

Title: The Henchman

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Summary: Being a Death Eater has its ups and downs.

Timeframe: One day after Voldemort returns in the graveyard in Book 4

Audience: PG-13

Category: Different Character Viewpoint

Warnings: Mild Profanity, Sexual Innuendo, Evil Violence

Length: 34 pages

## The Henchman

### Chapter 1 -- Big News

"Honey, I'm *home!*" Severin Selwyn called out as he closed the door to his small run-down cottage.

"Ya don't need ta shout; I'm right 'ere if ya bothered ta look," said his wife, Radella, from her chair at the old kitchen table, which dominated the front room of the cottage. Severin could not possibly have missed seeing her. "I could 'ave 'eard ya from the outhouse," she added and then muttered to herself so Severin could not hear her, "an probably smelled ya too... ya fishy old fart."

Severin was *not* old. In fact, he and Radella both looked relatively young. Middle age was at least ten years away.

Severin was tall and thin with strong hands and a rough but handsome face. His eyes were grey, and he had short stiff black hair. His voice was husky. He might have cut an imposing figure, but his wizard's robes were old and stained.

Radella was average height and quite attractive, with bright blue eyes, slender nose and full lips. Her hair was shiny brown, long and carefully braided. She had fair skin and her voice was melodic, despite a very thick accent. Her clothes were old but clean, however she did not wear witch's robes. Instead, she wore what appeared to be a festive peasant costume from a Muggle fairy tale, which showed off her ample curves.

Severin chuckled, "You won't get me going today, Dell. I've got good news... *really* good news."

"Yer imaginary uncle died 'n left us a fortune? No, wait... Ya won first prize in the 'My Favorite Death Eater' essay contest in the Daily Prophet," said Radella sarcastically.

"Oh, much better than that... *much* better." Severin grinned and raised his eyebrows.

"Well, I'm all guessed out," said Radella sullenly. She was not rising to the occasion.

"OK then... Hee's baaack!" proclaimed Severin, still standing, throwing his arms wide and stamping one foot like an actor on stage.

"Who's back?" asked Radella, genuinely puzzled.

"The Dark Lord, of course... He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named... You-Know-Who..." Severin said, sounding a little disappointed that Radella had not understood.

"Voldemort? I thought 'e were dead," she said matter-of-factly.

"Dell...! Don't say the *NAME!*" he shouted.

Radella just stared at him.

"Well, we all thought he was dead, didn't we? But now he's *back*, Dell," he declared.

"Ow'd ya know?" she challenged.

"I heard it from Crabbe," responded Severin. "He says he saw the Dark Lord himself. First, Crabbe' says his Dark Mark burned. So, then he Disapparated like in the old days; then he was with the Dark Lord and the other Death Eaters in an old graveyard."

Radella scoffed. "Severin, 're ya believin' Crabbe? 'E's yankin' yer chain."

“No, no. The word’s going around. Even Dumbledore is telling everyone it happened. And this time, my sweet, we’re gonna make it *big!*” he exclaimed.

“I’ll believe that when I see it. That’s what ya said the last time. We’re still livin’ in *my* parents’ cottage -- may they rest in peace.” She bowed her head for a moment, and then added, “An’ ya haven’t ’xactly set the world on fire since yer parents disowned ya.”

“I know. But you know I love *you* more than my family inheritance. This time will be different, I promise,” he said earnestly.

“But ya said Voldemort was a loser,” Radella reminded him.

“Dell, please stop saying the *name!* ...Anyway, that’s because I thought he was dead -- killed by a baby, no less. But now he’s back, and that shows how powerful he really is.”

“Yer believin’ *that?* Maybe ’e were on ’oliday or just predendin’ -- so ’e could be makin’ a big comeback claimin’ ’e beat death?”

“On holiday? You can’t be serious,” scoffed Severin.

“Then what about the stories from ’Ogwarts school... couple years ’go. The Potter kid kicked ’is bee-hind again -- twice. If that really ’appened, ’e sure weren’t dead.”

“Well, nobody *important* believed that stuff,” said Severin. “It’s just Dumbledore propaganda to make the Potter kid look good.”

“That’s what *yooo* say,” retorted Radella. “Everyone knows the Potter kid beat ’im when ’e’s just a baby. Maybe yer Dark Lord just ran off in shame then.”

“Well, it doesn’t matter *now*. You wait and see. This time, I’m going to be a *Death Eater*. I’m a Selwyn, one of the Sacred Twenty-Eight pure blood families,” Severin said proudly.

“An’ ya work fer a *fishmonger* now, don’t ya? An’ speakin’ of that, where’s our fish fer dinner?” Radella asked, looking at him sharply.

“Uh... I forgot,” Severin admitted. “I rushed home to tell you the good news.” He had the look of a small boy who had just been caught doing something wrong.

“Well ya just turn 'round and get that Sacred Twenty-Eight butt of yers out that door and get my fish... or it's sleepin' in the shed fer ya.”

“Right away, dear.” He turned and hurried out.

“Stupid fool,” she said, shaking her head.

## Chapter 2 -- Pledge

“Dell, Dell, wait 'til you hear!” Severin announced excitedly as he came through the front door a few days later.

“What's it *this* time?” Radella asked absently, sitting in her usual place at the kitchen table looking out the window.

“I'm a *pledge!*” he said proudly.

She turned to look at him. “Yer a what?”

“A pledge, a pledge... a pledge Death Eater! The Dark Lord needs more D.E.s... I told you yester...”

“Dee Eees?” asked Radella, cutting across him.

“Yes, D.E.s -- Death Eaters -- that's the abbreviation we use,” he explained excitedly.

Radella scoffed. “And I bet ya got some secret 'andshake too,” she mocked, waving her hand and wiggling her fingers at him.

“Never mind that. The Dark Lord needs more D.E.s because most of them are still in Azkaban... So, he's accepting new pledges. Lucius Malfoy briefed us,” said Severin, still sounding excited. Then he added derisively, “What an arrogant puffed-up peacock *he* is, the rich bastard.

“Lem'me see yer Dark Mark then, Mr Big Shot,” Radella said mockingly.

“Um... I haven't got one yet,” said Severin, sounding a little embarrassed. “I'm a *pledge*. You've got to do things to prove your loyalty and worthiness.”

“Like what?” said Radella, now sounding a little more interested.

“Oh... nothing *big*... like maybe... just blasting a bridge or killing some Muggles,” he said casually, waiving one hand.

Severin continued to stand while he talked. He was prone to do this when he was excited.

“Is *that* all?” Radella said, sounding disappointed. She folded her arms and leaned back in her chair.

“Well, I thought I'd kill a whole *bunch* of Muggles... you know, for extra credit,” Severin said, trying to be more impressive.

“Ya can do that nasty porcine Mrs Nose-in-the-Air down the lane fer me. I'd like ta do 'er m'self,” snarled Radella.

“That's too close to home. The Ministry would suspect...” Severin cautioned.

