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Tournament Woes

Chapter 1

Standard Disclaimer:

"Another one?" screeched Alyx.

Bob blushed and looked down at his feet. "What can I say? I've been attacked by rabid plot bunnies lately. Look! I have teeth marks on me!" he replied, and pointed to a mark on his shoulder.

Alyx leaned forward and slapped Bob in the head. "Idiot! Those teeth marks are from me!"

Bob grinned sheepishly. "Oh yeah," he mumbled in reply. "That was from the time you brought out the BBQ fork and oven mittens and we played..."

"Say another word and you're dead mister," Alyx growled. In her hand she held a 12 gauge shotgun.

Bob blinked and stuck his finger into the barrel. "So I can't even tell the people that we don't own Harry Potter?"

Alyx stared at his finger in consternation. She knew that pulling the trigger now would probably cause the gun to explode, that's what always happened on Bugs Bunny didn't it? "Well... er... yeah you can tell them that if you want."

Bob shook his head. "Nope. I don't want to tell them. In fact let them think that."

She blinked in confusion. She knew the story couldn't start unless someone said the disclaimer.

"Why not?"

"I don't feel like it," Bob replied mulishly. "You hit me and hurt my feelings."

She sighed. "Alright, how about if I put on that Stewardess uniform you like so much?"

"Can we use the Jello pit?" he asked hopefully.

She heaved another sigh. "Alright, but no alligators this time!"

"Right! On with the story!"

Tournament Woes

The door opened and an old man shuffled into the darkened house. "Torca Ignis," he muttered.

The room lit up as the wall fixtures flared to life. It was the magic version of gas lighting. The old man blinked in the yellow glow and stared at a figure who was sitting in a chair facing the unlit fireplace. In one hand the figure held a bottle of fire whiskey, half full.

"Albus? Is that you?"

"Hello, Abe, how was your trip to Nepal?" slurred the sitting man.

Aberforth Dumbledore stepped closer. "Are you drunk? And Nepal was fun. Apparently, free love still lives there."

Albus Dumbledore lifted the bottle to his lips and took a deep pull. "Cheers," he muttered.

"Merlin, Al! What happened to you? Why are you here?"

Dumbledore looked up at his younger brother, his eyes bloodshot and weary looking. "It's all over. Everything has turned to ash."

Abe reached down and gently pried the bottle loose from his brother's hand, then sat in the chair next to him. "Explain! Why aren't you at your school?" he demanded.

Albus shrank back from his brother's glare. "It wasn't my fault. I trusted Severus Snape!" he replied softly, then he shook his head. "It's all over now. You took a year off to play in Nepal, while I stayed behind and watched everything I had worked so many years for turn to ash."

Abe blinked at him in surprise. "What? Your little tournament didn't work out? And I'll remind you that you asked me to close my bar for a year. Couldn't have it giving Hogsmeade a bad name during the tournament, you said. Take a vacation, you said."

Albus rubbed at his temples tiredly. "So I was wrong!" he snapped. "But even if you were here I don't think it would have helped!"

"Will you stop beating around the bush and tell me what Snape did that was so bad?" Abe shot back.

Albus sighed deeply. "Severus is dead," he said softly.

Abe nodded grimly. "It was bound to happen. I warned you the man was trouble. What happened to him? Did the DMLE finally find evidence that

even you couldn't protect him from?"

Albus looked at him reproachfully, but Aberforth stared him down.

Finally, Albus looked away, a fact that shocked Aberforth to his very core. "No, it wasn't the DMLE. It was Harry Potter!" he blurted.

Abe blinked in surprise. He wasn't shocked to find out that Potter would do something like that, it was a long time coming. What shocked him was the anger and hatred he heard in his brother's voice when he said the name of Harry Potter.

Abe lifted the bottle and took a long pull for himself, then he motioned for his brother to explain. "What happened?"

