

Games Almost Played

Summary: Three unusual Tasks which could have happened in three Triwizard Tournaments that never did. R/S implied, Harry/Cedric

Notes: Alternate Universe. *Alternate Universe*. Canonpicking is fun but pointless because it is an *alternate universe*. It is probably several alternate universes. Also, thanks to heidi8 for the concept, metallumai for the title, setissma and dopplegl for the encouragement, and the Monday Night Pandemonium for help with the plot and indiscriminant encouragement. I may have forgotten someone. If so, forgive and notify.

PROLOGUE: UNLIKELY CHAMPION

"Oh, come on, Moony," James said.

This was never a good thing to hear from James, or for that matter from Sirius; it was the herald of an argument at the least, and at the most it had been the trumpet which sounded to announce the coming of some of their worst pranks into the world. Nothing good ever came of James and Sirius appealing to Remus to *come on*.

"Oh, come on, Moony," James said. "Don't tell me you haven't thought about it. You probably know more about it than the three of us combined."

Remus looked up from his book, annoyed. "Of course I've thought about it. I've thought about the mortality statistics associated with it."

"Nobody's going to die," Sirius scoffed. "Nobody *dies* at Hogwarts anymore. The last person who died at Hogwarts was -- thirty years ago at least!"

"So long ago?" Remus asked drily.

"You can't *not* put your name in," James said. "Even Peter's putting his name in. It's a compact. One of us is bound to be the Triwizard Champion and the other three'll help him out, won't we?"

"I'm entirely committed to helping one of you out if you are chosen, because I do not wish to see my friends die in violent and terrifying ways," Remus said, bending back to his book and picking up his quill to make a note. "That doesn't mean I have to put my own neck in the noose. Besides, who knows how the Goblet would react."

"React to what?" Sirius asked, leaning forward. Above Remus' head, he glanced at James and winked.

"To -- you know what," Remus muttered.

"Why would it react? The Hat didn't, did it?" James asked.

Remus looked up at him, turning away from Sirius. "No. It didn't react. And I still have nightmares about the idea that it might have."

Sirius' hand closed around a roll of parchment near Remus' elbow on the library table, sliding it toward himself silently.

"But it didn't, is my point," James said.

"James, I don't need a case of nerves right now. And I don't need to be worrying about the Cup when NEWTs are coming, either," Remus said, returning to his book once more. Sirius flicked the parchment into the loose sleeve of his robe. James raised an eyebrow at him.

"Well, I'm putting my name in tomorrow night," Sirius said. "Tonight I'm taking that Durmstrang bird to dinner in Hogsmeade."

"Which one?" James asked.

"Oh, what's her name," Sirius said dismissively. "High cheekbones, green eyes -- pretty girl. Brown hair."

"Right -- the one who dumped that bowl of stew on Nox Malfoy's head."

"That's the one! She suits me, don't you think?" Sirius asked.

"You just wish *you* had thought of dumping a bowl of stew on Nox Malfoy's head," Remus murmured.

"James! Psst! C'mere!"

James followed Sirius, who was gesturing with an incredible lack of subtlety, into the shadow of the Gryffindor banner in the Great Hall. It was just after dinner; in half an hour the Goblet of Fire would vomit out the names of the three school champions. The last of the sixth and seventh years were putting their names in.

Sirius held up two pieces of paper, one in either hand. Both were torn strips of parchment; one of them had *Sirius Aedelbert Malfoy Christopher Black* written in his own spidery handwriting; in the other, in Lupin's elegant copperplate script, was the name *Remus John Lupin*.

"Sirius, you madman! Is that why you stole his notes?"

"He puts his name on every bloody page," Sirius grinned. "They only said that the person had to write their name themselves, not that they had to be the ones to put it in. I fold it up in mine like so, and...."

"Elizabet Karkaroff!" Dumbledore announced. "Elizabet Karkaroff will be Durmstrang's Champion. Congratulations, Miss Karkaroff."

