

JAMES POTTER
AND THE
CRIMSON THREAD

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LOVINGLY BASED UPON THE WORLDS AND
CHARACTERS OF J. K. ROWLING

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4. SECRET OF THE DAGGER

“To be fair,” Rose said as she, James, and Ralph navigated the crowded corridor late the following morning, “I only found out about the harbor beneath the lake last year. Hagrid needed help with something, so he let me in on the secret.”

James was skeptical, but pitched his voice low so not to be overheard by the between-class throng. “Hagrid needed help with something in some secret lake beneath the lake, so he comes to a fifth-year student instead of another professor?”

“Excuse me,” Rose said, stopping in the hall and extending her free hand toward James, “I’m Rose Weasley. I’m sort of pretty amazing

at lots of unusual and difficult spells, even better than some professors I could mention. Have we met?"

"Ah," Ralph said with a nod. "It's a secret, whatever it is, but Hagrid needed some help with some difficult wand-work."

"I bet it has to do with that boat," James agreed, then glanced back at Rose. "Does it?"

Rose continued walking, lowering her own voice to a hush. "He won it off some wizard in the Hog's Head. I warned him, nothing good has ever come from such things in the past, mysterious strangers betting dragon's eggs and entire boats over card games in dodgy pubs. And what does he say?" Here, she stood as tall as she could and adopted a rather dopey frown, clearly doing her best impression of the half-giant: "But th' summer's are long, Rosie! One can only weed a garden so many times afore it starts getting' to 'im! I gets lonely and bored and in need o' comp'ny!"

James couldn't help smiling at Rose's impression. "So his new boat may not be exactly legal, then. What's he need your help with?"

Rose turned a corner, propelled by the noisy crowd approaching the Defence Against the Dark Arts classroom. "Well, it's not a wizarding boat, strictly speaking. A lot of unusual modifications need to be made to make it sea-worthy in wizarding waters. And it's not the sort of magic that one does on a day-to-day basis."

She unslung her knapsack outside the DADA classroom and rummaged in it briefly, producing a small but very thick book. The title, embossed in faded silver on green cloth, read: *The Essential Seafarer's Compendium of Nautical Enchantment, Boating Bewitchment, and Ship-shape Spellwork.*

"Looks..." James bobbed his head at the book. "Well. Looks like something you'd fall right into."

Ralph cocked his head. "So what makes a ship a *magical* ship, exactly?"

"Oh, you'd be amazed," Rose enthused, warming to the subject and flipping through the book. "Charmed hydrophobic varnish is what we've been spending most of our time on, so the ship repels water

when it travels up through the lake to burst onto the surface. And then there're anti-Grindylow hexes, siren-repellents, navigational mastheads, not to mention the purely mechanical and clockwork apparatuses, like folding masts, deck domes, sea-monster harnesses--"

"*Annnd* I'm bored already," James sighed, bypassing Rose as he entered the classroom. "But bully for you for getting a sneak-peek at the harbor under the lake. I'm sure it was worth all the time slathering magic varnish all over Hagrid's secret boat."

"*He* does the slathering," Rose rolled her eyes, following James and Ralph inside. "I just charm the stuff. And unlike you, I *like* learning new things. One never knows when a hydrophobic spell might come in handy."

The previous class was draining from the room, still muttering and collecting their books, while the next class filtered in around them.

"Boys," Debellows said, raising his eyebrows as he settled behind his huge desk. "And Miss Weasley. I don't believe I have you in my class until tomorrow's advanced lesson. Or am I mistaken?"

James shook his head quickly. "No, sir. We came to ask something else. We were, uh, curious, sir, about using some of our Defence Against the Dark Arts class-time for our seventh-year field work in a related profession."

Debellows stopped organizing the hopeless mess of paperwork on his desk and looked up, giving them his full attention for the first time. He looked vaguely puzzled, and then blinked and nodded. "Ah yes. I'm sure I must have received a notice about such a programme. I likely ignored it, as I do most intra-school communications. One can only be informed so many times about revisions to school dress codes and rescheduled meetings one has no intention of attending in the first place before all such notices start going directly into the rubbish bin. So. You three intend to pursue some practical experience in lieu of my class-time, is that it?" He seemed both open to the idea and slightly churlish about it.

