

Chapter VIII

Mugwump and the Pranksters

"So," Dumbledore said, "you are trying to start a civil war."

Harry shrugged. "It might turn out that way," he agreed.

Dumbledore stared at Harry.

"What?" Harry demanded. "As I said in the letter, the next move is up to the Ministry. If they are so stupid as to devote most of their energies into investigating 'The Order' and harassing the average wizard instead of attacking the Death Eaters, then they'll reap what they sow." Harry grinned. "And just think, two more Death Eaters were executed last night, as was that bastard Greyback." Harry snorted. "I'm sure HIS death will be trumpeted in the press, since he was a werewolf, even if I did claim he was associated with Riddle."

Dumbledore simply gaped at Harry.

"Look," Harry said, "Aren't you the Chief Mugwump or Head Pooh- bah or something? Don't you have any real power at the Ministry?" Harry's eyes narrowed. "Or do you just want to keep power within the little Pure-blood clique? Is that why you protected the children of Death Eaters as they became Death Eaters in turn from their own actions in my time?"

Dumbledore was stunned for a moment, realizing that he was the member of the staff whom the letter had accused of harboring Pure-blood bias. He shook his head and tried to jump back a point. "Harry, you were, I understood from what you told me, basically Muggle-raised. Democracy is a fine thing, in theory. . . ."

"If you say ANYTHING about mob rule, I may have to hurt you," Harry growled. "Representative democracy has many faults, but that isn't one of them. I am certainly not trying to create, let alone force, pure democracy on anyone. I know that is mere rule of the opinion of the moment. And believe me, I saw how the Muggles messed up trying to shoehorn democratic ideas into cultures that weren't ready for them, from the falling communist states to over-thrown dictatorships." Dumbledore blinked at that, since he was well-aware of the 'cold war' then currently going on.

"Some failed totally, because cultures cannot be forced to be democratic. They have to grow into the idea. The ones that worked grew into the forms with some birthing pains. Some of which were pretty ugly, corrupt, and even bloody. In almost every case, though, the resulting society was a hell of a lot better off than the dictatorship or oligarchy it replaced, and in none was it worse in most

ways. Believe me," Harry concluded, "the only thing I'm trying to force people to do is think, which is difficult enough."

"You have given me a lot to think about," Dumbledore admitted.

"So I have," Harry said. "If the Ministry spends most of its resources on going after the Death Eaters, then they don't have to worry about my writing any more letters for a while. Unless you somehow clue them in, I doubt they can ever get after me directly. If they go after the majority of wizards who just want to live a quiet life, they will stir up a sleeping giant which would make the actual giants seem tame and reasonable."

And with that, Harry took his leave. That left Dumbledore to try and direct forces he only had nominal influence over towards the proper goals. Dumbledore had decided that if the Death Eaters could be neutralized (and if he could ever locate that diary/Horcrux, which would allow Harry to destroy Voldemort), then the wizarding world (by which he meant Britain) could go back to the ways things should be.

He hoped.

From what Harry had told him, the Death Eaters had become by late 1973 or so the most directly violent of any Dark force in history. Grindelwald had caused more death, stirring up several Muggle wars, plus the wizarding confrontation which had lasted over a generation, but there had been more direct murders perpetrated by the Death Eaters. The May Massacre had equalled the worst of any previous such attack in European wizarding history.

The Old Families had failed, many backing Voldemort tacitly if not openly. The Ministry had been largely ineffective. The International had left the British alone (at their own request).

'Maybe,' Dumbledore thought, 'I should just let Harry alone, other than finding that cursed diary. The quicker Voldemort is stopped, the better chance society has of surviving in its current form.'

Harry returned to the common room to see James and Sirius mutely hanging in cages from the ceiling. Harry shook his head and pinched the bridge of his nose. "What did they do this time?" he asked in resignation.

"The little buggers took my broom," Georgia Anderson, one of the Chasers snarled, "flew up the stairs to the girls' dorms, and crashed into the main showers."

"We ought to blind the little pervs," one of the other girls shouted.

"Two questions," Harry said. "First, why did you leave your broom lying around the common room?"

"Well. . . ."

"I think we can guess," Harry teased. Georgia flew after breakfast on Sundays with her boyfriend from Hufflepuff, and then shared the gossip with her friends in a corner. Georgia blushed, knowing that even the First years knew what she was up to.

"Second," Harry went on, "what makes you think they knew it was the shower room? It could have been an accident."

"They were dressed as pirates, shouting 'where are the wenches?' as they flew up the stairs, and sang a chantey about 'sea chests' as they blew through the shower room door," Alice Grant retorted drily. "Not to mention what they said to those two."

