages that fished Lake Superior, many dating back to the 1700s.

"Farms, you forgot the farms," Margaret mocked scolded. "We're sort of in-between, geographically speaking, although most of the active forges are actually across the lake now. You?"

"My family was magical, but sort of migratory. As far as I know, I don't have any family now."

Margaret started to ask what had happened, but caught herself. "We're sorry to hear that." She tried again to stop herself, but couldn't a second time. "Where. . . ."

"I guess I'm a ward of the school. I've been here since July. I think they'll say something about it to all the students tomorrow."

"Why?" Megan asked.

"Because everyone will be more curious if they don't say anything."

The two cousins looked at each other and reached agreement. "Only she has been allowed to call me Marge and no one calls me Margie. You can call me Marge."

"And you may call me Meg, if we can call you Tabby."

Tabitha smiled. "Alright." 'I hope they feel the same later on.'

"So, have you already been Sorted?" Marge asked.

"Green, but they're going to have the Sorting Hat confirm it."

"Greens are good," Marge said. "My families are generally Greens or Oranges, although I think they've been in all of them over the years."

"Mostly Brown and Orange for me," Meg said, "but we should all hope for Green, now."

"Let's!" Marge said. Tabby smiled again. Across the courtyard, Tudor smiled in relief, and went off to his next meeting.

At 6:00, the First years were taken into the dungeons and ate a light dinner while the upper-classes ate in the Great Hall. Afterwards, the Headmaster addressed the students. He stressed, as Headmasters had since the late 1700s, the unity of the magical world. Old Believers of all types, Old Colonial families, more recent European 'Pure-Bloods,' Magical children of all other races, Muggle-born, Mixed and Half-Bloods -- the Ysgol fully served them all, plus aided in the education of the Eagles. The faculty and the House Prefects who would be taking care of the First year floors noticed that the Headmaster was even more emphatic about teasing students of unusual parentage not being allowed.

As the Headmaster spoke in the Great hall, the First years were told to straighten up their robes. At 7:45, they marched into the Great Hall, and the Sorting started almost immediately. Some students took only a few seconds to sort, the longest took four minutes. The whole process took over two hours.

Tabitha was glad to see that both her new acquaintances were chosen for the Green dragons. Her re-Sorting took only a few seconds, which the Sorting Hat used to assure her she was doing very well. In all, nine girls and twelve boys were sorted into the Greens.

Tabitha was of course towards the end of the Sorting. Still, once she reached the long Green table, she was able to enjoy some hot chocolate. At 10:20, the students were dismissed to their dorms.

Tabitha led her two friends through the crowd, and had them at the elevators in the Green tower in time to catch the second elevator up. Their Floor Prefect, a Sixth year named Gwen Lloyd, had been introduced to Tabitha earlier that day. She saw Tabitha leading two other Firsts towards the Tower, and so was able to concentrate on getting the other six students along.

Papers with the First year students' names were on their doors. Tabitha was pleased to see that her two friends were in the same room, between the first study room and her own room. She explained the layout and how they would work their door once the Prefect authorized them.

By 11:00, a very tired Tabitha was glad to climb into bed. Students from other time zones took mild potions to help them fall asleep.

The First years were woken up at 7:00. While the rest of the students started their classes, the First years would get to know each other and their surroundings better their first full day.

The Greens were gathered into a small classroom right after breakfast. To everyone's surprise, the Headmaster and two strangers were also present. The twelve boys introduced themselves first, in alphabetical order. Then it was the girls' turn.

"I'm Margaret Banks, from an Old Colonial family in Upper Michigan, where my family has lived since the mid-1700s. I'm in room 503. I only answer to Margaret. My family's mostly Green and Orange, so I'm happy to be here with Megan and Tabitha, and I hope we all get to know each other." Tabitha breathed a silent prayer her friend would think so after she introduced herself.

"I am Efa Gwener," a girl with a heavy Welsh accent said, "a member of the Mellt sect of the True, or if you prefer, Old Believers, and I live in one of the Mellt areas in northern Ontario. I am in room 511."

A tallish black girl was next. "I'm Kizzy Johnson, a full-blood from Toronto." She looked around. "This is a lot different than the city! Oh, and I'm in 517."

"I'm Megan Poppins," Meg said softly. "I'm from the Upper Peninsula, too, and I'm a Colonial, too, and Margaret's cousin and room mate."

"I am Modlen Rhisiart, a True Believer of the Tyrfaeu sect in 511. So, thunder will live with lightning." Mellt of course meant lightning, Tyrfaeu thunder. "The Tyrfaeu lands are in Prince Edward Island."

"Hola, I am Maria Rodriguez, a Full-Blood from Brooklyn. I'm in 519."

A nervous, slightly pudgy girl was next. "Cynthia Snyder, but my friends call me Cindie. I still can't believe any of this! I'm from a small village in upstate New York called Chemung. I'm in room 519, too." Maria put a reassuring arm on her Muggle-born room mate's shoulder.

"I wish I could tell you who I am, and what my heritage is, but I don't know. I'm going under the name Tabitha Spellman, and I'm in room 504."

At the out-burst of talking that caused, the Headmaster came forward and quickly quieted the children down. He gestured for the last girl to speak.

"My name is Anna Tanfani, and I'm a half-blood from a small town near Denver, Colorado. My father was Muggle-born, as were my mother's parents. I'm in room 517."

"Thank you, children. Let me explain about Miss Spellman. Miss Spellman has had her personal memory destroyed. After much research, her family remains essentially unknown. However, we believe she is from two Old Believer families, a true member in the case of her father, a Squib or Marginal as a mother." A 'Marginal' was a witch with some magical powers, which just never fully developed. Like a Squib, Marginals either had to stay celibate in Old Believer society, or left around the age of seventeen.

The Headmaster gave a slightly fuller description of Tabitha's situation, and then concluded, "The Green dragons traditionally are a fairly diverse House. I hope none of you have any problems with Miss Spellman's ancestry. Two people would like to speak with you on the subject. First, this is a Deputy Minister of the Confederation, Michael King."

"Thank you, Headmaster. Miss Spellman," he said with a slight bow, "students. We are fully satisfied with Miss Spellman's magical ancestry, although we regret we can not be more specific. I expect this will be a topic of gossip for the next few weeks. If any one's family has any leads for us, please let us know. Thank you."

The Headmaster didn't seem to be pleased with that short speech, but he went on to introduce the very elderly wizard next. "The other person who wishes to speak in Adda Lloyd, senior. . . ." All the Old Believers and Tabitha shot to their feet and bowed their heads. ". . . senior member of the Tuatha, the trio of leaders of the Old Believers."

Three weeks before, a set of instructions that must have had a timed release of some sort had surfaced in Tabitha's mind. She had written out a sheet of parchment, understanding the language but not many of the references. She understood enough to realize that much of it was Druidic lore, the kind that was only learned from secret oral tradition late in the twenty year learning process. Her magical parent was insuring her acceptance by the Old Believers. She had sealed it, and a note from herself, in an envelope, and then in six more. She had taken the package to the school owlery (the Ysgol did not permit familiars or pets of any kind) one night and sent it off. Each envelope had a different address and a sheet of codes that she did not understand. The recipients had understood, and sent everything up the chain of command, until one of the Tuatha had read it. Whomever had designed and implanted the knowledge in her head had not just been an Old Believer, but part of the Druid priesthood, the leaders of the Movement.

"Knowing your ancestry can be a wonderful, even satisfactory, thing. Knowing a close, loving family, and your community, is even better. Miss Spellman has been robbed of all that, and the innocence of youth as well. Should she accept our beliefs, she, like any member of this school, would be eligible for membership in what is commonly called either the Outer or Open Believer Sect. However, we feel she is owed more than that. She is eligible to join any, I repeat any, sect within our belief." The Old Believers' eyes went wide open at that, especially the Headmaster's. Some groups had very secret requirements even for those born into the sect.

"Every year, a Druid, often a novice, speaks to the new students here at the Ysgol. He would tell all who are not of the Faith that you are welcome, if you believe. Much of your instruction in History over the next few years will have the story of the Faith associated with it, for that is also much of the history of the magical communities of Europe and North America. He would also remind all Old Believers that we must tolerate those who do NOT believe, so long as they do not harm our Community or the general magical community. Miss Spellman is at least a witch of half blood. She is also under my supervision and protection, if she will accept either, or both. Miss Spellman?"

Over the previous three weeks, she had thought hard about the beliefs of the Old Believers. She straightened up and then bowed deeper. "May I approach the One of Three?" she asked in medieval Welsh accents.

"You may."

She walked up and knelt before the old man. "I know I am too young to join the True Belief, but I ask to be considered as if I were the child of Open Believers."

Saying it first in Welsh and then English, the Druid said, "We accept this child as a child of the True Belief, and say it Openly."

The Old Believers in the room bowed three times. FitzWilliam smiled as he did so. Any of the Pure-Bloods who would be hostile to any Muggle-born or half blood would now have to face



the Old Believers. Some of them, and their families, might not like this child's ancestry, but would defend her against all Outsider attack.

## **Chapter IV**

"May I sit with you?"

"Are you sure you want to? You can sit with the OBs, you know." The two cousins were the only two seated at a table for six in the large study area, where they were waiting for everyone to be weighed, measured, and have their eyes tested.

"I will, if you prefer, Margaret," Tabitha said a little sadly.

"Don't be silly," Meg said. "Sit down, Tabby."

"Meg. . . ."

"Marge, Tabby is my friend. Maybe the OBs will be our friends, too. Maybe the nigger will be. . . ."

"That's a VERY bad word," Tabitha corrected gently.

"It is?"

"Worse than 'Mudblood'."

Megan's tanned face paled and her hand flew to her mouth. "Oh, my! I didn't know!"

"Since Kizzy is a Full-Blood from Canada, I don't know if she'd prefer being called 'Negro' or 'black,' but I know you should NEVER use that word."

"If you say so," Marge said. "You do know some OBs don't like associating with, well, everyone else."

"I don't think many of that sort go here, although I'm sure there are exceptions," Tabitha replied. "I certainly don't think they'd be in the Greens. They'd more likely be Reds or Oranges, where they can try to out-snoot some of the snootier Pure-Bloods and Old Colonials."

Marge glowered a little, but Meg intervened, "Come on, you know she's right."

Marge sighed, "I know."

Efa Gwener walked over. She looked Tabitha in the eye and asked in Welsh, "Do you really know what you were saying, or are you a parrot?"

Tabitha replied in the same language. "I know the language very well. And I know the customs well enough to worship with Lightning or Thunder, or even in Secret. However, I intend to be Open for now."

Efa chewed her upper lip a bit, then nodded and switched to English. "And these are your friends?"

"They are. Margaret and Megan, and of course this is Efa." The three girls nodded.

"Did you know your room mate at all before this?" Margaret asked.

Efa winced. "No. I'm sure our differences would look insignificant to non-believers, but we both come from small groups that split some three hundred and fifty years ago. The Ysgol is about the only place we associate."

"Still, you probably have more in common than you would with the rest of us," Tabitha pointed out.

"True," Efa admitted. "It would be hard adjusting to someone from Muggle culture."

"Well, we only have one Muggle-born," Tabitha pointed out. "Just think how odd this must appear to her! All the others would have been raised in a mixed environment, and while either magical or Muggle culture could have prevailed, they would have at least have some basic understanding of us."

"Really?"

"Toronto doesn't have a separate magical quarter, and neither does Brooklyn, so they might have been raised in a mostly Muggle household."

"I never even heard of Brooklyn," Efa admitted.

"It was a separate city until it was incorporated into New York City," Tabitha said. "The magical quarters in New York City are in different boroughs."

"Oh. Okay," Efa said, willing to believe this apparently well-informed girl.

"So," Marge said, "are you going to sit?"

Efa smiled. "No, I'm being waved over by my cousin, who was sorted into the Oranges. Talk with you later."

"Hi, can we sit here?"

The three girls looked up and saw two of the boys from their House. Megan looked at her cousin, and Tabitha decided to defer to her as well, feeling she had pushed her luck far enough for that day. Marge shrugged. "Alright. You're . . . Henry and James?"

"That's right. James Mitchell, but everyone calls me Jim."

"I'm Margaret Banks, and everyone but Megan and Tabitha calls me Margaret."

Jim smiled and sat next to Megan. "That's Henry, my roomie," he said with a jab of his thumb. "He doesn't seem to say much."

"Who can, with you around?" Henry Dorff said, sitting next to Tabitha.

"You're from the Montana dragon ranches, right?" Margaret asked Henry.

"That's right, well, dragons, wyverns, and griffins."

"And your mother is a Muggle, and you live in northern California, right?" she asked Jim.

"Right. There's actually a whole valley of us, living a mixed life. There's a group of Spanish Pure-Bloods and another area of Indians a bit further into the mountains."

"Why did you come here, instead of any of the western schools?" Tabitha asked to two of them.

"Dad came here. He's from New Amsterdam, you know, the magical village inside in New York, but decided to go west," Jim answered.

"The California School is too liberal for my family, and I haven't taken to dragons as much as my family would like," Henry admitted.

Seeing the confused look on her friends faces, Tabitha explained, "The smaller schools in Rockies really specialize in Care of Dragons and similar animals."

"Right. They decided I needed a good general education, so they sent me here, although they're all hoping I decide I love dragons after all."

"Better you than me, pal!" Jim said. "I saw a wyvern once, and THAT was enough to convince me that dragon ranching was not for me!"

Tabitha looked up and saw Cindie looking around, confused. Her room mate, Maria, was at a table of Spanish-speakers, so even though there was one seat left, the girl was hesitating to sit down. Tabitha waved her over.

"Hi," Cindie said shyly. She was a slightly plain and pudgy girl. The others greeted her, and she sat.

"So," Margaret asked, "how strange do you find all this?"

"It's . . . well, strange. I mean, no one in my family is magical as best my mom could tell. There's just the two of us."

"Really?"

"My father was a stock car driver, and was killed a few years ago. Mom owns a little motel."

All the others looked at Tabitha. "Well, you all know what a hotel is, right?" They did. "And you all know about the automobile and how the roads link the towns and cities, of course. So, motels are small hotels for motorists between the towns. Motor hotel."

The group decided that made sense.

"You know an awful lot without remembering anything," Cindie said.

"Oh, I know an amazing amount," Tabitha agreed, "but I know nothing about myself."

"Is it . . . awful?" Marge asked.

"It was at first, and it's still pretty confusing. It's still . . . strange. But now I'm building a life."

At that point, Tabitha was called away. The five students looked at each other. "She's . . . different," Cindie said. "Nice, but different."

"She's weird, but I guess anyone would be after what happened to her," Jim added.

"She talks like my great-Aunt," Margaret observed.

"I like her," Megan said firmly.

"I like her, too," Margaret answered back. "Honest! But she does talk like Aunt Marilyn."

"Her Aunt Marilyn is a transfiguration and runes researcher," Megan told the others.

"Well, she does sound more like a grown-up," Cindie said.

"We either like her or ignore her," Henry said. "I can't think how I'd feel in her place."

"Me neither," Megan agreed. "And like I said, I like her."

"Me, too," Henry added.

"Everything about this place is weird," Cindie said thoughtfully. She shrugged, "Why not her, too?"

Margaret also shrugged. If Meg liked Tabby, she would go along. The girl was weird, but at least it seemed like a nice weird.

Tabitha rather enjoyed the first nine weeks of the fall term. She got along well with the girls in her year. She was especially close to Meg, and fairly close to Marge, Cindie, and Anna. The twelve older girls (all Fourth and Sixth years) on the floor pretty much ignored all the First years, although the two Old Believers (Sixth years Catrin Fychan and Efa Lloyd) made sure to keep an eye on Tabitha as well as Efa Gwener and Modlen Rhisiart.

The boys in her House year also pretty much ignored her, although again the Old Believers (Lloyd Adda, Awstin Mihangel, Dewi Puw, and Ofydd Pwy) made certain they were friendly with her in passing. Henry Dorff was the only boy who went out of his way to be with her.

Outside her House year, no one seemed to pay her much attention. A few of the snootier girls (mostly Reds and Oranges) made certain she saw them ignore her, and that was as far as it went. Most of the Old Believers either went out of their way to be friendly to her, while the rest at least seemed neutral. Other than a few dirty looks and snickers directed at her, she was left alone by most of the other students.

Her classes were going very well. When it came to knowledge and theory, she was of course at the top of her class. In terms of her practical work in Charms and Transfiguration, however, she was average at best, and she wasn't a very good flyer.

Every Sunday, she joined the other Old Believers in greeting the sunrise and saying farewell to the sun at sunset, and had also joined the equinox celebration. Since all of the ceremonies before November 1 were open to all (many more students converted to the Old Belief than dropped away from it), a number of the First year Greens joined her when possible. In short, Tabitha fit in.

The faculty was very pleased with her and pleased with themselves that they had allowed her to attend when she was likely a year too young. Few ten year olds would be able to just keep up with the practicals, let alone stand above the middle of the class.

Friday, November 1, 1968  
12:01 am

Tabitha's eyes flew open, and she was suddenly awake. She knew she had to go into the seventh compartment of her empty twelve-compartment trunk, and that she had to do it now.

She opened the seventh compartment, which like all the compartments led into a magical space, 12x12x9 feet. She climbed the ladder down, letting the lid drop behind her. As soon as it shut, the chamber was infused with a soft light. When her foot touched the floor, she heard a voice.

"My beautiful daughter. Now is a special time, a mystical night. It is also time I tell you a few things. First, I am sorry for what I have done to you. I am sure you none-the-less hate me for having done it, and you are right to do so. I did it because besides being a powerful and wealthy wizard, I am a greedy and ambitious one as well."

"I am greedy, because when I fell in love with your mother, I swept her off her feet instead of leaving her be. She was a Squib, almost powerful enough to pass for a Marginal, but in the end not close enough. When she was banished to the Outside, I helped her. I managed to father you, when again I should have left things alone."

"I am ambitious, and therefore did not move out of my position in the lines of power, in my Sect or within the Druids, to be with your mother and you. I know you suffer. I hope it is not unbearable."

"You were born on the Twenty-first of June, 1958, and are a Cancer. I'm sorry I cannot give you enough data to do a full horoscope. Your mother had an accident, and called to me. We arranged your life for you before she died. Yes, your mother loved you, but she agreed to allow me my career, at least for a while. However, on your fiftieth birthday, all will be revealed to you, and if you wish to exact vengeance then, I will accept it. Should I die before that, you shall be informed then instead. In the other eleven chambers, you will find hidden panels, which will allow you to access even more money and some other objects, should you need them. They will reveal themselves, two rooms at a time, on your birthday and thereafter."

"You might be wondering, for you are a very bright child, how many more secrets are there? Just one, which I shall come to in a moment. Your ancestry is True Believer. How then, you might wonder, should you pick a mate, should you fall in love with one. Do not worry, just do not choose a Hidden True Believer born before 1954 or after 1960. Those born in between are safe enough."

"Now, the last secret. Your mother had one real power. She was a natural Dreamwalker, and she had already awakened that ability in you. Access your memories, and if you need to, read the three books on the subject which are now in the first chamber. I have arranged a nice library for you there, with books most school children could not access. The spell which limited your ability will be lifted once you next awaken."

"Farewell, beautiful child. Happy voyages in life."

Tabitha knelt on the floor, and cried.

Tabitha woke up just in time to dress, run into the bathroom, and make the morning ceremony. These ceremonies were secret. Some portions were closed to most or even all the students, no matter what their ancestry. Druids-in-training stayed for more of the ceremonies, but she could only apply for that status later.

Tabitha's eyes were burning from all the smoke -- oak leaves and pine essence incense were heavily used in the ceremonies. She sat on a rock just outside the clearing where the Old Believers had constructed a monolithic stone circle back in 1515. The students from the school had been portkeyed the few miles to the circle before dawn.

"Are you alright?" Tudor Myrddin asked her, handing her a glass of cold cider.

"I didn't sleep that well last night."

"You say that like you usually don't have problems like that."

"I don't, well, not since the first week I woke up."

"Why then?"

"I was afraid I would wake up without my memories again," she said softly.

"Sorry."

She shrugged. "That's alright." She looked up at Tudor. "I don't know why, but I thought you'd in training to be a Druid."

"I actually did the first five years of training. That allows me to lead all the basic ceremonies."

"Then what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to try to be an auror, and maybe try to go on to hit-wizard." He looked up. "It's almost noon. We'll be eating soon." He held out his hand and walked with Tabitha to the feast with his hand on her shoulder.

That night, Tabitha showered off as much of the smoke as she could and crawled into her bed at 9:45. She fell into a deep, restful sleep.

Tabitha sat up in her bed, and saw that it was 11:20. She felt awake, and then she noticed both that she was seeing herself asleep, and yet didn't feel asleep. "I'm dream walking!" Her voice sounded hollow, and she realized it was because only she could hear it -- there was no reflection of her voice in the room.

She stood up and went to the door, then hesitated. She touched the door, and felt her hand stop. A little more pressure, and her hand stayed on the door. She closed her eyes and tried again, and felt her hand slowly push through the door. In an instant, she was in the corridor. After a moment's more thought, she went into Marge and Meg's room. She saw the faint sliver glow that showed both girls were dreaming.

Meg was dreaming of a meadow, with flowers and birds. Tabitha smiled, and went over to sample Marge's dream.

Marge was yelling and crying. "Why! Why won't you play with me any more? Why do you like Tabby more than me?"

A group of girls had surrounded Marge, all pointing at her and laughing. The only one she recognized was Meg. Tabby willed them all away, and knelt next to Marge. "Come on, Marge, you know Meg would never hurt you or laugh at you, or leave you for that matter."

"Of course she would!" Marge spat. "You're new, you're interesting, you're smart and pretty!"

"But Meg has been your best friend since you were both babies. You're going to stay best friends. And I like you both, so I would never want to hurt either of you by making you fight."

"Really?"

"Really. There's a lot for all of us to be afraid of here, but you're not being friends with Meg isn't one of them."

"You're right," Marge said. The dream started to become fuzzy.

"That's right. Sleep, nice and peacefully." Tabitha withdrew from the dream.

'I'll have to watch that,' Tabitha thought, as she went back into the hall. She decided to walk around the rectangle of hallways and then go back to sleep herself. As few steps, however, showed a light under the prefect's door. Tabitha decided to take a look.



Gwen Lloyd was sitting with the other two Sixth year Green OB's, talking about the day's ceremonies. Tabitha listened in for about five minutes, when one said, "Did you see Tudor today? Fussing over that little bastard we have?"

Tabitha was so shocked at the venom in the girl's voice, she stood rooted to the spot, although she really wanted to flee the room.

"Look," Gwen said, "yes, the girl's probably illegitimate, but that's hardly her fault. And she's a nice enough kid, in fact almost the nicest one of the bunch. That's saying a lot, considering the horrors we had last year."

"Two stuck-up Pure-Bloods, a Wop, a Spic, a Nigger, a Mudblood, and a bastard?" the first girl said. "Not much of an improvement, if you ask me."

Gwen and the second girl glared at her. "I have to say, you're a walking endorsement for True Believer compassion, Mabli," the second girl said.

"We should be exclusive," Mabli argued.

"Then why didn't you join the Hidden last year?" Gwen demanded. Those who joined the Hidden Believers or most of the more remote Old Believer settlements, left school after their Fifth year. The boys would then begin apprenticeships, while the girls would work in the communal halls until they married.

"Because my parents refused me permission. But my application is in!" She switched to the Old Welsh dialect of the Hidden. "I shall be amongst the Chosen! If not in this life, then in the next." She got up and walked out the door.

"I'm glad we're in private rooms this year," the second girl said. "I couldn't stand living with her any more."

"I don't blame you! Imagine, picking on poor Tabitha, and those others. What a bigot!"

"She's a town girl, no matter what her pretensions. Maybe she'll enjoy slopping hogs and hippogriffs and shoveling manure. Some people do, and some people don't mind it. I always hated both. And I hate cod boats and all the rest of it."

"What will you do then? Go Muggle?"

"Hardly. I really want those N.E.W.T.s in Potions and Herbology. I hope I can get a job with one of the commercial potion makers." As the conversation turned to more every day matters, Tabitha decided she should go into deeper sleep.

## **Chapter V**

It was over two weeks before Tabitha ventured into any visits during her Dreamwalks again. Instead, she practiced moving through the Tower. She was interested to discover that she had no difficulties getting onto any of the boys' floors while she was in that state. By the end of the second week, she felt comfortable enough to try looking into others' dreams again.

She went to Marge and Meg again, but they were in a dreamless state when she passed by. She tried some of the other girls on her floor, but the most they were dreaming about was shopping the next morning. Every third Saturday from October to May, merchants from Newton, a wizarding town a few miles away, set up shop in the great hall and some of the major corridors. After moment's hesitation, Tabitha headed down to 206.

She had been drawn to Harry Dorff's room more than once, although she couldn't say why. Tonight, even though it was 12:30, he was still up, playing poker in one of the study rooms. Tabitha went on down to the common rooms.

These were deserted. Tabitha had never tried to leave the Tower area, but tonight, she decided to try. Just before she made the exit, two boys came running through the door.

Literally, through the door. Tabitha realized they were Eagle students, and they were also Dreamwalking.

"Have we lost him?" one said.

"We better have, 'cause if we get caught here, we're in a LOT of trouble."

"Guess what; you're in a lot of trouble," Tabitha stated. The Ysgol Houses had two common rooms, one for House members only, the other for studying or meeting with friends. These two were certainly in the wrong room.

The two Indians looked at Tabitha in shock. "Look at that!" the second boy said. "I didn't know they could walk at night!"

"It's a rare gift, but obviously not unheard of," Tabitha said. "Now, this is a private common room. Please leave, and I won't turn you in."

"But we'll get caught!" the first boy complained.

"Then you needn't worry," a deep voice joined in. "You're both already caught."

"Master. . . ." the second boy started, but then gave up.

"You two, apologize to the young lady and return to camp. We shall discuss your punishment with the Chief tomorrow."

"We're sorry we intruded," the second boy said sincerely.

"We didn't mean . . . I mean, this wasn't part of the plan. Sorry."

The adult, a short, muscular middle-aged black man, watched the two youths leave. Then he turned to Tabitha. "I am called Johnson the Dreamwalker."

"I'm called Tabitha Spellman." She cocked her head to the left. "You're the Australian shaman, right?"

"Correct, although there are other terms for it where I come from. I was not aware any of the students here had this gift, or at least have had it awakened."

"It started a few weeks ago."

"And you informed no one?"

"No."

When nothing more was said, Johnson said, "I shall talk with you in the afternoon. Shall we meet in the griffin room at Two?"

"Yes, sir."

The students were allowed to shop starting by the class. The First years, of course, went last. Tabitha bought some small gifts for her friends -- she'd send them to their homes for Christmas. She only needed some basic supplies for herself. She sometimes wondered if her near-perfect eating habits were really a matter of taste or if her father had somehow built that into her along with a wide-ranging of knowledge rivaling any of her teachers.

She met with Marge, Meg, and Cindie to buy lunch from some of the vendors. They had eaten wizarding 'fast food' in October (sausages, apple and pear fritters, etc.) This time, they ate Muggle -- Marge and Meg were over-whelmed by pizza and chocolate malteds (the Ysgol was liberal, but did NOT allow soda).

The vendors and sales people started packing up at 1:30, and so Tabitha had no difficulty in finding her way to the griffin room, over near the Blue Tower. She was surprised that only Johnson the Dreamwalker was present.

Master J put Tabitha through a difficult thirty minute verbal exam on the subject of Dreamwalking. To his considerable surprise, she knew all the answers. He had heard of her, of course, and had heard about the encyclopedic knowledge she had been supplied with. Actually seeing it in action was quite remarkable.

For ten minutes, J seemed to study the girl, who merely looked back at him. Finally, she asked, "Are you trying to use Legilimency on me?"

"Yes, I am. I don't seem to be making much progress, however, which is very surprising. There are few people I cannot get at least some images from. May I try a more straight-forward attack?"

"Alright."

J cast the spell twice, with no results. He gathered his power, and cast the spell a third and final time.

This time, he got results. Words poured into J's mind. A seemingly endless flow of words, coming so fast he couldn't really understand them.

The stream was closed off, and J fell out of his chair. "Did you like my mind, sir?" Tabitha asked rather coldly. "Remember, most of what's in my memory is merely information. One set of information I've been looking very hard for since I woke up are ways of defending my mind. I will never be defenseless again."

"Well, you seem far from defenseless at the moment. There still is one major problem."

"I have to be registered. However, European, Confederation, and Old Believer regulations only cover adult Dreamwalkers. I do not wish to be banned for six years."

"But you wish to join the Open Believers," J pointed out.

"The Open Believers, and most Old Believer sects for that matter, have an agreement that allows for cross-training," Tabitha retorted. "Just because it's usually the Eagle students studying at the Ysgol or with druids doesn't mean I couldn't be trained, or at least supervised, in Dreamwalking by you." She smiled. "And yes, I do realize how you trapped me into asking for training."

"Trapped, child? I would prefer 'led'. Now, the restrictions on you would be. . . ."

Tabitha interrupted him and rattled off what would have been three pages of print in most books

"Very good, child. You do know what it means, yes?"

"I do now." Seeing the look on the teacher's face, Tabitha explained, "I know all this information, but I don't know I know it until I need it. Once I need it, I can understand it."

"I think I can understand what you mean. I must inform your Headmaster, you know."

"I know, sir. Will you be here next summer?"

"I shall. I believe you shall be as well."

"That's right. Perhaps I can formally learn then."

"I see no reason why you cannot," Johnson acknowledged. "I shall inquire, the chief shaman will likely be sympathetic."

Tabitha stood and bowed to Master J, in the manner she knew the Eagles would have. Johnson returned the bow.

Sunday, December 22, 1968

Tabitha, Gwen, and four other Old Believers walked into the elevator at the base of the Green Tower, but Tabitha and Gwen were the only two to get off on the fifth residential floor. They were the only two Old Believers on the floor staying over the holidays. Each morning, from the Twenty-first through the Twenty-fifth, the Old Believers would gather to greet the sunrise, marking the passage of the winter solstice. Starting the night of the Twenty-fifth, they would start a celebration which would end the night of January Sixth.

Now they had to go change out of their pure white robes before going to breakfast. When Tabitha rejoined the Prefect, Emily Tyne, a Fourth year Pure-Blood from an old Colonial family asked, "I take it the sun came up?"

"It was difficult to tell, since it very cloudy, but we have faith that it did," Gwen retorted.

A yawning Sixth year Muggle-born named Christine Ayers joined them. Like Emily, Christine had a private room, and were the only students staying beside Tabitha and Gwen. Other than the prefects, who were usually required to stay if even one of their charges stayed, about 90% of the students went home for the three week break. This holiday, all the Green girls staying just happened to be on the same floor.

That afternoon, Tabitha was in one of the study rooms, first practicing her levitation and then her transfiguration. When she looked up, she saw Emily Tyne was looking through the open glass wall that separated the room from the corridor. "Yes?"

"May I come in?"

Tabitha gestured her in. Tyne just looked at her. Finally, Tabitha said, "You don't like me, do you?"

"That's the problem; I do, but I don't like Old Believers, for a start."

"You don't like Old Believers, or you were raised to dislike Old Believers?"

"Some of both, I guess," she admitted. "Do you really buy into all that stuff?"

"I'm not so sure about the reincarnation parts," Tabitha admitted, "in fact, if it is true, I'm not sure I'd want to know. But it's a good life style, it makes me part of a community, and I enjoy the ceremonies."

"Even though your father was likely an Old Believer? Even though he did this to you?"

"You're probably right, of course, but he also could have been a Pure-Blood or Old Colonial who hired some Old Believer to do the same thing to me. You have to admit, some Pure-Bloods are as vain as any of Old Believers. I've heard the whispers from the Red Dragons. Grindelwald helped to cause two Muggle world wars, hoping to reduce the number of Muggles and enslave the rest, while attacking Muggle-born and Mixed-bloods. There's supposed to be a number of Pure-Blood groups dedicated to Pure-Blood supremacy."

Emily's jaw dropped. "Are you sure you're eleven?"

Tabitha shrugged. "I have several encyclopedias in my head; how should I talk?"

"Well, you're right. Some of the Reds were talking about pranking you somehow. Just thought you should know."

"Thank you."

"I'll tell Gwen and Tudor."

"Thank you again. You won't get in trouble, will you?"

"No, they don't know I overheard. I do agree that Pure-Bloods, which include most Old Believers and us Old Colonials, should run the wizarding world. That's different than saying everyone else should be totally disen . . . disen . . ."

"Disenfranchised?"

"Exactly."

"Or killed."

"Especially not killed!"

"You know something," Tabitha stated.

"No!"

"Is one of the European Pure-Blood groups building a following here?"

"There are rumors," Emily confirmed. "You probably don't know that Red exchange student from Hogwarts."

"I know who he is. He's a Sixth year . . . Marcus Malfoy?"

"Exactly. His father is the British Ambassador to the Confederation. So, stay away from him. He's going to try and lure you into a trap."

"When?"

"Christmas Eve, after dinner. I don't want you hurt if they get carried away."

"I'll be careful. Thank you."

Monday, December 23  
4:50 am

Dream Tabitha jogged through the Red dragon dungeon. She finally found the right room, and slipped into the large, private chamber. The room was twice the size of her room, and furnished in European luxury -- tapestries on two of the walls and a canopy bed.

Poking her head through the bed curtains, she saw Malfoy, who wasn't dreaming. She sat and waited.

When he finally started to dream, she joined him.

It wasn't easy pushing his dreams towards the right set of memories without revealing herself, but once Malfoy was properly prodded they flowed easily.

Malfoy actually knew fairly little about the would-be Dark Wizard his father was getting involved with over the previous few years. It was someone the older Malfoy had known at school, and who was now calling himself Lord Voldemort. Voldemort was taking a page from Grindelwald, but was apparently going to try to take over the wizarding world and then destroy the Muggles, unlike Grindelwald, who had tried to sow the seeds which would lead the Muggles to at least partially annihilate themselves. Tabitha extracted the information on the ambush against her, realizing with great surprise that it had been planned as a real attack than an extreme prank, and directed Malfoy back to his original dream of watching small boys on broomsticks.

After the morning services, Tabitha sat down and wrote out what she had found out. She was justified in her Dreamwalking into Malfoy's mind only because of Tyne's warning, and even then it was open to some interpretation. She also didn't know if anyone other than Johnson the Dreamwalker or the Headmaster knew about her ability, or if the Headmaster would want a visiting faculty member of the Eagles to know about a problem at the Ysgol. She therefore had no alternative but write to the Headmaster and hope he had time to read it.

Tabitha wished all the information she had been given had some sort of searchable index attached with it. It took her longer to figure out a way to call the Headmaster's attention to the letter than it did to write the letter in the first place. Still, she was finished well before lunch, and she dropped the letter off at the main office.

Tabitha was relieved when FitzWilliam took her and Tudor aside after the sunrise service on the Twenty-fourth. Outright bullying was harshly punished at the Ysgol, the current Head of the Red Dragons was an Old Believer instead of a Pure-Blood or Old Colonial, and a number of the faculty members were curious as to how many students would allow themselves to be involved with the planned attack. Tabitha's information showed 15 students in on the general prank, and six who were in on the fact that they were going to try and make the result look like a death caused by a prank gone too far by accident.

As she knew she would, the one First year Red girl who was staying over invited Tabitha to the Red open common area for tea and cookies. Tabitha rolled her eyes at the girl's poor acting. There was only one thing Tabitha needed answered, so she asked, just as they walked into large area where six corridors and two stairs came together, which was where the trap was supposed to be sprung, "Where's your wand, Petunia?"

Petunia Marsh smiled nastily. "Why? I don't need it at the moment," she said. Malfoy would use her wand to kill Tabitha, while the others merely cast minor curses. The hope was her death would be put down to an over-done prank. If the Killing Curse was discovered, it would be obvious that Marsh could not have done it.

Screaming, the other Pure-Bloods launched their attack. Tabitha triggered the portkey the Headmaster had given her, and found herself in the study room on her floor nearest to Emily's room. Emily, Gwen, and Christine were waiting for her, and Emily grabbed Tabitha in a tearful embrace.

"I'm sorry; I'm so sorry! I didn't know!" Emily sobbed repeatedly.

Tabitha looked pleadingly at the two other girls. Christine held Gwen back, and said softly, "Let her get it out of her system, Spellman." It had come to a shock to all three when the Headmaster had filled them in earlier.

Gwen took a deep breath, but Christine turned on her. "You hush, too! Pure-Bloods, Old Colonials, Old Believers, bah! Bigots, the lot of you, taken as a whole. And don't either of you look at me like that, even if it doesn't apply to either of you, you both know it's true. Mabli Sior, for example. is as big an OB bigot as any of those Pure-Bloods."

"She is," Gwen admitted.

"So, Spellman, do you know **why** Malfoy wanted to kill you?"

She shrugged. "By strict Pure-Blood labels, I'm an illegitimate half-blood OB with no family. There's apparently some Pure-Blood would-be Dark Wizard, calling himself Voldemort, trying to bring the remnants of Grindelwald's followers together back in Britain. The North American Confederation, and the OB's in particular, stand against the Pure-Blood propaganda, in part by allowing all magical people into the Open Believers and in part by standing for an older magic than the Pure-Bloods. My 'accidental' death would bring my story out. Since I'm supposedly of OB ancestry, I guess they hoped there would be a scandal. It would also be an attack on the Old Believers at their most liberal point -- letting me, at best a half-blood, certainly of muddled ancestry, even attend this school and join the faith."

Gwen made them all cocoa, and they sat up until a little after 10:00, when the Headmaster himself came to see them.

"Mister Malfoy and his five primary co-conspirators have been expelled. Ambassador Malfoy has been ordered home. He is taking his son, and perhaps the other five boys, although they will NOT be allowed into Hogwarts. The other fifteen have been put on Final Probation for at least the next calendar year." That meant they would be expelled for any discipline infraction, and could be expelled for mediocre or poor academic performance.

"Wow," Emily said softly. She was impressed. The Malfoys were one of the richest Pure-Blooded families in western Europe, and certainly in the top-half socially as well.

