A Nundu for A Pet Chapter 42 (A Warning from An Elf)

Hello everyone. I'm happy to publish a New Chapter of A Nundu for A Pet.

The morning sunlight streamed through the kitchen windows of the Tonks residence. Harry entered the kitchen, still dressed in his pajamas with a dressing gown hastily thrown over them, his hair more unruly than usual from sleep.

The Tonks family was already gathered around the breakfast table. Ted sat behind his copy of the *Daily Prophet*, occasionally emerging to take a bite of his eggs. Andromeda was arranging a plate of freshly baked scones, while Tonks—sporting hair the exact shade of the orange marmalade in the jar before her—was buttering her toast with exaggerated concentration.

"Good morning," Harry greeted, sliding into his usual seat.

"Morning, Harry," Ted replied, folding his newspaper. "Sleep well?"

"Yes, thank you, Mister Ted." Harry reached for the teapot. "No strange dreams about underwater kingdoms or royal sea horses, thankfully."

Tonks snorted into her tea. "Disappointed? No midnight rendezvous with Princess Crystal-Harmony?"

Harry rolled his eyes. "I was rather hoping we'd moved past that particular topic of conversation."

"Never," Tonks declared, her hair suddenly shifting to a shimmering blue that reminded Harry all too clearly of Crystal-Harmony's scales. "It's my solemn duty as your honorary big sister to never let you forget your embarrassing moments."

"Your hair matches your marmalade," Harry observed, deliberately changing the subject. "Trying a new breakfast-themed look?"

"Do you like it?" Tonks grinned, then scrunched up her face in concentration. Her hair shifted through various breakfast colors—egg-yolk yellow, toast brown, and finally settling on a tea-like amber. "I'm practicing subtle transformations. Professor McGonagall says precise control is essential for my N.E.W.T. studies next year."

"It looks..." Harry tilted his head thoughtfully, "hungry."

"Speaking of hungry," Tonks said, eyeing Harry's pajamas with an amused smirk, "nice dressing gown. Very royal. Did Princess Crystal-Harmony send that from the underwater palace of Abyssantica?"

Harry glanced down at his worn blue dressing gown. "Yes, actually. Sea silk. Enchanted to stay perpetually damp and smell like fish. Really brings the underwater ambiance to my morning routine."

"Very convincing," Tonks nodded seriously, her hair shifting to a royal purple. "Though if you were really going for authenticity, you'd have seaweed in your hair." She paused, examining his unruly black locks. "Actually, are you sure you don't? That cowlick looks suspiciously kelp-like."

"That's rich coming from someone whose hair just cycled through the entire breakfast menu," Harry retorted, reaching for a scone. "Trying to decide what to eat by wearing it first?"

"It's an advanced culinary technique," Tonks replied loftily. "I call it 'taste-testing by osmosis.' Much more efficient."

"Is that why your hair looked like Brussels sprouts at dinner last week?" Harry asked innocently. "Because if so, I'm concerned about your dietary choices."

"Cheeky," Tonks gasped in mock offense, her hair briefly flashing a scandalized red. "That was emerald green for Slytherin pride, in your honor!"

"It was definitely Brussels sprouts," Ted confirmed from behind his newspaper.

"Betrayed by my own father," Tonks sighed dramatically, placing a hand over her heart. "The family loyalty in this household is appalling."

Andromeda placed a generous helping of eggs and bacon onto Harry's plate. "Eat your breakfast before it gets cold, Harry."

"Thank you, Lady Andromeda," Harry replied with a small smile, which she returned warmly.

Beneath the table, Harry felt a familiar weight press against his legs. Itisa had slipped into the kitchen and was now weaving between the chairs, her gold eyes fixed on Ted.

"I see you've brought your shadow," Ted commented, his eyes twinkling as he not so subtly dropped a piece of bacon, which Itisa claimed from the floor.

"Ted," Andromeda admonished. "You're spoiling her."

"Nonsense," Ted replied cheerfully. "She's a growing... cat."

The slight pause before the word 'cat' made Harry and Tonks exchange amused glances.

"Speaking of growing things," Ted continued, turning to Harry, "your talismans are selling like hotcakes across the Ministry. Amelia Bones sent me an owl yesterday—the Auror Department is requesting another batch with the protective enhancements you designed last month."

Harry looked up from his breakfast, surprised. "Already? I thought the last order was supposed to last until October."

"That was the plan," Ted nodded, his expression turning more serious. "But they're finding more applications than originally anticipated. And word is spreading. I wouldn't be surprised if other countries' ministries start making inquiries soon."

"Other countries?" Harry repeated, setting down his fork.

"The International Confederation of Wizards has a conference next month," Ted explained. "Several representatives from foreign magical law enforcement departments will be there. Amelia plans to demonstrate your talismans during the security procedures workshop."

Tonks whistled. "Look at you, Potter. International magical business mogul before you've even hit your teens."

"It's not all good news," Harry said thoughtfully, absentmindedly stroking Itisa when she jumped onto the empty chair beside him. "If other countries see how effective the talismans are, they might try to create their own versions. Reverse-engineering isn't that difficult if you know what you're looking for."