Harry noticed then that Lily and Ellen were sobbing quietly in a corner, hurriedly dressed and still with wet hair.

"What did you say to them?" Harry turned and snarled at the pair. James and Sirius winced, but were obviously under silencing charms.

Alice considered, and then leaned over and whispered, "Your brother said, 'we can see some chests, but those two are just boards'. Black said, well . . . he said, 'and look at those ugly knotholes'. Do I need to tell you where they were pointing?"

Harry glared at James and Sirius, who both winced. Harry took a deep breath and said, "If you leave them up there too long, someone will have to change their diapers, and it isn't going to be me. It will be whoever put them up there."

Several girls wrinkled their noses.

Harry went over to Lily and Ellen. "I apologize for my idiot brother and friend." He leaned over and hugged each one, kissing them on the cheek in turn. "Assuming you don't retaliate, I can promise you, they won't prank you again this term." Harry stood and glared at James and Sirius. "Swear on your magic," Harry demanded.

James and Sirius looked appalled.

"You went over the line, and you both know it," Harry stated. James and Sirius both silently had to agree with that. "You both know a mere apology won't cover it, and we all know that you won't be able to hold off past Christmas anyway. So, the truce will be your apology, and if they prank you, the truce is off."

James and Sirius considered that, and James nodded his agreement. Sirius scowled and then did the same.

"Could someone let them out so we can go to our room?" Harry said. "I need to yell at them some more."

Harry led the shame-faced pair to their room, where he did scold them for ten minutes on why they had gone over the line, which, when they understood the implications and the possible official punishments they could have been given, made them sorry they gone as far as they had.

"Do you two have anything else to say?" Harry demanded.

"We really can't prank until Christmas?" Sirius pouted.

"You can't prank Lily or Ellen until then," Harry pointed out. "The rest of them are fair game."

"Oh," Sirius said, brightening, "that's not so bad then."

"Nothing else? Then I just have one more thing I want you to tell us about," Harry said severely as Remus came in and closed the door.

"What's that?" James asked, worried.

Harry smiled. "Tell us about the other girls' tits."

As Harry had predicted, there were strong calls for the Ministry to seek out and punish 'The Order of Founders' for killing alleged Death Eaters, and demands from Pure-bloods to pass strong measures against any group trying to create 'militias' or 'self-defense groups', pointing out that these laws would also apply to 'real' Death Eaters.

Instead, thanks in part to the behind-the-scenes whisperings of Dumbledore, the Ministry took a 'wait-and-see' attitude on those issues. This was because the Ministry and Wizengamot members with the real power understood that if they could quickly deal with the threat of violence that Voldemort posed, they might still avoid a confrontation they likely could not win against the majority of their own citizens.

All the Death Eaters Harry had listed were brought in and questioned under Legilimency and truth serums, and all were found to be Death Eaters, naming a few others, plus supporters who were sending Voldemort cash (including Sirius' mother, behind his father's back, as well as her brother). None had bothered hiding, because they did not believe it necessary. In the original time line, the

Ministry had only become serious about tracking down Death Eaters around 1976 and had never thought to track any other money until 1997.

By Christmas, all of Voldemort's Death Eaters but nine were serving ten years to life in Azkaban. Three had escaped altogether, while six had been Kissed. Each of the financial backers had been fined twice the amount they had donated (Mrs. Black's was one of the lowest fines, at 2000 Galleons, while the Malfoys had to pay the highest, 240,000).

Voldemort himself, however, would still be at large, having killed the six aurors and three hit wizards who had gone to bring him in for questioning. That fight had brought Harry the first twinges in his scar since he had arrived in the past.

Despite extensive searches in all the properties of the Death Eaters, the diary had not surfaced. Voldemort was still not killable in any real sense.

Flying under the Ministry's fairly incompetent notice, several extended families tried to band together, along with several groups of friends. These various group all quickly discovered that their knowledge of magical theory fell short of what they needed to do, as did their conception of exactly what they would need to do to protect their properties and families. Granted, the books that 'the Order' had recommended helped them set basic wards. However, those wards could only do so much.

A few of these people, however, had Muggle relatives, and they sought out their relatives' advice on how they protected their homes and other properties. This resulted in three wizards and a witch accidentally arriving at the same home security firm looking for information at nearly the same time. Recognizing each other for what they were, they joined together in their researches.

