

JAMES POTTER  
AND THE  
CRIMSON THREAD

BY G. NORMAN LIPPERT

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

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## 16. HAGRID MAKES A PLAN

“It was a dream, James. Had to be.” Rose was distracted and agitated as they walked along the snow-mushy path to the greenhouses. Cold water squelched into their shoes as they hurried, blinking against the stunning winter sunlight. The snow was a damp blanket over the grounds, pitted and heavy, as if exhausted after the long winter, ready to melt away at the first breath of spring.

“It wasn’t a dream,” James insisted, keeping his voice hushed despite the constant pummel of the wind. “You know I can travel to Petra in my sleep. I’ve told you the whole thing, about how, on the night I saved Petra on the back of the Gwyndemere, a connection happened between us, and it’s been there ever since. You’ve seen it with your own eyes! I tell you, I visited with Petra last night. She was

just as real as you and me right now. I could smell her. I could... um, touch her.”

“Just because you can travel to her in your sleep sometimes doesn’t mean you do it *every* time. You said yourself that you visited her in her grandparents’ gazebo. Harriers and Aurors have been staked out all around that farm ever since the Night of the Unveiling, guarding it and watching for her. She can’t put her big toe anywhere near there without being instantly surrounded.”

“And I told you,” James said, exasperated, “That it wasn’t the gazebo and the lake as it is now. It was caught in a loop of time from decades ago, before any of us were even born.”

“Right,” Rose nodded. “Definitely not something that would happen in a dream.”

“Rose, she’s been in contact with Al! And she’s tapping into the power of the Bloodline for strength and support! Whatever is left of Voldemort, she’s talking to it. She’s *listening* to it. And she’s using its power.”

“Look, James,” Rose said curtly, tromping into the shadow of the greenhouse. Sunlight shot blinding arrows from the glass walls. “It’s marvelous that you and Petra have this cosmic connection. Really, it is. And I’m just honest enough to admit that, quite frankly, I’m dead jealous of the both of you. It’s all so bloody, tragically *romantic* that I can barely *stand* it. Worse, the fact that it’s wasted on an emotionally constipated, immature clod like you—”

“Rose,” James interrupted, “I kissed her.”

Rose stopped in her tracks, sliding a little in the slush. She turned around, eyes wide. In a tight whisper, she said, “You didn’t!”

“Well, actually no. I didn’t. *She* kissed *me*.” He blew out a hard sigh and squinted in the reflected afternoon sunlight. “It was the last thing I expected. It was...” He shook his head, speechless at the memory.

“But you kissed her back,” Rose confirmed, her eyes still wide.

“Of course. And then, I just held her for awhile. Or... that might have come first. To be honest, the whole thing is almost too big

to remember. It takes up too much space in my memory.” He glanced quickly up at her again. “But that doesn’t mean it was only a dream.”

“No,” Rose breathed wistfully, an almost pitying look melting her features, “that’s the first thing you’ve said that convinces me it was actually real.”

Slowly, they continued on, rounding the greenhouse toward the entry. Mollified but suspicious, James said, “And why is that?”

“It’s simple,” Rose said, her tone wistful but condescending. “You’ve been completely besotted with Petra for years now. Have you ever dreamed of kissing her before?”

James shook his head firmly. “Never.”

“Of course not,” Rose said, dropping her voice as they pushed into the relative warmth of the greenhouse and the chatter of gathering students. “Dreams may toy with granting our wishes sometimes, but they don’t tease us with the things we want most of all. If they did, we’d be too heartbroken by reality to ever wake up.”

James nodded a little uncertainly. They made their way to a collection of wooden folding chairs arranged before the potting table. Behind this, Hagrid was bustling and humming to himself loudly.

“But it does leave a lot of unanswered questions,” Rose whispered as they settled into the front row. “Like, what will happen to Izzy when Petra leaves this dimension forever? And why would the last shred of Voldemort in her blood want her to go at all? And maybe most importantly, what does Judith have to do with any of it?”

“I... “ James began, then paused and mentally kicked himself. “I didn’t even ask her about Judith.”