"Smart boy," Andromeda nodded approvingly. "Indeed, that's a concern. Intellectual property protections in the magical world are... inconsistent at best."

"Not just foreign competition," Ted added, pouring himself more tea. "We should be prepared for domestic competitors too. Lucius Malfoy was making inquiries about the patent status of your designs last week."

"Malfoy?" Harry's eyebrows shot up. "What's his interest?"

"Money," Ted replied simply. "And perhaps a bit of... leverage."

"He doesn't like that his son is being outshone by you," Tonks added with a smirk. "According to my Slytherin contacts, Draco spent half of last year complaining about 'Potter and his stupid magical trinkets.'"

"Lovely," Harry muttered. "Something to look forward to this year."

"Speaking of which," Andromeda interjected, "have you given any more thought to your research on helping Anna Sallow? I noticed you've been spending a lot of time with those books Hermione gave you."

Harry nodded eagerly. "I think I'm getting closer to understanding how the Aqualis crystal works. It seems to respond to intention rather than specific incantations. If I can somehow combine its properties with the essence extracts Sebastian gave me and the healing properties of Neville's Luminary Willow..."

"Ambitious project," Ted remarked. "But if anyone can figure it out, it's you."

"Anna's latest letter said she's having more good days than bad now," Harry said. "But the healers still don't understand the underlying cause of her condition."

"Have you considered consulting with M.H.WW?" Andromeda suggested. "They might—"

Her words were cut short by the sound of fluttering wings. Three owls swooped through the open kitchen window, creating momentary chaos as they circled the breakfast table. The largest, a tawny official-looking owl, dropped the day's copy of the *Daily Prophet* in front of Ted before perching on the back of an empty chair. A second owl—a Hogwarts bird—delivered two letters sealed with the school crest, one to Harry and one to Tonks. The third, a small excitable creature, delivered what appeared to be a personal letter to Andromeda before zooming back out the window.

"Hogwarts letters!" Tonks exclaimed, tearing hers open with enthusiasm. "Let's see what unnecessary textbooks they're making me buy for my O.W.L. year."

Harry opened his more carefully, scanning the familiar green ink:

SECOND-YEAR STUDENTS WILL REQUIRE:

The Standard Book of Spells, Grade 2 by Miranda Goshawk Break with a Banshee by Gilderoy Lockhart Gadding with Ghouls by Gilderoy Lockhart Holidays with Hags by Gilderoy Lockhart Travels with Trolls by Gilderoy Lockhart Voyages with Vampires by Gilderoy Lockhart Wanderings with Werewolves by Gilderoy Lockhart Year with the Yeti by Gilderoy Lockhart

Harry frowned, reading through the list a second time. "Who compiled this list? Lockhart's biggest fan? Who even is this bloke?"

He looked up to find Andromeda's cheeks had taken on a distinctly pink tinge. She busied herself with the teapot, avoiding Harry's curious gaze.

"Gilderoy Lockhart," Ted explained, amusement dancing in his eyes as he glanced at his wife, "is quite the celebrity in the wizarding world. According to his many books, he's traveled the globe defeating dark creatures and saving communities from magical threats."

"According to his books?" Harry repeated skeptically. "And he's written... one, two..." he counted down the list, "seven books about himself?"

"Oh, there are more," Ted chuckled. "Those are just the ones assigned for your class."

"And Mister Newt has never mentioned him?" Harry asked. "That seems odd. Wouldn't two famous magical creature experts know each other?"

Ted's smile widened. "One might think so."

"Mum has a *massive* crush on him," Tonks announced gleefully. "She has all his books. Special editions. Signed copies."

"I most certainly do not have a crush!" Andromeda protested, her usual composure slipping. "I simply appreciate his contributions to defense against the dark arts education."

"Is that why you went to three of his book signings?" Tonks asked innocently. "For educational purposes?"

Andromeda's eyes narrowed dangerously. "Nymphadora Tonks! You'll be washing dishes by hand for a week!"

"Worth it," Tonks whispered to Harry with a wink.

"Andromeda attended one of his lectures at a healing conference," Ted explained to Harry, clearly enjoying his wife's discomfort. "Found his techniques for handling dangerous creatures while administering medical care 'most illuminating.' Didn't you, dear?"

Andromeda huffed. "If you're quite finished embarrassing me in front of Harry..."

"Never," Ted and Tonks replied in unison.

Harry couldn't help but smile at the family dynamic. Even when teasing each other, the warmth between the Tonks family members was palpable.

A thought suddenly occurred to him as he glanced down at Itisa, who was now cleaning her paws with exaggerated innocence after successfully extracting a second piece of bacon from Ted.

"I wonder if this Lockhart would recognize what Itisa really is," Harry mused. "If he's such an expert on dangerous magical creatures."

"That," Ted said thoughtfully, "would be quite the test of his credentials, wouldn't it?"