Sirius grinned, leaning back against the Gryffindor table, feet propped on the bench of the Hufflepuff table across the aisle. The green-eyed, high-cheekboned girl he'd taken to Hogsmeade stood up and bowed to the Headmaster.

"Told you I can pick 'em," Sirius said around a mouthful of the apple he was eating. Remus sat on the other side of the table, paying interested attention to the procedure and probably taking mental notes for an essay of some kind later.

"I think the Durmstrang professor approves, don't you?" he asked, pointing at the grinning young man who was applauding Elizabet. Another piece of paper came wafting out of the cup, and Dumbledore snatched it out of the air with a smile.

"Felix Malefoi," he announced. "As I am sure our own Slytherin house will be satisfied to hear....congratulations, Mr. Malefoi."

At the Slytherin table, Nox Malfoy slapped his second-cousin on the shoulder, grinning at him. Felix stood and saluted, looking very tall and imposing and dignified. The Slytherins pounded their table with delight.

"Which leaves only the Hogwarts school Champion," Dumbledore announced, and the Goblet obediently released a third slip of paper. Dumbledore took it from the air and smiled, mysteriously, as he read the name aloud.

"Remus Lupin," he said.

The hall actually fell silent for a moment. *Of all the unlikely people to be Champion...*

Then the Gryffindors burst into applause, and James shoved Remus to his feet. He bowed, stunned, and as he did so Sirius tilted his head back and grinned up at him.

"You son of a bitch, I will gut you for this," Remus said under the roar of the Gryffindors. "I will find out how you did it and I will cut you open."

"Save all that competitive spirit for the game, mate," Sirius said.

ACT ONE: FIRST TRY

"I hate you, I hate you, I hate you," Remus muttered as James and Sirius walked him out to the playing field where the first task was to be held.

"Can't get out of it now, Moony," James said, unconcerned. "Listen, you do cut a striking figure in that uniform."

"I feel like a ruddy fool. It's too tight," Remus complained.

"The term is *properly tailored*," Sirius answered. "Thank Merlin the school paid for it or you'd have shown up in a pair of Hogwarts pyjamas two sizes too large or something."

"I like my pyjamas," Remus sulked.

"Lily told me that Andrea told her that Bess Parkinson and Alice Drooble got into a fight over you," James said. "I guess Alice said she was going to ask you to Hogsmeade if you survived the first task --"

"Let's stop right there for a minute," Remus said, holding up a hand, "and contemplate the phrasing of *if you survived the first task*. Besides, the bloody Slytherins certainly aren't fighting over me."

"Well, in a way they are. I mean..." James furrowed his brow. "Sort of....if you weren't really a threat to them, they wouldn't even bother with those stupid badges and all."

"Loony Loopy Lupin," Remus mumbled.

"No," Sirius corrected patiently, holding up a badge in front of him. "Lovely Likeable Lupin."

Remus gave him a sardonic look. "Yes, Sirius. That's *so much better*. Listen, I know people are saying I'm a sad case to be Champion and that Hogwarts hasn't got a chance, I'm resigned to my fate. You don't have to try cheering me up."

"Who says I did it to cheer you up?" Sirius asked. "I did it to show Snape I can beat his badge charms any day."

"Besides, you've all kinds of brains, and Dumbledore said the Tournament isn't ever about brute strength," James added, as Sirius pinned the badge to his shirt. Immediately, *Lovely Likeable Lupin* began to alternate with *Slimy Smelly Snivellus*. "And you've got us!"

"And I've got to spend all morning on a broomstick, dodging homicidal sports equipment," Remus groaned. "I hate flying."

"But you're good at it!" James said.

"So? I'm allowed to hate things I'm good at. I hate Divination, too."