“Not all *three* of us--” James began, but Rose overruled him suddenly, shouldering past him to stand directly in front of Debellows’ desk.

“Yes, sir, Professor,” she said quickly, clearly not intending to miss a serendipitous opportunity. “All three of us. James, Ralph, and me. Er, yes. We three.”

She glanced back at James briefly, her eyes stern. James closed his mouth with a small click.

“Well,” Debellows said slowly, looking back down at his desk and shuffling papers again, randomly. “I suppose it would depend upon what sort of practical field experience you intended to engage in. I can only assume that you’d like to participate in some preliminary training for the Harrier Corps. I should warn you, my young friends: it is an arduous journey, becoming a Harrier, but vastly rewarding in every respect. I shall contact my old commander, see if I cannot call in a few favors to--”

“Um,” Ralph interrupted, sharing a suddenly wide-eyed glance with James. “Um. Not the Harriers, sir. Exactly. Quite...”

Debellows frowned and looked up again, his face etched with sincere puzzlement. “Not the Harriers? What could it possibly be, then?”

Rose answered, standing stiffly upright, almost as if she meant to salute the professor. “Auror training, sir. We wish to use the skills you’ve taught us to learn Auror methodology. To track down and capture dark wizards and witches, warlocks, hags, and other various threats to the good people of the magical world.”

James blinked at Rose, annoyed but rather impressed. Glancing back at Debellows, he added: “Like my dad, sir.”

Debellows turned his iron gaze from Ralph, to Rose, to James, and then drew a deep, skeptical sigh. “I suppose one can’t blame you three for entertaining such designs, coming from the families that you do. It does strike me as a bit of a wasted resource. You, especially, Mr. Potter, show great potential not only in defensive spellwork, which we will be delving into much more deeply in your final year, but in your

Artis Decerto and battle psychology. But..." he shrugged his massive shoulders—they were like continental tectonic plates on either side of his bull neck—and sighed again. "If that's what you have your hearts set upon, I suppose I cannot dissuade you."

"Sorry, sir," Rose said, still standing at attention in front of the cluttered desk.

"All right, then," Debellows looked down again, clearly reluctant but not quite invested enough to protest any further. "I suppose there is some... official parchment or other that I should sign." He shook his head dismissively. "I shall look into it. For now, assume my general support of your endeavor. I shall inform you when something has been arranged."

James backed away from the desk, pulling Rose and Ralph with him, anxious to escape before Debellows changed his mind. After a few clumsy backwards steps, the three thanked the professor, then turned and virtually ran from the classroom, threading past younger students who watched them go, bemused and curious.

"All *three* of us, eh?" James turned a sardonic look on his cousin as they hurried toward the stairs for lunch.

"You didn't expect me to pass up an opportunity like that, did you?" she shrugged. "To skip out on Debellows' annoying class and skive off to the Ministry of Magic to hob-nob with Uncle Harry and my mum? I doubt it'll last long before somebody catches on. But it'll be Professor McGonagall or Headmaster Merlin who do, not that mountainous lump, Debellows."

"You really don't much like him, do you?" Ralph commented as they turned to tramp down the stairs.

"If he taught the girls the same things he taught the boys I might feel differently," she sniffed. "*He* thinks a woman's best battle magic is a charm for cleaning blood off her husband's robes. Believe me, I've learned more defensive magic watching a wizard chess match than sitting in his stupid class."

James was familiar with Rose's ongoing private feud with the current Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher, and knew enough not

to debate her about it. She was right that Debellows divided his classes between boys and girls, ostensibly to make dueling practices fairer. As far as James was concerned, considering the competent fierceness of girls like Ashley Doone and Julian Jackson, he suspected Debellows might be exercising fairness more on the boys' behalf than the girls'.

At lunch, James noticed Albus seated, perhaps for the first time ever, at the Gryffindor table. He was across from Lily near the very end, in the center of a group of laughing fourth- and fifth-years, all leaning close and keeping their own confidences. Next to him, Lily's friend Chance Jackson was watching him closely, smiling and blinking far more than mere physiology demanded. James wondered for a moment if Albus' vaunted bachelorhood was being secretly challenged.