“*The Ministry would suspect?*” she said in a mocking voice. “An' ya wanna be a *Dee Eee?* Don't make me laugh.”

“The Dark Lord's instructions are to keep things quiet for now while he builds support. The Ministry is denying he's back,” he said defensively.

“Sounds fishy ta me... Maybe You-Know-Who isn't really back then. Maybe this's a clever ruse by Malfoy 'n 'is old pals to build themselves up. 'Ave ya seen *Old Voldy* yet?” she jeered.

Despite her mocking question, Radella had finally realized this was not just another one of Severin's wild stories.

Severin cringed, exclaiming “Don't say *that!* It's worse than saying the *name*.”

“Voldemort, Voldemort, VOLDEMORT!” she taunted.

“Stop, *please!*” He cried, holding his hands over his ears.

“So, 'ave ya *seen* 'im yet?” she repeated.

“Well, no,” he admitted, but quickly added, “But I will at the initiation ceremony,” before Radella could make another snide remark. But she did anyway.

“Initiation ceremony! Yer kiddin'? Fer grown men?” Radella taunted.

“No, I'm *not* kidding. It's secret of course. But obviously that's when the Dark Lord gives you the Dark Mark. Crabbe -- he's my sponsor -- says there are other things too, but he won't tell me what,” responded Severin, sounding a bit concerned.

“Are ya gettin' *paid*?” Radella said, changing the subject.

“Paid?” He looked shocked at the idea.

“Yea... *Paid*.... Ya know, with money... gold... galleons... *ta live on*. We're poor if ya 'adn't noticed,” said Radella, now very serious.

“The Dark Lord doesn't *pay* his followers. Are you mental?” Severin said looking dumbfounded.

“Then what's the point o' all this?” asked Radella holding her arms out wide. “If all I'm 'sposed get outta this is strutin' 'bout in my worn out ol' clothes 'n tellin' the neighbors, 'Ya better watch out, *my* 'usband's a poncy *Dee Eee* now,’ then you got another thing commin'...” She glared at him and then added, “An' where's my fish fer dinner?”

“Uh... pledging is going to take up a lot of my time now. So... I... quit-my-job.” He said the last bit very fast as if hoping she might somehow miss it.

“Ya WHAT!” she screamed. “An' what're we goin' ta *eat!*”

“Leftovers?” he suggested lamely.

“Well, there's none fer *yooo!*” she snapped.

“Darling...” he cooed, attempting to make peace.

Radella had had enough. "If ya like spendin' so much time with *Crabbe*, why don't ya just go 'n see if 'e's got a place fer ya at 'is fancy dinner table? ...An' a *bed* too!"

"But dear..." Severin pleaded.

"Out *now!*" she pointed at the door brandishing her wand, "or I'll curse yer wrinkle off."

### Chapter 3 -- Peace Offering

Radella was sitting at the kitchen table as usual a month later when the front door latch lifted, and the door creaked open about six inches. She was about to blast whoever it was with her wand, when a fancy gloved hand reached through holding a large leather pouch. It looked heavy and was making a wonderful jingling sound as the hand shook it.

Radella jumped up from the table, ran to the door and snatched the pouch. The weight of it made her shudder in anticipation as she opened it and looked in -- at the gleaming gold Galleons. The sack must be holding at least a hundred.

The door slowly swung open. A tall, hooded man in a bronze mask and shiny black robes was standing there in a commanding pose with his elbows out and his clenched fists on his hips.

"Oh, very kind sir... please do come into my humble cottage," Radella said slowly and distinctly in a sultry voice, beckoning him with her free hand.

The man strode through the door with confident strides and stopped before her.

Radella looked adoringly up at the masked face and said breathlessly, "What can I *do* for you, sir? And I do mean *do*."

She fluttered her eyelashes and slowly reached her free hand toward his private regions.

"Radella!" gasped the man in shock.

“Severin!” gasped Radella in surprise.

“What’s going on?” he demanded as he removed the bronze mask.

“I... I...” she spluttered, then recovering quickly, said “I thought yer wantin’ ta play some fantasy game with me,”.

“You didn’t *know* it was me... You were going to... to... *do a stranger* ...for some *gold!*” he said accusingly.

“Never!” exclaimed Radella. “Course I knew it was ya,” she said, trying to sound convincing.

“And what happened to your accent just then?” he said suspiciously.

“What accent?” she said dismissively.

“Your uneducated country bumpkin accent... the one I fell in love with.” He paused. “Just now, with... *him*, you sounded like some primping ingénue. So, you can speak *properly* if you want to.”

“I don’t know what ya mean,” she retorted sounding offended.

“Come on... tell the truth. What’s going on?” he demanded.

“OK. OK. I’ve been practicing talking like you,” she admitted, explaining, “Because Mrs Nose-in-the Air is always makin’ fun ‘o me. But it’s *hard*. I repeat everyday talk over and over until I sound like you.” Radella intentionally did not explain why she had invited a stranger inside for... services.

Severin said approvingly, “Well, that’s wonderful! Losing your accent will make it easier for you to socialize with the D.E. wives. Please keep practicing. I’ll help you if you want,” he offered. But then he turned sullen. “Radella... you haven’t explained why you invited a *stranger*...”

Radella was not going to discuss it, so she cut across him and went on the offensive, raising her voice with her own accusation. “An’ what’s this with *yooo*? Ya been gone fer *weeks!* Not so much as a by yer leave and then ya come prancin’ back in ‘ere lookin’ like some puffed up *gentleman*.”



“You kicked me out!” he protested.

“It’s ’nough ta give a lady an ’eart attack,” she complained, ignoring him while placing her hands on her breast and looking injured.

“It didn’t look like a heart attack to me,” he growled, and under his breath muttered, “And you’re no *lady*.”

Radella heard him, but decided it was best to ignore it, demanding, “Are ya gonna keep me in s’spense or tell me what’s goin’ on?”

This brought Severin out of his sullen mood. His face suddenly lit up and he proclaimed with a broad smile, “I’m a Death Eater!”

#### Chapter 4 -- Easy Money

Severin pulled up the left sleeve of his robe and showed Radella his forearm. There was a vivid red tattoo, or perhaps a scar, of a skull with a snake coming out of its mouth.

He said, “It turns black and burns when the Dark Lord calls or sends a message.”

“*That’s* the Dark Mark?” she said sounding surprised. Then she laughed, “I was ’xpectin’ an ’eart with ‘*Sevy Loves Voldy*’ written across it.”

“That smart mouth of yours is going to get us *killed* some day,” warned Severin.

“OK. OK... So what ’appened?” she asked, actually sounding interested.

Severin sat down at the kitchen table and Radella joined him.

“After I left you, I went to see Crabbe. He let me stay in his grounds keeper’s cottage. Then he showed me how to get on and let me go out on my own. It’s incredible; you won’t believe it... You go find a rich Muggle. You use the Imperius Curse and have them bring you some of their funny paper money. Then you take it to Gringotts and trade it for Galleons. It takes a pretty big pile of the paper money for each Galleon, but there are a *lot* of rich Muggles... You don’t want to kill *them*, the rich ones -- only the poor ones.”

