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Rating: PG-13/12+.

Author's notes:. With huge thanks to Strangemuses.

Summary: In order to set right what is wrong, Dennis Creevey travels in time with unfortunate consequences.

# # #

WHERE WE COME IN:

They always said school was hell; Colin Creevey just hadn't realised it could be this literal.

Screams rose in the haze, some of pain, more of grief and rage. It was impossible to tell who was winning. The Death Eaters had the advantage, the experience, the will to kill. The teachers and the children had desperation, drive, and the home ground. Hogwarts moved around them, battered and broken but guardian to the last, turning stairs, opening and closing doors, letting students back in who should have gone home -- who shouldn't even have been at the school at all.

He'd come to war with a bunch of stink-bombs in one pocket and a collection of flashbulbs in the other; not exactly conventional armaments, but Colin knew the risks. He knew it wasn't all basilisks glimpsed through cameras and vanishing arms on Quidditch pitches, that Pomfrey could not fix all the strange and terrible with some simple, foul tasting potion. He knew Cedric; he had actually talked to the boy -- mostly about the badges, admittedly, but still -- and had photos of him, before and after. Colin knew

this was real. Hadn't he made Dennis stay behind, as a good brother should? He knew -- but he couldn't leave them. They had worked together. They had trained together. Harry had saved them all. How could he just let that go unanswered?

He was a Gryffindor, by God, and a Gryffindor never retreats, never backs down, not even in the face of impossible evil!

Like people who tried to curse children (never mind that he was one) and Colin leaped out over the rubble, snapping off stunners at the white masks -- thanking them for that touch of melodrama, guys, it made it so much easier to distinguish the bad guys from the good -- and rolling as soon as he hit the ground. Their return blasts sliced past close enough that he felt the heat but, like in Quidditch, close to the goal didn't score you anything. Not that all of his own shots had struck home, but he was going at least one in five, which wasn't bad considering half the time he couldn't see a bloody thing.

Rubble blocked the corridor again. Colin sighed and took off in the other direction, knowing better than to run but striding hard, eyes everywhere. It was a shame, really, not just the whole war thing but the way it turned out years of practicing finding the best picture -- the most perfect composition in the shortest time, before opportunity was lost -- didn't actually help all that much in a warzone. He was too used to seeing everything at once, looking at the whole picture, when he needed to pick out friends and enemies. Extraneous details kept slipping in.

Like, for instance, how nicely the stairs and smoke framed that hole in the roof, something to shoot slow and high contrast, print in black and silver gels. Like the way Victoria's portrait, empty now and with the frame burning, centred over those cracks, would have made the perfect fast full colour shot. Like the way the smoke, fire, and filtered spell-light made that section over there look like a dragon, or maybe a giant rabbit: a giant, deadly rabbit of death. Like how he'd turned the wrong way and was suddenly in open space, people rushing round him, people and things -- statues and suits of armour, desks and wardrobes, all manner of things, everything come alive to fight. His fingers itched for his camera. He closed them tighter around his wand and doubled back.

Someone called his name, maybe. Colin wasn't sure and, in the rush, he couldn't see well enough to pick them out. Too many details, all at once -- concentrate on specifics, he reminded himself. Death Eaters were for cursing. All the other people were for helping. He had to put everything else one side. Well, almost everything, noticing the missing steps was quite important, so, people and where he put his feet. That was it. His feet and--

Was that Blaise Zabini? Hadn't the Slytherins all left already? Dennis would have said that wasn't fair, but if you couldn't be sure of some of them, it made sense to Colin to send them all away. They would be safer that way, whether the 'they' in question was the Slytherins or everybody else. Anyway, he figured everyone who really wanted to fight, good or bad, would have done as he had done and sneaked back. He wondered which Zabini was. The boy was looking his way, annoyingly well dressed in the chaos, annoyingly photogenic too, and Colin raised his wand forgetting in that second that it wasn't his camera. Zabini was already gone, though.

Realising he should be too, Colin leaped over the missing stairs and bounded the rest of the way up, pausing at the top to gasp for breath. It came in smoky and filled with foul smells and he coughed and choked, stumbling for the corridor at the landing's edge and ducking down, hoping the air would be clearer below the smoke and above the dust. It wasn't particularly, but it was better than nothing was.

From this angle, he could see back and down through the gap left by the missing railing. There was a flash of platinum blond, presumably a Malfoy -- he couldn't be sure it was Draco -- and someone who looked so much like Dennis that Colin's heart froze before he remembered that this was impossible. He edged forward to get a better look, but there was a clatter behind him. Backing slowly towards the stairs, he looked around, trying to find the source, glancing down to check on the two he had just seen in case they were coming up. They were not, but there were Death Eaters now on the bottom landing, cutting off his retreat. Swearing under his breath, he moved the other way, towards the noise.

Towards, it turned out, one slim boy dragging a much larger one; clearly, he had been right not to be sure that was Draco below because he was entirely sure it was Draco right here. A deathly pale, singed, scratched up Draco and a--

"Goyle's hurt!" Draco snapped at him. Help me!"

Colin gaped at him, wand still at the ready. "Help you?"

"I don't have a wand; I'm not going to do anything. This isn't about Potter or the Dark Lord; I just need you to help me help my friend. That's what Gryffindors do, isn't it?" Draco spoke in the sort of deliberate way that attempted and yet completely failed whatsoever to hide any of the edge of panic and desperation in his voice. Still, it wasn't until the other boy's voice cracked in the middle of the

haughty "please" that Colin's paralysis broke.

"There's a room," he started, because they were in the right seventh floor corridor, but Draco shook his head.

"We can't go there. There's a music room on the next floor. " He pulled at Goyle again, getting them moving. "We'll stay there, out of the way. "

Colin jumped quickly to his side, getting under Goyle's other arm, and they were back on the landing before he pulled them short. "There are Death Eaters on the stairs, we can't go this way. Death Eaters who are probably your friends and--! What am I doing? You're the enemy!"

"Ethical treatment of prisoners of war," Draco suggested, with unexpected humour. "I hear you people go in for things like that. Suggestions would be helpful. If you have a time-turner, we could nip back six months and order Goyle to diet. "

"If I had a time-turner, I'd go all the way back and stop any of this happening," Colin said. He pointed his wand. "Accio tapestry!"

One ripped its way off the far wall at his command and soared towards them.

"Ah," said Draco with the thoughtful tone of one who has just decided his newfound saviour wasn't so much a hero as a crazy person. "Of course; a tapestry is the obvious solution to ... almost nothing. "

"Shut up, Malfoy," Colin snapped, catching the cloth and quickly tearing a large strip off.

He pulled the flash bulbs from his pocket, dropped as many as he could fit onto the cloth and wrapped it around them, which went a lot quicker once Draco worked out what he was doing and took all of Goyle's weight. He hefted the makeshift grenade in his hand, wished fervently that he had practiced more Chasing, and chucked it down the stairs. A flick of his wand set it alight. Fire and flashes blazed and

there were startled yells from below.

"Up," Colin hissed at Draco unnecessarily. The other boy had already started pulling Goyle towards the stairs up. Colin retook his position, helping with the carrying. Spells hissed below. More flashes went off, stroboscope, cutting everything into bright slices. The shadows of the remaining railing, sharp and black, cut across them -- first this way, then that -- making it hard to see. He caught snatches of Draco's sickly, determined face, of blood on robes, of steps, of burning portraits, all in short jumps, as if time itself was broken. Time and space and--

The eighth floor landing -- technically a tower level now, Colin thought absently and bizarrely -- was empty, but the corridor beyond it was not.

They were both startled to see each other. Perhaps the Death Eater recognised Draco. Perhaps he did not. Draco was saying something Colin couldn't hear.

Colin tried to raise his wand.

The man raised his first.

Everything burned away green.

# # #

FIVE YEARS LATER

It wasn't five years, exactly, but that was bureaucracy for you. It was summer still, though, late and warm and spread around them like honey or maybe amber. It was hard to breathe. There was no place to move. A row of robes on either side, in front and at back, and Dennis wondered if each of them could feel the sweat collecting in their armpits, trickling down. He wished, not for the first or third or tenth time, that he could pull his wand out, cast a cooling charm or five, but he didn't feel much like having every Auror in the grounds descend on him in case he was a yet another long-lagging Death Eater sympathizer ready to disrupt the show. Service, he was supposed to say, as Croaker had insisted on -- five-year memorial service, and never mind your lip, lad, and try to look at least vaguely presentable. Yes.

Sir, yes, sir -- and by the way, my brother is still dead. Do you remember that? I do.

His gaze slid across the crowd, because looking at the clothes was much better than listening to the Minister talk about things he remembered far too clearly. Whoever had arranged the seating had grouped most people by occupation, although a few were standing with their boyfriends and girlfriends, husbands and wives, fathers, mothers, sisters...

Dennis was standing with Blaise Zabini and the other Untouchables. His girlfriend Natalie was by his side. Over there was Graham Pritchard in Ministry of Education blues, carefully holding up the retired but still somehow going Griselda Marchbanks who seemed thin as tissue paper. Over there, the Weasleys stood all together, mostly, absent Charlie but with Fleur and Gabrielle, and Arthur too, away from his department; Perkins stood on the far side, six rows down from Dennis. Ginny was standing with her family, no doubt to avoid the constant flash of the cameras and the never ceasing whisper of auto-quills, some focused on the Minister of Magic, but most to the other side and down a bit, on the Aurors. On the one in particular, the one everyone praised or blamed for the situation. One who had refused to stand at the Minister's side to stay with his own, but who was still standing alone. No one wanted to crowd the great Harry Potter after all.

For Dennis, five years had seemed -- well, not a blur exactly, but like a stack of quickly riffled photographs, little snapshots of moments as he surfaced briefly and randomly from his studies, pushing and pushing to be better, to be best, to make up for not being good enough before. It hadn't felt like five years and when he looked in the mirror, he could be fourteen still. That growth spurt his father had always promised had never really come and he was still scrawny and clean shaved and half lost in his robes. However, Harry was... Harry was Harry, but more so, older now; adult; a proper man. Harry was wearing his age. A little tired perhaps, a little sad; there was something in his eyes, in the way he held himself, in--

Dennis frowned. Now that he was paying close attention, he could see that Harry wasn't looking at the Minister at all, was probably paying less attention to the man than Dennis himself was. Harry was looking, in fact, in an entirely different direction, one which, annoyingly, was blocked for Dennis (always too short, damn it!) by the lines of people. He stretched up on tiptoe, shifting sideways a little, trying to see, failing.

It wasn't important. Anyway, it probably wasn't any of his business and, even if it was, because, right, Unspeakable, mysteries were his thing now, it was also Harry's and if anyone deserved some privacy it was Harry. It was Harry, who was standing far too still, the stillness of someone desperate to fidget. It was Harry, who held his hands behind his back, one on the wrist of the other. It was Harry, who kept looking away from whatever -- whoever -- and then slowly sliding his eyes right back.

Colin was still dead, his brain reminded him, just in case he had forgotten, which he had not, obviously.

It was an odd thought to be having in some ways, because it was a memorial service for everybody and he had known the other people that died. Maybe not as well, but he had known them all; at least to the point he could put names to faces. A fair few had been genuine friends. Even if you had won the day and made the world a better place, it was still very sad and you missed all of them. You should miss all of them. Frankly, it was a bit insulting to their memories to be focusing entirely on one person, even if that person was your family, even if he shouldn't have been there that day -- not alone, not without his brother.

"--Colin Creevey," said the Minister as if on cue, and Natalie squeezed his hand again as he jerked back around, away from Harry to look. "Joseph Dorny. Evan Dunkirk. Katy--"

It was just the recital. Well, there wasn't anything 'just' about it, really, having to stand up there and name all the dead -- not the naming, not there being people to name. Dennis tried to listen, but it was all a blur of noise. Listing them seemed to somehow deprive them of meaning, reduce them to a random string of phonemes.

"God, this is depressing," Zabini murmured in a bored sort of tone.

Natalie and a few of the others who were in hearing range glared at him. Dennis choked back his laughter and felt bad when Natalie gave him a sympathetic look. He almost started to explain it hadn't been a sob but then figured sympathy was much better than glaring and the inevitable lecture to follow, so he attempted to look sad instead. Natalie looked confused in response so Dennis quickly looked back to the stage.

"--and Jessica Zelazny," the Minister finished. "We remember. "

The words, repeated back, rolled across the crowd, less like an ocean swell and more like rain hitting a lake, a confusion of intersecting ripples.

"I remember," Dennis said, quietly.

There was more to the speech, but it was all round up stuff, and other people were beginning to shift restlessly in their seats now, ready to have it done with. The Great Hall awaited them, cool and dim and with readily accessible food and drink. Workers had finished the final restorative touches, including the Fred Weasley memorial plaque by the little roped off square of swamp and the much larger Remembrance Wall the Minister had unveiled earlier. If Dennis stretched, he could just about make it out, three thin blocks of something like glass, names engraved and highlighted in white, lights below and water running down. It was very pretty, he supposed. The lake was beyond it, visible through it. Not a ripple disturbed the surface.

Harry was still sneaking glances.

The thing about Colin was, it wasn't just that he was Dennis's brother, although that too, it was that it was incredibly, totally, unbelievable stupid. Colin shouldn't even have been there, at all. No one should have been there. Who holds a climatic battle in a school of all places? Colin should have doubly not been there, because they were muggleborn wizards -- and you were supposed to say it like that, as if 'muggleborn' wasn't just another way of saying 'mudblood' for those people too involved in their own liberalism to recognize the inherent racism in there being any need for a term at all. It had been a weird, messed year all over, to be honest, and none of it, not one bit of it should have happened. It wasn't heroic or cool or an adventure. It was just plain and simple, complete and utter stupid.

A sudden urge to yell SHUT UP at the stage grabbed him, but the Minister got there first, finishing his thank you and inviting people to join him inside the castle. By the time that the applause had died down and people had started to move, the urge had thankfully receded. People began to move, making it easier to breathe, and Dennis stretched as best he could to work the kinks out. He turned to Natalie to ask her if she was okay but she was already moving off.

"I'll meet you inside, Den," she called back, "I just want to talk to--"

To whom he missed under the rise of conversation around them as the crowd broke into chunks, slowly thinned out. There was Harry again. Dennis debated calling out to him, Gryffindor alumni and all that, but each time the shifting crowd gave him a view of the other man, something stilled his tongue. Perhaps it was because the conversation would inevitably turn to how sorry they were about all the dead people. Just as bad, it could end up stuck in meaningless awkward small talk.

Maybe what stopped Dennis was the way Harry was still staring. What was so bloody fascinating? It wasn't as if Harry was looking at the memorial or even Ginny or anything. He wasn't even glaring at the press, which was very unusual for the man now Dennis came to think about it. Harry, after all, had mastered the press-glaring art. He did it so often the press sometimes wrote articles about it. Yet Dennis still couldn't see. It was very annoying. He reached for his wand, then froze when five different Aurors all looked in his direction, and very carefully moved his hand back again, forcing a smile.

Suitably cowed, Dennis gave up and -- with one last glance back at the lake, but still no Squiddy -- turned towards the school. The universe, clearly having a strange, childish sense of humour, chose that exact moment to give him a clear, unimpeded view. Right there, standing alone in the middle of a wide empty circle was a young man with a very familiar set of pointed features, crowned by platinum blond hair in a striking sort of way, if you were in to that sort of thing. As Colin had always said, "He's a right stuck-up prick, Den, but he doesn't half take a good photograph. "

Harry Potter was staring directly at Draco Malfoy.

* * *

The atmosphere in the Great Hall was, if not party, at the least bordering on jubilant. Conversation rumbled and laughter rang through the music -- some Ministry supplied orchestra now, nothing too fancy, just a few people playing the old Wizarding classics. This was yet another sign of unintentional division; Dennis only knew they were Wizarding classics because everyone at the place over the age of fifty had felt the need to say so.

He would have preferred just to go straight home but Natalie had said she would meet him inside, so inside he was, along with everyone else, crowded under a freshly charmed ceiling that was currently pretending to be a pleasant summer's sky. This was rather unfortunate, as he wasn't so much in the mood for company as in the mood for being depressed, emotional, and getting drunk.

"Which," Dennis tried to explain to the drinks table, "is perfectly legal; I'm nineteen! Give me a fire-whiskey!"

The drinks table didn't say anything, probably because it was a table and even in the Wizarding world inanimate pieces of furniture are unlikely to speak; nor did it deliver the drink in question. The doilies stared back at him in a vaguely disapproving sort of way. Stupid lace-like placemat type things with their stupid eight-fold symmetry and their stupid mirrored cutting technique that, now he thought about it, one could easily encoded into an iterative generator and use to create endlessly different (if almost exactly the same) variants on a theme and--

"Don't blow anything up. "

"I wasn't going to!" Dennis complained, and then frowned at the table before looking around to see who had actually spoken.

"You had that look on your face," Graham said. "The 'I wonder what happens if' look. Judging by past evidence, the answer is nearly always something explodes. The hassle I got after you blew up the Slytherin common room!"

"I did not--!" Dennis started hotly before his brain caught up with his eyes and Graham's grin. "Oh, ha, ha. " He managed his own smile. "Hello, then. How's being a teacher?"

"Education overseer, thank you very much. " Graham smoothed down his robes with unconscious pride. "Assistant, admittedly, but it's important to start at the bottom so that you know everything by the time you reach the top, which is where I'll be in ten years. Minister Pritchard! It has a nice ring to it, don't you think?"

"Yes?" Dennis supposed it did, if you were into that sort of thing. Personally, he thought having to refer to himself as 'Unspeakable Creevey' was a bit of a mouthful and he only introduced himself that way when it was required absolutely. Still, he wasn't a Slytherin; not enough ambition as people forever told him. All those 'what do you want to be' and 'where do you see yourself in five years' questions -- he never had an answer to them. Graham had had his answers for ten years. It was both impressive and depressing. "Stupid drinks table. "

Graham looked at him quizzically and he realised that had been aloud.

"It won't give me fire-whiskey," Dennis explained and instantly wished he had not.

Graham's eyes softened with pity, and Dennis had sudden, uncharitable urge to hex the other man. Best friends for four years, even if they had slowly drifted apart after the Battle of Hogwarts, and now here he was, ready to draw his wand. He forced his hands deep in his pockets, waiting for the inevitable comment, which turned out to be, well, evitable, because what Graham actually did was pull a slim, burnished metal hip flask out of somewhere and wave it at Dennis.

"Flask of holding," he said, grinning. "Turn it one way for water, turn it the other..." He seized an empty glass from the drinks table and poured. "A nice glass of your finest fire-whiskey -- by which I really mean 'cheap', because have you seen how much good quality fire-whiskey costs these days?"

"Yeah. " Dennis accepted the glass and sipped. It was cheap, but it was drinkable. "Thanks!"

"Sure. " Graham resealed the flask and made it disappear back inside his robes.

"That was your birthday present in the third year," Dennis remembered. "I bought it for you so you could smuggle butter-beer into classes. "

Graham nodded. "And McGonagall caught on in about three seconds and we ended up spending a whole week undoing class transfigurations and then another week tidying up because you let all those rats escape. "

"Not on purpose!" Dennis complained. Graham laughed. Dennis smiled. "I didn't know you still carried that old thing around. "

"Always," Graham assured him. "You know, you should come down sometime. I know you have all those mysteries and things -- seriously, what is it you do? No, no, I know, you can't tell me. "

"It's the rules! They're pretty stupid rules," Dennis added, "because everyone knows I can't tell them which seems to make them ask more often. It's just research stuff! I'm not even a proper Unspeakable yet. I don't see what all the fuss is about. "

"I've always suspected that Unspeakables don't actually do anything but no one knows because they never answer questions," Graham mused.

"Generally I clear stuff up. " Dennis frowned. "Do you think they are secretly all janitors? If it takes me five years to find that out, I'm not going to be very happy!"

Graham laughed. "You never change. You really should come down, Den. I, you know. I miss having you around. " In addition, perhaps you could stop moping. I mean, it sucks and all, but it has been five years. Five years, Den.

Okay, maybe that last bit was only in Dennis's head. He tried to find his smile. "I'll floo-call you. Work

is really busy -- I'll call you, promise. "

"You better," Graham insisted, clapping him on the shoulder as he took his leave.

"I will," Dennis called after him.

Graham waved. His smile didn't reach his eyes either. They both thought Dennis was lying.

Dennis knocked back the rest of his fire-whiskey. You could have asked him about Draco Malfoy, a voice piped up in the back of his head, if you still knew how to talk to each other. It was the same one that pointed out Colin was dead or that he wasn't paying enough attention to Natalie. It was sort of like having an evil conscience.

It wasn't so much that Draco didn't have a right to be here as -- no, actually it was exactly that. He had been on the wrong side up until about twenty minutes before the end, if you were being generous, or always, if you weren't. How many of Draco's friends had his associates killed? Not many had been hurt at all, although, okay, yes, that was probably because the school had kicked all the Slytherins out just before the big bang. Turning up at the show was tacky, even if it was a meaningless Ministry showpiece, more political public relations stunt than actual memorial.

Malfoy was probably why Harry was drinking, Dennis mused, catching sight of the other man with an all-but-empty flute of champagne in his hand.

Sadly, this reminded Dennis of his own deplorable lack of drink. He was busy trying to come up with the means to blame this on Malfoy as well -- if there was going to be a scapegoat at all then there was going to be one very well used one, thank you very much. So busy, in fact, that he totally failed to spot Ginny Potter until he had almost walked into her. They both moved awkwardly for a moment, as if in some bizarre mockery of dance, before regaining their balance -- and both apologised at the same time.

"No," Dennis assured her, brushing a few drops of her spilled champagne from his arm, "it was my fault; I wasn't looking where I was going, sorry!"

"It's okay, Dennis. " Ginny smiled. She was wearing flat heels and still managed to be slightly taller than Dennis, who added 'being short' to his 'things to somehow blame on Malfoy' list. "How are you?"

"Good," he lied, "and yourself?"

Despite a post Hogwarts insistence that all the old gang should get together at least once a month, a sort of Dumbledore's Army reunion bash, Dennis hadn't actually seen Ginny to talk to since probably the wedding. It had been a very nice wedding, especially after Bill and Andromeda had driven off the press pack pressed up against the gates. Ginny had looked radiant then in white; she looked radiant still in a deep forest green that somehow managed to not clash horribly with her hair. Dennis wondered if that took magic, if the Weasleys had just had a lot of practice, or if Fleur had picked it out. The French woman had spoken to him only once at the wedding, to criticise his clothes, even though he had worn a nice suit. A nice Muggle suit, admittedly, and one a little old and oversized for him, because it belonged to his father, but nice nevertheless. He suspected she would have criticised today's robes too.

Ginny was saying something about Puddlemere's Chaser options, and he ran the preceding bit of the conversation back through his head and then promptly interrupted her to ask, "You're quitting the team?"

She chuckled. "Not yet and then only temporarily. Luckily -- although if asked, I intend to swear it was entirely intentional -- the season break happens to be just in the right place. "

"Right," Dennis nodded. That made sense. Well, no, actually that didn't make sense at all. "What?"

Ginny gave him a funny look. Her hand was resting on her belly in a protective sort of way.

"Oh. " Dennis blinked. Well, that was a good thing, wasn't it? New life, new hope, and so on and so forth: everybody was moving on with things. Everybody else was moving on with things, that annoying little voice put in. He swallowed, and managed a smile. "Congratulations!"

"Thank you. " Ginny smiled. "We were going to keep it under wraps for a while, but you know how reporters are with Harry. "

Dennis, who had witnessed the infamous Rita Skeeter at work in her prime, nodded.

"Still," she added, "I know you won't go around telling everybody. " That seemed to be a rather pointed statement, and Dennis was half expecting a lecture on the benefits of socialising, but what she actually said next was, "Oh -- Harry was looking for you. "

Dennis frowned, confused. "He was? Did he say why?"

Ginny shook her head. "I assume it was Ministry business or something like that. He's been on edge and I didn't want to pry too much. "

The memorial show was another to put anyone on edge and Dennis figured it was probably a dozen times worse for Harry who was the only one who had actually come back from the dead -- and with a baby on the way...

"I couldn't help overhearing," someone said smoothly and they both turned to see Blaise Zabini artfully leaning against a handy pillar right behind them, a matching flute of champagne dangling prettily between long, slim fingers. "I don't wish to speak ill of our humble saviour; personally, I would never hide things from my wife. "

Everybody had champagne except for Dennis. The universe had a very strange sense of humour indeed.

"You aren't married. " Ginny pointed out and continued in a cheerful, friendly tone. "Do you think this could have something to do with you being both terminally arrogant and ridiculously promiscuous, you inbred fake?"

Dennis gaped at her.

"Perhaps," Blaise mused, and sipped his champagne before blithely adding, "Or perhaps I just discriminate more than awe-struck blood-traitors clinging to impossible, naïve, and juvenile notions of true love. "

Dennis stopped gaping at Ginny -- who was, oddly enough, smirking into her champagne -- and gaped at Blaise instead. Blaise responded by tilting his head and running an appraising look all the way up Dennis.

"Creevey. " He smiled warmly.

"Um," said Dennis intelligently.

Ginny lightly smacked Blaise's arm. "You have no shame. "

"None whatsoever," Blaise agreed, checking her out with equal care. "Are you putting on weight?"

"Yes," said Ginny happily, patting her belly. "Thank you for noticing. "

"You're pregnant. " Blaise sounded amused. "It is Potter's, I take it?"

"Don't assume, simply because we're surrounded by Aurors and journalists, that I won't throw champagne at you," Ginny said.

"Er," said Dennis. They both looked at him expectantly. "Sorry, but, well, should you be drinking if you're, you know--"

"Up the duff?" Blaise suggested. "Knocked up? Got a bun in the oven? Joined the pudding club?" He beamed. "Please tell me it's a secret. "

"It isn't," Ginny said to Blaise, "and I'm not," she added to Dennis. "This is a prop to stop people offering to fetch me a drink. People try that all the time to get to speak to me, usually in the hopes of getting to Harry. It's rather insulting. "

She gave Blaise a pointed look from which Dennis surmised that he had missed something, but neither seemed inclined to explain.

"Our good friend Draco is here," Blaise said.

"I'd noticed. " They smiled at each other.

There was definite subtext going on. Dennis wondered what it was about, but the conversation swung immediately back to babies.

"Blaise is a good name for a boy. It's a good name for a girl. It is," Blaise said, "a very good name, and I'd be more than happy to allow you to use it for the darling child. "

"He'll be named James if he's a he, and Lily if she's a she," Ginny said, "but thanks for that useless and entirely narcissistic input. "

"You're entirely welcome," Blaise said easily, and offered her his arm. "We shall dance now, Mrs Potter. Everybody will be jealous, but such is our lot in life. " He smirked lazily at Dennis. "Creevey. "

"Um," said Dennis.

"It's fine," Ginny said, taking Blaise's arm, not looking in Dennis's direction even as she handed him her champagne.

"I'm always better than fine," Blaise demurred, doing likewise.

Ginny chuckled and let Blaise spin her away, leaving Dennis behind, a glass in either hand, gaping after them.

"I have no idea what just happened," he said to the empty air.

The champagne bubbled enticingly. You weren't supposed to mix the grain and the grape, he remembered, although whether that was actual potions advice or just one of those things people said he didn't know. Still, he had only had the one glass of fire-whiskey, so it was probably fine. He tipped Blaise's half-finished glass and his head back, emptying it in a few gulps. Bubbles tickled his nose and heat swelled in his belly. Clearly, they hadn't skimped!

Natalie would appreciate the other glass, he decided, assuming she would have had as much trouble acquiring alcohol as he had. Everybody should have a glass of champagne at a Ministry party. It was tradition or, at least, he assumed so from all the photos he had seen. There would be photos of this one too, spread across the front pages of the Prophet and the Quibbler and Witch Weekly and so on. He wondered if any of them would include him. Maybe there would be shots of Mrs Potter dancing with Unspeakable Zabini in an impressively graceful if disturbingly charged sort of way. Maybe there would be shots of Draco Malfoy. There would definitely be pictures of Harry, which reminded him of what Ginny had said -- and also brought Colin back to the front, damn it. He started to sip from her glass of champagne but quickly reminded himself that it was for Natalie.

Provided he could find her, of course. Alas, the other guests would probably consider standing on the drinks table to look as incredibly bad manners.

He turned his head. The crowd parted. It was a perfect moment ruined by the way they parted to reveal no one in particular. Dennis added 'the universe' to his list -- then, just as the gap started to close

again, he saw Harry step into the space across the Hall and pause for a moment, tipping his glass back, throat working. Dennis headed in that direction as fast as he could, which turned out to be quite slowly because people kept moving into his path, forcing Dennis to apologise and sidetrack so often that by the time he got to the spot where Harry had been, the other man was nowhere in sight.

"Bugger," he said under his breath.

Dennis turned around again, only to spy Madame Greengrass's feathered hat moving towards him, foreboding another endless, un-enthralling discussion of Wizarding chamber music. The other direction was clearly his; he took it with gusto and an energy that barely lasted ten minutes of obstacle filled crowd and endless hat ducking. Of course, statistically speaking, there were many different ways to be nearby and only a few ways to be far away, so in all probability, she wasn't actually stalking him, but it did rather feel that way. Blast! There she was again! Damn you high probability clustering effect!

And Natalie's glass was empty. How had that happened? Bugger!

Seeing the side-entrance to the Great Hall, he quickly ducked out through it, pressing himself back against the wall in the shadow of the doorway where no one following him out would immediately spot him. No one did. He risked a look. There was no sign of the hat. It was all clear, unless Madame Greengrass had had the same idea and, even now, was lying in wait just around that doorframe. That wasn't a pleasant thought and he was contemplating ways to check -- a mirror on a stick was currently topping the list -- when by raised, familiar voices coming from around the corner distracted him entirely.

"It's already done," the first said. Dennis was almost entirely certain it was Draco Malfoy. "You cannot change it. "

The second voice, he was entirely certain, belonged to Harry Potter. "Why can't I? If he is--"

"It already happened!" Draco practically yelled, and then added something too quiet for Dennis to hear. Harry replied, and Draco laughed, sharply. "Do you think I wouldn't change things if I could? Do you think this is what I wanted?"

"Yes! You always get what you want, don't you?"

"Isn't that my line?"

"I need--" Harry started.

"I know what you need," Draco said, and the next part of the conversation was again too quiet to hear.

The sensible thing to do would have been to leave, of course. The thing was, though it had been five-plus years, there was still the possibility that Draco meant Harry harm in some way. Gryffindors should stick together, in a champion the good cause sort of way, not in a weird Hufflepuff way. Not that here was anything wrong with being a Hufflepuff, and Dennis himself had friends from the house, and, anyway, they were all out of school now, so houses weren't important -- and by now he'd reached the end of the corridor and was, ever so carefully, peeking around the corner.

There was a suit of armour. There was a small display table, although Dennis assumed the bottle and glasses were a recent addition and not the usual ornament. There were Draco and Harry, close together, cheeks flushed, hair ruffled -- although, yes, Harry's hair generally looked ruffled and Draco's was only so in relation to his normally well-coiffed look. Harry was holding Draco back against the wall and Dennis, who had been at least vaguely considering defending Harry from Draco, started to think that perhaps the other way around would be of greater necessity. Harry's eyes were dark and intense. It was no surprise that neither had noticed him.

"Ginny's pregnant," Draco said. "That is what you want, isn't it? That's your family. "

"You," Harry started, but Draco shook his head, lifting a hand to press against Harry's chest. Not quite pushing him away but a definite 'let go' gesture, Dennis thought.

"There's nothing to change," Draco said. "What is, is, Potter. We both know that's how it works -- and family, well. Family is all. "

"I don't believe that," Harry said, but he let go and moved back.

Draco straightened up. "Yes," he said, tonelessly, "you do. "

Harry turned away. Draco did too, towards the display table, and picked up the bottle. He thumbed it open and poured a generous measure into one of the glasses, put it back, picked up the glass, and -- before Dennis could duck back out of sight -- turned the rest of the way and saw him. An expression Dennis couldn't identify briefly twisted its way across Draco's features before he schooled them back into icy perfection.

"Creevey," Draco said.

"Malfoy," Dennis acknowledged, stepping out into the corridor.

They both stared silently.

"Well," said Draco eventually, putting his glass down without drinking from it. "This is horribly awkward. "

"I think you should know that I blame you for everything," Dennis said, and finished off the champagne that he had just realised he was still carrying around with him in one huge gulp.

"No change there, then," Draco muttered.

Dennis, trying not to burp, didn't quite catch this. "Huh?"

"Never mind; it's not important yet. " Draco looked back at Harry, and then sighed. When he pushed

his hand back through his hair, he looked exhausted -- but Dennis assumed it was a trick of the light or something because, as soon as Draco's hand was down, he looked as well appointed as he always did. "Potter wants to talk to you. "

"Ginny said. " Dennis agreed.

Draco's lips twitched up, almost a smile. "Hooray for Mrs Potter. I hope you listen with your usual level of attention. Excuse me. "

He swept away without waiting for a response, leaving his glass on the table.

"You forgot your--" Dennis called after him, but the other man was already out of sight. Obviously, unlike Dennis, Draco had had practice moving at speed through a party -- another unexpected advantage of a pureblood upbringing, perhaps. Dennis shrugged and helped himself to the fire-whiskey.

It was much better than Graham's had been -- rich, smooth, and warming all the way down.

He looked towards the bottle to see what the blend was and found himself instead meeting pale green eyes behind glasses that could probably do with a good cleaning.

"Hello, Harry!" said Dennis, because this was what he always said when he met Harry and practically a decade of doing it made it entirely unconscious. It was almost Pavlovian, which had nothing at all to do with trifles, which was a shame because Dennis right fancied one. Possibly this was just a side effect of the fire-whiskey. He had another sip to check.

Harry was staring at him. Dennis blinked back.

"Um," he said.

"Dennis," said Harry. "Den, Den, Denny Den, Den, Den, Dennis..."

"Usually it's just Dennis," Dennis said, "or just Den, and very rarely Den-Den. It gets a bit redundant after that. "

"Have I ever told you," Harry started. He frowned. "Have I ever told you--?"

Dennis waited. Harry stared at him some more. It also got a bit redundant after a while.

"Ginny said you wanted to talk to me," Dennis said eventually.

Harry nodded. He was doing the intent looking thing still. It was starting to border on the creepy.

"Malfoy said the same thing as well. " Dennis added when nothing more was forthcoming. "And then he said 'hooray for Mrs Potter', only I'm not entirely sure why. I think I'm missing things, possibly because of all the champagne and fire-whiskey that I've been drinking that I wouldn't ordinarily be drinking. " He frowned. That sentence had gotten away from him a bit.

He waved Draco's glass of fire-whiskey at Harry to illustrate his point. Harry stared at it intently. It was like a theme.

"I think," said Harry, "I think--"

"Yes," prompted Dennis.

"I think," Harry repeated and, apparently, third time was the charm because he followed it up with, "I need another drink. "

"Sure!" Dennis offered Harry his own -- in the purloined from Draco sense -- glass.

Harry shook his head. "Finish that up and I'll pour us out some fresh ones. "

Two fire-whiskeys and two glasses of champagne were a fire-whiskey and two glasses of champagne more than Dennis's usual limit, a fact on which he would later blame his instant, ready agreement; that, and it being really good fire-whiskey.

"This is really good fire-whiskey," he told Harry, holding out his now empty glass and wobbling a little.

"It should be. " Harry poured Dennis a more than generous measure, and then did the same for himself. "It's from Slughorn's private stock. I think it might have been a bribe. " Harry frowned at the bottle. "To be honest, whenever he speaks to me all I hear is 'blah, blah, famous person, blah, blah, moustache'. "

"He does have a very big moustache," Dennis agreed. "It looks like handlebars or a walrus or maybe a walrus with handlebars, which would be useful so you didn't fall off when travelling by walrus, as people have known people to do. "

Harry ignored this in favour of raising his glass. "I," he said solemnly, "would like to propose to toast. "

"You're already married," pointed out Dennis, blinking at his own glass that had somehow become empty again. That was a neat trick!

Maybe it was a vanishing glass; not one that vanished but one that made its contents disappear by means of an inbuilt banishing charm. People often used them in pranks. George Weasley sold them at Weasleys' Wizarding Wheezes, which should really be Weasley's now, Dennis supposed, which was another very depressing thought.

Harry distracted him from his distraction by pouring another glass. "A toast," he said, "to friends, and family, and lovers, and second chances. "

"Second chances," Dennis agreed, taking a sip, a big one, which some people might have mistaken for a gulp but that was really just a very large sip, he was sure. He frowned. "Second chances at what, though? We already won, mostly. "

The 'mostly' part was the one that fucked you over.

"At everything," said Harry portentously. "Second chances at everything, Dennis; you have to look at the bigger picture. "

Dennis looked at the bigger picture. "I think it's a reproduction of Randolph Saltzerburg's 'E Pluribus Unicorn' painting, a title that's both bad Latin and also stolen from a collection of fantasy and science fiction stories by the noted author Theodore Sturgeon. They never should have given him the Golden Paintbrush award; Dean's 'Hogwarts At Large' was a much better piece. "

For a start, Dean had partly based it on some of Colin's photos.

"That wasn't quite the big picture I had in mind," Harry said. "...although, you're right, it is, and they shouldn't have. You see though, right, it's like Hermione says; our battle isn't truly over until we have confronted an intrinsic culture of Wizard privilege and entitlement. "

"Of course," Dennis agreed. "Absolutely, we should do that. " He nodded for a bit until he remembered to stop. "What does that have to do with the picture?"

"Society!" Harry proclaimed. "Society is a, a, a, a-- Well, I don't know, but it is one, and an absolute one at that, and do you know whose fault it is?"

"Everybody who, consciously or otherwise, allows their selves to become part of a culture in which somewhat arbitrary definitions are used to divide a common society into an unspoken hierarchical class system, even while vocally disagreeing with people who promote the same openly," suggested Dennis.

"Voldemort," said Harry. "That's who! His second rise encouraged the darkness in people to rise to the surface. If only someone had stopped him sooner, Dennis. Eh? Eh?"

He waggled his eyebrows and nudged Dennis pointedly with his elbow.

"Um," said Dennis. "Ow? And, also, what?"

"It's okay," Harry said. He tapped his nose with his finger. "I know all about it. "

"It's strange," mused Dennis, "and maybe it's just because of the fire-whiskey, but -- oh, thank you," he added as Harry happily topped his glass up. "Maybe it's just because of the fire-whiskey, but I can't help feeling there's a great deal going on that I'm completely missing. Everyone seems to be having very complicated interpersonal relationships and all I really wanted to do was have a lot to drink and feel sad about how much I miss Colin. "

"Me too," Harry sighed. "Well, not Colin. I mean, not that I don't miss Colin, it's very sad, but I miss many people. I miss Remus; I miss Sirius; I miss Tonks, and Hedwig and even Dobby. Poor brave Dobby. "

"Dobby," said Dennis, and they clinked their glasses together and drank.

"This really is very good fire-whiskey," Harry said. "I wonder if I can get Slughorn to give me another bottle. I could pretend to consider going to his stupid club thing. "

Dennis nodded. "He invited me once. "

"Really?" Harry sounded more intrigued than surprised or, anyway, that was how Dennis decided to interpret that.

"Just after I started NEWTs; he said I was an exceptionally bright polymath and would I like to come to this meeting of his? Then I got distracted during potions and turned everything green and he didn't invite me again. It was a bit rude, really. " Dennis pouted.

"Bastard," agreed Harry cheerfully.

"Bastard," said Dennis, and they clinked their glasses again.

"I bet that's something you'd like to do over again, huh?" Harry did the nudge-nudge, wink-wink, eyebrow waggle thing again.

Dennis shook his head. "Not really, no. "

Harry sighed. "This isn't going at all how I thought it would. "

Dennis wanted to ask what was going on with Harry and Draco, or Harry and Ginny, or Ginny and Blaise, or Blaise and Natalie, which there better bloody not be without him, or lots of things really, but he couldn't seem to get his tongue to work right to start talking about any of them. When he opened his mouth, what came out was "did it hurt? Dying, I mean. "

"No," said Harry. "Yes. No. I don't know. I don't remember. Anyway, I try not to. I--" He rubbed at his hair. "I don't think I could do it again, Dennis. Not like that. "

"Everyone dies," Dennis said. It was a thing they said. To all things a season, to live, and to die.

Everyone dies, eventually. Even brothers.

He lifted his glass to drink, but Harry grabbed his arm, looking at him with some intensity and impressive focus given the way Dennis could smell the alcohol on Harry's breath. He hoped it was Harry's anyway, and not his own. It-- Harry squeezed his wrist to get his attention.

"Don't say that," Harry said, forcefully. "Don't just say it like that. Death isn't something that just happens. Everyone lives, that should be the important part. That's where Voldemort got it wrong, you know. It's not about stopping death. It's about making life count. Life and love. Friends and family. "

"Second chances?" suggested Dennis.

"Them too," Harry agreed. "To life. " He raised his glass and waited and, when Dennis didn't move, said, "To life" again, and his glass clinked against Dennis's.

After a long moment, Dennis drank. He couldn't make the toast. Colin was dead. He knew it was bad that he kept coming back to that, that he wasn't moving on, but there it was.

"Time's a funny thing," Harry said, thoughtfully, and then was quiet for a while.

When they both had finished their glasses -- the two of them now sitting side by side on the floor of the corridor, backs against the wall under 'E Pluribus Unicorn' -- he started back up with "do you remember--?" In moments, they were regaling each other with anecdotes from their school days, jumping from year to year, person to person, point to point, until everything dissolved in laughter and silence and somehow it was hours later and the bottle of fire-whiskey was only a fifth full.

"It really was good to see you again, Harry," Dennis said. "Really, really, I mean, people keep saying I should talk to people and you are people and it was good, really. I mean, I love you, Harry. Not in boyfriend/girlfriend -- boyfriend/boyfriend sort of way. In a Harry sort of way. "

"Plutonium," Harry agreed, draping an arm around Dennis's shoulders and giving him an awkwardly angled hug.

"I don't think that word means what you think it means," Dennis said, leaning into Harry, mostly because it was easier than trying to keep his head up. "That's from a book, that is. Or a film. Maybe they made the film out of the book or the book out of the film, I'm not really sure, but that's a quote type thing from a thing I've seen or read. "

He blinked down the corridor. The suit of armour looked a lot like Draco Malfoy from this angle.

"Have you noticed," Dennis said to Harry, "how much that suit of armour looks like Draco Malfoy from this angle?"

Harry looked.

"You know what, Dennis?"

"What?" Dennis asked.

"I think that is Draco Malfoy. "

It was. Harry and Dennis both looked at each other, then they looked at Draco, then they looked back at each other, and then they cracked up laughing.

"Potter. " Draco kicked him. "Are you drunk?"

"No," said Harry, in the slow tone of someone who thought they were about to be very clever, "but the fire-whisky is! Eh? Eh? The fire-whisky is!"

"I'm going to kill you," Draco said in an absent sort of way. "I haven't decided how, yet, but it will be apt. And protracted. "

"You can't kill Dennis," Harry said which made Dennis go 'hey!' in the background because he had been pretty sure Draco was talking about Harry, who continued, "He's our second chance!"

"Living people don't need second chances," Draco said. "We get to keep on trying with what we've got. Only the dead don't get that. "

Dennis and Harry both stared at him blankly.

"Why do I even bother?" Draco asked the ceiling. "Come on. I'll take you home. "

Dennis and Harry continued to stare blankly. Draco rolled his eyes and kicked Harry again. "You, Potter. I'll take you home. I have no idea where Creevey lives--"

"I have a flat in London! It's in Tulse Hill which is nice enough, but a bit of a slog to get in to work," Dennis explained.

"--nor do I particularly care. " Draco tried to pull Harry up and Harry tried to help him and, between them, they achieved bugger all. "Some help would be appreciated. "

"Archimedes describes the principle of leverage as," Dennis began, before his eyes caught up to his brain and his brain caught up to his mouth. "Oh, did you want me to help you help Harry help himself up?"

Draco gave him a 'yes, you moron' look which Dennis totally missed.

"Come on then, Harry. " Luckily, the other man's arm was still slung over his shoulder and so, between them, Draco and Dennis managed to get Harry some semblance of upright, one under each arm. "It's a long way to the gates! We could put an animation charm on the painting and then stand on it and then tell it to take us to the gates!"

"Alternatively," said Draco, "we could just walk down this corridor, turn left, and use the floo in Professor Slughorn's office. "

"Walrus handles," said Harry. They both looked at him, but that seemed to be all.

"I still blame you for everything," Dennis said, cheerfully. There seemed to be something off about this whole thing, but he couldn't quite put his finger on what it was exactly. Maybe it was the fire-whiskey. He grabbed the bottle on the way past, just in case. "Hey, didn't you give poisoned fire-whiskey to Professor Moustache that one time? What was that all about?"

"I was trying to save my family," Draco said, an edge in his voice. "That's what people do. "

"My family's dead," Harry said sadly, "except Ginny, who's my awesome pregnant wife type lady, and Hermione and Ron, who are also awesome but neither pregnant or my wives, so far as I know. You're not dead," he added to Draco.

"Unless he's an inferi," Dennis suggested. "They walk around too!"

"Fire's good for those," mused Harry. "I forgot that once. Never again!" He tried to wave his fist, sending the three of them careening from side to side before Draco got them back under control.

"Get the door, Creevey," he said. "It isn't locked. "

Dennis slipped out from under Harry and fumbled with the doorknob until it turned, and then fumbled

some more until it turned in the other direction. Harry mumbled something and moaned a little.

"If you vomit, I won't be held responsible for my actions," Draco said.

"You're pretty; petty; pretty petty. " Harry frowned at Draco, and then giggled. "Petty pretty!"