"Lily is a notorious match-maker," Rose commented, glancing toward the end of the table to see what James was looking at. "She'd just love to see Albus and Chance together."

James scoffed. "Never happen," he grabbed his pumpkin juice and drank it down in three quick gulps, standing as he did so. He wiped his mouth with his sleeve and went on, "Albus will date from within his own house or he won't date at all. Fiera Hutchins is more his type."

"Hmph," Rose replied, standing as well and gathering her things.

Somebody bumped James from behind, hard enough to make him fumble his glass as he leaned to place it on the table. The glass tumbled and sprayed the dregs of his juice onto his books. Annoyed, he wheeled to see who had been clumsy enough to bump him so hard.

A small, rather blocky boy, a first-year Ravenclaw, was standing there with another boy and girl. All three were watching James with smug, tight smiles.

"*Ooops!*" the blocky boy said with sarcastic emphasis. "Clumsy you!"

James frowned in stunned surprise. The boy, who was at least a foot and a half shorter, with a shock of greasy ginger hair and freckles so dense that they seemed to join forces in a single blotch around his

nose, had clearly bumped James on purpose, and wanted James to know it. James opened his mouth, not even sure how to respond.

“Whassa matter, Potter?” the boy challenged, “Hinkypunk got your tongue?” He crossed his eyes and gawped his own mouth up at James in childish mockery. “Gah-gah-bwa-bwa-*dubbb!*”

The boy and girl with him snickered and glared up at James, their eyes sharp, glinting with baffling malice.

Before James could even begin to formulate a response, the trio turned and walked away, unhurrying toward the open doors, laughing loudly and nudging each other with their elbows.

“What was *that* all about?” It was Ralph, approaching from the Slytherin table, apparently having witnessed the interaction from a distance.

“James was just *bullied* by a *first-year*,” Graham said, a disbelieving laugh coming into his voice. “Did that really just *happen*, or am I dreaming?”

Rose looked equally consternated. “What did you do to earn *that*, James?” she asked, glancing from the departing trio to James. “And who *is* he?”

Belatedly, a pulse of embarrassed anger arose in James’ chest. He felt it redden his cheeks. “I’ve never seen that little prat before in my entire life!” he said, wonder and surprise turning his voice into a low rasp. “I don’t even know his name!”

“Edgar Edgecombe,” said a small voice. James glanced aside to see Shivani’s young brother, Sanjay, still seated nearby, his eyes wide and serious. “He’s a first-year, like me. Are you, you know...” he paused and glanced around the table, as if reluctant to be the one to say it, “going to let him get away with that?”

“I’d practice every jinx I ever learned on him,” Graham nodded, turning serious and meeting James’ eyes. “All at once. Twice over. Make an example out of ‘im.”

“James can’t just go jinxing first-years,” Rose said with a derisive glance toward Graham. “He’d just get hauled before the headmaster. Maybe even expelled. What’s wrong with you?”

As a group, they began to drift toward the doors, following the baffling trio into the Entrance Hall. “But the little Ravenclaw prat just insulted James!” Graham insisted in a hushed tone. “And by extension, all of *us!*”

“It’s James’ problem,” Rose replied loftily. “He may not feel free to discuss his response in front of the *Head Boy*—” she glared aside at Ralph, who looked mildly affronted, “—but he *will* respond.” She turned her gaze meaningfully on James. “*Won’t* you.”

It was a statement, not a question. James blew out a breath and shrugged. This was the very last thing he needed—some inexplicable upstart berk embarrassing him during his final year. Whatever bee the little prat had in his bonnet, James mostly just hoped that the boy, Edgar Edgecombe, had gotten it out. James didn’t enjoy comeuppance the way people like Scorpius Malfoy did. He didn’t understand meanness, and was deeply baffled about how to respond to it.

Fortunately, by the time he and Ralph got to the third floor and their next class, they were distracted from Edgar Edgecombe by the young new Charms teacher, Professor Odin-Vann.