"Miss Tyne, despite the perception among some parts of the magical community, the Old Believers in general do not run everything in the Confederation. However, the Tuatha and the Council of Druids and the Old Believers do have four of the six permanent members of the twelve person Leadership Council, and currently hold three of the other seats as well. We



protect our own, and you, Miss Spellman, are a child of the Confederation and a member of our Fellowship. Had it been you, Miss Ayers, targeted by this group, or had a group of Old Believer children planned this attack on you, Miss Tyne, they would have been dealt with in a similar matter, although it might have taken a bit longer to organize."

"Yes, sir," Emily said.

"Now, children, enjoy the Yule."

### Christmas, 1968

"Have you been looking forward to Christmas?" Christine asked as she joined the two Old Believers to greet the sunrise. Many non-believers joined in on Christmas Day.

"I guess. We get so many present opportunities . . . are they fun?"

"Are they fun?"

"Well, I don't remember any of the earlier ones."

Christine and Gwen exchanged looks. "Let us know what you think," Gwen said with a smile.

The original Colonial families had had a wide variety of winter gift-giving traditions. Many in New England did not celebrate the holiday at all until well in the 19th century; some still did not. Others celebrated on St. Nicholas Day, others 12th Night, a few New Year's Day. Most now exchanged gifts on Christmas. Old Believers originally gave gifts anytime between the winter solstice and 12th Night. They now generally opened gifts Christmas Day and 12th Night.

At the Ysgol, a tradition had arisen in the early 17th century. Friends most often exchanged small silver tokens with the names of both parties. These represented promises of hospitality, back when the Old Believer settlements were spreading all over North America, and it was possible you might be far from home and in need of a place to sleep. By 1968, these tokens had become charms, and even the most macho, wealthy, snobbish Pure-Blood felt proud of receiving the charms, usually in the form of a tiny silver book, which opened. You gave them for Christmas. On 12th Night, if you had not already given the giver a token on Christmas you either returned the token or a token in the form of a piece of parchment.

Tabitha rode up the elevator, and turned the corner to her room. She was shocked to see an over-stuffed stocking hanging on her door. While presents were exchanged under the tree in the Great Hall after breakfast, the tokens were exchanged this way.

She poured the tokens onto her desk, and was shocked to count 102 tokens, including one from each of the 36 members of the faculty and staff, and from Johnson the Dreamwalker, the Chief Shaman of the Eagles, and Adda Lloyd, the senior member of the Tuatha, who had come to talk to her class. All eight of the girls in her House year and the other twelve girls on

her floor, plus Henry Dorff and four of the other boys in her House year had also sent tokens. She was shocked and pleased. She had felt she had been taking a chance sending out 24 tokens. She would have to order 78 tokens the next day.

## Chapter VI

Tuesday, June 24, 1969

The Ysgol school year ended with a sunset ceremony on the summer solstice. Two or three days later, the students were sent home with one-way portkeys, leaving anywhere from noon until 6:00 pm, depending on what time zone they lived in.

Tabitha, of course, was staying the summer. She spent the previous day saying goodbye to her friends. Tudor, Meg, Cindie, Anna, and Henry were the hardest to say goodbye to. Somewhere, deep in her heart, Tabitha had hoped one of the people who claimed to consider her a friend would have asked her to come to their home for a least a week or two.

'Maybe next year,' she had thought, as she watched people portkey home. At least Gwen was staying the entire summer, while Christine would be back after July 4th. On the plus side, she, Marge and Meg wouldn't be moving their rooms. The other rooms would be assigned later that summer. She had also promised to write Marge and Meg by owl, and use the schools postal drop to write Cindie.

"Good morning, Miss Spellman."

"Good morning, Headmaster."

"Johnson the Dreamwalker will meet with you this afternoon at Three at the Eagle camp. When you return to your room after lunch, your grades should be there."

Tabitha furled her brow. "If they're ready today. . . ."

"Why not send them home with the students yesterday? Well, we don't always have a weekend to tabulate the grades, and we still had to mark the parchments. Even with magic, that takes some time. Plus, for the students who may not have done as well as they were expected to, well, let's hope it gives them a day or so more to find a warm welcome."

"Yes, sir."

"You did well, child. Be happy."

Tabitha took a deep breath and opened her grades:

*Astronomy* . . . . . 99  
*Charms*. . . . . 91  
*Defense* . . . . . 96  
*Flying*. . . . . 72  
*Herbology* . . . . . 96  
*History* . . . . . 105\*  
*Potions* . . . . . 105\*

*Transfiguration . . . 89*  
*. . . . Total . . . 94.125*

*\*Highest Possible Grade*

Tabitha smiled, and sat down to start letters to her friends.

Thursday, July 3, 1969

"You asked to see me, Headmaster?"

"Yes, Miss Spellman. Please sit down." FitzWilliam leaned back in his chair and looked at her. "I must say, Miss Spellman, we are very pleased with you. Just a year ago tomorrow morning, you were found. We had no idea what we might expect from you."

"Or what types of damage I might have suffered, or how trainable I might be," Tabitha supplied.

"Yes," FitzWilliam admitted, "that was part of it."

"I am damaged," Tabitha stated. "Life before last July is a blank. I fear that blankness. I fear someone tampering with my memory; I fear deep sleep; I fear death. I'm eleven years old. I shouldn't know the things I know; I shouldn't fear the things I fear. If I live to be two hundred, those fears will still be with me, and they'll never go away. In all likelihood, they'll increase. My classmates look upon me as a freak, because I am a freak. I've just been very lucky that some really do like me anyway."

"I am very sorry, Miss Spellman."

"So am I."

"You take no comfort in our beliefs?"

"I take some comfort in our beliefs. Faith is a hard thing for me, apparently. All any of us can have is faith. The possibility of oblivion is behind the drive for faith."

"Faith is a hard thing for many. At least you desire to believe. You are a good person, Miss Spellman. Try and have faith. You are also very impressive, and our guest instructor from Australia agrees. Despite your lack of firm belief, would you still accept studying as a druid?" The training started the summer after the First year of school, and Tabitha had applied.

"Really?"

"Really. You could not move past the first initiation in five years without firmer belief, but you may address that in time."

"I already know all the information through at least the tenth year, you know."

FitzWilliam's jaw set. "We are aware of that. Should your father ever be identified, he will have a great deal to answer for."

Tabitha started to say something, but held it in.

"Go ahead and say it, child."

"Why the devil couldn't they have just have passed me off as the bastard child of a squib!"

"That is a very good question. I wish I knew the answer. Now, have you an answer for me, child? Did you Hear the Call?"

"I Heard the Call, and I will Heed it."

"Be happy, child. You already know the information, illegally or not. While the others are memorizing the oral tradition, you may help them along. If you do it kindly, they will appreciate you, and not resent you."

"I hope so, Headmaster."

"And it will still take some practice to do the ceremonies."

"Of course, Headmaster."

"There is one more thing. We were wondering if you could help us."

"Headmaster?"

"We have a new student this summer, whose situation is not entirely unlike yours."

Tabitha had to think about that sentence for a few seconds. "Yes, sir?"

"Like you, he is alone. Unlike you, he is Muggle-born. His entire family perished in a fire this past March." FitzWilliam stopped, because Tabitha was giving him a very prescient look.

"He did it, didn't he sir?"

"Did what?"

"No one knew he was magical. He did something that made them laugh at him or in some other way humiliate him, and he accidentally caused the fire that killed them all."

"I hope others find it more difficult to puzzle that out," Fitzwilliam said. "He doesn't quite understand what happened that day himself. The staff will be keeping a close eye on him this year, and we'll explain it to him next year if he still hasn't figured it out, or if he's in denial."

"What's his name?"

"Thomas Lawrence. He's been pre-sorted into the Greens. He is with Miss Weiss now. After we get him acculturated this month, we'll test him to see if he has any discernible talents." All

students were tested to see if they had any number of 'special' gifts, although many, such as her own Dreamwalking or prophecy, could not be tested for.

"Yes, sir, I understand. I know the way."

"Now, run along."

Lawrence looked like he could be Tudor Myrddin's younger brother, with the same basic build, wild black hair, and deep blue eyes. Somehow, Tabitha couldn't imagine Thomas growing to be that tall, and in fact he would never surpass 5 foot 10.

Still, he was smart and pleasant. He was also totally ignorant of magical culture (he had spent late March through the end of June with foster parents). Tabitha enjoyed coaxing Tom along over the weeks before she left for the start of her druidical training.

Thursday, July 31, 1969  
Weston

In the mountains of southern Alberta, near the Montana border, is the small academic and religious center of Weston. Only Old Believers and a few invited academics may visit, let alone live there. It is the home of the primary Old Believer institute of higher learning, the Sefydliad ('Institute'), and it also serves as a training center for the druids, the intellectual, spiritual, and in many ways the political elite of the Old Believers. Tabitha was one of 186 children (45 girls and 141 boys) who were to be tested for the druidic life at Weston, while about an equal number of children from the strictest sects went through the same training elsewhere.

Tabitha was glad to see the four Old Believer boys from her House year (Lloyd Adda, Awstin Mihangel, Dewi Puw and Ofydd Pwy), plus Henry Dorff, were there. A stern looking Druid came up to them and said in Welsh (as all the conversations would be in Weston for these three weeks), "Well, since you six seem to know each other, and we needs teams of six, you are team twenty-one. The tent should be to your left."

The six quickly found their tent, which had a note instructing them to wait outside and to place the knapsacks they had been allowed on the benches in front of the tent. Nearly an hour later, a druid came up to them.

"I see someone has a sense of humor. First off all, I need your names and school information." That information gathered, the druid went on, "So, you all know each other. I hope you are not shy. You are about to become closer to nature. This is serious religious training, so no harassment of any kind will be tolerated. You will have clogs and a robe to wear, when you are wearing anything at all. Remove all other clothing and jewelry and put them in your knapsack and leave your knapsacks here. They will be returned to this tent when you leave. Robes and clogs are in the tent, go change and come out so I can size them. You have a few hours until dinner. Do NOT stray from the tent, except to go to the latrines, which are at the end of the rows. Well?"

"But. . . ." Lloyd sputtered, gesturing at Tabitha.

"Get used to it or leave." He looked at Tabitha. "You have any problems with this, Spellman?"

"No, sir. I would trust these boys with my honor before any others." She looked at the druid. "Is this tent magically enlarged?"

"No, it's not."

She pulled off her travel robe, leaving her in a t-shirt and panties. "I suggest you all take your travel robes off out here. It will be tight in there." She ducked into the tent. Henry shrugged and followed her lead, and then the other boys did as well.

When Tabitha came out of the tent, the druid had moved on to the next tent. He came back to size their clothes, and then reminded them not to talk to anyone from another tent.

"Why do you think we're not supposed to talk to anyone else?" Awstin wondered.

"In part, to build us as a team, and in part to give us a basic task, to see how well we follow orders." She turned to Henry. "Ignore them," she said, referring to two boys in a neighboring tent who were horsing around and trying to tease Tabitha.

"But. . . ." Henry protested.

"Ignore them," Tabitha hissed.

"Then what should we do?" Dewi asked.

"Sit and wait."

And so they did. The taunting went on for ten minutes, which is when three druids seemed to appear from nowhere. "Spellman!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Master."

"Yes, Master?"

He pointed to the nearby tent where the two boys had been teasing them. "Did any of these four try and restrain these two?"

"All did, Master."

"I didn't say anything!" one boy who had been taunting Tabitha complained.

"Silence!" The druid looked at Tabitha. "We have been watching. Had these two silenced themselves, we would have kept it in mind as the training started. You six did well." He turned and looked at the surrounding tents. "Some of you did well, others should have done better. You four could have done better. You two, come along. It's time to go home."

"What!" the louder of the two boys protested. "Do you know who we are? Who our families are?"

"No, I do not know your families. They are probably not of the Faith. That would not matter, if you had discipline. You do not. You do not know how to listen, obey, or behave. You two will join the others who failed their first tests. Come along."

While the first druid led the two protesting boys away, a second addressed the children. "Come. It is time to eat. You will arise before dawn to greet the sun."

"How do we, you know, sleep?" Dewi asked that night.

"Do any of you tend to have to, well, have to get up during the night?"

"Ofydd does," Lloyd said. Ofydd gave his school room mate a dirty look.

"Then let's try this tonight. It looks like it would work best if we all lay against one side, it would give us the most room. Why don't we try it Ofydd at the entrance, Dewi, Lloyd, Awstin, Henry, and me in the back."

They tried it, and they stuck with it the rest of their time in training.

It was growing chilly as they went into the tent. There were six pairs of blankets laid out and a third rolled up to be used as a pillow. Tabitha slipped between the blankets, and when Henry settled himself, she scooted next to him. Cuddled together, they both fell asleep.

Tabitha found herself facing herself. She quickly realized she was seeing herself in Henry's dream. She pulled herself out of his dream, then sat up and crawled through the tent. They had been warned not to wander the camp, so she sat crossed-legged and looked at the stars, curious if there would be any others Dreamwalking besides her.

"Is there a problem, Spellman?" a voice asked her five minutes later. One of the druids was patrolling in his dreams.

"No, Master. I just love looking at the stars."

"And why are you sitting here?"

"I didn't want to wander, just to look."

"Very well. Get back to your dreams."

"Yes, Master."

Going back through the back of the tent, she saw Henry had stopped dreaming. She reentered her body, and fell asleep against him.



The three weeks passed quickly and easily for Tabitha. The children had to memorize a series of prayers. Some they were already at least familiar with from the sunrise ceremonies at school. Most of the children from Old Believer families already had many of the prayers memorized. Tabitha spent much of her spare time coaching Henry.

Early in the second week, during the a rest period, Tabitha had sat under a tree and watched a group of her fellow acolytes play Swivenhodge in a meadow. After about twenty minutes, some the players dropped out while new ones joined. Henry flew over and landed near her.

"Well played," was all she said.

"Thanks."

"What's wrong?"

Henry sighed. "I don't know if I can do this."

"It's difficult for those not raised in the Faith to get started. After this summer, they won't have so much of an advantage."

"I suppose."

"I can coach you more," Tabitha offered.

"You have your own studies," Henry pointed out.

"Will you keep a secret?"

"For you? Of course."

"You know how I have all this information in my head? Well, that includes at least the first ten years of memorization."

"Wow!" Henry frowned. "So that means your father was a druid of some kind, right?"

"Right." After completing 5 years of study, the student became a novice, allowed to do most ceremonies. After ten years, the novice became an acolyte, allowed to do even more and to attend even the most secret ceremonies as at least an observer. At fifteen years, the acolyte became a disciple. At twenty years, the disciple became a druid. Of the 186 students, probably between 75 and 90 would make it through the five year program, but less than 20 would make it all the way through to become druids.

"Henry. . . ."

"You can call me Harry, if you want."

"Really? I've never heard you called Harry by anyone."

"My father and grandfather are also Henrys. MY father is called Hank."

"Yech. Harry is much better. You may call me Tabby, then."

"Thank you." Harry looked at her. "What were you going to say?"

"If you'll keep another secret, I can help you. I can't tell you what it is right now, though. Will you trust me?"

"Alright."

Henry was dreaming that night -- the 'drill druids' were yelling at him for a mistake he had made in reciting a long poem, one he just couldn't totally recall and which he would be tested on again the next morning. He was startled when he saw Tabby quieting the druids down. She walked over to him and took his hands. "Say it again, Harry. Say it with me."

He did so, and they said it perfectly. What was more, he was now certain he knew it. "You do know it," Tabitha said. "I've shared it with you. Every night, I will help you memorize the day's lessons, if you will let me."

"How. . . ."

"I'm a Dreamwalker. I've never deliberately entered your dreams before, and I won't without your permission." She put her hand against Harry's cheek. "Now, sleep more deeply. We both need it."

The next morning, Henry came up to Tabitha during a break. He tried to start saying something several times, but just couldn't spit it out.

Taking pity on him, Tabitha asked, "Did you want to ask about a dream you had last night?"

Henry merely nodded, then said, "You were there, weren't you? You Dreamwalked into my dream, and then dream-taught me."

"I did both," she admitted. "Are you upset?"

"I could be, I guess, but I'm not. Thank you."

"You're welcome."

Tabitha made it through the three weeks of training easily. With her coaching, her four Old Believer tent-mates had few problems. Henry, of course, also made it through easily once

Tabitha started giving him dream-teaching and tutoring. Henry and Tabitha had also become very close friends. For the rest of her life, on the rare nights when sleep came with difficulty, Tabitha only had to remember sleeping next to her friend on a chilly night in that slightly musty tent to feel warm, secure, and loved, and she would drift off quickly.

Tabitha returned to her room at the Ysgol on August 25, and prepared for her Second year.

In every way, Tabitha's Second year was her easiest. Instead of flying, students had to take either a course in 'Surviving in a Muggle World' (a basic introduction into Muggle culture and a primer in passing for 'normal' while passing through it) or 'Wizarding Traditions and Ceremonies,' depending on their family background. Tabitha knew all the information for both, but asked to take both. Having the information and being totally comfortable with it and the applications were, after all, two different things. With Henry's permission, she visited his dreams twice a week to help him with the memorization given to the druidical students during term. The courses, along with her regular courses and her druidical studies, were all review for her, except for the practical parts of Charms, Potions, and Transfiguration.

The four Old Believer boys in her House year remained her friends, albeit not very close ones. They, she, and Henry would often study their druidical lessons together, before going to bed. Tabitha also kept up her close friendships with Meg, Marge, Anna, and Cindie. She stayed or made friends with a few of the other students in her year, both in her House and in some of the others, although few ever became very close friends. Tabitha also became friendly with some of the older students in her House, especially with Gwen, Christine, and Emily, who all treated her as a little sister as well as a friend. The only First year she became friendly with was Tom Lawrence, although they were never very close in school until their last years.

As the summer of 1970 approached, Emily, Cindie, and Henry each asked if she could spend any of the summer with them. Tabitha approached the Headmaster to see if arrangements could be made.

The Headmaster consulted with his faculty and staff. Whatever the personal demons the young girl might still be wrestling with were obviously not affecting her school work or her personal relationships. While certainly not a leader in her House year (which would be Henry and Marge), Tabitha was certainly near the top of the pecking order, and well able to be let out of the protective cocoons of the Ysgol and Old Believers. They also felt it would be good for her to see something of the world.

The students would leave on June 23, and Tabitha would be traveling for three weeks of intense druidical study on July 31. She would therefore be allowed to stay with Cindie from June 25 - July 5, with Emily's family July 5 - 18, and with Henry's July 18 -31. She'd go with Henry to the training.

As Tabitha sat, waiting for her portkey to activate and take her to Cindie's home, she reflected on the past year. Her nightmares were almost gone, she had solid friends she could rely on,

she had found a place in her world where she was comfortable, and her grades were outstanding:

<i>Astronomy</i>	. . . . .	99
<i>Charms</i>	. . . . .	93
<i>Defense</i>	. . . . .	96
<i>Herbology</i>	. . . . .	96
<i>History</i>	. . . . .	.105*
<i>Magical Customs</i>	. . . . .	.105*
<i>Muggle Survival</i>	. . . . .	.105*
<i>Potions</i>	. . . . .	.105*
<i>Transfiguration</i>	. . . . .	90
. . . . .	<i>Total</i>	. . . 99.33

*\*Highest Possible Grade*

The next year, she would start her selected courses: Muggle Studies, Runes, and Arithmancy. As she felt the portkey tug her away, she hoped the next year would be as much fun as the last.

## **Chapter VII**

The Snyders lived in a small two storey house behind a small motel (18 units) on a fairly busy two-lane state highway that, Tabitha was told many times over her short stay, would soon be enlarged into four lanes over the next few years.

Tabitha had hoped for a swimming pool, but there wasn't one. On either side of the highway was undeveloped land for many miles. In fact, except for having to cross roads and highways, you could travel in a few directions for hundreds of miles without ever hitting a town. A mile to their west northwest was the small village of Chemung, with its raceway and a few miles beyond that was the small city of Elmira, to their southeast three small towns that made up the so-called Penn-York 'Valley'.

"I don't know what you'll do," Mrs. Snyder had said with a sniff after welcoming Tabitha, "but so long as you stay out of trouble, you're welcome to do it."

Summer assignments were no trouble for Tabitha -- she'd written them all out ahead of time. Mrs. Snyder had taken her the first afternoon down to a Grants Department Store in 'the Valley', so that she could buy a swimsuit and some more appropriate Muggle clothes and other items (fortunately her father had left some small amounts of American and Canadian money in the trunk). To Mrs. Snyder's approval, Tabitha was happy to help Cindie change the sheets and vacuum the rooms. Cindie did more than half the work, but it allowed Tabitha to think she had at least earned her meals.

Beyond that, Tabitha was happy laying out in the sun, watching television, and helping Cindie with her homework. Twice, Mrs. Snyder let the older woman who helped out at the motel run the office, and took Cindie and Tabitha down to 'the Valley' to the Drive-In. Tabitha studied the set-up and wrote up a short essay, to turn in for extra credit in Muggle Studies.

It was a nice, relaxing ten days.

The late morning of July 5, Cindie and Tabitha were waiting for Tabitha's transportation. They were a bit surprised to see an old Ford truck pull into the motel's graveled parking lot with Emily at the wheel. She and an older boy got out of the truck, smiles on their faces. "Hi! This is my cousin, Frank Johnson."

It turned out that the Tynes and their relations lived in a small magical village, about a 90 mile drive into Pennsylvania. "Muggles just see at most a dirt road turn-off," Frank explained. "They never could guess there's a whole wide valley filled with us and our farms."

After using the motel office's toilet, the trio took off, Emily again driving. "Even though we're Pure-Bloods, we like to be able to blend in," Emily explained.

"How many families are there?" Tabitha asked, curious.

"In one sense, it's all one family, but there are eighteen houses. We're all second cousins or closer. We marry out, of course."

"Of course."

"So we have, what, a hundred and twenty-three of us, all together?" Frank said.

"Something like that. Our valley was first settled in 1749. As far as they could tell, they might have been the first people to set foot there."

"Not even an Indian trail within twenty miles," Frank agreed.

"Were you involved in the battle Diahoga? That must be near here."

The pair laughed. "This highway is the trail the Muggles took to destroy the Iroquois Confederacy. Did you visit the Valley? The Battle of Diahoga was there in 1777. The Iroquois and British then came through in 1778 on their way to massacre Colonial Muggles over near Albany, and the Colonial Muggles came through in 1779 to destroy the Iroquois."

"Oh!"

"Since I just turned sixteen, and you're coming, I get to stay with Frank's family."

"And that's good, right?" Tabitha teased.

"Indoor plumbing is always good," Emily stated.

"You're getting spoiled at that school," Frank growled.

"Frank went to the Ag School out in Colorado," Emily said, "he likes manure."

"I guess I do, since I like you," he teased back.

"He's my first cousin, so I know he's just teasing," Emily told Tabitha, who was looking a bit confused by the by-play.

Soon they were driving the back roads, and then moved from narrow paved roads to a gravel road. From the gravel road, they turned off to a dirt track leading up a steep incline. The track curved to the left at the top, and after about twenty yards, it widened into a paved road. Ten yards further, there was a lookout on the side of the road. Emily pulled into it, and the three got out of the truck.

The valley was spread out in front of them. "This valley is pretty much under total cultivation," Emily said. "It's about three quarters of a mile wide, by 9 miles long. The next two valleys over, and the ones to the north and south, are also under our ownership, although the Muggles do come close to the southern one during hunting season."

"We all have to go out and put up more wards every fall," Frank agreed. "The sober ones are distracted by the wards, but the drunk ones sometimes stumble in. We hunt and gather plants and wood from the valleys."

"And what will I be doing in this sylvan paradise?"

"You mean besides milk and muck the cows and goats?" Frank asked.

"She won't be mucking out anything," Emily nearly snapped. Turning to Tabitha, she said, "You're good at potions, and can help prepare the ingredients for some brewing we're doing, if you want to help out. There are a lot of little chores you can help with, but don't feel too obliged. You're a guest."

"Do you have many guests?"

"Some."

"A fair number, actually," Frank said, "although most are here for potential matchmaking."

"I'm a bit young for that," Tabitha said drily.

"That's for certain," Emily almost snarled. "Let's go."

Frank drove them to his parents' house. It was a fairly modern-looking, almost Muggle-looking farm house. It even had a television antenna. "Electricity?"

"Some, generated by a windmill," Frank said. "My father is the local Muggle-relations wizard. He contacted the Snyders when the girl accidently dyed her room pink, for example. He gets called out about once every two months to disenchant items or apply memory charms. He likes to keep up with Muggle culture, so he doesn't cause more problems than he solves."

Tabitha's near-two weeks with Emily's clan was more interesting than fun for the most part. Tabitha wondered if FitzWilliam had approved of these visits to show her a range of lifestyles.

The clan lived a fairly wide set of lifestyles by themselves. Three of the households lived nearly a Hidden Believer lifestyle -- candles, open hearth cooking, chamber pots and all. Had they not accepted what the Hidden called banned 'modern' foods (corn, potatoes, tomatoes, pumpkins, coffee, etc.) and some Muggle-produced products (mostly hand tools, cloth, and some foods), the life-styles would have been identical. The other households ranged from just slightly more openness to the totally modern Johnson household. Tabitha spent some time in all of them.

While nearly all of the males and most of the females over ten spent most of the day doing farm chores, a few of the oldest women and Tabitha spent a great deal of time brewing potions, especially health potions for both the people and the livestock, and also starting in on the preserving of wild berries and other foods for the winter. Tabitha had a deft hand for chopping and measuring, and so did well under the elderly witches' supervision. They also tried to teach Tabitha how to knit, but she found crocheting better suited to her tastes.

While even a magical farm needed much work done by hand, things were easier than on a Muggle farm. Each night, the families gathered in three or four houses to make music.

Tabitha was not a confident singer (her voice was not that strong, although she did have perfect pitch). The families had her try all their instruments (she knew how to play them all in theory), and she found she was fairly comfortable, and able, with the lute, although it would take a great deal of practice for her to become really proficient.

Tabitha did wonder by her second day why the older girl had invited her. There were two other guests when she had arrived, both dating members of the extended family. Six others were supposed to show up before she left for the same reason. Tabitha and Emily were sharing a small bed in a tiny room in the attic of the farm house to help 'make room'.

Her third night, Tabitha found out. It was hot, and even the open window failed to stir a breeze. The two were forced to cuddle close on the small bed in the tiny room, despite the heat. Tabitha jumped when she felt Emily's fingers stroke her thigh.

"I'm sorry, Tabby . . . I just couldn't hold myself back, any more."

"Is that another reason why you keep turning Frank down?" Tabitha asked nervously.

"I might be attracted to some boys, but not my cousin," Emily said, wrinkling her nose. "I was attracted to you, though, from the instant I met you, but of course you were way too young then."

"And you don't think I'm too young now?"

"Thirteen might be a bit young to fool around with guys," Emily admitted.

Tabitha swallowed nervously. The fact that she was twelve had to be kept secret.

"Look, I know you're probably never going to be interested in, well, anything long term, especially not now."

Here was an area where Tabitha's encyclopedic knowledge was certainly lacking. Tabitha felt a wealth of conflicting emotions. She found Emily, Christine, and Gwen very attractive, and had been teased a little about crushing on them by some of the other girls in her year (who had also had similar childish infatuations with some of the older students, male and female), but she had never entertained the idea of even kissing them, let alone anything more physical.

On the other hand, in many ways Tabitha's life lacked one major thing -- any form of physical affection. She hadn't held anyone's hand since Tudor Myrddin had held hers showing around school her first year. The closest things to hugs she had ever felt were the time Emily had embraced her in relief after the abortive Christmas Eve attack, Henry and her huddling together for warmth, and walking arm-in-arm with some of her House mates.

"I don't know what I'm ready for," Tabitha told Emily. "Why don't you teach me?"

"We'll learn together."



When it came time for Tabitha to leave Emily's clan, she was a very confused girl. She decided to put her thoughts and feeling over what had happened between herself and Emily over the previous ten days aside, to be considered later.

Montana was of course several time zones away. After leaving by a timed mid-morning portkey the Headmaster had given her when she left the Ysgol, she arrived at the dragon ranch just in time for breakfast.

Tabitha found herself in a room like none she had even imagined. It was a large stone chamber, with a fireplace larger than any of the ones at school. On one side, a full-grown stuffed grizzly bear stood rampant, but it looked dwarfed by the fireplace. There were mounted heads of moose, bison, bears, and other creatures on the wall. The rest of the room was in shadows, as the fireplace was out.

"Bit gruesome, huh?"

Tabitha swirled around and saw Henry, standing there, looking like he always did -- tall for his age, getting a bit husky from hard work, and above all unlikely to make any demands on her. She flung herself into his arms in the relief of his normalness, "Harry!"

"Whoa! What's wrong, Tabby?" Henry asked as he hugged her back "Did you have a rough time at the Tynes'?"

"I didn't think so most of the time, but it was . . . odd." She wondered what story she could possibly tell her friend, which wouldn't get back to the Tynes and make her look bad.

"Odd?"

"Everyone was like . . . we were all being considered for future membership."

"I'm sure you were, dear," a matronly voice stated from the shadows.

Tabitha quickly freed Henry from her grip and backed away.

"Mother!"

A slightly taller, older, matronly version of Henry walked out of the shadows. "Henry dear, hush." The woman turned to Tabitha. "Now those of us who happen to live in the wizarding towns or in wizarding centers in Muggle cities get to know each other. Old Believers, at least in the smaller sects, also generally know each other fairly well. The rest of us encourage these summer visits so that we get to meet people, not just for matchmaking, but in general. So, don't think I'm already to start wedding plans for you and Harry. . . ."

"Mom!"

". . . because I'm not, and I won't. But this is how it's done, over time. Now, dear, show your friend to her room and hurry down before all the food is gone."

"Sorry about that," Henry said, taking one end of Tabitha's trunk while she grabbed the other.

"It's alright. Say, how big is this place?"

"It's between two and four storeys tall, but it's pretty spread out. We're here, while my parents are on the floor below. This room shares a bathroom with my little sister Julia. My older brother John and I are in the other two rooms. Ready?"

"Alright."

It turned out that there were nearly 100 people living on this part of the dragon ranch, in seven households and a dragon-hand bunk-house. There were eight of these small communes that ran the dragon ranch. Each also raised some other animal. One raised hippogriffs, one thestrals, one griffins, four feed animals for the animals and people, and this one wyverns.

After breakfast for twenty was over, Henry turned to Tabitha. "What shall we do first?"

"What do we have to do?"

"I have a few assignments to finish, we need to introduce you to the guards, but other than that, we're pretty free."

"No chores?"

"Did the other have you do chores?" Mrs. Dorff asked. When Tabitha nodded, she asked, "Such as?"

"I helped Cindie change the linen and clean. . . ."

"That wasn't too hard, was it?"

"No, with two it was pretty easy."

"Mrs. Snyder runs a Muggle inn, Mother," Henry pointed out.

"Oh, well, yes, that would make a difference."

"And I did a lot of the ingredient preparation for some tonics, plus helped with the berry preserving at the Tynes. But that was only five hours a day or so. . . ."

"Five hours! It sounds like you were unpaid help in both places!"

Tabitha considered. "Maybe at the Tynes, but not at the motel . . . that what the Muggles call a small hotel or inn near their motorways. Motor hotel - motel."

"Ah."

"That was less than an hour and a half on weekdays, maybe two and a half Saturday and Sunday."

"Well, Henry here has worked very hard since he's been home. You and he can set the table and clear it off. Did you have any fun?"

"Oh, yes! It was nice laying in the sun at Cindie's, and watching a little television, although a lot of it is pretty silly. The Tynes had musical evenings every night. I rather liked playing the guitar and especially the lute. I sent an owl off to the Headmaster, asking if I could have one at school."

"I expect you can, as long as you use silencing charms and your room mate doesn't mind."

"I don't have a room mate."

"Then it shouldn't be a problem. Now, help me clear, and then Henry will introduce you to the guardians."

"Now stand perfectly still, and try not to be scared, alright?"

"Alright."

Henry gave two whistles, and within seconds Tabitha heard two sets of wings beating their way towards her. Letting her eyes go up, she saw two large animals flying towards her. "I thought griffins and wyverns hated each other?"

"They compete in the wild where their habitats overlap, but the trained ones get along fairly well. Livy is old -- he was my great-grandmother's protector and dowry, and he came along with Mom. Ovid is the alpha male of our pack. Hold your hand out in a fist, palm down. That's right."

The reddish miniature dragon went first, looking at her and Henry. "Tabitha, friend, Ovid. Remember, Tabitha, friend." The wyvern's arrow-tipped tongue flipped out and ran along the underside of Tabitha's arm.

"Friend," Henry repeated. The wyvern blinked, and then took off. "He'll share your scent with the rest of the pack." The griffin did the same, and stalked off.

Tabitha really enjoyed her time with the Dorffs'. Her second afternoon, three owls arrived, carrying a package, which turned out to be a lute, along with an instruction book and sheet music. She played away happily in the afternoons out in the sun, while Henry finished his assignments. There was a small lake nearby, and they went swimming in the hot late afternoons with Julia and some of the other children from the compound. The families all seemed to accept her more openly than most of the Tyne clan had. Perhaps because they all lived at the same level of technology, there seemed to be fewer tensions here than there had been back east.

They were more open about asking Tabitha about herself. Perhaps because Henry was also taking the druidical training, they were interested in her opinions of the Old Believer in general. The Old Believers had seemed to be a taboo subject with the clan.

Each night, Tabitha visited Henry in his dreams. She managed to catch him dreaming at least once a night. They had both enjoyed dreaming together during the school year -- she would visit him on the weekends at the very least. This summer, she made certain he knew the material he would have to recite. They had often debated if they were cheating.

They had decided that while they might be bending the rules, they weren't breaking any. They were, after all, encouraged to learn the oral traditions any way they could, short of writing them down. This year, they would be required to work with a partner. Henry and Tabitha had decided from the beginning that they would partner together.

Tabitha found the wyverns quite impressive. She decided that she didn't really need to visit the dragon preserve to see their many-times larger cousins. When it came time to leave, Tabitha had recovered her emotional equilibrium. She felt ready to face the rest of the summer.

Tabitha and Henry sat outside, waiting for their portkey to activate, dressed in their white robes. Tabitha was leaving all her things at the Dorffs', where she would return for a few days before going back to the Ysgol.

Henry asked, "Do you know where we're going this summer?"

"The Yukon."

"Really? To the Old Believer's school?"

"Near it, anyway. I'm sure we'll never see the actual grounds."

"And next year?"

"Next year we go in mid-July back to the same place. The year after that, it's August again. After our WT's, we leave right before the summer solstice. The visitors go to the Old Tower at the Ysgol."

"It won't get easier, will it?"

"No, it won't." They then felt the tug of the portkey.

## **Chapter VIII**

The pair landed in a clearing in a grove of spruce. Henry handed one of the druids their portkey (a stick). "Step over here," another called in the Welsh they would be speaking for the entire time there. "Names?" he asked in Welsh.

"Henry Dorff."

"Tabitha Spellman."

"Who are your partners?"

"We're partners," Henry said.

"What? Really?"

"Yes, Master."

"H'mm." The druid flipped through his lists. "How odd. We don't usually allow that." He shrugged. "I hope you both know to behave yourselves, and that we will keep a closer eye on the pair of you."

"Yes, Master."

"Yes, Master."

"Hut fifty-four. Off with you."

"What was that all about?"

"We stay in two-person huts."

"Oh. . . . **OH!**"

"Harry, it's not a big deal. You're one of my best friends. I know I can trust you. And we're here on a religious quest. We'll behave, and they won't have any reason to split us apart."

"Alright. I just hope no one . . . gossips."

"Are you ashamed to be linked with me?"

"No."

"Then we won't worry about it."

The trail from the clearing opened into the top of a long valley. In a space some hundred yards wide and three hundred long, stood a hundred small stone huts. Beyond that, woods obscured the rest of the valley, except for some high towers in the distance.

"So many. . . ." Henry said in amazement.

"There a field further down the valley, where most of the Hidden and some of the more exclusive Old Believer children meet, like we did last summer. From now on, we're in this together, no matter what our backgrounds."

"Oh, great."

"Please don't say that," Tabitha whispered. "Some won't like us, but we all belong to the Faith together. At least pretend to like them, and they should pretend to like us."

"Fair enough. What are these huts?"

"They're based on paleolithic agricultural huts, although they're a bit smaller than most. Here we are." She ducked through the drape that served as a door. Henry shrugged and followed.

The hut was an oval, perhaps 10x12 feet. Around the outside of the oval were a pair of short stools and a short table, a stone sleeping platform, and, partially obscured by a three-foot high stone partition, a toilet and a sink. In the center was a hearth set into the stone floor. The sleeping platform was covered with spruce branches, and there were four folded blankets and two pillows.

"I guess we're going to be . . . cozy."

"Would you rather be sleeping with a boy?"

"No, but . . . people will talk."

"If anyone 'talks' here, I'm telling them I don't know what **they're** doing with their partner, but we're just sleeping. Here." She tossed her knapsack to Henry. "Hang them up on those hooks, and we'll read our instructions."

Henry did so, noticing for the first time there was a piece of parchment on the table. "We have to report to cabin three. It doesn't say why."

"Then let's go."

There were nine cabins, alternating with nine pavilions. After standing in a short queue, a druid had them stand while he looked through his lists. "Well, you two are interesting. In case you are interested, you are the first boy-girl partnership allowed in ten years. While there should be no teasing in this training, it may happen. What will you say?"

"We are telling them I don't know what **they're** doing, snuggled up with their partner, but we're just sleeping," Tabitha retorted.

The druid smiled slightly. "You have everything it takes to be a druid, but that is no guarantee you will make it," he said to Tabitha. He turned to Henry. "You are outstanding in nearly everything you do, although you have some difficulties with rote memorization, which is a lot of what you **must** accomplish in this basic training."

He went back speaking to both. "Now, if you succeed this summer, since you do not already belong to any known clan, you may be asked to join one or more. You will also be asked to declare which sects you wish to be considered for. Now, I am aware you are both now associated with the Open Believers. I must remind you that we do not allow full druidical training for Open Believers. The only druids above the acolyte level associated with the Open Believers are those who move over to the Open Believers later in life. If you maintain your desire to only be associated with them, you are also declaring you have no interest in going beyond that stage. Are you interested in going beyond?"

