



to proceed through the program without serious magical damage.

"They agreed that perhaps a young wizard of that age with the power of Harry Potter just might endure it, but they were skeptical. For the average sixth-year of even better than average abilities, it would be harmful. Dumbledore wanted a program for all of those who would volunteer from that class for the next school year. The Academy instructors thought they had succeeded in changing the Headmaster's mind. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

"That spring term when then-Minister Fudge caused Dumbledore to leave Hogwarts to protect Harry, the Headmaster visited a number of schools of magic around the world. He looked for any advanced Defense training program that would approximate Auror training, but nothing came close to his original ideas. This trip did create in the minds of a number of advanced students also finishing their fifth year, an interest in coming to Hogwarts and being a part of whatever Dumbledore would eventually develop. The names Albus Dumbledore and Harry Potter carried more cachet around the world than they did with the British Ministry of Magic at that time."

Tanner said, "Professor, please excuse my interruption. This is *exactly* what we want for our special anniversary edition, but how, Professor, HOW could anyone possibly not think highly of Harry Potter? I've read the stories. I know the history. But... but the first time he ever acknowledged my raised hand in a press conference I was so overwhelmed by his sheer good will towards me. If I knew nothing of him, I'd trust him instantly if he walked into a room. I've seen it happen."

"Ah, Miss Tanner, at your age, in your early thirties, you've never known our world without the stories of Sir Harry Potter, the Boy Who Lived, the Final Victor, Spell Monger Magister, former Minister of Magic, Headmaster Emeritus of Hogwarts, holder of the Order of Merlin First Class with two Clusters, ensigned Patriarch of the Potter, Black, and Ollerton family lines, public benefactor, and professional Quidditch star. And you will never want to mention his titles in his presence. He despises the inherent attention, though he looks fondly on his years as a Quidditch player and as Headmaster.

"And I cannot guarantee your safety if you mention how many decades he's topped *Witch Weekly's* Best Smile List."

Tanner smiled and said, "That fact is on page one of our Reporter's Handbook at *The Quibbler*."

"So, Miss Tanner, at the start of the summer of 1996, Harry Potter had just been proven correct about Voldemort's return after being slandered by the Minister of Magic and the *Daily Prophet* for over a year. And before you call that paper the yellow journalism rag that it is and was at the time, you must remember that it was then considered by most to be as respectable as your own *Quibbler* is today.

"At the start of that summer holiday, he was the smallest Gryffindor his age and smaller than most a year behind him. He was depressed and distraught because of the recent death of his godfather, the noble Sirius Black. Also, Harry feared for the safety of his best friends, and he felt very guilty about having lead them by accident into a fight with Death Eaters.

"He would frankly tell you that he was a physical and mental mess at that time, and one of the last persons anyone should follow.

"Of course that last part isn't true. Though he was exhausted and stressed beyond most human limits, I'd have followed him into the gates of perdition and back at that very moment, and I can name many others who would have been with us. But *Harry* thought of himself as nearly useless that day he rode back to London on the Hogwarts Express.

"Now, back to the Paladin Program and what it really was that summer, not in legend. Those who volunteered had to have a certain grade level in the appropriate classes, and commit to fairness to all, pureblood, halfblood, and Muggle-born alike. I hate to use those disreputable and archaic terms of the day. Yes, I see by the shock on your face how distasteful those words are, but they were backwards times, and Harry had not mobilized us to change things yet. We still had Death Eaters to fight and he had a Dark lord to kill. First things first.

"Volunteers had to:

- Agree to treat and defend all alike.
- Have or bring up their grade levels to the point needed to qualify academically.
- Take the Paladin Acceleration Potions series to mature them physically, mentally, and magically to where they could enter the pre-Auror training that September.
- Participate in all other summer Paladin Program activities including controlled 'visits' with members of the opposite sex to help with their emotional growth.
- Maintain all physical exercise requirements that summer and during school.
- Enter the Paladin Program curriculum at the start of the school year and maintain acceptable grade levels.

"There were a number of other rules I wish Dumbledore had insisted on, but hindsight's always clearer than foe glass.

"So on September first in 1996, we Paladins were all physically, mentally, and magically ready to start a pre-Auror program. But we were still emotionally not prepared. We never reached that maturity level while at school, and did not until we really were two years farther along.

"That, Miss Tanner, is all a Paladin Program participant was at the end of summer in 1996. Oh, all except Harry Potter. He still complains while with friends from that day that he can never do anything the easy normal way."

"But... but, Professor, what about the stories of superior height and strength? What about the fact that you were all gorgeous and handsome, more powerful than any wizards or witches around? You were the greatest magical class to come along. You are legends."

"Stand, Miss Tanner. There, now. You are not of extreme height for a woman, but you are 5' 9", correct? You are an inch taller than I am. For all of his presence, Harry Potter stands at average height. Just ask him; he won't mind. The tallest of us was Dean Thomas, God rest his soul. He was 6'