"I wouldn't worry too much," Tonks said, examining her own book list. "According to Penny Haywood—she was Head Girl when I started at Hogwarts—Lockhart visited Hogwarts when she was a student too. Gave a talk on banshee banishment. She said he spent most of the time signing autographs and admiring his reflection in the suits of armor."

"Sounds like someone who enjoys looking at himself a bit too much," Harry remarked.

"O.W.L. year," Tonks groaned, changing the subject as she reviewed her letter. "McGonagall's included the standard 'your future depends on these exams' speech. As if I needed reminding."

"Nervous?" Harry asked, buttering a scone.

Tonks' hair shifted briefly to an anxious pale yellow before returning to its breakfast amber. "Not about the exams, exactly. More about deciding what comes after."

"Still thinking about Auror training?" Ted asked.

"Yes, but I'm looking forward to training with Mad-Eye Moody," Tonks shrugged.

"What about you, Harry? Excited for the second year? Planning to revolutionize any other branches of magic after talismans?" Andromeda asked Harry.

"I'm looking forward to actually enjoying a full year at Hogwarts without a professor trying to kill me," Harry replied dryly. "Though given my luck..."

"Don't even joke about that," Andromeda said sharply. "This year will be perfectly normal and safe."

"Of course, Lady Andromeda," Harry agreed, exchanging a skeptical glance with Tonks. They both knew better than to expect "normal" or "safe" where Hogwarts was concerned.

"We should make a trip to Diagon Alley soon," Ted suggested, checking the calendar on the wall. "Perhaps next week? I'll need to visit Gringotts to discuss the next talisman production run anyway. Harry you will need to come with me, it's about time you learn a few things about vaults and how to deal with Goblins."

"And clearly we need to set aside extra time for book shopping," Harry added, waving his Hogwarts letter. "Given the extensive Lockhart library we're required to purchase."

"I'll help you find them," Andromeda offered a bit too quickly, then cleared her throat when everyone looked at her. "For educational purposes, of course."

"Of course," Tonks echoed with a grin. "Nothing to do with the rumor that Lockhart himself will be signing copies at Flourish and Blotts next week."

"Is that so?" Andromeda asked with forced casualness. "I hadn't heard."

Ted chuckled, reaching over to pat his wife's hand. "My dear, you've been planning our schedule around that book signing since it was announced in last Sunday's *Prophet*."

Andromeda sniffed. "I simply believe in supporting literacy events in our community."

Harry bit into his scone to hide his smile. As the conversation flowed around him, he found himself looking forward to the coming school year. Whatever challenges lay ahead, he had something the orphaned boy in the cupboard never had—people who cared about him, who would stand beside him no matter what.

Beneath the table, Itisa bumped her head against his leg, as if sensing his thoughts. Harry reached down to stroke her fur, wondering idly what Gilderoy Lockhart would make of a Nundu disguised as a house cat. If the man truly was the expert his books claimed, it would certainly be an interesting meeting.

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The mid-morning sky hung overcast above the Tonks' garden, casting everything in a soft, diffused light that made the colors of Andromeda's prized magical flowers seem more vibrant than usual. Harry knelt in the soft earth, carefully extracting weeds from around a cluster of shimmering Moonglow Lilies while Tonks, a few feet away, battled with a particularly stubborn garden gnome.

"Come on, you little—" she grunted, tugging at the gnome's stubby legs as it clung desperately to a root. "Let—GO!"

With a sudden release, Tonks tumbled backward, gnome in hand. The creature immediately sank its teeth into her thumb.

"OW!" she yelped, shaking her hand frantically. "You vicious little potato with legs!"

Harry couldn't help but laugh as Tonks finally dislodged the gnome and began spinning it above her head in the traditional method of gnome removal.

"This," she huffed as she twirled, "is exactly—why—magic—should be—allowed!" With a final grunt of effort, she released the gnome, sending it sailing over the garden hedge. "Three measly feet! That's pathetic."

"The trick," Harry said, setting down his trowel and standing, "is to make them dizzy enough before you throw." He reached into a nearby shrub and expertly extracted another gnome, which blinked at him in surprise. Harry began spinning it much faster than Tonks had managed. "They get disoriented and can't find their way back as easily."

He released the gnome, which soared well beyond where Tonks' had landed, disappearing into the field behind their property with a faint "Gerroff!" as it hit the ground.

"Show-off," Tonks muttered, nursing her bitten thumb. Her hair had shifted to a disgruntled reddish-brown. "Where'd you learn to degnome a garden anyway? The Dursleys didn't strike me as the gardening type."

"Professor Garlick showed us how last year," Harry explained, returning to the Moonglow Lilies.

"I still don't understand why we can't just use magic," Tonks complained, eyeing another gnome hole suspiciously. "That rule is dumb as hell."

"Even if you weren't underage. Lady Andromeda said no magic in the garden after you accidentally set the rosebushes dancing last summer," Harry reminded her. "Besides, she believes manual gardening builds character."

Tonks rolled her eyes dramatically. "Yes, well, my character is quite built enough, thank you very much." She sighed, picking up her own trowel. "Just wait until you're in O.W.L. year, Harry. It's

going to be a nightmare. Professor Flitwick already warned us we'll have charms homework every day."