"Buck up; I heard Dumbledore say that this Task could have had *dragons* in, but they couldn't lay hold of three full-grown ones in time," Sirius said. "So, you know, you could be anticipating being roasted werewolf nuggets instead of Mildly Concussed Lupin."

They arrived at the Quidditch field then, and James gave him a friendly shove.

"There's Lily; I'm off," he said. "Good luck, Moony. We're rooting for you."

Remus looked gloomily at the middle of the field, where the professors and Elizabet Karkaroff were standing. Malefoi didn't appear to have arrived yet.

"Listen, Moony, really," Sirius said, ducking his head a little. "I wouldn't have pulled a dirty trick like that if I didn't think you were up to it. I'm glad it's you. The Slytherins don't know anything anyway. They're rooting for someone from a whole different *school*, the traitorous bastards."

"Well, Malefoi's a bit more heroic than I am," Remus replied. "I didn't need this, Sirius."

Sirius studied him. "Yeah you did, actually. You'll see; you're stronger than they are."

"*Elizabet* could snap me in half."

"Not that kind of strength," Sirius said. "Listen, you think either of them have anything like the raw deal you've had? You'll surprise yourself. I know you will."

Sirius came with him onto the field, walking him as far as the table where the three regulation-standard broomsticks rested, each tied with a different coloured cord to indicate whose was whose -- Beauxbatons blue, Durmstrang brown, Hogwarts scarlet. Next to each broomstick was a Beater's bat in a corresponding colour.

"Sirius," Elizabet said, grinning at him. "I am going to humiliate your friend today."

"You know I love it when you talk dirty," Sirius said, as Malefoi arrived on the field. "Good luck. Remus'll win; I hope you come in second."

"If I lose to that, I will kill myself," she said, indicating Malefoi with a jerk of her head.

"Well, safe flying, anyway," Sirius said. She kissed him on the cheek.

"No kiss for me?" Malefoi asked Elizabet, smirking as he arrived.

"Sorry, I don't fancy blokes," Sirius answered.

"Play nice," Remus murmured. "People are watching."

"All right," Sirius agreed. He offered Malefoi his hand, smiling. "I hope you drop dead of venereal disease."

"May your genitals fall off at an inconvenient moment," Malefoi answered, also smiling as he shook Sirius' hand. Sirius clapped Remus on the shoulder, not at all reassuringly as it caused him to stumble a little, and walked off the field. A younger Durmstrang girl, apparently a friend of Elizabet's, took the cue and followed. Malefoi had come alone.

"Now then," Dumbledore said, approaching the table. "You have all been informed of the rules; three golden snitches have been released into the

air above the field. As soon as he aloft, five bludgers will also be released. You will be awarded points on a relative scale; Twenty points for first place, fifteen points for second, and ten points for third. The other thirty possible points will be awarded for style, as judged by myself and the other schools' professors," he concluded. "Please bear in mind that these snitches have been...altered slightly; you may experience some unpleasantness as you attempt to capture them. They are also marked, in order to indicate whose snitch is whose; we can't have you stealing them from each other willy-nilly."

He handed each of them a card with a rune on it. Remus sighed. Laguz; probably it was only chosen to correspond to his name (he saw Elizabet clutching Kenaz and Malefoi studying Mannaz) and anyway using runes in Divination was a very new tradition, but his scholar's brain couldn't help but toss up the fact that Laguz could represent ruin, destruction, and suicide.

Then again, just about anything could, if you looked at it in the right light. Or, as James would call it, the Highly Focused Remus Lupin Light of Doom.

"Do you have any questions before we begin?" Dumbledore asked. They shook their heads. "Very well; please take up your broomsticks and bats."

Remus picked up his broomstick and, with the other two, mounted; he swung the bat a few times, experimentally. He'd played Quidditch as a kid, of course -- who hadn't? -- but he'd never gone for the Gryffindor team, content to scrimmage with the other three when James felt he needed the practice. Beating certainly wasn't his forte; basic physics dictated that every time he hit a bludger, he overbalanced in the other direction.

