

JAMES POTTER  
AND THE  
CRIMSON THREAD

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

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## 6. ORDINANCE THIRTEEN

Despite Zane's advice, James had deliberately left out any reference to Professor Odin-Vann when he told the others about his dream visit to Petra. This was because, deep down, he was still half certain that the appearance of the professor was the vision's only truly imaginary element, culled by his dreaming mind from thoughts earlier that day.

And yet, as the next week began, James became suspicious that the professor was giving him furtive, sharp-eyed looks at unexpected moments. He noticed it for first time during Monday's breakfast, a decidedly gloomy affair beneath an iron-grey caul of autumn clouds.

The low sky hulked both outside the windows and in the upper recesses of the Great Hall, hiding the rafters within a fog of fine rain that, while never quite reaching the candles or the tables below, left the students hunkered, their voices subdued. James glanced toward the dais and caught the skinny young professor eyeing him sharply, his chin raised and craning, his hair combed in a glossy black wing across his forehead. He saw James' look and his head retracted between his shoulders like something on a spring, his eyes darting away. As James watched, the professor maneuvered a carafe of pumpkin juice slightly, as if to hide behind it.

It happened again that afternoon, in the halls between classes as the professor stood in the doorway of his classroom, his eyes sharp, watching James as he shouldered through the throng of students toward History of Magic. And again, unmistakably, in the library that evening, as James caught a glimpse of the professor between the bookcases, ostensibly reading a thick book but peering furtively at up from beneath his lowered brow.

The following day's Charms class was cancelled at the last minute with no appearance by the professor at all. James and the rest of the class were informed, after waiting for nearly a quarter of an hour, that Professor Odin-Vann had unexpectedly taken ill.

"Merely a trifle," Professor Votary assured them from the Charms classroom door, the irony in his eyes clearly editorializing the new teacher's absence as well as announcing it. "I'm sure he shall bounce back in a trice and feel quite the dandy for cancelling class at such short notice." He lowered his voice beneath the sudden noise of hastily packing bags and scraping chairs. "Something I never would have done, of course, cancel a class over a mere sniffle and cough. But, alas, young men these days don't seem to be built with quite the same constitution as those of the older generation."

And it seemed that the Ancient Runes professor was right after all, for as James and a few dozen other students gathered around the a notice board that evening, discussing the Quidditch tryouts announcement that had just been posted, he saw Professor Odin-Vann

at the end of the hall, seemingly perfectly healthy, standing with his wand in his hand, pointed at the floor. The man seemed to be watching James, and this time, when James met his gaze, the professor didn't glance away. James did not have on his spectacles, of course, so he couldn't quite make out Odin-Vann's expression. But he seemed to sense a sort of watchful resignation in the man's posture and the set of his face.

James was tempted to disengage from the group near the notice board and approach Odin-Vann right then and there. The professor must have sensed James' thoughts, however, for at that moment he turned, his robes flowing beneath the angles of his sharp elbows and knees, and stalked away, turning along an intersection and vanishing from sight.

James glared at the now empty corridor where Odin-Vann had stood a moment before. Was the man actually *avoiding* him? Impulsively, James launched along the hall in pursuit of him, using his long legs to carry him swiftly and quietly without resorting to an outright run. He reached the intervening corridor quickly, knowing that Odin-Vann would have disappeared into any of the myriad side passages, stairways, and doors. Instead, he nearly ran into the professor, who had stopped just beyond the angle of the corner, his shoulders slumped as if he had been magically turned off.

"Professor!" James said, skidding to a halt, the surprise in his voice sharpening it to a half-shout.

The young man startled so violently that he fumbled the wand in his hand. It clattered to the floor and rolled, even as the professor dropped to a squat and scrambled for it, his shoulders cinching up next to his ears like the wings of a vulture. He tried to stand and spin around at the same time, wheeling on James, but the movement was clumsy and James had to reach out an arm to steady the man before he stumbled sideways into the wall.

Footsteps echoed behind James, following him. He didn't need to look to know that it was Ralph and Rose, curious to see why James had run off.

Odin-Vann attempted to compose himself as quickly as he could before the newcomers arrived. He brushed a hand frantically down his robes, straightening them, and then smoothed his fingers compulsively over the thick hank of hair on his forehead, pushing it back into place.

“Mr. Potter,” he said, raising his chin as if he meant to wield his pointed beard like a dagger. “You shouldn’t startle people so. You never know how a trained witch or wizard might respond.” He gripped his wand tightly, as if to imply that only practiced control had prevented him from reflexively turning James into a frog.