"Every day?" Harry's eyebrows rose. "Even weekends?"

"Even holidays," Tonks confirmed grimly. "And McGonagall is supposedly worse. Charlie Weasley told me she made them transform a different object every single night for months."

Harry carefully patted soil around the Moonglow Lily's roots. "What about Defense Against the Dark Arts? With this Lockhart fellow assigning all those books, I'm a bit concerned."

"Who knows?" Tonks shrugged, her hair lightening to a thoughtful blue. "The Defense position has a new professor every year. The job's supposedly cursed, you know. No one's lasted more than a single school year in decades."

"Really?" Harry looked up with interest. "What happens to them?"

"All sorts of things," Tonks said, warming to her topic. "Two years before you started, Professor Grimblehawk developed an uncontrollable fear of his own wand. Had to be transferred to the Janus Thickey Ward at St. Mungo's. Before that, Professor Willoughby disappeared during an educational trip to the Forbidden Forest—they found him three weeks later living in a hollowed-out tree, convinced he was a bowtruckle."

"And now we get Lockhart," Harry mused. "If he's as qualified as his books suggest, he might actually know what he's doing."

"His books," Tonks snorted, moving to tackle another patch of weeds. "Have you ever seen them? They're ridiculous—I see them in every library I enter. Every cover has his face taking up most of the space, with this blindingly white smile. The actual title is tiny, squished at the bottom like an afterthought."

"Sounds like someone who enjoys looking at himself a bit too much," Harry remarked, gently coaxing a dozing Flutterwing—a butterfly-like magical insect—from a flower he needed to weed around.

"Mum nearly fainted when she met him at that book signing in '89," Tonks continued. "Dad teased her for weeks. He kept transfiguring random objects to have Lockhart's face. The teapot would wink at her during breakfast."

Harry chuckled, then noticed a small rustling in the compost heap. He tilted his head, listening. "Hang on. I think we've got something besides gnomes."

He approached the compost pile cautiously. A small snout poked out, sniffing the air tentatively.

"Garden jarvey," Harry identified, kneeling down. "They're related to ferrets, but they can talk. Usually just insults, though."

"Better back up then," Tonks warned. "They bite worse than gnomes and their vocabulary would make a hag blush."

Instead of retreating, Harry simply extended his hand, palm up, and made a soft hissing sound—not quite Parseltongue, but something instinctive that seemed to come naturally to him when dealing with magical creatures.

To Tonks' amazement, the jarvey emerged fully, regarding Harry with unexpected docility. It resembled an overgrown ferret with a peculiar tuft of fur on its head that almost looked like a tiny hat.

"Dirt-digger," it squeaked at Harry, though without the usual aggression jarveys were known for. "Worm-fingers."

"Hello to you too," Harry replied calmly. "This compost heap isn't a good home for you. There's a much better one in the field beyond the apple trees. More beetles and fewer humans to bother you."

The jarvey considered this, whiskers twitching. "Many beetles?" it asked suspiciously.

"Loads," Harry confirmed. "And no garden gnomes to compete with."

After a moment's consideration, the jarvey sniffed Harry's fingers, squeaked something that might have been *"Lucky day, twig-boy,"* and scampered off in the direction Harry had indicated.

Tonks stared at Harry. "That was... incredible. Jarveys are classified as pests because they're nearly impossible to relocate without stunning spells."

Harry shrugged, a little embarrassed. "They're not so bad if you speak their language." He returned to his gardening. "It helps if you offer them something better than what they're leaving behind."

"Is that what you do with Itisa too?" Tonks asked, half-joking. "Offer her something better than terrorizing villages and decimating populations when you found her in the park?"

"No, I offered the Dursleys, but she wasn't a big fan, but it seems bacon from Mister Ted seems to work nicely," Harry replied with a slight smile.

They worked in companionable silence for a while, the only sounds the distant calls of birds and the occasional grunt as they tackled particularly stubborn weeds. The physical labor was strangely satisfying, so different from the punishing chores the Dursleys had assigned him.

"This is nice," Harry said suddenly, surprising himself.

"Pulling weeds in muggy weather?" Tonks asked skeptically, blowing a strand of now-purple hair from her face. "You have strange definitions of 'nice,' Potter."

"No, I mean..." Harry gestured vaguely around them. "This. Being able to just... work in a garden because it's helpful, not because I'm being punished. Having someone to talk to while doing it." He focused intently on the soil, a little embarrassed by his admission. "At the Dursleys, gardening was always a punishment. I'd be out there for hours, no water, no breaks, and if I missed a single weed..."

He trailed off, uncomfortable with the memories.

Tonks' expression softened. She reached over and squeezed his shoulder. "Well, around here, gardening is just gardening. And if you miss a weed, the worst that happens is Mum gives you her disappointed eyebrow raise."

"The dreaded eyebrow," Harry nodded solemnly. "Truly terrifying."

"More frightening than You-Know-Who himself," Tonks agreed with mock seriousness.

