

The soft, golden glow of enchanted lanterns illuminated the ornate interior of the Beauxbatons carriage. The air carried a faint, floral perfume, mingling with the subtle scent of old parchment and ink. Antique furniture upholstered in pale blue velvet surrounded a polished mahogany table, its surface scattered with parchment scrolls, an inkpot, and a silver tea set that steamed invitingly.

Horace Slughorn stood at the threshold, adjusting his emerald-green waistcoat nervously. The splendor of the carriage was dazzling, but the unexpected summons had unsettled him. The one to invite him, Antoine Delacour, a tall man with sharp features and a commanding presence, approached him with a charming smile, his blond hair catching the light.

“Monsieur Slughorn,” Antoine greeted warmly, his French accent noticeable as he extended a hand. “It is a great pleasure to have you here. Please, come in.”

“Ah, Monsieur Delacour,” Slughorn replied, his joviality slightly strained as he shook the man’s hand. “Your invitation was... intriguing, I must say. And this carriage! It’s as magnificent as the rumors suggest.”

Antoine chuckled, gesturing for Slughorn to take a seat. “I am delighted you think so. Beauxbatons is known for its elegance, after all. Would you care for tea?”

“Yes, please, thank you,” Slughorn said, taking a seat in a chair. He felt himself sink into the comfortable foam and a small sigh escaped his lips. His eyes darted to the other occupant of the room, and he nearly dropped his teacup.

“Harry Potter!” Slughorn’s voice betrayed a mixture of surprise and apprehension.

Harry, seated across from him, gave a polite nod, his green eyes calm but watchful. He wore a simple black jacket, but his posture exuded confidence that top businessmen always seemed to radiate. “Good to see you, Professor. I hope you don’t mind me being here. This meeting concerns me too.”

“Ah, yes, of course,” Slughorn replied, his hand trembling slightly as he placed the cup down. Memories of his painful confession about Horcruxes to the young man resurfaced, and though he had shown him kindness, Slughorn still felt a gnawing sense of guilt.

Antoine’s voice broke the awkward silence. “I understand this might come as a surprise, but Harry is, shall we say, an integral partner in this venture.”

Slughorn’s curiosity piqued, momentarily overriding his discomfort. He leaned forward slightly, his calculating nature taking a front seat. “A venture, you say? Fascinating! Do go on, my dear boy – ah, gentlemen.”

Harry exchanged a glance with Antoine, who gave him an encouraging nod. Taking a deep breath, Harry began. “Professor, you know about the Chamber of Secrets, don’t you?”

Slughorn blinked with slight surprise before he gave a short nod. “How could I not? The tales of that basilisk! Terrifying business. But... what does that have to do with this meeting?”

“I killed the basilisk,” Harry said simply in a matter-of-fact tone, as if he was talking about the weather.

Slughorn’s mouth opened and closed as Harry’s words truly registered with him, and he gulped as he truly came to terms with it. His expression was a mix of awe and disbelief. “Merlin’s beard! You mean to say... you’ve decided to harvest it?”

Harry nodded. "It's been over a year, and the basilisk's been lying down there uselessly. I don't think it benefits anyone to leave it there. It will take some effort and a lot of help, but yes. Last I checked, the basilisk's remains are intact. We've got to be a bit careful, but extracting its materials would be the correct decision now."

"Well," Slughorn gulped. "If you're truly going to harvest it, then you're sitting on a fortune."

"Multiple fortunes," Antoine remarked, his tone brisk as he sat straight in his armchair.

Slughorn nodded. "The venom, in particular, is the rarest and most valuable potion ingredient in the world. I do not know exactly how much it'd be worth in today's market but it's bound to be a massive sum."

"It can fetch upwards of half a million galleons per vial."

Slughorn's eyes widened, his fingers twitching as if reaching for an imaginary cauldron. "Half a million! By the stars! And you mean to supply it? You truly believe it's wise to have such a dangerous substance enter the market?"

"Under strict conditions," Harry clarified. "And I believe you can guess why we've asked for this meeting, Professor."

Slughorn stared at the floor with a thoughtful frown. "If you want my suggestion, then the venom should only be sold for medicinal purposes. The potions it can create are incredibly complex and expensive, but they can save lives."

"That's what we've thought as well," Harry nodded. "As for the other parts – the fangs, scales, and hide – they'll be distributed through Antoine's network, but we'll control the supply to avoid flooding the market."

Slughorn leaned back, his mind racing. "This is... unprecedented. To work with basilisk venom... I can only imagine the possibilities! But the challenges as well. Potions of this caliber require utmost precision."