“You were there, weren’t you?” James asked quickly, his voice lowered. “I saw you, and you saw me. That’s why you’ve been watching me. You’re trying to figure out if I was really there. Just like I’m doing with you.”

James had to give the young professor credit. The expression on his face didn’t change a tick, but the color drained from it so quickly that he swayed on his feet. His fist relaxed on his wand.

“What’s this?” Ralph asked, breathing hard as he caught up. “Hi, professor. Feeling better, I hope?”

Rose had heard James’ question, however. She moved next to him and studied Odin-Vann’s face. “You were *there?*” she said, a suspicious lilt in her voice. A second later, her eyes blazed and she turned on James. “He was *there?! Why didn’t you tell us?!*” She pointed at the thin man, who heaved a deep, resigned sigh and sagged slightly.

“Let us *at least* not discuss this in the halls,” he growled, rolling his dark eyes. “My quarters are nearby, such as they are. Come.”

He turned and swept away, moving into the dimness of the corridor, nearly vanishing into it. James glanced back at Rose and Ralph, surprised into silence. After a moment, Odin-Vann paused and glanced impatiently back over his shoulder.

“Come!” he called, inserting a note of impatient command into his otherwise hushed voice.

Speaking volumes with her eyes alone, Rose glared at James, and then trotted to follow the teacher. Breathlessly, James and Ralph hurried to join her.

The professor's quarters were not, in fact, around the next corner, as the man had inferred. Odin-Vann led them briskly through turn after turn, into narrower hallways and down short flights of steps, into a section of the castle that James had never before seen. Here, there were no classrooms or offices, only ranks of doors, small and warped in their stone frames, squat and close together. Finally, stopping in a damp, nondescript corridor, the professor tapped a tarnished door handle with his wand, causing the door to unlatch loudly and creak partway open.

"Home, sweet home," he said, pushing the door fully open and ducking slightly to enter. He didn't invite James, Rose, and Ralph inside. He merely left the door open and assumed they would follow.

James had been in several of the teachers' quarters before, but this was by far the smallest and most spartan of any of them. The room seemed barely larger than a maintenance closet, crammed with a single bed against the far wall, beneath a single narrow window, next to a single, albeit very large, open leather trunk on a rickety three-drawer bureau. Across from this was a sagging Chesterfield sofa and a tall desk nearly obliterated beneath mounds of paperwork, tools, a huge magnifying glass on an articulated stand, a precariously leaning tea tray, and a thick book James recognized as the Charms class textbook: *The Caster's Lexicon of Spells, Charms, & Hexes*. The professor's copy was dog-eared, fat with use, and crammed with bookmarks and slips of parchment.

"I'll make this brief, and I shall deny every word should you choose to repeat it," Odin-Vann announced, remaining standing but indicating the sofa with one hand. With the other, he flicked his wand at the door, which swung shut with a sweep of air and a heavy clap. Once again, James noticed the Professor's magical prowess in the wake of a moment of stress. He wondered, perhaps unfairly, if the professor

would have been capable of something as simple as closing the door a few minutes earlier, when James had first confronted him in the hall.

Ralph plopped onto the couch, which moaned under his weight. Rose lowered herself onto the other end. James, however, stood in front of the closed door, observing the professor in the cramped space.

“So you really were there, then,” he confirmed, cocking his head.

In answer, Odin-Vann turned to the desk and began to shuffle papers, seemingly randomly. “How long have you three known her?” he asked. Without waiting for an answer, he went on, “I met Petra right here in school. I was a seventh-year, like you. She was a first year. A strange bridge for friendship to cross, but it happens sometimes. We had similar family situations, you see. She was being raised by her grandfather, who loved her, and his new wife, who did not. It was an unhappy arrangement, and Petra rarely spoke of it, but I recognized the silence. I had a similar home life, being raised by an uncle and his wife and his much older children. None of them wanted me there, and took pains to make certain I knew it. I had come to terms with it, having lived it all of my school years. I had hardened a bit. Petra had not yet hardened. And in my heart, I didn’t want her to. So I befriended her. We became secret allies. I watched out for her. It was a brief but important acquaintance. I expect she shared more with me during that one year than she did with any other school mates over the following six.”

He handled the magnifying glass on its articulated arm, moving it into a new position, apparently merely to give his hands something to do. He glanced back toward the three students, but not at them, exactly.