Rose did a subtle but pointed double-take at him. She rasped, “You didn’t tell her that Judith cornered you on the lake outside Millie’s home and warned you to stay away from her?” James had told Rose about the encounter, if no one else, since Rose most seemed to understand the mad power and ongoing threat of the Lady of the Lake. Most others, if they knew of her at all, assumed that Judith had been destroyed during the debacle of the Morrigan Web, over two years earlier.

“I was a little distracted,” James whispered defensively, “being zapped away to the gazebo in the first place, and learning that Petra’s been in contact with Al for months. And then there was the kiss...”

“James,” Rose sagged helplessly, “Zane Walker is right. You really are as dull as dishwater. You had a chance to ask the most important question of all, and you completely flubbed it!”

James blinked and frowned again. “Zane said I was dull as dishwater?”

“Not in so many words, but come on. He was whatever passed for the brains of you three before *I* came along. Now think: the only reason Judith warned you away from Petra is because she knows *you* don’t want her to carry out her plan. That means Judith *does* want her to. And apparently so does the ghost of Voldemort’s soul that lives in Petra’s blood, otherwise she wouldn’t be tapping into it for guidance and strength. So, the big question is obvious, isn’t it? Why would the two most evil entities in the whole wide world want Petra to go through with her mission?”

James shook his head and slumped back in his wooden chair. “It *can’t* be that. Petra says that assuming the role of the Crimson Thread in that other version of reality is the only way to fix everything here in this one. There must be some other reason why Judith wants me to stay out of it.”

“*And* another reason why the demented shred of Voldemort in Petra’s head wants her to go through with it?” Rose shook her head firmly. “You’re making the same mistake you always do, James.”

He glared back at her, suddenly perturbed. “And what’s that, you’re so smart?”

Rose hissed, “Trusting people who don’t always deserve to be trusted!”

“Like Petra,” James nodded, as if confirming a suspicion. “Look, you don’t know her like I do. Nobody does.”

“Petra isn’t a bad person,” Rose acknowledged, the spark in her eyes unwavering. “But that doesn’t mean that she’s always right, James. She can be wrong, just like you and me. Worse, she can be *lied to*.”

James had no response to that. Not because Rose's suggestion made him angry, but because he had honestly never even considered it.

Hagrid's voice boomed through the greenhouse, interrupting their hushed conversation, "Settle down, yeh lot, and find a seat. We've got loads t' cover today, so be ready with yer quills and parchments."

A ripple of surprise swept over the students, and then came the shuffle of knapsacks and bags as parchments, books, and quills were produced, balanced precariously on knees in the absence of desks.

"Professor Hagrid," Trenton Bloch said, raising a peremptory hand. "We don't usually take notes in this class. Does this mean today's subject will be on a test later?"

"Wouldn't yeh like to know," Hagrid answered cagily, his beetle-black eyes narrowing. Then, with a start, he straightened. "Erm. I mean... o' course yeh'd like to know. So, yes. Why, certainly there'll be a test. This is a class, init'?"

Apparently emboldened by Trenton's question, Ashley Doone spoke up from the back row, "Only, we've never had a test in this class before, Professor. Just practical examinations. I've stopped even bringing an ink and quill to the barn with me when I go."

"Yeah," Nolan Beetlebrick added, glancing around for encouragement from the rest of the class. "And why this sudden move to the greenhouses for the rest of term? There's no magical creatures here at all. Just plants."

Hagrid raised both of his huge hands as the class began to murmur. "Th' barn menagerie is off-limits until further notice. Nothin' t' be done about it. The barn's bein'... er... cleaned up. Again. With dangerous potions an' elixirs this time. Highly potent stuff, straight from Perfessor Heretofore's laboratory, don'cher know. So no one's allowed in nor out until further notice, not unless yeh wanna grow yerself a third ear and a hinkypunk tail."

James sensed Rose's sidelong glance. He slid an eye toward her and shrugged.