"Don't blow away," Elizabet said, grinning even as she looked straight ahead at her professor, who was about to blow the starting whistle.

The three of them shot up at about equal speed, at the same time a handful of Hufflepuffs released the Bludgers. Elizabet went for height; Remus dropped a little lower and darted to the other end of the field, away from Malefoi. Snitches were tricky, but it was a bright day and the thing was to constantly keep your eyes moving. He'd learned from the best; he'd learned from James.

He began to understand the strategy involved in the game after Elizabet did a sudden dive, coming parallel with a small, sparkling object. He sucked in his breath, batting a bludger her way; she ducked the projectile, but eventually pulled away from the snitch.

Not hers.

Remus kept his eye on the little glittering ball, spiralling lazily towards it; if it wasn't hers, after all, there was a fifty-fifty chance it would be his. Malefoi didn't seem to have noticed.

He glanced up to see what the others were doing and saw Malefoi finally taking an interest; he might as well go for broke. He dipped his broomstick down slightly and put on the speed, chasing after the little Snitch. It was nearly impossible to get a good look at the rune marking it, but it paused and reversed suddenly and he skewed around, looking up as it went past --

The first thing that registered was the Laguz stamped on the snitch; the second was that it was not a *golden* snitch at all. Even from a few feet away and moving at considerable speed, he could feel the frission over his skin.

Those *bastards* . The snitch was *silver* .

Out of the corner of his eye he saw Elizabet dive suddenly, and then just as suddenly stop; the snitch in front of her was holding deadly still, but she was backing away from it. Closer inspection showed a look of horror on her face, her eyes darting blindly --

Blindly.

She *couldn't see* .

"All right, Karkaroff?" he called, as she slowly backed her broomstick away from the snitch. Eventually she seemed to relax a little -- enough to throw him a rude gesture as her snitch darted away again. It zipped past his own head, in fact, and he saw that hers was white, with a black spo --

White. With a pupil. Her snitch was an *eyeball* .

"Sadists," he muttered. Malefoi, at the moment, was being actively pursued by his and was running fast from it, beating Bludgers out of his way furiously as he went. Remus couldn't see what his snitch was, but he could guess that it wasn't pleasant.

It's never just about strength , he thought. *They were right*.

House Champions did have to be strong, but it was more important, he knew, to be smart and brave. Jasper Flitwick, who was all of four feet tall and weighed ninety pounds, had won the Triwizard Tournament back in the seventeen hundreds, hadn't he?

He got aloft, ignoring the other two -- Elizabet was playing some kind of strange game of chicken with hers -- and found his own again, hovering at the other end of the field.

Right. Brave it is.

He put on all the speed he had, choosing to dodge the Bludger that was following him rather than bat it away, and got going fast enough that even

the braking charms on the broomstick wouldn't be able to stop a collision with the little ball of pain that was his immediate destiny.

He stretched out his fingers for it and saw, to his horror, that fine bristling hair was growing out of the back of his hand; claws erupted from the ends of his fingers and he could feel the bones in his arm begin the familiar shift from man to wolf. Still, he couldn't stop; he was going too fast to even veer away without falling, and he was high enough up that the fall would snap his neck.

The burn of close-by silver and the agonisingly slow crack of bone and shift of muscle filled his world, but after an unendurable few seconds he felt something small and hard smack into his palm --

And immediately, the world cleared.

He automatically brought his hand close and looked down; five human fingers, a whole and perfectly-formed arm under his Champion uniform, and a golden snitch nestled in his palm, Laguz engraved deeply in one side.

"Thirty seven Hogwarts, thirty five Durmstrang, *twenty four Beauxbatons*. That was bloody *brilliant*," James crowed for the ten thousandth time.