"In a pointy sort of way," said Dennis, half sort of stepping and half sort of falling into the office.

It was a very nice office, in an office sort of way. It had a nice sturdy looking wooden desk, a deep burgundy carpet, and a big stone fireplace with a fire lit and a box of floo-powder waiting ready on the mantelpiece. There was a box of bezoars. There was, for some reason, a small cuckoo clock in a stoppered glass jar. There was a big painting over the mantelpiece, except it was mostly empty, just a chair with a 'The Potions Master Is Out' sign on it.

"Alas, poor Snape," said Harry.

"Actually," said Snape from a tiny portrait on the next wall, "that one is Slughorn. He keeps a picture of himself in his office. The man's as bad as Lockhart was. Hello, Draco. "

"Hello, Severus," Draco said. "If you would please excuse us? Potter's quite drunk. "

"The fire-whiskey is drunk," Harry said.

"That's as funny now as it was a moment ago," Draco said.

"Um," Dennis said, from where he had accidentally spilled floo powder all over himself. "Hang on; I think I've got the hang of this now. "

"That used to happen to me a lot," said Albus Dumbledore from the other wall. His portrait was also tiny. It faced Snape's. "Of course, now I can just travel from portrait to portrait, which is really quite useful. "

"My wand may only be paint," Snape said dangerously, "but I can still poke you in the eye with it if you even think of coming over here. "

"Can we please just use the floo?" Draco whined.

"Professor Dumbledore!" gasped Harry. "It's you! You were always my favourite professor, even if you did almost get everybody killed with your pointlessly intricate scheme that relied on a great deal of coincidence and stupidity. "

"I've always found coincidence and stupidity to be the guiding principles of life," Albus mused. "And love, of course, being the strongest of the three. Hello, young Malfoy. "

"Bugger off," said Draco. "Harry--"

Harry had pulled himself away from Draco to stumble across the office and grab the portrait of Albus.

"I love my dead gay headmaster," he wailed.

"Winona Ryder's hot in that," Dennis said. "Christian Slater!"

Snape glared at them all from his portrait, except Draco.

"I have no idea what either of you are talking about," Draco said, grabbing up the soot brush from the

mantelpiece and using it, rather more roughly than was necessary, to get the floo powder off Dennis. "Potter. Home. "

"Hogwarts was always a home to me," Harry said.

"Yes," Draco said, "but you don't actually live here anymore. " He tossed the floo powder from Dennis into the fire, calling out "Godric's Hollow!" The fire sputtered a bit before finally flaring up and turning green.

"If I had a Time-Turner," Harry started.

"If I had a time-turner," Draco interrupted, "I would go back six hours and make sure you didn't have a drink in the first place -- and do put the portrait down, there's a nice Potter. "

"Oh," said Harry. "Sorry. " He let Albus go. "Bye-bye, Professor. "

"If I had a time turner," Dennis said, "or, well, not really, but something equivalent, because a straight forward time turner wouldn't be good enough, so more like, I don't know, a time-floo or something, I would go back and fix--"

"Everything!" yelled Harry. Draco smacked him. "Ow! That's abuse, that is. "

"You can't fix everything," Draco said. "Things wouldn't be better; they'd just be broken in completely different ways. You can only fix some things. "

"Important things," said Harry. He clutched at his head. "Oh. I don't feel so good, Draco. "

"Remember what I said about vomiting?" Draco warned him.

"I would though," Dennis said. They both looked at him. "Not vomit," he clarified. "The other thing. "

"There's a difference between what you want and what you need," Draco said. He pulled Harry towards the fire and then, one foot on the hearth, stopped and looked back at Dennis. "You have to decide what's really important to you, and go for it, any way you can. "

"But not by walrus," Harry put in, "because that would just be weird. "

Draco sighed. "You see what I have to put up with? It's times like these, Potter--"

The floo swallowed the rest of Draco's sentence as the two men flashed, whirled, and faded away. After a long crackling moment, the green flames dropped back to the more usual yellows and oranges. Dennis went to pour himself a drink, realised he had no idea what he had done with his glass, and raised the bottle instead. The firelight caught in it, splintered, sending little shards of brightness scattering across the room. It reminded him of the doilies, except with much more complicated symmetry. As the light danced across them, Albus beamed from his frame and Snape snorted from his, the two caught in paint and opposition, symmetry within symmetry.

Time floo, Dennis thought, and, right on top of that, one after each other: symmetry; vanishing glass; the principle of levers; times like these -- and somewhere in there, connections were made, patterns were seen, equations were formulated using the sort of fuzzy math you only get in Douglas Adams novels and somewhat rather inebriated minds, provided they had a NEWT level background in Arithmancy and experience working for the Department of Mysteries. Which was a lot more common than you would think, and Dennis was briefly sidetracked trying to calculate the probabilities, which lead, via branching theory, back to his original thought, in a massive, complicated, overlapping and criss-crossing super-spiral and--

And. ...huh. Huh!

It could be done, he realised. Malfoy was right. The living made their chances. Harry was right. Everybody deserved a second chance. It could be done. More importantly, he could do it, which was

good, because his plan was also very, very, very illegal. He fumbled for the floo powder.

"You'll blow yourself up," Snape said. "You were always terrible at potions. Your mind always wandered too much, boy. No focus!"

"Love," began Albus, "love is--"

"Oh, do shut up, you twinkly eyed bearded busy-body!" Snape yelled and stormed out of his portrait, vanishing from view.

"Good luck, my boy," Dumbledore said, doffing his hat at Dennis, and he too left, although at a rather more sedate pace and chuckling to himself, which was actually a bit off putting.

"Department of Mysteries," Dennis said as he tossed the powder into the fire. Once more, the flames rushed up. Once more, they turned green. Dennis took a swig from his bottle, recited his personal over-ride so security didn't shunt into the reception floos non- and off-duty personnel were supposed to use, and dived in.

Charm sequences whirled through his head, even as he whirled through the void, which was a bit nausea inducing and left Dennis briefly wondering what would happen if you did vomit mid-floo -- would it explode out of random grates to the disgust of strangers, or follow you to your destination, probably also to the disgust of strangers? Yet even this somehow seemed to fit into the great pattern he had suddenly somehow seen, the hub from which all things radiated. It was glorious. He had no idea why no one else had thought of it before, except for that small part where there was a chance you would explode, possibly even before you started because of inverted causality and the temporal fragging effect.

The Department of Mysteries grate swung into view and he dived for it, tumbling out in a mess of flame and smoke and ash. A quick hand, pressed to the mouth of the bottle, saved the last of the fire-whiskey as he rolled out of the hearth and came to a stop of the floor. He had never looked at the ceilings before -- at least not properly. They were very dull. That was probably why. Also, they could do with a new coat of paint. He made a mental note to write that on the jobs board and then completely forgot about it because he had a plan, oh, yes! A plan, by whatever it was you swore such things by.

Damn but that was some fine fire-whiskey.

Suddenly realizing that he had been at the party quite a long time and that the other Unspeakables could come back any minute and get in his way or arrest him, he pushed himself to his feet and staggered across the room. The private floo opened out into the Department of Mysteries break room that was as empty as usual since everyone used the canteen in the Being Division, which did very nice pastries. Dennis cracked the door open and peeked out. Anyone around? Not obviously.

Looking carefully both ways a few dozen times, Dennis carefully sneaked out into the middle of the outer room and then quickly closed his eyes until it stopped spinning. It wasn't spinning because he was drunk, which he was not, it was spinning because it was the room that span to make the doors line up because where the rooms actually were and where the doors were happened to be entirely different. Magic was all well and good, but it also made logic and obvious convenience go bye-bye in strange and annoying ways. He opened the nearest door. It was full of stars.

"Huh!" he said. "That's not right! Shhh!" He pressed his finger to his lips, muttering "Not so loud!" around it.

Okay. If that was the room with all the planets, then the room without the planets must be behind a different door. He tried one. It was an amphitheatre with a spooky veil. That would definitely by useful. It wasn't what he was currently looking for, though, so he went on to the next door, which was actually the third one along because he was having trouble with straight lines, and opened that instead. Stupid revolving room; it was going on his list. Soon he would need a bigger list. Not having a big enough list was also going on his list, goddamn it.

"Ah hah!" Dennis exclaimed, and then quickly clamped his hands over his mouth. "Ff mnf ngmgh!"

It was the right room. It was the room of clocks, of time turners -- except not, obviously, on account of how no one had gotten to making any new ones since they were all exploded the last time -- and of the far more important thing, on a desk at the back: a giant bell jar full of temporal distillate, perfect for when one needed a power source in order to bend the very fabric of space-time and weren't willing to irrevocably destroy your own timeline in the process.

(Also, there was a bird in the stream, repeatedly turning into an egg and back into a bird. Huh.)

The equations were still buzzing in his head and trembling in his fingertips, although maybe that was just the fire-whiskey. Either way, he was totally psyched up. The day would be saved! Not this day, obviously; a much earlier day, of fighting and stupid arse brothers getting their stupid arse stupidly killed, the arse. He would go down in history, although not in the notoriety sort of way, hopefully, since this was the sort of thing they sent you to Azkaban for, or worse, which would be bad, and he was a Gryffindor and they were forces for truth and justice and good things and fluffy bunnies and stuff.

Maybe Dennis would get a pet, later.

First, however, the bell jar of temporal distillate needed him to wire it, mystically speaking, into the veil chamber, obviously; a few ancient runes here, a few arithmetical equations there, a certain series of swishes and flicks and Bob was his uncle, especially if he screwed up and changed the wrong thing. He would not, of course. He had a plan, a drunken plan admittedly, but a plan of awesomeness anyway! Huzzah!

The bell jar, apparently unaware of this, proved to be ridiculously heavy.

"Wingar," tried Dennis. "Win-- Wingardium Levy-- Levio-- Wingard Levisasla -- Leviosa. Win guard theorem Levis sofa. ...Bugger. "

The bell jar went on the list.

He shoved the desk. It rocked a little. He shoved the desk again. It rocked a little more. He grabbed the bell jar before it could go tumbling. Clearly, this required some more lateral thinking, or maybe just lots of oil to slide on. Dennis bounded back to the canteen, careening off a few walls along the way, and started going through the cupboards before he remembered they were wizards and bounded back again. Waving his wand wildly, he half cast, half burped out a lubrication charm -- who knew it had actual uses -- leaving the floor a smeary, glistening, slippery mess. This time when he shoved the desk it, and the bell jar, slid a couple of inches towards the door. Of course, Dennis rebounded back a couple of feet

because of physics, but it was a start. Taking another swig from the fire-whiskey bottle, he set to work.

It took ten minutes to get across the time room, and almost the same getting the bell jar through the door that was only a few inches wider than the desk and, also, see earlier comments regarding Dennis and straight lines. Once it was outside, Dennis stopped and rested against it for a moment, trying to get his breath back, which would have worked better if a young woman in trainee Auror robes hadn't stepped suddenly into his view.

"What are you doing?" She asked.

Dennis looked at the bell jar. He looked at her. He looked at the bell jar again. He stared at the long, glistening trail back to its point of origin as if it would reveal the unspoken secrets of the universe.

"It's a mystery?" he tried.

"Oh. " She stared at him for a bit. He tried not to look like he was doing anything untoward. "Should you be working while drinking?"

"Neurological cushioning," said Dennis. Douglas Adams was proving to be very useful. He wondered if the man was a wizard too. "It's very important to stop the brain exploding. "

The Auror took a careful step back. "Is that likely?"

"It's certainly possible," Dennis agreed, on the basis that there was always the chance that all the atoms in your brain would simultaneously move apart, so the probability of it happening, no matter how small, was still non-zero.

"Right. " She edged away a little more. "Well, I'll just let you get on with that. "

"Thanks!"

Dennis went back to lubricating and pushing, which went easier now he remembered to cast cleaning charms as well, so the slippery bit was only in front and not under his feet. Fortunately, the door to the veil room was much wider than that to the time room, which was an interesting trick as they were all the same size when closed, and he edged the desk through with minimal difficulty. The Auror woman was still watching. He gave her a little wave and quickly shut the door behind him, setting the atrium outside spinning again.

Best to do this as quickly as possible, he decided, just in case Little Miss Suspicious decided to check up on him.

Getting the bell jar down to the dais was easy, because there were ramped sections on either side of the steps, although getting it down intact turned out to be slightly harder because of the whole weight/velocity/momentum thing and Dennis being quite titchy and light. Fortunately the bell jar proved to be surprisingly well made and ended up only slightly chipped and scratched, and he had said -- thought -- that he wanted it done quickly, so it all worked out in the end, probably.

Dipping his wand in the temporal distillate -- a sort of glowy, glittery, rushing wind that clung to his wand tip like thick soup to a spoon -- and carefully ignoring the way the larger of the specks were reflecting things not currently around, Dennis quickly drew a series of (rather sloppy) runes around the veil. He hoped that the drips caused by continuously rushing back to the bell jar for more 'ink' wouldn't have a too detrimental effect. When he was done, he tucked his wand back into his sleeve and wrestled the bell jar into its final position.

Nothing happened. Dennis swore. In seven different languages.

"The entire bloody universe is going on the list," he informed the empty room, snatched up the fire-whiskey bottle, and drained it in one, long, guzzling swallow. "I hereby dub you useless," he added to the bell jar, and hit it with the bottle.

The bottle broke, scattering glass impossibly far across the dais. The bell jar shifted the smallest fraction. Silver light exploded up all around him. The hanging veil, which previously had been shifting

slightly in its own peculiar breeze, blasted out almost horizontal. Silver-blue light filled the doorway and Dennis heard voices, dozens, hundreds of voices, shouting and whispering, singing and crying, all at once -- and then, loud and clear, Colin saying, "That's Harry Potter, that is!"

You had to decide what was really important to you, Draco had said, and go for it, any way you could. For Dennis, that was Colin. It was family. Before that stupid little conscience voice could pipe up again and remind him that, actually, Draco being willing to do anything at all for his family had turned out be a very poor piece of decision-making, Dennis took a deep breath, pulled his wand out again, raised it in salute, and charged at the rippling veil. The room door creaked open and, out of the corner of his eye, he saw the trainee Auror raise her own wand and open her mouth to yell something, but it was too late.

His wand pierced the surface and something immense grabbed him and yanked him in an impossible direction and someone was crying out and there was light, hideous, perfect light and then--

Then.

* * *

There was a creak of wood. Something was bobbing up and down and it took Dennis a moment to realise it was him. He felt odd, which was possibly the fire-whiskey although he actually felt quite sober, except for the bobbing up and down part. Possibly, it was brain explodey. His hands and feet did feel much closer than he remembered them being. The robes he was wearing felt too big and itched at his skin. It was very dark. He blinked his eyes a couple of times, had a brief moment of panic where he was suddenly convinced he was blind, and then realised the reason it was dark was because he was looking straight up at a storm-covered night sky.

He was outside. Outside and bobbing up and down. In the rain. This meant...

Dennis sat up quickly and looked around. There, in front of him, was a very confused Graham Pritchard, a very confused, ten years younger Graham Pritchard. Around them, Hogwarts Lake stretched from Hogsmeade behind to Hogwarts ahead, which was a whole lot of Hogs when you thought about it. The

castle itself, rain-lashed and bedecked in guttering torches, stretched up to the clouds, casting weird patterns of light and shadow through the storm overhead. It was just like how he remembered it, his first day here. It was exactly like, in fact.

He'd done it. He'd projected himself back in time. Second chance, here we come!

"Woo-hoo!" Dennis yelled, leaping to his feet.

And promptly fell out of the boat.

# # #

TEN YEARS EARLIER:

It was very weird being in ones own past, Dennis thought, and waved to Squiddy through the rain. It wasn't just the breaking the laws of causality thing. It was the way he appeared to have possessed his own past self and was now eleven again. Eleven and very, very small, which was an odd thing to feel because he hadn't exactly been tall in the present, which was the future now, but he was very, very small in the past, which was the present now. Time travel gave him a headache, although possibly that was an after-effect of the fire-whiskey. Could you go through a hangover backwards? He had very tiny hands. He waved them back and forth. Actually, it was more like being stoned.

(Not that Dennis had ever been stoned or experimented with magical herbs and/or potions, definitely not during the post OWLs party in Hufflepuff, and even if he had, it was Kevin Whitby's fault.)

"There yeh go," said Hagrid, draping his moleskin jacket around Dennis, which didn't make him any less soaked so much as it made him soaked in a big moleskin tent. "There's no point yeh drownin' before yeh've even been sorted. "

"I don't think there's any point me drowning even after I've been sorted!" Dennis said absently. He waved to Graham who grinned and waved back.

"Tha's a good attitude," Hagrid said, and clapped the boy on the back, which almost made him fall into the lake again. Fortunately, the coat got in the way and, anyway, the boats had long since slipped under the ivy and into the tunnel and the cliff face and, right at that moment, they bumped up against the underground harbour and came to a halt. Hagrid lifted Dennis out and put him down, so he could clamber across the rocks and pebbles towards a rising passageway in the rock.

While Hagrid helped a few more people out and checked all the boats were empty, Graham caught Dennis's arm. "That was so awesome," he breathed. "I totally thought you'd drown!" He didn't seem very put out by this.

"Nah," said Dennis. "Squiddy always keeps an eye on the boats. "

"Squiddy?" asked Graham, wide-eyed.

"The giant squid!" Dennis explained. "It lives in the lake!"

"Tha's right," Hagrid agreed. "Everyone stay close to me, now!"

They clambered up behind him until the smooth rock gave way to sodden grass and still pouring rain and the castle rising triumphantly in front of them. They quickly took the flight and, together, they clustered in front of the castle's huge, oak front door.

"Don't worry," Dennis said to Graham. "When the hat sorts you into Slytherin and me into Gryffindor, I'll still be your friend!"

"Is everyone here?" There was a chorus of agreement and Hagrid beamed genially down at them, and then raised a hand to knock at the door.

It swung open at once to reveal a tall witch in emerald green who stared down at them through austere, square glasses

"Hello, Professor McGonagall! Hello Peeves!" Dennis waved at the poltergeist that had been sneaking up behind the professor with a water-balloon in his hands.

Peeves quickly stuck it behind his back, which didn't help much as he was see-through. "Ikkle firsties know my name," he crowed.

"I'm Dennis Creevey!" Dennis said, realising they hadn't actually met before, yet.

"Yes, thank you, Mister Creevey," said McGonagall. "Peeves--"

The poltergeist pulled a face at her, stuck his tongue out at Dennis, and spiralled up through the ceiling.

"The firs' years, Professor McGonagall," said Hagrid.

"Thank you, Hagrid. I'll take them from here. "

Her heels clacked as she led them across the flagstones, past the impressively marble main staircase (much less annoying then the ones that moved) to the waiting area for first years.

"This doesn't look very big for a banquet hall," Graham complained.

McGonagall started to speak, but Dennis had already jumped in with, "It isn't, it's just a waiting bit before they take us in there and make us sit on a stool and then the sorting hat tells us if we're going to be in Gryffindor or Slytherin or Hufflepuff like Kevin or Ravenclaw like Orla! Stewart, Malcolm, Eleanor and Owen all go before me!"

"Please do be quiet, Mister Creevey," McGonagall sighed. "No one except the sorting hat knows which house you'll be sorted into. I supposed you've learned all this from your brother. I thought I recognised the ... Name. "

Colin. Colin would be here. He was here, in fact, right in there. "Um, yes, that's right," agreed Dennis absently. "Can we please be sorted now, Professor?" Colin, Colin, Colin!

"In a moment," McGonagall said. She gave him a look. It was very much a 'you're going on the list' look. Dennis briefly wondered if she blamed everything on Draco Malfoy as well, and then decided it was probably too early for that, and then, later, Snape was a much more likely target for the adults' lists. She launched into her usual speech. Dennis ignored it, pretty much as he had done the first time round and looked up at the far wall, waiting for--

"Ghosts!" squeaked Natalie -- not in 'oh, no, ghosts' way, in an 'oooooh, ghosts' way. In addition, she was also very tiny! Everybody was! It was very weird!

"Good evening, Baron!" Dennis saluted, nudging Graham to do the same. Natalie promptly followed, and Kevin, and all the other first years followed suit. McGonagall stared. The Baron frowned down at them, which Dennis ignored because it was the Baron's usual expression, and then almost smiled.

"Good evening," he rumbled back at them, and then floated off into the Hall with the Grey Lady and the Fat Friar. Sir Nick was already sitting with the Gryffindors, Dennis remembered.

"Right," said McGonagall in a clipped sort of way. Very sharp t. She drew herself up, imposing. "Right. Everyone smarten themselves up. "

The first years dripped on the stones, staring at her, blank and sodden and beginning to shiver.

She sighed and deflated. "I suppose it can't be helped. Come along, children. "

They formed a vague sort of line behind her. The other annoying thing about being very, very small again, Dennis thought, was that even the other very small people were still all taller than he was. The filed out until they were standing between the staff table and the whole of the rest of the school. All those staring eyes. Fun times. Except he didn't care anything about any of that, because, Colin, Colin, Colin, and, seriously, why was the Gryffindor table all the way over there? People always talked about how the Gryffindors or the Slytherins got first billing all the time, but if you were coming in from the non-side entrance, it was actually the Hufflepuffs who got to their table first. Like Cedric Diggory, who was dead, except not, yet, because he was sat right there. But still not important, because, right over there, beaming right back at him, was Colin.

Dennis really, really, really, wanted to run right over there and hug him, but he didn't, because that would have been insane and, in this moleskin coat he barely would have got three yards before he went tumbling, and, anyway, he would be able to go over there right after sorting, and he was practically first. Instead, he gave Colin two thumbs up and mouthed 'I fell in the lake' at him, because that was always cool. Colin's grin got even wider and he stuck his thumbs up back at Dennis and then continued to pull faces at him while the sorting hat got on with singing its song. Dennis bit his lip to stop from laughing and almost missed when McGonagall called his name. He staggered forward, tripping over the moleskin as he moved to the stool and sat down. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see Hagrid making his way towards the empty staff seat and then the hat--

(Which could read minds, he remembered, far, far, far too late.)

--was being placed on his head, which meant it pretty much covered him entirely, down to the mouth.

"Hello, again," said the familiar small voice in his ear. "I haven't seen one of you lot for a few years. Temporal projection into disjoint positions on your personal time-line is highly dangerous, you know. Why, Salazar Slytherin himself once messed around with it, until he accidentally created a timeline containing nothing but clowns and realised the folly of his ways. "

"Clowns," repeated Dennis sceptically.

"Slapstick clowns, juggling clowns, trapeze clowns, ministry clowns, scary white face clowns, big clowns, small clowns, clowns with no noses -- they smelled terrible, before you ask. "

"I wasn't going to," Dennis lied. "Can I be sorted into Gryffindor again, please? I need to save my brother from a dreadful fate. "

"Of course I'm going to do that," the hat complained. "I'm not the sort of hat to go around changing things. The smallest ripple reaches the farthest shore, my boy. You'd be well advised to change--"

"I'm tired and I'm wet and I'm kind of weirded out and I really want to hug my brother," Dennis whined, "so please, could you just--"

"GRYFFINDOR!" yelled the hat to the whole hall and then the small internal voice came back with, "don't say I didn't warn you, Dennis Creevey. Clowns!"

"Thanks, Mister Hat!" Dennis took it off to the sound of cheers, beamed at Colin, put the hat back on the stool with a pat on its point, and bounded -- as best he could in the moleskin -- over to the Gryffindor table.

"Colin, I fell in!" He practically threw himself into the empty seat next to Colin. "It was brilliant! And--" He almost said Squiddy, except he wasn't supposed to know that yet, and he didn't want to start anything until he had talked to Colin alone, so he settled for "--something in the water grabbed me and pushed me back in the boat!"

"Cool!" said Colin, excitedly. "It was probably the giant squid, Dennis!"

"Wow!" said Dennis in what he hoped was a 'neat, giant squid' voice, but which was more a 'hey, Colin, you're so tiny and bouncy and alive and still taller than me, but that's okay, because did I mention the

alive part' voice.

"Dennis! Dennis! See that boy down there? The one with the black hair and glasses?" Colin pointed at Harry, beaming. Harry looked away. "See him? Know who he is, Dennis?"

Across the hall, Draco Malfoy was staring at Harry. When he saw Dennis looking, he scowled and looked away.

"That's Harry Potter, that is," Colin said.

It was; tiny fourteen-year-old Harry Potter, who nine months from now would be in a graveyard, watching the Dark Lord rise again. It was Harry Potter with his scar and his glasses and his mess of hair. It was Harry, who would one day save all but five dozen or so of them. It was Harry, who was resolutely paying attention to the sorting and not to the two mousey-haired boys staring at him with matching dark eyes, nor to the platinum-blonde boy on the other side of the room doing the same. Seriously, what was up with Malfoy?

Dennis glared. Malfoy didn't notice, although Zabini, who was sprawled nonchalantly at Malfoy's side, did and looked back, arching a perfect eyebrow. Dennis rolled his eyes. Zabini grinned and leaned sideways to say something in Draco's ear that made the other boy stop glaring at Harry and start glaring at Blaise instead. Harry was still resolutely watching the sorting, so Dennis did too, and promptly stared at Madley, Laura as the sorting hat put her into Hufflepuff. She just happened to be the suspicious trainee Auror woman he had met in the Department of Mysteries. It really was a small world.

"Cute girl," said Colin.

"Natalie's prettier," said Dennis, and started applauding, which confused the rest of the table because the hat didn't call Gryffindor for the girl for another fifteen seconds.

"They're all going to glare at me when I clap for Graham being put in Slytherin in a minute," Dennis told Colin.

Hermione, overhearing, leaned forward. "I think it's very good that you're promoting inter-house harmony," she said, "although you can't be sure your friend will be put in Slytherin. Sometimes the hat surprises you. "

It did not.

"Oh," she said. Dennis clapped. Everyone glared.

Dennis had a sudden disquieting thought because, except for the few things he had said, every other event seemed to be proceeding exactly as before. He remembered falling in the lake. He remembered Colin pointing out Harry. Suppose changing things was impossible. Suppose, because they had already happened, all the things that had happened must happen. Dennis had made the future fixed by coming back. Suppose he had set the course of events in stone.

No, he decided, as the sorting ended and food appeared on the table. He just hadn't done enough yet. He needed to talk to Colin alone. Colin would believe him.

"House Elves need purpose," he told Hermione, but she wasn't listening. Nick was talking about the kitchens and Peeves and, any moment now, Hermione was going to start ranting and refusing to eat her food.

"This is very good food," Dennis said to Natalie. "Hello! I'm Dennis Creevey! This is my brother Colin!"

He threw an arm around Colin and hugged him. Colin pulled a face. "You're still wet," he complained, knocking Dennis away.

They were. Dennis searched under Hagrid's jacket and inside his clothes until he found his wand and pulled it out. He raised it to do a drying charm, and then realised he wasn't supposed to know any magic and he wasn't entirely sure he was allowed to do magic at the table. "Um. "

"You want the warming charm," Colin said, mistaking the source of the hesitation. He demonstrated, speaking carefully and waving his wand in an exaggerated way. "Instant-drying charms make your clothes itchy for days. "

Dennis nodded, and did a wide area variant on the same so that soon everyone around them was starting to steam a little bit, as they dried out.

"Cool," said Natalie. "You did that like you'd done it before!"

Colin laughed. "We're muggleborn, so we aren't allowed to do magic at home; the only time Dennis has done anything is when we were in Diagon Alley just before term. You should've seen it: it was great! Every wand in Ollivanders flew down on him at the same time until there was just this one hand sticking out of the top of the pile holding his wand. "

"That's an exaggeration," Dennis complained.

"Only slightly," Colin said. "Ollivander said you showed much promise!"

"And then he insisted I take good care of my wand because he didn't want to see me again for at least a year," Dennis added, "although he'll be here soon because of the Triwizard Tournament. Colin's good at magic though! He was petrified for his whole first year, practically, and he still managed to come in the top five the following year. Ginny came top! Hi, Ginny!"

He waved at the redheaded girl who stared blankly back. "Er. Hello? ...oh, it's another Creevey. "

"He's Dennis!" Colin said.

"I'm Dennis!" Dennis agreed.

"Right," said Ginny, and went back to her friends.

"I took loads of photos last year," Colin said. "I bet Dennis knows everybody already. "

"Yes. Photos. Ooh, puddings!" Dennis tucked into his dessert, snagging the hot chocolate fudge cake thingy for Natalie.

"Thanks," she said, surprised. "It's my favourite. "

"Yep. " Dennis nodded. "Chocolate!"

"Right. " She eyed him, spoon poised above the dessert. "You're kinda weird. "

"It's a Creevey thing," Ginny said. "You get used to it. " She smirked at Colin.

Blaise was watching her from the other table. It was as if the Slytherins had nothing better to do than just sit there and stare at the Gryffindors.

"Have you noticed the pointy-faced blond boy at the far table keeps staring at the guy with glasses?" Natalie asked. "Are they boyfriends or something?"

Colin laughed so hard he knocked his pumpkin juice over. "That's Malfoy. He's Harry's nemesis!"

"You-Know-Who is Harry's nemesis," Dennis corrected. "Malfoy's like a small nemesis. He's a nemesette!"

Hermione, overhearing, probably because she was the only one not eating her pudding, winced. "Please don't make words up. "

"Sorry, Hermione," said Dennis, and then remembered they hadn't been introduced yet. He pointed his spoon at Colin. "Pictures! Oh," he added, turning to Colin. "You should've brought your camera with you. "

"Why?" asked Colin in a whisper. With the puddings finished, Dumbledore was reading out the usual messages -- Filch; Forest; Hogsmeade.

"You'd be able to get a good shot of the fake Professor Moody who's about to dramatically enter the room," Dennis explained, while the people around them were complaining about the lack of Quidditch this year.

"I wanted to take pictures of your sorting, but the Professor wouldn't let me," Colin complained. "Who's Professor Moody?"

Dennis pointed. Everyone looked at the door. They looked back at Dennis. He pointed harder. They looked back at the door.

The fake Professor Moody dramatically entered the room, eyeball whirling madly and then turning so that only the white was showing.

"You're right," said Natalie. "That was very dramatic. "

"A little too dramatic," said Dennis, portentously. Everyone looked at him. He sighed. "You'll get that later. Moody's an Auror - a dark wizard catcher, only he's sort of retired because everything thinks he's crazy and paranoid although it turns out he's neither. "

Colin was looking at him strangely.

"Photos?" he tried. "Ooh, hang on, listen to this bit, it's where Dumbledore says the Triwizard Tournament's being held here. "

"You're joking!" yelled Fred Weasley.

"No, really," said Dennis, before realising Fred had been yelling at Dumbledore and everyone else was laughing. "Oh, right. We're all too young to enter, though," he added to Colin. "Can we meet up somewhere after they send the prefect to show us our dorms and everything?"

"Sure!" Colin nodded. "Come down to the common room after. "

* * *

After turned out to be a lot after, because he had stopped to change out of his damp robes -- steam drying really wasn't that efficient -- and then had to explain all his Muggle stuff to the pureblood wizards, which had been a lot more interesting the first time around. Finally, everyone else went to bed, and Dennis sneaked out, hoping Colin would still be there. He was, curled up in the seat closest to the damped down fire, keeping in the last of the heat. He grinned when he saw Dennis.

"Hey!" Colin started to get up, but Dennis practically threw himself across the room to wrap his arms around his brother, holding him as tight as he could. Colin patted his back, confused. "Um. Hi? Okay, I'm starting to have trouble breathing, Den. "

"Sorry!" Dennis yelped, letting go -- then, realising Colin hadn't been entirely serious, went back to hugging him, although not quite so tight. "I really, really, really missed you. "

"It's only been a couple of hours since dinner," Colin said. "You're not homesick, are you? You can write letters every day, and I bet we could get Dad put on the floo system so you could floo call him, even though he's a Muggle!"

"I'm not homesick," Dennis said, although, actually, yeah, he kinda was now Colin brought it up. He shifted uncomfortably until Colin moved around a little, and the two of them ended up in the chair, a little squished together. "I have to tell you something you're probably not going to believe, but it's true, I promise. "

"I believe you, Dennis. " Colin nodded.

"I haven't told you yet!" Dennis complained.

"Well, I believe you'll tell me the truth, and I believe the truth," Colin said, "so I reckon I'll believe you, so--"

"I've come back from the future to save your life," Dennis said.

There was a long pause. "Okay," Colin said slowly, "apparently I was wrong. "

"We should've come up with key phrases so we would know if one of us had travelled back in time and was really us and not someone pretending to be us with polyjuice or something," Dennis mused.

"If I come up with one now, and you have travelled in time, you'd already know it, so you could tell me it," said Colin. "Like--"

"Antwerp," said Dennis promptly.

Colin stared at him. "That's right!"

"You always pick Antwerp as your password," Dennis sighed. "Then we got panty raided by the Slytherins and they never let you pick the month's password ever again. If you pick a password because I came back, then I don't know it, because in the timeline before I came back, you didn't pick one, and the me in this timeline's future would know it, but he won't come back, because you won't die this time, so in that time there won't be any point in time-travelling!"

"Right," said Colin nodding. "...what?"

"Never mind," said Dennis. "If you think about time travel too much your head can explode. No, really! It's magic!"

"So you've travelled in time," said Colin, dubiously.

"Yes!" Dennis nodded.

"You still look ten to me," said Colin.

"Of course I do," Dennis said, "I time-travelled back into my own body! It's more like time-projection than actually travelling!"

"Okay," said Colin, nodding.

"You don't believe a word I'm saying," Dennis complained. "If you travelled back from the future to save my life, I'd believe you. Also, my 'identify person from future as from future' phrase would be 'Nitwit! Blubber! Oddment! Tweak!'"

Colin left that one alone in favour of asking "Save me from what?"

"You-Know-Who!" Dennis exclaimed.

"If I knew who, I wouldn't be -- oh, that you-know-who?" Colin asked. Dennis nodded. "He's already been defeated, Dennis. "

"He's coming back. Quite soon, in fact, although you're okay for a bit, because I arrived four years early, but that's good, because it gives you lots of time to prepare for not getting yourself killed, which was really dumb of you!" Dennis smacked Colin's arm, earning a startled yelp. "Don't do it again!"

"I haven't done it at all," Colin said. "Ow!"

"Yet," Dennis said. "You haven't done it yet. Although you're not going to do it this time, so in a sense it's true that you haven't done it at all. I think. "

"I know that my being petrified for all those months was very scary," Colin started. Dennis smacked him again. "Will you please stop doing that?"

"I'm not making it up," Dennis insisted. "I saw it! Well, I didn't see it, because I wasn't there, but I know all about it from the people who were there! Well, not all, because hardly anyone knows what actually happened because there was a lot going on and everyone was fighting all over the castle, so really, I don't know very much about it, except you were supposed to leave and you didn't and then they had your body because you were dead, which really, really sucked. "

"Do we need to have the conversation again about the difference between things that actually happen and things that we only dreamed happen in our sleep?" Colin asked.

"I can prove it!" Dennis said.

Colin waited. After a while, he said, "how?"

"Shh," said Dennis, "I'm still thinking. Um. Harry gets picked for the tournament!"

"Of course he will," Colin said. "He's Harry Potter. Everyone knows that already. "

"Right. What else happened this year?" Dennis caught Colin's expression and scowled. "I would like to see you remember day to day happenings of things that were ten years ago. Or nine. Nine and a bit. I'm going to prove it, you know. "

"Okay. " Colin nodded, clearly not believing him.

"I am!" Dennis insisted.

I am, he repeated to himself, and slipped back into his room, falling asleep the moment his head hit his pillow.

* * *

The problem was, Dennis thought, that he really didn't have a clue how to prove it. Aside from the fake Moody turning Malfoy into a ferret, -- he couldn't even remember when that happened in the term -- every other event he could think of related to the tournament and didn't happen for ages. This wasn't particularly a problem, because he did have four years, but he didn't actually want to have to live through them all again, if he didn't have to, even if it would be a good way to get better marks this time around. Of course, there was always the possibility that he did have to. It wasn't as if he had done any research on this sort of thing, except for the vague theoretic tinkering while doing odd jobs in the Department of Mysteries. That 'no going back' was probably something to investigate, because otherwise he had five years of History of Magic to look forward to, in the 'not' sense, except for the parts

about Goblins because those were interesting.

Pondering various options, including faking a sudden and complete allergy to spoken history older than himself, Dennis wandered into the Great Hall for breakfast and plonked himself down next to Graham Pritchard. This, of course, meant he was at the Slytherin table.

"Hello," he said to Graham, completely ignoring the older students staring at him and helping himself to an apple. "I have a problem. "

"You have many problems," said Graham without rancour. "You're supposed to sit at your own table, Dennis. "

"Nah, that's a myth. If you check the school rules, there's no actual restriction against it, so long as people aren't fighting over spaces or whatever, and there's always enough room for another four or five people at every table, even at dinner. " He waved the apple at the half-empty room. "Even more so at breakfast. "

He took a bite of the apple.

"Anyway," he added, "we said we'd be friends no matter what house we got sorted into. There was that whole swearing thing, so you can't go back on your word now. "

"I'm a Slytherin," said Graham proudly. "There is no contract, expressed or otherwise, that we can't get ourselves out of. "

"You can have my waffles," Dennis said.

"We get waffles?!" Graham beamed. "Hogwarts is awesome!"

"Just don't let Hermione..." He pointed across the room to where Hermione, Ron and Harry were going over their class schedules. "See her, the one with the bushy hair? Don't let her hear you say that. She has this thing about House Elves being slaves or something. "

"Yet another example of why mudbloods shouldn't be allowed into society," a sharp voice drawled behind them. "They don't know their places. "

"I have always wondered why Hogwarts has muggle studies for wizards but doesn't have wizard studies for muggleborns," Dennis mused. "Hello, Malfoy!" He added, twisting around to see. "I'm Dennis Creevey! Would you like an apple, they're very good?"

"There're gonna be waffles later," Graham put in, and then quickly shut up when Draco, flanked on either side by the bristling menaces of Crabbe and Goyle, glared at him.

"Run back to your own table," Draco said. He was attempting to loom, but Dennis had spent most of his life being the smallest person around, and that sort of thing just went right over his head.

"So, anyway," Dennis said to Graham, "suppose, entirely hypothetically, that you had travelled back from the future into your own past, into your own body, and you needed to convince people that you actually were from the future, but you didn't know enough immediate detail to just prove it, what would you do?"

"Tell myself the 'I have travelled in time' passphrase?" Graham asked.

"Do you mind?" growled Draco, a little put out by the way first years were totally ignoring his menacing. First years!

"Morning," said Blaise Zabini, dropping lazily into a seat opposite, the collar of his robes casually left wide open in a gaze-inviting sort of way. Dennis gazed. Blaise looked right back. "We seem to have gained a munchkin. Hello, little munchkin. "

"I am not a munchkin!" Dennis complained.

"It talks. " Blaise managed to sound almost impressed. "How adorable. "

"I'm cultivating links among the other houses to help further my own agenda," Graham announced in a deliberately casual sort of way that made Dennis think that Graham had been practicing that line.

"It's a Gryffindor," Draco said with audible disgust. It was the sort of tone in which people said 'kill it with fire'.

"You shouldn't play with fire," Dennis said to Crabbe. Everyone stared at him. "That was a bit of a non sequitur, huh?"

"Go away!" Draco yelled.

"Perhaps you need to say it in munchkin?" Blaise suggested cheerfully, deftly snagging a red apple from the table and rubbing it on his top before taking a bite. He had very white, very even teeth. Hermione's parents would have approved.

"I'm pretty sure munchkins aren't real," Dennis said.

There was a great noise of wings, and everyone looked up as the morning post came in, a hundred owls winging their way in through the open windows. Dennis looked across to the Gryffindor table and saw Harry staring up at them. There was no sign of Hedwig's white among the school browns, though. A large tawny owl dropped a package into Neville's lap and an eagle owl came swooping out of the throng to land on Draco's shoulder.

"Doesn't that hurt?" asked Graham.

"He pads his shoulders out," Dennis said.

"Why are you still here?" Draco complained, accepting the parcel of sweets and cakes from the bird and offering it some bacon.

"Ooh, the Prophet!" Dennis snatched it up.

"Perhaps you turned invisible and inaudible, Draco. " Blaise suggested blithely, reading his own mail. "I hear that can happen to people. Oh, look. My mother's getting married again. What joy. " He tossed the letter down, ignored Draco's incoherent fuming, and waved a hand royally at Dennis. "Munchkin! Read me the headlines!"

"He's not your slave," Graham said. "Dennis! Read us the headlines. "

"I'm still not a munchkin," Dennis added, flicking through the paper.

"I don't even know what a munchkin is," Draco said plaintively. Crabbe and Goyle had gotten bored of menacing and had settled on stuffing their faces with sausages and fried eggs instead. Draco had oatmeal, with honey.

"There's an article here about Arthur and the attack on Alastor Moody's place," said Dennis. Mister Weasley had insisted on being called Arthur ever since Dennis started working for the Ministry, although that hadn't actually happened yet, so maybe he shouldn't be calling Arthur Arthur. Hmm.

Draco snatched paper out of his hands while he was distracted. "Blah, blah, blah," he said. "There are far more important things going. What are they saying about the Tournament? Have they mentioned Father?"

Blaise and Dennis both rolled their eyes. Graham looked confused. Crabbe and Goyle missed the whole exchange because they were busy nudging Malcolm Braddock out of the way so they could steal his hash browns.

"Nothing much really happens until the Tri-wizard Tournament starts," Dennis informed Graham. He considered this and then added, "in a news sort of way, I mean, there are lots of classes and stuff and generally someone blows something up in potions every few weeks, so that's always fun. "

"Right," said Graham, meaning the exact opposite. "Your brother gave you really detailed, um, details of the school, huh?"

"...yes," said Dennis. "Talking of Colin, he's over there, where I'm going now, in a way that isn't suspicious or anything. "

"I didn't think it was suspicious until you said that," Graham pointed out, cutting up his waffles. "You're not very good at lying. This," he added, drowning the waffle bits in syrup, "is why you need a Slytherin: to keep you off the straight and narrow. You have to consider the rules more as guidelines. "

"That's why you can have breakfast with us whenever you want, munchkin," Blaise said.

"Um. Thanks?" Dennis eyed him. "You're just saying that because it irritates Malfoy, aren't you?"

"Yes," said Blaise and Draco both at the same time, Blaise cheerfully, Draco annoyed.

"Why are we friends again?" Draco asked Blaise.

"We're Slytherins," Blaise said. This didn't seem like an actual answer to Dennis but, apparently, it did to Draco because he got up in a huff and moved down a few places, kicking Malcolm Braddock out of the way. His new seat happened to give him a good view of the Gryffindor table, and he went back to

glaring at Harry. Dennis and Blaise both rolled their eyes again.

"These are damn good waffles," Graham mumbled around a mouth stuffed full of them and Dennis laughed because Graham always said that.

It felt like being back at school again, which was weird, because he was back at school again and, actually, he was before the 'again' part, so -- and here Dennis resolutely stopped thinking along those lines because he liked his head not explodey.

"I'll see you later," he said to Graham, who nodded, and headed across the room so he could have the rest of breakfast with Natalie and show her where the rooms for their lessons were. He ignored the "later, munchkin," Blaise called after him.

Stupid Blaise.

* * *

The morning's lessons went by in a blur until halfway through Charms where Dennis's absent-minded wingardium leviosa -- so much easier to say sober -- made every single feather in the class and Professor Flitwick end up pinned to the ceiling.

"Focus!" He squeaked down at them. "Absolute engrossment is the key! Wait--!"

A little too late, that last; Dennis had already automatically cast the 'finite incantatem'. Fortunately, Flitwick had very good reflexes and still had his own wand in his hand. The abrupt fall turned into a slow glide down in the middle of a twirling cloud of feathers. The class whistled and clapped.

"I wish I'd had your camera," Dennis told Colin when, later, they were studying together. "It was very

dramatic!"

Colin mumbled something about Tournelle's colouring theorem and waved him quiet. Dennis couldn't focus on his own work and pulled a discarded copy of the Prophet over instead. He frowned at the date -- it was either a misprint, there had been an extra Monday in the week, or his arrival had caused some kind of weird time-skip / chronology problems, a possibility he was carefully not considering -- and then glanced down at the article. It was the same one that he had read at breakfast, the one about Mister Weasley. The one where the paper had suggested Mister Weasley had made a mistake. The one he had read at breakfast, yes, but one which he had, in fact, read before, the first time around -- read it because...

Bugger! The ferreting was today!

"Colin," Dennis grabbed his arm. "Hey, Colin!"

"I'm trying to finish my advanced charms homework before dinner," Colin groused. "Can't it wait?"

"I can prove it!" Dennis crowed. Colin looked at his paper in confusion. "Not that. Well, that, too, because you reduce all possibilities to a finite -- that's not the point," he interrupted himself. "The future thing!"

"Oh," said Colin. "That. "

"And you're not supposed to be proving the theorem," Dennis added, "you're just supposed to apply it to the given net, and the answer's red-blue-blue. "

Colin looked sceptical. "You know this because you're from the future, and not just because you're good at maths?"

"No! I mean, yes, I am, and I am! But not that! Another thing. Harry and Draco Malfoy are about to have

a fight in the entrance hall while queuing for dinner. " Dennis tugged at Colin's arm, managing to get him to step away from the desk but not much more. "You will see then!"

Colin shrugged as best he could with Dennis hanging onto his arm. "Harry and Malfoy always fight. Fighting is what Harry and Malfoy do. I could have predicted that. "

"This fight's different," Dennis explained, "because of what happens to end it -- who happens to end it, and how! I'll explain on the way. "

He hurried towards the portrait hole. Colin frowned, and then hurried after him. Dennis grinned. They never could resist a mystery. That's why Colin would have been such a good journalist and Dennis would be a good Unspeakable -- unless people found out about the time thing, and then he would just be a very clever prisoner. Colin shook him, and he realised his brother had been trying to get his attention for the length of a corridor.