Stonehedge Security Services was born at that afternoon in mid- December. Calling in expertise from their families and friends, including Muggles and Squibs who knew about the magical world, the company launched an underground recruiting drive just before Christmas. In early February, 1972, they sprang the surprising result on wizarding Britain -- moderately priced home security. This included: 1) Muggle-inspired alarm systems (the rules on enchanting Muggle items for wizarding use were looser than they had become in the 1990s of the original time line; so long as the objects were not hazardous to Muggles or let loose in the Muggle world, they were legal) which easily tied into the wards 'the Order' had recommended and which alerted a central office which could respond; 2) the central office itself, which would not only alert the aurors but which also had its own small security force, led by three retired aurors; 3) a few skilled individuals who could cast stronger or more specialized wards.

A few of the more elitist Pure Blood Families protested, if only because it undercut their feelings of superiority to know that about half the wizarding population could now afford similar levels of protection as they did in their ancient estates. Since SSS had filed enough paperwork to show that they were working to help the aurors, and not against them, the Ministry bowed to the 'bourgeois progressivism' this move represented. By the start of the next summer, there were two other similar companies, prices had lowered by 20% (so that by then nearly 3/4 of the families could afford some extra protection if they chose to), and the already low general crime rate was down almost 60%.

As Voldemort was not yet captured, it also gave people the confidence to continue demanding that the Ministry keep hunting for him. They all (including the Ministry) ignored the fact that while the new security measures would help against any new Death Eaters, they would not be enough to stop Voldemort himself.

It was the second home security company -- Magi-Watch! -- which captured just over half of the total non-governmental market within two years. even though they announced their company a few weeks after SSS. This was in part because they also employed goblins, house elves, vampires, and werewolves in addition to wizards, Squibs, and Muggles who had magical relatives and therefore knew about the magical world. While SSS had a larger share of the actual home security business (not everyone wanted a vampire watching them by night), MW! had over 80% of the business market. Their success in the business/home security market was mostly due at first to an enthusiastic young Pure-blood lured from his position in the Ministry -- Arthur Weasley. When Harry had set up the company with the goblins and his father over Christmas (he was just a bit behind the founders of SSS, but had thought of the idea independently), he made certain he made Arthur's employment a condition.

Back at Hogwarts that autumn, however, Harry had decided after the broom incident that James and Sirius needed direction. Therefore, he coaxed them into forming the Marauders a bit early (the original four had done so at the end of their First year). Their long-term goal was the creation of what Harry knew would become the Marauders' Map, from an idea of James'. There also followed a series of minor pranks perpetrated against Fifth through Seventh years in all Houses as well as some on all the Slytherins. This was helped by the one other potion Harry had bothered memorizing besides the Wolfsbane Potion for the journey to the past. This other potion, combined with two charms and a minor hex, would infuse any foodstuff with an almost undetectable version of 'the Canary Cream Effect'. Harry justified this to himself by promising to seek out the Weasley twins if they ever decided to open any type of shop and invest in it.

It was Sirius who came up the idea of how to modify the potion to arrange different colors for the canary. Those dating members of other Houses would

therefore be turned into the appropriate House colors. Most of the Slytherins caught, however, turned the most lurid color combinations.

Having turned Lily's hair different colors, James and Sirius were the main suspects, but only Dumbledore was prepared to believe that First years could really pull off such a prank, as no one realized that the Marauders existed as a team of four (as opposed to just James and Sirius). The pair actually diffused the idea that they might have been involved when they offered to turn all the House members' hair to the House colors for the late autumn Quidditch games. The other students reasoned that anyone that open about their mastery of coloring spells would not be the pranksters.

As the autumn term wound down, Harry felt that on the whole he could congratulate himself. He had maintained good relationships with James and Sirius, and had made real friends with Remus, Lily, and Ellen. He was also friendly with a wide-range of students, across the Years and Houses, mostly due to the League. Between the League and the absence of the most rabid future Death Eaters, Hogwarts itself was actually a fairly pleasant place, at least compared to the 1990s.

In almost any other year, Harry would have stood out like a beacon. Not this time, however. The teachers did not know what to make of many of the new First years. Sirius and James were the two most natural magic users to come along since Tom Riddle. Remus was just a short distance behind them, and Snape and Lily were barely behind Remus. Lily and Snape both had a drive to really understand magic, with James almost at their level and Remus and Sirius just trailing James. Behind those five were the normal range of students, from the dull to the brilliant (such as Ellen). Harry outshone all of them, of course, but with a little effort on his part he could tone it down to merely being the most brilliant First year student in the history of Hogwarts in the most brilliant class in well over a century and a half.

Dumbledore understood much of what was happening, of course, and was totally uncertain about what to do about Harry and what he represented and what he hoped to do. Therefore, as Harry had expected, Dumbledore mostly did nothing, and what he did do smoothed the way for the 'Order of Founders'. His own 'Order of the Phoenix' would also finally be up and fully running by Christmas, and Dumbledore planned to feed bits of information to Harry when he deemed it necessary.