Albus sat back in his chair and stared listlessly at the fireplace for a long moment, then he began to speak.

"Last summer I made a big mistake. I sent Harry back to his family with instructions that no one was to contact him. I even pulled back our watchers for fear of attracting the attention of the other side. With no one watching him, we never knew his family left him alone for nearly the entire summer. They went off on holiday and he went off tripping around Britain on his own private holiday.

"That in itself wouldn't have been bad. But Harry learned a couple of vital things over the summer."

He paused and heaved another heavy sigh.

"What did he learn?" asked Abe.

Albus turned to look at his brother. "Does the name Samuel Abbot mean anything to you?"

Abe nodded warily. He knew a great deal, but wasn't about to admit it. "He's a retired healer, dabbles in Necromancy and a few other rarely practiced arts."

Albus grunted in acknowledgment. "Rarely practiced arts," he muttered, then he looked up at the ceiling for a moment. "Including Occlumency."

He turned to look at Abe again. "Harry ran into Samuel when he visited with his great granddaughter, Hannah. Harry had taken to using muggle post to write some people outside of his normal circle of friends and, despite my wishes, he formed a relationship with the girl."

Abe leaned forward in his chair. "So? He's a young teenager. He's going to be interested in any skirt that shows an interest in him."

"She wasn't acceptable!" Albus spat. "She was too independent and not right for him at all. I had someone already picked out for him!"

Abe frowned. "As interesting as this might be, what does Potter's love life have to do with Snape being dead? Mind you, I think he should have been kissed a long time ago, but that's just me."

Albus heaved another great sigh and rubbed at his temples again. "On one of his visits to the Abbots, Harry met Samuel, who didn't like the way he looked. After giving him a comprehensive physical and addressing a number of problems, he mentioned something in passing, which led to a conversation about Occlumency.

"Harry learned the basics, and he learned that the Ministry considers any defense used by an Occlumencer against an attack is acceptable. So he learned just one defensive technique, which, by the way, is almost always fatal. On the few, rare occasions someone has survived the attack, it has left that person with little more personality than someone who's been kissed by Dementors."

"I can see where this is going now," Abe said grimly. "Your boy attacked your other boy and he fought back."

Albus nodded glumly and looked down at the floor. "In the Great Hall, no less," he muttered angrily. "Harry was already angry with me for forcing him to compete in the tournament."

He looked up at his brother. "Snape keeled over in the Great Hall and died after convulsing for nearly twenty minutes. When Harry announced he was responsible and accused Snape of trying to rape his mind, I stood up to admonish him. I was trying to think of a way of avoiding having to call in the DMLE, but there were Ministry guests present!

"And if that wasn't bad enough, Harry's response was to publicly announce that a blood feud now existed between the Potters and me!"

Abe leaned back in his chair, a bit stunned. "I'd say Samuel taught Harry more than just Occlumency."

"I'd say so, yes," replied Albus sourly. "Harry then stood on a table and announced to the world that he considered me more of an enemy than Voldemort and blamed me for making his time in school dangerous. The press ate it up and the Ministry couldn't wait to get him in front of a witness pensieve."

Albus slumped lower in his chair.

"Well, you hit a rough spot, but you've had them before, Albus. You'll survive it. Tomorrow you'll return to your job, take a hang over potion and push forward again. It's what you always do," Abe said encouragingly.

"I have no job!" snarled Albus. "That damn kid ruined everything and nearly destroyed the school in the process!"

Abe stared at him in total shock. "What? How?"

Albus held out his hand and Abe leaned forward, handing him the bottle. He took a long pull from the bottle then settled back in the chair again.

"It was the tournament tasks," he said bitterly. "I thought Harry was kidding when he told me I would regret forcing him to compete. Two days after Snape died and the furor started to die down, the cup was relit and spewed out more names. Only this time there was no tournament organizing committee for the new entrants, there was no ritual to invoke the committee. The four people died almost instantly. Fudge, Malfoy, Peter Pettigrew and Tom Riddle."