"What happens to end the fight and who ends it and how?" Colin asked.

"You see, Malfoy is going to make fun of Ron's mum, and then Harry's going to make fun of Malfoy's mum, which is kind of mean, but Malfoy started it, so I suppose it's okay, and then Malfoy's gonna try cursing Harry while he's leaving, and then--" Dennis paused dramatically.

"I've seen that fight before," said Colin.

Dennis blinked at him. "Did you travel back in time too?"

"No," Colin said, "it's just that pretty much every fight with Malfoy and Harry goes the same way. They're very predictable, which is good -- I get loads of nice shots that way. Malfoy's a right stuck-up prick, Den, but he doesn't half take a good photograph. "

"I was just thinking that the other day," Dennis said cheerfully, and then remembered where he had

been at the time and sobered rapidly. "We need to go quicker or we won't get there in time!"

Whose stupid idea had it been to put the Gryffindor tower so far from the Entrance Hall? Stupid Founders.

"And then what?" Colin asked.

"And then we'll watch the fight, without interrupting," Dennis explain.

"No, I got that bit," Colin said. "I mean, what happens after Malfoy tries to curse Harry behind his back. "

"Fake Moody turns him into ferret!" Dennis exclaimed.

"I think his first name is Alastor, not -- Professor Moody turns Harry into a ferret?" Colin asked, aghast.

"What? No!" Dennis shook his head. "Malfoy does!"

"Malfoy turns Harry into a ferret?" Colin frowned, confused. "So where does Moody fit into this?"

"No, no, no," Dennis complained as they came out into the hall, where people were already queued to get in for dinner. "Moody turns Draco into a ferret! You'll see. Don't interrupt the fight. "

"Okay," said Colin, nodding.

"Okay," agreed Dennis looking around. He spotted Draco walking forward with a predatory gleam in his eye, and looked in the same direction to see Ron, Hermione and Harry coming the other way.

"Hello, Harry!" He called automatically and then promptly face-palmed. Colin turned laughter into a choked coughing sound that didn't fool Dennis one little bit.

"Oh, er. Hello, Dennis. And Colin," said Harry, his tones getting more leaden with each word.

"Don't mind us," Dennis said quickly. "We're just going to stand here out of the way and not change anything. I say, is that Draco Malfoy coming towards you and brandishing a newspaper type object, from which he might perchance read an article?"

Harry, Ron and Hermione all stared at him.

"Too much?" He asked.

The trio all turned to look at Draco, flanked by Crabbe and Goyle. All three were looking inordinately pleased with themselves.

"Hello, Malfoy!" Dennis said. "Did you want to read us something about Arthur -- Mister Weasley -- that you have read in the paper?"

"I -- yes. " Draco frowned at Dennis, rather thrown off his stride. He attempted to rally himself. "Listen to this! 'Further--'"

"Dad's in the paper?" Ron asked, grabbing the paper from Draco's hand. "Bloody hell, that's a terrible picture of mum. She looks about three hundred pounds. We will never hear the end of this. Who's this Rita Skeeter woman, then?"

"She likes to pretend to be a reporter," Colin said, "but she's really just a gossip columnist. She gets all the names and ages wrong as well, which is just sloppy research. People only read her stuff because she

exaggerates details to make them more salacious. It's not real journalism," he added dismissively.

"Killer dustbins?" asked Hermione, who had taken the paper off Ron to read it. "No wonder they called in the Misuse of Muggle Objects office. I do hope Professor Moody is much more stable than this points him out to be. "

"Not really," said Dennis, but Hermione missed this because of Draco snatching the paper back, aggrieved.

"This went completely differently before," Dennis complained to Colin. "Go ahead," he added to Draco. "Read it out. "

"I don't want to now," Draco snapped. "You ruined my scene. "

"You're supposed to insult Ron's mum," Dennis insisted. "Say she looks fat!"

"Oi!" said Ron.

He glared at Dennis, who pointed at Draco in a 'no, him' sort of way that would probably have failed to work if Draco hadn't said, "she does. "

"See!" Dennis beamed. "And now Harry can insult Mrs. Malfoy as well!"

"Uh," said Harry. "I don't really want to?"

Draco blinked at him. "Oh. "

"I mean, don't take it as me being nice to you or anything," Harry added quickly, "it just seems a bit lame. "

Dennis stomped his foot, which didn't seem to make very much impression. "You're doing it all wrong! You're supposed to fight so Moody can break it up. "

"Moody is here?" Draco asked quickly, spinning round. Crabbe and Goyle both swiftly assumed fake innocent postures.

Clomp, clomp, clomp went Moody as he came into view. "What's all this then?"

"Draco started it," Dennis said, pointing. "He was probably going to hex Harry in the back!"

"I was just reading the paper while waiting for dinner," Draco said in a calculatedly bored sort of way. "I don't know what the munchkin is talking about. "

"I'm not a munchkin!" Dennis yelled. Absolutely everybody stared at him. "Okay, that seems to be happening a lot today. "

"I see," said Moody slowly. "I suggest you all move along -- I'll not take any points now, but be advised: I have my eye on all of you. "

Moody's magical eye swivelled around in its socket, pointing at Dennis, then Draco, and then backwards through his head at Harry.

"You're an incredibly creepy man," Dennis said. "I think you should know that. "

There was a raspy, rumbling noise. It took Dennis a moment to realise Moody was chuckling. "You're a

brave one. "

"I'm a Gryffindor," Dennis said, affronted. "We are all brave!"

The chuckle came again, and then Moody swung around on the crowd. "What are you lot all gawping at? One the double!" He grinned nastily at Draco and clomped away.

"Barmy old man," Draco muttered. "Crabbe! Goyle! Get us into the Hall before having to look at these faces puts me off my dinner. " He sneered at Hermione and Ron, gave one last, lingering look at Harry, and then followed the two thickset boys.

"I'm going to punch him," Ron said.

"Leave it," said Harry. "Come on, I'm hungry. "

"Yeah, me too," Ron said.

"You're always hungry," Hermione complained.

"I'm a growing lad," Ron insisted.

Bickering in a friendly way, the trio headed off in the same direction as Draco. The rest of the crowd started doing the same, leaving only Dennis and Colin standing still.

"Bugger!" Dennis said.

"There was no ferret turning," Colin said.

"There would've been," Dennis insisted, "but we got in the way. Well, I say 'we', but it was mostly me. I broke my own rule! That wasn't very clever. "

Colin nodded. "Right. So now we are late for dinner and I still haven't finished my homework. "

"Well, yes," Dennis said. "Although the queue in is right there, so we could just go in now. "

"Good point," said Colin, moving to join it. "Dennis?"

"Yes, Colin?" Dennis asked, joining him.

Colin asked, "The next time you want to prove you're from the future, could you, you know, not?"

"Yes, Colin," Dennis said, meekly.

* * *

Time passed with annoying rapidity and it was starting to feel like four years wouldn't be enough. Weeks slipped through his fingers. On the upside, he had managed to get their usual study group together two years in advance and people were used to them breakfasting at each other's tables, at least in the sense that the insults had become running jokes. On the downside, he was just as bad at potions as he had always been, he had excessive amounts of homework to do (why was it still called homework when they didn't actually take it home to do it?), most everyone was ooh and awwing over the fake Professor Moody, and he still he didn't have anything resembling a plan.

On the other upside, Professor Vector had caught him doodling arithmancy equations while supposedly cleaning the classroom -- all detentions lately were cleaning jobs, to an obsessive-compulsive point that

had both teachers and students on increasing edge -- and been impressed enough to offer him early tutoring. He didn't think telling her that he wasn't so much a savant as had just done it all before would have been a good idea, and ended up accepting. The extra lessons had turned out to be a lot of fun, and attended by a few other students, including Ginny Weasley of all people.

"I didn't know you did Arithmancy," he said.

"I'm not just a pretty face," she said, and grinned.

"You are very pretty, though," Dennis said. "Colin fancies you and Michael Corner does, and Dean Thomas, and Su Li, and Eloise, and Neville Longbottom, a bit, although he also has a thing for Hannah Abbott, but she only has eyes for--"

"This needs a chart," Ginny said.

"I wrote my thesis on social network analysis," Professor Vector announced. "You see, it's all about the balance of desire and need, two equal forces that pull at people often in quite different ways. "

As well as being smart and pretty, Ginny was apparently also a relentless gossip and since between themselves and the others they knew, or knew of, pretty much everybody in their years, it only took them a couple of weeks to map out the relationships between them. Simplicity and Colouring reduced the complicated, multi-dimensional mesh to a relatively simpler one, and one afternoon in October, they watched Professor Vector create the whole thing in dust and light overhead. It was very pretty.

"Quite a lot of the universe does revolve around Malfoy," Ginny said. "Who knew?"

"I think it's the Quidditch that makes the difference. The other focal point there is Harry," said Dennis. "That's pretty obvious. "

"Sometimes," mused Professor Vector, "what everyone thinks is obvious is completely wrong. "

Dennis nodded, but he was looking at the names, thinking 'he dies, she lives, he dies, she dies, they die, they both live...' It wasn't just the big focal points, the social centres like Harry and Malfoy -- taking out any of the points, any of the people, changed the whole web around them. Connections vanished. People drifted apart, or sometimes together. If you took out Cedric Diggory -- and once the Tournament started, he would probably become a focal point, because the network changed continuously -- Cho moved closer to Harry. If you took out Ron, Harry moved closer to the Slytherins. What people wanted, what people needed... What did Dennis want? What did he need?

Saving Colin had seemed completely obvious -- was it actually completely wrong?

His brother's name was quite small, with just a few thin strands of connections to other people. Everyone was important in their own way, but in the grand scheme of things, in this pretence at objectivity that they had before them (but only pretence, because it relied on subjective interpretation, and none of them had all the details, not even Dennis), in this map of their lives, Colin was a small blip, a relative nobody. His death didn't change much. Perhaps his life would not, except for Dennis, and there were all those others.

No, he told himself. Small changes work, and you heard the hat. Clowns!

"-nis? Dennis!" Ginny nudged him, and he blinked up at her. "Come on, we've got dinner. "

Dennis frowned, and then looked back at the net, only to see Professor Vector had already despelled it. Oh.

"Okay," he said to Ginny, bouncing off his seat and offering to carry her books for her, which made her laugh.

Only walking down to dinner turned out to be a lot harder than they had expected, because people crowding around a new sign set up at the bottom of the stairs packed the entrance hall almost solid.

"What are they looking at?" Ginny asked. Dennis, who only just came up to her shoulder, gave her a 'how should I know?' look. "Oh, right. Hang on; I think I can just about see Ron over there on tiptoes. He will know. Brothers are very useful things. "

"They are," Dennis agreed.

They tried to move through the crowd, but people kept getting in the way. Ernie Macmillan bumped into them, muttering something about Diggory, and Dennis accidentally dropped half the books he was carrying. By the time they had picked them up, they had completely lost sight of Ron.

"It's probably just the announcement that the people from Beauxbatons and Durmstrang are coming soon," Dennis said. "Hello, Malfoy!"

"Did I give you permission to speak to me?" Draco asked.

"I don't think so," Dennis said, "but generally you just insult my heritage, my upbringing, my house and my height, so sometimes I kind of just tune you out, sorry. "

Crabbe and Goyle stepped forward menacingly.

"Bat bogey hexes," Ginny said, wand idly twirling in her fingers.

They both took a step back again.

"I suppose your brothers are going to try out for champion?" Draco sneered. "They say two heads are better than one, but in their case--"

"Harry's going to be champion," Dennis said.

Something flashed across Draco's face too fast for Dennis to understand, and the sneer came back, turned up a notch. "Of course he will. Everything revolves around Precious Potty. "

"It's funny you should say that," Dennis said, "because, you see, we were doing this thing in Arithmancy where--"

"You really should get over your crush, Malfoy," Ginny airily interrupted. "Harry doesn't like you. Learn to live with it. "

Draco's face paled, except for points of colour in his cheeks. "Like he ever notices you? A pathetic excuse for a pureblood?"

"Harry doesn't care about that sort of thing. In fact," said Ginny, "no one does, except useless, small-minded boys like you. "

Draco pulled his wand, but Ginny's was already out, touching his chest.

"You know," she said calmly, "if you can give me one thing, just one thing, that redeems you in even the slightest, the barest, the tiniest way, I'll tell Harry that under that mindless echo of your father there is a real person. He might even talk to you, without you insulting him first. Come on, Malfoy. Just one thing. "

He stared at her, mouth working silently -- and then growled, knocking her wand tip away with her hand and storming off. Crabbe and Goyle hurried after, barging into Dennis on the way, sending the books flying again.

"I really should've put some kind of boundary charm on those," he said. "Ginny?"

"Yes, Dennis?" she asked, looking in the direction the others had left.

Dennis started picking stuff up. "You don't really think Malfoy has a crush on Harry, do you?"

"No, of course not," she said, coming to help him.

Her hair fell across her face, a russet curtain. She was very pretty, Dennis thought. He could see why Colin liked her, and Harry, and possibly Blaise. He realised he had stopped helping pick the books up, and together they quickly finished off.

"Come on," Ginny said. "Dinner!"

"Dinner!" Dennis agreed, leading the way towards the entrance -- but he couldn't help noticing she glanced again back towards where Draco had gone.

* * *

The morning of the Champion's arrival, posh House banners hung in the Great Hall, just as Dennis remembered. He made the mistake of suggesting within Hermione's hearing that they should do it like that all the time, and got a lecture on uneducated and brainwashed slave labour that turned into an argument (and possibly subtext like flirting) with George Weasley that only the arrival of Hedwig sidetracked. It did look very good. No one paid very much attention to classes, and since Charms was already ending early anyway, Professor Flitwick spent it talking about the great duels he had seen fought and showing off some nifty spells that Dennis made a note of to look up later. Who knew you could go through school twice and actually learn new things?

Of course, there was no time after the lesson to go to the library, because they were all rushing back to the tower to drop off their bags and books and grab their cloaks and hats, whereupon they had to rush

right back down to the entrance hall again. Dennis and the rest of the first years lead everyone else out onto the lawn to wait.

"Aha!" Dumbledore called out. "Unless I am very much mistaken, the delegation from Beauxbatons approaches!"

He was not. The massive flying horse-drawn carriage was bombing along towards them through the evening sky. As it passed over the Forbidden Forest, it caught for a moment in two spotlight glows -- the Weasley's car, looking up.

'Bugger!' thought Dennis, realising he could have told Colin about the flying carriage and the ship surfacing out of the lake. If only he hadn't gotten distracted earlier -- which, really, was always his refrain. He needed to work on that. Absolute engrossment, like Professor Flitwick had said about the charms. Absolute. Alas, so busy was he thinking about this, that he pretty much missed the rest of the show until the part where Natalie nudged him and said they were going in.

The lines were slow moving at the front and eager at the back, and the first years quickly caught up to the third and fourth as they ended up bunched together.

"Hello, Harry!"

"What? Oh, uh. Hello, Dennis. " Harry frowned at him. "You know, you don't actually have to yell 'hello, Harry' every time you see me, right?"

"Yep. " Dennis nodded.

"This is going to be so great," Ron said, beaming. "Krum! Victor Krum!"

"He's just a Quidditch player," Hermione said, and all the boys around her made affronted noises. "I

don't see what the big deal is. "

"He's the best Seeker in the world," Ron insisted loudly, craning his head to try to get another look. Lee Jordan, up ahead of them, jumped up and down, trying to do the same. People on either side were scrambling for materials for autographs.

"Well, really," said Hermione loftily.

"We get to spend the next few months listening to Draco Malfoy trying to chat him up," Dennis informed them.

"Him? Krum, him? Malfoy and Krum, him?" Harry blinked at Dennis, eyes large behind his glasses. "Krum's a guy. "

"Yes?" Dennis nodded, feeling this was relatively obvious, if only because of the three repetitions of 'him'.

"Malfoy chats up guys?" Harry asked.

"He's not very good at it. Krum is much more interested in Hermione. I mean," Dennis added, "he probably will be, because, obviously, they haven't met yet, unless they did at the Quidditch World Cup or something. "

Hermione smiled a little and absently primped her hair.

"Malfoy chats up guys," Harry said to Ron.

"If I was in the same house as Pansy and Millicent, I'd chat up guys too," Ron said absently. He was

standing on tiptoe, trying to get a better view of Fleur.

"Blaise is kind of man-pretty," Dennis said. They both looked at him. "What? I'm just saying!"

"Which one is Blaise again?" Ron asked, despite having shared classes with the boy for years. Dennis wondered if this was a sign of a good Slytherin or a bad Slytherin or just of Ron and Harry's general inability to pay attention to anyone who wasn't insulting them or on a Quidditch team.

"He's over there," Dennis said as they finally made it into the Great Hall, and pointed at the Slytherin table, where Blaise was already lounging alongside Draco, casually flirting with the Beauxbaton students at the Ravenclaw table. Dennis revised his earlier statement from man-pretty to man-slut.

They took their own table, Ron trying to make spaces for the Durmstrang students, or, well, Victor Krum, anyway. He groaned when they ended up being coaxed over by the Slytherins. Draco, Crabbe and Goyle all managed to look insufferably smug. Blaise just looked amused, possibly because of the incredibly blatant way Draco was hitting on Krum. Dennis caught his gaze, looked at Draco, then back at Blaise; they both rolled their eyes and grinned together.

When Dennis finally returned his attention to his own table, it was to find Harry staring at Draco, a strange expression on his face.

"Alright, Harry?" Dennis asked, and Colin gave them both a concerned look.

Dumbledore's arrival (and subsequent speech) quelled whatever response Harry might have made. The feast began and they all ate, Dennis tucking in to a big slab of steak and kidney pie, forgoing conversation in favour of watching everyone around them -- the Durmstrang students seemed particularly enamoured of the golden plates, while the Beauxbatons students seemed particularly un-enamoured with everything.

The dinner passed without much commotion and, once the eating was finished, Dumbledore brought out the casket and made his big speech about the Tournament testing a person's magical prowess, their deductive ability, and whether or not their heads exploded at the sight of danger or some such. Dennis

didn't remember the man going on so much. Dumbledore had a bit too much of the flair for the dramatic, he decided, but since the rest of the hall was perfectly silent in anticipation, he resisted the urge to yell 'get on with it'.

The Goblet of Fire flared blue in the Headmaster's hand. It was nicely dramatic.

"The placing of your name in the goblet constitutes a binding, magical contract. There can be no change of heart once you have become a champion. Please be very sure, therefore, that you are wholeheartedly prepared to play before you drop your name into the goblet. Now," Dumbledore finished, "I think it's time for bed. Good night to you all. "

There was a scrape of benches as everyone started moving, and the rising buzz of conversation quickly replaced the previous deep silence. Blaise followed along behind Dennis, managing somehow to flirt simultaneously with Natalie and Cho Chang, until Draco's strident voice rang out.

"Zabini! Stop cradle-snatching, you lascivious pervert. Really, Victor -- can I call you Victor?"

Krum grunted something that might have been a yes, or a no, or possibly just a cough.

"You shouldn't judge the rest of us by the depravity of a few. Unless you like that sort of thing," Draco added quickly. "Do you? Like that sort of thing? When I said 'depravity' I was just joking with my good friend here..."

Whether Krum did or didn't went unsaid. Dennis would have bet on 'did', what with Krum's upcoming interest in Hermione who was far too young for him, although, obviously, old enough to make her own well-informed choices. (He didn't think she could read minds but it was always good to cover yourself, just in case.) There was no time to find out, though, because the girl in question and her usual bookends had arrived out of the crowd just as Ron was saying, "Dumbledore didn't say where the Durmstrang people are sleeping did he?"

"Hello, Harry!" said Dennis. "I mean -- bugger. "

"Better luck next time," said Natalie, patting his shoulder.

"Hello, Dennis. " Harry sighed.

"We have beds in Gryffindor," Ron was saying to Krum. "They are very comfortable. You're welcome to share mine!"

Harry blinked at him. Blaise laughed. Draco choked.

"Ron Weasley!" said Hermione, indignant.

"Well, not at the same time, obviously," said Ron, quickly.

"I think they sleep on the boat," Dennis offered, but no one was listening to him.

"I hardly think anyone from Durmstrang is going to want to dirty themselves with your sheets," Draco sneered. "All those holes--"

"No one wants to hear about your sheets, Malfoy," Harry snapped, casually moving in front of Ron.

"What's going on?" asked Colin. "You know you're blocking the exit right?"

Harry and Draco appeared to be too busy glaring at each other to notice. The rest of the students were beginning to queue up behind them, craning over each other to see what the hold up was. Karkaroff was trying to push through the crowd to get to them, but he wasn't making much headway.

"Poor Potty. Is no one paying attention to you?" Draco mock-pouted. "How sad. I might cry. "

Crabbe and Goyle both laughed.

"I'm not the one making a scene," Harry said, "or the one hanging off Krum like a cheap tart. "

"Harry Potter!" said Hermione, indignant.

"It's like a splinching," Blaise mused. "You just can't stop yourself watching. Would it be horribly trashy to start chanting 'duel, duel, duel'?"

"Yes," Dennis and Natalie both said, nodding.

Blaise nodded, as if he had suspected this. "You should do it for me then, munchkins. "

"Shh!" hissed Colin.

Draco had started smirking. "Are you jealous, Potter? I think you are!"

"Like I would be jealous of anything you have," Harry said, but his cheeks flushed.

"Let me punch him," Ron said to Hermione, who had both hands firmly fisted in his robes. "Come on, just once."

"Potty's got a crush," Draco sing-songed. "Come on, Potter, you can tell us all about it. Do you keep his poster over your bed?"

"Ron does," Ginny said, clambering over the tables to get to them. "Also, you're blocking the exit and some people at the back really need to use the bathrooms, so could you maybe fight outside or something? Thanks. "

"How do you know what I have over my bed?" Ron called after her, but she had somehow wiggled her way past and was already half-way out of the hall. She waved instead of answering and was gone.

"We could all climb over the tables," Dennis suggest, mostly because that had looked like fun.

"Do you make up little stories?" Draco suggested, not willing to let all these interruptions put him off his game. "Playing each other at Quidditch and then again in the showers -- a bit of the old find-the-Snitch?"

"You seem to have given this a lot of thought," Harry said, cheeks red. "Are you sure you're talking about me?"

"I -- o-of course, I am," Draco said. "You -- you stupid speccy scarhead. "

"Oh, well done," said Harry. "Your mastery of insults never fails to unimpress. "

Draco pulled his wand in response and Harry pulled his, and Hermione pulled Ron with surprising strength, and everyone around them moved back a little, to the annoyance of Karkaroff who had almost managed to reach them. Krum was starting to look a little like a squirrel who had just realised that tree they ran up was the Whomping Willow.

"Duel, duel, duel," Blaise prompted Natalie and Dennis, who both ignored both the suggestion and the subsequent pouting. "I need better minions. "

"Do you think there will be animal tricks?" Colin asked from where he was taking photos.

"Animal tricks?" asked Ron.

"Dennis thinks Malfoy should've been turned into a ferret," Colin said.

"He was," Dennis insisted. "Well, okay, no, he wasn't, but he would've been if he had been, which he wasn't, now. But he really was!"

"It's strange," said Hermione, mostly to herself. "All the words are English, but when he puts them end to end, they somehow lose all meaning. "

Both Harry and Draco were looking at them.

"Do you mind?" Draco asked. "We're trying to have a fight here. "

"Malfoy is trying, anyway," Harry said. He grinned. "Very trying. "

"That was quite good. " Draco nodded. "Did you get the mudblood to write it down for you in advance?"

Harry blinked, and then smiled a little. "Did you just compliment Hermione in a ... strange and backhanded sort of manner?"

Draco, who had been raising his wand, lowered it a tad. "What? No. I mean. No! I -- Stop bloody smiling at me, Potter!"

"Alright, alright, clear the way there, clear the way. " It was Moody, coming through the crowd, casually kicking Karkaroff out of the way as he did. The man fell on a Durmstrang student with food stains on his robes and the two went down. Moody drew closer, the clomp-clomp-clomp of his leg working to clear the path. "Potter! Malfoy! What's all this then?"

"Both Harry and Malfoy have crushes on Victor Krum," Natalie supplied.

"What?!" Both Harry and Draco yelped. Blaise cracked up.

"Oh, was that not it?" Natalie asked with apparently genuine confusion.

Draco said something nasty Dennis didn't catch -- just the general tone -- and Moody's magical swivelled to glare at him. Draco, not Dennis, although it was a magical eye, so who really knew? The pupil could just have been put on a side at random to confuse people. Crabbe and Goyle both took a protective step towards Draco, found that blue look turning their way, and quickly took two steps backwards.

"You know," said Harry, "I think Dennis is right. You really would make a good ferret, Malfoy. You're small and nasty enough. "

"Ferret, eh?" Moody smiled nastily. "I don't mind if I do. "

"Um," said Dennis.

"Wait," started Draco, and then squeaked as a hairy implosion compressed him down into white ferret shape.

"Huh," said Colin.

"Bugger!" swore Dennis.

"I really can't abide weak--" Moody flicked his wand. The ferret smacked into the ground and then lifted up again. "--snivelling--" He smacked Draco into the ground again. The ferret bounced higher. People laughed. "--sycophants. "

"Professor," Harry started.

"You see, young Potter, if there is one thing," bounce, "that really angers me," bounce, "it's a Death Eater," bounce at Karkaroff, "who lied and cheated and wriggled their way out," bounce, "when they should've gone straight," bounce, "to," bounce, "Azkaban," bounce.

"Stop it!" Harry yelled.

The laughter had. Moody actually did as well.

"I just, I think he's had enough," Harry said, quieter. "He's had enough. Please. "

Moody raised his wand again, and then seemed to reconsider, lowering it. He took a gulp from his hip flask, wiped his mouth on the back of his hand and then, still staring at Harry, flicked his wand at Draco.

This time when he bounced, he was in human form.

"I think I made my point," he said. "Well?"

"Y-yes, sir," Draco managed to get out between grit teeth, rolling over on the floor.

"On your way, all of you," he said. "You'll be wanting to take your students to your boat," he added to Karkaroff, who stuttered something incoherent and grabbed at a perturbed Krum, guiding him away. Moody clomped after, the other Durmstrung students went after that, and soon there was a whole rush of people passing them on either side.

Harry hurried to Draco's side, and offered him a hand up. "Sorry," he started.

"I don't need your help, Potter. " Draco smacked his hand away. "I don't want your help. "

Crabble and Goyle shouldered Harry away, although it was Blaise who stepped forward to help Draco up. He looked back for a moment, eyes sweeping across them, and then turned and, with Draco leaning an arm across his shoulders, half-walked, half-carried the other boy out of the room.

"You didn't need to apologise to that--" Ron started, heatedly.

"Ron," Hermione said quietly. She shook her head and he subsided.

"Come on, mate," he said more softly to Harry. "Gryffindor awaits. "

"Yeah," said Harry. He shook himself and pulled on a smile. "Have to think up ways past that age line, don't we?"

"Really!" Hermione huffed. "Boys!"

Talking together, they headed out.

"It didn't happen right," Dennis said, aloud, though to himself, "but it still happened. It still bloody happened. Not better, just different. " Colin and Natalie were both looking at him. "Exploding snap?"

Natalie smiled weakly. "Okay. "

Colin nodded and when, later, during their game they noticed him take out the film of the fight and leave it exposed, neither commented.

* * *

If little changes were just going to end up undoing themselves then Dennis would just have to do something more drastic. The obvious thing to do would have been to find and destroy the horcruxes now, but aside from the fact of their existence, Dennis wasn't really sure what they were or where they were or how one went about destroying them. This, rather understandably, put a bit of a crimp in that plan. One thing he did know where to find, though, was the Goblet of Fire, mostly because it was in the entrance hall on the stool normally used for Sorting. Ridiculously early the following morning, he sneaked down to have a look.

There it was, blue-white flames blazing merrily away at the centre of the circular Age Line.

Dennis was ten or twenty years old depending on how you looked at it (his birthday was in April, like Ron's). It wasn't as if he particularly wanted to compete, and he definitely didn't want Colin to compete, but perhaps if he could take Harry or Cedric's name out of cup, it would change things for the better. Of course, you probably couldn't take out what was put in, what with Dumbledore going on about all that magically binding contract, don't do it unless you are absolutely sure stuff. Still, it was worth a try, right? Right.

Checking to make sure there was no one around, like, say, fake Moody -- although he could be in the corridor or outside watching with that magic eye of his, which would be very weird and creepy and the sort of thing he would do -- Dennis carefully approached the Age Line. It didn't glisten, sparkle, or do anything of particular interest. It was just there, thin and gold and innocuous, as all the really strong magic tended to be. He lifted his hands and, holding them before him, walked slowly forward.

It was soft at first, like pushing into -- he wasn't sure what; jelly, perhaps; really squidgy mud. After a few inches, it was more like pushing against a mattress, then against a really hard mattress, then against a slippery, slime covered brick wall that was pushing back. Although, technically, everything pushed back, because of Newton's whole 'every reaction has an equal and opposite reaction' thing, so really it was best to think of a wall, or a big metal plate, maybe, that had been attached to a hydraulic ram which was--

His hand slipped forward. His hand also stayed where it was, the physical, fleshy, now-bit of his hand. Silver, translucent ghost fingers stuck out the other side, somewhat larger than the hand they were protruding from. Legs still automatically working pushed his body into the invisible wall, where it stopped, but momentum kept him going and Dennis found himself, insubstantial, faintly glowing, and clearly twenty again inside the age line.

"Well," he said, and his voice sounded weird, as if it too had become see-through or maybe hear-through. "This is certainly..."

There weren't words. He tried to move towards the goblet but kept sinking through the floor. He could float with concentration, but he couldn't touch anything. The Goblet of Fire sat there happily burning away and completely ignoring the hand passing through it. Dennis aimed a kick at the stool, but it went right through, and he ended up spinning head over heals.

At first, he thought it was just dizziness, but then he realised something was pulling at him, trying to take him away. He started back towards his body, but it got stronger with each step, until he had to crawl to move, half on, half in the floor. For a moment, he almost thought he was moving not on the entrance halls flagstones, but the raised dais of the veil room in the Department of Mysteries. There was a strong wrenching sensation. His outstretched, lunging fingers just managed to catch his slumped body and it abruptly stopped, sending him flying forward. Everything titled alarmingly for a moment. He tumbled backwards (as if he had been flung by catapult) to find himself ten again -- ten, and far, far outside the age-line.

"Bugger," he said, surprised to be breathing hard and trembling all over, as if had just done a ten-mile run.

New plan, then. Bugger.

* * *

It was All Hallows Eve. As was the tradition, bats filled the Great Hall. Fortunately, since it was a tradition, they had long since learned the hard way the downside of having living animals flitting about over head and charmed the room so the guano vanished silently (and thankfully odourless) a good ten foot up, so that only Hagrid and Madame Maxime had the slightest chance of danger. . People were impressed at breakfast and kept looking up, not so much at lunch and, by dinner, had stopped paying attention to the bats and decorations entirely, in favour of the Goblet of Fire.

Dennis noticed that, even though they had moved it back into the Great Hall, there was still an age-line drawn around the Goblet, presumably to stop last minute cheating. How very paranoid of them! Dennis was certain no one else was trying to disrupt the process. Obviously, they had trust issues.

"It will be Krum, Fleur and Cedric," Dennis said.

"I am shocked and amazed at your foreknowledge," Colin said.

Dennis pouted. "You're just saying that. "

"You do have a healthy grasp of the obvious," Colin admitted.

"I was right about the ferret," Dennis pointed out.

"I don't think it counts as real prophecy if you're the one making it come true," Colin pointed out in turn.

The people around them hushed them as Dumbledore had started speaking. He waved his wand and all

the candles went out, mostly, leaving the gleaming, burning Goblet as the main source of illumination.

(There was a faint click as Colin took a picture.)

The Goblet made its first choice. It was, of course, Krum.

"Big surprise there," said Ron.

Harry was watching Draco, Draco was watching Krum, and Krum was wandering up to the staff table. Dennis watched Moody, who was watching Krum and the Goblet at the same time, which was also a neat trick. Didn't it get confusing receiving two sets of sensory impressions at the same time? Mind you, quite a lot of lizards and things did it as well, and they didn't seem confused, at least as far as Dennis could tell. Who knew what a confused lizard looked like?

Thinking about this, he almost missed Fleur being picked, although most of the men and quite a lot of the women leaning forward for a better view as she passed was a bit of a giveaway. Moody watched her too, although less in a pervalicious old man sort of way and more in a 'yes, yes, get on with it' sort of way, and suddenly Dennis had a plan. It wasn't a very good plan -- in fact, he would go so far as to say it was probably terrible, but, never the less, it was a plan, and he had it.

The Goblet turned red for a third time, shooting out a piece of parchment with 'Cedric Diggory' written on it. A massive round of cheering went up.

"Blah, blah, blah," said Dumbledore.

It probably wasn't actually 'blah, blah, blah', but Dennis was too busy scrambling up onto the tabletop to pay close attention. Very few people were -- all busy chattering among themselves, save for those Gryffindors around Dennis who were busy asking what he thought he was doing.

"Gosh," yelled Dennis over the noise, "I hope no one has used an exceptionally strong Confundus Charm

on the Goblet of Fire to circumvent the magical protocols and convince it that there are actually four schools in the tournament, so that Harry Potter could be placed in a school by himself and thus be the only possible champion and therefore get picked and consequently be forced to be the unexpected fourth champion of the Tournament as part of some insane, pointlessly convoluted plot to kidnap him and resurrect You-Know-Who!"

By the time he had finished, voice squeaking as he ran out of air to speak with, everyone was staring at him, which meant they all missed the goblet flame flaring red again.

"You might want to read that," Dennis said, pointing.

Dumbledore took the small piece of parchment and smoothed it out. He read it silently, and then looked at Harry, the Goblet, and finally Dennis.

"I presume you have some sort of explanation for this, Mister Creevey. One," he added, holding up a hand to forestall Dennis, "which involves short sentences. "

"Yes," said Dennis.

Dumbledore waited. After a moment, he said, "not that short, Dennis. "

"Oh, right! Well," said Dennis, "I think Professor Moody would be a good person to ask about this. If he is Professor Moody. Because there is this thing called polyjuice potion. "

"It only lasts an hour," Hermione said, "and we have all been in here longer than that already. "

"Ah," said Dennis, "but, right. " He frowned. "Hang on; I know the answer to this one. "

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded Mister Crouch.

"Is the boy playing some kind of prank?" Bagman asked. "I played a lot in my days, you know, before the Quidditch. "

"The boy's obviously overwrought," said Moody. His fingers were casually resting on his wand. "Aren't you?"

Dennis felt a sense of enormous well being flood through him, which was very interesting, because it was sort of like that time that he had gotten really drunk and decided to travel through time, except without the drinking or the time-travel bit. It was also a bit like having cast one two many cheering charms on yourself, except without the constant need to giggle and the fluorescent urine. At least he hoped it was without the fluorescent urine, but there was no real way of testing this in the middle of the Great Hall, not without -- and wasn't he supposed to be saying something?

"No," said Dennis. "I don't think I'm overwrought. I'm feeling quite fine, thank you, although I am a little worried it will glow when I pee. "

Moody was looking confused, but then so were most people, except Blaise who was laughing, and Dumbledore who appeared to be trying to suppress a smile.

"Perhaps we should take this outside to discuss, Albus," said Moody.

"Here is quite fine for the moment," said Dumbledore thoughtfully. "Dennis, did you tamper with the Goblet yourself?"

"No!" said Dennis. "Well, I mean, I tried to, but I didn't get very far, so it doesn't count and--" Crouch was staring at him with blatant suspicion. Behind him, Moody took a slug from his hip flask. "I probably shouldn't have said that bit, huh? I--"

Hip flask!

"Hip flask?" repeated Dumbledore, which was neat, since Dennis didn't remember saying that aloud.

Moody chuckled. "A wee nip to keep the chill off my old bones," he said, offering the flask to Albus. "You're welcome to try some. "

Dumbledore accepted the flask, but held it out to Dennis. "Perhaps you would care to come up here and demonstrate, Dennis?"

"Um. Okay!" Dennis grabbed up his cup of pumpkin juice, downed the rest, and brought it up to the staff table, moving carefully around the Age Line to do so. Dumbledore handed the flask over, and Dennis tipped it up over the glass and poured. It was whiskey.

Dumbledore looked at him, eyes twinkling.

Dennis looked at the hip flask. It was very familiar. In fact, he had seen one just like it a few months before (and nine or so years into the future.)

"Ah hah!" He proclaimed. "I know the secret. " He fiddled. "See, because--" This time when he poured, it wasn't amber liquid, but a thick, goopy substance. "Da-dah!"

Dumbledore accepted the cup and then passed it to Snape, who proclaimed "Polyjuice Potion. "

"That's pretty cool," said Graham, who happened to be at the end of the Slytherin table close by. "Sneaky flask!"

"I buy you one later," Dennis assured him.

"Really?" Graham beamed. "Thanks!"

"Polyjuice potion, Alastor?" asked Dumbledore mildly.

"I keep it there for when I need a quick disguise?" Moody suggested.

"Perhaps you would care to try some," Snape said. "We can see who you turn into. "

"It might have gone off," Moody said quickly. "I probably wouldn't change at all. "

"Indeed," said Snape smoothly. "You won't mind if I study this, will you? Wait right there; it will only take an hour or so. "

"Hah!" cried Dennis. "Busted!"

"I don't know how you resisted my Imperious curse so readily, Creevey," growled Moody, turning on him, "but I doubt you're quite so resistant to--"

"Look out, Dennis!" yelled Colin.

The teachers all had their wands out by now, but Moody -- with a complicated flick of his wrist -- brought both the silk banners and the bats down on them. Some of the children started screaming, some yelled; many drew their wands as well, although no one seemed to have any idea what to do. Harry was rushing forward and Dennis waved urgently.

"Harry! Stay back!" Dennis insisted. "It's you he wants. "

"Not just him," said Moody, coming up behind him. "Goodbye, Father. "

"Huh?" said Dennis, and ducked as the wand swung his way.

The blast went well over his head, mostly because it Moody hadn't aimed at him. Mister Crouch, caught square in the chest, toppled backwards. He didn't look surprised.

Moody swung his wand towards Harry, casually blocking the "expelliarmus!" Dennis yelled and jumped on the man's arm. Red light blazed from the wand, but it struck only the Goblet of Fire with no effect.

"Dennis!" Colin yelled again. Light flashed, and again. Moody shook Dennis off. Light flashed. Dennis caught sight of Dumbledore lunging out of a cloud of bats and tattered silk; a glimpse of Natalie, white faced; Blaise, reaching for his wand; Harry, yelling; Draco, on his feet, flushed, eyes blazing. Light flashed. Dazed, Moody lashed out blindly, sending Dennis falling back towards the Goblet. Snape, Dumbledore, and Harry were all on him in that same instant, stunners blazing. Colin yelled.

Dennis tumbled backwards across the Age Line.

There was a great wrenching sensation and, even as his ten-year old self was crashing into the goblet, his twenty year old self was passing through it, in that disturbing, shimmery, ghostly sort of way. For a moment, he could see the whole of the hall, everybody, as if it was bright as day, as if he had all the time in the world -- and then the wrenching came again, worse than before, every part of his body being pulled in every possible (and some impossible) directions at once.

Everything blazed bright. Everything went black.

# # #

Everything was black and Dennis felt oddly light, not quite floating but as if he could with little ease. Had he fallen out of the boat again? Where was Squiddy? Or, worse, was this the afterlife? Was he bound across the Acheron to -- wait, was it the Acheron? Which was the outmost river of Hell? This was the problem with a school that didn't teach comparative theology. How was one supposed to know what to do in the after-life if they had never been told properly?

"No wonder people come back as ghosts," Dennis mused.

"People come back as ghosts because they have lazy, unfocused minds and are generally too stupid to realise they should be dead until too late," Snape said.

Dennis blinked at the black. It was robes. He looked up. Snape was wearing them.

"Huh," he said. "Are you dead too?"

"I have often considered the benefits of beating sense into children would far outweigh the cries of their overindulgent parents," Snape mused, "but the Headmaster seems to have a problem with the whole concept. " He sighed. "Do get up, Creevey. I'm sure even you can remember how to use your own feet. "

"I don't get up with my feet; I get up with my legs," Dennis said, demonstrating, "although I suppose that does include my feet which -- whoa!"

Standing up fast had made him float clear of the floor. Snape caught him before he could bounce off the wall, and he drifted slowly back to land again.

"Did someone get a wingardium leviosa wrong?" Dennis asked. "It requires focus, I'm told. Absolute engrossment. Professor Flitwick said. "

"No," said Snape shortly.

"Oh," said Dennis.

"We're on the moon," Snape added.

"Right," said Dennis. "What? No, what? Moon, what? What? This is Hogwarts!"

Snape turned Dennis around the face the window -- which, rather then being circular and high in the wall as Dennis remembered, was much larger, semi-circular, and right in front of them. Beyond the castle and the greenhouses, he could see the rippling edge of a giant bubble and, beyond that, white-grey ground, pitted with crates and covered in fine dust, stretching lifeless all the way to the horizon and the stars beyond.

Dennis stared. "I'm on the moon. "

"Your powers of observation underwhelm me," said Snape. "Come along, Creevey; the Headmaster will want to speak to you. "

# # #

FOUR YEARS LATER:

The highly polished oak door wasn't a perfect mirror but it was reflective enough for Dennis to see that he had aged a little -- or, rather, that he had arrived in a body older than the previous one. He wasn't back to his present though, and judging by his height and hands, he figured it to be about halfway there. This was either Harry's NEWT year or Colin's, provided they were still alive. All bets were off when you found yourself on the moon, which Dennis didn't get at all. They had done the social network analysis and everything. Moody hadn't seemed that important! Okay, yes, with the whole "working for the Dark Lord" thing, but apart from that.

The door to Dumbledore's office -- the one he was waiting outside of, the one with the brass knocker in the shape of a chocolate frog which looked quite old but which Dennis was almost entirely sure hadn't actually been there before -- swung open again. Snape swooped out and glared down at him. It was almost exactly like being back in Potions class, except nothing had exploded. Probably. Yet.

"Go inside, Creevey," Snape said. "The Headmaster wishes to speak with you alone; how fortunate for the both of us. "

"I still like you more than Professor Slughorn," said Dennis. Except for the killing Dumbledore part, obviously, but Harry had insisted that had all been part of a plan, although Dennis rather thought that any plan that hinged on you dying (and not coming back) wasn't a very good one. Slughorn was just plain creepy.

Snape stared at him. He had very dark eyes that glittered with (possibly malevolent) intelligence. They seemed to see right through you, rather like fake Moody's fake eye, except without being huge and blue and turning all the way around.

"Mm," he said thinly, and pointedly stepped around Dennis, waving an imperious hand at the open door.

Dennis wandered (well, bounced) into the Headmaster's office. The door slammed behind him. There were books and portraits everywhere, lit by odd candlesticks that didn't so much burn as just flicker and glow. Despite all the reflections, Dennis could still make out the surface of the moon outside through the many windows. Through the one directly behind the Headmaster's chair, he could see the Quidditch

pitch was still there, and was temporarily so distracted considering the physics of broomstick flight in low-gravity that he almost failed to notice Albus "Headmaster" Dumbledore himself, sitting in a high-backed chair behind the enormous desk.

"Ah, Dennis!" Dumbledore waved a hand at the visitor chair. "Do please sit. Remember to only make small movements, if you please. "

Dennis crossed the room to the chair in a single step. It looked quite heavy, but it moved very easily, and it took him a moment to get both the chair and himself in the right place and sat down. His head didn't come that far above the desk.

"Sherbet lemon," Dumbledore offered, leaning across it.

"No, thank you," Dennis said.

Dumbledore took the bowl back and then held it out again. "Lemon drop?"

"Does that ever actually work?" Dennis asked.

"You'd be surprised," Dumbledore said, taking the bowl back again. He popped one in his mouth and sucked on it for a bit, before continuing. "I understand you 'went a bit weird and then passed out', to quote your friend. "

"You do?" Dennis asked.

"Of course," Dumbledore said, leaning forward conspiratorially. "However, we both know that what actually happened was rather more esoteric. You're an anachronism enfleshed, a chronological aberration, a temporal traveller reoccupying positions in your own personal timeline. "

"How do you know that?" Dennis asked. "I might not be! I could be genuinely sick, and you made me come up here instead of going to Madame Pomfrey and now my head could explode or something. "

"Do you want to go to see Madame Pomfrey?" Dumbledore asked.

Dennis shook his head. "Not really!"

"There you go then. I'm sure your head won't explode, which happens much more rarely than you would appear to think, I assure you. As to how I know?" Dumbledore shrugged a little. "I am Albus Dumbledore: that is how I know. "

"That was rather tautological and didn't actually answer the question," Dennis said. He considered this for a moment, and then added, "Well, it did, but it didn't do it in a very satisfying sort of way. For me, anyway -- I mean, you might like being vague or appearing to be all knowing. No offence intended, Headmaster!"

"None taken, my boy," said Dumbledore.

"I bet the sorting hat just told you," Dennis decided.

Dumbledore changed the subject. "Now, I'm sure you have lots of questions you would like to ask. For instance, regarding the imposter who--"

"Not really," said Dennis. "Why is Hogwarts on the moon?"

"That's a very interesting story," Dumbledore mused, leaning back in his chair and stroking his beard. "To really understand it, one must first go all the way back to the early forties; it was a dark time in Europe as the rise of fascism spread a dark cloud that threatened to cast a shadow even on Great Britain. In those days, of course, I had lovely auburn hair and we wore onions on our belts and--"

"Can you give me the short version?" Dennis interrupted.