Antoine smiled. "That, Monsieur, is where you come in. Your expertise in potions is unparalleled. Harry and I are in agreement that if anyone could ensure the success of this endeavor, it would be you."

Slughorn's eyes widened and his chest puffed up slightly, though a hint of caution remained in his demeanor as he composed himself. "Well, I'm flattered, truly. But such a venture requires careful planning. Licensing, distribution, quality control... not to mention the ethics of handling such a dangerous substance."

"Which brings us to an important point of discussion," Harry interjected, making Slughorn turn to him. "We are planning to move the operations, Professor."

"Move the operations?"

"We'll be operating from Italy, not Britain," Harry clarified, to Slughorn's surprise. "I want to be clear with you, sir. The Ministry is in shambles, and I don't have any confidence in starting a business here. And then there is another matter to consider... about... you know..."

Slughorn blanched, catching on to what Harry was insinuating.

"Y-You mean... h-he will –"

"I believe it's a matter of when, not if," Harry replied calmly. "And I don't want to risk the business in any manner. You know he will come after me and everything I have. It makes sense to start this business overseas."

"But Italy?"

"I am planning to move to Italy when I'm done with my obligations in Britain," Harry told him, to more of his surprise. "And that's where we will be operating this business from."

"Harry has told me about how you might be at risk, Monsieur Slughorn," Antoine remarked calmly. "I believe it would help you as well if you were out of the country. The Italian weather would suit you well too, I believe."

Slughorn stared at Harry in shock, wondering just how much he had told Antoine. Harry gave him a reassuring nod.

"This is the best possible solution for everyone, Professor," he replied.

Slughorn looked contemplative for a long moment, pondering on the proposal. Finally, he said, "I'd like to hear more about this."

"Sure. Everything has been accounted for," Harry assured him. "We will arrange the necessary permits through official ministerial channels. Antoine will take care of the boring paperwork given his background as a French businessman and a team of experts will be arranged to coordinate with you for the venture. He will take care of the supply chain. Also, the administrative headaches are not your concern. All we need is a seasoned hand to oversee operations, and I believe you are capable of doing that."

Slughorn nodded slowly, thinking deeply.

Harry leaned forward, his gaze steady. "Professor, I trust you. This business is going to be massively popular, and I won't say that money is not a significant factor in all of this, but this could save countless lives as well. We already have plans to discuss subsidization of medicinal potions created from Basilisk venom to treat rare and serious cases so that there is freedom of trade and the people get their treatments at prices they can afford. I am a capable wizard, but I know my limitations. This endeavor is only possible with someone of your skill and integrity. Will you join us?"

Slughorn hesitated, his eyes flicking between Harry and Antoine. The prospect of working with basilisk venom thrilled him, but the weight of responsibility was daunting. Finally, he exhaled, a small smile forming on his lips.

"How could I say no to such an opportunity? Besides, it's not every day one gets to work with materials of legend. Count me in."

Antoine clapped his hands together. "Excellent! Welcome aboard, Monsieur Slughorn."

Harry smiled. "Thank you, Professor. I know this will be a success with you involved."

Antoine leaned forward, his voice taking on a more pragmatic tone. "Now, let's discuss logistics. The basilisk materials are incredibly potent and volatile. We'll need your input on how best to preserve their efficacy and ensure safety during extraction and transport. What storage methods would you recommend?"

Slughorn stroked his chin thoughtfully. "Hmm... Basilisk venom must be stored in magically reinforced glass to prevent any accidental seepage. The slightest exposure to air could compromise its potency. As for the other materials... the fangs and scales can be preserved with stasis charms, but they'll require regular reinforcement. I'd suggest a schedule of monthly inspections."

Harry nodded. "What about potion brewing? The venom is only going to medicinal purposes, so how do we ensure it's not misused?"

"A legitimate concern," Slughorn agreed, his voice serious. "We'll need to create a registry of trusted potion masters. They'll need certifications and will have to adhere to strict brewing guidelines. Perhaps... an enchanted ledger that tracks every drop of venom distributed and its intended use, properly secured of course. That way, we'll have transparency."

Antoine leaned back, smiling. "I can arrange for the ledger's enchantments. Additionally, we'll implement a contractual clause with each buyer, ensuring compliance under penalty of severe fines or legal action. Our reputation depends on maintaining absolute control over this material."

Slughorn's eyes gleamed with approval. "Excellent foresight! I'd also recommend we limit the number of buyers at first. Start small, with only the most reputable potion-makers. This will help establish trust in the market."

Harry tapped his fingers on the table, considering. "And for distribution? Antoine, do you have contacts in regions where these potions could make the most impact?"

