

- Chapter 2 -

Welcome to Hogwarts

Tarsuinn didn't know if he should laugh or cry for fear. McGonagall's grip hurt and he just wasn't able to put off the hat. He couldn't lift his arms further than his shoulders and therefore had no chance even to touch the hat. He hated not to be in control.

On the other hand, the whole thing was quite funny, too. Hadn't Sir Arthur Conan Doyle let say his Sherlock Holmes: *when you have excluded the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth*. Well, in his reckoning there were only two eventualities left. Either he finally had gone completely mad and hallucinated or he had ended up in a real *wizards' school* by coincidence. At first he had thought he was in a college where the Copperfields and Houdinis of the future could learn their tricky trade. But it wasn't. This castle, the teachers, the feeling that any moment would get the better of him – it was like being inside a madhouse in which all the occupants believed to know magic and – against all physics – did.

Mentally grinning, he decided to assume he was sane and all others were mad – even the nice girl from the train. The idea amused him still more and slowly banned the fear, which had almost overcome him, when he had felt the astonishment, loathing and anxious panic in the Great Hall. Actually it was stupid. Most of them acted as if he was the one with superior magical power not them. Some hundred people against one. Maybe he should feel flattered?!

“Excuse me, Professor McGonagall, Headmaster!”, a pleased but somehow virulent voice asked which belonged to a man who went upstairs at this moment. Tarsuinn hated such voices especially if they were pleased. Mostly it meant that others suffered.

“What a fortunate coincidence”, the voice continued.

The man waggled with a piece of paper in the air.

“What can I do for you, Professor”, asked Professor McGonagall in a voice which sounded as if she was chewing a lemon and tried to hide it.

“You will be pleased to hear that Potter and Weasley arrived at last.”

The paper was passed.

“Where are they?”, asked McGonagall hoarsely after probably reading something. By now she sounded furious and Tarsuinn was just relieved she was annoyed of someone else.”

“In my office. I thought it would be best to keep them away from the Great Hall.”

“You were right to do so”, she agreed. “Headmaster...?”

“You can go, Professor. I will follow soon.”, the headmaster promised.

Probably after locking me up somewhere, Tarsuinn thought sarcastically.

At least the firm grip released from his shoulder. He stood now, except for the headmaster and Tikki, alone on the floor while the steps of two people slowly died away.

“What direction?”, he asked the headmaster who hadn't moved for a few moments.

“Follow me”, was the reflective answer. The man seemed not to be as strict as McGonagall. He rather gave a friendly impression – like an old forbearing grandfather. With enough self-confidence to just walk in front of him, as if it was useless to run. Well, it was after all. Where should he run in here?

Tikki might find a way out for herself but for him, he doubted it.

“Sherbet Lemon!”, said the headmaster suddenly, his steps slowing down.

He just wanted to contribute an extremely intelligent “Huh?”, when the man strode out again and in front of them stone moved against stone. Voice-controlled door opener he realized. Again he followed and felt like a small doggy.

When he reached the door he stumbled and his head bumped painfully against the wall.

“Ouch”, he blurted out. The ground had slipped beneath his feet. Two strong hands helped him to his feet again.

“Thanks”, Tarsuinn muttered. “Didn't pay attention.”

Tikki – who had dismounted ungently, scolded him loudly.

“Okay, okay”, he replied. “I'm sorry. I should have listened to you.”

Though he had apologized, Tikki for now didn't want to ride on his shoulder again.

Suddenly the ground rocked shortly but this time the headmaster's hand hold him so he didn't fall again.

“Thanks again”, he said once more. Possibly, politeness couldn't hurt at the moment.

“There's no need for thanks”, was the apparently amused answer. “Come in and sit down.”

Tarsuinn just followed Tikki and sat down in a quite comfortable seat.

“Would you mind if I'd let you alone here for a short moment?”, the headmaster asked.

“As long as you don't bind me”, he replied. His humour sounded a bit weak even for his own ears.

“I rather hoped to convince you to stay with some food instead.”, the headmaster said forbearingly.

Tarsuinn's stomach rumbled enthusiastically and Tikki also sounded affirmative.

“This also applies for the small lady-mongoose here, of course”, the man added instantly.

His respect for the man increased a great deal. Only few British knew what a mongoose was and far less could recognise a female especially after such a short time.

“I think both of us wouldn't mind”, he agreed. “We'll also promise not to run if you insist.”

“It won't not be necessary.”

A gentle pop could be heard and a plate was pushed into his hands.

“Eat as much as you like. I will be back soon. Iced tea is on the desk.”

Thereby he made his way back to the door.

“Headmaster?!”, Tarsuinn delayed the old man.

“Yes?”

“What's your name, Sir?”, he asked curiously.

“My name is Albus Dumbledore”, he answered and if he hadn't heard a smile there he couldn't help it.

“Pleased to meet you”, he said politely. “I'm Tarsuinn McNamara and this is Tikki.”

“I'm pleased to meet you, too”, he said and moved a little closer again.

“Because I love to solve riddles”, whispered Dumbledore into his ear. Then he left without another word.

Silence fell around Tarsuinn. Tikki tore up some flesh and devoured it joyfully. He himself grabbed at his food, it were simple but delicious sandwiches, and wolfed it down. Oddly enough he could eat as much as he wanted to – the plate didn't get empty. Occasionally there were also strange things. Sandwiches with liquorice or sherbet (lemon) weren't his liking. Though he ate them and flushed down the disgusting taste with tea, because he worried the plate wouldn't fill again, if he put something back.

But at some point even he was full. Tikki didn't take that long to eat full and had already started to explore the room. Tarsuinn knew it was useless to forbid her to do so. It was in the nature of mongooses to explore every corner and wedge – a natural habit and Tikki in this case would never listen to him. To be true he was curious himself. But why not? He had only promised not to run. The room he was in was enormous, very high and full with the weirdest objects. Things which were warm and cold at the same time. Things which started to spin when he got near them. Things that backed up or jumped into his hand. It was utterly fascinating. Nothing gave an impression of technology, all appeared to be alive. He just made towards a wall when suddenly and unexpectedly hundreds of voices shouted at him.

“Read me... No me... I can help you to decrypt the future... I contain the wisdom of ten generations... The goblin rebellions... Power... The compliance of your darkest wishes... All about Quidditch... Stars and Planets...”

“SHUT UP!”, he shouted desperately, his hands pressed hard against his ears. The babble died away slowly. Right now he began to think he had indeed lost his mind. He was the only person in this room and yet he heard so many voices. Carefully he made another step forwards. His hand slid softly over the back of leather bound books and each thereupon whispered its title to him.

“The Secrets of the Mind.”

“Muggles and what electricity means to them.”

“Witches and the way to equality.”

“Morgana la Fey: Visionary and Forerunner.”

“What if?”

“A good omen.”

“A Thousand Ways To Power”

“Charms for Beginners”

“The Sapphire Rose.”

“Potions for dummies.”

“The Dark Ways Of Cure.”

Tarsuinn hesitated. He wanted to grab the last book.

“If I were you, I'd leave it”, a voice above his head said. “You're a few decades too young for such lecture.”

He knew this voice.

“You're the hat, aren't you?”, he asked.

“Of course, who else should I be!”

“Why don't you let me take you off?”, he wanted to know and backed up a little from the books.

“I haven't sorted you yet”, the hat explained. “If you listened to me instead of to all other sounds you'd have known.”

“Maybe you just have to sort me out. Then it all would be much simpler.”

“But the world isn't simple and coincidences are in fact very rare.

“And politicians are honest”, he replied.

“Only riddles are honest because they won't reveal anything voluntary.”

Didn't Dumbledore say something about riddles. Could he stay as long as he was a riddle?

But what could he conceal?

“You shouldn't lie to the headmaster.”, the hat interrupted his thoughts.