Abe's eyebrows rose to touch his hairline. "He used the cup to kill off Voldemort?"

Albus nodded wearily. "Oh, I can't prove it, but I'm pretty sure it was Harry that cast the *Confundus* curse on the cup and relit the blasted thing. He denies it, of course, and with his occlumency skills, I didn't dare try to find out the truth."

"Veritaserum?" asked Abe.

"Against the law to use on minors," Albus replied.

Abe nodded slowly. "All right, so Voldemort is dead, along with a bunch of Death Eaters and Fudge. Who's the new Minister?"

"Mortimer Stillwell."

Abe looked baffled. "Who the blazes is that?"

Albus turned a bleary eye on Abe. "Would you believe he was a minor Ministry employee until Harry Potter wrote a letter to the Prophet endorsing him? I only found out later that he was a friend of Samuel Abbot's and someone who had helped Harry learn about his heritage."

"I'll remind you that I told that you keeping that information from the boy was a bad idea," Abe said loftily.

Albus glared at his younger brother sourly. "Well, it seemed like a good idea to me at the time. How was I suppose to know he'd be so angry when he learned that I hid the information from him? Besides, he wasn't ready to know."

"All right, so he managed to get an unknown elected to the office after allegedly assassinating the Minister. How did he manage to cost you your job?"

"I'm getting to that!"

Albus took another pull from the bottle and burped loudly. "The first task was simple: get past a clutching dragon and retrieve a golden egg we had placed in her nest."

"Are you insane? You wanted a fourteen year old to get past a clutching dragon? She would have killed him!"

Abe trailed off when Albus shook his head sadly. "No, the dragon was the one that was in danger. The other contestants were magnificent in their magic. Potter was ruthless. He summoned his broom from the castle and used it to drive the poor beast into a raging fury. It broke free from its chain and took to the air, chasing him."

Abe leaned forward in his chair, caught up in the account.

"Potter led the beast on a merry chase for quite a while, then he dove for the school. The Divination tower, to be exact. With the beast hot on his trail, he veered away at just the last minute. Unfortunately, a Hungarian Horntail is not as maneuverable as a top of the line Firebolt racing broom. The poor beast plowed into the tower and exploded, killing two people."

Abe raised an eyebrow. "Only two?"

Albus looked at his brother. "My divination teacher, Sybil Trelawney, and Igor Karparov."

"Convenient that, eh?" Abe said, trying hard to suppress a smirk.

"What?"

Abe sighed. "Look, Albus, you're looking at this all wrong. Sure, he killed your pet Death Eater, but look at the good he's done. He took out Fudge and you know how corrupt he was. He killed Voldemort and gutted his top remaining Death Eaters. Then he killed the Seeress responsible for ruining his life and another, known Death Eater. Why is this such a problem?"

Albus blinked. "You don't think he knows of the prophecy, do you?"

Abe shrugged. "You know him better than I do. What do you think?"

Albus looked glumly at his feet again. "I thought I knew him, but I didn't. I thought sending him to his Aunt and Uncle would result in a nice, pliable lad who would be easily led into doing the right things. This probably wouldn't have happened if they hadn't gone on holiday."

Abe snorted. "Oh, it would have happened sooner or later. There isn't a teenager in the world that hasn't rebelled at least once. What about Potter's friends? Couldn't you find out from them?"

Albus shook his head. "Potter stopped talking to them when his name came out of the goblet. They refused to believe that he hadn't snuck his name

into it. Most of the school turned against him, so he decided to ignore them. When he finished the first task, his friends came up to apologize and he turned them down flat. He said that one betrayal is all he'd allow anyone. He said he had no intention of repeating his parents' mistakes.

"Miss Granger and Miss Weasley were most upset about his reaction. It didn't help matters that Harry continued to see Hannah Abbot, despite my telling him that she was unsuitable for him."