Antoine nodded. "Absolutely. My network spans Europe, North America, and parts of Asia. We'll focus on partnerships with medical institutions and independent healers. However, we'll need to carefully balance supply and demand—too much too soon, and we risk devaluing the product."

Slughorn's smile widened. "This... this is shaping up to be a masterpiece of both business and artistry. But tell me, what about security? Basilisk venom is bound to attract... unsavory interest."

Harry's expression darkened slightly. "We're prepared for that. The storage facilities will be protected with the strongest wards we can muster, and all transportation will be under magical escort. We'll also ensure that the public only knows the bare minimum about where and how the venom is stored."

Antoine added, "Discretion will be paramount. We'll employ trusted individuals and conduct thorough background checks. No one without clearance will have access to the materials."

Slughorn nodded approvingly, his initial reservations fading as the meticulous planning became evident. "Well, it seems you two have thought of everything. I must say, I'm honored to be part of such a groundbreaking endeavor."

Harry smiled. "We couldn't do it without you, Professor. With your guidance, this venture could change the face of magical medicine forever."

Slughorn returned the smile as he nodded. It most certainly did, and he could not help but feel excited over the prospect.

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In the Room of Requirement, Daphne, Fleur, and Valerie stood huddled around a glowing golden egg.

Fleur was pacing, her silvery-blond hair cascading down her back and her sharp, blue eyes narrowed in thought. "We must be missing something," she said, her voice tinged with slight frustration. "The sound this thing makes... this screeching... maybe it's not meant to be heard like this at all?"

Valerie, lounging in a cushioned armchair, toyed with a strand of her dark hair. Her eyes sparkled with amusement. "So, you're suggesting what? We go deaf for this one? I mean, it's an idea, but not exactly practical."

Daphne chuckled from her place on the couch, popping another strawberry in her mouth. Swallowing it down, she remarked, "Oh, come on, Val. Let's give her some credit. At least she's trying something, unlike that idiot who's out there doing business dealings and leaving this menial labor to us three."

Both Fleur and Valerie rolled their eyes.

"What did he call it? Division of labor? It's definitely labor, alright."

"Still, we need to get it done. Any more ideas?"

"What if the screeching is some sort of code?" Daphne mused thoughtfully. "You know, like changes in the pitch of screeches? Maybe it's meant to be broken down into some kind of sequence."

"That would be more clever than anything those idiots could come up with, if I'm being honest," Valerie remarked, making them chuckle. "Still, it's worth a try."

"You think the *Extractum* will work? It can translate sounds into images or words," Fleur mused aloud.

"I don't think it's ever been tried on something like this though," Daphne said. "It'd be quite an achievement if we can do this though."

"Say no more," Valerie smirked and got to her feet, approaching the egg. She reached out and grabbed the latch, and as one, all three witches applied silencing charms over their ears. With a twist, the egg spread open, glowing a brilliant shade of gold, and furious screeches filled the air.

"Sonorous *Extractum*," she said softly, and in an instant, the screeching from the egg morphed into a vibrating hum. Fleur flicked her wand and conjured a piece of parchment beside the egg. A thin, golden tendril emerged from the egg and linked up with the parchment that glowed the same shade of gold.

All three young women watched on curiously as golden scribbles began to appear on the parchment. It continued for roughly thirty seconds before the golden glow dissipated. Daphne reached out and picked up the parchment, staring at it for a long moment.

"Yeah, good luck figuring this shit out," she snorted and handed it over to Fleur whose eyes widened when she looked at what was written, or the lack thereof.

"It looks like someone gave a toddler something to write and the toddler went haywire," Valerie muttered, gazing at the parchment from beside Fleur who let out a sigh.

"It's all gibberish. Even translating this won't do," she muttered. She cast the translating charm for good measure, but to her surprise, the parchment did glow once again. Nothing else happened though.

"That was odd," Valerie remarked. "I've never seen that happen after a translating charm."

"Neither have I," Fleur muttered. "What language even is this?"

"You really think it's a language? It's more like some magical creature's screeching than some sound a human will make."

"So what? We now have to find someone who speaks an unknown magical creature's language?"

"Dumbledore might know," Valerie shrugged. "Don't think he'll be of much help though. Has to keep the tournament fair and all that."

They all rolled their eyes at that.

"If only there was a spell to translate this as well..."

"You think we're overthinking all this?" Daphne asked curiously. "We are meeting dead ends at every try. It has to be simpler than whatever we've tried so far."