“I knew she was powerful, even then. Although I had no idea how much, or why. I just knew that she was special. Later, when I heard about what happened in Muggle New York City, on the Night of the Unveiling, I trusted, deep down, that Petra had had a good reason for whatever she did. She was always powerful and passionate,

and she has a lot of buried anger—one can't blame her for that, what with her upbringing—but she was never driven by it. She may use her anger sometimes, like a healer uses a blade, to lance and excise, but never like a villain with a dagger, to threaten and kill.”

“Is that why you went to her?” Rose asked from the couch, leaning forward with interest. “To help her, once the rest of the magical world turned on her?”

Odin-Vann finally looked at Rose, and blinked. “Oh, I didn't go to Petra. How could I? No one knew where she was. And frankly, despite everything, I wasn't even positive that she'd really remember me. Both of us have changed quite a lot in the many years since we were friends. She was just a child then. I was...” He shrugged and shook his head faintly. “Well, I was just a gawky teenager, more full of ego than wisdom, but willing to spew either to anyone who would give me an ear.” He continued to shake his head wryly, and then looked back at Rose. “No, I didn't go to Petra. She came to me. It was only a few months ago. She needed help, you see. She has all the power, does Petra, but she doesn't have all the knowledge, and she is smart enough to know it. It turned out that she remembered her old friend Donofrio after all. She came to me, and asked for my help. And I granted it, of course. But in secret.” He pressed his lips together tightly, eyeing all three students with an air of wary annoyance. “Until now.”

“We're safe,” Ralph said pointedly, glancing around at the others. “In case you were wondering.”

“Oh, I know,” Odin-Vann admitted. “Petra told me whom I could trust, should I have need to. I believed her, and yet I wasn't certain I really *could* trust any of you. Not because you weren't on her side, but because you're, well...” He stopped abruptly and blinked at the three students.

James suddenly understood. “Because we're just teenagers,” he prompted. “It's OK. You can say it. Maybe we aren't trustworthy because we're just clumsy, loud-mouthed students who don't have any clue about how the grown-up world works.”



Odin-Vann shook his head at James. “No, not like that. I mean... yes. A little like that. But you misunderstand me.”

“That’s good,” Rose commented a bit archly. “Because believe it or not, we’ve been through the gauntlet more than once in our years. You’ve no idea.”

“Actually, I do.” Odin-Vann said in a different voice. James looked at him and saw a new expression on the man’s face. All the suspicion and caginess had finally gone out of it. He looked at them directly, settling his gaze on James. “Petra told me some of the things you lot have gone through on her behalf. She told me about the World Between the Worlds. She told me about the Gatekeeper’s curse, and how you intervened to protect her from herself. She said that you three, and some American named Zane Walker, have always been there for her, that you’ve faced things that most grown witches and wizards would run screaming from. I didn’t quite believe her, I admit. Because there’s so much at stake, you see. If we trusted you, and you didn’t come through—if you got caught somehow, or blabbed to the wrong schoolmate—well, I was just thinking of Petra’s mission. She mustn’t be stopped, you see. You know that as well as I. I had to be absolutely certain that you were exactly as competent and trustworthy as Petra said. So I watched.”

Ralph shifted on the end of the couch, narrowing his eyes slightly. “And what did you decide?”

Odin-Vann cocked his head at Ralph’s question, as if surprised and bemused by it. “Well. You didn’t give me much of a chance, did you? You three chased me down and proved you were as quick and observant and bold as Petra said. I hadn’t yet made up my mind, but I suppose I have now. Whether I like it or not.”

“I lied to my dad today,” James said. There was both guilt and defiance in his voice. The words cost him something to say. He sank onto the arm of the sofa, his eyes still on Odin-Vann. “I’ve done loads of things for Petra. Faced demons from another world. Battled Salazar Slytherin in another time. Been cursed and frozen and threatened. But

lying to my dad..." He shook his head and finally dropped his eyes. "That was the hardest thing of all."

"Your dad," Odin-Vann mused, half to himself. "Harry Potter, yes? The man of myth and legend, of course. But most importantly, the current head of the Auror Department, chief of wizarding law enforcement." He nodded at James soberly. "That must have been very difficult for you. But let me assure you, you did the right thing. The necessary thing. And I can promise you, were he in your shoes, knowing what you know, he would have done the same thing."

"You know that, do you?" James said wearily, glancing up again.

Odin-Vann shrugged and gave a tiny smile. "I do. I've read Revalvier's books. At least a dozen times, in fact."