The professor was very thin, James noticed, and dressed to hide that fact in layers of dark robes and a high, stiff collar. His beard, though sparse, was combed and waxed into a point sharp enough to draw blood. As the class filed in, he sat behind his desk, bent over a sheaf of parchments and scribbling busily with his quill. James had a secret suspicion that the professor’s busyness was a ruse to hide his nervousness. The young man didn’t look up as the students found their seats, unusually hushed in the presence of a new teacher. When everyone was seated, Odin-Vann put down his quill and finally raised his head. A lank wing of his black hair covered one eye. He raised a hand and pushed it aside in what was certainly, by now, a purely automatic gesture.

“Welcome, class,” he said in a reedy voice, sitting up slowly in his seat. “As you all know by now, I am Professor Donofrio Odin-Vann. I replace your previous teacher, the esteemed Professor Filius Flitwick, whom I sat under myself when I was in your place not that

very long ago. I am sure you, like me, are sorry to see him go. But I also hope that you, like me, will make the best of a new opportunity.” He smiled, and although it wasn’t entirely a genuine smile, James sensed that it was less insincere than anxious.

The professor stood then and brushed his robes off, moving from behind his desk. He glanced back at the chalkboard behind him and startled slightly, apparently surprised at the drabble of handwritten notes remaining from his most recent class. He produced his wand reflexively, and then paused, the wand raised awkwardly in his hand.

“Er, Mr. Potter,” he said, scanning the class and fixing his gaze on James. “If you would, ahem, please clear the chalkboard for us?”

He waited, his eyes imploringly on James. James blinked at the professor, and then drew his own wand from the pocket of his robes, suspecting that the professor had called on him not because of James’ potential magical competence, but only because he happened to know James’ name. Why the professor didn’t clear the chalkboard himself, James had no guess whatsoever.

“Corruptus,” James called from his seat, giving his wand a flick toward the chalkboard. With a puff of white dust, the scribbled words and diagrams vanished, leaving the board clean, if nominally smudged. It wasn’t a spell he’d had much practice with.

“Thank you,” Odin-Vann nodded with palpable relief, glancing back at the board. Stiffly, he put his own wand away again. “To begin, then, please turn in your textbooks to chapter one, ‘elemental transcendents and transmutations’.”

“Well that was weird,” Ralph said an hour later as they made their way to the library for study period. “He didn’t do a single spell himself until nearly at the end of the lesson.”

“He knows his stuff, though,” Deirdre commented appreciatively. “There’s more to Charms than wand-work. There’s theory and new spell writing, charmed objects, wand reflexology--”

“What’s wand reflexology?” James asked.

“Training a wand to do stuff on its own,” Rose explained, joining them at an intersection. “The witch or wizard has to have it in

their hand for the magic to work, but it saves time. A wand can reflexively complete a chain of pre-incanted spells or some especially hard magic, so long as the witch or wizard has embedded it properly.”

“Well that’s sort of the point, innit?” Ralph shook his head and glanced aside at Rose. “It all still ends up with a wand in a hand, doing magic. That new bloke, Odin-Vann, barely touched his wand until class was almost over. Although when he did, he was brilliant with it. Made the coatrack scuttle-dance around the room to the beat of a Rig Mortis song on the wireless.”

Rose shrugged. “He’s probably just nervous, what having the Head Boy in his class and all.”

“You’re never going to let that go, are you?” the bigger boy grumped, nettled.

“Actually, I’m very happy for you,” Rose softened her voice and patted him on the shoulder, which was quite a reach. “So this will be the last thing I say on the subject: it’s a worthy accomplishment, and you’re like a brother to me. But the Weasley in me insists that I warn you: if you ever pull rank on me, I’ll pull wand on you. And even that overgrown broom-handle of yours is no match for me in a duel.”

She smiled sweetly up at him and batted her eyes. Ralph blinked at her, then at James, who merely raised his hands in a *keep me out of this* gesture.

At dinner that evening, James watched Cedric Diggory’s ghost flit happily over the Hufflepuff table. He was happy for Cedric, but joined his own house in bemoaning the lack of an official Gryffindor Ghost. As they discussed this, their gazes roaming over the other tables and their attendant spectres, James’ eye was caught by the glare of Edgar Edgecombe. The small, blocky boy was seated in the middle of the Ravenclaw table, flanked by his two friends, whom James now recognized as Quincy Ogden and Polly Heathrow, both first-years. He vaguely remembered them from the Sorting. All three craned to peer at James, to assure he saw them looking. Edgecombe grinned and his brow lowered. Pure spite beat from him like waves of radiation. Then,

still staring at James, the ginger boy leaned and muttered something to his friends, who burst into shrill, nasty laughter.