“Yeah,” Hagrid went on, warming to the topic. “As yeh know, I’ve had to ship off most of the menagerie’s biggest an’ most dang’rous beasts, jus’ in case any other Muggles come a-wanderin’ onto the grounds. Ridiculous, o’ course, but orders is orders, an’ these ones come straight from th’ Minister o’ Magic ‘imself. So there’s no point in havin’ class in there anyways, least until further notice. Yeah, that’s about right.” He nodded to himself with obvious satisfaction. “An’ that’s why I’ve asked Perfessor Longbottom to let us use the north greenhouse for the rest o’ th’ term, and he was gracious enough t’ say yes. So. Today’s lesson will be on Amberguggins, a species o’ mimicking penguin indigenous to only a single unplottable cavern in th’ South Pole. Unlike other mimicking birds, such as common parrots, th’ Amberguggin mimics only swear words and embarrassin’ scatological euphemisms, thus their ban from p’lite society and even th’ mos’ dodgy o’ magical zoos...”

An hour later, with pages of disjointed notes and a list of the Amberguggin’s favorite vulgarities crammed into their knapsacks, the class filed muttering back out of the greenhouse, heading toward the castle and lunch in the great hall. James and Rose remained just inside the entrance, however, watching Hagrid as he bustled at the potting table again, humming too loudly to himself as he gathered his things. Finally, with a sweep of his huge coat, he rounded the table and tramped toward the door.

“And what, pray tell,” he asked gruffly, “are yeh both standin’ around for? I know fer a fact that Professor Votary is expectin’ you in Ancient Runes in ‘alf an hour.”

Rose put a hand on her hip. “You’re ‘cleaning the barn’ again, Hagrid? Really?”

“I won’t hear nary a word about it,” the half-giant said impatiently, waving both hands about his head as if to ward off a cloud of doxies. He pushed past James and Rose toward the door. “Jus’ you both mind yer bus’ness an’ stay away from th’ barn. S’dang’rous, it is.”

He pushed out into the cold and damp of the grounds with James and Rose following close behind. To James' surprise, Ralph was waiting just outside, leaning against the corner of the greenhouse.

"So what's in the barn, Hagrid?" he asked, pushing upright as Hagrid began to stomp across the unbroken snow toward his hut.

"Empty stalls an' potion fumes," he called back, "Yeh've no idea how hard it is scrubbin' up decades o' hippogriff guano. Get yerselves off t' lunch now, an' not another word."

"Actually," Ralph countered, "I think we know plenty well how hard it is to scrub the barn, considering we just did that very thing with Filch back before the holidays."

Hagrid scoffed. "Yar, well what Argus Filch calls clean and *I* calls clean are two very different things."

James was both annoyed and relieved that Ralph had joined them as they trudged along behind Hagrid. He still hadn't forgiven Ralph for blabbing to Millie about the break-up, and he was sincerely dismayed about Ralph's dueling performance against Professor Odinvann, but things just felt wrong when he and Ralph weren't on the same side. For the moment, he decided to let everything else go.

Trotting to catch up to Hagrid, James said, "Ralph here is Head Boy, you know. He would've heard about some big plan to quarantine the barn. Wouldn't you?" He glanced at Ralph meaningfully.

"Er, yeah," Ralph nodded. "That's a need-to-know kind of thing, it is. As Head Boy, I should be keeping curious younger years away from the barn. *If* it's as dangerous as you say it is, of course."

Hagrid only chuckled to himself as he strode through the snow, his boots leaving great, slushy plow-prints. "Wellnow, I appreciate th' offer, Mr. Head Boy, but believe it or not, I can secure a barn jus' fine on my own. Already magically sealed th' place up, top t' bottom." He paused and drew out his pink umbrella wand, brandishing it with a twinkle in his eyes. "I've come a long ways with my spellwork since yer parents' day. There's nary a soul gettin' in nor out o' that barn until further notice."



Pointedly, Rose asked, “And just who might be trying to get *out* of the barn, Hagrid?”

Hagrid’s face snapped shut like a mousetrap. “Not another word,” he said, stabbing a sausage-like index finger into the space between them, and then pointing it at the castle. “Back to th’ school wit’ yeh now.”

Without waiting, he turned around and pushed through the gate, striding into the front garden of his hut.