Rose spoke again, this time in a hushed voice. "You helped Petra make a horcrux."

Odin-Vann startled and turned to Rose, his eyes blinking rapidly. A flash of something like anger reddened his cheeks, and then he reconsidered and slumped to the bed, producing a loud squeak from its old springs.

"She didn't really need my help. Not with the spellcasting. All she needed was my encouragement. And in that respect, I did indeed help. And why not? She'd already committed the murder. Justified and right as it may have been, it was still a murder. The blood has stained her ever since. There was no point in her *not* using it. You were there when she summoned the power, James, converting her dagger into a talisman of immortality. You saw and heard. Or am I mistaken?"

James shook his head. "She had to do it to protect herself. She has to live, no matter how many people want to kill her. She has to survive so she can replace the Crimson Thread and set everything right again."

"Yes!" Odin-Vann hissed, pointing at James with enthusiasm. "Nothing must stop her! The horcrux isn't to prolong her life for her *own* sake! It's for the good of the world!"

James was taken slightly aback by the strength of the man's words. He was nearly spitting with the force of them. For the first time, James wondered if there was something more than civic duty motivating the young professor. Was he, perhaps, secretly in love with Petra? He was several years older than her, and yet James knew very well that differences in age were of little consequence to the blind compulsion of love. A worm of jealousy moved deep inside him.

"But it doesn't end there," Ralph said, his eyes still narrowed at Odin-Vann, calculating, measuring him with something that almost looked like cautious suspicion. "It doesn't end with the horcrux. Does it?"

Odin-Vann shook his head, growing somber again. "No. I'm afraid it does not. And that's why I was watching you." He chewed his lips and drew a deep sigh through his nose. Finally, almost reluctantly, he went on, now speaking in a near whisper. "Petra won't be able to accomplish her task on her own. She will need help. There are very few people she can call on. She's already reached out to me, and there are two others she has mentioned. But she will need you as well. If you choose to help. She did not wish me to ask. But I'm asking anyway."

A mixture of worry and anticipation brewed in James at Odin-Vann's words. The reality of Petra's plan took hold of him firmly. She would assume her role as the Crimson Thread from that other dimension, vanishing forever from her native destiny. He would never see or hear from her again. And against every passion and desire of his heart, he had to help her accomplish this task. He nodded slowly at Odin-Vann.

"We'll help. We'll do whatever we have to."

"Good," Odin-Vann said, restraining his excitement with some effort. "Because it won't be easy. For some of us, it may be the hardest thing we ever do." He eyed James as he said this, and James wondered if the professor knew. Probably he did. Petra may have told him, or she may not have. According to Rose, Albus, Scorpius, and even Zane, James' love for Petra was as plain as the nose on his face.

Odin-Vann nodded again, quickly and resolutely. As he spoke, he climbed back to his feet. “So be it. I will summon you when the time comes. It won’t be easy, but I am trusting your cunning and resolve.”

“Who else did she reach out to?” It was Ralph who asked. He was still sitting on the couch, his head cocked, his eyes intent.

“I don’t think I am quite at liberty to say—”

“Zane,” Ralph interrupted. “It has to be. I’m right, aren’t I?”

Odin-Vann slumped impatiently. “If so, only in the past day. She had considered it when last we spoke, but had not acted on it. The other person, she has been in correspondence with for several weeks.”

James wondered for a moment if the other person was him. That couldn’t be it, though. He could connect to her via their shared thread, but it could hardly be said that she had corresponded with him. The worm of jealousy in his heart fanned out and became a hooded snake. Who could it be? Why was it *not* him?

“So you see Petra regularly, then, eh?” Ralph asked, lifting his chin. “That’s a pretty keen interest for a bloke who knew her for exactly one year, and nearly a decade ago at that.”

“Ralph,” Rose asked from the corner of her mouth, leaning to nudge the boy as he glared at Odin-Vann. “Enough with the questions. What’s wrong with you?”

“I’ve a keen interest,” Odin-Vann answered, standing straight and cooling his voice. “Because the fate of the magical world—indeed, all worlds—hangs in the balance. I would think that was obvious.”

“Ralph,” James muttered, reaching for the door latch and tugging it open behind him. “Let’s go, eh?”

“You say you didn’t know if we could be trusted,” Ralph said, standing now, but not moving toward the door. “And for good reason. You’re right. There’s a whole world at stake. But what about you? Petra may trust you, Professor. But that doesn’t mean we have to. Not yet, at least.”