He was sitting on his bed, one arm around Lily, the other occupied with a bottle from the case of highly alcoholic moonshine butterbeer Sirius had wheedled out of Rosmerta. Sirius was sitting on James' trunk, so as to be close to the booze, and Peter was sitting on Remus' trunk. Remus himself was lying flat on his bed, hands covering his face, breathing deeply. The little golden snitch, now strangely inactive, sat on his chest, wings half-furled.

"I still say he was cheated," Peter said. "I mean, who's a judge of style, am I right? I thought it had loads of style. He deserved more for style."

"Well, he's never been the most graceful bloke on a broomstick, has our Moony," Sirius admitted. "I mean, even you can't deny that Elizabeth jumping off her broom to catch hers and then accio'ing it back under her was genius."

"It was the only way she could be sure she wouldn't pull back from grabbing it," Remus said quietly. "You saw what I had to do. The snitches played on our worst fears, and we had to prove they were harmless by grabbing them. Rather trite, really. Anyway, Malefoi didn't catch on until Karkaroff jumped, so they marked him down for imitating her, and besides he caught his the last, how stylish could he have been?"

"It wasn't very fair to blind her whenever she went near it," James said.

"She told me her mum's blind. Muggle, nothing to be done about it," Sirius replied.

"It wasn't any less fair than trying to turn me into a ruddy wolf right there on my damn broomstick," Remus said, sitting up and crossing his legs, catching the snitch in his left hand as it fell. James tossed him a bottle; he caught it instinctively in his right, then set it on the bed unopened.

"Did you ever even find out what Malefoi's was?" Lily asked.

"Clown nose," Remus answered absently. James and Sirius broke into sniggers.

"I don't blame him," Peter said stoutly. Remus held up the snitch, studying it intently.

"Now," he said, "I just have to figure out what to do with this pretty bauble."

ACT TWO: PREPARATION IS EVERYTHING

"Jesus Christ, don't you knock?"

Harry, who had been happily sitting in the Prefects' bathtub and contemplating Cedric's cryptic orders, now swore and reached for a towel, as if he was somehow going to cover himself while most of him was still underwater.

Cedric himself stood in the middle of the floor, arms crossed, grinning.

"Not when students who aren't supposed to be in here are using up all the hot water," he answered.

"Using up all the -- Diggory, you told me to come in here!"

"Yeah," Cedric said, stepping out of his shoes and taking his socks off. "Well, I did want to help."

"So help. I've no idea what to do," Harry complained. Cedric shrugged out of his robes and took his trousers off; Harry almost objected, but he was wearing boxers -- and Cedric was right. He could bust him for even being here.

Cedric sat on the edge of the bath and dangled his feet in it, leaning back. He still had his shirt and his Hufflepuff tie on -- Prefect's badge pinned to his collar.

"Cho helped me figure it out," he said. "Hell of a thing. I know why they put an age limit on it now -- Bagman has been sniffing around trying to help

you, hasn't he?"

"Yeah," Harry admitted. He was oddly more ashamed of this than of being naked in a bathtub with Cedric sitting nearby. Cedric was looking at his *face*, which helped.

"Seriously, in this case? Keep away from him," Cedric said. "I mean, the kind of keeping away where you don't enter a room alone with him. Especially if he asks you to bring the egg along."

"Why?" Harry asked. "I mean, he's a creep, but..."

"Just..." Cedric sighed. "Maybe it'd be better if you dropped out, Harry."

"Like I can! You heard Dumbledore!"

"But if you fail the second Task...I mean, it's okay if you fail because the rest of us have an unfair advantage."

"You're not that much bigger than I am," Harry scoffed. Cedric's eyes flicked down briefly.

"You're right," he said, glancing back up at Harry's face. "But that's...not it."

"Cedric, why did you tell me to go take a bath?" Harry asked, blushing furiously.

"To be honest?" Cedric sighed and loosened his tie. "It was the easiest way of getting you naked."