Abe reached out and Albus handed him the bottle. After a drink, he wiped his mouth and looked at his older brother. "So you have two people dead and one destroyed tower? That's not nearly as bad as the rabid Snorkack incident at Durmstrang during the 1707 tournament. That one killed 200 people and laid waste to the countryside for 10 miles, if you'll remember."

Albus shook his head. "No, that was just the first task. It gets worse."

"Go on," Abe urged guardedly.

"I thought things were settling down with Potter when he appeared at the Yule Ball with Miss Abbot on his arm. Sure, he asked her, despite my direct order for him to take Miss Weasley, but at least he wasn't causing any problems. Or so I thought.

"Out in the Rose Garden he found a beetle on his date's shoulder. He brushed it off and stepped on it. Two hours later, a fatally injured Rita Skeeter managed to return to her normal form before expiring. We never would have known what happened to her otherwise.

"Again, the DMLE investigated and cleared Potter of any wrong doing, but I am certain he knew it was Skeeter before he stepped on the bug. And amidst all this, the other champions were preparing for the second task, all of them, except for Potter. No, he had suddenly developed an interest in Muggle Industrial catalogs."

Abe leaned forward and took another pull from the bottle. "What was the second task?"

"The champions had to rescue someone from the lake. They had an hour to do so. None of the people we placed in the lake were really in any danger, but the champions were led to believe otherwise."

"And?"

Albus grimaced. "Two days before the event, I received a notice from the Abbots stating they would take me to court if I involved their daughter in the tournament. That left me no choice but to use Ronald Weasley as Potter's person. I can only surmise that Potter warned the Abbots ahead of time so they could hire the solicitor."

Abe watched his brother fall silent. The silence grew longer and he was trying to think of a way to prompt him to continue the story when he started up all on his own.

"On the morning of the second task, we all went down to the lake. When Potter learned that he had to rescue Ron Weasley, he laughed and said that Weasley meant nothing to him and he could stay down in the lake.

"The adults in the crowd fell silent and a number of the students became angry at Potter's comment. By this point, only the Hufflepuffs were still talking to Potter, mostly due to Miss Abbots' influence, I think. I commanded Potter to make the attempt to rescue his person. He scowled at me, then summoned a large bag from the castle.

"He reached into the bag and pulled out a large tin that had yellow and black markings on it. Using his wand, he punched a hole in the tin and levitated it out to the middle of the lake before letting it drop into the water. He repeated the process several more times, while everyone watched in confusion. Then the Merchief surfaced and screamed something at Potter. Potter looked up from breaking open another tin and screeched something back in Mermish."

"Potter speaks Mermish?" exclaimed Abe.

"Apparently," Albus replied dryly. "My Mermish isn't that good, but I could tell Potter was threatening the chief and the chief was getting more and more desperate. Finally, the Merchief nodded and vanished beneath the surface. Not three minutes later, all of the people we put into the lake were brought up to the surface and handed over to Potter. He rescued his victim, plus the others."

"How did he manage that?"

Albus shook his head. "I later found out that our tribe of Merpeople had contact with their brethren in the open seas and had heard about the muggles being able to poison water. Potter used a simple ruse of yellow dye and a label he had purchased from a muggle company. The Merpeople thought Harry was threatening to kill off all life in the lake. The tins leaked a yellow cloud into the water and the label said they were radiosomething or other.

"When questioned, Potter said he couldn't swim, and only a fool goes swimming in February in Scotland."

"Well, he is right about that, Al," Abe murmured, shivering at the thought. He waved a hand and the fireplace flared to life.

"He had no right to question me!" Albus snapped, pounding the arm of the chair. "I was the Headmaster and the one in charge! But no, even the press had taken up Potter's side, questioning my selection of the tasks. One bright reporter even went as far as to suggest that I deliberately allowed Potter to enter his name in the goblet. And the brat refuted that rumor and then suggested that I had entered his name against his will!"