Could this thing on his head in the end read his mind?

“Yes, I can”

This wasn't good. Maybe it was dangerous to stay here.

“There's no safer place than Hogwarts.”

“Even for me?”, he asked.

“For everyone who is welcome here.”

Slowly a thought formed in his mind. A possibility.

“Can Muggles come here?”

“Apparently, if you consider this day.”

“And how had it been until today?”

“Never! But maybe you're not a Muggle.“

“What? Do you mean...?”

“Well, the hat does not believe in coincidence”, the friendly voice of Headmaster Dumbledore broke in from the door.

“At least not if there are so many”, the hat constrained.

Dumbledore entered the room and seated like before on the chair behind the desk, which dominated the forepart of the office.

“Come. Sit down, Tarsuinn”, Dumbledore invited him.

He followed the request. Then he sat there and waited and waited...

It was something he hated. Silence meant indecisiveness. If a nice person – and, thanks to his voice, he regarded the headmaster as nice – let wait one a long time, it almost always meant the person was thinking about something unpleasant and searched for appropriate words.

“What shall I do with you now?”, he asked after what seemed to be eternity.

Tarsuinn rather didn't answer immediately. His sister had told him again and again that he must control himself and to choose his words very careful. He didn't always stick to it but it had always got him into trouble not to.

“I'd like to stay”, he tried to say in a steady voice but failed. It sounded rather piteous, almost

pleading.

"I fear it will be almost impossible", Dumbledore denied.

"Maybe I am ...", he took a deep breath at this crazy thought "... magic."

"Do you feel like you could be?"

Tarsuinn thought about it, explored his innermost self. Was he special? Could he do something special? Possibly something magic? Should he lie?

"No", he admitted in a low voice. "I don't think so."

"Nah – not that hasty. Could you hold still for a moment?"

"What are you going to do, Sir?", he asked and rocked anxiously on his chair.

"There's a charm we use to test the magical potential from children with non magical parents in secret. But the charm doesn't show if these potential will ever surface.

"Then do it."

He hoped it wouldn't hurt.

"*Monstrare Ops!*", he heard Dumbledore saying.

A prickling sensation spread from his head to his toes and back again. Moments later the feeling was gone completely.

"Curious!", the headmaster mumbled.

In Tarsuinn's opinion a mumbled '*Curious*' came close to thoughtful silence.

"What's curious, Sir?"

"I have yet to find out."

"How long will it take?"

"Longer than I can keep you here, Tarsuinn."

"Why don't you just take the time?"

"I doubt your parents would agree."

"My sister is my guardian. She will agree. She will be happy about it.

"She doesn't like you, does she?", assumed Dumbledore.

"She likes me very much!", Tarsuinn assured distinctly not to leave any doubt. Those from the youth welfare office had always tried to worm out something negative from him about his sister, too.

"I believe there are only few people who would let a boy the age of ...?"

"... eleven...", he filled the gap.

"... travel alone through England, if they are responsible for him.

"She can't help it. Rica is in hospital", he defended his sister.

"And why aren't you with her?", Dumbledore asked a question which troubled Tarsuinn much.

"They wanted to take custody from her and send me to an orphan". He swallowed. Probably it was time for a great deal of truth. "They'd never have given me back to her, I'm sure. Even if she were cured. That's why I ran from the orphan. To show them, they can't look after me there. She didn't endorse it, but after I had explained it to her we decided that I'll go into hiding and in the meantime she finds me a boarding school. In this way they couldn't blame her for not taking care of me. At least we hoped so. But to be true, neither she, nor me believed it. But now I'm here... and this is a school... and the hat told me there's no safer place anywhere. If I could stay..."

He tried to force back tears of desperation. It always happened when he thought of her. His sister who though he hadn't told it was fatally ill and according to the doctors only had few months left to live.

He missed her so much.

"I'll do everything. Whatever you want me to do", he pleaded and all his so carefully controlled emotions broke through. "I've got money, I'll work but please let me stay here. I... I don't know where else I should go. I only took the train because it was there.

Tears ran down his face. For the first time he had said aloud what he had never wanted to admit to himself since the day he had fled from the orphan: He felt all alone and helpless. Well – not all alone.

Tikki was suddenly there again, jumped onto his lap and huddled up against him. He stroked her fondly and so he managed to get his feelings under control again. Control was important for him.

"It will be difficult to convince the ministry of magic and the other teachers", Dumbledore said after a few moments. "And first of all we need the approval of your sister."

"You can call her", he suggested, plugging up courage.

“Electronic Muggle-artefacts don't work here”, his suggestion was denied. “But I will talk to your sister, maybe even tonight. Presumed you tell me the truth about how you came here.”

“It was just coincidence. Really. I just entered the wrong train.”

“Well, it's not that simple. There must be many more coincidences than just this one. And several coincidences are no coincidence any more.”

“But I haven't done anything.”

“Maybe not conscious and not on purpose. Just tell me what happened.”

He thought of the day for a moment, tried to recall what had happened today.

“Where should I start?”

“Shortly after you reached King's Cross will do.”

He concentrated for a moment. “Um – well. I was at King's Cross and just wanted to get somewhere else. It didn't matter to me which train in fact. I wanted to pay at the conductor's during the journey. Money isn't the problem. So I walked through the station. On one platform were especially many children who apparently were on their way to a boarding school. Besides, they talked about a platform nine and three quarters, I found it quite funny. Anyway I followed them and behind a short tunnel I stood next to a steam engine. Actually I thought there were none left and that's why it had been the moment I decided to take it. Steam engines just sound better than all others. I entered it. I wanted to wait for the conductor but I hadn't slept in the night and so I dozed off. I wouldn't even have noticed the train departing, if not a girl had asked, if the compartment was occupied. Then I fell asleep again. Sometime later she woke me up. Perhaps I had snored or something. I was quite surprised no conductor had come through yet but it didn't trouble me much. So I chatted a bit with the girl – by now I think we quite talked at cross proposes – and she borrowed me this robe, because mine was at the bottom of my backpack. When we left the train I wondered because it didn't rain. The girl then followed this gamekeeper, Hagrid and I just went along. When we were going by boat I realized for the first time that something was wrong. And in the castle I finally became sure. That's why I didn't want to put on the hat. That's all, really. I didn't do anything else.”

Again this long, thoughtful silence. To calm down he stroked Tikki particularly slowly. His hairline was itching madly but he controlled himself and didn't scratch.

“Can you explain to me how you know you went through a tunnel to platform nine and tree quarters?”, Dumbledore asked interestedly at last.

“You did notice, didn't you?”, Tarsuinn assumed.

“Yes, but not until the staircase. You're quite good in hiding it.”

“It's easy in here”, he constrained.

“Is that so?”

“It's – well – I know this must sound odd but I can sense the castle. The walls. Some but not all things. It's like everything in here were alive.”

“And you can sense humans and animals?!””, Dumbledore stated rather than asking.

“Not like this! Definitely not. I know where someone is because my four senses tell me. But with this castle ... it's different ... like having a fifth sense. Like it would say constantly: ‘I am here. Don't run against my wall, my knight's armour, my statue, leave my painting...’”

“And in the *tunnel* on the platform you didn't feel anything?”

“No. Why do you emphasise on this tunnel so much?”

“Because it's only *a kind of* tunnel. In fact you walked through a solid wall at this moment.”

“That's impossible, isn't it?”

“Well, if you walk blindly against the right wall ... yes, you can!”

“But doesn't it attract attention, if people just vanish through walls?”

“Muggles see it but they forget it instantly.”

“How?”

“It's a little too complicated right now.”

“So I'm only here because I'm blind?”

“Not only. There are other hurdles, too. For example in the Hogwarts Express. Haven't you been afraid?”

“No, I was asleep, I told you.”