"Right, that's it, I'm leaving," Harry said, climbing out of the bath and hastily wrapping himself in a towel. "Take House points if you want -- "

"No, Harry, really, listen," Cedric said quickly, standing up and moving to block him. "Just listen, okay?"

Harry, towel around his waist, didn't dare cross his arms for fear it would fall. "And you're warning me off *Bagman*? Move it, Diggory."

"The egg only opens if you're having sex near it," Cedric blurted. "That's why there was an age restriction."

Harry blinked.

"I thought, you know, you're pretty young..." Cedric said. "I dunno what you and Weasley get up to with Hermione -- "

"Nothing! Ew!"

"Well, that's one circulating rumour laid to rest," Cedric sighed. Harry felt small fireworks of fury go off in his brain. "I just thought, you know, you could just give up on the second Task if you wanted, nobody would think less of you. But uh, otherwise, you kind of -- I mean, blokes don't get so...involved in this kind of thing, emotionally. Like, it's just sex, right? And Hufflepuffs definitely don't get so involved in this kind of thing as Gryffindors, so unless you're planning to get Weasley or Granger to do it for you -- "

"*Stop saying that!*"

"-- then I thought I could," Cedric said desperately. "Help you. That is."

It took Harry a minute to figure out what Cedric was suggesting.

"Um," he said.

"You know, because I have a girlfriend so obviously it's not like I'm a poof or anything, and I know you're not but it's less *embarrassing* this way and it doesn't work if you're alone, believe me -- "

"-- I'd have found out by now," Harry finished for him. Cedric bit his lip.

"Guess you're not all that young, huh?" he asked.

"It's not funny, Cedric."

"No, sorry. So. There you have it."

Harry hesitated. "Couldn't you just tell me what it said?"

"Dunno if it's the same for every Champion," Cedric shrugged. "The other two won't even talk about it, I tried asking."

"So it opens up while you're...."

"Yeah."

"And it talks?"

"Scared the holy hell out of me, let me tell you," Cedric said nervously.

"How, how far do you have to, um, go?" Harry asked.

"Oh, uh," Cedric stammered. "I think, uh. Well, like I said. No involvement, just...I'm here to help you out, if you want."

Harry decided this was his most awkward moment at Hogwarts to date, which was pretty significant given what had happened to him in the past three years.

"Okay then," he said finally, head spinning a little. "I mean, I'm not a poof either."

"Course not."

"It's almost like homework."

Cedric nodded. "And it's only fair."

"Right! Only fair," Harry repeated faintly. Cedric cleared his throat.

"So, we have to both kind of..." Cedric paused. "Tell you what, count of three, you drop your towel and I'll take my pants off."

"Right."

"One, two, three."

Harry, with Gryffindor honour, let his towel fall. It took Cedric a second longer to get the boxers off, and his shirt still sort of hung down, but Harry could see that Cedric was, in fact, not all that much bigger than he was. This was heartening.

On the other hand, Cedric appeared to be much more *eager* than he was. Probably nerves. Cedric had been prepared for this. Harry hadn't. So to speak.

Cedric glanced down. "Ah. Well. I could."

"Please," Harry said, embarrassed. "I mean, nothing personal but -- "

"Right! Right."

Cedric touched Harry's stomach first, pressing his hand flat against his abdomen; Harry closed his eyes as Cedric's fingers slid lower, wrapping around his cock. His fingers were warm and surprisingly confident, given the situation they were in. And they felt...good.

Harry breathed deeply, slowly, trying not to think about how weird this was, particularly how weird it was that he was *enjoying* it. Then again, of course Cedric would know what to do, where to touch, since he was after all a bloke, which was the whole point of *Cedric* doing it...

"That's right, Harry," Cedric said in his ear. "Feels good?"

"Yeah," Harry breathed. Cedric's fingers tightened a little. Harry's hips jerked forward.

"Trust me," Cedric murmured. "I know what I'm doing, okay?"

