



## 11. *JARDIN D'ÉDEN*

Professor Wood's Bigfoot office consisted of a small space in the corner of Apollo Mansion's basement game room. A single rickety desk sat near the giant old refrigerator, overlooked by the stuffed heads of Heckle and Jeckle. Both heads were awake and listening intently as Wood gave James his line-writing assignment.

"It's the principle of the thing, really," Wood said apologetically. "I can't be seen to go easy on you, James, especially if you are going to play for the Bigfoot Clutch team. A hundred lines should suffice."

"This isn't really lines, Professor," James said tentatively, looking down at the small booklet in his hand. The cover was grey with tarnished silvery letters embossed onto it, reading, 'Official Rules and Regulatory Overview of the Sport of Clutchcudgel by Quincy Dirk Triplington, Commissioner, United States Parochial Clutchcudgel League'.

"Lines are lines, cadet," a voice bleated nearby. James glanced up to see Heckle, the deer head, studying him severely. "May as well make them useful, eh?"

"Who are you talking to?" Jeckle, the moose head, inquired, raising his chin and bobbing back and forth on his short neck. A bell jingled faintly from where it hung on his antlers. "I can't see. Somebody replaced my glass eyes with ping pong balls again."

James saw that the moose head's eyes had indeed been replaced with a pair of large white balls, each hand-decorated with a cartoonish bloodshot pupil. He grimaced uncomfortably.

"Jeckle's right," Wood replied, sighing briskly. "No sense copying down meaningless repetitions. One hundred lines from chapter one, 'An Introduction to the Game', should do quite nicely."

"I'm Heckle," the deer head corrected tartly. "*He's* Jeckle."

"*I'm* Jeckle," the moose head agreed blindly, its bulging eyes peering in two different directions. "Who are you talking to?"

"This new cadet whose unnatural flying skills are going to give us a fighting chance in this year's tourney, you big antler-brain. Pay attention, why don't ya?"

"You know, you've been a real grump ever since they turned your body into stew," Jeckle sniffed, turning away.

"I don't even *remember* having a body, you nappy-furred sawdust-head," Heckle grouched. "But at least *I* was tasty enough to eat. I hear they used your body for a big doorstop, but threw it out because it kept farting every time the door hit it."

"Anyway," Wood interrupted, turning back to James.

"I keep telling you," Jeckle insisted loudly, "I still *have* my body. It's just stuck on the other side of this stupid wall! If only I could break through, you'd see!" The moose head thrashed and grunted weakly.

Heckle rolled his glass eyes. "Yeah, you keep telling yourself that, Moosey."

"*Anyway*," Wood said again loudly, throwing a warning look at the stuffed heads on the wall. Jeckle, of course, missed the look, and continued to twist back and forth, kicking his nonexistent legs. Heckle peered back at Wood with his brows raised challengingly, as if to say *what are you going to do to me? I'm already a stuffed head on the wall.*

"Moving along," Wood exhaled, turning back to James. "Clutch can be a rather complicated sport, but you'll catch on quickly since you already know Quidditch."

"Er," James began, glancing around, "I, uh, I didn't really, you know... *play* Quidditch. Official-like. As such."

Wood frowned. "What do you mean? You're on the Gryffindor team back home, right?"

"Not really *on* the team, exactly," James answered miserably. "I mean, I support the team, of course. From a distance. I, er, planned to make the team this year."

"But the way you flew...!" Wood said, shaking his head in wonderment.

"It's skim-specific," Zane clarified from over a nearby couch, where he was watching with interest. "Trust me. I've seen James in action on a regular broom. Not bad, but not what anyone would call a broom wizard. So to speak."

“I saved him from certain doom the first time he tried out for the team,” Ralph grinned from his place next to Zane, holding up his huge green-tipped wand. James rolled his eyes and glared back at his friends.

“Well then,” Wood replied airily. “No matter, of course. You’re quite keen on a skrim, which is the important thing. We can verse you on the specifics of the game over the next week, and your lines will help. We field a solid team, if I do say so myself. You may be just enough to push us over the top this year.”

Zane screwed up his face in an effort not to laugh.

“We’ll put you Zombies in your place!” Norrick announced brashly from a nearby easy chair.

Jazmine, the rather portly Veela, sat across from him. “Er, in the nicest possible way, of course,” she said, and grinned sheepishly at Zane.

“It takes more than excellent flying to win at Clutch,” Zane said lightly, not meeting Norrick’s eyes. “Zombie’s magic game is going to be especially strong this year. What do you Bigfoots have planned in that department?”

“Wouldn’t *you* like to know!” the small boy, Wentworth, interjected from his own chair, sitting up straight and puffing out his narrow chest.

“I sure would,” Zane agreed with a smile. “And I bet *you* would too!”