"We are hiding from Muggle satellites," Dumbledore said.

"Okay. " Dennis nodded.

There was a long pause. The fire crackled. Dumbledore sucked on a sherbet lemon.

Dennis kicked his feet idly against the legs of his chair. "...is there a version between the long version and the short version?"

"Sometimes I like to do it in interpretative dance," Dumbledore said. "I'm gay, by the way. I just thought I would put that in there. Or out there -- out there! Oh, that's quite good; I must remember that for later. "

"It has nothing at all to do with the story," Dennis complained. "How did outing the -- how did revealing that Moody was a fake end up with Hogwarts on the moon?"

"That's a very interesting story," Dumbledore began again, stroking his beard once more. "To really understand it--"

"Hey," Dennis interrupted again. "You stole that line about onions from a Simpsons episode. Without proper attribution!"

"Hogwarts has had working televisions for some time now," Dumbledore admitted. "Ever since the Muggles worked out how to make their devices work inside magical fields, in fact. I do like the cartoons! Have you ever seen the one with the three little dog children who live in a water tower and the smart mouse and the crazy mouse and the nurse?"

"Muggles did what?" Dennis asked. "They aren't supposed to know about magic. There is a secrecy thing, for keeping secrets secret!"

Dumbledore nodded, sagely. "Once, there was. Unfortunately, you see, after you revealed that Barty Crouch Junior was impersonating Alastor Moody, in front of an entire school of witnesses, including a member of the Ministry -- even a man with gambling debts like Ludo Bagman -- there was no choice but to publically acknowledge the return of Voldemort. "

"But he hadn't returned, because Moody Crouch didn't kidnap Harry," said Dennis.

"It's true that Voldemort hasn't been restored to what he once was," Dumbledore began.

"He's more snake now than man," Dennis said, beaming. Dumbledore stared at him blankly. "Star Wars? Never mind. "

"Voldemort still holds flesh, small and weak though it may be, and many minions through whom his evil aims can be--" Dumbledore sighed and Dennis interrupted again.

"You mean he's an evil baby thing?" Dennis pulled a face.

"No," said Dumbledore. "Well. Actually, yes; yes, he is. Regardless, though his body is tiny, his reach is enormous, and so the infighting began and paranoia spread and all was dark throughout the land--"

"You have gone all poetic again," Dennis said. "Can we skip ahead a bit? Exposition makes my head hurt. "

"Very well," Dumbledore sighed. "A small fight broke out in Diagon Alley which turned into a large fight which then, unfortunately, spilled out into Muggle London. Since the Ministry was infighting between

the people who wanted Voldemort taken care of and the people who were still denying he was a threat, the Obliviator Squad were too slow to react. It would still have been a containable disaster if it hadn't been for the trial of Sirius Black. You see, Barty Crouch had confirmed that Peter Pettigrew was still alive, which in turn confirmed Harry Potter, Sirius Black and Remus Lupin's stories. Instantly, Peter Pettigrew was a target, and since everyone knew he could turn into a rat--"

"I knew that," Dennis nodded.

"Indeed. Since everyone knew," Dumbledore continued, "people started attacking rats, of which London has rather a lot, and soon there were a large number of cursed rats scurrying around the Muggle parts of the city. Even this could have been controlled, had Voldemort not started retaliating -- for to attack his lieutenants was to insult his power, and he will not abide any who challenge him. His attacks on Muggle buildings, combined with the already leaked magical events, as well as an under-siege Muggle Prime-Minister lead to the International Secrecy Act being broken rather spectacularly. "

"And then you decided to move to the moon," Dennis said, sceptically.

"First, we tried to deal; then we tried to threaten; then we tried to charm, in all sense of the world; then we tried to retreat to Europe, only to find our onetime allies had closed all the doors to us. The Muggles discovered our magical strongholds and then managed to come up with ingenious ways to overcome them, to allow their technology to overcome us. As the months turned into years, as our safe places become smaller and smaller, we were forced to perform a multi-wizard long-range Apparition and Bubble-Ward to the one place where the Muggles cannot look -- the far side of the Moon!"

"All because Moody was revealed?!" Dennis stared, aghast. "That's-- That is-- I don't know what it is, but it is one! And a huge one at that!"

"I once had that very reaction," Dumbledore said, "back in nineteen forty-something, a few months after I had met Gellert Grindelwald; we were sharing rooms in Godric's Hollow when -- did I mention I was gay?"

"Yes," said Dennis. "It still doesn't seem to have anything to do with the topic in question, though. "

"I like to share in the hopes that it will encourage my students to share anything with me, even if it's personal. " Dumbledore smiled genially. "I could share some more if you would like? My dear Gellert was a brilliant man, not just in his mind, but in his body and in bed where--"

"Please stop talking," said Dennis.

"It was a shame I had to have him locked up," Dumbledore mused. "That's the problem, my boy, with love. Sometimes what we want and what we need are very different things. Love is--"

"--really, really, really confusing," Dennis supplied.

"Exactly. " Dumbledore nodded. "You're wise beyond your years, Dennis. Perhaps because you are in fact older than you are, admittedly. It is both our strength and our weakness that we can love, not just once, but many times over, each different, each equally true. Love, love, love -- I knew John Lennon, lovely chap. Yoko Ono once let me bang in a nail. I can't say I understand art, but it was quite interesting. ...what was I talking about?"

"I genuinely have no idea," Dennis said. He stretched, yawning. "Is it late? It feels late. "

"It's always night on the far side of the Moon," Dumbledore pointed out. "Still, it is late. There is a bed waiting for you in Gryffindor tower, since it belongs to your current self. "

Dennis nodded. He was starting to remember it, memories from this life sliding in besides memories of the other one -- though the new memories were weak, like a half-strength double-exposure.

"Are you sure you don't want a sherbet lemon," Dumbledore asked as he got up to leave.

"No, thank you," Dennis said. He started away from the desk in a slow bounce, and the door opened by

itself. He caught its edge to steady himself. "Professor? That fight in Diagon Alley that started this whole thing -- who was it?"

Dumbledore's eyes twinkled bright and blue. "Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy. "

* * *

Dennis was dreaming. It was odd, because it felt real but he knew he was dreaming, but he was still dreaming it felt real. Or something. It was odd, was the point. He was sitting on something; he wasn't sure what -- a large glass or crystal shape, perhaps. He couldn't quite seem to focus on it. It bent and shifted under his gaze, grew translucent, even transparent, though it always held him up. The platform - cube - cylinder - upturned pyramid - thing was under him; in every direction, there were lines criss-crossing in a vast and empty space. The space was dark. The lines were bright, gold like the Age Line and thin as spider-silk. They moved around him. He could hear them whispering, like the rush of the morning post but much quieter, turned almost down to nothing.

One of the lines - wires - threads - came close enough to touch. Perhaps he moved to meet it. Either way, it was there to touch, so he touched it, as gently as he could. It trembled under his fingers and bent towards him -- and a little way away it hit another thread and that too bent, touching others, until the entire web - mesh - network was bending and touching and moving around him alarmingly. He tried to pull his hand back but the thread caught under his fingernails and broke. Wild grabs caught both ends before they could flutter out of reach, but the loss of tension had already started another wave of movement in the web. Dennis tried desperately to tie the broken ends back together in a knot, each tug and twist shaking everything that much more -- and when the knot was finally done, he looked back up to discover there was almost nothing left. When he looked back down, the gold thread between his hands was dissolving, was fading was gone.

He was all alone in the dark.

"Yes, yes, it's all very dramatic," Dennis complained, brushing his hands clean against his pyjamas, "but what does it actually mean? Is it supposed to be Professor Vector's model of a social network? All those lifelines? Because I already worked out that I screwed things up when I was conscious, so I don't know

why my subconscious would feel the need to bring it up again, so--"

The bed curtains rustled a little. He blinked up at the canopy overhead. He had woken up. Huh.

"Stupid brain," he muttered.

He closed his eyes again. Sleep didn't return. In fact, it wandered off in the other direction. He opened his eyes again.

"Bugger," he said, and sat up.

It was, as far as he could tell, very early in the morning. It certainly felt that way, anyway, even if it was always night on the moon. In addition, his head seemed to be inside a bubble of air, which he definitely hadn't been wearing before going to bed. He pushed the bed curtains aside to get his wand to undo it and discovered someone had left a small note on his bedside table.

"REMINDER," it read. "In order to ensure student safety in the event of a school bubble failure during sleep periods, all students are required to perform Bubble Head charms on themselves before retiring. Five points from Gryffindor. "

Dennis carefully read it again. It definitely said 'school bubble failure'. That didn't sound good. It definitely didn't sound like something of which there should be a chance. As time-travel trips to improve the past and the future went, this one was going right down there at the bottom. He wondered what Colin thought about--

"Colin!"

He had completely forgotten to ask Dumbledore about Colin! That was terrible! Okay, yes, admittedly, he was easily distracted, but Colin was the whole point of this. He should have asked straight away. Stupid

Dumbledore and his stupid sherbet lemon drops and his endless exposition!

Dennis scrambled out of bed and then swore, because he had been so tired when he had reached the dorm that he had just pulled his robes off and sacked out, and it was bloody freezing outside the self-warming bedclothes. He grabbed up his clothes and pulled them on, pulled them back off, turned them the right way around, and pulled them back on again -- all the while dancing from foot to foot on the icy flagstones.

Remembering wanting a cooling charm at the memorial show, Dennis cast it on himself in reverse, like having a pocket warmer but all over. That and a bit of exercise and a nice warm breakfast would be enough to keep him going, he decided, and headed towards the portrait hole. The painting swung wide at his push, though the Fat Lady just snored as he drifted back to the ground. Going up stairs was much easier in one-sixth gravity than going down them. There really should be guide ropes or something.

Something white and vaguely rodent-like bounced past him through the open hole. Dennis tried to follow it, but he turned so fast that he ended up spinning like a top and by the time he had steadied himself again, whatever the bouncing thing had been, it was gone. He remembered Dumbledore hadn't actually said that Pettigrew had been caught or that there were no cursed rats in the castle -- but, on the other hand, he hadn't said that Peter had not been or that there were rats.

A rumble in his stomach decided him against investigation for now -- it had been a very small, innocuous, almost cute looking white rodent-like thing -- and he let the portrait swing shut. Making his way down to the Great Hall, he found Ginny Weasley was there too, writing on parchment with a ballpoint pen in between sipping from a large steaming mug via a straw. She waved him over as soon as she saw him.

"Hello, Dennis. You're up early. Are you feeling better? I heard you had a funny turn. " Ginny frowned at him. "Did you know you're still wearing your sleep bubble?"

"Is Colin alive?" Dennis asked.

Ginny blinked at him. "...yes?"

"Okay!" Dennis nodded, relieved. "Oh! You're right! I'm still wearing my sleep bubble. "

He pulled his wand out and popped it, grabbing at the table when the sudden rush of air threatened to send him backwards. Since he was holding on anyway, he sat down, and discovered there was a handy bar to hook his feet around to keep himself down.

"Why don't we just use magic to create artificial gravity?" He asked Ginny.

"I've often wondered the same thing," Ginny said absently, underlining bits of her work.

Dennis watched her until his stomach rumbled again. He said "waffles" to his plate as he did every morning. Nothing happened.

"Never giving up hope that that will work, huh?" Ginny flashed him a grin.

"Um. No?" Dennis frowned. "I think that funny turn I had affected my memory," he said, which was somewhat true in a way. "How do I order breakfast again?"

"Carefully," Ginny grinned, "so as not to disturb it. " Dennis looked at her, blankly. She rolled her eyes. "Just grab a couple of food tubes from the dispenser, the same as every morning. "

Food tubes? Food tubes. Okay. Dennis supposed that made sense. Crumbs would be a pain in low gravity, drifting everywhere. Although the bouncing rodents would probably just grab it.

"Ginny," he asked, "Are there cursed rats in Hogwarts?"

"Just Draco," she said without looking up from her work.

"Right," said Dennis, nodding.

Ginny did look up at that. "Usually when I say that, you tell me that a ferret isn't actually a rat. "

"It isn't," Dennis said. "Why is Malfoy still a ferret?"

She blinked at him, and then put her pen carefully down. "Wow," she said. "You really are having memory problems. You remember the curse, surely?"

"The one that the fake Moody did?" Dennis asked.

"No! The one on Mister and Mister Potter," Ginny said, as if this was old news. Dennis gaped. "Harry and Draco? The Restitution Pact? Ringing any bells?"

"No," said Dennis.

"Oh," said Ginny.

"I think you would look lovely in bells," said Blaise, who had drifted up silently and was now taking a place next to Ginny. "Hello, munchkin. I heard you had gone mad. "

"I don't think so," Dennis said. "Did you come to check up on me? That's very nice of you. "

"I came because if I'm not here early, Girl Weasley steals all the coffee," Blaise said. He waved imperiously. "Go fetch me coffee and breakfast. "

"I'm not your minion," Dennis complained, but he got up anyway.

"Dennis is having memory problems," Ginny said to Blaise. "He seems to have forgotten the Harry and Draco thing. "

"I wish I could," Blaise mused.

"What Harry and Draco thing?" Dennis asked.

"Breakfast," Blaise demanded. "Then Girl Weasley will tell you all. "

"Thank you, Boy Zabini. By which I mean 'bite me'," Ginny added.

Dennis hurried as best he could to the dispenser and grabbed a handful of the tubes, which sort of looked like toothpaste or Dean Thomas's oil paints, except they were silver and marked with little pictures of various foods. He took a cup too and, after a bit of fiddling, managed to get it filled with coffee and covered with a top with a straw through it. He bounded back towards Zabini and Ginny, who both had the presence of mind to catch him on the way past and pull him back down to the bench.

"Hey," said Dennis, "this is completely unrelated to the previous discussion, which I haven't forgotten, but I just remembered, so, is there actually a chance the big bubble around the whole castle will go pop?"

"Yes," said Blaise.

"No," said Ginny.

"Yes," Blaise corrected, "but it's not very probable because of--" He waved a hand vaguely. "Magic. "

"A wizard did it," Ginny put in.

Blaise nodded. "A wizard did it. No one knows which one, though. He probably didn't want people to sue him if it breaks and we all die horribly in the vacuum of space. This is still not very likely," he added.

"Right," said Dennis, not actually reassured in the slightest.

More people had come down, each moving slowly along the tables to the food dispenser and then back again. Dennis examined his own tubes without much enthusiasm.

"I don't know why they put pictures on these things," Blaise said. "They all taste the same. Remember when we used to get real meals prepared by real servants and served on real plates with real cutlery?"

"I remember when people did their NEWTs and then actually left the school, instead of hanging around and whining," Ginny said pointedly.

Dennis frowned. "You have done your NEWTs?"

Blaise nodded. "All Outstanding. "

"No, please, be smug," said Ginny. "You do it so rarely. "

"Why are you still here?" Dennis asked.

"Ministry protocol because of something or other. They don't really explain things," Blaise added, "and if you try asking Dumbledore he just starts waffling on about things. Love, usually. He has this whole

speech. It's really quite boring. "

"I think it's sweet," Ginny said. "I like the idea that love conquers all. "

"You're a hopeless romantic and will no doubt die a sad, lonely death, surrounded by cats," Blaise said airily. "Tell him about the Harry and Draco thing. "

Dennis, though, was still watching the people coming in. "Shouldn't Colin have come down to breakfast by now?"

The others shared a look.

"Colin isn't here, Dennis," Ginny said gently.

"You said he was alive!" Dennis said.

"He is, but, well..." Ginny took a deep breath. "You see, Dennis, when people first learned about Muggle devices working on magical fields, your brother was seen with an automatic camera -- and in their hysteria, they, well. "

"He's in Azkaban," Blaise said, "and he's never getting out. "

* * *

The rest of breakfast passed in a blur. Dennis knew Blaise and Ginny had said things and he thought he might have replied once or twice, but none of it had sunk in. When Ritchie Coote, Natalie, and the others had joined them, Blaise had promptly wandered off. Dennis had excused himself not long after,

despite both Ginny and Natalie's concerned questions.

Not wanting to go back to a Gryffindor tower that had no Colin in it -- neither this one nor the one from his original timeline -- he wandered at random instead, nodding hellos to portraits that greeted him and avoiding the occasional roaming suit of armour.

"Shouldn't you be in class?"

Dennis looked up to see Violet peering down at him from her portrait. "I have a study period. "

Violet smiled. "I did so like independent study. I was quite a history buff in my day, dear. The Visigoths were my favourite subject -- big strapping men, conquering the world with their mighty swords. " She sighed, dreamily. "It was a different world in those days. "

"It's a different world now," Dennis said. "That's the problem. " History? It was better than nothing was. He would go to the library. "Thank you for the idea, though. I think I'll do some reading. "

"Don't read too much," warned Violet. "Daddy always said it would overheat the brain. Although he had very strange ideas; once, he spent many months researching ways to reduce the time it took to hard-boil an egg. He was obsessed! He had it down to twelve seconds by the end. That's why they fired him as Potions master. Those poor chickens... Oh," she added, because Dennis had already bounded off back down the corridor. She called after him, "Happy reading!"

"Thanks," Dennis yelled back, already taking the stairs down twelve at a time.

Wizards had of course, built Hogwarts. As architects went, wizards were very clever and often built buildings which really should have fallen down but never, ever did, which was all well and good, but it didn't make up for their tendency to just put rooms, corridors, doors and stairs wherever had seemed a good idea at the time. Thus, despite being on the fourth floor, it was actually faster to get to the library from the third floor by going down to the first, cutting through the Muggle studies classroom (fortunately not in use), and taking the rear staircase by McGonagall's office back up. Almost none of the classrooms seemed to be in use, actually, at least not the ones he passed, which was useful from the

'don't get caught skipping class' perspective, but disquieting from every other.

It was only as Dennis reached the door to the library that he realised how much he missed this, having a big, weird place to live in, knowing all the nooks and crannies. There really was nothing in the world like Hogwarts. It didn't deserve this, to be up here, up in the middle of nowhere, with so few pupils. He had to fix this -- but this time, he wouldn't blunder in and make everything go to pieces, make all those threads snap and everything change. He would have a plan. This meant he had to have knowledge, and what else was library for except knowledge? Except furtive seventh year snogging sessions with Natalie MacDonald, anyway.

The library looked much as he remembered it, complete with a glaring Irma Pince. He made a quick track for the stacks to get out of her line of sight and found that someone had strung handy guide ropes along the shelf edges. There was heat coming off the shelves, not much but enough to notice in the cold of the castle. Dennis presumed it was to keep the books in good condition -- in the research library in the Department of Mysteries some of the shelves had had cooling charms on them for the same reason. A closer look revealed there were little clips holding the books carefully in place.

He clambered his way towards the recent history section. Stacked in order of edition, from the original parchment wound on scrolls, through the parchment bound between slates, and finally to the card bound paper, the numerous versions of Hogwarts: A History occupied an entire bottom shelf. Dennis found the end where the latest version should be, and was -- but as he went to pull it out of the shelf, he noticed a smaller book had slipped in beside it, squeezed in at the very end.

It was titled "Hogwarts: A History -- Supplemental Edition (1995)" and Dennis had to read the by-line three times before he could believe it really said "by H. J. Granger. "

The book recapped much of what Dumbledore had said about Muggles finding out about wizards, and Dennis skimmed it, looking for things he didn't know yet. There were many snide remarks about Ministry personnel, especially Umbridge who had apparently been as nasty, although in differing ways, but Dennis didn't recognise most of the names. Infighting had clearly mixed things up a lot -- he discovered a reference to Arthur Weasley as a cabinet minister, although what a Minister of Cabinets did, Dennis wasn't sure. He also learned that Hermione and Ron were looking after the House Elves the school had left behind. Dennis wondered why Harry hadn't gone with them. Perhaps he had, but it didn't seem likely with Ginny talking about Harry and Draco and Draco being here and, apparently, sometimes a ferret. What was that all about?

A comment about the Restitution Pact that Ginny had mentioned caught his eye, but it was only an oblique reference -- Hermione didn't seem to approve, but insisted that everyone should trust the Headmaster, so Dennis assumed that, whatever it was, it was clearly Professor Dumbledore's idea. He read back and forth, hoping for more details, but there were none. With a sigh, he went to put the small book back in its clips.

There was a small, slim, incredibly silver snake in the gap. It looked oddly -- impossibly -- as if a beam of moonlight had somehow curled up and come to life.

"Hello," said Dennis, softly, in case noise startled it or summoned Pince.

It opened its mouth a little, flicking its tongue out at him, but it didn't approach nor back away. Dennis figured it liked the heat. Presumably, it was a students pet, because he was almost entirely sure moon-snakes weren't actually from the moon. It seemed to be interested in something. He was still carrying food tubes from breakfast, so he fished one out and offered it. The snake turned towards it, tongue flicking faster, but it still didn't move.

"It's okay," Dennis said. "I mean, probably, I don't actually know what snakes eat, but I presume you wouldn't eat anything that was bad for you. "

The snake didn't seem particularly convinced by this. Dennis wished, not for the first time, that they had perfected the charms to grant people temporary parseltongue abilities. Moving slowly, he carefully placed the book on the ground and then himself, stretched out on his belly. As slowly as he could, he moved the food tube towards the snake, squeezing a little out of the end.

"Tasty, tasty stuff," he lied.

His hand was out as far as it would go. He shuffled forward a little on his belly (like a snake, ha hah) until he was almost touching the snake, still at full stretch. It bared its fangs a little in warning. Dennis didn't move. He breathed as gently as he could. Slowly, the snake uncoiled a little, shifting towards him. Its small tongue flickered out again. Its green, slit-pupil eyes blinked at him.

It would be rather silly if this turned out to be Voldemort, Dennis mused, and only just stopped himself from jumping when the snake came forward, wrapping itself around his hand and wrist as it licked at the food tube paste.

The snake was warm and dry, and surprisingly smooth against his skin -- languid, almost liquid. He beamed, carefully stroking it -- her, he decided, carefully stroking her while she ate.

"Aren't you just the prettiest thing?" he asked.

"Yes. She is. "

Dennis turned his head towards the sound and blinked at the very expensive shoes suddenly next to him. He looked slowly up the long, leather-clad legs -- the trousers were tight in a spectacularly obscene sort of way -- and up, across the loose, ruffled, 'I have stolen this from Lord Byron' shirt -- green, though, not the poets white. He followed the line of the collar, open two buttons down, and the long pale curve of a neck behind it, platinum-blond hair curling at the nape, and the thin-pressed lips and the somewhat pointy chin and up to meet stormy grey eyes.

"Hello," he said.

"Take your hands off my snake," Draco said.

"Your snake is on my hand," Dennis said, carefully sitting up without dislodging her. "If I took my hand away, she would fall. "

"Are you trying to be funny?" Draco asked. "Hand her over!"

"No -- I mean, I'm not trying to be funny, and I am trying to hand her over," Dennis said, "but if I move

too quickly I bounce so --"

Draco reached down, one hand grabbing at Dennis's robes, the other at his wrist to hold Dennis steady as Draco pulled him easily to his feet. He waited impatiently until Dennis was still, and then snatched at the snake. She uncoiled easily, sliding around Dennis's wrist and Draco's for a moment like living handcuffs. When Draco tried to move back, she stretched out for the food tube again, so he snatched that as well.

"You shouldn't be feeding her this junk," he complained, although Dennis noticed that didn't stop him letting her continue to eat.

"What should I feed her?" Dennis asked politely.

Draco glared. "You shouldn't be feeding her at all, Creevey. "

Light glinted off the snake's scales as she curled around Draco's wrist and hand. It also glinted off the ring he was wearing on his wedding finger, a gold band with thinly engraved runes running around it. Dennis couldn't see them clearly enough to read them, especially when Draco caught him staring and moved his hand away, almost protectively.

"This is entirely your fault," Draco said. "You do understand that?"

"Yes," said Dennis, who was almost sure he did since everything was. He frowned. "Unless you're not talking about what I think you're talking about, then I might not understand. "

"The Restitution Pact," Draco growled. "Dumbledore's little 'make happy' idea. As if we had any other choice but to agree to his bizarre demands after what you did. You are absolute evidence that we were right to consider mudbloods a threat to our society -- to our very existence!"

"I was just trying to help," said Dennis, guilt and annoyance fighting. "I didn't make you fight. "

"'I didn't make you fight,'" Draco mimicked. "'I was just trying to help!'" It was actually a very accurate copy of Dennis's London accent. Some other time, Dennis might have been impressed.

"I was just trying to keep my family safe," he insisted, voice rising.

"Family? Family?!" Draco took a step towards him. Dennis stood his ground. "What do you know of family? What--"

He stopped mid-sentence, closed his eyes for a moment, then sighed and opened them. Dennis blinked in confusion, feeling he had just missed something.

"I remember Colin," Draco said and Dennis opened his mouth to speak, except Draco wasn't talking to him, but to Harry, who was leaning against the end of the stacks, a little way down from them.

"I know," Harry said.

"Hello, Harry!" Dennis said automatically.

Harry smiled. "Hey, Dennis. Feeling better?"

"Yes, thank you. " Dennis nodded. "Does everybody know I did whatever I did?"

"Everybody knows everything. " Draco sneered at him. "There are no secrets at Hogwarts, haven't you heard? The Headmaster likes us to share. "

Harry coughed, although it sounded suspiciously like he was smothering laughter.

Dennis couldn't work out what was funny and said so. "What's funny?"

"Our entire existence?" Draco suggested.

He glanced at Harry. Harry shook his head slightly. Draco rolled his eyes. Harry's lips pressed tighter together. Draco subsided a little. They had non-verbal communication down. It was very odd to watch, as if Dennis had suddenly gone deaf.

"Hello?" he said. They both looked at him. He smiled sheepishly. "I was just testing I hadn't gone suddenly deaf. "

Draco smirked a little. Harry smacked his arm. "Don't be mean about Luna. "

"No one even mentioned her," Dennis complained.

"Do run along, Creevey," Draco said. He looked pointedly at Harry.

"I thought you had classes," Harry said.

"No?" Dennis lied -- or maybe he was telling the truth, he really didn't know.

Draco made an odd growling noise in the back of his throat.

"Shh," said Harry, reaching out with his left hand to stroke the snake, his fingers brushing her scales and Draco's wrist equally. "You'll get her agitated. You know she picks up on it. "

He was wearing a wedding ring that was the exact same ring as Draco's ring.

Dennis, suddenly remembering Ginny saying 'Mister and Mister Potter' -- which he had somehow missed entirely the first time around -- gaped at them. "You're married?! To each other?!"

Both Harry and Draco stared at him as if he were insane.

"Memory problems," added Dennis quickly.

Draco took a step towards him. Dennis still stood his ground, although the sudden murderous look in Draco's eyes was a little off-putting.

Harry touched Draco's sleeve. His eyes were troubled too, but at least he didn't look like he was contemplating flaying Dennis alive.

"I wasn't going to," Draco began, as if in answer, and then broke off. He glared at Harry. Harry glared back. They both glared. There was glaring. Dennis wondered if he should say something. He was just about to, when Draco snapped "fine," turned on his heel, and stalked off.

Harry sighed. "He won't go far," he said to Dennis. "He'll remember in a second. "

"Remember what?" Dennis asked, confused.

"You really are having memory problems, huh?" Harry asked; his tone was somehow both bitter and amused at the same time.

"Yes," Dennis said. It was true, he realised, although not in the way Harry thought. Memories from this

timeline were starting to mix with the memories from the other one, becoming more real.

They both watched as Draco strode towards the door, bounding a little when he forgot to use small movements. Just as he got to the last of the tables, only a few feet from the exit, he stopped abruptly. He stood there for a moment, with his back to them, seeming to sink in on himself. Just as abruptly as he had stopped, he flung himself down into the closest seat, bouncing a little and earning an ireful glare from Madame Pince. He didn't look their way again -- deliberately, Dennis thought.

"I thought he was up to something," Harry said. "That's what really started it. It doesn't matter that I was right, or what he was doing, or why he was doing it. "

"He was trying to save his family," Dennis said. "That's what people do. "

Harry looked at him oddly for a moment, and then smiled. "Yes," he said. "I suppose it is. "

He sat down, leaning against the stacks. Dennis sat down next to him, trying and failing to brush dust off his robes. Lying belly down in the Library was clearly not the cleanest of plans.

"We were on opposite sides, of course. We always are. We push and pull at each other, but we somehow never end up in the centre. Hermione said--" Harry chuckled. "Well, never mind what Hermione said. There was lots of 'sublimate' this and 'transference' that in it. "

"I read her book," Dennis said, picking it up. "Well, it's more like an appendix than a book. Not a person appendix, a book appendix. I don't think you could write on a person's appendix, especially if it was still inside them. "

"I don't know about that," Harry mused. "Umbridge had this quill--"

"I remember that," Dennis said. Lee Jordan had told him about it in the original timeline. Harry was giving him an odd look, so he figured that never happened in this timeline and shrugged. "I mean, I

heard about it. Writing in your own blood. "

"They say she used it to write her own suicide note," Harry said, "or was forced to. "

They both shuddered. Dennis put Hermione's book back on the shelf, carefully held in the clips.

"What was she talking about?" he asked. "Hermione, I mean, when she was saying about sublimation?"

"Family," Harry said. "The things we want--"

"--and the things we need," Dennis finished. "I keep hearing that. Professor Vector said it about social networks, and Professor Dumbledore said it about love. "

"Love, friendship, hate, enmity... That's what it comes down to, Dennis. That's what everything comes down to, I think: need and desire. Which," Harry added, smiling a little, "is never as easy or as obvious as it might sound. Draco and me... In some ways, we are very much alike, I think. We just go about things differently, and then we end up fighting and fighting and fighting. Until we get to here. "

"The Restitution Pact," said Dennis. Harry nodded. Dennis waited. Finally, he said, "I know the words but I still don't know what they mean. "

"It was Dumbledore's idea," Harry said. "Personally, I think he reads too many romance novels. It's a bit Romeo and Juliet, except without the underage, poison, stabbing ending. " He considered this and added, "Probably. "

"'Two houses both alike in dignity'," Dennis quoted. "Oh! I get it! It's like when Kings used to marry their daughters off to make alliances between different countries. "

"It was an attempt to stop the infighting between Ministry factions and between the Ministry and

Voldemort," Harry agreed. "It was a 'choice' of course, but with the fate of the wizarding world resting on our shoulders, I was hardly going to say no. "

Dennis tried not to look disbelieving, but he clearly failed miserably, because Harry chuckled.

"Alright," he admitted. "I said no loudly and at length, but it was the right thing to do. Draco was just as -- Draco was much, much louder, to be honest, but Lucius had been named as a Death Eater and his family was in a crisis. There were rumours--" Harry winced and rubbed at his head.

"Is your scar hurting?" Dennis asked. "Is it the evil baby Dark Lord?"

"No," said Harry. It was clearly Dennis's day for people looking at him strangely. "Also those rumours I mentioned were completely spurious and unfounded rumours of no consequence and anything you may have heard about Draco being a rent boy is probably some kind of weird whore-complex fantasy that I have--"

He broke off, leaned sideways so he could see around the stacks, and flipped Draco off.

"Let me see that ring," Dennis said, suspicious, making a grab for Harry's hand and missing entirely because Harry had superb reflexes and Dennis had actually made Madame Hooch cry during his broomstick training lessons. "It's not just symbolic, is it? Why can't Draco leave the library?"

"It isn't the library," Harry said. "It's distance from me. If he gets too far away for too long--"

"--he turns back into a ferret," Dennis realised. "That's horrible!"

"I said he complained much louder. " Harry sighed. "It is, though. The Ministry wanted to be sure we would play nicely together, and Dumbledore seemed to think it was a good idea. "

"Can't he just take his ring off?" Dennis asked.

"Oh, no, it's proximity to me, not the rings, that fixes the ferret thing," Harry said. "The rings have their own effect, though. They, well. " He held his hand out so Dennis could look at the ring properly.

Dennis figured that if Blaise had done his NEWTs but Ginny was still in school, it must be her NEWT year, which made it his OWL year. He hoped that was adequate cover for him being able to read the runes as Harry turned his hand over. "Soul bonding? I thought that was a myth. "

"It's all too real," Harry said.

"You can hear everything he's thinking?" Dennis asked. "And he can hear everything that you're thinking?"

"Not everything," Harry corrected, "but pretty much, yeah. "

Dennis tried to imagine having someone listening to everything he was thinking. He didn't listen to everything he was thinking himself, so he couldn't see how anyone else would cope -- and to have your own thoughts on top of that! He had thought the mix of memories was bad enough, but at least they were fixed and in the past. If they kept coming... He shivered. "That's horrible too. "

"It isn't so bad," Harry assured him. "Well, maybe at the start it was, but I got used to it. And... I don't know. When you're forced together like that, even if you're resentful and everything, being in someone's head, knowing all their reactions to things -- their real reactions, I mean, not the ones they show people..."

"My dad used to say that if you wanted to really know a man, you had to walk ten miles in their shoes. Not literally though," Dennis added. "That really confused me when I was younger!"

Harry nodded. "That is it, exactly. Draco is smart and he can be quite funny when he's not being cruel,

and he is quite attractive in a pointy sort of way. Okay, he has his faults, I'm not denying that -- many, many faults--"

He grinned. Dennis wandered what Draco had said - thought - thought-said. It was a bit rude have secret private conversations with people while talking with other people. On the other hand, it would be very cool to have during boring lessons.

"I would never fall asleep in History of Magic again!" he announced.

Harry blinked at him. "Um. Okay?"

"Wait," said Dennis, because a previous bit of the conversation had bounced back to the forefront of his mind again. "You're married? I mean, married, married. Properly--"

Harry ducked his head, cheeks reddening a little.

"Oh," said Dennis. "...that's horrible?"

"I, um," Harry stammered.

"Ohh," Dennis said. "Right. Well -- okay. ...everyone thought you were rivals. "

"We were," Harry said. "I mean, we still are, really. It's just... I don't know what it is. I guess, in a way, Draco is my family now. " He pulled a face. "That sounded a lot better in my head than it did out loud. "

"No, it didn't," said Draco, who had come back to join them. "Creevey! Stop entertaining your prurient interest! It's bad enough when Blaise does it. "

"I was obsessed with him during sixth year," Harry said. "I have no idea why. "

"Perhaps because I'm your better in every way?" Draco suggested.

Harry smirked. Draco scowled. Dennis pouted. "Stop having silent conversations!"

"I want to go," Draco whined. "Potter!"

"I'm busy," Harry said.

They both glared. Married couples were supposed to bicker, Dennis thought, and almost said it aloud before deciding it would probably not be helpful. Harry and Draco were silently arguing again. You could tell by the way their eyes flashed, the flare of nostrils or the shape of a mouth -- the way they angled themselves towards each other, bristling, aggressive. You could tell by the way that they were suddenly the centre of each other's universes, as if Dennis had mysteriously vanished.

Dennis had never realised before how much hate and love could look alike.

"Fine," snapped Harry finally, springing to his feet, catching himself on the bookshelf instead of Draco, though that would have been far easier. "I'll see you later, Dennis. "

"Creevey," Draco sneered, turning on his heel.

They left together, close enough that their arms brushed, and still far, far apart. Like the Earth and the Moon, always in motion, always pulling at each other.

Dennis sat there, watching them go, and for a moment felt terribly, terribly alone.

* * *

Dennis was dreaming again. It was the same dream. He felt weak and thought, this is the moon, we have to exercise six times as hard to get the same effect, to avoid muscles decaying so much that to return to the Earth would crush us. He didn't get up, though. The thing below him, the crystal, turned slowly, expanded slowly. Phase-change boundary, he thought. Temporal condensation -- we fix events by observing them. When we know things, they become solid. The crystal could be shattered, though. The threads could be broken. He knew this. He knew all this. He had been here before. He didn't move.

"I'm not moving," he told the dark. "I know what you want, but I am not going to move. "

His breath rushed out of his body to shape the words, to focus the sound. Absolute engrossment, Flitwick said somewhere and somewhere else it was Malfoy, Draco saying, you have to decide what is really important to you, and go for it, any way that you can.

"No," Dennis said. "I'm not moving. "

But he breathed -- and his breath moved, and the strings trembled, the threads, shifting at his words, moving away, becoming entangled.

"Oh, come on!" Dennis yelled, lunging for them, late, too late, catching only broken edges. "That isn't fair! It's not--"

Natalie was in the room, shaking his arm, and Dennis almost asked her how she had gotten into his dreams before he realised that he had gotten out of them.

"Uh," he said, intelligently.

"Get up," she ordered. "Today is Quidditch!"

* * *

By the time that they made it down to the Quidditch pitch, the teams were already out. Dennis and Natalie grabbed seats with Ginny, Blaise and Graham just as the match commentary began.

"It's Slytherin versus Gryffindor," Kirke said, Sonorous magnified, "but you all knew that, so let us get right into it. Here comes the toss -- Gryffindor today not fielding Ginny Weasley, a perhaps surprising tactic on the part of team coach Harry Potter, who is with me here in the box. "

"Um. Hi," said Harry.

"Eloquent as ever, Potter," said Draco.

"And Draco Potter, Slytherin's team coach as well, as you just heard. " Kirke explained, "Slytherin are fielding a non-traditional four Chaser/one Beater combination--"

"As now permitted by the new International Quidditch Federation rules," Draco slipped in smoothly. Harry snorted and Draco started to say something else, but the Quaffle went up, and Kirke's play-by-play interrupted them.

"Tense game," said Graham cheerfully.

It was, not simply because the teams matched up quite well -- Ginny, it seemed, had been swapped out for the substitute keeper, which made up for the Slytherins' extra chaser -- but because Draco was throwing endless snide remarks into the commentary, and Harry was throwing back endless cheap insults. Kirke tried talking louder and faster, but it didn't have much effect. Indeed, the louder and faster he got, the louder and more personal Harry and Draco got.

"A splendid feint by Slytherin seeker Weatherington there has caught Peakes outside the field and--"

"I, of course, personally trained my Seeker," Draco interrupted, "while leaving the training of the other positions to each of my respective expert assistants, rather than trying to be a potter of all trades. "

"I think it's 'Jack' of--" Kirke tried.

"I see you taught him everything you know," Harry put in, smiling at Draco, before turning to Kirke and continuing with, "Weatherington, of course, demonstrates how over reliance on the capabilities of the broom rather than the rider, while often showy, can harm one's overall performance. "

Kirke nodded frantically. "That's certainly--"

"I see you're holding a chaser back at the goals, as if we wouldn't notice you fielding a second keeper just because you kept the position names. " Draco smiled unpleasantly. I would've thought a Gryffindor would have more respect for the spirit of the law. "

"I would've thought a Slytherin had more respect for ancient tradition than to change their team set-up just for a cheap advantage -- oh, but I forgot!" Harry exclaimed. "You only like to keep things the way they are when they work in your favour. "

Slytherin's Beater flashed past, smacking a Bludger that had been mere feet from crashing into the box back at the Gryffindor chasers who deftly split apart and reformed. The added keeper and the beater disadvantage meant Gryffindor were actually nudging ahead on goals. Neither Draco nor Harry

appeared to notice any of this.

"Really," sneered Draco. "Of course, absolutely, Potter. You're right. I have been playing off my celebrity status to avoid ever having to pay for all those rules I continuously break. No, wait," he drawled. "That wasn't me at all. "

"I paid," Harry snapped. "Boy, have I paid! It was you who always--"

"Of course it was me!" Draco laughed, sharp and bitter. "You never started anything in your life! You never had people bending over backwards for their precious Potter. You never had to spend a summer recovering from a dozen hexes--"

"People defend their friends," Harry insisted. "Perhaps that concept hasn't reached Slytherin yet. "

"Yes. Their wonderful, lovable, innocent friends. Like the Weasley twins with their 'jokes' and 'pranks'? Like the girl -- what is a bat-bogey here or there? Absolutely, you should defend them. After all, we were only Slytherins. " Draco sneered. "I forgot Gryffindor rules only apply to Gryffindors. "

"And what exactly is that supposed to mean?" Harry demanded.

Draco sat back. "You work it out, Potter. "

"And coming in now," Kirke started desperately.

Harry talked right over him. "You're right; why should I expect a Slytherin to talk straight? You're all so crooked, it's a wonder you can walk down corridors without bouncing off the walls. "

Draco laughed. "You're a fine one to talk about 'straight', Potter. "

"Oh, don't even go there, Potter!" Harry growled. "You and Krum--"

"Krum and I?! You and Cedric--"

"Don't you--"

"I'll do whatever I damn please, you--"

The crowd roared, Dennis and Blaise among them, drowning Draco out, cheering a small gold ball buzzing in a dragon-hide gloved hand.

"Weatherington got the snitch," Kirke bellowed. "Weatherington-- Oh! However, it seems Madame Hooch has ruled Demelza Robins last second goal fair, which, yes, brings Gryffindor's point total up to-- It's a draw! We have a draw! Well done, everybody!"

Both teams rose to the cheers of the crowd.

"Yes," said Draco, voice icy. "Well done everybody. "

Harry stood up abruptly, kicked his stool over, and stormed out of the box.

* * *

"I think the crush is thinning," Dennis said. "We should be able to get down now. "

The teams came out of their changing rooms and half the people who were trying to leave abruptly changed directions to descend on the players instead.

"Or not," Dennis added.

"We could just go down the back stairs," Blaise said, pointing to the door at the rear corner of their box. The other four looked at him. "Didn't you know about that? I thought we were just being sociable. "

"We could be sociable and inside somewhere warm," Natalie huffed, heading towards the door. The others followed.

"I have warming charms," Blaise said. Ginny and Dennis both nodded.

"I have butterbeer," Graham said, waving his hip flask.

"I hate all of you," Natalie said, finding the stairs and starting down them. "I'm plotting your deaths. " Dennis cast a warming charm on her, and she smiled at him. "Except Dennis. But the rest of you. "

"I could make it up to you," said Blaise, leering.

"See, you're not even trying now," Ginny said. "Don't you get bored of hitting on everything that moves?"

"That's what ropes and handcuffs are for," said Blaise easily, and caught Ginny when she slipped on the stairs.

She glared at him, straightened her robes, 'hmph!'ed, and pushed past Natalie to go down the stairs first.

Blaise grinned at her back.

"I want to be you when I grow up," Graham said. "Teach me your secrets, oh, wise master. "

"What's in it for me?" Blaise asked.

Graham waved the hip flask at him again. "Butterbeer?"

"Your bribes are weak and lame," Blaise said, taking it.

"You can have Dennis," Graham suggested.

"Oi!" Dennis looked back to glare. "I'm not a minion!"

"Of course not," Graham said in a placating sort of way.

"I'm not," Dennis said, not looking where he was going. "I'm -- oof!"

He had bumped into Natalie, because she had stopped at the foot of the stairs. Natalie had stopped because Ginny had stopped just through the doorway out. Ginny had stopped, the others quickly realised, because there were raised voices.

"What is going on?" Blaise asked, trying to push past. Ginny shifted a little, but both Dennis and Natalie managed to get out ahead of Blaise.

"I'll just stay back here, then," Graham said, sitting down on the steps. Blaise absently tossed back Graham's hip flask leaving him entirely distracted fumbling the catch.

They couldn't make out the words, but the tones were clear and angry, the voices familiar.

"Is that not," Dennis started, and Ginny hushed him. She tried to move back, but with the others crowding in the doorway there was nowhere to go, so instead she shuffled sideways a little and pressed back against the wooden stands. Cloth banners hung down from the box above and the wall curved, obscuring their view, obscuring the view of them.

Something sharp said, then, rising in pitch, not quite shrill but edged that; an answering rumble, heavy, dark and bitter; the return volley, soft, fast, hissed; a bark of laughter; an enraged yell. Silence -- save for the thud of approaching footsteps.

"Potter!" Draco, yelling, was instantly recognisable. Anger made his voice tight but no less posh, any less deliberately accent-less. "Will you just-- Harry!"

"Well I just what?" Surrey vowels, deepened, bare only the barest resemblance to the tones Dennis most usually associated with Harry -- laughter in his voice after Quidditch, or the bored tolerance of his 'hello, Dennis'. Still, it was hard to deny Harry had said them when the boy -- the young man in question came around the corner saying them, not looking back, not looking their way either.

Dennis could feel the words "Hello, Harry!" trying to get out of his mouth, but fortunately Natalie clamped a hand over his mouth, and Blaise pulled them both back into the shadows of the stands, against the doorway. Ginny shifted again, partially obscured by the drapery.

"I didn't mean," Draco started, and Harry laughed.

"No, you never do, do you? Just--" Harry made a violent motion with his hands. "Go away. "

"I can't," Draco snapped.

Harry spun back towards him, yelled. "Go away!"

"I. Can't. " Draco bit each word off.

Harry swore and started storming away, but Draco closed the distance between them faster, pulling Harry around and slamming him back against the opposite wall to the onlookers. Low gravity made them all super-strong in a way. People weighed less. Harry shoved back, but Draco had better leverage, and they went back into the wall. Harry struggled, gasping. Draco raised a fist.

Dennis tried to go to Harry, but Blaise stopped him, lifted him off the ground so his feet waved wildly but he went nowhere. Ginny's hand was on her wand, but she hadn't drawn it yet.

"I can't," repeated Draco again, softer. His hand dropped. "Do you think I haven't tried? Everything that has ever gone wrong in my life, everything that has never turned out the way it should, the way I was always told it would be -- every time, it has been you. It's always been you. "

"Let me go," Harry said, listlessly, without force.

Draco did not. "It should've been glorious. I -- we, Potter, we should've been glorious. This is just..."

"A joke?" Harry suggested, lips twisting in a bitter impression of a smile.