“Then you should have had a nightmare which should have awoken you. And then you should have jumped off the train!”, Dumbledore explained seriously.

“But that's...?”, Tarsuinn was horrified.

“Don't worry. As soon as you have jumped you wake up on a bench in the station and remember a strange dream. So you slept restful on the train?”

“The dream wasn't nice”, he admitted.

“That's really strange. But it's even more astonishing you passed the lake. Actually the mere people should have dragged you into the water.”

“You mean the divers who pushed the boat?”

“Not divers, mere people.”

“Then it really has been scales on their skin?”

“You touched them?”

“Just with my fingertips. I had my hand in the water.”

“That's even more strange.”

“Do you have an idea why they let me alone, if they should have dragged me into the water?”

“No, they refuse to talk about it. But they did warn me you should not be harmed. They are very arbitrary beings.”

“I'm quite glad about it.”

“Right now I'm not.”

Tarsuinn didn't find the last comment very nice. Silently he stared in the direction he knew the headmaster used to be who had stood up and paced now slowly through the office. His sister had often told him not to because many people felt troubled by his rigid look. But he was tired and afraid they would erase his memories of this – magical – day.

After a while he couldn't bear the silence any more.

“Why did you want me to put on the hat?”, he asked. “By then you already knew I don't belong here”.

“What? Uhm – Sorry. I was absorbed in the pensive. What did you say?”

Whatever a pensive might be.

“Why did you want me to put on the hat?”

“A hunch, just a hunch”, muttered Dumbledore.

“Are you in trouble now?”

“Maybe. Although it's not as much as trouble.”

“Do you think about how you can get rid of me or if I can stay?”

“Honestly?”, Dumbledore sounded amused. “Both. And I seek for gaps in laws from those I helped writing quite a few myself in order to prevent abuse.”

He sat down again. Tarsuinn could sense the headmaster's penetrative look on him.

“The Problem is ...”, he began in an urgent tone, “... I just have a hunch you are a wizard. Your coming to Hogwarts was no coincidence. But I don't have any real prove. If I had, I could matriculate you to Hogwarts with a simple signature. During our conversation I attacked you several times with harmless, but hostile charms. They should have activated your instinctive defences. But nothing. By now you're sitting here in front of me with pink hair, blue ears and a yellow nose. It would have been helpful, if only the talking hat...”

“RAVENCLAW”, it sounded above Tarsuinn's head. He froze for a moment in surprise.

“Am I now ... am I ...”, he stuttered.

“You lasted the most important hurdle”, was the satisfied answer. “Or at least it became much more difficult to ban you from Hogwarts. But only for a year.

“Why only one?”, he asked and then added hastily: “It's not that I'm not happy about it but...”

“Well – there's an old exceptional clause which had never been undone. Originally it was intended for children descendant from magical families who haven't shown any magical talent until their eleventh birthday. Some of these children were nevertheless sent to Hogwarts, in the hope their magical abilities would develop here. But only for a single year. To proceed to the second grade they had to pass the exams like everyone else.”

“Have there been many who made it this way?”, he asked.

“Only very few and none has ever become great.”

“So I could stay here for a year?”

“If your sister agrees and the school fee will be paid.”

“How much would it cost?”

Dumbledore quoted a sum.

“Uhm – how much is this in pound?”, Tarsuinn asked cluelessly.

Again he was told a sum but this time in Pound. Plus-minus some exchange rate fluctuations.

“I could pay this”, he assured after short consideration. “I just had to...”

“Keep calm. It yet needs another vote before you can stay in Hogwarts but I'm afraid this will have to wait. Professor Flitwick will already be sleeping for sure. Moreover I think it's time for us, too. It's well after midnight. You should be in bed for quite a while now. Come!”

The headmaster stood up, walked around the table, took the hat from his head (Tarsuinn mumbled a: “*Good bye!*” – but the hat kept silent) and took his hand. Then they left the office. Tarsuinn now became aware of how clumsy his motions had become. He almost stumbled over his own feet so he let himself be steered unresistingly like a small child. Fortunately they had to go only a short distance.

Short time later, he lay in an enormous cosy bed, hardly knowing how he got there. He was almost asleep when he heard Professor Dumbledore asking a last question.

“Please tell me your sister's name and where I can find her”, the ancient man said.

“Ireland, *Monaghan General Hospital*, Rica McNamara, ward 4, room 7”, he managed to whisper before he finally fell asleep.

Tarsuinn woke like every morning much too soon but this time he didn't regret it for even a second. Even if it wasn't yet certain he hoped he could stay here. But therefore it was surely necessary to make a good impression on this Professor Flitwick. He swung his legs out of bed. Momentarily he had to endure Tikki's good morning greeting ceremony which was in fact mainly *stroking Tikki*.

“Tikki?”, he asked after several minutes. “Is my *backpack* here?”

Helpfully she jumped from his lap – ran toward an edge and with a high whistling sound indicated that she had found the searched object and where it was.

He groped his way there and found his backpack in an unlocked cupboard. He opened it and wrinkled his nose. A fine smell of oranges lay in the air. He groped through his things and took some of his better clothes. The smell of oranges grew still stronger.

“Seems someone has washed all my things with *orange washing agent*”, he said to Tikki and grinned.

“They're mental these wizards – and they don't respect privacy much.”

Then he took a towel.

“I wonder Tikki, is there a *shower* somewhere around?”, he asked.

He interpreted the enthusiasm he received thereon as a definitive *yes*. The small lady-mongoose loved splashing and water – at least if it was 25 degrees Celsius warm or was even warmer. Anything else she regarded as flipping cold.

And so it came as it had to come – the shower became an enormous splash and swash. But for his blank astonishment he hadn't to mop any squirted water. When he left the shower the floor was dry as a bone like before.

“Cool”, he blurted out. “At least they know how to simplify live.”

He dried himself, wrapped Tikki into a towel for drying, put her on the bed and dressed then. Thereby he found a chair on which his clothes from yesterday lay. This smell of oranges had its uses, it was easy to find things. The borrowed cloak lay there, too. Clean and folded as if it were new. He was very glad about it because now he could give it back even today and thank Toireasa. Actually it was a shame she had been sorted to this Slytherin. But well – she had wanted it so much and he had hoped it for her, too.

Tarsuinn fumbled shortly for his watch, winded it up, undid the protective glass and scanned for the watch hands. It was nearly six o' clock.

Was this early or late in this school? Time to find out.

“Come Tikki”, he called. A cosy but muffled purring was the rejecting answer.

“Okay – stay where you are”, he laughed. “In the meantime I'll find me something *to eat*.”

The ultimate magic word to motivate Tikki. At once the rolling in the towel was forgotten and an about four pound heavy, cosy and livid fur ball ran over the bed up his extended arm and onto his shoulder. A long tail winded around his neck and throat and the queen was ready to be carried to her food.

“Lazy thing!”, he complained laughing and then let himself be steered by her out of the door and through the corridors. It was the reason many people thought he could see. Only few people could hear her silent *instructions* and far less would have trusted an animal to be able to. But mongooses were very intelligent and fast learning beings, though Tarsuinn wasn't sure who had trained whom. Tikki had always been with him. He could remember only few days without her and he also didn't know since when he was able to understand her *instructions*.

But it didn't matter in the end. Tikki allowed him an almost normal live and surly prevented innumerable bumps. Of course there were still accidents. Sometimes the lady-mongoose made a mistake sometimes he did. It happened mostly when one of them concentrated on something different. But at the moment there was no risk for that. The corridors of the castle were deserted and silent. From time to time he slowed down and extended a hand to touch a wall or a door. It fascinated and pleased him very much that everywhere he suspected a wall there was one indeed. It was the most beautiful feature of the castle except maybe the plates filling themselves with food.

He wandered through the corridors for quite a while – Tikki had led him several staircases downwards – when he suddenly stood in front of a wall.