James didn’t know whether he felt more proud of Ralph’s stubborn suspicion or mortified by it. Odin-Vann, for his part, merely

met Ralph's eyes, unflinching, but neither offering any defence or argument.

Rose tugged Ralph's sleeve, pulling him toward the door. At first, James didn't think Ralph was going to come. Then, finally, the big boy submitted, turning and following Rose and James from the room, offering no word in departure. As they filed into the hall, the wooden door clunked shut behind them.

"Way to go, Ralph," James breathed, shaking his head as they strode back the way they'd come. "Insult the one grown-up who seems to be on Petra's side."

"He's no grown-up," Ralph muttered, his eyes still narrowed. "He's barely older than us, no matter what his actual age. And he's as dodgy as the day is long."

Rose glanced from Ralph to James as they paced into the evening dark of the corridors. "I don't know which one of you is right," she admitted. "Maybe both, maybe neither. But I do know this: Professor Odin-Vann is our best hope for helping Petra. We may not have to trust him. But we can trust *her*." She paused to consider this for a moment, and then gave an agitated shrug. "Hopefully."

With that hanging in the air between them, none of them spoke during the rest of the trek back to their dormitories.



No matter how prepared James believed he was to assist Petra on her final mission, he hadn't been prepared to hear from Professor

Odin-Vann about it quite so quickly. He was at lunch that Friday when a stiff index finger poked him hard on the shoulder, startling him. He turned, half expecting to see the obnoxious twit Edgar Edgecombe and his first-year cronies grinning maliciously at him. Instead, he was met with the thin chest and faintly mouldy smell of Argus Filch, who was standing immediately behind him. James looked to see the man glaring down at him, his stubbly chin bristling.

“Detention, Mr. Potter,” he said from between gritted teeth. “Compliments of Professor Odin-Vann.” He stabbed out something in his left hand. James flinched back from it, and then saw that it was a rolled parchment, sealed with a blot of shiny red wax. Tentatively, he reached for it and plucked it from the caretaker’s horny fingers.

Filch leaned close and growled, “The professor invokes Ordinance Thirteen, Mr. Potter. You are familiar with that ordinance, I trust?”

James shook his head.

Filch clucked his tongue. “It means your punishment is not to be discussed with any other students. It’s a stipulation meant to avoid rumours during strict, unresolved disciplinary sentences. My, my, my, Mr. Potter,” he shook his head with mock concern. “What have you done *this* time?”

A moment later, the caretaker creaked away, leaving a pall of cold silence in his wake. James hunkered low and tucked the rolled parchment into his robes, anxious to read its contents but knowing he dare not in such a public place.

“What *did* you do?” Graham asked softly, morbidly impressed.

“Now, now,” Scorpius chided. “Ordinance Thirteen, you know. We wouldn’t want our curiosity to suck us into whatever fate is about to befall the young hooligan, would we?”

As James watched furtively, he saw Filch approach Rose where she sat further down the table. The caretaker didn’t need to tap her on the shoulder. She saw him coming, and her eyes were bright with glassy trepidation. James didn’t have to guess that Filch’s next stop would be at the Slytherin table.

But, in fact, that did not happen. After serving Rose her own small scroll, which she tucked quickly into her knapsack, Filch ambled toward the rear of the Hall and his customary place next to the doors. He turned and gave a nasty wink and nod toward the dais, content with the completion of his favorite duties.

James turned on his seat. Donofio Odin-Vann was watching from the head table. His gaze did not dart away this time as James looked at him, but neither did he show any sign of secret communication. Whatever James needed to know, it would apparently be on the sealed scroll currently in his pocket.

He ate as quickly as he could and stood to leave well before anyone else. Eyes watched him from all around, some impressed, like Graham, and others merely grimly curious. James ignored the stares and whispers as well as he could as he hoiked his knapsack onto his back, and was just shouldering through the double doors into the entrance hall when a girl's voice called out to him, surprising him in his tracks.

He turned around in the deserted entryway, expecting to see Rose. Instead, Millie Vandergriff followed him through the double doors, allowing them to creak shut behind her.

"What sort of trouble are you in?" she asked, her voice a mixture of warm concern and delicious conspiracy. "Does it have to do with that stupid interview? We did everything we could to keep you from jamming both feet into your mouth, but puppets can only do so much..."

James shook his head and rolled his eyes. "No. I can't really talk about it. Ordinance thirteen, apparently. It could get you into trouble, too."

Millie gave a wry smile. "How very noble of you to be so concerned with my welfare. Can you at least tell me about it when it's all over?"