“Yer pullin’ my leg,” scoffed Radella.

“I told you; you wouldn’t believe it, but it’s true. I thought the same thing when Crabbe was telling me about it. Then he showed me. I asked him why not just use *Geminio* to duplicate the Muggle money, but he said the Goblins can tell the difference and will stop doing business with you if you try it.”

“So ’ow much’ve ya got?” asked Radella greedily.

“I’ve lost count,” he said proudly. “It’s all in Gringotts.”

“An’ ya let me sit ’ere ’ungry, in rags while ya lived the good life fer the last month,” she said angrily.

“No. No. I couldn’t come back. I wasn’t a Death Eater yet. I had *Pledge* assignments. I had to get gold -- most of it goes for D.E. dues and the D.E. Pension Fund. The Finance and Revenue blokes are strict. If they don’t get their cut, it’s a big fine -- or worse. You don’t dare freelance. It actually got boring pretty fast. But then... I got to *kill* a few Muggles... *that* was fun. I did mine mostly up north. Each Pledge is assigned their own area to draw less attention.”

Then Severin laughed and said, “Muggles are so surprised when they realize there are real wizards. You do a few hexes -- humiliation works best -- to let it sink in a bit, then you *Crucio* them until they are begging for the big one -- *The K.C.*”

When Radella looked puzzled, he added, “The K.C. -- the killing curse -- *Avada Kedavra*, of course... We call it the K.C.”

“Why don’t you call it ‘The A.K.’ instead?” she asked.

“Well, I don’t *know*... Maybe it sounds too close to OK...? Who cares?” he said, sounding a bit irritated.

He went on, “Then I was invited to the Initiation Ceremony. There were three of us Pledges there, each with our sponsors. The only Pledge I knew was Gibbon; he’s a boot licker if I ever saw one. Goyle was his sponsor. Avery was the other sponsor. His Pledge, whoever he was, really looked nervous. Anyway, Malfoy comes in with the Dark Lord.” Severin suddenly shuddered.

“He is... it’s hard to describe” said Severin sounding nervous. “He’s beyond creepy looking. His skin is deathly white. He’s got no nose, just slits for nostrils. His eyes are red; and they bore right into you. He’s also got this high-pitched ringing voice, which I never expected. And he’s got this enormous pet snake -- and when I say enormous, I mean *gi-normous*. It follows him around. It...” His voice trailed off and his eyes seemed to unfocus.

“Then what?” Radella prompted.

Severin shook his head and continued. “Uh... So, we’re standing there, and we pledged our devotion, loyalty, obedience and willingness to sacrifice our lives in his service under pain of death, including for our entire families...”

“What?” exclaimed Radella.

“Dell, there’s nothing to worry about. It’s a routine pledge at this level of power. We’re on the *inside* now. Everything’s good. You’ll see. Calm down.” Severin clearly believed what he was saying.

Radella was not so sure.

“So, once we took the pledge, the Dark Lord stared at each one of us. I could feel him reading my mind. I never experienced anything like it before. I could tell the other pledges felt the same way. Then he had us hold out our left arms. He used his wand to curse the Dark Mark on. He did mine first. It really burned but I didn’t move a muscle. Then he did Gibbon, who flinched. So the Dark Lord kept burning it on him for at least a minute until Gibbon was in tears. Finally, he looked at Avery’s Pledge and laughed. It sent chills down my spine.”

Severin paused. He put his hands on the table and stared straight ahead. “He used the Cruciatus Curse on Avery’s Pledge until I could hear bones break from the muscle contractions. But the Dark Lord didn’t kill him. Oh... no... He called his snake and had the snake eat him alive -- swallowed him whole, headfirst, which was good, because it stopped the screaming sooner.”

“Yer... jokin’...” gasped Radella with a look of horror on her face.

“I’m not,” said Severin very seriously. “We had to watch the whole thing. I almost lost my lunch. It was nauseating. The Dark Lord didn’t explain why he did it. I can only guess he must have read something in the last Pledge’s mind he didn’t like.

Anyway, then he dismissed Avery. The rest of had dinner with the Dark Lord and the other Death Eaters to *celebrate*. I didn't have any appetite. Fortunately, the wine helped settle my nerves. I didn't say anything. Malfoy, the pompous ass, did most of the talking with the Dark Lord."

Severin appeared to have finished his story and sat back in his chair.

"Clearly, Voldemort's a complete nutter," said Radella matter-of-factly.

"Are you out of your *mind*?" he exclaimed. "Don't say things like that, Dell."

"Ya think that's normal -- the 'Allowe'en face an' the snake bit?" she asked incredulously.

"Alright, he's a *bit* mental," admitted Severin, "but he *is not* someone you'd even think about pissing off."

"So now yer a big bad *Dee Eee*. Look what ya got us into. I hope yer satisfied," Radella said with derision.

"So, you're turning down the gold, the new clothes, the new house and divorcing me then?" he asked smugly, raising his eyebrows.

"New *clothes*... new *house*?" she whispered.

He nodded. "*And* a house-elf..." he proclaimed proudly.

"A *house-elf*!" she shrieked.

She raced around the table, jumped into his lap and hugged him.

"So maybe the Dark Lord isn't so bad after all?" he asked with a sly grin on his face.

"All I know is... yer the *greatest*!" she exclaimed and kissed him.

## Chapter 5 -- The Good Life

“Bad day, dear?” crooned Radella as Severin came slumping into the finely appointed drawing room of their London townhouse.

“Didn’t you see the Daily Prophet,” he groaned as he collapsed into his favorite large, overstuffed leather armchair by the fire.

The Prophet was laying on the settee next to her. The headline read, ‘*Mass Breakout from Azkaban*’.

“What could be bad about more of yer Dee Eee friends gettin’ free?” asked Radella.

“Dell, these were his *favorites* -- the ones who kept fighting and didn’t disavow him when he... disappeared. It means I’m being pushed lower down in the pecking order. I’ll never get a seat at the high table now,” he said dejectedly.

“There were only ten,” she said encouragingly.

“Only *ten*,” he groaned. “That’s more than the Dark Lord usually invites for dinner...”

“...at the Malfoy’s,” she finished.

“Wait...” said Severin, surprised. “How did you know the Dark Lord is operating out of Malfoy’s place? It’s supposed to be a secret... That’s why I haven’t told you where I work.”

“Um... I might of ‘eard people talkin’ about it in Nocturne Alley. Maybe they were guessin’,” Radella said offhandedly, looking away. Then she suddenly looked back at him and said, “No... Yoo told me Malfoy was at yer initiation. So, I assumed ya were at Malfoy Manor.” She smiled sweetly.

“Well, don’t repeat it to *anyone*,” he said sternly. “Fortunately, the Ministry isn’t even looking for the Dark Lord.” Then he laughed. “That Fudge is an idiot. His blindness is helping us. The only ones we need to worry about are the Order of the Phoenix, especially Dumbledore.”