"Absurd," Draco corrected. "We live in a bubble on a moon, trapped in a castle we have out grown, repeating ourselves, over and over. "

"And you're wearing leather trousers," Harry said, and this time his smile was almost real.

Draco's smile was more of a smirk. "And I'm wearing leather trousers. "

Dennis had stopped fighting Blaise, but the older boy hadn't let go. He was holding Dennis close and still, so that Dennis could feel the heat of him, his breath, and his calmly beating heart. Ginny was motionless, standing just in the corner of his eye. Her hand was still of her wand, frozen, knuckles white. Her hair blocked his view of her face.

"What are we doing?" Harry asked, plaintively.

"Surviving," Draco said. "It's what Slytherins do. "

"I'm not a Slytherin," Harry said.

"Maybe you're just too stupid to die, then. " Draco reached out to touch Harry, left handed, his fingers curling against the nape of Harry's neck. Harry caught Draco's wrist with his own left hand, but didn't pull it away.

They were close now, so close their bubbles brushed together when they moved, rippling a little; merging a little.

"It's always been you," Draco said again. He leaned forward again.

"This isn't love," Harry said. "This isn't what-- It isn't--"

"This is. " Draco closed the distance between them, trapping Harry's arm between their bodies, Harry's hand still on his, their matching rings catching the lights from the pitch. The bubbles rippled, splurged, and merged, until there was only one. Harry's eyes closed. Lips found each other. Kissed.

Dennis held his breath, could feel Natalie and Ginny doing the same on either side.

"We're Slytherins," Blaise said in his ear, breathing, still breathing. "We take care of what is ours. "

There was a faint gasp behind them -- Graham, Dennis thought -- and it almost seemed Harry and Draco pulled apart at the noise. Neither looked their way. They looked at each other. Only each other.

That's how Draco looks, Dennis thought. That's how Draco has always looked at Harry. Ginny shifted, and he caught sight of her properly, and thought, her too.

(Her hand was resting on her belly.

"Oh. " Dennis blinked. "Congratulations. "

"Thank you. " Ginny smiled. "We were going to keep it under wraps for a while, but you know how reporters are with Harry. ")

"I know the password to the prefect's bathroom," Draco said.

Harry smiled a genuine, almost happy smile. "Come on, then. "

"That was rather the intention, yes," Draco said, airily. He dropped his hand, but Harry took it again, and tugged at him. Hand in hand, they drifted and bounded away.

"You still love him," Dennis said. Everyone else was watching the other two go and they flinched a little when he spoke, loud after they had been so quiet. "Harry, I mean. "

"So what?" asked Ginny, her voice sharp.

"So--" Dennis shrugged a little. The motion made him shift against Blaise, who let go. "So, nothing, I suppose. "

"I could never begrudge Harry anything he wanted," Ginny said.

"Harry said Malfoy was his family now," Dennis said, and felt bad when Ginny flinched away from him, face pale.

"Maybe," she said carefully, "maybe Draco is; but so are we. All of us. That isn't nothing. It's important. "

("You have to decide what is really important to you," Draco said, "and go for it, any way you can. ")

"This is the way things are now," Ginny said, and then with false cheer, "right then! Crowd is gone! Back to the castle!"

Without waiting for a reply, she strode off. It wasn't quite a run, but it didn't need to be when every step took her six feet.

"This is the way things are," Blaise repeated, quietly.

"Gryffindors take care of what is ours as well," Dennis told him. "We just do it differently. I have to-- I have to go. "

He hurried after Ginny, after Harry and Draco, but by the time he had gotten clear of the pitch and along the guide ropes, they were all long gone.

* * *

Dennis dreamed. It was nothing new. Everything was old, even when you came to it again for the first time. Hogwarts was older than they all were -- implacable, ancient stone. Even the renovations had felt old, as if age had crept across the new work like crawling coral, made it part of itself.

"Not this again! Look, if doing nothing doesn't work, and doing anything doesn't work, what's the point?" Dennis asked. There was no answer. He hadn't really expected one. "What am I supposed to do?"

The threads trembled at his voice, but they offered no solutions, just a bunch of names, connected by lines.

"You haven't even got it right," Dennis complained. "This network doesn't match anything. Which timeline is it supposed to be? Why do I keep asking questions when I know there will be no answers?"

There was no answer.

"That's what I thought you would say," Dennis said.

He examined the threads. These over here all went into that name: Harry Potter. These others over here went into that name: Draco Malfoy.

"That's wrong for a start," Dennis said, grabbing both names. "They go together in this time, see?"

The threads resisted and started to fray. Annoyed, he yanked harder, pulling Harry and Draco around each other and tying them together. It wasn't a particularly innovative knot. He had never been a

scout or even a cub or whatever came before cubs, if anything did. People probably used better ones to tie their shoes. Still, it was a knot, and the threads held together, mostly, even if there were some loose ends flapping around in the complete lack of a breeze -- some loose ends, and a single entirely loose thread, twisting between his hands.

Dennis held it up, expecting it to dissolve away but instead it just fluttered off his fingers, like a stray hair caught on a breath, and tumbled away, growing as it did so, catching on other threads as it lengthened, until he couldn't tell it from any of the other threads in the network.

"Okay," said Dennis slowly. "I think you should know that, if that was supposed to be revelatory, it didn't actually work! I still have no idea what this is all about! It's all a bit too vague, really. Can't you just paint it on a sign or--"

Something.

He was addressing the canopy of his bed.

Sighing, Dennis pushed himself up into sitting position, looking around. "Bugger," he said, finally, got up, got dressed, and went to get some breakfast.

Sucking on a food tube that advertised itself as being bacon and eggs and which tasted very much like all the other ones, he made his way through the castle, nodding hello to a portrait or two but passing no other students until he got to the library. Natalie, Graham, Ginny and Blaise were all already camped around the largest of the tables.

"Den!" Natalie waved him over, ignoring the glare from Madame Pince and the sharp 'hsss!'

"Hey," Dennis said, much more quietly, as he crossed to join them.

He fumbled with the chair for a moment before he managed to get both it and himself on the floor and

in the right place. Low gravity was really annoying. Practice was obviously called for -- practice, or them not being on the sodding moon. Draco had been right. Life was absurd.

"--kin?"

Dennis realised Blaise had been speaking for a bit already, but he couldn't remember what had been said.

"Are you okay?" Natalie asked, touching his hand.

"I'm fine, thank you for asking," Dennis said automatically. He looked at the papers spread out. "What are we studying?"

"Everything," said Ginny.

"Nothing," said Blaise.

"We haven't decided yet," said Graham. "We were waiting for you. "

"Really?" asked Dennis.

"No," said Natalie, shaking her head. The others grinned. Dennis did too. Ginny turned a laugh into a cough before the Librarian's attention could turn her way. She needn't have bothered, though. Madame Pince was distracted by the arrival of the Misters Potter, arguing as ever.

"It's a stupid plan. Your plans are ordinarily stupid, so this should go without saying, yet even taking that into account," Draco said, "it's an incredibly stupid plan. "

"We can't all spend our days standing around looking pretty," Harry complained.

"I don't see why not," Blaise mused.

Draco, judging from his expression, was thinking the same thing. Harry laughed at some unspoken comment.

"Mister Potter!" Madame Pince -- it wasn't actually a yell, Dennis realised, so much as an incredibly well focused whisper, like a laser, but with sound. "Be quiet, or leave at once!"

"Sorry, Madame Pince," said Harry, quickly steering Draco towards their table.

"Hello, Harry!" said Dennis.

"Hey, Dennis. " Harry deliberately squeezed in between Blaise and Ginny. Blaise didn't bother moving, but smiled wider.

Draco cleared his throat pointedly and, when that didn't work, shoved Blaise, who pouted a little, but finally moved around to sit next to Dennis. The smirk came back.

"I'm still underage," Dennis told him.

Draco pulled a face. "Do you have nothing better to do, Zabini?"

"I genuinely don't," Blaise said. "Unless you were offering?"

"You're bordering on self-parody," Ginny said firmly. "Could we please get back to studying school things?"

"Sure," said Harry. "What are you guys looking at?"

"Let us hope it's not potions," Draco said. Harry snapped a look off at him, and Draco just smiled a little.

"We hadn't really decided," Natalie said.

"Potter wants to drop rocks on the Dark Lord from space," Draco said. "It's a very clever and well thought out plan. "

He could have been more sarcastic, Dennis decided, but he probably would have had to try very, very, very, very hard.

"He would never see it coming," Harry insisted.

"How would you aim them?" Ginny asked. "It's not just like throwing a Quaffle. "

"It sort of is," Graham said. "Like how you can throw one far here, you could throw them for thousands and thousands of miles in space. "

"The Earth goes round," Natalie pointed out. "You would have to get the timing right. "

Draco was staring at them. "Why are you even considering this? 'Rocks from space' isn't a good plan. It's not even a plan. It's rocks from space!"

The others all shushed him quickly.

Dennis watched them as they all talked, leaning in to keep their voices low. A silencing charm would have been better, but some of the books were sensitive to magic, so they had to settle for more Muggle methods. Harry and Graham were arguing enthusiastically for the plan, Natalie was trying to interject logic, and Draco, Blaise and Ginny were all pointing out flaws. Draco kept touching Harry as he talked and, once, Dennis saw Draco's moon-snake slide out of his sleeve to curl around Harry's wrist. Ginny noticed it too, and her eyes darkened for a moment, but she kept right on talking.

"She was going to have your baby," he said, right in the middle of a discussion about runes and numerology and space cannon launch vectors. "Ginny, I mean. Harry's baby. "

There was a long, startled pause.

Ginny said, very quietly, "what?"

"What?" Draco practically yelled.

"I have told you!" Madame Pince did yell. "Out! All of you! Out, out, out!"

She stormed down towards their table, and they quickly grabbed their stuff, hurrying ahead of her towards the door. The moment they were outside, Draco grabbed Dennis and shoved him back against it.

"What do--" he started.

"AWAY!" yelled Pince.

Draco, dragging Dennis behind him, bounded up the corridor. The others followed after.

"What do you mean, she had his baby?" Draco asked, shaking Dennis. "Why would you say that?"

"It's true. In the future. The other future, not this one," Dennis said. He had no idea what he was doing. This wasn't a plan. It was starting to seem to be suicide, judging by the look in Draco's eyes. "Before, when I knew about Moody, that wasn't a guess or anything--"

"I knew you were faking the memory loss thing," Draco said.

The others had caught up to them -- they were in a landing, between stairwells, a space open enough that Dennis could see there was no one else around -- and Blaise and Harry dragged Draco off him.

"I travelled back from the future," Dennis confessed. "I know you won't believe me. Colin didn't then, either. It's true though. You were right -- this isn't how the world should be. It's my fault. Everything is. "

"Dennis," said Natalie, as gently as she could, "are you having another funny turn?"

"No! That wasn't -- that was me, arriving here!" Dennis explained. "I fell through an age line and got separated from my past self and then I ended up here in my other past self, but later than the first past self, but not as late as my present, which is your future!"

"...huh?" said Harry.

"It's not important," Dennis said. "I changed things. When I started out, the fake Moody tricked you, You-Know-Who rose. Then, in your seventh year, the school was run by Death Eaters, and you came back, and there was a huge battle, and you won, but Colin died. And I tried to fix it. I tried to make it better. But it just made everything terrible. That's how I knew Moody was a fake, because I had lived

through it before. "

"Umbridge," said Harry. "You knew about Umbridge. And you didn't know about the Pact. "

"I think he has cracked under the strain of the OWLs," Graham said. "Where is your Time-Turner?"

"I didn't use one," Dennis insisted. "Temporal projection is a known phenomenon!"

"It is," Ginny said. Everybody looked at her. "What? I just read about it, is all. I wasn't going to try and use it to change anything so that Harry wasn't married to Malfoy or anything. "

"What happened to not begrudging Harry what he wants?" Blaise asked.

"I, um. He could have Draco as well?" Ginny said.

"I don't do threesomes and I had him first," Draco said. "Could we get back to the bit where the cheating hussy is having my Harry's baby?"

"Draco!" Harry gasped, indignantly, sounding very much like Hermione for a second.

"Ginny and Harry are married in my future," Dennis said. "It's not perfect, but it's better than this, except for Colin being dead, but here he's in Azkaban, so that's almost as bad. The Muggles don't know us there, and Hogwarts is still in Scotland, and everyone here survives the war, even, which is pretty implausible when you think about it. "

"Everyone?" Harry asked, looking at Draco.

"My parents lived?" Draco asked.

Dennis blinked. "You believe me?"

"Not in the slightest," Draco said. "How do you do this temporal projection? Can you do it again? Can you put everything back exactly the way it was?"

"I don't want it back exactly the way it was," Dennis said. "I have to save Colin!"

"Are you insane?" Draco bellowed, making a grab for him.

Blaise got there first, pulling Dennis back. "No killing the munchkin," he said, waggling a finger at Draco.

"Thanks," said Dennis. "Also, stop calling me munchkin!"

Blaise pinched his cheek. Dennis swatted at Blaise's hand.

"Age line," said Natalie. "You fell though an age line?"

"Yes," said Dennis. "I went through it once before too, and I came out all ghostly -- oh! That would prove it!"

"There is an age line around the top of the Astronomy Tower," Harry said. "It only activates outside of classes -- it keeps underage pupils away from the, uh--"

"Nookie spot?" suggested Blaise.

"I was going to say parapet," Harry said, "but, yeah. "

"To the Astronomy Tower," Draco proclaimed.

"Okay!" said Dennis.

"I still don't believe you," Draco added.

"Okay. " Dennis nodded.

"This is fun!" Blaise clapped. "Everybody together, up on the Astronomy Tower--"

"We're underage," Dennis, Natalie, and Graham chorused.

"It's like I have some kind of reputation," Blaise mused.

"Did everyone miss the part where I proclaimed 'to the Astronomy Tower'?" Draco asked.

"No?" Dennis shook his head. "I don't think so. "

"Then," Draco asked pointedly, "why are we still standing around here?"

"Oh, you meant now," Graham said. "Right. Can we swing by the Great Hall for some more food tubes first?"

Draco growled something undecipherable and stormed off. Halfway down the corridor he stopped and looked back. "Well?!"

There was a chorus along the lines of, "Oh! Right! Yes! Following now!"

"I am surrounded by fools, idiots, and Gryffindors," Draco said, starting off again.

"It's like he said the same thing three times," Graham said cheerfully, and then, "ow!" because Ginny had smacked him. "You're a very violent young woman. "

The journey to the Astronomy Tower was an adventure fraught with boredom, because Draco refused to believe the fastest route was out the window and across the roof of the Owlery and tried to take them via the West Stairs which, as Dennis had tried to explain they would, turned ninety degrees when they were half-way up, forcing the group to backtrack almost all the way down to the dungeons before they could come up to the tower. They all crowded in the entrance until Blaise pointed out this was stupid, and then Harry, Draco, Blaise and Ginny all went out onto the parapet.

"Right," said Draco. "Pritchard, come here!"

"I'll bounce off," Graham complained. "It will hurt. "

"You're such a baby," Natalie said.

"Yes, but," Graham pointed out, "I'm not a baby that has snapped his neck by being catapulted back down the stairs by an over enthusiastic discrimination against the young. "

"You could just walk in slowly," Natalie said. She stepped across the threshold, managed another half step, and then yelped as she was shoved back across it. Dennis and Graham caught her before she

could go tumbling. "There," she said, a little breathless. "Easy. "

"And the point of that was?" Ginny asked.

"To demonstrate the age line was there and active," Draco said.

"Okay," said Ginny, nodding, "but we all knew that already. "

"You people really have no sense of drama," Draco complained.

"Come on then, Dennis," said Harry.

"Um. Okay?" Dennis shuffled up the entrance and reached out with his hands, feeling for the resistance of the wards. He edged slowly forward, feeling the air grow thick.

"Get on with it," said Graham, giving him a sharp shove.

Dennis stumbled forward a step and the wrench sensation came again and with it a curious feeling of doubling, being both inside and outside at once. He came forward, a silver shade, older than his body, gleaming and translucent.

Blaise, who had just taken a seat on the balustrade, jerked back up again.

"Holy shit," said Harry.

"Great Merlin's sweaty balls," Draco swore.

"...ewww," Natalie said, although whether at temporal-ghost-Dennis or Draco's choice of epithet was unclear.

Something -- time, perhaps, and space -- was tugging at Dennis, pulling him on, but he didn't want to go. Only half out of his body, he struggled backwards. Natalie and Graham grabbed at him, pulling him back. There was a feeling like something breaking, an elastic tether snapping, and he jerked back, in flesh again, solid. The three of them fell together, though fortunately only into the wall, not off the landing and down the stairs.

"You really did travel in time," Harry said, but he was looking at Ginny, not Dennis.

"Yes," said Dennis. "And I'm going to do it again, too. "

"How?" said Graham.

"Chuck him over the age line," Draco ordered imperiously.

"That won't work," Dennis said, helping Natalie up. "I mean, it would," he added, as he helped Graham up as well, "but I think I would just go forward, and I don't want to go forward in this timeline, I want to go back and make it so I don't screw everything up. "

"It was Draco and Harry who started the Diagon Alley riots," Blaise said. Draco and Harry both glared at him. "You did. Everyone knows. "

"It was Potter's fault," Draco snapped.

Harry sighed in a long-suffering sort of way. "I didn't make Crouch turn you into a ferret. How many times do we have to go over this?"

"At least one more?" Ginny suggested. The glares swung her way. "Sorry, not helping. "

"Harry only made the suggestion that Crouch should turn you into a ferret because Colin told Harry how I told him how Crouch turned you into a ferret in the first timeline," Dennis explained.

There was a slight pause as everyone parsed that, and then Draco made a noise of disbelief. "I'm still a ferret?!"

"No!" Dennis shook his head. "It was only the once and only briefly that time, not cursed like here!"

"That's good then. " Draco nodded. "Chuck him over the age line!"

"No," said Graham and Blaise at the same time.

"How do you go backwards?" Natalie asked.

This was a good question. Dennis wasn't entirely sure. "I need a power source. There was a big bell jar of temporal distillate in the Department of Mysteries in my timeline, so perhaps--"

The others shook their heads.

"The London Ministry was one of the first things the Muggles took down," Ginny said.

Draco sneered. "Magic near their precious Minister, how dreadful. "

"Prime Minister," Natalie corrected.

"I'm attempting to care," Draco said, "but it's just too much effort. "

Harry covered a grin.

"Tantra is a good power source," Blaise offered. "No? No? No. It's not like we know anyone who has been experimenting with time. "

Dennis beamed. "Yes, I do!" He bounded off down the stairs. "Violet's dad!"

The others exchanged looks and followed after.

"Just so long as it's not Dumbledore," Blaise said. "Strange, strange man. "

"Good lemon drops, though," Harry said.

Blaise eyed him. "You didn't--"

Harry looked appalled. "Dear god, no!"

"Okay. " Blaise nodded. "Now, let us never speak of this again. "

"Agreed," Harry said fervently.

"Telepathy sucks," said Draco.

"This is more exercise than I have had all year," Natalie mused.

"We are getting to see a lot of Hogwarts we don't normally pass," Graham pointed out.

"But only in a blur," Ginny said. "Are we sure this is a good thing to be doing? I'm all for reckless adventure, but reckless adventure that alters the entire course of history seems to be a bit less Gryffindor and a bit more incredibly stupid. "

"Of course, it is!" said Dennis, catching hold of a suit of armour as he went around the corner, stopping himself going flying by only the smallest of margins. "Onwards!"

"Absolutely," agreed Draco, a few steps behind him and moving with rather more grace, "even if it does require putting our faith in a midget mu--"

"Watch it," said Harry.

"Muggleborn," Draco said as if he had meant to all along, "with the attention span of a ... very ... short thing. " He frowned. "What does have a short attention span?"

"Nargles?" suggested Ginny.

"What are you thinking?" Harry asked Draco, suspiciously. "I can tell when you're hiding things. "

"Sod off and romance the girl Weasley, Potter," Draco said. "I have better things to do than deal with your constant paranoia. I'm surprised you haven't insisted this whole thing is a Dark Lord trap by now. "

"Oi!" said Dennis, looking back from where he was scrambling up onto a bench in a wall nook. Draco made 'get on with it' motions at him, and Dennis knocked on the wall to open the secret passage.

Harry, looking a little hurt, pointedly turned away from Draco and tried to help Ginny up onto the bench as well, which just got him glared at from her direction as well.

"I can take care of myself," she said.

"I never said you couldn't," he complained.

"Hmph!" She shoved past him and followed Dennis down the stairs. "Where are we going?"

"Slughorn's office," Dennis said. "I mean, Snape's office, I suppose. Because Violet's dad was the potions master when he was doing his egg thing! Don't worry," he added, "I know where it is. Draco showed me in the future. "

"Right," said Ginny. They came out into the corridor while the others were still clattering down the stairs. "And I'm pregnant?"

"Yes," Dennis said.

"And it's Harry's?"

"Yes," Dennis repeated. "Anyway, I think so, although it's possible you're having an affair with Blaise. "

"Right," said Ginny. "What? No, what?"

"Who is having an affair with me?" Blaise asked, beaming at them.

"Everyone," said Ginny. "Every single person in the universe. "

Blaise frowned at her. "Did you just call me a slut in an oblique sort of way?"

"This way," said Dennis, pointing, to forestall any arguments. It didn't work.

"I have extremely good grades," Blaise said, "and if the world wasn't so screwed up, I would already be working for the Ministry. I am intelligent, well read and well rounded. Simply because I happen to think that physical intimacy between two or more attractive people should be a fun, recreational activity of mutual benefit without the dross of enforced 'relationships' doesn't give you call to insult me, Weasley. "

She gaped at him. He stepped around her with dignity.

"Come on, munchkin," he called, heading off. "Let us change time!"

"Ah, okay," Dennis said, hurrying after him and then dropping into step. "I don't think Ginny meant to--"

"Yes," Blaise said quietly. "She did. "

"I don't think I should've said about her being pregnant with Harry's baby," Dennis confessed. "I think maybe that was cruel. There is no reason to believe we are actually going to find anything. "

"Sure we are, munchkin. And then you get to save the day, and your brother -- and don't let Draco tell

you otherwise," Blaise insisted.

They stopped at the door and Dennis did a quick 'point me' spell to check Snape wasn't inside.

"I have no time for Muggles," Blaise added. "I think Muggleborns should be made to choose, magic or not, and brought right over and obliviated. Ignorance is the biggest threat there is. " Dennis started to speak, but Blaise waved this away. "I also don't think it's worth dying over. Not just me. Anyone. " He smiled a little. "And like all Slytherins, I approve of lofty ambitions, even do-good ones. "

The others were almost on them. On impulse, Dennis stood on tiptoe and kissed Blaise's cheek.

The older boy blinked at him in confusion. "What was that for?"

"Luck!" Dennis said, and spelled open the door to the office.

"You're a strange little munchkin," Blaise said with affectionate amusement.

The others came in behind them, Harry closing the door. It was a lot of people. The office felt quite crowded. Harry kept glancing at Ginny, who was resolutely not looking at him.

"This temporary whatsit," Graham said.

"Temporal distillate," Dennis corrected. "It's a hyperdimensional superfluid compressed into four-dimensional space through-- No one cares, do they?"

"No," said Graham. "What does it look like?"

"Um. Glowy wind? Mostly?" Dennis nodded. "Glittery, glowy wind. And there's this bird -- it turns into an egg and back again. No," he said off their looks, "really, there is!"

"Right, then," said Natalie. "Glowing wind with bird-egg in. "

They all looked along the shelves, the dark, foreboding shelves full of dark, foreboding bottles filled with dark, foreboding liquids and things.

"Maybe it's covered?" Dennis suggested.

"Maybe we should just toss you across the age line," Draco said. "You could go back from the future. "

"I would end up in this future," Dennis explained again. "If there is no bell jar here, there will be no bell jar there. Most of this stuff isn't here in my future as it is. " He pointed. "There is a portrait of Snape there, and one of Albus over there, and a big one of Slughorn up there, apparently. That box with the bezoars and the clock in that jar over there stay, but pretty much everything else is gone. "

"Clock in a jar?" Blaise asked.

"This one!" Dennis knocked on the jar. It went 'ting'. He tapped it. It went 'twung'. He knocked the jar next to it, which went 'thunk' as solid things rapped with knuckles tend to do. He tapped the clock jar again. It went 'twonng'. "Huh. It's like a whole new musical instrument!"

"Or it's the thing you're looking for," Natalie said.

"Really?" Dennis eyed it. "But it's just a clock in a jar. " He tried to pull it down from the shelf, but it didn't move. "A clock in a jar that's really well sealed down!"

"Severing charm?" suggested Ginny, drawing her wand.

"No magic in the Potions office!" Draco yelled. "Are you insane? There could be no end of magically volatile substances in these jars. If it exploded, it could take out walls for floors. "

"Perhaps Snape would appreciate the natural light," Harry said.

"Uh, we could ask," Graham said. He was at the door, looking out into the corridor. "He's heading this way!"

"Distract him," Draco ordered.

"With what?" Graham asked.

"Obviously not with your scintillating wit," Draco snapped.

"Slytherins are known for their cunning," said Blaise, opening the door wide. "I'm sure you will think of something. " He shoved Graham out and slammed the door closed again. "Okay, where are the exits?"

Everyone looked at him.

"The other exits," Blaise said.

Everyone continued to look at him.

"Ah," he said. "My plan has a flaw. This is a first for me, I assure you. Still, this is Hogwarts! Find the secret passageway; there's always one. "

People started knocking on the walls, while Blaise leaned against the door. Harry knocked on the jar clock and then tried the stopper. Instantly, sparkling mist started to vent out of the clock. He slammed the stopped back in before it could escape.

"That's the stuff," said Dennis. "I need that!"

"Find something to put it in," Ginny said. "If we can't find another exit, maybe we can just smuggle it out. "

"We could use Graham's hip flask if Blaise hadn't chucked him outside," Dennis said.

"Right," said Blaise. "New plan. "

He opened the door, startling Snape who was outside, grabbed Graham, shoved him back into the room, and then slammed the door closed again, leaning back against it.

"Is this what being a Gryffindor is like all the time?" He asked. "It's almost fun. "

"First you throw me out, then you pull me in," Graham muttered. "Out, in, out, in; never mind me, I'll just--"

"Give Dennis your hip flask," Natalie said.

"Sure?" Graham pulled it out and passed it over. "I don't think now is a good time for drinking, though. " He reconsidered. "Actually, now is a very good time for drinking; give that back. "

Something thudded against the door.

"It's stuck," Blaise yelled. "You will have to come back later, Professor!"

There was a muffled reply, but it was drowned out by Graham's indignant cry at having his butter beer poured out (into a jar with eyeballs in). Dennis removed the stopper from the clock jar and held the flask over the top. Glittery smoke rushed up into it, making it shake in his hand. When he couldn't hold it anymore, he yanked it back, thumbing it closed and putting the stopper in with the other hand. The end of his sleeve caught in the smoke and started rapidly unravelling. The hip flask kept shaking, even when he secured it inside his robes.

"Now what?" he asked.

"Does anyone have a cunning plan?" Harry asked. Graham, Draco and Blaise shook their heads.

"We could stand in the corner and pretend to be statues until he leaves again," Dennis suggested.

"I'll take that as no. Right, then," Harry said firmly. "Something stupid, reckless and brave. Blaise! Open the door!"

"I said 'almost fun', not, 'I have suddenly become suicidal'," Blaise complained.

"Do it!" Harry insisted.

"Oh, very well. " Blaise stepped away from the door. "I don't know what you're going to do, though. It's not as if we can just all pile on him as he comes ... in. Oh. That is your plan, isn't it?"

"Pretty much," said Harry. "For Gryffindor!"

"Oh, dear sweet slutty mother of the demon bastard Merlin," said Draco, clapping a hand to his face.

Blaise opened the door. Snape lunged in, wand blazing. Harry jumped on him, yelling, "Run, Dennis! Run!"

Dennis made for the exit, but even with Harry on him, Snape managed to swing around.

"I must have gone crazy," Blaise said, and leaped on Snape as well.

The others joined in, which just meant that everybody, clinging to Snape, crashed into Dennis and the doorway, spilling out into the corridor in an unwieldy pile of robes and limbs.

"Run!" cried Harry again. Struggling free, Dennis did, vaguely aware that Ginny was behind him and Draco a way behind her. He could feel the flask shaking against his ribs and stretched his stride as far as it would go which, given the low gravity, was a great deal. Every short cut he could think of, he took, yelling every time Ginny fell behind because of a quick direction change so that she could follow. He slid to a halt at the entrance to the Astronomy Tower parapet, grabbing the doorway with both hands so he wouldn't go through.

"You have to go out and write the runes for me," Dennis said.

She nodded, breathlessly, and squeezed past him -- still dangling in the doorway -- and out onto the tower.

"Tell me," she said, and he did, and she went around the balustrades, marking the runes in a loose circle. "Like this?"

"Yes," Dennis nodded, "and then over there--"

"I see it. " She was already making the changes.

"You're very good at this," Dennis said. "No wonder you were in the advanced class! You could have been an unspeakable too, not just a Quidditch player, not that there is anything wrong with that, and you were a very good chaser, but you're really smart!"

"It's easy once someone else has done the first bit," Ginny said. "I never would've thought of using Arithmancy this way. Anyway, I like Quidditch and do you have any idea how much you can make in sponsorship deals alone? Not to mention very flexible hours -- well, except for games, of course -- and, you know, they are very good at maternity leave and things. If I was going to have kids. Which apparently I am. Despite the Harry and Draco thing. "

"I don't think there is a Harry and Draco thing in my timeline," Dennis said.

Ginny laughed. "Dennis, there has always been a Harry and Draco thing, and there always will. Even when they aren't on the moon. "

"I'm going to fix this," he assured her. "I'm going to save Colin too. "

"You cannot do that," Draco said.

They both swung round. He was at the top of the stairs, shaking, straining against something -- the curse, Dennis realised; Harry was far away.

"You have to undo your mistake," Draco said. "That's all. You have to let it play out. Harry lives. My parents -- your friends. "

"My brother," Dennis insisted.

"You caused this trying to save him," Draco said. "You cannot make things better. You cannot make them different without consequence. He didn't survive. My parents did. That's the way you said it was, so that's the way it has to be. "

"I know what went wrong," Dennis said. "Anyway, it was you two fighting that--"

The dream flashed up again in his head. The knot. The loose strand.

"It is you two," he repeated. "You're the focus of the net. I just have to bring you together there, first. Then there is no fight, and room enough for Colin and--"

Two flashes of red shot past him, one from Ginny's wand -- she had been slowly sneaking up in the background -- and one from Draco's -- he had been expecting exactly that. Draco's wand was blown out of his hand. Ginny was knocked back to the wall, just past the edge of the rune circle. The way was clear.

"Goodbye," Dennis said, pulling out the hip flask and taking a step backwards as he uncorked it. Glittering smoke slowly trailed out and the runes started to light up. Nice and easy did it. Just enough to get him back again. Four, five years. Nice and slow and--

Draco lunged into him. They struggled together, Draco and Dennis, and Dennis again, separating from his body but still, somehow, holding on to the flask, ghostly, glowing, and glittery. Draco cursed, Dennis pulled, and the flask slipped from both their hands. Dennis swung for it but Draco, far more used to the way things fell slowly here and far more practiced at catching, snatched it out of the air, upturning it and shaking hard. The glittering smoke gushed out. Dennis grabbed Draco's arm, but suddenly it was gone. The white ferret bounced at him. The flask fell. He fell. Everything fell.

There was a bright flash, as if moonlight had ignited, as if the whole moon had gone up in silver fire and then darkness came slamming down.

* * *

Floaty darkness. Floaty dry darkness, which meant he was probably not on a boat. Which meant he might still be on the moon. Which would seriously, seriously, seriously suck. Snape would probably give him detention for the rest of his life. In fact, Snape would probably invent a potion so that Dennis never aged just so that Snape could put him in detention for a literal forever, not just a figurative one. Eventually entropy would dissolve the walls of Hogwarts, which were quite thick and made of rather nice stone, leaving only Dennis behind, with a quill, endlessly writing 'I will not break into Snape's office in order to mess with the very fabric of causality'.

Also, it would probably be less dark if he opened his eyes. He did, cautiously.

There were flames, and they were from a torch and not the sort of flames some people thought you got during eternal damnation to hell or Snape's detentions, which was good, not just because of not being in hell, but because they weren't the fake-electric flickering ones of before. Or after, since that was now the future instead of the present or the past. Draco's ferrety intervention must not have had too bad an effect. He was still floating though, which was odd.

Dennis carefully turned his head left. There was a stone floor. He turned his head right. There was a stone floor. Stone floors shouldn't be floaty. More importantly, they definitely shouldn't be passing through a person's body. He looked down at himself. He was silvery, translucent, verging on the transparent.

"I'm a ghost," he said. "Okay. I'm a ghost. That is... Okay. "

Now would not be a good time to panic. He looked up again in time to see Peeves, carrying water balloons and chasing Harry -- except, no, it wasn't Harry, despite the familiar hair, because there was no scar, nor green eyes, which meant that that was James Potter, which also meant he was off his timeline by decades.

"Bugger," Dennis said. "Bloody buggering, buggering, bugger with bugger on top. "

# # #

SOME YEARS EARLIER (AND LATER)

"I have become unstuck in time," Dennis mused, pulling himself haphazardly through the air. "I've arrived before I was born and thus have no body. I need to get back to the past that is the future, now, but the past in my present, which-- Wait, forget that bit. I need to travel forward again. There is a jar of time in the potions office, and I need to go and open it, but I can't do that unless I can touch things. So therefore I should..."

What? Ghosts couldn't open things. Except--

"Peeves!" Dennis had just seen him. He snuck past a dripping wet James and followed Peeves through the wall into the music room. Peeves sunk down through the piano in a discordant burst of off-key notes, and Dennis followed, surprised to find himself in yet another secret passage rather than just the lower floor. It was thick with dust. Nobody had been here for years. Except the ghosts.

"Wait up," Dennis called after Peeves. "I need you to teach me how to touch things! Or, um-- Or I'll tell the Baron you've been throwing water balloons at people again!"

"You didn't see me do it," Peeves said cunningly, "so you can't blame me for it. "

He flew off through the wall. Dennis struggled after him.

"Please!" he begged. "I really need to know, so I can open the time jar in the potions office and get back

to the future!"

Peeves eyed him for a moment, and then came closer. "It's easy," he said. "You just put a bit of oomph into it!" Without warning, he shoved Dennis hard, sending him tumbling down head over heels through walls and floors.

By the time Dennis had gotten himself stopped and upright again, he was all the way down in the dungeons. Stupid poltergeist. Since the Potions Office was closer than anything else was, so he made his way there. Checking the corridor was clear, he carefully pushed his head through the door until he could just see inside. Thankfully, it was empty too.

"Right," he said to himself. "Put a bit of oomph in it. It should be just like charms, right? Like Flitwick said. Come on, Dennis. Absolute focus on the stopper. Opening the stopper. Stopper, stopper, stopper, stopper--"

He stepped through the door, walked right up to the shelf, and reached out for the completely empty space where the clock in the jar should be and knocked over the candlestick to its side. He was so busy going "stopper, stopper, stopper" that it took him a moment to realise there was nothing there.

"Bugger," he said. "...I have really got to stop saying that. "

"Lose something?"

"There should be a clock here," Dennis said. "In a jar. You open it and you get time coming out, and--" Wait, someone spoke. He spun around. "You!"

"I never know what to say to that," Dumbledore mused. "Proclaiming 'me!' seems a little egotistic. "

"I didn't touch anything," Dennis said quickly. "Why are you here? You shouldn't be sneaking around

people's offices, you know!"

Dumbledore gave him a pointed look.

"Just because I'm doing it, doesn't mean you should as well," Dennis said primly.

"I'm not 'sneaking'," Dumbledore said, taking a chair. "I came to see if you needed assistance. "

"How did you know I was here?" Dennis asked.

Dumbledore chuckled. "I am Albus Dumbledore: that is how I know. "

Dennis frowned at him. "I bet Peeves just told you. "

Dumbledore changed the subject. "Now, I'm sure you have lots of questions to--"

"Where is the clock? It comes in a jar. It goes there. " Dennis pointed at the empty spot on the shelf. "Sealed down and everything so you can't take it away. You get time when you open it!"

"My fried Nicolas Flamel has just such a thing," Dumbledore mused.

"The guy whose rock you hid in a mirror?" Dennis asked.

Dumbledore's eyes twinkled. "Did I?"

"What? No! Yes! Maybe! I don't know! Don't ask me about the future or Harry or Horcruxes or

anything," Dennis said. "I don't know anything and if I did I wouldn't tell you because there will be clowns! Clowns on the moon! Time travel sucks!"

Dumbledore blinked at him.

"Forget that last bit," Dennis quickly added.

"I have forgotten it already," Dumbledore assured him. "However, if I might offer some small advice?"

"Is this going to involve Gellert Grindelwald and bondage again?" Dennis asked dubiously.

"It wasn't going to," Dumbledore said, "but if you would like me to share some--"

"I really, really wouldn't," Dennis assured him.

"Pity. " Dumbledore shrugged a little. "I was just going to say: perhaps you might find the same effort that allowed you to touch the candlestick just then could also be used to allow things to touch you. I, of course, don't know anything about temporal mechanics and the relationship of Kac-Moody algebras to Calabi-Yau spaces, or, indeed, how one might apply Marvit's Law of Simplicity to-- Well. " He broke off, chuckling a little. "Anyway. I believe that, should you hold a focused image in your mind of what you intend to achieve, you will be able to jump forward to your intended destination. "

"Really?" asked Dennis sceptically. "Because I've been thinking about going to the future since I got here, and I haven't yet, just floated around some, and followed Peeves and found a new secret passageway and--"

Dumbledore coughed politely. "Was your focus absolute, or were you perhaps a little distracted?"

"I might have been a little distracted," Dennis admitted.

"Well, then!" Dumbledore clapped. "I shall leave you to it. I'm sure we will meet again, don't know where, don't know when, but--"

"I liked Johnny Cash's version better," Dennis said. "Although I have just realised that it won't come out for another thirty years, so you should forget I said anything. "

"I'm old," Dumbledore assured him. "I forget things all the time. Why, any moment now, I will probably forget this entire conversation ever happened. I must be off. I think I shall visit Nicolas. Good luck!"

"Thanks!" Dennis said. "See you later!"

Once Dumbledore had gone, he sat down in the middle of the room.

"Right," he said. "Absolute focus. Where do I want to be? Or, rather, when?"

First, of course, he had to stop himself screwing things up by revealing Moody early, so. First year. The potions office in his first year. Think potions. Think office. Think first year. Kingsley's first year in office had been-- No! Focus! Absolute engrossment. Remember the office.

It had still been Snape's in those days. It was never very well lit, because bright light made organic reactions accelerate, which was bad in potions and Dennis was getting off track. The office. Low light. A few candles. A fireplace, banked down, but internal floo ready. The glass jars of course, that annoyingly missing clock -- was that only there because Dennis had said it would be? A predestination paradox would not be a good way to start his, wait, tangent again, damn it! Remember the shelves. Remember the glass jars, full of pickled things, like the large dead frog (or Toad?) (Hopefully not Trevor!) in the purple liquid, and the other bits of animals and plant. There had been a cupboard too, in one corner, and a wall clock and some chairs and Snape's desk and sometimes an extra table, although Dennis didn't know why it was there and then not there. Perhaps it was an occasional table, which were very annoying things that -- damn, this focusing thing was hard. Potions, potions, potions, potions

whoa!

There was a wind out of nowhere, that wrenching feeling again and everything was sparkly light dark, and Dennis thought "POTIONS!" once more, wildly, before the entire universe threw up.

# # #

There was a frog. It was floating in purple liquid, looking bigger than it was, probably because of the refractive index and other such optics type things. It wasn't the sort of thing you saw every day, unless you were really bad at Potions and Snape personally supervised all your detentions to make sure you didn't blow up the entire school. Dennis's first thought on seeing it was, 'sweet bearded Merlin, it worked. ' His second thought was, 'bugger, I'm ten again. ' His third thought was 'Hello, Professor Snape', which was also the first thing he said, because the man in question was standing right there.

Snape's lips twitched. In anyone else, it would have been a smile. In Snape, it was more a portent of impending doom.

"Have I missed the Goblet of Fire?" he asked quickly before Snape could say anything.

Snape's eyes glittered darkly. "What do you know about the Goblet of Fire?"

"It's a goblet and it has fire in it," Dennis said promptly. "I have heard the teachers talking about it. " Which he had, although it hadn't happened yet, but for him it had already happened, so it was basically the truth. It had a high degree of truthiness at any rate, and Dennis concentrated on radiating an aura that spoke of this. "I wouldn't want to miss that. "

"No. You haven't missed it. " Snape sneered at him. "In future, Mister Creevey, I suggest you keep your ears firmly on your lessons and out of other people's business. Do I make myself clear?"

"Not without some kind of light bending ointment," Dennis said, thoughtfully, because he was still half thinking about refractive indexes. "You could put an invisibility cloak on, but you would still be opaque under it, so I don't think that counts!"

"Are you trying to be funny?" Snape asked, nostrils flaring in a dramatic sort of way.

"No?" said Dennis truthfully. "Um. Also, I realise this is a stupid question, but why am in your office?"

Something flickered in Snape's eyes that Dennis didn't recognise. It was only when Snape said "Are you sure you didn't breathe in any of the vapour?" that Dennis realised it might almost have been concern.

Since Dennis had no idea what Snape was talking about, he said, "I have no idea!"

"I see. " Snape pinched the brow of his nose. It was possible that it hadn't been concern so much as long suffering annoyance. "Go to the Hospital Ward and have Madame Pomfrey check you over. Detention Friday, directly after dinner. Do try not to damage the castle between now and then. "

"Yes, sir," said Dennis, and left as quickly as possible.

* * *

Madame Pomfrey said he was fine and sent him back to Gryffindor. Colin still knew about Dennis being from the future, but since he also still didn't really believe it, Dennis figured it was okay. He just had to be careful now. First tie the knot, then get the new thread all squared away. Everything the same as before, as close to it as he could, except Colin lives. It was a good plan, except for the part where right now Harry and Malfoy basically hated each other. But apart from that.

Still! He had four years!

Something would probably occur to him at some point. Maybe. He would endeavour to emulate the Slytherins with their subtle methods of insinuation and influence, and the Hufflepuffs with their steadfastness and attention to detail, and the Ravenclaws with solemnity and inquisitiveness, and the Gryffindors with their "Hello, Harry!"

"Hey, Dennis," Harry said, slowing slightly as he crossed the common room.

"Have you ever noticed that Draco Malfoy is actually quite pretty in a pointy sort of way?" Dennis asked. "He's very photogenic. "

Harry stared at him. "No," he said slowly, "I can't say that I have. " He hurried up the stairs.

"Just something to think about," Dennis called after him.

Well. That hadn't worked! He clearly had to try something else.

"Something, something, something," Dennis muttered. Nothing sprang to mind, so he went to find Colin, who was in his dorm room, sorting through boxes of photos.

"Colin," Dennis said and then again, twice, before Colin looked up.

"What is it, Dennis?" Colin asked.

"Suppose you wanted to get two people together who currently didn't like each other on the surface but who would get along if they could just get past that bit, because, really, they are both sort of obsessed with each other, although in different ways and for different reasons, but still obsessed, how would you

do it?" Dennis waited expectantly.

Colin blinked at him. "What? I mean... What? Who?"

"Harry and Malfoy!" Dennis exclaimed. Colin's jaw dropped. Dennis was quite impressed. He hadn't known that actually happened. "Don't worry; they secretly want to jump each other's bones. " He frowned. "Maybe. They might need a bit of prompting first. I don't suppose you know where we could get some kind of telepathic bonding rings or anything?"

"Dennis," Colin started, and then stopped. He frowned for a bit. Dennis waited patiently. "Dennis," Colin repeated. "Dennis--"

"That's me," Dennis said helpfully.

"Have you gone completely stark bollicking insane?" Colin asked.

Dennis pouted. "No! Theirs is a star crossed love, honest! I saw it in--" Wait, he couldn't finish that sentence truthfully. He needed a plausible misdirection, and quickly. "--a dream?"

"A dream," said Colin dubiously.

"Possibly a prophetic one?" Dennis suggested. "Definite snogging potential is what I'm getting at. "

"Dennis," said Colin kindly, patting the ground. "Come and sit by me. "

"Okay?" Dennis did. There were photos lying around and he picked one up at random. Ginny waved at him and he waved back. "Do you think they can actually see us when we do this? It's probably just like television, though. " He really should have asked how they had made Muggle stuff work in a magic field

before he had left the other timeline. He missed television a little during the year.

"The thing I want to talk about," said Colin. "Well, you see Dennis, about this dream of yours. "

"Dream? Oh, right, yes, the dream," Dennis nodded.

Colin took a deep breath and then let it out. "When a boy starts getting older, well, he starts to go through some changes and have, you know, feelings. About girls. Or boys, there's nothing wrong with that. "

Dennis stared at him in confusion. "Huh?"

"When boys start to turn into men, well. " Colin said. "It's a thing that happens to you. You know, you get taller, and spots, and hair in places, and your voice changes, and, well. You know. Things start to, well. Hormones! And so you have dreams with girls, or, well. Boys. Like, Harry and Malfoy, you know. Did I say there was nothing wrong with that?"

"Yes," said Dennis, nodding absently as he went through more photos. "Although I'm not really sure why you're trying, very badly, to explain puberty to me, or what it has to do with -- OH!" He looked up at Colin, cheeks reddening. "Not that sort of dream! No!"

Colin let out a relieved breath. "So you know all this stuff?"