“Enough, Mr. Walker,” Wood sighed. “Let’s keep the trash talk on the course. Bigfoot House prides itself in an honest game, pure and simple. Good fundamentals are our primary strategy.”

Zane shrugged and flopped low onto the sofa so that only the top of his head was visible. “That’s done wonders for you so far,” he said in a muffled voice.

“Tomorrow is Saturday,” Wood announced, ignoring Zane. “Let’s meet at Pepperpock Down after breakfast, shall we? We’ll give you a crash course on the basics of the game before the official practice begins. You’ll be up to speed in no time.”

“I’ll come too,” Ralph smiled crookedly. “And I’ll bring my wand. You never know when it’ll come in handy.”

James shook his head ruefully but couldn’t help smiling at the bigger boy. So much for his Saturday off, he thought, but it did feel quite good to be prized as a member of the team. He determined he would do everything he could to master the sport of Clutchcudgel in as short a time as possible. With his help, maybe the team *could* even win the tournament and unseat the reigning Werewolf champions. That would certainly put Albus in his place, if nothing else.

“*All’s fair in love and war,*” he muttered to himself as he climbed the steps to his dormitory room, Clutchcudgel rulebook in hand. “We’ll see how you feel about it when the tables are turned on *you*, little brother.”



As the days passed and James attended Clutch practices with the rest of team Bigfoot, he did indeed come to feel confident that he might help propel the team to victory over the course of the year.

“So now you know about the three positions in Clutchcudgel,” Wood explained to him as they walked back from practice one chilly autumn afternoon. “Clipper, Bully, and Keeper. Clippers are the offense, Bullies and the Keeper are defense. You’ll notice, though, that you haven’t been assigned to any of those positions.”

“Yeah, I did notice that,” James agreed, walking along with the grey breeze in his face. “I’ve been playing every part in every practice. But so has everyone else. Even Mukthatch gets pulled out of Keeper every now and then, which I don’t understand at all since those Bigfoot arms of his are about as long as broomsticks and as strong as tree trunks. What’s the point?”

“The point *is*, on Bigfoot team, everybody is trained to play every position,” Wood nodded, looking aside at James. “That way we don’t have any weak links. With the other teams, if their star Clipper gets sidelined by an injury or a well-placed hex, the whole team suffers the loss. A team is only as strong as its strongest player, you know. In Bigfoot House, every player is as strong as the others.”

James frowned as he thought back on the skills of his teammates. “Which is how strong, exactly?”

“Well,” Wood replied, taken aback, “strong enough, at least. Quite solid, if you ask me. The point is, if we lose one member of the team, any other member of the team is prepared to take their place. Even Mukthatch on goal. Harold Gobbins has nearly as good a reach and Jazmine Jade has the strength of any two boys her size, although she’d hate it if anyone knew it. Frankly, though, I’d be hard-pressed to find anyone as solid on the skrim as you are, my boy. You do your old dad proud. Why, I wager you might even beat him, skrim to broom!”

Wood clapped James heartily on the shoulder as they walked and James grinned even as his face flushed. The two walked in silence for a while, passing knots of students as they made their way across campus. Finally, James glanced up at the professor.

“So you knew my dad when he was a kid, then?”

Wood laughed. “That I did. Taught him to play Quidditch, just like I’m teaching *you* to play *Clutch*. Wheels within wheels is what it’s like, eh? Fate has a sense of humor.”

James was thoughtful. “What was he like as a kid?”

Wood looked down at James. “A lot like you, I suppose. He looked a lot more like your brother, though.”

“That’s what everybody says,” James replied, shaking his head.

“And I imagine you get right tired of hearing it too,” Wood agreed seriously. “But to tell you the truth, I see a lot more of him in you, as far as the kind of man you’re growing up to be. He was rather intense, but you couldn’t really blame him, not after all he’d been through, and what with his family situation.”

“The Dursleys,” James sighed. “I’ve heard about them. A little, at least.”

“You never see them?”

James shook his head. “Never once. Dad’s Uncle Vernon died a few years back, and Dad and Mum went to the funeral. I heard that Petunia Dursley barely said a word to either of them, although his cousin, Dudley, was decent enough. Invited Mum and Dad both to his house for tea after the graveside service. Dudley’s all grown up with kids of his own these days. Mum said that it’d be poetic justice like if one of Dudley’s kids was a witch or wizard, but nothing of the sort, apparently. His wife was nice, although she didn’t know anything about Mum and Dad being magical. She thinks they’re insurance salespeople or something. That’s what Dudley told her.”

“One shouldn’t be too hard on them,” Wood said stoically. “It’s rather a hard thing for many Muggles to deal with us magical folk. It puts their world a bit on its ear, if you know what I mean.”

James shrugged. As they neared Apollo Mansion, he spoke up again. “So what brought you here, Professor?” he asked. “To the States, I mean. If you don’t mind me asking.”