They shared a laugh, and Harry felt a warmth that had nothing to do with the humid summer air.

The peaceful moment shattered suddenly when the hairs on the back of Harry's neck stood on end. A cold prickle spread across his skin, the unmistakable sensation of being watched.

Harry froze, his hand halfway to a dandelion. Years of living with the Dursleys had given him a sixth sense for when hostile eyes were upon him, and now that instinct was screaming a warning.

"Harry?" Tonks asked, noticing his sudden stillness. "What's wrong?"

"Something's watching us," he whispered, slowly scanning the garden boundaries.

Harry's eyes turned snake-like, his green eyes glittered like emeralds, and he could hear everything around him again and see better.

With his enhanced vision, Harry detected a slight movement behind the distant hedge that separated the Tonks' property from the neighboring meadow. A small figure, no taller than Harry's waist, was partially concealed there, its large ears visible over the top of the hedge.

"Who's there?" Harry called out sharply, rising to his feet.

Tonks was beside him instantly, wand drawn despite the restriction on underage magic. "Where?" she asked, her hair darkening to a tactical black as she scanned the area.

"Behind the far hedge," Harry directed, his snake-like eyes never leaving the spot. "Something small. It just moved."

The moment Harry called out, the ears disappeared. There was a frantic rustling sound, followed by what almost sounded like a squeak of alarm.

"Come on," Tonks said, already moving toward the hedge with her wand at the ready.

They crossed the garden quickly, but by the time they reached the hedge, whatever had been watching them was gone. Tonks carefully parted the dense leaves, revealing the meadow beyond.

"Nothing," she muttered, frowning. "Are you sure you saw something?"

"Positive," Harry affirmed, his eyes gradually returning to their normal appearance. He pointed to the ground. "Look."

Small footprints were visible in the soft earth on the other side of the hedge—tiny, bare feet that led away from their position for about two meters before simply vanishing, as though whatever had made them had disappeared into thin air.

"Those are too small for a human child," Tonks observed, kneeling to examine them more closely. "And too large for a garden gnome."

"Could it be from one of your neighbors?"

Tonks shook her head. "Our nearest magical neighbors are the Fawcetts, and they're on holiday in Spain."

They stood in silence for a moment, both contemplating the mysterious visitor. A cool breeze rustled through the hedge, carrying with it the faint scent of coming rain.

"I will talk to Dad. The wards should not have allowed this to happen," Tonks said with a frown and walked towards the door, entering the house.

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The late afternoon sun cast long shadows through Harry's bedroom window. After finishing in the garden, Harry had showered away the dirt and spent an hour studying his new books on talisman crafting, but his mind kept returning to those mysterious footprints that had vanished into nothing.

Finally, he decided to fetch the Aqualis crystal and continue his research on helping Anna. Perhaps focusing on something productive would settle his unease.

As Harry pushed open his bedroom door, he stopped dead in his tracks, momentarily unable to process the scene before him.

Something—or someone—was jumping on his bed with wild abandon, giggling with high-pitched delight.

It was a creature unlike any Harry had encountered before. About four feet tall, with spindly limbs and a large, bulbous head dominated by enormous bat-like ears. Its eyes were perfectly round and an unnatural shade of green, like tennis balls. The creature was dressed in what appeared to be a pillowcase with holes cut for its head and arms, stained and threadbare but tied with what looked like a makeshift rope belt.

For a surreal moment, Harry simply watched as the being bounced with remarkable agility, occasionally doing a mid-air twist that would have impressed an Olympic gymnast.

"Who are you?" Harry finally demanded.

The creature froze mid-jump, hanging suspended in the air for an impossible moment before dropping onto Harry's bed with a soft thump. Its tennis-ball eyes widened to the size of saucers as it stared at Harry with a mixture of awe and terror.

"Harry Potter!" the creature squeaked, sliding off the bed and dropping into a bow so low that its long, pencil-like nose brushed the floor. "Such an honor it is, sir! Dobby has wanted to meet Harry Potter for so long!"

"I... um," Harry hesitated, thoroughly confused. "How did you get in here?"

The creature—Dobby, apparently—straightened from his bow, though he continued to wring his long, bony hands. "Dobby is a house-elf, sir. Dobby can appear and disappear at will."

"A house-elf?" Harry repeated, trying to recall if he'd read about such beings. He'd studied dozens of magical creatures with Newt, but house-elves hadn't been mentioned. "What exactly is a house-elf?"

Dobby looked momentarily surprised by the question, then his expression became somber. "House-elves serve wizarding families, sir. We cook and clean and polish and maintain the magical household, yes we do."

There was something in the way he said this—a slight droop to his already droopy ears—that suggested complexity behind the simple explanation.

"I see," Harry said slowly, though he didn't, not really. "And why exactly were you jumping on my bed?"

Dobby's ears quivered, and he looked down at his bare, knobbly feet. "Dobby has never been in the bedroom of the famous Harry Potter before, sir. Dobby was... overcome." His voice dropped to a whisper. "Dobby has heard such stories of Harry Potter's greatness, of his bravery, of his defeat of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named! And now Dobby sees Harry Potter has the kindest room, with the softest bed..." He stroked the bedcover reverently.