“This is about that dragon of yours, isn’t it?” Ralph called, following Hagrid into the yard. “About that letter you got from Grawp, talking about how Norberta’s all tetchy because she can smell that male circus dragon on the wind.”

Rose put a hand over her eyes. “Oh, no, no, no...” she said, her suspicions rising, “Hagrid, tell us you didn’t run off and do something ridiculous without us, did you?”

The trio followed Hagrid to his door, where he stopped and turned around again, adopting a beatific expression of innocence. With deliberate calm, he said, “The barn’s bein’ cleaned, that’s all. I can show yeh tomorrow if yeh like. Apart from a few heffalumps and a cage of wooly wozzles, that barn’s jus’ as empty as Mother Carter’s larder. If I do that, will it convince yeh that there’s *nothin’ t’* be suspicious about?”

James glanced aside at Rose and Ralph, who looked unconvinced. He shrugged and suggested, “Why not show us now, Hagrid?”

Hagrid’s eyes flicked back and forth. “Well, cuz I’m a busy perfessor, I am. An’ yeh lot have classes to get to. An’ like I said, s’not safe at th’ moment. I ain’t kiddin’ about those cleanin’ potions. Right noxious stuff, that is.”

Ralph raised his eyebrows. “In other words, whatever is in there now will be moved by tomorrow.”

“Gor!” Hagrid protested, dropping his façade of calm and turning back to his hut. He unlatched the door and shoved it open.

“Blimey! In all my years I can’t say as I’ve ever met a bunch more doubtful, suspicious, or untrusting as...”

He took a step inside his doorway and then froze in place, halting as if he’d just spied an Acromantula crouched on his dining room table. James, Ralph and Rose peered inside around the huge man, curious to see what had caught his attention. There was no Acromantula. What they saw instead was, if anything, even more surprising.

“It’s...” Rose breathed, ticking her eyes around the shocking sight within. “It’s all so... *clean!*”

It was true. For the first time in James’ memory—perhaps for the first time in forever—the interior of the hut was absolutely and utterly spotless. The wooden floor gleamed with polish. The rafters were scoured free of their customary cobwebs and layers of greasy, sooty dust. The dishes and cups were stacked and shining in the hutch. Even the ashes of the fireplace had been shoveled and swept, revealing the bare bricks beneath. Trife, Hagrid’s bullmastiff dog, sat up on the rug before the hearth, allowing his tongue to loll out in a happy, doggy grin.

James was about to ask what had happened to the hut when the answer, such as it was, revealed itself.

A pair of huge eyes opened beneath the table. Then, cautiously, silently, a house elf stepped out into the light. It was a female elf, and James recognized her immediately. The last time he had seen her had been in the living room of the Vandergriff’s house in Blackbrier Quoit. She wore the glove that her former mistress had given her. It drooped loose on her thin arm, still stained with dried pudding.

“I’m sorry, Master Hagrid,” Heddlebun said in her thin, high voice. “I finished cleaning the barn already. So I came here instead. I do hope...” Her eyes flicked around the hut, and then worryingly back to Hagrid, “that you don’t mind?”



Hagrid's plan, such as it was, turned out to be just as nuanced and subtle as one might expect from a half-giant who had once hidden a man-eating spider in a school cupboard, feeding it kitchen scraps.

"So," Rose sighed heavily, her brow knitted as she sat at his huge table, a cup of tea long-since cooled before her, "you're going to take your magical ship to the edge of London on the Thames, collect Norberta by night from Grawp and Prechka, bring her back in the ship's hold, and then hide her in the barn until the circus leaves London or you can arrange a new home for her."

"*No!*" Ralph said for the umpteenth time, his face brick-red with impatient incredulity. "How many times do I have to say that this is all completely daft?!"