James shook his head dismissively and looked away. What was the deal with the little prat? Maybe he would find out later. He hoped it wouldn't come to a confrontation. He wasn't particularly good in such situations. The stress of confrontation always muddled his mind, blew away his words, made his reactions feel clumsy and stupid.

And suddenly it occurred to him: perhaps that was what it was like for Professor Odin-Vann. Perhaps the nervousness he'd shown at the beginning of class resulted in the magical equivalent of stage-fright, the way some people developed stutters or nervous tics when under stress. Maybe the professor couldn't trust himself to do magic when he felt tense or self-conscious. Later, of course, when the professor had warmed to both the class and his subject, he had used his wand naturally, and with great skill.

Still, James thought, if an extremely competent witch or wizard couldn't rely on their magic in stressful or confrontational situations, that would be a rather debilitating limitation. It was no wonder, perhaps, that the young man had gone into teaching instead of, say, magical law enforcement.

James, on the other hand, may be unaccustomed to confrontation, and he may lose his wit momentarily when surprised, but he could do magic if it came to it. Edgar Edgecombe had surprised him once, but the obnoxious little twit wouldn't do so again. As Graham had suggested, James did know enough jinxes to put the boy in his place. Mentally, he checked them off-- *the Jellylegs jinx*, *Levicorpus*, *the Bat-Bogey hex*, *stinging spells*, *the Toe Biter*-- and decided that he could do most or any of them without getting into too much trouble with the administration. If, that was, the little berk was the tattling type. Maybe instead he was the type of wanton little bully who respected a hard shove back more than conciliatory words or appeals to authority.

Over the years, James had confronted and battled monstrous powers, maddened ghosts, mythical beings, and even doomed love.

But up until now he had never had much experience with bullies. Somehow, this nemesis seemed, if not the most difficult, at least the most potentially annoying.



That night, for the first time in months, James dreamed of Petra.

He heard her voice through a fog of what felt like great time and distance. He couldn't make out her words, but the tenor and lilt of her voice was unmistakable. It awoke in him the unguarded truth, irresistible and implacable in the uncomplicated core of his sleeping heart: he loved Petra. He had loved her for years, despite rarely seeing her, despite the complexities of her mysterious past and her uncertain future, despite even the doubt that sometimes haunted his waking mind. He loved her with the sort of hopeless, unabashed devotion that surpassed reason and intellect and shot straight to the bright solar center of his heart, charging and dominating it like a permanent lightning bolt.

Petra owned and occupied his deepest love. He could pretend otherwise while awake. But here, in the depths of the dream, the truth was an iron weight, heavier than the world.

He approached her through the fog, tuning her in, following the silver and crimson cord that bound them, and her voice began to clear. There was another voice as well—a man's voice? Was it the Muggle private detective she had partnered with back during the

intrigue of the Morrigan Web? James thought not. Marshall Parris was an American. This voice was British, and a bit younger. James recognized it, but only vaguely.

Gradually, their voices became clearer, closer, although still hidden behind great heaving masses of fog. James propelled himself onward, whumping through the cold greyness.

“I won’t dissuade you,” the man’s voice said, still thin with distance. “In fact, you’ll recall that it was my idea, almost two years ago, when you found me again.”

“I do recall,” Petra said. “But I dismissed the idea as your usual foolhardy blathering. You’ve always tended to be a bit emotional and thoughtless when it comes to protecting me.”

The man seemed unperturbed by this. “So what’s changed?”

“What you suggested thoughtlessly, *I’ve* given serious consideration.”

James pressed on, and finally the fog broke into tatters. Silver-frosted clouds stretched around him like arms, blocking the moon, casting shadows over a dark landscape: a small town with only a scattering of glowing windows, a scarcity of lit streetlamps. And then, past this, a huge mansion on a hill, encroached on all sides by forest and bramble, almost claimed by creeping vines and tangled roots. It was a mansion, though very old and utterly dark except for a single upper window, which flickered with the faintest suggestion of light. James approached it, slowing, listening, wanting nothing more than to hear Petra’s voice again, to see her, even if it was all merely a figment of his sleeping mind.