Abe shook his head and conjured some hot tea, to which he added a dash of fire whiskey.

"Well, at least no one died in that task," he commented.

Albus grunted and looked at his brother unhappily. "No, it was worse than that. Somehow the parents of our muggle born found out that I had placed Miss Granger into a magical coma without first obtaining the consent of her parents. Three days after the second task, Miss Granger received a notice from her parents, informing her that they were withdrawing her from the school and placing her in a muggle school."

"A move you obviously fought against."

Albus shook his head sadly. "How could I? Even with the new Minister, there is little love for muggle born in the government. Within a week, nearly every muggle born student had been withdrawn: a third of our student population! The Grangers wrote a scathing letter to the Prophet, which was published on the front page, complaining about our lack of care. Somehow that letter found its way into the hands of the other parents. Our budgets were wrecked, and through it all, Potter smirked at me and reminded me of his warning that I would regret forcing him to participate in the tournament."

Albus reached forward and grabbed the bottle from his brother's hand. Lifting it to his lips, he nearly drained the remaining liquid.

"After that, the Ministry and the Board of Governors opened an investigation into how things were run at the school. You couldn't walk two feet without finding some Ministry employee looking for some flaw to complain about."

Albus looked at the roaring fire in surprise, having just noticed it. "During all of the investigations, Potter dropped a few comments about his home life, which opened yet another investigation. I tried to step in to stop it and that's when I discovered I had very little political clout left."

He hung his head and his shoulders drooped. It was obvious he was defeated.

"They arrested me and charged me with obstruction," he whispered. "Me. All I did was try to talk the lead Auror into letting certain reports slide by without official notice."

Abe leaned forward and slapped his brother on his knee. "So you got caught! Now you're like me, a felon!" he said with a cackle. "So, tell me, was your punishment as bad as what they did to me?"

Albus shook his head. "They kicked me off of the Wizengamot, evicted me from the Chief Mugwump's residence and gave me a 10,000 galleon fine. The Board of Governors placed me on probation and ordered me to never talk to Potter again."

Abe looked at him sourly. "You tried to stop an investigation and they barely touched you. I fool around with a few willing goats and get a year in Azkaban!"

Albus looked up and glared at his brother. "I was losing my job! And the more I tried to hold onto it, the more it slipped through my fingers!"

He stood abruptly and started pacing. "Everything went wrong this year. First Potter learned a fatal, but completely legal, Occlumency technique and uses it on one of my Professors. Then he rebels when he's placed into the tournament. His friends abandoned him and, unlike previous years, he refused to forgive them. Even Sirius Black refused to tell Potter to listen to me. Can't these people see I had only their welfare in mind?"

Abe snorted. When Albus turned to look at him, he shook his head. "Come on, Al, let's be honest with each other. Potter learned a few truths about his life and knew you were at the heart of most of his troubles. He wasn't raised to idolize you like so many other wizards. To Potter, you were nothing more than another controlling adult he couldn't trust, like his Aunt and Uncle. And don't feed me that line about him needing his family, Those people are no more family to him than any stranger on the street."

Abe took a deep breath then glared at his older brother. "You've been pulling that lad's strings since the day his parents died and he finally woke up to the fact that he didn't have to dance to your music. So what happened with your third task?"

Albus slipped back into his chair and stared into the fire. "Potter happened, that's what," he muttered darkly.

"Explain!"

He sighed heavily. "We had a maze filled with traps of all sorts: Acromantulas, Sphinxes, Boggarts, Hinkypunks and Rinkly Fangtooths. It was just the usual stuff, really. All the champions had to do was get to the center of the maze and pick up the trophy cup."

Abe nodded and motioned for him to continue.

"Potter entered the maze first. He had a substantial lead in points, which gained him a two minute head start."

Albus leaned back in the chair and rubbed his face tiredly. "First thing we know, there's a heavy buzzing sound coming from the maze. I was getting worried at that point, but the officials sent the other champions into the maze when their time came.