Hagrid covered his eyes with both of his enormous, ham-like hands and plunked his elbows onto the table. "I knows," he said miserably. "I *knows* it's daft. But what'm I s'posed ter do?" He dropped his hands to the table and looked from Ralph to Rose to James. "Norberta *can't* stay in the mountains! She won't! You heard the letter, same as me! Grawp and Prechka can't keep an eye on 'er, not with their own tribe dealin' with Muggles a-comin' onto their lands and all the stress o' stayin' hid or gettin' ready t' fight! B'sides, the

arrangement's already made! They'll be there with Norberta tomorrow night, in an old abandoned wharf, at 'alf-past one in the mornin'!"

Rose nodded, merely confirming the details. "And you've got a house elf helping you for some reason, because she can..." She raised her eyebrows patiently.

"Soothe the savage beast," Hagrid sighed, glancing aside at Heddelebung, who stood in the corner on her chair, her shoulders hunched, her bulging eyes alert, ticking from one speaker to the next.

"Heddelebung is a beast-speaker, Miss," the elf offered, not for the first time. "Heddelebung learned it from her father, Bedderhum, who was in charge of our former master's stables, back when they *had* stables."

"So you can keep Norberta soothed and under control during the transfer," Rose nodded again, considering. "Since she'll be closer to the city, right close to the male dragon that she's been sniffing out for the past month. You have the ability to keep a Norwegian Ridgeback, who's in heat and smelling a male dragon, still and quiet within sight of a major Muggle city?"

Heddelebung nodded without hesitation. "It's an elfish talent, Miss, and Heddelebung is the best at it of her kind."

"Well, *that* certainly is convenient," James huffed crossly, folding his arms over his chest.

"James!" Rose scolded. "Are you accusing this poor elf of lying?"

"*No*," James sat up in his chair. "I'm accusing her of dumping a pudding all over Mrs. Vandergriff's head, all because she lost her job to a Muggle! The lying bit is just a strong suspicion, not an accusation."

A high, keening sound arose in the hut as James said this. He assumed that it was Hagrid's kettle preparing to whistle, and then realized, with some dismay, that the noise was emanating from the elf herself where she stood in the shadows. She was holding back a mounting wail of misery, but only just barely. Her lips trembled with

the effort and huge, shining tears welled in her eyes, glistening in the firelight.

“Oh, now look what yeh’ve done, James!” Hagrid reproached, reaching for the elf and patting her on one bone-thin shoulder, nearly knocking her over. “There, there, Heddlebun. He din’t mean it...”

“Of *course* I meant it!” James exclaimed. “I watched it happen! I barely stopped her from blaming it on one of the Muggle servants! Not that he didn’t deserve it, being a right obnoxious wazzock.”

“Well, maybe you should’ve let her!” Rose countered. “The poor thing had lost her whole reason for being! Whole generations of her family have served the Vandergriffs, only to be swept under the rug in favor of... of... *paid help!*”

“MMmmmmWAAAAHHHH!!” Heddlebun suddenly burst out, no longer able to hold in her wretchedness. “Heddlebun is a BAD ELF! Heddlebun ruined mistress’ *dress!* Heddlebun was dismissed from service because she is a horrible, terrible, nasty, AWFUL house elf!”

To James’ increasing dismay, the elf lunged and grabbed Rose’s teacup, then smashed it over her own head. Even before the shards finished pattering off the walls, she swiped at James’ own cup and repeated the action, smashing it to bits against her forehead and splattering cold tea in every direction. She reached next for Hagrid’s stoneware mug, but Hagrid still had his fingers hooked into its handle. The elf only accomplished yanking herself off the chair she’d been standing on and collapsing beneath the table. James winced at the knock-tumble of her body as it hit the plank floor. A moment later, her wails resumed, only faintly muffled.

“Heddlebun!” Rose cried, scrambling from her chair and ducking under the table. A moment later, she collected the elf into her arms, cradling the spindly body as if were a kitten, and retreated to the hearth, where she turned back, tilting a baleful, warning eye at James. *Not another word*, her gaze commanded.

James crossed his arms again and frowned defiantly.

The elf continued to wail. "Put Heddlebun down! Heddlebun is a *horrid* creature! Heddlebun deserves *punishment!*"

"Wherever did she learn this?" Rose raised her voice over the elf's wails, addressing the question to Hagrid. "Surely the Vandergriff's never beat her?"