Wood drew a deep breath and looked up at the grey sky. “My parents, actually,” he answered on the exhale.

James was curious. “What for?”

Wood looked down at him then, as if weighing how he should answer. After a moment, he sighed again and looked away. “It’s a bit complicated, I suppose. On the surface of it, they thought that if they brought me here, I could get a good advanced degree from the graduate school, further my learning, and become a teacher, like they’d always hoped. But that wasn’t the real reason for the journey, really.”

James waited, but Wood didn't seem to have anything else to say on the matter. Together, they approached Apollo Mansion where it sat like a giant brick beneath the low sky. Wind souged noisily beneath the eaves and carried dead leaves up into the air. After a moment, James realized that Professor Wood had stopped walking. Curiously, he looked back to see the man standing in the middle of the narrow path, smiling very slightly.

"My parents were afraid," Wood said quietly, lowering his eyes to meet James'. "I guess it's really as simple as that. You probably wouldn't understand it, but it was a frightening time to be a witch and wizard, or even a Muggle, although very few of them knew it."

Wood stopped again and looked away, out over the campus. He chewed on his words for a moment, and then went on. "It was the time of Voldemort's return, after all. No one knew what was going to happen. The Ministry was being taken over by the Death Eaters, and even Hogwarts had come under the thumb of Voldemort's minions. No one felt safe. As time went by, the battle lines grew bolder and more defined.

"My parents... they weren't fighters. They knew that what was happening was evil, but they were afraid. They didn't know what to do. As things got worse, they planned to do the one thing they thought was best. They planned to leave, to escape. I didn't want to go with them though. I wanted to stay and fight. They begged me to join them, but I refused. I was playing reserve for Puddlemere United at that time despite everything, but even more important than that, I was committed to being a part of the resistance along with your dad and the rest of my old schoolmates. When the Battle happened, I was there. I saw Remus cut down by Antonin Dolohov. I remember seeing Fred Weasley fighting like a wild man, even though I didn't see the blow that killed him.

"When it was all over, I was glad to have been there and to have done my part, but I missed my parents. I began to feel I had abandoned them by staying. As soon as I could, I followed them here, meaning to do what they had originally planned for me, to attend university and become a teacher. I found them here, but they seemed... older. Used up, like. They'd read about the Battle of Hogwarts in the American wizarding press, but none of their new friends here quite understood any of it. Very few of their neighbors celebrated the end of the Death Eaters. None of them had been there, after all. They didn't know what had really happened..."

Wood stopped as his voice drifted off, lost in the increasingly chilly breeze.

James took a step closer to the professor. "But... why did you stay here, then?"

Wood glanced back at him thoughtfully. He shook his head. "I don't really know. I did go to university, of course, right here, good old Alma Aleron. But when it was done, I just couldn't go back to England. My parents were afraid to lose me again. And what's more, strange as it is, I think they were ashamed of what I'd done. They never talked about it, but there was an attitude here in the States, a sort of confusion about who really had been right and wrong during the Battle. My parents had begun to think the same sorts of things. They'd forgotten how it had really been. They never talked about my part in the fight, and if I ever brought it up, they'd avert their eyes, like I'd said something taboo. I stayed because... I wanted them to know the truth."

James didn't quite understand Wood's words or what had really happened with his parents. He asked, "What *was* the truth?"

Wood blinked at him. "Why, that what I did was right. That it was a fight worth fighting. That I'd done the right thing."

James nodded slowly. "Do they know that now?"

Wood looked away again. "My parents both died years ago," he said blandly. "Whatever truth there is to know, they know it now, I suppose."

James wanted to ask why Wood still chose to stay now that his parents were dead, but the professor seemed to be done talking. He smiled rather stiffly at James and clapped him on the shoulder, less enthusiastically this time. "Come along, James. Good practice. I should let you get down to the cafeteria while there's still some dinner to be had."

James nodded and followed Wood into the shadow of Apollo Mansion. Deep down, he thought he did understand why the professor had chosen to stay in the States even though his parents had died. James couldn't have put it in words (at least not very easily) and yet the shape of it was clear enough in his head. Wood's parents may have died, but Wood's mission had not. Somehow, James understood that the question wasn't whether Wood's parents believed he had done the right thing by staying to fight the Battle. The question was whether he, Oliver Wood, believed it himself.



On the day of the season's first Clutchcudgel match, James, Ralph, and Zane had an early Potion-Making class. It had been arranged to begin right after lunch, rather than its normal time

one hour later, for reasons that had not yet been explained. The Alma Aleron Potions Master was a very tall, very dark-skinned man with an omnipresent grin that tended to have a somewhat unsettling effect on the students who sat beneath it. His name was Fenyang Baruti and he was apparently from the island of Haiti. He had a very deep voice and a vaguely hypnotic French accent. What sounded haughty and arrogant in Aunt Fleur, however, sounded smoky and deeply mysterious in Professor Baruti. James liked the professor, even though it was rather difficult to know if the man was technically *good*, exactly.