Severin continued, “Anyway, the Dark Lord called a big meeting of all the D.E.s to celebrate the breakout and meet them. You’d have thought it was his *birthday*. And there’s one, Bellatrix Lestrange; she makes me *sick*. She practically drools

looking at him, and right in front of her husband, Rodolphus -- the cuckold. She'd wipe the Dark Lord's backside if he asked her -- 'ass-uming'... he even has one."

He snorted at his own pun, then added, "You know, I don't think the Dark Lord ever changes his robes. He's always wearing the same one."

"This isn't like ya, Severin," said Radella sounding concerned.

Severin moaned. "Oh, Dell... You work hard. You play by the rules. And what does it get you? ...Just a kick in the teeth."

He shook his head sadly. "I got *disinvited* from whatever the Dark Lord is planning -- something big. He's replaced Gibbon and me with Dolohov and Rookwood. I'm a pure blood too, probably purer than half of them. But they're his *favorites*. It isn't fair." He pouted quite visibly.

Radella moved from her seat to cuddle with him in his chair.

"Sevy, you'll always be *my* favorite Dee Eee, no matter what," she crooned. "Ya just keep on workin' hard -- killin' Muggles, blowin' up bridges, and bringin' in the gold. And before ya know it, you'll have a place at the high table."

"You really think so?" he said hopefully.

"I know so," she said positively. "After dinner, I'll send the house-elf away, and I'll let ya do that special thing ya like -- right here in front of the fire."

"Oh Dell, I don't deserve you. How about tomorrow night too?" He asked slyly.

"Don't push it," she said sweetly.

## Chapter 6 -- Back on Top in June

"Dell, wake up!" Severin was standing over Radella shaking her shoulder as she lay snoring loudly in their luxurious bed.

She jerked up, half awake and shouted, "Hurry! Go before my..." Then stopped and let her eyes focus, before saying groggily, "What's goin' on?"

“What did you mean when you said ‘Hurry, go before my...’ just now? ‘My...’ what?” he asked suspiciously.

“I don’t know what yer talkin’ about. Ya must be imaginin’ things,” she retorted, now wide awake.

“No. Just now when I woke you, you said...” he persisted.

Radella cut across him yelling, “*Well, I don’t know!* It must have been a dream. Did ya decide to wake me up just to have an argument?”

“Of course not... I have important news,” he said, backing down.

“Well, tell me then,” sighed Radella, “I want to go back to sleep. I had a very busy day.”

“OK. Remember the big plan I told you about the Dark Lord’s been working on the last few months?” Severin said, his excitement returning.

“The one they cut ya out of?” she asked.

“The very one. Well, it went down tonight. And it was a complete... *disaster!*” he exclaimed and then let out a belly laugh.

“I was pulling staff duty tonight when the team assembled and left. The Dark Lord was there to see them off, so it was definitely a big deal. He said to them all, ‘Don’t fail me.’ And to Malfoy in particular, he said, ‘Don’t come back without the Prophecy.’ *A Prophecy, Dell!*” he exclaimed. “The Dark Lord was after a Prophecy in the Department of Mysteries at the Ministry of Magic,” and then added, sounding puzzled, “though, I don’t know why.”

He continued, “Well, after they left, the Dark Lord paced for about twenty minutes without saying anything. He got more agitated as time passed. Then he said something to himself which sounded like ‘too important not to see to it myself’ and Disappeared. It was pretty quiet for about an hour -- just a few D.E.s reporting their daily status.”

“Then the Dark Lord Apparated into the room holding Bellatrix and threw her to the floor. He started using the Cruciatus Curse on her. He screamed about the failure and the incompetence of her and Malfoy and the team he’d picked.”

“Well, this brought everyone into the room, including Narcissa. Bellatrix was crying and screaming. Narcissa pleaded with The Dark Lord to ease up on her, but he gave Narcissa a dose of the Cruciatus too. I think if Malfoy had returned too, the Dark Lord would have killed him on the spot. He was insane with anger.” Severin sucked his breath in through his teeth at the thought of it.

Then he finished, “Well, it’s a long story, but here’s the gist of it -- the plan *failed*. They didn’t get the Prophecy, instead it was accidentally destroyed. And, if you can believe it, Dumbledore and the Order of the Phoenix showed up and captured the entire team except for Bellatrix. But that’s not all. Harry Potter and some of his friends were in the fight too. And last but not least, The Dark Lord showed up at the Ministry as Bellatrix was trying to escape. He failed to kill the Potter kid *again* and ended up fighting Dumbledore. But he had to save Bellatrix and leave when Fudge and a bunch of Aurors arrived to help Dumbledore and Potter. I’m sure it will be headlines in the Daily Prophet tomorrow.”

Severin was so excited he could hardly contain himself. He almost seemed out of breath after telling the story.

“Severin, why are ya so happy?” asked Radella. “It was a disaster. Now everyone’ll know Voldemort’s back and the Ministry’s been coverin’ it up for a year.”

Severin did not even react to Radella using the Dark Lord’s name.

“Don’t you see, Dell? Eleven D.E.s are going back to Azkaban. I’ll be moving up again in seniority. I only wish Bellatrix had been caught too.”

“Are ya sure the high table is that important to ya?” asked Radella. “The more I hear about your boss, the less I like. Remember your initiation pledge -- it’s my neck too.”

“You worry too much,” he chided.

She changed the subject, “Why don’t ya come to bed?”

“No, no. I only came home to tell you the good news. You get your sleep. I’m going back. I don’t want to lose this opportunity for some face time during the



crisis. I need to be of as much help as I can be getting things reorganized.” He was clearly excited.

“Dell, we are on our way *back up again!*” he declared triumphantly, punching the air with his fist as he turned and left the bedroom.

## Chapter 7 -- Another Bump in the Road

“What do I need *to do?*” complained Severin as he flopped down in his big armchair by the fire.

“What is it this time?” droned Radella.

“The Dark Lord has made Bellatrix his second in command to replace Malfoy. Can you believe it? Bellatrix! Only two weeks ago he was torturing her!” he exclaimed.

“Well, I hear she’s a pretty powerful witch,” she responded. “And wasn’t she the only one of the twelve who escaped from the Ministry?”

“But only because the Dark Lord saved her,” he countered. “Doesn’t loyalty count for anything anymore?”

“Well, you said she practically worshiped him. With her husband back in Azkaban, maybe she’s doin’ Voldemort some special *favours*, if ya know what I mean... and he’s rewardin’ her,” suggested Radella.

“The Dark Lord doing it with Bellatrix?” He laughed. “I don’t think he’s looked at a woman in his life.”

“Are ya sayin’ Voldemort’s a pouf?” she said in shock.