James shook his head disgustedly. "It's an act," he answered, half to himself, although he saw that Ralph had heard him. "Got to be. She's not to be trusted."

Ralph saw this as further evidence of his larger point. "This is all a load of cobblers! You can see that, right?"

"There's nothin' t' be done about it," Hagrid declared, smacking the table with the flat of his hand, making the remaining dishes rattle. "Fer better or worse, the plan's goin' forward. Heddlebun an' I leave tomorrow night at midnight. By the nex' mornin', we'll either have Norberta in the barn, or I'll be in Azkaban."

"Ralph," James said seriously, looking aside at his friend, "You're not going to... you know... go to Headmaster Merlin or anything about this, are you?"

Ralph drew a hand down his face miserably. "I should, this time. I really should, and you bloody well know it."

Still holding Heddlebun's limp, hitching body in her arms, Rose said, "But you're not going to. Are you?"

Ralph glared at Rose fiercely for a moment, his jaw firm, and then sank back into his chair, defeated. "Of course not. I'm no tattletale."

"Not this time," James couldn't resist muttering.

"That's good to know, Ralph," Rose sighed, laying Heddlebun gently on the hearthrug next to Trife, who sniffed her head, and then licked her drooping, bat-wing ear. "Because if you tattle, you can't be allowed to come along."

Ralph spluttered, going rigid in his chair again. "Come along!? I'm not *coming along!* None of us is!"

"Of course we are," Rose corrected him firmly. "We went over this when we translated the letter from Grawp. Hagrid's like family to

us. Has been since our parents were little. In fact, if James' and my parents hadn't helped Hagrid out with Norberta back when she was still baby Norbert burning char-marks on this very table, we wouldn't even have this problem, now, would we? Come to think of it, we're just finishing what they started."

Ralph shook his head derisively. "You've been reading too much of Revalvier's books."

"No," Hagrid commented with a shrug, "That part is all true. Professor Revalvier interviewed me special. There, you can still see the scorch marks from Norberta's first flames..." He traced a finger along an old black stain and hitched a sniff.

"Seriously," James said, trying to inject a note of calm rationality into his voice, glancing back and forth between Rose and Ralph. "You know Hagrid's right. If this goes all pear-shaped, we're not talking detention. We're looking at actual legal trouble, the kind that doesn't get fixed by a letter from our parents."

"James, you and I both know that they don't send school students to Azkaban for this sort of thing," Rose chided, lifting her chin. "But they *do* send adult wizards who already have tetchy legal records. If Hagrid goes through with his plan alone—I'm sorry, Hagrid," she offered the half-giant an affectionately stern look, "But you'll get caught. You and Heddlebun both. You'll go to Azkaban. And Heddlebun, I don't know what they do to house elves that break the law, but it's got to be even worse than losing your service. However," she turned her gaze back to James and Ralph again, daring them to argue with her, "if we go along to help, nobody will face any consequences at all, because *we* won't get *caught*."

She met James' eyes and a ghost of a smile twitched the corners of her mouth. James tried not to smile back, but the moment he made the attempt, the task became impossible.

Ralph glared at both of them in disbelief. "You're *enjoying* this," he exclaimed, shaking his head in dark wonderment. "Aren't you!? You're both completely off your onions!"

Rose quelled her smile and approached Ralph. Putting her hand on the table near his, but not quite touching him, she asked, “Are you in, Ralph? We need you. We’re not a team without you.”

Hagrid spoke up, “No, Ralph! I can’t ask yeh...” He shook himself and glanced around at the others, “I can’t ask *any* of yeh t’ risk—”

“Of *course* I’m in,” Ralph admitted, rolling his eyes and slumping onto his crossed elbows. “Who am I kidding? Oh, I’m the worst Head Boy *ever*.”

“Maybe you are,” Rose agreed gently, placing her hand on Ralph’s shoulder. “But that’s exactly why we love you.”



## ***NEXT CHAPTER:***

**INTO LONDON!**

**GRAWP TURNS INTO A DUMPSTER!**

**RALPH SENDS A SECRET MESSAGE!**