"Yes," Dennis said. He frowned. "Oh, but if Dad asks, I don't, because he hasn't told me yet. "

"Okay. " Colin nodded, and then frowned. "Hang on, if dad didn't do the talk, how do you--"

"Can I borrow these, please?" Dennis interrupted, holding up a box of photographs of Draco Malfoy. He didn't wait for an answer, standing up quickly. "I need them for a, um, Charms project, yes!" He nodded

fervently, backing towards the door. "For Charms. And in no way related to the previous bit of conversation, before you go there. Okay, thanks, Colin! Bye!"

"Bye?" Colin called after him.

Dennis bounded back down the stairs to the common room, found himself an open table, sat down, and started going through the photos.

"Hello," Natalie said, sitting down next to him.

"If you were trying to get someone to notice that Draco Malfoy had non-prat qualities, including photogenic-ness, which may not actually be a word," he interrupted himself. "In fact, I'm pretty sure it wasn't, although it is now, but that's okay, because languages grow and -- and you're giving me the 'you're being odd' look. "

"That's because you're being odd," Natalie said. "If I was trying to get someone to notice Malfoy, what?"

"Which picture would you use?" Dennis asked, waving a hand at the ones on the table.

Natalie looked them over. "He's very pointy. "

"This is true," Dennis sighed.

"I like these ones, on the broom," said Natalie. "Did you take these?"

"Colin did," Dennis explained. "He's very good at it. He has lots of photos of everybody. "

"...I can't decide if that's a good thing or a creepy thing," Natalie said. "You should take these as well, because he's actually smiling instead of just smirking, looking smug, or being enraged. "

They both studied the last set of photos.

"Actually," Natalie decided, "leave the enraged ones in. "

"Okay!" Dennis nodded. He put all the 'no' photos back in the box and studied the pile of 'yes' photos.

"What are you going to do with them?" Natalie asked.

"Show them to Harry!" Dennis announced.

"What, Potter?" Natalie gave him the 'you're being odd' look again. "Okay. "

"The hard bit will be getting him to sit still long enough to do it," Dennis mused.

"Why don't you just surprise him with them?" Natalie suggested. "You could leave a couple out where he would see them, things like that. "

Dennis beamed at her. "That's a brilliant idea!"

"I know. " Natalie grinned. "Have you done your charms homework?"

"There's charms homework?" Dennis swore inwardly. He had forgotten he would have to do schoolwork

again. Didn't they know he had cunning plans of love to enact? Stupid Hogwarts.

Natalie showed him her notes and the worksheet and Dennis tried to explain how to do the charms theoretically and then gave up and started demonstrating and one thing lead to another and by the time the Gryffindor prefect let him have his wand back, it was bed time. Resolving to start littering Harry's path with photos of Draco in the morning, Dennis packed them in the not-exactly-secret compartment of his trunk and, yawning mightily, turned in.

# # #

It was freezing when he woke up, which was probably why it took him so long to notice that he was in different pyjamas than he had gone to bed in. Worse, all the contents of his trunk had been moved around. Worst still, the little piano calendar by Jimmy's bed was happily declaring it October, even though it had been September when he went to bed. And not just in a, he fell asleep on September 30th and woke up October 1st sort of way. In a 'more than a month passed while I was asleep' sort of way.

"Bugger," Dennis said, with feeling. He was thinking of adopting it as his catchphrase.

Random forward temporal jump! That wasn't good. In fact, it was bad. If it slipped every time he went to sleep, he only had a few weeks to get Harry and Draco together instead of a few years.

"The photos!" he suddenly remembered, and dived back to his trunk, which wasn't very sensible. Less haste, more speed as his father would say. Also, less falling across the room and banging your head on furniture. Rubbing his head, Dennis pushed the trunk open and checked the compartment. Fortunately, the photos were still there; he filled his pockets with them before letting the trunk fall closed.

"Right then!" He frowned. "I should probably stop talking to myself out loud as well. "

Although that did leave the question of where everybody was, until he checked the date again, and realised that everyone was probably gawking at the Goblet of Fire in the entrance hall. Which. Hmm. If everybody is down there, then, consequently, nobody must be up here, because people were very rarely in the same place more than once, especially without access to time travel, and how likely was that?

Present circumstances excepted.

Checking the corridor was clear, Dennis sneaked up to the fourth year boy's room and knocked on the door. There was, as expected, no answer. He carefully eased the door open and looked in. There was no one there. Excellent. Checking once again there was no one in the corridor, he slipped inside, pushing the door closed behind him. It didn't take long to find Harry's trunk as, fortunately, they all wrote their names on the inside front pages of their textbooks. Dennis dropped a photo of Draco in each one, added a couple more to Harry's notes for good measure, put one in each of his jumpers, and, since he still had a couple left, dropped one in the bedside table draw and, finally, slipped one into the canopy of Harry's bed, where he would see it when he went to sleep. Presuming he didn't take his glasses off first.

Mission expertly accomplished and convinced it wouldn't fail, Dennis bounced happily back to the door and swung it open to find himself face to face with Ginny Weasley.

"Um. Hello," he said.

"Hello," she said back. "Dennis, right?"

"That's me!" He nodded. "I mean, no, I'm some-one else entirely. "

She looked at him.

"Yeah, I didn't think that would work," he admitted. "Can I help you?"

"This isn't your dorm," she said.

"No," said Dennis. "No, it is not. "

"It's Harry's," Ginny added. She knew this because she had broken into it a couple of years earlier while hunting the diary of doom. "And Ron's. "

"Yes," said Dennis. "It is. I was looking for Harry! To ask him if he was going to try to be the Tri-Wizard champion. But he isn't here, so I couldn't ask him, and then I was going to leave him a note but I didn't have a quill or parchment, so now I should go and find some so I can leave him that note, as people do. Leave each other notes. ...You know, Natalie does that look too. "

Most people did. It was the 'okaaaaay, weird' look.

"I was looking for Harry too," Ginny said. "We could go see if he's by the goblet like everyone else. "

Dennis figured she just wanted to keep an eye on him but, since he now had no other plans, he readily agreed. They wondered down to the common room in companionable silence, and Dennis was reaching up to push the portrait open when he realised that Ginny was no longer next to him. He turned around to find her in the middle of the room, looking around pensively.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I thought I saw something moving," she said. "A flash of white. I thought it might be..." She shook her head, and then looked at him. "It's stupid, but I thought it might be our old rat. "

Rat? That reminded Dennis of something. But what? "We can look around," he suggested, trying to remember. "I think there are animal revealing spells, although I'd have to go and look them up because

it's not something I do very well. "

Ginny took a step backward when he drew his wand. "No, that's okay," she assured him. "It couldn't have been Scabbers. Let's just go. "

* * *

There were only a few people left lingering around the Goblet when they got downstairs, and none of them were Harry, so Dennis went and had breakfast instead.

"These are damn good waffles," said Graham around a mouthful of the same.

"Much better than food tubes," Dennis agreed, and carefully ignored the look Graham gave him. "Hello, Malfoy!"

Draco stared at him. "Who are you, again?"

"That's Pritchard's pet Gryffindor," Blaise supplied cheerfully.

"Oi!" said Dennis. "That's only partially true. "

"He's my henchman," Graham said cheerfully. "Hand me the syrup, would you?"

"I don't hench," Dennis complained, doing so. "I'm not even sure 'hench' is actually a verb. Anyway, Draco," he added, turning back to the other boy. "Have you ever noticed that Harry is pretty good looking in a scruffy sort of way?"

Draco choked on his toast. Crabbe slapped him on the back, good-naturedly. Eyes streaming and face red, Draco glared at him until he stopped, then grabbed a goblet of pumpkin juice and downed the whole thing in one go. He slammed the goblet down on the table and aimed daggered looks at Dennis.

"Explain to me why I'm not filling your intestines with live, angry scorpions," he said.

"Professor McGonagall is watching; such a spell would be considered a Dark Art; I'm pretty sure there is no such spell because of Oggham's Conjuration Limitation; and you're not actually homicidal or the sort of person who would really enjoy me writhing around in screaming agony for the few hours it would take them to rupture my innards and for me to die of bleeding and toxic shock," Dennis said, and helped himself to an apple.

Draco gaped at him.

"Anyway, I think that was a bit of an over reaction to me pointing out that Harry is somewhat physically attractive," Dennis added. "Graham agrees with me. "

"I do?" Graham leant sideways to look at Potter. "I suppose. But only because you said 'somewhat'. "

"I've always wondered," Blaise said, "does his hair do that naturally?"

"The scruffy thing? Yeah. " Dennis nodded. "Colin has loads of photos -- I could show them to you," he added to Draco.

"Die," said Draco. "In a fire. "

Crabbe laughed. Dennis winced.

Blaise said, thoughtfully, "Is it a side-effect of being curse-scarred, do you think?"

"His dad's hair was just like it," Dennis said. "I mean, so I've heard. Everyone says he has his mother's eyes as well. "

"What, like, as a souvenir or something?" Goyle asked. "That's pretty sick. "

"No!" Dennis shook his head. "I mean, his eyes look like his mother's eyes. They are the same colour and everything. "

"Sort of emerald," said Blaise. "Or maybe forest. It depends on the light. " Dennis eyed him. Blaise shrugged. "I'm a very observant person. Besides, he's been in the papers loads of times and Malfoy always--"

"I," Draco interrupted loudly, "don't see what's so special about peridot-green eyes. " He sneered. "And he's short!"

"I'm short," Dennis said.

Draco glared at him. "Your point?"

"I was just saying," Dennis said. "Anyway, he's still growing! I'm sure you will be the right heights when you're older. "

"The right heights for what?" asked Draco, dangerously.

"Shagging?" suggested Blaise blithely before Dennis could think of an answer.

Draco went white, then red, then white again. It was really fascinating, although Dennis realised that most people had missed it because they were all trying to look at Harry. Harry stared back, bemused. Dennis waved at him, and then pretended he hadn't seen the fleeting look of horror come across Harry's face.

"He's kind of stringy," Moon said.

"He wants fattening up," Millicent agreed. "Not too much, just enough to give you something to hold onto. "

All the boys in hearing distance pulled identical faces.

"I'm not eleven until April," Dennis said. "I'm way too young to be hearing that sort of thing. "

"I'm fifteen," said Nott, "and I'm still young to be hearing that, Millie. "

They started arguing. Dennis stopped listening. Harry was staring at Draco. Draco was glaring at Blaise and Dennis.

"You're not fucking funny," he spat.

"It would be funny fucking, though," Blaise said and then jerked back in surprise when Draco leapt to his feet, leaning over the table.

Whatever he had been about to say, though, was rather lost, since the same motion put him directly in the path of the contents of a bowl of cornflakes Mille had just swung hard at Nott.

There was a moment of stunned silence -- and then someone yelled "Food fight!" and pandemonium broke loose. Breakfast projectiles started at the Slytherin table, grabbed the Ravenclaws, bounced on into the Hufflepuffs and finally pulled the Gryffindors in, the whole room a mess of soaring bacon and flying toast and splashing milk. McGonagall, sonorous enabled, bellowed herself hoarse to little effect.

"I hate you all," Draco said, with what little dignity he could muster, wiping milk and cereal off his face and shaking his hands out, "and I'm going back to Slytherin. "

He stalked off, which would have been more impressive if three steps away he hadn't gone sliding on dropped bacon and crashed into a table, starting off yet more rounds of food aided violence.

"If you only did that on purpose, you would make a damned good Slytherin," said Blaise.

"I didn't do anything!" Dennis complained. "I was just asking! I didn't think he'd get so het up about it. Harry didn't. "

"You tried it on Potter too?" Blaise beamed. "I really should get my own pet Gryffindor. "

"I saw Dennis first," Graham said quickly.

"Still not a pet," Dennis said, and ducked an incoming roll.

* * *

"Maybe I should just give up," Dennis said, despondently, resting his head on the library desk and his arms on his head.

"You haven't even started your homework," Natalie said. "You know if you put it off until Monday morning you will never get it done. Anyway, you'll want it out of the way for the feast and the champion choosing. "

"I wasn't talking about the homework," Dennis said. "I was ... oh, never mind. "

"Okay," said Natalie, cheerfully enough. "Is this about you starting that riot this morning? That was pretty cool. Except where the Professors made us clean up by hand. "

"I didn't start--!" Dennis frowned, sitting up. "Well, yes, technically I did. Gromwaller has two ls," he added, reading her parchment upside down.

Natalie sneaked another one in. "We're Gryffindors, we never give in. Fight on against all odds, and so on. "

"Even Potions homework?" Ritchie asked from across the way.

"Even Potions homework," she agreed.

"School is hell," Ritchie moaned. Ginny patted him on the shoulder.

"At least we're not on the moon," Dennis said. The others all looked at him. "Tell you what," he continued, with false cheer, "I'll go find us some books to use. "

"We are so pathetic," Colin said. "It's the weekend, and we're all hanging around the library. How pathetic is that? No offence to you Ravenclaws. "

"We don't actually spend all our time in the library," Kevin said without looking up from where he was marking red crosses all over Graham's work. "Mostly because we have our own. "

"...really?" asked Colin. Kevin lifted his head long enough to smirk. Colin nodded. "I knew that. "

"Going to get books," Dennis said, wandering away.

The library was surprisingly full though, as Dennis passed, he realised many people seemed to be just messing about instead of actually working. Not everybody though and as he turned at the end of the stacks, he caught sight of Harry, Ron and Hermione at a table. Harry had a textbook out. Dennis wandered over to have a closer look. It seemed to be ones he had put photos in earlier.

"Hello, Harry!" he said.

"Hey, Dennis," Harry sighed.

"Found something interesting?" Dennis asked, nodding at the book.

"It's just my potions textbook," Harry said. "Nothing special. "

"Nothing in it caught your eye, maybe?" Dennis suggested. "No surprises or anything?"

"It's just my potions textbook," Harry repeated slowly.

"Oh," said Dennis. The other three looked at him expectantly. "Are you sure--"

"Yes," said Harry. "Hey, Dennis, this morning -- what was...?"

Dennis waited for him to finish. He did not. "What was what?"

"You and Malfoy, you weren't talking about... I mean, he's--" Harry frowned. "Yeah, n-never mind. "

"Um. Okay?" Dennis had no idea what that was about.

"Were you looking for something in particular?" Hermione asked.

"Books," Dennis said vaguely. "I was looking for some books. On stuff. "

"There are lots of interesting books about goblins in the history section," Hermione said. "I'm sure you'd find them interesting, Dennis. "

"I do like goblins," Dennis agreed and then, realising, "hey, you're only saying that because they're on the other side of the library!"

Hermione, caught, blushed a little. Dennis missed this though, because he had noticed three more of Harry's texts on the table, and bits of homework left out for the ink to dry.

"You looked through all of them?" he asked.

Harry and Ron exchanged looks.

"That's how people do homework," Ron said. "They look through books. "

"So..." Dennis frowned. "Okay, I'm going away now. "

"Creepy, creepy boy," Ron muttered.

Dennis ignored this, wandering blindly back along the shelves. He had put photos everywhere, in every book. Sure, Harry could have missed one, or two, or even five, but surely not all of them. Maybe Ginny had gone back later. Except she had been there at breakfast and she was at the study thing, and she hadn't said anything. Ginny, he was sure, would be one to speak her mind. So then, what had happened to the photos? Who else could have taken them, and why would they? How was Harry supposed to be caught off guard by a Malfoy who wasn't busy sneering at him and insulting him and notice the person behind the front?

He should have stolen the telepathic bonding ring things; that would have made this so much easier.

"Did you find some books?" Natalie asked, and Dennis blinked, surprised to find himself back at their table.

"I forgot I was looking," he said.

"I said we should've sent someone with him," Colin said.

"No, you did not," Ginny pointed out.

"In my head I did. Kevin distracted me with his lies. " Colin pointed at Kevin, all 'his fault! His fault!'

"Ravenclaws, man," Graham said. Ginny and Kevin both smacked him. "Ow! She's teaching you bad habits, Kev. "

"Hey, Ginny," said Dennis. "You haven't seen any photos lying around, have you?"

She shook her head. "No? Did you lose some?"

"Did you lose some of mine?" Colin asked, leaning forward in his seat so he could glare around the play fighting Graham and Kevin at him.

"Even if I had, you keep all the negatives, so you could just print more," Dennis said.

"True. " Colin nodded.

"I still need potions references," Natalie said. "And Dennis really needs them. "

"Oh, yeah, we looked over your work," Ginny said.

"And if you put the bicorn root in then," Colin added, "it would indeed make up for the may wings, except then your potion would explode. "

"And that would be bad," Ginny finished.

"Maybe I wanted my potion to explode," Dennis suggested. "Maybe that was my plan all along. " The others looked at him. "I'll just go find us some books. "

Fortunately, Colin came with him this time.

* * *

Dennis had hoped for a chance to snoop around Harry's room again, but Dean had been there when he got back from the library and just as he was going out, Neville came back. After that, Dennis got caught up in a round robin game of exploding snap which Ginny won hands down (pun intended!) and eventually everybody else went to bed. He didn't want to. Who knew when he would wake up? It would be best to stay awake as long as possible, maybe even with potions, except if you didn't dream you went mad (like Dreamless Sleep potion addicts did!), so there would have to be some kind of wide-awake dreaming potion as well. Maybe if you mixed up some of the more hallucinogenic things?

So involved did he get in considering the idea of sleep potions that let you never sleep, that he failed to notice everyone else going to bed in dribs and drabs until he was the only one left, curled up in an out of the way armchair. He summoned the drop cloth off the sofa and transfigured it into a blanket to wrap around himself. The fire was damped down; if you were looking for it, you could see the faint blur of House Elves coming in to tidy it up. House Elves prided themselves on not being seen, which made Dennis feel bad about trying to see them, so he kept looking around the room instead.

There was a faint shift in the carpet. He only just noticed it out of the corner of his eye. For a moment, he almost thought he had imagined it, and then it came again, closer. One of the small side tables jiggled a little. Not a house elf. Peeves again? No, not invisible like that, and ghosts couldn't touch anything. Invisible meant glamour or cloak, meant wizard, and in Gryffindor there was only one wizard with an invisibility cloak as far as Dennis knew. He clapped his hands over his mouth before the "Hello, Harry!" could get out and scrunched down in his chair, for once grateful for being small.

Pushing the hood of his cloak back, Harry stopped by the fire. It was very odd seeing just his head there, and even weirder when an arm came out of nowhere below it. Harry was holding something, staring at it -- a small, paper-thin rectangle. It appeared to be black from where Dennis was sitting. He started to lean forward to look, but his blanket shifted -- only a whisper of movement, but startlingly loud in the silent common room.

Harry looked around quickly, and then again, slower. He clearly didn't see Dennis, because he went back to staring at the thing in his hand. After a few long moments, he made a noise, somewhere between sigh and annoyance, and flicked the thing at the fire. Pulling his cloak back on, he headed away.

Dennis listened until he could hear footsteps on the stairs and then slipped out from his chair, hurrying over to see. The edge of the thing had caught a little, and he slapped it against the hearth a couple of times to put it out, before turning it into the last of the light. It was a photo. If he hadn't seen it before, it would have been hard to make out, but he knew what it was. It was the one he had put above Harry's bed, tucked into the canopy -- a photo of Draco, taking unawares, natural and smiling, not smug or showing off but just at ease with his friends, simple and care free.

Footsteps sounded again and Dennis dropped the photo on the hearth and dived for the nearest cover. He crawled along behind the sofa until he reached the other end, and then risked sticking his head up to look. Not just footsteps again, then, but Harry's footsteps. Dennis watched, holding his breath, as Harry knelt down by the fire and picked the photo up. He stared at it for another long moment and then resolutely shoved it back in his pocket. Turning on his heel, he yanked his hood back up, vanishing before he'd taken three steps.

Dennis carefully counted towards a hundred, got bored around seventy and stood up. Since no one yelled or anything, he figured Harry really was gone, and returned to his chair, pulling his blanket around him and adding a warming charm. Harry had kept the photo! A start had been made! His plan wasn't entirely crap, which was good, except for the part where he was still making it up as he went along. But still! A start! Now, all he had to do was stay awake. Stay wiiiide awake. Eyes open and wiiiii...

Something scuttled in the dark, but Dennis, falling swiftly and deeply asleep, missed it entirely.

# # #

"He made you badges," Dennis said. It was later in the year. They were outside. Grass showed through the first of the November snow.

"Badges of evil," Harry pointed out.

"I don't think they count as evil," Dennis complained. "I mean, on a scale, they would be quite near the bottom -- and he supported a Hufflepuff!"

"Maybe not evil evil," Harry admitted. "Badges of insult, then. They say 'Potter Stinks'. In blinking text. "

"Not anymore," Dennis said. "Colin and I recharmed them. "

He displayed the badge proudly.

"It says 'Potter Really Stinks' now," Harry pointed out. "And you've lost Cedric entirely. "

"It does?" Dennis looked at it. It did. "Huh! It worked earlier, honest! I don't know how that got changed again -- anyway, at least he's thinking of you, right?"

"That sort of thinking I could do without," Harry said. He sighed. "I don't even know why I'm talking to you. No offence. "

"You're nice and friendly and Ron isn't talking to you and Hermione is annoyed because you aren't talking to Ron," Dennis said promptly. "I think. That might be a continuity error, I keep losing track. "

Harry stared at him. "Right," he said slowly. "Anyway, I have to. Go. Do stuff. Now. Champion stuff! Yes! Goodbye!" He hurried away.

"Bugger," said Dennis.

# # #

"I was thinking," Dennis said at breakfast.

"No," said Draco.

"Don't you think that," Dennis tried.

"No," said Draco.

"You could always," Dennis started.

"No," said Draco.

"I'm sure Harry would," Dennis suggested.

"No," said Draco.

"But what if," Dennis mused.

"No," said Draco, "and if you open your mouth again, I'm going to curse you. "

"How am I supposed to eat breakfast if I can't open my--" Dennis yelped and ducked the red burst of light, which shot over his head, narrowly missed the Ravenclaws, and hit Cedric Diggory.

"It's a hit!" Ernie yelled. "Take them down! All of them!"

Almost as one, the Hufflepuffs leaped to their feet, wands blazing. The Durmstrang and Beauxbatons

students retaliated in kind, Ravenclaws and Gryffindors getting in the way. Smoke and light billowed and flashed in every direction.

"Um," said Draco.

"Bugger," said Dennis.

# # #

Time slipped again. Time was a very annoying thing. As was the universe, which seemed determined to get in his way. All his cunning attempts -- well, okay, maybe not cunning, but they were certainly attempts, and he thought he should get points for that -- to get Harry and Draco to notice one another in the good way just seemed to make them notice one another in the bad way. It was as if the universe was against him. Everything kept going wrong: photos disappearing, badges not working, Harry insisting Draco had tried to curse him when Dennis could have sworn Draco was in the library at the time, hiding from him while pretending not to.

(Draco had taken to heading rapidly in the other direction whenever he saw Dennis.)

"The problem," Dennis said to Colin over breakfast, "is that Malfoy doesn't know when to stop. He starts out funny, but then he just keeps on going right over that line into cruel, and then gets all hot under the collar when anyone points out he's being a twat. "

"Right. "

"And other problem," Dennis continued, "is that once Harry has made his mind up about something, he can be really, really stubborn, even when it's not in his best interest to be. Like that thing with Ron before the thing with the Dragon. "

"Mm. "

"Not to mention their mutual crush on Cedric Diggory," Dennis added.

"Well, he is extremely handsome," Colin said.

"I don't see what that's got to do with anything. " Dennis absently picked up a large, fat beetle with jewelled antennae that was crawling along the table. "Hang on, I'll be right back. "

"Mm," said Colin.

Dennis took the beetle to the window and dropped it outside on a handy low-hanging branch. He could just about make out the crowds gathered at the lake for the second task.

"I think we're a bit late," he called back to Colin. "Stupid time. ...do you think I'm going about this the wrong way?"

"To be honest," Colin admitted, "I haven't listened to a word you've said since the common room. Have a sausage. "

"No, thanks," said Dennis, taking one anyway. "We should go down. Maybe if we can get Draco to notice Harry being all heroic and everything, it will give us an in, and maybe we could hide somewhere and give Draco a little shock every time he started to say something obnoxious, like training a -- you're not listening to me again. "

"No," said Colin, "I'm piling toast on a plate. " He was. "Grab the honey; we'll take it down to the lake with us. "

"I'm not sure we're allowed to," Dennis said, but he picked up the pot anyway, grabbing a knife for spreading it with and a spare plate as well. "Okay!"

Colin made for the door and Dennis followed after, trying very hard not to think about the other problem, which was that this was the second task, which meant that the third task was next and Cedric was going to die. Cedric dying really sucked. On the other hand, moon-clowns. He wasn't supposed to be changing anything, except Harry and Draco, which, okay, yes, would have a knock-on effect, but since that knock-on effect would be, he hoped, being able to save Colin, that was okay. Maybe.

"Time is an extremely annoying thing," Dennis whined at Colin.

"Huh?" said Colin, glancing back. His eyes went wide. "Look out!"

Harry Potter, going nineteen to the dozen with gillyweed clutched in his head, shoved past them, bounding down the stairs so fast it was a wonder he didn't slip and break his neck. Dennis, slightly less lucky, did slip. Their plates, toast and honey went flying. Dennis made a wild grab for Colin, missed entirely, and tumbled backwards, managing only "Bug--!" before his head connected with something solid and the world went black.

# # #

Days went past like scattered photographs, falling through his fingers. It was spring. It was summer. Harry, pulled away from Cedric's body, vanished into the blur. Draco tumbled past yelling "I warned you!" A train horn sounded, loud, too loud. Dennis couldn't breathe. He grabbed for moments, but he couldn't focus. Hogwarts, he insisted to the dark and glistening rush, I have to be at Hogwarts. The castle swam around him. He was at Gryffindor table, the pre-term feast of his second year. Sir Nick was sitting between him and Colin, feathered hat set at an annoyed angle, complaining about something. Colin was waving his hands enthusiastically, talking about something. Dennis couldn't hear either of them. Their words were too far away and the more he stretched for them, the further they seemed to get, until he was suddenly catapulted away, like elastic snapping back. He yelled for Colin and Harry and

Natalie and Ginny and Blaise and even Draco and finally for Dumbledore as everything went--

# # #

It was bright and windy, but in a blustery autumn morning sort of way, not in a time winds sort of way, so Dennis counted it as a bonus. Still, it had been late February and it was now late September at least. Seven months had gone past, just like that. Two years and eight months left until the final battle. Thirty-two months. Nine hundred and seventy odd days. Depending on what day it actually was, which would be a good thing to know.

"What day is it?" he asked Colin, who was next to him. As was Ginny. They were in the entrance hall and Filch was checking a list of names. "Oh. Hogsmeade day! I shall come with you!"

"You're a second year," Colin reminded him. "You're just seeing us off. We've had this conversation already. "

"Come on, come on," complained Filch, "I haven't got all day!"

"Creevey and Weasley," Dennis said promptly. "See, look, there, and there, and there! All sorted!" Dennis assured Filch, who swatted him with the list. "Hey! I was just trying to be helpful. "

"Well, don't," Filch growled. "You can all go on, then. Well? Hoppit you horrible little--"

They did, and they were passing through the gates with Ginny when Colin finally said, "That really shouldn't have worked. "

"I'm going to ask Harry to consider including the Slytherins in the -- in his defence club," Dennis said, ignoring this.

Colin chuckled, caught sight of Dennis's expression, and quickly sobered. "Oh, you were serious?"

"Yes!" Dennis insisted.

"I know you have Slytherin friends, and I'm sure they are okay people, but even so -- I don't think Harry is going to go for that," Colin said.

"Of course he isn't," Dennis said. "But he should at least think about it. Not all Slytherins would dob him in as soon as they could, and I reckon a lot of them would like the chance to learn stuff that Umbridge isn't bothering to teach, which would give them reasons to keep the other Slytherins off Harry's back. Especially if it was someone sort of influential like Malfoy is. "

"What's this?" Ginny asked.

"Dennis thinks we should've invited the Slytherins too," Colin said.

"Oh. That's, well. That's very open-minded of you, Dennis," Ginny said.

"It's okay; I know you don't think it's a good idea. It's just," Dennis shrugged, "we never do anything to encourage the rest of Slytherin because of a small but incredibly vocal minority, but maybe if we reached out to the others, eventually we would reach them too. Anyway, that's what I think. "

"It's a nice idea," Ginny said, "but you know what? Malfoy never did manage to give me that one small thing to make me think he's human under all that rah-rah Dark Lord crap. "

"Is that really all it would take?" Dennis asked. "One good thing. "

Ginny shook her head. "No. But it would be enough to start from. It would be a chance, however slim. Isn't that what we do, Gryffindors? Grab those slim chances with reckless abandon?"

She attempted a smile. Dennis shook his head.

"I would, I think, and Harry, maybe, but not all Gryffindors are the same, either," he said.

"Hurry up, you lot," Fred yelled from down the way.

"Alright, keep your hair on," Ginny yelled back. "You should ask Harry," she added to Dennis. "It won't do any good, but I think you should ask him anyway. "

Fred yelled again and she hurried away, clearly expecting them to follow. Colin hung back, though.

"Are you okay?" he asked.

Dennis frowned. "Yes? Why?"

"I don't know," Colin said, "you just seemed kind of..." He shrugged. "Growing up fast, Den. " He managed a smiled. "You're still my little brother, right?"

"Always," Dennis said, hugging him. "Come on, or Ginny will have our guts for garters. Not that guts would make good garters. I don't think intestines would hold your socks up very well, and they would smell a bit. But maybe you could, like, refine them into proper garters or something. "

"...thank you for that really disgusting image," Colin said. "Race you. "

He won, but it was a close thing. In the rush, and because Ginny had been arguing with Fred, they ended up entering the Hog's Head first, laughing together. Still the others weren't far behind, or already in front, and the whole crowd of them -- twenty-five students altogether -- practically filled the dingy space inside.

The meeting went basically as Dennis remembered, and though he almost spoke up a few times to bring up the Slytherin thing, in the end he let it go as before, except this time he made sure to get Aberforth to sneak him a few butterbeers disguised as bottled fruit juice while everyone else was discussing the defence association.

"Why," Dennis asked Colin as they were leaving, "why, right, why do they call it butterbeer, anyway? It's neither beer nor butter. It's quite tasty though. Very warming!"

(It might not be very alcoholic, but he was also not very big, and the two appeared to cancel each other out.)

"Perhaps we should get you something to eat," Colin said, "to soak it up a bit. "

"Okay," Dennis said, nodding happily. "I like food. If it's tasty. I don't like untasty food. Hey, isn't that Malfoy?"

He pointed. Colin looked. There was nothing there now, just the long grass rustling, a flash of white that might have been a rat or a rabbit or something.

"Bugger!" Dennis said. "I was going to find Harry after the meeting. I completely forgot!"

"We live in the same tower," Colin pointed out. "You can just tell him later. Hey, Dennis!"

Dennis was already gone. Hogsmeade was small enough that it only took a few minutes of wandering

for him to find Harry, Ron and Hermione.

"Hello, Harry!" he called cheerfully.

"Oh, uh. Hello, Dennis," Harry said. He frowned. "Hang on, aren't you a second year? How did you--"

"I wanted to ask you something," Dennis said loudly, then shushed himself. In a slightly lower voice, he repeated, "I wanted to ask you something. About the you-know-what. " He tapped his nose significantly.

"What, Voldemort?" Harry asked.

"Not You-Know-Who," Dennis giggled. "You-know-what!"

"Er, right," said Harry. He waved Hermione and Ron to go on ahead and tugged Dennis into a nearby side street. "Dennis -- how many butterbeers have you had?"

"Um. " Dennis frowned. "At least three. Possibly four, because I finished off Colin's and Ginny's as well.

Harry pulled off his glasses so he could rub at his eyes. "Dennis..."

"Ssst! Not, not the point," said Dennis. "The point is, right, the point is. Slytherins. Slytherins are the point. Interhouse wossnames. You have got to reach out, reach out and touch somebody's hand. " He hummed. "No, hang on, that's a song. "

"Slytherins," Harry repeated. "Is this about your weird obsession with Draco Malfoy?"

"No," said Dennis, "except yes, but no, because it's not weird or an obsession, it's a mathematical wossname. Centres of connection, you see? I did the maths. And the woosh! Moon! So you see, you see, Harry, can I call you Harry? You see, Harry. " He frowned. "Okay, I said all this to Ginny and it sounded really good, but now I don't remember a word of it. "

"Maybe you should go back to Hogwarts," Harry said.

"I love Hogwarts. " Dennis nodded. "I love magic. Colin spent his first year petrified because of You-Know-Who's ghost. In my first year, the school champion died and You-Know-Who came back. I understand how important this is. I understand how real this is. It's not Quidditch. People die. " He frowned. "Okay, yes, people die in Quidditch too, so as metaphors or similes or whatever go, that kind of sucked. My point was, I do understand things. "

"Okay," said Harry, confused.

"And I think you would be a prat too, if you had grown up being indulged and told that you were the best just by existing and everyone and everything seemed to be aimed to that same end," Dennis said.

"Malfoy, again. " Harry sighed.

"His parents suck," Dennis said.

"The Dursleys suck," Harry said, heatedly, "and I think I turned out okay. "

Dennis waved this off. "I'm not saying Draco isn't at fault, but he's never been given a reason to be anything other than he is. He pushes your buttons and you go pwoing! Pop up, just like a toaster!"

"Er," said Harry. "This isn't some kind of innuendo, is it?"

"No," said Dennis. He frowned. "Although it might be?"

"It really isn't," said Harry, far too quickly.

"There's nothing wrong with it, if it is," Dennis informed him. "Have you had the talk? You see, when a boy gets older and starts turning into a man, he gets all these new feelings and--"

"Please stop talking," Harry moaned.

"It's not like I suggested you're only going out with Cho because you had a thing for Cedric," Dennis complained.

"Good, because I liked Cho way before I liked Cedric," Harry insisted.

Dennis blinked at him.

"Not that I, I mean, I was just-- shut up!" Harry snapped.

"Okay," Dennis said.

They were both silent for a bit.

"Anyway, I just wanted to say," Dennis said. "You don't have to tell them about the defence association. You don't even have to approach him directly. You could just mention the idea to Graham when he has breakfast with us, or to Blaise, or something. You know, just lay it out there, that there is this thing, and it would help. "

"He would give us up immediately," Harry said dubiously.

"He might not," Dennis said. "Not all Gryffindors are alike, you know. Some of them turn out to be Peter Pettigrew. So why shouldn't some Slytherins turn out to be like you? I don't think you should fault Draco for loving his family. He does, you know. "

"I know," Harry said, quietly.

"Anyway," Dennis said. He frowned. "I keep saying 'anyway' a lot. I should stop that. Anyway, just something to think about. I don't really expect you to invite the Slytherins, because that would probably fracture time or something. " He nodded seriously.

There was a clang, and they both looked around to see a dustbin fall over. A small animal darted away, no doubt a scavenger scared by the noise that also attracted attention from passer-bys, ending their privacy.

"Okay, I should go find Colin again," Dennis said. "Bye, Harry!"

"Goodbye, Dennis," Harry said. "Hey, I will-- I'll think about what you said, okay?"

"Thanks, Harry!" Dennis beamed and bounded off to catch up with Colin.

"Talked to Harry?" he asked.

"Colin!" Dennis beamed some more. "I did! Hello! Are we going back to Hogwarts? It's a bloody long way. "

"Luna and Ginny managed to hook us up with a carriage," Colin said. "Come on, you can squeeze in.

Lucky you're so small. "

"I'm not small," Dennis said. "I'm far away. "

Colin snorted. "Come on, little brother. "

They found the carriage and Colin pulled Dennis in. He took his place on the seat, leaning his head against Colin's shoulder, half listening as Luna said something about narwhales, maybe, and Ginny made disbelieving comments. Even with the bony rest and the shaking of the carriage, bouncing him up and down in his seat like being on a jinxed broom (Colin's first year, Dennis still had the photos, everything came back to Quidditch), even with all this it was surprisingly warm and comfortable in there. He swore he only closed his eyes for a second.

# # #

For a breath, he was suddenly in the Dumbledore's Army meeting, and everyone was practicing Expelliarmus so he flicked his wand but all that happened was books went flying, and then he did too, a month slipping through his fingers like smoke, and everything was dark and bright and loud and -- was someone singing?

# # #

They were. They were singing the Weasley King song, the one that had made Natalie wonder if Malfoy had a crush on Ron. It was actually somewhat funny, if you weren't on the receiving end, which was the problem with all of Malfoy's humour, really. He just didn't think enough.

Dennis opened his eyes and blinked a bit to clear his vision, before sitting upright. He felt off, somehow, as if he had pulled his drink with him, stretched out a hangover over, how long? A month or so. It was

the first Quidditch game of his second year. Slytherin versus Gryffindor. Wasn't it always? It felt that way. Ravenclaw and Hufflpuff matches just blurred away. Slytherin versus Gryffindor. Harry versus Draco. Of course, of course, wasn't that how the math had worked out? Ginny would know, should know, had seen--

He shook his head again, trying to clear it. There was no pattern to this thing. Or. He had been thinking about Quidditch -- that thing he had said to Harry, the jinxed broom. Focus. Focus was key. Absolute engrossment. (And someone else had said something just as important, but it kept sliding away in his head.) Focus, right, great, except he was having trouble thinking at all. The players on the field were a blur. Gryffindors were yelling around him, trying to drown out the song. Everything was noise and light and darkness and he had to grab himself to make sure he was still there.

"Come on, Dennis," he said aloud, barely recognising his own voice.

You die, he thought wildly as Fred swished past, smashing a bludger back. I can't save you. I won't save you, that's the worse of it. I'm worse than Voldemort. He just didn't care. I care, but I am still going to let you die. I'm not the hero here. I'm the villain.

He couldn't breathe. He couldn't breathe. He pushed himself away from the bench. Natalie mouthed something at him -- or maybe she said it aloud, but all he could see was her mouth moving, concern in her eyes. He waved her off, pushing past people, finding himself at the edge of the box. There still wasn't enough air. A wall of sound behind him. The pitch charms in front, pushing him back. No good if your audience falls to their death. It might interrupt the match.

Do you remember what happens, that little annoying voice in his head piped up. Do you? Draco happens.

"Oh, god," Dennis whispered. "First game of term. I have to--"

The crowd surged. He shoved past, finding his way to the rear exit, just like in the other timeline, and went down the backstairs as fast as he could, grabbing at the handrail every time his feet went out from under him, and somehow managing not to fall entirely or break his ankles. He burst out at ground level, expecting to see them still flying, except that last surge had apparently been Harry catching the snitch,

because the teams were coming in to land. There was uproar in the stands, catcalls, yells, jeering. Crabbe had smacked a bludger at Harry after the whistle had gone.

Dennis looked around frantically. He had to get to Harry before -- and there was Draco, circling, face twisted, colour in his cheeks but nowhere else. Dennis started forward. Something whispered behind him, brushed against his robes. He broke into a run, but Draco was suddenly landing, his face slack, and then pulling up into an abrupt sneer as he launched into his verbal offensive. Dennis, too far away, far too far, sank to his knees on the grass, watching it unfold -- Draco more vicious by the moment, tumbling down like an avalanche; Fred and George barely in check and then not even that; Harry lunging; firsts; blood on pale white skin; Hooch's hex--

He couldn't watch any more. There were no excuses, not really. Harry would never reach out now. Before it had even begun, it was over. Dennis pulled himself to his feet and turned away, stumbling listlessly off the pitch, back through the stands. He stopped immediately outside, leaning back against the stands for support. He felt sick. More than. You couldn't forget this sort of thing. Harry wouldn't. It was easy to think of Draco as a bad boy, of cartoon redemption, but then you saw all the, the grunge inside him...

Doubling over, Dennis vomited against the wall. Putrid chunks slid down the wood and he fell back.

His thoughts were a blur. Focus. He had to. He couldn't. What was there to focus on? Months of Umbridge, of increasing disgust, of increasing hate and abuse and then exams and Harry and the others off to the Department of Mysteries and that damn prophecy and Sirius. Where in there was there a time and a place for Dennis? Where could he stand, where would be his pivot, what his lever to move the recalcitrant universe? Lucius would go to Azkaban and Harry and Draco--

("I'm trying to decide what curse to use on Malfoy, sir. ")

Lights flashed. Inside his head, outside, he couldn't tell any more. Breath escaped him again. The ground seemed to be tilting, the wall bending, everything falling, or maybe just him. He thought he saw Draco, but it couldn't be, of course, because Draco was out on the pitch, bleeding, being tended to by Hooch, except, was that still happening? Hadn't it already happened? Had it happened yet? He was in too many places, too many people at once. Somewhere, someone was calling his name, but the voice kept changing, sometimes Colin, sometimes Natalie, sometimes Blaise, sometimes Ginny, sometimes

Draco or Harry or, and was that Auror Madley, Unspeakable Croaker? He thought he saw Draco again and tried to reach for him, crying out, "don't you understand?" except Dennis couldn't have said in that moment if he understand anything either. There was only the whirling and the thunder and everything crashing out like Narnia exploding from a wardrobe or a cabinet, a cabinet, and then final, blessed, blackness.

# # #

ONE YEAR (AND NO YEARS) BEFORE

"Bugger," said Dennis and opened his eyes. He was lying on the floor. The Weasley twins were looking down at him. He opened his mouth to ask where and, more importantly, when, he was, and was quite surprised when giggles came out instead.

"Too much cheer," Fred mused.

"Not enough pop," George agreed.

They bent down and easily picked Dennis up, setting him on his feet and pressing a bunch of lightly glowing lollipops into his hands.

"On the house," Fred said.

"For being such a good test subject," George added, and the twins hurried back into their workshop at the back of the store.

'Lighten up Lollipops' the label said. Dennis remembered these. It must be summer before his third year. He shrugged, opened another and licked at it. Artificial cheer was much better than gloomy thoughts about how he'd screwed everything up -- and there was a whole store of distractions around him.

He wandered off to take a closer look at the shiny kaleidoscope mirrors, narrowly missing the return of Fred and the arrival of Harry. He tilted the mirrors to look around the store, grinning as the customers were repeated in flowery patterns. The mirrors were adjustable -- at full strength, they reduced everything to endlessly intricate patterns of colour; at their weakest they merely split things in four, reflecting them horizontally and vertically. It was at this setting that Dennis caught sight of the Pygmy Puffs.

At the exact moment he turned his head, Mister Weasley stepped out of his way and he saw, in the same moment, both Draco Malfoy hurrying past outside and that Harry had noticed the same thing. Dennis quickly turned away, but watched in the mirror (having to tilt it continuously to get a good enough view) as Harry pulled his invisibility cloak out and Ron and then Hermione slipped under it. The door opened by itself.

Harry had seen Draco and instantly rushed off after him. Harry had seen Draco and gone after him. Right away. Just like that.

"I was completely wrong," Dennis said, beaming. Okay, maybe it was just cheering charms, but he felt fantastic. Harry had gone after Draco. He still had a chance. "Colin will live!"

"I should bloody well hope so," Colin said, appearing out of the crowd at his shoulder.

Dennis yelped in surprise and then, even as he was tumbling over backwards, burst out laughing. Chortles followed him all the way down.

# # #

There were laughs and a crowd and for a second Dennis thought he hadn't gone anywhere at all, until he looked up and saw the hanging Gryffindor colours.

"Harry's back," Colin said, pulling Dennis along. "Come on, we can get the match from the hero's mouth!"

They were in the common room. They had just won a game: Slytherin versus Gryffindor, of course. Harry had been flying against Harper, a boy in Colin's year, instead of Malfoy, which meant it was 1996 still, early November now. One and a half years to go, thought Dennis, and said, "Hello, Harry!"

"Hey, Dennis," said Harry in a long-suffering sort of way.

"Great game," said Colin. "Psyching out Harper! That was brilliant!"

"Draco would have to be pretty desperate to give up playing against you," Dennis put in.

Harry blinked at him, and was about to reply, when one of the girls jumped in with a different question. Dennis kept failing to get a word in edgeways. Harry kept failing to sneak off. Romilda Vane kept failing to get herself invited to Slughorn's Christmas party. Finally, with a deft bit of dodging and distraction, Harry managed to escape.

"Bugger," said Dennis cheerfully.

He found a chair to collapse into, eyes still blinking. Well, not blinking so much as slipping closed against his wishes and being quickly forced open again. He thought about going to find some coffee, and Harry, who had gone out of the portrait hole, but everything felt heavy and slow and he was still contemplating vague getting up plans when his eyes slipped closed and stayed that way.

# # #

It was May the next time he opened his eyes. Among other things, it meant he was now thirteen, which was either a good or a bad omen depending on how you interpreted your numerology, which was another reason Dennis had dropped Divination after his OWLs. In practice, it meant he had a month, or, well, a week, or, strictly speaking, however long he could stay awake for, to get Harry and Draco if not exactly shagging, then at least close enough so there would be enough leeway to get Colin out alive. The more he thought about it, admittedly, the more it seemed a very bizarre and stupid plan doomed to failure, but the maths was good and the outcome was brilliant and, also, he had nothing else to do, really, so onward! No Ravenclaw blithering for him! Just lots and lots and lots of coffee.

Dennis didn't really like coffee, so this also meant lots and lots and lots of sugar.

Blaise eyed him from the other side of the table. "If you're going to explode, could you go and do it at the Gryffindor table?"

"People very rarely explode," Dennis said, "except in a metaphorical sort of way, of if they take too many of those snack-box things that make you vomit. Does that count as an explosion? It's more a rupture, really, or a burst. Generally people just haemorrhage internally, and then blood comes out of the eyes and mouth and nose and fills the lungs and they die by drowning or--"

Graham, looking a rather sickly white-green, pushed his breakfast away. "Thanks, Dennis. "

"Sorry!" Dennis had some more coffee. "Yuck!"