“That’s just what you *do* like about him,” Rose had sniffed from the Shard a few afternoons earlier, sitting on the sofa in front of the Gryffindor fireplace thousands of miles away. “Sounds to me like one of those people who purposely keep their allegiances secret, so to avoid getting pigeonholed into any of the obvious compartments of life. People like that aren’t the sort that one can trust when things come to the sticking point.”

“Maybe,” Zane had agreed from the American side of the Shard. “But they’re a lot cooler than the straight up good guys. And they do tend to get all the girls too.” He grinned knowledgeably into the Shard.

“That’s true,” Ralph agreed with a serious nod. “Baruti’s got Petra. She’s his teacher’s assistant.”

Rose narrowed her eyes. “I don’t think that’s quite what he meant,” she said, glancing furtively from Zane to Scorpius, who sat in a chair nearby on the Hogwarts side of the Shard.

Unlike Potions class at Hogwarts, Alma Aleron’s version was held in a bright airy room halfway up the Tower of Art. The room was bounded by windows which looked out over an ornate but precariously crooked balcony. On nice days, Professor Baruti was known to take his class out onto the balcony, cauldrons, mortars, and pestles in hand, to do their assignments while seated cross-legged in the sun. This, he claimed, reminded him of his childhood in Haiti, when his father and mother taught him the art of mixing potions on the roof of their small house surrounded by the hiss of the wind and the chatter of the birds. The balcony leaned enough that a dropped pestle was prone to roll all the way across the cracked floor and fall the hundred feet to the ground below, which gave the afternoons in the sunshine a certain nervous edge. James was quite sure that when the breeze blew, he could feel the balcony tremble slightly beneath him.

Today, however, a stiff autumn wind and spritzing rain prevented the class from adjourning to the balcony, and James was rather glad. As he, Ralph, and Zane approached the shelves to gather their supplies, Professor Baruti entered from his office door in the corner of the room. Petra followed him, carrying a stack of parchments and wearing a large leather satchel slung over her shoulder.

“You will not need your cauldrons today, students,” Baruti called in his smoky accent, smiling even more indulgently than usual. “Today, we will be going on a small journey to view potion-making in one of its purest and most essential forms. You may leave your packs here and collect them upon your return, but do take a seat while Ms. Morganstern hands out your writing assignments. On the whole, I find your works passable, if uninspired. This is not your fault,



however, but rather that of your former Potions Masters, whose lack of passion for the subject has, of course, left you equally dull. This will surely change now that you are in *my* class.”

“He’s probably right about that,” Zane whispered. “Last year, I was in Professor Fugue’s Intro to Potions. It wasn’t just that he was boring. He made us wear safety goggles if we so much as sliced a lemon! It’s pretty hard to take the fun out of dissecting an Acromantula for its venom sac, but he managed to do it.”

Petra passed in front of their table and settled James’ essay before him. The grade at the top of the parchment was printed in red ink: H+. “Slightly better than Humdrum,” she explained quietly. “Not bad, considering the class average is Mediocre Minus. Izzy says hi, by the way.”

James smiled up at her, but couldn’t think of anything to say. She passed him by, continuing to distribute the writing assignments. When she was done, Baruti instructed the class to follow him out into the hallway. Mumbling curiously, the students began to descend the spiral staircase through the Tower of Art’s many levels. Along the way, they passed music lessons, magical art classes, and even a wizarding dance class mostly populated by Pixie students in yellow and pink tights. The teacher at the piano stopped playing and glared impatiently as the Potions students clumped noisily down the stairs in the corner of her studio. A strikingly handsome Pixie boy trembled on his toes, levitating his partner over his head in mid-pirouette, during the pause in the music.

“So where are we going?” James asked Zane.

“Beats me,” Zane replied happily. “But anything that gets us out of the classroom for a day is a good thing in my book.”

Ralph glanced aside at James as they descended past the dance studio. “Are you worried about this afternoon’s match?”

“Not really,” James said, his voice betraying his own surprise. “Maybe I’ll get nervous later, but for now, I’m just looking forward to it. We’ve been practicing for most of the week. I’m ready to finally see a match in action.”

“I’ll be rooting for you this time out,” Zane said bracingly. “You’re only playing the Igers. Next week you’ll be up against Zombie House, though. I’ll have to put on the yellow and black for that. No hard feelings.”

“What position do *you* play, then?” Ralph asked Zane curiously, but the blonde boy laughed and shook his head.

“I’m a first-string bleacher bum,” he replied. “You didn’t really think I was on the Zombie Clutch team, did you?”

Both Ralph and James were surprised. “Yes?” James answered, blinking.