“No. No, not at all,” answered Severin, clearly amused. Then he said very seriously, “I think the only thing that gets him excited is inflicting pain, both physical and mental. You should see him when he does it. He loves doing it. You know Wormtail -- Pettigrew -- the traitor from the Order of the Phoenix. He’s the Dark Lord’s personal assistant -- more of a servant really. He’s the one who found the Dark Lord in Albania and helped him come back to life; gave up his right hand to do it. You’d think the Dark Lord would be grateful. Instead, he treats

him like crap -- constantly humiliating him in front of everyone. And he loves doing it. Pretty sick if you ask me.”

“Are ya friends with Wormtail?” she asked.

“Are you *mad*?” Severin said reproachfully. “Why would I want to be friends with someone the Dark Lord picks on? Wormtail is shunned by everyone.”

Radella did not respond.

So Severin continued, “But that *effing* snake is the worst. I didn’t think big snakes ate that much, but this one does. It mainly gets fed Muggles, but if you screw up badly enough, he’ll feed *you* to the snake. And he’ll sit there grinning and watch the whole thing. He talks to it too -- Parseltongue, of course.” He shuddered.

Radella shuddered too. “Let’s not talk about that, if you don’t mind.”

“Right... I got off track,” Severin agreed. “As I was saying, Bellatrix is second. Travers has been made third and I’ve been assigned to him.”

“Well that’s good isn’t it? That means you’re fourth. And I hear Travers is nice.” She blushed involuntarily but Severin did not notice.

“No. I’m just his assistant. His main job is to manage the other D.E.s -- hand out duties and assignments. Bellatrix is above all that, she just hangs near the Dark Lord and passes his instructions to Travers.”

“Well, it’s better than what ya were doin’ before, right.” She said encouragingly.

“I suppose,” he admitted.

“Then quit complainin’ and just work hard. You’ll get to the high table sooner than you think. I’m sure of it,” she said encouragingly.

“You think so?” he asked hopefully.

“I do!” she said emphatically.

“Oh, there’s something else I forgot to mention... quite funny really.” He let out a giggle. “The Dark Lord has made the Malfoy’s kid, Draco, a Death Eater -- supposedly to take his father’s place now that he’s in Azkaban.”

“But he’s still in school, isn’t he?” she asked.

“He’ll be starting sixth year next month,” he responded.

“So what’s so funny then?” she asked not seeing any joke.

“His first assignment, directly from the Dark Lord himself, is...” he paused quite long for dramatic effect “... to *kill* Albus Dumbledore.”

They both laughed until their sides ached.

## Chapter 8 -- She Works Hard Too

“Did you have a good day, Dell?” asked Severin as he settled into his chair by the fire.

“Very nice. And you?” Radella inquired politely.

“Oh, pretty routine. Travers has me very busy. He’s having me handle the duty roster for him now and brief the D.E.s on routine assignments. I’m sorry it means working longer hours...”

“Nonsense!” she replied quickly. “If that’s what it takes for you to get that seat at the high table, I support you one hundred percent.”

“You’re a pearl without price, Dell. I see you’ve been working hard too,” he said teasingly.

“What do you mean?” she said a little nervously.

“Well, I think your accent is finally gone. It’s been almost two years that you’ve been working on it. Now that we’re rubbing elbows with the Dark Magic elite, being able to speak like them is important. I really appreciate that you recognized it and worked to correct it. I’m *proud* of you,” he said with sincere admiration.

Radella blushed. "Thank you, dear. I have been practicing a lot with... uh... the house-elf."

"Oh, speaking of Travers, I saw him just outside on the street as I was coming in. This is quite a bit out of his way, so I was surprised. I almost asked him in for dinner, but I didn't want to catch you unprepared. How about it if we have him over sometime this week?" he said thoughtfully.

"That would be lovely," she replied, still blushing, and sounding a little out of breath.

"Good. Why don't you schedule a time that will be good for the two of you," he said cheerfully.

Radella smiled and her eyes twinkled. "I shall -- right away!"

## Chapter 9 -- Lost Opportunity

"I've been cut out *again!*" Severin wailed. "It wasn't my fault Travers got captured again. It's like they're blaming me. I should have taken Travers place -- but no, Bellatrix selected Rowle instead and then he picked Gibbon for his assistant. You haven't met Rowle; he's..."

"Isn't he the big muscley blond one?" she asked innocently, interrupting him. "I think someone pointed him out to me in Nocturne Alley."

"He's a stupid gorilla. Now, I'm back where I was a year ago," he said angrily.

This time Severin had not made it to his chair by the fire. He just stood in the doorway to the drawing room looking dejected.

"I am very sorry about Travers; he was one of my favorites too," said Radella sympathetically. "But you will just have to move on and find another client... I mean, mentor," she said quickly, correcting herself.

"Face it, Dell, I'm bad luck. Crabbe was my sponsor. He ends up in Azkaban. Travers was my boss. Now he's back in Azkaban too."

“Nonsense, bad luck comes in threes,” she corrected. “That’s only two. And if you ask me, they got the worst end of it. You are still here, fighting the good fight for pure blood domination,” she said proudly.

“You’re wrong. I just haven’t told you the third one yet.” His shoulders sagged as he said, “There’s going to be another big operation, and I’ve been cut out again, this time by Rowle. He picked Gibbon over me... Did you know a *Gibbon* is a type of monkey? I’ve been replaced by a monkey,” he whined.

“You are digressing again, Severin,” she scolded. “What big operation?”

“Well... It’s a secret. But, what the hell, I’ll tell you since I’ve been cut out.” He paused and then said, “We’re going after Dumbledore at Hogwarts.”

Radella gasped. “You’ve got to be kidding. How will you... I mean *they*... get in? It’s so well protected.”

“I hate to admit it, but Malfoy’s kid has figured out a way in. He’s got a Vanishing Cabinet in Borgin and Burkes to connect to another one inside Hogwarts. They’re simply going to walk into Hogwarts and help Draco kill Dumbledore. Rowle’s got the Carrows, Yaxley, Gibbon of course, and, if you can believe it, Fenrir Greyback.”

“The *Werewolf*? You’re joking,” said Radella in amazement.

“I’m not. He creeps me out more than the snake. Until now, the Dark Lord has only used him for extortion. He’s not even a real Death Eater; just dresses like one. I wonder if the Dark Lord even knows Rowle is using him. *I* should be going instead of him. It’s not fair, Dell.” Severin’s shoulders sagged even more.

Radella had never seen him as dejected.

“What is it about me that keeps holding me back?” he moaned.

She did not answer. Instead, she got up, walked over and took his hands.

“I think it’s time for another of my *special favors*.” And she led him over to the expensive oriental carpet in front of the fire.

## Chapter 10 -- Unfortunate Success

“Damn. Damn. Damn.” Severin sat in his chair by the fire, his head hung low, whacking himself on the forehead with his wand with each word.

“I wish you’d stop doing that,” Radella said testily, nearing her limit. “You’ve been at it for half an hour, and I don’t see what the problem is. Dumbledore is dead. So what if Snape killed him instead of Draco. Plus, Gibbon is dead and Yaxley got caught. You have experience as the number three’s assistant. They are sure to select you for it again,” she said confidently.