"Why are you drinking it if you don't like it?" Blaise asked. "Is this a Gryffindor thing?"

"A Gryffindor thing?" Dennis asked.

"Resolute in the face of danger and food. Fight on until the last breath and / or drop. Rah, rah, rah," Blaise added vaguely. "Go lions. "

"Don't give up the day job," Graham said.

"I could be an actor if I wanted," Blaise assured him, "it's just that I really don't. Get Malfoy to do it; he's passable at impressions. "

All three of them looked towards the space Draco should have been in but wasn't. Crabbe and Goyle were both missing as well. It made that section of the table look very empty. People were crowding away from it. Dennis wondered if Draco had cursed the spot to ensure he always had a place to sit in the mornings. A place that just happened to always be roughly opposite where Harry had breakfast. 'Just happened' -- hah!

If Harry and Draco weren't Harry and Draco, they would already be together, Dennis was absolutely certain of this. It didn't help the current situation though.

"Blaise!"

"Munchkin. "

"I need you to help me set up Harry and Draco!"

Blaise shrugged. "Okay. "

Well. That was easy. "Don't you want to know why?"

"I presumed you were doing it for the laughs," Blaise said. Graham nodded.

"It's actually vitally important to the history of the future!" Dennis said. "...well, no, okay, it isn't really; the future sort of just happens no matter what! But for the right future, it is important! I have done maths!"

Graham and Blaise stared at him blankly.

"Yes," said Dennis, nodding. "I'm doing it for the laughs!"

Graham grinned and clapped him on the shoulder. "I knew we would make a Slytherin of you eventually. "

"Gryffindors do things for the laughs all the time," Dennis pointed out. "We had the Weasley twins!"

"I've always thought they would make good Slytherins too," Blaise mused. "On the other hand, though, I wouldn't trust them not to accidentally blow a hole in the ceiling and dump the lake into the common room. "

"Squiddy would block the hole until it was fixed!" Dennis said. "Or the holes! Unless it was a big hole! Anyway, Fred and George have never exploded the Gryffindor common room, although once they did turn absolutely everybody into canaries by getting Lee to spike the punch while they distracted everyone trying to give them biscuits! That was fun!"

"Are you aware you're exclaiming everything you're saying?" Blaise asked with interest. "More than usual, I mean. "

"No, I'm not!" Dennis complained. "Oh! Well, apparently I am! But that isn't important right now! We

have to get Harry and Draco together! For the future! Of laughs!"

"How do we do that then?" Graham asked.

Dennis pouted. "You're Slytherins, you're supposed to tell me, with your cunning and ambition and--"

"Stunning good looks?" Graham suggested.

"That's why I asked Blaise," Dennis agreed, nodding. Blaise laughed. Graham glared. "What?"

"Obviously," said Blaise, "we just need to get them in the same place and the same time without anyone else around"

"And then their natural mutual attraction will overtake them?" Dennis asked.

"Well, I was thinking more along the lines of bondage and booze," Blaise said, "but okay, we could try that. "

"Where?" said Dennis.

"Where do they have in common?" Graham asked.

"Quidditch!" Dennis said.

"Malfoy skipped the Slytherin-Gryffindor game," Graham pointed out. "Anyway, they've already played, so they won't do that again. "

"Oh, yeah. " Dennis frowned. "Where is Malfoy, anyway? Oh. " Right. Fixing the vanishing cabinet. "Missing breakfast as well; that's a bad sign. He has to go back to Slytherin at some point, though. "

"Not necessarily," Blaise said. Dennis pouted. Blaise patted his head. "I'm sure we will think of something. "

"Bathroom!" said Graham.

"You don't have to ask permission to leave the table," Blaise said.

"I wasn't, I was saying: bathroom! Harry as Quidditch Captain has access to the prefects' bathroom, and Malfoy is a prefect, so he does too. " Graham nodded. "You can get them there. "

"I can't get in," Dennis said. "I'm not a prefect. "

"I am," Blaise said. They both looked at him. "I don't like to advertise this fact," he explained, "because when you do people expect you to actually do something. "

"You can take points off people, though," Graham said.

Blaise shrugged. "It was more fun when Umbridge let us take points away from other prefects, but they've stopped that again. I was going to wait until the end of time and then just nobble the other houses so we won the House Cup. "

Dennis knew the House Cup would be the last thing on anyone's mind at the end of term, but there was no point saying that. He glanced up at the teachers' table, but Dumbledore wasn't there either. "Don't they know that breakfast is the most important meal of the day?"

"Probably not," said Graham. "Anyway. Malfoy and Potter. Lock them in the prefect's bathroom; don't let them out until they snog. "

"If someone is in the bathroom, no one else can get in," Blaise said. "They tightened the charms after last year's Inquisitorial Squad party that--"

"Please stop," Dennis said. "This is as bad as Dumbledore trying to tell me about him and Grindelwald!"

"There were lots of bubbles," Blaise said in a fond, nostalgic sort of way.

"Dumbledore was banging Grindelwald?" Graham asked. "Bloody hell! That's one for the books!"

"Not until summer it isn't," Dennis said, "and if someone was in the bathroom and Harry and Malfoy were both heading there, neither would be able to get in, and so they'd have to talk!"

"Or they could just leave," Graham pointed out.

"I think we should go back to tying them together," Blaise said.

"No, no, this will work!" Dennis said. "I can feel it in my bones!"

"I think that might just be all the coffee," Graham said.

"We'll need Potter's schedule," Blaise mused. He was looking over at the Gryffindor table where Ginny was just sitting down to breakfast. "Which is easily obtained. I shall be right back. "

"I'll come too!" Dennis said.

Blaise shrugged, swinging his legs over the bench and sliding to his feet. "If you must. Stay out of the way and let me do the talking. "

"Okay!" said Dennis, bouncing to his feet and around the table to Blaise's side. "I won't say a word! Totally silent! Like a post! One that's dumb and doesn't speak! Unlike howlers which are post and yell!"

"Sit down over there," Blaise said. "No, further away. A little bit further. Good. Stay! Good munchkin!"

"Still not a munchkin," Dennis said, and took another gulp of coffee. "Bleuch!"

Ginny stared at them both for a moment, and then looked up at Blaise. "You realise this is the Gryffindor table, right? I know Dennis has problems with that, but I figured your natural aversion to -- what is it, mudbloods and blood-traitors? -- would keep you away. "

"It's good to know that mine are the only prejudices that count," Blaise said easily, sitting down. "May I get you a drink? Some fresh pumpkin juice, perhaps, or some fine roast coffee, as opposed to the caffeinated treacle that the munchkin is drinking. "

They both looked at Dennis. He waved at them.

"If he keeps vibrating like that," Blaise mused, "do you think he will start to pass through solid objects? I've always wondered what goes on in Hufflepuff when no one else is around. Muffin?"

"Did you just call me muffin?" Ginny asked.

"I was offering you one," Blaise said, "but I would gladly call you muffin if you'd like me to. Do you think

Harry would complain?"

"...I'm going out with Dean," Ginny corrected him. "Were you really going to get me food?"

"In the sense of asking the House Elves do it, yes. " Blaise nodded.

"Because I'm incapable of doing it myself?" she asked, dangerously, fingers tapping on her wand.

"Because I'm being gallant," Blaise corrected, taking her hand in his own. "And charming. " He pressed a kiss to her knuckles. "And you are passably pretty. "

"We clearly have very different ideas of what's considered 'charming'," Ginny said.

"Perhaps you would like to discuss them?" Blaise suggested. "A candle-lit dinner, a cosy little table for two, some intriguing discussion -- it's as important to exercise the mind as it is the body. "

"I have a boyfriend," Ginny said.

"Bring him along," Blaise offered. "How is Harry?"

"I'm still going out with Dean," Ginny pointed out.

Blaise waved this away. "My dear girl Weasley--"

"One, I am not your anything, two, I'm especially not your dear anything, and three, I have a name," Ginny said. "And four, I'm wearing very sturdy shoes. "

"Ginevra Molly," said Blaise, "I've no doubt that you are formidable even without your sturdy shoes, but let us not lie to one another. You have no more given up on Harry Potter than--"

"--you have on seducing everything in the school?" Ginny suggested.

"Only the interesting ones!" Dennis put in. They both looked at him. He waved. "Hello! We have a plan!"

Blaise sighed. "Never work with animals, children or Gryffindors. "

"Are you only flirting because you want to know things about Harry?" Ginny asked.

"Of course not," Blaise said indignantly. "I'm flirting because you're attractive and I have no shame. Were you ugly or boring, I would be using entirely different methods to pump you for information. "

"I think you should go away now," Ginny said, but she was smiling a little.

"As you wish," Blaise said. "May I kiss your hand again?"

"No," said Ginny, and then, "well, okay. "

Blaise did, smiled at her warmly, said, "We'll get him there at eight, the rest is up to you" to Dennis, smiled warmly at Ginny again, and sauntered off.

"He'll get who where?" Ginny asked Dennis.

"It's a secret," Dennis said. "So, do you know where Harry is and what he's doing and where he will be for the rest of the day?"

"Possibly," said Ginny. "What are you up to?"

"I'm trying to get Harry and Draco together because when I pushed them apart everybody ended up on the moon but I still want to change the future so I'm getting them together so they will be a balancing force to limit the consequent changes I make, which is much more logical than it sounds, really, there was maths involve and, admittedly, dreams, but dreams can be maths too, it's very ubiquitous, I think, although that may not mean what I think it means," Dennis explained, "and that's why I need to know what Harry is doing so that I can arrange for him to be at the right place and the right time!"

"I. You. What?" Ginny stared.

"I have had lots of coffee," Dennis said, nodding a lot.

"I could tell. Would you like to explain that to me again, slowly?" Ginny said. There was noise around her and they both looked up to see most everybody was leaving. "Perhaps later. "

"I can walk you to class," Dennis said. "I have a free period now! Because it's History and Binns never notices if I'm there or not, basically! I'll carry your books!"

"Okay, then," Ginny said, who had brought them down to breakfast with her and was never one to turn down a bit of book carrying.

Dennis beamed and bounced to his feet and bounced up to her and took the books and bounced on the spot.

"You really should cut down on the caffeine," she said, leading the way out of the great hall. "So, what is this about Harry and Malfoy? Is it something to do with the way Harry has been obsessing about him all

term?"

"He has?" Dennis beamed. His plan was working. "Yes! It's totally about that! We are going to try and set them up!"

"So Harry can curse him and be done with it?" Ginny suggested.

"No!" Dennis complained. "So Harry and Draco can work things out. "

Ginny laughed. Dennis stared. Ginny sobered up. "Oh, dear, you were serious. "

"Yes!" Dennis nodded. "Draco may talk the talk, but he never had to walk the walk before! I reckon it's much easier to follow You-Know-Who if you have never met him. "

"He did have a certain... He had presence," Ginny said. "When he was younger, Tom did. " Dennis gaped at her. Ginny smiled a little. "It's a long story, and not one I want to recount. "

"Okay!" Dennis shrugged. "I didn't know other people knew You-Know-Who used to be Tom Riddle. Except Harry, of course, and Professor Dumbledore!" He looked around. "Are we going to Charms? It's quicker up the stairs behind the portrait of Uggleford the Gassy. "

"There are stairs--? Okay, sure. " Ginny nodded. "You know your way around Hogwarts very well. "

"I got lost all the time in my first year," Dennis said, "but the portraits and statues are very helpful if you're polite. "

"You talk to the portraits?" Ginny asked.

"Doesn't everyone?" Dennis asked.

"Not really. " Ginny shook her head. "They--"

Dennis was half way up the corridor before he realised Ginny wasn't next to him any more. He turned back to look, saw her stopped by a doorway, and started to call her name, but she quickly waved at him to be quiet. He sneaked back as stealthily as he could manage which, basically, wasn't at all, and joined her.

"What is it?" He whispered.

She waved him to be quiet. Someone was talking, just loud enough to be heard, inside what Dennis realised was a bathroom.

"Stupid, stupid, stupid, why will the damn thing not -- I tried, I have tried everything, every single thing and it won't, it will not--"

"That's Malfoy," Dennis whispered to Ginny.

She rolled her eyes at him, all 'I know!'

"This is all wrong, this is -- It wasn't supposed to be like this!"

Draco yelled, and Dennis remembered another Draco raging against the universe being the way it was instead of the way he thought it should be. Some half-formed revelation stirred in the back of his mind, but he lost it as Draco continued.

"I can't," Draco moaned, "and, oh -- mother, father. He'll kill them. It's my family, what else am I supposed to do? You can't just -- Not them. Not them!"

There was crash from inside, and Ginny and Dennis both jumped. Ginny grabbed Dennis, pulling him back, and they both pressed themselves against the wall as the door burst open. Draco, whiter than any living person had any right being, trembling and shaking, stumbled out of the room. He made a noise, somewhere between a sob and a gasp for breath, and then forced himself upright, quickly striding off down the corridor, angrily rubbing his face on his sleeve as he went.

Ginny and Dennis stared after him.

"Harry always has had a thing about saving people," she said, finally.

Dennis tried to think of something intelligent to say, but all that came out was "huh?"

"You can say a lot about the Malfoys," Ginny said, "and most of it would be true, but they love each other. They have that. They're human, under everything. And Harry, well. "

"He loves you," Dennis said.

She smiled at him. "If he does, I don't think he's noticed. "

"He will, though," Dennis insisted.

"Harry loves family," Ginny corrected. "I think-- I think Harry could end up in love with the idea of being in love with me, but that's not really the same thing is it? I've always wondered if that would be enough for me. I don't think so. I deserve more than that. I just don't know if Harry could ever truly give me more. "

Dennis wanted to contradict her, but he didn't know if he could. Anyway, Ginny was still talking, almost more to her self than him.

"Harry looks at me and he sees... I think he sees an idea about creating the happy family that he never had. I could give him that. I've always been willing to do that for him. I might even be willing to share him with somebody else -- so long as he was willing to share me in return. "

"Really?" asked Dennis.

"Just so long as I had him first and foremost. " Something like a smile twisted her lips. "I'm no saint, Dennis. I do love Harry and I'd be happy to give him the kind of happy family that he dreams about, that he needs -- but I deserve a chance to find real love just as much as he does. Do you think I'm selfish?"

Dennis shook his head. "Dumbledore said we can love many times, each equally true. Everybody deserves to find love. "

"They do. And Harry has his saving thing..." She frowned at Dennis, and then reached out idly to mess with his hair. "Sometimes you seem a lot older than you are, Den. "

"Sometimes I am," Dennis admitted.

"Do you really think Harry has a chance?" she asked. "I mean, do you think he could save Malfoy?"

"Harry will save us all," Dennis said. It wasn't just foreknowledge. It was an article of faith. He had believed it from the first. Harry would save them. That was what Harry did. Even after Colin... Well. Just because you got mad at people didn't mean you didn't still love them.

"I hope so," Ginny said. "I really do. Eight o'clock, did Blaise say?" Dennis nodded. "Come find me after classes. "

* * *

Lessons passed in a bouncing blur. The sixteen-sugar espressos probably had something to do with that, and Flitwick was sure they would be able to get the stains out of the ceiling or, at least, paint over them a few hundred times, so that was okay. Afterwards, he found Ginny as directed, although it turned out that the problem was less getting Harry to go the bathroom -- to which, it turned out, Ginny had known the password all along -- as getting him to go at the right time. Ron and Hermione were sniping almost constantly at each other and Harry had been desperate to get away from them for a bit -- while Dean had been increasingly annoyed at how little attention his girlfriend was paying to him.

Finally, the right time came around and Dennis rushed out ahead of Harry. Knowing the shortest routes, he was at the prefect's bathroom in minutes. Graham was there already, waiting anxiously.

"Draco's coming up already!" he said as soon as he saw Dennis. "I asked the Baron to ask Peeves to haunt the main stairwell, but that won't slow him down for long. "

"It's okay," Dennis assured him. "Harry is on his way as well. I just have to set up the glamours and confundus charms so they don't notice each other until the very last minute. How did you convince Malfoy to come on up?"

"I let Pansy overhear me asking Goyle if Draco still had a thing for her. " Graham grinned. "You should've seen his face! It was awesome. I wish I had your camera -- you are going to take photos of this, right?"

Dennis carefully ignored the question. "Is Blaise inside?"

"Yep. " Graham nodded. "Everything is ready. We need to go before they see us!"

"I have to do the charms," Dennis repeated. "Go on, though. I'll catch you up. "

Graham nodded again and hurried off, while Dennis set the charms at the Slytherin end of the corridor. One made the corridor look empty, another was a light confusion so you wouldn't check too closely, the last a weak disillusionment charm that would discourage them from the leaving, although only a little -- nothing up to Imperio standard. If they really wanted to leave, they would be able to. It was a NEWT standard charm that Dennis really wasn't supposed to know yet but, hopefully, no one would get a good look at it. He was setting the matching charms at the Gryffindor end when he spotted Harry coming up the stairs. There was no way Dennis could pass him without being seen on the landing.

"Bugger," he said and retreated the other way.

Draco was coming up the other stairs. Which, okay, yes, was the point, they were supposed to arrive together; they just weren't supposed to do it while he was still there.

"Bugger!" he said with more force, and ducked back.

There was no time. Desperately, he cast a disillusionment charm on himself, pressing back against the wall in the shadows by the door. He hissed the password at it but, of course, with Blaise inside, it just chimed softly -- and, of course, Blaise would be expecting Draco and Harry to try the same thing and be ignoring the entry requests. Bugger, bugger, bugger.

He clapped his hands over his mouth to stop himself saying 'Hello, Harry!' His heart was racing nineteen to the dozen, although possibly that was just all the coffee. Just stay calm and focused, he told himself. They're going to be too distracted any minute. Just stay calm and focused and bloody hell this wall is cold, the only place in the entire castle there wasn't a tapestry or a painting or something, just typical, and that isn't focusing, Dennis!

Draco, ignoring him entirely, wandered up to the door as if his feet were in very, very heavy shoes, and pulled at the handle, mumbling the password. The door stayed shut. Draco sighed, took a deep breath, let it out -- close enough that Dennis could feel the air move -- and tried the password again, louder and clearer. Nothing. He pulled at the door. Nothing. He put both hands on the handle and yanked. Still

nothing. He made a wordless noise of frustration and both pounded on and kicked the door.

"I think someone is in there," Harry said, from right behind him.

Both Dennis and Draco jumped, even though Dennis had actually been expecting Harry. Draco, who hadn't, not only jumped but spun all the way around, hand scrabbling for his wand.

"Potter," he spat.

"Expecting someone else?" Harry asked. He took a step forward. Draco took a step back. "You seem very jumpy. "

"Potter," said Draco again, face twisting.

Harry didn't say anything. They stared at each other. Dennis held his breath. They kept staring. Dennis carefully let his breath back out again so that he didn't pass out, which would be a right giveaway. It was like a Wild West stand-off, except that Draco's hand was already on his wand and Harry hadn't reached for him, and neither seemed to be about to curse each other, or do anything much. It was simultaneously incredibly tense and yet really boring. Dennis felt sweat trickle down his back. It was rather unpleasant.

"What?" said Draco finally.

Harry's lips twitched. "That's the best you've got?"

"That's the most you're worth," Draco snapped, and Harry's almost smile went away again. "Get out of my way. "

"No," said Harry, thoughtfully. "What are you up to, Malfoy? I've been watching you. "

"Your voyeuristic tendencies are of no interest to me. " Draco's sneer had come back, like slipping on a comfy jumper, something nice and old and well worn and warm and -- I really need to remember to charm my clothes warm or cool in advance, Dennis thought and made himself listen as Draco asked, "Don't you have a Weasley to moon over?"

Harry's eyes darkened. "Whatever it is you think you're doing, you're not going to get away with it. "

Judging by the set of Draco's shoulders, Dennis decided Draco didn't think he would get away with it either.

Harry moved forward again, but this time Draco didn't back down. There wasn't much difference in their heights. Draco was, perhaps, just a little taller. He gave them impression of being a lot thinner, although perhaps that was more about bearing than anything else. Harry, after all, just walked around places with none of the unconscious grace he showed in the air. Draco strode with a deliberate flair, and flew with it to; always more concerned about looking right than actually being right. He had his own sort of bravery, a thing steeped in tradition and family.

Once, Dennis thought, someone must have told him a Malfoy doesn't back down. Never apologise, never regret. Except somewhere along the way 'act as if you're always right' had somehow become 'you are always right', which is why you got such statements as: "When the Dark Lord takes over, I will enjoy watching him end you. "

"He's had a few tries," said Harry airily. "Hasn't worked yet. But I'm sure you'll be in his favour. Sucking up -- that's what you Malfoys are good at?"

There wasn't really a paler Draco could go and his posture was already so stiff that Dennis only saw the reaction because he had been looking for it.

"Don't talk about my family, Scarhead," Draco said. "You don't understand anything. You--"

"Dennis," Harry said and Dennis jerked, head banging against the door, afraid he had been seen until Harry continued, "he thinks there's something wrong with you -- I mean, not--" He shook his head. "Why weren't you playing, Draco?"

"Dennis Creevey is an O-grade whack job," Draco said, and Dennis clamped his hands over his mouth again. "I don't answer to him, and I certainly don't answer to you. "

"Who do you answer to?" Harry asked. "Have you met him, then? Face to face? I reckon you'd piss your pants in terror. "

He was advancing on Draco again and Draco's nerve had clearly broken because he was backing away, and Dennis would have been in a right pickle if the bathroom door hadn't suddenly cracked open just enough to let him be yanked inside. It closed again, silently, and judging by the lack of yells on the other side of the door, it hadn't been noticed.

Dennis looked at the wet hand on his arm and then along the wet, naked arm to the wet body at the other end of it. It was Blaise.

"I thought they'd caught you, then, when Harry said your name," he said.

"I thought they had caught me too," Dennis said, resolutely not letting his eyes go below Blaise's shoulders and, "how did you hear anyway?"

"Extendable Ears," said Blaise, offering him one. "I'm wearing a towel, by the way. In case you were wondering. "

Dennis looked down Blaise's wet chest, down over ridiculously impressive abs, to see the pink fluffy towel wrapped around Blaise's hips. It really was very warm in the bathroom. Steamy.

"Guh?" Dennis managed. Blaise waved the Extendable Ear at him again, so he took it. "Nng. "

"You really should lay off the coffee, munchkin," Blaise said, giving him the speculative look of someone wondering if you might be about to have a spectacular breakdown and, if so, should they move back or take photos? (Possibly Dennis was reading into it a little.)

The door thumped a little and, exchanging looks, they both leant forward, one end of the Ears against their own, the other pressed against the door.

"I can't help it if you're too stupid to die," Draco was saying.

"It's weird," said Harry, "because I've been thinking about it, and from a really skewed perspective, it's like you've been trying to warn me about things. Like how you knew about Sirius. About how dangerous it would be for Muggleborns, especially Hermione. About--"

"I wasn't warning you of anything," Draco interrupted. "Not everything in the world is about you. "

"I never said it was," Harry snapped. "You know who makes a big deal about me being famous?"

"Everybody!" Draco yelled. "Every single person in the--"

"You do," Harry cut in. "All those nicknames -- the Boy who Lived, the Chosen one. Always on your tongue, not mine. "

"I knew you weren't particularly bright," Draco said, "but I would have thought even you would recognise an insult when you heard one. "

"I do," Harry said, quietly.

There was a moment's silence. Dennis wished he could see out. Blaise was very close to him. Being able to see Harry and Draco's expressions would be quite useful. Blaise was close enough that Dennis could hear every breath, watch a drop of water slide down across ribs and get caught in that dark trail of hair leading down to the towel. Yes, being able to see Harry and Draco, who were important and who he was focusing on, yes, totally, being able to see them would be very, very good and asking Blaise what shampoo he used because he smelled good would just have to wait until never.

"You've seen him," Harry said. "Voldemort. You've seen what he is now. Is that what you want to be? Is that what you'll bow your head to?"

"Like looks mean anything," Draco said, and Blaise snorted. "He has powers you've never even dreamed of. "

"Don't talk to me about dreams," Harry said, anger edging back into his tone. "I'm sure you get Quidditch cheerleaders and pools of money, but I get--"

Draco laughed, sharp and bitter. "You don't know me at all. "

"I know you're smart, but lazy," Harry said, "that you have the skill for flying, but no talent, no love for it; that you're a good mimic, but you don't know when you've gone too far; that you hate it when people don't notice you. I know--"

"Go to hell. Get--" They banged against the door again. "Get out of my way. "

"I know," Harry repeated, "that you love your parents very much, that your mother dotes on you and your father wants you to be just like him, and you want that too, and that neither of you can ever look past what you think the world is like to actually see it. "

"You have no idea--" Draco tried again.

"You keep saying that," Harry said. "Hermione is the smartest witch of our age. Fred and George? No one does spellwork like them. The Weasleys are happy--"

"Tell that to Percy," Draco said.

Blaise made an amused little sound. Something clattered faintly, and Dennis looked away from the door for a moment. Bathrooms sooner or later meant Myrtle, and a yelling ghost gave things away. Like Harry attacking Draco with the Dark Arts, Dennis suddenly remembered, which hadn't happened yet, he was fairly sure. What effect would that have now? He couldn't nudge the future too far off course, but if he didn't nudge off course at all, it was all very--

Blaise moved a little closer and Dennis completely lost track of his thought. Through the Ear, Harry and Draco had gotten a little quieter, and Dennis realised it was because they had moved away from the door again. He too pressed closer to it, which didn't actually make the Ears hear any better, but it felt like it should, and there was always the possibility of sympathetic magical mutation.

"I know Muggles," Harry was saying, "and, yeah, some of them are a bit shit, really. Good ones, bad ones, indifferent -- just like wizards and witches. And, yeah, maybe Hermione goes a bit too far with her S. P. E. W stuff and--"

"Maybe," Draco snorted.

"Maybe," Harry insisted. "And maybe wizards need to realise that just because things have always been a certain way, doesn't mean they get to stay that way. Things change. People change. I got the message, you know -- my dad and his friends, yeah, they were right teenagers as teenagers, just like us.
"

"I'm nothing like--"

"Shut it," Harry snapped. "You never bloody listen to anything. They grew up, best they could, my dad and mum, and Sirius and Remus and all the others, and now we're just doing it all over again, and, bloody hell, I sound like Hermione. "

"A thousand words to come nowhere near a point," Draco sneered. "Yes. Just like her. "

"It's time to grow up," Harry said. "It's time to stop messing around. This isn't Quidditch, Draco. "

"I already stopped playing," Draco snapped. "Have you forgotten your own whining? 'Where were you, where were you?' I had better things to do. I have better things to -- get out of my way!"

"Stop being an idiot, Malfoy!"

"Go hex yourself, Potty!"

"Feisty," said Blaise, a chuckle in his voice.

"I don't think it's going well," Dennis said, looking across. "I think it's. Um. It's not. "

Blaise had very dark eyes. It was easy to get lost in them. And lovely cheekbones, which was something Dennis would never have expected to find himself thinking.

"Not what?" He asked, amused, a smile playing across his full lips.

"Not. Um. Going. I have a girlfriend," Dennis said desperately.

Outside, Draco was yelling something about Pureblood duty and pride and Harry was yelling something about kissing Voldemort's hem.

"Really," said Blaise, drawing the word out to sarcastic lengths.

"Well, Natalie doesn't know it yet," Dennis admitted. "But in the future. You know. When we're older. She will be. My girlfriend," he clarified. "Not just older, although she will be older. "

"Is nothing important to you except your stupid bloody pride?" Harry yelled.

"Family!" Draco yelled back. "It's family -- do you even know what that is?!"

They probably didn't even need the ears now. Dennis lowered his. Blaise already had.

"Munchkin," he said.

It wasn't the sort of word to make shivers run down you, although it was having a good go at it.

"Um," said Dennis, licking his lips, which were suddenly very dry. He backed up against the door, and Blaise moved with him, until there was almost no space left. "Har-- Dra-- Um. "

"Ordinarily, well..." Blaise trailed off thoughtfully. "You really are very young. "

"I am not," said Dennis automatically, and then remembering where he was, added, "except linearly, obviously, because, um. Something. I. You. Um. "

"Outside clothes only then," Blaise said, lips curling into the suggestion of a smile, and leaned the rest of

the way in.

"Family is all," Draco yelled. "It's all I-- You're going to lose, Potter. Why can't you see that? If you just gave yourself up to him, this would all be over. "

"If he just gave himself up, this would all be over," Harry pointed out. "It works both ways. For all his talk, he's just a bigger, uglier Dudley. If you gave Dudley a couple of machine guns, anyway. "

"A what? A couple of what? Stop talking gibberish," Draco complained. "Just-- Just stop. I have to -- I want to go. "

"Then go," Harry said. "I'm just standing here. You're the one who hasn't taken his hand off his wand. Or used it. "

"He has powers you--" Draco tried again.

"Yeah? So does Dumbledore. You think Voldemort will come here himself? What does it say about him, if you're the best he can do? Think, Malfoy!" Harry insisted. "Self-preservation's supposed to be what Slytherins do. Dumbledore can protect you. "

"It's not just me," Draco said. "He can't--"

"He can. Your mom, she can come here. E-even Lucius," Harry managed to get out.

"You can't save everybody," Draco said, quietly.

"I can try," Harry said, just as quiet. They didn't have to yell any more. They were close enough that even whispers were loud. "I want to try. "

"It was supposed to be better than this," Draco whimpered.

"It can be better," Harry assured him, gently.

"I, I don't--" Draco tilted his head, just a little. His eyes kept dropping away from Harry's and then coming back. "I don't know what--"

"Just let us help," Harry pleaded. His hand was on Draco's shoulder, his thumb against Draco's neck. He didn't know when he'd put it there. He could feel Draco's pulse, racing against him. "Let me help, Malfoy. Draco. "

"Don't," Draco gasped. "Don't say my name. "

"Draco," Harry repeated, leaning in. "Let me--"

The door to the prefect's bathroom popped open, and Dennis stumbled backwards out. It slammed shut by itself behind him as he turned around. He fell against it, breathing heavily. His eyes were glazed, his hair was messed, his lips were red, and one tail of his shirt had come out of the waist of his jeans.

"Blimey!" he said.

Harry and Draco burst apart as if they had been branded. There was a startled silence that stretched into something else.

"My name," Draco said, straightening up, schooling his features into full on haughty disdain, "is Malfoy. You would do well to remember that, Potter. "

Without waiting for a response, he turned on his heel and stalked off.

Harry swore, loudly, than ran his hands back through his hair, leaving it even messier than usual.

"I just," he started, then stopped. "It's just..."

Dennis blinked at him, slowly resolving focus. "Harry?"

"He's just so bloody aggravating!" Harry yelled, and then growled angrily. "Let me tell you, Dennis, life was so much sodding simpler when I could stop thinking about Draco bloody Malfoy all the bloody sodding buggering time!"

He stormed off in the other direction, leaving Dennis alone in the corridor. He blinked first one way, then the other, and then tried the door to the bathroom again. It refused to open, to either password or knocking. So. Yeah.

"Bugger," Dennis said.

* * *

It was late enough that the corridors were empty, so Dennis wandered around at random, minutes drifting into hours. He wasn't worried about Mrs Norris -- they had a working relationship based on Dennis bribing her with fish and telling her she was a pretty cat -- and Filch was always noisy when he came along. There was always the possibility of unexpected Snape, of course, although perhaps that would make him expected Snape. Either way, the man had mastered the art of moving perfectly silently, so Dennis would never know he was there until the moment of capture, so there was no point worrying about. He felt tired, which was bad, but also very wide away, which should be good because of the

sleeping-bad thing, but also had the downside of feeling as if someone had sandpapered his eyeballs.

Caffeine was going on the list. He couldn't remember what the list was for, but he knew there was one, and caffeine was going on it. In spades.

Plans were failing to come to mind or, if they were, they were being lost under his body complaining about being all trembling and uptight and his feet hurting and how he was pretty sure he had missed something else obvious, something that kept coming up, but he had no idea what, and it was distracting, and, also, how he had snogged Blaise Zabini quite a lot, which.

There was no 'which' really. He got that far and then. Guh.

"This is why all your teachers tell you that you need to pay more attention, Creevey," he admonished himself out loud. "Get a grip, man!"

The other part of his brain filled in lots of innuendo.

"Bloody buggering, buggering, bugger," he muttered.

"If it's bloody, you're doing it wrong," said the portrait of Offleward the Unsteady. "Unless you like that sort of thing. "

"Eww," said Dennis fervently.

"Shouldn't you be in bed?" Offleward asked.

"Probably," Dennis agreed. He realised some of the shaking was down to the cold. The corridors were always cool, even in summer. They had been after the memorial service. "Yeah. "

"Watch out for the trick step," Offleward called after him. "That's how I lost my foot, you know!"

"Only because you were too impatient to wait for help," Dennis called back, but he was too far away to make out the response.

It was late and if he hung around a bit to make sure, he could set a fire going in the common room to warm himself up a bit. Even the oldest students would have gone up by now. He would have the place to himself, because Hermione kept leaving clothes out, so there was really only Dobby doing the place. All night to think in and then, early tomorrow, he would go and find Draco and do whatever it was he had thought of by thinking all night. Or just wing it, when that failed.

He took the stairs, jumping over the trick step, and said the password to a sleepy Fat Lady a few times until she either got it or opened up just to shut him up. The clock on the mantelpiece chimed as he came in and he was surprised to find it was midnight. The last four hours had blurred past, except for the moments frozen in eternity, of course. Time was very strange. And possibly on the list.

What, what, what to say to Draco, was the question. "Hi, I know you're going to let Death Eaters into the school," was pretty much going to come across as "Crucio me! Crucio me very roughly!" Except less kinky role-play sounding, probably.

Digging over the coals -- Dobby did his best, but he was only one House Elf -- Dennis set a small bluebell fire in the middle. His father had once tried to teach Colin and Dennis about making fires on a camping trip before Hogwarts. Dennis found magical fires, surprisingly, were much less likely to explode. At least when they were well ventilated. He poked at the flue, dislodging soot that made the bluebell spit and hiss. Perhaps he should start looking up cleaning charms. Or find some way to stop Hermione so they could the rest of the House Elves back in a clean up properly. He poked again. Soot fell fast, thing black rain.

Something else fell too. It wafted from side to side, falling slow enough that even Dennis could catch it, after a couple of fumbles. It was a photo. A charred, marked, fragment of a photo, but a photo indeed. One Dennis knew, because it was of Draco, and because the last time he had seen it was in Harry's hand. He sighed. Obviously, he would have to start over with Harry before--

Before...

Dennis blinked at the photo and then fumbled for his wand, casting a quick "lumos!" He had been wrong. It wasn't the photo Harry had kept. It was from the same set, but it wasn't that one. It was the one Dennis had put in the Potions textbook. The one that Harry hadn't found, because it was already gone, because apparently it had gone up in flames, because it had been put in the fire, put in the fire by--

There were very small teeth marks in the photo.

Dennis looked at his wand, lying in his palm. "Harry Potter," he said. "Point me. "

The wand spun and rose slightly to point up at the dorms. Dennis was thinking, he was more enraged after that game than ever before. He was thinking, there was a clatter in the bathroom and then Blaise, and he flirts, but he wouldn't just, not because he's particularly nice but just because he thinks its more fun when you consent and, and there was that, in the grass, at Hogsmeade, and I saw, I saw him, behind me when he should have been, and, and, and--

"Draco Malfoy," he said. "Point me. "

The wand swung around and pointed down towards Slytherin -- and then it wobbled, confused, and swung back, pointing to the far wall, the one facing out of Hogwarts. The wand swung back to the Slytherin dorms, back to the wall, the dorms, the wall...

Cursing himself for not realising it before -- it was so obvious! Focus, you idiot -- Dennis leapt to his feet and charged for the exit.

A small blur of white came out from the far corner and lunged up into the air and then suddenly it was less ferret and more Draco Malfoy -- the other Draco Malfoy, from the Moon! -- with his wand out. A stunner flashed past so close Dennis felt the heat, and the light temporarily blinded him. His feet kept

moving of their own accord and he hit the wall to the left of the portrait hole and bounced off.

"It took you long enough," Malfoy sneered. "I worry about the intellect of the Gryffindors, I really do. "

"It was you," Dennis said, which was a bit stupid really, because they both knew it, but he couldn't stop his tongue working. "You've been stopping me all the time. You took the photos. You made Draco, the other Draco, after the Quidditch -- and Blaise!"

"You can get in anywhere in this place when you're small enough, even the prefect's bathroom," Malfoy said. "They would have done it anyway, sooner or later. It was already in their heads. I just nudged them a little. Balanced you out. Of course, I did it with rather more subtlety than your own efforts. "

He snapped another stunner off at Dennis, who ducked away, moving closer to the exit.

"But why?" he whined, though he already knew.

"To keep the timeline on track! To keep my parents alive, and myself. I have absolutely no clue why you believe getting this Draco and Harry together will help you," Malfoy added.

"There was maths!" Dennis insisted. "And dreams!"

"You really are the most peculiar child," Malfoy said. "That's why I have to stop you -- you skip forward every time you're knocked out. "

"How did you--" Dennis said, then ducked. That one singed his hair!

"How?" Malfoy sneered. "I'm Draco Malfoy. "

He snapped another spell off, except that in the time he had taken to do his proclaiming, Dennis had thrown himself backwards through the portrait hole. The stunner just knocked the portrait out of the other boy's way. Draco cursed -- vocally, not magically -- and followed.

Dennis rolled out into the corridor, found his feet, and ran off down it as fast as he could, not looking back even when spell light started lancing through the air around him. How far did he need to be? Malfoy had had trouble staying human on the top of the Astronomy Tower when Harry was in the dungeons, so, seven floors? Eight? And half the castle... How far away from Harry before it became hard to stay human though? Malfoy hadn't wanted to leave the library. Two hundred feet? Three? Bigger lead, that was what he needed, room to think in. A required room? Room of Requirement!

The stairs were already under him before he knew he was going to take them -- good legs! well done! -- and he leapt the trick step again and was on the landing and the next stairs, next landing, and there was Malfoy, yelling as he got caught in the trick step, yay, except there was a whoomf and a bouncing clump and Dennis risked a glance back and met vicious ferret death gaze coming the other way.

"Bugger!"

Ferret became Malfoy again, who had the advantage of long bloody legs, even in those ridiculous trousers, and also of being able to use his wand.

Dennis jumped the leg locker jinx and threw himself flat to avoid the body lock that followed it. Up again, and over, and there was the right corridor, and across the door, and back, and across the door, and why had they made this so difficult? and back, and, bugger, bugger, bugger--

"Wait!" Dennis cried, moving across the door again, feeling it begin to appear in the wall.

"No," said Malfoy.

The door opened. Dennis lunged. Something invisible grabbed him by his ankle and twisted him into

the air. Hogwarts, he thought, with as much focus as he could muster as the wall swung towards him, Hogwarts, he thought, putting every last caffeine driven spark into it, Hogwarts, Hogwarts, stay at Hogwarts--

# # #

--and he was, but too late, he realised to his horror, because he knew that darkness. It was the creeping, fake kind; the one that meant Draco was, right this minute, leading Death Eaters around with his Hand of Glory light. There was no time. No time at all.

"Draco Malfoy," he said to his wand and then, when it spun confused, "this Draco Malfoy! The one from now! Point me!"

Unlike the cheering charms, the caffeine hadn't followed him through. Purely physical, not magical. Worked on the body, not the spirit. No longer wired, then. Just tired, deep bone tired. Mental exhaustion, not physical. His body was okay. Remember that, he told himself. Use it.

"Point me!" he insisted to his wand, and it did.

Not the Astronomy Tower, then. Not yet. If only this timeline had had an age-line -- but perhaps it did. Dumbledore would have undone the charms to allow him and Harry to land. No time to think about that. He headed in the direction the wand indicated, recasting each time the turn of corridors got in the way. Once, someone tried to grab him; Amycus, he thought, even as he snapped off a muscle-paralysing charm intended for healers but quite usable as a weapon. The hand fell away. He moved on. Aurors fighting Death Eaters in the school. The final battle must have been like this, but times a thousandfold. All that chaos--

FOCUS!

"Point me!" There. He could see him now, too, that flash of blond. "Draco!"

Draco swung around. His curse struck Dennis's hasty "protego" and deflected, exploding the ground under Dennis, sending him flying.

"Stop this," Dennis yelled after him. "You can still stop this. Harry would--"

"It's too late," Draco yelled back. "It's too late. Just run and hide, Creevey. It will be over soon. Run and hide!"

Dennis tried to move forward. Rubble fell around him. Draco was gone, gone, gone. Soon Dumbledore would be too, and then Draco and Snape, escaping the school, and then, and then.

There was only one thing left, he realised. He had to make sure Colin didn't come back next year. He would -- he would do something. Stage an attack, yes. A soft jinx on Colin, blame it on a Death Eater, something non-fatal but which would ensure he couldn't come back. Recuperation, in Muggle London. Safe enough. He just had to move. He kicked and scrabbled at the rubble until he was clear and pulled himself up the broken wall. Focus. Move. Get to Colin. He was so tired. Don't give up. You're a Gryffindor. Stupid and reckless and foolhardy and brave and stubborn and move goddamn you!

But the corridor was growing longer with every step, longer and darker, and his legs were growing heavier and heavier, the noise of the battle getting further and further away, like he was shrinking, like he was becoming ferret small like the other Draco, and he stumbled, and fell, and crawled, and crawled, and slowed, and stopped. His fingers moved for a moment against the ground, as if he could pull himself forward by his nails alone. Then even those stopped.

He lay as still as death.

# # #

So that was it, then. One ferret too many. And himself, of course, always too slow, always too small. Never enough attention to detail. ("Run and hide, Creevey. ") And now. Now, now, now. No longer then. And what could he show for it, except maybe that at least he hadn't exploded the Earth or made them all moon men, hopefully. He lifted his arm and let it flop back to the bed. Proper weight. Good, good.

Bed? Oh. Bed. Cool. He had needed a nice nap.

It was warm, comfortable, and cosy and he snoozed, not asleep, not awake, just drifting. Seconds passed slowly and properly, each ticking into the next instead of jumping all over, knocking days out of alignment. Dust motes danced in the rays of sunlight that leaked between slats of the blinds and slowly stroked their way across his covers.

Remember Colin? Still dead! How do you like them apples?

"When life gives you sour apples, cover them in sugar and stew them," Dennis said.

"That's very profound," someone said, "but you still have to get up. Come on, lazybones. It's practically afternoon. "

Dennis frowned. "Dad?"

"Yes, Dennis?"

Rolling over, Dennis blinked sleep out of his eyes until he could focus on Robert Creevey in the doorway, smiling genially at him. His father wasn't a particular tall man but he managed, by virtue of being rather

stocky, to loom in large, comfortingly solid sort of way. Like both his children, he was crowned by a mess of mousey brown hair, though they had inherited their dark eyes from their mother.

I could have gone back to meet her, Dennis thought. I didn't even think of that before. Too late for that too, now.

His father was still waiting expectantly, so he said, "I'll be up in a minute. "

Robert chuckled. "You said that the last time I called you as well. I'll fry us up some eggs and sausages. "

"Over easy?"

"Over easy," Robert agreed. "Provided you're up and dressed, young man. Teenager or not, I'm not having you laze around all day in your pyjamas. "

"I could laze around all day out of my pyjamas," Dennis said, "but I think the neighbours would complain. "

Robert grinned at him. "Don't use all the hot water taking your shower. "

"I won't," Dennis promised.

"And don't go back to sleep," Robert called back as he left, amused.

"I won't," Dennis yelled, although he did let his head flop back onto the pillow.

Home, then. Which was much better than his flat because someone else did the cooking. Although, to be honest, someone else most often did the cooking in his flat as well. He only had ingredients for things because Natalie told him what to buy. He'd once offered to cook for her and she'd laughed herself silly.

"I can't hear you moving," Robert yelled from downstairs.

"I'm ninja quiet," Dennis yelled back.

He could hear his father's smile. "And I'm the Queen of Sheba. "

"How do you do, your majesty?" Dennis asked, and Robert laughed.

Dennis finally got up, stretching and yawning, picked up his wand and went and had a nice hot shower. His wand buzzed after three minutes, a trick he had picked up in Potions lessons, and he quickly rinsed his hair and got out, weaving his way through the steam back to his room. He pulled on some jeans and a t-shirt and wandered half way down to breakfast -- lunch, whichever -- before going back and finding himself some socks as well.

"Grab some plates, then," Robert said as Dennis came into the kitchen. "There's orange juice in the fridge if you don't want milk. "

"Milk's fine, thanks," Dennis said, setting places on the breakfast bar, before clambering up onto the stool.

He pushed his father's pile of papers to the end to make more room. It was quite a small kitchen, but Dennis preferred to think of it as cosy instead of crowded. Besides, there was only the two of them now. Lots of room. Too much, even. Robert dropped sausages and fried bread onto his plate and topped it off with a couple of friend eggs, over easy, and Dennis mumbled thanks because he had already started tucking in before everything had finished hitting his plate.

"Teenagers," Robert said with affectionate amusement. "Then you reach middle age and everything spreads. "

"You should exercise more," Dennis said. "It's good for your heart. "

"But it plays hell with my knees," Robert said. "They get you--"

"--coming and going," Dennis chimed in, and then grinned at each other.

"So what are you going to do today?" Robert asked. "Big long weekend ahead of you. Lots of time to tidy your room or help me with the van. "

"I already got up," Dennis said. "That's a lot! I don't want to over-do things!"