"I can think of only two Paths I would wish to follow," Henry stated. "To be honest, I would not have made it this far without Tabitha's help, so I do not know if I will make it to Novice, let alone beyond. If I do, I would be interested in flowing with the River." This was the third largest, and second most liberal, sect. "I would also be interested in flying with the Dragons." This small sect specialized in meting out justice, and worked with the Confederation aurors and hit-wizards.

"I do not know my Path," Tabitha answered. "I may be interested in flowing with the River, or flying with the Owls." This was a group of scholars who worked outside of the sectarian structure.

"It is clear you aid your partner," the druid asked. "Does he aid you?"

"I find memorizing the material easy," Tabitha answered. "And it is easy to understand the surface meaning. To understand how it speaks to the heart, I need only see it in Henry's eyes."

"Then you are both well-paired for the moment. I am to be called Master Rock, for that is both my sect and my nature. You are assigned to my pavilion, number three. Be early to meals, at least on windy or raining days, if you wish a good seat. All partners will come and leave meals together, and be together at all times unless you are told it is free time. There are no assigned seats. You are free to wander together until supper today, or go back to your hut."

Henry and Tabitha stood outside the door of cabin three, away from the queue, looking out over the field of huts. "I wonder how many of us there are," Henry said.

"A hundred and eighty-four," a voice came from next to them. The pair turned and saw two dark-haired, blue-eyed boys their age, one plump and smiling, one thin and scowling.

"Why speak to them?" the scowler hissed.

"We are all of the Faith, no matter our life-style differences," the slightly plumper, smiling boy retorted. "I am Cadfael ap Tudur ap Mawrth ap Rhys. This is my cousin and partner Puw ab Awstin ap Mawrth ap Rhys." The Old Welsh-style names showed them to be either Hidden or at least strict believers.

"I am Henry Dorff, and this is my partner Tabitha Spellman."

"Outsiders," Puw stated with a sniff.

"Outsiders to your culture, yes. Equal members of the True Faith," Tabitha retorted.

Puw's scowl deepened. "Women were never allowed into the Priesthood in the Old Days."

"In the Old Days, we were in the Old World and before the coming of Caesar. I would never dictate to your Sect."

"And I shall not seek to dictate to you," Cadfael answered.

Puw started to turn away, when Tabitha said sweetly, "I thought partners had to stick together?"

Puw halted. He was not about to destroy his chances to advance like this. "You are correct." He sighed. "Knowing my cousin's penchant for making odd decisions, let me guess. You are both Bydol-born."

"Huh?" Henry asked.

"Muggle," Tabitha answered. "My partner is of Pure-lines. . . ."

"Nearly all Colonial," he put in.

"Right. My father is high in the True Faith, but has not had contact with me, since my mother was a Squib born to True Believers," Tabitha said, giving her approved cover story. "You may make anything of that that you wish."

Puw glowered. Cadfael observed, "I've never heard of a mixed-gender team."

"We are good friends at school," Henry said simply.

"California?" Puw asked.

"The Ysgol," Tabitha replied. "I take it you are not allowed to tell us about your school?"

"No, we are not," Cadfael agreed.

"We're in hut Fifty-four. You?"

"We are in the hut in the row next to you, in Sixty-eight." Puw scowled again. The quartet moved off.

Puw remained rather stand-offish all day. Since he didn't seem to wish to associate with anyone else they came across, he just grumbled about tagging along with his cousin, Tabitha, and Henry.



His parting shot had been, "I hope you two are comfortable together."

"And I hope you're just as cozy," Tabitha had teased back. Puw had wrinkled his nose, while Cadfael rolled his eyes.

Once inside, however, Henry looked rather nervous. "What's wrong?" Tabitha asked.

"Are you sure we'll be fine?"

"Harry, the partition blocks off the toilet, if you're shy about that. Now, look." She stripped off her robe, which was all they wore, other than sandals. "See? Not a hint of anything interesting to see." She had not started to develop in any way.

Henry swallowed nervously while Tabitha slipped on her robe back on. "Now, if you get too excited, go into the toilet cubicle, and if I'm not asleep, ask me to step out. If you don't mind, I'm going to pee and get some sleep."

Henry's mouth was hanging open for several minutes during and after Tabitha's monologue. Then he watched her lay two blankets over the spruce branches. She climbed on and snuggled in. "Turn down the fire when you come to bed."

Henry blinked, lowered the level of the magical fire, used the toilet, and went to bed. Tabitha turned and snuggled up to her friend, and soon they were asleep.

"And how is our most interesting couple?"

"Very well, after a bit of a discussion. She is a most interesting girl. Does anyone know who her family is yet?"

"No, although the list for possible mothers is down to five. You spoke to her; is she really that bright?"

"I think so. She would be a fine addition to the priesthood, but I rather suspect her path will be other than with us." The druid paused. "It's interesting that young Cadfael struck up a conversation with them. I fear he will stray from the Stricter Paths to the more liberal."

"What do you suggest?"

"Nothing. He is a fine young man, and will lead whatever sect he finds his way to."

A week later, the students were enjoying some free time. Henry, Tabitha, and Cadfael were laying in the trees. Henry was exhausted. "Tired?" Tabitha asked.

"Yes. This is just plain difficult."

"It was worse until a few hundred years ago," Cadfael offered.

"Really?"

"Really," Tabitha agreed. "We have to learn the rituals and memorize the lore and songs, but we would have had to learn a lot of information that we learn in History of Magic and some of our other classes. We only have to memorize about half what they used to have to."

They laid in silence for a while, then Cadfael asked, "What's the outside world like?"

"Don't ask me," Henry said. "I know the spreads around the dragon ranch, and the Ysgol. We get the wizarding wireless, and some magazines, and that about it."

"That's more than we get," Cadfael said in turn. "I know our village and the fields around it, and Our School. We get a weekly paper, and some of the few students with more contacts with Outside say it's pretty censored."

"Do you get mail from outside?" Henry asked.

"I don't know," Cadfael admitted.

"Approved correspondents only. Censored coming in, possibly coming out, at least for the first few messages."

"Goddess, Tabitha, do you know everything?"

"No, but probably more than any one person should."

"When you get back, go to the head of the school's Ymchwiliad and ask if you may write to me."

"The what?" Henry's Welsh was still a bit rough at times.

"Inquisition. It's a committee that tries to keep Their School religiously pure."

"What reason can I give?"

"Say you like me and hope to get to know me better. I hope to join the Owls. They probably guess you're not happy right now. If you're going to have contacts with anyone, better a girl like me, who hopes to work with the Owls, than anyone else."

"But. . . ."

"No, I'm not interested in marrying you -- I swear our culture is a bit obsessed with the question of matchmaking -- but they'll think along those lines. And you can tell me anything, and I'll be careful how I write."

"Thank you."

"Harry, what's wrong."

"Nothing. Go to sleep."

Tabitha sat up on the bed and looked at the sulking Henry, who was turned away from her.  
"Henry, are you . . . upset that I offered to let Cadfael write to me?"

"No," he said, pouting.

"Yes, you are." She hesitated. "May I trust you with a secret?"

"Yes, you may. You know I would never tell one of your secrets."

"I didn't have my thirteenth birthday last June. I had my twelfth."

"Really?"

"Really."

"You're pretty powerful for being a year younger than you should be."

"I am. I'm just not ready to start thinking about dating, let alone anything more. I enjoy being with you. I feel . . . protected, sleeping with you. I don't know what will happen in the future. You might fall in love with someone else, one of us might decide to be celibate, we might fall in love together. I don't want to think about any of this for at least a year, maybe two. I am **not** interested in Cadfael for anything more than friendship. Alright?"

"Alright." He turned and hugged Tabitha to himself, which is how they fell asleep. Since they would now be Third years, they could go to the Spring Ball. He'd worry about asking her nearer to Christmas.

At the end of the second week, eight men and one woman sat around a ritual fire, going over the partners. "Hut Fifty-four, Henry Dorff and Tabitha Spellman."

"Have you been keeping a close eye on them?" the oldest druid demanded. "No fooling around?"

"Very little," their overseer stated. "They sleep snuggled together. There has been no kissing or fondling, no flirting. Spellman has an iron will; if that's why she encourages no attention, or if she is merely still a child, I do not know."

"How do you evaluate her as a candidate?" the woman demanded.

"I would rank her near the top. She may be a bit lacking in faith. I believe her to be so honest, however, that she will drop out if she decides her faith is not strong enough. She is not pursuing this as a career step. She is searching for a Path."

"And Dorff?"

"He is a leader. If he makes it to novice, he will wish to join the Dragons. If he fails, he will no doubt become a fine auror even without the Dragon connection."

"So you recommend we keep both of them?" the woman asked.

"Yes."

"Any objections?"

"Not an objection, merely an inquiry," another druid spoke up.

"Yes?"

"They are friends with Cadfael ap Tudur ap Mawrth ap Rhys, hut Sixty-eight. My observations would say this was primarily at his instigation?"

"I would agree. Spellman seems to like him. He certainly likes Spellman. Probably a bit of puppy love on his part."

"I must ask, to inform the Board of Inquisition, do these two have any set interest yet, beyond the Open Belief? I believe you mentioned the boy is interested in the Dragons?"

"He is. Both are interested in the River, while Spellman is interested in the Owls."

"The next most open, and the two groups who try to fly above the sects with their service?"

"All three would require more of a commitment than the Open Believers ask," Henry and Tabitha's overseer from the Rock sect pointed out. "I know my opinion carries little weight with the Hidden, despite our own strict life-style, but I would say if you are to allow the boy to find his own Path, these are two for him to talk to. They will paint a true picture, not an overly pretty one."

"They must be special," another druid put in. "This is the most positive I have ever heard you be about any Outsider children."

"They will never feel comfortable in any traditional setting, let alone a Hidden one," the Rock druid replied, "but the boy's faith burns true. He will only make it to Novice with Spellman's help, but I believe he should be considered by the River and Dragons."

"Are they cheating?" another druid asked. Many students who had trouble with the oral memorization tried to cheat by taking notes or transcripts, which were forbidden.

"Not exactly. Spellman is a Dreamwalker, and I believe she helps him dream-learn."

That brought everyone up short. "That is allowed?" one finally said.

"She should not be in dream-contact until she is of age!" another declared.

"This was reported a year ago," the Rock druid stated. "The Tuatha itself declared that it is allowed, although they did not think it wise to tell the children. She was trained at the Ysgol by an Australian shaman known as 'Johnson the Dreamwalker,' who was doing a one year faculty swap with the Eagles. She is registered with the Shamans."

"It seems to me," Cadfael's overseer said thoughtfully, "that this girl is given a great deal of leeway."

"So she is," the oldest druid declared, "upon the orders of the Tuatha and the Council of Druids, and both opinions were unanimous. Do you wish to ask them to reconsider?" Since the three Tuatha members all came from the stricter sects, as did five of the seven Council members (two of whom were Hidden), that ended the discussion.

Friday, August 22, 1970

Tabitha and Henry arrived back at his family's homestead late Friday afternoon. They, along with most of their fellow students, had gone through an initiation at dawn, and they were tired. Each was wearing a small holly leaf made out of silver. While they needed three more years of training before they could lead anything beyond family prayers, they would now be able to attend most of the ceremonies, even if they dropped out of the program. This was especially important for Outsiders, like Henry. Children of Old Believers could apply to attend these ceremonies when they turned 17.

"Thank you," Henry said. "I never would have made it this far without you."

"You're welcome. It will be odd having some classes without you next month."

"We'll be all the same classes but one!"

"One for you, two for me. I'm taking Arithmancy and Runes and Magical Languages." They were both taking Muggle Studies, and Henry's family insisted he had to take Care of Magical Creatures.

"I wish you were taking Care," Henry said.

"Why?"

"So I could teach you something for a change! Speaking of changes, let's tell Mom we're back, and see if we have time to change and go for a swim."

## Chapter IX

The first thing on Tabitha's agenda for September 1 was to deal with Emily.

Emily's eyes had lit up when she saw Tabitha, but they fell when she saw the expression on the young girl's face. Tabitha tried to be gentle, concluding, "So I'm just not ready for a physical relationship. I'm not upset with you about what happened in July, I don't regret it. I like you, and I am attracted to you, but I'm just not ready." She had grown over the last year, but was still a little shy of 5'. She stretched up to kiss the 5 foot 3 Emily lightly on the lips.

Emily grabbed Tabitha and hugged her tightly. "Are you sure you don't hate me?"

"I could never hate you." They kissed more firmly, and Emily let her young friend go. She was glad she didn't have another meeting for half an hour. Maybe she would be cried out by then.

Tabitha felt a huge surge of relief as she left the prefect's room. The floor was very busy, just before lunch. All the Third years and all the Sixth years except for the prefect for the First year girls were on the floor, as was one Fourth year girl -- for a total of 20.

Tabitha went down to Suite 509 and knocked. Marge and Meg were in one room, Anna and Cindie in the other. The five girls went down to lunch together, chatting about the summer.

That night, Marge and Meg sat in their room, taking turns brushing the other's hair. This was a ritual the pair had engaged in since they had been eight years old and had started staying over nights with each other.

"Go ahead and say it, if you want to," Meg said as Marge started on her hair.

"Say what?" Marge asked guiltily.

"Complain about Cindie and Anna being too noisy, complain about Tabby, try to make me jealous again that she spent time with Cindie, Emily, Henry, and the Old Believers, and that Anna spent a week with Cindie, too. Tell me that Efa and Modlen are snootier than ever to everyone except for Tabby."

Marge pulled the brush back and glared at the back of her friend and cousin's head. Meg was the only peer who could talk to her like that, but that didn't mean Marge liked it.

It especially hurt, Marge suddenly realized, because it was true. "Alright," she said with a sigh. "Cindie and Anna are noisier than I expected. I **really** wish those crank record players didn't work here. But the music is nice, and we'll work out the noise-level. I like Tabby, although not as much as you do. I wish we'd thought of asking her to visit at least one of us. . . ."

"I suggested it. You talked me out of it."

"That was only after she'd been invited everywhere else. We can work things out after Yule." She sighed again. "I do like her, but she's so . . . different from all of us! She's nice; she's helpful; she's pretty. She's so smart it hurts. When I'm with her, I love her, but something about her bugs me when we're not with her."

"I really like her, Margie."

"Really?"

"I like her like you like Emily."

"What!" She lowered her voice. "I mean, what do you mean?"

"You know what I mean. I saw you looking at her looking at Tabby all during dinner. You're crushing on Emily." She sighed in turn. "I'm crushing on Tabby."

Marge laid the brush down. "I'm not just jealous of Tabby, you know."

"I know." Meg suddenly smiled. "So, should we be miserable in our crushes, or should we do something about them?"

Marge smiled. "Let's do something about it."

Saturday, September 5, 1970

Meg laid on Tabby's bed. It was a coolish afternoon, but Tabitha had one of the window panels open in her room. Meg and Tabby were studying Runes and History together. Tabitha was sitting in her easy chair across the room, and Meg was trying to figure out if she should go through with her plan to get closer to her friend. She took a deep breath, and hoped for the best. "Tabby?"

"Yes?"

"Can we give the Runes a rest for a while?"

"Sure." She read Runes and the ancient languages already, and was just helping Meg anyway. "What should we do?"

"Can I try some palm reading?" Meg was taking Divination and Runes as her extra courses. She sat up and gestured to the bed next to her.

Tabitha smiled and moved over next to her friend. Meg took her hand, and studied the palm intently while Tabitha studied her friend. She, Megan, and Marge were now about the same height, Tabitha perhaps half an inch shorter than her friends. Tabitha's hair had grown a bit redder, Marge's blonder. Marge had developed more feminine hips and an A-cup bust, while Megan's figure was half-way between Tabitha's undeveloped form and her cousin's figure. After a few moments, Tabitha asked, "I thought they started with tea leaves."

"What? Oh!" Megan blushed prettily.

Tabitha grasped her friend's hand firmly, and said in her friendliest voice, "If you wanted to hold my hand, all you had to do was ask." Then she added, "Why don't you tell me all about it?"

Meg sat on Tabitha's bed, feeling very nervous. She had explained her tentative feelings for Tabitha, and Marge's feelings for Emily, and her and Marge's complex relationship. Tabitha had listened in that wise way she often had, thought hard, and then said she'd fix everything up and asked her to wait. That had been twenty-five minutes before.

Finally, Tabitha came back into her room, smiling in a satisfied way. "What's happened?" Megan asked.

Tabitha sat on the bed and said in her usual straight-forward way, "I suppose I should tell you. First of all, Emily seduced me this summer."

"What? I mean . . . she . . . Wow!"

"I really like Emily," Tabitha said, "but it was just . . . too much."

"You mean . . . actual. . . ."

"Sex. Yes. Oral and manual and lots of mutual rubbing." Megan turned bright red. "That's actually about how I felt about it, once I had a chance to think about it after I left. I wasn't ready for anything like that last summer." Seeing how nervous Megan was, she went on. "I thought Emily had accepted things, but she was pretty nasty to me the other day, saying that she should have known better than to get involved with a baby, who only wanted to cuddle and hold hands, and have little tea parties." Megan's expression cleared up a little. Tabitha smiled. "Actually, that sounds about right for me. How about you?"

"Oh, yes! but what about Marge?"

"Marge is with Emily right now. And you know what Emily's doing?"

"No!" All sorts of lewd images came into Meg's head.

Tabitha leaned over and whispered conspiratorially, "She going to . . . fix tea."

Megan snorted with laughter. "Seriously," Tabitha said. "I told her to go slower with Marge."

"Okay, Marge is taken care of," Megan said. 'At least, I hope so,' she mentally added. "What about Henry?"

Tabitha bit her lip. "I like him, too. He's very . . . snuggly." Meg snorted. Tallish, muscular Henry did not seem 'snuggly' to her. "Well, he is! I just feel I'm not ready for boys. That can cause too many problems."



"I agree," Megan said. "I like them, but the older ones are snotty and the ones our age still seem too young."

Tabitha pulled a tea pot out of compartment of her trunk. "I have several kinds, if you don't mind it plain."

"I don't, if you have peppermint."

"I do."

The pair happily gossiped all afternoon, holding hands and drinking tea. They went to dinner together, arm in arm. This was, fortunately, fairly common behavior for pairs of girls who were just friends, at least if they were in the same year or just a year apart. Larger groups often walked together, holding hands or with arms linked.

As the pair neared the Great Hall, they came across Emily and Marge, walking slowly and looking at each other wistfully. Tabitha moved her hand so that she could clasp Meg's and then grabbed Emily's. Emily and Marge looked startled, but then Emily caught on and moved her arms around Marge and Tabitha's waists. The other girls did the same, and they walked slowly into the Hall, laughing. Henry and Tom, watching the group from behind (not that they noticed each other), frowned.

The next morning, a large owl dropped a letter in front of Tabitha. "Cadfael?" Henry asked as she glanced at the contents.

"A note about him, actually, from the Chief Inquisitor, asking me to fill out a questionnaire."

"Who's Cadfael?" Marge asked.

"A boy we met at training in August. Rather sweet, although Henry didn't like him."

"He kept making sheep-eyes at you," Henry complained.

Tabitha glanced up from the letter. "He's a Hidden, or something close. I have to promise not to, quote, 'seduce him by Outsider ways,' unquote, if I am to write to him without supervision."

"Do you like him?" Emily asked.

"As a person, yes. Beyond that, no. He's sure he wants to become a druid, but I think he's tempted by the Outside life, even if he doesn't have much of an idea what it's like."

"What are you going to do?" Meg asked.

"Well, I want to tell them I'll write to Cadfael, and that while I'll answer any of his questions honestly, I won't try to 'seduce' him." She paused and looked thoughtful. "I think I'll talk with Mister Pedr."

"Why him?" Cindie asked, wrinkling her nose. Adda ap Luc ap Pedr was one of the three History teachers, and also taught the Magical Traditions course to the Second years. He did not think highly of those from any but strict Old Believer backgrounds. He had been teaching at the Ysgol since 1880, and had grown more disapproving every year.

"Because he's from such a strict background, he might be willing to help me phrase the letter better."

Tabitha's fall term was a great deal of fun. Her classes and druidical training were easy. She continued to spend much more time coaching her friends than she ever had to spend on her own work. Where she had spent much of her first two years snooping around the school and trying to gain mere experience living, now she spent most of her free time in her room. She wasn't moping or depressed, she was practicing the lute and had also taken up the small Welsh harp, which she and two of her Old Believer House mates were helping Henry and the other two Old Believers in the House year to play. They needed to learn the basics by the next summer.

When she wasn't practicing, Tabitha and Megan took to hosting little teas on Saturday morning. When they just had girls, they had it in Tabitha's room or in Megan's suite. Every other week, they engaged one of the small rooms on the Common Room floor, and invited some of the boys they knew, in their House and out. Henry and Jim came every time, as it was obvious that Henry liked Tabitha and his roommate liked Megan. They also invited other students, although not as often.

Sunday afternoons, the nine Third year Green girls gathered in the suite to do their hair and nails, gossip, and eat cookies. Despite their disparity of backgrounds, all nine were determined to work together. There were plenty of dissensions around the school to point up the dangers. So these girls came together, and although they teased each other about boys and crushes, no one went over a line where feelings could be hurt.

The pair had no idea how far Marge and Emily might have gone. They did know that Marge spent a fair amount of time in Emily's room. Prefects had a small bedroom, a sitting room, and 1/2 bath (toilet, sink, and shower), and some Saturday nights Marge spent the night with Emily.

Tabitha and Megan had not gone far at all -- massages and light kisses. The few Saturday nights they slept together, sleep, and some cuddling, was all they did. Their relationship was based more on emotional comfort than anything else.

Neither Megan nor Henry were very happy with Tabitha writing to Cadfael at first, but she only sent him one letter a week, and wrote it when she was alone. Since neither of the two people closest to her felt it took anything away from her time with them, they grew used to the idea.

Tabitha was very careful with her writing, certain that someone besides Cadfael would be reading the letters. Cadfael was, unsurprisingly, a bit less discreet. Although Cadfael never broke any real taboos (such as mentioning the exact locations of the Hidden School or any of their settlements), he did go into greater detail about everyday life amongst the Hidden than many of his fellows would have been comfortable with his revealing.

Barely noticed in September and October were small news items reprinted from the European press and reports from North American reporters in Europe. Dark activities were on the rise, and unsigned proclamations were being left, threatening those of Muggle and mixed ancestries.

When the morning newspapers arrived for Monday, November 2, however, the news was hard to miss. A small group of British Muggle-born had organized a pro-Muggle-born pressure group in 1967. They and their families, Muggle and magical, had all been massacred Halloween night and into the early morning of November 1. 48 people -- 18 Muggle-born wizards and witches, 15 of their magical spouses, 3 Muggles married to wizards, and 12 children. Over all eighteen houses, a mysterious, smokey green sign floated for several hours.

This was the first time the Dark Mark had been seen. It would be far from the last.

For most of the students at the Ysgol, the attacks rated a few moments of conversation at most. Tabitha, remembering the events of her first Christmas at the Ysgol, and some of the thoughts and memories she had seen inside of young Malfoy's head, had little doubt that the mysterious Lord Voldemort, or someone much like him, was involved. She decided to keep a scrapbook of news reports on the Dark forces arising in Britain, and wondered if she would ever see the name 'Malfoy' associated with it.

Tabitha sent out subscriptions to as many news periodicals as she could. Of all her friends, only Henry, who hoped to go into law enforcement, took any interest in Tabitha's new hobby. Meg, Cindie, and Anna had more fun crocheting with her instead.

Even Henry, who was always happy to read her latest clippings, was much more excited about sports -- he had gained one spot on the House Junior Quodpot team and another as a reserve beater of the Green Quidditch team the previous September, and there were games of some sort every Saturday and Sunday. Whenever Henry was playing that autumn and winter, Jim, Meg, and Tabby could be found in the stands, huddled together under a large afghan, which Tabitha had crocheted from dozens of different shades of green yarn that summer. On other weekends, Henry would join them under the afghan.

It was in early December, that the Headmaster called Tabitha to his office. "I see you're smiling, Miss Spellman. It's not often I get to see smiling children in this office."

"Certainly I'm not the only student you see on a regular, if non-disciplinary, basis, Headmaster?"

"I do have to make general inquiries at times, but nearly all of that I can delegate. And certainly you are not the first ward of the school, no, not by a long shot. As you know, you are not even the only ward of the school in the Green dragons, although I grant you your circumstances are different than any other."

"I'm certainly glad to hear that, sir!"

"Yes, well, as I was saying, you are not the only ward at present, but it is your turn to speak with me. So, tell me how do you feel you are doing?"

"Academically. . . ."

"Academically, you are brilliant. We pass on the academics. Tell me, how are your anxieties?"

"Still there, sir, although not as intense as they were. The Dreamwalking, and the meditation, helps."

"Good. Now, in your First year, you made a number of what we might call casual friends. In your Second, some ripened into true friendships, especially with Miss Poppins and Mister Dorff, and to some degree with Miss Banks, Miss Snyder, Miss Tyne, Mister Mitchell, and even Mister Lawrence."

"And Anna Tanfani, sir."

"Of course, and several of those are even truer friendships now. Tell me, did none of them invite you home over the holidays? And if so, why did you refuse?"

"Cindie only has her mother, and Anna's family is also very small," Tabitha pointed out, defending her friends. "I would really be in the way."

"Go on."

"Well, Margery Banks is a friend of mine, but she's still just a little jealous of Megan spending a lot of time with me. I wouldn't want to cause a problem there."

"I see, go on."

"Tom is going to have to stay," Tabitha pointed out.

"That is true." Besides having no family, it had been discovered Tom Lawrence had a minor magical gift for languages. (Meaning he could probably learn as many as seventy-five. Those with a major magical gift for languages could sometimes learn over 200.) He would be learning another set of languages over the break. "Go on."

"Well, I'm glad I visited Emily's clan last summer, but I don't think I'd be comfortable going back, sir."

"I see. And Mister Dorff's?"

"I think his mother would start planning our wedding," she said frankly. "I don't want to even think about that for another five years, at least!"

"Very well. I have received an inquiry from the family of Cadfael ap Tudur ap Mawrth ap Rhys, that's the Danadl clan. . . ."

Tabitha giggled. "Really? The Nettle Clan?"

"Yes," the Headmaster said in a slightly reproving voice. "They are curious if you have any interest in visiting them."

"Not at this time," she said firmly. "I respect their beliefs and practices, but I have no desire to stay any place without indoor plumbing, especially in the winter."

"I see."

"Will that make them happy, because it shows I have no desire to seduce Cafael away, or will it make them worry all the more about how much contact with me will contaminate him?"

"Probably both," the Headmaster said with a smile. "Cadfael is the current star of his clan academically. He is almost certain to make acolyte at the least, and will probably go on to full druid. They could use him as a clan advocate in the various Councils."

"You know, just as an experiment, I tried to make a flow chart of the different Councils that make up the Old Believers. They really make no sense."

"Except that it works," the Headmaster reminded her. "I hope you destroyed the charts."

"Of course, Master," she said in Welsh.

"Very good, child. So, you are staying here over break?"

"Winter break, yes, sir. This summer, it may be fun to visit again, before and after training."

"Very good, child. Be off with you, then."

Tabitha's friends were unsurprised to receive crocheted gifts as well as the traditional silver charms. She had made over a dozen sets of winter caps, mittens, mufflers, and slippers. She sent afghans to Mrs. Snyder, Mrs. Dorff, and Emily's aunt. She had also sent a cap, muffler, and mitten set to Cadfael as well as a token of friendship. She had not received anything from him, but didn't expect anything before Twelfth Night.

Monday, January 4, 1971

Tabitha was very surprised to be summoned to the Headmaster's office again. Besides the Headmaster, there was a man that she remembered had interviewed her back when she first

awoke back in 1968. There were also two men in druid robes and two other men in the tartans she recognized as the Danadl tartan. She wondered if Cadfael had somehow gotten in trouble. Or worse, gotten her in trouble.

"Child," the Headmaster said kindly, "we believe we have traced your mother."

Tabitha stumbled backwards into a chair. "Really?"

"It is not proven beyond all doubt," one of the tartaned wizards stated.

"No, but it is proven beyond all reasonable doubt," one of the druids stated even more firmly. The two tartaned men seemed will to accept that.

"There was a girl born in 1939. Her powers never fully developed. She preferred to leave in early 1956 rather than embrace a celibate life." Squibs and nearly all near-Squibs, in stricter Old Believer cultures, were not allowed to breed within the culture.

"She was born Elan, daughter of Tudur ap Lloyd ap Padrig ap Rhys of the Danadl clan. She changed her name to Ellen Lloyd, and was integrated into a Muggle community in central California. She disappeared, pregnant, in February, 1958," the intelligence man said. "We discovered she changed her name to Helen FitzPatrick and gave birth to a daughter, named Theodora FitzPatrick, June Twenty-first, 1958, in Hilo, Hawaii. She would move three times with her daughter, changing family names each time. From May, 1959, until August, 1962, they lived near Naples, Florida, under the name of Jones. From August of 1962 through January of 1964, they lived in Venice Beach, California under the name of Johnson. From then until March, 1968, they were back in Florida, near Sarasota, under the name of Lloyd again."

"Ah. . . ." the Headmaster said. He turned to Tabitha. "There is a magical beach resort near by. Any accidental magic on your part would not be noticed."

"She was involved in a Muggle auto accident in February, and died in late March. A man showed up three weeks before her death, but no one can remember what he looked like. The daughter disappeared right after the funeral. We have found a few school pictures amongst the girl's classmates, and there is no doubt of the chain of events." The intelligence agent looked at Tabitha. "There is no evidence about who the father is."

"The girl left the clan," one of the tartaned wizards stated. "This girl might be related by blood, but she is not of the clan."

"I understand that," Tabitha said. "I am, however, still associated with it, am I not?"

"Well. . . ." the other wizard started.

"Shall I quote the appropriate lore?" Tabitha asked in Welsh. "Need I request a ruling of the Hidden Council? I ask nothing more of the clan, other than the genealogical tables of the lost girl. I would not wish to marry a first cousin."

"No! you are entitled to more than that," the Headmaster said. "I represent your guardians. You are entitled to at least the small allotment."

"She is, since we find the case probable, if not totally proven."

"It cannot be proven now, unless the father steps forward," the Headmaster said. "I have one other question. . . ."

"The family operates an inn, in a Hidden location," a druid said. "She would have known many of the Hidden, and those druids, officials, and members of the Stricter Sects who deal with the Hidden."

The younger of the two tartaned men stood and said in English, "If these links are true, then you are of course not of my clan, but you are still my maternal first cousin, once removed. I believe you know my son, Cadfael."

"I am pleased to meet Tudur ap Mawrth ap Rhys," Tabitha said. "I do have one other question that you might be able to answer."

"Yes?"

"Do I look anything like my mother?" Cadfael and his father had short legs and long stocky bodies, black hair, and dark blue eyes.

The man looked at her. "A little. She did have your green eyes, a well-known trait in your mother's mother's lines. You look most like a younger sister of your mother's. They tend towards dark red or auburn hair, however. Your father must have bright orange or reddish blonde hair, along with that length of leg."

"Thank you, sir."

"You are not of the Truest Believers, but you have done your family proud. Should you be asked to join a traditional clan," (all full druids were required to do so, those in training were often asked between their third and fifth summer of training) "we would be honored if you chose us. By what name shall we call you?"

"I shall be honored to join you under the name I was given last, Tabitha Spellman."

"We shall enter that name in the bloodlines, even if there must be a question mark. Good day, Miss Spellman. Oh, since I was entering the world, I brought you this from my son." He handed her a small box. "We wish you well."

The five men left, and Tabitha opened the box. There was a silver dragon charm, which the Hidden used as their hospitality tokens. Tabitha arranged with the Headmaster for the surplus money from her previous years and her small allotment to be invested. She hoped to acquire a house elf and a home some time after she graduated from the Ysgol.

Tabitha did not share her ancestry with anyone right away. She eventually did with Megan and Henry, who took the news without any judgmental reaction. Cadfael was informed by his family, and he became an even more detailed correspondent.

## **Chapter X**

Spring was busier for Tabitha and her friends than the fall had been. Third years spent an hour a week learning basic dueling. Even though the power of Tabitha's hexes and curses were at best average, she knew more than any Seventh year and had decent reflexes.

Of the 21 students in her House year, all but Cindie, Anna, Megan, and Margaret seemed to enjoy the dueling. All 17 of the remaining students were hoping to win a spot on the House dueling team. There would be four team members and up to four alternates.

Henry, to no one's surprise, claimed the first place in late April, while Tabitha managed to become the third alternate.

The other bit of excitement for the spring was the Spring Ball, which was held this year on May Day (it was usually held either on the nearest Friday or Saturday to May 1 or the one right after Valentine's Day).

Henry had asked Tabitha the day he came back from winter break. To his surprise, Tabitha had readily agreed. Jim had asked Megan the same day, and all the girls had been asked before the end of January, which prevented any displays of jealousy.

Whenever Tabitha looked back at the magical photos she had of the evening (one just of herself and Henry, one with them and Jim and Megan, and one of their whole table of 12), she thought she and Henry looked cute, trying to dress as adults. Henry, tall and broad for his age, wore dark green dress robes with green velvet trim so dark it was almost black, which set off his dark auburn hair.

Tabitha, now slightly above average height for her year and very lean, wore Victorian-style robes in the same green as Henry's, although with lighter trim. The pair did little dancing, but enjoyed themselves.

Henry had hoped the dance might lead to more formal dating. Tabitha told him to ask again in the fall, unless he wanted to give up on his druidical training, or at least give her up as a partner.

Henry agreed to wait, and settled for a kiss on the cheek, and then asked her to visit the ranch both before and after their training during the summer. Cadfael, at least, did not ask for Tabitha to visit during the upcoming summer. She did receive a large number of other invitations. When the term ended on June 23, Tabitha was ready. Marge was leaving to spend two weeks with Emily, while Tabitha was going to spend a little more than a week at Megan's family farm in the northern peninsula of Michigan, near the shores of Lake Superior.

Viewed from Lake Superior, no one would guess that just behind the hills that marked the lake shore lay a magical village. It was small, two dozen houses, most with shops attached or on the ground floors. Around the village were a further two dozen farms. There was another small village a few miles away, hidden in a cove and protected by many charms that disguised the entrance from Muggles. Some of the villagers there were fisherman, others had shops or



tended small farms as well. There was also a magical co-op that made cheese, some of which they sold to a Muggle distributor.

The Poppins farm laid between the two villages. The house was fairly large, although more haphazardly put together than any Tabitha had seen before. Emily's clan's houses were fairly conventionally built, and the Dorff ranch, although eccentric in design, was sturdily built. The Poppins house only stood through the charms that kept it together. They grew their own food in fields and orchards, kept a few cows and a herd of goats, and gathered lots of honey. The family also made mead.

The family was multi-generational and fairly extended. Forty-two people lived on the farm, from Megan's younger sister, 6, to her paternal great-great-great grandmother, age 192. Megan had her own tiny room in the top of a crooked six storey turret. To a Muggle out on the lake, the top would appear as a tall pine tree. To Tabitha, it was an amazing view to see over six miles of wooded land to the lake itself.

Tabitha of course helped around the house with cleaning and other small chores, although she kept well-away from the live-stock. She decided she really didn't need to practice again this year how to milk a cow or a goat. Her few experiences the year before had convinced her it was a skill she had no great interest in mastering. She did take out her lute and Welsh harp and entertained the family after dinner. One of Megan's great-uncles often pulled out a fiddle, to play along.

Megan and Tabitha now approached each other more intimately, as Tabitha initiated her friend much like Emily had initiated her the previous summer. They hadn't planned on moving in that direction, but decided it their first night without even discussing it. Tabitha was more gentle, more sharing, and more tender with Megan than Emily had been with her, however. At the start of the next term, they would decide they had done so in part because they had total privacy at night, and in part because they had a limited time together. No matter what they did, they would have the summer to think about it.

The only thing Megan had worried about was having the highly academic Tabitha home with her when the grades arrived. Her family, however, understood once they saw Tabitha's grades, that whomever they compared Megan to, it shouldn't be Tabitha:

<i>Arithmancy</i>	. . . . .	.105*
<i>Astronomy</i>	. . . . .	99
<i>Charms</i>	. . . . .	93
<i>Defense</i>	. . . . .	96
<i>Herbology</i>	. . . . .	96
<i>History</i>	. . . . .	.105*
<i>Potions</i>	. . . . .	.105*
<i>Muggle Studies</i>	. . . . .	.105*
<i>Runes</i>	. . . . .	.105*
<i>Transfiguration</i>	. . . . .	90
. . . . .	<i>Total</i>	. . . . . 99.9

*\*Highest Possible Grade*

Tabitha was of course generally happy with her grades, although she wished she had more power -- that was the only thing keeping her grades in DADA, Charms, and especially Transfiguration under 100.

Tabitha was portkeyed from Megan's to Cindie's on July 2, where she would stay until July 9. Her stay was more relaxing than her time in Michigan, although of course less passionate as they were just friends.

Anna showed up the mid-morning of July 7, arriving in the nearby Valley by Muggle bus. Mrs. Snyder took the three girls back to the Valley July 8, for an excellent dinner at a small Italian restaurant that was so good even Anna was impressed and then on to the drive-in for the movies.

When Tabitha arrived at Henry's, he tried to treat her as something like a girlfriend. Tabitha soon set him straight, and had him reciting his lore under privacy spells. (Druidical students were allowed to practice magic in relationship to their studies.)

Henry wasn't sure why Tabitha was making him repeat his old lessons all Friday afternoon and all day Saturday, even in their dream-time together, but he had long ago learned to follow her lead, especially in their druidical studies.

On Sunday, they left via portkey a little before noon. Their instructions had reminded them to eat lunch before leaving and to bring a canteen of water.

"Names?" a tired acolyte asked as they managed to stagger to their feet.

"Henry Dorff."

"Tabitha Spellman."

The acolyte said nothing to them. Two teens in novice robes came forward. The acolyte handed each a sheet of parchment, and they led Henry and Tabitha away separately.