Zane laughed again. “You flatter me, both of you. I never got the hang of a skim. Call me a purist, but when I’m a hundred feet off the ground, I want both hands wrapped around something solid. You air surfers are totally nuts if you ask me. I play for the Zombie Swivenhodge and Quidditch teams, but nobody really cares about them. It’s mostly just for fun, *not* that we don’t try our best to kill each other out on the pitch. Clutch is where the real rivalries are here at the Aleron.”

As the class reached the main foyer of the Tower of Art with its curving bank of stained glass doors, Professor Baruti stopped and waited for the students to gather around. Humming to himself, he dug in the pocket of his colorful, complicated robes. When he withdrew his hand, he was holding a small envelope.

“Miss Worrel,” he nodded to a girl in the front. “Perhaps you’d be willing to do the honors. I’d do it myself, but alas, it only works on the breath of a young lady. Many dried potions are tricky that way.”

Emily Worrel, a skinny Igor girl with very thick glasses and mousy brown hair, took a step forward. “What do I need to do?” she asked timidly.

“When I give you the signal,” Baruti said gravely, holding up a finger, “blow as hard as you can, just as if you were blowing out the candles on your birthday cake. Can you do that?”

Emily shrugged and glanced around nervously. “I guess so.”

Baruti smiled again. Deftly, he upended the envelope and poured a fine white powder into the palm of his right hand. Holding it carefully level, he pushed one of the stained glass doors open, admitting the sound of the rain on the steps outside. Holding the door open, he winked down at the Igor girl.

“Now, Miss Worrel.”

The girl drew a breath, leaned forward, and blew as hard as she could. The dried potion powder swirled up out of Baruti’s hand and flew through the doorway, forming complicated eddies in the wet air. As it merged with the rainy breeze, however, the powder changed. It sparkled and glowed faintly, spreading but not diminishing, forming a sort of dome of light, laced faintly with rainbows.

“A trifle,” Baruti admitted with a smile, “but a useful one. Thunder powder mixed with a pinch of leprechaun gold dust. You can mix it yourselves, using the ratios found on page fifty-one of your textbooks.” He stepped out under the faintly shifting glow and looked up. No drops of rain fell on him despite the strengthening storm. A moment later he glanced back at the students gathered just inside. “Come, come!” he waved them forward with a laugh in his voice.

Zane shrugged. “Professor Fugue never did *that*,” he announced heartily, and stepped out into the rain. James and Ralph followed, and soon the entire class was threading through the wet campus, completely dry despite the increasing rain. A few older students, late for their own classes, ran past with their book bags held over their heads, their feet casting up dreary splashes on the footpaths. Baruti walked sedately, humming to himself again, while the rainbow-laden glow followed overhead, absorbing the rain with a sort of sparkling hiss. The class babbled happily and clustered around Emily Worrel, who grinned sheepishly and shrugged.

“I didn’t know I had it in me,” James heard her say.

James found himself drifting toward the rear of the group, where Petra walked alone, her leather satchel still slung over her shoulder. She held a large black book under her right arm.

“So do you know where we’re going?” he asked her.

She shook her head. “Professor Baruti never discusses his classes beforehand. He barely follows any curriculum at all. He hasn’t said so, but I don’t think he himself knows what he’s going to teach from one day to the next. He only arranged this outing just last evening.”

James nodded, thinking of the announcement regarding the earlier class-time that had come during breakfast that very morning. “So how is it working out with him?” he asked. “Are you liking being a teacher’s assistant?”

“For Professor Baruti, yes, I am,” Petra nodded. “He’s unusual, but he knows his stuff, and he’s more than willing to teach it to me. Potions was never my strongest suit, you know. Other magic... well, it sort of came naturally to me, so it was easy to rely on that alone. Now, though, I’m beginning to understand just how valuable potion-making really is.”

“The professor is teaching you?” James asked, glancing aside at her. “Like, outside of class-time?”

Petra nodded. “He’s teaching me loads of stuff, not just potions.”

James felt a stirring of jealousy. He knew it was utterly stupid, but that didn’t make the feeling go away. “What else is he teaching you?”

Petra smiled crookedly at him, as if she was reluctant to admit it. “Well, he’s teaching me French.”

“*French?*” James blinked, surprised. “You mean, like, the language?”

“Of course, silly!” Petra laughed. “It’s his native tongue. I’ve always wanted to learn it myself. It’s a beautiful language and... I don’t know. I just always thought it would be neat to learn. Like it might come in handy some day. Didn’t you ever think it might be useful to know another language?”

“Er, yeah, sure,” James lied, looking away and running a hand through his hair.

Petra sighed and hefted the book that she’d been carrying under her arm. “He has me reading this. It’s in French, but since I’m already familiar with most of the stories, it makes it a lot easier to understand. He says it’s the way he learned English, back when he was just a lad himself.”