"Okay, Cedric," Harry answered, not realising that this would be followed by a sudden cessation of touch. He opened his eyes to see Cedric studying his face.

"Trust me," the older boy repeated, keeping his eyes on Harry's as he dropped to his knees. Harry decided he didn't really want to watch, so he closed his eyes again.

Cedric's tongue flicked across the head of his cock, and Harry wondered if this was strictly necessary, but it didn't really matter. He couldn't quite remember why all this was happening in the first place, especially after the other boy slid his lips over his cock and his tongue moved and oh, god, no wonder all the seventh years were always sneaking off into the rosebushes....

He reached out blindly for something to hold onto, to keep him upright, and found nothing; instead he tangled his fingers in Cedric's hair, pushing him away before the whole exercise became a moot point.

"The...." he gasped, chest heaving. "I can't, until -- "

Cedric growled as he shot upright, grabbing Harry by the arms and turning him bodily, slamming him into the wall; Harry clutched at the shirt Cedric still wore as their bodies pressed together and *oh* nobody had told him it would get *even better*.

Cedric's mouth pressed against his, forcing his lips open, even as Harry moaned and tried to gasp for breath. Somewhere in the background there was a sudden creaking noise and another voice, but Harry didn't hear it through the haze of yes, Cedric, now, yes --

He shuddered and came against the other boy's body, allowing Cedric to hold him up by the shoulders and kiss him and reassure him that it was okay, that it felt good, that he had come too. They stayed that way for a long moment, until finally Harry realised that he'd completely ignored whatever the egg had said to him.

"I didn't hear it," he said. "I mean, I did hear it, but...you know..."

"Yeah," Cedric answered, still breathing heavily. Harry looked up at him, thoughtfully.

"So....we have to do it again, then," he said. Cedric pressed his forehead to Harry's, laughing.

"Looks that way," he answered.

"Uh, and next time...."

"Yeah?"

"Can you keep the tie on again?" Harry asked.

INTERMISSION: YULE BALL

After the lights have gone out, the music has ended, the last of the food has been eaten or cleared away by the house-elves, he stands in the centre of the Great Hall and looks up at the starry ceiling, the cold rafters of sky. The mirage is charming, of course, but he has always wondered whether the storms, the night, the overcast sometimes make the children feel cold and unwelcome, or naked to the elements, as he feels now.

Echoes of could-be and might-have and in-some-other-time eddy around him like ghosts, and he can reach out and pluck a single one here, shift another one slightly to fit his purposes, hold them like glass globes delicately between his fingers.

The Storyteller turns; here was the stage tonight for the Yule Ball, but in other versions it was there, or elsewhere, or there was no stage at all.

He walks a few paces toward the High Table, bare feet quiet on the stone floor. There. Albus Dumbledore sat there as a young professor and watched Tom Riddle dance Minerva McGonagall around the room, both laughing. Not too farther along, Sirius Black stood in the shadows with Elizabet Karkaroff -- the girl who looked oddly like Remus Lupin -- and they both made fun of James, trying not to be clumsy for Lily. There was Remus, solicitously fetching a drink for his partner Alice Drooble, and there was Frank Longbottom, looking terribly jealous of him.

The Storyteller turns again and his eyes fall on the pale outline of Harry dancing with his partner and looking at someone else; Harry picks Cedric out of the crowd of ghosts, Cedric whose hands hold Cho's very confidently. In one time, the Storyteller can see deep into the shadows at the back of the hall, where Cedric -- smelling of firewhiskey and starched clothing -- pins Harry against the wall and says things he will later pretend were entirely due to the alcohol, and not at all due to what Cedric will never admit to himself before he dies.

The Storyteller raises his fingers, blocks out the choking premonition of Cedric's death. In its place appears instead a tall, ginger-haired boy in Gryffindor gold, blue-eyed and charming. There is a young Ravenclaw on his arm, a beautiful girl named Henrietta Potter.