Severin stopped whacking himself. “You think so?” he asked hopefully.

But before Radella could answer, he continued, his voice now angry. “I wanted them to *fail!* I wanted them to fail, and all go to Azkaban so I would move up again. Now they’re heroes because they got Dumbledore. The Dark Lord doesn’t even care that Draco chickened out.”

“And then there’s Snape... You were home schooled, Dell; you never *had* him. He’s a bastard. I was a Slytherin, but he never liked me. He said I was hopeless. He still looks at me the same way. You know what he said to me today? He said, ‘I see you haven’t changed, Selwyn.’ I wanted to curse his bloody face off.”

“He’s now the Dark Lord’s right hand man, you know. That’s right, above Bellatrix. She hates him too; it’s unmistakable. We all knew he was the Dark Lord’s spy. He used to come around now and then, but he only ever met privately with the Dark Lord. But now he’s in every damn meeting. He looks down his hooked nose at everyone, but especially *me*.” Severin hung his head even lower.

“You can’t let this get to you, Sevy,” she said caringly.

He ignored her.

“You know what else?” he continued. “They have a bunch of agents in the Ministry. Thicknesse is one. I didn’t know. Nobody tells me anything anymore.”

He started whacking himself on the forehead again as he moaned, “I think they’re getting close to taking over the Ministry. You know what that means? It means that everyone is going to get out of Azkaban and I’m going to be a *nobody* again.”

“You’re a Death Eater. That is going to mean a lot in the new regime,” she said encouragingly.

He continued to ignore her.

“I’ve got *one* chance. The Potter kid is going to turn seventeen at the end of the month. He’s holed up at his home somewhere in Little Winging; but all the protection around him breaks when he turns. So we’re going to be waiting. I’ve got to capture him, Dell. If I do, the Dark Lord will give me anything I want.”

“I think you’re putting too much pressure on yourself, Sevy. This isn’t good.” She paused and then said slyly, “Why don’t you let me perform one of my *special favors* for you?”

He ignored her and kept whacking himself on the forehead.

## Chapter 11 -- The Worst Day Ever

“I don’t know why you stay with me, Dell,” said Severin dejectedly, slowly shaking his head.

Severin had not slept well for days, and it showed. He had also hardly eaten. He was standing in front of the fire staring into the flames wearing only his underwear.

Radella was sitting on the couch. She had stopped trying to get him to talk four days ago. Now she just waited and listened.

“I discovered the *real* Harry Potter, you know. I did.” His voice was strained. “They had sent up six decoys -- very clever -- using Polyjuice Potion. But I figured out the one my team was chasing was the real one -- it was the spell he used -- *Expelliarmus*. We were told it was his signature spell. He had even used it on the Dark Lord himself before. So, I called the Dark Lord using my Dark Mark, the first time I’d ever done it. And then two other Death Eaters and I were chasing Potter together with the Dark Lord. Did you know the Dark Lord can fly without a broom? It scared the hell out of me. Do we really have any concept of what he can do...?” He paused, shaking his head in wonder.

Then he continued. "Well, the two other Death Eaters were taken out. Then the Dark Lord and I caught up, and he dueled with Potter and -- I still can't believe it -- the kid *destroyed* the Dark Lord's wand. He didn't just knock it out of his hand -- he *utterly* destroyed it. Now, it was *actually* Lucius Malfoy's wand and not the Dark Lord's wand. Don't ask me to explain the wand business, I don't understand it myself. And I'm thinking, how is this possible? Is this Potter kid really the Chosen One? If not, how is it possible that he can so easily defeat the most powerful Dark Wizard ever -- one who can *fly*...?"

Severin suddenly looked stricken as he continued, "Then the Dark Lord looked over at me and screamed, '**Selwyn, give me your wand.**'"

"I panicked. I hesitated... I hesitated, but for only a split second, at most. It's the first time he had talked to me directly since my initiation. By the time I reacted and gave my wand to him, Potter had disappeared through a protective enchantment... We assume it was around one of the dozen or so safe houses Snape said the Order of the Phoenix are using."

Severin took a deep breath and finished, "The Dark Lord screamed and screamed in anger. I thought he was going to kill me. I'll never forget the look he gave me. But then he snapped my wand and Disapparated."

Severin paused for a long time and looked as if he was reliving everything in his mind. Then he said dejectedly, "There was no one else around that I could see, so I flew home on the broomstick."

He fell silent and put his head in his hands. He moaned, "I don't know what to do."

"Maybe you should contact someone you trust," Radella suggested. "How long can you sit at home? It's been almost a week. I'm glad you finally decided to tell me what happened."

"You're right, of course. I've got to do *something*." After a few seconds he said, "I'll send an owl to Travers."

"Travers!" gasped Radella. "I thought he was in Azkaban."

"Oh, I forgot to mention it," Severin said absently, "The Dark Lord secured the full allegiance of the Dementors a few days before Potter made his break, and they



released all the D.E.s from Azkaban. They were all pressed into the plan to catch Potter. Of course, there's no chance now I'll ever get a seat at the high table, especially having failed the Dark Lord. I'll be lucky if he doesn't have me tortured and killed."

Radella did not seem to hear his last statement.

"Oh, yes, send Travers an owl immediately," she said excitedly, quickly summoning parchment, ink and quill.

She helped Severin compose the letter, which diplomatically asked if it were safe for him to return to work. Once completed, she said, "You go get some rest. I'll send the letter."

As he started to walk out of the living room, Severin stopped, turned to face Radella and said, "There's one more thing I forgot to tell you and it's *important*, so please listen for once... The Dark Lord's name has had a Taboo Hex put on it. If you say it, it will alert the D.E.s, and they'll have Snatchers on you in about two seconds to haul you in."

"His name is taboo?" she asked uncertainly.

"That's what I said. And it's *no joke*," he said very seriously.

She did not know what a '*Snatcher*' was, but she could guess. She also knew this was not something he would joke about -- especially in his current state of mind.

As Severin left the room, looking both exhausted and dejected, he did not look back. If he had, he would have seen Radella starting to write her own letter.

## Chapter 12 -- Silver Lining

"Sometimes it's better to be lucky than good," said Severin cheerfully, once again sitting in his favorite chair by the fire. "I had a great day."

Radella smiled at him warmly from the couch. Severin was in the best mood he had been in a long time. She had let him expound since coming home without interruption.

“You know, I was surprised when Travers showed up so quickly after receiving my letter. It was nice of you to have him stay for breakfast after having traveled so early to give me the good news. I think he likes you, Dell,” Severin said, smiling.

He continued. “Of course, I needed to get back to work right away and couldn’t join you. You know the new wand Travers gave me was made by Ollivander. He’s been a... guest... of the Dark Lord for some time now.”

“I couldn’t believe it when Travers told us the Dark Lord had not blamed me for Potter’s escape and that all his anger was directed at Ollivander instead. I guess I did overreact, but it was understandable. However, I think it was the takeover of the Ministry yesterday that really got his mind off Potter’s escape.”