"Right," Harry said, still feeling off-balance. "That doesn't exactly explain how you found me, or why you're here."

At this, Dobby's demeanor changed completely. His tennis-ball eyes grew solemn, and he glanced anxiously at the window, then the door, as if expecting eavesdroppers.

"Dobby has come to tell Harry Potter..." He lowered his voice dramatically and leaned forward. "Dobby has come to protect Harry Potter, to warn him! Harry Potter must not return to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry!"

Harry stared at him. "What?"

"If Harry Potter goes back to Hogwarts, he will be in mortal danger!" Dobby insisted, his voice rising urgently. "There is a plot, a terrible plot to make terrible things happen at Hogwarts this year!"

Harry's mind raced. How had this creature bypassed the wards? The Tonks residence was protected by multiple layers of magical security, especially after his confrontation with Quirrell. Those wards were designed to detect any magical being approaching with harmful intent.

Unless house-elf magic operated differently? Or perhaps the wards didn't recognize Dobby as a threat because he genuinely wasn't one?

"What kind of danger?" Harry asked carefully. "Who's planning it?"

Dobby made a strange choking sound, then darted to Harry's desk and began rapidly banging his head against it. "Bad Dobby! Bad Dobby!"

"Stop that!" Harry rushed forward, pulling the elf away from the desk. "You'll hurt yourself!"

Dobby looked up at Harry with watery eyes. "Dobby must punish himself, sir. Dobby almost spoke ill of his family."

"Your family?" Harry frowned. "You mean the wizards you work for? Are they the ones planning something dangerous at Hogwarts?"

The elf's ears drooped even further. "Dobby cannot say, sir! Dobby will have to punish himself most grievously for coming to warn Harry Potter! Dobby will have to shut his ears in the oven door when he returns home."

"That's barbaric," Harry said, genuinely horrified. "Listen, Dobby, I appreciate your warning, but I need more information. What exactly is going to happen at Hogwarts?"

Dobby wrung his hands desperately. "Dobby cannot say more! Dobby only knows that Harry Potter must not put himself in peril! He is too important, too good, to lose!"

"Important to whom?" Harry pressed, trying to make sense of the elf's cryptic warnings. "Why would someone want to hurt the students at Hogwarts?"

"Not students," Dobby corrected anxiously. "Not all students. Just—"

He broke off again, looking around frantically before grabbing a heavy book from Harry's bedside table. Before Harry could stop him, Dobby began hitting himself over the head with it.

"Dobby, stop!" Harry seized the book, holding it out of reach. "This isn't helping! Just tell me what you can without... hurting yourself."

The house-elf swayed slightly, looking dazed from his self-inflicted blows. "Terrible things are coming to Hogwarts," he mumbled. "Dark magic from long ago."

"What kind of dark magic?" Harry asked, but Dobby had already snapped back to alertness and was looking horrified at what he'd let slip.

"Dobby has said too much!" he squeaked, tugging frantically at his ears. "Harry Potter must simply trust Dobby! Harry Potter must not return to Hogwarts!"

"Harry?" Nymphadora's voice called from the hallway. "Who are you talking to?"

Footsteps approached the door. Dobby froze, his eyes growing impossibly wider.

Tonks appeared in the doorway, her hair a curious lavender. "I thought I heard—" She broke off, staring at Dobby. Her expression shifted instantly from confusion to alert wariness. "Who's this?"

"He says his name is Dobby," Harry explained. "He's a house-elf."

Tonks' eyes narrowed. Her wand appeared in her hand, though she didn't point it directly at Dobby. "Which family do you belong to, elf?"

Dobby began to tremble violently, backing away until he bumped into Harry's desk. "Dobby cannot say, miss! Dobby is not supposed to be here!"

"Then why are you?" Tonks pressed, taking a step into the room. "How did you get past our wards?"

"Dobby came to warn Harry Potter!" the elf cried, his voice rising to a panicked pitch. "Harry Potter is in danger! There are dark plots at Hogwarts! Terrible danger!"

Tonks glanced at Harry, her confusion evident, then back to Dobby. "What kind of danger? Who's behind it?"

"Dobby cannot say!" The elf was practically vibrating with distress now. "Dobby has said too much already!" He turned pleadingly to Harry. "Harry Potter must promise not to return to Hogwarts!"

Harry shook his head firmly. "I can't promise that, Dobby."

Tonks took another step forward. "I'm going to call my parents," she said, her voice steady but tense. "We need to find out what's going on here." She raised her voice. "Mum! Dad! Could you come up here, please? It's important!"

The sound of hurried footsteps on the stairs reached them. Dobby looked utterly panicked now, glancing between Harry and the door with increasing desperation.

"Harry Potter will not stay away from Hogwarts?" he asked, a note of resignation entering his voice.

"No," Harry confirmed. "I won't."