"Five minutes into the task, an acromantula crawled out of the maze missing three legs and moaning piteously. Since we held the task near the Quidditch pitch, the sound of the poor beast attracted a dozen or more wild acromantulas from the forest. It took the Aurors nearly five minutes of solid combat to beat them back. The injuries were extreme and, strangely enough, confined mostly to the press box."

Albus took a deep breath. "The first contestant to fail was from Beauxbatons: some girl who was part Veela. She had run up against a Centaur and mistakenly tried to use her Veela charm to pass him by. Unfortunately for her, Veela can't use their charm on Centaurs to knock them into a stupor. Instead, she excited him into a full rut. They pulled her from the maze after listening to her scream for ten bloody minutes. All she'd say when she was carted off to St. Mungo's was 'ees too beeg!'"

Abe hid a smirk and watched Albus carefully. He noted his brother had developed a nervous twitch under his right eye and his hands trembled every so often.

“And Potter?” he asked.

“Potter!” spat Albus. “That blasted kid cut right through the maze using a combination of animated saws and fire spells. He arrived at the center and sat down to read a book!”

“How did you know?”

“Alastor Moody pointed it out to me once we subdued the centaur. Once the girl had been removed from the maze, the centaur went off in search of someone else. He found the Durmstrang champion. That poor lad will never be the same again.

“But Potter! No, he's sitting not ten feet from the one thing that will end the tournament and drop the maze. Instead of picking up the cup, he sat there, reading! Can you believe it? Reading a book while the British Wizarding Nation becomes the laughing stock of the entire world!”

“We mounted our brooms and flew to the center of the maze. Once we landed, I asked him why he hadn't taken up the cup to signify his victory. He very smugly replied he had no intention of picking up that damn cup because he had no desire to win the tournament. I explained to him that everyone would look up to him if he'd just pick up the cup.

“He smirked at me with that oily grin of his that makes me want to strangle the little bastard and said he didn't care and the rest of the wizarding world could jump in a lake for all he cared. He knew that even if Cedric Diggory, the other Hogwarts champion, arrived, people would always know that Potter got there first and refused the cup. He was deliberately making a mockery of the tournament and me!

“I strode over to the cup with the intent of picking it up and forcing Harry to touch it, but it was a portkey!”

Abe gasped. “No! It wasn't!”

Albus nodded. “It was. I landed in a small graveyard, and the next thing I knew, I was in a duel with Alastor Moody, who was screeching insanely about me ruining his master's plans.”

Abe held up his hand. “Wait a moment! Alastor? He was working for Voldemort? I don't believe it! And isn't Voldemort dead?”

Albus wiped at his face. “Yes, Voldemort is dead. Potter saw to that. I didn't find out until much later that it wasn't Alastor I was fighting. They found Alastor, dead, locked inside his trunk. Someone had been harvesting his hair for polyjuice potion. Before I learned that, I thought I had killed a friend.”

Abe's bushy eyebrows rose to touch his hairline. “You killed him?” he exclaimed.

Albus looked at him wearily. “I didn't mean to. I tried to capture him, but he fell and hit his head against the edge of a marble headstone. Whoever it was died while locked into the polyjuiced form. The DMLE ruled it an accidental death, but it was the last straw for the Board of Governors.

“They dismissed me from my position and asked me to never return to the school.”

He fell silent, watching the fire and pondering what might have been.

“And the tournament?” asked Abe.

“It was declared a draw since no champion laid a hand on the cup, but the press made sure everyone knew who got to the cup first and who refused to pick it up.

“I had such great hopes going into this year. The tournament would challenge Harry and force him to grow up. I was sure he'd finally lose his hatred for Severus, as well.”

Abe shook his head sadly. He knew his brother would never admit that the events of the past year were mostly his doing.