"Are you allowed to tell me anything?" Henry asked in Welsh.

The novice said nothing.

"I take that as a 'no,' Henry said. He saw they were coming out of the woods into the same valley they had studied the year before. He could see that at the far end of the encampment, there were many small groups of people. As he came closer, he saw that the groups were actually a large number of seated people, grouped anywhere from twos to fives, each seated in front of a student who was standing.

Henry realized what would be happening. He would have to recite the lore he knew. He hated recitations, but was grateful Tabitha had to some degree prepared him.

The novice left him standing some thirty-five feet from the nearest student. Five druids -- two full druids, two disciples, and an acolyte -- came from the hut area and four of them sat on stools about six feet from him. One druid took the parchment from the novice.

One of the disciples left his stool and walked closer. "We would like to hear you Recite all that you have been asked to learn, since the first lessons. If possible, please do so in order. Do not shout, just retell it as you have been taught. If you need to pause between lessons to drink, please do so. Alright?"

"Yes, master."

The disciple gave him a friendly smile, and sat on his stool. "When ever you are ready, student."

Henry swallowed nervously and began reciting.

Two and half hours later, Henry stopped. He was exhausted and sweaty, his throat was raw. The five judges looked at each other. They nodded, and the disciple stood. "Thank you, student. You may go to the same hut you stayed in last August."

Henry managed to nod, and staggered off to his hut. He was only a bit surprised to see Tabitha and Cadfael talking between their huts. Cadfael saw him first, and told Tabitha. She turned, and with a big smile on her face, ran to Henry and hugged him.

"What?" Henry demanded.

"You made it!"

"Well, I don't think I made many mistakes. . . ."

"You didn't make any real mistakes," Cadfael told him. "Did they ask that you repeat anything?"

"No."

"Then you passed. If you hadn't, you would be on the way home now."

"Really?"

"Really," Tabitha said.

"So you two passed, too?"

"Of course, we'd be gone otherwise," Cadfael said with a shrug.

"Don't be mean," Tabitha scolded, "he's still in a bit of shock." She turned back to Henry. "Why don't you get cleaned up and change into another robe?"

"Good idea," Henry agreed.

The trio was surprised that Cadfael's cousin apparently failed. Just before dinner, one of the acolytes led a girl over. She was placed into Hut 54, while Henry was moved in with Cadfael. Morag was the strict portion of the Rock sect, and seemed a bit stand-offish. Time would tell, Tabitha decided, if that was because she'd been thrust into an established situation and felt like an outsider, or if she just didn't like the idea of rooming with someone who was from other than a strict background.

The next morning, after the sunrise prayers and breakfast, the remaining students (now down to 132), were given a huge exam which (with a few breaks) would last until dinner. The third and fourth days, the students performed mock rituals, which included the rote recitation of prayers and formulae. The fifth day, the students had to play their Welsh harps and sing a traditional song.

The sixth day, the group rested, and awaited the results. To some of the students' consternation, the students were told to bring their knapsacks and all possessions to lunch.

July 16, 1971

After lunch, each student was called from the pavilion. The Hidden and others with Old Welsh names were called first (a little more than half of the remaining students), and then the others would be called alphabetically. There was still half an hour wait between the last student with an Old-style name and the others.

Just before Henry was called, Tabitha leaned over and kissed his cheek. "Good luck."

Henry was therefore smiling as he walked out of the glen towards the main valley. A few dozen yards on the path through the woods, a disciple came up to Henry. "Student Dorff?"

"Yes, master."

"Tell me, Student Dorff," he asked as they walked, "do you believe you could have achieved your current level without the dream-learning Student Spellman has been using with you?"

"I don't know," Henry answered. "I think I might have, but it would have been a tremendous struggle."

"An honest answer. Your test results were outstanding, your ritual work was average. Your playing could use improvement, but that is usually true for students who have not been raised hearing the harp. We are, however, concerned about your dependence on Spellman."

"Yes, Master."

"Many from inside the Heart of the Religion seek to become druids because it is an expected path. Most of those from the Outside seek to join because they see us at the center of magical culture and desire to use us as a stepping stone on a career path. The others often seek us out in order to join the Hidden or Stricter sections of the Traditional Sects. You are one of those who partially has sought us out to advance what you hope will be your career. However, that is balanced by the power of your faith. Therefore, we offer you a choice. Separate yourself

from Spellman, and do all the remaining work yourself. You may fail this summer, you may go on as far as you are able. Or continue as you are, and stop after your initiation to novice."

"What do you mean by 'separating' myself from Tabitha?"

"No more dream-learning, no private lessons. To prevent temptation, you should just become casual acquaintances."

Henry shook his head. "No. No, that I will **never** do." He stopped, forcing the disciple to stop as well. Henry tried to think of how to say what he meant in the formal Welsh he had been taught -- largely taught to him by Tabitha. "I will always remain true to the Faith, no matter if I am just another member of a casual gathering of the Open or a novice within a stricter sect. Tabitha will always be so close to my heart that I cannot and will not separate myself from her willingly."

"You are fourteen, she is thirteen. You are far too young to try and form a life-bond."

"I do not know if we will marry, but we will always be friends of the heart. Send me home now, if you must."

"No, I gave you honest choices. Come along."

When Tabitha was called, she walked with a senior druid. "You are the first student I have seen today who did not look nervous."

"Why should I be nervous?" Tabitha asked. "I have done everything correctly, have I not?"

"You have," the druid conceded. "However, you do have doubts."

"I have doubts about the afterlife. I do not know if we simply die, or if we are reincarnated as we are taught, or if we go on to some other plane of existence. I do not have doubts about the Powers around us. I do not have doubts about the potency of the Rituals to bring us closer to the Powers."

"Very well. If you do not resolve your doubts, you may not progress beyond acolyte."

"I understand, Master."

"Do I need to tell you where to report?"

"There are three buildings in the compound. One is for the Hidden and Strict Observers who wish to remain as purely old-fashioned as possible. I hope I am not there. One is for those you have the greatest doubts about, the other is for the rest. Am I in the former?"

"How are the buildings arranged?"

"Each is a three storey building with two towers. The first floor is the communal dining room and study rooms. The second and third floors are the main living floors. One tower has the teachers who are not acting as floor monitors. The other tower also has students."

"Exactly. Yes, you are in the tower of the former building. The top floor, in fact. You are there because we trust you. The doubts in your case are purely yours."

"Yes, Master."

"Go to your friend. Hurry down when the dinner bell rings. You have the longest distance to go."

The 'tower' was a full six stories above the three-floor base. The third, fourth, and fifth floors were sealed off. The top floor only had five rooms -- three small bed chambers, one with a toilet and sink, the final just held a cold water shower.

Tabitha was happy to see Henry, and only slightly surprised to find Cadfael was the third person on the floor.

"Some climb, huh?" Cadfael said after she had hugged them both.

Tabitha was grateful for the near-privacy and the fantastic view. Their third summer of training was mostly devoted to learning sacred songs by heart and more reciting of the lore they had learned previously.

The only problem Tabitha had that summer was with Cadfael and Henry, who constantly irritated each other and her. When the summer training was over, Tabitha returned to the dragon ranch, where she would spend a week. She decided she needed to have a talk with Henry, and resolved to do the morning after they went back to his home.

Right after breakfast on the morning of July 31, therefore, Tabitha dragged Henry outdoors and to the most secluded spot she knew of.

"What?" Henry asked for the fifth time that morning.

"Harry, what is your problem?"

"Err . . . what do you mean?"

"You and Cadfael were constantly sniping at each other, and you were actually vile to a number of the other students."

"You know why. . . ."

"Tell me."

"I love you."

"I like you, Harry. I don't care about any other boy. That may or may not change; after all you're just fourteen and I'm a year younger. So, let me tell you your two choices. Alright?"

"Alright. . . ." Henry answered fearfully.

"One, we can become acquaintances instead of friends. Two, forget the idea that we are going to be some grand romantic couple in school. But I do like you. I will not date any other boy than you, unless I give you fair warning, and you will not date any other girl without telling me. We can hold hands, and we will say we're dating."

Henry looked confused as he tried to untangle what Tabitha had said. Then he smiled. "You really like me like that? Really!?"

Tabitha sighed. "Boys." She gave him a light peck on the lips. "I take it we're dating?"

"Please."

"Just remember, do not press, Harry. I'm not ready and I'm not interested. Okay?"

"I'll do my best, and when I don't I know you'll remind me."

## **Chapter XI**

Tabitha returned to the Ysgol on Monday, August 9. Mary Tyler, one of the Magical Symbols and Languages teachers, was one of the Green faculty on duty on that summer. She had left a note for Tabitha to stop by her office when she returned.

Tabitha was glad to learn that her room assignment still hadn't changed. Sometimes the Third and Fourth years were displaced by necessity to other floors, but this year she and her friends were staying put.

Tabitha checked on Miss Tyler's office, and found she was in. "You wanted to see me, Miss Tyler?"

"Ah, Miss Spellman. Welcome back. I take it everything went well with your training?"

"Yes, Miss."

"Good." She knew she couldn't ask the details. "Now, Miss Swank and I were talking, along with Miss Weiss. You've been exposed to small-town Muggle life, and life in various magical homesteads. We are concerned that you haven't had much exposure to magical town life, or any time in a city. We talked it over with the Headmaster, and, not to make things a mystery, we were wondering how you would like to spend some time in Newton and New Amsterdam."

"Really!" Tabitha said happily.

"Really." Miss Tyler leaned over and said confidentially, "To tell you the truth, Miss Weiss and Mister Williams are dating and wish to visit New Amsterdam. I think they are even less used to a huge Muggle city than you would be. Now, I shall travel to Newton Thursday evening and return late Saturday morning. Do you wish to accompany me?"

"Yes, please!"

Tabitha had never traveled by floo, and found her first experience very disconcerting, ending with her taking a forward somersault into the Lookout Inn. "Watch out, young miss!" Strong arms helped pick Tabitha up.

"Ah, thank you, Mister Jones," Miss Tyler said. Tabitha felt herself being cleaned up by the man and Miss Tyler.

"First time flooing?" the man asked.

In answer, Tabitha coughed.

"I take that as a yes. Toby, get the ladies a cold lemonade or butterbeer."

"Lemonade for us both, please."



Tabitha was finally able to open her eyes, and saw she was on a large veranda, which did indeed overlook the valley Newton was in. She knew the statistics and the history. Newton had been the original capital of the Old Believers and First Settlers back in the 1500s. The new capital, in western Ontario, was merely known as 'the Capitol,' after the primary building complex.

The town of Newton was a very large magical town by European standards, average by American. It had a wizarding population of about 3300 and a goblin population of about 600. The Outlook Inn was on the north end of the valley, while an access road touched the south end. Some actually managed to drive autos there, although none were allowed in the town itself.

A young boy brought them mugs of lemonade, while his father had returned to the main dining room off the veranda. "Excuse me, do you go the Ysgol?" he asked Tabitha.

She swallowed a little lemonade, and answered, "Yes, I'm going to be a Fourth year Green dragon. This is Miss Tyler, who teaches there."

"Oh! It's nice to meet both of you! I'm Toby Jones. I start this September."

"I'll look for you, Toby," Tabitha said.

"Father said your rooms will be ready when you come back. Did you want to order dinner now?"

"What's the special today?" Miss Tyler asked.

"Oh, today it's a choice of shepard's pie or a Mediterranean salad with chicken. Fresh strawberries and cream or strawberry ice cream for dessert."

The women both ordered the salad and ice cream for later, and made their way down the path to town. They would walk the town the first afternoon, and then actively shop the next day, stay a second night, and leave the following morning.

Tabitha knew about all the various magical instruments and appliances. That was of course very different than actually seeing them. Despite being tempting, she bought very little. She had little need, after all, until such time as she decided to set up a household. She did buy a set of storage jars with permanent preserving spells on them. Tyler was amused to see her student fill them with teas, nuts, and dried fruits rather than candy.

Tyler was a bit surprised to see Tabitha visit Pwy Llath, to see if she could find a better match than the wand she had been given. After an hour and a half, she hadn't found anything as good, and let the quest go.

"I think you have an admirer," Miss Tyler teased Tabitha at dinner.

Tabitha saw young Toby was hanging about in the background. "I hope this one is Sorted into another House." She frowned. "Am I particularly attractive?"

"For a young girl who has just started to develop, yes, I would say most boys would think you attractive. Are boys bothering you?"

"Well. . . ."

"Are girls bothering you, too?"

"A bit of both to tell the truth. I'm just not ready for boys."

"I see. Anything you want to talk about?"

"No, nothing I can't handle. I just would prefer not adding to the problem."

"Well, as you said, we can hope young Master Jones is Sorted elsewhere. What do you think of Newton?"

"It's marvelous! I knew about all the magical gadgets, but I never got to see most of them before. I certainly don't need to buy much, although I would like to go to a music shop tomorrow, but it's a lot of fun just shopping!" She paused. "I might invest in one of those record players that work by crank, magic, and even electricity."

"How about clothes?"

"I have enough robes and underclothes and such." Tabitha paused and thought. "I could use a good pair of hooded cloaks, one for the winter and a slightly lighter one for the autumn and spring."

"Do you go out much? You don't take Care." The castle was so large many students never had to go outside during the winter.

"Well, not to play or anything," she said in the tone of any teen being accused of acting childish. "I go to the Quodpot and Quidditch matches, and I also walk over to the Eagle camp a few times a month."

"Are you friends with some the Eagles?"

"Some of the faculty, actually. And of course I'm out for most of the ceremonies, but I wouldn't wear a regular cloak for those."

"Good point. We'll go check out some of the cloaks, and the two music stores. They would probably have good deals on the record players, too. Are you going to be looking for records, too?"

"Oh, no. I should be visiting lots of music stores in New York, magical as well and Muggle."

Marcus Williams actually proved himself quite comfortable in New York as well as New Amsterdam. Rebecca Weiss was totally overwhelmed by both. Tabitha found herself sort of in between the pair in her feelings. She felt a bit overwhelmed by the sheer size and bustle of

New York, but not to the point where she felt paralyzed, like Weiss did a few times when confronted by a larger-than-usual crowd or blatant Muggle rudeness.

Even parts of New Amsterdam, in a section of the docks that Muggles saw as run-down warehouses, were built on a large scale. Tabitha concentrated on shopping for music (sheet music and records), and a few odds and ends for her friends, especially Tom Lawrence, who was missing his Muggle life a bit. She also had fun in the Muggle book stores, ransacking them for titles on ancient history. She was glad she had been able to borrow a magically-enlarged carpet bag to store it all.

Williams agreed to teach her the charms which would prevent the records from getting scratched or from wearing out, and Tabitha helped the adults figure out their way through Manhattan, with some help from Anna, who came in from Brooklyn to show them the main the Muggle sites.

Tabitha's Fourth year was a bit more complicated than her previous ones. She and Megan kept their relationship going, while continuing their more casual relationships with Jim and Henry. The two girls found a lot of satisfaction with the situation. The two boys, who didn't have a clue about the girls' intimate relationship, found things a bit more frustrating.

While she was glad Toby Jones had been sorted into the Blues (although he still stared at her often), Tabitha became even friendlier with Tom Lawrence. He was learning a wide-range of languages, and often came to Tabitha for information on the cultures and magic associated with them, even though she only spoke sixteen languages. He was also a year behind her in his druid studies, and she helped him a bit there, as well.

Tabitha did find it amusing to see other girls flirt with Henry. None of the girls of her House year were about to poach on her territory, but a Third year Green, and a number of Fourth and Third year girls from the other Houses saw him as fair game. Tabitha felt secure, however. With their sessions working on their druidical studies, general homework sessions, their work in the dueling club (where Tabitha had moved up to first alternate), and above all their continued weekly dream-sessions, Tabitha spent more time with Henry than any other girl possibly could. Whereas her relationship with Megan was fully sexual, Tabitha and Henry only progressed to full kissing over Christmas and had not gotten to petting by the end of the year. Henry, not knowing any better, was fairly happy with the progression of their relationship, and was proud to escort her to the Spring Dance (right after Valentine's Day that year) for the second year in a row. By the end of the year, they were acknowledged as a couple by their most ardent pursuers, and most of the flirts went elsewhere.

Tabitha kept up with her scrapbooks on the growing violence in Britain and Ireland. Many Muggle-born and half-bloods were found tortured throughout the course of the year. Tabitha saw that the Dark Wizard was now universally referred to as either 'You-Know-Who' or 'He-

'Who-Must-Not-Be-Named' and his followers were now referred to as 'Death Eaters.' Tabitha even did a history paper comparing Voldemort with earlier Dark Wizards. She wondered, as she looked at the perfect grade, if students had done the same when Grindelwald was trying to exert power.

She had found another person interested in the subject besides Henry. Tom Lawrence was passionately interested in the wizarding culture he now found himself part of, as well as the Muggle culture he had left. Tabitha felt a little sorry for him. He hadn't made the same sort of close friends she had. They weren't very close, but she saw she was the closest thing to a friend her fellow orphan had. Understanding that Tabitha saw him as a younger brother, Henry had even gotten over his jealousy of their spending time together.

As the end of her Fourth year moved towards its close, Tabitha was again given a large number of offers to visit. When she found out that Tom not only hadn't gotten any offers that year, but that he had not left the castle grounds since arriving in 1969 except for his druidical studies, Tabitha made an appointment with the Headmaster and worked out her summer schedule.

Tabitha would stay at school from June 23 through July 2. She also arranged for a day trip to Newton for herself and Tom. From July 2 through July 9, she would be at Cindie's. From July 9 through July 20, she would be with Megan, and from then until August 2, she would be at the dragon ranch with Henry. Her druidical training was from August 2 - 23, and she would return to the Ysgol on August 23. She hoped to make another trip to Newton before school started with Tom.

The summer went off exactly had Tabitha had hoped. Her grades were as high, or even slightly higher in the case of Charms, than usual. She felt she had helped Tom feel a bit more socially at ease, had rested well at Cindie's, and had a passionate time at Megan's. She had had to resist Henry's offers for a more intimate relationship -- she was both uncertain of her own sexual attitudes towards boys and certain that necking with Henry while in their bathing suits was as close to increasing their intimacy as she wanted to get.

At the August training, Tabitha found herself in the 'main-stream' building, while Henry remained in with 'doubtful' students and Cadfael was transferred in with the stricter students. Without Tabitha giving him dream-learning, Henry had to struggle much harder than usual, and in fact just barely was passed. He would have to work harder, and hope Tabitha would visit him when they were back at the Ysgol if he hoped to be invited back for the important Fifth year of training.

The Fifth year at the Ysgol was in many ways the most important. It was of course the students' WT year (the North American term for O.W.L.s). The outcome of the WTs would determine the final two years of study, and narrow most students' career choices. The few students from the stricter backgrounds would have to decide if they wanted to return to Strict Observance and start craft apprenticeships, or ask for another two years of training, risking possible banishment if their sect and family elders felt they had become to 'Outsider.'

Even with her encyclopedic knowledge, Tabitha found her Fifth year far from easy. She might have nearly all the information she needed at her mental command, but she still had to

organize it for the progressively difficult essays. She was also spending much of her little free time helping Henry and the other two Old Believer students struggle with their new material, and spending hours of her weekend dream-time teaching Henry. Because the rest of her classmates were even more stressed out, however, Tabitha did manage to move up to the third spot in her House year dueling team.

Tabitha was not too busy to keep up with the news from Britain and western Europe. 'He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named' and his Death Eaters had moved from brutalizing the Muggle-born, Mixed-bloods, and those married to them in Britain and Ireland to some random killings, which now sometimes also occurred in the Netherlands, Belgium, and parts of north-western France. The Ministries seemed to be successful only in turning away attempts of other national ministries and the International to help out, claiming that they were about to have the situation under control.

The WTs and N.E.W.T.s were always held in early to mid-June. For Tabitha and her class, that meant between June 4 and June 15. She breezed through her theoretical exams, and managed to work her way through the practicals without making any obvious errors. As always, she felt her charm-work and transfiguration were only slightly above average at best. She knew her theory was brilliant enough to overcome anything other than a disaster in those two subjects. She just hoped she had done well-enough to score E's, which she needed to move on.

Once the WTs were over, most of the Fifth years collapsed in exhaustion. For those striving to make the rank of Novice Druid, the most they could do was go to the final Quidditch matches Saturday (the junior Blues versus the junior Reds, which started at 9:30 and lasted either to 11:30 or whenever the snitch was caught, which ever occurred first, followed by the regular Blue versus Red teams, from 1:00 until the catching of the snitch or until noon Sunday, whichever came first) and the final Quodpot match Sunday at 1:00 (Green versus Orange, Green won the Quodpot Cup, but the Browns managed the junior Quidditch Cup and the Blues the regular Cup that year). After that, they had to prepare for a Full Recitation (which would take between three and four hours), written exams, ritual reenactments, and a short musical performance.

Candidates from all over North America converged on the oldest tower of the Ysgol, 96 in total this year. Between the school and Weston was a recreation of a great Stone Circle. Those who made it through the testing would be given the First Full Consecration at dawn on the Solstice. Those who were to be allowed to continue would receive Second Consecration at sunset.

The Recitations were on morning and afternoon of the 19th, the musical performance was that night. The short written exams were the following morning, the ritual reenactments that afternoon.

After dinner the evening of the 20th, Tabitha, Henry, Ofydd Pwy, and Awstin Mihangel, the four remaining of the six Greens who had started off together, sat in one of the small lounges at the base of the Green tower. They were waiting to hear the Summons.

"What do we do if we don't make it?" Awstin asked for the fifth time. He had had the greatest difficulty that year.

"Not being called is not a reflection of our faith," Henry reminded them. "Faith calls us all to worship. We are still equal in the Faith, even if we are not called."

Tabitha tried to comfort them without revealing that it was rare for a candidate who reached this stage not to be allowed to take the First Consecration. The real question was who would be allowed to take the Second.

Shortly before sunset, the Headmaster and a Druid entered the room. "Henry Dorff, Awstin Mihangel, Ofydd Pwy, Tabitha Spellman, you are all Called to greet the sunrise with the True Believers. Do you heed the Call?"

The four students stood, bowed, and each said, "I accept the Call."

The students flooded to near the stone circle, and then were separated for ritual baths. The students then sat through the night in meditation. When the first rays of dawn appeared, they rose, stripped off the robes, and greeted the longest day as they were brought into the world along with nearly all the full druids and most of the lesser orders. After they finished the prayers, they were anointed. They were druids, novices, but druids. For a brief time, from the start of the dawn prayers until the last prayer after the last novice was anointed, they partially shared a magical bond, forming part of one gestalt

Afterwards, they dressed and ate breakfast. As they finished, one of druids, acolytes or higher, approached the Novices and led them away. 24 were led back to the Ysgol, 72 were taken to tents.

Tabitha was one of the 72. She scanned the crowd for Henry, but didn't see him. After she rested in the tent, she looked again in the late afternoon. She knew he had been told he probably wouldn't advance before, but she had hoped.

She did find Ofydd Pwy, who confirmed that both Henry and Awstin had been sent back. She also found Cadfael and introduced him to Ofydd.

That evening, the group went through the Second Consecration. It seemed strange not to have Henry nearby. She hoped that the Dragons would still consider him.

The next day, Tabitha learned that she had been accepted by the River sect, and would be considered by the Owls if she went on to higher training after the N.E.W.T.s. Novices who wished to study towards becoming an acolyte who were not already members of a traditional clan could either apply to membership in one, or join one of three 'new clans' -- one had been created in the late 16th century while the other two had been created in the 18th century. This was needed as druids were associated both with sect and clan functions. Tabitha decided to apply to her mother's clan, the Danadl, even though few of them led lives Outside.

Since she was continuing her training, she had to stay for two weeks of additional training before going back to her room. To her friends' dismay, Tabitha was staying at the Ysgol this summer. She had accepted one of the two positions for female Green Prefects. She would be supervising the First years, while Margaret would be the Prefect for the Sixth years. (Henry and Ofydd were the boys' prefects.) She would be the one Green prefect staying the summer.

## Chapter XII

Tabitha moved her things from 504, which had been her home for the last five years, down to the prefect's suite in 324. She was allowed to floo to Newton on Saturdays, and went two Saturdays in July to pick up some odds and ends for her tiny suite.

WT results came out on June 16.

	<i>.Theory.</i>	<i>Practical</i>	<i>.Total</i>
<i>Arithmancy.</i>	<i>.O</i>	<i>.-</i>	<i>.O</i>
<i>Astronomy</i>	<i>.O+</i>	<i>.O</i>	<i>.O</i>
<i>Charms.</i>	<i>.O+</i>	<i>.E</i>	<i>.O</i>
<i>Defense</i>	<i>.O+</i>	<i>.E</i>	<i>.O</i>
<i>Herbology</i>	<i>.O+</i>	<i>.A</i>	<i>.E</i>
<i>History</i>	<i>.O+</i>	<i>.-</i>	<i>.O+</i>
<i>Potions</i>	<i>.O+</i>	<i>.O+</i>	<i>.O+</i>
<i>Muggle Studies.</i>	<i>.O+</i>	<i>.-</i>	<i>.O+</i>
<i>Runes</i>	<i>.O+</i>	<i>.O+</i>	<i>.O+</i>
<i>Transfiguration</i>	<i>.O+</i>	<i>.A</i>	<i>.E</i>

Tabitha was very happy with her results, and sent off letters to her friends, wishing them well in their results. She met with the Headmaster and those teachers staying over the summer to determine her schedule for the fall.

The problem was she could only take seven classes, and she wanted to take ten: Arithmancy; Basic Medicine; Charms; College Prep (so she could attend a Muggle university); Defense; History; Muggle Studies; Potions; Runes; and Transfiguration.

Tabitha was unsure of her career path. She was primarily interested in spell building/weaving, potions, and in both wizarding and Muggle culture and history. That allowed her to cut out the idea of Medicine -- she would learn some of the same material in N.E.W.T. Potions. She also took the Muggle S.A.T. exam. If she scored well enough on both the verbal and math portions of the exam, she might be able to forego the College Prep course.

Arithmancy and Charms were of course required for her hopes of becoming a Spell Weaver. Defense and Transfiguration were also seen as very useful. The Headmaster pointed out that Sixth and Seventh year Defense was mostly learning dueling and fighting techniques, which she already knew the theories behind. If she stayed with the dueling club, she would get plenty of practice. So, in the end, she wound up taking Charms, Transfiguration, Potions, History, Muggle Studies, Runes, and Arithmancy, since she found out in August that she had scored an 800 on her verbal SAT and a 610 on the math.

As Tabitha worked through that, she decided that life was good. She could look back over five years of accomplishment at school and with the Druids. She had good solid friendships, a wide-range of acquaintances, and satisfying relationships with Henry and Megan.

The rest of July was not as happy a time for Tabitha as she had anticipated. The Saturday after she received her WT results, Tabitha also received an owl from Megan.



While Megan was uncertain if her relationship with Jim would last past school, she was certain that her relationship with Tabitha wouldn't. Therefore, while she wanted to stay Tabitha's close friend, she felt they could no longer be lovers.

Tabitha was stunned. The news came out of nowhere.

Despite her background, Tabitha had managed to construct a very happy and productive life for herself. She now found that all that happiness was ground to dust in the aftermath of her first real love affair crashing. For the rest of July, Tabitha moped and pouted around the school and its grounds. It was the worst weeks of Tabitha's life so far, at least after her first month of consciousness back in July, 1968.

The teachers and the students present who knew her could tell Tabitha was suffering from a broken heart. Most were confused when Tabitha denied any trouble with Henry. Some of the female teachers, remembering back to their own school crushes, guessed both the true cause and the other person concerned.

Tabitha spent most of the daylight hours walking the forest paths around the school. As her angst entered its second full week, the Headmaster consulted with his teachers, two of whom let him know in private what they thought the problem was.

There being no ready potion to cure a broken heart, there was little the Headmaster could do, except ask his counterpart at the Eagle camp to ask his charges to keep an eye on Tabitha as she wandered the woods.

As attached as she had been to Megan, Tabitha was still not totally non-functional because of the break-up. She was careful in the woods, planned out her up-coming course work, checked out the files of the Third and Fourth year girls who were staying on her floor, and then spent every night playing Bach on her lute and blues records loudly on her phonograph.

This sour mood was at least conducive to Tabitha's catching up on her scrapbooks, which she had let lapse in the run-up to the WTs two months before. She noted that in addition to the individual murders and tortures, one family (a Muggle-born, a half-blood, and their children) had been tortured to death. That was more than enough to keep anyone in a poor mood.

Friday, August 3, 1973

Some days in July and August, although rare, could soar to the mid-nineties around the Ysgol. The average high temperature might be only in the mid-70s, but this Friday it was over 90, even in the shady woods. Tabitha sat on a smallish elm which had fallen over a spring, in shorts and a t-shirt, her bare feet dangling just over the cold water, her wand tucked behind her right ear.

She was deep in her own thoughts, and so had no clue there was anyone near, until she heard a voice ask, "What troubles you, sister?"

Tabitha looked up and blinked. What looked rather like the Hollywood image of an Indian maiden was standing a dozen feet away -- an attractive girl of about 16 or 17 in a buckskin

dress, moccasins, and head band, all beaded with bone and antler, her long hair in two braids. Many of the most traditional Natives wore native garb, but rarely of this quality.

Something of the surprise must have registered. "What?" She looked down. "Oh, this. We were having a formal meal at noon." She looked puzzled, and added, "Then the Chief took me aside and directed me here, saying I was to ask my sister what troubled her." She shrugged. "I don't have a blood sister, but when I saw you, I thought he might have meant you."

"Maybe," Tabitha agreed. She was about to introduce herself when she recognized the patterns on the girl's dress. "Are you a Chemung?"

"I am," the girl stated. During the 1780s, the decade after the magical Colonials had destroyed nearly all of the magical Iroquois and the Muggle Revolutionaries had destroyed the power of the Iroquois Confederacy, the only surviving Iroquois wizard, a Seneca who now went under the name of Chemung (from the river where the great defeats had occurred), had collected all the Iroquois he could find with any trace of magic and moved them and their families to a fairly inaccessible area in west-central Pennsylvania. There had been just over a thousand, and the numbers hadn't really increased since. They still lived a very traditional life-style, hunting and gathering as well as tending fields and orchards.

Unlike the old Iroquois, they also kept their names as secret as the exact locations of their valleys.

"I know you," the girl said. "You're the knowledgeable Old Believer who's a Dreamwalker."

Tabitha did not recall seeing this girl before, but many shied away from strangers. Still, the girl obviously knew her. Few members of the Eagles took the full seven year course of study at the Ysgol, or even the first five years. About half took a special four year course, usually from age 13 to 17, concentrating on potions, a combination of Defense and Creatures, and Charms. Most of the others came part-time over a ten year period, most often in the summer, alternating with training with their own wizards, shamans, and medicine men. Most groups were taught in three month units (December-February, March-May, June-August, September-November, with the fewest attending December-February).

"That's me, Tabitha Spellman, walking encyclopedia. What may I call you?"

The girl smiled and nodded. "You really do know a little about everything. Why not call me 'Maple'?"

"Alright, Maple. Did the Chief say anything else?"

Maple looked shy. "He said I should listen to you, and you should listen to me, that together we might at least find a sympathetic listener." She looked back at Tabitha. "So, why are you out here, looking sad?"

"Broken heart," Tabitha said simply.

"Ah."

"And you?"

"I'm not certain why the Chief sent me." Maple looked indecisive for just a moment then decided,. "Well, why not. Actually, he might know some of the reasons why I'm not happy. I certainly do **not** have a broken heart. In fact, I will never have my heart broken by a boy."

It took Tabitha a few seconds to figure that out. She gave Maple a twisted smile. "As it happens, my heart wasn't broken by a boy, or a man for that matter."

Maple looked at her, her mouth open from shock. Finally, she said, "Really?"

"Really. I do have a boyfriend, whom I like very much, but we haven't gone very far and I don't know if we ever will. I know at least right now that he's the only boy I can imagine wanting to kiss me. But for nearly three years, this one girl and I have been very close, and for two years, we have been . . . intimate. She decided soon after she got home for the summer that . . . that. . . ."

"That she wanted to move on to boys full-time?" Maple asked softly.

Tabitha nodded. She looked away, tears again streaming. Maple hesitantly approached the tall, lanky young woman with the long bright red hair, and finally laid a hand on her shoulder.

Tabitha cried harder, and Maple hugged the taller girl to her shoulder. "I understand that it hurts. Yet you've had something that I'll never have."

"Why is that?" Tabitha managed through her tears.

"Because that sort of behavior isn't acceptable to my people. There are so few of us, we are all expected to have children, one way or another, so long as there's no force. I really can't imagine living my life in any other way, or with any other people, so I must return. So, even though I've been allowed to extend my stay for a full year to study potions instead of leaving in November, I know that when I return, I must have at least one child, and that everyone would be most comfortable if I do that in a regular relationship. Marriage, if you prefer the term."

After resting in Maple's arms a few more minutes, Tabitha sat up and transfigured a pair of oak leaves into a handkerchief and blew her nose. "It seems as if you've already found yourself an alternative, even if it's far from an ideal one," she pointed out when she'd recovered her poise.

"You may be right."

"So what are you studying now?"

"The usual for us, but I want to concentrate on potions, and will likely only study that after November."

"You're in luck," Tabitha said.

"How is that?"

"I am brilliant at potions. If nothing else, I think we can both use a friend right now, and I think I would be allowed to help you."

"Thank you," Maple said, taken back.

"What type are you most interested in? Healing ones from common indigenous ingredients? Ritual potions? Something altogether different?"

"Mostly the first," Maple admitted. "I'm hoping to come up with some new ones that only use local ingredients." The Chemung had few resources to buy outside products.

Tabitha looked around in thought, then said, "How about a pain and fever reducer that doesn't depend on rabbit, willow, or birch?"

"Sounds good."

Tabitha pulled together a pile of leaves and stick, and transformed it into a large basket with a handle, and then transformed a rock and a pebble into a bottle and stopper. "Do you have any hickory trees left in your valleys?" From the little she knew, they would have once been more common than willow or birch trees in Maple's area.

"Oh, yes." She shook her head sadly. "I think those lands under magical guardianship are the only ones where the hickory survives, let alone thrives like they do in ours."

"Good. We need some of the immature nuts. If you're free, we can run the potion this weekend, and see how it works."

"You don't know?"

"It should work, but since we're inventing it, it will need to be tested."

"We're inventing a potion?"

"You did say you wanted to," Tabitha pointed out. "This will combine ideas from the Old Believers, the Cree, and the Seminoles, adapted for your ecosystem. Fill that up with spring water, and then we'll gather the ingredients. We can ask for permission for you to stay with me this weekend and try it out."

"Now wait a moment. . . .!"

"Oh, I'm not going to ravish you! Come on!"

'That's almost a shame,' Maple said to herself.

In less than three hours, they had filled the large basket, gotten permission for Maple to stay at the Ysgol until early Monday morning and found time for Maple to change into everyday buckskin, gotten permission to use the student potions lab, and were already preparing the ingredients. They would prepare the ingredients in two ways, one using the cauldrons, retorts, and other lab equipment, the other using traditional Indian equipment (eg boiling baskets and the like). Afterwards, they would subdivide those potions and add the more traditional bases, so the differences could be gauged.

The two also ate dinner in the lab, which is when Maple asked one of the questions that was bothering her. Tabitha had explained the rationale for each of the 33 ingredients, and why they were being prepared as they were. As she saw the huge quantities of ingredients boiling away, she turned to Tabitha. "Do we really need this much?"

"Well, we'll be reducing this quite a bit," Tabitha answered. "We have what, two batches of ten galleons going right now? We'll reduce it down to a total of three by the time we're done. These ingredients aren't as potent as the blood and bark, and if we started off with twenty galleons of the usual potion we'd still be reducing that down to about six."

"That's true," Maple admitted.

"Remember, the idea here is to create a fever and pain reducer out of what for you are more common things, not one that's more effective."

"That's true, too," she admitted. "So now there's nothing to do except tend the fires and make certain the baskets don't burn through?"

"Exactly. Still, the regular batch should be done by Seven-thirty. We can clean up and flavor and bottle that while the traditional mix takes its time. And even there, we should be done by Eleven."

"Why are you doing this?" Maple asked directly.

"Because I'm bored and lonely, because I have this huge amount of knowledge in my head and it's fun to actually use it instead of regurgitating it, and because you are cute and were nice to me."

"Oh. . . ."

They finished their stew and went back to observing the cooking and writing their notes -- and getting to know each other as people a little bit better.

Maple woke up with aching muscles. The second thing she noticed was that she was laying on something far too soft to be comfortable. Then she realized she was laying against something warm, if less soft. Memories flooded and she hissed in a combination of pain, confusion, embarrassment, and worry.

"Good morning."

"Good morning. . . . I don't remember you in my dreams."

"I wasn't in them. In case you've forgotten, you were practically asleep on your feet, and didn't want to sleep in one of the spare rooms."

"I know. This mattress is too soft. My entire body aches."

"If you won't think it too decadent, you can take a shower. If you won't think me too forward, I could massage you first and then in the shower. It doesn't have to go any further than that."

"Could it?"

"If you want."

"I do."

It was nearly noon before the pair made it to the potions lab. They gathered up the various combinations and copies of Tabitha's notes and brought them to Miss Swank, who besides being her Head of House was one of the three Potions teachers, and Miss Weiss. They would check the potions and then arrange for trials.

After lunch, Tabitha asked her friend, "What shall we do until dinner?"

"May we please go back to your room?"

"Of course." They went back, hand in hand.

To their considerable surprise, there was a note from the Eagle camp, granting Maple permission to stay at the Ysgol throughout August.

"What do you think about it?" Maple asked.

"If you're asking if I'd like you to stay, then the answer is yes. Do I also think it might be hard to let you go in September? Yes."

"I wonder why they're allowing it."

Tabitha shrugged. "Living a traditional life-style isn't always easy if you know about modern ones. They know you aren't happy with the traditional choices you've been given, so they're giving you a chance to see the alternative. I went through something a little like this with a traditional Old Believer, although except in the summer training we're just correspondents. I don't criticize his culture, I don't prettify ours. There are some really awful aspects of our culture. There's a madman and his followers butchering people in Britain for an ideology, there are the conflicts between the different segments of the culture here and around the world, not to mention the problems with the Muggles. The wards that the Old Believers helped your people create keep you away from the evils of the world, as well as from its material progress. There's really no way to separate them completely."