Dobby's shoulders slumped. "Then Dobby must make sure Harry Potter is safe!" he declared with sudden determination. "Dobby is sorry, but Dobby must protect the great Harry Potter, even if Harry Potter does not wish it!"

Before Harry could respond, Dobby snapped his long fingers.

"Harry Potter will forgive Dobby one day," the elf whispered. "When Harry Potter understands that Dobby acted to save his life."

With a loud CRACK that made both Harry and Tonks jump, Dobby vanished into thin air just as Ted and Andromeda rushed into the bedroom.

"What happened?" Andromeda asked sharply, her wand already in her hand as she scanned the room for threats. "Who was that crack from?"

"A house-elf," Tonks explained, her hair fading to a concerned blue. "Called himself Dobby. He was warning Harry not to go back to Hogwarts, saying there was some kind of danger there."

Ted frowned deeply. "A house-elf? Here? That shouldn't be possible with our wards."

"He said house-elves can appear and disappear at will," Harry added, still staring at the spot where Dobby had vanished. "And he seemed... desperate to keep me from returning to school."

Andromeda's expression darkened. "House-elf magic is different from wizard magic in many ways. They can bypass certain magical barriers that would stop wizards. But still, our wards should have at least alerted us to his presence."

"He mentioned something about terrible things coming to Hogwarts," Harry recalled. "And dark magic from long ago. Does that mean anything to you?"

Ted and Andromeda exchanged a concerned look.

"That's very vague," Ted murmured. "But still concerning."

"What kind of dark magic could he mean?" Harry asked, glancing between them.

Andromeda hesitated, then shook her head. "It's probably nothing—just attempting to frighten you. But I don't like this at all. A house-elf would never leave his family without explicit permission, and warning you like this... he's risking severe punishment."

"He kept hitting himself whenever he came close to revealing who his family was," Harry said grimly. "Apparently, he'll have to shut his ears in an oven door when he gets home."

"Barbaric," Andromeda muttered, her aristocratic features hardening. "But unfortunately not uncommon in certain families."

"We should contact Amelia," Ted suggested. "If there's any credibility to this warning, the DMLE should know. And we'll need to strengthen our wards, regardless."

"I'll floo call her now," Andromeda agreed, already turning toward the door.

"I still don't understand what a house-elf is," Harry admitted. "Or why one would risk so much to warn me."

"House-elves are magical beings bound to serve wizarding families," Ted explained as Andromeda left to contact Amelia Bones. "The relationship is... complicated. Most are bound magically to obey their masters in everything."

"Like slaves?" Harry asked, disturbed by the concept.

Ted grimaced. "The wizarding world has different standards than the Muggle one in some ways. Not all of them better," he added pointedly. "Many house-elves are treated well and take pride in their service, but others..."

"Like Dobby," Tonks finished, her expression grim.

"Exactly," Ted nodded. "For a house-elf to deliberately warn you against his family's wishes—assuming that's what happened—suggests something serious. Though it could also be a trick," he added thoughtfully. "House-elves can be used as pawns in political games."

"Either way," Tonks said, "someone managed to send a magical creature through our wards without triggering any alarms. That's concerning even without the warning."

Ted agreed. "I'll check the property boundaries, just to be safe. Tonks, stay with Harry."

After Ted left, Harry and Tonks stood in silence for a moment, both processing the strange encounter.

"Do you think he was telling the truth?" Harry finally asked. "About the danger at Hogwarts?"

Tonks shrugged, her hair a thoughtful shade of violet. "Hard to say. House-elves can't directly lie to their masters, but they can lie to other wizards, they can be deceived themselves, or ordered

to deliver false messages. But bypassing our wards just to deliver a fake warning seems elaborate."

Harry moved to the window, gazing out at the darkening sky.

He sensed movement and looked down to find Itisa padding silently into the room. The disguised Nundu surveyed the space carefully, her gold eyes narrowed, nostrils flaring as she caught unfamiliar scents. There was an unusual alertness to her posture, her muscles tense beneath her sleek fur.

She joined Harry at the window, pressing against his leg in a rare display of concern.

"I'm going back to Hogwarts," Harry said quietly, more to himself than to Tonks or Itisa.

Luna Lovegood

Luna Lovegood stood barefoot on the soft rug in her bedroom, wiggling her toes against the worn fibers as she contemplated her reflection in the mirror. The mirror, unlike those in most wizarding households, remained silent—her father had enchanted it years ago to refrain from commentary after it had once suggested Luna might look better with "normal" earrings instead of the dirigible plums she'd crafted herself.

It's really quite considerate of mirrors to worry about our appearances, Luna thought, *even if they're usually wrong about what looks good*.

She tilted her head, making her radish earrings sway gently. Today felt different somehow—a subtle shift in the air that reminded her of how pudding sometimes changed consistency just before it set properly. Something was coming. Something important.

"First day of school shopping," she murmured to herself, the words tasting new and exciting on her tongue.

From her window, she could see mist rising from the stream that wound past their cylindrical home. The early morning light gave everything a pearly glow, as if the world were wrapped in the iridescent shell of a Moonlit Glumbumble. Luna smiled at the thought. Perhaps she would find other children at Hogwarts who noticed such things.