“You have what you need,” the man’s voice said. “What do you require me for?”

“No one understands the underlying magic and spellwork like you do,” Petra said. “It’s your passion.”

The man’s voice, even more familiar now, seemed to smile doubtfully. “Petra, your visit to the Armory of Forbidden Books provided you everything you need to know regarding ‘the underlying magic and spellwork’.”

“Then maybe I just need a friend,” Petra sighed. “Someone who’s known me long enough to tell the truth. Someone impartial enough to see my real intentions. You know why I’m doing this, don’t you?”

James slowed as he neared the window. His dreaming mind rippled through the old glass without a sound. He entered a dark room with nothing but a small fire illuminating it, guttering and spitting in the hearth. The rug, as James’ bare feet touched it, was greasy and threadbare with age. The walls were filthy, cracked, leaning. James brushed them and his fingers came away thick with damp grime. The only furniture in the room was a pair of high-back chairs, facing the fire. Between them, sitting close to the light of the flames, collecting their glow and glinting brightly, was a silver tray.

Something sat on the tray. Not a cup or saucer. A butter knife? James drew closer, not sure he wanted to see. Mostly, he just wanted to approach Petra, to look upon her face, to see the glimmer of her eyes and the dark lustre of her hair. He missed her. His heart burned for her.

“You’re doing it because the world needs you,” the man said soberly. “But the world doesn’t know it. The world wants to stop you, by whatever means necessary, even if it means killing you. They blame you for everything.”

Petra sighed deeply. “They may not be entirely wrong in doing so.”

“That’s beside the point,” the man went on. “Even if you are the problem, you are also the solution. They cannot be allowed to stop you. For the good of all, both the Muggle and magical worlds, you must survive. Your life is more than yours. It belongs to the world. To the universe. No matter what, you... must... *survive*.”

James occupied the deep shadows of the room, creeping closer. He could see the top of Petra’s head over the back of her chair now. The firelight flickered on it like burnished bronze.

“I must survive,” she repeated the words with mingled regret and resolve. “So, even though we are here, in the house of the one

whose bloodline I am cursed with, even though I am willingly calling on his power now instead of thwarting it, as I've struggled to do at every step so far..."

"*He* did this for his own selfish aims, for power and destruction. *You* do it for the good of the world."

In the darkness, James blinked, as if coming fully awake in his own dream. What was happening here? Swiftly, he replayed the conversation he'd been barely hearing, having been too enthralled by the sound of Petra's very voice to attend to her words. He glanced around at the room he was in. The smell of mold and rot filled his nose. What was this place? What had she just called it? The house of the one whose bloodline she is cursed with...?

James suddenly understood, knew with the unshakable certainty of the dream: this was the mansion of Tom Riddle's father, long abandoned, overgrown, and falling to rot.

He looked down, toward the silver tray that glimmered in the firelight. Upon it was a dagger, its handle encrusted with jewels, its blade dark and sooty, tarnished almost black. He recognized it immediately. It was the dagger that had killed Morgan, the Petra from another dimension, wielded in the hand of Judith as part of her chaotic plan. How had Petra gotten it? More importantly, why?

Fear and horrible suspicion suddenly welled in James, and yet he crept forward still. *It's just a dream*, he told himself. *I'm only dreaming... none of this is real...*

Petra finally came into sight as she leaned forward, reaching for the dagger, collecting it into her thin hands. She cradled it in the firelight, her eyes wide, bright as she looked down at it. She drew a deep breath and shuddered as she let it out. Without raising her gaze from the dagger, she began to speak to it. As she did, James' eyes widened in horror. The fire responded to her words, first growing restless in the hearth, and then flaring with bursts of hungry green, almost seeming to breathe. As Petra reached the end of her recitation, wind entered the room, coming from nowhere and everywhere, lifting

the limp curtains, carrying dust and grit into the dank air, moaning throughout the dim, empty rooms of the decrepit mansion.