"I think we're underthinking, Daph," Fleur muttered. "And by that, I mean we're not thinking stupid. For all we know, that answer might be something idiotic like dumping this egg in pumpkin juice or something."

"Or maybe singing to it. What if it's just a lonely egg and wants some friends?" Daphne snorted. They all could not help but giggle softly.

"Well, the simplest approach was to douse it in fire. That didn't do anything."

"What if we need to hatch it?" Valerie asked. "We got this egg from a dragon. Hatching it might reveal what's really inside."

"I'm not going to be a mother dragon. You two can get it done if you're so eager," Daphne waved them off. "And to be honest, I think we should take a break now. It's late, and Harry must be getting done with his little business meeting."

"I guess," Fleur sighed as she stretched. She glanced at the egg one more time before shaking her head. Together, the threesome fixed their clothes and walked out of their room, the large metallic door vanishing behind them.

"I guess everyone's feeling too cold to roam around," Daphne remarked as they descended the stairs. There were no students in sight, and the castle was enveloped in silence. Only the faint rustle of winter winds echoed around the corridors.

"For all the beauty, Hogwarts does feel creepy sometimes," Fleur muttered.

"Oh? Is our big, bad veela scared of the wind and the silence?" Valerie asked teasingly in a singsong voice.

"Shut up," Fleur muttered, making them chuckle.

They walked down a deserted corridor in silence that was broken by Daphne.

“So,” she began, glancing at the others. “I guess it’s finalized now. Bye bye, Britain. Italy, here we come.”

“The business venture is more than enough to say that,” Valerie replied. “It’s going to be a lot of work though, setting up a potions business of such magnitude. I’m sure your father must be excited.”

“He definitely is,” Fleur smiled, adjusting her blue silk scarf. “He likes to expand his horizons, and the chance to have a role, however small, in a business that would be dealing with something like Basilisk venom... it’s going to be revolutionary.”

“Revolutionary, yes,” Daphne repeated. “But also dangerous. Basilisks are not exactly cuddly creatures, and extracting its venom and then using it for making healing potions is going to be incredibly tricky. Not to mention the security concerns.”

“You’re not wrong. Isn’t it unbelievable too, though? It is probably the most venomous substance in the world and still, it is so useful in making healing potions. An irony is there ever was one.”

“Exactly,” Daphne nodded. “And it’s a massive opportunity as well. We are not exactly poor, but given how much demand there is for potions that are more effective than what’s out there now, this is a massive opportunity.”

“Arry seems to have a knack for finding and exploiting opportunities. Papa is very impressed with him, and it is not so easy.”

“And Slughorn is involved as well. I bet he’s already imagined the grand opening, standing alongside us and smiling at the cameras,” Daphne chuckled.

“That does sound like him,” Valerie agreed with a grin. “Still. No matter what Slughorn did in the past, it doesn’t nullify the fact that he’s one of the best when it comes to Potions. It will be different from the teaching role he’s so used to, but I believe he’s the best person we could’ve gotten for this position.”

“Would it be so different though?” Fleur asked. “He used to teach before. Now, he is going to be supervising and handling matters. I think he’ll be perfectly at home as he guides the potioners.”

“Well, when you put it like that...”

They rounded another corner into an abandoned corridor, and immediately, they felt a shift in the air. It seemed colder, heavier, and the faint echo of footsteps in the distance lingered. The three witches were so attuned to the magic around them that they felt it easily.

“You two feel that, right?” Fleur asked as she stopped, holding up a hand.

“Yeah, it’s... off. Feels like we’re being watched.” Daphne replied, palming her wand.

“It’s the same as I felt during the Yule Ball,” Valerie whispered, her eyes narrowing.

As one, the three witches drew their wands, their senses on high alert.

Their instincts did indeed prove correct.

With a sudden bang, the corridor was enveloped in thick smog, blinding them entirely. However, it was all for naught as they flicked their wands, sending powerful winds spiraling around, blowing all the smog away.

At the same time, five figures stepped out from the shadows at the other end, their wands raised threateningly. Their eyes narrowed when they saw who they were.

Leading them was Roger Davies, his face twisted into something darker than his usual smugness tinged with self-assured arrogance. Alongside him was Marietta Edgecombe, her face twisted into a sneer. The other three – the same dark-haired girl and the two boys from before – were also there. All their faces were twisted with rage.

“You lot never learn, do you?” Daphne sighed in exasperation.

“Shut the fuck up!” Marietta snarled, taking them by surprise. Her eyes were bulging, her hatred radiating off her.

“You three whores have gotten away with it for too long,” Davies hissed, his eyes mad. “You fucks think you’re untouchable, don’t you? That you can keep humiliating us and get away with it everytime?”