"Luna, darling! Are you ready?" her father's voice called from downstairs, warm and slightly distracted as always.

"Almost!" she replied, turning her attention back to her wardrobe.

What did one wear to purchase their first wand and schoolbooks? Something lucky, certainly. Luna selected a bright yellow dress patterned with small blue stars. Her mother had sewn it for her three summers ago, and Luna had carefully expanded it with color-changing fabric that shifted between turquoise and violet at the hem.

Properly dressed, she skipped down the spiral staircase into their cluttered kitchen, where Xenophilius Lovegood was simultaneously attempting to pack a satchel, drink tea, and review a draft layout for the next edition of *The Quibbler*.

"There you are, moonbeam," he smiled, his protuberant eyes—so like her own—crinkling at the corners. "Ready for our expedition?"

"I've been ready since last Tuesday," Luna replied, helping herself to a piece of toast and spreading it with a generous layer of marmalade. "The Wrackspurts have been particularly scarce, which is always a good sign before important journeys."

"Excellent observation!" Xenophilius beamed, instantly diverted from his preparations. "Their migratory patterns do suggest they're sensitive to imminent change." He paused, brushing his wispy white-blond hair from his eyes. "Speaking of change, how are you feeling about Hogwarts, my dear?"

Luna considered the question as she chewed her toast thoughtfully. "I think it will be like discovering a new species of magical creature," she decided. "Exciting and a bit scary, but mostly fascinating."

Xenophilius nodded sagely. "That's a perfect analogy. Though I do hope you'll be careful—not everyone appreciates genuine curiosity and observation the way we do."

"You mean they might think I'm odd," Luna said matter-of-factly, without a trace of self-consciousness.

Her father's expression softened. "They might not understand you immediately," he amended gently. "Your mother always said that some minds need time to expand enough to see the world's true wonders."

Luna nodded, feeling the familiar bittersweet warmth that always accompanied memories of her mother. "I think I'll meet at least one person who sees things properly," she said with quiet conviction. "The universe tends to balance itself that way."

"Of course you will!" Xenophilius declared, suddenly animated again. "And until then, you have the Dirigible Plums to enhance your receptivity to the extraordinary."

He glanced at the clock—a curious contraption with thirteen hands and planets instead of numbers—and exclaimed, "Goodness, we should be off! The apothecary tends to run out of the freshest ingredients early, and we'll need to visit Gringotts first."

Luna picked up the small beaded purse she'd made herself. It contained three Sickles and seven Knuts (for luck), a small notebook for recording interesting observations, and a string of butterbeer caps that might prove useful in unexpected ways.

"Should we take the Floo or apparate?" she asked, already knowing the answer.

"Oh, apparition, certainly," Xenophilius replied, gathering his own wildly disorganized satchel. "Much less chance of Floo-borne Nargles this time of year."

Luna nodded seriously. "And they're especially attracted to new wands. Very wise, Daddy."

As they prepared to leave, Luna paused by the kitchen window, looking out at the misty morning. A thestral was visible at the edge of their garden, its skeletal form elegant against the greenery. Luna had been able to see them since her mother's accident, but she didn't find them frightening—only rather beautiful in their honesty.

"Do you think there will be anyone at Hogwarts who's interested in unusual creatures?" she asked suddenly. "Not just the ones in textbooks, but the ones most people don't notice?"

Xenophilius placed a gentle hand on her shoulder. "The most interesting people are always those who look beyond the obvious, Luna. You'll find your kindred spirits—perhaps not immediately, but they'll come. Magic has a way of drawing similar souls together."

Luna considered this, then smiled. "Like how Gulping Plimpies always travel in groups of exactly seven?"

"Precisely!" her father exclaimed. "Nature has patterns we're only beginning to understand."

Luna took her father's arm, ready for side-along apparition. "I think today is going to be important," she confided. "I feel it in the space between heartbeats."

"The most significant magic often happens there," Xenophilius agreed, his expression suddenly serious. "Your mother always said—"

"—that's where possibilities multiply," Luna finished with him.

With a crack, they disappeared from the kitchen, reappearing moments later in the designated apparition point of Diagon Alley.

The cobblestone street was already bustling with witches and wizards, many accompanied by children clutching Hogwarts letters identical to the one carefully folded in Luna's pocket.

Luna breathed deeply, taking in the mingled scents of potions ingredients, fresh parchment, and magical creatures from the Magical Menagerie. Everything felt simultaneously strange and familiar, like a dream revisited.

"Where shall we begin, moonbeam?" Xenophilius asked, looking slightly overwhelmed by the crowds.

Luna considered for a moment, then pointed toward the gleaming white building at the far end of the street. "Gringotts first, then Ollivanders. I think my wand is waiting for me."

"An excellent instinct," her father agreed. "Wands do have a certain temporal awareness—much like Blibbering Humdingers."

Whatever happened, this year would change everything. And Luna Lovegood was ready, radish earrings, unusual perspectives, and all.