“What next?”, he asked Tikki. “Doesn't look like a dining hall to me – more like a wall.”

But Tikki was sure he had to keep strait on. He heard the sounds she always used for a door. He groped testily with his hand, if this was another wall one can walk through. Unfortunately it wasn't. Instead of he felt a hand-painted picture so he instantly took his finger off before he would soil it.

“If this is a door then it's a secret one and we shouldn't...”

He heard approaching steps. What a fortunate coincidence. Now he could ask. He waited patiently for the steps to round the corner, opened his mouth...

“What?!”, shouted a harsh voice in surprise. “What are you doing here?”

“I ...”

“Yeah – you're the Muggle from yesterday. You shouldn't be here. Not here nor in the castle at all. Straying around here when you should be locked up. You come with me now.”

“But I...”

“Shut up!”, the man ordered sharply. “Or I'll lock you up in my secret dungeon and forget where it was.”

The man didn't sound as if he was joking. It sounded exactly as if he didn't even know what the word meant.

Tarsuinn was harshly grabbed in the neck. He only managed to keep Tikki from biting the rough hand by a fast grip. To his feet he heard a cat hissing.

“I've got him, Mrs Norris”, the man who hold him said and seemed to talk to the cat because beside them there was no one else there. “If this ugly beast on his shoulder tries to escape it will be yours.

“Tikki isn't ... arg!”

The grip around his neck became even more painful.

“What did I tell you?”, he man said virulently. “Shut up!”

Tarsuinn hardly managed to control Tikki. No matter how much he wanted to hear her teeth taking revenge for his pain it was not the time for something like this.

“Got that?”, the virulent voice hissed once again but very near to his ear now. The man smelled disgustingly of cat, tobacco, fish and sweat.

As a precaution he just nodded as clearly as possible.

“Good!”, the man said with a mean satisfaction in his voice. The led Tarsuinn the way he had come.

By now he had taken Tikki form his shoulder and hold her in his arms while he stroked her in order to steady her. It was no use. She was furious and eager to fight. She constantly tried to escape his arms.

Some minutes later they stood in front of a door. Although the door was closed the foulest kind of smells reached Tarsuinn's nose. Is smelled almost like a fridge after some weeks of power blackout.

The man knocked and an unpleasant: “Come in!”, could be heard from within. Tarsuinn knew the

voice and didn't like it at all. It sounded almost like the voice from the man behind him but was more self-confident and equipped with control and power.

The door was opened and they went inside.

"I caught the Muggle as he tried to run for it, Professor Snape", the man behind him explained hastily and submissively, it sounded a bit fawning. "Professor Dumbledore isn't back yet, so I brought him to you."

"I didn't want to..."

This time it really did hurt. Tikki used the opportunity to escape him. She jumped on his shoulder and bite the man. The man screamed in surprise and pain and released Tarsuinn. Instinctively he ducked and therefore avoided a blow which was surely directed at Tikki. Moments later he heard a biting and clawing pack of cat and mongoose rolling over the floor.

"That's enough!", the master of the room ordered and sounded extremely angry.

"Tikki! Come to me!", ordered Tarsuinn loudly. It was something he did only very rarely and Tikki for once obeyed him. He heard her running towards him, closely followed by the cat. Tikki jumped in his arms. He straightened and because no one was calling back the cat he kicked out. His foot made contact with something soft, he heard a loud meow and moments later crashing glass.

"Mrs Norris!", the mean man screamed anxiously, showing the first particular sympathetic emotion.

"I said that's enough!", the professor called Snape shouted again.

Tarsuinn quickly turned around so the teacher won't see Tikki any more. Then he stopped dead as a precaution.

The owner of the cat didn't.

"You won't do that to my cat again", he shouted from the place the cat had crashed. Heavy steps came toward him.

He was defenceless and so he crouched down and saved Tikki between his knees and chest and waited for whatever may come.

"Mr Filch!", Professor Snape thundered now. "Get a grip to yourself!"

The authority of the man worked momentarily. Filch stopped.

"But ...!"

"Your cat is fine, I believe. At least she's in a better state than some of my jars", Snape explained cold heartedly.

"Oh", was the only thing Filch managed to say.

Tarsuinn liked this man being reprimanded. Plucking up some courage he straightened again and waited quietly.

"You will tell me now curtly how you caught the Muggle and then you should bring your cat to Madame Pomfrey."

"Yes Professor. I spotted him in front of the kitchen. He must have slipped the headmaster. No idea how he knew the kitchen's the easiest way out. I think we wouldn't have missed him for an hour or perhaps even longer. And there are places where..."

"Thank you Mr Filch", interrupted Snape sharply.

Tarsuinn pricked up his ears. This sounded interesting. Perhaps, if he could stay here for longer he'd have to check it...

"You should look after your cat now, Mr Filch. I'll handle this affair", Snape explained.

"Yes Sir", confirmed Filch and left. He had to pass Tarsuinn close by so he better moved a few feet to the side. He collided painfully with a table and thereby knocked something metallic from the table. Professor Snape gave a sound as if something had fallen onto his food although he was several feet away.

"I'm sorry", Tarsuinn muttered.

He had a distinct feeling he was figured intensely.

"Tell me where you wanted to run to, Muggle!", Snape demanded.

"I was just searching for something to eat", he answered truthfully.

"It's not time yet. How could you wander through the castle freely?"

"The door wasn't locked and no one asked me to stay in that room."

"Probably another coincidence. Exactly like you managed to sneak into the castle perhaps?",

suggested Snape.

“It was no coincidence. Nobody locked me up!”, he said firmly.

“How did you come to Hogwarts, Muggle?”

“I already told this Dumb...”

“Professor Dumbledore!”

“... Professor Dumbledore. He seemed to believe me.”

“Well – I’m a bit more suspicious. And now you’ll tell it to me and also the true reason for you being here and who did sent you.”

“No”, Tarsuinn just replied.

“What? No?”, Snape asked slightly astounded.

“It’s not your decision”, Tarsuinn said. This Professor Snape was disgusting. He smelled somehow acridly, his voice was sharp, his look had to be, too and he ordered instead of asking. One could surely hate this man even more than this Filch.

“What do you mean?”, the Professor hissed.

Tarsuinn had enough by now. This day should have been a good one. He toggled stubborn.

“Your opinion doesn’t matter”, he said firmly and made a step forward. “I don’t have to tell you anything except for that I didn’t want to run. I was just searching something to eat.”

“Don’t take me for a fool!”, Snape stood up. “Someday they had to send someone to get Professor Dumbledore into trouble. A piteous story, innocent eyes and they all get soft and blind.”

“Don’t you think that sounds a bit paranoid, Sir?”, Tarsuinn asked genuinely concerned – but more for himself. “But if you insist, I’ll tell it again.”

“Never mind!”, Snape said suddenly perfectly calm. “I favour the truth... *Legilimens.*”

A wave of cold flooded his whole body. His ears failed him, his nose was on fire and then he heard himself asking the taxi driver to bring him to King’s Cross. He knew it had been yesterday. Then he suddenly was in the station, heard all the people on the platforms, smelled the sharp smell of the station’s toilets. Once again he followed the children to the platform, heard Tikki warning him of an object in his path.

It were his memories of yesterday. Harmless – he had told the truth. Nevertheless his innermost self struggled against it. His thoughts were extracted violently. What about: *Thoughts are free!*

“Where are the pictures?”, it hissed next to him and it certainly didn’t belong to his thoughts.

I can show you a few pictures, Tarsuinn thought in depth. *You just have to let me.*

He didn’t know if Snape could hear him who had started to zap through his memories.

Fast forward. Just noises, smells and felt you’ll get form me. But go on only a bit further then you’ll see something. Come on – the sleep on the train will be interesting. Don’t you realize? I’m hiding there something from you. You surely don’t want to see this. Believe me!