Robert chuckled. "Just for that, you can come to Tescos with me and carry all the groceries. "

"Okay. " Dennis shrugged a little. "Can we swing by Waitrose too? They do much better cheesecakes. "

"Do they now?" Robert smiled. "I don't remember cheesecake being on the list. "

"Cheesecake is always on the list," Dennis assured, "but sometimes it's written very, very, very small, so you might at first assume it wasn't there, when really it had been, all the time. "

Robert reached out to ruffle his hair, and Dennis ducked away, grinning. "If your room is tidy, you may have cheesecake. "

"Thanks, dad!"

They finished their breakfast in companionable silence, and then Dennis washed, while Robert dried. Two knives, two forks, two spoons, two plates, two glasses. Two, two, two.

Dennis sighed.

"You have that look on your face," Robert said. "The 'I'm thinking something weighty' one that usually ends up with things exploding. "

"I don't know why people keep saying that," Dennis complained. "I actually very rarely explode things!"

"I remember an incident--" Robert started.

"Spontaneous magic emission doesn't count," Dennis said. "Anyway, they found his trousers eventually. " He held the last dripping glass out for his father to take. "I was just thinking about-- Well. You know. "

Robert waited for him to continue.

"I miss Colin," Dennis admitted. All that time over again and he'd spent it trying to set up Harry and Draco instead of just being with Colin. How stupid was that. "I really miss him, dad. "

"I know," Robert said, dropping an arm around his son's shoulder and pulling him into a hug. Dennis briefly hugged him back, before pulling away and starting to put the dried things away. "But you know there's no arguing with your brother once his mind was made up. Clearly, I taught you two to know your own minds too well. Brave and forthright and downright stubborn. Still," he added, "you could always nip into that pub and floo the school or whatever it is you -- Dennis?"

Dennis had dropped his plate. Robert Creevey had lived alone with two sons for quite a few years, so it was a nice sturdy plate that didn't smash but just went thunk and then rattled around in slow circle before falling over.

"What?" Dennis asked in the ensuing silence. "What did you say?"

"You can floo the school? Is that the wrong word," Robert asked. "'Floo'?"

"What's the date?" Dennis asked. "The date! What is it?" He pushed past Robert, scrabbling through the bits of paper at the end of the bar, sending half of them flying before the morning's Daily Mail. He had to read the date line three times before it sunk in.

May the first. May the first!

"May the first!" He grabbed Robert and hugged him hard. "I have to go!"

"You-- What?" Robert blinked at him. "You can start by picking all those papers up. "

"No time," Dennis insisted, dropping down to grab the ones closest. He thrust them at Robert. "I'll explain everything later!"

May the first! He just had to be at Hogwarts before midnight! And not die during the battle with the world's greatest living evil wizard! No problem!

He grabbed his shoes, pulling them on, ignoring Robert's increasingly worried demands for explanations, darted to the front door, had a better idea, came back, ducked under Robert's hand and charged upstairs to grab his spare black robes. He almost fell down the stairs, trying to run and yank them on over his clothes at the same time. He hugged his father again, bounded towards the door, came up short, and dodged back into the house, pounding back up the stairs. Panting for breath, he burst into the bathroom and grabbed his wand. Robert was waiting for him at the bottom of the stairs as Dennis came

back down.

"You're going nowhere, young man, until you explain what is going on," he said.

"I don't have -- I mean, yes, absolutely, I will do that," Dennis said. "Let us sit down and discuss this like rational adults. " He sat down on the stairs and patted the step beside him.

Robert eyed him suspiciously, but squeezed into the space. Dennis was tiny, but the stairwell wasn't that large. Robert leant back on his elbows and looked sideways at Dennis.

"What's going on, son?"

"I think you should know," Dennis said, "that I feel really bad about doing this, but don't worry, the Ministry has been taken over and no one is currently monitoring underage wizardry properly, except for blackmail purposes, which won't matter tomorrow anyway. "

"Doing what?" asked Robert, thoroughly confused and then, apropos of nothing, dropped his head to chest, closed his eyes, and started snoring.

"Sorry," said Dennis, slipping his wand back into his sleeve.

He grabbed a pen from the cup by the phone, wrote 'have gone to save Colin, don't wait up, love Dennis No Middle Name Creevey' on the message pad, stuck the pen in his pocket, and hurried out into the street again.

By the time he got to the Three Cauldrons, he was gasping for breath. He managed to choke out a request for a spare broom, chucking all his remaining money at Tom. Not waiting for an answer, he grabbed it and some floo powder and dived into the fire. Gasping didn't do much for the floo either, chucking him out a few dozen stops early with no floo powder on him. Swearing, he clambered on the broom and set off. Fortunately, even Dennis could manage a straight line without too much trouble, and

he'd worry about the stopping when he got there.

It was getting dark by the time he got to Hogsmeade. Remaining light meant time, which was good for him, but it also meant visibility, which wasn't. As he swooped down towards the Hog's Head, meaning to get Aberforth to let him up to the castle, a shout went up, and then there were stunners searing through the air around him. Dennis tried to swing towards the castle and ended up spinning hopelessly in the air. A stray stunner set fire to the end of his broom and he yelped, yanking up frantically.

"I've got him!" Someone below yelled, but the green flame came nowhere close.

The broom careened earthwards, jerked back up at the last moment, bounced Dennis off first one wall and then the other, span completely around three times in a row, and then shot back up into the sky, trailing smoke and flames. Dennis had long since given up on steering in favour of holding on for dear life, which meant it was entirely by chance that the course of his flight took him across the Lake. Partly, at least, since the broom dipped again halfway across. He hit the water at speed and bounced up again, like a skipping stone, hitting the water again, bouncing again, water, bounce, water -- every impact jarring every bone in his body. For a second he thought he saw a group of rather startled mermen looking up at him, and then the water went away and he was bouncing across mud.

Unexpectedly, the broom's flight charms caught again. Dennis risked a glance back and found that the dip in the lake had put the fire out. He grinned and looked forward and yelped. A massive branch smashed him off his mount and he tumbled wildly in the air. He got a brief glimpse of the broom being reduced to splinters and then he hit the ground at the foot of the Whomping Willow.

Pain exploded all over his body. He couldn't tell if he blacked out. Perhaps if he had, he would have found himself back in London where this time's Dennis should actually be. All he knew was that one second he was on the ground trying to get his breath back, the next he was being yanked upright by one arm, more than upright, right off his feet. Long, yellow fingernails pressed hard enough into his wrist to break the skin. Dennis twisted to look into predatory eyes set below matted grey hair and over matted grey whiskers and a mouth full of far too sharp teeth.

"What have we here then?" the man -- the wolf asked, his voice a rasping bark. "A little stray from the pack?"

"Pureblood," Dennis gasped out. "I'm. Pritchard. Graham Pritchard!"

"Is that right?" The grin got wider. "Do you know who I am, little Pritches?"

"Fenrir Greyback," Dennis said. "Would you mind letting me down? This really hur--" The word became a yell as Fenrir tightened his grip. Blood trickled down Dennis's arm.

"Yes," Fenrir said. "I would mind. Do you know what else, little Pritches? I can smell a lie. And I can smell fear. "

"It's not you I'm afraid of," Dennis said without meaning to. It was true, but it wasn't diplomatic and it definitely wasn't smart. Fenrir's free hand closed around his throat.

"You should be," Fenrir said. "It makes you taste better, see? Your little heart pumping away, getting everything nice and wet--"

He leant in and licked Dennis's cheek. Dennis shuddered. Fenrir chuckled against him, foul breath filling Dennis's nose, mouth, and lungs. He choked, struggling. Fenrir squeezed harder. His thumb caressed Dennis's neck, right over the jugular.

Colin, thought Dennis wildly. Colin!

"Excuse me," said a haughty, cultured voice. "I believe that's mine. "

Fenrir's grip relaxed a little in surprise, and he turned slowly around, still holding Dennis like a doll. His lips drew back from his teeth. They really were very sharp looking, which was going to suck when Dennis kicked him. If he travelled back to the future after being dead here, would he be a ghost there? And -- hang on, he knew that voice.

"I believe I'm gonna rip both your throats out," Fenrir said. "Shall we see who is right?"

"Right?" Blaise arched a perfect eyebrow. "I am, of course. Get your own munchkin. "

Fenrir growled. "I'm--"

"I know who you are, wolf," Blaise said calmly. "I also know who I am. Crucio!"

Dennis screamed. It was worse, far worse, than the banging of the broom or the punch of the willow or the smack of the ground. It was liquid fire in his veins, molten iron in his bones. He writhed, shook, and kicked. His arm tore free of Fenrir's grip so violently his palm was slashed clean open. He fell twitching to the ground. The pain stopped almost instantly. It felt like years.

"And I don't share my toys," Blaise finished, his wand now idly trained on Fenrir. "There is a whole school of tasty morsels for you. Go chew on a Hufflepuff or something. "

Fenrir growled again, except Dennis suddenly realised it was laughter, awful, rumbling laughter. "You've some balls, kid. When this is done, you better pray I don't bite them off. "

Blaise just arched his eyebrow again and held perfectly still as Fenrir sauntered off, close enough that they brushed shoulders. As soon as the werewolf was gone, Dennis felt a spell grab him and pull him up. Blaise grabbed a handful of his robes and pulled him along and, to Dennis's surprise, they were suddenly somehow in the Slytherin common room.

"We have our own exit," Blaise said, tossing Dennis down into a chair.

"You," Dennis started, and found he had no idea how to finish that thought.

"Yes. " Light flared as Blaise drew his wand up Dennis's injured wrist and across the bloody palm. "That's going to scar. "

"You," Dennis repeated. "You just--"

"Shut up. " Blaise used his wand to cut strips from a throw rug, transfigured them into bandages, and started wrapping Dennis's wrist. He smacked Dennis when he yelped. "Hold still!"

"It hurts," Dennis gasped out.

"I should bloody well think so," Blaise yelled. "What the hell were you thinking? Were you even thinking? Why the flying fuck are you even here? Sheer bloody luck, you stupid--"

Blaise bit the sentence off and forced himself to breathe in, letting it out slowly. In a calmer tone, he continued, "If I hadn't seen you come across the lake, you would be dead now. Or worse. "

"You cursed me," Dennis said.

"You deserved it," Blaise said.

"No, I meant, well. " Dennis shrugged a little. "Thanks. And for--" He waved his bandaged hand.

"You just remember you owe me one. Two, even. Three. You owe me three. " Blaise sat back. "You can hide down here until--"

"No. " Dennis shook his head.

"Perhaps I am not making myself clear," Blaise said, and the anger was back in his voice. "You're a mudblood. If you're found, you'll die, and then I'll die, and I will be very, very pissed off about that. "

"Colin is going to die," Dennis said. "I have to save him. "

"Don't be ridiculous," Blaise snapped.

"Harry is here. He's going to win. He is, but it's going to be too late. Colin will already be dead. But he doesn't have to be. Just that one thing. I can fix that," Dennis pleaded. "Please. Help me. "

"The Dark Lord will win," Blaise said. "Have you been paying no attention at all?"

"I came back from the future," Dennis started, and Blaise burst out laughing.

"I've clearly addled your brains, munchkin. " He smiled. It was a wild thing and, for the first time, Dennis realised Blaise was right on the edge of breaking.

"Listen to me," he said. "Five years from now, I connected the veil in the Department of Mysteries to a bell jar full of temporal distillate and used it to project myself back along my own timeline. I know how this battle goes, because it already has. I know how it ends. I know who lives and who dies. You do, by the way. Crabbe doesn't; he's going to accidentally kill himself soon. Colin dies. But he doesn't have to. Help me or let me go. "

"You're insane," Blaise said. "You've cracked. You've gone nutso. You've--"

Dennis pulled his wand out. Blaise raised his, but Dennis just held it out on his palm.

"Harry Potter," he said. "Point me. " The wand shifted restlessly for a moment, then swung to point up into the castle. Towards Ravenclaw, perhaps.

Blaise stared.

"Draco Malfoy," Dennis said, and the wand did its usual restless shuffle, first pointing up, then over. "This Draco!" Up it went. "The other Draco. " Over it went. Okay. The important one now. Please still be alive. Please.

"You can't be doing that," Blaise said. "Compass directional location charms don't work on--"

"--people, yeah. This is new. They teach it to all the Unspeakables," Dennis explained absently. "Even novices like me. Colin Creevey. Point me. "

The wand hesitated, and Dennis's heart sank, but then it suddenly spun to point up and over. Somewhere on the third floor, then, and moving.

"So I end up an Unspeakable then?" Blaise asked in a thoughtful sort of way.

Dennis blinked at him. "Yes?"

"Only, see, what you're doing? It's my Charms NEWT project," Blaise said. There was something odd in his tone now, like he was speaking from some distance away. "I haven't shown it to anybody -- not even the theoretical work. "

Dennis stared. "Wait; that was you? Okay, I know you passed everything at Outstanding, but I didn't realise you were-- Do you have any idea how often I use this spell? Wait, wait, wait, that, that's not the point. The point is: you believe me?"

"Apparently," said Blaise in that same odd tone. "Although, strictly speaking, I've actually decided that the stress has gotten to me and I've gone completely mad. "

"Oh," said Dennis. He considered this. "Well, whatever works for you. " He pushed himself off the sofa, flexing his bandaged hand. It hurt like hell. "Come on, we have to find Colin before the other Draco does. "

"Right," said Blaise. "Okay. There is another Draco?"

"From an alternate timeline, who snuck back along with me," Dennis explained, cracking the common room door open enough to peer out. "He's been undermining my attempts to change time. He's why you kissed me in the bathroom. "

Blaise frowned. "I'm pretty sure I wanted to do that myself. I mean, I wasn't going to, because you were way too young, but-- Oh. "

"Yeah," said Dennis, opening the door a little wider, and then closing it again. "You wanted to do it too?"

Blaise shrugged. "You're oddly interesting. Possibly because apparently you've been travelling in time which, incidentally, is incredibly illegal. How very Slytherin of you. I approve of lofty-ambitions. "

"Even do-good ones?" Dennis asked.

"Even those," Blaise said. "Come on then. If Potter is going to win, I might as well appear to have been on the right side all along -- which I was," he added, as he opened the door, "because I was on mine. "

"And we protect our own," Dennis said. "It's just that Gryffindors consider everybody to be their own. "

"You can't save the world," Blaise said.

"No," Dennis agreed. "I don't think you can. It doesn't matter if you're changing it for good or bad, trying to change the whole thing doesn't work. But you can change parts, I think. I mean, I'm sure you can. "

"Like Colin," Blaise said, and Dennis nodded. "You know, if you teach me the spell to find him, I'll be able to--"

"Predestination paradox!" Dennis complained. "Also, are we going to stand here forever or are we going?"

"Stand here forever?" Blaise said hopefully. Dennis looked at him. "Okay, okay. They'll be putting lions on my robes next. "

They both leaned out into the corridor. It was clear. Wands held at the ready, they slipped out. The wall resealed itself behind them.

"Did I mention how incredibly pissed off I'm going to be if I die?" Blaise asked.

"Yes," said Dennis. "But you don't. "

"I didn't before you changed time," Blaise pointed out. "If you can save Colin, then people can die too. "

"I'll make sure you don't," Dennis said.

There was a noise up ahead and they both went silent, creeping up opposite sides of the corridor. They reached the corners and, on a silent count of three, looked quickly around them in opposite directions,

before jerking back into cover.

"Two," mouthed Blaise.

"One," Dennis mouthed back.

They nodded, and jumped out. Dennis smacked a hooded figure in the back with a stunner and the man (woman?) went down. Whatever curse Blaise cast smacked another Death Eater the entire length of the corridor. The third went down apparently of his own accord, and Dennis and Blaise were still looking at him in confusion when Ginny stepped into view.

"Hello, Dennis. " She was pointing her wand at Blaise. "I didn't expect to see you here. "

"I did," Dennis said absently. "Come on, we have to find Colin. Blaise is on his own side, but he's helping me out. "

"I am magnanimous and self-sacrificing for the greater cause," Blaise said cheerfully, "except without the self-sacrificing bit. "

Ginny nodded, taking this in her stride. Or possibly just ignoring it altogether. "Ritchie says the west corridor is blocked. We have to cross through the Cloisters. "

"Oh, right out in the open, yay," said Blaise.

"Aren't you going to say 'you shouldn't be here'?" Dennis asked Ginny.

"Everybody has a right to fight for Hogwarts if they can," she said.

"I'm totally for Hogwarts," Blaise put in. "Just in case you were thinking of cursing me. "

"I was," Ginny said.

"Being vindictive brings out the colour of your eyes," Blaise told her, smiling warmly.

"Stop trying to distract me with the truth," Ginny said, idly flipping her hair back from her shoulder.

"Colin," Dennis said to his wand, and it swung. "He's that way. "

Ginny whistled appreciatively. "That's pretty clever. " Blaise preened. She ignored him.

"It's about family, see," Dennis said, leading the way. "Everything is, I think. Marietta gave us up for her family. Draco went to ridiculous lengths for his. "

"He's a Death Eater," Ginny said.

"Maybe. But when he was going up to the Tower, last June, you know what he did? He told me to run and hide," Dennis said, taking the stairs up. "He could have just cursed me. He should have. Blaise did. "

"You did?" Ginny glared at him.

"For the greater good," Blaise assured her.

"He saved my life," Dennis said. "I owe him three. "

"Three what?" Ginny asked suspiciously. Blaise leered. Ginny flipped him off.

"And You-Know-Who, he didn't have any family but himself, so he became obsessed with it, with keeping himself alive. And Harry, well, Harry made his family. He has us, Hermione, Ron, you," he added to Ginny. "The Weasleys. Good things and bad things, it all comes down to family. Draco said it, you know, before all this. Family is all. "

They were moving slowly through the smoke, quietly as they could, Dennis speaking softly.

"Or, well, after, anyway. He said it, is the point. And Vector was right too, about everything is need and desire and how they're often not the same things at all, but I think we need family as much as we want them and--"

"Not that this isn't fascinating," Blaise began, "or, well, no, it isn't fascinating. Did you have a point, or were you just philosophising for the sake of it?"

"Draco's a twat, but at least he does it for understandable reasons?" Dennis said.

"That doesn't really make him less of a twat, though," Ginny pointed out.

"No," Dennis admitted. "But it's a start, isn't it?"

Ginny didn't say anything and then a few paces later there wasn't time for anyone else to either, because they had come back on the fighting again. Spells hammered home around them, exploding rocks and deflecting off three hasty shield charms. They snapped returning curses off and ran, diving for any available cover they could find.

"I was right," Blaise said conversationally. "I've gone insane. "

"We're never going to get across here," Ginny said.

"Colin," Dennis said to his wand. It pointed right across the mess.

"Oh, good," she said. "Nothing too hard, then. "

"Alternatively, I'm sane and both of you are nutso," Blaise suggested.

Ginny and Dennis grinned at him. He rolled his eyes.

"Hold on," he said, and jumped to his feet. "Hey! Potter's on third! Go, go, go!" He ducked back down again.

"You don't think that will actually work, do you?" Ginny asked.

"You never know," Blaise said. "It'd be a bit ironic if Potter really was on third, though. "

Dennis frowned. "I'm never really sure what irony means. " The others looked at him. "That has nothing at all to do with the situation. Right. We should, um. Something?"

"Don't you know specifics?" Blaise asked.

Dennis shook his head. "No! I don't remember it being like this -- the fight should've started earlier, I think. Or later. There was a ceasefire for a bit in the middle but. Everything is mixed up!"

"Have you buggered up time?" Blaise asked, in a very 'please say no' sort of voice. Ginny gave him an odd look.

"I don't know," Dennis said honestly. "The only think I know for certain is that Oliver Wood and Neville Longbottom find Colin's body. No one actually saw--"

No one actually saw, he thought. It was like Peeves said. You could only be blamed for seen things. There was something there. An almost plan. He groped for it, but Blaise distracted him, pointing.

"Isn't that him?"

It was, climbing the stairs. "COLIN!" yelled Dennis as loud as he could.

There was too much noise, too much going on. Desks and suits of armour and statues all charging between them. Dennis made a break for the stairs, Blaise and Ginny both shouting behind him. Something exploded at his heels but he didn't slow down. He lost sight of Colin, kept heading for the stairs. Someone came out of the smoke but he just ducked his head and kept going. Their hand closed uselessly over his head -- hah! too small for you! -- and then the figure was ducking away from incoming curses.

"There," cried Blaise, and Dennis glanced back -- how was Blaise keeping his robes so clean? -- and then forward, following the line of Blaise's arm. Smoke got in the way for a moment and Dennis blasted it away in time to see Colin bounding up over the missing steps to the higher landing.

Dennis took a step forward -- Ginny yelled something -- and suddenly, out of nowhere, Malfoy was in his way. No, not out of nowhere, from ground level, unfolding out of ferret shape.

"Too late, Creevey," he said.

"Colin's still alive," Dennis snapped, knocking the wand-tip away. "This isn't your time, Malfoy!"

"It's not yours either," Malfoy snapped. He tugged on his wand, and Dennis quickly let go. Momentum took Malfoy back a step and Dennis ducked around him -- except suddenly Malfoy was small again, rushing ahead of him, skipping easily around dancing desks.

"No!" Dennis yelled after him. "Blaise! Blaise!"

Blaise loomed out of the smoke, pulling him to one side. "Keep moving, munchkin!"

"Where's--" Dennis started to say, but Ginny was right there as well, guiding the desks aside.

They lunged through the gap to reach the landing, only to find Death Eaters had somehow arrived there first, were waiting on landings.

Dennis swore loudly, which turned out to be very stupid, because it drew the enemies' attention. Boxed on both sides, they turned back-to-back, deflecting and casting curses in rapid succession.

"So pissed off," Blaise gasped out.

"Just one," Ginny muttered. "Give me just one--"

"Colin!" Dennis yelled desperately.

The Death Eaters might have been trying to taunt them, but none of the three were listening, too busy staying alive. Dennis found himself, absently and bizarrely, thinking about Natalie MacDonald. She had been home schooled this year. She wouldn't even hear about the battle for another two days. At least

someone was safe. And, oh, poor Hogwarts! What have done to you? Five years to hide the scars. Five years of death. Come on, just one opening. Just one--

Something came falling down, explosions of light wrapped in flame.

The Death Eaters gaped. The flashes cut time into frozen moments: Ginny, striking; Blaise; the Death Eaters, caught completely off guard, going down like bludgers under a Weasley bat; Dennis, too, snapping off hexes -- impedimentia -- just like Harry had taught them, like Colin had mastered. The stomping on the guy after he went down was entirely Dennis, though -- not malicious, the body was just a useful ramp to the stairs.

"I've got it," Ginny said. There was only one left. "Go after Colin!"

Dennis went. Blaise was behind him. The other Malfoy was far, far in front.

"Wait," Dennis yelled. "Please!"

No more air for yelling. Run, Dennis, run. Up and up. Seventh floor now, lungs burning, knees week, hand shaking. Eighth -- the first tower level -- and.

One Malfoy, rising out of ferret form, wand ready.

One Malfoy, pale as anything, holding Goyle, staring at his doppelganger with bulging eyes.

One Creevey, Colin, hand on his wand. Too slow. Too slow.

One Death Eater, at the ready.

And Dennis, unable to slow, coming off the stairs at full velocity, didn't even try, just launched himself at Colin. Hit.

Green light flared overhead. He felt his hair crinkle.

Time snapped back to normal speed and Dennis and Colin went down in a tangle of limbs. The Death Eater tumbled backwards, crashed into the door of the music room, and slid down it to the floor. Blaise came up the stairs, smashing into the alternate Malfoy, sending him stumbling. The other Malfoy -- Draco -- opened and closed his mouth silently.

"Dennis?" said Colin in complete disbelief.

"Hi," said Dennis. "Come with me if you want to live. " He grinned. Colin stared. "Terminator? Never mind. I'm from the future, by the way. "

"You -- what? What? What?!"

"Th-th-there's," stammered Draco.

"Another you?" Malfoy sneered. "Oh, well done. "

"Wow," said Blaise, looking between the two of them. "You know, if it wasn't for the different hair-cuts..."

"There are two Malfoys," Colin said. "And I think one just saved my life. Or tried to kill me. "

"Both, actually," Malfoy said. "Do stop gaping," he added to his other self, and Draco's jaw snapped

shut. "But now I have to kill you. "

"No!" yelled Dennis.

"He dies. That's how it goes," Malfoy insisted. "You said it yourself. Stop trying to change the past. Your parents live if Colin dies," he added to Draco.

"They live even if he lives," Dennis said. "Why would that change now? I made a mistake before! I changed things too early! But I've -- look! Ask him! Ask him about Harry!"

"What about Potter?" Malfoy asked.

Draco looked just as confused. "I don't -- what? He, he saved me. And Gregory. Is that--?"

"See?" Dennis said. "It happened. It's already happened. Everything that leads up to your parents living has happened!"

"My, what, what?" Draco asked.

"You don't have to do this," Dennis said. "You shouldn't do this. You're not supposed to even exist. "

"There's still time," Malfoy said, but his voice was wavering. Blaise edged towards him. Malfoy swung his wand around. "I could kill Blaise. You said he lives. What if I kill him now?"

"He'll be extremely pissed," Dennis said. Malfoy blinked at him. "I mean, don't!"

"But I still can," Malfoy insisted. "So my parents can still die. Because you're here, changing things. "

"You're here changing things too," Dennis said. "You're changing them more!"

"What happened has to happen!" Malfoy yelled. He swung his wand back towards Colin. Dennis threw himself in the way.

"Um," Colin said. "I don't want to die? But it seems to me that if my staying alive is somehow breaking time--"

"SHUT UP, COLIN," Dennis yelled. "Malfoy! Listen to me--"

"You have nothing," Malfoy insisted. "You can't change everything. You--"

But Dennis had stopped listening. He was thinking, what happened has to happen. He was thinking, Peeves said, only get blamed for what is seen. For what is seen. And Draco had said, before, in the future. You can't change everything. Find what is important. And Harry had said, and Draco had said, and Harry, and Draco, and--

"They knew," Dennis said.

"What?" Malfoy's wand shook a little.

"You knew," Dennis insisted, and then to Draco, "I mean, you knew! In the future! You knew what I was going to do. Harry did too. Before I even left. Because I had already done it. Don't you see? It's like with Time Turners. You can only travel in the time-stream you already travelled in!"

"No," Malfoy said. "You came over. You came to my future. "

"Because I tried to do something I knew hadn't happened!" Dennis said. "The moment I did, everything broke! But I don't know Colin died! All I know is, they found a body that looked like him! That's it!"

"He has a point," Blaise said, quietly.

"I seriously have no idea what is going on," Draco said. "Why are there two mes?"

"Dennis travelled in time," Colin said. "You really did. My little brother. To save me. "

"To save you," Dennis said. "Um. You have to go underground for five years though, and everyone has to believe you're dead. "

"To keep the timeline true," Malfoy said.

"To keep the timeline true," Dennis said.

"Five years?" Colin frowned.

"Please," Dennis begged. "I won't change anything. I won't let anything else change. This happened. It already happened. The only one who can change it is you. Don't you understand? The only one who shouldn't be here is you. "

"There definitely shouldn't be two of me," Draco said, rather stuck on this point.

"There's an exit tunnel under the piano in the music room," Dennis said. "Colin can stay in the Round until everything is over, and then get out into Hogsmeade. No one will know, except me, and Blaise -- put your wand down, Blaise -- and both of you. And you already knew. I swear to you. Your absurd world is over. This one is real. This one is true. Please, Malfoy. "

"It's almost true," Malfoy said slowly. "You're right. I'm the only one that can change anything. " He met Draco's eyes. "Family is all. "

"Family is all," Draco agreed.

"For Harry, then. And mother, and father. "

"Wait," said Blaise suddenly, "you--"

And Dennis realised what was about to happen just a fraction too late -- for Malfoy had already touched the wand to his throat and, even as green light flared, glinting sickly off his wedding ring, his features shifted and ran so that it wasn't Malfoy whose lips shaped Harry's name, not Malfoy who hit the floor, cold and lifeless, not Malfoy but a perfect replica of Colin Creevey in Slytherin robes.

"I, I, I," Dennis stammered, "I didn't mean -- he didn't have to -- we could have used a Death Eater or -- he didn't have to do that!"

"Yes, he did," Draco said.

They all looked down at the other Colin.

"This is really freaky," Colin said.

"Yep," Blaise said. He flicked his wand, and the body's robes became Gryffindor coloured. "Music room, then?"

He was going for light, but he didn't quite make it.

"I have to -- I have to find my parents," Draco said. "They're alive, aren't they?" Dennis nodded. "I have to--"

He hurried off. They let him go.

"So, we just. " Colin swallowed. "We leave him there?"

"Oliver Wood is coming up the stairs," Blaise said.

"Yes," said Dennis. "We leave him. " He pushed open the music room door, stepping over the Death Eater body. "Come on. "

Blaise and Colin came. They closed the door behind them and locked it as best they could.

"Five years though," said Colin.

"It's better than never," Dennis said.

"You travelled in time," Colin said.

"I really did," Dennis said. "Oh, god! I have no idea what I'm doing! I was bluffing out there with Malfoy! I have no idea if anything I said was true! This entire plan was insane! Coincidence and stupidity!"

"And love," Blaise put in. "Love is important. Sure, you know, it screws things up as much as it fixes them--"

"You should've stopped earlier," Colin said to Blaise, smiling. He pulled Dennis into a hug. "You did good. "

"I hope so," Dennis said. "I really do. "

Together they moved the piano and took the ladder down and down and down until they were under the school and there they sat, side by side, and waited for the battle to be over.

* * *

"You know," Dennis said to Blaise afterwards, after it was over and Aberforth Dumbledore had taken Colin in, "I won't remember any of this. Not until I get back, I mean. "

"I'll remember it for you," Blaise promised him.

Dennis smiled. "I owe you four then. Four what, though?"

"Foreplay?" Blaise suggested, leering.

"I'm still only fourteen," Dennis said.

"And nineteen," Blaise pointed out. "Cumulatively, you're thirty three. That makes you the cradle snatcher, munchkin. "

They climbed the steps in companionable silence until Dennis sighed. "All those people--"

"We protect our own," Blaise said. "That's all any of us can do. That doesn't make you a bad person. "

"It still feels incredibly selfish," Dennis said.

"The things we want, the things we need," Blaise shrugged. "I never thought I'd be saying this to a Gryffindor, but seriously, you can over think things. "

They came to stop on the landing.

"So..." Blaise shifted uncomfortably. "How does this work, then? The time-thing?"

"I shift every time I fall asleep," Dennis said. "Lack of engrossment, you see? I think. Probably. Hey, in the future, could you see to it that I don't get arrested and put in Azkaban forever, maybe?"

Blaise grinned. "I'll think about it. ...even though I didn't agree with the Dark Lord's frankly ridiculous melodramatic methods--"

"Muggles and Wizards have a long way to go," Dennis said. "It doesn't just end now. And I agree it's not quite as simple as either side tried to make it. There are real cultural issues. But ... it's a start, right?"

"It's a start. " Blaise nodded. "Run along, munchkin. I'm going to go kick back in Slytherin until people stop wanting to hex me for wearing green. Are you sure you don't want to tell me how that spell--"

"No!"

"Just asking. " Blaise smiled. "What are you going to tell your father?"

"That Colin is in a magical witness protection program and for his safety we have to pretend like he's, you know. " Dennis shrugged a little. "We've always kept to ourselves. It's not like we could talk about magic to anyone -- don't give me that look! I know all the arguments. "

"And we'll keep having them until everyone believes you're right?" Blaise suggested.

Dennis shook his head. "Not everyone. Just enough. "

There was a long quiet. Blaise smiled. "See you later, Creevey. "

"Much later," Dennis agreed.

"Seriously, five years?!" Blaise laughed. "I'm never letting you plan anything ever. "

"I'm going now," Dennis said with mock affront.

They grinned at each other, and the Blaise turned away. His robes were still perfectly clean. Dennis was caked in dust and he'd never get the bloodstains out. He flexed his bandaged hand a couple of times to get the stiffness out, and then headed in the other direction. Most everybody was in the Great Hall, so it was easy enough not being seen on the way to Gryffindor, at least until he ran into Ginny.

"I saw-- I'm sorry," she said.

Dennis blinked at her. Oh. Right. "It's--" He shook his head. "Later. I'm headed back to the dorm. "

"I'll walk you," she said, dropping into step. "There's lots of cleaning up to be done. A lot of Death Eaters ran. "

"Yeah," Dennis said.

They walked in silence for a while. There wasn't much to say. The school was a mess. They were almost back to the Fat Lady before Ginny spoke again.

"I'm angry at everybody right now. I know it doesn't make sense. Even our side. None of this should ever have happened. "

Dennis nodded agreement, but didn't answer.

"Even so, I. I've been talking to people..." She trailed off. Dennis looked up at her, and then forward to see what she was looking at.

Draco Malfoy was hanging around in the corridor ahead of them, just outside the entrance. There were bags under his eyes and his face was bruised.

"I was," he started when he saw Dennis, and then he saw Ginny and stopped.

"Hello," said Dennis. "Were you looking for someone?"

"You," Draco said, then, "Potter. I--" He looked at Ginny, looked away.

"I've been talking to people," she repeated to Draco. "I heard you didn't identify Harry when he was captured. They're saying your mum didn't give Harry away when Voldemort thought his dead. She might well have helped win the war. Your father -- well. "

"He'll go back to Azkaban," Draco said quietly.

"Not forever," Dennis said.

"The thing is," Ginny started, and then stopped.

The other two waited.

"He needs me," Ginny said. "And he loves me, Harry does, in his own way. He's always wanted a proper family, you see, and I can give him that. And I love him, what I have of him. But Harry, well. Harry needs people to save. To protect. He's almost Hufflpuff in that. " Draco's face gave nothing away. "And, well. I have to share him with world anyway. What I'm saying is-- Well. You know, don't you?"

He nodded once, curtly. Ginny's lips twitched in something almost a smile.

"I'll never really like you," she said.

"I wouldn't expect you to," Draco said.

"And he'll always be mine," Ginny added.

"I know," Draco said. "Slytherins do actually know how to compromise. "

"For mutual advantage," Dennis said. They both looked at him as if they had forgotten he was there. "Sorry. "

"The password is Quaffle-iron," Ginny said. "Harry gets to make his own choice, for once. Good night, Dennis. Malfoy. "

"Weasley. "

"'night, Ginny," Dennis said and then, because he couldn't help himself, "say hi to Blaise for me. "

She waved in response, already half-way down the corridor.

"Don't mind me," Dennis said, waving at the portrait.

"Time travel," Draco said. "And this was the best you could come up with?"

"It seemed a good idea at the, um, time," Dennis said. "Anyway, I wouldn't have thought of it at all if you hadn't already known I was going to do it, so, if you think about it, this is entirely your fault. "

"My fault," Draco repeated, sceptically.

"Yep!"

"Gryffindors. " Draco turned to the portrait. "Quaffle-iron. "

"You're a Slytherin," the Fat Lady said.

"He's a Slytherin with the password," Dennis said. "Can we come in, please?"

The portrait swung open. Draco looked at him, looked at the gap, pulled himself up to his full height, slumped again, and finally crossed the threshold.

Harry, sprawled on a couch and staring blankly into the fire, looked up at them in surprise.

"Hello, Harry!"

"Dennis? Malfoy?" He frowned, getting up. "What's going on?"

"I time-travelled into the past to save my brother," Dennis said, "and accidentally created a secondary timeline that's gone now, but there were two Malfoys but now there is only one and, you know what? Get Draco to explain it to you. I'm going to bed. " He started off towards the stairs, then looked back and added, "Also, Ginny says it's okay to have him. Okay, really going now. "

This was a lie though. He went just far enough to be out of sight, and then snuck back to listen.

"You save my life," Draco said.

"Yeah. Well, you didn't give me in to the Death Eaters and your mum covered for me, so I figure we're fairly even. " Harry shrugged. "What was Dennis going on about?"

"It--" Draco frowned. "It's not important right now. I just-- I wanted-- I needed-- ...I don't know. "

"To say thank you?" Harry suggested.

"I wouldn't have thought so," Draco said, and they both smiled a little. "This is. Um. Really awkward.

"

"Yeah," Harry said.

"I, um. " Draco sighed. "Can I come over there? I feel really stupid having a conversation across a big empty room. "

"There's space," Harry said, moving back, letting Draco join him in front of the fire.

"Ginny said some stuff about-- And Creevey has been trying for ages for--" Draco shook his head. "That isn't what I meant, either. "

"You're not finishing a lot of your sentences," Harry said. "You look like shit, by the way. "

"Oh, thanks. " Draco rolled his eyes. "Like you're going to be man of the year. Oh. Well, you probably are, but only for defeating the Dark Lord. "

"Nothing important, then," Harry said, grinning.

"...I suppose you've no more reason to obsess about me," Draco said.

"I wasn't--" Harry started indignantly, and then reconsidered. "Well, maybe. I don't know. You might still be up to evil. Although, let's be honest, you did suck at it. "

"It's always been about you," Draco said.

"Yeah. "

They were quiet. They were standing very close. Dennis held his breath, realised this was stupid, and let it out again.

"You'll marry Ginny," Draco said. "You'll have kids. You'll probably name them after your parents. Or the Headmaster. "

Harry chuckled. "I saw him, you know. While I was dead. He has some funny ideas about love. "

"He had some funny ideas, full stop," Draco said.

"Also," Harry mused, "I think he was boinking Grindelwald. "

"Everybody knows that," Draco said. "You ruined my flow, by the way, with your random tangent about your insane hallucinations. I have no idea what I was saying, now. "

"You were saying I would marry Ginny. You're probably right. And you'll get married too," Harry said. "Get yourself an heir. Pureblood duty--"

"Family duty," Draco said. "You never understood that. It was always about family. "

"Everything is," Harry agreed.

They were very, very close together now.

"But I just, I want..." Draco closed his eyes, opened them again. "It's always been you. "

"This isn't love," Harry said, leaning in. "This isn't what-- It isn't--"

"This is," Draco said, resting a hand on Harry's shoulder, thumb against Harry's neck.

"Will you just snog already?" Dennis yelled from the stairs, and then clapped his hands over his mouth.

Draco looked enraged. Harry just chuckled and leaned in and whatever Draco might have been about to say it was lost in the soft press of mouth against mouth, in lips against lips. And whatever it was, it was.

Dennis smiled happily to himself and went to bed.

# # #

He woke up feeling hung-over. His bed was very uncomfortable, which was probably because it wasn't a bed at all, it was a stone floor.

"Ow," he said.

"Try not to move, Creevey," someone said.

Dennis cracked his eyes open, winced at the blaze of light, and screwed them tightly shut again. "Ow?"

"Dim those a bit, there's a girl," the voice said. It was vaguely familiar. Dennis tried his eyes again.

He found himself blinking at Laura Madley, trainee Auror. Not just a stone floor, then. The stone floor

of Department of Mysteries. Back to future. Present. Whichever.

"Hello, Laura," he said. "I feel ill. "

"He remembers your name, then," said the voice. "That's a good sign. "

Dennis realised why it was only vaguely familiar. Usually it was yelling at him, not talking in a reasonable way.

"Unspeakable Croaker, sir?" He tried to focus on his boss. "Am I fired?"

"If we fired people for being idiots, we wouldn't have any staff left, except myself and young Zabini," Croaker said. "Feeling okay to sit up? Zabini explained everything to us. "

"He did?" Dennis very, very carefully sat up. Laura caught him to stop him falling back over again.

"Yes, Creevey," said Blaise, smirking down at him. "I did. "

"Stress can do funny things to a man," Croaker said. "That memorial service -- shouldn't have made you go. "

Dennis frowned. That had almost sounded like an apology.

"Of course, you'll have to be suspended for a few days, full psychological review, blah, blah, blah," Croaker said. "Young Madley here stopped you before you did anything we'd regret and you were only unconscious a few minutes--"

"Sorry about that," Laura put in.

"That's okay," Dennis said. A few minutes.

"Apparently there's some new-fangled course for Aurors who crack that you can go on. Get your head in order. " Croaker clapped a hand on his shoulder. "Zabini said this wouldn't happen again. "

"It won't," Dennis said.

"Good, good. " Croaker pushed himself to his feet. "I'm sure you'll soon work off the black mark on your record. And, of course, if you ever come into work drunk again, I'll have your balls made into garters. "

Dennis opened his mouth to point out this wasn't particularly possible and then thought better of it. "Yes, sir. So, um. I'm not being sent to Azkaban, then?"

"For trying to kill yourself?" Croaker laughed. "What do you think we are, Muggles? Take the wee blighter home, Zabini. Madley, my dear--"

"The Aurors also have several new sexual harassment laws," Laura said primly.

Croaker coughed. "Well. Zabini. "

Blaise nodded. Laura handed Dennis a card. "My support group," she said.

"Um. Thanks?" He pocketed the card, and then frowned at his hand.

"Is everything okay?" she asked.

Dennis looked up at Blaise, who smirked, and then down at his hand again. There was a long scar over the palm and lighter lines on his wrist. Of course there were. They had been there for years, now.

"Yes," he said, beaming at them both. "It really is. "

# # #

WHERE WE GO OUT:

It was a few days later and they were all at Hogsmeade station for some reason that Natalie was refusing to explain again because otherwise he would never learn to pay attention, which Dennis thought was unfair. He had been paying attention, although it had been to how fine both Natalie and Blaise looked in their robes and how much he had looked like he was walking in a tent until he'd managed the transfigurations correctly.

"Most people can think about the same thing for more than thirty seconds," Natalie said from his left.

"Most people aren't our Dennis," Blaise said from his right.

"I can see you smirking at each other," Dennis said.

They were sat on a bench. Possibly, they were waiting for a train. Lots of other people were. There was a low rumble of conversation around them and, faintly, the lapping of the lake behind and, even

fainter than that -- you really had to be listening for it -- a breathy moan from the direction of the station toilets.

"Five years," said Natalie.

"Five years," said Blaise.

"Shut up," said Dennis, not unkindly.

It was a nice, bright, sunny day. Birds wheeled overhead, little pieces of white against the deep blue sky.

"Still," Natalie said. "It all worked out in the end. "

"It certainly did," said Blaise. "Eventually. With a bit of prodding. "

There was a noise behind them, and they all pretended not to notice Harry Potter saunter out, looking pleased with himself. His hair was a mess, but then it always was, so who would notice the difference? He crossed the platform to drape an arm over the shoulders of Ginny Potter, who leant into him but didn't stop talking to--

"Is it Astoria or Asteria?" Dennis asked.

"Astoria is a London music venue," Natalie said.

"Asteria was an Amazon killed by Heracles," Blaise said.

"I meant the Mrs Malfoy to be," Dennis said.

"Oh. " Natalie shrugged. "I have no idea. "

"It's a mystery," said Blaise, looking the woman -- tall, slender, brunette, heart shaped face -- up and down. "Perhaps I should go and find out. "

There was another noise behind them. They all pretended not to notice Draco Malfoy step calmly out of the toilets (perfectly coiffed) and turn the 'out of order' sign around. He strode easily across the platform, and stopped at the edge, looking out. Ast'ria said something to Ginny and they both laughed, and then she went to join her fiancé. Draco nodded curtly to the other two and then turned away.

"Love is a funny old business," Dennis said, frowning a little. "Isn't it a bit implausible that everyone got everything they wanted?"

"No," said Natalie in her kind, 'you're being a dumbass' voice.

"No," agreed Blaise. "It's magic."

"Oh. " Dennis considered this, and then nodded. "That's alright then. "

A horn blew, scattering the birds above them. Smoke could be seen rising from incoming engine.

"Well, that's my cue," said Blaise. "Until later. Munchkin. " He kissed Dennis's cheek and then leaned across him to smile at Natalie. "Lady munchkin. "

"I will smack you so hard," Natalie said, smiling back.

He leaned in to kiss her cheek too, but she grabbed his face and kissed him properly, on the lips, with

tongue. Dennis blinked at them. Natalie let go and set back.

"Mm," she said, licking her lips.

"Blimey!" said Blaise, leaning forward again.

"I'm sitting right here," Dennis complained.

"Go on with you," Natalie said, waving him away, and Blaise laughed, getting to his feet.

He treated them both to a ridiculously deep bow, and swanned off to join the crowd gathering at the platform edge.

There was a flapping noise overhead, and Dennis thought the birds were back until he realised it was just one bird -- his owl, in fact.

"Hello, Eeyore," he said as it landed on the bench. "What have you got there, then?"

"That would be my cue," Natalie said, getting up. "...wait, your owl is called Eeyore?"

"What's wrong with that?" Dennis asked, untying the note from around Eeyore's leg.

"Nothing at all," Natalie said, grinning. She leaned down to kiss him goodbye, and Dennis tugged her further down so he could kiss her properly.

She grinned at him when they finally moved apart. "Mmm. "

"You're supposed to say 'blimey'," Dennis said.

"You'll have to try harder next time then. " She grinned and waved, heading off. "Floo me when you get back. "

"I will!" Dennis frowned. "I still don't know why I'm here!"

"Read your mail, Den!" Natalie called back, skipping up onto the platform to join a smug looking Goblin as a very snazzily refurbished Hogwarts Express pulled into the station. Journey's end. And beginning, of course, depending on how you looked at it.

Dennis looked at the note. It read:

Nitwit, blubber, oddment, tweak, Antwerp.

The Hog's Head, rear room. Drinks are on you.

PS: Five years!!!

It wasn't signed, but, then, it didn't need to be. He slipped the note in his pocket and glanced back to the platform. There was Harry and Ginny, Draco, Natalie, Blaise. He raised a hand in automatic wave, but none of them were looking. It didn't matter. They would all be there when he got back. With Eeyore swooping ahead of him, Dennis pushed himself off the bench and started walking away from the platform. Soon he was striding, then running, laughter spilling out of him, while behind him, visible through the trees, Hogwarts stretched majestically above the forest, glittering in the sun.

All was well.

The End.