James loved the holidays. His mother and father had promised to take him and Harry to Diagon Alley for some proper Christmas shopping this year. He knew he couldn't take much out of his vault, but he hoped he could get away with

taken perhaps twenty Galleons. Harry had approached him, however, and reminded James that it would be difficult to slip any presents to Sirius without the Blacks finding out. Considering what had happened to Bellatrix and the other three students, the old guard Pure-bloods were still howling, and no doubt the first Gryffindor Black would be under closer observation than usual by his relatives.

James decided to let Harry get an envelope bespelled so that it would appear in Sirius' trunk Christmas morning with I.O.U.s from the Potter brothers in the card. James would simply owl Remus a card. That decided, James went back to thinking about what pranking items he could buy for Sirius, which Sirius could share with the other Marauders if needed. Dung bombs ruled, of course, that went without saying.

James decided to do things properly, and work up a list and then see what he could afford to buy.

Sirius was not looking forward to going to his parents' over the break. There would be no Christmas tree or stockings ('Filthy Muggle customs' in his parents' opinions). Nor would there be presents ('We supply you with what you need,' his mother would say). No, there would be a formal family roast beef dinner Christmas day, alternating between six different Pure-blood households. This year, it would have been at Malfoy Manor, had it not mysteriously burnt down. No doubt it would be at Grimmauld Place a year early.

His parents would be off to the formal Ministry Ball on New Year's Eve, and he and Regulus would have to be hungry until noon, as the twelve hours between midnight and noon New Year's Day was the house elf's yearly vacation.

'Next year,' Sirius vowed, 'I'll try to either stay here or get an invitation some place else.'

Remus was not looking forward to the holidays, and not just because there would be a full moon on Dec 31 at 20:20 UTC. He would have to stay at Hogwarts, so that he would have access to the Wolfsbane Potion. It was awful tasting stuff, and made him feel like he was walking through water. Still, he had not bitten himself once during the entire autumn term. He had not missed one class. And so far, neither James nor Sirius had questioned his not feeling well and spending one to three nights every month in the Infirmary (even though he really only needed to be gone on the night where there was a full moon, the others were there to disguise the timing).

Remus sighed. He would also miss Harry. Remus had never had a friend before, let alone one as close as Harry.

Lily was driving her dorm mates a bit crazy as they prepared and took their end-of-term exams. She just loved magic! and was so pleased to show off what she had learned. She just wished she could show her parents what she had learned. She had been surprised to learn that at least one grandparent on each side of her family had been Squibs, and that many of her great-grand parents had been magical. One great aunt had not only been magical, but she had even met her before she had been killed the previous May.

True, all of this had made her awful older sister even nastier than usual, but then, 'Pew-tunia' (as Lily sometimes called her) had apparently been nasty since their parents had announced Lily's impending arrival.

Ellen liked Hogwarts, but not as much as her friend Lily. She did want to get home and see both her parents and her twin sister, Elaine. Elaine was a Squib, and loved to learn about the magical world she was missing out on. By now, Harry could have told Elaine that while she would never be magical, her children, starting with Natalie MacDonald, would be -- but of course he couldn't.

Severus Snape watched as all the other First year Ravenclaw boys started to pack their things for the Yule holidays. He had no regrets about staying at Hogwarts. His family had never celebrated anything. They had never feasted. His father had thought marrying a witch would insure him an easy life.

It hadn't.

Snape had loathed his drunken, abusive father, and by extension (under his uncle's influence -- John Prince the Death Eater) all Muggles. His term in Ravenclaw and his time in the League had changed his bias to some degree. Now he hated magical bullies as well as Muggle ones.

It wasn't that he now liked Muggles, or Muggle culture. It was more that he had gained some balance. His Housemates had not jeered him or hexed him. He had arrived fully able to hex back, but was now glad he didn't have to. He had even made something of a friend. Peter was a natural follower, and had elected for some reason to follow Severus.

Snape saw he was appreciated by his teachers and by many of his Housemates -- at least the ones who paid any attention to First years. He still did not get along with James Potter at all -- he was arrogant and had been responsible for the capture of his uncle, after all. Nor did he like Potter's friend Sirius Black. He did admire and respect Harry, however, and knew that as long as Harry was around, he could tolerate James and Sirius.

He wondered what it would be like really celebrating Christmas for the first time.

As Peter Pettigrew said his goodbyes to Severus, he thought about all the lovely treats his mother would have prepared for him. Running around the castle had helped Peter lose a little weight, and his mother would no doubt want to fatten him up a bit before he returned.