If one considered how defenceless he was, it was astonishing how easily Snape let himself be steered. He made at memories like a vulture at a dead rabbit. Both of them got what they wanted. Snape got pictures and Tarsuinn a terrified gasp. They both were in the dream he had dreamed on the train.

It was night. It teemed down. A willow creaked in the wind. Its twitches grabbed for them, scratched their faces, cut deep open wounds. They avoided the willow’s stingers, rolled over the soaked ground down a small slope. Their knees hit a stone hard. Slowly they stood up, they had left the range of the willow. The wounds in the face and the knee were on fire. Slowly they looked up, up to the willow just to watch horrified the tree becoming smaller, collapsing to a singe solid shadow and then into a wolf-like shape which ran towards them. With a fang like a cartwheel and teeth of pure steel. They ran for it but didn’t come very far. Claws ripped their back, they were wrest to the ground. In a desperate effort they tried to avoid the fang, turned and tried to push the monster’s head away with the arms. They managed it but they became weaker and weaker. The fang got nearer. The weight of the wolf pressed the air out of the lungs. Its breath stunk horribly, nasty slobber dripped into the face, in the panting mouth. They swallowed up, choked. Hopelessly tried to keep the fang open with bare arms. The tongue of the monster-wolf already touched the face. The jaw closed slowly. The bones in the arms cracked...

“What are you... doing, Professor Snape?!”, a high but extremely indignant voice interrupted.

Tarsuinn found himself on his knees. Tikki pressed in his arms. He hoped he didn’t hurt her too much.

“We don't use magic against students as punishment”, the small voice said again. It came closely from the floor and approached him.

“Is everything all right?”, Tarsuinn was asked sympathetically. A minuscule hand softly touched his forehead.

Nothing was all right. The memory of the nightmare was still present, took his breath and ability to speak. Nevertheless he nodded, heavy panting.

“He's not a student! Just a Muggle”, Snape justified himself. Tarsuinn noticed satisfied that the teacher sounded affected, too.

“Well, then I should inform you now, Professor Snape. Mr McNamara is as of today a student of my house.”

Tarsuinn's hart jumped with joy.

“I see, Professor Flitwick. I wasn't aware of that fact. Naturally I would have informed you instead of taking action myself.”

“Of Course, I'm sure. Would you please tell me why you punished Mr McNamara? Flitwick asked.

“He tried to get access to the kitchen – I assume to flee – and was caught there by Mr Filch. Then he attacked Mr Filch's cat, behaved very insolent and refused to tell the truth.”

Don't you bend the truth a bit? Tarsuinn wanted to ask. Snape hadn't told a lie but due to the omissions it was perverted into something that was worse than a lie.

“Well – I will handle this hence. Mr McNamara? Are you able to walk? I think breakfast will do you some good.”

“One moment, Professor Flitwick. I'll follow in a moment”, Tarsuinn replied.

“Well then, Mr McNamara. But please remember the points for the house.”

With that the tiny Professor left the room in his tripling steps. If Flitwick had a hunch he wanted to tell Snape something nasty? His last comment seemed to impress it. But Tarsuinn couldn't resist to pay back a bit form what he had to sustain.

He put Tikki on the floor and walked without her help towards Snape, one hand groping in front of him. As he had reached the table he stopped and looked strait to the point he assumed Snape's eyes.

“Did you know?”, he said emphasising every single word: “*In my dreams it has never been a willow and never a wolf.*”

He turned and left the office without another word.

“I'll keep an eye on you, Muggle”, Snape dismissed him with a threatening undertone in his voice.

Tarsuinn ignored it. The door closed behind him with a loud bang. It forced a half-hearted smile on his face. He wondered how such a type could become a teacher.

“Well – now it's time for breakfast Tikki”, he assured. “We can't possibly not find the way now.”

And so it was. Even if Professor Flitwick hadn't hummed in front of them and there hadn't been the smell of scrambled eggs and beacon it wasn't possible to miss the voice:

RONALD WEASLEY! HOW DARE YOU STEAL THAT CAR! I WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN SURPRISED IF THEY'D EXPELLED YOU, YOU WAIT TILL I GET HOLD OF YOU¹...

He drew level with Flitwick halfway to the Great Hall and walked silently next to him. Actually he wanted to say something, to explain what had happened but he couldn't imagine a way which didn't sound like an excuse. Only when they got near the Great Hall – the magnified voice had faded away by now – something important he wanted to say and had forgotten about occurred to him.

“Thanks!”, he said in a low voice. “Thank you I can stay and for you help with Professor Snape.”

“Oh, you're welcome!”, Flitwick sniggered. “It had been Professor Dumbledore's power of persuasion which tempted me and his request. It doesn't happen often you should know. I only hope it doesn't cost us this year's House Cup. Which we will win this year for sure.”

“I'll try”, Tarsuinn assured in a low voice.

“That wouldn't do”, he said still sounding cheerful. If you want to achieve something this year you'll have to outdo yourself or you'll loose a full year of your live.

“Why's that?”

“I believe Professor Dumbledore will tell you after breakfast. Don't worry about it now. Problems

¹ Mixed citation: First part from the movie, second part from the book. Fit's better to the original version of *Mysteries of the past*.

only get worse on an empty stomach.”

Flitwick led him into the Great Hall and a bit to the right.

“Miss Clearwater”, he called with his small voice. “May I have a minute of your time?”

“Surely Professor”, a pleasant girl's voice answered. “How can I help you?”

She was clearly taller than Tarsuinn and surely a few years older, too.

“I'm beyond help as you should know”, the teacher explained cheerfully. “But this young gentleman could do with a bit of support. As of today he is a Ravenclaw and will give his best for our house. But he's completely new to the magic world.”

Mr McNamara! Miss Clearwater is a Ravenclaw prefect. I hope you will get along with each other. Excuse me – I seem to be awaited urgently at the teacher's table.”

He then proceeded toward the teacher's table. Tarsuinn could hear many students greeting the small man with a friendly “Good morning, Professor!”.

“Welcome to Ravenclaw”, said the prefect and interrupted his acoustic observation of the teacher.

“You can call me Penelope.”.

“I'm Tarsuinn”, he answered and extended his hand. It hung in the air for a moment before it was taken.

“My pleasure. Come – I'll bring you to the other first years.”

She led him far to the front toward the teacher's table.

“I assume you've got permission to take your animal with you?”, she asked and explained: “Usually it's not allowed especially because this is not quite one of the admitted species.”

“I don't know”, he admitted. “No one has forbidden it to me.”

“Well, it should be okay then. But make sure it doesn't get into trouble.”

“It is a she.”

“So she shouldn't get into trouble. I can't bear Slytherin and Gryffindor always winning. This year nothing shall go wrong.”

“Yes, of course.”

She probably meant this House Cup-thing. Seemed to be quite important to her. It didn't mean anything to Tarsuinn at all but he really didn't want to make trouble. Especially because she seemed to be a quite friendly person.

“Well”, Penelope stopped. “First years – this is Tarsuinn McNamara. It would be nice, if you could help him to cope with our world. You've witnessed his slightly unusual sorting after all. Why don't you sit down here.”

Tarsuinn did as he was told, placed Tikki in front of him on the table (“Please behave yourself.”) and climbed on the bench.

“Hello”, he said in a low voice and smiled abashed. He felt many eyes upon him. All of them somehow smelled of oranges.

“Hello Tarsuinn!”, a boy greeted him across the table. “I'm glad I'm not the only first year without magical parents in Ravenclaw. I'm Merton Philips.”

“I'm Page Bethlehem...”

“...Winona Darkcloud...”

“...Ian Fawcett...”

“...Alec Lancaster...”

“...Luna Lovegood...”

“...Cassandra Sheara...”