“So, what's going to happen to Hogwarts now with all of the muggle born students withdrawing?”

Albus shrugged. “Who can say? The board is looking into it's options. All I do know is that Potter won't be attending and that's the best news I've heard in a long time. He's withdrawn from the school and has set up a deal for private tutors, thanks to Black. Andromeda has become his official guardian, but I hear Sirius is helping Potter. There is also a rumor that the Blacks are looking to offer a betrothal contract to the Abbots in a couple years. Whether that is true or not, I have no idea.”

Albus stood and turned unsteadily to face Aberforth. “I think I will turn in for the evening.”

Abe nodded. “You're welcome to stay here, Al,” he replied softly. He knew that Albus really wasn't a bad man, he had just come to believe in his own legend and lost sight of the importance of the people that worked for him.

He watched his brother nod, then turn and stagger from the room. He was sorry that things had gone as far as they did, but Al really did need to be knocked down a notch or two.

An elf popped into the room, looked around, then vanished again a second later. Abe smiled and looked at the fireplace. A moment later, the flames flared green and a head appeared in the fireplace. He glanced around nervously for a moment, then his eyes came to rest on Abe and he

smiled.

“Abe! How was Nepal?”

“Excellent, Samuel,” Abe said softly. “You were right about the goats, by the way.”

Samuel chuckled and shook his head. “To each their own, I say.”

“I understand that you've had a very busy year.”

Abbot grinned. “You were right. Harry turned out to be a wonderful student. He was very eager to learn and willing to listen. He came around quickly when he found that I didn't want anything more than to honestly help him.”

Abe nodded. “I always thought that would be the case with him. His father was like that. But was it necessary for so many to die?”

Samuel frowned. “Honestly, Abe, most of that was accidental. Although I will admit that Harry did surprise me. When he came up with the idea of relighting the goblet and putting just a few names in, I realized he was talking about solving most of our problems in a single stroke. It was a masterful idea.

“All of the other deaths were purely accidental, except for Snape, and that was his own fault. He assaulted a mind protected by shields and paid the price. A master of the art would have backed away and considered other options, but Snape was, at best, only a modestly talented amateur. Hannah tells me that Harry was quite upset after he got over his initial outrage at being violated like that.

“The only other thing I know that Harry did was send a couple letters. One was to recommend Morty for the position of Minister. The other was to that Muggle girl's parents, explaining what Albus did. Her parents took it from there.”

Abe nodded thoughtfully. He had figured it would be something like what his friend described. The tournament had been proven dangerous in times past and discontinued. Albus, in his misplaced wisdom, and revived the tradition, but this year had been no different. With the damage and bad press, to say nothing of the death count, it had been decided that some traditions should not be continued, and the tournament should never be held again.

“So, Harry and Hannah?” he asked with a smirk.

Sam laughed. “They make a handsome couple, and better than that Weasley girl Albus tried to force on him. She is Molly personified and would have tried to control him.”

Abe nodded grimly. It was an apt description for the girl. “So, poker this Thursday?”

“Of course. Bring your money, old friend. I'm feeling lucky!” replied Sam.

Samuel vanished from the fireplace a few minutes later and the flames returned to normal. Abe took another sip of his drink, then stood, stretched and walked out of the room. *I almost regret missing all the fun this year, he thought. But then I would have missed out on all the pleasures of Nepal.*

With a whistle, he turned off the lights and left the room, feeling better than he'd felt in a long time. Harry Potter had solved the Voldemort problem, and toppled the corrupt Ministry. The new Minister was a moderate, good natured man, who liked poker but couldn't bluff to save his life.

Potter was out from under Albus' thumb and finally beginning to live his life on his own terms. The match of Harry and Hannah was a good one that might even survive the teenage years.

He paused at the bottom of the stairs. *What next?* he mused. *Perhaps it's time to bring Sirius in and clear his name. Harry would like his real guardian back, I'm sure.*

FINI