James could scarcely believe the words that came from his beloved's lips, spoken with slow, undeniable emphasis:

*"Extinguished soul's essence risen,
Final breath from murdered host,
Enter now, this, your prison,
Slave to my fragmented ghost."*

Petra held the dagger higher, her voice rising even as the rushing air combined with the flames of the hearth, carrying them around the room and illuminating it with green fire. She ignored this, her voice becoming a low boom through the growing tempest.

*"If I should die before I take,
The course of my intent design,
Then from this prison re-awake,
Immortal now... my dread Bloodline!"*

Petra's voice became thunder, not shouting, but amplified over the sudden cyclone of wind and fire that burst throughout the room, lighting it, tearing at the ancient wallpaper, whipping the curtains, condensing into a whirling maelstrom around the slight girl, now standing with the upraised dagger in her hands.

"Petra!" James called out, breaking his paralysis and finally finding his voice. She couldn't hear him, of course. This was just a dream, despite how terribly, frighteningly real it felt.

And yet, from the midst of that swirling, horrible cloud, even as it caught her hair, whipped it about her face and flashed in her stern, glowing eyes, Petra *glanced aside at James*. She saw him, blinked in a sort of waking flutter, and her face changed. Fear, and shame, and heartbreak suddenly filled her features, clouded her eyes.

The man in the other chair stood then, blocking James' view. He turned toward James, his own face full of surprise and wariness and more than a little fear.

It was, bafflingly, Donofrio Odin-Vann. He recognized James, opened his mouth to call out to him, but no sound could be heard over the roaring vortex of Petra's spell.

The whirl of fire and green light sucked all light into itself and contracted, taking both Petra and Odin-Vann and even the sprawling, dead mansion with it. Everything condensed into one brilliant, terrible point, and the point was shaped like a dagger, as blinding and merciless as the deaths it had caused.

And then, with a shock that was both icy and deafening, the point exploded.

James shocked awake at the sensation of it, as if thrown the many miles and leagues back into his bed by pure force, nearly crashing through it to the floor at the strength of it.

He flung himself up instead, and gasped as if he hadn't drawn a breath in minutes. His eyes blinked blearily around the dim silence of Gryffindor tower. His fellow Gryffindors were still asleep, sprawled variously across their beds, completely immune to the horrendous vision that James had just returned from.

But *was* it a vision? Had it truly only been a dream? Helplessly, he remembered the look on Petra's face as she had seen him, recognized him in the midst of the spell she had conjured.

He looked down at his hands in the darkness. Something was smudged on the tips of his fingers, dark and greasy by the moonlight. He touched his hands together and felt the filth of the mansion's walls on them. The smell was still in his night-clothes, the reek of ancient rot and mold and death.

Somehow, he had not only dreamed of Petra. He had *gone* to her. He had physically stood in the same room with her, touched its grimy walls, taken its air with him upon his return.

What he'd seen had not been a dream or a vision at all. Somehow, James had seen Petra and the inexplicable figure of Professor Odin-Vann perform some terrible spell, make some momentous decision that James sensed was irreversible, terrible, and portentous.

He tried not to know what that spell had been, but his deepest heart told him what his brain resisted. Petra had gone to the abandoned mansion that had once been the home of her cursed soul's-twin, Tom Riddle, the Dark Lord Voldemort. She was no longer resisting his poison influence, but channeling it, using it, bending it to her own will.

And with it, she had repeated that villain's most awful, damning spell. James flopped back onto his bed again, still breathing hard, his eyes wide and unseeing in the darkness. He could barely believe it. It was too awful to consider. And yet there was no question in his mind, even now, fully awake and in the comfort of his own bed in Gryffindor Tower.

Petra, the young woman that he loved, the girl who had once doodled happy fairies in the corners of her textbooks and sucked on the tips of her black hair during examinations, had done the unthinkable. Amazingly, dismayingly, she had fulfilled the black promise began by the death of her step-mother years earlier, a death that Petra herself had caused in a fit of blind, righteous rage.

Petra... had created a Horcrux.



NEXT CHAPTER:

**HOLY HINKYPUNKS, PETRA MADE A HORCRUX!
WAS THAT REALLY PROFESSOR ODIN-VANN?
WE LEARN PETRA'S FULL NAME IS "PATRACIA"!
(SERIOUSLY?!)**