They introduced themselves disordered. It were too many to remember all the names at once. So he concentrated on the names of the people next to him. All seemed to be quite friendly, some a bit reserved, others more curious. Tarsuinn couldn't blame them.

After they had all shaken hands with him the boy called Merton asked curiously: “What kind of thing was that yesterday. It was somehow ... weird. I really thought you were a Muggle.

“Oh...”, Tarsuinn was unsure what he should tell them. Probably the truth would yet be better.

“Well, most likely I am a Muggle”, he confessed and bite in his honey-toast. Around him silence had fallen. Then one of the girls started to laugh.

“Good joke! For a moment we were all shocked”, said Winona who sat next to him and while talking

elbow checked him hard in the side. “You've got us all.”

He chew carefully, swallowed and turned his head toward the girl, unsure how she would react on his next words.

“No joke. Professor Dumbledore, Professor Flitwick and this talking head think I *might* be a wizard. So I can stay for one year.”

“But if you were not a wizard, it should have been impossible for you to come here”, Winona objected vigorously.

“There's always a way”, Merton took over. “Even if it's just coincidence.”

“Hey – that tickles!”, Cassandra suddenly giggled at the other side of the table. “Stop it!” Tarsuinn guessed what was going on.

“Tikki! Leave her alone. Especially at the dining table. Get off!”, he grumbled.

“It's okay”, Cassandra chuckled. “She's quite cute. Is this a ferret?”

“No”, Alec interfered before Tarsuinn could answer. “That's a mongoose. My dad showed me pictures of those, he had taken in India. They are not cute. Actually they're beasts of prey.”

“This – a beast of prey? She's so small. She only hunts mice, doesn't she?”

A snide whizzing sound came from Tikki.

“Well – she hunts mice and rats too especially here in England”, he confirmed. “But she only gets excited if she's hunting king cobras or mambas. Then she gets quite frightening.”

“You mean...”, Cassandra hesitated for a moment in amazement, “... this cuddly monster hunts poisonous snakes?”

“Actually all snakes. She likes eating them she only prefers eggs.”

“Wow. I don't believe it!”

“Mascot”, a slightly absent sounding voice said a single word. *Luna* he remembered.

“Yes, of course”, Winona agreed loudly. “It fits. Ravenclaw's first class got a mongoose as a mascot.” They all laughed.

“Why?”, he asked, frowning. “Wouldn't be a raven more fitting? Because we are *Ravenclaws!*”

“Not therefore! There's a serpent in Slytherin's emblem”, the boy called Alec explained. His voice sounded if the thought Tarsuinn was a complete idiot.

“We don't like Slytherin?”, he asked in surprise.

“Of course we don't like them”, he boy answered disgusted. “Most Slytherins are arrogant and virulent. They're smug about their pure blood and many of them were followers of You-Now-Who. Tosh – let's put it right. Hardly one follower was not a Slytherin.

“But I met a girl on the train who was quite nice and has become a Slytherin”, Tarsuinn disagreed warily. “Surely not all of them are like you describe them?”

“They're all the same!”, the boy replied hotly. “And if she's not yet you won't have to wait long. You can trust me on that.”

Then he stood up suddenly and ran from the hall.

Silence fell on their part of the table.

“I didn't mean to...”, Tarsuinn whispered embarrassed.

“It's not your fault”, Cassandra assured him. “When He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named was strong Alac's family – like many others – suffered a great deal. His parents have fought for the shut down of the house of Slytherin for years but have failed yet.”

“I don't understand it at all”, Tarsuinn had to admit. “He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named? Suffered a great deal? What does all this mean?”

They told him in low voices. Each of the other children – except for Merton – added another horrible story. Soon Tarsuinn wasn't hungry any more and he understood Alec's behaviour. Though he didn't want to share Alec's generalization.

“... and so that was the end of-You-Know-Who.”

“A baby stopped him?”, Tarsuinn asked amazed.

“Yes. The boy sits right over there. With that scar shaped like lightning. Harry Potter.”

“That's the boy who wasn't on the train yesterday, wasn't he?”, Tarsuinn remembered.

“Yes. He and the small Weasley crashed in the Whomping Willow with a flying car yesterday”, Merton told excitedly. “And...”

“Oh that's just a bighead!”, another voice who had been silent up to now, added. It was the boy called Ian. “My mother always says: *Glory gets the better of anyone at some point*. And with him it already has. I bet anyone else would have got the boot for that but...”

“... but it was nevertheless cool”, Merton insisted. “Especially with such a classic sort of car. My father would have locked me in the house for the whole holidays just for that. He restores such cars you'll have to know.”

“Okay – you're right”, Ian agreed reluctantly. “It was kind of cool.”

“So?”, Winona got back on their original topic. “Do we make Tikki our mascot? It'd be so cool if we could take her into class, if we've got one together with Slytherin.”

Tikki sounded thrilled somehow.

“I hope it will be possible for her to accompany me”, Tarsuinn said.

“That's against the rules!”, Ian replied sceptically. “Why should they permit it to you?”

“Because Tarsuinn is blind”, again it was the absent voice from Luna. “Don't say you haven't noticed, have you?”

Again it was silent for a moment.

“Your stories are as absurd as your father's are”, Ian accused her. “You should suggest it as an article for his *The Quibbler*. *Blind Muggle vanquishes walls of Hogwarts*. That's rubbish, that is. And...”

“She's right, Ian”, Tarsuinn intercepted. “Tikki compensates my eyes.”

“You mean like a guide dog?”, Merton asked amazed.

A light draught moved rhythmically across his face.

“You don't have to waggle your hand in my face, Merton”, Tarsuinn said, grinning.

“That was me”, Winona said, laughing. “So that's how you got through the barrier at King's Cross.

You just didn't see it.”

“Never thought it would for once make me *not* hitting a wall”, Tarsuinn said ironically – and they all laughed.

“But – if Tikki is your substitute for a guide dog – shouldn't she've warned you of the wall?”, Merton asked. “I mean she must have seen it, mustn't she?”

The boy was quite right. There was something funny. Tarsuinn tried to remember the scene exactly. Tikki sat on his shoulder when he followed a family with children. She had warned him of a bench in his path when he was on platform nine and ten. Then there was this tunnel – it had to be this magical wall – and stood on platform nine and three quarters.

“She didn't warn me”, he mumbled in amazement. “That's not possible!”

“Magical branch”, Luna explained. This time she sounded a bit more involved. “Some doesn't only get much older but have other abilities, too. My father would be quite interested in her.”

“To do what?”, Ian asked acidly.

“Many secrets lay concealed”, the girl explained. She seemed to ignore the violating voice completely.

“*If you open your eyes and mind you're able to discover things others think to be impossible*”, she cited some text confidently.

“Or you believe the oddest rubbish”, Ian fired back.

“Ian's father works for the *Daily Prophet*. That's our newspaper. Luna's father owns the *Quibbler*”, Winona secretly whispered to Tarsuinn. “It's that sort of rivalry thing.”

“I see”, he whispered in response.

“They know each other quite some time. Because their parent's are neighbours. You can't imagine how disappointed they were when they ended up in the same house.”

Well, he could imagine this. Especially if he considered how different their tempers were. Ian was very emotional, talked a lot and got better arguments. Luna on the other hand seemed to be very reluctant – almost seclusive – didn't talk very much but yet her short interceptions reduced his argumentation to absurdity. But it only incited Ian even more.

Luckily the, still rising, discussion was interrupted by a loud: “*Timetables*”. Professor Flitwick walked along the table and handed over the timetables personally. He stopped as he had reached Tarsuinn.

“Mr McNamara, You'll not participate in classes today because you've got plenty to do. Moreover the

headmaster and I want to talk to you directly after breakfast. Can you find the headmaster's office again?"

"I think so, Sir", he replied.