"I'm sure there is a lot of ugliness in the world," Maple said. She stood and removed Tabitha's robe and underwear. "Right now, all I care about is beauty." Tabitha smiled at her shorter friend, while Maple gazed at her. Tabitha had a light tan on her face, arms, and shins, but the rest of her was creamy white. "May I ask a personal question?"

"Of course."

"Do you shave there, or don't European girls have hair there?"

"Oh, we do, some more than others. If you'll let me depilate you, you'll see why I've kept mine public area clean for two years."

"You're my guide, I can but follow. And tonight, I hope to see the real you in my dreams."

## Chapter XIII

Sunday, September 1, 1973

Maple woke up a little after dawn and stretched. This was likely the last time she would be waking up in Tabitha's bed. She wouldn't miss the too-soft mattress, but she would very much miss Tabitha. She wasn't sure if she was in love with the girl, or if she just had a great wealth of respect and affection for her. Hopefully the latter. It would make their separation easier.

Maple would be returning first to the Eagle camp, and then in just under a year, back to her world, better equipped in every respect than she had been just under a month before. Tabitha had been an inspired teacher of life. Maple now better understood the compromises that all people had to make as they traveled through their lives. Most people did not even realize they were making them, but Tabitha was well-aware of most of the ones she had made. Anyone looking at her would see a beautiful, well-adjusted if very aloof, brilliant young woman. Maple had learned the how much that picture was just an image that Tabitha projected. Her extreme experiences at 10 could have crippled Tabitha, it instead made her sense of self and self-control the strongest of anyone Maple had ever or would ever come across. This in turn forced Tabitha to stand apart from the people around her. Only Henry, Megan, and now Maple herself had been allowed even a glimpse of the tremendous emotional depths as well as the towering intellect. Friendly, caring Tabitha was really very lonely. Understanding Tabitha's compromises helped Maple understand and accept hers, even embrace most of them.

She sat up on the too-soft bed and stretched. Yes, she would miss the hot showers and indoor plumbing, she would miss Tabitha's gentle love-making and intelligent concern and conversation, she would miss sharing dreams -- sometimes she had felt she was swimming in the warm, comforting sea of Tabitha's love when visiting Tabitha's better dreams -- but she would not miss this bed.

She would be going back materially better off as well. She would be taking a set of cauldrons and other lab equipment. Maple had felt a bit guilty when Tabitha had taken her to Newton to shop, but had let herself be convinced. No Chemung had taken a fifth year of potion study in almost a hundred years, and the other three primary potion makers were over 135. The others could create the basic potions, but potions could be an exacting calling and few Chemung could spend the time to stay in constant practice.

Maple picked up her new wand. Most Eagles used generic wands, which did a decent-enough job for the basic work they needed. Maple was surprised at how wonderful a proper wand felt. She found her new wand so interesting she didn't even hear the door open.

"Having fun?"

She gave Tabitha a small smile. "To a degree. This has been a wonderful month."

"It is," Tabitha agreed. She embraced and kissed her friend's forehead.

"Ukúwæ," Maple said, "My darling Red Oak. I'll think of you when I taste unösta'shæ' and uthöta'ktö'."

"I taste like sassafras and raspberry?"



"To me."

"Then I'll think of you when I taste . . . uskwai'ta' and uköhsa'," she teased back, meaning ginger and honey. They kissed lightly. "Uköhsú," Tabitha murmured, "my darling Maple."

The girls were walking down to breakfast when Tabitha felt Maple stiffen beside her. Looking up, she saw the Eagle chief, two other Native Americans, and the Headmaster.

"It's time to come back, daughter," the Eagle chief said, "unless you intend to stay here."

"If those are my only choices, then I suppose I must go," Maple said sadly.

"I understand your concerns and your sacrifices," one of the others said softly. "We will help you be happy with your choices. Now go, while I talk with your friend. I shall see you before I leave."

"Miss Spellman," the Headmaster said, "remember to meet with the head prefects when the First years start arriving."

"Yes, sir." Tabitha watched her friend being led away.

"She's not being sent into exile, let alone execution, you know," the man said to her.

"Are you the chief of the Chemung?"

"Those would be the terms for both in English," the man agreed. "I wanted to thank you for befriending . . . what did she have you call her?"

"Maple."

"Really? That was her mother's nickname for her. As I was saying, thank you for befriending Maple. I knew she would not desert us, but she longs for something we cannot supply her."

"Are you going to force her to marry?"

"No, not marry."

"But she needs to have at least one child."

"She should, but again I shall not force her. Do you know anything of our culture?"

"I know the general ideas of the Iroquois, but nothing more than that."

"Then remember, our property and ancestry are matrilineal. While most of our longhouses have for some reason more women than men, she has been the only heir to hers for some years. It would make things easier for all if she had a daughter."

"I see. Thank you for explaining that."

"You are a novice druid, are you not?"

"I am. I hope to go on to acolyte."

"Very good. After Maple leaves next year, you may owl her. Address it to Maple, but tell the owl to take it to the Great Longhouse of the Chemung, or the Shamunk, if you prefer our pronunciation. I shall see that it gets to her. And, should she owl you, you may freely ask the owl to wait to take the response directly back to her. More importantly, if she and you both wish, you may visit her in two summers."

"Really?"

"Really. We do allow the occasional member of the Confederation Government to visit, and the occasional Old Believer as well. I hope you both at least stay in enough contact for her to ask your advice on potions -- I understand you hope to train as a master."

"I do, but I'm sure you'll find Maple is quite a knowledgeable and capable witch." 'Especially since I helped her dream-learn all the native lore and potion principles I could,' she added to herself.

After the floor meeting that night, Tabitha managed to get her First years into bed and then took a shower. As she brewed herself some peppermint tea, Tabitha looked at the corn husk doll Maple had made for her. She had also promised to make Tabitha wampum to symbolize their friendship, but that would take several years. Right now, all she had was the doll, her memories, and one wizarding photo that a White dragon had taken of the pair.

She moved over to a piece of furniture she had ordered back in May. It was a small cabinet with four sets of narrow shelves above it. Although it was a Roman idea rather than a Celtic one, she was using it as a shrine.

The top shelf had just two photos: the one of herself and Maple, and one of herself and Henry at the last Valentine's Ball. The second shelf had the doll, while the other shelves were empty. The top of the cabinet just had an incense holder and a candle. She replaced the photo of herself and Maple just as there was a soft knock on the door.

Opening it, Tabitha was a bit surprised to see who it was. "Megan," Tabitha said somewhat formally. "Come in. I was going to have some peppermint tea, if you would care for some."

"Thank you." Tabitha had added a second chair, a rocking chair. Megan sat on the old stuffed chair while Tabitha sat on the rocker.

"How was your summer?" Tabitha asked politely.

"You hate me, don't you? You're furious."

"No, I'm not either. I **was** furious, and terribly hurt, but I could never hate you." She poured the tea.

"I understood why you wanted to stay this summer, but I felt very hurt by it," Megan said casually.

"You broke up with me because I didn't feel able to visit anyone this summer?"

"No, but the fact that you didn't visit **me** hurt, and helped me decide that we wouldn't have a future together."

"Have you and Jim set the wedding date yet?"

"No, but at least that's a possibility. I want a house, husband, and children. I don't regret our relationship, never think that, but it's not the sort of relationship I want in the long run."

"I see. And when did Margaret remind you of that?"

"Marge? She didn't . . . oh, well, I don't think that was the reason. . . ."

"Of course not." 'She's only been hinting about it since Emily graduated,' Tabitha thought.

Megan blushed, but snapped back, "From what I hear, you weren't lonely. Sleeping with an Indian! How discrete of you."

"Jealous?"

"Of an Indian? Please!"

"You dumped me, and I went through two weeks of hell. I'm so sorry I didn't suffer enough to please you!"

There was a wealth emotion in Tabitha's voice, although she had not spoken loudly. It seared through Megan's heart, and she felt ashamed.

"I'm sorry," Megan said sincerely. She sipped her tea.

"So who told you about Maple?"

"Some of the Red Pure-Bloods, of course." The Red dragons Pure-Bloods wouldn't care what Tabitha did, only that she had crossed racial lines.

"I'll have to kiss Henry at breakfast near their table. That should stop most of the rumors."

"Good luck. I'm sorry I hurt you like I did."

"I know. I understand."

Megan stood and they embraced, and then kissed warmly and deeply. "I'll miss your kisses, as well as everything else," Megan said.

"Thanks. I'll miss you, too." 'More than you or anyone else will every know,' she thought. They kissed lightly, and Megan went off to bed. By leaving much which was really unsayable unsaid, they were able to part friends.

Monday, September 2, 1973

"Tabby, we need to talk," Henry said to Tabitha over the phone the next morning.

"We have Charms at Nine. . . ."

"I know. Let's eat now, and then talk."

"It must be important for you to call me at Seven!"

"It is. Meet you in front of the elevators."

"Shit."

"Good morning?" Tabitha said, although it came out as a question.

"Not really."

"Then to heck with breakfast," Tabitha said. She dragged Henry down to the dungeons and into one of the study rooms. "Speak. No, let me guess, you heard some rumor about me and Maple. That because we spent a lot of time together, we must be doing something disgusting. Right?"

"It would explain a lot about how you treat me, and other boys. Have you been using me, Tabitha?"

She decided that while she would happily lie to just about anyone else on Earth, the one person she shouldn't lie to about this was standing in front of her. "Emily Tyne seduced me the summer after our Second year," Tabitha told him. "I liked the physical act, but not with her. Megan and I were lovers for almost three years, but she has decided to devote herself to Jim."

Henry was stunned. He finally managed to say, "So you have been using me!"

"No, I have not. I sincerely like you, and am attracted to you. But I'm afraid to push our relationship any further."

"Why?"

"Because. . . ." Tabitha tried to think of how to explain herself.

"Tell me."

"Because you're the only boy I can see myself interested in, but we're not heading for traditional lives, Harry. Meg and Jim could marry right after they graduate and live on the family farm and live normal lives for the next hundred and fifty years, and if they don't end up

together, she'll find someone else to live that life-style with. She'll almost certainly be married within a few years of graduating. If you become a hit-wizard, you'll never get married. I won't be ready before at least seven more years either. I like you, I might even love you, but we're not likely to be together. . . ." Henry had to admit to himself that was true, although he hated that it was, ". . .and I can't afford to fool around with any boy."

Tabitha took a deep breath and went on, "And it was easier, and it felt more natural, to sleep with girls. No one thinks much about it, because there is a lot of it -- and a lot of it, probably most of it, is innocent, but that just covers up a lot of goings on you couldn't imagine." Henry looked dazed at that. "And, of course, it's easier to get a reputation as a slut than as a lesbian, and both are treated equally badly. I will brazen this out, Henry, but I will **not** lie to you, I will not use you, I have not used you, and I will not let you use me. I care for you, but I prefer girls to boys, at least right now. You can abandon our relationship, or even our friendship -- you can even confirm the rumors and maybe even have me striped of my prefect-status, but I will not openly lie to you."

"I won't blackmail you," Henry said slowly. "I won't abandon you. Can you swear you really care for me? That you've not just been using me?"

"I swear. Would you like me to make it a formal oath?"

"No." Henry put his arm around his best friend. "I love you. We've been through a lot, and we'll get through this. Since we'll likely both be here through Christmas, we'll sit down then and define our relationship. Until then, we go on as we have, and by then, we might know where we're going."

"Thank you, Harry."

"You're welcome, Tabby. Let's go lose some House points for smooching in class."

The flurry of rumors about Tabitha and Maple died out over the first few weeks of the fall term. A few students from other Houses made snide comments, most often before dueling matches (Tabitha managed to hang on to fourth place on the team). There had also been a few minor scuffles, with the Greens defending her 'honor' against Reds or Oranges, and in one case, young Blue dragon Toby Jones attacking two Third year Oranges. By Christmas, the rumors had died off.

Maple and Tabitha only met in passing a few times that term, and they kept those meetings public -- Maple was receiving some harassment for over-association with a non-Native. The night after the last meeting-in-passing, however, Tabitha was startled to find herself in Maple's dreams. It was the first time she ever found herself in another person's dream while not in physical contact. Johnson the Dreamwalker had warned her of the possibility -- she would have had to had been in dream-contact with the before, they both would have to be dreaming about the other, and both would have to deeply want to establish the contact.

The pair had a long talk and comforted each other with their troubles, but agreed it would be best if they continued to stay apart in the physical world. They would, however, try to

strengthen their dream-connection, although they later found out they could not make it over the distances involved after Maple left the area.

Tabitha and Henry went nearly everywhere together. The only time they were apart for any length of time was when they were in different classes and when Henry was a Quidditch practice (he had given up Quodpot that year). While they had the usual opportunities for light hugging and kissing, there was little they could do about anything more intimate (which was certainly on Henry's mind, at the least).

As the winter holidays approached, two of Tabitha's charges decided to stay over, as did one of Henry's. Most of the school would empty out, and they could sit down and discuss their future, at least in the short term.

The pair joined in the solstice celebrations with the other Old Believers.

Wednesday, December 26, 1973

"Did you have a nice Christmas?"

"I'm wearing the hat, scarf, and mittens you made for me, how could I have NOT had a great Christmas. And I'm sure Mom and Dad loved the afghan."

"Really?"

"Well, I'm sure Mom loved it."

"Be sure to thank them for these dragon-hide gloves. And yes, I've sent them a note, but you can send them my thanks as well."

"Yes, dear."

"Cut that out!"

"Ow!" Henry rubbed his upper arm. "You hit hard."

They continued to walk through the woods along a deer trail. "Where are we going, anyway?"

"Some place Maple showed me."

"Are we allowed to be here?"

"I asked if anyone else would be here today, and they said not until after noon."

"What's this?"

"It's a retreat, where the Indians can go to be alone."

"It's just a . . . I'm not sure what to call it."

'It' was a small, one room, round structure made out of interwoven branches, reeds, and other such material. It had no windows, and was entered by a short tunnel. Tabitha ducked down and crawled in, followed more awkwardly by the much-taller Henry.

It was dark inside until Tabitha started a magical fire in the fire pit in the center of the room. It was about ten feet across, and only six feet high near the center. Henry, already six foot two, had to stay in a crouch. Tabitha, at five foot seven, was standing up and smiling at her confused friend.

"Since you're down there, put some of the small sticks into the fire. We need some real heat, not just light." There was a small hole, where most of the smoke would escape. But not all. The hut reeked of wood smoke, tobacco, and other herbs.

"This isn't a sweat lodge, is it?"

"Not a sacred one. It's more commonly used for this." She bent over and kissed Henry deeply.

"Wow."

Tabitha pulled out her wand and cast warming charms around the hut. "Just stay there," she said. She took off her cloak and laid it on the spruce branches that were on one side of the hut. Henry's eyes went wide as she then took off her heavy robe, showing that she was now only wearing boots.

She laid back on her robe and cloak, and said, "One reason why I dislike male-female relations is that I see the boy getting all the real pleasures, the girl only getting the pleasure of knowing she's pleased him. If you can learn to pleasure me, my dear, I swear to learn how to pleasure you."

Henry leered. "I'll do my best, my love."

They both left the hut, feeling they had learned a lot about the needs and responses of the other. They never got to use the little hide-away in the woods again that year. If there were any places where mixed-gender couples could get together at school, they were unaware of them.

Henry was very glad he now had a private room, as he was more frustrated than ever. He could only hope Tabitha could spend time with him at his home that summer. She would spend the last week of June working with the Old Believers at the Ysgol. She would then spend two further weeks at a location she couldn't reveal to him. He had to be satisfied with heavy kissing in the stairwells, and concentrated on his studies, Quidditch, and dueling. Tabitha concentrated on her extra-curricular research and her dueling. By the time the Spring Dance, they seemed like the perfect couple.

Tabitha had agreed to spend three weeks in August with Henry's family. Starting on June 20, however, she would be spending three weeks in her druid training. The first three days would be at the Ysgol, helping with the sorting of the Fifth years.

Friday, June 21, 1974

"Did you sleep well?" the Headmaster asked Tabitha.

"Yes, sir." She smiled. "It's a lot less nerve-wracking this way."

"I'm sure it is. Since it's almost dawn, we should move into position. Join me."

"Yes, sir."

The year before, Tabitha hadn't really noticed how many druids of all ranks there were. She estimated there had to be over three thousand druids of various ranks around the circle.

Just before the last few novices were anointed, the ceremony was interrupted. A group of wizards appeared at the center of the circle.

A group of wizards in masks and black robes.

Tabitha was one of the few who instantly recognized who the thirty wizards were.

Death Eaters.



## **Chapter XIV**

"Old Believers! We follow the true master of magic!" one Death Eater called out. The Death Eater in charge had obviously been mis-informed somewhere along the line about how many people would be present at the ceremony. As he had noticed he and his group were outnumbered more than 100-1, his voice trailed off. "Bow down and . . . follow . . . us. . . ."

Silence hung over the crowd outside the stone circle. The remaining initiates near the alter stood as still as the others. The gestalt held the druids together, and they simply stared at the thirty Death Eaters. The druids had no fear, because they were united.

The same could not be said of the Death Eaters. The silence unnerved them. One suddenly raised his wand. "AVADA. . . ."

The Death Eaters never said another word. Hundreds of stunners were sent at them before the first death curse was completed. The Death Eaters were stripped and bound, then moved from the sacred stone circle.

Then the initiations were completed.

"Sister Spellman?"

"Master?"

"Would you come with me, please?"

Tabitha left lunch and followed the disciple. She was surprised to find herself led to the pavilion where the Council of Druids and the Tuatha were having lunch.

A voice in Welsh commanded, "Ah, Sister. Sit."

Tabitha sat and bowed her head before Adda Lloyd, eldest of the Tuatha. "No need of that. Brother FitzWilliam has told me you have a strong interest in these barbarians."

"Yes, Wise Master."

"Why?"

"At first, because of the plot to kill me my first Yule at the School."

"I remember the attempt. It was connected to this Voldemort?"

"Yes, Wise Master."

"I had thought so. It may interest you to know that the young man who made the attempt was one of the idiots who disrupted our ceremony."

"I had wondered when his name would appear, Wise Master."

"Tell me, what is the penalty for such desecration as was caused today?"

"In the Old Days, the penalty would be death."

"By what means?"

"Any or all could be put to death by being consumed by the fire of the wicker man." Druids had ritually burned those convicted of capital crimes in wicker structures which resembled the human body. "Any or all could be used as divination sacrifices. The one who started the death curse could also be beheaded, although that would have gone to whomever disarmed him, so that he could claim the head, to decorate his door."

"Very good, child. Anything else?"

Tabitha thought about that for a moment. Finally she said, "I suppose the head of the spokesman could be preserved and sent to his Master. . . ." She suddenly remembered noticing a cedar bucket near the door. She glanced at it, and swallowed nervously.

"Yes, we extracted what information we could and then beheaded him. The others burn tonight at dusk. Although dressed as Death Eaters, these were actually young and foolish hopefuls, except for the leader. They have had, so far, very little information for us. That little information will be sent to the British authorities, although we believe they will do little with it."

"Yes, Wise Master," Tabitha said in a very small voice.

"Now, as we saw and remember the event, you were actually one of the first to fire a stunner when the Call went out. It is impossible to know if you hit this Malfoy. However, if you wish it, you may have his head as a trophy."

An image of Malfoy's face sitting on her shrine spring into Tabitha's mind. "No, thank you for the honor, but no, Wise Master."

"Very well."

"May I ask a question, Wise Master?"

"Concerning?"

"The Burning tonight?"

"Do you wish to attend? As a party more injured than most, you may."

"No, Wise Master. I was merely curious if, if well. . . ."

"If they will feel the burning of their flesh? No. No, we are weak compared to our ancestors. They will be unconscious. Now I have a question."

"Wise Master?"

"Are there any you would wish to share knowledge of these events with?"

Tabitha thought about that. "Perhaps one, Wise Master. He is a Novice who did not advance with me last year."

"Ah, Brother Dorff? Very well. Share with no other who was not here today, and tell him to treat your information as a confession. If you do not wish to see the burning, you may leave after the Novices receive their second concentration. It is not a pretty sight. However, the tents are far enough away that you will not have to see the details. Go no further."

"Yes, Wise Master." At his gesture, she left the pavilion, avoid the cedar bucket with the hair floating at the top.

Tabitha watched the flames from the camp of tents, along with most of the younger people present. She sat with Tom, who had been part of the group consecrated that evening.

"I don't know if I can go on," Tom said.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean just what I said. Was there a trial?"

"Was one needed? Death Eaters, or Death Eater wannabes, aren't under Imperio, you know. They violated the ceremony, and at least one tried to kill."

"I guess. Sometimes, it seems as if force is more important than law."

"It is," Tabitha admitted. "Even in the Confederation, we're as close to old tribal laws as we are to the pure rule of law. The rest of our world is even worse when it comes to political crimes, and few Muggle countries are any better. Most are much worse."

They sat in silence for some time, glad the smoke was blowing away from them.

Finally, Tom spoke, changing the subject. "You would know this. I'm interested in learn the ancient runic ceremonies, the anti-demonic ones, and ritual magic. Would I have to make it to acolyte, or beyond, to learn these?"

"Yes and no. Yes, if you move beyond acolyte, you learn them. You can ask for permission to learn them anyway, but it's not automatic. The most powerful magic there is in this area are found in the various Mesopotamian and Tibetan rituals, and some of the ones from Africa are almost as powerful. There are . . . maybe eight of the greatest experts in the world on demonology and ritual magic teaching in the Confederation that I know of. Two Buddhists teach out in California. One teaches at the Sefydliad and another at Salem. Three teach at the Vieux Carrie in New Orleans."

"And the other?"

"Mister Gwyn."

Rhys Gwyn was one of the two Magical Language and Symbols teachers at the Ysgol. "Really? Is that why he left the Faith?" He had been a Hidden, but had left the sect, and then the Old Believers.

"I don't think so. I think he had some kind of run-in with the Powers of Darkness. If so, that sort of thing changes a person."

"I can understand that," Tom said, watching the smoke pillar high up into the starry night sky. "I killed my family, you know."

"You accidentally caused the fire that killed your family."

"No," Tom said sadly, "I killed my brother. I didn't do it on purpose, but I blasted him across the kitchen, which broke his neck and started the grease fire that killed everyone else. A few hundred years ago, the Muggles would have burned me alive like we are those Death Eaters, except without my being magically unaware. Why them and not me? Why wasn't I punished?"

"I think you've punished yourself fairly well," Tabitha pointed out.

"Maybe. Maybe not. That's the problem with punishing yourself. You're either too hard or too easy on yourself." He sighed. "Thanks for being my friend."

"I haven't been a very good one."

"Well, you're the only one. That makes you a pretty good one as far as I can see."

"There no one in your class? And what about Gloria?" She was a third year Brown Tom had taken to the dance in February.

"She wanted to go to the dance, and I wanted to take a girl. That's as far as it went. As for my class . . . maybe Lloyd Trowbridge, but no. Sorry, Tabby, you're my best friend, even if I'm not yours."

"Then thank you. What are you going to do? You'll meet with the trainers tomorrow, or at least we did last year."

"I think I'll ask about the ritual and demonology training outside the regular training, and I'll tell them I'm sticking with the Open Believers. I'll finish this year, if they want me to."

"Good luck," Tabitha said, hoping he would find a way to deal with his inner demons as well.

When Tabitha came back from training in northern Quebec, she found that Tom had been released from his training. Mister Gwyn had agreed to give Tom private lessons in demonology and symbolic and ritual magic, although they wouldn't start until August.

While she spent some time being friendly with Tom and some of the other students who were staying during the summer, Tabitha also spent two days a week in Salem. There she met with

the women who might sponsor her for study at the Salem Witches Institute. They also took her to visit some of the Muggle universities where she was planning on applying for Classics and Cultural Anthropology. Between her excellent (although not fantastic) SAT scores and the large number of universities in the Greater Boston area, plus the fact that she was fluent in all the relevant languages, she felt certain she could find some place which would accept her for at least one of the programs.

In the end, Tabitha decided to apply to Tufts, Boston University, and Radcliffe/Harvard. Since she spoke all the necessary languages (Latin, Classical Greek, and German) and more besides, she was sure she'd at least get into the classics programs.

In her heart, Tabitha was still a bit confused about what she wanted. Her ties with Henry were strong and real. On the one hand, they were unlikely to ever have a 'conventional' relationship, let alone marriage. That was where everyone was expected to head. Conventional wisdom would say she should move on to another boy.

Yet on the other hand, she could not imagine becoming involved with any other male. Homosexuality was actively despised in most of the Muggle world, with a few small spots of hidden tolerance. The Pure-blood and Old Colonial families were even more hostile. Some sections of the general magical community and the more liberal sects of the Old Believers discouraged it, but at least had some tolerance.

Of course, unlike nearly everyone else, Tabitha didn't have to worry about what any family had to say.

Faced with all these conflicting feelings and paths, Tabitha decided to go ahead and stay with Henry and his family. He had proven himself her best friend as well as an excellent and tolerant boyfriend. There was always a chance that he would not be accepted as a hit-wizard (she could not believe he would fail to make it through auror training). In that case, marriage might be possible around 1980, which is when she would be finishing her training in any event.

That wouldn't solve all of Tabitha's conflicts by any means, but she did feel it would be a workable solution.

And it was six years away.

A lot could happen in six years.

As usual, Tabitha had topped or come close to the top of the grading scale in all her classes. Henry had also done very well, and if he could claim at least five E or O N.E.W.T.s (the one in Defense mandatory), he had been assured entrance into the auror program.

Henry was now the oldest student in the dragon ranch community, as well as being from the owning family. Tabitha had wondered if this meant Henry might not be tempted to run a little

wild. As things turned out, Tabitha's time at the dragon ranch was more relaxing than she had anticipated. They were much more supervised than they had been before, which in retrospect made a great deal of sense. As things turned out, most of their best 'intimate time' was spent in their dreams.

They did managed to find times (and places) for some serious necking and petting every day. It was a great deal more difficult to find the privacy for more intimate play. To Tabitha's pleasure, Henry was very fair in making certain that Tabitha 'had a good time' (their code phrase) as many times as he did, one way or another.

Henry's mother was more solicitous than ever. She was obviously hoping that the pair would be coming back with some sort of announcement the next summer. Cautious probing revealed that Mrs. Dorff was hoping that her son would be persuaded into following a less hazardous career than law enforcement. Mr. Dorff still hoped his son would join the family business, but he seemed to be the only person who still thought there was any chance of that.

The rest of the family seemed to support Henry's decision to go for auror, if not joining the Dragons and hopefully the hit-wizards. The extended family also seemed to accept Tabitha. She was a little uncomfortable, as most seemed to make the same assumptions about the young pair as Henry's mother.

Tabitha really liked staying with the Dorffs. Never having had a family, she couldn't help but long for a family life. Still, she wasn't in any hurry to have her own.

Tabitha left the Dorffs to spend a few days with Cindie. She had remained a solid friend throughout the emotional roller coaster which had been Tabitha's Sixth year. Cindie, comfortably ensconced in a good relationship with a half-blood Brown, was planning on moving to New York City after her Seventh year and work on Muggle degrees in elementary education and child development. She was one of a small group who where planning on opening a series of magical combination daycare/elementary schools -- both of which were both lacking and in large demand in those urban centers with large magical populations. Tabitha went back to school for her last year with a new plan.

Tuesday, September 3, 1974

Boris Rasputin, the senior potions teacher, looked over the Seventh year Green, Blue, and Brown N.E.W.T. students. He was glad his first class of the year was the N.E.W..T. class. "This year, we will complete your intermediate knowledge of potions preparation. I hope you have all completed your summer essays. You were also to choose one of the potions which take at least three months of preparations." He held up a small stack of parchment slips. "Any last minutes changes?"

No one said anything. "No? Then I assume you all see that pile of yew needles. Chop them coarsely and add one cup to one pint of grain alcohol. Then shred the foxglove, and add three cups to the mixture. Remember, the result will be poisonous. Be careful!"

He sat and flipped through the slips, until he came to Tabitha's. His eyes bulged and he looked up at the girl, who smiled back. He sighed and went over to talk to her. "Miss Spellman?" Spellman was his favorite student.

"Yes, Mister Rasputin?"

"You really intend on doing this potion?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you will be doing this for?"

"For Mister Dorff, sir."

"I see. And do you intend on collecting the ingredients yourself?"

"All but one, sir."

"I see." He turned to Dorff. "Do you have any idea what we're talking about, Dorff?"

"No, sir."

"You're seventeen?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'll expect informed consent, Dorff, before I approve Spellman's potion."

"Yes, sir."

"So, what was that all about in potions?" Henry asked as they sat on a bench in a courtyard that afternoon.

"I found an interesting strengthening potion. It really only works for one person. It takes six months to brew, and is then distilled. If it's properly done, it will last for at least a century."

"I take it's special because it's keyed to one person?"

"In part, that and it's power. If any guy takes it, other than a near blood relative, it will about as much effect as that new Muggle drink they had us analyze last year."

"Gatorade?"

"That's it. It will have a slightly stronger effect on any witch or close male relative. But for you, it will be six times more effective than the strongest general healing potion available."

"Okay, I'll bite. What makes it special?"

"Well, for the batch I want to run, I'll need six pints of blood, drawn over a four month period."

"Ouch. Is that what he meant?"

"No . . . I'll also need twelve fluid ounces of semen, over a six month period."

"**What!** I mean," he went on, lowering his voice, "what?"

"I'll also need some nail pairings and skin. That can come from a callous. I'll have to give you a pedicure for the clippings, I guess."

"Please tell me you're teasing!"

"Nope." Tabitha's grin disappeared. "When I'm done distilling it, I should have about ninety two ounce doses. Think about that. If you make it as an auror or hit-wizard or dragon, you will get hurt. Sometimes, you will be seriously hurt. I can't protect you, Harry. This is one thing I can do to at least reduce the hurt, and help you heal."

"Then I think I shall give my informed consent." He grinned. "Are you sure you don't want to collect that ingredient?"

"I'm certain. I **hate** harvesting live lizard tails. You get me the three ounces I need, and I'll take care of the rest."

"Deal." Henry smiled. "You should have been an Orange Dragon." Tabitha had found a plan to help him in the future, but more importantly to him at the moment, she had secured a small private lab where, if they were careful, they could be alone. And, she had basically promised to help get him off numerous times over the year.

Even for Tabitha, the Seventh year was far from being an easy one. Most of the extra-curricular activities (other than Quodpot and Quidditch) were front-loaded. The Seventh year duels, for example, were all held between mid-September and the end of January. Tabitha, her power finally catching up with her older classmates, had moved up to the number two spot, and ended up the number three rated dueler in the Seventh year.

Tabitha received her acceptance from Tufts in early January. Although she was also admitted to BU and made an alternate at Radcliffe, she decided to stick with Tufts, in part because they had asked first and in part because it would be slightly easier to commute between there and Salem. The Ysgol staff arranged for her to visit Tufts over the short spring break to try and test out of as many courses as she could.

Early June brought the N.E.W.T.s. The students all agreed, as they did every year, that as nasty as the WT's had been, the N.E.W.T.s were worse. And, as in every year, the Fifth years refused to believe it, and the Sixth all hoped it wasn't true.

The question had arisen several times over the previous year where Tabitha would live after she graduated. In early April, she had been given conditional admittance to the Salem Institute



for both Spell Weaving and Potions. In addition, she had been admitted for less stringent programs, should she fail to achieve the necessary N.E.W.T.s. Therefore, her guardians, her mother's clan, and others came together and bought her a small house in Lynn, between the Salem Institute and Tufts. After she returned from her three weeks of training and visiting Henry for a week, but before visiting Maple for three weeks, she would also have to take her driver's exam (she had already been practicing, along with others interested in integrating with the Muggles).

The house had been built in the early 1920s, and had never been remodeled at all. Therefore, it would not be ready for her to move in until mid-August in any event. Fortunately, everything Tabitha owned could be moved into her trunks, with plenty of room to spare.

Tuesday, July 15, 1975

"Well," Mrs. Dorff demanded, "you've been waiting for a month, if not for a year. Open them!"

Neither Henry nor Tabitha wanted to open their N.E.W.T.s. It meant their lives had to move on. It meant that roads that had been in front of them might now be closed off. This was especially true for Henry. He had no idea what he might do with his life if he couldn't go into the higher end of law enforcement. Unlike most of his classmates, he had never wavered in his desires. He had done everything right along the way, but it still came down to the little bit of parchment he had taken from the owl.

Finally, Tabitha said, "I'll go first.

*N.E.W.T. Results for Tabitha Stephanie Spellman*

	<i>Theory</i>	<i>Practical</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Arithmancy</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>O</i>
<i>Charms</i>	<i>O+</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>
<i>History</i>	<i>O+</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>O+</i>
<i>Potions</i>	<i>O+</i>	<i>O+</i>	<i>O+</i>
<i>Muggle Studies</i>	<i>O+</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>O+</i>
<i>Runes</i>	<i>O+</i>	<i>O+</i>	<i>O+</i>
<i>Transfiguration</i>	<i>O+</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>O</i>

Tabitha was grinning as she read off the scores. She added, "They also included a note from the Salem Institute, saying I've been accepted as an apprentice Spell Weaver and apprentice Potions Maker."

After receiving congratulations from the assembled family, Tabitha looked at Henry. "Go ahead. If you failed everything, you can come to Boston and be my houseboy."

That made everyone laugh, and Henry finally opened his results.

*N.E.W.T. Results for Henry Frederick Dorff*  
 .....*Theory* . . *Practical* . . *Total*  
*Charms* . . . . . *O* . . . . . *O* . . . . . *O*  
*Creatures* . . . . . *E* . . . . . *A* . . . . . *A*  
*Defense* . . . . . *O* . . . . . *O+* . . . . . *O*  
*Potions* . . . . . *E* . . . . . *E* . . . . . *E*  
*Muggle Studies* . . . *E* . . . . . - . . . . . *E*  
*Transfiguration* . . *E* . . . . . *O* . . . . . *E*

"There's a note. I am to report to the Sefydlaid on September 29 if I still want to join the Dragons. I'll be initiated on November First, and my auror training starts at the Capitol November Third."

Everyone except Mrs. Dorff congratulated Henry. His mother was still obviously unhappy about his career choice.

That night, the couple sat underneath the bright stars, in a very private spot.

"I guess it's time to decide what we're going to do about . . . us," Henry said.

"There can't be an 'us,' in the sense of any sort of real bond, for at least four or five years," Tabitha pointed out. "If you go beyond auror and dragon, well, hit-wizards actively serve a maximum thirty years, so it could actually be thirty-five years before we are able to marry. For all intents, I'm magical born, so there's an excellent chance I'll still be able to have children when I'm in my early fifties, but that's no guarantee."

"That's true, but I do love you, Tabby."

"I know, and I love you, too. But while I can promise to wait in some respects, I do want affection, Harry. I won't promise not to become involved with other women."

"I know. I won't hold it against you."

"What are you going to do now in August and September?"

"I'm not certain," he admitted. "An awful lot of physical training, that's for sure!"

"Tell you what. Tufts' term starts September Fourth, and Salem the Eighth. Why don't you plan on joining me from the Twelfth through the Twenty-ninth? The Institute has dueling chambers which I can sign us up for, and there are some Muggle health clubs you can work out at."

"Really?" Tabitha nodded. "Thank you. I will."

"Good. Now lean back." Henry was just wearing a t-shirt and shorts. Tabitha undid his zipper and then opened the boxers underneath. She leaned over, while Henry leaned back and smiled.

## **Chapter XV**

Saturday, August 2, 1975

"Miss Spellman?"

"Yes?"

"I am Roger Symthe-Davies, with the Confederation Bureau of Native Affairs."

"Really? The Confederation Bureau of Native Affairs? Tell me, are there Confederation Bureaus of Old Believer Affairs and Pure-Blood Affairs and Colonial Affairs?"

"No," he admitted, confused, "but there are Bureaus of Immigration, Muggle Affairs, and . . . oh, this might be relevant, for Separated Communities Affairs, which would include many of the Old Believers."

"I see. And what may I do for you?"

"You have been authorized to go to the Chemung's Visitor's Longhouse. . . ."

"Correct. I believe, in fact, you might make me late."

"No, I have your portkey. However, I was asked to speak with you before you left."

"I believe you are."

Smythe-Davies frowned, but held his temper. "You are probably not aware that you are the first unofficial visitor requested by the Chemung since their final treaty was signed in 1797."

"What makes the difference between an official and unofficial visitor?"

The man looked puzzled.

"Let me guess. An official guest is sent by the Government, and unofficial one is one requested by the Chemung?"

"Not quite," Smythe-Davies admitted. "The Chemung also have some traffic with other Native groups, magic, Muggle, and mixed."

"And?"

"So, we have to treat this as we would any visit to those native groups who prefer . . . their privacy, for lack of a better term. Since the visit is approved by the head of the tribe, we don't have to worry about searching your possessions."

Tabitha's eyes went wide at that.

"I must remind you that unapproved travel to any of the Chemung's territory puts you totally under the tribal laws. Granted, the area is protected by anti-apparation wards, but you should

never try to make your own portkey. If they choose to kill or torture such visitors, that's up to them. I therefore suggest that you NOT go without a formal invitation, as you have for this trip. The portkey will automatically return at noon, August Twenty-fourth."

"Noon Eastern Daylight Time, or noon sun-time?"

"What?"

"No clocks there, you know."

"Oh." The man was embarrassed. "I don't know. I suggest you prepare for either. Anyway, please be aware that you might be questioned upon your return. We will not be asking for any private or personal information. We are concerned with the health and welfare of the Chemung, and yet we cannot supervise them as we should, since they are a sovereign community within the Confederation."

"Thank you for the warning."

"Have a good trip."

"Thank you," Tabitha answered.

Tabitha found herself on a hillside covered with hardwoods, next to a small longhouse that blended in well. She could see three types of oak, four types of maple, hickories, and many others. Some trees were ancient -- she was in a forest such as most of the eastern United States hadn't seen in a century or more.