“What is it?” James asked, glancing down at the huge leather-bound book.

“It’s a Bible,” Petra replied, lowering her voice. “*Les Saintes Écritures*. When I was very young, my grandmother would read to me from her big family Bible. I remember those stories even better than I do the bedtime stories my Grandfather Warren told me at night. In some ways, Grandmother’s stories were even more magical. Jonah and the whale, Daniel in the lion’s den, even Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Or *jardin d’Éden*, as it’s called in French.”

James nodded. “My Aunt Fleur speaks French,” he said, not knowing what else to say. “And so does my Uncle Bill now. He sort of had to learn, like, so he could understand what Fleur and Victoire were saying behind his back.”

Petra put the big book under her arm again as they passed in front of the Archive. James glanced aside and saw that there were still a few guards, older Werewolf students in raincoats and tri-

corner hats, posted around the entryway. They'd been there ever since the attack on the Vault of Destinies, although James couldn't imagine what they were protecting, considering what had already been done. The Archive custodian, Mr. Henredon, was rumored to have been moved into a secret wing of the campus medical school, where he was ostensibly still frozen solid despite the Healers' best efforts. James glanced back at Petra, curious to know what she thought of the Archive's guards, but she wasn't looking at them. After a moment, in a very low voice, James asked, "Petra, are you still having dreams?"

Petra blinked and looked aside at him. Thoughtfully, she replied, "I'm having different dreams now."

James frowned. "Not the dream you wrote about?"

"No," she said simply.

James walked on for a long moment. Up ahead, Professor Baruti seemed to be leading the class around the ruin of Roberts' mansion, toward the Warping Willow at the far end of the campus. James looked aside at Petra again. "Is there a castle in your dream?" he asked, his voice nearly a whisper. "A big black castle? Sticking out over a cliff?"

Petra looked at James sharply, her brow lowering. "How would you know that?"

James shook his head, not knowing how to answer. "I... think I saw... part of it. By accident. When I touched your dream story." He stopped and collected his thoughts for a moment before going on. "I think that we're still... connected, somehow. Remember the silver thread that appeared when you fell over the back of the *Gwyndemere*?"

Petra's eyes narrowed. "Yes," she answered in a low voice.

James gulped. "Well, I think it's still there, just invisible. I don't know where it came from, or why it happened, but it's... powerful. It's like I tapped into something bigger than myself, somehow, but I don't know what. And now... it won't go away."

"I feel it," she whispered, unsmiling. "But I didn't know you could too."

"I didn't," he replied. "At least not until I brushed your dream story in the bottom of my duffle bag. It was just a glimpse, but I saw something like a giant, ugly castle, all black and sharp. It was sitting on a sort of cliff, sticking right out over the edge, almost like it was holding the cliff up, and not the other way around. I could only get a sense of it all because it was so strong... so, sort of, *heavy*. Is that what's in your dream?"

Petra was still studying James as she walked, her eyes narrowed. Finally, she drew a long, deep breath. "It's just a dream," she answered, returning her gaze to the students marching along ahead of her. "It's not like it was before. Not like what I wrote. Headmaster Merlin told me to chase it down, and that's what I did. I don't have the dream about that night on the lake anymore, the one where Izzy died. I haven't had that dream since the attack on the Archive, in fact. It's like something broke the spell, or changed it. This dream... I can handle."

James watched Petra as she spoke. Her voice was calm, but there was something under her words, something watchful and secretive.

“Petra?” he asked in a near whisper. “*Was* it you that night? When the Vault of Destinies was attacked? Were you... maybe... sleepwalking?”

“I was in my room that whole night,” she answered blandly. “Izzy was with me. We were sleeping. Just like I told Merlin.”

“But...” James stopped and shook his head. “I could’ve *sworn* it was you. You looked at me. And there was another woman... someone I think I recognized from the train...”

Petra’s voice was oddly flat. “It was dark, James. Your eyes were probably playing tricks on you.”

“Maybe,” James agreed faintly. “But... who do you think it was, then? You think it really was those W.U.L.F. nutters?”

Petra raised her eyebrows slightly, and then glanced aside at him, a wry smile on the corner of her mouth. Ignoring his question, she said, “Do you know that this book tells the story of the beginning of the magical world?” She hefted the black tome in her hands again.

James looked down at the black leather Bible. “It does?”

“It does. It says that when God first created people, heavenly beings came down to the earth and fell in love with human women. They took them as their wives, and when they bore children, they were different from other babies. Some grew up to be giants. Others had special powers. They were called the Nephilim. That’s where we all began.” She tapped the big book.

“Wow,” James commented. “I never heard that story.”

“It’s all right here, in the book of *Genèse*, plain as day. But you know what else is in Genesis? The story of the *jardin d’Éden*. Do you know the story of Adam and Eve, James?” She peered sideways at him.