"Good. But this doesn't mean you don't have to catch up on today's subjects."

After this Flitwick proceeded to hand out the timetables to the older students.

"Oh No", Winona mumbled. "Alec won't like this."

"What?", Tarsuinn asked. His fingers slipped over the parchment. Unfortunately it wasn't Braille but apparently someone had used an extra scratchy pen and thick ink so he was able to read it though only slowly.

"I hoped they wouldn't set mixed classes because we're so many this year", Winona explained. "Well, we all make mistakes. We've got Herbology with the Slytherins three times a week! Oh no, we've got to look after Alec."

"And right this afternoon, too!", Ian added frustrated.

"You should really be careful", Penelope Clearwater's voice said behind them. "Professor Sprout doesn't like troublemakers at all. So don't let them provoke you, if they show off with their *pure* blood. Keep calm, remember your house and make good work. For them the worst is, if you are better than them. Remember it.

"Yes, Ma'am", Winona confirmed ironically.

"And you, Tarsuinn, should set off now", the prefect continued unperturbed. "As far as I know, you should see the headmaster and he has gone five minutes ago."

"Oh, then I should really go now. Do you come, Tikki?", he said in a hurry.

He quickly grabbed a hand full of marvellous smelling cookies, let Tikki climb on his shoulder, left with a: "See you!", and headed in the direction of the headmaster's office.

He found it due to Tikki's instructions quite fast, climbed the corkscrew stairs, which had been a moving staircase yesterday, reached the outer office and knocked on the closed office door, which opened momentarily.

"Come in Tarsuinn", said the headmaster's voice.

He did as he had been told. He sensed another person next to Dumbledore. It had to be Professor Flitwick.

"Sit down please. As Professor Flitwick has already told you, as of today you are a member of Ravenclaw House. But only probationary. I don't want to keep from you, that there was quite some resistance. Only the reference to the old school rule, I told you yesterday about, made the ministry of magic consider for your case. But only within the old rules. And there were terms set."

"What kind of?"

"Neither me nor another non-related person is permitted to pay the school fee. School books and other required equipment have to be paid by yourself, too. Furthermore you can only stay in Hogwarts for a year unless you educe magic power. If you don't the ministry also insist on wiping all your memories of this year and in replacing them with others.

Moreover you have to sign a contract in which you confirm you agree to these terms on your own free will. You must not tell or write to anybody or communicate by other means about our world. I'm sorry but I can understand the ministry's concerns."

"Okay", Tarsuinn replied curtly.

"Should I read the contract to you?", Dumbledore asked. "Or maybe Professor Flitwick?"

"Contracts are to be read in person", Tarsuinn answered. "At least one should try."

He hoped they wouldn't take it badly. He groped the desk, searching.

"Uhm – may I have it?", he said, smiling nonplussed when he didn't find it.

"Sorry", said Professor Flitwick. "It's still in my bag. I checked it for you Mr McNamara.

A piece of parchment was pushed in his hands. He unfolded it and began to read. Slowly his fingers followed the lines.

It took some time. He had to read some passages several times because the sentences were fairly complex and he tried hard to understand them. Most of it was about what he was permitted to tell whom and whom not, that he was not permitted to leave Hogwarts except for ministry approved cases and that he lost claim on the memories for the whole year, if he was nevertheless a Muggle. The

whole text was full of magical sounding words he didn't know and those meaning he didn't understand.

"Do you understand all of that?", Tarsuinn asked the professors, after reading.

"I think so", answered Dumbledore.

"I'm not so", Flitwick confided amused.

"What does: ... *the memories will be replaced by appropriate Muggle memories by a ministry's wizard chosen by the headmaster, the ministry's advocate and the magical guardian...* mean? Who's my magical guardian? That's not stated here. And what are *appropriate memories*? And what if I want to visit my sister?"

"Well...", Dumbledore's voice was soft and sympathetic, "Your magical guardian as your head of house is Professor Flitwick, of course. It's normal for students without magical relatives. With *appropriate memories* they want to express that they can't just wipe one year of your life. It would attract too much attention. So a wizard from the ministry whose job it is to modify memories will *create* a year of memories for you. Professor Flitwick's and my vote should make sure it will be pleasant memories."

"And for your sister – yes it is possible they do not permit you to visit her. But ...", Dumbledore made a pause for effect, "... I have spoken to her even yesterday. A really brave and pretty young woman, by the way – and she signed a quite similar contract to those in front of you which will allow you to send owls each other.

"To send owls?", he interrupted perplex.

"Owls transport our letters", explained Dumbledore. "Very reliable."

"And Rica really did believe you and signed?"

"Yes."

"May I see the contract? It's really not her kind to believe in magic.

"Of course", said Dumbledore and gave Tarsuinn another piece of parchment. "It indeed needed some of my most impressive magic to convince Miss McNamara."

"To heal her would have convinced her", Tarsuinn said.

"Even if I was able to, I mustn't do it", Dumbledore replied sadly.

"Why not?", he demanded to know. "It must be easy for you, mustn't it?"

"We by far can't heal any disease", Dumbledore explained in a soft voice. "And we've got strict rules concerning when and how we may help a Muggle. Miracles are very rare and attract far too much attention as you'll have to admit.

"You talked to her. It sounded as if liked her! How can you just watch her dying?"

"I don't just watch", he said still in a soft voice despite Tarsuinn's accusing sort of tone. "It's not me who can influence her fate only you can save her.

"Me? How?"

Hope arose in him.

"You have to become a wizard. Even if you muster only the smallest spell, you will be considered as a wizard and me or even better a healer may help you sister as good as magic can do."

"But...", the doubts let fail his words. In secret he had never believed he could possibly be a wizard. For him it was just an adventure in a strange and fascinating world. With mad people and crazy classes. But now he suddenly was responsible for his sister's life. If he failed...

"But the doctors said she's got only few months left to live", he said, begging for time for her and himself thereby.

"Your sister may be seriously ill, Tarsuinn but the hope you're offering her will give her strength to live. Study hard and write to her to give her the courage she needs. Then she will survive as long as it takes."

"Oh, no", he said in a low voice. His heart arched and his eyes were on fire.

"I'll sign", he whispered silently. "A small chance is better than none. Can I have a pen?"

"We use quills", Dumbledore told him and gave him one.

"And the ink bottle is here", Flitwick added and put it on the desk with a bang. It made Tarsuinn smile a little. He could smell the ink, he didn't need to hear where the bottle was.

"Couldn't you also steer my hand?", he asked ironically.

“It would invalidate the contract”, Dumbledore denied. “You can write, can't you?”

“I'll try, Sir”, he assured earnestly and it exposed to be more difficult than he had thought. He had never used a quill for writing before. Professor Flitwick erased some of his attempts from the parchment. Sometimes because he had used too much ink sometimes too less. But at last he managed it.

After that Tarsuinn heard Flitwick and Dumbledore signing. Then the parchment was rolled in.

“*Duplicia!*”, said Dumbledore moments later.

“And what's next?”, Tarsuinn asked. “Now I can participate in classes, can't I?”

“No need for hurry”, Flitwick said forbearingly. “At first you'll need books, a cauldron, appropriate clothes and the school fee has to be paid, too.

“How can I do that?”

“Well – you'll travel to London later today. There you will get yourself some of your Muggle money and change it at Gringotts. One part of the money is for the school fee – the goblins know the right vault – and with the rest you'll buy your school equipment.”

“And what do I have to buy?”

“I've got the list for the current year here. The term has already begun so perhaps you'll get some special prices.”

“Tarsuinn was handed the list. For now, he only glanced over it.