"Welcome," a voice said.

Tabitha turned and bowed to the chief, who had come out of the longhouse. The chief nodded, and looked at the girl. Nearly two years older, she had reached her full height of five foot ten. She was slender, but moderately well-muscled. She had dressed in a simple blue t-shirt, denim skirt, and leather sandals, and carried a leather satchel.

"Were you visiting in slightly cooler weather, daughter, you would be well-dressed. Some of our young prefer just what you would call a loin-cloth. If you are more modest, or if you fear being burned, we will get you some buckskins that cover as much as you have covered now."

"I've spent some time getting tanned all over. I'll be happy to conform with your customs wherever I can."

That took the chief aback. He had hoped to shake this woman a little. "Keep what you have for now. We have all learned to address your friend as Maple when we speak in other than our own language. She has her own longhouse, where she may spend time making potions."

"I never asked. Does this mean you move according to the season, or stay in one place until the ground grows tired?" The Iroquois had usually stayed in a village site until the fertility of the fields started to give out, when they would move a short distance. That would allow them

to tend the orchards they had made famous in up-state New York while moving as needed for their other crops, usually every ten to twenty-five years.

"Unlike our ancestors, we move according to the seasons. The valley bottoms tend to have many biting insects during the summer, the top of the ridges are far too cold and windy for more than half of the year. Still, while there is a great distance in terms of height, there is less than a half a mile in straight-line distance. We have five groups, each with two villages, spread over four valleys, plus a group of young men who wander, hunting, over five other valleys as well. They also intercept any straying Muggles, these days mostly drunken and lost hunters. Come. We have a six mile walk to Maple's house, which is in a central location to the other group sites. You will see it is in what you might call a glen or hollow. You are not to leave it without Maple as escort, unless I am with you. That will prevent any misunderstandings." They set off.

"Misunderstandings?"

"Not everyone is happy you are here, but they will not harm you in the hollow. If you are out alone, there might be a few who are tempted to do something stupid."

"I see. Maybe I should keep my shirt on, then."

"That would not provoke or prevent an attack. May I ask, what do you plan on doing these three weeks?"

"I plan on helping Maple brew and lay down some of the medicinal potions which will have the longest shelf-life, assuming you don't object to my using ingredients and containers I brought with me. I hope to learn any of the medicinal lore she is allowed to impart. I had hoped to help gather materials, but that will be difficult if I'm confined to this glen. And beyond that, it's not any of your concern."

"Well, I shall just wish you a pleasurable stay, shall I? And feel free to use whatever you brought. We appreciate it."

They walked the rest of the way in near silence, the chief merely pointing out a few features or animals along the way. Tabitha said little, other than repeating Smythe-Davies' statements. The chief shrugged, unconcerned.

They were traveling over a wide trail, but it wasn't easy walking, especially at the pace the chief walked it. They covered the six miles in just over an hour, and stood in front of a four foot waterfall.

"You can see the creek takes this short fall. Do not go past the falls without Maple or myself as escort. Your portkey will work from within this area as well as back at the lodge. I may or may not be able to visit. Have a pleasant stay." The chief took off on a run.

Tabitha shrugged and climbed up the ledge.

The path was narrow, as the stream had worn away a higher ledge of softer stone. The creek managed to squeeze between the rocks (the path climbed some 20 feet above the creek), and then the area opened up. She worried about Maple having to tread this path in the winter, but later learned that the two springs nearby were thermal springs, which helped keep the path ice free except in the most extreme weather.

The hollow was perhaps a hundred yards wide at its widest point, and just over a mile deep. A main ridge rose more than 700 feet in front of her (to the west), and there were two round knobs on either side of the glen, some 300 and 350 feet high. All were too steep for easy climbing, and Tabitha was willing to bet there were more than a few rattlesnakes in the rocky outcrops she could see on the steep sides.

Tabitha carefully made her way down the path. The longhouse was perhaps a hundred yards along the path west. Tabitha stopped about fifteen yards before the door, and shouted a hello. She didn't want to disturb Maple if she was making a potion -- which was the only reason she could imagine Maple hadn't been waiting for her, either at the Visitor's Longhouse or at the waterfall.

A very surprised-looking Maple came out of the structure. As the chief had mentioned, she was only wearing a loincloth and moccasins.

"Tabby! What are you doing here? I wasn't expecting you until next week!" She embraced her startled friend, and then pulled back with a frown. "And let me guess. This was the date all along. The chief guided you here."

"And said I wasn't to leave the hollow under any circumstances, other than with you or with him," Tabitha agreed.

The frown deepened. "I thought we'd spend two weeks living at the Visitor's Lodge."

"Nope, three weeks here, I guess."

"Why would he do that? The only building with plumbing is the lodge."

"Maybe he wants to put a price on my visiting? If I'm miserable, I won't want to come back."

"Probably." Her frown went even deeper.

Tabitha leaned down and kissed her friend's forehead. "You look very sexy in almost nothing."

Maple smiled. "Thank you." She hugged Tabitha again, and the two kissed deeply. "I've missed you."

"And I you." They kissed again.

"I'm glad you're here, but there's not much food, and like I said, no plumbing."

"Maple, do you think I didn't come prepared for everything?"

"Really?"

"Really. How much food do you have?"

"For two? I only have enough corn meal and dried venison for a week. I have enough of everything else, but we'll still need to do some gathering, and maybe some hunting and fishing."

"Well, I'm not much good at either, and I've never had fish outside of chowder, but I'll give it a try. Now, do you have any potions on?"

"Not right now. I do need to brew up some of that fever/pain drink you invented."

"We invented. It's on the patent. I have some ingredients that will improve it, or we can use them to make a stronger version for when you need it."

"I don't want to get you in trouble," Maple said. Then she added, "I don't want to get in trouble, either."

"I have blanket permission from the chief."

"And I suppose that includes a toilet?"

"And a shower, yes. I didn't want to use up any scarce resources, you know."

The two women broke into giggles.

"How does it feel?" Maple asked.

"Oddly natural, which shouldn't surprise me. Is this a new custom?" The pair were standing outside, nude except for the loincloths.

"It wasn't unknown, but no, it was never common, especially for the women. Why 'oddly natural'?"

"Well, odd because I'm not used to being nude outside. Natural because it should be natural to be nude when relaxing outside. I mean, I understand all the reasons for the taboos on nudity common to most cultures, but it still feels right."

The chief arrived on Tabitha's third day, along with six men carrying food. Tabitha stayed out of sight until the six men left. She was only wearing the loincloth and a rabbit-skin shawl, for which the chief was glad -- he wasn't used to seeing female foreigners in a state of near-nature, especially not one slightly taller than himself.

"I am not happy you are here," he said once they had walked away from the longhouse for some privacy.



"I had gathered that. So why did you ask me to come? This was your idea, remember."

"It was," he acknowledged. "Your friend . . . we need your friend. We are just a large enough group to survive, especially since about half of the few magical children born to the Muggle Iroquois decide to join us. Nearly all of us have at least some small magical ability. Only about fifty of us have what you would call above-average power, however. Your friend is the only person to have a real feel for herbology and potions so far this century. It's one thing to follow a recipe in a lab, it's another to make potions from scratch, collecting and preparing all the ingredients. She has that ability. Without her, we would soon have to beg the Confederation for help. With help would come interference, well-meaning, but we wish to maintain as much of our traditional life as possible. Should one of our younger children develop an equal ability, then she will have more options."

They walked slowly in silence for a few moments. "You are a price we pay for her happiness. She has chosen a young man to mate with, sooner or later. He is kind, and has fair magical talent. He will be a good match for her. She did not crave the Outside, she craved a person such as you. And you were too perfect for her. She fell in love with you. You fell in love with her, to some degree. So, you must be invited here, as long as she, and you, desire it. We will tolerate it."

"But you don't like it."

"No. Please understand me, we do appreciate your coming. If she invites you, and you notify us, you may come for up to twenty-eight days during the summer months. We shall discover the portkey coordinates and notify the Bureau of your status."

"Thank you."

The pair of teens walked the woods early nearly every morning, looking for potion ingredients. They prepared the ingredients in the mornings, brewed potions in the afternoons, and made love every night. The three days it rained, they simply stayed in and made love inside instead of outside.

Tabitha had brought one of her magical trunks, shrunken in her pack. On her sixteenth birthday, a hidden panel had revealed itself. Inside was a small flat. She had to fill the water tank and stock food, but after that, it was a self-contained flat for up to a month's use for a pair of individuals. She would have to flush out the septic system when she got home. She only used it for the toilet and to shower, but she was glad she had it.

When it was time for Tabitha to leave, they had prepared three years worth of storable potions. Maple's parting present was a necklace made out of animal teeth and quartz from one of the hills inside the Chemung territory.

Smythe-Davies tried to debrief Tabitha, but got little satisfaction. There really wasn't much Tabitha could tell the man, but wasn't about to give away the location of Maple's medical

glen, or 'the state of their habitat'. She figured that all that was the tribe's business. She merely said that the ones she had seen seemed very healthy and there were no shortages or problems she was aware of, all of which was true.

In the end, she took great pleasure in handing the Bureau representative the notification of her free access to the tribal areas. Since she refused to explain why she was allowed in, and it was really none of his business, he had to accept it.

Tabitha knew she would miss Maple, but she had a life to start just as her friend did. Her short-term goal was to exam out of as many courses as possible at Tufts.

While she was living through them, Tabitha thought that the five years between 1975 and 1980 were the most exciting and most important years of her life. Later on in life, she realized that they had seemed to be mostly because this was by far the freest time of her life.

Although she was not wealthy, Tabitha had some money of her own. She had won scholarships for her undergraduate programs that paid the tuition both for a fine (and expensive) private university and for the Salem Witches Institute. She owed little to anyone. She had some obligations as a novice druid; she would owe an explanation to the Headmaster back at the Ysgol as her trustee until she turned twenty-one should she do badly in either school or seriously misbehave. She had emotional ties to Maple and stronger ones to Henry.

That was about it. She would be living a life she loved on her own terms, with no other responsibilities. Few people were so lucky to have that much time with that kind of freedom.

On the other hand, it also meant she had no one on hand to congratulate her when she was told she had passed out of a third of all the credits required for her two undergraduate degrees, or when the Institute decided to allow her to study part-time over a five year period for her apprenticeships, to allow her the time to do her Muggle degrees, rather than the usual three.

That aspect changed of course when Henry showed up to spend the early autumn with her. While they respected the Maiden Charm, they spent a fair amount of time exploring all the other sensual possibilities they could think of. When they ran out of ideas, they looked over some Muggle 'how-to' books Henry came across in his explorations of Muggle Boston.

The house in Lynn was a fairly small one, although more than ample for one person. Because of the slope of the roof, the upstairs was even smaller than the downstairs. There was a good-sized bedroom with a 'half-bath' (toilet and sink), a small bedroom, and a small bathroom. When Henry first arrived, the house was fairly bare, other than a small kitchen table with two chairs, a bedroom suite, and the chairs and 'shrine' from her Ysgol room, plus a small potions lab in the basement, sharing space with the Muggle furnace, washer, dryer, freezer, and water heater. Just before Henry left, he supervised some Muggles, who moved in a bed and dresser to the small bedroom, a sofa for the living room, and furniture for the tiny room Tabitha was going to use as a home office.

"You never said what you needed to the other bed for," Henry pointed out after the Muggles left.

"Here," she answered, handing him a set of five keys.

"What are these for?" he asked, frowning.

"These two are the keys to the front porch," she answered. The house had an enclosed front porch. "These two are to the front door. Before you unlock the front door, do a reveal spell. Then use these two keys, and finally the front door locks, always going to the higher lock first."

"What's wrong with my using the back door?"

"When you leave, I'm increasing the spells on the back. The back porch invites a break-in." There was also a small enclosed patio/porch behind the house. "This way, you can always come in, even when I'm not here."

"You mean. . . ."

"That the other bedroom is for you? Yes. No matter what our relationship is over the next five years or so, you'll always have a bed. It may or may not be with me, but it will be here. There are six drawers in that dresser. Feel free to take the bottom three, or the bottom two and some of the closet space."

"You always think of everything, Tabby." He kissed her gently. "Thank you."

"You're welcome, and I just think of more scenarios than you do." That made Henry smile. Tabitha went on, "We've been seen together, at school, at the Institute, and by the neighbors. What's your cover story?"

"Why not say I'm going to a technical college in Ontario?"

"Fair enough." Tabitha suddenly grabbed Horny and pulled him into a fierce hug. This was very uncharacteristic of their relationship, but Henry improvised.

When they broke the embrace, Henry asked, "That was wonderful, but why?"

"Because I'll miss you, you silly ass," she said with tears in her eyes.

"Thank you. I'll miss you, too."

Two days before he left, Henry 'fixed' dinner (that is, he ordered and picked up a pizza, along with a bottle of wine). After they had finished off the pizza, they sat in the living room, and watched a magical fire in the fireplace.

"Tabby?"

"H'mm?"

"I know things have to be up in the air with us. You're not sure what you want out of life, or if you would want to spend it with me. I have no idea how far I might be going in law enforcement."

"And?"

"And despite that, I was wondering if you would wear this."

'This' was a small white gold ring, with a small emerald in it. "It doesn't mean we're engaged. It doesn't mean we're even promised to each other as anything more than intimate friends."

"In that case, I accept with pleasure." She slipped it onto her left ring finger. "No matter what, you are my best friend."

"And you will always be the girl of my dreams, in every sense possible."

"Let's go see if we can make some memories for our dreams to build on."

Tabitha missed Henry terribly, but in missing him she devoted herself to her school work. The Muggle University thought highly of her work, especially the Classics and History departments. The Anthropology and Philosophy professors she worked with only saw her as one of any number of bright students, although the Anthro profs would come to regard her as brilliant eccentric -- not uncommon in Bostonian academic circles by any means.

The Spells Mistress she was assigned to at Salem found her work promising, but the Potions Mistress was soon raving about her. Hilda Swank, her old Head of House back at the Ysgol, moved to a position at the Institute in 1976, and that furthered enhanced Tabitha's opportunities at Salem.

Tabitha finished off her two Muggle BA's in the spring of 1978. She would work on two MA's over the next two year: Modern European History at Tufts and History of Science at Harvard. She would complete her apprenticeship in Potions in with autumn of 1978, in Spell Weaving in the spring of 1979. It would take her just over a year to earn the 'master' level in both disciplines. There were two levels beyond 'master,' and she was thinking of working on both in potions and perhaps alchemy.

Despite what most Muggle-born would have guessed, southern and central New England has about the lowest ratio of magical to Muggle populations in North America. The reasons were easily understood. The Puritans were fervent haters of magic (even if they failed to catch any actual witches or wizards, there were many close calls), and the region lay between two competing magical regions. The Old Believers and the Old Colonial families who had come over with them in the 1500s had settled in what is now Maine, Quebec, and the Canadian maritime provinces, and were moving into Ontario and beyond by the time of the Muggle

American Revolution. Old Colonial and Colonial families that came over between the early 1600s and the early 1800s (the late-comers still took the name, to distinguish them from the third wave of immigration that came over in the second half of the 19th century) were (and still usually are, as far as the self-proclaimed Old Colonial 'gentry' are concerned) found in New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and western Virginia and West Virginia. It was the regular colonial families, half-bloods, Muggle-born and the like who settled most of the rest of what the Muggles would call the United States, while the Old Believers settled Canada and Alaska, while both groups spread through obscure valleys in the western mountain chains in the United States.

This left the rest of New England mostly as a buffer zone. It was for this reason that a group of independent-minded witches moved into the area in the mid-19th century. They opened the Salem Witches Institute in 1869. Its visionary, forceful, and wealthy founder, Susan Sanger (1803-1980), had kept the Institute free from outside interference. By the start of the 20th century, the Institute was the second only to the Old Believer Sefydliad in its reputation as a center of higher learning in many subjects.

Despite her close affiliation with the druids (most Old Believers in the area were with the Open Believers or just the average members of various sects), Tabitha fit in well with this magical society. This was why, despite her youth, she was asked to be one of the presiding clergy at Mistress Sanger's funeral in January, 1980, along with two Wiccans (since Tabitha was the highest ranking druid living in the greater Boston area at the time).

While Tabitha was welcomed into the various magical groups around Boston, they really didn't know what to make of her. She was careful not to come into conflict with the Wiccans (this had, after all, become their power base in North America over the previous 50 years). The Wiccans were just as careful not to come into conflict with her -- all other factors being equal, Old Believers, especially druids, rarely lose political confrontations in North America. The two groups had enough in common that they could come together to celebrate their ideas and downplay the ceremonial differences. The druid leaders, who tended towards the patriarchal, were happy enough to see this ecumenicalism, since they could always disavow it if it got out of hand.

Tabitha also stood at a midpoint of a cultural rift that existed in these magical circles of witches. One group, containing many of the elderly leaders left over from the 19th and early 20th century, preached celibacy (at least in public). The younger witches were starting to push for homosexual lifestyles, while most of the outsiders were more strictly heterosexual. Tabitha, who was openly bisexual, if unattached and celibate from the time Henry left until she visited Maple in August, 1976, could have been attacked by all sides. Instead, she moved between them, practicing tolerance and acceptance. As this was what the majority of the magical population were looking for, she fit in very well.

Tabitha did not engage in any casual relationships. She did have two relationships with two witches, one during part of the 1977-1978 academic year, and one in the spring of 1979. Both relationships ended on very friendly terms. Both women had decided that they could not stay

with Tabitha under the circumstances. She spent large segments of each summer through 1978 split between her druidical studies and spending time with Maple. 1978 was both when she was consecrated as an acolyte, and was introduced to Maple's husband and three month old daughter. She would never return except for brief visits. She also spent a few days each summer at the Capitol with Henry, and Henry spent a few weekends each year at Tabitha's.

After her tenth year of druidical study, Tabitha was consecrated as an acolyte but did not go beyond at her choice. Those who went on past their acolyte ritual had to make their service to the religion the focal point of their lives, which Tabitha was not interested in doing. As an acolyte, she would still be serving as a sort of part-time clergy. She was, however, without the suffrage for selecting the druidical representatives (limited to disciples and full druids) and unable to perform the highest ceremonies. She could perform all the public ceremonies, including marriage, however and could attend any ceremony.

With her magical, druidical, and Muggle studies, and her relationships, Tabitha did not have a great deal of free time. She spent some of it playing her lute and harp. Her Muggle classmates were sometimes able to entice her to a film or a concert. Beyond that, at least once a week (usually Sunday mornings), Tabitha would update her scrapbooks.

The fight in Britain was nearly a war in every sense of the term. It was still secret to the Muggles, but barely at times. Open fighting in front of the Muggles was one of the few ways that would bring the International and other national Ministries into the fight.

It was clear why Voldemort would keep the fight on that scale. Grindelwald had managed to start two Muggle world wars, hoping that the Muggles would exterminate themselves. Instead, the Second World War had partially unified the Muggle world against the Nazis and Japanese, and united most of the magical world against Grindelwald. The International had made things clear that that level of magical interference would never be tolerated again.

It was less clear why the British Ministry was refusing to call in help. The best explanation anyone had come with was that the British Ministry had always assumed it was the leading voice of the magical world since it started to form back in the late 1600s. Granted, the rest of the world rarely agreed, but the British, although it was not the leading Ministry (there wasn't one until the Confederation moved into that spot in the early 20th century), it did contribute more than any other single Ministry through the middle of the 20th century. Perhaps any Minister who appealed for help too soon would face the end of their career.

Tabitha came to believe that at some point the British Ministry would either have no choice but to call in outside help, or the International would come in any way. A group of family massacres started occurring in the summer of 1978. By the end of 1979, eight of the thirty most famous 'light' magical families -- famous for their wealth and ancestry -- were completely destroyed, and others, such as the Prewitts, had come close. The entire Dumbledore family was reduced to two elderly brothers. The Bones family was down to a brother and sister, and the brother was severely injured. The Potter family was down to one young man a little younger than Tabitha. The Crouchs were down to a father and son. The Moodys were down to one late middle-aged auror. At Halloween 1979, another family was totally massacred while two others, the Browns and Macmillans, managed to escape attacks with just a few casualties.

Sooner or later, something was going to break.

## Chapter XVI

Monday, Christmas Eve, 1979

Tabitha paced back and forth, wondering when Henry would show up. He should have apparated by now, which meant he was coming by Muggle car or taxi instead. She hated to think of Henry making the trek from the small Magical Welcome center near Harvard through Muggle northern Boston towards her house in Lynn, near Salem. He was far from incapable in the Muggle world (unlike most wizard-raised that she knew), but that didn't mean he wouldn't be in casual danger in the 'urban jungle.'

Finally, the doorbell rang. Tabitha sprang towards the door, a smile on her face. She flung open the door and nearly crashed into the door on the porch. Her smile disappeared when she saw the look on Henry's face.

"What's happened?" she asked.

"There was a disagreement at work. I don't know if I won or lost." Tabitha gestured him in, and they sat on the small love seat in front of the fire after Tabitha hung up his coat and Henry had taken off his boots.

"Tell me about it, if you're allowed." 'Please don't let him have failed to be admitted into the hit-wizard apprenticeship,' she prayed. 'He's an auror, he's a Dragon, but he really wants to be a hit-wizard.' Dragons were of course the Old Believers charged with security, and were often found in the auror and hit-wizard ranks.

"I probably shouldn't, but I will. I'm not going to join the hit-wizard apprentice program. . . ."

"I'm so sorry."

Henry held up his hand. "In fact, I'm leaving the aurors."

**"WHAT!"**

"Officially, I've quit."

"And unofficially?" They didn't play games with each other.

He took a deep breath. "I've been asked to put together a team."

"A team? You mean . . . to go Britain?"

"To go to Britain. The idiots at the British Ministry refuse to ask for the International for help, and the International can't act against them without pressure."

"And the only governments with the pull to do that would be the other Europeans, who are sticking their heads up their collective asses, hoping that Voldemort can't see them there, and the Confederation, who claim that we're too busy fighting that cult in the south to interfere."

"That's just an excuse. That cult is no more dangerous than any other mixed magic/Muggle cult. There are some dangers of knowledge bleeding over to the Muggles, but it's not a class



one conspiracy. They're using that as an excuse to avoid dealing with Voldemort, and will continue the policy unless we're asked by the British or unless he comes out to the Muggles."

He sighed, missing Tabitha's growing nervousness. "We had three teams of six in Britain, but they were attacked a few weeks ago. There were only two survivors." Henry saw Tabitha looking at him with horror. "What?"

She pulled her wand on him. "Are you going to try and kill me?"

Henry frowned. "What?"

"The MLE and the Dragons have authorized you to go on this mission, haven't they?"

"They have."

"Then they won't let me have this knowledge! It would cause a huge scandal if the news got out! You should know as well as anyone that I can't be memory-charmed! I've worked very hard to make certain that **NEVER NEVER** happens again!"

Henry tried to calm her down. "Tabs! You should know I would **never** do anything to hurt you! I figured you would want to go with me, and if for some reason you refuse, then I'll use Obliviate and just not tell them it can't work on you." He went down on his knees and put his hands out. He moved from English to Old Briton, the ritual language of the Old Believers. "I swear to you, your life is more important to me than mine. By the ring I gave you, I swear."

Tabitha lowered her wand slightly. "You want me to go?"

"I could go by myself, but that wouldn't help them much. I need a team."

"Help who? Who were in the previous groups?"

"That mostly classified. I can't lead a team of other people 'on leave' from the MLE, because I don't have the seniority, but I need a team. People who can work together. You know more about Voldemort than anyone not in Intelligence. You are a Charms Builder and Potions Master. You can defend yourself. You're a brilliant researcher. Above all, I know I can trust you."

"How many people?"

"In my group? Six, if you can find or suggest an assistant."

"Just one? Tom Lawrence," she answered immediately.

"He's not a great dueler, but he certainly has everything else going for him," Henry agreed. "How soon do you think you can get an owl back from him?"

Tabitha rolled her eyes. "When would we leave?"

"Late May. One of my team needs a little more training, and I know you would need that amount of time to make plans."

"Toby?"

"Toby. You don't know the other two."

"Okay, hang on." Tabitha turned and picked up the telephone.

"What are you doing?"

"I doubt my phones are tapped, don't you?"

"Right now? Certainly not. There are elements within the Confederation who could, but they're on our side."

"Great." She turned her attention back to the phone.

"Hello?"

"Tom, this is Tabby. Can you talk?"

"To you? Always!"

"No, idiot! Are you alone?"

"At the moment."

"What are you doing with your life?"

"You know what I'm doing!"

"Do you want to do something more important?"

"Like what?"

"Like going to Britain and joining the underground against Voldemort."

There was a long pause on the line, then, "You're kidding."

"You know how I've always felt about him. I've been given the chance to go, and was told I could recruit you."

"To do what?"

"Potions and going through intelligence, although there's always the chance you might have to defend yourself."

"When?"

"May."

There after another long pause, "I can't afford to finance myself."

Tabitha turned to Henry. "Are we expected to pay our own way?"

"There's no regular salary, but we can cover transportation, food, lodging, and the like."

Tabitha repeated that to Tom. After a short pause, he said, "Tell Harry that if he can get my rent and utilities paid here while I'm away, I can go."

Tabitha smiled and repeated that to Henry, adding, "And I'd like the same deal."

Henry nodded. Tabitha passed that on to Tom.

"Unless I hear differently from you, I'll come visit, either over Mardi Gras, Easter, or both. And I'll hex anyone who approaches me that I don't know."

"Sounds good, Tom. I'll let you know."

"Thanks." Tom sighed. "At least I have five months to get in shape."

They said goodbye, and they hung up.

Henry snorted when Tabitha told him what Tom had said. "Who would be afraid of Tom?"

"Anyone with a brain. He's a lousy dueler because he has average reflexes. If he gets the drop on you, he knows more hexes than you ever will and he can make them all work, and he knows more about ritual magic than anyone not hidden away in some religious community."

"I never knew him all that well. . . ."

"You went to school with him for six years!"

"And he was a year below me. He never played Quodpot or Quidditch, never made the dueling team, and was never very involved in the religion."

"He's a Novice as well as an Open Believer. Just remember, you might not have made it to Novice with my special help."

"I'm not making fun of him! I know he's smart, I know he's loyal, at least to you, and I know he's Muggle-born, so he's not even going to be recruited."

"And he'll be a Potions Master by May. And he has a Muggle undergrad degree in Classics, and will have his MA in British history by May."

"British history? Really?"

"Really. He's become a real nut for British culture. He picked it up from his housemate. They even drink Scottish stout and cook traditional roast beef dinners, complete with Yorkshire pudding, on Sundays for their Muggle friends. He told me they're having a roast tomorrow, with stout, claret, and port."

"In New Orleans? He's nuts!"

"They are . . . enthusiasts."

"No, they're nuts. But to heck with Tom, and Voldemort, and everything else. . . ."

"Uh uh," Tabitha scolded. "Not yet. Who was involved in the previous teams?"

"I shouldn't tell you, but it was Tudor and Gwen. There were at least two teams of six, and Gwen was there as a researcher."

"Gwen? Gwen Lloyd? My old Floor Prefect?"

"Yes. They were the only two survivors, out of all the teams. Tudor is still recovering, but he'll be back in fully fighting form long before May, and he'll be leading the groups, and be my boss. Gwen will be recovered a little later. I won't know how many other teams there will be, or who will be on them."

"The need to know?"

"Exactly."

"And his boss?"

"I can't tell you who's above us in our Government, Tabby, or else I would have to kill you, and I don't want to do that. In Britain, it will be Albus Dumbledore. He's leading an underground movement, but we can't go beyond that until we're over there. If it wasn't for that group, Voldemort would have taken over the British community by now."

"I had wondered why the fight was still going on. I thought maybe the British Ministry wasn't as incompetent as we all thought."

"Most are, but not all. There's a new head of their Law Enforcement, Barty Crouch. He's very very bright, and he's also very cold and ruthless, which isn't surprising, considering what happened to most of his family. We hope he'll really unleash the British aurors and hit-wizards. With us and Dumbledore's other volunteers, it might be enough."

"Let's hope." She gave Henry a very strange look.

"What?"

"I think it's time to break the Maiden's Charm."

**"WHAT!"**

"We've been close for over ten years. We've had sexual contact for seven years. We're going into combat in five months."

"You want to get married tonight?"

"You don't have to be married to break the Charm. The best way to do it is for me to put a charm on your penis, and you put a complimentary charm on my vagina. That will break the Maiden's Charm and prevent any real pain. There's only one problem."

"What's that?"

"You can't wear a condom. Have you been anywhere you shouldn't have been?"

"I've only been with you, Tabitha. Can you say the same?"

"You're the only male I've ever even french-kissed, the only male I've ever let touch me more than a friendly pat on the shoulder. I've never done anything any more than kissing another boy lightly on the lips, and I've only really allowed that from Tudor, Tom, and Cadfael. You know about each of the girls, and I haven't caught anything from them."

"I trust you as much as I love you."

"I've also found an interesting set of flexibility charms," Tabitha teased.

"Really?" Henry said with a real smile.

"Really. Just for your information, I don't have to be anywhere until the dawn of Twelfth Night -- I agreed to lead a service -- I have enough food for an small army, and I have my little lab here ready to make the First Night Potion, just in case we ever want to use it."

Henry grinned and picked Tabitha up in his arms.

"Why Rhett!" Tabitha fluttered her lashes, and they laughed as he carried her up the stairs.

Henry partially awoke to strong scents. They teased his senses, and he wondered where he was. Someplace nice, from the smells and the soft warm mattress. The same signs also told him he had no idea where that someplace was.

Since he felt so safe, for the first time in months (he had been tracking down a group of violent smugglers between early October and mid-December) and was so comfortable, he laid there, his eyes shut, and tried to identify each smell.

The most powerful scent was of an incense in the air -- pine and spruce -- with lilac a close second. He guessed the bed linens were stored with lilac potpourri. There was wood smoke as well, and he wondered if whomever had built it had added some damp oak leaves to it for the stronger scent. There were also other aromatics in the air -- pipe tobacco for one. Underneath it all, there was the smell of food -- apple pie and turkey.

'Pipe tobacco?' Henry thought. He hurriedly sat up. "Why would there be pipe smoke in Tabby's house?"

Tabitha's house looked to be completely Muggle, as long as any visitor stayed out of the tiny potions lab in the cellar. It had been built in the 1920s, and she had completely remodeled it. The downstairs had a living room and small dining room in front, as well as a kitchen, stairs, powder room, and small study, and there were two bedrooms and a bath in the smaller upstairs (due to the pitch of the roof). Henry pulled on boxers and his robe. He saw the incense was still slightly smoldering on Tabitha's household shrine. He paused and looked at

it. His was the only picture on the top shelf. The second held the photo of Tabitha and Maple, her corn husk dolls, her tooth and quartz necklace, and the wampum. It also had three other photos, of Megan and the two other women whom Tabitha had considered to be her lovers and friends. The next two shelves down held photos of close friends.

Henry padded down the stairs. There was fire in the fireplace. He was unsurprised to see a basket of oak leaves, various conifer cones, acorns, and the like on one side of the hearth, stacked wood on the other side. The former would be burned for various ceremonial purposes. There was a small device gently puffing the pipe smoke. No doubt there was some ritual reason for that as well.

The apple pie, along with a pumpkin pie, was in the small dining room, cooling. Henry loved these two front rooms. The house was small, with an enclosed porch running the full length of the front. The living room took up two thirds of the length of the house, and nearly two thirds of the original depth (before Tabitha had extended the tiny kitchen back further), and yet it was only twenty-four by fifteen feet. The only furniture were the old build-in bookshelves on either side of the fireplace, a large sofa (with a Christmas afghan Tabitha had made), and two rocking chairs. The dining room had an old handmade oaken table with eight matching dining chairs and two sideboards. One held the two sets of dishes, wine glasses, and crystal. The other held Tabby's growing pewter collection.

A glance in the large, modern kitchen (the remodeling had also built-out the kitchen into the back yard) showed it was empty as well, although there were many good smells there. Henry had to duck into the powder room under the stairs, and when he came out Tabby was basting the turkey.

"Everything smells great, but where were you?"

"Checking on the First Night Potion. It looks perfect."

"Oh. . . ." Not knowing what else to say, he asked, "What time is it?"

"Almost Nine. You looked tired, so I let you sleep."

"Thanks. I should have been up to greet the dawn."

"I made certain to ritually purify you."

That explained the incense, he realized. "Thank you, acolyte."

"Would you like breakfast first, or presents?"

"When is dinner, and will we be alone?"

"Two o'clock, and two pairs of lesbian Wiccan witches will be here after One." She smiled at the look on his face. "Just be glad that it's not my gay Muggle friends. They're mostly vegans."

"Breakfast, then, since I know I got my best present last night."

Tabitha blushed slightly, but turned and opened the fridge. Soon she had a large pan of bacon cooking.

"Two questions. One, way enough bacon to feed a dozen people, and two, why live so Muggle?"

"Let's see . . . in order, I cheat a lot when it comes to cleaning. I've found food tastes better cooked by hand. I need the bacon grease."

"For what?"

"We're having regular skillet bread and corn bread the same way."

"Alright."

"Get dressed and see if the fire needs tending."

"Yes, my love."

When he was finished dressing and tending the fire, Henry opened the front door and went onto the cold enclosed porch. One end had chairs for summer sitting. On the other side there was a six foot spruce, fully decorated Muggle-style at first glance. Henry smiled as he saw most of the ornaments were magic bubbles, which would burst into nothingness in a day or two more. Two fairies had also made their home deep inside the tree. Tabitha hadn't put any packages under the tree, to discourage any Muggle vandals.

Henry went back in and went into Tabitha's small den. He turned on the radio, and found a station playing Christmas songs. A flip of a switch turned on small speakers throughout the house. Henry was told to relax, while Tabitha played hostess.

Henry enjoyed the dinner conversation almost as much as he enjoyed the dinner (chowder, a full turkey dinner, both served with mulled cider; pie and espresso; and finally they split a bottle of vintage port, served with hickory nuts and walnuts). One of the witches helped Tabitha clean up while another played Tabitha's lute.

One pair of witches disappeared, while the others drove off in an old VW Beetle, a little before 7:00. Tabitha went up to take a shower while Henry raked out some ashes and rebuilt the fire.

Tabitha came down the stairs in a long flannel nightgown. Henry went up for a quick shower, and when he came down he sat next to Tabitha on cushions near the fire. She had fixed them sundaes, and they ate them slowly.

"It's going to be a tough campaign, isn't it?" Tabitha finally said.

"It will," Henry admitted. "The British Ministry has always been part of the problem."

"What else?"

"This Voldemort really is an amazingly powerful and evil wizard. He could very well be the most powerful Dark Wizard in centuries."

"Really?"

"Really."

"And twelve or eighteen of us, or however many, should make a difference?"

Henry shrugged. "Let's hope."

December 26, 1979

The Capitol

Tudor Myrddin sat in a pub in the Capitol of the Confederation, nursing a tankard of shandy. It was a fairly traditional pub, and Welsh was as common as English. He was away from his family over the holidays, making arrangements for the new groups to go over to Britain. He only had three groups lined up -- two combat groups and a mixed combat/research group that Dorff would be leading.

It wasn't going to be enough.

He almost wished he was drinking something stronger.

"May we sit with you and have a drink?" a voice asked.

Tudor looked up, and wondered who the two strangers might be.



## **Chapter XVII**

Thursday, December 26, 1979  
The Capitol

"May we sit with you and have a drink?" a voice asked.

Tudor looked up, and wondered who the two strangers might be. The two young men standing there were nothing special to look at. They in fact looked like the run-of-the-mill wizards any one would expect around the Capitol. They were average height, long in the body and short in the leg, with black hair and blue eyes. Both were a bit above average in muscle mass, the younger one was a bit huskier than the other. They could be brothers or distant cousins.

"Do I know you?"

"You should know me," the older one said. Tudor frowned in thought. "Quidditch," the man hinted.

"You were a Blue chaser, two years ahead of me, right?" The man nodded. "Trowbridge?"

"Maurice Trowbridge. This is my brother, Lloyd. And yes, we're part of the Trowbridge clan, although a very obscure branch." The Trowbridges were one of the most prominent of the magical English families what had crossed with the Old Believers. They were now entrenched everywhere from the Hidden to Old Colonials.

Tudor gestured and Maurice sat. Lloyd asked his brother, "Butterbeer?"

"Warm," the man agreed.

"Can I get you a refill?" Tudor shook his head. Lloyd came back with a large tankard of warm butterbeer for his brother and a bottle of Scottish stout for himself.

"What can I do for you?"

"You know, you aurors and hit-wizards aren't as clever as you like to think," Maurice said.

"In what way?"

"You've left a parchment trail all over. If it wasn't for the fact that a number of people agree with your goals, there'd be a big stink about your last mission."

"I've been on leave for over a year," Tudor stated.

"But still on full-pay, with the Intelligence Department paying you and your surviving team-member." Tudor scowled at them.

"You do that well," Lloyd said. "Seriously, the only things wizards are good at keeping quiet about are our existence and some family secrets. Not to mention that the attacks on your teams made the fringe media in Britain, so it was never totally secret."

"What was it in?"

"A new scandal sheet called The Quibbler. I'll loan you some copies, if you want."

"Thank you. Now, who are you and what do you want?"

"I'm a sersiant," Maurice answered. Sersiants were the basic Confederation security force. "What do I and some of my friends want? We want in on the fight in Britain."

In part to give himself time to think, he turned to Lloyd. "Are you a sersiant, too?"

"No, I'm studying at the Vieux Carre and a Muggle university in New Orleans."

"Really?" Tudor had fire-talked with Henry that morning. "Do you know Tom Lawrence?"

"He's my housemate, why?"

Tudor stared at him. "When did you leave New Orleans?"

"Early yesterday evening."

"Where were you Christmas Eve?"

"I was at a Muggle party, why?"

"I think he's saying your friend was recruited," Maurice pointed out, "and he thinks Lawrence told you about it."

"If that's what you think, you're wrong. Want to give me a truth potion?"

"Maybe later." He turned back to Maurice. "Who exactly is 'we'?"