“Potter will get his very soon, but it’s your time first,” the dark-haired girl growled.

The air exploded with flashes of multicolored lights as the first salvo of spells flew. Daphne, Fleur, and Valerie split into a formation, their wands moving in perfect sync.

“*Oppugno vines!*” Edgecombe shouted, sending a tangle of thorny vines whipping toward Daphne.

Daphne reacted instantly, slashing her wand through the air. The vines disintegrated mid-flight, but she was forced to erect a shield as a powerful *Confringo* from one of the boys blasted toward her. The shield absorbed the spell and Daphne retaliated with a banishing charm that caught the boy, sending him crashing against the wall where he slumped over with a dull thud.

Meanwhile, Fleur was locked in a fight with Davies. He fired a volley of hexes, each more vicious than the last. The veela deflected them with ease, countering with a sharp gust of wind that Davies shielded against. He was sent skidding back a few feet and once he came to a stop, he grunted, glaring at her with utter loathing.

“You are pitiful,” she hissed, further fueling his ire.

Valerie darted and spun as spells whizzed past her. She pointed her wand toward the dark-haired girl and a sharp lance of fire shot forward, forcing her to dive to the ground. Valerie pressed her advantage, but she was forced to swerve to the side as a vicious cutting curse phased through where she just stood. She hissed as the curse grazed her upper arm and glared at the boy who had cast it.

Both Daphne and Fleur saw the small cut on Valerie’s arm and they saw blood. Daphne snarled, her wand slashing downward. A wave of silvery smoke erupted around them, blinding everyone apart from Daphne momentarily. However, unlike their adversaries, Fleur and Valerie could still see as Daphne shared her sight with them, and together, the three witches pounced on their attackers like ravenous predators.

Shards of ice erupted on the floor where the attackers stood, making them cry out in pain. Before they could react, they were all yanked up in the air, flailing helplessly as they were slammed against each other. Another flick of the wands and they were banished against opposite walls. Painful grunts escaped them as they fell to the floor.

With another flick of their wands, they bound their attackers with enchanted ropes that threatened to tighten whenever they dared to move too much.

As the smoke dissipated, Edgecombe snarled in frustration, sending another cutting curse toward them which was swatted away lazily by Valerie. The ropes tightened further, making her cry out as her hands went slack and her wand fell on the floor.

Within a minute, the fight was over. The five Ravenclaws lay scattered, unconscious or groaning in pain as Fleur gave her wand a swish, healing the cut on Valerie's arm. The brunette nodded at her wives and together, they walked over, standing over them.

"Think that's enough of a lesson, or should we make sure they learn it for good?" Daphne growled, her wand trained on Davies who tried to stay conscious but was failing. With a faint snarl, he succumbed as the ropes tightened around him.

Suddenly, a sharp voice rang out and they looked up.

"What is the meaning of this!?"

Professor Sinistra and Professor Vector emerged from near the end of the corridor, their footsteps hurried as they approached them. Shock was written across their faces as they reached them, surveying the scene with wide eyes.

"What in Merlin's name happened here?" Sinistra asked, aghast.

"They attacked us, Professor," Daphne said tightly. She lowered her wand but did not relax in the slightest.

Vector frowned as she knelt by the unconscious dark-haired girl. "And you decided to take matters into your own hands?"

"They did not give us much choice," Fleur replied sharply. "They ambushed us and we acted in self-defense."

The two professors exchanged a glance as they nodded. "We'll deal with this from here. You three can go for now. Your heads of house, and your headmistress, Miss Delacour, will be told about this incident."

"Understandable," Valerie replied, as the other two nodded. With a final glare at their attackers, they sheathed their wands and turned to leave. The two professors watched them go toward the Entrance Hall before they turned to each other, sighing.

Five minutes later, the corridor was empty once again as the professors left with the five injured students levitating in front of them. Once their receding footsteps faded entirely in the distance, a subtle shimmer rippled at the far end of the corridor. A figure stepped out from the shadows, his disillusionment charm fading just enough to reveal the faint outline of a man.

He approached the spot where Valerie had been struck, and for a moment, he stared. His plan had worked out as he had expected. A subtle hint of induced rage and targeted motivation planted into his pawns' minds and he had gotten what he wanted.

His wand glinted faintly as he waved it over the ground and a few drops of blood hovered in the air, glowing faintly in the dim light. The figure conjured a small vial, and with a precise flick, the blood floated into it.

Pocketing the vial, the figure turned and disappeared into the shadows, the disillusionment charm cloaking him all the while.

To be continued...