UNIFORM

First-year students will require:

1. Three sets of plain work robes (black)
2. One plain pointed hat (black) for day wear
3. One pair of protective gloves (dragon hide or similar)
4. One winter cloak (black, silver fastenings)

Please note that all pupils' clothes should carry name tags

COURSE BOOKS

All students should have a copy of each of the following:

The Standard Book of Spells (Grade 1) by Miranda Goshawk

A History of Magic by Bathilda Bagshot

Magical Theory by Adalbert Waffling

A Beginners' Guide to Transfiguration by Emetic Switch

One Thousand Magical Herbs and Fungi by Phyllida Spore

Magical Drafts and Potions by Arsenius Jigger

Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them by Newt Scamander

Break with a Banshee by Gilderoy Lockhart

Gadding with Ghouls by Gilderoy Lockhart

Holidays with Hags by Gilderoy Lockhart

Travels with Trolls by Gilderoy Lockhart

Voyages with Vampires by Gilderoy Lockhart

Wanderings with Werewolves by Gilderoy Lockhart

Year with the Yeti by Gilderoy Lockhart

OTHER EQUIPMENT

wand

cauldron (pewter, standard size 2)

set glass or crystal phials

telescope set

brass scales

“I've never heard of such books before”, he said then. “And I don't know where to get a wand, too. And I have absolutely no idea what Gringotts is.”

“Of course, you will not be on your own”, Dumbledore answered. “The ministry would never allow that. But Hagrid agreed to accompany you.”

“The gamekeeper?”

“Yes – he wants to buy some things anyway and doesn't mind to pick you up. He knows exactly where you can get what you need.”

“When?”

“As soon as we are done here.”

“Is there something else?”

“Not on our part but maybe you've got questions?”

Tarsuinn pondered for a moment. At first he couldn't think of anything, but then he remembered the contract and how minutely detailed it was.

“About Tikki...”, he began.

“Yes?”

“May she stay with me? Also in classes? I need her, you'll have of course noticed.

“I think, I can permit it in this special case. But only as long as I don't hear any complaints.”

“Oh, could you exclude the caretaker?”, he couldn't stop himself.

“No but I have spoken with him and you can forget about your bad start.”

“I think, I have no other questions.”

“None?”, Dumbledore asked somehow lurking.

“No.”

“And what about your eyes?”

“What's the matter with them?”

“Maybe we'll be able to heal them.”

“You won't – can't – help my sister so why me?”

“You are here and in our supervision. We possibly can give you eyesight for a year.”

The offer was incredibly tempting but also so unfair.

“I don't want it”, he said defiantly.

“It's a handicap and will hinder you in learning.”

“Nevertheless, I don't want it”, Tarsuinn insisted stubbornly. He didn't want to feel still more blameable towards Rica.”

“Well – I can't force you”, Dumbledore said.

“But I can”, Flitwick interfered. “Mr McNamara, I'll bring you to Madame Pomfrey right now who will check you.”

“You can't make me to”, he denied.

“Well, I can”, Flitwick replied sharply. In his normally quite kind voice was an unexpected rigid undertone. “Because, now I am your guardian and head of house and I will not tolerate a diseased student taking classes unless at least an attempt of healing has been made.”

“That's unfair”, Tarsuinn complained.

“That's live. Stand up and follow me. Unless you've got something to add Professor Dumbledore, of course.”

“No. I think everything is in the right track.”

A quarter of an hour later Tarsuinn entered the hospital wing with Flitwick. He was quite furious about Flitwick who though gave the impression he was by all means able to bring him here against his will. Despite his shortness.

“Finally!”, the nurse greeted them. “Since I've heard you're permitted to stay here I've waited for your visit Mr McNamara. Sit down. We'll begin immediately.”

At the same time she was striding through the place energetically as if Tarsuinn was dying within the next few seconds.

“Well – head back – yes, that's right and do not blink.”

For some time she apparently examined his eyes. Once she turned his head softly to the left than to the right, pulled his lids open and let a cool liquid drop into his eyes. After about ten minutes he was allowed to bring his head in a normal position again.

“Strange, I don't see anything”, she said directed to Flitwick.

“Funny, nor am I!”, Tarsuinn commented.

“Hmpf – don't you get snappish”, she reprimanded him. “Actually you should be able to see. Every healer will confirm it. But you don't malingering either, McNamara. Tell me, have you ever been able to see?”

“My sister told me I could see when I was very small. But I can't remember.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes! But I dream in pictures and I know what colour the grass is.”

“Then you're an extremely extraordinary case. You can go now but next week you'll come back again. I'll inform you on time and a specialist will examine you then.”

“No need to hurry”, he said shortly.

“As if!”, she pressed on him sharply. Like every nurse she seemed not to tolerate opposition. “Every day without eyesight is a day of handicapped live. And just because you've got a Merlin-complex or something, it doesn't change a thing.”

“I'll better go now, if you don't mind”, he said unfriendly. He just didn't want to discuss it any more.

“Yes – do as you please. These young people, rude and stupid at the same time. I pity you this year, Professor Flitwick.”

“Calm down, Poppy”, Flitwick chuckled. “He had a very eventful but not exactly enjoyable morning. I believe you've already seen Mrs Norris this morning, haven't you?”

“Yes I have”, replied Madame Pomfrey. It sounded bitter. “And now go. Maybe there'll be someone yet today who will appreciate my help.”

Tarsuinn followed Professor Flitwick out of the hospital wing.

“You did Madame Pomfrey wrong by projecting your anger of me on her”, the professor blamed him on their way.

“It was all planned by you even before you asked me in the headmaster's office”, Tarsuinn replied.

“You'd have brought me to the hospital wing either way no matter if I agreed or not. That's more than unfair.”

Flitwick stopped and suddenly he gave a rather rigid impression almost like Professor McGonagall.

“Unfair it is? Do you know what's unfair? Last night I accompanied Professor Dumbledore to your sister. I met a Muggle-girl who is kind, brave and intelligent. But also fatally ill. I had to stand there and mustn't help her, because if I did, moments later five ministry wizards would have Apparated there, put me into Askaban and made your sister ill again. You don't know how unfair I found *that*. But instead of asking for herself, she talked about you all the time, what a fine boy you were. For a great deal, it had been her words, which made you a member of my house. And I have sworn to do everything in my power to help you and your sister. But the only chance I've got is to find even the smallest glimmer of magic in you. But I'll fail, if you refuse help from people who can and want to help you. I thought you realized what's at stake for you this year. So put aside your pride and bear down your fear and do whatever has to be done. It will still be much harder for you than for the others, anyway. You can't afford to reject any help. Are you aware of that?”

Tarsuinn suddenly felt very small even smaller than little Professor Flitwick who right now seemed to be a giant.

“Yes, Sir”, he whispered.

“That's better”, Flitwick's tone was perfectly normal again and as if nothing had happened, he led Tarsuinn the way to the room he had slept this night.

So – please pack the things you'll need for your stroll through London then I'll bring you to Hagrid. It didn't take long and so, short time later they left the castle and walked across a meadow to a house which smelled a bit mouldy and of all sorts of animals.

“Ah – there yeh're, Professor”, he heard the prominent voice who had collected the first years back on the platform. “Jus' wanted to check what kept yer.”

“I'm sorry Hagrid. We had lots to do and so we've got into delay”, said the Professor whose voice was exactly the opposite of the gamekeeper's deep and booming one.

“No prob'. Jus' have ter see how I'll manage all me shopping.”

“I think, inside Diagon Alley McNamara will do on his own as long as you warn him about

Knockturn Alley. You just have to accompany him at the Muggles', according to the ministry.”

“Okay, Professor. Are yer ready, boy?”

Tarsuinn nodded.

“So – if yeh'll excuse us, Professor – we shall leave now.”

“Of course, Hagrid. Mr McNamara, behave yourself”, Flitwick urged him.

“I will”, Tarsuinn promised. “And ... thanks.”

“Wouldn't know what for?”, he laughed and left.

Tarsuinn couldn't help it – he started to like the little Professor very much.