"Us, and twenty-two others. Sixteen of us are sersiants, and we want a chance to serve."

"And the others?"

"Seven wives," Maurice admitted. "I know, that's dangerous. All seven are skilled witches, and would provided a strong base."

"Children?"

"Some," Lloyd answered. "The only people who should know where the wives are located besides the husbands would be perhaps you, myself, and the girls."

"What?"

"Three safe houses. One for the sersiants, one for the women and children, and a third one. I'd be in the third one. I'd be doing things like the shopping for all three. The girls would take turns showing up, one each day. Their husbands would rotate through as well."

"Ah. And why you?"

The young man smiled. "Because unlike most of this lot, wizard-born the lot of them, although two of the women have some experience in the Muggle world, I can function in the British Muggle world."

"How?"

"For whatever reason, I've always been fascinated by Muggle culture in general, and British Muggle culture in particular. I have Muggle degrees in modern European history and British literature, and I'll have my Master's in May, unless you accept us and we leave sooner. I spent the summer of 1977 in Melbourne, Australia -- my parents didn't want me visiting Britain under the circumstances and I didn't have the money to send myself until the next year. I spent the last two summers in Muggle Britain. I never even entered the magical world for so much as a butterbeer. I even took Muggle transportation."

"As you'll discover when you do the background checks, my little brother is a fairly average wizard in some respects, just a bit above average in power. He does have one special ability that I really wish I had, though."

"What's that?"

"A talent for wandless magic," Lloyd said. "I can do most spells at at least a low-level, without a wand, and that includes apparation."

"Really?"

"Really. That's what I've been working on at the Vieux Carre. My transfiguration is almost the equal of what I can do with a wand, but the dueling is weak."

"Not that you're all that great to begin with," he brother added.

Lloyd ignored that. He turned to Tudor. "Are you interested?"

"I am," Tudor admitted. "I hope you thought to bring a list? You know we'll have to look into this very carefully."

"We know," Maurice agreed. He handed Tudor a list of names. The brothers finished their drinks and left.

Sersiants were not as well-trained fighters as aurors or hit-wizards, but they were trained. Any sersiant who worked above the basic levels would probably be the equal or superior in training to most of the Death Eaters.

And Tudor would have sixteen of them, if they could all be trusted, plus Lloyd and the wives. Forty-two volunteers in total might actually make a serious difference in the war, for there were thought to be less than a hundred active Death Eaters. In a war on terror, though, you needed to out-man and out-gun the terrorists.

Tudor smiled. It might just work.

Wednesday, January 2, 1980

"By Epona! We should track down the leaks and rip them a new set of h'rmp!" Tabitha quieted Henry by stuffing a tollhouse cookie in his mouth.

"Lloyd is perfectly trust-worthy, and I was going to ask if there was any way to bring him in," she said to Tudor. "The question is, are the others reliable?" The three were sitting in Tabitha's kitchen.

"Strangely enough, yes," he answered. "None have any history of Dark magic in their families or close contact with any suspect persons. They're all fully-qualified. All the men are from Old-Believer or Colonial families, most a mixture of both, as are four of their wives. Two of the wives are from what are really Muggle families -- all their grandparents are Squibs or Muggles. The other one is from Viet Nam -- there were a number of magical Buddhist families that have moved to southern California over the last forty years apparently.

"I don't know any of them," Henry complained.

Tudor sat back and recalled the information he needed. "Maurice Lloyd, born in the magical village of Carantouan" (this was a wizarding town along the Pennsylvania/New York border, slightly east of where Cindie and Emily were from), "in 1949. Blue dragon, Quidditch chaser. Seven WTs, including an E in Defense. Five N.E.W.T.s, , with an A in Defense. Played professional Quidditch for two years, a reserve chaser for the Ontario Generals, and then he entered service as a sersiant. He has an excellent record. In addition, one of their great great great grandmothers was my great great great-aunt. They are of the River sect, and while some of their relatives are somewhat sharp merchants, that's the worst that has ever been said of anyone in their family."

"As for Lloyd, he was a White dragon. He scored twelve WTs, with an E in Defense. Much stronger in theory than in practice in everything. All seven N.E.W.T.s, again with an E in Defense." He looked back at his friends. "Very capable wizards, but nothing extraordinary."

"Really?" Tabitha asked.

"So you know?"

"Of course."

"Know what?"

"Lloyd Trowbridge has a real knack for wandless magic, including apparation. In fact, he has an amazing knack for apparation. While he can't cross anti-apparation barriers, he can apparate within them."

"Without splinching?" Areas under anti-apparation spells were infamous for causing accidents when students tried to apparate within the areas, as many students found out at places like Hogwarts and the Ysgol.

"Hasn't lost a hair. In fact, he's done some work testing wards. He's so good, he can find any cracks in the wards and go through them."

"That's supposed to be a myth!" Henry protested.

"I thought so, too, but I've been told he's not the first to have the ability. It is pretty rare, though. It's estimated that maybe a dozen people have the ability, and probably some don't know it. It also means he can also . . . hesitate the apparation."

"What does that mean?"

"That means when he disappears, he doesn't have to immediately appear someplace else. That's how he can search out the chinks in the system," Tabitha stated.

"Exactly. So if we take him, we don't have to worry about his getting caught and tortured for information."

"So you trust this bunch?"

Tudor handed Henry a stack of parchment. "Here's what we have on everyone so far. You two go over the information and tell me what you think. They all went to California, the Ysgol, or the Colorado School."

"My family all went there, except for me," Henry admitted.

"Maurice and two of the other sersiants are the oldest, Lloyd is the youngest. If we go with it, Lloyd will be going to Britain in February. He's finished his studies at the Vieux Carre and only has two independent studies left for his Muggle University degree. We'll set him up with money and a cover story. He'll be setting up three places for his people. I don't know if he'll have much if any contact with your team; we might have him set up places for all of us. I will certainly limit the others to their own group."

"Like I said, we can trust Lloyd," Tabitha stated firmly. "The rest, well, I'll look over the folders if you really want me to."

"Why wouldn't he . . . oh. Right. The need to know," Henry said. He looked at Tudor. "It's up to you."

Tudor took the parchments back. "Well done. I will tell you that Lloyd will be traveling as a Muggle. Not even a wand." He looked at Tabitha. "You'll be ready to leave by June First?"

"Yes, sir," she said. "Whomever finds us a house, make certain we have room for a potions lab. I'll be bringing a lot of ingredients."

"I'll arrange for a line of credit," Tudor said. He turned to Henry. "I'll need to see you on the Seventh."

"Right." All three shook hands.

Tuesday, February 27, 1980

"The worst thing about Britain is learning who to drive on the bloody left side of the road," Lloyd Trowbridge muttered to himself as he drove through the rain. "The second worst thing is the weather."

It had taken him just a few days to find two of the residences he was put in charge of finding. "Like going to the mattresses," he grumbled as he nearly wrecked yet again, avoiding a pothole by turning the wrong way. He needed seven apartments for the wives, some of whom had children. He had managed to find a small building that was just being completed on the High Street of a small neighborhood of what had been a village until it had been swallowed up by Greater London in the late 1960s. The ground floor and basement were already leased, but the eight apartments on the higher floors hadn't been until he had taken the lot the previous morning.

The sixteen sersiants were even harder to house. Fortunately, one of them was bringing a house elf to help with the general housekeeping. He had managed to find a small sprawling farm house that with some magical work would just fit what was needed.

He now needed a house for himself and housing for two of the three teams of six. The third group would need an even larger house.

As he drove towards the next listing, he thought about meeting Dumbledore the previous Friday. He had never seen a wizard with so much presence. He had hoped they could make a difference. Now he thought they actually had a good chance to win.

Monday, June 3, 1980

"So what's this surprise?" Henry asked in a growl. He and his team were crammed into a small van, being driven through the outskirts of London at what he thought was a far too high rate of speed.

"Sorry, orders," Lloyd said with a grin. He felt he had finally gotten the hang of driving on the left over these last two and a half weeks. He managed to get on and off the roundabout without causing any crashes.

"Where are we?"

"It's a village called Whinging, believe it or not."

"Why wouldn't it be called Whinging?" Toby Jones demanded.

"It's British slang for whining or complaining. Across that little bridge is Little Whinging, a little tonier but it's just suburban sprawl. The shops are all over here." Lloyd drove through the streets to the train station and turned parallel to the tracks. At the outskirts, where the tracks went over an old canal, he pulled into the driveway of a large house.

"Big place," Henry muttered.

"You'll need it," Lloyd said with a grin. "Please note how secluded you are here. Old canal behind you, railway to the right. To the left, on the other side of the wall, is a cemetery, with the Methodist chapel beyond. The rectory is across the road from the chapel."

"What was the building we passed?" Henry demanded, jerking his thumb at the building across the road.

"I'm not sure of the British term, but it's where the local buses are cleaned and repaired. There was one resident I couldn't get rid of . . . hope you don't mind sharing with a rather dour ghost."

"Really?" Tom asked. "Of whom?"

"Victorian maid, impregnated and committed suicide. She's not very aware, of course." Few Muggle ghosts were.

"Any other surprises?" Henry demanded.

"Two, right now. Two more at the end of July. Come on in and meet the other two members of your team."

"What! I wasn't told. . . ."

"It was Dumbledore's idea, and Tudor approved it. Fuss at them, not at me!" The six recently arrived Americans stood in the entrance way and saw two smiling, very pregnant, tall young women.

"Alice Longbottom, Lily Potter, let me introduce Henry Dorff, the team leader, and Tabitha Spellman, Thomas Lawrence, Titus Wells, William Loomis, and Tobias Jones, better known as Harry, Tabby, Tom, Willie, and Toby. Titus, alas, is just plain Titus."

"What's the story?" Henry demanded.

"Mrs. Longbottom is an auror, and wife of an auror. They and the Potters are in the Order. As you can see, they are hardly ready for combat at the present time. They needed a place to hide out until a few months after the babies are born. . . ."

"Late July or early August, in both cases," Alice said proudly.

"Oh, Epona!" Henry said, his eyes raised to the heavens.

"The only people who know the location, outside of you lot and myself, are Dumbledore, Myrddin, Longbottom, and Potter," Lloyd went on. "Now, these two are VERY well-known by the opposition. Even though this is about the most Muggle of all places I could find, they should NOT leave the house. I've expanded part of the basement so that everyone can walk and practice dueling. It would be best, actually, if only Tom and Tabitha went into town. It would be best that no one else be thought to live here."

"It would be best if you stopped talking like that," Toby muttered.

Lloyd glared up at the bigger man. "And it might be best for you to remember who's going to be everything but feeding you, kid, and I'll probably end up doing some of that, too." He turned to Tabitha and Tom. "I'll be going with you into town tomorrow morning to set up a Muggle checking account, or as they would call it here, a current account. I'll also show you the stores. Your cover is simply that you're writers, working in England for two years. If anyone asks, after a few weeks just say your work is progressing. I'll be by at least once a week to see if you need other supplies. There are anti-apparation wards up all over, except for the back porch. Anyone apparating there will still set off some soft chimes set all over the house. Any questions? No? Great. I've got to get the van back to the rental place. I'll be by later."

Lloyd left them in the entrance hall. Tabitha turned to the women. "Have you been briefed on us?"

"Other than the fact you're American volunteers, no," Alice admitted.

"Your friends weren't any happier over this arrangement than we were, or you are," Lily said. "I'm sure you'd all be happier without us and we'd be happier someplace else. However, we're all stuck here together."

"When are you do? Around August First?" Tabitha asked.

"A few days after for me, actually," Lily answered. "We have made arrangements for the delivery."

"We can go into those details later," Alice stated. "We're going to be getting a lot of information and shifting though it. I understand some of you will be working for us?"

"No," Tabitha answered sweetly, "Tom and I will be working **with** you." The two women glared at each other.

"I've been involved in this for five years. . . ."

"Great. Another six years and you'll match me. One of Voldemort's followers tried to have me killed Christmas, 1968. I've been researching this since. Tom and Henry have been helping since the very early Seventies. You've been living this, we've been observing this. We have different perspectives; we'll have different contributions to make."

"Let's get set up," Henry said.



## **Chapter XVIII**

It took two weeks for the group to get used to each other and used to working together. Dorff, Wells, Loomis, and Jones were each out on missions at least two nights a week, and were often doing surveillance the other nights. Alice and Lily took care of the general house cleaning (which they could do without strain due to magic) while Tabitha and Tom took kitchen duty.

Because James Potter knew of the safe house's location, Dorff's team was paired with Longbottom's sub-team of Potter, Lupin, Black, and Pettigrew. Other than one short visit each, none of Dorff's team ever visited Longbottom's safe house or the Marauders' house, and besides Dumbledore, the only members of the Order of the Phoenix who knew where Dorff's team was located were Longbottom and Potter.

In terms of the fight against Voldemort, things slowly swung around to the forces of light that summer and early autumn of 1980. This was in part because of the American reinforcements, and in part because of Barty Crouch's new 'kill first, ask questions later' approach to dealing with anyone caught in the commission of a suspected dark activity.

In the middle of all that, of course, came two births. Alice went into labor early in the morning of July 30th, giving birth just after midnight. By then, Lily was also in labor, and gave birth late that afternoon. Dumbledore was there, and assured the parents that he would take care of registering the births (in different towns, of course, in case anyone tried to check on their locations -- they had lost one family that way already).

Friday, October 31, 1980'

"Tom?"

"M'mmm?"

"Tom, will you stop reading that and listen."

Tom looked up from the old scroll. "What's up?"

"Have you heard anything I've said?" Henry demanded.

"I heard you send all the others out to various locations to keep an eye out for Death Eater activity." They knew there was at least one low-level spy somewhere in Voldemort's forces, but not who it was. All Dumbledore would say was that he had more than one source and was hoping for at least one more soon. Obviously, the information had just come through about the meeting and they were scrambling to cover one set of possibilities on short notice.

"Right. The problem is, there are two more places and only one of me. Even Lloyd is covering a location."

"I'll go!" Alice Longbottom said.

"Don't be silly," Henry snapped.

"Having had a baby months ago does NOT disqualify a person from finally going on an active mission."

"I think it does, at least for two years. You agreed to one. If you don't like that, ask Dumbledore to be reassigned."

"I take it you want me to go," Tom said, jumping in.

"Any objections? We know they're going to have a meeting tonight, and we need to know if it's at any of the known locations. We would need you to watch for about four hours, and identify anyone who shows up without a mask. I saved the least likely for you."

"Least likely, huh? You don't know much about cliches, do you?"

That confused Henry, so he decided not to pursue it. "Just apparate or portkey out if you get in trouble. Here's the info." He handed Tom a slip of paper. "We're out of invisibility cloaks, but there's plenty of cover. Disillusionment should be more than enough."

"We'll see." Tom checked his watch. He had just four hours to get ready to go.

Tom apparated, already disillusioned, well over an hour before dusk. He would have to be there some five to eight hours, since he had left a little early, and he hoped the spells he had used would work -- having to take a 'bathroom break' during this type of surveillance could be fatal. He arrived in an apple and pear orchard on a country lane that skirted a low ridge. He was across the lane from a rundown cottage, and behind the small gamekeepers cottage was the wooded ridge.

Tom had collected a number of oak leaves that afternoon, and magically inscribed runes, glyphs, and symbols onto them before leaving. He set five down twenty yards apart, setting four of them near trees. He set a small, flat, inscribed stone atop each leaf. Then he repeated the process closer to the center of the circle. With his wand, Tom traced a circle and pentagram while chanting six sets of incantations, using the outer leaves as star points. If he had done the spells correctly, and if they reenforced each other as predicted, he should be safe within the inner area from any spell shot at him, and from detection. He would still be vulnerable to a physical attack, but he had created a portkey to an open area (no one could apparate in or out of his enchanted area). So long as no one physically came across the area, he should also be hidden. Since one of the charms was a distraction charm, he should be safe from that.

Tom sat down and leaned against the apple tree he had used to center his creation. The life force of it and the other four trees were built into the spelled area. The weak spot was the forward point of the star, but even that laid over a tree root.

Now the hard part began -- the waiting.

The first person showed up a little after 9:00. He came out of the woods, in full Death Eater regalia. There was a brief few moments of light inside the cottage, before things dimmed, and Tom guessed the windows had been spelled to contain the light. He was wearing Muggle night vision goggles, magically enhanced, and was sure he could identify anyone who showed up without a mask.

Others started to gather a little before 11:15. These were all fully dressed in Death Eater regalia, down to the masks. The most Tom could do was keep count. He pulled out his wand and the portkey. He would be ready to go as soon as he felt the meeting had started. Whether or not that would give either the Order or the Ministry enough time to organize a counter-strike was something he didn't care about at the moment.

A total of twenty-one people arrived by 11:50, meaning it was a large gathering by Death Eater standards. It was at that moment that six people apparated near the woods. Four in masks, and two without.

One of the ones without a mask was clearly a prisoner. Tom didn't recognize him, but he was unconscious and his wrists were tied behind him.

The other was clearly Voldemort. Tom shuddered when he was what Voldemort had turned himself into. He was an alien, inhuman creature.

The group was moving towards the cottage. Tom knew that as soon as they crossed the threshold, he had to go for help. Just before they reached the door, however, Voldemort stopped and looked straight at him. The others stopped and looked as well.

"Stupefy!"

The hex would have missed Tom by three feet. Voldemort had somehow detected the enchanted area.

The wards flared but easily held. "Avada Kedavra!"

Although said empathically, it was the softest killing spell Tom had ever heard. Most people had to scream the spell, even to kill a fly.

The wards again held, but the runes on top of the stones were started to glow red hot. Another major curse and they would explode. Tom activated his portkey. His leaving pushed the stones over the limits of their structural endurance, and they both shattered and smouldered the leaves.

It took Tom a few seconds to recover his poise, and then he collected himself and apparated back to the safe house. He hadn't wanted to splinch himself, after all.

Voldemort was slightly startled to see a number of small explosions across the road. He turned to his Death Eaters. "Execute the auror and then have everyone disband for the evening." His eyes sought out two followers. "Rastaban, Severus, come with me."

He marched across the lane, the two puzzled Death Eaters following. "What did you see, Severus?"

"I saw nothing until you turned suddenly, Master. You sent a simple stunner, which flared against some sort of magical boundary, then the Death Curse, which did the same." There was a pause. "That should not have happened."

"And then?"

"Then I heard a slight rush of air, which meant someone portkeyed out. After that, there were a number of instantaneous small explosions."

"How many?"

"I'm not certain, Master. I think somewhere between . . . seven and twelve."

"There were ten." He knelt down and picked up a burnt leaf, and then a fragment of the stone. He raised his wand and cast light around the orchard. "I see. I know what was done, although not how to do it. Very clever. Someone managed to build a pentagram which supported numerous wards. It was anchored on these trees. The trees absorbed the Death Curse. They will certainly sicken, and may die." He stood. "There is not a wizard in Europe who could have done this. Not even Dumbledore and Flitwick together could have done this. This means those . . . druids and their ilk have reentered the fight." He paused. "That explains much of what has happened since mid-June. Our enemies have a new group of reinforcements. I thought as much, but it is good to have proof."

He turned to Snape. "You work in Diagon Alley, and do part-time work in Hogsmeade. Snoop around and find out anything you can about these people."

"Yes, Master." Snape bowed.

"Lestrage, disillusion and climb that tree. If you make a sound, they will capture you. Do **not** attack anyone. Even if Dumbledore shows up and turns his back on you, do not attack. Understand?"

"No, Master, but I will obey."

"Let's make certain that auror is dead. Then we may leave."

"Yes, Master."

Alice and Lily were sitting in front of the fire when a set of beads flashed as chimes proclaimed some one had apparated in. They stood and took out their wands. The door opened and revealed Tom Lawrence. They kept their wands at the ready, while he kept his away.

"They're at the cottage," Tom said breathlessly. "Voldemort is there, along with a prisoner."

"You're sure?" Alice demanded.

"Do you think I could mistake someone else for Voldemort?"

"No," Alice admitted, "no, from what I've heard I have to admit no one could. I'll alert the teams. You should go back about ten minutes after I send out the notice."

"Right. Somehow, I was spotted. Voldemort sent two curses in my direction, although they both just missed."

"So they are either going to be cleared out or laying a trap? Great. How many Death Eaters were there?"

"About twenty-five or twenty-six . . . twenty-five plus Voldemort, and the one bound man." Alice nodded and hurried out.

Lily came in and handed Tom a small glass of lemonade. "Thank you, Lily."

"You're welcome. Be careful."

"I will. I just hope I don't apparate right in the middle of the Death Eaters."

"Go in in a crouch, on the off chance they haven't already cleared out." She smiled. "Of course, if you'd care to babysit Harry and Neville, Alice and I could go instead."

"Somehow, I think the only two people who would think that a good idea are you two."

Lily smiled. "Probably."

Alice came in. "Eight minutes."

Tom sighed. He stood and stretched. "I wish I could stick to potions and rituals."

It was clear when the Order and Volunteers arrived that the dirty work had been finished. The Dark Mark hung over the cottage, and the body was laying just outside the cottage door.

Rastaban was disappointed. The opposition only said what had to be said. Still, he had an excellent visual memory, and a good artistic hand. He would be able to make drawings of some of the Order and Volunteer members.

Friday, November 28, 1980

The masked Death Eater opened the door, and two men dragged a shivering unmasked Death Eater from the room. "No one seems to have much luck tonight," the doorkeeper sneered.

Severus recognized the voice. 'Malfoy. Trust him to get a job that runs few risks,' he thought as he made his way into the room. He knelt before the Dark Lord.

"Well, my potions maker, have you discovered anything?"

"Only negative information, my Lord. There have been no new North Americans visiting either Diagon Alley or Hogsmeade."

"Crucio!"

Crabbe and Goyle dragged Snape out a minute later. 'What has happened?' Snape thought. 'If they aren't there, they aren't there. Why would he do that to me for no reason?' He was dropped unceremoniously outside the back door of the house they were occupying for the moment. 'He would do it because he's a sadistic monster,' came the answer as Snape talked to himself. 'You've known it for months. You've really known it since you took the Mark. You probably should have known even before that. But you wouldn't admit it to yourself.'

Snape dragged himself home, uncertain about what, if anything, he could do.

Snape had been followed in by two young men who had just joined. They had only left Hogwarts five months before, and had made overtures within weeks. They were to be prized for the moment, as they had family members among the opposition.

"You first," Voldemort ordered.

"I have heard nothing from my brother," the young man said. Had nearly anyone else brought bad news that night, they would have paid instantly. Voldemort was glad he stayed his hand when Regulus Black added, "but Barty followed up on a lead I gave him."

Voldemort turned to Barty Crouch Junior. "Well?"

"I temporarily located Peter Pettigrew, my Lord."

"Temporarily? One of you had best explain, and quickly!"

"Pettigrew is addicted to sweets from a Muggle sweet shop in his hometown," Regulus said.

"We've been keeping an eye out there whenever we could," Barty continued. "He went in just this afternoon, at Two-fifty. When he came out, he turned into an alley and disappeared. He went all the way down the alley."

"So, how many sweets did he buy?"

"At least three pounds," Barty said.

Voldemort turned to Regulus but said nothing. The teen took the hint. "If Pettigrew has the same habits as he did in school, he would eat about a pound a week. Of course, it might go

faster if he doesn't hide it well. My brother always liked to steal a little at a time until Pettigrew protested."

"He has only appeared once?"

"Yes, Master, but we have only been able to keep a part time look out for this past week."

"I see. Lucius!"

"Master?"

"These two boys will tell you the location of a Muggle sweet shop. We will need to keep an alley near it under surveillance during working hours. Who do we have available who can operate undercover in the Muggle world?"

"Foster and Snape, my Lord."

"Johnson, Smith, and Carson still haven't returned?"

"No, my Lord."

"Inform Snape we will need more of the potions. Only have him report on his other projects when he has something to report. We shall use Foster and these two until the others return."

"Yes, my Lord."

"He knows Pettigrew, does he not?"

"By sight, my Lord."

"Good. If the idiot has any sort of pattern to his sweets habit, we shall have him." He glared at the two boys. "If this was just a one-time impulse purchase, you had best hope we do not end up putting to many resources into it before we find it out!"

Barty Crouch bowed in worship. Regulus Black bowed in terror. Voldemort enjoyed seeing both.

Snape managed to get back to his cold-water flat without splinching himself. Hands shaking, he managed to pour some of the potion he had invented into a glass and gulp it down. It soothed inflamed nerves, and that was certainly the condition of anyone's nerves held under a Cruciatus curse -- at least until the nerves frayed and were then destroyed.

When had things started to go wrong? At first, the Dark Lord had seemed everything a Slytherin Pure-Blood like himself could ask for. The violence had seemed regrettable, but necessary. Some older students, especially Lucius Malfoy, had long defended the Dark Lord in the Common Room. When had he decided that killing and torture were reasonable tools of political force?

Had it been as that Easter of his Third year when he had been lost? When Malfoy had invited himself and four other boys to Malfoy Manor? Malfoy's older brother had lectured them, inspired them.

'Well,' Snape thought, 'Marcus certainly was a believer.' He remembered being shocked at the news that a number of young followers had been massacred in America that next summer.

'Perhaps that should have been a clue that this was not going to be as easy as many claimed it would be,' he thought. 'That it was not just the 'Muggle lovers' grinding down those who deserved power.' Many of the Old Believers made families like his own and the Malfoys seem open and welcoming to others, yet they rejected Voldemort. If it was, as the Pure Bloods claimed, because they were muddled with religion, that seemed to give them a great deal of power through unity as well.

Snape sat down and doodled some numbers. How large was Voldemort's force? Perhaps sixty full Death Eaters and several hundred more followers remained after months of minor losses, more than half of whom were in Britain and Ireland. Say, at the outside, 300 people in Britain and Ireland for the Dark Lord, with some 60,000 people opposed at the moment. They could spread terror, but could they hope to win? And if they did, what would the other magical communities do? There were over half a million or more in the Confederation alone, and at least a few had knowledge that even Voldemort admitted was unknown in Europe.

So here he was, tied to a leader he feared but no longer respected, in a cause he was uncertain of, in a war he no longer believed possible to win.

He would have to consider his options. There didn't seem to be many. He had killed, after all. He had killed an innocent Muggle boy as part of his initiation, he had killed in two firefights with the opposition.

Snape decided not to worry about that now. He poured himself a small glass of cheap gin. Mixing that with the potion would intoxicate him enough to make it impossible to think about anything for at least eight or ten hours.



## **Chapter XIX**

Monday, December 8, 1980

Peter Pettigrew was in many ways an average wizard at best. His family was undistinguished, his marks at Hogwarts had been average. Most average wizards were keeping their heads down in this time of trouble.

In that respect, Pettigrew was not average. Right out of school, he had been swept up into the fight against Voldemort. Within a few months, he had been accepted into the Order of the Phoenix. He still wasn't certain why he had gone along with his friends, other than it was a habit developed over seven years of school.

After all these years, he still wasn't certain why he had been placed in Gryffindor. He wasn't smart enough for Ravenclaw, hard-working or loyal enough for Hufflepuff, well-bred enough or ambitious enough for Slytherin, or brave enough for Gryffindor. The Sorting Hat had kept him there for some time, debating between Slytherin, the House of his mother, or Gryffindor, the House of his father, an auror who had been killed a few years before.

He had therefore asked for Gryffindor, and wound up meeting three of the most unusual boys to attend Hogwarts in many a year. James Potter and Sirius Black would have been princes in any House. They had the breeding and ambition for Slytherin and were more than brilliant enough for Ravenclaw. They even could work hard enough to have been decent Hufflepuffs, and they were loyal to each other and to their House. But they were Gryffindors, brave and boisterous.

Remus Lupin was different. Nearly as capable as the other two, he was much quieter and bookish. While James and Sirius seemed capable of absorbing knowledge. Remus worked a little harder, and understood things deeper. It had been shocking to learn that Remus hadn't been 'delicate' and 'sickly' but a werewolf.

Peter had been horrified. James and Sirius had been delighted, and Peter had learned to go along as well. It was to help Remus that the two had decided to become Animagi, with again Peter's going along for the ride.

To successfully become an Animagus was a major achievement. To become mammalian was an even greater achievement. Of course, his rat was overshadowed by Sirius' huge dog and even more by James' stag.

He was always overshadowed. It was still going on. Sirius and James were fighting this war, Peter was collating information. Even Remus did nearly as much fighting as he did research. Peter was left behind in many ways, but on the whole he preferred that.

It was safer.

Peter liked playing it safe.

There was only one slightly risky thing Peter indulged in. He loved the boiled sweets of his childhood, and the little shop in his home town was one of the few small town sweet shops that not only was staying in business but still made many of their own sweets. Not a soft paste, not hard and crunchy, they had just the right texture and flavors as far as Peter was

concerned. He had little comfort in his current existence, in fact the sweets were all he had. Even Sirius and James recognized this, and never stole them, like they had at Hogwarts.

He apparated into the alley as usual and scurried out to the side street. It was a nasty, dark day, with a hard, driving, nearly-freezing rain. Peter picked up an even larger order than usual, so that he could give some away for Christmas.

He hadn't noticed a slim figure follow him out of the alley and into the shop. Therefore, he didn't pay any attention to the young man, whom he should have recognized, as he asked when he should make a special order for Easter.

Told he could at any time, Peter made his large order early, and set a date to pick it up. Going back into the storm, Peter disappeared as soon as he entered the alley, since there was no one around, that he could see, much to the disappointment of another young wizard at the back of the alley.

While they were worried about their Master's reaction to their failure to grab Pettigrew, Regulus and Barty knew they could at least report a date where Pettigrew could be kidnaped, if attempts failed between now and then.

Wednesday, Christmas Eve, 1980

Harry and Neville were napping, and Alice and Lily were taking a break from the children and their paper work to have tea.

"You seem nervous," Alice said, teasing the younger woman.

"Neither Frank nor James have been able to spend the night since Halloween, and here we have two nights together. I haven't been to the Marauders' place in weeks. You're telling me you're not nervous and excited?"

"Excited, yes," she admitted, "nervous, no, but I've been married longer than you." She fished around for a different topic. "Our housemates are stranger than I had realized."

"You mean all that chanting every morning this week? Well, Tabby and Henry are priests of some kind, and some of the others are believers. . . ."

"I've read about them, but didn't realize the reality."

"I wish I had. I don't think Binns ever mentioned them."

"From Binns, a student would never realize that there's a world outside of western Europe or history before Merlin," Alice said with a sniff.

"True. I do like some of them."

"Well, Harry, Tabby, and Tom are alright, but Toby is an arrogant one, isn't he?"

"That's because he's in lust with Tabby, and she doesn't care for him."

"True," Alice agreed. "I just can't tell if she return's Henry's interest of not."

"Oh, she does -- she even told me they had been lovers but didn't want to go to far here when everyone else here has been forced to be more celibate -- but she has other interests," Lily said.

"Really? Who?"

"She told me that she really liked Harry, but preferred . . . girls."

"Was she flirting with you?"

"No!"

"I just wondered. You two would certainly be a striking pair of red-heads!"

"Very funny."

"I thought so. At least Titus and Willie are quiet. I just wish we could get out more." She immediately raised her hand. "I know, I know. This is why we're safe here."

"But James and Frank aren't," Lily said softly, speaking what they both feared most.

#### Christmas, 1980

Titus, Willie, and Toby were on duty all day Christmas. While Voldemort had been relatively quiet since Halloween, no one believed the threat was over.

Harry and Neville were, of course, far too young to have any understanding about Christmas. That didn't prevent the two infants from being the center of everyone's attention, and from their being showered with gifts. Even the somewhat stand-offish Toby Jones had bought the boys magically-flavored pacifiers.

Mid-morning, Alice and Lily were finally able to leave for a short time. Henry escorted Lily, Harry, and James to the Marauder's communal flat and Tabitha escorted the Longbottom's to Frank's secret headquarters.

Remus and Sirius almost totally ignored Lily, concentrating instead on entertaining Harry. They both adored the baby, and loved playing with him, even when that just meant making faces at him. Peter spent his time taking photos and taking care of dinner. James and Sirius couldn't cook, and usually wound up blowing up the Muggle tinned food Lloyd provided, since they refused to use a tin opener. Remus cared little for food. It was left to Peter, who was usually home when he wasn't going out for supplementary supplies, to do most of the cooking, while he and Remus split the cleaning.

James and Sirius had decorated the row house in the run-down council terrace Dumbledore had somehow arranged for them to lease. They had a Christmas tree, complete with magical and Muggle decorations. Remus had found and coaxed a small group of fairies to come and live inside it for the season.

Young Harry enjoyed watching the fairies that Remus had encouraged to come out and dance for him more than he did the presents. Peter managed to take a lot of photos.

When the day was over, Lily wrapped Harry up well, and Henry apparated back to the house at Whinging with Harry. He and Tabitha would be minding to two infants for the night.

James would have dragged his wife immediately to bed, but Lily first ordered Sirius into James' bedroom. "If there is one prank, one hoax, one hex, Sirius Black, I swear I'll shrink your willie to the point you'll have to sit to pee and no girl will never be able to find it."

It took Sirius over half an hour to de-hoax James' bedroom.

Friday, December 26, 1980

"Feeling better, Prongs?" Remus asked.

"Less . . . Prongy?" Peter teased.

James glowered at them. Peter hurried off to bring in the coffee.

Sirius made his way in. "Well, Prongs! Did the buck have a good f. . ."

He did not finish the sentence, as Lily had sealed his mouth. "Really consider if you want to bait us this morning, Sirius, dear." She put his mouth back.

Sirius felt his mouth. It seemed to be back to normal. "Yes, well . . . sleep well, did we?"

"Very well, thank you," Lily said primly. "And you?"

"Very well. Thanks, Wormtail," Sirius added as Peter poured them coffee. "So," he went on, looking for some topic which wouldn't get him hexed, "who was your guardian?"

Lily rolled her eyes. "He's one of the American volunteers, as you know perfectly well. He's an auror on leave."

"So the Confederation isn't just condoning their presence, they're actually supporting the Order?" Remus asked. They didn't have many chances to ask questions.

"Exactly. They're paying the expenses, and arranged for some of their aurors and others to come over."

"I guess they couldn't send too many aurors and hit-wizards over," James mused. "They can't leave themselves even partially unprotected."

"A number of them are sersiants, Confederation guards and constables."

"Not as formidable as aurors, but well-trained nonetheless," Remus pointed out.

"Exactly. They're doing a lot of the basic guard work here, too. That frees up the Order and the other volunteers. They actually have a pretty good system set up."

"Do you know what happened Halloween night?" Remus asked. "The reports didn't seem to make sense."

"Oh that was . . . I guess we're not supposed to use full names, right? His name is Tom. He's one of the three who's not a sersiant, auror, or Dragon."

"Dragon?" Peter asked, finally sitting down to his own breakfast.

"The Old Believer security people," Lily told them. "Tabby is a really brill spell weaver and potions brewer. Really good dueler, too. They brought Lloyd over because he understands British Muggle culture. Tom is really good potions brewer if not as good as Tabby, but his real specialty is old ritual magic. I'm really learning a lot from all of them."

"So this Tom used ritual magic?" Remus asked. "That would explain a lot. I would never have thought about anchoring a warding spell with a living entity like that."

"He used six wards, on top of whatever he needed to do to create the enchanted pentagram," Lily explained. "I wish we knew what drew Voldemort's attention. He showed us what he had done, although I admit I didn't totally understand it. . . ."

"What? You? And you let him live without fully explaining? Shocked I am, girl, shocked!"

"I can remove your mouth again, Black, so watch it! He'll teach me more this spring, when we can get out a bit more, at least at night. Anyway, he set up the same set of spells and wards, and as far as any of us could see, he was invisible."

"Voldemort can probably sense actual magic, even at low levels," James pointed out. "Some people have a knack for it, and many people develop more sensitivity as they grow older." He paused and frowned. "I wonder how old he is."

"I wonder who he was," Remus added. "He's a British wizard, so he was probably trained at Hogwarts. He must be younger than Dumbledore."

"Dumbledore knows who he is, but he told me the knowledge isn't useful at this time," James said. "I wish he would explain more."

"I know," Sirius agreed. "I thought we'd be pushing more, now that we have these reinforcements, but we still seem more reactive than active."

"Dumbledore learned something in June or July," James answered. "I have no idea what, but it has made him more cautious, even though he's seemed more confident that we'll win. I wish I had some clue about what it was."

"The need to know," Peter reminded them. "It's nice to have all the answers, but we can never be certain one of us won't be captured. Even if we all stand up to torture like we hope we will, I'm sure there are other ways of . . . extracting information. Truth potions, if nothing else."

Sirius sneered, but James agreed. "You're right, Wormtail. I know I can withstand the Imperius and maybe even torture, but there are truth potions out there that would have anyone spilling everything they know. He must have a few master potion brewers, assuming there's anything that can't be bought on the black market."

"Snivellus probably works for him," Sirius growled. "Slimy, greasy git." Remus gave his friend a dirty look.

"I don't know if Severus would work directly for Voldemort or not," Lily stated primly. "Even if he doesn't, however, there are plenty of others."

"And Snape wouldn't have to work directly for him, anyway," James pointed out. "One of his Slytherin pals could just say, 'Sev, old boy, here's some gold. Make us this potion, no questions asked.' And if he wouldn't, there are probably two dozen or so potion masters and apothecaries just in England that I wouldn't want to answer for under oath."

"True," Sirius agreed.

"Let's talk about something better than Severus Snape," Lupin pleaded.

"Let's talk about Harry," Sirius said. "He needs to see his godfather and two favorite uncles more often."

"Considering the only other uncle he has is Vernon Dursley, you two aren't quite as honored as all that," James teased. The group went on to more pleasant things to discuss, like how fast Harry was growing, and when Sirius could teach him to ride a broom.

As Lily prepared to leave, she remarked to James. "By the way, you'll never guess who moved into the next village to us."

"Who? And how would you know?"

"Petunia and Vernon. I know because I get so bored I even read the estate sales in the local weekly."

"Oh."

"If we're still there at the end, I'll take the entire group over to meet them. That should give the pair of them a shock!"

"Lils!"