“Sort of,” he answered. “They were the first people God made, right?”

She nodded. “God made them and put them in a perfect garden. They had everything they needed, and there was only one rule. They weren’t supposed to eat from one very special tree.”

“I remember,” James said, recalling the times when his own Grandmother Weasley had told him Bible stories as a child. “The Tree of Knowledge. Right?”

“That’s right,” Petra replied quietly. “The Tree of Knowledge.” She was silent for a long moment, considering.

“But,” James prodded, “they didn’t listen, if I remember.”

“No,” Petra agreed, her voice still soft, distant. “They didn’t. Eve ate the fruit, and then she gave it to Adam. I’ve been thinking about that a lot lately. There was only one thing they weren’t supposed to do, and she did it anyway. She did it for both of them, and nothing’s been the same ever since.”

James felt a coldness settle over him. He watched Petra, waiting for her to go on. When she didn’t, he asked, “So... why do you think Eve did it?”

Petra sighed again and looked up at the grey sky, past the glimmering rainbows that continued to shift overhead. “She did it because she believed in her heart that it was the right choice. Not only for her, but for everyone else. That’s why she ate the fruit, and why she gave it to her husband, and all the rest of us throughout the generations that followed. She wasn’t evil. She was just... misinformed. She was doing what she *felt* was best.”

James shook his head. “So what does all that mean to us?”

Petra tucked the book back under her arm again and touched him on the shoulder. “It means that we can’t just rely on what we feel, James. We can’t always trust our hearts. Sometimes, as hard as it is to accept... the heart is a liar.”

James was about to ask Petra what this had to do with the dream she was having, the one he had gotten a harrowing peek into when he’d accidentally touched her dream story, but at that moment, Professor Baruti’s voice called out through the rain, interrupting his thoughts.

“Everyone gather under the Tree,” he said, gesturing toward the Warping Willow. “Huddle in close, under the branches. Pretend you are one big happy family, going on a little vacation. That’s the way.”

“Where are we going, Professor?” Norrick asked, cramming in behind Emily Worrel. “Don’t we need permission slips for this kind of thing?”

“Not far, not far,” Baruti replied, ducking beneath the branches himself. “School policy states that parental permission must be acquired for travel of more than twenty miles. We, however, will barely leave the campus. Wait and see, wait and see.”

James pressed in under the shadow of the Tree, moving alongside Ralph and Zane. When he turned around, he found himself face to face with Petra. This close to, he noticed that they were nearly eye-level in height. She smiled at him, brushed a stray lock of hair out of her face, and then turned to look out over the campus.

Still humming, Professor Baruti shouldered his way toward the Warping Willow’s large gnarled trunk. There, he produced a small piece of parchment and a quill from his robes. Squinting, he peered up at the sky, checked the position of the sun, and then scribbled something on the parchment. Finally, he held up the parchment between his thumb and forefinger and, in a lilting, singsong voice, said, “Warping Willow, wing us hence, day or year or none or all, wend us from this present tense, we who are ephemeral.” When he was finished, Baruti turned and, almost casually, flicked the small parchment into a hole in the Willow’s trunk.

Just as it had upon James’ arrival, the Tree began to shift subtly overhead, as if some otherworldly breeze was pushing through it. The whip-like branches whispered and the lighting began to change in the sky overhead.

“Look,” Zane rasped suddenly, pointing past Ralph’s shoulder. “The rain! It’s falling *up!*”

In front of James, Petra gasped, and then laughed with delight. Sure enough, all over the grey-lit campus, drops of rain seemed to jump up from the ground, leaping into the sky as if to rejoin the clouds. Overhead, the Tree whispered and stirred, and the backward rain grew faster,

turning into a blur. Within seconds, James sensed the motion of the clouds, and then that of the sun beyond the clouds as it dipped back toward dawn. Darkness swept over the campus as time began to march backwards outside the canopy of the Tree.

“I never get tired of this,” Zane commented breathlessly. Next to him, James nodded.

Petra stood directly in front of James, looking out as the days and months began to march past. Her head moved slightly as she watched the sun turn into a golden streak and the leaves leap back up onto the trees, turning green and lush. Seasons went by and she sighed deeply. James watched her as she watched the view. She was so close to him and yet turned away from him. That was all right though. Without really thinking about it, he raised his hand and very nearly stroked his fingers over the dark sweep of her hair. Instead, he lowered his hand to her shoulder and rested it there, as if only for support or as a gesture of familiarity. Very faintly, she leaned back against his hand, and he was glad.

Time flew by beyond the branches of the Tree and finally began to cycle back through seasons, and then weeks, and finally days. The sun slowed in its arc and crept once more up into a pristine, cloudless sky. A hot breeze blew in beneath the canopy of the Warping Willow, bringing a scent of wild grass and, unexpectedly, animal dung. With a sort of deep sigh, the Tree went still and Professor Baruti clapped his hands together.