"I suppose so," James shrugged distractedly, edging backwards across the entrance hall, anxious for a moment alone to read Odin-

Vann's note. "If you really want to know. But, it might not be what you expect."

"I do want to know," Millie said with a firm nod. "And I imagine it's exactly the *last* thing any of us would expect. That's why I'm curious."

"What do you mean?" James paused, allowing Millie to join him in the centre of the floor.

"You're James Potter, aren't you?" She smiled again and cocked her head. Her eyes were very blue, sparkling with something like mischief in the dimness of the entrance hall. "You went into the Chamber of Secrets after Petra Morganstern when she kidnapped your sister. You were in the Hogwarts Express engine with Headmaster Merlin when the train nearly went over a cliff, and you both saved it, along with the rest of us. You were right there in the middle of it on the Night of the Unveiling." She arched one eyebrow sardonically. "You do seem to get into loads of trouble, James, but it's not usually of the detention variety. Frankly, I'm a little jealous."

"Of me?" James frowned in surprise. "Believe me, you wouldn't want to be in the sorts of trouble I've been in." He sighed briskly and ran a hand through his messy hair, adding, "And still *am* in, actually."

Millie took another small step closer, drawing James into her gaze. "I'm not jealous of *you*, silly. Believe it or not, you aren't just the son of Harry Potter anymore. When people talk about you in the dormitories and common rooms, they're not telling stories about what happened a few decades ago to your dad. They're talking about the things you've done yourself. You don't know that, do you? You're a bit of a legendary figure yourself these days. You, and Ralph Deedle, and Zane Walker, and Rose Weasley." Her eyes ticked to the side and she reached up, combed a stray lock of blonde hair behind her ear. "It's *her* I'm a little jealous of."

"Why?" James asked incredulously, frowning. "*Her* biggest job seems to be constantly reminding us of how we're going to ruin the whole universe by tinkering with super dangerous stuff and how she'd



be so much smarter and quicker doing the dangerous tinkering instead.”

Millie tilted her head ironically, her eyes meeting his again. “I’m jealous of Rose Weasley because *I’d* rather be the one standing beside you when the next adventure starts. And I’d never tell you how you’d ruin anything. Except perhaps me for any other boys.”

James’ frown turned quizzical. He blinked at her sparkling blue gaze. She seemed barely inches from him in the shadows of the entrance hall. He could smell her shampoo and a hint of perfume. “What... do you mean?”

In a whisper, she said, “Do I need to get out the Hufflepuppet Pals and have them spell it out for you?”

And then she leaned forward slightly, raising her chin to his, and kissed him. It was a light kiss, more playful than romantic, on the corner of his mouth. But the sudden sensation of her lips on his, both warm and soft, teasing and sensual all at once, exploded in his mind and body like magical fireworks, blotting out every other thought. He stood dazed as she took a step back from him, smiling faintly.

“Go read your note and attend to your detention,” she prodded him. “But do tell me what you’re up to later, if you are willing. I want to be a part of it. In whatever way I can. If you’ll let me.”

Behind her, the Great Hall doors pushed open again, disgorging a group of Ravenclaws, all chattering noisily. The lunchtime crowd inside was rising, gathering their books and knapsacks, preparing to return to classes. Millie turned to thread back inside, probably to retrieve her own books. She was lost in the crowd after only a few paces.

James didn’t move. He could still feel the spot on the corner of his mouth where Millie had kissed him. It tingled like magic. Fleeting, helplessly, he wondered if magic had been involved somehow. Had she used some illicitly charmed lip-gloss to stun him? Was it even now freezing him to the spot, turning him into a human statue of awestruck surprise?

He glanced down at himself. He could move, after all. Clumsily, he turned around, hefted his knapsack again, and hurried across the entrance hall toward the staircase, remembering the note in his robes, and Odin-Vann's supposed detention. Suddenly, all of it seemed slightly less important. Perhaps even a little fun. He would read whatever the young professor had written, and probably with Rose's help (or Millie's? The thought suddenly tantalized him immensely) he would do whatever was required.

Millie Vandergriff, he mused, had indeed worked magic on him. But it wasn't the sort of magic they taught in Charms class, or even Defence Against the Dark Arts. It was the oldest magic in a very old human book. And apparently, happily, there was no defence against *that* kind of magic at all.



## ***NEXT CHAPTER:***

**A SECRET MISSION!**

**ZANE WALKER & ALMA ALERON!**

**PETRA GOES TO WAR!**