The Storyteller smiles. They do make a striking pair.

ACT THREE: LOSS AND VICTORY

"That boy," said the Minister for Magic, "looks scared to death."

"He often looks scared to death," replied the Headmaster. "Usually before he does something brilliant. It's part of his particular charm."

"Quite, quite. Is he a Weasley? By relation, I mean -- he has that look, and that ginger hair...."

"I believe so, yes."

"I thought as much. Grand, brave sort of family, all Gryffindors. He is a Gryffindor, isn't he?"

The Headmaster laughed, a little amazed. "You haven't been paying much attention to what goes on at Hogwarts, Minister, have you?"

"Sorry. I know it's an important diplomatic event and all that, but you really have no idea what a troublesome job I'm having at the moment. That horrible Muggle queen of theirs -- Victoria -- the Prime Minister should never have told her about us. Day in and day out, she's pestering me..."

"We all have our burdens to bear," the Headmaster said amiably. "Yes; Wulfric is a Gryffindor. His mother was a Weasley, I think, before she married; his father is Percival Dumbledore, the alchemist."

"Wulfric?"

"Well, Albus by rights, but nobody calls him that. He seems to think Wulfric rather jaunty. So it is! So it is."

They stood on a platform in the station of the brand new "underground" train that the Muggles had just built in London, a delightful device which suited their purpose excellently. Below, the official mediator of the Triwizard Tournament stood facing the competitors. Both Durmstrang and Beauxbatons had female champions and this had caused some good-natured ribbing of young Wulfric Dumbledore, but then Wulfric had challenged any of them to go up against the other Champions and so far no-one had taken him up on it. Now he stood between the other two, pale but proper, eyes taking in the shining train before him with apparent delight.

"The rules are simple," the Mediator was saying, standing in the doorway of the train. "You are to navigate from point to point, following directions you will receive along the way in the form of riddles; you will also face several traps and pitfalls which have been placed in your way. These trains are your transportation, and each one holds a clue, but you must not remain on any train for too long, or you will find yourself further away than when you began."

The Headmaster saw Dumbledore repeat this to himself with a smile. Dumbledore, he rather thought, was more familiar with the idea than the other two, who were looking quite bewildered. The Headmaster wondered if they had even traveled by train before or if they, as most of Europe's magical community, preferred broomsticks.

He'd read an essay of Dumbledore's recently, one which a professor had sent to him with a concerned note. *The world is changing and expanding, and so too must we all. It is not enough to simply know what we are taught; we must look beyond to this other world in which we conceal ourselves. Muggles possess a unique ingenuity which the magical community has yet to harness....*

It was worrying, he had to admit that, but anyone with two ounces of sense could see that the boy was destined for great things, and the Triwizard Tournament was only the beginning.

"...are there any questions?"

"No, sir," they chorused.

"Very well, then. As the leader, Ms. Petrokova will board the first train; Mr. Dumbledore the second, and Ms. Gant the third."

The Headmaster and the Minister watched as Petrokova climbed warily inside the car and looked around; it took off with a lurching jerk and she nearly fell over. Wulfric waved to a black-haired woman in the crowd and shouted a question at the girl. It sounded like, "If I win, will you marry me?"

Henrietta grinned and shouted her reply: "If you lose, the children get my name!"

This seemed enough for Wulfric, who clambered into the second car as it pulled inside and could be seen to be lifting up his robe, apparently to examine one of his legs, as it pulled away.

Five years later, when Wulfric James Potter was born, his father got into a small accident on his way to St. Mungo's and oddly enough the resulting scar matched precisely a new line which had just opened on the underground. The significance of this was lost on him at the time, however, and perhaps rightly so.

"We could still call him Dumbledore, if you like," Henrietta said. "I don't mind."

Her husband looked down at the infant in his arms, wondrously.

"Suddenly, losing the tournament to Gant seems rather insignificant," he said with a smile.

END