“This way, then, students,” he cried. “We have just over an hour and a half before we must return, so let us use it wisely. Good afternoon, Mr. Flintlock.”

Petra stepped out into the sunlight and James followed, blinking in the sudden heat. The campus of Alma Aleron University had vanished away, replaced by the small weedy yard with its surrounding glass-topped stone wall. Whenever they were, it felt like the middle of a particularly sweltering summer. All around, students began to strip off their sweaters and blazers and fan themselves in the still air. James could vaguely hear a distant, low rumble.

“What is that?” Zane asked quizzically, peering around and fanning himself with his tie. “Traffic?”

“An airplane?” Ralph suggested, looking up at the untouched blue sky.

“Good day, Professor Baruti,” Flintlock the troll said in his slow, gravelly voice, unlocking the gate’s padlock. The growth over the gate was even thicker now than it had been when James had first seen it. Swaying leaves and vines completely obscured the view beyond. “Going to visit Miss Amadahy, I presume?”

“Right you are, my stone-hearted friend,” Baruti answered jovially.

Flintlock smiled, pulling away the huge padlock while Baruti turned back toward the milling students.

“Attention, class,” he called. “Today, you may well learn more about the advanced art of potion-making than any textbook could teach you throughout the rest of the semester. We are about to visit a community that has been simmering magical elixirs for thousands of years and still does so

today just as their forefathers did in eons past.” Here, Baruti stopped and smiled to himself. “Of course, I mean ‘today’ in the purely rhetorical sense.”

“When *are* we, Professor?” Norrick called out, mopping his forehead with his sleeve. “Since when do potion-makers live in Muggle Philadelphia?”

Baruti poked a finger into the air, as if to say *wait and see*. Then he turned to the troll. “Open the gate, *s’il vous plaît*, if you would, Mr. Flintlock.”

With one huge stony hand, Flintlock gripped the gate and pulled. There was a sustained ripping sound as years of vines and bushes were torn apart, half of the green mass riding the gate inwards as Flintlock swung it open. James had expected to see the residential street of Philadelphia outside the gate, but like the campus of Alma Aleron University, the street seemed to have vanished. In its place was a vast, uninterrupted prairie, dotted with trees and carpeted with tall, shushing grasses. A multitude of brown humps seemed to be swimming through the grasses in the hazy distance.

“No way,” Zane said as a huge grin spread across his face. Along with the rest of the class, the three boys pressed toward the gate, eager to see the entire view beyond. As James passed through, he found himself standing atop a low hill that overlooked miles of sunny valley. The river sparkled in the distance, snaking toward the horizon. James now recognized the brown humps in the grass as buffalo. An enormous herd of them followed the curves of the river, tossing their great shaggy heads and kicking up a cloud of dust that hovered all around them.

“Well,” James said, nudging Zane, “you said you thought that that rumbling sound was traffic. You weren’t too far off.”

“Wicked!” Ralph said suddenly, turning. Both James and Zane followed his gaze. In the near distance, spreading away from the base of the hill upon which stood the Alma Aleron gate, was a teeming Native American village. Hundreds of buff-colored conical tents poked up from the grass, each decorated with colorful symbols and shapes. Trails of white smoke drifted into the sky from dozens of small fires, most tended by dark-skinned men with bare chests and long, neatly braided black hair. Children and women milled throughout the village as well, stretching buffalo skins, pounding grain in wooden bowls, or simply sitting cross-legged around the fires, conducting their councils. A woman was walking up the hill to meet the class, her jet black hair shining in the sun, her short buckskin tunic swishing about her strong legs.

“Good day to you, Ayasha,” Baruti called down to her, bowing.

“It is indeed,” the woman replied. “I see you received my note about today’s lesson.”

Baruti nodded and spread his hands. “Only last night. The cave paintings grow hard to read after so many centuries.”

“It is well that you were able. The Wraithraize is at its ripest and ready for threshing. Come, the pots are already boiling in wait.”

“Professor,” a Vampire girl called from near the gate. “Is she a...? Are those...?”



“Welcome to Philadelphia,” Professor Baruti announced expansively, turning back to the class and smiling, “*before* it was Philadelphia. This is Shackamaxon, the largest extra-temporal, unplotable Indian reservation in North America.”

Next to James, Ralph let out a long low whistle. “Wow,” he said slowly, his voice filled with awe. “Rose Weasley is going to be *sooo* mad.”

*Thus completes chapter eleven. What did you think?*

Tomorrow’s chapter will be released at noon, CST, via [www.jamespotterseries.com](http://www.jamespotterseries.com). In the meantime, come on over to the [Grotto Keep forum](#) to discuss what’s happened thus far.