"What? We won't hurt them, or prank them. That's something you and Sirius did far too often as it is! It's just that Tabby and Tom can't believe people like the Dursleys exist."

"We never hurt anything more than their pride!"

Lily gave him a dirty look. "Alright," James agreed, "we ground their egos into the mud. Still, we never caused any physical pain."

"What about the day Vernon had to spend in the loo?"

"We warned him not to eat more than three of the candies in a four hour period! Is it our fault he ate all two dozen in an hour?"

"Considering his eating habits, the fact that you didn't tell him what would happen if he did eat too many, and the fact that Sirius or you put a 'Desire me' charm on them. . . ."

"Sirius. . . ."

"Which ever! I don't like Vernon any more than you do. I don't especially like Petunia all that much, to be honest, but she's still my sister. What will happen if something happens to us. . . ."

"Nothing will happen to us! And if it does, Padfoot, Moony, and Wormtail will raise Harry."

"If anything happened to you, Sirius would more likely go crazy to get revenge, not worry about Harry," Lily pointed out. "And Remus could never get custody. They would more likely turn Harry over to Petunia rather than to Peter. Remember that when I say I want some bridges left that you and Sirius haven't burnt or shit all over."

James winced at that. When Lily talked like that, you had best listen.

"I mean it, James."

"If we're killed during the war, maybe we should ask Frank and Alice. . . ."

"They have enough, looking out for Neville. Maybe I should ask Tabitha. . . ."

"No! I don't want my son raised in America! They'll make a tree worshiper out of him!"

"They don't worship trees!"

"Fine, bushes then!"

"Alright, I won't argue about it now. Just remember, we have to think about Harry first, not what we want."

"I'll think about it. Why don't you come here for a minute. You don't have to leave this instant, you know."

"So, do you two feel more . . . relaxed?" Tabitha teased her friends.

"As a matter of fact, yes," Alice said calmly, while Lily blushed a bit. "The question is, how's the tension between you and your admirers?"

"Toby can wish all he wants. I'm no more available to him now than when he first saw me when he was eleven."

"Poor boy," Alice said.

"'Poor boy' my ass! He went through a dozen girl friends at school, persuaded one to break the Maiden's Charm and seduced one without it." The two women winced. "If they had Old Believers instead of Muggle-born, his father would have gone broke paying the bride prices! As it was, one girl got a Muggle abortion and the other girl had to leave during his Seventh year -- her Fifth. No, I'm staying well-away from Toby's arms, I assure you."

"What happened to the girl who left?" Lily asked.

"The school arranged for her to retake her Fifth year at one of the smaller schools. Toby is still paying child support. I think the other girl moved to California, but of course she might have moved on by now. I know he's paying child support. Watch out," she warned the two women, "he'll start in on you two now that you've regained your figures. He likes blondes and redheads."

Alice laughed.

"Don't laugh," Tabitha warned again. "You might be an auror, but so he is. And he has a certain slimy charm, when he leaves the cold-fish impression behind."

Alice laughed again. "I assure you, I can take care of myself. And while I wouldn't bet on Lily in a duel against an auror, I'd bet on her in a battle of wits against any three people."

"I've had practice battling against the pranks of four lunatics," Lily pointed out. She turned to Tabitha. "I hope you and Tom will continue to show us that old ritual and druidic magic. In return, I can teach you at least some hexes that only work against males -- and which can only be cast and removed by women at that."

The three women smiled smiles that would have either thrilled or terrified any male who saw them.



## **Chapter XX**

Monday, April 13, 1981

Peter woke up, terrified. He wasn't really sure why he was terrified, but he was. He also wasn't sure why he couldn't move or see, until he realized he was bound and gagged, naked and laying on a cold hard floor.

And then he remembered being attacked and stunned.

He wet himself.

"Ah," a cold voice said, "we're awake, I see." Peter whimpered. He had never heard that voice before, but there was no doubt in his mind who it was. It was You-know-who himself.

Peter soiled himself.

To his amazement, Peter was not tortured over the next twelve hours. Almost as bad for him, however, he heard several other people tortured slowly to death as he was moved from room to room in some sort of dungeon. All the while, Voldemort was whispering to Peter -- demanding that he imagine what it would be like when his turn came; asking him where his powerful friends were, why they hadn't saved him yet.

Other voices also whispered to him in those twelve long hours, telling him how wonderful the Dark Lord was, singing his praises while denigrating Dumbledore, his friends, and general wizarding culture. After the seventh hour, they also started to praise Peter as well.

Peter had no way of knowing they were time-turning him, and would continue do so until he broke. No one would save him, because no one would ever know he was missing.

Voldemort had decided in December to wait until near Easter to capture Peter Pettigrew. He had talked to each of his Death Eaters who had known Pettigrew, especially Regulus Black, Rastaban Lestrangle, and even Severus Snape. He had decided that Pettigrew needed to do more than tell him everything that he wanted to know.

Voldemort wanted to break Pettigrew, so that the young man would follow him. He needed a mole, and Pettigrew seemed like the best bet. Dumbledore had planted at least two low-level spies in his organization, and Voldemort had only recently discovered and killed them. It was time to turn the tables.

Five of the six Death Eaters picked to break Pettigrew relished the job, enjoyed torturing the Muggles to terrify the man and watching Pettigrew squirm. They glorified in pleasing their Master, competed with each other. The Lestrangle brothers, Bellatrix Lestrangle, Lucius Malfoy, and Barty Crouch Jr. saw this as sport as much as work.

Regulus Black, however, was losing his desire to serve. The reality of what was happening was shocking to him. It had ceased to be a game by the second hour. He started hanging back, and hoped no one would notice.

They all did, but since Voldemort said nothing, the other five could not.

At the start of the twelfth hour, Peter had the blindfold removed. He had been given no food and just enough water to keep him going. He was terrified, tired, and traumatized.

The sight of Voldemort would have made him soil himself, had he not already done so twice hours before.

"You now have two choices, Peter Pettigrew. Never think you have more than that. You may tell us everything we want to know, willingly or not, and then we shall kill you. Or you may join me." Voldemort then repeated the ideas they had been planting for hours. "You know I am going to win. Join me, and help me strike down the ones you have served, yes served! for over ten years. Serve me well, and you shall find power and rewards beyond what you have dared dream. Serve me poorly, well. . . ." Voldemort spun around. "Avada Kedarva!"

A body fell to the ground. Voldemort gestured, and Malfoy held up the body while Bellatrix pulled off the mask.

At first Peter thought it was Sirius. Then he noticed the differences. "Regulus!"

"He betrayed the trust I put in him," Voldemort said sadly. "If only he could have stayed loyal." He shook his head in sorrow, and then turned to Peter, who squeaked. "Your first impulse will be to tell me everything that will seem to you safe to tell me, and then swear to follow me. And then you shall betray me to those who claim to be your friends. If you do any of that, however, I will find and kill you. So, tell me everything and die like the animal you are, or tell me everything I want to know, and join me."

"You can't speak? Or you don't know where to start? Tell me first, then, something easy. Tell me when the Longbottom and Potter boy were born." The announcements had come out in early August, but had not mentioned a time or place.

### Monday Afternoon

Had anyone been at the Marauder's council house when he returned, Peter might have confessed what had happened. But the house was quiet when he returned. There was just a note from James, asking Peter to pick up some more beer the next time he went out for groceries, that the other three were on a stake-out and that he and Sirius would be back Friday. Sunday night, of course, would be a full moon, so Remus would not likely be back before the following Tuesday.

They hadn't missed him at all. They hadn't known he was in trouble. How many times had James or Sirius known the other was in trouble? How many times had they run to help Remus

when he needed it? Many more times than they had ever stopped to help him, Peter was sure. Peter had undergone twelve hours of mental torture, six more hours of intense questioning, and then had been branded with the Dark Mark. He had no idea that, in real time, less than three hours had passed. All Peter knew was he was tired, sick, injured, and terrified.

He collapsed on his bed. He didn't dare go to Dumbledore, or anyone else. If they didn't believe him, he was as good as dead anyway. He was on the other side now. He had to make certain his side won.

Friday, June 26, 1981

Lloyd hauled the empty bottles, tins, and boxes out to the large rubbish bin and dumped them in. He spent about three hours every day shopping for supplies and another two hours delivering them. He also had to dump most of the rubbish, to make certain Muggles didn't wonder why there was so much trash being generated by just a few people.

Lloyd went into his small place to wash his hands and eat lunch. He had one more delivery to make, to the sersiants.

Lloyd never saw a rat crawl out of the bin and make its way over to the back door, which was open a crack on the warm day. It crawled into a stack of boxes, which Lloyd would portkey to the sersiants later that day.

Thursday, July 2, 1981

1:23 am

Alastor Moody walked stiffly around the grounds of the destroyed farm house. There were a few aurors trying to clean up the many bodies. Three of the four injured had already been moved out. He approached the remaining person, who had given Moody a sign earlier, which Moody had answered with a signal of his own. The young man was associated with the Order somehow.

Moody sent two aurors away and gave the young man the return sign. "My name's Moody. I take it this was one of the groups of North American volunteers?"

"Yes, sir. Sixteen . . . ex-sersiants who came over to help. I was the supply officer. They lived here and tried to stay out of sight of the local Muggles. I live elsewhere, and brought supplies in and took garbage out. They mostly did surveillance. One must have been followed back somehow."

"Probably. Does the Phoenix know your home location?" They did not mention Dumbledore's name in public.

"He's the only one who does," Lloyd answered. "I got a fire call about thirty minutes ago. The house was under attack. I put out the alarm and apparated here to try and help out." He looked up into the sky. "I hope he sent people to the other site. It had some of their wives and children."

"I was told that was being taken care of, but not about your location," Moody said. "Your friends took out nine permanently. Not a good return, considering they all were killed but three."

"My brother was killed," Lloyd said, still in shock.

"Sorry, lad."

"How much trouble are we in with the Ministry?"

"My boss doesn't like that your lot is here very much, since you're not under his direction, but Crouch's not going to bother you. You'll find that no one will say anything. As far as he's concerned, you don't exist and this never happened. I will need to debrief you, however."

"Really?"

"Well, there is a chance that an auror named Dawlish will try to bring you in. He's certainly anti-Voldemort, but he's allied to some elements in the Ministry that might give you a rough time."

"I can always escape him, if I have to."

"There are anti-apparation wards where he'd take you."

"That doesn't bother me."

"What? Oh . . . the Phoenix mentioned your talent. Go ahead, if you have to. Hopefully, you won't. The three survivors are in the Phoenix's care. Now, tell me everything from the moment you got the firecall."

It did not improve Lloyd's mood, already dark and depressed, to learn that the building he had been living in had been compromised -- someone had ransacked it. The other locations were abandoned within a week.

"I am sorry for your losses," Dumbledore told the young man late that afternoon.

"Thank you. I guess this means I should leave, doesn't it?"

"If you wish to accompany your brother. . . ."

"That's not what I mean. I've been compromised. I should have been the strongest link, not the weakest! I'm sure most of the rest think I'm a traitor, and the others that I'm an idiot!"

"You are neither. If you were, you would have sent the Death Eaters against the other three teams first. They are the more dangerous. Somehow, you were tracked. Did you have a fall back position?"

"Sir?"

"A bolt hole of some kind?"

"Yes, sir, a small flat in Oxford."

"Good. Let us go see it."

Despite what Dumbledore had said, he was still under some sort of suspicion. Still, Lloyd was soon cleared. He moved once again, and set up operations for the three groups further north, in and around Lancaster. He also help move the bodies, the three survivors, and the wives and children back across the Atlantic.

His sister-in-law, niece, and nephew would never speak to him again.

The fight against Voldemort had been going against the Dark Lord since at least the previous November. Between Easter and the attack in July, things had moved back towards a stalemate. After the attack, however, the Death Eaters became more active and more successful.

July had seen a number of other successful attacks. August saw things escalate. It was clear that there was at least one informer in the Order.

Unknown to any in the Order or the Volunteers, there was also once again an informer in Voldemort's camp. Severus Snape had wrestled with his decision through early February. Having made his decision, however, he spent much of February through April collecting as much data as he could, and then he took the information to Dumbledore.

Snape had thought little of Voldemort's interest in Pettigrew since November, however. Voldemort had asked about all of the Marauders many times, especially about James Potter. The Snape of the mid-1990s would have picked up the clues. Snape at twenty-one wasn't as clever as he liked to think himself.

Snape had waited until the first Sunday before Easter to arrange his visit to Dumbledore. He wanted as few students about as possible.

Voldemort had, however, detected a decreasing interest and enthusiasm in Snape. His brilliance in potion brewing was all that was keeping him alive, although Snape never recognized that. He had been moved from near the inner circle to near the outside, with the other useful but slightly untrustworthy members. Slightly untrustworthy, but not to the point of killing. Yet.

In short, Voldemort's mole was more useful than Dumbledore's, not that Snape would ever admit that to himself.

Sunday, September 20, 1981

James looked confused. He looked repeatedly at Lily, Harry, and Dumbledore. "What?" he demanded.

"In short, it was prophesied in June that either Neville or Harry, more likely Harry, will be the one to destroy Voldemort."

"But . . . but they're babies!"

Dumbledore repressed a sigh. He had just gone through a similar discussion with the Longbottoms. "They are, and that is irrelevant. Prophecy can never be totally wrong. It is more relevant that somehow Voldemort has learned that the Prophecy exists, although he may not know the details. It is more relevant that Voldemort believes the Prophecy. And above all, it is more relevant that right now the forces allied against him are in retreat -- in fact, to be blunt, we are losing -- and that I have just received confirmation that Voldemort will soon be switching from general attacks to trying to locate Harry and Neville." Snape had finally been informed of the plans, since he would again be needed in the field.

"What do we do?" Lily asked.

"We need to locate a good hide-away. We shall stock it with enough food for months, and then I shall charm it with the Fidelius charm."

"What exactly is that?" Lily asked. She had heard of it, but didn't know the details.

Dumbledore explained the Charm.

"I have just the place," James said.

"Where?"

"It's a large cottage outside of Godric's Hollow. My paternal great-grandmother was the last person to actually live there, and she died about twenty years ago. When my grandparents' house was destroyed, I sent the house elf there to prepare it in case we ever needed a place to hide out."

"That sounds reasonable. I shall look at it personally. How long would it take to stock it with at least six months worth of food, firewood, and coal, if not a year?"

"Three or four weeks. Why so long?"

"I want you three to totally disappear."

"We will."

Tabitha stopped Dumbledore before he left. "The boys are in danger, aren't they?"

Dumbledore hesitated, but finally simply said, "Yes."

"Let us add to their protection."

That of course peaked Dumbledore's interest. "How?"

Tuesday, September 22, 1981

"I still don't like it," James grumbled.

"It can't hurt," Alice said.

"And anything that helps. . . ." Frank added with a shrug.

"Stop grumbling and be thankful," Lily said.

Tabitha, Henry, Tom, Tudor, Lloyd, and two of the other North American aurors who were Novices had joined in a circle around young Harry and Neville, who were placed in the center of an inner circle of natural objects. The other members of the group, Dumbledore, the Longbottoms and Potters, and James' friends formed an outer circle. As the equinox sun rose, they invoked every Power they were capable of bringing to bear. Each also swore to protect the two boys with their lives.

The British wizards and witches were shocked to see the tendrils of power form between the boys, and between the boys and the seven Old Believers.

Fifteen years later, even though they couldn't believe that Harry Potter was still at the center of Voldemort's plans, Tabitha, Henry, Lloyd, Tom, and especially Tudor (who had taken the lead in swearing to protect Harry -- Henry had taken the lead swearing to protect Neville) would return to protect the boys. The other two aurors had been killed, one in the last month of fighting Voldemort, the other several years later.

Wormtail hurried off to report this latest development to Voldemort that very afternoon. Only the fact that there had been no warning of the ceremony prevented Voldemort from punishing Pettigrew for reporting after the fact.

In the face of this new development, Voldemort felt he had to hold off on the attack on the boys he had planned for that Saturday night. It took him more than a week to decide that the protections probably wouldn't help very much if at all against the Killing Curse, although when he succeeded, it might stir the wrath of the Old Believers. They had never forgiven him the attack on their summer solstice ceremony in the early '70s, and were behind the presence of this small force of North Americans.

He decided that he had to risk it to get the boys. Potter would go first, and then Longbottom. If one of them really was the only threat to him, then it wouldn't matter if the Old Believers came in sooner or later.

Thursday, October 1, 1981

"I'll miss you," Lily told Tabitha and Tom.

"We'll miss the two of you," Tom said, shaking Harry's hand, which made the toddler giggle.

"You're a very happy baby, Harry," Tabitha said softly, tears forming in her eyes. "Try and stay happy. Here," she said to Lily, handing her a conch shell.

"What does this do?"

"Well, right now, if you hold it to your ear you can hear the ocean," Tom said. "We want you and Dumbledore to go over it, to show that there're no enchantments on it right now. We'll enchant it, and five others. We'll keep one, Lloyd will take one, Dumbledore will take one, and you can give the fifth one to one of James' friends. These will only work one way. If you or James call for help -- the phrase will be 'goddess, help us' -- we will be able to reach you despite the Fidelius. We cannot trace you unless it sends out an alarm, and will not work at all in the other direction."

"And, if any of the three of you are seriously injured, you have twenty minutes to prevent it from calling out a distress call. The phrase is, 'goddess, hold back,'" Tabitha instructed. "If . . . should anything worse happen, the alarm will go off automatically."

"Thank you."

"Do you remember all the rituals we've taught you?" Tabitha asked.

"Oh, yes," Lily said. "I hope I don't need any of them."

"We hope you won't, either," Tom acknowledged.

Saturday, October 31, 1981

11:20 pm

"Is somethin' wrong, Professor Dumbledore, sir?"

Dumbledore had been walking around the castle since the end of the Feast. He had been troubled all day. Although he knew his gift in divination was tiny, he did not think he was being paranoid. He looked up, surprised to see Hagrid.

"I cannot believe anything is wrong, however, I cannot shake the belief something is about to happen, or perhaps is even happening."



"Is there anythin' I can do, Professor?"

'Why not?' Dumbledore thought. "Do you have your, well, your umbrella with you?" He led Hagrid back to his office.

"Bit of a raw night, I thought, sir," Hagrid said, although both men knew the night was cold and clear.

"Good. Sugar Quill," he said, giving his current password. "I shall make a portkey for you. If everything is fine, you will appear what will look like an open field. If everything is fine, keep holding on to the portkey. If everything is not alright . . . assess the situation. You will be able to tell, because there will be a small house . . . or its wreckage. If no Death Eaters are outside, drop the portkey instantly and look for survivors."

"Who might I be looking for?"

"Harry Potter."

"What, not James and Lily?"

"If you see anything other than an empty field, it is unlikely that there will any other survivors, from either side. The most we could hope for is young Harry. Now remember, the portkey will return two minutes after you arrive. Are you ready?"

"Yes, sir."

Hagrid disappeared. At the same moment, the conch shell the Potters had given him began to blow the alarm that signaled at least one of the Potters had been killed.

Dumbledore's face turned ashen, but he hurried to the fireplace to put out the alarm call. The North Americans would be there soon after Hagrid, but it would best if he could signal a general alert.

## **Chapter XXI**

Hagrid arrived approximately 10 seconds after he had left Dumbledore's office. As far as he could tell, he was standing near a large larch, facing an open field. "Good," he muttered, "no problems."

But about thirty seconds later, there was an explosion which blew Hagrid back into the tree. A lesser man would have been knocked out, and probably seriously injured. Hagrid managed to pick himself up within seconds. He was shocked to see the remains of a small house lay in what had been the open field. He threw down the portkey, and approached cautiously, his umbrella out and at the ready. He couldn't notice a large rat scurrying out of the opposite side of the wreckage and head into the woods.

At that moment, he heard a child crying. Hagrid tore through the rubble, tossing sections of wall as he did so. In less than two minutes, he had uncovered toddler Harry, who was clutching on his mother's robe. There was a jagged cut on his forehead. A few feet away there was a robe that Hagrid knew instinctively knew had been Voldemort's. "You!" he growled. Had Harry's crying not intensified, Hagrid would have torn through the rubble, looking for Voldemort's body and James'. He flipped another wall out of the way to make certain the rubble wouldn't fall on them, and he saw James' lifeless body. "Poor tyke," he said softly.

Hagrid started to carry the crying toddler out of the wreckage. As he did so, he heard another sound, and looked up, umbrella again at the ready.

"Oh, it's you," Hagrid said as Sirius Black landed.

"Damn!" Sirius swore. "The rotten bastard! I'll kill him! Did you see the rat?"

Sirius meant Peter, but of course Hagrid thought he meant Voldemort.

"Aven't seen anyone alive but Harry."

"Give him to me. I'm his godfather. I'll take care of him."

"Dumbledore said I was to take him if I were to find him."

Sirius looked torn for a moment, then decided to go after Peter first, since Harry was safe. He would come to regard that as the second worst of idea of his life, after suggesting that Peter be the Secret Keeper in the first place. "Fine. Take my bike, then. It'll adjust for you. To ride it like a broomstick, the command is 'Snivellus blows.' To turn it back into a Muggle cycle, the command is 'Snivellus sucks.'"

Hagrid shook his head at that. "Go on," Sirius commanded. "Make sure he's safe, if you're not going to turn him over to me."

"Alright." Hagrid made his way over to the motorcycle. He turned to ask Sirius a question, but he had seemingly disappeared. He had, in fact, transformed into his dog form. He was already trailing Pettigrew's trail into the woods from the other side of the rubble, out of Hagrid's line of sight.

"Where'd he go?" Hagrid asked the still whimpering Harry, suspicious. Hagrid was about to mount the enlarged motorcycle a few moments later when he heard a deep voice say, "Move and you're dead."

"It's alright, Henry," a deeper voice said. "That's Hagrid, one of Dumbledore's people."

"Still, don't move." Four people came around to the front.

Hagrid recognized one of them. "Yer the American's," he said, his accent thickening.

"That's right," Tudor Myrddin answered. "Harry, Johnny, check the parameter. Tabby, check the bodies. Hagrid, tell me everything you know."

In less than five more minutes, fifteen members of the Order and nine more of the Americans, plus Dumbledore and Alastor Moody, had arrived. Hagrid had repeated his tale, and Dumbledore had told them about the Fidelius, plus the fact that the last he knew, Sirius Black was to be the Secret Keeper.

"So that's why he wanted Harry!" Hagrid roared, nearly waking the exhausted Harry up. He had refused to allow Harry out of his massive arms.

"Sirius Black? The spy?" Henry said. "That's hard to believe."

"Do you doubt it?" Tudor asked.

"A little, but if he wasn't, then he certainly knows what happened," Henry retorted.

"Either he is guilty or he knows who is, and went after them," Tabitha stated. "Either way, we must find him. Either way, someone will pay for this. And there is only one treasure that this crime may be redeemed in!"

"Gwaed!" John Alden, one of the druids who had sworn to protect Harry shouted.

"Ni!" Tudor shouted. "GWAEDOLIAETH!"

"**GWAEDOLIAETH!**" John, Henry, and Tabitha all screamed. All four Old Believers then raised their wands, and again shouted, "**GWAEDOLIAETH!**" Four bolts of jagged lightning flashed into the sky. "**GWAEDOLIAETH!**" and all the Americans had joined in.

Tudor turned to Dumbledore. "For the moment, we shall protect the child. None but us, save you, shall approach him without instant death. Henry! Tabitha! I charge you with his life!"

"Our lives are forfeit, should we fail," they answered.

"I want Hagrid with him," Dumbledore stated. "And this is only until Black is found."

Tudor stared at Dumbledore, who stared back. Tudor backed down, reluctantly. "Henry, fly that thing to your house. Hagrid, please carry Harry on the back. Tabitha, return now and guard. Contact Tom and Lloyd. There are to be two of you with Harry at all times."

"I obey."

"I obey."

Tudor turned to the other Confederation members. "You know who we are looking for. Find him!" As the motorcycle took off, all the Americans disappeared.

Alastor Moody turned to Dumbledore. "What was that all about?"

"They have been challenged to enforce what to them is a sacred contract. Their charge, Harry, has been orphaned and hurt. This act can only be paid for in blood. But not just blood, that is 'gwaed'. That is any blood. No, they swore by their blood, the blood of their families, their faith -- it is the blood of the killers or their own. Now, let me try and deduce what happened here tonight."

Monday, November 1, 1981

Dumbledore stood in the parlor of the house used by one of the Confederation teams. John Alden, Tabitha, and Henry were standing behind Tudor, ready to back him up. Tabitha held Harry in her arms. Tom and Lloyd came in to lend further support.

"The Ministry will not allow you to have Black, let alone allow you to execute him," Dumbledore repeated. "He is captured; Voldemort is disembodied. You are not foresworn. Now, let Hagrid have Harry. We need to take him to his relatives."

"Lily said her sister loathed her, and loathed magic," Tabitha stated. "How can you allow her to have custody of Harry?"

"You taught Lily the ritual that protected Harry," Dumbledore pointed out.

"Yes, the Mother's Sacrifice," Tom agreed. "I am not so certain that placing Harry with his mother's family will be as effective as you think."

"Especially not when we have a better alternative," Tudor added.

"And what is that?"

"Let us take Harry," Tudor said simply.

"**What!**" Hagrid roared.

"On the one hand, we do not believe Lily's sister a fit guardian. We base this on Lily's opinion. On the other hand, Harry needs to be protected. There are still uncaught Death Eaters, and we totally agree with you, Voldemort is more likely disembodied than destroyed.

That means he will likely come back. Harry is now the symbol of his downfall, and so will likely be a target."

Dumbledore had still not said anything about the Prophecy. "Go on."

Tudor went on. "You believe the Sacrifice will protect Harry. We have doubts, considering Petunia's feelings towards magic. In addition, we agree that it would not be a good idea to raise Harry in the general British magical community. It could be dangerous, it could be almost as bad for his ego as being raised by his aunt, if in the opposite extreme."

"I believe you exaggerate his aunt's disdain," Dumbledore said.

"In any event, let me take Harry. I will raise him as my own. Only one person outside this room need know that Hari Myrddin is Harry Potter, and she would be my wife."

"I didn't know you were married."

"I had hoped to be a hit-wizard, and American hit-wizards do not marry. However, I do not need the job. Gwen and I would marry. She was here two years ago, and is currently in Ireland, doing solo support work for me. We would live deep in Old Believer territory. He would be safe from outside attack. He would be raised as a normal wizard. He will be loved. This I swear."

"Or Henry and I could do it," Tabitha offered. "We will love him as our own. Either way, Harry will grow up loved and strong."

Dumbledore hesitated. Then he spoke. "Petunia and her husband are the boy's natural and legal guardians. I could not just give Harry to you even if I wished to."

The Old Believers' faces hardened. Tudor fought an internal battle for several moments, but felt he could not go against the greatest wizard of the age. "Very well. We expect to be called should Voldemort return. If we are not, we shall be most displeased."

Dumbledore merely nodded his head. Tabitha kissed Harry, as did the men. She then handed him to Hagrid.

"I'll take good care of him, I will," Hagrid promised.

"Thank you," she said. Hagrid left.

"One last question," Henry said before Dumbledore disappeared.

"Yes?"

"Did you relay our offers to the Longbottoms?"

"I did. They thank you, but prefer to stay in Britain. I am certain they are in no more in danger from the remaining Death Eaters than anyone else."

"I hope you're right," Henry replied. Dumbledore disappeared.

"The Ministry will want us gone as soon as possible," John pointed out.

"I know," Tudor agreed. "If we're still here, they'll have to thank us. I'll tell Lloyd to get ready to pull everything out."

"Not everything," Henry said.

"What do you mean?"

"We'll be coming back. Maybe in ten years, maybe in twenty, maybe in fifty, but we'll be back."

"You're right," Tudor agreed. "I'll make the arrangements. I don't think Lloyd here will mind having the option of staying."

Monday, November 23, 1981

Henry stretched in the small bed in Tabitha's spare room. All the tensions of the past sixteen months had hit Tabitha and himself shortly after they had arrived Friday afternoon. They had left Britain nearly two weeks before, but had undergone a ten day debriefing.

They had worked hard Friday, getting Tabitha's house back into shape. Fortunately, she had ordered things like wood before she had left. A house elf from Salem had shown up the day before they had arrived and given the place a thorough cleaning. They had only staggered out Saturday afternoon because they needed food. They had barely stuck their noses out of their respected beds Sunday.

A short rap on the door distracted him. "Come in!"

Tabitha came in and sat down a covered tray. Henry sat up and she placed the tray on his knees. Henry just looked at it in amazement.

"Don't get used to it," she warned, whisking the top away.

"Wow," he said. A small Turkish coffee, an omelet, ham, toast, and a large orange juice sat there.

"I've noticed you tend to feed me best when you think I'll be angry at you or you want something," he said, buttering the toast. "Which is it?"

"You were told you could have at least a year off to decompress, right?"

"Right. Then off to hit-wizard training."

"Would you like to spend that year here?"

"Here? In this bed?"

"I was thinking about the big bed. I know . . . hit wizards can't be married. I love you, but I can't follow a traditional life-style anyway. Stay. We've seen too much death. We've had to cause too much death." She took hold of Henry's hand. "Let's create a life."

"Really?"

"Really."

"A baby? Really?"

"Well . . . yes."

"When?"

"Let's go grocery shopping again first. We need to find a turkey. Maybe we'll have lots of things to give thanks for."

"Good idea."

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Friday, July 21, 1995

No one small group totally controls the policies of the wizarding Confederation of North American. However, if a certain group of twenty-four wizards and three witches happened to totally agree, it would be hard for the other power blocks to stand up to them.

Of course, since this rather impromptu group contained twelve who were Old Believers of various view points, six who were major manufacturers with ties as close to the Muggle world as to the magical, six who were Old Colonials who generally disliked each other almost as much as they disliked the other groups, with a Native American and two opportunistic political operatives who were mostly interested in winning than their actual position on any issue, they had never all agreed.

They hadn't agreed this day.

Yet.

"But why would we interfere? Wait," the wizard said, "I know, we technically couldn't. Fine. Why would the International interfere?"

"We don't have an excuse yet, but I'm sure we will long before the next rounds of elections."

"Before October, 1996. . . . And until then?"

"We'll start moving our people around."

"Who do we need to put into place?"

"We need Tudor Myrddin in as head of the MLES."

"But he's a hit-wizard!" several voices yelled. "And an Old Believer," another voice added.

"He is also a true Myrddin and a Novice in the River sect, and when he leaves service, he **will** be high in the Councils of the True Faith. On a more practical level, he also served twice in Britain against Voldemort."

"You mean the Confederation volunteers that the British have always denied were there?" a businessman asked.

"Exactly. He led the fight in the last year or so, or at least he led our people who were involved in it. And, and this is not to leave this room, he has maintained a small network there. His sources say that Fudge will try to discredit Potter rather than investigate his claims."

"If Fudge goes that route, it means he's hoping Potter is wrong, not that he's sure the boy is," one of the pure politicians stated.

"Agreed."

An Old Colonial spoke up. "Normally, I would say Myrddin is far too young to head the MLES. He's only about forty-five. The MLES head is usually at least in his sixties when he gets the job. Does this mean he's going to hold the job for at least sixty years, instead of forty or so?"

"That depends," an Old Believer said. "If the International agrees it has to interfere, that means we'll have to send people over to run Britain. If Myrddin is head of the occupation Council, he would be over-qualified to come back and head a department here."

Those who weren't keen on someone as strong and independent, yet as tied to the Old Believers as Myrddin, in long-term control of the MLES looked at each other. Finally, one looked up. "It's been almost a hundred years since an Old Believer had this job. Would he be willing to give it up to fight this Voldemort again?"

"Seven of our people swore an oath at an Equinox ceremony to protect Harry Potter and another young boy Voldemort was after. Myrddin stood as blood protector."

"Then why make him head of the MLES?"

"Because it could easily be six months to a year before we can get the International to move, unless Voldemort strikes early. We'll need to organize our resources, and that will work best if he is in charge of the MLES."

The wavering members looked at each other again. Each man nodded. "We agree," their spokesman agreed. "We want this Voldemort crushed if he's back before he can cause too much trouble in general and especially with the Muggles. You want to get him for the same reason, and for his attack on your ceremony. If you say Myrddin is the best way to do it, well, I don't have any better ideas. Does anyone else?"

No one spoke.

"Deal?" the Old Believer point man asked.



"Deal," the others agreed.

Monday, August 14, 1995

"Daddy, you look very nice."

"Thank you, Princess. I'm just glad your mother allowed you to attend."

"Well, it's not everyday that my godfather is made Head of the Magical Law Enforcement Services."

Henry Dorff pretended to frown. "I thought you were here to see me sworn in as the Chief Hit-Wizard!"

"Oh, I am, but Uncle Tudor is ever so much more important than you," she teased.

Henry smiled and looked at his daughter. Her hair was a few shades darker than Tabitha's, and she was a little taller and a bit broader in the shoulders than her mother had been at thirteen. She had his jaw-line, as well. But the eyes were the same shade of bright green as her mother's, and her personality was all her own. She was bright, athletic (on the Blue Quodpot and Quidditch teams and the dueling teams as well), and a House leader, even if it wasn't for the Greens.

"How's she doing?"

The girl shrugged. "She and Joy lived together for over five years and the bitch dumped her without warning. . . ."

"Sabrina!"

"What else can I call her? I thought she loved Mom, I thought she loved me! and it turns out she's been having an affair for almost a year?"

"We all make mistakes. I just need to know how your mother is recovering." He knew it was partially his fault. He could have married Tabitha. He had preferred pursuing his dream of becoming a hit-wizard, thinking she would be content to be his lover whenever he could make it to Boston. In retrospect, he was surprised she had put up with the arrangement for so long. It had been the one major error he had made in their relationship. It had taken three years after their breakup before she would allow him to even kiss her cheek.

"She seems better. She's worried about something, but it's not Joy."

"Sabrina. . . ."

"Yes, Daddy?"

"Did your Mom have any special message for me?"

She frowned. "You know, she did say something odd. I asked, 'Any messages for Dad,' and she said, 'Just that Harry is waiting.' But that doesn't make any sense, since you're Harry. She wouldn't explain, though. She just said you would understand."

"She meant a different Harry, sweetheart." 'Yes,' Henry Dorff thought, 'Harry Potter is waiting for us to help him. Neville might be as well. And we will, if Tudor Myrddin and I have anything to say about it.'

"Come on, Princess. You can recite your lessons from druid camp with us. Your godfather and I are Novices after all. You can tell us if we make any mistakes."

Sabrina rolled her eyes.

Thursday, January 11, 1996

"Mister Myrddin?"

"Yes?"

"Mister Dorff is here."

"And our Ten o'clock appointment?"

"Not yet."

"Send Harry in."

"Yes sir."

Henry Dorff came into the office. "Tudor."

"Harry. Sit down while we wait."

Tudor was obviously not happy about waiting. "Be reasonable," Henry said. "How can a Hidden be on time, when they can't have watches?"

"Why are you always so reasonable whenever we have to deal with these people?"

"Because I'm Henry Dorff, new to the faith, and you're Tudor Myrddin, heir to Merlin. I have to put up with a bit more than you."

"I guess. I just wish I knew who we were meeting."

"Mister Myrddin? the druid Cadfael ap Tudur ap Mawrth ap Rhys, speaker for the Danadl clan and representative to the Confederation for the Hidden Faithful for this quarter year."

Myrddin and Dorff stood, and Henry bowed. Myrddins bowed to few powers, and then only to keep harmony.

"I thank you for this meeting," Cadfael said in Welsh.

"And how may we be of service to the representative of the Hidden?" Myrddin asked politely in the same language. The Hidden sent a new spokesman every three months, to make certain he didn't become corrupted by Outside ways. They wouldn't be the spokesman again for at least five years.

"Three things. First, you know the secret we have Hidden in our Hearts?" Cadfael asked.

"The Scouring? Yes."

"You mean it's true?" Henry asked, shocked.

"Yes," Cadfael said. "Look at the Muggles. They will destroy their culture, built on their technology, sooner or later. We, and some others, preserve the True Harmony, and you know it in your heart. When that happens, we will scour the Muggles from our ancestral homelands and any of the wizards who stand in our way."

"With the help of the Hidden back in Europe," Myrddin added.

Cadfael looked at him in surprise.

"Remember who it is you're talking to," Myrddin said softly. "Merlin, Myrddin if you prefer, helped reenforce the wards that hide the Great Circles." He looked at Henry. "There are ancient circles that have never ceased to be used as they have for almost five thousand years. The Hidden hold the Heart of the Faith. Only Hidden of acolyte status or higher, full druids, and a few of us outside that circle, know the full truth. Even what I have just told you is just a fraction of the truth."

He turned his attention back to Cadfael. "Yes? What about it?"

Cadfael took a deep breath. "Some are wondering if this Voldemort might not be useful in our quest."

"Anxious are they? Or just bloodthirsty?"

"A bit of both. Grindelwald would have been a better bet for us, but it wasn't time then, and it isn't time now. I just wanted to warn you in case we need some help from the dragons."

"Is that likely?"

"Possibly, not likely, since this is a small bunch and they wouldn't know how to find Europe, much less conquer it." He shrugged. "There are idiots everywhere."

"Second?"

"Second, well, you do know we maintain agents of our own around the world."

"I do. I could probably name you most of them."

"Well, many of them, perhaps. I looked into which of them might have been involved with Tabitha's mother. I have narrowed the list to twelve. Could you please ask Tabitha if I should pursue it?"

"I will," Henry answered. "I don't know if she will wish to pursue it or not. I suspect she won't."

"Nor do I know. I thought she should have the choice. I shall not unless she asks. If she wishes me to look into it, I need to know before the equinox." That was when his term as speaker for the Hidden would end.

"Understood," Henry agreed.

"Third. . . ." He turned more serious. "Most of us do not believe this Voldemort is likely to pose a threat beyond the British magical community. However, in studying the material provided on his last attempt, we did see one thing which could cause the International to be brought in, no matter how much they may fight against it, and might even touch on our interests." He handed Myrddin and Dorff each a small piece of quartz. "If you call me, I shall come."

"Under what circumstances?" Myrddin asked.

"The defection of the dementors. Let us discuss terms."

End of Part II