“Travers is now an assistant to Yaxley at the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. I’m going to be working for him again. I never thought I’d be a ‘Ministry Official’.” He gestured using two fingers of each hand to frame the last two words and chuckled. “Under the new regime, there are going to be real opportunities for me there. I’m primarily going to be processing people who the Snatchers bring in. And Snape’s not around anymore. Thicknesse has appointed him Headmaster of Hogwarts. I bet Dumbledore is rolling over in his grave.” He laughed.

Severin suddenly turned serious. “Listen, Dell. There’s something we need to discuss. Thicknesse has created something called the Muggle-Born Registration Commission. Dolores Umbridge is in charge of it. She’s his Senior Undersecretary. She’s a pure blood fanatic and a fellow traveler... I mean we didn’t even need to put her under the Imperius Curse like most of the other senior Ministry Officials. Did you know she claims to be related to the Selwyns?” He paused and sneered, “*As if...*! And she is... *uuugly* -- looks like a toad... Definitely no relative of my family.”

He paused for a second to remember the point he wanted to make. “Anyway, we both know your blood status is in doubt because you were adopted... I’ll just say it straight out: Travers said Yaxley told him that you’ll have to attend a hearing before the Commission.”

“Severin! No!” gasped Radella looking frightened.

“Wait... It’s all right. They know your adopted parents were pure blood. It doesn’t matter if they were poor. So what if you were left on their doorstep? You know it makes you a pureblood in my eyes. Your parents never would have taken in a Mudblood,” he said assuredly.

“This is just a formality. Everything’s been arranged. You’ll officially be found to be a half-blood, and it will all be legally documented. We need to do this because a Death Eater can’t have a wife whose blood status is in doubt. Right?” Severin smiled at her reassuringly.

“Sevy, I do *not* like this,” she said, sounding worried. She knew her parents had never cared about blood status. They had been old and childless and were overjoyed when she was left to them.

“Dell, there’s nothing to worry about,” Severin assured her. “What could go wrong?”

### Chapter 13 -- On the Run

“Have you lost your *mind*? What were you *thinking*?” hissed Severin.

Severin and Radella were seated together on the couch in the living room.

Radella sobbed, “I panicked. I was scared. The Dementors... you don’t know what they’re like. They were guarding us. Then a Ministry Official came out of the courtroom and told us to leave and go into hiding. He escorted us up to the atrium and had us leave using the Floo Network. So, I came home.”

“Well, now you’re on the Undesirables List,” moaned Severin. “I can’t *fix* this, Dell. You know why? Because that so called Ministry Official that got you out was actually *Harry Potter* in disguise.” Severin shook his head and then added, “...Polyjuice Potion again.”

Radella gasped.

“We think he was there to free some of the Muggle-Borns that have been helping him while he’s been in hiding. Every name on today’s docket, including your name, is now connected with *him*. Look, Dell. Even *I* was given Veritaserum -- *and* tortured a bit,” he winced, “to *prove* I knew nothing about it.”

“How was I to *know*?” she wailed. “Why didn’t you *come* with me? This wouldn’t have *happened*!”

“You know Travers sent me on an assignment. It couldn’t be helped. I’m sorry, Dell,” he explained again.

“You’re not going to *turn me in*, are you?” she asked, tearing up.

His tone softened. “No. But you *can’t* stay here.”

“But where can I go?” she blubbered.

“I think you should go back to your parent’s old cottage. I don’t think I ever told anyone where we lived before coming here.” It was the only place he could think of.

Radella railed, “It’s *horrible*, Sevy.” Then she began sobbing.

“I know, but I’ll come see you every week and help you fix it up. You just need to hide until I can figure something out. Unfortunately, I had to *disavow* you.” He had considered not telling her.

Radella sobbed harder.

“Dell, there’s something else we need to talk about... and it *pains* me... deeply,” he said sorrowfully. “Travers told me I was better off without you. He said you have been unfaithful to me and that everyone knows it. He said it’s what’s been holding me back. He said, ‘You can’t have a Death Eater in charge of anything who can’t even figure out his wife is cheating on him.’”

Radella looked at him in total shock.

Severin paused, took a deep breath and said, “*Please* say it isn’t true, Dell.” He looked at her imploringly.

She did not say anything. She just continued to look at him, her eyes wide and mouth open, for several seconds. Then she blinked. It looked like she wanted to say something, but her lips just trembled, and tears began running down her cheeks.

He lowered his head and said softly, "Let's go gather up the things you'll need. We'll wait until it's dark before we go."

Radella grabbed his arm and said tearfully, "Why are you being so *kind* to me? I was unfaithful."

"Because I suspected it for the longest time but didn't want to believe it. I loved you... and... I *still* love you. I can't explain it other than that," he said quietly.

"Oh, Severin," she moaned. "I can't explain myself either. I don't deserve your love."

She released his arm and put her face in her hands.

"Do you love me?" he asked.

She looked up at him. "Oh, I do; I do. But it seems so wrong for me to say it now -- I didn't think I the right to say it after what I've done to you. Can you *forgive* me?" she said, sounding truly sincere.

"I haven't thought about that yet." He paused. "Let's not talk about this anymore today."

He stood up and held out his hand. She took it and got up slowly.

He led her out of the room to begin packing.

## Chapter 14 -- In Hiding

The old cottage looked better than it ever had. Severin sat at the table, while Radella poured him some Firewhisky. Her hair was jet black now and her skin was an olive color. She looked like a gypsy. It was a good disguise.

After taking a healthy swig, Severin said, "The Dark Lord is more obsessed with Potter than ever. I think he's even looking for Potter himself; he's gone a lot now."

"We're tracking down every lead. Remember the one I told you about Xenophilius Lovegood, where Travers and I thought we saw Potter Disapparate with the

Mudblood girl? Well, I can tell you we are both very glad we decided to hush it up. It means death. You can never admit you let Potter escape from you -- even though the Dark Lord has already done so several times himself. We just reported that old Xeno told us Potter and the girl had been to see him and had destroyed his house. We said we hadn't believed him and that he must have lost his mind because we were holding his daughter hostage."

"Nobody doubted us -- he's the editor of the Quibbler after all, and his daughter is completely mental too. Did I ever tell you I was the one who grabbed her off the Hogwarts express at Christmas? All she wanted to talk about were imaginary magical creatures."

Severin paused. "Sorry, digressing again... as usual... Anyway, here's the big story... and you won't read about this in the Daily Prophet." He paused again, this time for dramatic effect, then said slowly, "Snatchers... caught... Harry Potter... yesterday..."

"He was *captured*?" Radella asked excitedly.

"Wait, wait, it gets better... They caught Potter, the Mudblood girl, and one of the Weasley blood traitor kids and brought them to Malfoy Manor to turn over to the Dark Lord. But he wasn't there. And guess what? The Malfoys... LET THEM ALL ESCAPE!" He shouted the last words, slapping his hand on the table.

"No way!" exclaimed Radella.

"Oh, yes, they did!" he chortled excitedly. "But *they* couldn't hush it up because they already used the Dark Mark to call him. The Dark Lord had given strict orders not to use the Dark Mark except to report Potter's capture. He tortured the Malfoys for *hours* -- serves them right -- but he didn't do it himself. No. He made Draco torture his parents and his dear aunt, Bellatrix, too. Draco was unlucky enough to be home from school for Easter holidays. The Dark Lord told Draco if he refused, he'd kill them all. It's funny; Narcissa had made Draco go back to Hogwarts even though he'd been made a D.E. -- 'to keep him safe.' What a laugh. The Dark Lord called in all the D.E.s and said he'd kill anyone who let Potter escape again."

"Oh, and Wormtail's dead. Potter strangled him," Severin added as an afterthought.

Radella said in amazement, "By my count, Potter's beaten or gotten away from You-Know-Who at least half a dozen times -- if you count the school stories."

"Well," said Severin, "I have heard talk that some of the D.E.s are getting a bit nervous. This Chosen One story is gaining strength in the population."

"What do *you* think?" she asked.

"Too soon to tell... If it is true, we'll need to start thinking about an *exit strategy*," he said quite seriously.

## Chapter 15 -- Exit Strategy

Severin paced around the tiny front room of the old cottage, circling the kitchen table where Radella sat.

"Dell, I'm really lucky to be alive this time. He slaughtered everyone in the room. I was standing near the Malfoys by the door to the hallway. As soon as I heard the Goblin say, 'Potter boy...', I bailed. So did the Malfoys and a few others -- including Bellatrix, unfortunately. They knew what was coming too."

Radella shook her head in disbelief.

Severin was shaking. "Ever since the Dark Lord came back from somewhere with a new wand -- it was soon after he tortured the Malfoys and Bellatrix, maybe even later the same day -- he's been even more unpredictable. I heard Malfoy say it looked like Dumbledore's old wand. But I can't remember what it looked like."

Severin continued. "Anyway... there must have been a half dozen or so representatives from Gringotts -- wizards and one Goblin who came to Malfoy Manor to report the Gringotts break-in. He cut them to pieces. But he also killed Mulciber, Avery, Goyle and Nott. They weren't fast enough to get out the door." He paused, remembering the blood spraying everywhere, and involuntarily shuddered, but he was not finished.

"Thicknesse plans to cover up the break-in in the Daily Prophet. The story will be in tomorrow's edition about the escape of a 'Rogue Dragon,' but too many people saw Potter and his friends riding it. Everyone is talking about it. I mean, *breaking*

*into Gringotts and escaping on a dragon -- who could possibly do that? Everyone thinks Potter's the Chosen One now. I can tell even more of the D.E.s are getting nervous."*

"I know. I heard it down in the fish market," said Radella.

"But here's the curious thing. I mean, it's *bizarre*. You know what they broke into Gringotts for...? A small gold cup -- that's all." Severin shook his head in disbelief.

"A small gold cup...? You're joking," said Radella in wonder.

Severin shook his head. "No... really. And they got it from the Lestrangle's vault. I overheard Bellatrix telling Narcissa it belonged to the Dark Lord. She was storing it for him. Turns out it wasn't Potter escaping again that set off his murderous rage -- it was the damned cup being stolen. No one has a clue about what's going on." He shrugged and then finished the story.

"Well, a few minutes after killing everyone, the Dark Lord settled down a bit. I'll tell you, he still seemed crazed to me -- and I mean an order of magnitude more than usual -- I thought he might kill us all. But he left... went outdoors, got his snake and Disapparated with it. Then about an hour later, Snape sent us a message on behalf of the Dark Lord for all of us to gather in Hogsmeade. It turns out Potter somehow evaded a trap set up there for him and he got into Hogwarts. Then Snape was driven out of Hogwarts by the teachers and they're going to defend the castle against the Dark Lord."

They stared at each other for a moment.

"You haven't seen Travers, have you?" Severin asked tentatively.

*"Of course not!"* she protested.

Severin held his hands up, palms out. "Sorry, it's just that he's gone missing. Someone said he went to Gringotts early this morning. We're wondering if he got caught up in the break-in. I'm sure he'll turn up. The Dark Lord has commanded all his supporters to join him in taking Hogwarts. It's all-in to get Potter this time."

Severin looked at Radella for some evidence of concern about Travers but did not see any. That made him very happy."



Radella sensed it and said, "Haven't you figured it out, Severin? Travers betrayed you and set me up. His behavior was as bad as mine; but he wanted me out of the way. I wasn't *going* to be declared a half-blood by the Commission. That's why he sent you away."

Severin looked stunned.

Radella looked exasperated and said, "Severin, you can't trust *anyone*. It's time for your *exit strategy*. Something really dangerous is about to happen -- it's the *final* showdown -- the D.L. versus the Chosen One... I don't want you to *die*. Think of your options."

"The *Dee Ell*?" he asked weakly.

"You know what I mean -- the Dark Lord, of course. I know we're not supposed to use the 'V' name anymore, so I had to think of something else because saying You-Know-Who is *stupid*... And don't change the subject," she scolded.

"OK then..." he paused, "...an exit strategy... What could happen *if* the 'Dark Lord falls? What are my options?"

Severin started to tick off his fingers. "I could fight and die in the battle with him -- not good. I could survive the battle, join the '*Dark Resistance*,' have the Ministry hunt me down and die fighting -- also not good. I could be captured instead, and they send me to Azkaban for life -- that's worse than dying. I could *not* join the Resistance, turn myself in and plead repentance for a shorter sentence, but it's still *years* in Azkaban -- and still worse than dying. Or... we make a run for it. It would have to be far away -- abroad, maybe South America," he said, holding his little finger and grinning.

"I like the sound of that one. Let's go now, Severin," Radella said imploringly, "Please."

"But then, I'd still be hunted down no matter which side wins. The best option actually has twice the risk. Who knows, we might *win*. In fact, I think we *will* win, since we outnumber the Hogwarts staff by a very wide margin," he said confidently.

"But the Chosen One is *destined* to win..." she moaned.

“That’s *if* there actually is a Chosen One, and *if* Potter is the one,” he said skeptically. “I never really believed it. The kid has just been *lucky*.”

Severin suddenly grabbed his left forearm.

“I have to go,” he said urgently.

“Severin, *please* don’t go!” she implored reaching out and grasping his arm.

“Don’t worry, Dell. I’ll be smart. If it looks bad, I’ll bail.” He smiled at her as he said it.

He leaned over and kissed her. Then he gently removed her hand from his arm and walked out the cottage door. She heard the crack as he Disapparated.

“But you’re *not* smart, Sevy,” she whispered as her eyes welled up with tears.

The End

End Notes: In Chapter 10 of this story, the quote: ‘Selwyn, give me your wand’ in **bold** text is taken from Chapter Four of Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, by J. K. Rowling.